

Equating and Contrasting of Digital Addiction in British Newspapers: Critical Stylistic Analysis

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مساواة والتناقض الإدمان الرقمي في الصحف البريطانية: تحليل سلوبي نقدي

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Abstract

Digital addiction is a new type of behavioural addiction that emerges as a result of excessive and compulsive use of new digital technologies. Many researchers have focused on studying substance addiction and some types of digital addiction in a variety of fields such as discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and psycholinguistics. However, no linguistic study is conducted on digital addiction as an umbrella term. The current study aims to reveal the underlying ideologies of digital addiction as an umbrella term for digital devices, digital platforms, and digital media in two British newspapers. In association with the aim, the study sets out two hypotheses: (1) the critical stylistic tool of equating and contrasting is employed in both newspapers articles to express the concept of digital addiction, (2) there are differences in using the tool of equating and contrasting to embody ideologies of digital addiction between the Guardian and Independent's articles. To examine the hypotheses set forth, an analytical tool, is called equating, and contrasting taken from Jeffries' model (2010) of critical stylistic analysis is adopted. Based on the findings, the study concludes that the tool of equating and contrasting is employed in both newspaper articles to express the concept of digital addiction. There are differences and similarities in using the tool of equating and contrasting to embody negative ideologies of digital addiction.

المستخلص

الإدمان الرقمي هو نوع جديد من الإدمان السلوكي ينشأ نتيجة الاستخدام المفرط والقهري للتقنيات الرقمية الجديدة. ركز العديد من الباحثين على دراسة إدمان المواد و أنواع من الإدمان الرقمي في مجموعة متنوعة

من المجالات مثل تحليل الخطاب وتحليل الخطاب النقدي وعلم اللغة النفسي. ومع ذلك، لم يتم إجراء أي دراسة لغوية حول الإدمان الرقمي كمصطلح شامل. لذلك، فإن الهدف من الدراسة الحالية هو التحقيق في الإدمان الرقمي كمصطلح شامل للأجهزة الرقمية والمنصات الرقمية والوسائط الرقمية في صحيفتين بريطانيتين واسعتي النطاق. تزامنا مع الاهداف، تحدد الدراسة فرضيتان: (1) يتم استخدام الأداة الأسلوبية النقدية المساواة والتناقض في كلا مقالات الصحف للتعبير عن مفهوم الإدمان الرقمي، (2) هناك اختلافات في استخدام أداة المساواة والتناقض لتجسيد أيديولوجيات الإدمان الرقمي بين المقالات الكاردين ومقالات النديندنت. لفحص الفرضيات المحددة مسبقا تم استخدام الأداة التحليلية تسمى

المساواة و التناقض مأخوذة من وانموذج جفريز (2010) لتحليل الاسلوبي النقدي. تلخص الدراسة الى ان أداة المساواة والتناقض تم استخدامها في مقالات كلتا الصحيفتين لتعبير عن مفهوم الإدمان الرقمي. هناك اختلافات وتشابهات في استخدام أداة المساواة والتناقض لتجسيد الأيديولوجيات السلبية للإدمان الرقمي.

Key Words: Equating and contrasting, critical stylistics, digital addiction, newspapers

الكلمات المفتاحية: المساواة و التناقض، الاسلوبية النقدية، الإدمان الرقمي، الصحف

1. INTRODUCTION

Addiction is defined as an uncontrollable desire to do something repeatedly that causes harm to a person's psycho-physiological health or social life (Karagün et al, 2018, p.1). Sussman (2017, p.89) indicates that the general categories of addiction are substance and behavioural.

Digital addiction (henceforth DA) is a new type of behavioural addiction that is characterised by compulsive usage of digital devices that causes physical and mental harm to the addicts as well as their loved ones (Dicey, 2019, p. 24). DA is an umbrella term for digital devices, digital platforms, and digital media; it is becoming a recognised problem globally (Cham et al, 2019, pp.2-3).

