

# Normalizing hostility: TikTok netizens and hate speech on Ahmad Sahroni

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## Abstract

This study examines hate speech in the comment sections of TikTok news accounts discussing Ahmad Sahroni, a prominent Indonesian political figure. As social media increasingly shapes public opinion and political discourse, understanding how hostile language is produced and circulated online has become essential. The objective of this research is to analyze the linguistic, discursive, and ideological features of hate speech using Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis framework supported by van Dijk's (2008) socio-cognitive approach. Data were collected from five major TikTok news accounts, with twenty-five top-liked comments selected for analysis. The findings show that hate speech appears through insults, negative labeling, sarcasm, accusations, and mockery, while some comments reinforce broader narratives of public distrust toward political elites. These results highlight how TikTok's algorithm and user interaction patterns contribute to the visibility and normalization of hostile discourse. The study provides insights that can support digital literacy efforts and inform policy discussions.

**Keywords:** *Hate speech; TikTok; critical discourse analysis; political discourse; social media.*

## Introduction

Social media has become a major space for public discussion, political conversation, and the spread of both information and hostile messages. The rapid growth of digital technology has brought major changes to human communication, especially within social media platforms (Inayah, 2025). TikTok, with its algorithm-based content and active comment sections, strongly shapes how people form opinions. To understand how users behave, it is also important to look at the content-filtering algorithms used by social media. Because of this, researchers have examined social media as algorithm-based systems to learn how recommendation algorithms shape people's political actions and opinions (Medina Serrano, 2020). A range of linguistic styles appears, from polite and argumentative to emotional and impolite, showing the dynamic nature of Indonesia's online culture (Al Hakim, 2025). Moreover, online media operates as a large industry that accelerates communication by producing

information, which in turn shapes and influences its audience (Widodo, 2023).

The components of communication such as setting, participants, goals, speech patterns, tone, media, norms, and genres play a crucial role in analyzing the dynamics of language use in digital spaces. Understanding these elements is essential for examining how netizens construct meaning, convey intentions, and either uphold or violate politeness norms in online interactions, particularly in politically sensitive contexts like commenting on presidential posts. This framework is essential for mapping out the context of online communication, which is often open to multiple interpretations (Yusuf, 2025, p. 145).

This study examines hate speech, defined as expressions that attack, insult, or discriminate against a person or group based on identity attributes, appearance, profession, or social status. Tahir (2024, p. 231) stated that hate speech is characterized by discriminatory expressions, hate, and incitement to violence. Cyberbullying, abuse, and other forms of hate speech are realities of contemporary society and pose a threat to society

(Siegel, 2020). The broad freedom of expression can contribute to the rise of hate speech, making it appear as an extension of free speech. Many people use hate speech as an easy way to gain quick attention without much effort. This behavior challenges the boundaries of free expression. Different countries regulate hate speech in different ways. Hate speech usually opposes freedom of speech and violates fundamental rights of a human being (Chetty, 2018, p. 108). Online hate speech is a growing concern due to the increasing social media content (MacAvaney et al., 2019). In the context of online platforms, hate speech can be defined as any comment, post, picture, or video that is meant to degrade, offend, or even call for harm on a person or group of people based on their characteristics (Akinsanya, 2024). Hate speech has been a prevalent problem in the past, but the problem has become more significant in the recent past because of the increase in the number of people engaging in online conversations (Hassim, 2024, p. 3). These patterns appear clearly in the online comments directed at Ahmad Sahroni, where users use hostile expressions to show dissatisfaction and challenge his public image.

To analyze these dynamics, the present study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary theoretical framework. Fairclough explains that discourse is not merely a reflection of social reality but a form of social practice that both shapes and is shaped by broader power structures (Fairclough, 1995). His model includes three dimensions: text analysis (examining vocabulary, grammar, and coherence), discursive practice (how texts are produced, distributed, and interpreted), and social practice (the ideological and sociopolitical contexts that give meaning to discourse). Complementing Fairclough's perspective, van Dijk highlights the importance of shared mental models, group ideologies, and power relations in shaping discourse production (van Dijk, 2008). Van Dijk argues that hate speech and discriminatory language often stem from underlying ideological polarization, constructed through "us vs. them" representations, negative labeling, and discursive strategies that justify hostility.

