

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

In the 21st century, the rapid expansion of social media has fundamentally reshaped communication across social, cultural, and political domains. Digital platforms such as Twitter (now X), Instagram, and Facebook enable individuals to articulate opinions, emotions, and ideological positions beyond traditional constraints of time and space. While this openness has strengthened democratic participation and public engagement, it has simultaneously facilitated the proliferation of hate speech as a communicative practice that targets individuals or groups through linguistic aggression, humiliation, and provocation, particularly in politically charged contexts.

In Indonesia, the migration of political discourse into digital spaces has intensified both civic participation and discursive conflict. The country's vibrant online ecosystem allows citizens to criticize, question, and challenge political authorities; however, these interactions often blur the boundary between legitimate political expression and hostile linguistic behavior. One of the most polarizing manifestations of this phenomenon is the ongoing digital discourse surrounding allegations about the authenticity of President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi's) academic diploma. What initially emerged as a matter of public inquiry concerning transparency has gradually evolved into a sustained symbolic attack on Jokowi's political legitimacy, intellectual credibility, and moral authority.

The urgency of examining this case lies in its distinctive character as a targeted allegation directed at a national political leader and circulated persistently in digital spaces. Unlike generalized political criticism or episodic hostility toward public figures, the diploma controversy functions as a strategic attempt to delegitimize presidential authority by framing a specific accusation as an established fact. In this context, digital hate speech operates not merely as emotional expression but as a collective mechanism for constructing narratives of wrongdoing that claim factual status. This shift—from opinion-based hostility to hostility framed as truth—renders the phenomenon particularly consequential for public trust, democratic discourse, and political polarization.

Within this discourse, accusations are rarely articulated as tentative or speculative claims. Instead, they are frequently framed as factual truths through specific linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms, such as categorical assertions, the suppression of epistemic modality, and evaluative labeling. Through repetition and circulation in online communities, unverified

allegations gain the appearance of objectivity and social legitimacy. Language, therefore, functions not merely as a medium of information but as social action that actively performs delegitimization and constructs ideological alignment among audiences.

Moreover, hostility in this digital discourse is often conveyed implicitly rather than through overt insults. On platforms such as Twitter/X, users employ sarcasm, irony, mock politeness, presupposition, exaggeration, and metaphor to express suspicion and ridicule while maintaining plausible deniability. Utterances framed as rhetorical questions, ironic commentary, or seemingly neutral observations function pragmatically as accusations. This indirectness complicates both ethical regulation and analytical interpretation of hate speech, as meaning depends heavily on shared contextual knowledge, intertextual references, and audience inference.

From a pragmatic perspective, such expressions cannot be adequately explained through lexical analysis alone. Drawing on Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory, digital hate speech can be understood as a constellation of communicative acts involving locutionary content, illocutionary intent, and perlocutionary effects. A speech act analysis of strategic discourse emphasizes that political utterances do not merely transmit information, but are purposive actions designed to achieve strategic outcomes such as legitimizing claims, attacking reputations, mobilizing supporters, and shaping public perception. In this sense, discourse becomes strategic when speakers systematically select particular speech acts—especially assertives, expressives, and directives—to influence audiences and control interpretive frames. In the context of the diploma controversy, assertive acts present allegations as facts, expressive acts ridicule and morally condemn the target, while directive acts encourage suspicion, rejection, or further dissemination of accusations. Their illocutionary force is therefore closely connected to broader political objectives.

Pragmatics, as the study of meaning in context (Yule, 1996), thus provides a crucial analytical framework for uncovering how hostility is produced, interpreted, and legitimized in digital interaction. Through speech act analysis, attention is directed not only to what is said, but also to what is done through saying it, why it is done, and what social consequences it generates. This perspective is particularly relevant for strategic discourse in digital politics, where indirect language, repetition, and audience alignment often function more powerfully than explicit statements.

Empirical studies have demonstrated the relevance of pragmatic analysis in examining online hostility. Previous research has shown that assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts dominate hate speech in digital political discourse, reflecting not only individual affect but also

collective ideological positioning and social alignment. However, existing studies have largely concentrated on generalized political hostility, institutional critique, or celebrity-related controversies. As a result, there remains a significant gap in research that specifically investigates how a focused allegation is linguistically and pragmatically constructed to delegitimize a national political leader and sustain hostility over time.

Furthermore, the dynamics of digital hate speech are shaped by linguistic and ideological contexts. Variations between Indonesian- and English-language discourse may reflect different audience orientations, communicative norms, and strategic objectives. Indonesian-language utterances often cultivate emotional proximity and local solidarity, while English-language discourse may serve to internationalize allegations and appeal to global audiences. A comparative analysis across these two languages is therefore essential to understand how similar accusations are pragmatically framed and strategically disseminated within distinct discursive environments.

Against this background, the present study investigates digital hate speech related to Jokowi's diploma authenticity through a pragmatic framework that integrates micro-level analysis of speech acts and illocutionary force with macro-level analysis of strategic discourse, ideology, and audience orientation. By examining how accusations are framed as factual truths and how hostility is constructed and circulated in Indonesian- and English-language discourse, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of language as a tool of power, persuasion, and polarization in contemporary digital politics.

1.2 Research Questions

These issues highlight the pragmatic mechanisms of digital hate speech, particularly how speech acts and illocutionary force—conceptualized in Austin's and Searle's Speech Act Theory—are realized to frame allegations as factual truth and to construct and disseminate hostility.

1. How are the illocutionary configuration strategically realized in Indonesian and English digital hate speech to construct allegations about President Joko Widodo's diploma as factual truth?
2. How are pragmatic strategies, realized through sequences and patterns of illocutionary acts, employed to construct and disseminate hostility in digital hate speech within online political discourse?

1.3 Research Objectives

This research aims to investigate the realization of speech acts and illocutionary force in digital hate speech related to allegations concerning the authenticity of President Joko Widodo's diploma in Indonesian- and English-language online discourse.

Specifically, this study seeks:

1. To analyze how the illocutionary configuration is realized in Indonesian and English digital hate speech to frame allegations about President Joko Widodo's diploma as factual truth.
2. To interpret how pragmatic strategies, realized through sequences and patterns of illocutionary acts, function to construct and disseminate hostility in digital hate speech within online political discourse.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study offers substantial theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to linguistics—particularly within pragmatics and digital discourse analysis—while also carrying direct significance for Twitter (X) users as participants in contemporary digital political communication. The findings demonstrate that political hate speech on Twitter (X), especially surrounding accusations of President Joko Widodo's diploma authenticity, cannot be understood as isolated opinions or emotional reactions. Instead, such discourse operates through strategic illocutionary configurations that actively construct “factuality,” normalize hostility, and shape collective perception. For users of Twitter (X), this underscores that language on the platform functions performatively: assertive speech acts with high illocutionary commitment, reinforced by expressive acts, presuppositions, and implicatures, encourage audiences to accept allegations as settled truths, align emotionally and ideologically, and further circulate hostile narratives without critical verification.

From a theoretical perspective, the study extends Speech Act Theory by demonstrating that speech acts in digital hate discourse function not merely as expressions of belief or attitude, but as strategic instruments for constructing and stabilizing contested political realities. The analysis shows that assertive speech acts dominate the discourse and are systematically realized through declarative structures, the elimination of epistemic modality, and the use of factive and evaluative lexis. These features frame accusations as epistemically closed facts rather than debatable claims, thereby strengthening illocutionary force. Expressive acts—such as insults, mockery, and stigmatizing labels—do not operate independently, but intensify assertive force by delegitimizing the target's moral and social credibility. Presupposition and implicature further embed guilt and malicious intent as background assumptions, contributing to the naturalization of accusations. The comparative analysis of Indonesian and English data enriches pragmatic theory by demonstrating how the same illocutionary logic is adapted across linguistic and cultural contexts to address local and global audiences while maintaining identical discursive objectives.

Methodologically, this study contributes to digital pragmatics by integrating micro-level analysis of speech acts and illocutionary force with macro-level analysis of pragmatic strategies, audience orientation, and ideological polarization. This integrative framework illustrates how localized linguistic choices on Twitter (X) scale up into broader patterns of hostility, alignment, and polarization. By analyzing presupposition-driven accusations, rhetorical provocation, strategic violations of the Cooperative Principle, and intertextual recontextualization within a bilingual corpus, the study provides a replicable analytical model that moves beyond surface-level lexical detection and captures the pragmatic complexity of digital hate speech as it circulates among users.

Practically, the findings are highly significant for Twitter (X) users, educators, policymakers, and platform governance actors. For users, the study highlights the importance of pragmatic awareness: recognizing how allegations are discursively treated as facts, how dialogic space is foreclosed, and how emotional alignment is engineered through language. Such awareness is essential for developing critical digital literacy and resisting coerced consensus in polarized online environments. For policymakers and platform moderators, the study demonstrates that hate speech often operates below the threshold of explicit insult or violence, making it difficult to address through purely lexical or content-based moderation systems. Incorporating pragmatic dimensions—such as illocutionary force, accusation naturalization, and identity delegitimization—can inform more context-sensitive and effective approaches to regulation and civic education.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of pragmatics as a critical analytical framework for understanding the social consequences of language use in the digital era. By foregrounding how meaning, intention, and context interact in the construction and circulation of political hostility on platforms such as Twitter (X), the research advances scholarly understanding of language as social action and highlights its central role in shaping trust, legitimacy, audience alignment, and power relations within contemporary digital politics.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to a pragmatic analysis of digital hate speech circulating on the social media platform Twitter/X in relation to allegations concerning the authenticity of President Joko Widodo's diploma. The scope is deliberately defined to ensure that the analysis remains focused on the linguistic and strategic mechanisms through which allegations are framed as facts and hostility is constructed and disseminated in online political discourse, as examined in Chapters

IV. The issue of the diploma is treated solely as an empirical context for pragmatic analysis, not as an object of factual, legal, or historical verification.

Accordingly, this study does not aim to assess, prove, or refute the material truth or legal status of the allegations surrounding President Joko Widodo's diploma. Instead, the controversy is used as a discursive site to examine how language functions pragmatically to construct pseudo-factual realities and normalize antagonism in digital interaction. The findings are therefore analytical and discursive in nature, rather than evidential or juridical, and do not constitute a political or normative position on the ongoing public debate.

In terms of the object of analysis, the study examines only text-based hate speech in the form of tweets, replies, and quote tweets. Non-textual materials such as images, memes, videos, emojis, and other visual or multimodal elements fall outside the scope of this research. The data are drawn from publicly accessible posts produced between 2022 and 2024, a period during which discourse surrounding the diploma allegations intensified on Twitter/X.

With regard to theoretical orientation, the study is confined to pragmatic frameworks, particularly speech act theory (Austin and Searle), illocutionary force, presupposition, implicature, and Grice's Cooperative Principle. The analysis does not incorporate purely syntactic approaches, isolated lexical-semantic analysis, psychological profiling of speakers, or legal evaluations of hate speech. The primary concern is the pragmatic function of utterances and their role in shaping meaning, alignment, and hostility within digital political communication.

At the micro-pragmatic level (Chapter IV, A), the scope is limited to the realization of assertive and expressive speech acts, mechanisms of illocutionary strengthening, the use of declarative structures, the suppression of epistemic modality, and the deployment of evaluative, stigmatizing, and insulting lexis in framing allegations as factual truths. The study does not attempt to classify all possible speech act types, but focuses on those most central to the construction of hate speech in the data.

At the macro-pragmatic level (Chapter IV, B), the analysis focuses on pragmatic strategies involved in the formation and circulation of hostility, including the naturalization of allegations through presupposition and implicature, strategies of othering and identity delegitimation, violations and exploitation of the Cooperative Principle, provocative rhetorical styles, intertextuality, recontextualization, and adaptation to local and global audiences. Quantitative measurement of dissemination patterns or statistical network analysis lies beyond the scope of this study.

From a linguistic perspective, the study is restricted to Indonesian and English utterances occurring within the same discursive context. The cross-linguistic comparison aims to identify

similarities and differences in pragmatic realization and audience orientation, rather than to examine structural grammatical contrasts or translation equivalence.

Within these clearly defined boundaries, the study seeks to provide a focused and in-depth account of digital hate speech as a systematic pragmatic practice that constructs reality, mobilizes collective sentiment, and reproduces hostility in online political discourse, without exceeding the established analytical limits of the research.

