# Swearing in online commenting discourse: Investigating netizens' involvement in virtual discussion arena

**Teguh Setiawan***, **Suhardi, and Beniati Lestyarini**

*Department of Indonesian Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Cultures, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Jalan Colombo No. 1, Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

**ABSTRACT**

Swearing is a verbal behavior characterized by the use of profanity and taboo words to express emotions and anger, which exists in various communicative contexts in every language and culture. Despite its notorious use as language expressions, swearing actually functions to indicate the user's degree of involvement in certain event of communication. This study observed the use of language in digitally-mediated communication setting namely in the commenting discourse responding to certain online news items. The aim of the present study is to investigate netizen's involvement in a commenting discourse, as reflected in the use of their language expressions using profanity in the comment sections of online news items. Using a combination of transitivity analysis (Eggins, 2004) and the use of swearing to indicate solidarity (Eggins & Slade, 1997), the study investigated functions and roles of swearing in online news commenting discourse. The study identified that the most frequently used swear-words are taboo words, which are targeted to certain people in the news reports. This further entails implications on the formation of commenter groupings based on certain standings over an issue in news items.

**Keywords:** Commenting discourse; involvement; online news items; social media; swearing

## INTRODUCTION
### Preliminary Observation
The use of profanity in communication is mostly considered notorious in every language. Swearing, specifically, is often found as offensive and impolite behavior (Ljung, 2011), hence it is commonly regarded as unavoidable phenomenon in social life (Senberg et al., 2021). In other words, swearing is a universal and distinctive phenomenon in every language and culture (Grehan, 2004; Hughes, 1991; Ljung, 2007; McEnery, 2006; Smith, 1998). From various perspectives, swearing is a verbal behavior that utilizes taboo language to express the speaker's heightened emotional and aggressive state toward the listener (Burgoon, 1993; Jay, 1992, 2000; Kwon & Gruzd, 2017). This means that swearing involves the use of words that have the potential to be offensive, unpleasant, socially unacceptable, or inappropriate in specific social contexts, and the

words used in swearing also carry a significant degree of aggressiveness (Fagersten, 2012). Previously, Montagu (1967 p. 105) stated that swearing is expressing aggressive feelings verbally due to frustration, as words have strong emotional associations. In other words, swearing refers to words or expressions considered taboo, used to convey strong emotions and create a particular social stigma.

As an ingrained behavior, swearing occurs in direct spoken communication where interlocutors are engaged in face-to-face communication so that individuals can meet and exchange words directly. Swearing also occurs in indirect written communications, such as on the computer-mediated communication (CMC) setting, for example through social media where people communicate through writing without physical encounters (Ljung, 2011). As a consequence, messages posted on various

* Corresponding Author
Email: teguh_setiawan@uny.ac.id

channels of social media are usually accessible by public and can spread rapidly and through interconnected user networks.

The initial observation for the present study includes the use of profanity in online news portals. It was observed that swearing can also be associated with certain contexts, for example when the communication become so harsh that swearing is used intentionally to offend, intimidate, or cause emotional and/or psychological harm. It may be used as the expression of hatred as well. However, swearing is not always triggered by an attack on the speaker. It can also result from the behavior of others that goes against legal and ethical norms and can be provoked by news items regarding different ideologies and political beliefs. In such contexts, swearing is often used for insults, such as in cases of sexual harassment, hate speech, obscene phone calls, and verbal abuse (Jay et al., 2006; Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). In fact, swearing has become socially contagious and can spread, especially in the internet, through textual mimicry (Kwon & Gruzd, 2017). In other words, swearing from one person can serve as a trigger for others to use swearing. In social media, the spread of swearing is evident, both as a response to news articles of various topics, for example as observed in this study in terms of violations of laws and about political figures with different beliefs. In other words, swearing can be used to identify both pro and con groups in a case that triggers the use of profane language. In social media, netizens can freely communicate using swear words.

