

Beyond Consensus: Symbolic Convergence and Affective Polarization in Algorithmically Mediated YouTube Discourse on Trump's 2025 Inauguration

Nurhayani Saragih¹, Leila Mona Ganiem¹, Abdul Rahman HI¹, Novi Erlita¹, Sri Wahyuning Astuti², Farid Hamid Umarella¹, Ira Purwitasari¹

¹Department of Communication Science at Universitas Mercu Buana, Indonesia

²Department of Communication and Social Science at Telkom University, Indonesia

Correspondence: Nurhayani Saragih, Department of Communication Science, Universitas Mercu Buana, Indonesia.
Email: nurhayani.saragih@mercubuana.ac.id

Received: September 26, 2025

Accepted: February 21, 2026

Online Published: February 23, 2026

doi:10.11114/smc.v14i2.7998

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v14i2.7998>

Abstract

This article examines 466 YouTube comments posted in response to CNN's coverage of Donald Trump's 2025 inauguration to explore how symbolic convergence operates beyond consensus in algorithmically mediated digital discourse. Drawing on Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) and Agenda-Setting Theory, the study analyzes how symbolic cues activate situational, character-based, symbolic, and action-oriented fantasy themes that crystallize into competing rhetorical visions. The findings indicate a predominance of negative sentiment, particularly through situational and character-based fantasies that frame the inauguration as a moment of democratic crisis. At the same time, positive and neutral fantasies sustain narratives of national restoration, legitimacy, and resilience. Rather than converging toward shared agreement, these fantasy chains stabilize antagonistic meanings through affective alignment and narrative repetition shaped by platform visibility logistics. By integrating netnography with thematic analysis, this study conceptualizes YouTube comment spaces as an affective-symbolic arena in which symbolic convergence functions as a mechanism for producing and sustaining affective polarization. In doing so, the article advances SCT by demonstrating that convergence in platform-mediated political discourse operates through the algorithmic stabilization of competing symbolic realities rather than consensus formation.

Keywords: symbolic convergence theory, affective polarization, fantasy themes, agenda-setting, digital political discourse

1. Introduction

In an era of fragmented information flows and intensifying political polarization, digital platforms have become critical arenas for constructing and contesting symbolic meaning. Donald Trump's 2025 inauguration as the 47th President of the United States was not merely ceremonial but a globally mediated performance saturated with ideological and emotional significance (Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Nip, 2019). Among these platforms, YouTube functioned simultaneously as a broadcast medium and a participatory interface through which audiences consumed, interpreted, and reframed the event in real time (Jenkins et al., 2018; Kozinets, 2019).

Trump's rhetorical style—direct and metaphorically charged—invites symbolic interpretation and ideological alignment (Lawler McDonough, 2021; Martin, 2021). His appeals to divine guidance, national salvation, and anti-elite resistance resonate with broader populist narratives and right-wing moral nationalism (Waisbord, 2018). Within YouTube comment sections, audiences engage in collective meaning-making through memes, metaphors, and emotionally charged language, transforming the platform into a symbolic arena of both support and dissent (Serrano-Puche, 2021). Building on these dynamics, this study applies Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) (Bormann, 1985; Bormann et al., 1996) to examine how dramatized narratives and fantasy themes crystallize into competing rhetorical visions within polarized digital discourse. In parallel, Agenda-Setting Theory (AST; McCombs & Shaw, 1972) is employed to explain how media attention and emotional salience structure the prominence of symbolic issues in digital discourse.

While previous studies have largely applied SCT as a descriptive framework for interpreting shared group narratives,

this study repositions the theory as an analytical lens for examining how fantasy themes and rhetorical visions operate within algorithmically mediated comment spaces. Rather than viewing symbolic convergence as the formation of shared consensus, this article conceptualizes convergence as the stabilization of competing symbolic realities, even in the absence of agreement. In this context, fantasy chains function as mechanisms through which affective polarization and ideological alignment are intensified rather than resolved.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2019) to analyze user-generated commentary responding to CNN's YouTube coverage of Trump's 2025 inauguration. The analysis focuses on how fantasy-based narratives shape symbolic meaning, collective identity, and affective polarization in digital political discourse.

The study further examines how agenda-setting dynamics influence the visibility of contested political issues such as nationalism, divine destiny, anti-elitism, and geopolitical tensions—debates surrounding the proposed relocation of Palestinian refugees (De Rosa et al., 2021; Kotilainen & Pellander, 2022).

Accordingly, the study addresses four research questions: (1) How do symbolic narratives and fantasy themes dominate YouTube comments on Trump's 2025 inauguration? (2) How are rhetorical visions of support and opposition collectively constructed? (3) How does political polarization manifest through symbolic language and affective expression? and (4) How does agenda-setting dynamics shape the prominence of contested political themes? By integrating SCT and AST, this study advances a theoretical extension of SCT for understanding affective polarization in algorithmically mediated digital discourse. Rather than treating convergence as a pathway to consensus, the article demonstrates how symbolic convergence operates as a discursive mechanism through which polarized rhetorical visions are produced and stabilized within platformed political communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Symbolic Communication in Digital Political Discourse

Symbolic communication plays a central role in contemporary political discourse, particularly within digital environments characterized by high interactivity, emotional intensity, and ideological fragmentation. In such contexts, meaning is not fixed but continuously negotiated through visual symbols, metaphors, memes, and emotionally charged narratives circulating across various social media platforms. Political actors frequently rely on symbolic appeals—drawing on nationalism, religious references, and moral metaphors—to generate emotional resonance, reinforce group identity and demarcate ideological boundaries (Martin, 2021; Waisbord, 2018).

Within this broader landscape of symbolic political communication, Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) offers a critical conceptual entry point for understanding how shared meanings and collective identities emerge through storytelling and symbolic interaction (Bormann, 1985). Rather than reiterating the full mechanics of SCT at this stage, this section situates the theory within a wider scholarly tradition concerned with how symbols and narratives structure political meaning in digital contexts. Recent scholarship demonstrates that digital communication intensifies ideological polarization through symbolic discourse. Serrano-Puche (2021) for example, showed that symbolic narratives circulating in online communities do not merely reflect collective emotions but actively contribute to the construction of oppositional identities. Similar dynamics are evident in polarized debates surrounding issues such as COVID-19 vaccination, climate change, and geopolitical conflict, where competing narratives are mobilized to articulate moral boundaries and political belonging.

A growing body of literature supports these observations. Flew (2019) and McCoy et al. (2018) highlighted how crises of trust are intensified by narrative fragmentation in digital media, producing symbolic confrontation among ideological groups. De Vreese et al. (2018) and Siles et al. (2023) further demonstrated how digital populism strategically deploys religious and moral symbolism to foster collective identification while marginalizing dissenting voices. Additionally, Moreno-Almeida (2021) argued that political memes and visual symbols function not only as creative expression but also as organizing devices for collective narratives. By condensing complex political messages into easily shareable formats, memes accelerate the circulation of symbolic cues and strengthen interpretive communities around specific political issues. In this context, Jost et al. (2018) noted that social media platforms facilitate political mobilization by reinforcing ideological alignment and collective motivation.

