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SHARING PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE ON WEB 2.0 AND BEYOND

DISCOURSE AND GENRE

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Introduction

1. Why "Web 2.0 and beyond"?

This book deals with professional communication on blogging and networking platforms, presenting the results of research carried out by the author over the last few years [1].

In recent years, the use of Web-mediated digital technologies has constantly grown in importance, reshaping the communication ladscape in all professional activities. A crucial role has been played by social media, i.e. online resources that enable users to connect, interact, and share contents (cf. Drury 2008), where "users are no longer mere spectators, but participants that generate content continuously and guide the direction of the conversation" (Figueroa and Otero 2014, 40). Social media include a diversity of applications with different core functions and structures, all designed to facilitate information sharing, knowledge distribution, and opinion exchanges. Among such applications there are blogs, micro-blogs, social networking sites, wikis, forums, content communities (e.g. YouTube) (cf. Chan-Olmsted, Cho, and Lee 2013). All these applications are usually referred to collectively as Web 2.0, as they belong to the second generation of Web-based applications.

In its first stage of development – now often referred to retrospectively as 'Web 1.0' – the Web was essentially static and served mainly informative purposes, favouring the rapid circulation of professional knowledge and information, with users consulting pages passively and for the most part not participating in generating content. It also made exchanges possible between individual professionals by means of stand-alone applications such as email, chats and instant messaging.

[1] This book contributes to the national research programme "Knowledge Dissemination across media in English: continuity and change in discourse strategies, ideologies, and epistemologies", financed by the Italian Ministry for the University for 2017-2019 (nr. 2015TJ8ZAS). This book has been peer reviewed.

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In time there was a gradual shift towards more collaborative communication technologies (Herring 2013, 4-6), usually referred to as 'Web 2.0'. The introduction of this denomination has often been attributed to O'Reilly Media, where co-founders Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty came up with the expression during a brainstorming session in 2003 (cf. O'Reilly 2005), and then used it for the title of a series of annual conferences focusing on the Web, *Web 2.0 Conference*, which started in 2004 and were held yearly until 2011 [2], and contributed to consolidating the term with the general public. But it has been shown (cf. Aced Toledano 2013) that the term Web 2.0 had been used earlier, in January 1999, by Darcy DiNucci, an expert in electronic information design, in an article written in the context of Web design (DiNucci 1999), where she used the expression to refer to the "embryo" of the Internet of the future, and saw it as the coming true of "the world of myriad, ubiquitous Internet-connected tools […] [which] has long been predicted". The expression was also in the title of a book by Dermot McCormack (2002) – *Web 2.0: 2003-'08 AC (After Crash). The Resurgence of the Internet & E-commerce* – predicting a new stage in the development of the Web. Aced Toledano (2013) also lists several articles published before 2004 where the expression is used. Be that as it may, it is a fact that the term Web 2.0 was popularized and took hold with the Web 2.0 conferences.

A clearcut definition and delimitation of Web 2.0 seems difficult, because the concept is rather fuzzy and also includes some applications that pre-date the denomination itself (e.g. Wikipedia and eBay), so the divide between it and Web 1.0 is blurred. And the scope of the definition is made even more fluid by the fact that there are ever-newer Web-based phenomena emerging every day.

In light of these and other similar considerations, Herring (2013, 4) proposes the following definition:

> […] web-based platforms that emerged as popular in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and that incorporate user-generated content and social interaction, often alongside or in response to structures or (multimedia) content provided by the sites themselves.

To illustrate the peculiarities of Web 2.0 O'Reilly proposes a comparison with Web 1.0: Encyclopedia Britannica (online) vs Wikipedia, personal website vs blogging, content management systems vs wikis, publishing vs participation, etc. In O'Reilly's (2009) view, "Web 2.0 is all

[2] As of 2006 the name of the conference was changed to *Web 2.0 Summit*.

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about harnessing collective intelligence. Collective intelligence applications depend on managing, understanding, and responding to massive amounts of user-generated data in real time".

Quite obviously, at the time of its original introduction the term Web 2.0 reflected the feeling that there were changes underway that would change Web-mediated communication radically. In the very years when the expression Web 2.0 started to circulate and became established, new social media platforms were being launched (Myspace and LinkedIn in 2003; Facebook in 2004) and soon thrived, being followed by others introduced in the subsequent years (Twitter in 2006; Instagram and Pinterest in 2010), with an ever greater emphasis on interactivity and networking. Content sharing on blogs and platforms like YouTube was also growing exponentially with users participating collaboratively to content development.

In time, an important additional factor has been the spread of tablets and, above all, smartphones that have rendered Web 2.0 applications readily available to everyone all the time, everywhere, a development also facilitated by the increasing availability of WiFi in public spaces. An other important factor has been media technological convergence (cf. Jenkins 2007; Androutsopoulos 2010). Thanks to it the Web is ever more frequently used to access other traditional media, e.g. radio and television, newspapers, and cultural products (e.g. ebooks), and the same multimedia content can be accessed from different types of devices. As regards in particular newspapers, with news being accessed online from computers or mobile phones, media outlets have realized that the mere replication on the Web of contents originally written for print newspapers, radio, or television is no longer adequate, and have decided to explore multimedia delivery of information. At the same time, the reading experience has become interactive, with the possibility of commenting online and opening a debate on issues dealt with in articles and editorials. Referring to the degree of interactivity and users' participation to content creation Castells (2009, 63) has coined the expression "mass self-communication".

All these developments testify to the fact that in time Web 2.0 applications and platforms have evolved dramatically, exceeding all expectations, and have had an impact on all areas of activity, from personal and social to political and economic. They have changed the dynamics of how people relate socially, how they work, get entertainment, do their shopping, carry out research. They have also had an impact on how public institutions function, on how businesses are organized and operate, on how professionals share knowledge and relate to each other

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and to their clients, etc. In particular, social media have changed social relations profoundly on an individual level, but also in the professional dimension (LinkedIn being a case in point) with useful networking options, often accompanied by other services. On social media dialogue has turned into a multi-party interaction, a complex conversation in which all participants are engaged. In this context it can really be stated that we are now well beyond the idea of Web 2.0 as conceived at the time when the notion was introduced.

In recent times other important developments – such as the rise of Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things (Koreshoff, Robertson, and Leong 2013, 335; Soro, Brereton, and Roe 2019), Big Data (cf. Dedić Stanier 2016, 116; Paganoni 2019), the Semantic Web, etc. – have been under way that are less directly perceptible by the individual users, but are bound to have – and have in part already had – a tremendous impact on our lives. Indeed their denominations have already become buzzwords, although some of the underlying technologies are still being perfected. These innovations represent the third generation of Web applications, often referred to as Web 3.0, which has long been seen as imminent, but there is wide agreement that the transition to it has not really been completed yet.

2. The linguistic perspective

The emergence of a whole range of highly dynamic and participatory Web-mediated phenomena where language plays a crucial role poses a challenge for the linguist, both from a methodological and an operational point of view. Herring's (2004; 2013) proposal of Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) presents a methodological framework based on the idea of adapting "existing methods […] to the properties of digital communication media" (2013, 5). It is not in itself "a single method but rather a set of methods from which the researcher selects those best suited to her data and research questions" (Herring 2004, 343). It involves "language-focused content analysis", counting both on qualitative and quantitative investigations which can be carried out on different levels – microlinguistic structure, semantic and pragmatic meaning, interaction and social behaviour – as a function of the materials explored and the purpose of the research being carried out.

In broad terms, CMDA is the frame of reference also for the studies collected in this book, as they take a discourse analytical approach, with

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special attention for genre analytical aspects, and discuss on the one hand the peculiarities of Web 2.0 genres and on the other the need to adapt the methodological toolkit for an adequate and effective analysis. These theoretical issues are discussed in particular in Chapter 1.

The rest of the book looks at specific social media and how they are used in communication between professionals in the legal sector, and in particular arbitrators and law professionals.

The focus is first on blogging platforms, the earliest of all social media, as used by legal practitioners to share knowledge, express views, ideas, reflections, comments, information (e.g. about products or services) and debate topical issues. The main object of analysis is the law blog as a genre, with special attention for its generic integrity, in a context where thematic blogs have shown a tendency to evolve rapidly losing their distinctive traits, and in particular the existential character that distinguished them originally. In the analysis the opportunity is also taken to discuss problems related to the collection of a corpus of texts from social media, characterised as they are by interactivity and multiple participation.

Attention then shifts to Social Networking Sites, with a chapter comparing professional groups – notably arbitration discussion groups – on Facebook and on LinkedIn respectively, looking in particular at how the differences in the character and architecture of each of the two SNSs influence users' behaviour in terms of communication and identity construction.

In the last two chapters the focus is on LinkedIn, the professional SNS. In Chapter 4 the focus is on legal practitioners' groups as communities of practice, where professionals share knowledge and discuss topical issues, but – as the analysis shows – at the same time take advantage of the networking options for purposes of personal branding as well as for self-promotion.

In the last chapter the corpus analysed consists of job advertisements on LinkedIn, that is, on a traditional genre which is embedded in the professional networking site. This provides the opportunity to evaluate what happens to an extant genre when it is embedded in a site that is characterised by a high degree of interactivity and participation.

The picture that emerges from these studies is complex, but somewhat partial not only because there are so many other aspects to be explored, but also in consideration of the focus on one community of practice – that of legal practitioners, arbitrators, lawyers, magistrates, judges – used as a case study. Therefore, the agenda for future research needs to consider a representative sample of professionals' communi-

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ties. A further element to be considered is that social media are highly dynamic and subject to an unrelenting process of evolution, so linguists have to keep in mind that in their research not only descriptions but also analytical tools and research methods require incessant updating and fine-tuning.

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1. Investigating Genres on the Web: Methodological Issues

1. Introduction

This chapter looks at Web-mediated communication from the point of view of genre analysis, with a focus on the structural and textual properties of genres on the Web [1]. Its approach is essentially methodological and sets the stage for the analysis to be carried out in the following chapters.

For the linguist one of the problems associated with the analysis of language use in multimedia and multimodal communication and within the context of the Web is the need to develop conceptual frameworks to cope with the complexity and the novelty of new multimedia constellations, within which traditional forms of communication, as well as text types and genres, are remediated (Bolter and Grusin 1999). This implies asking whether already existing categories and tools developed in the study of traditional forms of discourse production and reception can be adapted, or an effort should be made to shape completely new *ad hoc* tools.

In Garzone (2002) this methodological issue was discussed with specific reference to text used in Web-mediated communication, and in particular in e-commerce communication which is taken as a case study, exploring the possibility of extending the Text Linguistic model to the analysis of multimodal and multimedia discourse. The study concluded that from the point of view of textuality Web communication is stratified, featuring multiple layers of text: the inherent textuality of such alphabetic text as is present, the overall textuality of the page, resulting from the integration between linguistic and iconic elements, and the superimposed level of hypertextuality (Garzone 2002, 286-287), in addition to more or less hidden 'very short texts' (or 'microcontent': the *domain name*, the

[1] This chapter is a revised and updated version of Garzone (2007).

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site title; the *page title*; *sub-titles*; *links*; the *HTML page title*, *meta tags*, the *keywords*, *alt(ernative) texts*). Therefore traditional models and categories of linguistic and textual analysis are not in themselves inadequate, but their use should be accompanied by the development of a conceptual framework able to incorporate analytical categories suitable for a textual configuration which includes not only text, but also non-linguistic, non-linear elements – visual, iconic and functional (links, toolbars, buttons, etc.) (*ibid.*, 295). In particular, if Text Linguistic tools are to be relied on, they have to be applied on two different levels, that of alphabetic text and that of the 'page-as-text' or, better, as the page as a semiotic complex.

Here I shall take a similar approach, turning my attention to genre and asking whether traditional genre theory can be extended and applied to the new media, or modified in order to make it suitable for them. To do so, I shall rely on a concept of genre as defined by Swales and elaborated by Bhatia (Swales 1990; Bhatia 2004; [1993] 2013) [2], structured in the three basic levels of communicative purpose, move structure and rhetorical strategies, integrated on the one hand by consideration of lexico-grammatical correlates (Eggins 1992) and on the other by attention to social situatedness (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995).

In the discussion the starting assumption is that so far Web communication has largely drawn on existing genre repertoires (Orlikowski and Yates 1994, 547), thus giving rise to an extensive a phenomenon of 'genre migration', while newly created genres native to – or resident on – the Web are gradually emerging. In many cases, genre migration has apparently consisted in a process of reproduction. This has been the case for some traditional genres such as the book or the academic article which apparently have moved intact to the Web (although, as will be demonstrated, this is not always the case). In some other cases, instead, genres have preliminarily undergone a degree of adaptation, as by necessity the new medium has made some of the defining traits of the genre inadequate or obsolete (Crowston and Williams 1997; Lemke 1998; 2006).

In other cases, totally new genres have emerged to exploit the new (virtual) communicative spaces made available by the Internet, or to meet needs that are peculiar to this environment. An example is the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions), which has emerged as a distinct genre on the Usenet and Web, although – as Yates and Orlikowski (1994, 547) suggested – these new genres are ultimately derived from earlier genres, as in a new situation at least at an initial stage individuals will tend to

[2] Cf. also Miller (1984); Martin (1985a; 1992); Eggins (1994); Eggins and Martin (1997).

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reproduce genres they have experienced previously as members of other communities. In a research conducted on 100 web pages Crowston and Williams (1997) found that 82 of them more or less faithfully reproduced genres or combinations of genres familiar in traditional media, while eleven pages appeared to be novel genres (e.g. hotlists, home pages, Web server statistics). But the impression is that a similar investigation conducted today would certainly find a higher number of new native genres or profoundly renewed genres that have developed out of a radical process of adaptation to Web communication. The discussion will provide an opportunity to explore how genres are affected by changes in communicative variables and how their semiotic configuration evolves and adapts to new contextual coordinates.

2. Criteria for genre identification and analysis

The problem of the possible extension or modification of the concept of genre to make it suitable for the new media has received some attention in scholarly domains outside strictly linguistic research – e.g. in business communication studies, system sciences, information science and technology – especially in preliminary studies exploring some aspects of the problem. Furuta and Marshall (1996) explored the relationship between genres and technologies, Treloar (2000) discussed it with reference to the genre of the scholarly journal, Crowston and Williams explored the range of genres emerging on the Net (1997), Yates and Orlikowski (1992) and Yates *et al.* (1999) took an essentially diachronic approach, and Roussinov *et al.* (2001) explored people's recognition of genres on the Web.

In linguistics and discourse studies, the problem falls within the scope of a more general debate on the reconsideration of the criteria to be applied for the identification and classification of genres, with authoritative voices (Askehave 1999; Askehave and Swales 2001) putting into question the purposive, goal-directed view of genre, in the formulation originally proposed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia ([1993] 2013) and ultimately also incorporated – at least partially – into most major contemporary approaches to genre (Hyon 1996).

As is well known, such original conceptualization of genre saw purpose as the main criterion for the classification of texts within genres; this emerges clearly from Bhatia's definition of genre based on Swales (1990):

> [a genre] is a recognizable communicative event *characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s)* identified and mutually understood by the

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> members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. (Bhatia [1993] 2013, 13; my emphasis)

The need for a revision or update of this definition has emerged as a result of the increasing awareness of the complexity of the role of discourse in contemporary society and the ever greater sophistication in discourse research. In particular, advances in genre studies have brought home the awareness of the multifunctionality of genres, and have shown the concept to be elusive and so complex as to make the actual goal of communicative acts not so easy to pin down: "the purposes, goals, or public outcomes are more evasive, multiple, and complex than originally envisaged" (Askehave and Swales 2001, 197). As a corrective, they advocate an approach in which – although purpose retains the status of a privileged criterion – genre categorization is seen as "more a matter of extensive text-in-context inquiry" than of "a narrow text-based analysis" (*ibid.*, 209). This involves the socio-rhetorical study of different factors at work in discourse production, and in particular structure, style, content and context, in addition to purpose, resulting in what Askehave and Swales call "genre-status reviewing" or "repurposing of genres". This is all the more relevant for the present discussion as it is pointed out that repurposing "allows attention to focus on the highly contemporary issue of how technological advance affects the way in which genre-exemplars are perceived and ranked in relation to their mode of transmission: telex, fax, phone, e-mail, face-to-face meeting, video-conference, on-line journal, print journal and so on" (*ibidem*).

In accordance with this line of thought, a concrete proposal for the revision of criteria to be used in genre analysis when dealing with computer-mediated discourse was put forth by Askhehave herself, together with Ellerup Neilsen (Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen 2004; 2005), suggesting that the first step to be taken is to incorporate also the notion of 'medium' into the notion of genre. It is to be noted that the two authors, like many others who have studied the problem, classify the Web as a medium in itself, while in my view it is more accurately defined as a Hypermedia Computer-Mediated Environment (HCME, cf. Hoffman and Novak 1995) which embraces various media integrating them into a single environment, a property which has also been defined "multi-medianess" (Askehave and Ellerup Nielson 2004, 12-13) and which brings with it multimodality, i.e. the possibility of using a variety of modes in communication.

Of course, the notion of medium should be used with some caution avoiding conflating genre (rhetorical functions) and channel (mode), as

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Martin (1985b, 17) already warned in the early stage of genre research: "[The] distinction between purpose of a text (genre) and the way it is transmitted (mode) is an important one because so many of our folk linguistic terms confuse mode and genre" [3]. But at the same time its importance should not be played down, as some authors did in the past insisting on the primacy of genre over medium for the sake of establishing the communicative purpose of a text, as they accepted unconditionally the assumption that purpose was the crucial element for genre identification (cf. Yates and Orlikowski 1992, 310 [4]; Yates *et al.* 1999).

But today, with the proliferation of Web genres and their ever more extensive and evident recourse to Web-specific communicative practices – rather than adaptations of pre-existing ones – by necessity extending genre analysis to Web-mediated communication involves more than adopting an analytical framework that "reduce(s) media specific elements to something which is beyond the genre itself" (cf. Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen 2005). On the contrary, what is necessary is a revision of the whole set of analytical tools so that the 'media' element is tightly incorporated into the notion of genre, thus determining its overall readjustment as a system, in line with Askehave and Swales' (2001) general considerations. Although Web genres have their printed counterparts, the environment where they are situated and the medium/media they rely on add unique properties to them. Then, if one considers to what extent the use of media in Web communication relies on technologies, it becomes evident that there is a direct relationship between the options made available by the latter and the generic characteristics of communicative events. For such options, and their limits, the terms 'affordances' is generally used, a term borrowed from the Human-Computer Interaction Community, to describe what a particular technology or piece of software affords or allows the user to do [5].

[3] As an example Martin refers to letters to the editor: "Letters to the editor for example are usually hortatory expositions sent through the mail and have much more in common with sermons and political speeches than with other types of letter" (Martin 1985b, 17).

[4] Cf., for instance, Yates and Orlikowski (1992, 310): "Although our notion of genre is clearly differentiated from that of medium, we recognized their interaction by positing that medium may play a role in both the recurrent situation and the form of a genre".

[5] The term "affordance" was first coined by the perceptual psychologist James Jerome Gibson in 1966 and further explored in Gibson (1979). It was adapted to Human-Machine Interaction and later to Human-Computer Interaction (cf. Norman 1988).

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Thus, the selection and use of a given medium and reliance on its affordances, and in particular on multimodality options, are important factors in the preservation or evolution of the characteristics – whether accessory or constitutive – of a genre, as the options offered by a given medium condition the way it is used, in other words what you can do with it.

3. Properties to be incorporated in the analysis of Web-mediated genres

On the basis of these theoretical premises, a description will be provided of the elements to be taken into account in the classification and analysis of Web-mediated genres and in the discussion of their potential impact on research in this area. The following sub-sections focus specifically on the inherent and distinctive properties of communicative Web genres, also considering the changes that pre-existing genres have undergone in their migration to the online environment, properties which ideally should be incorporated into the model discussed so far (cf. Garzone 2007).

3.1. *Extension in participation framework*

Potentially the Web provides a global audience to anything that is published on it, unless the designer puts a filter to access; this has been described as "multiplicity" (Kaufer and Carly 1993; 1994) or "global reach" (Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen 2005). Of course, a text belonging to a given genre adopts the communicative practices of the (virtual) discourse community [6] it is addressed to, which is constructed in the text itself. In discursive terms, global reach has an evident impact on the organization of texts. But the potential audience of a website also includes a virtually infinite number of Internet surfers who simply come across the document by chance and can become potential readers, users, interlocutors, followers, adepts, customers, investors, etc.

Drafters of documents to be posted on the Web are aware of these potential users, who thus acquire the status of ratified participants rather than simple bystanders (Goffman 1981, 131-133); this has contributed to

[6] On the applicability of the notion of discourse community and virtual discourse community to cartain categories of Web-mediated exchanges, cf. Chapter 3, § 2.1.

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what Bhatia calls "genre bending" (2004), and in particular to adding a promotional component to most genres that have migrated to the Web.

A good example is that of Annual Company Reports and CEOs' Letters, which were originally conceived as essentially informative documents addressed to shareholders and now, as a result of their dissemination through the Web and the availability of multimodal options in their drafting, have become instruments for external organizational communication, since they can reach a potentially planetary audience of experts and laymen alike. In discursive terms, in business communication this evolution has also determined the deployment of strategies aimed at corporate image building and promotion (cf. Garzone 2004). This implies that the prevalence of an informative, ideational focus, which in theory should characterize financial reports, is eroded by the presence of an element of involvement, stance and/or argumentation, combined with recourse to interpersonal discursive features.

At the same time, Web-mediated communication offers an opportunity for individualized contact and expression, as on the one hand it addresses each user individually and, on the other, gives everyone the possibility of exchanging views with other users – either synchronously or asynchronously – by means of discussion lists, chat lines, or by 'posting' his/her opinions on a blog or on a Social Networking Site. Hence the typically interpersonal discursive approach, mimicking face-to-face communication and attempting to reproduce some aspects of an interpersonal relationship (Mandelli 1998, 62), with a continuous effort to activate the phatic function to start a contact. The message is often formulated in the first person (either 'I' or 'we') and is directed personally to the receiver, who is addressed as 'you'. This is generally true also for 'very short' texts in links which invite the user to perform an action, often making recourse to an imperative verb form (e.g. "get a catalogue", "use our online order form", "receive the latest news", "receive free standard shipping with your first purchase").

3.2. *Multimodality*

Multimodality – i.e. the combined utilization of different semiotic resources within a single communicative process – is nothing new, nor is it exclusive to the Web. Rather it is an inherent property of human communication, characterising all its forms, from face-to-face communication (oral language [text + suprasegmentals] = verbal + visual + gestural + proxemic) to printed texts (text + illustrations = verbal + visual), from

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print advertising (slogans + pictures = verbal + visual) to televised communication (verbal [oral and written] + visual + gestural, etc.) [7]. Hartmut Stöckl (2004, 10) goes so far as to argue that "the purely mono-modal text has always been an exception while the core practice in communication has essentially been multimodal all along" [8]. However, today multimodality is often associated with the computer-mediated environment, because with their inherent multi-medianess HCMEs give simultaneous access to the use of a number of multimodal technologies, images, sounds, animations, films, which can be easily combined and utilized together with no special technological procedures nor additional costs for reproduction and distribution.

Besides, the 'promotional' component that is added to genres when they migrate to a Web-mediated environment favours recourse to multimodal features. This affects – albeit often less extensively – also texts in 'frozen' formats; for instance, annual company reports, even when published in pdf format, exhibit an impressive range of graphs, charts and vivid colour images, which would make the reproduction of the document in brochure format on glossy paper and its distribution very expensive.

When research is carried out on Web discourse characterised by multimodal features (e.g. graphics, pictures, audio material, videos, etc.) with the aim of providing a comprehensive description, the analyst will need to adapt pre-existing language-centred analytical tools in order to accommodate a multiple semiotic makeup (Garzone 2002). In particular, s/he can refer to some focalised studies that have explored the nexus between multimodality and genre, although not in particular in relation to Web-mediated communication, but rather in general terms, so findings are applicable to, but not specific of, online genres. In particular, worthy of mention is the Genre and Multimodality Model that defines several layers of description for multimodal documents (Bateman 2008; Hiippala 2016), which are used to take apart and de-construct documents to be analysed, and examine them analytically [9].

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[7] For a more detailed analysis of this problem cf. Santulli (2007, § 1).

[8] On the different forms of multimodal communication and on the issues involved in their study and analysis cf. among others Kress and van Leuwen (2001); LeVine and Scollon (2004); O'Halloran (2004); Ventola *et al.* (2004).

[9] The layers are: the base layer, identifying all the elements deployed by a particular page to carry its meanings (Bateman 2008, 110); the layout layer, i.e. the visual make-up of the page (*ibid.*, 122); the rhetorical layer, including a set of units – verbal, visual, auditory, etc. – over which rhetorical relationships are to hold (*ibid.*, 164); the navigation layer, comprising layout elements which are not derived from the content,

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3.3. *Hypertextuality/hypermediality*

Hypertextuality is a constitutive characteristic of Web text. A hypertext, according to Theodor H. Nelson, "is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways" (1981, 0/2), or – more specifically – in Landow's words (1992, 3): "Text composed of blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality described by the terms *link*, *node*, *network*, *web*, and *path*". When created for a given purpose and stored on a CD or any other magnetic support, hypertexts – albeit vast and complex – are closed systems. But the Web in its global interconnexity is an open system and represents the conflation of an immense number of hypertextual systems, thus realizing – as J. Landow (1992, 3-4) points out – Roland Barthes' description of an ideal textuality (Barthes [1970] 1974):

> […] the networks [réseaux] are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*, they are indeterminable […]; the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. (Barthes [1970] 1974, 5-6 [Engl. transl.]; 11-12 [French]; emphasis in the original)

Hypertextuality confers some further properties on Web texts which will be analysed in the next few sub-sections.

