

# A Critical Stylistic Study of Cyber Trolls' Comments on the Al-Jazeera Arabic TV Channel's YouTube Videos Concerning the Israeli-Iranian 2024 Conflict

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**Abstract**—This study develops a critical stylistic model to identify and analyze trolling comments on social media platforms. It attempts to identify the trolling messages and the political agendas behind them in a selected genre. Namely, it will examine and analyze the comments on a YouTube video published on April 13, 2024, by Al-Jazeera's Arabic Channel YouTube Platform concerning the Iranian military attack against Israel. Those who wrote those trolling comments showed their dissatisfaction with the limited and planned attack by Iran, which did not cause too many Israeli people to be killed during that attack. In fact, they wanted that attack to be the starting point of a more destructive regional war. Their inflammatory comments underline racist doctrine and nationalist ideologies through their hate-filled lexical items against the channel, its correspondent, and the pro-Iranian participants approving that kind and level of Iranian response. The current study adopts a two-dimensional model for uncovering the ideological convictions of the trolls and their trolling messages. It relies on the findings of social, psychological, and critical stylistic perspectives as it attempts to test the workability of the model in this new genre and the possibility of universality of its suggested analytic critical stylistic tools by applying the model to Arabic data. The study concluded that cyber trolls often wait until a considerable number of the targeted opponents comment, and then they start commenting using different techniques. The trolls' comments reflected their racist, religious doctrine and nationalist political ideologies.

**Index Terms**—trolling, critical stylistics, ideologies, YouTube comments, discourse analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

The year 2024 witnessed a considerable number of wars and other conflicts involving more than a dozen countries and threatening the lives of millions around the world. Perhaps most notable about these conflicts, however, are the internet trolls who played significant roles in feeding those conflicts by spreading disinformation and inflammatory and provocative comments on social media platforms as different means to their ends. This trolling language and behavior were apparent in the Israeli-Iranian conflict, where trolls tried to widen disagreements among people and push the scene into a destructive regional war. However, a new type of troll has recently appeared in the Middle East and has come to be known in Arab culture as “الذباب الالكتروني”/aldhubab alalkitruniu, which literally means “electric or internet flies.” It refers to those anonymous people who troll social media sites, spreading disinformation, verbally harassing group members, and gaslighting conversations into futile arguments. Quite often, the messages and comments made by the trolls reveal their political convictions as part of their sociocultural values and beliefs.

Trolling has been an issue of debate by different disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and computer science, and it has proved to be difficult to identify and precisely define. Investigating trolling requires the investment of linguistic findings, and this proved to be crucial and inevitable. This renders any attempt to investigate trolling into a multidisciplinary procedure. Research, particularly in social and psychological sciences, has proved trolling to be of different motives, types, and techniques, yet there is no clear consensus on such issues.

People often ask some typical questions concerning the trolling behavior, like “Who are the trolls?” and “Why do they do what they do?” Unfortunately, objective and scientifically verified answers to these questions have been very limited. One answer to the first question, according to computer scientists, is limited to uncovering the identities of accounts spreading what is manually decided to be misinformation into two types: human trolling and bot trolling, both of which are done by using BotHunter and Netmapper computer software programs. The first one is to identify anonymous accounts, and the second is to identify the use of offensive lexical items in messages. Attempts to design automated identification of trolling have proved to be a tedious process and are still in their initial forms (see a contemporary attempt of this kind by Uyheng et al. (2022) to invent a “TrollHunter” program). Research concerning the second question has proved to be difficult to answer and renders trolling behavior to some psychological motives such

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as sadism. The current study believes that an important motive that pushes trolls to enroll in trolling behavior is ideological. The political motivations and their manifestations in their acts of trolling have not, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, been investigated. Investigating such aspects requires an appeal to findings of critical linguistics disciplines. Therefore, this study attempted to answer two main questions:

1. How can trolling comments on a media platform be identified?
2. What are the underlying ideologies of the participating trolls in such platforms?

According to the above-mentioned questions, the following hypotheses were put forth:

1. Trolling messages can be identified according to some contextual, social, psychological, and linguistic variables.
2. Trolling comments in the analyzed data try to emphasize racist, doctrinal, and nationalist ideologies to instigate a more destructive regional war ideology.

To achieve these hypotheses, the following procedures were followed:

1. Developing an eclectic critical stylistic model of trolling based on insights derived from Berghel's (2018) and Kızıltepe's (2019) psychological characteristics of trolling, Uyheng et al.'s (2022) operational definition of trolling that shows its psycholinguistic variables, and Jeffries' (2010, 2023) critical stylistic tools of identifying ideologies via styles.
2. Using the developed model phase concerning trolling, beginning with data collecting and stratification to identify the trolling comments and exclude the non-trolling ones.
3. Using both dimensions of the model to analyze the identified trolling comments and uncover the underlying ideologies of the involved trolls in those comments.

With respect to the study's limits, the data of the study was limited to one YouTube video from Al-Jazeera's Arabic TV YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYgfre6yghQ>). The analysis is limited to the verbal comments and excludes the non-verbal and paralinguistic ones because they require a multi-modal semiotic treatment, which is beyond the limits of this study.

