

Framing the Gaza Crisis: A Comparative Analysis of Trudeau's and Biden's Social Media Narratives

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Abstract

The Gaza Strip crisis, particularly following the October 7, 2023, escalation has garnered global attention and elicited a diverse range of political responses. As state leaders increasingly rely on digital platforms to communicate their positions, understanding how crises are framed on social media has become crucial for research in political communication. This study applies framing theory to analyze how former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and former U.S. President Joe Biden framed the Gaza Strip crisis through their official X (formerly Twitter) accounts. Using a qualitative framing analysis, the study examines 112 original tweets – 45 from Trudeau and 67 from Biden – posted between October 7, 2023, and January 19, 2025. The research identifies key framing strategies, including problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendations, to assess how both leaders framed the crisis's humanitarian, political, and security dimensions. Findings reveal both convergences and divergences in their framing strategies. Both leaders emphasized the humanitarian crisis, advocating for the application of international law, humanitarian assistance, and the establishment of ceasefires. However, while Trudeau's framing prioritized humanitarian concerns and diplomacy, Biden's tweets placed greater emphasis on terrorism, security, and Israel's right to self-defense. Trudeau's messaging was often more conciliatory, aligning with Canada's tradition of peacekeeping and humanitarian aid, while Biden's framing reflected the United States' strategic alliances and counterterrorism priorities. This study contributes to the growing body of research on political communication in digital spaces by demonstrating how social media serve as a strategic platform for crisis framing, diplomacy, and shaping public opinion. The findings underscore the influence of digital political framing in shaping global narratives and policy debates. The study concludes by proposing recommendations for future research on the evolving role of social media in political communication.

Keywords: framing theory, Gaza crisis, humanitarian crisis, political communication, social media, X platform

1. Introduction

The escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip has led to a severe humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. In this sense, a report published by the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates on January 16, 2025, states that, as of January 14, 2025, Israeli forces have killed 46,645 Palestinian civilians, including thousands of children. Additionally, over 10,000 individuals are believed to be buried under rubble across Gaza, and at least 110,012 people have been injured since October 7, 2023. These figures underscore the humanitarian disaster unfolding in the region and highlight the critical role of global political actors in shaping public discourse and policy responses to the crisis.

In this context, social media platforms have become central arenas for political leaders to frame events, articulate policy positions, and shape public perception. Framing theory provides a powerful lens for understanding how state actors craft messages to shape audience interpretations. Despite a growing body of work on framing in political communication, relatively little research has explicitly focused on how national leaders frame the Gaza conflict via social media. This study addresses that gap by comparing how Justin Trudeau and Joe Biden constructed narratives about the Gaza crisis on the X platform. It examines how these leaders used framing strategies to convey their governments' positions and influence international discourse. This study examines how former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and former U.S. President Joe Biden framed the Gaza Strip crisis on X (formerly Twitter), focusing on their use of social media as a strategic tool for political messaging and public diplomacy. To do so, this study will address the following three research questions: 1) How do Justin Trudeau and Joe Biden employ the four core framing functions in their X posts about the Gaza crisis? 2) In what ways do the framing functions used by Trudeau and Biden converge or diverge in their construction of the Gaza crisis, and how do these differences reflect each leader's political

and diplomatic positioning? 3) How do the following specific framing functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation, shift across key phases of the Gaza crisis, and how do these shifts reflect changes in each leader's diplomatic objectives over time?

In social media, framing is compelling because it allows leaders to shape public perception through concise, emotionally resonant messages. Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of social media framing in shaping public opinion during crises. For example, Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) analyzed Twitter discourse during the Arab Spring, revealing how user-generated content and hashtags framed the uprisings as grassroots movements. Similarly, Vraga and Bode (2017) examined how corrective framing on social media can counter misinformation and influence the public's understanding of scientific issues. These studies underscore the importance of framing in digital communication and its influence on public discourse during crises.

The findings of this study offer important insights into how political leaders use social media to shape public discourse, influence policy outcomes, and advance their diplomatic agendas. By comparing the framing strategies of Trudeau and Biden, this paper illuminates how national values, foreign policy priorities, and political contexts shape leaders' communication strategies. It also highlights the potential of social media as a platform for global diplomacy and advocacy, particularly in addressing complex and contentious issues such as the ongoing crisis in the Gaza Strip.

