



Maison Française d'Oxford
Institut français de recherche à l'étranger



How social media change the journalistic sphere: cross-cultural perspectives on the circulation of digital posts on news media websites

27 October 2023

Convenors : Pr. Sophie Marnette (University of Oxford), Pr. Pascal Marty (Maison Française d'Oxford), Pr. Laurence Rosier (Université libre de Bruxelles), Pr. Françoise Sullet-Nylander (Stockholms universitet), Dr. Grégoire Lacaze (Aix-Marseille Université, Maison Française d'Oxford)

[International Seminar on Social Media Discourse Analysis \(ISSMDA\)](#)

[Channels of Digital Scholarship](#)

([Maison Française d'Oxford](#) and [Digital Scholarship @Oxford](#))

Zoom session

Register here:

<https://univ-amu-fr.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcrd-GspjssEtzb3VpvfUowZ7M6T16SxuLc>

1pm-1:20pm (UK time): opening speech

1:20pm – 2pm

- Erin McInerney (Université de Strasbourg / University of Glasgow)

“Making old news newsworthy: The Instagram ‘French girl’ and the perpetual reconstruction of French femininity in news media”

This paper explores the reproduction of Instagram user-generated content by news media. Leaning on the thematic dimensions of gender and multimodality, we consider how news media recycle ‘Instagrammable’ discursive practices to remake already familiar cultural figures in the public imagination. The figure that concerns this study is the French woman, better known on Instagram as the ‘French girl’. Using a sociolinguistic and socialsemiotic framework, this paper presents a corpus of news articles from the online edition of Vogue magazine which use Instagram content to illustrate and characterise the ‘French girl’ archetype. Two research questions were identified for this purpose. The first sought to identify the micro- and macro-discursive functions served by Instagram content in the selected news articles. The second line of inquiry questioned the linguistic and semiotic homogeneity of these articles and the relationship of these similarities to ‘French girl’-type content on Instagram. Previous research on multimodality, elite discourse and gender performance online frames this paper’s theoretical approach (Goffman, 1979; Dobson, 2015; Baker and Walsh, 2018; Blackwood, 2019; 2021). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis were conducted on the Vogue articles in the corpus, each of which was published between 2021 and 2023. Following analysis, we conclude that the Instagram platform and its user-generated content offer a large range of communicative affordances to Vogue. By incorporating the images of Instagram creators into the magazine’s articles, Vogue is able to provide ‘new’ semiotic material to its readers and recapitulate its ‘French girl’ discourse ad nauseam. Findings revealed a number of salient collocations and phrases that resurfaced in the corpus, each article of which was written by a different author. The use of repetitive language about what it means to be ‘French’ and female in Vogue mirrors a similar uniformity present in digital ‘French girl’ discourses visible on Instagram. Consequently, we suggest that the use of Instagram content by news media contributes to a larger phenomenon of micro- and macro- homogeneity in fashion news. The widespread use of linguistic heterogeneity in publications such as Vogue renders these magazines complicit in the recycling and redistribution of a set of narrow cultural stereotypes in the public sphere. We posture in conclusion that Instagram’s reach and influence on major publications have demonstrated the ability of online trends to transcend digital boundaries and subsequently, participate in the construction of a figure in the public imagination, even for individuals who are not users of the platform.

Keywords: Digital Discourses, Critical Discourse Analysis, Multimodal Discourse, Gender Performances, Instagram

2pm-2:40pm

- André Gouws (Stellenbosch University and Akademia)

“The creation of a new type of public sphere by journalistic boundary workers”

The journalistic public sphere plays an important role in society, as a platform for deliberation on issues of public importance, on behalf of the public (see Garnier et al, 2020; McNair, 2018; Bruns & Highfield, 2016). However, the continuing loss of influence by legacy media in local and hyperlocal areas around the world has led to the need for a re-imagination of what the journalistic public sphere means in the digital era. My presentation, which flows from my PhD study, departs from an understanding that journalism, its functions, and actors can no longer be understood by relying on assumptions about the hegemony of legacy media (Mellado, Geirgiou & Nah, 2019:333). The online public sphere is no longer a space only occupied by journalists. Various new actors participate on social media in the creation of an alternative public sphere, competing with or entirely replacing the journalistic public sphere. The online public sphere is an online space where citizens deliberate on issues of public importance (see Bruns & Highfield, 2016; Reese & Shoemaker, 2016), on the boundaries of journalism. These actors are often seen as interlopers by journalists and researchers, but should be examined as new actors in the field of journalism (Swart et al., 2022), who are re-defining the meaning of journalism. Boundary work is one theoretical perspective that can help explore what counts as the journalistic public sphere (Carlson, 2018). Boundary work typology provides a way to investigate, analyse and describe the new type of public sphere emerging on social media. My PhD work aims to describe and define the characteristics of the online public sphere on the shifting boundaries of journalism, in a South African context. Exploring and describing this new type of public sphere, specifically as manifested on Facebook due to its dominance in South Africa, is important because of the key role of this communal communicative space in public deliberations. This is particularly important because the journalistic public sphere is losing its hegemonic role as the main mediator of the public sphere. My presentation to this conference is a conceptual argument about the emergence of a new type of online public sphere through social media, which does not appear to function as part of the traditional journalistic public sphere.

