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Facebook as a space for political discussion in Algeria: A study on the pages of 2019 presidential candidates.

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Abstract:
Following the emergence of Web 2.0, virtual spaces have become important arenas for political discussion, offering users greater freedom of expression than many offline settings. Their interactive nature has encouraged political participation and public debate. Meanwhile, the large volume of user-generated content has made continuous moderation by Facebook page administrators increasingly difficult, allowing these platforms to function as relatively autonomous communication spaces. This environment provides a valuable context for examining Habermas' theory of public communication. Accordingly, this study explores political discussions among Facebook users during the campaign for the Algerian presidential election of 12 December 2019, considering the contextual factors shaping the research question.
Keywords: *Communication; Discussion ethics; Presidential elections; Facebook; Users.*

ملخص:

مع ظهور الجيل الثاني من الويب(Web 2.0) ، أصبحت الفضاءات الافتراضية ساحات مهمة للنقاش السياسي، إذ وفّرت للمستخدمين قدراً أكبر من حرية التعبير مقارنة بالعديد من البيئات الواقعية. كما أسهمت طبيعتها التفاعلية في تعزيز المشاركة السياسية وإثراء النقاش العام. وفي المقابل، أدى الحجم الكبير للمحتوى الذي ينتجه المستخدمون إلى زيادة صعوبة الرقابة المستمرة من قبل مديري صفحات فيسبوك، مما أتاح لهذه المنصات أن تؤدي دور فضاءات تواصلية تتمتع بقدر من الاستقلالية. ويوفر هذا الواقع سياقاً مناسباً لاختبار نظرية هابرماس حول التواصل العمومي. وانطلاقاً من ذلك، تستكشف هذه الدراسة طبيعة النقاشات السياسية بين مستخدمي فيسبوك خلال الحملة الانتخابية للانتخابات الرئاسية الجزائرية في 12 ديسمبر/كانون الأول 2019، مع مراعاة العوامل السياقية التي تشكل سؤال البحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التواصل، اخلاقيات النقاش، الانتخابات الرئاسية، فيسبوك، المستخدمون.

I. INTRODUCTION

The topic of language and discussion within public spheres, as explored by the German scholar Jürgen Habermas, represents a significant research project aimed at creating a shared lived world. This world is based on a universal language capable of articulating the self with a high degree of clarity while acknowledging the rights of others to express themselves and present their impressions, desires, and ideas. Habermas articulates this concept under the term "ethics of discussion," which he considers a fundamental requirement of his theory—Communicative Action Theory—alongside other essential assumptions, such as the ability to express oneself freely within public spheres, the absence of any authority intervening to curtail this freedom, and the reliance of speakers on argumentation, prioritizing the strongest argument.

Habermas presents these assumptions for a real public sphere, envisioned as a space free from all forms of power. This space could effectively contribute—detached from all forms of ideological bias—to the practice of political discussion among interlocutors, generating ideas and revealing needs and desires. Simultaneously, it serves as a free ground for transmitting political messages from the governed to the ruling class, representing a unique form of political communication that relies on essential elements often overlooked in the functional structural model of political message exchange between governors and the governed: the significance of the public sphere as a unifying ground, the importance of discussion in generating ideas and revealing desires, and the significance of language and the ethics of discussion.

Habermas's theories are rooted in sociological foundations (such as Max Weber's thesis of disenchantment, George Herbert Mead's psychosocial thesis, and Talcott Parsons's general theory of society), philosophical foundations (including the ideas of Karl Marx, Hegel's notion of self and other, Edmund Husserl's thought, Immanuel Kant's ideas, and John Langshaw Austin's philosophy of language), and scientific foundations (such as the work of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg). This multifaceted approach makes his theories deeply embedded and complex, and effectively translates the philosophical legacy of the Enlightenment into reality.

Practical engagement with Habermas's theory of communicative action - whether testing it in its entirety or examining parts of it - is not straightforward, especially given the various obstacles that might prevent the fulfilment of the conditions he sets. A serious discourse that allows everyone freedom of speech, is based on argumentation, is partially liberated from certain forms of domination and, above all, respects the ethics of discussion, currently seems to be possible only in parliamentary chambers, cultural cafés, scientific workshops and other closed spaces that allow for a certain degree of public engagement. However, with the emergence of the second wave of the Web, it has become clear that effective virtual spaces are emerging, which make them worthy of study because they possess essential elements that cannot be realised in the real public sphere.

Habermas's theories remain linked to the real public sphere, as noted above. However, with the emergence of the virtual community - through its various communication networks - as a new space, political discussion has become predominantly virtual. This shift is due to the fundamental freedom of discussion and expression that this alternative space offers, as we have concluded from our multiple observations, especially in contrast to the field harassment currently seen in real public spaces .

Moreover, the sheer volume of content and user contributions in these spaces has made it increasingly difficult for administrators of large Facebook pages to intervene continuously and effectively. This relative liberation from certain forms of authority makes these alternative spaces fertile ground for scholarly research that tests Habermas' theories.

