



**Centro di Ricerca sui Linguaggi Specialistici**  
**Research Centre on Languages for Specific Purposes**

**Stefania M. Maci**  
**& Michele Sala (eds.)**

**REPRESENTING AND  
REDEFINING SPECIALISED  
KNOWLEDGE: VARIETY IN LSP**







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Stefania M. Maci & Michele Sala (eds.)

**Representing and Redefining Specialised  
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GIUSEPPE BALIRANO / MARGARET RASULO<sup>1</sup>

## ‘You’re only as good as your last tweet...’: Academic Self-branding and Knowledge Dissemination

### 1. Introduction

This study is part of an ongoing investigation into what we would like to identify as a unique, and so far underexplored, form of knowledge dissemination by means of online academic bio-photos. By focusing on academic online identity construction, we intend to highlight the core discursive mechanisms underlying such a practice as well as differentiate specific features from more familiar ones characterising general social networking public profiles (Fitzpatrick 2015). Although a relatively new convention in the academic workplace, the practice of scholars crafting their own academic identity through online personal branding has been gaining momentum during the past decade. This is mainly due to the rapidly changing world of work and the proliferation of online social networking sites (SNS) which have blurred the boundaries between work and personal lives (Garzone 2015; Duffy/Pooley 2017). With the Web becoming a workplace, where involvement in networking practices and the construction of a social presence are no longer a choice, scholars are now seriously reflecting on the importance of defining personal branding tools for

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<sup>1</sup> The authors discussed and conceived the article together. In particular, Giuseppe Balirano is responsible for parts 4, 6 and 7; Margaret Rasulo is responsible for parts 1, 2, 3 and 5.

the dual purpose of individual advancement and knowledge dissemination.

Consequently, by exploring scholarly knowledge sharing practices occurring on academic SNSs, the main aim of this paper is to investigate the extent to which the social construction of academic identity overlaps and interdiscursively blends together with previously investigated and more traditional processes of disciplinary knowledge dissemination (KD) (Hyland 2012a, 2015). This study, in fact, is taking a broader approach to KD by using Hyland's own perspective as a starting point, especially when he argues that:

In pursuing their professional goals and constructing knowledge, academics engage with others, and because of this, discourses carry assumptions about knowledge, relationships and how this should be structured and negotiated. (Hyland 2012a: 175)

Hence, our approach explores these renegotiated discourses as enacted by renewed digital knowledge sharing practices such as those occurring in dynamic Web 3.0 environments. To this end, the investigation is based on the analysis of a multimodal corpus comprising a collection of profiles crafted by university scholars and posted on the academic social networking site (ASNS) known as *Academia.edu*.<sup>2</sup> This platform, which is not an educationally affiliated organization, foregrounds the entrepreneurial mission of “accelerating the world’s research”<sup>3</sup> as it is essentially designed for academics whose main intention is to share research papers and interests as well as other general information concerning affiliation and academic engagements. Also part of *Academia.edu*'s mission is to afford scholars the opportunity to monitor the impact of their research through deep analytics (Price 2012) while tracking the work of other academics they choose to follow (Thelwall/Kousha 2014). Established in 2008 in San Francisco by Richard Price as part of the Open Science movement, to date, *Academia.edu* is reported having nearly

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<sup>2</sup> <<https://www.academia.edu/>>. Retrieved 2 April, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> <<https://twitter.com/richardprice100>>. Retrieved 8 August, 2019.

31,000,000 registered account-holders contributing over 20 million papers and attracting nearly 26 million unique visitors a month.<sup>4</sup>

Against this backdrop, it is quite evident that data collected from ASNSs are of major interest for linguistic exploration, mainly owing to the impact that the above-mentioned academic social networking practices may have on how language is devised and packaged in order to facilitate knowledge dissemination. For the purpose of shedding light on this still grey area of language innovation, the online profiles collected from the *Academia.edu* site are the object of this study as they comprise multimodal instantiations of both knowledge dissemination and self-branding resources.

## 2. Academic self-branding practices

In recent years, as mentioned previously, ASNSs that offer information sharing and communication tools for professional purposes have arisen alongside the more general SNSs, and *Academia.edu* is among the most popular ones. By offering opportunities for interrelations to occur among scholars, these sites may not only influence but also encourage self-branding processes of the research community. The word *self* within the context of this study specifically refers to the management and diffusion of one's own products, or 'measurable deliverables' (Luka *et al.* 2015) by making them available to fellow account holders. As for the more general concept of branding, the underlying social trigger that seems to encourage this practice is to be traced to the world of corporate management. For the past 20 years now, as marketplace logics have increasingly infiltrated nearly all realms of social and professional life, information sharing and online persona management have become essential commodification practices related to the creation of an identity that is personally and socially gratifying (Ko/Cho/Roberts 2005). This means that as individuals are encouraged to think of the

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<sup>4</sup> <<https://www.academia.edu/about>>. Retrieved 2 April, 2018.

*self* as a commodity (Hearn 2008; Gandini 2016; Gehl 2011), crafting a digital identity takes place mainly through branding practices which not only facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and support collaboration, but also encourage product impact monitoring and control of the perception that others have of our achievements (Ovadia 2014).

