



Critical Discourse Analysis of Online Platforms: An Overview

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Abstract

The rise of online platforms has transformed the discourse landscape, enabling users to create and share content actively, thereby shaping public perceptions and societal narratives. Understanding the dynamics of this discourse is essential for comprehending its socio-political implications. This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) concerning online platforms, exploring how language is utilized across various digital contexts to influence identity formation and social inequalities. Methodologically, the review systematically searches electronic databases, including Google Scholar and ProQuest, using keywords related to CDA and online platforms. A total of 30 relevant studies are purposefully selected and thematically analyzed to identify key patterns and insights. The findings of this review reveal that online platforms significantly impact public opinion and identity through discourse practices, highlighting strategies that reinforce stereotypes and manipulate perceptions. The analysis categorizes these practices across social networking sites, microblogs, multimedia content, and advertisements. Ultimately, the review underscores the importance of critical engagement with digital communication to enhance understanding of its ideological undercurrents. It advocates for future research to explore underrepresented areas, such as emerging social media platforms and the effects of algorithm-driven content.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Identity formation, Online platforms, Public perception, Social media.

1. Introduction

The Internet is frequently characterized as an open and decentralized content creation, distribution, and consumption framework. Users have evolved from merely accessing information on static websites to actively creating and sharing content on interactive platforms. This transformation has facilitated the emergence and growth of online platforms (Cho, Zh & Busch, 2023). Today, these platforms are essential for many individuals, as they organize data flows, facilitate economic interactions, and enable social exchanges among users (van Dijck et al., 2018).

An online platform is any computer application or service that hosts digital content and services on the Internet, facilitating the access, distribution, creation, sharing, and exchange of information. Examples of such platforms include various web services, such as social media, online marketplaces, and search engines. Users typically access these platforms and associated services through websites or applications on internet-connected devices, including desktops, laptops, and mobile or smart devices (Clark, 2018).

Discourse, on the other hand, as defined by Stubbs (1983, p. 1), is "language above the sentence or the clause," and the study of discourse encompasses any aspect of language use. It involves constructing and arranging language segments that can be larger or smaller than a single sentence, with additional context often extending beyond the sentence itself. The term 'discourse' applies to both spoken and written language, encompassing any sample of language utilized for various purposes. Consequently, discourse represents any sequence of speech events or any combination of sentences in a written form, where successive sentences or utterances are interconnected. Discourse transcends the boundaries of individual sentences; in other words, it refers to "any coherent series of sentences, spoken or written" (Matthews, 2005, p. 100).

Besides, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of the most influential approaches to discourse analysis. It examines language and its social practices and emphasizes that the context of language use is essential for understanding discourse (Wodak, 2001). According to Van Dijk (1998), CDA is a field that studies and analyzes written and spoken texts to uncover the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias. It investigates how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political, and historical contexts. In simpler terms, the primary objective of CDA is to reveal the complexities of power

relationships. It aims to clarify the connections between discourse practices, social practices, and social structure connections that may be obscure to the average person (Fairclough, 1995).

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the CDA related to online platforms. It examines how language is employed across various digital contexts, including social networking sites, microblogs, multimedia content, and other online platforms, like advertisements, to shape public perceptions, identity formation, and societal narratives. This review seeks to illuminate the complexities of power dynamics, social inequalities, and the ideological implications embedded in online discourse by synthesizing insights from multiple studies.

