

LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This research departs from the post-truth phenomenon which is characterized by the dominance of subjective opinions and emotions in shaping public perception, which has a serious impact on social cohesion in the digital space. Language plays an important role in this process, not only as a means of communication, but also as a discourse that reproduces power and social identity. This research aims to analyze how digital language shapes and fragments social identities, as well as to evaluate the role of digital citizenship education in facing the challenges of disinformation and social polarization. The approach of this research is qualitative with a systematic literature review method based on a critical sociological perspective. Data is obtained from journal articles, academic books, educational policies, and other literature sources collected through a targeted search in scientific databases. The analysis is carried out thematically and interpretively with an emphasis on concepts from Foucault, Hall, Bauman, Giroux, and Habermas. The results of the study show that the digital space creates a new form of social fragmentation, but also opens up opportunities for intervention through critical education. Therefore, digital citizenship education needs to be systematically integrated to form inclusive, critical, and ethical citizens in communicating in the digital era.

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INTRODUCTIONS

In the global and national context of the post-truth era, there has been a significant shift in the way information is perceived, especially in the socio-political order. This era is characterized by the dominance of emotions and

personal opinions that often replace objective facts. The dissemination of information through digital media, which is increasingly fast and massive, accelerates the process of fragmentation. This has led to the emergence of the phenomenon of misinformation and hoaxes that can polarize public opinion and undermine trust in social and political institutions. Research shows that misinformation can easily spread across vast digital platforms, creating a major challenge for society in distinguishing between true and false information. (Foroughi et al., 2019) (von Gillern et al., 2022) (Foroughi et al., 2019) (von Gillern et al., 2022)

The role of language in shaping social reality is crucial in this post-truth era. Language is not only a means of communication, but also a means of representing ideology and identity. In the digital space, the dominance of certain narratives can produce fragments of society that are separated from each other. For example, hate speech and identity politicization can divide communities. Hate speech on social media often elicits strong emotional reactions, which in turn deepens social divisions and complicates dialogue between different groups. In this regard, it is important for the public to develop a critical awareness of the use of language in the digital sphere. (Paradise & Abdulkarim, 2022) (Paradise & Abdulkarim, 2022) (Foroughi et al., 2019)

The fragmentation of identity in the digital context is also increasingly striking, especially with the emergence of echo chambers reinforced by social media algorithms. This echo chamber leaves individuals exposed to only information that suits their views, which in turn reinforces social polarization. The fragmentation of civic identity on social media can be seen from how ethnic, religious, and political groups are separate in the narratives they consume and disseminate. This threat to social cohesion is very real, as a result of society's inability to engage in constructive cross-viewpoint conversations. (Mowafy, 2022) (Mowafy, 2022) (Wulandari et al., 2021)

The digital literacy crisis in Indonesia is also a big challenge in dealing with this post-truth reality. Many individuals lack critical thinking skills and adequate digital literacy to sort through the information received. In addition, increasing intolerance and digital-based radicalism increasingly threaten the harmonious social order in society. To deal with this problem, education must be able to foster a critical and ethical attitude among citizens. Civic education integrated with digital literacy is essential to equip individuals with skills in navigating information in a complex cyber world. (Isdendi et al., 2023) (Isdendi et al., 2023) (Paradise & Abdulkarim, 2022)

The urgency of digital citizenship education cannot be ignored. An educational approach that emphasizes not only knowledge, but also on digital skills and the formation of the character of an active citizen who is critical and tolerant is indispensable. In this context, education serves as a means to form an inclusive collective identity, which can prevent social fragmentation in the digital space. Research shows that the development of media and digital literacy in the educational curriculum will increase students' awareness of their responsibilities as citizens in this digital era. (Wulandari et al., 2021) (Curran & Ribble, 2017)

In addition, integrating digital citizenship into the educational curriculum is a strategic step to build legal and ethical awareness among students. This is important so that they can participate actively and responsibly in an increasingly digitized society. For example, training programs for teachers on digital citizenship can strengthen an understanding of ethics and responsibility in the use of technology. In the long run, this kind of education is expected to create a generation of citizens who are more empowered and sensitive to social issues that may lead to polarization. (Paradise & Abdulkarim, 2022) (Bal & Akcil, 2024) (Isdendi et al., 2023)

