

Populism and New Media's Resonance: An Analysis of the US Presidential Election

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Abstract

This study critically examines the structural marginalization of institutional discourse within algorithm-driven social media environments, with a particular focus on the 2024 U.S. presidential election. Through a comparative analysis of populist communication practices in the United States, Brazil, and India, the paper identifies three interrelated mechanisms contributing to the decline of institutional expressiveness: the misalignment between formal discourse structures and platform algorithms, the erosion of institutional agenda-setting capacity, and the absence of procedural authority over content visibility. Drawing upon discourse analysis and platform governance theory, the research conceptualizes this phenomenon as an emerging form of “expressive failure” under platform logics. The findings suggest that populist actors exploit the emotional and viral affordances of social media to displace rational, authoritative expressions traditionally upheld by public institutions. In response, the study proposes a policy framework that embeds communicative responsibilities into institutional governance, thereby reasserting institutional legitimacy within digitally mediated public spheres.

Keywords: *institutional discourse, platform governance, populist communication, algorithmic visibility, digital public sphere*

1.0 Introduction

With deep reconstruction of the digital communication ecology, social media platforms have evolved from neutral information channels into power fields of political expression. During the 2024 U.S. presidential election, platform mechanisms amplified political information, prioritized emotional expression, and marginalized institutional voices, shaping a new legitimacy crisis within public discourse. Although numerous studies have examined populism and online communication, existing findings remain fragmented across platforms and contexts, limiting our understanding of how digital infrastructures systematically mediate institutional visibility and authority. This study addresses that gap by systematically mapping how platform logic reshapes the visibility and legitimacy of institutional communication. By clarifying the conceptual scope of institutional expression and examining cross-national patterns, the research provides a coherent foundation for theoretical analysis and comparative discussion.

1.1 The Rise of Platforms and Changes in Expression Structure

Building on the transformation outlined in the introduction, this section focuses on how the rise of social media platforms has restructured the mechanisms of political expression and public discourse. During the 2024 US presidential election, social media platforms restructured the flow of campaign information. According to Reuters [1], as of that month, 57 million citizens had submitted early votes, and candidates placed advertisements on multiple platforms focusing on taxation and the economy, strengthening the leading role of digital media in public participation. In the same week, political short videos on TikTok using the hashtag #ElectionFluence were viewed over 320 million times, with an engagement rate 42% higher than in 2016.

This phenomenon reflects what Van Dijck and Poell [2] describe as “platform logic”, in which algorithmic recommendation, data-driven feedback and participation protocols reshape content visibility and authority. Platforms have become active participants in shaping public opinion. As Mohamed [3] observed, new media has become an essential channel for politicians to build recognition and emotional connection.

The emergence of such mechanisms profoundly affects voters’ information access and cognitive structure. Medina Serrano et al. [4] found that TikTok’s algorithmic system tends to amplify emotionally rich and visually stimulating content among younger users. This mechanism can subvert the traditional path of public opinion formation and transform platforms into spaces where political cognition is continuously shaped. In the traditional mass communication system, political issues were filtered by editorial gatekeeping, whereas now user engagement, including clicks and dwell time, determines issue salience.

The attention-allocation capacity of social media enables certain political discourses to gain sustained visibility without structural rebuttals, creating an illusion of consensus through algorithmic distribution. In this context, the interactive relationship between public authority and public opinion feedback is undergoing reconstruction, placing institutional pressure on governance legitimacy. To avoid terminological ambiguity, “institutional expression” in this study refers to structural statements made by government agencies, mainstream political parties or public authorities on digital platforms concerning policy positions, procedural legitimacy or governance stance, which possess clear institutional origins and public authorization. Such transformation highlights the tension between algorithmic visibility and institutional legitimacy, which forms the conceptual foundation of this study.

1.2 Historical evolution and the origin of problems

Public sphere legitimacy stems from procedural rationality, not voice volume, a principle embedded in U.S. political culture since the Federalist Papers. By the mid-20th century, the spread of radio and television marked the industrialization of public expression. The 1960 Kennedy–Nixon televised debate is a prime example: it not only influenced election results but also demonstrated the public mission of mass media as an intermediary platform [5]. Yet this phase also set the precedent for media-driven legitimacy, where visibility began to outweigh procedural reasoning.

