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# From Public Opinion to Digital Resistance: The Role of Social Media in Contesting Government Policies

I Gusti Ngurah Parthama<sup>1)\*</sup>, I Wayan Pastika<sup>2)</sup>, I Made Netra<sup>3)</sup>, I Nyoman Aryawibawa<sup>4)</sup>

1,2,3,4) Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author Email: <a href="mailto:ngurah-parthama@unud.ac.id">ngurah-parthama@unud.ac.id</a>

#### Abstract

The rise of social media has significantly transformed public discourse. It allows individuals to engage in political discussions, express opinions, and challenge governmental narratives. Unlike traditional media, social media platforms facilitate interactive and participatory engagement. Users can respond to official statements in real time. This study examines user comments on Kompas Facebook post regarding the Indonesian government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Analyzing the discourse within these comments, the research explores functions of social media as a platform for democratization, power resistance, two-way communication, and alternative discourse formation. This study employs qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). It is used to categorize and interpret user comments. The data included diverse linguistic strategies such as support, criticism, sarcasm, rhetorical questions, and religious expressions. Those were systematically coded to identify emerging themes. The findings reveal that social media enables democratic participation. It is also characterized by polarization of discourse and performative engagement. The interaction between government narratives and user responses demonstrates that social media facilitates counter public discourse, ideological contestation, and user-driven political deliberation. The study concludes social media that serves as a dynamic space for political communication where institutional narratives are actively contested. However, the limited presence of constructive suggestions highlights the challenges of fostering substantive policy discussions in digital spaces. By bridging discourse analysis, media studies, and political communication, this research provides a novel contribution to understanding digital discourse dynamics in contemporary political engagement.

Keywords: Social Media, Digital Discourse, Political Communication, Democratization, User Engagement.

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped the nature of public discourse. It enables individuals to engage in discussions beyond traditional media constraints. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have become essential spaces for public engagement. The engagement where individuals can freely express their opinions, challenge dominant narratives, and interact with political institutions. Unlike traditional news media, which primarily function through one-way communication, social media fosters a participatory culture. Users can respond to news coverage in real time. The comment sections of news articles on platforms like *Kompas* serve as microcosms of this broader digital discourse. It reflects the ways in which citizens engage with socio-political issues. As Barton and Lee (2013) argue, digital texts and online interactions have redefined individuals participate in discussions. It is also possible to make user-generated content a vital component of contemporary communication. Furthermore, Crystal (2011) highlights that social media introduces new linguistic norms. The norms are encouraging informal, direct, and highly interactive forms of discourse that shape modern digital communication.

Within this digital landscape, user comments serve as an important indicator of public sentiment and political engagement. The comment sections of news media posts allow users to either support, critique, or challenge governmental narratives. It creates these spaces integral to the formation of public opinion. Unlike traditional opinion pieces or editorial sections, social media comments emerge organically and reflect a broader spectrum of perspectives. According to Đorđević (2022), these digital discussions create a more decentralized and democratic

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discourse. It allows alternative voices can gain visibility which is excluded from mainstream media. This is particularly significant in political contexts since governments often attempt to control narratives through official statements. However, as seen in the *Kompas* dataset, users frequently contest these narratives through sarcasm, rhetorical questions, and direct criticism. It demonstrates on social media functions as a platform for counter public discourse. Thurlow (2017) argues that such digital interactions challenge the hegemony of institutional communication. At the same time, it creates spaces for ideological contestation and alternative viewpoints.

Despite the democratizing potential of social media, a fundamental issue arises regarding the nature and structure of digital discourse. While comment sections allow for free expression, they also tend to be highly fragmented, emotionally charged, and often dominated by reactive rather than constructive engagement. One of the primary challenges in analyzing social media discourse is the tendency for discussions to be polarized. Users are either strongly support or vehemently criticize governmental policies without engaging in nuanced debate. As Kruse et al. (2018) explain that social media does not always function as an ideal public sphere. The conversations are often shaped by algorithmic amplification, ideological echo chambers, and performative expressions of dissent. The solution to this issue lies in developing a systematic understanding on comments function as discursive tools. Whether it acts of resistance, ideological alignment, or mechanisms for deliberative engagement. By categorizing and analyzing user-generated content, it can better comprehend on digital discourse that shapes public perception and influences political communication.

