

The Intersection of AI-Generated Cartoon Images in Hate Speech on Facebook: A Linguistic and Visual Discourse Analysis

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¹Received: 27/08/2025; Accepted: 05/10/2025; Published: 09/10/2025

Abstract

This research investigates the use of artificial intelligence (AI)-generated cartoon images in the dissemination of hate speech on Facebook. These images, often humorous, satirical, or stylised, are no longer limited to entertainment or political commentary but have increasingly become a channel for coded hate speech. This study is based on 125 AI-generated cartoon images collected from Facebook users' profiles between January 2022 and December 2024, using an Android phone and a computer. The study employed multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) to examine the data, focusing on both linguistic and visual dimensions. All the samples analysed contained these two elements. A qualitative method was used to explore how different modes (text and image) interact to construct meaning in a structured and functional way. The findings reveal several themes, including; linguistic patterns of selective justice and political victimhood; political cartoons with subtle or coded language; satirical cartoons reflecting age, power, culture, and humour; AI-cartoon images addressing power, legacy, and foreign influence in Cameroonian politics; the theatrics of development and leadership. These results provide insight into the themes, patterns, and impacts of AI-generated cartoons in the spread of hate speech on social media.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence; AI-generated cartoon images; Facebook; hate speech; multimodal discourse analysis.*

Résumé

Cette recherche analyse l'usage de dessins animés générés par l'intelligence artificielle (IA) dans la propagation du discours de haine sur Facebook. Ces images souvent humoristiques, satiriques ou stylisées, ne servent plus seulement au divertissement ou au commentaire politique mais deviennent également un moyen de diffuser un discours haineux codé. L'étude porte sur 125 dessins animés générés par l'IA et collectés sur les profils d'utilisateur de Facebook entre Janvier 2022 et Décembre 2024, à l'aide d'un téléphone Android et d'un ordinateur. L'approche de discours multimodal (ADM) a guidé l'examen des données, en mettant l'accent sur les dimensions linguistiques et visuelles. Tous les échantillons contenaient ces deux dimensions. La méthode qualitative a permis de comprendre comment les différents modes (texte et image) interagissent pour produire du sens. Les résultats révèlent plusieurs thèmes; justice sélective et victimisation politique; caricatures politiques utilisant un langage subtil ou codé; représentations satiriques liées à l'âge, au pouvoir, à la culture et à l'humour; images de l'IA sur le pouvoir, l'héritage et l'influence étrangère.

¹ How to cite the article: Fombo E.; (2025); The Intersection of AI-Generated Cartoon Images in Hate Speech on Facebook: A Linguistic and Visual Discourse Analysis; *Multidisciplinary International Journal*; Vol 11 No. 2 (Special Issue); 1-16

dans la politic Camerounaise; mise en scène du development et du leadership. Ces résultats apportent un éclairage sur les thèmes, les tendances et l'impact des dessins animés générés par l'IA dans la diffusion du discours de haine sur les réseaux sociaux.

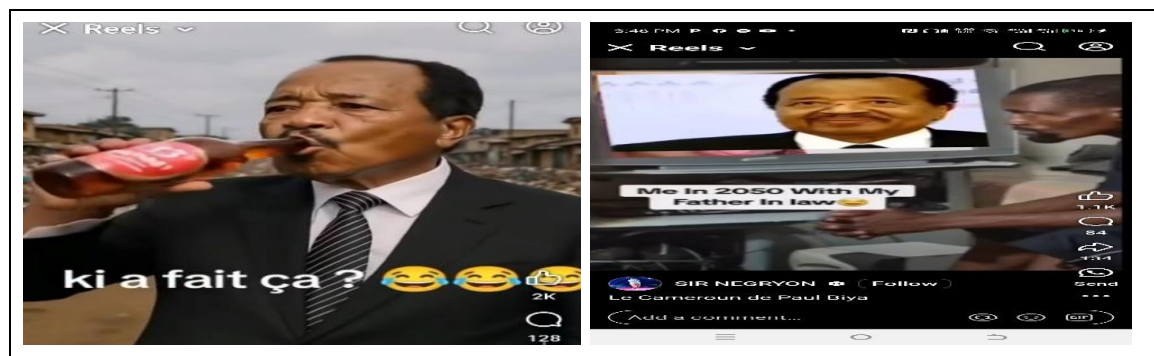
Mots-clés: *intelligence artificielle; dessins animés générés par l'IA; Facebook; discours de haine; analyse du discours multimodal*

1. Introduction

The intersection of linguistic and visual discourse analysis can offer a rich perspective on how AI-generated cartoon images contribute to the framing, reinforcement, or subversion of hate speech on a platform like Facebook. AI-generated cartoon images circulate on social-media platforms today. Such images have been used for different purposes; to go along with social-media posts like visualization/ visual support for content or supposedly depicting a real event or person. Published alongside articles on disinformation, low-quality clickbaiting or other news websites, are inserted in video clips and AI images of real-looking persons as profile images of fake social-media accounts.