Taken together, this literature underscores that symbolic communication in digital political discourse operates as a contested arena of meaning, identity, and power. Rather than serving merely as a channel for expression, symbolic narratives structure how political realities are interpreted, contested, and emotionally experienced—dynamics that become especially pronounced within algorithmically mediated environments. The implications of these dynamics for SCT are developed more fully in Section 2.4 where symbolic convergence is examined as a mechanism operating within polarized digital publics.

2.2 Agenda Setting and Emotional Resonance

Agenda-Setting Theory (AST) focuses on how media influence public perceptions of issues by shaping which topics are highlighted and which are marginalized (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Rather than merely reflecting public priorities, media actively structure attention and relevance, operating as a symbolic mechanism of power that defines what is considered

socially and politically important. In the digital era, the agenda-setting dynamics have shifted significantly. While mainstream media continue to play a role, individual and collective actors on social media increasingly participate in producing, circulating, and amplifying political content (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Vargo et al. 2018). Citizen journalists, political influencers, and online communities can influence dominant narratives through content virality and strategic hashtag use, contributing to a more decentralized and participatory agenda-setting process (Brown, 2018; Sorvali, 2023).

Emotional resonance plays a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of agenda-setting processes. Contemporary political issues are frequently framed through emotions such as fear, anger, nostalgia, or hope to increase visibility and engagement (Hautea et al., 2021). Emotions not only reinforce memory retention but also drive affective political behavior (Papacharissi, 2016). As a result, political content is no longer consumed as neutral information, but as emotionally charged experiences that deepen ideological alignment and polarize public discourse (Hasell et al., 2024). Recent evidence suggests that emotional and symbolic appeals are most effective when grounded in lived experience and perceived social relevance. Saleh et al. (2024) demonstrated how social media shapes behavioral intention through emotional identification among younger or politically engaged audiences. In parallel, socioeconomic pressures can shape receptivity to emotionally framed political content. Structural challenges in service and trade-oriented economies, for example, may heighten public sensitivity to narratives that evoke frustration, anxiety, or hope (Shahnia et al., 2020).

Research further indicates that emotional framing intensifies agenda-setting and priming effects during periods of crises or uncertainty (Andersen et al., 2016). This dynamic is evident in Donald Trump's political rhetoric, which frequently mobilizes themes of national decline, elite betrayal, and identity crisis. Such rhetoric leverages symbolic and emotional appeals to forge psychological connections between leaders and followers (Feezell, 2018; Gilardi et al., 2022; Salman et al., 2016). Contemporary scholarship also highlights how social media algorithms amplify emotional resonance by creating emotional echo chambers, where users are selectively exposed to content that reinforces existing emotions and beliefs (Aghajari et al., 2023; Brady et al., 2020; Brennen et al., 2021; Del Vicario et al., 2016; Tanesini, 2022; Watkins et al., 2020). Morally and emotionally charged content, such as anger or empathy, tends to spread rapidly, intensifying digital polarization and shaping agenda-setting outcomes. Taken together, agenda-setting and emotional resonance operate as interdependent mechanisms in digital political discourse, shaping not only what issues gain visibility but also how they acquire symbolic and affective force.

2.3 Digital Polarization and Discourse Fragmentation

Social media platforms accelerate political polarization by fostering algorithmically structured echo chambers and filter bubbles that reinforce preexisting beliefs while limiting exposure to alternative perspectives (Arora et al., 2022; Peralta et al., 2024). Within these environments, political engagement is increasingly driven less by deliberative reasoning than by affective responses such as anger, fear, and group pride, which heighten in-group attachment and intensify out-group rejection (Hameleers et al., 2022; Wilf et al., 2023).

On platforms such as YouTube, these dynamics are particularly visible in comment sections, where political discourse becomes fragmented into ideologically aligned clusters characterized by extreme language, cynicism, and symbolic expression. Netnographic research shows that algorithmic visibility and participatory repetition amplify congruent narratives while marginalizing or aggressively contesting dissenting voices, reinforcing exclusionary patterns of engagement (Treuillier et al., 2024).

These dynamics reshape not only interactional dynamics but also the broader structure of public discourse and opinion formation. The proliferation of partisan content, disinformation and moralized rhetoric conditions for inclusive deliberation, intensifying “us versus them” framing and deepening affective polarization (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024; Humprecht et al., 2020). Longitudinal and experimental studies further demonstrate that sustained exposure to emotionally and ideologically congruent content contributes to the delegitimization of democratic institutions—an effect closely tied to algorithmic infrastructures that privilege affectively salient and morally charged narratives (Adams et al., 2023; Miller & Vaccari, 2020; Vasist et al., 2024).

Within this polarized and fragmented communicative environment, symbolic dynamics play a crucial role in stabilizing collective alignment and antagonism. Shared narratives circulated through slogans, memes, hashtags, and dramatized rhetoric function as symbolic anchors that bind in-group members while demarcating ideological boundaries. Rather than merely expressing opinion, these symbolic formations organize meaning, identity, and power, creating the conditions under which competing rhetorical visions are consolidated and sustained in digital publics.

2.4 Extending Symbolic Convergence in Algorithmic Political Discourse

Rather than revisiting the foundational premises of SCT, this section focuses on how the theory can be extended to account for the conditions of algorithmically mediated political discourse. While SCT has been widely applied to examine how shared meanings and collective identities emerge through dramatized narratives across organizational, interpersonal, and mediated contexts, its engagement with the algorithmic and affective infrastructures shaping

contemporary digital platforms remains limited. As a result, the role of platform logistics in structuring symbolic visibility, narrative repetition, and emotional intensity remains under-theorized within SCT-based research. In contrast, scholarship on digital and political communication demonstrates that online discourse is deeply shaped by algorithmic power, affective visibility, and platform governance, which condition how symbols, emotions, and narratives circulate and gain prominence (Bucher, 2018; Papacharissi, 2016). Platforms actively organize attention through algorithmic ranking, recommendation systems, and visibility hierarchies that function as forms of political and symbolic governance (Srivastava, 2021; Ulnicane & Aden, 2023).

Building on this gap, this study extends SCT by situating symbolic convergence within algorithmically mediated comment environments, where fantasy themes are not only shared but selectively intensified and stabilized through platform-specific affordances such as visibility hierarchies and participatory repetition. In this context, YouTube comment sections function as affective-symbolic arenas in which collective identities are produced through emotional alignment and symbolic opposition, rather than as neutral spaces of opinion expression (Kozinets, 2019). By applying fantasy theme analysis to polarized political discourse on YouTube, this article demonstrates that symbolic convergence and affective polarization are not contradictory processes but mutually reinforcing dynamics. Under algorithmic conditions, convergence emerges less pathway towards shared agreement than as a mechanism through which competing symbolic realities are consolidated and rendered emotionally salient. This reconceptualization advances SCT by integrating algorithmic mediation into its explanatory framework, showing how symbolic narratives acquire affective force and political significance under conditions of platform-driven visibility and polarization (Bucher, 2018; Papacharissi, 2016).

2.5 Netnography and Online Political Engagement

Netnography is employed not as a demographic mapping of online communities, but as an interpretive approach to examining vernacular symbolic practices and affective expression in public comment spaces. This orientation aligns netnography with SCT by focusing on how fantasy themes and rhetorical visions emerge through everyday symbolic interaction. Netnography is a qualitative research approach developed to examine cultural meanings produced and circulated within online communities. Adapted from ethnography, it is specifically designed for digitally mediated environments in which interactions, symbols, and narratives unfold rapidly and publicly (Kozinets, 2019). As such, netnography provides a rigorous framework for analyzing digital political discourse by foregrounding symbolic practices, affective engagement, and narrative formation in online environments.