These two perspectives together allow this study to capture how linguistic choices in TikTok

comments reflect social identities, ideologies, and relational power structures. Several previous studies provide important foundations for this research. Jacques (2023) demonstrates that TikTok's algorithmic features can amplify racially hostile messages, revealing how platform affordances shape discursive patterns. Silaban (2024) finds that comment sections on Indonesian news social media accounts mirror broader social polarization and narrative framing. A study by Syahputra (2019) examines how expressions of hatred circulate on Indonesian social media and how these hostile interactions create a "spiral of anxiety" among users, showing that continuous exposure to online hostility reinforces fear, tension, and political polarization in digital spaces. Additional CDA-based works employing van Dijk's framework show how Indonesian online discourse frequently constructs ideological binaries and stereotypes, particularly when discussing political figures.

An additional study by Solovev and Pröllochs (2022) shows that replies to U.S. Congress members' tweets contain hate speech at varying rates depending on the politician's party affiliation, gender, and ethnicity, suggesting that social media users' hostility is structured by identity. Discourse-based research also helps explain how hate speech works in language. Khlopotunov (2023) finds that American political discourse often uses insults, accusations, mockery, and attempts to discredit others, especially when speakers create a division between "us" and "them." Research on Indonesian social media further supports these findings. Mubarok et al. (2024) examine Instagram comments and find that users frequently use hate speech in the form of insults, defamation, mockery, and provocation, usually directed at public figures and made easier by online anonymity. Meanwhile, reports by Jalli (2025) indicate that TikTok's moderation systems remain inconsistent, allowing hate speech to spread within highly engaged comment threads. Note that research on TikTok, especially within news account contexts, remains limited.

Despite these contributions, important research gaps persist. Most existing hate speech studies focus on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook, with very few examining TikTok news

accounts, which operate differently from user-generated content due to their journalistic framing and institutional credibility. Additionally, research targeting individual Indonesian politicians on TikTok is scarce, leaving the dynamics of political hostility in this environment underexplored. Finally, previous studies rarely integrate CDA with considerations of algorithmic visibility and platform affordances, limiting understanding of how linguistic patterns are shaped by technological structures. These gaps highlight the need for a more comprehensive examination of hate speech within TikTok's politically charged comment systems.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze the linguistic, discursive, and ideological characteristics of hate speech in TikTok news-account comment sections revolving around Ahmad Sahroni. People in academic and professional fields are expected to help fight hate speech so society can become more tolerant. Research like this supports public safety by giving policymakers the information needed to create laws that address hate speech while still protecting First Amendment rights. Specifically, the research examines how hostile expressions are constructed through vocabulary, syntax, emojis, and rhetorical strategies; how these expressions circulate and gain visibility within TikTok's algorithmic environment; and how they reflect broader sociopolitical tensions in Indonesia. Through this approach, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of political discourse, hate speech, and digital interaction in contemporary Indonesian social media spaces.

## Methods

The data for this study were collected from the TikTok comment sections of five major Indonesian news accounts: Inilah.com (@inilahcom), Tempo.co (@tempo.co), tvOneNews (@tvonenews), detik.com (@detikcom), and Metropolitan.id (@metropolitan.id). These accounts were selected purposively based on their large audience reach, with each account having at least one million followers, ensuring that the discourse within their comment sections reflects widely circulated public opinions. From each account, one video was selected using the criterion of having at least one

million views, indicating strong user engagement and broad visibility.

After selecting the videos, the researchers gathered relevant information, including the video link, upload date, total views, and number of likes. Screenshots of the comment sections were taken to preserve the original content and ensure that the data remained unchanged even if the platform later modified or removed comments. From each selected video, ten comments with the highest number of likes were chosen for analysis. These highly endorsed comments were considered to represent the most visible, influential, and widely supported public reactions within the digital discourse. In cases where multiple comments had the same number of likes, the comment appearing earliest in the thread was selected to maintain consistency in data selection. Because the majority of comments were written in Indonesian, the analysis was conducted in the original language to preserve semantic accuracy and contextual nuance.

