
“YOU MUST TRY IT”: A FORENSIC LINGUISTICS ANALYSIS OF ONLINE GAMBLING PROMOTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA COMMENT SECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the persuasive strategies employed in online gambling advertisements circulated through social media comment sections. Drawing on a dataset of 32 interactions from TikTok between 21 August and 23 September 2025, the analysis examines how language constructs trust, credibility, and manipulation. Each dataset entry includes a primary promotional comment, often framed as a testimonial of success, and at least one reply, ensuring dialogic interaction. Using a move analysis approach, the findings reveal systematic patterns of persuasion, including claims of winning, reinforcement from other users, and staged dialogue that collectively simulate authenticity. These patterned linguistic moves demonstrate that the comments are strategically orchestrated rather than spontaneous. The recurrence of testimonial chaining, where initial claims are echoed and validated by follow up comments, emerges as a key marker of deception. Engagement metrics such as likes and replies further amplify visibility, making these illicit promotions harder to detect or remove. This study highlights how forensic linguistic analysis can uncover the structural and interactive dimensions of deceptive discourse, offering insights into the mechanisms of online gambling promotion in Indonesia’s digital landscape.

Keywords: deceptive communication, forensic linguistics, online gambling, persuasive discourse, social media comments

ABSTRAK

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Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi persuasif yang digunakan dalam iklan judi online yang beredar melalui kolom komentar media sosial. Dengan menggunakan 32 interaksi dari TikTok dari tanggal 21 Agustus hingga 23 September 2025, proses analisis fokus pada bagaimana bahasa digunakan untuk membangun kepercayaan, kredibilitas, dan manipulasi. Setiap data mencakup komentar utama berupa promosi judi online, sering kali diperlihatkan sebagai testimoni kemenangan, serta memiliki minimal satu balasan komentar untuk memastikan adanya interaksi dialogis. Melalui pendekatan analisis gerakan atau move analysis, hasil temuan menunjukkan adanya pola persuasif yang sistematis, termasuk klaim kemenangan, testimoni tambahan dari pengguna lain, dan rekayasa dialog sehingga percakapan tampak autentik. Pola linguistik ini membuktikan bahwa komentar tidak bersifat spontan, melainkan disusun secara strategis. Kemunculan banyaknya testimoni yang bertujuan untuk memperkuat klaim awal yang dibuat oleh penulis, merupakan salah satu penanda utama penipuan. Tingkat interaksi penonton seperti jumlah suka dan balasan turut memperluas jangkauan pesan, sehingga promosi ilegal ini semakin sulit dideteksi maupun dihapus. Penelitian ini menegaskan peran analisis linguistik forensik dalam mengungkap dimensi struktural dan interaktif wacana manipulatif, sekaligus memberikan pemahaman mengenai mekanisme promosi judi online di lanskap digital Indonesia.

Kata kunci: linguistik forensik, judi online, komentar media sosial, konstruksi penipuan, wacana persuasif

A. INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has transformed how people interact, communicate, and consume information in the digital era. Beyond personal networking, social media has become a powerful space for advertising, where promotional messages are no longer limited to formal endorsements by celebrities or influencers but are also generated by ordinary users who act as content creators. These advertisements are often reinforced in the comment sections, where individuals provide organic reviews that appear authentic to other users. This form of interaction offers a sense of certainty and trust, making audiences more susceptible to persuasion. Such a strategy has gained remarkable popularity in Southeast Asia, a region with one of the highest rates of social media usage in the world.

While social media advertising has enabled businesses to reach wider audiences, it has also opened the door to illegal practices (Jimmy & Sumarlan, 2024; Ahmad et al., 2024). Among them is the promotion of online gambling, an activity prohibited in many Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia. These promotions often appear in the comment sections of unrelated posts, where individuals interact with one another by sharing so-called “testimonies” about the large sums of money they claim to have won. Such interactions create an illusion of credibility and trustworthiness, exploiting the perception that reviews and peer recommendations are more reliable than official advertisements (Suharsono, 2019;

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Zhang et al., 2023). Despite the illegality of online gambling in many jurisdictions, including Indonesia, the deceptive discourse in these comment sections remains widespread and highly accessible.

