

Metacommunication in public discourse: A case study of the utterance of 'Stupid Worldwide' by Ahmad Sahroni

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Received 27 June 2025

Revised 24 July 2025

Accepted 26 July 2025

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how metacommunication works in the case of the worldwide stupid speech controversy by Ahmad Sahroni related to the dissolution of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia. The remark gained public attention not because of the substance of the message about the danger of dissolving the House of Representatives, but because of the choice of words that were considered rude and inappropriate to be uttered by a state official. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method through the analysis of critical discourse on statement texts, media reports, and public interaction on social media. The results show that the metacommunication aspect, especially diction and delivery style, is more dominant in shaping public perception than the substance of political messages. Media framing that highlights the world's stupid diction and virality on social media magnifies the resonance of controversy, making it a digital popular culture phenomenon. This controversy not only impacts Sahroni's personal image but also has implications for the institutional delegitimization of the House of Representatives, further deepening the crisis of public trust. Thus, this study confirms that in political communication in the digital age, legitimacy is not only determined by substantive performance, but also by the way elites choose words and communication styles, as well as how their messages are perceived and reproduced in the media space.

Keywords: metacommunications, public, media social, politic

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental aspect of social and political life. Through communication, ideas and interests are conveyed to the public. However, in the process, communication never stands alone as an explicit message, but is always accompanied by implicit meanings that can be captured through the tone of voice, expression, language style, and accompanying social situations (Ramadhan et al., 2025). This aspect is known in the study of communication science as metacommunication, which is communication about communication or communication that explains how the main message should be understood. In the public sphere, especially in the realm of political communication, metacommunication has an important role because it influences the way the public interprets the words of political figures (Sari et al., 2021). Not infrequently, messages intended as jokes, criticisms, or satire are captured differently by the audience. This occurs because the public pays attention to the content of the message and the context and way of conveying it (process). Thus, the metacommunication dimension can determine whether a statement is positively accepted, rejected, or controversial.

This phenomenon has become increasingly complex in the digital era. The development of social media makes every speech of a public figure can be widely spread in a matter of seconds, cut out of context, and given various interpretations by netizens and mass media (Fatra et al., 2024). In such a situation, controversial messages can easily cause public uproar and give rise to different frames. The case of the worldwide stupidity by Ahmad Sahroni, an Indonesian politician from the Nasdem party, is relevant case to be examined.

Ahmad Sahroni's statement on the issue of the dissolution of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia which called the discourse a worldwide stupid thought caused widespread controversy in the public sphere. This remark is not only seen as a personal response to the idea of dissolving the House of Representatives but is also considered to represent the political position of a public official with authority in parliament. The controversy intensified when the statement was reported extensively by the mass media and disseminated through social media. In this process of dissemination, the context of the original communication is often cut or reduced, so that the public highlights the world's stupid diction more than the overall intent of Ahmad Sahroni's statement. As a result, the remarks are considered offensive, degrading, and even unethical for a government official.

Public reactions were divided into several groups. Some strongly criticized the choice of words used, considering that a representative of the people should use polite and constructive language (Budi Srikandi, 2023). Others consider the statement to be a spontaneous expression that does not need to be overly problematic. This polemic shows how metacommunication, namely intonation, word choice, media framing, and public interpretation, plays a role in shaping the meaning and controversy of a political statement. In this context, public attention shifted from the substance of Ahmad Sahroni's statement regarding the potential threat to the state if the House of Representatives was dissolved to the diction used, especially the term stupid worldwide. This shift in focus shows that the metacommunication aspect, namely the choice of words and delivery style, is more prominent in shaping public perception than the main message to be conveyed (Kerins et al., 2023). The remarks, which were made in certain contexts, were widely perceived in the public sphere as abusive and degrading statements. This controversy shows how metacommunication works not only the word "stupid" that is a concern, but also how the public interprets the intention, intonation, socio-political position of the speaker, and the framing of media that reinforce certain perceptions (Fatra et al., 2023).

