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DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT AS AN EQUITY-ORIENTED PRACTICE: FICTION-BASED DEEP LEARNING FOR CULTURALLY A...

Sujinah Sujinah, Dian Karina Rachmawati, Henry Trias Pugu
Jatmiko, Alvenita Putri Aulia, Mahesa Ishak Ramdhani, Bouchra
Aboura

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CONSTRUCTING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN BIPA PEDAGOGY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF AR-ENHANCED LEAR...

Indrya Mulyaningsih, Tiwaporn Jan-Kaew, Tatik Ekawati, Veni
Nurpadillah, Muhammad Arif Rahman

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Pages 14 - 27

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- » Focus and Scope
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Moch Syahri, Bambang Prastio, Imam Arifa'llah Syaiful Huda

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Indah Fadhillah, Muhammad Luthfi Zuhdi, Rouli Esther

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Pages 158 - 177

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Pages 104 - 118

DOI: 10.22202/jg.2026.v12i1.10681

VERICULTURA-AI: TOWARD A CULTURALLY GROUNDED AND ETHICALLY RESPONSIVE MULTIMODAL AI FRAMEWORK FOR ...

Fernandes Arung, Fathiaty Murtadho, Endry Boeriswaty, Reny Nur Eriyani, Hestiyani Parai

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Pages 142 - 157

Introduction

DOI: 10.22202/jg.2026.v12i1.11058

OSTENSIVE-INFERENTIAL COMMUNICATION AND DISCURSIVE POLITENESS IN SOCIAL MEDIA CRITIQUE: A STUDY OF...

R Kunjana Rahardi, Yulia Setyaningsih, Rony Sulistiyono, Seli Tria Febriani

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Home > Vol 12, No 1 (2026) > Rahardi

OSTENSIVE-INFERENTIAL COMMUNICATION AND DISCURSIVE POLITENESS IN SOCIAL MEDIA CRITIQUE: A STUDY OF INDONESIAN DIGITAL DISCOURSE

R Kunjana Rahardi, Yulia Setyaningsih, Rony Sulistiyono, Seli Tria Febriani

Abstract

Politeness research in digital discourse has predominantly focused on linguistic strategies, giving limited attention to how multimodal resources and pragmatic inference interact in the construction of evaluative meaning in social criticism. This gap is particularly salient on social media platforms, where criticism of public issues is often conveyed through indirect, symbolically mediated forms that require audiences to infer meaning from integrated linguistic, visual, and contextual cues. To address this gap, this study investigates the discursive-integrative politeness strategy in social media discourse on social criticism, examining how users negotiate the interpersonal dimension, evaluative stance, and structural critique through indirect communicative strategies. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design within a pragmatic discourse-analytic framework, this study analyzes a purposively selected corpus of 120 textual and video-based posts on economic inequality, government performance, environmental degradation, and unresolved human rights issues on Instagram and TikTok. The findings reveal that social criticism is frequently expressed in indirect forms such as parody, irony, rhetorical questioning, sarcasm, empathetic narration, and symbolic comparison. These communicative resources function as ostensive cues that enable audience members to infer evaluative meanings by integrating linguistic, visual, and contextual information. The study suggests that discursive-integrative politeness enables the expression of criticism in socially acceptable ways while preserving critical engagement with public issues. Though limited to a relatively small corpus from two social media platforms, the study contributes to politeness theory by demonstrating how multimodal meaning-making and inferential processes interact in the circulation of social criticism in digital public discourse. These findings have implications for understanding how digital platforms shape the negotiation of politeness, critique, and public participation in contemporary media environments.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



OSTENSIVE, INFERENTIAL COMMUNICATION AND DISCURSIVE POLITENESS IN SOCIAL MEDIA CRITIQUE: A STUDY OF INDONESIAN DIGITAL DISCOURSE

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Politeness research in digital discourse has predominantly focused on linguistic strategies, giving limited attention to how multimodal resources and pragmatic inference interact in the construction of evaluative meaning in social criticism. This gap is particularly salient on social media platforms, where criticism of public issues is often conveyed through indirect, symbolically mediated forms that require audiences to infer meaning from integrated linguistic, visual, and contextual cues. To address this gap, this study investigates the discursive-integrative politeness strategy in social media discourse on social criticism, examining how users negotiate the interpersonal dimension, evaluative stance, and structural critique through indirect communicative strategies. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design within a pragmatic discourse-analytic framework, this study analyzes a purposively selected corpus of 120 textual and video-based posts on economic inequality, government performance, environmental degradation, and unresolved human rights issues on Instagram and TikTok. The findings reveal that social criticism is frequently expressed in indirect forms such as parody, irony, rhetorical questioning, sarcasm, empathetic narration, and symbolic comparison. These communicative resources function as ostensive cues that enable audience members to infer evaluative meanings by integrating linguistic, visual, and contextual information. The study suggests that discursive-integrative politeness enables the expression of criticism in socially acceptable ways while preserving critical engagement with public issues. Though limited to a relatively small corpus from two social media platforms, the study contributes to politeness theory by demonstrating how multimodal meaning-making and inferential processes interact in the circulation of social criticism in digital public discourse. These findings have implications for understanding how digital platforms shape the negotiation of politeness, critique, and public participation in contemporary media environments.

Introduction

The accelerated growth of digitally mediated communication has changed the practices of present-day communication, re-signifying how meanings, social identities, evaluative stance and interpersonal relationships are negotiated in public discourse (Sun et al., 2021; Yus, 2021). Social media platforms have become complex communicative milieus where messages are instantly disseminated to heterogeneous audiences, continuously archived and constantly reinterpreted through sharing, commenting, remixing and recontextualisation (Zappavigna, 2012; Page, 2012). In these environments, communication is not limited to verbal language but increasingly relies on the interaction of textual, visual, audiovisual and symbolic resources (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018; Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Jewitt, 2014). Thus, to understand how social meanings are negotiated in digital discourse, we need analytical frameworks that can account for discourse, cognition, context, and multimodal meaning-making.

Theoretical development of politeness studies has been significant over the last four decades. In early politeness theories, politeness is viewed as a strategic device for managing interpersonal relationships, maintaining social harmony, and minimizing face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kasper, 1990). Such approaches informed influential accounts of the role of linguistic forms in promoting interpersonal

cooperation. However, more recent scholarship has increasingly challenged the universal applicability of such models, suggesting that politeness cannot be reduced to predetermined linguistic strategies independent of social context and participants' interpretations (Watts, 2003; Locher, 2004; Arundale, 2013). Critics have argued that assessments of politeness arise not from linguistic forms per se but from situated interpretations of communicative behavior in particular sociocultural contexts (Haugh, 2007; O'Driscoll, 2011).

