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Negotiating Gender Power Relationships through Language: A Critical Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Discourse on Gender Conflict in the Comment Section of Najwa Shihab's Instagram Account

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ABSTRACT

The development of social media has created a digital space for communication that enables the open negotiation of gender identity and power relations through users' linguistic practices. Instagram, as one of the global communication platforms, serves as a discursive arena where users express support, resistance or stereotypes regarding gender issues. This study aims to analyse how gender power relations are negotiated through language in the comments section of Najwa Shihab's Instagram account on posts addressing gender issues and the representation of women in the public sphere. The study employs a qualitative approach with a critical sociolinguistic design. The data consist of Instagram users' comments on posts from Najwa Shihab's account that contain debates regarding gender roles, women's authority, and constructions of masculinity and femininity. Data collection was carried out using digital documentation and non-participant observation, whilst data analysis employed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which encompasses data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Preliminary findings indicate that the negotiation of gender power relations emerges through three dominant patterns: gender legitimisation, gender delegitimisation, and discursive resistance. Language is used to reinforce patriarchal stereotypes by labelling women as emotional, subordinate, or unfit to hold authority. Meanwhile, other comments express resistance by negotiating gender equality and the legitimacy of women in the public sphere. Furthermore, code-mixing, evaluative language and argumentative strategies

demonstrate how language functions as an instrument both for reproducing and for resisting gender power relations in digital communication. This study confirms that Instagram comment sections constitute a complex sociolinguistic arena for shaping and negotiating contemporary gender ideologies.
Keywords: critical sociolinguistics, digital discourse, gender negotiation, instagram comments, power relations

Introduction

The development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the way society communicates, particularly through the emergence of social media as a space for public interaction. This is because it enables the production, distribution and negotiation of meaning to take place openly and simultaneously. In the context of global digital communication, social media has become a discursive arena where diverse social identities, ideologies and interests converge, with language serving as the primary instrument for constructing, maintaining and negotiating power relations. One platform that vividly illustrates these dynamics is Instagram, particularly in its comments section, which allows users to express opinions, support, criticism, resistance and negotiation regarding specific social issues. Instagram's comment sections constitute a dynamic linguistic space, as they reveal how language is used to establish legitimacy, maintain social positions, and challenge symbolic domination within digital society (Barton & Lee, 2023; Thurlow & Mroczek, 2023; Seargeant & Tagg, 2022).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is not viewed as a neutral means of communication but rather as a social practice that reflects the power structures, identities and cultural values of its speakers' communities (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Androutsopoulos, 2022; Bucholtz & Hall, 2022). Language use is always influenced by social context, relationships between speakers, dominant ideologies, and the social constructs that develop within a society (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). In the digital sphere, language practices undergo transformation as interactions take place across cultures, are multimodal, and are influenced by the algorithmic dynamics of social media platforms. Consequently, language practices in digital communication not only represent social reality but also function as instruments for negotiating social identities, including gender identities and the accompanying power relations.

Gender issues are among the most frequently debated topics in contemporary digital communication. The rise of social media has opened up space for discourses relating to feminism, masculinity, the representation of women, the division of domestic roles, gender equality, and the legitimacy of women in the public sphere. However, the openness of the digital space has also given rise to ideological conflicts between groups that support gender equality and those that uphold patriarchal values. In this context, language becomes an arena of ideological contestation, revealing how gender-based power relations are negotiated, maintained and challenged through the discursive practices of social media users. In other words, digital comments do not merely contain personal opinions, but also reflect society's ideological positions on gender relations in the digital age (Litosseliti, 2022; Talbot, 2022; Marwick, 2022).

The phenomenon of negotiations surrounding gender power relations becomes all the more intriguing when considered in relation to women in positions of authority in

the public sphere. Women who emerge as opinion leaders, journalists, academics or public figures often face different forms of social evaluation compared to men. Assertiveness in men tends to be perceived as a form of leadership and professionalism, whereas women who display similar traits are frequently labelled as 'emotional', 'harsh', 'too dominant' or 'aggressive'. This situation highlights the existence of gender-based double standards, indicating that women still have to negotiate the social legitimacy of the authority they hold (Pérez-Sabater, 2021; Risman & Davis, 2023; Marwick, 2022). In the digital sphere, this negotiation is clearly evident in social media users' comments, which explicitly or implicitly debate women's position within power relations.

