

CO-CONSTRUCTING DIGITAL COMMEMORATION ON FACEBOOK DURING REUNIFICATION DAY

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Abstract

Vietnam's reunification day has increasingly been commemorated through social media, where remembrance extends beyond official institutions to include influential digital figures and public participation. Although previous studies have examined digital memory and influencer communication, limited attention has been paid to how Vietnamese key opinion leaders (KOLs) and their audiences collaboratively construct commemorative discourse during nationally significant events. This study investigates how Vietnamese KOLs and their audiences co-construct digital commemoration on Facebook during the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification day. A qualitative corpus-based design was employed to analyse 32 Facebook posts published by 13 prominent KOLs and 160 highly engaged audience comments using an integrated framework of critical discourse analysis and digital linguistic ethnography. The findings reveal that KOLs construct commemorative meanings through evaluative language, personalised storytelling, and multimodal symbolism, while audiences actively participate through expressions of alignment, emotional resonance, reflection, and occasional critique. These interactions demonstrate that commemorative meanings are continuously negotiated through linguistic choices, visual resources, and platform-mediated engagement. Digital commemoration on Facebook functions as a dynamic and participatory process in which influencers and audiences jointly shape public memory, extending current understanding of digital commemoration, influencer-mediated discourse, and online civic engagement in contemporary Vietnam.



Keyword: *Critical discourse analysis; digital commemoration; digital linguistic ethnography; Facebook; key opinion leaders*

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INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's reunification day (30 April) is one of the most politically and symbolically significant commemorative events in contemporary Vietnam. Traditionally, the event has been represented through official ceremonies, state media narratives, and ritualised displays of national unity and victory. In

recent years, however, commemorative practices have increasingly expanded to social media platforms, particularly Facebook, where remembrance is no longer produced solely by state institutions but also by celebrities, entertainers, and social media influencers, commonly referred to as key opinion leaders (KOLs). Through posts, images, and audience interaction, these platform-mediated practices signal a shift from institutionalised remembrance to more participatory and interactional forms of digital commemoration.

Within this digital environment, commemoration has become a hybrid communicative practice in which patriotic narratives intersect with emotional storytelling, personal branding, and public engagement (Abidin, 2016; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Reading, 2011). KOLs frequently combine linguistic, visual, and affective resources, including national symbols, personal reflections, commemorative imagery, and multimodal design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Machin, 2013), while audiences actively respond through comments, emojis, and other platform affordances that display agreement, amplification, negotiation, or critique (Androutsopoulos, 2014). Facebook, therefore, functions not merely as a communication channel but as a participatory space in which commemorative meanings are continually produced and reshaped (Hoskins, 2014; Reading, 2011).

Previous scholarship has demonstrated that digital platforms play an increasingly important role in shaping collective memory and public commemoration (Hoskins, 2014; Reading, 2011). Research has also shown that social media transforms remembrance into a dialogic and participatory practice in which users actively negotiate meanings rather than simply reproduce official narratives (Androutsopoulos, 2014). Similarly, Rohadi and Sugaryamah (2024) highlight the importance of critical engagement with social media content, showing that users may encounter both language-related and non-language-related difficulties when analysing issues circulating on digital platforms. These studies have significantly advanced understanding of digital memory; however, they have primarily examined commemorative practices from broader perspectives rather than focusing specifically on how influencers and audiences jointly construct commemorative meanings on Facebook in non-Western contexts.

From a discourse perspective, critical discourse analysis (CDA) conceptualises discourse as a social practice through which ideology, power relations, and collective identities are constructed and negotiated (Fairclough, 1993; van Dijk, 1998). Within memory studies, CDA has been widely employed to examine how commemorative discourse legitimises national narratives through evaluative language, modality, and historical representation (Wodak, 2014). Complementing this perspective, digital linguistic ethnography (DLE) highlights how discourse is shaped by the socio-technical conditions of digital platforms, including affordances, visibility regimes, and interactional practices (Androutsopoulos, 2014). In addition, multimodal discourse research has demonstrated that visual resources, such as national symbols, colour schemes, emojis, and ceremonial imagery, play a central role in constructing emotional engagement and ideological positioning within digital communication (Azer et al., 2023; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Machin, 2013; Stepaniuk, 2024).

