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Conversational Structures in the Comment Sections of Instagram New Portals

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Abstract. This study explores how digital conversations take shape when social media users react to government policies. The goal is to understand whether these interactions generate meaningful discussions or simply short-lived emotional outbursts. Focusing on the LambeTurah Instagram comment section, the study analyzed 1,282 comments from August 2025 triggered by policy statements from seven Indonesian officials. Using qualitative netnography and Conversation Analysis approaches, the study examined how users take turns speaking in the digital space. The results show that Instagram's design disrupts the natural flow of replies, making it different from face-to-face conversations. Key findings revealed that 90.6% of interactions consisted of short, minor sentences in a statement-response pattern regarding policies. This occurs because many users simply comment to express agreement, vent their feelings, or use sarcasm, leading to deadlocked interactions. While complex dialogues emerge when sharing practical information, some controversial comments cannot be classified because they disappear after sparking an uproar. Ultimately, political conversations on Instagram are more about the expression of shared identity and emotions than in-depth debate, which impacts how we understand public opinion today.

Keyword: Adjacency Pairs; Affective Publics; Conversation Analysis; Digital Discourse; Sequence Expansion

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of political communication by providing an unprecedentedly open and democratic platform for public discourse and opinion formation. In the digital era, the flow of information is no longer a one-way broadcast from institutional authorities to the public; instead, it has become a multidirectional exchange where every citizen has the potential to be a producer of discourse. Numerous studies confirm this shift, highlighting

how social media platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of information, bypass traditional media gatekeepers, and directly influence public perception (Suhendra & Selly Pratiwi, 2024). These platforms act as networked publics, where comment sections facilitate political dialogue free from the constraints of physical distance or institutional gatekeeping (Rambe et al., 2025).

However, this democratization of speech is fraught with inherent complexities and interactional challenges. The decentralized nature of digital platforms often leads to a cacophony of voices, where the quality of deliberation is frequently questioned. (Sitorus et al., 2024) identify the potential for extreme polarization within these spaces, noting that algorithmic content curation tends to reinforce existing biases and amplify divisive perspectives (Vera-Revilla et al., 2025). Furthermore, the effectiveness of political participation in digital spaces is heavily contingent upon the digital literacy of the participants, which is essential for maintaining healthy, inclusive, and constructive discourse (Çiçek, 2024; Elizamiharti & Nelfira, 2023). Within this context, the formation of public opinion is not merely a cognitive or rational process but is deeply embedded in affective dynamics. (Papacharissi, 2015) argues that contemporary digital engagement is driven by affective publics, where the circulation of collective feelings and shared sentiments becomes the primary engine for mobilization and solidarity. This effective turn suggests that emotions like humor, irony, and indignation are not peripheral to political talk but are central to how digital public spheres are organized.

In Indonesia, the digital political landscape is uniquely shaped by the presence of non-institutional news aggregator accounts that act as pivotal intermediaries in the information ecosystem. These accounts bridge the gap between mainstream journalistic reporting and the raw, unfiltered reactions of the public. One of the most prominent examples is the Instagram account LambeTurah. With a follower base reaching tens of millions, LambeTurah has evolved from a celebrity gossip account into a significant political actor that disseminates hot issues, including government policy statements and public scandals. Its comment section has become a site of intense digital contestation, where netizens from diverse backgrounds congregate to react to government officials in real-time. The massive and rapid interaction network within these comment sections raises a critical analytical question: how are these conversations structured, and what dominant communication patterns emerge when netizens respond to high-stakes political issues in an informal and often chaotic environment?