Notably, Many researchers have focused on studying substance addiction and some subdivisions of digital addiction in a variety of fields such as discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and psycholinguistics. However, no linguistic study is conducted on digital addition as an umbrella term. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to investigate digital addiction as an umbrella term via a critical stylistic tool (equating and contrasting) in two British newspapers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Critical Stylistics

CS is a branch of stylistics that focuses on text analysis from a critical perspective. It tries to expose hidden ideologies in texts and how texts offer the world of reality to the hearer or reader (Ahmed & Abbas, 2021, p.11809). The study of the female body in women's magazines (2007) lead to the development of the term "critical stylistics" in 2010 when Jeffries tried to describe how language could restrict and dominate women in their lives (Tabbert, 2016, p.37). CS has developed as a highly prominent approach to linguistic ideology and as a reaction to the development of CDA. Even though the roots of CDA are related to stylistics, Roger Fowler, a renowned stylistician and one of CDA's researchers. Recently, the two fields are separated (Jeffries, 2014, p.408). Critical stylistics could bridge the gap between critical discourse analysis and stylistics and reveal the writers' methods for constructing their ideologies in their writings by combining their strengths and advantages (Coffey, 2013, p.30).

According to Jeffries (2010, p.14), the main objective of CS is to expose the ideological structure of a literary (novels, poems, etc) or non-literary (newspapers,

political manifestoes, etc). Jeffries (2010, pp.1-16) asserts that CS provides a more systemic, comprehensive linguistic set of eclectic tools by combining the best tools of stylistics, CL, and CDA. CS aims “to give the reader a clear set of analytical tools to follow in carrying out the critical analysis of texts”. These tools are called textual-conceptual functions (TCFs).

2.1.1 Equating and Contrasting

This textual-conceptual tool that investigates how texts use equivalence and opposition to structure the world. Texts can create new synonymies and oppositions, sometimes between words that people would never associate with each other out of the context and sometime between phrases and clauses, or even entire paragraphs. The text producers use a variety of “syntactic triggers” to produce these associations, which are then important in conveying their ideology (Jeffries, 2010a, pp.51-3). Several triggers are often generated by syntactic frames that cause the production of opposites and fewer frames generate equivalence such as apposition (Jeffries, 2016, p.164).

(i) Equating

Jeffries (2010a, pp.51-9) states that equating refers to the employment of synonyms, despite the fact, that many linguists agree that there are no identical synonyms, and even near-synonyms are not truly similar, and each one has its own implications. There are still some items that English speakers regard to be comparable in meaning. In addition, numerous dictionaries demonstrate that meaning equivalence is psychologically real for English speakers. Four syntactic triggers create textual equivalence relations within a text, which are:

- a) Intensive relational equivalence employs intensive verbs. This informative type of equivalence is employed to make a general case more particular to inform the reader and to achieve some aims. For example, “so the best way to get in shape at your age is to get active and eat healthily” (Jeffries, 2007, p.108).
- b) Appositional equivalence refers to the same referent made in an appositional structure without conjunction like (and). For example, “it was fury, incompetence”.
- c) Parallel structure refers to the equating of two ideas by placing them in a parallel construction with otherwise identical wording. It expresses equated ideas and some other structures containing identical elements. For example, “high immigration is dangerous, high immigration is our children’s future”.
- d) Metaphorical equivalence refers to the conceptual equivalence constructed by using metaphors and similes. They need the cognitive strategies related to them to interpret them. For example,
 1. *This government is like a poodle* (simile).
 2. *This government is a poodle* (metaphor).

Table 1
Textual Triggers for Equating

Types of Equivalence	Syntactic Triggers
Intensive relational equivalence	X is Y; X seems Y; X became Y; X appears Y; Z made X Y; Z thinks X Y; Z cause X to be Y etc.
Appositional equivalence	X,Y,(Z) etc.
Parallel structure	X is Y. X is ZX,Y,(Z) etc.
Metaphorical equivalence	X is Y; The X of Y; X is like Y etc.

(ii) Contrasting

Jeffries (2010a, p.51) states that contrasting is the use of opposition. Tabbert (2016, p.103) asserts that opposition involves not only opposite conventionally accepted, also called “canonical or binary opposite” like black/white, but also textually generated opposition between seemingly unconnected entities. A Syntactic trigger or a negation could all be contributing factors to the opposition. The sense of opposition can be activated by negativity. However, opposition and negation are separated (Tabbert, 2015, p.49). Nahajec (2009, p.110) indicates that “opposition puts two events, states or existences into contrast to each other whereas negation opposes non-events against events, non-states against states or non-existence against the existence and thereby constructs unrealized worlds”. Jeffries (2010a, p.55) illustrates the more common syntactic triggers of opposition that she cites for Jones (2002), Davies (2008), and Jeffries (2007, 2009).

