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A Critical Stylistic Analysis of Digital Addiction in British Newspapers

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Abstract

Digital addiction is a new type of behavioural addiction that emerges as a result of excessive and compulsive use of new digital technologies. Many researchers have focused on studying substance addiction and some types of digital addiction in a variety of fields such as discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and psycholinguistics. However, no linguistic study is conducted on digital addiction as an umbrella term. The current study aimed to detect which critical stylistic tool (textual-conceptual functions) are employed in Guardian and Independent's articles to reflect ideologies regarding the concept of digital addiction. The study concluded that all five critical stylistic tools are employed in both newspaper articles to reflect negative ideologies since they are employed to warn people that digital addiction affects all aspects of life like drugs and convince them to increase their awareness of it.

Keywords

Critical stylistics, textual-conceptual functions, digital addiction, newspapers

1. Introduction

Addiction is defined as an uncontrollable desire to do something repeatedly that causes harm to a person's psycho-physiological health or social life (Karagün et al, 2018). Sussman (2017) indicates that the general categories of addiction are

substance and behavioural.

Digital addiction (henceforth DA) is a new type of behavioural addiction that is characterised by compulsive usage of digital devices that causes physical and mental harm to the addicts as well as their loved ones (Dicey, 2019). DA is an umbrella term for digital devices, digital platforms, and digital media; it is becoming a recognised problem globally (Cham et al, 2019).

Notably, many researchers have focused on studying substance addiction and some types of digital addiction in a variety of fields such as discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and psycholinguistics. However, no linguistic study is conducted on digital addition as an umbrella term. Accordingly, the present study is set to bridge the gap by investigating the concept of digital addiction as an umbrella term via five critical stylistic tools to detect the underlying ideologies in the selected articles. Precisely, the present study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Which critical stylistic tools are employed in Guardian and Independent newspapers' articles to express the concept of digital addiction?
2. What are the underlying ideologies embedded in the newspapers' articles in a way that attracts the readers of these articles to change their minds about the concept of digital addiction?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical stylistics

CS is a branch of stylistics that focuses on text analysis from a critical perspective. It tries to expose hidden ideologies in texts and how texts offer the world of reality to the hearer or reader (Ahmed & Abbas, 2021). The study of the female body in women's magazines (2007) lead to the development of the term "critical stylistics" in 2010 when Jeffries tried to describe how language could restrict and dominate women in their lives (Tabbert, 2016). CS has developed as a highly prominent approach to linguistic ideology and as a reaction to the development of CDA. Even though the roots of CDA are related to stylistics, Roger Fowler, a renowned stylistician and one of CDA's researchers. Recently, the two fields are separated (Jeffries, 2014). Critical stylistics could bridge the gap between critical discourse analysis and stylistics and reveal the writers' methods for constructing their ideologies in their writings by combining their strengths and advantages (Coffey, 2013).

According to Jeffries (2010), the main objective of CS is to expose the ideological structure of a literary (novels, poems, etc) or non-literary (newspapers, political manifestoes, etc). Jeffries (2010) asserts that CS provides a more systemic, comprehensive linguistic set of eclectic tools by combing the best tools of stylistics, CL, and CDA. CS aims "to give the reader a clear set of analytical tools to follow in carrying out the critical analysis of texts". These tools are called textual-conceptual functions (TCFs).

2.1.1 Differences between CDA and CS

Regardless of the interdisciplinary CDA approaches that emphasise how language is used to create ideologies and power relations in social contexts, CDA approaches have received criticism in terms of theory, methodology, interpretation, and context (Hassan, 2019). CS has emerged as a reaction to CDA and there are several differences between them:

1. CDA is criticised for lacking a clear, complete, and comprehensive linguistic toolkit of analysis. While CS provides a more systemic, comprehensive linguistic set of eclectic tools by combining the best tools of stylistics, CL, and CDA (Jeffries, 2010).
2. CDA is criticised for proffering a “partial” or “subjective” study of texts and it emphasises specific aspects of texts and ignores others (Widdowson, 2004). Therefore, Jeffries in her framework of CS withstands personal biases and informs objectivity by constructing the interpretation textually grounded (Ibrahim, 2018).
3. “CDA main practitioners were often more interested in the contextual (and thus necessarily vague) features of powerful language and were less concerned to provide a reasonably broad range of tools” (Jeffries, 2010). Thus, the social, historical, visual, and such text- external represent the core of CDA analysis. Whereas, in CS the primary focus is on revealing the ideological underpinnings of texts and the way language is manipulated to pass certain ideological contents or convince the reader to change or adapt ideological viewpoint to confirm the text (Jeffries, 2014)
4. Fairclough divides analysis into three stages: description, interpretation, and explanation. Many CDA researchers are interested in the process of explaining how texts are produced and read concerning the socio-political landscape. Whereas, CS researchers are interested in the first and second stages (Jeffries, 2010)
5. The term ‘critical’ in CDA is intended to imply a socialist and most likely Marxist, approach to language analysis. Conversely, the term ‘critical’ in CS refers to a method of uncovering ideology in any text (Jeffries, 2014)

