

Critical Discourse Analysis of Comments on CNN's Instagram Post about Donald Trump's Meeting with Volodymyr Zelensky

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Abstract

Purpose: (1) To identify the ideologies of users as reflected in comments on CNN News Instagram posts about the meeting between Donald Trump, JD Vance, and Volodymyr Zelensky, (2) to examine how Instagram functions as a social media platform in shaping public discourse about the Trump–Zelensky meeting.

Methodology: descriptive qualitative with Teun A van Dijk's critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, which covers three dimensions, namely macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. A total of 160 clean comments were collected through purposive sampling. These comments were selected based on the completeness of the arguments, the use of evaluative language, the clarity of the theme, and their suitability for CDA analysis. Four selected comments were analyzed in depth. Teun A van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive approach is used to understand Instagram's role in the process of shaping public discourse.

Results: Four main ideologies were found in the Instagram comments: anti-US power rejection ideology, diplomatic ethics, anti-Zelensky nationalism and populism, and pro-peace. In the socio-cognitive analysis, Instagram acts as an active and persuasive space for discourse production, a place for ideological reproduction and negotiation, and algorithmic visibility to reinforce the dominance of certain ideologies.

Applications/Originality/Value: Instagram as a discursive party that shapes public opinion on international political issues. This research can be used as a reference for studies on digital political communication, discourse analysis on social media, and the influence of algorithms on public opinion formation.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis (CDA), teun A. van dijk, instagram comments, political ideology, trump and zelensky, public discourse, social media.

Introduction Section

Social media was first established in 1997 as an internet-based platform or application that allows users to exchange information, ideas, and images, as well as interact directly without being limited by space or time. Social media invites anyone interested to participate by contributing and providing open feedback, commenting, and sharing information quickly and without limits (Kaplan, Andreas, and Haenlein, 2010).

Types of social media include social networks, forums, blogs, and visual worlds. This study focuses on social networking. Social networking is a web-based service that allows individuals to build public or semi-public profiles, compile lists of other users, and explore their own and others' connections within the system (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Instagram is a type of social network where users can choose a profile photo and upload photos and videos to their accounts.

Each post is accompanied by a caption, likes, comments, and shares. Instagram users actively choose and use the platform to fulfill various needs—cognitive, social, and entertainment (Suryanto, Puteri, & Pratama, 2019). Therefore, Instagram's interactive features facilitate users' needs to obtain information, communicate, and engage in social activities in the digital world.

Instagram's advantages led CNN to utilise it as a tool for disseminating the latest information. CNN News is an interactive and fast news media outlet for disseminating information to the public (McQuail, 2010). Therefore, all factual news can be easily accessed by the entire global community and become a place for public discussion in the comment section. Comments posted on CNN News regarding the meeting of the three figures show various public discourses, ranging from criticism of diplomatic ethics to peace solutions for the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Interactions between users appear in the comment reply feature. Therefore, to find out what other types of ideology are developing and how the media plays a role in shaping public opinion through the language used, researchers used a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach.

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This approach uses Teun A van Dijk's (1993) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory, which studies how social power, domination, and inequality are manifested, reproduced, and resisted through texts and speech in social and political contexts. This model uses three main dimensions, namely the macro, superstructure, and micro dimensions to reveal the global meaning, text organization, and linguistic elements used to form discourse. The researcher also uses Teun A van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive approach to determine the role of Instagram in shaping public discourse through the relationship between text, social cognition, and social structure, which will be realized through a three-step mechanism.

