

## Normalizing Illegality: Multimodal Manipulation in Indonesian Online Gambling Advertisements

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### ABSTRAK

*Perjudian daring di Indonesia masih menjadi aktivitas yang meluas meskipun ilegal, dengan strategi promosi yang terus berkembang untuk menghindari deteksi dan sanksi hukum. Penelitian ini mengkaji teknik persuasi dan pengelabuan yang digunakan dalam iklan perjudian daring dengan menganalisis unsur tekstual dan visual melalui kerangka Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Data penelitian ini terdiri atas 34 iklan bergaya judul yang disertai gambar, seluruhnya diambil dari platform news feed. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya pergeseran yang signifikan dari format promosi tradisional—yang sering menampilkan figur otoritatif—ke penggunaan individu biasa seperti mahasiswa, pedagang makanan, dan pekerja lokal. Pergeseran ini mencerminkan strategi penargetan sosial-ekonomi, yang secara khusus menyasar kelompok masyarakat menengah ke bawah yang lebih rentan terhadap daya tarik perjudian. Konstruksi visual dan linguistik mengenai kekayaan instan, keberhasilan yang tampak mudah, serta penggunaan figur yang relatable berfungsi untuk menormalisasi perilaku perjudian sekaligus menyamarkan status ilegalnya. Pola-pola ini mengindikasikan adanya upaya yang disengaja untuk menyisipkan wacana perjudian ke dalam konteks kehidupan sehari-hari, sehingga meningkatkan daya persuasifnya. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan peningkatan kampanye kesadaran publik, penguatan literasi digital, serta pengawasan regulasi yang lebih ketat untuk membantu mengidentifikasi dan menangkal taktik multimodal dalam promosi perjudian daring.*  
Kata kunci: linguistik forensik, iklan perjudian daring, SFL

### ABSTRACT

Online gambling in Indonesia remains a widespread yet illegal activity, with promotional strategies evolving to evade detection and legal sanctions. This study investigates the persuasive and deceptive techniques used in online gambling advertisements by analyzing both textual and visual elements through the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The dataset consists of 34 headline-style advertisements accompanied by images, all extracted from news feed platforms. The findings reveal a notable shift from traditional promotional formats—often featuring authoritative figures—to the use of ordinary individuals such as students, food vendors, and local workers. This transition reflects a socio-economic targeting strategy, aimed particularly at middle- to low-income groups who may be more vulnerable to gambling appeals. The visual and linguistic construction of sudden wealth, casual success, and relatable personas serves to normalize gambling behavior and obscure its illegality. These patterns suggest a deliberate effort to embed gambling discourse within everyday contexts, enhancing its persuasive power. The study recommends increased public awareness campaigns, improved digital literacy education, and stronger regulatory oversight to help identify and counteract these multimodal tactics in online gambling promotion.

**Keywords:** forensic linguistics, online gambling ads, SFL

## A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the ways in which advertisements reach audiences. In the digital era, promotional content does not rely solely on

conventional media such as television, billboards, or print, but it spreads swiftly through online platforms and news portals (Bagheri et al., 2024). In today era, advertisements are often integrated seamlessly into videos by content creators, blurring the line between entertainment and promotion (Ki et al., 2020). In some cases, viewers may remain unaware that what they are watching is, in fact, an advertisement. This dynamic circulation has created new opportunities for industries—including those deemed illegal, such as online gambling—to penetrate public spaces of communication and target broader audiences in ways that appear natural and engaging.