**Some Reviews on Swearing**
Allan and Burridge (2006) distinguish swearing based on its contexts, categorizing them as ordinary contexts that is where swearing is not intended to insult but rather serves as a form of catharsis and humor and harsh contexts that is where swearing is used with the intention to attack or insult. The significance of context in swearing behavior is also illustrated through the violation expectation theory (Burgoon, 1993; Johnson & Lewis 2010). When communicating in formal settings, the use of swearing has a high potential to disrupt the ongoing conversation. The more emotional the swear-word is used, the greater the potential for disruption, and the higher the severity of the offense. Conversely, in a normal context where no offense is expected, the use of swearing is not perceived as offensive (Johnson, 2012; Johnson & Lewis, 2010). Psychological motives (e.g., emphasizing feelings), linguistic motives (e.g., out of habit), and sociological motives (e.g., to appear cool) are important for both men and women (Fine & Johnson, 1984; Nasution & Rosa, 2012).

The greater the potential for a word to be offensive, the higher the likelihood that it will be considered swearing. Research provides clear

evidence that swearing ranging from mildly offensive to highly offensive is perceived as more offensive, aggressive, and impolite (Janschewitz, 2008; Jay, 1992; Jay et al., 2008; Mabry, 1974). In a study on online responses to celebrity swearing, Stapleton (2020) demonstrated that emotions and offensive attitudes are common perceptions formed by listeners regarding swearing. Moreover, several studies have found that the expression and/or release of negative emotions are cited by participants as the primary motivation for using swearing (Baruch et al., 2017; Jay, 2009; Jay et al., 2006; Rassin & Muris, 2005; Stapleton, 2003). Similarly, in a self-report study by Popuşoi et al. (2018), road drivers were reported to use swearing to express verbal aggression and as a form of catharsis that allowed them to cope with feelings of anger. A cross-cultural linguistic study on swearing conducted by Ljung (2011) shows that despite the fact that swearing is often considered offensive and impolite behavior, it is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that is understood and worth studying. Swearing, in many languages, is used euphemistically as a taboo expression of pain or anger.

The emotional impact of swearing depends on an individual's experience with their culture and language conventions. The culture of the speaker and the listener greatly influence the impact of using profane words, particularly the impact of impoliteness (Christie, 2013). In other words, impolite utterances cannot be universally interpreted because impoliteness depends on the relationship between the speaker and the listener (Locher & Watts, 2005). It is also important to note that the context of swear-word use strongly determines whether a word is serving its function as swearing or, conversely, as a taboo or normal word (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). This means that the context of the utterance will determine whether the use of swearing will result in harm or not (Jay, 2009a). Even the context of the utterance will determine whether swearing is used for the purpose of insult or to express solidarity without an intent to offend (Pinker, 2007). The role of context in determining the status of swearing has been examined by several previous studies. Fagersten (2012) classified swearing contexts into two types: disruptive swearing and social swearing.

In reality, the use of swearing is closely related to taboo words, with some swearing words being taboos themselves (Ljung, 2011; Matusz, 2017; Nodoushan, 2016; Valdeón, 2019). Swearing words are suitable for expressing emotions because their primary meaning is connotative rather than literal or denotative (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). The use of taboo words is potentially linked to aggressive, high-emotion, and socially unacceptable behavior (Fägersten, 2012). In other words, taboo words are bound by the speaker's moral and cultural norms (Dewaele, 2018). For example, words like "*goblog*"

or "*bodoh*" are considered taboo. The use of such words would violate social norms as they can hurt the speaker's feelings. The taboo value is reflected in the protected values and vocal tone or facial expressions (Dewaele 2018). Generally, the emotional impact and aggressiveness of swearing words depend on the conventional meaning of the word used, both semantically and pragmatically (Culpeper, 2011, p. 124).

