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Linguistic Politeness on Social Media as a Reflection of Character Among the Younger Generation

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ABSTRACT

The development of social media in the digital era has transformed the communication patterns of the younger generation, making them more open, fast, and free. This situation has also given rise to various violations of language ethics, such as the use of hate speech, sarcasm, verbal insults, and cyberbullying, reflecting a decline in politeness in the digital space. This article aims to describe the phenomenon of politeness in digital communication, analyze the relationship between language use and the character development of the younger generation, and explain efforts to improve language ethics in social media. This research uses a literature review method with a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were obtained from various secondary sources, including scientific journals, books, and previous research relevant to the study of politeness and digital communication. Data analysis techniques include data reduction, data presentation, and descriptive conclusion drawing. The results of the study indicate that language use in social media not only functions as a means of communication but also reflects the character, empathy, social responsibility, and emotional maturity of the younger generation. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy, character education, and cultivating polite communication habits are necessary to create an ethical, healthy, and responsible digital communication culture.

1. Introduction

This transformation is marked by the exponential rise of social media usage worldwide, with the younger generation or "digital natives" standing out as the most active user group today. In this thoroughly digital era, cyberspace should serve as a platform for positive self-actualization for young people, where virtual social interactions remain grounded in principles of linguistic politeness. Ideally, the communication ethics and etiquette observed in the real world should be fully reflected in digital interactions. As the primary pillars of digital transformation, young people are expected to use social media wisely by producing speech that is inclusive, respectful, and educational thereby reinforcing a noble national character within the virtual public sphere (Mutma, 2019). Linguistic politeness in the digital space serves as a key indicator of the emotional and intellectual maturity of digital natives, as well as a reflection of the society's essential character.

However, the current reality in the digital realm reveals a concerning discrepancy stemming from shifts in the communication patterns of the younger generation. Digital spaces

which offer anonymity and reduce the formal barriers of the real world often erode social controls regarding language use. Communication phenomena among Indonesian netizens frequently demonstrate levels of digital politeness that are susceptible to social friction.

On various social media platforms such as TikTok, X (Twitter), and Instagram, comment sections are often rife with cyberbullying, hate speech, destructive criticism, and the use of profanity and destructive sarcasm. Young people often become ensnared by cyber-anonymity; the absence of formal constraints leads them to feel free to express emotions without regard for moral degradation or the psychological impact on their interlocutors, ultimately triggering actions that threaten either positive or negative "face." The erosion of this sense of courtesy demonstrates that the unfettered digital space has shifted the boundaries of conversational morality, where face- threatening acts against interlocutors are now considered commonplace among adolescents (Purnama & Sukarto, 2022).

Research on linguistic politeness in digital spaces has been conducted from various pragmatic perspectives. Several prior studies have focused on the application of politeness strategies such as Brown and Levinson's theory or Leech's maxims within comment sections on platforms like Instagram to observe how speakers maintain social relationships virtually (Magfiroh & Rahmiati, 2024). Such studies have also explored how cyber-communication ethics are practiced by specific age groups or communities. However, most of this research suffers from a fundamental limitation: it tends to be descriptive-textual, merely categorizing types of cyber-politeness violations on a specific platform using micro-level data corpora. A key shortcoming is that previous research has not deeply linked these digital linguistic behaviors to moral degradation or the reconstruction of the speakers' psychological and sociological character.

This research gap underscores the importance of the present conceptual article. While earlier studies have focused on micro-level empirical data such as simply counting the frequency of specific speech acts this article offers the advantage of an integrative theoretical approach. It analyzes the importance of linguistic ethics not merely as a macro-instrument, but as a reflection of a person's inner qualities. The article excels in holistically conceptualizing how cyber-speech behavior serves as a direct reflection or primary indicator of the character quality, empathy, and cultural competence of today's younger generation.

