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Digital Discord on Facebook: Identity, Conflict, and Discursive Strategies in Jordanian-Palestinian Interactions

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Abstract This study investigates the negotiation of Jordanian–Palestinian identities on Facebook and how platform architecture exacerbates online tensions. Using Critical Discourse Analysis and sociolinguistic theory, 800 user comments collected between January and July 2025 were examined. The findings reveal the use of binary framing, historical intertextuality, metaphoric legitimation, and register shifts to assert and challenge the notion of collective belonging. Additionally, pseudonymity, algorithmic engagement loops, and interactive feedback collectively contribute to the heightened digital discord. Notably, half of the comments originated from locked profiles with ambiguous or symbolic names, highlighting the role of anonymity in amplifying the polarization. This study offers a conceptual framework that links micro-linguistic practices with macro-technological structures and introduces digital discord as an analytical lens. Recommendations include implementing stronger identity-verification mechanisms, decoupling visibility from raw engagement metrics, and integrating curricular modules to uncover covert "hidden hand" campaigns.

Keywords: *Digital discord, Jordanian–Palestinian discourse, Hidden-hand campaigns, Critical discourse analysis, Pseudonymity*

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1. Introduction

The Jordanian-Palestinian relationship is uniquely complicated, marked by deep historical connections, shared struggles, and nearby geography, yet also troubled by unresolved identity issues and competing national stories (Khalidi, 2006; Ryan, 2018). This special dynamic is influenced by Jordan hosting the world's largest Palestinian refugee population (Chatty, 2010) and its official role as the keeper of Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites, which was confirmed in the 1994 peace treaty with Israel ("Treaty of Peace", 1994). These connected historical, demographic, and political factors create a situation in which cooperation and conflict constantly coexist, making it different from typical international relations (Frost, 2024).

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This complexity has increasingly appeared on digital platforms, especially Facebook, which is widely used by both communities (Arab Barometer, 2024). Online spaces now host heated debates that reflect and often intensify offline tensions, involving both political figures and inauthentic profiles (Banikalef et al., 2023). A notable rise in such interactions occurred in early 2025, driven by renewed political discussions about an alternative homeland for Palestinians and the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza (Al-Jnaidi, 2025). This environment encourages accusatory posts and emotionally charged comments, allowing users to redefine identity, belonging, and perceived betrayal through specific linguistic choices and create new narratives that diverge from established perspectives (BaniKalef & Al-Khawaldeh, 2025).

This study examines Arabic Facebook discourse from January to July 2025 to understand its role in sustaining or escalating Jordanian-Palestinian tensions. Previous research has focused on identity politics in Jordan or misinformation in the region. Few studies have analyzed everyday user-generated discourse that negotiates contested Jordanian-Palestinian identities online. Most studies highlight elite narratives, state strategies, or broad patterns of polarization. Few studies have addressed how ordinary Facebook interactions, shaped by anonymity, algorithmic visibility, and linguistic variation, construct conflict. This study fills this gap by centering grassroots voices and the sociotechnical conditions that drive digital discord. It employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reveal how power dynamics, ideologies, and past conflicts are embedded in language and narratives (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 2006), alongside the sociolinguistic theory to explore how linguistic variation (e.g., code-switching, dialect use) facilitates identity alignment and expression (Blommaert, 2010). Crucially, it addresses the challenge of authenticating communications, investigating the impact of fake accounts and bots on discourse (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018), and conceptualizes Facebook as a social field shaped by algorithms, anonymity, and digital geopolitics (Gillespie, 2014). Focusing on how users negotiate identity, assign blame, and build solidarity or opposition online, this study explores the revival and reshaping of historical conflicts in digital spaces. It specifically asks the following: (1) How do discursive and linguistic strategies construct or challenge collective identities, influencing tensions? (2) What role do platform features (anonymity, algorithmic visibility, interactivity) play in expressing and escalating these tensions? This analysis of Arabic discourse, mindful of its dialectal diversity (Mashaqba et al., 2023), contributes to our understanding of digital polarization, identity performance, and conflict communication within a shared linguistic framework.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Language, Identity, and Humor in Jordanian Discourse

Research shows that Jordanian political and cultural expression often merges language, identity, and power. Humor plays a central role in working around social restrictions in this setting. Al Kayed (2019) found that Jordanian jokes break conversational norms described in Grice's Maxims. They rely on shared cultural knowledge to carry implied meanings and address sensitive subjects. This builds on the work of Banikalef et al. (2014), who saw humor as a "safe valve" for dissent, allowing discussion of political, religious, and sexual taboos. In this context, humor becomes a form of critique and a way to assert identity in public life.