In the tradition of political communication, the language used by public figures is not only a means of conveying messages but also a representation of identity, power, and social relations. Therefore, Ahmad Sahroni's speech can be understood as a communication event that involves more than just linguistic meaning. These remarks serve as political symbols that open up space for debate, criticism, and even the formation of public opinion (Prasetya, 2018). The massive response of netizens shows that metacommunication has the constructive power to shape public discourse and the relationship between politicians and the public.

Through this case study, it is important to take an in-depth look at how metacommunication shapes meaning and controversy. This study not only contributes to the understanding of communication theory but also enriches the discourse on political communication in Indonesia. In addition, this study is expected to reveal how the interaction between public figures' speeches, public responses, and the role of social media shapes contemporary political discourse. Thus, this research is not only theoretically relevant but also has practical significance in understanding the dynamics of political communication in the digital age.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of understanding the meaning, context, and dynamics of political communication that emerged through Ahmad Sahroni's remarks on the issue of the dissolution of the House of Representatives (Abdussamad et al., 2024). The qualitative approach was chosen because it is appropriate to explore the phenomenon of communication that is full of symbols, interpretations, and meanings, so that a politician's statement can be understood not only as a text, but also as a metacommunication event that shapes public perception (Jabeen et al., 2023). This study uses a case study approach, as formulated by Yin (2014), because this research focuses on a single event that is full of meaning, namely the utterance of stupidity around the world by Ahmad Sahroni. The case study allows researchers to examine in-depth how a political statement can influence the dynamics of public discourse through the interaction between political actors, media, and society in digital space.

2.2 Data Analysis

The research data were obtained from two main sources. First, primary data in the form of recordings of Ahmad Sahroni's statements in public forums and news reports containing the statement. Second, secondary data in the form of online media coverage, social media uploads on various platforms such as Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, as well as netizens' comments that can be understood as netizens journalism practices. Thus, the data used come not only from political actors or mainstream media but also from the active participation of the community in the social media space. Data collection is carried out through digital documentation and observation. The documentation includes the collection of news texts, transcripts of statements, and screenshots of social media uploads. Meanwhile, digital observation or netnography is used to trace public interaction on social media related to the speech "stupid worldwide", so that researchers can understand the discourse patterns, virality dynamics, and framing carried out by citizenst (Ariyani Iskandar & Irawati, 2023).

Data analysis uses critical discourse analysis as developed by Fairclough (1995), which views discourse as having three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The text dimension includes an analysis of diction, language style, and metacommunication aspects of Ahmad Sahroni's statement. The dimension of discursive practice highlights how the media and netizens frame the speech, while the dimension of social practice emphasizes the implications of the statement on political legitimacy, the institutional image of the House of Representatives, and polarization of public opinion.

3. RESULT

This study found that Ahmad Sahroni's remarks calling the discourse on the dissolution of the House of Representatives a "stupid mind in the world" were perceived by the public as a metacommunication event rather than as a substantive message. The substance of the statement regarding the threat to the state if the House of Representatives is dissolved almost drowned, while the diction of "world stupidity" has actually become the center of public and media attention. This shows that the metacommunication aspect, especially the choice of words and delivery style, has a greater resonance in shaping perception than the content of the main message. In terms of political communication, the

statement shows how the speech of a public official not only represents himself personally but is also attached to the institution he represents. Sahroni's remarks caused controversy because they were seen as not in accordance with the language ethics of state officials, thus affecting the legitimacy of the House of Representatives. This controversy was then amplified by the media, which tended to use the term "world fool" in headlines, thus magnifying the symbolic effect of the statement.

In the social media space, research findings show that public reactions move quickly through the virality process. Netizens not only responded to the content of the statement, but also reproduced video clips, memes, and comments that focused on the word "world idiot." Netizen journalism plays an important role in the dissemination of this issue, where the public acts like journalists who document, interpret, and redistribute Sahroni's statements in various creative formats. This process makes the statement not only a political issue but also a popular cultural phenomenon in the digital space.

3.1 The diction of "world idiot" is more prominent than the substance of the issue about the threat of dissolution of the House of Representatives.