Overall, a deeper understanding and approach to the interplay between language, identity, and social fragmentation in the post-truth era is essential. The rapid and manipulative dissemination of information in this digital era requires a holistic response from all parties, especially in the context of civic education. It is important to develop digital literacy skills that allow individuals to not only understand information, but also to actively participate in building more constructive narratives in society. In this way, it is hoped that the community can move towards social cohesion and a more inclusive identity even in challenging conditions. (Wulandari et al., 2021)

The lack of critical literature studies that link language, identity, and social fragmentation in the context of digital citizenship education is a significant research gap. In the post-truth era, where information is often vague and subjective, and social problems are complex, the need for an interdisciplinary approach is urgent. Disciplines that include linguistics, sociology, and education can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the changing

dynamics of language and identity in the digital realm. Research into this can uncover how language functions as a tool to shape and fragment social identities in the digital space, and encourage the development of strategies in digital citizenship education that are more responsive to these challenges. (Xu et al., 2019)

Furthermore, the selection of literature review as a research method provides a strong justification in building conceptual and pedagogical understanding. By collecting and analyzing various relevant literature sources, this study aims to analyze the use of language in shaping social identity and examine the impact of the post-truth era on social cohesion in Indonesia. This research will also identify challenges and opportunities in digital citizenship education to respond to the phenomenon of disinformation and social polarization. By following this approach, it is hoped that a strong conceptual perspective can be offered for the strengthening of digital literacy and civic ethics, which are crucial in building a more inclusive and united society. (Elcicek et al., 2018) (Heath, 2018)

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review method based on a critical sociology perspective, especially in sociolinguistic studies, social identity theory, and critical citizenship education. This approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives of understanding and interpreting social phenomena in depth through the analysis of relevant scientific texts and narratives. As a literature study, this research does not involve the collection of primary data, but focuses on a comprehensive review of various literature sources that discuss the relationship between language, identity construction, social fragmentation, and the dynamics of civic education in the context of the post-truth era and the development of digital space.

The main objective of this study is to identify how the practice of digital language contributes to shaping and fragmenting people's social identities, as well as to analyze how the post-truth era affects social cohesion and the concept of citizenship in virtual public spaces. In addition, this research also aims to explore the strategic role of digital citizenship education in building critical literacy, language ethics, and social solidarity amid rampant disinformation, hate speech, and polarization of public opinion.

The data sources used in this study are secondary literature consisting of scientific journal articles, academic books, research reports, civic education curriculum, and relevant policy documents regarding digital literacy, online communication ethics, and character education in a digital society. The literature was collected through systematic searches in various scientific databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Web of Science, and DOAJ. The search was conducted using keywords such as "digital citizenship education", "post-truth and identity", "language and social fragmentation", "digital discourse and polarization", "critical pedagogy in civic education", and "media literacy and civic identity".

The literature selection criteria include publications in Indonesian and English published in the last eight years, namely 2017 to 2025, and also include classic theoretical works by critical thinkers such as Michel Foucault on discourse and power, Stuart Hall on the construction of cultural identity, Zygmunt Bauman on liquid society and social disintegration, Henry Giroux on critical pedagogy, and Jürgen Habermas on public space and communicative rationality. Literature that is technically descriptive without depth of conceptual analysis and irrelevant to the educational context or digital social dynamics are excluded from the review.

The data analysis process is carried out with a thematic and interpretive approach. Researchers identify, classify, and interpret key themes that reappear repeatedly in the literature, such as the crisis of digital identity, divisive language practices, production of exclusive narratives, and civic education challenges in responding to media-based disinformation and intolerance. The focus of the analysis is directed at how language is used as a tool for the production of meaning and power in the digital space, and how education can be an intervention space to develop critical awareness, communication ethics, and inclusive civic identity.

