

*The essay below was submitted in May 2019 by Malan Jacobs, former Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation (SLF) team member from March 2013 until July 2015, as part of his MA studies in Communication for Development at Malmö University in Sweden. The essay had to 'demonstrate an analytical approach to the interpretation of media/texts and communication processes within the field of communication for development and social change.' Within the theme of 'Voice and Listening', Malan reflected on his own participation in SLF's Photovoice: Street Life in Ivory Park project in 2013, as administrator of the project's Facebook ads campaign. Although Malan demonstrates that 'one voice was promoted over the other' through Facebook ads, the project also included the dissemination of postcards where 'negative' messages of development e.g. photos about service delivery problems, were promoted.*

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## **Promoting one voice over the other: Facebook ads administration during the Street Life in Ivory Park Photovoice project**

### **1. Introduction**

This assignment is a multimodal critical discourse analysis of 12 photographs which were taken by six street photographers and two photojournalists who participated in the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation's (SLF) Photovoice: Street Life in Ivory Park project in 2013. The photographers uploaded their photos during April 2013 on the Photovoice project's Facebook page (Charman, 2013:9,15), 12 of which were promoted by the author through Facebook advertising. The assignment attempts to demonstrate that these 12 photos did not correlate well with the message the photographers communicated through what they have each identified as their five 'most meaningful' photographs at the end of the project.

Within the theme of voice and listening and in the broader context of communication for development and social change, it will be argued that staff of non-profits need to properly plan the social media component of Photovoice projects to ensure an equal and true representation of voices. The assignment thus also touches upon the theme of Strategic Representations of Development and Social Change.

### **2. Project Overview**

In 2013 SLF, a non-profit organisation in Cape Town in South Africa, undertook a Photovoice project named Street Life in Ivory Park in collaboration with UrbanWorks Architecture and Urbanism (SLF, n.d.a). This project formed part of the Participate initiative and was funded by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex. The Participate initiative aimed to contribute to the post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) debate, through bringing the 'perspectives of the

poorest and most marginalized' into the debate. SLF was one of 18 organisations across the world that comprised the Participate Research Group (SLF, n.d.b).

Eight photographers participated in the project, who, after participating in workshops to refine the project concept, were set out to capture photos demonstrating 'everyday life on the streets' in Ivory Park – its social and economic dimensions – during the month of April 2013. The project aimed to empower the photographers to be a 'voice for change' through raising awareness of the importance of the informal economy (Charman, 2013:11). A lack of government action in terms of formalising and regulating the informal economy, is hampering growth in the informal economy on which the livelihoods of many people depend (SLF, 2019). Photography and social media training formed part of the photographers' participation in the project (Charman, 2013:11).

During April 2013, the photographers shared their photographs on a dedicated project Facebook page. The photographers posted a total of 250 photos over the month-long period. Of these photos project staff, including the author, reposted 49 photos to people who liked the page, of which 12 were also promoted by the author through paid Facebook advertising, mostly to people around the Ivory Park area (Facebook, 2019).

At the end of the project, the photographers were asked to each choose their 5 'most meaningful' photographs. These photos were subsequently displayed at an exhibition in Ivory Park, which were attended by community members and policymakers. It was also included in the final Photovoice report which included a multimodal critical discourse analysis of the photographers' 'most meaningful' photographs and its captions and descriptions (Charman, 2013:18-54). The photos also formed part of a multimedia exhibition in New York at the UN General Assembly Special Session on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and were displayed in the United Nations (UN) lobby for the Open Working Group meeting in March 2014 (Beckles, 2014).

### **3. Photovoice as text within the theme of Voice and Listening**

Photovoice is a method that aims to help address what Couldry (2010:10) describes as a 'contemporary *crisis* of voice' through empowering participants to 'reflect on and communicate their community's concerns to represent their culture, to expose social problems, and to ignite social change' (Sutton-Brown, 2014:169). Couldry (2010:10) makes a distinction between voice as *process* and voice as *value*. According to Couldry (2010:11-12) voice as value is about 'discriminating *in favour* of ways of organizing human life and resources that, through their choices, put the value of voice into

practice'. In explaining voice as process, Couldry (2010:15) draws in the first instance from philosopher Judith Butler, who describes it as 'giving an account of oneself'.