Some show both persons, most often politicians, celebrities, and influencers in situations that never happen. The image of president Biya dancing and drinking beer besides heaps of deposited waste in Yaounde depict events that never happened. For example, AI-generated images ruin him dancing in public national event in Yaounde (see images figure 1 below). While professional fake news websites and outlets, most likely backed by state actors also use AI images to publish alongside fake articles. The vast majority of such AI-generated photo, however, are created and spread by social media and forum users. This trend demonstrates the effects of the democratisation of AI-generated tools and their misuse (Karen & Nehring 2025: 23).

Figure 1: AI-generated cartoon images of Paul Biya



Source: A-generated cartoon images from Facebook.

In recent years, the proliferation AI-technologies has transformed how visual content is created and shared across digital platforms. Among these advancements, AI-generated images have emerged as a prominent tool, capable of producing hyper-realistic visuals with minimal human differences. While these innovations hold immense potential for creative and professional endeavors, they also raise critical concerns about their implications in perpetuating harmful narratives, particularly on social media platforms like Facebook. This study investigates the intersection of linguistics and visual discourse analysis to explore how AI-generated images contribute to the propagation of hate speech on Facebook.

Facebook, as one of the largest social media platforms, has implemented AI-driven moderation systems to detect and remove hate speech. However, the intersection of AI-generated images and hate speech remains a complex issue, requiring a subtle approach that incorporates both linguistic and visual discourse analysis. Linguistic analysis examines the textual elements accompanying AI-generated images, while visual discourse analysis explores how imagery conveys implicit or explicit hateful messages.

AI-generated images can play a troubling role in hate speech by amplifying harmful narratives and spreading misinformation. These images might create stereotypes, distort facts, or manipulate public opinion. For example, AI can produce fake visuals of individuals or groups, leading to defamation or incitement. Additionally, they can subtly embed hateful messages, making them harder to detect. This study aims to analyse the linguistic and visual elements of AI-generated images used in hate speech on Facebook, providing insights into their impact, role, and effectiveness in amplifying hate speech. This paper answers the following research questions:

1. What linguistic and visual features characterise this use?
2. How do AI-generated cartoon images visually encode hate speech on Facebook?
3. How are the visual elements incorporated through AI-generated images?

2. Significance of the study

This study bridges the fields of linguistics, visual discourse analysis, and AI-technology, providing a fresh perspective on how AI-generated cartoon images intersect with language to propagate hate speech. It sheds light on the mechanisms through which hate speech is not only verbal but also visually amplified, offering a deeper understanding of how harmful content evolves in this digital era.

3. Previous studies

Some studies have interpreted different forms of linguistic and visual communication using Kress Van Leeuwen's model of visual semiotics (Al-azzawi & Kadhim 2024; Wang 2024; Harmeed & Ejam 2022; Simsek & Bozdag 2024), even though they did not use AI-generated data. Societal perception of AI has also been examined by some researchers (Moravec et al 2024; Seth 2024; Wen & Chen 2024; Kanzola et al 2024). They made a general study on the societal attitudes towards AI by examining public perceptions of AI. The studies conclude that many view AI as a transformative tool, others view it as a job displacement. AI is influenced by gender, age, and education. Thus, the younger generation and those with lower education level show less interest with AI applications. Political ideology has limited impact on AI benefit perceptions and that science, news consumption and knowledge influence AI perceptions significantly. And, that social economic factors (including economic and political standings) significantly influenced public attitudes toward AI. The above studies, based on their aims and conclusions, studied societal perceptions excluding social media, which is also evolving at a geometric rate with AI-generated contents. Some of the studies however, did not use Van Leeuwen's visual semiotics model nor Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistics as their conceptual background.

Unlike the above studies, research on AI-generated cartoon images is diverse. While some authors have focused on the use of AI-generated images and Hate Speech (Sagi, Tomer, Amir, Einat 2023; Munn & Meg 2025) explore how AI-generated content contributes to hate speech and evaluate detection methods. Others have investigated AI and its Effects on Disinformation (Putlanda, Chikodzore-Patersonb & Gavin Brookes 2023; Chioma 2024; Helal 2025; Karen & Nehring 2025;). They explore how AI-generated visuals contribute to harmful narratives. The main idea investigated under these studies is to examine a combined influence on AI-generated dissemination and credibility in the digital age, exploring its impacts on communication. The studies have the objective to analyze how AI algorithms influence the visibility and information consumption, evaluate the ethical challenges posed by AI-generated content, it impacts on public trust and misinformation management. Overall, these studies highlight the potential for AI-generated images to reinforce and amplify harmful stereotypes and biases. As well as demonstrating the ideological import of such imagery, and thus the need for these to be critically interrogated by multimodal critical discourse analysts. The studies underscore the need for ethical consideration in AI design and usage, including developing more diverse and inclusive training datasets. Finally, these studies have shown that even when the same linguistic principles are involved in AI-generated verbal cartoon images, there may be differences in the ways the same images are used to convey meaning.

All these studies have shown the realisation of AI-generated cartoon images and hate speech, how they are blended together by the producers to achieve a common goal, which is far from entertainment or humour. With all of these, there are limited scholarly attention on how AI tools are appropriated to produce these images, the semiotic and linguistic strategies they employ, and the ways audiences interpret them in local socio-political contexts. Our present investigation continues this tradition, using Cameroonian data.