Barahmeh (2023) linked ethnic humor in Jordan to political expressions. He observed that humor on social media now serves as a major channel for dissent, replacing graffiti and political cartoons. Al-Momani et al. (2016) noted that satire remains tied to cultural power and contested identities. Using Apte's (1985) model of ethnic humor as a tool for stereotyping helps explain how online jokes, especially on Facebook, reinforce the ethnic divides between Transjordanians and Palestinians.

These divisions are central to Jordanian identity politics. Ryan (2018) examined state campaigns such as "We Are All Jordan" and responses to the Arab Spring. He found that unity was promoted in ways that obscured deeper political and social rifts, especially those involving Palestinian citizens. Brand (1995) described the paradox of shared citizenship alongside conflicting national stories, a tension shaped by state policies. Gabbay (2014) studied the exclusion of Palestinians after Jordan's 1988 withdrawal from the West Bank, including the removal of national ID cards. He argued that these

measures create formal hierarchies of belonging, breach international norms, and intensify ethnic stratification, both offline and online.

Other scholars have provided a broader context. Reiter (2004) discussed the gap between Palestinian economic influence and political exclusion. Layne (1994) stressed the role of tribal ties in managing ethnic diversity. Ababsa and Daher (2011) placed Jordanian identity within the larger pressures of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Together, these studies show the complexity of identity, resistance, and political speech in Jordan in both traditional and early digital settings. However, little research has examined how current online platforms, such as Facebook, influence and intensify daily tensions between Jordanians and Palestinians. This study addresses this gap using critical discourse analysis and digital ethnography.

2.2. Digital Platforms, Political Expression, and Identity in Jordan

Digital platforms now act as major spaces for political speech, identity claims, and ideological boundaries across the Arab world, including Jordan. They shape public opinion, polarize debate, and distort perception. Hamdi (2024) analyzed Arabic Twitter through Van Dijk's ideological square and found that misinformation fuels ideological conflict. People often share false news that fits their beliefs, using its language structure to affirm group identity rather than to verify accuracy. This shows deliberate and belief-driven sharing behavior.

In Jordan, Alodat et al. (2023) found that social media boosts political participation among youth, with Facebook being more influential than Twitter for political information. Gender shaped how this influence worked. Al-Hussein (2020) studied social media use by political elites through Habermas' public sphere theory. He found that most interactions occurred outside formal channels, with ideological struggles fueling the spread of fake news. Al-Saleem (2011) showed that Jordanian students switch between English and Romanized Arabic online to fit context, revealing how they manage identity in digital spaces.

Research from other regions points to the shared mechanisms that heighten this division. Igwebuike and Chimuanya (2021) studied fake news in Nigerian elections and found that emotional language, vague claims, and divisive metaphors made falsehoods more persuasive. These traits appear in Jordanian nationalist and solidarity debates in the media as well. Potthast et al. (2018) showed that stylometric analysis can separate hyperpartisan news from satire but noted that extreme partisan styles share traits absent in mainstream media. Zannettou et al. (2018) found that false information exploits cognitive biases such as coherence and conformity. Cota et al. (2019) measured how ideological sameness in online networks deepens misinformation and strengthens echo chambers. Harbi (2024) examined how political speech online manipulates emotions like fear and hope, builds or erodes trust, and shapes identity ties during unrest.

While these studies explain elite narratives, platform features, and broad regional patterns, they say less about ordinary users. This study focuses on everyday Facebook posts, comments, memes, and hashtags in Jordanian–Palestinian exchanges. It asks how these grassroots interactions build solidarity and deepen the divisions. It also examines how historical tensions and identity disputes play out in real time.

Existing scholarship offers a strong base for understanding online identity and power in Jordan and the region. Humor serves as a form of dissent. State policies embed such identity hierarchies. Misinformation spreads through belief-driven emotional content. The missing piece is how ordinary Facebook users create, contest, and reshape their group identities in daily conversations. This study builds on past research but shifts the focus to micro-level exchanges within this specific, historically charged relationship. The next section outlines the methods used to study these interactions.

3. Methodology

This study investigates how Facebook discussions shape national and collective identities within the complex Jordanian-Palestinian relationship. It specifically examines the discourse surrounding highly charged political issues: the alternative homeland concept for Palestinians, Jordan's custodianship of Jerusalem's Islamic sites, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and the role of the Muslim Brotherhood. This research explores two core aspects: (1) the linguistic and discursive strategies users employ to construct

or challenge identity positions and (2) how platform features such as anonymity, algorithmic visibility, and interactivity mediate the circulation and reception of politically sensitive content. An interdisciplinary framework combining CDA and sociolinguistics was employed to capture both macro-level ideological formations and micro-level linguistic practices within these online interactions.

