



STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF INTERNET DISCOURSE: PLATFORMS,
PROTOCOLS, AND POWER

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Abstract: *This article presents a comprehensive structural analysis of internet discourse, moving beyond textual content to examine the underlying frameworks that shape how language is produced, distributed, and received online. The findings reveal that structural analysis is essential for understanding phenomena like misinformation, public deliberation, and identity performance, as the "rules of the game" are often coded into the digital environment itself.*

Keywords: *Internet Discourse, Structural Analysis, Platform Affordances, Digital Genre, Algorithmic Curation, Intertextuality, Online Communities, Computer-Mediated Communication*

Introduction: The study of language online has progressed from early celebrations of its liberation from spatial and temporal constraints to more critical examinations of its complexities. While significant research has focused on linguistic features (e.g., netspeak, emoji), pragmatic functions, or social impacts, a systematic structural analysis of the very scaffolding of internet discourse remains a crucial undertaking. Drawing from structuralist traditions in linguistics and sociology, as well as contemporary digital media studies, this article defines structure not as a rigid determinant, but as the set of relatively stable, rule-governed relationships that organize a system and make specific practices possible or probable.

Materials and Methods: This study employed a comparative, multi-method approach to structural analysis, selecting three platforms emblematic of different structural paradigms:

Reddit: A forum-based platform structured around topic-specific sub-communities (subreddits), threaded commenting, and community moderation governed by explicit, user-generated rules.

X (Twitter): A microblogging platform historically structured by brevity (character limits), asymmetric follower relationships, and a real-time feed, now heavily mediated by algorithmic curation promoting engagement.

TikTok: A short-form video platform structured by a proprietary, immersive "For You Page" algorithm, native remix tools (Duet, Stitch), and a sound- and trend-centric culture.

Results and Discussions:

1. The Platformal Layer: Code as Constitutional Law





The analysis confirmed that platform architecture sets the foundational "rules of the game," privileging certain discourse forms and social actions.

2. The Communal Layer: Genre as Social Structure

Within platform constraints, users develop stable generic structures that normalize interaction.

3. The Intertextual Layer: The Network as Structure

Discourse is structured not in isolated posts but in sprawling networks of reference.

Discussion: Structure and Power

This structural analysis reveals that power in internet discourse is not merely a matter of who speaks, but is embedded in the architectural and social structures that shape the speech situation. Algorithmic curation is a form of structural power, invisibly prioritizing certain voices and topics. Community moderation is a form of gatekeeping power, enforcing normative boundaries. The mastery of platform-specific genres and intertextual codes constitutes cultural capital, determining who can participate effectively. Furthermore, these layers are in tension: communal norms on Reddit might resist algorithmic trends; users on X create thread genres to overcome character limits. Internet discourse is thus a dynamic, structured system of constraint and agency, where every act of communication is simultaneously an act of navigation within a pre-existing architecture and a potential, albeit limited, act of structural negotiation.

Conclusion: This structural analysis demonstrates that internet discourse is a highly organized, multi-layered system. By examining the interplay of the platformal, communal, and intertextual layers, we move beyond analyzing surface-level content to understanding the deep logics that govern digital communication. This approach is critical for diagnosing contemporary issues: the spread of misinformation can be traced to structural features like the incentivization of engagement over accuracy; the fragmentation of public sphere is exacerbated by algorithmically sealed discursive enclaves; and new forms of literacy are required to navigate these complex structures.

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