However, this intermediation soon began to unravel. In the 1980s, cable television gave birth to ideological journalism, as Fox News and MSNBC polarized discourse, and the media gradually shifted from information mediation to opinion dissemination. At the same time,

Americans' trust in institutions and the media experienced a steady decline. Since 1997, the proportion of respondents who "highly trust" major national media has fallen by nearly 40 percentage points. This erosion of institutional credibility paved the way for emotionalized and partisan media logics to replace earlier norms of public reasoning.

The events of September 11, 2001, became a turning point for institutional expression. The monopoly of the national security narrative, while temporarily unifying public opinion, also marginalized anti-agency voices that accumulated on emerging digital platforms. By the time Obama was elected in 2008, the Tea Party and right-wing grassroots movements had begun organizing protests through social media, from which a parallel "anti-agency public sphere" gradually emerged [6]. This transformation signaled the fragmentation of communicative authority and the loss of institutional gatekeeping power.

Trump's election in 2016 marked a structural rupture of the public sphere. He bypassed traditional channels such as White House briefings and used Twitter to directly announce policy intentions, transforming the communication process between the president, digital platforms, and the public into a disintermediated structure. This was not merely an innovation in campaign strategy but a substantive weakening of institutional expression mechanisms [7]. The normalization of direct communication through platforms redefined political legitimacy as algorithmic popularity rather than procedural credibility.

The algorithmic logic of social platforms further perpetuates this trend. Recommendation systems prefer content with strong emotions, clear positioning, and sharp rhythm, which are typical traits of populist discourse [8]. Emotion has become the new communicative currency, while the cost-effectiveness of rational expression has sharply declined. This shift reveals the systemic asymmetry between institutional discourse and the platform's incentive structure.

The "corruptive practices" narrative after the 2020 U.S. presidential election, and its viral circulation across social media, vividly demonstrates the failure of institutional expression. Despite court rulings, statements from secretaries of state, and mainstream media denials, a large segment of the public continued to believe video clips and image posts on TikTok and Telegram [9]. This does not represent the disappearance of facts but the replacement of institutional truth by platform logic as the dominant organizing mechanism of belief.

In short, the U.S. public sphere has shifted from a procedural consensus space to an algorithmic emotional space. This transformation is not a sudden power displacement but the cumulative result of decades of weak institutional expression. When public institutions fail to adapt to the rhythm and expressive logic of platforms, the erosion of communicative authority becomes inevitable.

1.3 Overview of research issues and structures

The erosion of traditional media authority, combined with the growing dominance of social media platforms, has fundamentally reconfigured the barriers to entry and visibility structures of political issues. In their seminal study on agenda-setting theory, McCombs and Shaw [10] argued that the media's primary function is not to dictate what people think, but to shape what they think about by organizing issue salience. When this agenda-setting power shifts from institutionalized media to technological platforms, the mechanisms of agenda formation also undergo structural transformation.

The integration of social media platforms into electoral communication has, therefore, altered not only the channels of political messaging but also the logic of political visibility [11]. In this new environment, dominance in political communication increasingly belongs to technical platforms and campaign teams capable of manipulating algorithmic traffic and optimizing content ranking. Within electoral competition, the interplay between issue emergence, prioritization, and voter attention has evolved into a highly technical process. Consequently, the cognitive orientation of voters and the algorithmic architecture of platforms have become tightly intertwined, shaping the information ecology through which citizens interpret political issues. This convergence is particularly visible in the rise of social media populism, where emotional resonance often substitutes for institutional authority.

Therefore, this paper proposes two research questions:

I. How do social media platforms employ algorithmic mechanisms to reshape the structure of political expression and provide a communicative advantage to populist discourse?

II. Under what conditions does the public perceive credible advocacy when institutional discourse loses its dominance, and how does this shift influence political trust?

And put forward two corresponding research goals:

I. To identify the structural coupling mechanisms between platform algorithmic preferences and populist expression, explaining why institutional discourse is increasingly marginalized within platform-based communication.

II. To explore the cognitive transfer mechanisms of public trust following the decline of institutional expression, and to propose institutional responses for restoring communicative legitimacy and trust reconstruction in platform governance.

