Survival in *The Hunger Games*: A Comparative Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Met Gala 2024 and Gaza Images

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ABSTRACT

This study employs multimodal critical discourse analysis to examine the stark juxtaposition between the Met Gala 2024 and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, revealing how global media constructs and perpetuates systemic inequalities. Drawing on Kress and Van Leeuwen's multimodal semiotic theory, the research analyses eight images, four from each context, to decode how visual and textual elements shape public perception and reinforce power hierarchies. The analysis depicts a dystopian dichotomy reminiscent of The Hunger Games, in which media coverage simultaneously celebrates extravagant privilege while marginalising humanitarian suffering. This differential treatment reflects "digital colonialism", the prioritisation of Western cultural spectacle over Global South crises. The results highlight the urgent need for media literacy education and ethical frameworks that address the influence of platforms during humanitarian crises.

Keywords: *Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Digital Colonialism, Visual Equity, Celebrity Activism, Humanitarian Media Ethics*

Introduction

It has been some time since the world has been split into gaps of wealth, power, and fame. Two major yet completely disparate events took place in 2024: the Met Gala and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Events like these, especially the Met Gala 2024, are a microcosm of global politics and the differences in life between individuals. The Met Gala, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, is renowned for its exceptional design. Big names, architects, and design specialists gather to appear in radiant clothing types, as declared in accordance with the year's theme. The theme for 2024, "The Garden of Time," was inspired by the notion that the impact of time has its roots in human culture and glory. This event has long been criticised for being exclusive. People openly displayed their extravagant dresses (Creevey & O'Connor, 2021), while thousands were facing oppression and a controlled distribution of resources. Using this idea, which is eerily similar to the movie "Hunger Games," a story rich in themes of disparity,

exhibition, and disobedience, this research delves into unloading the symbolic layers that arise when these two settings are analysed.

Since 2007, Gaza's economy has been in ruins, and its people struggle to survive. According to humanitarian organisations, nearly everyone in Gaza lives below the poverty line, and more than half rely on aid from other countries or UNRWA (Farhat et al., 2023). The issues faced by Palestinians are in sharp contrast with the events happening, like the Met Gala. While people in the Gaza territory struggled to survive and find shelter for their families, celebrities were promoting their glamorous designer wear. These two contrasting spectrums of glamour at the Met Gala and tragedy in Gaza represent the scale of inequality in the world today. The media plays a significant role in shaping the world's perceptions of people and has considerable influence over public opinion. Gaza has frequently been talked about in the media due to its hardships and sufferings, alongside its people's struggle and resilience to fight against the odds (Suwarno, 2025). This representation of one side (Gaza) differs from the other (Met Gala). Media coverage of the Met Gala is often more glamorous and less representative of the underlying social and political attitudes. In contrast, Gaza is constantly portrayed as an unresolvable issue, invoking a feeling of helplessness in both the audience and the victims. Media coverage often employs semantic structures that frame marginalised communities in specific ways (Al-Hejin, 2015), similar to how Gaza imagery is depoliticised in Western media. The concern is that a high-profile event like the Met Gala overshadows the voices of those from less privileged backgrounds (Khan et al., 2020).

Aim of the Study

This research aims to highlight the role of traditional media in portraying and reshaping news and events, thereby influencing viewers' perceptions. The researchers have employed the CDA model to highlight the role of text and images in constructing social realities. Another aspect discussed in this research is visual anthropology. Using Kress and Van Leeuwen's theory of multimodal semiotics, the study examines framing choices, body posture and position, colour symbolism, and types of setting and story context to provide a basis for interpretation of socio-cultural connotations. The investigation also considers conflict studies, with a focus on media representations of war and suffering. It also caters to fashion studies that investigate how fashion events frame or address social and cultural matters. This study also examines the most significant relationship between fiction and reality. It is illustrated by references to "The Hunger Games" and by linking the dystopian world to images drawn from the Met Gala. It represents a window into how the culture we produce shapes our experience of the natural world.