This paper begins with a review of relevant literature on framing theory and the use of social media by political leaders. It then outlines the methodology employed for the qualitative framing analysis, followed by a comparative analysis of tweets from Trudeau and Biden. The paper concludes by reflecting on the broader implications of the findings, discussing avenues for future research, and exposing the study's limitations.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Framing Theory as a Theoretical Foundation for Analyzing Social Media Content

Framing theory, first conceptualized by Erving Goffman and further developed by Robert Entman, explains how communicators select and emphasize specific aspects of reality to influence audience interpretation. It is a crucial framework for understanding how information is constructed, communicated, and interpreted across various media contexts. Initially rooted in sociology and communication studies, this theory examines how individuals and organizations shape perceptions of reality by emphasizing certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others. This literature review examines the foundational concepts of framing theory, its evolution, and its application to the analysis of social media content. The review is structured around three key themes: (1) the origins and conceptualization of framing theory, (2) the role of framing in media and communication studies, and (3) the application of framing theory to social media research.

The concept of the "framework" was first introduced by Goffman (1974, 1981, 1986), who argued that our verbal and physical actions are influenced by how we frame the activities and events in which we are engaged. He asserted that individuals apply a primary framework "to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms" (1986, p. 21). Goffman identified two types of primary frameworks: natural and social. External determinants shape natural frameworks without human interference, while the motives and intentions of social actors influence social frameworks. These frameworks provide context and understanding for events, guiding individuals in interpreting and describing occurrences.

The work of Entman (1991, 1993, 2004, 2007, 2010) significantly expanded the literature on media framing and news discourse. According to Entman (1993), any news frame consists of two key elements: "selection" and "salience." Framing an event involves "selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Entman identified four primary functions of news framing: (1) defining problems and determining the actions of causal agents along with their associated costs and benefits, (2) diagnosing causes by identifying those responsible for the problem, (3) making moral judgments to evaluate the effects of causal agents, and (4) suggesting remedies and predicting their potential outcomes. He explained that news frames operate on three distinct objects: political events, issues, and actors (such as individual leaders, groups, or nations).

Entman (2004) emphasized that verbal and visual frames can generate support or opposition in political conflicts. This power is measurable through what Entman termed "cultural resonance and magnitude." News frames that incorporate culturally resonant terms—those that are noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged—exert a stronger influence on audiences (Entman, 2004, p. 6). Journalists and reporters frequently utilize keywords, phrases, and images to highlight specific aspects of reality while downplaying others, thereby shaping public narratives.

According to Entman (1991), journalists construct frames by strategically including or omitting potential problem

definitions, explanations, evaluations, and recommendations, ultimately shaping how audiences perceive events and reality. News frames are built through "keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images emphasized in a news narrative" (Entman, 1991, p. 7). As a result, news frames direct audiences' attention toward dominant actors and voices within the text. The interaction between news sources and journalists is crucial in shaping how events, groups, places, nations, and cultures are represented. As Entman (2007) noted, "frames introduce or raise the salience or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way" (p. 164).

Framing theory has become a foundational tool in media and communication studies, offering insight into how messages are constructed, disseminated, and interpreted across various contexts. Scholars such as Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) distinguish between media frames – how media present issues – and audience frames, which reflect how individuals interpret these issues through the lens of their prior experiences and beliefs. Traditionally, research has shown that media and political frames significantly influence public opinion and policy outcomes, often reflecting broader national ideologies and values (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997).

The rise of social media has dramatically reshaped the information environment, making framing theory increasingly relevant for understanding digital communication. Unlike traditional media, social platforms enable both political actors and ordinary users to create, amplify, or contest narratives without the mediation of editorial gatekeepers. This shift has enabled the proliferation of user-generated frames, which can both reinforce and disrupt dominant discourses (Papacharissi, 2015). Scholars have applied framing theory to examine how digital platforms are used to shape perceptions of political protests, public health crises, social justice movements, and international events (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Vraga & Bode, 2017).

However, despite growing interest in digital framing, relatively little research has examined how heads of state use social media to shape public understanding of highly polarized geopolitical crises such as the Gaza conflict. While prior studies have examined media portrayals of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, few have analyzed direct messaging from national leaders. This study addresses that gap by investigating how former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and former U.S. President Joe Biden employed framing strategies on the X platform to construct narratives around the Gaza crisis. In doing so, it advances our understanding of digital diplomacy and how humanitarian, security, and moral frames intersect in the communication strategies of state leaders.

Framing theory provides a crucial foundation for understanding how political leaders utilize online platforms to shape public perception and advance diplomatic objectives. Entman's (1993, 2004) model identifies four framing functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. These functions together explain how communicators construct meaning and influence audience understanding. When applied to the online environment, these framing functions extend beyond traditional news media into the dynamic, interactive realm of social media, where state leaders engage directly with global audiences.