This study adopts the 2024 U.S. presidential election as its primary case and conducts a comparative analysis with the electoral contexts of India and Brazil. Through this approach, it examines the practical implications of platform communication in shaping political cognition and institutional trust across different democratic settings.

2.0 Literature Review

On a global scale, social platforms have a profound impact on the structure of political communication, and the academic community has formed diverse research perspectives around their coupling path with populism. This chapter systematically reviews how platform mechanisms affect the generation, mobilization, and dissemination of populism in different political systems from three dimensions: developing countries, developed countries, and the United States. At the same time, introducing a critical perspective, reflecting on the neglect of the mechanism of weakening institutional expression in current research, and proposing an analytical framework for how the "political performance space of platform empowerment" can replace traditional institutional discourse structures in different countries, providing theoretical support and comparative dimensions for subsequent analysis.

2.1 Review of populism and platform logic research

The global expansion of new media has profoundly transformed the speed and structure of information dissemination. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [12], users in more than 70 percent of countries now rely on

algorithmic recommendations to guide their decision-making. These algorithms tend to privilege controversial and emotionally charged content, which reshapes how information gains public attention. This study draws on the 2024 United States presidential election as a central case and compares it with electoral experiences in India and Brazil to analyze how platform communication influences political cognition and institutional trust.

Social media has become the dominant channel through which citizens access political information, and users increasingly prefer content that evokes strong emotions. This shift enables populist actors to bypass traditional media filters and directly shape voter attitudes. Banaji and Choudhury [13] demonstrated that the absence of verification mechanisms in WhatsApp networks during the 2018 Indian election exacerbated misinformation and collective hostility, illustrating how platform structures reinforce polarization. Several international organizations have also linked the deepening of political division to the decline in information reliability, emphasizing that emotional circulation has gradually replaced factual mediation in political communication.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [14] reports that more than 40 percent of respondents express uncertainty about the authenticity of online information, with younger users showing higher levels of distrust. This cognitive fatigue leads citizens to rely more heavily on algorithmic cues in their information evaluation process, further amplifying exposure to provocative or divisive content. Thussu [15] argues that the traditional “communication responsibility structure” has been replaced by platform logic, eroding the normative boundaries that once maintained the public credibility of mass communication.

The deeper structural roots of these changes lie in the resurgence of anti-globalization and the rise of neo-mercantilist thinking. Following the 2008 financial crisis, the legitimacy and profit mechanisms of global value chains came under widespread scrutiny. Many states repositioned themselves as defenders of domestic interests rather than participants in global coordination. As Rodrik [16] observed, the political economy of globalization has shifted from “embedded liberalism” toward “economic nationalism,” a transformation that also extends to digital communication governance, where states seek to reassert control over discourse power.

Within this shifting context, social media platforms have evolved into the main arenas for non-institutional expression. The low barriers to entry, preference for emotional content, and algorithmic amplification have created spaces of high visibility for marginalized and anti-establishment voices. However, this phenomenon should not be interpreted as a technological realization of free speech, but rather as a reflection of public anxiety and distrust toward institutional actors. The global spread of populism thus represents not merely the diffusion of new communication tools but the cumulative result of declining institutional credibility and weakened communicative authority. These developments reveal a gap in existing research, as most studies remain event-driven and lack a systematic understanding of how platform logic restructures political legitimacy. A more integrative and comparative mapping is therefore necessary to clarify the mechanisms through which platforms mediate the visibility, authority, and trust of institutional communication.

2.2 Developing countries: lack of institutions and platform mobilization

In many developing societies, social media platforms are expanding more rapidly than state institutions can adapt. Under weak regulatory and institutional conditions, platforms not only transmit information but also reshape political discourse and social identity formation. The recommendation mechanisms of these platforms play a critical role in this process. As Zuboff [17] observed, large platforms monitor user behavior and dwell time to optimize algorithmic feedback for repetitive dissemination of similar content. This “behavioral prediction” logic is content-neutral, blurring the boundary between political and entertainment spheres. Once users show interest in a particular populist narrative, algorithms repeatedly present related material. Populist discourse therefore does not depend on formal organization; it can dominate information spaces as long as it aligns with algorithmic preferences.

