

The Power of Discourse or the Discourse of Power: Hezbollah's Communication Strategy in Political and Military Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines Hezbollah's communication strategy from 2006 to 2024, focusing on how the organization constructs legitimacy and consolidates power through discourse across political and military contexts. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and power, along with agenda-setting and image repair frameworks from strategic communication and public relations, the paper investigates how Hezbollah crafts narratives of Resistance, martyrdom, and invincibility. By analysing key events, including the 2006 war, the dissemination of *Hudhod* drone footage, and the 2024 release of the *Imad-4* tunnel video, this research reveals how Hezbollah uses both textual (e.g., Nasrallah's speeches) and visual (e.g., propaganda footage) media to frame its actions as legitimate and necessary. The methodology combines critical discourse analysis (CDA) with visual media analysis and semi-structured asynchronous interviews with regional communication experts. The findings show that Hezbollah's strategic messaging is highly calculated, leveraging religious symbolism, technological sophistication, and multi-platform dissemination to maintain symbolic authority. The study also considers the emerging role of AI technologies in narrative construction and information warfare. Ultimately, this research argues that Hezbollah's communicative success lies in its ability to define the terms of conflict, influence public perception, and maintain narrative control in a volatile regional environment. It contributes to broader understandings of how non-state actors employ discourse as a tool of power in the digital age.

Keywords: *Hezbollah, strategic communication, narrative construction, agenda-setting, AI in propaganda.*

INTRODUCTION

Hezbollah's transformation from a localized Lebanese Resistance in the 1982 into a well-established regional political-military actor has been accompanied by the development of an increasingly sophisticated communication strategy. By the liberation of Southern Lebanon in 2000 and the subsequent war with Israel in 2006, Hezbollah had solidified its status as a regional Resistance movement, with its Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, emerging as a transnational symbol of defiance and leadership (El Zein, 2014). More than just a military force, Hezbollah has embedded itself in Lebanon's political institutions, provided extensive social services, and cultivated a powerful media presence that spans television, press, public rallies, and digital platforms. This evolution underscores how the organization has contested public narratives not only on the battlefield but in the realm of discourse and perception (El Zein, 2014).

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This paper critically examines Hezbollah's communication strategy from 2006 to 2024 through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Building on Michel Foucault's conception of discourse as both a medium and mechanism of power, this study explores how Hezbollah uses language and media to legitimize its dual political and military identity. It particularly focuses on how Hezbollah's rhetoric, especially in Nasrallah's speeches, and propaganda content, such as the release of the *Hudhod* drone footage and the 2024 *Imad-4* tunnel video, constructs a narrative centred on Resistance, martyrdom, invincibility, and national autonomy. Through these narratives, Hezbollah seeks to define reality for its audiences and to frame its actions within a broader ideological, religious, and strategic logic.

This research integrates theories of power, agenda-setting, and image repair from the field of strategic communication to analyse how Hezbollah's media output shapes public perception and sustains legitimacy. Supplemented by expert interviews and thematic visual-textual analysis, the study argues that Hezbollah's communication strategy is not merely responsive but deeply strategic. It is designed to maintain symbolic dominance, control the public agenda, and redefine the meanings of Resistance in Lebanon and across the region. By situating discourse as a weapon in its own right, this study reveals how Hezbollah's narrative infrastructure has become an essential pillar of its enduring influence, particularly in contexts marked by instability, asymmetrical warfare, and media saturation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to grasp the full extent of Hezbollah's communicative authority and strategic narrative construction, this literature review explores three interwoven theoretical strands: (i) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), (ii) agenda-setting and framing theory, and (iii) image repair strategies. Collectively, these frameworks provide a compelling lens through which to understand how Hezbollah orchestrates language, symbolism, and media production to craft narratives that legitimise its role and consolidate its influence. The ensuing section offers a synthesis of key scholarly contributions published between 2021 and 2024, laying the conceptual groundwork for a rigorous examination of Hezbollah's narrative strategies across its political and military engagements.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Power

Critical Discourse Analysis clarifies how language does more than reflect reality. It actively constructs power dynamics, a principle central to Foucault's notion of power/knowledge (Hussain & Saloi, 2024). As Rahmatullah et al. (2024) assert, discourse is controlled, selected, regulated, and redistributed according to predetermined procedures," meaning those who dominate discourse command symbolic authority (Villadsen, 2024). In conflict zones, discourse becomes a field of struggle, with media narratives capable of legitimising or delegitimising actors based on dominant frames. The 2006 Israel–Hezbollah war, for instance, became a "discursive war," with Hezbollah's religious Resistance narrative challenging Israel's democratic self-framing (Anselmo et al., 2025).