3.3.1. Co-articulation and interactivity

Web discourse is co-articulated by its original designer, who conceived its architecture in the form of a number of different options, with pre-established inner navigation paths and external links leading to other sites, and the reader who materially contributes to its realization every time s/he explores it (cf. e.g. Garzone 1997; 2002, 286-287), with largely unpredictable results, although invited or constrained by authors/designers. This not only has an impact on the notion of authorship as Web authors have no control on the information on their websites, but it also interferes with the concept of move sequence and structure. In some cases, not only does the user contribute to the unfolding of discourse by choosing the moves to

but serve to guide the reader through the document (e.g. page numbers, pointers, running heads, titles) (*ibid.*, 122).

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be realized and the order in which to realize them, but s/he is often given the power to offer a more material collaboration by adding text (or even images, sounds, animations etc.) and create links and pathways, thus "[he/she] more fully collaborate[s] in producing an artifact that is materially different because of [his/her] participation, and not just semiotically reinterpreted" (Lemke 2006). If genre is realized – amongst other things – by means of a recognizable sequence of moves and structural organization, it is obvious that the variability of discourse structure in text realization afforded by the hypertext medium represents a crucial element to be reckoned with in extending genre theory to Web-mediated communication. Incidentally, as Lemke (2006) points out, co-articulation is a feature which contributes to avoiding monologism in communication, in the Bakhtinian sense of including multiple social voices (Bakhtin [1935] 1981).

It is to be noted that interactivity and co-articultion affect not only genres that are posted on the Web by means of an interactive, hypertextual medium (html or Java script), but also have discursive consequences on texts which are published in Adobe or Postscript format – and are therefore, so to say, embedded in websites as frozen sequences of pages in succession – if only because the change in tenor, i.e. the extension in participation framework, has a deep impact on the discursive and linguistic organization of texts, usually entailing a more 'dialogic' quality of communication. Today there are cases where also the pdf text features hyperlinks that add a degree of interactivity to the reading experience. A case in point is the "The article of the future" project [10], launched by Elsevier in 2013, aiming "to revolutionize the traditional linear format of the academic paper to make it more dynamic and user-friendly", adding hypertextual features to the traditional, monolithic pdf txt. The new format still has the pdf look, but references in the text are hyperlinks and clicking on each of them there appears a pop-up with the full reference; similarly, definitions are provided for technical terms by means of a pop-up accessible at a click, as well as underlying scientific data, graphs, tables and plates.

Another important factor to be considered is that with the growing popularity of blogging and social networking platforms, the so called 'Web 2.0' platforms, there is more for users than co-articulation: participation and collaboration. The last few years have seen the success of blogs, Social Networking Sites, and content sharing platforms like YouTube and Wikipedia, where users have taken on the role of active contributors to contents and their dissemination, so much so that O'Reilly (2005) has described them as ways to "harness collective intelligence". In

[10] https://www.elsevier.com/connect/designing-the-article-of-the-future [10/10/2019].

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addition, the social impact of these platforms should not be neglected, as all of them offer opportunities to make connections, or networking.

3.3.2. Multiple reading modes

In their article on the 'upgrading' of the genre model to adjust it to the digital medium, Askenhave and Ellerup Nielsen (2004; 2005) emphasize an element which has been widely discussed since the 1980s in the rich literature on the hypertext: the fact that the hypertext system induces users to activate (alongside the traditional linear 'reading-as-such' modality) a non-linear reading modality, denominated "hyper-reading" (Sosnoski 1999, 135). Thanks to this "navigating mode" (or "linking mode") the reader can navigate the site and actively construct his/her own reading path through one or several sites. So when consuming Web texts, the Web user employs two different cognitive capacities and demonstrates two different types of behaviour when s/he shifts from the reading to the navigating mode and vice versa. (Hyper)links are the main elements that enable navigation, being functional constituents of Web documents, which realize moves in a way that does not exist in the reading of printed texts, which is inherently linear. Adding links to a web page is not simply a question of enabling the navigator to 'move on', but rather a question of connecting items on the web page in a meaningful and sensible way, setting up a semantic relation between web page A and web page B, and creating a possible path for navigation.

3.3.3. Intertextuality

While intertextuality exists also in traditional printed texts (e.g. de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981, 10-11, 182-206) [11], in the case of Web communication not only can the reader readily and easily move (or leap) from one text to another thanks to hyperlinks, but in this environment the conceptualization of one text depends on its relation with other texts, in other words the isolated text has no meaning in itself in the overall textual system, but must be seen in relation to the texts to which it is linked (Mitra and Cohen 1999).

[11] In actual fact de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, 10-11, 182-206) see intertextuality as one of the seven standards of textuality. Since its original theorization by Kristeva ([1969] 1986), the notion of intertextuality has been widely applied in the literary and linguistic analysis of texts as well as in semiotics.

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3.3.4. Granularity

Another important property of computer-mediated discourse, which of course persists when instances of such discourse are posted on the Web, regards the textual units into which discourse is broken up for computer-mediation and distribution. The basic 'grain' of a text is given by the size of the units into which it is broken down for computer mediation, and it often corresponds to the amount of text that can be displayed on the screen. But this is highly variable. In the semiotic space of the web page, text is often split into smaller, coherent segments to avoid scrolling long pages and scanning long text lines, being presented in the form of *lexias* [12] (i.e. graphically separated blocks of text, often coinciding with paragraphs, limited in size and often in width), or in columns, in the style recommended by Web-writing handbooks, geared to an environment which makes linear reading difficult and tiring. Usually this regards mainly the pages on the surface levels of websites, which are more genuinely hypertextual, while the deeper levels often contain lengthy stretches of text, which is obviously destined to be printed for efficient reading. In the case of longer documents, the software used to encode and post the text is fundamental. In particular, pdf files are essentially frozen and present the text in a continuous whole made up of the 'picture' of the sequence of printed pages. Instead, when html is used, the text is usually broken down into sections, all of them accessible individually from a main menu; scrolling is adopted when a section is longer than the amount of text contained on a screen.

An example is the text of UK Acts of Parliament. The html version available on a dedicated website, legislation.gov.uk, presents every Act by means of a table of contents where each heading or sub-heading is a hyperlink that directs to a page containing the corresponding section of the Statute. Thus Web-mediated communication can present "meaning-by-degree" (Lemke 2006): the text is not presented to the reader all at once; rather, it unfolds in discrete units to which access is given by means of navigation devices. On the same website, for each statute the pdf format is also made available, in which the document, when opened, is displayed in its entirety and accessible by scrolling.

[12] The word *lexia* was introduced into English by Landow ([1992] 1997, 34) to translate Roland Barthes' term *lexie* (1970), the meaning of which broadly corresponds to that of Derrida's *morceaux* (1972).

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4. Generic integrity

In light of what said so far it is evident that in the case of extant genres, i.e. pre-existing genres that have migrated to the online environment and by adapting to it have undergone radical changes, the new dimensions discussed above, deriving from the peculiarities and affordances of the new medium, may have the effect of changing a genre beyond recognition. In this respect, the concept of generic integrity is especially useful and has been widely relied on in research. It is defined as "a socially constructed typical constellation of form-function correlation representing a specific construct realizing a specific communicative purpose of the genre in question" (Bhatia 2004, 123) [13]. More simply, generic integrity is the set of distinctive properties that are constitutive of a genre's identity and make it immediately recognizable. The notion is especially relevant in the case of Web-mediated genres, but also applies to Web-native genres that are subject to the dynamic and ever-changing character of the Web and tend to evolve very rapidly. An obvious example is that of blogs, which are native to the Web and have only a short life between them, but have evolved along different paths, so that today some of them have lost their original generic identity completely. This aspect is discussed extensively in Chapter 2.

5. Conclusion

Although the traditional model of genre analysis is not totally unsuitable for application to Web communication, the consideration of the properties of computer-mediated discourse, also in contrast with those of printed discourse, clearly suggests that such a model requires some adaptation, first and foremost the downgrading of purpose as the guiding criterion for the determination of whether a text qualifies for membership in a given genre.

Although purpose has been largely recognised as the central notion to be used in the identification, description and classification of genres, the analysis of Web genres – more than traditional printed genres – requires that we accept Askehave and Swales' suggestion (2001, 207) that "it would be prudent to abandon communicative purpose as an immediate or even a quick method for sorting discourses into generic categories",

[13] The notion of 'generic integrity' was originally used by Bhatia in his 1993 book, where however it was not defined.

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while retaining the concept as "a valuable – and perhaps unavoidable – long-term outcome of the analysis". But other factors, move/strategy structure, style and content in context, have to be accorded at least as much weight as purpose: consideration of these factors is essential for the researcher to be able to 'repurpose' the genre and review its genre status, in a process that perfectly meets the researcher's need to tackle the issue of the evolution of genres under the pressure of an ever more pervasive spread of technological advances.

After migration to the Web, a given genre does retain its original purpose (as defined in social terms), although it realizes it in an environment which allows the use of media whose affordances are profoundly different from those of the traditional printed medium. In particular, as Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2004; 2005) point out, the hypertextuality of the Web-mediated environment determines that some of the moves identified by traditional analysis in any given genre are realized not only through textual strategies and references, but also by means of links; indeed, in the hypermedia environment there are also some moves which are specific to it, having no counterpart in the printed medium, and can be realized exclusively by means of (hyper)links.

Furthermore, also the concept of 'structure' as a recurrent property of a genre needs revision in consideration of the co-articulation of discourse typical of the hypermedia environment, where moves can be realized in a different sequence by different users (or even by the same user at different times). Therefore, in the analysis of Web-mediated communication – as in that of any other hypertextual/hypermedia product – the concept of structure should be better defined as "a set of structural components and pathways". Other elements to be taken into consideration, in addition to purpose, style and content, are: semiotic mix (i.e. media utilized), grain, degree of interactivity, as well as multimodality. In particular, in the analysis of Web genres it is essential that the examination of structure, style and content in context should not only look at Web texts – all types of texts, not only 'long alphabetic texts' – for their formal, semantic and pragmatic properties, but – as Candlin already recommended in 2000 talking in general about academic discourse – should adopt "multiple modality in research methodology" (2000, xix). Furthermore, the study of certain socially-oriented and/or collaborative forms of Web communication should also take account of the social dimension characterising them.

Only a multi-dimensional and semiotically stratified approach, taking account of the multimedia and multimodal complexity of Web communication, can provide an accurate description and categorization of Web genres.

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2. The Law Blog: Issues of Generic Integrity

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the genre of the weblog, or blog, which is native to the Web and is certainly one of the most popular Web genres. Born as a personal, diaristic form of online writing, in time it has diversified into distinct forms of expression used in different contexts, personal, professional, corporate, academic, etc. to manifest (and hopefully exchange) views, ideas, reflections, comments, information (e.g. about products or services). Thus one of the main issues debated in discourse analytical research on Web communication is whether, in spite of diversification, the original genre of the weblog has to some extent survived, having simply evolved into a series of sub-genres, or the outcomes of the transformation undergone are so divergent that it is no more possible to see them as diverse realizations of the same genre (cf. Garzone 2014; 2015a).

This is the main issue discussed in this chapter, which takes legal blogs as a case study, and looks at their peculiarities in search of evidence that may confirm one of the two alternative hypotheses above.

1.1. *The weblog as a genre: distinctive features*

Weblogs have been with us for little more than two decades [1], an astonishingly short stretch of time if one considers that the latest available reli-

[1] The term "weblog" was first used by Jørn Barger on 17 December 1997 (Barger 2007), while its short form, "blog", was coined in April/May 1999 by Peter Merholz, who jokingly broke the word *weblog* into the phrase *we blog* in the sidebar of his blog Peterme.com (cf. https://www.peterme.com/archives/00000205.html [10/10/2019]).

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able statistics indicate that there are from 500 to 600 million blogs in the world today, out of over 1.7 billion websites [2].

The blog is typically "located at the intersection of the private and public realms" (Miller and Shepherd 2004), offering individuals an extraordinary opportunity of self-expression, open to an audience that can be planetary. This is possible thanks to the affordances of the blog format, which is in an intermediate position between, on the one side, relatively static and asymmetrical HTML documents and, on the other side, interactive text-based Computer Mediated Communication (e.g. newsgroups, chatrooms, etc.) as well as social networks, to which blogs are more and more often linked. According to Herring, Scheidt, *et al.* (2005, 162), blogs "allow authors to experience social interaction in ways that are otherwise difficult to achieve through web pages, while giving them ownership of, and control over, the communication space that is difficult to achieve in CMC".

Preliminary to this discussion, it is worth examining the distinctive traits as well as the main characteristics of the genre under investigation. A blog is "a website containing an archive of regularly updated online postings" (Grieve *et al.* 2010, 303), which has traditionally been described as characterised by three distinctive features: reverse chronology of its entries, frequent updating, and a combination of links with personal commentary (cf. e.g. Miller and Shepherd 2004; Herring, Kouper, *et al.* 2005). These properties are accompanied by recurrent peripheral features that make blogs promptly recognizable: they present posts, which include a date, a time stamp, and a permalink [3], usually followed by a repertoire of links that mostly feature comment threads reacting to or commenting on the content of relevant posts (cf. Riboni 2010, 91 ff.; 2014). The presence of comments responding to the posts, or in some cases to other comments, is also a recurrent feature of blogs, although it is not obligatory (as discussed in § 2.2 below). In most cases each post is accompanied by a photograph of the writer, a specification of his/her name and, sometimes, even short biodata; this is sometimes also true for comments, which similarly feature the contributor's name or, more frequently, nickname. It has been suggested that a further distinctive trait is the presence of links to other blogs (Marlow 2004; cf. also Blood 2002), but this is not always the case (Herring, Kouper, *et al.* 2005), as some

[2] Cf. respectively https://hostingtribunal.com›blog›how-many-blogs and https://growthbadger.com/blog-stats-2019/ [10/09/2019].

[3] A permalink, or permanent link, is an URL that points to a blog post and remains unchanged, even when it passes from the front page to the archives.

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blogs prefer linking to websites, mainstream media or social networks, e.g. Facebook or Twitter (Myers 2009, 28-37), rather than to other blogs. The combination of posts, comments and links is characteristic of the genre, as it makes it possible to realize a peculiar kind of interpersonal interaction, favouring a sense of community among bloggers.

Having originated mainly as individualistic forms of self expression, blogs have become greatly diversified in their realizations, also as a function of the topics they deal with, hybridizing with relevant traditional and online genres. For instance Herring, Scheidt, *et al.* (2005) identify the influence of travelogues on travel blogs, and that of researchers' project journals on k-logs [4]; Garzone (2012) sees posts on 'news and blogging' websites (e.g. The HuffPost) as the result of hybridization between blogs and news discourse (cf. also Bruce 2010), especially comment articles and editorials (cf. van Dijk 1992; Vestergaard 2000; Westin 2002). Finally, Mauranen (2013) identifies the conference paper as one of the ancestral genres of the science blog.

These considerations provide a general picture of the blogosphere as essentially divided into personal blogs and thematic blogs, as proposed by Krishnamurthy (2002). The same distinction has also been made by Grieve *et al.* (2010) through a factor analysis of functional linguistic variation in blogs, with the identification of thematic and personal blogs as the major blog text-types, followed by a marginal and rare blog type, the expert blog.

Today the personal blog is still very popular, but in the last few years thematic blogs have increased their relative importance, with many of them developing from single-author into multi-author blogs where posts are written by many different authors and professionally edited, often hosted on the websites of institutions or organisations, such as companies, public departments, research bodies, newspapers or magazines, etc.

From the viewpoint of genre categorization and genre analysis, blogs have been perceived as problematic. In this respect they are similar to other Web-mediated genres (cf. e.g. Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen 2004; 2005; Garzone 2007), but they pose further problems due to their rapid and extensive diversification which – it has been argued – undermines the shared rhetorical action that originally made it possible to classify all blogs as belonging to a single genre (Miller and Shepherd 2009). Mauranen (2013) also points out that in the case of blogs a pre-existing

[4] The term 'k-log' is an acronym for *knowledge blog*, which is an internal/Intranet blog, not accessible to the general public, which serves as a knowledge management system; the term 'klog' is also sometimes used to refer a blog that is technical-content oriented. Cf. http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/K/klog.html [31/05/2011].

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discourse community of users can hardly be identified, and this makes it impossible to meet one of the criteria traditionally used in genre analysis for the purpose of genre identification (i.e. recognition and understanding of the communicative purpose of the relevant discursive events *by the members of the professional or academic community in which it occurs*: Bhatia [1993] 2013; cf. also Swales 1990), given that in Web-mediated communication "it is the context that seems to create genres, and communities emerge around them" (Mauranen 2013, 30).

This chapter uses law blogs, also called 'blawgs', i.e. blogs used by the legal, academic and professional community to exchange scholarly opinions, as a case study to debate topical issues and discuss important legal cases. This is one of a diversified range of thematic blogs in domain-specific and professional communication into which weblogs have diversified [5].

The main purpose is to explore some of the distinctive features of the law blog as a genre in order to determine to what extent this realization of the weblog has moved away in time from its original form, characterised by a personal, diary-like format into a type of academic, professional or journalistic expression, and whether this evolution has been so extensive as to jeopardise its generic integrity (cf. Chapter 1, § 4). The analysis is essentially corpus-based and starts with a discussion of the criteria to be applied in the construction of a corpus of blogs.

2. Aim, scope and method

Law blogs are used by the academic and professional community to exchange professional views, comment on legal cases, maintain scholarly conversations, and take advantage of a form of instant academic publication open to debate (Berman 2006; 2007; Kerr 2006; Solum 2006; Volokh 2006).

They also enable writers in this area of specialization to reach much larger audiences than those traditionally addressed, thus contributing to the dissemination of legal knowledge and the discussion of topical legal cases.

In this work, a corpus of law blogs will be explored with a view to assessing the degree of variation across the four blawgs it comprises, correlating results with various contextual inherent factors. The ultimate aim is to verify whether variation inside the sub-genre is so substantial as

[5] On law blogs cf. Garzone (2014; 2015a), on which the following sections are loosely based.

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to compromise its generic integrity and its membership of the blog genre, in a context where it has been put into question (as illustrated above; cf. Miller and Shepherd 2009; Mauranen 2013).

For this purpose the recurrence of self-mentions in the different blogs included in the corpus will be examined as evidence of the individualistic/existential character of the blog that has been identified as one of its most salient distinctive traits. Other aspects considered will be the overall discursive organization, content orientation, and inner constitution, as evidence of a more or less dialogic orientation. This will make it possible to shed light on issues concerning the conceptualization and evolution of the blog genre and its sub-genres in terms of generic integrity. It will also provide the opportunity to reflect on the role of blogs and bloggers in the construction and dissemination of (legal) knowledge.

2.1. *Methodological issues*

Considering that the main aim of this chapter is to assess the generic integrity of blawgs and their degree of differentiation from their parent genre, the analysis will first focus on linguistic and discursive features that may provide evidence of the degree to which blogs have diverged from their original distinctive characteristics. The original purpose of blogs in general was self-expression, an element that is still considered to be distinctive of the macro-genre and therefore shared by the (sub-)genres it includes as a pre-requisite for membership. Therefore the analysis will focus on the degree of persistence of personal/existential elements.

The linguistic/discursive realization taken to be an indicator of such an elements is the frequency of interactional metadiscourse, and in particular of self-mention (Hyland 2001). Accordingly, the analysis will focus on personal pronouns and other forms of self-mention, comparing results with those obtained from two comparable corpora, also observing variations across posts and comments. It will also consider the thematic status of first-person pronouns in a systemic-functional perspective (Halliday and Mathiessen 2004, 64-67, 73 ff.) as well as the lexical verbs associated with such pronouns.

The methodological toolbox relied on in this study is essentially based on discourse analysis, and especially on metadiscourse research (Crismore 1989; Hyland 2005), using Hyland's (2001) work on self-mention in academic research articles, which – in conformity with the principles of CMDA (Herring 2004, cf. "Introduction", § 2), has been chosen as the most suitable analytical instrument for the purposes of this study.

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It also considers studies on blogs from various disciplinary perspectives (e.g. Blood 2002; Krishnamurthy 2002; Herring, Kouper, *et al.* 2005; Herring and Paolillo 2006; Giltrow and Stein 2009; Myers 2009; Puschmann 2009; 2010; Grieve *et al.* 2010; Mauranen 2013) and more specifically on law blogs, mainly by legal scholars (e.g. Caron 2006; Kerr 2006). Finally it takes account of the literature on the suitability of traditional analytical tools for the analysis of Web-mediated communication from various methodological perspectives (i.e. text linguistics: Garzone 2002; genre analysis: Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen 2005; Garzone 2007; Giltrow and Stein 2009; Santini, Meheler, and Sharoff eds. 2010; argumentation theory: Carter 2000; Lewiński 2010; Degano 2012).

The investigation is carried out on *ad hoc* corpora of law blogs, using results from automatic interrogation routines as a basis for the discussion (see § 2.3 below).

2.2. *Compiling a Web-derived corpus: the case of blogs*

Constructing a Web-derived corpus raises a number of issues, not only when it is based on automatic Web genre recognition (Sharoff 2010). According to Santini *et al.* (2010) such issues include the presence of centrifugal forces at work on the Web and the indeterminacy of document boundaries (with special regard for granularity: cf. Chapter 1, § 3.3.4) in computer-mediated environments, linked to the "composite and diversified characterization of web documents", and enhanced by "the tendency towards rapid change and evolution of genre patterns" (Santini *et al.* 2010, 13). These challenges, however, are hardly relevant to this study, which can rely on a clear preliminary definition of the target genre, and of the documents to be included in the corpus.

A further set of more specific issues derives from the fact that Internet pages contain markup, and more specifically according to Santini (2010): navigation frames enabling navigation on a complex website, text-internal hyperlinks, and non-hypertextual markup, such as explicit formatting of headings, etc. In consideration of the linguistic and discursive focus of this study, markup elements were not retained in the compilation of the law blog corpus, which consists only of running text. However, the need to take account of the contextual, multimodal and interactional aspects of the documents analysed was accommodated by integrating automatic interrogation routines with 'manual' analysis, also examining hypertextual, graphic and visual elements that contribute to a text's semiotic configuration.

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As yet another problem is the composite nature of the blog genre, which necessarily features posts, while comment threads are mostly present, but are not constitutive of the genre. This is why some researchers have chosen to collect only posts: for instance, in their multi-dimensional factor analysis Grieve *et al.* (2010) only used posts and excluded all other kinds of text found on the blogging platform. This choice, albeit justified in theory by the non-mandatory nature of comments, excludes an important component present in many blogs, if not in the majority of them. So the analyst cannot ignore comments, where there are some.

In light of these considerations, posts and comments are assumed here to be part of one and the same communicative event, although asymmetrical and with different functions.

This is why both the posts and comments of the blogs under investigation are included in my corpus, although they are organised into two separate sub-corpora on account of their discursive differences: posts are pre-planned (sometimes quite long and complex) textual realizations, pointing to a problem, or expressing opinions or commenting on facts, while comments are contingent, often spontaneous, responses to posts or to other comments, and are part of an adjacency pair, the first element of which is the post, or a previous comment. This organization into two sub-corpora will make it possible both to analyse the texts as one corpus, and – when expedient – to look at posts and comments separately.

2.3. *Corpus description*

The corpus compiled for this study comprises texts from four blawgs, two from the US and two from the UK: the Wall Street Journal Law Blog, the Above the Law Blog, The Magistrates' Blog and the UK Human Rights Blog, collected in the course of 6 months from September 2012 to April 2013. These are examined on the basis of computer-generated textual evidence through the use of WordSmith Tools 6.0 (Scott 2012). The contents of each blawg were copied and pasted into separate files for posts and comments, constructing two sub-corpora whose overall details are given in *Table 2.1*.

Table 2.1. – Details of Blawg Corpus and sub-corpora.

	Main corpus	Posts	Comments
Tokens	153,548	79,666	73,882
Types	12,971	8,764	8,804
STTR	43.37	44.44	44.55

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Table 2.2 shows data relative to each single blog analytically, considering both posts and comments together.

Table 2.2. – Details of sub-corpora.

	Above the Law	(UK) Human Rights	Magistrates'	Wall Street Journal
Tokens	8,445	7,545	32,137	25,421
Types	6,546	5,977	4,624	4,463
STTR	42.79	42.84	43.08	45.86

As can be seen from *Table 2.2*, the characteristics of the four sub-corpora are relatively uniform in terms of Standardized Type/Token Ratio, with a slight variation for 'Wall Street Journal', which is the only blawg that is not written exclusively by scholars and practitioners of the law, but also by (specialised) journalists.

This is because the Wall Street Journal Law Blog (from now on, 'Wall Street Journal' or WSJ, http://blogs.wsj.com/ law/) is part of the website of a major US financial newspaper. It is presented as "an online publication that covers hot cases, emerging trends and big personalities in law […] brought to you by lead writer Joe Palazzolo, with contributions from The Wall Street Journal's legal reporters". Its home page betrays the obvious effort to make it immediately recognizable as a blog on account of its peripheral features, with a photograph of Palazzolo and of the eight main contributors, their names and positions (e.g. "Joanne Chung, Law Bureau Chief").

The other three blawgs are maintained by law professionals. Each of them has its own specific focus.

The Above the Law Blog ('Above the Law' or AL www.abovethelaw.com), addressed to law professionals, is run by members of law firms in the US, and is owned by Breaking Media. In *The Washington Post* it has been defined "a must-read legal blog" (Shapira 2007). It is a site of exchange of views among lawyers, also dealing with business aspects of the legal profession. Occasionally it publishes gossip and rumours about law schools, small legal practices and the salaries and bonuses at many of the large firms. Its homepage, which does not feature contributors' photographs, starts with a Top Stories section, with the headlines of each "Top Story" linking to relevant texts and illustrations.

