

## RENEGOTIATING MEANING IN MULTIMODAL MEDIA CONTEXTS<sup>1</sup>

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### *Abstract*

*With the exponential growth of digital technology, multimodality has become a normal state of communication (Kress, 2010). The emergence of Web 2.0 environments and the shift of Internet to accommodate highly interactive contents have generated new attitudes towards language and text. Drawing on recent related literature (Hesmondhalgh 2013, Danesi 2016, Tannen and Trester 2015), and relying on research carried out in the field of media literacy, the paper aims to prove that the internet has encouraged a dramatic expansion in the variety and creativity of language. Building on a comparative approach, online and offline communication instances exemplify how meaning is created and negotiated. Bi- and multilingualism, biliteracy, code-switching and language loyalty on digital platforms are also analysed. The relevant findings of the research may assist instructors while designing relevant teaching material to illustrate the importance of decoding medialects to construct meaning.*

**Keywords:** multimodality, computer mediated communication, e-sociolects, e-dialects, contextual meaning

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### *1. Continuity and Change in the Media*

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At the frontier between past and present, in a global society where human communication is highly mediatized, Thomas Carlyle is the first scholar to be credited for his 1841 reference to the press as the “Fourth Estate”, as a subsequent continuation of the balance of powers known as the “Estates-General” in the legislative assembly in France before the 1789 Revolution (Hortobágyi 2009). Over time, and more visibly at the end of the 20th century, the mighty media could just as well have rightfully ranked as the “First Estate”. In this light McNair argued that journalism had become into the linchpin of a more democratic world, stating that if critical scrutiny of political power by the journalistic fourth estate is key to democracy... then the critical scrutiny of both media and political power, and the always-evolving relationship between the two, is a further mechanism for maintaining democratic accountability” (2006: 207). Almost simultaneously with

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McNair's scholarship, in 2007 the Oxford Internet Institute launched a new project called the "Fifth Estate" developed from Bill Dutton's Inaugural Lecture *Through the network (of Networks) – the Fifth Estate*<sup>3</sup>, to examine the newly emerged powerful individual voices and networks, which act independently of the traditional media.

As Hesmondhalgh (2013) points out, cultural industries, which play a considerable and determining role in people's understanding and knowledge of the world, make and circulate texts – an umbrella term "for all content and cultural 'works' of all kinds" (2013: 3) turning people not only into *prosumers* (producers and consumers of media, (Toffler 1980), but also into symbol creators and meaning negotiators.

In this light the paper addresses issues raised by the new electronic communication trends and tries to contribute to a better understanding of how meaning is determined and negotiated on multimodal media platforms. The following scheme is proposed. First we anchor the field of research against a multi- and cross disciplinary backdrop. The next step is defining and positioning Discourse 2.0 and multimodality in relation to each other. Finally, a fresh perspective is offered of how theory translates into the empirical findings.

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## ***2. Multidisciplinary setting***

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Nowadays researchers are fundamentally influenced by findings reached in other disciplines. Viewed through the lens of contemporary academic disciplines, research in media linguistics in general and discourse analysis in particular can be situated at a multidisciplinary intersection. In what follows I propose a short insight into four different sciences. The first related concept is found in communication sciences, namely the concept of media literacy as the phenomenon of developing conscious awareness in understanding and decoding medialects as media-bound varieties of language. While discussing the main building blocks of media literacy and, and through the analysis of knowledge structures, Potter (2008) proposes a clear-cut distinction between information and knowledge, where "information resides in the message, whereas knowledge resides in a person's mind. Information gives something to the person to interpret [answering the question 'what?'], whereas knowledge reflects that which has already been interpreted by the person [answering the questions 'how?' and 'why?']" (2008: 13). The next discipline that proves beneficial is epistemology from the realm of philosophy, which deals with the nature of knowledge. With an eye on the real vs. the virtual worlds of the digital platforms, it is of utmost importance to develop an understanding of how we can separate true ideas from false ones, and how we can be confident that we have recognized the truth.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/archive/downloads/events/2007/20071015\\_WD\\_5thEstateLecture.pdf](https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/archive/downloads/events/2007/20071015_WD_5thEstateLecture.pdf)  
William Dutton - Prepared for an Inaugural Lecture, Examination Schools, University of Oxford, 15 October 2007

