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DISCURSIVE NATURE OF LANGUAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS: A POLITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TRUMP AND KHAMENEI'S SELECTED POSTS

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Abstract

The rapid development of social media has dramatically changed the way geopolitical conflicts as conveyed and framed for the target audience. The current study explores the significance of social media in the strategic contest between the United States and Iran, proving to be a catalyst of tension in 2026 which resulted in US-Israeli joint military action against Iran in February 2026. Using Fairclough's (2003) Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of text, this research interprets the strategic use of social media sites, including X, Truth Social, Facebook, and Instagram, by American and Iranian politicians to construct divergent narratives of power, legitimacy, identity, and conflict. Textual features (military metaphors, binary oppositions, emotive language), discursive practices (social media posts), and broader socio-political contexts (American colonialism, Iranian anti-imperialism, asymmetric use of digital tools) are all considered in the analysis. The findings demonstrate that social media is not only a mode of communication but a site of struggle through which discourse creates reality, alters the way people think about the conflict, and affects international relations. The findings contribute to explicate the hidden motifs and agenda implied in the geopolitical discourse and digital communication for researchers, policymakers and media practitioners.

1. Introduction

Social media has transformed the practice of modern politics, diplomacy and warfare discourse. The I-platforms like X (previously Twitter), Facebook and Instagram are more than just communication tools. They are battlefields where governments craft narratives and wage information battles. The history of tensions between Iran and America is long. It was born from the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the hostage crisis, nuclear standoffs and America's exit from the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – 2015 Iran nuclear deal). But the tensions escalated in 2026 and later Israel conducted airstrikes against Iranian military and nuclear targets

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on February 28, citing the circumstances in Lebanon, Gaza and America's engagement in the fight.

This was a ground conflict, but also a social media fight. The White House combined actual attack footage with scenes from video games such as *Call of Duty* -a tactic labeled by critics as the "gamification of war" NPR (National Public Radio). Iran responded with AI-generated animations insulting Trump and Netanyahu. According to propaganda specialist Nancy Snow CNBC (Consumer News and Business Channel), it is "a war of weapons" and a "war of aesthetics." Iranian parliament speaker Ghalibaf even took to X to condemn Trump for trying to manipulate financial prices on Truth Social. That shows how much geopolitical fighting is happening on social media. In this study, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology has been used to the analysis of social media posts, memes and official declarations from both sides. CDA argues that language is never neutral. It actively produces power and ideology. So, the research is about how America and Iran used digital platforms to make their identity, legitimacy and geopolitical position. This work contributes to our understanding of digital political communication and information warfare.

1.1 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What linguistic and discursive methods are used by the American and Iranian politicians to frame the whole conflict?
2. What are the sociopolitical factors that account for the use of specific framing methods on social media?

The Objectives of this study are aligned as:

1. To explore the hidden and explicit ideologies through the different discursive methods used in the selected texts.
2. To explore why both sides choose certain framing methods on social media and to determine the sociopolitical considerations behind these decisions.

1.2 Significance of the Study

There are various reasons why this study is important. First, it deals with the current issue in an era where social media has become the key source of information for the present fight. Secondly, the study uses Fairclough's CDA model to provide a balanced analysis beyond U.S.-centric perspectives. Thirdly, it contributes to theoretical debates on how digital platforms mediate conflict, produce ideology and affect international relations. Finally, the findings are beneficial for researchers, policy makers and media practitioners working within the field of digital diplomacy and strategic communication.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically based on the Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Fairclough (2003). This paradigm offers a rigorous multi-layered approach to the analysis of language as social and political practice. It is especially useful in the study of social media discourse in the context of geopolitical conflict. CDA is not simply a way of describing

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language, it is, as Fairclough (2003) suggests, a critical social science method which aims to understand how language builds, maintains and challenges power and ideological relations.

2.1 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model considers discourse as a text, discursive practice and social practice (Fairclough, 2003). These three elements can be separated analytically but are inter-related in practice and each offers a different view on the role of language in social and political contexts.

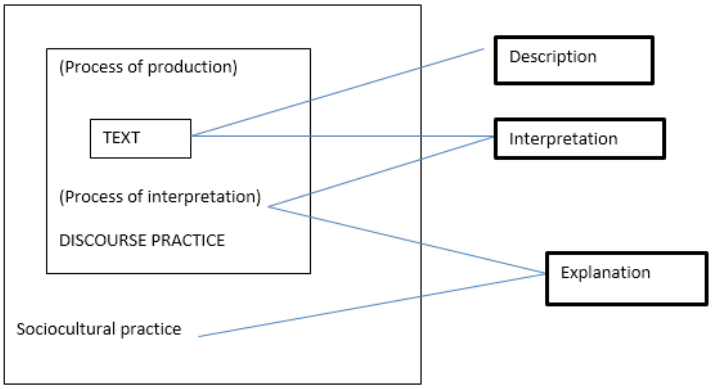


Figure 1. ***Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Discourse. Adapted from Fairclough (2003)***

i. Text (Textual Features): The first dimension describes the formal linguistic features of the text; these include the vocabulary, grammar, syntax, metaphor, transitivity, modality and rhetorical devices of the text. In the dispute between Iran and America, American politicians like Trump use military analogies such as "going after" and "floating at the bottom of the sea" on Truth Social to project military aggression and control. In contrast, Iranian state media use irony, meme aesthetics and religious symbolism on X and Facebook to create a counter-hegemonic narrative. It is these word choices and frameworks that allow governments and media to frame events in ideologically loaded ways.

