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Discourse analysis and social media

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Challenges of social media for discourse analysts

Given the pervasiveness of social media as well as the fact that it has been implicated in a host of contemporary ills, from the spread of 'fake news' to the proliferation of metal health problems among users, it is not surprising that social scientists of all stripes have turned their attention to understanding how people use social media and their impact on social life. The main difference between the way discourse analysts approach social media and the way other social scientists do is a matter of both focus and method. Discourse analysts are primarily interested in the *semiotic dimensions* of social media and the ways discursive resources and the social meanings and norms of interaction associated with them emerge within different kinds of online social networks (Androutsopoulos, 2008; Leppänen et al., 2017; Thurlow and Mroczek, 2011). While some discourse analytic work on social media simply attempts to apply traditional discourse analytical tools to social media *content*, most discourse analyst interested in social media are concerned with the ways social media have *changed* the kinds of texts people produce, the kinds of social interactions they engage in, and the kinds of social practices and social identities they perform (Herring, 2013).

One of the difficulties of talking about how discourse analysts approach social media is deciding what is meant by 'social media' in the first place. As technologies have advanced and platforms have evolved, the classic definitions of 'social network sites' developed in the

early 2000s, which emphasised -- for instance, their ability to facilitate the formation of stable networks of connections within which users are able to share content (boyd & Ellison, 2008), and the ‘persistent’, ‘replicable’, and searchable nature of that content (boyd, 2010) -- do not accurately describe many of the social media platforms that have developed over the past decade. TikTok, for example, is less about forming a stable network of connections and more about looser aggregates of users gathering around various discursive objects: memes, trends, and challenges; and the whole point of Snapchat is that content shared over it is *not* persistent, replicable or searchable). Indeed, the only real consistencies across social media platforms is that they allow users to share and comment upon content, much of which they have generated themselves or repurposed from other users’ content, and that the purpose of this sharing and commenting is to promote some form of *sociality* (Baym, 2010; Leppäntn et al., 2014). Given this broader definition, a whole range of different applications can be described as social media. Apart from the ‘usual suspects’ (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), there are also video sharing platforms (such as YouTube, Vimeo), messaging apps (such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger), image messaging applications (such Snapchat), applications for sharing short videos (TikTok, Vine), dating apps (such as Tinder, Grindr), news aggregation and discussion platforms (such as Reddit), social question-and-answer sites (such as Quora), and content curation sites (such as Pinterest). Further complicating this is that fact that these applications are often used in combination with one another, and many platforms have the capacity to connect with and share content and/or users between them. Furthermore, since social media use has become so thoroughly embedded in practices in the material world (see below), it is sometimes difficult to demarcate ‘social media use’ as a bounded practice. This is especially true now that most social media use occurs via mobile devices, and so can intersect in complex ways with a whole range of physical spaces, people and practices (Bolander and Locher, 2020).

Another problem with trying to describe how discourse analysts analyse social media is the sheer variety of approaches analysts have taken. In some ways, a more important question than what constitutes social media *technically*, is how analysts conceptualise it and what dimensions of it they prioritise (which is inevitably tied up with how they conceptualise 'discourse' and what dimensions of it they prioritize). Is Twitter, for example, conceptualised as a collection of texts, as a space for interaction, as an application, as a social network, or as a broadcast platform (Brock, 2018)? And what are we supposed to be analysing when we analyse it? Are we supposed to be analysing the technology, its users, the texts they produce, or wider processes, practices, performances or power structures associated with the platform?

Rather than attempting to articulate any particular 'method' or demonstrate any particular technique for the analysis of social media discourse, then, what I would like to do in this chapter is to consider what it is that makes social media discourse *different* from other kinds of discourse, and how these differences affect the ways discourse analysts approach it. To do this I will explore the various ways discourse analysts have addressed three traditional dimensions of discourse when it comes to social media: 1) the textual (and intertextual) dimension, 2) the dimension of social interaction and participation, and 3) the dimension of power and ideology. I will then briefly describe some aspects of social media discourse that discourse analysts are just beginning to explore and suggest some ways forward.

