Deconstructing the horror. Film analysis to reduce the impact of seeing real violence

Desmontar el horror. Análisis fílmico para reducir el impacto de ver violencia real

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This work aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of the film analysis of A Message to America, the first video of beheadings of ISIS, as a media literacy tool to reduce the anxiety, and the emotional and cognitive impact (unconscious and conscious reactions) that these videos of real violence provoke in young people. **Methodology:** For this, 80 volunteers were recruited from first-year communication students at the UPV/EHU and divided into two homogeneous groups of 40. Group A watched an educational video about the film analysis of A Message to America, group B did not. Later, all the participants watched another video of the ISIS decapitations, and their viewing was monitored to record their state of anxiety before and after the experiment (using the STAI/E questionnaire), and their physiological (HRV and EDA) and cognitive responses (using an ad hoc questionnaire). **Discussion and results:** The results show that exposure to the film analysis of A Message to America does not attenuate the anxiety or emotional impact that these videos of executions produce in students, but it does reduce their cognitive impact and improve their understanding and interpretation, while empirically testing the correspondence between the audiovisual resources of the video and the physiological reactions of the viewer. **Conclusions:** The experiment confirms the suitability of film analysis to educate the eye in the contemporary audiovisual context.

KEYWORDS: Media Literacy; Film Analysis; Real Violence Videos; Neuroscience; ISIS; DAESH Propaganda.

RESUMEN

Introducción: Este trabajo pretende demostrar la efectividad del análisis fílmico de *A Message to America*, primer vídeo de decapitaciones del Estado Islámico, como herramienta de educación mediática para reducir la ansiedad y el impacto emocional (reacción inconsciente) y cognitivo (reacción consciente) que este tipo de vídeos de violencia real provocan en los jóvenes. **Metodología:** Multidisciplinar, aprobada por el Comité de Ética de la UPV/EHU, que combina herramientas de psicología, neurociencia y comunicación. Se reclutaron 80 voluntarios distribuidos en dos grupos homogéneos de 40. El grupo A visionó un vídeo didáctico con el análisis fílmico de *A Message to America*, el grupo B no. Después, todos los participantes (80) vieron otro vídeo de ejecuciones del EI, visionado que fue monitorizado para registrar su estado de ansiedad antes y después del experimento (mediante cuestionario STAI/E), y sus respuestas fisiológicas (HRV y EDA) y cognitivas (mediante cuestionario *ad hoc*). **Discusión y resultados:** La exposición al análisis fílmico de *A Message to America* no atenúa la ansiedad ni el impacto emocional que los vídeos de ejecuciones producen en los estudiantes, pero sí reduce su impacto cognitivo y mejora su comprensión e interpretación, al tiempo que prueba empíricamente la correspondencia entre los recursos audiovisuales del vídeo y las reacciones fisiológicas del espectador. **Conclusiones:** El experimento ratifica la idoneidad del análisis fílmico para educar la mirada de los jóvenes en el contexto audiovisual contemporáneo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Alfabetización Mediática; Análisis Fílmico; Vídeos Violencia Real; Neurociencia; Estado Islámico; DAESH; Propaganda.

1. Introduction

Audiovisual narrations "form, inform, conform, and even deform our perception of things" (Marzábal and Arocena, 2016, p. 9). Hence, the publication on August 20th, 2014, on YouTube of *A Message to America*, the propaganda video that showed the beheading of James Foley, an American photojournalist and hostage of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (also known by the acronyms ISIS, in English, and

DAESH, in Arabic; hereinafter IS) set off all the alarms. This video of real violence had an immediate diffusion that the traditional media of the planet could not stop, despite acting jointly. While these were limited to showing some of its images for informational purposes, Internet users had the full video at their disposal, which caused an intense emotional impact on those who saw it. It was the first of many since, until the fall of the caliphate of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2019, it was followed by at least another 1,500, of which 15% were spectacularly violent (Lesaca, 2018, p. 106).

