

MITIGATING RAPPORT THREATS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the strategies applied by people on social media in mitigating rapport threat behaviors and tries to formulate the rapport building behaviors from the applied strategies. The research is done to see whether the strategies work well in rapport threatening atmosphere in various situations taken from social media interactions. The data for this study were obtained from a number of online chats and discussion on several social media apps such as, Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube and Instagram. The interactions were some chats, comments, discussion and arguments in Bahasa Indonesia. The data were taken from the interactions that cause offenses or threat on the interpersonal rapport of the people chatting on the social media. The method applied for this study is descriptive qualitative to identify the people's strategies on social media to mitigate some rapport threat behaviors in the social media interactions. The study shows that people apply a number of strategies to mitigate the threats to the interpersonal rapport. The strategies are apologizing, complimenting, expressing gratitude, using emoji, using honorifics to address others, choosing the appropriate words, choosing the relevant topic and organizing information to be told to others. It is clearly shown from the study that there are a number of rapport threat behaviors in social media interactions but the people interacting on the social media have certain strategies which in turn become the rapport building behaviors to mitigate the threat.

Keywords: *rapport threat behaviors, social media interactions, strategies to mitigate threat*

INTRODUCTION

Social media are the means that people use to interact virtually with internet connection. Social media makes long distance communication possible in a quick and more convenient way. The users may chat, make some comments and even make an audio and video call. In this modern society where internet use has been a common necessity, social media interactions are gaining ground. Social media have become a necessity for people all around the world and it is very common for people to interact in the media through a number of applications. The use of social media has been increasing in Indonesia for the last ten years. This is indicated by the common use of the media by Indonesian people in their daily life. There were 170 million social media users in Indonesia in January 2021 and the number of social media users in Indonesia increased by ten million between 2020 and 2021 (Kemp, 2021). From the data, we can see that a huge number of social media users in Indonesia now have their own social media accounts like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or at least they have the WhatsApp application on their smartphone.

These social media platforms are used widely in Indonesian people's virtual interactions. This type of interactions is different from daily interaction in which people meet face to face and interact directly. In social media interactions, the users can express their mind much more freely and impulsively. Harsh words and swearing can be more commonly found in social media interactions. This kind of interactions with such impolite atmosphere may trigger some offenses or rapport threats among the interactants. However, not every interaction in social media has this kind of atmosphere. Some people talk nicely to each other and use the social media as tools to enhance their relationship with their families, colleagues and friends. This article only limits its scope to the rapport threat interactions, where people talk in impolite atmosphere with harsh words, insults and swearing, to see what strategies these people use to mitigate the rapport threats in this kind of interaction.

Rapport Management is a theory proposed by Spencer-Oatey as a response to Brown and Levinson's Politeness Principles (1987). Spencer-Oatey points out that many linguists have challenged Brown and Levinson conceptualization of face (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). Thus, she tries to reformulate the concept by proposing a modified framework for conceptualizing face and rapport in this Rapport Management theory that is entailed by the three interconnected components namely face management,

management of sociality rights and obligations, and management of interactional goals. Rapport is defined as subjective evaluation to people's harmony and disharmony in social interactions. Spencer-Oatey further states that positive rapport of people can be threatened in three main ways: through face-threatening behaviour, through rights threatening/obligation-omission behaviour, and through goal-threatening behaviour (Spencer-Oatey, 2003).

The notion of rapport management as a framework has been used by a number of researchers in researching politeness in social talk for it goes beyond the linguistic strategies used by interactants (Sampietro, 2019) or it can be managed with such strategies as the textualization of speech acts, the use of phatic talk, the strategic blending of institutional, personal and professional discourses, the use of evaluative language, and the provision of grounders for requests (Ho, 2013). By taking these results into consideration, this article analyses the face-threatening behaviours that may appear in social media interactions where some face-threatening atmosphere can be found in the interactions with harsh words, insults, swearing, accusations and even the use of all capital letters. The researcher considers the use of all capital letters to be rapport threatening because all caps are used to indicate strong feeling (McCulloch, 2019). The strong feelings are like angry, displeased and furious that internet users express by using all capital letters in their social media interactions.