In the context of online political engagement, netnography is particularly effective for capturing the symbolic and affective dimensions of public discourse. On platforms such as YouTube, open comment sections enable users to articulate political stances through symbolic forms, including memes, hashtags, capitalization, emojis, and emotionally charged language that express moral judgment and ideological identity (Highfield & Čančar, 2018; Papacharissi, 2016). These practices constitute forms of vernacular discourse: spontaneous, informal, yet symbolically dense forms of public communication (Johansson, 2017; Oh, 2019). Recent research further demonstrates netnography's capacity to illuminate political participation among marginalized groups, for whom social media functions as a critical space for negotiating identity, expressing dissent, and articulating collective interests (Hüu, 2022; Theocharis et al., 2023). Political humor and meme-based expression, particularly among younger generations, are likewise understood as modes of participatory engagement and symbolic resistance to dominant power structures (Penney, 2020). Taken together, netnography offers a rigorous methodological framework for analyzing digital political discourse by foregrounding symbolic practices, affective engagement, and narrative formation in online environments.

Accordingly, netnography supports the analysis of algorithmically mediated discourse by foregrounding symbolic narration and affective alignment rather than user characteristics. Within this study, netnography enables the identification of fantasy themes, symbolic cues, and affective alignment as they emerge organically in everyday political talk. This approach makes it particularly well suited for the application of SCT to algorithmically mediated digital publics, where collective meaning and polarization are produced through repeated symbolic narration rather than deliberative exchange. This approach is particularly appropriate for studies that examine symbolic convergence in large-scale, open, and algorithmically organized publics rather than bounded online communities.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2019), integrated with thematic analysis, to examine symbolic narratives and rhetorical visions in public responses to Donald Trump's 2025 inauguration speech on YouTube. The analysis is guided by Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT; Bormann, 1985; Bormann et al., 1996) and Agenda-Setting Theory (AST; McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which are employed as analytical frameworks to examine processes of meaning co-construction and issue salience in digital discourse. A total of 466 comments were purposively selected from a high engagement CNN YouTube video of the inauguration speech (approximately 14.2 million views),

based on relevance, clarity, and discursive richness. The analytical procedure followed a multi-stage process, including data preprocessing, thematic coding, fantasy type classification, and sentiment annotation.

3.2 Data Collection and Preprocessing

The dataset initially comprised 8,280 public comments, extracted in April 2025 using the YouTube Comments Downloader. Only English-language comments containing more than ten words were retained. Spam, duplicate entries, and bot-like content were manually removed, resulting in a final corpus of 466 analyzable comments. All comments were lemmatized and cleaned (e.g., stopwords, punctuation, emojis removed) to reduce noise. To support the identification of symbolic cues, selected terms were standardized using placeholders (e.g., “God” → [religious_symbol]).

3.3 Coding Process and Analytical Framework

Thematic analysis followed Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-phase model and was conducted using NVivo 12 Plus. An initial round of open coding was performed on approximately 15% of the dataset to develop a coding schema. This schema guided the classification of fantasy types (situational, character-based, symbolic, and action-oriented), as well as the identification of fantasy chains and rhetorical visions. Sentiment polarity (positive, negative, neutral) was coded in parallel and cross-checked manually, yielding percent agreement above 85%. Symbolic cues (e.g., “Savior,” “Tyranny,” and “Freedom”) were mapped to broader rhetorical visions, while agenda-setting dynamics were assessed through patterns of symbolic prominence and framing.

3.4 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Methodological rigor was ensured through triangulation across data sources, theoretical frameworks, and analytic procedures. All comments analyzed were publicly accessible and anonymized. Where necessary, potentially sensitive quotations were paraphrased to minimize identifiability. Ethical considerations followed established guidelines for digital and netnographic research, balancing individual privacy with the public nature of online political discourse (Kozinets, 2019; Samuel et al., 2019).

4. Results

This section reports descriptive and thematic findings from 466 YouTube comments posted in response to CNN’s coverage of Donald Trump’s 2025 inauguration. The presentation prioritizes observable patterns in the data, while interpretive and theoretical implications are reserved for the Discussion section. Beyond symbolic and rhetorical coding, the results highlight distinct affective tendencies across supportive and oppositional comments. Supportive comments are characterized by expressions of admiration, pride, and religious reassurance, whereas oppositional comments frequently employ sarcasm, irony, and moral criticism. These affective patterns recur across lexical frequency counts, sentiment polarity, and fantasy-type classifications, providing an empirical overview of how emotional orientations are distributed within the dataset.

Figures 1 and 2 summarize lexical prominence across the comment corpus. High-frequency terms such as “*president*,” “*America*,” and “*country*” reflect a strong focus on national leadership and collective identity, while terms such as “*history*” and “*government*” index references to institutional contexts. Additional terms, including “*criminal*” and “*tariff*,” point to recurring concerns related to legal legitimacy and policy issues. Together, these lexical patterns indicate that discussions combine affective language with symbolically charged references to politics and governance.

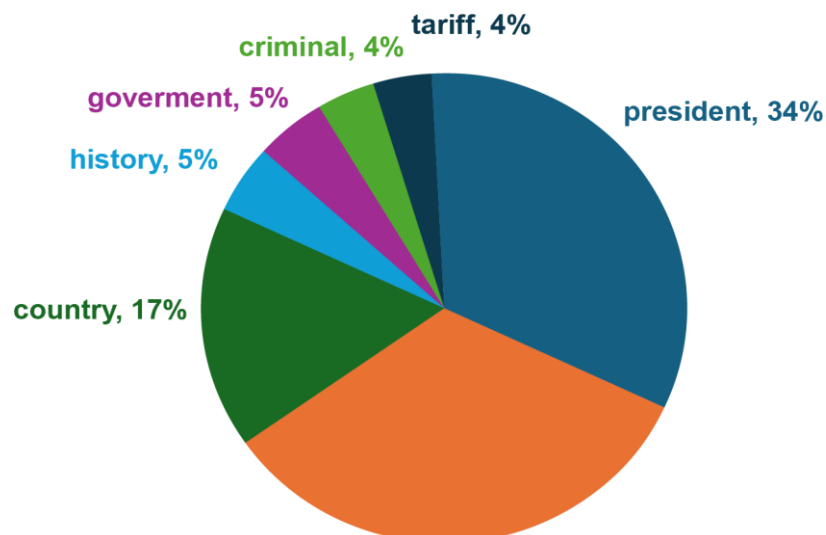


Figure 1. Frequency of the Most Common Words in YouTube Comments

Note. This figure displays the relative frequency of the most commonly used words in comments responding to the inauguration. The prominence of terms such as “president,” “America,” and “country” underscore a focus on national leadership and collective identity.



Figure 2. Word Cloud of Key Symbolic Terms

Note. This figure visualizes salient symbolic and ideological terms in the comment corpus. Larger words indicate higher frequency, reflecting collective attention to national and political identity themes.



Figure 3. Sentiment Polarity and Fantasy Type Treemap of Trump’s 2025 Inauguration Comments

Note. This figure integrates sentiment polarity (positive, negative, neutral) with fantasy types (situational, character-based, symbolic, action-oriented) to depict the intersection of affect and framing.

