

# **(Im)Politeness and (In)Civility in Social Media: The Case of Pronouns and Propositions in Twitter Comments**

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**Abstract:** While social media provides “a public sphere”, a term coined by Habermas, which can foster public participation leading towards democracy, this also comes with issues of (im)politeness and (in)civility reflected in the use of language. This study explores issues of (im)politeness and (in)civility in digital communication through the analysis of pronouns and propositions in twitter comments posted by netizens in an official site of Jokowi’s twitter account (@jokowi). 138 data were randomly collected from netizens’ twitter comments responding to three Jokowi’s twitter posts stating his actions towards students’ demonstration posted on September 26, 2019. This study also used 106 responses from a questionnaire. Content analysis was used as the method of the study. To analyze the utterances in the comments, theory of impoliteness by Culpeper and theory of incivility by Papacharissi were used. The findings of this study revealed that some pronouns indicate inappropriate identity markers and some propositions used sarcasm or mock politeness based on the cotext and context of the use. In addition, the analysis of propositions showed some degree of incivility as they reflect an attack towards the positive face of President Jokowi as seen from their denying, and distrust towards President Jokowi’s efforts. Thus, in spite of the fact that some impolite use of pronouns and propositions indicate public participations as in Lyotard’s “democratic participation”, this should be also accompanied by rational discussions in order to create a democratic society.

**Keywords:** *(im)politeness, (in)civility, pronouns, propositions, social media, democracy*

## **Introduction**

Indonesia is reported as one of the countries who has the highest social media users. As reported in a local newspaper Liputan6.com, there were three social media that are mostly used namely Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. For the Facebook users, Indonesia is in the third rank among other countries with 140 million users. For the users of Instagram with 56 million users, Indonesia is in the fourth rank. Finally, although the number is not as many as those who use the other social media platforms, for the Twitter users, Indonesia is in the twelfth rank with the number of users 6.6 million (Kurnia, 2018). Some of these users may not only use one digital platform but they can also use three or two of them at the same time. They use social media for variety of purposes but mainly this social media has helped them to interact with others both for interactional and transactional purposes. Culpeper & Hardaker (2017) stated that Facebook for example was initially used for interactional purposes or relation-oriented, but nowadays this has shifted into transactional (task-oriented), which users can also use for business purposes.

This social media has provided various platforms which has brought some changes in the way people interact. Through the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram it is now easy to reach others. This social media has enabled people not only to communicate with ease regardless time and space, but also social status. Without having to go through some painstaking procedures, it is easy for common people or citizens to interact and inform authorities, like governors, ministers, or event president through their social media accounts on matters that concern public interest or to share ideas and participate in discussions. This social media provides what Habermas (1991) called “public sphere” in which people can rationally contribute their own take on public issues. Their contribution may influence the authorities’

decisions in order to meet the public interest. In the same light, Chen (2017) argues that social media provides a digital sphere that has a potential for public deliberation. In spite of the fact that this social media interaction can enhance public participation, Habermas' vision of rational interactions may not always be the case as the identity in internet or digital communication is fluid and status markers are not clearly defined (Poster, 1997). In addition to its function to facilitate the public participation, digital communication such as social media, according to Graham & Hardaker (2017), provides the ease of identity construction because in digital communication, the internet users have more control on how they present themselves in their interaction. They further explain that social media are equipped by tools, such as "like" and "block", that reflect how the users of social media evaluate the comments or other internet users' behavior. This has an implication for other researchers to investigate how this digital communication operate in various areas. Saifullah (2016) at the end of his discussion in his research on semiotic analysis on the users of Twitter comments on the Issues of Terrorism on the Internet in the Wave of Democratization of Post-Reform Indonesia suggested further investigation on verbal signs found in the readers' responses in relation to politeness strategies.

Studies on impoliteness and incivility in online communication have attracted some researchers by looking at those topics from various lenses. These areas are mostly researched in different fields, impoliteness studies are mostly conducted in the study of language, meanwhile studies on incivility are mostly done in communication or sociology (Sifianou, 2019). Unlike studies on politeness, studies on impoliteness has not gotten much interest from researchers until recently. This partly due to impoliteness research is not conducted independently, instead impoliteness is treated as "the absent of politeness" (Eelen, 2001). Nevertheless, Graham & Hardaker (2017) argue that the flood of digital media has caused more interactions are facilitated through this media and the expectations of what considered polite and impolite in those contexts may be shifted. Therefore, studies on politeness and impoliteness are still relevant to this day.