This situation leads us to question the nature of the discussions among users in these alternative spaces produced by virtual communities, especially during the presidential election campaign period on 12 December 2019. This period has contextual factors that give objective meaning to our research problem, which can be summarised as follows: To what extent do Facebook users consider the ethics of discussion in their comments on candidates' posts during the legal campaign period for the presidential election of 12 December 2019?

We will analyse this by answering the following questions:

-What degree of freedom do the presidential candidates' pages offer their users on 12 December 2019?

-To what extent does the content of the posts on the presidential candidates' pages stimulate discussion among users?

-What is the degree of discussion present in the users' comments on the presidential candidates' pages on 12 December 2019?

-What is the nature of the discourse in users' comments on the presidential candidates' pages during the campaign period?

-What is the significance of the content of the comments made by users on the pages of the presidential candidates during the campaign period?

1. An Introduction to Jürgen Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action

1.1. Communicative Rationality - The Idea and Roots of the Discourse on the Issue

It is important to note that the importance of dialogue and discussion in public spaces has been recognised by political philosophers since the early days of democratic thought in the eighteenth century, due to the openness and liberation of these spaces from any form of authority. This recognition stimulated demands for freedom of the press, especially after the idea of a free marketplace of ideas, free from state intervention and censorship, had gained traction, allowing individuals to express their interests and needs.

As the world today has become a pluralistic sophistry, a singular truth presented from an ideologically justified perspective does not serve the broader contexts that shape the public sphere . As a result, conflict has become the subject of dialogue, and disagreement has become the basis for consensus. This situation prompted Jürgen Habermas to reflect on the issues that hinder human liberation in a space that should facilitate the formation of political opinion and its transmission to the ruling elite.

Habermas sought to enable philosophy to liberate the public sphere from all forms of authority, residue and tension through the idea of abandoning the claim to perceive the truth and considering truth as a collective matter (Al achaab, 2012). Historically, this claim was supported by sophistry - the recognition of the perception of truth through the multiple perspectives of individuals - which Plato countered by unsettling his opponents with their own arguments. The question of truth and the distinction between right and wrong is a matter of dialogue and debate, with the stronger argument being favoured, which is the position Habermas takes.

Moreover, a political system cannot achieve legitimacy in the long run, especially in a world that resembles a small village, unless it fortifies itself with the truths believed by the governed, thereby securing its legitimacy. Truths derived from narrow points of view can only be seen as a balance between social and political systems under a closed totalitarian regime. In this regard, Habermas believes that communicative rationality can produce knowledge that is more realistic and in harmony with societies, as individuals contribute proposals and engage in participatory dialogue. In this way, the world becomes more rational and human life is freed from oppression, guardianship and subjugation.

When we explore the roots of the discussion on communicative action, we primarily return to the critical theory produced by the Frankfurt School, which was established in 1923. Its members fled to Switzerland, then France, and eventually the United States due to the rise of Nazism. This school focused on social philosophy and the critique of instrumental reason, which alienates and dehumanizes individuals by separating them from values and ethics .

Key thinkers and philosophers associated with this movement include Max Horkheimer, who introduced the idea of relative reason in his work "Critique of Instrumental Reason"; Theodor Adorno, who proposed the concept of aesthetic rationality as a means of liberating individuals from the domination they suffer due to instrumental orientation; and Herbert Marcuse, known for his idea of the one-dimensional man and the rationality of irrationality. These three thinkers represent the first generation of the Frankfurt School, which engaged critically with the notion of reason and recorded sharp observations regarding the modernity project based on reason, science, and the self.

Jürgen Habermas, the proponent of communicative action theory and a member of the second generation of the school, acknowledged the shortcomings produced by modernity, with

the most significant being the dominance of control through the use of instrumental reason. This type of reason is inhumane, relying on strategic action aimed solely at profit. In contrast, Habermas proposed a communicative rationality based on understanding, mutual comprehension, and humanity, drawing upon the contributions and comprehensive works of the critical school.

Two types of rationality can be distinguished: first, practical rationality, which is understood as reasonable within limited contexts, tied, for example, to specific regions, cultures or ethnicities; and second, instrumental rationality, which is detached from the human aspect, where reason becomes a tool for achieving results at minimal cost - a rationality on which capitalism is built. Habermas presents a third, more open, practical and humane rationality: communicative rationality, which seeks to understand individuals and avoid judgement without communication.

Through his dual critique of subjective reason and the approaches of the first generation of postmodern philosophers, Habermas seeks to dismantle the idea of a transcendent, fixed truth and the illusion of possessing the truth. He wants to appreciate modernity and try to benefit from it by proposing a communicative rationality that is more beneficial for the world and humanity.

1.2. The Ethics of Discussion according to Habermas

Habermas points out that his theory of communication aims to liberate the concept of the lifeworld, which has remained under the constraints of transcendental philosophy. He acknowledges that this cannot be achieved without social-linguistic education. Moreover, the participants in the discussion process cannot engage in coordinated verbal action that is effective unless each participant is granted a shared lifeworld that is intersubjectively formed through dialogue and established within the self.

