Scholarly Communication and Visibility: The Impact of Multimodal Discourse in Academic Social Networking Sites

Anna Franca PLASTINA, *University of Calabria, Italy*

annafranca.plastina@unical.it

Abstract

Scholarly communication across formal and informal channels has traditionally been a well-defined practice to share knowledge, establish visibility and build reputation within the academic community. At the turn of the current millennium, social networking sites started to proliferate and gain momentum as a revolutionary communication mode. However, the academic community remained largely unaffected as it had its own well-developed communication networks. As scholars started to show a growing need to strengthen their social networks at the start of the current decade, academic social networking sites (ASNSs) were soon developed in response. Although these specialised web platforms are independent of higher education institutions and are still in their embryonic stage of usage, they are becoming an important part of informal scholarly communication. They may thus appear to disrupt traditional discursive practices, which can now be mediated also through this new technology. As these practices still remain largely unexplored, the current paper contributes to filling this void. The study particularly investigates the multimodal choices that scholars make in ASNSs to boost their professional visibility, and questions how the resulting meaning-making processes may impact on traditional scholarly communication. Multimodal discourse analysis was conducted on a random sample of ASNS webpages (N=100) created by a group of scholars (N=20). Findings show that choices were negotiated to shape multimodal discourses of identity, reputation, visibility and impact across formal and informal communication. Personal agency was, however, strongly influenced by the conventions of formal scholarly communication, but enabled by technological affordances to create a new participatory sub-culture.

Keywords: *scholarly communication, multimodal discourse, academic social networking sites, professional visibility*