

FRAMING POWER AND IDEOLOGY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ELON MUSK'S TOWN HALL SPEECH

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Abstract

Technology figures increasingly shape political discourse and hold substantial power over public sentiment. This study, thus, examines how language constructs power and ideology in Elon Musk's Town Hall Speech using Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis model. This CDA framework provides a systematic approach to analyze linguistic features, discursive processes, rhetorical strategies that function to legitimize technopopulism, a discourse merging technocratic authority with populist appeal. By applying this multidimensional analytical lens, this paper exposes how Elon Musk, speech patterns reflect tendencies of technology elites exercising political authority through purposeful rhetorical choices. Drawing on the full transcript of the speech, data were analyzed across textual, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions. The findings reveal that Musk's discourse combines emotional populism with rational technocracy. At the textual level, metaphors, inclusive pronouns, and crisis framing generate collective urgency and moral unity. Through digital mediation on X (formerly Twitter), the speech evolves from a local communicative act into a global ideological performance. At the sociocultural level, Musk's rhetoric naturalizes neoliberal and technocratic values such as efficiency and deregulation, framing them as moral imperatives. The study concludes that Musk's language conceals domination behind narratives of innovation and progress, exemplifying how technopopulism legitimizes authority in digital capitalism. This research contributes to CDA scholarship by demonstrating that technological discourse not only reflects but actively shapes power relations and ideological formations in contemporary political communication.

Keywords— Critical Discourse Analysis, Digital Discourse, Elon Musk, Language and Power, Political Communication, Technopopulism.

Introduction

In the contemporary digital era, political discourse is increasingly shaped by technology figures who hold substantial power over public opinion. The words, narratives, and metaphors used by figures such as Elon Musk are not merely communicative styles but also instruments for the production of power and ideology (Fairclough, 2010). One prominent phenomenon in this context is the combination of technocratic and populist rhetoric, commonly referred to as *technopopulism*. Pabst (2022) illuminates that *technopopulism* integrates elements of technocracy, which emphasize technical competence and efficiency, with the populist narrative of representing "the people's interests." Elon Musk, widely recognized as a technological innovator, serves as an ideal case to analyze how the discourse of *technopopulism* operates in applied political communication.

Elon Musk's *Town Hall Speech* in Pennsylvania addressed crucial issues such as immigration, public security, freedom of speech, and government spending. Through this speech, Musk positioned himself as a leader who advocates for the people by adopting an ostensibly

rational and technical approach. However, this raises a fundamental question about how power and ideology are subtly framed through his lexical choices, syntactic structures, and discursive strategies. Empirical research applying CDA to technology leader speeches, like Elon Musk, remains limited. Most previous studies have only focused on traditional political discourse or populism on social media, particularly within political party contexts in Europe and the United States (Engesser et al., 2017). Meanwhile, there has been little application of critical discourse analysis to technology figures who also play active roles in political arenas. Accordingly, this study aims to fill that gap by employing Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional model to analyze Musk's speech comprehensively. As explained by Ar (2015), language both shapes and is shaped by social relations while embedding ideological values that often remain concealed. This approach allows researchers to examine how figures like Musk construct legitimacy through technological and freedom-oriented rhetoric that appears objective yet implies specific ideological agendas.

By focusing on Elon Musk's speech, this study seeks to uncover how linguistic elements, social contexts, and rhetorical strategies interact to construct a *technopopulist* discourse of power. This research aspires to contribute to the development of discourse studies and enhance the understanding of digital political discourse through speech and the role of technology figures within it. In doing so, this paper engages with ongoing debates at the intersection of language, technology, and political ideology.

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach that seeks to uncover the relationship between language, power, and ideology in social contexts. It begins with the assumption that language is not neutral but functions as a tool to construct, maintain, and challenge existing power structures (Wodak, 2009). In the realm of modern political communication, CDA enables researchers to examine how linguistic choices, sentence structures, and rhetorical strategies are employed to shape public perception of social and political issues. According to van Dijk (2006), discourse analysis should be understood as a social practice that both represents and shapes social reality. Every text or utterance is embedded in broader social contexts such as power relations, ideology, and dominant cultural values. Therefore, CDA focuses on how language practices are used either to sustain domination or to resist social injustice.

