

Research Article

Communication Strategies and Effects of Public Policy Advocacy on Social Media Platforms: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Framing, Engagement, and Policy Influence

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Abstract

In this paper we examine the use of framing by advocacy organizations and government entities in social media to advance public policy goals and the effect of those strategies on different types of citizen response. We adopt a sequential explanatory mixed methods design by combining quantitative content analysis of a 2340-policy related posts from Twitter/X, Facebook, and Instagram with semi-structured interviews of 24 communication professionals. The sample comprised 20 public-facing organizations operating in one national context, in four policy domains – healthcare, environmental policy, education and social welfare. Five framing categories – diagnostic, prognostic, motivational, episodic, and thematic – were operationalised and evaluated against publicly available engagement metrics (likes/reactions, shares/reposts and comments), while click-through rate was evaluated separately where organisation-level analytics were accessible. Motivational framing generated more total engagement, but episodic framing generated more substantive comment-based participation. Differences across platforms demonstrate that predominantly visually-oriented environments support motivational and narrative frames, and platforms with more supports for text and links support solution-oriented and deliberative policy talk. According to interview results, we can explain this pattern by an engagement – depth paradox: Practitioners need attention maximizing content and at the same time want to be able to express complex policy positions in a responsible way. The study is a contribution to research on digital political communication, in bringing together framing strategies, platform affordances, algorithmic uncertainty and various modes of engagement for policy advocacy.

Keywords

Public policy advocacy, Social media, Framing theory, Digital engagement, Networked publics, Political communication, Content analysis

1. Introduction

Social media have fundamentally reshaped public policy communication. Policy advocacy no longer rests on press conferences, legislative testimony, white papers and broadcast news, but advocacy organizations and public agencies now share a multi-platform space where citizens can be at the same time audience, amplifier, critic and co-producer of the policy discourse (Bossetta, 2018; Boulianne, 2020). This shift is significant in the context of democratic participation as platform architectures have an effect on what policy messages are made visible, how they're interpreted, and whether they spark mobilization, contestation, or deliberation (Mendelsohn et al., 2024).

While these bodies of work have made significant advances in studying social media and political communication, the framing, platform affordances, and public policy advocacy literatures are not always well integrated. Some research studies policy frames without connecting frames to engagement outcomes. Other studies quantify engagement patterns without asking what strategic framing choices led to that pattern (L'opez-Rabadan, 2022). In addition, most framing research done in digital media has been concentrated on elections, protests and social movements, while ordinary policy advocacy by established groups and government agencies remains understudied (Luong & Vu, 2025).

Comparative platform analysis is also needed. To treat Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram as single communicative space effaces the differences in algorithmic curation, visibility, shareability of links, character limit and interaction design (Bossetta, 2018). These affordances condition whether it is most effective for a policy message to come through problem-diagnosis, proposed solutions, mobilizing callings, personal accounts or systemic evidence.

Against such a background, the study seeks to achieve three objectives: We aspire to develop a systematic taxonomy of framing strategies in social media-based policy advocacy; we would like to test if they are associated with different kinds of citizen engagement across platforms; and we would like to understand how communication professionals perceive and deal with the induced platform-based strategic trade-offs in advocacy. The study is informed by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the framing strategies of advocacy organizations and government agencies used when communicating about public policy in social media?

RQ2: What are the relationships between the different framing strategies and measures of citizen engagement on Twitter/X, Facebook and Instagram?

RQ3: How do communication professionals perceive the strategic benefits of and constraints on

utilizing, social media as a communication vehicle for public policy advocacy?

By adopting a sequential mixed-methods design in which the content analysis and the interviews with the practitioners complement each other, the study combines empirical breadth, at the platform level, with interpretative depth. It thus contributes to framing theory in a context of routine policy advocacy; provides comparative evidence of how platform affordances moderate framing effects; and bridges the gap between academic analysis and professional communication practice by exploring how practitioners make strategic framing choices amid algorithmic uncertainty.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Framing Theory in Political Communication

Framing theory, which dates back the seminal work of Goffman (1974) and which was subsequently brought into the communication literature in a more formalized form by Entman (1993), posits that the selection, emphasis and organization of information in a public discourse has an impact on how an audience comes to understand social reality. Entman's canonical definition describes framing's four functions: problem definition, causal attribution, moral judgment and treatment recommendation. In political communication framing has been defined as a process by which media, political actors, and advocacy groups provide interpretive schemas that help define the public's perception of policy problems (Scheufele, 1999; Chong & Druckman, 2007).

