EXPLORING THE DIGITAL PLAYGROUND

OF LANGUAGE AND SEMIOTICS:

Building a Revised Framework for Critical Multimodal Analysis of

Digital Discourse on Social Media

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TITLE PAGE

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PREFACE

This master's thesis is completed between February 2019 and August 2019 in the final semester of my graduate degree in Interactive Digital Media at Aalborg University. The field of digital discourse presented and scrutinised in this study came to mind from my bachelor's degree in English culture and language that I wished to make relevant in my pursuit to specialise in the relationship between linguistics, culture and digital media.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor, Bo Allesøe Christensen, for extremely proficient guidance, constructive advice and kind support throughout the process of completing this study. Finally, I would like to express gratitude to my family for their endless encouragement of spirit and confidence in skill.

Enjoy.

ABSTRACT

The objective of the study "Exploring the Digital Playground of Language and Semiotics: Building a Revised Framework for Critical Multimodal Analysis of Digital Discourse on Social Media" is to validate or disprove that qualitative methodological frameworks in digital discourse analysis of sociolinguistic practices on social media are inadequate, invalid and unreliable.

Two hypotheses were formulated to form more concrete objectives of scrutiny: 1) Current qualitative methods in digital discourse analysis are somewhat ineffective, because the field of digital discourse is changing too rapidly for former academic claims to be valid; and 2) current qualitative methods in digital discourse analysis are unreliable, because scholars and researchers often dismiss the significance of multimodality in digital discourse practices.

The study applies and combines traditional considerations and practices from critical discourse analysis with current observations in the field of digital discourse analysis, which are brought to light through a narrative literature review of qualitative methods in the field. Through critical synthesis and review of relevant literature findings, it is made possible to build a new framework coined critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse, which is then applied in a case study of comments on Facebook in order to evaluate and reexamine whether the framework can facilitate an analysis that considers linguistic, technological, semiotic and ideological aspects of computer-mediated communication on social media.

Through the analysis, in which the framework is applied, it is concluded that the framework effectively considers both macro-level and micro-level perspectives of discourse analysis, thus providing considerable insights to the multi-faceted nature of socialising in the virtual world. In regarding the technological affordances of the platform under scrutiny, the context of the text, the actual text and lastly the ideologies expressed through the affordances

and the text, the framework provides a versatile range of focal points in academic scrutiny of digital discourse.

Ultimately, the study concludes with an encouragement for further work to 'flesh out' the framework, as it is currently presented as a preliminary outline that will benefit additional advancement in which not only the aspects of analysis provided in this study is applied, but also the relationship between them, as well as considering how they transplant from the online world to the real world.

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1.0 Introduction

On account of the relatively new employment and consumption of digital media, hereunder social media, scholars and researchers are beginning to grasp and discuss the impact that such media have on social and cultural utility and influence, as well as on the development and constitution of normative behaviour and practice on the digital playground of language and semiotics (DiDomenico & Boase, 2013, p. 119). The question of how discourse and communication takes place and is shaped in everyday interaction has long been asked and answered, but the question that remains to be answered is how discourse and means of communication are "affected by their transplantation into virtual environments?" (Sindoni, 2013, p. 1).

With an exponential increase of access to and interaction with social media platforms in the past decade, new practices of communicating and exchanging social interactions have challenged "the ways discourse analysts think about texts, […] and even the nature of language itself" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 1). Social media in particular have introduced and shaped new forms of social interaction and communication "than those found in face-to-face conversation and traditional written texts" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 1).

Established research and academic practice in discourse analysis provide a vast range of research methods and analytical methods, as well as a rich foundation of applied theory in the field. However, few scholars and researchers within the field of discourse studies seem to take technological affordances and multimodality into account, thus ignoring the affect these aspects may have on how media users communicate, socialise and otherwise engage with other users (Sindoni, 2013; Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019; Thurlow, 2018; Herring, Stein & Virtanen, 2013). Therefore, revised methods in discourse analysis, in which multimodality is taken into account, are needed to understand the implications of computer-mediated communication in the constantly evolving world of language and semiotics.

1.1 KEY CONCEPTS

Discourse analysis traditionally constitutes a variety of applied theory and methodology in the humanities, social sciences, linguistics, psychology studies etc., however, all sharing the same interest of study - language usage. The extensive catalogue of theories and methods in discourse analysis derives from an abundance of ways, contexts and efforts in which language is utilised. Amongst the main analytical practices in discourse analysis are ethnography of communication, international sociolinguistics, conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis (Siegel, 2018, p. 1) - the latter being the implemented method of analysis in this study.

1.11 Critical discourse analysis

When applying a critical discourse analysis approach, the primary focus remains on "language use as a social practice" in which the aim is to "reveal how social power relations are constructed, negotiated, maintained and reinforced through language usage" (Siegel, 2018, pp. 8-9). This viewpoint is mainly influenced by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, amongst others, which will be further defined in section 1.2, 'Research scope'.

Critical discourse analysis distincts itself from other analytical methods in discourse studies as it is problem-oriented and "the researcher has interests and questions in advance (Siegel, 2018, p. 10). Additionally, the purpose of conducting a critical discourse analysis is to raise awareness on specific issues (Siegel, 2018, p. 10), which is achieved by posing a general theory or framework and applying it to a particular case. In doing so, the researcher can thus validate or disprove the preliminary questions and interests of the study. These research questions and hypotheses will be presented in section 1.3, 'Problem definition and research questions'.

1.12 Social media

The interest in academic scrutiny of social media is based on the heightened attention towards and need for a sociolinguistic shift in digital discourse analysis in which the field moves beyond an emphasis on linguistics (Androutsopoulos, 2006, p. 421; Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019, p. 4) and shifts towards a "growing preference for research that is more committed to the social meanings of technology and its particular […] significance for specific users, groups or communities" (Thurlow, 2018, p. 422). Thus, social media is considered relevant to place under scrutiny in this regard in order to put more focus on the social implications of digital discourse practices.

Specifically concerning social media, Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2019) assert that social platforms "create new spaces for online identity performances and negotiations" as well as provide study-worthy processes of "formation of new forms of social organization and social interaction" (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019, p. 10), to which Herring (2007) points to further attention towards the social and technological affordances of digital discourse analysis as well (Herring, 2007, p. 3). Additionally, Turner (2010) calls for attention towards digital practices by 'ordinary' individuals, since technologies today have taken a 'domestic turn' (from: Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019, pp. 11-12), and also, because current social platforms have provided full access to 'public spheres' through technology, thus making so-called ordinary media users the primary interactant on social platforms and the key actor in discourse practices.

1.13 Multimodality and semiotics

When studying and analysing digital discourse practices, the primary focus lies on "the ways people build and manage their social world using various semiotic systems" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 3). Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2019) describe digital discourse analysis more precisely as "how multimodal, multi-semiotic resources are employed to enact identities, activities, and ideologies in the digital world, as part of a larger

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social world" (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019, p. 4). They also assert that critical and scholarly work on multimodal computer-mediated communication is sparse, as previously stated, thus expressing a need to look at digital discourse practices "beyond the linguistic level" (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019, p. 17). Ultimately, future scrutiny on digital discourse practices and -analysis should focus on creating and advancing a methodological framework that facilitates academic interest in the social implications of digital discourse. Such a framework has been recommended by multiple scholars to be coined 'critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse' (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019, p. 17).

Accordingly, Jewitt (2014) and Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) defines multimodality as "attending to the way language interacts with - and is only made meaningful through its interaction with - other semiotic systems" (from: Thurlow, 2018, p. 138). In other words, multimodality is a hypernym for the bridge between the textual modes and the semiotic modes that expresses meaning in conjunction. According to Norris (2004), it is especially relevant to account for multimodality as it is almost always integrated in digital technologies "by combining writing, images, sounds and other semiotic modes" (from: Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019, pp. 5-6; Thurlow, 2018, p. 141). Conclusively, multimodal modes of communication on digital platforms cannot be separated from textual modes, and, if done so, would inevitably affect the conclusions of such studies negatively, since these modes are so tightly interconnected and woven into the fabric of digital social practices.

1.14 Text

Jones, Chik & Hafner (2015) define the concept of 'text' generally as "properties of semiotic artefacts" that collectively form types of 'texts', as well as a system to "accomplish particular social actions [...] to regulate what people can say, write or think" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 4). More specifically, Jones, Chik & Hafner (2015) place the concept of text in the following outline for analysing discourse practices online:

1. Texts: "How different technologies of entextualisation allows us to combine semiotic elements to form socially recognisable texts that can be used to perform different kinds of socially recognised actions."

2. Contexts: "The social and material situations in which texts are constructed, consumed, exchanged and appropriated."

3. Actions and interactions: "What people do with texts, especially that they do with and to each other."

4. Power and ideology: "How people use texts to dominate and control others and to create certain 'versions of reality'."

(Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 4)

This outline will be revisited and implemented in the analysis in chapter 5.0, 'Study analysis and results'.

1.2 RESEARCH SCOPE

As briefly addressed in section 1.1, 'Key concepts', practices in discourse analysis are often analysed in adherence to the Bourdieuian or Foucauldian tradition (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 2; Thurlow, 2013, p. 226). The Bourdieuian tradition of comprehending and analysing discourse practices is primarily concerned with "the way social conventions become submerged into people's habitual dispositions" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 2), thus focusing on how occurring discourse practices become familiar and customary throughout social practices, and thereby offers significant insights from a sociological viewpoint by paying attention to the individual. The Foucauldian tradition, on the other hand, focuses on what "sorts of behaviours, identities and relationships are considered normal" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 2), thus focusing on established sociolinguistic practices and thereby offers a more cultural perspective by paying attention to the collective.

It can be argued that one of these perspectives on focal viewpoints of discourse analysis cannot dismiss the other in the context of social media and digital practices, since these offer consideration to both the individual experience of shaping and practicing identity as well as the social experience of engaging with other people and participating in collective cultural practices - both of which are considered essential aspects of the social media experience. By adhering to both views, digital media can more successfully be understood as "new ways of interacting with people, sharing, selecting and discarding information according to taste or opinion" (Sindoni, 2013, p. 5). Thus, both individual and collective practices of digital discourse will be considered throughout this study.

Accordingly, digital discourse practices and online social interactions are not based exclusively on habitual nor normative behaviours, generally speaking, but also on the context of which the interaction takes place. Digital discourse concerns "the concrete, situated actions" in which people "with particular mediational means" engage and interact in order to "enact membership in particular social groups" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 2; "Digital academic discourse: Texts and contexts", 2018, p. 2). This is also supported by Sindoni (2013), who claims that "language, instantiated in speech and writing, needs to be analysed in context, even though the context in question is, as in this case, a fragmented, mesmerizing, virtual conglomerate of bits and bytes" (Sindoni, 2013, p. 2). The difficulty of analysing discourse practices in the context of digital media is that computer-mediated communication overall is not based on the same patterns of socialisation and interaction, but change and vary depending on the context of the interaction taking place. Anything from mediational affordances (e.g. text-based, app-based, web-based etc.) to user identity (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, social and cultural background etc.) can thus affect the nature of the conversation.

Furthermore, it is also argued that the field of digital practices is changing too rapidly for any analytical framework to withhold a status of relevance ("Digital academic discourse: Texts and contexts", 2018, p. 3; Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 1). In this regard, it may not be beneficial for this study to provide a withstanding framework for analysing digital discourse

practices, however, by defining a concise research scope and problem definition, it could be possible to provide new insights that may be useful in academic scrutiny by proposing a preliminary framework as a foundation for further studies in the field.

With the intention to define a concise research scope in researching, analysing and discussing practices in digital discourse analysis, it is problematic and perhaps even restrictive to separate online and offline exchange of communication. Language in itself can be defined by distinctive linguistic features depending on its form, whether oral or written. However, it is also a fluid concept that changes and evolves both in time, space, context and source. Due to the scope of this study and the time frame provided, it will likely result in a vague and superficial insight, if further delimitations are not made. Therefore, written discourse will be of exclusive concern, and the significance of oral communication will thus not be placed under scrutiny in this study. The reason for this delimitation is based on the more substantial significance of written and textual communication in computer-mediated communication compared to oral communication. Accordingly, a regard for online and offline communication in conjunction is limited from the scope of this study.