To understand the dynamics of social media political communication more deeply, one must first grasp the technical and interactional differences between digital and face-to-face conversations. Traditional Conversation Analysis (CA), as pioneered by (Sacks et al., 1974), was built upon the observation of synchronized, face-to-face interactions where turn-taking is orderly and sequential. However, digital interactions on platforms like Instagram operate under a fundamentally different logic. Digital spaces allow hundreds or even thousands of individuals to speak almost simultaneously, creating an environment devoid of physical cues like eye contact or vocal intonation (Elizamiharti & Nelfira, 2023). Interactions in these spaces are often asynchronous, meaning a response can occur minutes, hours, or even days after the initial stimulus. Consequently, the resulting interactional structure is far more complex, branching, and frequently disjointed. Unlike traditional dialogue which proceeds linearly, digital communication creates multi-threaded and fragmented conversations, a phenomenon that (Herring, 2013) describes as disrupted turn adjacency.

In these fragmented threads, the conceptual link between a comment and its response can be separated by dozens of intervening posts, making the conversational flow difficult to track using conventional methods (Putri & Gautama, 2022). This structural complexity necessitates a more nuanced application of CA principles to reveal the underlying order within the apparent digital chaos. While research on Indonesian digital politics has flourished, the majority of studies remain focused on macro perspectives such as sentiment analysis (identifying positive or negative trends) or the impact of social media on electoral polarization (Sitorus et al., 2024; Suhendra & Selly

Pratiwi, 2024). There is a significant research gap regarding the micro-interactional structures of how netizens actually talk to one another and to authority figures in the comment sections of aggregator accounts. Understanding whether these conversations follow a structured logic or appear as random outbursts, and identifying which types of responses such as agreement, sarcasm, or emotional venting dominate the discourse, is a crucial step toward a comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's digital democracy.

This gap is not only empirical but also theoretical. Conversation Analysis, on its own, offers precise tools for mapping how threads open, expand, and close, yet it does not account for why netizens choose to escalate a dispreferred response into open confrontation rather than letting it lapse, since sequence organization alone is agnostic to the emotional stakes that drive expansion. Affective Publics theory, conversely, explains how sentiment circulates and mobilizes collective feeling, but operates at the level of aggregate discourse and offers no method for tracing how that sentiment is structurally enacted turn by turn within a single thread. Integrating the two therefore addresses a genuine methodological blind spot: CA supplies the structural granularity to identify where and how affective escalation occurs, while Affective Publics supplies the interpretive frame for why netizens sustain or abandon a given thread. This synergy, rather than the novelty of the LambeTurah data alone, constitutes the primary theoretical contribution advanced in this study.

Accordingly, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the digital conversation patterns of netizens in response to government officials' statements in the LambeTurah Instagram comment section through the integration of Conversation Analysis (CA) and the theory of Affective Publics. Specifically, the research addresses three central questions: (1) What structural patterns of digital conversation emerge in netizen responses to government officials' statements? (2) What dominant adjacency pair patterns are formed within these digital exchanges? (3) How do affective dynamics shape the expansion or termination of these interactional sequences?

In the context of this study, structural patterns refer to the visual and conceptual configuration of interactions, including how threads expand or terminate. Adjacency pairs are defined as the basic units of interaction consisting of two related utterances, such as a statement followed by a response. Furthermore, communication preference refers to the social logic behind a response; for instance, whether a user provides a preferred response that aligns with the previous turn’s expectation or a dispreferred response that complicates the interaction through disagreement or elaboration (Pomerantz, 2018). Affective dynamics, in turn, denote the ways collective sentiment, such as solidarity, indignation, or sarcasm, shapes whether an interactional sequence expands into further turns or is abruptly closed (Papacharissi, 2015). By mapping these elements, the findings of this research are expected to provide significant theoretical contributions to digital linguistics and practical insights for government communication practitioners in navigating the volatile affective landscape of Indonesian social media.

METHOD

Research Design and Method

A qualitative approach with a netnographic method is employed to represent communication practices within digital culture. Netnography is utilized due to its relevance to the nature of the data, which consists of natural digital interactions on social media platforms. The primary data source is the comment sections of the Instagram account LambeTurah. This account was selected as the research site based on its massive follower base, high engagement rates on political posts, its role as a consistent non-institutional news aggregator, and its function as a representative public sphere for Indonesian netizens’ political responses.