Figure 3 visualizes the distribution of sentiment polarity (negative, positive, and neutral) across fantasy types identified in the dataset. Negative sentiment appears most frequently, particularly within situational and character-based fantasy

structures. Symbolic and action-oriented fantasies are also present, though at lower frequencies. The visualization highlights how emotional tone varies across different narrative forms used by commenters. Overall, the results show that YouTube comment discourse surrounding the inauguration is structured by recurring emotional expressions, symbolic references, and narrative patterns. These empirical distributions form the basis for the theoretical interpretation developed in the following Discussion section.

4.1 Sentiment Analysis

The sentiment distribution in public comments responding to Donald Trump's 2025 inauguration speech shows a clear predominance of negative sentiment. Of the 466 comments analyzed, 240 (52%) were coded as negative, 198 (42%) as positive, and 28 (6%) as neutral. Negative comments frequently expressed criticism and concern regarding Trump's return to office, often referencing legal issues and perceived implications for democratic institutions. Representative statements include, "A convicted felon with unchecked power—this is the end of democracy as we know it," reflecting recurrent themes of institutional anxiety and political opposition within the dataset.

Positive comments were primarily supportive, emphasizing approval, optimism, and expressions of loyalty. Examples include, "Welcome back, President Trump. May God guide your leadership for America's future," and "He's the only one strong enough to fix this broken country." Neutral comments, though relatively infrequent, tended to adopt an observational stance, such as, "Regardless of politics, the ceremony was historic," and "Interesting speech; let's see what happens next." Figure 3 visualizes the distribution of sentiment polarity (positive, negative, neutral) in relation to fantasy types. Negative sentiment appears most frequently across the dataset, particularly within critical or oppositional narratives. Positive sentiment is most commonly observed in comments aligned with patriotism and unity, while neutral comments typically reference procedural or historical aspects of the inauguration without explicit emotional valence. These sentiment distributions provide an empirical overview of affective orientations in the comment corpus and serve as a basis for further analysis of narrative structures and rhetorical visions, which are examined in subsequent sections and summarized in Table 1.

4.2 Narrative Theme Analysis

Thematic analysis reveals two dominant narrative orientations in the comment corpus: pro-Trump ($n = 171$) and anti-Trump ($n = 167$). In addition to these two primary orientations, several recurring themes emerged, including political and media skepticism, policy and social identity concerns, ambivalence, and visual-symbolic references. Pro-Trump narratives frequently depicted Trump in positive and affirming terms, emphasizing leadership, national restoration, and religious reassurance. Representative comments include, "Trump embodies the true spirit of American leadership," and "God has answered our prayers—he's back." These comments commonly referenced themes of economic recovery, religious values, and patriotic sentiment. Anti-Trump narratives, by contrast, were characterized by critical framing of the inauguration and its political implications. Comments often referenced Trump's criminal conviction and expressed concern about democratic institutions. Examples include "How can a convicted criminal be celebrated as a leader?" and "This is a dark day for American democracy." Such comments articulated themes of institutional distrust, governance concerns, and moral criticism.

Several additional thematic patterns were identified across the dataset. These include:

- Political and media conflict, reflected in statements such as "The media no longer informs—it manipulates," and "This is all a show for ratings."
- Policy and social identity concerns, for example, "His agenda threatens minorities and immigrants alike."
- Ambivalence expressed in comments such as "I'm tired of both sides—nothing ever changes."
- Visual-symbolic references, including remarks like "His salute said more than his words ever could."

Fantasy-type classification indicates that situational and character-based fantasies appear most frequently in the dataset, while symbolic and action-oriented fantasies occur less often. These distributions highlight variation in narrative framing across comment types. Figure 3 presents a proportional treemap integrating sentiment polarity and fantasy type illustrating how affective tone is distributed across narrative forms identified in the analysis.

4.3 Fantasy Type Analysis

Using the fantasy-type categories derived from Symbolic Convergence Theory (Bormann, 1985; Bormann et al., 1996), the analysis identified four recurring fantasy types in the comment dataset that characterize how the inauguration was discussed.

- Situational fantasies ($n = 181$) were the most frequent and commonly framed the inauguration in relation to broader political conditions. Comments in this category often referenced democratic decline or systemic crisis,

as illustrated by statements such as “This is how fascism starts—with applause and blind loyalty,” and “We’re watching democracy crumble in real time.”

- Character-based fantasies ($n = 114$) focused on Trump as a political figure, emphasizing evaluations of his character and leadership. Supportive comments included expressions such as “Trump is a chosen leader, blessed by God,” while critical remarks described him as, “a narcissist who thrives on division.” These comments centered political interpretation on personal attributes and moral judgment.
- Symbolic fantasies ($n = 105$) relied on religious and national imagery to articulate responses to the event. Examples include metaphoric expressions such as “The bald eagle weeps for a democracy in decline” and “Today, the American flag waves with renewed pride.” Such comments employed symbolic language to convey emotional reactions to the inauguration.
- Action-based fantasies ($n = 66$) referenced calls for political action or collective alignment. Illustrative comments include “It’s time to rise and resist,” and, “We must stand united behind our President.” These statements emphasized mobilization and collective positioning in response to the event.

Across the dataset, these fantasy types appear with varying frequency and provide an empirical overview of the narrative forms through which commenters expressed political reactions to the inauguration. The distribution of fantasy types is summarized in Figure 3, which situates these categories alongside sentiment polarity.

4.4 Cross-Tabulation of Narrative Themes, Fantasy Types, and Sentiment

As summarized in Table 1, the cross-tabulation presents the distribution of sentiment polarity across narrative themes and fantasy types in the comment dataset, illustrating how negative, neutral, and positive sentiments are clustered within pro-Trump, anti-Trump, and other thematic categories.

Table 1. Cross-tabulation of Narrative Theme, Fantasy Type, and Sentiment.

Narrative Theme	Fantasy Type	Negative	Neutral	Positive
A. Pro-Trump Narrative	A. Character-based	1	1	32
	B. Situational	0	1	14
	C. Action-based	4	1	50
	D. Symbolic	3	1	63
B. Anti-Trump Narrative	A. Character-based	62	0	1
	B. Situational	81	1	1
	C. Action-based	2	0	0
	D. Symbolic	19	0	0
C. Political Conflict & Media	A. Character-based	4	0	8
	B. Situational	25	2	13
	C. Action-based	1	0	7
	D. Symbolic	1	0	1
D. Ambivalence	A. Character-based	1	2	1
	B. Situational	13	12	1
	D. Symbolic	0	2	0
E. Policy & Social Identity	A. Character-based	1	0	0
	B. Situational	14	2	1
	C. Action-based	0	0	1
	D. Symbolic	1	0	0
F. Visual Narrative				
	D. Symbolic	7	3	4
Total		240	28	198

Within pro-Trump narratives, symbolic and action-based fantasies are most frequently associated with positive sentiment, as illustrated by comments such as “Today, the American flag waves with renewed pride” (symbolic–positive) and “We will rebuild America stronger under Trump’s leadership” (action–positive). In contrast, anti-Trump narratives are largely characterized by situational and character-based fantasies associated with negative sentiment. Situational fantasies constitute the largest share of negative comments in this category, followed by character-based fantasies. Illustrative examples include “Trump reflects the failure of leadership and morality” (character–negative) and “This is how fascism starts—with applause and blind loyalty” (situational–negative).