2.1.2 Textual- Conceptual functions (Critical Stylistic Tools)

2.1.3.1 Naming and Describing

Jeffries (2010) asserts that this textual-conceptual tool’s function is to help writers or speakers describe a specific event or item in a way that appears to create ideological meaning. Naming is a broad term that refers to a range of linguistic practices, containing:

- The choice of a noun to represent a referent.
- Noun phrase modification to determine the nature of the referent.
- Nominalisation is the process of converting verbs into a noun.

2.1.2.2 Representing Actions/Events/States

Representing actions/ events/ states is depends on the choice of the verb to characterise the situation as an action, event, or state in a clause. Each of these options can have an ideological impact based on how the recipients see the situation (Jeffries, 2010). This textual-conceptual function is based on the model of transitivity as set out by Simpson's (1993) version of Halliday's system of transitivity. This version is attainable and is acquainted with a symbiosis of CDA and stylistic methods for text analysis (Khuzaae, 2019). This textual-conceptual function is based on Simpson's model of transitivity because it is clear and relatively usable.

2.1.2.3 Prioritising

Prioritising is a textual-conceptual tool that aids in the understanding of various ideological interpretations coming from foregrounding/backgrounding in clauses structure (Jeffries, 2014). Jeffries (2010) states that there are three ways in which information can be prioritised in English sentences, each of which has the influence of making some portions of the sentence more prominent than others, including, information structure, transformation, and subordination.

2.1.2.4 Presenting Others' Speech and Thoughts

Jeffries (2010) indicates that this textual-conceptual tool is related to how the speakers/writers use the power of language to quote others' speeches and thoughts that might potentially involve manipulation and highlighting certain ideological meanings. Many texts claim to reflect the words of others faithfully. Indeed, even if no malice is intended, there are constantly gaps between the quoted speech and the original version caused by not only hesitation, intonation, false starts, and facial expression but also the selection of which words to quote may be important.

2.1.2.5 Representing Time, Space, and Society

According to Jeffries (2010), this textual-conceptual tool is concerned with the textual processes that construct the essential features of time and space for a text world, as well as some of the parameters of the social world in which human participants act. The linguistic model of this tool is based on deixis since it brings time, space, and society together in a theoretical framework. Deixis is a technical term derived from Greek that means pointing via language and any linguistic patterns applied to accomplish this pointing are called deictic expressions (Yule, 1996)

2.2 Digital Addiction

Addiction is defined as an uncontrollable desire to do something repeatedly

that causes harm to a person's psycho-physiological health or social life (Karagün et al, 2018, p.1). Sussman (2017, p.89) indicates that the general categories of addiction are substance and behavioural.

Digital addiction (henceforth DA) has emerged as a result of the development of digital technologies in our time and the integration of such technologies with mass media (Bagcl, 2019). Digital addiction is a new type of behavioural addiction that is characterised by compulsive usage of digital devices that causes physical and mental harm to the addicts as well as their loved ones (Dicey, 2019). According to Singh and Singh (2019), digital addiction is an umbrella term for the following three categories:

- a) Digital device addiction such as computer addiction, smartphone addiction, and digital gadget addiction
- b) Digital platforms addiction such as Google search addiction, YouTube addiction, Facebook addiction, Twitter addiction, and so on.
- c) Digital media/ medium addiction such as video games addiction, computer games addiction, and mobile apps addiction.