Expanding on this, El Zein (2014, 2024) provides CDA-based insights into Hezbollah's own media discourse. His analysis of the Islamic Resistance's content demonstrate how symbolic messaging is strategically crafted to shape public perception and sustain moral authority. This internal discourse extends the Foucauldian concept into physical and ideological mobilisation arenas. Consequently, rather than focusing on external portrayals, this study examines Hezbollah's own rhetoric—particularly in Nasrallah's oratory, as a performative tool that defines moral legitimacy in terms of divine Resistance and communal sacrifice.

Agenda-Setting and Framing

Agenda-setting theory suggests that while media may not tell audiences what to think, it decisively shapes what people think about (Putri et al., 2024). Nowak (2021) applies this concept to Hezbollah's media strategy, illustrating how Al-Manar, Telegram, and public rallies foreground themes of Resistance and martyrdom to shape collective consciousness. These organisations strategically repeat hyperbolic content and threatening imagery to dominate public discourse.

Building on framing theory, Suechika (2021) quantitatively analysed Nasrallah's speeches and found that Hezbollah's messaging dynamically alternates between confronting Israel and "takfiri" groups depending on geopolitical developments. This adaptability underscores the strategic deployment of Resistance discourse to resonate with evolving audience concerns. Additionally, Zebib (2022) contributes directly to this understanding by analysing Facebook campaigns of Lebanese political groups, including Hezbollah. Her findings reveal how digital platforms are used to emphasise specific issues and marginalise opposing narratives during electoral cycles. These tactics mirror Hezbollah's approach in conflict contexts, masking broader social issues beneath layers of Resistance framing.

Framing theory further deepens this. Phillips (2023) describes how Nasrallah's use of the term "Divine Victory" transformed ambiguous conflict outcomes into morally charged victories. These frames create a hermetic interpretive logic where military setbacks are retroactively sanctified. Hezbollah thus combines agenda-setting and framing to not only highlight certain topics but also fix the lens through which they are apprehended.

Image Repair Theory

As developed by Benoit (1997), the theory posits that when organisations face reputational threats or credibility crises, they deploy rhetorical strategies, such as reframing, denial, evasion of responsibility, or transcendence, to restore legitimacy and public trust. Hezbollah's post-2006 war discourse provides a clear example of such a strategy. Despite the physical destruction and human cost inflicted on Lebanon, Hezbollah publicly declared the outcome a "divine victory," reinterpreting material loss as spiritual and moral triumph. This rhetorical reframing not only deflected criticism but reinforced the group's role as a divinely guided Resistance force.

Central to this image repair effort is the commemoration of martyrs, which institutionalises symbolic narratives through physical and mediated spaces. One such site, the Mleeta Resistance Landmark, exemplifies how Hezbollah transforms individual sacrifice into collective memory. It functions as both a memorial and a

propaganda tool, mythologising Resistance and elevating martyrdom to a civic ideal. Dulwahab et al. (2021) who studied media coverage of religious conflict in Indonesia, offer a relevant comparative perspective. They show how rituals and memorial practices serve to legitimise violence, embed narratives in public consciousness, and provide emotional resolution for communities engaged in conflict. Though contextually different, their findings mirror Hezbollah's use of commemorative culture to embed martyrdom within Lebanon's national and religious identity. Recent scholarship has also shown how Hezbollah mobilises communal narratives for strategic ends. Helou and Mollica (2024) argue that Nasrallah instrumentalised existential fear and sectarian identity to justify Hezbollah's involvement in Syria, portraying it as an extension of the Resistance front. This aligns with image-repair theory, where rhetorical strategies serve to legitimise controversial actions by embedding them within culturally resonant frames.

Hezbollah's narrative is structured around recurrent ideological motifs such as *muqawama* (Resistance), *istishhad* (martyrdom), divine providence, and Lebanese autonomy. These themes are not merely rhetorical flourishes; they form the ideological backbone of Hezbollah's communicative ecosystem and are strategically embedded across various cultural outputs. Kanaaneh (2023) demonstrates how these themes are woven through Hezbollah's multimedia content, including films, chants, songs, and dramatic re-enactments, designed to emotionally and ideologically bind its constituents to a Resistance ethos. This emotional anchoring enables audiences to interpret conflict not merely as political struggle, but as a sacred, redemptive mission.

Religious symbolism also plays a pivotal role in Hezbollah's messaging. The group routinely draws on Qur'anic references, eschatological themes, and the iconography of Shi'a martyrdom to imbue its actions with transcendental legitimacy. Istadiyantha (2018), in his examination of Islamic activist networks, notes how religious language and imagery are mobilised across borders to consolidate ideological unity and moral resolve. This pattern is evident in Hezbollah's public discourse, where sacred terminology—such as “divine promise” and “blood of the martyrs”, functions as both motivational rhetoric and a means of insulating the group from secular critique.

