

Semiotic Analysis of Political Cartoons During Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract

Political cartoons play a vital role in analysing the truth and hidden realities. It represents the message as a whole, consisting of more than one meaning in just one image or caricature. Political cartoons are based on themes that are universal and reflect situations at the national and international level. During war situations, the conflicts between the different states are delineated by political cartoons and represent the chronological changes during the war. The Russia-Ukraine war was a major emerging conflict around the globe in the year 2022. The researcher and authors depicted the war by raising their voices in different ways. In the same way, the political cartoonist also depicted the war situation by portraying cartoons in creative and satirical ways. The present study aims to analyse the semiotic meaning generated by political cartoons on social media during the Russia-Ukraine war. Semiotic theory is used as a theoretical framework for this study. Moreover, the meanings generated by political cartoons during the Russia-Ukraine conflict are analysed using Barth's model. The data for the semiotic analysis was taken from Tribune Content Agency. A total of 10 political cartoons are deeply analysed through the literal, denoted, and connoted meanings they show. The findings of the study show that the political cartoons reflecting the Russia-Ukraine war were mostly ironic and satirical about how Russia is using power to invade Ukraine. The findings also revealed that many political cartoonists depicted "Bear" in their cartoons, which showed how serious and persistent Russia is about destroying Ukraine. The aggression, power, pride, and egocentrism of Russia are criticised by political cartoonists.

Keywords: Political cartoons, Russia-Ukraine war, Semiotics, Russian power

1. Introduction

Political cartoons are the source of sharing information, hidden realities, or the truth. It represents the message as a whole, consisting of more than one meaning in just one image or cartoon. Any image or cartoon called a "sign" is full of meaning, having a hidden agenda and ideologies behind it. In addition, their role in social media is vibrant, active, and fast. Any piece of information or news is uploaded to media, and within a few seconds, cartoons are made and shared on social media—the fastest means of communication and spreading of information today. This study aims at a semiotic analysis of political cartoons, particularly those related to the Russia-Ukraine war.

The latest conflict between Russia and Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine. According to the Global Conflict Tracker, the armed conflict between the two countries started over Crimea's annexation by Russia in 2014 (Global Conflict Tracker, 2022). Since then, escalation has started, and Russia's invasion move has been critically analysed by the world with an eye toward hatred.

Benjamin Franklin is considered the founder of political cartoons. His first artistic cartoon of a snake labelled “Join or Die” represents American colonies, promotes nationalism, and brings a new idea about how complicated and complex political issues or settings can be represented by an image (Political Cartoons, 2022). Political cartoons are funny and comic but highlight or point out some key factors of what's going on at the national or international level, including the socio-political context behind it.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the world seems divided, and the world that remains silent on the Kashmir and Palestine issues gets a sudden realisation of the violation of human rights. Political cartoons that emerged at this time highlight the hypocrisy of the world. In this study, the researcher has tried to analyse the semiotic meanings generated by political cartoons and how they represent a divided world perspective.

The current study aims at the semiotic analysis of political cartoons, particularly those related to the Russia-Ukraine War. This paper aims to analyse the semiotic meanings generated from political cartoons during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Moreover, this study will also evaluate how these political cartoons represent the Ukrainians' sufferings and determination from the perspective of the Russia-Ukraine war. The research questions of this study are as follows:

- What linguistic and semiotic meanings are generated by political cartoons after the Russia-Ukraine war?
- How do political cartoons represent the Ukrainian's sufferings as well as determination from the perspective of Russia-Ukraine war?

The study aims to critically analyse political cartoons and the semiotic meanings that emerge from them. Through those semiotic meanings, the divided world perspective on the Ukraine issue is analysed as meanings are embedded in cartoons. This is important to understand in terms of the semiotic meanings and how they highlight the world's perspective.

In this paper, the researcher has analysed only ten political cartoons from the Tribune Content Agency. The selected ten political cartoons are critically analysed through semiotic analysis. Moreover, the cartoons are related to the Ukraine issue only.

2. Literature Review

This chapter includes an analysis of past studies. The two types of studies are discussed below: one is based on theoretical literature in which the semiotic theory has been analysed from various perspectives and how this theory helps to do semiotic analysis. The second part contains the empirical literature, which is the literature from the past that is analysed. At the end of this chapter, the literature gap is also identified.