The Magistrates' Blog ('Magistrates' or MAG http://magistrates-blog.blogspot.it), a British website, introduces itself as "written by a team, who may or may not be JPs, but all of whom are interested in the

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Magistrates' Courts". It purports to offer "Musings and Snippets from a group of people interested in Magistrates' Courts and their work". All cases are based on real ones, but "anonymised and composited". It posts experts' personal reflections and thoughts on legal cases and the profession, making it clear that individual opinions are not to interfere with law enforcement ("JPs swear to enforce the law of the land, whether or not they approve of it").

The fourth source, the UK Human Rights Blog ('Human Rights' or HR http://ukhumanrightsblog.com/) is "written by members of 1 Crown Office Row barristers' chambers". It discusses courts' decisions on human rights and topical cases. Quite interestingly, when a legal case is discussed, the post is preceded by its details (e.g. "Association for Molecular Pathology *et al* v Myriad Genetics Inc, *et al*, United States Supreme Court 13 June 2013"), a feature that confers a typically legal flavour on these posts, and is accompanied by a link to the original judgment.

The three professional blogs exhibit most of the peripheral features of the genre – the reverse chronology of entries, frequent updating, and links to other blogs or websites, date and time stamp, but do not feature the writers' photographs.

As this study seeks to identify the peculiarities of the target texts within the more general picture of legal communication, Blawg Corpus data are compared with data from two comparable corpora consisting of (meta)legal texts, representing both the academic and the professional register: research papers in the law section of the CADIS corpus (courtesy of Prof. Maurizio Gotti, University of Bergamo), hereafter mentioned as 'CLC' (i.e. Cadis Law Corpus), and arbitration awards from Kluwer Bank, issued between 1998 and 2002 and delivered by sole arbitrators, which will be referred to as 'AAC' (Arbitration Award Corpus). *Table 2.3* shows the characteristics of these two corpora.

Table 2.3. – Characteristics of corpora used for comparison.

	CLC	AAC
Tokens	368,980	349,381
Types	18,447	18,635
STTR	40.64	34.95

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3. Blog profiles

Before moving on to the actual analysis of the features identified as distinctive of the blog genre, i.e. self-mentions, now some general aspects of the overall profiles of the four blogs will be considered.

3.1. *Recurrent lexicon*

Some preliminary elements to understand the shared characteristics of the blogs under investigation, as well as the differences among them, can be gathered by comparing their frequency lists. The results are presented in *Table 2.4*, which shows the ten most frequent lexical items extracted from the frequency list of each of the blogs, with domain-specific words highlighted in bold typeface.

Table 2.4. – List of most frequent lexical items.

AL	%	HR	%	MAG	%	WSJ	%
Law	0.56	**court**	0.50	**court**	0.25	**court**	0.70
Firms	0.22	**rights**	0.44	people	0.17	**law**	0.53
Partner	0.20	**law**	0.40	blog	0.16	**judge**	0.37
Work	0.18	reply	0.29	public	0.15	**federal**	0.28
Lawyers	0.17	**human**	0.27	time	0.15	**firm**	0.24
partners	0.17	**case**	0.24	get	0.13	**justice**	0.23
Time	0.16	article	0.19	**magistrates**	0.13	**case**	0.21
Year	0.16	people	0.18	years	0.12	**legal**	0.20
School	0.14	public	0.17	say	0.12	new	0.19
Know	0.12	**Judge**	0.16	Law	0.10	**lawyers**	0.17

Lexicallywise, the least specialised blawg is 'Magistrates', with only two highly frequent words pertaining to the legal domain (*court*, *magistrates*). At the other end of the spectrum there is 'Wall Street Journal' in which the specific vocabulary is predominant and takes up nine of the top ten positions. 'Above the Law' and 'Human Rights' have an intermediate position, with 'Above the Law' preferably focusing on professional issues, as indicated by the presence of the words *firms*, *partner/s* and *work*, and with 'Human Rights' that has *human* and *rights* ranking second and fifth respectively, while neither of them appears in any of the other blogs.

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A clearer idea of the topics dealt with in each blawg can be obtained from the analysis of a representative sample of headlines from each blawg [6]:

Above the Law Blog
"What Ya Gonna Do, When Gawker Posts A Sex Tape Of You?"
"Which Biglaw Firms Are Opening Their Wallets to Donate to Obama and Romney?"
"Reading Tea Leaves: Defense Bar Freaking Out About the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act"
"Vacation Memo: Paternity Leave" (announcing one of the bloggers' paternity leave)

UK Human Rights Blog
"The revolving door of EU criminal justice – Jodie Blackstock"
"When the UN breach human rights… who wins?" [NADA v. SWITZERLAND – 10593/08 – HEJUD [2012] ECHR 1691]
"Goodbye Abu Hamza (really this time)" [Abu Hamza and others -v- Home Secretary]
"Government should have consulted Child Poverty Commission on welfare strategy" [Child Poverty Action Group, R (on the application of) v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions [2012] EWHC 2579 (Admin) (17 July 2012)]

The Magistrates' Blog
"Enfant? Terrible!" (about legal issues in the case of a child who ran away with her teacher)
"Who Said Original Thinking Was No More?" (about community sentences)
"All In a Day's Work" (about the list of cases dealt with by the blogger in the last few months)

Wall Street Journal Law Blog
"How the Sleepy FCPA [Foreign Corrupt Practices Act] Became a Hulk and Why It's Staying that Way"
"The AM Roundup: JP Morgan Sued over Mortgage Bonds, More"
"Appeals Court Upholds 'Short-Swing' Ruling Against Bulldog"

The analysis of this representative sample of post headlines shows that, although in general terms the focus of these blogs is on legal issues, they deal with them with different degrees of specificity and from different perspectives, also sometimes touching upon other topical and, above all, personal issues.

[6] N.B.: headlines are followed by a gloss in brackets when the title is not referential.

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Overall the main themes covered can be summarised as follows:
- presentation and discussion of legal issues and topical cases, including breaking legal news and reactions to significant legal developments;
- discussion of problems and issues (even gossip) relevant to one of the legal professions (or law schools);
- personal themes and every day issues.

However, these themes do not appear in all the blogs and their coverage is uneven. *Table 2.5* provides a representation of their distribution across blogs.

Table 2.5. – Distribution of themes across blawgs.

	AL	HR	MAG	WSJ
Presentation & discussion of cases	X	X	X	X
Discussion of the professional community's problems	X		X	
Personal themes / everyday issues	X		X	

From *Table 2.5* it emerges that also in this case 'Above the Law' and 'Magistrates' on the one hand and 'Human Rights' and 'Wall Street Journal' on the other hand show a similar profile. While the latter two focus exclusively on legally-related topics, 'Above the Law' and 'Magistrates' also deal with personal and existential problems, mostly – but not necessarily – connected with the relevant legal professions, in addition to presenting and discussing legal cases or new legislation. 'Magistrates' is remarkable for choosing fancy headlines, hardly referential, thus presenting the posts in a less specialised light, while 'Above the Law' is unique for the fact that, when it deals with court cases, it features the exact legal reference and a link to the relevant judgment.

3.2. *Internal constitution*

As discussed in § 1.1 and § 2.2 above, blogs consist of posts and comments, with the latter being a peculiar element which, however, is not obligatory and is not always there. Therefore, it seems that the internal constitution of each blog, i.e. the presence of comments and the ratio between posts and comments, may be indicative of its interpersonal and dialogic characteristics.

In the case of the blogs under discussion, in terms of internal constitution as determined by the relative incidence of readers' responses, there seem to be substantial differences among them. If one considers the aver-

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age number of comments elicited by each post, 'Magistrates' emerges as the most dialogic with 21 comments per post, followed by 'Above the Law' with 17.5, while 'Human Rights' has not even half of this (7.2) and 'Wall Street Journal' only 1.7. These data are shown graphically in *Table 2.6*.

Table 2.6. – Average number of comments per post.

	COMMENTS PER POST
AL	17.5
HR	7.2
MAG	21.0
WSJ	1.7

These results change only partially if instead of evaluating comments in numerical terms one compares the average number of words found respectively in posts and comments within each single blog, with 'Human Rights' presenting data that are more similar to those regarding AL and MAG, while WSJ resents radically different data, as shown in *Table 2.7*.

Table 2.7. – Posts vs comments: number of words in absolute and in percentage terms.

	POSTS: NR OF WORDS	COMMENTS: NR OF WORDS
AL	21,926 = 45.26%	26,519 = 54.74%
HR	26,519 = 58.17%	19,891 = 41.83%
MAG	4,844 = 15.08%	27,293 = 84.92%
WSJ	21,642 = 85.14%	3,779 = 14.86%

These findings clearly indicate that two of the blawgs, 'Magistrates' and 'Above the Law', are more genuinely dialogic and conform with the personal and interpersonal tradition of the blog, and a third blog, 'Human Rights', shows a lower propensity to response and debate, while the Wall Street Journal Blog is a case apart, characterized as it is by a scarcity of comments, thus appearing more in line with the journalistic tradition.

Altogether these data on posts and comments suggest important differences among blogs. 'Magistrates' is the most 'open' of the four blawgs attracting more comments presumably on account of its tendency to deal with existential and ethical themes as well as discussing topical issues, albeit in the perspective of the JP's profession. It is followed by 'Above the Law', which however in this case is much less distant from 'Human Rights' than with respect to other parameters (self-mention, second-person reference). The Wall Street Journal Blog is an extreme case, with a very limited presence of comments, in terms both of sheer number of

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responses and of overall number of words contained in comments. In this respect, it is more similar to online newspapers, where most articles attract only few comments (although there may be exceptions).

In the next section, self-mentions and other individualistic elements will be analysed seeking confirmation for the overall impressions gathered in the general profiling of the blogs under investigation.

4. Analysis: self-mentions and other individualistic elements

4.1. *Pronominal reference*

The first step in the analysis focuses on first-person pronouns as forms of self-mention, i.e. as indicators of the textual presence of an individualistic/existential component. Explicit non-pronominal author self-references were also considered, but they are virtually absent in all the corpora, with the exception of one occurrence of 'this writer' and four of 'this author' in CADIS (*this author views*, *this writer believes*, etc.). Second-person pronouns were also taken into account as 'engagement markers' (Hyland 2005) signalling strong writer involvement when a potential interlocutor is addressed. *Table 2.8* shows the results of the comparison; it is to be noted that the first column features data extracted from the whole Blawg Corpus, comprising both posts and comments:

Table 2.8. – Self-mention in the Blawg Corpus vs CLC and AAC (percentages).

	Blawgs %	*CLC %*	*AAC %*
I	0.69	0.04	0.02
Me	0.11	< 0.01	0.04
My	0.16	0.03	< 0.01
myself	< 0.01	< 0.01	< 0.01
We	0.25	0.07	0.07
Us	0.08	0.03	0.01
Our	0.09	0.02	0.02
ourselves	< 0.01	< 0.01	< 0.01
You	0.52	< 0.01	0.01
Your	0.13	< 0.01	< 0.01
Yourself	0.01	< 0.01	< 0.01

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The figures show that first-person singular reference in blawgs, including posts and comments, is much more frequent than in the other two corpora. This difference is especially marked for the first-person singular, as 'I' is over 17 times more frequent than in CLC and 34 times more frequent than in AAC. The divergence is even more striking for second-person pronouns/possessives, which hardly occur at all in CLC and AAC.

Table 2.9 below shows the same comparison, but data regarding Blawgs are broken down analytically distinguishing between posts and comments.

Table 2.9. – Self-mention in blawg posts and comments vs CLC and AAC.

	Blawg Posts %	Blawg Comments %	All Blawgs %	*CLC* %	*AAC* %
I	0.39	**1.10**	0.69 [7]	0.04	0.02
me	0.06	0.18	0.11	< 0.01	0.04
my	0.11	**0.25**	0.16	0.03	< 0.01
myself		< 0.01	< 0.01	< 0.01	< 0.01
we	0.25	0.23	0.25	0.07	0.07
us	0.06	0.04	0.08	0.03	0.01
our	0.11	0.07	0.09	0.02	0.02
ourselves	< 0.01	< 0.01	< 0.01	< 0.01	< 0.01
you	0.37	**0.75**	0.52	< 0.01	0.01
your	0.07	0.22	0.13	< 0.01	< 0.01
yourself	< 0.01	0.01	0.01	< 0.01	< 0.01

The main difference between posts and comments in terms of frequency, is in first-person singular and second-person pronominal reference, especially as regards 'I' and 'you', with comments featuring a much more prominent personal and interpersonal component. However, when compared with the two control corpora also posts show a much higher frequency of linguistic elements compatible with the original existential dimension of genre.

Table 2.10 shows the same data in the four sub-corpora analytically.

[7] Please note that the datum relative to the whole corpus is not necessarily the mathematical average between the figure relative to Posts and that relative to Comments, as the size of the two sub-corpora is uneven.

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Table 2.10. – Self-mention in posts and comments in each blawg vs CLC and AAC.

	AL %		HR %		MAG %		WSJ %		*CLC* %	*AAC* %
	Posts	Comm	Posts	Comm	Posts	Comm	Posts	Comm		
I	0.74	1.25	0.12	0.85	0.70	1.10	0.19	0.98	0.04	0.02
Me	0.11	0.24	< 0.01	0.14	0.19	0.12	0.02	0.27	< 0.01	0.04
My	0.21	0.29	0.07	0.13	0.21	0.24	0.03	0.29	0.03	< 0.01
Total 1st pers. sing.	**1.06**	**1.78**	**0.19**	**1.12**	**1.10**	**1.46**	**0.24**	**1.54**	**0.07**	**0.06**
We	0.39	0.21	0.11	0.21	0.87	0.31	0.21	0.11	0.07	0.07
Us	0.09	0.06	0.08	0.09	0.19	0.06	0.06	0.11	0.03	0.01
Our	0.13	0.02	0.08	0.09	0.29	0.10	0.10	0.05	0.02	0.02
Total 1st pers. pl.	**0.61**	**0.29**	**0.27**	**0.39**	**1.35**	**0.47**	**0.37**	**0.27**	**0.12**	**0.10**
You	0.92	1.14	0.08	0.47	0.33	0.58	0.18	0.29	< 0.01	0.01
Your	0.17	0.29	0.02	0.12	0.10	0.22	0.02	0.11	< 0.01	< 0.01
Total 2st pers.	**1.09**	**1.43**	**0.10**	**0.59**	**0.43**	**0.80**	**0.20**	**0.40**	**< 0.01**	**0.01**

The data relative to Posts indicate that the blogs examined tend to converge into two groups, 'Above the Law' and 'Magistrates', on the one hand, with 1.06 and 1.10% respectively, and 'Human Rights' and 'Wall Street Journal' on other, with 0.19% and 0.24%, which means that the former pair shows a frequency of 1st person singular pronouns that is three times as high as in the other two files, a difference which – albeit less substantially – regards also first person plural pronouns. This suggests that in 'Above the Law' and 'Magistrates' the personal component originally typical of blogs is more substantially preserved, while the fact that this differentiation is accompanied by a parallel variation in the frequency of second person pronouns indicates also a greater degree of interpersonal interactivity. However, it is to be noted that also the readings obtained for 'Human Rights' and 'Wall Street Journal', although much lower, are by far higher than those found in the control corpora, thus suggesting that albeit less substantial, the individualistic component typical of blogs is preserved also in them.

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If then data relative to comments are considered, in all sub-corpora the frequency of first person pronominal reference tends to be higher than in posts, with a more substantial difference in the case of 'Human Rights' and 'Wall Street Journal' which had very low readings for posts, while for comments they are more in line with the other blogs considered. In 'Above the Law' and 'Magistrates' the discrepancy between posts and comments is smaller, with the frequency of first-person singular reference in comments being about 40% higher than in posts. The difference between posts and comments is much more limited in the case of second person pronouns, with 'Above the Law' being by far the most interactive of the blawgs, followed by 'Magistrates', while the other two show much lower readings. Quite meaningfully, in the case of first person plural pronouns data about posts are not higher than those about comments, which suggests that all commenters prefer to speak as single individuals rather than as representatives of a category or a group. The difference between posts and comments is further highlighted by searching their respective Wordlists in order to obtain keywords, i.e. the words that in statistical terms are abnormally frequent in one of two sub-corpora in comparison with the other. The results obtained are shown in *Table 2.11*.

Table 2.11. – Keywords in Blawg Posts vs Comments [8].

Posts			Comments		
Keyword	*Rank*	*Keyness*	*Keyword*	*Rank*	*Keyness*
Said	3	104.30	I	3	291.36
court	4	65.12	September	4	241.81
Firm	7	60.30	guest	5	192.06
federal	10	49.07	reply	6	168.59
Dewey	11	46.04	you	7	87.86
disclosure	12	43.90	I'm	8	86.42
justice	13	43.19	don't	9	84.85
Thursday	14	42.50	it's	10	75.28
patent	16	36.74	just	11	62.91
settlement	17	36.26	October	12	60.86
judge	18	36.20	your	13	59.66
lawsuit	22	33.82	you're	14	54.97

[8] It is to be noted that only meaningful keywords have been included in the table, while entries like "S", "T", "U" and "RE", which mainly result from occasional elements that are part of the graphic structure of blog entries, have been omitted.

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It is interesting that the Keywords in posts are mainly legal terms, like 'court', 'disclosure', 'justice', which indicate a specifically domain-oriented focus, as well as words like 'guest' and 'reply' which are part of the functional metalanguage of the genre (the list also includes the day of the week when much of the material contained in the corpus was downloaded). This, together with the presence in comments Keywords of names of months, is simply evidence of the date specified in every single entry.

As regards the Keywords in Comments, it is extremely meaningful that most of those at the top of the list are linguistic elements connected with the interactional dimension, and in particular first- and second-person pronouns and verb forms, 'I' and 'you' being among those with a high keyness index. The presence in the list of contracted verb forms (four in the ten top keywords) is evidence of the more colloquial character of comments, as is the frequent use of 'just', which is typical of spoken language, and confirms the nature of speech-like interactive written discourse that blog comments share with many other Web genres (cf. Cherney 1999; Baron 2000; Pistolesi 2004).

4.2. *Self-mention and theme*

As Hyland (2001) points out for academic discourse, writers project their views and confer a personal dimension on discourse not only by choosing to use first-person pronouns, but also by thematising such pronouns, which in English involves fronting them in sentence-initial position. This emphasises the writer's presence and the individual character of the views or information put forth in the ensuing sentence.

While Hyland takes into account all exclusive first-person pronouns (i.e. 'I' and exclusive 'we'), in this study only first-person singular pronouns are considered, as their occurrence provides indisputable evidence of a substantial component of self-expression in blawgs.

As regards the criteria used here to identify thematised pronouns, the items counted as thematic are first-person singular pronouns in absolute sentence initial position, thus having the role of Topical theme, as well as first-person singular pronouns appearing at the beginning of a sentence preceded only by a Thematic theme – continuative, conjunction or modal adjunct (cf. Halliday and Mathiessen 2004).

According to these criteria, in the Blawg Corpus 'I' is used in thematic position in 42.29% of occurrences, while in CLC and AAC the percentage is respectively 33.33% and 35.48%. These data confirm the

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greater emphasis laid on the individual and personal character of the views put forth in Blawgs as compared to traditional academic and professional genres.

4.3. *Lexical verbs with first-person singular pronouns*

In order to gain a better understanding of the role that blawg writers construct for themselves in a text, in this section the verb forms that collocate with first-person singular pronouns are analysed across the four corpora.

In this comparison, the first element that stands out is the variety of lexical verbs used in the text. A further finding is the higher frequency in Blawgs of first-person singular verb forms in the simple past, which provides evidence of a strongly personal narrative component. This is all the more meaningful given that, as Walker (2003, 45) points out, "many weblog entries are shaped as brief, independent narratives, and some are explicitly or implicitly fictional, though the standard genre expectation is non-fiction".

Each of these two aspects – variety of lexical verbs collocating with the first-person singular pronoun and presence of a personal narrative component – will now be discussed in more detail.

The verbs used in the present tense in the Blawg Corpus are mainly verbs of cognition (*think*, *know*, *understand*), metadiscursive verbs (*assume*, *suggest*, *notice*) mostly realizing speech acts, and attitudinal verbs (*fear*, *feel*, *worry*). In contrast, the range of verbs in the two control corpora is much more limited. In CLC there is a prevalence of metadiscursive verbs, while attitudinal verbs are virtually absent, thus indicating a more epistemic rather than affective approach in presenting information and arguments. In AAC, verbs in the present tense are used to put forth the arbitrators' views (*I agree*, *I hold*, *I find*), which often take on a performative value as they set out the arbitrator's findings, or illustrate his/her reasoning (*I assume*, *I consider*).

As regards the Blawg Corpus, it is interesting that first-person singular forms in posts tend to involve mostly verbs of cognition (*believe*, *think*, *doubt*, *hope*, *worry*, etc.), for example:

(1) *I doubt* the lenders will fund chapter 11 too much longer. (WSJ, post)

(2) The new law allows the police to deal with squatters, but *I don't anticipate* too many prosecutions arising as a result. (MAG, post)

Cognitive verbs are also extensively present in comments, but an equally numerous range of attitudinal and metadiscursive verbs can also be found

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(e.g. *assume*, *claim*, *suggest*), which seems to provide evidence of a more explicit argumentative vein. In the following examples, an attitudinal and a cognitive verb are still in the service of argumentation, but cast in an evidently personal dimension:

(3) However, *I feel* that this woman was – and probably still is – highly unstable and not in a rational frame of mind […]. (HR, comment)

(4) *I assume* her legal advisers have advised her to appeal against the length of the sentence. (HR, post)

In the next example, approval for or disagreement on a fellow magistrate's behaviour are expressed in even more personal terms:

(5) *I love* his wry humour and his quirky knack of capturing the gamut of the human experience as seen from the bench. But *I reserve the right not to agree* with everything he says. (MAG, comment)

In many cases, the personal component takes on an existential dimension, both in posts and in comments. In the following examples, professional information about the writer is provided, as well as reference to personality traits:

(6) I do not sit in family court. (MAG, post)

(7) I am not one for ruining careers. (AL, post)

(8) I am a loyal follower of the UK Human Rights Blog. (HR, comment)

In (9) below, the present progressive is used to express the commenter's personal choices:

(9) I am considering this school since it MIGHT be the only law school I can attend, I cannot move down south. (WSJ, comment; capitalization for 'flaming' in the original)

It is to be noted that blawgs contain, albeit rarely, also other types of verbs which do not occur at all in the control corpora. See the following examples featuring a behavioural/physiological verb (*live*) and verbs of doing (*blog*, *cook*):

(10) And hey, *I live* in San Francisco and *I BLOG* for a living. (AL, comment; capitalization for 'flaming' in the original)

(11) Now *I can cook* a bit, even if I wouldn't get far on Masterchef. (MAG, post)

In both cases it is evident that the presence of some verbs that do not belong to the metadiscursive, cognitive or attitudinal categories typically used in professional and academic communication is strictly connected with the projection of the writer's existential dimension into the text.

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The difference between blawgs and the control corpora is even more marked if first-person singular verb forms in the present perfect are examined, as in CLC and in AAC they include exclusively metadiscursive or metacognitive verbs (e.g. *I have already quoted*, *I have noted*, *I've wondered*), while these are extremely rare in the Blawg Corpus (e.g. *I have explained*, *I have written*), where this tense more frequently refers to personal existential or professional experience (e.g. *I have matured*, *I have received*, etc.), bringing it to bear on the problem being discussed in each case, as in the following example:

(12) *I have spent* most of the Summer reading this and half a dozen other reports which either support or criticise the Human Rights Act. In not one single case, in any of the reports *I have read*, nor indeed, on this blog *have I seen*, anyone address the 'elephant in the room'. (HR, post)

This example shows very well how the discussion of a general issue (the actual effectiveness of the Human Rights Act 1998 to "ensure equal access to its provisions by the working poor") is cast in terms of personal experience.

In some other cases a relational/existential verb in the first-person singular present perfect is used to construct an authoritative image of the writer:

(13) *I have been* a member of the MA for more than a quarter-century. (MAG, post)

But probably the most meaningful element that emerges from the comparison between blawgs and the control corpora is the considerable number of first-person singular verb forms in the simple past appearing in the former, while they are quite sparse in the latter.

CLC has only five verb forms in the simple past (i.e. 3.40% of all first-person singular forms). Since they all belong to the metadiscursive and cognitive types, they all contribute to the construction of the textual image of the author as researcher, as an epistemic subject, mainly referring intertextually to his/her previous research – e.g. "This international legal 'primitivism', *I argued*, embodied the same kind of fear and fascination"; "*I benefitted* immensely from Jerry Frug's and David Barron's work on similar issues".

Quite significantly, in AAC first-person singular verbs in the simple past are absent, with the only three instances embedded in language reports. This – also in light of general considerations put forth above on the kind of lexical verbs used – suggests that in awards the focus is specifically on reasoning and deliberating. The self-image that the arbitrator constructs in the text is that of the person who will eventually decide the case.

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These findings contrast with results from the Blawg Corpus, in which 255 out of 1,045 first-person singular verb forms (i.e. 24.40%) are in the simple past, thus confirming the presence of a stronger personal narrative component, which is slightly more marked in posts (27.88%) than in comments (23.19%).

Only in very few cases is the simple past utilized for metatextual/metadiscursive purposes (e.g. "As *I made* abundantly clear in my introduction, […]"; "As *I pointed out* in my last post on the case. […]"), and always in posts, while this use is absent in comments.

