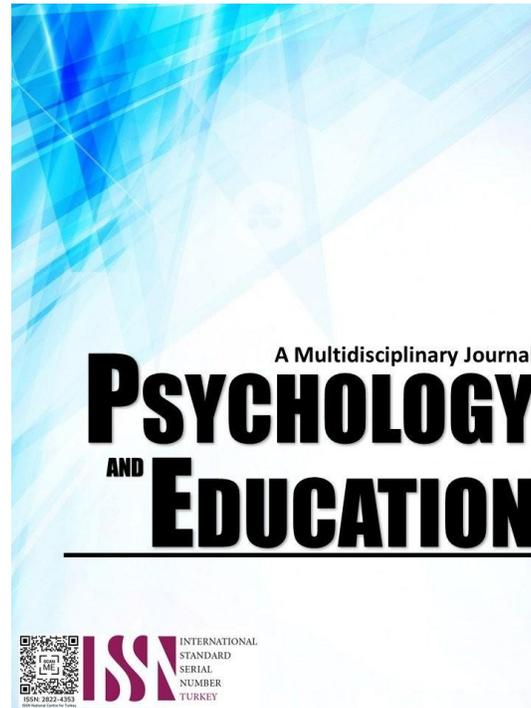


**PUBLIC SENTIMENT ANALYSIS ON THE POGO HEARINGS INVOLVING
ALICE GUO: A CORPUS-BASED SENTIMENT ANALYSIS
OF FILIPINO NETIZENS**



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Public Sentiment Analysis on the POGO Hearings Involving Alice Guo: A Corpus-Based Sentiment Analysis of Filipino Netizens

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Abstract

This study explored the sentiments of Filipino netizens toward the POGO hearings involving former Mayor Alice Guo, who faced allegations of corruption, identity fraud, and foreign influence. Using a qualitative sentiment analysis integrated with corpus linguistics, 3,000 social media comments from Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube were analyzed through computational tools to identify lexical patterns and sentiment polarity. The findings show that public discourse was predominantly negative (70%), characterized by condemnation, distrust, and frustration, while neutral (18%) and positive (12%) sentiments reflected analytical positions, empathy, and limited support. Thematic analysis revealed five dominant concerns—judicial inaction, systemic corruption, identity fraud, erosion of public confidence, and heightened public scrutiny—underscoring widespread dissatisfaction with governance and institutional accountability. Overall, the study contributes to understanding digital political discourse in the Philippine context by demonstrating how emotional and moral evaluations shape public opinion and civic engagement.

Keywords: *public sentiment, Filipino netizens, social media reactions, sentiment analysis, Philippines*

Introduction

The analysis of public sentiment expressed through social media has become an essential area of inquiry in contemporary political discourse, as digital platforms increasingly function as spaces for civic participation and opinion formation. Social networking sites such as Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube enable individuals to articulate political attitudes, emotions, and evaluations in real time, allowing scholars to examine how public opinion emerges and circulates in response to political events (Alsaedi & Zubair, 2019; Ahmad et al., 2019). Within this context, sentiment analysis has been widely applied to identify affective orientations toward political actors, policies, and institutions, offering valuable insights into public trust, polarization, and governance dynamics (Rahate et al., 2022; Bhuvanewari & Shoba, 2024).

Recent political developments in the Philippines have intensified public engagement on social media, particularly during high-profile Senate investigations involving allegations of corruption, governance failures, and foreign influence. One such case centers on the Senate hearings related to Philippine Offshore Gaming Operations (POGOs) and the involvement of former Bamban Mayor Alice Guo. These hearings prompted extensive online discourse, with netizens expressing a wide range of emotional and moral evaluations regarding identity legitimacy, institutional accountability, and national sovereignty. Rather than recounting the events narratively, this study situates the Guo controversy as a political flashpoint that generated sustained digital engagement and evaluative language, making it a relevant case for examining sentiment formation in Philippine political discourse (Obenza et al., 2024; Sumayo & Baradillo, 2023).