In this context, social media framing operates as a central mechanism of digital diplomacy. Political leaders employ digital platforms not only to inform but also to frame international events in ways that reflect their nations' values, foreign-policy priorities, and strategic interests. Tweets and posts can become diplomatic acts, as they define crises, attribute responsibility, express moral positions, and recommend courses of action that align with national objectives. Thus, online framing serves both communicative and diplomatic purposes. It shapes narratives, legitimizes policies, and signals political alignment to domestic and international publics.

By linking framing theory to digital diplomacy, this study underscores that how leaders frame issues on social media is integral to how states project influence and conduct diplomacy in the digital age. Framing is, therefore, not only a tool for shaping opinion but also a means of performing diplomacy through communication.

To advance beyond a descriptive overview, this study adopts Entman's four framing functions not merely as a conceptual reference point but as an operational framework uniquely suited to analyzing digital diplomatic communication. Unlike broader conceptualizations of framing, Entman's model specifies analytically separable functions – problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation – that map directly onto how political leaders strategically construct meaning in crisis communication. On social media, where leaders communicate through concise, high-stakes messages that simultaneously inform, justify, and signal diplomatic intent, these four functions offer a clear and systematic lens for interpreting how meaning is built and contested. Each function captures a distinct dimension of digital diplomacy: defining the crisis, attributing responsibility, articulating normative commitments, and outlining preferred courses of action. This functional clarity makes Entman's model particularly well-suited to analyzing the communicative practices of state leaders who must balance humanitarian, political, and security narratives in real time.

In the empirical sections that follow, the four framing functions serve as the primary analytical categories for coding

and interpreting all tweets. Each function structures a component of the analysis: problem definition identifies how each leader characterizes the Gaza crisis; causal interpretation reveals how responsibility is assigned or obscured; moral evaluation captures the ethical principles invoked to justify particular positions; and treatment recommendations illuminate the diplomatic and policy actions each leader promotes. Organizing the analysis around these four functions ensures that Entman's framework is not simply referenced but methodologically enacted. This approach strengthens the study's theoretical contribution by demonstrating how a function-based model of framing can reveal the diplomatic logic embedded in political leaders' digital communication.

2.2 Framing Theory and its Application to Media Content Analysis

Framing theory has become a cornerstone of media and communication studies, providing valuable insights into how information is constructed, disseminated, and interpreted. This section examines the application of framing theory to media content analysis, highlighting key studies that have employed this framework to investigate various forms of media, including news, political communication, and social media. These studies underscore the versatility and enduring relevance of framing theory in understanding media effects and public discourse.

News media play a crucial role in shaping public perception by framing issues in specific ways. Scholars have extensively examined how news organizations use framing to influence audiences' understanding of events, policies, and social issues. One of the most influential studies in this area is Iyengar's (1991) work on episodic and thematic framing. Iyengar discovered that episodic framing, which focuses on individual events or stories, tends to lead audiences to attribute responsibility to individuals, whereas thematic framing, which emphasizes broader social trends, encourages attributions to systemic factors. This distinction has profound implications for how audiences perceive issues such as poverty, crime, and healthcare. Similarly, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) examined how symbolic devices, such as metaphors and catchphrases, frame contentious issues like nuclear power and climate change.

Another seminal study by Tankard (2001) developed a systematic approach to identifying and analyzing media frames. Tankard proposed a list of 11 framing devices, including headlines, images, and quotes, which can be used to detect frames in news content. This methodological contribution has been widely adopted in framing analysis, ensuring rigor and consistency in the identification of frames.

Political communication is another area where framing theory has been extensively applied. Political figures, including politicians, parties, and advocacy groups, strategically use framing to shape public opinion and influence policy outcomes. A prominent study by Chong and Druckman (2007) examined how competing frames influence public opinion on contentious issues. They found that a frame's effectiveness depends on its strength, repetition, and the audience's prior beliefs. This study emphasizes the dynamic nature of framing in political discourse and the importance of context in shaping frame effects.

Similarly, Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997) investigated how media frames influence public attitudes toward civil liberties issues. Their experimental study demonstrated that subtle framing changes, such as emphasizing free speech over public order, can significantly alter audience support for specific policies. This research highlights the significant impact of framing on shaping political attitudes and behaviors.

The rise of social media has transformed the framing landscape, enabling users to create, share, and contest frames in real-time. Social media platforms provide a unique space for studying framing dynamics, enabling the rapid dissemination of user-generated content and the emergence of counter-frames. A landmark study by Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) analyzed Twitter discourse during the Arab Spring uprisings, revealing how hashtags and user-generated content framed the events as grassroots movements. This study demonstrated how social media can amplify alternative frames and challenge dominant narratives.

Another critical study by Vraga and Bode (2017) explored how corrective framing on social media can counteract misinformation. They found that expert sources and evidence-based corrections can effectively reframe misleading information concerning climate change and public health. This research highlights the potential of social media as a tool for promoting accurate and balanced framing.