Research on KOLs has likewise expanded considerably in recent years. International studies have recognised influencers as important mediators of public opinion and civic engagement, particularly through affective communication and relational authenticity (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Shen et al., 2023). In Vietnam, however, empirical studies have focused predominantly on commercial contexts, such as influencer marketing, consumer trust, and livestream commerce (Le, 2022; Tran et al., 2025). These studies establish the

persuasive and communicative roles of Vietnamese KOLs in commercial settings, but they do not sufficiently explain how the same actors participate in national commemorative discourse or how their audiences respond to such discourse. Consequently, little is known about how Vietnamese KOLs contribute to commemorative discourse, negotiate national identity, or facilitate audience participation during historically significant events.

Despite these growing bodies of research, an important gap remains. Three limitations can be identified in the existing literature. First, studies of digital memory have generally examined online commemoration without sufficiently foregrounding the role of high-visibility influencers as mediators of public memory. Second, research on influencer communication has largely focused on commercial and promotional practices rather than national commemoration and collective memory. Third, studies of social-media discourse have not sufficiently examined how influencer-produced messages and audience responses interact to co-construct commemorative meanings, particularly in the Vietnamese context. As a result, the co-construction of commemorative meanings through linguistic, multimodal, and platform-specific practices remains insufficiently understood.

To address this gap, the present study investigates how Vietnamese KOLs and their followers co-construct digital commemoration on Facebook during the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification day in 2025. Unlike previous studies that examine digital memory, influencer communication, or social-media discourse largely as separate areas of inquiry, the present study brings these dimensions together by analysing KOL posts and audience comments as interconnected forms of commemorative interaction. The study contributes to the literature in two important ways. First, it demonstrates how influencer-mediated commemorative discourse combines patriotic legitimization with affective performance, positioning KOLs as symbolic intermediaries between official narratives and vernacular participation. Second, it shows how audience responses actively shape the visibility, resonance, and ideological development of commemorative discourse through interactional engagement. To examine these dynamics, the study integrates CDA and DLE, enabling commemorative discourse to be analysed simultaneously as ideological practice and platform-mediated interaction.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are (1) to examine the linguistic and multimodal strategies employed by Vietnamese KOLs in constructing commemorative discourse on Facebook, (2) to investigate how audiences linguistically and semiotically align with, negotiate, or contest these commemorative messages, and (3) to explore how KOLs and audiences co-construct digital commemoration through interaction on Facebook. To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions (RQ):

1. What linguistic and multimodal strategies do Vietnamese KOLs use on Facebook to construct commemorative meanings during the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's Reunification Day?
2. How do followers linguistically and semiotically align with, negotiate, or contest these commemorative messages in the comment sections?
3. How do discursive themes converge and interact across KOL posts and audience comments in the co-construction of digital commemoration on Facebook?

By foregrounding influencer-audience interaction within a platform-specific context, this study reconceptualises digital commemoration as an elite yet dialogic site where ideology, affect, and mediated participation intersect in contemporary Vietnamese society.

METHODS

1. Data source and sampling

This study employed a qualitative corpus-based design to investigate digital commemoration on Facebook during the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's Reunification Day. The corpus comprised 32 Facebook posts published between 27th April and 4th May 2025 by 13 high-visibility Vietnamese KOLs. This period represents the peak commemorative cycle surrounding Reunification Day, encompassing both anticipatory posts before 30 April and reflective posts following the anniversary. The selected KOLs represented elite influencer publics rather than the Vietnamese population. The sample included five singers, one actor, two actresses, two television hosts (MCs), one TikToker, and two beauty pageant titleholders. Purposive sampling was adopted based on three criteria: (1) possession of a verified Facebook account, ensuring publicly identifiable and high-visibility profiles; (2) more than 400,000 followers, used as a practical indicator of substantial platform reach; and (3) publication of at least one Facebook post explicitly commemorating Reunification Day during the sampling period. The inclusion of KOLs from different professional backgrounds was intended to provide diversity within the influencer sample while maintaining the study's focus on high-visibility public figures. These criteria ensured that the dataset represented prominent influencer discourse within Facebook's platform ecology.