UNESCO [12] highlights that in the absence of media literacy and civic education, this self-reinforcing loop reshapes users’ perception of what constitutes “normal political language” and erodes patience with institutional discourse. Pal and Chandra [18], in their fieldwork on India’s social media environment, found that political mobilization increasingly takes place outside traditional party structures. They observed that everyday online content gradually accumulates emotional energy, which can later be mobilized into collective action. Repeated exposure to identity-threat narratives in closed groups has led to incidents of offline violence, providing a low-cost and organization-free pathway for exerting political pressure.

A similar mechanism is evident in the Philippines. Duterte’s administration relied heavily on the Facebook ecosystem to create a pseudo-intimate environment of public opinion, using memes, short videos, and satirical posts to frame anti-establishment discourse as “common sense” [19]. Within such a communicative space, democratic legitimacy is no longer maintained through procedural norms but through improvisational discourse that claims to “speak directly to the people.” The platform, instead of mediating information, aggregates collective emotion and amplifies it into a form of political legitimacy.

Beyond South and Southeast Asia, Brazil presents a distinct variation of the same logic. Bolsonaro’s extensive use of Telegram and YouTube during the 2022 election created an emotionally charged “public layer” that connected “ordinary citizens” against so-called “pseudo-elites.” Through daily livestreams and religious symbolism, he built an emotional field that bypassed institutional verification and expanded platform-based communication exponentially. In the absence of judicial oversight and effective content moderation, the platform evolved into an alternative order of authority rather than a neutral information channel [20].

These cases illustrate how, in environments with fragile institutional frameworks, the communicative power of platforms substitutes for formal legitimacy. Platforms offer cost-free, unmediated access to political visibility while favoring content that elicits emotion, controversy, and belonging. This dynamic produces what may be termed de-institutionalized expression dominance, reflecting not democratization but the substitution of algorithmic visibility for institutional authority. The literature on developing societies has yet to systematically explain this structural coupling between algorithmic affordances and institutional weakness, underscoring the necessity of a more comparative and integrative analysis in the present study.

2.3 Developed Countries: Institutional Expression Failure and Post-Truth Structure

Unlike the path of "institutional emptiness leads to alternative expression" in developing countries, the crisis of expression in developed countries does not stem from the failure of the system itself, but from the process by which the function of institutional expression is quietly marginalized by the logic of the platform. Institutions still exist, and elements such as news organizations, electoral procedures, and judicial independence are still in play, but their dominance in the public opinion space is being weakened. Institutional voices are not silenced by censorship but displaced by the grammar of platform logic.

Developed countries have long relied on a set of expressive mechanisms composed of media, political parties, and professional institutions, which perform the functions of issue setting, fact-checking, and public education, forming a stable framework for the modern public sphere [21]. However, as social platforms have become the main entry points for information, the logic of expression has undergone profound changes: visibility first, emotion first, and speed first. This logic does not directly suppress institutional voices, but constantly dilutes their influence, causing them to gradually lose their "discourse axis dominance" in public spaces.

Although public broadcasters such as the BBC maintain a neutral stance and offer diverse perspectives, fragmented images, inflammatory statements, and de-contextualized short video content dominate the allocation of attention resources. "Take Back Control", "Migration Crisis", "Loss of Sovereignty", etc. become the focus of public opinion, and procedural language is difficult to form an attractive force for public opinion [22]. In Germany, this trend is showing a structural evolution.

The far-right AfD party has systematically used platforms such as Facebook and Telegram to build "semi-enclosed spaces of expression", forming emotional resonance networks through image narratives, identity mobilization, and anti-mainstream hashtags. Mainstream parties and government departments still publish content within the institutional framework, but their messages often lack competitive dissemination under the platform's recommendation logic. This is not a failure of language, but a structural suppression.

This phenomenon implies a fragmentation of sources of legitimacy: the legitimacy of platform expression no longer depends on procedural legitimacy or factual basis, but on "the frequency of being seen" and "the identifiability of emotions." As Corner [23] has pointed out, "post-truth" is not the absence of facts, but the fact that the truth no longer organizes the public's cognitive and trust structures. Once procedural language loses its constructive power in public spaces, institutions remain, but they no longer have explanatory power.