2. Related Works

Wenzhong and Jingyi (2013) investigate using vague language in English commercial advertising through a qualitative lens, applying Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature. Their study finds that vague language can enhance communication flexibility, increase persuasiveness, and maintain information accuracy while also posing risks of misleading readers and causing misunderstandings. Similarly, Merzah (2021) analyses Iraqi humor in Facebook comments on political posts using a pragmatic approach, examining adherence to Grice's (1975) principles. The study reveals that the maxims of relation and manner are generally respected. In contrast, the maxim of quality is often violated, supporting Attardo's view that humor does not inherently imply a lack of conversational cooperation. Rambe and Mulyadi (2023) explore the relationship between semantics and pragmatics in social media interactions, focusing on their impact on digital identity formation and community building. Their qualitative study finds that social media language facilitates communication, expresses emotions, and shapes identities, underscoring the importance of context in virtual communication. Wisasongko et al. (2023) conducted a study analyzing the types of verbal humor in the YouTube video "Uncle Roger Discussing by this Egg Fried Rice Video (BBC Food)." The researchers identified eight types of verbal humor using a descriptive qualitative approach and frameworks from Shades' classification of verbal humor and Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humour. The results indicated that satire was the most prevalent form, illustrating how humor critiques Western cooking methods for Asian dishes. Karmila et al. (2023) investigate language politeness violations in comments on the Instagram account @kemenkominfo, emphasizing their relevance to high school education. The study employs observation and note-taking for data collection using a qualitative descriptive and pragmatic approach. The findings identify six types of politeness maxim violations, with contributing factors including speakers' lack of trust, emotional expression, and indirect communication.

3. Methodology of the Review

The initial electronic database search was conducted using Google Scholar and ProQuest Scholarly Journals in this review. Google Scholar was utilized due to its accessibility and comprehensive coverage of literature across various disciplines, and ProQuest was chosen for its reputation as a reliable database that offers a wide array of information from respected sources, which are particularly beneficial for academic research. Keywords such as "critical discourse analysis," "online platforms," and "social networking sites" were employed to refine the search results. The authenticity and scholarly rigor of the studies were critical criteria for inclusion. Initially, 40 relevant studies were identified and downloaded from the databases. Out of these, 10 studies focused on non-verbal communication were excluded. The remaining articles were then analyzed thematically to identify key patterns and themes, including the role of online platforms in perpetuating stereotypes and shaping public perception. Each study was critically evaluated for its theoretical framework, findings, and contextual relevance, facilitating a synthesis of insights illuminating the interplay between language, power, and social identity in digital communication. However, this review is limited by its focus on specific platforms and types of discourse, potentially overlooking other important areas of online communication.

Table 1. Stages of Studies Selection for the Review.

No.	Stage	No. of Articles
1.	Initial collection	40
2.	Excluding the studies of CDA within nonverbal communication	30
3.	Final studies of CDA within the context of online platforms	30

The 30 papers reviewed are examined in light of the following four themes shown in Figure 1:

