

Digital Discourse Analysis on the Political Influencer Hasan Piker (Hasanabi)

How does Hasan Piker use interaction with his audience and multimodal communication to form his political commentary?

Introduction

Hasan Piker, known as HasanAbi on the platforms Twitch and YouTube, is a left-wing political commentator with over 2.7 million followers on Twitch and 1.42 million followers on YouTube. Piker's political affiliation is connected to his identity as an opponent of capitalism and American foreign policy and advocates for left-wing causes such as Black Lives Matter, abortion access, government-funded health care, and more (Capital Research Center, n.d.). With such a large and varying audience in gender, age, ethnicity and more (@HasanAbiReacts, 2024), Piker's use of Twitch for political discourse allows him to spread his commentary on a large scale. Piker's commentary contains interactions and multimodal communication to create attractive discourse to gather an audience. Hence, it can be valuable to understand how political commentary is built in digital spaces which can then influence political discourse both online and offline. Therefore, using digital discourse analysis, how does Hasan Piker use interaction with his audience and multimodal communication to form his political commentary?

Digital discourse analysis studies how communication practices influence digital environments and explores how language constructs social worlds in online spaces (Alek, n.d.). Through digital discourse analysis, this paper will help understand how Piker constructs his political commentary which is important given his considerable influence in digital media spaces and how he challenges mainstream media and right-wing political ideology. Understanding how Piker forms his discourse is important as it's his basis of developing his discourse and influencing his audience into political participation. Through his discourse, it can be better understood how digital media impact political participation and communication. Digital discourse analysis will be applied to the video "WESTERN RESPONSE TO ISRAELI TERRORISM IS DISTURBING" posted on Piker's YouTube channel, *HasanAbi*, on September 21, 2024. Firstly, the theoretical framework will be established by combining theories about discourse analysis methods and academic articles regarding Piker, his community, and his influence on political spaces. Followingly, the case study video will be analysed using the chosen methodological approach. Lastly, the research question will be answered and supported using information gathered from the analysis and theories applied.

Theoretical framework and methodology

Digital discourse analysis (DDA), the field of study that explores the ways in which language is used in digital communication (Moshinsky, 2022), is important for understanding the use of language in the digital age and interpreting language in different social and political contexts (Alek, n.d.). DDA can be used to study political discourse to provide "insights into the ways in which language is used to shape public opinion and influence social change" (Alek, n.d., p. 2). DDA is most appropriate to analyze Piker's video because DDA allows a multimodal analysis as text, image, and video allow a deeper understanding of the digital discourse (Alek, n.d.) and allows an analysis of the following four dimensions in Piker's video: texts, contexts, actions and interactions, and power and ideology (Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015). Jones et. Al (2015) explain that the dimension of text focuses on texture, intertextuality ("linkages between texts" and "relationships between themselves [texts] and other users of texts" (Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015, p. 7)), and multimodality. The dimension of context focuses on the social and material situations in which texts are constructed, consumed, and/or exchanged. The dimension of actions and

interactions focuses on how people use text to perform social actions. Finally, the dimension of power and ideology focuses on the promotion of values and beliefs within digital spaces.

DDA will firstly be used to analyze Piker's interaction with his audience in the video. This will mostly focus on the dimensions of contexts (what is the topic being discussed during the interaction) and actions and interactions (how is Piker interacting with his audience member(s)). How the interactions shape the flow of the conversation, such as the audience asking questions and commenting, will also be analyzed. Together, this will be analyzed to see how the political commentary is shaped by Piker's and his audience's interactions. Following this, the dimensions of text and power and ideology will be used to analyze how Piker uses multimodality in the video to shape his political commentary. This includes how Piker engages with various means of communication: spoken language, visuals, articles, videos, etc. within the casestudy video.