Regarding the language used for swearing, Ljung (2011, p. 17) provides four criteria for words to be considered swearing: the use of language containing taboo words; taboo words used with a non-literal meaning; swearing can be formulated within a rule; and it can also be the use of emotive language whose primary function is the expression of the speaker's emotions and attitudes. In other words, not all words can be used for swearing. Only specific words are used for swearing, such as words related to sexual organs, sexual activities, animals, and death. These words can arouse and represent the speaker's emotions and aggressiveness towards the listener (Ljung, 2011; McEnery, 2006; Pinker, 2007). By using these words, the speaker hopes that the emotions, such as anger, can be represented through their use of words without having to resort to physical actions because the social and psychological impact of using swearing words is significant for the listener. Feelings of insult and degradation automatically arise from the use of swearing.

This can happen because communicators share the belief that swearing is an acceptable norm for their interaction (Alonzo & Aiken, 2004; Burgoon 1993), making swearing a marker of interpersonal aggression. Public swearing is swearing aimed at emphasizing the speaker's opinion aggressively or their feelings towards an entity. This type of swearing remains a form of emotional outburst that tends to be uncivilized (27). There is a common assumption that women are more emotionally expressive than men. Numerous studies have explored emotional expression in men and women, and many of them suggest that women are the more emotionally expressive gender (Kring & Gordon, 1998). Moreover, specific emotions are stereotypically associated with each gender. Happiness, sadness, and fear are believed to be more characteristic of women, while men are thought to be more prone to anger (Kelly & Hutson-Comeaux 1999).

In the context of swearing as an expression of emotions and anger, swearing has been associated with women (Jespersen, 1922; Lakoff, 1975). This is supported by findings (Bailey & Timm, 1976; Hughes, 1992; Jay & Janschewitz, 2007; Oliver & Rubin, 1975; Risch, 1987; Staley, 1978) indicating that swearing is significantly more common among women. Beers-Fagersten (2007) pointed out that the term "negro" was rated as the most offensive word

by students at the University of Florida, followed by "cunt," "motherfucker," "bitch," and "fuck." The findings also showed that, on average, female participants rated the words as more offensive than male participants did. In Jay and Janchewitz's (2008) study of the gender effects on offensive ratings in hypothetical written situations, they found that female participants found more swearing.

Claims that women prefer milder swearing are also supported in self-report data (Bailey & Timm, 1976; Oliver & Rubin, 1975), but some researchers dispute these claims with conflicting evidence from actual observations (Anshen, 1973; Gomm, 1981; Jay, 1986; Limbrick, 1991). Other studies suggest that men swear more than women, supported by data from actual usage and self-report (Anshen, 1973; Berger, 2002; Gomm, 1981; Jay, 1986; Limbrick, 1991). Stapleton (2003), who surveyed the use of 14 potentially offensive swearing words by 15 men and 15 women in Northern Ireland, strengthened the assumption that women use these words less frequently than men and are more sensitive to their offensive feelings.

In other words, both women and men can use swearing. Swearing used by women tend to adhere to standard language, and they are inclined to use milder swearing and less frequently than men (Ljung, 2007, p. 93). Women are advised not to use swearing because traditional cultural expectations dictate how they should behave. Women are expected to be respectful, polite, sensitive, and nurturing of the needs and feelings of others. Therefore, women who use such terms may be considered deviating from cultural stereotypes and feminine expectations because swearing is seen as forceful and aggressive (Stapleton, 2003). Conversely, Sollid (2009) revealed that Swedish men use swearing in all situations more than women and utter more offensive words when swearing. However, Johnson and Lewis (2010) showed no significant differences between male and female swearers in contemporary language usage. In short, previous research has reported inconsistent results regarding gender differences in swearing.