Texts and (inter)textuality on social media

Obviously, of central concern to discourse analysts are issues around how texts are structured, how they are linked with other texts, and how they function to make various social practices, social identities and social relationships possible. Social media have challenged the way discourse analysts approach textuality in at least three ways: They have facilitated more

multisemiotic forms of communication; they have given rise to new *genres* and altered expectations around more traditional ones; and they have given rise to new practices of *entextualzation*, r*econtextualzation* and *intertextuality* which have challenged traditional understandings of authorship.

Nearly all discourse analysts dealing with social media texts have had to contend with their complex *multisemioticity*: the way they facilitate the combination of different modes including writing, image, sound, and layout (see e.g. Adami and Jewitt, 2016; Androutsopoulos, 2011; Leppänen et al., 2014; Zappavigna 2016), as well as the way social media themselves constitute complex 'semiotic technologies' (Jovanovic & van Leeuwen, 2018), which make available different configurations of semiotic resources and thus different potentials for meaning-making. I use the term *multisemiotic* rather than *multimodal* in order to encompass not just the combination of modes one finds in social media texts, but also the semiotic variety within modes, for example, the variety of codes (languages), styles and scripts that are often used within written language (Spilioti, 2019). While similar degrees of multisemioticity can be found in other kinds of digital (and analogue) texts, what distinguishes social media are the affordances they provide for mixing and layering resources — the way, for example, apps like Snapchat allow users to create complex collages of images, text and symbols.

Figure 1, for example, which is a screenshot of a Snapchat 'story' created by a Saudi Arabian woman (reprinted from Albawardi & Jones, 2019) combines photography with printed text in a particular font, emojis, handwriting and drawing. More important than just the variety of modes, however, is the way the application allows the creator to layer them on top of one another, so the material resource of her body (including her dress and hair style) is recruited as a canvas on which to inscribe her written commentary, with the *placement* of the words and drawing being as significant as their semantic meanings. Because of these

affordances, *multisemiotic* posts on social media cannot be analysed in the same way that we might approach images in magazines or the design of static webpages. In many ways, they are more akin to semiotic landscapes whose meaning is a result not just of a 'grammar' of design, but also of the way they are *emplaced* across material and virtual spaces.

Figure 1: Snapchat story (from Albawardi 2017, see also Albawardi & Jones, 2021)

Another aspect of social media textuality of interest to discourse analysts has been the way they have contributed to the transformation (or remediation) of traditional communicative *genres* (e.g. the personal note, the snapshot, the postcard) and the development of new and 'emergent' genres (Herring, 2013). In line with the new affordances for intersemioticity described above, social media have facilitated the formation of a range of new and emerging *visual* genres, such as selfies (Veum and Undrum, 2018; Zappavigna 2016) and image macro memes (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015. Social media also seem to

facilitate the development of *hybrid* genres, especially genres in which the fixed nature of text interacts with the more dynamic orality of interaction. Soffer (2016:2), for instance, notes how Snapchat 'brings together the "snap" of visual culture, referring to capturing the moment through picture taking and the "chat" of orality.'

Rather than seeing social media genres as stable instantiations of the communicative practices of particular discourse communities, discourse analysts working on social media genres often focus on the inherent instability and dynamism that results when the 'horizons of expectations' brought along by users interact with the technological evolution of platforms. 'In contrast to traditional views of genres as institutionalized and stable practices,' writes Lomborg (2014:23), 'the communicative genres of social media are continuously shaped, adjusted, stabilized and destabilized through participants' active engagement.' Because of this, he argues, the business of discourse analysts should be to understand 'how users "do" and ascribe meaning to social media in and through communicative practice … by invoking, negotiating, and adjusting relevant genre knowledge over time' (p.4). This can be seen in Figure 1, which is essentially a type of 'selfie', but one in which the 'global' conventions of the genre (Veum & Undrum, 2018) have been adjusted to the local conditions of the user (including her communicative purpose of highlighting a 'flaw' in her appearance, and the conditions of her culture which place social constraints on women broadcasting full frontal images of their faces). In this case, the words ('eyeliner on fleek') and the 'sassy woman' emoji serve to accomplish some of the semiotic work that in traditional selfies are accomplished with the face.

