

Impoliteness Strategies in Online Political Discourse: A Study of Hate Comments on Ahmad Sahroni's Instagram Account

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 18/12/2025

Revised: 02/01/2026

Accepted: 24/12/2025

Keywords:

Computer-mediated discourse analysis
Impoliteness

Instagram

Moral Discourse

Political Communication

ABSTRACT

Language used in digital communication shows how people express feelings and deal with social power. In the case of Indonesia's social media, being rude or impolite has become a big part of how users share their opinions and criticize others. This study looks into the different ways people use impolite language in comments that target Ahmad Sahroni, an Indonesian lawmaker, on Instagram. This research collected 50 comments from various Instagram posts, including political and lifestyle topics, to cover a wide range of online hostility. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method and applies Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) to understand how social media features influence the way people talk. Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory is used as the main way to analyze the language. The results show five main types of impolite strategies: bald on record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withholding politeness. Among those, positive impoliteness is the most common. People often use moral and religious words to make their comments seem justified, while humor and sarcasm help hide their anger. These findings show that impolite language isn't just about showing moral judgment in online conversations. This study adds to the understanding of how language works in digital spaces by looking at impoliteness in moral contexts and helps explain how social media supports group behavior around moral responsibility

I. Introduction

Language has become an essential part of how people express their feelings and define who they are. In social media contexts, communication occurs rapidly, publicly, and often emotionally, making linguistic behavior particularly visible. One prominent phenomenon in online interaction is impoliteness, defined as language use intended to attack face, damage reputation, or express hostility [1]. Impoliteness does not always appear in direct or aggressive forms. In some contexts, it is conveyed through humor, satire, or ridicule, allowing speakers to attack face while maintaining a socially acceptable tone. This pattern has been observed in Indonesian comic discourse, where mock politeness and rudeness function as tools of social criticism [2]. These variations highlight the flexibility of impoliteness strategies across different communicative contexts. As social media increasingly shapes public discourse, impoliteness has become a key focus in studies of digital communication.

Research on Indonesian social media, particularly during the 2024 presidential election, shows that impoliteness frequently appears in political interactions. During this period, social media platforms became spaces for moral judgement, satire, and public criticism, where users openly expressed dissatisfaction toward political figures [3]. Similar patterns are also found in hate comments on Twitter/X, where impoliteness strategies function as a means of expressing political disapproval and moral positioning [4]. Users often employ negative language, sarcasm, and verbal aggression to criticize political opponents across platforms such as TikTok, Twitter/X, and Instagram [5], [6]. These studies indicate that impoliteness functions as a linguistic strategy for expressing disagreement and positioning oneself within political debates.

Although previous studies have documented impoliteness in online political discourse, most have focused on explicitly political content. Beyond online interactions, impoliteness strategies such as positive impoliteness and mock politeness have also been identified in fictional discourse, where face attacks are realized through character interaction rather than direct political debate [7]. These findings suggest that impoliteness strategies operate across different communicative contexts. Building on this broader understanding of impoliteness, several studies have examined how these strategies operate in digital interaction. Research on Instagram and YouTube comments has identified strategies such as bald on record impoliteness, mock politeness, and positive impoliteness, mainly in contexts of cyberbullying or overt political disagreement [8], [9]. In the Indonesian context, Instagram's public and interactive features have been shown to intensify impolite expressions, particularly in cases of online shaming and cyberbullying [10]. When political contexts become more salient, other studies show that sarcasm and face attacks dominate political commentary during election periods [5], [11].

However, less attention has been given to impoliteness in responses to mixed content posts, where political figures share personal lifestyle or luxury-related content. In such contexts, impoliteness often targets perceived moral behavior rather than explicit political positions. This distinction is important, as impoliteness refers to linguistic strategies, while hate speech and moral judgment represent broader evaluative stances that may be realized through impolite language.