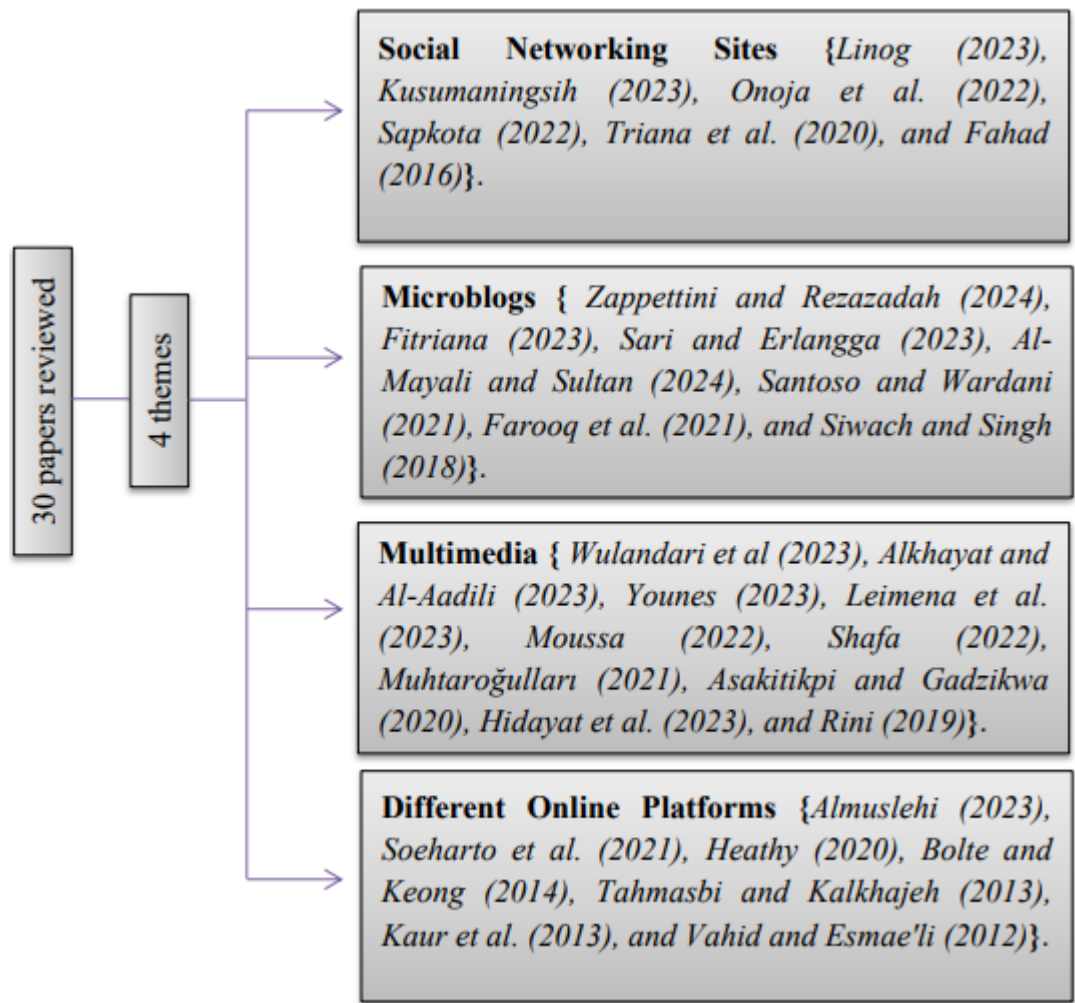


Figure 1. Screening and Classifying the Selected Papers for Review.

4. Findings

The researchers reviewed 30 studies focusing on CDA within the context of online platforms, categorizing the findings into four thematic groups: social networking sites, microblogs, multimedia content, and various online advertisements. Each thematic group was analyzed to uncover recurring patterns and significant insights regarding discourse practices.

4.1. Critical Discourse about Social Networking Sites

Linog (2023) studies critical discourse analysis and political Facebook posts within the Bangsamoro Tapatan Lane group to examine how such political posts construct social inequalities and represent public opinion. This study employs Fairclough's (1995) CDA as a qualitative approach to analyze the language used in these posts. The findings indicate that the posts effectively construct social inequities through deliberate language choices, utilizing derogatory adjectives, passive voice, intertextuality, and modal verbs to manipulate and persuade the audience. Similarly, Kusumaningsih et al. (2023) examine the application of Fairclough's (1995) CDA to enhance understanding of advertisement discourse for used motorcycle sales on Facebook. The study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze advertisements from the Ninja R/R Sales and Purchases Group in Klaten, Yogyakarta, Solo, and surrounding areas. The findings reveal that the advertisements are well-structured in the textual dimension, convey appropriate contextual meanings in the discursive dimension, and reflect social values related to motorcycle ownership in the social dimension. Onoja et al. (2022) comprehensively examine the discourse surrounding farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria, as expressed through Facebook comments on The Channels TV's posts from January to July 2018. The study employs Van Dijk's principles of CDA (1995, 2001, 2015) and Du Bois's concept of stance-taking, focusing on 84 comments referencing the Fulani ethnic group amidst significant violence and displacement. The findings reveal a stark imbalance in discourse control, with predominantly anti-Fulani comments reflecting broader societal narratives that generalize criminal acts to the entire ethnic group, indicating a reproduction of social dominance and prejudice.

