

LANGUAGE, POLARIZATION, AND THE EXPRESSION OF POLITICAL IDENTITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A LITERATURE REVIEW FROM A DIGITAL SOCIOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between language, political polarization, and political identity expression in social media through a digital sociology approach. Using a systematic literature review method, this study analyzes various relevant scientific works in the last ten years. The main focus is directed at how language is used as a tool of political expression and how such linguistic practices shape individual and collective identities in the digital space. Data was obtained from journal articles, books, research reports, and conference proceedings obtained through academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. The results of the analysis show that linguistic practices on social media—such as the use of hashtags, ideological diction, and visual symbols such as memes and emojis—play a major role in strengthening political identity and deepening polarization. Social media also creates echo chambers and filter bubbles that hinder dialogue across ideologies. The approach of digital sociology allows for a deeper understanding of how power, symbols, and discourse are intertwined in the formation of public opinion in the digital age. In conclusion, language in social media is not just a means of communication, but also a political means that shape affiliations, conflicts, and social structures. This study recommends the need to strengthen digital literacy and communication ethics in building a healthy and inclusive digital public space.

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INTRODUCTIONS

The development of digital technology has significantly changed the shape of public spaces and the social interactions that occur in them. Initially, public spaces were focused on limited face-to-face interactions, but now with the advent of social media, these spaces have evolved into virtual arenas that allow individuals to interact more broadly and dynamically. Social media, as a manifestation of digital technology, has provided a new platform for people to interact with each other and express their political views openly and directly. In this context, the political interactions that occur on social media are often capable of creating rapid and powerful waves of opinion, changing the way individuals participate in public discussions. (Fathurochman & Tutiasri, 2023; Nurhamdani et al., 2024)

Language plays an important role as the main tool in expressing oneself and identity in the digital space. The language dynamics that emerge on social media, including the use of informal styles, slang terms, memes, and political hashtags, create a distinctive and highly contextual form of communication. Digital language does not only function as a means of communication, but also as a means for individuals to show their political affiliation and identity in a performative way. In other words, the choice of words and ways of speaking can reflect a person's political position, which in turn can influence the way others view them. The language expressions used in social media play a role in shaping political narratives and group identities, which further complicates political dialogue in society. (Kriswantoro et al., 2022; Mannayong et al., 2024)

However, this development cannot be separated from the challenges related to political polarization, which is increasingly prominent in the digital era. Political polarization, often defined as the sharp distinction between 'us' vs 'them', has become stronger thanks to social media that can accelerate and deepen ideological segregation. The use of social media algorithms, which tend to give rise to content that is in line with the views of individuals, reinforces the formation of echo chambers, where individuals are only exposed to the same point of view, thus leading to the strengthening of political polarization. Thus, social media not only creates space for political discussion, but also for explored conflicts between polarized groups. (Karim, 2019; Sitorus et al., 2024)

Political identity in the digital context is not something static, but rather a dynamic social construct. Social media makes political identities openly formed and negotiated, giving individuals the opportunity to showcase and discuss aspects of their identities in real time. Expression of identity on social media is often tracked through digital symbols such as profiles, captions, and hashtags, all of which serve as self-representation in cyberspace. This interaction not only creates individual identities but also allows the emergence of collective identities based on political affiliation. (Mannayong et al., 2024; Wahyudi, 2023)

Through social media, individuals can easily engage in political discussions as well as respond to relevant issues in society, thus creating a more inclusive space for participation. Research shows that this participatory space is important in strengthening democracy, as it offers opportunities for individuals to be actively involved in political decision-making. However, the challenge faced is how to keep this space open and not trapped in destructive polarization. (Fathurochman & Tutiasri, 2023; Nurhamdani et al., 2024) (Kriswantoro et al., 2022; Wahyudi, 2023)

These various forms of participation reflect the increasing involvement of the younger generation in the political process, creating a more dynamic political culture. Generation Z, for example, has a complex acceptance of political polarization in digital media, and is often involved in discussions that raise contemporary social issues on digital platforms. This shows that social media has the potential to be a means for political activism, but it can also be a battleground for ideas that can exacerbate polarization. (Fathurochman & Tutiasri, 2023; Isfiaty & Saleh, 2023)