Lastly, the study attempted to test the workability of the developed model for this new genre and the possibility of universality of its suggested analytic critical stylistic tools called "textual-conceptual meanings" by applying the model to Arabic data.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Trolling

#### (a). Trolling Definitions

The concept of the "troll" was introduced and coined in the late 1980s (Donarath, 1999). It has been used in politics and social media since 2010 to refer to those "malicious interactions seeking to deceive, disrupt, or aggravate contentious conversations" (Al Marouf et al., 2019). Although often used on social media, "internet trolling is an antisocial online behaviour characterised by posting inflammatory, provocative comments with the intention of upsetting others" (March et al., 2023, p. 4815). Therefore, "people who enjoy causing disagreement on the internet, attempting to start discussions, and upsetting people are called "trolls", and their behavior is called "trolling" (Aydın et al., 2021, p. 380). However, the term "trolling" in present time is exploited "by the media to describe the posting of offensive messages by an individual or group in addition to the more proactive, deliberate, and organised hate campaigns engaged in by groups of individuals in a pre-meditated manner" (Hardaker, 2010, p. 224), cited in Lumsden and Morgan (2017). According to Uyheng et al. (2022, p. 1), "troll messages are significantly associated with more abusive language, lower cognitive complexity, and greater targeting of named entities and identities." The current study adopts this latter definition of trolling as its operational definition.

#### (b). Trolling Motivation

According to psychological perspectives, trolls require motivation to engage in trolling behavior. These motivational sources include "boredom or attraction" (Hardaker, 2010), "being a phenomenon," "having fun," "creating conflict," "gaining reputation," "discrediting others," "experiencing psychological fulfillment," "taking revenge," "loneliness," "curiosity," and "malevolence" (Herring et al., 2002). Some political motives may make a good reason to troll. Trolls have fun doing these trolling behaviors and enjoy the devastating consequences of that behavior (Aydın et al., 2021, p. 381).

#### (c). Troll Types

Trolls direct their online behavior towards a range of purposes. Based on these purposes, trolls have been classified in different ways; for example, there are "aggressive" and "provocative" trolls. The former are "trolls who insult specific users, intentionally misinterpret words, and engage in behavior such as sending personal messages to them." The latter trolls "try to get people's attention or disrupt the flow of conversation by posting a comment meant to enrage them" (Veszelski, 2017). Bishop (2012), cited in Aydın et al. (2021, p. 381), provided more detailed types of trolls and classified them into four groups:

1. “Haters” are the trolls that “provoke people to act vengefully and make mistakes. Vindictive trolls are those who oppose or commit attacks on stereotyped thought, tradition, or institutions. This group is one of the most active in terms of data sharing”.
2. “Lolcows” come in three types: (a.) “Big Man,” who “wants to create order and posts about other people’s worldviews”; (b.) “Ripper,” who “constantly focuses on negative issues, such as death and illness, and exhibits depressive behavior toward other individuals”; and finally, (c.) “Chatroom Bob,” who “tries to use individuals to their advantage by sharing and drawing attention to a variety of joke content”.
3. “Bzztters” are those who “constantly talk about meaningless topics, thereby avoiding the main point of debate”.
4. “Eyeballs” “utilize other people’s instant mistakes and distractions to send provocative content. They then observe the reactions to themselves and enjoy the situations they encounter”.

*(d). Characteristics of Trolling and Contextual Factors*

According to Hardaker (2010) and Hutchens et al. (2015), trolling comprises “four interrelated characteristics: aggression, deception, disruption, and success. Situational factors, including anonymity, have also been found to contribute to trolling interactions and behaviours” (Lumsden & Morgan, 2017). This is supported by Uyheng et al. (2022), who pointed out that “considering the interactive context of a given utterance is crucial in any evaluation of its apparent expression of intention to harm”.

*(e). Trolling Techniques*

Aydın et al. (2021, p. 381) stated that there are some considerable methods of trolling that can be used in a variety of ways. “Ad hominem” attacks discredit an idea by providing negative claims about the person who supports that idea. Among the common trolling techniques are raising emotional responses by sharing provocative content about others, deliberately opposing or showing aggression, and the sharing of abusive, sexist, provocative, racist, deceptive, and incendiary forms. Moreover, trolls can intentionally post “false facts,” distracting from the topics and engaging in meaningless talks, criticizing spelling errors in texts rather than their content, particularly on some social media platforms (Berghel, 2018; Kızıltepe, 2019).

Trolling attacks can be identified in the comment sections of various online platforms. Hardaker has pointed out several types of trolling pathways (Hardaker, 2013). “Digress,” for example, is a technique of drawing people into pointless discussions that are disconnected from the immediate context. “Hypo-criticism” reflects hostile criticism by focusing posts on spelling and grammatical errors rather than on their contents. “Antipathise” is that way of creating an alarming environment in the relevant society by “making repulsive posts and manipulating emotions, sharing provocative content, or deliberately sharing erroneous and incomplete information.” “Endanger” is a way of alleging to be an expert and offering suggestions that put people in critical situations and stimulate risky behavior. “Shock” is showing insensitivity in serious situations and making fun of issues such as death and religion. Aggress is that method of adopting “vulgar, abusive, and teasing phrases, as well as reputation-damaging and derogatory comments” (Aydın et al., 2021, p. 381).