Thirdly sociology offers a functionalist perspective (Turner and Stets 2006) which enables us to understand how social systems operate as a whole, how they change, and what social consequences they have. Only with a conscious sensitivity to these issues can we decode messages and co-create new meanings when negative aspects of social life provide the context (e.g.: warring events, racism, and sexism). This is the point where the fourth discipline enters, namely psychology offering elements of the cognitive personality theory, which assists us in explaining individual behavioural differences related to the differences in how people think and process information, with a special focus on communicating in the contexts related to undesired aspects of social life. As András (2007) argues, from a communication philosophy perspective, it is extremely difficult to differentiate the virtual world from the real one. The problem originates from the clash between the concepts of “private” and “social”. Strong arguments prove that the social aspect of language and communication prevails over the private when building knowledge and developing meaning.(András 2016).

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### ***2.1. Theoretical perspectives on multimodality and Discourse 2.0***

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Nowadays as most forms and instances of communication are positioned in relation to social media, and as web-users communicate predominantly through texts, multimodality also influences the audience’s semiotic and generic understanding of information. A novel interpretation of the linguistic input and language resources employed in computer-mediated communication (CMC) and computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) can lead to a better understanding of how the multimodality of media texts generates new meanings through the usage of different semiotic modes.

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#### ***2.1.1. Computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA)***

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When scrutinizing new technological communication, Susan Herring is to be credited for having recognized and developed the CMDA paradigm (the term coined by her at her 1994 GURT workshop) as a logical positioning of linguistics into the Web 2.0 environment. Defined as communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers, computer-mediated discourse (CMD) is a specialization within the broader interdisciplinary study of computer-mediated communication (CMC). It is distinguished by its focus on language and language use in computer networked environments, in addition to its use of methods of discourse analysis to address that focus (Herring, 2001; 2004). Since then CMC has undergone a remarkable shift, juxtaposing messages with infotainment content, giving birth to what Herring (2013) defines as convergent media computer mediated communication (CMCMC), where discourse in new contexts raises new issues.

Echoing both Herring's (2013) and Hesmondhalgh's (2013) argument of what can be considered as *text*, we can rightfully agree that convergent media operate with what Danesi (2016: 18) identifies as three new dimensions focusing on the old Saussurian langue-parole interface, namely environment (real or virtual), multimodality and hypertextuality.

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### *2.1.2. Multimodal contexts*

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With the rise and omnipresence of digital technologies, new modes of representation and communication practices have been created. Nowadays communication in online media involves multimodality (Danesi, 2016: 29) where textual, linguistic, spatial, aural or visual, verbal or non-verbal resources are employed to increase the reception of an idea or concept. As opposed to the hypermedia, which links different types of media that are external to a text, multimodality is the synergy of several modes to create a single artefact. Thus, by transforming a message from one mode to another, the information is reiterated and reinforced.

Moving from print-based to screen-based literacies (Kress 2010), CMC has made written communication a prevalent form of daily information transmission. Languages (both written and spoken discourse) seem to be shaped by the modalities of the digital media and of "instant communication response" culture (Danesi 2014). Multimodality also entails multiliteracy, which is the ability to understand different modes in communication. A multimodal text addresses a larger nevertheless more focused and intended audience. By reiterating the message and placing words with a preconceived meaning in a new modal context, the text changes semiotic effect and creates a new meaning for the audience. (Bezemer and Kress 2008).

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### *2.1.3. Sociolinguistic considerations and meaning*

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Defined by Danesi as e-sociolinguistics, the sociolinguistic study of CMC offers new terrains of investigation. For the purpose of this paper e-literacy – a shorthand of a language adapted to the digital media – is tackled in more detail. With the growth of technology, there are many ways to communicate a message, so literacies change to accommodate these new forms of expression. Multimodality transforms the message as it goes from one medium to the next. The reshaping of the information, is defined by Kress (2004) as transduction, referring to how a text is understood across a variety of different means.

