

EMIC-EPISTEMOLOGICAL POLITENESS IN DIGITAL PUBLIC DISCOURSE: AN INTEGRATIVE DISCURSIVE PRAGMATICS APPROACH

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Abstract

This study examines emic–epistemological politeness in social media discourse from the perspective of integrative discursive pragmatics, drawing on politeness theory and epistemic pragmatics as its theoretical framework. It argues that politeness is not merely a strategy of interpersonal mitigation, but an epistemically grounded and reflexive resource for articulating social criticism within digital public spheres. The study explores how discursive practices are strategically employed to negotiate meaning, manage face relations, and construct epistemic legitimacy in response to socio-political issues. Employing a qualitative design within an interpretative–constructivist paradigm, the study utilizes critical discourse analysis. The data consist of selected social media utterances expressing social criticism, collected through non-participatory observation and systematic digital documentation. A purposive sampling technique was applied. The analysis is guided by an integrative discursive-pragmatic framework that incorporates situational, social, cultural, and cybertextual dimensions, with particular attention to multimodality and facework. Findings indicate that emic–epistemological politeness is realized through interconnected discursive strategies. Factual–persuasive constructions foreground moral accountability in public governance, while persuasive generalizations, often grounded in the epistemic authority of public figures, intensify critiques of political integrity. Reframing strategies destabilize dominant normative discourses by reconfiguring moral and socio-political relations. In addition, implicit delegitimization operates as an indirect yet effective critical resource, while contrastive strategies expose inequalities in social recognition, particularly in gendered responses to sensitive issues.

Keywords: emic–epistemological politeness; discursive pragmatics; social media discourse; social criticism; multimodality

Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji representasi kesopanan emik–epistemologis dalam wacana media sosial dari perspektif pragmatik diskursif integratif. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa kesopanan tidak semata-mata berfungsi sebagai mekanisme mitigasi interpersonal, melainkan juga sebagai sumber daya reflektif yang berbasis epistemik untuk mengartikulasikan kritik sosial dalam ruang publik digital. Analisis difokuskan pada bagaimana penutur secara strategis memanfaatkan praktik diskursif untuk menegosiasikan makna, mengelola relasi muka, dan membangun legitimasi epistemik dalam merespons isu-isu sosial-politik kontemporer. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dalam paradigma interpretatif–konstruktivis dengan metode analisis wacana kritis. Data penelitian berupa ujaran media sosial yang mengandung kritik sosial, yang dikumpulkan melalui observasi non-partisipatif dan dokumentasi digital secara sistematis. Korpus data dipilih secara purposif dan dianalisis

menggunakan kerangka pragmatik diskursif integratif yang mencakup dimensi kontekstual situasional, sosial, kultural, dan sibertekstual, dengan multimodalitas dan pengelolaan muka sebagai konstruksi analitis utama. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesopanan emik-epistemologis direalisasikan melalui konfigurasi strategi diskursif yang saling berkaitan. Konstruksi faktual-persuasif menekankan akuntabilitas moral dalam tata kelola sumber daya publik, sementara generalisasi persuasif—yang kerap berlandaskan otoritas epistemik figur publik—mengintensifkan kritik terhadap integritas politik. Strategi reframing berfungsi mendestabilisasi wacana normatif dominan dengan merekonfigurasi relasi antara nilai moral dan realitas sosial-politik. Selain itu, pengungkapan implisit terhadap praktik-praktik delegitimasi berfungsi sebagai bentuk kritik tidak langsung yang tetap memiliki daya ilokusi kuat, sedangkan strategi kontrastif menyoroti ketimpangan dalam pengakuan sosial, khususnya dalam respons berbasis gender terhadap isu-isu sensitif.

Kata kunci: kesopanan emik-epistemologis; pragmatik diskursif; wacana media sosial; kritik sosial; multimodalitas

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the digital communication ecosystem has fundamentally transformed the ways in which individuals and social groups produce, distribute, and negotiate meaning in the public sphere. Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook have become prominent discursive arenas in which users—ranging from ordinary citizens, activists, to public figures—engage in public commentary, including the expression of social criticism toward governmental policies, social inequality, and public ethical issues, particularly in the post-pandemic digital era (Sikka, 2008; Rahardi et al., 2025). In these contexts, social media discourse is no longer limited to interpersonal interaction, but also functions as a site of civic participation and ideological contestation, where moral evaluation and identity construction occur simultaneously and multimodally.

Within such environments, politeness emerges not merely as a linguistic strategy for maintaining interpersonal harmony, but as a discursive resource through which users articulate criticism in ways that remain socially intelligible and publicly negotiable. For instance, indirect evaluative comments toward public policy decisions often combine irony, factual claims, and moral positioning, allowing users to criticize authorities while maintaining epistemic legitimacy and avoiding direct confrontation. This illustrates that politeness in digital discourse is closely tied to the management of visibility, credibility, and social acceptability in online public interaction.

A substantial body of research in pragmatics has traditionally conceptualized politeness as a set of strategies for maintaining face, particularly within Brown and Levinson's framework (Levinson, 1983, 2013). However, recent developments indicate a shift toward contextual, emic, and discourse-oriented approaches that emphasize meaning negotiation within specific communicative practices. In social media contexts, expressions that appear impolite at the surface level often function as vehicles for critique, evaluation, and resistance, particularly in relation to institutional authority and social injustice.

Despite this development, existing studies remain limited in addressing how politeness operates within specific genres of digital discourse, such as comment sections responding to political news, opinion threads on X, or user-generated responses to viral socio-political content.

Moreover, most studies still focus on micro-level linguistic strategies, while neglecting how these are shaped by broader ideological structures, platform affordances, and multimodal resources such as emojis, hashtags, images, and repost mechanisms.

