

A pragmatic analysis of linguistic manipulative statements displayed on Facebook political group page

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Abstract - This study investigates the pragmatic dimensions of linguistic manipulative statements found in Facebook political group pages, with a particular focus on the Hoatiti group. Social media platforms like Facebook have become powerful tools for political discourse, where language can be intentionally used to manipulate users' perceptions, beliefs, and actions. It examines how specific linguistic features are employed to sway opinions and promote particular ideologies within the group. Through qualitative analysis of posts and discussions on the Hoatiti group page it uses a purposive sample of n=5 statements, to identify patterns of language manipulation, misinformation, and loaded questions. The study also explores the socio-pragmatic context of these manipulative statements, examining how the interaction between the writer, the reader, and the political environment shapes the effectiveness of such discourse. This is a case study analysing how language is used strategically to manipulate Facebook users. Findings revealed that manipulation in political language, while not always overt, can occur through the use of specific pragmatic techniques including speech acts, among others. Through the lens of pragmatics, this research uncovered how these techniques were employed on Facebook and how they contributed to creating a persuasive and often manipulative environment. Findings revealed that subtle, yet powerful role of language influenced political thought on Facebook and provides insight into the broader implications of digital political communication. It is therefore, recommended that insights from such studies could inform the development of counter-narratives through public awareness campaigns to protect individuals from being emotionally manipulated.

Keywords: facebook; hoatiti; manipulation; political discourse; pragmatics

1. Introduction

The evolution of social media since the 90s when broadband became popular has allowed its users to create and utilise Facebook through, sharing of information, making new friends, and uploading content (Dhingra & Mudgal, 2019). In the past years and recently it has enabled the formation of political group formation. Therefore, the influence and manipulation of the public on Facebook has been realised since the late 2000 when Facebook gained acceptance for its services through adoption by users globally and today users have an enormous experience regarding its use (Olarinan 2018). Therefore, Sridharan and Girish (2022) postulates that Facebook usage leads to an experience of happiness, enjoyment or pleasure that creates a value of pleasure-seeking. The assumption is that Facebook can cultivate a sense of adventure, personal challenge, and accomplishment in users since it enables them to explore innovative opportunities of participating in challenging activities as well as sharing and posting content realised through speech acts. However, various documented studies prove Facebook does humiliate users in numerous ways and poses a problem in linguistic manipulation of text in different settings.

For this reason, the rise of social media platforms has drastically transformed the landscape of political communication, creating spaces where political ideologies, opinions, and propaganda are easily disseminated. Facebook, in particular, with its expansive user base and features that encourage interaction, has become a potent arena for political groups to engage with the public. However, alongside its benefits, it has also opened the door for the spread of manipulative language aimed at shaping perceptions, steering opinions, and influencing behavior. In this context, linguistic manipulation becomes a key strategy in political communication, especially in closed or semi-closed groups where members are often exposed to a singular, biased narrative. This study focuses on the political group Hoatiti, a Facebook community known for its active engagement in political discussions. The group provides a relevant case study for analysing how language is used strategically to manipulate its members. Manipulation in political language, while not always overt, can occur through the use of specific pragmatic techniques that includes presuppositions, implicatures, rhetorical questions, and speech acts, among others. These elements are not only tools for communication but also for influencing thought. Through the lens of pragmatics, this research seeks to uncover how these techniques are employed on the Hoatiti page and how they contribute to creating a persuasive and often manipulative environment.

Furthermore, the study highlights the significant impact of Facebook since its inception, particularly regarding its use in political discourse. It discusses how Facebook allows users to share content and engage with political ideologies, but also serves as a platform where linguistic manipulation and misinformation can occur. The use of language, especially indirect speech acts, plays a crucial role in manipulating followers' perceptions. The challenge arises in how language can be used to subtly influence public opinion, often without the audience being aware of the manipulation.