In sociolinguistics, the relevant aspect of semantic analysis is how meaning reflects social roles, attitudes, beliefs and values. (Danesi 2016). When reading on digital platforms, we are activating what Baron (2013) coined as "snippet literacy", a change from a linear reading experience to a random-access process. And since

digital media discourse are widely understood to be written conversation (Tannen 2013), multimodal texts are active in blending authorship, readership, production and consumption, and this meaning is co-created, user-generated and fully negotiated. Biliteracy for example is expressed by the term e-diglossia, which displays two different varieties, namely the online vs. offline literacies as mentioned by Varnhagen, Mcfall, and Pugh (2010). Haas and Takayoshi (2011) extend this dichotomy and define online literacy as everyday literacy, whereas offline literacy is referred to as standard literacy. Perkel (2008) suggested that social media have generated new shared literacy practices facilitated by the cut-and-paste capabilities of CMC. The process of finding and reusing resources of others is called “bidirectional literacy”, which encompasses analysis (reading), production (writing) and interactive sharing (photos, videos, blogs, etc.) Authorship of a text is now neither individualistic nor completely original, since remixing is fundamental to how people create texts (Alvermann, 2008). Barden (2012) points out that e-literacy also operates as a catalyst, which facilitates and imparts basic literacy to larger populations.

New media also allow for greater use of individual expressions and linguistic space for promoting personal and local identities through varieties of language. In the digital environments e-dialects and code switching express more loyalty to a community group than militant commitment to safeguard a minority language. Switching languages is a sign of a person’s readiness to communicate and the existence of support from within a group is an underlying factor for language maintenance. Code-switching on the other hand can be determined by the principle of relevance theory. This statement is based on the basic assumption that human cognition is relevance-oriented: people bestow attention on information which they find relevant. The communicators’ aim is to get attention, and since the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition, they can create an expectation of relevance (Forintos, 2007, 2008)

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### ***3. Methodological aspects***

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Building on a comparative approach, online and offline communication instances exemplify how meaning is created and negotiated. Considering the theoretical aspects presented in the previous subsections, the present article aims to find instances that illustrate CMDA features. Alongside multimodality, code switching will also be analysed as a tool of negotiating meaning.

Two different platforms have been chosen for scrutiny. First *LinkedIn* as a professional platform provided discourse material from my personal online activity - 391 comments in 5 discussions of the group *Applied Linguistics* (27,763 members as of August 15, 2016)) and 624 comments in 6 discussions of the group *Bilingual Professionals (French and English)* (57,029 members). LinkedIn being a platform where professionally oriented users usually affiliate with their work network, I

have posited that the discourse will not abound in CMC elements, and that people will preserve their real identity and communicative culture. To relate back to the new dimensions added to the Saussurian dichotomy, on this platform the communication environment is a real one in terms of content (people are sharing hands-on experience from their own professional background). In this case, basic meaning is assumed, nevertheless the participatory activity can engender new interpretations. As to literacy, the discussions and comments on this platform exhibit forms of asynchronous communication carried out by using offline standard literacy as a rule.

The second online site is the White House Blog, from which I have chosen two underlying topics and the comment threads they have generated on the blog's Facebook platform. The two events were President Barack Obama's historical visit to Cuba in March 2016, and the success of the Olympic Team USA in August 2016. In both instances, I have postulated that the comment threads will abound in CMC features, discourse 2.0 elements following Tannen's (2013) nomenclature, and to some extent an abundant usage of code-switching. Due to the formal nature of the White House Blog and the informality of the Facebook, I was expecting a balanced e-diglossia i.e. a healthy parity between synchronic and asynchronous literacy.