A more specific issue in this context concerns to the typology of user comments. It is especially in Facebook discussions surrounding governmental policies. The *Kompas* Facebook post about the government's response to Covid-19 tells on digital discourse operation. It comes on comments ranging from expressions of support and approval to criticism, sarcasm, and alternative suggestions. The refined categorization of these comments reveals distinct patterns of engagement, including support/praise, criticism, sarcasm/irony, constructive suggestions, prayer/wish, and general statements. Each of these categories represents a unique mode of digital participation. It also reflects varying levels of engagement with official narratives. Bouvier (2015) contends that digital discourse is not merely reactive but also deeply performative. Users can engage in rhetorical strategies that amplify their voices within the algorithmic structure of social media. Additionally, Baron (2008) notes that the immediacy of online interactions fosters a culture of directness and informality. The interaction influences individuals communicate and engage with political discussions. Understanding these typologies is essential for assessing the broader implications of social media as a mechanism for public discourse and democratic engagement.

Some studies have relevant ideas with the comments of users in social media. Lee and Chun (2016) the user comments also create psychological effect and public opinion poll. By applying social judgement theory and spiral of silence framework, there two experimental studies conducted on exposure the online comments and poll results. Finding shows that online comment shape opinion public. While negative comments increased to speak out among those who already held negative views. Poll also resulted in interaction among individual to reinforce existing attitudes rather than changing it. Comments also have a potential way to change adolescents (Koutamanis et al., 2015). When they receive negative feedback, there is tendency of changing online behavior. Adolescents engage with risky online self-presentation and social exploration. The sensation-seeking individuals and those who have experience with family conflict tend to be vulnerable. Vendemia et al. (2019) mention political messages on social media can also be influenced by the presentation of user comments. Especially, when the users show their affiliation and comment deletion strategies. Strategic presentation of comments significantly affect trust in political messages.

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The gap in the literature lies in the lack of empirical studies that systematically categorize and analyze on users respond to governmental narratives within digital news discourse. There is a need for research that bridges the gap between discourse analysis, media studies, and political communication by examining the nuanced interactions that occur in comment sections. The present study seeks to address this gap by systematically categorizing user comments in response to the Kompas Facebook post on the government's COVID-19 response. By analyzing different discursive strategies—ranging from direct support and criticism to irony, religious expression, and rhetorical engagement—this research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding on social media functions. The functions are as a platform for democratization, resistance against power, two-way communication, and alternative discourse formation. The study contributes to digital discourse analysis with offering a refined typology of social media engagement. At the same, it demonstrates on user navigation and challenges institutional narratives in real time. Additionally, it highlights the performative and participatory nature of digital interactions. It also reinforces the idea that social media is not just a passive medium for information consumption. However, it is also an active site of discursive negotiation. Thus, this research offers a novel contribution to the study of political communication in digital spaces. It also emphasizes the evolving nature of public discourse in an era of algorithmically mediated interactions.

# RESEARCH METHODS

The data source for this study comprises user comments on a *Kompas* Facebook post concerning the Indonesian government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The primary news text was published on March 15, 2020. It presented the government's official stance for outlining measures to ensure economic stability and public health. The dataset included a corpus of usergenerated comments in response to this post. It reflected a broad spectrum of public reactions (Adolphs & Knight, 2020; Dordevic, 2022). These comments served as linguistic artifacts that captured diverse engagement patterns namely support, criticism, sarcasm, rhetorical questions, religious expressions, and constructive suggestions. Facebook remains one of Indonesia's most widely used digital platforms for political discourse. It was given an analysis on the comment section that provides valuable insights for citizens interaction with governmental narratives (Creswell, 2007). By focusing on organically generated responses within a naturally occurring digital discourse, the research ensures the authenticity of user engagement. It also provides a relevant and contemporary data source for digital discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003).

The method and technique of data collection employed in this research was a qualitative content analysis approach. User comments are systematically extracted and categorized based on their linguistic and rhetorical features. The data collection process involved compiling the full text of the comment section, removing duplicate or irrelevant entries, and classifying responses according to their predominant discursive function. Given the diverse nature of social media engagement, the research applies purposive sampling to select comments that exemplify distinct linguistic strategies such as support, criticism, irony, religious discourse, and constructive suggestions. As Barton and Lee (2013) suggest that qualitative analysis of digital texts requires contextual sensitivity. It shows that each comment is interpreted in relation to the broader discourse surrounding the news topic. The method allows for an in-depth exploration of user interactions and captures the nuances of public sentiment and ideological contestation within digital spaces (Miles et al., 2014).