From 2014 to today, many research works have addressed the propaganda of the radical Islamist group using, above all, content analysis. And they coincide in emphasizing two issues:

The first is that it is a surprising, successful, and global comprehensive propaganda campaign (Al-Rawi, 2018; Gómez-Montano and Velasco-Arias, 2015; Lesaca, 2017; Lesaca, 2018; Ligon et al., 2015; López, 2015; Mahood and Rane, 2017; Martín-Blanco, 2020; Rey-García et al., 2016; Ryan, 2015; Sunde et al., 2021; Welch, 2018; Winter, 2015; Zelin, 2014), with a constant presence on social networks, especially on Twitter (Bauer, 2015; Berger and Morgan, 2015; Klausen, 2015; Macnair and Frank, 2018), which has managed to conceive a new urban tribe, the cool jihad, with its own codes of clothing, musical tastes, etc. (Behn, 2014; Picart, 2015; Qvotrup-Jensen et al. 2021). The second is the consequent need to study it objectively and thoroughly to articulate alternatives focused, above all, on counterpropaganda (Aly et al., 2014; Berger, 2016; De Graaf, 2015; Farwell, 2014; Leander, 2016; Lieber and Reiley, 2016; Schmid, 2015; Sorenson, 2014).

In this sense, there are no academic works that address the most serious and innovative aspect of these videos: their quality. For the first time in history, real violence is not exhibited in amateur, sloppy, technically poor recordings. On the contrary, the beheading of hostages is shown in mainstream productions, propaganda artifacts carefully crafted by professionals who articulate the resources of audiovisual language to build a discourse, manipulate the emotions of viewers and influence their attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors regarding the terrifying IS message. These documentary videos resolved with fictional styles build a solid, effective, and formally attractive story.

Nor have the perceptual consequences of these videos among young people been studied, a generation that has integrated digital skills and the consumption of ambiguous, liminal, and violent images since childhood. They enjoy, parody, or transform them easily, but they are unable to interpret them and distinguish what is real from what is fictional because they lack the media competence to do so. After years of spreading fake news, hoaxes, lies, and manipulated images through social networks, experts agree on the need to educate the gaze in this "infoxication society" (Abril, 2007; Abril 2013; Aguaded et al., 2019; Aparici et al., 2009; Gutiérrez and Tyner, 2012; Marzal-Felici, 2021; Pérez-Tornero, 2020; Sampedro, 2018). This helplessness of young people is especially worrying when it comes to determining how they perceive violent images in general and those in IS beheading videos in particular; It is worth asking whether or not they naturalize this violence, how it affects them on an emotional level, and how they process it on a cognitive level.

The hypothesis of this research defends the usefulness of textual analysis as a method of media literacy because it provides young people with the necessary tools to disassemble, process, and interpret these violent videos. It is the most effective method because it has a greater effect than forewarning (Freedman and Sears, 1965); it is better to "teach" how to look, to decipher, than to warn of the brutality of what is going to be seen. Furthermore, dismantling the propaganda device is more effective than counterpropaganda in delegitimizing terrorist discourse since violent messages, once deactivated, are no longer dangerous weapons. In short, it is about offering, with its differences, a tool for media education similar to the essay *Historiciser le mal, une édition critique de Mein Kampf* (2021) which, instead of contesting or prohibiting the reading of *Mein Kampf* (Hitler, 1925), proposes a critical contextualization that deconstructs and delegitimizes the Nazi discourse.

2. Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between exposure to film analysis of *A Message to America* and the impact of other videos of IS beheadings on young people, both in their state of anxiety (psychological level) and in their unconscious (emotions, at the physiological level) and conscious responses (feelings, their interpretation of those emotions, and the discourse, at the cognitive level). The purpose of the study is threefold, because it aims to determine if this exposure manages to: a) mitigate the anxiety that viewing videos of IS beheadings provokes on a psychological level; b) reduce its emotional impact at the physiological/unconscious level; c) reduce its perverse (manipulative) effect at a cognitive/conscious level. And it answers five research questions about its effectiveness:

Q1: Does it help reduce anxiety?

Q2: To reduce the emotional/unconscious impact?

Q3: Does it shape the cognitive/conscious response to the emotional impact of the videos?

Q4: Can it be used to identify the audiovisual devices that guide the interpretation?

Q5: And to better understand how it works, increase distance, reduce fear and threat perception?

3. Methodology

This experimental study requires a mixed methodology designed by a multidisciplinary team that applies research techniques from neuroscience (physiological emotional impact), psychology (impact on anxiety and stress), and communication (cognitive impact) to the subjects of this study.