In Indonesia, online gambling has become increasingly widespread and is practiced by people from diverse social backgrounds (Abrori et al., 2025; Suryaningsih & Muhdiarta, 2025). The rise of this phenomenon can be traced back to the socio-economic challenges faced by many communities, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when mass layoffs and limited job opportunities pushed individuals to seek alternative sources of income or escape (Kesar et al., 2021). Despite this, online gambling is explicitly prohibited under Indonesian law. Regulations such as Law No. 7 of 1974 on Gambling Control and Law No. 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE Law)—amended by Law No. 19 of 2016 and Law No. 1 of 2024—clearly criminalize both conventional and online gambling activities. Additionally, the Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP), as revised in Law No. 1 of 2023, reinforces these prohibitions by penalizing the organization, facilitation, and participation in gambling. Violations can result in fines and imprisonment of up to 10 years. Nevertheless, advertisements promoting online gambling continue to circulate widely across digital platforms. Reports indicate that Indonesians lost over USD 20 billion to online gambling in 2023 alone, with significant participation among youth and low-income groups (Siste et al., 2023). For some, the consequences are severe: individuals lose their savings (Wahyuni et al., 2024), fall into overwhelming debt (Pane et al., 2024), and in tragic cases, resort to suicide as a result of financial desperation caused by online gambling (Aziz, 2024; Agustriana & Sugiarti, 2024). This paradox between strict prohibition and persistent engagement highlights the need to examine how such advertisements are constructed to attract users and circumvent public scrutiny.

Traditionally, online gambling advertisements projected images of aspirational lifestyles, often portraying wealthy, attractive men or alluring women who embodied success and desire (Di Censo et al., 2023). These figures were strategically selected to create associations between gambling, luxury, and social status, reinforcing the illusion that participation could elevate one's life. The glamorous imagery also functioned as a fantasy appeal, enticing viewers with promises of wealth, excitement, and sexual allure (Juanda et al., 2023; Rossi & Nairn, 2024). However, recent trends show a striking shift in representation. Instead of glamorous figures, advertisements increasingly highlight ordinary individuals such as parking attendants (*tukang parkir*), high school students (*siswa SMA*), or university students (*mahasiswa*). This change reflects an attempt to construct gambling as relatable and accessible, embedding it within everyday social contexts. By foregrounding common characters, the advertisements suggest that gambling is not reserved for the rich and powerful but is a normal activity for anyone, subtly legitimizing and normalizing its presence in daily life (Han et al., 2025).

From a forensic linguistics perspective, such strategies merit careful examination. Forensic linguistics, which studies the use of language in legal, criminal, and investigative contexts, provides critical tools for analyzing how discourse in gambling advertisements manipulates identity, constructs persuasion, and potentially exploits vulnerable communities (Coulthard et

al., 2016). This research falls within the scope of language as evidence, since the choice of words, slogans, and character representations in online gambling advertisements may serve as indicators of criminal activity. If these linguistic constructions are proven to facilitate or encourage gambling practices, they may be considered part of the evidentiary materials in legal proceedings. In this sense, forensic linguistic analysis can contribute to identifying whether the organizers of online gambling, as well as the participants, could be subject to legal sanctions under Indonesian law, particularly in relation to cybercrime and gambling regulations.

Several recent studies have examined the discourse of online gambling advertisements, particularly through the lens of multimodal analysis (Juanda, 2023; Kroon, 2023), persuasive linguistic strategies (Gaudett, 2025; Krawczyk & Własiuk, 2021), and the role of authority figures in enhancing credibility (Rossi et al., 2025; Singer et al., 2024). These works highlight how gambling promotions often rely on imagery of wealth, glamour, and success to attract potential users. However, such approaches have primarily focused on aspirational or celebrity-like representations, leaving unexplored the emerging trend in which ordinary individuals—such as parking attendants, high school students, university students, or village heads—are depicted as central characters. This gap is significant, as the inclusion of everyday people marks a shift in persuasive strategy, normalizing gambling practices within the daily lives of Indonesian society. Addressing this underexplored dimension, the present study situates itself within a forensic linguistics framework, focusing on language as evidence to critically analyze how these advertisements operate discursively and legally.

