

## **Netizen Narratives of Hate: A Pragmatic Analysis of Insulting Comments in Putri Padang's TikTok**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the pragmatic features of insults in the comment sections of TikTok videos posted by Putri Padang, a popular Indonesian content creator. Using a qualitative approach, the research analyzes the types of insults, the pragmatic strategies used by netizens, and the social functions of these insults. Drawing on speech act theory, politeness theory, and impoliteness theory, the study categorizes insults as direct or indirect and identifies strategies such as sarcasm, hyperbole, and face-threatening acts (FTAs). The findings reveal that insults on TikTok serve not only as expressions of hostility but also as tools for social bonding and status assertion within the comment section. TikTok's platform features, such as viral content promotion and easy commenting, contribute to the heightened prevalence of aggressive language. The study concludes that digital platforms like TikTok create unique environments where insults function as complex social acts, involving both individual expression and group dynamics. This research highlights the importance of understanding online communication in shaping public discourse and suggests avenues for future studies on digital aggression across various platforms.

**Keywords:** impoliteness, insults, politeness theory, pragmatics, speech act theory, TikTok

### **Introduction**

In the digital era, social media platforms have become not only a medium for entertainment and self-expression but also a space where public discourse unfolds in real time (Filibeli & Ertuna, 2021). Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as a global phenomenon, particularly popular among younger audiences for its short-form video content and viral trends. However, with its rapid rise, TikTok has also become a site for aggressive interactions and digital hostility, manifesting in the form of hate speech, cyberbullying, and public shaming within comment sections (Rahmah & Khasanah, 2023).

In Indonesia, the increasing accessibility of the internet and the proliferation of digital content creators have given rise to unique online dynamics (Stanca & Cristina, 2014). One such example is the case of *Putri Padang*, a TikTok personality whose content has sparked significant attention and, at times, controversy. The comment sections on her videos have been saturated with various forms of insults, criticism, and negative sentiment, reflecting broader trends in how netizens

engage in discourse on social media platforms.

Understanding the nature of these online insults requires more than surface-level observation. A pragmatic analysis-focusing on the intentions, implied meanings, and social functions behind these utterances-can offer valuable insights into how language is used as a tool for expressing hostility, asserting power, or constructing group identities in the digital realm (Retta, 2023). By examining the specific linguistic features and pragmatic strategies employed in the comment section of Putri Padang's TikTok videos, this study aims to uncover the underlying narratives and communicative functions of hate expressed by Indonesian netizens.

Previous studies on digital communication have explored various aspects of online hate speech, ranging from its psychological effects to its linguistic features (McCambridge, 2022; Green, 2024). Pragmatic analyses, in particular, have been employed to investigate how insults and impoliteness strategies function in online settings, often revealing that such expressions are context-dependent and influenced by social norms, anonymity, and perceived power dynamics (MasterClass, 2021 ; Retta, 2023). In the Indonesian context, research has been conducted on cyberbullying (Green, 2024) digital discourse in political settings (Siregar & Suprayetno, 2024) and netizen behavior in Instagram or Twitter commentaries (Bączkowska, 2021; Umar, 2021).

However, most of these studies tend to generalize online hate speech without closely examining the pragmatic aspects of specific discourse platforms such as TikTok, where language use and audience behavior can differ significantly due to audiovisual content, algorithmic visibility, and comment virality (Jafarnia et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on online communication and hate speech, limited scholarly attention has been paid to the *pragmatic construction of insults* in Indonesian TikTok comment sections. The case of Putri Padang presents a unique and timely opportunity to fill this gap. Unlike platforms where textual discourse dominates, TikTok's hybrid nature-combining video performance and user interaction-creates a rich site for examining how language, intention, and context intersect in digital aggression. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge the gap between existing pragmatic theory and emerging patterns of digital behavior in Indonesia, contributing to a localized understanding of online verbal hostility.

This research seeks to explore how online insults are pragmatically constructed and what these patterns reveal about digital communication behavior in Indonesia. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between language, media, and society in the age of digital interaction.

