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Leech's Politeness Maxims in Indonesian Digital Communication: Enactment, Violation, and Negotiation on X and Instagram

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of communication in the digital era has created new challenges for the application of conventional politeness norms, particularly in non-Western social media contexts that remain underrepresented in international pragmatics scholarship. This study examines how Indonesian netizens enact, violate, and negotiate Leech's six politeness maxims across 150 public comments collected from X and Instagram between January and February 2025. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with contextual pragmatic analysis, the study classifies each comment against Leech's tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy maxims. Inter-coder reliability was established through independent coding by two researchers, yielding a Cohen's kappa coefficient of $\kappa = 0.81$. Results indicate that the approbation, tact, and sympathy maxims are most consistently applied, reflecting Indonesian cultural orientations toward appreciation, face protection, and empathetic concern. The agreement and modesty maxims are most frequently violated, particularly in politically charged discourse, where categorical disagreement and epistemic self-assertion function as identity-expressive strategies. Five cross-cutting negotiation strategies were identified: contextual adaptation, linguistic mitigation, emoji-mediated modulation, indirect humor, and in-group versus out-group differentiation. These findings demonstrate that politeness in Indonesian digital communication has not eroded but transformed into a hybrid, contextually negotiated repertoire. The study contributes to digital pragmatics theory and provides an empirical foundation for developing communication ethics curricula in Indonesian language education..

Keywords: *Agreement Maxim, Digital Pragmatics, Leech's Politeness Maxims, Politeness Negotiation, Social Media Discourse*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the communicative landscape of contemporary society (Grewal et al., 2022; Lane et al., 2024). Social media platforms, in particular, have created a distinct virtual environment where interaction unfolds under conditions that differ considerably from those of face-to-face communication (Croes & Antheunis, 2021; Sutcliffe et al., 2023). In Indonesia, social media penetration reached approximately 191.4 million users in 2024, representing around 68.9 percent of the total population (Kemp, 2023). Platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have become central arenas for public discourse, enabling Indonesian citizens to express opinions, participate in debates, and engage with social and political issues at an unprecedented scale. This communicative transformation not only alters the medium through which people interact but also introduces new and complex challenges for the maintenance of linguistic politeness norms (Anwar et al., 2021; Eslami et al., 2023).

In the context of digital communication, one of the most compelling phenomena to examine is how the principles of linguistic politeness are enacted, modified, or negotiated by Indonesian netizens. Digital communication is broadly characterized by brevity, informality, reduced contextual cues, and multimodal expression, all of which create challenges for politeness norms traditionally understood within verbal face-to-face interaction (Herring, 2012; Jayaputri & Aziz, 2024). Unlike spoken communication, written digital discourse lacks prosodic features such as intonation, facial expression, and body language that ordinarily support the interpretation of communicative intent and interpersonal attitude. These absences have been shown to increase the likelihood of misunderstanding and, consequently, of perceived impoliteness or communicative friction in online environments (Tsoumou, 2023).

Initial observation of Indonesian netizens' behavior on social media reveals a notable duality. On one hand, comment sections on politically sensitive posts frequently contain sarcasm, personal attacks, dismissive remarks, and expressions of hostility that appear to violate conventional politeness norms. On the other hand, many interactions demonstrate warmth, moral support, and solidarity, particularly in response to personal hardship or public tragedy. This coexistence of seemingly contradictory communicative tendencies suggests that politeness in Indonesian digital communication has not simply eroded; rather, it appears to be actively negotiated and reconfigured in response to the affordances and constraints of digital platforms (Jayaputri & Aziz, 2024; Prayitno et al., 2021). The study of how this negotiation operates is therefore of considerable theoretical and practical relevance.

To examine this phenomenon systematically, the present study draws on the politeness theory developed by Leech (2016), which identifies six maxims governing cooperative and courteous interaction: the tact maxim, the generosity

maxim, the approbation maxim, the modesty maxim, the agreement maxim, and the sympathy maxim. These maxims have long been recognized as a foundational framework for analyzing the extent to which speakers minimize communicative imposition and preserve interpersonal harmony. The continued relevance of this framework in contemporary digital contexts has been affirmed in recent pragmatic scholarship examining online political discourse, social media comment practices, and the multimodal features of computer-mediated communication (Kádár et al., 2021; Locher & Bolander, 2017).

Despite the richness of existing research on digital pragmatics, the empirical application of Leech's six-maxim framework to Indonesian social media interaction remains underexplored. A systematic search of major academic databases, including Scopus and Google Scholar, using keywords such as "Leech politeness maxims," "digital pragmatics," and "Indonesian social media," returned limited results that specifically address the negotiation of all six maxims within an Indonesian digital communication context. While some studies have examined impoliteness strategies in Indonesian online discourse, these investigations have not employed Leech's framework as their analytical lens, nor have they focused on the negotiation dynamics that emerge between traditional politeness values and the egalitarian communicative culture of Indonesian social media (Rossini, 2022; Tsoumou, 2023). This gap constitutes the primary motivation for the present study. Relatedly, recent work in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis has demonstrated that communicative politeness, gendered language patterns, and rapport-building strategies are deeply embedded in both spoken and media-mediated discourse (Syuhra et al., 2024). The importance of developing pragmatic competence and communicative literacy in digital and instructional contexts has also been underscored in recent educational research (By & Veng, 2024; Roring et al., 2024), reinforcing the need for a more systematic understanding of how politeness norms function within digitally-mediated public interaction in Indonesia.