*(f). Trolling vs. Other Terms*

*1. Trolling vs. Bullying*

Cyberbullying is the internet form of real-life bullying, and trolling is a form of online harassment. In fact, these two terms are not totally different concepts. Bullying is defined in terms of psychology and law as “influencing, crushing, and intimidating the other person who is in a superior position or stronger” (Farrington, 1993), cited in Aydın et al. (2021, p. 380). However, according to DeVoe and Kaffenberger (2005), bullying has four main characteristics: it is negative and aggressive. It is repetitive. It occurs when there is a power imbalance between the participants, and it is directed to a specific goal. Bullying is like trolling in that it is an antisocial behavior that yields negative effects (Taylor, 2006), and when it occurs online, it is referred to as virtual bullying or cyberbullying (Eroğlu et al., 2015). Cyberbullying is defined as an aggressive behavior performed by a group of people or an individual online in a repetitive and deliberate manner against a powerless victim (Solberg et al., 2007).

*2. Trolling vs. Hate Speech and Cyber-Aggression*

Similar to trolling, hate speech and cyber-aggression are some types of malicious online behavior, yet they are not identical, as these categories may not perform other uses of trolling like “humor,” “distraction,” or “non-hateful yet offensive talk” (Davidson et al., 2017).

*3. Trolling vs. State-Sponsored Information Operations*

According to Zannettou et al. (2019), trolling may be commonly employed in state-sponsored information operations. However, not all such accounts may necessarily participate in trolling per se.

*4. Trolling vs. Automation (bots)*

Trolling may potentially be identified among both bot and human accounts as they perform as unique agents of disinformation (Uyheng et al., 2022).

### 5. *Trolling vs. Cyber Vandalism*

Cyber vandalism and trolling are frequently misunderstood by internet users. Cyber vandalism can be “defined as online community behavior that deletes or deconstructs digital content, artifacts, and products”. Acting differently, trolling is that act which is “committed by the troll individual by throwing or instigating fodder at other group members, attracting them to unproductive arguments, and distracting them from their original purpose” (Aydin et al., 2021, p. 385).

## B. *Critical Stylistics*

### (a). *Definition of Critical Stylistics*

Critical stylistics is a relatively contemporary field of stylistics. It focuses on non-literary texts with the aim of uncovering the ideological underpinnings of such texts. Critical stylistics has been developed as a reaction to the occurrence of critical discourse analysis as a politically motivated linguistic discipline and a continuously effective approach to ideology in language. Critical stylistics is a multidisciplinary subject since it goes beyond text to include all forms of context in addition to background knowledge; hence, it is linked to other disciplines, among which are history, sociology, cultural and literary studies, psychology, political science, and so on. One of the important domains that require extensive critical stylistic research is media since it is a problematic field that often involves a “power imbalance” and ideologies invested to “oppress others” (Jeffries, 2023, pp. 436-439).

### (b). *Jeffries' Model of Critical Stylistics*

Jeffries (2010) introduced a model of critical stylistics that focuses on “the ideological aspects of the linguistic features to be found in texts” (Jeffries, 2023, p. 436). In fact, most of the principles of the “critical” traditions have drawn on Halliday’s functional linguistics and particularly his systemic functional linguistics.

Jeffries textual-conceptual functions (TCFs) represent a framework of textual meaning, as in the following concise account:

#### 1. *Naming and Describing*

Texts name and describe whatever is included in them of animate and inanimate entities and abstract notions. There are choices to be made, such as those between words and phrases that are denotatively equivalent yet differ connotatively, e.g., “terrorist” and “freedom fighter.” Both words denotatively refer to “a politically-motivated producer of violence.” However, they differ in their connotations. This also includes choices among formal, informal, euphemistic, dysphemistic, and other language varieties. This function also includes considering premodification of noun phrases by evaluative adjectives and the post-modification of them by propositional phrases that involve ideologically sensitive material (Jeffries, 2023, pp. 441-442).

#### 2. *Representing Actions/Events/States*

This function relies on Halliday’s “transitivity” (1994). The focus here is on the choice of the main verb in a clause. These choices may have ideological consequences, e.g., “John (informed/spoke to/let the cat out of the bag to) the police.” Jeffries (2023, p. 442) recommends consulting Simpson (1993) about transitivity and its “relation to the presentation of the producer’s (or narrator’s) point-of-view”.

#### 3. *Equating and Contrasting*

Texts can make “non-conventional” synonyms and antonyms that involve political ideologies, e.g., racist ideology. The following texts are taken from an election poster campaign executed in the 1980s by the Conservative Party in the UK, as they were placed below photos of both an Afro-Caribbean man and an Asian man:

Labor says he’s Black.

Tories say he’s British.

