

Language of Power: Cultural Narratives and Technological Mediums in Modern Politics

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ABSTRACT:

In the modern world, political power is not limited to institutions, laws, and authority. It is now a combination of cultural stories and technology. Politics is not just about governance but about storytelling that creates identities, evokes traditions, and moves people together. Public narratives like nationalism, religion, and historical memory contribute to constructing public consciousness and validating authority. When these stories are amplified with digital tech, they reach unprecedented scale and influence. Political communication is undergoing a transformation through the explosion of social media, data-driven campaigns, and algorithmic personalization. They allow leaders to get around traditional gatekeepers and communicate directly with citizens.

At the same time, visual and symbolic politics – memes, videos, hashtags – have reduced political discourse to a simple, emotive message. While this mixture of culture and technology creates the possibility for greater political participation by more people, it also introduces issues: misinformation, polarization, and digital manipulation. This article explores the way in which contemporary politics employs cultural symbols and technology in the construction of power, demonstrating its transformative opportunities and the threat these pose to democratic discourse.

KEYWORDS:

Language of Power, Cultural Narratives, Political Communication, Social Media, Digital Democracy, Modern Politics.

Introduction

Political power has always been dependent on language. It helps leaders to persuade, gain legitimacy, and mobilize people. From Aristotle's rhetoric to revolutionary manifestos of today, political speech has informed the course of government and society. Today, the language of power is less through parliamentary debates and traditional media, and more through the kinds of cultural stories that evoke feelings of identity, memory, and belonging. Stories about nationalism, religion, and historical consciousness are both symbolic and tactical mechanisms that legitimate power and make groups homogeneous (Gramsci, 1971; Anderson, 2006).

Cultural narratives are important as they provide people with shared meaning and direction. In his concept of "imagined communities," Anderson (2006) maps the extension of the nation-state as an entity constructed out of myths and symbols. In the vision of Antonio Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony, ruling groups maintain power not merely through military strength, but by creating a way of thinking and conduct. These insights highlight the fact that culture is not simply a reflection of the political; it contributes to the making of politics. In reaffirming the close relationship between culture and politics, we see that history and the memory of it, the myths of origin, and the moral values associated with those myths are essential resources for leaders and movements to legitimize themselves.

At the same time, technology has fundamentally changed the way we share and contest stories. The internet, social media, and other digital tools have granted politicians new means of reaching people directly, mustering support, and influencing narratives without relying on traditional media. Manuel Castells (2009) calls this the rise of a "network society," in which power flows through digital networks. McNair (2018) adds that the mediatization of politics makes public debate into an interactive dance of political leaders, media outlets, and digitally engaged citizens.

This cultural and technological blending brings both advantages and disadvantages to modern-day politics. On one hand, online platforms via their ability to help expand democratic participation by allowing marginalized voices to speak out and the ability to help grassroots movements grow (Shirky, 2011). On the other hand, the same tools can spread misinformation, deepen polarization, and increase surveillance, which brings into the picture difficult questions about the ethics of political communication today (Habermas, 1989; Foucault, 1980). In this context, the understanding of how power works entails looking at the ways in which cultural narratives are constructed, and how it is shaped, mediated, and transformed by technology.

Review of Literature

Scholars have long pointed out the role of language in politics. It is a tool for persuasion, control, and finding identity. Foucault (1980) claimed that discourse is a mechanism of power which determines what can be said and thought in a society. Gramsci (1971) added that cultural hegemony is held in place through narratives which make the dominance of ruling groups appear normal. Together, these thinkers make the case that political authority is not only carried out through institutions, but through cultural and linguistic practices.

The notion of national identity, particularly in the form of Anderson's (2006) 'imagined communities', is useful in understanding how a common narrative and associated cultural symbols give rise to a political sense of belonging. These narratives provide citizens with a framework in which to interpret political events and position themselves in a greater historical and cultural context. Research also suggests that cultural narratives are effective weapons to legitimize authority and mass support (Smith, 2009).

Technological media have played an important role in the changing face of political communication. Manuel Castells (2009) identifies a "network society" which accelerates and extends political

debate through digital platforms. Social media in particular is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it democratizes communication and mobilization (Shirky, 2011); on the other hand, it spreads disinformation, creates echo chambers, and feeds populist rhetoric (McNair, 2018). Habermas (1989) forewarned about the fragmentation of the public sphere—a concern that seems to be more pressing in the age of algorithm-driven communication.

Overall, the literature shows that the point where cultural stories and technology intersect is the key to understanding today's power dynamics. Cultural studies tell us how stories build and sustain legitimacy while communication research explains how technology spreads and reinforces these stories. Together, these two areas can be used to form a useful framework for the study of political power in the twenty-first century.

Theoretical Framework

The dynamics of power in modern politics cannot be understood without involving some important cultural, discursive, and technological theoretical traditions that connect culture, discourse, and technology to political authority. A number of key thinkers are helpful to shed light on this study.

Discourse and Power of Michel Foucault: Foucault (1980) thought of power as diffuse, relational, and embedded in discourse rather than concentrated in formal institutions. For him, discourse defines what it is possible to know, say, and do and using that forms political realities. This is to say that political language is not simply used to communicate policy – it is used to construct legitimacy, authority, and subjectivity. For example, the “War on Terror” narrative following 9/11 made security discourses operate worldwide and justified surveillance and military intervention as a necessity to ensure public security. Similarly, during the pandemic, the language of “national duty” was used by many governments to normalize lockdowns and health surveillance during the pandemic.

