

# Language as a Catalyst for Shaping Religious Identity and Political Ideology in the Era of Social Media

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## ABSTRAK

Selain tujuan komunikatif tradisionalnya, bahasa di era digital berfungsi sebagai mekanisme strategis untuk membangun opini publik, menegaskan solidaritas kelompok, dan mengedarkan konten ideologis. Namun, penggunaannya di platform media sosial sering kali berkontribusi pada peningkatan polarisasi sosial. Penelitian ini menyelidiki peran bahasa dalam mempengaruhi identitas agama dan ideologi politik dalam diskursus digital, dengan menekankan kapasitas ganda bahasa untuk mendorong kohesi sosial sekaligus perpecahan. Sebuah *Systematic Literature Review* dilakukan, yang mencakup 44 artikel yang telah melalui proses peer review dan terindeks di Scopus dan Web of Science, yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2021 hingga 2025. Analisis ini mengungkapkan berbagai strategi linguistik, termasuk representasi simbolik, retorika emosional, dan pemahaman ideologis, yang semuanya memainkan peran penting dalam membangun identitas kelompok dan solidaritas, sambil sekaligus memperburuk fragmentasi sosial. Temuan ini diinterpretasikan melalui perspektif Critical Discourse Analysis dan Framing Theory. Penelitian ini menyoroti perlunya kerangka regulasi yang lebih kuat untuk mengatasi konten ekstremis dan menyerukan peningkatan literasi digital untuk mendorong keterlibatan yang lebih bertanggung jawab dalam diskursus daring. Selanjutnya, penelitian ini merekomendasikan penelitian di masa depan untuk memeriksa penggunaan bahasa di komunitas non-Inggris dan untuk mengeksplorasi implikasi jangka panjang komunikasi digital terhadap konstruksi identitas. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih dalam mengenai interaksi kompleks antara bahasa, ideologi, dan identitas di lingkungan digital kontemporer.

**Kata Kunci:** *Identitas Agama, Ideologi Politik, Media Sosial, Bahasa, Sosial Media*

## ABSTRACT

Beyond its traditional communicative purpose, language in the digital age serves as a strategic mechanism for constructing public opinion, affirming group solidarity, and circulating ideological content. However, its usage on social media platforms frequently contributes to increased social polarization. This study investigates the role of language in influencing religious identity and political ideology within digital discourse, emphasizing its dual capacity to foster both social cohesion and division. A Systematic Literature Review was conducted, comprising 44 peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, published between 2021 and 2025. The analysis reveals a range of linguistic strategies, including symbolic representations, emotional rhetoric, and ideological framing, all of which play a significant role in constructing group identity and solidarity, while simultaneously intensifying societal fragmentation. These findings are interpreted through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis and Framing Theory. The study highlights the urgent need for stronger regulatory frameworks addressing extremist content and calls for enhanced digital literacy to foster more responsible engagement in online discourse. Furthermore, it recommends future research to examine language use in non-English-speaking communities and to explore the long-term implications of digital communication on identity construction. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between language, ideology, and identity in contemporary digital environments.

**Keywords:** *Religious Identity, Political Ideology, Social Media, Language, Social Media*

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the world has witnessed various cases demonstrating how social media has become a central arena for shaping religious identity and political ideology. One notable example is the 2022 protests against Iran's hijab law, sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini. The movement went

viral on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, mobilizing global support for women's rights and religious freedom (Alami Fariman & Hakiminejad, 2024). In a different context, the dissemination of religiously motivated hate speech in Myanmar via social media underscores how digital platforms can be leveraged to propagate identity-based narratives (Ansar & Khaled, 2023; Aziz, 2022). In Indonesia, the 2024 election period saw an increase in religious and political polarization narratives. Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram were widely used to reinforce specific religious identities or marginalize other groups, often exacerbating social tensions (Wijayanto et al., 2024). This phenomenon affects not only individuals but also broader social structures, highlighting the crucial role of language in defining and shaping public perceptions of religion and politics.

Religious identity, as a fundamental aspect of human life, is a social construct shaped by inherited values, beliefs, and practices while also being continuously redefined within specific socio-cultural contexts (Reicher et al., 2021; Dhami et al., 2024). Social media has provided new spaces for individuals and communities to express their religious identities (Mishol-Shauli & Golan, 2022; Agarwal & Jones, 2022). Language plays a central role in this process, serving as a medium for conveying religious values through scripture quotations, symbols, and personal narratives (Panarari & Gili, 2024). For instance, hashtags such as #PrayForParis or #alleyesonrafah illustrate how religious identity is recontextualized in a broader and cross-cultural digital landscape.