Narrative themes related to political and media conflict, policy and social identity, and ambivalence display more mixed sentiment distributions, although negative sentiment remains prevalent across these categories. Visual-symbolic

narratives show a smaller but noticeable distribution across all three sentiment types. Overall, the cross-tabulation demonstrates systematic variation in sentiment polarity across narrative themes and fantasy types. These distributional patterns provide an empirical overview of how affective orientation and narrative framing intersect within the YouTube comment corpus and serve as the basis for further interpretation in the Discussion section.

4.5 Sample Comments by Theme, Fantasy Type, and Sentiment

This subsection presents selected sample comments to illustrate how narrative themes, fantasy types, and sentiment orientations co-occur in the dataset. Pro-Trump narratives are predominantly associated with positive sentiment and frequently emphasize leadership and patriotic symbolism, as reflected in comments such as “Trump embodies the true spirit of American leadership” and “Today, the American flag waves with renewed pride.” Anti-Trump narratives are largely characterized by negative sentiment, often expressing concern about democratic legitimacy or moral decline, as illustrated by comments such as “The bald eagle weeps for a democracy in decline.”

Themes related to media and political conflict display more varied sentiment, combining distrust with resistance as reflected in comments such as “The media distorts reality for political agendas” and “Turning off biased news channels is an act of freedom.” Ambivalent comments tend to express neutral skepticism toward politics, as in “Two wings of the same bird, both incapable of soaring,” while policy and social identity narratives reference inequality and governance issues, occasionally accompanied by positive acknowledgment, such as “Even small steps toward social justice deserve recognition.” Visual-symbolic narratives are reflected in comments that emphasize gestures or imagery, for instance, “A simple salute spoke volumes about national pride.” Together, these examples illustrate how narrative themes and fantasy types are systematically associated with distinct sentiment orientations within the comment corpus.

5. Discussion

This study advances a theoretically integrative framework that connecting symbolic convergence, affective polarization, and platform-mediated visibility in contemporary digital political discourse. Public reactions to Donald Trump’s 2025 inauguration on YouTube reveal a polarized symbolic arena in which emotionally charged narratives and fantasy types intersect to shape collective meaning and ideological alignment. Rather than functioning as neutral exchanges, comment sections operate as sites of symbolic contestation where competing rhetorical visions of national restoration and democratic decline are negotiated through affective and narrative alignment.

5.1 From Empirical Patterns to Theory: Interdimensional Relations in Algorithmically Discourse

Drawing on the patterned distributions of sentiment polarity, fantasy types, and narrative themes reported in Section 4, this subsection theorizes how these dimensions align to produce stabilized rhetorical visions in algorithmically mediated comment spaces. Under algorithmically mediated conditions, symbolic convergence is shaped not only by narrative repetition but by platform visibility logics that selectively amplify emotionally salient fantasy themes through engagement-driven exposure. These algorithmic processes are not neutral or autonomous but operate within platform-specific governance frameworks that prioritize engagement, visibility, and affective intensity.

YouTube comment sections therefore function as affective-symbolic arenas in which algorithmic ranking and recommendation systems structure which narratives gain prominence and stability. Symbolic cues operate as organizing devices through which collective meaning is produced in YouTube comments on Trump’s 2025 inauguration. Terms such as “Savior,” “Tyranny,” “Revival,” and “Fake news” function as emotionally charged, ideologically saturated signifiers that activate shared cognitive and affective schemas. These cues serve as rhetorical triggers for collective engagement. According to Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), such cues initiate fantasy chaining, where users expand on familiar symbols through narrative elaborations that reinforce or escalate dominant themes (Bormann, 1985). For instance, “Savior” in pro-Trump discourse often frames him as a redeemer or nationalist hero, while “Tyranny” in anti-Trump commentary evokes fantasies of authoritarian collapse.

Through this iterative process, fragmented comments coalesce into collective narratives, ranging from hope and renewal to fear and betrayal. These fantasy chains foster group solidarity and crystallize into rhetorical visions that shape public understanding (Bormann et al., 1996; Serrano-Puche, 2021; Waisbord, 2018). As shown in Table 1, symbolic cues and fantasy chains align with six dominant narrative themes, including national restoration, elite conspiracy, social fragmentation, and emotional patriotism. Pro-Trump comments like “May God guide your leadership” or “The American flag waves with renewed pride” construct political identity through symbolic cohesion (Martin, 2021; Waisbord, 2018). Conversely, anti-Trump discourse often uses situational and character-based fantasies to depict institutional decline. Statements such as “A convicted felon with unchecked power—this is the end of democracy” exemplify symbolic resistance, dramatizing political decay in ways that align with De Vreese et al. (2018) and Siles et al. (2023).

These patterns illustrate how symbolic cues and fantasy chains operate as emotionally resonant devices that shape ideological orientation, imagined futures, and collective identity through the patterned alignment of affective intensity, narrative framing, and fantasy type. This symbolic convergence, outlined in Table 1, functions both as affective storytelling and as a rhetorical mechanism for negotiating symbolic power in digital political culture. This study extends Symbolic Convergence Theory by demonstrating that, in algorithmically mediated comment spaces, fantasy chains operate not as pathways to shared agreement but as structuring mechanisms that stabilized affective polarization across competing digital publics.

5.2 From Distribution to Meaning: Fantasy Types, Sentiment, and Affective Polarization

Building on the interdimensional relations outlined in Section 5.1, this subsection shifts focus from mechanism to meaning by examining how the uneven distribution of fantasy types sustains affective polarization within fragmented digital publics. Drawing on four fantasy types (character-based, situational, action-oriented, and symbolic), the discussion shows how sentiment and ideological alignment are narratively organized through recurring symbolic forms. Action-oriented fantasies are most prominent in pro-Trump narratives, emphasizing mobilization, leadership, and national restoration. Comments such as “We will rebuild America stronger under Trump’s leadership” frame Trump as a transformational agent and position political support as a collective project of renewal. These narratives align positive sentiment with calls for action and unity, reinforcing affective cohesion among supporters.

By contrast, situational fantasies dominate anti-Trump discourse, framing the inauguration as a symptom of democratic erosion or institutional failure. Statements like “Once again, empty promises dominate the political stage” articulate systemic frustration and political disillusionment, anchoring negative sentiment in narratives of decline rather than individual grievance. Character-based fantasies appear across ideological positions but diverge sharply in evaluative tone. In pro-Trump discourse, Trump is portrayed as virtuous and morally grounded: “President Trump is a man of faith and courage,” while anti-Trump narratives depict him as narcissistic or corrupt: “Trump is a narcissist who only cares about himself.” These contrasting character narratives personalize political conflict, transforming ideological disagreement into moral judgment.

Symbolic fantasies rely on religious and national imagery to dramatize political meaning. Pro-Trump rhetoric frequently invokes patriotic ideals (“Trump represents freedom, patriotism, and the American dream!”) whereas anti-Trump expressions like “The bald eagle weeps for democracy” deploy the same symbolic imagery to signify national decline. Through such imagery, affective orientation is embedded in collective symbols rather than explicit argumentation. Together, these fantasy structures show how political actors and events are narratively constituted through affective alignment rather than neutral description. As Kozinets (2019) and Papacharissi (2016) argued, digital political discourse operates through affect, metaphor, and performance as much as through deliberation. In this configuration, fantasy types do not merely reflect ideological positions but function as narrative infrastructures through which affective polarization is reproduced and stabilized.

