Technological mediation of celebrity tutors' expertise in YouTube promotional videos

In Hong Kong, "celebrity tutors" teach in shadow education, the private tutoring of school subjects outside school hours (Bray, 2010). They become famous for not only their supposed expertise in examination skills, but also their frequent advertising activities. Previous research (e.g., Koh, 2016) has shown that in advertisements, tutors use exaggerated words such as 'kings' and 'gods' to refer to themselves to show their expert status. However, their increasing presence and enactment of expertise online (e.g., running Facebook pages, Instagram accounts and YouTube channels) since the early 2010s has yet received scholarly attention. Such bears significance as online information informs students' decisions and in turn impacts tutors' popularity (and income). Addressing this gap, this paper conducts a multimodal critical discourse analysis (Machin, 2016) on the ideological construal of knowledge and expertise (van Dijk, 2011) in a collection of promotional videos from the Youtube channels of celebrity tutors and tutorial-school chains. We sample the data by theme (Herring, 2004), focusing on videos about examination skills. Informed by the notion of technological mediation (Mortensen et al., 2017), we examine how various multimodal affordances of YouTube as well as the video as a communication medium are managed to foreground (and background) tutors' expertise. Our analysis pays attention to both the verbal and visual tracks of the videos and their interaction (Eriksson, 2016). Preliminary findings show that the videos often involve tutors defining students' lower epistemic status (e.g., claiming that students are "dead wrong"). This is augmented visually when the videos zoom in to show tutors' embodied action of crossing out students' answers. As tutors highlight the severity of students' epistemic problems, they look into the camera at a personal distance. Tutors also make claims about but almost never fully demonstrate their expertise. Catchy video titles, for example, suggest that the tutors know some exclusive skills. However, aside from saying that their skills are useful, tutors do not teach or show the skills within the videos. Overall, we argue such promotional videos "mythify" (or flaunt as well as obscure) tutors' expertise, ultimately serving to attract students-consumers to pay for tutorials.

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