This study examines impoliteness strategies in Instagram comments directed at Ahmad Sahroni, a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat). His Instagram content, which combines political communication with lifestyle representation, provides a relevant site for observing how impoliteness operates beyond formal political discourse. This study adopts [1] impoliteness framework to analyze strategies such as bald-on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, mock politeness, and withholding politeness. A qualitative descriptive approach is employed, supported by Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) [12], [13], to account for Instagram's public and interactive features.

The study aims to identify the types of impoliteness strategies used in comments directed at Ahmad Sahroni, examine their contextual use and frequency, and interpret how these strategies reflect political criticism and moral evaluation in Indonesian social media discourse. Accordingly, the central research question is:

How do Instagram users employ impoliteness strategies to express hate, sarcasm, and criticism toward Ahmad Sahroni, and what do these patterns reveal about political and moral discourse on Indonesian social media?

II. Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to explore how impolite language is expressed in online interaction. A qualitative method was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand how language reflects social attitudes, communicative intentions, and shared meanings in digital contexts. [1] Impoliteness Theory was used as the main analytical framework to identify five impoliteness strategies: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withholding politeness. To support this linguistic analysis, Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) was applied as a complementary approach [12], [13]. While Culpeper's theory explains the types of impoliteness strategies found in the comments, CMDA helps explain how Instagram's features, such as public visibility and comment-based interaction, influence the way impolite language is used.

The data of 50 comments collected from the public Instagram account of Ahmad Sahroni, a member of Indonesia's House of Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat). The comments were selected through purposive sampling based on the presence of negative evaluation, verbal aggression, sarcasm, or ridicule directed at the account owner. To capture a variety of contexts, the comments were taken from political posts as well as lifestyle, endorsement, and personal content. Although the comments were publicly available, ethical principles were applied by anonymizing all user identities and focusing the analysis on linguistic patterns rather than individual users. No interaction with the commenters occurred, and the data were used solely for academic purposes.

The comments were initially grouped into three descriptive categories: direct hate, sarcasm, and mocking comments. These categories were used to describe the general tone of the data. The main analysis was conducted using Culpeper's five impoliteness strategies, and a single comment could contain more than one strategy.

Each comment was analyzed in relation to its post context to understand how impoliteness operates in both explicitly political and less obvious situations. By combining linguistic analysis with contextual interpretation, this study provides a clearer picture of impolite behavior in real online interaction [5], [13].

III. Results and Discussion

This section shares the results of a study looking at how Instagram users use impolite language in their comments about Ahmad Sahroni. The study uses a framework from [1] on impoliteness, along with Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) by [13].

This section presents the patterns and frequencies of impoliteness strategies found in Instagram comments directed at Ahmad Sahroni, based on [1] framework. The table below outlines the frequency of various forms of rudeness in the data set. The percentages presented reflect descriptive distributions of the data and are not intended as statistical inference. The following are some examples.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Impoliteness Strategies in Instagram Comments

Impoliteness Strategy	Description	Frequency (n = 50)	Percentage
Bald on Record Impoliteness	Direct, unmitigated insults or attacks (e.g., "tolol lu", "idi si najis")	14	28%
Positive Impoliteness	Damaging the target's need for approval or respect, including ridicule, moral degradation, or exclusion (e.g., "ga pantes jadi dewan", "Dewan	17	34%

Penindas Rakyat")			
Negative Impoliteness	Violating the target's freedom or autonomy through threats, commands, or imposition (e.g., "rasain nanti karmanya", "lu harus lenyap dari muka bumi")	6	12%
Sarcasm / Mock Politeness	Pretending politeness or humor to disguise aggression (e.g., "happy anniv tikus-tikus", "mantap pak DPR receh banget kontennya")	9	18%
Withholding Politeness	Lack of expected politeness markers in contexts where respect is socially expected (e.g., "ga mutu", "mandi napa karyawan")	4	8%
Total Comments Analyzed: 50			

Table 1 shows that *positive impoliteness* is the most frequent strategy (34%), followed by *bald on record impoliteness* (28%) and *sarcasm/mock politeness* (18%). These results indicate that criticism on Instagram is often framed through moral evaluation and social judgment, rather than overt verbal aggression. Similar studies have been reported in research on hate comments toward public figures, where positive impoliteness and sarcastic remarks are commonly used to weaken public image and question social legitimacy [14].