2.1 Role of political cartoons in history

The term "cartoon" "refers to the codification of metaphors and it depicts the sarcastic genre through which a cartoonist criticizes, informs, and entertains his/her audience" (Mhamdi, 2017). Across various disciplines like sociology, political sciences, communication, and education, there has been an increasing interest in political cartoons. They are one of the most powerful mediums due to the range of meanings they hold. Their themes are universal and mostly reflect the present situation at the national and international levels. According to Meidani (2015), cartoons reflect various themes, beliefs, and ideas that are not interpreted by the cartoonists but by the audience themselves. In the same context, Azhar et al. (2021) analysed political cartoons using structural semiotics. The emergence of political cartoons dates back to ancient Egypt culture in 1360 BC; it was the time when animal and human cartoons were made on walls, stones, etc. (Jordan, 1990). Cartoons cover a range of various subjects, including socio-cultural, political, and economic happening in any nation, country, and across the whole globe. It signifies individual as well as national interest (Lacity & Rudramuniyaiah, 2009). Political cartoons gained popularity during the American Civil War after World War II (Vinson, 2014). According to Abdul-Raheem (2020), political cartoons remained successful due to the use of both verbal and non-verbal features. Becker (2022) stated that cartoons deal with the subjects in a more satirical way than comics. Cartoons are intended to say what one is unable to say in written text. They give liberty to the creator to spread awareness through the impeded message in the form of cartoons (Barker, 2016).

Most of the cartoons covered themes like the economy, foreign policy, domestic policy, human rights, democratic governance, and the press. Furthermore, the personal scandals of military rulers were exclusively highlighted by political cartoons (Altehenger, 2013). Sani et al. (2014) investigated the use of political cartoons in the first decade of the millennium. The study suggests that political cartoons embody images, words, and satire that can entertain as well as inform the public on current issues. These visuals constitute a social discourse that reflects current happenings and social practices; thus, they can be used to point out our perceived flaws of vice and folly as a way of transforming society (Sani et al., 2014). Mhamdi's significant study examines the use of political cartoons after the Tunisian Revolution, using theoretical perspectives of semiotic analysis. The findings suggest that political cartoons were used to reflect on socio-

political factors in Tunisia after the 2011 uprising. The cartoons mirrored the existing conditions and hidden discourse. They subtly transmitted verbal as well as non-verbal messages to encode the critical meanings fully. Thus, it led their audience to question the existing status quo. This study revealed eight major themes. Terrorism, revolution, the ousting of the president, elections, political uncertainty, independence, the Tunisian exception to the so-called “Arab Spring,” and financial corruption (Mhamdi, 2017) Just like other visuals, cartoons embody full-fledged discourse. El Refaie (2016) explored the ways in which the audience interprets multimodal texts. In addition to this, in the political context of the Russia-Ukraine War, cartoons play a very important role in saying, discussing, or describing in caricature form those elements, topics, or figures that one is unable to speak or write about openly.

2.2 Semiotic Theory in Semiotic Analysis

Semiotic theory is used as a theoretical framework for this research. According to Pierce's theory, any image or sign can be categorised at three levels: icons, indexes, and symbols. The icon bears a physical resemblance to real things. Indexes are a part of the sign that reflect the message, and the symbols are either universal or culturally learned (Kull, 2019). Freddie de Saussure describes language as a "sign system" in his book *Course in General Linguistics*. He further stated that it consists of signified and signifier, where one is the "mental concept" and the other is the "physical form" of the object, respectively.

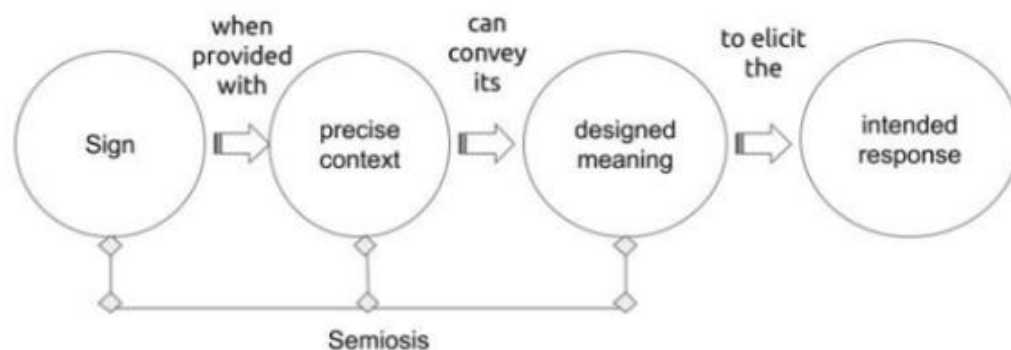


Figure 1. Model of Semiotic Theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966)