The significance of this study rests on three interconnected rationales. First, theoretically, this research tests the applicability of a classical pragmatic framework in a non-Western, digitally-mediated context, contributing to the ongoing effort to diversify pragmatic inquiry beyond its predominantly Western conceptual origins. Second, empirically, it generates systematic evidence regarding the specific strategies through which Indonesian netizens negotiate politeness across varying discourse contexts. Third, practically, its findings provide a principled basis for designing digital literacy programs and communication ethics curricula that reflect the actual pragmatic behavior of Indonesian social media users.

The present study is guided by three interrelated research questions: (1) How are Leech's six politeness maxims enacted in the speech acts of Indonesian netizens on social media? (2) In what forms and under what contextual conditions do violations of these maxims occur? (3) Through what strategies do netizens negotiate

politeness between traditional communicative norms and the expressive demands of digital public discourse?

The novelty of this study lies in its combined focus on all six Leech maxims as an integrated analytical system, its attention to the negotiation process as a sociolinguistic phenomenon rather than a binary compliance or violation, and its grounding in an Indonesian cultural and linguistic context that has been underrepresented in international pragmatics scholarship. These dimensions collectively position this research as an original contribution to the fields of digital pragmatics, cross-cultural politeness studies, and Indonesian language education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech Acts and Digital Communication

The theoretical foundation of speech act theory was established by Austin (2023), who argued that utterances perform actions rather than simply convey information. This foundational insight was systematically extended by Searle (1979), whose taxonomy classified illocutionary acts into five functional categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. In digital environments, the execution of speech acts acquires distinctive characteristics. The absence of paralinguistic cues and the mediated, asynchronous nature of online interaction require speakers to deploy alternative resources, such as punctuation patterns, capitalization, and multimodal elements, to accomplish the communicative work that tone and gesture perform in face-to-face speech (Herring, 2012). Research has substantially expanded understanding of how speech acts function in online communities. Yu et al. (2023) examined posts from a Hong Kong online discussion forum and found that representative acts dominated text-based interaction, followed by directives and expressives, with emoji operating as pragmatic tools that contextualized the illocutionary force of written utterances. In the Indonesian context, digital speech acts are further shaped by the coexistence of local norms, such as hierarchical respect and indirect communication, with the more direct, egalitarian conventions that characterize global social media cultures (Leech, 2014).

Leech's Politeness Maxims: Framework and Contemporary Relevance

Leech (2016) proposed the Politeness Principle as a complement to Grice's Cooperative Principle, arguing that politeness functions primarily to minimize interpersonal friction and preserve social harmony. The six maxims operate as a coordinated system: the tact maxim minimizes imposition on the other party; the generosity maxim orients speakers toward placing the other's benefit above their own; the approbation maxim promotes praise and suppresses criticism; the modesty maxim directs speakers to minimize self-praise; the agreement maxim encourages convergence over disagreement; and the sympathy maxim calls for the expression of empathy and concern. Leech (2014) later acknowledged that the applicability of

these maxims varies across cultural and communicative contexts and that they must be understood as tendencies rather than absolute rules. Brown and Levinson (1987) face theory, which positions politeness as a strategy for managing positive and negative face wants, has been extensively applied alongside Leech's maxims to explain how speakers simultaneously pursue self-expression and relational maintenance. More recent approaches treat politeness as a socially situated evaluative practice that participants negotiate dynamically rather than a fixed property of utterances (Locher & Bolander, 2017). Haugh's (2024) work further emphasizes that politeness is best understood as both an object of participant evaluation and an analytical perspective, a distinction particularly important in digital contexts where evaluative norms shift rapidly across platforms.

(Im)politeness in Digital and Social Media Contexts

Research has consistently shown that digital environments generate their own pragmatic conventions, including tolerance for directness, platform-specific registers, and new forms of face-threatening behavior (Andersson, 2024; Tsoumou, 2023). Andersson (2024) introduced the concept of "e-mpoliteness" to describe how impoliteness strategies in social media function as expressions of digital social capital, enabling users to establish distinction and group affiliation through face-threatening acts that would be unacceptable in conventional speech. Tsoumou (2023) demonstrated that Facebook users responding to politically charged posts employ a range of impoliteness strategies, with impoliteness-oriented items substantially outnumbering politeness-oriented ones in politically polarizing contexts. Rossini (2022) similarly found that online political talk frequently involves incivility that, while antinormative in tone, is not necessarily incompatible with substantive political engagement; it is intolerance, rather than incivility per se, that most seriously threatens democratic discourse.