Another example of the instability and dynamism of social media genres is the way people's narrative and practices of storytelling have adapted to the affordances of social media. There has been considerable work by discourse analysts on social media narratives, much of it drawing on concepts such as 'small stories' (Georgakopoulou, 2007) and 'shared

stories' (Page, 2018), which focus on textual practices which often bear little resemblance to canonical narratives but nevertheless serve the social functions of narratives. Such frameworks allow analysts to engage with the *partiality* of narrative practices on social media and to explore how snippets of 'narrative behaviour' – such as the Snapchat 'story' in Figure 1-- function to link people and groups together across networks (Georgakopoulou, 2014, 2021). They also allow analysts to explore how stories and the identities enacted through them are *multiply situated* along various textual trajectories and across timescales (Page, et al., 2013).

What is of particular interest to discourse analysts is not just the emergence of new genres, but of new *genre ecologies* in which text types interact with and affect one another in new ways (e.g. selfies and 'stories'). As KhosraviNik and Unger (2015: 209) put it, 'it is the mix of genres itself which constitutes a main characteristic of the new communicative ecology. Instead of the specific genre forms and unidirectionality of textual practices in traditional (mass) media, users now deal with a wide variety of textual genres almost simultaneously.'

Social media platforms are not just unique in terms of the configuration of different kinds of texts that are found on them, but also in terms of the possibilities they make available for the (re)composition and (re)circulation of texts. Leppänen and her colleagues (2014) have noted how social media texts are, by their nature moving targets, less like artefacts and more like dynamic processes, and argue that the focus of discourse analysts should be on *entextualization* -- the ways social actions become 'portable', detachable from their original contexts -- and *recontexualization* -- the ways they change as they are introduced into new contexts (see Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Georgakapoulou, 2014; Jones, 2009a). 'Digital media data,' write KhosraviNik and Unger (2015:231) 'do not lend themselves to being frozen in time and are often recontextualized (by linking, sharing etc.) very rapidly in evolving

situations.' Thus engagement with the practices of production, distribution and consumption of texts and communication in more central ways than in the past is inevitable.' A key task facing discourse analysts of social media, then, is 'developing methods to trace the way texts (and the meanings, social relationships, and identities associated with them) change as they travel from context to context' (Jones et al., 2015:9) through practices such as crossposting (Adami, 2014), retweeting (Squires, 2016), hyperlinking (Jones & Hafner, 2021), embedding (Androutsopoulos and Tereick, 2016), and curating (Snyder, 2015).

These processes of text making (and re-making), in fact, are central to the very forms of sociality that social media promote. 'Intertextuality,' as Jones and his colleagues (2015:7) point out, 'is essentially a *social* process through which people not only create linkages between texts, but also create relationships between themselves and other users of texts, showing themselves to be competent members of particular communities by using the conventions of intertextuality of those communities.'

This last point in many ways highlights the limits of a focus on texts and textuality in analyzing social media. As Bouvier and Machin (2018:184) argue, when it comes to social media, 'we may simply no longer be able to start from the text as a point of analysis…Rather we may have to position texts based on what users do with them.' The 'story' in Figure 1, for instance, is not just a 'story', and not just a 'selfie', but also a kind of 'utterance'-- part of an ongoing conversation ('chat') the user is having with her Snapchat friends. Social media, then, are not repositories of texts, but complex collections of 'conversations' that emerge in a kind of 'liquid architecture' that is shaped and co-constructed through participation and interaction (Bolander & Locher, 2020, see also Androutsopoulos, 2008).