Self-branding practices also leverage other corporate strategies such as self-marketing and advertising. While these refer to activities undertaken by individuals or businesses to put themselves on the market, self-branding activities take the branding concept a step further to include the strategic and intentional management of identity over time. In point of fact, a brand can stand for who you are professionally as it refers to the values, abilities and actions that others associate with you; a brand is indeed designed to influence perception. Thus, self-branding is the process of creating a recognizable professional name and reputation for oneself or one's company or business.

Upon reflection, one may ask what this has to do with the academic world. Hyland (2012c) clearly explains that the individuality of academics today is being increasingly marginalized in favour of university branding, which consists in downplaying a multidimensional view of the scholar to better showcase the institutions as they are intent on becoming measurable deliverables themselves. This means that some universities are likely to present academics according to a model that is ideologically suited to promote the institution; a corporate choice which often leaves academics with very little autonomy in constructing their own online persona (Thoms/Thelwell 2005).

The resulting predicament, however, is that academics have been experiencing a parallel pressure induced by their institutions to engage in self-promotional practices as these same institutions have become progressively more market-driven. Scholars have therefore been called on, at the same time, to 'create a brand' (Meyers 2012) and 'curate a digital identity' (Marshall 2015) as they produce knowledge, able to stand the test of benchmark quality standards. This is to say that papers, volumes, lectures, monographs and research projects are now being referred to as research output, and the process

of knowledge dissemination has now become a process through which measurable deliverables are provided. More specifically, academic self-branding practices serve a twofold purpose: firstly, they are the conduit towards the creation of a more effective system of disseminating scholarly achievements, owing to the meaning-making immediacy of the Web; secondly, they promote a more persuasive image of the academic persona.

### 3. Searching for a hybrid genre

Drawing on the above discussion, we would like to argue that the integration of more general social-networking elements within the context of professional profiling for academic networking requisites has generated a likewise aggregation of codes and conventions (Eggins/Martin 1997; Bhatia 2000; Swales 2004). This process is generally known as 'hybridization of genre' (Bhatia 2004), and refers to the blurring of boundaries between discourses that appear to be especially prominent in the domain of contemporary media (Fairclough 2003). Hybridization as applied to new forms of academic social networking practices is construed by and through *ad hoc* multimodal devices, which, we posit, will eventually change the perception of the academic world in line with the communicative immediacy of the new media.

It is useful to briefly mention here Hyland's (2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2015) extensive work on the more traditional bios which he states is perceived to be a 'peripheral genre'. Defined as 'naturally occurring texts' that accompany a research article (Hyland 2012b), these short statements are quite revealing in terms of how academic identity is ultimately constructed. Hyland explains that identity work is a process which is not achieved in isolation, but is forged by interacting with others, and consequently requiring feedback and recognition from others. However, he affirms that placing emphasis on the social nature of identity construction does not mean neglecting the role of individual agency as expressed through

preferences and choices, nor does it imply forgetting the context in which they are enacted. Hence, it is through this triangulation of perspectives involving context-specific conventions, personal agency and interaction with others that self-branding occurs also within ASNSs such as *Academia.edu*.

Returning to the discussion on hybridization, when bios migrated from their position accompanying a research article onto ASNSs, in our view, a novel genre was created, one that blends together conventional genre moves with more revealing medium-induced multimodal features. One possible purpose of this congenial blend is the importance of establishing and maintaining credibility as a successful academic through novel ways of disseminating knowledge.

#### 4. Corpus and methodology

The creation of a multimodal corpus that could be somehow representative of the semiotic mechanisms employed for academic online self-branding was carried out in two main phases: the design of the corpus and the collection of the required multimodal texts. These two interrelated phases have been procedurally guided by the following overarching research-questions, postulated as an initial query before our effective corpus collection:

1. How is academic social presence construed in terms of linguistic choices and multimodal co-deployments?
2. How does the medium work to shape and remediate typically established genre-specific moves?
3. To what extent can media-based self-branding strategies forge a professional identity within existing academic communities via interdiscursive strategies?
4. How can a 'multimodal critical discourse' approach shed light on the self-branding practices devised and packaged by academics for the purpose of self-promotion?

Hence, in order to critically explore, and possibly answer, the issues raised by these investigative queries, it was necessary to collect a corpus of online academic profiles through which scholars can easily construct and socialize their professional identity without the limitation of space and content provided by more traditional institutional Web pages. All SNSs are websites that have a public or semi-public profile page, including dating sites, fan sites and so on. Moreover, each SNS has its own different rules for establishing online connections; a social networking site is, in fact, also known as a social website because it helps people socialize and exchange viewpoints. While more general SNSs, like *Facebook* and *Twitter*, straddle the line between private and professional engagement, the ASNS *Academia.edu* seemed the best choice for our data collection.