Sapkota (2022) presents a study to analyze the language employed in birthday wishes on Facebook and how it reflects social power dynamics among Generation Z. The research adopts Fairclough's (1995) CDA, utilizing a qualitative methodology. The model examined the language of birthday wishes from 10 Facebook friends aged 15 to 20. The findings indicate that the language of birthday wishes serves as a medium for self-expression and interaction, characterized by informal language and significant socio-cultural implications, including variations in gendered language and the impact of digital communication on language proficiency. Furthermore, Triana et al. (2020) present a study on social practices to identify how students at Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang produce text on Facebook. The study employs Fairclough's (1995) CDA as its methodological framework, utilizing documentation, observations, and in-depth interviews for data collection. The findings indicate that the text production process occurs in three ways: students create their texts, share texts created by others, and produce texts based on their consumption of existing content. Finally, Fahad (2016) investigates synchronous Facebook communication between native (NS) and non-native English speakers (NNS) in a group focused on international study consultancy. Employing a qualitative approach and Fairclough's (2001) CDA model, the study explores the relationship between discourse and social context. The findings highlight that online interactions enable identity

negotiation and reveal power dynamics, emphasizing the pedagogical implications of using social networking sites for second language learning.

4.2. Critical Discourse about Microblogs

Zappettini and Rezazadah (2024) examine the discursive strategies employed by the Biden administration on Twitter during the critical period surrounding the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan. To analyze a dataset of 302 tweets from key figures within the administration, the researchers use Wodak and Meyer's (2009) CDA framework to identify prevalent themes and communicative strategies. The findings reveal that narratives of securitization, national interest, and responsibility are strategically mobilized through macro strategies such as transcendence, bolstering, blaming, and mitigation, framing the withdrawal as a necessary response to an unsustainable military presence rather than an inevitable consequence of past interventions. Similarly, Fitriana (2023) analyses the ideologies and framing strategies present in tweets by Donald Trump concerning immigration, national security, and travel bans, with a particular emphasis on enhancing critical literacy among learners utilizing Huckin's framework (1997) as the model for textual analysis. The findings indicate that Trump's tweets frequently portray certain groups negatively, employing provocative language and imagery. In addition, Sari and Erlangga (2023) present a study that analyses the conversation topics surrounding the trending Twitter hashtag #JokowiRajaTega and interprets the responses of the Twitter community to it. They employ a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing Norman Fairclough's (1995) framework. The main findings indicate the hashtag trends due to public discontent over President Jokowi's decision to revoke the 3 kg LPG gas subsidy.

Furthermore, Al-Mayali and Sultan (2024) present a study on trolling within Iraqi political discourse on Twitter. The study examines three tweets from prominent figures during the Iraqi protests between 2019 and 2020 utilizing van Dijk's (2006) ideological square model. The findings highlight that context is essential for understanding the dynamics of trolling, with ideological strategies illustrating how in-group and out-group representations contribute to the discourse. Santoso and Wardani (2021) provide a comprehensive analysis of the communication strategies utilized by two Indonesian presidential candidates on Twitter, utilizing a dataset of tweets from Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto using Van Dijk's (1993) model. The findings reveal distinct components in their tweets, categorized into the macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure, highlighting themes such as political campaigning and voter engagement. Farooq et al. (2021) explore and identify rhetorical devices in the Twitter political discourse of Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi concerning the issue of Indian-occupied Kashmir in 2019. The authors adopted a qualitative approach, utilizing Paul Gee's Model of Seven Building Tasks of Language for their analysis. The main findings reveal that both prime ministers employ rhetorical devices such as amplification, repetition, and allusion to serve their political objectives. Finally, Siwach and Singh (2018) present a study utilizing Fairclough's (1995) model of CDA to reveal how politicians articulate their perspectives on significant social and political issues. Hindu nationalist sentiments characterize Swamy's tweets, while Tharoor critiques government policies and social injustices. The study highlights how these discourses promote democratic engagement on Twitter.

