



# Narrativity and Multimodal Communication in The New Media Age

Muhammad Hasyim\*, Burhanuddin Arafah

Hasanuddin University

\*Corresponding author. Email: [hasyimfrance@unhas.ac.id](mailto:hasyimfrance@unhas.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

The internet era has changed the rules of social communication. In today's digital age, communication mediums have provided the widest possible access to internet users. The hallmark of digital media is social semiotics that uses complex multimodalities (a combination of verbal and nonverbal signs, such as emoji, images, video, audio, and music). The multimodality of internet use can cause communication problems, leading to misunderstandings of the message. This paper aims to identify how to use narrative and multimodal communication in the new media age. The approach used was semiotics, which sees the media as a transmission medium of multimodal signs. This paper concludes that the use of multimodal communication can lead to communication problems due to the emergence of multiple interpretations. This research shows it is important for internet users to adopt a digital media culture (a critical attitude when responding to different things that they receive and spread).

**Keywords:** *Cultured digital media, Multimodal communication, Narrativity, Semiotic.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication problems are still one of the interesting issues to be discussed. The issues pertain to social media communications, namely reading and interpreting messages in digital media texts. It is undeniable that social semiotic multimodality is a widely used approach to communication between users on social media, e.g., the use of verbal and nonverbal signs (emojis, videos, music, audio, etc.), which occurs simultaneously. The phenomenon of language (verbal and non-verbal) has colored communication between users in digital media.

Today, we live in the information age (digital era). Digital media help to connect people around the globe. In addition, digital media makes it easier to interact with each other and provides quick access to information and can communicate limitlessly. Interactive media make people not only receive information, but also can create, send, and share information with anyone and anywhere.

Long before, McLuhan (1911-1980) stated that in 1960-1970 the world community were facilitated by the availability and ease of access to information in different parts of the world (Danesi, 2002). People can easily and quickly get information about events in a country.

Digital devices such as smartphones, tablets and notebooks have become gateways to information access. We can explore the world with one finger to find information. Television programs that were watched using LED TV are now available using applications on smartphones and social media. The local, national, and international press have presented news and information in online and print versions. Moreover, starting from elementary school up until university, they have also used digital media to support their learning activities. Technological aids have become a necessity for learners, such as online dictionaries, verb conjugations, and other teaching materials. A concrete example is Covid-19. The pandemic caused a global learning crisis at all levels of education to use online-based learning media. Furthermore, everyone purchases their daily necessities online.

The information age has changed the way the world community think and behaves. The results of a survey conducted by Vulchanova (2017) showed that many mothers in the UK use tablets to read a story or fairy tale before bedtime. Many mothers show animated video stories for kids on YouTube to help their children eat well (Geddes, 2019). In the United States, a survey of parents with children aged 2-4 months shows that at the age of 3 months, about 40% of children regularly watch TV, DVDs or videos, and at the age of 24 months, the

number increases up to 90% (Zimmerman, 2005). Other studies have also explained that babies without media exposure show lower language development compared to those who are exposed to media (Ferguson & Donnellan, 2014). Research in the United States shows that 'social' robots have a positive effect on the language development of children (Westlud, 2016). In his research, Sheridan (2016) claims that digital technologies transform the way humans learn and teach, as well as the way humans write and research, and it happens in all academic disciplines, including humanities fields. The digital age evoked what is now called the Digital Humanities (DH). Different countries, such as America, define and describe DH projects in all activities.

It is undeniable that based on data from wearesocial.com (2020), the number of internet users around the world in 2020 reached 4.5 billion people or over 60 per cent of the world's population. It means that more than half of the world's population now uses social media. Out of 4.5 billion, 3.8 billion people of those use social media.

The number of social media users is constantly growing. This can certainly create a new society (*cyber society*) that is not limited by time and space. Internet users can communicate with each other limitless in real-time. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the number of internet users has reached over 50% of the total population in 2020. This is evidenced by data from *We Are Social* (2020) that there were 175.4 million internet users in Indonesia in 2020. The most widely used application is social media.

