MANAGING RAPPORT ON SOCIAL MEDIA: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RAPPORT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE RAPPORT THREATENING BEHAVIORS IN SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the rapport management strategies to mitigate rapport threatening behaviors in social media interactions and to find out the effectiveness of the strategies. The social media platform from which the data was obtained is Facebook. There are a number of rapport threatening behaviors on the social media platform which are insult, criticism, cynicism, mockery, profanity, accusation, challenge, and blasphemy. These acts and expressions are considered to be threats to rapport since they can cause verbal conflicts and dispute in the interactions. This study found that these threats can be mitigated by rapport management strategies which comprise of five types of domains. This study, however, only found three domains of strategies and one newly found strategy in social media context. Most of the strategies are evidently effective to mitigate the rapport threats and consequently maintain the harmonious situation of the social media interactions.

Keywords: rapport threatening behaviors, verbal conflicts, rapport management strategies.

A. Introduction

Technology has been significantly advanced and developed and this advancement and development has also significantly improved the way people live their lives. People are now making use of technological tools or devices to support their daily activities, from complicated works such as automobile or car assembly in car factories that use robots to assemble parts of cars which are produced in the factories, to daily social activities such as holding a meeting, inviting colleagues to an event, or simply chit-chatting with friends. Technology has made its impact on nearly all the dimensions of life including ways of communication (Sheoran, 2012). With the advent of technology, the internet provides people with a new platform where individual have access to communication with each other easier and faster (Gu, 2022). One of the ways of communication that is resulted from technological

advancement is social media. Social media have been widely used by people globally and they have become inseparable part of people's daily life (Marsuki et al, 2023).

Many people spend hours each day to be actively involved on their social media platforms. Social media, however, have both positive and negative impacts. The positive impacts include allowing people to stay connected with friends and family, providing educational and business opportunities, creating awareness about issues, and providing entertainment and stress relief (Jose, 2023). The negative impacts on the other hand are harmful speech, cyberbullying, toxic behaviors, addiction, and the spread of hoaxes and disinformation. This study examined the rapport threatening behaviors and the harmful speech that can be found in social media interactions and how Rapport Management (Spencer-Oatey, 2003) can mitigate the threats caused by such behaviors

This study introduces a novel approach by integrating Rapport Management into the analysis of social media interactions, a topic that has not been extensively explored before. According to Zhang and Leidner (2020), although numerous studies have examined the positive and negative impacts of social media, there is a scarcity of research on how Rapport Management approaches can be utilized to mitigate threats to interpersonal relationships caused by harmful interactions on social media. This study provides a new perspective on understanding how specific strategies in Rapport Management can be applied to reduce threats arising from harmful speech and negative behaviors on social media platforms, thereby creating a safer and more constructive online environment.

B. Research methods

The descriptive qualitative method and exploratory study were used as the research methods of this study. The descriptive qualitative method was used to obtain firsthand data from the participants on how they reacted to rapport threatening behaviors in social media interactions and what strategies they used to mitigate such behaviors. Meanwhile, the exploratory study was useful for this study because exploratory study is a method that is used to analyze events, find new concepts and the development in a new context (Robson and McCartan, 2016).

Research on verbal conflicts in social media interactions is relatively new, therefore, the researchers used this particular method for this study.

The data for this study were taken from twenty interactions on Facebook posts. The selected posts were the ones with a number of comments which were made by social media users to respond to the posts. The data were taken from social media interactions in Bahasa Indonesia and English with a few comments in other languages such as French, Czech, and Croatian to cover various types of interactions and to obtain data from more than one language.

Observational Data

The twenty interactions were observed to find out the rapport threatening behaviors showcased by the social media users in their interactions on the social media platform (Facebook). The rapport threatening behaviors were determined by observing whether the behaviors were offending or caused other users to feel offended. The behaviors were then classified based on their speech act type. Having determined the type of the rapport threatening behaviors, the researchers tried to find out the strategies applied by the social media users to mitigate the threats to harmonize the interactions. There are five strategies that were attempted by social media users to create or maintain the harmony of the interactions.