Furthermore, research into written computer-mediated communication will be restricted to the English language. This delimitation is made both to ensure cohesion in the analyses and to maintain a level of academic quality, since I have primary academic proficiency in discourse analysis based on the English language and its study practices. While this may present a number of inexhaustible areas in the process of reviewing and synthesising literature findings, it can also be concluded that English is one of the most utilised languages on social media, given its international status, and will thus still provide a relevant body of literature to review and texts to analyse.

1.3 PROBLEM DEFINITION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following section comprises of the definitive research scope of this study, which includes a problem definition, hypotheses and research questions. The problem definition is a

concise statement of the study's fundamental issue and remains the primary target of scrutiny. The following hypotheses are concrete presumptions founded on the problem definition with the purpose of validating or disproving them through the analyses in this study. The hypotheses are thus the more concrete objects of scrutiny. Finally, the research questions presented subsequent to the hypotheses are formulated as a specific set of enquiry to be discussed and refuted primarily in the primary analysis, the literature review, in order to ensure that any further work in this study is still relevant and in alignment with the hypotheses and, ultimately, the problem definition. Collectively, these sections express the study's scholarly interest and academic contribution.

1.31 Problem definition

The initial issue is a presumed inadequacy or lack of valid and reliable qualitative methodological frameworks in digital discourse analysis of sociolinguistic practices on social media.

1.32 Hypotheses

The problem definition presented above is a culmination of two main hypotheses that will be the analytical objective in the primary analysis, the literature review, and the secondary analysis, the case study. The hypotheses are based on a personal preliminary research in the field. The hypotheses are the following:

1. Current qualitative methods in digital discourse analysis are somewhat ineffective, because the field of digital discourse is changing too rapidly for former academic claims to be valid.

2. Current qualitative methods in digital discourse analysis are unreliable, because scholars and researchers often dismiss the significance of multimodality in digital discourse practices.

1.33 Research questions

Finally, the research questions, as mentioned above, serve as the guiding questions for discussion and refutation primarily in the literature review. The research questions are the following:

1. Which qualitative methods of analysis are currently utilised in digital discourse analysis of social media platforms?
2. Are the qualitative methods of discourse analysis used today considered to be adequate in obtaining valid and reliable data of digital discourse practices by scholars and researchers in the field?
3. What are the major issues with current qualitative methods in digital discourse analysis and how can they be modified to promote more valid and reliable research and data in the field?

These research questions will serve as a structure for the research conducted in the following chapters, as will be presented below.

1.4 THESIS STRUCTURE

Following this introductory chapter, the primary analysis - a literature review - is presented focusing on which qualitative methods are currently utilised in digital discourse analysis practices and, also, highlighting how they are utilised and in what context. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of established research in the field in order to clarify potential research gaps and needs for further academic scrutiny. Additionally, the literature review will conclude with answering whether current qualitative methods in digital discourse analysis are considered inadequate or lacking and why.

The secondary analysis - a case study - is based on the qualitative methods highlighted in the literature review and seeks to implement the conclusive observations from the primary analysis and evaluate these through a specific case study in which a micro-analysis of user comments on Facebook is conducted. The purpose of this analysis is to propose and evaluate a framework for analysing digital discourse and to clarify what aspects of the framework has value and what aspects are lacking. This analysis concludes with suggestions for further work in the field, specifically in regard to enhancing the proposed framework.

Lastly, a final conclusion of the study's findings will be presented in which a summary of the study is presented as well as final thoughts that are considered valuable for any further studies in the field of digital discourse analysis.

2.0 Literature review

The acknowledgement that digital media is affecting language and discourse practices is widely noticeable within the academic community. More specifically, "new forms of knowledge creation and self-representation online have meant changing language uses" ("Digital academic discourse: Texts and contexts", 2018, p. 1). Equally so, more academic publications within the field are paying attention to the impact of digital media and examining how online language and digital discourse practices are evolving and impacting communities, societies and cultures ("Digital academic discourse: Texts and contexts", 2018; Barton & Lee, 2013; Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015).

However, it is equally apparent when researching the field that analytical methods and practices in digital discourse analysis and online language studies are scattered, lacking consensus, and have yet to modify to the multimodal means and forms of digital media compared to analogue media (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019; Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015; Herring, 2013; Wilson, 2016; Bouvier, 2015).

In this chapter, I seek to synthesise and review a body of literature within the field of digital discourse studies in order to answer research questions 1 and 2 presented in section 1.3, 'Problem definition and research questions':

1. Which qualitative methods of analysis are currently utilised in digital discourse analysis of social media platforms?
2. Are the qualitative methods of discourse analysis used today considered to be adequate in obtaining valid and reliable data of digital discourse practices by scholars and researchers in the field?

In the following, I will firstly present what topics will be reviewed, as well as the theoretical considerations made and methodological approaches chosen prior to the actual process of conducting the review. Thereafter, the literature review will be presented followed by a concise summary of the synthesised research. Thus, prior to the actual review of literature, an in-depth overview of conducting the review in a systematic way is accounted for to ensure full transparency (Victor, 2008, p. 1).

2.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of qualitative methods of analysis in established research within the field of digital discourse studies, and to emphasise the theoretical foundation on which the rest of this study rests.

More specifically, this review aims to fulfil the following: 1) To describe the current state of methodology in digital discourse analysis and practice, 2) to provide a critical review of the methods presented from the literature findings, and 3) to identify potential gaps in the methods presented for further consideration. In identifying research gaps within the field of this study, it may lead to new understandings of primary studies from which these new perspectives could not emerge individually, but only when reviewed in conjunction.

Thus, this chapter is considered the primary analysis of the study, as it contributes to validating or disproving the problem definition and the hypotheses presented previously (cf. section 1.3, 'Problem definition and research questions').

2.2 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Generally speaking, a review can be defined as a "systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesising the existing body of completed recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners" (Booth, Papaioannou & Sutton, 2016, pp. 1-2). In order to conduct a review that provides valid insight to any chosen field,

efficiency and quality are main criteria. As Hart (1998) highlights, quality in this sense refers to "appropriate breadth and depth, rigor and consistency, clarity and brevity, and effective analysis and synthesis (from: Booth, Papaioannou & Sutton, 2016, p. 3). Efficiency in this context was achieved through a systematic approach to reviewing literature, which is exemplified in the following section. Quality was thus ensured by being systematic and following a specific template for synthesis and review.

While the main purposes of conducting a review is to estimate the landscape of a specific field of study and to identify potential gaps in established research, another motivation for a literature review is to discover and unfold whether the established research in that field is still reliable and useful in a more current context. As stated in the introduction, the field of discourse studies has already been recognised to lack reliability and consensus in regard to methodological approaches when applied to digital media. It is thus relevant to examine if and how analytical tools in digital discourse analysis could be considered invalid or unreliable, and, equally so, to seek any propositions to enhancing these methodological approaches.

Reliability, value, validity, and credibility are terms often used when synthesising research findings, however, there is little to no consensus on when such quality criteria have been met (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 136). This may be the case since quality criteria are rarely uniform principles throughout the academic landscape of qualitative studies. However, one criteria in appraising qualitative studies that has reached consensual agreement is the level of transparency and "adequacy of a description" of the studies' data presented in the review (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 136). For example, most journal entries and -publications have page restrictions and will thus affect the number of pages available for the author to include in the journal (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 137). As a result, an author can choose to write what methodology was used, but leave out further details on how these methods were employed and why (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 137). Obviously, this can complicate an attempt to synthesise and review qualitative methods used in sampled research findings. One efficient way of classifying one research finding, as well as identifying its primary data, lies in

the ability to separate the following: 1) the data itself, or quotations of the data, from "field notes, stories, case histories" etc. (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p.139); 2) data and findings not relevant to the review; 3) data or other findings imported "from other studies to which researchers referred to situate their own findings" (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 139); 4) the specific "analytic procedures, or the coding schemes and data displays" (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 137) researchers use as part of their data; and 5) the researchers' "discussions of the meaning, implications, or significance of their findings" (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 137).

Since the goal of the literature review is to synthesise current methods applied in digital discourse studies, metasynthesis is considered the most appropriate approach. Metasynthesis is generally defined as 'research of research' in which sampled research publications are considered the primary data (Bondas & Hall, 2007, p. 131; Paterson, Thorne, Canam & Jillings, 2001, p. 5). Metasynthesis offers "the opportunity to draw theoretical inferences from several related research reports by synthesizing the findings presented within these studies" (Waterfield, 2018, p. 987), thus aligning with the purpose of this review presented previously. Therefore, the ultimate potential of metasynthesis is the opportunity to link several studies together and provide a deeper reflection on and understanding of the original studies (Bondas & Hall, 2007, p. 116) by reviewing them in conjunction. In order to achieve a successful synthesis of data, one must maintain "the central metaphors and/or concepts of each account and comparing them to other key metaphors or concepts in that account" (Bondas & Hall, 2007, p. 118; Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 29), thereby estimating the similarities and dissimilarities of the collected data.

The purpose of qualitative metasynthesis is thus to integrate research findings to emphasise theme and pattern (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 199). Within the domain of metasynthesis, there are several methods available for integrating research findings, all of which have different outcomes and thus different purposes of use. For this review, the specific method of metasynthesis chosen is a 'constant targeted comparison' of findings. More

specifically, this method is used to deliberately "search for similarities and differences" in studies reviewed. In doing so, such a comparison has "the potential to sharpen and deepen understanding of the common and unique features" of the specific field of study (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 202). The distinctive characteristic of metasynthesis is that the integrations comprises of "more than the sum of parts in that they offer novel interpretations of findings that are the result of interpretive transformations" (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 18), thus providing new value to the original studies. In doing so, the review still remains "faithful to the findings in each report" (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 18), while also contributing with interpretations that are derived from the studies as a whole instead of individual parts.

2.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Prior to selecting which methodological approach is best suited for conducting a review, it is crucial to consider what constraints must be respected and what delimitations must be made to ensure quality of and validity in the process. A successful review is based on "a previously agreed level of quality" that either includes "all studies or only those that meet a minimum quality threshold" (Booth, Papaioannou & Sutton, 2016, p. 3). Due to a short time frame for conducting this review, quality criteria have been determined to efficiently work through the body of literature available.

One way to ensure quality of a literature review, while also respecting the time constraints at hand, is to limit the breadth of the research, for example by specifying research questions as concisely as possible and/or limiting the criteria for research findings included in the review. Also, in order to ensure transparency in the systematic process of conducting this literature review, specific steps have been followed. While there are multiple ways to methodologically conduct a review, it is essential to stick to a specific method that is suitable for the purpose of the review, because bias will then be less likely to occur (Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou, 2016, p. 37; Kitchenham, 2004, p. 4). In the case of qualitative research,

mapping across studies is a possible method of choice, "if the studies have measured educational attainment using different scales, that are sufficiently similar and reveal a common overall pattern of effect" (Booth, Papaioannou & Sutton, 2016, p. 39). However, if "the scales used are substantively different in terms of their underpinning rationale or the results of such measurements are so disparate as to provide conflicting conclusions" (Booth, Papaioannou & Sutton, 2016, p. 39), a more descriptive approach such as a narrative review may be more suitable.

For this literature review, the process of conducting a narrative review has been chosen as the most suitable methodological approach for synthesising literature findings. What distincts the narrative review from other forms of review is its primary focus on answering a research question, "which may lead to new theories or research or summarize current practice, often presenting controversies and emerging issues that may not have presented themselves in individual works" (Waterfield, 2018, p. 985). This thus summarises the purpose of this review, also stated previously above.

The prominent disadvantage of conducting a narrative review compared to other forms of systematic reviews is, however, a current lack of consensus on the process of synthesising qualitative research, thus leaving the possibility for more subjective conclusions. It is considered a prominent issue with many literature reviews in which critical analysis and synthesis occurs, as well as in reviews displaying a lack of explicit disclosure on the process of conducting the review. A lack of methodological disclosure in a review can ultimately lead to speculation on how systematic the process was, how methodological choices have been made and thus if bias is present. In order to avoid this, the following sections are included to display full transparency of the review and synthesis process.

2.31 Narrative review

The following model on steps involved in conducting a narrative review is inspired by Waterfield (2018) and has been utilised to facilitate the synthesising process:

Formulate a research question

↓

Identify key concepts, theories, etc.