Semiotics not only deals with the "sign" system but also with the surface and deep meanings generated by signs. It is a means to analyze, interpret, and generate meanings from the image by analysing verbal and non-verbal communication. Roland Barthes, in his 1957 book *Mythologies*, developed the semiotic theory, which divides signs into code systems and analyses them in a cultural context. Everything, including speech, is a sign,

which gains meaning in a sociocultural context. Through his ideas, any sign can be interpreted in its connotative meanings as well. According to Logan (2015), the ST model of social constructionism consists of three things: signs, context, and meanings. In the following figure, the importance of signs, context, and how intended meanings are generated from the image or cartoon are represented. According to De Saussure (1916), a sign consists of both the signifier and the signified, the sound and the mental image it refers to. Moreover, in 2018, Bowcher represented that context is an important medium that helps the speaker and the recipient have meaningful conversations. In addition, Ines Pspita (2022) suggested that meanings are generated through the relationship between the signifier and the signified. The semiotic analysis allows the researchers to analyse political cartoons at three levels: linguistics, connoted, and denoted meanings, and to interpret according to personal understanding. In any political cartoon, the written text is the linguistic choice used; the denoted meanings are the literal meanings interpreted from the image, while the connoted meanings are non-literal but they involve socio-cultural meanings and interpretations attached to the cartoon. Moreover, in this study, the focus will not only be on the linguistic message but also on the denoted and connoted meanings depicted by the cartoons.

2.3 Depiction of hidden realities through political cartoons

According to Aazam, Baig, and Azam (2020), political cartoons play a vital role in analysing the hidden realities of society by depicting a particular point of view. Abdel-Raheem (2020) mentioned that on the one hand, political cartoons represent imaginary stories about the beliefs of the world, and on the other, they depict real-life characters and events. The metaphoric message is mostly conveyed through visual representation in political cartoons. Newcomer and Wholey (2015) support the idea and state that logical connection is very important, along with visual representation. To understand visual representations effectively, one should explore these cartoons in terms of socio-political context. If the contextual background is not depicted in political cartoons, it can be a challenge for readers to understand the issues depicted by the cartoonists. As per the study of Mateus (2016), while creating political cartoons, it is very important to consider the social context. By analysing the social changes over time, one can be able to interpret the meanings portrayed by cartoons.

Moreover, those values that are being challenged, contested, and debated by society can be depicted by cartoons (Genova, 2018). In political cartoons, humour is important, but the most important thing is to communicate the message to the audience. Graau and Zotos (2016) supported the idea and represented that humour is one of the factors that enhance the beauty of portrayals, but the important thing is to create meaning from portrayals. Moreover, the cartoonist uses references from cultural aspects to understand the subject matter. For example, they can represent politicians as fictional characters who can tell their stories and make jokes. However, Khamdamovna (2020)

argues that cartoons usually depict satire, not humor. Moreover, he created a line between humour and satire. Firstly, the cartoonists are depicting a particular topic, and many times it has less humour in it. Secondly, satire is not self-explanatory; one has to understand the context behind it (Mateus, 2016).

According to Silaski and Durovic (2019), cartoonists depict harsh realities that cannot be expressed openly. If cartoons depict what is openly said, it will lose its real value and become less effective. Moreover, by portraying cartoons, one can express negative views and feelings without taking responsibility for the views about particular issues. Political cartoons represent the group interests and perspectives of different societies. As per Al-Momani, Badarneh, and Migdadi (2017), political cartoons not only satirise the status quo but also highlight the socio-political discourse and hidden stance in a comic way. Political cartoons not only express the attitudes, ideologies, and views of the cartoonist but also the social group. In addition to this, the purpose of the caricatures is to draw attention to revealing hidden messages (Gibbs, 2016). The above discussion showed that these political cartoons are not mere creations for fun, but they depict the ideologies that are attached to a particular country or situation. Moreover, these political cartoons represent the socio-political situation that the country is going through.

2.4 Importance of political cartoons during the Russia-Ukraine war

Political cartoons are based on themes that are universal and reflect situations at the national and international level. During war situations, the conflicts between the different states are delineated by political cartoons and represent the chronological changes during the war. As per Danjoux (2018), the Palestine and Israel conflict is depicted through cartoons to investigate whether the chronological changes were the main cause of the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in October 2000. Moreover, the chronological changes during the war are also depicted through cartoons. During the outbreak of violence between Palestine and Israel, the mood and focus of the cartoons also shifted.

Pedrazzini and Scheuer (2018) mentioned that the relationship between two states can also be depicted through political cartoons. By analysing the political cartoons, one can easily identify whether the relationship between the two states is stable or not. The political cartoons were created by Indian artists to analyse the relationship between the US and Russia during the administrations of Trump and Obama (Pacheco, 2021). Moreover, the symbols and metaphors used in political cartoons represented political reality. Another study was conducted by Al-Momani, Badarneh, and Migdadi (2016), in which the Arab Spring is represented through cartoons. The political cartoons depicted the socio-political context during the uprising in the Arab region in 2011 and also delineated the changes in stances and practises of people toward politicians and politics.