Further, Fairclough (2010) emphasizes that CDA serves two main missions: analytical and emancipatory. Analytically, CDA investigates how texts are shaped by social practices and underlying ideologies. CDA is not only a linguistic method but also a social project committed to the pursuit of equity and justice. The Three-Dimensional Model developed by Norman Fairclough is one of the most influential CDA analytical frameworks. Fairclough conceptualizes language as a form of social practice that is deeply intertwined with social structures, ideologies, and power relations. This model analyzes discourse through three interconnected dimensions: text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice (Malik Umer Ajmal & Tayyaba Zainab, 2024). These dimensions are dialectically related and cannot be examined in isolation.

The textual dimension focuses on linguistic features that appear explicitly in spoken or written discourse, such as lexical choices, syntactic structures, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies. This level of analysis identifies how meaning is constructed through visible linguistic elements (Negm, 2021). The second dimension, discursive practice, involves the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. At this level, researchers explore how texts are produced within specific social contexts, who the key actors are, and how audiences interpret the intended meanings (Joy et al., 2024). In the digital era, these processes have become increasingly complex because discourse dissemination no longer depends solely on traditional media but also on social media algorithms and user participation. The third dimension, sociocultural practice, represents the broadest analytical level, linking texts and discursive practices to wider social, cultural, economic, and political structures. This dimension examines how power, ideology, and societal values shape and are reflected in discourse (Nahdi & Taufiq, 2023). It also investigates how specific ideologies are legitimized, either explicitly or implicitly, through linguistic

processes.

Furthermore, Jiang (2019) asserts that the strength of CDA capacity to connect linguistic analysis with broader systems of social power. Therefore, analyzing Elon Musk's speech through this model offers deep insight into how language operates as an ideological instrument to construct *technopopulist* power, merging technology and politics within a framework of discursive legitimacy. In its recent developments, CDA has evolved to adapt to the digital era. Contemporary study indicates that social media platforms have become new spaces for reproducing power and ideology (Esposito & KhosraviNik, 2023). Through platforms such as *X (Twitter)*, *Facebook*, and *YouTube*, political and economic discourses are now constructed in more visual, multimodal, and interactive ways. Consequently, discourse analysis today extends beyond written text to include visual, audiovisual, and symbolic elements that reinforce ideological messages. As Dyah et al. (2025) explains, researchers must be aware of their interpretive position because discourse analysis always involves subjective perspectives. With such reflexivity, CDA is no longer viewed as an "objective" approach claiming universal truth but rather as a reflective effort to understand power dynamics through language.

Language, Power, and Ideology in Political Discourse

In political discourse studies, language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as an ideological tool that legitimizes specific systems of power (Cohen-Almagor, 2017). Through language, political actors construct self-representation, build credibility, and influence how social reality is perceived by the public. Al-Awawdeh (2022) argues that power in discourse is *discursive* in nature, it is constructed through structured and recurrent linguistic practices. Power is not always expressed through physical dominance but through control over knowledge, information, and meaning. In this sense, ideology serves as a cognitive framework that justifies social and political actions while enabling dominant groups to maintain their hegemony.

According to Jones et al. (2015), modern political discourse cannot be separated from the dynamics of globalization, digital media, and information capitalism. The fusion of economics and communication has generated a new form of symbolic power in which influence is no longer derived from formal authority but from the ability to control public narratives. Figures such as Elon Musk exemplify how individuals can merge technological, economic, and moral discourses to produce new forms of symbolic domination rooted in technological influence. Further, recent study by Nurohmah & Sundasewu (2024) emphasize the importance of multimodal analysis in understanding the relationship between language and power. In the context of digital media, power is not only constructed through text but also through images, symbols, and virtual interactions.

In the context of CDA, ideology is understood as a system of ideas that shapes how social groups perceive and interpret the world (Masrurroh et al., 2025). Ideology operates through language by constructing binary oppositions such as *us vs. them*, *good vs. evil*, or *the people vs. the elite*. These oppositional strategies are often employed in populist and technopopulist rhetoric to create an illusion of solidarity with the public. In Musk's discourse, for instance, lexical choices such as "freedom," "truth," and "power to the people" serve to build a political identity that appears to represent collective aspirations while simultaneously reinforcing the hegemonic role of technology and digital capitalism.

Technopopulism in Contemporary Political Communication

The term *technopopulism* emerged to describe a political phenomenon that merges two seemingly opposing orientations: populism and technocracy. According to Deseriis (2017), technopopulism represents a new logic of democratic politics in which leaders seek legitimacy through dual claims, by presenting themselves as the true representatives of the people (*populist appeal*) and as competent experts guided by rational and evidence-based decision-making (*technocratic competence*). In this context, figures such as Elon Musk exemplify this hybrid form of leadership, combining discourses of technological innovation with populist rhetoric centered on freedom, efficiency, and empowerment.