3.1. Sample, procedure, and instruments

The study received a favorable report from the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Beings of the Universidad del País Vasco (CEISH-UPV/EHU), whose protocol was applied in the recruitment of volunteers among first-year students (18-19) of the degrees in Audiovisual Communication, Journalism, Advertising, and Public Relations of the UPV/EHU, who signed the informed consent and completed the 8th edition of the STAI questionnaires (Guillén-Riquelme and Buela-Casal, 2011) updated with the scales for the diagnosis of anxiety in adolescents, university students, and adults.

The STAI (A/E), State Anxiety questionnaire, measures anxiety as a transient emotional state and has been used to measure and compare the anxiety of subjects before and after watching violent videos.

The STAI (A/R), Trait-Anxiety questionnaire, measures anxiety as a trait, namely, the subject's tendency to perceive situations as threatening, and has served to form two homogeneous groups in terms of the anxious propensity of their individuals (of 39 and 44 people).

Group A (39 subjects) watched the didactic audiovisual material prepared ad hoc for the study that explains in 25 minutes the analysis of the video *A Message to America*, chosen for its inaugural and canonical character: it establishes the execution rituals and the narrative and formal patterns that others perpetuate. This audiovisual material applies the textual analysis of structural semiotics as a methodology to determine the mechanisms that organize the form of meaning and show how its meaning and persuasive springs work.

Textual analysis has been used on multiple occasions to analyze all kinds of fictional visual and audiovisual texts, but when it comes to real violence, everything changes. It is enough to remember the debate around the representation of the Holocaust and the legitimacy of showing the unimaginable that began in the fifties with a phrase by Theodor Adorno taken out of context: "Writing poetry after Auschwitz is an act of barbarism" (Adorno, 1983, p. 34). Despite the controversy, the images of real violence have not only been shown but have been thoroughly analyzed; serve as an example, the careful reading offered by Georges Didi-Huberman of four photographs that members of the Sonderkommando took in Auschwitz in August 1944 (Didi-Huberman, 2003). On this occasion, the analysis observes the visual, sound, montage, representation, narration, and enunciation aspects of *A Message to America*, to unravel both its denotative meaning (explicit, literal), as well as its symbolic and connotative values.

Four days later, the monitored viewing of the montage used as an experimental stimulus began with all the subjects in the sample (83, 43 women and 40 men). This montage is made up of a selection of three of the violent IS videos released in 2015: *Nation of the Cross* (the murder of 21 Coptic Christians on a Libyan beach) appears in its entirety, then, separated by a few seconds in black, inserts of the most extreme images of real violence from two other videos are included: the burning of the Jordanian pilot Moaz al Kasasbeh and the public execution by shooting 25 soldiers in the neck at the hands of children.

Viewing *Nation of the Cross* in its entirety makes it possible to fully observe the physiological and emotional curve drawn by their propaganda devices and compare it with the impact of the moments of extreme violence in the inserts, as well as to observe the degree of identification and understanding of their propaganda devices. Before viewing, the subjects were informed of its violent content and of the possibility of interrupting it in case of anxiety, a situation for which a psychological care protocol was available.

Neuroscience analyzes emotion, an automatic and unconscious process, by measuring the physiological activity or arousal of subjects while watching movies, television, or ads. As it influences decisions, both communication and marketing have used these techniques (Núñez-Cansado et al., 2021) to better understand the impact of media stimuli on cognitive and emotional processing (Crespo-Pereira and Legerén-Lago, 2017). They are research applied to the entertainment industry and oriented to the design of content adapted to human physiology (Aldama, 2015; Crespo-Pereira and Legerén-Lago, 2017). It is about measuring the attention, emotion, and memory of cinematographic (Tapia-Frade and Martín-Guerra, 2015), television (Crespo-Pereira and Legerén-Lago, 2017; Linebarger and Walker, 2005; Tapia-Frade and Martín-Guerra, 2016a), advertising (Baraybar-Fernández et al., 2017; Micu and Plummer, 2010; Tapia-Frade and Martín-Guerra, 2016b, 2017), and political discourses (Martínez-Herrador et al., 2008; Martínez- Herrador et al., 2012) to improve their effectiveness; and to delve into consumer behavior (Morin, 2011). Its incorporation in this study has an unprecedented and innovative purpose: to demonstrate the effectiveness of textual analysis as a method to educate the gaze and mitigate the perverse effects of IS propaganda videos.