These criticisms led to the development of discursive approaches to politeness, which redefine politeness as an interactionally negotiated and socially constructed phenomenon (Locher & Watts, 2005; Watts, 2003). From this perspective, politeness is not a property of utterances but rather an evaluative judgment that arises in discourse. In interaction, participants actively negotiate meanings, relationships, identities, and expectations (Arundale, 2013; Haugh, 2013; Balla et al., 2026). Third-wave politeness scholarship has further extended this orientation by focusing on relational work, ideological positioning, contextual variability, and social meanings across diverse communicative settings (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Culpeper, 2011; Rahardi et al., 2025). This orientation has been productively applied across diverse research contexts, including analyses of media discourse and state control (Harmonis et al., 2026), cyberbullying within religious discourse (Syahri et al., 2026), patriarchal ideology in traditional texts (Syamsudduha et al., 2026), and metaphors of social justice in digital discourse (Mahmudah et al., 2026), demonstrating the relevance of discursive frameworks to understanding power and identity in communicative practices.

However, despite these advances, scholars have observed that discursive approaches sometimes offer limited explanations of the cognitive processes through which interlocutors identify communicative intentions and arrive at evaluations of politeness or impoliteness (Unger, 2012; Wilson & Bishop, 2022). Discursive perspectives have been productive in accounting for contextual variability and social negotiation. However, they have often failed to investigate the inferential processes by which participants interpret indirect meanings, identify communicative intentions, and make evaluative judgments from complex discourse. This limitation is particularly evident in contemporary digital communication, where messages are often based on irony, parody, sarcasm, metaphor, intertextuality, and visual symbolism. Recent scholarship has addressed these challenges by examining how communicative intentions are negotiated in digital contexts, including visual narratives of disaster (Rahmat et al., 2026), gestural cybertextual contexts (Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025), and numerical wordplay in digital communication (Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025).

To address this problem, a relevant complementary perspective is cognitive pragmatics. Relevance Theory views communication as an ostensive-inferential process in which communicators produce stimuli to prompt audiences to infer intended interpretations (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Wilson & Sperber, 2004; Unger, 2012; Silalahi, 2026). Meaning is not transmitted directly and encoded in the message, but is reconstructed from assumptions about context and expectations of optimal relevance. The success of a communicative act hinges on the addressee's capacity to infer the speaker's informative and communicative intentions and to incorporate available contextual information (Carston, 2002; Yus, 2021). Applied to politeness research, this perspective suggests that politeness judgments are made through audiences' inferential recognition of relational intentions, social positioning, and communicative goals (Rahardi & Budhiono, 2024; Tiawati et al., 2026). This inferential orientation has been extended to digital contexts where users must infer criticism from irony, parody, and visual juxtaposition, as demonstrated in studies of mythopoeic negotiations in postcolonial narratives (Fadhilla et al., 2026), humour and cultural references in translation (Arbain et al., 2026), and identity construction in digital discourse (Mahmudah et al., 2026).

The application of Relevance Theory to politeness research remains controversial. Some scholars argue that inferential models may overemphasize cognitive processing at the expense of sociocultural norms, ideological structures, and historical context in interpretation (Sikka, 2008; Arundale, 2013). These problems are relevant in digital communication environments where communicative meanings are distributed across multiple semiotic modes and interpreted within complex networks of social and cultural knowledge. Neither exclusively cognitive nor discursive approaches seem sufficient to explain the complexity of digital interaction. The need for theoretical integration becomes particularly evident in social media discourse where users frequently engage in social criticism. Digital users participate in public evaluations of political actors, government institutions, environmental issues, economic inequality, and historical injustice.

However, such evaluations are seldom expressed directly through accusations. Instead, criticism frequently occurs in parody, irony, sarcasm, rhetorical questioning, metaphorical representation, intertextual references, and multimodal juxtaposition (Dyner, 2015; Rahardi et al., 2025; Syahri et al., 2026). These communicative practices allow speakers to adopt critical stances and to negotiate interpersonal relations, public visibility, and social accountability. Audiences are required to infer meanings that extend beyond the explicit linguistic content.

Today's digital communication is multimodal, which makes it more complex to interpret. Multimodal research has demonstrated that meaning is generated through the interaction of a range of semiotic resources such as language, images, typography, colour, layout, gesture, sound, and audiovisual sequencing (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Jewitt, 2014; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018; Syahri et al., 2026). Thus, the production of meaning in digital environments requires integrating textual and visual clues rather than relying solely on linguistic interpretation (Sanz, 2013; Norris, 2004). Particular problems of analysis arise from the language of social media, since evaluations of stance, criticism, solidarity, and politeness are often based on the relation between verbal and non-verbal resources rather than on language alone. Recent scholarship has underscored the necessity of analyzing multimodal meaning-making across diverse contexts, including augmented reality-enhanced pedagogy (Mulyaningsih et al., 2026), AI-assisted lie detection (Arung et al., 2026), diagnostic assessment for culturally responsive instruction (Sujinah et al., 2026), cultural identity stereotypes in traditional expressions (Effendy et al., 2026), and vericultura-AI frameworks for ethical multimodal analysis (Arung et al., 2026). These studies collectively demonstrate that understanding digital politeness and criticism requires integrated approaches that account for linguistic, visual, and inferential dimensions of meaning-making.

In recent years, scholarship has recognized the importance of multimodal and inferential processes in digital communication (Sun et al., 2021; Yus, 2021; Zeng & Yang, 2025; Rahmat et al., 2026). Yet these developments have been only partially absorbed by politeness research. Modern research is more likely to focus on discursive negotiation, inferential interpretation, or multimodal meaning-making. To date, however, few studies have systematically investigated the interaction of these dimensions in social media discourse, especially in public critique and sociopolitical commentary. The relationship between discursive evaluation, cognitive inference, and multimodal communication remains under-theorised.

This theoretical gap becomes very clear in Indonesian contexts. Prior studies of politeness have focused on hierarchical relationships, honorific systems, deference practices, and culturally embedded norms of respect (Rahardi et al., 2025). These studies have greatly helped in understanding local politeness systems. However, they have mostly been built in face-to-face communication settings and may not fully reflect the dynamics of contemporary digital discourse. The direct application of Western politeness theories to Indonesian communicative practices has been repeatedly questioned, as judgments of appropriateness are heavily dependent on local cultural values, collective identities, and contextual expectations. The present study proposes the notion of discursive, integrative politeness. The framework proposed here, unlike other approaches that focus on either social evaluation or cognitive interpretation, views politeness as the result of three interrelated processes: discursive negotiation, ostensive, inferential interpretation, and multimodal meaning construction. Politeness is neither an intrinsic property of linguistic forms nor a simple cognitive judgment. Instead, it stems from the interaction of socially situated discourse practices, audiences' inferential recognition of communicative intentions, and the multimodal resources through which meanings are publicly articulated.