The diction of "world stupidity" is the most prominent element of Ahmad Sahroni's statement compared to the substance of the issue he actually raised, namely the threat to the country's stability if the House of Representatives is dissolved. Instead of seriously discussing the argument about the importance of the existence of the House of Representatives in the Indonesian political system, the public is more busy discussing the choice of words that are considered rude and inappropriate to be said by a state official. This phenomenon shows how the metacommunication aspect, namely, the way the message is conveyed through diction, often affects the reception of the message more strongly than the content of the message itself.

In this context, the word stupid serves not just as an adjective but as a symbol that marks an emotional, reactive, and emphatic style of political communication. The labeling with this diction encourages the public to focus more on the condescending tone contained in it, so that the main message about the potential threat of dissolution of the House of Representatives is drowned in the hustle and bustle of reactions to the controversial choice of words. In other words, the public no longer interprets Sahroni's statement based on substantive arguments but through metacommunication lenses that emphasize the emotional and symbolic aspects of his speech. In the context of mass and interpersonal communication, the public often pays more attention to the style of language used by the communicator than to the substance of the message conveyed. This phenomenon can be understood because language styles have an emotional, aesthetic, and persuasive appeal that is easier to stick in the audience's memory. In other words, the choice of diction, intonation, humor, or metaphor takes center stage, while the content of the message that should be the main focus is often omitted. This tendency has two implications. On the one hand, an attractive language style can strengthen the delivery of messages, make the audience more engaged, and make it easier to internalize meaning. However, on the other hand, if the language style is too dominant, then the essence of the message has the potential to be blurred, so that the public only remembers how to convey without really understanding what is being conveyed.

In the political realm, for example, the speeches of figures are more often remembered for their humor, sarcasm, or distinctive rhetorical style than for the programs or visions they offer. Similarly, on social media, netizens tend to get stuck in the uniqueness of writing styles, such as the use of slang, satire, or mixed language, without criticizing the substance contained behind it. Thus, this phenomenon suggests that in the practice of communication, form often dominates attention over content, requiring communicators to find a balance between the aesthetics of language and the power of meaning.

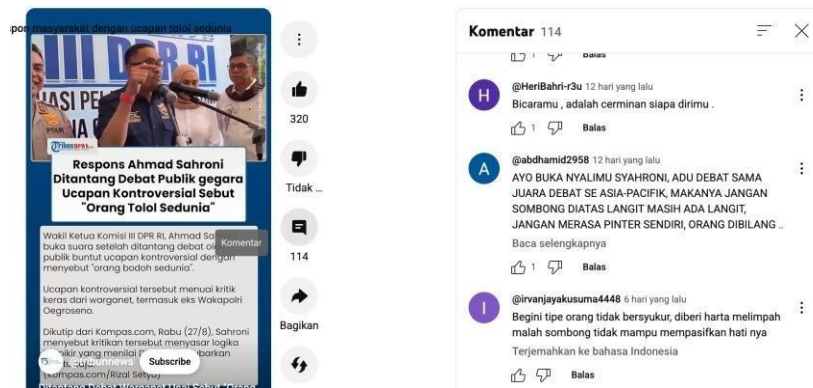


Figure 1. Capture YouTube Processed Researcher

Figure 1 shows how the public reacted to Ahmad Sahroni's statement in the digital space, especially on YouTube. Netizens' responses tended to condemn the choice of the word "stupid" that was thrown, instead of discussing the substance of the political communication that he actually wanted to convey. This phenomenon shows that meta-communication, which is an additional meaning that arises from the way the message is delivered, not just from the content of the message, plays a dominant role. In this case, Ahmad Sahroni's communication style that featured harsh words was the main point of public attention. As a result, the intended meaning in the realm of practical politics is no longer discussed; more common are the assessments of morals, ethics, and linguistic politeness. This shows that the public on social media is more sensitive to the choice of diction than to the substance of the argument.

This phenomenon also affirms the view that modern political communication cannot be separated from the public's perception of the symbols, styles, and emotions it evokes. When a political actor uses language that is considered degrading, the public responds with negative framing, which then goes viral through comments, re-uploads, and online discussions. Thus, the existence of meta-communication is becoming increasingly real: the public not only assesses what is conveyed but also how something is delivered.