To illustrate, in a comment responding to a government policy announcement on social media, a user may write: *Great job, another brilliant way to ignore public needs* 👍. This utterance simultaneously performs praise and criticism, where the emoji, irony, and lexical choice together construct a layered evaluative stance. Such examples show that politeness cannot be separated from multimodal and epistemic dimensions of meaning-making.

Against this background, this study focuses on social media discourse in the Indonesian digital public sphere during the contemporary period (post-2020), particularly in user-generated commentary on socio-political issues. It investigates how ordinary users and digital opinion leaders articulate social criticism through discursive strategies that are simultaneously polite, evaluative, and epistemically grounded. The study is situated within pragmatic inquiry and adopts an integrative discursive pragmatic framework that conceptualizes meaning as emerging from linguistic, social, cultural, ideological, and multimodal dimensions of interaction (Verschuere, 1997; Park, 2017).

Furthermore, this study draws on third-wave pragmatics, which emphasizes the role of multimodality in contemporary communication. Meaning in social media is constructed not only through verbal language, but also through semiotic resources such as emojis, images, hashtags, formatting, and platform-specific interactional features. These resources function as stance markers that shape interpretation, intensify evaluation, or mitigate criticism (Barton & Lee, 2013; Blitvich & Bou-Franch, 2018).

Context in this study is understood as multi-layered, encompassing situational, cultural, social, and societal dimensions, as well as virtual and cybertextual environments. Social media discourse is therefore analyzed as a dynamic interactional space where meaning is continuously co-constructed through user engagement, platform architecture, and intertextual relations among posts, comments, and responses. By integrating these perspectives, the study conceptualizes emic-epistemological politeness as a discursive practice through which social criticism is not only expressed but also legitimized in public communication. Politeness in this sense functions not merely to preserve harmony, but also to enable critique within socially acceptable and epistemically justified boundaries.

Ultimately, this study addresses the following questions: (1) what discursive strategies are used by social media users in articulating social criticism; (2) how politeness is constructed within specific digital genres such as comment-based interaction on socio-political posts; and (3) how epistemic legitimacy is negotiated through these practices. By doing so, the study contributes to a more grounded understanding of politeness as a situated, multimodal, and ideologically embedded phenomenon in contemporary digital discourse.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a critical discourse analysis design grounded in integrative discursive pragmatics. This approach is selected as it enables an in-depth exploration of language practices as socially situated actions imbued with meaning, ideology, and power relations within digital communication contexts. Epistemologically, the study is anchored in an interpretative-constructivist paradigm, which conceptualizes meaning as a socially constructed

phenomenon negotiated through discursive interaction (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Smith et al., 2011). Accordingly, the analytical focus extends beyond the linguistic structure of utterances to examine how *emic*–epistemological politeness is constructed, articulated, and interpreted within the dynamic and multimodal environment of social media.

The data consist of digital textual utterances expressing social criticism on social media, specifically on short-form video platforms such as Instagram, particularly in the form of captions, on-screen text, and user comments accompanying the videos. The units of analysis include user-generated content in the form of captions, comments, and transcribed spoken discourse from videos addressing public issues, including social justice, gender equality, and human rights violations. Data sources are drawn from publicly accessible posts, with careful attention to digital research ethics, including the anonymization of user identities and context-sensitive data usage (Mahsun, 2007). The dataset is purposively selected based on the following criteria: (1) the presence of social criticism, (2) the use of discursive strategies relevant to politeness, and (3) the representation of social response dynamics within digital public discourse.

The object of this study is the representation of *emic*–epistemological politeness in social media discourse, particularly in utterances that articulate critique of social phenomena. The analysis focuses on the discursive strategies employed by speakers to manage face, express evaluation, and negotiate meaning within a multimodal context (Kate Beeching, 2015; Pflaeging et al., 2021). Furthermore, the object of analysis encompasses the relational interplay between text, context, and audience response as part of a broader process of meaning construction. Thus, the study does not treat utterances merely as isolated linguistic entities, but as components of discursive practices involving the interaction of multiple semiotic resources in digital spaces.

Data collection is conducted through non-participant observation and digital documentation. The researcher systematically searches, identifies, and archives relevant data from social media platforms using specific keywords and topical criteria aligned with the research focus (Sudaryanto, 2015). Selected data are documented through screenshots, textual transcription, and detailed recording of the accompanying discursive context, including posting date, interaction type, and audience responses. This process is carried out iteratively to ensure both the diversity of the dataset and the depth of representation of the phenomenon under investigation. In addition, preliminary categorization of the data is undertaken based on emerging discursive strategies as part of the pre-analytical stage. Given the large volume of data collected, only five data excerpts are presented in this paper due to space limitations. However, these selected examples are considered representative of the overall data classification.

Data analysis is performed using an integrative discursive-pragmatic approach comprising several stages: (1) data reduction to select the most representative utterances; (2) identification and classification of discursive strategies, such as contrast, irony, repetition, and implicature; (3) contextual analysis encompassing situational, cultural, social, and cybertextual dimensions; and (4) interpretative analysis within the framework of *emic*–epistemological politeness, incorporating the concepts of face and multimodality. To ensure the validity and rigor of the findings, the study employs data and theoretical triangulation by comparing multiple data sources and integrating perspectives from pragmatics, critical discourse analysis, and digital communication studies. Additionally, peer debriefing and iterative validation of interpretations are conducted to enhance the consistency and credibility of the analysis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research findings, demonstrating how emic–epistemological politeness is enacted in social media discourse through a diverse repertoire of pragmatic and discursive strategies. The findings indicate that politeness is no longer confined to the normative maintenance of interpersonal harmony; rather, it operates as a reflective and epistemically grounded mechanism for articulating social critique in digital public spaces. The analyzed utterances reveal how speakers strategically mobilize a range of semiotic resources—both verbal and multimodal—to manage face, construct evaluative stances, and negotiate epistemic legitimacy in addressing sensitive public issues.