Table 2. CMDA Analysis of Representative Hate Comments

No.	Comment (Translated/Paraphrased)	Culpeper's Strategy	CMDA Interpretation
1	"Tolol lu." (You're stupid.)	Bald on Record	Direct verbal attack without mitigation; the shortest, most aggressive form of impoliteness typical in online flaming (Culpeper, 1996).
2	"Kek gini wakil rakyat? Ckckck."	Positive Impoliteness	Challenges the addressee's social identity as a legislator; uses rhetorical questions and mocking interjections "ckckck" to express moral contempt.
3	"Ga pantes jadi dewan." (Unfit to be a parliament member.)	Positive Impoliteness	Targets social role and competence; expresses exclusion from institutional legitimacy.
4	"Rasain nanti karmanya." (You'll get your karma.)	Negative Impoliteness	Imposes a moral threat, invoking divine punishment to assert moral superiority.
5	"Happy anniv tikus-tikus."	Sarcasm / Mock Politeness	Uses sarcastic congratulations and animal metaphor "rats" to imply corruption; mock-celebration tone disguises explicit insult.
6	"Makan aja masih pakai duit rakyat."	Positive Impoliteness	Accuses the addressee of moral corruption; presupposes collective ownership ("duit rakyat") to intensify blame.

7	“Ga mutu.” (Low quality.)	Withholding Politeness	Brief lacking politeness markers; typical of face-threatening silence.
8	“Bu ngidam apa sampe ngehasilin anak kek gini?”	Positive Impoliteness	Extends insult to a family member; inflicts moral humiliation through a mock question.
9	“Dewan Penindas Rakyat.” (Council of People’s Oppressors.)	Sarcasm / Politeness	Ironically redefines DPR acronym; lexical creativity reinforces collective cynicism.
10	“Lu rasain nanti karmanya, om.”	Negative Impoliteness	Combines threat and patronizing address term “om” to lower the target’s status.
11	“Postingannya kenapa kek anak SD sih?”	Positive Impoliteness	Infantilization portrays the DPR member as childish; diminishes social authority.
12	“Mandi napa karyawan!!!”	Withholding Politeness	Command form violating social distance; expresses disgust through imperative.
13	“Bumi gonjang-ganjang, Sahroni kayak anjing.”	Bald on Record	Profanity-based rhyming insult; emotional expression with rhythmic emphasis.
14	“OH GINI HASILNYA KALO ANAK DIKASIH MAKAN DUIT HARAM.”	Positive Impoliteness	Caps lock for emphasis; accuses corruption through religious-moral framing.
15	“Serius ini medianya sang dewan? Gabisa bayar konten kreator?”	Sarcasm / Politeness	Ironic question with performative disbelief; frames attack as humor while undermining capability.

Table 2 presents representative examples of impolite comments and illustrates how different impoliteness strategies are realized in Instagram interactions. The most common form of impoliteness is positive impoliteness, which means commenters frame their criticism as a moral judgment that challenges Sahroni’s credibility, behavior, or public image as a political figure. These comments often contain evaluative language that questions his moral conduct or suitability for public office. Sarcasm/mock politeness is frequently realized through ironic praise, humor, or exaggerated expressions, which allow users to convey criticism indirectly. Bald on record impoliteness is reflected in direct insults.