In the context of the photos and voice as process, the photographers were each tasked to give account of Street Life in Ivory Park. However, the photos had a personal dimension since the photographers were from the community and as Charman (2013:11) noted in the final report, 'each photograph contains personal significance to the world of the photographer himself'. In terms of voice as value, it can be argued that although unintentional, voice as value wasn't given adequate attention through the Facebook component of the project. This will be demonstrated in the text analysis section below.

Couldry also emphasises that both speaking and listening form part of voice as a social process (2010:17). Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to determine the extent to which the posted, reposted and promoted photos on the Facebook page actively contributed towards the intended objectives of the project through viewers of the photos 'listening' and ultimately acting upon the message of the photos, Crawford (2009:527) points out that 'lurkers' or 'non-participants' 'contribute a mode of receptiveness that encourages others to make public contributions'. It can therefore be argued that the photographers were likely encouraged by the more than 1,000 people that liked the project Facebook page, motivating them to take and post more photos than they would have otherwise, which ultimately provided them with a wider selection of photos to each choose their 5 'most meaningful' photos from. Having a larger selection of photos to choose from, likely contributed to the refinement of their message.

It must be noted, however, that Crawford's point about 'lurkers' are specifically referring to social media users who are not engaging on social media itself, through posting or commenting for example. It doesn't refer to the *offline* actions of users. It can therefore be argued that promoting photos to policymakers and politicians to engage in what Crawford (2010:529) refers to as 'reciprocal listening' would have engaged policymakers in *conversation* and more likely contributed towards policy change – or at the very least provided an additional channel of engagement with the photos – apart from through the final report and exhibitions only. The photos were only promoted through paid ads to general members of the public, which was a severe limitation of the Facebook approach.

#### **4. Relevance of Photovoice and Voice and Listening for Communication for Development and Social Change**

According to Hemer and Tufte (2016:11) voice is especially relevant 'for those whose lives depend on the material conditions of development and social change'. Hemer and Tufte (2016:18) also relate

voice to the concepts of 'participation, agency, activism, narrative and artistic expression' and contend that Communication for Development is 'thriving at the margins', which doesn't only refer to the grassroots level but also speak to the 'symbolic or physical distance to power'. The Photovoice project was ultimately about bringing the voices at the margins into the post-MDGs debate. The MDGs were criticised by the Participatory Research Group for framing goals separately with very specific outcomes, without due consideration for the interconnectivity of challenges and the political structures that contribute to exclusion and inequality (Participate, 2013).

The Photovoice project can be grouped under Tufte's (2017:17) third generation of communication for development which is participatory (participation by photographers who are internal community members), attempts to address structural inequality (the unequal relationship between the formal and informal economy and non-inclusive growth) and communicate social issues and problems (such as service delivery problems).

According to Patel (2016:130) 'by voicing their aspirations and taking pride and responsibility in developing strategies and solutions, the urban poor may transform their own lives and the city and locality they live in, as well as bringing that voice to the global stage to challenge obstructive policies and practices that deny the poor that possibility.' In the case of the Photovoice project, the photographers voiced various aspirations (along with 'reality checks') (Charman, 2013:30), which was displayed on the world stage as mentioned above.

It is beyond the scope of this assignment to determine the impact the final project report and exhibitions had on policymaking and implementation. However, the Participatory Research Group warns that the mere acknowledgement of the stories of people at the margins, 'even perhaps to some extent being moved by them was not the 'visceral response' we felt was needed to create urgency for change' (Shahrokh & Wheeler, 2014:62).