From a forensic linguistic perspective, this phenomenon is particularly concerning. Language in comment sections can serve as evidence of manipulation, where fabricated testimonies blur the boundary between authentic interaction and promotional discourse. The strategic use of fake accounts, repetitive phrasing, and staged dialogues represents a form of linguistic deception that not only misleads potential victims but also poses challenges for law enforcement and regulatory bodies. Research in opinion spam and fake review detection shows that deceptive content often exhibits distinct stylistic and sentiment patterns that make it distinguishable (Salminen et al., 2025; Jakupov et al., 2024). Similarly, analysis of fake profiles and interaction patterns in online social ecosystems provides evidence that accounts used in coordinated promotions can be identified by their linguistic and behavioral traces (Sarfraz et al., 2025).

Previous research has examined online gambling advertisements from multiple perspectives, including psychology (Tessier, Romo, & Zerhouni, 2021; Jimmy & Sumarlan, 2024), law (Parker et al., 2024; Rossi et al., 2021), and public health (Armitage, 2021; Supriyadi et al., 2024). Linguistic research has also analyzed online gambling discourse, but the specific focus on advertisements through comment-section reviews remains novel. Unlike traditional ads, comment-based promotion relies heavily on interactivity and the construction of social proof, making it a unique and understudied phenomenon in the field of forensic linguistics.

Thus, this study aims to uncover the persuasive strategies employed in online gambling advertisements circulated through social media comment sections. By examining how language is used to construct trust, credibility, and manipulation, this study contributes both theoretically and practically. It not only advances our understanding of how illegal advertising operates in digital environments but also highlights the risks posed to ordinary users, particularly in regions with high social media engagement and limited digital literacy. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of forensic linguistic analysis in exposing deceptive practices and protecting vulnerable communities from online gambling manipulation.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Online Gambling Promotion in Indonesia

Online gambling has become one of the most prominent digital issues in Indonesia, despite its prohibition under national law. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, are often used to disseminate gambling content disguised as lifestyle promotions or “testimonials” from satisfied users. These advertisements frequently target individuals from middle- to low-income backgrounds, exploiting their aspirations for quick financial gain. Research has highlighted how these ads rely on visual glamorization, promises of instant

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wealth, and interpersonal persuasion to attract vulnerable audiences. The accessibility of gambling content through mobile devices and the anonymity of social media further contribute to the rapid spread of these illicit practices.

Another important dimension of online gambling promotion lies in the platform logic of engagement. Comments, likes, and replies are not merely conversational features but metrics that determine a post’s visibility in algorithmic ranking systems. Gambling promoters exploit this by embedding their content in comment sections of popular videos, where any type of interaction adds to the overall engagement score. Since higher engagement increases the likelihood that a video will be pushed to more viewers, content creators are often reluctant to delete such comments, even if they are unrelated or promotional. Previous research shows that visible likes and comment counts can increase user perceptions of credibility (Tenenboim, 2022), while positive engagement provides emotional rewards that motivate creators to maintain such interactions (Stsiampkouskaya et al., 2021). Moreover, engagement-driven visibility ensures that gambling promotions benefit from a cycle of amplification, where popular content circulates widely across platforms (Zhang, 2021). In this way, the algorithmic logic of engagement sustains the presence of gambling discourse and exposes it to larger audiences.

While studies in psychology, law, and public health have examined the harmful consequences of online gambling, including addiction, legal implications, and mental health concerns, fewer studies have focused on its linguistic dimensions. In Indonesia, online gambling promotions are often circulated in indirect ways, such as appearing in the comment sections of unrelated posts, making them harder to track. This strategy capitalizes on the interactive and communal nature of social media, where comments are perceived as more authentic than direct advertisements. As such, understanding the language of these promotions is crucial, not only for academic inquiry but also for law enforcement and public awareness campaigns.