↓

Choose a search strategy

↓

Conduct a computerised search

↓

Conduct a supplementary search

↓

Conduct critical analysis and synthesis of the literature in relation to key concepts, theories, etc.

↓

Formulate conclusions and recommendations

Model 1: Process of conducting a narrative review (Waterfield, 2018, p. 985).

What distincts the narrative review from other forms of review is, as mentioned previously, its primary focus on a research question, from which new perspectives on emerging issues may be brought to light. The following subsections will thus explain each step illustrated in the model above (cf. Model 1, 'Process of conducting a narrative review') in regard to the subsequent synthesis and review of sampled research findings.

2.311 RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this review is to account for and, to some extent, resolve discrepancies in the use of analytical methods within the field of digital discourse studies. In order to do so, the review will focus on analysing and synthesising current positions and propositions concerning academic practices in analysing digital discourse.

The main research question is: Which qualitative methods of analysis are currently utilised in digital discourse analysis of social media platforms and what propositions have been presented to advance digital discourse analysis?

This research question is specified from the research questions from the introduction (cf. section 1.3, 'Problem definition and research questions'), therefore, this chapter seeks to answer that question. Of course, this research question is quite broad. Therefore, further limitations, delimitations, and well-defined methodological choices will be clarified in the following in order to specify the research as much as possible (Victor, 2008, p. 3).

2.312 KEY CONCEPTS

The key concepts derived from the preliminary literature search are from the key words submitted by the author(s) in the sampled publications. Any key word that presented itself multiple times (e.g. more than once) will thus be considered a key concept.

The key words noted are: *Computer-mediated communication, computer-mediated discourse, multimodality, digital discourse, social media, critical discourse studies, and critical discourse analysis.*

These key words will be utilised as search words, both independently and paired together (e.g. 'digital discourse' or 'digital discourse and social media'), in the secondary literature search to identify as many relevant literature findings as possible.

2.313 SEARCH STRATEGY AND INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

In choosing a search strategy and how to sort through literature findings, it is essential for such findings to be as relevant as possible to the research question formulated for the review, as well as being up-to-date with any contemporary development and thinking in that particular field of research (Waterfield, 2018, p. 985). To ensure that the literature findings included in this review are contemporary, the findings are selected from the publication year 2010 to 2019. The year 2010 is chosen as the earliest publication date, since many

mainstream social media platforms, such as Instagram, Messenger (Facebook), and Snapchat, launched in 2010 and 2011. Of course, some literature dated later than 2010 can still be considered relevant to current research. This literature may be selected based on its recurrent representation in the more current literature findings. Thus, literature that serves to enhance theoretical understanding, but is not directly included in the synthesizing process, will not have any particular limits concerning publication date, as long as the theory serves a purpose for the issue at hand.

Additionally, as a student of Aalborg University, I have unlimited access to Aalborg University's search engine, AUB. It will thus serve as the primary platform for searching literature. The secondary platform applied is the multi-disciplinary search engine, ProQuest. It is first and foremost an international platform and will therefore ensure a wider range of literature that might not otherwise be available on AUB.

While it is crucial for the validity of the review to represent the area of research exhaustively, both in order to avoid subjective 'hand-picking' and bias and to be able to generalise observations in the sampled research, it is equally argued that even one study can contain an abundance of information and insights, thus 10 to 12 studies is generally recommended (Bondas & Hall, 2007, p. 117; Sandelowski, Docherty & Emden, 1997, p. 368) to exhaust these studies sufficiently for data, rather than including more studies and thus risking the exclusion of valuable information. The main concern with synthesising such a small sample of studies is that it can be deemed as neither valid nor reliable, and also not generalisable. However, as Sandelowski & Barroso (2007) suggest, it is not the definitive goal to be generalisable in qualitative studies, but rather to form and propose an idea that reaches "facets of human experience out of the reach of quantitative methods", to develop and validate "culturally sensitive instruments and participant-centred interventions", as well as to magnify "the practical significance" of the qualitative studies sampled for the review (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 2).

According to Sandelowski & Barroso (2007), the "initial topical (what), population (who), temporal (when), and methodological (how) parameters" must be set (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 35), once the purpose and research question have been determined. These parameters will thus assist in clarifying the criteria for including or excluding literature findings in the review. For this review, the following parameters have been set:

1. Topical parameter: The topical parameter for the review is qualitative methods used to analyse digital discourse practices. However, since this field of study is still relatively new, and due to the restricted time frame for conducting the review, the inclusion of literature will consist exclusively of qualitative data, thus excluding all quantitative data. Additionally, included literature findings is restricted to publications from between 2010-2019, as well as only featuring publications presented in English.

2. Population parameter: The population parameter for the review will focus on media users to facilitate the general focus on social media. More specifically, 'media users' refer to people who engage in computer-mediated communication for recreational and personal means. Therefore, all analyses of digital discourse practices in professional or educational settings are excluded. Additionally, the population parameter for this review will not distinct nor account for gender, ethnicity, religion, education and other identity factors.

3. Temporal parameter: The temporal parameter for the review is set between February 2019 and May 2019. This time frame allows for an in-depth search for relevant literature, a preliminary reading of the retrieved literature, a revision of the search criteria, a secondary search for relevant literature in accordance with the revised research criteria and lastly a comprehensive reading of the retrieved literature prior to writing the synthesis and review of the included literature findings.

4. Methodological parameter: As mentioned, this review only accounts for qualitative methods of inquiry, however, 'qualitative methodology' can comprise of a vast

collection of methodological approaches and practice disciplines (Saini & Shlonsky, 2012, p. 9). Additionally, many qualitative inquiries are multidisciplinary in their methodological application, thus making it challenging to search for relevant literature for a literature review by solely using the term 'qualitative' as a methodological parameter. Therefore, to define the utility of the term 'qualitative' for this specific review, it comprises of qualitative research in which "techniques for data collection or analysis commonly viewed as qualitative were used to produce only surface treatments of data" (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007, p. 40). In addition, the following methodological parameters have been excluded: 1) studies in which no humans actively participated or were observed for data collection, 2) studies using mixed methods from which qualitative and quantitative could not be separated, and 3) non-academic research e.g. from websites, blogs, public forums etc.

2.314 SEARCH RESULTS

The literature search was conducted in four separate steps. Firstly, a preliminary computerised search was conducted using general keywords, thus attempting to aim for a broad search result and literature scope. Secondly, a superficial read of the sampled literature findings allowed for an introductory understanding to the field, leading to further insight to apply for a more in-depth search. Secondly, a supplementary computerised search was conducted using more specific keywords that were identified from the primary search (cf. section 2.3, 'Methodological approach'), thus aiming for literature more determined for application in this particular review. Lastly, a thorough read of the remaining sampled literature findings resulted in a substantial exclusion of literature, since many of these articles proved irrelevant to the purpose of this study.

In the preliminary search, the literature findings were considered relevant based on a reading of the keywords, abstract and occasionally the introduction of the publication, in case the abstract was too ambiguous. The reason for this somewhat brief yet efficient manner of

including and excluding a publication from the body of literature was to ensure that no publication was excluded or included on the basis of bias. I have thus abstained from gaining an insight to the publications' methodology and research findings in the preliminary search in order to solely assess the individual publication's relevance to the research question for the review first and foremost.

Ultimately, 43 publications were excluded from the review, for example on the basis of their audience or target reader. Many articles included the keywords used to locate research findings, such as 'digital discourse analysis' or 'computer-mediated communication', but were targeted to readers interested in medicine and healthcare practices. While these articles may still have included aspects worth regarding, they were ultimately excluded from the review, since they did not include considerations on social media or multimodality, which are considered essential in this review. Since multimodal semiotic modes, such as pictures, videos, emoticons and other non-textual means of communication ultimately define what distincts discourse from digital discourse (Herring, 2013, p. 1), it would be dubious to exclude these factors. Ultimately, the process of setting a purpose, formulating research questions, choosing a search strategy and performing a multi-step literature search has resulted in 8 academic publications that suit this review's purpose and inclusion criteria. Needless to say, this is lower than the recommended 10-12 publications (cf. section 2.3, 'Methodological approach'). It has, however, not been possible to include more publications simply to meet the inclusion criteria without compromising the quality of the synthesis and review.

2.4 SYNTHESIS AND REVIEW

In this section, 8 publications within the field of digital discourse analysis will be synthesised and reviewed. To sum up the preceding sections, the purpose of this section is to 1) describe the current state of methodology in the field, 2) to provide a critical evaluation of methods used in the literature findings, and 3) to identify gaps in those methods for further scrutiny in this study's subsequent analysis. To provide a sequential overview of similarities

and dissimilarities of the literature findings, this section is divided into subsections based on a general theme that is recurrent in sampled literature. A conclusion and summary of these subsections is presented in the closing section of the chapter.

2.41 Applying traditional conversation analysis to digital contexts

According to Gredel (2017), many social media platforms can be studied and considered as a variety of media, such as a platform for collaborative authorship, as a news source, as a hyper-textual space or as a cultural reference (Gredel, 2017, p. 99). Seen as a multilingual and -modal corpus of continuous negotiation and collaboration, traditional discourse analysis neglects the multifaceted nature of digital discourse and communication (Gredel, 2017, p. 100). Additionally, the methodological challenge of analysing digital discourse comes from the continuous birth and development of digital data (Gredel, 2017, p. 100), thus making any analysis of digital discourse practices a brief and fleeting insight to the state of these practices. With that said, a number of scholars, including Gredel, have attempted to apply different methodological frameworks that may be applicable to digital discourse analysis.

In her study on interactive debates between users on Wikipedia, Gredel (2017) suggests that the methodological framework DIMEAN ('Diskursanalytisches Mehr-Ebenen-Analyse-Model': Multi-level discourse analysis model) is currently the most suitable analytical tool when conducting conversation analysis on digital platforms, since it takes the aspect of agency into account, and thus pays attention to the role of the individual media user (Gredel, 2017, p. 103). However, this framework was ultimately developed specifically for written texts (Gredel, 2017, p. 104; Herring, 2019, pp. 25-26), thus not taking digital discourse nor multimodality into account.

Dismissing the impact of multimodality on digital discourse practices is problematic, since the grammatical, syntactical and semantical structure of computer-mediated communication is "non-sequential, interactive and dynamic" (Gredel, 2017, p. 104), and therefore differentiates from the "consecutive order of text elements" that characterises the

traditional form of written texts (Gredel, 2017, p. 104). Also, the hyper-textual nature of social media comprises of "self-contained units that each user can combine via individual paths with the help of internal and external links" (Gredel, 2017, p. 104), which is unique to digital discourse and is thus not considered in traditional discourse analysis. Lastly, what differentiates the digital text from the traditional written text is the "extremely blurry line between private and public" (Gredel, 2017, p. 104), as well as the availability of and access to the internet in which anyone can attend. This aspect is especially considered relevant when analysing digital discourse practices, since social media in particular is largely more public than real-world discourse practices and social interactions, thus making media users more explicitly active or inactive in social settings and also seemingly more deliberate in levels of activity and actions. This particular aspect will be revisited in the secondary analysis (cf. section 5.1, 'Analysis of comments on Facebook').

With that said, Gredel (2017) does offer a relevant proposition from the DIMEAN framework that may be applicable in building a new framework for critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse. In accordance with the tradition of conversation analysis, the target is to identify "recurrent linguistic patterns revealing meaning regimes that structure knowledge" (Gredel, 2017, p. 105). In this regard, Gredel (2017) suggests that policies and guidelines in shaping a methodological framework should be paid more attention to as a preliminary contribution to digital discourse analysis. More specifically, the structure-related levels of communication, such as comments, chat, status updates, sharing etc., are not uniform throughout all social media platforms. It is therefore crucial to first regard how these institutional aspects play into how media users interact and engage on the specific platform that is placed under scrutiny.

By conducting a microanalysis of contributive conversation between users and editors on Wikipedia, Gredel (2017) exemplifies how the technological structure of the platform has relevance to the kinds of discourse practices users implement in discussions and conversations. These include referencing to older data on the the platform or the internet in

general as a means of legitimatising utterances in debate, informal writing style following an increased use of various punctuation marks, as well as tagging. These are not exclusive to discourse practices on Wikipedia and are therefore relevant to consider in digital discourse analysis of other platforms as well.