Framing theory has also been applied to analyze media content during crises and risk events. For instance, An and Gower (2009) examined how U.S. news media framed the H1N1 pandemic and found that frames emphasizing threat and uncertainty dominated coverage. This study underscored the role of media frames in shaping public perceptions of risk and influencing behavioral responses.

Similarly, Brüggemann and Engesser (2017) analyzed framing in climate change communication and identified four dominant frames: ecological, economic, societal, and scientific. Their study showed how different frames can promote or hinder public engagement with climate issues, depending on their alignment with audience values and beliefs. Recent scholarship has also examined how Western media outlets frame pro-Palestine protests, revealing significant differences

in the narratives they construct. For instance, Jaber (2025a) compared coverage by The Guardian and USA Today, finding that while The Guardian often emphasized humanitarian and justice-oriented frames, USA Today tended to foreground security and order-based narratives. In another study, Jaber (2025b) examined Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's framing of the 2022 war in Ukraine through his tweets. The study demonstrated how national leaders strategically employ humanitarian, security, and diplomatic frames in digital diplomacy, offering a relevant comparison for analyzing Trudeau's communication about the Gaza crisis.

The studies discussed in this review demonstrate how media framing influences the public's understanding of international conflicts and shapes perceptions of such events. Indeed, framing theory has proven to be a powerful tool for analyzing media content across diverse contexts, from traditional news media to social media platforms. The literature review illustrates the versatility of framing theory in uncovering how media messages are constructed, disseminated, and interpreted by examining its role in news media, political communication, social media, and crisis communication. This review also highlights the enduring relevance of framing theory in understanding the effects of media and public discourse.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative framing analysis to examine how former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and former U.S. President Joe Biden framed the Gaza crisis on the X platform (formerly Twitter). Guided by Entman's (1993, 2004) framing framework, the analysis identifies four core framing functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. These functions serve as both the theoretical foundation and the analytical framework for data processing and interpretation, ensuring conceptual consistency throughout the study.

3.1 Research Design and Questions

To investigate how digital communication shapes international narratives during crises, this study examines how former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and former U.S. President Joe Biden framed the Gaza crisis through their posts on X. Grounded in Entman's four framing functions named problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation, the analysis focuses on how each leader constructed meaning, signaled diplomatic priorities, and communicated national values through short-form social media messages. To ensure analytical precision and address the study's comparative and temporal dimensions, the following are the three research questions that guide the inquiry:

RQ1: How do Justin Trudeau and Joe Biden employ the four core framing functions in their X posts about the Gaza crisis?

RQ2: In what ways do the framing functions used by Trudeau and Biden converge or diverge in their construction of the Gaza crisis, and how do these differences reflect each leader's political and diplomatic positioning?

RQ3: How do the following specific framing functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation, shift across key phases of the Gaza crisis, and how do these shifts reflect changes in each leader's diplomatic objectives over time?

Each research question aligns with specific analytical objectives: RQ1 informed the identification of Entman's four framing functions, RQ2 guided comparative coding between leaders, and RQ3 shaped the temporal and contextual interpretation of framing trends.

3.2 Data Collection and Sampling

The dataset consists of 112 original English-language tweets published between October 7, 2023, and January 19, 2025, comprising 45 tweets from @JustinTrudeau and 67 tweets from @POTUS. The timeframe was selected to encompass the entire escalation period of the Hamas-Israel conflict, from its onset through to the announcement of the ceasefire. Tweets were identified using the search term "Gaza" to ensure they were relevant to the crisis. While this focus ensured topical precision, it may have excluded posts using indirect references or euphemisms.

Only original tweets were included in the analysis; retweets, replies, and quoted tweets were excluded to maintain analytical consistency and focus on the leaders' direct communication. The data were collected manually from verified accounts and exported into a dataset containing tweet IDs, publication dates, and text content. All data were publicly available, and no ethical clearance was required.

The analysis focused exclusively on textual content, excluding visual elements such as images or videos due to the lack of reliable multimodal coding protocols for such materials. However, future research could expand the methodological scope to incorporate multimodal framing analysis.

3.3 Data Processing and Analytical Procedures

The analytical procedure operationalized Entman's four framing functions as coding categories. Each tweet was examined to determine which of the following functions were present:

Problem Definition: Framing humanitarian, security, or political conditions as a crisis.

Causal Interpretation: Attributing responsibility (e.g., Hamas, Israeli Defense Forces, or international actors).

Moral Evaluation: Expressing explicit or implicit moral judgments or appeals to international law.

Treatment Recommendation: Proposing specific actions such as ceasefires, aid, or negotiations.

