

Negotiating Morocco's Hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup: A Critical Discourse Analysis of YouTube Comments

GHIZLAN ELALAOUI

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23101507>

Published Date: 02-October-2026

Abstract: In the age of digital communication, social media platforms have emerged as important spaces for public discourse, allowing users to respond to and contest mainstream media representations of major public events. Accordingly, this study examines how Moroccan social media users react to mainstream media representations of Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup, focusing on Medi1 TV YouTube videos and their users' comments. Drawing on thematic analysis and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, the study analyzes users' comments responding to selected videos about the event. Although many comments are supportive to the event, the scope of the study focuses on oppositional comments that challenge the mainstream media narrative. The analysis shows that oppositional comments bring issues of government priorities, public spending, and social conditions into the discourse surrounding Morocco's hosting of the World Cup. The study also highlights social media as a space for counter-discourse in which alternative perspectives and public concerns can challenge dominant media narratives surrounding major national projects.

Keywords: Morocco; 2030 FIFA World Cup; mainstream media; YouTube comments; Critical Discourse Analysis; thematic analysis; counter-discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the age of digital communication, the role of mainstream media in shaping public narratives about major events is increasingly being challenged. While mainstream media may often reflect dominant institutional and national perspectives, the widespread use of social media has created alternative spaces for public discourse that are participatory but also critical (KhosraviNik, 2018). This dynamic is particularly relevant in the case of Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup, a landmark event that has been widely celebrated at both national and international levels. Mainstream media representations frame this event in terms of national achievement, development, international recognition, and progress. Social media, however, provides users with opportunities to respond to, negotiate, and contest such representations by raising concerns about government priorities, public spending, and socioeconomic conditions.

This divergence raises important questions about how dominant narratives are contested by audiences in digital spaces. As such, this study examines social media users' reactions to mainstream media representations of Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup, focusing on comments posted in response to Medi1 TV YouTube videos as a representative source of mainstream media coverage. Through thematic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study identifies the main concerns expressed in users' comments and examines how oppositional voices challenge dominant representations of the event. In doing so, the study offers insight into how social media can provide a space for counter-discourse, enabling users to question dominant understandings of national development and draw attention to issues of social justice and public welfare.

Research Problem

Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup has attracted considerable media attention and is widely portrayed in mainstream and state-affiliated media through narratives of national achievement, development, international recognition,

and progress. However, such representations do not necessarily encompass the diverse perspectives and concerns expressed by the general public. Despite the growing role of social media as a space for public debate and audience engagement, limited research has examined how Moroccan audiences respond to mainstream media representations of major national events, particularly Morocco's World Cup hosting. Although studies such as Ait Soussane and Ibourk (2025) have addressed related aspects of the event, research focusing specifically on audience responses remains limited. This study therefore examines this gap by focusing on how oppositional comments question dominant narratives and foreground major concerns.

Research Objective

The study aims to highlight social media as a participatory space in which ordinary members of the public can articulate their concerns, question dominant narratives, and make their perspectives visible. To this end, it investigates YouTube comments posted in response to Medi 1 TV coverage of Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup, focusing on how these comments provide a space for lay voices to express concerns and engage with dominant media narratives.

Research Questions

- 1- Which themes are expressed in users' comments that challenge mainstream representations of Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup?
- 2- How do users' comments discursively challenge dominant mainstream media representations of the event?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the literature relevant to the present study, focusing on media representations, audience responses, and the role of social media as a space for public expression and the negotiation of dominant media narratives. It also outlines the theoretical perspectives that inform the analysis of users' comments on Medi 1 TV's YouTube coverage of Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

- Contextual Background

On October 4th, 2023, the International Federation of Association Football (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) FIFA officially announced that the 2030 FIFA World Cup would be hosted jointly by Morocco, Spain, and Portugal, marking a historic first for a World Cup to be shared across two continents: Africa and Europe. For Morocco, this selection represents not only a significant sporting achievement but also a culmination of decades-long efforts to bring the tournament to North Africa. After five previous unsuccessful bids (1994, 1998, 2006, 2010, and 2026), Morocco's persistence has finally borne fruit, placing the country on the global stage in a new and profound way.