The conventional opposites (Labor/Tory) are put in the form of a parallel structure, a process that motivates the reader to comprehend “that the two object complements (Black/British)” will “also be opposites.” The implicit racist ideology of the text reassures the right wing of the Conservative Party, while the superficial meaning of the text suggests to some other potential votes that Tories are not racist (Jeffries, 2023, p. 443; Rawian et al., 2024, p. 91).

#### 4. *Exemplifying and Enumerating*

When using this function, texts may create particular world views by either enumerating or exemplifying members of categories. It is possible that texts involve uses that are located between these extremes. There are some potential ideological consequences of listing choices in relation to the textual construction of a text (Jeffries, 2023, p. 443).

#### 5. *Prioritizing*

This function is related to the grammatical aspect of subordination as it forms background in the subordinate clause and foreground in the main clause for ideological purposes. An example of prioritizing is seen in the following two

clauses: (a) “Though the government is split down the middle, ministers are not admitting there’s a problem,” and (b) “Though ministers are not admitting there’s a problem, the government is split down the middle.” These clauses differ in the truth value of their propositions. The structure informs the recipient of the producer’s opinion (Jeffries, 2023, pp. 443-444).

#### 6. *Implying and Assuming*

Implying and assuming are related to the pragmatic concept of implicature and the semantic concept of presupposition, respectively. These functions can also be ideologically significant. Levinson’s (1983) account of presupposition is recommended here for more details (Jeffries, 2023, p. 444).

#### 7. *Negating*

Negating can have a significant ideological effect as it has the effect of producing mental images of both the negated and the positive proposition, particularly when the text is attempting to influence the reader towards imagining the positive version. The prototypical forms of negation are the negators “no” and “not.” The peripheral ones include morphological forms of negation (un-, dis-, non-, etc.), some grammatical item of negative semantic content (never, nowhere), and lexical items of incidental negative semantic senses (lack, fail) (Jeffries, 2023, pp. 441-444).

#### 8. *Hypothesizing*

Jeffries (2023, p. 445) stated that this function relies on Halliday’s system of modality and that Simpson’s (1993) account of modality is an excellent model that “serves the purpose of critical stylistics very well.” According to Verdonk (2002, p. 39), there are different tools of modality: (a) modal verbs, like “will,” which expresses assumption or certainty; “would,” which communicates certainty; “may,” which indicates possibility; “may not,” which shows negative possibility; and “may well,” which is used for strong possibility; and (b) sentence adverbs, like “perhaps” and “unquestionably,” which express modality of the whole sentence or clause.

#### 9. *Presenting the Speech and Thought of Others*

Short (2012) was the first to highlight the stylistic effect of speech and thought modes of presentation. Semino and Short (2004) pointed out that modes of “speech and thought presentation” work “across genres and at the textual level of meaning” (Jeffries, 2023, p. 445; Rawian et al., 2024, p. 92).

#### 10. *Representing Time, Space, and Society*

The primary function of the deictic expressions, which are able to show ideological implications by creating “text worlds” and “reflect political realities (e.g., *Here we are in recession again*) can also reflect political dogmas (e.g., *People from elsewhere are taking our jobs*)” (Jeffries, 2023, pp. 445-446).

### C. *Related Works*

There are two kinds of work related to the present study: work that is related to the concept of the study (trolling) and work related to its linguistic field (in this case, critical stylistics).

#### (a). *Related Works to Trolling*

Trolling has been investigated in academic research largely within the fields of psychology, sociology, and computer sciences. Lumsden and Morgan (2017) tackled trolling according to social and media perspectives. They focused on the framing of trolling in some British newspaper reports. Aydın et al. (2021) investigated trolling and some related behaviors, like bullying, with the aim of uncovering the psychological incompatibilities that cause such acts. March et al. (2023) aimed to test the role of gender and psychological traits like sadism, extraversion, and psychopathy in a corpus of self-reported informants who have participated in trolling behavior. Uyheng et al. (2022) constructed a multidisciplinary approach to trolling. Their work focused mainly on inventing the Trollhunter computer program, which could be used to identify internet trolling. That study also relied on psycholinguistic perspectives and the definition of trolling, which offered that study some analytic variables.

#### (b). *Related Works to Critical Stylistics*

Previous studies related to critical stylistics (CS) can be classified into (a) those that investigated literary data, including Ibrahim and Hussein (2018) and Hussein and Hussein (2021), all of whom targeted poetic, and dramatic data, respectively; and (b) most of the CS studies that analyzed non-literary data, like political speeches, newspaper articles, women magazines, press articles, news reports, TV Channels speeches, sports commentaries, presidential campaign speeches, state governor speeches, and American sermons (see Mao, 2012; Coffey, 2013; Olaluwoye, 2015; Saffah, 2017; Al-Shemmery, 2020; Oseni & Odebiyi, 2021; Babatunde & Olanrewaju, 2024; Omotunde, 2024; Rawian et al., 2024). All these works adopted Jeffries’ model of critical stylistic tools. One of these works limits Jeffries’ analytical tools to just one tool. Others range from using anywhere from three to all ten Jeffries tools. These works approved the workability of the model in uncovering some significant hidden political ideologies of the producers.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This section is mainly concerned with research design, data collection and description, data stratification, and the model of analysis.