Hence, the use of language as a communication tool plays a crucial role in people's lives. Using language permits and makes it possible to express an idea, or feelings, share information, make an apology, and incite action (Limbong et al, 2022; Okpala et al, 2023). The main purpose of language is to convey meaning which is often a challenge because getting to understand the meaning can be difficult than anticipated. A statement can be interpreted differently from the actual intended meaning and sometimes interlocutors can have different perceptions and views of what the message intends to deliver (Leth, 2021). The misunderstanding of the message conveyed often results in misconceptions and misinterpretations that can hinder or stop the continuity of the discussion (Limbong, et.al., 2022). Language use is realised in political dialogue where statements and messages are shared between those who post political opinions and the followers who read the content shared on Facebook (Ghassemi & Hemmatgosha, 2019).

The increasing role of social media, particularly Facebook, in shaping political discourse has drawn significant academic attention in recent years. This review examines focusing on pragmatic analysis, indirect speech acts, and linguistic manipulation in online political spaces. Hence, recent studies have extensively explored the influence of social media on political opinions, particularly Facebook, which has become a platform for political manipulation and propaganda. Giglietto and Lee (2017) discuss how political pages on Facebook often serve as echo chambers, where manipulative language and fake news are proliferated to shape public opinion. Ferrucci et al (2020) further emphasize that political discussions on Facebook utilize emotional manipulation, often employing negative language to provoke strong emotional responses and steer political behavior.

Facebook's architecture allows the rapid dissemination of content, making it an ideal platform for political actors to engage in indirect manipulation. As noted by Giglietto et al (2019) political posts that

contain emotionally charged language are more likely to be shared, demonstrating that emotional manipulation plays a key role in influencing public engagement with political content. Thus, the use of indirect speech acts has emerged as a subtle but potent tool for political manipulation. In a recent study, Sarathy et al (2020) identify that political figures often rely on indirect language to obscure their true intentions. This makes it harder for readers to discern manipulative intent, allowing political actors to exploit ambiguity for personal or party gain. Additionally, Holmes and O'Loughlin (2012) categorize indirect speech acts into directives, imperatives, and interrogatives, suggesting that the interpretation of such acts depends heavily on context. This framework has been useful in recent studies like that of Rahayu et al (2018), which applies these principles to online political discourse, analysing how indirect directives manipulate followers into supporting political ideologies.

Speech Act Theory, originally formulated by Austin (1962) and later expanded by Searle (1977), remains a crucial theoretical framework for analysing linguistic manipulation. Studies have increasingly focused on the application of this theory to digital communication platforms like Facebook. Research by Rosyadi and Eriyanto has emphasized that political statements on Facebook often rely on illocutionary acts (statements with implied action), which are a key feature of manipulative language. These illocutionary acts can influence the behavior of readers by implying actions, rather than directly instructing them, making manipulation harder to detect. For this reason, the role of emotional manipulation in online political discourse has become a focal point in recent studies. Ferrucci et al (2020) assert that emotional appeals, particularly those inciting anger or fear, are effective in guiding followers toward political ideologies. Negative language, in particular, has a stronger impact on engagement and can incite actions aligned with the political goals of the speaker, according to Celliers and Hattingh (2020). These studies reveal that indirect manipulation through emotive language plays a significant role in shaping political ideologies on Facebook, particularly in group pages where users are often primed for political engagement. This is why Facebook's role in spreading misinformation and fake news has been the subject of much debate. Dwivedi et al (2021) point out that misinformation is often framed within indirect speech acts that mislead readers without overtly lying. This is supported by Zhang and Wu (2023), who demonstrate how implicature i.e., the implied meaning behind statements allows politicians to frame their narratives while avoiding direct accountability. These findings align with Emeka-Nwobia (2016), who argue that indirect manipulation is frequently used to exploit the cognitive biases of readers, making political groups on Facebook particularly susceptible to these tactics.

The literature underscores the importance of understanding indirect speech acts and their role in linguistic manipulation on social media platforms like Facebook. The use of emotional manipulation, fake news, and misinformation has intensified, with Facebook group pages becoming key sites for this kind of discourse. Speech Act Theory provides a robust framework for analysing these manipulations, highlighting how indirect language can be strategically used to influence political ideologies.