One female public figure through whom this phenomenon can be observed is Najwa Shihab. As a journalist and presenter known for being critical, assertive and outspoken on socio-political issues, Najwa Shihab is often at the centre of public discourse on social media, particularly when discussing leadership, women's issues, public policy or conducting political interviews with national figures. Najwa's position as a woman in authority makes her Instagram account a space for interaction that reveals various forms of negotiation regarding gender power relations (Abidin, 2021; Georgalou, 2021). In the comments section of Najwa Shihab's posts, one finds comments that legitimise women's capacity as leaders, but at the same time, there are also comments that delegitimise women's authority through gender stereotypes, labelling, and evaluative language that positions women as subordinate. This situation demonstrates that Instagram comments are not merely a form of response to content, but also a discursive arena where users construct and challenge gender ideologies.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in a critical sociolinguistic approach that views language as a social practice inextricably linked to power relations. This perspective is relevant for understanding how language is used to maintain social domination or to build resistance against specific power structures. Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on symbolic power help to explain how language is used as an instrument of social legitimation, whilst Michel Foucault's perspective positions discourse as an arena for the production and reproduction of power (Fairclough, 2022; Foucault, 2021; Van Dijk, 2021). Meanwhile, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity enables this study to understand how gender identities are produced and negotiated through digital linguistic practices. Furthermore, Robin Lakoff's ideas on language and gender serve as a foundation for identifying how gender stereotypes manifest through lexical choices and linguistic evaluations in the comments section.

Although research on language, gender and digital media has developed significantly, there remains a research gap that requires attention. Research by Agata and Saifullah (2022) on linguistic variation in Instagram captions shows that gender influences the use of linguistic features on social media, with men and women exhibiting different tendencies in conveying meaning through language. However, this study focused on Instagram captions and did not examine user interactions in the comments section.

Furthermore, the study by Meirandani et al. (2025) on language and gender in online communication on Instagram and TikTok found that women tend to use more collaborative and emotional language, whilst men more frequently use direct and concise expressions. This study contributes to our understanding of gender-based

variations in language, but has not yet examined how language is used to negotiate power relations in digital interactions.

In the context of social media comments, Zainuddin and Karim (2025) analysed TikTok comments using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach. The research findings indicate that users' comments not only reproduce traditional gender stereotypes, but also give rise to forms of resistance against the dominant gender ideology. These findings demonstrate that social media is an arena of contestation over identity, ideology and power. However, the study focused on TikTok and did not specifically examine women in positions of public authority as objects of discourse.

Another study by Firayani (2025) on politeness strategies in social media comments relating to gender issues found that female users tended to employ indirect criticism, mitigation strategies and emotional markers such as emojis, whilst male users were more likely to use direct confrontation and sarcasm. These findings suggest that gender debates on social media are influenced not only by ideology, but also by the pragmatic strategies employed by users. However, the focus of this research was on politeness strategies and did not address the negotiation of gender power relations from a critical sociolinguistic perspective.

Furthermore, research by Tambunsaribu and Prasetyo (2024) on the linguistic features of the internet in Instagram comments found differences in the use of digital linguistic elements between men and women, such as the use of emoticons, abbreviations, capitalisation and other expressive markers. Although it provides an overview of the characteristics of digital language based on gender, this study has not yet examined how these linguistic features function in constructing legitimacy, resistance or delegitimisation of women in the digital public sphere.

Based on these various studies, it can be concluded that previous research has generally focused on gender-based language variation, gender representation on social media, politeness strategies, or the characteristics of digital language. To date, there has been relatively little research specifically examining how gender power relations are negotiated through language in Instagram comment sections, particularly in relation to female public figures such as Najwa Shihab. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by integrating perspectives on language, gender and power within a critical sociolinguistic framework to analyse the processes of legitimisation, delegitimisation and resistance towards women in positions of authority in the digital sphere.