Existing sentiment analysis studies have extensively examined electoral campaigns, political speeches, and policy debates, often focusing on sentiment polarity classification or predictive modeling in Western or election-centered contexts (Chaudhry et al., 2021; Demartini et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2021). In the Philippine setting, prior studies have analyzed public sentiment toward political appointments and national policy issues, yet limited attention has been given to crisis-driven political hearings involving allegations of identity fraud and systemic corruption (Obenza & Baradillo, 2023; Raymunde & Baradillo, 2023). Moreover, many sentiment analysis studies emphasize computational classification while giving less consideration to the evaluative and moral dimensions of language that shape public judgment and trust.

This study addresses this gap by examining how Filipino netizens construct emotional, moral, and evaluative meanings in response to the POGO hearings involving Mayor Alice Guo. By integrating qualitative sentiment analysis with corpus linguistic techniques and appraisal-based discourse analysis, the study moves beyond polarity classification to capture how affect, judgment, and appreciation are linguistically realized in online civic discourse. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of scholarship on digital political communication by offering a context-sensitive analysis of sentiment in a non-electoral, crisis-oriented Philippine political setting. Ultimately, this study seeks to deepen understanding of how digital public discourse reflects broader concerns about governance, institutional credibility, and civic accountability. By analyzing netizens' sentiments during a politically charged investigation, the study provides insights relevant to scholars, educators, and policymakers interested in the role of emotional and moral language in shaping public opinion and democratic engagement in the Philippines.

Research Questions

The general objective of this study was to examine how Filipino netizens express and construct public sentiment toward the POGO hearings involving former Mayor Alice Guo by analyzing the dimensions of online discourse across social media platforms. To achieve this objective, the study addressed the following specific research questions:

1. What are the frequently occurring lexical items and expressions in social media discourse related to the POGO hearings involving former Mayor Alice Guo?
2. How are public sentiments toward the POGO hearings distributed in terms of positive, negative, and neutral orientations across social media platforms?
3. How do these sentiments manifest through affective, judgmental, and appreciative evaluations based on appraisal-based discourse analysis?
4. What dominant themes emerge from the clustered sentiments regarding the key issues raised during the POGO hearings involving former Mayor Alice Guo?
5. Which sentiment orientation is dominant in the overall public discourse, and how does this distribution reflect Filipino netizens' perceptions of governance, institutional accountability, and credibility?

Literature Review

The proliferation of digital communication has transformed social media into a pivotal arena for political discourse and institutional accountability. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that these platforms do not merely host information but serve as dynamic spaces where public sentiment is actively constructed and negotiated. Studies by Sumayo and Baradillo (2023) and Tsheola and Sebola (2023) highlight that sentiment analysis in this context has moved beyond simple polarity to explore how digital interactions reflect deeper issues of public trust and national security. Despite this progress, much of the existing research remains focused on electoral politics, leaving a significant gap in the understanding of how the public linguistically evaluates legislative transparency during high-profile investigations, such as the Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGO) hearings.

The relationship between systemic corruption and public perception is a recurring theme in the literature, particularly concerning the erosion of institutional credibility. Research suggests that when governance scandals emerge—such as those involving identity fraud and foreign influence—public discourse shifts toward intense moral adjudication. Vannucci (2020) argues that such environments trigger a "trust deficit," where netizens move from being passive observers to active evaluators of state legitimacy. However, traditional sentiment analysis often fails to capture the nuance of this transition. By focusing solely on positive or negative labels, scholars overlook the complex "evaluative mechanisms" that define how citizens negotiate power and accountability in a polarized digital landscape.

To address these limitations, this study integrates Arnold's Appraisal Theory as a primary analytical lens. Appraisal Theory provides a more sophisticated framework than standard sentiment modeling by categorizing evaluative language into three distinct subsystems: Affect (emotional response), Judgment (moral evaluation of behavior), and Appreciation (evaluation of things or processes) (Castro et al., 2022). While studies like those by Troiano et al. (2022) have applied appraisal dimensions to general emotion classification, their application within the specific context of Philippine legislative hearings remains largely unexplored. This theoretical integration allows for a deeper synthesis of how language reflects social ethics, enabling this research to move beyond the "what" of public opinion to the "how" and "why" of collective emotional and moral construction.