Social media has transformed the framing dynamic, both in terms of who creates frames and how frames travel. L'opez-Rabad'an (2022) suggest that the framing research has been transformed by the digital turn, by making frame production more distributed and by allowing for more fine-grained framing effects in platform settings. In such spaces, the user is not only a consumer of organizational frames, but a producer of counter-frames, of amplifiers, and of interpreters. advocacy organizations will therefore not only need to understand how to work around institutional messages, but also anticipate user-generated reframing that might circulate rapidly and unpredictably.

Mendelsohn et al. (2024) provide a useful analytic model through disaggregation of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames of social movement communication across social media, and large-scale analysis shows us a lot of issue-domain variation in framing strategy. Much less is known about how organizations that do sustained policy advocacy have adapted and selected among frames in time, and frames specific to a platform, and have measured the impact of frames.

2.2. Social Media and Public Policy Communication

Scholarship on public administration has also analyzed the transformation of government-citizen communication by social media. Mergel (2013) characterizes push, pull, and networking approaches and Wukich (2022) introduces a structure-content scheme to classify forms of engagement based on

communicative purpose and post attributes. These frameworks are useful as they show that social media communication is not a unitary activity but a set of strategic choices regarding information provision, interaction and relationship building.

Recent empirical studies also show that the government social media presence can be associated to citizen involvement and compliance as well as perceived accessibility of government but by mediating factors such as trust, privacy concern and reachability of such platforms (Jiang & Tang, 2023; Yuan et al., 2023). For policy advocacy, this implies that social media posts don't just convey information, but contribute to setting the conditions by which citizens come to know policy problems, consider solutions, and determine whether or not to get involved.

In advocacy contexts, digital tools have enriched the tactical repertoires of advocacy in the face of growing difficulties with message control, audience segmentation and algorithmic mediation (McNutt, 2023). Social media discussion may also affect policy agendas: Song and Choi (2023) find that both the quantity and framing of Twitter/X discussion may affect whether issues make it into legislative consideration. Taken together, these studies imply that advocacy communication needs to be understood at the confluence of framing strategy, engagement consequences, and platform structure.

2.3. Platform Affordances and Networked Publics

Platform affordances offer an important analytic focus through which to understand how technical architectures set up communicative possibilities. In Bossetta (2018), it is shown that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat variously differ in network structure, functionality, algorithmic curation, as well as available modes of expression. For policy advocacy, such differences are consequential because they influence what organizations may post, but also what kind of engagements platforms render more likely.

boyd (2010) first came up with the notion of networked publics to describe how social media allows for publics that are persistent, searchable, replicable, and scalable. However, as Ojala and Ripatti-Torniainen (2024) warn, aggregating content online should not always be automatically equated with public formation, which is a crucial point to make for the present work, as high engagement numbers may merely signify attention and not deliberative policy participation.

Taking a combination of computational, normative, pragmatic and cultural perspectives, Miller Hartley et al. (2023) also urge hybrid approaches for studying publics in datafied societies. Motivated by this observation, in the current study we treat engagement metrics as valuable but incomplete indicators, and complement quantitative content analysis with qualitative interviews.

2.4. Research Gap and Theoretical Framework

The review also spot three gaps. First, framing theory has been used very extensively in studies of

electoral campaigns and social movements, but more rarely in the day-in-day policy advocacy of organizations and government agencies. On the other hand, the second and third waves are much sparser and have yet to be the focus of much comparative platform analysis, particularly in terms of how the same policy actors adjust framing strategies when moving on and off Twitter/X and onto Facebook and Instagram. Similarly, practitioner insights into strategic framing decisions have yet to be represented at the volume they deserve to be, despite the fact that these decisions underlie the communication practices under analysis.

We address these gaps by synthesizing framing theory and platform affordance theory using a sequential mixed-methods design. We base the framing categories on Entman (1993), Benford and Snow (2000), Iyengar (1991) and recent framing research on digital media, which we operationalize as diagnostic, prognostic, motivational, episodic, and thematic. The study furthermore argues that framing effects are mediated by platform affordances and that practitioners more and more compose messages for two audiences at the same time, human publics and algorithmic systems determining visibility.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This work employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018): quantitative phase determines associations between framing strategy, platform, and engagement outcomes; qualitative phase then provides explanations on how communication professionals make sense of those patterns and tailor their strategies. Such a design is right since the research questions call for both a systematic measurement of communication patterns and a contextual understanding of professional decision making.