It also shows that in the digital era, every word, expression, and rhetorical style of political communicators becomes a communication commodity that cannot be separated from public spotlight. The word "stupid" chosen by Ahmad Sahroni is a stronger signifier than the political message itself, so that political communication is actually reduced to ethical and emotional debate.

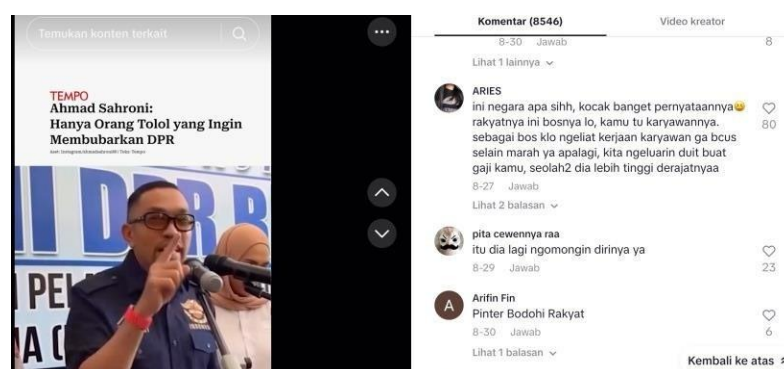


Figure 2. Capture Tiktok Processed Researcher

Figure 2 shows how Ahmad Sahroni's statement again reaped a strong response from the public, this time on TikTok. It can be seen that the number of comments reached 8,546, and the majority of comments were nuanced with anger, disappointment, and condemnation of remarks that were considered inappropriate. This phenomenon confirms that social media has become an arena of collective expression,

where the public channels their feelings. Netizens' reactions are no longer limited to intellectual debates about political ideas but rather to the emotionalization of messages, where feelings of anger, offense, and disappointment are the main energy in shaping public discourse.

The high number of angry comments also shows a crisis of political communication's legitimacy: the public does not accept messages wrapped in harsh language and even rejects the communicator. From the perspective of the sociology of communication, this can be read as a form of symbolic resistance, namely, the rejection of society not only to the individual who speaks but also to the representation of power that he brings. Thus, TikTok as a digital public space not only functions as an entertainment medium but also as a forum for socio-political criticism. The response of thousands of comments that are uniform in expressing anger shows the emotional solidarity of the community regarding certain issues. This phenomenon further strengthens the argument that in the era of social media, political communication cannot be separated from the public perception of language ethics.

3.2 The role of social media in Ahmad Sahroni's case

The media in this case tends to frame the news by placing the "world idiot" at the center of the news, especially in the title or headline. Instead of highlighting Ahmad Sahroni's argument about the dangers that might arise if the House is dissolved, most of the media chose to raise his controversial choice of words as the element that attracted public attention.

This practice is in line with framing theory (Entman, 1993), which states that the media not only reports reality but also selects certain aspects of that reality to be highlighted, thus shaping the audience's perspective. By emphasizing the diction of "world fools," the media indirectly directs readers to understand Sahroni's statement as a linguistic controversy rather than a substantive political argument. This shows that the logic of media reporting is more in favor of news values that emphasize conflict, sensation, and emotional appeal rather than an in-depth explanation of the dissolution of the House itself. As a result, Sahroni's political message was reduced to mere provocative quotes that were easy to remember and spread.

This type of framing has a wide impact on shaping public discourse. The public who receive information through the media is more likely to reproduce the same narrative, thus reinforcing the virality of the diction on social media. Thus, the media not only serves as a channel for conveying information but also as a discursive actor that magnifies the symbolic resonance of certain political statements. In this context, the media's framing of the term "world idiot" makes it not just a piece of speech, but a symbol that dominates public conversation and strengthens the metacommunication dimension of the case.