With the hosting rights secured, Morocco has intensified its investments in major infrastructure projects to ensure the country is fully prepared for this global event. These include the construction and renovation of world-class stadiums, the expansion of transportation networks, and the improvement of hospitality and tourism facilities. Such efforts are intended to modernize key cities, enhance international visibility, and stimulate economic growth. The World Cup has therefore become a catalyst for large-scale development, pushing the country to accelerate projects that have been in planning for years.

However, the excitement surrounding the World Cup also coincides with Morocco's ongoing social challenges. Despite notable development initiatives, the country continues to struggle with issues in education and employment, widespread poverty, limited access to quality healthcare, and regional inequalities, particularly between urban centers and rural communities. According to Sahibi and Hamzaoui (2017), spatial disparities in Morocco are historically entrenched, with development concentrated in urban centers while rural areas remain marginalized. Other research has emphasized imbalances in education, infrastructure, and labor market access as key drivers of regional inequality (Bakour & Abahamid, 2019).

For many citizens, the massive financial commitments tied to hosting the tournament raise difficult questions about priorities and resource distribution. While the World Cup promises economic opportunities and global prestige, it also highlights the tension between investing in international visibility and addressing the persistent socio-economic problems that affect daily life in Morocco.

- The Media Landscape in Morocco

Before the 1990s, Morocco's media landscape was largely characterized by strong state control, with government-controlled radio and television dominating the national information space and independent journalism operating under political and legal constraints. Following the late 1990s and the accession of King Mohammed VI in 1999, the media environment became more pluralistic, with the expansion of independent newspapers, magazines, and later digital news platforms. Amin (2002) notes that the spread of satellite broadcasting and the internet contributed to changes in reporting practices across the Arab world. Although reforms such as the 2016 Press Code increased legal space for journalism, traditional media remained subject to political boundaries and self-censorship, particularly regarding the monarchy, Islam, territorial integrity, and national security (El Kadoussi, 2022).

A major transformation has been the growth of online news media and social media, which have created new spaces for information sharing, public debate, and citizen participation. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have enabled Moroccans to move beyond the role of passive media consumers and become active producers and distributors of content. Elboukhari and El Kadoussi (2026) identify Facebook as the leading platform in Morocco, followed by YouTube and Instagram. Online news outlets such as Hespress, Chouftv, Le360, and Hibapress have also become important sources of news and attract large audiences through immediate coverage of national and local issues.

Despite these developments, digital media have not completely escaped political and institutional influence. Online journalists, activists, and media outlets may still face pressure, while self-censorship, misinformation, and regulation remain concerns. Nevertheless, social media comments have become particularly important spaces where public narratives can be expressed, discussed, and negotiated. The Moroccan media landscape has therefore evolved from a predominantly state-controlled system toward a more diverse and digitally connected environment, combining expanded opportunities for public participation with continuing forms of political and institutional control.

- Medi1 TV (State-Affiliated Media)

Medi 1 TV was launched in December 2006 under the name Medi 1 Sat, expanding the activities of Medi1 Radio, which was established in 1980 through Moroccan-French audiovisual cooperation. The television channel was created to provide news and current-affairs programming focusing particularly on Morocco and the wider Maghreb. Initially, the channel involved both Moroccan and French investors. In 2009, however, the Moroccan state acquired a majority of its capital, bringing Medi1 Sat into the public audiovisual sector. It was subsequently renamed Medi1 TV in 2010 and expanded its terrestrial broadcasting and news programming.

Medi1 TV underwent further restructuring in 2014 and formally operated as a private audiovisual service for a period. Nevertheless, its close links with state-related institutions remained significant. In 2021, the Moroccan government announced plans to bring Medi 1 TV under the SNRT-led (Société Nationale de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision) state-owned public broadcasting company of Morocco, and the restructuring was subsequently completed, with SNRT becoming the owner of Medi1 TV. This institutional position is important for the present study because it places Medi1 TV within Morocco's broader state-linked mainstream media environment.