Similarly, political ideology has found a dominant space within social media platforms, allowing individuals to engage in political discourse, voice their opinions, and even influence public policy (Eady et al., 2024; Peralta et al., 2024). Language serves as a key instrument in crafting persuasive political narratives (Bronnikov, 2023; Hackenburg & Margetts, 2024). The use of terms such as "fake news" and "alternative facts" in global political discourse exemplifies how language can shape public perceptions of truth. In many cases, political identity intersects with religious identity, creating complex dynamics in social interactions (Kwuelum, 2024).

As a technological medium, social media not only facilitates communication but also functions as a space for ideological dissemination on a global scale (Vico, 2024). With billions of active users, social media transcends geographical boundaries, creating an environment where religious and political identities interact, collide, and sometimes assimilate (Barnidge, 2022; Russo et al., 2024; Poorthuis et al., 2024). The virality of content and algorithm-driven user preferences further amplify the influence of language in shaping identity narratives (Chen et al., 2023). Language, as a central element of communication, plays a pivotal role in constructing religious identity and political ideology in the social media era (Müller et al., 2022). Beyond serving as a means of conveying messages, language also functions as an instrument of power, shaping perspectives, influencing emotions, and guiding actions (Walker, 2024). Within this context, research on the role of language as a catalyst in shaping religious identity and political ideology becomes increasingly relevant.

Several studies have explored the intersection of social media, religious identity, and political ideology. Jamil (2022) examined the role of social media in political mobilization during the Arab Spring but did not delve into the role of language in religious and political narratives. Sulfikar et al. (2023) focused on the expression of religious identity on social media in Indonesia but emphasized social dynamics rather than linguistic analysis. Widmann (2022) and Klinger et al. (2023) discussed political discourse and emotions on social media, yet without an in-depth exploration of language's role in shaping identity and ideology. Konstantinova (2022) identified linguistic patterns in social media, but their connection to religious and political identity remains underexplored.

While these studies provide valuable insights, they reveal a gap in understanding language as the core element linking social media to religious identity and political ideology. This research aims to address this gap by examining language as a primary catalyst in shaping identity and ideology in the digital era. Using a Systematic Literature Review approach, this study explores linguistic patterns, social interactions, and the global implications of language on social media, offering both theoretical and practical perspectives. The findings are expected to contribute significantly to understanding how language constructs religious and political identity within an increasingly digitalized world.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, as outlined by Booth et al. (2021), to explore how language influences religious identity and political ideology in the context of social media. The research follows a structured approach to collecting and analyzing relevant information, involving clear steps such as identifying credible sources, selecting pertinent literature, and systematically analyzing the identified materials. The study is conducted using the PRISMA Flow Diagram, adapted from Page et al. (2021), to ensure methodological rigor and transparency in the process. The primary objective of this research is to investigate how language shapes narratives related to religion and politics in the social media landscape, especially with respect to the formation of identities. By systematically reviewing scholarly articles and other academic sources, the study intends to illuminate the relationship between linguistic strategies, ideological reinforcement, and identity formation in a globalized digital world.

The research addresses three main questions: How is language used in religious and political ideology narratives on social media platforms to shape individual and group identities? What linguistic strategies are employed in religious and political discourse on social media to influence or reinforce political ideologies? And finally, what are the effects of language use on social media in relation to political ideology polarity and the formation of religious identity in a global context? The table below outlines these questions and their corresponding research objectives.

Table 1. Research Questions and Objectives

Research Questions	Research Objectives
How is language used in religious and political ideology narratives on social media platforms to shape individual and group identities?	Examining the role of language in religious and political ideology narratives on social media in shaping individual and group identities.
What linguistic strategies are employed in religious and political discourse on social media to influence or reinforce political ideologies?	Analyzing linguistic strategies in religious and political discourse on social media to influence or reinforce political ideologies.
What are the effects of language use on social media regarding political ideology polarity and the formation of religious identity in a global context?	Exploring the impact of language use on social media in relation to political ideology polarity and religious identity formation in a global context.

Data for this study is sourced from secondary materials, including peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings, with a focus on publications from 2021 to 2025. These sources were chosen to ensure the research's relevance to contemporary social media discourse. The data was systematically gathered from databases such as the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Scopus, and Web of Science, using keywords like "Language and Identity," "Religion and Politics,"

"Social Media Discourse," "Political Ideologies," "Religious Identity," and "Linguistic Strategies in Social Media."