2. Move Analysis for Forensic Analysis

Online gambling has become one of the most prominent digital issues in Indonesia, despite its prohibition under national law. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, are often used to disseminate gambling content disguised as lifestyle promotions or “testimonials” from satisfied users. These advertisements frequently target individuals from middle- to low-income backgrounds, exploiting their aspirations for quick financial gain. Research has highlighted how these ads rely on visual glamorization, promises of instant wealth, and interpersonal persuasion to attract vulnerable audiences. The accessibility of gambling content through mobile devices and the anonymity of social media further contribute to the rapid spread of these illicit practices.

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3. Linguistic Features in Forensic Linguistics

Forensic linguistics has long emphasized the role of linguistic features, such as lexical choice, syntax, discourse markers, and pragmatic strategies in identifying manipulation, authorship, and deception (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). In the case of online gambling promotions, linguistic features such as exaggerated quantifiers (“millions instantly”), colloquial language, and repeated positive assertions play a central role in constructing trust. Studies in forensic contexts have also examined how impersonation and identity construction are carried out linguistically, such as using informal greetings, local slang, or emojis to appear like an ordinary user. These features make the comments blend into the larger digital conversation, disguising them as genuine.

Another important feature is intertextuality, where multiple comments build upon one another to create an illusion of dialogue. For example, one account may post a supposed success story, while others respond with supportive comments, creating the appearance of consensus. This practice resonates with broader forensic linguistic findings that show how deceptive discourse often relies on repetition and reinforcement across texts. By examining these features in the specific context of Indonesian online gambling promotions, researchers can highlight how language functions both as a tool of persuasion and as potential evidence of illegal activity.

C. METHODS

1. Research Design

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This research employed a qualitative design because the aim was to analyze online gambling advertisements in depth rather than to measure them quantitatively. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for forensic linguistic studies, as it allows researchers to uncover hidden meanings, rhetorical structures, and persuasive strategies embedded in naturally occurring discourse (Grant & Tayebi, 2023). By focusing on the construction of persuasion in comment sections, this study prioritizes the depth of analysis over breadth, in line with qualitative research principles.

1. Research Data

The dataset for this study comprises 32 interactions drawn from 10 TikTok videos' comment sections between 21 August and 23 September 2025. Each interaction consists of a primary comment promoting online gambling, often in the form of a testimonial (e.g., claims of winning large amounts of money), followed by replies from other users. The inclusion criteria required that each comment had at least one reply, ensuring that the data represented dialogic interaction rather than isolated self-promotion. Table 1 below presents the demographic distribution of the dataset, including the number of likes and replies that each gambling-related comment received.

Table 1. Data demographics of online gambling promotional comments on TikTok

Data	Date	Video Types	Comment's Like	Comment's Reply
Data 01	05/07/2025	Promotion	1240	53
Data 02	22/08/2025	Entertainment	78	14
Data 03	26/08/2025	Personal Branding	235	30
Data 04	20/09/2025	Entertainment	17	12
Data 05	20/09/2025	Entertainment	15	3
Data 06	20/09/2025	Quote	99	4
Data 07	20/09/2025	Quote	6	14
Data 08	20/09/2025	Tutorial	9	13
Data 09	20/09/2025	Quote	8	11
Data 10	20/09/2025	Quote	6	9
Data 11	20/09/2025	Entertainment	75	11
Data 12	20/09/2025	Entertainment	389	15
Data 13	20/09/2025	Entertainment	153	8
Data 14	20/09/2025	Entertainment	66	2
Data 15	20/09/2025	Quote	132	17
Data 16	20/09/2025	Quote	8	11
Data 17	20/09/2025	Quote	4	1

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Data 18	20/09/2025	Promotion	227	7
Data 19	20/09/2025	Promotion	4	2
Data 20	21/08/2025	Personal Branding	1	7
Data 21	21/08/2025	Personal Branding	84	3
Data 22	21/08/2025	Personal Branding	79	3
Data 23	21/08/2025	Personal Branding	0	1
Data 24	21/08/2025	Personal Branding	4	3
Data 25	21/08/2025	Promotion	1	1
Data 26	20/09/2025	Health	1	1
Data 27	23/09/2025	Tutorial	5	7
Data 28	23/09/2025	Entertainment	13	9
Data 29	23/09/2025	Entertainment	8	1
Data 30	23/09/2025	Personal Branding	13	9
Data 31	20/09/2025	Entertainment	1398	11
Data 32	20/09/2025	Entertainment	173	24

The comments were found across a range of video types, including entertainment ($n = 13$), personal branding ($n = 6$), quotes ($n = 7$), promotion-based content ($n = 4$), tutorials ($n = 2$), and health-related content ($n = 1$). This spread suggests that online gambling promotions appear opportunistically across different genres rather than being limited to specific content categories.