Interview.

Interview is a qualitative research instrument that relies on asking questions in order to collect data. For this study, some active social media users were interviewed in order to obtain their perception on the rapport threatening behaviors that may happen in social media interactions and how they reacted to such behaviors to see the effects on their interpersonal rapport, as well as to see what strategies they would apply to mitigate the threats.

The analysis in this study utilized both observational data and interviews to comprehensively understand rapport-threatening behaviors and the strategies employed to mitigate them. The observational data were meticulously gathered from twenty interactions on Facebook posts, focusing on comments made by users in response to these posts. The researchers identified and categorized rapport-threatening behaviors by observing whether these behaviors were offensive or caused offense to other users. These behaviors were then classified based on their

speech act type. By identifying the types of rapport-threatening behaviors, the researchers could analyze the strategies employed by users to mitigate these threats and maintain harmonious interactions.

In addition to the observational data, interviews with active social media users provided deeper insights into their perceptions of rapport-threatening behaviors and their reactions to such interactions. These interviews were instrumental in understanding the personal strategies users employ to manage and mitigate threats to their interpersonal rapport on social media. By combining these methods, the researchers were able to draw a comprehensive picture of how rapport management strategies are applied in the dynamic and often volatile environment of social media interactions. This dual-method approach allowed for a robust analysis of both the observable behaviors and the subjective experiences of social media users, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of interpersonal dynamics in online interactions.

C. Research Results and Discussion

1. Research Results

From the twenty interactions from Facebook, there are several rapport threats that are expressed in eight types of expressions which are insult, mockery, cynicism, profanity, criticism, accusation, challenge, and blasphemy. The following table shows the threat types and how many times they are found in the social media interactions.

Table 1. Types of Rapport-threatening Behaviors

Types of Threats	Interaction Number	Total Occurrence
Insult	Fb 03, Fb 06, Fb 07, Fb 08, Fb 10, Fb 14, Fb 17, Fb 18, Fb 20.	48 occurrences
Criticism	Fb 04, Fb 05, Fb 08, Fb 09, Fb 16, Fb 17, Fb 18, Fb 20.	42 occurrences
Cynicism	Fb 04, Fb 08, Fb 12, Fb 13, Fb 15, Fb 19, Fb 20.	35 occurrences

Mockery	Fb 06, Fb 07, Fb 12, Fb 13, Fb 17, Fb 20.	23 occurrences
Profanity	Fb 02, Fb 09, Fb 10, Fb 13, Fb 20.	18 occurrences
Accusation	Fb 02, Fb 10, Fb 14	7 occurrences
Challenge	Fb 10, Fb 14	5 occurrences
Blasphemy	Fb 20	4 occurrences

The table shows that insult is the most expressed threat to rapport in Facebook interaction with nine interactions where it is found. From the nine interactions, a total of forty-eight occurrences of insult is also found. As the name suggests, insult is very rapport-threatening because it is considered as a conspicuous lack of politeness or civility, a lack of respect for another's dignity, a lack of appropriate consideration or concern, in other words a lack of due regard (Daly, 2018). Thus, it can be concluded that insult is offending and rapport-threatening because it is humiliating and offensive. The following excerpt of interaction taken from Facebook interaction number eighteen or Fb 18 shows how threatening an insult is because it causes other social media user, to which the insult is addressed, to reply with similar responses. This causes the interaction to be very offensive since the participants of the interaction are insulting one another.