From a compositional point of view, *Academia.edu* profile page presents the user's personal picture, which, just like on every other SNS, is placed on the left-hand side of the page. On its right, we find the name of the user immediately followed, on a different line, by the scholar's academic affiliation and their academic interests. The third line presents the user's academic bio-note. Directly under it, since also the academic world requires legitimation, a series of force feedbacks may be seen as the recipients of power relation and legitimation of the role of a scholar. As a matter of fact, we have an immediate feedback on where the scholar is standing within their online community by means of reference-boxes reporting:

1. the number of their followers;
2. the number of profiles of other academics they follow;
3. the number of the co-authors who have participated in the elaboration of some of the 'measurable deliverables' they have put on display;
4. the total number of views they have obtained so far;
5. the position they have reached as academics on the website, based on the total number of visits their profile has received and the number of papers, books or material downloaded by their followers.

Immediately below this category, we find a series of other SNS icons through which it is possible to exchange information about the user. These icons are important intersemiotic strategies to connect *Academia.edu* to other SNSs by reinforcing the type of social environment which *Academia.edu* belongs to.

The last line, which is possibly the most important one of the whole webpage, hosts links to the solid products the scholar wants to share with their online academic community. This line is central since it works to differentiate *Academia.edu* from any other SNS. Here, by simply clicking on a link, we can automatically download articles, books, conference papers and the several other ‘measurable deliverables’ the user has decided to upload for public knowledge dissemination and to underpin their position within the academic world.

Our corpus, exclusively drawn from the *Academia.edu* platform, was created by selecting, by means of the *BootCat* front-end,<sup>5</sup> only those webpages which presented both the scholars’ written bionotes and a visual prompt, such as a personal picture. For this preliminary work, we decided to concentrate only on the profiles posted by scholars working within the top-ranking universities in the UK, but our next step will also include academic self-branding webpages from other countries in order to find out whether academics use different semiotic strategies to represent themselves and their work in different linguistic landscapes.

From a procedural viewpoint, we collected a total amount of 5,445 profiles and began our investigation by dividing our corpus (SELF-BRANDING BIONOTES\_Corpus) into two main sub-corpora: 1. a linguistic one, comprehending the scholars’ self-branding written bionotes (30,226 tokens); and, 2. a semiotic one, including the scholars’ visual prompt (487 pictures). Moreover, each subcorpus was further subdivided into two main groups representing the distinction between contemporary sciences: HUMANITIES on the one hand, gathering profiles of scholars working in the field of Linguistics, Art,

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<sup>5</sup> *BootCaT* front-end is a graphical interface for the *BootCaT toolkit* (Baroni/Bernardini 2004) which automates the process of finding reference texts on the Web and collating them in a single corpus.

History, etc., and SCIENCES on the other, incorporating profiles from scholars involved in scientific disciplines such as Science, Technology, etc. These two groups were further distributed into two other sub-categories, namely JUNIOR scholars and SENIOR scholars, according to the represented participants' academic age (rather than to their biological one), and finally each single sub-group was categorised according to gender.

Owing to the composite multimodal nature of the texts under scrutiny, the investigation of our corpus could only yield significant results if based on a hybrid approach combining both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. Specifically, the quantitative tool employed here, and described in detail further on, pertains to and supports the semiotic analysis of the profiles conducted within the qualitative framework provided by Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) (Kress/van Leeuwen 1996, 2001; Martin 2004; O'Halloran 2010; van Leeuwen 2013).

In addition, the Web-based academic bionote is the result of genre hybridization therefore requiring, in our view, the support of a qualitative analysis based on the principles of Genre Theory. This analysis, we find, is effective in revealing how today's academics refer back to the functional conventions and hallmarks of the traditional genre of bios in order to create a new and effective genre whose rhetorical moves and processes are opportunely re-formulated to fit the purpose of the context (Devitt 2004; Martin/Rose 2008; Martin 2013).

Regarding our linguistic analysis, the investigation of the corpus was substantiated by cross-analyzing the results obtained from the implementation of the aforementioned methods with the tools drawn from Critical Discourse Analysis, with the purpose of exploring the interpersonal/interactive metafunction of represented participants (i.e. their positioning, self-critical attitude, stance, appraisal, etc.).

As mentioned above, the examination of the semiotic resources employed for the construction of the academic profiles collected in the corpus was largely undertaken from a Multimodal Critical Discourse perspective. For several linguists, MCDA is concerned with accounting for the communication of meaning within texts, and the issues arising from the consideration of semiotic resources other than

language in interaction with each other and with language. Current research in multimodality is evolving around some interconnected theoretical assumptions, which tackle meaning as it is created through the situated configurations of image, gaze, gesture, body posture and movement, music, sound, speech, etc. (Jewitt 2014). From a multimodal perspective, semiotic resources such as the image, the voice, the action and so on are referred to as modes of communication and representation since they employ an array of meaning-enhancing modes. Such modes of communication are frequently seen as socially produced over time since they convey the social and/or individual features of different communities in specific social contexts.