The theory of communicative action operates within a dialectical struggle between knowledge and ignorance, which refers to the concept of consensus, or as Habermas puts it, “a dialectic of agreement that succeeds or fails” (Habermas, 1995, p. 496). It is important to note that what is true and sound cannot fail in an environment that guarantees freedom of ethical discussion. However, dialogue can often fail, mainly because of a lack of breadth in the debate or the marginalisation and exclusion of citizens from participation. This can also happen when the nature of the issues under discussion is unclear.

Habermas aims at a rationalised communicative action based on the ethics of discussion and the preference for the stronger argument. He sees it as a suitable medium for the natural reproduction of reality by those who have the natural right to change the lifeworld. According to Habermas, rationality is demonstrated by the willingness of individuals to engage in dialogue and discussion with convictions that allow for the possibility of error. He links communicative rationality to what he calls the ‘power of cohesion’ between individuals, which achieves consensus through mutual recognition and thus forms a social lifeworld. This lifeworld encompasses multiple and diverse perceptions and rationalities.

Habermas sees communicative action as a reflective act in itself, noting that “reflection is no longer a matter of the cognitive subject returning to itself in its transformation into an object” (Habermas, 1995, pp. 485, 497). Instead, reflection is replaced by coordination within communicative action, which involves two levels: speech and action.

Habermas suggests that participants in communicative action implicitly demand a claim to validity, which may consist of truth, rightness and comprehensiveness. These claims serve as a common and reciprocal link that stimulates discussion and ensures its credibility. This process, governed by these intersubjective standards, is what he calls communicative rationality (Habermas, After Marx, 2003).

In his book “Science and Technology as Ideology”, Habermas states that communicative action can only be rationalised by addressing the ethical dimension, which is the responsibility of the active subject. The universality of moral laws implies not only a shared obligation among individuals, but also a prior consensus based on a common ground.

It is worth noting that Habermas himself believes that the application of universal standards aimed at achieving the ethics of contemporary humanity does not guarantee individuals the freedom of private life. Therefore, these universal standards should not restrict the individual's space to have personal projects and individual peculiarities. Habermas asserts that what is said about work also applies to discussion, since the words "yes" or "no" mean that an individual has transformed himself into an act of revealing his intentions and demands, which is an initiative of value. The understanding of individuals as moral persons allows their judgements and actions to express their true selves (Habermas, The Future of Human Nature: A Liberal Approach, 2006).

We believe that the rationality proposed by Habermas is a realistic and applicable rationality because it takes into account and is rooted in society. Habermas successfully moves from social integration to political integration, aiming to activate the ethics of effective discussion that respects individual particularities and affiliations without neglecting them. This point is also emphasised by Ben Nasser in his study (Ben Nasir, 2017). In response to the French philosopher Alain Boyer's question about the problem of critical discussion and the ethics of discussion, Habermas states that, within the framework of the theory of communicative action, he has tried to define behaviours characterised by reasonableness that allow everyone to participate in communicative processes, regardless of their affiliation, culture or language (Habermas, Ethics of Discussion and the Question of Truth, 2010). Citizenship thus becomes an ethical act within creative discussions aimed at a better world.

II. Methods and Materials:

1. Study Method, Tools and Sample

Our study is based on a survey method that aims to describe and explain (Marwan, 2000), as well as a content analysis that uses quantitative research techniques and objective interpretations (Abdel Hamid, 2000) .

The study uses a survey method, which is a descriptive and analytical approach to the study of social and human phenomena, particularly media and communication phenomena. This method allows the researcher to cover all aspects of the community being studied, resulting in a comprehensive, objective reading. The research tool we use is content analysis, a rigorous method used to obtain accurate and clear data about the phenomenon under study. These data allow the researcher to describe and analyse the phenomenon (Marwan, 2000). content analysis works to uncover the details of the content and its latent meanings using quantitative research techniques and their objective interpretations.

We identified five main pages representing the accessible community for the study, which are the official pages used by the candidates in the Algerian presidential election of 12 December 2019. Below is a table with basic preliminary information about these pages:

Table (1): Basic preliminary information about the pages of the candidates in the Algerian presidential elections of 12 December 2019.

Page Number	Official Page Name	Number of Page Likes	Number of Page Followers
01	Abdelmadjid Tebboune	840,857	More than 900,000
02	Abdelkader Bengrina	199,550	More than 214,000
03	Ali Benflis	1,326,707	More than 1,300,000
04	Belaid Abdelaziz	168,946	More than 173,000
05	Azzedine Mihoubi	58912	60922

The source : Compiled by the author

Note: For the number of followers column, we have given an approximate number as Facebook does not provide an exact number of followers after the 100,000 follower threshold.

After an exploratory study of the pages in question, we found that the total number of posts during the election period was 1,422. This number of posts contains a large number of comments from users on these pages. Therefore, we defined our research sample in two phases:

1 .Defining the percentage of posts to be studied: we selected 20% of the total number of posts on the sites studied during the election period, which is about 285 posts.