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#### ***4. Analysis of data***

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As mentioned above, discourse on LinkedIn has proved to be a good example of well-constructed, offline literacy. The topic of the 5 discussions in the *Bilingual Professionals* group were conducted in the field of applied linguistics, focusing on bilingual issues in foreign language acquisition and learning, as well as on translation and interpreting. The dialogues are a clear example of well edited conversation, very much in the asynchronic practice where we do not have the pressure of real-time response, and the comments can be properly built. The participants are present with their real professional load, with the majority allowing access to their accounts, which helps to recognize them physically (photos available on the site) while also situating them both geographically and professionally into the conversational framework. Consequently – as opposed to Facebook - face saving devices would prove irrelevant on this platform, as there is no need to consider positive or negative face work when addressing someone or making a remark. (West and Trester 2013)

Inferring from the name of the group, I was positing that due to the order of the two languages in the label (French and English - a sequence that does not follow an alphabetical order when listing the two languages) the conversations will display a relevant number of French language comments, which has proved to be true only at a lower rate. The five discussions I have analysed consisted of 16, 1, 8, 278, and 88 comments respectively. Two of the discussions started in French, three in English.

Even those started in French shifted to English following a few turns. Reading through the comment thread I realized that turn-taking is well respected, replies are provided only after the comment has been posted, and the texts are closer to formally written paragraphs. Certainly, there are also instances of spontaneous contributions, but these are not emotionally overloaded, do not spring from the nature of the message and its meaning, but are an expression of the commenter's personality rather than the natural flow of the discourse. We have a considerable number of greetings when a person joins the conversation, and quite often, when a female professional launches an issue to be discussed, male commenters will not fail to greet and use phatic forms, as if in real-time conversation. Even the greeting seems to be adjusted to the time zone of the earlier posting commenter. We can also observe a concern to facilitate understanding to all the participants, thus English as a lingua franca is preserved in most cases. Code-switching is planned and deliberate, and in contrast with Facebook, where in-group solidarity calls for code-switching or mixing, a language different from English is employed to illustrate the issue or elicit the answer embedded in the addressed commenter's own linguistic and cultural environment. (For instance, in discussing the best English translation for the French phrase on a menu "*Consommer/Manger à volonté*", a Norwegian commenter was addressed in her native language when being explained to her the reason for a certain translation option, as the relevant answer could also be found in the Norwegian gastronomic tradition.) The choice of the language in the discussions also indicates that certain topics are felt to be more appropriate when articulated in one or other language. It is also interesting to remark that whenever a bilingual opinion or comment is added, this would be a mirror translation in two languages, mostly English and French. Considering McLuhan's statement "the media is the message" (1964), and Tannen's view on the role of the metamessage in multimodality, relevant hyperlinks on LinkedIn are not attached for emotional reasons, but for facilitating understanding and constructing or enforcing an already traded meaning. The 88-comment discussion was posted on Aug 21 and when I joined in on Aug 25 it already had 88 comments. The thread started and continued over 8 comments in French. We can deduct from this that the need to properly translate the phrase *consommer à volonté* into English poses problems to several French speaking professionals. Thus the conversation, which digresses slightly towards the analysis of the cultural texture of several countries where this catering service 'You can eat as much as you can' has become a habitual practice, generates new meanings to the discussed concept.

In addition to the above tackled phenomena, in the six discussions with 30, 11, 13, 24, 165, and 381 comments respectively in the *Applied Linguistics* group, I have tried to also investigate gender roles, enthusiasm markers and even CMC features like acronyms, emoticons, volubility. Firstly, we can remark that depending on the topic, we witness unbalanced gender participation. In the literature, although there are data underlying that CMC is closing the gender gap, on this platform we can still find signs of gender differences when choosing to engage in the conversation