While the research results so far have explored many sociolinguistics aspects, its role in establishing relationship between the interlocutors is often disregarded. But a study by Eggins and Slade (1997) offers a framework in how swearing functions to indicate a certain degree of solidarity. They stated that swearing, along with naming, technicality, and slang are used to establish involvement among participants in a communicative event. Therefore, it becomes interesting to see how, despite the notoriousness of swear-words, swearing actually plays role in setting roles and forming groups, especially in CMC. The aim of the present study is to investigate netizen's involvement in a commenting discourse, as reflected in the use of their language in the comment sections of online

news portal. In doing so, the study investigated the following aspects:

1. The functions of swearing at the comment section of news article and the role of swear-words users in commenting discourse.
2. The implications on the formation of commenter groupings based on certain standings over an issue in news items.

## METHOD
### Data
The present study is a qualitative research, with attempt to explore and elaborate the data descriptively. The data are sourced from the total of eighteen news items. The themes of the news items were related to the discussion of current dynamics of Indonesian situations collected between November 2021 and January 2022. Data acquisition techniques were performed through two methods, namely, reading and recording (Sudaryanto, 2015)—the reading technique involved carefully reading the data source to identify data. The recording technique was used to document all data found during the reading process on data cards. Data was analyzed using distributional and pragmatic correspondence methods (Sudaryanto, 2015).

There were two categories of news content serving as data sources. The first category included news articles reporting norm violations committed by individuals, such as corruption, murder, theft, or rape. Such news articles often trigger netizens' responses in the form of swearing as an expression of disapproval of behavior that violates social norms. The second category encompasses news related to public officials' statements, decisions, or behaviors that do not violate legal or ethical norms. The specific research data comprised utterances of readers' entries in comment sections of news items, especially those which contains profanity or swearing. This study establishes two important terminologies. First, the netizens are addressed as 'commenters' to refer to their role in writing comments in the online news portals. Then, the activity in which these commenters is engaged in is termed commenting discourse. In regard to the focus of the discussions, the names related to the incidents of the news items found in the data are not included. They will be referred to anonymously when necessary.

### Data Analysis
The data analysis process was conducted using a combination of transitivity analysis (Eggins, 2004) and the use of swearing as a part of solidarity as posited by Eggins and Slade (1997). In the first layer of analyisis, the aspects of swear-word users were evaluated based on the linguistic units used in swearing, for example in the lexical choices. In addition, the research instrument consists of parameters used to determine whether the language units used by netizens can be categorized as swearing or not. The first parameter is the context of use because whether something qualifies as swearing or not is determined by the context of use (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). The second parameter is that the words used have non-literal meanings and are used to express emotions or dissatisfaction towards others (Ljung, 2011; McEnery, 2006). These words often fall into the category of taboo words (Ljung, 2011; Matusz, 2017; Nodoushan, 2016; Valdeón, 2019). In the second layer of the analysis, the intent behind swearing use was determined based on the target of swearing. At this stage, the study used the principles from Eggins and Slade (1997) that the use of swearing in a communicatiave event provides some indication of casualness or formality of the talk. Then, this can be a sign to show the relationship between swearing and the users' involvement in certain communicative event, in this case in commenting discourse. The involvement will further reveal the positioning of the speaker in the group, in this case it will show how commenters may stand over an issue in news items.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
The overall study results show that netizen's involvement in a commenting discourse are reflected in their language such as profanity. The comment sections of online news portal is an arena in which commenters play roles as either supporters or opponents of the presented views. Further to this result, two categories of descriptions are presented as the following.

**The functions of swearing at the comment section of news article and the role of swear-words users in commenting discourse.**
*Forms of Swearing*
In this study, words were found to be the linguistic unit which is most commonly used as a form of swearing. The first part of the analysis results in the identification and the categorization of the profanity. Quantitatively, it is found that linguistic unit in the form of lexical items or words are most frequently used in the data (Table 1).

