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## THE SEMIOTIC INTENSITY APPROACH: A SCOPING REVIEW OF AMPLIFICATION AND ATTENUATION MECHANISMS IN MULTIMODAL MEDIA DISCOURSE

Zehao Yin 

National Research University Higher School of Economics,  
Moscow, Russian Federation

 [eric520magneto@gmail.com](mailto:eric520magneto@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** In the context of global communication, the construction of national images in the media has evolved from passive reporting to active meaning modulation. Using China as a case study, this research introduces the Semiotic Intensity Approach (SIA) to quantify how news media integrate verbal, visual, and layout resources to either amplify or attenuate specific narratives. By conceptualizing media discourse as a communicative event, this study conducts a systematic scoping review of a corpus of 56 core studies to construct a unified taxonomy of bias. The synthesis identifies 25 distinct cross-modal mechanisms (14 amplifying and 11 attenuating) that systematically deviate from a standard journalistic factual register. The analysis reveals a quantitative chasm in existing scholarship: while high-arousal amplification strategies dominate academic attention (70.2%), the equally strategic quiet mechanisms of attenuation (29.8%), such as spatial relegation or intersemiotic decoupling, remain under-theorized. The framework demonstrates how intersemiotic synergy acts as a multiplier effect to lock in preferred readings, whereas modal dissonance is frequently deployed to structurally suppress cooperative or positive narratives. The SIA reconceptualizes abstract framing concepts into operationalized metrics, serving as a diagnostic tool for researchers and educators to decode the anatomy of bias. This study establishes a foundation for reproducible, cross-cultural media analysis and highlights the theoretical necessity of moving beyond bias diagnosis toward the active restoration of narrative complexity.

**Keywords:** multimodal discourse analysis, media discourse, amplification and attenuation, semiotic intensity approach, intersemiotic synergy.

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## МЕТОД СЕМИОТИЧЕСКОЙ ИНТЕНСИВНОСТИ: ОБЗОРНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ МЕХАНИЗМОВ АМПЛИФИКАЦИИ И ОСЛАБЛЕНИЯ В МУЛЬТИМОДАЛЬНОМ МЕДИАДИСКУРСЕ

Цзэхао Инь

Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики»,  
Москва, Российская Федерация [eric520magneto@gmail.com](mailto:eric520magneto@gmail.com)

**Аннотация.** В контексте глобальной коммуникации формирование национальных образов в СМИ эволюционировало от пассивного освещения событий к активной модуляции смысла. На примере Китая данное исследование представляет семиотический подход к интенсивности для количественной оценки того, как новостные СМИ интегрируют вербальные, визуальные и позиционные ресурсы для усиления или ослабления конкретных нарративов. Концептуализируя медиадискурс как коммуникативное событие, данное исследование проводит систематический обзор корпуса из 56 ключевых исследований для построения единой таксономии предвзятости. Синтез выявляет 25 различных кросс-модальных механизмов (14 усиливающих и 11 ослабляющих), которые систематически отклоняются от стандартного журналистского фактологического регистра. Анализ выявляет количественный разрыв в существующих исследованиях: в то время как стратегии усиления, вызывающие сильное возбуждение, доминируют в академическом фокусе (70,2%), столь же стратегические, но «тихие» механизмы ослабления (29,8%), такие как пространственная редегация или интерсемиотическая декомпозиция, остаются недостаточно теоретически обоснованными. Предложенная концепция демонстрирует мультипликативный эффект межсемиотической синергии, закрепляющей предпочтительные интерпретации, в то время как модальный диссонанс часто используется для структурного подавления кооперативных или позитивных нарративов. Семиотический подход к интенсивности переосмысливает абстрактные понятия фрейминга в операционализированные метрики, служащие диагностическим инструментом для исследователей и преподавателей, позволяющим расшифровать анатомию предвзятости. Данное исследование закладывает основу для воспроизводимого межкультурного анализа СМИ и подчеркивает теоретическую необходимость перехода от диагностики предвзятости к активному восстановлению сложности нарратива.

**Ключевые слова:** мультимодальный дискурсивный анализ, медиадискурс, усиление и ослабление, семиотический подход к интенсивности, межсемиотическая синергия.

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### Introduction: Why Amplification & Attenuation Matter

In the context of global communication, the construction of national images in the media has evolved from a paradigm of passive reporting to one of active meaning modulation – the systematic selection and coordination of semiotic mechanisms to guide audience perception and emotional response toward a preferred reading [1–4]. This discursive shift is underpinned by technological advancements that favor multimodal constructs, where visual and linguistic resources synergize to shape public perception [5–7]. In this study, China is selected as a strategic analytical case to examine these dynamics. This choice is methodological rather than normative; it reflects the high frequency and salience of China-related narratives in contemporary global media, offering a data-rich environment to rigorously test how multimodal mechanisms modulate meaning.

Synthesizing the reviewed literature, this study operationally defines amplification as any strategic choice of verbal, visual, or layout cue that increases the salience, emotional valence, or perceived threat/benefit of a particular frame. Conversely, attenuation denotes the systematic softening, marginalization, or omission of narrative elements, thereby reducing their semiotic and affective impact. Fundamental to these definitions is the establishment of a baseline for neutral presentation. Within this proposed framework, this baseline is operationally defined as the “standard journalistic factual register” – a mode of reportage characterized by the absence of evaluative modifiers, neutral visual framing, and non-hierarchical layout choices. Amplification and attenuation are thus conceptualized as semiotic modulations that deviate from this factual zero-point to either intensify or diminish the narrative’s weight.

Furthermore, “semiotic mechanisms” are defined as the specific, operational strategies within a given mode – such as hyperbolic lexis in language or visual relegation in layout – that function as the building blocks of “meaning modulation.” Meaning modulation itself is conceptualized as the systematic selection and coordination of these mechanisms to guide audience perception and emotional response toward a preferred reading.

Conceptualization of amplification and attenuation is rooted in Entman’s notion of framing as “highlighting and suppressing” [8], yet his text-centric model left an operational gap regarding material realization across modes. To bridge this, scholars have mobilized complementary frameworks: Martin and White’s (2005) Appraisal Theory [9] offers precision for verbal graduation, while Kress and van Leeuwen’s Visual Grammar [7] provides tools for analyzing visual salience and information value. Furthermore, Bateman’s GeM model [10] and Liu and O’Halloran’s work on intersemiotic texture [11] elucidate the layout and rhetorical cohesion necessary for multimodal meaning-making.