The results of research from *We Are Social* in collaboration with Hootsuite (2022) state that most Indonesians spend an average of 3 hours and 26 minutes on social media every day. Indonesia has a social media penetration of 59% (160% million active users) and 99% of Indonesians access social media on their smartphones. Furthermore, the ten most popular social media platforms in Indonesia. YouTube is the most widely used application with 88% of users between 16-64 years old. Meanwhile, the popular social platforms are WhatsApp (84%), Facebook (82%), and Instagram (79%).

The information age has impacted the development of various fields because of different types of innovations (Schwab, 2016). The impact of the digital era affects language usage as multimodality semiotic in social media. Multimodality semiotic is a computer-mediated communication (McQuail, 1997), human communication that occurs through the use of digital media formats (chatting, email, messages, forums and social networking) and text-based communication (social media messages). Multimodality semiotic is a system that connects the sender and receiver with internet intermediaries that allow them to talk to each other. The

language of Multimodality semiotic has become a focus of linguistic research. For example, a linguistic approach is used to understand language use in computer-mediated communication by examining the use of features, such as emojis, loanwords, sentence structure in chat rooms, and pragmatic rules in communication including conversations, registers, styles and dialects. Language studies as multimodality semiotic is a form of text-based computer-mediated communication (computer-mediated discourse analysis).

According to Gee and Hayes (2016), the rapid evolution of digital technologies affects linguistic variations. The language used in digital communication, especially on social media being discussed is the use of verbal and visual language (emoji) in social media. Nowadays, internet users use verbal and non-verbal language (emojis) to express thoughts and feelings. Emojis have dominated the conversations (chats) on social media. The communication phenomena found in social media is the use of social semiotic multimodality, a combination of verbal and nonverbal language, for example, emoji that uses simultaneously in communication (conversation) on social media.

The use of language in CMC in the digital era is an intriguing phenomenon to consider. The digital era is marked by the increasing use of social media that changes the way people (internet users) communicate (conveying messages). The language phenomena, particularly found in social media, is the use of social semiotic multimodality. The use of verbal and non-verbal language (one of which is emoji) occurs simultaneously when conveying ideas and expressing emotions on social media, both personally and in a group. The social semiotic multimodality in verbal and non-verbal (visual) communication has become a current issue, and an approach that can be used to discuss the phenomenon is semiotics. The purpose of media semiotics (social) is to understand how semiotic resources are used by internet users in digital media.

Semiotic analysis is an analysis of language in digital media and is one of the approaches that are taken into consideration. Conveying meaning through signs in digital media is closely related to semiotics, which has a focus on sign systems. In semiotics, digital media text production is at a denotative (informative) level. Text circulation (publication) is a process of exchanging signs between the text and the reader. Text consumption is the process of conveying meaning through reading a text, which generates denotations, connotations, and myths (Barthes, 1977). Semiotic analysis of digital media texts is to focus on how humans or internet users produce, circulate (disseminate), and consume (interpret) digital media texts. According to Riffaterre (1978), the meaning of a text is carried out through a process of dialectics and readers (internet users), namely the dialectic between denotation and connotation.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

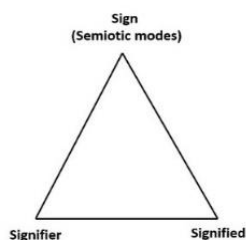
### *The basic semiotic concept in computer-mediated communication*

Images, symbols, signs, and other things with similar meanings are all studied in the scientific field of semiotics. It seeks to comprehend their purpose and significance. In a social context, semiotics looks for the meaning of these objects (social media). Social semiotics is a branch of post-structuralist theories that combine social interaction and structuralist semiotics' tools. A subfield of semiotics is called social media semiotics studies: how people make meaning in particular social and cultural contexts and makes an effort to explain meaning-making as a social practice. To produce various texts and meanings in a variety of situational contexts and contexts of culturally significant activity, social media semiotics also makes use of semiotic practices unique to cultures and communities. In social media semiotics, complex signs are used to study human interaction.

Saussure (1959) has emphasized the concept of signs by defining a science that studies the role of signs as part of social life. Signs are part of the life of society. A sign is a system of verbal and nonverbal language (images, graphics, photographs, etc.) that is created and communicated. Semiotics in multimodal communication can be seen in Figure 1.