Emoji, Multimodality, and Politeness Negotiation

Emoji have emerged as a central resource in digital politeness negotiation, compensating for the absence of prosodic and facial cues. Sampietro (2021) demonstrated through a corpus study of WhatsApp conversations that emoji function not merely as emotional decorations but as pragmatic tools for signaling humour, softening critical remarks, and coordinating conversational alignment. This paralinguistic role is especially significant for politeness, as emoji can mitigate the face-threatening potential of otherwise direct or confrontational utterances. Intertextual practices such as quoting and recontextualizing others' utterances have also been identified as politeness strategies in online interaction. Kádár et al. (2021) showed that intertextual quoting in online forums can serve both solidarity-building and face-threatening functions depending on how it is framed, highlighting the context-dependence of all digital politeness strategies.

Politeness Negotiation and Digital Literacy in Educational Contexts

The negotiation of politeness norms in digital environments carries significant implications for education and language learning. Sociolinguistic research has established that communicative politeness, gendered language patterns, and rapport-building strategies are deeply embedded in discourse across spoken and media-mediated settings (Syuhra et al., 2024). From a language education perspective, the development of pragmatic competence in digital contexts is increasingly recognized as a component of digital literacy. Research focused on language learning environments has demonstrated that communicative effectiveness depends not only on grammatical accuracy but also on the strategic management of interpersonal relations through appropriate pragmatic choices (By & Veng, 2024). In Indonesian formal education, where students and teachers increasingly interact through social media and messaging platforms, the norms of digital politeness directly shape the quality and inclusivity of educational communication (Roring et al., 2024). The present study contributes to this educational conversation by providing an empirically grounded account of how politeness operates in Indonesian digital public discourse.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the enactment, violation, and negotiation of Leech's (2016; 2014) six politeness maxims in Indonesian netizens' speech acts on social media. Qualitative methodology is selected because the research objective is interpretive rather than measurement-oriented: it seeks to understand how communicative meaning and politeness function are constructed within specific sociolinguistic contexts, a purpose for which naturally occurring discourse data are methodologically more appropriate than elicited or experimental samples (Denzin et al., 2023). The analytical framework applies Leech's six-maxim model deductively, using each maxim as a predefined coding category against which data units are classified. Where a single comment reflects pragmatic features relevant to more than one maxim, all applicable categories are recorded, recognizing the established polyfunctionality of utterances in digital discourse (Locher & Bolander, 2017).

The data consist of 150 public comments collected from X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram between January and February 2025. Both platforms are selected because they represent the two most widely used text-based social media environments among Indonesian netizens and generate genuine, unscripted public interaction around shared social and political content (Kemp, 2023). Comments were drawn from eight accounts, comprising three national news outlets and five Indonesian public figures across political, social, and cultural domains, anonymized throughout this study as Accounts A through H to protect the identities of both account holders and commenters. Data collection was conducted through non-

participant observation: the researchers accessed public comment threads without interacting with users at any stage, ensuring that the discourse captured was entirely naturalistic. Each comment was documented alongside its contextual metadata, including thread position, post topic, emoji use, and interactional context, and user identities were anonymized at the point of collection. From an initial pool of 230 candidate comments, 150 were retained through purposive selection based on five criteria: written entirely in Indonesian, directed at another user or post content, containing at least one meaningful speech act beyond a bare emoji reaction, positioned within an active discussion thread, and representative of varied topic types spanning neutral, social support, and politically sensitive discourse.

Data analysis proceeded in five stages: initial reading and familiarization, maxim-based classification of each comment, contextual pragmatic interpretation of underlying illocutionary intent, identification of politeness negotiation strategies, and pattern synthesis across the dataset. To strengthen the credibility of the classification, coding was carried out independently by two researchers, the primary author and a second coder with a background in Indonesian pragmatics. Both coders classified a random subset of 30 comments, representing 20 percent of the total corpus, prior to full coding. Inter-coder agreement was assessed using Cohen's kappa coefficient, which yielded a value of $\kappa = 0.81$, indicating strong agreement and sufficient reliability to proceed with independent classification of the remaining data (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Disagreements on individual items were resolved through discussion and consensus before full coding continued. Trustworthiness was further strengthened through theoretical triangulation across Leech's maxim framework and relevant literature on digital (im)politeness, peer debriefing with a senior linguistics scholar, and contextual validation in which borderline classifications were re-examined against the broader thread in which each comment appeared (Denzin et al., 2023).

This study treats all data as publicly accessible information and does not involve human subjects in the conventional sense, as no contact was made with users and no private data were accessed. User anonymization was applied consistently throughout the research process to minimize any residual identifiability. The absence of member checking is justified by both the public nature of the data and the pragmatic analytical focus, which targets the linguistic properties of utterances rather than the subjective experiences of individual commenters. These decisions are consistent with current ethical guidelines for qualitative research involving public internet data (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Data Distribution

Analysis of 150 public comments from X and Instagram produced 180 maxim instances in total, as individual comments frequently exhibited pragmatic features relevant to more than one of Leech's six politeness categories. This

polyfunctionality of naturally occurring digital discourse is consistent with the broader literature on online pragmatics, which recognizes that speakers rarely orient toward a single interactional goal within a single conversational turn (Graham & Hardaker, 2017; Kádár et al., 2021). Table 1 presents the complete distribution of maxim application and violation across the corpus.