Through a systematic synthesis of literature based on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, this research is expected to provide an in-depth conceptual understanding of the relationship between language, identity, and social fragmentation in the digital context, as well as contribute strategic ideas to the development of digital citizenship education that is more responsive to the challenges of the post-truth era.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Digital Language as a Discourse and Instrument of Power

In today's digital age, language serves as a powerful instrument of power, which can produce and regulate the knowledge and identity of individuals and groups. Language, in this context, acts as a form of discourse that shapes the way people think and express themselves in the digital space. Foucault states that discourse not only reflects reality, but also creates that reality through the practice of speaking and writing. In the digital space, what is expressed or ignored contributes to the formation of a narrative of power that governs who is allowed to speak, be heard, or even be removed from public discourse. Thus, critical analysis of the language used in the digital context is essential to understand the dynamics of existing power. (Alcaraz, 2022) (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021)

Digital platforms create spaces where power can be doubled and spread widely. The inequality in access to and influence of voice in the digital space implies that not all individuals are in the same position in reaching a larger audience. In many cases, the voices of those who are considered socially dominant or 'correct' have the upper hand, while those who are critical or opposing are often ignored. This raises concerns about fair representation in the context of public discourse, where only certain narratives are allowed to flourish, while others are deemed irrelevant or illegitimate. (Bonhomme & Alfaro, 2022)

The practice of hate speech has also emerged as one of the ways of language-based social control in the digital space. Hate speech, whether originating from individuals or groups, not only creates an atmosphere of fear, but also reinforces existing social stigma and prejudice. In many cases, this hate speech is directed at specific groups, creating polarization and deepening divisions between communities. This reinforces Foucault's argument about how power operates not only through direct action, but also through the regulation of language and the social norms that surround it. (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021)

Ideological labeling and media framing are two other techniques used in social control. Labeling is often used to assign a specific identity to individuals or groups, aiming to discredit their voice in public discourse. Through this strategy, the media and powerful individuals can frame others in a negative context, reinforcing certain narratives. Media framing can affect people's perceptions of certain issues, where emphasis on certain aspects of news or information can significantly shape public perception. (Bonhomme & Alfaro, 2022) (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021)

The development of digital technology facilitates the creation of new spaces for discussion and social interaction, but it also brings its own challenges in terms of controlling and regulating discourse. The emergence of algorithms that regulate the content displayed to users could be one of the factors that strengthen power relations in the digital space. Users are often only exposed to content that matches their preferences and views, creating an echo chamber where opposing opinions are marginalized. This creates an ecosystem where power relations depend on the platform's ability to choose which information is worth disseminating. (Lenz, 2021)

In conclusion, language in the digital space functions not only as a means of communication, but also as an instrument of power that regulates knowledge, identity, and social relations. In this context, it is important to conduct a critical analysis of existing discourse, as well as understand how hate speech practices, ideological labeling, and media framing contribute to social control. Therefore, to create a more inclusive digital environment, it is important for people to be critical in consuming and producing language, as well as actively challenging existing power structures. (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021)

Social Identity as a Discursive Construct

Social identity in the digital space is not fixed; rather, it develops and is negotiated through a wide variety of discourses that emerge on digital platforms. According to Stuart Hall, identity is not a static entity, but rather the result of a continuous process of social representation. In the digital age, social media facilitates the creation of collective narratives that allow individuals to form group identities based on religion, nation, or political affiliation (Bennis, 2024). Through online interactions, individuals communicate with each other and form a common understanding of

themselves and the groups they represent, which is certainly influenced by the broader social and political context. (Sun, 2025)

The role of social media in identity formation is especially felt when individuals and groups use the platform to convey their views and experiences. For example, on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, the narrative built can be very influential in creating a collective identity. Users often form their identities through hashtags, posts, and comments that reflect their shared experiences. This process is not just an individual expression; It is a collective interaction that creates or strengthens certain values and beliefs within society. (Oliver, 2020)

However, this identity formation does not come without consequences. Inter-identity conflicts often occur as a result of unequal discourse competition in digital public spaces. One identity may seek to dominate, while the other seeks recognition or legitimacy. This competition can lead to tensions that are not only limited to the virtual level but also spill over into real life, creating conflicts that are social and political in nature. For example, when something controversial is raised, reactions from different groups can lead to sharp polarization and threaten inter-community relationships. (Sun, 2025)

In this context, the practice of hate speech and labeling certain identities becomes a tool for dominant groups to maintain power and silence voices that are perceived as different or opposite. Hate speech can arise in response to perceived threats to the identity of a particular group, and is often used to normalize discrimination and exclusion against other individuals or groups. This serves to reinforce social hierarchies, where narratives that are considered "right" gain more legitimacy, while others do not. (Bennis, 2024)

