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Emotional Advocacy and Cognitive Empowerment in Social Change and Crisis Communication: Exploring Multimodal Discursive Strategies in THE WHY Videos

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explain how to explore the roles of multimodal crisis discourses in NGO's empowering and advocacy communication meant to fight cognitive limitations and lack of genuine commitment to implementing social changes that can alleviate or eradicate ongoing global crises. The selected data is represented by THE WHY foundation's videos addressing the globalised community. The methodological approach combines multimodal discourse analysis with thematic reflexive analysis. Drawing upon this methodological framework, the article shows how to examine the integration of several semiotic modes in empowering or disempowering representation of social actors as groups or identifiable individuals affected by global crises' consequences. Drawing upon an understanding of discourse as socially constructed knowledge, the article also shows how to explore crises-related social practices that are multimodally legitimated (or delegitimated) according to strategic advocacy goals. The identified multimodal discursive strategies are connected according to their crisis-related communicative themes (issue identification, blame attribution, and potential solutions) and accomplish two overarching functions related to implementing social change: empowerment articulation and advocacy orientation. This article contributes to the expanding fields of both crisis communication and communication for social change in NGO context. By showing how to examine the roles and effects of the semiotic modes' potent interdependence and functional differentiation upon the emotional convergence or segregation between represented social actors and prospective viewers, it provides means for rethinking and improving the strategic usage of multimodal discursive strategies and, consequently, move the study of crisis communication and communication for social change forward.

Keywords

social change, crisis communication, advocacy, empowerment, discourse, multimodality