During the Russia-Ukraine war, political cartoons depicted war in many ways. One of the Ukraine cartoonists depicted this horrible war by showing a girl in a terrible

state in a bombed-out building, and she is protected by her stuffed animals from an incoming Russian shell. Moreover, another picture depicted how the war affected them (Abdul-Raheem, 2022). Moreover, the Ukrainian culture is depicted by Yuriy Zhuravel through political cartoons that represent the interests of the Ukrainian people. Moreover, sadness, despair, and anger can be seen in political cartoons of Ukraine during the war situation.

As per Agarwal, Punn, and Sonbhadra (2022), the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is highly discussed on social media by international media. The Washington Post shared the post, which depicted a caricature of Putin looking at himself in the mirror and saying, "I will denazify Ukraine." The mirror reflection depicts Adolf Hitler, the German dictator, not the Russian leader. Moreover, the Global Times news also delineated the issue by showing a man who is wearing a cap representing the prints of the US flag. He has a bomb in his hand named "NATO expansion," and he throws one in "Russia-Ukraine Conflicts" and moves away.

2.5 Challenges faced by political cartoons

Cartoons depict both the positive and negative sides of a situation. Kuttner et al. (2017) mentioned that they can make people come closer or push them far apart. On the positive side, they can make people alert about violations of rules and regulations, and by highlighting the issues through inferences, they can make them aware of real-life situations. As per Al-Momani, Badarneh, and Migdadi (2017), if the issues are highlighted during the time of violation by creating caricatures, they may have a positive effect that leads society toward change. On the other hand, McClennen (2018) argued that cartoons may have positive effects on cartoonists and the in-group community, but at the same time, they may have negative and harmful effects on the out-group community because most of the time the cartoons are created to criticize, mock, and undermine their community. There are different examples in history in which cartoons have presented negative effects. Sanderson (2016) exemplified the negative impact of cartoons created by Block on Nixon, and Nixon wanted to remove that image because that image was referring to his image in Herblock's cartoon. A Russian cartoonist depicted the caricature of Adolf Hitler, and he was angered by him and swore to kill the cartoonist when the Germans captured Moscow (Pogrebetskaya & Bause, 2018). Additionally, offensive cartoons that depict ethnic and racist jokes are rarely accepted by society because these cartoons hurt the sentiments of society. Knopf (2015) analysed and argued that cartoons on sensitive issues are serious social artefacts and depict the sense of self and identity. There are various challenges faced by the political cartoonist while creating political cartoons, so one has to look after these challenges while creating these political cartoons.

The above studies discussed the importance of political cartoons from different perspectives, as they depict the real image of society in satirical ways. It also depicts the harsh realities of what society is going through. During the Russia-Ukraine war, different

political caricatures were created by cartoonists that depicted the hypocrisy of the world (Zhabotynska & Ryzhova, 2022). The past literature showed that different studies were conducted on political cartoons from a discourse perspective as per Shaikh, Tariq, and Saqlain (2019); however, there is a gap in the literature that the previous studies are lacking in analysing the political cartoons during the Russia-Ukraine war. The current study addresses the gap and tries to fill the one that the previous studies left.

3. Research Methodology

For the analysis of cartoons, different theoretical frameworks and various approaches can be adopted. This may include semantic, linguistic semiotic, psycholinguistic, and pragmatic approaches. In this study, the semiotic approach was used, as it is a “philosophical approach that is used to interpret messages in terms of their signs and patterns of symbolism.” Barthes is one of the renowned semioticians. According to him, a sign conveys connotative and denotative meanings. The system is essentially divided into three parts: the text, the denoted image, and the coded iconic message (Rudrakumar & Venkatraman, 2022).

Verbal captions that comprise lexical and structural choices constitute linguistic messages. The literally denoted message involves the description of the images, including non-linguistic features like colors, facial expressions, drawings, gestures, and physical exaggerations. The symbolic connotation of the message provides an interpretation of the inter-semiotic relationship between the linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Since cartoons are based on culture, each cartoon is analysed first with the contextual background, and then the literal meaning moves to the denotative and symbolic interpretation. This research is based on a qualitative research design. The qualitative research approach is used in the study to analyse political cartoons from the Ukraine perspective. The data comprised political cartoons collected from Tribune Content Agency, and a total of ten political cartoons have been used as a sample for this research.

The data is analysed through the semiotic analysis of cartoons, including written text, facial expressions, colors, etc., at three basic levels: the sign itself, context, and meanings intended to spread.

Ronald Barths's analytical model is used for data analysis. He proposed this model in 1964. According to Ronald Barths, an image has two folds of meaning: literal meanings and connoted meanings that are complex (as cited in Leak, 1994).