Participation and interaction on social media

Just as social media challenge the ways discourse analysts approach the study of texts and textuality, they also complicate the ways they understand social action and interaction and the role discourse plays in it. Since the development of the earliest forms of computer-mediated interaction (e.g. IRC chat, MUDs and MOOs), discourse analysts have focused on what makes them different from the kinds of interactions they have traditionally studied, pointing out, for instance, the ways asynchrony affects things like turn-taking and topic management, the ways digital technologies alter the mutual monitoring possibilities for interactants (Jones, 2009b), the range of new forms of 'low friction' and 'off the shelf' interaction such as 'liking' (Jones and Hafner 2021), and the ways digital technologies enable new 'participation frameworks' (Goffman 1981) for interaction, allowing people to take up positions as different kinds of 'speakers' and different kinds of 'listeners'.

Social media have introduced even more complexity, in many ways defying common 'linear' models of communication (Blommaert et al., 2019), and requiring discourse analysts to re-think exactly what they mean by 'interaction'. Interaction over social media, for instance, often does not involve the kinds of 'focused gatherings' (Goffman, 1961:18) that discourse analysts are used to, those in which participants and goals are fairly well defined and sequential contributions are clearly related to each other. Rather, interactions commonly consist of brief *reactions* to content other users have posted, generated in the context of scrolling or swiping through multiple potential interactional spaces. Often, the purpose of these reactions seems to be less to achieve definable interactional goals and more to simply maintain sociality. Multiple scholars, for instance, have commented on the ritualistic, phatic nature of social media interaction (Jones & Hafner, 2021; Varis & Blommaert, 2014). But that does not mean that social media interaction is in any way simple or predictable. Many analysts, for example, have examined the iterative ways reactions and comments build on and 'riff' upon one another in social media environments, resulting in thematic polylogues (Bou-

Franch & Lorenzo-Dus, 2021), collaborative narratives (Page, 2018), or competitive improvisations (Zhou at al., 2017).

Central to this complexity is the range of possibilities social media platforms make for *participation*: users can actively participate in initiating interactions and responding to other users, they can passively observe the interactions between others, or they can operate in the space between these two poles (Jovanovic & van Leeuwen 2018). Given the 'always on' nature of mobile communication, even simply being connected to a social media platform is a form of participation. Zappavigna (2011), for instance, has pointed out that much communication over social media involves what she calls 'ambient affiliation', which may *not* involve direct communication or conversation-like exchanges with specific interlocutors, but rather takes the form of common alignment to particular discursive artefacts circulating through the network (such as hashtags or memes). Other forms of interaction can be generated automatically, triggered by users actions rather than their intentional formulation of utterances: examples include the 'read ticks' on Whatsapp and the activity notifications on Facebook (Adami and Jewitt, 2016; Eisenlauer, 2014).

Finally, social media create possibilities for users to 'stage' interactions without actually engaging in them, as when celebrities or politicians create profiles or send tweets in ways that deploy the technologies of social media themselves as 'stand-in[s] for talk' (Thurlow, 2017:142).

The most important thing about the different modes of participation social media make available to users is that they are *dynamic* (users can strategically shift among different speaker/listeners roles) and that they are *meaningful* (the speaker/listener roles that users take up themselves convey meaning – for example, not liking someone's post can be as meaningful as liking it). As with all social interaction, meanings also depend on the social histories and relationships that users bring to interactions. In Figure 2, for example, which is a

transcript of a post that appeared on my niece Emily's Facebook page when she was 13 years old, shows both the variety of interactional roles available to Facebook users and how those roles can shift in the course of an interaction. The post refers to an online quiz my niece took called 'What piercing best suits you'.

Emily Jane Wheeler
Emily took What piercing best suits you (mostly for girls)
Normal lip piercing
Your (sic) wild and your (sic) still and never will be like anyone else. You can be the life of the party but then your (sic) still very unique. No one messes with you cause they know what your (sic) ca…
See more
October 16, 2009 at 9:28pm via Quizzz **Comment Like Take this quiz**

Rodney Jones So when are you going to get your piercing? :)
October 17, 2009 at 12:17pm **Delete**

Emily Jane Wheeler I don't know….probably ummmmmmmm… NEVER :D
October 18, 2009 at 12:06pm **Delete**

Cheri Jones Wheeler That's a smart choice.
October 18, 2009 at 12:12pm **Delete**

Figure 2: Emily's piercing (adapted from Jones, 2012: 89)