The 32 posts were selected from the identified KOL accounts when they met the thematic and temporal criteria. Relevant posts were identified using both textual and visual indicators. Textual indicators included keywords such as 30/4, *50 năm giải phóng miền Nam, thống nhất đất nước* [50 years since the liberation and reunification], and *đại lễ* [grand ceremony]. Visual indicators included national flags, military imagery, commemorative colour schemes, state ceremonies, and references to historical figures. Posts were included when their textual and/or visual content explicitly connected the publication with Reunification Day commemorative discourse.

2. Audience comment selection and data collection

To examine audience participation, the five most-engaged comments from each of the 32 posts were collected according to the number of Facebook reactions, producing a dataset of 160 audience comments. The selection of five comments per post provided a consistent sampling rule across the corpus and allowed audience responses to be examined in relation to each KOL post while keeping the qualitative dataset analytically manageable. The comments were selected based on their visible engagement at the time of data collection, including reactions such as likes and loves. This strategy was adopted because highly engaged comments represent responses that had achieved greater visibility within the platform's interactional environment. The purpose was, therefore, not to establish the general opinion of Facebook users but to examine highly visible forms of audience uptake, alignment, negotiation, and contestation. Because engagement-based selection may privilege popular responses and underrepresent less-visible participation, the 160 comments are treated as platform-amplified audience responses rather than representative public opinion. Less-visible comments were consequently outside the scope of the present study.

3. Analytical framework and instruments

The study adopted an integrated analytical framework combining CDA, DLE, and focused multimodal discourse analysis. CDA was employed to examine how ideological meanings, national identity, and commemorative narratives were linguistically constructed, whereas DLE provided a platform-oriented perspective by analysing Facebook's affordances, visibility regimes, and interactional organisation. Multimodal analysis complemented these approaches by examining how visual resources contributed to meaning-making.

The coding framework was developed deductively from the theoretical framework and relevant previous research and was subsequently refined inductively during analysis. The analytical process proceeded in four stages. First, the researcher familiarised themselves with the entire corpus through repeated reading of the 32 KOL posts and 160 audience comments and recorded initial observations in analytic memos. Second, deductive coding was applied to identify theoretically relevant linguistic, multimodal, and interactional features. Third, the coded data were repeatedly compared across posts and comment sets, allowing recurrent or previously unanticipated patterns to be refined into additional analytical categories. Finally, the categories identified in KOL posts and audience comments were compared and synthesised to determine broader patterns of co-construction across the two datasets.

For KOL posts, five analytical dimensions were examined: (1) evaluative lexis, including expressions of pride, gratitude, and emotional evaluation; (2) modality, including expressions of obligation, belief, aspiration, or expectation; (3) narrative framing, including commemorative, moralising, personal, and reflective orientations; (4) collective identity cues, including inclusive pronouns and references to national unity; and (5) multimodal resources, including national symbols, colour schemes, emojis, ceremonial imagery, and traditional attire.

For audience comments, five analytical dimensions were examined: (1) stance orientation, including alignment, negotiation, and resistance toward KOL messages; (2) emotional register, including pride, nostalgia, irony, scepticism, and ambivalence; (3) historical referencing, including references to national events, historical figures, and personal or familial memory; (4) interpersonal bonding, including informal language, kinship terms, and culturally specific expressions; and (5) engagement strategies, including emojis, emphatic punctuation, rhetorical questions, and interactional phrasing. These dimensions functioned as analytical guides rather than rigid categories and were refined through repeated comparison across the corpus.

Visual analysis followed a two-stage procedure consisting of (1) systematic description of observable visual features, such as symbols, colour schemes, imagery, and composition, and (2) interpretation of their ideological and affective functions in relation to accompanying textual content. This procedure ensured that visual meanings were interpreted in relation to text-image interaction rather than treated as independent evidence.