METHODOLOGY

The method that was used in this research is a descriptive method by using the qualitative approach to elicit the data that were obtained during the research. The methodology integrated the Rapport Management theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, 2003) and Participant Observation (Spradley, 1980) to observe and analyse what strategies the social media users apply to mitigate the rapport threat behaviours in their interactions on social media. The research was conducted in February - April 2020 but was then extended until March 2021 to get more latest data. The data were taken from social media interactions in some social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and YouTube. The interactions are in Bahasa Indonesia involving some random internet users who were chatting or commenting on certain social media posts. To obtain the data, the researcher screenshots the social media interactions from the four platforms. The screenshots were then sorted based on the platforms to see the rapport threatening situations and the strategies applied by the social media users to mitigate the rapport threatening situations and atmospheres. The researcher only took the interactions with rapport threatening situations or the interactions which were rapport threatening and excluded those which were not to see the strategies to mitigate the rapport threats.

There is a total of forty interactions that were screenshot which are ten interactions for each social media platform. From those forty interactions, there are only less than a third of them where the users of the social media applied some strategies to mitigate the threats caused by some rapport threatening behaviours like insults, harsh words, accusations and the use of all capital letters. The rest were the situations with no strategies to mitigate rapport threat at all so the atmosphere were still rapport threatening.

The strategies are categorized based on the five domains that play important roles in management of rapport (Spencer-Oatey and Xing, 2003) namely Illocutionary domain, discourse domain, participation domain, stylistic domain and non-verbal domain. Illocutionary domain considers rapport management can be either threatened or enhanced by the use of speech acts such as apologies, giving compliments, gratitude, requests and so on. Discourse domain looks at the content and structure of certain interactions as discourses. Participation domain focuses on the procedural aspects of an interaction such as overlaps, pauses, or turn-takings. Stylistic domain involves the choice of style in interactions like choice of specific terms, choice of tones like joking or serious, the use of figurative language and others. Non-verbal domain is the domain that pays attention to the non-verbal aspects of an interaction such as body language, gestures, eye contacts and other non-verbal tools.

ANALYSIS

There is a total of twelve interactions where social media users apply some strategies to mitigate the rapport threat behaviours obtained from the whole data. From these twelve interactions, one interaction from three different platforms or three selected interactions that may represent the others are presented in this section.

1. Strategies found in Facebook comments

The strategies that are mostly applied by the users of this social media platform are Illocutionary domain such as apologizing, giving compliments, and gratitude and non-verbal domain such as using emoji to mitigate rapport threats. Some sensitive issues on this social media platform were raised due to certain comments made by some users and they, the comments, were responded negatively by other users. This situation triggered the rapport threats indicated by some harsh words, insults and in some other cases the users typed their comments in capital letters to show that they were either angry or displeased. The rapport threats are highlighted in red whereas the strategies to mitigate them are highlighted in light blue. The rapport threats were mitigated by the users by applying two types of strategies, apologizing and complimenting which belong to illocutionary domain and using emoji as a non-verbal strategy as shown by the following excerpt;

Excerpt 1

Facebook user 1: "Tawwa cewe Makassar, beraniya gadai bukan miliknya."

Facebook user 2: "skip mungkin tdk semua cewek Makassar...Karna perbuatan begini individu... Hti2 dalam membawa nama suku jatuh.y ke SARA 🙏"

Facebook user 1: "pastinya yg di foto saja bro... Masa iya semua cewe Makassar.. Kamu sih ada2 aja... Hahaha"

Facebook user 2: "Tdk ada2... Krna kita sebut TAWWA CEWE MAKASSAR, BERANINYA GADAI BUKAN MILIKNYA... Kesan.y cewek Makassar demikian. Knp hrus bawa nama suku kah?"

Facebook user 1: kamu kan posting di group yg ada nama kata Makassar, pelakunya orang makassar, TKP jg di Makassar.. Terlalu cepat basah ketekmu saribattang.. Biar kamu senang, aku tulis: Tawwa cewe Makassar tidak ada yang suka menipu... bagus kan...!!

Facebook user 2: 😂😂😂😂

Facebook user 3: "sangge jai tong protes na" (terlalu banyak protesnya)

Facebook user 1: "maaf, tabe daeng 🙏"