**Table 1**
*Frequency of Swearing*

| Forms of swearing | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Phrase | 11 | 4.8 |
| Words | 218 | 95.2 |

Generally, the selection of word forms for swearing is based on the semantic ability of a word to encompass both literal and non-literal meanings, depending on its contextual usage. For example, the word *babi* (pig) in Indonesian has two meanings namely a suckling animal and an extremely offensive swear word in the context of Indonesian culture. Apart from having literal and non-literal meanings, words can also have similar denotative meanings but with different connotations. As observed in the data, the commenters use words that have similar denotative meanings, such as *gila*, *sedeng*, *gendeng*, *sableng,* and *edan*. These lexical items are originated with the influence of different local languages, which is generally known among Indonesian to have similar meaning that is 'crazy'. However, each of these words has different connotations that is in the degree of craziness, which is also generally known among Indonesian. The words *sedeng*, *gendeng*, and *sableng* are more emotive than *gila* and *edan.* This further reflect the users background native language, which is related to how a person evoke a more emotional responses by using their mother tongue. Using words with different connotations but similar denotative meanings allows speakers to choose words that best represent their emotions or anger.

**Table 2**
*Frequency and Types of Swear Words*

| Word | Number | Percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Verb | 8 | 3.6 |
| Adjective | 96 | 44.1 |
| Noun | 114 | 52.3 |

From a categorization perspective, the most frequently used swearing forms are nouns, followed by adjectives (Table 2). Nouns used in swearing are related to animals (*babi* (pig), *anjing* (dog), *asu* (dog), *monyet* (monkey)), refer to occupations (*rampok* (robber), *garong* (thug), *bajingan* (villain)), and related to human negative qualities (*penjilat* (bootlicker), *penhianat* (traitor), *komunis* (communist). Adjectives used for swearing refer to the intellectual or psychological state of a person (*bodoh* (stupid), *bloon* (dim-witted), *goblok* (foolish), *tolol* (foolish), *sungsang* (opposite-minded), *somplak* (stupid), *geblek* (foolish), *dungu* (idiotic), *sableng* (crazy), *gendeng* (crazy), *bobrok* (corrupt), *songong* (arrogant), and *edan* (crazy)). Due to their reference to human intellectual insults, these words fall into the category of taboo language. McEnery (2006) categorizes such words on a 'violation scale,' while Jay (2000) includes them in the category of obscene swearing, dirty words, profanity, name-calling, insults, verbal aggression, taboo utterances, ethnic-racial slurs, vulgar, colloquial, and scatological language. By theory, the use of such taboo words can express aggression, high emotions, and are socially unacceptable (Beers-Fägersten, 2012). This strengthens the opinions of Jay (2000), Ljung (2011), and Valdeón (2019) that taboo words are widely used by many languages and cultures for swearing. Other studies also demonstrate that swearing using offensive words is perceived as more offensive, aggressive, and impolite (Janschewitz, 2008; Jay, 1992; Jay et al., 2008, 2008; Mabry, 1974).

***Swearing Actors and Targets***
In the second part of the analysis, the system of transitivity (Eggins, 2004) is useful to determine the actor and target of the swearing by commenters regarding the online news items. This system identifies the actors and targets of swearing based on the verbs used in the utterances. Hence, categories of actors may include sayer, behaver or attribute; and categories of targets may include goal, receiver, value and behaviour. Other aspects, such as gender and possible cultural backgrounds, are also taken into account in interpreting the commenters' use of swearing.

In the actual data, these participants are observed from the names and/or addresses used when commenters interact in the commenting discourse. A commenter who leaves a comment will have a username displayed as their user identity. The use of names serves to differentiate between individuals (Hofmann, 1993, p. 193). This is reinforced by Robins' opinion (1992, p. 28) that personal names refer to an individual as one entity, regardless of how many people may be referred to by that name. Personal names, as products of culture (Donnellan, 1972; Kripke, 1980), can be used to determine gender, male and female, as in cultural concepts, personal names already refer to certain genders (Hofman, 1993). In regards to this study, names can be a good indicator in distinguishing the gender of the commenters and what entails by the swearing.