The monitoring of the viewing was carried out in shifts of three subjects gathered in a Gesell room, which guarantees the essential conditions of silence and darkness, and was carried out in three consecutive phases for 20 minutes: after the viewing of any video or familiarization with it, it is followed by the calibration, in which five selected audiovisual pieces are shown to generate different activation patterns with which the physiological response model of each participant is defined; and, finally, the evaluation, which collects these answers in the software. Between each phase, a washout is performed so that the subject relaxes and recovers the physiological levels altered by the stimulation.

Once the viewing was over, the participants completed the STAI/E and the cognitive impact questionnaire designed ad hoc for the study and divided into three blocks: the first measures the conscious response

to the emotional impact of the video; To calibrate it, it first asks participants if they have been able to watch the videos in their entirety, then asks them to select, among the 20 emotions of the PANAS Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson et al, 1988), those that they have experienced and specify to what degree they have done so (from 1 "very little or not at all" to 5 "always or almost always"); They are also asked about their ability to distinguish between reality and fiction in this hybrid format, if it seems plausible to them, and if this liminal format has influenced their emotions. The second block calibrates the level of identification, understanding, and interpretation of the narrative and formal devices that convey the IS propaganda discourse in *Nation of the Cross*, for which the subject must identify these devices ordered from greater to lesser degree of detail in the questionnaire: narrative structure, ellipses, and metaphors, on the one hand, and construction of characters and roles, on the other. And the third assesses the usefulness of textual analysis for greater awareness of the discursive and emotional manipulation to which these videos subject viewers.

3.2. Data analysis

Following Bitbrain's methodology, the subjects' EDA and HRV signal measurements obtained during viewing were transformed into two derived metrics: activation (tonic response) and impact (phasic response), displayed in units of percentage. Arousal was determined by comparing it with the average activation or impact in each case.

The analysis of the statistical results of all the questionnaires completed by 80 subjects presents a maximum sampling error of +/-1.90% and a statistical confidence interval of 95% (in the most unfavorable assumption that p=q=0.5). Data treatment was performed by applying statistically significant differences χ^2 (CHI square) with a minimum confidence interval of $p<0.05$.

The crossover variable of the study is the comparison between group A (exposed to textual analysis) and group B or the control group.

4. Discussion and results

4.1. No effect on anxiety

There are no significant differences between the results of the STAI/E before and after viewing in groups A and B, so exposure to the textual analysis of *A Message to America* has not served to reduce the anxiety that videos of executions of the IS provoke in viewers.

4.2. No effect on the brutal emotional impact of the video: the triumph of propaganda

The experiment does not show significant differences between the participants of group A (exposed to film analysis) and those of group B (control group) in any case, neither in the average activation and impact values nor in those of the three crucial moments. In both cases, all subjects present an equivalent emotional response. This data shows that exposure to didactic audiovisual materials does not reduce their emotional and unconscious impact on young people. However, a significant physiological response common to all subjects has been detected during the climax of *Nation of the Cross* (the beheading of the Copts), a fragment that has impact values higher than the average of the complete video (272% vs. 107%, p=0.000). In other words, the emotional impact of that first contact with violence, although the same in both groups, is detectable through the measurement of the physiological response, and the same happens with the rest of the key moments of the same video.

Figure 1. *Impact level (in percentage) while watching Nation of the Cross.*
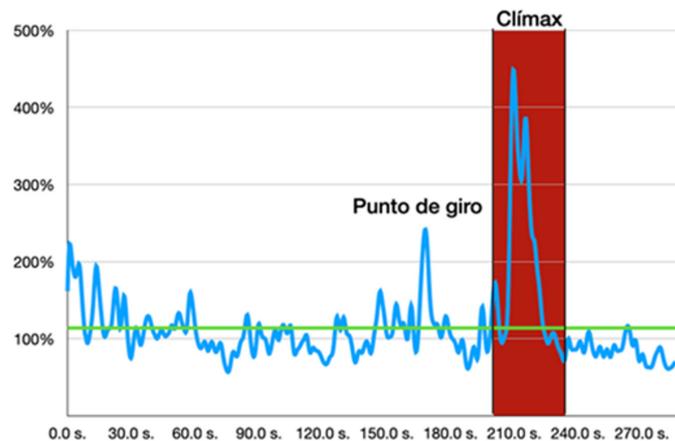
Source: Own elaboration based on psychophysiological measurements.