ii. Discursive Practice (Interpretation): The second dimension has to do with the production, distribution and consumption of texts. Social media platforms like X, Truth Social and Instagram have their own algorithmic logics that they follow, amplifying some viewpoints and marginalizing others. The White House in a strategic move, releases viral movies that mix military footage with pop culture references. It's a kind of gamification of media war. Iran is another country using AI-generated misinformation through state-linked accounts. At this level, intertextuality is also considered, with particular regard to how postings cite and remix other texts, genres and discourses to achieve maximum rhetorical effect.

iii. Social Practice: The third dimension is to place discourse in broader socio-political, historical and ideological systems. The history of US-Iran relations from the 1979 revolution and JCPOA

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(Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action) to the 2026 conflict, impacts the discursive techniques of both sides. Trump's social media rhetoric reproduces notions of American exceptionalism, military superiority, and Orientalism. Iranian counter-discourse, in contrast, supports anti-imperialism and regional sovereignty. At this level we conceptualize discourse as perpetuating and challenging existing power relations and ideologies.

3. Data Analysis

Data Analysis This chapter is devoted to the analysis of four selected social media postings, applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis, analyzing each post on the levels of textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice.

Post 1: Trump (Truth Social 28 February 2026)

"A short time ago, the United States military began major combat operations in Iran. Our objective is to defend the American people by eliminating imminent threats from the Iranian regime. A vicious group of very hard, terrible people. For 47 years, the Iranian regime has chanted Death to America and waged an unending campaign of bloodshed and mass murder."

In the above post from (Trump), the data is analyzed at three levels as mentioned in Fairclough's 3D Model. Trump uses harsh military language in this post. Words like 'major combat operations' and 'eliminating threats' paint the war as essential and legitimate. Words such as 'vicious' and 'terrible people' demean Iranians, reducing them to a menacing and uncivilized enemy. References to 'Death to America' and 'bloodshed' evoke fear and animosity among American listeners. A clear binary opposition is created with America positioned as the defender and Iran portrayed as the aggressor. The author uses the first person plural pronoun "Our" often, creating an air of togetherness and identification for all Americans.

The post appeared on Trump's own Truth Social site at 2:30 AM as the battle started. By using his own platform, Trump bypasses media censors and delivers his story straight to millions of followers. This is a slow narrative control play. It shapes the public's opinion before the mainstream media can get an alternate analysis out. The post provides intertextual justification for military action by drawing upon 47 years of US-Iran history. "our" refers to US citizens, the military, and the American nation. This generates a sense of communal identification and makes the spectator feel part of the conflict. For cohesive techniques, Trump utilizes repetition ('vicious', 'terrible'), referring ('Our' as a joint effort made by America and its allies in support of Israel) and historical reference ('47 years') that links the post as a compelling narrative for their power showoff. The tone is strong, threatening and directive for the target audience. Trump deliberately utilizes scary words to evoke urgency and outrage in the audience.

This post at this level is a copy of American imperialist ideology **'Us versus Them'** where America seems to be the 'savor' of the globe. It also shows his dominance in retaining Iran as a 'Antagonist' for the region. These ideological viewpoints are founded in US-Iran conflicts that go back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The discourse is one of moral superiority to justify military aggression. America is shown as a powerful and honest country which fights for its citizens. But Iran is

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portrayed as a scary and tough enemy. This is nothing new. Such narratives have long been deployed by powerful nations to drum up popular support for war.

Post 2: Khamenei (Last Public Speech, 11 February 2026)

"The Islamic Republic will never surrender to American arrogance. Our resistance is our strength. The enemies of Islam seek to destroy our sovereignty and our values. We will stand firm. Death to those who wage war against the Muslim world."

In this selected post from (Khamenei), the data is analyzed at three levels as mentioned in Fairclough's 3D Model. The use of explicitly religious rhetoric throughout Khamenei's speech, such as Islamic Republic, enemies of Islam, and Muslim world, frames the struggle as a religious war rather than a geopolitical one. Resistance philosophy is expressed in words such as 'never surrender' and 'stand firm'. "American arrogance" erodes the legitimacy of American power and authority. There is a binary contrast between them: Islam and Iran are victims, while America and Israel are aggressors.

This is an official state speech broadcast on Iranian state media and directed at Iranian citizens and the wider Muslim world. Its principal objective is to rally Islamic solidarity and build support for the Iranian state, both within the country and outside. The speech is highly intertextual, drawing on decades of Islamic revolutionary discourse.