Although recent scholarship has expanded these foundations into digital and news value contexts (e.g., [3, 12]), a unified taxonomy that captures the synergistic mechanics of amplification and attenuation across these modes remains absent. Therefore, considering the semiotic complexity of modern media discourse as a communicative event, a cross-modal approach is required to analyze meaning modulation – the systematic selection and coordination of these mechanisms to guide audience perception and emotional response toward a preferred reading.

Addressing this gap, this article introduces the Semiotic Intensity Approach (SIA). This article operationally defines Semiotic Intensity as the aggregate measure of a discursive element’s salience, affective charge, and structural “prominence”. Unlike general concepts of “framing strength” or “news values,” the SIA specifically quantifies how verbal, visual, and layout resources synergize to amplify or attenuate specific meanings. This approach reconceptualizes amplification and attenuation not merely as abstract concepts but as quantifiable mechanisms, providing a framework to track how they work simultaneously across verbal, visual, and layout resources.

This article asserts three distinct claims for significance in the context of this scoping review. First, it addresses the fragmentation in multimodal studies by synthesizing a unified taxonomy – the SIA – which renders abstract framing strategies into operationalized, cross-modal metrics. Second, it theoretically identifies and maps the “quantitative chasm” in existing scholarship, shifting critical attention from the well-documented strategies of amplification to the under-theorized and subtle mechanisms of attenuation. Third, the resulting taxonomy serves as a diagnostic tool for researchers to conduct reproducible media analysis and for educators to decode the subtle “anatomy of bias” in journalistic training.

## Methodology

### 1. Research Design: Why a Scoping Review?

This study employs a systematic scoping review design, following the methodological framework established by Arksey & O’Malley [13] and refined by Levac et al. [14]. Unlike systematic reviews that aim to answer precise questions via statistical meta-analysis, a scoping review is specifically designed



to “map key concepts underpinning a research area and the main sources and types of evidence available” [15].

This approach was selected as the most appropriate strategy for three reasons:

1. **Conceptual Heterogeneity:** The literature on “amplification” and “attenuation” spans disparate fields (linguistics, media studies, political communication) without a unified terminology.
2. **Taxonomic Goal:** The primary objective is not to aggregate effect sizes but to synthesize a typology of semiotic mechanisms across verbal, visual, and layout modes.
3. **Gap Identification:** A core function of this review is to identify the “quantitative chasm” between well-documented amplification strategies and under-theorized attenuation mechanisms [16].

The review protocol aligns with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist to ensure transparency and replicability.

## 2. Search Strategy and Eligibility Criteria

A comprehensive search was conducted across three major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Communication & Mass Media Complete (EBSCOhost). The search strategy was designed to capture the intersection of three core concepts:

The Phenomena: Amplification and Attenuation (and their conceptual synonyms);

The Approach: Multimodality;

The Context: News Media Discourse.

The eligibility criteria were defined as follows:

**Inclusion:** The selection process utilized a dual-phase approach. Primary Inclusion focused on empirical studies published in English between 2000–2024 that analyzed meaning modulation through the interplay of at least two semiotic modes in print or digital news. Secondary Inclusion (Ancestry Approach) utilized citation tracking to intentionally incorporate foundational theories and methodological exemplars (e.g., Appraisal Theory, Visual Grammar). Crucially, while primary empirical studies were required to be multimodal, texts included via the Ancestry Approach were permitted to focus on a single mode (e.g., strictly verbal or visual) to provide necessary theoretical depth for the specific SIA mechanisms.

**Exclusion:** Within the primary database search, studies focusing on a single semiotic mode or those not centered on news media were excluded. Purely theoretical papers that did not directly contribute to the operationalization of the SIA mechanisms were also excluded.

## 3. Study Selection and Data Extraction Process

Following a multi-stage screening process based on the PRISMA-ScR protocol, 56 core texts were selected for synthesis (see Table 1).

To ensure methodological rigor, data extraction was conducted via a systematic qualitative coding approach. Each included study was analyzed to identify: (1) the specific semiotic mode addressed (verbal, visual, or layout); (2) the operational definition of the identified mechanism; and (3) its functional role in either amplification or attenuation. These extracted mechanisms were then cross-referenced across the corpus to establish their frequency and theoretical grounding, forming the basis for the SIA.

## 4. Analytical Synthesis: A Framework-Informed Thematic Analysis

The synthesis of findings was not a statistical meta-analysis but a framework-informed thematic analysis [17], structured and guided by the integrated multimodal framework. The analytical workflow proceeded from the qualitative codebook to hierarchical taxonomy construction, ensuring that the resulting schema was theoretically grounded rather than ad-hoc. Two coders independently categorized 15 % of extracted mechanisms; disagreements were resolved via negotiated consensus, achieving Cohen’s  $\kappa = 0.84$  for final mechanism classification. This two-stage process – inductive coding followed by deductive framework mapping – balances analytical rigor with theoretical coherence.

The analysis proceeded in two stages:

Open Coding: Extracted mechanisms were first coded inductively based on the semiotic mode they pertained to (e.g., “use of metaphorical headline,” “high-salience photograph,” “decentralized layout”).

Thematic Framework Categorization: These initial codes were then systematically organized into a hierarchical taxonomy as a structuring matrix:

Mechanisms were classified under Verbal, Visual, or Layout/Typographic modes.

Within each mode, they were further analyzed through the lenses of:

Appraisal Theory (e.g., mechanisms of Graduation – intensification vs. diminishment) [9, 18];

Visual Grammar (e.g., mechanisms manipulating Salience, Information Value) [7];

GeM & RST (e.g., mechanisms governing layout structure and rhetorical relations between text and image) [10, 11].

Special attention was paid to synthesizing findings on intersemiotic complementarity – how mechanisms across different modes work in tandem to achieve a unified amplification or attenuation effect<sup>1</sup> [12].