Pabst (2022) explains that technopopulism arises as a response to the growing distrust toward traditional political institutions. Technopopulist actors attempt to replace conventional

political authority with expertise rooted in technology and data. This discourse is grounded in the belief that technological advancement can solve social inequality and bureaucratic inefficiency. However, such a belief also carries ideological implications, as it produces a new configuration of power in which control over technology translates into control over social and political narratives. From CDA perspective, technopopulism can be understood as a dual discursive strategy, rational in its technical dimension and emotional in its political appeal (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021). Technopopulist discourse employs the language of morality and efficiency to construct an illusion of objectivity, while concealing ideological agendas that serve specific political and economic interests. Elon Musk, for example, often portrays himself as a defender of free speech and open innovation, yet simultaneously reinforces the hegemonic dominance of major technology corporations within global capitalism.

The intersection between technopopulism and digital media is also crucial in understanding its communicative dynamics. As Di Nubila et al. (2023) observe, social media platforms allow technopopulist figures to communicate directly with the public, bypassing traditional intermediaries such as journalists or political institutions. Through platforms like X (formerly Twitter), populist messages are reframed in a technologically modern and progressive format, creating an illusion of proximity with “the people” while expanding economic and ideological influence. Peron et al. (2025) argues that technopopulism represents not only a shift in political speech but also a structural transformation of global power relations. Therefore, a CDA of technopopulism, as undertaken in this study, is crucial for understanding how language and technology interact to construct legitimacy and social discourse in the digital era.

Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design grounded in Norman Fairclough’s (2010) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. The CDA framework was chosen because it provides a systematic approach to examining how language constructs, sustains, and challenges power relations within social practices. Fairclough’s model is particularly relevant to this study since it enables a multidimensional exploration of linguistic structures, discursive processes, and sociocultural contexts that shape ideological meaning. The analysis focused on Elon Musk’s *Town Hall Speech* in Pennsylvania as a representation of technopopulist political communication, where technological authority and populist appeal intersect through discourse.

The data of this study consisted primarily of the official transcript of Musk’s speech, accessed from Rev.com. The transcript was selected as it represents a significant instance of a technology entrepreneur engaging in overt political discourse, making it a valuable text for examining how technological figures exercise symbolic power through language. To deepen contextual understanding, the research also included secondary data from journal articles, news reports, and online commentaries that discussed Musk’s rhetoric and public influence. The analysis was conducted using Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of CDA, which examines discourse at textual, discursive, and sociocultural levels. Textual analysis involved the close reading of linguistic features such as vocabulary, syntax, metaphor, and modality to uncover implicit ideological meanings. The discursive practice analysis focused on how the speech was produced, circulated, and interpreted within the digital public sphere, particularly exploring the intertextual relationship between Musk’s self-presentation and existing political narratives. The sociocultural analysis situated the speech within the context of American political culture, digital capitalism, and technopopulist ideology, allowing a critical interpretation of how language functions to legitimize authority and reproduce dominant worldviews. To ensure validity, the study employed source triangulation by cross-referencing the speech transcript with peer-reviewed research and verified media publications. This approach ensured that the interpretation remained objective, consistent, and theoretically grounded within the principles of CDA.

Results

Textual Dimension

The textual analysis focuses on the linguistic structure of Musk’s speech, encompassing

lexical choices, metaphors, syntactic structures, and rhetorical strategies. Musk’s discourse is characterized by direct and emotionally charged language that aims to establish solidarity with his audience while simultaneously legitimizing his ideological stance.