## **5. Text analysis**

### **5.1. Technique: Multimodal critical discourse analysis**

In order to analyse the text, namely the 12 photographs and its captions given by the photographers, which were promoted through Facebook advertising by the author, a multimodal critical discourse analysis will be done. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002:1) proposes a preliminary definition of discourse analysis 'as a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world).'

Berger (2016:180) contends that a *multimodal* analysis is useful when working with both written text and visuals. Berger goes further to explain that a multimodal *critical* discourse analysis ensures that hidden ideological content is given attention, beyond analysing a text in a descriptive manner only.

The photographs will be analysed within the context of the theme: Street Life in Ivory Park, interpreting what the photographers might have wanted to communicate through each photo and its caption. The messages will be compared with the collective message of the 40 ‘most meaningful’ photos the photographers identified at the end of the project, which Charman (2013:7) in his analysis grouped under the following messages for development:

- Marginalisation and Resilience
- Aspirations and Reality Checks
- Business in the Community Interest
- Ambiguities and Choices

Tools to enact the discourse analysis draws from Gee’s (2011) discourse analysis toolkit. A selection of Gee’s 27 tools has been used to inform the analysis. In each case a broad theme and message for development will be identified as well as sentiment, which answers the question: is Street Life in Ivory Park being reflected in a positive, neutral or negative light?

## 5.2. Analysis

<p><b>1.</b></p>  <p><b>Photographer:</b> Ndlovu  <b>Caption:</b> your reliable one stop shop.township style!</p>	<p>Reference to ‘reliable’ and ‘one stop’ are adjectives used to represent a positive view of the <i>shop</i>, which is the subject or main topic of the sentence<sup>1</sup>. Through ‘township style’ Ndlovu communicates that the shop is authentic, true to the township. The picture reinforces the idea of a one stop shop with the wide variety of items available on sale. The township in the background reinforces the reference to ‘township style’ in the text.</p> <p><b>Theme:</b> economic activity  <b>Sentiment:</b> positive  <b>Messages for development:</b> Business in the Community Interest, Resilience</p>
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<sup>1</sup> Tool #4: The Subject Tool (Gee, 2011:19)

2.



**Photographer:** Noko  
**Caption:** buzy street were business is happening afternoon

Reference to ‘busy’ and ‘business’ points towards a ‘hive of economic activity’ in the streets of Ivory Park. Cars, a tarred road, electricity, shops and people are in the picture, which might challenge stereotypical views of townships as a place of only deprivation. Through showing a completely ‘different side’ of township life, Noko is therefore not reproducing context but is transforming it<sup>2</sup>.

**Theme:** economic activity  
**Sentiment:** positive  
**Messages for development:** Business in the Community Interest, Aspirations

3.



**Photographer:** Ndlovu  
**Caption:** building a better society.

Ndlovu is using the bricks in the picture that will be used to build a physical structure, as a metaphor for building a better society. The word ‘better’ correlates with a positive sentiment, but what was left out in the text is that ‘better’ is aspirational as well, indicating that there is a *need* for building a better society because of the significant socio-economic challenges in informal settlements<sup>3</sup>.

**Theme:** government services / basic needs  
**Sentiment:** positive  
**Messages for development:** Aspirations

4.



**Photographer:** Noko  
**Caption:** cellphone covers and pouch,ryt here on our street

The reference to ‘ryt here’ communicates to the reader, similarly to Ndlovu’s reference to ‘one stop’ in photo 1 that you don’t have to go far to buy what you need. The intonation focus is on ‘ryt here’ which strengthens Noko’s point<sup>4</sup>.

**Theme:** economic activity  
**Sentiment:** positive  
**Messages for development:** Business in the Community Interest, Resilience

<sup>2</sup> Tool #13: The Context is Reflexive Tool (Gee, 2011:85)

<sup>3</sup> Tool #2: The Fill in Tool (Gee, 2011:12)

<sup>4</sup> Tool #5: The Intonation Tool (2011:28)

5.