Given this gap, this study offers novelty through three main aspects. Firstly, this study simultaneously integrates the analysis of language, gender and power relations within the context of digital communication on Instagram. Secondly, this study not only examines gender representations but also highlights the process of negotiating gender power relations through the linguistic practices of social media users (Lazar, 2021; Evans & Lépinard, 2022; Mendes et al., 2021). Thirdly, this study utilises Instagram comment sections as the primary discursive space to understand how patriarchal ideology, gender resistance and the legitimisation of women are linguistically negotiated within Indonesia's digital public sphere. Consequently, this study is expected to expand the field of digital sociolinguistics, particularly in understanding the transformation of language practices and gender power dynamics in the era of global communication.

Based on the above, the aim of this study is to analyse how gender power relations are negotiated through language in the comments section of Najwa Shihab's Instagram

account. Specifically, this study aims to identify forms of gender legitimisation and delegitimisation, the linguistic strategies employed by Instagram users, and patterns of discursive resistance to gender stereotypes within digital communication spaces. It is hoped that this study will make a theoretical contribution to the development of critical sociolinguistics and digital communication studies, whilst also providing an understanding of how social media serves as an arena for the formation, reproduction and negotiation of contemporary gender ideologies.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach within a critical sociolinguistic paradigm to examine how gender power relations are negotiated through linguistic practices in Instagram comment sections (Pennycook, 2021; Holmes & Wilson, 2022). A qualitative approach was chosen because this study seeks to understand the meanings, ideologies and social constructions embedded in language use, rather than statistically measuring the frequency of a phenomenon's occurrence. Meanwhile, a critical sociolinguistic perspective was adopted because it views language as a social practice closely linked to power relations, identity and ideology within society. In the context of this study, language is understood not only as a means of communication, but also as an instrument used by social media users to legitimise, delegitimise, maintain or challenge gender-based power relations.

The research data consisted of user comments on posts from Najwa Shihab's Instagram account that addressed issues relating to women, leadership, gender equality, domestic roles, gender stereotypes and the representation of women in the public sphere. The selection of Najwa Shihab's account was based on her position as a female public figure with social and intellectual authority in the Indonesian public sphere; consequently, her posts frequently elicit responses that demonstrate support, rejection or negotiation regarding gender power relations. The research data focused on posts with high levels of interaction that indicated debate or conflicting opinions on gender issues in the comments section (Georgalou, 2021; Lee, 2023).

The data selection technique employed purposive sampling, namely the deliberate selection of data based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Miles et al., 2020). The data criteria included: (1) posts containing gender issues, either explicitly or implicitly; (2) posts that received a large number of comments; (3) comments demonstrating support, rejection or negotiation regarding the position of women in the public sphere; and (4) comments containing evaluations, arguments, stereotypes or other forms of linguistic expression relating to gender power relations. Based on these criteria, a number of posts were selected to serve as the primary source of data for the research.

Data collection was carried out using digital documentation and non-participant observation. The researcher observed posts and comments on Najwa Shihab's Instagram account without directly participating in the interactions taking place. Comments that met the research criteria were then documented via screenshots, manual note-taking, and transcription into a research data format. The data was then screened to remove comments that were spam, duplicates, or irrelevant to the research focus (Rogers, 2022; Yus, 2022).

Data analysis utilised the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2020), which comprises three stages: data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. In the data reduction stage, comments were classified according to themes relating to gender legitimacy, gender delegitimisation, discursive resistance, gender stereotypes, and the negotiation of power relations. The next stage involved data presentation by grouping comments into analytical categories so that emerging linguistic patterns could be systematically identified. Subsequently, the researcher interpreted the data to understand how Instagram users employ language to construct, maintain, or challenge gender power relations.

To strengthen the analysis, this study adopts the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) combined with a critical sociolinguistic perspective (Fairclough, 2022; Machin & Mayr, 2024; Van Dijk, 2021). The analysis was conducted by examining lexical choices, evaluative language, argumentative strategies, social labelling, code-mixing, and other forms of linguistic expression used in the comments. Through this approach, the study not only identifies what social media users say, but also how language is used to reproduce or negotiate gender ideologies and power relations within the digital communication space.