Table 1

Ronald Barth's Analytical model for Semiotic Analysis (Rudrakumar & Venkatraman, 2022)

Linguistic messages	Wordplay polysemes, metaphors, code-mixing, puns, ambiguity
Denoted message	Colors, facial expressions, physical exaggerations, drawings
Connoted message (symbolic)	Themes symbolized.

4. Data Analysis

The data is analysed through the semiotic analysis of cartoons, including written text, facial expressions, colors, etc., at three basic levels: the sign itself, context, and meanings intended to spread. To analyse the representation of the Russia-Ukraine war through the political cartoon, the researcher has used Ronald Barth's model. According to Ronald Barth, an image has two folds of meaning: literal meanings and connoted meanings that are complex (Seo and Huh, 2018). A total of 11 political cartoons have been selected and are being analysed one by one in detail. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has been depicted by different political cartoonists in different ways.



Figure 1. Tribune Content Agency

a) The Linguistic Message (text)

“You are under the protection of mother Russia” is represented as a linguistic message in the text.

b) The Denoted Message (literal)

The denoted meaning in this political cartoon is depicted through a person who is standing, while the rest of the people are lying on the floor. Moreover, the tank is depicted in the picture. Some of the people in the picture are trying to pick their flag up from the floor, but they are unable to do this, so they are just looking at the flag. The blood is also flowing out of the mouth of one person.

c) The Connoted Message (symbolic)

This figure symbolises so many things. The first symbol in this picture depicts a person who is standing and seems very happy. The person is depicting the president of Russia, who seems very happy after creating a lot of destruction. Moreover, the people who are lying on the floor are wearing yellow and blue T-shirts, which seem to indicate that they belong to Ukraine. There is so much chaos in the lives of Ukrainians, as many of them are dead. The tank in the corner also symbolises that the war is over and many Ukrainians are dead. Moreover, it also shows the Russian invasion of Ukraine because everything seems to be on the verge of destruction. This picture also depicts how the Ukrainian people have struggled for freedom and lost their lives in order to save their country. The blood shows the suffering and damage done to Ukrainians who lost their lives in the conflict.

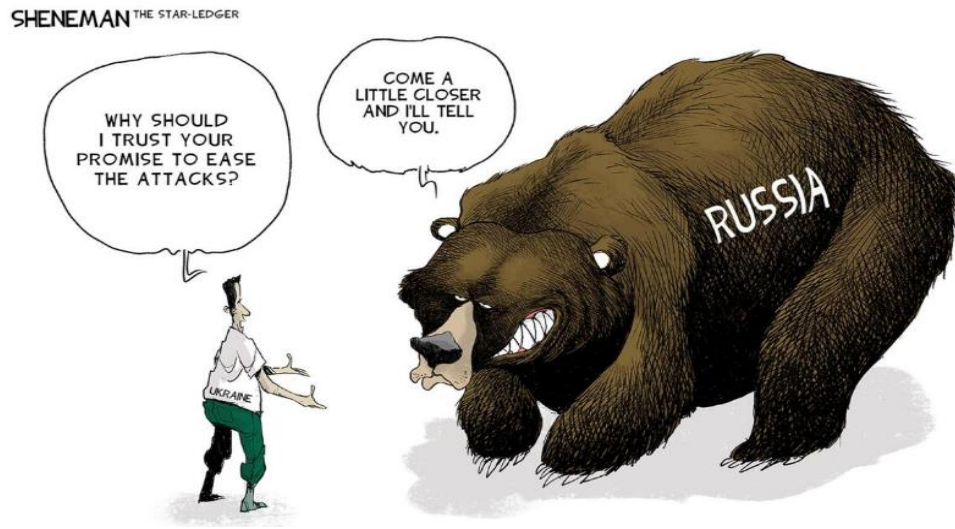


Figure 2. Tribune Content Agency

a) The Linguistic Message (text)

Two country names, such as "Russia" and "Ukraine," are depicted in this picture. The linguistic meaning in this image is represented through two clauses. Like the Ukraine is asking the question to Russia, "Why should I trust your promise to ease the attacks?" Russia replies, "Come a little closer, and I will tell you."

b) The Denoted Message (literal)

The indicated message is conveyed through two characters. One character is represented by Bear, and the other is represented by a young person. Both of these characters are depicting countries, as the bear is depicting Russia and the young man is representing the country of Ukraine. Here in this picture, two contrasting pictures are depicted: one represents the animal, and the other represents the human creature.

c) The Connoted Message (symbolic)