In this example, the way Emily positions herself in relation to what she has posted is already complex—rather than positioning herself as the 'speaker', she has allowed a third party application (called Quizzaz) to post the 'results' of a survey she took about piercing on her behalf. Eisenlauer (2014) points out how such automatically generated texts offer new possibilities for speakers when it comes to enacting self-presentation and stance, allowing them to claim particular identities or take particular stances in more indirect ways without, for instance, appearing to be bragging or committing themselves to conversational exchanges

with others. This positioning, however, is disturbed by me recruiting her directly into an exchange about what kind of piercing she will get, which forces her to take a less ambiguous stance towards the information that was posted. Here, of course, she is put into a bind, having to come up with an answer that is acceptable not just to me but to all of the other people in her network who can 'overhear' our conversation, which include both her friends (who are likely 'pro-piercing', and her mother – Cheri Jones Wheeler—who is decidedly not). Her heavily hedged answer: 'ummmmm….I don't know probably ummmmmm…. NEVER!!!!! :D' is designed for all of the potential listeners, but mostly for her mother, who, in response to it, shifts her position from overhearer to addressee with her comment: 'That's a smart choice'.

As this example demonstrates, one of the most important issues when it comes to understanding how interaction unfolds on social media is the way *context* is interactionally negotiated in online spaces. In response to the dominant view in media studies that social media environments are characterised by 'context collapse' (Marwick & boyd, 2010) in which the boundaries between social contexts are seen to be 'erased', making it more difficult for users to tailor their messages for specific audiences, discourse analysts like Szabla and Blommaert (2020) and Caroline Tagg and her colleagues (2017) have argued for a more dynamic (discourse analytical) view of context in which offline contexts are not unproblematically superimposed onto online environments, but rather users 'design' contexts through various linguistic and stylistic choices and interactional strategies, taking into account their understandings of the technical affordances of the platform — including the algorithmic processing of communication (see Jones, 2021) — and the norms of communication associated with particular communities of users. This can be seen clearly in the ways my niece carefully exploits the affordances of the medium by allowing Quizzaz to 'animate' her interest in lip-piercing rather than doing it herself, and the way her stylistic

choices (unconventional spelling and capitalization, ellipsis, and the emoticon :D) help create an utterance that ‘says’ slightly different things to me, to her friends and to her mother.

Since the key function of interaction on social media platforms is sociality, much discourse analytical work has focused on how conviviality, connectedness and community are discursively created and sustained in these environments. Seargeant and Tagg (2014: 9), in fact, argue that identity performances on social media ‘cannot be discussed in isolation from the communities with which individuals align themselves and the ways in which those communities establish and maintain the relationships that comprise them.’ Of course, different social media platforms promote different kinds of possibilities for ‘community’ through the kinds of opportunities they provide for connecting and sharing content. Some networks promote more durable connections or take steps to make visible the strength of users’ connections through algorithmically pushing stronger ties to the top of users’ news feeds, while others, like TikTok, promote weaker connections built around more ephemeral ‘trends’ and ‘challenges’ (Jones and Hafner, 2021). Several analysts have noted how affiliation on social media is often less a matter of explicit identification and more a matter of common alignment enacted through processes of *stance taking* (which can be as subtle as using common language, images, or hashtags) (Georgakopoulou 2013; Zappavigna 2011; Zentz 2021). Others have talked about the metapragmatic function of sharing and remixing content (such as memes) as facilitating feelings of ‘conviviality’ and the formation of what Blommaert (2018: 68) refers to as ‘light communities’.