This study is premised on Speech Act Theory, originally introduced by Austin in 1962. The theory posits that language is not merely a tool for conveying information, but a mechanism through which actions are performed. Applying Speech Act Theory in the context of social media contributes to theoretical knowledge by demonstrating how traditional linguistic concepts apply to modern, digital platforms. Therefore, the study demonstrates how Austin's and Searle's theories of illocutionary acts (e.g., directives, declarations, and commissives) are employed to manipulate public perception and political discourse. Language is used not just to state facts or describe reality but to carry out social functions, such as making requests, offering promises, or giving commands. In political discourse, these linguistic functions are crucial, particularly when language is used to persuade, manipulate, or control the audience. According to Speech Act Theory, an utterance can perform multiple actions at once. Austin divides these actions into three core components that include the locutionary Acts which are basically the act of saying something as they involve the actual words or phrases used in a sentence (this is the literal meaning of the utterance). It also includes illocutionary acts which are the intended function behind the words, such as asking, commanding, or promising. It reflects what the speaker is trying to achieve with the utterance. The illocutionary force is the real action behind the statement. Lastly, it pertains the perlocutionary acts being the effect the utterance has on the listener, such as convincing, intimidating, or motivating them. This is the impact of the statement on the audience.

However, in the context of this study, illocutionary acts are central to understanding how political statements on Facebook manipulate followers. Politicians and political figures often use indirect language to achieve illocutionary goals without appearing manipulative. For example, a post may appear as a simple commentary, but it implicitly pushes an agenda, subtly influencing public opinion or encouraging specific actions. This indirect approach is particularly potent in political discourse, where the writer may disguise their intent to avoid appearing overtly controlling or manipulative. In Facebook political group pages,

manipulative speech acts are often disguised as casual comments, opinions, or discussions. Politicians and their supporters may use emotional appeals, rhetorical questions, and suggestive language to influence public opinion indirectly. By applying Austin's Speech Act Theory, this study aims to identify illocutionary acts (e.g., directives, expressives) in political posts and examine how these acts influence the audience's perceptions and actions (i.e., perlocutionary effects) by analysing the use of indirect speech acts that subtly manipulate readers without appearing overtly coercive.

The problem centres on the ambiguity of indirect speech acts in Facebook political groups, where manipulative language is difficult to identify. This lack of clarity in recognizing manipulation presents a challenge, as the emotional and negative language used can influence followers' actions without them being aware. Furthermore, there is a research gap in studying manipulative political language on Facebook, especially in the context of Lesotho.

The study aims to increase the understanding of manipulative language in political posts by analysing how indirect speech acts are used to subtly influence followers. The research questions focus on:

RQ1: "what signs of violent manipulative statements are displayed in the language used on Facebook political group pages"? This question aims to identify the linguistic features of manipulative statements that incite or suggest violence, aggression, or hostility in political discussions on Facebook.

RQ2: "what strategies of indirect speech acts are applied by politicians to entice followers toward their political ideology on Facebook"? This question seeks to uncover how politicians use indirect language techniques (such as implicatures, rhetorical questions, or emotional appeals) to subtly influence and attract followers to their political ideology.

The objective of this study is to describe the signs of indirect speech acts in manipulative political statements used on Facebook political group pages. The aim of this objective is to identify and categorize the specific features of indirect speech that appear manipulative, focusing on how language subtly influences readers. It is also to explain the strategies applied by politicians on Facebook political group pages when appealing to followers to adopt their political ideology. The intention of this objective is to analyse the methods of indirect speech acts that politicians employ to persuade followers without explicitly stating their intentions, focusing on how they manipulate language to gain support. Thus, these research questions and objectives guide the study in analysing the pragmatic and manipulative use of language within Facebook political discourse, specifically within the framework of Speech Act Theory.