The method and technique of data analysis involved thematic coding and discourse analysis. It integrated insights from digital linguistics and media studies. First, user comments are classified based on lexical choices, sentence structures, and rhetorical strategies. It enabled a systematic identification of discursive categories. This step follows a thematic coding approach

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which ensures such linguistic patterns namely expressions of agreement, sarcasm, religious sentiment, and political resistance are clearly delineated. Following this, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework was applied to examine user-generated responses interaction with the governmental narrative presented in the news article. As Bouvier (2015) and Lee and Chun (2016) argue digital discourse functions as a site of ideological negotiation. Institutional power is contested through public interaction. The study examines comment sections which enables two-way communication, democratization, and counter public discourse. It also highlights social media's role as a transformative force in contemporary political engagement. By combining qualitative thematic coding and discourse analysis, the research provided a comprehensive framework for understanding digital discourse dynamics within the context of news media interactions.

#### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The news article *Pemerintah Jaga dan Minimalkan Dampak Penyebaran Virus Korona* was published by *Kompas*. It provides an official government statement regarding efforts to control and mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The article highlights President Joko Widodo's assurance that essential goods remain available and economic policies have been implemented to sustain business continuity amid the crisis. The response of government is framed as proactive with ministers working remotely to manage both the health and economic effects of the pandemic. Additionally, the President calls for public cooperation and urges citizens to work, study, and worship from home to curb the virus's spread. The article conveys a sense of urgency while simultaneously reassuring the public on emphasizing unity and collective effort. The official statement stance is likely influenced the diversity of responses in the comment section. It is ranging from support and encouragement to skepticism and criticism of government actions.

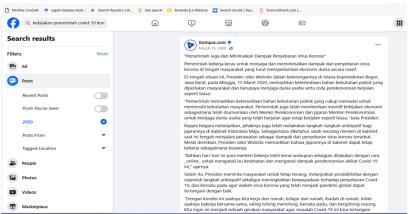


Figure 1. Main News Text on Social Media Facebook Kompas

# Digital Discourse and User Engagement in Social Media Comments: A Linguistic Analysis

The refined quantitative analysis of social media comments on *Kompas* Facebook news posts reveals significant patterns in online discourse. The dataset is now categorized into statement/general opinion (19 instances), support/praise (7 instances), prayer/wish (5 instances), criticism (5 instances), and constructive suggestion (2 instances). The dominance of statement/general opinion suggests that a large portion of social media users engage in neutral expressions, observations, or general thoughts without strong emotional or ideological alignments. The condition aligns with Barton and Lee's (2013) findings that digital discourse often consists of casual and interactive engagement. It does not necessarily contribute to polarized debates, but rather functions to maintain participation in online conversations.

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Additionally, Crystal (2011) argues that much of internet linguistics is shaped by spontaneity and informal structures. It shows digital users engage in short and expressive interactions that may not always be ideologically driven. The prevalence of general statements in online discussions supports the notion that social media users contribute to news discourse through varied forms of engagement. They are not solely limited to confrontation or support.

Refined Category	Count
Statement/General Opinion	19
Support/Praise	7
Prayer/Wish	5
Criticism	5
Constructive Suggestion	2
Religious/Belief	2
Warning	1
Sarcasm/Irony	1

Figure 2. Refined Category of Comments on Kompas Users Post

The category support/praise indicates a significant number of users expressing approval of government policies or public figures. It has 7 instances in the list. Comments such as *Mantap Pak Anies* (steady, Mr. Anies) and *Pak Jokowi keren* (Mr. Jokowi is cool) reflect the alignment of users with political figures or decisions. The pattern aligns with Đorđević's (2022) work on digital media discourse. It suggests that social media enables a performative aspect of political engagement. Users publicly display their support as part of identity construction. Baron (2008) further explains that online platforms alter discourse norms and fosters a culture of brief on emotionally charged statements that serve to reinforce social affiliations. The presence of supportive comments highlights digital discourse functions as a space for collective affirmation. Users do not only consume information, but also actively express solidarity with particular viewpoints.