Conversely, it is suggested that storage and durable access has a significant impact on communicative acts (Gredel, 2017, p. 105) in the sense that media users can, as stated, also reference back to older data, unlike in real-world oral communication. This particular consideration does make sense to include in an analysis of Wikipedia, since all activity is logged publicly on the platform. It is, however, more problematic to consider on a platform like Facebook, since media users are always able to edit and/or delete content and data without other users having access to the prior state of data.

Conclusively, considering technological affordances and the structure-related levels of communication available to media users should, according to Gredel, be an initial consideration in digital discourse analysis, since these have impact and influence on the discourse practices placed under scrutiny.

2.42 The role of semiotics

Like Gredel, Lyons (2018) acknowledges that while academic attention has been paid to linguistic and typographic features of computer-mediated communication, accounts have so far "mainly been descriptive and [have] rarely considered the emergent grammar of the digital language system" (Lyons, 2018, p. 18).

Lyons (2018) explores the significance of kineticons (typographic symbols), such as emojis, which function to "activate the readers sensory associations" as well as "represent embodied actions and observable bodily phenomena, such as gestures, body positioning, facial expressions etc." (Lyons, 2018, p. 18).

In this study, Lyons (2018) differentiates between language-based conventions, which include text, grammar and punctuation, and non-language symbols, which include emojis and

multiplication of letters (Lyons, 2018, p. 20). With that said, Lyons emphasises that in multimodal texts, in which both language-based and non-language-based modes take place, "meaning does not equal a sum of meanings expressed through each of the modes employed, but takes into account the interplay between them" (Lyons, 2018, p. 21). Lyons (2018) thus suggests applying a methodological framework where actions of discourse are distinguishes between lower-level, higher-level and frozen actions (Lyons, 2018, p. 19). Lower-level is "the smallest units of actions […] for example, a single complete gesture", whereas higher-level is "constructed from a number of lower-level actions" (Lyons, 2018, p. 19), for example a range of gestures that comprise a conversation. And finally, frozen actions signify the textual placement of objects such as letters, symbols, and a variety of other multimodal elements. How a media user utilises different levels of action has an impact on the nature of the conversation as well as shaping the identity of the individual user.

However, despite recognising the significance of multimodal communication on digital discourse, Lyons focuses exclusively on text messages from a sampled group of frequent users, in which multimodal expressions are limited to the meaning of the single text, and can thus be analysed "with no interference of other multimodal and multimedia content" (Lyons, 2018, p. 21). In this regard, the data from this study limits any insight on how the framework would potentially work in analysing public spaces like forums, discussions and debates on social media. However, by separating the framework from the data, the framework does offer a simple yet potentially effective way of analysing digital discourse practices, applicable to different types of digital platforms. In applying a distinction between different levels of action in discourse to a general framework for digital discourse analysis, the framework itself can become more practical to implement and adapt to any particular study in the field.

2.43 Intersecting online and offline interactions and ideologies

Lyons' contribution to digital discourse analysis stands out in the distinction between 'communication' and 'expression'. More specifically, analysis of digital discourse should

distinct between "information that is given and information that is given off", also referred to as intentional and unintentional interaction (Lyons, 2018, p. 23). For example, the function of kineticons "is similar to that of non-verbal content of face-to-face exchanges" in that "they provide attitudinal cues" (Lyons, 2018, p. 24). The intentional interaction lies in the use of an emoji to represent the facial expression of the user, whereas the unintentional interaction lies in the actual facial expression the user has in real life, which may differ from the emoji used in the conversation. The importance of this distinction lies in the acknowledgement that multimodal communication in its many forms are digital tools that media users employ as part of creating and shaping their identity online. This aspect of non-textual online communication facilitates the comprehension that online communication differs from offline communication being that it leaves little to no room for unintentional actions and can thus be considered as a highly revised version of offline communication.

Thurlow (2017) also addresses a tendency in digital discourse analysis to focus "on the role of language and communication" as opposed to the sociological implications of digital discourse that are "clearly shaped also by the way people understand and talk about mediation and meaning-making" (Thurlow, 2017, p. 18). It is here suggested to emphasise "the intersection of language ideologies, media ideologies and, perhaps, especially, semiotic ideologies" (Thurlow, 2017, p. 18). Thurlow (2017) asserts that "so much metadiscursive framing of digital media fixates on matters of language (e.g. grammar, spelling)", however, it should undoubtedly focus equally on the impact of media and semiotic ideologies (Thurlow, 2017, p. 12).

In this study, a Foucauldian perspective on discourse analysis is taken to consider the "culturally shared belief systems or ways of talking about the world by which people come to know what (or who) should be treated as natural, neutral and/or normal" (Thurlow, 2017, p. 11). Inspired by Gershon's (2010) framework on analysing media ideologies of discourse practices, Thurlow (2017) proposes to extract the following evidence when analysing digital discourse practices: 1) language ideologies, for example, in the perspective of Foucault, by

distinguishing linguistic properties that propose a disapproval of language change or otherwise 'improper' language and thus differs from normative language practices; 2) media ideologies, for example by distinguishing "the communicative possibilities and the material limitations of a specific channel" (Gershon, 2010, p. 283); and 3) semiotic ideologies, for example, by incorporating the discursive values of visual communication such as emojis, videos, GIFs, images etc. and how these are linked to the textual communication at play.

Thurlow's (2017) contribution to digital discourse analysis contributes a missing link in current digital discourse methods of analysis - one that should be considered in understanding digital discourse practices as more than mere linguistic material, but also sociological and psychological material. While Lyons' (2018) and Thurlow's (2017) suggested frameworks bring up similar aspects, such as attention to technological affordances of the platform and the play between non-textual and textual elements of communication, they ultimately provide two different perspectives to a methodological: One with a focus on the meaning-making behind the single unit of communication and one with a focus on the meaning-making of a collection of units in digital communication. Both are considered equally valuable to identify the micro- and macro-implications of digital discourse practices.

2.44 The advantage of micro-analysis

One aspect of discourse analysis that is distinctive to digital practices is the non-verbal modes and devices used to express similar cues as in face-in-face interaction, like facial expressions and body gestures. However, as Darics (2013) asserts, these non-verbal devices "cannot be treated such a way that the same cue invariably accomplish the same function" (Darics, 2013, p. 142). Rather these devices should be viewed as "context-bound manifestations" (Darics, 2013, p. 142). While Garcia & Jacobs (1998), Markman (2005) and Meredith & Potter (2014) suggest that analysing non-verbal communication should focus more on process rather than outcome (e.g. by recording participants' digital interaction in action) (from: Darics, 2013, p. 143), it is conversely proposed that this will not necessarily

reveal other interpretations of data than doing micro-analyses of existing data on digital media. In doing so, such a narrow focus allows "for a more in-depth exploration of the possible functions of a single cue type" (Darics, 2013, p. 143). The process of conducting such an analysis is, according to Darics, efficiently made by extracting existing data and decoding the context(s) of the individual non-verbal cues. An essential aspect of contextualising non-verbal cues is the nature of media users attempting to recreate oral communication through non-normative textual communication (Darics, 2013, p. 143; Soffer, 2010, p. 313). Darics proposes here that non-standard language use, spelling and grammar is often employed to "shorten the reaction time", as well as being used to express personality and creativity (Darics, 2013, p. 143).

As of now, it is not possible to determine whether this statement is valid, especially since the study does not assert nor illustrate how contextualisation of non-verbal cues in non-standard language is performed methodologically. Even though Darics does not offer specific contribution to enhancing methodological frameworks in digital discourse analysis, it is still, in the context of this study, considered valuable to acknowledge and implement the efficiency and methodological quality that micro-analyses may offer.

2.45 Levels of formality through comparative analysis

Pérez-Sabater (2013) asserts that online communal platforms, like Facebook, are inherently participatory in which users "can add information or modify the information already online" (Pérez-Sabater, 2013, p. 83), as well as "create a group and this can open to other users, or restricted to a pre-selected community" (Pérez-Sabater, 2013, p. 83). Additionally, Facebook is home to a vast number of communities, both formal and informal, which makes online language more 'fluid' between formal and informal uses, mainly because "the traditional boundary between author and audience" crumbles (Pérez-Sabater, 2013, p. 84).

In a micro-analysis of texts from Facebook, Pérez-Sabater employs both quantitative and qualitative data, however, the quantitative data of informal and formal conversational traits do

not point to conclusions that the qualitative data could not necessarily have. In reality, the quantitative data merely functions to emphasise the validity of the qualitative, perhaps to avoid the stigma that often follows qualitative studies concerning validity and credibility.

The qualitative data was conducted by extracting both formal and informal texts from various public Facebook groups and pages. The purpose of the study was to distinct whether formal conversational traits, like greetings and farewells, that are often seen in e-mail correspondence, is also present on Facebook. While the study did point to the conclusion that formal traits are used on Facebook, albeit morphed from e-mail correspondence, it is unclear what methodological framework was employed when analysing the online texts. The idea of distinguishing formal from informal discourse from both a Bourdieuian and Foucauldian perspective could still be interesting to include in a modified framework for digital discourse analysis, if that remains the objective of a study.

One example of a methodological framework that could be useful to apply to distinguish formal and informal discourse is suggested by Gruber. Gruber (2017) asserts that a fundamental aspect of digital discourse analysis is the consideration of the "modal affordances […] implemented by developers as a result of users' (anticipated) needs or as improvements of shortcomings of previous systems" (Gruber, 2017, p. 2). Different modal affordances thus fulfil different communicative needs. In order to examine what such affordances are and how they impact discourse practices on a specific platform, comparative analysis is a possible methodological tool to employ. An example of this is to examine the modal affordances in a formal online space, such as a company's Facebook page, to an informal online space, such as a public Facebook group formed by common interest, thus perhaps shedding light to varieties of digital discourse based on the level of formality presented in that specific context.

While Pérez-Sabater (2013) and Gruber (2017) offer compelling perspectives on possible approaches and focal points to analysing digital discourse practices, they also appear too substantial to consider in this study without risking a dismissal of the other propositions.

Comparative analysis of levels of formality in online spaces is thus encouraged in further studies, but will not be revisited in this study.

2.46 The play between micro- and macro-levels of digital discourse

Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch (2017) offer a distinctive perspective on social media interaction in which media users only engage with online sharing "because they emerge in a playful process of collaborative interaction and play" (Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch, 2017, p. 2865). According to Rowe (1992) media "have no instrumental value; the realization or pursuit of which is intended to be of absorbing interest to participants and spectators" (from: Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch, 2017, p. 2865). In this regard, it is asserted that 'play' or 'games' is "governed by the logic of trial and error" which makes social media ideal to play out various types of interactions (Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch , 2017, p. 2868). Therefore, it is argued that digital discourse practices are better understood and scrutinised by performing a structural analysis in which both the micro-level and macro-level of the discourse is regarded, similar to Gredel (2017) and Darics (2013). More specifically, Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch (2017) propose to interpret discourse in two parts: 1) as a single core unit of text "that carries the main message, and 2) as several 'satellites' conveying information to and from the core unit (Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch, 2017, p. 2868), resembling Lyons' (2018) framework of analysing levels of action of discourse. For example, a shared article appearing on a Facebook news feed would be regarded as the core unit, and the comments, shares and likes regarded as the satellites. In the example of a journalistic post on Facebook, the posted article functions as the context, however, the meaning-making of the context is made by the comments, likes and shares, as the article would merely be a link to another website, if the discursive artefacts of user interaction were missing. Together, these entities are categorised as a hypertext that evolves as more comments are made and the story or context of the article alters. To perform such an interpretation of digital discourse practices, Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch (2017)

propose case studies as a methodological approach to emphasise specific discourse practices, rather than trying to pin down a universal approach to media discourse, once again similar to Darics' (2013) approach to conducting a micro-analysis of digital discourse practices.