Sample commenter names are identified mostly in user names such as *Kurniawan*, *Amir*, *Karyana*, *Indra* that can be identified as specific male names as per Indonesian common names. In the observation, the study found that male commenters dominates the use of swearing on the online news portal compared to females. This is futher evidenced from the limited use commenters in female usernames participating in the commenting discourse by giving responses in the form of swearing. This fact shows that, in online

commenting discourse, males swear more than females. This is hinted in a study by Bird and Harris (1990), which indicates that males are more likely to swear than females. Similarly, studies reported by Jay (1992) show that men are more likely to swear in public than women. Furthermore, the assumption that swearing is mostly considered a male behavior (Hughes, 1998). This study contributes to these previous studies by providing facts from online commenting discourses.

The current notion that says the number of women who swear is low is reinforced in the study where only a small number of commenters who use swearing are female. There may be a cultural influence on this matter, in which the prevailing cultural values in Indonesia considers women to be more polite and well-mannered compared to men. In traditional terms, women are viewed as language and etiquette custodians (Johnson & Fine, 1985) and experts in euphemisms, using milder swearing words (Lakoff, 1973). The claim that women prefer milder swearing is also supported by studies based on self-report data (Bailey & Timm, 1976; Oliver & Rubin, 1975). Apparently, this is shown in online commenting discourse as well.

Although online commenting discourse provides a wide, free space for anyone to express themselves in terms of emotions and anger by swearing, women tend to choose words with lower emotional intensity. In the data, female swearing was found in words like *gila* (crazy), *bodoh* (stupid), *miskin* (poor), *koruptor* (corruptor), *pencuri* (thief), *brengsek* (rascal), and *anjing* (dog), which could have been other words with the same intention but with a stronger emotional impact and higher level of offense to the listener, such as *goblok* (foolish), *tolol* (dim-witted), *sedeng* (crazy), *geblek* (foolish), *bangsat* (scum), *bajingan* (villain), *garong* (thug), or *babi* (pig). Overall, the study shows that stronger swear words are more commonly used by males to have more emotional impact, leading to a higher level of offense to the listener (Jay & Janschewitz, 2006).

In online commenting discourse, actors, sayers or behavers using swearwords are also identified to use pseudonyms, in which case gender identity is blurred. The sample pseudonyms identified in this study includes *kan asin*, *Obie Aja*, *A2n04*, *Bhineka Tunggal Ika*, *ghostprotocol_3*, *mamihjulid*, *Delta soldiers*, *MakelarCOD*, *HijauVs*, and *Langit1090*, which has no indication to refer to the genders the commenters. But then, the previous results makes it safe to assume that based on the swearing words used, the lexical choices employed includes words that have a strong attacking force these commenters in pseudonyms are more likely to be males than females. This is consistent with the findings of Jay and Janschewitz (2006), which show that swearing depends on the gender of the speaker and the gender of the listener, but males use more offensive language than females. It can also be inferred that the use of pseudonyms in swearing, especially in online commenting discourse, is intended to conceal the commenter's true identity so that others cannot recognize them. In this way, they can freely swear without worrying about their true identity being revealed.

Then, further to the analysis of words such as *garong* (thug), *rampok* (robber), *sableng/sabl\*ng/goblok* (foolish), *otak sungsang* (distorted mind), *songong* (arrogant), *babi* (pig), and *monyet* (monkey), swear words used by commenters with certain pseudonyms, which reflect these actors, sayers or behavers to have Javanese cultural background. This is clarified by the use of swear words in Javanese such as *gendeng* (crazy), *munyuk* (monkey) and *asu* (dog). This is in line to Dewaele's (2004b, p. 220) statement that the first language is considered to have greater emotional power, in this case when used as profanity. Similarly, Colbeck and Bowers (2012) showed that not only the first language is more emotional, but also taboo and sexual words from the first language used as swear words have a greater emotional impact, where word processing can occur quickly and automatically.