Previous studies that serve as references include research by Abboud et al (2020), which discusses critical discourse analysis of speeches by two Iraqi politicians using Teun A Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model theory. This was followed by research by Huda & Hidayat (2020), which examined the formation of public opinion on Tempo.com through Teun A Van Dijk's three-level analysis of macro, superstructure, and micro, which play a role in shaping public perception. In addition, research by Carlos et al (2021) discussed political discussions on Instagram and found that there is an active community of commentators who shape negative ideological discourse. Furthermore, Feni Listiyani (2023) analyzed how TvOne constructed the discourse on the murder case by Ferdy Sambo through live broadcasts on YouTube. Subsequently, previous research by M. Fikri AR (2024) discussed a three-level analysis of Fox News online news regarding the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Another study by Thomas Clark (2025) examined how major American media outlets such as CNN and Fox News portrayed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Safer Kalaman (2025) analyzed YouTube comments to assess public sentiment surrounding the Trump-Zelensky meeting. Next is research by Nawal Abbas et al (2025) which discusses the role of social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok in shaping public opinion and spreading digital ideology through CDA by Teun A Van Dijk and Fairclough. Furthermore, research by Saud and Dewanti (2025) observes political hate speech on Instagram and the fact that social media is an arena for power struggles. This is followed by research by Fadillah and Isma (2025), which discusses public reactions to the dismissal of coach Shin Tae Yong in the comments section of Sport Kompas' Instagram. Finally, the topic most relevant to this study was conducted by Rihandy & Hidayatullah (2025), who analyzed the representation of social actors Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky in Al Ghad and BBC News Arabic reports.

However, the framework they chose was Theo van Leeuwen's theory. Based on previous studies that examined political discourse on social media and analyzed user comments using various CDA frameworks, there has been no study that directly examines the ideology of Instagram users in the context of the meeting between Donald Trump, JD Vance, and Volodymyr Zelensky using Teun A van Dijk's three-dimensional analysis.

Most previous studies have focused on news media and political speeches, rather than spontaneous and interactive public comments. Furthermore, no research has examined the role of Instagram in shaping public discourse. This gap highlights the need to examine how public ideology emerges in Instagram comment sections and the role of social media in shaping public opinion. Therefore, this study will answer two main questions: 1) what user ideologies are reflected in their Instagram comments about the Trump-Zelensky meeting and 2) how does Instagram function as a social media platform in shaping public discourse about Trump-Zelensky contained in the comments.

Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with Teun A Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis model approach, which focuses on three elements, namely text, social cognition, and context, also known as macro, superstructure, and micro. Discourse analysis has levels and dimensions. These levels and dimensions make the analysis broad, ranging from structural description to Van Dijk's functional analysis (1985: 4). Linguistic data using qualitative descriptive methods cannot be changed in the analysis, so researchers need to interpret and explain the data (Sudaryanto in Prihartono and Suharyo, 2022). The research data consists of critical comments posted directly by Instagram users, obtained from official CNN news. A news post titled "What's Next for Ukraine After the Argument in the Oval Office," containing a video of a meeting between US President Donald Trump, US Vice President JD Vance, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, will be analyzed from a CDA perspective. Researchers require two weeks during the last two weeks of October 2025. Researchers were able to collect a total of 160 edited comments from short comments, emojis, and stickers. Then, all comments were selected using purposive sampling techniques, with the following criteria: (1) containing complete opinions, (2) using evaluative phrases or sentences, (3) the writing having clear main ideas in accordance with the ideological theme, (4) the text being analysable in three dimensions: macro, superstructure, and micro.

After going through the above stages, four main comments were obtained that represent all existing comments and ideological themes. The comments will be analysed using the macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure dimensions to find the main ideas for answering the research question. In the process of macrostructure analysis, the researcher reads the comments as a whole and begins to look for existing subtopics and formulate them into several points. Then, in the process of superstructure analysis, the researcher begins to read and look for the sequence of content in the comments. This is to determine the patterns used by speakers in conveying their opinions or perceptions. Finally, in the microstructure analysis process, the researcher reads the comments and understands the meaning word by word, and finds out what goals they want to convey. Researchers examined sentence formation and cohesion in relation to each other. Then,

what language styles and opinion delivery strategies are used? The analysis results are written into three types of points according to the order of dimensional analysis according to Teun A van Dijk.