4. Theoretical Approaches

To analyse AI-generated cartoon images in hate speech on Facebook through linguistic and visual discourse analysis, Theo Van Leeuwen Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approaches and theoretical perspectives of social semiotics, visual communication, reading images, and the Grammar of Visual Design (1996, 2006, 2008 & 2022) helped examine how different modes of communication, such as text on images, gestures, spatial arrangements, and symbols, work together to create meaning. It moves beyond traditional discourse analysis, which primarily focuses on language, to consider the interplay of these different modes in constructing meaning. The core idea is that communication is rarely, if ever, purely linguistic; instead, it's a rich art culled from multiple semiotic resources. MDA approaches and theoretical perspectives emphasize that each mode contributes uniquely to the overall message. For example, in AI-generated cartoon images, the background, the target's body language, and other features are combined to convey a particular narrative and to evoke specific emotions from the audience.

On a platform like Facebook, where most of the images are disseminated, the layout, colour scheme, typography, and interactive elements are combined with the written content to create a cartoon image and to communicate the producers' intention through it. The theoretical perspective, through its approaches, also explores how different modes interact with each other. This interaction can be complementary, where modes reinforce the same message, or contradictory, where the different modes of communication (e.g visual images, spatial layout) create tension or ambiguity. Understanding these interactions is crucial for interpreting the full meaning of a multimodal text.

The study, therefore, applied MDA approaches and their theoretical perspectives to analyse how meaning is constructed and negotiated in diverse contexts. Ultimately, providing a comprehensive approach to understanding communication in a world increasingly saturated with multimodal texts. These approaches and theoretical perspectives handle the AI-generated cartoon images on Facebook. They emphasize meaning-making through different semiotic resources, such as images, gestures, and sounds within social contexts. It explores how multimodal texts shape communication and cultural understanding.

The above approach best explains the AI-generated cartoon images in hate speech, which are used to communicate intentions. Michael Halliday & Kay O'Halloran's (2011) theoretical perspective of systemic multimodal functional linguistics (SMFL) analyses how different modes work together to create meaning in a structured, functional way. Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (CMDA) investigates the multimodal texts by examining power dynamics, ideology, and biased use through AI-generated content. The perspectives are useful for identifying implicit hate speech that AI moderation might overlook. Social Semiotics (SS) helps identify semiotic resources, such as symbolic gestures and racial imagery used by AI generators to reinforce harmful stereotypes. Examining how visual composition, including placement, colour contrast, and framing, influences the interpretation and impact of hateful messages. Exploring the ideological positioning of the represented image, to show how it is depicted, and what message is conveyed through the images.

5. Method and data

This study adopts a qualitative multimodal analysis, using screenshots of the cartoons shared on Facebook. A multimodal analysis was used to explore the interplay between textual and visual elements in AI-generated cartoon images and hate speech. With our goal being depth and insight, a purposive sampling technique was used to select 205 screenshots of AI-generated cartoon images on Facebook. Activists' profiles were followed (scrolled), and detected

images were screenshot. The Data collected adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring anonymity of social media users and compliance with Facebook's policies.

Analyzing AI-generated cartoon images with hate speech on Facebook, data classification follows both linguistic and visual discourse frameworks. Linguistic data includes implicit hate speech (coded language, metaphors). Visual data involves semiotic elements, including symbolic imagery (stereotypes, exaggerated features). This multimodal approach enables a detailed examination of how AI-generated cartoon images contribute to online hate speech discourse.

The intersection of AI-generated cartoon images in hate speech on Facebook requires a multimodal discourse analysis that integrates both linguistic and visual methodologies. Social semiotics provides a powerful framework for analyzing AI-generated cartoon images in hate speech on Facebook, as it examines how meaning is constructed through multimodal elements. A systemic functional linguistic (SFL) approach examines the register, tone, and lexical choices within accompanying text to identify implicit hate speech markers. CMDA investigates the multimodal texts by examining power dynamics, ideology, and biased use through AI-generated content. Combining these approaches and perspectives, the study analysed the layered meanings embedded in AI-generated cartoon images and their role in digital hate speech propagation.

6. Analysis

The analysis of this study reveals an interplay between AI-generated images and hate speech on Facebook. Through linguistic and visual discourse analysis, patterns emerge in how text and imagery contribute to harmful narratives, implicitly. This section presents categorised results, highlighting the linguistic and visual elements in AI-generated images in hate speech. By examining these elements, the study provides deeper insights into the evolving nature of online discourse and the role of AI in shaping digital interactions. It is classified into two main categories; language in images (linguistic elements) and visual elements.

6.1 Language in images.

AI-generated cartoon image producers used both linguistic and images to disseminate contents. This shows how meaning is created not just by words, but how they are presented and used to accompany images.

6.1.1 Linguistic Patterns in selective justice and political victimhood.

All the three images below depict individuals either behind bars or in prison attire, using language in images to invoke themes of imprisonment, justice or injustice.

Figure 2: Representation of linguistic patterns in selective justice and political victimhood.



