TOXIC BEHAVIORS IN SOCIAL MEDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF RAPPORT THREAT BEHAVIORS IN SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTIONS

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Abstract. Toxic Behaviors are what people do that irritate, annoy, or cause unpleasant feeling to others. These behaviors may cause other people to be depressed, angry, furious, sad, and anxious. In Rapport Management (Spencer-Oatey, 2000), these toxic behaviors are known as rapport threat behaviors since this kind of behaviors can threaten other people interpersonal rapport which is essential for harmonizing relationships between people. The main purpose of this study was to analyze these threatening behaviors to rapport in social media interactions. Social media interactions are the interactions found in social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, MySpace, and other platforms. The sample for this study was the interactions in two social media platforms which are Facebook and Instagram. The study found that there are several rapport threat behaviors in the two social media platforms interactions. The rapport threat behaviors are accusations, insults, trash talks, the inappropriate use of emoji, the use of all capitalized letters and misunderstanding context and the captions of certain posts.

Keywords: toxic behaviors, rapport threat behaviors, social media interactions.

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INTRODUCTION

Internet and social media have become parts of people’s daily life and activities. With the advancement of technology, people are no longer accessing the internet by sitting down at their computer to connect to the virtual and online environment globally that is used to be called ‘the net’. People can have dinner while opening their social media accounts, make an appointment for a blind-date on their social media platforms while they are playing video game which they can also do by online or using the internet connection.

They can even make a video call using their social media application while driving their car. This advancement of technology makes the access to social media become easier and more convenient which consequently increases the number of social media users globally. There is an estimated number of 4.65 billion users of social media around the world in April 2022 based on the analysis from Kepios (2022). In other words, the social media users around the world as of April 2022 are about 58.7% of the total global population. This number indicates that there is a significant increase in the number of social media users every year. The increasing number of social media users automatically increases the social media interactions as well. It is now a common activity for many people to interact on their social media platforms or applications. However, the interactions in social media sometimes bring about quarrels, debates or even toxic behaviors that sometimes make the users insult, mock, and trash talk one another.

These kinds of situations can be threats to the fellow social media users’ interpersonal rapport because these toxic interactions may lead to rapport threatening behaviors that can infringe and even ruin the harmonious
atmosphere in the social media interactions. This study analyzed what kinds of behaviors shown in social media interactions are considered to be rapport threatening behaviors which may lead to disharmonious situation or atmosphere in social media interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rapport Management

Rapport Management is a theory that was proposed by Helen Spencer-Oatey in 2000 and then re-explained in 2008. The theory formulates the management of harmonious and disharmonious relationship of interlocutors in social interactions. Rapport management comprises three important and interconnected elements which are the management of face, management of sociality rights and obligations, and management of interactional goals (Spencer-Oatey, 2003).

Face is a concept that is related to notions such as esteem, regard, worth and dignity, and what is claimed or protected by a person in a communicative act (Robinson et al, 2015). The concept of face is primarily based on Goffman’s (1967) definition of face in which he theorizes face as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Furthermore, face can be considered to be a person’s sense of identity or self-concept as an individual, as a group member and as a part of the person’s relationship with other people. In these three concepts of self, people sometimes consider themselves to have particular qualities such as physical appearance, personal characteristic, way of thinking and so on. In certain occasions, people perceive these qualities positively, for example, when they think themselves as smart, responsible, hard-working, and so on. But in other occasions, they can also perceive them negatively or neutrally. Most people would like to be assessed positively by others, so they naturally want other people to see their positive qualities and avoid showing their negative qualities. Face is closely related to these attributes and to assess which attribute is face sensitive and which is not, depends on the person, the context, and the situation.

The second component of Rapport Management is the management of sociality rights and obligations. Sociality rights and obligations are the aspects that people have in their relation to other people. They are based on legal agreements and requirements, roles and positions conceptualizations, and behavioral conventions, styles and protocols of social encounters.