and adding a comment to express one's opinion with softeners, and downtoners still being used more frequently by women. As the discussion unfolds in a specific topic, a transfer from offline to online literacy can be observed. Here when starting the analysis, I also postulated that CMC features will not be abundant. If we are following historical stereotypes, we could suppose that people living and working in a country with certain stereotypical traits will not flout any conversational maxims. One such interesting finding is related to a young female commenter from India (a country stereotypically with strong English linguistic traditions) who uses online literacy in the online form of *i dunno about this*. Another misconception of a stereotypical image is the comment of a high professional German male commenter, who following a long thread of academic conversation, annoyed with a misunderstanding and the reiteration of an already settled matter, turned to online literacy both in form and content: *Oh, god, not another...OOPS, Laugh out loud, ;-D*. In the discussion I have checked there was no intended code-switching, just peppering with words and expressions, such as *Can I sell more product by hijacking a language forum? N'importe pas*. As a final remark, one might wonder why a discussion yields only one comment, as in the case of the *Bilingual Professionals* group. As opposed to Facebook threading, the groups of professional interest automatically dismiss and refuse to comment on any politically incorrect or off-topic offensive discussion launching contributions.

The next digital environment to analyse was a combination of a more formal platform – the White House Blog – and its Facebook platform. I have opted for this site as I considered it the best example of multimodality with a convergence of different types of media to foster a better decoding and understanding of the messages sent by the American government. From the onset, I have posited that given the formal nature of the governmental media, its Facebook platform would be an amalgamation of both synchronous and asynchronous literacy, nevertheless CMD elements will definitely prevail. In proving my hypotheses, I have chosen two pieces of news that I thought might encourage people to take up the challenge and make their own comments.

The first text was dated March 26, with a post juxtaposing a status update consisting of a personal greeting in Spanish, a short topical sentence and an embedded YouTube hyperlink.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=The%20White%20House%20visit%20to%20Cuba>  
Accessed March 26, 2016.





As we can see from the picture above ten hours after the post was released there were already 689 comments. As a general stance, I have supposed that this post will generate comments related to the history of the Cuban minority in the U.S., possible immigration issues, determining moments in the history of Cubans in the U.S. Aware of the fact that Florida can rightfully be considered a bicultural and bilingual state, I have expected that many comments will be written in Spanish.

The first comment was reacting on the power of the media saying *“Press like if you think that obama [The President’s name in small case] is the best USA president in history”* [punctuation missing]. This comment generated a thread of 70 additional turns.

The second comment I have chosen to react to in more detail reads as follows: *“Hard to discuss human rights in Cuba with Gitmo down the road. Lovely trip though. I’m so proud of this First Family. You represent us well.”* Comments respond to this initial prompt to continue in a stepwise digression away from the original topic. In this thread, we have female commenters who can be characterized according to what Tannen calls volubility vs. considerateness in the rapidity with which they have reacted to the information. In the first six comments, we have information related to both old and new political issues, namely the George W. Bush administration compared to the current Obama administration, the Republican versus the Democratic platform in backing up the closure of Guantanamo, the end of the embargo, Republican majority in Congress related to the issue of nominating the supreme court justice. A hyperlink on gun control is embedded in one of the comments.

(F) *Hard to discuss human rights in Cuba with Gitmo down the road. Lovely trip though. I'm so proud of this First Family. You represent us well. 26 March at 23:54*

(F) *He's still trying to close that place. Too bad Congress is dragging its feet. I hope he will succeed by the end of this year. And I hope by then the embargo will be lifted, too. That would be good. 26 March at 23:56*

(F) *Well, he's trying!!! 27 March at 00:04*

(F) *It was Congress who demanded it be closed. Now it's congress keeping it from happening. Are you seeing what kind of .... they are? 27 March at 00:22*

(F) *The president wants Guantanamo closed but apparently it's about as easy as his choice for the supreme court being considered by the GOP 27 March at 00:55*