Table 2

Opposition	Syntactic Triggers
Negated	X, not Y; Some X, no Y; Plenty of X, a lack of Y
Transitional	turn X into Y; From X to Y; X becomes Y
Comparative	more X than Y; Less X than Y
Replacive	X instead of Y; X rather than Y; X in preference of Y

Concessive	despite X, Y; X, yet Y; X, still Y
Explicit	X, by contrast with Y; X, as opposite to Y
Parallelism	he like X, she likes Y; Yours is X, mine is Y
Contrastive	X, but Y

Textual Trigger for Contrasting

the ideological implication of this tool can clarify the good-bad, positive-negative, moral-immoral directions of subjects in question like validating or invalidating actions and legitimating specific activities that others may perceive as illegal or inhuman (Jeffries, 2014b, p.115).

2.2 Digital Addiction

Addiction is defined as an uncontrollable desire to do something repeatedly that causes harm to a person's psycho-physiological health or social life (Karagün et al, 2018, p.1). Sussman (2017, p.89) indicates that the general categories of addiction are substance and behavioural.

Digital addiction (henceforth DA) has emerged as a result of the development of digital technologies in our time and the integration of such technologies with mass media (Bagci, 2019, p.101). Digital addiction is a new type of behavioural addiction that is characterised by compulsive usage of digital devices that causes physical and mental harm to the addicts as well as their loved ones (Dicey, 2019, p. 24). According to Singh and Singh (2019, p.4-6), digital addiction is an umbrella term for the following three categories:

- a) Digital device addiction such as computer addiction, smartphone addiction, and digital gadget addiction
- b) Digital platforms addiction such as Google search addiction, YouTube addiction, Facebook addiction, Twitter addiction, and so on.
- c) Digital media/ medium addiction such as video games addiction, computer games addiction, and mobile apps addiction.

2.3 Media and Newspapers

The term 'media' refers to a communication medium between senders and recipients. Media has two categories: old and new. The first category includes newspapers, magazines, books, and radio while the latter includes the internet, digital TV, and so on. Thus, the newspaper is mediated between them; it is old because it is printed and connected to legacy news media, and it is new because it can be online

(Tabbert, 2016, pp.2-3). The decision to focus on newspapers is due to the newspapers' language which is typically considered popular and easily accessible (Hillbom, 2009, p.4)

3. METHODOLOGY

The current study adopts a mixed method in a form of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. This collection causes both methods to complete, support each other, and resulting in "richer and more comprehensive" research (Neuman, 2014, p.167). The qualitative part is descriptive more than predictive; the aim is to have a deep understanding and interpretation with a precise analysis of the phenomenon. Meanwhile, the quantitative part aims to confirm the results in the form of numbers that uses to support the interpretation (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009, pp.7-167).

The collected data consists of ten articles collected from two quality British broadsheet newspapers: Guardian and Independent. The decision to select these two newspapers is justified for the following reasons: first, they occupy the highest popular broadsheet newspapers in the United Kingdom from 2019 to 2020 (Watson, 2020). Second, they award a 100% trust rating by the media watchdog NewsGuard (Dearden, 2020). Third, both newspapers' websites have free access.

Regarding the analysis model, the researcher of the current study adopts a critical stylistic tool (the textual-conceptual tool of equating and contrasting) to detect the ideologies by presenting digital addiction and its types in relationship with other concepts.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Guardian

1. **"Dr Anna Lembke, a world-leading expert on addiction,** is concerned about my "phone problem". (Art 1)

This sentence contains an appositional equivalence, which is constructed by the juxtaposition of two noun phrases to provide more elaboration for Dr. Anna as a very skillful and knowledgeable about the science of addiction.

2. "The first 12 hours will be filled with anxiety and Fomo, **but** as time unfolds, I'll experience a sense of real freedom, will gain insight into my relationship with my digital companion and will "resolve to get back to using it a little differently, she says". (Art 1)

The contrastive opposition is constructed by the conjunction 'but' to depict two opposite states. The first effect of avoiding using a digital companion is negative but as time unfolds, the effect will be positive because the writer tells the readers that they will be free from the unreal world and they will gain insight into their relationship with a digital companion.

3. “Behavioural (**as opposed to** substance) addictions have soared”. (Art 1)

The writer implies that substances may be run out. However, behaviours like using digital companions do not run out and are always available.

4. “Social media, which once promised to act **as** a window to the world, has slowly but surely become an engine for a kind of global solipsism, a breeding ground for fake newsbias, compulsion and vanity – which profit the shareholders of these platforms”. (Art 2)

The metaphorical equivalence is constructed by using the simile “as” to depict social media as a window to knowing what happens in the world. However, the writer uses the contrastive opposition with the conjunction “but” demonstrating that this window becomes the source of negative things more than positive things.