Some research on impoliteness tries to address the theoretical issue, others try to find an empirical implementation of this impoliteness theory. Kienpointner (2008) claims that impoliteness is related to emotional embedded arguments that can stimulate people to create impolite utterances. Graham & Hardaker (2017) discuss the relation between the relationship of emotion, intention as well as context in (im)politeness. Bousfield (2008) emphasized intention face threatening act on the part of the speaker in determining impoliteness. This idea was then criticized by Culpeper (2011) whose study proved otherwise, that is some acts can be considered impolite although the speakers did not have any intention to do so. Therefore, intention is not a prominent determining factor in impoliteness. Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2011) has developed theories on impoliteness from theories of politeness by Brown & Levinson (1983). He states that while politeness is intended to save face, impolite utterances are targeted to attack face whether intentionally or not. He developed similar classifications of impoliteness while adding other classifications beside bald on record impoliteness, positive and negative politeness such as including sarcasm or mock politeness.

Similar to the study of impoliteness, some studies on incivility have also been conducted by researchers. Some studies on incivility focus on the contextual factor, Rowe (2014) investigate whether being anonymous is a contributing factor that makes people write civil or uncivil comments by comparing comments in newspaper websites and those in newspaper Facebooks. Coe et al (2014) examined whether key contextual factors such as the topic of articles and article sources stimulated uncivil comments. Other researchers also conducted studies on incivility by looking at other factors such as the effects of uncivil statements on readers and by

acknowledging the problematic universality of incivility (Luck and Nardi, 2019). Brooks & Geer (2007) highlight the term of incivility with “inflammatory comments” which has nothing or little to do with substance of the discussion. On the other hand, Chen et al (2019) concluded in their study that it is difficult or even impossible to abandon incivility and encourage research on incivility while being aware of its inherent theoretical description of incivility.

Papacharissi (2004) argued that the two areas are separate stating that “profanity and name-calling are merely impolite, while more virulent speech – such as threats against democracy or stereotyping – are uncivil”. However, both are related as they both are an attack towards someone’s face. Similarly, Sifianou (2019) acknowledges the conceptual relationship between (im)politeness and (in)civility and further explains that the research combining these two areas have been neglected. This research tries to bring the two topics together to analyze the use of Indonesian personal pronouns and propositions in social media in order to find out the impoliteness and incivility in social media. Personal pronouns in Indonesian language is closely related to culture and manners. Alwi et.all (1998) mentioned three parameters which can be used to determine the use of those personal pronouns, namely age, social status, and closeness of the relationship among the participants in the interaction. For example, personal pronouns Bapak/Ibu is more appropriate than *Anda* or *Saudara* as the terms of address when the speaker speak to someone who has higher status.

## **Research Questions**

Based on the previous explanation, social media facilitates a public sphere for public deliberation on various issues including the ones related to public matters regardless time, space and even social status. In addition, being anonymous users of social media, they arguably may post comments which can be considered uncivil and (or) impolite. However, this may also reflect the public deliberation and identity negotiation. By analyzing the use of personal pronouns and proposition the netizens’ use in President Jokowi official twitter account. This study will investigate how do social media facilitate public deliberation and identity negotiation? In order to answer this research problems, this research will mainly focus on answering the main research questions: How are impoliteness and incivility reflected in the use of personal pronouns and propositions in the netizens’ twitter comments? This research questions are further divided into:

- 1) What personal pronouns did the netizens’ use in President’s Jokowi twitter account?
- 2) What propositions did the netizens’ convey in their twitter comments?
- 3) What types of (im)politeness and (in)civility are reflected in the netizens’ use of personal pronouns and propositions?

## **Methodology**

This study employs a content analysis method. The source of the data is an official twitter account of President Jokowi (@Jokowi) and the data was pronouns and propositions taken from netizen comments responding to statements posted @Jokowi dated on 26 September 2019. Since these statements were posted @Jokowi, these statements represented President Jokowi’s attitude towards demonstrations initiated by students which have caused some casualties on the part of students and police officers. These posted statements were directed both to the authorities to respond persuasively and avoid being repressive in handling students’ demonstrations, and to the students to conduct the demonstration peacefully and that he is willing to meet the students personally to listen directly the students’ aspirations. These posts

were then responded by netizens. To collect the data of the netizens' twitter comments as reactions to the president's posts, this research used a software called Scrapestorm. Of the 197 netizen comments which were randomly collected, 138 data could be further analyzed because the rest comments were pictures or comments which are not relevant.