The validity of the data is ensured through theoretical triangulation, which involves comparing the research findings with various theoretical perspectives on language, gender and power. This study draws on Robin Lakoff's theories of language and gender, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, and Michel Foucault's theories of power relations and discourse. Through this triangulation, it is hoped that the interpretation of the data will possess an adequate level of credibility and validity, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the negotiation of gender power relations in Instagram comment sections as part of contemporary digital communication practices.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents a linguistic analysis of user comments on Najwa Shihab's Instagram post, which addresses issues of gender, women's experiences and women's position in the public sphere. The analysis focuses on forms of language use that represent the negotiation of gender power relations in digital interactions. From a critical sociolinguistic perspective, social media comments serve not only as responses to a post, but also as discursive practices that reflect the ideologies, identities and power relations developing within society. Consequently, the analysis of Instagram comments enables researchers to identify how users construct legitimacy, resistance or negotiation regarding gender constructions through their choice of language. This approach is consistent with Critical Discourse Analysis, which views language as an arena for the production and reproduction of power relations within digital society.

Based on the data reduction and categorisation process, four main themes were identified that illustrate the negotiation of gender power relations, namely: (1) gender legitimisation, (2) gender delegitimisation, (3) discursive resistance, and (4) moderate negotiation.

Distribution of Gender Discourse Categories in Instagram Comments

To obtain an initial overview of the trends in gender discourse emerging in the comments section of Najwa Shihab's Instagram account, all comment data was first

classified according to its discursive function. The categorisation process involved identifying the main themes relating to the legitimisation, delegitimisation, resistance and negotiation of gender issues that emerged in the posts. This classification is important as it enables researchers to understand patterns of user interaction as well as the forms of power relations constructed through language in the digital space.

The results of the categorisation show that users' comments not only express support for or opposition to the views expressed in the posts, but also reflect a complex process of negotiating gender identity. Some users legitimise women's authority in the public sphere, whilst others display resistance to certain gender narratives through criticism, humour or sarcasm. Furthermore, comments were also found that sought to adopt a moderate stance by emphasising equality between men and women. This variety of responses demonstrates that Instagram's comments section functions as a discursive arena where various gender ideologies interact, are upheld and are debated.

The distribution of gender discourse categories identified in this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Gender Discourse Categories

Category Data Total Percentage	**Category Data Total Percentage**	**Category Data Total Percentage**
Gender Legitimisation	18	18%
Gender Delegitimisation	24	24%
Discursive Resistance	41	41%
Moderate Negotiation	17	17%
Total	**100**	**100%**

As shown in Table 1, the category of discursive resistance was the most dominant, comprising 41 data points (41 per cent). The dominance of this category indicates that Instagram users do not tend to passively accept the gender discourse featured in Najwa Shihab's posts, but rather actively construct ideological positions through comments containing arguments, rebuttals or alternative interpretations regarding the relationship between men and women. This finding suggests that the comments section functions as a discursive arena enabling users to openly negotiate the meaning of gender.

From Fairclough's perspective, the dominance of discursive resistance indicates that digital spaces are not merely venues for the reproduction of ideology, but also spaces for ideological contestation. Social media users do not merely consume messages conveyed by public figures, but also produce counter-discourse that seeks to negotiate or even challenge certain views on gender. For example, comments such as 'whether you're a man or a woman, it's equally tough' demonstrate users' efforts to reject gender dichotomies that position one group as suffering more or holding more power than the other.

The second, fairly dominant category was gender delegitimisation, with 24 instances (24 per cent). Comments in this category generally took the form of sarcasm, humour, irony or direct criticism of narratives deemed to be overly biased towards one gender. The emergence of this category indicates that some users still hold views that reject or question certain claims regarding women's experiences in the public sphere.

From Bourdieu's perspective, delegitimising comments can be understood as a form of struggle for symbolic power. When a female figure gains social legitimacy

and discursive authority, other groups emerge who seek to undermine or challenge that legitimacy through language. Therefore, delegitimisation not only reflects disagreement but also indicates a competition to determine which gender narratives are considered legitimate in the digital sphere.

Meanwhile, the 'gender legitimacy' category comprised 18 data points (18 per cent). Comments in this category expressed support for women in positions of public authority, including recognition of women's competence, experience and contributions to society. This percentage indicates that some users expressed positive recognition of female figures appearing in the public sphere.