#### A. Research Design

The present study adopts a qualitative and quantitative mixed-methods approach following its research questions and the tentative hypotheses, as set in the Introduction. The qualitative approach tries to link the textual features of the “textual-conceptual functions” to the ideological strategies of the text. The quantitative approach is used first in the data stratification and then to test the objectivity of the qualitative analysis.

#### B. Data Collection and Description

The data of the study includes the comments of trolls taken from one YouTube video with 366,796 views and 905 comments published by the Al-Jazeera Arabic TV Channel on their YouTube platform that has over 19.4 million subscriptions. The video concerns the Iranian-Israeli conflict in 2024 when an Iranian military group calling itself the *Al-Waad Al-Sadiq 1* (meaning Operation of Truthful Promise 1) carried out the country’s first military attack on Israel on April 13, 2024, in response to an Israeli airstrike on the Iranian embassy complex in Damascus, Syria, on April 1, 2024.

#### C. Data Stratification

The data have been classified and stratified according to the following steps:

1. First, all the comments (N = 905) on the Al-Jazeera YouTube channel were downloaded from the above-mentioned video as they were posted by the participants starting from the day the video was published on April 15, 2024, until the day that the data was collected for this research on January 10, 2025. Interestingly, all of the comments were posted the same month that the video was published, save two that were posted later in November 2024. The comments were manually treated on a separate list by copying the accounts and their comments one by one.
2. Next, the comments were divided into two types: pro-Iranian attack comments (N = 632) and anti-Iranian attack comments (N = 273). The study limited itself to the latter because these comments were expected to include trolling since the video praised Iran’s attack against Israel as part of their tendency to support Palestinians and any acts that support them. These 273 comments were hypothesized by the current study to include trolling and non-trolling comments.
3. The resulting data (N = 273) from the previous two steps were qualitatively analyzed according to the first dimension of the model, which is concerned with trolling behavior to identify the trolling comments (N = 238) and exclude non-trolling comments (N = 35). That process was done by testing the data in terms of the variables derived from the operational definition of trolling supported by its suggested characteristics and techniques, like those that use ad hominem arguments by using sexist, provocative, racist, deceptive, and/or incendiary content (see elaboration on the procedure of identifying trolling in the analysis of Text 1).
4. The study also excluded paralinguistic anti-Iranian comments (N = 10), like those that used memes or other representations of cackling, dots, etc., which require semiotic treatment and hence are beyond the limits of this work. Similarly, the study did not comment on such paralinguistic aspects when used within verbal comments. The resulting data (N = 228) were assumed to be verbal trolling comments and were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed according to the model of the study in order to uncover their shared stylistic features and their detailed types of ideologies. Table 1 summarizes the steps of data stratification.

TABLE 1  
DATA STRATIFICATION

Data	No.	Percentage
Pro-Iranian comments	632	69.83%
Anti-Iranian non-trolling comments	35	3.86%
Anti-Iranian non-verbal trolling comments	10	1.10%
Anti-Iranian verbal trolling comments	228	25.19%
Total	905	100%

#### D. The Model of the Study

The current study develops an eclectic critical stylistic model of identifying and analyzing trolling comments on social media platforms. First, the model relies on the findings of some psychological and social research on trolling to identify the trolling messages and limit the data. In this dimension, the model adopts Uyheng et al.’s (2022) operational definition of trolling (see II. A. a), which shows its crucial characteristics: association with more abusive language, lower cognitive complexity, and greater targeting of named entities and identities. This analysis also relies on Berghel’s (2018) and Kızıltepe’s (2019) perspectives concerning techniques of trolling (see II. A. e). Secondly, the identified trolling messages will undergo further critical stylistic analysis in order to highlight the underlying ideologies. The critical analysis relies on Jeffries’ (2010, 2023) model of the ‘textual-conceptual functions and its theoretical linguistic backgrounds (II. B. b). Figure 1 represents the model of the study.