Thus, in the developed world, populism resonates not with the collapse of institutions, but with their loss of linguistic dominance in the public arena. Platforms are not hostile to the system, but, under the guise of their algorithmic neutrality, have always favoured forms of content expression that attract attention, accelerate transmission and create division. Populists are the "natural fit" for this structure.

2.4 American Case Study: Platform Structural Embedding and Emotional Logic

Among Western democracies, the United States was one of the first to integrate social media into electoral strategies and remains the most illustrative case of populist discourse resonating deeply with digital media logic. Unlike the institutional vacuum observed in

developing contexts or the speech marginalization common in other developed states, the U.S. experience is characterized by the structural embedding of platform logic within institutional operations. Platforms have evolved from communication channels into technical foundations and emotional accelerators of political practice.

A widely cited example is the evolution of digital public opinion in the Rust Belt, which became a key site for populist emotional mobilization during the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. Research and media reports indicate that Trump repeatedly invoked narratives of “lost industrial dignity,” “workers betrayed by globalization,” and “grassroots abandoned by elites,” using social media to construct what he framed as “the collective identity of the dispossessed.” According to The New York Times [24], his campaign operated numerous pseudo-spontaneous accounts that produced visual narratives of closed factories and abandoned towns, transforming regional economic anxiety into national political anger. This transformation demonstrates how localized grievances can be algorithmically amplified into national identity politics, converting emotion into political capital.

This operation was not merely discursive but technically synchronized with the algorithmic prioritization of emotional and identity-based content. Papacharissi [25] observed that the “emotional public” of digital platforms is organized primarily through affective empathy. In this structure, the adversarial and emotionally charged character of populist discourse is structurally aligned with algorithmic curation, yielding amplification advantages in visibility and engagement.

At the institutional level, Trump’s presidency further embedded social media within the executive communication apparatus. Kreis notes that Trump used Twitter as a medium for policy announcements, diplomatic statements, and personnel decisions, bypassing traditional administrative intermediaries and editorial oversight [7]. This practice institutionalized a “direct expression model” that exemplifies how platform logic enables immediate feedback loops between leaders and audiences, eroding procedural mediation.

After the 2020 election, this “platform political structure” evolved even further. The Washington Post reported that Trump and his supporters employed YouTube, Telegram, and TikTok to spread the “electoral corruption” narrative, which gained momentum not through evidence but through algorithmic exposure, hashtags, and visual virality. The platform’s attention-first logic, combined with the adversarial emotional structure of populist discourse, transformed unverified claims into perceived truth, displacing institutional communication.

Kreis and McGregor further revealed that Trump’s campaign engaged directly with multiple technology firms to optimize recommendation systems for greater content exposure, demonstrating that platform logic had become part of the institutional infrastructure of expression itself [9]. Emotional and visual expressions now hold communicative primacy, while procedural discourse is increasingly marginalized. This shift produces a legitimacy dislocation within institutional structures, where algorithmic trust diverges from procedural legitimacy. Consequently, the American case illustrates how the fusion of populist affect and platform architecture institutionalizes anti-institutional expression within the system itself.

3.0 Methods

This study therefore adopts a comparative political communication approach that is suitable for examining cross-national variations in platform governance and discursive legitimacy. The

method builds on the analytical framework of platform logic, state intermediary, and structural expression output, which enables structural rather than event-based comparison. Three representative countries, namely the United States, India, and Brazil, were selected for their contrasting political systems and platform ecologies. These cases represent diverse media ecosystems and institutional configurations, offering a balanced cross-regional comparison. Data collection combined peer-reviewed academic literature, official policy documents, and multilingual platform texts obtained primarily from Scopus, Web of Science, and SpringerLink, with supplementary searches in Google Scholar. These databases were chosen for their cross-disciplinary coverage and established reliability in communication and governance studies. Boolean combinations such as “populism AND social media” and “platform logic AND governance NOT advertising” were applied to ensure thematic precision and to exclude commercially oriented studies.

Only publications and official documents from 2010 to 2024 were included to reflect the evolution of platform-mediated political communication, while conference papers and non-peer-reviewed materials were excluded for consistency. The study constructs a comparative path diagram across three analytical dimensions: voice adaptation degree, algorithmic intervention depth, and institutional mediation strength. These dimensions serve as operational indicators to visualize how platform structures reshape institutional visibility. This design ensures methodological transparency, replicability, and analytical rigor.