**Photographer:** Develd  
N/A

Without a description it is unclear if Develd was attempting to portray a positive picture. However, the large bowl of ‘amagwinya’ or ‘vetkoek’ as it is being called in South Africa, a very popular, almost ‘staple food’ in the townships, renders this picture likely positive.

**Theme:** economic activity

**Sentiment:** positive

**Messages for development:** Business in the Community  
Interest

6.



**Photographer:** Michael  
**Caption:** You can always get what you want on the streets

This picture of a mobile trader also confirms the ‘one stop’ reference of Ndlovu in picture 1 and the ‘ryt here’ reference of Noko in picture 4. The mobility of the trader is emphasised by the fact that the trader walks in what looks to be a residential street. It is also clear that the trader is carrying many items, confirming what Noko refers to ‘you can always get what you want’.

**Theme:** economic activity

**Sentiment:** positive

**Messages for development:** Business in the Community  
Interest, Resilience

7.



**Photographer:** Michael  
**Caption:** Communication on the go in Ivory Park....

Similarly, to Michael’s ‘on the go’ narrative of the mobile trader in photo 6, Michael demonstrates here that sometimes the customer can also easily access services (not only products) – in this case a public phone.

**Theme:** economic activity

**Sentiment:** positive

**Messages for development:** Business in the Community  
Interest

8.



**Photographer:** IDTV

**Caption:** African game called: Nchuva in xistonga (11/04/2013)

Reference to 'African' communicates a certain type of authenticity to the game<sup>5</sup>. A picture about a leisure activity can also generally be regarded as positive, as it is an enjoyable activity. A stereotype that townships are only places of deprivation is challenged again. The picture communicates that despite the challenges people experience in townships, people have ways to enjoy themselves.

**Theme:** leisure

**Sentiment:** positive

**Messages for development:** Choices

9.



**Photographer:** Develd

**Caption:** Ready for Business Ivory Park Taxi Drivers wearing formal on mondays.

'Ready' communicates the concept of preparedness. The group photo and the fact that everyone is dressed the same also displays a sense of unity among taxi drivers. South Africa has high levels of taxi violence. This photo thus challenges stereotypes that might exist that there is no collaboration between drivers.

**Theme:** economic activity

**Sentiment:** positive

**Messages for development:** Business in the Community Interest

10.



**Photographer:** Ndlovu

**Caption:** Get musical eKASI, true inspiration from the roots of the township.

'eKASI', is a reference to 'township'<sup>6</sup> Along with the word 'roots', it points towards the authenticity of the music and a level of pride in local music artists.

**Theme:** leisure/economic activity

**Sentiment:** positive

**Messages for development:** Business in the Community Interest, Aspirations

<sup>5</sup> Tool #16: The Identities Building Tool (Gee, 2011:110)

<sup>6</sup> Tool #24: The Social Languages Tool (Gee, 2011:161)

<p><b>11.</b></p>  <p><b>Photographer:</b> IDTV  <b>Caption:</b> Ivory park's garbage disposal system, effective work by the pick it up team, keep up the good work guys (24/04/2013)</p>	<p>IDTV is impressed by the service of the garbage disposal team. However, reference to 'keep up the good work guys' might also communicate that there are sometimes or often garbage disposal problems in the area.<sup>7</sup></p> <p><b>Theme:</b> government services / basic needs  <b>Sentiment:</b> positive  <b>Messages for development:</b> Aspirations</p>
<p><b>12.</b></p>  <p><b>Photographer:</b> Paton  <b>Caption:</b> Building RDP houses.</p>	<p>Although the South African government since the end of apartheid in 1994 made big strides to subsidize housing for the poor, enormous backlogs remain. RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) houses are houses built by the Government. The absence of reference to 'The Government' could be due to disappointment with unmet expectations.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, although 'RDP' by implication refers to Government housing, the intonation is more likely on 'houses', as opposed to 'RDP'.</p> <p><b>Theme:</b> government services / basic needs  <b>Sentiment:</b> positive  <b>Messages for development:</b> Aspirations</p>

### 5.3. Discussion

From the above it is clear that the photos the author promoted all had a positive sentiment about Street Life in Ivory Park. Furthermore, seven photos had an economic activity focus, three a government services/basic needs focus and one a leisure focus. One photo crossed both the economic activity and leisure themes.