2.3 Media and Newspapers

The term 'media' refers to a communication medium between senders and recipients. Media has two categories: old and new. The first category includes newspapers, magazines, books, and radio while the latter includes the internet, digital TV, and so on. Thus, the newspaper is mediated between them; it is old because it is printed and connected to legacy news media, and it is new because it can be online (Tabbert, 2016). The decision to focus on newspapers is due to the newspapers' language which is typically considered popular and easily accessible (Hillbom, 2009)

3. Methodology

The current study adopts a qualitative method. The qualitative part is descriptive more than predictive; the aim is to have a deep understanding and interpretation with a precise analysis of the phenomenon. (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

The collected data consists of ten articles collected from two quality British broadsheet newspapers: Guardian and Independent. The decision to select these two newspapers is justified for the following reasons: first, they occupy the highest popular broadsheet newspapers in the United Kingdom from 2019 to 2020 (Watson, 2020). Second, they award a 100% trust rating by the media watchdog NewsGuard (Dearden, 2020). Third, both newspapers' websites have free access.

Regarding the analysis model, the researcher of the current study adopts a critical stylistic tool (the textual-conceptual tools) namely: naming and describing, representing actions/events/states, prioritising, presenting others' speech and thought, and representing time, space, and society to detect the ideologies by presenting digital addiction and its types in relationship with other concepts.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Naming and Describing

1. "She calls the smartphone the "modern-day hypodermic needle": we turn to it for quick hits, seeking attention, validation and distraction with each swipe, like and tweet". (Guardian)

The highlighted part is the apposition phrases used to identify the same thing, which functions as an object for the sentence. Likewise, the words "seeking attention", "validation", and "distraction" are nominalisation. The ideological implication of the metaphorical expression is to describe the smartphone as the modern-day hypodermic needle, implying that the needle is used to inject drugs into the body. Thus, smartphone addiction is as dangerous as drug addiction. The process of seeking attention describes the behaviour of waiting for the admiration of others, validation is the action of declaring something officially acceptable, and distraction refers to the entertainment things; all these nominalisations elucidate the features of the smartphone that stimulate us to be addicts.

2. "Smartphone is now **the place** where we live', anthropologists say". (Guardian)
- The choice of the noun "the place" functions as a complement, to suggest that the smartphone is no longer just a device. It drives us to ignore our homes and families.

1. "Giving your child a smartphone is like "giving them a gram of cocaine", a top addiction therapist has warned". (Independent)

The noun phrase "your child a smartphone" functions as the subject and the noun phrase "a gram of cocaine" functions as a complement to draw the readers' attention to the potentially dangerous addictive properties of smartphones that negatively influence children's mental health children since they are immature.

4. "We are calling on the parent companies of Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat to prioritise the health and wellness of its users by implementing safeguards to protect minors from the danger of cyberbullying and sexual exploitation that run rampant on their platforms". (Independent)

The choice of noun "cyberbullying" and the noun phrase that is pre-modified by the adjective "sexual" is used to highlight the harmful social media contents that negatively influence children's and teenagers' thinking. Thus, urging the companies to restrict these harmful contents and draw the parents' attention to these contents to protect their children.

4.2 Representing Actions/Events/ States

1. "Our smartphones **are making** us dopamine junkies, with each swipe, like, and tweet feeding our habit". (Guardian)

The kind of process in the above clause is a material action event expressed by the verb "are making", in which the actor "our smartphones" is inanimate, while "us dopamine junkies" is the goal. The writer uses the verb "making" with the inanimate actor to imply that smartphones can create or cause powerful

effects that may be turning us into dopamine addicts.

2. "They **observe**: "In other ways, the smartphone may reduce the prior experience of home as a refuge". (Guardian)

The verb "observe" is a material action intention, in which "they" is the actor and "In other ways, the smartphone may reduce the prior experience of home as a refuge" is the goal, suggesting that researchers have found that smartphones have a harmful impact on our homes.

3. "Concern has grown recently over the number of young people seen to be sending or receiving pornographic images, or accessing age inappropriate content online through their devices". (Independent)

The relational circumstantial process is expressed by the verb "has grown", in which "concern" is the carrier and the complement is the attribute, to highlight the negative change of young people's ethics and behaviours.

4. "Facebook recently admitted that social media can be bad for you, but added that it all comes down to how you use it". (Independent)

The verb "admitted" signifies a material action event with "Facebook" as an actor and the relative clause as a goal to confess the intentionally harmful addictive effect of this app as reality.

4.3 Prioritising

1. "The smartphone is no longer just a device that we use, **it's** become the place where we live". (Guardian)

The cleft structure is used to prioritise how smartphones affect people's way of living and communicating with their families.