### 5. Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As a Chinese qualitative researcher examining the multimodal discourse of British news media, I acknowledge that my cultural background shapes my analytical lens. My initial motivation for this study stemmed from a sensitivity to the negative biases often directed at China in Western media narratives. While a positivist approach might view this subjectivity as a limitation, a constructivist perspective recognizes that this insider identity provides a cultural intuition useful for detecting subtle ideological nuances and semiotic choices that might otherwise be missed. To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of this study and to balance my personal perspective, this study developed and applied the SIA. By operationalizing abstract biases into quantifiable semiotic mechanisms (such as amplification and attenuation), the SIA serves as a methodological anchor. This approach ensures that my interpretations remain grounded in systematic textual and visual evidence rather than subjective assumptions.

## The Semiotic Intensity Approach: A Taxonomic Synthesis

### 1. Overview of the Corpus

The review strategy yielded a final integrated corpus of 56 core texts. This comprises contemporary multimodal empirical studies (published between 2000 and 2024) retrieved via the primary search, synthesized alongside single- and multi-mode theoretical frameworks identified through citation tracking. The complete list of selected studies, along with their methodological details and primary semiotic focus, is provided in Table 1. The chronological distribution reveals a sharp increase in relevant scholarship post-2018, coinciding with intensifying geopolitical narratives surrounding Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and international conflicts.

**Table 1. List of Core Literature Included in the Synthesis**

ID	Core Literature	Citations* (till 2025.12.20)	Verbal	Visual	Layout
S-20	Lakoff G., Johnson M., <i>Metaphors We Live By</i> , University of Chicago Press, 2003. DOI: 10.7208/chicago/9780226470993.001.0001	101752	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-12	Entman R.M., <i>Framing: towards clarification of a fractured paradigm</i> , McQuail's Reader in Mass Communication Theory, ed. by D. McQuail, SAGE Publications, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 390–397.	32194	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<sup>1</sup> Caple H., *Playing with words and pictures: Intersemiosis in a new genre of news reportage*, PhD thesis, Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney, 2009.

Continuation of Table 1

ID	Core Literature	Citations* (till 2025.12.20)	Verbal	Visual	Layout
S-05	Fairclough N., <i>Discourse and Social Change</i> , Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992.	32080	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-01	Kress G., van Leeuwen, T., <i>Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design</i> , 3 <sup>d</sup> ed., Routledge, London, 2021. DOI: 10.4324/9781003099857	28031	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-03	Fairclough N., <i>Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research</i> , Routledge, London, 2003.	25607	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-04	Kress G.R., Van Leeuwen T., <i>Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication</i> , Arnold, London, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001.	13578	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-02	Martin J.R., White P.R., <i>The Language of Evaluation</i> , Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005. DOI: 10.1057/9780230511910	11333	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-28	Haslam N., <i>Dehumanization: An Integrative Review</i> . <i>Personality and Social Psychology Review</i> , 10 (3) (2006) 252–264. DOI: 10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_4	4532	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-09	Charteris-Black J., <i>Critical Metaphor Analysis, Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis</i> , Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2004, pp. 243–253. DOI: 10.1057/9780230000612_12	4005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-07	<i>The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis</i> , ed. by C. Jewitt, 1 <sup>st</sup> ed., Routledge, London, New York, 2009.	3171	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-18	Van Leeuwen T., <i>The Representation of Social Actors, Texts and Practices</i> , Routledge, 2013, pp. 32–70. DOI: 10.4324/9780203431382	2740	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-47	Leyens J.-P., Paladino P.M., Rodriguez-Torres R., Vaes J., Demoulin S., Rodriguez-Perez A., Gaunt R., <i>The Emotional Side of Prejudice: The Attribution of Secondary Emotions to Ingroups and Outgroups</i> . <i>Personality and Social Psychology Review</i> , 4 (2) (2000) 186–197. DOI: 10.1207/S15327957PSPR0402_06	1383	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-39	Bednarek M., <i>Evaluation in Media Discourse: Analysis of a Newspaper Corpus</i> , Continuum, London, 2008.	1348	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-23	Bednarek M., Caple H., <i>Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond</i> , <i>Discourse &amp; Society</i> , 25 (2) (2014) 135–158. DOI: 10.1177/0957926513516041	623	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-30	Chouliaraki L., Stolic T., <i>Rethinking media responsibility in the refugee 'crisis': a visual typology of European news</i> , <i>Media, Culture &amp; Society</i> , 39 (8) (2017) 1162–1177. DOI: 10.1177/0163443717726163	589	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-46	Flusberg S.J., Matlock T., Thibodeau P.H. <i>War metaphors in public discourse</i> . <i>Metaphor and Symbol</i> , 33 (1) (2018) 1–18. DOI: 10.1080/10926488.2018.1407992	580	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-19	<i>The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies</i> , ed. by J. Flowerdew, J.E. Richardson, Routledge, London, 2018, pp. 2–62.	558	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-29	<i>The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies</i> , ed. by J. Flowerdew, J.E. Richardson, Routledge, London, 2018, pp. 2–62.	556	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-15	Musolff A., <i>Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust: The Concept of the Body Politic</i> , Routledge, 2010. DOI: 10.4324/9780203847282	392	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-16	Liu Y., O'Halloran K.L., <i>Intersemiotic Texture: analyzing cohesive devices between language and images</i> . <i>Social Semiotics</i> , 19 (4) (2009) 367–388. DOI: 10.1080/10350330903361059	383	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-22	Zillmann, D., Knobloch, S., Yu H.-S., <i>Effects of Photographs on the Selective Reading of News Reports</i> , <i>Media Psychology</i> , 3 (4) (2001) 301–324. DOI: 10.1207/S1532785XMEP0304_01	327	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Continuation of Table 1