Platforms and Power

More recent discourse analytical work on social media has taken a more explicitly *critical* turn (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2016; Jones et al. 2015), focusing on the ways ideologies

and power relations are reproduced in the broader social contexts in which technologies and information are produced, circulated, and valued. Work in critical discourse studies on more traditional media texts (such as newspaper articles) and on social interactions in institutions and workplaces has sought ways to link discourse to broader ideologies and power relations. Critical analysis of social media discourse, however, cannot just migrate models of language and power from these more traditional contexts. Rather, as Jones and his colleagues (2015:1) put it, 'analytical tools designed to examine the ideological dimensions of discourse need to be adapted to contend with discursive environments in which the loci of power are much more diffuse and the instruments of ideological control and discipline are more subtle and complex.' Because of the more user-centred, interactive nature of communication on social media in which ordinary users have the capacity to produce texts of all kinds and broadcast them to large groups of people, the distinctions between 'official' and 'unofficial discourse and between the 'powerful' and the 'powerless' that has dominated more traditional approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis are not as clear-cut. At the same time, while corporate and political power is not enacted in the same way it was in older media, the ways corporate entities channel and manipulate the kind of communication that takes place on social media sites and thereby end up *colonising* nearly every corner of social life is, in many ways, much more insidious. KhosraviNik and Unger (2014) argue that while in traditional mass media corporate and institutional entities wielded power *behind* discourse, in social media settings, they wield power *in* discourse, having woven their way into the fabric of everyday social interactions.

Because of this, rather than just exploring the links between discourse and social systems, analysts of social media discourse must concern themselves with *sociotechnical systems*, accounting not just for the texts generated by human social actors, but also for the programs and protocols which determine how these texts get generated and circulated and which shape

what can or cannot be seen by users in particular contexts (Bouvier and Machin, 2018; Brock, 2018; Jones et. al, 2015; KhosraviNik, 2020; Poulsen et al., 2018). On social media, ideologies are expressed and power relations enforced not just through texts and interaction, but through *flows of information* that are often not immediately apparent to individual users (nor to discourse analysts). At the same time, critical approaches to social media are concerned not just with these (sometimes hidden) mechanisms of control, but also with the discursive opportunities for resistance that are provided within sociotechnical systems and the ways technical affordances and representational resources can be used strategically by individual users (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2015).

Much of the more recent critical work on social media discourse has been informed by the burgeoning field of 'platform studies' (Gillespie, 2010; van Dijck et al., 2018), which emphasises the *political economy* of social media platforms: how they are governed by a small number of powerful corporations, and the 'discursive work' (Gillespie, 2010:348) they undertake to (re)shape sociality in service to the neoliberal agendas of these corporations. What this means for discourse analysts is that their investigations of the affordances and constraints of social media platforms must integrate the semiotic analysis of front-end texts and interactions with an analysis of the underlying 'application layers' and larger 'media ecosystems' of web services (Moschini, 2018:623).

Part of interrogating the political economy of platforms (and its discursive underpinnings) has involved focusing on the *economics of attention* that governs interaction on social media, from the discursive strategies platform owners employ to increase 'engagement' (Jones & Hafner, 2021), to the relationship between attention and social status on social media platforms (Marwick, 2013; Page, 2012). The economics of attention have also contributed to shaping social media genres like 'stories', and 'selfies', impacting notions of what counts as a legitimate story and who counts as a legitimate story-creator (Georgakopoulou, 2021) and

reproducing certain ideologies around selfhood, authenticity, and beauty (Page, 2019; Zappavigna, 2016).

Another focus of critical work has involved exploring the discursive processes that support the data extraction and ubiquitous surveillance practices engaged in by social media companies and on which they depend for their profits. Jones (2016, 2020a), for example, has examined the textual and pre-textual strategies companies use to compel users to consent to surveillance and to engage in discursive practices (such as clicking on 'like' buttons and using emojis) that make their online actions more 'legible' to the algorithms that process their personal data. Others have pointed out how 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2019) also depends upon the normalization of practices of 'social surveillance' such as social media 'stalking' (Jones & Hafner, 2021; Jones, Schieffelin & Smith, 2011).