4. Data analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative qualitative procedure combining deductive and inductive coding. Initial coding categories were derived from the

theoretical framework, while repeated close reading enabled additional patterns to emerge through constant comparison. The researcher first analysed KOL posts to identify recurrent linguistic, multimodal, and ideological strategies used to construct commemorative meanings. The audience comments were then analysed in relation to the corresponding KOL posts to identify patterns of alignment, negotiation, and contestation. In the final analytical stage, findings from the two datasets were brought together to examine how themes converged, diverged, or interacted across KOL posts and audience responses. Attention was given to recurring patterns of patriotic celebration, affective nostalgia, critical reflexivity, and forward-looking unity. This cross-dataset comparison enabled the analysis to move beyond separate descriptions of KOL discourse and audience responses towards an interpretation of digital commemoration as a process of interactional co-construction.

5. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

As the study was conducted by a single researcher, inter-coder agreement was not applicable. Instead, analytical trustworthiness was addressed through repeated coding, internal re-coding, analytic memo-writing, and maintenance of an audit trail. Coding proceeded through repeated comparison across the corpus, and after approximately two-thirds of the dataset had been analysed, no substantially new discursive categories emerged. Subsequent data instances primarily reiterated established patterns with minor variation, which was considered evidence of thematic saturation appropriate to the qualitative design. To assess coding consistency, approximately 25% of the dataset was re-coded at a later stage, and the results of the two coding rounds were compared. Borderline or ambiguous cases were reviewed and documented through analytic memos, while category definitions were refined where necessary to improve consistency and conceptual clarity. The audit trail recorded coding decisions, category revisions, and interpretive reflections throughout the analytical process, providing a systematic means of assessing the stability and transparency of the researcher's interpretations in the absence of a second coder.

The study used only publicly accessible Facebook posts and comments. No private information was accessed, and no interaction with users occurred. All audience comments were originally written in Vietnamese and were translated into English and paraphrased where necessary to preserve their core meanings while minimising traceability. Usernames, profile information, and other personal identifiers were excluded from the dataset and manuscript. These measures sought to maintain analytical transparency while protecting users' contextual privacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Discursive strategies used by KOLs (RQ1)

The findings addressing RQ1 show that Vietnamese KOLs constructed Reunification Day commemoration through a recurring combination of evaluative language, collective identity, narrative framing, modality, and multimodal symbolism. The dominant discourse was strongly affirmative, emphasising national pride, gratitude, peace, historical continuity, and collective responsibility. However, rather than simply reproducing institutional commemorative narratives, KOLs frequently personalised these meanings

through emotional self-positioning and everyday forms of expression. The findings therefore suggest that influencer-mediated commemoration involves both ideological reproduction and personalisation of national memory.

Five major discursive dimensions were identified across the 32 Facebook posts: evaluative lexis, modality, narrative framing, collective identity cues, and visual semiotics. Their relative prevalence is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Discursive strategies used by Vietnamese KOLs in commemorative Facebook posts

Discursive dimension	Description	Frequency (n = 32 posts)
Evaluative lexis	Emotionally charged expressions signaling pride, gratitude, reverence	High
Modality	Use of obligation, belief, or moral stance (e.g. duty, gratitude)	Medium
Narrative framing	Celebratory or reflective framing of national history	High
Collective identity cues	Inclusive pronouns, national slogans, shared moral positioning	High
Visual semiotics	National colors, ceremonial imagery, symbolic attire	High

Note. Frequency labels (High/ Medium/ Low) indicate relative prevalence across the corpus rather than statistical measurement. Visual semiotics include photographs, colour palettes, emojis, and layout features accompanying post text.

1.1. Evaluative language and patriotic positioning

Evaluative language was one of the most prominent resources in the KOL posts. Expressions associated with pride, gratitude, emotion, and reverence repeatedly positioned Reunification Day as a morally significant national event. Rather than presenting 30 April simply as a historical anniversary, KOLs constructed it as an occasion requiring an appropriate emotional response. For example, one post expressed an intensely emotional sense of national pride and enduring gratitude, while another positioned Vietnamese identity itself as a source of pride. Such expressions can be paraphrased as “feeling deeply moved and immensely proud to be Vietnamese” and “being proud of being Vietnamese.” These formulations illustrate how historical commemoration was transformed into personal affective positioning.