Finally, the convergence of corpus linguistics and thematic analysis offers a robust methodology for synthesizing large-scale social media data. By utilizing tools such as AntConc and Orange, researchers can identify lexical patterns that reveal the dominant concerns of the public. This study builds upon the inductive thematic framework of Colaizzi (1978), which facilitates the transition from raw data to meaningful thematic clusters (Siboni et al., 2020) such as judicial inaction and systemic corruption. By synthesizing these methodological and theoretical approaches, the present study seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the Filipino netizen's role in modern digital accountability, bridging the gap between linguistic theory and political reality.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach integrating sentiment analysis and corpus linguistics to examine public sentiments on the POGO hearings involving Mayor Alice Guo. Following the framework of opinion mining (sentiment analysis) as defined by Cambria et al. (2015), the study explored the computational aspects of opinions, attitudes, and emotions expressed by Filipino netizens (Sumayo & Baradillo, 2023). Complementarily, corpus linguistics, as explained by Zhou (2023), was utilized to systematically collect and analyze large quantities of naturally occurring language from social media platforms. This integration of computational and linguistic approaches enabled the study to reveal evaluative meanings embedded in digital discourse, aligning the analysis with both the emotional and moral dimensions of online communication.

Research Corpora

The study analyzed a curated dataset of 3,000 online sentiments extracted from the comment sections of Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube posts related to the POGO hearings. These sentiments represent a diverse array of public reactions from Filipino netizens, offering insights into their perception of Mayor Alice Guo's image and role in the controversy. Data collection focused exclusively on posts that directly address former Mayor Guo's behavior, language use, and visibility in the hearings, utilizing a purposive sampling approach.



Table 1. Public Sentiments that Define the Opinions of the Public on the POGO Hearings Involving Former Mayor Alice Guo

Appraisal Category	Definition	Percentage	Descriptive Equivalent	Sample Sentiments
Affect	Expressions of emotional responses or feelings toward Mayor Alice Guo's demeanor and statements during the hearings.	22%	Particular	"We're also happy because it's your last hearing with POGO yeyyy!! Move on then. PHILHEALTH NAMAAAAN!!" (Row 8) "My Baby Alice has changed so much, she's even better now at the hearings 🤍😍" (Row 18) "Poor her (why am I soft hearted?) 🧐" (Row 659) "I love you, Mayor Guo. I know you have a good heart. God Bless you, po. Prove them they are wrong!" (Row 895) "Keep fighting, we love you. Mayora, continue your legacy. 🙌👍❤️" (Row 1209)
Judgement	Captured moral evaluations and critiques aimed not only at Mayor Guo but also at the broader government machinery.	63%	General	"I don't believe a single word she's saying because she's a pathological liar!" (Row 2164) "Guo was sent to the Philippines by a group of people. Supported her until she learns Tagalog. The first thing she said is that her father is half Filipino, which is not true." (Row 34) "Remove Guo from the country and include all the Chinese investors!" (Row 48) "Crime does not pay. We have really been sold to China" (Row 478) "If she was born here, why is her Chinese accent so prominent?" (Row 184) "I really admire Sen. Risa's calm and wise approach in questioning, all backed by data and evidence. Salute 🙌" (Row 12) "GREAT JOB, SENATORS! SALUTE!" (Row 1097) "At least Alice and her lawyers have an idea of what to ask her in court. Thanks, Congress!" (Row 564) "The mayor is GREAT, relax, composed... no reaction" (Row 120) "Great final hearing on POGO! It's just the beginning. Exciting to see the work done by the committee. Thank you, Sen. Risa Hontiveros, for leading!" (Row 2)
Appreciation	Evaluative comments about the situations, institutions, or technologies involved, focusing on how the event is perceived in terms of quality, efficiency, or significance.	15%	Particular	

Clustered Sentiments Regarding the Various Issues Raised During the POGO Hearings Involving Mayor Alice Guo

The thematic analysis of the corpus, as presented in Table 2, identified five dominant clusters that characterize the digital discourse surrounding the POGO hearings involving Mayor Alice Guo. These themes consist of Judicial Inaction, which encompasses comments regarding the duration of legal proceedings and the level of accountability from oversight institutions; Systemic Corruption, which includes sentiments addressing foreign influence and the role of political favoritism; and Identity Fraud, which focuses on the authenticity of the subject’s nationality and background. Furthermore, the analysis identified the Erosion of Public Confidence, reflecting remarks on the state of institutional trust, and Public Scrutiny, which captures demands for transparency and the sustained monitoring of the investigative process. Collectively, these descriptive categories represent the primary subjects of concern identified within the dataset without further interpretive evaluation.