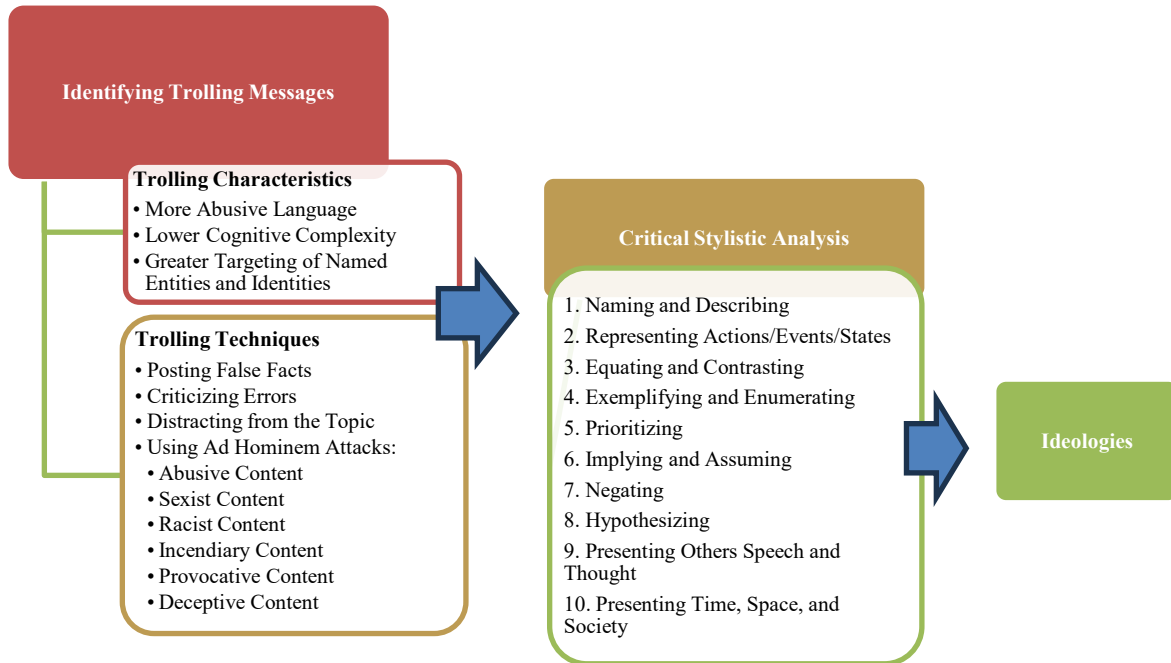


Figure 1. The Model of the Study

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

##### Analysis of Two Representative Texts

This section includes a qualitative analysis of some representative comments that represent the main ideologies of the trolls in the comment section of the analyzed video. The comments are written in Arabic, as they were posted by the commentators, then followed by their translations into English. The translations are by the researcher.

##### A. Text 1

“هي في الحقيقة مناورة إيرانية إسرائيلية كفاكم سداجة متى كان المجوسي عدو اليهودي”

“*hya fi alhaqiqat munawarat 'iiraniat 'iisrayiyliat kafakum sadajat mataa kan almajusi eaduu alyahudii*”

“It is, in fact, an Iranian-Israeli maneuver. Don't be silly. When has the Magus been an enemy of the Jewish?”

Considering that the analyzed video praises the Iranian attack, the associated commentary of the video, and the first 69 comments on the video were similar, claiming that that kind of attack is considered an act of self-defense by Iran, making the comment of Text 1 provocative trolling because (a) it is associated with some kinds of abusive language forms represented by the use of the term *مناورة/munawara* (maneuver), *سداجة/sadhaja* (silliness), and *المجوسي* (Magus); (b) the comment involves lower cognitive complexity, as it is brief; and (c) it also achieves the third characteristic of trolling by including greater targeting of named entities and identities. It targets the Iranian as well as the Israeli governments and people in two main ways. First, it suggests that the attack is a deceptive plan between these two identities to act as if they were enemies, while they in fact planned to deceive the Muslims and the Arab people to achieve their own political strategies. Second, it directly accused the Iranians of being atheists or non-Muslims and indirectly accused both the Israelis and the Iranians of being non-believers, so it used that analogue “Magus and Jewish.” The term “maneuver” has been echoed by four more comments and emphasized dozens of times by other comments, using contextually synonymous terms like *مسرحية/masrahia* (play), *فلم/falam* (film), etc.

In terms of the critical stylistic dimension of the model, the following textual-conceptual functions (TCFs) have been identified in Text 1:

1. *Naming and Describing*: The comment initially named the targeted identities using the conventional labels “Iran” and “Israel,” then used references to the identities of these people using the nouns “Magus” (a pre-Islamic Iranian ethnic religion) and “Jewish.” The use of the term “Magus” is ideologically sensitive and reveals racist and doctrinal ideologies, since it views those people to be non-Muslims or atheists.
2. *Representing Actions/Events/States*: The comment included three Arabic nominal clauses: a nominal clause (statement), another nominal clause in the imperative mood, and an interrogative in the form of a rhetorical question. These types of clauses do not require the use of explicit main verbs; hence transitivity does not work in this comment.
3. *Equating and Contrasting*: The use of the term “Magus” in this comment equated the Iranians to non-Muslims and differentiated them from Arab Muslims. Moreover, the term is used because of the adopted racist and doctrinal ideologies of the person who posted the comment.
4. *Exemplifying and Enumerating*: This function was not identified in the analyzed comment.

5. *Prioritizing*: Subordination was not used in the grammatical structure of this comment.
6. *Implying and Assuming*: The rhetorical question at the end of the rhetorical question, “When has the Magus been an enemy of the Jewish?” implicates the truthfulness of the reverse meaning.
7. *Negating*: The comment does not include either typical or peripheral forms of negation.
8. *Hypothesizing*: Modality does not work in this Arabic structure.
9. *Presenting the Speech and Thought of Others*: The comment does not use modes of speech or thought presentation.
10. *Presenting Time, Space, and Society*: The comment includes two person deictic expressions in the phrases هي الحقيقة /hi fi alhaqiqat (It is, in fact) and كفاكم/kafakum (don't). The former is represented by the pronoun هي/hi (it), which is understood from the context to be “the Iranian attack.” The latter is the pronoun /m (you, plural), which refers to the addressees of the comment; that is to say, the channel and its correspondent and the participants who supported the Iranian attack.