In this realm, ethics in communicating on social media is an important concern. Freedom of opinion provided by digital platforms is often abused, resulting in the emergence of hoaxes and disinformation, and can cause hatred between groups. Poor political communication can have a direct impact on the quality of democracy and the political process in a country, which in turn worsens the social atmosphere. Therefore, the challenge of maintaining healthy and constructive interaction on social media is essential. (Karim, 2019; Wahyudi, 2023)

The gap in social media studies often lies in an excessive focus on the effects of political behavior, while aspects of language and sociological identity, which are crucial in mediating political understanding, receive less attention. Research on how language plays a role in expressing and shaping political identities on these platforms is

expected to shed light on this complex phenomenon. While there are many studies that address the polarity that arises from interactions on social media, few highlight the symbolic and discursive dimensions of such activities, signaling the need for a digital sociology approach to capture a deeper nuance of how language is used as a means of expression in digital public spaces. Some studies have shown that language is not limited to a mere means of communication, but also a medium for affirming identity and political affiliation, which can reinforce or dismantle polarity narratives in society. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to further investigate how social media functions in reinforcing political polarization through different linguistic practices. By analyzing the findings of previous studies, we are expected to evaluate the contribution of digital sociology perspectives in understanding the interactions that occur. (Pettersson & Sakki, 2023; Unlu & Kotonen, 2024) (Schweitzer et al., 2024)

METHOD

This research utilizes a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review method based on a digital sociology perspective. As a literature study, this study does not collect primary data directly from respondents or social media, but focuses on searching, selection, analysis, and synthesis of previous scientific works that discuss the relationship between language, polarization, and political identity in the context of social media. This study aims to identify thematic patterns, theoretical approaches, and conceptual gaps in the existing literature in order to provide a solid conceptual foundation for further studies.

The data sources in this study are academic documents which include scientific journal articles, books, research reports, and conference proceedings relevant to the topic. The documents were obtained through searching various academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR, with keywords such as "*political identity*", "*language and politics*", "*social media polarization*", "*digital discourse*", and "*digital sociology*". Literature searches were limited to publications within the last ten years to maintain relevance to contemporary social media contexts, although classical literature of important conceptual value was still considered.

The data collection technique is carried out through a systematic selection stage based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria include publications that explicitly address topics related to language, political identity, and polarization in the digital space, especially on social media. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria include literature that only discusses digital or linguistic technical aspects without any connection with the socio-political dimension. The selected literature is then analyzed thematically and critically to identify the theoretical approaches used, key findings, and gaps and challenges in previous research.

Data analysis was carried out with a thematic analysis approach, namely by grouping literature based on the main themes that emerged, such as the expression of political identity through digital language, linguistic practices in polarized spaces, and the impact of algorithms on political content. In addition, the critical discourse approach is also used to examine how power relations and ideology are reflected in linguistic practices discussed in the literature. All findings are synthesized narratively within the framework of digital sociology, highlighting how digital technologies shape socio-political interactions through the medium of language and discourse. Through this method, the research is expected to make a strong conceptual contribution to understanding the dynamics of political identity and digital polarization in more depth.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Language as an Instrument of Political Identity Expression on Social Media

In the era of social media, language has become one of the key instruments to express and strengthen the political identity of individuals and groups. The linguistic practices used on these platforms, such as the selection of ideological diction, the use of slogans, and hashtags, function not only to convey political messages, but to build solidarity among followers of the same ideology. For example, supporters of a movement often convey political messages through words that resonate with the values they hold, creating a form of collective recognition that is able

to move people to participate more actively in societal issues. This diction, which contains the results of ideological thinking, can create a clear separation between "us" and "them", which in turn can contribute to polarization in society. (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021; Venus et al., 2024)

Language styles that reflect collective identities, such as nationalism, religiosity, and populism, are also evident in interactions on social media. The language adopted in this context not only conveys information but also serves to affirm the position of each group in the broader political context. For example, in important political moments, we often find the use of hashtags as a symbol of attachment to a certain identity or as a tool to mobilize the masses. The use of terms or phrases that have strong connotations can increase a sense of unity among group members, ultimately facilitating greater social mobilization. (Haqqi et al., 2022; Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019)