In addition to these four theoretical functions, each tweet was assigned a dominant thematic frame, such as Humanitarian, Security/Terrorism, or Diplomatic/Peace, to capture the broader narrative orientation of each leader's communication. These thematic frames were identified through inductive coding and supported by prior framing literature (Tankard, 2001).

The data processing and analysis followed the following sequential steps:

1. Initial reading and segmentation: All tweets were read multiple times to confirm relevance and to delineate discrete analytical units.
2. Open and axial coding: Using Entman's functions as a guide, codes were applied to textual elements (words, phrases, or clauses) signaling each function. Axial coding was then employed to identify relationships among these codes and to determine overarching thematic frames.
3. Comparative and interpretive analysis: The coded tweets were compared across the two leaders to identify convergences and divergences in framing emphasis, tone, and diplomatic orientation.
4. Quantitative synthesis: Frequency distributions were computed to determine the relative prominence of each framing function and dominant theme across both datasets (see Tables 1 and 2).

A structured codebook guided the analysis. Each of Entman's four framing functions was operationalized into concrete indicators: problem definition (identification of crisis conditions), causal interpretation (assignment or implication of responsibility), moral evaluation (normative or legal judgments), and treatment recommendation (proposed actions). Each category included inclusion/exclusion rules and short examples to ensure consistent application across the dataset. Tweets were also tagged with broader thematic frames (humanitarian, security/terrorism, diplomatic/peace) when relevant. Tweets were coded in a three-step process: an initial holistic read-through, followed by deductive coding using the four framing functions and inductive refinement where needed, and a final consistency check after the complete coding cycle. Tweets could receive multiple codes when performing multiple framing functions simultaneously. A single researcher conducted all coding due to the interpretive nature and manageable size of the dataset. While no inter-coder reliability statistics were produced, transparency is ensured through explicit coding rules and documentation. Future work may incorporate paired coding or statistical reliability measures.

The analytical procedures described above yielded both quantitative and qualitative insights into the framing strategies employed by Trudeau and Biden. The coded data were synthesized into frequency distributions and comparative tables that reveal how each leader emphasized particular framing functions and thematic orientations. These quantitative summaries (Tables 1 and 2) illustrate how specific tweets perform the functions of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. Together, these results demonstrate that integrating Entman's model theoretically and methodologically enables a nuanced understanding of digital political communication and its diplomatic implications.

Several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies exclusively on textual content and does not incorporate visual elements such as images or videos, which may contain additional framing cues. Second, although the codebook and coding procedures are fully documented, the absence of multiple coders limits the ability to verify coding decisions statistically. Third, the dataset includes only English-language tweets, potentially excluding audience-specific messaging in French or other languages. Finally, the study focuses on leaders' posts rather than audience engagement metrics or reception dynamics, thereby constraining the findings to a production-side framing rather than frame effects. These limitations do not undermine the validity of the analysis but contextualize its scope and suggest directions for future research.

4. Results

4.1 Overview of Framing Patterns

The analysis of Justin Trudeau's and Joe Biden's tweets reveals two distinct yet internally coherent framing systems that become apparent when applying Entman's four framing functions as an integrative analytical lens. Rather than emerging as isolated observations, each function contributes cumulatively to a broader narrative architecture through

which both leaders construct meaning and signal diplomatic intentions. While both leaders relied heavily on problem definition as the foundational function, their subsequent use of causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation diverged significantly. These cumulative divergences reflect different national identities, foreign policy cultures, and strategic priorities. Therefore, the findings show not only what each leader emphasized but also how their framing functions interact to produce coherent diplomatic narratives on X, in which communication is direct, condensed, and highly visible.

4.2 Trudeau's Humanitarian – Diplomatic Narrative

Justin Trudeau's tweets consistently frame the Gaza crisis in a humanitarian manner, with the problem defined through imagery of suffering, deprivation, and vulnerability. His repeated references to the "dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip" (15/10/23) and statements such as "the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is heartbreaking" (30/10/23) establish a crisis narrative centered on the urgent needs of civilians. This orientation is reinforced through emotionally charged examples, such as his reflections after meeting Palestinian families who described "the pain, anger, trauma, and grief they're feeling" (2/11/23). These messages foreground the lived human toll rather than the political or military mechanisms behind the violence.

Trudeau's causal interpretations follow from this humanitarian emphasis. He rarely assigns blame explicitly, instead suggesting that the crisis stems from broader systemic factors, including conflict escalation and restrictions on humanitarian access. In tweets such as "we're concerned about the worsening conditions in Gaza, and we agree that humanitarian assistance must reach Palestinian civilians" (17/10/23), the causal mechanisms are attributed to obstructed aid and persistent violence rather than named political actors. This diplomatic ambiguity reflects Canada's historical tendency toward cautious, consensus-oriented foreign policy. It reinforces a framing logic in which the structural environment, rather than specific agents, is responsible for civilian suffering.