The chart indicates in red the climax (average 272%) and the activation peak at the second turning point when silence foreshadows what is going to happen. This almost exact coincidence between the physiological responses of the viewers and the audiovisual devices of the video designed to provoke them shows in a very visual and impressive way the efficiency with which the authors, terrorists, and propagandists, have constructed their message. The video works perfectly, impacting the viewers' emotions just at the moments intended by the author, demonstrating both the expertise of IS propagandists and the potential of film analysis to detect the good (or bad) functioning of narrative and formal devices. The same film analysis, although it does not serve to avoid the impact of violent videos on the viewer's emotions, will serve, as will be seen later, to improve the interpretation of those emotions.

4.3. With effect on conscious impact: the need for textual analysis

4.3.1. Analysis to modulate feelings

The data show significant differences between groups A and B in three factors: the ability to see the scenes of extreme real violence in their entirety, the perception of the credibility of the staging, and how the similarity of the videos with fiction influences feelings.

Table 1. *Distribution of the conscious response to the IS execution videos between groups A and B.*

Full or partial viewing	Total	Group A	Group B
They have seen the full video	89,2%	82,1%	95,5%
They have closed their eyes	10,8%	17,9%	4,5%
Credibility of staging	**Total**	**Group A**	**Group B**
Yes, totally	66,3%	64,1%	68,2%
Not completely	28,9%	35,9%	22,7%
Not at all	4,8%	0%	9,1%

Similar to fiction	Total	Group A	Group B
It has been less difficult	66,6%	78,1%	46,2%
It has been more difficult	39,4%	21,9%	53,8%

Source: Own elaboration.

89.2% of the participants claimed to have been able to see the real scenes of extreme violence in their entirety and only 10.8% confessed to having closed their eyes. However, there are significantly more subjects in group A who have not been able to watch the full video (17.9%) (p=0.05) than those in group B (4.5%).

On the other hand, the perception of the credibility of the staging of the videos is the majority: 66.3% of the participants affirm that they have totally believed it, despite being aware of its resemblance to fiction, while 28.9% % claim to have believed it, but not completely, and 4.8% do not consider it credible at all. However, the members of group A (35.9%) who claim not to have fully believed the staging, are significantly more (p=0.09) than those of group B (22.7%). Despite the lack of significance, it should be noted that there is no member of group A among those who say they did not believe it at all.

88.5% of the participants admit that the resemblance of these videos to fiction has influenced their emotions, but in a different way. 66.6% perceive that this resemblance has helped them, making viewing it less harsh than if it were a video of real, explicit non-fictionalized violence, while the opposite has happened to 39.4%. However, there are differences between the two groups: the subjects of group A (21.9%) who have stated that the video has been harder for them due to its resemblance to fiction are significantly fewer (p=0.006) than those of group B (53.8%).

4.3.2. Analysis to dismantle the propaganda artifact

There are no clear differences in terms of general understanding of the video. The descriptive data shows that the majority of the participants state that they have understood it well (83% compared to 16.9%), both in group A (76.9% compared to 16.9%) and in group B (88.6 % compared to 11.4%). However, significant differences have been detected concerning specific aspects of the advanced understanding of narrative and formal devices, and the construction of characters and roles in *Nation of the Cross*.

Regarding the former, only one significant difference was detected relative to a narrative device: the participants who understood that the audiovisual piece is clearly structured in presentation, middle, and end (81.9%) are more (p=0.019) than those who have not (18.1%). For the rest, the descriptive data show that the metaphor has also been understood by the majority (92.8% compared to 7.2%) and that the ellipsis is the least distinguished resource (62.2% compared to 37.8%).