While extensive research has been conducted on the influence of social media on politics, there is limited focus on the pragmatic analysis of manipulative political language, especially within Facebook group discussions. Previous studies have largely focused on direct speech and explicit manipulation. This research narrows its focus to indirect speech acts, such as implicature and rhetorical language, which are more subtle and harder to detect. It offers insight into how politicians use indirect language to manipulate discourse in ways that may go unnoticed by the public. Therefore, the study fills this gap by analysing indirect speech acts used in manipulative political statements, highlighting how language is strategically used to influence opinions without directly stating intentions. This study contributes to the existing body of research by addressing a significant gap in the pragmatic analysis of manipulative political language used on social media, particularly Facebook political group pages.

Hence, the study is geographically focused on Lesotho, where no specific research has been conducted on the pragmatic analysis of political manipulation through language on Facebook. By analysing a local political group page (Hoatiti News and Media), this research expands understanding of how political manipulation occurs in this context and can offer comparisons to global trends.

2. Method

The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on qualitative content analysis, focusing on the indirect speech acts used in political posts on the Facebook group "Hoatiti News and Media." The study uses purposive sampling, analysing five political statements for patterns of manipulative language. This structure sets a solid foundation for this study's analysis on how political groups use indirect speech acts on Facebook to subtly manipulate followers, and how this can be understood through a pragmatic lens.

In the context of this study, the sampling method focuses on purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique. This technique is used to select specific data that align with the study's objectives, particularly focusing on indirect speech acts and manipulative political language. The sample size consists of five (n=5) political statements that have been purposively selected from the Hoatiti News and Media Facebook political group. These statements are chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives, specifically in displaying signs of indirect speech acts and linguistic manipulation. Once

extracted, the statements were classified into relevant categories based on Speech Act Theory, which includes five categories of indirect speech acts: declaration, directive, assertive, expressive, and commissive. These categories were analysed to uncover hidden manipulative messages embedded in the indirect language of the statements. The classification process involved examining the pragmatics of each statement, with a particular focus on how the language was used to influence the readers’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Purposive sampling is used to select the statements to ensure that only relevant data i.e. in this case, posts containing potential indirect speech acts and manipulative elements are analysed. The purpose is not to generalize findings across all political posts on Facebook but to provide a detailed and nuanced analysis of how manipulative language is used in specific instances. The statements are selected based on the discussion on Hoatiti political Facebook page and reflects on political communication that attempts to persuade, manipulate, or influence readers.

The selected statement involve language that is not directly explicit in its message but instead uses indirect forms of communication such as implications, suggestions, or emotional appeals. The selected posts also show some form of interaction, whether it is comments or reactions, to gauge how the language might have impacted the audience. Therefore, for Data Collection, the statements are collected directly from the wall of the Hoatiti News and Media Facebook political group. Posts that are public and can be accessed without violating privacy policies are included.

The focus of analysis concentrates on the linguistic behavior of the statements, particularly analysing the presence of manipulative language, indirect speech acts for example, suggestions, implications, or subtle coercion), and how these contribute to political discourse. The aim is to uncover patterns in the use of language that aim to influence or manipulate the readers’ political beliefs or actions.

For ethical consideration, an informed consent was issued to Hoatiti Facebook group use the statements and comments from its wall to extract data for the study. Permission was granted clearly stipulating the type of information to be used and the purpose of the study. Hence permission was granted through a letter. Issues of anonymity was also clearly stipulated in the consent forms that the names and identity of the users were to be protected and the study would not mention their names but assign codes where necessary to their responses.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The findings of this study were based on the pragmatic speech acts. Therefore, it focused on the following five points of illocutionary speech acts (i) Declaratives, (ii), Representatives, (iii) Expressives, (iv) Commissives and (v) Directives.

The statement in Table 1 below is imperative as it gives an order to tell the Prime Minister that he should stop using English because he is not conversant in it. It is an illocutionary statement that is directive because it makes a request. The writer uses an indirect speech in the statement “Tell Matekane it is not called packet but budget” which is considered an inappropriate use of English language to sound very polite in rectifying the mistake picked up in his conversation, but it somehow has a hidden agenda.