In this case, social media served as a catalyst that magnified public anger and disappointment. The digital space that should be an arena for discussion has actually developed into a forum for uncontrolled emotional expression, marked by the emergence of hate speech, sarcasm, and invitations to take real actions. This dynamic shows how social media can shift symbolic anger into practical anger, which has implications for social action in the real world. More concretely, the massive circulation of video clips of Ahmad Sahroni's speech with the diction "world stupidity" not only triggered debate in cyberspace but also gave birth to a collective response in physical space. The masses and certain community groups were encouraged to carry out destructive actions, including looting Ahmad Sahroni's private house. This event shows that virality on social media has a very strong mobilizing power: it can turn digital disillusionment into real mass action.

This phenomenon emphasizes the role of social media not only as a medium of communication but also as a space for the production of social emotions that can trigger instability. This is in line with the view that digital media is often an arena of crowd dynamics, where collective emotions develop quickly and are difficult to control. Thus, Sahroni's case illustrates how controversial political speech, when combined with the logic of social media virality, can transform into social chaos that transcends the boundaries of digital space (Noorikhshan et al., 2023).

The results of this study also show that political communication in the digital era is no longer one-way from the elite to the community but is greatly influenced by the dynamics of social media, which is

interactive and participatory. The presence of netizens as new actors in digital public spaces makes political communication more fluid, fast, and difficult to control. Social media provides a space where individuals can produce, reproduce, and distribute political messages, shaping collective public opinion. This participation of netizens presents a new strength: political messages are no longer interpreted only based on the content conveyed by political actors but also based on interpretations, comments, and framing carried out by the digital community.

In other words, the authority of meaning in political communication has shifted. If, in the past, meaning was more controlled by political communicators through the mainstream media, then in the digital era, the meaning is negotiated and even seized by the public through online interaction. The dynamics of comments, likes, shares, and political memes produced by netizens can increase or decrease the legitimacy of a political actor. This shows that modern political communication is not only determined by the messages strategically designed by politicians but also by the emotional and social resonance created through the participation of netizens on social media. Thus, political communication in the digital era is dialogical, dynamic, and vulnerable to public interpretation, which is often colored by emotional sentiment and popular digital culture.

3.3 Institutional Delegitimization

The controversy triggered by Ahmad Sahroni's worldwide stupid remarks shows that the impact does not stop at individual figures but spreads further to the image of the House of Representatives as a political institution. The public does not view the statement as a mere personal mistake but interprets it as a reflection of the communication style of the people's representatives in general. In the logic of representation, a member of parliament never speaks only on his or her behalf but also carries the symbol, dignity, and legitimacy of the institution he represents. Therefore, any speech that is considered inappropriate will immediately be associated with the credibility of the institution.

This phenomenon is in line with the theory of political legitimacy (Lipset, 1959; Habermas, 1975) which emphasizes that public trust in democratic institutions is determined not only by formal performance, but also by the symbols, language, and communications produced by the political elite (Ramkita & Muslim, 2023). Controversial speech is one of the factors of delegitimization because it emphasizes the distance between the ideal representation of the people's representative and the actual behavior. In this case, the House of Representatives, which has long faced a crisis of trust, is increasingly cornered when one of its deputy leaders reinforces the negative stereotype that parliament is filled with politicians who are arrogant, emotional, and insensitive to the aspirations of the people.

This institutional delegitimization is exacerbated by media logic. The framing of the mainstream media that highlights the diction of "world idiot" as a headline makes the issue even more attached to the identity of the DPR. On the other hand, in the digital space, public narratives develop in the form of memes, satirism, and harsh criticism that are not only directed at Sahroni, but also at the House of Representatives as an institution. Thus, the media acts as an amplifier that strengthens delegitimization, while social media acts as an echo chamber that reproduces and expands on negative perceptions.