1.6 Research Novelty

This study offers conceptual, analytical, and methodological innovations in the fields of pragmatics and digital discourse by positioning hate speech not merely as a lexical or emotional phenomenon, but as a strategic pragmatic practice that functions to construct reality, organize hostility, and mobilize audiences. The primary novelty of this research lies in the integration of micro-pragmatic findings (Chapter IV, A) and macro-pragmatic analysis (Chapter IV, B) within a single, coherent analytical framework.

1. Conceptual Novelty: Hate Speech as a Structured Illocutionary Practice

In contrast to previous studies that tend to view hate speech as an expression of negative attitudes or as a violation of politeness norms, this research demonstrates that digital hate speech operates through the dominance of assertive speech acts that systematically factualize allegations. Chapter IV-A reveals that illocutionary force does not emerge naturally but is strategically constructed through the suppression of epistemic modality, the use of declarative structures, and the integration of expressive speech acts as illocutionary reinforcement. In this respect, the study introduces a new understanding of coercive illocution, referring to a condition in which speech acts restrict the audience's interpretive space and impose symbolic agreement.

2. Analytical Novelty: Linking Micro–Macro Levels in the Production of Hostility

Another significant contribution lies in mapping the direct relationship between the realization of speech acts and strategies for the construction and dissemination of hostility (Chapter IV). This study demonstrates how micro-level features—such as presupposition, implicature, and evaluative expressive acts—escalate into macro-level strategies including othering, identity delegitimation, polarization, and symbolic collective action. Accordingly, the research offers an analytical model that explains how hate speech transforms from individual utterances into collective discursive practices, an aspect that has rarely been systematically elaborated in studies of digital pragmatics.

3. Cross-Linguistic Novelty: Local–Global Adaptation of Pragmatic Strategies

This study also introduces cross-linguistic novelty by showing that Indonesian and English realize similar pragmatic strategies while targeting different audiences. Chapters III and IV

demonstrate that Indonesian functions to build emotional proximity and local solidarity, whereas English is employed to internationalize the allegations and enhance the global legitimacy of the claims. The novelty lies in the finding that linguistic differences do not produce divergent illocutionary goals, but rather different modes of discourse distribution and legitimation.

4. Methodological Novelty: An Integrative Pragmatic Analytical Framework

Methodologically, this research proposes an analytical framework that integrates speech act and illocutionary force analysis with macro-pragmatic strategy analysis, including violations of the Cooperative Principle, intertextuality, and recontextualization. This approach moves beyond keyword-based analysis and enables the identification of implicit, covert, and pragmatically aggressive forms of hate speech. The model is replicable for the analysis of hate speech in other political and cultural contexts.

5. Socio-Discursive Novelty: Hate Speech as Symbolic Collective Action

The final contribution lies in conceptualizing digital hate speech as symbolic collective action rather than merely individual expression. Chapter IV shows that through intertextuality, provocative rhetorical styles, and cross-platform reproduction, hate speech functions to consolidate shared sentiments and prolong cycles of hostility. This conceptualization broadens the understanding of the social impact of hate speech and opens new avenues for research into the relationship between language, ideology, and digital mobilization.

The novelty of this study is grounded in its pragmatic reconceptualization of digital hate speech as a structured illocutionary practice, rather than as a collection of offensive lexical items or emotional outbursts. Departing from dominant approaches that focus on content classification or normative definitions of hate speech, this research demonstrates that hostility in digital political discourse is fundamentally enacted through speech acts with specific illocutionary force. By foregrounding Austin's notion of language as action and Searle's classification of illocutionary acts, the study reveals how accusations concerning the authenticity of Joko Widodo's diploma are pragmatically performed as acts of delegitimization, moral condemnation, and political discrediting.

A key contribution of this research lies in its systematic integration of micro- and macro-pragmatic analysis. At the micro level, the study identifies how assertive speech acts, stripped of epistemic hedging and reinforced by declarative structures, function to commit speakers to the truth of allegations that lack empirical verification. At the macro level, these illocutionary acts are shown to operate within broader pragmatic strategies—such as presuppositional framing, implicature, repetition, and evaluative labeling—that normalize hostility and stabilize contested claims as “common sense.” This dual-level analysis advances pragmatic scholarship by

demonstrating how individual utterances accumulate into durable discursive formations in digital environments.

In addition, the study offers a novel understanding of digital hate speech as a performative and strategic phenomenon. Rather than treating online hostility as reactive or impulsive, the findings show that hate speech is often carefully calibrated to maximize perlocutionary effects, including public distrust, id

‘eological alignment, and affective polarization. Illocutionary force functions as the key mediating mechanism between linguistic form and social consequence, allowing speakers to enact aggression while maintaining plausible deniability through indirectness, irony, and presupposition. This insight extends classical speech act theory into the domain of digitally mediated political conflict, demonstrating its continued relevance in analyzing contemporary communicative practices.

Another significant novelty of this research is its cross-linguistic and audience-oriented perspective. By comparing Indonesian- and English-language digital hate speech, the study reveals how identical illocutionary intentions—such as accusing or delegitimizing—are strategically adapted to different ideological audiences and communicative norms. Indonesian-language discourse tends to emphasize emotional proximity, shared cultural assumptions, and in-group alignment, whereas English-language discourse functions as a tool of internationalization, framing allegations in universalist moral terms to appeal to global audiences. This comparative dimension contributes new empirical evidence to pragmatic studies of bilingual and transnational digital discourse.

Finally, this research advances interdisciplinary scholarship by positioning pragmatics as a critical interface between linguistic theory, political communication, and digital media studies. By uncovering the illocutionary mechanisms through which hate speech gains authority, circulates legitimacy, and produces real social effects, the study reframes digital hate speech as a form of symbolic power exercised through language. In doing so, it makes an original and substantive contribution to pragmatics, critical discourse analysis, and the study of digital political communication, offering both theoretical refinement and methodological innovation for future research on language, ideology, and power in the digital public sphere.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Previous Studies

Research on pragmatics and hate speech has expanded significantly over the past decade, providing important insights into how linguistic choices, speech acts, and pragmatic strategies construct hostility in digital environments. These studies consistently demonstrate that hate speech is not merely a collection of offensive expressions but a complex communicative practice shaped by speaker intention, contextual cues, audience orientation, and ideological positioning. Within this scholarly trajectory, the present study builds upon prior research in both theoretical orientation and analytical focus, while offering a more integrated and context-specific pragmatic investigation. The following studies form the principal foundation for situating the present research.

1. Digital Hate Speech as Contextualized Pragmatic Action in the Online Political Sphere (Widyatnyana, Rasna, & Putrayasa, 2023)

Recent studies on digital hate speech have increasingly moved beyond a purely lexical or content-based approach toward a view of hate speech as a contextualized pragmatic action embedded in online interactional environments. A representative contribution is the study by Widyatnyana, Rasna, and Putrayasa (2023), *“Ujaran Kebencian dalam Twitter #Sebelum2024JokowiLengser: Kajian Cyberpragmatics”*, which examines Indonesian political hate speech on Twitter using a cyberpragmatic framework. Their analysis demonstrates that hate speech in digital settings emerges not simply from offensive expressions, but from the interaction between linguistic choices, platform affordances, and patterns of user participation.

Conceptually, this study provides an important foundation for the present research by rejecting decontextualized linguistic analysis and emphasizing the role of digital ecology in meaning construction. Widyatnyana et al. (2023) show that features such as hashtag activism, retweeting practices, and imagined co-presence of audiences shape how utterances are produced, circulated, and interpreted. In this sense, meaning is treated as an interactional outcome jointly constructed by speakers, audiences, and the socio-political context of Twitter/X. This orientation is compatible with the present study’s assumption that digital hate speech constitutes a form of pragmatic action situated within a technologically mediated political sphere.

However, despite its contribution to cyberpragmatic scholarship, the study leaves a critical analytical gap at the level of internal pragmatic mechanics. The analysis primarily categorizes and describes manifestations of hate speech and discusses their pragmatic effects in general terms, without systematically examining how hostile meanings are enacted through specific speech act

configurations. In particular, Widyatnyana et al. (2023) do not provide a detailed account of how illocutionary force operates to convert political allegations into pragmatically stabilized “facts,” nor do they analyze the role of assertive speech acts, declarative syntax, presuppositional framing, or the strategic removal of epistemic modality in producing this effect.

The present research is explicitly positioned to extend rather than replicate this line of inquiry by foregrounding Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) as its primary analytical framework. Instead of treating hate speech as a general cyberpragmatic phenomenon, this study examines how hostility is performed through recurrent illocutionary acts, particularly assertives that commit speakers to the truth of contested propositions. The focus is not merely on what forms of hate speech appear, but on what speakers do pragmatically when they accuse, delegitimize, and morally condemn through language.

By integrating micro-level speech act analysis (types of illocution, illocutionary strength, and commitment) with macro-level pragmatic processes (hostility circulation, audience alignment, and ideological stabilization), the present study deepens the cyberpragmatic approach into a speech act-oriented pragmatic model. This allows for a more precise explanation of how digital hate speech functions as a mechanism of political delegitimation, specifically in the case of allegations concerning the authenticity of President Joko Widodo’s diploma. In this way, the study fills a theoretical and analytical gap in existing research by demonstrating how digital hate speech derives its persuasive and polarizing power from the strategic deployment of illocutionary force rather than from lexical hostility alone.

2. Ideological Prejudice and Discursive Delegitimization in Digital Hate Speech (Priyatna, Wibowo, & Syafirah, 2024)

Priyatna and Syafirah (2024), in *“Prasangka Etnis dan Ujaran Kebencian: Analisis Ujaran Kebencian terhadap Etnis Tionghoa di Twitter (X)”*, provide a rigorous account of the ideological underpinnings of digital hate speech by examining how ethnic prejudice is reproduced and normalized in online political discourse. Their study demonstrates that hate speech operates as a discursive mechanism through which negative labeling, overgeneralization, and attribution of malicious intent are stabilized as shared social assumptions within digital communities. In this framework, hate speech functions symbolically to construct social hierarchies, reinforce in-group boundaries, and legitimize exclusionary attitudes toward targeted groups.

This study is conceptually relevant to the present research in its treatment of hate speech as a discursive and ideological practice, rather than as an impulsive expression of emotion. Priyatna et al. (2024) convincingly show that hostility in digital environments is structured through oppositional identity construction (“us” versus “them”) and sustained through collective

interpretive frames. This perspective aligns with the current study's assumption that hate speech plays a central role in processes of delegitimization and social polarization in online political communication.

Nevertheless, while Priyatna et al. (2024) offer a strong sociological and ideological analysis, their study leaves a crucial analytical gap at the level of pragmatic realization. The focus remains on the representational and ideological outcomes of hate speech—how prejudice is manifested and reproduced—rather than on how such prejudice is linguistically enacted through specific speech acts. In particular, the study does not systematically examine how assertive illocutionary acts, presuppositional structures, implicature, or the suppression of epistemic modality contribute to transforming evaluative judgments into pragmatically stabilized claims that appear factual or self-evident. As a result, the mechanisms by which delegitimization gains discursive authority at the utterance level are not fully theorized.

The present research advances this line of inquiry by shifting the analytical emphasis from ideological representation to pragmatic performance. Drawing on Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), this study examines how digital hate speech—specifically allegations concerning the authenticity of President Joko Widodo's diploma—is realized as a series of illocutionary actions that actively perform delegitimization. Rather than asking what ideological meanings are expressed, this research asks what speakers do with language when they accuse, discredit, and morally condemn in digital political discourse.

By linking micro-pragmatic analysis (types of speech acts and illocutionary force) with macro-level ideological effects (delegitimization, polarization, and hostility circulation), the present study provides an analytical bridge between ideological critique and linguistic explanation. In doing so, it complements and extends Priyatna et al. (2024) by demonstrating that ideological prejudice in digital hate speech is not only discursively represented but pragmatically produced and stabilized through recurrent speech act patterns.

3. Forensic-Pragmatic Approaches to Political Hate Speech in Digital Media (Abdullah, Djou, & Umam Kau, 2025)

Abdullah and Umam (2025), in *“Ujaran Kebencian Netizen Pendukung Anies terhadap Prabowo di Media Sosial X: Kajian Pragmatik Linguistik Forensik”*, examine political hate speech through a forensic-pragmatic lens, treating hostile utterances as linguistically performative acts with potential ideological and legal consequences. Their study demonstrates how speech acts such as accusations, insults, and delegitimizing statements function to undermine political credibility and construct imputations of wrongdoing within digital political conflict. By situating hate

speech within forensic linguistics, the authors foreground the evidentiary and responsibility-attribution dimensions of language use in social media.