Engagement levels with the gambling-related comments varied significantly. Some comments generated substantial attention, such as one comment under an entertainment video that received 1,398 likes and 11 replies, while others received minimal interaction (e.g., 1 like and 1 reply). On average, the dataset reflects 155 likes and 10 replies per comment, indicating a moderate but meaningful level of visibility.

3. Data Collection

The data were collected using a purposive qualitative sampling strategy, focusing on TikTok as a high-traffic platform in Southeast Asia. The researcher did not use specific keywords; instead, data were obtained by scrolling through the For You Page (FYP) feed to identify gambling-related promotional comments. To ensure fairness and avoid overrepresentation, each video was scrolled a maximum of three times in its comment section, and only comments that contained evidence of gambling promotion with subsequent replies were selected.

The collection period lasted one month (25 August-24 September 2025). Data were captured using screenshots and screen recordings to preserve the textual and interactional elements (e.g., likes, replies) as well as prevent loss from potential deletion. Following this, the raw data were decoded into text format for linguistic analysis.

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To reduce researcher bias, the collection process followed a consistent procedure across all videos. Only comments that demonstrated engagement (replies from either the original poster or other users) were retained. Furthermore, usernames and profile pictures were anonymized in line with the Ethical Guidelines of the Faculty of Social Science, Universitas Mulawarman, thereby respecting participants' digital privacy. After collection, the comments were transcribed into text format for analysis.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis applied a move analysis framework, adapted from Biber et al. (2007), to identify rhetorical functions within online gambling promotional comments. This framework combines a top-down (theory-driven) and bottom-up (data-driven) approach. In practice, this means the researcher began with general move categories informed by prior discourse studies and refined them iteratively through close reading of the data.

Each comment and its replies were segmented into moves, such as claim of winning, proof through testimonial, congratulatory reinforcement, invitation to join, site promotion, humorous reinforcement, and non-verbal reinforcement. These moves represent distinct strategies that participants use to construct persuasion in the comment section. For example, a user might begin by claiming they won a large amount of money (Move 1), provide proof such as an image of cash or naming the gambling site (Move 2), and then be reinforced by others who either congratulate them (Move 3) or share similar winning experiences (Move 5).

An excerpt of the analysis is presented in Table 2, showing how moves were assigned to specific comments and interactions:

Table 2. Example of data analysis

Participant	Chat	Move
C8	<i>Rezeki hari ini habis cair 35jt</i>    	1 (Claim of Winning)
C8	<i>(gambar setumpuk uang tunai)</i>	1 (Claim of Winning)
C8	<i>"QUISTOTO22"</i>	2 (Locating the Site)
F16	<i>Makasih infonya bng saya coba dulu</i> <i>300k mumpung semalam gajian siapa tau</i> <i>jp</i> 	4 (Desire to Try)
F16	<i>mumpung Nemu disini gw cobain main</i> <i>disini</i>	4 (Desire to Try)
F16	<i>semoga gua jga nular menang nya</i>  	4 (Desire to Try)
G	<i>Tadi malm main di sini game mahjong</i> <i>scater pertama langsung berisi 3,5jt</i>  	5 (Social Proof)

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G	Kalo ama yng lain runkad mulu cuma di sini gw bisa ngerasain wd 🤔❤️	5 (Social Proof)
G	Ling nya cocok untuk balikin modal yang kalah bg 👍	5 (Social Proof)
G	lain kali kalau ada yang mantap info lagi y bg	3 (Congratulatory)
K	Hahaha seneng banget gua bg 🔥 info lu bagiin emang jos markotop	3 (Congratulatory)
TP	ciss dulu yang wd jutaan kwkw, awalnya sih gak percaya tapi penasaran bawa modal 200k iseng doang eh di kasi wd 3jt 😂😂	5 (Social Proof)
L	nitip iPhone 17 promax bang	8 (Counter-Discourse)
A	😂😂😂😂	7 (Interaction Padding)