Table 1 Extract No 1 Sign of indirect illocutionary act in a manipulative political statement

Statement	Loose translation
Le joetse Matekane ha e bitsoe Packet hothoe Budget, Ha ke ne ke le eena ne ke tla itihela setulong.	<i>Tell Matekane that it’s not called Packet but Budget. If I were him, I would remove myself from the Prime Minister seat.</i>

The statement "Tell Matekane it is not called packet but budget" illustrates a directive illocutionary act. Although structured as a polite request, it is a veiled criticism of the Prime Minister’s command of the English language. The request serves as an indirect attack on the leader’s competence, conveying a hidden agenda of undermining his credibility. This manipulation is subtle, as it appears to offer correction while simultaneously lowering the Prime Minister’s dignity by mocking his mistake in a public setting. It is an indirect way of passing on the message to the readers that the person using the language that they are not eloquent enough in the use of the language. It comes in the form of a request hence it is a directive. The statement is a sign of manipulation that indicate some form of deceit by degrading and lowering the Prime Minister’s dignity as the head of state.

From Table 2 below it is clear that an indirect speech sign is realised as an assertive illocutionary act because it conveys information about the writer’s state of mind. The statement can be declared as a

belief of the writer’s indirect state of mind because he/she indirectly states that if smaller parties without any constituencies overthrow the government Democratic Congress party (DC) would provide them a fair share of the government funds.

Table 2 Extract No 2 Assertive Illocutionary Indirect Manipulative Speech Act

Statement	Loose translation
DC e ts’episa mekha e menyane ekang ea bo Mapesela basenang mabatooa hore ba lihele puso ebe batla khutlisa mabatooa ane a ba khone ho fumana karolo chelateng tsa Sechaba.	<i>DC promises small parties like those of Mapesela party some constituencies to bring back the number of constituencies to 41 so that they can have a fair share of government funds.</i>

The above statement is regarded as an assertive illocutionary manipulative speech act because it is informing party members on something about to happen. Besides from informing, suggesting, or reporting on something it is also realised to be something else. In this regard, the speech act is realised as representing the situation (state of affairs) by claiming what is to be expected or what is to happen.

Table 3 Extract 3 Commissive Illocutionary Indirect Manipulative Speech Act

Statement	Loose translation
Ha feela ho lateloa Molao, puso re tlo e liela Mapolesa a eme ka li AK47 le Limarumo. Hon Mapesela.”	<i>If the government follows the rule of law, we will topple it whether police come with AK47 no matter what.</i>

The commissive illocutionary speech act has been realised in Table 3 below. The indirect speech has been understood from the point of view as a cautionary act, a threatening act and in an ambiguous manner. The phrase “if” states a form of warning that ‘if you do not do this or do not do this’ good or bad consequences shall follow. From the statement, the government is warned and threatened if they follow the rule of law, it shall be overthrown no matter what. The commissive in this regard is realised because it declares a commitment and a promise.

The following statement from Table 4 is a declaration because declarations are explicitly or implicitly stated as realised below.

Table 4 Extract 4 Declarative Illocutionary Indirect Manipulative Speech Act

Statement	Loose translation
Bohanyetsi bo ts’episa litho tsa RFP tsohle botona tse tselelang ka ho bona ka hara paramente.	<i>Opposition promises RFP members Ministerial Cabinet positions should they cross the bench to their party in parliament.</i>

The declaration in Table 4 above is structured in the form of maintaining that the opposition plans on allocating Ministerial positions should they vote for them in parliament. Declaration creates a change in something or cause for something to happen. In this instance, the statement is manipulative because it convinces the reader to act for or against the information shared depending on the side of politics, they are in. It can be seen as a provocatory statements. Declarations are often used in directive speech but also realised in indirect speech depending on what they imply as in this case.

It can be concluded that they are realised as verdictive declarations because they signal judgements made and are considered effective declaration because of the situation they bring about to the statement. The writer as realised in Table 4 uses the statement to change the situation in a way once it has been uttered. In this case, he/she states an opinion for those who want to take the ministerial positions to change the state of things by acting on the statement.