This study is novel in that it develops a discursive, integrative framework of politeness that systematically brings together three analytical dimensions that have been largely studied in isolation in prior research: discursive assessment, ostensive interpretation, and multimodal meaning construction. Politeness has been studied separately from a discursive, a cognitive, or a multimodal perspective. However, we know little about how these dimensions interact in the interpretation of social criticism in digitally mediated communication. The study integrates these perspectives into one overarching analytical model. It thus provides a more comprehensive account of how politeness is socially negotiated, cognitively inferred, and multimodally constructed in present-day social media discourse. Hence, the present study attempts to answer the following research questions: (1) How are the manifestations of discursive-integrative politeness realized in

social media discourse of social criticism? (2) How do textual and visual semiotic resources function as ostensive cues for inferential interpretation? (3) How do inferred interpretations of audience members serve to evaluate politeness, critique, and social positioning in digital discourse? By theoretically integrating discursive pragmatics, cognitive pragmatics, and multimodal discourse analysis in the context of digitally mediated communication, the study aims to contribute to current scholarship on politeness in addressing these questions.

Materials and Methods

The design of the present study is qualitative, descriptive-interpretative, and situated within a discursive-cognitive-pragmatic paradigm. The qualitative approach is theoretically rooted in the view that discursive-integrative politeness is not an inherent property of linguistic forms but an interpretive phenomenon emerging from discursive negotiation, multimodal meaning-making, and inferential processing. The epistemological base of the study is built on an interpretivist perspective which views meaning as socially constructed, contextually situated, and cognitively inferred. The analytical framework brings together discursive pragmatics, Relevance Theory, and multimodal discourse analysis to investigate how politeness evaluations arise from the interaction of discourse practices.

The corpus comprises 120 purposefully selected Indonesian-language discourse units obtained from publicly available posts on Instagram, TikTok, and X (social media platforms), from January to December 2025. These platforms were chosen because they are complementary communication environments that are widely used for public discussion and social criticism. Instagram is socializing through images, TikTok is audiovisual communication of short duration, and X is public commentary in text. Together, these platforms form a diverse corpus for investigating the multimodal realization of politeness in digital discourse.

Purposive sampling was used to identify analytically relevant manifestations of discursive, integrative politeness. The criteria for selection were operationalized as: (1) Indirectness: criticism is expressed through an implicit rather than explicit evaluation; (2) Irony: incongruity between literal and intended meaning; (3) Metaphorical representation: symbolic comparison; (4) Evaluative stance toward social actors, institutions or events; (5) Intertextual references to wider sociocultural or political discourses; (6) Multimodal cueing through images, emojis, typography, audiovisual features or visual symbolism. Discourse units that contained at least two of these features were selected for the final corpus. The data collected utilized non-participatory digital observation. An iterative search was conducted to identify relevant posts using keywords related to governance, social inequality, environmental concerns, and public accountability. Selected discourse units were stored as screenshots, transcriptions, and metadata documentation. Contextual information, such as platform characteristics, posting dates, interactional positioning, audience engagement patterns, and accompanying visual materials, was systematically recorded.

The main theoretical constructs were operationalized before coding to ensure analytical transparency. An ostensive cue was any textual, visual, or multimodal device that led audiences to an intended interpretation beyond literal meaning. Six categories of ostensive cues have been identified from a preliminary corpus examination and the theoretical literature: ironic contrast, rhetorical interrogation, sarcastic juxtaposition, metaphorical representation, empathetic narration, and symbolic comparison. Four dimensions were coded for each discourse unit: (a) discursive strategy, (b) type of ostensive cue, (c) use of multimodal resources, and (d) inferred politeness orientation. Discursive strategies included parody, irony, sarcasm, rhetorical questioning, empathetic narration, symbolic comparison, and intertextual referencing. Politeness orientation was coded as affiliative, mitigated-critical, implicitly confrontational, or relationally neutral.

Social media discourse is multimodal. Thus, an adapted multimodal transcription protocol was used, informed by social semiotic multimodal discourse analysis. The data were recorded at three interrelated levels: verbal, visual, and contextual. The verbal layer consisted of textual content, captions, hashtags, and comments. The visual layer recorded image composition, salience, symbolism, typography, emojis, and audio-visual elements. The contextual layer identified socio-cultural references, platform affordances, interactional positioning, and intertextual associations. The visual analysis focused on representational, interactive, compositional, and symbolic meanings, and the relationships between textual and visual modes were coded as complementary, reinforcing, contrasting, ironic, or evaluatively dissonant.

The analysis was performed in four iterative steps. First, textual and visual data were coded for ostensive cues that functioned as interpretive prompts. Second, a contextual reconstruction was performed through the analysis of sociocultural references, public events, platform conventions, and intertextual links. Repetitions in the corpus were noted, and relevant publicly available sociocultural sources were consulted to identify shared cultural knowledge. Third, the inferential paths were reconstructed using Relevance Theory by identifying the explicit meanings, contextual assumptions, implicated meanings, and the most relevant interpretation in the given cognitive environment. Relevance was defined as the interpretation that has the greatest contextual effect for the least processing effort. Fourth, the inferred meanings were evaluated in terms of relational alignment, evaluative stance, criticism, and manifestations of discursive-integrative politeness. Then, a comparative analysis across discourse units was conducted to identify recurrent pragmatic patterns.

To improve trustworthiness and analytical reliability, several procedures were applied. A coding manual was created before analysis, providing operational definitions, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, and coding examples. Two researchers independently coded a random sample of 20% of the corpus (24 discourse units). Inter-coder reliability was measured using Cohen's Kappa, and categories that did not meet the minimum threshold were revised through discussion until agreement was reached. Source triangulation was conducted by cross-examining similar discursive phenomena on Instagram, TikTok, and X, whereas analytic triangulation involved incorporating discursive, inferential, and multimodal perspectives throughout the interpretation process. Reflexive memos and coding records were kept to provide an audit trail and increase interpretative transparency.

The findings section only presents five examples, but these were chosen through theoretical, not convenience, sampling. Each example had to exemplify a different discursive strategy, include clearly identifiable ostensive cues, show interaction between textual and visual resources, and illustrate recurrent patterns throughout the broader corpus. The examples selected are therefore representative, not isolated cases. The study acknowledges that inferential interpretation is inherently subjective, relying on the researcher's judgment, and cannot fully replicate the cognitive processes of real audiences. To reduce interpretive bias, analyses were based on documented contextual evidence, systematic coding procedures, triangulation strategies, and collaborative interpretation. All data were collected exclusively from publicly available social media content. User identities and potentially identifying information were anonymised in accordance with ethical principles for research in digital discourse. Although the attention is placed on Indonesian-language discourse and a small corpus, the methodological combination of discursive pragmatics, ostensive-inferential communication and multimodal discourse analysis offers a solid framework for the study of contemporary instances of politeness in digitally mediated social criticism.