Trudeau's moral evaluations further establish this humanitarian-diplomatic posture. His insistence that "innocent civilians must be protected and international law upheld" (18/10/23) invokes universal principles and legal norms, positioning Canada as a morally grounded actor committed to upholding international humanitarian law. This moral language is not supplementary; it serves to justify his recommended policy responses, which include humanitarian aid, ceasefires, and diplomatic engagement aimed at de-escalation. Statements like "Canada fully supports efforts to release the hostages, end the humanitarian crisis, and return to a path of peace" (9/8/24) demonstrate how treatment recommendations emerge naturally from the moral and humanitarian framework he establishes. Trudeau's problem definitions, causal explanations, moral arguments, and treatment recommendations form an integrated humanitarian-diplomatic narrative that foregrounds empathy, international legal norms, and multilateral cooperation. The cumulative effect is a framing trajectory that situates Canada as a compassionate and principled actor seeking to de-escalate and provide relief to civilians while avoiding polarizing political attributions.

4.3 Biden's Security – Stability Narrative

Joe Biden's tweets, while also attentive to humanitarian concerns, adopt a markedly different framing approach that intertwines human suffering with urgent security imperatives. His problem definitions often juxtapose expressions of sadness or outrage over civilian casualties with direct references to " Hamas's terrorist attacks," as seen when he wrote, "I am outraged and deeply saddened by the explosion at the Al Ahli Arab hospital in Gaza" (18/10/23) alongside statements condemning Hamas's actions. This dual framing constructs a crisis environment in which humanitarian distress and terrorism are mutually reinforcing aspects of the problem.

Biden's causal interpretations are considerably more explicit than Trudeau's. Responsibility is assigned squarely to Hamas, as in references to "American citizens being held by Hamas" (27/10/23) or descriptions of Hamas as the instigator of violence and the obstacle to regional peace. This causal clarity justifies the United States' strategic posture and frames military responses as necessary acts of self-defense. It also situates the crisis within a familiar U.S. foreign policy narrative in which democratic allies face illegitimate threats posed by non-state armed groups.

His moral evaluations similarly reinforce a binary moral landscape. Biden frequently asserts both Israel's right to self-defense and the obligation to adhere to international humanitarian law, as in his reminder that Israel must act "in a manner consistent with international humanitarian law" (30/10/23). This dual moral emphasis creates a narrative that balances empathy for civilians with principled support for a key ally. Biden thus uses moral language to frame U.S. policy not merely as a strategic necessity but as morally grounded, consistent with democratic values and global leadership responsibilities.

Biden's treatment recommendations reflect this balance between security and humanitarian concerns. His statements urging "humanitarian pauses" (10/11/23) and his commitment that the United States "will continue to lead international efforts to get humanitarian aid into Gaza" (11/6/24) demonstrate a willingness to support humanitarian relief without

undermining Israel's security objectives. This blend of security-oriented and humanitarian actions forms a coherent narrative in which stability, deterrence, and controlled humanitarian support serve as mutually reinforcing diplomatic goals. Biden's framing functions form a security–stability narrative that champions alliance politics, counterterrorism, and regional deterrence while acknowledging humanitarian imperatives. His framing demonstrates how U.S. digital diplomacy merges moral legitimacy with strategic necessity.

4.4 Comparative Narrative Synthesis

Comparing the two leaders' framing trajectories reveals how the four framing functions operate cumulatively rather than as isolated rhetorical devices. Trudeau's humanitarian–diplomatic framing positions civilians and international law at the center of his narrative, emphasizing empathy, restraint, and multilateral action. Biden's security–stability framing, by contrast, positions Hamas as the central causal agent and frames the crisis through the lens of terrorism, alliance commitments, and democratic values. Both leaders use moral language, yet Trudeau deploys it to emphasize universal protection while Biden uses it to legitimize security responses. This cumulative synthesis demonstrates that Entman's framework provides a robust interpretive structure for understanding digital diplomacy. By examining how framing functions interact, the analysis reveals how leaders construct coherent diplomatic narratives under crisis conditions and use social media to influence international perception in real time.