Data Collection and Procedures

Data were collected from posts featuring official statements concerning public policies delivered by President Prabowo Subianto and six cabinet-level officials during August 2025. This timeframe

was chosen due to the high intensity of public discussion during that month. Selection criteria for posts included direct statements from government officials, at least 100 comments per post, and relevance to substantive public policy issues. The collection process involved documenting all conversations within the designated timeframe, identifying eight primary issue clusters from seven public figures: Prabowo Subianto (PS), Muhaimin Iskandar (MI), Nusron Wahid (NW), Zulkifli Hasan (ZH), Stella Christie (SC), Abdul Mu'ti (AM), and Sri Mulyani (SM). Digital documentation was performed through comprehensive screenshots of conversation threads, which were then grouped by issue and ministry. These files were transcribed into structured textual data, including anonymized usernames, timestamps, and reply structures, and were recorded immediately after publication to prevent data loss.

Data Analysis Framework

The analysis followed the Conversation Analysis (CA) framework and proceeded through four integrated stages. In the first stage, open coding, each comment-reply unit within the 1,282-comment corpus was read closely and labeled according to its sequential position, distinguishing initiating turns (first-pair parts) from responsive turns (second-pair parts). In the second stage, categorization, responsive turns were sorted into adjacency pair types statement-response, question-answer, assessment-agreement/disagreement, request-grant/refusal], with a residual "unclassifiable" category reserved for responses whose initiating comment had been deleted, as in the NW case. In the third stage, structural mapping, each of the four purposively selected issue clusters (SM, AM, NW, and ZH) was visualized as an interaction network using a tools, with node color denoting turn position (blue = original post, pink = first-pair response, orange/purple = post-expansion turns) to allow visual comparison of centralized versus branching topologies. In the fourth stage, quantification, the frequency of each adjacency pair type was tabulated across the full 1,282-comment corpus to produce the distribution reported in Figure 7, allowing the qualitative case analyses to be read against corpus-wide frequencies rather than the four illustrative clusters alone.

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the coding process, two validation procedures were applied. First, investigator triangulation was conducted: each of the three authors independently coded a subsample of the corpus, and coding discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. Second, negative case analysis was used, whereby comments that resisted straightforward classification, such as orphaned replies in the NW cluster, were treated not as noise to be discarded but as data points that refined the boundaries of the coding categories themselves. Together, these procedures were intended to reduce the risk that the reported patterns reflected a single coder's interpretive bias rather than an intersubjectively stable structure in the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. The Structural Patterns of Digital Conversation

This study focused on the Instagram account LambeTurah as a digital interaction space where netizens responded to government policies. Based on data collected in August 2025, a total of 1,282 comment units were analyzed, drawn from eight public policy issue clusters. These discussions were triggered by official statements from seven government figures, including President Prabowo Subianto and several ministers. The primary findings indicated that while the volume of comments was exceptionally high, the quality of interaction was generally shallow and brief. Notably, 90.6% of all interactions followed a simple statement–response pattern, in which an initial comment received only one reply before the conversation ceased permanently.

These conversational structures were visualized through interaction networks. In most instances, the structure was centralized or fan-shaped, with thousands of comments attached

directly to the main post without inter-comment connectivity. This pattern suggested that netizens preferred to address the subject of the news directly rather than engaging in dialogue with other users. However, in certain information-based discussions, more complex and branching structures, resembling a root system, could be observed, indicating sustained back-and-forth dialogue. The study also identified the phenomenon of comment deletion, which typically occurred after a comment triggered negative reactions or when a user decided to withdraw a statement. This act of "definitive repair" forcibly severed the flow of conversation within the digital space.

To systematically map these conversational structures, this analysis examined four representative issue clusters that exhibited significant variation in interactional patterns. These cases were selected through purposive sampling to capture the full spectrum of observed dynamics, ranging from highly centralized, monologic structures to dense, interconnected dialogic networks.