Results and Discussion

The section presents and discusses the results of the analysis of social media discourse on public issues such as agrarian inequality, political leadership, environmental degradation and unresolved human rights violations. The analysis focuses on how speakers construct social criticism through discursive-integrative politeness, considering linguistic and multimodal resources in digital communication. The results are structured around the main communicative strategies identified in the data and then interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks of discursive politeness, social criticism, and multimodal discourse. In doing so, the study aims to explore how politeness functions not only as a means of maintaining interpersonal harmony, but also as a strategic resource for negotiating criticism, resistance, and public engagement in contemporary social media environments.

Result

Parodic Social Criticism in Social Media Discourse

In this subsection, we will investigate discursive-integrative politeness in parodic strategies of social media social criticism. Parody functions as a highly sophisticated rhetorical device, allowing digital speakers to formulate critical assessments of pressing social realities. By leveraging humorous, ironic, and highly symbolic language, internet users efficiently navigate complex socio-political landscapes. This specific mode

of communication allows citizens to voice sharp criticism without provoking a confrontational, hostile digital atmosphere. Consequently, parodic discourse fosters public dialogue while strictly adhering to implicit online politeness standards, successfully mitigating direct interpersonal tension. For instance, social media platforms have become central arenas for modern digital activism. In these virtual spaces, everyday language is intentionally subverted to challenge deep-rooted institutional power dynamics and economic imbalances. In the following data, an adapted popular song lyric underscores the systemic inequalities regarding the control and ownership of agrarian resources. By replacing original, romanticized lyrics with sharp economic truths, the content creator highlights how corporate monopolies displace local farming communities. This linguistic subversion acts as a vital dual mechanism: it entertains the target audience while educating them on regional marginalization.

So, this parodic approach relies heavily on shared cultural knowledge, creating a strong sense of in-group solidarity among digital users who instantly recognize the underlying social critique. The integration of politeness occurs because the critique remains fundamentally indirect, carefully embedded within a framework of satire and playfulness rather than direct, aggressive personal attacks. This minimizes defensive reactions from opposing parties while maximizing message sharing, user engagement, and algorithmic virality. Through this complex linguistic synthesis, digital discourse effectively transforms entertainment into a peaceful, non-threatening tool for political resistance. Ultimately, analyzing these strategies reveals how modern Indonesian digital communication uses humor to both democratize political commentary and maintain societal harmony.

Data 1

“Lihat Kebunku tertata sawitnya luas terbentang tapi tak ku punya”

[Look at my plantation, its oil palms stretch wide and neatly arranged, yet none of it belongs to me.]



Figure 1: Aerial view of oil palm plantation

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSvJTuzkhLJ/?igsh=c2Y3aHZ6cWU5MnM0>

A video of a vast oil palm plantation, with perfect rows and a river running through it, plays on the screen. This sentence is a parody of a popular song lyric mocking the inequality in land ownership in Indonesia, reflecting how humour and cultural references are strategically employed to convey critique across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Arbain et al., 2026). It is somewhat ironic that, with all the resources at people's disposal, most do not own the land. The message is meant to raise awareness of economic injustice in the agricultural sector. Discursive-integrative politeness on social media is more often indirect than direct, aligning with the view that politeness in digital contexts is interactionally negotiated and shaped by social norms and ideological positioning (Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025; Mahmudah et al., 2026). The data reveal how a reflective parody is employed to critique unequal land ownership in Indonesia. For example, the phrase "*Lihat kebunku tertata sawitnya luas terbentang tapi tak ku punya*" ("Look at my plantation, its oil palms stretch wide and neatly arranged, yet none of it belongs to me") is accompanied by aerial visuals of orderly plantations, and the combination of textual and visual elements makes the meaning more evaluative and ideological.

Parody is a means of taking back culturally available resources, functioning as a form of discursive resistance that allows minority voices to challenge dominant narratives (Fadhilla et al., 2026; Mahmudah et al., 2026). And, like song lyrics would be for everyone in the world, the syntactic pattern is very familiar. However, when we recontextualize it, we end up with irony: a semantic distance between literal and intended meanings. He criticizes the unequal distribution of land but avoids directly confronting anyone to avoid being accused. Politeness, discursive-integrative, is parody as the artful balancing of evaluative expression and social relations. If agrarian inequality is a matter of economic and political sensitivities, it is a very risky proposition to confront the speaker directly, as digital criticism often navigates power structures and state control (Harmonis et al., 2026; Syahri et al., 2026). So, parody is a pragmatically possible way for the group to dissent and coexist.

The semiotic relationship between text and visuals allows for collective interpretation. "*Tapi tak ku punya*" is a contrast between resource supply and lack of access. It is an irony that results from audience inference rather than normative pronouncements, and is the product of common cultural understanding. The mechanism of ostensive-inferential communication is that the appearance of an utterance is an ostensive stimulus, which leads to the inference of structural inequalities outside the claim of non-ownership. This inferential process is central to understanding how digital audiences interpret indirect criticism and make evaluative judgments in multimodal environments (Rahmat et al., 2026; Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025). An inferential path enables a social critique to be understood without explicit verbal confrontation. Discursive-integrative politeness is centered on processes of social critique. This allows social critique to occur while keeping communication with the audience comfortable. The context guides how audiences interpret so that critique can circulate in diverse, public digital spaces without a hostile tone.

Multimodality strengthens both rhetorical and ideological power, as meaning in digital environments is generated through the interaction of linguistic, visual, and audiovisual resources (Rahmat et al., 2026; Mulyaningsih et al., 2026). The social critique of uneven economic representation and resource distribution is amplified by the dissonance created by juxtaposing images of productive plantations with textual claims of exclusion. This case demonstrates how social media can serve as a venue for creative social critique via cultural remix and intertextuality. Parody allows complex evaluative messages to be communicated succinctly and accessibly. It clarifies that politeness in the digital world is not an avoidance of critique but a pragmatic way to communicate social critique effectively within collectively negotiated interpretive spaces, resonating with findings on how discursive strategies enable critical engagement while maintaining social acceptability (Mahmudah et al., 2026; Syahri et al., 2026; Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025).

Ironic Social Criticism of Public Leadership Competence

This subsection examines discursive-integrative politeness as ironic criticism of public leadership competence on social media. Irony enables indirect evaluation of leadership quality by highlighting the gap between personal background and professional expectations, allowing critical reflection without confrontational language. This discursive tactic is evident in public responses to perceived competence of regional political leadership. In digital communication, citizens increasingly employ nuanced linguistic

strategies to navigate political authority. Social media platforms have transformed into virtual agoras where public officials are constantly monitored, evaluated, and judged by constituents. However, directly questioning powerful administrative figures carries significant social, legal, and digital risks. To mitigate these dangers, speakers employ irony as a rhetorical shield and mechanism for civil engagement.