In addition, media framing also contributes to regulating how identities are formed and understood in social contexts. A style of reporting that chooses to place a certain emphasis on certain aspects of the story can affect how the audience understands and accepts that information. In many cases, the media doesn't just report the facts; He also participates in creating narratives that can divide society based on social and political identities. This means that social identities are not only produced through individual interactions, but also through the way the media frames narratives in public spaces. (Sun, 2025)

The use of language in the digital space also plays a big role in this process. Language is not only a means of communication; It also serves as a means to build and assert social identity. The use of certain terms, symbols, and expressions on social media can reflect a person's political or social affiliations, clarifying their position in a larger identity crisis. Thus, considering language as an integral part of identity formation is important in analyzing dynamics in the digital space. (Arifin, 2023)

Overall, social identity in the digital space is an intricate and dynamic construct generated through interacting discourse. This process of identity formation shows how individuals and groups seek to be understood and recognized in society, despite being often threatened by the inequalities and competition that exist within the digital public space. Understanding these dynamics is essential to confront the social and political challenges that arise in today's digital age, as well as to create a more inclusive and equitable space for all voices. (Bennis, 2024)

Social Disintegration in a Liquid Society

In the context of Zygmunt Bauman's thinking about a liquid society, polarization and social fragmentation are becoming increasingly prominent symptoms in the digital era. Bauman underlines that a fluid society is characterized by weak social attachment and instability of collective values, in which relationships between individuals become highly fluid and less permanent. In such a community, individual identity is not only determined by the larger social and cultural context, but also by the interactions that occur in the digital space. With the acceleration of technological developments, society becomes increasingly fragile in terms of social cohesion, as emotional attachment between individuals decreases and inter-group relationships become unstable. (Best, 2016)

Rapid changes in communication patterns in the digital age also contribute to a reduction in social solidarity. Communication that takes place on digital platforms is often transient and superficial, thus reducing the depth of interaction and inhibiting the formation of strong relationships between individuals. Many interactions that occur in cyberspace are reactive and do not consider the broader context, resulting in social fragments that are not connected

to each other. The concept of identity, in this sense, is becoming increasingly fragmented, where individuals only interact with people who have similar views, creating a filter bubble effect. (Aidnik, 2017)

The use of algorithms in digital platforms further strengthens the exclusivity of identity in online communities. Algorithms designed to curate content often give priority to existing narratives and ignore different perspectives. This creates an echo chamber where the same opinions and ideas are mutually reinforcing, while conflicting views are ignored or even excluded from public discourse. As a consequence, the digital space becomes an arena for the formation of narrow and limited identities, emphasizing polarization among different groups. (Milan & Tréré, 2021)

The disintegration of online communities caused by this algorithm also creates a risk of the emergence of extreme thinking and intolerant views. When individuals are only exposed to perspectives that support their own views, they become more likely to adopt defensive attitudes toward different groups, which can make things worse. This polarization often leads to real social conflicts, where differences of opinion not only disappear from the public sphere, but also lead to discriminatory actions and violence between groups. (Aidnik, 2017)

The presence of digital space as a platform for information sharing accelerates social disintegration by lowering geographical and cultural boundaries. However, instead of building solidarity, it recreates the boundaries of exclusive identities. For example, certain groups may feel marginalized in discussions conducted in digital spaces, thus encouraging them to form closed communities that are more tight-knit and defensive against the 'other'. This creates an environment where constructive dialogue is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve. (Violin et al., 2024)

In this context, it is important to remember that while a fluid society offers opportunities to connect and interact widely, it also leaves a void that extreme narratives can exploit. Therefore, to rebuild social cohesion, there needs to be a collective effort to utilize inclusive and empathy-based communication in the digital space. (Aidnik, 2017)

Thus, the social disintegration in a liquid society described by Bauman is a complex and layered phenomenon, rooted in changes in communication patterns and the use of algorithms in the digital space. To address these challenges, strategies are needed that encourage inter-group connectedness and dialogue, as well as awareness of the negative impacts of polarization and social fragmentation that are increasingly severe in the digital age. These efforts are not only important to create a more cohesive society, but also to foster solidarity in the face of social issues that threaten our collective order. (Aidnik, 2017; Best, 2016)