3.1. Design

This study examined how Arabic Facebook users navigate Jordanian–Palestinian identities and how platform features shape these political tensions. It uses an integrated CDA (Fairclough, 2013; Reisigl & Wodak, 2018) and sociolinguistic framework (Blommaert, 2010; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The dataset contains 800 Arabic comments collected between January and July 2025.

One key dynamic is the identity work through language. Users use legitimation and delegitimation to grant or strip credibility. Some comments call Jordan a "guardian of the Zionist entity." Other posts invoke the Ottoman administrative units. These historical references challenge modern border claims to this area. Dichotomous frames such as "خائن" (traitor) versus "الأردني الشهم" (honorable Jordanian) create rigid social categories. Metaphors, binary labels, and register shifts mark ideological stances and police group membership.

The second dynamic is the platform-driven amplification of discord. Half of the comments (400 of 800) came from profiles with ambiguous names, such as symbols, non-standard scripts, or ideological adjectives. Locked or pseudonymous accounts hide user demographics and allow inflammatory speech without incurring social costs. Facebook's engagement-based sorting pushes provocative posts to wider audiences. This reach turns isolated provocations into broader digital conflicts. Anonymity and algorithmic amplification combine to increase polarization in online political exchanges.

3.2. Corpus

This study used a corpus of 800 Arabic Facebook comments posted from January to July 2025. Comments were drawn from public discussions on four political themes: the alternative homeland debate, Jordan's custodianship of Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and the contested role of the Muslim Brotherhood. These issues act as flashpoints where national belonging, loyalty, and political legitimacy are negotiated and challenged.

The corpus was built in two phases to ensure diversity and balance of the data. Phase one, from January to March 2025, targeted highly active threads on sovereignty and territorial identity. This produced 210 comments. Phase two, from April to July 2025, expanded the sample to 590 comments. The sources included Al Jazeera Jordan, AlMamlakaTV, SarahaNews, JorNewscom, AmmanTime, and International Policy Magazine. This expansion broadened the voices to cover both mainstream and marginal perspectives.

This study focused on textual features rather than demographic identity. The researcher did not verify nationalities or authenticate personal details. The analysis focused on words, arguments, and interactional patterns across threads. This approach kept the focus on language as a site of negotiation and reduced interpretive bias. Treating comments as a corpus revealed recurring rhetorical moves, intertextual references, and discursive patterns. The material reflects an antagonistic online arena where Jordanians and Palestinians contest and defend their collective identities. The corpus serves as a linguistic resource and social document of digital discord.

3.3. Procedure

The analysis employed an integrated CDA and the sociolinguistic framework to understand the construction and contestation of identities amid tensions.

3.3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)

Drawing on Fairclough and DHA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2018), the analysis systematically reveals how language reflects and reproduces power asymmetries, social hierarchies, and ideological polarization. The key strategies identified include:

- Legitimation/Delegitimation: Users actively constructed legitimacy for some actors while stripping it from others. Examples include labeling Jordan "الأردن أكبر حارس للكيان" (Jordan is the biggest guardian of the Zionist entity) to imply complicity, or using religious invocations like "اللهم يا ناصر المظلومين… الملك الذي قدم زوجته لمكرون" (O God, supporter of the oppressed… this king who offered his wife to Macron) to morally delegitimize leadership. Conversely, terms like "الأردنيين الأحرار" (the free Jordanians) assigned legitimacy to an idealized identity.

- Intertextuality & Historical Revisionism: Users frequently invoked history to frame the current tensions. Comments like "ما في إشي اسمه الأردن، هي فلسطين من ضمن بلاد الشام" (There's no such thing as Jordan; it's part of Greater Syria) used Ottoman geography to challenge Jordan's modern legitimacy. References to administrative units, such as "متصرفية حوران" (Mutasarrifate of Hauran), contested contemporary territorial claims.

- Discursive Dichotomies: Identity was often expressed through stark oppositions. Terms such as "خائن" (traitor), "الهاشمي العميل" (the Hashemite agent), and "اللاجئ المتآمر" (the conspiring refugee) created rigid binaries of hero/villain and native/outsider, loyalist/collaborator, casting groups as either existential threats or saviors.

3.3.2. Sociolinguistic Analysis

Complementing CDA, sociolinguistics (Blommaert, 2010; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013) has examined finer-grained linguistic practices signaling identity, stance, and belonging:

- Indexicality: Language choices directly signal group affiliation. The derogatory "ملك البندورة" (Tomato King) indexed opposition to the Jordanian monarchy, while terms like "النشامى" (brave Jordanians) or "أحرار فلسطين" (free Palestinians) indexed pride or resistance.

- Code-switching and Diglossia: Users fluidly shifted between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and dialects based on context and emotion. Vernacular phrases like "زم شو دينكوا انتو؟" (Hey, what religion do you guys follow?) conveyed scorn, while formal MSA phrases like "بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم" (In the name of God…) added religious gravity or authority.