Barthes (1957) developed a broader view of signs, which are not only a language but also any sign that is outside the language (photography, fashion, magazines, and films). Halliday (1978) and Van Leeuwen (2005) use the term "semiotic resources," which gives a view of signs built on relationships between modes. The concept of semiotic resources that Van Leeuwen referred to includes obvious modes of communication such as language, gesture, images, and music, but also less obvious ones such as food, dress, and everyday objects, all of which carry cultural value and significance. A semiotic resource is a resource for meaning making.

By reference to Van Leeuwen's semiotics, a sign that produces individual and universal meanings (Hall, 1980; Williamson, 1978) is largely determined by the sign resources. The question that can be raised related to semiotics is how experts' study digital media that enable people to communicate and interact with their online



**Figure 1** Semiotics in multimodal communication.

communities and social networks using signs. Semiotics studies how people make meaning as part of social practices and how the use of signs as a system of signs in society (Poulsen & Kvale, 2018).

Therefore, the primary object of media semiotics is multimodal texts, for example, posts on social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, and the next is social practices in virtual communities and social networks. The use of text in digital media is inseparable from technological features for design, production, distribution, and consumption. For example, creating a text post on WhatsApp not only involves capturing and uploading images but also using other features, such as emojis, videos, photos, and so on. Users are actively involved in the process of meaning-making by selecting and negotiating with the various features offered by digital media.

Multimodal digital semiotics involves the use of technology (*multimodality*). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) between users and other Internet users communicate using internet technology using multimodality; they communicate using different modes at the same time, for example, verbal language including emojis, graphics, images, videos, audios, music, and others (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).

The semiotic modes (multimodality) are now expanding the scope of linguistics to explain the prevalence of emojis, images, audios, and videos as modalities and how multimodal communication combines traditional and digital media (social media). Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) extended Halliday's social semiotic and applied a new functional "grammar" in social network communication. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), this grammar is seen as a semiotic resource that is created by social networks and is used to produce meaning formed by multimodality.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

The object of the research is a conversational text using multimodality (verbal and nonverbal signs) in related social media. In addition, direct observations were made of conversations on social media. The author uses descriptive research methods to describe the characteristics of phenomena in social media texts. The theory of semiotics is used to explain language phenomena syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically in communication on social media. The author uses a questionnaire data collection method that is distributed online to respondents, observes communication between social media users and studies literature. The number of respondents was as many as 300 people. The characteristics of respondents are 1). gender: male, 4.5%, female 55.6%; 2). Age: 12-20 (31.2%), 21-59 (68.2%), > 60 (0.6%); 3). Education: Junior high school (1.6%), Senior high school (57.3%),

bachelor’s degree (21.6%), master’s degree (12.5%), Doctorate degree (3%) and occupation: student (70 .1%), Civil servant (11.8%), Employee (5.2%), Entrepreneur (4.8%), lecturer (3.9%) and etc. (5.1%)

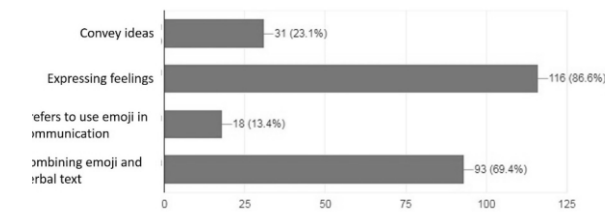
**4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Studies related to semiotic multimodality have been carried out. Hermawan (2013) has analysed the use of multimodality (verbal and nonverbal language used simultaneously) in understanding the text. The results of his research show that the meaning of digital media texts cannot be analysed only with linguistic analysis tools, but requires two different analytical tools, namely linguistics, and image analysis tools to find a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of the text. Jewitt and Henriksen (2016) have applied a social semiotic multimodal approach to the social media platform Pinterest to explore the multimodal design of users through normal-social norms interactions using the multimodality of writing (verbal language), colours and images. The focus of the research in this paper is communication on social media with the use of multimodality (verbal and non-verbal language) which produces a model of multimodality communication in social media.