Otherwise, in comments verbs in the first-person singular simple past are state or action verbs referring to the blogger's existential experience, which becomes part of the message. The beginning of a post in 'Above the Law' on the real usefulness of law schools illustrates very well how the switch to personal narrative shifts the discussion of general issues to a personal perspective:

(14) Is law school worth the tuition? Should I take out loans to go to a highly-ranked school, or accept a scholarship to a lower-ranked school? These are the burning questions that this website loves to pose.
I have opinions on these subjects like everyone else, but honestly, what do I know? The legal market was very different when I went to law school.
I attended The University of Pennsylvania Law School from 1996 through 1999. *I loved my* classes, my professors and my friends. Sure, law school was stressful, but, as I frequently quipped, it was better than work. (AL, post, Tom Wallerstein, 27/09/2012)

Here questions concerning the choice of the law school to go to, and the possible return on investing in a prestigious law school, are reinterpreted and discussed in light of personal experience. The author tells the story of his own professional life and considers the careers of his fellow students, to produce a general conclusion, again in personal terms:

(15) I never bought into the idea that a law degree is a ticket to do anything you want. Obviously, that is even less true today than it was in the late '90s. But at least back then, if you went to what U.S. News deemed to be a top school, you had a pretty decent chance of ultimately guiding your career in the direction you wanted it to go. (AL, post, Tom Wallerstein, 27/09/2012)

This intersection between professional and personal emerges clearly also in the following example from the UK Human Rights Blog:

(16) Freemen on the Land are "parasites" peddling "pseudolegal nonsense": Canadian judge fights back
September 30, 2012 by Adam Wagner
Meads v. Meads, 2012 ABQB 571 (Canadian) – read judgment / PDF

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> Almost a year ago, I and some other legal bloggers wrote about a phenomenon known as the Freemen on the Land movement. I called the post Freemen of the dangerous nonsense, for that is exactly what the movement is, for those desperate enough to sign up to it. Now a Canadian judge has done many judges around the world a huge favour by exploding the movement's ideas and leaders (or "gurus") in a carefully referenced and forensic 192-page judgment, which should be read by anyone who has ever taken a passing interest in this issue, and certainly by any judge faced by a litigant attempting the arguments in court. [...]
> This is a long judgment, on the scale of a reasonably sized book. I will try my best to point out a few interesting bits but I would recommend that you read it. It is well set out and easy to follow. My numbered references are to paragraphs. [...]. (HR, post)

It is meaningful that the case is introduced by a personal narrative that highlights its potential interest, but also implies the blogger's ability to predict its importance. Introducing the actual discussion of the case ("I will try my best [...]"), he presents his report as a personal commented version of a lengthy text. The post itself is long and complex, totaling 1,737 words. It is followed by a list of links for further reading and – as of October 3 at 9:07 pm – by 57 responses. Here is an example of a complete comment:

(17) on September 30, 2012 at 1:32 pm | Reply Tom (iow)

> Very welcome indeed, and although *I'm sure* that freemen true believers will dismiss it with the usual handwaving about how the judge did not have authority, it is useful to educate third parties with.
> Also interesting *to me* is that the section on "foisted agreements" has some relevance to quasi-legitimate commercial practices as well, such as software "licence agreements", private parking companies, and some rogue employers. Some examples of their practices are not a whole lot different, except that in a few cases the courts seem to have approved of it.

Again, self-mention occurs at the beginning of the comment, presented as a personal contribution, although in the second paragraph "the relevance of the section on foisted agreement to certain commercial practices" is linguistically presented as objective, by making recourse to presupposition: thus "Also interesting to me is that the section on 'foisted agreements' has some relevance to quasi-legitimate commercial practices as well" presupposes "the section on 'foisted agreements' has some relevance to quasi-legitimate commercial practices as well".

In light of the analysis carried out in § 4, it can thus be stated that, although they have developed within a domain-specific context thanks to the efforts of academic and professional writers in the legal field, blawgs

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have not lost the personal individualistic character that is distinctive of the weblog genre, although this is much more evident in comments than in posts.

5. Conclusion

This chapter used corpus linguistics to investigate the generic integrity of blawgs (i.e. law blogs), one amongst many thematic blogs that have evolved in the past few years out of the (macro-)genre of the weblog. Originally introduced as a diaristic genre aimed at self-expression, self-disclosure and, more indirectly, community building, blogs are now also used for scholarly, professional and popularization purposes by various domain-specific discourse communities.

The analysis of self-mention in the texts of four law blogs, also comparing them for control with other two legal corpora, respectively academic and professional, has confirmed that, in spite of the profound evolution that has characterized blogs in the last two decades, their original distinctive feature, i.e. individualistic self-expression, has been preserved. This clearly appears from the texts as, in spite of the domain-specific character of the topics they deal with, law bloggers tend to avoid the de-personalized approach of legal academic and professional discourse, constructing instead a textual image of themselves by means of self-reference, and in particular first-person pronouns. At the same time, they also show a higher frequency of the second-person pronoun to address their interlocutors than the two corpora used for comparison, and this can be interpreted as an interactional device aimed at building a sense of community.

This interpersonal component characterizes posts and comments alike, although it is more marked in the latter owing to their semiotic configuration.

The analysis of the verb forms with which first-person singular pronouns collocate suggests that self-mention in blawgs is mainly used not only metadiscursively (as is mostly the case in the other two corpora), with reference to stages and stances in the text or to the blogger's previous writings, but also to express his/her views or existential experience. The discussion of legal issues is approached not only in intellectual or professional terms, but also in light of the individual's experiences and opinions.

This draws a picture of the blawg as a hyphenated micro-genre, instrumental to the needs of a domain-specific community, which at the

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same time maintains some of the original generic characteristics of the blog (macro-)genre. In some cases (e.g. in the Wall Street Journal Law Blog) this also means deliberately preserving some of the genre's peripheral features, so as to be promptly recognizable by users, reassuring them the blawg has not lost its original generic integrity and continues to be a blog.

More in general, in light of all these considerations, it is deemed preferable to consider the blog as a macro-genre (Garzone 2012), as proposed by Bhatia (2004) for letters [9], comprising a whole range of 'hyphenated' – i.e., bi- or poly-rhematic – (sub-)genres (public affairs blog, corporate blog, political blog, etc.), each with its own peculiarities, but also sharing some distinctive features and part of its communicative purpose with all other blogs.

[9] Bhatia (2004, 34) describes the 'letter' as a macro-genre, while he considers the 'business letter' as a 'genre colony'. It is to be noted that among scholars there is hardly any agreement as to how to refer to groupings of a number of (sub)genres that serve – at least partially, if not exclusively – the same purpose.

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3.
Sharing Knowledge on Social Networking Sites: Professional Groups on Facebook and LinkedIn

1. Aim and method

In 1996, at a time when it was a prevalent opinion that the main use of the Internet was to become an "information superhighway" and social media were still a long way ahead, in his book *Being Digital* Nicholas Negroponte expressed the view that in time the Internet's real impact would be that of "creating a totally new, global social fabric" (Negroponte 1996, 183). Today, online social media are actually creating a global social fabric, opening up new public spaces that make a variety of interactions among users possible, from "one to one" in emails and private messages on social media to "one to many" in blogs and Social Networking Sites [1], and "many to many" on forums and community web pages.

In this chapter the focus is on Social Networking Sites (SNSs), Web platforms that offer professional communities a golden opportunity to expand their contacts and converse with colleagues and peers worldwide [2]. The analysis will consider in particular international arbitration

[1] It is to be noted that while the acronym 'SNS' is universally used, for the full denomination some authors like boyd and Ellison (2007) prefer "social network site" dropping the *-ing*, because *networking* "emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers", and would apply only to a limited set of sites, as some important SNSs "are not for network*ing* in the sense of making new friends or business contacts, but on the other hand, the term *networking* also emphasizes the interpersonal communication aspect, which is often important" (Thelwall and Stuart 2010, 265). The denomination 'Social Network*ing* Site' is preferred here, given that the social media examined do focus on networking. Cf. also Beer (2008).

[2] Cf. Garzone (2016) on which this chapter is loosely based.

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and mediation practitioners as in this respect they seem to be a fully representative category of professionals, especially suitable as an example to discuss the use of SNSs by professional communities. This is because they are a rather dispersed community operating across borders, sometimes independently, sometimes within the framework of arbitration institutions which, regardless of the geographical location of their headquarters, deal with international cases initiated in any country of the world. While in the past opportunities for exchange of information, views and opinions among arbitration professionals were virtually limited to institutional occasions and events and international conferences, today social media offer them a convenient and constantly available opportunity to keep in touch, circulate information and debate topical issues and problems that emerge in their practices.

In particular, arbitration discussion groups on Facebook (FB) and LinkedIn (LI), two of the most popular SNSs, will be examined with the aim of shedding light on how professionals use each of these social networks for their purposes. Special attention will be given to how the differences in the architecture of each of these SNSs as sociocultural systems influence users' behaviour in terms of communication and identity construction. A further issue to be discussed is whether SNS groups qualify as virtual communities, a question that has already had some attention in research, but not with specific reference to professional groups on SNSs (cf. e.g. Murillo 2008; Parks 2011; Angouri 2016).

The study is set in a discourse-analytical framework (cf. e.g. Brown and Yule 1983; Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton, 2001; Blommaert 2005), and will also take into account general studies of linguistic communication in Web-mediated environments (e.g. Herring 1996; Garzone, Catenaccio, and Poncini 2007; Baron 2008), and on Web 2.0 (cf., among others, Herring 2008; Myers 2009; Thurlow and Mroczek 2011; Campagna *et al.* 2012; Tannen and Trester 2013; Georgakopoulou and Spilioti 2016). Obviously, reference will also be made to research on SNSs, mostly produced within communication, information and media studies (e.g. boyd and Ellison 2007; Papacharissi 2011). For this work, of particular interest are investigations of the influence the structural features of online spaces exert on self-presentation and expression (Dominick 1999; Walker 2000; Papacharissi 2007) and their effects on connection-sharing and social relations (Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield 2006; Donath 2007), as well as analytical and linguistic studies of social media interaction (cf. e.g. Pérez-Sabater 2012, Tannen 2013, West and Trester 2013 on Facebook; Garzone 2015b on blogs, Facebook and Twitter). Overall research in all the disciplines involved tends to give

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attention to Facebook, while LinkedIn hardly appears in any linguistic or discourse-analytical study apart from a research by Papacharissi (2009) comparing Facebook, LinkedIn and AsmallWorld.

2. Professional groups on SNSs

In today's world SNSs have become ever more pervasive and are now an integral part of our daily routines. They have created new virtual spaces where users can interact, exchange information and discuss issues, with the additional option of constructing an identity for themselves irrespective of their 'real' demographic profile and social situation. This emerges clearly from boyd and Ellison's definition of SNSs as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public for semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd and Ellison 2007, 211).

By supporting existing and new social ties they enable us to be part of an extended network of relations and interact with them. This is especially true of Facebook, which is largely used to maintain, renew and start personal social connections. But SNSs – including Facebook itself – also offer interesting opportunities for professionals, who create and maintain profiles on them and become members of thematic groups in order to keep in touch and share views with their colleagues, peers and alumni, promote personal or business branding, enhance their professional reputation and connect with customers (cf. Garzone 2016).

The networking platforms considered here, Facebook and LinkedIn, are two of the most popular among professionals, institutions and companies. As is well-know, Facebook is a non-specialised network, which – having started out as a Harvard-only network in 2004 (Cassidy 2006) – was opened to High School networks in 2005, and to corporate networks in 2006 (cf. timeline in boyd and Ellison 2007, 212), and has continued to grow exponentially ever since. It defines itself as "a social utility that connects you with the people around you" (www.facebook.com) and is inherently versatile being open and accessible to a virtually unlimited number and variety of users (Papacharissi 2009, 204). According to Thelwall and Stuart's (2010) classification of SNS types, Facebook belongs to the category of *socializing SNSs*, which "support informal social interaction between members" (Thelwall and Stuart 2010, 265-266). Thus its

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corporate and professional use is only one amongst many, with personal use certainly prevailing.

Instead, LinkedIn, founded in 2003 (cf. boyd and Ellison 2007, 212), is inherently professionally oriented and belongs to the category of *networking SNSs*, which "support non-social interpersonal communication" (Thelwall and Stuart 2010, 265-266) [3]. It is tailored specifically to the workplace environment, offering not only the opportunity to connect with professional people of your interest (colleagues, former students, schoolmates, etc.), publish posts and participate in discussions, but it also features a jobs section (see Chapter 5).

Apart from this basic difference, both SNSs host groups, i.e. dedicated spaces to connect with specific sets of people, which are used by professionals to keep in touch with their peers, share information and updates, and debate topical issues.

Facebook groups often include family, friends, teammates or co-workers, but in many cases they have a clearly professional orientation. At the time when the corpus on which this study is based was collected (2014), there were three possible privacy settings for groups: public, which anyone could join, closed, which anyone could ask to join or be added or invited by a member, or secret, which one could join only if added or invited by a member. Since August 2019, declaredly for the sake of clarity, the privacy settings have been reduced to two, public and private, with different levels of visibility. Public groups are always visible, private groups are either 'visible' (corresponding to closed groups) or 'hidden' (corresponding to previous 'secret' groups) [4]. In groups, members receive notifications by default when any member posts within the group.

LinkedIn groups are obviously all workplace oriented; to join them you have to ask or be invited by a member.

Therefore, apart from the different concept underlying each of the two SNSs, at first sight LI and FB groups seem to have convergent characteristics, performing a similar function, in spite of differences in the items included in the menu at the top of the page, with FB featuring also Videos and Photos in addition to Events and Files, while on LI all the options included are exquisitely professional in kind (Connections, Alumni Education, Companies, Groups and Jobs).

[3] Thelwall and Stuart's (2010) classification includes a third category, *(social) navigation SNSs*, which "support finding resources via interpersonal connections" (e.g. Flickr and YouTube).

[4] Cf. https://www.facebook.com/help/220336891328465?ref=learn_more [10/10/2019].

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2.1. *Professional networking and online communities*

For the sake of this study, an important distinction is that between 'virtual communities' and 'virtual communities of practice'. Virtual communities – a notion introduced by Rheigold ([1993] 2000) – can be defined as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net *when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace*" (my emphasis). Its indiscriminate application to any CMC group (e.g. Falk 1999 to teacher conferences; Boyd 2002 to e-Bay; Evans *et al.* 2001 to consumers; Kardaras, Karakostas, and Papathanassiou 2003 to insurance officers, etc.) has spurred research aimed at identifying criteria for a rigorous definition of virtual communities. The criteria proposed are essentially psychological, being based on the "sense of community" (Blanchard 2004, 2; cf. also Jones 1997), i.e. on "feelings" (e.g. feelings of membership; feelings of influence; integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection, cf. McMillan and Chavis 1997). In other theorisations different defining elements are listed, which Parks (2011, 108) synthesises as follows: ability to engage in collective action; shared ritual, social regulation; patterned interaction among members, identification, sense of belonging and attachment; self-awareness of being a community. On this basis, it is commonly accepted that the notion of virtual community is applicable to ordinary FB interactions, but it seems problematic to apply it to FB professional groups. For such groups and for LI discussion groups a more suitable notion could be that of "virtual 'community of practice'" (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). The requisites or "essential traits" for a group to qualify as a virtual community of practice have been defined in terms of the application of Wenger's (1998) theory to Internet-based collectives (cf. Murillo 2008) and are: mutual engagement, which includes debating issues related to the profession, collective problem-solving and sharing useful information; joint enterprise, i.e. caring for some shared domain of knowledge; shared repertoire, including shared criteria, practices and artefacts; community, which includes members' knowledge of each other and shared sense of community; and learning or identity acquisition, which includes acquiring new knowledge and new skills, and acquiring and enacting a professional identity (Murillo 2008).

These criteria seem to be met by professional SNSs. But if there is no doubt that on LI the identity constructed and projected by users is by definition specifically professional, the personal character of FB and its sociocultural makeup raises serious doubts as to the fact that its groups with a professional focus may qualify as communities of practice.

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Therefore one of the purposes of this study is to ascertain whether discursive practices and language use on FB groups of arbitration professionals are sufficiently professionally oriented as to make them classifiable as 'virtual communities of practice', by analysing them in parallel with similar groups on LI.

In particular, attention will be given to how these discussion groups on the SNSs considered are used in terms of contents and discursive exchanges in relation to the needs of the professionals utilising them and the identities they construct for themselves, through linguistic and discursive choices made in their posts as well as through their personal profiles, when accessible (Seargeant and Tagg 2014). The construction of an online identity is an especially critical issue in online interactions, as it cannot always rely on elements based on actual real-world acquaintance and it is often the result of a process involving "self-definition, delineation, and manipulation of available cues" (Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield 2007; Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin 2008).

Another important aspect that will be explored is how the underlying concept and the architecture of each of these two SNSs can condition professionals' interaction. In this respect, variations in textual and discursive organisation will be investigated as a function of the peculiar characteristics of each medium/genre.

The research presented in this study is based on a corpus including the posts and comments posted on FB from January to July 2014 respectively on the International Arbitration and on the Commercial International Arbitration Groups, and the LinkedIn posts of the International Arbitration Group and the Commercial and Industry Arbitration and Mediation Group (all groups on LinkedIn being private).

3. Facebook groups

The FB discussion groups used as case studies for this research are the International Arbitration Group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/arbitration/), a public group created by Alexandre Hory, Maude Lebois, Gaëlle Le Quillec, and Alexis Martinez (an academic and three professionals), with over 10,000 members, which sets forth its mission as follows: "The International Arbitration Group is an active and informal discussion forum for anyone interested in arbitration. It is the oldest of its type. We circulate information of interest from time to time", and the International Commercial Arbitration Group (https://www.facebook.

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com/groups/4470171265/), with 3,041 members, which defines itself as "The group page for all lawyers interested in international commercial arbitration" [5].

In both cases the group is presented as being open to anyone interested in arbitration, an idea which in the case of the Commercial Arbitration Group is reinforced by the use of the adjectives 'active' and 'informal', and by the fact that there is no description of the kind of professionals to whom it is addressed, while in the International Commercial Arbitration Group it is specified that it is made up of, and aimed at, lawyers.

Noteworthy in the description of the former group is the commitment to disseminate information about arbitration, which is nevertheless presented only as a marginal feature ("we circulate information of interest *from time to time*"; emphasis added).

In actual fact, the group site presents relatively regular updates on the most important cases and decisions in the industry.

In the example that follows there are updates about two landmark decisions about the *Yukos Shareholders vs. Russia* case; the first about a multi-million award of the Permanent Court of Arbitration and the second about a parallel decision by the European Court of Human Rights.

The first update is extremely short and invites the reader to look up details on the International Arbitration News FB page.

(1) *Alexandre Hory* [6]
July 28 at 2:05 pm
– BREAKING NEWS: Yukos investors won historic record award against Russian Federation.
See the International Arbitration News FB page for more information:

This concise post is accompanied by various photos, a link to the description of the case on the "International Arbitration News" FB page, and other useful links, and has attracted a comment expressing congratulations to the arbitrators involved:

(2) July 28 at 2:34 pm
Tushar Kumar Biswas
Congratulations Professor Emmanuel Gaillard, Dr. Yas Banifatemi as well as Ms. Jennifer Younan for this wonderful victory.

[5] Both groups are public.

[6] A post on a social network site has a peculiar layout and is accompanied by a picture or an icon representing the writer, and so are all comments; other peripheral features are the "like", "comment", "share" links. Given the linguistic/discursive focus of this study, here in examples only the name of the writer, date, time and text of the post will be shown.

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The second update reports on a ECHR decision taken a few days later, and contains some evaluative observations that compare the outcomes of the two decisions:

(3) *Alexandre Hory*
July 31
– YUKOS / European Court of Human Rights (ECHR): Russia ordered to pay € 1.87 billion (USD 2.51 bn) in compensation to the former shareholders of Yukos for unfair tax proceedings. The ECHR has also ruled Russia must pay €300,000 in legal costs.
Russia will also need to produce "a comprehensive plan for distribution of the award of just satisfaction" within the coming six months, according to the ruling published today.
➤ http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-145730
Though the assessment by the European Court of Human Rights is well below the record $50 billion in damages and another $60 million in legal costs that was awarded to the former Yukos shareholders earlier this week (see the posts below), it's the highest ever in the ECHR history.
#Yukos #EHCR #Russia

This update also triggers comments, and a reply by Hory, one of the group's founders:

(4) Nader Ibrahim Interesting.
July 31 at 11:27 pm

Özge Tosun Let's see whether Putin is going to pay or natural gas prices in EU increases suddenly.
July 31 at 11:33 pm

Alexandre Hory - @ Nader: Never ending story…
We'll have the enforcement proceedings now and it's not going to be a barrel of laughs (I was consultant in the Noga case and it has been impossible to enforce the awards…).
July 31 at 11:35 pm

Alia Algazzar I am looking forward to the enforcement proceedings!! This is a landmark case!!

A first essential element to be examined here is the degree of formality. Facebook has a reputation for being a network where "friends" meet, and carries with it a presumption of colloquial informality (cf. e.g. Herring 2010) resulting from the same drift towards orality as observed in e-mails and in asynchronous CMC. In this respect, Tannen (2013) suggests that, rather than presuming a clearcut divide between written and spoken discourse in terms of linguistic features, one should think of online exchanges as exhibiting "oral and literate strategies that are

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found in [both] speaking or writing" (*ibid.*, 99), contending that in digital media interaction written language is characterised by features that are similar to those previously shown to constitute conversational style in spoken interaction (*ibid.*, 100). In particular, she points at metamessages as important elements that "communicate how a speaker intends a message" (*ibid.*, 101) in an environment lacking the paralinguistic phenomena pertaining to oral interaction (e.g. pitch, amplitude, length of pauses, intonational contours, etc.). Similarly, in a study of academic communication on FB Pérez-Sabater (2012) concludes that it cannot be taken for granted that all FB communication is in a conversational, colloquial style, as in many cases posts tend to be more formal, being used for a variety of purposes. For instance, in the examples of academic communication on FB that she examines, posts are also utilised for administrative purposes, and take on a formal bureaucratic tone, thus presenting a whole range of linguistic features spanning from oral to literate.

The linguistic analysis of the FB corpus confirms this unevenness in linguistic choices. In the examples above, the posts are essentially informative and exemplify two different styles of updates: the short update – in example (1) above qualified as "Breaking news" – which, in order to be fully informative, counts on a link leading to a comprehensive text, and has in itself a very linear syntax (in this case Subject-Verb-Object-Adverbial: "Yukos investors won historic record award against Russian Federation"); and the more detailed communication in example (3), which in spite of also featuring a link, is relatively complete and self-contained. Greater length in an informative text logically involves greater syntactic complexity, which is especially perceptible in the second, evaluative part of the post, characterised by a long left-branching hypotactic sequence preceding the short main clause, which however features a contraction (*it's*), an obvious indicator of some kind of conversational style.

The comparison of these posts with the relevant comments shows a clear contrast, which is less marked in the case of example (2), but is sharp in the sequence included in example (4), where there are several metatextual elements that indicate the more conversational style of the contributions: use of *let's*, suspension points, consistent use of contractions (*we'll*, *it's*), double exclamation marks, recourse to idiomatic expressions (*a barrel of laughs*).

Other contents on the International Arbitration Group page regard arbitration procedures under way, arbitration awards rendered, changes in International Arbitration institutions, arbitration legislation, new organisational appointments and jobs and other professional training opportunities – e.g. "The Max Planck Institute Luxembourg would like to appoint

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highly qualified candidates for 2 open positions as Senior Research Fellow (Postdoc) (m/f), July 30" – or opportunities for novices to have their research work published (calls for papers or publishing initiatives), as well as announcements regarding conferences and seminars, for example:

(5) Martin Svatoš
July 30 at 8:32 am • Edited
Last Chance to Register for the 56th volume of European Law Seminar in Urbino, Italy (18th-30th August 2014) including lectures on arbitration […] this time, we are going to focus on arbitrability of disputes.

(6) Adrian Bannon shared Friarylaw Mediation's event.
July 23 at 12:07 pm
Really looking forward to our August International Mediation Summer School in Dublin. Still a handful of places left for anyone interested in becoming an internationally accredited mediator in a global centre of excellence for conflict resolution.

These two posts, although providing information about Summer Schools, are examples of informal communication, in the style that one would use in jotting down a quick personal note: for instance, both in example (5) and in (6), the opening sentence contains no finite verb forms, and in (5) the first person plural pronoun is used (*we are going* …), thus introducing an element of personal agentivity.

But apart from these slight variations, occasionally the corpus contains also posts that are more genuinely interactive, many of them being aimed at exchanging information about problems related to arbitration and mediation. The person presenting a query is sometimes an insider, as in the following example posted by the author of (5) above:

(7) *Martin Svatoš*
May 14
Dear friends, I am starting a research containing (among others) the question of mediation in Malta. Quite mysterious country from my perspective […]. Do you know someone practicing mediation there? Who are the leading mediators in this country?

But in other cases, the fact that the group is public attracts questions by novices, who sometimes seem to be unaware of the discursive conventions of the professional community. See the following example, where a student poses a question, which receives two subsequent replies by the same user:

(8) Benzir Ahmed Joy
July 3 at 1:13 pm • London, United Kingdom
Hi! It's me Joy from United Kingdom. I am a LL.M. student doing dissertation on application of foreign law. I have a short following question to ask you – "Does anybody know how a foreign law proven before the

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English courts in international arbitration cases?" If anybody knows the right answer, please let me know. I would be glad to know the proper sources (if you can). Thank you.

(8a) Duncan Bagshaw Hello Joy. A question of foreign law is treated as an issue of fact before an English Court (there is a case called "Bumper Corporation v Commissioner of Police") and should be proven using expert evidence from a lawyer or academic who is an expert in the area of law which is in issue. The parties can agree what the foreign law is. If there is no evidence, the court can assume that the foreign law is the same as English law.
July 11 at 6:51 am

(8b) Duncan Bagshaw In international arbitration this would also apply, for instance you could look at the case of Cruz City 1 Mauritius Holdings where Indian law governed the arbitration agreement and the parties each called an expert on Indian law. [7]
July 11 at 6:55 am

In this case it can be inferred that the LL.M. student is a FB user who is not a regular member of the group and is seeking the assistance of more expert users. His post is highly dialogic, eliciting a response, and starts with a very informal form of address. The replies he receives are professionally competent, and certainly much less colloquial. Although (8a) opens with a direct address, the form used – "Hello, Joy!" – is only moderately informal and is followed by a reply which is competent and professional, albeit simple, as is fit for a text that has a pedagogical purpose.