3.1 Data sources

This study focuses on the social media dissemination strategies of the Trump campaign during the 2024 United States presidential election as the primary case. The case captures a high-intensity intersection between populist communication and platform governance, which is suitable for observing how algorithmic structures amplify emotionally charged messages and marginalize institutional discourse. Data were gathered through a systematic review of mainstream coverage and platform materials between October 2023 and November 2024. For news and investigations, sources included The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Financial Times, chosen for editorial credibility, cross-platform reporting, and consistent coverage of election-related platform dynamics. Retrieval used cross-database searches in Scopus, Web of Science, and SpringerLink to locate peer-reviewed background literature on populism and platform logic, supplemented by targeted queries in Google Scholar to capture interdisciplinary items not indexed elsewhere.

Boolean combinations were pre-specified to align with the research focus, for example: “Trump OR ‘Trump campaign’” AND “TikTok OR YouTube OR X OR Twitter” AND “algorithm OR recommendation OR AI-generated” AND “election OR voting OR 2024,” with exclusions such as “NOT advertising,” “NOT campaign finance,” and “NOT entertainment” to remove commercially oriented or off-topic materials. Inclusion was limited to English-language news reports, investigative features, official statements, and peer-reviewed studies published in 2010–2024. Exclusions covered conference abstracts, non-peer-reviewed reports without methodological detail, opinion essays, duplications, and items without full-text access, in order to enhance reliability and replicability.

Platform-native materials from TikTok, YouTube, and X were collected through account and topic tracing around high-exposure events, such as the use of AI-generated videos or the

circulation of a “2020 election manipulation” narrative. For each event, the study recorded visibility signals and dissemination pathways, including view and share counts, comment velocity, hashtag clustering, cross-platform pickup in mainstream outlets, and subsequent moderation or fact-checking. This media-tracking and discourse-analysis procedure operationalizes how digital infrastructures shape narrative salience and how such mechanisms allow populist messages to bypass institutional verification.

Beyond descriptive mapping, the data strategy is anchored in Habermas’s account of the structural transformation of the public sphere and in van Dijck and Poell’s formulation of platform logic. These frameworks justify the emphasis on institutional discourse and algorithmic mediation, and they guide the comparative indicators used later in the study to evaluate visibility, legitimacy, and governance implications.

3.2 Framework and Analytical Path

Building on the methodological design above, this section outlines the theoretical basis and analytical dimensions guiding the comparative study. The analysis adopts a dual theoretical framework integrating Habermas’s [26] concept of the public sphere with van Dijck and Poell’s [2] platform logic model. These frameworks together link the normative ideal of rational deliberation with the empirical dynamics of algorithmic mediation. Habermas emphasizes that the legitimacy of public discourse arises from rational deliberation and procedural fairness, not emotional mobilization or attention competition. When communication deviates from these principles, institutional expression risks becoming fragmented and performative.

The platform logic framework further explains how algorithmic systems redefine the visibility of information and the prioritization of issues through recommendation mechanisms and participation density. This mechanism tends to amplify emotional and symbolic content while constraining rational and procedural expression, creating structural tension between communicative efficiency and institutional legitimacy.

To operationalize these concepts, the study applies three analytical dimensions: the degree of voice adaptation to platform features, the depth of algorithmic intervention in shaping attention, and the strength of institutional mediation in maintaining legitimacy. These indicators translate theoretical concepts into measurable dimensions, guiding comparative analysis across the United States, India, and Brazil. The framework reveals how digital platforms restructure visibility and authority across different governance systems.

3.3 Reliability test and limitation explanation

Unlike empirical methods based on large-sample datasets or surveys, this study adopts a structural interpretive framework. Its objective is not to measure how many people see certain content, but to reveal which forms of expression hold structural advantages within platform environments. In interpretive inquiry, reliability is therefore understood not merely as variable repeatability, but as the internal coherence of theoretical logic and the structural consistency of the explanatory framework, especially within a technologically dynamic and semi-closed communication system.