**4.1. Social Semiotic of Verbal and Visual Language in Multimodal Communication**

The phenomenon of language (linguistics) in multimodal communication is the use of social semiotics by combining verbal and non-verbal language. One example of non-verbal cues is emojis as a sign system. Emojis are social semiotic resources that have a standardized system used on social media. Specifically, emoji as a sign system in digital media consists of three categories, namely smileys and people (facial expression), animals and nature, food and drink, activity, travel and places, and objects, symbols, and flags. A social semiotic multimodal emoji is a sign used to link signifiers and signified. The signifiers are emojis in different categories that can be selected by social media users according to the message to be conveyed, and the signified is the meaning produced by emojis. Signifiers are how individuals use emoji forms to express thoughts, emotions, and feelings in various situational contexts. Emoji (signifier) is the expression, and emoji (signified) is the meaning (content). Multimodal communication is a combination of verbal language and emojis as a signifier together that produces meaning (signified). The use of a combination of verbal language and emojis in multimodal communication represents emotions (happy, sad), thoughts, etc.

This data shows that internet users can express their emotions and feelings using emojis (e.g., smileys and people) in conversations on WhatsApp. Non-verbal

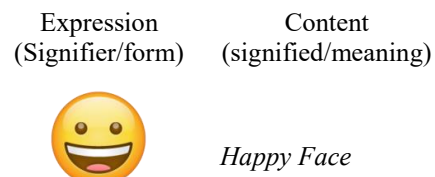


**Figure 2** The proportion of Emoji forms used by participants.

communication with emojis also indicates the existence of an open attitude (in public spaces) to express feelings and emotions.

The emojis available in WhatsApp are the languages that each type has been given the identity of an emoji so that internet users can use them based on their situational contexts. The data in figure 2 shows that 86.6% of users use emojis to express feelings and subjective aspects that respondents most frequently use in communication. The Parole emoji shows how freedom of expression in public spaces (social media) can be seen not only between the sender and the interlocutor but also among the rest of the participants, for example in one WhatsApp group.

Semiotically, the choices of emojis by internet users in communicating are excretions as signifiers that evoke meaning as signified, thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the senders (internet users). The interlocutor can interpret or understand the senders’ intentions through their expressions (signifiers). Emoji signifying can be seen in Figure 3.



**Figure 3** Emoji signifying.



**Figure 4** Emoji Placement in Sentences.

The text used in delivering the message indicates that, in addition to verbal language, non-verbal language such as emoji is part of the text (sentence structure). Thus, text on social media consists of both verbal and non-verbal language (emojis). Sentence structure in social media (e.g., WhatsApp) indicates that social media users use social semiotic multimodality, a combination of verbal language and non-verbal language (emojis). It can be seen in the sentence structure; that is, emojis are placed at the beginning and end of the sentence. Based on the data, 76.9% of users place emojis at the ends of sentences, 14.2% in the middle of sentences, and 9% at the beginning of sentences. It indicates that the emoji is a cover function in a sentence. The non-verbal language (emoji) serves as a punctuation mark, replacing a period. An example of the use of emoji at the end of a sentence can be seen in Figure 4.

Emojis that are elements of sentences can be illustrated in a combination of verbal text use (sentences) and emojis. Figure 5 shows that internet users prefer to communicate with a combination of verbal text and emoji in conveying messages. Users construct sentences with a combination of verbal text and emojis to convey ideas and express feelings. Likewise, when they reply to a message from the interlocutor. The reply is a combination of verbal text and emoji. In the sentence structure, emoji serve to give emphasis and meaning to the message conveyed. The emojis as social semiotic multimodality in WhatsApp, consisting of smileys and people, animals and nature, food and drink, activity, travel and places, objects, symbols, and flags, have

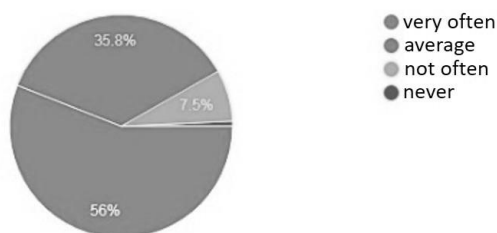


Figure 5 The frequency of emoji usage in multimodal communication.