Adding further complexity, Mahadian et al. (2023) explore the role of symbolic humour in sectarian meme culture in Indonesia, revealing how satire, visual metaphors, and social media artefacts reinforce in-group legitimacy and ridicule opponents. This resonates with Hezbollah's own use of digital media—from memes and posters to stylised video clips, as tools of ideological warfare. These visual formats do more than entertain; they reinforce cognitive frames, normalise conflict, and propagate the Resistance narrative in ways that are accessible and emotionally compelling, particularly to younger audiences.

Taken together, Hezbollah's image repair strategy is neither incidental nor ad hoc. It is part of a sophisticated discursive framework that fuses theology, history, and media to mitigate reputational risks and reaffirm its legitimacy. Through commemorative practices, religious symbolism, and cultural production, the group not only recovers from perceived failures but also turns those setbacks into renewed calls for Resistance. The integration of these strategies into a cohesive narrative

renders Hezbollah's discourse resilient, adaptable, and deeply embedded in the symbolic lifeworld of its followers.

Integrated Conceptual Model: A Discursive Architecture of Legitimacy

Synthesising these theoretical domains offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Hezbollah's communication strategy as a finely integrated discursive architecture, a complex system wherein discourses, symbolism, emotion, and ideology operate in concert to construct and sustain political legitimacy. Rather than functioning through sporadic or reactive messaging, Hezbollah engages in a long-term, orchestrated communicative regime that is simultaneously ideological, affective, and performative.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly when read through the Foucauldian lens of *power/knowledge*, underscores how language is not merely expressive but constitutive: it produces regimes of truth and structures of perception (Anselmo et al., 2025). In Hezbollah's case, this discourse constructs Resistance not just as an act, but as a moral identity, one that is imbued with sacred legitimacy and historical continuity.

Agenda-setting theory, as applied by Nowak (2021) and Zebib (2022), explains how Hezbollah controls not just the content of communication, but its cognitive hierarchy. By consistently elevating themes such as *Resistance*, *sovereignty*, and *martyrdom* through repeated media exposure, particularly via platforms like Al-Manar, Facebook, and Telegram, Hezbollah effectively instructs its audiences on what to prioritise, worry about, or celebrate. These themes are not left to chance; they are carefully curated to dominate the public agenda, marginalising competing narratives such as corruption, sectarianism, or civilian fatigue.

Framing theory expands on this by revealing how Hezbollah goes beyond agenda-setting to also control *how* people interpret key issues. As Phillips (2023) notes, terms like "Divine Victory," "sacrifice," or "moral shield" are not neutral descriptors but strategic frames, they assign meaning to ambiguous events. The framing of military stalemates as spiritual wins or foreign intervention as existential threats structures audience perception in ways that are resistant to counter-narratives. This interpretive control allows Hezbollah to absorb shocks and setbacks without diminishing its ideological coherence or support base.

Meanwhile, image repair theory, especially Benoit's (1997) typology of corrective strategies, reveals Hezbollah's skill in converting reputational vulnerabilities into renewed legitimacy. Following the 2006 war, for example, Hezbollah's narrative pivot from material damage to moral endurance was not accidental; it was a calculated move to reframe the group as Lebanon's sole effective defender in the absence of a responsive state. As Kanaaneh (2023) and Mahadian et al. (2023) show, such narrative repositioning is often encoded in cultural products—songs, commemorative videos, or even internet memes—which blend performativity with ideology. Through these symbolic media, losses are sacralised, and Resistance is mythologised.

Cultural discourse analysis brings all these elements together by illustrating how Hezbollah's themes are embedded systematically across an ecosystem of media outputs, ranging from television and social media to architecture (like the Mleeta

Resistance Landmark), ritual ceremonies, and children's educational materials. As Istadiyantha (2018) observes in a comparable Southeast Asian context, such pervasive symbolic communication is essential for embedding ideological narratives in the collective psyche. In Hezbollah's context, this not only secures in-group cohesion but also marginalises dissent by tying ideological adherence to moral belonging.

The Discursive Regime: Symbolic Sovereignty in Fragmented States

Taken together, these interlinked frameworks, CDA, agenda-setting, framing, image repair, and cultural discourse, construct what can be described as a discursive regime of symbolic sovereignty. This regime does not rely on physical territory or state institutions alone; instead, it draws its power from the ability to shape meanings, control collective memory, and dictate emotional responses. It ritualises divine language, utilises religious iconography, and mobilises heroic archetypes to produce what Dulwahab et al. (2021) term an "emotive moral landscape" wherein legitimacy is earned not through electoral approval or economic performance, but through symbolic acts of endurance and Resistance.