In this political cartoon, different symbols are depicted. The first symbol is the character "bear," which shows the Russian country, and particularly, it is representing Russian President Vladimir Putin. Most of the time, when people think about Russia, the picture of a bear comes to mind because the bear has been associated with Russia for ages. Till the 17th century, the bear was used in logos, advertisements, cartoons, and even paintings in Russia; however, despite its close connection, the bear is not used as the official symbol of Russia. The political cartoonist used the bear as a symbol to capture how much Russians are self-assertive and prideful like the one portrayed in this image. Moreover, the facial expression of the bear symbolises that Russia is full of anger and hatred for Ukraine, and they are saying that they will be attacking Ukraine because Ukraine is also threatening Russia. Moreover, the bear face also symbolises that Putin is feeling proud of his actions. Here, the symbol depicted by a person (Ukraine) shows that Ukraine is under attack and how Russia is trying to occupy its territory. Moreover, this picture depicts that the stronger one is ripping the weaker one. Ukraine is pissed off because of Russia's attack. As in the text, one can see how Russia is threatening Ukraine by saying, "Come closer to me and then I will tell you." The picture also depicts that soon Russia is going to attack Ukraine and will occupy the territory of Ukraine as it belongs to them.



Figure 3. Tribune Content Agency

a) The Linguistic Message (text)

The linguistic message in this image is represented by a person who is holding a flag, and the verbal caption is "Don't ever give up!" The second verbal caption is represented through the phrase "Biden-US-Dollars for Oil."

b) The Denoted Message (literal)

The denoted message in this image is represented by a bear who is holding a boy in its mouth while holding a sack of coins in its paw.

c) The Connoted Message (symbolic)

In this political cartoon, two symbols are depicted. One is depicting the picture of a bear, which symbolises the bear, and the picture of the flag is also there on the bear, which is the symbol of Russia. Moreover, the facial expression of the bear is showing that Russia is feeling so much anger and anguish toward Ukraine. Moreover, on the other hand, the bear is holding a sack of coins from the US. Russia is a transporter of crude oil to the US, which in return pays dollars. This also shows that the US is also taking advantage of the war and paying funds to Russia for it. This shows the hypocrisy of both Russia and the US. Moreover, the picture of the boy symbolises that the war is continuous and many Ukrainians are killed by the Russians. Moreover, the drops of blood from the mouth of the bear show the sacrifice of the Ukrainian people and the loss of so

many lives. However, the holding of the flag by Ukraine shows that they have strong determination and are trying to fight back against Russia.



Figure 4. Tribune Content Agency

a) The Linguistic Message (text)

The linguistic message is depicted by the text "Ukrainians." The other text in the image is "US/NATO."

b) The Denoted Message (literal)

Some people in this image are in uniform, and they are trying to fix the flag, whereas, on the other hand, one person is trying to pull the flag. Moreover, it shows that the people who are wearing the same uniform are trying to continuously struggle.

c) The Connoted Message (symbolic)

This image is providing a big sense of both persuasion and determination. The people who are wearing uniforms are representing the Ukrainian army, which has a strong determination to fix up its flag. The Russia-Ukraine war is depicted in this political cartoon. It also symbolises the sacrifices of Ukraine, and NATO is hiding these sacrifices. The first symbol here is represented by the Ukrainian flag, which is presented as a shield. It is visible that the Ukrainian army is determined to fix the flag, but it also shows that in the end, the flag will be disintegrated, which shows the possibility of losing

the war. Moreover, in this picture, NATO is trying to make the second symbol, US/NATO, represents how NATO, the US, and the European Union are cowardly standing behind this agenda, and they are exploiting the sacrifice of Ukraine to defend themselves. Moreover, it seems that NATO and European countries are worried about the issue because they know that Russia can attack Ukraine.



Figure 5. Tribune Content Agency

a) The Linguistic Message (text)

The linguistic message is depicted through the poster, which shows "No global warming, only climate change," that J. Kerry is holding in his hand. Moreover, J. Kerry is also targeting a woman by saying, "You are destroying Putin from something very important."

b) The Denoted Message (literal)

In this figure, two people are portrayed. One is J. Kerry, who is holding a poster in his hand and is trying to convince the woman. J. Kerry is also saying something to the woman. The woman, on the other hand, is depicting Ukraine, and she is carrying a baby in her hands. The woman is seen as having so much anger for the other person, and she is also wounded as she has a bandage on her head.

c) The Connoted Message (symbolic)

This picture symbolises two countries. One is J. Kerry, who is the US special presidential diplomat for climate change. He is holding a poster in his hand that shows that he is stopping Ukraine to end the war. Moreover, it also symbolises that the heat created by war should be ended now and there should be some kind of positive change. Moreover, he is convincing women that Ukraine is depriving the president of Russia of something very important. On the other hand, if the researcher looks at the face of a woman, she has so much anger on her face. She has bandages on her head as well as on her arms while she is holding her baby too. Ukraine was a vibrant country for the Ukrainian people, but now it is tainted with anguish and blood. It shows how they move hopelessly out of their own country while looking hopelessly at their distracted homes. This cartoon overall depicts the theme of the agony and torment of Ukraine's people and the disregard of Russians, who turn a blind eye to Ukraine's desolation and crises.