The data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework. First, at the textual level, the researchers examined each comment to identify linguistic indicators of hate speech, such as insults, negative labeling, accusations, and other hostile expressions directed at Ahmad Sahroni. Attention was given to word choice, tone, and implicit meanings that contribute to conveying hate or negativity. Second, at the discursive practice level, the analysis focused on how these hate speech comments are produced and shared within TikTok. This includes observing how top-liked comments gain visibility, how users build on shared narratives, and how hate speech becomes normalized through repetition and user endorsement. Third, at the social practice level, the comments were interpreted in relation to broader social and political contexts in Indonesia. Using van Dijk's (2008) sociocognitive approach, the analysis also considered how hate speech reflects shared beliefs, group polarization, and public perceptions of political figures like Ahmad Sahroni. This helps explain why certain negative discourses emerge and gain support online. Through these three steps, the analysis identifies how hate speech is constructed,

circulated, and socially reinforced within TikTok comment sections.

## Findings and discussion

This section presents the analysis of hate speech found in the comment sections of five Indonesian TikTok news accounts: Inilah.com (@inilahcom), Tempo.co (@tempo.co), tvOneNews (@tvonenews), detik.com (@detikcom), and Metropolitan.id (@metropolitan.id). A total of twenty-five comments, five from each news account, were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework. The analysis focused on identifying linguistic features of hate speech such as insults, negative labeling, accusations, and hostile expressions and interpreting how these expressions reflect ideological meanings and public attitudes toward Ahmad Sahroni. The results reveal that hateful comments on TikTok function not only as spontaneous reactions to political news but also as markers of collective discontent, polarization, and public frustration. Through CDA, this discussion explores how different types of news about Ahmad Sahroni trigger specific patterns of hostility and how these patterns contribute to shaping online political discourse in Indonesian social media spaces.

The five news headlines selected for this study represent major stories involving Ahmad Sahroni that circulated between August and November 2025. The video from Inilah.com, posted on 3 November 2025, shows Ahmad Sahroni delivering a speech at a public event, which sparked critical reactions from viewers questioning his credibility and intentions. The Tempo.co video, posted on 25 August 2025, shows Sahroni mocking individuals who propose dissolving the DPR, generating a wave of negative comments accusing him of arrogance and insensitivity. The tvOneNews video, posted on 21 August 2025, features Sahroni arguing that providing a housing allowance would be more efficient than the government maintaining official residences, a statement that drew backlash for appearing elitist and self-serving. The detik.com video, posted on 5 November 2025, reports that Sahroni was found guilty of violating the DPR's

code of ethics, prompting strong public condemnation and accusations of corruption and misconduct. Finally, the Metropolitan.id video, posted on 2 November 2025, shows Sahroni confiding about his house being looted, yet commenters responded with blame, skepticism, and hostility rather than sympathy.

### CDA analysis at the textual level

The first comment retrieved from comment section of inilah.com says, "bukan orang korupsi doang yang dibenci rakyat. tapi ucapan, perkataan dan perilaku juga harus diperhatikan!! (C1)" At the textual level, this comment uses negative language to show disapproval toward the political figure. The phrase "yang dibenci rakyat" labels the person as someone disliked by the public. The commenter also hints that the person's speech and behavior are inappropriate, creating an implicit accusation. The double exclamation marks add emotional intensity and show strong criticism. Since this comment does not clearly show how users build shared narratives or reflect larger political ideologies, the discursive practice and social practice levels do not apply.

The second comment from the same account states, "gak korupsi ( krna ga ketahuan) (C2)" along with a sarcastic emoji. At the textual level, this comment makes an indirect accusation, suggesting that the political figure is corrupt but simply has not been caught. The use of parentheses and the emoji creates a mocking tone, adding a sense of ridicule. These features show clear hostility and sarcasm. Because this comment alone does not show how meaning is spread or connected to wider social beliefs, the discursive practice and social practice levels are not applied here.