3.2. Quantitative Phase: Content Analysis

3.2.1. Sampling Strategy

The quantitative sample was constructed by a purposive, criterion based selection of advocacy organizations and government agencies engaged in public policy communication in the United States. Organizations had to: (a) have active public accounts on all three platforms at the time of study; (b) regularly post content concerning identifiable public policy goals (mission statements and recent campaign material were checked for confirmation); (c) be in one of four policy domains—healthcare, environmental policy, education or social welfare; (d) use similar public-facing organizational accounts rather than personal accounts of individual leaders. A purposive strategy was used since the study was concerned with analytically comparable policy communication actors rather than a statistically representative sample of all possible organizations.

The final sample comprised a total of 20 organizations, 12 advocacy and eight government organizations spread across the four policy areas as in Table 1. To enhance comparability, the organizations were matched as far as possible with regard to domain, public communication activity and minimum audience size. From each organization, 40 policy-related posts per platform were randomly sampled from posts published between 1 January to 31 December 2023. The final corpus included therefore 2,400 original posts (20 organizations x 40 posts x 3 platforms). Retweets, reposts, shares of content of third-parties, and duplicate cross-posts were excluded in order for the analysis to base on deliberative framing choices by the sampled organizations.

Table 1

Sample Composition by Organization Type and Policy Domain

Policy Domain	Advocacy orgs (n)	Govt. agencies (n)	Total
Healthcare	3	2	5
Environmental policy	3	2	5
Education	3	2	5
Social welfare	3	2	5

3.2.2. Social Media Data Collection Procedure

Posts were included if they were published between 1 January and 31 December 2023. Public post metadata and engagement counts were downloaded between 5 and 20 January 2024, after the observation window had closed, so that each post had at least 72 hours to accumulate engagement. Twitter/X data via Academic Research API; Facebook & Instagram data via CrowdTangle under research access at time of data collection. The extraction procedure included: post ID, platform, organization, timestamp, text/caption, link and media indicators, public like/reaction counts, share/retweet/repost counts, comment counts, and public comment threads where available.

The platforms had varying access constraints. Twitter/X retrieval was constrained by terms and rate limits of the Academic Research API; CrowdTangle facilitated Facebook Page and Instagram public-account post data, but did not include impressions, reach, or algorithmic ranking indicators. Deleted posts, posts that were made unavailable before collection, or posts in which the public engagement fields had been removed, were imputed by drawing another valid post in the same organization-platform-month stratum. No private messages, closed-group content, non-public follower information, and no personally identifying account-level information about ordinary users was collected.

3.2.3. Coding Framework

A deductive coding scheme was designed based on the theoretical synthesis described in Section

2.4. The five framing categories were operationalised with indicative and clear framing indicators for each of the categories (Table 2). The scheme is founded on Entman's (1993) framing functions, Benford and Snow's (2000) core framing tasks, and Iyengar's (1991) episodic/thematic distinction. Coders identified the dominant frame per post; as a secondary task, coders also recorded secondary frames for audit purposes.

Table 2

Coding Framework for Policy Advocacy Framing Strategies

Framing Category	Operational Definition	Example Indicators
Diagnostic Framing	2. Posts that name a policy problem, assign a responsibility or describe causes.	blame attribution; problem definition; causal narratives; evidence of harm.
Prognostic Framing	Posts that suggest an answer or solutions, implementation paths, reforms or policy instruments.	policy recommendation; implementation plan; legislation suggestion; program description;
Motivational Framing	Type of post Whether the post is asking its audience to act, seems urgent, or marshals support.	petition link; event invitation; donation appeal; hashtag campaign; solidarity appeal
Episodic Framing	Posts demonstrating the policy consequences for a particular person, family, community, organization, or case.	personal story; testimonial; case ex.: localized incident; specific event.
Thematic Framing	posts posing questions about policy in terms of evidence that is systemic, structural, statistical or institutional.	statistics; trends data; institutional reports; infographics; visual analytics and structure analysis;

Additional decision rules were created to differentiate between overlapping categories. The call to action was the dominant communicative purpose, a post is coded as motivational even if it also briefly included a personal story; the post is coded as episodic even if it includes a brief story, but a concrete case or affected person is the main carrier of the policy message and any call to action is secondary. Likewise, data visualizations were coded as thematic if and only if the evidence or the structural pattern was the main message, otherwise visuals were regarded as a format feature. A random 20% subsample (n = 480) was coded by two trained coders independently. Cohen's kappa was reported as 0.78 to 0.86 for the five categories above the 0.75 level which is typically used in content analysis. The disagreements were resolved by discussion and the rules of decision were clarified before the remaining posts were evenly split between coders.