#### B. Text (2)

”السلام على من اتبع الهدى كيف يعقل وإيران قتلت صدام الذي كان يريد قصف إسرائيل بجديّة“

“*alsalam ealaa man aitabae alhudaa kayf yaeqil wa'iran qatalat sadaam alladhi kan yurid qasf 'iisrayiyl bijidiya*”

“Peace be upon those who follow the “right path” (Islam). How could it be believed? Considering that Iran killed Saddam, who had seriously wanted to bomb Israel”.

This is another type of provocative comment on the analyzed video. It is a trolling message because it includes some variables of such messages. Taking the context of the situation and the background knowledge of the people involved in that comment, the writer addresses those who approved of the content of the video. The writer of this comment greeted them with an Islamic greeting, which is rarely used to address non-Muslims or atheists, mostly in some limited (and often hostile) situations (see Al Shamiri, 2016, p. 134). The comment also accused Iran of being responsible for killing Saddam Hussein, who served as the president of Iraq from 1979 until his overthrow in 2003. He was persecuted, given a trial, and executed after the collapse of his regime. Even today, he still has supporters in Iraq who subscribe to “Ba’athism” or “Saddamism” ideologies. Comments on this video show a considerable number of such trolls, as will be shown in the critical stylistic analysis of this comment. In addition to that association of abusive language, the comment also shows lower cognitive complexity. Moreover, it shows the third criterion of trolling messages; that is to say, it presents the “greater targeting of named entities and identities,” and in this case, the targeted identity named is Iran.

In terms of critical stylistics, the comment can be analyzed according to the “textual-conceptual functions,” as in the following account:

1. *Naming and Describing*: The comment has named the targeted identity, which is “Iran.” This noun was modified by the interjection كيف يعقل/kayf yaeqal (How could it be believed) and is made the theme of the strong statement, which embodies an accusation that Iran killed Saddam. Another choice of naming is the post-modification of the proper noun Saddam (who had seriously wanted to bomb Israel). This modification assumes that Saddam was a real freedom fighter, unlike Iran. This use reveals that hidden nationalist ideology, namely Ba’athism or Saddamism. The current study uses these latter terms synonymously as they are perceived by the Iraqis in the present time.
2. *Representing Actions/Events/States*: This function was uncovered by considering the transitivity of the main verb used in this brief comment. The troll used the verb قتلت/qutilat (killed), which means the deliberate ending of somebody’s life. This use reveals one of the main conflicts between those who adopt the Saddamism ideology and Iran, as they believed it to support the Iraqi government that executed Saddam. The second main verb is used in the subordinate clause كان يريد/kan yurid (had wanted), which emphasizes the proposition that Saddam wanted to really attack Israel, unlike Iran’s attack, which was like a “film” or “play.” This is apparent in the modification of that verb by the adverbial propositional phrase بجديّة/bijidiya, which means “seriously”.
3. *Equating and Contrasting*: By using the Islamic greeting “Peace be upon who follows the right path,” which is suitable to also address non-Muslims and atheists, the troll equates all who participated in the comment section, supported Iran, and praised the content of the video with the non-Muslims. The comment differentiates between Iran and Saddam and implicitly between Iran’s followers and Saddam’s ones. This function, as a result, emphasized the hidden ideologies of Ba’athism and Saddamism.
4. *Exemplifying and Enumerating*: This function was not identified in the analyzed comment.
5. *Prioritizing*: The use of the subordinate clause is to foreground and emphasize the believed merits of Saddam on the part of his followers. It reveals the writer’s ideology, as mentioned in the previous functions.
6. *Implying and Assuming*: Initiating the aforementioned comment with the Islamic greeting implicates the troll’s attitude towards his opponents. The use of the factual verb “kill” shows a use of factual presupposition that Iran had really killed Saddam.
7. *Negating*: This comment does not include either prototypical or peripheral forms of negation.
8. *Hypothesizing*: The comment does not include the use of modality.
9. *Presenting the Speech and Thoughts of Others*: In the words of Leech and Short (1981), this comment exploits one mode of thought presentation, which is a narrative report of a thought act (see also Al-Ameedi & Al Shamiri, 2018). This is apparent in the subordinate clause, which used a verb of thought, “want,” in “who had

seriously wanted to bomb Israel.” It is used to express those trolls with the group ideology of Saddamism and Ba’athism.

10. *Representing Time, Space, and Society*: Text 2 does not include deictic expressions.