Table 1 Distribution of Application and Violation of Leech's Six Politeness Maxims

Maxim	Application	Violation	Total
Tact	28 (18.7%)	10 (6.7%)	38 (25.3%)
Generosity	15 (10.0%)	3 (2.0%)	18 (12.0%)
Approbation	32 (21.3%)	12 (8.0%)	44 (29.3%)
Modesty	8 (5.3%)	15 (10.0%)	23 (15.3%)
Agreement	6 (4.0%)	21 (14.0%)	27 (18.0%)
Sympathy	25 (16.7%)	5 (3.3%)	30 (20.0%)
Total	114 (76.0%)	66 (44.0%)	180 (120.0%)

Note: Total percentages exceed 100% because a single comment may contain more than one maxim instance.

Source: Analysed by the researchers (2026)

Three primary patterns emerge from the aggregate distribution. First, the approbation maxim (29.3%) and the tact maxim (25.3%) are the most frequently occurring categories overall, followed by the sympathy maxim (20.0%), indicating that Indonesian netizens orient toward appreciation, face-protective mitigation, and empathetic concern as their dominant default communicative stances across both platforms. Second, the sympathy maxim records the lowest violation rate of all six categories at 3.3%, suggesting that empathetic expression occupies a particularly protected communicative register within Indonesian digital discourse. Third, the agreement maxim exhibits the highest violation-to-application ratio in the corpus, with 21 violations against only 6 applications, a 3.5:1 imbalance considerably more pronounced than any other maxim. The modesty maxim similarly records more violations than applications (15 against 8), making it the only other category where violations outnumber compliant instances.

Tact Maxim: Mitigation as a Face-Protective Strategy

The tact maxim was observed in 28 application instances (18.7%) and 10 violation instances (6.7%). Application instances appeared predominantly in comments containing requests, corrections, unsolicited advice, and disagreements framed cooperatively. Across these instances, Indonesian netizens deployed a recognizable repertoire of mitigating devices: conditional constructions (*kalau boleh*, 'if I may'), epistemic hedges (*mungkin*, 'perhaps'), permission-seeking pre-sequences, and inclusive first-person plural pronouns (*kita*, 'we'). Data 1 illustrates

how several mitigating strategies are coordinated within a single corrective comment:

“Kalau boleh saran, mungkin bisa dicek dulu faktanya sebelum dishare ya. Tidak apa-apa kalau memang tidak sempat cek sih, tapi lebih baik kalau kita semua lebih hati-hati.” (If I may suggest, perhaps check the facts before sharing. It is fine if there is no time, but it would be better if we were all more careful) - (Account C, Instagram, January 2025).

The opening conditional *kalau boleh saran* functions as a pre-sequence that requests interactional permission before delivering corrective content, preserving the addressee's epistemic autonomy. The hedge *mungkin bisa dicek* reduces the directness of the correction, while the concessive clause *tidak apa-apa kalau memang tidak sempat* explicitly releases the addressee from the implied burden. The inclusive pronoun *kita* distributes the normative force across all participants. This layered mitigation strategy aligns with Kádár et al.'s (2021) concept of face-protective digital interaction, in which speakers negotiate interactional equilibrium through successive layers of linguistic softening. Violations of the tact maxim (10 instances, 6.7%) were concentrated in politically charged threads:

“Baca artikelnya dulu sebelum komen! Jangan asal ngomong!” (Read the article before commenting! Stop talking without thinking!) - (Account A, X, February 2025).

The paired imperatives *baca* and *jangan asal ngomong* impose the speaker's will without mitigation, constituting a face-threatening act of considerable interpersonal force. That such violations were confined almost entirely to politically charged discourse confirms that topic sensitivity operates as a contextual trigger that overrides speakers' otherwise consistent investment in tact-oriented face protection (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021). A second tact application demonstrates sensitivity in the context of a request directed at an administrator:

“Admin, maaf ya ganggu. Bisa tolong jelaskan maksud dari data ini? Kalau sibuk gak papa kok, nanti aja pas sempat.” (Admin, sorry to bother you. Could you please explain what this data means? If you are busy it is fine, later when you have time) - (Account D, Instagram, January 2025).

The pre-emptive apology and the explicit release maximise the addressee's freedom to comply at their own convenience, demonstrating the sophisticated pragmatic toolkit available to Indonesian digital communicators for managing informational need alongside interpersonal sensitivity.

Generosity Maxim: Altruistic Orientation and Prosocial Behaviour

The generosity maxim was the least frequently observed category (15 instances, 10.0%; 3 violations, 2.0%). Despite its comparatively low frequency, it produced some of the most socially consequential interactions in the dataset. Data 4 illustrates the prototypical form of generosity application:

“Kalau ada yang butuh info lebih lengkap tentang cara daftar, bisa DM saya. Saya bantu share pengalaman saya kemarin daftar.” (If anyone needs more complete information about how to register, feel free to DM me. I will share my experience registering yesterday) - (Account F, Instagram, January 2025).