The study’s reliability rests first on transparent data selection. All analyzed discourse events were drawn from verified mainstream media sources. These cases are not random but

structurally representative, consistently revealing a pattern in which institutional expression is technically silenced by platform mechanisms. The interplay of algorithmic recommendation, emotional labeling, and institutional inertia provides empirical grounding for the argument that expression mechanisms have failed.

Credibility is further supported by theoretical discipline and paradigm clarity. The study constructs a diagnostic framework that identifies the structural conflict between emotional expression, platform visibility logic, and institutional discourse rhythm. It treats neither platforms as neutral nor emotional spread as a new political norm. Instead, it conceptualizes visibility reconstruction as a gradual erosion of public rationality and a transformation from formal legitimacy to algorithmic legitimacy.

Finally, the comparative scope across the United States, India, and Brazil reinforces horizontal reliability. Despite differences in institutional systems and political cultures, the mechanisms of institutional discourse failure display a high degree of convergence. This cross-national validation strengthens both theoretical robustness and structural insight, suggesting that the displacement of institutional discourse is a global rather than a local phenomenon.

In summary, the study establishes reliability through the integration of theoretical coherence, structural rigor, and cross-national verification. It provides both an interpretive framework for understanding how institutional discourse becomes silenced and a replicable foundation for future governance research.

4.0 Findings

This chapter reveals the multiple dilemmas of institutional expression under the platform mechanism and the formation logic of the dominant path of populist discourse. The results show that although platform logic has technical commonalities, it produces different political consequences in different countries. The analysis shows that institutional expression faces visibility disadvantage, voice mismatch, and algorithmic imbalance within platform communication mechanisms, gradually degenerating into a structural weak signal that challenges the legitimacy foundation of contemporary public governance.

4.1 The platform mechanism's biased amplification of expressed content

Social platforms drive information delivery by user preferences, and their core algorithms (e.g. TikTok's For You page, Facebook's News Feed) enhance the visibility of emotional, simplified, and conflicting content by optimizing metrics such as viewing time, emotional response, and interaction frequency [2], prioritizing the amplification of populist expressions that can provoke rapid resonance. This amplification mechanism is not accidental but institutionalizes the communication structure embedded in the platform architecture.

In the United States, the Trump team established short-video-dominated "emotional highlands" through TikTok and Twitter, leveraging platform features to generate daily conflict issues and reinforcing the "elite-people" opposition structure, giving its remarks an attention advantage in the absence of fact-checking [9].

As an embedded information system, platform logic inherently favors emotionally resonant content, placing institutional discourse at a structural disadvantage. This indicates that algorithmic systems no longer simply mediate communication but actively redistribute

political visibility, transforming attention into a new form of symbolic power that shapes legitimacy.

4.2 The dominant path of populist discourse

Although the technical structure of platforms is highly homogeneous, there are clear differences in the expansion paths of populist discourse across countries. This variation reflects not only the depth of platform embedding in each political system but also the adaptability of institutional intermediaries and political cultures in responding to platform logic.

The populist expression path in the United States reflects “institutional coexistence platform mobilization.” During his term, the Trump administration regarded social media platforms as governance tools, constructing a “visibility-first, emotion-first” mechanism through Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok. This structure did not abolish institutional procedures but displaced traditional agenda-setting through platform dominance in visibility and influence. Researchers note that the Trump campaign used short videos, inflammatory texts, and visual narratives to build a tagged identity of “betrayed people” and to reinforce the narrative of “institutional dysfunction–leader salvation” [9][25].

India’s populist discourse exhibits “institutional alternative platform mobilization.” In a context of weak party structures and strong religious politics, platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook have evolved into extra-institutional mobilization systems. The closed semantic loops constructed by such networks marginalize minorities and normalize exclusion.

Brazil’s populist path is characterized by “institutional hollowing through anti-establishment emotional structures.” Bolsonaro used YouTube, Telegram, and Instagram to fuse daily life, religion, and politics into a single populist narrative, reducing policy debates to confrontations between “real people” and “fake elites.” According to Feres Júnior & Gagliardi [20], Bolsonaro built “pseudo-intimate” relations with audiences through family imagery and patriotic symbolism to bypass institutional questioning.