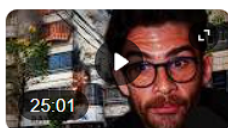
In order to better understand the video in the case study, Piker's general focus in his Twitch streams (which he then uploads clips of onto YouTube) must be explored. Piker streams on Twitch regularly, almost daily, and his main attraction is his daily coverage of news (Rudenshiold, 2022). Piker's coverage has a sense of familiarity and everydayness as he moves through browser tabs looking at Twitter/X posts, news clips, media articles and more (Rudenshiold, 2022) which creates an attractive stream to the audience. He also has a participatory audience who share sources and links of pieces of news relevant to Piker's discussion and he often asks his audience for opinions: Piker's connection with his audience is more "cyber-social" (Rudenshiold, 2022, p. 27) than parasocial, meaning Piker remains relatable and in a sense "babysits" his audience (Rudenshiold, 2022, p. 27). These elements are important in understanding why Piker is so popular in political commentary in digital spaces. Furthermore, the sense of everydayness in his use of multimodal communication is a relevant factor in his political discourse. Piker's use of Twitch, where "political streamers and their audience are able to affect discourse both on the platform and in the communities around it" (Rudenshiold, 2022, p. 27), allows him to combine preexisting "gamer" culture present on Twitch's platform and discussing political content (Rudenshiold, 2022).

Case study

The focus of this case study is the video "WESTERN RESPONSE TO ISRAELI TERRORISM IS DISTURBING" posted on Piker's YouTube channel *HasanAbi* on September 21, 2024, which has gained almost two hundred thousand views and eight thousand likes in two weeks. This specific video was selected due to its extreme relevance to current ongoing global issues and targets how western media reacts to such problems. Political discourse on the topic of Israel has been trending since the beginning of conflict in Israel on October 7th, 2023, and has had mixed reactions by western media that often supports Israel rather than Palestine and Lebanon. This video offers alternative reactions to the conflict than western media does.

[www.youtube.com > watch](https://www.youtube.com/watch)

WESTERN RESPONSE TO ISRAELI TERRORISM IS ...



Comments1K · IRAN ATTACKS **ISRAEL** · Hasan Explains The Israel-Palestine Conflict to Nmplol · THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME **ISRAEL**...

YouTube · HasanAbi · 2 weeks ago

Figure 1 Case study video thumbnail

The choice of one of Piker's YouTube videos over a recording of Piker's stream on Twitch was due to the length and range of topics of Piker's streams: on average between 7 to 8 hours of a multitude of different topics of discussion. The YouTube video is 25 minutes and focuses on solely one topic of discussion: this allows to better understand how Piker develops extensive political discourse on one specific political subject.

Interaction

Context is particularly important for Piker forming his political commentary. For Piker to begin and develop his political commentary, he must first be aware of the contexts and situations of the political information he is going to share so that he can correctly inform his audience to the best extent. Only when the context is established and helping Piker form his political arguments and ideas, then the audience can interact with the political discourse. His audience must be aware of the subject of discussion to be able to ask questions, add their opinion on the topic, or overall engage in the discussion. Piker usually read his audience's messages written in chat, and occasionally takes the action to display an audience member's message in the centre of the stream (seen in figure 2/figure 3). It is important to distinguish between two types of general interactions between Piker and his audience. There are interactions that help develop political discussion and interactions that contribute to Twitch's "gamer" culture, this includes referencing memes or using emotes.

Piker's action of displaying a member's message highlights specific interactions as it puts an audience member in the spotlight in front of Piker and thousands of people. In this video, two types of interactions happen when an audience member's message is displayed: a positive or negative reaction from Piker and the audience. A negative reaction happens with the message depicted in figure 2 which starts at 3:27 minutes in the video where Piker reacts by saying "Dawg, there was a f**king funeral, what are you talking about?". A positive reaction, due to its contribution to political discourse, occurred at 8:03 minutes (figure 3) where Piker reads out a piece of information shared by an audience member and uses it to further develop the political message Piker was trying to get across.