Despite the fact that online gambling is illegal in Indonesia, forensic linguistic research on its advertising discourse remains essential. Illegality does not diminish the importance of scholarly inquiry; on the contrary, it heightens the need to understand the communicative mechanisms that allow such practices to persist and spread. By analyzing the linguistic and semiotic features of these advertisements, forensic linguistics can reveal how language is strategically used to bypass regulations, attract vulnerable populations, and legitimize illegal behavior in the eyes of ordinary people. Furthermore, systematic analysis provides valuable insights for policymakers, law enforcement, and digital regulators in formulating more effective strategies to counteract online gambling.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. The Gambling Reality in Indonesia**

Gambling in Indonesia is strictly prohibited, both legally and religiously. The Indonesian Penal Code and Law No. 7 of 1974 criminalize all forms of gambling, including lotteries, sports betting, and casino-style games. This legal framework is deeply intertwined with Islamic teachings, which classify gambling (*maisir*) as haram, or forbidden (Al Fatih, Nur, & Hermanto, 2025). In regions like Aceh, where Sharia law is enforced, punishments can be especially severe, including public flogging (Azzuhri, 2024). Despite these prohibitions, gambling continues to exist in various forms, often operating covertly or through digital platforms that bypass local regulations.

The emergence of online gambling has significantly complicated enforcement efforts. With the utilization of mobile devices and internet access, digital gambling platforms have become increasingly accessible to Indonesians. These platforms offer anonymity and convenience, making it difficult for authorities to monitor and prosecute users. In response, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) has blocked over one million

gambling-related websites, while the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK) continues to track suspicious financial activity (Setkab, 2024; PPATK, 2024). However, the rapid evolution of technology has created a regulatory gap that traditional law enforcement struggles to close, especially as younger demographics become more engaged in online betting (Perdana et al., 2024).

This digital shift has had a particularly damaging impact on medium to low-income families. A 2025 report from the Ministry of Social Affairs revealed that over 600,000 recipients of government assistance programs—such as the Family Hope Program (PKH) and Basic Food Assistance (Sembako)—were suspected of participating in online gambling (Jakarta Globe, 2025). These individuals often redirect funds intended for essential needs toward gambling, worsening their financial instability and deepening poverty cycles. PPATK has also reported a rise in household debt and mental health issues linked to gambling addiction (PPATK, 2024). In response, the government has launched public awareness campaigns and proposed the formation of a national task force (Indonesia.go.id, 2024). Yet, without targeted interventions such as financial literacy education and community-based support, vulnerable groups remain at high risk of falling into the destructive patterns of gambling (UMY, 2025; Budiman et al., 2022).

## **2. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in Forensic Linguistics Analysis**

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by M.A.K. Halliday, offers a powerful framework for analyzing language as a social semiotic system. Unlike traditional linguistic models that focus primarily on structure, SFL emphasizes the functional roles of language—how it is used to enact social relationships, represent experiences, and organize discourse. These functions are categorized into three metafunctions: ideational (representing reality), interpersonal (enacting social roles), and textual (organizing information) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This functional orientation makes SFL particularly suitable for forensic contexts, where language is not only a medium of communication but also a tool for persuasion, manipulation, and legal interpretation (Sujatna, Kuswoyo, & Rido, 2021).

In forensic linguistics, SFL enables researchers to dissect how legal actors—such as lawyers, judges, and witnesses—construct meaning through language. For example, in courtroom discourse, lawyers may strategically emphasize or de-emphasize certain elements to shape jurors' perceptions of guilt or innocence. A study by Felton-Rosulek (2015) applied SFL to analyze 17 sets of closing arguments in felony cases, revealing patterns of silencing and foregrounding that influence legal outcomes. By examining transitivity choices, modality, and appraisal language, analysts can uncover implicit biases, power dynamics, and rhetorical strategies embedded in legal texts (Cui, 2020). This approach provides a nuanced lens for understanding how language functions within institutional settings.

Moreover, SFL's applicability extends to written legal documents, police reports, and digital communications involved in criminal investigations. Its emphasis on context and meaning-making allows forensic linguists to trace how narratives are constructed and contested. As highlighted in recent scholarship, integrating SFL with corpus linguistics and linguistic anthropology enhances the reliability and depth of forensic analysis (Afrianto, Sujatna, Darmayanti, & Ariyani, 2021). This interdisciplinary synergy not only strengthens evidentiary interpretation but also contributes to fairer legal processes by revealing how language can subtly shape justice (Siregar & Nugroho, 2025).