This approach converges with the present study in its fundamental recognition that hate speech is not merely descriptive or expressive but action-oriented. Both studies acknowledge that political hate speech performs acts of delegitimization through linguistic choices that target authority, moral standing, and public trust. In this respect, Abdullah et al. (2025) implicitly affirm the relevance of Speech Act Theory for understanding how political hostility is enacted through language in digitally mediated environments.

However, despite this shared theoretical foundation, the two studies diverge substantially in analytical orientation and research objectives. Abdullah et al. (2025) primarily pursue forensic goals, focusing on speaker intent, accountability, and the legal interpretability of hostile utterances. Their analysis is oriented toward determining whether particular statements satisfy juridical criteria for hate speech and can function as admissible linguistic evidence. Consequently, the analytical unit tends to be the individual utterance as a discrete evidentiary object, rather than as part of an evolving discursive process.

This forensic emphasis leaves a pragmatic gap concerning how hate speech operates beyond legal classification—specifically, how hostility is gradually intensified, normalized, and reproduced within digital discourse over time. The study does not systematically address how repeated assertive speech acts, presuppositional framing, implicature, and the strategic removal of epistemic modality contribute to the stabilization of allegations as seemingly factual truths, nor how these illocutionary patterns mobilize audiences and sustain polarization across platforms.

The present research advances beyond this limitation by reorienting the analytical focus from legal evaluability to pragmatic structuration. Drawing explicitly on Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), this study conceptualizes digital hate speech not as isolated evidentiary units but as a series of recurrent illocutionary actions that collectively perform political delegitimization. By integrating micro-pragmatic analysis (types of speech acts and illocutionary force) with macro-pragmatic processes (circulation, audience alignment, and polarization), the present study addresses a dimension underexplored in forensic-pragmatic research: how political hate speech acquires durability, credibility, and mobilizing power within the digital public sphere.

In this way, the study complements rather than replicates forensic-pragmatic approaches, repositioning speech acts not primarily as legal evidence but as strategic instruments of discursive power in contemporary digital political discourse.

4. Pragmatic Configurations of Digital Aggression across Discursive Domains (Nasution, Izar, & Afifah, 2021)

Nasution, Izar, and Afifah (2021) provide an early pragmatic account of digital aggression by examining hate speech targeting K-pop idols and fan communities in online environments. Their study demonstrates that digital hate speech is predominantly realized through assertive and expressive speech acts marked by high emotional intensity, evaluative labeling, and symbolic hostility. Within this framework, hate speech functions as a pragmatic resource for articulating affect, reinforcing in-group solidarity, and constructing oppositional identities in entertainment-oriented digital discourse.

This study shares an important theoretical intersection with the present research in its recognition that hate speech operates through recurrent pragmatic configurations, rather than isolated lexical insults. Both studies reveal that categorical assertions, emotionally charged evaluations, and implicit derogation play a central role in producing “us versus them” distinctions. Nasution et al. (2021) thus establish that digital aggression is structurally patterned at the pragmatic level, suggesting the cross-contextual relevance of speech act-based analysis.

However, the analytical scope of Nasution et al. (2021) remains largely descriptive and typological. While the study successfully identifies dominant speech act categories and affective tendencies, it does not systematically interrogate how illocutionary force is intensified, stabilized, or strategically engineered within digital discourse. In particular, the research does not address how evaluative or expressive utterances may be transformed into truth-claiming assertive acts, nor how presupposition, implicature, or the strategic suppression of epistemic modality contribute to the naturalization of hostile claims.

Moreover, because the study is situated in an entertainment and fan-culture domain, it does not engage with issues of ideological authority, political legitimacy, or public accountability. The consequences of hate speech are thus examined primarily at the level of interpersonal hostility and community identity, rather than at the level of discursive power over public truth, institutional credibility, or national leadership.

The present study advances and recontextualizes this line of inquiry by relocating similar pragmatic configurations into the domain of digital political discourse, where the stakes of aggression are substantially higher. Focusing on hate speech surrounding allegations concerning President Joko Widodo’s diploma authenticity, this research demonstrates how assertive speech acts are not merely expressive of hostility but are strategically mobilized as acts of factualization. Through presuppositional loading, implicature-based accusation, and the systematic erasure of

epistemic uncertainty, hostility is pragmatically transformed into seemingly objective and self-evident truth claims.

By doing so, the present study bridges a critical gap between entertainment-based digital aggression and politically consequential hate speech. It shows that while certain pragmatic structures of hostility are shared across discursive domains, their illocutionary calibration and social effects differ significantly. In political contexts, these shared structures are repurposed to sustain ideological polarization, delegitimize institutional authority, and shape public perception in the digital public sphere—dimensions that remain outside the analytical reach of Nasution et al. (2021).

5. Indirect Illocution and Strategic Ambiguity in Digital Hate Speech (Oktaviani & Alam, 2022; Afriawati & Guntari, 2022)

Studies by Oktaviani and Alam (2022) and Afriawati and Guntari (2022) highlight indirectness as a salient pragmatic characteristic of digital hate speech. Their analyses demonstrate that antagonism in online discourse is frequently articulated through sarcasm, irony, mock politeness, presupposition, and insinuation, rather than through explicit insults or overt accusations. Such indirect strategies enable speakers to convey hostile stances while maintaining plausible deniability, thereby obscuring illocutionary intent and complicating both normative judgment and analytical identification of hate speech.

This body of work converges with the present study in its recognition that the illocutionary force of digital hate speech often diverges from its surface linguistic form. Indirect illocution allows speakers to perform acts of accusation, ridicule, or delegitimization without encoding these acts explicitly in propositional content. Meaning is thus pragmatically inferred through shared contextual assumptions, ideological alignment, and audience participation, rather than through direct semantic assertion.

Nevertheless, the analytical orientation of these studies remains primarily phenomenological and stylistic. While Oktaviani and Alam (2022) and Afriawati and Guntari (2022) successfully catalogue forms of indirect hostility and identify their pragmatic effects, they do not systematically theorize how indirect illocution functions as a structural mechanism within sustained discursive processes. In particular, these studies stop short of explaining how pragmatic ambiguity enables evaluative or speculative utterances to circulate as quasi-factual claims, or how indirectness contributes to the stabilization of contested meanings within digital publics.

Furthermore, the studies do not sufficiently address the temporal and accumulative dimensions of indirect illocution in political discourse. Indirect hostility is treated largely as an

interactional strategy, rather than as part of a broader illocutionary economy in which repeated ambiguous acts gradually construct legitimacy, authority, and epistemic credibility.

The present research advances this line of inquiry by reconceptualizing pragmatic ambiguity as a strategic illocutionary configuration, rather than a merely stylistic or interactional phenomenon. Focusing on digital hate speech surrounding allegations of President Joko Widodo's diploma authenticity, this study demonstrates how indirect illocution operates as a mechanism for the incremental factualization of accusations. Through presuppositional framing, implicature-based allegation, and the systematic suspension of epistemic modality, hostile claims are rendered resistant to direct refutation while remaining continuously reproducible across digital interactions.

By foregrounding illocutionary force and its cumulative effects, the present study shifts the analysis of indirectness from descriptive pragmatics toward an explanatory account of political meaning construction in digital hate speech. In doing so, it fills a critical gap left by earlier studies, elucidating how strategic ambiguity functions not only to obscure responsibility, but to sustain, legitimize, and normalize political delegitimization within the contemporary digital public sphere.

6. Illocutionary Categorization of Hate Speech in Political Commentary (Siregar et al., 2025)

Siregar et al. (2025), in their article *"Illocutionary Acts of Hate Speech: Analyzing Social Media Commentary Targeting Anies Baswedan,"* examine digital hate speech through the lens of Speech Act Theory, with particular attention to the distribution of illocutionary act types in social media commentary. Drawing on Austin's and Searle's taxonomies, the study identifies how hate speech targeting a political figure is realized through dominant illocutionary categories—most notably assertive, expressive, and directive acts. The authors demonstrate that hostile political commentary is pragmatically structured not only to express negative evaluation but also to perform acts of accusation, blame, and condemnation within digitally mediated interaction.

This study is significant in establishing that hate speech in online political discourse can be systematically analyzed as a configuration of illocutionary acts rather than as isolated offensive expressions. By mapping speech act types across a corpus of social media comments, Siregar et al. (2025) contribute empirical evidence that political hostility is linguistically organized and pragmatically patterned. Their findings strengthen the argument that Speech Act Theory remains a productive framework for examining digital political aggression.

However, the analytical focus of Siregar et al. (2025) remains primarily taxonomic and classificatory. The study concentrates on identifying *what kinds* of illocutionary acts occur in hate speech, but offers limited discussion of how illocutionary force is strategically intensified, stabilized, or transformed into truth-claiming discourse. Assertive acts are treated largely as one

category among others, without a systematic examination of how assertiveness functions to suppress epistemic uncertainty, naturalize allegations, or construct contested claims as factual and non-negotiable.

Moreover, the study does not explicitly address the internal pragmatic mechanisms that enable hate speech to exceed momentary expression and acquire discursive durability. Phenomena such as presuppositional loading, implicature-driven accusation, repetition across interactional chains, and the strategic removal of epistemic modality are not theorized as part of an integrated illocutionary configuration. As a result, the process through which evaluative hostility becomes normalized as shared “knowledge” within digital publics remains analytically underdeveloped.

The present thesis builds upon and extends Siregar et al. (2025) by shifting the analytical emphasis from illocutionary categorization to illocutionary structuration. Rather than asking which speech acts occur, this study investigates how assertive speech acts are pragmatically engineered to function as authoritative accusations in the context of allegations concerning President Joko Widodo’s diploma authenticity. By foregrounding illocutionary force, epistemic positioning, and pragmatic strategies of reinforcement, this research advances Speech Act Theory from descriptive classification toward an explanatory account of how digital hate speech performs political delegitimization.

In this way, the present study remains theoretically aligned with Siregar et al. (2025) while addressing a clear gap in their analysis—namely, the absence of a systematic explanation of how illocutionary acts operate as truth-producing mechanisms in contemporary digital political discourse.

7. Assertive Illocution and Dishonesty in Digital Socio-Political Discourse (Rahardi & Utami, 2025)

Rahardi and Utami (2025), in their study *“Socio-political hoaxes in virtual public space: Assertive illocutionary manifestations of dishonesty in a critical pragmatics perspective,”* examine the pragmatic mechanisms underlying the production and circulation of socio-political hoaxes in digital public spaces. Grounded in Speech Act Theory and enriched by a critical pragmatics orientation, the study demonstrates that hoax discourse is predominantly realized through assertive illocutionary acts that commit speakers to the truth of false or misleading propositions. Assertiveness, in this framework, functions as a key pragmatic vehicle for disguising dishonesty as factual reporting.

A central contribution of Rahardi and Utami (2025) lies in their demonstration that dishonesty in digital political discourse is not primarily encoded through explicit markers of

falsehood, but rather through pragmatic manipulation of illocutionary force. By foregrounding assertive speech acts, the study shows how deceptive content gains credibility, authority, and persuasive power in virtual public space. This insight reinforces the relevance of Speech Act Theory for analyzing digital political communication beyond surface-level semantic truth conditions.

Conceptually, this study aligns with the present research in treating digital political discourse as performative, where utterances do not merely describe reality but actively construct versions of it through illocutionary commitment. Both studies reject the notion that digital misinformation or hostility is an accidental by-product of online interaction; instead, they conceptualize it as a strategic pragmatic practice oriented toward social and ideological effects.

Nevertheless, despite its strong theoretical grounding, Rahardi and Utami (2025) leave an important analytical gap that the present study seeks to address. Their analysis is primarily oriented toward dishonesty and misinformation as communicative outcomes, rather than toward hostility and delegitimization as pragmatic processes. While assertive illocutionary acts are identified as vehicles of hoax dissemination, the study does not systematically examine how assertiveness is combined with evaluative judgment, moral accusation, and identity-based targeting to produce hate-oriented political discourse.