- Stance-taking: Linguistic devices that position users relative to events or figures. Phrases like "أكيد لا يعلمون" (Surely, they don't know) claimed epistemic authority, while "حسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل" (God is sufficient for us…) invoked divine judgment to express indignation. Modal verbs and imperatives (e.g., "كان يجب أن…" - It should have been…; "ما رح نسمح" - We will not allow…) reinforced positions.

- Positioning & Boundary Work: Users explicitly positioned themselves ("نحن الأردنيين الشرفاء" - We, the honorable Jordanians) while demarcating symbolic boundaries against others ("يا فلسطينية خونة" - You traitorous Palestinians). Terms such as "اللاجئين" (refugees) versus "أبناء البلد" (sons of the country) or "أردني أصيل" (pure Jordanian) linguistically reinforce social and ethno-national divisions.

- Affective Expressions: Emotionally charged language was pervasive in the comments. Metaphors and hyperbole like "دقت ساعة الصفر لتنظيف البلد من خفافيش الظلام" (The zero hour has come to cleanse the country of bats of darkness) incited action. Expressions of grief or frustration ("ما قدمت شيء لغزة، ولا حركت ساكن"–[Jordan] did nothing for Gaza, not even lifted a finger) were amplified by emojis, prayers, and exclamations.

This study utilizes a comprehensive interdisciplinary framework, combining CDA and sociolinguistics, to analyze the discursive practices that intensify Jordanian-Palestinian tensions on Facebook. The methodology thoroughly investigates how users employ language and platform features to delineate boundaries, assert claims, and challenge legitimacy in a highly charged digital setting. It not only uncovers the mechanics of this digital discord but also places them within a broader sociopolitical and technological context. To enhance analytical credibility, two expert linguists independently analyzed and categorized a subset of the data using the established framework. The following section details the

findings and examines their implications for identity construction, power dynamics, and digital mediation of political conflict in the region.

4. Results

This section analyzes the discursive strategies and linguistic patterns in Facebook comments on Jordanian–Palestinian relations. It traces how digital discord emerges in user-generated posts and replies. The analysis addresses the study's two research questions and uses CDA and sociolinguistics. These methods work together to reveal how identity, ideology, and platform features shape online political discussions.

This section is organized thematically. First, a CDA-focused analysis examines how users legitimize or delegitimize political positions and identities in comments. It examines intertextual references and practices of historical framing as rhetorical strategies. The analysis documents discursive polarization across the dataset. Each theme pairs selected comments from the corpus with the relevant literature and critical interpretation. Interpretations emphasize power, ideology, and identity in online interactions. Following this, a sociolinguistic analysis examines how language choices and platform affordances mediate these tensions. It focuses on code switching, dialect choice, register shifts, and pragmatic devices. The goal was to link linguistic practices to broader patterns of identity and political contention.

4.1. CDA: Reconstructing Identities in a Digital Battleground

This section uses CDA to examine how Facebook users negotiate, contest, and perform Jordanian and Palestinian identities online. The analysis identified the following rhetorical strategies: legitimation, delegitimation, historical intertextuality, and binary framing. It also highlights the nomination, predication, argumentation, and perspectivization. Each strategy acts as a rhetorical tool for claiming authority, assigning blame, or denying belonging. The following sections examine these strategies in detail and link them to the concepts of power and identity. This CDA-centered inquiry shows how online discourse stages symbolic conflicts over belonging and legitimacy.

4.1.1. Legitimation and Delegitimation: Narratives of Authority, Resistance, and Betrayal

One of the most pervasive strategies in the dataset is delegitimation, a linguistic and ideological move that strips actors or institutions of their authority, authenticity, or moral standing. These utterances are often emotionally charged and tap into shared grievances and collective memories.

"الأردن أكبر حارس للكيان الصهيوني"

("Jordan is the biggest guardian of the Zionist entity")

This comment reframes the Jordanian state not as a defender of Arab or Palestinian interests, but as an accomplice to their perceived oppressor. The use of "guardian" evokes betrayal, repositioning Jordan within a narrative of complicity. The implication is clear: Affiliation with Israeli interests undermines Jordan's Arab and Islamic legitimacy (Tarawneh, 2025)

Another comment intensifies this narrative:

"الملك لا يمثلني… باع غزة والضفة مقابل سلام كاذب"

("The king does not represent me… he sold Gaza and the West Bank for a false peace")

Political compromise is re-coded as commodification. The verb "باع" (sold) metaphorically reduces national strategy to treason, reinforcing a recurring trope in Arab political discourse: that state leaders have abandoned the Palestinian cause in exchange for illusory stability (Regier et al., 2009)

In contrast, legitimation is reserved for those who are seen as ideologically unyielding:

"الأردني الحر لا يقبل بالذل ولا بالتطبيع"

("The free Jordanian does not accept humiliation or normalization")

Such utterances redefine the national identity through resistance. Being Jordanian is no longer a matter of legal citizenship but of moral stance. Those who normalize relations with Israel are excluded from the imagined moral community. This reflects van Leeuwen's (2008) typology of legitimation, particularly through moral evaluations and authorizations.