The data collection process involves a series of structured steps. First, possible sources are identified using specific keywords and the research focus. Then, abstracts and full texts of the articles are screened for relevance to the study objectives. Finally, the data is coded under thematic categories, including authors, publication years, methodologies, and key findings, to facilitate in-depth analysis. The data analysis is carried out using two complementary methods: thematic analysis, which helps identify key themes related to language use in religious and political discourse, and content analysis, which focuses on identifying linguistic strategies within texts, particularly on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. This analysis is critical for uncovering patterns and structures in religious and political narratives.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study's findings, several strategies have been employed. First, source triangulation is used to cross-check the data against existing literature, ensuring consistency and preventing contradictions. Additionally, peer review is incorporated to validate the synthesis of results and to obtain feedback on the overall research process. These measures contribute to the credibility and robustness of the study's conclusions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following PRISMA flow diagram outlines the systematic process of article selection used in this study. Starting with the total number of articles identified through database searches, it then depicts the screening and filtering stages, ultimately leading to the inclusion of 44 relevant articles. This process illustrates how articles that did not meet the predetermined criteria were excluded, ensuring the quality and relevance of the literature analyzed.

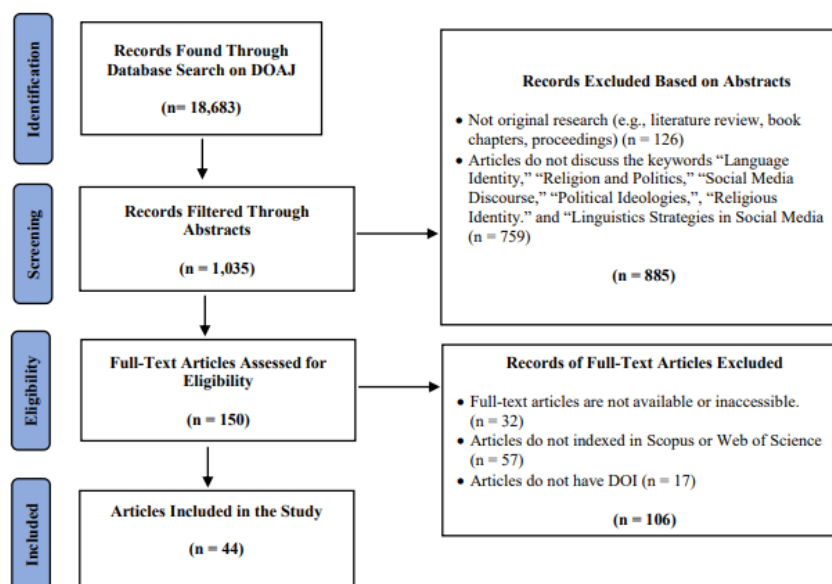


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Based on the diagram above, the literature search lays a solid foundation for any research in that the study is naturally built upon relevant and high-quality sources. For this study, an extensive search was conducted mainly through the DOAJ database, which initially revealed about 18,683 articles related to the specified keywords. However, not all articles retrieved were relevant to the

research objectives, since many dealt with broader issues, many were not methodologically relevant, and many did not meet the already predetermined inclusion criteria. Therefore, in order to ascertain the most relevant works, a strict selection mechanism was put in place, where each article was filtered for relevance and quality. After this process, only 44 articles were capable of being included for further analysis. This very significant reduction shows the necessity to filter extremely well to ensure that the final dataset is made up of studies that make a meaningful contribution to the answers to the research questions. The following graphic indicates a drastic contrast between the total number of identified articles and those that finally met the criteria for inclusion.