Furthermore, the study treats assertive illocution largely as a carrier of false propositional content, without fully theorizing the internal pragmatic strategies that intensify and stabilize illocutionary force over time. Mechanisms such as presuppositional framing, implicature-based accusation, strategic removal of epistemic modality, and repetition across interactional chains are not analyzed as components of a broader illocutionary configuration that transforms contested claims into socially circulating “truths.”

The present thesis builds upon Rahardi and Utami’s (2025) findings by shifting the analytical focus from dishonesty as informational deviation to delegitimization as pragmatic action. Rather than examining hoaxes in general socio-political discourse, this study concentrates on digital hate speech surrounding allegations of President Joko Widodo’s diploma authenticity. By doing so, it investigates how assertive illocutionary acts are not only deceptive but also hostile, functioning to undermine political legitimacy through truth-claiming accusation.

By integrating fine-grained illocutionary analysis with pragmatic strategies of reinforcement and circulation, the present research extends the critical pragmatics perspective into a speech act-centered explanation of how digital hate speech acquires authority, durability, and mobilizing power. In this way, the study complements rather than duplicates Rahardi and

Utami (2025), advancing the field from an analysis of assertive dishonesty toward a more comprehensive account of assertive hostility in contemporary digital political discourse.

8. Illocutionary Speech Acts in Instagram-Based Hate Speech (Faizah et al., 2025)

Faizah et al. (2025), in their study *“Kajian Pragmatik pada Tindak Tutur Ilokusi dalam Ujaran Kebencian di Kolom Komentar Instagram,”* investigate the realization of illocutionary speech acts in hate speech produced by Instagram users. Employing a pragmatic framework grounded in Speech Act Theory, the authors identify dominant illocutionary categories—such as assertives, expressives, and directives—used to convey hostility, insult, and condemnation in comment-based interactions. Their findings demonstrate that hate speech on Instagram is pragmatically structured through recurrent illocutionary acts that function to express evaluation, emotional stance, and antagonistic positioning toward targeted individuals or groups.

The primary contribution of Faizah et al. (2025) lies in their systematic classification of illocutionary speech acts in a visual-oriented social media platform. By mapping illocutionary types to instances of hate speech, the study provides empirical evidence that digital hostility is not random or chaotic but follows recognizable pragmatic patterns. This reinforces the relevance of Speech Act Theory for understanding how antagonism is enacted through language in digitally mediated environments.

Conceptually, this study aligns with the present research in its recognition that hate speech operates at the illocutionary level, where utterances function as social actions rather than as neutral statements. Both studies share the assumption that pragmatic force—rather than lexical offensiveness alone—is central to the construction of hostility in social media discourse.

However, despite its descriptive and classificatory strengths, Faizah et al. (2025) leave several analytical dimensions unexplored. First, the study primarily treats illocutionary acts as static categories, focusing on their distribution and frequency, without examining how illocutionary force is strategically intensified, stabilized, or transformed across sequences of digital interaction. As a result, the dynamic process by which hostile speech acts evolve from individual comments into normalized or widely accepted accusations remains under-theorized.

Second, the analysis does not sufficiently address how assertive illocutionary acts in hate speech function as truth-claiming mechanisms. While assertives are identified, the study does not explore how declarative syntax, presuppositional loading, implicature, and the systematic removal of epistemic modality work together to convert evaluative judgments into seemingly objective or factual claims. This limits the explanatory power of the study in accounting for how digital hate speech acquires credibility and persuasive force.

Third, Faizah et al. (2025) focus on interactional hostility at the level of user commentary, without situating illocutionary acts within broader political or ideological projects. The study does not examine how hate speech contributes to processes of political delegitimization, reputational damage, or symbolic power struggles, particularly in contexts involving public figures or contested political authority.

The present research extends and deepens the contribution of Faizah et al. (2025) by shifting the analytical focus from illocutionary identification to illocutionary configuration and function. Rather than merely categorizing speech acts, this study investigates how assertive illocutionary acts are strategically deployed to perform delegitimization in digital political discourse, specifically in relation to allegations concerning President Joko Widodo's diploma authenticity.

By integrating micro-pragmatic analysis of speech act realization with macro-pragmatic analysis of hostility construction, circulation, and audience alignment, the present study addresses a critical gap left by Instagram-based comment analysis. In doing so, it demonstrates how illocutionary force operates not only to express hatred, but to produce durable political narratives, thereby advancing speech act-based pragmatics from descriptive mapping toward an explanatory model of digital hate speech in the contemporary public sphere.

Synthetic Positioning of Previous Studies and State of the Art

A synthesis of the eight previous studies demonstrates a converging scholarly concern with digital hate speech as a pragmatic phenomenon, particularly in relation to political discourse, illocutionary acts, and ideological contestation in online spaces. Collectively, these studies have established that hate speech on social media is not merely expressive hostility, but a structured communicative practice realized through specific illocutionary acts—most prominently assertives and expressives—used to attack credibility, construct antagonistic identities, and mobilize public sentiment. This body of research confirms the relevance of speech act theory in examining digital political hostility, thereby providing a strong theoretical foundation for the present study.

However, a closer examination reveals that most existing studies prioritize classification and frequency mapping of illocutionary acts in hate speech, often stopping at the identification of dominant categories such as assertive accusations, expressive insults, or directive provocations. While these works successfully demonstrate *what types* of speech acts are used, they offer limited insight into how illocutionary force is pragmatically engineered to transform allegations into perceived factual truths. Consequently, the pragmatic mechanism through which false or unverified claims acquire epistemic authority in digital discourse remains underexplored.

Furthermore, several prior studies approach hate speech from critical pragmatics or socio-political perspectives, foregrounding power relations, ideology, or media manipulation. Although analytically valuable, such approaches tend to subordinate speech act theory to broader critical frameworks, resulting in less systematic engagement with Austin's felicity conditions and Searle's constitutive rules of illocutionary force. As a result, the internal pragmatic logic of how utterances *perform* actions—rather than merely *reflect* ideology—has not been fully explicated.

Another notable limitation in previous research lies in the treatment of illocutionary acts as isolated units. Most studies analyze individual comments or utterances without sufficiently addressing how sequences and patterns of illocutionary acts function cumulatively to construct, reinforce, and circulate hostility across digital interactions. This gap obscures the dynamic process through which hate speech escalates from single accusations into sustained discursive campaigns within online political discourse.

In addition, comparative analyses across languages remain relatively scarce. Existing studies predominantly focus on single-language datasets, thereby overlooking how illocutionary force may be realized differently across linguistic and cultural contexts. This limitation is particularly significant in politically sensitive discourse, where language choice, pragmatic norms, and audience expectations play a crucial role in shaping the perceived legitimacy and force of allegations.

Within this landscape, the present study positions itself as advancing the field by offering a strictly pragmatic analysis grounded exclusively in Austin's and Searle's speech act theory. Rather than integrating multiple theoretical frameworks, this research foregrounds illocutionary force as the central analytical lens, enabling a precise examination of how assertive and expressive speech acts are pragmatically deployed to frame allegations concerning President Joko Widodo's diploma as factual and unquestionable truths.

Moreover, this study contributes a process-oriented perspective by analyzing not only individual illocutionary acts but also their sequential organization and recurring patterns. By doing so, it reveals how hostility is not merely expressed but *performed, reinforced, and propagated* through patterned pragmatic strategies in digital political discourse.

Finally, by adopting a bilingual Indonesian–English corpus, this research fills an empirical gap in cross-linguistic pragmatic analysis of digital hate speech. This comparative dimension allows for a more nuanced understanding of how illocutionary force operates across languages while maintaining similar hostile intentions, thereby strengthening the explanatory power of speech act theory in contemporary digital contexts.

Taken together, these contributions establish the present study as extending prior research from descriptive categorization toward a deeper pragmatic explanation of illocutionary force, factualization strategies, and hostility construction, thus marking a clear and substantive advancement in the study of digital hate speech within the Austin–Searle paradigm.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

1. Speech Acts and Pragmatic Structure: Language as Social Action in Digital Hate Speech (Austin)

Within pragmatic theory, meaning is not treated as a static property of linguistic expressions, but as an outcome of action performed through language. J. L. Austin's seminal contribution lies in his rejection of the descriptive fallacy—the assumption that the primary function of language is to describe states of affairs that can be evaluated as true or false. Against this view, Austin proposes that uttering a sentence is itself a form of social action; as he famously formulates, “*to say something is to do something*” (Austin, 1962, p. 12).

This conception is foundational for the analysis of digital hate speech, where utterances do not merely reflect attitudes or opinions but actively perform acts such as accusing, blaming, delegitimizing, and morally condemning targeted individuals. In this sense, hostile statements circulating in digital political discourse should be understood not as passive representations of belief, but as actions designed to intervene in social reality by reshaping reputations, authority, and public legitimacy.

Austin's tripartite distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts provides a layered framework for examining how such actions are realized linguistically (Austin, 1962). At the locutionary level, an utterance consists of a propositional content articulated through particular lexical and syntactic choices. In digital hate speech concerning allegations about the authenticity of President Joko Widodo's diploma, this level is often realized through grammatically declarative and informationally framed sentences.

However, the analytical significance of these utterances lies primarily at the illocutionary level. Although locutionarily structured as neutral statements, these utterances function illocutionarily as accusations presented as factual truths. Through categorical assertions, the suppression of epistemic modality, and the deployment of evaluative predicates, speakers perform the act of accusing while simultaneously concealing its actional character behind a veneer of factuality. Austin's framework allows us to identify this disjunction between form and force: what appears to be stating is, in fact, accusing.

At the perlocutionary level, such illocutionary acts are oriented toward producing effects on audiences, including distrust toward institutions, moral condemnation of political figures, and

intensified ideological polarization. Importantly, Austin does not reduce perlocutionary effects to speaker intention alone; rather, they emerge through uptake and circulation, making them particularly relevant in digitally networked environments. Thus, Austin's model enables an analysis of digital hate speech as a form of social action operating simultaneously at micro-pragmatic levels (individual illocutionary acts) and macro-pragmatic levels (their cumulative societal effects).

Nevertheless, while Austin provides a powerful conceptualization of language as action, his framework remains relatively open-ended with regard to the systematic classification of illocutionary forces. This analytical gap becomes particularly salient when addressing large datasets of digital discourse, where recurrent patterns of action demand a more explicit typology. It is at this point that Searle's reformulation of speech act theory becomes analytically indispensable.

2. Illocutionary Force and the Systematization of Assertive Speech Acts (Searle)

Building on Austin's conception of language as action, John R. Searle seeks to systematize illocutionary force by proposing a taxonomy of speech acts based on their communicative point. While Austin emphasizes the performative nature of utterances and the contextual conditions of felicity, Searle shifts the analytical focus toward the internal structure of illocutionary acts themselves. In doing so, he introduces a more formal classification that distinguishes assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Searle, 1979).

Among these categories, assertive speech acts are of central importance to the present study. Searle defines assertives as acts whose "*point or purpose is to commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition*" (Searle, 1979, p. 12). This definition foregrounds propositional commitment as the defining feature of assertive illocutionary force, thereby offering a precise analytical lens for examining how allegations are linguistically framed as factual realities.

In digital hate speech surrounding the controversy over Joko Widodo's diploma authenticity, assertive speech acts function as the primary mechanism through which contested claims are transformed into seemingly objective truths. Speakers systematically employ declarative sentence structures, categorical wording, and the absence of epistemic hedging to present accusations not as opinions, suspicions, or hypotheses, but as established facts. Through this illocutionary configuration, the speaker implicitly claims epistemic authority while simultaneously disavowing the subjective or evaluative nature of the act.

From a Searlean perspective, the force of these assertive acts lies not in their empirical verifiability but in the illocutionary commitment they enact. By asserting a proposition, the speaker places themselves under an obligation to its truth, regardless of whether that truth can be

substantiated. This insight is crucial for understanding digital hate speech, where repeated assertive accusations gain persuasive power not through evidence, but through the cumulative effect of reiterated commitments across digital platforms.

At the micro-pragmatic level, assertive illocutionary force binds individual speakers to the alleged truth of the accusation. At the macro-pragmatic level, the repetition, recontextualization, and collective endorsement of these assertive acts allow them to circulate as shared knowledge. In this way, Searle's typology enables the analysis to move beyond Austin's general notion of illocutionary action and specify how particular kinds of action—namely assertive acts—dominate the pragmatic architecture of digital hate speech.