### **3. Recent Study on Online Gambling Advertisement**

In recent years, the proliferation of online gambling advertisements across digital platforms has raised significant concerns, particularly in countries like Indonesia where gambling is legally prohibited and socially stigmatized. These ads often employ persuasive and deceptive language to lure individuals—especially those from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds—into high-risk betting behavior. From a forensic linguistic standpoint, analyzing such advertisements involves uncovering how language is used to manipulate perception, obscure illegality, and construct a false sense of opportunity.

Forensic Linguistics, when combined with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), offers a robust framework for dissecting the linguistic strategies embedded in gambling promotions. SFL's metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—allow researchers to examine how gambling ads represent reality (e.g., portraying gambling as a path to wealth), negotiate relationships (e.g., using inclusive language like “you too can win”), and structure information to maximize emotional impact. A recent study by Juanda et al. (2023) applied multimodal and semiotic analysis to Instagram gambling ads in Indonesia, revealing how visual and verbal signs work together to present gambling as fun, profitable, and socially acceptable. These findings underscore the importance of critical linguistic analysis in exposing the ideological underpinnings of such content.

Moreover, research using computational linguistics has identified recurring lexical patterns in Indonesian gambling promotions on platforms like Twitter. Perdana et al. (2024) found that terms such as *jackpot*, *maxwin*, and *prediksi* are frequently used to evoke excitement and certainty, often masking the inherent risks. These studies demonstrate how forensic linguistic tools can support regulatory efforts by identifying manipulative discourse and aiding in the classification of illegal content. As online gambling continues to evolve, interdisciplinary approaches that combine linguistic theory, digital forensics, and social awareness are essential for mitigating its impact—especially on populations with limited critical literacy and economic resilience.

## **C. METHOD**

### **1. Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine the linguistic and visual strategies used in online gambling advertisements that appear in Smartphone and Google news feeds. These platforms present curated content in a format that blends headlines, thumbnails, and short descriptions, making them highly influential in shaping user perception. The research is grounded in Forensic Linguistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), offering a multimodal lens to analyze how language and imagery work together to manipulate and persuade (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

### **2. Research Data**

The dataset consists of 34 online gambling advertisements collected from Google news feeds. These platforms are commonly accessed by everyday users through mobile devices and present curated content in the form of headlines, thumbnails, and short descriptions. The ads selected for this study typically mimic the style of legitimate news articles, blending promotional

content with journalistic formatting to enhance credibility and engagement. Many of these ads feature emotionally charged visuals and persuasive language that promise instant wealth, minimal effort, or guaranteed success—making them particularly appealing to economically vulnerable audiences.

### **3. Data Collection Process**

Data were collected using purposive sampling, targeting advertisements that explicitly promote online gambling through clickbait-style headlines and provocative imagery. The Android news feed, accessible by swiping right on mobile devices, and the Google news feed, visible when opening a new tab or launching the Google homepage, were chosen as primary sources due to their widespread use and algorithm-driven personalization. Screenshots of the selected ads were captured and compiled into a multimodal corpus, which includes both visual and textual elements for comprehensive analysis. Each ad was transcribed and cataloged to facilitate linguistic and semiotic examination.

### **4. Data Analysis**

The analysis is guided by the three metafunctions of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL): ideational, interpersonal, and textual. These metafunctions allow the researcher to examine how gambling is represented as desirable or risk-free, how relationships with viewers are constructed through emotional appeal and direct address, and how information is organized to guide interpretation and evoke curiosity (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The analysis is conducted at the clause level, enabling a detailed examination of how meaning is constructed through individual linguistic choices within each clause. This approach follows Halliday and Matthiessen's framework, which treats the clause as the central unit of meaning in SFL and has been widely applied in media and advertising discourse (Gunawan & Aziza, 2017; Cui, 2020). In addition to SFL, Visual Grammar as developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) is applied to assess the representational, interactive, and compositional meanings of the images, including gaze, framing, layout, and color. This multimodal approach enables researchers to decode how visual elements contribute to persuasive messaging, particularly in digital advertising (Yanti & Yuniari, 2021). The integration of visual grammar with SFL has proven effective in analyzing promotional content, especially where text and image work together to construct emotional and ideological appeal (Sari, 2021).