Table 5 Extract 5 Expressive Illocutionary Indirect Manipulative Speech Act

Extract No.	Statement	Loose translation
5.	<i>Ke qenehela tonakholo lentsoe le ea tetema.</i>	<i>I feel pity for the Prime Minister; his voice is shaking</i>

The expressive indirective political manipulative statements indicate the expression of the writer through his/her utterance. The feeling of pity indicates the psychological attitude of the writer toward the Prime Minister. The findings reveal the speaker's emotions and feelings about themselves regarding a situation depending on the situation which they use to communicate different things.

3.2 Discussion

The present study examined the use of manipulative language in political statements found on Facebook, focusing on how different illocutionary speech acts were used to influence and sway public opinion indirectly. The analysis highlights the subtle yet effective nature of pragmatic manipulations, which are embedded in political discourse through indirect speech acts. The findings reflect the crucial role that speech act theory, particularly J.L. Austin's work, plays in understanding how political language can be both influential and manipulative.

The study revealed that politicians and political influencers frequently use illocutionary speech acts to manipulate their audiences without directly stating their intentions. Each of the five speech act types analysed (declaratives, representatives, expressives, commissives, and directives) exhibited varying levels of manipulative intent. The declaratives were used to issue promises or rewards, subtly pushing audiences toward specific political behaviors. This aligns with earlier research which suggests that declarations often aim to change the audience's perception or actions. The representatives conveyed information that, although seemingly factual, was indirectly suggestive of a specific point of view or belief. This tactic plays a key role in the political landscape by influencing what people believe to be true without directly stating the information. Thus, expressives engaged the audience emotionally, making them feel pity or concern, often leading to emotional manipulation. Politicians and their supporters use this method to align their views with the public's emotional responses. Moreover, commissives in this context, often served as threats or warnings, designed to coerce the audience into compliance or to create fear of consequences. Also, as realised in the findings the directives, while often framed as requests or suggestions, carried hidden agendas that aimed to subtly degrade or discredit opposing figures, thus altering how readers perceive political figures.

As a result, the study shows that the indirect nature of these acts allows politicians to shield themselves from direct criticism, while still conveying their messages effectively. This supports the idea that indirectness in political language is a calculated tactic that enhances deniability and reduces accountability, a common observation in political discourse analysis and the role of Facebook in politics.

Social media platforms like Facebook provide fertile ground for these manipulative speech acts to thrive. The rapid spread of information, combined with limited regulation of indirect speech and a wide, politically diverse audience, makes it easier for political figures to disseminate manipulative messages. The interactive nature of Facebook, where users can comment, share, and react, further amplifies the impact of these manipulations by engaging more users and reinforcing certain political views within echo chambers.

The findings align with previous studies on the role of social media in shaping political opinions. As with earlier research on disinformation and fake news on social media, this study shows that indirect language manipulation plays a key role in subtly shaping public discourse, making it a powerful tool for those looking to sway opinion without direct confrontation.

One of the key findings in the study was how the politeness or seeming harmlessness of indirect speech acts allowed speakers to hide their true intentions. For example, in the directive speech act involving the Prime Minister's use of English, the speaker framed the statement as a polite correction but used it to question the leader's competence in an indirect manner. This highlights how indirectness and politeness can mask derogatory or manipulative content.

This notion resonates with earlier research in politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), where indirect speech is often used to mitigate face-threatening acts. However, the study demonstrates that in political discourse, indirectness may also serve a darker purpose: enabling speakers to attack opponents without appearing confrontational, thus manipulating their audience's perceptions.

The study also underscores the broader idea that linguistic manipulation is a key component of political strategy. Political figures use carefully crafted language not just to communicate policies or ideas but also to subtly discredit opponents, enhance their own image, and influence public opinion. This aligns with the understanding of rhetoric in politics, where language is used as a weapon to win support, not necessarily by presenting facts, but by shaping perceptions.

The study adds to the growing body of literature that explores how indirect and manipulative language forms part of a deliberate political communication strategy aimed at controlling narratives on social media. Politicians use speech acts that require the audience to interpret hidden meanings, fostering environments where doubt, suspicion, and emotional responses are used to dominate discourse.