Source: A-generated cartoon images from Facebook (July 30, 2022)

In an overview statement, all the three cartoon images depict targets behind bars; literal or stylised with accompanied text raising questions or demands regarding their detentions. Major labelings in the three images include *FORJINDA ZACCHEUS*, *ABDULKARIM*, AND *ABDUKARIM ALI*. The tone is critical, accusatory, and emotionally provocative, with the label *ANGLOFOOLS* suggesting a critical stance toward Anglo or Anglophone political discourse.

Compositionally, the central figure (image 2) is positioned prominently, suggesting primacy or urgency. Flanked by image 1 & 3, creating a visual argument or juxtaposition. From framing angle, bars represent imprisonment and metaphorical suppression, with frontal closed-up shots inviting empathy and solidarity. From a salience view point, bright and blue background and bold yellow text in image 2 attract attention. This particular image is more stylised and dramatic, which is a reflection of urgency. Gazeingly, all figures look forward, confronting the viewer, a demand image that asks viewers to engage directly. In terms of modality, realistic photos i.e images 1 & 2 vs cartoon-like stylisation (image 3) suggest different degrees of realism or seriousness. Image 3 may subtly depoliticise. And clothing here also communicates, the formal attire in image 2 implies professionalism or legitimacy. Prison uniforms in 1 & 3 denote criminality or political detention.

Ideationally, in images 1 & 2, linguistic triggers like, *what about FORJINDA ZACCHEUS?* In interrogative mood suggests neglect or forgotten injustice, highlighting omission and moral inconsistency. *RELEASE ABDOULKARIM IMMEDIATELY* in imperative mood is a demand action and urgent tone and also function as tools of persuasion, accusation, or satire fitting within hate speech or propaganda framework. In image 3, *what about Abdoukarim?* A repetition of the interrogative frame suggests uneven public or political concern and visual bars symbolize suppression and victimhood. These linguistic structures used in the images imply a systematic neglect or selective justice, which contrasts with public advocacy (image 2) and ignored cases (images 1 & 3).

Interpersonally, the use of *YOU* implied in imperative (*release*) and *YOU-questioning* (*what about...?*) invite the viewers to judge or act. The captions also suggest disparity or bias in legal or or political treatment, highlighting certain targets being jailed and others are overlooked or ignored. The use of colloquial and emotionally charged register, *COWARDS!* (image 2) heightens an accusatory tone and moral urgency. The tone also suggests critique of judicial fairness or government selective, a common discourse in political cartoons and hate speech content, especially in political polarized environments. Capitalisation is used here for emphasis shouting effect. Textually, parallel structures across images create cohesion. Text-image alignment (above/below characters) helps direct the flow of interpretation.

In power and representation (PR), the images construct a counter-narrative to dominant state discourses. The targets imprisoned are not depicted as criminals but as victims or activists. In intertextuality, the visual trio comments on selective activism or bias in advocacy and media attention. In ideology, the creator appears to criticise Anglophone elite hypocrisy denouncing injustices selectively (see label *ANGLOFOOLS* in image 1). The middle and the last figures being central and well-dressed, symbolise a favoured political prisoner, where as the other is neglected

SFL and SS frameworks provide lens to interpret how meaning is constructed through both linguistic and visual modes, and how these meanings reflect ideologies, identities, and power relations. The three images above function as visual-practical satire, using multimodal resources (language, image, composition) to expose inconsistencies in public or political concern for detained individuals. Through the SS and SFL lens, the images argue that justice and advocacy are unequally distributed, perhaps along lines of class, region, or political affiliations. The images exemplify visual hate speech patterns by using slurs and mockery like “*Anglofools*”, “*Cowards*” promoting, framing, reinforcing, and encouraging us-vs-them narratives, state actions, ethnic/regional grievances, and public outrage.

6.1.2 Political cartoon images with subtle or coded language.

The images below are used by the producers featuring coded language and visuals that disseminate hate speech implicitly. This classification includes the use of death as a political weapon, dehumanization, dismissive tone, and political targeting through linguistic/visual irony.

Figure 3: Representation of images and political commentary in Cameroon's crisis era



Source: A-generated cartoon images from Facebook (Sept 30, 2022 & Jan 7, 2024)

With an overview of the images, the text *MINUS ONE. The man who said it was you people who decided to join us, has kicked the bucket.* A cartoon figure in football attire with a bucket falling over, and others in political robes. A speech bubble says “Amadou Ali a marqué” (Amadou Ali has scored). A visual metaphor like bucket falling, football match setting, political figures stylized comically are the literary components of image 1. The text “*PROF. OWONA FINALLY KICKED THE BUCKET...*” and the cartoon person kicking a football- a metaphor for death and others watching from the bench in uniforms are the literary components of image 2

In what is represented i.e the ideational metafunctions like verbal and material processes- “*kicked the bucket*”, “*scored*”, “*finally kicked the bucket*”. Participants and implied audience like individuals named or shown (Amadou Ali, Owona), the people allegedly misled, and a circumstance like political sphere, death, judgment show a re-contextualisation of political deaths as sport-like events, trivializing human mortality.