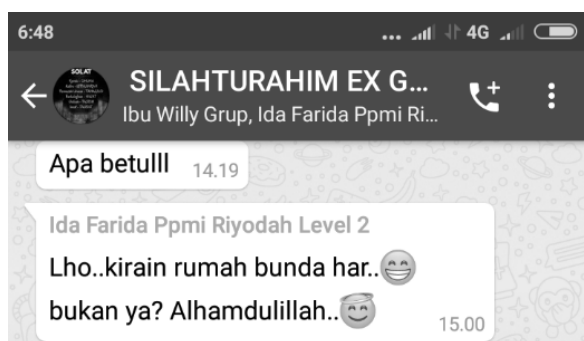


Figure 6 Emoji Syntax.

Table 1. Semantics of emoji

Emoji	Semantic
	<i>Grinning Face:</i> <i>A yellow face with straight, open eyes and a wide, open smile that exposed some of the top teeth and tongue. Frequently communicates feelings of joy, gladness, or humor.</i> <i>(<a href="https://emojipedia.org/grinning-face/">https://emojipedia.org/grinning-face/</a>)</i>
	<i>Face Blowing a Kiss:</i> <i>A little, crimson heart is portrayed as a yellow face winking with puckered lips blowing a kiss. may signify a kiss good-bye or good-night and, more broadly, convey feelings of love and affection.</i> <i>(<a href="https://emojipedia.org/face-throwing-a-kiss/">https://emojipedia.org/face-throwing-a-kiss/</a>)</i>
	<i>Loudly Crying Face:</i> <i>a sobbing yellow face with an open mouth and closed eyes, crying torrents of heavy tears. may transmit other strong emotions, such as uncontrollable laughter or overpowering delight, in addition to inconsolable grief.</i> <i>(<a href="https://emojipedia.org/loudly-crying-face/">https://emojipedia.org/loudly-crying-face/</a>)</i>

meaning. The naming of each emoji places emphasis on the emoji's usage. For example, the smiley and person emojis are given some examples in Table 1.

The names of emojis describe their identities. For example, the facial expression "grinning face" shows the meaning of pleasure and joy so that WhatsApp users can use the emoji to express these feelings. The list of names of emoji is the purpose of denoting, which became the basis for the user to convey meanings of connotation as a form of expression and the expression of feelings. It can be mentioned in a sentence using an example in figure 6.

Pragmatics in multimodal communication shows that the use of social semiotic multimodality (verbal language and non-verbal emoji) is the interaction of conversations (speech acts) between the speaker and the interlocutor. Through social semiotic multimodality, emotional relationships are known to be involved in the conversation on social media. In pragmatics, social

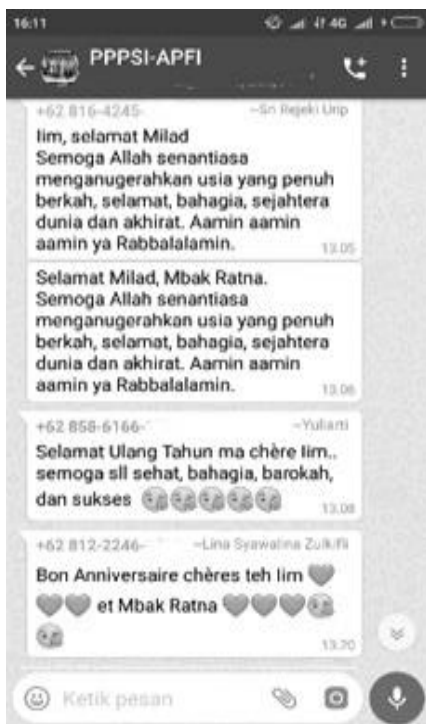


Figure 7 Pragmatic emoji.

semiotic multimodality (a combination of verbal language and emoji) serves as a medium for conveying personal and general messages. Social semiotic multimodality can also indicate communication between personas, relaxed or official atmospheres, social relations, and hierarchical relationships between personas. This can be seen in the communication between teachers and students, the relationship between parents and children, peer relationships, etc.