The phenomenon of hate speech on social media has been widely documented in recent years, particularly in connection with the rise of user-generated content platforms. Tareen and Tariq (2021) stated that online hate speech refers to communication that targets individuals or groups in a derogatory, dehumanizing, or threatening manner, often rooted in prejudice related to race, gender, religion, or other identity markers. With the spread of digital platforms, expressions of hate have become more accessible, immediate, and often unmoderated. Alamsyah and Sagama (2024) emphasize that the affordances of social media-including anonymity, lack of face-to-face interaction, and virality-provide fertile ground for the normalization of hostile interactions. In TikTok, where user comments appear directly beneath viral content, the speed and volume of

responses often amplify the visibility of hate-based expressions.

In Indonesia, the issue of digital hostility is particularly concerning due to the combination of high social media usage and relatively low levels of digital literacy. Hardiyanto et al. (2024) observed that cyberbullying and verbal aggression are common in online spaces, particularly targeting women and public figures who deviate from perceived social norms. These insults are often framed not only as personal attacks but also as moral or cultural judgments, reflecting broader societal tensions. The concept of *online disinhibition effect*, as proposed by Yunus (2021), helps explain why users express more extreme opinions online than they would in face-to-face interactions. Thus, the digital environment creates a unique context for examining how hate speech operates linguistically and socially.

Pragmatics, as a subfield of linguistics, focuses on how meaning is constructed and interpreted in context (Baider, 2020). One of the foundational theories in pragmatics is the speech act theory, which emphasizes that language is not merely used to convey information but also to perform actions (Siregar & Suprayetno, 2024). In the context of insults, pragmatic analysis allows researchers to examine how certain utterances function as verbal attacks, whether explicitly (e.g., name-calling) or implicitly (e.g., sarcasm or passive-aggressive comments) (Green, 2024; Retta, 2023). Theories of politeness and impoliteness, such as those developed by Li and Xu (2018) and later expanded by Siagian and Sitorus (2023) and Li and Xu (2018) are particularly relevant for analyzing hostile language use, where the speaker intentionally threatens the hearer's face or social identity.

Building on these theories, recent studies have applied pragmatic frameworks to online discourse. Green (2024) proposes that insults in digital communication cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined in their full interactional and social context. Siagian and Sitorus (2023) argue that impoliteness in online environments often serves strategic purposes, such as displaying group loyalty, asserting dominance, or provoking engagement. These insights suggest that insults in comment sections are not random expressions of anger, but socially meaningful acts. In analyzing TikTok comments pragmatically, it is thus essential to consider not only the literal content of the message but also the implied intentions, relational dynamics, and platform-specific communicative norms (Napitupulu & Situmorang, 2022).

TikTok, as a hybrid platform that combines entertainment, performance, and interaction, presents a distinct environment for linguistic behavior. While much of the scholarly attention has focused on TikTok's algorithmic culture, viral trends, and youth engagement (Rahmah & Khasanah, 2023). There is limited exploration of how language functions within its comment sections. The format of TikTok encourages rapid and often emotionally charged responses, which can lead to high instances of flame wars, ridicule, and hostile exchanges. The brevity and informality of TikTok comments also challenge traditional norms of politeness and discourse structure, making it an important site for pragmatic inquiry (Tasyarasita et al., 2023).

In the Indonesian context, research on TikTok has primarily focused on media literacy (Slamet, 2024) and cultural identity, and digital activism (Samsudin et al., 2023). However, micro-level linguistic analyses of user interactions, particularly in cases involving public scrutiny like that of *Putri Padang*, remain underexplored. Localized phenomena such as public shaming and *netizen*

*justice* are prevalent but understudied in academic literature, especially from a pragmatic standpoint. This gap is significant given the unique sociocultural values embedded in Indonesian online discourse, which often blends humor, indirectness, and moralizing language. Therefore, this study aims to fill a critical gap by applying pragmatic tools to analyze how insults are constructed, justified, and interpreted in the TikTok discourse community surrounding Putri Padang (Tasyarasita et al., 2023).

## **Method**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, focusing on a pragmatic analysis of insults in the comment section of TikTok videos posted by Putri Padang. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of linguistic features, intentions, and social functions within digital discourse. The primary aim is to identify and examine the pragmatic strategies employed by netizens when engaging in hostile interactions, and to understand the social meanings embedded in these insults. This approach is particularly suited to analyzing the complexities of online language, where context, tone, and indirectness often play crucial roles in shaping the meaning of a comment.

