

GENDER STEREOTYPES IN INSTAGRAM COMMENTS: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE USE

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an important communication space where users construct identities, express opinions, and negotiate social meanings through language. Within this environment, gender stereotypes continue to emerge while also being challenged through user interactions. This study aims to analyze how language use in Instagram comments reflects and challenges gender stereotypes from a sociolinguistic perspective. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using 150 English-language comments collected from 15 posts on the Instagram account @therock through purposive sampling. The data were gathered through digital documentation and analyzed using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings reveal two dominant patterns of language use. Some comments reinforce traditional gender stereotypes by portraying men as protectors and symbols of strength, while women are represented as emotionally expressive and family-oriented. In contrast, other comments challenge these stereotypes through men's expressions of emotional vulnerability and appreciation, as well as women's encouragement of men's health awareness and the sharing of personal experiences. These findings indicate that Instagram comments function not only as a medium of social interaction but also as a dynamic space where gender meanings are continuously reproduced and negotiated through language.

Keywords: *Digital Communication, Gender Stereotypes, Instagram Comments, Language Use, Sociolinguistics.*

ABSTRAK

Media sosial telah berkembang menjadi ruang komunikasi yang memungkinkan pengguna membangun identitas, menyampaikan pandangan, serta menegosiasikan makna sosial melalui penggunaan bahasa. Dalam ruang tersebut, stereotip gender tidak hanya direproduksi, tetapi juga dipertanyakan melalui interaksi antarpengguna. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana penggunaan bahasa pada komentar Instagram merefleksikan dan menantang

stereotip gender dari perspektif sosiolinguistik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan perspektif sosiolinguistik. Data penelitian berupa 150 komentar berbahasa Inggris yang diambil dari 15 unggahan akun Instagram @therock melalui teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan dokumentasi digital dan dianalisis dengan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña yang meliputi pengumpulan data, kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan dua kecenderungan utama penggunaan bahasa. Sebagian komentar masih merefleksikan laki-laki sebagai pelindung dan simbol kekuatan, sedangkan perempuan lebih banyak digambarkan sebagai sosok yang ekspresif secara emosional dan berorientasi pada keluarga. Di sisi lain, sejumlah komentar menunjukkan upaya untuk menantang stereotip tersebut melalui ungkapan kerentanan emosional dan apresiasi dari laki-laki serta dorongan perempuan terhadap kesadaran kesehatan laki-laki dan berbagi pengalaman pribadi. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa komentar Instagram menjadi ruang komunikasi yang dinamis, tempat makna gender terus direproduksi sekaligus dinegosiasikan melalui praktik berbahasa.

Kata Kunci: Komentar Instagram, Komunikasi Digital, Penggunaan Bahasa, Sosiolinguistik, Stereotip Gender.

A. Introduction

The development of social media has changed the way society communicates, shares information, and builds interactions in daily life. Various digital platforms no longer function merely as means of sharing content, but also serve as spaces for users to express opinions, showcase identities, and participate in public discussions. Among these platforms, Instagram has become one of the most interactive through its comment feature, which allows users to provide responses, opinions, or evaluations of post. These characteristics make the

Instagram comment section a communication space that showcases the natural use of language in various social contexts. Therefore, user comments are viewed not only as a form of simple communication but also as representations of values, identities, and social perspectives within digital society. (Kubin et al., 2024; Marko, 2023; Iftikhar et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of communication on social media can be understood thru a sociolinguistic perspective that views language as part of social practice, not merely a

tool for conveying information. The use of language is always influenced by the social context, the speaker's identity, interpersonal relationships, and the norms prevailing in a society (Al Masaeed, 2024). Thus, language not only functions as a means of communication but also as a medium for building identity, demonstrating group membership, and representing social values in various communication situations. Kawafha and Al Masaeed (2023) explain that sociolinguistic studies provide an understanding of the relationship between language, ideology, and social practices, while Kelly-Holmes (2024) emphasizes that the development of digital communication has expanded the scope of sociolinguistic studies because interactions on social media show how identity and social meaning are continuously negotiated through language use.

In the context of digital communication, the use of language not only reflects individual identity but also plays a role in shaping and reproducing social constructs, including gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes often emerge through word choice, forms of expression,

and communication strategies used in everyday interactions. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language serves as a means to represent social values related to gender while also building identity in various communication contexts. Pak (2025) explains that contemporary sociolinguistic studies no longer focus solely on the differences in language between men and women, but also on how language is used to build, negotiate, and represent gender identity in various social contexts. In line with this, Sargin (2025) states that language plays an important role in the formation of social identity, so the use of language can reflect the complex dynamics of gender. Furthermore, Zibin et al. (2025) demonstrate that gender-based communication patterns are still evident in digital interactions, although their forms are influenced by the context of communication and the social relationships between users.