This irony operates by creating a noticeable gap between literal praise and subtextual condemnation. When internet users encounter leaders who lack technical expertise, they avoid direct insults and instead weaponize exaggerated compliments in deeply sarcastic tones. This strategic choice aligns with politeness tenets by maintaining a calm, non-aggressive surface level of communication. By avoiding overtly hostile language, speakers prevent immediate escalation of online conflict and preserve digital decorum. Yet beneath this polite exterior lies a sharp critique that deconstructs the leader's professional legitimacy and highlights systemic failures.

Furthermore, ironic critique relies heavily on the shared cognitive and cultural framework of the online community. For the criticism to succeed, audiences must possess mutual understanding of the actual sociopolitical context surrounding the leadership. When this shared awareness exists, the public can instantly decode the underlying message, turning a simple comment into powerful shared consensus. This collective decoding fosters in-group solidarity among citizens disconnected from formal political processes. By laughing together at structural incompetence, digital users democratize political commentary, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and establishing an alternative, decentralized system of public accountability through viral linguistic subversion. These interactions reveal how digital communities utilize linguistic subtlety to challenge entrenched political authorities. By cloaking systemic grievances in the protective language of polite understatement, social media discourse negotiates boundaries between civic resistance and communicative harmony.

Data 2

"Bupati Pekalongan ngaku ga paham hukum karena latar belakangnya penyanyi dangdut"

[The Regent of Pekalongan Admits she does not understand the law because her background is a dangdut singer.]



Figure 2. Social media post on the Regent of Pekalongan

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DVg0qgqEnhI/?igsh=eWN3Zm8wOGJ2bWFz>

This is the first thing we would characterize as a public official. The public official is in self-defense against the government's legal requirements. Indeed, the statement ignited a heated debate over the competence and integrity of regional leaders, especially those from the entertainment industry, reflecting broader patterns in which media discourse shapes public opinion and state control (Harmonis et al., 2026). The statement also links previous social status to the responsibilities of political office. More broadly, the phenomenon reflects the extent to which the public cares about governance in the region. Data suggest that social media discourse provides space for social criticism of public figures, but not necessarily for confrontational criticism, as digital platforms enable the negotiation of identity and the amplification of minority voices through pragmatic communication strategies (Rahmat et al., 2025; Mahmudah et al., 2026). The phrase "*Bupati Pekalongan ngaku ga paham hukum karena latar belakangnya penyanyi dangdut*" ("the regent of Pekalongan admits she does not understand the law because her background is as a dangdut singer") went viral after the official admitted to having limited knowledge of legal and bureaucratic procedures during the investigation into alleged corruption. From the point of view of discursive pragmatics, the reposting of this statement is not only a matter of disseminating facts, but rather a way of shaping evaluative attitudes, demonstrating how cyber-pragmatics operates through inferential processes in digital communication (Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025). Instead of condemning the official for incompetence, and thus condemning it, speakers repeat the official's own admissions so that the audience can receive the message. Thus, the discursive-integrative politeness is achieved through information that shows the disparity between the state's power and the lack of expertise implied by the official's profession.

The main rhetorical device of the critique is irony. Regional leaders should be expected to understand regulation, bureaucratic procedures, and governance, reflecting institutional expectations that are often negotiated in digital discourse through metaphor and symbolic comparison (Mahmudah et al., 2026). The difference between institutional expectations and self-representation is that it faces legal uncertainty. The irony here is that, in our society, it is not always transparent to criticize leadership publicly, as digital criticism often navigates power structures and ideological positioning (Syahri et al., 2026). This irony serves to reduce the force of criticism in digital public communication through discursive-integrative politeness. Criticism of public officials can easily turn into a polarized debate. The speaker would often resort to indirect means, such as presenting statements as subjects of public reflection. This way, criticism is approachable and not attacked head-on. From an ostensive-inferential standpoint, the utterance is an ostensive message which directs the audience to take up meaning beyond its literal meaning. The sentence says only what the official's answer was. However, we must understand that it is difficult for people to take a stand because they are unfamiliar with legal matters and the duties of public office. This inferential process is central to understanding how digital audiences interpret indirect criticism in multimodal and intertextual environments (Rahmat et al., 2026; Mulyaningsih et al., 2026). The critique circulates through the recontextualization of the official's own words, enabling social accountability without explicit confrontation (Harmonis et al., 2026).

Rhetorical Environmental Criticism in Social Media Discourse

This subsection examines the expression of discursive-integrative politeness in social media discourse through rhetorical critique of environmental issues. This communication mode enables digital speakers to implicitly convey ecological degradation without direct, aggressive accusations, allowing audiences to reach conclusions through logical inference (Mahmudah et al., 2026). Environmental criticism thus takes the form of rational reflection rather than hostile indictment. Environmental advocacy has grown significantly in digital discourse. However, traditional activism often relies on alarmist or guilt-inducing narratives that may trigger psychological reactance or public fatigue. To bypass these barriers, digital users increasingly adopt discursive-integrative politeness strategies (Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025). By framing ecological crises within rhetorical questions or contemplative statements, speakers create a non-threatening environment that respects audience autonomy and invites shared reflection. Consequently, communication remains polite on the surface while delivering a disturbing message about environmental destruction beneath it.

This rhetorical approach leverages social media affordances by transforming complex scientific data into accessible textual content. Simplified reflections on deforestation democratize ecological knowledge and

reach broader audiences (Rahmat et al., 2026). The deliberate simplicity captures users' attention during scrolling and stimulates cognitive engagement. As audiences process underlying ironies and unspoken truths, they actively participate in constructing the final critique. This collective processing fosters shared responsibility and solidarity around environmental protection, shifting narratives from passive consumption to active reflection on ecosystem survival.

Ultimately, environmental activism and communicative politeness can coexist effectively in digital spaces. By cloaking ecological grievances in rational reflection and polite understatement, social media discourse negotiates boundaries between environmental resistance and social harmony. This illustrates how Indonesian digital communication utilizes strategic subtlety to challenge corporate negligence and weak institutional policies without resorting to hostile confrontation, demonstrating that politeness is not an avoidance of critique but a pragmatic way to communicate social critique effectively within collectively negotiated interpretive spaces (Syahri et al., 2026; Mulyaningsih et al., 2026).

Data 3

"Sudah paham kan sejauh ini?"

[You understand by now, don't you?]