2:40pm-3:20pm

- Manel Salem (Université Sorbonne Paris Nord)

“Breaking Barriers and Building Synergy: How Social Media Changed the Game for Traditional News Media in the Arab World during and after the Arab Revolution”

In the wake of the Arab revolution, social media played a significant role in changing life in the Arab world. Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook provided a space for people to share information, organize protests, and connect with others who shared their views. As a result, social media played a key role in toppling authoritarian regimes and promoting democracy in the region. In addition, social media have become increasingly important to the journalistic sphere in the Arab world. With traditional news media outlets often facing censorship and restrictions on their reporting, journalists have turned to social media to spread information and reach a wider audience. Platforms such as Twitter and YouTube have enabled citizen journalists to document events in real-time and share their experiences with the world. Today, social media continue to shape the political and social landscape of the Arab world. They have provided a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, and have enabled the rapid dissemination of information in a region where traditional media outlets are often controlled by the state. As a result, social media become an indispensable tool for serious traditional media, and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

3:20pm-3:30pm : break

3:30pm-4:10pm

- Johannes Angermuller (Open University)

“Social media as a regime of discursive (in)visibility”

What do Greta Thunberg, Kanye West and Noam Chomsky have in common? They are all celebrities in a public arena where they exist because they are visible (cf. Angermuller & Hamann 2019). They are examples of individuals entering discourse by occupying highly visible subject positions in their communities (cf. Pêcheux 1975). Yet actors are involved in struggles over visibility whenever they enter discourse whether they gain notoriety or not. If language is the fundamental medium for making the subject visible (Benveniste 1974), social media technologies have amplified the capacity of a few distinct speakers to monopolise the attention of the many who are barely heard or not at all (Angermuller 2018). In this contribution, I will deal with the challenges of studying social media as a regime of visibility. While linguists usually ask how subjects are made visible in language, we also need to ask what are the social structures of (in)visibility in which discourse participants are subjectified. Through social media, controversies can connect many users, bridge new and traditional media outlets and bring forth new lines of demarcation. I will take examples from current controversies around the question of (post)truth at the intersection of politics and science in order to discuss the intertwinement of linguistic and social practices of visibilising subjects in social media discourse.

References

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4:10pm-4:50pm

- Camilla Cavalcanti and Fábio Malini (Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória – Brazil)

“Unveiling @GretaThunberg's Retweeting: The Power of the Discursive Strategy in Digital Environmental Advocacy”

Greta Thunberg, a prominent environmental activist, has effectively utilised retweeting as a reported speech strategy on social media to amplify her climate advocacy. This study examines the role of retweeting as a communication tool, focusing on its impact on conveying @GretaThunberg's messages and enhancing the reach and influence of her climate-related initiatives. By analysing her retweeting patterns and content, we explore how retweeting engages with followers, connects with like-minded individuals, and reveals the influential ecosystem shared by her. Through data mining, we collected a corpus of 3253 tweets from the "post-pandemic @GretaThunberg" from February 17, 2021, to July 1, 2023. We produced graphs revealing actors and words across this selected period.

This research draws on theoretical frameworks from linguistics (Authier-Revuz, 1990, 2004; Bakhtin, 2017; Calsamiglia, H.; Ferrero, C. L, 2003; Mesquita, D. P. C.; Rosa, I. F. 2010; Van Dijk, 2005, 2006, 2012, 2014, 2021; Van Leeuwen, 2008; Wodak, 2014; Wodak & Fairclough, 2010) and network analysis (Malini, 2016; Barabasi, 2016), delving into the linguistic and rhetorical aspects of retweeting as a reported speech strategy. It investigates how @GretaThunberg employs retweets to lend credibility to others' statements, endorse or criticise other actors, highlight significant climate-related developments, and foster a sense of collective urgency. This study explores how retweeting serves as a means of indirect speech, allowing @GretaThunberg to express her perspectives while avoiding direct self-promotion (Castells, 2015) and bridging other voices to the network (Barabasi, 2014).

The analysis also examines the reception and responses generated by the retweeting activity. By assessing audience reactions and the impact of retweeted content, the research sheds light on the efficacy of this strategy in mobilising public opinion, inspiring action or generating negative comments.

Furthermore, this study addresses potential challenges and controversies associated with retweeting as reported speech, mainly that "recycling" or "recontextualising" messages risk disseminating misinformation and diluting the original message. It also highlights the need to critically evaluate the sources the activist amplifies through retweets to ensure the accuracy and credibility of shared content.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of social media's role in contemporary climate advocacy, specifically how @GretaThunberg leverages retweeting as a powerful tool for spreading awareness, fostering engagement, and encouraging collective action in the fight against climate change. By exploring the nuances of this strategy, the study hopes to offer insights and implications of digital activism on effectively utilising social media to advance urgent social and environmental causes.

5pm: end of the day session