Conversely, criticism constitutes a notable counterbalance to expressions of support and emphasizes the contestation of power in digital spaces. It has 5 instances in the table. Comments such as *Telat ente brow... Kebijakan nya makan korban dulu baru action...* (You are late brow ... the policy takes victims first and then takes action ...) exemplify skepticism toward government responses. Adolphs and Knight and Shahbaznezhad et al. (2020; 2021) argues that social media platforms facilitate counter publics. The groups challenge dominant narratives through interactive discourse. This is further supported by Thurlow (2017) who posits that digital discourse enables an alternative public sphere. Political dissatisfaction is vocalized and widely disseminated in digital. The ability of social media users to engage critically with public affairs underscores the role of digital platforms as a mechanism for democratic participation. It is often within the confines of polarized discourse. The presence of critical comments suggests social media as fostering political engagement. It also reveals tensions in governance and public trust (Schindler & Domahidi, 2021; Vendemia et al., 2019).

The prayer/wish category has 5 instances and shows a significant use of religious language in social media discourse. It reinforces the role of belief systems in interpreting sociopolitical events. Statements such as *Tidaklah Allah menurunkan suatu penyakit melainkan menurunkan obatnya juga* (Allah does not send a disease but sends the cure as well) illustrate religious discourse is interwoven with discussions of governance and crisis management. Crystal (2011) and Baron (2008) acknowledge the integration of religious expressions in online spaces. They argue that digital discourse serves as a medium for reaffirming cultural and spiritual identities. Furthermore, Kruse et al. (2018) highlight that social media often becomes a platform for moral and ethical debates. It reflects the intersection of politics, religion, and digital communication despite its secular foundations. The presence of religious discourse in social

Email: editorijhess@gmail.com

media commentary suggests that belief systems continue to shape public engagement. it is particularly in times of uncertainty.

The low occurrence of constructive suggestions has 2 instances. It is an important finding as it underscores a critical limitation of digital discourse. Social media enables public expression and it does not necessarily encourage solution-oriented discussions. The rarity of comments offering concrete policy recommendations such as *Negara harus menyediakan desinfektan untuk setiap wilayah pak* (the country must provide disinfectants for each region, sir) suggests that online debates are often dominated by reactions rather than deliberative discourse. Kruse et al. (2018) argue that social media platforms provide an avenue for civic engagement. They are primarily driven by affective rather than rational discourse. Koutamanis et al. and Vendemia et al. (2015; 2019) further assert that social media interactions tend to privilege performative rather than pragmatic communication. It suggests that while users may engage critically with public issues, the structure of digital discourse often prevents the emergence of sustained and solution-oriented debates.

In general, the refined categorization of social media comments on *Kompas* Facebook posts provides valuable insights into the nature of digital discourse. The dominance of statement/general opinion aligns with previous research on internet linguistics. It emphasizes the informal and interactive nature of online communication. The presence of support/praise and criticism highlights the ideological contestation within digital platforms. Those reinforce Dorđević's and Bouvier's arguments that regards social media as a site of political engagement. Additionally, the role of prayer/wish comments demonstrates religious narratives that shape online discourse which is consistent with findings by Baron (2008). Finally, the scarcity of constructive suggestions indicates a challenge in fostering rational deliberation in digital spaces. The analysis contributes to the broader understanding on language, politics, and belief systems that interact within the framework of social media. It reinforces the need for interdisciplinary research in digital linguistics and discourse studies.

# Discussion: Social Media as a Platform for Digital Democracy, Power Resistance, and Two-Way Communication

Social media has transformed contemporary discourse by providing a platform for individuals to engage in democratic participation. It can challenge dominant power structures and facilitate two-way communication between governments and the public. The analysis of comments on *Kompas*'s Facebook post regarding the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic illustrates digital platforms function as a democratic space. Users express opinions, critique policies, and engage in alternative discourse. As Barton and Lee (2013) argue, social media fosters a participatory culture. Traditional gatekeeping mechanisms in mainstream media are bypassed and enabled individuals to contribute to public debates in real time. The diversity of comment categories—including support/praise, criticism, sarcasm/irony, and constructive suggestions—demonstrates social media that has become a venue for democratic expression. Users exercise their right to voice approval, discontent, and alternative perspectives regarding government policies (Adolphs & Knight, 2020; Kohout et al., 2023).