In addition to the netizens' twitter comments, this study uses a questionnaire to elicit opinions on the use of pronouns and propositions in netizens' twitter comments. This questionnaire was randomly distributed on 18 – 21 October 2019 through social media WhatsApp. The questionnaire is divided into two parts, two types of closed questions require respondents to evaluate the use of pronouns and propositions in the netizen twitter comments in terms of (im)politeness. To analyze the data, the results of 106 responses to the questionnaire were then calculated and then classified based on theories of impoliteness by Culpeper (1996) and theories of incivility by Papacharissi (2004).

## Results

This section describes the result of the study and the discussions of the results. The first two parts describe the results of the use of pronouns and propositions, both from the analysis of pronouns and propositions in the netizens' twitter comments and the results of questionnaires. Then, on the second part, these results are further explored in relation to impoliteness and incivility in social media.

### *The use of personal pronouns*

In the netizen twitter comments, the use of pronouns directed to President Jokowi is various. The netizens did not only use pronouns *Bapak Presiden* (Mr. President) or *Bapak* (Sir) as the most neutral and appropriate terms of address or pronouns to someone who has the highest status since president is considered as the most important person and has the highest position in the country. Instead, they also use other pronouns such as *Komandan* (Commandant), a term of address which is directed to someone who is in charge in a military organization other forms of pronouns such as *Kamu*, *Anda*, *Lu* (You), *Tuan* (Mister), *Pakde* (uncle). The last five pronouns, however, are not commonly used by people in general in the context of public face-to-face communication with the president.

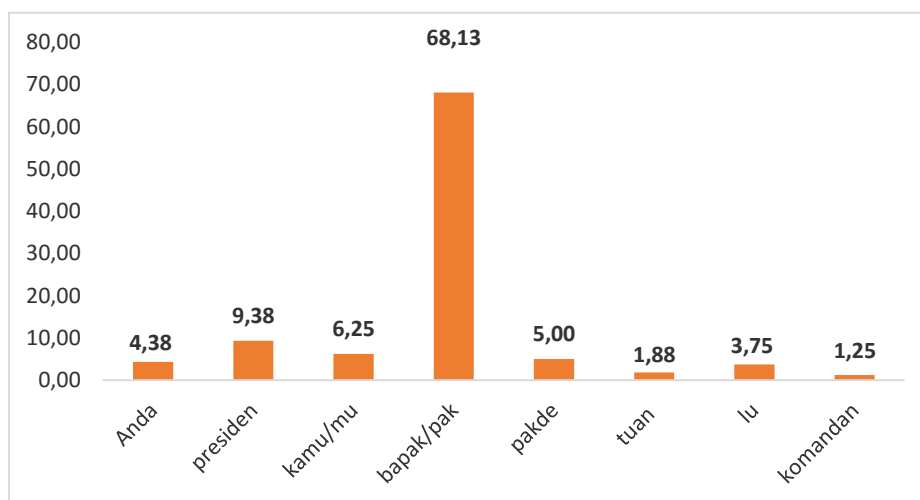
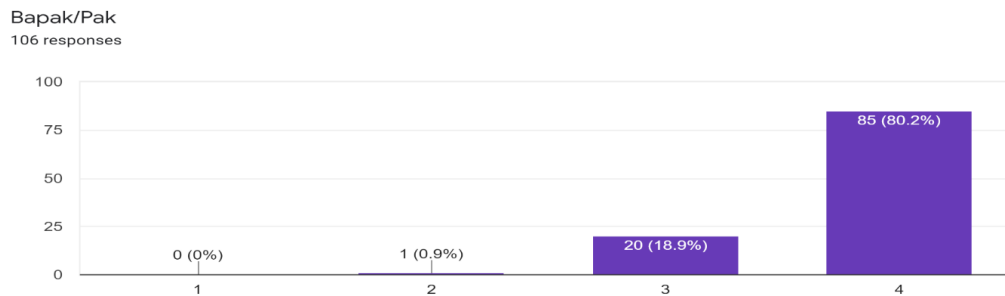


Figure 1. The variety use of personal pronouns in the netizen's comments

Based on figure 1, the personal pronouns the netizens mostly used in addressing president Jokowi to respond to the president Jokowi’s posts was *bapak/pak*, with the percentage of 68.3%, the second one is *presiden* with the percentage of 9.38%. In addition to the use of those two personal pronouns, the netizens also used *kamu* (6,25%), *Anda* (4,38%), *pakde* (5%), *lu* (3,75%), and two others with similar percentage, *komandan* (1,25%) and *tuan* (1,88%).