Based on the gap analysis above, the primary issues highlighted in this study concern the low level of linguistic politeness on social media, the widespread use of impolite language among the younger generation, and the significant impact of such digital communication on the erosion of adolescent character quality. The decline in linguistic politeness within the digital sphere is perceived as a warning sign of a moral identity crisis. Consequently, a theoretical framework is essential to unravel the cyber-sociocultural factors shifting the politeness standards of the younger generation and to reposition language ethics as a pillar for cultivating noble character within the digital ecosystem.

Given the complexity of these issues, this article is written with several primary objectives: first, to describe linguistic politeness in the digital space and its associated linguistic phenomena; second, to explain the relationship between language and the character of the younger generation holistically from a sociopragmatic perspective; and third, to describe efforts to improve digital language ethics through the formulation of adaptive and solution-oriented strategies. Through these objectives, the article aims to make a theoretical contribution by enriching the field of cyber- sociopragmatics, while also offering practical contributions to educational institutions and policymakers for designing character-strengthening strategies that adapt to the communication dynamics of the younger generation in virtual public spaces.

2. Method

This study employs a literature review method (or library research) with a qualitative-descriptive approach. This method aims to explore, evaluate, and synthesize theories to construct a new

conceptual framework regarding cyber language ethics, without conducting direct empirical fieldwork (Snyder, 2019). The data utilized consists of qualitative material specifically texts, theoretical propositions, conceptual ideas, and findings from prior empirical studies relevant to the topic. All data sources are secondary and possess formal scholarly credibility, drawn from indexed national and international research journals, academic textbooks, and policy documents concerning cyber ethics. Sources were selected via academic databases such as Google Scholar, Garuda, and Sinta. Data collection was conducted through a structured and systematic literature review. The process began with a literature search, followed by rigorous screening based on specific inclusion criteria: the documents had to align with the study's focus on the degradation of verbal ethics, commenting phenomena, cyberbullying, and adolescent character formation in virtual public spaces. Once relevant documents were gathered, in-depth data recording was performed through critical reading to explore the conceptual ideas within each source. Subsequently, data analysis was carried out using a qualitative-descriptive approach via content analysis. The analytical steps included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification to produce a new, solution-oriented theoretical synthesis (Miles et al., 2014). Through this process, the validity of the theoretical arguments is substantiated, allowing for a description of the causal relationship between linguistic politeness on social media and the character of the younger generation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Linguistic Politeness in Digital Communication

Linguistic politeness is a crucial aspect of maintaining social relationships and fostering harmonious communication. In the context of digital communication, linguistic politeness has become increasingly vital because social media interactions occur openly and are accessible to a wide audience.

Linguistic politeness entails using language that observes ethics, respect, and regard for the interlocutor. Politeness is not demonstrated solely through one's attitude when expressing opinions on social media or in digital public spaces.

The rise of social media has shifted societal communication patterns toward greater speed and freedom. Social media usage often involves expressing opinions without regard for norms of linguistic courtesy. Consequently, various forms of politeness violations emerge, such as the use of profanity, innuendo, sarcasm, and hate speech. Musyawir (2024) explains that violations of linguistic politeness principles on social media are largely driven by users' emotions and a lack of awareness regarding digital communication ethics.

In the digital era, linguistic politeness is increasingly important because social interaction is no longer confined to face-to-face communication but also takes place virtually via social media. Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X (Twitter), and Facebook enable individuals to express opinions quickly and openly to a broad audience. However, these advancements in communication technology have also altered societal communication patterns, particularly among the younger generation. Unrestricted digital communication with minimal social oversight often leads to breaches of linguistic ethics, ranging from hate speech, sarcasm, and insults to cyberbullying.

Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that communication involves the concept of "face" or social image which every speaker must preserve. When someone uses harsh or demeaning language, the action constitutes a "face-threatening act" that can undermine the interlocutor's self- esteem.

This phenomenon is frequently observed in digital communication, particularly in social media comment sections, which are often rife with destructive criticism, mockery, and unhealthy debates. Low awareness of digital communication ethics makes social media users more prone to impulsively expressing emotions without considering the impact on others.