Figure 3. AI-generated image of orangutan in deforested landscape

Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSuDGD5nc/>

This content uses artificial intelligence (AI) technology to depict an orangutan holding a warning sign in the middle of a deforested area. The environmental message gets across through social media, prompting the audience to consider the damage caused by deforestation, reflecting broader patterns of how visual narratives in digital discourse shape public understanding of ecological issues (Rahmat et al., 2026; Dhea et

al., 2022). The new AI-generated images are a way to communicate conservation issues online, demonstrating how multimodal resources can be strategically deployed to convey evaluative meaning in digital public discourse (Mulyaningsih et al., 2026). The content asks netizens to draw their own conclusions about ecological destruction in the language of digital popular culture. Data highlights the ability of social media discourse to serve as an effective tool for transmitting environmental critique through implicit and reflective discursive strategies. "*Sejauh ini sudah paham kan?*" ("You understand by now, don't you?") is uttered in a digital screenshot of an orangutan huddled in a barren forest holding a warning sign. This is an AI-generated image showing the destruction of nature's wildlife due to deforestation. The image, coupled with the short text, provides a multisensory ecological message that is informative and very powerful.

From a discourse-pragmatic perspective, the utterance is a rhetorical rather than a literal question, functioning as an ostensive stimulus that guides audiences toward inferential meaning beyond the explicit linguistic content (Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025; Rahmat et al., 2026). You see the orangutan curled up in a lonely forest, out of its environment, and you know that deforestation has destroyed the habitat of the species. The meaning then concerns the brevity of the text and its symbolic imagery. From the discursive-integrative politeness perspective, this type of criticism allows us to criticize without accusing anyone, reflecting how cyber-pragmatics enables the negotiation of evaluative meaning through indirect communicative strategies (Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025). Environmental degradation worldwide is intertwined with powerful economic and political interests, and assigning blame may meet resistance. This dynamic reflects broader patterns of how media discourse navigates power structures and state interests (Harmonis et al., 2026). The critique is presented as a question for reflection, thus preserving dialogic openness and encouraging moral evaluation. The utterance is a stimulus in the sense of ostensive-inferential communication that guides the listener to a meaning that goes beyond what is written down in a form, aligning with the view that communicative intentions are inferred through the integration of linguistic, visual, and contextual information (Rahmat et al., 2026; Mahmudah et al., 2026). Together with the view of the deforested landscape, we interpret the causal link of human activity and ecosystem destruction, and the wider human consequences for wildlife in general. The communication is even more powerful thanks to the multimodal dimension, as meaning in digital environments is generated through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources (Mulyaningsih et al., 2026).

AI-generated images reflect shifting rhetorical strategies in digital environmental communication. They enable fast, visually compelling messages that compete effectively in social media's attention economy. Environmental criticism is expressed through multimodal symbolism, rhetorical questions, and audience inference, allowing ecological messages to be disseminated in an accessible way while conveying collective environmental responsibility (Bhandari et al., 2026). This subsection examines how discursive-integrative politeness is represented as empathetic ethical criticism on social media. Empathetic approaches allow speakers to articulate victim experiences and remind the public of the state's moral obligation to address ongoing human rights violations. In this way, criticism is expressed not as confrontation but as empathy and collective reflection. The following data exemplifies this strategy for preserving society's collective memory of past injustices. The story concerns the long-term struggle of families participating in the Thursday Vigil movement for justice for their missing children during the 1998 political unrest in Indonesia. The sentence underscores how many continue to keep the nation's collective memory of unresolved human rights violations, representing peaceful resistance, loyalty, and the history of victims' families. The message ultimately reminds the state of its moral obligation to the victims of past injustices. Such empathetic criticism aligns with discursive practices that negotiate minority voices and collective identity in digital public discourse.

Empathic Moral Criticism of the Collective Memory of Human Rights Violations

In this subsection, we explore the manifestation of discursive-integrative politeness through empathetic moral criticism in social media discourse. This deeply empathetic approach allows online speakers to address the profound suffering of marginalized victims while reminding the public of the state's absolute moral obligation to address unresolved human rights violations. Within this particular discursive framework,

criticism is never expressed confrontationally or aggressively; instead, it is subtly channeled through genuine expressions of empathy and shared moral reflection.

Evidence of this specific linguistic strategy is clearly presented in the upcoming empirical data. Through this analysis, we show how an intimate, human-centered story can be an effective tool for keeping society's collective memory of past injustices alive. By avoiding direct political indictments, creators maintain a polite, non-threatening digital environment. This communicative politeness minimizes defensive reactions from institutions while maximizing emotional engagement from the audience. Ultimately, this method transforms historical trauma into a shared ethical responsibility, utilizing compassion rather than hostility to demand justice. This strategy demonstrates that digital discourse can successfully challenge systemic neglect while firmly upholding the core principles of social and communicative harmony.

Data 4

"Dia hanya seorang ibu yang kehilangan anaknya sejak 1998"

[She is only a mother who has lost her child since 1998]



Figure 4. Social media post on Thursday Vigil movement

Source: <https://instagram.com/p/DOvS6bfE-TD/>

This narrative is about the ongoing struggle of mothers of Thursday Vigil groups who seek justice for the children who were forcibly disappeared during the 1998 political turbulence in Indonesia. It is about people's dedication to the nation's collective memory of human rights violations, reflecting how digital discourse enables minority voices to challenge dominant historical narratives and advocate for social justice (Mahmudah et al., 2026; Rahmat et al., 2025). It is a culture of peaceful resistance that is fueled by symbols of loyalty and the heritage of victims' families. The message at the heart of the message is to inform the state not to forget the moral responsibility of the victims of past wrongs, reflecting broader patterns of how media

discourse navigates state power and historical accountability (Harmonis et al., 2026). Data highlights how social media can be used to make criticisms of historical injustice in response to people, through empathy and reflective discursive mechanisms. The phrase "*Dia hanya seorang ibu yang kehilangan anaknya sejak 1998*" ("She is only a mother who has lost her child since 1998") refers to the long struggle of mothers whose children were taken from them in the political evolution of Indonesia into the reform era. This is because the story closely mirrors the Thursday Vigil in the civil solidarity movement, a peaceful demonstration that also serves as a reminder of the continuing human rights violations.