Figure 2 Example of negative reaction to an interaction

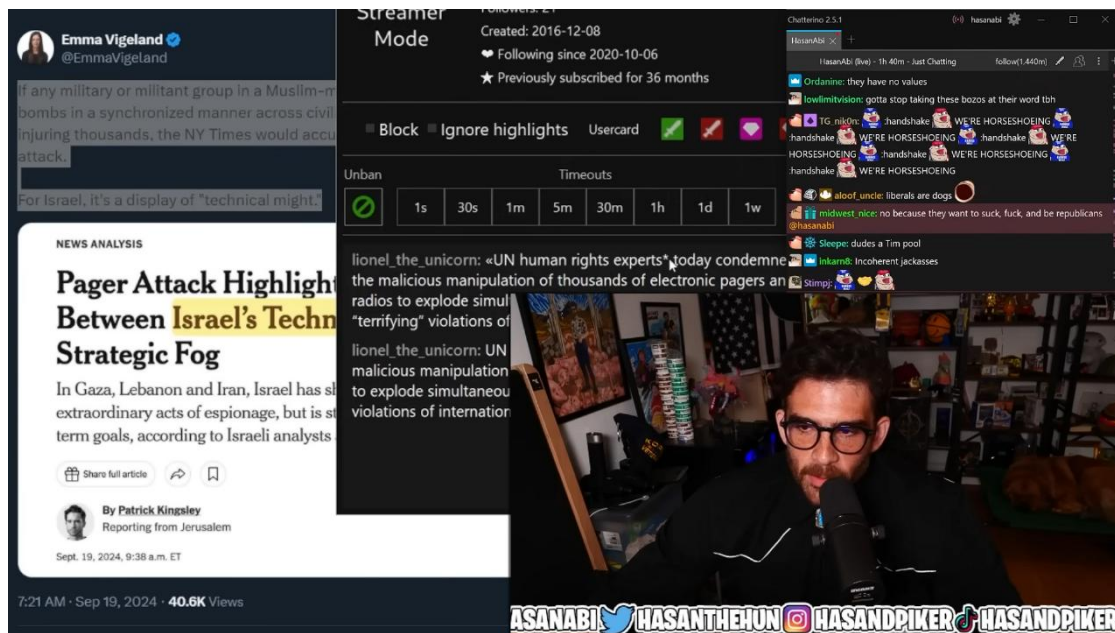


Figure 3 Example of a positive reaction to an interaction

The video ends with Piker asking his audience a question at 23:28 minutes regarding a news clip they are watching. Piker uses this question to his audience to summarize his political discussion that the entire video was about. It also allows his audience member to make a final statement about their ideas after listening to Piker's commentary.

Thus, context is especially important for Piker to begin and form his commentary and the context also allows his audience member to contribute to the political discussion and interact with Piker.

Multimodal communication

Piker utilizes a range of texts to engage in political commentary. Firstly, Piker's visual layout for his stream is important: he has his audience members chat in the top right, a live camera of him in the bottom right, and the whole left side to display the desired content that contributes to Piker's political discourse. This establishes three passages of communication: the desired content to the audience, the desired content to Piker, and Piker and his audience to each other (depicted in figure 4 in red arrows). Secondly, Piker forms his political commentary through a range of sources. In the beginning of the video, a clip from the news broadcast Good Morning America is played to introduce the topic of discussion to his viewers. Piker then reads and discusses several Twitter/X posts from Christopher C. Cuomo and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and later on posts by Open Source Intel, Zelina Khodr, Emma Vigeland, Emanuel (Mannie) Fabian, and more. Piker also uses articles by Amnesty International, Independent, Sky News, United Nations Human Rights (Office Of The High Commisioner), and The New York Times. The video ends with Piker discussing a BBC News clip. The combination of over a dozen means of communication to express and support his political commentary, Piker successful uses multimodality to form his discussions.

Piker's commentary is also formed by intertextuality between his verbal communication and the other texts in the video. Piker quotes, translates, and makes connections between what he says and the pieces of texts as well as makes connections between what his audience says and pieces of text. This is best displayed when Piker makes a connection between what an audience member said and a New York Times article and a Twitter/X post (seen at 3:26 – 4:37).

Lastly, Piker posting his political commentary on YouTube allows further spread of Piker's discourse on another platform and allows another audience (the YouTube audience) to also engage in his political discourse.