According to Bourdieu, this kind of legitimacy is a form of social recognition that generates symbolic capital. In the context of this study, language is used to construct the image of Najwa Shihab as a female figure possessing intellectual and moral authority. Comments such as 'the perspective of Indonesia's finest woman, which should be emulated' demonstrate how users linguistically validate women's social position in the public sphere.

The final category was 'moderate negotiation', comprising 17 data points (17 per cent). Although this represents the smallest percentage, this category is of great theoretical significance. Comments in this category are generally characterised by the use of politeness, mitigation and hedging strategies, such as the use of phrases like 'in my opinion', 'if I may say so', or 'I somewhat disagree'. These strategies indicate that users are attempting to express differing views without creating open conflict.

From Butler's perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates that gender identity is not fixed, but is continually negotiated through social practices and linguistic interactions. Users in the 'moderate negotiation' category neither fully accept nor reject a particular viewpoint, but seek to create a more inclusive space for dialogue regarding gender experiences. Thus, this category reflects the dynamic process of negotiating the meaning of gender that takes place in the digital sphere.

Overall, the distribution of data in Table 1 shows that gender discourse in the comments section of Najwa Shihab's Instagram is dominated more by discursive resistance (41 per cent) than by legitimisation (18 per cent) or delegitimisation (24 per cent). This finding suggests that gender issues on social media are no longer understood in black-and-white terms as a conflict between pro and anti-groups, but have evolved into a complex arena of ideological negotiation. Social media users actively employ language to construct, maintain, challenge and negotiate gender power relations.

From a critical sociolinguistic perspective, these findings demonstrate that language in the digital sphere functions as a primary instrument in the production and reproduction of power relations. Through word choice, argumentative strategies, humour, sarcasm and politeness, users not only express their opinions but also construct gender identities, define social positions and advocate for their ideological legitimacy. Consequently, Instagram comment sections can be understood as digital public spaces that reveal how gender power relations are continually produced, debated and negotiated through everyday linguistic practices.

Some examples of comments from Najwa hihab's Instagram account can be seen in Figure 1 below.

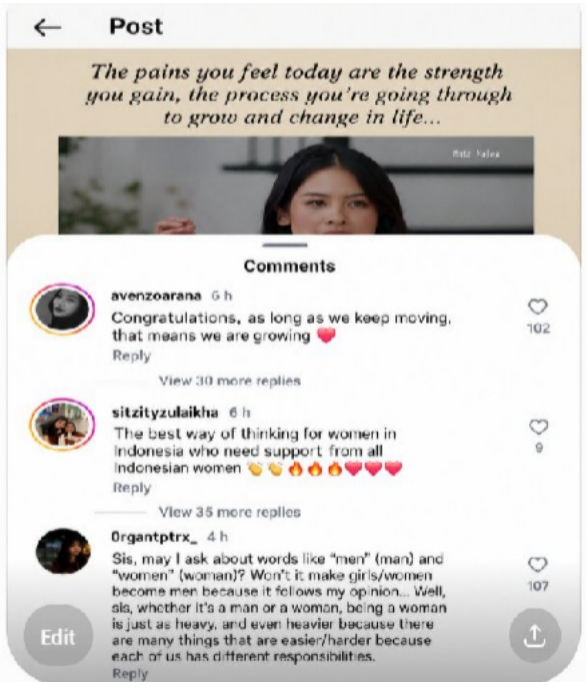


Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates the process of gender negotiation, rather than merely support for Najwa Shihab. Based on this data, the findings can be classified into four categories, namely (1) affective support; (2) gender legitimisation; (3) gender issues; and (4) discursive resistance, in line with the frameworks of 'Language, Gender, and Power' and Critical Sociolinguistics. A detailed explanation is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Categorisation of Instagram Comment Data

No.	Comment	Category	Linguistic Strategy	Meaning of Gender and Power
1	*"It's okay to go slowly; as long as we keep moving, it means we are growing."*	Affective Support	Motivational language	Not directly related to gender, but fosters digital solidarity and emotional support among users.
2	*"The best perspective from an Indonesian woman that should be emulated by all Indonesian women."*	Gender Legitimation	Positive evaluation	Constructs Najwa as an ideal, authoritative, and inspirational female figure.
3	*"Men will never be able to become women because, in my opinion, being a woman is truly difficult. Whether one is a man or a woman, each faces different challenges and responsibilities."*	Gender Issue	Gender categorization	Establishes identity boundaries between men and women by emphasizing their distinct lived experiences.
4	*"Whether male or female, life is equally difficult; both face their own struggles."*	Discursive Resistance	Equality-based argumentation	Challenges gender hierarchy and promotes the idea of social equality between men and women.