This comment performs a commissive speech act in Searle's (1979) sense, committing the speaker to a future action that benefits the addressee at a personal cost. The conditional framing *kalau ada yang butuh* preserves the addressee's autonomy by making the offer non-obligatory, while the first-person commitment *saya bantu share* signals genuine readiness to provide concrete assistance. A second generosity application extended to resource-sharing:

“Saya ada link artikel yang mungkin bisa membantu. Ini linknya: [URL]. Semoga bermanfaat ya.” (I have a link to an article that might help. Here is the link: [URL]. I hope it is useful) - (Account E, Instagram, February 2025).

The hedging modal *mungkin bisa membantu* preserves the addressee's epistemic independence by framing the resource as potentially rather than definitively useful. The closing *semoga bermanfaat* orients the communicative purpose explicitly toward the addressee's benefit. The very low violation rate (2.0%) indicates that altruistic communicative behaviour occupies a normatively protected position within Indonesian digital social interaction even in adversarial threads (Locher & Bolander, 2017).

Approbation Maxim: Appreciation, Praise, and Face Attack

The approbation maxim produced the highest total frequency in the corpus, with 44 instances (29.3%). The 32 application instances spanned a wide range of expressive intensity. Direct evaluative comments represent the most common form:

“Keren banget penjelasannya! Sangat jelas dan mudah dipahami. Terima kasih sudah berbagi ilmu 🙏😊” (What a great explanation! Very clear and easy to understand. Thank you for sharing your knowledge 🙏😊) - (Account B, X, January 2025).

“Setuju! Pendapat yang matang dan berdasar. Salut buat cara berpikirnya yang objektif 🧠” (Agreed! A mature and well-founded opinion. I admire the objective way of thinking 🧠) - (Account D, Instagram, January 2025).

Emoji co-occurred with 78% of all approbation applications, functioning as affective amplifiers. This instrumental use of emoji as pragmatic reinforcers of illocutionary force confirms Sampietro's (2021) finding that emoji serve not merely as decorative elements but as paralinguistic resources that strengthen communicative intent. Violations of the approbation maxim (12 instances, 8.0%) clustered in political and ideological debate threads:

“Komen macam apa ini? Gak punya otak apa? Logika dasar aja gak ngerti.” (What kind of comment is this? Are you brainless? You cannot even grasp basic logic) - (Account A, X, February 2025).

This utterance constitutes a face attack operating at two levels: the rhetorical question *komen macam apa ini* dismisses the addressee's contribution as categorically unworthy, while *gak punya otak apa* targets the addressee's cognitive capacity as a person. Such utterances correspond to what Culpeper (2021) identifies as impoliteness in mass digital communication, where weakened social accountability reduces the interpersonal cost of face-threatening behaviour. More elaborate approbation applications involved detailed justification of the positive evaluation:

“Makasih banyak ya sudah nulis ini. Jarang banget ada yang mau repot-repot kasih penjelasan sepanjang dan sejelas ini. Semoga makin banyak yang baca dan sadar.” (Thank you so much for writing this. It is very rare for someone to go to the trouble of giving an explanation this long and this clear. I hope more and more people read it and become aware) - (Account E, Instagram, February 2025).

This comment performs approbation at multiple levels: explicit gratitude, comparative evaluation (*jarang banget*, 'very rare'), and a concluding expression of hope that extends the positive evaluation outward to a projected audience, transforming individual appreciation into a quasi-public endorsement (Yu et al., 2023).

Modesty Maxim: Self-Promotion and the Renegotiation of Humility Norms

The modesty maxim is the only category in this study where violations substantially outnumber applications (15 violations, 10.0%; 8 applications, 5.3%). In traditional Indonesian communicative culture, particularly within Javanese-influenced registers, humility in self-presentation is strongly normative, associated

with the concept of *andap asor* that prescribes maintaining a socially lower interactional position as a sign of respect and cultural refinement (Watts, 2003). The eight application instances reproduced the culturally familiar Indonesian humility repertoire:

“Terima kasih pujiannya, tapi sebenarnya saya masih banyak belajar juga kok. Masih banyak yang lebih baik dari saya.” (Thank you for the compliment, but actually I am still very much learning. There are many who are better than me) - (Account D, Instagram, January 2025).

The self-deprecating formulations *masih banyak belajar* and *masih banyak yang lebih baik dari saya* perform the core function of the modesty maxim: minimizing self-praise while maximizing self-directed diffidence (G. Leech, 2016). The particle *kok* softens the modesty claim, making it sound natural rather than performative. The 15 violation instances appeared almost exclusively in politically charged threads:

“Emang gue yang paling bener. Kalian semua gak ngerti apa-apa. Pengalaman gue jauh lebih banyak dari kalian.” (I am definitely the one who is right. None of you understand anything. My experience is far greater than all of yours) - (Account A, X, February 2025).

“Kalau gak ngerti, jangan komen deh. Kalian harus belajar dari saya yang sudah expert di bidang ini.” (If you do not understand, do not comment. You all need to learn from me, who is already an expert in this field) - (Account A, X, February 2025).