Additionally, in analysing the role of Instagram as a platform for shaping public discourse. Using van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive approach, which views digital discourse as a medium of interaction between text and social structures. The analysis was conducted through three aspects: (1) message production, how users construct meaning through the diction they use, (2) ideological reproduction, how comments interact to respond to political perspectives in the comment section, and (3) algorithmic visibility, how Instagram features can influence public discourse. Therefore, the researcher observed interaction patterns, the number of comment engagements, and Instagram's comment placement mechanisms. All analysis results will be presented in the findings section and discussed further to answer the two research questions in the discussion section.

Findings

a. Instagram users' ideology in comments on CNN News regarding the meeting between Donald Trump and Volodymr Zelensky

First Comment

"JD was the one instigating to begin with. It's very disrespectful that they try to impose their authority on Zelensky in front of the world and blame him. Even more so after the fact that Trump had been mocking him and calling him a dictator just days prior. I don't like Zelensky, but Trump and JD went overboard."

The macrostructure level, users chose the main theme of criticism of the abuse of power by Donald Trump and JD Vance as the most powerful figures in diplomatic meetings with Ukraine. Commentators believed that the actions taken by the US were a form of coercion of power in diplomacy and degraded Ukraine in the political situation.

The superstructure level, comments begin with identifying the parties that triggered the conflict ("JD was the one instigating"), explaining the rude and mocking remarks toward Zelensky, and concluding with an evaluation of Trump and JD Vance's attitude as "going overboard." The pattern in these comments shows an argument developing from trigger, assessment, and conclusion.

The microstructural level, commentators use negative words such as "instigating," "disrespectful," "mocking," and "went overboard," indicating disapproval of Trump and JD Vance's attitudes. Commentators also use the pronoun 'they' to represent Trump and JD Vance as the guilty parties and "him" for Zelensky as the victim who received unfair treatment. This strategy demonstrates a rejection of the offensive behavior of Trump and JD Vance.

Second Comment

"It's really embarrassing. Zelensky is so mature and acts with dignity. What I mean is, Trump has no ethics and he could express himself much better if he could. Unfortunately, he's not ready for this kind of conversation. You cannot insult a leader as if he were a child in front of the world. I would feel the same if it were anyone other than Zelensky."

The macrostructure dimension, the comments discuss the main theme of diplomatic ethics that a state leader must possess. The discourse contains a moral contrast between Zelensky, who is considered "mature" and "dignified," and Trump, who lacks ethics and good communication skills in diplomacy.

The superstructure dimension, there is a pattern built with expressions of embarrassment towards Trump's attitude ("so embarrassing"), followed by a positive evaluation of Zelensky's attitude, then sharp criticism of Trump's ethics, and closed with a moral message that a leader should not treat other state leaders like "children" in public meetings.

The microstructure dimension, evaluative diction such as embarrassing, no manners, not equipped, and insult a leader is used as a form of moral judgment on Trump's attitude. The use of dignity and mature is used to build a positive attitude towards Zelensky. The commentator emphasizes the phrase "so much better" to reinforce his harsh criticism of Trump. The ideology that is apparent is diplomatic ethics as a form of belief that every state leader must be treated with respect and courtesy.

Third Comment

"Zelensky is an ungrateful leech who expected billions of dollars and refused to cease fire for peace!!! He was used to that from Biden. Zelensky does not care about America and will start WW3."

The macrostructure dimension, the main theme is criticism of Zelensky as a leader who is greedy, ungrateful, and poses a threat to global stability. This theme is built through the narrative that the assistance provided by the United States is not appreciated and is exacerbating the conflict.

The superstructure dimension, comments are composed of negative statements, followed by accusations of financial issues and rejection of a ceasefire for peace. Commentators associate Zelensky with Biden to support the argument that Zelensky is only exploiting the United States, concluding with a prediction that World War III will occur in the future.