Prior to conducting an in-depth analysis, the data from Najwa Shihab's Instagram comments were categorised according to discourse themes, linguistic strategies and the gendered meanings they contained. This categorisation aimed to identify the forms of negotiation of gender power relations that emerged through user interactions in the digital space. The analysis shows that comments serve not only as responses to posts, but also as a means of building solidarity, legitimising female authority, constructing gender identity, and negotiating the concept of equality between men and women. The results of this data categorisation are presented in Table 2.

1. The Legitimacy of Women's Authority in the Public Sphere Comment:

"The perspective of Indonesia's finest woman, which all Indonesian women should emulate" constitutes a very strong form of gender legitimisation. Linguistically, the use of the superlative "finest" serves to bestow the highest possible assessment upon Najwa Shihab. The phrase "should emulate" indicates a process of social legitimisation, as the commentator is not merely praising an individual but establishing her as the standard for Indonesian women's behaviour. From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, this comment generates symbolic capital for Najwa Shihab. Najwa's authority does not stem from formal power, but from the social recognition granted by the digital community. Thus, language is used to:

- build women's authority,
- provide social legitimation,
- create an ideal model of womanhood in the public sphere.

2. Negotiating Gender Identity

The following comment is particularly significant:

"Excuse me, but regarding your comment that 'men will never be able to become women', I find it a bit... well..." This comment shows that the user does not outright reject the statement. Instead, they employ a mitigation strategy: "Excuse me", "in my opinion", "a bit... well". In pragmatics, this is known as a 'hedging strategy'. The user attempts to criticise without creating direct conflict. This phenomenon demonstrates that gender negotiation takes place through polite language. This is highly relevant to your research topic as it shows how social media users:

- do not simply agree,
- do not simply disagree,
- but negotiate the meaning of gender.

3. Resistance to Gender Polarisation

The most important part appears in the sentence:

"Whether you're a man or a woman, it's actually the same—it's equally hard for both." This statement demonstrates a form of resistance to gender essentialism. Gender essentialism holds that:

- men naturally possess certain characteristics,
- women naturally possess certain characteristics.

However, the commentator states: "it's equally difficult for both". This implies that biological differences are not used as a basis for determining a person's social value. From Judith Butler's perspective, this comment rejects rigid gender constructions and supports the understanding that the social experiences of men and women are equally complex.