Research Questions

1. How do dress, body language, and environmental context in Met Gala 2024 and Gaza images contribute to the construction of identity and social status?
2. How do visual and textual elements in the selected Met Gala 2024 and Gaza images represent inequality and survival through the lens of *The Hunger Games* narrative?

Literature Review

Celebrities are instrumental in drawing the public's attention to newsworthy global issues and events. The "famous for being famous" in the art world refers to how most people become glamorous and popular not on account of their talent but due to heavy media exposure and a publicly acceptable face(S) (McCaa, 2015). Nowadays, celebrities are not just restricted to entertainment. They are exerting a significant influence on global and cultural issues, including politics, social injustice, public policies, environmental concerns, and other pressing issues (Xu et al., 2025). Additionally, celebrities unite, persuade, and use social media to expand their exposure and connect with a vast and diverse audience (Mansouri & Parina, 2023). Thus, trends

are set for the public, and their ideologies are shaped. Partzsch (2015) pointed out that celebrities have become more involved in global politics. Researchers such as Kenalemang (2021) and Xing and Feng (2023) have examined how body language, postures, attire, and colour schemes represent celebrities' personas, cultural narratives, and social status.

The mechanisms through which celebrities shape public ideologies become clearer when explored through multimodal discourse analysis. Reading Images (1996) and Multimodal Discourse (2001) introduced the concept of multimodality, which reshaped visual analysis by positioning language as the primary means of communication. However, multimodal discourse analysis reveals how different modes, like images, sound backgrounds, colour schemes, body language, and outfits, communicate beyond text and language (Bi, 2019). Kress and Van Leeuwen suggest that social interactions and relations can be encoded in images, silently influencing us through implicit norms. This can reveal hidden values, intentions, and ideologies that convey a stronger sense of communication than words. These modes develop different public opinions, understandings, and cultural values that are encoded in images, such as people's postures, expressions, outfits, layouts, and backgrounds (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

Kress (2009) proposed the four assumptions for multimodal critical discourse analysis. First, language and other semiotic modes (gestures, sounds, colours) play equal roles in conveying the meaning. The second is that different components generate unique meanings. Each mode produces different effects that play various roles in understanding the message. Third is the intentional choice of modes. This elaborates on how different viewers choose different modes and how they want to display their messages. Fourth is that meaning is realised through the use of multimodal resources. For effective and impactful communication, language and semiotic modes (such as gestures, sounds, backgrounds, and visuals) are combined to convey the overall meaning. By recognising cultural aspects, multimodal discourse analysis enables content creation that best relates to the viewer's cultural dimensions.

Social media posts today are about much more than words; it is about the balance of context and imagery (images are worth a thousand words), and finally, emojis give our brains another way to interpret complex theories or ideas, even if they (emojis) are often very rough equivalents. This requires an analytical approach that considers how multiple modes interact and contribute to the transformation of coherent messages (Brommesson, 2017; Liu et al., 2024).

Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative research methodology, with multimodal critical discourse analysis as a primary method. It mainly focuses on visual images that provide symbolic, interactive and compositional functions. All these functions help connect what a visual element represents and how viewers interpret it (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

1) Representational Meaning

In representational meta function, there are two types of meaning: one is narrative, where images, signs and ads represent an action, and the second is conceptual meaning, which is an abstract idea and understanding of the images, such as handshaking, and it is a narrative representation that carries the conceptual meaning of friendliness.

2) Interactive Meaning

It focuses on how images are represented and captures the audience's attention towards the ad's character. It involves contact (either direct or indirect gaze), distance (close or far), gestures (how body language carries a specific message), modality (realism of pictures), close-up shots (show affection), wide shots (more formal), postures (confidence), high-angle shots (superiority), straight-angle shots (concept of equality) and attitude (position through which a shot is captured). All these functions carry different information to the viewer.

3) Compositional Meaning

It involves engaging visual elements and their message, for example, different positions carrying information in the same context (Bi, 2019).