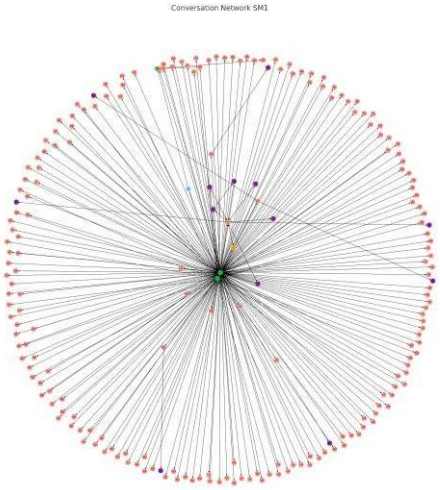


Figure 1 Conversation Network SM1

Figure 1 displayed the conversation network triggered by Finance Minister SM controversial statement. The network structure was characterized by a dominant concentration of pink nodes clustered around three main green nodes, which served as primary anchors triggered by blue nodes representing LambeTurah's original post. The dominance of pink nodes indicated that most participants provided direct, first-level responses to the central post without engaging with other commentators. However, the presence of orange and purple clusters at the periphery of the network indicated horizontal interactions between users.

This network pattern reflected a hybrid mode of participation. The network exhibited a strong tendency toward centralization, where individuals primarily responded directly to institutional actors or key posts rather than interacting with each other. However, the emergence of colored clusters indicated pockets of horizontal interaction between users that developed outside this centralized pattern. SM statement triggered affective resonance strong enough to mobilize thousands of commentators, although the limited expansion of the conversation suggested that most participants treated their comments as terminal expressive acts rather than as invitations to ongoing dialogue.



@pi***13 Kenapa harus mpok alpa si?! Kan ada Sri Mulyani... 😢

@a***a @pi***13 ada kamu jg mba, knp bukan km aja? @smindrawati

@b***o @a***a gapapa ka minimal srimulyani sempet punya kontribusi banyak juga.. ekonomi makro itu sulit loh lawan kita yahudi.. lah drpd dia NGELONTONG SAYUR WKWKWK. gada manfaat buat umat.

Figure 2 LambeTurah Post and Comment Sample

The expansion of the conversation generated by the change disrupted and interrupted the expected flow of interaction. This was seen when the main comment, namely the account @pi***13 who responded directly to LambeTurah's post, expressed a strong affective sentiment through a disappointing comment, "Kenapa harus Mpok Alpa, sih?! Kan ada Sri Mulyani...". This statement triggered a sarcastic response from another user, namely @a***a, "Ada kamu juga Mba, kenapa bukan kamu saja? @smindrawati". This common action directly challenged expectations and created interactional friction. The friction between @pi***13 and @a***a was what drove the formation of colored clusters in the peripheral area. Another user who commented, namely @b***o, supported @a***a's comment on the main comment by writing, "Nggak apa-apa Kak, minimal Sri Mulyani sempat punya kontribusi banyak juga.. Ekonomi makro itu sulit lho, lawan kita Yahudi.. Lah, daripada dia NGELONTONG SAYUR WKWKWK. Enggak ada manfaat buat umat." Then intervened to validate @a***a's position and refuted @pi***13's by introducing a new narrative that differed significantly from the original context. This phenomenon demonstrated that contextual failure caused the conversation to no longer be controlled by the original post, but instead spread horizontally to other issues (such as personal offenses).