One example in figure 7 is the WhatsApp group of the All-Indonesia French Language Teachers Association (PPPSI). The context of the conversation is that one of its members is having a birthday, and another member is congratulating. The social semiotic multimodality in those conversations shows the relationship between colleagues of fellow members and the relationship of familiarity. Birthday wishes end with non-verbal language emojis that have the function of strengthening the meaning and relationships of fellow group members.

## 5. CONCLUSION

With the presence of semiotic multimodality, communication on social media by users produces three communication models. First, communication using verbal language; second, communication using a combination of verbal and nonverbal language (emoji language, video, music, sound, etc.); and third, communication using non-verbal language (emoji, photos, videos, audio, music, etc.).

Communication with multimodal communication shows that the interactivity of communication between

two or more people (in one group) takes place in real-time and is connected without regional (country) boundaries. The interactivity of communication in semiotic mode by internet users also shows its role as text production (messages), publisher (shared messages) and text consumer. On the one hand, they can produce texts (messages, news, comments, etc.) and publish them. However, on the other hand, they are text connoisseurs (news, information, and even hoaxes).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study was created and planned by all authors. The experiment was carried out, the data was analyzed, and the paper was written by Muhammad Hasyim and Burhanuddin Arafah. Each author made edits to the work. The final drafts of the manuscript were approved by all authors, who also consent to have responsibility for their work's content.

## REFERENCES

- Barthes, R. (1957). *Mythologies*. Paris: Editions du Seuil. Imprint.
- Barthes, R. (1977). Image, music, text. (S. Heath, Ed.) *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Vol. 37, p. 220). Hill and Wang. doi: 10.2307/429854
- Danesi, M. (2018). *Understanding media semiotics*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ferguson, C. J., & Donnellan, M. B. (2014). Is the association between children's baby video viewing and poor language development robust? A reanalysis of Zimmerman, Christakis, and Meltzoff (2007). *Developmental Psychology*, 50(1), 129.
- Geddes, L. (2019). What's so fascinating about weird children's TV shows? Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20191206-why-children-find-weird-television-so-mesmerising>
- Gee, J. P., & Hayes, E. R. (2011). *Language and learning in the digital age*. Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse. *University of Birmingham*.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1978). *Language as Social Semiotic*. London: Arnold
- Hermawan, B. (2013). Multimodality: Menafsir verbal, membaca gambar, dan memahami teks. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 13(1), 19-28.

- Hootsuite. (2022). Indonesian Digital Report 2022. Retrieved from <https://andi.link/hootsuite-we-are-social-indonesian-digital-report-2022/>
- Jewitt, C. Henriksen, B. (2016). Social Semiotic Multimodality. *Handbuch Sprache im multimodalen Kontext*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Munich/Boston
- Kress, G., and Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge.
- McLuhan, Marshall. (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- McQuail, D., & Windahl, S. (1997). *Communication models for study of mass communications*. London: Longman.
- Riffaterre, Michael. (1978). *Semiotics of Poetry*. London: Indiana of University Press.
- Saussure, de Ferdinand. (1959). *Course In General Linguistics*. New York: Philosophical Library
- Schwab, Klaus. (2016). *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum
- Sheridan, M. P. (2016). Recent Trends in Digital Humanities Scholarship. *Dejica, Daniel, Gyde Hansen, Peter Sandrini & Iulia Para (eds.)*, 2-13.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2005). *Introducing social semiotics*. Psychology Press.
- Vulchanova, M., Baggio, G., Cangelosi, A., Smith, Linda. (2017). Editorial: Understanding Language Development in the Digital Age. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 11 (447), 1-7
- Westlund, O. (2013). Mobile News: A Review and Model of Journalism in an Age of Mobile Media, *Digital Journalism*, 1 (1), 6-26
- Williamson, Judith. (1978). *Decoding Advertisements*. London: Marion Boyars.
- Zimmerman, F. J., and Christakis, D. A. (2005). Children's television viewing and cognitive outcomes: a longitudinal analysis of national data. *Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med*, 159, 619–625.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