The third component of Rapport Management is the management of interactional goals. Interactional goals are the set purposes of people’s interaction with others that they want to achieve. These interactional goals can be relational as well as transactional in nature. These goals have significant effect on rapport since any failure to achieve them can cause frustration and annoyance (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Rapport threat behaviours are the behaviours that may cause the positive rapport (harmony) between people to be threatened in three main ways: through face-threatening behavior, through rights-threatening/obligation-omission behavior and through goal-threatening behaviour (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

The three interconnected components of rapport are the primary background of the study in which the rapport threat behaviors are based on. The rapport threat behaviors were analysed by looking whether the behaviors have considerable effects on the three aspects of rapport. This was done to see what kind of behaviors in the social media interactions can cause some threats to the social media users’ interpersonal rapport.

Social Media

Social media is one of the most used features in this online or web based application on internet. Social media in today’s electronic media empowers individuals by using internet and web based applications to connect and interact in a new and easy way which facilitates the formation of big virtual communities which
However, social media is changing our concept of the word ‘friend’ by affecting our interpersonal interactions even though the people’s concept of ‘friend’ might not have changed a lot. Social media is restructuring our thoughts of relationships. It is criticized that might have a long list of friends in social media who have never met or may never meet them, however he/she believes that this virtual and distant friendship can serve many functions (Karimi, 2013).

Social media interactions are the verbal and non-verbal interactions that are facilitated by social media platforms and/or social media applications where people can have virtual interactions such as chit-chatting, commenting certain posts, giving responses with emojis, replying to other people’s comments, selling and buying some goods and products, and even voice or video calling other social media users. These interactions have become a part of modern people daily routines. Interactions in social media make distance to be no longer a hindrance for people to be connected to other people from different parts of the world. Despite the advantages the social media have to their users, they also have negative impacts when the interactions in the media have a number of threats to interpersonal rapport of the users such as insults, embarrassment, trash talks, hate speech, abusive content and so on. This study particularly tried to formulate what behaviors that social media users show to other users can be considered to be threats to interpersonal rapport and can ruin the harmonious atmosphere in social media interactions.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study was conducted in January – May 2022 by taking a number of social media interactions in two different social media platforms which are Facebook and Instagram. There was no limitation like age, nationality, and gender for the users to be taken as the participants of this study and there was no certain category, theme and type of the interactions to be taken as the data for this study. However, the researcher purposively took the interactions with explicit and conspicuously tense atmosphere in which the social media users are quarreling, debating, and arguing in their interactions. The study used the descriptive analysis method to see what kinds of behaviors are threats to interpersonal rapport of the social media users and to elicit the occurrences of these rapport threat behaviors in the social media interactions.

RESULT

There is a total of three interactions taken from the two social media platforms; two from Facebook and one from Instagram. The interactions have several rapport threat behaviors that can be considered to be toxic behaviors which can disharmonize the interactions in social media. The followings are the excerpts and the analysis of the interactions among the social media users of the two social media platforms.

Excerpt 1 taken from Facebook

In this interaction, the Facebook user 1, FB1, posted his gameplay in certain Facebook fanpage for a particular online game. His post is then responded by Facebook user 2, FB2, who thinks that FB1 is cheating. This comment made by FB2 is then replied by FB1 and other Facebook users who have the same opinion as FB2’s.

FB1: Facebook user 1
FB2: Facebook user 2
FB3: Facebook user 3
FB4: Facebook user 4

1 FB2: (commenting on FB1 post)
Why you have to cheat to get the wins or kills that’s dumb as f***

2 FB1: (replying and tagging FB2)

never cheat to get on the leaderboard or for kills or anything I cheat cause I’m the best at bridge glitching that’s my property. Just don’t come on this street. This is my sh**!!

Excerpt 1 taken from Instagram

In this interaction, the Instagram user 1, IG1, posted an image with a certain text and its caption which is then responded by Instagram user 2, IG2, who thinks that IG1 is making fun of his/her followers.