From a discursive pragmatic point of view, it's not so much a question of "only a mother" but the very essence of who the person is and how they are to point out the humanitarian aspect of the message, illustrating how cyber-pragmatics operates through inferential processes to convey evaluative meaning beyond explicit linguistic content (Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025). Digital discourse enables us to maintain our attention on unresolved human rights violations by introducing victims' families who are in a position of public need to tell their stories. Another aspect of discursive-integrative politeness is that criticism is expressed through moral reflection rather than public blame, allowing social critique to circulate while preserving dialogic openness and social harmony (Rahmat et al., 2026; Mahmudah et al., 2026). By emphasizing the victim's experiences, the discussion also encourages the public to reflect on the moral impact of historical injustice on itself. The maternal figure's symbolic power adds to the message. In the context of Indonesian society, motherhood is characterized by persistence, sacrifice, and unconditional love. The story of a mother who has been seeking justice for decades is therefore of great moral significance and amplifies the criticism of structural injustice, resonating with how cultural identity and historical memory are constructed through narrative and symbolic representation (Fadhilla et al., 2026; Mulyaningsih et al., 2026). This case illustrates that, through discursive-integrative politeness, social media discourse can tell the story of human rights violations through empathy and symbolic representation. Personal suffering is made into a communal moral reminder of justice, responsibility, and historical memory in contemporary digital public discourse, demonstrating how digital platforms enable the negotiation of identity, minority voices, and collective memory through pragmatic communication strategies.

Sarcastic Criticism of Government Performance in Environmental Issues

This subsection demonstrates how discursive-integrative politeness is realized in sarcastic criticism of government performance on environmental issues on social media. Sarcasm operates as a sophisticated rhetorical device that emphasizes the disjunction between explicit praise in textual statements and the grim reality of poor environmental governance, thereby expressing social criticism indirectly through the juxtaposition of positive language with contradictory visual evidence. In one video, a woman sits calmly on a small boat in a heavily polluted river overflowing with plastic waste. The caption reads as sarcastic praise of the state.

In contemporary digital discourse, navigating political commentary requires a balance between civic dissatisfaction and communicative decorum. Direct attacks often result in defensive retaliation or online polarization. To circumvent these outcomes, digital citizens utilize sarcasm as an integrative linguistic mechanism that satisfies social media politeness. By clothing critique in the vocabulary of approval, the speaker maintains a surface-level appearance of civil harmony. The politeness aspect is integrated because the speaker does not deploy vulgarity or overt insults; instead, they invite the audience to witness structural failure through calculated irony (Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025; Mahmudah et al., 2026). This method forces the viewer to reconcile flattering textual claims with undeniable visual decay, transforming a post into an interactive space of intellectual accountability.

Furthermore, this multi-layered tactic alters how environmental advocacy is consumed in the digital age. Rather than presenting abstract data, the video leverages spatial and visual cybertextuality to create immediate emotional resonance (Rahmat et al., 2026; Mulyaningsih et al., 2026). The woman's presence amid garbage deepens the sarcasm, and when the public collectively engages, the gap between bureaucratic promises and ecological reality becomes impossible to ignore. This shared realization bypasses traditional propaganda, allowing citizens to build an organic consensus regarding state negligence. Ultimately, analyzing these sarcastic interactions reveals that digital discourse need not be aggressive to be revolutionary. By

integrating politeness with sharp, visually verified sarcasm, internet users effectively challenge institutional incompetence while preserving the decorum of the online public sphere.

Data 5

"Stoplah protes soal pemerintah kita, hasil nyata pekerjaan mereka terpampang nyata kok!"
[Stop protesting our government; the real results of their work are clearly visible!]



Figure 5. Social media post on polluted river

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DRg4c5sE6ml/?igsh=MWl5djJmZmZxdXFsYQ>

A woman sits on a boat in the middle of a heavily polluted river, surrounded by huge piles of plastic waste. The video's caption sounds very positive, but it's actually sarcastic, given how bad the image is. The contrast between the positive text and the polluted environment is seen as a protest against the government's failure to address environmental pollution. The visual evidence serves as a form of protest against the claim that waste management policy does not work, reflecting how multimodal resources amplify rhetorical and ideological power in digital discourse (Rahmat et al., 2026). Data shows how social media uses sarcasm to criticize government actions on environmental issues. A video shows a woman sitting on a boat in a polluted river with huge volumes of plastic waste, with the caption "*Stoplah protes soal pemerintah kita, hasil nyata pekerjaan mereka terpampang nyata kok!*" (Stop protesting our government, the real results of their work are clearly visible!). The text appears to praise the government's performance. However, the visual evidence of such heavy pollution makes the picture look very different. It's a sarcastic effect, one that turns what seems like praise into an implicit criticism.

This is a very discursive-pragmatic phenomenon, involving a kind of reversal of meaning. The statement about the government's achievements being visible, in the context of environmental degradation, does not mean what the literal version means but is a criticism of the government's failure in environmental governance, illustrating how cyber-pragmatics operates through inferential processes to convey evaluative meaning (Rahardi & Rahmat, 2025). In terms of discursive-integrative politeness, sarcasm is an appropriate way to convey a critical evaluation of public institutions without sounding confrontational. It is common for speakers to use indirect rhetorical language to convey evaluative messages, avoiding discursive conflict, as digital criticism often navigates power structures and ideological positioning (Syahri et al., 2026; Harmonis et al., 2026).

In the context of ostensive-inferential communication, the caption is presented as an ostensive stimulus that invites the reader to infer meaning beyond its literal content (Rahmat et al., 2026). The message appears to say the government has done a lot, but the visual image shows that the "visible results" refer to the environmental condition in question. The critique's multimodal character amplifies its rhetorical effect. An image of a river filled with plastic waste is a testament to environmental failure, and the irony becomes even more pronounced when it is accompanied by praise. Discursive-integrative politeness is also manifested in the use of visual evidence to support criticism. The polluted environment is implicit evidence of policy failure rather than an explicit criticism (Mahmudah et al., 2026). The critique is based on fact and not allegation.

This also shows how citizens can express criticism of public policy in creative and symbolic ways. Irony and sarcasm are attention-grabbing strategies in the competitive digital information environment, helping critical messages spread widely and environmental issues be discussed (Mahmudah et al., 2026; Rahmat et al., 2026). All in all, this suggests that discursive-integrative politeness in digital discourse can be realized through sarcastic strategies that exploit the tension between texts and reality on screen. Dialogue of this kind enables speakers to make sharp criticisms of environmental management while still communicating in an indirect, reflective, and participatory way in contemporary digital public spaces.

Discussion

The results show that discursive-integrative politeness in social media discourse is realised through diverse communicative strategies, such as parody, irony, rhetorical questions, empathetic narration, and sarcasm. In the cases analyzed, criticism of agrarian inequality, political leadership, environmental degradation, and unresolved human rights violations was rarely made in direct accusation. Instead, speakers used symbolic representations, contextual contrasts, multimodal resources, and inferential cues that allowed audiences to construct evaluative meanings through interpretation. These findings support recent arguments that politeness should be understood as a situated, emergent phenomenon, negotiated through interaction and interpretation, rather than a stable linguistic property (Watts, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005; Arundale, 2013). From a discursive-pragmatic perspective, the findings support the claim that politeness is evaluated by participants' contextualised assessments rather than predetermined linguistic forms (Haugh, 2013; Kádár & Haugh, 2013). These findings are consistent with discursive approaches to politeness as relational work developing in the context of interpretation and social evaluation, rather than as conforming to universal politeness strategies (Locher, 2004; Arundale, 2013).