Data for this study were collected from the comment sections of a selection of TikTok videos posted by Putri Padang between January and April 2025. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select videos that attracted significant public attention, particularly those that resulted in public discourse, controversy, or backlash. A total of 20 TikTok videos were chosen, along with their corresponding comment sections, to ensure a variety of interactions were captured. Only comments that contained clear insults, offensive language, or aggressive remarks were included in the analysis, while neutral or supportive comments were excluded. The decision to focus on Putri Padang's videos was based on her high visibility and the frequent occurrence of online insults directed toward her, making her content a relevant case study for this research.

The data were analyzed using a pragmatic approach, drawing on theories of speech acts (Rabbani, K., Mehmood, M. A., & Areej, 2024), impoliteness (Vásquez, 2021) and politeness theory. The analysis focused on identifying the types of insults used in the comment sections, as well as the pragmatic strategies behind these insults. Specifically, the study examined:

- 1) Direct vs. Indirect Insults: Categorizing insults based on their explicitness or subtlety.
- 2) Face Threatening Acts (FTAs): Identifying insults as speech acts that threaten the social face of the target.
- 3) Strategic Use of Politeness: Investigating how netizens use indirectness, sarcasm, or humor to soften or escalate the impact of their insults.
- 4) Social Functions: Understanding the purposes behind the insults, such as asserting dominance, group loyalty, or resistance.

Each comment was coded for these features, and a thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns of hostile language use.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Types of Insults in TikTok Comments**

The analysis of TikTok comments in Putri Padang's videos revealed a variety of insults, which were categorized into direct and indirect insults based on their explicitness. Direct insults, such as name-calling or explicit derogatory terms, constituted many of the offensive comments. For example, many commenters used terms like "bodoh" (stupid) or "gak berguna" (useless) to directly attack Putri Padang's character or appearance. These comments are examples of bald on-record impoliteness (Bączkowska, 2021) where the speaker's intent to attack the hearer's face is overt and explicit.

Indirect insults were also prevalent, and they often took the form of sarcasm or humor, which allowed the commenters to indirectly target Putri Padang without facing immediate backlash. One common strategy was the use of mockery and sarcasm, where commenters would pretend to compliment Putri Padang but subtly undermine her in the process. For example, one comment read, "Wah, keren bange tya, bisa bikin orang mikir kalau ini lucu." (Wow, so amazing, you can make people think this is funny). This form of indirect insult aligns with positive impoliteness, where the speaker subtly attacks the target's social identity by pretending to be complimentary while actually mocking them (Retta, 2023).

### **Pragmatic Strategies Employed by Netizens**

The study also identified several pragmatic strategies used by netizens to either escalate or mitigate the impact of their insults. A dominant strategy was sarcasm, which allowed commenters to attack Putri Padang's behavior or appearance without being overly direct. By using sarcasm, netizens could evade direct confrontation while still communicating disapproval or disdain. This tactic is consistent with (Filibeli & Ertuna, 2021) concept of indirect impoliteness, where the insult is veiled within a socially acceptable framework (e.g., humor or irony) but still carries a hurtful undertone.

Additionally, hyperbole was frequently used as a strategy to amplify the insult. Netizens would often exaggerate their critiques to make their point more forcefully. For example, one comment stated, "Sepertinya kamu satu-satunya orang yang tidak mengerti humor." (You seem to be the only person who doesn't understand humor). Here, the commenter exaggerates the perceived lack of humor, intensifying the insult. This aligns with the notion of negative impoliteness, where the speaker undermines the hearer's autonomy by dismissing their ability to participate in the conversation.

### **Social Functions of Insults**

The analysis also revealed that insults in Putri Padang's TikTok comment sections served multiple social functions beyond merely expressing disapproval. One prominent function was social bonding within the comment section. Several commenters aligned themselves with other users who had similarly insulted Putri Padang, thereby creating a sense of community around shared negative opinions. This phenomenon is often referred to as group polarization, where members of an online group solidify their position by engaging in collective criticism or mockery (Siagian & Sitorus, 2023). In this sense, the insults functioned to bond over shared values and reinforce group identity.