From a CDA perspective, this pattern is significant because evaluation does not merely describe an event; it establishes preferred emotional orientations toward that event. Pride and gratitude function as discursive resources for constructing a shared moral community. This finding is consistent with Wodak’s (2014) argument that national identity is frequently reproduced through evaluative and affective representations of collective history.

At the same time, the present findings extend this perspective by showing how such evaluative discourse is personalised by KOLs. The national narrative

is not presented exclusively through institutional or formal language but through the intimate and emotionally accessible style characteristic of social-media communication. In this respect, the findings support Marwick and Boyd's (2011) observation that public figures construct relational closeness through forms of seemingly personal communication. However, while their work primarily concerns micro-celebrity practices and audience relationships, the present study demonstrates that relational communication can also become a mechanism through which national memory is emotionally mediated.

1.2. Gratitude, sacrifice, and historical continuity

A second prominent pattern involved representations of historical sacrifice. Several KOL posts connected contemporary peace and happiness with the sacrifices of previous generations. One post, for example, expressed gratitude towards ancestors and those who had sacrificed so that subsequent generations could experience peace. Another framed the commemorative moment through the idea that those who fought with weapons enabled the present generation to pursue education and intellectual work. Such expressions construct a temporal relationship between past sacrifice and present responsibility. The past is not represented as a closed historical episode but as a moral foundation for the present. The metaphorical contrast between holding guns and holding pens is particularly significant because it compresses a complex historical transition into a highly accessible image of generational continuity.

This finding corresponds with research on the politics of memory, in which commemorative discourse selectively connects representations of the past with contemporary collective values (Wodak, 2014). However, the present data indicate that this process is not restricted to formal political discourse. KOLs translate historical memory into short, emotionally accessible formulations that are compatible with Facebook's communicative environment. The finding also has implications for digital literacy and critical engagement. Rohadi and Sugaryamah (2024), examining students' analysis of current issues presented on Twitter in Indonesian and English, demonstrate that interpreting social-media discourse requires attention not only to linguistic forms but also to critical thinking. Their findings are relevant here because the commemorative messages examined in the present study are similarly embedded in a digital environment in which emotional and ideological meanings may be condensed into highly shareable textual and visual forms. Although the two studies address different RQs and platforms, both highlight the importance of examining how social-media users construct and interpret meaning rather than treating online content as transparent representations of reality.

1.3. Narrative framing and collective identity

Narrative framing was also highly prominent. KOLs predominantly employed celebratory and reflective frames, presenting Reunification Day through themes of national unity, gratitude, peace, and continuity. Collective identity was frequently constructed through references to Vietnamese people, shared historical experience, and national belonging. The recurrent use of collective identity cues indicates that KOL discourse moved between individual and collective positioning. A KOL could speak from a personal perspective while simultaneously positioning personal experience as part of a broader national

community. This movement between the self and the nation is important because it allows public figures to participate in national memory without adopting the formal register of institutional communication.

This pattern is broadly compatible with earlier studies of national discourse, particularly research showing that collective identities are constructed through linguistic categorisation, evaluation, and representations of shared experience (van Dijk, 1998; Wodak, 2014). Nevertheless, the present study adds a platform-specific dimension: collective identity is constructed through a combination of linguistic choices, personal narratives, images, emojis, and other resources that make national discourse compatible with the communicative conventions of Facebook.

1.4. Multimodal symbolism and platformed visibility

The linguistic strategies identified above were consistently reinforced through visual resources. National flags, red-and-yellow colour schemes, ceremonial imagery, historical references, and symbolic clothing such as *áo dàì* provided visual anchors for commemorative meanings. These resources condensed complex historical narratives into recognisable symbols and helped establish an affective atmosphere of celebration and reverence. From a multimodal perspective, visual resources do not merely decorate textual messages. They participate in meaning-making by directing attention towards particular interpretations and emotional responses (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Machin, 2013). The present findings therefore support previous research showing that visual design can intensify engagement with social-media content (Stepaniuk, 2024).

