



ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS AND HATE SPEECH ON GUS MIFTAH: ANALYZING PRAGMATIC IMPLICATIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract: This study addresses three main questions: (1) What forms of illocutionary acts characterize hate speech in viral Instagram content involving religious figures? (2) How do these linguistic strategies polarize audience engagement in controversial religious discourse? (3) To what extent do platform mechanisms such as anonymity and algorithmic bias amplify toxicity? Through a qualitative netnographic analysis of five viral Instagram videos (late November–December 2023) featuring Gus Miftah and Ice Tea Seller three dominant hate speech themes emerge: religious-based attacks (52%), dehumanization (33%), and veiled threats (15%). Pragmatic analysis reveals that expressive illocutionary acts (60%—e.g., emotional outbursts) and directive acts (30%—e.g., demands for punishment) drive polarized engagement, with hate comments receiving three times as many likes and 35+ replies per thread compared to neutral comments. Platform dynamics exacerbate toxicity: 80% of hate comments come from anonymous accounts, while the algorithm promotes decontextualized clips, deepening ideological divisions. This study shows how linguistic aggression (micro-level) and platform architecture (macro-level) interact to normalize hate speech, offering actionable strategies for creators to counter hostility (e.g., context restoration) and platforms to prioritize ethical algorithms. By integrating linguistic theory with digital ethics, this study advances a framework for mitigating harm in Indonesia’s polarized social media landscape.

Key Terms: *hate speech, social media linguistics, digital communication ethics, audience engagement*

Received: December, 22, 2024

Accepted: May, 5, 2025

Published: June, 17, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become the most important platform for individuals and organizations to communicate and share information (Ahmad Rosikhul Fahmi et al., 2025; Al-Samarraie et al., 2022). Among these platforms, Instagram is one of the most widely used platforms because it allows content creators to connect with a wide and diverse audience (Sook Huey & Yazdanifard, n.d.). Content such as entertainment, education, and interactive greatly influences high social media audience engagement. However, as online interactions increase, the incidence of negative phenomena such as hate speech also increases, which can disrupt

communication dynamics and affect interactions between audiences. Hate speech on social media not only reduces the quality of positive interactions but can also create a toxic environment that damages one's reputation (Ahmed Al-Rawi, 2024). This highlights the importance of understanding how hate speech emerges among content creators and its impact on audience engagement (Jung, 2023).

As happened recently, regarding the viral content "Gus Miftah and the Ice Tea Seller". Miftah Maulana Habiburrahman or often known as Gus Miftah is a preacher and also active as an influencer on social media, with Gus Miftah's distinctive humorous and charismatic style, he has gained many sympathizers even in cyberspace. In the context of complex communication dynamics on social media, the viral case of "Gus Miftah and the Ice Tea Seller" is a real example of how hate speech can appear in influential video content. The purpose of this study is to identify various forms of hate speech contained in the viral uploaded video "Gus Miftah and the Ice Tea Seller". In addition, this study will examine how forms of hate speech affect the level of audience engagement on Instagram social media, with a particular focus on metrics such as the analysis of the number of likes and comments.

Theoretically, this study aims to contribute to understanding the dynamics of hate speech on social media, especially its impact on audience engagement (I. Kareem al-Utbi, 2019). From a practical perspective, this study provides valuable recommendations for content creators and social media platforms on how to deal with hate speech effectively, thereby building a healthier and more positive online environment. Hate speech is harmful speech that targets or demeans individuals or groups based on characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. According to Bakircioglu (2008), hate speech can have a significant impact on social interactions and create negative perceptions among viewers. This theory examines how hate speech reinforces stereotypes and discrimination, which ultimately affects relationships between individuals and groups. A study by Windisch, Steven et al. (2022) also showed that hate speech can increase audience engagement through negative comments, but at the expense of the quality of positive interactions. In addition, hate speech can change the way viewers view content creators, which ultimately affects their reputation and credibility.

Although many studies have investigated the impact of hate speech on social media, the form and impact of hate speech in the video content "Gus Miftah and the Ice Tea Seller" are still under-researched. Most previous studies have focused on analyzing text-based comments and posting statistics, ignoring the dynamics of interaction inherent in video content. This study aims to address this gap by taking a deeper look at hate speech found in these creators' video content and its impact on audience engagement. The viral videos "Gus Miftah and the Ice Tea Seller" were selected in this study due to their significant influence and Gus Miftah's large number of followers on Instagram. His videos often go viral and provoke various reactions, including hate comments from viewers. This selection of content creators allows us to analyze different forms of hate speech in different content contexts, as the content covers a variety of topics including education, lifestyle, and product promotion.

