

Innovations and Challenges in Social Media Discourse Analysis: Methods, Frameworks, and Contributions

Article review

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ABSTRACT

This article engages with "Innovations and Challenges in Social Media Discourse Analysis" (2024) by Michele Zappavigna and Andrew S. Ross through a consideration of the approach the book takes to the study of discourse in social media spaces today. Rather than presenting a comprehensive summary of the chapters of the work, the review focus is on the general orientation of the work and the types of analytical questions it raises about online interaction. The book considers social media

communication in terms of it being shaped by the practices that are specific to the particular platform and makes the interaction of language with other semiotic resources apparent. Through references to selected examples discussed by the authors, the review reflects on the way concepts such as networked interaction, affiliation, and multimodality are used to account for communication in everyday communication in digital environments. The article places the book within current debates of discourse studies as well as its relevance for researchers interested in media discourse.

تتناول هذه المقالة كتاب «الابتكارات والتحديات في تحليل خطاب وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي» (٢٠٢٤) لميشيل زابافينيا وأندرو إس. روس، من خلال النظر في الكيفية التي يقارب بها الكتاب دراسة الخطاب في سياقات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي المعاصرة. وبدلاً من تقديم عرض شامل لفصول الكتاب، تركز هذه المراجعة على التوجّه العام للعمل والأسئلة التحليلية التي يثيرها بشأن التفاعل عبر الإنترنت. ينظر الكتاب إلى التواصل عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بوصفه ممارسة تتشكل وفق خصائص المنصات نفسها، كما يسلط الضوء على تفاعل اللغة مع موارد سيميائية أخرى. ومن خلال الإشارة إلى أمثلة مختارة ناقشها المؤلفان، تتأمل المراجعة كيفية توظيف مفاهيم مثل التفاعل الشبكي، والاصطفاف/الانتماء، والتعددية الوسائطية في تفسير أنماط التواصل اليومي داخل البيئات الرقمية. وتضع المقالة الكتاب ضمن النقاشات الجارية في دراسات الخطاب، كما تبحث في أهميته للباحثين المهتمين بخطاب الوسائط الإعلامية.

1- INTRODUCTION

Discourse analyst are now faced with arising more challenges due to social media change in media discourse In response to this, Zappavigna and Ross's Innovations and Challenges in Social Media Discourse Analysis (2024) considers Social media as unique semiotic system. The book emphasizes the importance of realizing social media discourse is "daily" speech on online spaces, which is characterized by widespread interconnection and multimodality. The authors say that previous conversation models, which focused on short-term in-person interactions,

were not designed to deal with the vast searchable archives of discussion provided by platforms such as Twitter and Instagram.

The review concentrates on the methods adopted by the book, key concepts, and contribution to media discourse research. In the following sections, we first describe the methodological approach of the authors (which involves the use of corpora and of social semiotic theory), and the major analytic concepts which they develop (such as hyper-logue and ambient affiliation, etc.). We then focus on their treatment of multimodal aspects such as emoji and images as well as applying insights to real examples of multiple modality discourse. Finally, we look at the book's contribution to language studies of media discourse. All analysis is based directly on directly from Zappavigna and Ross (2024) in text by chapter excerpts from the original source.

Theoretical and Methodological Approach

Zappavigna and Ross describe the social media as a context where language mingles with other semiotic resources (images, emoji, formatting) in a technological environment. Zappavigna and Ross treat social media as an environment in which language is working alongside other semiotic resources such as images, emoji and formatting features in particular technological environments. From a social semiotic perspective, platforms are considered instead of acting as neutral channels of interaction as "semiotic technologies" which shape, enable and constrain communicative practices.

In order to study these dynamics, the authors use big multimodal datasets from online platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Instead of isolated examples or interpretation, what they have done is to call attention to repetitive patterns that appear in a wide variety of interactions. In this regard, the study is part of the quantitative traditions of discourse analysis, especially through its most particular attention to patterns of frequency and co-occurrence.

One methodological focus of the book is the concept of ambient affiliation, which is used to examine how forms of social alignment develop online. Given that much social bonding on platforms occurs via indirect actions including to liking, retweeting or following hashtags the

authors apply it to consider the circulation of shared values and interests between users. Alongside this, they highlight the importance of multimodality, indicating that different modes of language, paralinguage (incorporating things such as punctuation and tone cues), images and symbols tend to be used together with one post. The chapter dealing with analysis of emoji, for instance, describes categories as ideational concurrence, interpersonal resonance, and textual synchronization for understanding how emoji are related to written language in practice.