Our multimodal analysis was aided by the ATLAS/ti software (Version 7.1.8), which offers quantitative tools to manage, extract, compare, explore, and re-assemble meaningful visual pieces from large amounts of data in creative, flexible, and systematic ways. The semiotic resources taken under scrutiny in this study are essentially the photographs/images selected and uploaded by scholars to their *Academia.edu* profiles to complement their online academic identity. The represented participants in our corpus are all the entities that are present in the visual corpus, whether animate or inanimate. They represent the situation ‘at stake’, its current worldview or states of being in the world. The interactive participants, one being the producer (the academic, in our corpus) and the other the viewer (their followers), interrelate with each other in the act of encoding and decoding a visual. Noticeably, the three main elements in Kress and van Leeuwen’s theoretical notion of metafunctions stem directly from Halliday’s (1994) functional grammar and its system of metafunctions simultaneously operating within a text.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) visual grammar, reading or viewing a picture or any other form of visual imagery entails the decoding of a coherent arrangement of three main factors which connect and establish semiotic relations: the represented participants, the interactive participants, and all the coherent structural elements of a visual. Both multimodal codes, i.e. the linguistic and the semiotic code of images, “have their own quite particular means of realising what in the end are perhaps quite similar semantic relations” (Kress/van Leeuwen 1996: 44). The investigated visual process types

we concentrated upon are those pertaining primarily to symbolic and attributive processes, Gaze, Mood and Modality.

## 5. The Move Identification Pattern

Drawing once again from Hyland's (2011, 2012b) seminal work on identity construction through bionotes, we identified a set of moves similar to the ones he previously reported. These moves, along with a set of criteria (Hyland 2011), reveal how academics construct their identities in terms of what they say and how they say it, and therefore correspond to genre expectations. Our data analysis led to the identification of three distinct moves coded into a Move Identification Pattern (MIP) that we adopted for the investigation of both the linguistic corpus and the selected images in the multimodal corpus.

We subsequently turned to Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics to explore how these moves were encoded in the material, mental and relational process type categories. Although Halliday includes verbal, behavioural and existential process types as part of his transitivity analysis, it was our decision to exclude these from our own analysis of the corpus data at this stage of the study. This choice was based on the nature of the experience as expressed in bionotes which we believe is best represented by the events and the states of the actors whose academic life we attempt to narrate.

Each move was then assigned a keyword identifier which was useful, especially in terms of co-referencing the constituent parts of each move, to shift from the linguistic to the multimodal analysis (cf. Section 6) and from junior to senior linguistic and semiotic instantiations. The framework in Table 1 is a graphic representation of each of the three moves, indicating the general aim of each move, the keyword identifier along with a brief explanation, and the prevalent process types.

<p><b>Move 1:</b> Developing a value proposition;  Keyword: positioning (stating who we are, employment, education);  Relational processes.</p>
<p><b>Move 2:</b> Reinforcing proposition;  Keyword: consistency (highlighting research, what we do, what we are interested in);  Material processes.</p>
<p><b>Move 3:</b> Relating to audience through engagement processes;  Keyword: authenticity (expanding on the above two moves);  Combination of three processes.</p>

Table 1. Move Identification Pattern (MIP).

Move 1 of our MIP, whose keyword is *positioning*, describes how scholars represent themselves in what are usually opening statements and how they attempt to establish an immediate impression of who they are and their general background. This move is mainly realized by relational processes as they express the state of ‘being’ and indicate attribution. Within Move 2, realized by material processes, scholars expand on their positioning act by providing proof, and therefore show *consistency* of behaviour. Move 3 is the most complex one as it is realized by resorting to all three-process type categories (i.e. material, mental and relational). This move rests on the keyword *authenticity*, which means that the information about who one is and what is presented corresponds to a true image of the person. There is engagement in this move, especially in terms of relating to the target audience which, in itself, is an identifying feature of authenticity (De Sousa 2007).

## 6. Linguistic analysis

This section presents findings from the linguistic analysis of each of the three moves. The selection of examples from the data regarding junior academics will be followed by the data from the senior academics.

### 6.1. Move 1. Value proposition; positioning

Within this move, juniors seem to position themselves by frequently mentioning academic titles as illustrated in the examples below (italics added).

- (1) *I studied music and musicology at King's College London (PhD, BMus, MMus).*
- (2) *Helen S. is a PhD candidate at King's College London, working with a large group of researchers on the role and representation of fashion in the work of James Joyce.*
- (3) *I completed my PhD in Philosophy of cognitive Sciences at the University of Bristol. I have recently started as a research associate in the Department of Cognitive Science, and together with my research group we will be exploring [...].*

Either by using the first person pronoun or their full name, a choice which largely depends on the level of personal involvement with the work they are conducting (Hyland 2012b), the Juniors' foregrounding of their academic titles seems to make up for the fewer measurable deliverables that they have or do not have compared to the Seniors. Also, in the same examples, the Juniors often mention their involvement in group-conducted research work, possibly to strengthen their position in the academic world. In examples 4-6, what is additionally highlighted is the modifying devices used to add emphasis on their experiences.

- (4) *I am a self-funded PhD student* in the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Bristol. My current research is focused on the impact of [...].
- (5) Peter S. completed a PhD at Cambridge on [...]. He had an *early career* in the field of Palaeography at the Department of Anglo-Saxon Norse.
- (6) Margaret W., MA (Cantab.) MClfA. Having received a *classical education*, my archeological work conducted with others is based in the North of England.