This perspective is also supported by West (2012), who differs between small stories and larger stories, specifically on Facebook, in which larger stories (like a news feed article) are "designed for imagined recipients" (West, 2012, p. 2), whereas small stories (like the comments below the article) are designed for a more specific group, like 'ratified hearers' (friends) or 'overhearers' (friends of friends) (West, 2012, p. 4). The point of this distinction is to realise that digital discourse practices differ depending on where and how the media user interacts on the platform. West (2012) emphasises the importance of regarding this aspect in discourse analysis as it provides an insight to "the ways of which speakers/ writers use language to establish and maintain ties between the current linguistic interaction and prior ones involving the same participants", and also to "the ways in which listeners/ readers identify and use these ties to help them (re)construct a meaning" (West, 2012, p. 6). While West, like Darics (2013) and Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch (2017), asserts that micro-levels of discourse, or 'small stories', are essential in conducting digital discourse analysis, such an analysis should also regard discourse practices from a macro-level viewpoint, or 'larger stories', since they comprise of additional or distinctive technological affordances and can thus provide a diversified insight to discourse practices from a broader perspective.

2.5 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

The preceding literature review was conducted as a metasynthesis in which the goal was to search for similarities and dissimilarities in a selection of literature findings. In doing so, the individual findings function as 'more than the sum of parts', but as a unified interpretation and

synthesis from which it is possible to summarise a conclusion to the research question formulated for the review.

By employing Waterfield's framework of a narrative review, the following research question was formulated: Which qualitative methods of analysis are currently utilised in conducting digital discourse analysis of social media platforms and what propositions have been presented to advance digital discourse analysis?

After applying a specified search strategy, as well as setting inclusion and exclusion criteria and parameters for the literature findings, the final review has revealed several methodological positions in digital discourse analysis, as well as a few propositions in how digital discourse analysis can be conducted in a more comprehensive way compared to traditional methods of discourse analysis.

First and foremost, conducting micro-analyses of case studies was predominantly favoured in analysing digital discourse practices. The two methods of analysing discourse mentioned were conversation analysis and structural analysis. Also, the review revealed that multiple scholars in the field agree that technological affordances of the particular platform should be examined first, as this aspect affect how discourse is ultimately shaped and adapted.

Thereafter, when analysing digital discourse from a micro-level, two approaches are suggested: One in which actions of discourse is examined from different levels, thus dissecting each discursive mode individually, and one in which the different modes of discourse is examined from an ideological perspective, thus focusing on the meanings displayed in the individual discursive modes as a whole. Lastly, it is also suggested that the same attention should be paid to discursive modes from a macro-level in order to shed light on the linguistic, mediational and semiotic properties of discourse practices both individually and collectively.

3.0 Initial conclusion

The preceding literature review answered research question 1, as presented in section 1.3, 'Problem definition and research questions' in the final section of the chapter. The conclusion of the review did not, however, provide an answer for research question 2: Are the qualitative methods of discourse analysis used today considered to be adequate in obtaining valid and reliable data of digital discourse practices by scholars and researchers in the field?

This question can essentially be both validated and disproven. The research findings included in the review are - from an individual point of view - valid in their execution, apart from leaving out details on methodological approaches to collecting data, as well as reliable, since they undoubtedly provide information that shares insights to the field of digital discourse analysis. Conversely, as concluded in the literature review, individual studies on digital discourse are mostly very narrow in their academic focus and what is thus ultimately lacking is more consensus and generalised applications of frameworks to unify the field. Since this field is still novel and experimental, finding relevant methodology and applied theory in the field of digital discourse is tricky and often leads to discrepancy. In that regard, qualitative methods in the field of digital discourse analysis may be adequate, but also certainly sparse and lacking in congruence.

Additionally, two hypotheses were presented in section 1.3, 'Problem definition and research questions' that can to some extent be evaluated. Firstly, it was presumed that current qualitative methods in digital discourse analysis are somewhat ineffective, because the field of digital discourse is changing too rapidly for former academic claims to be valid. This viewpoint is shared by several scholars ("Digital academic discourse: Texts and contexts", 2018; Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015; Gredel, 2017; Zappavigna, 2012). More specifically, it has been stated that current analytical frameworks in the field face a short window of relevancy due to constant development of new technologies and new social features and applications. Also, a

continuous stream of new data on digital media makes it difficult, to say the least, to track such developments and make conclusive statements that are applicable in future studies. In this regard, it is safe to presume that this hypothesis is correct. However, each publication included in the review (as well as the many publications that were excluded) still provide valid insights in their respective areas of expertise. While most are, as mentioned, limited in scope, they offer new perspectives when scrutinised collectively, as presented in this study. Therefore, these methodological perspectives are still considered well grounded and substantial to include and apply in shaping a general framework for analysing critical multimodal digital discourse. The aim for this study will thus be to propose a 'skeleton', so to speak, that will offer an outline for further scholarly attention.

Secondly, it was presumed that current qualitative methods in digital discourse analysis are unreliable, because scholars and researchers often dismiss the significance of multimodality in digital discourse practices. This hypothesis has more or less been disproven by the findings of the literature review. While multimodality, as expressed by Sindoni (2013), Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2019) and Thurlow (2018), is still not standardised in digital discourse analysis, as they argue it should be, the process of conducting a literature review for this study has made it clear that an albeit small but established body of literature is traceable within the subject of multimodality. The challenge with this body of literature regarding multimodality in connection with digital discourse is that a majority of these studies are based on micro-analyses, and thus have very specific insights. For example, traditional analytical discourse methods, such as conversation analysis, content analysis, comparative analysis etc. have been applied to study kineticons/graphicons, letter repetition, language change between genders, ages and social groups etc., however, none adhere to a general framework or a set of methodological approaches in the domain of digital discourse analysis. The only multifaceted and versatile framework encountered in research for this study was Herring's framework for computer-mediated discourse published in 1996 (which was not explicitly included in the literature review, but will be revisited in chapter 5.0, 'Study analysis

and results'). This framework has been applied by a number of scholars, however, as versatile as this framework may be, it is predominantly built for and applied in linguistic studies, thus not considering the value of sociology, psychology and technology, as is coveted by scholars today (Androutsopoulos, 2006; Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019; Thurlow, 2018). Also, as asserted by Waterfield (2018), when examining a highly contemporary and progressive issue, like digital media, it is of most importance to submit to references that are as up-to-date as possible (Waterfield, 2018, p. 985). Therefore, while the second hypothesis of this study has more or less been disproven, it is still considered of value to provide further insights to building a revised framework for critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse.

4.0 Study design

In the preceding chapter, a sampled body of literature within the field of digital discourse analysis was synthesised and reviewed. The literature review appointed a number of key factors to include in building a framework for analysing discourse practices on social media. In this chapter, these factors will be moulded into a proposed framework prior to applying it in the subsequent analysis.

4.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this study design is to shape a framework for analysing digital discourse practices on social media. This chapter will clarify how the methodological framework for the subsequent analysis is intended for use, without expressing judgment nor concern for the layout and functionality of the framework - any critical regard for the framework will inevitably come to light in the analysis and will thus be discussed in that chapter. The framework for analysis is coined 'Critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse', inspired by Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2019) (cf. section 1.1, 'Key concepts').

4.2 THE ROLE OF THE TEXT

In the case of this particular study, the word 'text' refers only to written discourse, as well as semiotic modes, such as emojis, letter repetition, punctuation, images, GIFs, memes etc. Therefore, auditory discourse, such as video, sound, podcast etc., is excluded from consideration. As mentioned previously (cf. section 1.1, 'Key concepts'), Jones, Chik & Hafner (2015) specifically define the word 'text' as "a collection of semiotic elements" in which cohesion is built by "the way different parts of the text are held together using the syntactic and semantic resources of whatever semiotic system is being used", and coherence is built by

"the way different parts of the text are ordered sequentially so that it can be recognised by readers as logical and meaningful" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 5).

Conversely, Jones, Chik & Hafner (2015) also express that discourse analysis should go beyond syntax and semantics, as it only provides practical meaning and utility when looking at what discourse practices say about the real world and how (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 8). From a broader perspective, it may also be of great interest to further understand the implications of digital media, and specifically social media, to examine how digital discourse practices convert and adapt in the transition between online spaces and real-life spaces, however this is also excluded from this study, but is highly encouraged to consider in future work in the field.

4.3 CRITICAL MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL DISCOURSE

The subsequent analysis will be conducted based on a case study of discourse practices from user comments extracted from a journalistic post on the social media platform, Facebook. While comparative analysis with other platforms is favoured, as stated by Gruber (2017) (cf. section 2.4, 'Synthesis and review'), this study will focus exclusively on Facebook to respect the time scope and too ensure an in-depth and concise analysis, but also because Facebook is the most active social media platform today (Clement, 2019, ¶ Global social media ranking).

Case studies are considered useful for "understanding existing phenomena for comparison, information, or inspiration" (Hanington & Martin, 2012, p. 28). The case study method "focuses on gaining detailed, intensive knowledge about a single instance or a set of related instances" (Hanington & Martin, 2012, p. 28), which may be about "individuals, organizations, entire communities, events, or processes" (Hanington & Martin, 2012, p. 28).

In the context of this study, case studies can neither support nor reject hypotheses, however, they "may shed light on theory", (Hanington & Martin, 2012, p. 28), thus allowing to clarify if and how a theory and/or methodological practice is useful or not. Also, case studies

are considered an exploratory tool of research in a design process; in this case, case studies will allow for clarification on the design of a suggested framework to analyse digital discourse on social media.

4.31 The four constituents of critical multimodal analysis

Inspired by Jones, Chik & Hafner (2015), and in inclusion of the factors concluded from the review, the case study will focus on the following four aspects of discourse:

1. The text: More specifically, what technological affordances there are to produce text and "allow us to combine semiotic elements" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 4). This is also in alignment with the conclusion from the review in which such affordances of the discourse practices are examined first (cf. section 2.5, 'Conclusions and summary'). Here, the goal is to examine the digital platform at play.

2. The context: More specifically, what the social and material situation is in which the text(s) is "constructed, consumed, exchanged and appropriated" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 4), thus addressing what the significance of the core unit of the text is, as expressed by Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch (2017) (cf. section 2.4, 'Synthesis and review'). Here, the goal is to examine the situation that surrounds the discourse under scrutiny.

3. The actions and interactions: More specifically, what the media users are doing with the texts. This related to distinguishing between the lower-level, higher-level and frozen level of the text, as expressed by Lyons (2018) (cf. section 2.4, 'Synthesis and review'). Here, the goal is to examine the individual discourse and the components of it.

4. Power and ideology: More specifically, how the individual actions and interactions express dominance and "certain versions of reality" (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 4), in correlation with Thurlow's (2017) approach to language-, media-, and semiotic

ideologies in which belief systems about such ideologies are shaped as or becomes normative (cf. section 2.4, 'Synthesis and review').

4.32 Samples of discourse and content analysis

The samples extracted from Facebook are transcribed directly from the original source without subject to change, however, leaving out any indication of authorship. This has been done to ensure full anonymity, as well as to respect the privacy and dignity of the users from which I have sampled comments from, and also to avoid the hassle of obtaining permission to use the material.

The analysis will ultimately present a final proposition for a general framework to analyse digital discourse practices on social media. Thus, the study design presented in this chapter will be 'put to the test' in the analysis without knowing, prior to analysing the discourse, if the design for analysing digital discourse practices is adequate for the task - that is thus the purpose of this study to find out.

The observations made through this analysis will be summarised simply by identifying "the common themes and themes that emerge from the data, supported by a general indication of how dominantly they are represented" (Hanington & Martin, 2012, p. 40). The purpose of this approach is to evaluate the methodological stances presented in the primary analysis, the literature review, prior to proposing a final methodological framework for the secondary analysis, the case study, as mentioned.

Thus, the aim for conducting a case study is to verify whether the established methods highlighted in the literature review are in fact useful for critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse, and if so, how. Equally, it may shed light on aspects of digital discourse analysis that have not been accounted for in the review.

5.0 Study analysis and results

As stated in the preceding chapter, the aim for this analysis is to verify whether the established methods highlighted in the review are in fact useful as part of a collected framework for analysis, and if so, how.

A specific case of current discourse practices on social media will be used throughout the analysis to exemplify and clarify how the analytical stances and propositions from the framework play out in practice. The case chosen from the social media platform, Facebook, was selected based on its international relevance and novelty. The micro-analysis will follow the framework presented in section 4.3, 'Critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse'.