While most posts have no real opening and start *in medias res*, as most comments do, example (8a) is one of 8 cases (i.e. about 7% of the total) that are opened by forms of address, thus providing evidence of interpersonal engagement. In three cases, the opening form of address is "dear + noun" (*dear all*, *dear friends*), which can be considered quite formal leaning towards the written, while in the other five cases more informal forms of address are utilised, "hello everyone!" and the much more colloquial "i guys" [*sic*], "Hi!", "Hey", which in Pérez-Sabater's (2012) study of FB is classified as "very informal".

In the International Arbitration Group corpus, posts similar to example (8a) are relatively rare, but, for the only fact of being there, they show that, beyond its eminently informative function, the discussion group also provides an opportunity for conversations among its members, frequently with the participation of students or novices, as can be inferred from examining their profiles (when accessible).

[7] Here reference is made to the case "Cruz City 1 Mauritius Holdings v Unitech Ltd and others (No 2) [2014] EWHC 3131 (UK)".

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3.1. *The FB profile and identity construction*

Profiles are unique pages where one can ''type oneself into being'' (Sundén 2003, 3), with a structure and contents that are guided by the network by means of questions about a set of descriptors organised in a template (boyd and Ellison 2007, 213), which the user can decide to be open or private; in the latter case, they are accessible only to 'friends'.

For instance, in the case of the author of the question quoted above, Benzir Ahmed Joy, by looking at his (open) profile one learns that he is a Bangladeshi student in London, and that he studies Law at BPP Law School, London Holborn, and previously attended the London College of Legal Studies in Gulsha (Dhaka), Bangladesh. This is all we get to know about his professional status. But we obtain all sorts of other information that contributes to defining his identity: he is a Vocalist/Lyricist at RosSNieL Music Production (RN MuZik), his friends/followers are mostly Bangladeshi or Indian and he communicates with them in Bengali, he is member of other thirty-two FB groups, amongst them some religious groups like *AL-Qur'aan and AL-hadith*, *British Muslims* and *Islam is the only way of peace*, groups aimed at learning English like *Free English Lessons* and *English Practice*, professional groups such as the *European Lawyers for Democracy and Human Rights* and the *Bangladesh Judicial Service Examination*. Further personal information can be gleaned from the photos he displays on his profile, e.g. the picture of a toddler (probably Palestinian) under the threat of a gun, with the caption "killed by Israel".

Indeed, this is a complete profile, accounting for various aspects of the writer's identity, but for the user who accesses it from a group page such as that of International Arbitration, it is somehow at odds with the professional character of the group itself. This is because the FB profile is aimed at presenting a user's identity as a multi-faceted whole, so the descriptors required regard a whole range of users' personal details (whereabouts, education, profession), their tastes (music, books, movies, TV shows, sports, inspirational people, clothing, restaurants), which will appear in their profiles together with the list of their friends and of the groups of which they are members, and all these elements will contribute to their self-presentation.

This clearly indicates that on FB a user's professional identity is somehow dispersed among various other social identities, and this has inevitable consequences in terms of language use and discourse. And it is only natural that someone used to publishing posts on his/her "general" FB profile, and on discussion groups focusing on various kinds of non-

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professional topics, should continue to use, consistently or occasionally, the same colloquial register even when participating, on FB itself, in professional discussions where linguistic usage usually tends to deploy higher levels of formality.

These findings are in keeping with Pérez-Sabater's (2012) contention that language use on FB is not consistent, and does not always exhibit prevalent oral traits. In the case of discussion groups, it is reasonable to expect that discursive choices differ from those typical of FB communication with personal friends; but there is no single distinctive register characterising them, rather they seem to feature different registers, in particular one used for informative posts, and another more colloquial one for conversational exchanges or discussions proper, especially evident when one of the interactants is a novice or a student.

4. LinkedIn groups

As is well known, LI is a professional social networking site, which attracts people from various sectors of activity as well as students-to-be-professionals. Although it is open to all, its system includes various levels of gated access and controls that mimic that of the professional world.

4.1. *The LI profile*

An idea of the difference between FB and LI can easily be gathered by comparing the profile template they offer. The LinkedIn profile template is very different from the FB one, described above, as jobs and education are the main focus; supplementary sections include a whole range of other professionally relevant details – experience, skills, projects, languages, organisations, honours and awards, test scores, courses, patents, certifications, volunteering and causes – with only one marginal section labelled "interests and personal details". Thus the profile that emerges from this template regards specifically a person's professional identity, while – as pointed out above – a FB profile is more generally personal in character, although it may also include professionally-relevant details. For instance, for one of the most active contributors to the Commercial and Industry Arbitration and Mediation Group on LI, Julian F. Summers Jr., the user will learn immediately that he is a "Commercial Litigator with Insurance, Arbitration-Law, and B-2-B Focus", and that his practice

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is located in the Greater Los Angeles Area; you will also find synthetic information about his past jobs and his education. By perusing the subsequent sections, you will find a complete resumé of his career and his current professional activity, and the list of his skills with endorsements by other professionals; only in the final section will you learn briefly about his non professional interests and hobbies ("avid reader, writer, fly fisher, swimmer, boater, guitar player, legal history buff and music lover"). Also the list of the groups of which he is a member is consistently professional in character and focuses on arbitration, ADR, legal issues, insurance or alumni. Similarly professional in character are his connections. All the information included in this profile defines a specifically professional identity, only occasionally offering a short glimpse of other aspects of his personality, which however do not contribute substantially to constructing his LI identity. Thus this kind of personal profile is perfectly in keeping with the professional focus of the group; synergically with the elements that are "given" or "given off" (Goffman 1959), i.e. deliberately provided or leaking through unintentionally by this user's linguistic and discursive behaviour in his contributions to the discussion, it contributes to constructing his identity, which is strictly professional.

4.2. *Professional groups on LI*

LI groups are dedicated spaces to connect with specific sets of people (colleagues, former students, schoolmates, etc.), which are used by professionals to keep in touch with their peers, share information and updates, and debate topical issues (cf. e.g. Garzone 2018a). On the LI websites they are introduced as follows:

> LinkedIn Groups provide a place for professionals in the same industry or with similar interests to share content, find answers, post and view jobs, make business contacts, and establish themselves as industry experts. […] As a LinkedIn Groups member, you're able to join like-minded members in conversations, find answers and post and view jobs in industries you're interested in.
> (https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/1164/linkedin-groups-overview?lang=en) [10/10/2019]

In broad terms the Directory of LI groups includes mainly two types of groups, "professionals in the same industry" and professionals "with similar interests", in other words groups consisting of people working in the same profession or industry (e.g. Consultants Network, Oil and Gas

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People, Medical Devices, Social Media Today, Applied Linguistics), and groups comprising people who share interests that cut across professional domains (e.g. Green, Professional Women's Network, Intercultural Intelligence). In actual fact, in theory there exist more than 2 million groups, but many of them are only "ghost towns" (Gershbein 2017), i.e. they were started and then discontinued but not cancelled, and as yet others have a negligible membership (in the order of a few dozens); therefore the real number is by far lower. But in spite of the inactivity of some of them, LI groups are an important outlet for users to build an online presence, and many are very active, mostly averaging a few thousand members, and in some cases – the so called 'featured groups' – including up to half a million or more participants (e.g. Marketing Communication: 696,833; Digital Marketing: 1,118,384; Retail Industry Professional Group: 517,414).

Access to the groups is not open, but gated. It can be gained by invitation from a group member or manager, or by request to be admitted, subject to group owners' and managers' approval. This contributes to maintaining the groups cohesive and highly focused.

The International Arbitration Group (https://www.linkedin.com/groups/129101/), which includes 30,811 members, introduces itself as

> a network database of professionals working in the legal field of international arbitration, including commercial and investment-state arbitration in a wide range of industry sectors, including but not limited to aviation, aerospace, chemicals, construction, communications, oil & gas.

Similarly the Commercial and Industry Arbitration and Mediation Group (https://www.linkedin.com/groups/1964382/), with 3,660 members, introduces itself as follows:

> The Commercial and Industry Arbitration and Mediation Group is a forum for the open discussion of issues and sharing of information concerning domestic and international arbitration, mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). Commercial and industry ADR covers the spectrum from arbitrations and mediations arising out of general, commercial contracts through more specialized forms of dispute resolution used by various industries, including the reinsurance, insurance, maritime, telecommunications, IT, securities, financial services, construction industries and others. We also consider labor and employment arbitration and mediation to be within this spectrum.

While in the first case the description simply accounts for the fact that the group relies on a professional network covering a whole range of different economic and institutional activities, the latter is more analytical

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and attributes the group a two-fold focus: sharing information and discussing issues. In actual fact, updates and informative posts are not as prominent as on the FB pages examined in the previous section, being less than 10% of the total; they regard important ADR cases, conferences, educational opportunities and jobs, as can be inferred from titles like "CPR's Young Attorneys in Dispute Resolution Program (Y-ADR)" and "The Renny Corporation launches Settle-Now", etc. Instead, most posts deal with professional issues (e.g. "My colleague explores what's possible when one or more parties resist mediation"; "Ethics and Legal Bargaining: A Pernicious Brew"; "Allowing parties to express their anger can be a curse and a blessing", etc.) and give rise to comments, triggering interesting discussions among professionals. In some cases, the posts are not integrally published on LI; rather there are only a few introductory sentences, containing a link to a blog, or another site where the rest of the text is published, for instance:

(9) Anger can be a pathway to resolution
John Beard
Anger as a Pathway to Resolution, Part I shaffermediation.com
There are very few emotions as destructive as anger. Shootings, murders, rapes, spouse and child abuse, intra-family squabbles (big and small), road rage, divorce, gang violence, are all fueled in part by anger. Anger is usually an aspect of any […].

This 40-word post, ending with suspension points, quotes the opening of a longer post (513 words) published on the author's website, which can be accessed by clicking on the title or on a "read more" link. In spite of being partly displaced to another site, the relevant post does attract comments on the Commercial and Industry Arbitration and Mediation Group site, as in the following example, commenting on (9):

(10) Dermot Taber
Vice President of Business Development at Renny Corporation
I tolerate some expressions of anger while I keep my finger on the disputants' respective pulses. Anger is a natural expression during confrontational and contentious discussions. I contend that it is important to allow some controlled venting while remaining true to the facilitative process. The process keeps the session flowing. If things get too testy, then return to the step in the process or proceed to the next one.

It is interesting to note the personal stance-taking approach of this comment, with the recurrence of the first person singular pronoun, and the strongly assertive collocation "I contend".

When, as in this case, posts draw attention to important arbitration-related issues, they sometimes trigger long threads of discussion in which

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contributors debate on the views put forth in the original post, or those expressed by other commenters. In the example that follows the discussion focuses on bullying and on the possible role of mediation in countering it, and has its starting point in the following post, published integrally on LI:

(11) Paul Silver
The Answer to Bullying: Stop Seeking or Becoming a Bigger Bully to Bully the Bully
July 29, 2014
Bullying is a frequently discussed theme on LinkedIn and on various blogs and social and other media. We hear it is 'on the rise' and an epidemic of workplace bullying is occurring on a global scale. But there is rarely an approach advocated which could not be characterised as 'Seeking or Becoming a Bigger Bully to Bully the Bully'. There is an assumed clarity about who is and who is not 'a bully' and yet the processes used to respond to bullying allegations in most organisations fail to establish that bullying occurs to any degree that is sufficient to say officially: 'That person is a bully!' […].

The post, having a length comparable to that of a magazine article (1,566 words), is highly argumentative, as is immediately betrayed by the occurrence of *but* and *yet* in the first few lines, and contends that, even when the bully is successfully identified, in most organisations the processes used to respond to bullying allegations lead to the victim's resignation, as they focus on blame rather than on resolving difficulties in the working relationship between those involved. So, it is concluded, a mediation approach would be more effective than the investigative approach mostly taken.

The post is characterised by the use of openly argumentative language with a wealth of meta-discursive elements of all kinds and the syntactic elaboration needed to sustain complex reasoning, as in the following excerpt:

(12) So the answer to bullying is not to seek or become a bigger bully to bully the bully or even to 'prove' bullying has occurred in a situation. It is to support a focus on the experiences of those involved, both the person who alleges bullying and the person accused and to support both of them in creating different ways of interacting with each other within their working relationship so that the focus is on learning and change rather than a process that leads to mutual destruction. (*ibidem*)

The post ends with an open invitation to participate in the discussion:

(13) Please share any comments or views or questions you have about this article in the comments section below […]. (*ibidem*)

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An animated debate follows, with 18 contributions by 12 group members, interspersed with 9 replies or comments by Silver himself.

Many of the comments start with a form of address or an appraising observation, with an initial sentence that is often evaluative and leaning on the oral side:

(14) An excellent article Paul which highlights in clear terms the benefits of mediation over investigation. (Jim Cuffin)

(15) Some very thought provoking comments to an interesting article […]. (J.R. Carey)

(16) As usual, Paul, a well thought-out toss of the discussion ball to get the conversation going. (Pedro Stanford)

(17) Great article! (Jane Hale)

(18) Very good article with some key points to draw on and share within the workplace as development. Thank you. (Elisabeth Reynolds)

But the most informal tone is found in the replies to comments posted by Silver himself:

(19) That sounds fabulous Donald, very thoroughly thought through as an approach […].

(20) Hi Jim and thanks for the comment and also thanks Elisabeth Reynolds and Priscilla Fairs for your comments […].

(21) Wow, Pedro, so many great points.

(22) Exactly Greg, that's a focus more on 'what's happening and what can change to create a better way forward?' than 'who's the bully?… ok prove it!'.

Not only do these comments call the interlocutors by their first name, but in some cases they also feature colloquial forms of address and evaluative expressions. However, after the initial informal bit, which seems to be aimed at reproducing the flavour of a real-world conversation and keeping the discussion going, most of these contributions to the interaction are as argumentative as the post, and articulate the reasoning accurately and elaborately, as in the following example, extracted from a 549-word intervention:

(23) **Jane Wilson**
Managing Director at ERS Resolutions – experts in workplace conflict prevention, management and resolution
A thoughtprovoking article and in my response I am absolutely not disagreeing that mediation has a great role to play, […]. But I have some areas where I disagree with you, possibly based on the fact that my company does a huge amount of investigations and I see a real value in these being done well (as we do them, naturally!). As a mediation company and an

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> investigation company, I have thought a lot about the issues you raise here. I'm not sure you accurately reflect good practice in investigations. Sure there is some very bad practice out there. But a good investigation should not be about 'proving' someone 'is a bully' but about determining on evidence, whether specific alleged behaviours took place or not. Investigations are neutral. […].

The tone is relatively informal, although not colloquial, and to some extent cumulative, reflecting the approach typical of oral argumentation. But the reasoning is stringent and complex, with recurrent concession and consequence clauses (cf. Halliday 1994, 236), leading in the last two sentences to a very clear formulation of the writer's stance (*Sure … But …*). Similarly, Silver's replies are no less complex; for instance his reply to Wilson's comments – example (23) – is 718 words long.

The linguistic and discursive makeup on LI is certainly typically professional. All participants project a professional identity, which is also outlined in detail in their profile, and strive to give credit to the views they express by highlighting their competence and experience. In this respect, of relevance is the recurrence of first person singular reference, which is especially frequent in comments, probably as a result of their more interactive tone, but possibly also out of commenters' need to get credit for themselves, while the main writer is authoritative by default.

This professional approach is typical of both posts and comments. Posts, whether published integrally on LI or accessible through a link, maintain the language and tone of professional writing, being characterised by frequent recourse to metadiscourse. Comments are definitely more interpersonal, with frequent first-person singular discourse, and occasionally display a relatively informal tone, which is also adopted by post authors when they take actively part in the discussion.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed pages of Arbitration Groups on FB and LI as instances of the utilisation of social networking sites by professional communities, and examined them comparatively.

On both SNSs the topics dealt with are exclusively professional, but on FB interactions seem less specific, being mostly limited to informative exchanges: announcements are made, updates given, members are consulted by other members to obtain information on topics of their interest, seniors are asked for professional advice by novices also thanks to the free accessibility of the FB groups analysed in this study. As regards LI,

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it is also used for a similarly informative function, but members often raise hot topics for discussion – principles, ideological implications, current practices, issues and problems most frequently experienced by practitioners – which are debated heatedly, thus turning the group into a forum for the exchange of professional views and opinions.

As regards the status of the two SNSs as online communities, of course it can be taken for granted that in its basic function as a site for ordinary personal interactions FB does qualify as a virtual community, meeting the relevant psychological criteria described in the literature (cf. § 2.1 above): manifest feelings of membership, shared emotional connections and sense of belonging, and attachment shown by people using it. But at the same time the findings of the analysis of FB Arbitration Groups' interactions indicate that – in spite of the differences identified – there are more similarities with the corresponding LI groups than with ordinary personal interactions on FB itself.

In actual fact, groups on both SNSs meet the requirements to qualify as virtual communities of practice (cf. § 2.1 above): they are used to share useful professional information; their members – but also novices aspiring to become full-fledged arbitration professionals – have a shared repertoire and a shared sense of community; the fact itself of consulting senior members to solve basic problems is evidence of the desire to acquire new domain-specific knowledge and skills.

A more complex issue is that of professional identity as constructed by interactants on each of these two SNSs. The identity constructed by group members on LI is integrally professional; every member defines and enacts his/her professional identity, and projects a sense of authoritativeness which is partly textually constructed, but also supported by an individual's personal profile, which, from the very moment when the user fills it, tends to present his/her credentials, highlighting competence and expertise and, whenever applicable, authoritativeness. This is certainly less true in the case of FB professional groups, where the fact of posting information about the main news and events in the profession provides evidence of competence and expertise, but the professional identity constructed within the context of the FB Arbitration Group is only part of a more complex construct which is defined on the basis of other, non-professional elements that are available: the list of other FB groups to which the person belongs; the FB profile, in its entirety when it is not kept private, or in reduced version, mostly featuring only the cover photos, which are usually of a personal/biographic kind. Hence a progressively thinner and blurrier distinction between personal and professional identities (Fieseler, Meckel, and Ranzini 2015). An effect

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that that could be obviated by means of the so called 'Multiple Profile Management', i.e. the possibility of creating more than one profile on the same social network, thus presenting two or more different personas (e.g. non-professional and professional). But this is not possible on FB (nor on LI) as this function is disallowed (cf. Stutzman and Hartzog 2012, 770-771).

Overall, FB's character as a generalist social networking site, which hosts all sorts of groups focusing on an infinite range of topics, hobbies and activities, with professional interests being relatively marginal, also results in a degree of diaphasic variation in language use. Hence the co-presence of oral and literate traits (Tannen 2013) which can occasionally be found also across interactions within the same professional group.

Quite unexpectedly, also LI communication occasionally exhibits typically oral traits, in particular in the openings of members' contributions to debates, when the prevailing element is essentially phatic, initiating a linguistically realised social interaction, and is subject to a relatively small degree of sociolinguistic variation, mainly in terms of tenor of discourse as a function of the social role that the writer of each post/comment takes on in the context of the conversation, with tones that sometimes mimic oral discussion in the professional environment. But most of the time the discursive approach is consistently professional, and therefore relatively scholarly, as members contribute to the debate by means of complex reasoning and argumentation, involving recourse to correspondingly complex syntactic structures and qualified lexicon.

More in general, it can be stated that Web-mediated applications – in the case examined here SNSs – create virtual spaces which, on account of their architecture, on the one hand suggest and enable particular modes of interaction (self-presentation, discussion, opinion- or knowledge-sharing, etc.), and on the other hand provide a context where exchanges occur being subject to the same variables as those that operate in the 'real' world. When the persons involved are new acquaintances encountered on the network, these variables are generated locally in the virtual environment, while in the case of existing offline connections – which are certainly prevalent on FB (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2006; Baron 2008, 84) – they partly reflect social relations already present in the real world and partly result from virtual roles that participants perform in the social media context.

Thus, when investigating interactions on SNSs, discursive and linguistic analysis needs to take into account a whole range of factors connected with the characteristics of the virtual environment and of online

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interaction, without at the same time putting aside 'real world' variables. This of course requires that traditional analytical tools be adjusted to the complex architecture of SNSs and their peculiar relationship to the real life social context.

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4.
Legal Professionals' Groups on SNSs: Focus on LinkedIn

1. Introduction

While in the previous chapter, the focus was comparatively on the distinctive features of professionals' groups on Facebook and LinkedIn, here attention will concentrate specifically on legal practitioners' groups on LinkedIn, the most popular professional networking site, where professionals have an opportunity to share knowledge, post information and debate issues that are topical in their domain of specialization.

An interesting aspect of professionals' use of social networking sites is that, in spite of the complex multimodal affordances of Web-mediated communication, most interactions in these social spaces rely on the written medium: the world of online communication is to a great extent a "textually-mediated social world" (Barton and Lee 2013, 27). Since the initial stages of research on online communication this fact has fostered investigations on the transformation of language in the shift from orality to literacy in computer-mediated interactions (cf. e.g. Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittemore 1991). Therefore, in spite of the increasing availability of multimodal affordances, many complex behaviours that people perform online are entirely constituted "though and by means of discourse", as Herring (2004, 338) points out, a fact that makes discourse analysis all the more relevant to the investigation of online interactions.

By supporting existing social ties and creating new ones, SNSs enable users to enter an extended network of relations and interact with them. But they also offer interesting opportunities for professionals, who create and maintain profiles on them and become members of thematic groups in order to keep in touch and share views with their colleagues, peers and alumni, promote personal or business branding, enhance their professional reputation and connect with customers.

In the previous chapter, I showed that it would be problematic to classify LI groups as *virtual communities* as such (Rheigold [1993] 2000;

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Herring 2008), while – given their exquisitely professional character – a more suitable notion could be that of "virtual 'Community of Practice'" (Wenger 1998), as LI groups meet the requisites or "essential traits" defined by Murillo (2008) by applying Wenger's (1998) theory to Internet-based collectives (cf. Garzone 2016).

This chapter [1] analyses conversations on LI groups with the aim of ascertaining the motives guiding members in their online activity and defining the social practices they engage in. This can be achieved by focusing on the rhetorical strategies deployed in negotiating/communicating professional knowledge in group conversations. Special attention is given to how participants discursively construct their own image of authoritativeness in the process of disseminating and negotiating professional knowledge. Another aspect to be evaluated is the impact of the architecture of the SNS and the affordances it makes available on the actual dynamics of group interaction.

2. Materials and method

2.1. *Corpus description*

The four professional LI groups chosen as representative of different aspects of legal practice are listed here below, with an indication of their membership, accompanied by the short introductory texts displayed on their LI homepages:

> **Leadership for Lawyers** (LL) (68,306 members)
> Leadership for Lawyers is a legal networking forum. If you are interested in the latest trends, best practices, technology advancements, innovation in the law and leadership, then we invite you to join this group.
>
> **LegalTech & Innovation Network** (LI&IN) (77,715 members)
> LegalTech & Innovation Network is the global virtual community for people working in the legal technology industry like law firm IT staff, legal software vendors, legal IT consultants, but also paralegals, knowledge management specialists, and lawyers interested in the technology that facilitates their work […].
>
> **Mediation Discussion Group** (MDG) (7,792 members)
> This group is designed to provide a discussion forum for mediators around mediation issues and issues of professional practice.

[1] This chapter is loosely based on Garzone (2018a), originally published in *Altre Modernità / Other Modernities*.

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International Arbitration (IA) (29,124 members)
This group is a network database of professionals working in the legal field of international arbitration, including commercial and investment-state arbitration in a wide range of industry sectors, including but not limited to aviation, aerospace, chemicals, construction, communications, oil & gas.

The four groups have different sizes, also on account of the substantiality of the professional collectivity involved, as arbitrators and mediators are only a segment of the legal professional community. Nevertheless, all four groups analysed are reasonably active, with at least two postings a day on each of them or more. For each of the groups, online exchanges were collected for a whole month from early May to early June 2018, including both posts and comments. *Table 4.1* shows the number of exchanges included in the corpus, which totals 557.

Table 4.1. – Details of groups examined.

Group	Members	Exchanges in month considered
Leadership for Laywers	68,312	198
LegalTech Network	77,714	186
International Arbitration Group	29,124	98
Mediation Discussion Group	7,792	75

2.2. *Method*

The methodological approach adopted in this study is Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (Herring 2004), a broad conceptualization which envisages the application of methods adapted from any of the language-focused disciplines to the analysis of online discourse. Herring defines it as "language-focused content analysis" (*ibid.*, 341), describing it as a toolkit from which every researcher can choose the instruments that are most suitable to explore the case at hand.

This study, based on the analysis of texts exchanged in interactions (Herring's "logs of verbal interaction", *ibid.*, 339) within the LI groups considered, relies on discourse analytical tools (cf. Chapter 3, § 1), and at the same time takes account of the inherent properties of computer-mediated communication and its semiotic and contextual coordinates.

In this respect, an especially useful concept is that of *proximity*, which can be borrowed from the literature on scientific communication (Hyland 2010) and transferred to the context of LI groups. It refers to "a writer's

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control of rhetorical features which display authority as an expert and a personal position towards issues in an unfolding text" (*ibid.*, 117). The criteria outlined by Hyland are useful for the analysis of Web-mediated communication on account of their flexibility and multidimensionality: *Organisation* includes all aspects of text design and presentation, and is therefore suited also to the description of the online environment; (*Argument*) *Structure* looks at the focus and framing of knowledge exposition, also considering the syntactic resources deployed (e.g. linguistic devices contributing to agentivity and impersonality); *Stance* regards expression of personal attitude, including evaluation and metadiscourse; *Reader engagement*, i.e. linguistic devices encoding the presence of the addressee in the text (especially reader pronouns and questions); *Credibility* regards the reliability of sources of knowledge, which online is often realized by means of hyperlinks redirecting to authoritative sources.