- YouTube: A Digital Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere was developed most influentially by German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Habermas conceptualized the public sphere as a social space where citizens come together to discuss matters of common concern, exchange views, and form public opinion. With the emergence of digital media, this concept has been extended to online spaces where users can participate in public debates beyond traditional media institutions.

YouTube, launched in 2005, provides such a space by allowing users not only to consume media content but also to produce, share, and comment on it. Its comment sections can therefore function as spaces for public discussion and the expression of alternative perspectives. For Lange (2007) and Kovala et al. (2020), YouTube serves as a digital public sphere where users freely express ideological orientations and cultural anxieties, making it a valuable context for the study of everyday discourse.

Thus, although YouTube cannot be considered a fully democratic public sphere, its participatory features can provide ordinary citizens with opportunities to voice concerns and challenge dominant narratives. In the present study, YouTube is therefore viewed as a digital space where Moroccan users can respond to mainstream media representations and articulate counter-discourses concerning the hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

Research in the Moroccan context supports this perspective. Ben Moussa, Benmessaoud, and Douai (2020) showed how social-media users employed memes during Morocco's boycott movement to challenge dominant political, economic, and media narratives, demonstrating the potential of digital platforms for counter-discourse and resistance. Similarly, international studies such as Lawson et al. (2017) and Nkwe (2023) demonstrate how social media can enable audiences to challenge, negotiate, and sometimes reproduce dominant media representations. Together, these studies highlight social media as spaces where audiences actively construct alternative meanings rather than simply consuming mainstream narratives. However, limited research has examined how Moroccan audiences respond to mainstream representations of the 2030 FIFA World Cup. The present study addresses this gap by examining how users' YouTube comments reproduce, question, and challenge dominant narratives surrounding the event.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Social Media Theory: Active Audience

This study draws on social media and audience theories to understand how users participate in the production, circulation, and contestation of discourse surrounding Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup. These perspectives provide a theoretical basis for viewing social media users not simply as recipients of media messages but as active participants who can negotiate and challenge dominant narratives.

The rise of digital media has transformed the traditional relationship between media producers and audiences. In the conventional mass-media model, journalists and media institutions largely controlled the production and circulation of information, while audiences were viewed primarily as passive recipients (Zhao, 2019). The development of the internet and social media has shifted this model toward a more participatory communication environment. Jenkins (2006) describes this transformation as a move from a "read-only" to a "read/write" media culture, in which audiences participate in producing, sharing, interpreting, and modifying media content. Users can comment on news, share information, challenge interpretations, and produce alternative content, making the boundaries between producers and consumers increasingly blurred.

Social media platforms provide relatively accessible spaces in which audiences can actively engage with, reinterpret, and contest mainstream media narratives. Thus, rather than treating audiences as passive recipients of media messages, this research examines their reactions as forms of participatory discourse.

This transformation is captured by the concept of the "prosumer," associated with Alvin Toffler, which combines "producer" and "consumer." Social media users can simultaneously consume and produce media content by commenting, sharing, reposting, creating videos and memes, and expressing alternative perspectives. Jenkins et al. (2013) similarly emphasize the active role of contemporary audiences in shaping, circulating, and remixing media content. Related concepts such as the participatory audience (Stamenković, 2020) and networked publics (boyd, 2010) further emphasize the ability of digital audiences to interact, form connections, and participate in public discourse.

The changing role of audiences can also be linked to Habermas's (1991) concept of the public sphere, understood as a space where individuals discuss matters of common concern and contribute to public opinion. Although digital platforms do not fully correspond to Habermas's ideal public sphere, they provide new spaces for citizens to express opinions, encounter competing perspectives, and debate public issues. Social media therefore extends opportunities for public participation by allowing users to engage directly with media content and with one another.

This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to the present study because users responding to Medi 1 TV's YouTube coverage are understood as active prosumers rather than passive audiences. Through their comments, they negotiate, reproduce, or challenge mainstream representations of Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup. The framework therefore helps explain how social media can provide ordinary users with opportunities to participate in public discourse and articulate alternative or counter-hegemonic perspectives on a major national event.