The role of visual language, including memes, emojis, and images, in the expression of political identity is increasing. These visualizations offer a new way for users to convey their political positions in a more digestible and attention-grabbing way. Memes, for example, are often a cultural weapon used to express criticism of a particular policy or candidate, using humor to reach a wider audience. Emojis also play an important role in creating nuances and emotions in digital communication, giving depth to texts that are often considered rigid or dry. The use of these provocative visual elements adds a new layer to the discussion and helps in building solidarity among individuals with similar ideologies. (Haqqi et al., 2022) (Fornara & Lomicka, 2019; Ge, 2019)

The concept of political identity performativity in the digital space emphasizes that political identity is not just self-recognition, but is also the result of social interactions that occur on social media. By creating and managing self-image in a digital context, individuals not only express themselves but also engage in the creation of broader meaning in society. It reflects how identity can be collectively formed and affirmed through linguistic practices and the use of visual symbols that flourish on social media platforms (Alturayef et al., 2023; Lai et al., 2017). This shows that political identity in the digital era is fluid, which can change along with the dynamics of interaction in the digital public space.

In this context, research shows that language cannot be separated from broader political phenomena, since it is a key mediator in the formation of public opinion and political mobilization. Therefore, understanding linguistic practices on social media is not only important for linguistic analysis, but also for understanding how political opinions and affiliations are formed within society. Researchers have observed that the way individuals convey their positions is often influenced by group affiliations and existing social norms, meaning that political expression on social media can provide deeper insights into the formation of social and political identities. (Wong et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2023) (Akintayo et al., 2024)

The involvement of language and visual elements in social media in expressing political identity creates a foundation for the formation of new communities that are connected through common values and beliefs. On the other hand, it can also exacerbate the polarization that exists between different ideological groups in society. This polarity is especially felt when different points of view meet in online discussions, often triggering intense emotional responses and giving rise to conflict. Thus, to understand the dynamics of political interaction on social media, critical analysis of the language and visual representations used is essential. (Johnson & Goldwasser, 2016, 2018)

Political Polarization and Fragmented Language Practices

Binary patterns in language use, which primarily reflect the divide between "us" and "them," are becoming particularly prominent in political discussions on social media. Labeling political opponents with specific terms not only distinguishes between groups, but also creates an image of the enemy that can fuel animosity and conflict. This kind of polarizing language is often used as a strategic tool to assert group identity and delegitimize others, creating a narrative that ideological differences are not just views but as threats to be faced. The practice reflects the tendency of digital rhetoric to construct a common enemy, resulting in internal cohesion within the group. (Dewi, 2024)

This rhetoric not only emerges from individuals, but is also supported by media structures that allow for the widespread and rapid dissemination of such messages. In this context, social media algorithms play an important role

in determining the visibility of discourses that reinforce polarization. When algorithms tend to show content that matches the user's interests, this creates a filter bubble that limits exposure to opposing views, thus deepening polarization. Users will be exposed to information that supports their beliefs more often, while alternative viewpoints become increasingly invisible, contributing to the fragmentation of public discourse spaces. (Atmojo & Pratiwi, 2022; Puansah, 2024)

This fragmentation is also exacerbated by echo chambers, a condition in which people confirm each other's opinions without constructive debate. In this echo chamber, every input and interaction further strengthens existing views, and this has the potential to separate groups in society psychologically and socially. The implications of this phenomenon are evident in voter behavior during elections, where individuals feel alienated from others who have different views, resulting in a situation in which tolerance for differences is reduced. Therefore, language not only serves as a means of communication but also as an instrument for establishing an exclusive political identity.