ID	Core Literature	Citations* (till 2025.12.20)	Verbal	Visual	Layout
S-35	Peng Z., Representation of China: An across time analysis of coverage in the <i>New York Times</i> and <i>Los Angeles Times</i> , <i>Asian Journal of Communication</i> , 14 (1) (2004) 53–67. DOI: 10.1080/0129298042000195170	276	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-11	Bednarek M., Caple H., 'Value added': Language, image and news values, <i>Discourse, Context &amp; Media</i> , 1 (2–3) (2012) 103–113. DOI: 10.1016/j.dcm.2012.05.006	258	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-45	Torabi Asr F., Taboada M., Big Data and quality data for fake news and misinformation detection, <i>Big Data &amp; Society</i> , 6 (1) (2019) 2053951719843310. DOI: 10.1177/2053951719843310	232	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-38	White P.R.R., Exploring the axiological workings of 'reporter voice' news stories – Attribution and attitudinal positioning, <i>Discourse, Context &amp; Media</i> , 1 (2–3) (2012) 57–67. DOI: 10.1016/j.dcm.2012.10.004	219	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-06	Machin D., Mayr A., <i>How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction</i> , SAGE Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks, 2023. DOI: 10.4135/9781036212933	199	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-41	Maran T., <i>Ecosemiotics: The study of signs in changing ecologies</i> , Cambridge University Press, 2020. DOI: 10.1017/9781108942850	156	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-13	Greenwood K., Jenkins J., Visual Framing of the Syrian Conflict in News and Public Affairs Magazines. <i>Journalism Studies</i> , 16 (2) (2015) 207–227. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2013.865969	145	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-31	Greenwood D.N. Fame, Facebook, and Twitter: How Attitudes About Fame Predict Frequency and Nature of Social Media Use, <i>Psychology of Popular Media Culture</i> , 2 (4) (2013) 222. DOI: 10.1037/ppm0000013	139	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-21	Kraidy M.M., The projectilic image: Islamic State's digital visual warfare and global networked affect, <i>Media, Culture &amp; Society</i> , 39 (8) (2017) 1194–1209. DOI: 10.1177/0163443717725575	92	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-42	Van Leeuwen T., Legitimation and multimodality, <i>The Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics</i> , ed. by B. Forchtner, R. Wodak, Routledge, New York, 2017, pp. 218–232. DOI: 10.4324/9781315183718	78	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-17	Chen Ch., Visualizing the knowledge domain of multimodal discourse analysis (2009–2019): A bibliometric review, <i>Forum for Linguistic Studies</i> , 2 (1) (2020) 57–70. DOI: 10.18063/FLS.v2i1.1205	63	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-40	Holsanova J., In the eye of the beholder: Visual communication from a recipient perspective, <i>Visual Communication</i> , ed. by D. Machin, De Gruyter, Berlin, 2014, pp. 331–335. DOI: 10.1515/9783110255492.331	58	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-14	Tang L., Transitive representations of China's image in the US mainstream newspapers: A corpus-based critical discourse analysis, <i>Journalism</i> , 22 (3) (2021) 804–820. DOI: 10.1177/1464884918801116	56	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-32	Munday J., <i>Evaluation and intervention in translation</i> , Text and Context, Routledge, London, New York, 2014, pp. 83–100. DOI: 10.4324/9781315759739	45	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-26	Chen M., Zhang Ch., Framing corruption in the Chinese government: A comparison of frames between media, government, and netizens, <i>International Journal of Communication</i> , 10 (2016) 20.	32	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-48	Li K., The media image of Chinese older people: From stigmatic stereotype to diverse self-representation, <i>Global Media and China</i> , 6 (3) (2021) 281–302. DOI: 10.1177/20594364211012513	28	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-24	Liu Y., Li D., The US-China battle over Coronavirus in the news media: Metaphor transfer as a representation of stance mediation, <i>Discourse &amp; Society</i> , 33 (4) (2022) 456–477. DOI: 10.1177/09579265221088122	27	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-08	Bateman J.A., <i>Multimodality and genre</i> , Information Design, Routledge, London, 2017, pp. 237–258. DOI: 10.4324/9781315585680	24	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Continuation of Table 1

ID	Core Literature	Citations* (till 2025.12.20)	Verbal	Visual	Layout
S-25	Yang Z., Military metaphors in contemporary Chinese disease coverage: a case study of the <i>People's Daily</i> , 1946–2019, <i>Chinese Journal of Communication</i> , 14 (3) (2021) 259–277. DOI: 10.1080/17544750.2020.1818593	23	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-51	Kimmelman V., Basic argument structure in Russian Sign Language, <i>Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics</i> , 3 (1) (2018) 116. DOI: 10.5334/gjgl.494	23	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-53	Bi M., Multimodal Discourse Analysis of News Pictures, <i>Theory &amp; Practice in Language Studies</i> , 9 (8) (2019) 1035–1039. DOI: 10.17507/tpls.0908.23	22	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-43	Li Z., Zhao R., Lou B., Corpus-based critical discourse analysis of reporting practices in English news reports on public health events in China and the United States, <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> , 14 (2023) 1137382. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1137382	20	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-44	Peng Y., Lu Y., Chapter 4: Computational visual analysis in political communication, <i>Research Handbook on Visual Politics</i> , ed. by D. Lilleker, A. Veneti, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023, pp. 42–54. DOI: 10.4337/9781800376939.00010	19	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-54	Tseng C.-I., Laubrock J., Bateman J.A., The impact of multimodal cohesion on attention and interpretation in film, <i>Discourse, Context &amp; Media</i> , 44 (2021) 100544. DOI: 10.1016/j.dcm.2021.100544	19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-56	Li L., Gao F., Contrasting semantic and sentimental features between Chinese and American economic news discourse in the epidemic era: A corpus-based critical discourse analysis, <i>Social Sciences &amp; Humanities Open</i> , 7 (1) (2023) 100435. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100435	16	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-52	Li X., Zhang, R., The diplomatic interpreter's negotiation of power and solidarity through engagement choices: A case study of the Chinese Foreign Minister's 2018 press conference, <i>Discourse, Context &amp; Media</i> , 39 (2021) 100459. DOI: 10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100459	12	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-27	Zhao J., Zhang D., Visual propaganda in Chinese central and local news agencies: a douyin case study, <i>Humanities and Social Sciences Communications</i> , 11 (2024) 588. DOI: 10.1057/s41599-024-03059-5	7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-34	Whitworth K., Li Y.-T., Visual Framing: The Use of COVID-19 in the Mobilization of Hong Kong Protest, <i>The China Quarterly</i> , 253 (2023) 19–34. DOI: 10.1017/S0305741022001564	7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-50	Fu H., Zhu H., Discursive construction of corporate identity through websites: An intercultural perspective on the commercial banks of the United States and China, <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> , 13 (2022) 947012. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.947012	6	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-10	Qinfeng X., Yulian C., A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the National Publicity Film of China, <i>Communication and Linguistics Studies</i> , 6 (2) (2020) 16–22. DOI: 10.11648/j.cls.20200602.11	5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-36	Shahjahan R.A., Estera A., Vellanki V., 3 Global University Rankings' Visual Media, Cartography, and Geopolitics of Knowledge Global University Rankings and the Politics of Knowledge, ed. by M Stack, University of Toronto Press, 2021, pp. 74–92.	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-33	Vila-Seoane M., Framing China: The Belt and Road Initiative in Argentine national media outlets, <i>Communication &amp; Society</i> , 36 (4) (2023) 155–174. DOI: 10.15581/003.36.4.155-174	3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S-55	Akinseye T., Social Actors' Representations in Newspaper Headlines on Domestic Violence against Men and Women in Sub-Saharan Africa, <i>Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications</i> , 10 (4) (2024) 233–258. DOI: 10.30958/ajmmc.10-4-3	2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