However, the findings also suggest that visual symbolism performs a particular function in influencer-mediated commemoration. KOLs combine nationally recognisable symbols with their own public persona. Consequently, national identity and personal identity become visually intertwined. The KOL does not simply display a national symbol; the KOL's body, clothing, photographs, and personal presentation become part of the commemorative representation. This represents an important distinction from more institutionally centred accounts of commemoration. Digital commemoration on Facebook allows national symbols to circulate through personalised and influencer-centred forms of visibility. In this sense, platformed commemoration can be understood as a hybrid practice in which public memory intersects with affective self-presentation.

2. Audience responses and Stance-taking (RQ2)

Addressing RQ 2, audience comments largely affirmed the commemorative frames introduced by KOLs, but they also displayed aspirational positioning, emotional diversification, and occasional reflexive critique. Audience stance-taking was analysed across five dimensions: alignment versus resistance, emotional register, historical reference, interpersonal bonding, and engagement strategies. An overview of stance types observed in the 160 comments is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Audience stance types in high-engagement Facebook comments

Stance type	Linguistic and multimodal features	Relative prevalence (n = 160 comments)
Affirmative alignment	Praise, gratitude, collective pronouns, supportive emojis	High
Aspirational alignment	Expressions of admiration or desire to emulate civic attitude	Medium
Affective personalisation	Family memories, generational references, emotional narratives	Medium
Critical reflexivity	Irony, hedging, reframing toward social concerns	Low
Neutral / informational	Factual clarification or brief acknowledgement	Low

Note. Comments were categorised based on dominant stance. Paraphrasing was applied systematically in analysis and reporting to minimise traceability of public social media content.

2.1. Affirmative alignment and affective uptake

Affirmative alignment was the most visible audience response. Many commenters expressed pride, gratitude, emotional attachment, or appreciation of the KOL's commemorative message. For example, one comment can be paraphrased as “feeling deeply grateful to previous generations whose sacrifices made today's peace possible.” Another expressed the sentiment that the KOL's action was meaningful because it spread positivity and demonstrated patriotism. These responses demonstrate what can be termed affective uptake: audiences adopted the emotional orientation of the original post while reformulating it in their own words. Importantly, this was not necessarily verbatim repetition. Commenters frequently translated collective commemorative narratives into personal emotional statements.

This finding supports Hoskins' (2014) argument that digital environments facilitate more participatory forms of memory-making. It also extends this argument by showing that audience participation may operate through very small linguistic and semiotic acts, including short evaluative statements, emojis, and expressions of gratitude. These seemingly brief responses nevertheless contribute to the circulation and reinforcement of commemorative meanings.

2.2. Personal and intergenerational memory

Affective personalisation was another significant pattern. Some audience responses connected national commemoration with personal or family histories. One commenter, for instance, described herself as someone who had grown up during wartime and later lived through peace. Another described becoming emotional after watching historical footage of President Ho Chi Minh. These responses are particularly important because they transform an officially recognised national anniversary into an individually experienced memory. The historical event is no longer represented only through collective political narratives but becomes connected to biography, family experience, and emotional remembrance.

This finding is consistent with Hoskins' (2014) conceptualisation of digital memory as increasingly affective and participatory. It also illustrates how social-media users connect public memory with private experience. Nevertheless, the present findings add an influencer-mediated dimension: personal memories emerge in response to posts initiated by high-visibility public figures, suggesting that KOL posts can function as prompts for audiences to articulate their own relationships with national history.

2.3. Aspirational alignment and relational engagement

A further group of comments expressed admiration for the KOL's commemorative behaviour or conveyed a desire to adopt similar civic attitudes. Some comments praised the action as meaningful and inspirational rather than merely agreeing with the historical message. This pattern is relevant to research on micro-celebrity and influencer communication. Marwick and Boyd (2011) argue that social-media celebrities cultivate relational connections with audiences through perceived intimacy and accessibility. The present findings indicate that such relational dynamics can extend beyond entertainment or commercial communication. KOLs can become models through which audiences express forms of civic and patriotic identification.