Table 2. *Distribution of Nation of the Cross device identification between groups A and B.*

Identification of narrative and formal devices		Total	Group A	Group B
The video has a clear structure with a presentation, middle, and end	Yes	81,9%	92,3%	72,7%
	No	18,1%	7,7%	27,3%
Ellipsis: black image indicates that the entire execution will not be shown	Yes	62,2%	69,2%	30,8%
	No	37,8%	30,8%	44,2%

The blood-stained sea is a metaphor for what awaits their enemies (the West)	Yes	92,8%	94,9%	90,9%
	No	7,2%	5,9%	5,9%
No. of narrative and formal devices identified		**Total**	**Group A**	**Group B**
One		9,6%	0%	18,2%
Two		44,6%	43.6%	45,5%
Three		45,8%	56,4%	36,4%

Source: Own elaboration.

Likewise, the advanced understanding of the narrative and formal devices is measured with the sum of these three elements: the structure, the ellipsis (execution in off), and the metaphor (the sea stained with blood as a warning to the West). The participants who have identified only one of these elements are 9.6% (0% in group A and 18.2% in group B); those who have identified two, 46.6% (43.6% in group A and 45.5% in group B), and those who have identified three, 45.8%. In this case, students from group A (56.4%) identified the three expressive resources significantly more (p=0.012) than those from group B (36.4%). The average comprehension by groups confirms this hypothesis since that of group A (5.13%) is greater (p=0.007) than that of group B (4.36%). Moreover, no one in group A has only understood one of the three elements, something that does happen in group B (18.2%).

Regarding the identification of the characters and roles, all the participants, 100%, understand that the exhibition of the decapitated bodies works as proof that the execution has been committed; 94% interpret the executioner's gesture of pointing the knife at the camera as a threat, 6% do not; 91.6% recognize the men in orange jumpsuits as enemies of IS, 8.4% do not; 88% identify the hooded men as IS heroes, 12% do not; and, finally, 75.9% understand that the executioner justifies the execution of the infidels and 24.1% does not.

Table 3. *Distribution of Nation of the Cross character and role identification between groups A and B.*

Character and role identification		Total	Group A	Group B
The men in orange overalls are the enemies of IS	Yes	91,6%	100%	84,1%
	No	8,4%	0%	15,9%
The hooded uniformed men are the soldiers and heroes of ISIS	Yes	88%	94,9%	81,8%
	No	12%	18,2%	5,1%
The executioner's gesture of pointing the knife at the camera is a threat to the West	Yes	75,9%	84,6%	68,2%
	No	24,1%	15,4%	31,8%
The exhibition of the bodies with the heads over the belly is proof of the execution	Yes	94%	97,4%	90,9%
	No	6%	2,6%	9,1%
Number of characters and roles identified		**Total**	**Group A**	**Group B**
One		4,8%	0%	9,1%
Two		4,8%	0%	9,1%
Three		25,3%	23,1%	27,3%
Four		62,7%	76,9%	50%
Five		2,4%	0%	4,5%

Source: Own elaboration.

There are only two significant differences between the two groups: members of group A have recognized the men dressed in orange as enemies of IS and the uniformed soldiers as heroes of the terrorist group significantly more. In the first case, it is 100% versus 84.1% (p=0.009); in the second, 94.9% versus 81.8% (p=0.066).

The advanced understanding of the construction of the characters is measured with the sum of these five elements: the enemy (men in orange jumpsuits), the hero (men in uniform), the justification for the executions, the knife towards the camera as a threat to the West, and the display of the decapitated bodies as evidence of the execution.

Most of the participants, 97%, have identified between four (62.7%) and three (25.3%) of these elements; few have only recognized two or three (4.8%), and even fewer have registered all five (2.4%). It is noteworthy that the members of group A (76.9%) who have identified four elements are significantly more (p=0.022) than those of group B (50%).

4.3.3. Analysis to gain awareness of discursive and emotional manipulation

The data that measures the perception of the members of group A on the usefulness of the film analysis of *A Message to America* when facing the rest of the violent videos of the IS are descriptive and show very different evaluations.

Most of the subjects positively judge the usefulness of the analysis: 86.5% think that its viewing has been of some use to them; only 13.5% don't think so. Undoubtedly, the majority statements among the participants are that it has helped them understand its operation (91.9%) and gain understanding (81.1%); those who deny it are very few (8.1%) in the first case, and few (18.9%) in the second. On the other hand, just over half of the participants, 56.8%, affirm that film analysis has made violent videos more attractive, although 43.2% don't think so.