Moreover, the findings suggest that discursive strategies such as irony, contrast, repetition, and implicature function not merely as rhetorical devices but as epistemic instruments for positioning the speaker in relation to social reality. Through these strategies, speakers do not simply express opinions; they actively intervene in broader meaning-making processes, including the distribution of recognition, the representation of victimhood, and the critical evaluation of social institutions. In this regard, politeness emerges as a complex site of negotiation where critical expression, social norms, and the imperative of discursive acceptability intersect within digital communities.

Against this backdrop, the following section systematically elaborates the various manifestations of emic–epistemological politeness identified in the data. Each subsection explicates the discursive strategies employed, the contextual conditions that shape their emergence, and their pragmatic as well as ideological implications. This approach enables the analysis to move beyond descriptive accounts of linguistic phenomena toward a deeper understanding of how digital communicative practices contribute to the formation of social consciousness and the dynamics of contemporary public discourse.

The Discursive Construction of Factual–Persuasive Criticism

This subsection elaborates how social criticism is articulated through a discursive strategy that combines factual grounding with persuasive force in social media discourse. Data 1 demonstrates that emic–epistemological politeness is not necessarily realized through mitigation or the softening of expression; rather, it may emerge through the rhetorically constructed presentation of facts aimed at fostering collective awareness. The utterance *Dirut LPDP sentil alumni: Ingat anda pakai duit pajak* (LPDP President Director reminds alumni: Remember, your education was funded by taxpayers' money) illustrates how institutional authority is mobilized as a source of epistemic legitimacy to advance a critique grounded in strong normative and moral claims.

In this context, the critique is not framed as a personal attack but as a fact-based reminder that carries persuasive force regarding the social responsibility of public fund beneficiaries. The interplay of social, cybertextual, and situational contexts enhances the illocutionary force of the utterance, rendering it not only informative but also evaluative and reflexive. Accordingly, this data highlights how politeness, from an emic–epistemological perspective, operates through discursive strategies that integrate factual authority with persuasive intent in shaping public awareness and moral accountability within digital public discourse.

Data 1



Dirut LPDP sentil alumni: Ingat anda pakai duit pajak

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DVQsLbXCQ11/?igsh=M3Q1YjB6MzVjNGtl>

Discursive Context:

The utterance can be interpreted through three interrelated contextual dimensions: social, cybertextual, and situational. Socially, it reflects the issue of moral accountability in the use of public funds by LPDP alumni, foregrounding expectations of ethical responsibility attached to state-sponsored resources. From a cybertextual perspective, the message is disseminated via social media, where it is shaped by attention-oriented linguistic choices and supported by visual or platform-specific features that enhance its visibility and circulation. Situationally, the utterance emerges as a response to an issue currently under public scrutiny, thereby situating it within an ongoing discursive event. Accordingly, the meaning of the utterance is not determined solely by its propositional content; rather, it is constructed through the dynamic interplay of social expectations, situational immediacy, and digitally mediated modes of expression. This interaction amplifies the evaluative and persuasive force of the utterance, positioning it as both a reflection of and an intervention in contemporary public discourse.

The utterance *Dirut LPDP sentil alumni: Ingat anda pakai duit pajak* (LPDP President Director reminds alumni: Remember, your education was funded by taxpayers' money) represents a form of public criticism constructed in a concise, compact, and direct manner, foregrounding the issue of accountability in the use of public funds by LPDP alumni. Within the landscape of digital discourse, its dissemination through social media—supported by visual elements and attention-oriented linguistic formulation—not only enhances the visibility of the message but also underscores the urgency of the issue within an emergent social context. Thus, the effectiveness of the utterance lies not solely in its propositional content, but in the orchestration of form, medium, and situational momentum.

From an emic perspective, the utterance reflects the speaker's sensitivity to communicative norms in digital public spaces. The critique is delivered assertively without devolving into personal attack, thereby maintaining a balance between its corrective function and the principle of politeness. The use of a concise, fact-based structure indicates a strategic effort to avoid affective intensification that could provoke audience resistance. In this sense, emic politeness is realized as a communicative practice oriented toward social acceptability without compromising the clarity and firmness of the message.

From an epistemological perspective, the utterance functions as both a trigger of factual awareness and an ethical prompt. The phrase *ingat anda pakai duit pajak* (Remember, you are using taxpayers' money) carries a presupposition that LPDP funding derives from public contributions, thereby implicitly invoking a moral obligation on the part of its beneficiaries. This

strategy not only conveys information but also invites inferential processing, guiding the audience to recognize the ethical implications embedded in the stated fact. Epistemological politeness is thus manifested in the assumption that the audience possesses the cognitive capacity to interpret and evaluate the message rationally.

The cybertextual dimension plays a significant role in amplifying the persuasive force of the utterance. The affordances of social media—characterized by multimodality, rapid dissemination, and the economy of attention—are effectively utilized through the combination of concise textual expression and visually engaging elements. This format enables rapid internalization of the message without diminishing its depth, while simultaneously extending its reach across a broader audience. Accordingly, emic–epistemological politeness is not only encoded in linguistic choices but also enacted through strategic mediation.

Furthermore, the fact-based delivery of criticism reflects an implicit recognition of the audience’s epistemic agency as active interpreters. Rather than imposing explicit evaluative judgments, the speaker provides a factual foundation that encourages independent assessment. This reinforces the epistemological dimension of politeness, wherein respect for the audience is enacted through the provision of space for cognitive engagement and ethical reflection. The persuasive force of the utterance is further reinforced through a strategy of reminding, articulated in a direct yet controlled manner. The imperative *ingat* (remember) functions as a marker of normative emphasis without escalating into verbal aggression. Instead, it operates as a trigger for collective awareness, prompting the internalization of values related to public responsibility. The economical yet semantically dense lexical choice reflects pragmatic precision in balancing assertiveness with politeness.