Framing Techniques

Framing images is another aspect that enhances understanding of context themes, such as grouping, which highlights superiority and the role of a single individual in reinforcing the message of community and individuality. D'Angelo and Marino (2024) and Kress (2003) note that multimodality is significant, as visual and textual elements need to be seen as co-contributors to meaning, such as colours and shading, which highlight the primary information and provide a better understanding quickly. This multimodal strategy is employed in textbooks, which utilise various diagrams, images, and comprehensive information to facilitate a connection between language and visual signs (Kenalemang, 2021).

Social Semiotic Theory by Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006)

In this analysis, the framework aims to analyse the meaning carried by signs, images, colours, backgrounds, body language and gaze.

Cultural Dimensions

MCDA and social semiotics give us an analysis of how editorials create meaning and do not fully explain how different people belonging to different cultures demonstrate them because every culture has its own analysis criteria and perceptions—cultural dimensions like power distance, collectivism vs. individualism, and cultural values. By combining MCDA and social semiotics, we can see how editorials use both visual and textual elements. It reveals that ads communicate by words and use signs and symbols, which show the viewer's beliefs, values, and cultural identity. This means that complete information is conveyed when the textual and visual contexts are relevant to cultural values (Xing & Feng, 2023) .

Population and Sample

The study population comprises digital media representations of two contrasting events: the Met Gala 2024 and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza/Rafah, specifically focusing on visual coverage that occurred during the critical period surrounding May 6, 2024.The study employs purposive sampling to ensure theoretical relevance and maximum variation within the defined population. The sampling criteria included: (1) high visual impact and symbolic representation, (2) widespread media circulation across international outlets, (3) clear embodiment of the luxury-suffering dichotomy central to the research questions, and (4) temporal proximity to May 6, 2024, to capture the immediate juxtaposition of events.

Eight images constitute the sample: four from Met Gala coverage and four from Gaza/Rafah documentation. This balanced 4:4 ratio enables systematic comparative analysis while maintaining analytical depth. The images were sourced from established digital archives, including major news outlets (Arabnews.com, Vogue.com, merdeka.com, Mehrnews.com) and social media platforms, representing both Western and non-Western media perspectives. The temporal sampling frame spans from May 5-8, 2024, capturing pre-event preparation, the Met Gala itself (May 6), and immediate aftermath responses.

This periodisation allows examination of how media narratives evolved during the peak intersection of these contrasting events. The eight-image sample provides sufficient data for multimodal critical discourse analysis while remaining manageable for detailed semiotic examination. This sample size aligns with established multimodal research practices that prioritise analytical depth over breadth, enabling comprehensive analysis of visual elements, textual components, and their ideological implications within the study's theoretical framework.

Data Analysis

This chapter analyses how the visual and textual decisions of selected images construct contrasting realities of privilege and suffering. Employing Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, it examines how clothing, body language, setting, framing and captions create meanings in terms of identity, power and inequality. The juxtaposition of Met Gala 2024 photographs with images from Gaza demonstrates how media assigns glamour to one setting and prefigures suffering in another.

Image 1 Source: Arabnews.com   Image 2 Source: Vogue.com

Image 1 depicts a Palestinian woman in traditional dress and green hijab, arms outstretched with an open mouth against a backdrop of destruction and displacement bags. Image 2 shows a Met Gala attendee in an elaborate green gown with gold details, embodying the "Garden of Time" theme.

Visual Contrast and Symbolic Analysis

These images communicate entirely different realities through considered choices in image-making. The Gaza picture is o muted tones, a black dress, a green hijab against crumbling infrastructure, while the Met Gala image has vibrant green and gold contrasting with lush staging. This colour dichotomy that repeats itself about the Hunger Games is "the survival-versus-spectacle story at heart," with the woman's uplifted gaze and spread arms making her look desperate and pleading, and displacement bags represent the concept of forced migration. Direct camera by comparison, the stars gaze at (the huge, elaborate headpiece lying rest, in fact, 2) her ego and that chiselled chin projecting confidence and cool as though from miles away, the large ornate headpiece. offers an almost-celebrity Scientology (Lewis, 2017), though one more akin to a sort of godliness by proxy.