In attitude or evaluation i.e the interpersonal metafunctions, evaluating the language used like “*Most corrupt pillar*” “*rulling mafia clan*” “*distorted constitution*”, the use of second person “*you people*” and inclusive “*us*” create distance, blame, or mockery embedded in a declarative and ironic mood, with a high certainty- “*finally most corrupt*”. All these interpersonal metafunctions convey judgmental tone intensifying negative representation, and suggesting moral superiority of the producer.

In terms of organization i.e textual metafunctions, frontal loaded information-“*MINUS ONE*” “*Finally kicked the bucket*”, captures attention. Satirical wordplay like “*scored*”, “*kicked*”, “*bucket*” also contributes to ironical juxtaposition. Through systematic functional linguistics, we see how meanings are constructed to show judgment and ridicule

From what is depicted i.e the representational meaning, the narrative structures (action) like characters playing football represent political actions and deaths. In reaction, benchwarmers looking on, suggesting waiting their turn or complicit spectatorship represent deaths. The symbolic structures like football jersey nationally identifying Cameroonian team colours, falling buckets signifying deaths, score celebration (mocking victory over a political death), are used to depict the targets.

Relating to viewers i.e, interactive meaning (gaze), characters do not look at the viewers, it makes them objects of ridicule rather than subjects. Distantly, medium-long shot-viewer as observer, not participant. Regarding framing, no clear boundaries-blend of sports and politics signifies entertainmentisation of political death.

In terms of compositional meaning, i.e the layout, the central figures-deceased politicians in red/orange bucket, action, national colours (green, red, yellow), create a nationalistic undertone, yet satirically used to mock the targets. This is in addition to the action (victors) and postures drawn attention to kicking, falling, scoring, used to emphasise disgraceful exit. Visuals enhance symbolic violence, creating a spectacle of political death

We employed SFL and SS to explore both linguistic and visual modes of communication, revealing the ideological meanings and emotional impacts. Both, linguistically and visually, embedded hate indicators like dehumanization, mockery, ridicule, euphemism, exclusionary language, hyperbole, and labeling. Using death as sport “scoring” (to reduce the dignity of political figures), laughter, celebration of death (To reinforce group hostility), *kicked the “bucket”*, “scored” (masks violence with humour), “you people”, “Us” (to othering, scapegoating), and “most corrupt” “mafia clan” (to reinforce negative stereotypes). All of these, to display hatred and to foster a toxic discourse environment that promotes hate against targets or political groups by using multimodal satire and national symbols. The cartoons serve both as political commentary and carriers of potential hate speech.

6.1.3 Satirical cartoon images of age, power, culture, and humour

The images below show how the producers used visual humour, linguistic hybridity and social parody to critique political longevity and personalize leadership in Cameroon.

Figure 4: Representation of satirical cartoon images of Cameroonian society: Age, power, culture, and humour.



Source: A-generated cartoon images from Facebook (Feb 13, 2024 & Dec 28, 2023)

In Image 1, a male figure (cartoon image of President Biya) standing beside a cake with a number “91” and national colours, a female figure (cartoon image of Cameroon’s first lady) striking a provocative pose, representing youthfulness or social commentary on gender and power blended with bright blue, evoking a dreamlike atmosphere are social parody to critique political longevity and personalize leadership in Cameroon through visual features. The French and English mix (“Impossible N’est Pas Camerounais” or “Nothing is Impossible for Cameroonians” and “The Fossil That is Alive!”). Here, the use of code mixing reflects the bilingual Cameroonian context, with the President as national figure reinforces the individual’s enduring role. Besides, there is some humour and irony in calling someone a “fossil” while celebrating them as “alive”. These linguistic hybridities are also used to critique political longevity.

In image 2 linguistically titled “The Royal Family/La Vida Local” visualized characters in domestic roles; labeled as chef, the other in a relaxed pose. This depicts leaders as part of an everyday family dynamic with the warm background colours, which suggest familiarity or domestic comfort. Linguistic elements titled with Spanish phrase “La Vida Local” humourously blends languages to create a parody of “La Vida Loca” (the crazy life) depicted in the image.

Image 1 critiques political longevity and power monopoly. The president is metaphorically a “*fossil*”, implying obsolescence and extreme longevity. Image 2 humanises political leaders by portraying them in familiar, domestic roles, but also subtly mocks the personalization of power, qualified as “*The Royal Family*”. Socially, the use of humour, irony, and colloquial speech creates intimacy between the cartoonist and the viewers, and targets engagement in light dialogue, softening critique with playfulness. In terms of message organization, bold centered titles and speech bubbles guide viewers’ attention, directing visual focus, and readers interpretation. Image composition juxtaposes authority with formality to shape the intended message.

There are strong allusions to Cameroonian socio-political life, where leaders often stay in power for almost decades. Local expressions (“*Njam Njam*”) and birthday symbols (“*91*”) appeal to share cultural knowledge and the festive tradition in Cameroon despite the country’s stability. Power and identity reframed national leadership as both mythic (*fossil*-like longevity) and *bana* (family cooking scene). It also challenged traditional power narratives by using satire and parody. Interactional modes like body language, exaggerated features, and props (birthday cake, cooking utensils), Linguistic modes like bilingualism (“*Bon anniversaire mon cheri*”) captions, playful register, and intertextual references. These are combined to create a polysemic text that invites critical reflection and humour.