Various studies have shown that language use on social media is influenced by social factors, including gender stereotypes. Several studies have found that the communication patterns of men and women still show differences in how they express

opinions, convey emotions, and build interactions in the digital space (Zibin et al., 2025; Limatius, 2024). Other research also shows that social media not only serves as a communication space but also as an arena for the formation and dissemination of gender representations thru the use of language, symbols, and forms of interaction among users (Flores & Sepúlveda, 2025). Additionally, studies on user comments on digital platforms reveal that comment sections are spaces that exhibit more spontaneous communication practices, thereby reflecting the attitudes, ideologies, and social constructs evolving in society (Küchler et al., 2023; Kubin et al., 2024). These findings indicate that social media is an important data source for understanding how language is used to shape and respond to various social issues, including gender stereotypes.

Although the relationship between language, gender, and digital communication has been extensively studied, most research still focuses on differences in communication styles based on gender, politeness strategies, the use

of non-verbal symbols, or gender representation on various social media platforms. Additionally, previous studies have primarily identified communication patterns based on gender rather than explaining how language is used to maintain or challenge gender stereotypes in digital interactions. Studies that specifically analyze how language use in Instagram comments reflects or challenges gender stereotypes from a sociolinguistic perspective are still relatively limited. Moreover, the characteristics of Instagram's comment section allow users to express opinions, provide judgments, and respond to various social issues more spontaneously, thereby generating linguistic data that reflects the dynamics of communication in digital life. These characteristics indicate that Instagram comments not only serve as a medium of interaction but also as a space where gender stereotypes can be maintained, negotiated, or challenged thru the use of language. Therefore, research on the relationship between language use and gender stereotypes in Instagram comments is still needed to provide a more comprehensive understanding

of how language is used to reproduce or challenge gender stereotypes in digital communication spaces.

Based on the identified research gap, this study aims to analyze how language use in Instagram comments reflects or challenges gender stereotypes from a sociolinguistic perspective. This research is expected to enrich sociolinguistic studies, particularly those related to language use in digital communication and the construction of gender stereotypes on social media. In addition to contributing to the development of academic studies on language and gender, the results of this research are also expected to serve as a reference for researchers, educators, and the public in understanding the role of language in building more critical, reflective, and inclusive digital communication.

B. Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a sociolinguistic perspective to analyze how language use in Instagram comments reflects or challenges gender stereotypes. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the

meanings, communication patterns, and social contexts contained in linguistic data in depth (Pyo et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the sociolinguistic perspective is used to understand the relationship between language use and social construction in digital interactions (Grieve et al., 2025; Adizovna, 2024).

The research data come obtained from English-language comments published on the Instagram account @therock. This account was chosen because it has a high level of interaction and a diverse audience, providing authentic linguistic data for analysis. Data were collected from 15 posts published in June 2025, consisting of 12 videos and 3 photos. From each post, 10 comments were selected using purposive sampling because this technique allows researchers to choose data that best aligns with the research objectives, specifically comments that contain language use related to gender stereotype representation. The selection of comments was based on three criteria: the comments were written in English, the gender identity of the authors could be identified, and the comments contained language use

relevant to the research focus. Thus, the total data analyzed amounted to 150 comments.

Data collection was carried out through digital documentation of public comments on Instagram. After the comments were collected, the data were selected according to the research criteria, then recorded using a language observation sheet to identify word choices, forms of expression, and indications of gender stereotypes. Next, the data were classified using a sociolinguistic codebook so that each comment can be grouped based on relevant linguistic characteristics. During the analysis process, the researchers also compiled field notes to document the communication context and interpretations of the social meanings that emerged from each comment. All data used in this study were obtained from publicly available comments on Instagram. Therefore, this research does not involve personal information beyond the content published by users.

Data analysis refers to the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes four stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and

conclusion drawing and verification. After all the comments have been collected, the researcher selected and focused the data in accordance with the research objectives. The condensed data were then presented in the form of categories and descriptive narratives, making it easier to identify patterns of language use that reflect or challenge gender stereotypes. The final stage was carried out through a repeated process of interpretation and verification to ensure that the findings are consistent with empirical data and capable of addressing the research focus on the reflection and challenge of gender stereotypes in Instagram comments.

C. Result and Discussion

The Analysis of 150 English-language comments collected from 15 posts on the Instagram account @therock shows that language use not only reflects long-standing gender stereotypes in society but also demonstrates efforts to challenge these gender constructions. These findings indicate that the Instagram comment section not only serves as a medium for social interaction but also as a communication space where users construct, maintain, and

negotiate gender meanings through language. To facilitate the presentation of the research results, the findings obtained are grouped into two main categories, namely the use of language that reflects gender stereotypes and the use of language that challenges gender stereotypes.