To enhance reliability, the researcher and two trained linguists independently coded the dataset. Inter-coder agreement was calculated using percentage agreement, resulting in a match rate of over 80%, which exceeds the minimum threshold typically accepted in linguistic research (Hober et al., 2023). Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached, ensuring robustness and consistency in the categorization of moves.

5. Research Ethics

The study adhered to ethical standards for online research. All data were drawn from publicly available TikTok content, and no interaction was conducted with commenters. To protect digital privacy, usernames and profile photos were anonymized, and identifying details were removed from the dataset. The research followed the Faculty of Social Science Ethical Guidelines, Universitas Mulawarman, which emphasize the protection of online participants even when their content is publicly accessible. The data were securely stored and used strictly for academic purposes.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Structure of Persuasive Moves in Comment-Based Gambling Ads

The analysis identified eight distinct persuasive moves that structure the interaction in comment-based online gambling advertisements. These moves illustrate how persuasion unfolds through claims, reinforcements, and user engagement tactics. Table 3 presents the identified moves and their descriptions.

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Table 3. Identified moves in comment-based online gambling promotions

Move	Description
Move 1: Claim of Winning	A user claims success in online gambling, often mentioning specific amounts of money through text or screenshots/images.
Move 2: Locating the Site	Users ask about the gambling platform or provide its name/website to build discourse around accessibility and authenticity.
Move 3: Congratulatory	Users offer congratulatory responses to the initiator’s claim of winning.
Move 4: Desire to Try	Users express willingness or intention to participate in gambling activities.
Move 5: Social Proof	Other users reinforce the initiator’s claim by posting similar winning stories or supporting testimonies.
Move 6: Call to Action	Users issue direct or indirect invitations encouraging others to join or try the platform.
Move 7: Interaction Padding	Users post non-lexical or low-information content, such as emojis, random letters, or scribbles, to inflate interaction counts and make the thread appear more engaging.
Move 8: Counter-Discourse	Users challenge the authenticity of gambling claims or question the credibility of the platform.

Although these eight moves were consistently identified across the dataset, their sequence was not always linear. In many interactions, the moves did not follow the order of 1-2-3 but appeared in recursive or repetitive patterns. For instance, a claim of winning (Move 1) could be followed directly by social proof (Move 5) or interaction padding (Move 7) before any congratulatory responses (Move 3) appeared. This fluidity reflects the dynamic and adaptive nature of discourse in social media comment sections, where moves overlap and cycle to maintain engagement. This variability in sequence leads naturally to an examination of move frequency across the dataset.

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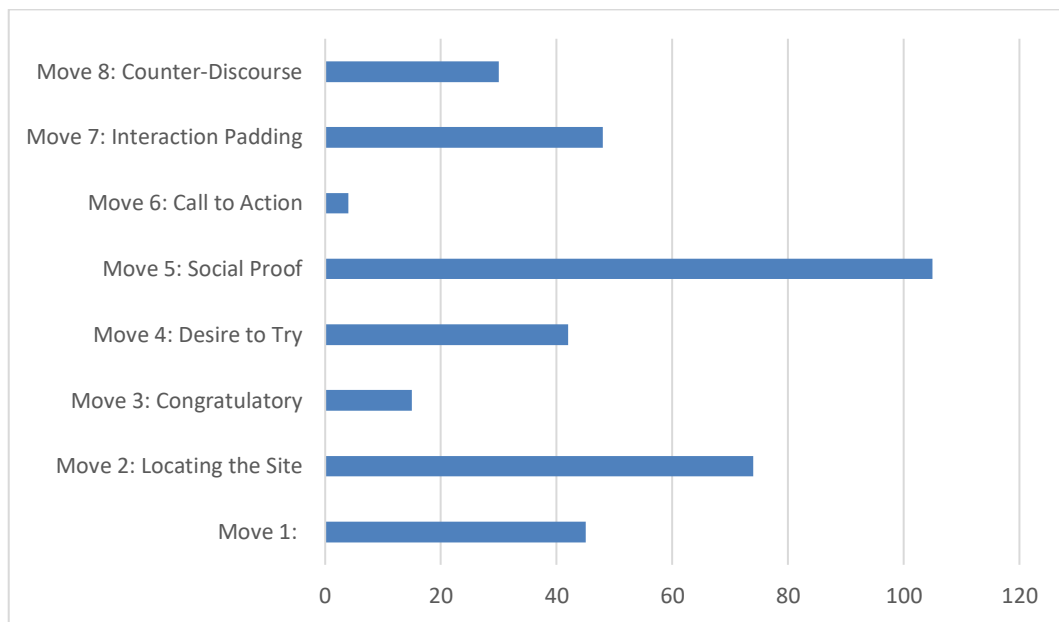