Key Analytical Concepts: Hyperlogue and Ambient Affiliation

The concept of the "hyperlogue" is an important theoretical contribution. Based on Zappavigna and Ross, social media conversations feature multiparty, networked interactions rather than just two-person exchanges. They define a hyperlogue as many-to-many talk that is simultaneous and searchable on digital platforms in order to capture this. Unlike traditional conventional "chat" a hyperlogue can include user mentions, hashtags, and threads that connect disparate utterances over time and location. This idea aids analysts in comprehending, for example, how individuals collaborate through public hashtag threads or how comments on a popular post create a loose dialogue without explicit turn-taking guidelines. The book improves discourse theory by presenting hyperlogue, which essentially acknowledges that digital communication surpasses the limitations of co-present conversation and accounts for social media's "expanded affordances".

The ambient affiliation framework was first proposed by Zappavigna, and the authors expand upon it in this book. The term "ambient affiliation" describes the various ways users align or "affiliate" with one another indirectly, often by using shared hashtags or symbols. Rather than direct replies, users frequently connect through these markers to signal common interests. The authors differentiate between two types of affiliation: communing affiliation, in which relationships arise through shared topical markers, and dialogic affiliation, in which bonds form through explicit exchanges, such as responses. For communing affiliation, they suggest three possible mechanisms: Convoking, Promoting and Finessing. Promoting means making social connections more explicit and visible in various ways, such as tweeting content to spread an idea.

Finessing, on the other hand, means carefully placing a relationship within a larger context. i.e. where someone uses subtle language or secondary hashtags. Provoking refers to the process of mobilising or rallying a community around some issue, and part of doing this is through a hashtag to recruit supporters. Together, these three processes form a tripartite model employees that provides a fine analytical framework for examines how user networks are formed. For example, coordinated retweeting can be used to promote awareness of a shared value, a trending hashtag can be used to encourage public discussion of an issue, and ironic memes can be used to identify users attitude and relationships towards a given topic.

Seen from this perspective, the combination of hyperlogue and ambient affiliation helps to understand the unexpected negotiation of social relations and forms of solidarity over digital platforms. Rather than taking a stationary context for discourse (like in classical Conversation Analysis) they suggest that the analyst has to trace the way the features offered by social media (e.g. hashtags, sharing) establish "ambient" ties. These notions are supported by examples and analysis of corpus and how values and social ties pass around online without the direct dialogic exchange.

Multimodality: Emoji, Selfies, and Visual Discourse

Another major focus of the book is the study of multimodality as the relevance of how different semiotic modes (text, image, etc.) combine in social media posts. The authors emphasize that "social media discourse is highly multimodal", requiring an analysis not only of words, but also graphic, layout, or symbolic elements. Two chapters speak to this, one on emoji (paralinguistic symbols) and one on selfies (visual self-representation).

There is a chapter in the book looking at the relationship between emoji and text when communicating online. Rather than adopting the idea of emoji as decorative elements, the authors suggest bin of analytical framework based on the various Hogwarts emoji perform alongside

language. They differentiate between a number of interactional roles, including illustrating or reinforcing textual meaning; conveying affective or attitudinal cues; and being aligned with the flow of discourse.

For example, a red heart emoji may support interpersonal resonance in terms of expressing affection or it may support ideational meaning in such investor as "love you" by visuo supporting the concept of love. Using this framework, the authors examine the role emoji have played in processes of dialogic affiliation, especially in threaded dialogues, where conversations are used to signal alignment or solidarity via users' responses. The discussion implies that emoji often occur together with text in patterned ways and are active participants in the creation of online conversational practices.

In the chapter dedicated to selfies and images, authors discuss the visual communication as one of the important dimensions of social media communication. Drawing mainly on information from Instagram, Zappavigna and Ross create what they call a "selfie taxonomy" and examine images that people post about activities such as cycling or working out. Their analysis reveals how decisions of composition, and visual perspective, such as camera angle, framing and gaze, contribute to what they call "visual intersubjectivity," referring to the relationship created between the subject of the image and its viewer.

For example, a picture of the gym selfie taken at a low angle can woo strength or confidence. Images are also explored in relation to the related hashtags and text, with a particular focus on how they work together in a single post. In the midst of comment threads, emojis and tags often bring extra layers of affiliation, in a way that shows also how relationships that are being formed are negotiated visually as much as verbally. Overall, the discussion highlights the importance of the image as one integrated with language, showing the role played by linguistic cues, hashtags, and emoji stickers (graphics) to conjointly construct identity and affiliation online.