From a forensic linguistic perspective, the study investigates deceptive phrasing, ambiguous claims, and rhetorical devices that may violate ethical or legal standards, with particular attention to lexical choices, modality, and transitivity patterns. This approach aligns with recent scholarship that applies SFL to uncover manipulation and bias in legal and promotional discourse (Felton-Rosulek, 2015; Perdana et al., 2024). By combining clause-level linguistic analysis with multimodal interpretation, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how online gambling advertisements construct persuasive narratives that may obscure risk and legality.

### **5. Ethical Framework**

This study is based on publicly available online gambling advertisements retrieved from social media news feeds. No human participants were involved, and no personally identifiable information was collected. Ethical approval was not required under institutional guidelines for

research using publicly accessible data. However, the authors acknowledge the potential sensitivity of the content and have taken care to anonymize brand names and avoid reproducing identifiable promotional material.

## D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. FINDING

#### a. Mood Patterns: Building Urgency

The analysis of 34 online gambling advertisements reveals a total of 45 clauses, and shows that the declarative mood is the most frequently used. There are no instances of imperative or exclamative moods, and only 2 clauses are realized as interrogatives. This suggests a strong preference for statements over questions or commands. Table 1 presents the distribution of mood types used in the dataset.

**Table 1. Mood Use in Online Gambling Advertisements**

Mood Type	Frequency	Percentage
Declarative	43	95.56%
Interrogative	2	4.44%
Imperative	0	–
Exclamative	0	–
	45	100.00%
Mood Type	Frequency	Percentage
Declarative	43	95.56%
Interrogative	2	4.44%

As shown, declarative mood dominates the dataset, appearing in 43 out of 45 clauses (95.56%). This is significantly higher than interrogatives (4.44%), and imperatives and exclamatives are entirely absent. The declarative mood is used to present outcomes and events as factual and direct, often without hedging or modal expressions.

This pattern is evident in several headlines from the dataset:

- OGA01: “Pulang<sub>(Finite)</sub> Kampung<sub>(Complement)</sub> Bawa<sub>(Finite)</sub> Rezeki<sub>(Complement)</sub>, Mahasiswa Rantau<sub>(Subject)</sub> Menang<sub>(Finite)</sub> Mahjong Wins 3<sub>(Circumstance)</sub> Rp177.000.000<sub>(Complement)</sub>”
- OGA02: “Bermodal<sub>(Finite)</sub> 45 Ribu Saja<sub>(Complement)</sub>, Kepala Desa Cikujang<sub>(Subject)</sub> Berhasil Jackpot<sub>(Finite)</sub> Rp 500 Juta<sub>(Complement)</sub>”
- OGA26: “Sri, Pedagang Nasi Uduk<sub>(Subject)</sub>, Raih<sub>(Finite)</sub> Rp46.400.000<sub>(Complement)</sub> dari RTP Live<sub>(Adjunct)</sub>”
- OGA32: “Cair<sub>(Finite)</sub> Kilat<sub>(Complement)</sub> di DANA<sub>(Adjunct)</sub>, Fajar<sub>(Subject)</sub> Pecahkan<sub>(Finite)</sub> Rekor<sub>(Complement)</sub>! Kemenangan Rp185 Juta Gate of Olympus<sub>(Adjunct)</sub>”

These headlines use declarative structures to assert success and reward, often featuring ordinary individuals and specific monetary outcomes. Previous studies, such as Anafo and Ngula (2020), have also found that declarative mood is commonly used in promotional and manipulative texts to present claims as facts and reduce reader resistance. While this study does

not explore manipulation in depth, the dominance of declaratives may reflect a similar communicative strategy.