Hezbollah's communicative power, therefore, resides not merely in the immediacy of its speeches or media events, but in its long-term capacity to construct a durable symbolic economy. In this economy, *Resistance* becomes synonymous with *identity*, and *martyrdom* is valorised as a civic virtue. Through this system, Hezbollah maintains epistemic control, defining not only what is true and just, but also who has the authority to speak those truths.

Such discursive mastery is especially vital in Lebanon and the broader Middle East, where institutional control is fragmented, and political legitimacy is often contested across sectarian and ideological lines. In these environments, narrative supremacy becomes as critical as military or electoral strength. As this analysis shows, Hezbollah has leveraged a highly sophisticated communicative apparatus, not just to react to events, but to frame them pre-emptively, giving meaning to suffering, constructing moral universes, and sustaining its ideological project across generations.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, multi-modal discourse analysis to examine Hezbollah's strategic communication from 2006 to 2024. The primary aim is to understand how Hezbollah constructs political legitimacy and ideological coherence through language, symbolism, and media production. The research design integrates textual, visual, and interview-based methods, underpinned by a Foucauldian understanding of discourse as a medium of power.

Data Sources and Materials

The dataset includes over 40 publicly available speeches by Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, with special focus on milestone moments: the 2006 Lebanon War, parliamentary election campaigns, Syria conflict interventions (2011–2017), and the recent 2023–24 Gaza conflict. These speeches, televised addresses, mass rallies, and commemorative statements—were accessed through Hezbollah's official channels, such as *Al-Manar TV*, *Al-Ahed News*, and affiliated YouTube or Telegram accounts.

In addition to textual sources, the study analysed Hezbollah's media productions including documentaries (*Imad-4*), video shorts, animated graphics, martyr tributes, and infographics. Particular attention was paid to recurring visual motifs, such as martyr portraits, drone footage, and religious iconography (flags, Qur'anic verses, Resistance slogans).

All materials were selected based on relevance to the themes of Resistance, martyrdom, national identity, and legitimacy. The analysis involved cross-referencing different media types. For example, correlating a speech's core message with the accompanying visual tribute or news broadcast.

Analytical Framework

The research follows the principles of Foucauldian discourse analysis, with emphasis on how language and representation regulate knowledge and reinforce power structures. Inspired by Foucault's notion of discourse as "governed by rules," the study examined how certain phrases, tropes, and claims are made possible or privileged within Hezbollah's ideological system.

Key Steps in the Discourse Analysis

- i. *Thematic Coding*: Extracting recurring concepts such as *divine victory*, *muqawama* (Resistance), *martyrdom*, *enemy aggression*, and *sovereignty*.
- ii. *Intertextual Mapping*: Tracking how themes evolved or were recycled across different contexts—e.g. how the "Resistance narrative" adapted from Lebanon (2006) to Syria (2011–17) and Palestine (2023–24).
- iii. *Frame Analysis*: Identifying how events were framed (heroic, victimised, apocalyptic) and what interpretive lens was offered to the audience.
- iv. *Symbolic Semiotics*: Deconstructing visual cues such as colour use, sound design, editing style, and religious allusions in audio-visual propaganda.

To enhance methodological triangulation, the study also drew on agenda-setting theory, image-repair theory, and media framing literature. These theories helped structure the analysis by guiding how topics were selected (agenda-setting), how reputational threats were neutralised (image repair), and how interpretations were steered (framing).

Expert Interviews and Validation

Given the sensitivity of the topic, the study conducted five semi-structured asynchronous interviews with communication scholars and Middle East media analysts. These respondents (coded R1–R5) have experience analysing militant or ideological messaging and were consulted remotely through encrypted platforms.

Interview questions focused on 3 dimensions:

- i. The emotional and ideological resonance of Hezbollah's narratives;
- ii. Perceptions of technological and aesthetic sophistication in recent media outputs;
- iii. Thematic coherence and evolution of messaging across different conflicts. For example, one respondent (R1) observed how Nasrallah's speeches are "saturated with sacred language," confirming our textual findings. Another

(R4) discussed Hezbollah's use of "high-end media signalling," validating our interpretation of visual rhetoric. These insights provided external validation for our textual and visual readings and added experiential richness to the analysis.

To ensure ethical compliance, anonymity was guaranteed, and no identifying information was retained or published. Interview responses were used to support, not dominate, the textual analysis, serving as interpretive supplements rather than empirical anchors.

The following protocol was used in asynchronous interviews with subject-matter experts. Each respondent (coded R1–R5) received a digital consent form and responded via secure channels. Questions were open-ended, allowing elaboration. Follow-up clarifications were permitted as needed.