Notably, delegitimation is often turned against other users as well, especially Palestinians, who are labeled as agitators or opportunists. These intra-Arab discursive battles reflect Van Dijk's (1998) concept of ideological square thinking, where in-groups are valorized and out-groups vilified to reinforce ideological boundaries.

4.1.2. Intertextuality and Historical Anchoring: Mobilizing the Past to Define the Present

Facebook users frequently invoke historical references not as background but as argumentative tools to support their claims. History becomes a reservoir of legitimacy, a site of memory weaponized for contemporary ideological combat (Tikhonova & Artamonov, 2023)

"ما في شي اسمه الأردن، هاي كلها فلسطين وبلاد الشام قبل الاستعمار"

("There is no such thing as Jordan. This is all Palestine and Greater Syria before colonialism")

This utterance collapses modern national boundaries into a pre-colonial imaginary, positioning Jordanian sovereignty as a colonial fiction. As Fairclough (2003) explains, this is a case of interdiscursivity, where prior discourses are reactivated to authorize current claims.

Likewise:

"احنا أبناء النكبة، ما بننسى مين خان القضية"

("We are the children of the Nakba—we do not forget who betrayed the cause")

The Nakba is not merely a historical reference; it is a living identity that shapes the present. The speaker situates themselves within the moral lineage of victims and resistors, casting others who "forget" as morally suspect. This resonates with Reisigl and Wodak's (2018) concept of the historical argumentation theory.

Similarly:

"باعوا القدس زي ما باعوا اللاجئين"

("They sold Jerusalem just like they sold the refugees")

This language invokes collective trauma as a framework for interpreting present-day actions, suggesting a continuity of betrayal. Such temporal layering is a hallmark of Arab digital activism, in which history is used to challenge dominant narratives and to reclaim discursive agency (Batonai, 2024).

4.1.3. Dichotomous Framing: Constructing the "Self" and the "Other"

Polarization is central to the dataset. Users repeatedly construct binary oppositions—us versus them, free versus subjugated, loyal versus treasonous–through memes. These dichotomies serve to morally simplify political complexities and demarcate ideological boundaries.

"إحنا الأردنيين الأحرار، مش زي اللاجئين اللي بيثيروا الفتن"

("We are the free Jordanians—not like the refugees who incite sedition")

This comment fuses national identity with moral virtue, contrasting "free Jordanians" with refugees, who are portrayed as instigators. The word "فتن" (sedition) carries heavy connotations of moral and national decay, further stigmatizing dissenting views.

From the other side:

"أنتم من تخونون القدس ونحن من نموت لأجلها"

("You are the ones betraying Jerusalem; we are the ones dying for it")

Here, the Palestinians inverted this accusation. Jordanians are recast as traitors, while Palestinians position themselves as the moral center of the struggle against Israel. This kind of ideological polarization, described by Wodak and Boukala (2015), reduces discourse to absolute ethical statements.

Such binaries also extend to class and ideology.

"أولاد القصور" vs. "أبناء المخيم"

("Children of the palaces" vs. "Children of the camps")

"السحيجة" vs. "الأحرار"

("Regime sycophants" vs. "The free")

These labels index deeper social tensions, showing how discourse constructs both vertical (state vs. people) and horizontal (elite vs. grassroots) antagonism (Ledin & Machin, 2019)

4.1.5. Naming, Framing, and Arguing: Discursive Strategies in Action

Beneath the surface of these ideological struggles lie four interwoven strategies: nomination, predication, argumentation, and perspectivization (Reisigl & Wodak, 2018).

- Through nomination, users label actors in ways that signal their moral status or ideological alignment.

"السحيجة"، "المطبلين"، "العبيد للنظام"

(“Bootlickers,” “drummers,” “slaves to the regime”)

These labels go beyond mere insults; they characterize political actors as both complicit and morally bankrupt. On the other hand:

"أحرار الأردن"، "رجال الأمة"، "أبناء الثورة"

(“Free Jordanians,” “men of the nation,” “children of the revolution”)

These titles confer honor and authenticity, reinforcing symbolic boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

- Prediction assigns characteristics to these actors. For example:

"الحكومة باعت القدس وباعتنا معاها"

(“The government sold Jerusalem—and sold us with it”)

This suggests betrayal at both the symbolic and personal levels. Similarly:

"أنتم اللاجئون سبب كل الفتن والانقسام"

(“You refugees are the source of all sedition and division”)

Predication in these examples aligns with Van Dijk’s (1998) observation that negative attributes are often assigned to perceived out-groups to justify their exclusion.