**The (im) polite use of personal pronouns**

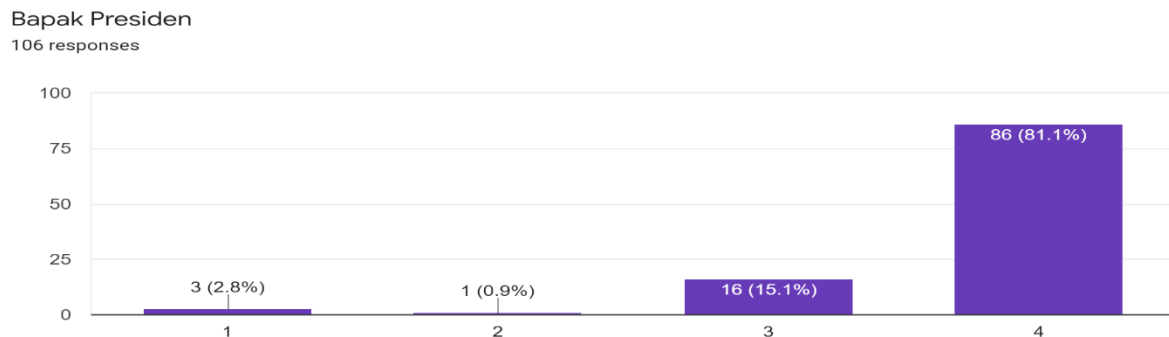
To find out the norm of using personal pronouns in this digital context that is in the context of netizens’ participation as a reaction towards the president’s twitter post, 105 responses were collected and analyzed. Those pronouns drew different responses from 105 respondents. The results of the questionnaire in which respondents have to choose one from scale 1 to 4 which means impolite to polite showed that the use of pronouns *Bapak Presiden* and *Bapak/Pak* tend to be considered polite by respondents (figure 2 dan 3).



Scale: 1(impolite) – 4(polite)

**Figure 2.** The respondents’ opinions on the use of personal pronoun *Bapak/Pak*

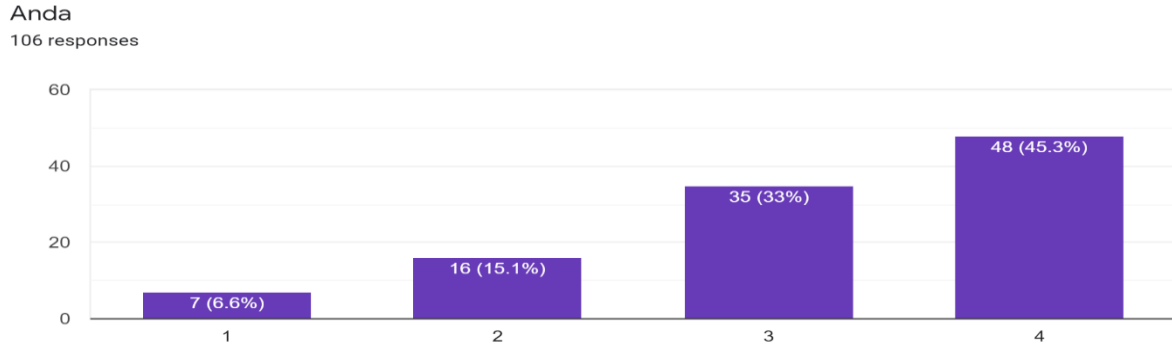
Figure 2 shows the respondents evaluation on the use of personal pronouns of *Bapak/Pak* in addressing the president. The highest number of respondents (80,2%) considered that addressing the president with personal pronouns *Bapak/Pak* is polite, only 18,9% of the respondents thought that personal pronouns was rather polite. None of the respondents considered that the use of this personal pronoun is impolite.



Scale: 1(impolite) – 4(polite)