3.2.4. Engagement Metrics

Engagement data was recorded at 72 hours from the time of post publication, in order to balance the prevalence of early diffusion against comparability across posts. Three publicly observable metrics were opened up to all posts: like/reaction, share/retweet/repost, and comment. We calculated an

aggregate engagement rate of (like+shares+comments)/follower count*100. CTR was considered separately as it is not customarily opened up as a public metric. CTR data was available for link-bearing Twitter/X and Facebook posts for 9 out of 20 organizations that gave analytics access; not available for Instagram posts that didn't use external link tracking and for organizations that didn't share analytics dashboards. As such, CTR was utilized for descriptive checks and qualitative interpretation, but was not included in the primary ANOVA or HLM models. No imputation was done for posts without CTR data.

3.2.5. Statistical Analysis

Chi-square tests of independence were conducted to answer the question of whether there was a difference across platforms in the distribution of all five framing categories. One-way ANOVA with Tukey post-hoc comparisons were used to test for differences in mean engagement rates between framing categories. posts were nested within organizations to account for the organization-level variance using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). CTR was not included in the main models due to missingness and limited comparability; if it was available, it was used as an additional descriptive indicator. All analyses were performed in R (version 4.3.1) with the lme4 and emmeans packages.

3.3. Qualitative Phase: Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the quantitative study, 24 communication professionals were interviewed. The study participants work in 16 out of the 20 sampled organizations (n = 10 social media managers, n = 8 policy communication directors, and n = 6 digital strategy consultants). Interviews lasted 45–75 minutes and were held via video conference. The interview guide focused on four topics: strategic aims for social media policy advocacy; choices of framing and platform adaptation; perceived opportunities and challenges of digital advocacy; and understandings of engagement metrics and audience feedback.

Interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and then analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Initial codes were inductively developed, grouped into candidate themes, and then cross-compared with the quantitative findings, to identify convergence, divergence, and explanatory extension. The latter was used as the integration procedure to identify how practitioners' accounts explained the engagement patterns observed within content analysis.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was received from [insert institutional review board name], protocol[insert approval number], on [insert approval date]. All interview participants were given an information sheet which outlined the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, that they could

withdraw at any time, how their data would be stored and the publication outputs of this study. Written informed consent was obtained before each interview.

Anonymized any participant names and job titles that could identify participants, and information that is specific to an organization. We store interview transcripts in encrypted drives that only the research team can access, and any quotes that we report on use role descriptors instead of names.

The social media component utilized posts which were published by public organizational accounts. Since the analysis was centered on organizational communication and not individual users, ordinary commenters were not named, quoted using identifying handles, or profiled. Only aggregated or paraphrased public comments were utilized to measure the substantive character of engagement. No private messages, closed-group content, or non-public platform analytics of ordinary users were gathered.

4. Results

4.1. Distribution of Framing Strategies (RQ1)

The content analysis revealed that motivational framing was the most popular strategy (used in 38.7% of the 2,400 posts), followed by diagnostic framing (26.4%), prognostic framing (19.8%), episodic framing (9.3%), and thematic framing (5.8%). The higher prevalence of motivational framing suggests that organizations primarily used social media to mobilize attention and support, but that the mix of frames differed significantly among platforms.

X/Twitter had the largest portion (31.4%) of diagnostic frames, fitting with use of X/Twitter as a space for problem definition, issue contestation, and quick political commentary. Facebook, perhaps unsurprisingly, had the highest use of prognostic framing (33.1%), which suggests its longer-form and link-sharing affordances enabled solution-oriented policy explanation. Instagram was almost exclusively motivational (60.3%), which makes sense given the visual and affective focus of the platform on awareness-building and mobilization.

