

**THE ROLE OF MULTIMODAL AFFORDANCES IN SHAPING DIGITAL MEDIA DISCOURSE****Aminov Farrukh**

Karshi State University, PhD student

[aminov.fk@qarshidu.uz](mailto:aminov.fk@qarshidu.uz)

ORCID: 0000-0001-5429-0929

**Abstract.** The current study explores the impact of the availability of various forms of multimodal affordances in the production of discourse within digital media. Within the framework of multimodal discourse analysis and affordance theory, a qualitative methodology was employed to analyze how multimodal elements are utilized by participants within prominent social media websites. The study shows that digital communication is, indeed, characterized by the inherent multimodality that is shaped by the combination of several semiotic elements. Also, it demonstrates that social media affordances, including the ability to like, share and comment on the posts as well as incorporating visual or audio elements into communication, are simultaneously enablers and constraints for the discursive processes taking place within these platforms. Finally, this work emphasizes the participatory nature of digital discourse in which the interaction between participants leads to the co-construction of meanings. Overall, this project offers an insight into how multimodal affordances influence discourse in digital media.

**Keywords:** Multimodality; Multimodal affordances; Digital media discourse; Social media; User engagement; Meaning-making; Interactivity; Semiotic modes; Computer-mediated communication.

**RAQAMLI MEDIADISKURSINI SHAKLLANTIRISHDA MULTIMODAL IMKONIYATLARNING ROLI**

**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu tadqiqot raqamli mediada ma'no ishlab chiqarishda turli xil multimodal imkoniyatlarning mavjudligining ta'sirini o'rganadi. Multimodal ma'no tahlili va imkoniyatlar nazariyasi doirasida taniqli ijtimoiy media veb-saytlarida ishtirokchilar tomonidan multimodal elementlardan qanday foydalanishini tahlil qilish uchun sifatli metodologiya qo'llanildi. Tadqiqot shuni ko'rsatadiki, raqamli aloqa, haqiqatan ham, bir nechta semiotik elementlarning kombinatsiyasi bilan shakllanadigan o'ziga xos multimodallik bilan tavsiflanadi. Shuningdek, u ijtimoiy media imkoniyatlari, jumladan, postlarga like bosish, ulashish va sharhlash, shuningdek, vizual yoki audio elementlarni muloqotga kiritish qobiliyati, bir vaqtning o'zida ushbu platformalarda sodir bo'ladigan diskursiv jarayonlar uchun imkoniyat va cheklovlar ekanligini ko'rsatadi. Ushbu ish raqamli mediada ishtirokchi xususiyatini ta'kidlaydi, unda ishtirokchilar o'rtasidagi o'zaro ta'sir ma'nolarni birgalikda yaratishga olib keladi. Umuman olganda, ushbu tadqiqot multimodal imkoniyatlarning raqamli mediada ma'noga qanday ta'sir qilishini tushunishga imkon beradi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Multimodallik; Multimodal imkoniyatlar; Raqamli mediadiskurs; Ijtimoiy media; Foydalanuvchilar bilan aloqa; Ma'no berish; Interaktivlik; Semiotik usullar; Kompyuter vositasida muloqot.

**РОЛЬ МУЛЬТИМОДАЛЬНЫХ ВОЗМОЖНОСТЕЙ В ФОРМИРОВАНИИ ДИСКУРСА  
ЦИФРОВЫХ МЕДИА**

**Аннотация.** В данном исследовании изучается влияние доступности различных форм мультимодальных возможностей на формирование дискурса в цифровых медиа. В рамках анализа мультимодального дискурса и теории возможностей использовалась качественная методология для анализа того, как участники используют мультимодальные элементы на популярных сайтах социальных сетей. Исследование показывает, что цифровая коммуникация действительно характеризуется присущей ей мультимодальностью, которая формируется сочетанием нескольких семиотических элементов. Также демонстрируется, что возможности социальных сетей, включая возможность ставить лайки, делиться и комментировать публикации, а также включать визуальные или звуковые элементы в коммуникацию, одновременно являются факторами, способствующими и ограничивающими дискурсивные процессы, происходящие на этих платформах. Наконец, эта работа подчеркивает партисипативную природу цифрового дискурса, в котором взаимодействие между участниками приводит к совместному конструированию смыслов. В целом, этот проект дает представление о том, как мультимодальные возможности влияют на дискурс в цифровых медиа.