End of Table 1

ID	Core Literature	Citations* (till 2025.12.20)	Verbal	Visual	Layout
S-37	Liu W., Du C., and Liu F., Communicating change: a multimodal critical discourse analysis of China’s poverty reduction posters, <i>Frontiers in Communication</i> , 9 (2024) 1444032. DOI: 10.3389/fcomm.2024.1444032	1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S-49	Wu G., Gadavani S., The Representation of the Middle Class in Chinese Magazine: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, 1995–2021, <i>Language, Discourse &amp; Society</i> , 12 (1 (23)) (2024) 117–133. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12570743	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note\*: Checkmarks (☑) denote the primary semiotic mechanisms extracted from each text for the construction of the SIA framework. While primary empirical studies are inherently multimodal, certain foundational texts incorporated via the Ancestry Approach may exhibit a single checkmark (e.g., only Verbal or Visual) as they were selected specifically to provide deep theoretical grounding for that particular mode.

The disproportionate academic focus on amplification is likely not accidental. Based on the aggregate frequency analysis in Table 2, amplification mechanisms were documented 252 times (70.2%), compared to only 107 instances (29.8%) for attenuation mechanisms. Media logic often exploits an evolutionary predilection for threat detection, prioritizing high-arousal content to capture audience attention. Consequently, scholars have followed suit, analyzing what is “loud” and visible. However, this article contends that attenuation is not synonymous with neutrality. The strategic removal of emotive language or the visual marginalization of actors (e.g., V-Att-3 Relegation) requires as much editorial agency as amplification. By systematically identifying these “quiet” mechanisms, the SIA framework reveals that bias is constructed as much by what is suppressed as by what is emphasized.

The review identified disjointed terminologies across the sampled literature. What some authors termed “foregrounding” (e.g., S-12 in Table 1) overlaps significantly with “intensification” (S-24), while “exclusion” (S-36) and “the passive voice” (S-41) are treated as isolated linguistic phenomena rather than connected strategies of attenuation.

Based on the systematic synthesis of the 56 core texts (empirical and theoretical), this review identified and operationalized a total of 25 distinct semiotic mechanisms (14 of Amplification, 11 of Attenuation). The frequencies detailed in Table 2 reflect the holistic foundational and operational prevalence of each mechanism within this integrated corpus. The full operational definitions and theoretical lineages for each mechanism are detailed in the Consolidated Taxonomy in Table 2. It should be noted that the citations listed in this table are representative rather than exhaustive; for each mechanism, the table prioritizes the most frequently cited empirical studies to illustrate the primary theoretical grounding found in the corpus.

To construct a comprehensive SIA, I categorized these mechanisms into four levels of research attention based on their empirical prevalence in the reviewed corpus:

1. High Attention (Explicitly identified in >40% / ≥22 studies): Dominant strategies such as Hyperbolic Lexical Intensification and High-Salience Imagery.
2. Medium Attention (15–40% / 8–21 studies): Established but secondary strategies like Metaphorical Framing.
3. Low Attention (<15% / ≤7 studies): Peripheral strategies often found in layout analysis.
4. Emergent (Theoretically deduced, <3 studies): Mechanisms logically necessitated by the framework (particularly within Attenuation) but empirically under-documented.

Crucially, this review adopts an inclusive typology. This study did not limit analysis to ‘High’ or ‘Medium’ frequency mechanisms. Instead, this review explicitly included all four levels, with a particular emphasis on ‘Low’ and ‘Emergent’ categories. This methodological decision was made to address the “blind spots” in current scholarship: While high-frequency mechanisms reveal observed media habits, the inclusion of emergent mechanisms allows this thesis to build a logically complete

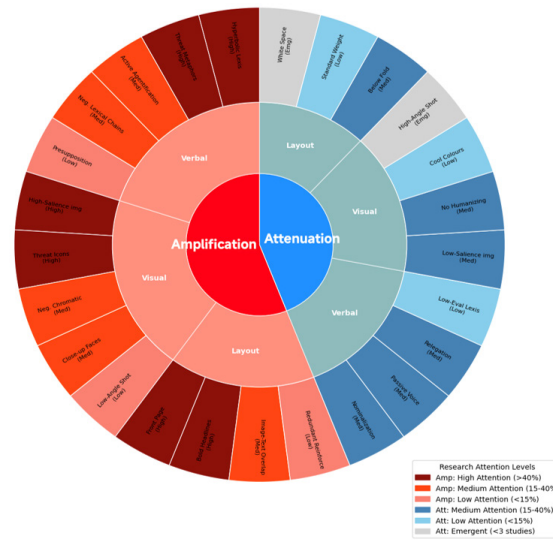


Fig. 1. The Hierarchical Taxonomy of Semiotic Intensity Mechanisms

theoretical model (the SIA) that accounts for the full spectrum of semiotic potential, rather than just repeating well-trodden findings.

The structural logic of this inclusive taxonomy is visualized in Figure 1, and these mechanisms function across three semiotic modes: Verbal, Visual, and Layout, which demonstrate how media producers systematically “turn up” (Amplify) or “turn down” (Attenuate) the volume of specific narratives.

As demonstrated in Table 2, the “hierarchy” established in Figure 1 is operationally grounded in the frequency of each mechanism’s occurrence across the reviewed corpus. This ensures that the SIA framework reflects the current state of academic attention, differentiating between dominant media habits and under-theorized emergent strategies.