5.1 ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS ON FACEBOOK

This micro-analysis will examine samples of comments in the commentary section of an online article called "Disney's Live-Action 'Little Mermaid' Will Star Halle Bailey As Ariel" published by the Huffington Post on their website July 3rd, 2019 and shared the following day on Facebook with the caption "The live-action reboot of Disney's 'Little Mermaid' has found its princess of the sea". The article has generated immense attention (compared to their other recent posts) with currently 3,3 thousands comments, 1,6 thousands shares, and 13 thousands likes, thus being one of Huffington Post's most active posts on Facebook currently.
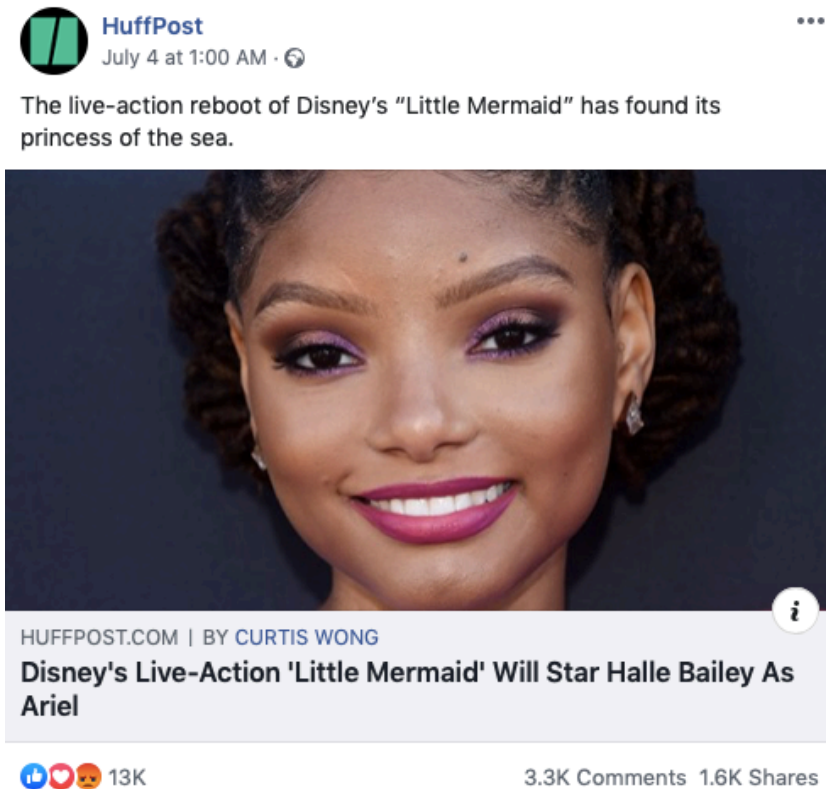
Image 1: "Disney's Live-Action 'Little Mermaid' Will Star Halle Bailey As Ariel"-post on Facebook.

5.11 The text

Before diving into the context of the specific case under scrutiny, an examination of the technological affordances that surrounds the context is crucial to conduct in order to understand the frame of which the discourse is taking place. As illustrated in Image 1, a post on Facebook is ultimately structured in six rows:

1. The first row depicts the Facebook profile of which the article is published by, hereunder a profile picture and a profile name, as well as a subtle time stamp indicating when the post was posted, a globe signalling that the post is public, and lastly a three-dotted icon that gives the user access to a few settings, such as turning on or off notifications (thus allowing you to choose, if you want to stay updated on the post or not), or saving the link for later reference.

2. The second row includes a bar in which the editor of the post can leave a caption in relation to the content on the third row. In this case, the caption states "The live-action reboot of Disney's 'Little Mermaid' has found its princess of the sea".

3. The third row generally constitutes an image, meme, GIF or video, which in this case is an image of the actress, Halle Bailey, chosen to play Ariel in the upcoming remake of the Little Mermaid. Since this row is the primary 'home' for multimodal modes, it is also considered the main attraction point of a post. In this case, the image is not necessarily relevant to the discourse being analysed, however, it does reveal the focal point of the debate, which is the actress' racial background - this will be revisited and further explained in subsection 5.12, 'The context'.

4. The fourth row is all information linked to the article and the primary source of the post, which includes the original title of the article, the source and the author of the article.

5. The fifth row is the first technological affordance that facilitates interaction for and between users, which includes information on how many likes (or more specifically, reactions) the post has gained and how many comments and shares have been made. By clicking on each number, it is possible for a user to see what users have interacted using these technological affordances.

6. The sixth and final row is not illustrated in Image 1, which is the commentary section. This section includes a top row for entering a new comment, followed by individual rows below for each comment made by other users. Each row includes a profile picture and profile name of the user who published the comment, followed by the actual comment. Lastly, on the right of each row, users can 'like' or 'react' to any comment with a set of five emojis: A thumbs up for 'like', a heart for 'love', a laughing emoji for 'haha', a shocked emoji for 'wow', a crying emoji for 'sad', or a red-faced emoji for 'angry'.

In regard to user interaction, Facebook's proprietary algorithms dictate which users and what content are considered more relevant or current than others based on how (inter)active the user or content is (Kelly, 2016, p. 103). This algorithm thus "imposes a hierarchy that shapes the user's experience and the accessibility of information, but is designed to appear neutral" (Kelly, 2016, p. 103). This is noticeable in any public commentary on Facebook in that the feature is not hierarchical, meaning that particular comments are highlighted due to the fact that they are liked or replied to the most. This is visibly marked in the sixth row of a post as 'Top comments' or 'Most recent'. The same applies for a user's 'News feed', as well as multiple other features on the site, where a user will firstly be presented with posts from sources or friends the user interacts with the most.

The technological features afforded on Facebook, such as the 'Like'-button, 'Share'-button, and 'Reply'-button, can also be considered as mimics of social interactions that "naturalizes the technological processes governing Facebook" (Kelly, 2016, p. 99). The processes invoke casual and spontaneous interactions (Kelly, 2016, p. 100), while simultaneously cementing a user's online identity in a highly edited way compared to spoken discourse (Kelly, 2016, p. 100). Essentially, it is arguable that these invitations for interaction are tools for expressing self-esteem - according to Mehdizadeh (2010) "all humans have a vital need to maintain and/or raise it in both online and offline social settings" (from: Petroni, 2019, pp. 260-261), which is also academically supported by a number of scholars (Grunander, 2016, p. 3), thus interactions like 'liking', 'sharing', or 'commenting' are social practices that users carry out to maintain or boost their self-esteem and -worth in the digital community. Additionally, social interaction in a digital context only takes place when users encourage other users to "respond to, comment on, and approve of" (West & Trester, 2013, p. 133) a shared interest, thus acknowledging each other and establishing each other's worth in that context. Ultimately, likes and comments can be considered social currency: The more you give and/or gain, the more value you have as a member of the community.

5.12 The context

According to Broersma & Graham (2013) and Hermida (2013), "social media has become an important news source and participatory space for journalists (from: Johansson, 2019, p. 33). Accordingly, this specific case is one example out of a vast collection articles that are shared daily on Facebook for faster distribution and community participation.

The context that situates this case study is, as mentioned, the Huffington Post article titled "Disney's Live-Action 'Little Mermaid' Will Star Halle Bailey As Ariel" shared on their Facebook page. The article is a simple statement announcing that 19-year-old singer, Halle Bailey, has been chosen after an extensive search to play the role of Ariel in the live-action remake of classic tale, the Little Mermaid. In the article, it is appointed that the primary reasons for this particular choice of actress rest on the "rare combination of spirit, heart, youth, innocence, and substance - plus a glorious singing voice - all intrinsic qualities necessary to play this iconic role" (Wong, 2019, ¶ Entertainment). The article concludes with mentioning that the movie will include all the classic songs from the original Disney animation movie, including "Part of Your World" and "Under the Sea", as well as new songs to truly caption Halle Bailey's vocal talent.

However, the article does not include nor reveal the context of the discourse that will be examined in the subsequent subsection. The 'real' story under scrutiny has essentially unfolded through the comments on Facebook, which are based on the issue of race. The story essentially unravels in a heated debate on cultural- and racial appropriation in which interactants in the commentary section are discussing, whether Halle Bailey is an appropriate choice to play Ariel based on difference between the actress' and the character's race. From a general standpoint, the interactants are separated in three groups that each present a dominant viewpoint in the debate: 1) People who support the choice, because it is of modern relevance to include minorities more in the entertainment industry; 2) people who do not support the choice, because Halle Bailey's racial background supposedly does not align with the origin of Ariel in which the central arguments are that the Disney-version of Ariel is

caucasian and has red hair or that the original H.C. Andersen-version of Ariel is Danish and must therefore look Scandinavian; and finally 3) people who are indifferent to either opinion, stating that Ariel is a fictional character and should thus not be subject to real-world issues or that the debate itself is ludicrous simply because it revolves around a fictional subject. All three viewpoints will be further explored through specific examples in the next subsection.

5.13 The actions

For analysing the linguistic values of the actions and interactions taking place in this particular case study, the framework of Herring (1996) is utilised as inspiration. A number of scholars in the field have attempted to deconstruct and push forward a new framework, however, the effective and reliable structure of Herring's framework has left it more or less unaltered (Thurlow, 2018, p. 135). As expressed in chapter 4.0, 'Study design', the actions and interactions of this case will be applied in relation to Lyons' (2018) distinction between lower-level actions (the smallest units of actions), higher-level actions (the conjunction of multiple lower-level actions) and frozen-level actions (the textual placement of letters, symbols, multimodal elements etc.). Concerning Herring's framework, this includes examining any particular spelling, word choice and punctuation on lower-level actions; sentence structure, exchanges, topic developments, repairs, humour and conflict on higher-level actions; and finally symbols on frozen-level actions. All aspects mentioned here may not be included, if they do not appear in the specific comments extracted from the commentary section of the article. The comments will in this subsection be referred to as 'satellites', inspired by Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch (2017).

The actions examined are based on a primary satellite from the commentary section and the secondary satellites of the primary satellite - in other words, the most popular and highlighted comment to the article and the replies users have made to that comment. The interactant of the primary satellite will be referred to as 'User 1'. Interactants of secondary satellites will be referred to as 'User 2', 'User 3' and so on. The primary satellite is as follows:

User 1: "People mad because they think the mermaid is supposed to be white… I've got some bad news about your boy, Jesus. [emoji: 'rolling on the floor laughing' inserted 11 times]".

Secondary satellites include the following:

User 2: "[meme: male of asian heritage pointing and smiling; text stating 'That's Racist']"

User 3: "Best comment ever!!!!"

User 4: "Hey idiot. Little Mermaid is Danish."

User 5: "[meme: Shirley Temple giggling; text stating 'LOL']"

User 6: "Besides the fact that he was just as fake as little mermaid [emoji: 'face with tears of joy' inserted 4 times]".

User 7: "this is the dumbest comment since it's an old danish fairytale and NOT IN ANY WAY created by Disney."

User 8: "She's also… you know… fictional."

5.131 LOWER-LEVEL ACTIONS

It was initially expected, based on personal bias, that misspelling or non-standard spelling would occur regularly, since studies on digital discourse tend to fixate on this issue (Thurlow, 2017, p. 12), and also since scholars have noted that grammatical correctness or spelling and grammar is often neglected to shorten reaction time (Soffer, 2012, p. 1094; Darics, 2013, p. 143). This, however, does not appear to be the case in the satellites sampled for examination. While they are significantly short and consist mostly of a single sentence, no misspelling is noticeable. Aspects such as neglecting to capitalise initial words like 'this', as seen in User 7's comment, or proper nouns like 'danish' or 'little mermaid' by User 6 and 7, as well as missing punctuation, like a comma in 'Hey idiot' by User 4, or leaving out words, like a verb in 'People

mad' by User 1, is considered grammatically incorrect. With that said, these misspellings or non-standard linguistic observations are not considered substantial enough to settle on any significant conclusions.

An interesting aspect worth highlighting, though, is the use of punctuation - specifically the use of periods and exclamation points. User 1, User 3 and User 8 all utilise three periods to create a break in their sentence, but with different effect intended. In User 1's comment, the three periods occur as a natural break to ease cautiously from the first statement to the second. User 3 employs four exclamation points to emphasise excitement and to amplify the significance of the word 'best' in the sentence. And finally, User 8 also employs three periods twice to develop a sense of seriousness and irony or sarcasm towards the context. Additionally, User 7's use of capitalised letters serves as a strong tense by highlighting the words 'not in any way', thus emphasising their opposed view in the statement clearly. It is thus apparent from these four different uses of punctuation or 'tense-markers' that they are employed to stress a specific feeling or tone to a sentence, since both feeling and tone can be difficult to apply from a physical space to a predominantly textual space.