This finding differs from the dominant focus of Vietnamese KOL research on commercial persuasion, consumer trust, and livestream commerce (Le, 2022; Tran et al., 2025). The data suggest that influencer influence in Vietnam is not necessarily confined to consumer behaviour. Under particular commemorative circumstances, the same visibility and relational mechanisms can facilitate civic and memory-oriented engagement.

2.4. Critical reflexivity and negotiated patriotism

Although less frequent than affirmative responses, critical reflexivity is analytically important because it demonstrates that audience engagement was not completely homogeneous. Some comments questioned the sincerity of highly performative patriotism or redirected commemorative discourse towards contemporary social issues. One response, for example, can be safely paraphrased as "peace is valuable, but greater practical support should also be provided to veterans." This response does not reject the commemorative value of peace. Instead, it connects symbolic remembrance with a contemporary social concern. In this way, commemoration becomes a platform for evaluating whether the values celebrated in historical memory are adequately reflected in present social conditions.

Another response expressed ironic scepticism about the poster's patriotic positioning, which can be paraphrased as "perhaps I am not usually patriotic." Rather than functioning as straightforward opposition, this formulation introduces distance between the commenter and the dominant patriotic frame. These examples are significant because they challenge a simple binary distinction between support and resistance. Audience negotiation can occur through qualification, irony, reframing, and the introduction of alternative concerns. Such findings are compatible with research emphasising the contested and negotiated nature of online discourse. They also resonate with Rohadi and Sugaryamah's (2024) emphasis on critical thinking when interpreting current issues presented through social-media platforms. However, unlike their focus on students' critical reading abilities, the present study examines critical reflexivity as an observable discourse practice within audience responses.

Thus, the comments demonstrate that digital commemoration may simultaneously reproduce dominant national narratives and create limited discursive space for reflection on their contemporary implications.

2.5. Multimodal audience engagement

Audience participation was also multimodal. Emojis, repeated punctuation, typographic emphasis, and other visual or paralinguistic resources intensified emotional stances. Such resources are particularly significant in Facebook communication because users can communicate affect without producing extended verbal arguments. The findings therefore support the view that digital discourse should not be analysed through written language alone. Meaning is distributed across words, images, emojis, interactional conventions, and platform affordances (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Machin, 2013). The audience's contribution to commemoration consequently takes place through both linguistic and semiotic resources.

3. Co-construction of digital commemoration (RQ3)

Synthesising patterns across KOL posts and audience comments, four interrelated discursive themes emerged: patriotic celebration, affective nostalgia, critical reflexivity, and forward-looking unity. Table 3 presents the distribution of these themes across posts and comments, indicating their overlap and relative prominence.

Table 3. Emergent discursive themes in KOL posts and audience comments

Discursive theme	Key characteristics	Dominant source
Patriotic celebration	National pride, unity, symbolic ritual, moral solidarity	KOL posts & comments
Affective nostalgia	Personal or familial memory linked to national history	Audience comments
Critical reflexivity	Subtle scepticism, irony, or issue reframing	Audience comments
Forward-looking unity	Generational continuity, future civic responsibility	KOL posts & comments

Note. Themes are analytically distinct but frequently co-occur within the same post or comment thread. The dominant source indicates where the theme appeared most consistently, not exclusive ownership.

3.1. From patriotic celebration to affective participation

Patriotic celebration constituted the dominant thematic frame. KOLs foregrounded national pride, gratitude, historical sacrifice, and unity, while audiences generally responded in compatible affective terms. However, the interaction between these two levels transformed commemoration from a one-directional message into a participatory process. The KOL post establishes an initial commemorative frame, while audience responses reproduce, personalise, qualify, or redirect that frame. The resulting discourse is therefore neither entirely institutional nor entirely vernacular. Instead, it emerges through interaction between an elite influencer public and its audience.

This finding develops earlier work on digital memory (Hoskins, 2014; Reading, 2011) by demonstrating how influencer visibility can become an important intermediary mechanism in the construction of commemorative discourse. It also extends scholarship on KOLs by demonstrating that influencer-mediated communication can operate within civic and historical domains in addition to commercial ones.