Furthermore, this fragmented linguistic pattern creates challenges for healthy dialogue in society. When political discussions are divided into specific groups, efforts to reach consensus or acceptable solutions become increasingly difficult. Politicians can also feel pressure to speak in a polarizing tone in order to maintain support from their voters, creating a cycle in which polarization is exacerbated through the use of emotion-provoking language. In this context, the message taken by the public is often distorted, as the focus on differences trumps efforts to understand similarities. (Night, 2022)

The data shows that rhetoric that relies on portrayals of a common enemy tends to provoke a defensive reaction among political opponents. Strategies like these, rooted in fear and hatred, can exacerbate already fragmented social conditions and create a vicious circle in broader politics. This emphasizes the importance of understanding the use of language as a key factor in the process of political identity formation and polarization in society. Research also shows that political identities built through the use of ideological diction reflect user biases as well as broader mindsets that are accepted in those societies. (Harah, 2019)

Faced with these challenges, there needs to be a planned effort to create a more inclusive discussion space where diverse views can be expressed without fear of intimidation or discredit. Good political education is expected to facilitate further knowledge among the public in order to encourage more constructive dialogue and better intergroup understanding—even if this is at odds with entrenched communication structures and patterns. Changing the way people interact and communicate with each other on social media can be a fundamental step in improving the current state of polarity. (Ernawati & Wijaya, 2023)

The Role of Social Media in the Production and Reproduction of Political Discourse

Social media has become an increasingly complex battlefield for political narratives and meanings, where political actors, netizens, and buzzers interact dynamically to produce and reproduce political discourse. When information is processed and disseminated through digital platforms, each actor not only contributes to the existing discourse but also serves as an observer as well as a critic. In this context, social media provides a space where political narratives can be changed instantly and influenced by varied information flows. This creates challenges for individuals and groups who want to shape public opinion and control narratives in political debates. (Tan & Sayankina, 2023; Wahyudi, 2023)

Interactions between political actors and netizens are often symbiotic; On the one hand, politicians use these platforms to reach voters directly, while on the other hand, social media users are often represented by buzzers spreading content that supports a particular agenda. For example, an analysis of social movements in various countries shows that the influence of buzzers in promoting or damaging the reputation of political figures is significant, especially during election periods. In the case of the presidential election in Iran, buzzers on Twitter played a role in manipulating public opinion, making the platform an arena for fierce rhetorical battles. (Dawson & Mäkelä, 2020; Farzam et al., 2023)

Each social media platform has characteristics that influence how users build narratives. For example, Twitter tends to emphasize on summarizing information and using hashtags to spread the message quickly. On the other hand,

platforms like Facebook prioritize more detailed content and more in-depth interactions among users, allowing for more substantial discussions. TikTok also introduced multimedia elements that focus on visuals and creativity, which allows economic and political narratives to be conveyed in a more appealing way to young audiences.

The adaptation of the language and communication styles used across platforms also reflects the importance of context in the production of discourse. On Twitter, for example, the use of language is often tailored to attract attention within strict character limits, while Facebook allows for longer and more detailed explanations. This contributes to the dynamics in which political messages can be influenced by the media, which requires a deep understanding of the intricacies of the platform in order to maximize the reach and influence of the narrative being built.

Global case studies show that these differences also depend on local cultural and political contexts. In countries with authoritarian regimes, such as in media analysis in Russia during the Ukraine crisis, pro-government narratives are often spread through bots and fake accounts to shape public opinion and seize hegemony in discussions. On the other hand, in a more democratic country, netizens have more freedom to explore various narratives and create counter-narratives as an action against disinformation. (Marigliano et al., 2024)

However, the reality that netizens and political actors interact in a fragmented information ecosystem has serious social consequences. The formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles often leads to ideological alienation, reduces tolerance for alternative views, and deepens political polarization among different groups. The consequences of this are not only felt in the political realm but can also extend to other sectors of society, such as education and daily social interactions. (Alfonzo, 2021; Campbell, 2023)

In this regard, it is important for researchers and policymakers to understand the role of social media not only as a means of communication, but also as an arena in which political discourse is produced and reproduced. Given that political narratives spread on social media can have a significant impact on public opinion, it is important to examine how these discourses are formed, and how the actors involved manage their identities and influence across different platforms. This also signals the need to increase media literacy among the public to face the challenges arising from the complexity of social media in a political context. (Karimova, 2020; Tan & Sayankina, 2023)

Through a deep understanding of the mechanisms of production and reproduction of discourse on social media, we can better understand the power dynamics involved. As technology evolves and the use of social media expands, the ability to influence political narratives will continue to be a major focus in public debate, demanding our attention to the issues that arise in this never-static digital realm.