5.132 HIGHER-LEVEL ACTIONS

Looking exclusively at higher-level actions in the sampled satellites, it is apparent that that two of the three stances on the matter is represented, as highlighted in the subsection on the context of the case. Firstly, users who support the choice of actress for the role of Ariel are not represented in this case study, since no obvious supporters of Halle Bailey playing Ariel has commented on the primary satellite. This thus leaves the debate between the two other groups: People who do not support the choice of an African-American playing Ariel in the Little Mermaid vs. people who find the debate ludicrous.

The latter group is easily spotted in the crowd of comments on the article, since these comments often, if not exclusively, feature emojis or memes. Emojis and memes are essentially considered effective tools to express humour and sarcasm, which will be revisited

in the subsection on frozen-level actions. Conversely, users who do not employ visual means of communication express a more serious tone - these being the users who are not supportive of the choice of actress.

In regard to exchanges between users, topic development and relationship repairs, it appears from the sampled comments that no such interactions between these users are present. It would thus appear that secondary satellites are individually situated and only remain a response to the primary satellite, but not to each other. In other words, no further exchanges or repairs in the conversation are apparent and any conflict is thus not concerned with a smaller group of interactants, but rather interactants separated largely in the three groups presented earlier. What can ultimately be derived from this observation is that users in controversial debates may refrain from interacting directly with a specific user in order to avoid direct confrontation, but rather engages in the debate from a distance by presenting a viewpoint to the mass group of interactants.

5.133 FROZEN-LEVEL ACTIONS

When looking at symbols and multimodal means of communication in the sampled comments, two kinds of visual modes are present: Emojis (also previously referred to as graphicons and kineticons) and memes.

Generally, a lack of graphicons or kineticons can signal a sense of seriousness, since they are mostly used to express humour, irony, enthusiasm etc. For example, a repetition of punctuation, letters or multimodal means of communication are ways to express enthusiasm or lack thereof (Tannen, 2013, pp. 106-108), as also examined in the lower-level actions. This statement also correlates with the examined satellites in which User 4, User 7 and User 8 all have an underlying serious or negative tone, which is essentially due to both the chosen wording, like 'idiot' and 'dumbest', and the lack of tense-markers or visual modes, like an emoji. Conversely, humour and enthusiasm is effectively expressed by User 1 and User 6 in which laughing emojis are not only employed, but also repeated up to 11 times to clarify

intensely just how humorous they find their statements and the context of their statements.

Interestingly, the catalogue of emojis on Facebook spans from a large array of emotions, objects, situations etc., however, in this case - perhaps due to the humorous tone of the situated discourse - no emojis are employed that signify anger, annoyance, frustration or sarcasm, which could have been relevant for User 4, 7, and 8. Based on this case alone, it can thus be assumed that emojis are predominantly used to express positive emotions, whereas the absence of emojis predominantly expresses negative or suppressed emotions, which is also supported by Herring & Androutsopoulos (2018, p. 134).

As mentioned, two memes are sampled from the commentary section, which include the following:
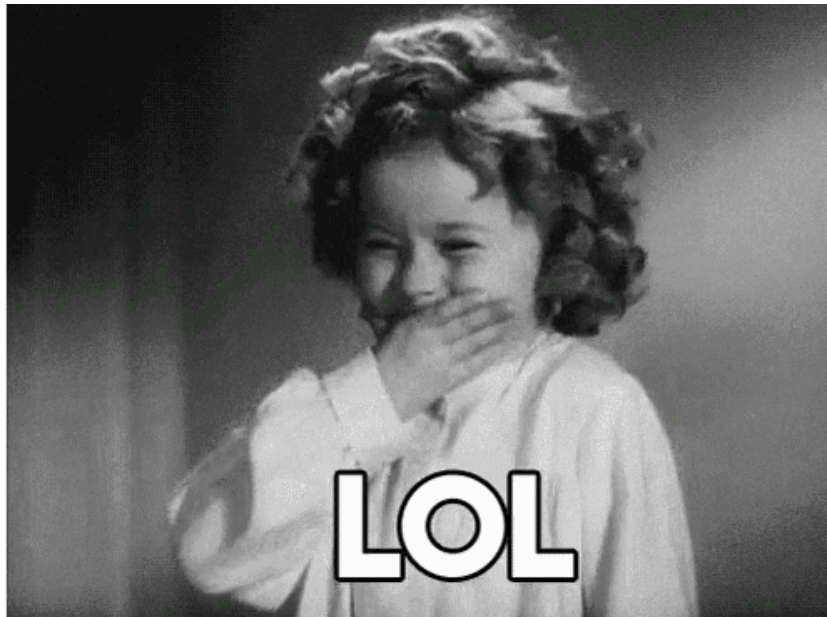

Image 2: 'That's Racist'-meme.

Image 3: 'LOL'-meme.

In both cases, the text is "the primary mode and the picture plays no substantial role in altering the meaning conveyed verbally" (Yus, 2019, p. 113). The text could without comprising its meaning be unaccompanied by the picture, since the picture itself does not provide any additional information. It can thus be argued that the use of a picture to animate the text is to embody the text in a conversation, by illustrating it in a more 'fleshed out' way and thus bringing life to the text. Also, a meme stands out more than mere text, so it effectively provides both attention and reaction simultaneously.

Additionally, a meme can also be text and picture that accompany each other to 'act out' the meaning of the meme. The text thus anchors the meaning that is conveyed and the picture contributes with a sense of life-like expression, that ultimately sets the tone of textual meaning. This type of meme is considered the most common type of meme and is mainly objected to provide a humorous outcome (Yus, 2019, p. 118), which is also the case in Image 2 and 3.

Ultimately, applying emojis or memes to a predominantly textual conversation is way for users to bring in real-world emotions and reactions, which essentially makes computer-

mediated communication less artificial and more natural. In that sense, it is arguable that while digital discourse is distinctive in its form and application, it is not unrelated nor autonomous from real-world discourse, as they mimic and influence each other in innumerable ways.

5.134 PASSIVE ACTIONS

One aspect of action-based discourse that Lyons' framework does not account for (cf. section 2.4, 'Synthesis and review') is discourse that is not actively illustrated or visualised through the technological affordances of the context. More specifically, the discourse that has been examined thus far can be referred to as active actions, but does not account for passive actions, specifically likes and shares.

West & Trester (2013) assert that "rather than writing a comment that engages with the post in some meaningful way, users may simply click the like-button to indicate having noticed and appreciated a friend's post" (West & Trester, 2013, p. 145). What also makes this action more efficient for both the poster or responder is that "neither interactant is committed to any future action" (West & Trester, 2013, p. 145). As mentioned, the Huffington Post-article under scrutiny in this study has collected 1,6 thousands shares and 13 thousands likes. While it is not possible to derive concrete discursive conclusions based on these, shares and likes are inherently still levels of interaction and express both emotion and attitude towards the context at hand. What can be derived from this passive mode of communication is that the attitude users have towards the context of this case (e.g. an African-American woman playing the Little Mermaid) is overwhelmingly positive, despite the abundance of dismissive and opposing comments to the article. By click the 'Like'-button, it is displayed that 8 thousand users like the article, 4,8 thousand love the article, 320 hate the article, 147 are surprised with the article, 95 are amused by the article and 42 are sad by the article. While this may not conclude irrefutably that the commentary section on social media generally serves to voice opposing or conflicting viewpoint (rather than simply using the 'Like'-button to give a negative

reaction), it does propose that popular opinion on a matter cannot be fully and comprehensively sourced by exclusively looking at textual and semiotic discourse of active actions, but must also consider passive means of communicating on social media.

5.14 The ideologies

Shifting from a micro-level to a macro-level perspective, Thurlow (2018) asserts that social media are "inherently ideological" which is apparent in the way certain types of language on social media quickly become standardised as "correct, good or normal language" (Thurlow, 2018, p. 138). A central argument when discussing discursive ideologies on social media is how digital discourse is designed and shaped to better communication. The central idea in this case is that better communication, or better options for communication, empowers people. More specifically, Cameron (2000) asserts the following:

> "Developing their communication skills enables them to realize their goals and take charge of their own destinies [...]. But what is called *empowerment* has little to do with liberating people from existing constraints on their agency and freedom. In many cases it has more to do with teaching them to discipline themselves so they can operate more easily within those constraints: become more flexible, more team-oriented, better at resolving conflicts and controlling the emotions that threaten to disrupt business as usual (from: Thurlow, 2013, pp. 227-228).

In the following, these linguistic, mediational and semiotic ideologies that exist to shape communication will be discussed.

5.141 LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

Zappavigna (2012) asserts that media users are "engaging in a practice that centers on making the ordinary visible to others" (Zappavigna, 2012, p. 37), which stems from a social

need to remain in the collective consciousness. Thereby, interacting on social media can be seen as "an ongoing performance of identity" (Zappavigna, 2012, p. 38) based on a fundamental desire for affiliation and connectedness. In order for such a collective conscious to thrive, structure and praxis is necessary to some extent. In this regard, it is essential to examine what normative and standardised language ideologies are apparent in the context of analysing digital discourse in any specific case.

Structure and praxis largely shapes and standardises digital discourse on social media through technological affordances, as these affordances function as frames to discipline the interactants choice of socialisation and communication with others. By providing specific interactional features that users are obligated to roam within and cannot detour from, it provides both a strict and intimate space for users to engage in. Accordingly, what users choose to do within these constraints is where social practices, cultural construction and political development come to light.

When looking specifically at textual communication on social media within the technological affordances available to users, "shortening the reaction time is much more important than grammatical correctness or spelling and punctuation" (Soffer, 2012, p. 1094), thus making digital discourse more 'economical' in the sense that "reducing the number of keystrokes and speeding typing" (Soffer, 2012, p. 1094) is more beneficial. A simple example of this linguistic development is the popular use of acronyms such as 'OMG' for 'Oh my god' or 'LOL' for 'laughing out loud', as employed in one of the sampled memes. In many cases, a simple emoji can be used as a replacement for a fully worded sentence, such as placing an emoji hysterically laughing as a substitute for writing 'That is so hilarious'. Accordingly, in West & Trester's (2013) study, it was concluded that humour and ridicule tend to create "much more impassioned responses" (West & Trester, 2013, p. 136). This was especially apparent when users applied emojis or acronyms (e.g. 'JK' for 'just kidding' or once again 'LOL' for 'laughing out loud) to express positive politeness and friendliness (West & Trester, 2013, p. 136), which has also proven to be the case in this analysis.

5.142 MEDIA IDEOLOGIES

Petroni (2019) asserts that "social media interactions go beyond the virtual dimension of the Web and regain their 'trueness', the real face-to-face dimension, since multimedia features such as photos, videos, gadgets, music, friends' lists and links to others' social networking profiles are identity markers which surrogate the physical interplay" (Petroni, 2019, p. 258).

Schmitz (2001) contributes with four factors that are distinctive in computer-mediated communication that certainly holds value in this context: 1) It is monologic in a "less disciplined and uninhibited way", 2) it is dialogic in a playful and somewhat anarchic way, 3) it is non-linear and lacking in structure and hierarchy, 4) it is interactive in that the "distinction between author and reader" is blurry (from: Androutsopoulos, 2011, p. 4).

Specifically regarding the nature of playful and anarchic communication, social media is characterised by its impulsive and fast-moving pace (Bouvier, 2015, p. 151), and because of this unstoppable speed in shaping and reshaping, writing and rewriting, sharing and resharing etc., scholars like Hodgkinson (2008), Lindgren (2010) and Georgakopoulou (2014) are questioning whether established media ideologies are disciplining users to promote "disengaged and insular forms of ideas, values, concepts, worldviews" (from: Bouvier, 2015, p. 151) and so on.