Within the framework of digital communication, the utterance also exemplifies discursive risk management. Criticism of sensitive issues such as public fund allocation carries the potential for controversy; however, mitigation is achieved through message simplification, factual objectification, and the avoidance of personalization. Emic politeness serves to maintain relational stability in digital interaction, while epistemological politeness ensures that the message remains grounded in accountable information.

Socially, the utterance contributes to the activation of collective awareness regarding the importance of transparency and accountability in the management of public resources. The message transcends individual expression, affirming broader social norms concerning the ethical use of state funds. In this regard, emic–epistemological politeness operates as a mediating mechanism between critical expression and the maintenance of social order.

The interaction between emic and epistemological dimensions in this utterance produces a communicative form that is simultaneously corrective, informative, and persuasive. The factual basis is integrated with linguistic strategies that sustain social acceptability, enabling the audience to comprehend, evaluate, and respond to the message without experiencing excessive interpersonal pressure. This synergy reflects a defining characteristic of digital pragmatics, emphasizing efficiency, relevance, and epistemic legitimacy.

The Discursive Construction of Persuasive Criticism on Public Policy

This subsection examines how criticism of public policy and the integrity of state officials is manifested through persuasive strategies within the framework of emic–epistemological politeness. Data 2 shows that social criticism in digital media does not always appear in the form

of extended argumentation; rather, it can be constructed concisely yet effectively through the use of a public figure's authority as a source of discursive legitimacy. The statement associated with Susi Pudjiastuti carries strong epistemic weight, enabling the critique to gain broader resonance in the public sphere.

In this context, the persuasive strategy lies not only in the propositional content of the utterance, but also in the social position of the represented speaker and its alignment with collective public concern regarding the integrity of state officials. The utterance functions as a form of evaluative generalization which, although potentially controversial, reinforces its reflective force by encouraging the audience to reassess the moral condition of structures of power. Thus, emic-epistemological politeness in this data is realized through the utterance's ability to articulate criticism assertively while remaining within an acceptable framework of public discourse, supported by social legitimacy and a relevant situational context.

Data 2



Susi Pudjiastuti sepakat 80 persen pejabat RI punya mental nyolong

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSsIPj0kk5q/?igsh=MTEYamZicWx6b3dlZQ==>

Discursive Context:

The utterance can be understood through the dimensions of social and situational context. Socially, it reflects a critique of the moral integrity of public officials, particularly in relation to practices of corruption or ethical deviations within structures of power. Situationally, the utterance emerges as part of a public statement responding to issues currently unfolding in the public sphere. Accordingly, the meaning of the utterance is not confined to the content of the critique itself; rather, it is constructed through the interplay between prevailing social norms concerning the morality of public officials and the situational context that gives rise to the utterance.

The utterance *Susi Pudjiastuti sepakat 80 persen pejabat RI punya mental nyolong* (Susi Pudjiastuti agrees that 80 percent of Indonesian officials have a thieving mentality) represents a form of public criticism characterized by evaluative generalization, exerting strong rhetorical pressure on issues of integrity among public officials within the domain of public policy. Discursively, this construction does not merely convey information but also articulates a critical stance toward the moral condition of the bureaucracy through a strategy of quantification (80 percent), which serves to intensify dramatic effect while broadening its scope of social relevance. In the context of digital discourse, such formulation effectively captures audience attention and stimulates both cognitive and affective engagement.

From an emic perspective, the utterance reflects the complexity of politeness practices in digital public spaces. Although lexically it appears confrontational, the criticism is not directed at specific individuals but rather at a broader social category, namely “Indonesian officials.” This strategy of generalization functions as a mitigation mechanism that reduces the potential for face-threatening acts at the individual level, thereby allowing the critique to remain within socially acceptable boundaries. In this sense, emic politeness is realized not through attenuation, but through the redirection of critique toward a structural domain.

From an epistemological standpoint, the utterance contains a propositional claim that invites critical evaluation from the audience. The use of the quantifier “80 percent” operates not only as a rhetorical device but also as an inferential trigger, prompting the audience to reflect on the severity of the issue being highlighted. Here, epistemological politeness lies in the implicit recognition of the audience’s capacity to assess the validity, implications, and contextual grounding of the claim. The audience is positioned as an active epistemic subject rather than a passive recipient of information.

Situationally, the utterance emerges within a context of heightened public sensitivity toward issues of corruption and governmental ethics. Its persuasive force is therefore derived not only from its linguistic structure but also from its resonance with shared knowledge already established within society. The critique gains significance through its interaction with the audience’s collective experience of governance irregularities.

Furthermore, the persuasive dimension of the utterance is grounded in strategies of simplification and intensification. Simplification is evident in the use of direct and easily comprehensible language, while intensification is realized through the evaluative and emotive expression *mental nyolong* (a thieving mentality). This combination enables rapid message absorption while leaving a strong cognitive impact. Nevertheless, within the framework of emic–epistemological politeness, this intensity remains within acceptable limits because it is directed toward systemic critique rather than personal attack.

Within the cybertextual landscape, the utterance gains additional meaning through its mode of delivery, namely video-based social media (reels). Its multimodal character—integrating text, visuals, and potentially audio—enhances both persuasive force and message dissemination. This underscores that politeness in internet pragmatics is shaped not only by linguistic choices but also by the ways in which messages are mediated and contextualized within digital ecosystems.

From the perspective of discursive risk management, the utterance carries a high potential for controversy due to its negative generalization about public officials. However, this risk is mitigated through source attribution *Susi Pudjiastuti setuju* (Susi Pudjiastuti agrees), which functions as both an authoritative legitimization and a redistribution of discursive responsibility. In this way, the speaker is positioned not as the sole originator of the claim but as a mediator of an already credible public stance.