The microstructure dimension, there are meaning intensifiers through the capital letters in the words “USED” and “DOES NOT”. The use of the dehumanizing metaphor “leach” claims that Zelensky is a parasite, and the use of a polarization strategy positions America as the victim and Zelensky as the threat. The repetition of exclamation marks (!) represents strong emotional expression and reinforces the commentator's ideological position.

Fourth Comment

“I disagree with the deaths of millions of innocent people in the Ukraine/Russia war. I disagree with further destruction in Russia and Ukraine. I disagree with global warming and climate change caused by this war. Zelenskyy's comments about wanting this war to continue are not something I support. I disagree with the potential for nuclear war. Therefore, I support Trump in his efforts to end the war and work with Ukraine for prosperity.”

The macro-structure dimension shows a major theme of wanting to stop the war between Russia and Ukraine, to prevent potential casualties and further environmental damage. The speakers prioritize peace as the main value and position Trump as a figure capable of ending the war. The negative impacts of war, such as civilian casualties, damage to the country, climate change, and the potential for nuclear war, are used to strengthen the anti-war argument.

The superstructure dimension begins with a rejection of the war, followed by criticism of Zelensky, who is considered to have exacerbated the conflict, and concludes with reasons for siding with Trump as a figure who has the power and authority to stop the war and bring peace.

The microstructure dimension features the repetition of the phrase “I'm not...,” which serves as an intensification strategy to emphasize the rejection of war. The lexical choices of “innocent people,” “destruction,” “global warming,” and “nuclear war” create a widespread and increasingly serious threat. The comment also portrays Zelensky as the party perpetuating the conflict and Trump as the actor of peace.

b. Instagram's role in shaping public discourse during the Trump-Zelensky meeting.

To understand the role of Instagram, the researcher used an analysis of three main aspects: message production, ideological reproduction, and algorithmic visibility. First, regarding the message production process aspect, the researcher examined the comment feature used by users. The comment section is used as a place for users to express their thoughts. Most comments use sentence structures containing evaluative diction, metaphors, and some emotional markers to influence other readers. From the numerous comments, a pattern emerged: comments containing moral values would receive responses from other individuals who agreed or disagreed. This pattern was influenced by the caption narrative used by CNN to frame the news. So it can be used to form a new opinion or steer towards a specific goal.

Second, in terms of ideological reproduction, Instagram comment sections also serve as a place for the reproduction and negotiation of user processes. In this comment section, several major ideologies that are frequently produced are found, namely anti-Zelensky, pro-Zelensky, anti-Trump, and pro-Trump factions, as well as pro-peace. Through ideological debate, a network is formed where users reveal new facts and information to each other to refute or strengthen their respective opinions. Thus, a collective public discourse is visible.

Third, the aspect of algorithmic visibility can be seen from the likes and reply features on Instagram comments to determine which comments have the most likes and replies and what ideology they contain. This influences public discourse because public opinion naturally forms.

Based on the three aspects mentioned above, it was found that Instagram plays an important role as a place for discussion and interaction among users to refute and strengthen each other's ideologies. Directly, Instagram became a social media platform that contributed to shaping international public opinion or perception regarding the news of the meeting between Donald Trump, JD Vance, and Volodymyr Zelensky.

Discussion

Based on the results of Teun A van Dijk's (1980) public discourse analysis, he emphasises three levels of discourse structure: macrostructure (global theme), superstructure (text organisation), and microstructure (language choices). Through these three analyses, the first comment contains an ideology that leads to rejection of the power-imposing attitude of Donald Trump and JD Vance, representing the US side, towards the Ukrainian side. The ideology reflected is anti US power rejection ideology. The second comment, in its analysis, has the theme of Donald Trump being considered to lack ethics and good diplomatic communication skills. This claim is supported by the findings in the superstructure analysis, which states that Donald Trump treated the leader of another country like a child. The speaker praised Zelensky's mature attitude in the face of Trump's treatment. In the microstructure analysis, the speaker expressed initial embarrassment and used evaluative criticism towards Trump's moral values. Based on these three analyses, the second comment reflects the ethical ideology of diplomacy that every national leader must possess in order to respect other national leaders. Next, in the third comment, the macrostructural analysis revealed the subtopic that the United States' provision of aid was not appreciated by the Ukrainian side, and the aid was considered to be further exacerbating the conflict. In the superstructure analysis, it was found that there were indications of a third world war caused by Ukraine, and in the microstructure analysis,