Table 1. Textual Dimension Analysis

Linguistic Aspect	Data from Transcript	Analysis	Ideological Meaning
Patriotic Lexicon	“Pennsylvania is so important to the future of the world.”	Musk links a local political issue with the destiny of the world, using patriotic language such as <i>future of the world</i> to evoke global responsibility.	Constructs his image as a visionary leader and savior of the nation, not merely a businessman.
Repetition and Parallel Structure	“We want secure borders. We want safe cities... We want freedom of speech.”	The repetition of <i>we want</i> builds rhetorical rhythm and collective identification between the speaker and the audience.	Reinforces Musk’s persona as the voice of “the people,” a key feature of populist discourse.
Inclusive Pronouns	“We,” “our,” “us.”	Musk employs inclusive pronouns to construct solidarity and shared interest between himself and listeners.	Erases the divide between technological elites and ordinary citizens, advancing <i>technopopulist</i> ideology.
Moral Opposition Diction	“Anyone who is against those things is fundamentally anti-American.”	Creates a moral binary between “us” (patriots) and “them” (anti-Americans).	Establishes a moral hierarchy that legitimizes nationalist and exclusionary values.
Metaphor and Analogy	“Our border looks like World War Z,” “Zombie Apocalypse.”	Hyperbolic metaphors dramatize the issue of immigration as a violent threat.	Frames immigration as an existential danger, promoting a protectionist worldview.
Heroic Narrative Structure	“You show what matters by your actions, not your words. And my actions are I’m here.”	Musk positions himself as a man of action rather than rhetoric.	Reinforces a technocratic leadership discourse that values efficiency and results.
Emotional and Evaluative Tone	“Are you insane?” “What the hell is going on?”	The informal, emotionally charged tone builds authenticity and spontaneity.	Projects Musk as a “truth-telling” outsider aligned with the common people, a populist appeal.
Historical Intertextuality	“We want the Constitution to be upheld.”	Refers to American founding values and constitutional authority to legitimize his argument.	Anchors his discourse within national historical symbols to enhance legitimacy.
Modal Expressions of Certainty	“Donald Trump has to win this election.”	The modal <i>has to</i> signals absolute necessity and moral compulsion.	Positions Musk as an authoritative voice rather than a neutral observer, asserting ideological certainty.
Ideological Labeling Strategy	“They will kill people... the Democratic Party will not put hardened criminals in prison.”	Uses extreme generalizations to negatively label the political opposition.	Constructs ideological enemies to strengthen populist and polarizing discourse.
Religious and Moral Register	“The hell with them.”	Employs religiously infused moral language to express condemnation.	Fuses moral righteousness with political stance,

			reinforcing conservative ideological alignment.
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Musk’s linguistic choices reveal a strong reliance on populist strategies framed through technocratic reasoning. The repetition of “we” functions as an inclusionary pronoun, positioning Musk as part of the collective while reinforcing a dichotomy between “us” (the people) and “them” (political elites or perceived enemies). Moreover, his lexical emphasis is used to highlight the attempt to naturalize ideological assumptions as common sense. Such linguistic constructions work ideologically to equate Musk’s technological and political agenda with moral and rational superiority. His repetitive use of metaphorical imagery, aligning with populist rhetoric that constructs crisis as a justification for decisive leadership. This dramatization of threat simultaneously reinforces Musk’s image as a rational savior capable of restoring order through technological efficiency and pragmatic governance. This pattern demonstrates how language operates as an instrument for legitimizing authority under the guise of neutrality and logic.

Discursive Practice Dimension

This dimension analyzes how Musk’s speech is produced, distributed, and interpreted within the socio-political and media environment surrounding him. The speech in Pennsylvania was not an isolated communicative event, it was broadcast live through multiple channels, including X (formerly Twitter) Spaces and video streaming platforms. This hybrid form of communication allowed Musk to simultaneously address a live audience and an online public, reinforcing his dual identity as both a political communicator and a technological innovator. Such multimodal production exemplifies what Fairclough (2010) refers to as the *interdiscursivity* of modern media texts, where technological discourse merges with political populism to produce a powerful ideological narrative.

Table 2. Discursive Practice Dimension Analysis

Discursive Aspect	Context / Data	Analysis of Production and Interpretation	Ideological Meaning
Production Context	Elon Musk delivers his speech at a town hall in Pennsylvania, broadcast live and circulated widely on X (formerly Twitter).	The discourse is simultaneously local (addressing Pennsylvania voters) and global (amplified via digital media).	Shows the hybrid nature of <i>technopopulism</i> that merges grassroots appeal with global technological power.
Media Intermediation	Clips and quotes from the speech went viral on social media platforms within hours.	Digital networks function as <i>discursive amplifiers</i> that transform Musk’s personal speech into a global political message.	Demonstrates how digital capitalism enables ideological dissemination at scale.
Audience Interaction	The crowd responds with cheers, laughter, and applause, reinforcing Musk’s statements.	The live audience acts as a legitimizing echo chamber, creating real-time consensus and emotional validation.	Constructs an image of collective will, masking the asymmetry of power between speaker and audience.
Intertextual Circulation	Phrases like “freedom of speech” and “Constitution” are later quoted by supporters and news media.	The reuse of these phrases across contexts expands Musk’s discourse into public narratives.	Embeds Musk’s political stance within national ideological frameworks.
Recontextualization through X (Twitter)	Musk reposts excerpts of the speech on his own platform, adding	The message is recontextualized to emphasize his brand as a	Reinforces his authority as both a speaker and media owner, merging