4.5 Quantitative Overview of Framing Functions and Thematic Patterns

To establish an empirical foundation for the analysis, this section presents the quantitative distribution of Entman's four framing functions —problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation — across Justin Trudeau's and Joe Biden's tweets. These results illustrate how frequently each leader employed specific framing strategies and how these functions coalesced into broader thematic orientations, including humanitarian, security/terrorism, and diplomatic/peace frames. Tables 1 and 2 summarize these distributions and offer a comparative snapshot of each leader's framing tendencies. The quantitative findings serve as a baseline for the subsequent qualitative interpretation, which explores how the frames function rhetorically and diplomatically within the leaders' online communication. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of Entman's four framing functions across both leaders' tweets.

Table 1. Distribution of Entman's Framing Functions across Leaders' Tweets

Framing Function	Trudeau (n=45)	Biden (n=67)
Problem Definition	30%	35%
Causal Interpretation	20%	25%
Moral Evaluation	25%	20%
Treatment Recommendation	25%	20%

The distribution shown in Table 1 reveals notable similarities and distinctions in how the two leaders applied Entman's four framing functions. Both Trudeau and Biden relied heavily on problem definition, framing the Gaza crisis primarily as an urgent humanitarian and security emergency. This finding demonstrates that both leaders used their platforms to draw global attention to the crisis, fulfilling Entman's (1993) first function of selecting and highlighting aspects of perceived reality.

However, subtle divergences emerge in the relative emphasis on other functions. Biden devoted a higher proportion of tweets to causal interpretation, consistently attributing blame to Hamas for initiating the conflict and legitimizing Israel's right to self-defense. This pattern reflects the United States' security-oriented foreign policy discourse. In contrast, Trudeau's tweets demonstrated a more balanced approach between moral evaluation and treatment recommendations, indicating a stronger focus on humanitarian obligations, adherence to international law, and calls for a ceasefire and negotiation. These distinctions suggest that while both leaders used framing to define the crisis and mobilize empathy, Trudeau's discourse emphasized diplomacy and moral responsibility, whereas Biden's emphasized accountability and security imperatives.

To identify the broader orientations that shape each leader's communication, Table 2 presents the dominant thematic frames that emerged from the coded data.

Table 2. Dominant Thematic Frames by Leader

Theme	Trudeau %	Biden %
Humanitarian	45	30
Security/Terrorism	20	45
Diplomatic/Peace	35	25

As shown in Table 2, the dominant thematic frames reveal the broader narrative orientations underlying each leader's communication. Trudeau's discourse was primarily anchored in humanitarian and diplomatic/peaceful frames, reflecting Canada's foreign policy tradition of peacekeeping, multilateralism, and moral diplomacy. His frequent references to

civilian suffering, international law, and humanitarian aid underscore a consistent portrayal of Canada as a compassionate, constructive global actor.

By contrast, Biden's discourse was dominated by the security/terrorism frame, which aligns closely with U.S. counterterrorism and alliance narratives. His tweets frequently referenced Hamas as a "terrorist organization," linked the Gaza crisis to broader geopolitical threats, and highlighted U.S. support for Israel's defensive actions. This framing pattern portrays the crisis as part of a global security struggle rather than a purely humanitarian catastrophe.

The comparison highlights both convergence and divergence: while both leaders advocated for humanitarian relief and temporary ceasefires, Trudeau emphasized moral responsibility and human suffering, whereas Biden emphasized security threats and political stability. These results reveal how national identity and geopolitical context shape elite framing strategies in digital diplomacy.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative results demonstrate that both leaders employed social media framing to define the Gaza crisis, articulate national values, and shape international understanding. While Trudeau's frames emphasized humanitarianism and multilateral engagement, Biden's emphasized counterterrorism and strategic stability. These findings underscore the dual role of online framing as both message construction and diplomatic signaling.

5. Discussion

5.1 Framing as a Mechanism of Digital Diplomacy

The findings contribute to broader debates on digital diplomacy by illustrating how leaders use framing as a strategic tool to construct national identity, justify policy choices, and communicate with domestic and global publics simultaneously. In the context of the X platform, where messages bypass traditional media filters, framing becomes a form of direct diplomatic performance. The structure identified in both leaders' tweets demonstrates that digital diplomacy is not a matter of spontaneous commentary but a deliberate communicative practice shaped by national narratives, foreign policy commitments, and international expectations. Entman's framework makes visible how leaders strategically assemble definitions, causal stories, moral judgments, and treatment recommendations to construct meaning in networked environments.

The Trudeau–Biden comparison extends framing theory by highlighting how the four functions operate cumulatively in digital spaces, where immediacy, visibility, and personalization shape leader communication. The analysis suggests that framing in digital diplomacy functions less as a set of discrete communicative moves and more as a layered system in which each function scaffolds the next. This cumulative operation expands traditional applications of Entman's model, which focused on journalistic texts, and demonstrates its relevance for understanding elite-driven, real-time digital communication. The findings also show that framing serves as a mechanism through which leaders enact national role identities, blending moral language with strategic imperatives in ways to reinforce broader foreign policy narratives.