Many users attack Sahroni’s credibility and integrity as a public servant, using phrases like “ga pantes jadi dewan” or “duit rakyat dipakai.” These expressions match Culpeper’s [1] concept of moralized impoliteness is where insults are made acceptable by referring to ethical values and justice. In Indonesia’s cultural context, words like “karma,” “haram,” or “duit rakyat” show how aggression is tied to moral discussions, making offensive comments seem like fair public criticism. This is similar to what [5] found, where online users often use impoliteness to correct others’ behavior in political talks.

Sarcasm and mock politeness are frequently used to deliver criticism in a less direct way. Through irony, exaggerated praise, or humor, users are able to express disapproval while avoiding openly aggressive language. This pattern supports previous studies on Indonesian social media, which identify sarcasm as a common strategy in political and semi-political discussions [5], [9]. Rudeness on social media should also be considered an integral part of a system that regulates how

people interact online. In Indonesia, comments that criticize public figures are often not just rude remarks but rather expressions of public concern and a desire for accountability. Every conversation involves maintaining one's public image or "face." When users accuse Ahmad Sahroni of misusing public funds or being unworthy of his position, they are not just hurting his personal image but also reflecting shared expectations about public accountability.

From a Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis perspective, these patterns are influenced by Instagram's public and interactive features, where visibility and audience presence encourage users to align with dominant evaluative tones [12], [13]. The findings indicate that impoliteness functions as a shared communicative practice in Indonesian social media, appearing not only in explicitly political content but also in responses to personal and lifestyle posts [5]. Similar collective patterns of impoliteness have also been identified in hate comments toward K-pop figures, where netizens employ shared evaluative language to express moral judgment and group alignment [15].

Some researchers have explored how gender may shape patterns of hostile language on social media. For instance, [16] noted that female contributors often emphasize issues related to physical appearance, while male contributors tend to focus on political topics when engaging in online hate speech. Although this study does not include a systematic gender analysis of the commenters' identities, such findings highlight how gendered expectations may influence how hostility is expressed in digital interaction.

The research shows that impoliteness on Ahmad Sahroni's Instagram account goes beyond just personal dislike and instead shows deeper social and moral ideas. In this study, impoliteness appears as a way for users to express criticism while positioning themselves within shared moral expectations. Recognizing these different levels can help future studies go beyond just calling things rude and instead look into how impoliteness helps build order in the digital public space.

IV. Conclusion

This study concludes that impolite language in Instagram comments directed at Ahmad Sahroni is rarely used as simple personal hostility. Instead, most impolite expressions function as moral evaluations aimed at questioning a public figure's credibility, behavior, and responsibility. The dominance of positive impoliteness in the findings suggests that commenters tend to frame their criticism through ethical and moral judgments rather than direct personal attacks. The results also indicate that sarcasm and mock politeness are commonly used to express criticism less explicitly. Through humor, irony, and exaggerated praise, users are able to convey disapproval while still aligning with shared norms of online interaction. From a Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis perspective, this pattern reflects how Instagram's public and interactive setting encourages users to participate in collective evaluations, even in posts that are not overtly political.

In theoretical terms, the findings confirm the relevance of [1] impoliteness framework for analyzing online discourse, while also showing the importance of cultural and contextual factors. References to morality and religion in the comments highlight how impoliteness in Indonesian social media is often justified through shared ethical values. Rather than challenging existing theory, this study emphasizes the need to apply impoliteness analysis in a way that is sensitive to local sociocultural contexts. This research suggests that impoliteness on social media works as a communicative tool through which users negotiate moral expectations and public accountability. By focusing on recurring language patterns rather than individual intentions, this study contributes to a clearer understanding of how online hostility operates within contemporary digital public spaces and offers a useful point of reference for future studies in similar contexts.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Rahmadsyah Rangkuti for his invaluable guidance in the preparation of this article. His insights and support have been instrumental in shaping our research and analysis. Also, the author acknowledges the use of publicly available comments from Ahmad Sahroni's *Instagram* account as the primary data source, which contributed significantly to the analysis and findings presented in this study.

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