At the same time, Searle's formalization entails a degree of abstraction that risks underplaying the socio-political conditions under which speech acts acquire force. For this reason, his framework must be read not as a replacement for Austin's, but as a complementary analytical refinement that gains explanatory power when re-embedded within Austin's broader conception of language as socially situated action.

3. Illocutionary Force, Contextual Conditions, and Digital Mediation

Illocutionary force does not operate in a vacuum. Both Austin and Searle emphasize that speech acts are governed by conditions that render them recognizable and consequential, even if they conceptualize these conditions differently. Austin frames these as felicity conditions tied to conventional procedures and appropriate circumstances, whereas Searle formalizes them as constitutive rules that define what it is to perform a particular illocutionary act.

In digitally mediated political discourse, these conditions are profoundly shaped by platform affordances, anonymity, algorithmic amplification, and heightened political polarization. As Hymes observes, *"there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless"* (Hymes, 1972, p. 278). Digital hate speech operates precisely within such rules of use, where accusatory assertive acts are normalized through repetition, virality, and collective alignment.

Mey further situates illocutionary force within broader social structures, arguing that *"pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society"* (Mey, 2001, p. 6). From this perspective, assertive accusations concerning diploma authenticity do not function as isolated speech acts; rather, they are embedded within patterns of circulation that enhance their perceived factuality and ideological resonance.

Thus, while Austin's framework highlights the actional nature of language and Searle's framework specifies the internal logic of assertive commitment, a pragmatic analysis of digital hate speech must integrate both with an account of contextual and technological mediation.

Illocutionary force is intensified not only by linguistic design but also by the socio-digital conditions that enable hostile assertions to be repeatedly encountered, endorsed, and normalized.

4. Digital Hate Speech as Performative and Strategic Action

From a speech act perspective, digital hate speech constitutes a form of deliberate communicative action rather than a spontaneous expression of emotion. In line with Austin's notion of performativity, hostile utterances in digital spaces enact social actions through specific illocutionary forces. In the case of the diploma authenticity controversy, speakers predominantly employ assertive illocutionary acts to perform accusing, delegitimizing, and morally condemning actions while presenting these actions as neutral statements of fact.

These illocutionary acts are embedded within pragmatic strategies that amplify their force. By suppressing epistemic modality, invoking shared presuppositions, and adopting declarative forms, speakers construct hostility in a manner that appears rational and commonsensical. As Waldron argues, hate speech functions as "*a mode of attack on the public standing*" of its target by undermining social credibility and legitimacy (Waldron, 2012, p. 105).

At the micro-pragmatic level, assertive speech acts commit speakers to the alleged truth of the accusation. At the macro-pragmatic level, their repeated circulation across digital networks transforms these commitments into collectively sustained narratives. Consequently, digital hate speech operates as a performative mechanism through which political allegations are stabilized as perceived truths and mobilized to sustain polarization in both Indonesian- and English-language online discourse.

5. Pragmatics as the Analytical Foundation of This Study

Taken together, this theoretical framework demonstrates that pragmatics—particularly speech act theory as articulated by Austin and refined by Searle—provides a robust analytical foundation for examining digital hate speech. Austin's conception of language as social action foregrounds the performative and consequential nature of hostile utterances, while Searle's classification of illocutionary acts enables a systematic analysis of how assertive commitments dominate the pragmatic realization of political accusations.

By integrating these perspectives, this study is able to capture not only what is said in digital hate speech, but what is done through language and how such actions are strategically designed, circulated, and normalized. Pragmatics thus allows the analysis to move beyond surface-level linguistic description and conceptualize digital hate speech as a form of social action—performed through speech acts, reinforced through digital mediation, and sustained through ideological alignment within contemporary political communication.

6. Speech Act Theory as an Analytical Lens for Digital Hate Speech

Speech Act Theory constitutes the primary analytical lens through which this study examines digital hate speech as a form of social action within contemporary political discourse. Rather than treating hate speech as a mere reflection of opinion, emotion, or attitude, this framework conceptualizes hostile utterances as deliberate linguistic actions that intervene in social reality by accusing, delegitimizing, stigmatizing, and polarizing. This perspective is grounded in the foundational work of J. L. Austin and its subsequent reformulation by John R. Searle, whose approaches—while related—differ significantly in theoretical emphasis and analytical orientation.

Austin's central intervention lies in dismantling the assumption that language primarily serves to describe states of affairs. By arguing that "*to say something is to do something*" (Austin, 1962, p. 12), he reframes meaning as action and places the focus of analysis on what speakers accomplish through utterances in specific social contexts. Searle, while accepting this premise, redirects the theory toward a more systematic account of illocutionary force, proposing a taxonomy of speech acts governed by constitutive rules. In this study, these two perspectives are not treated as interchangeable but as analytically distinct and mutually illuminating. Austin provides the conceptual foundation for understanding digital hate speech as social action, while Searle offers tools for identifying and classifying the dominant forms of action realized through such speech.

In the controversy surrounding the alleged authenticity of Joko Widodo's diploma, digital hate speech is predominantly realized through assertive illocutionary acts that present allegations in declarative form and commit speakers to the truth of contested propositions. However, the social efficacy of these utterances cannot be fully understood through illocutionary classification alone. It requires an Austinian sensitivity to context, uptake, and consequences, as well as a Searlean account of propositional commitment and rule-governed force. Accordingly, Speech Act Theory enables this study to operate simultaneously at the micro-pragmatic level—where individual utterances enact specific illocutionary forces—and at the macro-pragmatic level—where repeated and circulating speech acts construct and normalize hostility within digital networks across Indonesian and English discourse.

7. The Structure of Speech Acts: Austin's Tripartite Model and Digital Hostility

Austin's distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts provides a foundational structure for analyzing how hostile meanings are produced and take effect in digital communication. The locutionary act refers to the act of saying something with a particular sense and reference; the illocutionary act concerns what is done in saying something; and the

perlocutionary act involves what is achieved by saying something, such as persuading or provoking (Austin, 1962).

In digital hate speech, hostile meaning rarely resides at the locutionary level alone. Utterances surrounding the diploma controversy often appear as grammatically neutral, declarative statements that ostensibly convey information. Yet, as Austin emphasizes, *“the illocutionary act is the performance of an act in saying something as opposed to the performance of an act of saying something”* (Austin, 1962, p. 99). What is performed through these declaratives is not the neutral transmission of facts but the act of accusing, casting doubt, or delegitimizing a political figure.

Austin’s model is particularly valuable in highlighting the misalignment between linguistic form and social action. A sentence that is locutionarily factual may be illocutionarily accusatory and perlocutionarily inflammatory. At the perlocutionary level, the effects of such utterances become visible in the form of collective suspicion, moral condemnation, and ideological polarization. Importantly, Austin does not treat these effects as accidental; rather, they are integral to understanding how speech functions within a social field. This emphasis on consequence and uptake is crucial for analyzing digital hate speech, where the impact of an utterance is amplified through circulation, repetition, and audience alignment.

However, while Austin’s framework powerfully captures the actional and contextual dimensions of hostile speech, it offers relatively limited guidance for systematically distinguishing between different types of illocutionary acts. This limitation becomes analytically significant when examining large volumes of digital data characterized by recurring patterns of accusation. It is at this point that Searle’s classificatory project becomes relevant.

8. Searle’s Classification of Illocutionary Acts and the Logic of Hate Speech

Searle’s reformulation of speech act theory seeks to systematize Austin’s insights by classifying illocutionary acts according to their communicative point. He identifies five basic categories—assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations—each defined by a distinctive relationship between words, world, and speaker commitment (Searle, 1979).

In the context of digital hate speech, assertive and expressive acts are particularly salient. Assertives are defined as illocutionary acts whose *“point or purpose is to commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition”* (Searle, 1979, p. 12). This notion of propositional commitment provides a precise analytical explanation for how allegations are framed as facts in hostile digital discourse. By asserting that a diploma is “fake” or that a leader has “deceived the public,” speakers linguistically bind themselves to the truth of the claim, regardless of its empirical verifiability.

Expressive speech acts, by contrast, function to display the speaker's psychological attitude toward a state of affairs. As Searle explains, "*expressives are those illocutionary acts that express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition*" (Searle, 1979, p. 15). In digital hate speech, expressives often manifest as overt insults, ridicule, or moral outrage. While these acts may appear more emotionally transparent than assertives, their force lies in reinforcing negative evaluations and aligning audiences affectively against the target.

From a critical perspective, Searle's classification helps clarify how hate speech often disguises hostility as assertion. By adopting the illocutionary form of assertives, speakers present ideological judgments as objective descriptions. However, Searle's focus on rule-governed force risks abstracting speech acts from the socio-political conditions that render such assertions persuasive or dangerous. Consequently, his framework gains explanatory depth only when reintegrated into Austin's broader concern with context, convention, and consequence.

9. Indirect Speech Acts and the Pragmatics of Implicit Hatred

One of the defining features of digital hate speech is its frequent reliance on indirect speech acts. According to Searle (1975), indirect speech acts allow speakers to communicate meanings that go beyond what is explicitly stated. Through rhetorical questions, sarcasm, insinuation, or irony, speakers convey hostile meanings without directly articulating them.

This indirectness serves important strategic functions. It allows speakers to maintain plausible deniability, evade moderation, and deflect accusations of hostility while still achieving delegitimizing effects. From an Austinian perspective, such utterances illustrate the gap between locutionary content and illocutionary force: what is said explicitly differs from what is done pragmatically. Indirect speech acts thus exemplify how hate speech operates not through explicit verbal aggression alone, but through calculated ambiguity that relies on shared contextual assumptions and audience inference.

10. Context, Convention, and the Conditions of Illocutionary Success

Both Austin and Searle emphasize that speech acts succeed only under appropriate conditions, though they conceptualize these conditions differently. Austin introduces the notion of felicity conditions, stressing that the performance of an illocutionary act depends on recognized conventions and appropriate circumstances. Searle formalizes these conditions as constitutive rules that define what it means to perform a particular type of act.

In digital environments, these conditions are profoundly reshaped by platform affordances, anonymity, algorithmic amplification, and ideological polarization. As Hymes observes, "*there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless*" (Hymes, 1972, p. 278). Digital hate speech exploits such rules of use, embedding accusatory acts within communicative norms

that reward virality and group alignment. Consequently, the interpretation and uptake of illocutionary force cannot be separated from broader social and technological contexts.

11. Perlocutionary Effects and the Social Consequences of Digital Hate Speech

The perlocutionary dimension of speech acts is central to assessing the societal impact of digital hate speech. Austin characterizes perlocution as the effects an utterance has on hearers, such as persuading, alarming, or inciting. In the context of hate speech, these effects include the normalization of stigma, erosion of trust in institutions, and the polarization of public opinion.

From a critical pragmatic standpoint, perlocutionary effects are not incidental outcomes but integral to the function of hostile discourse. Repeated assertive accusations, circulated and recontextualized across digital networks, accumulate persuasive force and reshape collective perception. Speech acts thus operate not merely as individual communicative moves but as discursive practices with enduring consequences for the social order.

12. The Analytical Value of Speech Act Theory for Digital Hate Speech

Taken together, Speech Act Theory—when approached through a critical dialogue between Austin and Searle—offers a powerful framework for analyzing digital hate speech. Austin's emphasis on language as socially situated action foregrounds the performative and consequential nature of hostile utterances, while Searle's typology clarifies how specific illocutionary forces, particularly assertives, dominate the pragmatic architecture of political hate speech.

By integrating these perspectives, this study moves beyond surface-level identification of offensive language and toward an analysis of how hatred is performed, legitimized, and circulated through speech acts in digital political discourse. Speech Act Theory thus enables a nuanced understanding of digital hate speech as a form of linguistically mediated social action with profound ideological and societal implications.

2.3 Assertive Speech Acts and Illocutionary Force

This section elaborates the concept of assertive speech acts and illocutionary force as central mechanisms through which digital hate speech operates as social and ideological action. While assertive speech acts are commonly understood as acts of stating or describing reality, a critical speech act perspective reveals that they function not merely to represent states of affairs, but to *construct* them discursively. In digital hate speech, assertive acts are strategically mobilized to frame accusations, suspicions, and ideological judgments as factual statements, thereby endowing them with strong persuasive and delegitimizing power.

The theoretical grounding of assertive speech acts must be situated within the broader development of speech act theory, particularly the contrasting contributions of Austin and Searle.