**Ключевые слова:** Мультимодальность; Мультимодальные возможности; Дискурс в цифровых медиа; Социальные сети; Вовлеченность пользователей; Создание смысла; Интерактивность; Семиотические способы коммуникации; компьютерно-опосредованная коммуникация.

**Introduction.** Over the last few decades, technological development and, consequently, the appearance of numerous types of digital media have drastically changed the ways communication processes occur. Thus, digital media discourse implies the use of diverse semiotic means, namely text, images, video, audio, etc., in addition to the traditional textual format. In other words, digital media discourse involves multimodal communicative environments where meanings are created via inter-semiotic communication of various signs. Therefore, traditional models of discourse analysis based on linguistic considerations cannot be effectively applied to analyze the current dynamics of digital media discourse.

It should be noted that the term affordance became highly popular in discourse studies because of the crucial importance of the phenomenon under analysis. The notion was introduced into linguistic theory by James J. Gibson who defined it as possibilities offered by the environment. Affordances can also be described as characteristics of a medium which are used to influence user behavior. Digital media affordances include various communicative features, such as likes, shares, comments, hashtags, as well as integration of images, video, audio, etc. Such characteristics provide users with different opportunities to communicate while simultaneously setting limits on their actions.

On the other hand, multimodality, as conceptualized by academics like Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, asserts that meaning-making is achieved through the integration of several semiotic modes, each offering unique communicative possibilities. Digital environments offer a complex interrelationship between these modes, allowing users to craft elaborate and sophisticated messages. The use of text alongside emojis, images, or sounds may greatly affect the interpretation process and increase engagement levels. Therefore, multimodal affordances are a fundamental way through which

the digital discourse environment is created, as they offer users an opportunity to compose, change, and respond to messages dynamically.

The significance of digital discourse environments has grown exponentially, prompting many academics to examine the phenomenon. However, it is apparent that there is still a need to develop an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the dynamics of multimodal affordances in digital media environments. This study will seek to address this limitation by exploring the impact of multimodal affordances on digital media discourse environments. This paper employs a multimodal discourse analytical framework to investigate this issue further.

**Methodology.** In terms of research design, this study follows the qualitative approach associated with Multimodal Discourse Analysis. It provides a basis for studying meanings produced through the interconnection of several semiotic modalities in digital spaces. The reasons for choosing this kind of qualitative research are associated with the necessity to take into consideration the specificities of multimodal communication as well as how platform-specific affordances influence the discourse practices of users. Moreover, certain insights will be taken into consideration from Computer-Mediated Communication to address the issue in question more effectively.

As for the research sample, it will comprise the selection of texts available on digital media platforms with rich multimodality, such as Instagram and X (former Twitter). The selection will be made considering the richness of multimodal affordances provided by the mentioned platforms. They involve the use of such modalities as visual, verbal, gestural, audio, and symbolic (likes, shares, comments, and other interactive features). The sampling will be based on maximum variation to provide for a variety of discourses and different kinds of information.

The data gathering was done using systematic observations and manual collection of publicly available posts for a set period. The collected data consist not only of the content of the posts but also of the secondary elements of interactions like user comments and reactions and metrics of engagements. Concerning ethical issues, the focus of the research has been on the publicly available information, and anonymity has been observed whenever necessary.

In regards to the analysis, the research will use multimodal coding that combines both semiotic and functional aspects. In this regard, first, the data will be divided based on semiotic modes, which include language, images and color, sound and music, voice, and platform-specific interactional features. In turn, all of these semiotic modes will be interpreted in their functionality by examining the processes of meaning making, user engagement, and interactional processes. The latter will also include the way in which semiotic modes function together and support each other given certain affordance conditions offered by the platform.