Another interesting aspect of the communicative possibilities on an interactive field like the comment section on Facebook is the relationship between blunt honesty and trust. Social media allows users to efficiently communicate personal opinion, preference and taste in a comfortable manner, since expressing such viewpoints does not directly impact the person expressing these views as it would in face-to-face conversation (Wilson, 2016, pp. 53-54). However, they are still bound by social politeness, since any interaction always features the user's name and profile picture - given that they are truthful of course. Additionally, Bouvier (2015) asserts that honesty is an easier attribute to gain on social media, since users have the ability to unfollow, unsubscribe, log out, block or otherwise disengage from any threat or confrontation (Bouvier, 2015, p. 151), which is rarely the case in face-to-face communication,

thus making dignity and social rank easier to maintain. This type of 'online honesty' can also quickly evolve into arrogance and in some cases cyberbullying. Gee & Hayes (2011) distinguish this as the primary downside of social media in that such media have an enormous audience that allow each person to find their significant audience and create groups or communities centered around common interest. While this aspect of social media holds immense potential and value, it also creates a virtual space of both togetherness and estrangement, since "people can splinter and even polarize around their favored passions, values and even political views, communicating only with others who share their passions, values and views" (Gee & Hayes, 2011, p. 4) and dismissing those who do not. Essentially, social media in this regard is neither public in the true sense of word nor civil (Gee & Hayes, 2011, p. 4), but rather an obscure space of enclosed communities, rival terrains and private sections. Ultimately, this view is more or less supported by current media ideologies in which users enter a space of constructed affordances and structures for social play, but where the user still has freedom to customise their playground by friending certain people, liking certain pages, following certain groups and adjusting personal settings to their specific preference. This is not to say that social media are inherently 'bad' or dominate virtual social relations in negative ways - rather, it is to distinct that technological affordances and underlying media ideologies alone can not be regarded as detrimental to the social laws and practices of computer-mediated communication, but the substantial scrutiny of the utility and impact of digital discourse should rest on how people use and engage with social media.

5.143 SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGIES

According to Sindoni (2019), a "social-semiotic and multimodal approach sees communication as a co-shared and systematic co-deployment of resources, such as language, image, music, kinesics and proxemics patterns (Sindoni, 2019, p. 75). Additionally, it is expressed that these resources are "orchestrated" by users in various contexts in a culturally meaningful way which is principled by pattern and reproduction (Sindoni, 2019, p.

75). In that regard, these co-constructed patterns can thus be coined the "grammar" of digital language (Sindoni, 2019, p. 75). Therefore, semiotic artefacts are an essential aspect of computer-mediated communication, especially since semiotics ultimately allow users to embody real-world experiences in the virtual world. As articulated by van Leeuwen (2005), "it contributes not just to organizing communicative events, but also vitalizing them, allowing, in the case of these conversations, users to reach very high levels of empathy and intimacy in a shorter time as compared to face-to-face communication" (from: Jones, 2013, p. 509). Above all, semiotic modes of communication is what allows users of social media to create social relations that can become as intimate as real-world relations and often much faster, since the variety of semiotic artefacts is immense and perhaps thus facilitates easier and unambiguous conversation.

The popular comment analysed in subsection 5.13, 'The actions', was essentially popularised based on its immense accumulation of 'Likes' - a technological semiotic feature that, according to West (2015), functions as a "quick and inexplicit backchanneling device" (West, 2015, p. 144), and serves as a "response without claiming an active role in the participation framework" (West, 2015, p. 145). Accordingly, semiotic artefacts allow users not only to create intimate relations and conversations, but also to navigate what level of interactivity they wish to proceed with, without compromising the value of the social relations they have built (El-Jarn, 2014, p. 208). While non-verbal cues, such as bodily gestures in real-world communication can easily be misunderstood and come across as dismissive or hard-to-read, giving a 'Like' or otherwise reacting to another user's advance through multimodal affordances essentially becomes an act of friendly approval without requiring the user to make further comprehensive acts of contact. The advantage of the utility of semiotics is thus the freedom it provides the user to quickly and effectively roam in virtual spaces and maintain social relations with very little effort.

5.2 DISCUSSION

In applying a new framework inspired mainly by Jones, Chik & Hafner (2015) and Lyons (2018), it is apparent that digital discourse comprises not only of linguistic values and modes in a textual sense, but also contributes with further comprehension and perspective on sociological and technological affordances and practices. By analysing a specific case from both a micro- and macro-perspective, a deeper understanding of the interplay of technology, media and language is made possible. This process can ultimately be depicted in the following way:
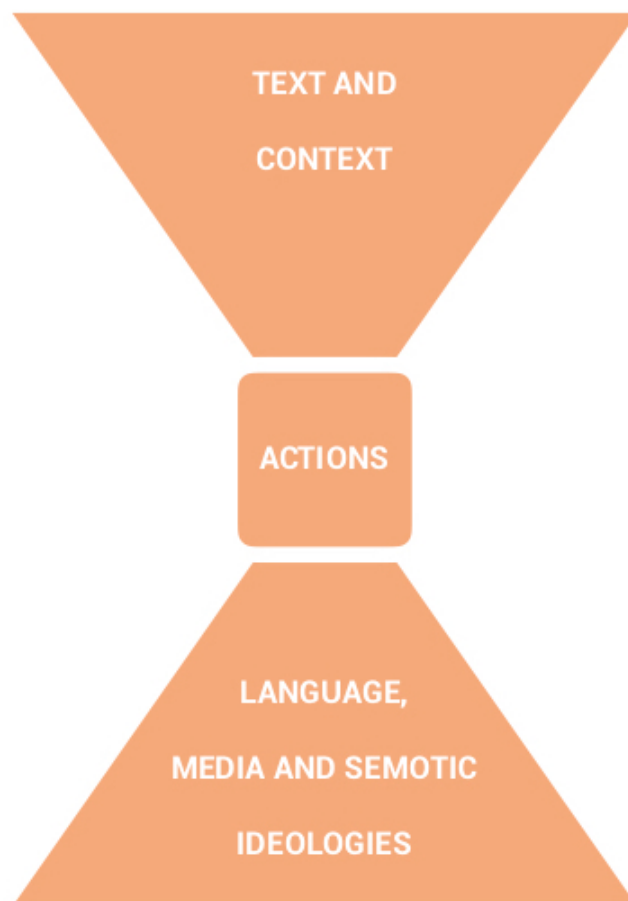
Model 2: Macro- and micro-processes of critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse.

This model shows how the process of conducting critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse should first consider technological affordances (the text) and the specific case under scrutiny (the context) in order to examine and present the setting and the situation of the discourse from a macro-level position, which is illustrated by a wide angle that narrows can moving closer to the next constituent of the framework. Thus, the analysis narrows its focus to the actions and interactions that situate the context in order to comprehend what discursive artefacts are in play and allowed by the technological affordance from a micro-level position, which is illustrated in a narrow focal point in the model. Lastly, the framework for critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse once again widens its focus to consider what ideologies are expressed in the relation between the text, context and actions from a macro-level position, which is illustrated by once again widening the angle. Through this process, it is made possible to discuss discourse not only from a linguistic standpoint, but also a sociological, psychological, technical and political standpoint.

With that said, this framework for analysis, as presented in chapter 4.0, 'Study design', and conducted in this chapter, 'Study analysis and results', can without question afford further improvement. The framework for analysing multimodal digital discourse does not provide unique or uniform theoretical guidance or methodological consideration for specific practices of analysing case studies of digital discourse, as intended. In this regard, the framework could be more 'fleshed out' in terms of clarifying what each constituent of the framework deals with and connects to. The framework does, however, provide a general approach to discourse analysis of computer-mediated communication on social media that touches on what scholars are seeking and requesting for in future work in the field (cf. chapter 2.0, 'Literature review'). Ultimately, the framework presented and utilised in this study should be regarded as a preliminary skeleton or outline for critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse that is encouraged to be further developed in future work.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

In this chapter, samples of comments in the commentary section of the online article "Disney's Live-Action 'Little Mermaid' Will Star Halle Bailey As Ariel" published on Huffington Post's Facebook page was analysed in accordance with the framework presented in chapter 4.0, 'Study design' in order to examine whether the framework is useful for critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse.

Firstly, the technological affordances of the post and commentary section were examined. Here, it was clarified that Facebook's algorithms impose a hierarchy of relevant content based on how (inter)active users are and what content they engage with the most. The specific technological affordances that encourage interaction were proven to mimic real-world social interactions and relations, thus making social life appear more natural on social media. Also, these affordances ensure that users fulfil a vital need to raise social relations and express self-esteem through them, which is ultimately made possible by Facebook's technological affordances for interaction.

Secondly, it was observed that an absence of multimodal means of communication, like emojis and memes, is generally linked to an expression of negative or dismissive emotions, whereas a presence of such artefacts is predominantly used to express positive emotions, most often in the form of humour, in order to create impassioned and friendly conversations with other users.

The analysis also revealed that the initial framework did not account for a distinction between active and passive interactions, such as using the 'Like'-button, which should be considered when examining both the technological affordances and the actions of any digital discourse practice.

Thirdly, the analysis appointed that structure and praxis are the fundamental components that standardises digital discourse and disciplines users in how to navigate the virtual terrain. By having strict structural affordances for users to roam within, it shapes discourse to be more economical and thus more beneficial for effective and intimate relations.

In terms of ideological stances in digital discourse, it came to light that computer-mediated communication is largely indisciplined, playful and anarchic in its structure, practice and hierarchy. Also, because social media, generally speaking, is a virtual public playground, it allows users to find and create groups or communities of like-minded people, which does provide value to the social experience of social media, but also suggests the ability to both unite with and disengage from other people. Conversely, semiotic ideologies depend substantially on the merit of semiotic artefacts and their ability to create empathy and intimacy in a more immediate way than in real-world interactions.

Ultimately, it is concluded that the framework presented and applied in this study more or less provides a useful process of analysis in which both macro- and micro-level viewpoints are considered, as well as implementing consideration for linguistic, sociological, psychological and political aspects of discourse studies and analysis. The framework should, however, for further development, be additionally advanced by providing more specified theoretical and methodological guidance in applying the framework, while also expanding the framework not only to include the four constituents (text, context, actions and ideologies), but also the relationship between these constituents. Therefore, the framework is currently considered an outline for critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse in future studies.

6.0 Final conclusion

In "Exploring the Digital Playground of Language and Semiotics: Building a Revised Framework for Critical Multimodal Analysis of Digital Discourse on Social Media", the problem definition and main objective was to validate or disprove the following issue: The initial issue is a presumed inadequacy or lack of valid and reliable qualitative methodological frameworks in digital discourse analysis of sociolinguistic practices on social media.

By regarding language as a social practice, as applied in traditional critical discourse analysis, and adhering to a scholarly claim that future studies in digital discourse analysis should consider multimodality, a new framework was presented coined 'Critical Multimodal Analysis of Digital Discourse'. Inspired by Jones, Chik & Hafner, amongst a number of other scholars in the field, a variety of linguistic, technological, semiotic and ideological aspects of computer-mediated communication were put into consideration in developing this framework.

Through a narrative literature review of qualitative methods in current digital discourse analysis practices, it was made possible to distinct what aspects to include in the framework, as well as what aspects should be reevaluated and revised to promote more valid and reliable data in future academic work.

The goal for this study was ultimately to implement the framework in a case study to clarify whether it could facilitate an analysis of the predominant aspects of digital discourse, such as the technological affordances, the context, the actual text, and the ideologies expressed through the discourse under scrutiny.

Ultimately, the framework for critical multimodal analysis of digital discourse, based on the literature review, the study design of the framework, and the study analysis, has provided a a versatile and multi-faceted outline for scholars in the field to apply across multiple disciplines and academic focuses, but still remains to be 'fleshed out' with specified theoretical and methodological guidelines to ensure both credibility and validity in the

framework. In doing so, it is conceivable that future studies in multimodal digital discourse can provide substantial insights in how discourse is and will be transplanted into the virtual environments that we all create and interact with in our daily lives.

6.1 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

An interesting perspective to place under scrutiny within the field of digital discourse is to examine how discourse practices change and adapt across multiple platforms. This study has only taking a static case study into account, thus excluding one rather important aspect of social media, that is sharing. As this study has proven, technological affordances of the platform used does have an impact on the semiotic and ideological properties of the text. It is thus conceivable that analysing text 'in motion' across multiple platforms will prove insightful to further work in the field.

Equally so, examining the affect of mobility may also provide new insights on the responsive and adaptable nature of digital discourse practices, as well as offering a perspective on the relationship between and crossing of the online world and the real world.

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