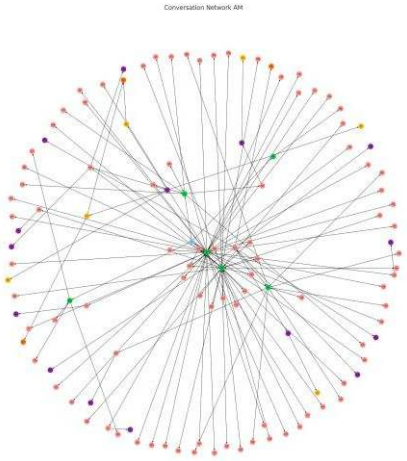


Figure 3 Conversation Network AM

Figure 3 displayed a much more complex and decentralized interactional topology than Figure 1. While pink nodes representing direct responses remained numerically dominant, there was a much higher density and a more even distribution of purple and orange nodes. This color diversity indicated extensive conversational expansion, suggesting that participants were not simply reacting to initial posts but were actively engaged in ongoing horizontal exchanges. Figure 3 showed a high frequency of continued expansion, where basic interaction pairs were

routinely followed by third and subsequent turn-taking positions, creating a multi-layered interactional structure. This structural complexity suggested that certain issues had a higher "dialogic appeal" encouraging users to invest in ongoing argumentation or collaboration rather than simply a one-off, reactive outburst.

The expansion in Figure 3 was uniquely characterized by collaborative turn-taking and affiliative sequences. In contrast to the adversarial friction in Figure 1, the interaction here functioned as an arena for collective problem- solving. As netizens, particularly parents, exchanged advice about setting up Roblox, they engaged in actions that supported the attitudes or projections of the previous speaker. The structural density of the purple and orange clusters reflected a high level of interactional commitment, where affective publics transformed into deliberative affective publics. Here, collective emotions were not simply "released" but channeled into peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, sustaining the conversation long after the initial stimulus.



@dy***3 Diawasi ortu cukup kali pak gausah di larang, aku suka mabar roblox bareng anak ku soalnya cobain deg pak apalagi naik gunung nagih

@__v***r @dy***3 sayangnya ga semua org tua bisa dampingi 7/24. Awalnya kami org tua juga mengira itu hanya mainan seperti mini craft ternyata banyak oknum yang merusak, bahkan banyak konten dewasa di dalamnya.

@h***u @_v***r iyakan skrg jaman udh canggih Bun, kalian bisa matiin hp nya lewat email kalian. Jadi kalo merasa anak ny kelamaan main gatau waktu, Ingsung kalian matiin hpnya dri hp kalian:))

semua ada solusinya

@m***a @h***u gimana caranyaa kak? Aku pengen nyoba juga matiin hp anakku lewat email ku

@m***a @h***u gimana caranyaa kak? Aku pengen nyoba juga matiin hp anakku lewat email ku

@s***i @m***a pakai aplikasi family link ka

@a***3 @m***a tqpi ttp dipilihin permainannya ka,,, krn prnh maen tmn bunbun tmn lain cma bwt ngambil dompet gitu,, serem

Figure 4 LambeTurah post and Comment Sample

The micro-mechanisms of this expansion were driven by the negotiation of epistemic authority, where users negotiated "who knows what" regarding digital security. For example, on the account @dy***3, which triggered a longer chain where accounts @ v***r and @h***u provided technical tutorials. This created an epistemic asymmetry where one user asked or shared and others responded with their own expertise, prompting a subsequent turn from @m***a, as the chain then expanded further because various participants joined the

conversation flow created by @dy***3. This chain represented a multi-party turn- taking system where the "speaker" role was maintained through the provision of highly useful content. This long line of interaction showed that when digital spaces provided functional utility, they transcended the "broadcast" model and built a distributed network of meaning that operated independently of the original institutional control of the post. In fact, the expansion did not stop with @ma*. The conversation continued with replies from other accounts, such as @si* and @a3*, who replied to @ma*'s comment, until the conversation ended at @a3* without any further responses from other users.