This interaction shows that there are five rapport threatening behaviours highlighted in red and four strategies to mitigate them highlighted in light blue. The first threat occurs when Facebook user 1 makes a general statement accusing a Makassarese girl to do a bad deed. This is responded negatively by Facebook user 2 who feels that user 1 has accused all Makassarese girl generally to do bad deed. However, in order to mitigate the threat that she feels would occur, she uses an emoji, folded hands signalling pardon. User 1 still carries on his rapport threatening behaviour by countering user 2's criticism by saying something while laughing. The constant rapport threatening situation caused by user 1's attitude makes user 2 defend her argument by typing what user 1 says and asks him why he should make a general statement despising certain ethnicity. The rapport threat situation goes on but user 1 realizes this so he makes a statement to amuse user 2 by complimenting and asking for her agreement. User 2 feels that her interpersonal rapport is no longer threatened so she responds with emoji as her strategy to mitigate further threat and ends her involvement in the interaction. Another user butts in offended by user 1's statement about Makassarese girl but user 1 has realized that his statement is rapport threatening so he apologizes to mitigate the rapport threatening situation caused by his statement. From this interaction, we can clearly see that a certain rapport threat and the rapport threatening situation caused by it can be mitigated with rapport management strategies. The strategies that user 1 and 2 use in this interaction are apologizing and complimenting which belong to illocutionary domain and using emoji which belongs to non-verbal domain.

2. Strategies found in WhatsApp chats

The strategies that are applied in this platform are illocutionary domain, discourse domain and non-verbal domain. Interestingly the use of emoji are applied in different ways. A certain user uses it as a strategy to mitigate the threat but the other one uses it to make an insult thus it becomes a rapport threat device. The following excerpt shows the interaction:

Excerpt 2

WhatsApp user1: (attaching an advertisement and invitation to join certain money game application)

WhatsApp user 2: "money game 🤔"

WhatsApp user 1: "🤔🤔🤔 sok tahu 🤔🤔"

WhatsApp user 2: "sok tahu apanya? Sudah ditetapkan ilegal sama SWI OJK, Kominfo sudah blokir webnya, difatwakan haram sama sebagian ulama, sebagian besar iklannya comotan dari YouTube sampe2 perusahaan2 besar yang iklannya ditayangkan di app itu buat klarifikasi kalo mere tidak pernah pasang iklan di situ."

WhatsApp user 1: "🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔 lanjut pc bro"

WhatsApp user 3: (responding user 2) "Iya betul ini sudah diperkarakan, setelah **** ada lagi ***** itu sama sj Money Game sm caranya dgn *****"

WhatsApp user 2: "Betul. CNN dan NET bahkan sudah beritakan karena banyak masyarakat yg terperdaya."

WhatsApp user 4: "afwan ijin keluar hp berat"
+628524288**** keluar

WhatsApp user 1: (Attaching a video link showing something to support his statement) "Bea tu 🤔🤔🤔 mainnya kurang jauh om 🤔🤔🤔"

WhatsApp user 2: (responding user 1) "Detik ke 00.50 sampe 02.18, Pak TLT tegaskan kalo **** dinyatakan ilegal oleh SWI OJK. Nah setelahnya memang beliau bilang **** sementara mengurus perijinan tapi dengar tdk setelahnya kalo **** dianjurkan tdk pake sistem jual beli vp, tdk pake sistem referral yg ini semua masih dilakukan **** sampe sekarang 🤔. Lagian ini dipotong videonya. Video lengkapnya dong dipost."

WhatsApp user 1: "iri bln bos 🤔🤔"

WhatsApp user 2: "Ngapain iri, mas/pak?"

WhatsApp user 3: "Izin mau Tanya admin, di Grup ini emang bisa Promosi yah selain produknya MafazaFresh?"
+628218775**** keluar

Group admin : (responding user 3 and 1) "Iye maaf untuk Smentara blm bisa ya kak untuk promosi selain produk mafaza kak 🙏🙏🙏🤔"

WhatsApp user 1: "Mainnya kurang jauh om 🤔🤔🤔 Haters skip 🤔🤔🤔"

WhatsApp user 2: "Hater, bukan haters. Haters kalo banyak lagian tidak semua yg anggap **** ilegal haters lah. Waspada dan tdk mau terlibat di dalam sesuatu bukan berarti benci, gimana sih? Mas/pak, ditonton baik2 tdk videonya? Jelas2 di situ Pak T katakan **** ilegal meski memang beliau bilang belum ada masyarakat yg laporkan tentang kerugian yg dialami."