2 .Determining a manageable sample of comments: We found that the number of comments on the sample of 285 posts was 33,280. This is a significant number that cannot be feasibly studied due to its size and the time required. Therefore, we decided to study 5% of the total number of comments, or 1,664 comments. This is a manageable number that would require significant effort and time to analyse. We believe that studying this number of comments will provide results that can be objectively generalised to the characteristics of the sites studied, especially since we selected these comments in a random and non-systematic manner.

The following table shows the number of comments representing 5% of the total number of comments for each page studied:

Table (2): Number of comments representing 5% of the total number of comments for each page studied.

Pages	Number of Vocabulary in the Sample	Number of Comments in the Sample	Number of Comments Corresponding to 5%
Page one	19	2,820	141
Page two	48	12,660	633
Page Three	51	8,220	411
Page four	53	4,340	217
Page five	114	5,240	262
Total	281	33,280	1,664

The source : Compiled by the author

2. Validity and Reliability

On the basis of a content analysis form containing a series of categories corresponding to indicators - where we identified a series of indicators closely related to the subject of the study - we designed and refined this form by subjecting it to procedural validity (with the help of a group of qualified judges) and reliability (by involving two researchers to analyse 10% of the study sample and assessing the agreement rate between the three results, thus calculating the reliability coefficient). Below is a brief overview of the categories used to analyse the problem under study:

2.1. Categories to study the degree of freedom in the spaces offered by the pages of the presidential candidates on 12 December 2019:

-Supportive comments: comments expressing support for the candidate or the content.

-Oppositional Comments: Comments opposing the content of the post or the candidate in general.

-Neutral comments: Comments that take the stance of a detached observer.

-Objective Comments: Comments characterised by rationality and realism.

We will not only rely on these categories to study the degree of freedom; we will also use participant observation to record interventions by page administrators, such as deletions or modifications, or their comments intended to guide the discussion.

2.2. Categories to study the element of motivation in post content:

-Posts that stimulate discussion: Posts that have interactive content.

-Non-Stimulating Posts: Posts that do not encourage discussion.

2.3. Categories to study the element of discussion in the content of comments:

-Comments that include discussion: Comments that discuss the content of the post or the candidate's platform in general.

-Non-Discussion Comments: Comments that do not contain any discussion.

2.4. Categories to identify the type of discourse in user comments:

-Inclusive comments: Comments that contain non-exclusive discourse.

-Exclusionary Comments: Comments that contain exclusionary discourse.

-Satirical Comments: Comments that use sarcastic language.

.5 Categories for determining the meaning of discourse in user comments:

-Religious meaning: Comments with religious implications.

-National Meaning: Comments with national implications.

-Ethnic Meaning: Comments with ethnic implications.

-Sectarian Meaning: Comments with sectarian implications.

- Regional Meaning: Comments with regional implications.

III. Results and discussion :

Enter the results of the study in the same format (font, size, dimension between lines). A summary of the collected data should be presented in the proportions or totals form, then review the analysis conducted on the collected data using both text and illustrative means (Tables and shapes) in accordance with the method and tools reviewed above. After presenting the results, their contents can be evaluated and interpreted statistically in the light of the hypotheses and compared with previous studies results.

1. Degree of Freedom in the Spaces Offered by the Candidate Sites

Habermas' theory of communicative action raises the issue of freedom as a key factor in the success of the philosophy of communicative action. This action considers the effectiveness of discussions between participants and their degree of freedom. It is impossible to know people's desires, needs, aspirations and proposals without achieving a certain level of freedom that allows them to express themselves away from the various forms of authority under which they live, such as political authority and its constraints, social norms and even self-imposed authority.

The theory of communicative action posits that a public communicative space that is characterised as creative and ethical is one that enjoys a high degree of freedom that removes restrictions on participants and facilitates mutual understanding through dialogue, provided that the discourse is based on evidence, reasoning and argumentation.

Through our study of the research community offered by the sites we studied, we made several observations about the degree of freedom within these spaces:

1. Unrestricted freedom: All the sites studied offer users an unrestricted degree of freedom. We observed that user comments ranged from support to opposition, neutrality and objectivity, with some comments even reaching the level of personal denigration.

2. Lack of intervention with critical comments: We found that the administrators of the sites we studied did not intervene to delete highly critical comments. While it is possible that there were interventions outside our observation, even assuming that such interventions occurred, it does not change the fact that the spaces provided by these sites are not subject to strict control. This is mainly because the virtual space is open to all possibilities and any deletions by the administrators could negatively affect the candidate's image and political ideas.

3. No involvement of administrators: We did not record any cases where page administrators replied to or liked comments, indicating a degree of neutrality with regard to the space provided by these pages.