	captions such as “Truth matters.”	truth-defender and freedom advocate.	discursive and institutional power.
Discursive Framing by Media	News headlines frame Musk’s speech as “a political intervention by a tech mogul.”	Media framing redefines the event from civic engagement to political advocacy.	Illustrates the negotiation of meaning among institutions, aligning with Fairclough’s view that discourse is a site of ideological struggle.
Selective Reception by Public	Supporters interpret the speech as honesty and bravery, while critics see manipulation.	The speech generates polarized readings depending on ideological alignment.	Reveals how audience interpretation participates in reproducing or resisting dominant ideologies.

Musk’s discursive practice shows that he strategically uses the affordances of digital media to amplify his ideological position and bypass traditional journalistic filters. By livestreaming his speech through X Spaces, Musk enacts what Fairclough terms *control over discourse circulation*, shaping both the message and its channels of dissemination. This form of self-mediated communication allows him to present himself as transparent and authentic while avoiding potential critique from mainstream media. In doing so, he redefines the relationship between political communication and media power, situating himself as both producer and regulator of public discourse. The audience’s responses, such as applause, vocal affirmations, and online engagement, demonstrate the reciprocal construction of meaning between speaker and listeners. The audience’s enthusiastic approval reinforces Musk’s legitimacy as a spokesperson for “common sense” and “rational values.”

Sociocultural Practice Dimension

This dimension situates Musk’s discourse within broader socio-political and ideological contexts to reveal how his language reproduces and legitimizes structures of power in contemporary technopolitical culture. Musk’s speech occurs amid increasing polarization in American society, growing distrust toward traditional political institutions, and the rise of digital populism. Within this setting, Musk’s rhetoric of “common sense,” “freedom,” and “efficiency” functions as more than persuasive language, it operates as a mechanism to align technological authority with political legitimacy. According to Fairclough (2010), discourse not only reflects but also *constitutes* social reality, and Musk’s technopopulist stance exemplifies how technological leadership can be discursively transformed into political power.

Table 3. Sociocultural Practice Dimension Analysis

Sociocultural Aspect	Observed Phenomenon	Contextual Analysis	Ideological Implication
Technopopulism Ideology	Musk frames himself as a rational innovator who “speaks for the people.”	His discourse merges technocratic rationality (efficiency, expertise) with populist rhetoric (the will of the people).	Illustrates the rise of <i>technopopulism</i> , where technological authority legitimizes political influence.
Power of Digital Capitalism	The speech is amplified through Musk’s own platform, X.	Control over both discourse and medium grants Musk dual power, linguistic and infrastructural.	Demonstrates how economic ownership transforms into symbolic and political dominance.
Normalization of Neoliberal Values	Emphasis on self-reliance, innovation, and minimal government interference.	These values align with neoliberal ideology that celebrates individual entrepreneurship.	Reproduces neoliberal hegemony under the guise of technological progress.

Moralization of Politics	Musk uses moral judgments (“anti-American,” “insane”) to evaluate political stances.	Blends ethical language with political critique, moralizing public debate.	Turns political opposition into moral failure, reinforcing ideological polarization.
Hegemony of Technological Rationality	Recurrent references to logic, science, and problem-solving.	Positions technology as the ultimate solution to social and political crises.	Establishes the ideology of <i>techno-solutionism</i> , legitimizing elite control through technical discourse.
Reinforcement of Masculine Leadership Culture	The speech tone is assertive, emotionally charged, and confrontational.	Reflects a masculine-coded leadership style tied to dominance and control.	Reproduces patriarchal norms in political communication, equating power with aggression.
Integration of Religion and Politics	Moral references such as “hell” or “good people” evoke spiritual imagery.	Invokes religious moral codes to justify political opinions.	Merges faith-based morality with political ideology, strengthening conservative populism.
National Identity Construction	Frequent references to America, the Constitution, and patriotism.	Constructs a collective identity rooted in historical and cultural symbols.	Reinforces nationalist ideology as a unifying but exclusionary force.
Polarization as a Communication Strategy	The discourse relies on sharp contrasts, freedom vs control, people vs elites.	Simplifies complex social realities into binary moral choices.	Normalizes conflict-driven discourse that sustains populist mobilization.