- **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary theoretical approach concerned with the relationship between language, discourse, power, ideology, and society. Rather than viewing language as a neutral means of communication, CDA considers discourse as a form of social practice through which particular representations of reality can be produced, reproduced, and legitimized. It is particularly concerned with the ways in which language may contribute to the maintenance of unequal social relations and the exercise of power. For Fairclough (1992), CDA seeks to uncover the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias by relating texts to the wider social and institutional contexts in which they are produced and interpreted. Critical discourse analysts therefore pay particular attention to “discursive manifestations of hegemonic oppression within a particular network of practices such as education or the media” (Weninger, 2012, p. 147).

A central concern of CDA is the identification and critique of social wrongs. In this perspective, discourse is closely connected to social problems such as inequality, discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, and the unequal distribution of power and resources. CDA examines how dominant groups, institutions, or ideologies may use discourse to legitimize particular ways of representing social reality while making alternative perspectives less visible or less legitimate. As Fairclough (2003) argues, critical discourse analysis is concerned with the relationship between discourse and broader processes of social change, particularly where existing social arrangements involve injustice or unequal power relations. The purpose of such analysis is therefore not simply to describe linguistic patterns, but to make visible the connections between discourse and forms of domination that may otherwise appear natural, normal, or unquestioned.

CDA is consequently characterized by its critical and emancipatory orientation. It seeks to reveal how dominant discourses become established and how they may contribute to the reproduction of existing power relations, while also recognizing the possibility of resistance and alternative forms of meaning. This emphasis on social struggle is particularly important because discourse can both reproduce and challenge dominant ideologies. From a CDA perspective, texts are therefore understood as sites where different interests and interpretations may compete with one another. Examining discourse can consequently contribute to a better understanding of how power operates in society and how dominant representations may be questioned or resisted. In the context of the present study, this theoretical perspective is relevant because representations of Morocco’s hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup can be understood not simply as descriptions of a sporting event, but as discourses connected to broader questions of national development, social priorities, public resources, and competing understandings of social progress.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine how Moroccan social media users react to and interpret mainstream media representations of Morocco’s hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup. The rationale for using this model lies in its ability to provide an in-depth analysis of individuals’ thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as to uncover underlying meanings that cannot be captured through quantitative data (Neuman 2016). The use of qualitative research methods is also important because they can reveal contextual differences and nuances that emerge within similar categories, thereby capturing details that might be overlooked by quantitative methods. The aim is to move beyond surface-level descriptions of social media’s impact and delve into the intricate ways social media users represent issues, a goal best achieved through methods that prioritize depth and meaning. The ultimate objective is to generate what Geertz (1973) famously termed “thick description”: a detailed account not merely of behaviors, but of the layers of meaning, intention, and context that surround them.

- **Data Collection and Sampling**

Data collection followed a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria, described below.

- **Selection of YouTube Videos**

The videos were identified through a systematic search of YouTube using the keywords “Medi 1 TV,” “Morocco,” “World Cup,” and “hosting FIFA 2030.” The selected videos were published between October 2023 and October 2024, a period that captures the year following the announcement of Morocco’s successful bid to co-host the tournament. This timeframe was selected to capture public perceptions, expectations, and concerns during the early stages following the announcement. To ensure sufficient data, only videos with more than 16,000 views and at least 26 user comments were included. The four selected videos met these criteria.

- Selection and Filtering of User Comments

All comments posted under the selected videos were collected and compiled as text files. The data were then filtered through three stages. First, data cleaning involved removing spam, emoji-only posts, links, hashtags, and broken or unintelligible text. Second, relevance filtering retained comments that directly or indirectly addressed Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup, with particular attention to comments that questioned, criticized, or challenged dominant representations of the event by raising concerns about government priorities, public spending, education, healthcare, poverty, inequality, and other socioeconomic issues. Third, duplicate removal eliminated repetitive or copy-pasted comments.

