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## A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis on Newspaper Coverage on War on Drugs in the Philippines: Merits and Demerits

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### ABSTRACT

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

### INTRODUCTION

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

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

use, and violent traffickers. In the study, among 1235 participants exposed to news articles that employed these dehumanizing frames, they exhibited more negative attitudes towards drug users and demonstrated lower support for harm reduction programs. On the other hand, Singh *et al.* (2021), in their study on Malaysian Media regarding the representation of the war on drugs, stated that articles gave primacy to images and language that outraged readers, which resulted in negative public perceptions.

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

Craig (2019) argued in her analysis of 378 articles from three Philippine digital broadsheets and revealed that these articles engaged in a critical and evaluative assessment of the issue towards the war on drugs. Specifically, some broadsheets were negative in slant, garnering 72.90%,

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while the others were neutral with 44.90%, and some more articles had a positive tone, reflecting 21.96%. The frames used by the columnists were attribution of responsibility, conflict, articulation of solution, morality, and human interest, respectively.

In Davao City, a study by Aguisando *et al.* (2017) found that the most common news topics on the war on drugs in Philippine newspapers included slain drug suspects, government officials involved in illegal drugs, drug lords, foreigners in the drug trade, and drug users or pushers who surrendered. Regarding the language structure, the news articles employ descriptive modifiers and quantifiers, which could provoke an emotional response from the audience. Moreover, it also tries to capture the readers' attention by emphasizing various societal problems behind the issue of the war on drugs. A study of Ilagan *et al.* (2020) also looked at how local newspapers influence the public's perception and their impact on political propaganda against the anti-drug campaign in Davao City. Specifically, it has been revealed that among 256 news articles, the news reports only reiterated the voice of the government instead of acting as a critic.

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

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

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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

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

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

In addition to Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal framework, this study was further enhanced with Halliday's textual metafunction in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Halliday highlighted how textual elements could be manipulated, organized, or formed so that coherence and relevance were reinforced to enable meaning-making. As Halliday (1985) suggested, meaning relied on the purposeful selection of modalities organized according to conventions of those modes. The spatial layer in texts is considered the physical layout of

different sections by news editors, the thematic variations of headings for articles and captions, and the framing modalities in images, which guide viewers on “what to see” in them. The textual metafunction foregrounded considerations of thematic system, information structure, and language cohesion. All of these choices in language and across modalities created connected or integrated wholes, presenting critical insights into how the narrative regarding the war on drugs was arranged to foreground or emphasize importance, as determined by textual choices made by the publication and by the texts themselves. This organization also revealed and sometimes rearranged ideological stances, expressing hidden ideological values that could exaggerate the ideological concerns raised not only through what was said or displayed, but crucially through how it was enacted or organized in the text.

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

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

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

interact to construct and convey meanings, shape public perception, and frame the issue’s merits and demerits.

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

The focus of the study included 31 newspaper articles, which fit Creswell’s (2017) recommendation of using between 10 and 50 resources depending on the type and question of research. Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasized that data saturation could often be achieved with a sample size of around 30 in thematic analysis, where depth and richness of data were prioritized over sheer volume. This flexible approach ensured a balance between depth and quality in the analysis.

The study also explored 10 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with participants to answer research question 4. Purposive sampling is also used to ensure diversity of participants. Purposive sampling, as defined by Creswell (2017), is a non-probability technique used to intentionally select individuals or groups based on specific criteria relevant to the research question. Participants aged 18 and above must be perceived as politically aware individuals who were part of the target audience. A wide range of characteristics and perspectives was necessary to explore the varying interpretations of newspaper coverage of the Philippine war on drugs.

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

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

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




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

multimodal strategy to construct meaning around the Philippines’ war on drugs.

Across the 31 articles, meaning is built jointly by verbal wording, images, and page/layout. Verbal headlines and lead paragraphs cue stance and frame causality; visuals anchor emotion and “proof”; spatial placement (front page, above-the-fold, caption proximity) prioritizes institutional voices and guides reading paths. Together these modes work as a single system: text legitimizes, images intensify, and layout hierarchizes what matters (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

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

**Table 1:** Modes of Communication Employed in Newspaper Coverages of the Philippines’ War on Drugs

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

Spatial	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	
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Table 2 indicates that cohesion was realized almost exclusively through referential markers, with exhaustive use in verbal (31/31 items) and spatial modes (31/31) but only sparse occurrence in visuals (5 instances); no instances were recorded for conjunctions or lexical cohesion. Thematic organization similarly foregrounded themes in both verbal and spatial modes (31 each), with no rheme-specific coding reported. Information structure emphasized given information in verbal and spatial modes (31 each), with no entries under New information. Overall, the results show a linguistically conservative pattern: heavy reliance on referential cohesion and theme/given configurations in verbal and spatial resources, and limited deployment of equivalent







devices in visuals.