Tabel 1.
Language Use Reflecting Gender Stereotypes

Category	Findings	Representative Comments
Men as protectors	Men are portrayed as family protectors.	"For everyone, I hope you are always healthy in this world, and God always blesses you and protects you wherever you are, always keep your spirits up my brothers in this world" (P14-M3)
Men associated with strength	Masculinity is associated with physical strength.	"Dad strong pretty" (P14-M4)
Women as emotionally expressive	Women's comments emphasize emotional expression and affection.	"ur fan from Nigeria love u so much" (P3-F4)
Women associated with family	Women's comments highlight family-oriented relationships.	"You have beautiful girls... I have a wonderful boy and we love Lilo and Stitch" (P15-F3)

Based on Table 1, some comments still show the use of language that reproduces traditional gender stereotypes. Men are more

often represented as responsible, strong figures who play the role of family protectors. This tendency is evident in comment P14-M3, which contains prayers and hopes that men remain strong and receive protection, as well as comment P14-M4, which directly associates the figure of a father with strength. These findings indicate that the social construction of masculinity is still reflected in communication practices on social media.

Conversely, comments written by women more frequently express affection, admiration, and closeness to family relationships. Expressions like "love u so much" in comments P3-F4 and P15-F3, which link the posts to experiences with family, show that women are still often represented through interpersonal relationships and expressions of affection. This indicates that language use on social media is still influenced by social constructed gender roles.

Tabel 2.
Language Use Challenging Gender Stereotypes

Category	Findings	Representative Comments
Men express vulnerability	Men openly express emotional vulnerability and the social	"It's the social aspect of men are so tough and that agenda that gets pushed

	pressure they experience.	onto men that make them feel like they have to live up to this expectation" (P9-M4)
Men express appreciation	Men openly communicate admiration and appreciation.	"Discipline over motivation, I told my class your quote yesterday. They loved it" (P5-M5)
Women promoting men's health	Women encourage men to prioritize their health.	"Hopefully this will help men go to the doctor when they are having pain and / or don't feel good. Women don't want to lose you!!!!" (P9-F2)
Women share personal experiences	Women share personal experiences to promote health awareness.	"Same as my mother she died this year April but it's her kidney and she refuse or scared to be admit" (P9-F4)

In addition to reflecting gender stereotypes, this research also found comments that indicate a tendency to challenge traditional gender constructs. As seen in Table 2, some comments from male users show openness in expressing social pressure and emotional vulnerability. For example, comment P9-M4 criticizes the view that men must always appear strong, making them reluctant to seek help when facing health issues. These findings indicate a rejection of the traditional

masculinity norms that have developed in society.

On the other hand, comments from female users not only contain emotional support but also encourage a change in perspective regarding gender roles. Comment P9-F2, for example, invites men to pay more attention to their health and not be bound by traditional masculinity demands. Meanwhile, comment P9-F4 shows that personal experiences can be utilized to raise awareness about the importance of maintaining health. These findings indicate that social media provides a space for users to express more flexible views on identity and gender roles.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that gender representation in Instagram comments is dynamic. In the same communication space, the use of language can serve to maintain long-standing gender stereotypes while also becoming a means to challenge and negotiate those gender constructions. Thus, language in digital communication not only serves as a tool for conveying information but also as a social practice that shapes, reproduces, and alters

gender meanings according to the ongoing interaction context.

The findings of this research align with the views of Sevilla Requena (2024), who states that language is a social practice that plays a role in shaping identity and representing social values. The results of this study also support Pak's (2025) argument that the use of language in contemporary contexts not only represents gender identity but also serves as a means to construct and negotiate gender meanings in various social contexts, including digital communication. Additionally, the results of this study also support the findings of Singh (2024) and Colosi et al. (2023), which show that digital spaces allow individuals to construct and negotiate gender identities more flexibly compared to traditional communication contexts. The main contribution of this research lies in the finding that within the same discussion space on Instagram, two tendencies in language use can be found simultaneously: the use of language that both reflects and challenges gender stereotypes. This finding shows that social media has become a dynamic communication space where various gender

representations can coexist and continue to be negotiated through language use.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the use of language in Instagram comments not only reflects traditional gender stereotypes but also presents forms of communication that challenge these stereotypes. Some comments still depict men as strong figures, protectors, and family leaders, while women are more often associated with emotional expression and family relationships. However, this study also found that both men and women use language more flexibly in representing gender roles, such as men expressing emotional vulnerability and women advocating for changes to traditional masculinity.

These findings indicate that social media serves as a space that allows users not only to reproduce but also to negotiate gender meanings through language practices. Thus, gender representation in digital communication is dynamic and influenced by communication goals, user experiences, and interaction contexts. Future research is recommended to examine gender

representation across various social media platforms or to employ more diverse data sources in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of language use in digital communication.

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