2. "**Due to the comments**, I began to hate myself and felt 'outside' of everything, so then I tried to kill myself," the girl told the charity". (Guardian)

Fronting is used to prioritise and convince the readers that the opinions on social media platforms negatively affect our mental health.

3. "In a recent survey of more than 1,500 teachers, around two-thirds said they were aware of pupils sharing sexual content, with as many as one in six of those involved of primary school age". (Independent)

The information structure shifting is realised through fronting to prioritise the truth that young children are being exposed to inappropriate contents that could have a negative impact on their thinking.

4. "According to the research, it really comes down to how you use the technology," the company wrote". (Independent)

By using fronting, the writer prioritises the scientific evidence that the dangers of technology depend on how people use them. Thus, the writer convinces the readers to regulate their use.

4.4 Presenting Others' Speech and Thought

1. "We're losing our capacity to delay gratification, solve problems and deal with

frustration and pain in its many different forms," says Lembke". (Guardian)
Direct speech is adopted by the writer in presenting Dr Lembke's speech to express the truthfulness of what Dr Lembke says regarding the negative effect of excessive use of digital companions.

2. "It's "easier to go from abstinence to moderation, than from excessive consumption to moderation," says Lembke". (Guardian)

In order to convince the readers to adopt Dr. Lemke's method of treatment, the writer employs direct speech that makes the facts presented seem unquestionably true.

3. "I always say to people, when you're giving your kid a tablet or a phone, you're really giving them a bottle of wine or a gram of coke," she said". (Independent)

The writer adopts direct speech in presenting the expert Harley Street's speech to express the faithfulness of what she has concerning the risk of digital devices on children.

4. "So many of my clients are 13 and 14-year-old-girls who are involved in sexting, and describe sexting as 'completely normal'," said Ms Saligari". (Independent)

Direct speech is adopted in presenting Ms. Saligari's speech to convey the truthfulness of what she states regarding the teenagers' negative change of their ethical beliefs.

4.5 Representing Time, Space, and Society

1. "According to addiction expert **Dr** Anna Lembke". (Guardian)

By using the social deictic 'Dr', the writer draws the readers' attention to the fact that Anna Lembke is an expert and her information is so reliable.

2. "Smartphone is **now** 'the place where **we** live', anthropologists say". (Guardian)

The time deictic "now" and personal deictic "we" signify that smartphones change the way of living for all people in the present time.

3. "We are doing it because modern life requires us to link up over the net in regard to jobs, professional and social connections – but not in an obsessive way". (Independent)

The personal deictic "we" is used to represent a sense of in-groupness, in which the internet becomes one of the essential things in our life but users should be aware of the risks associated with compulsive uses.

4. "The most powerful tech companies in the world are making deliberate decisions that do great harm," said Tristan Harris, an ex-Google employee, who is part of the campaign". (Art 4)

Harris is characterised by the social deictic "ex-Google employee" as a technology specialist who is familiar with the decisions made by technology companies.

5. Discussion of Results and Comparison

5.1 Naming and Describing

In Guardian's articles, this tool reflects negative ideologies regarding the

concept of digital addiction through the choice of noun, modification, and nominalisation; such as that, obsessive use of digital technologies makes people dopamine addicts, that suffer from repetitive, compulsive behaviours that are difficult to control and lead to an unhealthy pattern of thinking and behaving like drugs and other types of substance addiction. Moreover, socially, the excessive use of digital devices affects people's actual interaction and relationships with their families and friends negatively because people become more interested in the unreal digital world and ignore their loved ones. Emotionally and psychologically, digital technologies especially excessive gaming, affect people especially children and teenagers by changing their moods and thinking. Finally, the writers illustrate through naming and describing how digital technologies can manipulate all generations negatively and convince the readers to moderate their use and loved ones' use in order to avoid negative consequences.

It is found that the similarities between the Guardian and Independent in using the tool of naming and describing are that both newspapers convey the idea that digital addiction like other substance addiction affects peoples' mood, thinking, and behaviour. Therefore, this tool is used to show the harmful effects of digital addiction as well as to convince people to moderate their use in order to avoid negative effects. Meanwhile, this tool is used in the Independent's articles to convince readers to moderate their use by stating how experts argue people to prohibit children and teenagers, especially girls from exposition to inappropriate content that normalizes sexual violence, pornography, and cyberbullying since they affect their mental health.