Compared to the five 'most meaningful' photographs of the project participants, the photos the author promoted had a strong economic activity bias. Several of the 'most meaningful' photographs included pictures with a negative sentiment towards government services. Examples are as follow:

<sup>7</sup> Tool #2: The Fill in Tool (Gee, 2011:12)

<sup>8</sup> Tool #9: The Why This Way and Not That Way Tool (Gee, 2011:55)



**Michael**



**Reeves**



**Patrick**

The 12 promoted photos also solely focused on Charman’s messages of development of Resilience, Aspirations and Business in the Community Interest and not on Marginalisation and Reality Checks as well.

Apart from the findings of the text, there was also an inequality in terms of whose voices were promoted. For example, although Reeves posted 35 out of the 250 photos, none of his photos was promoted through Facebook advertising. In contrast, Bongumusa had 3 of his photos promoted, delivered 2,708 times to Facebook users’ news feeds.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Total photos</b>	<b>Reposted</b>	<b>Promoted</b>	<b>Ad Reach</b>	<b>Ad Photo Views</b>
Paton	47	8	1	1030	27
Reeves	35	3	0	0	0
Martin	34	14	2	1259	55
IDTV	31	3	2	2114	114
Bongumusa	28	5	3	2708	123
Michael	27	7	2	862	58
Develd	25	5	2	1088	73
Patrick	23	4	0	0	0
	<b>250</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9061</b>	<b>450</b>

Table 1

In the context of listening, Lacey (2013:18) argues that ‘it is only through listening out for difference that a plurality of voices can register’, and that ‘it is not only the *number* of voices or contributions that matters’. One can therefore contend that the author didn’t pay enough attention to ‘listening out’ when deciding which photos to promote. A greater plurality of voices, promoting both the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ of Street Life in Ivory Park would’ve been the result.

Having the photographers choose their ‘most meaningful’ photos throughout the project, would’ve ensured that the ‘correct’ messages were communicated throughout the month-long period.

#### **5.4. Reflections from an outsider-insider**

Gee (2011:19) argues that it is 'sometimes good, when doing discourse analysis, for an insider and outsider to study the same data together'. In a further study, gathering views from the participants (insiders) themselves would be helpful. The author is an outsider in the sense that he wasn't one of the eight photographers and didn't grow up in a township. Although he is a South African, he can't speak from a 'lived reality' perspective and therefore has limited understanding of the dynamics of township life.

As a project staff member (insider to the project) and having done the Facebook ads promotions himself, the author had access to material to do the analysis and could critically reflect on the process. A potential 'conflict of interest' that existed with this project is the fact that SLF specialises in informal economy work. This might have contributed to the author promoting certain photos aligned to what Wright (2018:99) refers to as 'organizational positioning, branding and fundraising strategies', with a tension between fundraising and advocacy aims. This might have influenced the author's bias to promoting a large number of photos displaying economic activity.

### **6. Conclusion**

The above critical discourse analysis of 12 photos which were promoted through Facebook ads as part of the Photovoice: Street Life in Ivory Park project, is an example of where voice has been misrepresented through not providing adequate attention to the plurality of voices, focusing largely on positive representations of development. Non-profits engaging in Photovoice projects should consider using Facebook ads to spread the message of the project, but properly plan this engagement. Project staff should be wary of personal and organisational biases and preferably work in collaboration with project participants when deciding which photos to promote. This is not only in the participatory spirit of Photovoice, but will ensure the legitimacy of the project and enhance the policy influencing potential of this communication method.

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