Figure 6: The Tribune Agency

a) The Linguistic Message (text)

In this figure, there is no depiction of linguistic meanings.

b) The Denoted Message (literal)

The denoted meanings in this picture are depicted by the three claws with sharp, pointed nails. The nails are so pointed, and they are pricking inside something so that the blood is moving out of it.

c) The Connoted Message (symbolic)

In this image, the symbols are depicted in three different ways. The very first symbol is the representation of two colors, yellow and blue, which represent the flag of Ukraine. The second symbol is the representation of bear claws, which symbolises Russia, and it seems that it is so powerful that it is tearing the flag of Russia. Another symbol that is depicted in the image is the blood stains from the claw marks. It shows how much Russia is powerful and ruthless toward Ukraine. It also depicts that because of the continuous war between Russia and Ukraine, there is so much chaos in the country. The theme of power is represented in this image, which demonstrates Russia's ability to exert pressure on the Ukrainian people and its lack of compassion for Ukraine. This picture symbolises Russia's pride, and the Russian people believe that whatever happens, they will kill the people of Ukraine for the sake of pleasure.



Figure 7. Tribune Content Agency

a) The Linguistic Message (text)

The linguistic message in this image is represented by the word "Ukraine" on the land. There is also a depiction of numbers such as 3-2-1.

b) The Denoted Message (literal)

The cartoon depicts a picture of a person who seems very happy and satisfied. The person is holding some kind of ringing bell in his hands. It shows that something is in front of him, and he wants to start by ringing the bell. Moreover, he is trying to start pressing the bell by saying 3-2-1.

c) The Connoted Message (symbolic)

The above figure depicts the picture of a person, who symbolises the president of Russia. The facial expression of the Russian president shows that he seems very happy. He has the map of Ukraine's country in front of him, and he is trying to press the bell. It means that he seems very happy to initiate the war on the Ukrainian people. There is a line at the centre of the map, which represents that Russia is trying to grab the territory of Ukraine. The map is divided into two halves, the larger of which is larger than the smaller. This picture shows that Ukraine is being presented to Russia as prey, and Russia is enjoying it. This image also shows how Russia is wearing down Ukraine, which is being used by the Russian Federation as a source of payment on behalf of betraying Russia. Moreover, during the war, Russia overpowered Ukraine by lecturing its way. Ukraine is facing so many challenges and is facing poverty due to the Russian Federation. During the Russia-Ukraine war, many Ukrainians lost their lives serving their country. Moreover, in this image, the ringing bell is placed on the larger part of the map, which shows that Russia is trying to occupy the large territory of the Ukraine by initiating the war situation.



Figure 8. Tribune Content Agency

a) The Linguistic Message (text)

The linguistic message in this image is represented by the verbal caption "UN willing to hold war crimes trial" written on the top of the building. Another verbal caption identified is "United Nations" and "Zelenskyy continues to take the high ground."

(b) The Denoted Message (literal)

The cartoon depicts a picture of one large building with different flags representing different countries. Moreover, one person is moving upstairs with a flag in his hands and trying to reach that high building. It seems that this building is of very high value. Moreover, the person is holding a flag in his hands, which shows that his flag is not represented in this high, authoritative building. The person is struggling continuously to reach that place. The caption in the picture shows that this high building is representing the United Nations, and there are different countries that are members of the UN, but the person holding a flag is not a member of the UN.

(c) The Connoted Message (symbolic)

The symbolic message in this cartoon is interpreted through a combination of linguistic and denotative messages. Through linguistic and semiotic analysis, this

building depicts the power of NATO. The person who is struggling to reach that building represents Ukraine. The person in the image holding a flag in his hand and struggling continuously is the Ukrainian president. He also wants to join the hands of an American, and he continues to take the high ground.

Both the visual and verbal elements emphasise the theme of the role of NATO regarding the Russia-Ukraine war. In April 1949, NATO was created by Americans in competition to counter USSR threats. Almost 30 countries have joined NATO, and Russia is also a member. In those countries that are members of NATO, the collected security is provided to each member. Before joining NATO, Ukraine was part of the USSR, which collapsed in 1991. Now Ukraine also wanted to be part of NATO, as shown in the picture where the little girl is looking back at NATO. However, Russia never wanted Ukraine to be part of NATO, as it can be seen in the picture that Ukraine is in continuous struggle. Both Russia and Ukraine are neighbors, and Russia thinks if Ukraine becomes part of NATO, the sovereignty and the structure will be distributed. This was one of the main reasons for the Russia-Ukraine war. It shows that the UN is fully responsible for the Russia-Ukraine war.