5.2 Representing Actions/Events/States

The ideological effect of this tool in Guardian's articles is to represent digital addiction through the choices of verbal processes. The writers represent digital devices as powerful products that can turn people into addicts like drug addicts and reduce their creativity. They reveal that the awareness of the negative influence of excessive use of social media platforms is not enough and imply that people's emotions, relationships, and work depend on digital devices. They state that experts warn of internet addiction to family members and convince readers to protect their children from the harmful consequence of excessive use.

It is found that the similarities between the Guardian and Independent's articles in using the tool of representing actions/events/states is that both newspapers reveal that digital devices could turn people into addicts like drug addicts. Thus, it is used to highlight that awareness is not enough about the negative effect of digital addiction. Likewise, it is utilised to encourage parents to protect children and teenagers since they are immature.

Meanwhile, this tool is used in the Independent's articles to represent the negative change that digital devices caused to children and teenagers' ethical values and behaviours. Likewise, it is utilised to highlight the confession of Facebook that social media platforms have addictive harmful effects but these effects depend on how people use these platforms.

5.3 Prioritising

In Guardian's articles, this tool is used ideologically to attract readers' attention to the information that gains priority through changing the structure. It prioritises spending time on digital companions. It also emphasises the fact that the digital world is different from the real world because it may contain fake news, encouraging bias, affecting the privacy of homes, and increasing bullying among people, especially students. Moreover, it prioritises the obligation of taking the harm of digital companies more seriously especially gaming since it is classified as a disorder. This tool is implemented in both newspaper articles to prioritise the necessity of taking the harmful effects of digital addiction more seriously in order to find treatment.

Meanwhile, this tool is used in the articles of the Independent mainly to refer to the fact that children's exposition to inappropriate content influences their mental health. It prompts the actual interaction rather than online interaction.

5.4 Presenting others' Speech and Thought

It is noteworthy to mention that presenting others' speech is used 52 times while presenting others' thoughts is used 1 time in Guardian's article. In Independent's articles, only others' speech is presented. Ideologically, this tool is employed in both newspaper articles to express the faithfulness of what is stated and convince the readers to believe by adopting heavily the direct speech of doctors and experts regarding the negative influence of digital addiction.

5.5 Representing Time, Space, and Society

This tool is used in both newspaper articles to reveal certain ideologies linked to time, place, and society. It is used in both newspapers to represent digital addiction as a global problem that could affect all people everywhere in the modern-day and requires a solution.

Conclusion

This section presents the conclusions of the findings arrived at in the analysis of the selected data:

1. The result of the current study shows that all the selected five critical stylistic tools (textual-conceptual functions) proposed by Jeffries' model (2010) of critical stylistic analysis are implemented in the selected newspapers' articles to express the concept of digital addiction.
2. The underlying ideologies regarding the concept of digital addiction are negative because both newspaper articles warn of its negative effects on all aspects of life like drugs and convince the readers to increase their awareness of it. The ideologies of each tool are presented as follows:
 - a. The tool of naming and describing is used extensively in both newspapers

to reflect the ideologies that the effects of digital addiction are like other types of substance addiction, convincing the readers to increase their awareness and moderate their use. However, this tool is used in Guardian articles to pay the readers' attention to the negative effects of the excessive use of digital companions in all aspects of life, especially social life. In contrast, this tool is used in the articles of the Independent to draw the readers' attention more to the dangers of exposure to inappropriate content on people's mental health, especially children and teenagers.

- b. The tool of representing actions/events/ states is employed widely in both newspapers to attract the readers' attention to the powerful effects of excessive use of digital technologies that can turn people into addicts. Nevertheless, this tool is used in Guardian articles to present digital companions as powerful products that affect people's emotions, relationships, and work. However, this tool is used in Independent articles to represent the negative changes that excessive use of digital companions causes to children and teenagers' ethical values and behaviours.
- c. The tool of prioritising is implemented in both newspapers to prioritise the necessity of taking the harmful effects of digital addiction more seriously. Nevertheless, in Guardian articles, this tool is used to prioritise the fact that the digital world is different from the real world and affects the privacy of homes. Nonetheless, this tool is implemented in Independent articles to prioritise the fact that children and teenagers' excessive use impacts their mental health.
- d. The tool of presenting others' speech and thought is implemented in the same way in both newspapers since both newspapers rely heavily on adopting others' speech directly to express the faithfulness of what is stated by others to convince the readers to believe them rather than adopting others' thoughts.
- e. The tool of representing time, space, and society is utilised in the same way in both newspapers to represent digital addiction as a global problem in the modern-day that requires a solution.

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