

Digital media as ideological actors

When studying digital discourse researchers initially focused on discourse enabled by and found on digital media. Increasingly, digital discourse analysts shifted attention to the interaction between humans and digital media in the realization of digital discourse. Digital discourse in these novel approaches is understood as a socio-technical assemblage. Digital platforms not only enable and constrain discourse, they have agency. Quantification, datafication, algorithms and affordances impact the input and the uptake, they make discourse (in)visible and as such change which discourse is produced, reproduced and consumed. Even more, platforms change the meaning of discourse, they function as a Goffmanian frame. Analyzing digital media not just as a new sociolinguistic environment but as discursive actors in themselves is a necessary next step.

In my talk, I want to focus on how we can analyze digital media as ideological actors. The way digital platforms direct discursive behavior through their interfaces not only enables specific digital cultures, it also normalizes certain cultures, practices and norms. Those norms are not free, but resemble, reflect and normalize the societal relations produced by digital capitalism. When Meta describes Facebook's mission as 'Bringing people closer every day' it is not necessarily lying. Meta is indeed facilitating (and programming) sociality. At the same time, it is obvious that such slogans obfuscate the *raison d'être* of the platform: the extraction of data. That is hardly ever mentioned. Althusser wouldn't be surprised. Ideology, he argued, represents the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live' (Althusser, 2020: 39). Platform ideologies are not exceptions to this rule. They hide the core business from view: the extraction of data through the coordination of socio-economic relations. Platform ideologies, because they normalize user behavior, are one of the elements that allow for the extraction of data, and thus of generating profit. Attention economies and digital cultures are thus rich terrain for the analysis of platform ideologies, and the unequal power relations they create and sustain.

References

Althusser, L. (2020). *On ideology*. London: Verso.

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