Table 2. Consolidated Taxonomy of Semiotic Mechanisms

Mechanism ID	Mechanism Name	Functional Description	Research Attention (N = 56)	Representative Sources (ID) & Citations
V-Amp-1	Hyperbolic Lexical Intensification	Increases emotional valence and perceived urgency through graduation of force.	High (28/56)	1. S-12 – 32194 2. S-02 – 11333 3. S-39 – 1348 4. S-23 – 623 5. S-22 – 327
V-Amp-2	Threat-based Metaphorical Headlines	Transfers negative connotations through conceptual mapping.	High (24/56)	1. S-20 – 101752 2. S-09 – 4005 3. S-46 – 580 4. S-15 – 392 5. S-24 – 27
V-Amp-3	Active Agentification of the Target Actor	Constructs an “Actor-Responsibility” schema.	Medium (17/56)	1. S-18 – 2740 2. S-03 – 25607 3. S-14 – 56
V-Amp-4	Repetition of Negative Lexical Chains	Creates a cumulative emotional charge.	Medium (15/56)	1. S-03 – 25607 2. S-56 – 16
V-Amp-5	Presupposition and Assumed Consensus	Naturalizes controversial claims as background truth.	Low (6/56)	1. S-03 – 25607 2. S-19 – 558

Continuation of Table 2

Mechanism ID	Mechanism Name	Functional Description	Research Attention (N = 56)	Representative Sources (ID) & Citations
Vis-Amp-1	High-Salience Photographs	Prioritizes attention; anchors emotion.	High (31/56)	1. S-04 – 13578 2. S-23 – 623 3. S-22 – 327 4. S-06 – 199 5. S-10 – 5
Vis-Amp-2	Negative Chromatic Recursion	Evokes associations of danger, crisis, or authoritarianism.	Medium (19/56)	1. S-04 – 13578 2. S-06 – 199 3. S-40 – 58
Vis-Amp-3	Threat Iconography	Activates pre-existing fear schemas.	High (26/56)	1. S-12 – 32194 2. S-30 – 589 3. S-32 – 45 4. S-54 – 19 5. S-34 – 7
Vis-Amp-4	Low-Angle Camera Shots	Constructs a sense of dominance and intimidation.	Low (5/56)	1. S-04 – 13578 2. S-06 – 199
Vis-Amp-5	Close-Up Facial Expressions	Personalizes and emotionalizes abstract issues.	Medium (13/56)	1. S-04 – 13578 2. S-30 – 589 3. S-22 – 327
Lay-Amp-1	Front-Page Placement Above the Fold	Maximizes exposure and agenda-setting effects.	High (23/56)	1. S-12 – 32194 2. S-04 – 13578 3. S-23 – 623 4. S-45 – 232 5. S-08 – 24
Lay-Amp-2	Oversized, Bold Headlines	Visual shouting; frames the interpretive lens.	High (27/56)	1. S-05 – 32080 2. S-02 – 11333 3. S-39 – 1348 4. S-23 – 623 5. S-06 – 199
Lay-Amp-3	Image-Text Overlap	Forces semantic integration; reduces interpretive space.	Medium (11/56)	1. S-16 – 389 2. S-11 – 258 3. S-08 – 24
Lay-Amp-4	Redundant Multimodal Reinforcement	Creates a cross-modal “Lock-in” effect.	Low (7/56)	1. S-04 – 13578 2. S-16 – 389
V-Att-1	Nominalization	Extracts agency and vitality from beneficial narratives.	Medium (14/56)	1. S-05 – 32340 2. S-03 – 25607 3. S-04 – 13578
V-Att-2	Passive Voice	Obscures agency; lowers perceived responsibility for positive outcomes.	Medium (12/56)	1. S-04 – 13578 2. S-14 – 56 3. S-32 – 45
V-Att-3	Relegation to Later Sections	Weakens agenda-setting impact through spatial marginalization.	Medium (14/56)	1. S-12 – 32194 2. S-23 – 623 3. S-11 – 258
V-Att-4	Low-Evaluative Lexical Choices	Reduces emotional engagement with pro-China frames.	Low (5/56)	1. S-02 – 11333 2. S-39 – 1348
Vis-Att-1	Neutral/Low-Salience Imagery	Signals secondary importance; avoids emotional capture.	Medium (20/56)	1. S-01 – 28031 2. S-28 – 4532 3. S-18 – 2740 4. S-47 – 13835 5. S-30 – 589
Vis-Att-2	Absence of Humanizing Imagery	Prevents empathy formation with Chinese subjects.	Medium (16/56)	1. S-01 – 28031 2. S-04 – 13578 3. S-22 – 327 4. S-06 – 199



End of Table 2

Mechanism ID	Mechanism Name	Functional Description	Research Attention (N = 56)	Representative Sources (ID) & Citations
Vis-Att-3	Cool Colour Palettes	Weakens urgency; associates with calmness/non-threat regarding positive stories.	Low (4/56)	1. S-04 – 13578 2. S-06 – 199
Vis-Att-4	High-Angle/ Distant Shots	Visually diminishes the subject's power and agency.	Emergent (2/56)	1. S-01 – 28031 2. S-31 – 139w
Lay-Att-1	Below-the-Fold Placement	Lowers probability of encounter and perceived news value.	Medium (13/56)	1. S-12 – 32194 2. S-11 – 258 3. S-08 – 24
Lay-Att-2	Standard-Weight Headlines	Visual understatement; lack of “shouting” effect.	Low (5/56)	1. S-05 – 32080 2. S-06 – 199
Lay-Att-3	Wide White Space Separation	Hinders cross-modal meaning integration.	Emergent (2/56)	1. S-16 – 383 2. S-40 – 58

## 2. The Verbal Mode: Graduation of Force

Within the SIA framework, the verbal mode functions as the primary locus for explicit ideological graduation, dictating how a story is told before it is visualized. Rather than operating in isolation, verbal mechanisms synergize along two primary theoretical axes: the escalation of affective charge (Amplification) and the obscuring of agency (Attenuation).