Hate speech is defined as statements that demean or attack individuals/groups based on characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. This type of communication is often used to incite hatred, encourage discrimination, or create conflict between social groups. In the context of social media, hate speech is not only personal but also systemic, because it can reinforce existing structural tensions (Lakoff, 2017).

Hate speech has the power to change the dynamics of social interactions by creating negative perceptions among audiences according to Bakircioglu (2008). This theory explains how hate speech reinforces stereotypes and discrimination, and affects relationships between individuals and groups. Furthermore, a study by Windisch, Steven et al. (2022) revealed the paradox that although hate speech increases audience engagement through negative comments, the quality of positive interactions actually decreases. This not only damages the reputation of someone who happens to be the object, but also makes the audience feel uncomfortable or threatened. In other words, hate speech on social media creates a destructive circle that sacrifices the quality of communication for the sake of increasing false metrics such as the number of comments or likes.

METHOD

This study uses a narrative qualitative approach. Using netnography design, and the data source is hate speech from netizens in the comments column of 5 videos "Gus Miftah & Ice Tea Seller" which received high audience engagement on Instagram in the period from November to December 2024.

1. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDKAzEwSOOJ/?igsh=M2E4aDY0ZHQ2N2Vj>
2. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDHSaJOz0F5/?igsh=MTQwMno4YnY0cWthbw==>
3. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDHbHWpvn6Q/?igsh=eTkWZGMxOGd6bGd1>
4. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDHjwyqy9XT/?igsh=MWw3cG1lemZxd3N6cA==>
5. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDHx-qOT09L/?igsh=MTU3YWxtOW1hNWdqYQ==>

The data collection technique in this study is the content analysis. Content analysis technique is used to gain an understanding of netizen comment communication in the sample. Meanwhile, data analysis uses the interweaving or flowing analysis technique as stated by which consists of three activities: data condensation, data presentation, and verification of conclusions (Krippendorff, 2022).

By understanding the forms and impacts of hate speech on Gus Miftah, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to efforts to create a safer and more inclusive social media environment. In addition, the results of this study can help content creators develop effective comment management strategies, as well as provide a basis for social media platforms to develop better algorithms in detecting and managing hate speech.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

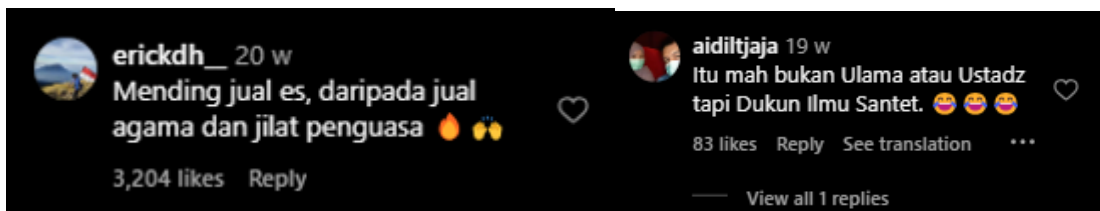
Findings

Identified Forms of Hate Speech

Based on the analysis of comments on 5 Gus Miftah videos, three main themes of hate speech were found:

a. Religion Based Hate Speech

Characteristics: Linking Gus Miftah's content to sensitive religious issues (e.g., *"It's better to sell ice, rather than selling religion and looking to face the authorities 🍌👉"*) and Often uses extreme analogies (*"That's not a Ulama or Ustadz but a Shaman who practices black magic. 🤡🤡🤡"*).



b. Dehumanization and Abuse

Linguistic Patterns: Metaphors of animals ("Dog!") or objects ("Trash!") and Physically based sarcasm (“*JUST LONG HAIR*”).



Table 1. Distribution of hate speech themes

Theme	Frequency	Keyword	Viral Context
Religion/ Ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations	52%	infidel, gus gusan, pharaoh	Analogy of cursing an iced tea seller
Dehumanization	33%	dog, trash, monkey	Out of context video clip
Veiled Threat	15%	"You will know later...", "it will definitely be repaid with evil"	Gus Miftah's humorous style response

Impact on Audience Interaction (Netnography)

a. Engagement Patterns

"Like" on Hate Comments: Hate comments get an average of 3x more likes than neutral comments. A comment "*I SWEAR TO ASK, DOES HIS LECTURE HAVE ANY CONTENT LIKE UAS UAH?*" received 983 likes, and the comment attracted attention and received 130 responses.