The four videos initially yielded 287 comments. Following a pilot review and the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 47 comments were retained as the final corpus. A purposive sampling strategy was used to focus the analysis on comments expressing critical or oppositional positions concerning the event. Since the comments were posted in both Arabic and English, Arabic comments were translated into English for analysis, while the original Arabic versions were retained alongside their translations to preserve the original linguistic data. The following table shows this data:

Documents	Document Name	Document Link	Publication Date	Comments and Number of views
Video 1	موندیال 2030 یحط ..ملف خاص# الرحال بالمغرب	https://youtu.be/pnoWB92-w4E?si=89jhT0QafIDSPxob	5 October 2023	26 Com. 16k Views
Video 2	فوزي لقجع : المشاريع المرتبطة كأس العالم 2030 انطلقت في كافة المجالات	https://youtu.be/gpC2js93nJ4?si=FSPYzLGH_5ceTIDG	2 May 2024	85 Com. 22K Views
Video 3	مخطط ضخم وطموح تحضيرا لاحتضان المغرب نهائيات موندیال 2030	https://youtu.be/uBHiRRgB0W4?si=aPJzgOEMin05eEe1	4 July 2024	120 Com. 34K Views
Video 4	استعدادات مكثفة في المغرب لاحتضان كأس العالم 2030	https://youtu.be/sYkrX9zBSyc?si=9Nrc0bAUeL5krvLe	13 July 2024	56 Com. 19K Views

5. DATA ANALYSIS

- Thematic Analysis

The first analytical phase consisted of a thematic analysis of the comment dataset. The themes emerged from the data and were guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model, which provides a rigorous and systematic structure for this process. The thematic analysis involved the following stages:

- Familiarization:** The researcher read the entire dataset repeatedly in order to become thoroughly familiar with the data and to identify emerging patterns, recurring ideas, and significant issues related to users' reactions to Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup.
- Initial Coding:** Open coding was conducted by identifying significant semantic units and recurring meanings across the dataset. The comments were coded both inductively and deductively. Inductive coding allowed themes, meanings, and patterns to emerge directly from the data, whereas deductive coding was informed by the research questions and the CDA framework.
- Theme Development:** The initial codes were grouped into broader conceptual categories in order to form preliminary themes. Related codes were organized according to the meanings and concerns they shared. This stage made it possible to move from individual comments to broader patterns of meaning across the dataset.
- Theme Review:** The preliminary themes were then carefully reviewed to represent a coherent and meaningful pattern within the dataset.
- Theme Definition and Naming:** Each theme was clearly defined and labeled to reflect the dominant concerns, attitudes, and discursive positions expressed by users.
- Reporting:** Each theme was contextualized through representative comments and was supported by descriptive evidence from the dataset.

- Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The second phase involved Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). After the themes had been identified and reviewed, selected comments representing the main themes were subjected to critical discourse analysis, through which the linguistic and discursive content of the themes was interpreted. Fairclough's CDA model was used to analyze the selected corpus because it allows the researcher to move beyond the description of linguistic features and examine how language is connected to broader relations of power, ideology, dominance, and resistance. In this study, the model views each comment as a communicative act consisting of three interconnected dimensions:

a) The Textual Dimension describes the linguistic features of the text itself, including vocabulary, grammar, structure, and style. It involves the examination of the linguistic resources through which users constructed and communicated meanings around Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup. Particular attention was paid to dominant lexical choices, recurrent words and expressions, evaluative adjectives.

b) The Discursive Practice provides an interpretation of the contextual framework within which communication takes place, particularly the processes of production, distribution, and consumption. In the present study, this dimension was used to examine how users' comments responded to, reproduced, negotiated, or challenged representations circulating through mainstream Moroccan media.

c) The Social Practice dimension provides an explanation of the broader societal, political, and ideological implications of discourse. In other words, it examines how certain ways of speaking and representing social reality become legitimized, normalized, and reproduced within society. This dimension makes it possible to connect linguistic and discursive patterns identified in the comments to broader Moroccan social and political contexts.