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

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

**Table 2:** Linguistic Organization of the Modes of Communication in Contributing to the Overall Expression of the Philippine War on Drugs

Organization Strategy	Devices	Mode	F	Codes	Sample corpora
Cohesion	Referential markers Conjunctions Lexical cohesion	Verbal	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	

	<p>Referential markers Conjunctions Lexical cohesion</p>	<p>Visual</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>TMT4, INQ3, INQ8, INQ9, INQ11</p>	 <p>(TMT4)</p>  <p>(INQ3)</p>  <p>(INQ8)</p>
	<p>Referential markers Conjunctions Lexical cohesion</p>	<p>Spatial</p>	<p>31</p>	<p>PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13</p>	<p><b>NATION</b> Duterte promotes Oplan Tokhang brains</p>  <p>(PSC4)</p> <p><b>News</b> Drug war meant to save 'many' Filipinos from 'few' drug offenders</p>  <p>(SC2)</p> <p><b>War on drugs: Filipinos still confronted with many questions</b></p>  <p>(INQ2)</p>
<p>Thematic System</p>	<p>Theme Rheme</p>	<p>Verbal</p>	<p>31</p>	<p>PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13</p>	<p>PNP bares numbers: 4,251 dead in drug war (PSC6) 'Nothing to fear in revived Oplan Tokhang' – police (TMT3) Duterte gov't ordered, paid killers in war on drugs — AI (INQ3)</p>

	Theme Rheme	Spatial	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	<p><b>HEADLINES</b> <b>Drug war killings still hound Philippines – US</b> Ann Katigbak - The Philippine Star April 22, 2019   12:05am</p>  <p><b>(PSC1)</b></p> <p><b>'Nothing to fear in revived Oplan Tokbang' – police</b> Anwarising - The Philippine Star April 22, 2019   12:05am</p>  <p><b>(TMT3)</b></p> <p><b>HEADLINES</b> <b>SC orders PNP: Submit report on drug war</b> Mia Pineda - The Philippine Star April 2, 2019   12:05am</p>  <p><b>(INQ9)</b></p>
Information Structure	Given information New information	Verbal	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	<p>Addiction is defined as a chronic, relapsing brain disease characterized by compulsive drug seeking and drug use, despite harmful consequences (INQ4)</p> <p>The PDEA was tasked to take the lead in the administration's war on drugs while the Philippine National Police is cleansing its ranks following the death of a South Korean businessman allegedly killed by rogue policemen. (INQ6)</p> <p>The photo, which was likened to Michelangelo's sculpture Pietà, went viral and was even described by the firebrand President as melodramatic during his first State of the Nation Address (Sona). (INQ11)</p>






	Given information	Spatial	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	 <p>(PSC7)</p>  <p>(TMT1)</p>  <p>(INQ5)</p>
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Table 3 reports a fully uniform pattern across the corpus: all 31 coded items deploy conceptual representations (representational metafunction), modality resources (interactive metafunction), and compositional structuring (information value, salience, framing). Narrative and interactional subtypes were not separately evidenced. In short, every item realizes merits/demerits through conceptual depiction, calibrated modality, and consistent

compositional cues, with 31/31 frequency in each observed category. Representationally, agency clusters around officials, operations, and statistics (merits: order, capacity), while victims and communities are less elaborated, which dilutes experiential detail of harms. Interpersonally, formal quotes and procedural language foster distance and rationality, even as images of raids and bodies invite

**Table 3:** The Use of Multimodal Discourse to Present the Merits and Demerits on War on Drugs

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

<p>Interactive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interaction</li> <li>- Modality</li> </ul>	<p>31</p>	<p>PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13</p>	
<p>Compositional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information value</li> <li>- Saliency</li> <li>- Framing</li> </ul>	<p>31</p>	<p>PSC1,PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13</p>	

ethical engagement.

Compositionally, headlines, photo saliency, and strategic omissions amplify authority and compress dissent, producing a controlled field where both “success” and “cost” can be signaled but not equally elaborated (Machin *et al.*, 2020).

