



Department of English

Hybrid Departmental Seminar

Changing the World by Activism on Social Media: the Contribution of MCDA



Speaker

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Gwen Bouvier (PhD, University of Wales) is a Distinguished Professor at Shanghai International Studies University, Institute of Corpus Studies and Applications. Her main research interests are digital communication and civic debate on social media. Professor Bouvier's publications have drawn on critical discourse analysis, multimodality based on social semiotics, and online ethnography. She is the Associate Editor for Social Semiotics and Book Review Editor for Discourse & Society. Her latest publications include the book *Qualitative Research Using Social Media*, Routledge 2022 and the articles 'Evaluating the American-Chinese Trade War on Chinese Social Media: Discourses of nationalism and rectifying a humiliating past' (Critical Discourse Studies, 2024); 'Knowing conflicts through gender politics: Cutting hair to show solidarity with the women of Iran' (Discourse, Context and Media, 2024); and 'Cancel Culture and trigger-ready fragmented interest groups: the case of Depp versus Amber Heard' (TV and New Media, 2024).

17 October 2024

4:30–5:30pm

LKK101

ILP unit: 1.5 (IED)

Abstract:

Scholars have showed concern in regard to how social media have transformed civic debate and the public sphere in our societies. The affordances of social media platforms work against more detailed and nuanced accounts of issues, favouring simplifications, buzzwords and forms of symbolism, as well as posts that are more provoking and extreme. It has been shown that the public is becoming fragmented into a range of mutually confirming interest groups, each with their own competing hashtags and social media channels. Such groups may be heterogeneous and shifting, yet come to occupy spaces where a limited vernacular of narratives create a self-confirming set of world views, where often even highly bloated claims go unchallenged.

In this presentation, I explore how Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) can offer a contribution to this growing literature. MCDA provides a set of tools that allow us to draw out what we can think of as the 'discursive scripts' carried on any hashtag. This simply means the kind of issues being raised on the hashtag, who is represented as being involved, with what kinds of aims, priorities, outcomes and causalities. MCDA allows us to explore such representations in the language, images, graphics and videos posted on hashtags. In MCDA, we can then compare the discursive script found on the hashtag with the actual events that are being represented.

Here, I look at a case study of an instance of social activism on Twitter/X, where users mobilized to support the women of Iran during the so-called Women's revolution in 2022. I first explain the nature of the situation for women in Iran at the time. Following this, I draw out the discursive script carried on the hashtags. The well-intentioned activism we find on the feed misrepresents local realities for Iranian women and rather carries hugely ethnocentric ideas about self-empowerment, freedom, and having the individual right to 'voice'.

Zoom link

<https://lingnan.zoom.us/j/95082355605?pwd=XobplgbP9YJV03o2Ri0UTFvnaiVacV.1>

Meeting ID: 950 8235 5605

Passcode: 50538087