Temporal Scope and Case Study Structure

The timeline of analysis was segmented into four thematic case studies. Each phase allowed the study to trace continuity and adaptation in Hezbollah's messaging, revealing how core themes were retained or modified to fit changing geopolitical realities:

- i. 2006 Lebanon War: Focus on Nasrallah's "divine victory" rhetoric and the symbolic inversion of military defeat into moral triumph.
- ii. Electoral and Political Contexts: Messaging during Lebanese elections, particularly the construction of Hezbollah as both a Resistance group and a national defender.
- iii. Syria Conflict (2011–2017): Shift from defensive Resistance to regional intervention, including justifications based on protecting holy shrines and fighting ISIS.
- iv. Gaza and the Hudhud Campaign (2023–24): Emphasis on technological displays (e.g. drone footage) and solidarity rhetoric with Palestinians, culminating in the *Imad-4* narrative video.

Source Integrity and Bias Mitigation

To preserve analytical integrity, all speeches, broadcasts, and videos were drawn from publicly available official sources, allowing independent verification. No leaked or unverifiable content was used. The study also cross-referenced pro-Resistance and Western-leaning analytical sources to balance perspective and reduce ideological bias. For instance, while Hezbollah's own outlets provided insights into intent and symbolism, external think tanks (e.g. ICSR, MEMRI) offered critical readings of narrative manipulation.

The study acknowledges its interpretive nature and does not claim to measure the "effectiveness" of propaganda in empirical terms. Rather, it interprets the mechanisms and structures through which Hezbollah seeks to legitimise its actions and shape public consciousness.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section explores how Hezbollah constructs and reinforces its political-military legitimacy through strategic messaging. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA),

agenda-setting, and image-repair frameworks, and drawing on primary interview data (coded R1–R5), we identify four major communicative strategies: symbolic authority via sacred rhetoric, cognitive dominance through media saturation, narrative reframing of loss, and technological sophistication in visual propaganda. These findings are thematically integrated and illustrated with direct respondent quotes and examples from Hezbollah's communications (2006–2024).

Constructing Symbolic Authority through Sacred Rhetoric

Many respondents observed that Hezbollah's messaging operates at a deeper symbolic level, often employing sacred language to legitimise its military role. One interviewee (R1) described the rhetorical effect of Nasrallah's speeches, noting how they are "saturated with sacred language," particularly the invocation of terms like "divine victory." This framing, according to the respondent, elevates the discourse "beyond politics into spiritual mobilisation."

This aligns with Foucault's theory of discourse as a mechanism of power, wherein language shapes not only perception but also moral frameworks. By sacralising its military and political actions, Hezbollah transforms political violence into a divine obligation, rendering opposition not just politically incorrect but morally untenable. Martyrdom, Resistance, and sacrifice become not mere strategy, but sacrosanct duties. In this way, symbolic authority is constructed through the sanctification of rhetoric.

Dominating the Agenda through Thematic Saturation

Interviewees also highlighted Hezbollah's deliberate strategy of thematic saturation. One participant (R2) remarked that "when every news slot, social post, rally speech, and televised program refers back to Resistance, martyrdom, or sovereignty threats, you lose room to think anything else."

This sentiment encapsulates the agenda-setting power of Hezbollah's communication. By flooding its media ecosystem with recurring themes, the party effectively dictates what issues are perceived as important by its audience. Analysis of Al-Manar content from 2006–2024 indicates that over 70% of messaging revolves around core themes of Resistance, victimhood, and divine justification. This repetitive framing fosters a cognitive environment where alternative narratives are marginalised.

The strategy is both emotional and intellectual. Fear of external enemies is counterbalanced with pride in national and religious identity. Whether discussing economic hardship or public health, Hezbollah consistently reframes issues to reinforce its central theme of Resistance. One documentary, for instance, concludes with the line: "Where there is Resistance, there is sovereignty. Where there is surrender, there is erasure."

Narrative Reframing: From Loss to Moral Capital

Another key theme emerging from the interviews was Hezbollah's ability to reframe military or political losses as moral victories. As one respondent (R3) explained, "Hezbollah doesn't hide casualties, it rather honours them. But in doing so, it turns loss into narrative asset: you're a martyr, not a casualty."

This approach exemplifies image-repair theory, where reputational threats are countered through rhetorical strategies. Hezbollah’s 2006 war narrative demonstrates this clearly. Despite material losses, the party declared a “Divine Victory,” framing the war not as a defeat but as a testament to resilience and divine favour. This phrase was echoed across speeches, memorials, and educational materials, embedding it deeply in public consciousness.

Our visual analysis of recent media productions, particularly the 2024 video *Imad-4*, reveals similar tactics. High-definition footage of battle scenes is paired with Qur’anic recitation and poetic tributes, transforming scenes of death into moments of transcendence. In such narratives, sacrifice is not mourned but celebrated, reinforcing the idea that martyrdom is a gateway to collective honour.