Figure 1. Frequency of moves in comment-based online gambling promotions

The distribution of moves across the 32 data sets is shown in Figure 1. The analysis found that Move 5 (Social Proof) appeared most frequently, occurring 105 times, while Move 6 (Call to Action) was the least frequent, with only 4 instances. Other moves included: Move 2 (Locating the Site) with 74 instances, Move 7 (Interaction Padding) with 48 instances, Move 1 (Claim of Winning) with 45 instances, Move 4 (Desire to Try) with 42 instances, Move 8 (Counter-Discourse) with 30 instances, and Move 3 (Congratulatory) with 15 instances.

The predominance of Move 5 (Social Proof) demonstrates the centrality of peer reinforcement in sustaining the credibility of gambling claims. By contrast, the rarity of Move 6 (Call to Action) suggests that explicit persuasion is minimized in favor of implicit or community-driven discourse. This aligns with studies such as Zhang et al. (2025), which note that indirect forms of endorsement are more persuasive in online contexts because they appear less scripted and more authentic. Similarly, Move 7's relatively high frequency reflects the role of low-information engagement in boosting algorithmic visibility, as observed in platform-based manipulation research (Stoian, 2023).

These moves mirror traditional advertising strategies such as testimonial, endorsement, and product placement, but are disguised as organic peer-to-peer interactions. Rather than presenting a brand message directly, the ads are embedded in the casual flow of user comments. Previous studies on covert advertising (Evans & Wojdyski, 2019; Ju et al., 2022) suggest that such tactics increase persuasion by lowering audience resistance, as users perceive comments as genuine experiences rather than scripted promotions. The blending of testimonial and conversational styles in gambling ads reinforces this deceptive naturalness.

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From a forensic linguistics perspective, the patterned use of moves provides evidence of systematic deception. The recurrence of structured strategies—claims, reinforcements, and interaction padding—demonstrates that the comments are not spontaneous but strategically orchestrated to manipulate perception. Previous forensic studies (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010; Olsson & Luchjenbroers, 2013) emphasize that recurring linguistic structures in fraudulent texts can signal coordinated manipulation. In this dataset, the recurrent interplay of Move 1 and Move 5 mirrors testimonial chaining, a known deception marker.

Furthermore, the presence of counter-discourse (Move 8) highlights the contested nature of online gambling promotion and underscores the linguistic battle for credibility. While some users attempt to resist persuasion, their voices are often drowned out by repetitive reinforcement moves and interaction padding. This imbalance reflects what Grant and MacLeod (2020) identify as discursive asymmetry in deceptive communication, where overwhelming repetition is used to marginalize dissenting voices. Consequently, the move patterns in these ads can be seen as forensic evidence of manipulative tactics designed to exploit vulnerable communities under the guise of casual interaction.