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

Table 4 shows that readers perceived the drug war’s merits as concentrated in five domains: enhanced public safety (quieter neighborhoods, fewer visible drug transactions, lower crime, greater peace of mind); rehabilitative promise (program completion, personal change, family reintegration, “second chances,” though

underreported); police effort (professionalization, body cameras, acknowledgment of risk, and many non-violent operations unseen in the news); fear as deterrent (curbed activity, surrenders, heightened caution, concealment/discipline via fear); and strong leadership (political will, decisiveness, accelerated action). Overall, benefits were framed as order, deterrence, and state capacity, with rehabilitation noted but media-marginalized.

Perceived gains in public safety stand out in readers’ narratives, marked by quieter surroundings, fewer visible drug transactions, and a stronger sense of security in communities. Rehabilitation programs are acknowledged as avenues for personal change, family reintegration, and second chances, though participants note that such stories are underreported in the media. Police efforts are appreciated through signs of transparency

and professionalism, such as the use of body cameras and conduct of non-violent operations, which are rarely highlighted in coverage. Fear also emerges as a deterrent force, prompting caution, surrender, and discipline among

individuals once involved in illegal activities. Finally, strong leadership is credited for political will, decisiveness, and accelerated government action, seen as driving the campaign's order and direction (Lasco & Yu, 2023).

**Table 4:** Perspectives of the Filipino Readers on the Merits of the War on Drugs as Presented in the Philippine Newspaper

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

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

Table 5 shows that readers identified demerits clustered around human rights risks (due-process deficits, headlines on extrajudicial killings, brutality framing, warrantless actions), media bias (Metro Manila focus, negativity bias, burying positive stories, anti-administration tone), pervasive public fear (panic-inducing narratives, anxiety over “lists,” fear shaping perceptions), and class disparity (victims depicted as poor, slum-centred raids, exclusion of elites, focus on low-level pushers). Net harms were construed as rights erosion, stigmatizing coverage, fear-saturated public life, and inequitable targeting.

Human-rights concerns dominate the perceived harms—media reports highlight due-process violations, extrajudicial killings, and disregard for warrants, often emphasizing brutality over justice. Media bias is also evident, with Metro Manila–centered coverage, a focus on

failures, and the burial of positive or reformative stories, contributing to perceptions of anti-Duterte sentiment. Meanwhile, public fear pervades the narratives, as stories depict communities gripped by anxiety afraid of being listed, misidentified, or caught in operations. Finally, class disparity emerges through portrayals of poor victims and slum raids, reinforcing views that the marginalized bear the brunt of the war on drugs, while elites remain largely untouched (Lasco & Yu, 2023).

**Ideological Appeals Depicted in the Newspaper Coverage of the Philippines ‘War on Drugs’**

Newspaper coverage of the Philippine drug war mobilized multimodal appeals law-and-order, sovereignty, social/human consequences, and morality through coordinated verbal, visual, and spatial resources. Linguistic organization (cohesion, thematic choice, information structure) systematically foregrounded authority while backgrounding victims. Interpreted via representational,

**Table 5:** Perspectives of the Filipino Readers on the Demerits of the War on Drugs as Presented in the Philippine Newspaper

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

interactive, and compositional metafunctions, these frames advanced perceived merits (public safety, rehabilitation, police action, deterrence, strong leadership) alongside demerits (human-rights violations, fear, media bias, class disparity). Recurrent imagery Duterte and political elites, armed police, prisoners, and bodies helped construct competing narratives of security versus moral/efficacy concerns. Outlet emphases diverged (e.g., law-enforcement/sovereignty in *The Philippine Star* and *The Manila Times*; social costs in *SunStar*; moral critique in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*). Findings pertain to the sampled outlets/timeframe and reflect interpretive analysis.

### CONCLUSION

This study’s multimodal critical discourse analysis of Philippine newspaper coverage on the war on drugs offers valuable insights for media and literacy education. The findings reveal that newspapers use verbal, visual, and spatial modes to shape meaning and influence public perception. These modes interact to make news narratives more persuasive, underscoring the importance of media literacy instruction that helps students recognize how multiple forms of communication create impact. Linguistic organization, through word choice, grammar, and sequencing, also constructs meaning and reflects ideological bias. Classroom discussions that teach students to deconstruct emotionally charged or persuasive language are therefore essential. The analysis

further shows that visuals often reinforce or counter verbal messages, framing public opinion and eliciting emotional responses. Readers’ interpretations, however, are influenced by their cultural and political contexts, highlighting the role of critical reflection on personal values and perspectives. Ideological appeals embedded in multimodal narratives legitimize certain stances while marginalizing others, demonstrating media’s power in shaping belief systems. Educators can respond by guiding students to identify bias, analyze rhetorical strategies, and engage critically with media texts. Overall, the study emphasizes integrating multimodal critical literacy in education to foster critical thinking, awareness, and responsible civic engagement.

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