IG1: Instagram user 1
IG2: Instagram user 2

1 IG2: (commenting on IG1 post)
You are mean!

2 IG1: (replying)
I don’t have a sense of humor you moron!
3 FB1: (making the second reply and still tagging FB2)
   *Only player in H1Z1 history to own multiple glitches throughout the map (2 bridge glitches)*
4 FB3: (replying and tagging FB2)
   *Only player to brag about being trash for sure 😊*
5 FB4: (replying and tagging FB2)
   *You see how bad his aim is? That’s why he has to cheat*
6 FB1: (replying and tagging FB3)
   *Trash also only player to have a bridge named after him. What have u done?*
7 FB1: (replying and tagging FB4)
   *It’s like a game inside the game cause u already know how dead the game is so this is my way of throwing a lil more action into things.*
8 FB4: (replying and tagging FB1)
   *Who named it this? You? Literally no one calls the bridge that except you bro.*

The accusation made by FB2 and his swearing words saying ‘dumb as f***’ makes FB1 as the post maker respond with the same negativity because he says that FB2 does not need to go to the particular spot that he personally claims, and he ends his remark by saying a bad word to refer to what he claims as his own.

The accusation made by FB2 is a threat to FB1 positive face because FB1 wants a praise and appreciation that he feels he has achieved in playing the game but instead, he is accused of cheating. It is also a threat to FB1’s interactional goal because he tries to clarify what he has done in the game as a response to FB2’s accusation but FB3 and FB4 see it differently. They have the same opinion as FB2’s and think that FB1 has cheated and (FB3) even calls him trash. The threat to his interactional goal makes FB1 responds negatively by typing his comments in all capital letters.

These all-capped responses to both FB3 and FB4 show offenses felt by FB1 because it signals strong feeling from the all caps (McCullough, 2019). From this short interaction but with tense atmosphere, we can conclude that accusation and swearing words are threats to positive face and interactional goal because by accusing someone of cheating makes their positive value that they think they have to be unappreciated and their clarification to it is not responded positively so instead of convincing others, which is the interactional goal, it brings about another quarrel so the interactional goal set by FB1 in this interaction is not achieved.

Excerpt 2 taken from Facebook

In this interaction, Facebook user 5, FB5, comments on a video by asking where the incident in the video takes place. The context of the post and where it happens have actually been explained in the captions of the post but FB5 does not read them. This causes other Facebook users, FB6 and FB7, to criticize FB5 for being reluctant in reading the captions.

FB5: Facebook user 5
FB6: Facebook user 6
FB7: Facebook user 7

1 FB5: (commenting by asking)
   *Dmana ini*
2 FB6: (replying and tagging FB5)
   *Sudah tertulis di keterangan ☹️☹️*
3 FB7: (replying and tagging FB5)
   *Budayakan membaca, jangan malas pak. 🙈*
4 FB5: (replying and tagging FB7)
   *Pelan2 sj pak.*
5 FB7: (replying and tagging FB5)
   *Pelan2 ma ini pak, ka macet ki.*
6 FB5: (replying and tagging FB7)
   *Biar mi macet.*

FB5’s failure in understanding the posted video which leads him to ask something that actually has been clarified in the captions makes FB7 tell FB5 not to be lazy in reading. This accusation makes FB5 get offended because he warns FB7 to just calm down. This has strong indication that instead of just asking
FB7 to calm down, FB5 shows that he dislikes the accusation and implicitly criticizes FB7.

This situation shows that FB’s sociality right to get the information he needs that he expresses in his first comment where he asks about the location of the incident is not appreciated by both FB6 and FB7 since they do not answer the question that they feel is not needed to be answered because it has been stated in the captions. FB5’s interactional goal which is to get the answer to his question is also barely achieved because the question is not explicitly answered though FB6 tells FB5 where he can get the answer.

It can be concluded from this short interaction that accusation (as shown in FB7’s comment) can cause some threats to interpersonal rapport because it makes the sociality right and the interactional goal unachieved in this interaction. Interestingly, the uses of emoji which can act as upgraders and downgraders and help manage the conversation (Sampietro, 2019) as shown in FB6’s facepalming (downgrader) and FB7’s folded hand (showing respect gesture as a sign of upgrader) are not taken by FB5 as either threat or enhancement to his rapport.

Excerpt 3 taken from Instagram

In this interaction, Instagram user 1, IG1, comments on a video posted on Instagram showing an accident involving two fancy cars. One of the cars is allegedly thought to be owned by a police officer and the driver of the car does hit and run but is then chased by the victim. IG1 believes that the driver of the car is an irresponsible police officer, but this claim is challenged by other Instagram users, IG2 and IG5. However, IG2 is also challenged by IG3 while IG4 and IG6 comment neutrally in the interaction. IG4 implies that IG2 and IG3 should stop debating while IG6 politely asks IG1 to pray for her.