Fantasy types are unevenly distributed across sentiment categories: action-oriented and symbolic fantasies cluster within pro-Trump positivity, while situational and character-based fantasies dominate anti-Trump negativity. These patterns illustrate how ideological alignment intersects with affective investment in fragmented digital publics (see Table 2 for examples of contrasting rhetorical framings across fantasy types and sentiments).

Table 2. Contrasting Pro- and Anti-Trump Narratives across Fantasy Types and Sentiment

Fantasy Type	Pro-Trump Narrative (Positive Sentiment)	Anti-Trump Narrative (Negative Sentiment)
Character-based	President Trump is a man of faith and courage. He fights for the people, not for himself.	Trump is a narcissist who only cares about his own image, not the American people.
Situational	After the chaos we've seen, Trump is the only one who can fix this broken country.	Look at the division and chaos he caused—America was better off without him.
Action-based	Trump rebuilt the economy, created millions of jobs, and secured our borders.	He signed disastrous policies that hurt the middle class and favored the rich.
Symbolic	Trump represents freedom, patriotism, and the American dream!	Trump symbolizes everything wrong with American politics: greed, lies, and hate.

Table 2 provides a rhetorical cross-comparison between pro- and anti-Trump narratives, categorized by fantasy type (character, situational, action, symbolic) and sentiment polarity. Each pair of examples demonstrates how opposing ideological positions utilize parallel narrative structures to express divergent emotional framings and political worldviews. The distribution of fantasy types across sentiment categories reveals how affective polarization is narratively organized rather than merely emotionally expressed. This finding suggests that polarization in digital political discourse is sustained through symbolic repetition and emotional alignment embedded in fantasy themes.

5.3 *Beyond the Case: Algorithmic Polarization and Collective Identity Formation*

This study demonstrates that symbolic convergence within algorithmically mediated platforms reinforces political polarization by organizing collective identity through emotionally charged fantasy chains. Rather than facilitating deliberation, recurring symbolic narratives simplify political complexity into antagonistic oppositions, framing political actors as either redeemer or existential threat (Martin, 2021; Waisbord, 2018). Dominant fantasy types, particularly situational and character-based narratives, translate structural and ideological tensions into emotionally legible stories of crisis, betrayal, or restoration. These narrative forms reduce interpretive nuance and intensify affective alignment, strengthening in-group cohesion while delegitimizing opposing viewpoints through the consolidation of shared fantasy themes and rhetorical visions (Bormann, 1985; Papacharissi, 2016).

Within this configuration, YouTube comment sections function as symbolic arenas where in which affect, identity, and ideology converge through repeated narrative performance. Pro-Trump discourse emphasizes patriotism and divine leadership, while anti-Trump narratives foreground moral crisis and institutional breakdown. Hybrid narratives, such as critiques of elites and media, further signal broader crises of symbolic legitimacy in contemporary political communication (De Vreese et al., 2018; Kubin & Von Sikorski, 2021). These dynamics reflect wider processes of affective segmentation in digital media. Algorithmically reinforced visibility and emotionally salient content, such as anger, fear, and nostalgic nationalism, drive engagement and sharpen ideological boundaries, stabilizing polarized rhetorical visions through differential exposure and repetition (Arora et al., 2022). Importantly, this analysis does not infer individual psychological states. Instead, affect and cognition are conceptualized as discursively organized phenomena, publicly articulated through shared symbolic forms. Within a SCT framework, fantasy themes and rhetorical visions operate as collective mechanisms that channel moral judgment, reinforce in-group and out-group distinctions, and stabilize polarized identities across digital publics.

Although grounded in a specific political event, these patterns are not context-bound, as they emerge from shared platform-specific logics of algorithmic visibility and affective amplification. These logics are not incidental but are embedded in platform governance structures, including content ranking, recommendation systems, and engagement-oriented design choices implemented by platform operators such as YouTube. Rather than operating as neutral infrastructures, platform algorithms condition affective alignment by privileging emotionally resonant narratives that sustain polarized rhetorical visions. The theoretical contribution of this study lies not in the specificity of the Trump inauguration, but in its illustration of how symbolic convergence operates under platformed conditions of affective polarization.

5.4 *Beyond Consensus: Rhetorical Visions and Symbolic Stabilization in Digital Publics*

Public commentary on Trump's 2025 inauguration coalesces into two dominant rhetorical visions. Pro-Trump narratives emphasize national revival, religious values, and patriotic morality; while anti-Trump discourse frames the event as a symbol of democratic decline and authoritarian resistance (Martin, 2021; Waisbord, 2018). In this context, statements such as "Turning off biased news channels is an act of freedom" function as boundary-making declarations that signal ideological belonging within polarized digital publics (Papacharissi, 2016; Penney, 2020). Emotionally salient content, such as anger, fear, and nostalgic nationalism, drives engagement and sharpens group boundaries, intensifying ideological alignment (Treuillier et al., 2024; Wilf et al., 2023). From an agenda-setting perspective, this finding indicates that emotionally charged narratives, rather than neutral information, play a decisive role in shaping public attention and issue salience (Feezell, 2018; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Vargo et al., 2018). Emotions such as anger, fear, and nostalgic nationalism enhance salience and deepen political alignment (Hautea et al., 2021).

These affective dynamics sustain moral dichotomies (i.e., restoration versus collapse, hope versus fear) that reinforce symbolic convergence and facilitate digital moral contagion. Consistent with theories of moral contagion (Brady et al., 2020; Vasist et al., 2024), emotionally saturated narratives diffuse rapidly in platformed publics, intensifying ideological alignment while narrowing the space for deliberative democratic engagement (Miller & Vaccari, 2020). Ultimately, rhetorical visions emerge as stabilized symbolic formations within polarized digital publics, where emotion, identity, and ideology converge through repeated narrative performance. Rather than functioning as passive reactions to political events, these rhetorical visions constitute structurally stabilized outcomes of symbolic convergence, through which emotion, identity, and ideology are recursively organized and reproduced in algorithmically mediated publics (Bormann et al., 1996; Papacharissi, 2016). These dynamics signal a shift in online political communication, from deliberative exchange to contested symbolic meaning-making, deepening sociopolitical fragmentation and challenging democratic discourse (Miller & Vaccari, 2020; Vasist et al., 2024). See Figure 3 and Table 1 for illustrative data and visual summaries.