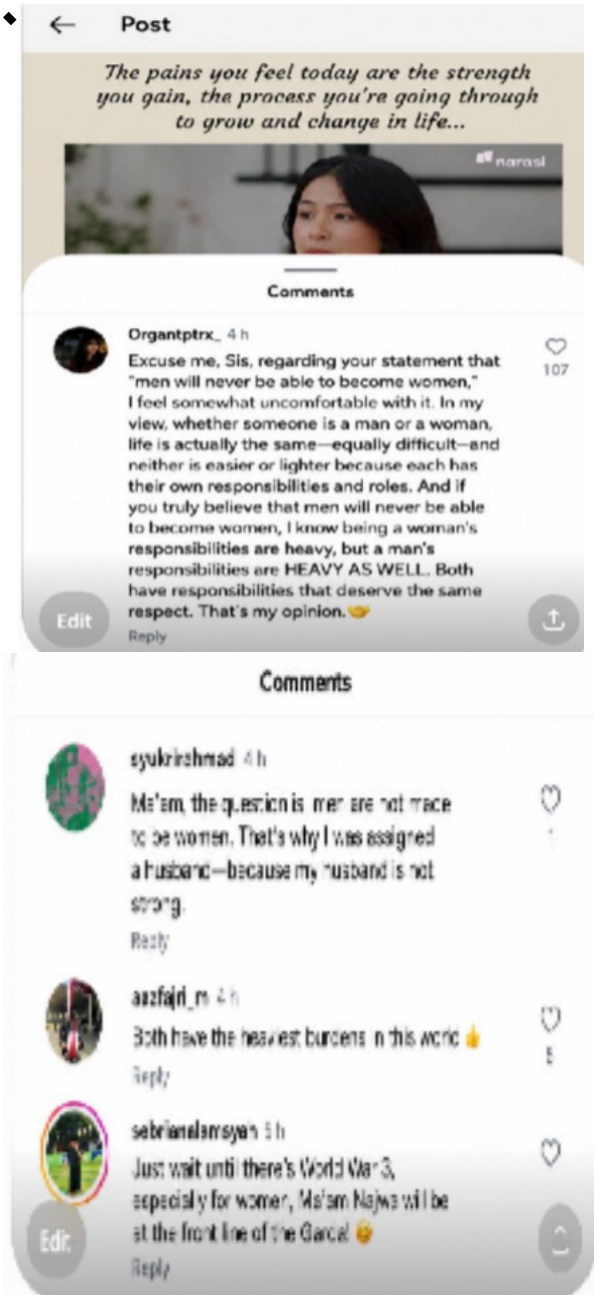


Figure 3. Figure 4

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the process of gender negotiation, resistance to gender polarisation, and the construction of the ideal woman in the digital sphere, which can be clearly categorised in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Categorisation of Instagram Comment Data Based on the Negotiation of Gender Power Relations

No.	Comment Data	Discourse Category	Linguistic Strategy	Meaning of Power Relations
1	*"Excuse me, Sis..."*	Gender Identity Negotiation	Hedging and mitigation	Expresses criticism in a non-confrontational manner while maintaining politeness and interpersonal harmony.
2	*"Whether male or female, it is actually the same; both face equally difficult challenges."*	Resistance to Gender Polarization	Inclusive argumentation	Rejects gender hierarchy and promotes an egalitarian perspective on social responsibilities.
3	*"Do not assume that men would never be able to become women."*	Resistance to Gender Essentialism	Counter-argumentation	Challenges essentialist views and rejects rigid gender stereotypes.
4	*"Agreed 🤝"*	Discursive Affirmation	Direct agreement	Demonstrates support for the discourse of gender equality
No.	**Comment Data**	**Discourse Category**	**Linguistic Strategy**	**Meaning of Power Relations**
				and mutual respect.
5	*"Well, my wife asked me to carry the water gallon because she said she was not strong enough."*	Humor and Resistance	Irony	Critiques gender generalizations by presenting an everyday example that contradicts them.
6	*"The one who bears the burdens of the whole world 👍"*	Gender Sarcasm	Irony and mockery	Delegitimizes claims of gender superiority through sarcastic exaggeration.
7	*"If World War III happens, especially for women, put Ms. Najwa on the front line 🥲."*	Patriarchal Resistance	Sarcasm and hyperbole	Challenges particular narratives of gender equality by invoking traditional assumptions about gendered roles in warfare.

As a digital public space, Instagram's comments section serves as an arena where various perspectives on gender are articulated and debated through language. In this context, users not only respond to posts but also negotiate gender identities, social authority and the power relations that surround them. Through the use of specific linguistic strategies, these comments reflect support, resistance, criticism, or rejection of the gender constructions that have developed within society. To map out these forms of negotiation, the comment data has been categorised according to discourse type, linguistic strategy, and the implications of power relations, as presented in Table 3. A detailed explanation follows.

1. Negotiation of Gender Identity

This category is most evident in the following comments:

"Excuse me, please..."

"In my opinion, it's a bit... well..."

"Don't assume that men can't become women."

The data shows that users did not outright reject Najwa Shihab's statement. Instead, users opted for a softer linguistic strategy through the use of hedging.

Phrases such as "Excuse me, please", "in my opinion" and "it's a bit... well..." are forms of mitigation that serve to reduce face-threatening acts. According to Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, this strategy is used when the speaker wishes to express

disagreement without damaging interpersonal relationships. In the context of this study, users are negotiating the meaning of gender, rather than simply accepting or rejecting a particular viewpoint. Butler's perspective explains that gender identity is not a fixed category, but rather a social construction that is continually produced through interaction. Therefore, these comments indicate that social media users are participating in the process of forming and renegotiating the meaning of gender through linguistic practices.