**Verbal Amplification** is predominantly achieved through mechanisms that actively “upgrade” the news value and emotional impact of a communicative event. High-attention strategies like Hyperbolic Lexical Intensification (V-Amp-1) and Threat-based Metaphorical Headlines (V-Amp-2) function rhetorically to maximize narrative urgency (S-39; S-22; S-46). Theoretical lineages trace this to Framing and Appraisal Theories, where high-arousal lexis and negative metaphorical mappings (e.g., treating a geopolitical shift as a “flood”) define social reality and logically close off alternative policy outcomes (S-12; S-02; S-20; S-09). Furthermore, texturing systematically enforces an Actor-Responsibility schema through the Active Agentification of the Target Actor (V-Amp-3), syntactically monopolizing agency for the out-group (S-14; S-18). Combined with the Repetition of Negative Lexical Chains (V-Amp-4) and Presupposition (V-Amp-5), media discourse manufactures a saturated macro-narrative that naturalizes aggressive intent as background truth, effectively manufacturing consent (S-03; S-19; S-56).

**Verbal Attenuation**, conversely, works to dampen agency and visibility, particularly when reporting beneficial or cooperative narratives. Mechanisms such as Nominalization (V-Att-1) and the Passive Voice (V-Att-2) operate as theoretical technologies of Agentive Distancing; they extract the agent from positive actions, rendering achievements as abstract phenomena rather than competent governance (S-03; S-04; S-32). This linguistic neutralization is structurally reinforced through Relegation to Later Sections (V-Att-3) and Low-Evaluative Lexical Choices (V-Att-4). Grounded in the nucleus-satellite model and Appraisal Theory's interpersonal meaning, these mechanisms ensure that positive frames are buried in the textual periphery and stripped of affective alignment, thus failing to generate the emotional resonance required to shift public perception (S-12; S-11; S-02).

## 3. The Visual Mode: Salience and Affect

The visual mode within the SIA framework modulates intensity by managing affective intensity and social distance, effectively setting the “emotional temperature” of the communicative event (Table 2). The synthesis of the corpus indicates that visual resources are strategically deployed to either arrest attention through immediate emotional triggers or to enforce “visual cooling” through distancing mechanisms.

**Visual Amplification** mechanisms are designed to “up-scale” perceived threats and urgency by anchoring emotion and prioritizing attention. High-Salience Photographs (Vis-Amp-1) establish a “demand”

relationship through variables like size and sharpness, triggering emotional engagement that enhances subsequent text processing (S-01; S-22). This ideological utility is furthered by Negative Chromatic Recursion (Vis-Amp-2), where dark spectrums signify “menace” or “atmospheric priming,” ensuring even positive news feels jarring against a pre-set dark reality (S-06; S-40). Moreover, Threat Iconography (Vis-Amp-3) activates fear schemas by presenting subjects as a “faceless mass” or “state machinery,” a strategy empirically over-represented in conflict narratives (S-12; S-30; S-44). These affective weapons are reinforced by Low-Angle Camera Shots (Vis-Amp-4), which spatialize social hierarchy by conferring overwhelming power onto the subject, and Close-Up Facial Expressions (Vis-Amp-5), which replace humanitarian compassion with the “responsibility of ambient threat” (S-01 S-06; S-30).

**Visual Attenuation** functions through “mechanistic dehumanization,” increasing social distance to dampen the structural impact of positive or dissonant narratives (S-28). Neutral or Low-Salience Imagery (Vis-Att-1) and the Absence of Humanizing Imagery (Vis-Att-2) act as an “empathy blockade”, where the denial of emotional depth and the “demand” gaze renders subjects as interchangeable automatons or mere placeholders (S-04; S-47; S-18). This “affective damping” is achieved by pairing positive stories with “boring” visuals that fail to secure visual primacy within the page hierarchy (S-22). Furthermore, Cool Colour Palettes (Vis-Att-3) signal clinical detachment, while High-Angle/Distant Shots (Vis-Att-4) visually diminish the subject’s agency by analyzing them as “specimens” or ant-like patterns (S-04; S-06; S-31). Collectively, these mechanisms reinforce a detached, colonial gaze that systematically marginalizes the Other within the visual economy.

#### 4. The Layout Mode: Hierarchy and Zoning

Within the SIA framework, the layout mode functions as the “instruction manual” for consuming the communicative event, organizing spatial relationships to determine the reading path and information hierarchy. As detailed in Table 2, layout mechanisms synthesize by either aggressively managing reader attention to enforce maximum visibility (Amplification) or spatially marginalizing dissonant, positive information to manage narrative prominence (Attenuation).

**Layout Amplification** ensures forced integration of meaning through structural primacy and intersemiotic fusion. Front-Page Placement Above the Fold (Lay-Amp-1) capitalizes on Western reading paths, acting as an institutional “spotlight” that elevates narratives to high salience. Grounded in Kress & van Leeuwen’s concept of the “Ideal” zone [7] and GeM model (S-08) grid, this spatial allocation mathematically constructs the news value of “Prominence.” This structural power is paired with Oversized, Bold Headlines (Lay-Amp-2), functioning as “visual shouting” to impose preferred intertextual frames. Categorized as a visual realization of Graduation: Force, heavy typography signals factual authority and “superlativeness”, transforming subjective claims into objective facts (S-02; S-06; S-23). To cement these frames, Image-Text Overlap (Lay-Amp-3) and Redundant Multimodal Reinforcement (Lay-Amp-4) maximize Intersemiotic Texture. By collapsing processing distance and creating high “cohesive density,” these mechanisms force a semantic fusion and a “truth effect” that eliminates interpretive doubt, leaving no gaps for alternative readings (S-16; S-08; S-04). Crucially, these spatial framing cues are often stripped by automated text classification, rendering layout amplification invisible to purely computational analysis (S-45).

Layout Attenuation functions spatially to satisfy journalistic diversity requirements while structurally rendering counter-narratives invisible. Below-the-Fold Placement (Lay-Att-1) signals secondary status by demoting information to the mundane Real zone (S-08), ensuring it lacks the salience required to activate framing effects (S-12; S-23). This Structural Demotion is compounded by Standard-Weight Headlines (Lay-Att-2), a typographic understatement or “visual quieting” that visually codes stories as “light news” so they merely “whisper” (S-05; S-06). Furthermore, Wide White Space Separation (Lay-Att-3) physically distances visual evidence from positive verbal text. By lowering the density of cohesive devices and breaking saccadic eye movement, media execute Intersemiotic



Decoupling, actively preventing cross-modal integration and stopping positive visual affect from validating the narrative (S-16; S-40).