These results worsen when asking about distance, fear, and the perception of threat, and they are not decisive: 61.9% affirm that the analysis has helped them distance themselves from the represented violence, but 38.1% state it has not; half, 50%, believe that it has helped them not to feel so afraid, but the other half believes that it has not; and only 35.7% think that the analysis has served to make them feel less threatened, while 64.3% think it has not.

Taking into account the sum of these three elements: distance, fear, and threat, there are some significant differences. The percentage of those who consider that the film analysis has not served to attenuate these three emotions (30.8%) is significantly higher (p=0.00) than those who admit that it has served to lessen one (25, 6%), two (20.5%), or three (23.1%) of the emotions mentioned; the result improves when adding the percentages (69.2%).

5. Conclusions

The results allow validating the usefulness of the film analysis of *A Message to America*, not to reduce anxiety or the emotional and unconscious impact caused by videos of IS executions, but to improve the conscious interpretation of those emotions and the discursive content that they carry. Exposure to the analysis reverses the cognitive impact and the interpretation wins in three aspects: the perceptive response to the fictionalization of the executions, the identification and understanding of the audiovisual devices that articulate the propaganda discourse, and the awareness of the manipulation to which the video subjects the viewer.

The data from the questionnaire confirm that textual analysis is an ideal tool for educommunication. Indeed, the young people who have watched the didactic audiovisual material of *A Message to America* are the ones who have reacted best to the impact of *Nation of the Cross*. On the one hand, contrary to what was expected, they are the ones who have closed their eyes the most to the most violent scenes of the beheading of the Copts, perhaps because they knew what they were facing. On the other hand, they are also the most aware of the discursive nature of the videos, those who do not fully believe their staging, even knowing that the violence they show is real; that is, the film analysis helps them understand this video as a construction with characteristics of fiction that, however, shows real deaths. There is no denier among them, no individual who claims not to have believed anything; they understand that the videos are documentaries, or rather, that they document reality, despite including characteristics of fiction. That resemblance to fiction, moreover, becomes less harsh thanks to the analysis.

Added to the reduction in the cognitive impact of violent videos is the improvement in their interpretation; because, although all the participants say they have understood them well, when examined, those who saw the film analysis show that they have understood them better. These subjects best interpret the canonical resources and the meaning of *Nation of the Cross*: they are the ones who best identify and understand the narrative and formal devices indicated in the study (structure, ellipses, metaphors, and characters); and also those who best appreciate how the videos present the IS soldiers as heroes and the men in orange as enemies, a determining association that would mean assuming the point of view of the terrorists and distancing themselves from the Western victims. Likewise, these subjects point out that, although they are not so sure about reducing fear and the perception of threat, the analysis has served to improve their understanding of the IS videos and gain perspective. For all these reasons, it can be said that the experiment has worked.

An important finding is added to this, the results of the physiological response of the subjects during the viewing of the IS videos show new and conclusive evidence: the correspondence between the intentional articulation of the narrative and formal resources of *Nation of the Cross* and its ability to provoke the viewer's emotional reaction, which empirically proves a) that the theories of audiovisual language are correct in assuming that the articulation of its resources has certain emotional effects on the viewer; b) that the authors of the violent IS videos are aware of these resources and have used them intentionally and effectively to provoke an emotional curve capable of conditioning the interpretation and feelings of the viewers; c) that textual analysis is the most appropriate method to dismantle this and all types of audiovisual texts, the scalpel that, by unraveling all its components, manages to reverse, if not the viewer's physiological and unconscious responses, then their conscious interpretations, so that propaganda, however good it may be, does not achieve its objectives.

Obviously, we know that it is difficult to go from laboratory studies to the real world, an issue that constitutes one of the clearest limits of this work, but the responses of both groups of viewers (the one exposed to the film analysis and the one previously warned) were different; the group exposed to the analysis showed greater conscious resistance to the violent content of the videos of the self-proclaimed IS, which shows that, according to experts, media literacy is key; and that knowing how to look means, on occasion, being able to look.

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