One of the defining characteristics of social media is the role in facilitating individual democratization. It exercises their freedom to express opinions, arguments, and perspectives without the constraints typically found in traditional media. The comment section of the *Kompas* post reflects the phenomenon. Users engage in discourse ranging from outright support of government policies to sharp criticism and satirical engagement. The condition aligns with Crystal's (2011) assertion that digital communication enables rapid and widespread dissemination of user-generated content. Therefore, it democratizes access to information and public discourse. Moreover, Fairclough (2016) notes that the accessibility of online platforms amplifies participation. It makes political engagement more direct and immediate. The presence of constructive suggestions in the dataset indicates that social media users do not merely react to

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government actions. They also attempt to contribute meaningful solutions to public issues. It suggests that social media is not only a space for digital activism, but also a forum for deliberative engagement. Individuals can participate in shaping policy discussions.

Social media has emerged as a critical platform for democratization. It enables individuals to participate in political discourse, express opinions freely, and engage in deliberative communication beyond the constraints of traditional media. Unlike conventional mass media, social media facilitates participatory engagement by allowing users to comment, share, and challenge dominant narratives in real time. It differs to conventional mass media which information flows unidirectionally from institutions to the public. As Barton and Lee (2013) emphasize digital platforms that provide an open space. Citizens can engage in political discussions without editorial gatekeeping. It fosters a more inclusive and pluralistic public sphere. Similarly, Crystal (2011) argues that the structural openness of social media enhances linguistic accessibility. The condition enables diverse communities to engage in public discourse on their own terms.

Furthermore, social media empowers individuals by lowering the barriers to political participation. Đorđević (2022) highlights that digital discourse allows for micro-level activism. Individuals can voice dissent, mobilize support, and influence public opinion. The democratization of discourse is particularly evident in comment sections of news articles. The comment section enables users to directly respond to governmental statements as seen in the *Kompas* dataset. By fostering two-way communication between authorities and citizens, social media transforms political engagement from a passive activity into an interactive process. The change reinforces its role as a vital instrument for digital democracy and participatory governance (Fairclough, 2003; 1995).

Beyond democratization, social media also serves as a tool for challenging power and governmental authority. The presence of critical comments in the *Kompas* dataset highlights digital platforms which empower users to scrutinize state actions and policies. Statements such as *Telat ente brow... Kebijakan nya makan korban dulu baru action...* (You are late brow ... the policy takes victims first and then takes action ...) exemplify users leverage social media to hold authorities accountable. Thurlow (2017) argues that digital discourse functions as a counter public sphere. Power imbalances are actively contested. Similarly, Bouvier (2015) emphasizes that online spaces provide a mechanism for users to resist dominant political narratives by amplifying dissenting voices. The analysis of the comment section reflects the dynamic. Criticism is directed toward the government's perceived delayed response and prioritization of economic stability over public health. The engagement of users in openly criticizing government actions illustrates social media fosters a more participatory and accountable governance model. Even if official narratives attempt to maintain control over public perception (Fairclough, 1995; Vendemia et al., 2019).

Another crucial function of social media is its capacity for two-way communication. It gives direct interaction between authorities and the public. The *Kompas* article in official government statement presents a narrative of proactive policy implementation. It emphasizes the President's assurances regarding public welfare and economic stability. However, user responses in the comment section indicate skepticism. Several commenters question the government's preparedness and decision-making processes. It reflects Kruse et al.'s (2018) argument that governments utilize social media to disseminate information and public reactions often disrupt one-sided narratives. They foster an interactive communication model. Unlike traditional media where news is largely unidirectional, digital discourse allows for immediate feedback and collective deliberation. The presence of rhetorical questions in the dataset highlights user engagement in discursive challenges to government statements. They reflect a demand for greater transparency and accountability. It shifts from passive consumption to active engagement. Digital

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platforms alter traditional media dynamics by fostering direct public participation in governance discourse.