### b. Transitivity: Constructing Action and Reward

The transitivity analysis of 45 clauses reveals a clear dominance of material processes and it is followed by relational processes. Other process types appear only once: mental, verbal, and existential, while behavioral processes are entirely absent. This distribution indicates a strong preference for action-oriented language, with minimal representation of internal states, speech, or existence. Table 2 below shows the frequency and function of each process type found in the dataset.

**Table 1. Distribution of Process Types in Online Gambling Advertisements**

Process Type	Frequency	Percentage
Material	34	75.56%
Relational: Attributive	6	13.33%
Relational: Identifying	2	4.44%
Mental	1	2.22%
Verbal	1	2.22%
Existential	1	2.22%
Behavioral	0	0.00%
	45	100.00%

As shown, material processes dominate the dataset, accounting for 75.56% of all clauses. This is significantly higher than any other process type. Relational processes follow at a distance, with attributive and identifying types together making up 8 clauses (17.77%). Mental, verbal, and existential processes each appear only once, while behavioral processes are entirely absent. This pattern aligns with findings from Anafo and Ngula (2020), who observed that material processes are frequently used in scam and promotional discourse to simulate everyday experience and conceal manipulative intent. In advertising, material processes are often employed to foreground action, transformation, and reward—key elements in persuasive messaging.

Examples from the dataset illustrate how material processes are used to construct dynamic and outcome-driven narratives:

- OGA14: “5 Inovasi Teknologi & Smartfren 5G<sub>(Goal)</sub> yang Diam-Diam<sub>(Adjunct)</sub> Dipakai<sub>(Material)</sub> Pecinta Mahjong Wins<sub>(Actor)</sub>”
- OGA18: “Mengapa<sub>(Circumstance)</sub> perjudian<sub>(Actor)</sub> membuat<sub>(Material)</sub> otak manusia kecanduan<sub>(Goal)</sub>?...”
- OGA23: “Bocoran praktis montir bengkel motor Pak Rydu<sub>(Actor)</sub> di Yogyakarta<sub>(Adjunct)</sub> tune up Honda Scoopy<sub>(Adjunct)</sub> sambut<sub>(Material)</sub> Agenda Scatter Hitam<sub>(Goal)</sub>”

These clauses use verbs like *membuat* (make), *sambut* (greet), and *dipakai* (used) to depict gambling-related actions as routine and achievable, often performed by relatable figures such as mechanics or everyday workers. The frequent use of material processes reflects a linguistic pattern that foreground doing and achieving.

### c. Theme-Rheme: Guiding Reader Interpretation

The thematic analysis of 45 clauses reveals a strong dominance of topical themes, which appear in 42 instances. These themes typically foreground participants or processes, guiding the reader's attention toward the subject matter of the clause. In contrast, textual themes—used to organize information or signal cohesion—are found in only 3 instances. Notably, interpersonal themes, which express speaker attitude or engage the reader directly, are entirely absent from the dataset. This distribution suggests a preference for content-focused messaging over interactive or evaluative framing. Table 3 below shows the frequency and function of each theme type identified in the dataset.

**Table 3. Distribution of Theme Types in Online Gambling Advertisements**

Theme Type	Frequency	Percentage
Topical	42	93.33%
Textual	3	6.67%
Interpersonal	0	0.00%
	45	100.00%

### d. Visual Grammar: Reinforcing Emotional Meaning

This study applies the visual grammar framework by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to analyze the visual elements in online gambling advertisements. The analysis focuses on three metafunctions: representational meaning, which examines the participants and actions depicted; interactive meaning, which explores the relationship between the image and the viewer; and compositional meaning, which considers how visual elements are arranged to convey salience and information value. These metafunctions help identify how meaning is constructed visually in the advertisements. Figure 1 and Figure 2 depict some online gambling ads from news feed.