5. “In 1995, The Unabomber manifesto asked that we “never forget that a human being with technology is exactly **like** an alcoholic with a barrel of wine”. (Art 2)

The simile “like” indicates that the harm of alcohol and technology is similar, which sets off the metaphorical equivalence.

6. “This phenomenon was leading to the **death of proximity** when it comes to face-to-face interaction, he said”. (Art 3)

The metaphorical equivalence is triggered by the noun phrase “death of proximity” to emphasise that smartphones turn us into digital natives and reduce our face-to-face interaction. Hence, we become physically together but emotionally and socially Physically separated.

7. “They observe: “In other ways, the smartphone may reduce the prior experience of home **as a refuge**”. (Art 3)

The metaphorical equivalence is triggered by the simile “as” to indicate that smartphones reduce the privacy of homes.

8. “Smartphone users have become “**human snails** carrying our homes in our pockets”. (Art 3)

The metaphorical equivalence is triggered by the noun phrase “human snails”, which suggests that smartphone users are more preoccupied with their smartphones than with their homes.

9. “The children and young people we work with tell us about the positives of using technology, **but** also that being exposed to harmful content or being bullied round the clock on social media can have a serious impact on their mental health.” (Art 4)

The conjunction “but” triggers the contrastive opposition to indicate that there are advantages and disadvantages to technology. It depends on how people and companies actually use it.

10. “Although the internet offers incredible opportunities to learn and play, it also carries serious new risks from cyberbullying to online grooming,” said Javed Khan, Barnardo’s chief executive”. (Art 4)

The contrasting process of concessive opposition “although” highlights the serious negative effects of the internet. Then, the writer uses appositional equivalence to clarify that this information has been obtained from a reliable person.

11. “Kendal Parmar’s son went **from** being a sporty and sociable boy who loved school, **to** a child who would stay in his room and rarely go outside”. (Art 5)

The contrasting process of the transformational opposition illustrates the negative change in personality that game disorder causes

12. “We are not saying this is an epidemic **but** there will be people with this disorder who need treatment”. (Art 5)

The contrastive opposition is triggered by the conjunction “but” to suggest that gaming disorder is not an epidemic; it still requires appropriate therapy for those who experience it.

4.2 Independent

1. “Giving your child a smartphone is **like** “giving them a gram of cocaine”, a top addiction therapist has warned”. (Art 1)

The metaphorical equivalence is constructed by using a simile to equate the risk of smartphone use on children’s brains with the risk of substance addiction.

2. “**Ms Saligari, who heads the Harley Street Charter clinic in London**, said around two thirds of her patients were 16-20 year-olds seeking treatment for addiction – a “dramatic increase” on ten years ago - but many of her patients were even younger”. (Art 1)

The appositional equivalence is constructed by the juxtaposition of two noun phrases to provide more elaboration that Ms Sagligari is an expert and that her information is reliable. Likewise, the contrastive opposition is used to clarify those very young children at risk of becoming internet addicts.

3. “So many of my clients are 13 and 14-year-old-girls who are involved in sexting, and describe sexting **as** ‘completely normal’,” said Ms Saligari”. (Art 1)

The use of the simile “as” to equate sexting to normal behaviour sets off the metaphorical equivalent, which demonstrates how young girls' morals and thoughts are negatively changing.

4. "When someone comes to you and says they did not sleep last night because they spent 14 hours playing games, and it was the same the previous night, and they tried to stop **but** they couldn't – you know they have a problem". (Art 2)

The contrastive opposition is indicated by the conjunction "but," which emphasises how excessive gaming may be an abnormal behaviour that needs treatment.

5. "Mainey **turned to** internet bingo following the breakdown of her marriage". (Art 2)

The contrasting process of transitional opposition "turned to" highlights how people use the internet to ignore their problems and feelings of loneliness. The writer implies that their loved ones should be aware of their behaviour because it can harm them.

6. "Henrietta Bowden Jones, consultant psychiatrist at Imperial College, London, who runs Britain's only NHS clinic for internet addicts and problem gamblers, said: "The majority of people we see with serious internet addiction are gamers". (Art 2)

By means of an appositional equivalence, the author claims that "Henrietta Bowden Jones" is a specialist and that her information is trustworthy in order for the readers to accept the damaging effects of gaming.

7. "A spokesperson for Snap said: "**While** we can't comment on active litigation, our hearts go out to any family who has lost a loved one to suicide". (Art 3)

The concessive opposition is denoted by the conjunction "while" to promote the goodness of the company in order to manipulate people that the company is concerned about their benefits over the legality of the litigation.