Research by Salsabil and Ningsih (2023) indicates that violations of linguistic politeness on social media frequently manifest as sarcasm, insults, and provocative remarks in Instagram comment sections. These findings suggest that social media is often used as an outlet for emotions without regard for norms of linguistic courtesy. Furthermore, research by Fitri and Saleh (2025) explains that the lack of linguistic politeness among the younger generation in digital spaces is influenced by freedom of expression, user anonymity, and limited social control in online communication.

Beyond its role as a communication tool, polite language serves social functions: maintaining interpersonal relationships, avoiding conflict, and fostering a comfortable communication atmosphere. In social media and digital spaces, the use of polite language helps cultivate a healthy and educational environment. Linguistic politeness also reflects an individual's empathy, respect, and emotional maturity during interactions with others. Therefore, linguistic politeness should be understood not merely as a set of linguistic rules, but as an integral part of character education in the digital era.

For the younger generation active users of social media the ability to use polite language has become a key indicator of character and moral quality in digital spaces. Young people are expected to use social media wisely by prioritizing communication that is polite, critical, and responsible. In this way, social media can serve as a space for positive interaction and support the creation of a more ethical digital communication culture.

3.2 Language Phenomena Among the Younger Generation on Social Media

The language phenomena observed among the younger generation on social media represent a shift in communication culture within the digital era. Young people are known as the most active users of social media. In digital communication, they frequently employ slang, abbreviations, emojis, and popular internet-born terms. This language usage forms part of the younger generation's social identity, helping to foster closeness and familiarity within the digital space without the need for face-to-face interaction. However, the excessive use of informal language can impact communicative politeness.

Fitri & Saleh (2025) explain that the low level of linguistic politeness among the youth in digital spaces is influenced by freedom of expression on the internet and a lack of social control in online communication. Furthermore, Salsabil & Ningsih (2023) found that many social media users violate politeness principles by employing sarcasm, insults, and provocative remarks in Instagram comment sections. This phenomenon demonstrates that social media serves not merely as a communication space but also reflects the behavior and character of its users. Therefore, there is a need for awareness regarding the use of polite language to ensure that digital communication remains healthy and responsible.

Beyond serving as a communication tool, language on social media also functions as a representation of the younger generation's social identity. The use of informal language, viral terms, and communication styles characteristic of social media illustrates how young people adapt to technological advancements and digital culture. Research by Fadli, Ikra, and Yani (2025) explains that the speech strategies employed by Generation Z on social media are both strategic and contextual, serving to build emotional closeness and project social identity within digital communities.

However, the excessive use of informal language can affect communicative politeness. Many social media users prioritize speed and spontaneous expression over linguistic etiquette. Consequently, various forms of impolite communication emerge, ranging from sarcastic comments, insults, and body-shaming to hate speech and cyberbullying. Sarcasm is often regarded as a form of humor or criticism, yet in practice, it can spark conflict and hurt others' feelings. This phenomenon is increasingly common in the comment sections of social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter.

Research by Malikha (2025) on adolescent comments on TikTok indicates that the use of sarcasm and direct communication strategies without regard for social norms has become the dominant form of communication among young people on social media. The study also found that poor language etiquette is influenced by freedom of expression and a lack of social oversight in online communication. Furthermore, Fitri and Saleh (2025) discovered that violations of politeness principles in social media comment sections often manifest as sarcasm, insults, and provocative remarks directed by netizens at public figures. Cyberbullying is another serious negative consequence of digital communication. It can range from mockery, physical insults, and the spread of negative comments to persistent verbal intimidation via social media. The impact of cyberbullying extends beyond the victim's psychological state; it can also diminish the self-confidence and mental health of adolescents. On the other hand, social media also reflects the character and behavior of its users. The language a person uses in the digital space can reveal their values, attitudes, and level of social awareness. Therefore, linguistic politeness must be maintained even during online communication. Politeness in language is not merely about using courteous words; it also reflects respect, empathy, and responsibility when interacting with others. Fatmawati and Ningsih (2026) explain that politeness in digital communication is crucial for maintaining social relationships, preventing conflict, and shaping the character of the younger generation in the digital era.