It can be seen that the neutral architecture of platform technology is endowed with distinct political functions under different institutional conditions. Platforms act not only as communication tools but also as identity builders, mobilization organizers, and institutional competitors in the populist discourse system. Across these cases, the United States reflects internal adaptation of populist logic within institutions, while India and Brazil show external substitution where platforms replace weakened institutional mediation. This cross-sectional comparison reveals the global spectrum through which digital populism reorganizes authority.

4.3 Political culture and institutional resilience determine the influence of populism

While global populist transmission paths are converging, each country’s narrative logic remains shaped by its political culture and institutional resilience. Under platform mechanisms, these narratives have become technologically optimized. Van Dijck & Poell [2] point out that algorithmic feedback systems encourage communicators to adjust discourse strategies, forming adaptive paths more aligned with platform logic.

This process retains populism’s anti-system core but localizes its content. For instance, the “Election Integrity” label used by the Trump team in 2020 converted a general anti-elite sentiment into a specific challenge to U.S. electoral legitimacy. With technological mediation,

populist narratives have become both emotional tools and platform-optimized resources.

At the same time, differing institutional responses reflect variations in political culture and structural resilience. Zuboff [17] argues that in highly institutionalized states, prolonged inaction allows platforms to assume functions of public opinion management once held by institutions. This power transfer weakens institutional self-defense and makes the system appear as the problem rather than the solution. Hence, institutional resilience and political culture jointly determine whether platform logic becomes an auxiliary governance tool or a competing discourse authority.

4.4 Policy recommendations for media populism

The decline of institutional expression on digital platforms stems not from a lack of content but from inadequate structural adaptation. Therefore, “digital expression responsibility” should be embedded in governance through institutional design. Governments should establish a synchronized communication plan mechanism at the policy-approval stage, requiring policy units to include platform communication drafts for professional review. This approach enhances predictability and shifts expression responsibility to the decision-making phase.

Tufekci highlight that the role of social media in amplifying the emotional and reactive nature of political discourse, enabling both protest movements and populist rhetoric to spread rapidly and widely across networks [27]. To address this, it is recommended to create permanent “Digital Communication Support Posts” within policy departments to restructure and translate institutional language for digital platforms. These positions would institutionalize communication as a governance duty rather than an outsourced task, improving visibility and coherence.

At the same time, algorithmic bias reinforces emotional narratives and weakens institutional language stability. This mechanism disrupts public governance but lacks formal response pathways. To mitigate this, a “priority display and negotiation mechanism” should be established between government and platforms for issues involving national security, health, and major policy communication. Third-party governance institutions could regularly assess platform visibility logic and ensure baseline visibility for institutional expression. However, these recommendations are based mainly on English-language sources and public data, which limit the cross-linguistic coverage of institutional communication. Future research should integrate vernacular data and non-English platforms to expand these findings.

5.0 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the weakening of institutional expression in digital environments is not a temporary communicative imbalance but a structural outcome of platform logic. Algorithms reshape visibility into a form of symbolic power, making attention rather than rational legitimacy the basis of public recognition. Comparative findings from the United States, India, and Brazil indicate that platform mediation systematically amplifies emotional narratives while constraining procedural discourse, resulting in a governance deficit embedded in the architecture of communication systems.

Theoretically, the research reframes institutional responsiveness as a problem of communicative adaptation rather than information control. It extends while challenging

classical deliberative perspectives by situating legitimacy within algorithmic environments where emotional intensity often overrides procedural rationality. Methodologically, the study provides a structural interpretive framework for examining how digital intermediaries transform the boundaries of institutional authority.

Future research should focus on two urgent gaps. The first concerns the behavioral dimension of institutional communication: more empirical work is needed to understand how audiences interpret, resist, or reconstruct institutional discourse within algorithmic spaces. The second gap concerns the geographical scope of evidence, because current research remains concentrated in Euro-American and Asian contexts, limiting theoretical generalization. Targeted comparative studies in African and Latin American regions are essential to test the applicability of the proposed framework. Collaborative networks among universities and research institutes across these regions would strengthen data diversity and generate more inclusive theories of governance and communication.

By advancing these directions, this study deepens the understanding of how platform infrastructures reshape institutional legitimacy and provides a conceptual and empirical foundation for cross-regional governance research.

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