2. Linguistic Features of Deceptive Comment Interactions

The linguistic dimension of comment-based gambling promotions reveals how language is carefully engineered to manipulate perceptions of credibility, profitability, and urgency. Rather than presenting straightforward advertisements, these interactions simulate peer-to-peer conversations that blend informal speech with highly persuasive techniques. The comment threads in online gambling promotion make heavy use of key linguistic strategies: exaggeration, colloquial tone, emojis, and quantifiers. These strategies amplify claims of success in ways that make them hard to verify but compelling to read. For instance:

- (1) “*Gue yang habis WD 24Jt bilek* 🤔😅”
(I just withdrew 24 million 🤔😅)
- (2) “*POV: SISA 350K JADI 21jt* 📁💰❤️”
(POV: From 350 thousand left to 21 million 📁💰❤️)
- (3) “*Gw yang wd55 jt bilek* 😊❤️🤔”
(While I just withdrew 55 million 😊❤️🤔)
- (4) “*Rezeki hari ini habis cair 35jt* 🥳🥳”
(Blessings today, just cashed out 35 million 🥳🥳)

Such utterances use precise large numbers (“24Jt”, “55 jt”, etc.) and colloquial registers (“*gue*”, “*bilek*”, “*rezeki hari ini*”), mixed with emotive emojis, to evoke intimacy and excitement. Research shows that exaggeration and emotional framing are frequently used in deceptive social media campaigns to increase persuasive appeal (Stepaniuk & Jarosz, 2021; Chen et al., 2024). The colloquial tone helps

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reduce psychological distance between speaker and audience, making the claim sound peer-driven rather than advertisement-driven.

A second feature is the use of discourse markers and pragmatic strategies that aim to construct authenticity and interpersonal trust. Commenters frequently embed casual markers such as “*bang*,” “*bro*,” or “*gue aja kaget*” that imitate everyday interaction and downplay the commercial intention behind the message. These discourse cues create the impression of spontaneous peer talk rather than a staged endorsement.

- (1) “*Gua aja kaget bisa WD sebanyak ini* 🤔🤔”

(I was so surprised I could withdraw that much 🤔🤔)

- (2) “*Awalnya sih gak percaya, tapi penasaran bawa modal 200k eh dikasih WD 3jt* 🤔🤔”

(At first I didn’t believe it, but I tried with 200k capital and got 3 million 🤔🤔)

The linguistic performance of relatable slang and humility markers constructs a persona of an “ordinary player” who happens to succeed. By using everyday terms such as *gue*, *bang*, or *kagak nyangka*, commenters create the impression that they are casual gamblers sharing honest experiences rather than promoters. This ordinariness is reinforced through humility markers like “*gue aja kaget*” (*I was even surprised myself*), which signal modesty and downplay the intentionality of the self-promotion. Such self-positioning makes the testimony sound less scripted and more trustworthy, even though the context indicates otherwise. As argued by Chiluwa et al. (2020), these pragmatic strategies are key in deceptive discourse because they disguise promotional content as authentic experience.

This finding aligns with van Dijk’s (2006) view that everyday linguistic markers are often mobilized to create ideological closeness, thereby making persuasive discourse more acceptable. In online gambling promotion, the use of slang and informal registers functions not only as a marker of in-group identity but also as a means to reduce suspicion, since readers feel they are interacting with peers rather than advertisers. Research on online scams (Ye et al., 2019) has similarly shown that fraudsters frequently rely on a “performance of normality” to construct credible social identities. In this context, the deliberate use of colloquial tone and humility markers can be interpreted as a strategy of linguistic impersonation, where fabricated personas simulate the voice of everyday gamblers to enhance trustworthiness.

A third important strategy is repetition and intertextuality, which create the illusion of consensus. Many replies echo the same claims of big wins or copy-paste similar testimonial structures, amplifying the sense that multiple people independently report success.