This dimension also shows how communication can contribute to the maintenance or transformation of social relations, dominance, and hegemony, depending on how particular discourses are reproduced, challenged, or contested. In the context of the present study, the analysis examined how users' comments challenged the narratives surrounding Morocco's hosting of the World Cup by drawing attention to alternative social realities and competing national priorities.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the selected YouTube comments was conducted in two stages. First, thematic analysis was used to identify the main concerns expressed by commenters. Second, the selected comments were examined through Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in order to explore the linguistic features of the comments, the context in which they were produced, and the social purposes and meanings underlying them.

- Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis identified three closely related themes in the selected comments: (1) government priorities, particularly education and healthcare; (2) public spending and resource allocation; and (3) socioeconomic problems, including poverty, unemployment, and inadequate living conditions. Although presented separately for analytical purposes, the themes frequently overlap.

Theme 1: Government Priorities (Education and Healthcare)

Several commenters questioned the priority given to football and World Cup preparations in relation to essential public services such as education and healthcare. For example:

“كاس العالم لي بقا لينا يستثمر في الكرة ويهدم التعليم والصحة”

“The only thing left for us is the World Cup: money is invested in football while education and healthcare are being destroyed.”

The comment places football investment in direct opposition to education and healthcare. Similarly:

وماذا عن المستشفيات والتعليم الرديئ المهمين لنهضة البلدان، أقسام التعليم فيها خمسة و أربعون تلميذا، الأمم لا تتقدم ببناء الملاعب و تلهية الشعب بل بالتعليم و البحث العلمي

“What about hospitals and poor-quality education? Some classrooms have forty-five students. Nations do not progress by building stadiums and entertaining the people, but through education and scientific research.”

Here, the commenter draws attention to hospitals, classroom conditions, and scientific research while questioning the importance attached to stadium construction. Another comment states:

“الأمم الناجحة تجعل من البحث العلمي والعدالة الاجتماعية محوراً أساسياً في نهضتها، وليس مجالات الترفيه الزائلة العابثة”

“Successful nations make scientific research and social justice central to their development, rather than fleeting forms of entertainment.”

Taken together, these comments give particular importance to education, healthcare, scientific research, and social justice when discussing national development.

Theme 2: Public Spending and Resource Allocation

A second theme concerns the use and distribution of public resources. One commenter states:

“الكل يتكلم عن البنى التحتية والسياحة لكن هناك مشكل اجتماعي كارثي يجب التصدي له”

“Everyone talks about infrastructure and tourism, but there is a disastrous social problem that must be addressed.”

The comment draws attention to social problems alongside the emphasis on infrastructure and tourism. Another user writes:

“خصنا بنية تحتية في القرى و نواحي”

“We need infrastructure in the villages and surrounding areas.”

This comment focuses on infrastructure needs outside the major urban and sporting contexts associated with the World Cup. A further example is:

“مكناس مدينة كارثية عامرة بالشفارة وهي قريبة من فاس التي ستظم كاس العالم، أرصفة قرب العمالة تعود للقرن الطباشيري”

“Meknes is a disastrous city, full of thieves, and it is close to Fez, which will host the World Cup. The sidewalks near the provincial administration date back to the Stone Age.”

The comment highlights inadequate local conditions and uses sarcasm to draw attention to the state of the city's infrastructure.

Theme 3: Socioeconomic Problems

The third theme includes poverty, unemployment, homelessness, begging, and other socioeconomic difficulties. One commenter writes:

“خاص ناقشوا حتى مسائل المتعلقة بالجانب الاجتماعي التسول والمشردين والباعة المتجولين”

“They should also discuss social issues such as begging, homelessness, and street vendors.”

Another states:

“جيش من المتسولين في كل مكان وحراس السيارات في كل الأزقة... سنكون عرضة للسخرية إن لم نعالج هذه الآفات”

“There is an army of beggars everywhere and car guards in every alley. We will be exposed to ridicule if we do not address these problems.”