In dealing with multimodality, the book emphasizes the role played by images and emojis in the research of social media discourse. By outlining specific analytical categories for the use of emojis and visual self-

representation, Zappavigna and Ross provide resources which can be adapted to studying platforms where text and images are combined.

Empirical Insights and Case Study

While much of the book develops theoretical frameworks, the authors regularly draw connections from the ideas to concrete examples from social media. They work with a variety of data sets, such as sets of tweets, Instagram images and comments on YouTube videos that clarify how each concept works in the real world.

The discussion of searchable talk in the book highlights the role of hashtags in making content retrievable and organized across the various social media platforms and the discussion of ambient affiliation, in turn, refers to cases where Twitter users create collective identities through shared tagging practices. The analysis of emoji is based on some examples from real posts to illustrate the ability of visual symbols to create subtle differences in the meaning of a text, and the chapter on selfies considers selected Instagram images produced by cyclists and gym-goers.

In one of the later chapters, the authors mention a concrete example to illustrate the application of their analytical concepts, the use of everyday user discourse by corporate actors. By looking into posts that were related to Starbucks, they consider that normal talk about coffee too often accompanied by emojis and hashtags circulates within branded settings. Instead of considering these posts as simply promotional content, the analysis focuses on the intersection of the language produced by users and commercial practices.

This case helps to highlight the Kevin types of semiotic work engaged in when the communication of the everyday becomes part of corporate campaigns. It also provides a context in which concepts such as ambient affiliation and multimodal analysis may be used to seek to understand the process of negotiation of power relations within seemingly ordinary forms of online discourse and relationships.

Across the examples discussed, it is possible to observe similar tendencies in how social media interaction will take place. Rather than direct exchange reliance, users frequently make use of affiliative resources

like hashtags, shared memes, and emoji - in the development of associations and declaration of a sense of community. At the same time, the networked form of online interaction suggested through the concept of the hyperlogue means that meaning is not generated in a single interaction, but is created through interconnected contributions. The multimodal signals (emoji and images) are not peripheral but central to negotiating tone, stance, and identity. For example, the tripartite emoji framework shows that users systematically use emoji to build ideology and emotion into their posts. Likewise, the selfie study reveals that users make deliberate choices in image construction to manage how they present themselves and engage others.

Contributions to Media Discourse Analysis

By focusing exclusively on their book as the source, this review highlights the contributions Zappavigna and Ross make to linguistics and discourse analysis. First, they extend discourse theory to new terrain. Traditional models (e.g. Conversation Analysis) assumed speech in dyadic or small group settings; this book expands the field by accounting for mass and layered interactions on digital platforms (hyperlogues). Second, the book introduces novel analytic frameworks for semiotic resources. The concepts of ambient affiliation (with Convoking, Promoting, and Finessing) and emoji-text convergence offer concrete methods for other analysts. Researchers can apply these directly to social media corpora to study identity, solidarity, or digital rhetoric.

Third, the methodological approach is itself a contribution. By compiling and coding large social media datasets, the authors demonstrate how corpus methods and qualitative insights can be combined. The discussion developed in the book draws attention to the role of large-scale data in the study of discourse. The analysis of corporate co-opting, in particular, offers an example of how methods from discourse analysis may be relevant beyond the field of linguistics, in other fields like media studies and marketing, for instance. Rather than openly politicized instances, the authors discuss the use of everyday forms of discourse within commercial contexts.

Across the chapters the authors have a consistent focus on clarity in analysis and on giving structured presentation of arguments and often

raise issues with potential limitations before they give ideas on how they might be addressed. Rather than the book attempting to present, in fact, definitive answers, such an approach situates the book in a larger scholarly dialog. In particular, the account of conceptual frameworks, the use of empirical data and the attention to media discourse in different contexts suggest ways in which the study can feed into work in conceptual frameworks on discourse analysis that is ongoing.

Conclusion

Innovations and Challenges in Social Media Discourse Analysis (Zappavigna & Ross, 2024) resolves questions that occur when discourse analysis is applied to current social media environments. Rather than focusing on online interaction as a form of extension of face-to-face interaction, the book highlights the ways in which digital platforms influence communicative practices, due to their technological and semiotic features. Working with examples from material found on the Web, the authors draw attention to ways in which meanings and social relations play out across networked spaces. The analysis discussed throughout the book indicates that discourse analysis may be usefully adapted to media contexts that go beyond face-to-face interaction, especially when attention is given to the interaction of language with other semiotic resources. In this sense, the study gives a point of reference for further research on media discourse without aiming at giving a comprehensive and final account.

References

Zappavigna, M., & Ross, A. S. (2024). *Innovations and challenges in social media discourse analysis*. Routledge