Table 2. Clustered Sentiments Regarding the Various Issues Raised During the POGO Hearings Involving Mayor Alice Guo

Theme	Keywords	Core Ideas	Sample Sentiments
Judicial Inaction	Inaction, Accountability, Urgency	Failure to act on criminal behavior Lack of investigation and transparency Delay in decision-making and action	"Why is Congress so lenient to these alleged criminals?" (Row 60) "Please investigate every local government in every part of the Philippines..." (Row 30) "People who let her slip into a government job without proper documents should also be investigated." (Row 20) "The DILG should speed up the filing of the petition..." (Row 81) "One big happy Pharmally and POGO these are!! I blame the previous administration!!!" (Row 77)
Systemic Corruption	Deceit, Favoritism, Exploitation	Corruption within businesses and instructions Foreign control through corrupt practices Political favoritism and exploitation	"Pogo is an illegal business; they are good at cheating and tricking people." (Row 39) "The sad thing is, because many people in positions look like money, foreigners have already bought the Philippines without the awareness of ordinary citizens." (Row 49) "The Philippines is a dump for syndicates 🤢 poor Philippines 🙄" (Row 75)

Identity Fraud	Discrepancy, Manipulation, Authenticity	False claims of nationality or identity	Alice Guo is very relaxed; it is obvious that some politicians care about her. (Row 23)
		Inconsistencies in background and behavior	Crime does not pay. We have really been sold to China. (Row 57) "You can just declare that you are Filipino..." (Row 32) "If she was born here, why is her Chinese accent so prominent?" (Row 48)
Erosion of Public Confidence	Deceit, Distrust, Accusation	Deliberate fabrication of identity	"Maybe they just used Alice Guo to distract our country." (Row 26) "Guo was sent to the Philippines by a group of people. Supported her until she learns Tagalog." (Row 31) "She grew up on a farm here in the Philippines, but is fluent in Chinese, why not Kapampangan?" (Row 43)
		Loss of trust in individual credibility	"I don't believe a single word she's saying because she's a pathological liar!" (Row 24)
		Perceived dishonesty and manipulation	"She constantly nods her head and blinks her eyes, a great indicator that she's anxious and lying." (Row 28) "Seriously, the mayor is even allowed to lie...besides that, she has serious connections with syndicates." (Row 47)
Public Scrutiny	Investigation, Accountability, Transparency	Corruption and negative associations	"Alice is a professional liar." (Row 55) Liar, Alice Guo! You're a real Solid Chinese spy from your country. (Row 70) "Please investigate every local government in every part of the Philippines..." (Row 30) "Why haven't they filed a case against her yet? So frustrating!" (Row 67)
		Desire for thorough investigation	"There should be no Pinoy attorneys to defend her. The Chinese are doing too much in the country." (Row 42)
		Frustration with lack of action or accountability	"What a great final hearing on POGO! Final hearing, but it really is only the beginning." (Row 82)
		Ongoing public oversight and examination	"Great Job, Senators! Salute!" (Row 94)

Sentiment Analysis that Best Describes the Opinion of the Public

The overall sentiment distribution concerning the POGO hearings and former Mayor Alice Guo is presented in Table 3. Automated classification using Orange software categorized the 3,000 sentiments into three distinct orientations: negative, neutral, and positive. The data show that negative sentiments (70%) constituted the majority of the public discourse. Neutral sentiments (18%) represented the second-largest portion, followed by positive sentiments (12%), which formed the smallest category within the analyzed corpus.