Although not applied systematically, all these notions make it possible to identify the discursive positioning of each participant within the relevant group and the discursive devices used to introduce and present professional knowledge, updates and information.

The analytical toolbox relied on also marginally includes pragmatic notions drawn on genre analysis for the purpose of identifying actions performed in online discourse (Bhatia 2004; [1993] 2013; Swales 2004), starting from the assumption that LI group conversations constitute a genre – a notion which I am aware some authors would question (Miller and Shepherd 2009) [2] – and a reconfigured genre rather than an emergent one (cf. Herring 2013, 14) for the fact of being conversational and monomodal, rather than collaborative and multimodal.

3. Conversations on LI groups

As in other SNSs (e.g. Facebook), on LI groups conversations are organised in posts and comments, with peripheral features similar to those of posts on Facebook, blogs and other social media (cf. Myers 2010): a picture of the writer in the upper left corner of the relevant section, accompanied by a caption introducing her/him, with name and/or job description, or the specification of some personal traits embedded

[2] Miller and Shepherd's (2009) objection that blogs cannot be considered a genre, but only a medium can obviously also be applied to SNS group conversations. I have questioned this objection in Garzone (2012).

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from the initial phrase of the personal profile – e.g. "Property lawyer"; "Humourist, (aka humourist) author and speaker" –, but sometimes also 'promotional' phrases – like "Legal Translations performed ONLY by Lawyer-Translators"; "Helping people resolve conflict"; "Looking for the right mediator? Look here: [link]" –, although the "Rules" of most groups include a "No advertising of services" prescription.

Figure 4.1 shows the standard layout of a post.

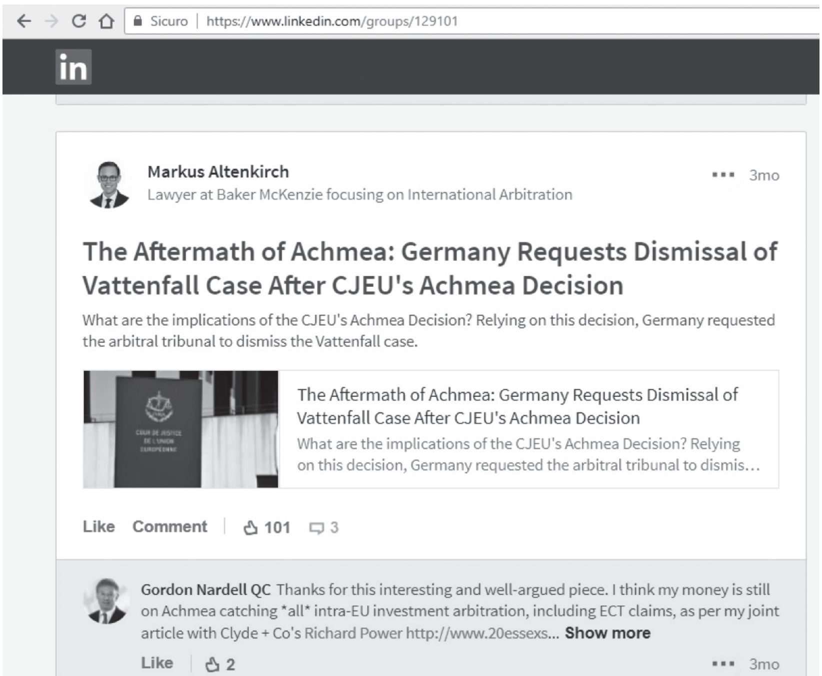

Figure 4.1. – Layout of a LI group post (IA group).

The headline "The Aftermath of Achmea: Germany Requests Dismissal of Vattenfall Case after CJEU's Achmea Decision" is followed by a brief text:

> What are the implications of the CJEU's Achmea Decision? Relying on this decision, Germany requested the arbitral tribunal to dismiss the Vattenfall case.

The text is very short and in practice rephrases exactly the content of the headline switching to a verbal style from the typically nominal structure of the title and inserting a question, which activates reader-engagement. The

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headline and text appear again in the link preview underneath, i.e. a separate section where a visual preview of the linked website is displayed, thus showing that the post is only a preview of a text that resides elsewhere.

Post texts tend to be always short, but – as in the post in *Figure 4.1* – the reader can either expand them or choose to be redirected to a longer, more complete version posted elsewhere.

A look at the headlines of the posts included in the corpus can provide an idea of the topic and the rhetorical purpose of each post, i.e. in generic terms (cf. Bhatia [1993] 2013), the move that the post intends to accomplish. In keeping with the description and aim of the groups, in many cases the posts propose a topic or an issue for discussion, e.g.

> "Peer mediation?" (MDG)
> "Whether dispute between non-signatory to arbitration agreement can be referred to arbitration in domestic arbitration?" (IA)
> "Corporate governance and sustainable development" (LL)
> "What does GDPR mean for an organization's hybrid IT strategy?" (LI&IN)

The moves announced in these headlines are: discussing the viability of peer mediation, discussing the possibility that in domestic arbitration also a non-signatory party may be bound by an arbitration agreement, discussing corporate governance and sustainable development, discussing the meaning of GDPR for an organization's hybrid IT strategy.

Other recurrent moves are:

- communicating a new development in the profession and its areas of activity (a new statute, a decision taken by a court or a tribunal, an award issued), e.g.

  > "Property Rights of Women in India!" (LL)
  > "New UAE Arbitration Law Issued" (IA)

- giving tips and suggestions for practice, e.g.

  > "Don't Become Collateral Damage" (LL)
  > "Five Ways to Make Your Days Better" (LL)
  > "Negotiating via e-mail: challenges and tactics" (IA)

- announcing events and conferences, e.g.

  > "Free Webinar: 15 Ways to Market Your Training Programme and Learning Tech" (LI&IN)
  > "Arbitration Conference London 15 June 2018" (IA)

- announcing reports, publications or projects, e.g.

  > "Research Project: The mediation process for handling disputes in interfirm strategic alliances" (MDG)

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"LCIA publishes its facts and figures: The 2017 Casework Report" (IA)
"Introducing the Global Risk Series - Book 1 Risk Management How Tos" (LL)

- asking for help or assistance (usually by novices or students), e.g.

"Seeking Examples for a book […]. Do you have one to contribute?" (MDG)
"Do You Start with Joint Sessions in Your Construction Mediations?" (IA)
"Attending Legal Sec? Want to talk about CLE tracking?" (LI&IN)

It can be noted that, on account of their attention-catching function, many of the headlines tend to be highly interpersonal, addressing the reader directly with questions, imperatives and/or second person pronouns, while others are more clearly ideational, generally consisting of one or more nominal structures.

In more general terms, as regards the purpose of LI group conversations, the analysis of headlines seems to suggest that professionals' participation in LI groups is aimed at three main functions: sharing knowledge, finding and giving updates and information, and participating in discussions. However, this inference needs to be confirmed in light of the analysis of the actual posts.

3.1. *Posts: discursive aspects*

In the next section, the analysis of the linguistic and discursive aspects of posts and comments will make it possible to identify the rhetorical strategies group members deploy to display their virtual identity, disseminate expert knowledge and construct their arguments.

As pointed out above, the text in posts tends to be very short or reduced to the headline only, because in terms of organisation (in Hyland's 2010 sense) LI shares with other SNSs the peculiarity that in each case only two or three introductory lines are displayed (often no more than 50 words) by default, as the complete text can be reached only by using the *Show more* link or a hyperlink leading to a different web page or site.

Here are some examples of texts as they appear by default on the LI group page:

(1) *How to Transform Yourself from an Operational manager to a Strategic Leader*
Learn what it takes to transform yourself to become a Strategic Leader. (LL)

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(2) *So You Want to Hold a Contest (and Not Go to Jail)?*
Have a marketing department that loves contests and sweepstakes? Find out the basics of what in-house legal teams need to know. (LL)

(3) *"Charlie's Law"*
Charlie's parents want a 'Charlie's Law' to prevent cases like these whereby an "independent mediator" is used to come to an agreement between hospitals and families. (MDG)

(4) *The Prague Rules - Inquisitorial Rules on the Taking of Evidence in International Arbitration*
Will the so-called "Prague Rules" help to reduce the time and costs of arbitration proceedings as promised by the Working Group? We compare the Prague Rules with the IBA Rules on the Taking of Evidence. (IA)

(5) *Free Webinars about Learning Technology - Topics You'd Like to See?*
I'll be delivering free webinars related to learning technology starting in mid July. They will be open to everyone. Are there any learning management system topics you want to explore? Selection, implementation, general administration? Maybe somethi… *Show more* (LI&IN)

(6) *This week I look at some of the legal aspects of aircraft management agreements. Please click on the link below* [headline only] (MDG)

These representative examples of posts exemplify the different discursive approaches that characterise them. Examples (1) and (2) above exemplify the highly interpersonal, reader-engaging structure prevailing in this kind of texts. They address the reader directly in the second person, ask readers questions and exhort them to perform actions. In example (3), making reference to baby Charlie's case, the linguistic structures present the topics impersonally, raising the issue of mediation between hospitals and families in problematic cases. In example (4) focusing on the Prague Rules, the text starts with a question and the writer replies to it presenting himself as part of a professional group capable of discussing the issue competently. In general, in posts recourse to the first person plural pronoun is rather rare. Less rare, appearing in about 10% of the posts, is recourse to first person singular, which is prevalently used in posts that focus on contingent events, as in example (5), inviting to a webinar ("Free Webinars about Learning Technology"), which is highly interpersonal, with self-mention used in combination with the second person pronoun, as can be seen in the two questions appearing respectively in the headline and in the body text.

But the analysis of posts is complete only if their full text is considered. As anticipated, in many cases the full text is made available by clicking on the *Show more* button.

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For instance, in a post titled *Messaging Security: Need to Protect the Confidential Information*, signed by Sneha Patil, Technology Executive | security specialist, published on the LI&IN group, by default the following lines are displayed:

(7) As the frequency of security breaches has increased over the past 5 years, organizations have increased their IT security investments to protect against advanced messaging threats. The constant pressure of managing sensitive data of consumers while t… *Show more*

A click on *Show more* will expand the text to 258 words, consisting of a general statement which contextualizes the issue:

(7a) The constant pressure of managing sensitive data of consumers while transmission, along with the need to manage stringent compliances, has led enterprises of all sizes to adopt messaging security solutions for critical information protection.

Evidently here an effort is made to maintain a specialist register, constructing an image of expertise for the person responsible for the post. The tone is typically impersonal, but in the following paragraph there is a question that re-activates reader-orientation:

(7b) Why Enterprises are adopting Messaging Security?
• Messaging security solution helps organizations protect their communications and comply with stringent regulatory compliance. […].

In the two subsequent paragraphs the text goes on to illustrate in detail the need for security in cloud messaging as well as in email messaging in a competent technical tone, with inanimate subjects, recourse to acronyms (CAGR, PCI, DSS, etc.) and even recourse to a formal *where*- word (*wherein*):

(7c) Cloud messaging security solutions are available according to customer's demand, *wherein* a customer can start or stop any service, at will. (emphasis added)

Overall the post offers an informative overview of problems connected with companies' messaging security and the possible solutions, with no reference to any specific producer (McAfee, Cisco, Symantec, Microsoft and Google are all mentioned).

In other cases, the technical information given is put to use to promote something, as is the case with the following post by Christina Gruen, Head of Partner and Industry Solutions Marketing, titled "Growth Through Innovation: 7 Ways to Leverage Mobile Expense Management and Drive Profitability". The post opens as follows (with the lines displayed by default highlighted in italics):

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(8) *Market benchmarks indicate that Travel & Entertainment (T&E) expenses are a firm's #2 indirect cost with a run rate of 1-12% of annual revenues. Many firms struggle with disjointed processes for capturing, tracking and reconciling client billable T&E* and that leads to highly inefficient workflows that add significant additional hidden costs.
[See more] [3]
I invite you to join our thought leadership webinar on Tuesday, June 12th at 11:00am Pacific/2:00pm Eastern when we'll discuss:
• How to achieve almost instant ROI from standardizing key spend management processes across your firm and organization […].
Even if you can't make the date/time for the webinar, please register today and receive the recorded webinar to view at your convenience:
www.chr.om/ExpenseManagementBestPractices
Hope to see you online! (LI&IN)

The initial lines function as a teaser for potential readers, using impersonal and technical terms to pose a serious problem most companies have to deal with. When expanded by clicking on *Show more*, these lines turn up to be the introduction to a text promoting a webinar on the topic. Thus the initial apparently knowledge-focused approach leaves way to a definitely promotional tone. It is interesting that the author refers to herself in the first person, as the subject who invites users to the webinar, while all the rest of the text is reader-oriented addressing the reader in the second person, with even a polite imperative ("please register"). The only exception is one occurrence of *we* in its inclusive meaning obviously aimed at getting the potential participants involved directly as members of a professional ingroup. The tone is technical throughout, with recourse to domain-specific terms ("run rate", "annual revenues", "client billable T&E", "workflows", "ROI", "key spend management processes"), thus constructing a highly professional identity for the author and the organization offering the webinar.

But in the overwhelming majority of cases, the two or three lines displayed are all the text actually contained in the post, and serve as a trailer for a longer excerpt that is posted elsewhere online, on LinkedIn Pulse, a blog or a website maintained by the author of the post or his/her organization, or an online magazine article (e.g. *Forbes*), occasionally even a TED talk, a podcast or a video. The link to this external text (or multimodal resource) is featured in a box in the lower part of the tab in the form of a link preview, usually consisting of its title and initial lines.

[3] The *See more* caption disappears when the text is expanded by clicking on it. Here it is maintained, in square brackets, to show the original length of the post.

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For instance in the following post on IA, signed by Tim Dr. Meyer-Dulheuer, Patent Attorney at Dr. Meyer-Dulheuer & Partners LLP, Patent Attorneys, there appears the following text (in its expanded form):

(9) *Data protection: many products on online trading platforms concerned*
A few weeks ago, a German District Court prohibited a pharmacist from selling pharmacy-only medicines via the Amazon trading platform.
This is a far-reaching ruling on data protection, especially concerning all sensitive data.
Explosive: it implies that every competitor has the right to sue as soon as he would discover an infringement of a product on an online trading platform such as Amazon that may be associated with sensitive data - much more than just the customer data of pharmacies. http://ow.ly/flQd30kf-Cxw Show less

These lines inform the user about a German District Court's final decision and its implications [4]. Although the wording is impersonal, the author's obvious purpose is to express his stance, highlighting the importance of the ruling which is described as "far-reaching" and "explosive" because of its implications, which amount to "much more" than the contingent case. It is followed by a box with the link preview consisting of the title and the first few lines of a detailed report (a blog post) on the case:

(9a) *Data protection for sensitive data: Pharmacist may not sell drugs via Amazon*
An important and very far-reaching ruling on data protection has already been reached before the entry into force of the basic […].

These lines are in actual fact a hyperlink redirecting the user to a 832-word text published on the website of the author's law firm, in the Blog section (incidentally, bilingual German and US English), and has the form of a 'technical' summary of the landmark ruling.

Thus the LI post sets forth an evaluation of the significance of the court decision, establishing the author's competence and authority to judge the weight and consequences of a judgment, and at the same time redirects the user to read a more detailed specialist account of the issues at stake.

It can thus be stated that the organisation of group conversations is strongly conditioned by the hypermedia environment where it is set. Text is not used as a single and continuous entity, but rather as an assembly of

[4] The landmark judgment in question was delivered by the German District Court of Dessau-Roßlau which declared sale of drugs via Amazon illegal on account of data protection for sensitive data as provided for by the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in force since 25 May 2018.

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parts that can be shown only partially, or has to be retrieved at a different URL thanks to the navigating mode (Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen 2004). Furthermore, many of the posts are not self-standing, but rather depend on the connection with the main text published on another page or website. This means that the LI group conversation is a genre that is not complete in itself, being symbiotic with other genres to which it is linked hypertextually.

As far as a posts' authors are concerned, the hypertextual character of the LI makes more information available on them than can be inferred from the texts they post. By clicking on the author's name the user can gain access to her/his personal profile, which provides exhaustive information about a person's professional status, a complete resumé of education and career, and current professional activity, and even non professional interests and hobbies, as described in Chapter 3. Other useful elements are the list of his/her skills with endorsements by other professionals and the list of the groups of which s/he is a member.

Thus – as pointed out in Chapter 3, § 3.1 – thanks to the affordances of the LI environment the identity of people publishing posts in group conversations is constructed not only on the basis of elements that are "given off", but also of elements that are "given" (Goffman 1959). If a user showcases her/his expertise by publishing interesting and competent posts, the accessibility of the profile in a way guarantees her/his authoritativeness. The credibility of the contents posted is not based only on the reliability of the sources to which reference is made, but also on the 'reputation' of the author which in case of doubt can be verified by looking at the hard facts set forth in the profile. It can be argued that for a professional the fact of joining a group and participating in its conversations can be highly beneficial in terms of personal branding, an activity which is advertised among the main options offered by LI.

But participation in LI groups is often motivated by more explicit forms of promotion for goods and services, which has an impact on the micro-linguistic characteristics of discourse, i.e. on the way knowledge is presented, with strong reader-orientation being a recurrent feature of promotional discourse.

As pointed out above, headlines tend to be by definition strongly reader-oriented, and often so is the short segment of text that is immediately visible, especially if it is meant to attract the reader's attention in order to redirect it to a text posted elsewhere. See the following examples:

(10) Want to improve your knowledge and join the discussion on procedural and technical innovations to reduce time and cost in #arbitration? (IA)

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(11) Legal marketing has become more competitive. Lawyers need every advantage to attract new clients. Today, everyone is searching online. You may already have a website, but if you aren't deploying a full array of marketing tactics, your phone won't be ringing. (LL)

In these examples, reader-engagement is realized by means of a question and by addressing recipients directly as *you*.

As regards the articles to which the user is redirected, it is difficult to generalise, but texts whose real purpose is to advance knowledge in some respect, either practical or theoretical, tend to display the features of specialist communication, giving preference to impersonal traits and domain-specific lexicon. For instance in a post published on the LI&IN group titled "Law's unique take on 'Time is Money' and why it must change" the headline itself is a link redirecting the reader to a *Forbes* article on how to expand access, and improve and accelerate the delivery of legal services. The article deals with the issue under a professional perspective, using all sorts of impersonal linguistic resources, from nominalisations to passives, from inanimate subjects to anticipatory *it*, to confer a typically specialised tone on discourse. This is an instance of a domain-specific approach to the transmission of professional knowledge where the author has no ulterior motive (apart from showcasing his competence).

But in many other cases, the author of a post has an agenda that goes beyond the sharing of information. A case in point is a post similar to the one discussed above, published on the LI&IN group, "Time for the way attorneys look at time entry to change" (posted by John Blake, Regional Director of Sales at Bellefield Systems), where time is also the main topic, the focus being on how time and services are billed to clients by law firms. Although this post and the article it re-directs to ("[Case study] How to achieve a timekeeping implementation that makes other firms jealous" [5]) may seem reasonably informative, it emerges that their ultimate purpose is to promote the *iTimeKeep* solution, an app to be used on computers or mobile devices.

This is true of many of the posts. Their declared purpose is to analyse a recurrent issue or discuss solutions to a problem, but in actual fact they have a promotional aim which overrides all other objectives and, in textual terms, determines the reader-orientation typical of promotional discourse.

[5] http://blog.bellefield.com/case-study-how-to-achieve-a-timekeeping-implementation-that-makes-other-firms-jealous [10/09/2019].

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3.2. *Comments*

After discussing in depth posts' characteristics, attention will now be addressed to comments. Although the topics they deal with can be of great interest for legal practitioners, the posts discussed in § 3.1 did not attract any comment in the month after their publication. This is a constant trait of these legal professional groups: on the IA group only one in three posts attracts a comment, less than one in five on MDG, about one in ten in LL and one in fifteen in LI&IN.

And when there actually are comments, they are isolated, and often contingently evaluative, being as short as "Such a beneficial topic for all firms !!!!", or slightly more elaborate, with only a small addition by the commenter, e.g. "A wonderful storyline about conviction as a leadership quality to which could be added: passion".

But in some cases the comment is more complex. For instance, only one comment is attracted by a post on the LL group titled "Emotional intelligence training, meaningful work, and legal leadership" redirecting to an article of the same author published on a blog he maintains ("Psycholawlogy"):

(12) **Dina Eisenberg Esq.** This is a well-timed discussion as the profession transforms itself. We need to understand the idea of meaningfulness at work for our own happiness and to better service clients. All lawyers should take EQ [6] training at some point.

This comment is highly evaluative and clearly aimed at stance-taking, defining the post as "well-timed", and sets forth other considerations in the first person plural, referring to the legal profession with inclusive "we".

An interesting fact in terms of organization is that quite frequently also comments, posted as they are on the group page, nevertheless refer to the full article which is published on another website.

As far as the degree of interaction is concerned, only in few cases do posts actually sparkle a real debate, attracting several comments. One of such cases is a post on MDG significantly entitled "How to resolve your workplace conflict peacefully?" which will be discussed as an example. As in most other posts, only a couple of lines appear on LI (41 words), identical to those appearing in the link preview, and the user is redirected to a blog, the MediatorSelect Blog, where the complete article appears, comprising 2,198 words. In the month following its publication (7 May

[6] EQ stands for 'emotional quotient', otherwise known as 'emotional intelligence'.

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2018), the post attracted nine comments of variable length – from 10 to 185 words – posted on the LI group page (while, quite interestingly, there were no comments at all to the original blog post on the relevant website).

The post deals with workplace conflicts and argues in favour of mediation as an effective solution. The author's interest in the topic seems to be genuine, although the caption accompanying his name ("Looking for the Right Mediator? I help connect Hiring Parties with …") proves that he is engaging in this conversation with the ultimate aim to promote his own services as mediator.

The first three short comments focus on the content of the article and give rise to a self-contained three-part exchange (Tsui 1989), i.e. an adjacency pair plus a follow-up move:

(13) **Siprachanh "Sippy" Chanthaphaychith** An excellent article! […].
Khaled Soufi Thank you, Siprachanh, we appreciate your feedback :)
Khaled Soufi It's may pleasure and gratitude to be able to read your work, Khaled Soufi.

But after this initial stage characterized by polite exchanges, a more meaningful and longer comment (142 words) triggers a discussion on the possible solutions to conflict in the workplace, with ideas negotiated among four commenters,

(14) **Julie Mayer** Great article and absolutely correct… however there is another dynamic to remember in workplace conflict… no employer pays an employee to come to work for a relationship. Workplace mediation needs to separate the conflict from the emotion and build a workplace agreement that can be managed. […].

In this comment it is interesting that the appreciation for the article is followed by an objection introduced by "however" to the effect that in the workplace personal emotions must be put aside in favour of efficiency and productivity. In the subsequent conversation, comments refer to Mayer's and other participants' comments rather than to the main article:

(15) **John (Norval) Settle** I agree with you in principle, Julia. Also, a piece that's missing here is recognition that mediation is "second best" -- the "best" solution lies in developing leaders who understand the human and practical dynamics of anticipating and managing conflict. […].
Paul Rajkowski And just where are those leaders who understand the human and practical dynamics of anticipating and managing conflict coming from? In the moment decision making is needed and that usually is a mediation session between the conflictees. […].
Julie Mayer I thoroughly agree with both of you that leadership needs to include having courageous conversations […] the right conversation at the

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> right time with the right people. Many times the leaders will notice and talk about behaviours but not with the staff. I was called to do a mediation between two very senior staff who had not spoken to each other for two years. […].
> **Khaled Soufi** Agree with you mediation is not meant to be the first way to resolve the workplace conflicts […] actually in the in the paragraph "How to resolve conflict in the workplace?" mediation is the last one. Mediation could be used when other tools didn't work. […].

Here commenters add new ideas to the article's content, each expressing a slightly different position and offering a contribution that is accepted and re-elaborated by the other interlocutors, until the person who published the post in the first place, Khaled Soufi, intervenes in the discussion observing that in actual fact those ideas were already set out in the original article and thus re-affirms his status as the initiator and moderator of the debate.

All discussants express their agreement in the first person singular ("I agree"), an element that marks a stark difference with the language used in the posts and in the articles/posts to which they are linked: in the comments there are contractions, a direct form of address (Julia), a rather loose syntax mimicking oral language, the insertion of a personal narrative sequence in Mayer's last turn ("I was called to do a mediation […]"), and even recourse to an emoticon (not reproduced here). This shows very well that comments are perceived by participants as a different contribution to the genre, where interpersonal professional exchanges take an informal approach and are genuinely interactive and argumentative, as proved by recourse to various concessive and adversative devices (however, but, surely).

Unfortunately these complex and genuinely interactive conversation threads are rather rare on LI groups. The dearth of comments provides evidence that the desire to *debate* problems is certainly not the real motivation moving people to participate in a group, in spite of the declarations set out in groups' introductory texts. Sharing knowledge, pointing out problems to the attention of other professionals, giving and getting updates on the profession are much more plausible motives. Another important reason is personal branding, i.e. the effort to establish an authoritative and competent image of oneself for professional and career purposes.

But for many users the main intent seems to be of a promotional kind and derives from their need or desire to advertise goods or services. The genre of group conversations is thus bent (Bhatia 2004) to the personal agenda of its members and used as a promotional instrument.

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4. Final remarks

The analysis of a corpus of 557 posts published on LI groups of legal practitioners provides evidence that of the three main aims identified through the analysis of headlines, sharing knowledge, finding and giving updates and information, and participating in discussions, only the first two are confirmed unconditionally, while only rarely do participants seem to have any real desire to discuss professional issues with other group members. Although members' activities within LI groups are generally called "conversations" or "interactions", in light of the results of the analysis it must be kept in mind that these denominations are essentially conventional as in most cases they do not comply with the broad definition of online conversations given by Herring (2010, 4) as "any exchange of messages between two or more participants, where the messages that follow bear at least minimal relevance to those that preceded or are otherwise intended as responses". Further research is needed to verify if the relative scarcity of comments is a peculiarity of legal practitioners' groups or is a general characteristic of LI groups.