Socially, the utterance serves as a mechanism for articulating collective dissatisfaction with governance practices. The critique extends beyond individual opinion, activating broader public discourse on the importance of integrity, transparency, and accountability. In this regard, emic–epistemological politeness operates as a means through which sharp criticism can still contribute to constructive public engagement.

The interaction between emic and epistemological dimensions in this utterance produces a communicative form that is paradoxical yet productive: at once sharp and provocative, yet

simultaneously opening space for rational reflection. Facts, opinions, and rhetorical strategies converge to produce a message that is not only evocative but also invites critical evaluation.

The Discursive Construction of Social Criticism on Societal Standards of Physical Evaluation

This subsection examines how social criticism of systemic injustice is manifested through discursive strategies that combine reflective and persuasive dimensions within the framework of emic–epistemological politeness. Data 3 demonstrates that politeness practices are not always oriented toward the mitigation of expression; rather, they may be realized through the articulation of critique that is assertive yet conceptually structured. The utterance *Jangan suruh kami 'bersyukur' untuk menutupi sistem yang rusak* (Do not ask us to be 'grateful' to conceal a broken system) signals a rejection of normative discourses often employed to reduce or neutralize criticism of injustice, while simultaneously opening space for a reconfiguration of the meaning of "gratitude" in relation to social reality.

Furthermore, the conceptual opposition between "gratitude" as a spiritual domain and "protest" as a mechanism of survival reflects a powerful reframing strategy in the construction of critical argumentation. In this context, the utterance not only expresses resistance to perceived injustice but also reconstructs the boundaries of meaning between religious values and socio-political practices. Supported by the cybertextual characteristics of digital media—which enable amplification and emotional resonance—the utterance functions as a persuasive device that invites the audience to reconsider the relationship between normative resignation and collective action. Accordingly, emic–epistemological politeness in this data is realized through the utterance's capacity to articulate transformative critique while maintaining legitimacy within the public discursive space.

Data 3



Jangan suruh kami 'bersyukur' untuk menutupi sistem yang rusak. Bersyukur itu urusan spiritual, tapi protes adalah urusan bertahan hidup

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DTKT4UGEYoY/?igsh=dDVvcm1jaGdnNWo2>

Discursive Context:

The utterance can be understood through the dimensions of social and cybertextual context. Socially, it represents a critique of systemic conditions in governance, particularly concerning injustice and deviations in the exercise of power. From a cybertextual perspective, the message is delivered through digital media using a reflective and persuasive style designed to generate both cognitive and affective resonance among audiences. Accordingly, the meaning of the utterance lies not only in its expression of protest against injustice, but is also constructed through its mode

of delivery within a digital ecosystem that enables message amplification, the reframing of meaning, and the broader formation of public opinion.

The utterance *Jangan suruh kami 'bersyukur' untuk menutupi sistem yang rusak. Bersyukur itu urusan spiritual, tapi protes adalah urusan bertahan hidup* (Don't tell us to 'be grateful' to cover up a broken system. Gratitude is a spiritual matter, but protest is a matter of survival) in Data 3 constitutes a highly elaborated form of social criticism, articulated through a reflexive and systematically structured argumentative configuration that targets systemic conditions perceived as unjust. The critique is explicitly foregrounded in the opening clause, *Jangan suruh kami 'bersyukur' untuk menutupi sistem yang rusak* (Do not ask us to be 'grateful' to conceal a broken system), which operates as a discursive rejection of normative narratives frequently mobilized to neutralize or delegitimize expressions of social discontent. In this construction, "gratitude" is re-signified as an ideological instrument that potentially normalizes structural inequality, thereby establishing a critical stance that challenges the moral authority of such discourse from the outset.

From a discursive-pragmatic perspective, the deployment of the negative imperative "do not" signals resistance to hegemonic normative pressures embedded within the social order. The use of the collective pronoun "us" expands the enunciative footing from an individual to a communal epistemic position, thereby endowing the utterance with enhanced legitimacy as a representation of shared social experience. This collective alignment not only intensifies the illocutionary force of the utterance but also constructs a solidaristic stance among those subjected to comparable structural conditions. Consequently, the utterance functions simultaneously as a vehicle of collective articulation and as a site for the negotiation of meaning within the broader public sphere.

The object of critique is further specified in the clause *menutupi sistem yang rusak* (to conceal a broken system) which encodes an implicature of systematic discursive obfuscation. The verb "conceal" indexes a manipulative dimension in the production of public discourse, wherein normative values are strategically mobilized to deflect attention from underlying structural inequities. In this respect, the critique extends beyond the material conditions of injustice to encompass the discursive mechanisms that sustain and reproduce such conditions.

The argumentative architecture of the utterance is further developed through a rigorous conceptual differentiation between the spiritual and socio-political domains, as articulated in the proposition *Bersyukur itu urusan spiritual* (Gratitude is a spiritual matter). This formulation does not negate the intrinsic value of gratitude; rather, it recontextualizes it within its appropriate epistemic domain as a personal and transcendental practice. Such differentiation prevents the instrumentalization of spiritual values as justificatory devices for systemic injustice, thereby preserving their ethical integrity.

This conceptual distinction is subsequently intensified through the adversative construction *tapi protes adalah urusan bertahan hidup* (but protest is a matter of survival) in which the conjunction "but" functions as a marker of strong semantic opposition. Within this discursive configuration, protest is elevated from a discretionary expressive act to an existential necessity, thereby acquiring both social legitimacy and moral urgency. The utterance thus redefines protest as a rational and ethically justified response to conditions that threaten the fundamental conditions of human existence.

The phrase "a matter of survival" introduces a significant degree of semantic intensification, repositioning protest within an existential register. This reframing transforms

protest into an indispensable mechanism for the preservation of fundamental rights, thereby grounding its legitimacy in both ethical reasoning and lived experience. The strategic interplay between lexical selection and syntactic structuring here exemplifies how persuasive force is constructed through the integration of rational argumentation and experiential resonance.