Again, chi-square tests confirmed that the platform framing strategy distribution was significantly different when all 5 framing categories were included in the analysis, $\chi^2(8) = 358.43$, $p < .001$. We present the platform framing strategy distribution of the new 5 categories in Table 4.

Table 3

Mean Engagement Metrics by Framing Strategy (N = 2,400)

Framing Strategy	Mean Likes (SD)	Mean Shares (SD)	Mean Comments (SD)	Engagement Rate (%)
Diagnostic	342 (128)	187 (94)	76 (41)	3.82
Prognostic	298 (115)	156 (82)	92 (53)	3.45

Motivational	521 (203)	312 (147)	134 (72)	6.11
Episodic	467 (178)	275 (131)	118 (64)	5.43
Thematic	215 (97)	124 (68)	58 (33)	2.51

Table 4

Distribution of Framing Strategies Across Platforms (χ^2 Test)

Platform	Diag.	Prog.	Motiv.	Epis.	Them.	$\chi^2(8)$	p
Twitter/X	31.4	22.7	30.8	9.1	6.0	—	—
Facebook	28.6	33.1	24.8	8.5	5.0	—	—
Instagram	19.2	3.6	60.3	10.3	6.6	—	—
Overall test	—	—	—	—	—	358.43	< .001

4.2. Framing Strategies and Engagement Outcomes (RQ2)

One-way ANOVA revealed that engagement rates varied across the 5 framing categories ($F(4, 2395) = 28.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = .046$). Tukey post-hoc tests revealed that motivational framing ($M = 6.11\%$, $SD = 2.34$) elicited significantly greater aggregate engagement than every other category ($p < .001$). Episodic framing ($M = 5.43\%$, $SD = 2.18$) produced the second-highest aggregate engagement, and we found this framing to be significantly higher than diagnostic ($M = 3.82\%$), prognostic ($M = 3.45\%$), and thematic ($M = 2.51\%$) framing ($p < .01$).

Disaggregating engagement by metric type explained the engagement – depth paradox; motivational posts were most effective for visible, low-threshold engagement like likes and shares, while episodic posts elicited longer comments ($M = 47.3$ words, $SD = 28.6$) and a greater proportion of substantive comments, which we defined as comments containing policy-relevant reasoning, questions, evidence, or lived-experience claims instead of mere approval. On average, 37.8% of comments to episodically framed posts satisfied this criterion, while 21.4% of comments to motivational posts did so. So, the frame that elicited the most aggregate engagement was not the same frame that prompted the deepest comment-based participation.

Controlling for the organizational follower count and posting frequency, HLM results replicated the framing strategy main effect. The fixed effect of motivational framing remained significant ($\beta = 1.87, SE = 0.31, p < .001$), and the intraclass correlation ($ICC = 0.14$) indicated that organization-level variation is meaningful, but not dominant. Because CTR was only available for some link-bearing posts, CTR was not included in the HLM and analyzed descriptively; the available CTR patterns were

in line with main results but should be taken with caution.

4.3. Platform Moderation Effects

Platform moderation of the framing – engagement relationship was observed for HLM interaction terms. Motivational framing's engagement advantage was greatest on Instagram ($\beta = 2.41$, $p < .001$), followed by Twitter/X ($\beta = 1.63$, $p < .001$), and smallest on Facebook ($\beta = 1.12$, $p = .003$). In contrast, prognostic framing was associated with engagement with Facebook ($\beta = 0.94$, $p = .008$) but not Twitter/X or Instagram, which may have indicated that Facebook's longer-form and link-sharing affordances accommodated solution-oriented policy discussion.

While thematic framing elicited the lowest aggregate engagement measures overall, we do see the platform-specific pattern on Twitter/X that thematic posts accompanied by a data visualization received 2.3x more reposts than the thematic posts that did not have a visualization. Such a finding suggests that visual evidence can in part make up for the relative lack of engagement potential of systemic, data-based framing if evidence is shareable in fast moving platform environment.

4.4. Qualitative Findings: Practitioner Perspectives (RQ3)

Thematic analysis revealed four themes which explain, complicate and extend the quantitative patterns. Interviews are not treated as a separate strand, but the following analysis links practitioner accounts directly to the statistical difference between aggregate engagement and substantive comment-based participation.