Through SFL and SS, the producers used both visual and linguistic elements to portray their targets. The above images, while satirical, reinforces hateful and stigmatization narratives through disrespectful caricatures of aging leaders (*Fossil*, referencing caricature of old age, reducing leadership to satire and personal insult), sexist depictions of Cameroon first lady, Chantal Biya (hyper-feminised women as distraction), accusations of theft and privilege disguised as “jokes”, cynical portrayals of national identity (turning governance into a kitchen joke trivializes leadership and suggests country is being devoured, promoting national humiliation or incitement)

6.2 Visual Elements.

AI-generated producers used cartoon images without linguistic elements to represent ideas. The visual language is therefore displayed through colours, shapes and layout in designs.

6.2.1 AI-images of power, legacy, and foreign influence in Cameroonian politics

The images below highlight a nation a critical crossroads where age, power, legacy, and foreign interest shape the future of political power. Both images offer a striking visual narrative of political transition in Cameroon

Figure 5: Representing a nation in transition: power, legacy, and foreign influence in Cameroonian politics



Source: A-generated cartoon images from Facebook (July 21, 2022 & July 25, 2022)

The Cartoon images above show political figures in Cameroon and France. Drawing on SFL and SS the images demonstrate ideologies of, colonial legacy, aging, foreign influence and hereditary. In image 1, the targets in wheelchairs, with national sashes, represent aging (83, 83, and 93) or physically unfit postcolonial Cameroonian leaders. The two western-looking figures (Emmanuel Macron and Francois Hollande aged 44 and 63), tall, healthy, strong, well dressed, and standing confidently represent physically able and young leaders. In image 2, Macron's gestures toward a seated smiling Frank Biya, while his father crowns symbolise political hereditary. This is backed up by the background building (the Cameroon's unity palace/presidency), which indicate a political setting.

In the representational meaning (ideational) of the images, the targets in wheelchairs (Cameroonian old figures) symbolize physically unfit and outdated leaders. Macron and Hollande (French looking figures) are symbolic of neocolonial hegemony. The act of crowning is central, which symbolizes transfer of power, and Macron's gesture symbolizes endorsement, influence, control as the colonial power. These show the multimodal tenets of the actor, the process, and the setting, which suggest state authority or official endorsement.

In the interactive meaning (interpersonal), no direct contact with the viewer emphasizes observation, not interaction. Frontal and full-length views make the viewer an observer, not a participant. These show the multimodal tenets participant. Macron and Hollande (western figures) stand tall, shows dominant position or superiority, while Cameroonian leaders in wheelchairs show subordination or passivation role. These show the multimodal tenets of Gaze, angle, and power relations.

In the compositional meaning (textual), the two images separate panels contrast past leadership in image 1, with new leadership transition in image 2. Macron and the crown are visually central, highlighting external endorsement as key to leadership. Image 1 shows a current/past regime, while image 2 shows new and anticipated/future energetic leadership. This shows the role of foreign powers in facilitating leadership renewal in Cameroon. These show the multimodal tenets of framing, salience, and information value

From the perspective of social semiotics, the visuals imply that postcolonial Cameroonian leadership remains dependent on western approval or influence. A symbol of colonial continuity in Cameroon. The wheelchairs symbolize political stagnation or disability, hinting at leaders clinging to power despite frailty. The cry of aging leadership crisis in Cameroon. The crown is not earned but bestowed, critiquing the manufactured legitimacy of successorship (power transfer). Macron's authoritative stance and gesturing point to France involvement in Cameroonian political transitions, reinforcing dependency, which is neocolonial control.

Images 1 and 2 above employed visual metaphors, positioning, and symbolism to critique the state of political leadership in Cameroon. Power, age, and foreign influence are interwoven in the images, which serve both as a satirical commentary and critical lens on postcolonial governance. SFL's visual grammar and SS tools unveil all of these.

Though this is framed as a political transition, the AI-generated cartoon images reflect latent hate speech patterns, including ageist and ableist mockery (using wheelchairs symbolically mocks disability and old age, which reinforces harmful stereotypes about elderly people). Colonial inferiority narratives or neocolonial framing (Using Macron to symbolically crown a successor implies that Cameroonian sovereignty is controlled or influenced by France, reinforcing the narrative of Cameroonian leaders as puppets or western dependency). This can provoke xenophobia toward former colonial power. Tribalism and elitist power consolidation imagery (this can fuel hate speech based on the political, ethnic, or class division, especially if viewers interpret it as one ethnic group being privileged over others). Moreover, these images from all their indications, critique poor leader, neocolonial ties, and manipulated transitions of power in Cameroon. These stylistic devices used like mockery, infantilization, foreign domination, can unintentionally reinforce social hatred or division.

6.2.2 The theatrics of Development and leadership

The visuals below aimed at to expose the performative nature of governance and the predatory tendencies that undermine genuine progress. They satirically show the contradictions and dramatization surrounding development and leadership in contemporary Cameroon.

Figure 6: Representing the theatrics of Development and leadership



Source: A-generated cartoon images from Facebook (Nov 6, 2022 & Mar 25, 2022)

The Cartoon images above show a satirical critique of Cameroonian leadership and elite behaviour, particularly within a postcolonial context. They convey symbolic meanings embedded in the visual and ideological resources of the AI-generated cartoons.