- Argumentation supplies the logic underpinning these claims, often through the use of topoi—commonplace reasoning structures (Wodak & Meyer, 2002)

"إذا سكتنا، بكرا بنشوف الاحتلال على أبوابنا"

(“If we stay silent, tomorrow we’ll see the occupation at our doors”)

Such utterances evoke a sense of urgency, linking silence to complicity and action to moral obligation.

- Finally, perspectivization reveals the speaker’s stance, emotional, ideological, or experiential:

"أنا فلسطيني، بس مش مع اللي بعملوه بعض الشباب عالفيس"

("I'm Palestinian, but I don't support what some youths are doing on Facebook")

This internal critique introduces nuance and distance from such generalizations.

Emotions also play a key role.

"والله دموعي نزلت لما شفت أطفال غزة تحت الأنقاض"

("I swear I cried when I saw Gaza's children under the rubble")

This act of affective witnessing (Chouliaraki, 2006) constructs a shared emotional and ethical community. In other cases, irony is weaponized:

"احنا بنطبع، وبنشجب، وبنستنكر، وبنسكر التعليقات"!

("We normalize, we condemn, we denounce, and we disable the comments!")

In this example, sarcasm undermines the performative aspects of official discourse and exposes a sense of disillusionment.

In summary, Facebook does not simply operate as a digital platform for communication but as a dynamic arena of discursive conflict in which identity, power, and belonging are continuously negotiated. It is here that digital discord unfolds- not as a byproduct of online interaction but as a structurally embedded and discursively sustained phenomenon. Through strategies such as legitimation and delegitimation, historical referencing, and ideological polarization, users engage in rhetorical performances that do more than express opinions; they construct narratives, assert loyalties, and contest national imaginaries.

The findings reveal that language functions not only as a means of expression but also as a site of struggle. Users position themselves and others through linguistic choices that invoke memories, claim authenticity, and set boundaries. What emerges is a highly charged symbolic space in which the act of commenting becomes a form of political engagement, shaped by the platform's affordances and the sociohistorical tensions it mediates.

As Facebook users navigate this contentious landscape, their discourse reflects more than personal sentiment; it resonates with broader questions of betrayal, legitimacy, and collective identity. The digital discord observed here is neither fleeting nor peripheral; it is central to how identities are constructed and contested in the digital age. The next section further explores this topic by examining the sociolinguistic dimensions of these interactions, focusing on how code-switching, indexicality, and stylistic variation serve as tools for boundary-making and identity negotiation in Jordanian-Palestinian online discourse.

4.2. Sociolinguistic Analysis

This section examines how the language practices on Facebook function as tools for constructing and contesting collective identities in Jordanian–Palestinian digital discourse. The sociolinguistic theory (Blommaert, 2010; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013) underscores that every lexical choice, register shift, and expressive marker has social significance. On Facebook, pseudonymity, algorithmic amplification, and interactive feedback loops not only enable conversation but also determine which voices resonate and which narratives gain momentum. The following six interrelated dimensions- indexicality, code-switching and diglossia, stance-taking, positioning, linguistic boundary work, and affective expression–illustrate how linguistic choices reflect, reinforce, or resist collective identity formations.

4.2.1. Indexicality

Indexicality occurs when words or phrases indicate social meanings, roles, or identities beyond their literal definitions (Blommaert, 2010; Jaffe, 2016). Each word or phrase reveals a speaker's social position, group, or perspective (Banikalef, 2018).

"ملك البندورة"

“Tomato King”

Satirizes King Abdullah II, indexing widespread contempt for monarchical authority.

"الفلسطينيه احلى من الاردنيه مليون مره"

“Palestinian women are a million times more beautiful than Jordanian women.”

This statement indexes not only subjective preference but also a broader ideological claim of ethnocultural superiority.

“عميل”

“Agent”

The monarchy is labeled as a collaborator with foreign powers, invoking the notion of betrayal.

4.2.2. Code-Switching and Diglossia

Code-switching refers to switching between two or more languages or language styles within a single conversation. People do this for specific reasons, such as expressing themselves more clearly (Blom & Gumperz, 2020). Diglossia occurs when a language has two forms: one for formal situations and another for everyday speech (Qudah, 2017).

“Listen, abu lahja badawiyya انك الأردني الكوح احنا أردنية اكثر منك”

“Listen, you with the Bedouin accent—You’re the fake Jordanian. We’re more Jordanian than you.”

The use of English transliteration and hybrid phrasing highlights sarcastic boundary marking and ideological inversion.