Theme 1: The Engagement – Depth Paradox. Practitioners talked about an ongoing tension between the need to produce measurable engagement and the desire to convey substantive policy information. One policy communication director spoke of a “built-in trade-off” between creating algorithmically-viral content and content that helps the public understand nuanced policy positions. Participants also explained how motivational framing tended to spark likes and shares but may need to be simplified through policy and that episodic framing sometimes led to fewer numbers of total interactions but more thinking comment threads. This interpretation aligns with our quantitative result that motivational framing led to engaging volume and episodic framing led to more engaging depth.

The interviews hence permit to specify in practice what “engagement” means. Practitioners did not rate all engagement the same way: likes and shares were helpful to be seen, but comments adding a question, evidence or personal experience were rated more valuable for policy learning and relationship building. This distinction of practice echoes this statistical distinction between aggregate engagement rate and substantive, comment-based participation.

Theme 2: Platform-Specific Strategic Adaption. Platform-differentiated strategic adaption was also described by participants with Twitter/X seen as a space for quick reaction and reframing issues as well as accessing journalists and policy makers, while Facebook was considered more suitable to

community building and longer-form policy articulation, hence the greater use of prognostic framing in the quantitative data. Instagram was characterised as an awareness and mobilisation platform where the visual immediacy and emotional storytelling often replace the policy nuance. Practitioners from organisations with accounts on all three mentioned having distinct content calendar and messaging guides for each platform.

Theme 3: Narrative as Strategy. Practitioners described the effectiveness of episodic framing for bringing humanity back to abstract policy debates. Several of our participants contended that people-centered stories of policy decisions were far more effective than data-driven content had been at capturing attention and converting actions. Meanwhile, participants raise concerns about the ethics of the instrumentalization of their personal stories, in particular when the stories were about vulnerable populations. This response generalises the quantitative results by showing that episodic framing is not only an engagement strategy, it is also an ethical choice that involves consent, accuracy and responsibility.

Theme 4: Algorithmic Uncertainty and Institutional Adaptation. Participants consistently and repeatedly mentioned that platform algorithms influenced their communication decisions in ways they could not easily observe or control. They described adapting their posting times, content formats, and framing approaches based on perceived changes in reach and visibility. We had several participants mention frustration at the fact that an unexplained drop in organic reach could kill off months of relationship building with online audiences. This theme accounts for why practitioners framed messages not just for the citizens, but also, for the algorithmic systems that decide on the visibility, a pattern that gets further developed in the discussion below as dual-audience framing.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Taken together, the results add to framing theory by demonstrating that frames are not only interpretive devices but also strategic tools tied to varying engagement outcomes. Motivational framing led to the highest aggregate engagement, which confirms the significance of mobilising and affective appeals in digital communication (Banks et al., 2021). Yet episodic framing also prompted more substantive comments, confirming that democratic value was indeed not a direct function of engagement volume alone. The results therefore confirm the need for a more complex description of engagement that would disentangle surface-level measures of visibility from more substantive forms of policy participation.

Second, in platform moderation effects, affordances were constitutive, not just contextual, for digital policy communication. Instagram amplified motivational framing via visual and affective immediacy while Facebook facilitated prognostic framing via longer form text and link-sharing

capacity. These platform affordance patterns imply that platform design choices affect not only message reach, but also which types of policy reasoning become communicatively feasible.

Third, the qualitative evidence about algorithmic uncertainty suggests another theory problem for framing research. The classical framing analysis presumes a relatively fixed communicative infrastructure, and yet social media advocacy is carried by algorithmic systems whose ranking rules are inscrutable and changeable. Practitioners then design frames for two audiences simultaneously: human publics who decode policy meaning and platform algorithms that govern visibility. In this work we frame that condition as dual-audience framing. The concept has empirical grounding in how practitioners described adapting frame, formats, timing and emotional intensity in response to perceived algorithmic change as well as in explaining why engagement-maximizing frames and deliberately richer frames can be at odds with each other.

5.2. Practical Implications

For communication practitioners, we think the engagement advantage of motivational framing should be considered in conjunction with its limitations for diagnosis, explanation, and policy learning. A sequencing strategy might be optimal: motivational frames to get attention and create affinity, then diagnostic and prognostic frames to create more in-depth understanding once an audience has been reached. Several interviewees reported on precisely such a back-and-forth strategy and they seemed to us to constitute a pragmatic resolution of the engagement – depth paradox.