### The implications on the formation of commenter groupings based on certain standings over an issue in news items

Within the engagement of the online commenting discourse, commenters are also influenced by the topic of news or conversation. There are two patterns of swearing targets performed by commenters on social media. Commenters who are confronted with news about legal or moral violations such as robbery, murder, infidelity, verbal violence, or religious norm violations will direct their swearing at the reported figures involved in these violations. Technically, the transitivity system calls this category as goals. It means that regardless of the commenters' gender, they collectively swear at the same goals. Violators seem to become a common enemy for the commenters, being perceived as causing significant harm and disruption to the harmony of society. The first pattern of swearing targets is depicted in Figure 1. The diagram illustrates that commenters have the same goals for swearing. This is evident from the use of almost identical swearing words. For news topics about robbery or corruption, the common swearwords used reflect their disapproval, such as *garong* (thug), *celeng* (hog), *tikus busuk* (rotten rat), *muka badak* (thick-faced), and *gembel* (bum). For news topics about other violent cases, such as violations of religious norms, verbal violence, infidelity, or rape, commenters use words like *goblok* (foolish), *anjing* (dog), *monyet* (monkey), *jahanam* (hell), *iblis* (devil), *setan* (satan), and *gendeng/sableng* (crazy).

**Figure 1**
*Direction of swearing in news item regarding law violations*
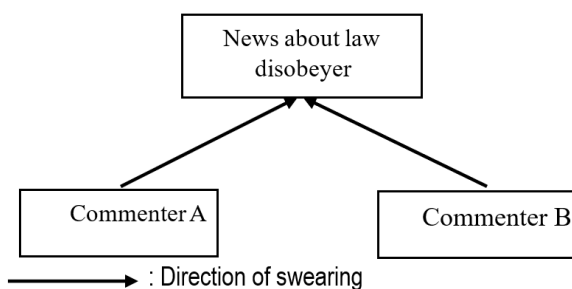


Swearing expressed by the commenters hows a common cause, to which is they respond to behaviors they consider inappropriate or improper. This common motive makes one person's swearing act as a trigger for others' swearing. This reinforces the findings of Kwon and Gruzd's (2017) study, who examined swearing on a social media platform, that swearing in an online commenting discourse can socially transmit and spread through textual mimicry.

The pattern of swearing targets for political news differs from targets for news about legal and moral violations. Swearing is done solely as a form of displeasure, even if the person being sworn at has done something good. For instance, in a news item that depict a political figure who has done positive actions and compliance with the law and moral norms, swearing still occurs. This means that swearing is not caused by improper or indecent behavior or speech of the reported politician, but rather by commenter's personal opinion which may oppose to the politician's standing. Similarly, in a news items where a certain political figure is shown to have different political views against another figure in the news report, swearing is directed towards the first figure. In short, swearing can become a form of defense against the swearing done by one group to another, indicating support and opposition of a certain political figure.

Figure 2 shows how the target pattern of political news is directed at two parties. The first target is the person being reported. Swearing directed at the person being reported is not necessarily because the individual has committed illegal or morally wrong actions but is based more on personal dislike or group incompatibility. Commenters no longer consider the presence or absence of legal or norm violations committed by the person being reported, as in the first pattern. A commenter will swear even if the person being reported has not violated any laws or norms, simply based on personal opinion of differing poltical views.

**Figure 2**
*Direction of swearing of political news*
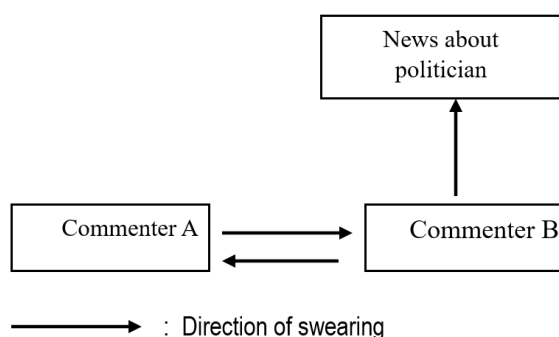


To elaborate more, Figure 2 shows how commenter B engage in two-way swearing: swearing directed at the figure or party being reported and towards the group of commenter A supporting the figure they are swearing at. On the other hand, commenter A engage in one-way swearing, only directed at commenter B who swears at the figure supported by commenter A.