Visual Sophistication and Techno-Rhetoric

Respondents also spoke to Hezbollah’s evolving use of media technology. One participant (R4) noted that “the drone footage and tunnel videos are not just propaganda, they are high-end media signalling.” Another (R5) added that even without advanced tools like AI, the careful orchestration of music, pacing, and symbolic placement reflected “media training and strategic intentionality.”

These observations point to Hezbollah’s increasing visual sophistication. From cinematic documentaries to social media shorts, the party’s communications are meticulously crafted. Our analysis of 2023–2024 footage shows that media competence itself has become a form of symbolic power. Technical prowess in visual storytelling affirms Hezbollah’s image not only as a military actor but as a professional, disciplined organisation.

This strategy speaks to newer dimensions of strategic communication, where form becomes as important as content. The visual rhetoric of competence, exemplified in drone surveillance, immersive battle re-enactments, and graphically-enhanced martyrdom tributes, functions as both proof of operational capacity and a claim to legitimacy.

Table 1: Thematic table linking empirical findings to conceptual frameworks

Analytical Dimension	Interview Insight (R)	Evidential Example	Theoretical Linkage
Symbolic Rhetoric	R1: “Sacred language... spiritual mobilisation.”	Repetition of divine terms (jihad, victory, martyrdom)	CDA: Language as constitutive of power (Anselmo et al., 2025)
Agenda Saturation	R2: “You lose room to think anything else.”	72% of media content centres on Resistance themes	Agenda-setting (Nowak, 2021; Putri et al., 2024)
Narrative Repair	R3: “You’re a martyr, not a casualty.”	Post-war rhetoric reframes loss; Imad-4 honours sacrifices	Image-repair theory (Benoit, 1997; Phillips, 2023)
Media Modernisation	R4: “High-end media signalling.”	Cinematic drone videos, 3D animations, tunnel narratives	Visual rhetoric, strategic modernity (Kanaanah, 2023)

SYNTHESIS

The findings of this study reveal a multifaceted and highly strategic communication architecture employed by Hezbollah—one that seamlessly integrates symbolic rhetoric, agenda dominance, narrative repair, and media sophistication. Each of these pillars, while analytically distinct, operates in dynamic synergy to construct and sustain the party's political and military legitimacy.

First, the use of sacralised language in Hezbollah's discourse elevates its messaging beyond the realm of ordinary political communication. Respondent R1 highlighted how speeches by Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah are imbued with "spiritual mobilisation," where terms like *jihad*, *divine victory*, and *martyrdom* are repeated ritualistically. This rhetorical strategy aligns directly with Foucauldian notions of discourse as a vehicle of power (Anselmo et al., 2025). In this context, language is not neutral—it is a moral weapon that legitimises the use of force and renders dissent as sacrilegious. Such symbolic authority effectively reconfigures violence as a sacred duty, turning the battlefield into a site of spiritual affirmation.

Second, the theme of agenda saturation reveals how Hezbollah deliberately dominates the cognitive space of its audience. R2's assertion that "you lose room to think anything else" underscores the totalising effect of repeated thematic content, namely Resistance, sovereignty, and martyrdom. This reflects the mechanisms outlined in agenda-setting theory (Nowak, 2021; Putri et al., 2024), wherein media actors influence what people consider important simply by the volume and frequency of content. In Hezbollah's case, this strategy is executed across multiple platforms—from Al-Manar TV and public billboards to Telegram channels and war documentaries—creating a unified and inescapable ideological ecosystem.

Third, the strategy of narrative reframing, as described by R3, allows Hezbollah to transform potential vulnerabilities into sources of strength. The statement "you're a martyr, not a casualty" reflects how losses are discursively reconstructed as moral victories. This corresponds with Benoit's image-repair theory, wherein reputational threats are mitigated through rhetorical strategies such as denial, justification, or transcendence (Phillips, 2023). Our visual analysis confirms this trend in the 2024 *Imad-4* production, where the depiction of battlefield deaths is aestheticized through Qur'anic verse and poetic eulogy. This not only preserves the dignity of the fallen but also reinforces the party's narrative of divine favour and heroic perseverance.

Finally, visual sophistication emerges as both a tactical tool and a symbolic register of modernity. Respondents R4 and R5 noted Hezbollah's use of high-end media formats—such as drone footage, 3D tunnel reconstructions, and cinematic pacing—not merely as propaganda but as "signalling mechanisms" of operational competence. This strategy aligns with recent literature on visual rhetoric and strategic communication, particularly Kanaaneh's (2023) work on Hezbollah's use of popular media to encode its Resistance ideology. The party's evolving media arsenal allows it to appeal to younger, tech-savvy demographics, enhance credibility among domestic and regional audiences, and counter competing narratives that portray it as regressive or extremist.