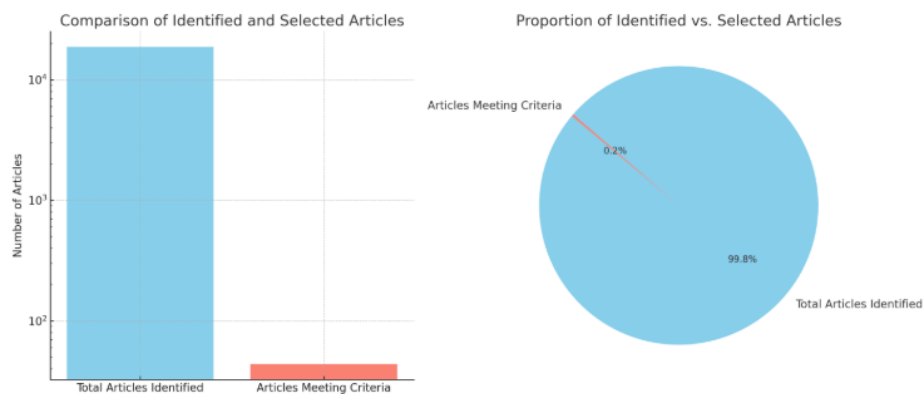


Figure 2. Literature Screening Overview of Identified and Eligible Articles

It can be seen from the screening results that only a tiny fraction of about 0.24% of the total identified articles were actually found to satisfy the inclusion criteria. This finding emphasizes the importance of the careful selection process in literature reviews, where only the most relevant and high-quality sources are allowed to pass for the research analysis. The following analysis presents the findings that address these questions:

#### A. The Use of Language in Religious Narratives and Political Ideologies on Social Media Platforms to Shape Individual and Group Identities

This study addresses the research question of how language is used in religious narratives and political ideologies on social media to construct individual and group identities. The findings reveal that language, when employed strategically and deliberately, serves not only as a communication tool but also as a medium for shaping social and political identities. Language functions as an instrument to create group solidarity through linguistic symbolism (O'Rourke & Dayán-Fernández, 2024), emotional rhetoric (Szabó & Lipiński, 2024), and ideological framing (Alousque, 2024). In religious narratives, language is often crafted to highlight universal moral values that reinforce fraternity and group cohesion (Dodlek, 2024). Conversely, political ideologies utilize language to establish identity boundaries of "us versus them," a dynamic that strengthens internal solidarity while fostering antagonism toward outsiders (Sheets et al., 2023).

This study adopts a systematic literature approach, incorporating critical discourse analysis and framing theory. The findings not only reaffirm previous research but also reveal new patterns. For instance, Boyd & Markowitz (2024) noted how religious symbols in social media texts are frequently employed to strengthen collective identity, particularly among minority communities (Abanoz, 2022). This study expands on that perspective by identifying how emotional rhetoric

patterns are intensively used to mobilize support or counter political opposition, as elaborated in Lakoff's theory (Garello, 2024).

This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the global context, where digital platforms serve as the primary space for constructing, challenging, and redefining group identities. For example, the use of terms such as "digital jihad" or "online democracy movement" illustrates the intersection of religious and political language in shaping cross-cultural identities (Song et al., 2024; McLean et al., 2024). However, this study also highlights the increasing hybridity of identity in the digital era, where individuals often blend local and global identities in their online activities. These findings not only provide a descriptive overview but also offer a deeper interpretation. The use of language in religious and political narratives on social media demonstrates a dual potential: fostering solidarity on one hand while exacerbating social conflicts on the other. This dynamic aligns with Gordon & Tannen (2023) findings, which emphasize that digital discourse often reinforces identity duality through inclusion and exclusion processes (Bork-Hüffer, 2022). Furthermore, this study identifies a research gap, particularly the lack of exploration regarding the long-term impact of linguistic symbolism on identity formation in multicultural societies (Chin & Levey, 2023).

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study expands the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis by highlighting the role of digital language in constructing identity amidst globalization. It also proposes modifications to framing theory by incorporating the emotional element, which is a defining characteristic of discourse on social media an aspect that has received limited attention in previous studies (S. J. Kim et al., 2024). From a practical standpoint, the findings provide crucial insights for policymakers in designing regulations to mitigate polarization risks stemming from extremist narratives on digital platforms. Additionally, enhancing public digital literacy is essential, particularly in recognizing and understanding how language in online narratives influences perceptions of religious and political identities (Moore & Hancock, 2022).

For future research, this study recommends further exploration of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic contexts, including how language is utilized in religious and political narratives in non-English-speaking societies. A longitudinal approach is also necessary to understand the long-term impact of digital discourse on individual and group identities, particularly in societies with low digital literacy levels (Jaff, 2023). Through a systematic approach, sharp interpretation, and in-depth synthesis, this study not only addresses the research questions but also makes a significant contribution to the development of theory and practice in the fields of language studies, identity, and digital media. This discussion offers a fresh perspective relevant to the evolving global dynamics while enriching the existing literature with novel and significant findings.