Power Dynamics and Social Hierarchy

These juxtaposed images illustrate how the media uses visual language to build up social hierarchies. The Palestinian woman's nondescript clothing in the midst of ruin is a sign of impotence, while the celebrity's specially designed clothes and special location speak to privilege and cultural power. This hierarchy is upheld by observers and photographers at the Met Gala, which projects an image of a celebrity turned most admired figure, whereas some figures in Gaza's background may imply share community suffering.

Caption Analysis: Reinforcing Disparity

The Gaza caption employs military terminology ("extreme force," "militants") that depoliticises the conflict through formal, authoritative language. The Met Gala caption uses celebratory language ("whimsical," "went full-on") that emphasises creativity and fashion. This linguistic disparity reinforces the visual hierarchy; one context demands serious attention to violence, while the other invites admiration and a sense of escape.

Image 3 Source: merdeka.com   *Image 4 Source: Mehrnews.com*

Framing and Focal Point

Image 3 on the left features soft greens and lights, creating a calm yet artificial setting that complements the high-fashion theme. The model stands out for its luxury as its primary focus. In contrast, Image 4 shows a public space filled with grief, highlighting loss and solidarity.

Colour and Symbolism

In the left image, a woman hugs a small, wrapped figure in the Palestinian flag. Its colours, black, red, white, and green, represent struggle, strength, and hope. Flowers on the body show mourning and lost innocence. Wrapping the child in the flag represents national identity and sacrifice. The woman's hijab reflects her cultural background and faith. In the second image, a model is wearing a black gown, a symbolic representation of dominance and elegance. It conveys a message of power to the spectators and has a mesmerising influence on them. The flowers are used to decorate her hat as part of her outfit, conveying a sense of luxury that contrasts with the actual hardships affecting human life in significant ways.

Gaze and Body Language

In the right image, the model stands calmly and confidently, conveying absolute authority and pride through her unwavering expression and slight tilt of her head. The models need to hide their emotions to attract the focus of the spectators towards their outfits in most fashion shows. As shown in the image, the model is ensuring her emotions are well hidden while influencing people with her confidence to showcase her outfit. This signifies the importance of beauty over feelings in the fashion industry. As compared to it, the second image represents the emotions of a woman holding a small, lifeless body wrapped in a flag in her hands, conveying a message of pure love and loss at the same time. She also conveys grief and power through her serious expression, making it clear that, apart from the circumstances, she stays strong as she seeks respect and empathy from the world through her body language.

Status Indicator

The first image is a symbolic representation of a person who is enjoying her life to the full extent by being wealthy and famous, which comes with the perks of admiration and luxury. The gown and headpiece that she is wearing are fairly well-designed, which makes her seem unreal as compared to the struggles of the real world. On the other hand, the second image portrays the daily struggles of people who are trying their best to keep their hopes alive, despite their situation, which is affecting their lives in an immense manner. She is representing her cultural identity and resilience through her simple and traditional clothes. She is providing a symbolic

representation of unity and strength, expressing the true power that comes from solidarity and humanity through her body language and surroundings, unlike the model, who only represents wealth as a true power. She stands with her community, sharing their pain as they face hardship, in contrast to the model who enjoys her wealth while being unaffected by the situation of people around the world.

Caption Analysis

The caption of the right image says, "TEHRAN, Dec. 02 (MNA) – UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has sounded a strong warning about the toll being exacted on children in the Gaza Strip, which has come under a renewed and genocidal Israeli war."

Whereas the left image caption says, "For this year, once again Zendaya stole the attention of many people with a dress from the Dior John Galliano era of 1999!" translation.

Tone

We can assume how intense the suffering and loss of Gaza is through phrases like "renewed and genocidal Israeli war". This came into sight through the tone of the first caption, which clearly represents the struggles and deaths of people living in Gaza, along with their strong faith in keeping their hopes alive. By comparison, the second caption refers to Zendaya's glamorous, celebratory appearance at the Met Gala, a highly regarded event among celebrities. The tone of the caption is joyful and flashy, which truly represents the event. The feelings of admiration and luxury are represented through phrases like "stole the attention" and "Dior John Galliano era" dress, which also emphasises the true essence of the Met Gala.