Social media also plays a crucial role in amplifying alternative voices that might otherwise be excluded from mainstream media narratives. The presence of sarcasm/irony in the dataset suggests that users employ humor and satire as tools of resistance. It is an aspect widely recognized in digital activism. Đorđević (2022) asserts that social media enables marginalized voices to engage in political discourse through creative and subversive rhetorical strategies. Furthermore, Baron (2008) notes that digital platforms allow individuals to bypass traditional editorial controls. It facilitates the emergence of counter-narratives. The comment section of the *Kompas* post demonstrates this phenomenon as users employ irony and humor to critique governmental inefficiencies. It challenges authoritative discourse and generates alternative readings of state policies. The informal and irreverent tone of digital discourse illustrates users who reclaim agency in political conversations. It leverages the interactive nature of social media to counteract dominant informational hierarchies.

Additionally, the presence of religious/belief comments in the dataset highlights another dimension of alternative discourse within digital media. In traditional news reporting, secular perspectives often dominate official narratives. However, social media provides a space where users integrate religious frameworks into public discussions. Comments such as *Tidaklah Allah menurunkan suatu penyakit melainkan menurunkan obatnya juga* (Allah does not send a disease but sends the cure as well) illustrate social media accommodates faith-based interpretations of socio-political events. Crystal (2011) and Baron (2008) acknowledge that digital platforms facilitate the convergence of religious and political discourse. The platforms allow for a more diverse range of ideological expressions. The aspect of social media discourse demonstrates digital platforms function as inclusive spaces. The spaces are for public debates by multiple epistemologies including religious, cultural, and secular perspectives. The integration of faith-based discourse in online discussions suggests that social media fosters pluralistic engagement. It provides different worldviews to coexist within the same communicative space.

The analysis of user comments on the *Kompas* Facebook post demonstrates that social media serves as a crucial platform for democratization, power resistance, two-way communication, and alternative discourse formation. The ability of users to express support, criticize policies, engage in satire, propose solutions, and integrate religious perspectives illustrates digital platforms to redefine traditional media dynamics. Barton and Lee (2013) argue that social media facilitates participatory engagement by removing traditional barriers to public discourse. Similarly, Bouvier (2015) and Thurlow (2017) also highlight the role of social media in resisting dominant power structures. The intersection of digital discourse with political, cultural, and ideological frameworks suggests that social media is not merely a passive medium for information consumption. However, it is an active site of negotiation, resistance, and engagement. As such, continued interdisciplinary research on social media discourse remains critical to understanding digital platforms that shape contemporary political and social landscapes (Fairclough, 2003, 2016; 1995).

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis of digital discourse in social media comment sections highlights the evolving nature of public engagement in contemporary political communication. The categorization of user responses in the *Kompas* Facebook post on the government's Covid-19 response illustrates social media functions as a platform for democratization, a tool for resisting power, a medium for two-way communication, and a space for alternative discourse. The findings reveal diverse engagement patterns. It ranges from support, criticism, sarcasm, rhetorical

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questions, and religious expressions to constructive suggestions. Reflecting the participatory nature of social media interactions as features of social media. It states digital discourse that removes traditional barriers to participation. The removal enables individuals to engage in political discussions without institutional mediation. Moreover, the presence of counter public discourse as evidenced in critical and sarcastic comments aligns with argument that social media facilitates ideological contestation. It challenges dominant power structures. These findings underscore the importance of social media in fostering digital democracy. At the same time, it allows citizens to voice opinions, scrutinize governance, and contribute to public discourse in unprecedented ways.

Furthermore, the study reinforces the significance of two-way communication in social media discourse. The study also demonstrates governmental narratives that are not merely consumed, but actively contested and reshaped by the public. The presence of religious expressions and rhetorical engagement also suggests that digital spaces accommodate a plurality of worldviews. They enable discussions extending beyond secular political debates. However, the limited presence of constructive suggestions raises concerns about the extent to which social media fosters substantive policy discussions. It argues that digital interactions are often driven by emotional rather than rational discourse. This study contributes to the growing field of digital discourse analysis by offering a systematic framework for understanding user engagement in political communication. Future research should explore social media algorithms that influence discourse visibility and whether digital engagement translates into real-world policy influence. By bridging discourse analysis, media studies, and political communication, this research underscores the transformative potential of social media in shaping contemporary democratic participation.

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