#### **B. Linguistic Strategies in Religious and Political Discourse on Social Media: Influencing and Reinforcing Political Ideology**

This study explores the linguistic strategies employed in religious and political discourse on social media to influence and reinforce political ideology. The findings reveal that linguistic strategies in social media operate synergistically to construct, strengthen, and disseminate specific ideological narratives. One of the key findings is discourse polarization, where binary opposition such as "us vs. them" is strategically utilized to differentiate ideological groups and foster collective loyalty (Michail, 2024). Orkibi (2022) notes that such strategies not only reinforce distinctions but also strengthen group identity through the framing of in-group superiority narratives. For instance,

the use of hashtags like #KawalSyariah or #TolakLiberalisme reflects a systematic effort to create ideological opposition and define group membership boundaries (Brown et al., 2022).

Furthermore, collective identity reinforcement emerges as a crucial element of linguistic strategies on social media. This finding aligns with Demaj (2022) research, which highlights the central role of language in shaping "imagined communities" through symbols and narratives that are widely accessible to group members. On social media, this strategy is evident in the use of jargon, religious terminology, and ideological symbols that reinforce group solidarity (Agudelo, 2023). Jackson et al. (2023) demonstrates that these symbols not only construct group identity but also serve to legitimize particular ideologies in public discourse.

Agenda-framing strategies also play a significant role in disseminating ideological discourse. Through language, political and religious actors on social media frame specific issues in alignment with their ideological interests. Civila & Lugo-Ocando (2024) explains that framing is a process of selecting and highlighting certain aspects of reality to shape public perception. In this context, emotional rhetoric and religiously driven narratives become primary tools for achieving persuasive effects (Dodlek, 2024). For instance, the narrative of "religious morality" is frequently employed to justify particular political agendas, as evidenced in studies on political dynamics in Muslim-majority countries (Yilmaz et al., 2023).

Moreover, this analysis finds that linguistic strategies on social media often exploit emotional rhetoric to enhance the appeal of ideological narratives. Dekeyser & Roose (2022) argues that emotionally charged language, such as moral appeals or claims of group persecution, has significant potential to mobilize the masses rapidly. For example, the spread of viral content related to religious issues on social media is often designed to elicit strong emotional responses, whether sympathy or outrage, in support of specific ideological agendas (Senbel et al., 2022).

In a global context, these linguistic strategies are not confined to any single nation or culture. Peker (2022) study on political populism in Europe reveals that identity-based religious rhetoric and political ideology have become key tools for mobilizing support across digital platforms. This indicates that social media functions as a transnational space where ideological narratives can easily transcend geographical and political boundaries. Consequently, these strategies pose new challenges in managing pluralism and social cohesion in the digital era. However, such linguistic strategies also carry negative implications, including heightened ideological polarization and social fragmentation. Agudelo & Olbrych (2022) highlights that social media often serves as a space for exclusivist narratives, which hinder intergroup dialogue. On the other hand, these findings also point to opportunities, such as the potential for mobilizing global solidarity on critical issues, as exemplified by the #PrayforPeace campaign (Adebayo & Akeem, 2022; Fabbri, 2022).

Overall, this study provides deep insights into how linguistic strategies shape and propagate political ideology and religious identity through social media. These findings not only enrich theoretical understanding of the relationship between language, media, and ideology but also offer practical implications for policymakers, scholars, and the broader public in managing the social impact of digital interactions.

### **C. The Impact of Language Use in Social Media on Political Ideological Polarity and Religious Identity Formation in a Global Context**

This study aims to examine how language use in social media influences political ideological polarity and the formation of religious identity within a global context. The findings indicate that

social media has become a primary arena where language functions not only as a communication tool but also as a means of constructing group identity, reinforcing specific ideologies, and fostering social fragmentation (Christiansen, 2024; Chau, 2024; Mayor & Bietti, 2024). Observed patterns of language use include the deployment of metaphors, jargon, religious symbols, and narratives that create binary oppositions. For instance, Chang et al. (2022) found that social movement-based hashtags on Instagram are frequently used to strengthen group solidarity with specific ideological aims. Hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter or #MeToo serve not only to disseminate information but also to cultivate a strong collective identity among supporters of these movements. However, these hashtags also frequently provoke debates and digital segregation, intensifying divisions between supporters and opponents. These findings align with Chiluba (2024) perspective in critical discourse analysis, emphasizing that language, including digital discourse (Dooly & Darwin, 2022), serves as an instrument of power capable of shaping and maintaining social structures and ideological hierarchies in society.