Antonio Gramsci's Theory of Cultural Hegemony: Antonio Gramsci through the concept of cultural hegemony argued that ruling classes continue to hold power not just on the basis of coercion but also through the process of winning the consent of the governed. They do this by ensuring that elite values and ideas are embedded in popular cultural narratives, religious practices, and national myths. For example, the stories of civilization and religious symbols have been appropriated by Indian political leaders to promote majoritarian identity politics. In the United States, the slogan "Make America Great Again" made nationalism into a shared cultural project which justified new policies. The following examples demonstrate how hegemonic narratives make certain ways of thinking seem like common sense.

Jurgen Habermas and the Public Sphere: Habermas (1989) defined the public sphere as a space of rational and critical deliberation between citizens free from state and market influences. His theory emphasizes the democratic strength of open communication. In fact, digital technology has divided that world. During the U.K. vote on Brexit, for instance, emotional appeals (which were reinforced by ads on Facebook) played a larger role than well-defined arguments. The 2016 U.S. presidential election showed how misinformation and echo chambers destroyed the caliber of public discourse. These cases reveal the distance between Habermas and the political world.

Manuel Castells and the Network Society: Castells in his book (2009) states that power flows through communication webs in the network society. The political actors in the control of the networks enjoy structural benefits. The Arab Spring (2010–2011) demonstrated the power of social media and, in particular, Twitter and Facebook to mobilize grassroots movements to overthrow authoritarian regimes. Likewise, U.S. leaders like Donald Trump have used Twitter as a direct way to circumvent traditional media, create narratives, and rally supporters. These cases seem to verify Castells's assertion that digital networks are at the center of the

modern struggles for power.

Synthesis: These theories, together, make up an integrated framework of looking at power in modern politics. Foucault exposes the way in which discourse constructs political reality, Gramsci puts legitimacy in the context of cultural narratives, Habermas puts democratic ideals of communication in the foreground, Castells locates these dynamics in digital networks. From the War on Terror and Brexit to India's cultural nationalism and Trump's digital populism, examples of how cultural narratives and technology interact and complement each other as tools of political power in the 21st century are provided.

Discussion and Analysis

The intersection of cultural stories and physical technology have redefined the face of political power and what it looks like today. While the role of culture in giving legitimacy had been emphasized by earlier thinkers such as Foucault and Gramsci, new dynamics made manifest are that digital networks (Castells) and the fragmented public sphere (Habermas) can amplify, distort, or even weaponize those narratives.

Populism and Narrative Politics: Populist leaders in democracies across the board have leveraged stories from culture to shore up their authority. By setting up an opposition between "the people" and "the elite" they create an imagined unity that delegitimizes dissent. Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" and Narendra Modi's appeals to India's cultural and civilizational pride are just two of the most obvious examples of how cultural identity played a central role in mobilizing support these days, at the cost of pluralism.

Digital Media as Amplifier of Power: Digital platforms are now the primary places where political narratives are fought and gained traction. Social media also enables leaders to bypass institutional gatekeepers to speak to the public. Trump's use of

Twitter, the viral spread of pro-Brexit slogans, and the digital campaigns in the 2014 and 2019 Indian elections indicate the preferential bias that algorithms have upon emotionally charged, polarizing content, over reasoned debate. This trend supports Castells's argument that the control of networks is part of power in the modern age.

Democracy is weakened by disinformation: Although expanding the digital public domain gives us access to information, it also spreads false information and echo chambers. Misinformation undermines rational debate, as evidenced by Russia's disinformation campaign ahead of the 2016 U.S. election, and the "WhatsApp rumors" currently circulating in India. The ideal of fair, reasoned debate – based on the work of Habermas – runs counter to a reality in which stories are designed to influence emotions and behavior.

Technology now allows political stories to be carried across the world: The Arab Spring taught us how digital networks can spread across borders and ignite movements across the world. Meanwhile, nationalist histories in the U.S., U.K., and India illustrate the ways in which leaders manipulate cultural myths in order to consolidate power at home and assert power abroad. These trends are evidence that cultural stories no longer remain within the context of one country and spread worldwide via digital platforms.

Technology and culture are two-edged swords: On the one hand, they democratize politics, giving a voice to those who have been silenced by movements such as Me Too and Black Lives Matter. On the other hand, they can be used to reinforce authoritarianism, as in China's use of surveillance and state-controlled media. The mechanisms that give citizens power can also enshrine authoritarian power.

Conclusion

The research indicates that in contemporary times political power is no longer confined to official institutions. Instead, it works

through the combination of cultural stories and technology. Using Foucault's concept of discourse, Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony, Habermas's public sphere, and Castells's network society, we can see that authority now is constructed as much through symbols, language, and myths as it is through digital platforms and communication networks. Examples – Trump's Twitter populism, the Brexit campaign, India's cultural nationalism, and the Arab Spring – are just a few examples of where narratives and technologies are shaping legitimacy, mobilization, and contestation.

The coming together of culture and technology has deep implications. On the positive side, cultural stories amplified by digital platforms allow for people to have a more accessible participation in politics. They amplify the voices of those who are marginalized and make transnational solidarity movements possible. On the negative side, the same tools can increase polarization, spread misinformation, and enable digital authoritarianism. Thus, politics is and will increasingly become fought in hybrid spaces where culture and technology reinforce each other.

Going forward, scholars and policymakers must critically explore how digital infrastructures are changing political communication and in what ways cultural myths get mobilized in new ways. Democratic resilience will require preserving the freedom of expression as well as addressing inequalities of information access. It also involves controlling algorithmic bias, and promoting civic literacy. Ultimately the language of power in contemporary politics will remain closely intertwined with both cultural imagination and technological mediation and therefore understanding them is critical for understanding the future of global democracy in the digital age.

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