Data 10 performs three simultaneous modesty violations: the unhedged superlative *paling bener* claims absolute epistemic privilege; *kalian semua gak ngerti apa-apa* positions every participant as comprehensively ignorant; and *pengalaman gue jauh lebih banyak* invokes credential authority to justify the dismissal. Data 11 escalates by issuing a prescriptive exclusion (*kalau gak ngerti, jangan komen*) and self-appointing as pedagogical authority. These violations are most productively understood through Andersson's (2024) framework of *e-mpoliteness*, in which asserting absolute correctness signals in-group credibility and ideological commitment to co-present community members.

Agreement Maxim: Polarization, Intolerance, and Productive Disagreement

The agreement maxim registered the most pronounced imbalance in the corpus, with 21 violations (14.0%) against only 6 applications (4.0%), a 3.5:1 ratio. Violation instances ranged from categorical rejections to elaborate performative dismissals:

“Pendapat lu salah total! Gak ada benarnya sama sekali. Kalau mikir aja gak bisa, mending diam!” (Your opinion is completely wrong! There is not a single correct thing about it. If you cannot even think, you are better off staying silent!) - (Account A, X, February 2025).

“Gue gak akan pernah setuju sama pendapat kayak gitu. Ini beda banget sama nilai yang gue pegang. Kalian semua yang mikir kayak gitu salah!” (I will never agree with an opinion like that. This is completely different from the values I hold. All of you who think like that are wrong!) - (Account H, X, February 2025).

Data 12 performs a categorical content rejection through the double superlative *salah total* reinforced by *gak ada benarnya sama sekali*, eliminating any residual validity from the addressee's position. Data 13 combines personal inflexibility, value-based identity assertion, and sweeping collective condemnation, converting a dyadic disagreement into a tribal boundary-marking act. This mirrors what Rossini (2022) identifies as intolerant discourse, which denies the other party's standing as a legitimate interlocutor. The six application instances demonstrated a markedly different pragmatic architecture:

“Saya paham maksud Anda dan ada beberapa poin yang saya setuju. Namun, untuk poin X, saya punya pandangan yang sedikit berbeda. Mungkin kita bisa diskusikan lebih lanjut?” (I understand your point and there are several aspects I agree with. However, for point X, I have a slightly different view. Perhaps we could discuss it further?) - (Account E, Instagram, January 2025).

“Beda pendapat itu wajar. Yang penting kita tetap saling menghormati dalam berdiskusi.” (Disagreement is natural. What matters is that we continue to respect each other in discussion.) - (Account D, Instagram, February 2025).

Data 14 achieves cooperative disagreement through a staged pragmatic sequence: empathetic acknowledgement, explicit partial agreement, minimal disagreement framing (*sedikit berbeda*, ‘slightly different’), and an inclusive invitation to dialogue. Data 15 meta-communicatively articulates the norm of mutual respect as the governing principle of productive disagreement, reflecting what Leech (2014) describes as the effort to minimize discord while preserving communicative honesty.

Sympathy Maxim: Empathy, Cultural Expression, and Normative Protection

The sympathy maxim was applied in 25 instances (16.7%) and violated in only 5 instances (3.3%), giving it the lowest violation rate of all six maxims.

Application instances exhibited the greatest cultural specificity, drawing on Islamic formulaic expressions, formal Indonesian condolence registers, and multimodal resources:

“Turut berduka cita yang sedalam-dalamnya. Semoga keluarga yang ditinggalkan diberi kekuatan. Innalillahi wa inna ilaihi raji’un 🕌🙏”
(My deepest condolences. May the family left behind be given strength. Innalillahi wa inna ilaihi raji’un 🕌🙏) - (Account G, Instagram, January 2025).

“Pasti berat ya mengalami hal seperti itu. Semoga kamu kuat dan bisa melewati masa sulit ini. Kalau butuh teman curhat, saya siap dengar kok 🗨️❤️” (It must be heavy to go through something like that. I hope you are strong and can get through this difficult time. If you need someone to talk to, I am here 🗨️❤️) - (Account G, Instagram, February 2025).

Data 15 performs multiple interrelated communicative functions. The formal condolence expression *turut berduka cita yang sedalam-dalamnya* draws on an elevated Indonesian mourning register, while the Islamic formula *Innalillahi wa inna ilaihi raji’un* functions as a culturally specific solidarity marker establishing shared religious community. The prayer emoji 🕌🙏 reinforces the devotional character of the comment, performing the paralinguistic work of a solemn bowed head (Sampietro, 2021). Data 16 demonstrates emotional acknowledgement and practical solidarity through the validating clause *pasti berat ya*, which explicitly normalizes the addressee’s difficulty before encouragement is offered. Violations (5 instances, 3.3%) were qualitatively the most socially disruptive in the corpus:

“Yasudah, yang penting bukan kamu kan yang kena. Udah ah, gak usah lebay gitu 😏” (Well, as long as it is not you who was affected. Stop being so dramatic 😏) - (Account A, X, February 2025).