Example 2:

"استقلال قال سبعكو وسبع اشكالكو"

“Independence? Damn your kind and all your types.”

In this context, Colloquial Jordanian Arabic is employed for its emotional impact, utilizing diglossic contrast to mock national celebrations. As noted by Androutsopoulos (2015), code-switching in online discourse often signifies social alignment or distancing. This is further supported by Banikalef et al. (2023), who observed that Arab youth use hybrid digital Arabic to construct political and cultural resistance.

4.2.3. Stance-Taking

Stance-taking involves expressing affective, epistemic, or evaluative attitudes toward a proposition, person, or group (Jaffe, 2016). Stance is inherently dialogic because it responds to the previous discourse and encourages further engagement.

Example 1:

"بدي استفرغ من انبطاحك"

“I want to vomit from your submissiveness.”

This visceral affective stance indexes moral revulsion against political passivity, casting the addressee as disloyal to the nation.

Example 2:

"ما بتعطو الا قله القيمه"

Translation: “All you give is worthlessness.”

Adopting a stance of moral condemnation serves to delegitimize the value system of the opposing group. Jaffe (2016) emphasizes that stance is a fundamental practice in identity work, particularly in polarizing contexts. In digital discourse, the interactive nature of platforms amplifies stances, contributing to what Marwick and Boyd (2014) describe as "networked affect."

4.2.4. Positioning

Positioning refers to how speakers locate themselves and others within discourse, assigning identities, roles, or moral alignments (Kayi-Aydar, 2021). Positioning is dynamic and shaped by the narrative sequences.

Example 1:

"انتي بداخلك عارفه الصح… وما حد بنسب حاله لفئه قاتله حالها تناسبه"

"Deep down, you know what's right… No one would want to marry into a group so desperate to marry us."

The speaker positions themselves as morally superior, and the other as socially inferior and desperate.

Example 2:

"معي جواز اردني"

"I hold a Jordanian passport."

The speaker repositions themselves to challenge the essentialist notion of national belonging. This aligns with Logue et al. (2025), who noted that online platforms facilitate real-time repositioning, allowing users to align or misalign their identities according to ongoing interactions. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in politically sensitive contexts, such as Jordan-Palestine.

4.2.5. Linguistic Boundary Work

Linguistic boundary work entails the use of language to construct, reinforce, or regulate symbolic group boundaries (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This often involves the processes of othering and stereotyping.

Example 1:

"كنتوا ساكنين بالمغارات بين الافاعي والعقارب والقمل"

"You (Jordanian) used to live in caves among snakes, scorpions, and lice."

This highly derogatory phrase constructs the other group as primitive and uncivilized, thereby excluding them from national legitimacy.

Example 2:

"ارادنة عندي ٤انا شخصيا مشغل"

"I personally employ four Jordanians."

The speaker employs the labor relationships to assert group superiority and economic dominance. Blommaert (2020) highlights how linguistic differences are iconized and fractally reproduced as ethnic or political boundaries. This phenomenon is particularly evident in digital discourse, where symbolic violence is performative.

4.2.6. Affective Expressions

Affective expressions are emotionally charged linguistic forms that extend beyond merely conveying feelings; they galvanize group loyalties, reinforce divisions, and position speakers within ideological conflicts (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). On Facebook, these expressions are used to amplify digital discord, often manifesting as curses, insults, or expressions of contempt.

Example 1

"سرقتم كل شيء منّا"

“You stole everything from us”

This brief accusation has significant historical weight. By employing the term “سرقتم” (you stole), the speaker portrays Jordanians not merely as competitors but as thieves of Palestinian land, identity, and dignity. This phrase eliminates the nuance of “كل شيء” (everything), rendering the grievance absolute. In this manner, emotion transforms into an accusation, and identity becomes a moral narrative. It conjures victimhood and historical injustice and calls for recognition.

Example 2

"ورا البقر"

“Behind cows”

This phrase targets Jordanians with brevity and sharpness, implying that they are primitive and backward, thus portraying them as uncultured and inferior. The speaker opts for mockery rather than argumentation. Its potency lies in its simplicity: a single image laden with social judgment delivers a complete insult to the identity of the subject. This form of mockery not only demonstrates pride in the speaker’s group but also heightens symbolic exclusion.

Example 3

"إن شاء الله يصير بالأردن زي غزة"

“May Jordan become like Gaza, God willing”

This statement turns a divine invocation into a curse. Gaza, a symbol of suffering, is invoked not for sympathy but as a malediction aimed at others’ suffering. The religious frame gives moral weight to hostility and presents vengeance as justified. This reframes political pain as divine justice and widens the emotional divide. These affective expressions do not occur randomly. They are deliberate, strategic, and socially charged in nature. They sharpen identity boundaries, turn history into personal insults, and drive online conflict. On Facebook, emotion increases visibility, so such expressions spread and signal belonging or betrayal. Affect describes and produces discord, one word at a time.