The following table presents a set of data that counts the frequency of user positions in comments that are representative of the entire study sample:

Table (3): User attitudes in comment content (F: frequency, P: Percentage)

Category of Position in Comment Content	Page one		Page two		Page Three		Page four		Page five	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Biased	129	94.16	402	71.91	278	73.54	50	68.24	180	23.72
Opposed	06	04.38	116	20.75	84	22.22	11	23.69	60	0.79
Neutral	00	00	04	0.72	08	02.12	06	05.21	02	04.35
Objective	02	01.46	37	06.62	08	02.12	211	02.84	11	100%
Total	137	100%	559	100%	378	100%	50	100%	253	23.72

The source : Compiled by the author

Analysis of user comments and degree of freedom

The table shows that the frequency of biased (supportive) comments about the candidate and his discourse within the total sample of pages reached 1,133, representing 68% of the total number of comments analysed. On the other hand, the frequency of comments against the candidate and his project was 316, or 18.99%. Meanwhile, the number of neutral comments was 25, or 1.50%, and the number of objective comments was 64, or 3.85% of the total.

If we add the number of neutral and objective comments to the number of oppositional comments, we get a total of 405 out of the 1,538 comments recorded. This means that 26.33% of the comments recorded do not agree with the proposals made by the pages studied and their candidates. This reflects an important aspect of the degree of freedom of these sites, since we can conclude that sites that do not allow freedom of expression would not produce even a small percentage of comments that contradict their themes.

Returning to the differentiation of the degrees of freedom on each of the pages studied, the following ranking emerges from the data presented in the table:

- Page Four: The highest percentage of unbiased comments about the candidate and his ideas with 31.88%.

- Page five: Close behind with 28.97%.

- Page Two: With 28.09%.

- Page three: With 26.64%.

- Page One: The lowest with 5.84%.

2. Discussion Stimulation Element in Post Content

Table(4): Shows the stimulation in the content of the post.

Category of Motivation in Post Content	Page one		Page two		Page Three		Page four		Page five	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Encouraging Discussion	04	21.05	12	25	34	66.67	20	39.21	43	37.72
Not Encouraging	15	78.95	36	75	17	33.33	31	60.78	71	62.28

Discussion										
Total	19	100%	48	100%	51	100%	51	100%	114	100%

The source : Compiled by the author

2.1. Non-stimulating posts

The data shows that the frequency of non-stimulating posts reached 170, which represents 60.07% of the total posts on all pages. It is worth noting that there are differences between the pages studied in this category. Page Five ranks highest with 41.76% of the total post frequency, followed by Page Two with 21.18%, Page Four with 18.23%, Page Three with 10% and finally Page One with 8.82%. This variation is due to the different sample sizes for each page.

Returning to the overall percentage for this category, which is 60.07%, this means that the majority of posts in our sample do not encourage Facebook users to engage in discussion. The characteristics of these posts include :

- Images without substantive discourse
- Videos that lack the candidate's commitment to the electorate
- Emotional rhetoric that does not address the needs and aspirations of citizens
- Announcements of events
- Other similar content

It is important to note that Facebook generally serves as a platform for information and mobilisation. By examining the communities available on each page, we found that it often provides a direct representation of reality, free from various forms of censorship. This characteristic makes it a less professional medium, often prone to media errors and exaggeration. As a result, each candidate's page tends to reflect a narcissistic image of the candidate, focusing mainly on emotional and superficial aspects, while neglecting rational and objective dimensions.

It is therefore reasonable that the percentage of non-stimulating posts is significantly higher than that of stimulating posts. If we were to analyse the content of a candidate's own television channel, we would probably come to the same conclusion; the medium cannot play a neutral role and is therefore unable to raise more objective issues, as it tends to emphasise the candidate's personal qualities and strengths over other aspects.

This finding leads to an important preliminary conclusion: the posts on candidates' pages do not create a broad public space for discussion, as they do not effectively stimulate users to engage in meaningful discourse.

2.2. Discussion Encouraging Posts

The data shows that the frequency of discussion-stimulating posts reached 113, representing 39.93% of the total posts on all pages. It is important to note the variation between pages in the frequency of this category. Page Five ranked highest with 38.05% of the total post frequency, followed by Page Three with 30.09%, Page Four with 17.70%, Page Two with 10.62% and finally Page One with 3.54%. This variation is mainly due to the different sample sizes for each page.

Looking at the percentages recorded for this category within each page, we see that Page Four leads the ranking, closely followed by Pages Three and Five, then Page Two and finally Page One. The differences in these percentages are mainly due to the communication strategies adopted by the administrators of each page and the specific nature of the content they publish. For example, the administrator of Page Three focused on clear and specific discourse, minimising emotional content and emphasising the presentation of specific points from the candidate's programme. This approach resulted in a high percentage of discussion stimulating posts for Page Three.

In contrast, page one had the lowest percentage of discussion stimulating posts. The content on this page was posted in a spontaneous and unplanned manner, as discussed earlier in

relation to its activity. The effectiveness of stimulating posts lies in appealing to users' rationality and presenting real issues that reflect citizens' needs.

Finally, we come to an important conclusion: the stimulation of discussion in the posts is a result of the efforts made by the administrators of the site, which can be seen in their careful selection of the content published and their focus on designing more engaging and discussion-oriented material.