Vocabulary

The different perspectives shown in both captions are highlighted by the appropriate vocabulary, which resonates with the given context. The caption of the image in which the woman is carrying a small, lifeless body wrapped in a flag triggers a sense of phenomenal affliction and human frailty by utilising words like "toll". Comparatively, in other caption worlds, such as "Dior", "stole the attention", and "era" are used to accentuate luxury, high fashion, and cultural significance at the Met Gala event. In contrast, the word "attention" used in the caption indicates admiration and style simultaneously. Similarly, awareness and urgency for humanitarian issues are emphasised in Gaza in the first caption.

Luxury

The prestige of the Met Gala is evident in the use of words like "high fashion" and "artistry," while it represents the renowned historical collection of designers. It describes the dominance of luxury in the second caption, while the event signifies the epitome of elite status. The first caption focuses solely on survival and the devastating loss of life without any hint of luxury, in contrast to the second caption. It represents the pure suffering and sadness of the people in Gaza rather than beauty and wealth. The Met Gala accentuates fashion and cultural celebration, which

is completely opposite to the foreboding reminder of conflict and the desperate need for peace represented in the first caption.

Image 5 Source: Twitter　　　Image 6 Source: Englishnews.com

These images are from the Met Gala 2024 and the Israel-Gaza war, which provokes us to seriously contemplate the juxtaposition of human realities. Image 5 represents fashion and celebration of life, while image 6 conveys the ambience of mourning, death, and grim sadness

Framing and Focal Point

Glamour and elegance are carefully portrayed in Image 5, showcasing the Met Gala event in which the model intentionally stands slightly off-centre, presenting the lively energy of the whole event. The man standing beside her in black gives a sense of stability and support, adding contrast and depth to the image. In contrast, Image 6 presents a man holding a child in his hand, and the reaction of his surroundings, which emphasises the central figure and the gravity of the situation through the art of framing. The attention of spectators is drawn directly to the tragic subject, as the focal point of the whole scenario is a white bundle held by the man in the image. The emotional response of men is emphasised through the expression on their faces, which also contributes as the focal point.

Colour and Symbolism

The black background makes the white gown stand out, showcasing glamour, elegance, and purity in a mesmerising manner. The green and white details add freshness, which retains the primary focus on the model apart from anything else. Beauty and life are symbolically represented through the floral patterns on the dress, making it appear more beautiful. The colour palette is subdued, dominated by darker tones due to low lighting. The importance of the white bundle in the man's hand is emphasised by the darker clothing of the men and the dimly lit background, attracting the attention of the spectators towards it, apart from its surroundings. Here, the white bundle signifies a sense of loss due to the innocent life taken in humanitarian crises. The colour white, in general, symbolises purity and innocence, as well as the community of men coming together in mourning to support one another during tough times. The dimly lit environment creates a sense of grief, lending a darker, more sombre tone to the tragic sense of the whole scenario. However, these kinds of colours present two completely different worlds, one filled with joy of fashion and attention, while the other is filled with heart-wrenching grief and the pain of loss of humanity.

Gaze and Body Language

In the Met Gala image, the model's gaze provides a sense of fame being completely exclusive and unaffected by her surroundings. She presents a perfect display of calm detachment in the way she faces the camera while looking to the side. However, in the right image, the man expresses the depth of grief while slowly losing the hope of any upcoming help through his way of looking at the child that he is carrying in the bundle. The faces of the men surrounding the man holding the child display pure grief, empathy, and concern as they gaze at him, while their body language remains melancholy and respectful. The slight forward step of the celebrity displays progress, while her body posture remains full of confidence and elegance.

Status Indicators

The off-white off-the-shoulder gown with   a fragile floral print is so haute couture and exclusive. The minimal jewellery look with just one pendant and statement earrings perfectly goes with the dress without overshadowing it. The less-is-more bling moment in bold earns a thumbs up from us.

Contrarily, the clothing is simple and practical, expressing a sense of community, grief, and sombre sorrow. The men's clothing looks unassuming, reflecting a society where public expressions of wealth are muted or not at the forefront in this moment of collective mourning. Compare this with the other end of the spectrum, where left clothing is a fashion statement of luxury and personhood.