Critical approaches to social media discourse have also addressed the opportunities social media offer for resistance and social activism in a range of national contexts (e.g. Featherman, 2015 in Iran, Wu, 2088 and Wu and Fitzgerald, 2020 in China, Jones and Li, 2016, in Hong Kong, and Zentz, 2021 in the United States). Wu and Fitzgerald (2020), for example, show how many of the technological affordances of social media, especially the way they facilitate multisemiotic meaning making and intertextuality, are central to the strategies internet users in China use to elude state censors. Finally, critical attention has also been focused on the ways social media sites affect the discursive practices associated with political debate more generally (Bouvier and Machin, 2021), and, in particular, how the discursive patterns and textual trajectories that social media afford can promote radicalisation, conspiracy theorising, and authoritarian populism (Blommaert, 2019; Maly, 2018; van Raalte et al 2021).

Future Directions and challenges

Given the quickly changing landscape of social media in which new communicative affordances are constantly being introduced and old ones are constantly being repurposed by users, it is difficult to predict the kinds of challenges analysts interested in social media discourse have in store for them. Current trends, both in social media scholarship and in technology, however, point to three issues that are likely to be of importance in the coming years.

The first has to do with the challenges discourse analysts will face in accounting for the various forms of 'hidden semiosis' that affect the ways texts are circulated and interactions are 'engineered' on social media. As Couldry and Kallinikos (2017) argue, most analysis of what goes on on social media platforms (and, indeed, most discourse analysis more generally) is based on the idea that they are 'spaces of appearances' (Arendt, 1960) in which users enact social presence and make certain discursive objects available to one another. The problem is that much of what 'appears' on social media is, at least in part, the result of *invisible* computational processes that operate beneath the surface of texts and interfaces. Couldry and Kallinikos (2017;147) write: 'there is on social media platforms no "appearance-in-itself" but only ever appearance that is the derivative of prior processes of calculation.' The difficulty for discourse analysts is not just the difficulty of doing 'discourse analysis' on 'language' (computer code) that most of them have no expertise in, but also the fact that most of the algorithms that govern social media sites are proprietary, unavailable for scrutiny even to those who might have the skills to scrutinize them. Jones (2020b, 2021) suggests that one way for discourse analyst to overcome this limitation is to focus not on the technologies themselves, but on the inferencing processes that users develop as they interact them, how they, for example, alter their discursive behaviour based on how they think social media algorithms work.

Another challenge for discourse analysts working on social media will be to more fully address the *material* dimensions of social media use. Many discourse analysts working on social media have advocated approaches which focus on what has been defined as 'the online-offline nexus' (Blommaert et al., 2019), exploring how social media platforms are dynamically and discursively linked to offline activities (e.g. Androutsopoulos, 2008, 2013; Leppänen et al., 2014). But there is still much to be done in terms of understanding the use of social media as an *embodied* practice (Jones, 2020c; Wargo, 2015) in which material resources (physical spaces, bodies) are constantly intersecting with and being transformed by semiotic resources available in virtual spaces. This strand of research will become even more important as social media platforms incorporate aspects of 'augmented' and 'virtual reality' (as Facebook promises in its vision of the 'metaverse').

Finally, as social media are increasingly dominated by expressions of hostility and animus, and as platforms themselves intentionally amplify content that triggers users' emotions as a way of increasing engagement, much more attention needs to be paid to the discursive dimensions of *affect* on social media platforms. As indicated in the discussion above, social media platforms are '*stance-rich* environments' (Barton and Lee 2013: 31) in which much of the interaction involves communicating evaluations (e.g. 'liking' or 'disliking') other people's content, and, by extension, other people. Not surprisingly, most discourse analytical work on social media has focused on 'meaning-making' in the rather conventional Hallidayan sense. But a great deal of communitive action on social media is a matter of 'affective routines' (Katz, 2001) that unfold very quickly, sometimes beneath the level of consciousness. At the same time, work from the perspective of 'affect studies' on the ways 'intensities' of emotion are generated online (Hillis et. al, 2015), and the way affect serves to bind users together in 'publics' (Papacharissi, 2015), are often short on specifics, lacking grounding in a coherent understanding of discourse processes. Future work in

discourse analysis, therefore, should aim to engage with these scholars, as well as with others in posthuman and new materialist perspectives who have sought to problematize many of our assumptions about social interaction, to help to identify ways to explore the discursive underpinnings of online affect, affinity and animus (Jones, 2021b).

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