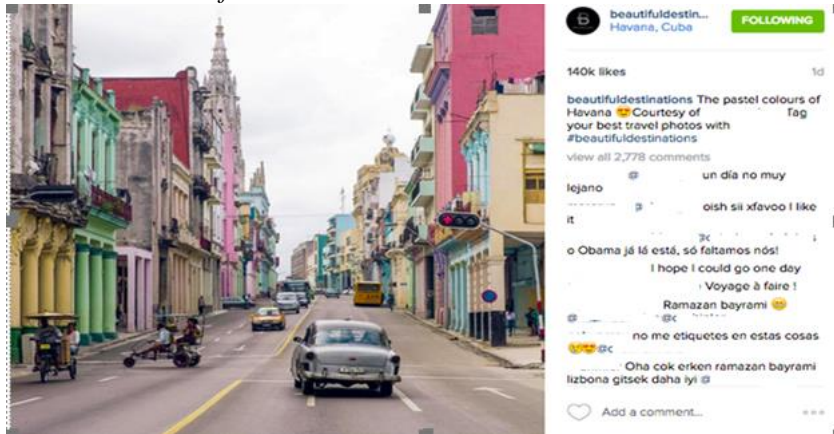
(F) *It's funny how the right wing was all in favor of the no fly list when Bush came up with the idea. They only have a problem when a president who doesn't believe in torture wants to use it. <http://www.newsweek.com/gun-control-and-no-fly-list-all...>*

In this string all the comments have been made in English, and the topic was highly political. As we can see there are no online literacy peculiarities, the conversation seems to be in real time rather than set in a virtual environment. Discourse activity on this platform confirms Tannen (2013) in arguing that the social media analogues conversational style. The commenters have also asserted their real identity with names and pictures. Several strings could also be exploited for educational ends, as the slight digressions from the initial prompts give way to a multitude of voices and opinions regarding different Cuban-American issues, some of which were embedded in a historical perspective. For example, we can find information on how Cuban migration began, how families over three generations had integrated to the U.S. and forged an American identity. We can infer from the available data that more than half of the comments are made by people who possibly belong to second or third generation Hispanics, and though most of them are bilingual and bicultural, they seem to feel more secure in writing in English than in Spanish.

The White House started a Q&A platform, and asked the following question: *“Do you have questions about the work we are doing to improve the relationship between the citizens and police in local communities through #OpenData?”* One of the participants in the talk was a young woman who formulated her question in the form of a formal letter: *“Yes, thank you President Obama for these questions between citizens and police in local communities. [new line] My question: To improve and provide law enforcement to persons with mental illness training law enforcement of their contacts and public involvement to address as a crisis. [new line] With sincere thanks. [new line] Respectively, [new line, with the name]”* To this comment we have two very constructive replies, which remain within the topic, trying to explain and provide new meaning to what training initiatives are to help police differentiate between violent misconduct and mental health. In turn, the

thread generates new questions. The formal language then gets peppered with informal register to abruptly develop into hate speech, which is dismissed and discarded in a very prompt reply – a very current practice nowadays.

When it comes to less formal topics, such as travelling or marketing touristic sights, we come across other multimodal prompts, such as the illustration below, which was retrieved from a list of Cuba related links referring to the President's visit. The lead-in for the news reads as follows: *"Sharing President Obama's Trip to Cuba with #CubaVisit, March 21, 2016 at 2:51 PM ET by Simone Leiro, Twitter Facebook, Email. Summary: People across the world have taken to social media to express their excitement for President Obama's #CubaVisit"*<sup>5</sup>.



Alongside the embedded twitter links and hyperlinks, and an appealing image, we have a multilingual string of comments related to travelling to Cuba. Emoticons reinforce the enthusiasm of an oral conversation.

From the same official platform, I have analysed President Obama's message related to the success of Team USA at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games<sup>6</sup>. The convergent multimodal text is a twitter message posted on the Facebook platform of the White House Blog (these three elements are an expressive example of how one and the same message can be displayed on several platforms and thus potentially targeting a larger intended audience.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2016/03/21/sharing-presidents-obama-trip-cuba-cubavisit> Accessed March 22, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/WhiteHouse/photos/a.158628314237.115142.63811549237/10154647869964238/?type=3&theater> Accessed August 22, 2016.



**The White House**  
10 hrs · 🌐

As Rio 2016 comes to a close, **Team USA** finishes with 46 gold medals, 37 silver medals, and 38 bronze medals—more than any other country in competition. Their athleticism, talent, perseverance, and humility will be remembered for generations. Congratulations, **Team USA**—we are so proud of you!