Austin conceptualizes illocutionary force as the performance of an action *in* saying something, emphasizing the contextual and conventional conditions under which such actions succeed. Searle, by contrast, systematizes illocutionary acts according to their communicative point and defines assertives primarily in terms of speaker commitment to propositional truth. This shift from contextual action to propositional commitment is analytically significant for understanding how digital hate speech transforms subjective accusations into apparently objective facts.

Searle explicitly states that “*the point or purpose of the assertive illocutionary act is to commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition*” (Searle, 1979, p. 12). In digital hate speech, this commitment functions as a rhetorical and pragmatic strategy: by asserting rather than merely suggesting or questioning, speakers present contested claims as settled realities. The resulting illocutionary force enhances the legitimacy of the claim while simultaneously weakening the social and moral standing of targeted individuals or groups.

1. Characteristics of Assertive Speech Acts

Assertive speech acts include utterances such as stating, claiming, asserting, reporting, concluding, and accusing. What unites these acts is not their grammatical form, but their pragmatic orientation toward representing the world as the speaker takes it to be. Levinson notes that assertives are defined by the fact that they “*commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition expressed*” (Levinson, 1983, p. 240).

From an Austinian perspective, this commitment is not merely a mental state but a socially recognizable action. To assert something is to place oneself in a position of epistemic responsibility within a given interactional context. However, Austin does not provide a rigid taxonomy of such acts; instead, he emphasizes the variability of illocutionary force depending on circumstances, uptake, and convention. Searle’s contribution lies in abstracting from this variability to define assertives as a coherent class governed by constitutive rules.

In digital discourse, this abstraction becomes operationally powerful. Declarative sentence structures—often associated with neutral information delivery—are used to perform assertive acts that function illocutionarily as attacks or delegitimations. The hostility of the utterance does not lie in overt emotional language, but in the truth claim itself, which presents ideological judgments as descriptions of reality. This illustrates how Searle’s definition of assertives clarifies the internal logic of such utterances, while Austin’s framework explains their social force and consequences.

2. Illocutionary Force and Degrees of Speaker Commitment

Illocutionary force refers to the action-performing capacity of an utterance. Austin famously distinguishes illocutionary acts from locutionary meaning by asserting that “*the illocutionary act is performed in saying something*” (Austin, 1962, p. 99). Crucially, for Austin, illocutionary force is

not inherent in linguistic form alone; it emerges through conventions, contexts, and the recognition of the act by others.

Searle reframes this notion by linking illocutionary force more directly to speaker intention and commitment. In assertive speech acts, the degree of speaker commitment to the proposition becomes a defining feature of the act's force. This commitment may be linguistically strengthened through epistemic markers such as adverbs of certainty, appeals to authority, or claims of evidential access.

However, as Mey emphasizes, illocutionary force cannot be reduced to linguistic encoding alone: *"Illocutionary force is never context-free; it is always embedded in social practice"* (Mey, 2001, p. 95). In digital hate speech, speaker commitment is amplified not only by linguistic markers but also by ideological alignment, group endorsement, and repeated circulation. Thus, while Searle's model helps identify degrees of commitment at the utterance level, an Austinian—critical pragmatic perspective is necessary to account for how such commitments gain force within broader social contexts.

3. Assertive Speech Acts as Instruments of Accusation and Legitimation

In digital hate speech, assertive speech acts are frequently employed to perform accusations under the guise of neutral reporting. This practice exploits the distinction between grammatical form and illocutionary function. As Searle observes, *"the same sentence can be used to perform different illocutionary acts"* (Searle, 1979: 30). A declarative sentence may thus function as a statement, an accusation, or a judgment, depending on its illocutionary force.

From an Austinian standpoint, this flexibility highlights the performative nature of assertion: accusing is not a separate grammatical category, but an action accomplished through asserting under particular conditions. By presenting accusations as information, speakers obscure the actional character of the utterance and present hostility as epistemic fact. This strategy enables hate speech to operate implicitly, avoiding explicit markers of aggression while remaining effective in constructing stigma and delegitimization.

Here, the contrast between Austin and Searle is analytically productive. Searle explains *how* accusations are linguistically structured as assertives; Austin explains *why* such acts succeed socially—namely, because they are recognized and taken up as legitimate actions within a given communicative practice.

4. Linguistic Markers of Assertive Illocutionary Force

The illocutionary force of assertive speech acts is often reinforced through specific linguistic markers, including mental state verbs (e.g., *know*, *prove*), epistemic expressions of certainty (e.g., *clear*, *undeniable*), and unmodalized declarative syntax. Levinson notes that

“illocutionary force can be signaled indirectly through linguistic and contextual cues” (Levinson, 1983, p. 264).

In digital hate speech, such markers function to suppress doubt and foreclose alternative interpretations. From a Searlean perspective, these markers strengthen the speaker’s commitment to truth. From an Austinian perspective, they enhance the felicity of the assertive act by aligning it with conventions of authoritative discourse. The convergence of these mechanisms allows assertive speech acts to position ideological claims as part of the shared common ground, thereby discouraging critical scrutiny.

5. Assertive Illocutionary Force and Perlocutionary Effects

The illocutionary strength of assertive speech acts has direct implications for their perlocutionary effects. Austin defines perlocutionary acts in terms of their consequences for hearers, such as persuading, alarming, or influencing beliefs. In the context of digital hate speech, assertives with strong illocutionary force are particularly effective in producing perlocutionary outcomes such as the normalization of hatred, the formation of biased public opinion, and the reinforcement of social polarization.

Culpeper observes that verbal aggression often operates through epistemic positioning: *“Claims to truth can be powerful vehicles for verbal aggression”* (Culpeper, 2011, p. 58). This insight aligns with an Austinian view of speech as action with consequences and a Searlean view of assertion as commitment. Assertive speech acts thus function as a primary medium through which ideological stances are transformed into discursive actions with enduring social impact.

6. The Analytical Relevance of Assertive Speech Acts and Illocutionary Force

In sum, assertive speech acts and their illocutionary force constitute a central mechanism in the operation of digital hate speech. Searle’s formulation clarifies how commitments to propositional truth enable speakers to present accusations as facts, while Austin’s framework situates these commitments within a broader understanding of language as socially consequential action. Through the strategic elimination of epistemic modality, the use of certainty markers, and the exploitation of declarative form, hate speech operates implicitly yet forcefully.

By integrating Austin’s emphasis on performativity and context with Searle’s account of illocutionary commitment, this framework enables a nuanced analysis of how seemingly simple assertions function as social actions that accuse, delegitimize, and ideologically influence audiences in digital political discourse.

2.4 Expressive Speech Acts and Presuppositional Framing in Digital Hate Speech

This section examines how expressive speech acts operate in conjunction with presuppositional framing to construct affective alignment and moral evaluation in digital hate

speech, while critically contrasting the theoretical assumptions of Austin and Searle. Rather than treating expressives merely as vehicles of emotion, this analysis conceptualizes them as *performative social actions* whose force emerges from their placement within broader illocutionary and presuppositional structures. In digital political discourse, hostility is not realized solely through explicit assertive claims or overt accusations, but through a layered configuration of expressive stance-taking, backgrounded assumptions, and implicit inferential cues.

From an Austinian perspective, expressive utterances cannot be reduced to the expression of inner psychological states; they must be understood as *acts performed in saying something* (Austin, 1962). Emotional displays such as mockery, indignation, or moral contempt function as illocutionary acts insofar as they enact public evaluations and social positioning. Searle, by contrast, conceptualizes expressive speech acts more narrowly as utterances whose primary function is to express a psychological state specified by a sincerity condition (Searle, 1979, p. 15). While analytically useful, this psychological orientation risks obscuring the social and ideological work performed by expressives in hostile discourse.

In digital hate speech related to allegations concerning Joko Widodo's diploma, expressive acts frequently appear to function as *responses* to an already presupposed wrongdoing. This configuration allows speakers to present contempt, irony, or moral outrage as justified reactions rather than as contestable positions. The hostility, therefore, is not located in what is asserted, but in how emotional and evaluative stances are publicly performed and normalized. Here, Austin's emphasis on the performativity of language provides a stronger explanatory framework than Searle's sincerity-based classification, as it foregrounds the social consequences of expressive acts rather than their internal psychological grounding.

1. Expressive Speech Acts and the Affective Dimension of Hate Speech

Expressive speech acts function to display the speaker's affective and evaluative orientation toward a state of affairs or social actor. In digital hate speech, such acts include ridicule, sarcasm, complaint, moral condemnation, and insinuating disappointment. These expressives are not neutral reflections of emotion; they actively construct the target as worthy of contempt or suspicion.

Searle characterizes expressives as speech acts in which "the words fit the world" and the speaker does not aim to alter reality but to reveal an internal state (Searle, 1979, p.15). However, when applied to hostile political discourse, this account proves limited. Expressive utterances in hate speech demonstrably *do* change the social world: they publicly attribute blame, construct moral hierarchies, and invite collective alignment against the target.

Austin's framework allows for a more critical interpretation. By insisting that utterances are actions performed under felicity conditions, Austin highlights that expressives function as *evaluative performances*. Mockery or moral outrage does not merely reveal an attitude; it *enacts* social judgment and positions the speaker within a moral community. This aligns with Culpeper's observation that negative evaluations function as verbal aggression (Culpeper, 2011, p. 19), but Austin's contribution lies in showing how such evaluations are institutionally and interactionally consequential, regardless of their emotional authenticity.

Thus, in digital hate speech, expressive acts operate not simply at the affective level but as illocutionary moves that consolidate hostility by transforming subjective emotion into socially recognizable acts of condemnation.

2. Presupposition as a Mechanism for the Naturalization of Hatred

Presupposition functions as a key pragmatic mechanism through which hatred is rendered natural and resistant to challenge. Classic pragmatic accounts define presupposition as background assumptions treated as shared common ground (Stalnaker, 1974, p. 50) or as propositions taken for granted rather than asserted (Levinson, 1983, p. 204). In digital hate speech, presupposition enables speakers to embed accusatory content—such as alleged deceit or illegitimacy—as already established facts.

From an Austinian perspective, presupposition can be understood as a means of shaping illocutionary force without explicit locutionary commitment. Austin's tripartite distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts reveals that speakers may perform acts of accusation or delegitimization without overtly stating them. Presuppositions allow illocutionary acts to be performed covertly, thereby minimizing exposure to rebuttal while maximizing social effect.

Searle's framework, with its emphasis on assertives as commitments to truth (Searle, 1969, p. 16), helps clarify how presuppositions function as *implicit assertives*. However, Searle's model tends to assume a relatively transparent link between proposition and commitment. Digital hate speech exploits precisely the opposite condition: speakers appear not to commit, while still achieving the effects of assertion. Here, Austin's attention to indirect performativity better captures how presuppositions operate as strategic actions rather than as incomplete assertions.

In this sense, presupposition in hate speech performs a dual function: it backgrounds contested claims as common knowledge while simultaneously enacting social judgments that frame the target as already culpable.

3. Implicit Meaning in Digital Hate Speech: Speech Acts Beyond Explicit Assertion

Implicit meaning constitutes a central pragmatic resource in digital hate speech, particularly in contexts where speakers seek to advance accusations while avoiding overt responsibility. Drawing on Grice's Cooperative Principle, hearers infer hostile meanings on the assumption that speakers are acting rationally and purposefully (Grice, 1975, p. 45).

Austin's assertion that "in saying something we are doing something" (1962, p. 6) underscores that illocutionary force need not be tied to explicit propositional content. Sarcasm, rhetorical questions, and ironic remarks allow speakers to perform accusatory acts indirectly, relying on inference rather than assertion. Searle's theory of indirect speech acts helps systematize this phenomenon, but his emphasis on speaker intention and conventional force can underplay the role of audience-supplied interpretation in networked discourse.

In digital hate speech, implicit meaning is especially effective because interpretations are collectively reinforced within ideologically aligned communities. Levinson's observation that implicatures are defeasible and context-dependent (1983, p. 113) explains how speakers retain deniability while hostility circulates and solidifies at the collective level.

4. The Interaction of Expressive Speech Acts and Presuppositional Meaning

Hostility in digital hate speech emerges from the interaction between expressive stance-taking, presuppositional framing, and inferential interpretation. Expressive acts publicly display moral and emotional alignment, while presuppositions embed contested claims as background truths. Together, they enable speakers to perform acts of accusation and delegitimization indirectly.