Table 3. Mapping of Symbolic Cues, Fantasy Types, and Rhetorical Visions by Narrative Theme

Narrative Theme	Symbolic Cues (Fantasy Triggers)	Fantasy Type(s)	Fantasy Chain Example	Rhetorical Vision
Pro-Trump Narrative	“Savior,” “God’s will,” “Revival,” “Rescue America”	Symbolic / Action	National Restoration	Sacred Redemption and the Restoration of National Glory
Anti-Trump Narrative	“Tyranny,” “Dictator,” “Fall,” “Threat to freedom”	Situational / Character	Democratic Collapse	Moral Crisis & Institutional Decay
Political & Media Conflict	“Fake news,” “Media lies,” “Manipulation,” “Deep State”	Situational / Symbolic	Elite Conspiracy	Contestation of Information and the Erosion of Trust
Ambivalence Narrative	“Uncertain future,” “Love-hate,” “Conflicted”	Character / Situational	Identity Crisis	Emotional Disorientation
Policy & Social Identity	“Division,” “Identity politics,” “Fragmentation”	Situational	Social Fragmentation	National Cohesion under Threat
Visual Political Narrative	“Raised fists,” “Flags waving,” “Tearful eyes”	Symbolic	Emotional Patriotism	Embodied Sentiment and Unity

Table 3 synthesizes how symbolic cues activate specific fantasy types that generate fantasy chains and culminate in distinct rhetorical visions across dominant narrative themes. For SCT, these findings demonstrate that convergence in polarized digital public spaces does not signal consensus, but reflects the algorithmic stabilization of competing symbolic realities that organize affective and ideological alignment.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that YouTube comment section responding to Donald Trump’s 2025 inauguration speech function as a symbolic and emotional battleground for political meaning-making. Drawing on a netnographic approach and SCT (Bormann, 1985; Bormann et al., 1996), the analysis shows how symbolic cues such as “Savior,” “Tyranny,” and “Fake news” activate fantasy chains that crystallize into competing rhetorical visions, shaping political identity and ideological alignment in digital publics. Integrating Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) further reveals that these discursive practices do not merely reflect public sentiment; but actively structure issue salience through emotionally resonant framing (Feezell, 2018; Vargo et al., 2018).

Empirically, anti-Trump narratives are dominated by negative affect rooted in institutional distrust and fears of democratic backsliding, whereas pro-Trump discourse relies on religious and patriotic symbolism to advance rhetorical vision of national restoration. These polarized formations are organized through stark moral dichotomies (i.e., hope versus decline, freedom versus collapse) that intensify ideological alignment and constrain deliberative engagement (Brady et al., 2020; Papacharissi, 2016). Theoretically, this study extends SCT by demonstrating that, within algorithmically mediated political discourse, convergence does not primarily operate as a pathway to consensus. Instead, it functions as a mechanism through which affective polarization is produced and stabilized. In this context, fantasy themes and rhetorical visions act as structuring devices that consolidate antagonistic symbolic realities rather than shared agreement. Practically, these findings challenge the assumption that platforms such as YouTube operate as neutral conduits of public discourse. Instead, they function as affective infrastructures that amplify emotionally charged narratives, with significant implications for democratic communication and political polarization in platformed publics. Future research may extend this framework across platforms, modalities, and methodological designs to further assess how symbolic narratives shape political cognition affective alignment, and engagement in algorithmically mediated.

7. Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers theoretical and empirical insights into symbolic convergence and affective polarization in YouTube discourse surrounding Trump’s 2025 inauguration, several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, the dataset is limited to comments from a single YouTube channel (CNN) within a specific temporal window. As such, the findings may not capture cross-platform or cross-audience dynamics. Future studies could incorporate comparable content from other media outlets and platforms to examine variation in symbolic framing and affective alignment. Second, the analysis focuses on textual data. Although rhetorical and thematic coding captured symbolic and emotional patterns, contemporary political communication is increasingly multimodal. Subsequent research could integrate visual and auditory elements to examine fantasy chains operate across modalities. Third, the qualitative design prioritizes interpretive depth over statistical generalizability. Complementary computational and longitudinal approaches, such as sentiment tracking, topic–emotion co-evolution, or network analysis, could further trace how fantasy themes diffuse and stabilize within algorithmically structured environments. Despite these limitations, the study establishes a robust foundation for examining the symbolic, emotional, and ideological mechanisms shaping digital publics. Future research may extend this agenda through comparative political contexts, experimental designs on symbolic framing, and audience-level analyses of algorithmic exposure and visibility.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Authors contributions

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

Not applicable.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

References

- Adams, Z., Osman, M., Bechlivanidis, C., & Meder, B. (2023). (Why) Is Misinformation a Problem? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 18(6). <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221141344>
- Aghajari, Z., Baumer, E. P. S., & Difranzo, D. (2023). Reviewing Interventions to Address Misinformation: The Need to Expand Our Vision Beyond an Individualistic Focus. In *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* (Vol. 7, Issue CSCW1). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3579520>
- Andersen, K., Bjarnøe, C., Albæk, E., & De Vreese, C. H. (2016). How News Type Matters. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 28(3). <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000201>
- Arora, S. D., Singh, G. P., Chakraborty, A., & Maity, M. (2022). Polarization and social media: A systematic review and research agenda. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.121942>
- Bormann, E. G. (1985). Symbolic Convergence Theory: A Communication Formulation. *Journal of Communication*, 35(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1985.tb02977.x>
- Bormann, E. G., Cragan, J. F., & Shields, D. C. (1996). An expansion of the rhetorical vision component of the symbolic convergence theory: The Cold War paradigm case. *Communication Monographs*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759609376371>
- Brady, W. J., Crockett, M. J., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2020). The MAD Model of Moral Contagion: The Role of Motivation, Attention, and Design in the Spread of Moralized Content Online. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620917336>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

- Brennen, J. S., Simon, F. M., & Nielsen, R. K. (2021). Beyond (Mis)Representation: Visuals in COVID-19 Misinformation. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220964780>
- Broda, E., & Strömbäck, J. (2024). Misinformation, disinformation, and fake news: lessons from an interdisciplinary, systematic literature review. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 48(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2024.2323736>
- Brown, C. (2018). Journalists are Gatekeepers for a Reason. In *Journal of Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality* (Vol. 33, Issue 2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2018.1435497>
- Bucher, T. (2018). *If... then: Algorithmic power and politics*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190493028.001.0001>
- De Rosa, A. S., Bocci, E., Bonito, M., & Salvati, M. (2021). Twitter as social media arena for polarised social representations about the (im)migration: The controversial discourse in the Italian and international political frame. *Migration Studies*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnab001>
- De Vreese, C. H., Esser, F., Aalberg, T., Reinemann, C., & Stanyer, J. (2018). Populism as an Expression of Political Communication Content and Style: A New Perspective. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 23(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161218790035>
- Del Vicario, M., Vivaldo, G., Bessi, A., Zollo, F., Scala, A., Caldarelli, G., & Quattrociocchi, W. (2016). Echo Chambers: Emotional Contagion and Group Polarization on Facebook. *Scientific Reports*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep37825>
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., ... & Wang, Y. (2021). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.10216>
- Feezell, J. T. (2018). Agenda Setting through Social Media: The Importance of Incidental News Exposure and Social Filtering in the Digital Era. *Political Research Quarterly*, 71(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912917744895>
- Flew, T. (2019). Digital communication, the crisis of trust, and the post-global. *Communication Research and Practice*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2019.1561394>
- Gilardi, F., Gessler, T., Kubli, M., & Müller, S. (2022). Social media and political agenda setting. *Political Communication*, 39(1), 39–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2021.1910390>
- Hameleers, M., Brosius, A., & De Vreese, C. H. (2022). Whom to trust? Media exposure patterns of citizens with perceptions of misinformation and disinformation related to the news media. *European Journal of Communication*, 37(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231211072667>
- Hasell, A., Halversen, A., & Weeks, B. E. (2024). When Social Media Attack: How Exposure to Political Attacks on Social Media Promotes Anger and Political Cynicism. *International Journal of Press/Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612231221806>
- Hautea, S., Parks, P., Takahashi, B., & Zeng, J. (2021). Showing They Care (Or Don't): Affective Publics and Ambivalent Climate Activism on TikTok. *Social Media and Society*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211012344>
- Highfield, T., & Čančar, E. (2018). Social media and everyday politics. *Croatian International Relations Review*, 24(82). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2017.1362457>
- Humprecht, E., Esser, F., & Van Aelst, P. (2020). Resilience to Online Disinformation: A Framework for Cross-National Comparative Research. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219900126>
- Hũu, A. N. (2022). Social Media and the Online Political Engagement of Immigrants: The Case of the Vietnamese Diaspora in Poland. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.54667/ceemr.2022.01>
- Jenkins, H., Ford, S., McCracken, G., Seles, S., Tindall, N. T. J., & Timke, E. (2018). Author Meets Critics—Spreadable Media. *Advertising & Society Quarterly*, 18(4). <https://doi.org/10.1353/asr.2018.0005>
- Johansson, M. (2017). Everyday opinions in news discussion forums: Public vernacular discourse. *Discourse, Context and Media*, 19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2017.03.001>
- Jost, J. T., Barberá, P., Bonneau, R., Langer, M., Metzger, M., Nagler, J., Sterling, J., & Tucker, J. A. (2018). How Social Media Facilitates Political Protest: Information, Motivation, and Social Networks. *Political Psychology*, 39. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12478>