Symbols of Authority and Violence

Gigi Hadid has attracted the spotlight as a powerful and authoritative model at the Met Gala event, which symbolises the rule of Capitol, where beauty is often used to dominate the district, turning a blind eye to human suffering. In contrast, the helplessness and violence of human rights are displayed through the shrouded body carried by the man in the second image. The Hunger Games are a harsh reminder of the Capitol's rule, which has the power to take lives while instilling fear in human minds, as revealed by the mourners holding funeral cloths. The game shows the Capitol's readiness to sacrifice its people for entertainment and power, which is comparable to the funeral cloth presenting the deaths of innocent people while highlighting the theme of power struggles in Panem.

Mocking Behaviour by The Elite's

The misery of people in the region seems to be mocked through the extravagant nature of the Met Gala event, especially when it is compared with the images of heart-wrenching grief faced by the people from Gaza. The people of Capitol often make fun of the hardships faced by the district people, while continuously ignoring their problems as they indulge in their luxurious lives, which has exposed their lack of concern towards the district people. The wealthy people's lack of care for worldwide issues reveals a profound separation from the real world, much like how the Capitol residents are depicted as uncaring about the deaths in the Hunger Games. Poignantly, the photo serves as a metaphor for how exposed men and children can be in relation to bigger things or forces that affect their fate. The men's expressions suggest a sense of helplessness against the tragedy that has occurred. It underscores the stark contrast between those who hold power and those who are simply trying to survive in difficult conditions.

Caption Analysis

The caption of right image says, "A man holds the body of a child killed in an Israeli airstrike at a hospital in the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah, on May 7, 2024. (Photo by Rizek Abdeljawad/Xinhua)"

The caption of the left image says, "Gigi Hadid in custom Thom Browne at Met Gala 2024 'Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion"

Tone

The tone this caption presents is both dull and factual, yet also emotional. It covers a tragic and traumatising event in a mannered way, but the subject evokes grief, empathy, and horror. Whereas the tone of the left caption is fashion-centred, entertaining, and glamorous. It presents the style and fashion theme of the event.

Vocabulary

The language in the caption shows a journalistic manner, avoiding political and emotive tones. The image is described as "A man holding the body of a child," clearly straightforward and emotional, as described "killed in an Israeli airstrike," which also explains the event clearly, describing the cause of death. The caption is straight and clear, with a powerful emotional impact from the imagery and description.

The left image utilises promotional, stylised terms such as "in custom Thom Browne," where the word "custom" connotes exclusivity and luxurious craftsmanship. "Thom Browne" adds designer reputation to 'Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion. The sub-title, artistic and thematic at once for the happening, is mounted beside the textile, predicting both creative and conceptual exhumation.

The caption is, in fact, written in a higher register of language than most other captions on Instagram and is similar to the sort deployed by those working in fashion media when it performs its celebratory narration – the celebration of looking good, of pop culture, of riches.

Image 7 Source: RNZ news.com   *Image 8 Source: Instagram*

Framing and Focal Point

The Met Gala has a lush, verdant backdrop for those sparkling outfits to pop against all of which is shot in an ethereal setting with staged lighting. The contrast of both natural and artificial glamour complements the theatre-like vibe of this event. There are a couple of women embracing, their sumptuous clothing and theatrical postures revealing their sophistication. The left image, on the other hand, features a medium close-up of the plain-looking faces of three women in their emotional delivery. And the tight shots are about their reactions and focus on how much they are bereaved. A woman between them, embracing one of the women who leans against her, is especially notorious for how central she is and how explicitly despairing. The faded grey tones contribute to the sadness. In a close-up, a mourning woman is carried by others, another picture of sorrow writ large. The contrasting backgrounds highlight the contrast between luxury and survival, as well as the strength of those facing hardships.

Colour and Symbolism

The woman wearing a silver gown exposes elegance and classic beauty, as the blue-green details embedded in the outfit of the other model add energy, mystery, and creativity to the whole scenario. The second image presents dark and muted colours, which symbolise sorrow and hardships, while dominating its surroundings. People's emotions are highlighted through these shades, which are used to display resilience and solidarity in tough times.