For senior scholars, on the other hand, owing to their established position in academia, institutional affiliation or specialization are priority mentions, as we can see from the examples 7-9 below.

- (7) *As a professor of International Development* in the Department of International Development at *King's College* London, I have conducted extensive research.
- (8) I have conducted research as *professor of Archeology* in the *Andes of South America*, and in the *Himalayas of Northeast India* [...].
- (9) *Member of* the TOPOI Excellence Cluster.

Also, as Seniors are usually well-equipped with measurable achievements, they often describe their experiences in terms of research places they have worked in, as shown in the examples below.

- (10) I have conducted research as *professor of Archeology* in the *Andes of South America*, and in the *Himalayas of Northeast India* [...].
- (11) My research focused on social and political movements both in *South India and Scotland* [...].

Mentioning a time reference also seems to highlight their professional authority, as in the following examples.

- (12) My research and writing *over 25 + years* has focused on [...].
- (13) I have a *long-standing interest* in histories of child-care [...].

## 6.2. Move 2. Reinforcing propositions

Junior scholars in Move 2 seem to reinforce their position by consistently referring to group participation:

- (14) I have actively *collaborated* on a range of pedagogic research with *a number of colleagues* [...]. We performed various filed experiments on a population of [...].
- (15) I am currently working and conducting experiments *with a number of other people* as network facilitator on an international project.
- (16) *I am part of* a well-funded *community* research project [...].

Their experience is also represented as an active one, implying that they are doers rather than passive recipients. In fact, as can be seen in the examples below, this move is mainly realized by material processes.

- (17) I am *experimenting with* various methods and *trying out* a number of other tools in this new archeological research expedition.
- (18) A large part of my research project *is doing research* in robotics [...].

Seniors appear to be consistent in counting on their measurable achievements and they do so in exact numbers:

- (19) *Two further* books build on the primary thesis [...].
- (20) His *10 authored books* are listed on his site. He has co-authored or co-edited *23 other books* and special issues [...].

At times they also opt for approximate quantity as shown below:

- (21) [...] *a series of* essays edited jointly in 2014.
- (22) In *all my professional career*, I have edited *a number of volumes* in my area of research, and co-edited *many more* of international interest.

As in Move 1, Seniors insist on mentioning a time span which seems to strengthen their position as successful academics:

- (23) I have authored or co-authored *various other books over the years* [...].
- (24) Through a *forthcoming book* and *several articles* [...].
- (25) He has *published extensively* [...] and has *15 years'* international research experience [...].

### 6.3. Move 3. Relating to audience through engagement processes

As mentioned previously, our Move 3 refers to audience engagement processes; this is where the openness comes in and where *authenticity* plays a major role. Juniors seem to express their authenticity by directly involving their readers, and by using the inclusive *we*, as in the following example:

- (26) *I ask you:* can we, and should we, educate for good questioning?

There are also many instances in the corpus where Juniors make room for emotions that express a system of attitude through the semantic area of affect (Martin/White 2005). Some of these are shown in the following examples.

- (27) I am *very excited* since I have acted as a sort of *happy* qualitative/quantitative researcher so far.
- (28) My *main preoccupation* is to see publication of many UK excavations [...].
- (29) I've *been hoping* to work with [...].

Senior scholars seem to express their authenticity by using their measurable achievements once again and they do so in numbers as shown below.

- (30) I have supervised *14 doctoral* students and *9 masters* students, and taught *many more*.

They also seem to count on their various roles in order to boost credibility of their academic standing. In examples 31 and 32 they are keepers and leaders.

(31) I am *keeper* of the museum as well as a member of the academic community.

(32) I am a *supportive and critical leader* [...].

Indeed, strongly supported by their dissemination potential, they also see themselves as celebrities.

(33) He has appeared on both the BBC radio 4 and 5 discussing childhood wellbeing [...].

(34) His research has been *cited by* non-governmental organizations (NGOs) [...].

It is also just as important to them to increase their visibility by inviting people to download their measurables as expressed in the example below.

(35) Open access papers can be *downloaded* from this site, with an active research portfolio [...].

Generally speaking, along the lines of Hyland's (2012b) own findings in the similar area of research, our findings indicate that junior scholars, owing to their often limited experience in academia and probably with fewer measurable deliverables, tend to represent themselves by mentioning their present and past positions, projects and educational experiences. They also strengthen their positions by relating their work to audience appeal through emotional involvement. Seniors on the other hand, establish who they are, who they are affiliated with and expose their long-standing experience by drawing on the solidity of their work. They are strong on knowledge dissemination potential and it is through this that they relate to their audience.

## 7. Multimodal analysis

Genre analysis is frequently discussed by multimodal scholars for a variety of different reasons, such as the description of multimodal phenomena and/or their properties (Held 2005; Tan 2010; Bateman 2011). Tan (2010: 93), in particular, applies genre theory to illustrate the multimodal features and the semiotic potential of websites as digital media, clarifying that a website can be considered as:

an innately hybridic genre that generates a multitude of intertextual possibilities by assembling texts from various modes and discourses (e.g. verbiage, image, sound, activity) that are then represented in multiple relations to one another.

