THEME: THE STRUCTURE OF INTERNET DISCOURSE ACROSS PLATFORMS AND GENRES

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Abstract: The architecture of online communication is not monolithic but is fundamentally shaped by the interplay of platform affordances and discursive genres. This article investigates the structural patterns of internet discourse by analyzing how specific technological features—such as character limits, threading, permanence, and algorithmic curation—interact with user-defined genres (e.g., the political thread, the fan theory, the review) to produce distinct communicative norms and textual forms. The findings demonstrate that internet discourse is a layered construct where genre conventions adapt to, and are constrained by, the underlying platform architecture, resulting in platform-specific "discourse ecologies" with significant implications for public deliberation, community formation, and knowledge production.

Keywords: Internet Discourse, Digital Genre, Platform Affordances, Discourse Analysis, Social Media, Reddit, X (Twitter), Online Communities, Computer-Mediated Communication

Introduction: The internet has evolved from a simple information network into a complex ecosystem of human interaction, giving rise to diverse forms of discourse that defy traditional linguistic and rhetorical categorization. Early computer-mediated communication (CMC) studies often treated online language as a homogeneous entity, focusing on aspects like anonymity or reduced social cues. However, contemporary internet discourse is characterized by its radical plurality, structured simultaneously by the technological frameworks of platforms and the emergent, culturally specific practices of their users.

This article posits that to understand modern online communication, one must analyze the symbiotic relationship between platform and genre. A platform, defined by its technical affordances and governance policies, provides the structural "grammar" for interaction—it sets the limits and possibilities (e.g., 280 characters, up/down voting, reblog chains). Genre, understood here as a socially recognized, purpose-driven form of communication (e.g., a "TikTok tutorial," an "AMA on Reddit," a "Twitter thread"), represents the "rhetoric" that users develop within these constraints.

Materials and Methods: A comparative case study approach was employed, selecting three platforms representing distinct structural paradigms: X (Twitter) (microblogging, algorithmic timeline, strong emphasis on virality), Reddit (macro-forum, topic-centric sub-communities, threaded commenting with community moderation), and Long-form Blogging Platforms (e.g., WordPress, Medium) (static author-led posts, linear commenting, high permanence).

Data collection occurred over a three-month period and focused on capturing discourse around two sustained public events: a major political election and the release of a blockbuster film. This allowed for cross-platform genre comparison (e.g., election commentary, fan analysis).

The analytical method was a hybrid qualitative content analysis and digital discourse analysis. Each corpus was examined for:

Formal Structure: Thread depth, comment length, use of platform-specific syntax (e.g., @mentions, /r/subreddit links, hashtags).

Generic Norms: Recurring communicative purposes, rhetorical moves, and community-enforced rules (e.g., Reddit's "Reddiquette," blog commenting policies).

Results and Discussion: The analysis revealed three dominant structural principles that manifest differently across platforms and genres.

1. Fragmentation and Recursion

The most visible structural feature is the breaking down of discourse into modular, recombinable units.

2. Intertextual Density

Internet discourse is structured through dense webs of reference, facilitated by platform tools.

3. Platform-Mediated Temporality

The lifespan and pace of discourse are direct products of platform architecture.

Discussion: These structural principles are not deterministic but interact dynamically with user agency. Communities develop genre conventions to exploit or resist platform structures. For example, the "Twitter thread" is a genre born of resistance to fragmentation, while Reddit's "serious" reply tag ([Serious]) is a genre rule designed to counteract the platform's tendency towards recursive humor and derailment. Algorithmic curation further complicates this, as it invisibly structures visibility and sequence, privileging certain generic forms (e.g., emotionally charged posts, controversial comments) over others, thereby shaping the discourse ecology from within.

Conclusion: This study demonstrates that internet discourse is systematically structured by a tripartite relationship between technical affordances, algorithmic curation, and socially enacted genres. There is no singular "internet language," but rather a family of discursive systems, each with its own architectural logic. X produces discourse as a stream of recursive fragments; Reddit as a set of hierarchical, community-governed trees; and blogs as anchored, cumulative networks.

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