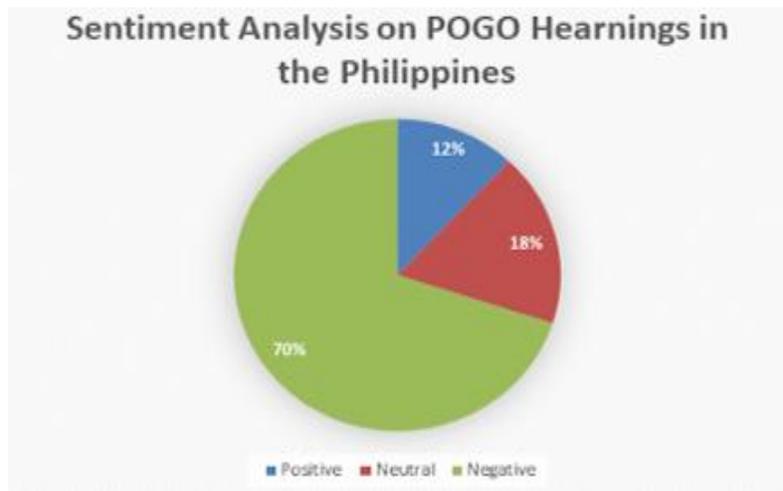


Figure 2. Sentiment Analysis on POGO Hearings in the Philippines

Table 3. Sentiment Analysis that Best Describes the Opinion of the Public

Sentiment	Percentage	Descriptive Equivalent	Sample Sentiment
Negative	70%	General	"I grew up on a farm, I didn't know anything, I don't remember anything, I didn't prepare my birth certificate. I'm so tired of hearing her say it over and over again! Legit liar." (Row 25) "Remove Alice Guo from the country and include all the Chinese investors!" (Row 33) "Your Honor, she's a big liar! She's wasting the taxpayer's money and your time. She and her partners should be punished!" (Row 34) "When those people get through!! Corrupt officials are at it again" (Row 85)

Neutral	18%	Particular	“Expert Liar! 100%!”(Row 53)
			“We're also happy because it's your last hearing with POGO yeyyy!! Move on then. PHILHEALTH NEEEEEXT!!” (Row 1)
			“In the many senate hearings now, I'm interested in listening and wondering where Mayor Guo is from.” (Row 12)
			“If I were in Mayor Alice's situation, I would just resign as mayor for everyone's peace.” (Row 36)
			“I was born in 1984, my father is a farmer. But I have a baby picture. 😊” (Row 18)
Positive	12%	Particular	“They're so frustrating, but she's cute.” (Row 15)
			“I love you, Mayor Guo. I know you have a good heart. God bless you, po. Prove them that they are wrong!” (Row 92)
			“Just fight, Mayor Alice 🙏” (Row 3)
			“Keep fighting, we love you. Mayora, continue your legacy. 🙌👍❤️”
			“Come sit beside me—you'll be safe here.” (Row 93)
			“At least Alice and her lawyers have an idea of what to ask her in court. Thanks, Congress!” (Row 99)
			“The mayor is GREAT, relax, composed... no reaction” (Row 90)

Discussion

This study revealed several key aspects of public sentiment toward the Senate hearings on illegal POGO operations and the controversies surrounding former Mayor Alice Guo, emphasizing its emotional, moral, and evaluative dimensions. Through the lens of Arnold’s Appraisal Theory (1960), the analysis categorized digital discourse into Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation, demonstrating that appraisal frameworks remain highly effective for illuminating the communication of emotions and values in public discourse (Dalimunte & Wen, 2022). Notably, Affect (22%) in this study manifested as frustration, sarcasm, disbelief, and anger; these results highlight how affective reactions anchor public engagement in contentious issues (Gervais, 2024) and reveal a deep emotional investment in the hearings' outcome that mirrors decision-making patterns observed in other social contexts (Ababio-Donkor et al., 2020).

A primary contribution of this research is the identification of Judgment (63%) as the most dominant category, signaling that moral evaluations regarding honesty and credibility were the central drivers of public reaction. This finding reinforces the premise that moral judgment is frequently the most prominent appraisal type in politically charged environments (Mirzaaghabeek, 2022), particularly when linguistic framing focuses on identity and foreign affiliations (Kellert et al., 2024). Finally, Appreciation (15%) captured the public's scrutiny of performance and procedural quality. By documenting both the praise for legislative professionalism and critiques of the hearings' effectiveness, this study illustrates the dual role of appreciation in evaluating the conduct and perceived quality of democratic proceedings (Rohimajaya & Hamer, 2022).