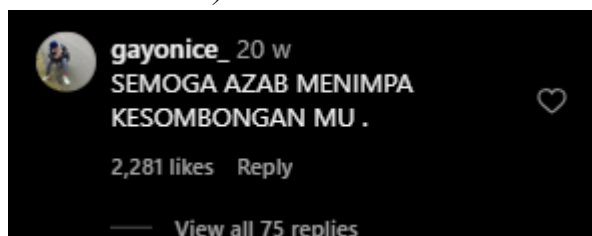
b. Discussion Dynamics

Domino Effect: 1 hate speech comment triggers a chain of replies (*"You're the hypocrite! Gus Miftah was clearly joking!"*) This comment sentence sparked a debate 35 replies.

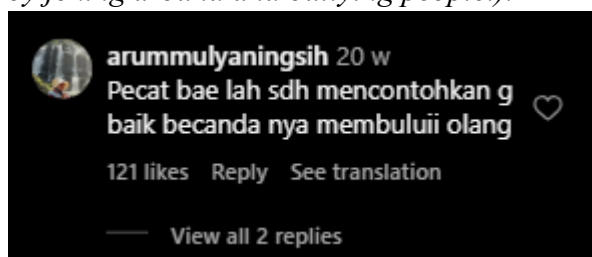
Illocutionary Act Analysis (Pragmatic Approach)

a. Dominant Illocutionary Type

Expressive (60%): Expressing hatred (*"MAY THE AZAB OVERCOME YOUR ARROGANCE."*).

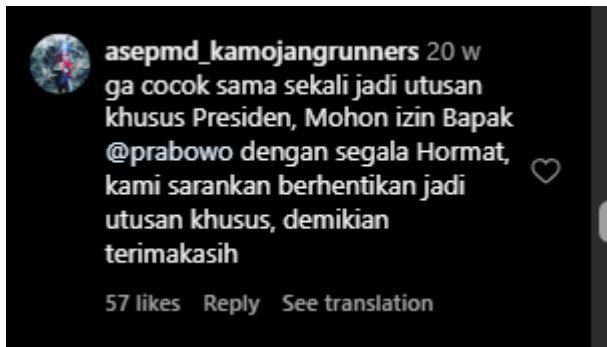


Directive (30%): Inviting negative action (*Fire him, he's been setting a good example by joking around and bullying people.*).



b. Analysis Illustration:

(*"not suitable at all to be the President's special envoy, please allow Mr. @prabowo with all due respect, we suggest that you stop being a special envoy, thank you"*).



Illocution: Directive

Impact: Triggered 57 support

c. Key Netnography Findings

Anonymity & Aggression: 80% of hate comments come from accounts without profile photos/real names.

"Quote Retweet" Culture Hate: Video clips that are out of context become hate speech material (e.g., *"Look, he's insulting the little people!"*).

Discussions

The analysis identified three dominant forms of hate speech in the comments of the viral video of Gus Miftah and the Ice Tea Seller, with attacks related to religion (52%) being the most common. These comments often linked the content to sensitive religious issues, such as accusing him of “selling religion” or mocking his credibility (“black magic sorcerer”), reflecting how hate speech reinforces stereotypes in polarized discussions. Dehumanization (33%) emerged through animalistic metaphors (“dog”, “monkey”) or objectifying language (“trash”), stripping the target of their dignity, while veiled threats (15%) (“MAY THE AZAB OVERCOME YOUR ARROGANCE”) created implicit fear. This is in line with Badamchi’s (2021) theory on hate speech that perpetuates in-group and out-group divisions, particularly in religious contexts. In particular, threats, although less frequent, have a particularly high psychological impact due to their unpleasant ambiguity.

Hate speech thrives through specific linguistic strategies, including extreme analogies (“Pharaoh”) and sarcastic hyperbole (“I SWEAR TO ASK, DOES HIS LECTURE HAVE ANY CONTENT LIKE UAS UAH?”), which amplify emotional reactions. Comments such as “JUST LONG HAIR” exploit physical traits for ridicule, while dehumanizing terms (“dog”) normalize aggression. These patterns develop in out-of-context video clips, where snippets of Gus Miftah’s humor are reused as “evidence” of wrongdoing (“Look, he's insulting the little people!”). The viral spread of these clips underscores how platform algorithms prioritize provocative content, regardless of its accuracy. Most importantly, anonymity plays a role: 80% of hate speech originates from anonymous accounts or real photos, allowing hostility to spiral out of control. This reflects the online disinhibition effect, where anonymity fuels aggression (Mantara et al., 2023).