3. The Discussion Element in Comment Content

Table (5): Shows the element of discussion in comment content.

Category of Discussion Element	Page one		Page two		Page Three		Page four		Page five		Total	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Includes Discussion	10	07.09	111	17.54	60	14.60	22	10.13	98	37.40	301	18.09
Does Not Include Discussion	131	92.91	522	82.46	351	85.40	195	89.86	164	62.60	1363	81.91
Total	141	100%	633	100%	411	100%	217	100%	262	100%	1664	100

The source : Compiled by the author

3.1. Non-Discussion Comments

The data shows that the frequency of non-discussion comments within the total sample of comments across all pages reached 1,363, accounting for 81.91%. There are significant differences between pages in terms of the frequency of this category. Page Two ranks highest with 38.30% of non-discussion comments, followed by Page Three with 25.75%, Page Four with 14.31%, Page Five with 12.03% and finally Page One with 9.61%. This variation is mainly due to the different number of comments on each page.

When analysing the highest percentage of non-discussion comments within each page studied, Page One had the highest percentage compared to the others, followed by Page Four, then Page Three, Page Two and finally Page Five, as shown in the table. This ranking is due to the prevalence of comments that are arbitrary, spontaneous and often taken out of context.

We observed that this type of comment often seems to be a wave of reactive protest. These comments often consist of sarcasm, empty rhetoric, unclear language and sometimes harsh statements. At best, they represent symbols of positions ranging from sympathy and support to opposition.

The high percentage of this category suggests that the public space of these sites is not one that fosters discussion leading to mutual understanding and the exchange of ideas and perspectives. Instead, it serves as a space to vent feelings of dissatisfaction, reflecting a form of virtual social protest.

The presence of comments without meaningful discussion can be attributed to two main reasons:

1. Lack of political culture: Users, especially those who make these comments, often lack political awareness or familiarity with the topic, leading them to comment for the sake of commenting. This is evidenced by the large number of comments, some of which are out of context or reflect the commenter's unfamiliarity with the topic and its context.

2. Limited political awareness: Even among those with some political knowledge, commenters may resort to this type of comment as a form of protest, or their limited political culture may prevent them from forming an expressible opinion. This limited understanding often results in comments that express positions but do not rise to the level of constructive discussion.

Both of these explanations are evident in the comments analysed, as we have recorded a significant number that express opinions, but these expressions do not rise to the level of fruitful discourse.

3.2. Discussion Comments:

The data shows that the frequency of comments containing discussion within the total sample of comments across all pages reached 301, representing 18.09% of the total 1,664 comments analysed. Notably, the frequency of this category varies between pages. Page Two ranks highest with 36.88% of discussion comments, followed by Page Five with 32.56%, Page Three with 19.93%, Page Four with 7.31% and finally Page One with 3.32%. This variation is mainly due to the different number of comments on the different pages.

When analysing the recorded percentages of discussion comments within each page, we find that Page Five recorded the highest percentage, followed by Page Two, Page Three, Page Four and finally Page One. This variation is largely due to the nature of the comments recorded. We found that discussion comments are often characterised by argumentation and reliance on persuasive appeals, taking a particular stance towards the candidate or their manifesto. As such, these comments have the potential to contribute to the formation of a public space around the post or the issue it raises.

Observations of the discussion comments show that they are not just comments for the sake of discussion; they attempt to shape the meaning proposed by the post. These comments often seem to come from users who are structured within a particular political or ideological framework, whether they agree with the discourse of the post or take an opposing stance.

In addition, we have found that the presence of discussion in comments does not necessarily indicate a robust debate as defined by the concept of discussion. Often this 'discussion' consists of simply stating positions without attempting to argue, support or defend the project, issue or individual. At best, it may defend the individual in an emotional rather than a rational way, without engaging with the idea or project. This phenomenon can be attributed to the nature of the medium, which seems to have transformed users into individuals who are content with their beliefs and orientations, without seeking to justify or argue.

4. The nature of the discourse in user comments on the pages of the presidential candidates (12 December 2019).

Table (6): Type of discourse in the comments

Category of Nature of Discourse in Comments	Page one		Page two		Page Three		Page four		Page five	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Inclusive	00	00	04	04.44	08	26.67	08	28.57	03	20
Exclusionary	00	00	02	03.22	00	00	02	07.14	00	00
Satirical	06	100	84	93.33	22	73.33	18	64.29	12	80
Total	06	100%	90	99.99 %	30	100 %	28	100%	15	100%

The source : Compiled by the author

4.1. Comments with Inclusive Discourse

The data shows that the frequency of comments characterised by inclusive discourse within the total sample of comments across all sites reached 23, accounting for 13.61% of the total 169 comments from other subcategories. Notably, there is some variation between pages in the frequency of comments with inclusive discourse. Pages Three and Four ranked highest with 34.78% each of this category, followed by Page Two with 17.39%, Page Five with 13.04%, while Page One had no comments of this type.