In order to strengthen the analytical validity of the analysis, the research employs an organized process of coding through iterative categorization and comparison. Interactions within the multi-modal discourse will be analyzed based on the affordances presented by each platform. Through this approach, the common strategies employed by users within their discourse as well as how they make use of certain platform features will become clear. These results can then be applied to the larger theoretical context of multi-modality and affordance theory.

**Results.** The results obtained demonstrate that the presence of multimodal affordances becomes one of the defining characteristics of the process of digital media discourse as they define the ways of making meaning, interaction of the participants, etc. In the analyzed cases, the communicative act is accomplished through the interaction of several modalities, including verbal, visual, aural, and interactive ones. These modes interact in order to create a set of meanings which depend on context and interpretation of users.

One of the major findings is related to multimodal affordances as elements of making meaning. The linguistic components such as captions and comments usually create the propositional base for interpreting the meaning of certain messages. However, the interpretation of linguistic elements depends on the interaction with visual and auditory modes. Thus, in many cases, the visual or aural modes may add something to the meaning that has been already created in texts, reinforce, or change the interpretation of linguistic signs. Graphic icons such as emojis can affect the interpretation of certain messages by modifying its meaning through affective or evaluative functions.

Furthermore, it is important to stress that the study demonstrates the significance of interactive affordances as factors facilitating user participation in the discourse. Such features as likes, shares, and comments are not simply additional options but integral parts of the process of communication that enables the transformation of monologic into dialogic relations between speakers and receivers. In turn, commentaries serve as platforms for discussion, assessment, and reevaluation of the initial messages, thus resulting in the extension of their meanings and emergence of new discourse layers. Therefore, discourse in digital media is always participatory and constructed by multiple actors.

One more important finding concerns the contribution of multimodal affordances in the development of personal and collective identities. In their turn, the users utilize different types of media – texts, images, video materials, and interactive options – to construct the needed image and position within the community. The visual elements such as photographs, color schemes, and stylistic preferences assist in the formation of an individualized or organizational persona, whereas linguistic and interactive options complement the picture created through the visual means.

Lastly, the results show that affordances of the platform have an impact on discourse patterns by emphasizing some modes of communication and types of interaction over others. Video-based platforms, for instance, focus on audiovisual modes and immediate interaction, whereas text-based platforms prioritize brevity and immediate communication. This affects not only the processes of content creation but also its interpretation and dissemination. In other words, affordances serve as facilitators and inhibitors of specific communicative practices.

In summary, the findings show that affordances of multimodal semiotic modes play a crucial role in shaping the structure of discourse within digital media contexts. They affect the process of meaning-making, user interaction, and identity performance.

**Discussions.** The results of this research prove that multimodal affordances are not only technological components of digital platforms but also essential processes that define the development of digital media discourse. Following the Multimodal Discourse Analysis theory, the study shows that meaning can be generated only when different semiotic modes work together and not through linguistic communication alone. The theory put forward by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen

states that all semiotic modes have unique possibilities for communication and that meaning is generated through their orchestration in particular contexts. This study develops further on the theory by demonstrating that such orchestration is largely driven by affordances provided by digital platforms.

According to affordance theory, which was developed by James J. Gibson, these findings emphasize that affordances can be viewed as both facilitative and restrictive. In terms of facilitation, the study demonstrates that digital media afford many expressive options for the user through the use of text, graphics, audio, and interaction capabilities. The study shows that affordances, on the other hand, channel users into specific patterns of communicative behavior by favoring particular modes and types of interaction. To give an illustration, the focus on visual and video material leads to the creation of extremely engaging and emotionally charged messages, whereas the possibility of interaction stimulates further communication between the user and the digital medium.

Also, the conclusions confirm the idea that digital media discourse is inherently interactive and co-produced, which is one of the focal points of Computer-Mediated Communication research. In contrast to more traditional means of communication where the creation of meaning happens at the hands of one sender only, digital media offer opportunities for users to actively participate in the process of discourse production through commenting, reacting, and sharing posts. Such active participation makes discourse a continuously changing entity in which meanings are renegotiated and recreated. Thus, the impact of interactive affordances on such processes should be analyzed when studying digital media discourse.