The sociocultural context of Musk’s speech reflects a convergence between neoliberal values and populist narratives. His emphasis on efficiency, promoting freedom of speech, and protecting constitutional rights constructs an image of the ideal citizen as self-reliant, rational, and technologically competent. Through this narrative, the neoliberal principle of minimizing state intervention is reframed as an act of empowerment for “the people,” while simultaneously consolidating the influence of technological elites. This process aligns with Fairclough’s view that discourse can sustain hegemonic projects by embedding ideology within every day’s reasoning. Furthermore, his critique of mainstream media and bureaucracy reinforces the public’s disillusionment with traditional governance systems, directing faith toward technology and entrepreneurship as alternative sources of societal rescue. This sociocultural framing transforms his persona into a symbolic bridge between technology and populist democracy, an embodiment of *technological messianism* that merges innovation with moral redemption.

Discussion

Rhetorical Construction of Technopopulism

Elon Musk’s speech reveals a deliberate fusion of technocratic authority and populist appeal, a hallmark of technopopulism (Deseriis, 2017; Pabst, 2022). His rhetoric serves not merely as a political endorsement but as a linguistic performance that constructs his dual identity as both a rational innovator and a voice of the people. Musk frames his presence as an act of authenticity and moral duty, he positions himself as a leader grounded in practice rather than rhetoric, contrasting himself with political elites who “only talk.” Such discourse linguistically activate the populist dichotomy between *action* and *talk*, reinforcing a moral binary that privileges common sense and productivity over bureaucracy and debate (Dorey, 2025).

Moreover, Musk’s repeated invocation of “common sense” and “sensible things” performs ideological work by universalizing his personal worldview as self-evident truth. In Musk’s discourse, the emphasis on “secure borders,” “safe cities,” and “freedom of speech” operates as rhetorical shorthand for broader conservative ideologies, distances him from overt partisanship. This allows him to occupy a unique discursive position where he is simultaneously

anti-elite and technocratic, populist and rational, rebellious yet data-driven (Leipold & Winkel, 2017). Further, Musk's use of colloquial and emotional language further strengthens his connection with the audience. Expressions like “*What the hell is going on?*” and “*We don't want to be in a Mad Max movie*” dramatize social decay and invite collective frustration. These phrases function as affective bridges between speaker and audience, converting complex political debates into emotionally charged narratives of common struggle (Papacharissi, 2016). The humor, sarcasm, and pop culture allusions such as “Mad Max,” “World War Z,” “zombie apocalypse”, to simplify political issues into visual metaphors that resonate with a digital audience accustomed to memes and cinematic storytelling (Huber, 2020). In Fairclough's terms, this is a clear case of *recontextualization*, where political discourse borrows from entertainment and digital culture to enhance ideological persuasion.

Musk's technopopulist hegemony relies heavily on affective mobilization, the strategic use of emotion to construct moral consensus. His dramatic metaphors of societal decay, coupled with moments of humor and self-irony, generate an affective proximity with his audience that masks structural inequality. This narrative function ideologically to elevate his political alignment with Donald Trump into a moral mission, while simultaneously positioning technological progress as the ultimate safeguard of civilization. Through such rhetoric, Musk fuses national destiny with technological advancement, redefining progress itself as the victory of technopolitical rationality (Arslan, 2025).

Musk's speech also reveals how technopopulism sustains itself through digital mediation and spectacle. The live streaming of the event on X, transforms political discourse into participatory performance, where likes, comments, and shares serve as mechanisms of ideological reproduction (Pond & Lewis, 2019). This aligns with Fairclough's notion that hegemony in the contemporary era is maintained through *discursive hybridity*, the blending of political, economic, and cultural discourses into seamless media events. Musk's hybrid role as both communicator and platform owner exemplifies this perfectly, he not only delivers the message but also governs the very infrastructure that circulates it. Thus, power becomes embedded not only in what is said but in how it is distributed and consumed. In this sense, technopopulism becomes the new hegemonic language of the digital age, a discourse that celebrates freedom, efficiency, and reason while subtly reinforcing elite dominance through the naturalization of technological authority.