Austin's emphasis on performativity highlights that these interactions are not merely communicative but constitutive of social reality. Searle's categorization of illocutionary acts clarifies how expressive and assertive forces coexist, but Austin's framework better accounts for the strategic opacity of hostile discourse, where force is achieved without explicit commitment.

As Mey (2001, p. 21) argues, pragmatic meaning is inseparable from social and ideological conditions. In digitally mediated political discourse, the convergence of expressives, presupposition, and inference enables hostility to be enacted as a shared evaluative orientation rather than as a series of isolated utterances.

5. Relevance to the Analysis of Digital Hate Speech

This analysis demonstrates that expressive speech acts and presuppositional structures constitute central mechanisms through which digital hate speech is pragmatically realized. Expressive acts transform affective stances into public social actions, while presupposition embeds unverified allegations as taken-for-granted truths. Implicit meaning supports these processes by allowing accusations to circulate without explicit assertion.

Contrasting Austin and Searle reveals that while Searle's taxonomy provides analytical clarity, Austin's performative perspective offers a more critical account of how hostility operates as social action. Digital hate speech thus emerges not as the expression of opinion or emotion alone, but as a structured pattern of speech acts that actively construct political reality, credibility, and polarization across Indonesian and English digital discourse.

2.5 Pragmatic Strategies in Digital Hate Speech

This section elaborates pragmatic strategies—such as sarcasm, irony, mock politeness, evaluative lexis, hyperbole, and repetition—as central mechanisms through which hostility is constructed, intensified, and legitimized in digital hate speech. Rather than treating these strategies as stylistic ornaments or rhetorical excesses, this analysis conceptualizes them as strategic means for performing illocutionary acts indirectly, allowing speakers to enact hostility while minimizing explicit accountability.

A pragmatic perspective, following Mey (2001, p. 6), understands language use as fundamentally shaped by social conditions and ideological environments. In this sense, digital hate speech is not merely a reflection of negative attitudes but a form of social action, realized through patterned pragmatic choices that exploit context, inference, and shared assumptions. This insight resonates strongly with Austin's foundational claim that "in saying something we are doing something" (Austin, 1962, p. 6), which foregrounds the performative nature of language.

Searle's speech act theory complements this view by systematizing illocutionary force into rule-governed categories—assertives, expressives, directives, commissives, and declarations (Searle, 1969, 1979). However, the contrast between the two theorists becomes analytically productive in the context of digital hate speech: while Searle emphasizes speaker intention and propositional commitment, Austin draws attention to how social acts are accomplished through language even when intention and explicitness are strategically obscured. Pragmatic strategies in hate speech exploit precisely this gap.

1. Indirectness as a Primary Strategy

Indirectness constitutes one of the most dominant pragmatic strategies in digital hate speech. Hostile meanings are conveyed through utterances that are not overtly aggressive at the locutionary level, such as rhetorical questions, ironic observations, insinuations, or ostensibly neutral commentary. As Searle notes, "In indirect speech acts the speaker communicates more than he actually says" (Searle, 1975, p. 60). From this perspective, indirectness allows speakers to perform assertive or expressive acts while softening—or disguising—their explicit form.

However, Austin's framework reveals a deeper dimension of indirectness. For Austin, illocutionary force does not depend on surface form or explicit performative verbs, but on how

utterances function within specific contexts and conventions. An indirect utterance may therefore fully perform an act of accusation or delegitimization even if it lacks explicit markers of attack. In digital hate speech, indirectness is not merely a politeness strategy but a mechanism of deniability: speakers can claim they were “only asking” or “just stating facts,” while the perlocutionary effect—suspicion, outrage, or moral condemnation—is successfully achieved.

Thus, whereas Searle accounts for indirectness primarily in terms of intention-based inference, Austin’s approach better captures how indirect hostile acts become socially effective regardless of speakers’ overt commitments, especially in digitally mediated environments.

2. Presupposition and the Naturalization of Accusations

Presupposition functions as a particularly powerful strategy for embedding hostility into discourse. By presupposing certain propositions—such as wrongdoing, dishonesty, or moral failure—speakers position accusations as already accepted truths rather than as claims requiring justification. Stalnaker (1974, p. 50) defines presupposition as what is treated as common ground, while Levinson (1983, p. 204) emphasizes its resistance to challenge.

From an Austinian perspective, presupposition enables speakers to perform illocutionary acts covertly. An utterance may locutionarily appear descriptive or evaluative, yet illocutionarily function as an accusation by treating the alleged misconduct as given. Austin’s emphasis on the distinction between locution and illocution clarifies how speakers can “do” accusation without explicitly “saying” it.

Searle’s account adds that presupposition allows assertive commitment to be implicit rather than explicit (Searle, 1969, p. 16). However, Searle’s framework still presumes that commitment—however indirect—remains tied to speaker intention. Digital hate speech often exploits presupposition precisely to blur or diffuse such commitment, shifting the burden of proof onto the audience or the target. In this respect, Austin’s attention to social uptake and perlocutionary consequences provides a more critical lens for understanding how presupposition naturalizes hatred as background reality.

3. Implicit Meaning and Pragmatic Indirection

Implicit meaning operates as a central mechanism through which hostility circulates without overt verbal aggression. Grounded in Grice’s Cooperative Principle, audiences infer meanings on the assumption that speakers are communicating rationally and purposefully (Grice, 1975, p. 45). In digital hate speech, this inferential process is exploited to suggest accusations, moral failure, or conspiracy without explicit articulation.

Austin’s insight that illocutionary force can operate independently of literal content (Austin, 1962, p. 15) is crucial here. The hostile act is not encoded directly in words, but emerges through

inference, shared ideology, and contextual cues. Searle's notion that indirect speech acts can carry the same illocutionary force as direct ones (Searle, 1969, p. 16) systematizes this phenomenon, but Austin's framework better accounts for how such force becomes effective even when speakers disclaim intention.

Levinson's observation that implicatures are defeasible and context-dependent (1983, p. 113) explains why implicit hostility is so adaptable in digital environments: meanings can be amplified, repeated, and recontextualized across networks, while individual speakers retain plausible deniability.

4. Evaluative and Expressive Strategies

Evaluative and expressive strategies—including sarcasm, irony, hyperbole, and emotional emphasis—serve to publicly display negative attitudes toward the target. Culpeper (2011, p. 19) frames such behavior as impoliteness, involving intentional verbal aggression. From a speech act perspective, these strategies realize expressive illocutionary acts.

Searle conceptualizes expressives as acts that reveal psychological states (Searle, 1979, p. 15). Yet, in digital hate speech, expressives do more than express emotion: they enact social judgment. Austin's performative perspective highlights that mockery or moral indignation functions as a public act of condemnation, contributing to the construction of collective hostility regardless of the speaker's internal sincerity.

5. Pragmatic Framing and Social Polarization

Pragmatic strategies also operate at the level of framing, shaping how social reality is interpreted. Van Dijk (1998, p. 8) emphasizes that ideology structures group-based representations of "us" and "them." Through indirectness, presupposition, and evaluation, digital hate speech frames targets as morally deficient outsiders, reinforcing polarization.

Austin's notion of perlocutionary effect is especially relevant here: framing strategies aim not merely to express hostility but to produce social consequences, such as distrust, delegitimization, and collective alignment against the target. Searle's model helps classify the acts involved, but Austin's attention to effects and uptake better explains how framing functions as ideological practice.

6. Politeness and Pseudo-Politeness Strategies

Pseudo-politeness constitutes another strategic resource. By employing polite forms, honorifics, or ironic courtesy, speakers can perform face-threatening acts while maintaining an appearance of civility. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 65) show that politeness strategies can be used manipulatively to threaten face.

From an Austinian viewpoint, pseudo-politeness illustrates how illocutionary force can contradict locutionary form: an apparently polite utterance may function as an act of condemnation. Searle's emphasis on conventional force alone is insufficient to capture this contradiction; Austin's performativity foregrounds how social meaning emerges from use, not form.

7. Pragmatic Strategies as Ideological Practice

Taken together, these pragmatic strategies demonstrate that digital hate speech is an ideologically embedded practice of social action. As Mey (2001, p. 214) argues, language users do not merely describe the world but act in it. Through indirectness, presupposition, implicit meaning, evaluation, and framing, speakers mobilize expressive and assertive acts to normalize hostility.

The contrast between Austin and Searle is revealing: Searle provides analytical precision through categorization and intention, while Austin offers a critical account of how language performs social action even when intention, explicitness, and responsibility are strategically obscured.

8. Relevance to Digital Hate Speech Analysis

A speech-act-centered pragmatic approach thus moves beyond surface-level identification of offensive language. It reveals how hostility is strategically embedded, legitimized, and circulated through pragmatic choices. By contrasting Austin's performative emphasis with Searle's intentional taxonomy, digital hate speech can be understood as a performative social practice that actively shapes perception, credibility, and polarization across online communities.

2.6 Pragmatic Context, Ideology, and Audience

This section examines pragmatic context, ideology, and audience orientation as constitutive dimensions in the production, interpretation, and circulation of digital hate speech. Within pragmatics, meaning is not conceived as an intrinsic property of linguistic form, but as a relational achievement that emerges from language use in specific social, ideological, and interactional contexts. Utterances derive their force, legitimacy, and social consequences through their embedding in particular situations of use, through the positioning of speakers, and through the inferential and evaluative work of audiences.

In digital hate speech, context cannot be reduced to immediate co-text or situational parameters. It encompasses anonymity, platform affordances, algorithmic amplification, virality, intertextual repetition, and the sedimentation of recurring ideological controversies—especially those involving public figures. These features fundamentally reshape how speech acts are performed, recognized, and taken up.

Levinson's (1983, p. 9) definition of pragmatics as the study of relations between language and context encoded or conventionalized in language provides an important starting point. However, digital discourse challenges any narrow conception of context as merely grammaticalized or situational. Instead, pragmatic context in online environments is layered, distributed, and dynamic, involving technological infrastructures and ideological alignments that exceed face-to-face interaction. This expanded view aligns more closely with Austin's understanding of language as socially embedded action, while exposing limitations in Searle's more formal, intention-centered, and rule-governed account of speech acts.

1. Pragmatic Context as a Framework for Interpreting Utterances

Pragmatic context comprises all the conditions that enable hearers or readers to recognize what social action an utterance performs. Hymes' (1972, p. 278) insistence that there are "rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" foregrounds the idea that meaning emerges from culturally and socially situated norms of interpretation. In digital hate speech, these norms include shared familiarity with ongoing scandals, repeated accusations, ideological narratives, and evaluative frames surrounding public figures.

Austin's speech act theory places contextual dependence at its core. His claim that "in saying something we are doing something" (Austin, 1962, p. 6) implies that identifying an illocutionary act requires attention not only to linguistic form but to circumstances of utterance, participant roles, and socially recognized conventions. An utterance that appears descriptively neutral at the locutionary level may, in context, perform an illocutionary act of accusation, ridicule, or delegitimization.

Searle, by contrast, emphasizes speaker intention and the constitutive rules that define particular types of speech acts (Searle, 1969, p. 22). While this framework offers analytical precision, it risks underestimating how illocutionary force in digital hate speech can arise even when speaker intention is ambiguous, denied, or strategically obscured. In online environments, contextual cues—shared assumptions, prior discourse, ideological alignment—often substitute for explicit indicators of hostile intent, allowing illocutionary force to be inferred rather than declared. This divergence highlights a key contrast: Austin foregrounds contextual recognition and social uptake, whereas Searle prioritizes intentional rule-following.

2. Ideology as a Macro-Pragmatic Contextual Dimension

Ideology functions as a macro-pragmatic context that shapes both the production of utterances and their interpretation by audiences. Van Dijk (1998, p. 8) defines ideologies as socially shared systems of beliefs that organize group knowledge, attitudes, and evaluations. In

digital hate speech, ideological alignment conditions whether an utterance is interpreted as reasonable criticism, justified suspicion, humor, or hateful attack.

From a pragmatic standpoint, ideology does not merely color interpretation; it actively conditions illocutionary force. Mey (2001, p. 21) emphasizes that pragmatic meaning is meaning-in-interaction, shaped by social forces rather than individual cognition alone. Hate speech thus emerges as a collective discursive practice embedded in ideological formations.

Austin's framework accommodates this view by situating speech acts within social conventions and power relations. Illocutionary acts derive their force from shared understandings that are often ideological in nature. Repeated accusations, even when implicitly formulated, gain force because they resonate with pre-existing ideological expectations.