Taken together, these strategies are not used in isolation. Rather, they are mutually reinforcing components of a holistic communicative system. A Nasrallah speech saturated with sacred metaphors (rhetoric) is reinforced by a martyrdom

poster (visual cue), which aligns with a viral Al-Manar documentary (agenda) and echoes the same themes found in street chants, memorial sites, and classroom materials. All of these elements embed within a Foucauldian moral cosmology that defines Hezbollah's interpretive universe.

This synthesis also underscores how Hezbollah maintains discursive hegemony even during times of military or political instability. By controlling both the message (content) and the medium (form), the party positions itself as the ultimate arbiter of truth and Resistance in the Lebanese context. Its discourse operates simultaneously at the cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic levels, an architecture of legitimacy that is not easily dismantled. Moreover, the intentional blending of religious symbolism with strategic communication tools allows Hezbollah to project resilience, sanctity, and modernity in a single narrative frame.

In summary, Hezbollah's strategic messaging represents a case of ideologically anchored communication that integrates power, faith, and technology to maintain symbolic capital and moral high ground. The organisation's mastery of discursive and visual strategies ensures its continued relevance, not merely as a military actor but as a hegemonic voice in the political and cultural landscapes of Lebanon and the broader Middle East.

LIMITATIONS

Despite the depth and breadth of this study's analysis of Hezbollah's strategic communication, several limitations must be addressed to contextualise its findings and guide future research trajectories.

Restricted Access to Internal Sources

A primary constraint was the lack of direct access to Hezbollah's internal messaging apparatus. Due to the sensitive nature of the organisation and security-related restrictions, interviews with actual Hezbollah operatives, media personnel, or affiliated spokespeople were not feasible. Consequently, the qualitative insights presented here are based on external analysts and Middle East communication scholar's familiar with Hezbollah's media practices. While this provides valuable third-party perspectives, it limits the study's ability to assess intentionality and behind-the-scenes strategic planning. Insider testimonies would provide richer, more authentic data on the mechanisms of message construction and audience targeting.

Publicly Available Content as a Sample

The discourse and visual materials examined in this study are sourced from publicly accessible platforms, such as Al-Manar television, Hezbollah's official websites, Nasrallah's televised addresses, and social media outputs. However, Hezbollah is known to maintain internal channels of communication (e.g., secure forums, WhatsApp groups, or face-to-face religious briefings) where narratives may be more ideologically intense or contextually nuanced. These channels remain inaccessible to researchers; thus, the analysis potentially omits dimensions of the discourse reserved for internal or elite audiences.

Translation and Cultural Contextualisation Challenges

Although the research team includes Arabic speakers and efforts were made to preserve the fidelity of original phrases, any cross-linguistic study faces limitations. Hezbollah's use of religious metaphors, Qur'anic allusions, or cultural idioms may not always transfer seamlessly into English. The symbolic weight of a term like "*muqawama*" (Resistance), for instance, may have layered meanings, spiritual, political, historical, that lose subtlety when translated. Moreover, rhetorical devices such as repetition, rhythm, and liturgical cadence in Nasrallah's oratory are challenging to replicate in English, potentially flattening the emotive or persuasive power perceived by Arabic-speaking audiences.

Temporal Complexity and Political Flux

This study spans a wide historical timeframe from the 2006 Lebanon War through the Syrian conflict and up to the recent 2023–24 Gaza war. While this longitudinal scope allows for tracing thematic continuity, it also introduces variability. Hezbollah's messaging is responsive to political shifts, e.g., changes in Israeli military posture, Lebanese electoral crises, or regional alliances, which means that thematic emphases may fluctuate. For example, during the Syrian war (2011–2017), sectarian language increased slightly, while post-2020 messaging returned to a more pan-Arab Resistance frame. Treating these shifts as part of a cohesive strategy risks overlooking contextual adaptations.

Limited Audience Reception Data

The study's analytical focus is on message production rather than reception. That is, it evaluates what Hezbollah says and how it says it, but not how diverse audiences interpret or internalise these messages. The absence of empirical audience studies (e.g., surveys, focus groups) means the paper cannot fully measure the persuasive or mobilising effect of Hezbollah's communications. While the interviews offer interpretive insights from communication professionals, they do not substitute for direct audience feedback, particularly from grassroots supporters or critics.

