

The Effects of Affect – Exploring the Linguistic Construction and Reception of Emotionality in Multimodal Online Reviews

This study is interested in the multi-faceted relationship between emotionality and authentication in product reviews (Vásquez 2014) on YouTube. Focussing on a corpus of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), taken from two subgenres, tech reviews and beauty reviews, the discourse-pragmatic analysis aims to examine the linguistic repertoire of genre participants to construct subjective and intersubjective emotional experience in digital narratives (Bednarek 2008, Georgakopoulou 2022). More specifically, the analysis focuses on reviewers' multimodal display of affect in the evaluation of products and the follow-up metapragmatic comments among review audiences in which the authenticity of the review(er)s is discussed.

Drawing on methods from corpus analysis and discourse analysis, this study examines how multimodal self-disclosure is both an indicator of and a strategic tool to authenticate genuine reviewer identities. On the one hand, affect can indicate that the reviewer is genuinely invested in the product and has a personal connection to it, which in turn may convey a sense of sincerity and honesty to viewers, making the review(er) more relatable and trustworthy (Kanai 2019). On the other hand, affect can also be a tool for manipulation in reviews, as reviewers and brands often rely on emotional appeals to sell products. Some reviewers may deliberately exaggerate their emotions to create a false sense of authenticity for various interpersonal and economic purposes.

The findings suggest that multimodality plays a key role in the authentication of affect in eWOM. It creates social spaces of identification, relatability and thus a crucial commodity in eWOM, which is especially relevant for the construction and maintenance of fandom and parasocial relationships online (cf. Hund 2023).

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