This violation dismisses the addressee’s distress at two levels: the relativizing clause *yang penting bukan kamu kan yang kena* frames it as insignificant, while *gak usah lebay* attacks the authenticity of the emotional expression. The deeply incongruous emoji 😏 signals amusement, inverting the expected empathetic response and publicly humiliating the commenter. The severe negative reactions generated by this and the four similar violations provide in-situ evidence that sympathy maxim violations carry genuine social cost in Indonesian digital discourse (Yu et al., 2023).

Politeness Negotiation: Cross-Cutting Strategies

Beyond maxim-specific findings, the analysis reveals five cross-cutting strategies through which Indonesian netizens actively negotiate politeness norms across the corpus as a whole. These strategies represent higher-order communicative orientations that regulate how speakers manage the tension between expressive authenticity and interpersonal face maintenance in digital public discourse.

The first strategy is contextual adaptation, the most pervasive regulatory mechanism observed. The same commenter may apply the tact maxim carefully in a neutral informational thread while producing categorical violations of the agreement and modesty maxims in a politically charged thread on the same platform within the same collection period. This context-sensitivity confirms that politeness in Indonesian digital discourse is not a stable individual trait but a situationally calibrated practice (Kádár et al., 2021). Table 2 summarizes the observed variation in politeness behaviour across the two primary discourse contexts.

Table 2 Politeness Behaviour by Discourse Context

Discourse Context	Dominant Maxims Applied	Dominant Maxims Violated	Overall Orientation
Social support threads	Sympathy, Generosity, Approbation	None dominant	Collaborative, empathetic
Informational threads	Tact, Approbation	Tact (minor)	Cooperative, evaluative
Political/ideological threads	Approbation (selective)	Agreement, Modesty, Approbation	Competitive, adversarial

Source: Analysed by the researchers (2026)

The second strategy is linguistic mitigation, the primary face-protective tool in non-adversarial contexts. Hedging particles (*mungkin, sepertinya*), conditional constructions, permission-seeking pre-sequences, and inclusive pronouns were identified in 89% of tact maxim applications and 72% of approbation applications in informational threads. The selectivity of this mitigation repertoire is analytically significant: the same speakers who deploy elaborate linguistic softening in social support threads show little or no such behaviour in political debates, confirming that mitigation is a strategic rather than habitual resource.

The third strategy is emoji-mediated modulation, which compensates for the absence of prosodic and gestural cues in written digital text. Table 3 presents the functional distribution of emoji across politeness-relevant comments.

Table 3 Functional Categories of Emoji in Politeness-Relevant Comments

Emoji Category	Representative Examples	Primary Politeness Function	n
Positive affect	😊 ❤️ 👍 🍀	Approbation reinforcement	41
Reverence and prayer	🙏 🤲	Sympathy and religious solidarity	28
Encouragement	💪 🌟 ✨	Solidarity and generosity	19
Softening	😊 🙄	Tact and face-saving	14
Irony and indirect criticism	😏 🙄	Approbation violation (indirect)	11

Source: Analysed by the researchers (2026)

The irony and indirect criticism category is particularly analytically productive. Emoji such as 😏 and 🙄 appeared in comments whose lexical content was neutral but whose emoji carried a critically evaluative implicature through contextual incongruity, as illustrated in Data 18:

“Wah, datanya ‘unik’ ya, keluar dari semua penelitian internasional 😏 Mungkin pakai metode penelitian dimensi lain kali ya? 🙄” (Wow, the data is quite “unique”, deviating from all international research 😏 Perhaps a research method from another dimension was used? 🙄) - (Account B, X, January 2025).

The scare quotes around *unik* signal ironic usage, transforming an ostensibly complimentary adjective into a criticism of the data’s deviance. The emoji 😏 and 🙄 reinforce the mocking and skeptical intent respectively, functioning as multimodal markers of ironic distance that make the criticism legible without requiring explicit face-threatening language.

The fourth strategy is humor and irony as indirect critical tools, closely related to emoji-mediated modulation but distinguishable as a primarily linguistic phenomenon. Indonesian netizens deploy humor to soften critique by creating emotional distance between the critical content and its target, allowing face threat to be registered while maintaining a veneer of playfulness. The fifth strategy is in-group versus out-group differentiation, which produces the sharpest contrast in maxim compliance across the corpus. Within communities of shared ideological or social affiliation, commenters applied the approbation and sympathy maxims at consistently high rates, reinforcing solidarity through mutual appreciation and empathetic concern. Toward perceived out-group members, the agreement and modesty maxims were violated with significantly greater frequency and severity, suggesting that politeness norms in Indonesian digital discourse function not as universal communicative obligations but as membership criteria that delineate

cooperative in-group interaction from competitive out-group positioning (Andersson, 2024).