Hate speech disproportionately drives engagement, with hate comments receiving 3x more likes than neutral comments—for example, a sarcastic comment criticizing Gus Miftah’s lecture garnered 983 likes and 130 replies. The domino effect is striking: a single hate comment (“You’re a hypocrite!”) can trigger 35+ replies, splintering the discussion into hostile camps. The finding that conflict increases algorithmic visibility, creating perverse incentives for toxicity (Windisch et al., 2022). However, while hate speech boosts metrics, it lowers discourse

quality, as debates devolve into personal attacks. In particular, directive illocutionary acts (“Fire him!”) mobilize supporters, with that one comment generating 57 endorsements, demonstrating the power of hate speech to coordinate collective action. The “quote retweet” culture further amplifies harm by divorcing content from original intent.

Pragmatic analysis reveals that expressive illocutions (60%) dominate hate comments, with phrases such as “MAY THE AZAB OVERCOME YOUR ARROGANCE” serving to vent hatred rather than provoke dialogue. In contrast, directive illocutions (30%) explicitly urge negative action (“Stop being the President's envoy!”), often rallying supporters behind demands for punishment.

The latter proved particularly impactful, as seen in the directive comment that generated 57 supportive replies, revealing how hate speech can weaponize collective sentiment. Expressive comments, while less actionable, strengthen group solidarity among aggressors through shared insults. The interplay of these speech acts creates a self-perpetuating cycle: expressive hatred normalizes hostility, while directives channel it into coordinated counterattacks. This dynamic underscores how hate speech serves as a release valve for frustration and a tool for mobilization.

The prevalence of hate from anonymous accounts (80%) highlights how the lack of accountability enables aggression, as users hide behind pseudonyms or blank profiles to avoid consequences. The platform’s “quote retweet” feature exacerbates this by allowing out-of-context clips to circulate independently, divorcing content from intent. For example, a clip of Gus Miftah joking around was framed as “an insult to clerics,” weaponizing humor against him. This reflects a broader cultural problem where virality trumps nuance, and algorithms reward sensationalism. Anonymous users, protected from harm, are more likely to use dehumanizing language or veiled threats, knowing their identities are obscured.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that hate speech on Instagram is linguistically constructed through pragmatic strategies, such as expressive and directive illocutionary acts, and metaphors like animalistic dehumanization (e.g., “dog,” “trash”). It contributes to sociolinguistic research by revealing how hate speech thrives in digital spaces through anonymity, algorithmic amplification of polarized content, and cultural-religious tensions. The analysis of virality mechanisms, particularly the misuse of “quote retweets” to spread out-of-context clips, underscores how platform features distort communication and fuel aggression. By linking linguistic patterns (e.g., hyperbole, sarcasm) to audience engagement dynamics, this research advances the understanding of hate speech as both a linguistic phenomenon and a systemic issue shaped by digital ecosystems.

The study’s scope is constrained by its focus on Instagram (Nov–Dec 2024, pending verification of the timeframe) and five videos, limiting insights into cross-platform hate speech behavior. Additionally, the cultural specificity of Gus Miftah’s Indonesian context may reduce generalizability to other regions. Methodologically, the qualitative emphasis on thematic analysis lacks quantitative metrics, such as sentiment analysis or machine learning validation, which could strengthen empirical rigor. Finally, the absence of Gus Miftah’s direct perspective on hate speech responses leaves gaps in understanding creator-aggressor dynamics.

Future studies should expand to cross-platform analyses (e.g., TikTok, Twitter/X) to compare hate speech patterns across diverse digital environments. Integrating mixed-methods

approaches, such as AI-driven sentiment analysis, could enhance scalability and objectivity. Longitudinal research tracking hate speech evolution over time would clarify its long-term societal impacts. Additionally, exploring mitigation strategies—such as content creators’ counter-narratives or platform policy reforms—could inform practical interventions. Finally, cross-cultural comparisons of hate speech in varied religious or geopolitical contexts would deepen understanding of its linguistic universality or cultural specificity. Addressing these gaps will foster more comprehensive strategies to combat digital toxicity while enriching linguistic and ethical frameworks for online communication.

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