However, the major reservation concerning the application of genre theory to extremely diverse multimodal instantiations without specific constraints and criteria is still an unresolved issue. This section seeks to tentatively explore the application of genre analysis by simply amplifying the three distinct genre moves identified and presented in the previous two sections. The main idea here is to adapt the MIP to the constraints of the semiotic self-(re)presentation as constructed and publicly displayed within the selected academic social actors' profiles on *Academia.edu*. Each semiotic move corresponds to a move analyzed in the previous section; thus, instead of an unviable linear analysis of semiotic moves within a given text (i.e. a single photograph), we proceed to combine the scholars' personal choices of representing themselves through pictures to one or more moves in the written bionotes analyzed in Sections 4 and 5.

The semiotic moves in our MIP model work to disclose the way academics intentionally craft an image of their online persona in terms of professional self-representation via the picture they choose to identify themselves with and/or their professional involvement in the academic community. Although selecting and posting a personal picture cannot immediately suggest a subjective act of intentional creation, it epitomizes unavoidably a meaningful act of identity

construction, or of subjective agency, since scholars autonomously decide upon which picture best describes their public persona. Needless to say, the layout structure of the ASNS is never arbitrary but functionally motivated. As said, in *Academia.edu* on the left-hand side of the website page, we have a photograph which fully participates in reinforcing the value proposition of the matching bionote. Indeed, the combination of visual and verbal texts, their joint structure and spatial proximity in the layout, require that both linguistic and semiotic texts should be interpreted together.

We employed the same keyword identifiers used for co-referencing the constituent parts of each linguistic move in order to bring our general analysis to a coherent level of investigation. Table 2 shows a graphic representation of each of the three semiotic moves designating their main aims, their specific keyword identifiers along with the leading process types taken under scrutiny.

<p><b>Semiotic Move 1:</b> Developing a value representation;                  Keyword: Positioning;                  Narrative processes: Non-transactional reactions.</p>
<p><b>Semiotic Move 2:</b> Reinforcing bionote Move 1;                  Keyword: Consistency;                  Conceptual processes: Symbolic processes.</p>
<p><b>Semiotic Move 3:</b> Engagement;                  Keyword: Authenticity;                  Combination of processes.</p>

Table 2. The semiotic moves.

Semiotic Move 1 is mainly realized through the representational metafunction, that is, the semiotic function of construing the representation of what is going on in the world. In particular, all the photographs corresponding to Semiotic Move 1 are narrative processes illustrating how academics represent themselves as doing something for one another. All pictures describe Non-Transactional reactions since only the Reactor (i.e. the represented scholar) comes forth in the image. Such condition gives the viewers the opportunity to imagine what the represented academic may be looking at while interacting with them, being at the same level.

Semiotic Move 2, following the bionote Move 2, in which the academics develop on their positioning move by providing some evidence, is equally identified by the keyword *consistency*. It is realized mainly through conceptual processes whereby the represented participants are portrayed as ‘being and having’, that is, the scholar’s image is construed as a ‘thing’, an action or an event (Existential) or in terms of the scholar’s attributes (Relational). This move explicates the connection between the academics and their research or personal interests by often enacting a symbolic process by means of the representation of places, props or scientific objects that are interdiscursively associated to the scholar’s work.

Semiotic Move 3 is activated by the keyword *authenticity*, so this is the move where openness comes in. Move 3 needs the other two semiotic moves and processes to be realized and analyzed. In almost all pictures belonging to this category, the engagement with the viewer is enacted by the welcoming and smiling faces of the represented participants.

This section discusses the findings of the multimodal study. The discussion is presented in three parts corresponding to the three semiotic modes identified above.

### 7.1. Semiotic Move 1: The Face Act

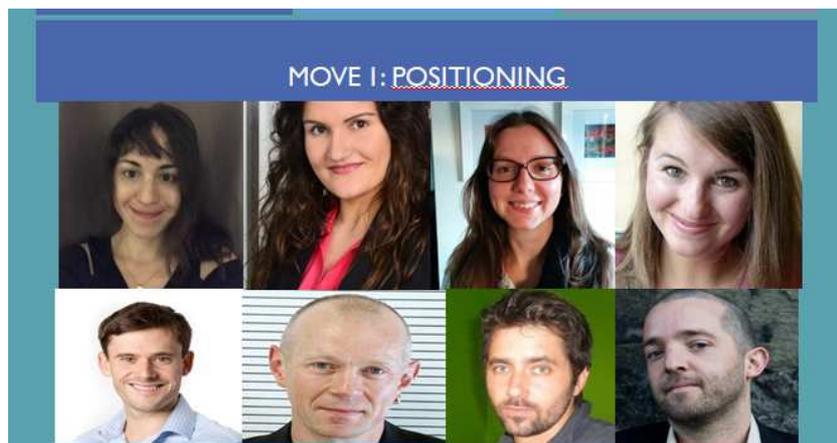


Figure 1. *The Face Act*: positioning.