Within the cybertextual ecology of digital media, the utterance derives additional efficacy from its mode of circulation. The affordances of social media, particularly multimodality, rapid dissemination, and interactive engagement, facilitate both the amplification of meaning and the generation of cognitive and affective resonance among audiences. Consequently, meaning emerges not solely from the linguistic configuration of the utterance but from its embeddedness within a dynamic digital environment that shapes processes of interpretation and uptake.

From the standpoint of discursive politeness, the utterance exemplifies a sophisticated manifestation of emic-epistemological politeness. The emic dimension is evident in the speaker's reliance on internally grounded experiential knowledge and culturally situated interpretive frameworks. The epistemological dimension, in turn, is reflected in the logically coherent structuring of argumentation, which presupposes an audience capable of engaging in critical evaluation and inferential reasoning. Rather than imposing a determinate evaluative stance, the utterance provides an epistemic scaffold that invites active interpretive participation.

The interaction between these emic and epistemological dimensions produces a mode of communication that is simultaneously critical, reflective, and persuasive. More importantly, the articulation of critique does not transgress the boundaries of social acceptability; instead, it is strategically calibrated to maintain discursive legitimacy while maximizing evaluative impact. In this sense, politeness is not reducible to mitigation, but functions as a regulatory mechanism that enables the constructive articulation of critique within a rational and socially accountable framework.

The Discursive Construction of Social Criticism on the Discrepancy between Political Promises and Policy Implementation

This sub-section examines how social criticism of the gap between political promises and the implementation of public policy is articulated through the disclosure of delegitimizing practices within digital discourse. Data 4 demonstrates that emic-epistemological politeness can operate through strategies that expose problematic discursive mechanisms, such as the dissemination of stigma and political defamation targeting public actors. The utterance *Ketua BEM UGM difitnah LGBT dan dekat dengan Anies Baswedan* (The Chair of UGM's Student Executive Board was slandered as LGBT and close to Anies Baswedan) does not merely convey information; it also carries an evaluative dimension that directs audience attention to manipulative opinion-shaping as an integral component of power dynamics.

In this context, the critique is not delivered directly against policy decisions, but rather through the revelation of deviant political communication patterns that contravene principles of public ethics. This strategy reflects a form of reflective politeness, wherein the speaker avoids overt confrontation by relying on discursive facts with high evidential salience. Given a social context characterized by polarization and the intensification of smear campaigns, the utterance functions as a mechanism for cultivating critical awareness of the symbolic means employed to undermine the legitimacy of specific actors.

Consequently, emic-epistemological politeness in these data is manifested through discursive practices that reveal ethical disparities in political communication while maintaining social acceptability within the public sphere. This strategy operates through an implicit yet semantically potent mode of expression, enabling critique to be both incisive and socially responsible.

Data 4



Ketua BEM UGM difitnah LGBT dan dekat dengan Anies Baswedan

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

Discursive Context:

The utterance can be understood through the lens of social and situational contexts related to delegitimization practices, including political defamation and the construction of social stigma toward student activists in the public sphere. Socially, this phenomenon reflects the dynamics of opinion contestation at the national level, where sensitive personal issues are often mobilized as instruments to undermine credibility and fragment public support. Situationally, the utterance emerges within a political communication climate characterized by intensified polarization and the proliferation of smear campaigns. Consequently, the meaning of the utterance is not solely determined by its propositional content but is constructed through discursive practices that leverage the sensitivity of personal issues as a persuasive strategy, while simultaneously signaling significant challenges to ethical discourse in contemporary digital public spaces.

The utterance *Ketua BEM UGM difitnah LGBT dan dekat dengan Anies Baswedan* (The head of the student executive board (BEM) of Universitas Gadjah Mada Student Executive Board has been falsely accused of being LGBT and of having close ties to Anies Baswedan) in Data 4 represents a form of social critique directed at the phenomenon of delegitimization in public opinion contests, particularly through mechanisms of political defamation and identity-based stigmatization. Textually, the utterance conveys information regarding allegations directed at a student activist. Pragmatically, however, it carries a strong evaluative dimension, namely criticism of political communication practices that deviate from principles of deliberative rationality, relying on personal attacks rather than substantive argumentation.

The primary marker of critique lies in the lexical choice *difitnah* (slandered), which inherently carries a normative evaluation of the falsehood and illegitimacy of a claim. This choice of words functions not only descriptively but also performatively, negating the legitimacy of the circulating discourse. Consequently, the speaker implicitly constructs an epistemic position as an agent of clarification and correction against distorted information in the public sphere. Within this framework, the utterance operates as a counter-discourse to smear campaigns that degrade the quality of public deliberation.

Furthermore, the phrase *difitnah LGBT* highlights the critical dimension of the instrumentalization of social identity in delegitimization strategies. In certain sociocultural contexts, such labels are often mobilized as stigmatizing devices that exploit societal normative sensitivities to construct negative public images. By identifying the label as part of a falsehood, the speaker not only rejects its propositional truth but also critiques the discursive logic that uses personal identity as a basis for public judgment. This demonstrates a reflective awareness of how identity discourse can be manipulated for political purposes.

The delegitimization dimension is extended through the clause *...and close to Anies Baswedan* (...and close to Anies Baswedan) which illustrates the use of political association as a framing strategy. Affiliation or proximity to a particular political figure in a polarized context is often interpreted reductively as an indicator of ideological alignment, subsequently used to discredit the individual. The utterance thus reveals practices of political identity simplification that risk obscuring the complexity of individual positions in the public sphere.

Overall, the construction of this utterance indicates a shift from substance-based critique to identity-based attacks in the dynamics of digital political communication. The speaker implicitly critiques the degradation of public discourse quality, where rational argumentation is replaced by sensational personal delegitimization strategies. Therefore, the utterance represents not only criticism of a specific case but also a broader critique of communication patterns in contemporary digital ecosystems.