The Position and Contribution of Digital Sociology in Understanding This Phenomenon

Digital sociology comes as a conceptual framework that can be used to understand the complex relationship between technology, language, and power, especially in the context of today's political dynamics. With the advancement of digital technology, the way individuals and groups interact socially has changed significantly. Digital sociology helps us analyze how identity and polarization are socially constructed through these platforms. In this context, language is not just a means of communication, but it is also a product of the social interactions that are formed in digital public spaces. (Santagiustina et al., 2025; Serrano et al., 2020)

The theoretical implications of the digital sociology approach suggest that political identity is constructed through linguistic practices and social interaction in digital media. Through the use of specific language, individuals and groups can assert their identities, strengthen political positions, as well as contribute to polarization in society. For example, in creating narratives on social media, public participation in shaping political discourse has a significant impact on the way people view certain issues, reinforcing our perceptions of other groups and triggering conflicts. (Judijanto et al., 2024)

The limitations of quantitative or technocratic approaches are a challenge in the analysis of this phenomenon, as these approaches tend to focus on presenting data and statistics without diving into the symbolic dimension and deeper meaning. Digital sociology, with its qualitative approach, is able to explore the broader behaviors, emotions,

and contexts that influence interactions in cyberspace, thus providing a more comprehensive perspective on the formation of public opinion and collective identity. Understanding the symbols used in digital communication is crucial, as it can reveal how power, social norms, and culture interact with each other. (Daeli et al., 2024)

In the context of digital public spaces, digital sociology allows us to see a shift in the way in which public discourse is generated and controlled. The fragmented public spaces of social media are often filled with conflicting views, creating challenges to healthy dialogue between different points of view. In this case, digital sociology serves to explore how political discourse is constructed and questions who has a voice in those discussions. Through this analysis, we can better understand how collective identity and polarization can be interconnected, as well as how this impacts social mobilization and political behavior in society. (Judijanto et al., 2024)

Overall, digital sociology offers valuable insights into understanding the various nuances in social interactions that occur in digital spaces. It is not just a product of technological advancement, but it is also a reflection of existing social structures, norms, and patterns of power that are intertwined in everyday life. Changes to digital public spaces demonstrate the importance of digital sociology approaches in analyzing contemporary issues, including political polarization and identity. (Daeli et al., 2024; Serrano et al., 2020)

The challenge faced in this approach is how to integrate empirical data and qualitative analysis to capture the entire spectrum of social realities present in digital media. This effort certainly requires interdisciplinary collaboration, involving sociologists, political scientists, and information technology experts to provide a thorough understanding of the interactions that occur on social media. With a combination of these approaches, we can enrich academic and societal discussions about how digital technology is shaping the way we interact, politicize, and communicate. (Judijanto et al., 2024; Wahyudi, 2023)

In a broader framework, digital sociology is not only a tool for academic analysis, but it can also be a guide for policymakers and society to better understand the dynamics in the digital public space. Thus, digital sociology has the potential to create positive changes in the way we interact and create a more inclusive society, although the challenges are constrained by polarization and discourses that threaten social cohesion. It is important, then, that we continue to explore and understand how this phenomenon is evolving and how we can adapt to create a healthier and more productive public discourse.

CONCLUSION

Language has a crucial role in shaping and expressing political identity in the context of social media. Language is not only a means of communication, but also a medium of political affiliation and group solidarity. Through a systematic literature review with a digital sociology approach, it was found that digital language practices—such as the use of hashtags, ideological diction, and visual symbols—have facilitated the formation of collective identities while reinforcing political polarization. Political identity on social media is performative and dynamic, constantly being shaped and negotiated through a growing discourse. Although social media opens up a wider space for political participation, these platforms also give rise to the phenomenon of echo chambers and filter bubbles that deepen ideological divisions. Media algorithms also reinforce polarization by displaying content that is in line with user preferences. Digital sociology provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the symbolic, discursive, and power dimensions in this phenomenon. Ultimately, understanding the interconnectedness between language, identity, and digital platforms is essential to reassess the dynamics of public discourse and democratic participation in the digital age. These findings emphasize the importance of inclusive digital literacy and ethical communication practices to reduce polarization and build a healthier digital public space.

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