Incomplete Access to Digital Propagation Metrics

Hezbollah's media strategy increasingly leverages digital technologies, including viral videos, memes, livestreams, and encrypted chat groups. However, this study does not include an analysis of metadata, such as engagement rates, comment sentiment, or algorithmic reach, on platforms like Telegram, YouTube, or Twitter/X. These metrics are crucial for understanding how messages travel, resonate, or are contested in digital public spheres. The absence of such data restricts the study's ability to quantify impact or identify key nodes of online influence.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To build upon the insights of this study and address its identified gaps, several research directions are proposed. These suggestions aim to advance academic understanding while also offering practical implications for policymakers, journalists, and civil society actors.

Audience Reception and Interpretive Communities

One critical avenue is to examine how Hezbollah's messages are received, decoded, and interpreted by different audiences. Reception studies by using interviews, surveys, or ethnographic observation, could shed light on how narratives of martyrdom, Resistance, or victimhood are experienced by youth, women, diaspora communities, or political opponents. Understanding audience segmentation (by class, sect, or region) would allow a more granular mapping of communicative effectiveness. Such research could also uncover points of cognitive dissonance, rejection, or reinterpretation.

Comparative Analysis with Other Militant or Political Actors

Hezbollah is not alone in deploying strategic communication within a religious-nationalist framework. Comparative studies with groups such as Hamas, the Popular Mobilization Forces (Iraq), or the Houthis (Yemen) could illuminate both shared discursive tropes and divergent framing strategies. For instance, how do these groups differently sacralise Resistance, use media aesthetics, or respond to reputational threats? A comparative lens would refine theoretical models of militant image repair, especially across Sunni-Shia ideological divides.

Digital Metrics and Platform-Based Research

To fully capture the dynamics of digital propaganda, future studies should collaborate with data scientists or social media analytics firms. This would allow researchers to track viewership trends, virality, sentiment fluctuations, and bot activity associated with Hezbollah content. Understanding which messages gain traction, on which platforms, and among which demographics would enhance both academic and policy-level analyses. Network mapping of pro-Resistance influencers and their amplification strategies could also help identify gatekeepers and information hubs in the digital ecosystem.

Access to Internal Doctrinal Materials

Where ethically and logistically feasible, future research should examine Hezbollah's internal communication, such as training manuals, doctrinal videos, or cadre-level educational pamphlets. These materials may reveal strategic differences between internal indoctrination and public persuasion, offering a rare glimpse into the group's layered communication model. Such an analysis could help disentangle propaganda from pedagogy, especially in religious seminaries or militia camps.

Psycholinguistic and NLP-Based Analysis

Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools, particularly those designed for Arabic corpora, could be applied to Nasrallah's speeches and Al-Manar broadcasts. Sentiment analysis, metaphor mapping, and keyword frequency tracking would enable a more systematic study of emotional appeals, ideological patterns, and rhetorical shifts. For example, changes in the use of fear-based vs. pride-based language could be tracked over time or across crises. These quantitative methods would complement the qualitative insights of CDA and agenda-setting theory.

Applied Policy and Counter-Narrative Development

Finally, think tanks, governmental bodies, and international NGOs can benefit from the findings of this and related research. By understanding the emotive and symbolic grammar of Hezbollah's communication, these actors can design more resonant and culturally sensitive counter-narratives. Importantly, such responses must not merely be fact-based rebuttals, but rather engage with the affective, religious, and historical dimensions of Hezbollah's appeal. Collaborations between media scholars and strategic communication experts could yield practical tools for narrative competition in conflict zones.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how Hezbollah constructs, maintains, and amplifies its political-military legitimacy through strategic communication. By applying a multi-theoretical framework, drawing from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), agenda-setting theory, image-repair strategies, and visual rhetoric, the study provides analysis of Hezbollah's public messaging across textual, visual, and audio-visual formats. Primary interviews provided first-hand insights that enriched and grounded the theoretical discussion.

The findings demonstrate that Hezbollah's messaging is neither ad hoc nor purely ideological, it is an orchestrated system designed to assert symbolic power, cognitive dominance, and narrative control. Through sacred rhetoric, the party sacralises its actions, transforming military engagement into divine duty. Through agenda saturation, it monopolises the information ecosystem, leaving little discursive space for counter-narratives. Through narrative repair, it reframes losses into moral victories, cementing a sense of communal sacrifice. And through sophisticated media production, it communicates professionalism and technological competence, projecting strength both internally and externally.

These strategies are not isolated. Rather, they are mutually reinforcing, forming an integrated discourse machine that combines emotional resonance, religious authority, and modern media aesthetics. Hezbollah's communication thus constitutes more than just propaganda, it is a strategic, symbolic system through which the group sustains its hegemony in the Lebanese political and social landscape.

Ultimately, this analysis contributes to the literature on militant communication, Resistance ideologies, and strategic narrative construction. It also offers a model for understanding how non-state actors build legitimacy in hybrid war and post-conflict environments, not just through battlefield victories but through the careful construction of meaning, memory, and media.

BIODATA

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