Excerpt #1

TS   : I really want Volk to win, but he has to pass Islam's strength in wrestling.
U1   : @TS just my opinion, but I think it's going to be near impossible to submit Volk.
TS   : @U1 fingers crossed!!!!
U2   : @TS we don't cross fingers, we raise one ☝, inshallah Islam will win.
TS   : @U2 raise it up yo ass boi. You Islam/Khabib fans are annoying.
U2   : @TS in sha allah means if god wills, u muppet. I know you still mad, casual.
TS   : @U2 so pointing your finger upwards, and saying gods will is the same thing moron, so if it's god will for Islam to win?? Hear yourself, dung beetle. You didn't need to comment here, me and the guy were just commenting our favorite. You are a nut hugger, bye. Go pray to allah and pray for Islams victory in Shallah douche bag.
     The underlined words are the insults made by the two social media users, the Thread Starter (TS) and User 2 (U2). TS interacts with U1 (User 1) about the

upcoming fight of their favorite fighter vs another fighter who is favored by U2 (User 2) who comes and comments by expressing his religious faith. User 2 may want to try to establish a good rapport with both TS and U1. However, instead of creating a harmonious atmosphere in the interaction, his comment triggers the TS to respond negatively with an insult to him. Consequently, U2 then replies with other insults addressed to TS. This situation proves that insult is a serious threat to the harmony of an interaction since it attacks others' interpersonal rapport, and it makes the interaction to be offending and irritating.

Similar to insult but with much fewer occurrences, blasphemy is another threat to rapport in social media interaction. Blasphemy is defined as an expression of opinions mocking God's powers, or individuals seeking to take such powers for themselves (Nash, 2013). This expression has the potential to be a serious threat to rapport since it can be very sensitive to religious people if their God, faith, or religion is being mocked by other people who have different perspective.

The following excerpt shows how a blasphemy threatens people's interpersonal rapport in a social media interaction. The interaction is taken from Facebook interaction number twenty or Fb 20.

Excerpt #2

TS: The champion has a name and his name is not Charles Oliveira 😂 😂 😂 😂 😂
U1: @U? wkwkwkwkwk you lol Islam is the best
U2: @U? that tap was sooooo conor. 😂
U3: @TS Cult of stonekissers has emerged from their caves 😂 😂 😂 ☕ 🗡 🩹
TS: @U3 The champion has a name and his name is not Charles Oliveira 😂 😂 😂 😂 😂
U3: @TS Muhammad is Allah 😂 😂 😂 😂 😂 😂 😂 😂 😂
U6: @U3 yeah get a shirt at least for a beggars you worship fuckin cunt
U7: @TS true
U8: @U3 that kisser just kick cross worshipper ass

The blasphemies are started by User 3 to respond the sarcasm expressed by the thread starter in his comment. User 3 who is a fan of a certain mma fighter responds to this sarcasm by verbally attacking the religion of the fighter who just beat the fighter that he favoured. These verbal attacks are then responded by similar blasphemies expressed by user 6 and user 8 who also verbally attack user 3's religion, thus, creating a very rapport-threatening situation among the users who are

engaged in the interaction. This interaction also proves that a severe rapport threat like a blasphemy tends to be responded with the similar rapport threat which in turn results in a disharmonious situation of the interaction.

Managing rapport to harmonize rapport-threatening situations as what are shown from the two interactions is crucial to create a well and harmoniously conducted social interaction. Spencer-Oatey's work on Rapport Management has included some rapport management strategies that interlocutors may apply to maintain each other's face. The strategies are divided into five different domains which are illocutionary domain strategies, discourse domain strategies, participation domain strategies, stylistic domain strategies, and non-verbal domain strategies.

The strategies however are applicable to a direct interaction or face-to-face interaction. For the virtual interaction like social media interaction, there are certainly differences from its direct counterparts. The strategies that were found in this study may belong to several domain strategies, except the participation domain strategies since they involve the strategies such as turn-takings, pauses, and overlaps which are not clearly indicated in social media interactions that only have typed or written comments in the interactions. Another benefit of having virtual interaction as the data of the study is the discovery of new strategies that do not belong to the five domain strategies. The researchers named the new strategies as preventive and excessive strategies. They are called preventive and excessive strategies since one of the strategies was applied by a social media user to prevent further dispute in the interaction and the other strategy is excessive because the admin of the social media page had to resort to take excessive action to avoid further quarrel in the interaction.