At the textual level, this comment uses a questioning form that appears neutral on the surface, but in context it carries an indirect negative tone. The excerpt "beliau meninggal gara apa? (C3)" retrieved from comment section of Tempo.co account implies a sarcastic or provocative tone, suggesting that the commenter is not genuinely asking but indirectly mocking the situation surrounding the backlash. However, the comment does not contain explicit insults or clear hate-speech markers. Because it does not show strong discursive patterns

or ideological meaning on its own, the discursive practice and social practice levels are not applicable.

Another comment from the same account also contains a hostile and mocking tone. The phrase “lihat rumah lu sekarang (C4)” directly references the destruction of Sahroni’s house after the controversy, using the event to ridicule him. The use of informal and confrontational language “lu” adds to the aggressive tone. The comment functions as a form of indirect insult by reminding the target of the consequences of his behavior. Because the comment does not independently show how meaning is circulated or connected to broader ideological structures, the discursive practice and social practice levels do not apply.

In a comment retrieved from Metropolitan.co, “kalian tau GOROH?? nah dia ngomong GOROOHHHHH!!! (C5)”, the user uses exaggerated spelling and repeated letters to mock the target. The long form “GOROOHHHHH” emphasizes ridicule and creates a strong negative tone. The rhetorical question “kalian tau GOROH??” also frames the statement as exposing dishonesty. These linguistic choices show negative labeling and mocking language. Since this comment does not clearly show discursive or social-level patterns, only the textual level applies.

Another excerpt from comment section of the same account; “tukang boong jgn percaya jadi dewan.. ijazah nilai 6 semua (C6)” uses direct negative labeling through the phrase “tukang boong”. The writer also gives a command “jgn percaya” telling others not to trust the person, which adds a persuasive and hostile tone. The claim “ijazah nilai 6 semua” works as an attack on the person’s intelligence or qualifications.

Moving to comment section in tvOneNews account, at the textual level, the comment “seperti menonton topeng monyet (C7)” uses mockery to describe the tvOneNews video in which Sahroni argues that lawmakers should receive a housing allowance instead of using official residences. This insult shows that viewers perceived Sahroni’s statement as absurd and disconnected from public reality. The comparison to a “topeng monyet” performance highlights how the audience viewed the video not as a serious policy argument, but as something embarrassing or laughable. The negative

wording reflects frustration with what many believed to be an elitist and insensitive proposal.

From the textual level point of view, another comment from the similar source “AWAL MUASAL RAKYAT MARAHH YA KRNA INI (C8),” expresses anger through capital letters and strong emotional language. This ties directly to Sahroni’s statement in the tvOneNews video, which appeared to prioritize lawmakers’ comfort rather than public interests. The wording shows immediate emotional rejection of the proposal.

The excerpt “harusnya di pecat ‘5\$ (C9)” from comment section of detik.com meaning should be fired uses direct and strong evaluative language. It expresses a clear demand for punishment and removal from office. The inclusion of the stone-faced emoji reinforces a tone of sarcasm. This reaction directly connects to the detik.com report, which states that Sahroni was found guilty of violating the DPR’s code of ethics. The comment reflects the public’s response to this finding, signaling frustration with his alleged misconduct and reinforcing the idea that ethical violations should lead to formal consequences.

In another comment from the similar section before “kok non aktif, pecat lah gnti yg bner2 kerja!!! (C10)”, the user expresses strong criticism by demanding that Ahmad Sahroni should be fired. The phrase “pecat lah” functions as a direct command, showing hostility and dissatisfaction. The expression “gnti yg bner2 kerja” implies that the target is not doing their job properly, which acts as a form of negative labeling. The use of multiple exclamation marks intensifies the emotional tone and signals heightened frustration. These linguistic features make the textual level clearly present.

### **CDA analysis at the discursive practice level**

The comment from the Metropolitan.id account also reflects discursive patterns because it repeats and reinforces common online narratives about dishonest politicians and low credibility. Phrases like “jgn percaya jadi dewan” and “ijazah nilai 6 semua” show how the user is reproducing well-known accusations that often appear in political discussions. The comment contributes to the spread

of a shared narrative that political figures are untrustworthy or unqualified.