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The trolls behind both Texts 1 and 2 kind mainly use the “ad hominem attack” trolling techniques. The writer of Text 1 uses the expression *مناورة/munawara* (maneuver) to refer to the Iranian attack in order to establish an ad hominem logical argument and affect the readers’ perception of the scene. Similarly, other commentators used a variety of lexical items to express and emphasize the same idea: any attack by Iran or its military coalition against Israel is the result of a deceptive plan between Iran and Israel to deceive the Arab people and Muslims and achieve their own objectives. The trolls in the comment section of this video also used a variety of similar terms to ridicule the attack, like *مسرحية/masrahia* (play) (N = 67), *تمثيل/tamthil* (acting) (N = 12), *فلم/falam* (film) (N = 12), *العاب نارية/aleab naria* (fireworks) (N = 6), *كذبة/kidhbatan* (lie) (N = 3), *لعبة/lueba* (game) (N = 3), *مسلسلة/musalsalat* (series) (N = 1), and *رسوم متحركة/rusum mutaharika* (cartoon film) (N = 1). The term *مسرحية/masrahia* (play), above, is a well-established term in contemporary Arabic, particularly in the domain of social media during the 2024 Israeli-Iranian conflict. The opponents of such trolling behavior, which is commonly used on social media in similar situations, intelligibly refer to such trolls as *جماعة المسرحية/jamaeat almasrahia*, which literally means “people of the play”.

Trolls behind text like the Text 1 comments show their political conviction and express racist and religious doctrine ideologies against Iran. These ideologies are expressed by using the term *مجوسي/magusi* (Magus) (N = 4) to refer to the out-group Iranian people. The contextualization of this term in such comments expresses both a racist out-group (non-Arab) and religious doctrine out-group (non-Muslim) addressees. Other trolls in this video used other direct terms to indicate the Iranians as out-group participants and express their racist ideology like *فرس/faras* (Persians) (N = 3), *عجم/ajam* (Ajam) (N = 1), and *بلاد فارس/bilad faris* (Land of Aryans) (N = 1). In addition to the use of the term *مجوسي/magusi* (Magus), which reflects their racist ideology as well as a religious doctrine; moreover, other trolls used doctrine terms like *رافضة/rafiza* (Rafidhite) (N = 2) and *شيعة/shiea* (Shiite) (N = 2) as opposed to those trolls who sometimes explicitly used the group ideology of Salafism.

Trolls commenting similarly to Text 2 emphasize Ba’athism and Saddamism ideologies. Such comments explicitly glorified the former president of Iraq, using items like “Saddam,” “Saddam Hussein,” “Saddam of Iraq,” and “May Allah bless your soul, Saddam Hussein”.

Other trolling comments on the analyzed video adopted different techniques of trolling, including intertextualizing hostile, formulaic, and provocative trolling expressions. This technique is mainly done by quoting text, usually religious, by decontextualizing it from its conventional uses and intercontextualizing it in the immediate context of trolling. An example of this is *اللهم اضرب الظالمين بالظالمين واخرجنا منها سالمين/allahuma adrib alzaalimin bialzaalimin wakhrajna minha salimin* (Almighty Allah, kill the unjust by the unjust and let us be safe away from their conflict) (N = 3). The item “unjust” was used to refer to both the Israelis and the Iranians.

Provocative direct appraisal of Israel has been rarely used (N = 1) as a trolling technique in the analyzed data.

Joking using racist, dysphemistic, and sexist terms has been rarely used as a trolling technique in the analyzed video (N = 3).

Some trolls of the analyzed video used a few totally irrelevant comments regarding the context of the situation, probably to distract the participants’ attention (N = 5).

Most of the comments have been written in informal Modern Standard Arabic with different grammatical and spelling mistakes. That reflects the educational background of the participant trolls and the targeted speech communities. A few comments were written in misspelled English (e.g., TEATER SHOUW) or in Arabic transcribed by English letters (e.g., Iran leysat Hamas) (N = 4). Table 2 represents the analyzed trolls’ explicit lexical choices, which manifest their ideological convictions.

TABLE 2  
THE TROLLS EXPLICIT LEXICAL CHOICES OF IDEOLOGICAL ITEMS

Ideology	Ideological Explicit Lexical Choice	No.	Percentage
Racist (Anti-Iranianism)	مجوسي (Magus)	4	22.22%
	فرس (Persians)	3	16.16%
	عجم (Ajam)	1	5.55%
	بلاد فارس (Land of Aryans)	1	5.55%
Doctrine (Salafism)	رافضة (Rafidhite)	2	11.11%
	شيعة (Shiite)	2	11.11%
Nationalist	سلفي (Salafi)	1	5.55%
	صدام (Saddam)	1	5.55%
	صدام حسين (Saddam Hussein)	1	5.55%
	صدام العراق (Saddam of Iraq)	1	5.55%
	الله يرحمك صدام (May Allah bless your soul Saddam)	1	5.55%
Total	11	18	100%

## VI. CONCLUSION

Trolling comments on social media platforms can be identified according to some social and psychological criteria manifested in their styles, which reveal characteristics and techniques of their trolling acts. Moreover, the comments of trolls during a time of war often underline some political ideologies that reflect their sociocultural convictions and beliefs. Trolls enrolled in the comment section of the analyzed YouTube video show their adherence to three main ideologies: racist (anti-Iranianism), doctrine (Salafism), and nationalist (Saddamism/Ba'athism) ideologies. Finally, Jeffries' (2010, 2023) critical stylistic "textual-conceptual meaning" is universal as far as English and Arabic are concerned. These meanings proved to be workable as analytic tools of the genre of trolling on social media platforms.

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