

Parlez-vous Parisian? Multimodal Creativities, Femininities and Digital Discourses at Instagram's Café de Flore

This paper leans on the thematic dimensions of gender and multimodality to explore how Instagram users construct Parisian narratives at the 'Café de Flore' geotag. Employing a sociolinguistic and social-semiotic framework, the present study discusses a corpus of 75 posts tagged at Café de Flore between January 1st and January 31st, 2022. Two research questions were identified for this purpose, both of which consider how communicative modes (Kress, 2010) function as salient resources for the making of Parisian stereotypes online. The first of these explores how the notion of 'Parisian', as both a noun and an adjective, is represented linguistically and semiotically by Instagram users at Café de Flore. The second line of inquiry examines the extent to which 'Parisienne' and 'Parisian' emerge as distinct, gendered figures in these digital discourses. Previous research on elite discourse, semiotic creativity and embodied performance contributes heavily to this study's conceptual frame and to its multimodal context (Blackwood, 2019; 2021; Thurlow and Jaworski, 2017; Baker and Walsh, 2018). Data were first analysed from a constructivist grounded approach (Charmaz, 2014) and subsequently further analysed using Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress, 2010). Findings suggest that the terms 'Parisian' and 'Parisienne' as both nouns and adjectives, are deployed as profitable labels in the networked context of Instagram. We conclude that Instagram users further elaborate on these linguistic representations in their posts by selecting and ordering semiotic resources associated with French cultural tropes. Gendered language and gender display were among the most salient of these resources. Used strategically, these discursive practices aid users in depicting themselves as expert, feminine narrators in an elite sociocultural context. Finally, our data suggest that Instagram users portray Café de Flore as a specifically Parisian (rather than French) site of engagement and a physical resource for the generation of profitable material online. Consequently, we posture that the curation of 'Parisian discourses' on Instagram is a highly mediated communicative process—one that relies heavily on the affordances of Instagram's networked environment and its push for increasingly multimodal, and yet, increasingly homogenous, digital content.

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