**Figure 1. Online gambling ad featuring a university student**



**Figure 2. Online gambling ad featuring a food vendor**

In terms of representational meaning, Figure 1 shows a man holding a stack of gold coins, with several people in the background participating in a game. The man acts as the actor, sending

a vector through his gesture, while the potential audience serves as the target. This narrative structure centers the man's activity as the focal point of the visual message. The headline includes the subject "Mahasiswa Malang", which may refer to the man depicted, suggesting he is the one who won the reward. In Figure 2, the visual elements include a slot machine and numerous gold coins with Hanzi characters. These components represent the game and its rewards. The narrative is constructed through the presence of the slot and coins, implying gameplay and outcome. The headline mentions "Sri, Pedagang Nasi Uduk", which may relate to the visual elements shown, suggesting that the slot and coins are associated with her experience as a player.

Moving into interactive meaning, Figure 1 positions the man close to the viewer, creating a sense of proximity and engagement. His gaze is directed upward toward falling gold coins, indicating aspiration rather than direct interaction. This lack of eye contact suggests an offer image, where the participant is presented for observation. The group of people in the background is placed further away and appears to be actively socializing and participating in the game, contributing to a communal and lively atmosphere. The bright and cheerful setting, supported by saturated colors, reinforces a joyful tone. In Figure 2, no human participants make direct eye contact with the viewer. Instead, close-up visuals of gold coins and a slot machine dominate the foreground, creating intimacy with the game elements. The Lucky Neko logo is also present, likely referencing a specific game. The use of bright colors contributes to a positive connotation, enhancing the appeal and excitement of the gambling experience.

Compositional meaning is reflected in how visual elements are arranged to guide viewer attention. In Figure 1, the man holding the coins is positioned on the right side near the center, making him a salient participant. Trees on the far left and right edges serve as framing devices, enclosing the scene and directing focus inward. This layout emphasizes the man's role while maintaining visual balance. In Figure 2, gold coins fill the background from the left to the center, with the slot machine placed on the far right. The Lucky Neko logo appears in the bottom-left corner, while the center features large promotional text: "MOTOSLOT DETIK DETIK HUJAN SCATTER GEGARA". Below it, bold text reads "POLA GACOR LUCKY NEKO", and further down is "Jangan lewatkan peluang JP Maxwin Terbesar 500x". These elements are arranged to highlight key promotional messages and guide the viewer's gaze from visuals to text.

Overall, the visual grammar analysis reveals how online gambling advertisements use familiar imagery, strategic layout, and emotionally resonant design to construct a narrative of accessibility and reward. These findings suggest that visual elements are not merely decorative but play an active role in shaping viewer perception.

## 2. DISCUSSION

From a forensic linguistic perspective, online gambling advertisements exhibit a consistent pattern of manipulative discourse realized through both linguistic and visual strategies. Linguistically, the dominance of declarative mood (43 out of 45 clauses) and material processes (34 out of 45 clauses) reflects a deliberate effort to present gambling outcomes as factual, attainable, and action-oriented. These constructions are not neutral; rather, they function persuasively by obscuring risk and exaggerating reward. As outlined in Coulthard et al. (2016), forensic linguistics treats language as evidence, particularly in contexts involving deception or coercion. In this dataset, elliptical declaratives such as "Modal Kecil Meledak Jadi Cuan Besar" omit subjects and finite verbs, yet imply certainty and immediacy. The absence of modal hedging or disclaimers reinforces an illusion of guaranteed success, aligning with Olsson's (2008) notion

of linguistic concealment, where omission serves persuasive rather than informative purposes.

In addition, the minimal presence of mental, verbal, and existential processes suggests a lack of reflection, dialogue, or acknowledgment of risk. Instead, the discourse foregrounds transactional outcomes, which may constitute covert manipulation by limiting the reader's critical engagement. This is further intensified by ambiguity and ellipsis as rhetorical devices. Lexical items such as "*bocoran*" or "*strategi rahasia*" are semantically open-ended, inviting multiple interpretations without committing to verifiable claims. Structurally, predicate ellipsis compresses information while maintaining persuasive force, creating semantic vagueness alongside a sense of urgency and opportunity. The absence of interpersonal markers further masks subjectivity, allowing speculative claims to appear factual.