**Figure 3.** The respondents’ opinion on the use of personal pronoun *Bapak Presiden*

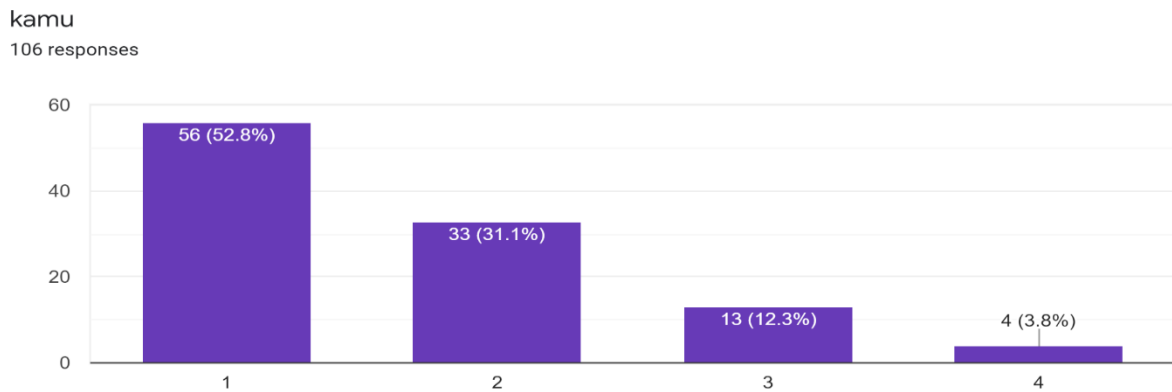
Similar to the respondents' evaluation on the personal pronouns Bapak/Pak, figure 3 above shows that 81,1% of respondents considered that the use *Bapak Presiden* to address the President is considered polite, similar to the use of *Bapak/Pak*, with a slight different percentage.



Scale: 1(impolite) – 4(polite)

**Figure 4.** The respondents' opinion on the use of personal pronoun *Anda*

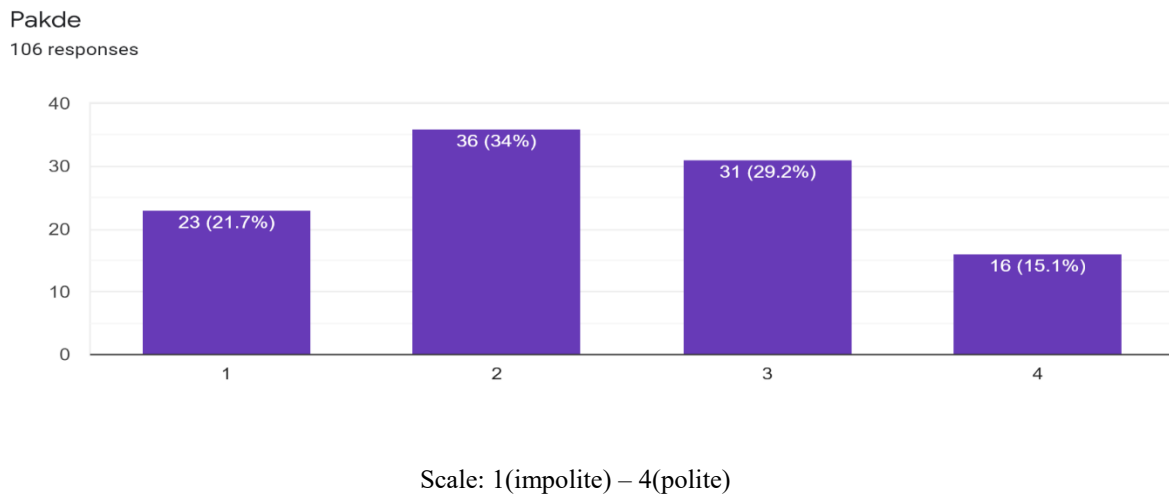
In responding to the question on the use of personal pronouns *Anda* to address the president, the respondents had various evaluations, with the tendency towards the evaluation of polite with the percentage 45.3% and rather polite 33%. The rest, however, considered the personal pronoun *Anda* was considered rather impolite with the percentage 15.1% and the least number of percentage 6.6% opinionated that *Anda* was impolite.



Scale: 1(impolite) – 4(polite)

**Figure 5.** The Respondents' opinion on the use of personal pronoun *Kamu*

Different from figure 4, figure 5 above shows the respondents' opinions towards the use of pronouns *Kamu* to address the president tend to be evaluated as impolite. The use of *Kamu* tends to be considered impolite by 52.4% of respondents and rather impolite by 31.4% of respondents.



**Figure 6.** The respondents’ opinion on the use of personal pronoun *Pakde*

Unlike the previous respondents’ evaluations which showed a clear distinction between polite and impolite pronouns the netizens used in the twitter account of President Jokowi, the following use of pronouns *Pakde* were judged along the continuum of impolite and polite scale by respondents. This means that respondents had varied judgments whether or not those pronouns were considered impolite or polite. As seen from figure 6 above, the respondents’ evaluation towards the use of pronouns *Pakde* directed to President Jokowi lies along the line of scale with a slightly higher percentage in the middle points that can be classified as rather polite and rather impolite. *Pakde* tends to be classified as rather impolite as chosen by 33.3% of respondents. This may imply that the use of pronouns *Pakde* can be problematic as they are perceived differently among respondents.