In a visual description of the Cartoon images, the target (Biya) in a traditional white attire and the target (Chantal Biya) in a red dress stand beside an elaborate wedding cake and gifts. The environment is a muddy rural area with children and workers digging in the background with a yellow construction truck also visible. In image 2, several vultures with human heads (of recognizable political figures in Cameroon) perch under a poster that reads: “*king vulture*” (a metaphor for power-hungry leadership and succession battles). All vultures wear or bear a portrait of a central leader on their chest

In the representational meaning, the target couple in stylish clothing symbolize political affluent or economic potentials. The peasants/labourers digging the red earth, represent the working poor or marginalized masses who suffer for the rich. This juxtaposition of wealth and suffering implies exploitation and neglect of the masses who are the engines of their political affluence. In image 2, vultures symbolize greed, corruption, and power-hungry individuals waiting to devour the state. Human faces are a satirical depiction of real political actors competing for succession. The slightly visible text “*King Vulture*” centres the authority of president Biya, worshipped by scavengers, possibly suggesting dictatorship or cult of personality

In an interactive meaning, the audience is positioned as a witness, not a participant and the targets (couple) look aware or indifferent to the suffering masses behind them, which symbolize disconnection between the political leader and the grassroots. The posture of the vultures bending toward the king vulture evokes submission, fear, and respect

In compositional meaning, foreground (cake and the targets) with 40 celebrate the stay in power, new wealth, consumption and excess to the detriment of the masses. Background (digging labourers) symbolize invisible exploitation. Colour contrast (bright, white, red) against the earthy brown symbolize division between luxury and hardship. In image 2, posture, the top center is symbolic of control over the vultures projected as unity in greed, not service.

In a social semiotic lens, the images critique how leaders enjoy foreign-style feast and wealth amidst social decay, and the succession struggle, elite infighting, and vultures' nature in Cameroonian politics. Here power is portrayed by the cartoon producers as something thought to be consumed by politicians. Implying that postcolonial leaders behave like predators rather than servants of the people. There is a highlight of class inequality, resource misuse, and moral blindness of ruling class (image 1).

The AI-generated cartoon images provide a biting satire of political leadership in Cameroon exposing the moral disconnect between rulers the ruled, and the hunger for power. Imagery function as a powerful mode of political commentary in postcolonial Cameroonian social media discourse. While the above cartoon images are also themed as theatrics of development and leadership, they employ patterns of hate speech like dehumanisation (transforming politicians into vultures is a textbook form of dehumanizing rhetoric, which is hallmark of hate speech), mockery, incitement, class-and power-based resentment, potential triggers of ethnic and generational distrust can fuel divisional and hate speech among political camps or ethnic groups depending on the real-life figures represented

7. Discussion

This paper attempted a multimodal discourse analysis of AI-generated cartoon images in hate speech on Cameroon social media landscape, taking Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistics and Kress & Van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar and Social Semiotics as a conceptual background. Specifically, our analyses focused on posts disseminated on social media with attention paid on AI-generated cartoon images in hate speech. To achieve this, we categorized our data into different themes: AI-generated cartoon images representing linguistic Patterns in selective justice and political victimhood, political cartoon images with subtle or coded language, satirical cartoon images of age, power, culture, and humour, AI-cartoon images of power, legacy, and foreign influence in Cameroonian politics, and the theatrics of development and leadership.

AI-generated cartoon images representing linguistic Patterns in selective justice and political victimhood. Under this theme, AI and visual rhetorics, linguistic patterns of selective justice, political victimhood through visual codes, AI and the new age of subtle political dissent are not just political commentary, but tools of visual linguistic agency. Through strategic language used on the images ("*what about...*"), symbolic framing (*prison bars, uniforms*), and cultural context (*Anglophone figures*), produce a semiotic battlefield where justice, memory, and voice are contested. This draws the audience's attention on whose justice is remembered, whose victimhood is legitimized, and how language through AI help to see the struggles.

Political cartoon images with subtle or coded language. Under this theme, the code and subtle language patterns like "*kicked the bucket*", "*MINUS ONE*", "*The man who said it was you people who decided to join us*", are not just reporting a death, counting down mentality toward dismantling a corrupt system, or the language is colloquial and mocking, tapping into popular frustration with political revisionism. Visual symbolism and political semiotics like football metaphor (deeply embedded in Cameroonian culture), posture and positioning (suggesting relief or joy at his exit, reinforcing the victim-vs-oppressor frame), the use of national flag and colours (suggest that the battle is not personal, but national in scope). The images illustrate how coded language and subtle visual framing can perform powerful political work. They do not just inform, they provoke, remember, and resist

Satirical cartoon images of age, power, culture, and humour. The images in this subtitle use satire, which is a form of commentary employing irony, exaggeration, humour to explore interconnected themes that are central to the Cameroonian sociopolitical landscape. The cartoonists used different elements to satirise the targets, which are age (91, a biting irony, exposing the disconnect between physical age and political rhetoric). Power is also ridiculed through visual exaggeration and verbal irony. Expressions like "*this one is powerful*" satirizes the inner circles of influence and familiar enrichment in governance, and "*The Royal Family-La Vida Local*" parodies the privileged lifestyle and dynastic tendencies to the ruling elite. The Cameroonian culture is also laid bare through visual symbols, gendered performances, and verbal innuendos to stereotype youthful Cameroonians and to expose how elite Cameroonians emulate foreign

styles while disconnected from grassroots realities. Both images used humour not simply to entertain but to provoke thought and critique, to capture how age, power, and culture intertwine in Cameroonian context. They serve as vernacular commentary, showing that despite institutional power, the people still find voice through creativity, sarcasm and coded images to express their thoughts to the public.