Members' motivations seem to be different from those stated in the texts introducing the groups on their home pages. Rather than to debate with other professionals, group members seem to desire to simply share their knowledge, bringing issues or developments to the attention of other professionals. Personal branding is another reason, as this can contribute to showcasing their expertise and enhancing their professional reputation. But even more frequently their main purpose is that of promoting goods (e.g. software solutions) or services, which is done more or less openly in spite of the fact that in the Rules of three out of four groups examined (International Arbitration, Meidation Discussion Group, LegalTech & Innovation Network) there is an explicit provision stating that no promotion/marketing of commercial products and services is allowed. This is possibly why the advertising activities are concealed as tips for professional improvement or solutions for recurrent problems. This is an obvious case of genre bending (Bhatia 2004), typically turning a professional genre into a promotional one.

Another interesting aspect that has emerged from the analysis regards the organisation of posts, which in many cases are not self-standing, but rather symbiotic with other texts (e.g. articles, blog posts) or resources published on other websites. In this respect, the affordances of the medium are used to enact forms of meaning-making that cross genre boundaries. This can be effectively described by making recourse to Lemke's notion of *traversals* (2005, 46) which refers to "temporal-

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experiential linkings, sequences, and catenations of meaningful elements that deliberately or accidentally, but radically, cross genre boundaries", in contrast with the well-defined and rigid boundaries of standardised "traditional" genres. The new media enable the use of "more resources for hybridization"; indeed, in the case at hand, this generates what could be defined a "symbiosis" of genres. In LI group posts and comments, meaning is negotiated along traversals that cross genre boundaries.

These developments open up new perspectives, also in terms of linguistic and discursive analysis. They also bring new problems for the analyst. For instance, when collecting corpora and having to decide what to include: only the part of the post published on the group site or the whole post retrieved from a blog, a website, a TED talk? only posts or also comments? in two separate corpora or in one corpus, without distinction? All these issues which now seem problematic will likely be solved as Web-mediated communication becomes the rule, rather than the exception, in professional interaction.

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5. Social Media for HR Recruitment: Job Advertisements on LinkedIn

1. Introduction: LinkedIn as the professional social networking site

In a speech delivered in 2014 (Weiner 2014) LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner outlined the idea of the first 'Economic Graph' to be developed by LinkedIn, that is, a digital representation of the global economy including a profile for every company in the world, and a digital representation for every job offered by these companies, and of every skill required to obtain these jobs, based on all the data available on LinkedIn. On this basis LinkedIn would be in a position to "overlay the relevant professional knowledge for everyone of those individual members, companies and universities to the extent they want to share" (cf. also https://economicgraph.linkedin.com/ [15/10/2019]). This grand vision highlights LinkedIn's core value proposition, "connect talent with opportunities at massive scale", in Weiner's words.

Founded in 2003 (cf. boyd and Ellison 2007, 212), LinkedIn is the most important professional social networking site (cf. Chapter 3, § 3.2). Its membership, which also includes corporate and institutional subjects, has grown exponentially in the last few years, reaching 610 million in mid 2019, with 303 million active monthly users, 40% of which visit the site daily. It is used by 92% of Fortune 500 companies [1].

As illustrated in Chapters 3 and 4, it offers important networking opportunities to professional people, but it also features a jobs section which not only can be searched, but also automatically selects the offers that potentially fit each user's profile and offers various tools to support users seeking a job and companies searching for suitable employees.

[1] Cf. https://99firms.com/blog/linkedin-statistics/#gref [10/10/2019].

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So LI gives users the opportunity to connect with the professional world, stay informed through professional news and knowledge, get hired and build their careers (Weiner 2014). According to Weiner this is achieved thanks to three main components: Identity, manifested through the professional profile of record, i.e. a permanent public profile posted on the site (cf. Chapter 3, § 4.1); Network, as it connects all the world's professionals; and Knowledge, as it qualifies as the "definitive professional publishing platform" (Slideshare, Groups, Pulse, Influencers). It also offers various useful instruments for businesses, with four main Business Solutions: Hire (Talent Solutions), Market (Marketing Solutions), Sell (Sales Solutions), and Learn (Learning Solutions).

Within this context, Talent Solutions offers a whole set of tools to recruit candidates, source talent and build one's brand (cf. https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions [09/10/2019]; cf. also Napolitano e Parviero 2015). Among these, the most important readily available function is job posting. Companies can post their openings on LinkedIn, and this enables them to reach suitable candidates. One of its great advantages is that it automatically advertises job postings to LinkedIn members with profiles that match them, and this puts job ads right on the desktop of candidates with the right skills and experience, even if they are not active job seekers. The recruiting Company will also receive a list of members who could be a good fit for their hiring needs.

An important option to support a company's HR recruiting efforts is to maintain a career page on LinkedIn (part of Talent Solutions) where it can promote its Employer Brand, giving candidates an authentic view into the corporate culture and letting them explore company life. The layout of Career Pages, renewed in October 2016 with a design that "puts the spotlight on company culture and job opportunities" [2], and improved in November 2018 to "Give You More Ways to Easily Engage and Connect with Candidates" [3], features three main tabs, the "What We Do" tab, similar to the traditional company description, with new features such as Recent Updates and the renewed Company Photos section, the "Life" tab with contents illustrating what life is really like at the company, with employee-created content, videos and photos, and the "Jobs" tab, which displays all job adverts the company has posted on LinkedIn, presenting first the jobs that match the viewers' skills and

[2] https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/product-updates/2016/introducing-the-next-generation-of-linkedin-career-pages [10/10/2019].

[3] https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/product-updates/2018/new-linkedin-pages-design-engages-candidates [10/10/2019].

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expertise. Another valuable support to job posting in terms of Employer Branding are the Showcase Pages which, although not specifically aimed at recruiting (they are classified as Marketing Solutions), can be of great value and have the advantage of being free of charge. Showcase Pages are extensions of the Company Page that deal with specific aspects, promote specific business units or initiatives, address specific target groups or audience segments, use different languages, etc.

The main focus in this chapter is on job advertisements on LinkedIn [4]. Job ads are a long-lived genre that for most of its life existed mainly in the daily/weekly press environment in the form of classified ad. With the advent of the Internet ads moved to specialised job search sites like *indeed* (www.indeed.com) [5], *totaljobs* (https://www.totaljobs.com/) and *monster* (https://www.monster.co.uk/) and to the Job Sections of online newspapers into separate job sites, like *Guardian Jobs* (https://jobs.theguardian.com/), *Telegraph Jobs* (https://jobs.telegraph.co.uk/) or *Independent Jobs* (http://independentjobs.independent.co.uk/). The next step in the evolution of the genre was the rise of Social Networking Sites (SNSs), and in particular of LinkedIn, specialised in the offer of careers content, including careers tabs and job ads, and having recruitment as one of its most important functions.

It can be expected that in itself the migration to a new medium will have had an impact on the characteristics of the job ad genre, and further changes can be expected to have been caused by its recontextualisation in LinkedIn. This poses the question of the generic integrity of the job ad posted online, and in particular of the job ad on LinkedIn. To provide a reply to this question, the analysis will focus on the description of the peculiarities of LinkedIn job advertisement as a sub-genre, identifying similarities with and differences from the traditional printed job ads published in newspapers, as well as job ads posted on other online platforms.

2. Materials and method

This study is based on the analysis of a corpus of 172 job advertisements originally posted on LinkedIn, with reference to four selected locations – London, Amsterdam, New York and Melbourne – to have global

[4] On LinkedIn job ads cf. also Garzone (2015a; 2018), on which this chapter is loosely based.

[5] Unless otherwise indicated, all websites were last visited on 25 October 2019.

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representativeness and avoid any possible geographical distortions. The job functions considered are Project Manager (PM) and similar middle management positions. 50 ads were downloaded for each location from 15 to 28 February 2017, with the exception of Amsterdam, for which only 22 ads for the kind of position chosen were found. The corpus consists of a total of 99,598 running words, STT 48.94, with each single advertisement varying in length from 182 to 1,287 words, and an average length of 571 words.

This corpus is first submitted to qualitativative investigation, looking in particular at the macro-structure of job ads in a genre-analytical perspective. Then a finer-grained analysis of the way the moves constituting the genre are realized is carried out, also using the Wordsmith Tools 6.0 software suite (Scott 2012).

The study is set in a discourse-analytical framework (cf. Chapter 3, § 1), with special reference to genre analysis (Swales 1990; 2004; Bhatia 2004; [1993] 2013), and to discourse analytical and linguistic research on social media interaction, and in particular on SNSs (e.g. boyd and Ellison 2007; Thelwall and Stuart 2010; Papacharissi 2011; Thurlow and Mroczek 2011), which so far have given little attention to LinkedIn, with very few studies devoted to it, e.g. a research by Papacharissi (2009) comparing Facebook, LinkedIn and AsmallWorld, and Garzone's (2016) comparative investigation of professional groups on LinkedIn and Facebook. Of interest is also an early survey-based study of Internet recruitment and selection in the UK by Williams and Verhoeven (2008).

As regards specifically job announcements, for contextualisation purposes reference is made to reports produced within the corporate world investigating the impact of social media on the recruitment process and on job seekers' behaviour (e.g. Nigel Wright Recruitment 2011; Broughton, Foley, and Cox 2013; CareerBuilder 2016), and to studies of recruitment advertising carried out in other disciplinary perspectives (e.g. economics: Ryan, Gubern, and Rodriguez 2000; management: Rynes and Cable 2003; organizational psychology: Rafaeli 2001). Reference is also made to studies of employer branding (e.g. Ambler and Barrow 1996; Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Barrow and Mosley 2005; Christiaans 2013), a notion that brings together HR and brand management (Ambler and Barrow 1996) and refers to "the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity" (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004) enacted by a company to attract applications from the most suitable and capable applicants, but also with the side effect of contributing to increasing the satisfaction and productivity of current employees (cf. *ibidem*).

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In linguistics and discourse analysis the literature on job advertisements is relatively limited. Apart from case studies presented in general works whose main focus is on other aspects (e.g. Bhatia 2004, 62, dealing with the job ad in his discussion and classification of promotional genres; Fairclough [1995] 2010, 142-148, discussing advertisements for positions in the university as evidence of the marketization of the academic world; Asprey 2005, discussing the job ad as a special case in advertising), there have been isolated studies on various aspects, like Solly (2005) on identity construction in primary school job ads, Loth *et al.* (2010) on information extraction, Lago and Hewitt (2004), presenting a comparative analysis of English and Spanish ads, and van Meurs' (2010) book-length study of job ads in English in the Netherlands.

More specifically relevant to the scope of this chapter is the monograph on classifieds by Bruthiaux (1996), which first introduced the study of the job advertisement as a genre in its own right as a classified ad, and was followed by Gillaerts (2012), centred on job announcements in Dutch in Belgium. In a similar vein, but characterised by a more systematic approach, is Łącka-Badura's work focusing on online ads, including various essays (Łącka-Badura 2013; 2014) later integrated into a book-length study (Łącka-Badura 2015).

After this brief overview of various strands of previous research that are considered potentially useful for the sake of the analysis presented here, in the next section a more detailed account will be given of the findings of discourse analytical studies of the job ad genre.

3. The job advertisement as a genre

The "job ad[vert[isement]" or "job announcement" is a highly restrained genre that has been around for a very long time. Originally published in newspapers or (more rarely) in magazines, often among the classifieds or on the careers page, job ads were heavily conditioned by space limitations because of the expensiveness of advertising space, their publication being subject to a fee calculated per word. This of course was a good reason for brevity and simplicity. Indeed in a study of classifieds conducted on a 1991-1992 corpus including 200 job ads, Bruthiaux (1996) sees job ads and other classifieds as instances of "linguistic simplicity" (*ibid.*, 90). Their traditional style was concise and standardized, characterized by "conventionalised prefabricated segments […] in more or less predictable sequences", a feature made possible by their "narrow communica-

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tive function" (*ibid.*, 91). These recurrent idiomatic sequences and fixed collocations also functioned as register markers. When published in classifieds, job ads also frequently utilized recurrent conventional abbreviations such as: xlnt = excellent, secy = secretary, exp = experience, & = and, wtd = wanted, pls = please, etc. (*ibid.*, 123).

As regards the structure of the standard job ad, Bruthiaux also identifies five main components: *the target*, i.e. job description; *the recruiter*, i.e. information about the company or the individual placing the ad; *the requirements*, i.e. specifying qualifications and experience; *the reward*, i.e. salary and benefits, if any; and *a contact segment*.

In his diachronic study of job announcements in Dutch newspapers from 1944 to 2010, Gillaerts (2012) identifies more or less the same elements as found by Bruthiaux, which he formulates in terms of moves, in a genre-analytical framework (Swales 1990; Bhatia 2004 [1993]; 2013).

According to Gillaerts, before 1950, such moves were: (1) specifying the function (Bruthiaux's *target*); (2) outlining the profile (Bruthiaux's r*equirements*); (3) specifying the offer (Bruthiaux's *reward*); and (4) detailing contact information (Bruthiaux' *contact segment*).

Information about the Company was mostly missing, with only very general indications. For instance, in ads published on the careers page of the *Guardian* or the *Daily Telegraph* it was customary to find simply the name of the Company with no further specifications or, more frequently, wordings like "a British manufacturing Company", "a busy advertising agency", "a privately owned West Country Group", while the name of the Company was mentioned only in the contact information, or not at all when the ad had been posted by a recruitment agency.

But after 1950, information about the recruiting Company became a conventional part of every ad, often being presented before all other moves. Indeed, according to Gillaerts this is the main structural change undergone by job ads in the course of time. Thus the standard move structure now is:

> 1. introducing the Company; 2. specifying the function; 3. outlining the profile; 4. specifying the offer; and 5. detailing contact information. (Gillaerts 2012, 267-270)

Today job ads are ever less frequently published in newspapers. When they advertise lower positions, they more often appear in giveaways; when they are for higher positions (then in this case they are mostly referred to as "Appointments" or "Executive Appointments", rather than simply "jobs"), they are more often published in quality newspapers like the *Financial Times* or the *Times & Sunday Times*. But those job ads still

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printed in newspapers do exhibit the structure described by Gillaerts. See the following example from the *Financial Times*, 22 February 2017:

(1) HEAD OF BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE, E-COMMERCE

Manchester £75 – 85K + Benefits

A leading e-commerce organization is seeking a Head of Business Intelligence (BI) to join its team in Manchester. The head of BI will report to the Finance Director and lead a cross-functional team to deliver robust reporting, insight and analytics projects for the global business. You will work closely with all business functions to fully understand their information requirements with a focus on marketing merchandising, trading, buying and finance.

Key responsibilities include:

- Developing relevant key performance measures and indicators for the global business.
- Ensuring all BI metrics and measures align to the business strategies, goals and objectives […].

The successful candidate will have strong BI experience, ideally within an e-commerce or retail setting, and fully understand information and data reporting requirements surrounding key e-commerce business drivers. The ability to build relationships and influence multiple stakeholders is essential. Proven experience managing a team of BI analysts or developers will be beneficial.

To apply for this role, please forward you Curriculum Vitae to […] or call for a confidential discussion on: […].

The advert starts with a presentation of the Company, even if very concise ("A leading e-commerce organization"), probably because the ad has been posted by a recruitment agency and not directly by the potential employer. It is followed by the specification of the function, which is realized both in terms of behaviours to be enacted within the function ("The Head of BI will report to the Finance director […]") and in terms of responsibilities, spelled out in a bullet point list by means of *-ing* forms. Similarly the profile is specified in terms both of experience and skills, and personality traits. The "detailing the offer" move is realized very concisely simply by quoting the amount of the salary + benefits offered, and the "contact information for application" takes up the last line.

This shows that the genre description proposed by Gillaerts (2012) for the printed job ad has not changed in recent times.

But of course if the online job advert is considered, there are reasons to believe that changes may be found, if only on account of the genre's migration to a different medium.

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In her research, Łącka-Badura (2013; 2014; 2015) analyses the structure of the genre, working on a corpus consisting entirely of job ads posted online (on *telegraph.co.uk*, *guardian.co.uk*, *thetimes.co.uk*, *jobsite.co.uk* and *totaljobs.co.uk* [now *totaljobs.com*]). Although she discusses the growing importance of e-recruitment (Łącka-Badura 2015, 15-16), she has no doubt considering the job advertisement as an 'extant' genre (Shepherd and Watters 1998, 98; cf. Łącka-Badura 2015, 51), i.e. unchanged in its electronic realization, and analyses it exclusively in the "reading mode" (Askenhave and Ellerup Nielsen 2004; 2005), albeit recognising the usefulness of hyperlinks. So in discussing the genre, she talks monolithically of "job ads" and does not seem to problematise the fact that all those included in the corpus are posted online, and on websites with different characteristics, without paying specific attention to possible variations determined by the medium.

The "general model" of the content of job ads that Łącka-Badura proposes and uses as a starting point for a minute analysis of the steps included in each move is very similar to Gillaerts' (2012) (which incidentally does not appear in her references), with only some differences. *Table 5.1* compares the two move structures:

Table 5.1. – Moves in job ads according to Gillaerts (2012) and Łącka-Badura (2015).

Łącka-Badura 2015 – online ads	Gillaerts 2012 – printed ads
0. Job identification (job overview/summary)	
1. Announcing availability of the position	1. introducing the Company
2. Presenting the organization – building credibility	2. specifying the function
3. Specifying responsibilities and requirements involved	3. outlining the profile
4. Offering benefits	4. specifying the offer
5. Instructing candidates how to apply (cf. Łącka-Badura 2015, 8)	5. detailing contact information

As anticipated, in terms of general move structure, Łącka-Badura's scheme does not differ greatly from Gillaerts', the main differences being in the order in which the elements are listed (the "Introducing the company" move being postponed to position 2) and the split of the "Specifying the function" move into "0. Job identification (job overview/summary)" and "1. Announcing availability of the position" (cf. *Table 5.1*). As regards the labels given to the various moves, Gillaerts'

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seem to be somewhat clearer. For instance, where Gillaerts uses "specifying the offer", Łącka-Badura prefers "offering benefits", which actually is not always the case, as in many cases benefits are not actually offered. While the addition of an optional move "Announcing availability of the position" appears reasonable, it seems odd that the exposition of responsibilities ("Specifying the function") and requirements ("Outlining the profile") should be collapsed into a single move ("Specifying responsibilities and requirements involved"), although these two moves are mostly realized separately and at length, plenty of attention being set aside for each of them in most ads.

To sum up, it can be stated that comparing the analyses of printed and online job ads as put forth by Gillaerts and Łącka-Badura some elements of continuity emerge which provide evidence of a degree of generic integrity characterising the genre even after migration to the Internet, although the order in which the moves are realized may vary.

3.1. *Job ads on online recruitment platforms*

In this section, a brief overview of the main features of job advertisements posted on online recruitment platforms will be offered, so as to identify their general characteristics and at the same time set the ground for the identification of the peculiarities of job ads posted on LinkedIn. As anticipated above, the migration of job advertisements to the Web took place in parallel with the increase in popularity of online newspapers, and more in general of online communication.

The first obvious effect of the migration of job ads to the Internet was to put an end to text length restrictions, which – as discussed when reporting on Bruthiaux's (1996) study – derived from the high cost per word of placing classifieds in newspapers. In contrast, posting job ads on online boards is either free or subject to a flat rate, or a two- or three- tier rate, so that there can be variation in terms of length and graphics, but there is certainly no reason to spare words. So recruiters are now in a position to provide all the information they deem necessary or desirable, a dramatic change from the not too distant past when ads could be considered instances of linguistic simplicity and bristled with abbreviations, like telegrams (Bruthiaux 1996, 123).

As regards the structure of job ads, both on independent sites (e.g. *indeed*, *monster*, *careerbuilder*, *jobsonline*) and on job platforms connected with online newspapers being still part of their websites, as in

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the case of the *Times & Sunday Times*, or having evolved into separate platforms like *Guardian Jobs*, there is a basic template for advertisements, as in *Figure 5.1*, showing a job advert on https://jobs.theguardian.com.

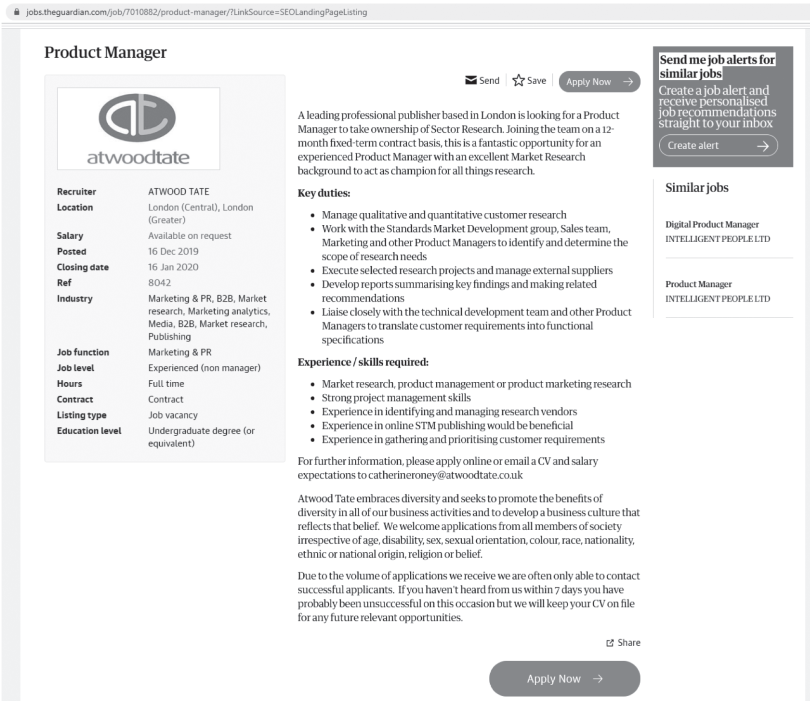

Figure 5.1. – Standard Job Ad at https://jobs.theguardian.com/ (posted on 16/12/2019) [6].

The main text of the advert takes up the central column. The job title appears in the top left corner of the tab, and under it the logo of the company posting the advertisement – be it a potential employer or a recruitment firm as in *Figure 5.1* (Atwoodtate). Always in the leftscan column (but on other online job boards in the rightscan column) there is a Job Summary, which is a peculiar (although not obligatory) feature of online job adverts, and summarises the main characteristics of the position offered with a varying degree of detail. In the *Guardian Jobs* ad above it specifies location, job type, salary, date of posting and closing

[6] https://jobs.theguardian.com/job/7010882/product-manager/?LinkSource=SEOLandingPageListing.

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date, industry, as well as job function, job level, hours, contract and educational requirements, reflecting a job description which provides very comprehensive information about the position. On other job recruitment platforms the Job Summary could appear in a different position (e.g. before the advertisement on *totaljobs*, in a separate tab on *monster*, at the foot of the ad on *careerbuilder UK*).

In the case of independent job sites, companies are also offered the option to design their own advertisement format, using their own graphics and organising the text as they wish, paying a higher rate. This option is often taken advantage of by large companies and by recruitment firms, who use their own template, their graphics and iconography, i.e. their own visual identity.

An interesting aspect of job ads posted by recruitment agencies, which on independent job sites tend to be a majority, is that in most cases they do not introduce the company that is actually offering the position, if not cursorily (e.g. "Great opportunity to join *this professional, yet fun Telecoms company* […]"; "*A leading provider of lighting and staging solutions* now require a passionate and knowledge person […]", emphasis added), while in many cases they feature an "About us" that introduces the recruitment agency, thus preferring "recruiter branding" to "employer branding", probably on the basis of the idea that good candidates trust recruitment firms with a solid reputation.

More in general, the "Introducing the company" move is not always realized and when it is, not always extensively, and sometimes it is replaced by an invitation to visit the recruiting company's website to learn more.

The other move that seems to have lost prominence in comparison with traditional job announcements is "Detailing the offer"; it is often missing or it is realized very briefly, e.g. "Salary: £38,000 – £48,000 + health + pension + benefits", or simply by means of the indication of the exact pay or a general statement about salary or salary and benefits ("Attractive package", "Attractive salary") in the Job Summary, or simply referred to as "Available on request" as in the ad in *Figure 5.1*. In the Job description, the moves that are always realized are "specifying the function" and "outlining the profile", being often set out in sub-titled sections (e.g. "Key tasks and responsibilities", "Role", "Competencies", etc.). It is interesting that in most cases the invitation to apply is not realized verbally, but rather by means of an "Apply" button which leads to an online form to be filled in, sometimes visible by scrolling at the foot of the advert.

Overall the analysis of job advertisements posted on online job boards confirms Łącka-Badura's (2015) findings, as they shows a

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degree of continuity with the traditional printed job advertisement, although the elements of change are not missing. The moves are basically the same, but the order in which they are set out and their realization may vary considerably, with some important differences connected with the affordances of the medium, and in particular the addition of the Job Summary section, and recourse to an "Apply" button. Of course, given the great variety of job boards, sites and job listings, there is ample scope for variation, but these are the main general trends.

Attention will now be turned to job advertisements posted on LinkedIn. This SNS will be introduced in general terms, before going on to analyse the job adverts included in the corpus.

3.2. *Job ads on LinkedIn*

Job advertisements on LinkedIn, which are subject to a standard template, seem similar in appearance to the basic format of the job ads posted on other recruitment sites as discussed above, but they are accompanied by various extra sections, mainly located below the main text of the job ad and mostly accessible through scrolling: "Highlights", the "Premium Careers feature", "Meet the team", "About us".

As anticipated, on LinkedIn the main section of the job announcement that hosts the job description and the Job Summary does not appear to be very different from those of other online job ads, with the main text in the centre column and the Job Summary in the right scan column. At first the job description appears only partially, in excerpt form (its top part), but in its full version (accessible by clicking on the link "See more", cf. *Fig. 5.2* below) it can be several hundred words long (in the example: 441 words), with the lower part accessible by scrolling, and is mostly divided into titled sub-sections ("Job overview", "Job description", "Skills and qualifications", etc.).