Consequently, there is a need to enhance digital literacy and education regarding language ethics among young people to ensure that social media usage remains healthy and responsible. Being mindful of word choice, respecting the opinions of others, and avoiding hate speech are vital steps toward creating a positive digital environment. Linguistic politeness on social media also plays a key role in maintaining the quality of communication and fostering a more ethical digital culture.

3.3 Linguistic Politeness as a Reflection of Character in the Younger Generation

Linguistic politeness is a crucial aspect that reflects an individual's character and personality. Language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a means to demonstrate attitude, ethics, and the way an individual shows respect for others. In social life, a person who uses polite language is generally perceived as having good character, being capable of emotional control, and respecting prevailing social norms. Conversely, the use of harsh, insulting, or provocative language can reflect a lack of awareness regarding communication ethics and poor self-control. Therefore, language is closely linked to character formation, particularly for the younger generation living amidst rapid, all-encompassing digital technological advancements.

In the digital realm, the use of polite language demonstrates respect, empathy, and responsibility toward others. Conversely, the use of harsh and impolite language can reflect a lack of awareness regarding communication ethics. As active social media users, young people need to understand that digital communication requires norms of politeness just as face-to-face communication does. Linguistic politeness can serve as a form of character education, as it instills values such as respecting others, controlling emotions, and thinking before speaking.

Rohali (2013) states that linguistic politeness is a vital component of societal character formation, as polite language fosters harmonious and civilized social relationships. Furthermore, Fatmawati and Ningsih (2026) explain that the use of polite language can cultivate more positive communication ethics within the digital environment. Thus, linguistic politeness is not merely a linguistic matter; it also serves as an indicator of the character and morality of the younger generation in digital social life.

Politeness in language can also serve as a component of character education for the younger generation. Through the use of proper and polite language, young people learn to respect differing opinions, manage their emotions duringcommunication, and think before expressing themselves in digital public spaces. These values are crucial for building a healthy and responsible communication culture.

In the social media era, the challenge of maintaining linguistic politeness has intensified because digital communication often occurs spontaneously, without regard for the psychological impact on others. Many social media users employ harsh language, sarcastic comments, and even hate speech to gain attention or follow online communication trends. This phenomenon indicates a decline in communication ethics among the younger generation. Conversely, using polite language on social media can foster a more positive and comfortable communication environment. Polite language helps reduce conflict, strengthen social bonds, and improve the quality of interactions among social media users. Fatmawati and Ningsih (2026) explain that the use of polite language among the youth can help establish more positive communication ethics in the digital realm. Linguistic politeness can also be viewed as a form of social responsibility in keeping digital spaces safe and healthy for all users.

Linguistic politeness is not merely a matter of linguistics; it also reflects an individual's moral values and character. Individuals accustomed to using polite language tend to possess better social skills, as they are able to consider others' feelings and avoid conflict during communication. In modern education, the habit of using polite language needs to be instilled early on so that young people develop ethical awareness when using social media or interacting in daily life. Research by Pranowo (2015) confirms that linguistic politeness reflects an individual's emotional and moral intelligence within society.

Thus, linguistic politeness can be understood as a reflection of the younger generation's character in digital social life. The use of polite language demonstrates respect, empathy, responsibility, and self-control in communication. Therefore, raising awareness about the importance of language ethics on social media must be continuously pursued through character education, digital literacy, and the cultivation of positive communication habits, in order to foster a more civilized digital communication culture.

3.4 Efforts to Enhance Language Politeness in the Digital Space

Efforts to improve language politeness in the digital space have become crucial amidst the rapid development of communication technology and social media. The digital space is currently used not only for exchanging information but also as a venue for shaping opinions and social identities, as well as for interpersonal interaction. However, freedom of expression on social media often leads to the use of impolite language, such as hate speech, sarcastic comments, cyberbullying, and verbal insults. Therefore, various efforts are required to foster digital communication that is healthier, more polite, and responsible.