Moreover, some insults appeared to be driven by a desire for dominance or status assertion. Many of the most aggressive insults were not aimed solely at discrediting Putri Padang but were also directed at other commenters who appeared to support her. This illustrates how online interactions, particularly in public comment sections, can act as arenas for users to assert their status and challenge others. For example, one commenter wrote, “Coba deh buka mata, jangan ikut-ikutan aja!” (Try opening your eyes, don’t just follow the crowd!). This type of comment reflects a strategy of status assertion, where the speaker positions themselves as more knowledgeable or superior to others in the comment section.

### **The Role of TikTok's Platform Features in Shaping Insulting Discourse**

The findings also highlight how TikTok’s platform features contribute to the nature and prevalence of insults. The algorithmic promotion of viral videos, combined with the ease of commenting and the public visibility of remarks, creates an environment where users can engage in high-stakes interactions. TikTok’s unique combination of visual and textual content enhances the emotional intensity of interactions, making it more likely for netizens to engage in aggressive or sarcastic discourse. Additionally, the brevity of TikTok comments allows for quick, snappy exchanges that are often more provocative and less filtered than comments on other platforms like Instagram or Twitter.

This study’s findings also confirm that the lack of accountability in online spaces encourages a higher frequency of impolite and aggressive comments. As noted by Dwi (2023), the absence of face-to-face interaction reduces the social risks associated with using hostile language. TikTok’s format, which encourages users to express their thoughts in quick bursts, further fuels this phenomenon. As one commenter put it, “Emang apa bagusnya sih? Semua orang cuma ikut tren aja” (What’s so good about this? Everyone just follows the trend). This quick, direct insult reflects the fast-paced, high-engagement environment fostered by TikTok.

### **Comparison with Previous Studies**

The results of this study align with previous research on hate speech and impoliteness in digital environments. Muhtadi and Wihardja (2024) found that online platforms amplify aggression and insult due to their unique affordances, such as anonymity and the lack of face-to-face interaction. Similarly, the study by Nugroho and Adrianto (2022) on social media discourse underscores the strategic use of sarcasm, hyperbole, and indirectness to convey impolite messages while maintaining plausible deniability. The current study’s findings confirm that TikTok, despite its entertainment focus, serves as a platform where users can freely engage in verbal aggression with minimal repercussions, particularly when it comes to public figures like Putri Padang.

## **Conclusion**

This study set out to explore the pragmatic dimensions of insults in the TikTok comment sections of Putri Padang’s videos. By employing a qualitative analysis rooted in speech act theory, politeness theory, and impoliteness strategies, the research has provided a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic and social dynamics behind online insults. The findings highlight the

strategic use of both direct and indirect insults, with sarcasm, hyperbole, and face-threatening acts emerging as dominant strategies. These pragmatic strategies allow netizens to navigate the delicate balance between expressing hostility and avoiding direct confrontation, demonstrating the complexity of digital discourse.

A significant contribution of this research is its exploration of the social functions of insults in digital spaces. Insults in Putri Padang's TikTok comment sections were not merely expressions of disapproval but also acted as tools for group bonding and status assertion. Netizens used insults to align with others who shared similar negative views, fostering a sense of community. At the same time, they leveraged hostile language to establish dominance and assert their own social position within the comment section. This finding reinforces the idea that online interactions, particularly in platforms like TikTok, are not solely about individual expression but also about navigating group dynamics and social hierarchies.

Additionally, the role of TikTok's platform features—such as the promotion of viral content and the ease of commenting—found to exacerbate the frequency and intensity of insults. The platform's structure encourages quick, often provocative exchanges, where insults are used not only to attack individuals but also to challenge or dominate other users. These platform affordances contribute to an environment where face-threatening acts are more likely to occur, aligning with previous research on the amplification of online aggression (Waqas et al., 2019).

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, there are some limitations. The focus on a single public figure and platform limits the generalizability of the findings to other social media contexts or individual cases. Future research could expand the scope by analyzing insults across various social media platforms and examining how different types of content (e.g., political, personal, or comedic) influence the use of hostile language. Additionally, a longitudinal study could explore how the nature of online insults evolves, especially as digital platforms and user behavior continue to change.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of understanding the pragmatic and social functions of insults in online communication. By analyzing the discourse surrounding Putri Padang's TikTok videos, the research provides a window into the complex world of digital aggression, where language serves not only to attack individuals but also to reinforce group identities and assert social status. As social media continues to play a central role in modern communication, further exploration of the dynamics of online insults will be essential for understanding how digital spaces shape social interactions and public discourse.

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