Gaze and Body Language

The joyful atmosphere at the Met Gala is suggested by the woman in a silver gown opening her arms for a warm embrace, signifying connection and friendship. It presents a mutual reaction of care from both of them at once as the woman wearing a blue-green outfit leans in with a smile, which creates a happy vibe in the surroundings. However, the image from Gaza seems to be more emotional through the body language of the people, while the colour palette seems to be muted with dark clothes worn by women and neutral tones in the background, displaying an idea of deep sorrow and helplessness. The lack of bright colours makes the atmosphere more sensitive, sad, and emotional. The strong bond, reflecting deep sadness and reliance during difficult times, is evident in the two women's leaning postures; they appear to be crying as they hold on to each other, conveying a sense of support and unity. Their raised hands and open mouths convey a universal expression of shock, despair, and vocal mourning, while the act of embracing serves as a symbolic representation of comfort and grief.

Caption Analysis

The caption of the left image says, *"Women react outside the trauma ward after a child relative being treated there died in the aftermath of bombardment on their displaced persons camp, at the Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir el-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on 11 May, 2024. Photo: AFP"* Whereas the caption of the right image says, *"From a warm embrace between #MetGala co-chairs @zendaya and @jlo, to the link-up of comedy duo @DonaldGlover and @AyoEdebiri that we'd love to be a fly on the wall for, tap the link in our bio for an exclusive look at all the best moments from inside the 2024 Met Gala. Photos: @poupayphoto"*

Tone

The caption under the Met Gala image provides a celebratory, luxurious, and light-hearted tone. Similarly, phrases like "a warm embrace" and "linkup" describe friendliness and excitement. These memorable moments are captured and shared for fun and entertainment, creating a sense of a glamorous event that invites readers to engage with exclusive interest, while fostering a cheerful and welcoming mood. However, the caption of the Rafah image is displaying a sorrowful situation through its sober and factual appearance, while the tone of the caption is informative and tragic, highlighting the loss of life and the situation of the surroundings. Words like "died," "aftermath of bombardment," and "displaced persons camp" contribute to a severe and compassionate tone while urging readers to recognise the human cost of war and violence.

Vocabulary

The phrases associated with social media and celebrity culture, such as "exclusive look," "best moments," and "link in our bio" are included in the caption of the Met Gala event, It appeals an audience who enjoys entertainment and fashion thorough this casual and upbeat language, while highlighting the luxurious and exclusive nature of the event for readers who are interested in popular culture. In contrast, journalistic and straightforward language like "react," "trauma ward," "died," "bombardment," "displaced persons camp" is used in the Rafah caption, conveying the severity of the situation and the context of violence and loss. The vocabulary used in the Rafah caption focuses entirely on conveying important information, whereas the Met Gala caption attracts readers solely for entertainment.

Discussion

The jarring dichotomy of the Met Gala and the tragic photos coming out of Gaza points to a global hierarchy of visibility where Western cultural events enjoy an excessive amount of celebratory cheer, including the overlooking of pain in the Global South (Humanitarian, 2025).

Celebrities are endowed with cultural authenticity and symbolic authority by the visual strategies of their representation, which utilise flattering lighting, sumptuous colour schemes, and frontal gazes. Contemporary celebrities can harness the symbolic power of social media, transforming

public persona into a microcelebrity to influence global topics (Xu et al., 2025). This power, though, is applied selectively; just look at the relative silence about the crisis in Gaza. Decontextualised Gaza images, political to the core, depoliticise and render natural what's been normalised but should be regarded as an unfathomable tragedy: it could not happen, and hence no one is responsible for it. Whereas Gaza's unfiltered emotional outbursts evoke sympathy or exhaustion (Al Jazeera, 2024), the restrained and refined emotions in Met Gala coverage inspire appreciation and aspiration.