Beyond linguistic features, the advertisements also strategically target ordinary individuals through relatable narratives. References to figures such as "*Ibu Nurjanah*" or "*Pemain Bali*," along with phrases like "*modal kecil*," construct gambling as accessible and embedded in everyday life. This aligns with what Grant and MacLeod (2020) describe as linguistic profiling, where discourse is tailored to exploit social identities and psychological triggers. The use of colloquial expressions such as "*cuan*," "*bocoran*," and "*rahasia*" mimics informal interaction, creating what is often termed synthetic personalization—an illusion of direct, personal communication in mass advertising. Repeated exposure to such patterns may contribute to linguistic normalization, reducing audience sensitivity to financial and ethical risks.

Visually, these manipulative strategies are reinforced through multimodal design. Drawing on the framework of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the advertisements deploy representational, interactive, and compositional meanings to amplify persuasive claims. Representationally, images of individuals surrounded by money or winning symbols construct a narrative of success and achievement. These visuals often feature ordinary-looking participants, reinforcing the idea that substantial winnings are common and attainable.

Interactive meaning enhances engagement by positioning viewers as observers of success while subtly inviting participation. Techniques such as close-up framing, upward gaze, and bright, saturated colors create emotional resonance and a sense of immediacy. Compositional meaning further directs attention through high-salience elements—large fonts, central placement of rewards, and visually dominant claims like "*JP Maxwin Terbesar 500x*." These design choices foreground reward while minimizing or omitting risk-related information.

Taken together, the convergence of linguistic compression, ambiguity, audience targeting, and visual emphasis forms a cohesive manipulative discourse. The advertisements persuade not only through what is explicitly stated, but also through what is omitted, implied, and visually amplified. In forensic terms, this constitutes a form of deceptive communication, where both textual and visual structures are engineered to influence behavior while limiting transparency and critical evaluation.

## **D. CONCLUSION**

This study shows that online gambling advertisements in Indonesia are not neutral promotional texts but carefully crafted persuasive discourses designed to manipulate vulnerable audiences. Linguistically, the dominance of declaratives and material processes presents gambling as factual, easy, and reward-driven, while the absence of disclaimers or modal hedging removes space for critical evaluation. Ellipsis and ambiguity further obscure risks and inflate the

sense of certainty, leaving readers with compressed but powerful messages that are difficult to resist.

More importantly, the findings highlight how these advertisements indirectly reveal the demographic profile of their audiences. By using colloquial expressions, relatable characters, and references to everyday life, the texts clearly target ordinary Indonesians—often those from middle- to low-income backgrounds who may lack strong financial literacy or critical thinking skills. This strategy, a form of linguistic profiling, exploits social vulnerability by framing gambling as accessible, socially validated, and low-barrier. In doing so, the ads normalize risky behavior among groups least equipped to manage its consequences. The visual analysis further reinforces this targeting, with imagery of ordinary people achieving extraordinary success, bright and accessible design elements, and layouts that foreground rewards while suppressing risks. Together, the linguistic and visual choices construct a persuasive multimodal discourse that directly appeals to individuals who are most at risk of harm.

From a forensic linguistic perspective, these findings underscore the need to view gambling advertisements as more than commercial communication; they are evidence of manipulative practices that exploit socio-economic conditions and cognitive vulnerability. Regulators, educators, and policymakers should be aware that such ads are not just persuasive but systematically tailored to specific audiences. Future research could explore how sustained exposure to these discourses shapes social attitudes toward gambling, particularly among Indonesia's most economically and educationally vulnerable populations.

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# *Ilmu Budaya*

**Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Budaya**

e-ISSN 2549-7715 | Volume 10 | Nomor 2 | April 2026 | Halaman 189—204  
Terakreditasi Sinta 4

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Yanti, N. P. M. P., & Yuniari, I. G. A. M. E. (2021). Multimodal analysis of “Energen” ads. *International Journal of Systemic Functional Linguistics*, 4(1), 26–29. Retrieved from <https://ejournal.warmadewa.ac.id/index.php/ijsfl/article/view/2346>