2. Resistance to Gender Polarisation

The most compelling evidence is found in the following comments:

"Whether you're a man or a woman, it's actually the same—it's equally tough for both." "Because each has their own responsibilities and roles."

These comments demonstrate resistance to the gender polarisation that frequently arises in digital discourse. The commenter does not position men as the superior party or women as the more oppressed party. Instead, they construct an argument that places both genders on an equal footing. Linguistically, the use of the construction 'men or women' indicates a strategy of inclusivity. Meanwhile, the repetition of the phrase 'both' functions as a cohesive device that reinforces equality. From Fairclough's perspective, this comment constitutes a form of resistance against discursive practices that construct a binary opposition between men and women. The user seeks to dismantle narratives of gender conflict and replace them with narratives of social equality. This finding suggests that social media is not always a space for the reproduction of patriarchy or radical feminism, but also serves as an arena for negotiation that allows for the emergence of moderate positions.

3. The Construction of the 'Ideal Woman' in the Digital Sphere The construction of the 'ideal woman' is evident in the comment:

"The perspective of Indonesia's finest woman, which all Indonesian women should emulate."

This comment not only offers support for Najwa Shihab, but also constructs a representation of what the 'ideal woman' should be like. Discursively, there are three characteristics of the 'ideal woman' as constructed by users:

Characteristic	**Linguistic Evidence**
Intelligent	*"perspective"* (*cara pandang*)
Characteristic	**Linguistic Evidence**
Worthy of Emulation	*"should be emulated"* (*perlu ditiru*)
Representation of Indonesian Women	*"all Indonesian women"* (*seluruh perempuan Indonesia*)

In Butler's theory of gender performativity, female identity is not understood as something natural, but rather as something constructed through social and discursive practices. Consequently, such comments represent an attempt to establish normative standards regarding what is considered the ideal woman in society. Interestingly, the construction of the 'ideal woman' in this data does not centre on physical or domestic aspects, as is often found in patriarchal cultures. Instead, the 'ideal woman' is associated with intellectual capacity, insight and social contribution. These findings indicate a shift in gender ideology within Indonesia's digital sphere, where women's intellectual authority is increasingly gaining social legitimacy.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Instagram comment sections constitute a discursive space that reveals how gender power relations are negotiated through the linguistic practices of social media users. Based on an analysis of comments on Najwa Shihab's Instagram account, it was found that language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a social instrument used to construct, maintain or challenge gender ideologies prevalent in society. The interactions occurring in the comments section reveal a contestation between views supporting gender equality and those still rooted in patriarchal values.

The research findings identify three main patterns in the negotiation of gender power relations, namely gender legitimisation, gender delegitimisation, and discursive resistance. Gender legitimisation is manifested through the use of language that recognises women's capacity as competent, empowered individuals who are worthy of holding positions of authority in the public sphere. Conversely, gender delegitimisation is evident through the use of stereotypes, negative labelling and evaluative language that seeks to limit or cast doubt on women's authority based on traditional gender constructs. Meanwhile, discursive resistance takes the form of rebuttals, critical arguments and efforts to dismantle patriarchal assumptions reproduced through language.

This study also found that the use of evaluative language, argumentative strategies and code-mixing were the primary linguistic tools in this negotiation process. The presence of terms derived from global gender discourse indicates that debates on gender in Indonesia's digital space do not take place in isolation, but are connected to global communication flows that influence how users understand and discuss gender issues. Thus, social media functions not only as a space for social interaction, but also as an arena for the production and reproduction of ideologies that shape public perceptions of women, men, and the power relations between them.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the critical sociolinguistic view that language is a crucial arena in the formation and negotiation of social power. In practical terms, the research findings are expected to raise awareness of the role of language in both reproducing and challenging gender inequality in the digital sphere. Further research is recommended to broaden the scope of study to include various social media platforms and to combine a sociolinguistic approach with multimodal analysis in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of language, gender and power in contemporary digital communication.

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