4.3. Critical Discourse about Multimedia

Wulandari et al. (2023) explore the representation of bullying in a specific YouTube podcast episode by analyzing 15 data points derived from the podcast, which discusses the severe trauma resulting from bullying, employing CDA as its methodological approach: Van Leeuwen's theory of inclusion. The findings indicate that the podcast effectively incorporates the perspectives of marginalized individuals without further marginalizing the perpetrators, thereby showcasing the nuanced dynamics of discourse related to bullying and mental health. Alkhayat and Al-Aadili (2023) conduct an ideological analysis of defamation in selected YouTube videos to examine three defamatory videos by Kevin J. Johnston, focusing on how the language used in these videos perpetuates ideologies of prejudice, racism, and discrimination by using Van Dijk's (2016) Ideological Discursive Strategies and Lasswell's Communication Model. The findings reveal that negative lexicalization and derogation are prevalent strategies, underscoring the significant role of malicious language in shaping perceptions and instigating hostility towards targeted individuals on social media platforms.

Furthermore, Younes (2023) provides a thorough examination of how language in children's advertisements on YouTube influences young viewers utilizing Fairclough's (1989-1995) three-dimensional model by analyzing six advertisements to uncover the linguistic features and persuasive strategies employed, including imperative forms, personal pronouns, and celebrity endorsements. The findings indicate that these tactics effectively engage children, enhance brand awareness, and promote purchasing behavior. Leimena et al. (2023) conducted a study employing CDA on the Instagram account @Sajak_Maluku, utilizing Van Dijk's model. The study aims to elucidate the themes and moral lessons embedded in the discourse on this Instagram account. The findings reveal two prominent themes in the discourses from June 1 to June 10, 2022: self-reflection and religious themes, with the majority focusing on religious teachings that emphasize gratitude, faith, patience, and humility. In a related context, Ali and Moussa (2022) comprehensively examine how Emirati social media influencers construct their identities through visual and textual content on Instagram, utilizing a qualitative approach to analyze 30 posts from 10 influencers. The study employs methodologies such as visual content analysis and multimodal discourse analysis, as proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012). The findings uncover two primary themes: the juxtaposition of traditional and global identities. Additionally, Shafa (2022) examines the manifestation of racism in comments on YouTube utilizing Fairclough's (1992) model by analyzing user comments from a specific video, "The Young Turks," on YouTube channel to identify the types of racism expressed and to understand the implications of these racist discourses. The findings reveal that there are two main categories of racism, personal and institutional, highlighted through various user comments that reflect stereotypical and prejudiced views.

Muhtarogullari (2021) presents a study on the CDA of advertisements on Instagram, exploring how prominent fashion brands utilize these advertisements to influence sociocultural values and challenge stereotypes related to body image, racism, and LGBT rights, employing Fairclough's (1995) model. The findings underscore the role of advertising in shifting cultural narratives and promoting acceptance of diversity within contemporary consumer

culture. Similarly, Asakitikpi and Gadzikwa (2020) provide a nuanced examination of xenophobic narratives in South Africa through a qualitative content analysis of selected YouTube news videos by employing Van Dijk's (1998) theory of the ideological Square as a framework to explore the dichotomy of 'us' versus 'them' in South African discourse surrounding immigrants. The findings reveal that South African leaders and citizens frequently frame xenophobia as a reaction to perceived threats posed by foreigners, attributing crime and economic instability to their presence while simultaneously underscoring the nation's constitutional commitment to ensuring safety for all. Moreover, Hidayat et al. (2023) conducted a study on beauty product advertisements in Indonesia posted on YouTube. They analyzed three prominent beauty product advertisements from Wardah, Inez, and Sariayu using Fairclough's (1995) model. The study aims to uncover how language influences consumer perceptions and behaviors, particularly among women in Indonesia. The findings revealed that advertisers employed intimate and personalized language and visual representations of beauty to suggest that their products could fulfill societal beauty standards. Finally, Rini (2019) examines the linguistic and ideological strategies employed in L'Oréal's beauty advertisements on YouTube utilizing Fairclough's (1992) model. The findings indicate that the advertisements employ specific vocabulary, including adjectives and verbs, to construct an idealized image of beauty, ultimately suggesting that beauty is closely associated with product usage.