The present findings both corroborate and extend existing scholarship on digital politeness in several important respects. The high overall frequency of approbation and tact maxim application is broadly consistent with prior research characterizing Indonesian communicative culture as oriented toward harmony maintenance, interpersonal respect, and collective face preservation (G. Leech, 2016; Watts, 2003). However, the present data substantially nuance this characterization by demonstrating that these harmony-oriented tendencies are contextually bounded rather than universal: they operate strongly in social support and informational discourse contexts but are systematically overridden in politically charged threads by competing norms that reward assertiveness, positional dominance, and categorical disagreement. This finding contributes to the theoretical effort to move beyond static characterizations of national communicative cultures and instead to understand politeness as a situationally variable practice whose norms are dynamically negotiated in response to interactional demands (Haugh, 2024; Kádár et al., 2021).

The pronounced violation of the agreement maxim in political discourse contexts corroborates Rossini's (2022) finding that online political talk is structurally associated with intolerant discourse patterns that deny the epistemic standing of political opponents. The present study extends Rossini's (2022) analysis by identifying the specific utterance-level mechanism through which this intolerance is enacted: agreement maxim violations in the Indonesian corpus do not merely express disagreement but systematically deny the validity of the addressee's position, the quality of their reasoning, and their right to participate in the exchange. This maxim-level analysis of political impoliteness provides a more granular account of online intolerance than sentiment-level approaches and confirms the applicability of classical pragmatic frameworks to the micro-interactional dynamics of digital political polarization (Tsoumou, 2023).

The finding that most clearly departs from expectations established in prior literature concerns the sustained normative protection of the sympathy maxim. Rossini (2022) and Tsoumou (2023) both document the pervasive dominance of impoliteness in politically charged digital discourse, a pattern confirmed in the present corpus for the agreement and modesty maxims. The sympathy maxim, however, remains largely insulated from competitive dynamics even in threads where other maxims are routinely violated, with a violation rate of 3.3% against the agreement maxim's 14.0%. This differential protection suggests that empathetic expression in Indonesian digital discourse is grounded in cultural values more resistant to the pressures of political polarization than the norms governing disagreement or self-presentation. It also indicates that politeness is not a unidimensional scale in this context but a multidimensional communicative system in which different maxims carry different normative weights shaped by cultural,

religious, and interactional factors simultaneously. This finding has not been previously documented in the existing literature on Indonesian online communication and constitutes the most culturally specific theoretical contribution of the present study.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the enactment, violation, and negotiation of Leech's six politeness maxims across 150 public comments collected from X and Instagram by Indonesian netizens between January and February 2025. The findings demonstrate that politeness in Indonesian digital communication has not disappeared but undergone a substantive transformation: it is actively negotiated in response to platform characteristics, topic sensitivity, and perceived interlocutor identity rather than applied uniformly as a stable behavioral norm. The approbation, tact, and sympathy maxims remained the most consistently applied categories across the corpus, reflecting the continued salience of appreciation, face-protective mitigation, and empathetic concern as default communicative orientations. Conversely, the agreement and modesty maxims were most frequently and severely violated, particularly in politically charged discourse, where categorical positional assertion and epistemic self-promotion functioned as identity-expressive strategies rather than mere lapses in communicative competence. Five cross-cutting negotiation strategies were identified: contextual adaptation, linguistic mitigation, emoji-mediated modulation, humor and irony as indirect critical tools, and in-group versus out-group differentiation. Collectively, these strategies reveal that Indonesian netizens navigate a communicative environment in which traditional cultural values of harmony and humility coexist with the egalitarian, expressive, and competitive norms of global digital culture, producing a hybrid politeness repertoire that is flexible, contextually sensitive, and culturally grounded.

These findings carry theoretical and practical implications for both digital pragmatics and language education. Theoretically, the study confirms the continued analytical productivity of Leech's classical six-maxim framework in a non-Western, digitally-mediated context while demonstrating that the framework must be applied with attention to contextual variability rather than as a fixed prescriptive standard. The differential normative protection observed across maxim categories, most strikingly the near-immunity of the sympathy maxim even in adversarial threads, suggests that politeness in Indonesian digital discourse operates as a multidimensional communicative system in which individual maxims carry culturally specific normative weights that cannot be reduced to a single politeness scale. This finding extends existing scholarship on digital (im)politeness by providing cross-cultural evidence from an Indonesian-language corpus and by linking maxim-level pragmatic analysis to the broader dynamics of online political polarization and identity performance. Practically, the results underscore the

importance of integrating digital pragmatic awareness into Indonesian language education curricula, equipping learners with the analytical tools to recognize, interpret, and navigate the complex politeness norms of contemporary social media interaction.

This study acknowledges several limitations that open productive directions for future research. The corpus was limited to two platforms, X and Instagram, over a two-month collection period, and did not systematically account for demographic variables such as age, regional background, educational level, or political affiliation that may significantly shape individual politeness behavior. Future research would benefit from cross-platform comparisons that include platforms with different architectural affordances, such as TikTok comments or WhatsApp group discourse, as well as longitudinal designs that track shifts in politeness norms over time in response to major political or social events. Comparative studies examining sympathy maxim behaviour across culturally distinct national contexts would be particularly valuable for determining the extent to which the differential maxim protection observed in the present corpus reflects specifically Indonesian cultural values or broader patterns in digital politeness across Asian communicative contexts.

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