Language use in social media often reflects the intensity of ideological polarization through targeted linguistic strategies. For instance, Ait Hadi et al. (2024) demonstrates that religion-based narratives on social media not only reinforce conservative ideologies but also foster collective solidarity in opposing policies perceived as conflicting with their beliefs. Additionally, Mehmet & D'Alessandro (2022) highlights that multimodal communication, which integrates visual and verbal language on social media, further solidifies users' ideological positions, creating a more emotionally charged effect in message dissemination. This study underscores that such patterns are not merely forms of individual expression but also reflections of broader ideological structures in global society.

In a global context, the role of social media in disseminating ideological discourse transcends geographical boundaries while remaining influenced by local contexts. In China, as noted by Zhang (2022), religious narratives on social media platforms like WeChat are strictly regulated by the government but continue to be used to reinforce nationalism aligned with state ideology. In contrast, in countries with greater freedom of expression, such as the United States, social media language tends to be more explicit and aggressive, as found by Borah et al. (2022) and Taegyeon Kim (2023). These findings suggest that while social media possesses global characteristics, local dynamics remain crucial in shaping communication patterns and the ideologies they produce.

The impact of language use in social media extends beyond individual expression, contributing to the formation of fragmented social structures. Social media platform algorithms tend to reinforce polarization by creating "filter bubbles," where individuals are only exposed to information aligning with their ideological preferences, as explained by Bellina et al. (2023). This phenomenon strengthens ideological and religious identities within increasingly compartmentalized communities, leading to sharply polarized societies. Such fragmentation poses significant challenges in fostering inclusive dialogic spaces on social media.

The findings of this study offer important theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, they expand the understanding of the relationship between language, ideology, and digital technology across cultural contexts. For example, Widian et al. (2023) illustrates how religious symbols are used in political narratives in Indonesia to reinforce specific ideologies, mirroring similar dynamics observed in other countries. This research also strengthens Critical Discourse Analysis theory by incorporating an intercultural dimension in analyzing language within digital spaces. Practically, these findings are relevant for designing more inclusive and dialogic social media policies. Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook could consider modifying their algorithms to



prioritize discourse that promotes cross-ideological understanding rather than exacerbating polarization.

Furthermore, the results of this study are pertinent to digital literacy development, particularly in helping social media users comprehend how language can be used to reinforce specific ideologies or manipulate public opinion. Such literacy could be integrated into educational curricula to cultivate a critical understanding of the role of language in shaping identity and social dynamics. These findings also provide practical insights for policymakers in the technology and education sectors to foster a more inclusive digital ecosystem. However, this study has certain limitations, such as its predominantly qualitative approach, which may not offer a quantitative perspective on the extent to which language in social media influences polarization and identity formation. Future research could integrate quantitative methodologies to provide a more comprehensive analysis. Cross-cultural studies are also necessary to explore variations in language use patterns across different cultural and political contexts.

Thus, this study makes a significant contribution to understanding the dynamic interplay between language, social media, and ideology in a global context. The findings are not only relevant for the advancement of sociolinguistic theory but also have broad practical implications, both for social media policy and digital literacy education. This contribution is crucial for fostering more inclusive and dialogic public spaces in an increasingly complex digital era.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that language in religious and political discourse on social media plays a crucial role in shaping individual and group identities. Using a Systematic Literature Review approach, the findings indicate that linguistic strategies such as symbolism, emotional rhetoric, and framing theory are widely employed to reinforce ideologies and deepen political polarization. Religious narratives often emphasize universal moral values to strengthen group solidarity, whereas political ideologies tend to exploit the “us versus them” dichotomy to foster loyalty and construct opposition. The study also highlights that digital platforms have become key arenas for social identity construction, where language serves as a tool that can either enhance cohesion or exacerbate social conflict. Furthermore, this research offers a novel perspective on Critical Discourse Analysis by emphasizing the emotional dimension in digital discourse framing, an aspect that has been previously overlooked in linguistic studies.

Building on these findings, this study recommends further research on how linguistic strategies in religious and political discourse operate in cross-cultural and multilingual contexts. Longitudinal studies are also needed to understand the long-term impact of digital narratives on social identity, particularly in societies with varying levels of digital literacy. The practical implications of this research include the need for stricter social media regulations to prevent the spread of extremist narratives and the enhancement of digital literacy programs to help individuals critically assess the influence of language on religious and political identity formation. Ultimately, this study makes a significant contribution to the advancement of theory and practice in language studies, identity, and digital media in an increasingly complex globalized era.

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