AI-cartoon images of power, legacy, and foreign influence in Cameroonian politics, combines satire with political critique to visually convey the audiences' views on authoritarian endurance, dynastic ambitions, and external (especially French) influence in postcolonial Cameroon. This conveys power and political longevity visually communicated through wheelchairs, legacy and symbolic succession, visually communicated through Biya placing a crown on a seated Franck Biya—a symbolizing monarchical-style power transfer for dynastic politics. This corroborates Van Dijk (1998), Bayart (1993) ideology, which reflects how dominant ideologies, elite families perpetuate rule through patrimonial networks and personal loyalties rather than democratic institutions. The foreign influence and neocolonialism reflect Chinweizu (1987), Nkrumah (1965) and Konings & Nyamnjoh (2003), who argue that Africa remains politically and economically manipulated by colonial powers despite formal independence. The visual semiotics used (*wheelchairs, crowns, suits, and body posture*) all symbolize institutional decay, stage legitimacy, and western puppeteering, which is read through Van Leeuwen (1996) visual communication and social interaction, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), reading images

The theatrics of development and leadership are well-grounded in African political economy and visual semiotics. Scholars like Mbembe, Ferguson and Chabal & Daloz all provide theoretical tools to unpack such images as representations of “the politics of spectacle” in Africa. The images depict a performative development contrasting elite and grassroots reality (barefoot children, rural landscape) and suggesting disconnect and development as a show rather than substance. This concept ties with Guy Debord's (1967), Ferguson (1994), and James Scott (1998) highlights on how African political elites perform power and progress in theatrical, exaggerated ways to maintain control and ignore local realities. The cartoon images show political elites represented as vultures, gathered beneath a portrait of president Paul Biya symbolizing opportunism, decay, and feeding of the leadership class benefiting from a falling state. Chabal & Daloz (1999) proposes that what appears as disorder (e.g. vulturous leadership) is actually a strategic mode of rule, and, much of African rulers perform rather than genuine execution.

In a similar thematic finding, democracy image, the involvement of other countries and powers in the Arab Spring, Authorities/military people relations, the dual role of media and social media, Stages of the Arab revolutions, and women's issues and consequences of the Arab Spring are some of the themes or categories found by Shifaa et al (2018) in the Arab Spring Political Cartoon images.

Other studies have also discovered how similar linguistic features are used in AI-generative images with negative connotations to target prominent personalities, how they exert power with regards to meaning-making choices that are afforded by open AI's software for generating visuals, and how they are adapted to satirize the targets, Manera 2024; Hannah Mieczkowski, Jeffery T. Hancock, Malte Jung, and Jess Hohenstein 2021; Westberg, G., Kvåle, G. 2024. Unlike the visual elements identified in this study, other researchers have also identified the representation of visual language in non-verbal communication and the multimodal fusion in analyzing political cartoons. McMahon 2023; Tiffany Ying-Yu-Lin & Wen-yu Chiag 2015; Shifaa Mohammed Abdoullah, Tengku Sepora Tengku Mahadi, Ghayth K. Shaker Al-shaibani & Ambigapathy Pandian 2018. They revealed that the visual language for the case of Arab Spring cartoons from 2011 to 2013 reflected some common themes that highlight issues such as the image of democracy, the involvement of interfering countries and powers in the events of the Arab Spring, government authorities, military-people relations, the role of media and social media, an account of the stages of the Arab revolutions and issues of women's image in relation to socio-political change and ethical responsibilities for both the cartoonists and the Arab people. These are represented via visual messages that connote different meanings. It also revealed that the role of non-verbal visual language can be effectively realised and highlighted through the Arab cartoonists' utilisation of the interaction between

different signs of the cartoons' elements such as symbolism, metaphor, labelling, irony, analogy and colour to convey certain intended messages.

8. Conclusion

Findings from the analyses and discussion have proven that the AI-generated cartoon images disseminated on social media included many linguistic and visual features in their creations associated with negative connotations. Most of the linguistic and visual elements used on the cartoon images intended to draw the attention of the readers, while spreading hatred. Moreover, from the data we conclude that the social media today is not only an arena of news, fake news and entertainment, but equally a place where users settle scores through all forms of AI-generative contents. Is it therefore shown that the creation of these contents, express and reveal the intentions, attitudes and ideologies of the producers. The AI-generated cartoons presented Cameroon's visions and anticipations towards freedom of expression and noticeably manifest the elevated public consciousness among Cameroonians.

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