The following table shows the name of the strategies and the number of the interactions where they are found.

Table 2. Strategies to Mitigate the Rapport-threatening Behaviors

Type of Domain	Name of Strategies	Interaction Number
Illocutionary domain	1. Gratitudes	Fb 01, Fb 05, Fb 15.
	2. Advises/suggestions	Fb 03, Fb 07, Fb 09.
	3.Supplying information/clarifying	Fb 02, Fb 05, Fb 06.

	4. Apologies	Fb 05
	5. Wishes	Fb 13
	6. Expressing sympathy	Fb 14
Non-verbal domain	1. Emoji use (folded hands)	Fb 01, Fb 03, Fb 04, Fb 05, Fb 06,
	2. Emoji use (thumbs up)	Fb 05
	3. Emoji use (heart emoji)	Fb 14
Discourse domain	1. Organization of information	-
	2. Topic management	-
Stylistic domain	1. Choice of appropriate lexis and syntax	Fb 17, Fb 19,
	2. Choice of tone	-
	3. The use of honorifics	Fb 05
Preventive and Excessive Strategies	1. Deleting comment	Fb 16
	2. Blocking the offending user	Fb 18

2. Discussion

Several studies have explored the dynamics of rapport management and conflict resolution in online interactions, providing relevant insights for this study. For instance, Bouvier (2020) examined how politeness strategies can mitigate conflicts on social media platforms and found that positive politeness strategies, such as expressing gratitude or sympathy, can effectively reduce the intensity of online disputes. Similarly, Herring et al. (2015) explored the role of face-work in maintaining harmony in online discussions, emphasizing the importance of strategic communication to manage interpersonal relationships.

In addition, Derks, Fischer, and Bos (2008) analyzed the impact of emoticons and emojis in computer-mediated communication, highlighting their role in conveying emotions and mitigating misunderstandings. Their findings suggest that the use of non-verbal cues, such as emojis, can complement verbal strategies to enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution in online interactions. This aligns with the current study's observation that combining verbal and non-verbal strategies,

such as expressing sympathy and using heart emojis, can effectively mitigate rapport-threatening behaviors.

Furthermore, research by Walther (2011) on social information processing theory suggests that users adapt their communication strategies to the limitations of online platforms, often developing unique methods to manage interpersonal dynamics. This theory supports the notion that social media users can develop and apply specific strategies to maintain harmony and mitigate conflicts, as demonstrated in the current study.

These studies collectively reinforce the importance of strategic communication in managing rapport and resolving conflicts in social media interactions, providing a strong theoretical foundation for the analysis presented in this research.

Analytical Explanation

The analysis in this study utilized both observational data and interviews to comprehensively understand rapport-threatening behaviors and the strategies employed to mitigate them. The observational data were meticulously gathered from twenty interactions on Facebook posts, focusing on comments made by users in response to these posts. The researchers identified and categorized rapport-threatening behaviors by observing whether these behaviors were offensive or caused offense to other users. These behaviors were then classified based on their speech act type. By identifying the types of rapport-threatening behaviors, the researchers could analyze the strategies employed by users to mitigate these threats and maintain harmonious interactions.

In addition to the observational data, interviews with active social media users provided deeper insights into their perceptions of rapport-threatening behaviors and their reactions to such interactions. These interviews were instrumental in understanding the personal strategies users employ to manage and mitigate threats to their interpersonal rapport on social media. By combining these methods, the researchers were able to draw a comprehensive picture of how rapport management strategies are applied in the dynamic and often volatile environment of social media interactions. This dual-method approach allowed for a robust analysis of both the observable behaviors and the subjective experiences of social

media users, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of interpersonal dynamics in online interactions.

These strategies can be either effective or ineffective in mitigating the rapport-threatening behaviors in Facebook interactions. The effectiveness of the strategies is measured by applying two conditions. The first and the primary condition is when a strategy successfully ends a verbal conflict between or among participants of an interaction. The secondary condition is when social media users who are involved in an interaction give their approval to the strategy by giving their likes to the strategy or when they verbally approve the strategy.