### **Discussion: Synthesis, Synergy, and Contextualization**

#### **1. Intersemiotic Synergy: The Multiplier Effect**

While the mechanisms detailed in Table 2 have been cataloged individually, a defining characteristic of the SIA is its recognition that these modes rarely operate in isolation. The framework posits that high-intensity framing is achieved not through single-mode graduation but through Intersemiotic Synergy – a “multiplier effect,” where verbal, visual, and layout resources mutually reinforce one another to close off alternative interpretations.

Synthesizing the data from the 56 reviewed studies (Table 1), the synthesis identified stable “coupling patterns” or “co-occurrence clusters” between modes. As illustrated in the integrated architecture of Figure 1, the most potent form of amplification occurs when Hyperbolic Lexical Intensification (V-Amp-1) is spatially anchored by High-Salience Photographs (Vis-Amp-1). Qualitative analysis of the corpus suggests that verbal threat narratives are predominately accompanied by simultaneous visual amplification, creating a closed semiotic loop.

This suggests that media producers instinctively align the “emotional temperature” of text and image to ensure maximum semiotic impact. For instance, a headline describing a “border crisis” is rarely presented alone; it is almost invariably accompanied by Threat Iconography (Vis-Amp-3), such as high-contrast images of chaotic crowds or military hardware. Bateman [19] defines this as a Resonance relation, where the visual evidence provides the “empirical proof” for the verbal claim, rendering the threat narrative empirically indisputable to the reader.

Conversely, the SIA reveals that attenuation often operates through Modal Dissonance or decoupling. A recurrent observation across the dataset is that positive China-related news (e.g., scientific cooperation) frequently lacks visual alignment. Instead of reinforcing the positive verbal message with high-salience imagery, media producers often employ Neutral/Low-Salience Imagery (Vis-Att-1) or utilize Wide White Space (Lay-Att-3) to physically separate the visual evidence from the favorable headline. This lack of synergy effectively “dampens” the positive signal. As a result, even when a cooperative story is explicitly told in the verbal mode, it fails to resonate visually or emotionally, leading to weak retention and low agenda-setting power.

#### **2. Contextualizing Semiotic Intensity: Content and Selection Bias**

The quantitative difference revealed in this study, where amplification mechanisms account for 70 % of the discourse compared to 30 % for attenuation, must be contextualized within the specific content of the analyzed narratives and the positionality of the primary researchers. The content itself drives much of the semiotic intensity. A substantial portion of the 56 empirical studies analyzed in this scoping review focused on crisis-driven topics, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic. Topics related to global health crises, lockdowns, and threats to human life are fundamentally negative and catastrophic. Consequently, media outlets naturally resort to strong amplification strategies like war metaphors and emotive modifiers to report on these issues. Furthermore, there is an underlying secondary selection bias. A subset of the authors of 56 studies shares a positionality as scholars aiming to expose negative Western biases against China. This shared ideological stance likely influenced their initial sampling, leading them to disproportionately select highly conflictual and adversarial texts for their analyses while potentially overlooking more neutral or positive topics like the Beijing Olympics or cultural exchanges. Therefore, the high frequency of amplification identified by the SIA is not solely an objective measure of routine Western media discourse. It also reflects the crisis-heavy content being analyzed and the collective selection bias of the researchers who originally curated these texts.

## Conclusion

This study set out to resolve the fragmentation in multimodal discourse analysis by constructing a unified taxonomy of bias. By synthesizing 25 distinct semiotic mechanisms, the SIA successfully bridges the gap between qualitative interpretation and quantitative measurement. Crucially, the analysis confirms that media framing is not a binary operation of “biased” vs. “neutral,” but a dynamic continuum, where amplification and attenuation operate in synergy. The framework provides the missing vocabulary to describe how media outlets can simultaneously shout about a foreign threat while whispering about domestic complicity.

Unlike abstract conceptual models, the SIA offers a grounded blueprint for how media narratives are constructed. However, a theoretical taxonomy derived from past literature is retrospective: It reveals the tools scholars have used in individual case studies, but it has not yet captured how these mechanisms function dynamically over time.

Currently, comprehensive longitudinal datasets are needed to test how these mechanisms function dynamically over time. Future research should apply this framework to high-stakes coverage, such as ongoing geopolitical conflicts, to empirically validate these findings. Such an application will determine whether the academic literature’s focus on amplification reflects actual journalistic practice, or if reporters utilize attenuation strategies more frequently than currently theorized. Ultimately, the SIA is not merely a theoretical construct but a pedagogical and analytical tool. For journalism educators, it provides a structured vocabulary to teach the “anatomy of bias;” for the public, it offers a mechanism to resist discursive manipulation – empowering readers to recognize when their perception is being strategically modulated, whether through the amplification of fear or the attenuation of empathy.

Crucially, while this study operationalized the SIA using China-related narratives as a strategic analytical case, the generalizability of this framework to other geopolitical contexts, such as Russia, requires further empirical validation. Although its architecture is inherently transferable, the tripartite structure, measuring verbal graduation, visual salience, and layout hierarchy, must be rigorously tested before it can be equally applied to analyze power dynamics in other institutional contexts, such as corporate crisis communication, climate change discourse, or domestic electoral framing.

Beyond empirical application, the limitations of the diagnostic model point toward a necessary theoretical evolution. While the SIA effectively detects how media discourse simplifies reality, a crucial frontier remains: the active restoration of the nuance lost in this process. Future scholarship must move beyond diagnosis toward remediation, exploring protocols to systematically reintroduce excluded context and restore the complexity of crisis narratives.

Ultimately, this review does more than summarize; it reorients the field from mere criticism toward verifiable measurement. By staking out a clear research frontier centered on cross-modal synergy and quantifiable analysis, the taxonomy provides the necessary foundation upon which falsifiable, cross-cultural media analysis can be systematically built. This shift ensures that future inquiries into national image construction are grounded not in intuition, but in rigorous, reproducible semiotic evidence.

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#### INFORMATION ABOUT AUTHOR / СВЕДЕНИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ

**Zehao Yin**

**Инь Цзэхао**

E-mail: eric520magneto@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5397-0485>

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