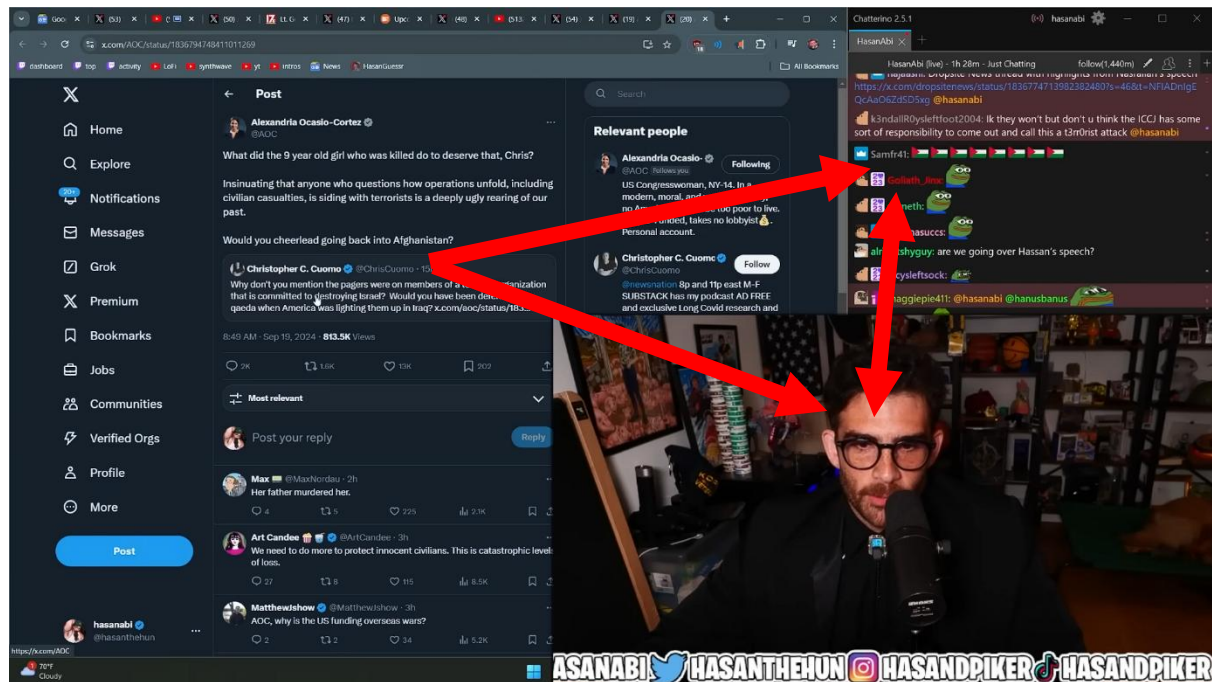


Figure 4 Three way communication during Piker's stream

The dimension of power and ideology within this video is explored through the values and beliefs spread by western media that Piker argues against in his political commentary. Using different forms of text, Piker constructs political commentary that challenges mainstream media and challenges the power the western media has over information and news coverage. Piker also constructs his political commentary by sharing his own beliefs and biases about the ongoing political conflict.

Hence, using multimodal communication, Piker develops his political commentary to share alternative information and values than those portrayed by western media. Piker also utilizes his platform, and power, to challenge the power western media has in digital spaces.

Conclusion

To conclude, digital discourse analysis was used to analyse interaction and multimodal communication in Hasan Piker's YouTube video "WESTERN RESPONSE TO ISRAELI TERRORISM IS DISTURBING" by studying the dimensions of context, actions and interactions, text, and power and ideology.

To answer the research question "How does Hasan Piker use interaction with his audience and multimodal communication to form his political commentary?", Piker uses interaction with his audience to engage in political discussion and to begin and develop his political commentary. Piker also uses multimodal communication to diversify his commentary and share alternative information and biases as well as to challenge western media which is a large priority in Piker's political commentary. Both interaction and multimodal communication play a significant role in helping Piker form his political discourse, allowing his to create attractive commentary and popularity to gain a larger audience.

References

- @HasanAbiReacts. (2024, August 31). 024 HasanAbi Community Census | HasanAbi Reacts. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl2H5_d-yVU
- Alek. (n.d.). *Digital Discourse Analysis (DDA): A New Perspective on Language Use in the Digital Age*. Retrieved from Repository UIN Syarif Hidayatullah: <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/bitstream/123456789/68943/1/Digital%20Discourse%20Analysis%20%28DDA%29-%20Uncovering%20New%20Perspectives%20on%20Language%20Use%20in%20the%20Digital%20Age.pdf>
- Capital Research Center. (n.d.). *Hasan Piker*. Retrieved from Influence Watch: <https://www.influencewatch.org/person/hasan-piker/>
- Jones, R. H., Chik, A., & Hafner, C. A. (2015). Introduction: Discourse analysis and digital practices. In *Discourse and Digital Practices. Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age* (pp. 1-17). Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781315726465-1
- Moshinsky, M. (2022). *Research Method for Digital Discourse Analysis*. Bloomsburg Publishing.
- Rudenshiold, A. (2022, April 18). 'Live' and a leftist: Twitch, political livestreaming, and Hasan Piker. doi:<https://doi.org/10.18130/d1ws-rg21>