Framing of Fear and Control

A central feature of Musk's Pennsylvania speech is the strategic mobilization of fear and urgency to frame political and social realities. Musk repeatedly invokes images of chaos, insecurity, and decline, phrases such as “*Our border looks like World War Z,*” “*Zombie apocalypse,*” and “*We're going to be fully Mad Max*”, which evoke dystopian and catastrophic imaginaries. These metaphors dramatize the state of the nation, converting abstract policy issues like immigration or public safety into vivid moral crises (Arcimaviciene & Baglama, 2018). This rhetorical pattern is crucial within Fairclough's (2010) framework, as it exposes how language serves to construct social problems and legitimize power relations.

The repetition of crisis-related metaphors not only appeals emotionally but also works ideologically to naturalize control and surveillance as reasonable solutions (Smart, 2023). Musk linguistically constructs a threat environment that demands decisive, technocratic intervention. Fairclough's CDA highlights this move as a form of *ideological legitimation*, the discursive process by which power structures justify themselves through narratives of necessity. In Musk's framing, control becomes a moral imperative, and those who resist regulation or strong governance are depicted as irrational or anti-American.

The use of binary oppositions, such as “freedom vs. censorship” and “rationality vs. insanity”, these dichotomies are central to the populist grammar identified by, as they create an “us versus them” structure that simplifies complex realities into emotionally charged moral divides (Katsambekis, 2022). This binary framing casts Musk's movement as the guardian of reason and liberty while labeling opponents as irrational agents of chaos. Even his claim that “anyone against these values is anti-American” exemplifies the moral absolutism embedded in his discourse. Furthermore, Musk's deployment of humor and informal speech, serves a dual purpose. On the surface, it humanizes him and fosters relatability; beneath it, the casual tone

normalizes his ideological assertions as common sense. Fairclough (2010) refers to this as *conversationalization of public discourse*, where informal language disguises political persuasion as everyday reasoning.

Digital Mediation and the Recontextualization of Political Speech

Elon Musk's speech represents a new paradigm in political communication, one deeply shaped by the affordances of digital media. Within Fairclough's CDA framework, this can be viewed as a transformation of discursive practices. From the outset, Musk tells his audience, "*We're doing a live X Spaces as well as a video cast,*" emphasizing that his speech exists simultaneously as a physical and digital event. This self-referential moment is significant, this marks a process of *recontextualization*, where language and media practices from the technological domain are appropriated into political discourse to legitimize new forms of authority. By controlling both the message and its medium, Musk bypasses traditional journalistic gatekeeping and asserts what Fairclough (2010) describes as *control over the order of discourse*. His self-broadcasting through X Spaces enables him to reach millions without institutional filters, giving the illusion of transparency and authenticity while maintaining complete narrative control. This dynamic embodies what van Dijk (2006) terms *discursive power*, the ability of elites to define social reality by shaping communicative access.

The participatory structure of digital platforms further amplifies Musk's ideological influence. Audience interactions, applause, and online comments become part of the discourse itself, producing what Cohen-Almagor (2017) calls *discursive amplification*. The audience's emotional alignment, seen in cheers and affirmations during his speech, creates a feedback loop that reinforces Musk's authority as a "people's leader." However, this interactivity is asymmetrical: while the audience appears empowered to engage, the communicative frame remains entirely curated by Musk. Through this model, he performs what Fairclough might identify as *simulated democracy*, where participation gives legitimacy to pre-engineered ideological outcomes.

Technological Authority as Ideological Power

In Elon Musk's speech, technological authority operates as a central ideological mechanism that legitimizes his political and moral stance. Throughout the Pennsylvania address, Musk continually positions his technical expertise as synonymous with truth, efficiency, and problem-solving capability. When he claims, "*I'm a technologist.. it's too easy to hack,*" he simultaneously critiques digital voting systems and elevates his own credibility as an engineer. This act of self-legitimation through professional identity aligns with Fairclough's (2010) idea that discursive power often depends on *epistemic authority*, the capacity to define what counts as valid knowledge. Musk's authority stems not from political experience but from his technological success, allowing him to transform technical knowledge into moral capital.

This rhetorical transformation is ideologically significant. By framing technological reasoning as a universal logic (Fisher, 2010), Musk constructs a worldview in which political and moral conflicts are reducible to technical inefficiencies. Issues like government spending, border control, and public safety are recast as engineering problems rather than social complexities. Consequently, political legitimacy is transferred from elected officials to technocratic figures who claim superior problem-solving capacity (Bandola-Gill, 2021). Musk's discourse thus reinforces the neoliberal ideology that privileges efficiency and expertise over collective decision-making.