Socially, the phenomenon reflects the increasing complexity of opinion contests in the digital media era, where controversial and emotionally charged information has a higher potential for virality. Student activists, as part of a critical civil society, are particularly vulnerable to such delegitimization practices, especially when engaging in power critique. Hence, the utterance can also be read as an implicit defense of the strategic role of students in maintaining social accountability within democratic structures.

From a pragmatic perspective, the utterance functions both as a clarificatory and corrective mechanism toward circulating narratives. By marking the allegation as “slander,” the speaker intervenes in the formation of public opinion, guiding the audience toward a more critical evaluation of the validity of the information. In this sense, the utterance serves as a discursive literacy mechanism that encourages audiences to engage in verification and reflective assessment rather than accepting information uncritically.

Within the politeness framework, the utterance exemplifies a complex manifestation of emic–epistemic politeness. The emic dimension is reflected in the speaker’s evaluation of the phenomenon based on internalized social norms regarding justice, communication ethics, and protection of individual reputation. The epistemic dimension emerges through the deployment of social knowledge about smear campaigns and information manipulation as a basis for constructing rational critique. The speaker avoids aggressive expression, relying instead on evaluative markers that enable the audience to draw inferences independently.

The interaction between these dimensions produces a form of critique that is implicit yet robustly argumentative. Criticism is conveyed not through direct condemnation but through deconstruction of the discursive mechanisms underpinning slander and stigmatization. This strategy demonstrates a high degree of pragmatic sophistication, where the effectiveness of critique lies in activating critical awareness without generating excessive interpersonal resistance.

The Discursive Construction of Social Criticism on Unequal Social Responses

This subsection examines how social critique of unequal responsiveness in public discourse is manifested through contrastive strategies that highlight disparities in the recognition of victims' experiences. Data 5 demonstrates that emic–epistemic politeness is not necessarily realized through neutral or moderate expressions; rather, it can emerge in forms that are superficially intense and confrontational while maintaining a strong reflective purpose. The utterance, *Cewek berisik banget kalau soal korban pelecehan! Cowok juga banyak yang kena, giliran speak up kami di olok-olok* (Girls are so loud when it comes to victims of harassment! Many guys experience it too, but when we speak up, we are mocked) illustrates how the speaker constructs a discursive opposition to expose the imbalance in societal legitimacy and empathy extended to different groups.

In this context, the contrastive strategy functions not only as a rhetorical device but also as an epistemic mechanism to challenge dominant meaning structures in public discourse. The speaker does not merely complain about personal experience but interrogates social norms determining who is considered worthy of being heard and recognized as a victim. Within a social context laden with structural gender biases, the utterance serves as a reframing effort that promotes broader social recognition.

Therefore, emic–epistemic politeness in this instance is realized through the utterance's ability to articulate sharp critique of disparities in social responsiveness while maintaining a reflective orientation that opens space for more inclusive dialogue within public discourse.

Data 5



Cewek berisik banget kalau soal korban pelecehan! cowok juga banyak yang kena, giliran speak up kami di olok-olok

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DUDrsMJEfDw/?igsh=dmdxaGE4cm45ZGxm>

Discursive Context:

This data represents discourse on gender equality in the reporting of sexual harassment cases in public spaces. Contextually, the utterance constructs a tension between the experiences of women and men, who are often positioned asymmetrically in terms of legitimacy, credibility, and social responsiveness when voicing experiences of sexual violence. This disparity reflects structural biases within legal systems and social norms that affect the recognition of victims. Consequently, the articulated message emphasizes the demand for equal and non-discriminatory recognition for

all victims, regardless of gender, as part of efforts to strengthen substantive justice within both legal and social domains.

Data 5 represents an articulation of social critique focusing on the inequitable distribution of legitimacy in public discourse surrounding experiences of sexual harassment. Specifically, the utterance interrogates how epistemic authority—namely, who is considered a “legitimate victim”—is constructed and negotiated within social spaces. The statement does not merely express individual grievance; it indexes structural tensions in the production of social meaning, whereby certain experiences gain greater visibility and empathy than others. Within a discursive–integrative pragmatic framework, the utterance functions as an evaluative act that challenges disparities in recognition while simultaneously revealing the symbolic exclusion mechanisms operating in public discourse.

Pragmatically, the construction relies on a sharp binary contrast between the experiences of women and men. The phrase *cewek berisik banget* (girls are so loud) should not be read literally; it indexes a social stereotype in public discourse, portraying women as overly vocal or excessive when raising certain issues. Conversely, the continuation *cowok juga banyak yang kena, giliran speak up kami di olok-olok* (many men are affected too, and when we speak up we are mocked) reverses perspective, exposing a discursive paradox: when men attempt to enter the victim narrative, they experience delegitimization through ridicule. This contrast does not merely compare experiences; it exposes inconsistencies in societal norms regarding whose voices are acknowledged as legitimate.

Furthermore, the utterance operates as a discursive reframing strategy. The speaker does not outright reject the dominant narrative that positions women as the more vulnerable group but shifts focus to the underrepresented experiences of men as victims. In this way, the critique problematizes rather than negates existing discourse—it does not invalidate one narrative but broadens the scope of the discussion toward inclusivity. Lexical choices, particularly emotionally charged phrases, indicate that the reframing is not neutral; it conveys affect, frustration, and resistance toward perceived structural injustices.

In terms of power relations, the utterance reveals that victim recognition is determined not solely by the factual experience but also by institutionalized interpretive frameworks within society. Discourse on sexual harassment is shaped by a long history of gendered imbalance, often prioritizing women’s vulnerability. The discursive consequence of this dominance, however, limits legitimacy for experiences that do not conform to this framework. The statement thus functions as a challenge to interpretive hegemony that tends to homogenize victim experiences.