Figure 9. Tribune Content Agency

a) The Linguistic Message (text)

The linguistic message in this image is represented by a verbal caption using different statements: one is "Ukraine Refugees." The person who seems to be in uniform asks, "Would you be willing to relocate to Philadelphia?" and then they reply, "We will take our chances here." Moreover, on the top left corner, the very important statement is written: "Philly reaches 100 homicides for 2022, outpacing last year's record."

b) The Denoted Message (literal)

The literal meaning of this image shows that Ukrainians are moving toward another country. They are fleeing the war situation and seem to be Ukraine refugees. The Ukrainian refugees came to the UN Refugee Agency to save and protect their lives. Moreover, the UN Refugee Agency asks them if they are willing to relocate to Philadelphia, and they seem to agree to go there. Moreover, this picture depicts that in the Ukraine war, many people lost their lives.

c) The Connoted Message (symbolic)

Symbolically, this image is representing so many things. Initially, it shows that all these people in the image are Ukrainian refugees, and they have such fearful faces. In this picture, one can see that everybody is hugging their loved one, as the effects of war seem to be prominent on their faces. They ran away from the war situation, and now they are afraid that the Russian army will come and also kill them. There is a lot of fear on their faces, and they went to the UN Refugee Agency, where they are requesting to be protected and to save their lives. The UN refugee agency asks them if they are willing to move to Philadelphia. They reply that they will go; they will never lose this chance. Despite hearing that Philadelphia is not a safe country for them, as shown in the image, 100 people will be killed by other people in 2022, they agree to go. On the other hand, it is represented that the Ukraine is suffering because of the war. This figure shows how Russia is pissed off between Russia and the US and how both countries are getting benefits by invading Ukraine.



Figure 10. Tribune Content Agency

a) The Linguistic Message (text)

The linguistic message is represented by two words, "time" and "crime." Furthermore, the name "Zelenskyy" is written in Time magazine, whereas the name "Putin" is written in Crime.

b) The Denoted Message (literal)

The two personalities are represented in this picture. The first one represents the picture of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, and the second one represents the personality of Russian President Putin. Moreover, the Russian president is representing crimes, as can be seen in the picture, by holding missiles in his hands. On the other hand, the Ukrainian president is representing the time, and he is waiting for the right time.

c) The Connoted Message (symbolic)

This image is the depiction of two magazines that represent two different countries. One magazine is representing Ukraine, and the other is representing Russia. In Ukraine Magazine, there is one picture that represents Ukrainian President Zelenskyy. The Ukrainian president seems motivated and determined, as can be seen in the image. On his back, there are Ukrainian flags. On the other hand, in Russian magazine there is one picture that represents Russian President Putin. Putin is holding weapons-related tools in his hands, and he seems very angry. This image is creating a broad visual state in

the eyes of people and is showing the real image of the story. “Crime” symbolises that Russia has strong power and can capture anything that comes its way. This image depicts how powerful Russia is, and how anything that stands in its way can be destroyed by Russia. The cruelty of Russia is represented in this picture because, in 2014, the Ukrainian peninsula "Crimea" was annexed by Russia. In 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine and is trying to make Ukraine part of Russia. This image depicts the real situation of the Russia-Ukraine war and how Russia is overpowering Ukraine.

5. Conclusion

The Russia-Ukraine war was a major emerging conflict around the globe in the year 2022. The researcher and authors depicted the war by raising their voices in different ways. In the same way, the political cartoonist also depicted the war situation by portraying cartoons in creative and satirical ways. In this paper, semiotic analysis of political cartoons is done to analyse and understand the linguistic, denotative, and connotative meanings through Barthes's lens. This study presents the role of political cartoons during the Russia-Ukraine war and how their meaning is conveyed to the world through these cartoons. This research found political cartoons reflecting the Russia-Ukraine war that were mostly ironic and satirical about how Russia is using power to invade Ukraine. Moreover, this research also analysed the perspective of Russia invading Ukraine. Many political cartoonists depicted Bear in their cartoons, which showed how serious and persistent Russia is about destroying Ukraine. Moreover, the flag of Ukraine also symbolises that the fallen Ukraine is still resilient. The aggression, power, pride, and egocentrism of Russia are criticised by political cartoonists. Moreover, without context information, it is not possible to understand and interpret those cartoons.

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