These findings have important implications for understanding political communication in the digital age. With the rise of social media, the ability of politicians to manipulate language indirectly and reach large audiences has grown exponentially. This raises concerns about transparency in political discourse, as indirect speech acts can conceal motives and intentions, making it difficult for the public to discern the true message. Understanding these tactics is crucial for voters, media outlets, and political analysts who must navigate a landscape where indirect manipulation can be used to skew perceptions of political figures and policies.

Through the application of the Speech Act Theory on manipulative statements, the study enhances deeper understanding of how indirect language functions in real-world political contexts. It also underscores the importance of pragmatics in political discourse analysis, demonstrating that manipulation often occurs at the level of implied meaning rather than overt language. This insight is valuable for linguists, discourse analysts, and communication scholars interested in the intersection between language, power, and influence. This study highlights the importance of critical media literacy, where audiences need to be trained to recognize and decode manipulative speech acts. Future political communication strategies will likely continue to evolve to become more indirect, subtle, and manipulative, making the need for pragmatic awareness all the more essential.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates how illocutionary speech acts, particularly when used indirectly, serve as powerful tools of manipulation in political discourse on Facebook. By analysing political statements through the lens of speech act theory, the study shows that political figures use subtle linguistic cues to manipulate public opinion while maintaining a façade of politeness or neutrality. The indirect nature of these speech acts allows for greater flexibility in conveying messages without being overtly aggressive, thereby manipulating audiences in subtle but effective ways. This research further explores how emotional and violent manipulation is encoded in language, answering calls for more studies on how negative language (e.g., fear, anger, or resentment) is used to influence behavior in social media. It also addresses how manipulative language can incite violence or hostility, which is a growing concern in the study of political communication online. By examining indirect speech acts on a political Facebook group, this research broadens understanding of online political discourse and the ways in which politicians and influencers manipulate language to garner support. The study's focused on subtle, indirect manipulations reveals hidden layers of influence that go beyond traditional forms of political propaganda. Therefore, the findings reinforce the need for further research into how manipulative speech acts shape political discourse, particularly in online spaces where political communication is becoming increasingly opaque and indirect.

Limitations

The study is limited to analysing political statements and comments on the Hoatiti Facebook page, which may not represent the broader landscape of social media political discourse. Findings might not be generalizable to other platforms or types of political content. The interpretation of linguistic mistakes and relevance violations may also vary depending on cultural, political, and social contexts. Since the study focuses on a single page, it may not account for broader contextual factors that influence language use in different regions or among different audiences. Assessing language for relevance violations and manipulative intent involves subjective interpretation, which may lead to bias. Even with systematic criteria, nuances in language and sarcasm, humour, or cultural idioms may affect interpretation. Since social media language evolves rapidly, with new expressions, slang, and trends emerging frequently, linguistic mistakes observed in this study might change over time, potentially limiting the study's long-term applicability. Lastly, the study focused on only Grice's Relevance Maxim to form part of a broader framework for understanding conversation principles. Focusing solely on relevance violations may overlook other important aspects, such as the Maxims of Quality, Quantity, and Manner, which could provide additional insights into manipulative language tactics.

Recommendations

Policymakers should consider the impact of indirect manipulation when drafting regulations for political speech on social media platforms. Clear guidelines that address the use of manipulative tactics in political campaigns could help ensure that public discourse remains transparent and accountable. Governments, in partnership with tech companies, should develop frameworks to mitigate the spread of manipulative content while safeguarding free speech. The study found that expressive speech acts, which evoke emotions such as pity or fear, play a significant role in political manipulation. Future research could focus on emotional manipulation in political discourse, examining how emotional appeals (whether direct or indirect) are used to manipulate public sentiment. Insights from such studies could inform the

development of counter-narratives or public awareness campaigns that protect individuals from being emotionally manipulated.

It is therefore suggested that in order to mitigate the negative effects of such manipulation, future research and practical interventions should focus on raising awareness, improving educational efforts, and developing technological solutions that can identify and address the use of indirect manipulative speech acts.

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