The following excerpt shows how a strategy successfully mitigates a rapport-threatening situation in certain social media interactions. The interactions are taken from Fb 01 and Fb 15.

Excerpt #3

Fb 01
- U1: so what? What did u get for being infamous? Being hated makes u feel better? I feel pity for u
- TS: THANKS 🙏
Fb 15
- U3: TS semoga kamu juga dapat hidayah 😊
  "May Allah also give you His blessings and mercy 😊*."*
- TS: U3 Aamiin. trimakasih. Udah didoakan 🙏
  "Aamiin. Thank you for the wish 🙏*."*

The participants in these interactions criticize and sarcastically condemn the thread starters (TS) of each interaction. However, both thread starters respond similarly to the criticism and condemnation by expressing their gratitude. It shows that despite the rapport-threatening remarks made by other users who personally attack both thread starters' interpersonal rapport, the thread starters intentionally try to mitigate the rapport-threatening behaviors to harmonize the situation of the interaction. This expression of gratitude is the strategy applied by the two thread starters of Fb 01 and Fb 15 to mitigate the rapport-threatening situation in the interaction. The effectiveness of this strategy can be subjectively assessed, but since there are no more replies or responses from the offending parties in both interactions, this strategy can be considered effective in mitigating the rapport threats in the interaction.

Expression of gratitude is one of the illocutionary domain strategies found in this study. Most of the other illocutionary domain strategies and other strategies are also effective in mitigating the rapport-threatening situation in the twenty sampled Facebook interactions.

The following excerpt also shows how two combined strategies that belong to the illocutionary domain strategy (expressing sympathy) and non-verbal domain strategy (emoji use) mitigate a rapport-threatening situation caused by an insult in a certain interaction. The interaction is taken from Fb 14.

Excerpt 4

- U4: U2 zato ceto mi dad vremene tvojoj zeni, smradovi jedni, zbog vas ljudi ne igraju vise, fuj odvratni ste (That's why we will give our time to your wife, you stinkers, because of you people don't play anymore, yuck, you are disgusting.)
- U2: U4 love you bro 🫶

This expression belongs to the expressive type of speech act and is only found in one interaction on Facebook (Fb 14). It is clearly seen in the excerpt that user 4 insults user 2 in Croatian. When translated, the insult is quite rude as user 4 says that user 2 is a stinker, disgusting, and even brings user 2's wife into the insult. User 2 does not respond to the insult angrily but instead expresses his sympathy by saying 'love you, bro' and gives a heart emoji as his strategy to avoid further dispute. These strategies are effective because user 4 does not give any more negative response to user 2 and gives a like to the comment, indicating that the strategies successfully end the verbal conflict between the two users.

From these two excerpts taken from three interactions, we can see that the strategies are considerably effective in mitigating rapport threats in social media interactions because they can stop the verbal conflicts or disputes in the interactions. In other words, the harmony (rapport) of the interactions can be positively constructed when these strategies are applied to mitigate any kinds of acts or expressions that have the potential to threaten rapport.

D. Conclusion

It is becoming evident from this study that rapport threatening behaviors in social media interactions can lead to quarrels and disputes. The finding has confirmed that there are eight types of rapport threatening behaviors from sampled

Facebook interactions. These rapport threatening behaviors evidently disrupt the harmonious situation of social media interactions, hence, some strategies to mitigate the threats are needed to harmonize the interactions. Social media users mostly express their strategies by applying the illocutionary domain or speech act strategies to mitigate the rapport threats in their social media interactions. There are other domains of strategies that are found but with fewer occurrences than the illocutionary domain strategies. Most of the rapport threatening behaviors that cause verbal conflicts in the interactions are successfully mitigated by these strategies. The effectiveness of some strategies is immeasurable since there are certain occasions where the strategies are ignored by the social media users who are arguing or having some verbal conflicts in the interactions.

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