4.4. Critical Discourse about Different Online Platforms Like Advertisements, Online Texts, and News

Almuslehi (2023) conducts a comprehensive examination of the pervasive issue of online hate speech directed at Iraqi actors by employing Fairclough's (2001) model within the framework of CDA to analyze comments from social media platforms, specifically Facebook and Instagram, over two years. The findings indicate that hate speech manifests through emotionally charged language and moral judgments, reflecting broader sociocultural norms that shape public perceptions of actors. Similarly, Soeharto et al. (2021) present a qualitative analysis that focuses on representation, relationships, and identity within the news coverage of the February 2019 death of an ATKP cadet utilizing Fairclough's (1992) model to examine the linguistic choices and structural elements of the news articles to uncover underlying ideologies and social dynamics. The findings suggest that the news encompasses three dimensions—representation, relationships, and identity. It indicates that specific dimensions of the text are relatively balanced in reporting the event's pros and cons. Moreover, Heathy (2020) comprehensively examines how gender stereotypes are perpetuated in print advertising, employing Fairclough's (2003) model. The findings reveal that advertisements continue to depict women primarily in traditional roles, reinforcing stereotypes of femininity and dependence, while men are portrayed as strong and authoritative figures.

Bolte and Keong (2014) employ CDA to examine the portrayal of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants (RASIM) in Malaysian online news, focussing on three major newspapers: The Star, The New Straits Times, and Malaysiakini. By analyzing 24 news articles published between May and October 2011, the study highlights distinct ideological perspectives shaped by the newspapers' political affiliations by applying Fairclough's (1989, 1995, 2001) and Van Dijk's (1988) models. They reveal that government-linked media tend to frame RASIM more favorably, emphasizing national security and policy themes. At the same time, the independent outlet, Malaysiakini, provides a more balanced portrayal, raising concerns about refugee protection and human rights.

In addition, Tahmasbi and Kalkhaje (2013) analyze television bank commercials through the lens of ideological manipulation and power dynamics by applying Fairclough's (1992) model. Their findings indicate that bank advertisements are designed to promote services and attract audiences, similar to magazine advertisements.

These advertisements specifically target specific demographics through discourse. Consequently, advertisers construct a biased and inequitable discourse that subtly manipulates viewers. Kaur et al. (2013) also examine the ideology in advertisements for beauty products in local English magazines, employing Fairclough's (2001) model.

The findings indicate that the discourse surrounding beauty products constitutes a social practice wherein language becomes an integral part of a social process.

The language used in these advertisements reflects prevailing ideologies and social status among women; consequently, women with fair skin, slim figures, and conventional beauty are perceived to possess more power than their counterparts in society. Through these exceptional attributes, an ideology is constructed to promote the image of being part of an 'in-group' rather than being considered outdated. Finally, Vahid and Esmae'li (2012) critically analyze six advertisements using methods rooted in CDA and visual design theory. They apply Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional model and Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) grammar of visual design to examine the interplay of power and ideology in advertising.

The findings indicate that advertisers frequently position viewers as empowered decision-makers in product advertisements, whereas governmental ads tend to assert authority and control over public behavior.

5. Conclusion

This review has examined the complexities of CDA about online platforms, synthesizing insights from 30 studies across diverse digital contexts. The review findings indicate that online platforms significantly influence public perceptions and identity formation through discourse, often reinforcing social inequalities and shaping public opinion. The analysis reveals that discourse practices on social networking sites, microblogs, multimedia content, and advertisements play a crucial role in framing societal narratives and influencing political discourse. This review has significant implications in underscoring the need for critical engagement with digital communication.

Understanding how language operates in online environments can empower users to navigate the socio-political landscape more effectively, fostering a greater awareness of the ideological undercurrents that shape public discourse. This awareness is essential for mitigating online communication's adverse effects, i.e., perpetuating stereotypes and social biases. However, this review is not without its limitations. The emphasis on specific platforms and types of discourse may overlook other significant areas of online communication that also deserve investigation.

Furthermore, the rapidly evolving nature of digital platforms poses challenges in maintaining the currency of the analysis. Future research should investigate underrepresented areas, such as the influence of emerging social

media platforms and the impact of algorithm-driven content on public discourse. Additionally, longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into how discourse evolves in response to societal changes.

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