Moreover, Musk's frequent invocation of freedom, particularly freedom of speech, reveals how technological authority is discursively intertwined with libertarian ideals. His critique of censorship and government overreach aligns with the Silicon Valley ethos of technological libertarianism, which presents digital platforms as spaces of radical openness while concealing corporate control. When Musk asserts, "*They're attacking me for freedom. It's like, yo, that's the First Amendment,*" he performs a moral defense of technology as the protector of democracy. Yet, beneath this populist defense lies an ideological paradox, this tension exposes how the discourse of freedom can function as an instrument of control, masking asymmetrical power relations under the guise of empowerment (Mulderigg, 2011). As a consequence, Musk's technological authority becomes a discursive bridge that merges rational expertise with moral

righteousness. It enables him to frame his interventions as objective and benevolent, while delegitimizing alternative viewpoints as irrational or corrupt.

The Reproduction of Neoliberal Logic through Technocratic Discourse

Musk's speech also reveals how neoliberal ideology is linguistically reproduced through the discourse of technocratic rationality. His repeated calls for efficiency reflect a core neoliberal logic, the belief that social and political systems should emulate the efficiency of markets and corporations. According to Fairclough (2010), neoliberal discourse often operates by *technologizing language*, where governance is reframed through managerial and economic metaphors that depoliticize decision-making. For examples, when Musk argues on reducing government spending, his statements evoke a moral economy where fiscal austerity equals virtue. Such rhetoric echoes the neoliberal ideal of *small government*, positioning the state as inefficient and burdensome while glorifying private innovation as the true driver of progress (Vogel, 2022). By embedding these ideas in everyday language ("common sense," "basic stuff," "normal thinking") Musk normalizes neoliberal ideology as pragmatic truth rather than political choice. Fairclough identifies this as *ideological naturalization*, a process through which dominant economic principles become accepted as the only rational worldview.

Furthermore, Musk's creation of a hypothetical "efficiency" encapsulates the neoliberal fantasy of perfect governance through technocratic management. The discourse of "efficiency" in this context conceals structural inequalities by implying that all social problems can be solved through technical refinement (Avgerou & McGrath, 2007). When Musk claims that "whatever you incent will happen," he adopts a corporate lexicon that treats governance as a system of incentives and productivity metrics, mirroring private-sector logic. This discourse is subtly fused with populist resentment. His critique of "wasteful bureaucrats" and "failed agencies" channels collective frustration toward the public sector, while his own technocratic leadership embodies the neoliberal ideal of the entrepreneurial hero. This dual strategy, attacking the state while personifying efficiency, creates what could be called a *technopopulist neoliberalism*: an ideological hybrid where anti-elite sentiment legitimizes elite power in new forms. In CDA terms, this represents a *discursive inversion*, where the language of emancipation (efficiency, freedom, innovation) conceals the reproduction of economic domination.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Elon Musk's speech represents a paradigmatic case of the intersection between technocratic rhetoric and populist discourse, an articulation of *technopopulism*. Through Fairclough's CDA three-dimensional model, the findings demonstrate how linguistic strategies at the textual level (lexical choice, metaphor, repetition, and pronoun structures) are employed to construct collective solidarity, dramatize crisis, and normalize technical reasoning as everyday truth. Metaphors of catastrophe such as "World War Z" and "Mad Max" amplify a sense of urgency, while repeated expressions like "we want" and the use of inclusive pronouns reinforce identification between the speaker and the public. Musk's speech illustrates how the relationship between message production, digital mediation, and public visibility operates to extend the reach and legitimacy of discourse. Within the sociocultural dimension, Musk's discourse reproduces and consolidates neoliberal values (efficiency, deregulation, and market rationality), by reframing them as moral and rational choices. His choice of words emphasis the framing of political issues as technical problems displace complex political conflicts, positioning technocratic rationality as the ultimate solution. The paper shows that Musk's speech reaffirms the relevance of CDA in deconstructing the illusion of technological neutrality and exposing how rhetorical strategies disguise domination as benevolence. It, further, suggest that technopopulist discourse redefines the sources of political legitimacy and establishes a new hegemonic order rooted in technical authority and digital circulation.

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