8. "Congressional testimony has shown that both Meta Platforms and Snapchat were aware of the addictive nature of their products and failed to protect minors in the name of more clicks and additional revenue," said **Matthew P Bergman, the firm's founder**". (Art 3)

The appositional equivalence is used to assert that this information is obtained from a reliable person to convince readers to believe that social media platforms have addictive designs that could harm minors.

9. "The most powerful tech companies in the world are making deliberate decisions that do great harm," said **Tristan Harris, an ex-Google employee, who is part of the campaign**". (Art 4)

The writer uses appositional equivalence to pay readers attention to the fact that designs on this platform are designed to be addictive. This information is obtained from a reliable source who worked on this platform.

10. "Facebook recently admitted that social media can be bad for you, **but** added that it all comes down to how you use it". (Art 4)

The contrastive opposition is denoted by the conjunction "but" to encourage the readers to reduce their use of social media platforms and be aware of their potentially negative impacts.

11. "Playing them compulsively now qualifies **as** an official mental health condition, according to the World Health Organisation". (Art 5)

The simile "as" denotes metaphorical equivalence to portray gaming as a disorder that significantly affects a person's ability to think clearly, regulate emotions, and behave appropriately.

12. "**Dr. Shekhar Saxena, director of the WHO's department for mental health and substance abuse**, said the agency accepted the proposal that gaming disorder should be listed as a new problem based on scientific evidence". (Art 5)

By using appositional equivalence, the writer draws the readers' attention to the fact this information is obtained from a specialist and the classification of gaming as a mental disorder based on scientific evidence that specialists have discovered

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of Textual-conceptual Tool of equating and contrasting in Guardian's Articles

Critical Stylistic Tools	Fr.	Pr.
Equating and Contrasting	53	6.89%

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages of Textual-conceptual Tool of equating and contrasting in Independent Articles

Critical Stylistic Tools	Fr.	Pr.
Equating and Contrasting	43	7.98%

The tool of equating and contrasting is used in Guardian's articles for 53 times (6.89%). On the contrary, it is used in the Independent's articles for 43 times (7.98%).

Ideologically it helps the readers to comprehend the articles by presenting digital addiction and its types in relationship with other concepts. The writers of Guardian's articles adopt the experts' words/speech equating to convince the readers that the harmful effects of excessive use of digital technologies are like the harmful effects of drugs, alcohol, and other substance addiction. Oppositional meaning evokes in the readers' minds the fact that behaviour addiction does not run out and is always available, unlike substance addiction. The writers highlight the fact that the advantages and disadvantages of digital devices depend on how people use them.

It is found that this tool is employed in both newspaper articles to convey the idea that digital addiction is as dangerous as drugs. It is used to pay the readers' attention that the advantages and disadvantages depending on people's way of use. Meanwhile, it is used the article of Independent to illustrate that employees of tech companies often agree that digital media, platforms, and particularly games have negative effects. Therefore, mothers must keep an eye on their children and teenagers' use because it impairs their capacity to think clearly, control their emotions, and behave appropriately.

Conclusion

This section presents the conclusions of the findings arrived at in the analysis of the selected data.

1. The analysis of the current study shows that the tool of equating and contrasting that proposed by Jeffries' model as one tool (textual-conceptual tool) of critical stylistic analysis is employed in both newspaper articles. Consequently, hypothesis **No.1** which reads: "the critical stylistic tool of equating and contrasting is employed in both newspapers articles to express the concept of digital addiction" is valid.

2. The results of the study reveal that there are differences and similarities in using the tool of equating and contrasting to embody ideologies of digital addiction between the Guardian and Independent articles.

I. Ideologically, the tool of equating and contrasting is employed in both newspaper articles to convey the idea that digital addiction is as dangerous as drugs. Also, it is used to attract readers' attention to the fact that the advantages and disadvantages of digital companions depend on people's way of use.

II. In Guardian's articles, this tool is utilized mainly to convey the idea that digital addiction is so harmful and always available since it does not run out like substance addiction. Whereas, in Independent's articles, it is

used to illustrate that the employees of tech companies equate the risk of digital companions with the risk of substance since it affects people's ethical values and personality especially children and teenagers. Hence. hypothesis **No.2** which reads: "there are differences in using the tool of equating and contrasting to embody ideologies of digital addiction between Guardian and Independent's articles" is partly valid.

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