This discourse reinforces notions of anti-imperialism and Islamic solidarity, presenting opposition to Western rule as a religious and moral duty. These positions have roots in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Iran is cast as defender of Islam and national sovereignty against illegitimate Western imperialism.

Post 3: British Broadcasting Corporation News (X, March 2026)

"Iranians brace for infrastructure strikes as Trump deadline nears. A Tehran resident said: 'About them hitting energy infrastructure, using an atomic bomb, or levelling Iran — my honest reaction is that I'm OK with all of these. If attacking targets brings down the Islamic Republic, I'm fine with that."

In the given statement from (BBC News), the data is analyzed at three levels as mentioned above. 'Brace for' passively normalizes incoming military strikes as inevitable, not illegal. An anonymous civilian comment is used to suggest Iranians would accept annihilation of Iran. The references of 'atomic bomb' and 'levelling Iran' normalize excessive violence by putting it in a civilian discourse. It states the one sided point of view, there is no alternative voice and conflict is constructed as a sort of freedom. This post has substantial institutional credibility and a huge worldwide audience, posted on BBC's official X account. It is a dubious editorial policy to use an anonymous and unverifiable source. Crucially, the BBC later withdrew the quote without formally correcting it; a discursive cover-up which itself demonstrates the way in which narratives are manipulated under public criticism.

This piece reproduces the prejudice of Western media, presenting the conflict as liberation not aggression. It reinforces the geopolitical narratives of the United States and Israel, in which Iranian civilians are depicted as being in favor of the destruction of their own state. The silent deletion of the quote by the BBC in the face of public outrage highlights how speech can be

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questioned and contested, and exposes the power relations at play in Western media coverage of non-Western conflicts.

Post 4: PressTV / Iranian State Media (X, 28 October 2026)

"The Supreme Leader is safe and sound, steadfast and firm in commanding the field. The Islamic Republic stands strong. The enemy has achieved nothing. Iran's armed forces are responding with full force to this illegal aggression against our sovereignty and our people. The Zionist-American alliance will face the consequences of their crimes."

In the above post from (pressTV), the data is analyzed at three levels as mentioned in Fairclough's 3D Model. "Safe and sound" line is a deliberate lie as Khamenei was getting killed in airstrikes when the message was made. 'Stands strong' and 'full force' provide the appearance of Iranian strength despite heavy military casualties. The use of terms like 'illegal aggression' and 'crimes' seeks to delegitimize American and Israeli military action by framing it in legal and moral terms. The compound phrase 'Zionist-American alliance' joins the two foes together, construing them as a united criminal power. A binary opposition is set up: Iran as victim sovereign, the US and Israel as criminal aggressors.

The western infrastructure is strategically used to channel narratives that are anti-western. The post, targeted at international Muslim and anti-war communities, was made the same day as the strikes. Conscious dissemination of false information is a weapon for maintaining the morale of the population and preventing the enemy from winning in the global information arena.

This speech reproduces regime survival ideology, in which the state must appear powerful, even in the face of military defeat. The anti-imperialist narrative sees the conflict as illegal Western assault against a sovereign nation. References to 'sovereignty' appeal to international law and United Nations norms to ground legitimacy. These are attitudes in line with Iran's historical self-construction as a resistance state since the 1979 revolution, as a state that portrays the United States and Israel as criminals to delegitimize their military operations worldwide.

4. Findings and conclusion

This study demonstrated the function of social media in the strategic battle between the United States and Iran, with a particular concentration on the war in 2026. Four social media posts (Trump, Khamenei, BBC News, and PressTV) were analyzed to reveal its textual features, discursive practice, and social practice by applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings show that social media is not only a communication conduit, but a dynamic battleground where power, ideology and identity are forged and disputed especially for political discourse. American rhetoric, as expressed through Trump's Truth Social posts, repeatedly replicated notions of American exceptionalism, military domination, and Orientalism, presenting the war as a heroic endeavor against a barbarous adversary. Iranian discourse, embodied in Khamenei's speech and PressTV, employed religious resistance, anti-imperialism and regime survival ideology to portray Iran as a sovereign victim of illegitimate Western invasion. The BBC and Western media showed how even ostensibly neutral outlets impact the way the world sees things by choosing what to publish and how to tell it. These results show that language is never neutral, and as Fairclough (2003) argues, social media posts are potent ideological instruments that are used in the service of the larger geopolitical interests of

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contending state actors. Both sides made strategic use of media, timing, audience targeting and intertextuality to maximize rhetorical impact and dominate the global information arena. The work contributes to the literature of political linguistics, digital communication and geostrategic analysis. It provides a bilaterally balanced examination of both American and Iranian discourse, thereby overcoming the Western-centric views in the previous scholarship. Future study could apply this approach to other geopolitical conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war or the Palestine-Israel dispute to further investigate the role of digital discourse in shaping international relations and public opinion in the long run.

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