Socioeconomic concerns are also expressed through a list of social difficulties:

“وماذا عن تقارير حول أوضاع ضحايا زلزال الحوز والبطالة و الأمية و التشمكير و الإجرام و الصحة و التعليم، ولا عارفين غير مقولة المغرب زين”

“What about reports on the situation of the victims of the Al Haouz earthquake, unemployment, illiteracy, delinquency, crime, healthcare, and education? Or do we only know the slogan ‘Morocco is beautiful’?”

Other comments express more immediate economic concerns:

“كنقلب على خدمة كاين شي واحد هنا عارف شي معلومة”

“I am looking for a job. Does anyone here have any information?”

and:

“الشعب يريد العيش الكريم”

“The people want a dignified life.”

Overall, the thematic analysis shows that the selected comments give considerable attention to public services, resource allocation, unemployment, poverty, and living conditions.

- Critical Discourse Analysis

The selected comments were then examined using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, focusing on the textual, discursive-practice, and social-practice dimensions.

- Textual Dimension: Repeated Lexical Choices and Evaluation

At the textual level, some words and expressions are repeatedly used across the selected comments. These include references to poverty, joblessness, unemployment, illiteracy, school dropouts, lack of healthcare, education, health, and other social problems. Such repeated lexical choices give visibility to social and economic concerns and make them central to the commenters' discussions of Morocco's development.

The comments also contain rhetorical questions, contrasts, negative evaluations, and sarcastic expressions. For example, questions such as “وماذا عن المستشفيات...؟” (“*What about hospitals...?*”) redirect attention toward healthcare and education. Likewise, expressions referring to beggars, unemployment, illiteracy, and poor services foreground problems experienced or perceived in everyday Moroccan society. At this level, language is therefore used to emphasize particular social realities and to construct them as important issues.

- Discursive Practice: Producers, Audience, and Context

At the level of discursive practice, the comments were produced by common Moroccan YouTube users, rather than by official institutions or professional media actors. They appear as responses to publicly available media content concerning Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

The potential audience extends beyond the immediate YouTube community, as the comments are publicly accessible to Moroccans and people worldwide. Their publication on a widely accessible social media platform allows ordinary users to articulate their views in a public communication space.

The comments were produced during a period characterized by social, economic, and political difficulties in Morocco, including concerns related to employment, education, healthcare, poverty, and the consequences of the Al Haouz earthquake and its disastrous aftermath. This wider context is relevant to understanding why these issues are brought into discussions surrounding the World Cup.

- Social Practice: Priorities, Legitimization, and Normalization

At the level of social practice, the comments can be understood as expressing particular views about what should constitute a national priority. By repeatedly referring to education, healthcare, employment, poverty, scientific research, and social justice, commenters construct these areas as essential social needs.

This discourse therefore works to legitimize and normalize the idea that greater priority should be given to healthcare, education, employment, and other basic social needs rather than placing exclusive emphasis on hosting the World Cup. The comments do not necessarily reject the event itself; rather, they question the prioritization of World Cup-related investment in relation to other pressing needs.

In this sense, the comments construct a particular understanding of development in which improving citizens' living conditions and strengthening essential public services are presented as important bases of national progress. The discourse consequently brings questions of government priorities, public resources, and social conditions into the discussion of the World Cup.

Research Implications

The findings highlight the importance of considering social media alongside mainstream media when examining public perceptions of major national projects. The selected comments bring attention to everyday concerns related to education, healthcare, employment, poverty, infrastructure, and public spending, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how citizens interpret and negotiate representations of the 2030 FIFA World Cup. The study also contributes to research on media discourse, social media, and Critical Discourse Analysis in the Moroccan context by demonstrating how Fairclough's framework can connect linguistic choices with broader social concerns.

The findings also have implications for media practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. The concerns expressed by users suggest the value of taking public expectations regarding social and economic priorities into account when discussing major national events. Rather than viewing critical comments simply as negative reactions to the World Cup, they can be understood as expressions of broader concerns about development and social wellbeing. More broadly, the study highlights the role of social media as a participatory space where ordinary users can express, negotiate, and question dominant representations of important national issues.

7. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, its focus on YouTube comments does not represent the full range of Moroccan social media users or other platforms. Second, greater attention was given to selected oppositional comments, while supportive comments were not analyzed in equal depth. Third, translating Darija and Arabic comments into English may result in the loss of some culturally specific meanings. Finally, the qualitative and interpretive nature of CDA allows for alternative interpretations of the data. For the recommendations, future research could examine multiple social media platforms and use longitudinal approaches to explore how public discourse develops before, during, and after the 2030 World Cup. Studies could also compare supportive and critical comments more systematically and investigate public perceptions of World Cup-related spending and social priorities. At the practical level, mainstream media could provide greater space for diverse public perspectives, while policymakers could address concerns related to education, healthcare, employment, poverty, inequality, and local infrastructure. Greater transparency regarding World Cup-related public spending could also contribute to public trust.

8. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to examine how social media provide ordinary citizens with a space to respond to and potentially challenge dominant mainstream media representations of Morocco's hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup. The findings show that, although the broader dataset was predominantly supportive, selected critical comments expressed concerns relating to "government priorities, public spending, education, healthcare, employment, poverty, and socioeconomic conditions". The CDA further shows that these concerns were constructed through repeated social-problem vocabulary, rhetorical questions, contrasts, and evaluative language. Rather than simply rejecting the World Cup, commenters used discussions of the event to emphasize the importance of addressing pressing social needs and prioritizing citizens' living conditions and essential public services. The findings therefore highlight social media as a space where ordinary citizens can express their perspectives and negotiate representations of major national projects.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ait Soussane, J., & Ibourk, A. (2025). The effect of hosting FIFA World Cup on unemployment: An empirical estimation on a panel of 10 hosting countries. *Soccer & Society*, 26(6), 1049–1065. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2025.2538060>
- [2] Amin, H. Y. (2002). Freedom as a value in Arab media: Perceptions and attitudes among journalists. *Political Communication*, 19(2), 125–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600252907407>
- [3] Ben Moussa, M., Benmessaoud, S., & Douai, A. (2020). Internet memes as "tactical" social action: A multimodal critical discourse analysis approach. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 5920–5940. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/14534>
- [4] boyd, d. (2010). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites* (pp. 39–58). Routledge.
- [5] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- [6] Elboukhari, B., & El Kadoussi, A. (2026). Moroccan social media users' views on Facebook and YouTube as media accountability instruments. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 19(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18739865-bja10008>
- [7] El Kadoussi, A. (2022). The perception of self-censorship among Moroccan journalists. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 27(2), 231–263.

- [8] Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Polity Press.
- [9] Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- [10] Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Basic Books.
- [11] Habermas, J. (1991). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (T. Burger & F. Lawrence, Trans.). MIT Press.
- [12] Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.
- [13] KhosraviNik, M. (2018). Social media techno-discursive design, affective communication and contemporary politics. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11, 427–442. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-018-0226-y>
- [14] Kovala, U., Palonen, E., Ruotsalainen, M., & Saresma, T. (2020). Populism and the media: Alongitudinal and comparative analysis of populist discourses in the news media. *European Journal of Communication*, 35(4), 347–366.
- [15] Lange, P. G. (2007). Publicly private and privately public: Social networking on YouTube. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 361–380. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00400.x>
- [16] Neuman, W. L. (2016). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (7th ed.). Pearson.kov
- [17] Nkwe, S. (2023). An analysis of xenophobic elements in South Africa's public discourse via social media. *Journal of African Films & Diaspora Studies*, 6(1), 23–40. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-2713/2023/6n1a2>
- [18] Sahibi, Y., & Hamzaoui, M. (2017). Spatial inequality of growth between Morocco regions. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(2), 227–235. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2017.v8n2p227>
- [19] Stamenković, I. (2020). Online audience in digital media network. *Applied Media Studies Journal*, 1(1), 29–40.
- [20] Weninger, C. (2012). Critical discourse analysis. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 146–148). SAGE Publications.
- [21] Zhao, T. (2019). Analysis of the concept of audience in the digital age. In *Proceedings of the 2018 International Workshop on Education Reform and Social Sciences (ERSS 2018)*. Atlantis Press. doi.org