the chosen word usage was intended to sway opinion against Zelensky and in favour of Trump, also known as nationalists and populists, because Ukraine was considered a threat. Based on that analysis, the ideology reflected in the third comment is anti-Zelensky nationalism and populism. Analysis in the fourth comment, regarding macrostructure analysis, found that the theme conveyed is the cessation of conflict to prevent nuclear war and an increase in casualties. Next, in the superstructure analysis, the speaker begins their comment by rejecting war, criticising Zelensky, and expressing a pro-Trump stance, which is seen as potentially ending the conflict. Finally, in the microstructural analysis, the use of intensifier repetition strategies in the anti-war rejection phrase was used to influence other readers and reinforce ideas or concepts. Then the speaker also uses word choices that mention the negative impact of war. Based on these three analyses, the ideology reflected in the fourth comment is pro-peace and desires Trump to stop the war. Therefore, the answer to the first research question regarding the ideology used by Instagram users is anti-power domination ideology, diplomatic ethics ideology, pro-Donald Trump and anti-Zelensky ideology, and pro-peace ideology. Instagram can be used as a tool to gather criticism and feedback for resolving international conflicts from the perspective of the public itself, not just from government circles.

The next discussion concerns the role of Instagram in shaping public discourse. The researcher uses Teun A van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive approach theory to explain that ideology and discourse are interconnected through social cognition and power structures in society. Through three aspects of analysis, the researcher examined the role of Instagram as a place where the process of message production occurs. All produced messages contain diction to express themselves about something, especially spontaneous expressions using specific word choices and punctuation marks to represent each individual's response. Next, regarding the reproduction of ideology, the comment section serves as a platform for the reproduction and negotiation of meaning. In this case, everyone who wrote a message also added some interesting facts that were validated based on their respective levels of understanding. This is used to emphasise their position, arguments, and to refute other opinions. Next, regarding the aspect of algorithmic visibility, this is a capability that Instagram itself possesses. Instagram can show which types of comments have the most likes or the most replies. It can determine the content of the most dominant public discourse, but there must still be direct contribution from the users themselves. After analysing the three aspects above, the answer to the question of how Instagram functions as a social media platform in shaping public discourse about Trump-Zelensky is contained in the comments. That is, through message production, ideological reproduction, and algorithmic visibility in shaping public opinion regarding the meeting between Donald Trump, JD Vance, and Volodymyr Zelensky.

Conclusion

This study shows that the comment section on CNN News' Instagram post about the meeting between Donald Trump, JD Vance, and Volodymyr Zelensky serves as an active discussion space for shaping, negotiating, and producing political ideology. Researchers used Teun A van Dijk's three-dimensional analysis and found four main ideologies emerging in the Instagram comments. The ideology consists of a rejection of US power dominance, diplomatic ethics, anti-Zelensky nationalism and populism, and a pro-peace ideology. The discovery of ideological variations reveals that social media users are not only consumers of information, but also producers in shaping the discourse within international society. To uncover the role of Instagram, the approach used is Teun A van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. Through this approach, it was found that public discourse can be shaped and controlled through three main aspects: the message production process aspect, the ideological reproduction aspect, and the algorithmic visibility aspect. In the interaction between users and algorithmic mechanisms, the language used can influence international political issues. It is concluded that Instagram serves to disseminate information quickly and also contributes significantly to the formation of public opinion, especially in diplomatic meetings between the United States and Ukraine.

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