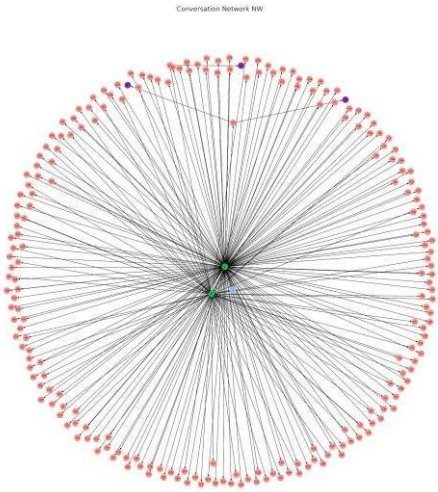


Figure 5 Conversation Network NW

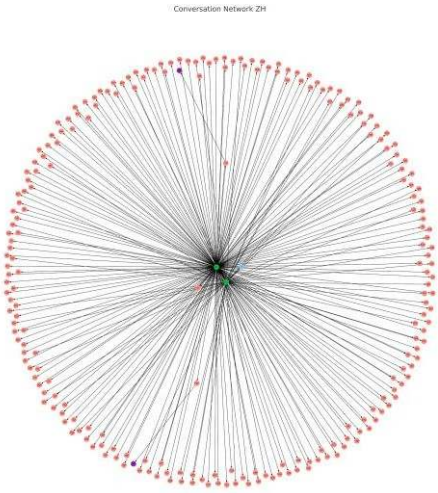


Figure 6 Conversation Network ZH

Figures 5 and 6 displayed a very different interactional topology, characterized by interactional stasis. Unlike the layered networks in Figures 1 and 2, these two networks consisted almost entirely of pink nodes radiating from the center, with almost no diversification of secondary colors. This structure suggested that the conversational sequence ended abruptly after the initial interactional pairing of posts and comments. Although NW and ZH statements

generated high volume, there was no interactional friction that prompted the second speaker to offer a rebuttal or clarification, resulting in only a series of isolated one-way transmissions.

The contrast with the previous figures lay in the types of responses given. In Figures 1 and 3, expansion was driven by disagreements or challenges that required more interactional work. In contrast, Figures 5 and 6 were dominated by responses that simply echoed sentiments or used emojis to signal presence. These responses were terminal because they did not seek validation and did not offer space for further conversation. This demonstrated that high participation volume did not automatically result in high dialogic engagement. The comments section here functioned as a collection of individual broadcasts rather than a connected conversation.

b. The dominant Adjacency Pair Patterns in Digital Exchanges

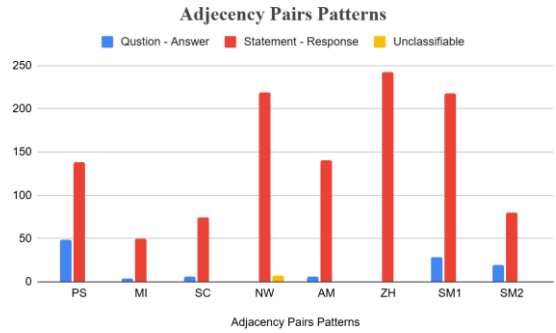


Figure 7 Adjacency Pairs Pattern

Quantitative analysis of the structure of interaction pairs revealed a striking dominance of statement-response sequences, which accounted for 90.6% of all conversational turns. This phenomenon represented a fundamental shift from the focus of classical Conversation Analysis, which traditionally emphasized a more balanced distribution of turns. This dominance of statements illustrated an extreme form of a preference for agreement. In Instagram comment sections, statements were typically positioned not to invite in-depth deliberation, but rather to solicit a congruent response. The high frequency of statement- response pairs indicated a systematic failure of sequence expansion. The majority of interactions in LambeTurah were trapped in sequence closure, where a statement was immediately followed by a terminal response that closed off the opportunity for a third or fourth turn. This explained why the network topology for the cases of ZH and NW remained atomistic and centralized, lacking the interactional hooks that allowed the sequence to expand beyond the basic pair.

An interesting aspect of the findings diagram above was the presence of several comments on the NW case post that could not be classified into adjacency pairs. This occurred because the primary comment responding to LambeTurah's post had been removed from the conversation flow, leaving only other users' responses to the missing entry. Technically, this removal broke the chain of sequential accountability in the communication flow. This overall finding suggested that the discourse structure in the comments section was often incomplete, with the remaining responses consisting only of affiliative statements signaling solidarity or outright rejection without any discernible context. As a result, the comments section appeared more like a jumble of comments unconnected to the context of the post or other comments, with the volume of statements emerging independently without following the quality of a complete dialogic exchange.