The implications of this study are long-term. When the legitimacy of the House of Representatives is eroded, there is a risk of increasing political apathy, low public participation in the democratic process, and strengthening anti-parliamentary sentiment. This is in line with Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) view that political language is not only representational but also performative; it has the power to construct socio-political reality. By choosing the wrong words, an elite can indirectly undermine the symbolic authority of the institution they represent. Thus, this case underscores the importance of metacommunication awareness in political communication. The delegitimization of the House of Representatives, which is born from diction, shows that language symbols can surpass the strength of policy substance. The House of Representatives, which should function as a pillar of democracy, is threatened by the communicative actions of its own members, which unknowingly exacerbate the long-standing crisis of institutional legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

The controversy over the words "world fools" cannot be separated from the dimension of metacommunication, namely implicit messages inherent in the way of delivery, choice of diction, and emotional tone of a politician. In the case of Ahmad Sahroni, the public not only hears substantive arguments about the dangers of dissolving the House of Representatives, but also captures the relational cues contained in the phrase "world idiot." This metacommunication gives the impression that a representative of the people speaks in a condescending, impolite, and disrespectful tone to the public. From a sociological perspective, this type of offensive metacommunication serves as a symbolic mirror for the institution it represents. The public interprets that if a leader of the House of Representatives communicates in a rude and contemptuous manner, then the institution he represents is also considered to operate in the same manner. In other words, public disappointment with Sahroni is automatically transferred to disappointment with the DPR as a whole.

Disappointment has both emotional and institutional dimensions. Emotionally, the public feels degraded by the language used by a state official; while institutionally, the public is increasingly losing trust that the House of Representatives is an institution that is able to represent the voice of the people with full responsibility and ethics. This is a form of delegitimization that is born from metacommunication, not from the substance of policy, but from the way language is used and the symbolic meaning attached to it. Furthermore, this case shows how metacommunication can strengthen the legitimacy crisis that has long afflicted the DPR. If public distrust was previously triggered by performance factors such as corruption, low productivity of legislation, or conflicts of interest, the dimension of political communication has deepened the gap between people's representatives and the people. Within the framework of *Habermas' (1975)* theory, communication that does not prioritize rationality and politeness gives birth to a crisis of legitimacy, namely, the erosion of institutional authority in the eyes of the public.

Thus, metacommunication plays a dominant role in giving birth to public disillusionment with the DPR. A brief diction such as "world fool" can be a symbolic trigger that reinforces the negative image of the institution, exacerbates the crisis of legitimacy, and widens the gulf of distrust between the people and their representatives. This shows that institutional legitimacy is built not only through policy and performance but also through the way political elites choose words and communicate with the public.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Ahmad Sahroni's words with the diction of "world idiot" are more powerful in shaping public perception than the substance of the message he wants to convey about the danger of the dissolution of the House of Representatives. The public pays more attention to the way of delivery and the choice of words that are considered harsh, so that substantive meanings are drowned behind the linguistic controversies. This shows that in political communication, the metacommunicative aspects of word choice, language style, and emotional tone have greater resonance power than the content of the message. The controversy is not only inherent in Sahroni's personal figure but also has a direct impact on the image of the House of Representatives as an institution. The public interpreted the statement as a form of language inappropriateness from a state official, thus exacerbating the long-standing crisis of the DPR's legitimacy. From the media side, the framing of news that highlights the diction of "world fools" has increasingly shifted the public's focus from substance to symbolic aspects. Meanwhile, social media accelerates the spread of issues through virality, memes, video clips, and netizens' comments, thereby magnifying the emotional effects and making this case a popular cultural phenomenon in the digital space.

Ultimately, this case confirms that political legitimacy in the digital age is determined not only by substantive performance but also by the way political elites communicate with the public. One short diction can be a symbolic trigger that causes institutional delegitimization, strengthens negative perceptions of the DPR, and widens the gap of distrust between the people and their representatives. In other words, modern political communication is vulnerable to being influenced by metacommunication, media framing, and virality dynamics on social media, all of which can construct and collapse the symbolic authority of democratic institutions.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study.

Informed Consent Statement

Not Applicable.

Author Contributions

R contributed to the conceptualization, research design, and overall supervision of this study. He also served as corresponding author. EF contributed to data collection, literature review, and drafting of the analysis section. AS contributed to the theoretical framework and provided critical revisions to strengthen the discussion section. TTFM contributed to the data interpretation, editing, and refinement of the final manuscript.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author for privacy reasons.

Funding

This study received no external funding.

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