The algorithmically enhanced proliferation of images from the Met Gala across conflict zones mirrors what some scholars have coined as "digital colonialism", or the dominance of Western cultural products on spaces such as the internet (Liu et al., 2024). It feeds into hegemonic ideologies that valorise spectacle over solidarity.

In The Hunger Games, the theme of resistance and empowerment is prominent as it highlights the indifference or mockery of the Capitol's citizens towards the struggles of the districts (Sasani & Darayee, 2015). However, characters like Katniss Everdeen have become a symbol of rebellion, inspiring people to fight injustice and oppression. The images of Gaza reveal silent strength and defiance in the face of the struggle to survive through the embrace and shared grief of losing their loved ones, while not being able to do anything to reverse the situation. Even without the resources of Capitol, the people seemed to find strength in their solidarity in the Hunger Games, which provided a little string of hope that kept them alive while seeking help from the cruel world. The district reveals that even with fewer resources, they have not lost humanity or will to survive, demonstrating resilience and unity as empowerment. However, the Capitol is using fashion and luxury to display its power and authority to everyone.

Images 1 and 2 directly mirror the Capitol-districts divide in *The Hunger Games* (Sasani & Darayee, 2015). The Met Gala represents Capitol excess, entertainment, and luxury that distract from systemic violence, while Gaza embodies the districts' forced survival struggles.

Images 3 and 4 are The Hunger Games all over again: the dystopian underbelly of celebrity reflects society, where glamour clouds real pain. The model's luxe ensemble mirrors the Excess of Capitol, while the dressed-up woman represents the poorer girl, fighting to get her hands on simple survival amidst hardship. The mourning woman holding a deceased child wrapped in a flag reflects the suffering, violence, and loss experienced by people in conflict-ridden areas. This exactly portrays the scene of other districts in the Hunger Games, where the districts bear the brunt of the Capitol's excesses and are forced to sacrifice their children. The child parallels the children sent into the Hunger Games, innocents, victims of a system they did not choose. Both the Met Gala and the Hunger Games highlight the stark divide between the elites and the general population.

Image 5 of the Met Gala, where model Gigi Hadid shines in her white floral gown, mirrors the splendid display of the Capitol, showcasing fashion as a symbol of authority and wealth (Sasani & Darayee, 2015). This display distracts the audience from the harsh realities of life faced by other parts of the world. In The Hunger Games, entertainment and power are displayed in a significant way to conceal the violence and oppression inflicted on the districts. It can be highly comparable to the Capitol's grand and lavish parties, which display immense entertainment and power at once and stand in stark contrast to the struggling lives of the people living in their district. The citizens of Capitol wear vibrant clothes, which contrasts with the district's practical, mournful attire. In the Hunger Games, the cruelty of the Capitol and the vulnerability of the districts are displayed through the deaths of the children; however, this image displays that certain populations are excessively affected by continuous violence and hardships due to the human cost of such a system.

Images 7 and 8 reflect the divide between the wealthy and the struggling, similar to the one depicted in *The Hunger Games*. The Capitol's luxury is displayed through the Met Gala, which stands in stark contrast to Gaza, highlighting the hardships and violence faced by the district's people as they seek empathy and help from the world. The divergence between privilege and empathy, which highlights global inequalities, is evident through these images (Khan et al., 2020). The media thrives on the spectacle of the Met Gala and promotes an idealised world that is often unattainable to the common people. They are disconnected and unaware of others' struggles and suffering.

Conclusion

This study extends Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal framework to analyse how media representations of the Met Gala 2024 and the Gaza crisis construct global inequality through ideological and geopolitical meaning-making. This visual analysis suggests that semiotic choices are not benign but actively produce hierarchies: Met Gala aesthetics make privilege seem natural as an aspirational quality, and Gaza images depoliticise suffering by portraying it as inevitable tragedy. The Hunger Games analogy works well to understand the workings of celebrity spectacle in a world where humanitarian crises are sidelined. The study's findings recommend urgent structural reforms to the media. Newsrooms need to establish a moral framework that prevents a cultural moment from drowning out audience attention to humanitarian disasters. Embedding a framework of visual equity principles into media would also take us closer to journalism that serves human dignity rather than spectacle.

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