The thematic analysis further revealed five major concerns shaping public discourse: Judicial Inaction, Systemic Corruption, Identity Fraud, Erosion of Public Confidence, and Public Scrutiny. A significant finding of this study is that netizens perceive judicial inaction as a fundamental failure to deliver timely justice, a sentiment that fosters deep cynicism toward the legal process (Brychko et al., 2021; Borja et al., 2024). Furthermore, the data highlights how perceptions of systemic corruption in the POGO case undermine institutional credibility, echoing broader scholarly observations on the damage caused by entrenched corrupt practices (Vannucci, 2020; Davis, 2021). The public's focus on allegations of identity fraud also reveals a unique concern regarding the authenticity of representation; this aligns with warnings that misrepresentation by officials not only erodes trust but can also threaten national security (Charaya & Pathak, 2022; Mungai, 2024). Ultimately, the erosion of public confidence documented here illustrates how persistent governance failures diminish citizen trust (Hendrickse, 2024), reinforcing the study's conclusion that transparency and rigorous public scrutiny are essential for democratic legitimacy (Carr & Jordan, 2024).

Sentiment classification in this study showed a clear imbalance, with negative sentiments dominating at 70%, followed by neutral at 18% and positive at 12%. A key insight from these results is that the negative responses conveyed a profound frustration over perceived dishonesty, foreign influence, and the waste of public resources; this mirrors broader observations that public dissatisfaction tends to intensify when political figures are perceived to fail societal expectations (Wildan, 2023). Simultaneously, the presence of neutral comments reflects a specific segment of the audience characterized by curiosity or ambivalence, which is consistent with the tendency of the public to withhold definitive judgment while political situations are still evolving (Pathak & Rai, 2023). Furthermore, although positive sentiments were limited, they uniquely underscore themes of loyalty, admiration, and a hope for vindication among certain netizens, illustrating how positive politeness strategies can be utilized to reinforce solidarity even within the context of highly contentious national debates (Dalimunte & Wen, 2022).

In sum, the findings indicate that an interplay of emotional intensity, moral evaluation, and assessments of institutional performance shaped public opinion on the POGO hearings. The predominance of negative sentiment underscores heightened demands for transparency, justice, and decisive leadership. At the same time, the presence of neutral and positive voices suggests that public discourse remains dynamic, leaving room for shifts in perception as events unfold.

Conclusions

The study revealed how emotionally charged language in crisis-related social media discourse can strongly influence public perception, civic behavior, and institutional trust. Drawing from public comments on Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube during the POGO hearings involving former Mayor Alice Guo, the findings underscore how affective, judgmental, and appreciative expressions, categorized using Arnold's Appraisal Theory, shape collective sentiment and guide online civic engagement. A primary implication of this research is that the empirical dominance of Judgment (63%) indicates a shift in digital civic engagement where netizens act as moral adjudicators of state legitimacy. These findings underscore how recurring narratives about integrity, identity, and governance directly influence the trust placed in public officials, suggesting that moral evaluations are now the central drivers of public reaction in the Philippine political landscape. Furthermore, the overwhelming 70% negative sentiment, driven by specific thematic concerns such as Systemic Corruption, Identity Fraud, and Judicial Inaction, reflects a profound "trust deficit". This clear linkage between negative polarity and perceived governance failures implies an urgent need for institutional transparency and faster investigative processes to prevent the permanent erosion of public confidence.

Regarding the emotional dimension of the discourse, the presence of Affect (22%) in the form of anger and sarcasm illustrates the role of emotional language in intensifying public reactions and shaping collective attitudes. Because unchecked emotionality online risks fostering misinformation or hostility, these findings suggest that educational interventions, such as media literacy programs, should be implemented to develop students' emotional intelligence and awareness of lexical priming. While positive sentiments remained limited at 12%, their presence reveals the function of politeness strategies in framing public dialogue and reinforcing solidarity even within highly contentious debates. This dynamic distribution of sentiment suggests that a complex interplay of emotional intensity and assessments of institutional performance shapes public opinion.

Building on these insights, future research may examine larger datasets across multiple crisis events and explore cross-cultural differences in emotional expression. There is also a significant opportunity to combine computational sentiment analysis with qualitative interviews to deepen the understanding of context-specific discourse patterns and the "how" and "why" of collective moral construction. By pursuing these directions, scholars can better inform educators and policymakers on how to cultivate ethical and socially responsible engagement in an increasingly media-saturated environment. Ultimately, this study reinforces that the words we choose online not only express our emotions but actively shape the civic narratives and democratic realities we collectively inhabit.

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