Empirically, the study demonstrates how two leaders addressing the same crisis on the same platform produce divergent diplomatic narratives that reflect their national identities, geopolitical roles, and political cultures. Trudeau's humanitarian–diplomatic narrative foregrounds Canada's role as a middle-power champion of international law and humanitarian norms. Biden's security–stability narrative reflects U.S. obligations as a global power anchored in alliance politics, counterterrorism, and democratic leadership. These differences highlight how digital diplomacy is intertwined with national role conceptions and how leaders tailor their messaging to both domestic constituencies and international audiences. The comparison, therefore, contributes to the literature on leader communication by demonstrating the heterogeneity of digital diplomatic practices even within similar Western liberal democracies.

Additionally, the findings underscore how leaders use framing to manage international legitimacy, define moral responsibility, and justify foreign policy actions. Trudeau's framing projects compassion, restraint, and multilateralism, reinforcing Canada's normative identity. Biden's framing projects resolve, moral clarity, and alliance solidarity, reinforcing U.S. strategic commitments. These communicative choices illustrate how digital diplomacy has become a hybrid space where humanitarian norms and security imperatives co-exist and where leaders must balance moral expectations with geopolitical constraints. Understanding these dynamics helps scholars and practitioners of diplomacy appreciate the strategic logic behind crisis communication in real time.

6. Concluding Remarks

This study examined how former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and former U.S. President Joe Biden framed the Gaza crisis on the X platform, analyzing how state leaders employ digital communication as a tool of framing and diplomacy. Grounded in Entman's (1993) conceptualization of framing functions — namely, problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation — the research provides empirical insight into how political actors strategically construct meaning and shape international narratives in real time. By linking these functions to the communicative logic of digital diplomacy, the study highlights how social media platforms serve not

only as channels of information but also as spaces for symbolic negotiation and geopolitical positioning.

The findings show that both leaders emphasized humanitarian concerns and invoked Israel's right to self-defense, yet their framing strategies diverged sharply in focus and tone. Trudeau's discourse reflected a humanitarian and diplomatic orientation, prioritizing empathy, international law, and restraint. His framing underscored Canada's identity as a middle power committed to multilateral cooperation, diplomacy, and human rights. Biden's framing, by contrast, was shaped by a security-terrorism orientation, rooted in moral dualism and strategic alliance politics. His emphasis on deterrence and counterterrorism reflected the United States' geopolitical imperatives and its enduring partnership with Israel. These contrasting approaches illustrate how leaders' national identities and foreign policy priorities are reflected in their digital communication practices.

This study advances framing scholarship by situating Entman's model within the broader context of digital political communication and diplomacy. It shows that framing functions operate as mechanisms through which leaders not only interpret crises but also project national values, define moral legitimacy, and pursue diplomatic objectives. In digital environments, where leaders communicate directly with global audiences, framing becomes performative, simultaneously shaping public perception and enacting diplomatic stances. Additionally, this study highlights the increasing significance of social media as a platform for international engagement, where political leaders craft narratives to manage crises, justify policy actions, and assert moral authority. Trudeau's emphasis on humanitarian relief and multilateral cooperation positions Canada as a moral actor in global governance, while Biden's focus on security and alliance solidarity reinforces the United States' leadership role within a rules-based order. Both demonstrate that social media platforms function as tools of narrative diplomacy, spaces where framing decisions directly influence international legitimacy and public opinion.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. The dataset is restricted to English-language tweets published within a defined timeframe and excludes other forms of communication, such as press statements or televised addresses. The focus on two North American leaders limits the generalizability of findings across cultural and geopolitical contexts. Additionally, the study does not incorporate visual or audience-level analysis, both of which could reveal additional dimensions of meaning-making and reception. Future research could expand this inquiry by including a broader range of actors, platforms, and multimodal data, and by exploring how audiences interpret or contest elite framing during global crises.

In summary, this study demonstrates that social media framing and digital diplomacy are intertwined processes through which leaders articulate power, morality, and identity in the global arena. The contrast between Trudeau's humanitarian framing and Biden's security-driven framing illustrates how national context and diplomatic role shape not only what leaders say but also how they perform diplomacy in a digital age. As international crises continue to unfold within networked media spaces, understanding how framing functions operate within digital diplomacy will remain essential for explaining how political leaders construct legitimacy, mobilize empathy, and influence global narratives.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Fadi Jaber was responsible for the study design and revision. Dr. Jaber was also responsible for data collection, proofreading, and reformatting the manuscript according to the submission guidelines. Dr. Jaber read and approved the final manuscript.

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