The second important conclusion concerns identity construction in digital environments. Namely, according to the data collected in the present research, multimodal affordances enable users to use a wide range of resources to construct and present their identity. This corresponds to a wider perspective within discourse analysis that considers identity as something dynamic and situational. On the other hand, it also demonstrates that digital identities are constructed under specific constraints dictated by each environment.

Conclusively, this study adds to the growing debate on the influence of technology on communication by showing that the internet is not a passive channel of communication; it is active in discourse creation. The use of algorithms, interfaces, and affordances plays a significant role in visibility, engagement, and interpretation. Thus, for an in-depth understanding of digital media discourses, it is important to study not only the semiotics but also the technosocial environment in which the semiotics take place.

In conclusion, this study shows that there should be an integration of the multimodal perspective with the affordance perspective. This will give an insight into how digital communication is conducted in current media environments.

**Conclusion.** In this paper, the concept of multimodal affordance has been studied with reference to digital media discourse in order to show that modern digital discourse has a multimodal nature, which means that it is constituted in the context of interplay between multiple semiotic modes and affordances inherent in specific digital platforms. The results of the study indicate that the nature of meaning production in digital discourse is multimodal and depends on the interconnection and interplay between different modes, including linguistic, visual, auditory, and interactive modes.

The study also suggests that in the case of digital media discourse, affordances become a very important factor that defines the way users communicate and produce meanings. Affordances are, on the one hand, enabling, and, on the other hand, constraining. As for interactive affordances, they make it possible for people to become participants in meaning production in addition to being receivers of messages. That is why digital discourse should be regarded as a collaborative endeavor.

Moreover, the research reveals the role played by the affordances of multimodality in the construction of identities, since users take advantage of semiotic resources at their disposal in order to construct an identity that corresponds to certain communicative norms.

On a theoretical level, the study makes a contribution to the combination of Multimodal Discourse Analysis and the concept of affordances in order to enhance the understanding of digital communication. On a methodological level, the study emphasizes the necessity of applying analysis methods which take into consideration both semiotic and technological aspects.

Nevertheless, the current study is confined to a qualitative approach and certain platform choices that may be unable to represent digital discourse practices in their entirety. The future research may consider expanding the sample size, applying a more quantitative methodology, and exploring the potential effects of new technologies like artificial intelligence and augmented reality on multimodal communication.

To sum up, multimodal affordances play an important role in the development of digital discourse. An awareness of the role played by multimodal affordances can be vital for modeling discourse processes in the context of the contemporary digital environment.

## References

1. Nancy Baym, N. K. (2015). *Personal connections in the digital age* (2nd ed.). Polity.
2. Jan Blommaert, J. (2020). *Durkheim and the internet: On sociolinguistics and the sociological imagination*. Bloomsbury.
3. danah boyd, d. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press.
4. Norman Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
5. Terry Flew, T. (2021). *Understanding global media* (3rd ed.). Palgrave.
6. James J. Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton Mifflin.
7. Susan Herring, S. C. (2007). A faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse. *Language@Internet*, 4.
8. Henry Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. NYU Press.
9. Carey Jewitt, C. (2009). *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. Routledge.
10. Carey Jewitt, C., Bezemer, J., & O'Halloran, K. (2016). *Introducing multimodality*. Routledge.
11. Andreas Kaplan, A. M., & Michael Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68.

12. Gunther Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.
13. Gunther Kress, G., & Theo van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. Arnold.
14. Lev Manovich, L. (2001). *The language of new media*. MIT Press.
15. Alice Marwick, A. E., & danah boyd, d. (2011). To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter. *Convergence*, 17(2), 139–158.
16. Donald Norman, D. A. (1988). *The design of everyday things*. Basic Books.
17. Kay L. O'Halloran, K. L. (2004). *Multimodal discourse analysis: Systemic-functional perspectives*. Continuum.
18. Zizi Papacharissi, Z. (2015). *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics*. Oxford University Press.
19. Theo van Leeuwen, T. (2005). *Introducing social semiotics*. Routledge.
20. Shoshana Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism*. PublicAffairs.