3.2. Affective nostalgia and the personalisation of national memory

Affective nostalgia emerged most clearly when audiences connected national history to personal and intergenerational experience. References to wartime childhood, historical figures, family sacrifice, and emotional reactions to archival material demonstrate how collective memory can become embedded in individual biography. This finding reinforces the argument that digital memory is increasingly participatory and affective. However, the present data show that affective memory is not simply generated independently by users. It can be activated by highly visible commemorative posts and subsequently elaborated by audience members through personal narratives.

The interaction therefore moves from collective history to personal memory and back to collective identity. A national event provides the initial frame; individual users insert their own memories; and these personal accounts subsequently reinforce the broader commemorative environment.

3.3. Critical reflexivity within commemorative discourse

Critical reflexivity constituted the least prominent but theoretically significant theme. Its presence indicates that digital commemoration does not necessarily result in complete ideological consensus. Instead, users may accept the emotional importance of commemoration while questioning how its values are enacted in contemporary society. The veteran-support comment illustrates this dynamic particularly clearly. The comment does not deny the value of peace or sacrifice. Rather, it introduces a contemporary ethical question into the commemorative frame. The result is a form of negotiated patriotism, in which expectations of social responsibility accompany national pride.

This finding complicates interpretations of social-media commemoration as straightforward reproduction of official narratives. Although alignment was dominant, the audience responses demonstrate that ideological meanings can be subtly reframed from within the commemorative discourse itself.

3.4. Forward-looking unity and civic responsibility

The fourth theme involved the transformation of historical remembrance into a future-oriented discourse. Expressions concerning gratitude, contribution, and responsibility positioned the younger generation as inheritors of historical sacrifice. One recurring idea can be paraphrased as carrying historical memory forward through gratitude and a willingness to contribute. This forward-looking orientation is important because it prevents commemoration from being reduced to retrospective celebration. The past is used to construct expectations concerning the present and future. In CDA terms, historical representation therefore becomes connected to moral positioning: remembering sacrifice implies a responsibility to preserve peace, contribute to society, and maintain collective continuity. Such a pattern also illustrates the value of integrating CDA with DLE. CDA helps identify the

ideological and moral meanings embedded in these representations, while DLE directs attention to the platform environment through which these meanings are circulated, responded to, and made visible.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how Vietnamese KOLs and their audiences co-constructed digital commemoration on Facebook during the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification day. Addressing the research objectives, the findings demonstrate that commemorative discourse is jointly produced through linguistic choices, multimodal resources, and platform-mediated interaction rather than being transmitted unidirectionally from influencers to audiences. KOLs employed evaluative language, narrative framing, collective identity cues, and symbolic visual resources to construct patriotic and emotionally resonant commemorative messages, while audiences actively participated by expressing alignment, aspiration, negotiation, and occasional critical reflection. Together, these interactional practices reveal digital commemoration as a dynamic and dialogic process in which national memory is continually interpreted and reshaped within Facebook's communicative environment.

This study advances current scholarship in three important ways. First, it demonstrates the analytical value of integrating CDA with DLE to examine digital commemoration as both an ideological and platform-mediated practice. Second, it extends existing research on Vietnamese KOLs beyond commercial communication by highlighting their role as symbolic intermediaries who mediate between institutional narratives and public participation during national commemorative events. Third, it foregrounds the agency of audiences by showing that followers are not passive recipients of commemorative discourse but active contributors to the co-construction of collective memory through linguistic, affective, and multimodal engagement.

The findings also have practical implications for communication and education. They suggest that KOLs and cultural institutions may foster more meaningful public engagement by combining national narratives with authentic personal storytelling and interactive communication. In addition, the study highlights the value of discourse-analytic and media-literacy approaches for helping learners critically interpret commemorative messages and multimodal representations circulating on social media platforms. Several limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis focused on a purposive corpus of Facebook posts published during a single commemorative period and therefore does not represent all forms of digital commemoration in Vietnam. Furthermore, the emphasis on highly engaged comments reflects platform visibility rather than the full diversity of audience participation. Future research may extend this work by examining additional social media platforms, comparing different commemorative events, employing mixed-methods designs, or investigating a broader range of influencers and online communities. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how digital memory and public commemoration continue to evolve across changing media environments.

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