One such effort is strengthening digital literacy. Digital literacy relates not only to the ability to use technology but also encompasses the ability to understand the ethics, norms, and responsibilities involved in digital communication. Young people need to understand that every form of communication on social media has social and psychological impacts on others. With sound digital literacy, social media users will be wiser in their choice of words, respect the opinions of others, and avoid spreading hate speech and negative information. According to Kurniawati and Baroroh (2016), digital literacy can help the public enhance critical thinking skills, understand communication ethics, and use digital media responsibly.

In addition to digital literacy, character education is a vital factor in improving language politeness in the digital space. Character education aims to instill moral values, empathy, responsibility, and respect for others in daily life, including in online communication. Language politeness is an integral part of character education, as it teaches individuals to speak politely, control their emotions, and be considerate of the feelings of their conversation partners. Pranowo (2015) states that language politeness reflects a person's character and emotional intelligence in social life.

Schools play a crucial role in instilling the value of linguistic politeness through Indonesian language instruction. Teachers can educate students on digital communication ethics, the proper use of language on social media, and the negative impacts of cyberbullying and hate

speech. Beyond the school setting, families also bear the responsibility of fostering polite language habits from an early age. The family environment serves as the primary setting where children learn how to communicate and conduct themselves with others. Parents can model polite language, monitor their children's social media activity, and instill an understanding of the importance of respecting others in digital communication. Applying principles of linguistic politeness to digital academic communication helps create interactions that are more courteous and respectful of the interlocutor. Therefore, it is essential to encourage the wise use of social media among the younger generation to foster a healthy and ethical digital communication environment.

Linguistic politeness on social media is a vital aspect of establishing healthy, ethical, and harmonious digital communication. The evolution of digital technology and social media has transformed the communication patterns of the younger generation, making them faster, freer, and more open. However, these changes have also given rise to negative phenomena such as the use of abusive language, sarcasm, hate speech, and cyberbullying indicating a decline in linguistic ethics within the digital sphere. A lack of linguistic politeness not only affects the quality of communication but also reflects a decline in the character and morals of the younger generation within the realm of digital social life.

The findings indicate a strong link between language and an individual's character. Polite language use reflects respect for others, empathy, responsibility, and emotional maturity in communication. Conversely, impolite language can trigger social conflict and reflects a lack of awareness regarding digital communication ethics.Thus, linguistic politeness can be understood as a reflection of the younger generation's character in the digital era.

Furthermore, social media serves not only as a means of communication but also as a space for young people to shape their social identities. Therefore, sustained efforts are required to foster linguistic politeness by strengthening digital literacy, character education, and awareness of digital communication ethics. Schools, families, and the community play a crucial role in cultivating habits of polite and responsible language use on social media.

This article aims to encourage the younger generation to use language more wisely in the digital realm while upholding values of courtesy, ethics, and mutual respect. By fostering a culture of polite digital communication, social media can become a space for positive and educational interaction that strengthens national character amidst rapid technological advancement.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that linguistic politeness in social media communication is closely related to the character formation and social behavior of the younger generation. The findings show that the use of polite language reflects respect, empathy, responsibility, emotional maturity, and awareness of digital communication ethics, whereas impolite expressions such as sarcasm, insults, hate speech, and cyberbullying may contribute to conflict and indicate a lack of awareness of others' feelings. Social media also functions as a space for young people to construct social identities, making language use an important representation of their character in digital interactions. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy, character education, and awareness of language ethics through collaboration among schools, families, and the wider community is essential to cultivate polite and responsible communication habits. This study contributes to the field of linguistics, particularly cyber-sociopragmatics and language education, by providing an integrative conceptual understanding of linguistic politeness as not only a communication strategy but also an indicator of character and a foundation for developing a healthier, more ethical, and responsible digital communication culture among the younger generation.

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