The analysis shows how users deploy sociolinguistic practices to shape and contest collective identities. Identity does not remain a mere claim. People express themselves through language. Indexical phrases, rhetorical positions, alignments, and symbolic labels place speakers within national and ideological divides. Phrases like “الأردن للأردنيين” signal a sociopolitical stance, mark group boundaries, and invoke histories of belonging and exclusion. This matches Jaffe’s (2016) point that linguistic forms are “loaded with indexical meanings.” In tense contexts, such as Jordanian–Palestinian interactions, small lexical choices act as clear signals of alignment or resistance.

These discursive moves gain force within Facebook’s architecture. Platform features shape what spreads and how the users respond. Pseudonymity reduces social risk, allowing people to post insults like “ملك البندورة” without direct reprisal. Emotionally charged lines such as “دم غزة برقبتكم” attract more engagement, which raises visibility. Algorithms reward high engagement and thus push provocative content to a larger number of users. Astroturfing accounts, bots, and pseudo-anonymous profiles amplify these misleading messages. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) show that oppositional identity work helps maintain group cohesion, a pattern that is visible in these exchanges.

The interaction between language and platform design shapes online political boundaries. Tagging, nested replies, emojis, and repeated slogans create visible patterns of group membership. These practices build affective communities that strengthen in-group solidarity and raise out-group antagonism. Online identity work becomes a public performance that reinforces real-world tensions.

5. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine how Arabic Facebook discourse reflects and shapes the negotiation of Jordanian–Palestinian identities in politically charged digital spaces. By analyzing 800 comments posted between January and July 2025, this study sought to uncover the rhetorical strategies users employed to legitimize or delegitimize political actors, construct collective belonging, and frame historical memory. It also aimed to evaluate how platform affordances, such as anonymity, algorithmic visibility, and interactivity, intensify conflict. These objectives were guided by a combined framework of CDA (Fairclough, 2013; Reisigl & Wodak, 2018) and sociolinguistic theory (Blommaert, 2010; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

The findings revealed that digital discourse is not simply a mirror of offline tensions but an active site where identities are contested and redefined. Previous research has confirmed that online interactions often amplify pre-existing social divisions by rewarding emotionally charged and polarizing content (Feldman & Nahmias, 2025; Marino et al., 2024). The prevalence of delegitimizing labels such as "traitor" or "agent" and the constant invocation of historical grievances echo Van Dijk's (1998) observation that ideological polarization is sustained through the binary framing of in-groups and out-groups. Similarly, the strategic use of code-switching and dialect variation reflects Blommaert's (2010) argument that linguistic choices index shifting positions of solidarity and exclusion during moments of conflict. These patterns confirm that online language serves as a symbolic battleground where national belonging is defended or denied.

Another significant justification for these findings lies in the interplay between discourse and digital architecture. Facebook's algorithmic emphasis on engagement has been shown to privilege emotionally resonant and conflict-oriented content (Gillespie, 2014; Hamdi, 2024). This was evident in the circulation of inflammatory comments that gained visibility, regardless of their factual grounding. Moreover, the widespread use of pseudonymous profiles aligns with Bradshaw and Howard's (2018) global study of organized social media manipulation, which highlights anonymity as a condition that enables individuals and groups to amplify polarizing narratives without being held accountable. These insights suggest that both linguistic practices and technological design reinforce the dynamics of digital discord in Jordanian–Palestinian interactions.

This study has two implications. First, it demonstrates that online discourse surrounding Jordanian–Palestinian relations is not only reflective of long-standing political grievances but also functions as a mechanism that shapes contemporary identity politics in Jordan. This reinforces Fairclough's (2003) view that discourse is a social practice with material consequences for social relations. Second, it highlights the necessity of platform regulation and digital literacy initiatives. Educators and policymakers must address not only misinformation but also the subtle ways in which language—through metaphor, intertextuality, and dichotomous framing—fuels hostility and entrenches identity boundaries (Wodak & Meyer, 2002; Harbi, 2024). For conflict resolution practitioners, these findings underscore the urgency of designing online interventions that encourage reflective dialogue rather than antagonistic exchanges.

Future studies should expand on this work by adopting mixed-methods approaches that integrate computational text analysis with digital ethnography. Such methods could provide a more systematic quantification of discursive patterns and allow cross-platform comparisons involving Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. Longitudinal research tracing the evolution of Jordanian–Palestinian online discourse over time would illuminate how historical events, political shifts, and technological changes affect identity performance. Finally, comparative studies with other conflict-prone contexts, such as Lebanon or Iraq, could situate Jordanian–Palestinian digital discourse within a broader regional framework of contested belonging and digital polarization.

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