From a pragmatic perspective, the expression *di olok-olok* (mocked) carries strong evaluative implicature, indexing symbolic violence in social responses. Mockery acts not only as an interpersonal reaction but also as a social mechanism that disciplines who is “permitted” to speak in public spaces. Accordingly, the utterance highlights that barriers to reporting or disclosing harassment are not merely structural within legal systems but also cultural, rooted in interactional norms that dismiss or negate certain experiences.

Within an emic–epistemological politeness framework, the utterance exhibits an ambivalent yet meaningful configuration. On one hand, expressions like *berisik banget* may appear to violate conventional politeness norms due to their evaluative and potentially generalizing nature. On the other hand, within digital discursive practice, such expressions serve as intensification strategies that amplify the illocutionary force of the critique. Politeness here is not defined by the avoidance of negative expression but by the epistemic aim of the utterance: to

open space for reflection on disparities in social recognition. In other words, politeness is manifested through efforts to expand collective understanding, even when conveyed through superficially confrontational forms.

Additionally, the utterance illustrates how digital spaces function as arenas for contesting meaning, enabling previously marginalized voices to emerge. Plurality, however, does not automatically produce equality, as each voice must negotiate established norms, stereotypes, and social expectations. The critique reflects the speaker's metadiscursive awareness that expressing experience involves not only articulation but also anticipation of how the experience will be received, interpreted, and evaluated by the public.

Argumentatively, the utterance's strength lies in revealing paradoxes within social justice discourse: advocacy for one group does not automatically yield inclusivity for all groups. By highlighting marginalized experiences, the speaker critiques implicit assumptions in public discourse that tend to generalize victims based on specific categories. This demonstrates that discursive justice requires not only recognition but also sensitivity to the diversity of experiences.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illuminate how *emic*–epistemological politeness functions as a multifaceted mechanism in digital public discourse, transcending conventional notions of face-saving. Rather than simply mitigating conflict, politeness operates as a reflective and epistemically grounded strategy that enables speakers to articulate social critique while maintaining legitimacy and audience engagement. Factual–persuasive strategies, such as highlighting public accountability in resource utilization, demonstrate that the deployment of evidence and normative reasoning can simultaneously assert moral evaluation and guide collective awareness, effectively balancing critique with socially acceptable expression.

Persuasive generalizations, often endorsed implicitly through the authority of public figures, reveal a sophisticated interplay between epistemic positioning and social influence. By aligning evaluative claims with widely recognized authorities, speakers enhance the perceived validity of their critique while navigating potential resistance from audiences. This underscores that politeness in digital discourse is not a passive social lubricant but an active epistemic tool that negotiates credibility, social norms, and power relations, particularly in contexts marked by political polarization and ethical ambiguity.

The data further demonstrate that reframing and contrastive strategies allow speakers to contest dominant normative discourses and expose structural inequities. Through strategic repositioning of moral and socio-political concepts—as seen in critiques of gendered responses to public injustices or delegitimization tactics—participants challenge entrenched interpretive frameworks, broaden the scope of social recognition, and mobilize audiences toward critical reflection. These mechanisms highlight the dynamic interdependence of *emic* sensitivity and epistemic rigor, whereby affective intensity is carefully calibrated to reinforce rather than undermine the persuasiveness of critique.

Finally, the implicit exposure of manipulative practices, such as political smear campaigns or identity-based delegitimization, illustrates how digital discourse affords opportunities for counter-hegemonic intervention. Speakers construct argumentatively rich, yet ethically constrained, critiques that engage audiences in reflective evaluation without resorting to overt aggression. This study demonstrates that *emic*–epistemological politeness is a strategic

resource that mediates social critique, epistemic authority, and normative negotiation in digital spaces, offering a conceptual framework for understanding how socially responsible communication can coexist with incisive and transformative public discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study advances the understanding of emic–epistemological politeness by demonstrating that politeness in social media discourse operates as a strategic, knowledge-oriented, and ideologically situated resource for performing social criticism. Rather than functioning merely as a mechanism of mitigation, politeness in digital interaction is shown to be closely tied to the construction of epistemic authority and the negotiation of legitimacy within online public spheres. In terms of contribution to cyber-pragmatics, this study extends the field by foregrounding the interplay between linguistic strategies, epistemic positioning, and platform-mediated interactional dynamics in the production of meaning. It shows that cyber-pragmatic phenomena cannot be fully understood through speech-act or politeness-strategy analysis alone, but require an integrative approach that accounts for multimodality, intertextuality, and the affordances of digital platforms. In this sense, politeness is reconceptualized as a cyber-pragmatic resource that operates across verbal, visual, and interactive semiotic systems in online communication.

Furthermore, this study contributes a more nuanced understanding of how social criticism is pragmatically realized in digital environments. It highlights that evaluative and critical meanings are not necessarily expressed through direct linguistic forms but are often constructed through layered discursive strategies involving epistemic stance-taking, reframing, and contrastive positioning. These strategies demonstrate how users simultaneously manage face concerns and assert evaluative judgments within socially acceptable boundaries. Theoretically, the study reinforces the relevance of integrating emic and epistemological perspectives in cyber-pragmatic research, particularly in understanding how meaning is co-constructed in user-generated digital discourse. It also underscores the importance of treating politeness not as a static norm, but as a dynamic and context-sensitive practice embedded in technological and ideological environments.

The study has limitations in terms of data scope, as it focuses on selected social media platforms and specific types of socio-political discourse. In addition, while qualitative interpretation allows for in-depth analysis, future research would benefit from incorporating corpus-based and multimodal analytical approaches to capture broader patterns of cyber-pragmatic behavior across platforms. Future studies are encouraged to expand the scope of analysis to include diverse genres of digital communication, such as political memes, influencer discourse, and algorithmically shaped content circulation. This would further enrich the understanding of how politeness, epistemic stance, and social criticism interact within increasingly complex digital ecosystems.

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