This interaction shows that user 1 keeps threatening user 2 interpersonal rapport by mocking him and keeps saying that he is a hater. This rapport threatening atmosphere looks more obvious because there are two members of the group who are leaving the group when other members are arguing. The rapport strategies applied by user 2 belong to discourse domain because he comments politely by addressing user 1 with honorifics (mas/pak) and arranges his comment in a more structured and mannered fashion. He also uses sad emoji to politely deny what user 1 tries to claim at the beginning of the interaction. The admin of the group realizes the rapport threat situation of the interaction, thus, he politely asks user 1 not to promote his business in the group by apologizing and

asking him nicely while using folded hands and halo emoji. The strategies worked really well because after this interaction, user 1 agreed to stop commenting and promoting his business.

3. Strategies found in Instagram comments

The strategies applied in the following interaction are complimenting which belongs to illocutionary domain, using honorifics and tone choice which belong to stylistic domain as shown in the following excerpt;

Excerpt 3

Instagram user 1: “kasar amat sama orang tua lu ngab”

Instagram user 2: “silakan anda berkata demikian, nanti jika anda merasa kehilangan barang anda dari maling, tolong jangan emosi, santay aja, lepaskan dy dan kaaih (kasih) dy pergi selesai”

Instagram user 3: (to user 2) “dia uda tua mas”

Instagram user 3: (to user 2) “dari pada di dorong kenapa ga dibilangin baik baik”

Instagram user 2: (to user 3) “saya mengerti baik nya dari mas yang budiman, dy emang sudah tua, apakah ga ada cara lain jika dia ga mau berurusan, kan dy bisa bertanya terlebih dahulu, kalo kaya gitu yg kena imbas sypnya, bapa nya juga toh, jika ada warga seperti ini lebih baik kita yg gatau apa apa mendingan diam aja, diam sudah membantu ga membuat suasana jdi tambah panas”

Instagram user 4: (to user 2) “sok bijak amat lu”

Instagram user 5: (to user 2) “belum ngopi..??”

Instagram user 2: (to user 5) “yuk ngopi, ku lihat sepatumu bagus, aku suka, sukses ya usaha nya”

Instagram user 2: (to user 4) “hi cantik, baik kabar nya? Ada masalah kah dgn saya?”

Instagram user 6: (to user 2) “lah yg ribet kan elu komen Dmna2 😊”

Instagram user 2: (to user 6) “aku tau niat baik dari kk yg punya hati seperti bidadari, aku paham hal itu, bisakah kita leraikan dgn mengajak warga langsung ke kantor polisi, dari pd pusing pusing mikir debat langsung bwa aja ke pihak berwajib ya toh, ada yg simpel ga perlu ribet atuh”

The interaction is even started with a harsh comment in which user 1 accusing someone in the video to be rude to an old guy. This comment was responded nicely by user 2. He talks nicely and tries to be very polite by complimenting and using honorifics. These strategies work really well to mitigate the rapport threat that occurred at the beginning of the interaction. However, three other users comment negatively to user 2 and their comments are all rapport threatening behaviour because they either rudely accuse user 2 or imply something which is actually an insult. User 2 knows how to manage his interpersonal rapport so he keeps commenting nicely by choosing some nice words addressed to those who negatively react to him. He also keeps complimenting by saying, “sepatumu bagus (you have a pair of nice shoes), hi cantik (hi, pretty girl), aku tau niat baik dari kk yg punya hati seperti bidadari ... (I know you have a good intention which is as good as your angelic heart...)” and all of these strategies work well again because at the end of this interaction, neither of those other users show their opposition or make other rapport threatening behaviours to user 2. Furthermore, user 2 chooses the relevant topic and organizes his sentences well so he also applies discourse domain as a strategy.

CONCLUSION

The most common strategies that were found from the data and as shown in the analysis are complimenting, apologizing and expressing gratitude which all belong to the illocutionary domain. There are also other strategies like using emoji which belong to non-verbal domain, addressing other people with honorifics, choosing the appropriate words and tones which belong to the stylistic domain.

There is one example where a certain social media user applies certain strategies like topic choice and organization of information that belong to the discourse domain. Thus, it can be concluded that social media users apply the four interrelated domains as their strategies to mitigate some rapport threatening behaviours in their social media interactions. The participation domain could not be found applied by social media users because there is no clear participation sequencing like turn-takings, pauses, or overlaps in social media interactions where people can interact anytime they want and whenever they are online. This research shows that the strategies work well to mitigate the rapport threats in social media interactions. People stop commenting negatively when others apologize, give some compliments, express their gratitude, use emoji in a good manner, use honorifics, choose the most appropriate words and choose the relevant topic and organize their information that they give to others. These strategies can be a solution or a way for social media users to build a rapport building behaviour to enhance their interactions on social media.

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