The findings also add to the discussion about the relationship between politeness and social critique. Traditionally, politeness has been implicitly associated with conflict avoidance, mitigation, and interpersonal harmony (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kasper, 1990). This observation is consistent with recent developments in third-wave politeness scholarship, which underscores the dynamic negotiation of social relationships and ideological positioning in interaction (Culpeper, 2011; Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Rahardi et al., 2025). A particularly important finding concerns the role of inferential interpretation in the construction of politeness meanings. Communicative success in all five examples hinged importantly on the audience's ability to infer meanings beyond the literal textual content. This pattern lends strong support to the relevance-theoretic view that communication is achieved through ostensive-inferential processes rather than the direct transmission of meaning (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Wilson & Sperber, 2004).

Audiences are not just decoding linguistic messages but actively reconstructing communicative intentions by integrating textual cues, visual representations, contextual assumptions, and sociocultural knowledge

(Carston, 2002; Unger, 2012; Yus, 2021). Thus, politeness is not only a matter of what is said but also of how communicative intentions are inferred and interpreted in specific cognitive environments. The observation extends previous applications of relevance theory to digital communication and provides empirical evidence for integrating inferential pragmatics into current politeness research (Rahardi & Budhiono, 2024; Yus, 2021).

These findings support critiques that cognitive approaches require supplementing with attention to social and cultural dimensions of meaning-making (Sikka, 2008; Arundale, 2013). Discursive, integrative politeness, therefore, extends beyond inferential processing by acknowledging that communicative interpretation is at once cognitive, social, and ideological. Politeness scholarship has traditionally focused on linguistic interaction, treating language as the primary medium for interpersonal meaning (Kasper, 1990; Haugh, 2013). Nevertheless, our results demonstrate that social critique in contemporary digital environments is often realized through the interaction of verbal and visual resources.

These observations support social semiotic approaches to multimodality, which argue that meaning is created by the orchestration of multiple semiotic modes, rather than by language alone (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Jewitt, 2014). The results also demonstrate that visual representations frequently serve as ostensive cues for guiding inferential interpretation. Criticism, empathy, irony, and relational positioning are often evaluated across textual and visual resources that work together to create coherent communicative meanings (Sanz, 2013; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018). These observations align with recent studies that highlight the need for analytical frameworks that account for multimodal meaning-making processes in contemporary communication (Jewitt, 2014; Norris, 2004). The study also adds to emerging scholarship on digital public discourse. Previous research has shown that social media environments encourage participatory meaning-making, audience engagement, and the circulation of user-generated evaluations concerning public affairs (Page, 2012; Zappavigna, 2012; Sun et al., 2021). The present findings extend these observations by demonstrating how indirect communicative strategies enable citizens to negotiate criticism in highly visible, potentially contentious digital spaces.

Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that discursive-integrative politeness in social media discourse is mediated by various rhetorical and multimodal strategies, including parody, irony, sarcasm, rhetorical questioning, and empathetic narration. The findings reveal that social criticism of agrarian inequality, political leadership competence, environmental degradation, and unresolved human rights violations is rarely articulated through direct accusation. Instead, speakers employ symbolic representation, semantic contrast, and multimodal structures as ostensive cues that guide audiences toward inferential interpretations of critique. Through these strategies, criticism is implicitly but effectively articulated while maintaining communicative openness and a reflective tone. Social media functions as a discursive environment where users engage in creative, culturally relevant forms of communication, such as parody, cultural references, anthropomorphic symbolism, and visual irony, that transform social criticism into collectively interpretable discourse. In this communicative ecology, politeness cannot be understood simply as the avoidance of criticism; rather, it entails framing critique through indirect, reflective, and multimodal forms of communication that invite audiences to participate in the construction of meaning. This discursive-integrative approach suggests that politeness in digital contexts emerges from the negotiation between evaluative expression and social relationality, enabling critical engagement without explicit confrontation.

The study contributes to politeness theory by demonstrating how multimodal meaning-making and inferential processes interact in the circulation of social criticism in digital public discourse. By integrating insights from Relevance Theory, discursive pragmatics, and multimodality, this research offers a framework for understanding how digital citizens navigate the tension between critique and politeness in contemporary media environments. The findings also have implications for understanding how digital platforms shape public deliberation, social awareness, and the negotiation of civic participation. However, the study is not without limitations. It is conducted primarily on specific social media platforms and is analyzed qualitatively from a limited corpus. Future research should expand the corpus into other digital contexts, such as YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and emerging AI-mediated platforms, and explore complementary

quantitative approaches better to understand the social and discursive dimensions of discursive-integrative politeness. Further investigations could also examine how these strategies vary across cultural contexts and political systems, and how digital platforms continue to reshape the relationships among politeness, critique, and public participation. Ultimately, this study underscores that discursive-integrative politeness represents not a retreat from critique but a pragmatic adaptation to the communicative affordances and constraints of the digital public sphere.

Declaration

Conflicting Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. All authors have approved the final version of the manuscript and agree with its submission for publication.

Ethics Approval

This study has obtained ethical clearance in accordance with applicable research ethics standards. All data have been anonymized and are used solely for academic purposes.

Data Availability

Data will be available from the corresponding author [kunjana@usd.ac.id] upon reasonable request.

Generative AI

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to improve language quality, style, and readability. The authors independently developed all ideas, analyses, interpretations, and substantive content.

Author Contributions

Conception and Design: This study was conceptualized and designed by RKR and YS, encompassing the development of the core research questions, theoretical frameworks in pragmatics and linguistics, and the educational methodology. RS and STF assisted in the design phase by providing valuable input and aligning the study with contemporary educational needs. **Data Collection and Analysis:** Data collection, technical formatting, and initial data processing were primarily conducted by STF. Data analysis and linguistic interpretation were conducted by RKR and YS, leveraging their expertise in multimodal text, phonology, and pragmatics to develop the key findings. **Manuscript Preparation:** The initial draft of the manuscript was prepared by RKR, YS, and RS. They contributed to the writing of the introduction, literature review, methods, and results sections of the manuscript, integrating linguistic theory with curriculum and learning perspectives. **Critical Review of Intellectual Content:** Substantial contributions to the critical review of the manuscript before submission were provided by RKR, YS, and RS. They reviewed and edited the content, refined the argumentative structure, and shaped the final intellectual framework of this paper. **Accountability for All Aspects of the Work:** All authors agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work, ensuring the integrity and accuracy of the research and the resulting manuscript.

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