A first glance at the ad in *Figure 5.2* immediately identifies a peculiarity of LinkedIn, i.e. the fact that in many cases at the top of the right scan column, which hosts the Job Summary, there appears the name of the person who posted the job ("Job posted by …") with his/her position, and a photograph. Below this specification, in the lower part of that same column, there is the Job Summary (not visible in *Fig. 5.2*, being positioned under the "Posted by …"), which specifies concisely the Seniority Level, Industry, Employment Type and Job Functions characterizing the post offered.

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Just below this main section hosting the Job Description in its central part, there is a sequence of graphically separate tabs with various features. The first one is the Premium tab showing the number of candidates who have already applied, and introducing the paid "Premium Career feature", which is advertised as enabling you to "get hired an average of 2X as fast".

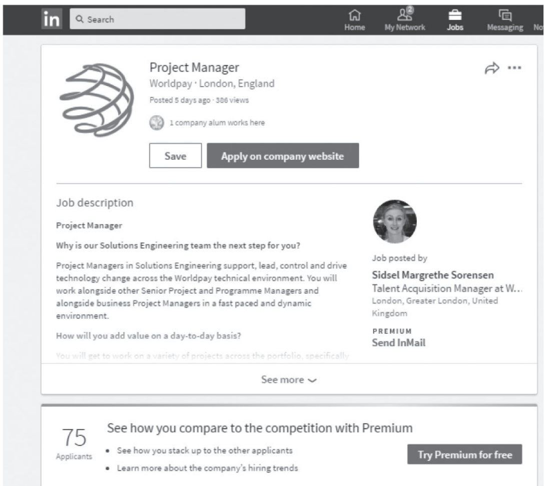

Figure 5.2. – Top part of a job ad on LinkedIn (excerpt).

Having a Premium account subscription (https://premium.linkedin.com/) gives applicants a chance to learn more about the company's hiring trends, enables them to see how they "stack up" to other applicants, and learn who has viewed their profiles so far. It also offers the jobseeker the opportunity to be featured at the top of the applicant list when s/he applies for a job on LinkedIn, thus standing out among other candidates. Also offered is the option to interact directly with the recruiter and other people in the LinkedIn network through the InMail service. In some cases the Premium account offers the only possibility of getting access to salary details when browsing jobs (in the cases when such details are given at all), which otherwise are accessible only when one actually applies or sends in a query, and incidentally this also entails disclosing one's personal details.

After the "Premium" tab, in some cases there is a "Highlights" tab informing the applicants if there is anyone working in the recruiting company who has attended the same educational institutions they attended

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or worked for the same organization they worked for. This feature is part of LinkedIn customizing functions which match the information regarding the advertisement and the recruiting company with the user's general search criteria and previous positions, thus providing personalized information.

This section is followed by an optional tab called "Meet the team", which offers the applicant the possibility of "meeting" some of the recruiting company's employees working in the corporate sector for which the job is advertised. Usually this involves the pictures, names, functions and occasionally background details (e.g. education, previous positions) of two or three employees, but in some cases (as in the one at hand here) a "See all" link enables you to view the pictures, names and functions of more employees, sometimes a dozen or more.

The final tab is the "About us", introducing the recruiting company by means of a text of variable length, from a few to several hundred words, often (but not always) collected from the recruiter's career page. The verbal description is usually accompanied by a picture or a video, also collected from the career page.

The overall structure of a LinkedIn job advert can be schematised as follows, also taking account of its graphic organization on the web page, with the solid line representing the delimitation of separate tabs, and the dashed line delimiting a separate area within the same tab (*Fig. 5.3*).

<table>
<tr><td>Company
Logo</td><td colspan="2">Job Title
Name of Company
Date when ad posted
"Apply" button</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Job description</td><td>Posted by … (optional)
Job Summary</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Introduction to Premium Careers feature</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Highlights (optional)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Meet the team (optional)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">About us
- Picture or video (optional)
- Text</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 5.3. – Structure of the LinkedIn job advertisement.

In terms of moves, this corresponds to the following generic structure, where the moves realized in the main job description (highlighted in gray in *Fig. 5.3*) are in normal-font style, while those in italics are additional moves realized in separate tabs (*Fig. 5.4*).

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Job summary

Specifying who has posted the job

Eliciting the jobseeker's interest (teaser)
Introducing the Company
Specifying responsibilities (the function)
Specifying desired qualifications skills and experience / ideal candidate's personality (the profile)
Detailing the offer
Equal Employment Opportunity Statement (USA)
Inviting applications / detailing application procedure and contacts

Job description

Stating number of candidates so far/ Offering the Premium Career feature

Providing information about people in your network working for the company

Providing information about Company's employees / potential future colleagues

Figure 5.4. – Structure and moves in the LikedIn job advertisement.

It is to be noted that neither Gillaerts' nor Łącka-Badura's models include the Equal Employment Opportunity Statement, which is hardly ever there in European job ads, but it is very often there in US companies' job listings, being mandatory in the case of federal contractors and sub-contractors [7].

This complex overall structure sets LinkedIn job ads apart from those posted on any other job boards, not only because of the complexity of the features (and services) offered, but above all because the job announcement proper is accompanied by a number of extra features that set it within the context of the LinkedIn virtual community. The job advert is no more only a decontextualised piece of text offering a working opportunity, but is presented as the result of the action of a real person who has materially posted the job putting you in touch with an organization comprising real people, and as an opportunity for you to set in motion a process that will potentially lead you to work within the context of a professional community. In other words, a LinkedIn job advert is clearly set within a SNS with all the social implications of this fact.

[7] The Equal Employment Opportunity statement is recommended for US Companies and mandatory for federal contractors and sub-contractors in pursuance of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other laws enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, cf. https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm [10/10/2019].

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Thus, the job announcement is moved from the social vacuum of the newspaper page or the online job board to an online community context, where potential applicants can clearly perceive the presence of competing candidates and that of the recruiter as a functioning organization made up of people that may potentially become their colleagues.

In the next section the peculiarities in the realization of the main moves in the LinkedIn job ads will be discussed, leaving a detailed examination of the steps realizing each single move for a further study.

3.3. *Moves in LinkedIn job ads*

While in Gillaerts' model of the printed job ad, the first move was "Introducing the Company" reflecting the practice that prevailed in printed job ads in the more recent decades, on LinkedIn adverts open in a variety of different ways.

One relatively popular opening is by means of a "teaser text", usually in the form of questions aimed at verifying if the jobseeker is the ideal candidate for the position offered, with an overwhelming presence of interactional metadiscourse (Hyland 2000, 48-50). See the following example, where the two questions already clarify the qualities the ideal candidate should have, followed by a statement addressed directly to the candidate who has replied positively to them:

(2) Have you got the drive and experience to take on the challenging and complex world of finance?
Do you love taking on great levels of responsibility and delivering successful outcomes for the business?
Then we've got a IT Project Manager position for you. (Senior IT PM, Eligo Recruitment, Amsterdam Area, Netherlands)

Here the first question focuses on experience (i.e. on a component of the profile), while the second one has more to do with the ideal candidates' attitude and ambitions. This pattern recurs frequently. See this other example:

(3) Are you a Civil Project Manager with a strong tier one or top end tier two background?
Do you have a strong experience in Earthworks and Pavements?
Does the opportunity to work with a growing Tier two civil engineering contractor sound exciting to you?
Then this may be the opportunity for you! (Confidential, Melbourne, Australia)

The rhetorical procedure is basically the same, but in example (3) there are three questions, as a specific query about experience is added (the

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second question), while in both cases the last question regards the job-seeker's desired attitude.

In both examples the questions are followed by a statement starting with the sequencer "then" to draw a conclusion from the possible positive replies to the queries posed, again with a slight difference in that in example (2) in the final sentence there is a self-mention ("we") increasing the interactional import of the statement.

Another very popular way, indeed the most popular, to open an advert on LinkedIn is to focus on the position being offered. In discursive terms this is realized in two different ways, which somehow reflect the first two moves identified by Łącka-Badura (2015). The first is simply outlining the role being offered, corresponding to her "0. Job identification (job overview/summary)", as in the following examples:

(4) Our Project Manager is responsible for ensuring that every project follows the agency process and meets all necessary deliverables. (PM, Guidemark Health, New York, USA)

(5) The Project Manager (PM) sets the tone with the client of the Vanguard Team and represents the culture of the organization while building complex, fast-paced high quality projects in the New York Metropolitan area. (Vanguard Construction and Development Co. Inc., Greater New York City Area, USA)

In other cases, it is the availability of a position that is announced (Łącka-Badura 2015: "1. Announcing availability of the position") in terms of opportunity offered (ex. 6) or of recruiter's search (ex. 7):

(6) Exciting opportunity for an experienced Project Manager to join a national, Australian AV Integrator! Great Career opportunity! (Corporate Initiatives, Melbourne, Australia)

(7) Description Corgan seeks a Project Manager to join the firm in the Critical Facilities Studio of our New York City office. (PM, Corgan, New York, USA)

The announcement of the availability of a position is often combined with an anticipation of the requisites for the job (the profile):

(8) We have an exciting new role at BT within the Competition Finance Department for a commercially minded, intelligent and driven project manager with 4+ years project management experience and a dynamic, adaptable attitude. (PM, BT, London, UK)

Noteworthy in these few lines (33 words in all) is the extraordinary density of adjectives, with two Classifiers, "new" indicating the character of the position, and "commercially minded", delimiting the kind of poten-

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tial employee the company is looking for, and five Epithets, all expressing positive qualities (cf. Halliday and Mathiessen 2004, 218-220).

In other cases, instead, aspects of the responsibilities involved in the position are anticipated:

(9) We have an excellent opportunity for a Project Manager to lead other members of the Professional Services team in the implementation of software solutions for our clients. (Provenir – Prispanny, New Jersey, New York, USA)

(10) As part of a positive order book and ongoing growth, Butler Electrical is Seeking experienced Electrical Project Manager with the overall responsibility to coordinate, implement, execute, control and complete specific Mechanical Electrical projects in Melbourne. Minimum 5 Years Project Management Experience. (ASGM Pty Ltd T/As Butler Electrical, Melbourne, Australia)

Thus the job itself and the opportunities it offers are frequently set out in the very first move opening the advert.

In some other cases the opening move is the presentation of the Company, but less frequently than one would expect in the light of what was the case in traditional ads and in consideration of the strong employer-branding orientation of LinkedIn. As noted above, this trend is found also in many online ads posted on other job boards, where Company presentation is often minimal or non existent, maybe because reliance is made on the possibility of visiting the recruiting Company's career page on LinkedIn itself or on its website. However, even when not appearing at the beginning of the advert, in LinkedIn job ads Company presentation is hardly ever missing, as all of them feature an "About us" section which however is not part of the job description, being displaced to a separate tab, usually the last one in the sequence. But in many cases the employer is introduced *also* in the job description. In the following example, the presentation of the recruiting employer at the beginning of the Job Description also includes a hyperlink to the concern's website:

(11) **NYU Langone** is one of the nation's premier academic medical centers that includes five hospitals […] and more than 200 ambulatory locations across the New York metropolitan area. It also includes NYU School of Medicine, which since 1841 has trained thousands of physicians and scientists who have helped to shape the course of medical history. Our trifold mission to serve, teach, and discover is achieved daily through an integrated academic culture devoted to excellence in patient care, education, and research. Learn more about NYU Langone. We have an exciting opportunity […]. (PM, NYU Medical Centre, New York, USA)

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In this ad the recruiting company is presented not only here, but also in the "About us" text at the foot of the page where the same points are touched upon, but entirely reformulated. Thus within the same ad, the recruiting institution is introduced twice, and in addition a link is given to the relevant career page. This provides evidence of the recruiter's efforts in terms of employer branding, obviously aimed at attracting the best possible candidates.

In other cases, the company introduction opening the job description is less institutional in tone, and rather than simply outlining the profile of the potential employer it highlights its strength and innovative character by means of heavily evaluative language:

(12) It's exciting times here at Red Energy - 100% Australia owned, over 600 employees and integration with Lumo Energy – this is a success story we're proud of. We first entered the energy market in 2004 – we wanted to provide something different, to shake things up and we've been doing a good job of it ever since. We are currently recruiting a Project Manager […]. (PM, Red Energy, Melbourne, Australia)

Here the resources deployed are not only adjectives ("exciting", "proud") as in example (11) above, but more complex structures defining the company's story and accomplishments. Also in this case the "About us" sets forth the same notions but is formulated differently, maintaining the same corporate branding tone.

Another move that is subject to variation in online ads is "Detailing the offer". As already observed, this move, which has virtually always been there in printed ads, in online job adverts is often absent, or worded very vaguely, with no specification of the actual salary offered. This trend is even more marked in the case of LinkedIn ads, where the actual salary offered is specified with precision only in 40 ads out of 172, while in some others rather generic expressions are used, e.g. "compensation […] commensurate with experience", "very attractive remuneration package", "an excellent work environment, great benefits and pay!", or "competitive pay and a wide range of benefits". In some cases, there is a specification of the perks offered, listing them in detail, often arranged in a bullet-point list: e.g. "Benefits (eligible from day one): Private Health Insurance, Life Insurance, Cycle to Work scheme, Subsidised Gym Membership, Eyecare, Pension, 23 days holiday per annum" etc.

This avoidance of reference to economic conditions offered is part of a trend that has grown with the habit of posting jobs online, where they can be accessed by anyone, so specifying salaries and benefits could cause competition between current and new employees, and also competition with other companies in the industry (cf. Vyvial-Larson 2013). In

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the case of LinkedIn this has also to do with the fact that giving access to pay and conditions is one of the services offered to Premium subscribers. Furthermore, although salary and benefits are certainly important incentives in a job advertisement, there are other inherent elements that may help attract good candidates, which have to do with the quality of working conditions offered by the recruiting company:

(13) This is a fantastic opportunity to join a leading business and have ownership of the development of your brands & major retail clients. With over 250 staff, many achieving 10+ years service, we have a fantastic team environment, which offers the ability and opportunity to grow your career. (Account / Project Manager – TPF Toys, Melbourne, Australia)

Here the offer is framed with a focus on opportunities associated with the job and in terms of employer branding, using the adjective "fantastic" as a sort of catchword. In other cases it is the opportunity for working experience and professional growth to be gained in the position advertised that is presented as part of the offer:

(14) Each area offers a unique career experience and a compelling mix of work and training opportunities, work environment and structure for career progression. (Bid Manager – Resources, Accenture, Australia-Melbourne)

This more immaterial component of the offer often comes together with the actual specification of working conditions and (more rarely) salary, as in the following example where once more we find the collocation "fantastic opportunity", which actually occurs 6 times in the corpus (out of 12 occurrences of the word "fantastic"):

(15) The role offers a fantastic opportunity to progress within the business to a Senior National Account Manager position within the next two years. The company offers a generous benefits package, including the chance to earn up to 33% bonus, car allowance, pension scheme and more. (London Sales Manager – Wine Spirit Resourcing Group, London, UK)

As anticipated before, another move that has changed with the migration of the genre to the Internet is the invitation to apply, which in most cases is realized by means of a hypertext link, i.e. a button leading to a form to be filled in: "Apply", "Apply now", "Apply on website". But in several cases the jobseeker is also given the option to get more information by talking to someone on the phone. This is especially frequent when the advert has been posted by a recruitment firm, as in the following examples:

(16) Click APPLY or contact Paul Forster for a confidential discussion. [phone number, email] (PM, Melbourne Australia, posted by Stellar Recruitment)

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(17) Clicking apply is the best way to apply, but you may also: Lauren.Draves@CyberCoders.com. (PM, New York, posted by CyberCoders Staffing and Recruiting)

As regards the two core moves, specifying the function and outlining the profile, they tend to be the most stable, being realized in virtually all cases, even in the shortest adverts.

See the following example:

(18) **About the role**
VicTrack are seeking Project Managers to deliver end to end projects in transport, infrastructure and telecommunications. Capable of design, planning, execution, monitoring and controlling, and reporting to ensure the project meets deadlines. Ensuring that issues are resolved. Strong relationship skills with key stakeholders and communication.
Position status: Full-time
Closing date: 22 March 2017
(PM, VicTrack, Melbourne, Australia)

Although the sub-title ("About the role") would suggest that the paragraph merely outlines the function and role, this is done only in the first sentence, while the following three sentences specify the skills necessary to qualify for the job. Thus the two main moves are realized in only 56 words. In this case, in spite of the obvious desire for concision, preference is given to a complex cohesive textual form, but oftentimes recourse is made to bullet point lists, as was customary in traditional printed ads (cf. ex. 1 above), e.g.:

(19) *What You Will Be Doing*
- Collaborate with the team and clients to understand and resolve issues quickly
- Work directly with development team to create detailed documents of progress […]
- Lead meetings, drive projects and meet deadlines!

What You Need for this Position
- At least 3 years of experience and knowledge of Project Management (PMP Certification is a huge plus!)
- Underwriting within a financial institution
- Strong Computer Skills++
- Ability to lead meetings and drive projects
- Okay with occasional travel (25%)

What's in it for You
- Competitive base salary
- Vacation/PTO [8] […]

(PM, New York, USA, posted by CyberCoders Staffing and Recruiting)

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[8] PTO stands for "Paid Time Off".

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Here each point is formulated either as a nominal element or a bare infinitive; in other cases in bullet point lists preference is given to *-ing* forms:

(20) **Responsibilities**
Specific Responsibilities (client-facing):
Defining the scope and objectives of a project with the client
Employing project management tools as needed e.g. Gantt [9] chart, critical path, risk analysis, forecast assistance
Planning the optimum approach to meet client objectives within agreed cost and timescale
Acting as a Trusted business partner, giving "best advice" on implementation
In partnership with the client, developing criteria to measure the project's effectiveness and ensuring the project meets this criteria […]. (PM, Miller Heiman Group, London, England)

A similar variability is recorded in the use of personal pronouns. The potential applicant is mostly addressed as "you", but there is a switch to the third personal singular pronoun when the ideal candidate is described. This appears clearly in the following example:

(21) *Your* role would be pivotal to this developing relationship, and *you* would be expected to manage all aspects of project delivery as the work scope evolves.
The right candidate for this role must have minimum three years' experience within a project management role and have an interest in landscape and design. (PM, Nikki Tibbles, Founder Wild at Heart, Battersea, London)

While the explanation in the first sentence is obviously aimed at making the jobseeker identify with the role, in the second the idea that in order to get the position one has to qualify as "the ideal candidate" is restored. More in general, the third person singular pronoun is often also used to outline the position offered:

(22) *The Senior PM* is responsible for managing the global implementation of multiple Temenos product (T24, WM, TAP…) projects for a single Temenos client or a group of related clients. (PM, Temenos Computer Software, London, England)

A similar alternate use of personal pronouns is found in the reference to the potential employer. When the job ad is posted directly by the recruiting company – a situation that tends to be prevailing on LinkedIn – the concern is usually referred to with a first person plural pronoun:

(23) *We* understand that outstanding candidates can come from a variety of backgrounds. While specific experience is important, *we* are ultimately

[9] A Gantt chart is a horizontal bar chart used to show a project plan and its progress over time. Cf. https://www.teamgantt.com/free-gantt-chart-excel-template [10/10/2019].

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looking for candidates who have the personal characteristics to thrive in a growing client-focused business. (AnswerLab, PM, New York, USA)

In many cases the recruiting organisation's self-reference is deployed as a counterpart to the second person reference used to address potential candidates and this emphasises the interpersonal component in the text of the advert:

(24) *We* only recruit the best, and *we* are committed to helping *you* achieve *your* career goals and become even better than *you* are today. (PM, Affinity Water Utilities, London, UK)

This does not mean that potential employers do not occasionally switch to third person reference:

(25) Walsh is currently seeking a Project Manager for commercial building projects (interior and aviation) in Newark, NJ. (The Walsh Group, New York, USA)

Of course, third person reference is the rule when the advert is posted by a recruitment agency, as in the following example where the potential employer is mentioned as "our client":

(26) *Our client* is hiring for an experienced, well-organized, and sharp Project Manager. (PM, New York, posted by Atrium Staffing)

Another interesting aspect of job description is the tendency, when addressing directly the jobseeker in the second person, to make recourse to a verb form with the modal "will" with an evidently predictive meaning, with the collocation "you will" occurring 199 times (out of a total of 515 entries of "will"):

(27) As Project Manager *you will* be responsible for end-to-end management of one or more projects concurrently within Arvato's CRM business. (PM, Arvato, Slough, London, UK)

(28) In this role, *you will* be helping lead the charge toward a more Agile and collaborative working environment at Nitro. *You will* be reporting to the Operations Director […]. You will oversee the work of a more junior Project Manager […]. (PM, Nitro Digital Internet, London, UK)

This same verb form is also used with subjects like "the candidate", "the Project Manager", etc.:

(29) *The successful candidate will* be responsible for managing Lab projects which involve: […]. (PM, Financial Reporting Council, London, UK)

(30) The Project Manager will define and manage the entire process of executing software projects for our customers […]. (PM, Intelerad Medical Systems, Melbourne, Australia)

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Verb forms with "will" are also used when the skills and qualifications required are specified, but in this case it cannot be taken for granted that the meaning is purely predictive, as there obviously is an epistemic component:

(31) The ideal candidate will be a strong communicator, a clear thinker and be equipped with proven project management skills. (PM, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, Melbourne, Australia)

(32) As the successful candidate, you will hold a degree in a relevant field with significant experience in project management in the water and environment sector. (PM, posted by Planet Forward, London, UK)

However, with third person subjects like "the project manager", "the candidate", or "the role", the simple present is also frequently used:

(33) The Project Manager has direct reporting responsibilities and actively mentors team members to ensure they further develop their skills and that their performance objectives are achieved. (PM, Provenir Computer Software, New York, USA)

(34) The role is responsible for managing the P&L of the project and ensuring that all costs are controlled and revenues maximized. (Senior PM, Temenos Computer Software, London, UK)

Of course, there would be many other interesting linguistic aspects to be explored, but their discussion would go beyond the scope of this study. The brief analysis presented here focusing on the realization of the core moves shows that, in spite of a degree of conventionalisation in the verbiage of job adverts, the genre is subject to a degree of variation. As might to some extent be predictable, discursive strategies seem to be characterised by two main trends: a focus on the candidate, setting very high (sometimes unrealistic) standards, which could appear discouraging, but at the same time a discursive approach obviously aimed at engaging him/her and encourage identification with the required professional profiles.

The brief analysis presented here shows that in its core 'obligatory' elements, and in particular in the job description, the LinkedIn job advert shows a remarkable degree of generic integrity and continuity with the traditional advertisement, as do job ads published on other online recruitment platforms. However, if looked in its entirety, embedded as it is in a SNS and including various peculiar extra features and services, the genre shows a degree of variation which is worthy of further exploration in future research.

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4. Final remarks

The preliminary analysis of a corpus of job advertisements posted on LinkedIn has provided evidence of an impressive degree of continuity with the traditional printed job advertisements published in the Classifieds sections of newspapers, with the repertoire of moves remaining basically the same, although the online publication allows greater scope for variation in terms both of length and structure, also because of the availability of hypertextual affordances thanks to which one or more of the moves can be realized by making recourse to the navigating mode (e.g. introducing the recruiting company, invitation to apply).

LinkedIn job adverts share these characteristics with other online adverts, but exploit the Web-mediated environment more fully. Their fixed basic template includes – in addition to the Job Description proper and the relevant Job Summary – various other tabs giving access to supplementary information contributing to contextualizing the advert within the context of the Social Networking Site, i.e. of a virtual community of practice (Garzone 2016, 353-354; cf. Wenger 1998). In many cases in which the advert is placed directly by the recruiting company rather than by a recruitment consultant, the specification of the person who has materially posted it, with name, position and a photo contributes to representing the recruiting company as a community of real persons rather than as an immaterial entity and the position is set in its real work context.

This is reinforced by the possibility of getting to know some of the Company's employees working in the same area ("Meet the team"). A chance is also often given to learn if any of the Company's employees share the jobseeker's academic or career background ("Highlights") and be informed on how many other people have already applied for the position, so that the applicant has a clear perception of him/herself as a candidate within a group of competitors. This option is amplified if the applicant is a "Premium" subscriber and can access much more information about other candidates and about the recruiting company's HR policy, and working condition within it.

Thus, in spite of their apparent similarity to announcements posted on other recruitment platforms, LinkedIn job ads are communicatively different and take advantage of the options made available by the SNS where they are set. In terms of genre analysis, if the generic integrity of the Job Description proper (function and profile) is impressively preserved in spite of its migration to the Web, in the realization of all the other moves there are changes due to the affordances of the Internet

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medium, and other changes yet deriving from their situatedness in a social networking environment, which opens up various possibilities in terms of job search strategies and options. Variations are recorded in the "Introducing the recruiting company" move, which is always realized in the "About us" tab, but not always in the Job Description, also in consideration of the availability of a hypertextual link (the company logo in the upper left corner of the template) leading to the Company's career page. Variations can be found also in the "detailing the offer" move, which in many cases does not indicate the salary being offered, and often neither the benefits, laying more emphasis on the opportunities inherent in the position advertised and on the value of the recruiting company in terms of working environment and personal growth, with a sort of "demarketising" effect on job ad discourse.

The analysis presented in this study is merely preliminary, providing only general insights into the overall generic structure and distinctive features of job advertisements posted on LinkedIn, with a focus on their peculiarities as determined by their hypertextual character and their embeddedness in a social networking site. Further research is needed for a detailed discussion of the linguistic and discursive features of the subgenre investigated, also in order to ascertain whether, in addition to the structural peculiarities identified in this work, at the microstructural level job advertisements posted on LinkedIn do exhibit identifiable linguistic differences from job ads posted on other online platforms and/or printed job ads.

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