

More power to the people? Critical Discourse Studies in the age of social media



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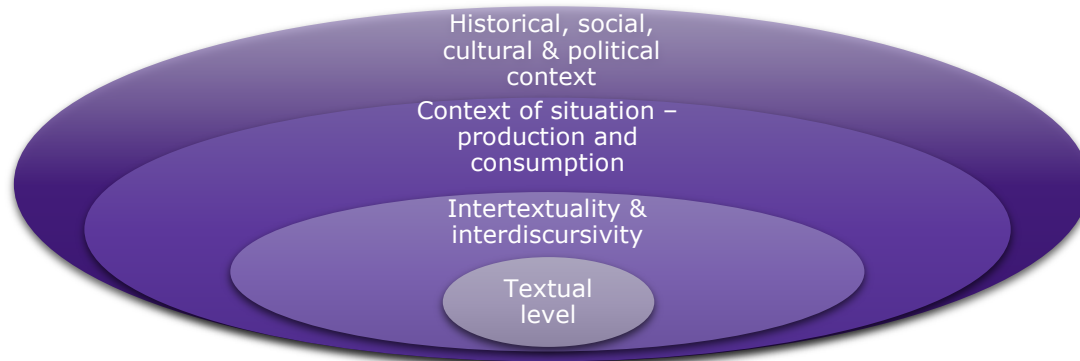


- Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)
- Social media – the new communicative paradigm and some effects

- CDS and social media: 4 approaches
 - Social media as data repositories
 - Discourse-analytical contextualisation & theorisation of social media
 - Discourse(s) about social media
 - Discourse(s) by social media providers

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)

- Language use carries out ideological work – beliefs, norms, values, taken-for-granted assumption, attitudes, power dynamics manifest in language use
- We can study society through the discourse lens:
 - Examining language use (discourse) as a means to an end – to understand social phenomena, power relations and ideological trends (i.e. versions of reality)
 - From 'neutral' data analysis to normative critique
 - Contextualisation – embedding the discourse material



(see e.g. Wodak and Meyer 2016; Machin and Mayr 2012)

Social media – the new communicative paradigm

“web-based and mobile services that allow **individuals, communities, and organizations** to **collaborate, connect, interact, and build community** by enabling them to **create, co-create, modify, share, and engage with content** (user- or bot-generated)”
(Nau et al 2022)

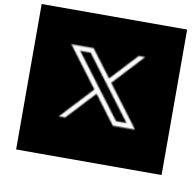
Social media *communication* (KhosraviNik 2018):

- Users collaborate to create content
- Interpersonal and mass communication happens simultaneously
- Users can access institutionally or user-generated content

Social media – the new communicative paradigm

From traditional top-down mass communication to user-generated content – the participatory internet

1. a plethora of (non-elite) voices
2. sizable audience
3. globally accessible
4. real-time information sharing



A new communicative paradigm

Opportunities for users:

- Transnational public spheres – more power to the people
 - information exchange and deliberation
 - organising collective action
 - political activism

- Transnational private spheres – finding community, finding friends
 - connecting people with similar interests
 - safe spaces and anonymity (but data security?)
 - taboo breaking and experience sharing online

A new communicative paradigm

→ Content curation/moderation – the providers

- ad-friendly and appealing content: “commercialised and tabloidised” (Fuchs 2015)
- filter bubbles and algorithmic distortion:
 - personalised info
 - impoverished info horizons
- lack of fact checking – d/misinformation
- hate speech and incitement vs freedom of expression
- providers’ political interests

→ Echo chambers and trial by social media – the users

- fragmentation and polarisation
- interactional conventions – responsive uptake
- anonymity and decontextualisation
- cyberbullying, cancel culture and online mobs

CDS and social media – 4 approaches



4 approaches to social media

1. Social media as data repositories
2. Contextualisation and theorisation of social media
3. Discourse(s) *by* social media providers
4. Discourse(s) *about* social media

Kopf, Susanne. forthcoming. Unravelling Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) – Four Approaches to Studying Social Media through the Critical Lens. *Critical Discourse Studies*.

1. Social media as data repositories

Exploring **social media discourse** about an issue to understand **various people's and organisations'** versions of the world

- Contextualisation
 - shape of discourse material?
 - ephemeral material – moderation policies?
 - prosumers and research policies?
 - societal impact?
 - ...

→ The social media communicative paradigm is complex,
so:

2. Contextualisation and theorisation

Examining various services and the underlying communicative paradigm

- Explore media affordances and modus operandi to cast light on
 - how these elements condition discourse material
 - a social media service's potential to be used for particular purposes (e.g., activism)
- Embed the medium in society by
 - investigating a service's reach and position in society (impact of service and its discourses)
 - theorising and examining a service's potential societal function(s)

3. Discourse(s) by providers

Exploring social media providers' versions of the world

- Discursive treatment of
 - the service and its objectives (for profit?)
 - content policies
 - user groups,
 - business accounts
 - ...
- Providers' discourse aimed at particular audiences
- Diachronic studies

4. Discourse(s) about social media

Exploring users' discourse about social media

- Various users, user groups (and non-users):
 - specific services,
 - what they use it for
 - the providers,
 - users,
 - etc.
- Comparing discourses across different groups/people

- Caution: contextualising the service and the discourse producers

4 approaches to social media

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Thank you for your attention 😊



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