The Crisis of Public Space and the Weakening of Communicative Rationality

The crisis of public space in the digital age illustrates the increasingly complicated conditions in the practice of rational deliberation and equal participation. Digital media, while offering a wide and open public space, does not always guarantee that the discourse that occurs is inclusive and democratic. There is a phenomenon in which emotions and personal opinions often dominate this space, causing the information that is disseminated to be no longer based on rationality. Habermas emphasizes that the ideal public space is a place where individuals can relate equally and prioritize dialogue based on rational argumentation. However, in reality, many interactions in digital public spaces focus more on expressing personal feelings and sentiments, rather than on critically exchanging ideas. (Fitri et al., 2021) (Rahman et al., 2023)

The dominance of populist narratives on social media has further exacerbated this situation. In many cases, content that puts the interests of a particular group first place can quickly spread and attract the attention of many people, while weaker voices or differing views are often overlooked. This creates a gap between those who have greater access and influence over the public, and those who are less fortunate in terms of access to information. As a result, digital public spaces often do not serve as an arena for discussions that value differences, but rather as a field for escalating identity disputes and competitions. (Oktarini et al., 2022)

The fragmentation of digital citizens is also an impact of this public space crisis. When individuals group based on common interests or views, they tend to get caught up in a circle of information that reinforces their beliefs

in the absence of constructive challenges. This creates an environment in which dialogue between differences becomes increasingly difficult. The inability to conduct a dialogue that respects each other and understands different views leads to a further decline in social cohesion and solidarity among citizens. (Zacharia, 2023)

The impact of this fragmentation is not only limited to the limited space in the arguments being discussed, but also to the erosion of mutual trust between members of society. Research shows that individual participation in public discourse contributes to the formation of identity and social solidarity. However, with increasing polarization, individuals may feel alienated from platforms that are supposed to be a place for them to express opinions and engage in meaningful discussions. (Purwanto & Widiyatmoko, 2024)

Furthermore, the strengthening of identity exclusivity triggered by digital platform algorithms plays an important role in directing the direction of social interaction. Algorithms are designed to promote content that is most relevant to the user's preferences, which often traps individuals in a narrow flow of information. This further reinforces social segregation so that individuals tend to only interact with similar thought models. As a result, the potential to find common ground or understand different perspectives becomes increasingly diminished, to the detriment of the pluralism that should be the basis for a democratic society. (Nurhamdani et al., 2024)

This crisis of public space requires us to rethink how we contribute to constructive dialogue in digital public spaces. Education that prioritizes digital literacy and critical thinking skills in the use of social media is becoming increasingly urgent. People need to be trained to identify and appreciate fact-based arguments, as well as respect differences of opinion in discussions, so that digital public spaces can once again serve as a meeting place for diverse ideas and create social cohesion. (São Paulo & Gift, 2020)

Overall, the crisis of public space in the digital age poses a major challenge to the practice of democratic deliberation. While digital media can provide space for broader participation, the ideal foundation of communication is often overlooked by the dominance of emotions and populist narratives. To overcome this social disintegration, it takes a concerted effort to strengthen dialogue, respect differences, and support platforms that encourage synergy in public discourse.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights how language in the digital space functions not only as a means of communication, but also as an instrument of power that shapes and fragments social identities in the post-truth era. In this context, hate speech practices, ideological labeling, and media framing reinforce social polarization and weaken social cohesion. Social identities that were once dynamic and open are now narrowing through digital echo spaces that reinforce biases and affiliations of certain groups. The ideal digital public space as a place for rational deliberation, as Habermas argues, is actually degraded by the dominance of emotional opinion and populist narratives. As a consequence, society is increasingly fragmented and it is difficult to achieve social understanding. On the other hand, digital citizenship education based on critical pedagogy plays an important role in shaping citizens who are media literate, ethical, and reflective. Education must be able to encourage critical thinking skills, build social solidarity, and strengthen awareness of language responsibility in the digital space. Thus, the results of this study recommend the need to strengthen digital citizenship education as a strategic response to face the challenges of identity and social fragmentation in a digitalized society.

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