Another comment from the tvOneNews account reflects the discursive practice level. A common online narrative that politicians frequently act in ways that anger the public is expressed. By stating that this issue is the “AWAL MUASAL RAKYAT MARAHH” (origin of public anger), the user connects Sahroni’s remarks to a broader pattern of perceived elitism. The engagement the comment received helps amplify and circulate this narrative across the platform.

At the discursive practice level, the comment from the detik.com account participates in and strengthens a widely shared narrative in Indonesian online spaces that political figures involved in ethical violations or corruption should face strict punishment. By saying “harusnya di pecat,” the commenter aligns with ongoing public discourse related to accountability and distrust toward politicians. The high engagement (48.9k likes) shows that many users support or agree with this viewpoint, allowing the statement to circulate widely and become part of a collective judgment against Sahroni.

### **CDA analysis at the social practice level**

First, the comment from the Metropolitan.id account also reflects the social level. This comment connects with wider public distrust toward political representatives in Indonesia. By calling the person a liar and questioning their education, the comment reflects broader social beliefs about who deserves political authority and how dishonesty is strongly condemned. It also mirrors ongoing public frustration with political elites, making this level relevant.

The social practice level in the comment from the tvOneNews account mirrors wider societal frustrations in Indonesia about inequality and political privilege. Sahroni’s housing-allowance proposal is interpreted not as a neutral policy idea but as evidence of a deeper divide between political elites and ordinary citizens. The comment reflects shared beliefs that such statements disrespect public struggle and reinforce social and economic inequality.

Next, the comment from the detik.com account reflects broader societal expectations regarding political integrity and public responsibility. Indonesian society has long been sensitive to issues of corruption and abuse of power, and the detik.com report about Sahroni violating the DPR’s code of ethics reinforces these concerns. The comment echoes these social beliefs by insisting that unethical behavior should lead to dismissal. This aligns with van Dijk’s socio-cognitive idea that discourse mirrors shared public attitudes—in this case, the belief that political elites must be held accountable and that misconduct justifies removal from office.

Expressions that target Ahmad Sahroni. These words clearly express anger, disappointment, or distrust toward him. Only some comments, specifically comments 6, 8, and 9, go beyond simple insults and connect to wider online discussions about Indonesian politicians. Then, they repeat common narratives such as politicians being dishonest, provoking public anger, or deserving to be fired. Because of this, these comments also reflect social issues in Indonesia, including public distrust toward political elites and expectations for stronger accountability. Overall, the findings show that most comments attack Ahmad Sahroni at the language level, while a smaller number help strengthen broader negative views about politicians in Indonesia.

**Table 1. CDA Analysis of ten excerpts on Ahmad Sahroni’s affair using Fairclough’s three levels**

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Textual Level</b>	<b>Discursive Practice Level</b>	<b>Social Practice Level</b>
<b>C1</b>	✓	–	–
<b>C2</b>	✓	–	–
<b>C3</b>	✓	–	–
<b>C4</b>	✓	–	–
<b>C5</b>	✓	–	–
<b>C6</b>	✓	✓	✓
<b>C7</b>	✓	–	–

Comment	Textual Level	Discursive Practice Level	Social Practice Level
C8	✓	✓	✓
C9	✓	✓	✓
C10	✓	–	–

## Conclusion

This research concludes that hate speech toward Ahmad Sahroni in TikTok news comment sections is shaped by linguistic choices, platform dynamics, and broader sociopolitical contexts in Indonesia. At the textual level, all twenty-five analyzed comments display forms of hostility, including insults, accusations, mockery, and emotional expressions that frame Sahroni negatively. At the discursive level, several comments reflect and reinforce recurring online narratives of political dishonesty, elitism, and public frustration. Meanwhile, at the social practice level, the comments reveal deeper societal issues such as declining trust in political representatives, expectations for accountability, and heightened sensitivity toward corruption and privilege. These findings demonstrate that hate speech on TikTok is not merely spontaneous emotional expression but part of wider ideological and cultural patterns. The study contributes to understanding how algorithmic visibility and user engagement help sustain hostile discourse. Future research may explore other political figures, compare different social media platforms, or examine the role of TikTok's moderation system in managing hate speech more effectively.

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