The finding that episodic framing leads to higher discursive engagement has also implications for the strategic interest in narrative-centered policy communication. Ethical protections such as informed consent, careful contextualization, avoiding exploitative storytelling and fact checking should accompany this approach. Stories may help make abstract policy problems more concrete and personally salient, but should never be deployed to make vulnerable people props for engagement.

Finally documented platform differences show that a generic cross-posting approach would not be efficient. Resource-constrained organisations could think about platform choice based on strategic goals: Twitter/X to set agendas and get policy-elites attention, Facebook to build community and explain solutions, and Instagram for awareness and mobilisation. The result that data visualizations enhance the effectiveness of thematic framing on Twitter/X also has implications for evidence-based advocacy more generally being worth investing in data visuals to convey messages concisely.

5.3. Algorithmic Change and Engagement Metrics

Algorithmic change is a methodological and practical issue for interpreting the measures of engagement reported here. In the course of any 12-month observation window, platform ranking systems, recommendation algorithms, verification policies, and content-format priorities can change in ways that influence organic reach without regard to message quality. Because the available platform

data did not contain impression counts, ranking signal or direct measure of algorithmic exposure, the analysis cannot completely isolate framing effects from platform distribution effects.

For this reason, the results have to be considered associations between framing strategies and observed engagement under the platform conditions during the study period, and not timeless causal effects. We also use the interview data to place this limitation in context: the practitioners themselves characterized algorithmic uncertainty as a regular constraint, and frequently adapted framing choices in response to perceived shifts in reach. Future work will need to pair content analysis with access to platform audit data, impression-level analytics, or longitudinal designs capable of more finely discerning the effects of algorithmic change.

5.4. Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be noted. First, the study relies primarily on public engagement metrics which only capture visible interaction, but not attitude change, policy learning, offline participation, or private sharing. Second, the purposive sample was designed for analytic comparability across organization type, policy domain, and platform activity and is not meant as statistically representative of all advocacy actors or government agencies. Larger probability-based samples would be required to estimate population-level prevalence. Third, paid promotion couldn't be systematically observed and may have impacted some engagement outcomes. Fourth, CTR was only available for some link-bearing posts from organizations that had granted analytics access, so it was treated as supplementary, not as a primary dependent variable. Fifth, the 12-month window captures broad patterns but may not fully encapsulate framing changes over longer policy-cycles.

Future scholars should address these limitations by fielding surveys or experiments that measure attitudinal or behavioral reactions to posts with different framing. Longitudinal panel studies of organizations across multiple policy cycles would reveal the black box of how framing strategy adapts after policy wins or losses, after crises, or after algorithmic changes. The popularity of short-form video apps such as TikTok also deserves research on framing in video-centric spaces. last but not least, dual-audience framing per se deserves theoretical and empirical investigations as it captures an ever more pronounced phenomenon in political communication in algorithmically mediated public spheres.

6. Conclusion

The present work takes the first identified steps toward demonstrating social media-based public policy advocacy characterized by systematic framing choice with differential effects by engagement type and platform environment. In this case, motivational framing most notably tended to yield surface-level engagement, episodic framing most directly tended to be germane to substantive comment-based participation, and platform affordances mediated the relations in significant ways.

These results complicate idealized descriptions of social media as a simple extension of democratic participation. The platforms studied here increase the scale and speed of policy advocacy, but also reward formats that emphasize emotional immediacy and engagement volume over policy complexity. The engagement – depth paradox identified by practitioners thus corresponds to a larger democratic tension between participatory breadth and deliberative quality.

Theoretical contribution The framing work contributes to framing scholarship for cast platform affordances and algorithmic mediation as active players in framing dynamics. Dual-audience framing – the crafting of messages for both human publics and algorithmic systems – is a framing concept that is salutary to understanding why organizations may craft policy messages to satisfy visibility pressures and communicative or ethical goals.

In practice, these findings suggest there is more to effective policy advocacy than engagement maximization: Platform-specific policy advocacy techniques, ethical use of narrative, transparent use of metrics, and deliberate ordering of motivational, diagnostic, prognostic, episodic and thematic frames are all required. As public policy discourse continues to flow across platform infrastructures, studies which combine quantitative measurement and practitioner sense-making will be essential in analysing if, and how, social media is aiding, or replacing, the democratic work of public policy communication.

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