As shown in the Figure above, Semiotic Move 1 presents all close-up shots of academics. In this move, the *Gaze* is fundamentally used to interpret the positioning of the represented participants or the reactors. Their gaze is always frontal facing and therefore directed at the viewers. In this particular case, it is to be noted that although the phenomenon which corresponds to the object of their gaze is not displayed before the viewers, these scholars show their attitude and expect to communicate with their peers. The direction of their gaze represents the vector which sets off a 'Non-transactional reaction'. In Kress and van Leeuwen's terms (1996), the image mood of Move 1 may be defined as a 'demand' since the represented participants are directly engaging their viewers by asking them to interact. Moreover, since social (intimate, or impersonal) distance and intimacy in a picture is realised by the size of frame, varying from very-close-shot to very-long-shot, the distance between the represented academics and their viewers is determined by a very close shot, where such a short proximity positions the viewers and the represented participants on the same social level. They do belong to the same community in a peer-to-peer type of positioning. In that sense, each photograph works to create a strong sense of empathy between the represented participants and their viewers.

Move 1 re-semiotizes the pragmatic 'perlocutionary force' of the utterance – its effect being persuading, convincing, or otherwise getting someone to do or realize something, whether intended or not (Austin 1962) – through what we would like to define a visual 'Face Act'. Face Acts serve to create inclusivity and familiarity by means of the visual 'demand' encoded in the image. Salience is given to the position of the eyes and the mouth of the represented participants who are directly engaging the viewer's thoughts, emotions or even their physical response. All these pictures are in high modality strengthening the relationship between the undefined space of the online world and the actual real life.

Figure 2 shows the alignment between the eyes and the mouth of the represented participant who is engaging his viewers through a demanding Face Act.



Figure 2. *The Face Act*: gaze, smile, salience, modality.

Both gaze and smile seem to demand the viewer to enter a relation of social affinity and identification. On the other hand, since there is no 'gaze' contact between represented participants in the image, gaze and smile depict the represented participants impersonally as items of information or objects for contemplation. It is important to highlight that the perlocutionary choice of a *Face Act* can suggest different relations among participants, such as engagement or even detachment. However, all images in this move suggest an engagement relation, parallel positioning, and familiarity.

### 7.2. *Semiotic Move 2: The Interdiscursive Act*

This move includes pictures which reinforce the value proposition of the written bionotes in Move 1. The represented scholars in semiotic Move 2 show their personal connection with the research they are carrying out by means of symbolic processes. Such processes correspond to what a participant is or means. In symbolic attributive processes, there are two participants: (a) the Carrier whose meaning and identity is revealed by (b) the Symbolic attribute (i.e. the other participant). In Symbolic suggestive processes, instead, there is only one participant, the Carrier, and its symbolic meaning is displayed by other elaborations, for example other visual descriptions in the

background. In all the pictures in Move 2, in fact, the represented participants (or rather, the Carriers) are portrayed together with an element or a prop symbolizing their job as scholars. In some pictures only a scientific object, a background place or an academic prop such as a blackboard or a book are representatives of a symbolic suggestive process. Such types of representations are to be intended as forms of visual dissemination which by means of a symbolic process enact an interdiscursive connection between the academics and their professional interests.

Figure 3 reports a selection of images classified in semiotic Move 2 which covers different representations of academic self-branding strategies ranging from symbolic attributive processes to symbolic suggestive processes.



Figure 3. Move 2: *Consistency*.

The semiotic *Interdiscursive Act* is a highly performative act, which implies a symbolic process whereby the represented participants communicate to their viewers their position in the academic community by connecting their own image to the one of an object representing their job, academic field or interest as scholars (i.e. the scholars and the notes she is reading, the scholar and a piano, the scholar and a group of animals, etc.) . This *Interdiscursive Act* creates

consistency by expanding the scholar's positioning move in the written bionote providing visual proof.

### *7.3. Semiotic Move 3: The Smile Act*

Semiotic Move 3 refers to audience engagement and encompasses Move 1 and Move 2 discussed in the linguistic analysis of the bionotes by activating all the previously analyzed multimodal processes simultaneously. In terms of Mood, Move 3 may express both 'demand' and 'offer', connecting with the former two semiotic moves. Authenticity is provided here by a very close proximity between the scholars and their followers. As far as social distance is concerned, it is influenced by different sizes of frame, namely close-up, medium or long shots. Therefore, since the size of all frames in Semiotic Move 3 is a close-up shot, this indicates little social distance which involves the participants in an informal relation, typical between friends. As in Move 1, the gaze of the represented participant in Semiotic Move 3 is in fact monovectorial, which implies a direct engagement with the audience. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 117) consider this particular visual configuration as relating to two different functions: first, it establishes a visual form of direct address, which serves to acknowledge the viewer explicitly, as if they were being told: "Hey – you [out there]!"; secondly, it constitutes an Image Act when, ultimately, the image-producer "uses the image to do something to the viewer"; hence, the reason for it being labeled a 'demand' image. Essentially, it is the participant's gaze, and potentially their gesture (such as smiling) which demands some form of action from the viewer and thus compels the viewer to enter an imaginary relationship with the participant. It is typically the facial expression of the represented participant which signifies exactly what type of relationship is established between both parties. A smile from the represented participants will probably induce the viewer to enter a state of 'social affinity' with them (Kress/van Leeuwen 1996). As for Move 2, the represented participants' gaze does not engage the viewers directly, but academics are depicted in the act of looking somewhere else suggesting an 'offer' rather than a 'demand'. This is because the

viewers are offered the images as information available for their perusal (Machin 2007). Understanding the agency of the viewer as articulated through their gaze challenges a shift of analytical emphasis away from the image/text towards the social identities and experiences of the viewer. This necessarily connects with the context of viewing as part of the meaning-making process.