To sum up, while commenters may have different commenting behaviors, their polarity in responding to the same news can be generally categorized as pros and cons. This fact supports previous studies based on experiments conducted by Anderson et.al. (2014). They examined the impact of swearing on readers' judgments of public policy issues, showing a tendency for uncivil comments to polarize opinions, for example supporters of one public policy issue become more supportive while opponents become more negative when exposed to uncivil comments. In the context of the online

commenting discourse where personal presence is absent, such emotional and aggressive swearing potentially increases group identity polarization and hinders the flow of different opinions or produces a spiral of silence effect towards minority perspectives (Kwon et al., 2015).

**CONCLUSION**

Initial observation of the present study involves an examination on how commenting section of certain news items serves as an arena for a communicative event in which the commenters use swear words to express their opinions on various discussion of certain news articles. The analyses have shown that swearing is an expression of anger and emotions manifested in verbal form. Unlike normal communication, which is usually done directly or indirectly while maintaining politeness and self-respect, swearing is a deliberate choice of communication that intentionally violates the norms of politeness and cultural values of the speaker. This occurs in a CMC such as online commenting discourse as well. Users of swearing are aware that the words they use can have negative consequences for their interlocutors as the words used violate the norms of politeness in their culture. As an expression of emotions and anger, there must be reasons that trigger someone's emotions to engage in swearing because generally anger is the main motivator for using swear words (Fine & Johnson, 1984). In direct communication, the appearance of negative emotions as the basis for swearing can be triggered by behavior observed or words heard, whether directed at oneself or others. In the context of CMC in an online social media, it can be triggered by the news encountered by commenters. Based on data analysis, there is an influence of the news read on the reasons for swearing.

In this study, the commenters show their standings using profanity, which then indicate their involvement in the online commenting discourse as either supporters or opponents of the presented issues in the news items. When faced with news that informs about legal violations and breaches of moral norms, commenters collectively swear at the same goals, namely the reported party due to the behavior of the figure they perceive as having betrayed public trust (in the case of corruptors), violated moral norms (in cases of rape, adultery, hate speech), or disrupted public safety (robbery, murder). For this reason, the perpetrators feel justified in swearing. These reasons align with the findings of Jay (2000), Jay et al. (2006), and Jay & Janschewitz (2008) that swearing on social media is intended to offend, intimidate, or cause emotional or psychological harm, contributing to expressions of hatred in various forms. Pinker (2007) also states that one of the goals of swearing is to demean or insult someone. On the other hand, commenters' responses

on political news items is usually triggered by different perspectives among netizens towards the reported political figures. Whether the activities or statements made by the political figures are positive or negative, commenters are still split into two opposite groups. Swearing by one netizen can trigger other swearing, both within the same group and across different groups. It becomes an automatic response in the form of swearing. This is the dark side of swearing in online commenting discourse that can potentially trigger the transmission of aggressive emotions, which can be contagious through imitation (Coe et al., 2014) and social reciprocity processes (Burgoon, 1993) both as verbal behavior and as explicit emotions. Several other studies also state that the expression and/or release of negative emotions are imitated by participants as the main motivation for swearing (Baruch et al., 2017; Jay, 2009; Jay et al., 2006; Rassin & Muris, 2005; Stapleton, 2003).

While this study reported the function of swearing in a CMC and its impact in the commenter grouping, it is recommended that the subsequent study delve further into how swearing in a CMC brings about impact on a wider public perspective about the reported issues in certain news items. The use of big data involving a big number of respondents will add to the validity of the judgements in such explorations.

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