- Klinger, U., & Svensson, J. (2015). The emergence of network media logic in political communication: A theoretical approach. *New Media and Society*, 17(8). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814522952>
- Kotilainen, N., & Pellander, S. (2022). (Not) Looking Like A Refugee: Symbolic Borders of Habitus in Media Representations of Refugees. *Media History*, 28(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2021.1932445>
- Kozinets, R. V. (2019). Netnography: the essential guide to qualitative netnography research. In *Netnography*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198796978.003.0007>
- Kubin, E., & Von Sikorski, C. (2021). The role of (social) media in political polarization: a systematic review. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 45(3), 188–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2021.1976070>
- Lawler McDonough, M. (2021). Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump. By Jennifer Mercieca. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2020. 320 pp. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 51(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/psq.12708>
- Martin, S. A. (2021). Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump Jennifer Mercieca. *Journal of Communication*, 71(2). <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqab007>
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2). <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>
- McCoy, J., Rahman, T., & Somer, M. (2018). Polarization and the Global Crisis of Democracy: Common Patterns, Dynamics, and Pernicious Consequences for Democratic Polities. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218759576>
- Miller, M. L., & Vaccari, C. (2020). Digital Threats to Democracy: Comparative Lessons and Possible Remedies. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220922323>
- Moreno-Almeida, C. (2021). Memes as snapshots of participation: The role of digital amateur activists in authoritarian regimes. *New Media and Society*, 23(6). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820912722>
- Nip, J. Y. M. (2019). Gatewatching and news curation: Journalism, social media, and the public sphere. *Digital Journalism*, 7(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1598883>
- Oh, D. (2019). The ambivalent Internet: mischief, oddity, and antagonism online. *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(8). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2019.1606267>
- Papacharissi, Z. (2016). Affective publics and structures of storytelling: sentiment, events and mediality. *Information Communication and Society*, 19(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109697>
- Penney, J. (2020). ‘It’s So Hard Not to be Funny in This Situation’: Memes and Humor in U.S. Youth Online Political Expression. *Television and New Media*, 21(8). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419886068>
- Peralta, A. F., Ramaciotti, P., Kertész, J., & Iñiguez, G. (2024). Multidimensional political polarization in online social networks. *Physical Review Research*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevResearch.6.013170>
- Saleh, M. S. M., Mehellou, A., Huang, M., & Briandana, R. (2024). Social media impact on sustainable intention and behaviour: a comparative study between university students in Malaysia and Indonesia. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 17(4), 1143–1161. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jarhe-10-2023-0479>
- Salman, A., Mustaffa, N., Mohd Salleh, M. A., & Ali, M. N. S. (2016). Social media and agenda setting: Implications on political agenda. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 32(1). <https://doi.org/10.17576/jkmjc-2016-3201-19>
- Samuel, G., Derrick, G. E., & van Leeuwen, T. (2019). The Ethics Ecosystem: Personal Ethics, Network Governance and Regulating Actors Governing the Use of Social Media Research Data. *Minerva*, 57(3). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-019-09368-3>
- Serrano-Puche, J. (2021). Digital disinformation and emotions: exploring the social risks of affective polarization. *International Review of Sociology*, 31(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2021.1947953>
- Shahnia, C., Purnamasari, E. D., Hakim, L., & Endri, E. (2020). Determinant of profitability: Evidence from trading, service and investment companies in Indonesia. *Accounting*, 6(5). <https://doi.org/10.5267/j.ac.2020.6.004>
- Siles, I., Guevara, E., Tristán-Jiménez, L., & Carazo, C. (2023). Populism, Religion, and Social Media in Central America. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 28(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211032884>
- Sorvali, S. (2023). Selecting and Editing of Readers’ Letters in the Late 19th-Century Finnish Press. *Media History*, 29(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2023.2265406>

- Srivastava, S. (2021). Algorithmic governance and the international politics of big tech. *Perspectives on Politics*, 21(3), 989–1000. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592721003145>
- Tanesini, A. (2022). Affective Polarisation and Emotional Distortions on Social Media. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 92. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1358246122000261>
- Theocharis, Y., Boulianne, S., Koc-Michalska, K., & Bimber, B. (2023). Platform affordances and political participation: how social media reshape political engagement. *West European Politics*, 46(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2087410>
- Treuillier, C., Castagnos, S., Lagier, C., & Brun, A. (2024). Gaining a better understanding of online polarization by approaching it as a dynamic process. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1), 8702. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-58915-w>
- Ulnicane, I., & Aden, A. (2023). Power and politics in framing bias in Artificial Intelligence policy. *Review of Policy Research*, 40(5), 665–687. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.12567>
- Vargo, C. J., Guo, L., & Amazeen, M. A. (2018). The agenda-setting power of fake news: A big data analysis of the online media landscape from 2014 to 2016. *New Media and Society*, 20(5). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817712086>
- Vasist, P. N., Chatterjee, D., & Krishnan, S. (2024). The Polarizing Impact of Political Disinformation and Hate Speech: A Cross-country Configural Narrative. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 26(2). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-023-10390-w>
- Waisbord, S. (2018). The elective affinity between post-truth communication and populist politics. *Communication Research and Practice*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2018.1428928>
- Watkins, C. D., Xiao, D., & Perrett, D. I. (2020). Social Transmission of Leadership Preference: Knowledge of Group Membership and Partisan Media Reporting Moderates Perceptions of Leadership Ability From Facial Cues to Competence and Dominance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02996>
- Wilf, S., Maker Castro, E., Gupta, K. G., & Wray-Lake, L. (2023). Shifting Culture and Minds: Immigrant-Origin Youth Building Critical Consciousness on Social Media. *Youth and Society*, 55(8). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X221103890>