***The propositions in the netizens’ twitter comments***

This section focuses on the classification of propositions and the result of a questionnaire about the use of propositions. The questionnaire about the propositions is divided into two parts, the first part asks the respondents’ opinions about the (in)appropriate use of the propositions directed to the president and the second part asks to what extent that those propositions need to be taken into consideration by President Jokowi.

The statements in President Jokowi twitter accounts received diverse reactions from netizens. Based on the analysis of propositions of the netizens’ comments in his twitter, there were at least five classified propositions: some showed support, some were criticisms, demands of justice, and distrusts towards the president’s proposition. Figure 4 below shows the classification of those propositions, namely (1) the respondents appreciated and supported the actions and statements of President Jokowi in responding to the students’ demonstrations (31% of the total 138 comments) ; (2) the respondents demanded that the president take a stern action to the perpetrators who have caused chaos during demonstrations(5%); (3) the respondents have some doubt and disbelieved the president’s serious effort in handling the situation (22%); (4) the respondents thought that the president’s response was too late since there had been some casualties resulted from the oppressive acts of the police officers (19%); (5) the respondent demanded the president to uphold justice and investigate the case of killings during demonstration (23%).

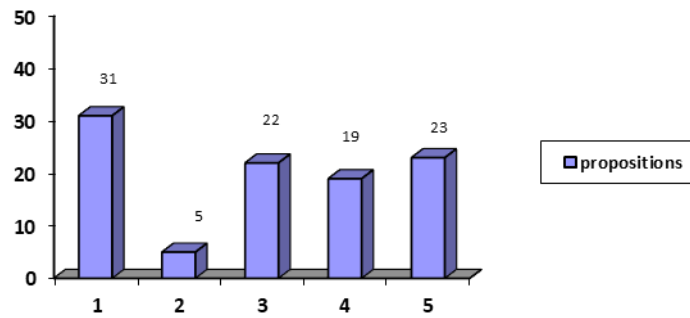


Figure 7. The propositions of netizens' comments

Those five classifications are derived from identifying the propositions in netizens' statements which are diverse. In proposition 1, for example, netizens stated a support to the president statements by using various pronouns such as *Pakde, mu, Pak, Pak Presiden, Komandan* and different statements such as the following:

- 1.1) Semangat **pak de** .. jgn trpancing omongan orang yg sirik akan kedudukan bapak saat ini.. Saya yakin indonesia lebih maju di tangan **pak de** ..Bismillahirrahmanirrahim... Allahhuma sholli aala syaidina muhammad ... Semoga **pak de** sehat selalu di beri umur panjang .. amin (Be strong pakde...don't bother those people who envy your being president..I'm sure that Indonesia will progress under your leadership pakde. (A prayer)...may you always be healthy and have a long life...amiin)
- 1.2) *Lepaskan Bebanmu **Pak**,... insyaAllah Indonesia akan kembali Jaya,.. dan kembali berdaulat, terlepas dari tangan2 Zholim,.... dan semoga Allah merahmatimu,....*(Set your self free from all the burden Pak...With God's blessings Indonesia will victory again...and set itself free from those evil hands...May God bless you)
- 1.3) ***Pak Presiden**, kenapa ya... untuk bergerak maju itu banyak sekali batu2 kerikil yg dihadapi bangsa ini. Mudah2an segala hal yang saat ini sedang terjadi bisa selesai dengan jalan yang paling baik. Sehat2 dan semangat ya **Pak**. Tuhan memberkati.* (Mr. President, I wonder why?.,to move forward, this country often is faced with some obstacles. May everything that has happened can be well passed and solved. Keep your spirit high, Sir, May you are always blessed and be healthy).
- 1.4) *siap **komandan**.dibandingkan dgn 98, 98 sangat sadis dn brutal krn aku saksi hidup 98.jdi kami generasi 98 sgt tau dn sgt paham dgn kondisi saat ini,klo kita mau bikin perbandingan saat ini ga sesadis 98. lanjut **pa** trslah bekrja dn bekrja semua u 1 negara ini.* (Compared to 98, which was so brutal because I was the living witness of the brutality of 98, so we 98 generation are well aware and understand thoroughly with the recent condition. If we compare with what happened in 98 this was not that brutal. Keep on working and working for all and this country)

Another example is proposition 2, a criticism, in which according to the respondents, the president statements and actions were rather late.