This disparity is not necessarily due to differences in the number of comments on the pages studied, but rather to the contexts created by the waves of comments on the posts. We observed that inclusive comments often serve as a rational and ethical intervention, initiated by users from time to time, to curb the verbal excesses that occasionally occur among users.

Coming back to the overall percentage for this category, which is 13.61%, it is particularly low, especially considering that it comes from a total of 169 comments in other sub-categories. If we compare this percentage with the total number of comments analysed, we get an even weaker figure of 1.38%. This suggests that the spaces created by these sites through their posts and user comments do not represent a truly inclusive environment from a numerical point of view.

4.2. Comments with Exclusionary Discourse

The data shows that the frequency of comments characterised by exclusionary discourse within the total sample of comments across all pages reached 4, accounting for 2.36% of the total comments classified by type of discourse. In particular, this percentage comes from the comments on pages two and four, which each contribute 50% to this category, while the other pages did not record any comments of this type.

The total percentage for this category, which is 2.36%, is again very low and therefore not significant. When calculated as a percentage of the total number of comments analysed, it is only 0.24%.

Exclusionary discourse among users is a fundamental issue when considering the communicative action approach in our study, as such discourse often stems from racist tendencies or ideological views that are not in line with Jürgen Habermas' thesis. Therefore, the distinction between inclusive and exclusionary discourse serves as a crucial operational framework for the findings of our study. The negligible percentage of exclusionary discourse among user interactions suggests that the public space created by these sites is relatively healthy in terms of the language used by participants.

4.3. Satirical Comments

The data shows that the frequency of satirical comments within the total sample of comments across all pages reached 142, which represents 84.02% of the comments categorised by type of discourse. If we calculate this percentage in relation to the total number of comments on all pages, we find that it is 8.53%, which is indeed a significant figure.

Looking at the pages, we can see that the frequency of this category varies. Page Two ranks highest with 59.15% of the total number of satirical comments, followed by Page Five with 15.49%, Page Four with 12.68%, Page Three with 8.45% and finally Page One with 4.22%.

These percentages suggest that satire is an important language of expression. Although it often appears to be used purely for mockery, we observed in many comments that satirical language can carry a purposeful message. Users often use satire to critique and comment on political, social, economic and cultural issues, infusing their remarks with criticism, reproach and dissatisfaction.

In addition, satire is often used by users to mask their limited knowledge of public affairs, leading them to make snap judgments about issues out of context.

Tracking the language used in comments on the sites studied, we found that satirical language often contains imprecise and non-objective statements, sometimes resorting to harsh insults and vulgar expressions. However, some satirical content conveys profound propositions and perspectives, highlighting that satire can be a unique form of expression, especially in the face of potential political repression against social media users.

5. The Meaning of Discourse in User Comments on the Pages of Presidential Candidates (12 December 2019).

Table (7): Meaning of discourse in comments

Category Of discourse meaning in comments	Page one		Page two		Page Three		Page four		Page five	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Religious	23	71.87	52	51.49	02	07.41	01	05.56	12	31.58
National	09	28.13	41	40.59	09	33.33	11	61.11	19	50
Ethnic	00	00	02	01.98	01	03.70	02	11.11	00	00
Sectarian	00	00	00	00	00	00	01	05.56	00	00
Regional	00	00	06	05.94	15	55.56	03	16.66	07	18.42
Total	32	100%	101	100%	27	100%	18	100%	38	100%

The source : Compiled by the author

5.1. Comments with Religious Significance

The data shows that the frequency of comments categorised as having religious significance within the total sample of comments across all sites reached 90, representing 41.66% of the total 216 comments analysed in this category. Notably, the frequency of religious comments varied between pages. Page Two has the highest percentage with 24.07%, followed by Page One with 10.64%, Page Five with 5.56%, Page Three with 0.93% and finally Page Four with 0.46%.

Comparing the percentage of religious comments in relation to other subcategories within each of the pages analysed, the ranking is as follows Page One leads with 71.87%, followed by Page Two with 51.49%, Page Five with 31.58%, Page Three with 7.41% and finally Page Four with 5.56%.

Calculating the percentage of religious comments over the total number of comments analysed gives a figure of 5.41%. This is a relatively low percentage that does not give any clear meaning. It is noteworthy that a higher percentage was expected, given the religious sentiments that characterise Algerian society.

5.2. Comments of National Significance

The data shows that the frequency of comments categorised as having national significance within the total sample of comments across all sites reached 89, accounting for 41.20% of the total comments analysed in this category. Similar to the previous category, there is a variation between pages in the frequency of national comments. Page Two has the highest number with 46.07%, followed by Page Five with 21.35%, Page Four with 12.36% and Pages One and Three with 10.11% each.

Looking at the percentages of this category in relation to other sub-categories within each page surveyed, the ranking is as follows: Page Four leads with 61.11%, followed by Page Five with 50%, Page Two with 40.59%, Page Three with 33.33% and finally Page One with 28.13%.

The percentage of national comments compared to the total number of comments analysed is 5.35%. This percentage is also relatively low and does not give any clear significance.