**President Obama** @POTUS Following

Couldn't be prouder of **#TeamUSA**. Your determination and passion inspired so many of us. You carried that flag high tonight, **@Simone\_Biles!**

Like Comment Share

20k  
1,076 shares 434 comments

Write a comment...

As far as language usage is concerned, we have a formal, well-structured discourse paragraph as a trigger, which draws a thread of longer and shorter contributions, only with slight sidestep digressions from the main content. The first comment was posted by a female member of the network in a well-structured text, both in form and content, resembling offline language. It reads as follows: *“Congratulations to all the athletes who competed during this year's #RioOlympics. It takes dedication, hard work, and perseverance to even make an Olympic team. I love the camaraderie the games bring for people all over the world. Wish regular folks could get that same spirit of coming together for the common good.”* The second comment reveals hidden meanings that can be decoded from the message. It reads as follows: *“Although i am a Chinese boy,Team USA is actually good.And Michael Phelps is one of my favorite sportsmen.Congratulations to Team USA.But i wonder how do people feel when America retry the women's 4\*100 meter relay.I think even they don't retry,Team USA is still the champion of the world.It is not smart to do that.”* We presumably have a person who has built his comment consciously to express his personal opinion on a certain event related to the Olympic Games. Starting with a discourse element functioning as a softener (he congratulates team USA for their achievements) and sharing his personal enthusiasm for Michal Phelps (despite the latter's unacceptable behaviour off-competition, which had been on the news for days). We have to consider the age and maturity of the commenter, as his narrative would rather be the opinion of a young man than that of a boy, as he describes himself. We infer that what in the non-Anglo-Saxon culture would designate a boy, does not necessarily equal the politically correct definition of a young man in the American culture. This can be deduced from his comment and opinion on the redo of the women's 4x100 relay. The third comment in the thread comes from a female networker with a name that would automatically



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## 5. Conclusion

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The article has endeavoured to exemplify how CMC has impacted the interpretation of discourse and meaning. From the findings, we may draw several conclusions. Firstly, we can rightfully agree that access to user-generated meaning in participatory and convergent media necessitates the consideration of a highly important factor, namely of the materiality of communication, which refers to the physical artefacts that enter into meaning making. (Deumert 2016) Without the proper electronic devices, one will ignore the presence of new discourse patterns emerging in CMC. Our CMDA examples taken from different CMC platforms have clearly shown that in a highly converging media environment characterized by the confluence of the public and the private spheres, (Papacharissi 2009), meaning is co-constructed in publicly shared conversations (Vogler 2013) Online media have become highly influential in the sense people give to words and texts on these sites (Danesi, 2014).

New meaning can only be negotiated if people are active participants in the process of communication. As West and Trester (2013) argue, it is not sufficient simply to acknowledge that a person engages with a text by responding with emoticons, cryptic monosyllabic writing or acronyms, one also has to share reasons and opinions or as the writers formulate it "... you must share HOW you engage and WHY. (West and Trester 2013)

Even more important than participation is what Ilana Gershon (2010) calls "second-order" information, which provides cues to how a message should be interpreted, what a user interprets the message to mean because of how it is communicated. The denotative meaning of the message has to be coupled with the metamessage, or with what McLuhan (1962) refers to in his seminal quotation "*The media is the message*" namely that the medium through which the information is transmitted fosters the construction of the meaning.

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*Sources for pictures from social platforms:*

Visit to Cuba:

Note 3. White House Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=The%20White%20House%20visit%20to%20Cuba>

Accessed March 26, 2016.

Note 4. The White House Blog

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2016/03/21/sharing-presidents-obama-trip-cuba-cubavisit>

Accessed March 22, 2016.

Congratulating Team USA

Note 5. White House Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/WhiteHouse/photos/a.158628314237.115142.63811549237/10154647869964238/?type=3&theater>

Accessed August 22, 2016.

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