- 2.1) ***Pak** maaf maaf nih. Tpi kemana aja selama 3 hari.Sekarang udah ada korbannya **pak**.* (Excuse me, Pak. But, where have you been these last three days.There are some victims pak).
- 2.2) *Telat **pakk** telattt sekarang udah timbul korban jiwa itu kan yang bapak mau liat para aparatmu memperlakukan mahasiswa dan pelajar indonesia dengan sangat tidak*



*terhormatt memfitnahh memukuli bakkann menembakk apa salahh mereka pakkk. (Too late Pak, now there are some*

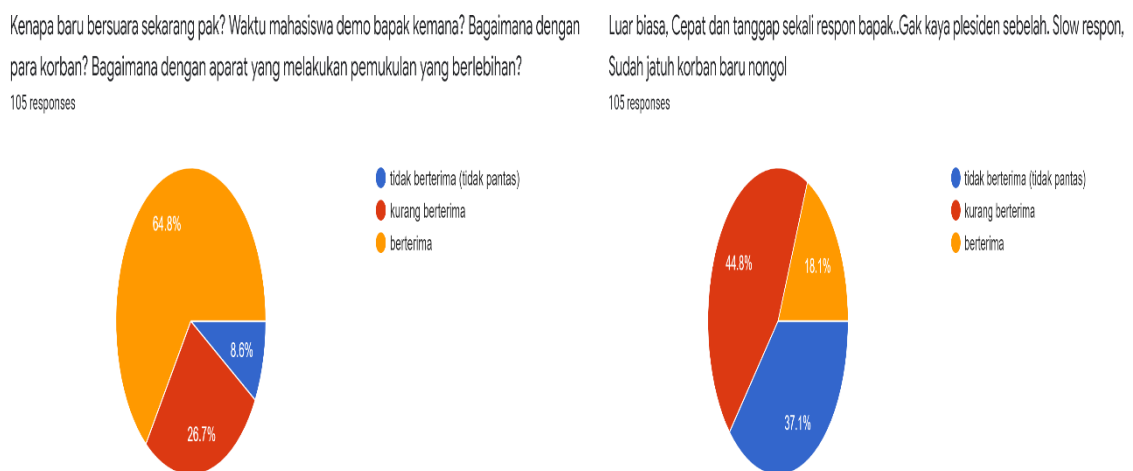
2.3) *Luar biasa, Cepat dan tanggap sekali respon bapak..Gak kaya plesiden sebelah. Slow respon, Sudah jatuh korban baru nongol.* (Amazing, what a quick and fast response you did, different from other presidents whose response came after some casualties occurred)

2.4) *Kenapa baru bersuara sekarang pak? Waktu mahasiswa demo bapak kemana? Bagaimana dengan para korban? Bagaimana dengan aparat yang melakukan pemukulan yang berlebihan?*

Those four different comments actually convey similar propositions or content, that is the netizens opinionated that the response that had been taken by the president was considered useless as there were some people died, injured and got beaten up by authorities.

### ***The (im)politeness and (in)civility of the netizens’ twitter comment propositions***

Based on the previous explanation, the use of pronouns directed to the presidents are various and the same propositions were stated differently by netizens. These same propositions, however, were evaluated differently by the respondents (figure 5). Some were considered appropriate, some were considered less appropriate, and some other appropriate.



**Figure 8.** The respondents’ evaluations towards the propositions of netizens’ comments

The two comments (2.3) and (2.4) belongs to the same proposition that is the president were late in responding to the students’ demonstration. Instead of being evaluated the same, the statement on the left of figure was considered appropriate to be directed to the President, selected by 64.8% of respondents. On the other hand, the righthand side statement was considered less appropriate with 44.8% respondents thought so.

In responding to a question “To what extend do those propositions need to be taken into consideration by President Jokowi?” The majority of respondents (93%) thought that it is important for the president to pay attention to those propositions. Only 7% of respondents thought otherwise because they considered that the proposition delivered by netizens were destructive, unclear, and inappropriate. Of 93% respondents who considered it is important for the president to pay attention to the people’s voice reasons that the president needs to provide rooms for public aspiration. Of those respondents, 10% of the them explicitly stated that

netizens must pay attention to their use of words or use polite words and be constructive in criticizing the president. Meanwhile, 15% of the respondents suggest that the netizens' use of inappropriate language should not prevent the presidents to listen to and get the substance of the criticisms.