5.3. Comments with Ethnic Significance

The data shows that the frequency of comments characterised by ethnic significance within the total sample of comments across all pages reached 5, representing 2.31% of the total comments analysed in this category. Notably, this percentage comes from the following pages: Page Two and Page Four with 40% each, and Page Three with 20%. No such comments were recorded on the other pages.

Calculating the frequency of ethnic comments against the total number of comments analysed gives a figure of 0.30%. This is a negligible percentage. The ethnic significance reflected in these comments concerns expressions celebrating Amazigh identity, which are presented out of context, thereby giving the speech an ethnic connotation.

5.4. Comments with sectarian connotations

The data show that the frequency of comments categorised as sectarian within the total sample of comments on all pages did not exceed 1, representing 0.46% of the total number of comments analysed. This single occurrence was recorded on page four. If this frequency is compared with the total number of comments analysed, the figure is 0.06%, which is also negligible.

5.5. Comments of Regional Significance

The data show that the frequency of comments characterised by regional significance within the total sample of comments on all pages reached 31, representing 14.35% of the total number of comments in this category. There are notable differences between pages in terms of the frequency of comments of regional significance. Page Three has the highest number with 48.39%, followed by Page Five with 22.58%, Page Two with 19.35%, Page Four with 9.68%, while Page One had no comments of this type.

Calculating the percentage of regional comments in relation to the total number of comments analysed gives a figure of 1.86%. This is a low percentage that lacks clear significance.

IV. Conclusion:

The study of user comments on the Facebook pages of the presidential candidates from 12 December 2019 allowed us to explore an important aspect addressed by Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action: the ethical, universal and human dimension of the discourse between interlocutors. Based on the results obtained and our theoretical framework, we conclude our study with the following observations:

It is crucial to note that the issue of inclusive language does not necessarily manifest itself in the discourse of the participants. It may remain unspoken because it is not a real concern for users. In this context, silence on the issue reinforces its existence and makes inclusive dialogue seem meaningless, as it may be unconsciously present in the participants. For example, inclusive discourse becomes necessary and relevant in times of heightened ethnic and cultural conflicts or ideological disagreements based on regional, intellectual, historical or ethnic lines. However, in the current social and cultural context of Algerian society, inclusive discourse may be less important than more urgent discussions that better express the needs and desires of individuals.

This examined category is one of the key elements derived from Habermas' philosophy of communicative action, which we applied to our study. Proposals and inclusive perspectives can promote a common ground for all, where communication is based on understanding, consensus and rationality.

Regionalism can also emerge from a variety of sources, such as folklore, songs and sports teams, as well as from inadvertent or deliberate statements by politicians. The historical dominance of one region over another in certain areas can lead to a heightened sense of pride among its inhabitants, which, if exaggerated, can lead to superiority and contempt for other regions .

In Algeria, regional thinking exists at both popular and elite levels, but often remains silent and manifests itself in symbolic violence. This issue needs to be studied in depth, as it is a natural disease that needs to be addressed .

We emphasise the importance of religion and its values and rules in the process of social control. The more religion serves as a means of organisation, understanding and communication, the more it fits into Habermas' philosophy of communicative action. However, religion becomes counterproductive to the aims of this theory when it is used as an unquestioned text for legislation. According to the aims of the theory, all ready-made texts that might limit the effectiveness of discussions on various issues, desires and needs should be transcended, without any authority to constrain, direct or frame them.

We note that the national significance of the interlocutors' speech is to a large extent natural and healthy, but it can produce the opposite result if a counter-concept is created, especially in times of peace. It is normal to resort to the concept of "enemy" in times of war and political conflict. Habermas aims at the universal human being, who transcends all forms of barriers that limit his universality, by achieving understanding and moving away from strategic rationality, which can make a person coldly strategic.

We point out that ethnicity, culture, sect, religion or even the small details within a person that determine his identity, inclinations and desires should serve as a starting point for individuals. However, one should not remain imprisoned by these aspects. The essence of Habermas' theory is to reach understanding, not conflict. For example, an individual can start from his desires, his ethnicity, or even his tribe, and express all of this as a valued uniqueness. At the same time, however, they must believe that this uniqueness leads them to a wider world in which their vision expands.

We emphasise the importance of overcoming proposals that come from a narrow ideological perspective, which can lead to fruitless debates that do not produce real results that serve the common good.

We note that sectarian tendencies often reveal limited interpretations of the world. Sectarianism provides its adherents with ready-made explanations that can create false, illusory conflicts and negatively affect the public sphere rather than contribute to its discussion and understanding.

We highlight the dangers of regionalism, especially when it comes to a public sphere that can be dominated by feelings of pride, distorting its outcomes. For example, by examining the community available for each site we studied, we found that comments with regional content are not randomly distributed, but appear as a result of contagion. Regional comments appear only after the silence is broken. Moreover, regional discourse is more pronounced at the popular level than at the official or elite level. Habermas thus envisages a common ground through which people can transcend their differences, starting from these differences without denying them. This starting point of individuality and specificity requires a great deal of rationality, which ultimately prevails and achieves the common good.

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