Taken together, these findings answer the study's three research questions. In response to RQ1, the four case networks showed that structural outcome was determined not by

comment volume but by the presence or absence of interactional friction: dispreferred responses (adversarial in the SM case, epistemic in the AM case) triggered post-expansion sequences and branching, colored clusters, while networks built on preferred, non-referential responses (NW, ZH) collapsed into centralized, single-pair broadcasts. In response to RQ2, the corpus-wide quantification confirmed that this branching was the exception rather than the rule: statement-response pairs accounted for 90.6% of all turns, reflecting an extreme preference for agreement (Herrera et al., 2025; Sacks, 1995) in which most users treated the comment section as a space for terminal expressive acts rather than sustained exchange, a pattern consistent with Schegloff's (2007) account of minimal post-expansion and with the broadcast-style engagement described by Freelon (2015).

In response to RQ3, affective dynamics explain why some threads escalated while others did not. Where a comment provoked strong collective sentiment, whether adversarial (SM) or affiliative (AM's collaborative knowledge-sharing among parents), that affect supplied the interactional motivation to extend the sequence, turning what Papacharissi (2015) calls an affective public into what Freelon et al. (2022) term a deliberative affective public. Where a comment failed to provoke such sentiment, or where its originating comment was deleted (as in the NW case, breaking sequential accountability; Atkinson & Heritage, 1984), the thread had no affective motivation to expand and closed after a single pair. This suggests that on LambeTurah, affect functions as the switch that determines whether a structural opening for expansion (a dispreferred response, a request for information) is actually taken up, while sequence organization alone only identifies where such openings occur. Practically, this indicates that the LambeTurah comment section operates less as a deliberative forum than as a stage for public identity performance, where the architecture of each network is a direct trace of users' affectively motivated choices to either close or extend a given exchange.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how digital conversations are structured when netizens respond to government officials' statements in the comment section of the LambeTurah Instagram account, and how affective dynamics shape that structure. Analysis of 1,282 comments across four representative issue clusters showed that these interactions were overwhelmingly organized around a single structural pattern, statement-response pairs, which accounted for 90.6% of all conversational turns and typically closed after one exchange rather than developing into extended dialogue (RQ1 and RQ2). Where this pattern was broken, expansion into branching, multi-turn networks occurred only when a comment provoked strong collective sentiment, whether adversarial, as in the Finance Minister case, or affiliative, as in the collaborative Roblox-parenting discourse, indicating that affect functions as the mechanism that determines whether a structural opening for expansion is taken up or left unexpanded (RQ3).

Theoretically, these findings suggest that Conversation Analysis and Affective Publics theory address complementary blind spots in the study of digital political talk: CA identifies where in a sequence expansion becomes structurally possible, while Affective Publics explains why users choose to take up that possibility, and neither framework alone accounts for the pattern observed here. Practically, the findings suggest that government communication practitioners should not read high comment volume as evidence of engaged public deliberation; the LambeTurah data indicate that most political comment threads function as sites of brief, affectively driven expression rather than sustained exchange, and that sustained exchange is more likely to emerge around practical, informational stakes than around adversarial political controversy.

This study is limited in several respects. The data were drawn from a single aggregator account over a single month, which constrains generalization to other platforms, account types, or time periods with different political dynamics. The four case networks discussed in depth were purposively selected to represent the observed range of structural outcomes, which supports

analytic depth but means the qualitative interpretations should not be read as representative of all eight issue clusters in the corpus. Future research could extend this analysis through cross-platform comparison (e.g., X/Twitter or TikTok comment sections), longitudinal tracking of how affective intensity around a single issue evolves over time, and quantitative testing of the relationship between affect markers and sequence expansion across a larger, multi-account corpus.expected.

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