## Discussions

By taking two aspects of linguistics, pronouns and propositions in the context of social media, in this case a twitter, we would like to discuss the issues of impoliteness and incivility in the netizens' twitter comments which were posted in the official twitter account of President Jokowi. In order to find out how impoliteness and incivility reflected in the use of pronouns and propositions of netizens' comments, the pronouns and propositions were analyzed by on the theories of impoliteness (Culpeper, 2011) and incivility (Paparachissi, 2004).

To address the president, netizens did not only use the neutral pronoun of *Bapak/Pak*, as in an address towards an adult male, or the more common way of addressing the president as *Bapak Presiden*, they also used informal forms of pronouns such as *Lu/Loe*, or *Kamu* which shows equality. Though showing equality, *Lu/Loe* and *Kamu* are inappropriate use of pronouns and considered impolite by respondents. Their impolite evaluation on the use of pronouns is not based on the cotext of the pronouns because in the questionnaire the pronouns were singled out from any sentences. Their evaluation of impoliteness was based on the context of the use. To consider whether words are considered (im)polite, one needs to consider the context because "no words or sentences are inherently impolite" (Fraser & Nolan, 1981; and Culpeper, 2005). These pronouns are situated in the context of computer mediated communication or social media communication between the president and his people. Therefore, they are considered impolite. Further analysis showed that these two pronouns can be classified as inappropriate identity markers and based on Culpeper (1996,2005, 2011) theory of impoliteness it can be seen as an attack towards the positive face of the president. Other pronouns, *Pakde* and *Komandan* also fall into this classification. Both pronouns were false identity markers of the president because the president neither has a family relationship nor a chain relation of command to the netizens who address the president that way.

The various use of pronouns reveals another interesting information about how computer mediated communication can be a medium of public sphere in which people can contribute share ideas or a medium to vent public aspirations to the authorities or persons who have higher status such as the president. Unlike face-to- face interaction, online communication facilitates the netizens to negotiate their identity. Through the use of informal pronouns *Lu/Loe* and *Kamu*, though considered impolite, the netizens tried to negotiate their identity and pull themselves on the same level or equal to the president to share their take on the matter. Locher & Watts (2008) state that polite and impolite is a relation work in which it involves power and identity which are constantly negotiated.

A closer examination on the propositions, this study found that some propositions were impolite. Two examples will be presented here:

- 1) *Luar biasa, Cepat dan tanggap sekali respon **bapak**..Gak kaya **plesiden** sebelah. Slow respon, Sudah jatuh korban baru nongol.* (Amazing, what a quick and fast response you did, different from other presidents whose response came after some casualties occurred)

- 2) *Bapak slowrespon sekali kayak gebetan :( temen saya udh pada digebukin, ada yang mati juga :( ada yang hilang belum balik.* (Bapak was very slow, like my crush (my friends had been beaten up, died and went missing)

Without referring to the context of the statements, sentence 1 means differently from sentence 2. However, the readers' schemata enable them to get the correct interpretation of the sentence. They were aware that the president's remarks on students' demonstration were made after it caused death on the part of the students, so both sentences have the same propositions. As the first sentence means the opposite of what is stated while the second sentence uses a simile to show an irony of the situation, both sentences are an attack towards the president positive face, and can be classified as sarcasm or mock politeness (Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2011). This implies that internet users have more control and freedom on how they present themselves in social media compared to face to face interaction (Graham & Hardaker, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

Social media has brought an easy and "direct" communication to the users. This advantage also comes with problems, such as impoliteness and incivility. Based on the analysis of pronouns and propositions, this study showed netizens used various personal pronouns to address the presidents, from the common way of addressing *presiden, Pak/Bapak*, to the ones that might never be used in face to face communication with the president in Indonesian context such as *Anda, kamu, lu*. In addition, the propositions in netizens comments could be divided into some being supportive and the others were criticizing the government. Some netizens' comments on twitter were considered impolite and uncivil. This study should be followed by a study on (im)politeness and (in)civility in other social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram to investigate whether those platforms are also marred with impoliteness and incivility and to what extent they are different also whether these impoliteness and incivility influence the internet users participation in contributing their ideas. In addition, studies on how is (im)politeness amplified in the interactional digital communications or social media, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter comments can be further explored.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to extend my gratitude to Dadang Sudana, PhD, the Director of Postgraduate studies of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Dr. Aceng Ruhendi Saifullah as the lecturer at the Postgraduate Studies of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. In addition, zillions of thanks are for my family and friends, whose names cannot be mentioned one by one. With their supports and encouragements, I could finally complete and submit this paper to be presented in an International Conference on Arts Language and Culture.

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