Searle's conception of speech acts as rule-governed behavior (Searle, 1969, p. 22) offers less explicit engagement with ideology. While his model explains how intentions are structured linguistically, it remains relatively neutral regarding how ideological common ground precedes and enables recognition of illocutionary acts. In digital hate speech, hostile meanings are not only inferred cognitively but affirmed ideologically, suggesting that illocutionary force cannot be fully explained without reference to macro-social belief systems.

3. The Audience as an Active Participant in Meaning-Making

Contemporary pragmatics recognizes the audience as an active co-constructor of meaning rather than a passive recipient. Grice (1975, p. 44) highlights the inferential work required of hearers to derive speaker meaning, while Austin (1962, p. 14) emphasizes that an illocutionary act succeeds only when it is recognized as such by its audience. From this perspective, hate speech is not fully realized at the moment of utterance but through processes of audience uptake.

Digital environments intensify this dynamic. Audiences are plural, fragmented, and often anonymous, yet connected through shared ideological orientations and algorithmically curated visibility. Meaning is negotiated, reinforced, or contested through comments, reposts, and recontextualization. From an Austinian perspective, such forms of uptake are integral to the felicity and social efficacy of illocutionary acts.

Searle's emphasis on intended audience understanding remains relevant, but digital hate speech frequently reaches unintended audiences who nonetheless contribute to meaning-making. These audiences may reinterpret, amplify, or normalize hostile meanings, demonstrating that illocutionary force often exceeds the boundaries of speaker intention. This again underscores the contrast: Austin's model privileges uptake and effect, whereas Searle's centers on intention and recognition within a more stable communicative frame.

4. Speaker–Audience Relations and Illocutionary Effectiveness

The effectiveness of speech acts in digital hate speech depends on the alignment between speaker and audience. Austin (1962, p. 14–15) argues that speech acts are felicitous only when conditions of recognition and acceptance are met. If an audience fails to recognize an utterance as an accusation, satire, or insult, the illocutionary act may misfire.

Searle (1969, p. 22) similarly emphasizes shared rules and background assumptions as prerequisites for illocutionary force. In digital hate speech, ideological affinity often secures such alignment, amplifying illocutionary force and facilitating rapid circulation. Conversely, ideological misalignment may result in contestation, irony reversal, or reframing of the utterance, illustrating the instability of illocutionary meaning in heterogeneous online spaces.

5. Digital Context and the Transformation of Audiences

Digital media transform speaker–audience relations by collapsing spatial, temporal, and social boundaries. Utterances circulate instantly across networks, magnifying perlocutionary effects such as stigma normalization, moral panic, and political polarization. Culpeper (2011, p. 31) notes that perceptions of impoliteness are highly context-dependent; anonymity and weak social ties reduce normative constraints, enabling more extreme forms of hostility.

From an Austinian perspective, this transformation alters the conditions under which illocutionary acts achieve uptake. Utterances intended for limited audiences may acquire new meanings as they circulate and are recontextualized. Searle's model, which presupposes relatively stable speaker–hearer relations, is less equipped to account for such fluidity, whereas Austin's emphasis on consequences and effects offers greater explanatory reach.

6. Context, Ideology, and Audience in the Construction of Hateful Meaning

The interaction of pragmatic context, ideology, and audience forms an ecosystem in which hateful meaning is produced, stabilized, and reproduced. Van Dijk (1998, p. 194) identifies discourse as the primary interface between ideology and society, a claim that resonates with Austin's conception of language as action. Digital hate speech performs social acts—accusation, exclusion, delegitimization—through the strategic alignment of contextual cues and ideological assumptions.

Searle's taxonomy of speech acts helps identify the types of actions performed, but Austin's framework reveals how these actions gain force through repetition, recognition, and collective uptake. Hateful meaning thus emerges not solely from speaker intention but from sustained audience participation within ideologically aligned communities.

7. Relevance for the Analysis of Digital Hate Speech

An adequate analysis of digital hate speech must integrate pragmatic context, ideology, and audience participation. Speech acts are not merely produced by speakers but realized through audience recognition, ideological resonance, and digital circulation. Contrasting Austin and Searle demonstrates that while intention and rule-governed structure matter, social uptake, contextual embedding, and perlocutionary effects are decisive for understanding how hate speech operates in digital environments.

A speech-act-centered pragmatic approach therefore reveals digital hate speech as a performative social practice—one that actively shapes perception, moral evaluation, credibility, and political polarization through the strategic mobilization of context, ideology, and audience engagement.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

This study conceptualizes digital hate speech as a pragmatic phenomenon that emerges within digitally mediated political communication and develops through processes of interaction, circulation, and audience alignment. The empirical focus is the controversy surrounding the authenticity of President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi's) diploma as articulated and circulated on Facebook and Twitter (X). These platforms serve as primary digital arenas where political allegations are produced, amplified, and normalized through repeated linguistic exchange, allowing speech acts to perform social functions beyond mere information transmission.

The object of analysis is digital hate speech targeting Joko Widodo, approached through a pragmatic lens that views utterances as communicative actions with social and political consequences. In this perspective, digital hate speech is not treated as isolated opinion or emotional expression but as strategic language use intended to delegitimize political authority and mobilize hostility. Utterances are designed to construct and convey claims as uncontested truths, thereby performing acts of accusation, condemnation, and social positioning.

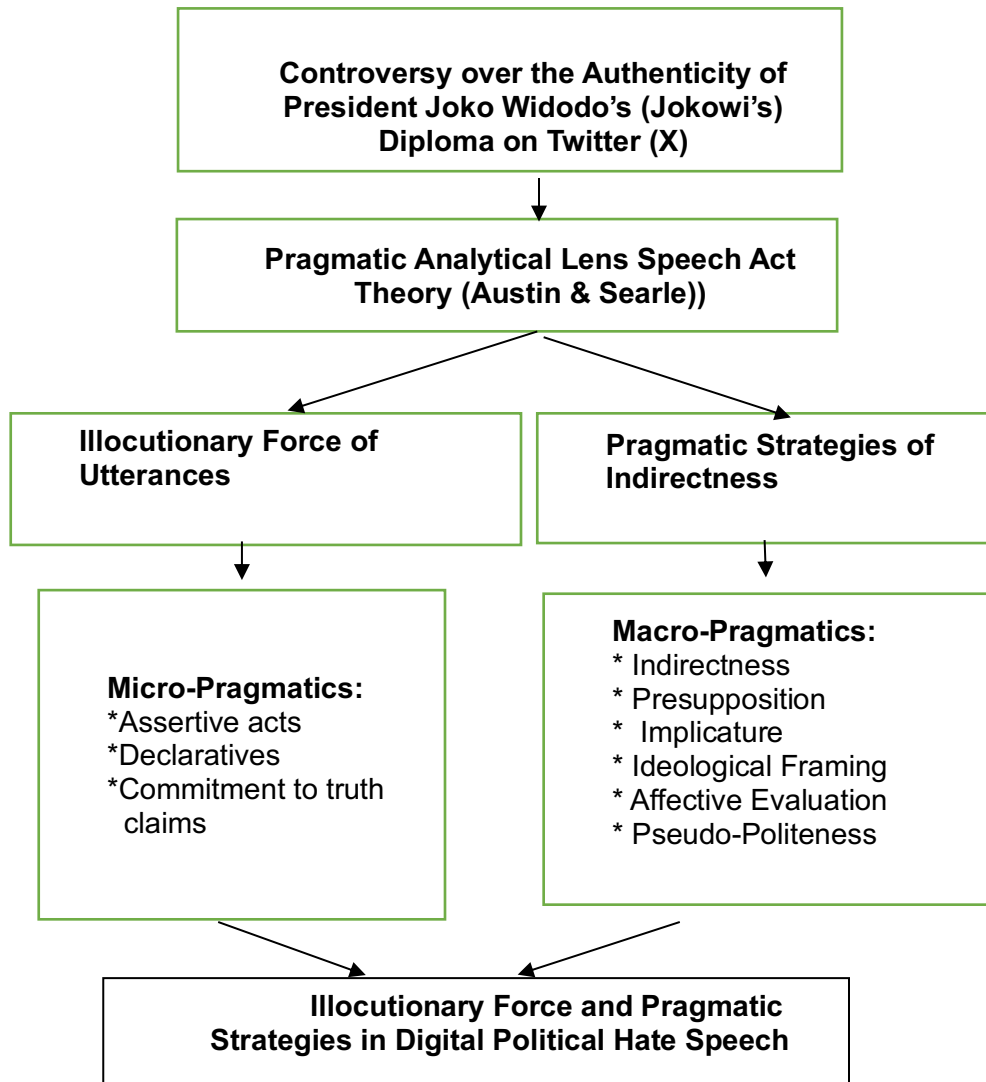
The analytical framework operates along two interrelated pragmatic dimensions. The first dimension focuses on illocutionary force in digital hate speech, grounded in the theoretical principles of Austin and Searle. This dimension examines how illocutionary acts—particularly assertive and declarative forms—function to establish the factuality of propositions. Speakers commit to the truth of their statements, suppress epistemic doubt, and employ linguistic structures that transform allegations regarding Jokowi's diploma into statements perceived as objective, authoritative, and self-evident. Through these illocutionary mechanisms, contested claims are pragmatically enacted as socially and politically potent realities.

The second dimension addresses pragmatic strategies of indirectness that facilitate the construction and dissemination of hostility. Such strategies include presupposition, implicature,

ideological framing, affective evaluation, and pseudo-politeness. By embedding negative evaluations and accusations within seemingly neutral or rational discourse, speakers convey hostility without overt aggression. These mechanisms allow hate speech to be normalized, legitimized, and socially accepted within the digital public sphere, demonstrating how strategic language use can perform moral, social, and political functions simultaneously.

By integrating these two dimensions, the conceptual framework illustrates how micro-level pragmatic realizations—the illocutionary force of individual utterances—interact with macro-level strategies to sustain, amplify, and circulate political hostility across platforms and audiences. The framework ultimately culminates in the conceptual outcome: *Illocutionary Force and Pragmatic Strategies in Digital Political Hate Speech*, capturing how speech acts and pragmatic strategies operate in concert to frame allegations, normalize antagonism, and intensify polarization in contemporary digital political discourse.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DIAGRAM



Operational Definitions

1. Digital Hate Speech

In this study, digital hate speech is defined as online utterances realized as speech acts that illocutionarily function to accuse, delegitimize, or degrade a political actor. Operationally, it refers to Indonesian and English social media utterances that question or deny the authenticity of President Joko Widodo's diploma and frame such allegations as taken-for-granted truths.

2. Speech Act

A speech act is defined as an utterance understood as a form of social action rather than a mere grammatical structure. Operationally, each data unit is analyzed as a speech act comprising a locutionary content, an identifiable illocutionary force, and an intended perlocutionary orientation toward the audience, following Austin and Searle.

3. Assertive Speech Act

An assertive speech act refers to an utterance through which the speaker commits to the truth of a proposition, presenting claims or accusations as factual. Operationally, assertive acts are identified through declarative statements that affirm, conclude, or state allegations without epistemic hedging, positioning the audience as recipients of finalized information.

4. Expressive Speech Act

An expressive speech act is defined as an utterance that conveys the speaker's emotional or evaluative stance toward the target of discourse. Operationally, expressive acts include ridicule, condemnation, or moral judgment that function to intensify the persuasive and affective impact of accompanying assertive acts.

5. Illocutionary Force

Illocutionary force refers to the type of action performed through an utterance, such as asserting, accusing, condemning, or delegitimizing. Operationally, it is determined by analyzing linguistic form, contextual cues, and audience orientation in accordance with Austin's and Searle's speech act classifications.

6. Illocutionary Strengthening

Illocutionary strengthening is defined as pragmatic mechanisms that intensify the certainty, authority, and persuasive power of a speech act. Operationally, it is identified

through strategies such as the removal of epistemic modality, the use of conclusive formulations, and normative labeling that present allegations as authoritative and non-negotiable.

7. Internationalization of Accusations

Internationalization of accusations refers to the pragmatic strategy of realizing speech acts in English to shift allegations from a local to a global audience, thereby enhancing their symbolic legitimacy. Operationally, it is identified when English-language utterances invoke global values, international audiences, or universal norms to elevate the illocutionary force of accusations without additional empirical evidence.