We need to distinguish between the represented participant's gaze and the viewer's assumed gaze in order to understand different positions and points of view. If the represented participant's gaze indicates a modality of demand or offer, it is the viewer's gaze – the viewer's personal reading of an image – which enacts a simultaneous process of decoding and re-encoding. When one decodes a message, he/she is extracting the meaning of that message into terms that are easy to understand. Without using words the decoding behaviour would be suggested by means of a gesture such as observing a picture, or simply by body language such as smiling (Figure 4). Smiling is a subcategory of facial expressions in non-verbal communication. As a matter of fact, the smile is one of the simplest means of connecting with others. An individual who smiles while communicating with others is often perceived as confident, honest, and trustworthy.



Figure 4. Move 3: Engagement

The human smile, with its structural and nonverbal features, is the most important cue in interpersonal communication processes (Figure

5). Positive emotions expressed by smiling may lead to more positive interpersonal judgments (Dion *et al.* 1972) and make people attribute higher degrees of attractiveness and social competence as well as less dominance as compared to non-smiling people (Reis *et al.* 1990). However, although the mechanisms through which people perceive different types of smiles and judge their authenticity remain unclear, it is evident here that the performative *Smile Act* has the power to directly engage the audience. In particular, the scholars' act of smiling on their bionote pictures is a clear self-branding strategy which affects two fundamental dimensions of social judgments: warmth and competence. Self-branding authenticity is thus gained via a non-verbal cue in Move 3, which is not so far from what is taking place in consumer behavior research and managerial practice.



Figure 5. *The Smile Act*.

Table 3 summarizes our multimodal findings. As we can easily infer, multimodal construction is widely carried out by the Humanities scholars (H), while Science scholars (S) tend to be very similar in their semiotic self-branding representations by means of mainly symbolic processes across gender. Quite surprisingly, Senior scholars (S) tend to represent themselves by means of a casual attire as opposed to their more formal appearing Junior (J) counterparts. On the other hand, Humanities scholars tend to shift between symbolic and analytical processes. It is interesting to note that Male (M) Senior scholars behave similarly to Female (F) Junior scholars in the choice

of the oblique angular positioning which is an evident stance of power relation.

GENDER and RANKS	
S-J-M = Low modality, symbolic process, vestimics > old-fashioned/elegant attire;	H-J-M = High modality, symbolic and analytical processes, vestimics > casual attire;
S-S-M = High modality, symbolic process, vestimics > casual attire;	H-S-M = High/Middle modality, analytical process, vestimics > from casual to elegant, oblique angle, half-smile engagement;
S-J-F = High modality, symbolic process, smiling attitude;	H-J-F = High modality, symbolic process, smiling attitude, oblique angle;
S-S-F = High modality, symbolic process, smiling attitude;	H-S-F = High modality, analytical process, smiling attitude.

Table 3. Gender and ranks across the corpus.

## 8. Conclusion

The sentence 'You're only as good as your last tweet...' (Lauren 2013) in the introductory part of the title of this chapter is a clear call to all academics to connect with the online world in order to have more visibility. Today, developing a webpage, crafting social media profiles, and interacting with followers and clients across networks must be considered compulsory practices which necessarily enmesh also the academic world. The ASNS *Academia.edu* created for academic users, in particular, mirrors all the main social media conventions, from follower counts to activity notifications, so that academic profiles with photographs and other common features are similar to those appearing on *Twitter* and *Facebook*.

This chapter has highlighted the way *Academia.edu*, from a purely discursive viewpoint, succeeds in hybridizing the bionote genre by accentuating new forms of academic social presence construed by and through specific multimodal devices. Such discursive strategies, we posit, will eventually change the perception of the academic world in line with the fast-communicative immediacy of the new media. Our

analysis has identified three multimodal moves leading to the assumption that *Academia.edu* infrastructure of scholarly communication and relative affordances can only intensify academic visibility (interactivity, feedback and analytics) through linguistic and multimodal self-branding interdiscursive strategies. As a result, the expected development might be the creation of networked intellectuals characterized by a strong media presence together with the subsequent facilitation of knowledge dissemination codified through academic self-branding strategies, which are implemented by scholars across disciplines. Moreover, measurability of output via the convergence between academia practices and knowledge corporation strategies (such as posting, following, bookmarking, recommending) is slowly becoming a viable practice. Therefore, while social media, on the one hand, impact the way academics discursively disseminate knowledge through self-branding multimodal strategies, on the other, they reinforce community power relations through conventional academic discursive practices, through the so-called measurable deliverables. Ultimately, this study has identified new hybrid genre moves which have been detected as interdiscursively deployed in both our linguistic and semiotic analyses.

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