- (3) “*Kukira hoax ternyata real* 🤔🤔”

(I thought it was a hoax, turns out real 🤔🤔)

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(4) “Barusan abis coba emg bagus pecahannya, makasih 🙌”

(*Just tried it, the winnings are really good, thanks 🙌*)

(5) “Emg bagus pecahannya disini 🙌 🙌”

(*The payouts are really good here 🙌 🙌*)

Such repetitive discourse aligns with findings in computational propaganda research, where intertextual echoes and patterned phrasing are used to simulate authentic crowd engagement (Woolley & Howard, 2018). In the context of gambling promotion, repetition creates a manufactured consensus that strengthens the credibility of exaggerated claims. This echoes Beauvais (2022) observation that fake news ecosystems often rely on duplication of narratives across multiple accounts to give the impression of broad support. By repeating similar claims in slightly varied forms, promoters exploit the heuristic that “many voices must mean truth,” a bias particularly effective in online environments where readers scan quickly rather than critically evaluate.

Beyond repetition, these exchanges often reveal identity construction and staged dialogue. Commenters use fake personas by using ordinary-sounding nicknames, slang-filled expressions, and relatable tones to impersonate everyday gamblers. These personas are further reinforced through staged interactions, where one account asks for information, and another quickly replies with a link or “success story,” producing an orchestrated back-and-forth that mimics genuine social proof.

(6) “Info link? Bosen kalah mulu”

(Info link? I’m tired of always losing)

(7) “Search di Google, yang ada gambar pemburu maxwin 😊 jangan salah pilih”

(Search in Google, the one with the hunter image 😊 don’t choose the wrong one)

This pattern resembles what Al-Rawi et al. (2021) call synthetic engagement, where fabricated dialogues between controlled accounts strategically manufacture trust. Similar dynamics have been observed in coordinated disinformation campaigns (Starbird et al., 2019), where staged dialogues blur the line between authentic peer-to-peer communication and orchestrated persuasion.

From a forensic perspective, these features constitute linguistic impersonation: language use that disguises a deceptive promotional identity as an authentic peer. Such impersonation is not merely rhetorical—it represents coordinated inauthentic behavior that can mislead vulnerable users. The exaggerated claims, fake personas, and staged dialogues may therefore serve as forensic linguistic indicators of fabricated identity, which can be used as evidence in legal or investigative contexts (Grant & MacLeod, 2020).

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In summary, the interactional patterns across these datasets highlight how deceptive gambling ads do not rely solely on single exaggerated claims. Instead, they strategically mobilize exaggeration, colloquial tone, discourse markers, repetition, identity construction, and staged dialogue to engineer an environment of trust. This multifaceted manipulation underlines the importance of linguistic forensics in detecting coordinated deception in online advertising.

E. CONCLUSION

This study examined the linguistic strategies employed in online gambling promotion within Indonesian social media, focusing particularly on how comment-based advertisements are structured and performed. Through move analysis, the findings reveal that these comments do not emerge spontaneously but are systematically organized into persuasive steps, beginning with exaggerated claims of winning, followed by social proof through fabricated testimonies, and concluding with directives or links that function as calls to action. Such patterned discourse demonstrates that online gambling promotion is a coordinated communicative practice rather than isolated acts of individual users.

The analysis also shows how rhetorical features such as exaggeration, colloquial tone, heavy emoji use, repetition, and intertextuality create an atmosphere of authenticity and consensus. These strategies construct the illusion of ordinary people sharing genuine experiences, while in fact, many comments are staged dialogues produced by controlled accounts. Engagement metrics such as likes and replies further amplify these effects by boosting the visibility of gambling promotions and discouraging deletion by content owners. In this way, the linguistic manipulation is reinforced not only by textual moves but also by the algorithmic logic of social media platforms.

From a forensic linguistic perspective, these findings underscore that language itself can serve as evidence of illegality. The fabricated personas, staged interactions, and orchestrated persuasion moves constitute forms of linguistic impersonation and coordinated inauthentic behavior. Such features are not merely stylistic but signal deceptive intent, providing potential evidence in cases of fraudulent advertising and online gambling regulation. Beyond their legal relevance, these strategies also highlight the vulnerability of digital audiences, particularly those with low digital literacy and economic insecurity, who are disproportionately targeted by these discourses.

In sum, online gambling promotions on Indonesian social media are best understood not as random user interaction but as a carefully engineered form of digital deception. The integration of move analysis and forensic linguistic perspectives allows for a systematic mapping of how language is mobilized to manipulate, mislead, and ultimately exploit vulnerable users.

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