1 IG1: (reacting to the original post by commenting and expressing her opinion) *Mala… ini kejadian di mobil Mala ya yang diabrak? Itu oknum polisi lagi sakau kali yak… parah banget sih kelakuan pengayom masyarakat kok brutal.. ngaco nih memalukan jajaran TNI-Polri.*

2 IG2: (replying and tagging IG1) *Ga usah so tau itu cuma plat palsu, bukan anggota*

3 IG3: (replying and tagging IG2) *Tau darimana lo kalo itu plat palsu sekarang yang sok tau siapa njing 😂 😃*

4 IG2: (replying and tagging IG3 and then tagging IG6 at the end of the comment) *Coba liat storynya wah ini temennya kali kak @IG6*

5 IG3: (replying and tagging IG2) *Sok tau lu 😃*

6 IG2: (replying and tagging IG3) *Lu so tau tolol*

7 IG4: (replying and tagging IG2 but also addressing IG3) *Lah malah rebut lu berdua*

8 IG5: (replying and tagging IG1) *Hati2 bicara*

9 IG1: (replying and tagging IG2) *Anda siapa ya*

10 IG6: (replying and tagging IG1) *Bantu viralkan and doanya ya ka git semoga pelakunya mau bertanggung jawab*

IG1 blames and explicitly accuses a police officer that he thinks owns the car to be an irresponsible guy. She even states that the police officer is drunk and acts brutal and this opinion is challenged by IG2 who believes the irresponsible driver is not an officer. But instead of reacting positively to IG1’s accusation, IG2 insults her by calling her ‘sok tau’. This negative remark is then also challenged by IG3 who is not convinced by what IG2 says. IG3 even harshly mocks IG2 by calling him ‘njing’ (a dog) and ‘sok tau’ (smartass).
The negative reaction to his comment makes IG2 try to clarify his claim by telling IG3 to read the original poster’s story which provides the complete story of the accident. However, IG2 accuses IG3 to be the culprit’s friend when he says, “Ini temannya kali kak.” which he refers to IG3. This accusation makes his clarification not well accepted by IG3 because IG3 then responds negatively by calling IG2 ‘so tau’ and these repeated insults make IG3 ‘tolol’ (stupid) and ‘sok tau’. From this interaction, we may conclude that accusation like the previous two excerpts from Facebook is heavily rapport threatening. This in turn leads to toxic behavior by other social media users who feel that the accusation is wrong.

Thus, similar to the two previous samples from Facebook, accusations in this interaction are rapport threatening because the accusations cause other users to respond negatively to the accusations which in turn threaten the accusers’ sociality right and interactional goal. The other visible rapport threat behavior in this interaction is insult which is shown by the utterances of IG2 and IG3. The two users are trash talking and insulting each other showing a very toxic atmosphere in the interaction. These trash talks and insults do not only threaten their positive face, but also their negative face (the wants to be unimpeded), because by insulting, the doers impose certain characteristics like smartass, a dog, and stupid in this interaction to the addressees who do not want to be addressed with such humiliating attributes.

**CONCLUSION**

From the three sample of interactions, it can be concluded that the interactions in social media may cause rapport threatening behaviors when the social media users respond to particular posts or comments by accusing someone else like shown in all three interactions, insulting or trash talking which leads to other toxic responses as shown in interaction one and three, and misunderstanding the context of the comment as shown in interaction two. The use of all capitalized letters and emojis are also shown in these interactions. The use of all caps indicates that the user feels that his interpersonal rapport is threatened because using all caps signals a strong feeling.

On the other hand, the use of emoji shown in these interactions barely has their intended effects. Emoji which can be used to enhance interactions are not responded positively by the addressee as shown in interaction two in which FB5 does not show any appreciation intended by FB7 in putting folded hand emoji as a respect gesture. Emojis which are used in interaction three are even used to increase the insults made by IG3. From these examples, we can conclude that the use of emoji despite its advantages as upgraders and helping in managing conversation barely has any good effect to the interpersonal rapport of the social media users because the interactions have already been in toxic atmosphere due to rapport threat behaviors that are initiated early in the interactions.

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