

Emojis in Digital Governance: Empirical Insights from Indonesian Ministries

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Abstract

This study explores how Indonesian ministries create impressions to the public through their use of emojis on X (previously Twitter). Based on a qualitative content analysis of 1,897 tweets, this research finds evidence of the strategic use of emojis in ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication. The findings indicate that emojis are not only used to raise public engagement, but also to create an image of positivity and friendliness. Ingratiation and self-promotion emerged as the most salient strategies. This paper examines the role of emojis in government communication and contributes to the understanding of digital political communication with further practical insights into managing public relations for government agencies.

Keywords:

emojis; social media; impression management theory; organisational discourse

Introduction

Digital technology has revolutionised government communication, transforming it into a dynamic and interactive process emphasising transparency, accessibility, and engagement. Social networking sites (SNS), such as X, have become critical for governments to disseminate information, build relationships, and connect with citizens on a personal level. These platforms enable public organisations to create networks of communication where users can consume, generate, and respond to information with ease (Paliszkiewicz, 2016). Unlike traditional one-way communication, SNS facilitates real-time interaction and fosters community participation, making it an indispensable tool for modern governance (Nakerekanti & Narasimha, 2019; Dudley & Johnson, 2017).

These platforms have reshaped government communication patterns, necessitating an evaluation of how public organisations, including ministries, disseminate

information to engage with their audiences (Busch & Amarjargal, 2020; Pérez-Dasilva et al., 2020; Sulistiadi et al., 2020). The use of SNS presents opportunities and challenges, with both positive and negative impacts on public dynamics and order (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2020). As Lu et al. (2020) highlight, the effectiveness of government communication on SNS depends on the management of public spaces through an optimal mix of information disclosure and blocking, supported by clear, accurate communication and clarification of misinformation.

This study situates itself within the broader context of government communication by addressing the gap in research linking digital political communication with impression management strategies, particularly through the use of emojis. Existing studies on organisational discourse largely focus on private entities and corporate environments, leaving the public sector and government communication underexplored (Beelitz & Merkl-Davies,

2012; Bergström & Knights, 2006; Phillips & Oswick, 2012). By extending this discourse to public administration, the study enriches the theoretical understanding of how government agencies utilise digital tools to shape their public images (Raadschelders, 2011).

Social networking sites (SNS) offer a favourable setting for impression management because organisations can present a polished image. They can use SNS as an additional platform to manage their image, controlling which aspects they present and highlight, as their online actions influence public perception (Benthaus et al., 2016; Paliszkievicz, 2016; Roulin & Levashina, 2016). We use impression management theory to examine how organizations communicate externally to achieve strategic goals. Traditionally, the concept has focused on individual self-expression. While past research has expanded to the corporate sector, very few attempts have been made to test the concept in the public sectors, especially in developing countries. Yang and Liu (2017) explored the usage of Twitter by firms in the FTSE 100 index in releasing earnings-relevant information, showing that companies strategically focus on positive disclosures in creating stakeholder impressions. Although their work illustrates social media impression management, it is limited to financial narratives and corporate contexts. Likewise, Usmani et al. (2020) explored visual impression management in sustainability reports, emphasizing the symbolic uses of visuals to maintain corporate legitimacy.

Based on these findings, this paper addresses the gap by applying impression management theory to the public sphere and analysing Indonesian ministries' use of emojis as a visual tool in online communication. The study situates this inquiry within a developing nation context and makes new contributions toward understanding the practice of impression management in a government setting.

While previous research highlights impression management's role in shaping public

perception (Benthaus, Risius, & Beck, 2016), this study examines how these techniques are embedded in public sector discourse. Specifically, it responds to Grant, Hardy, and Oswick's (2004) call for more diverse applications of discourse analysis by examining how Indonesian ministries use emojis on X for impression management. Unlike prior studies that predominantly focus on the corporate context, this study demonstrates how public organisations utilise emojis to build a reputation, instil integrity, earn public trust, and align with societal values (Bergström & Knights, 2006; Hossain et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021).

Emojis have become integral to digital political communication, functioning as symbolic tools to enhance transparency, relatability, and engagement. Public organisations, such as government ministries, employ emojis to foster connections with citizens, balancing professionalism with approachability (Wu, 2023; Wurst et al., 2023). While private entities often adopt emojis to appear friendlier, government ministries leverage them to meet public expectations of openness and trustworthiness (Kannasto et al., 2023). This study focuses on the role of emojis in Indonesian government communication, examining their use through the lens of impression management theory. It demonstrates how expressive emojis in organisational tweets not only convey emotions but also enhance approachability and relatability in public discourse (Babin, 2020; Beißwenger & Pappert, 2020; Massey, 2022). By connecting organisational discourse and public administration, this research provides insights into how digital communication tools shape public perception and build trust.

Literature Review

Government Communication and Social Networking Sites

Digital disruption has transformed communication patterns, reshaping how governments interact with the public (Australian

Government's Productivity Commission 2016; el Masri and Sabzalieva 2020; Hammond 2020; Kusumasari et al., 2024). This shift, driven by digital technology, has made social media a key communication platform (da Silva & Peterson, 2019; da Silva & Texeira, 2020), enabling rapid interaction, broad reach, and diverse public discourse beyond what traditional media can accomplish (Criado & Villodre, 2020; Moss et al., 2015).

As a result of rapid information distribution and overabundance, social and digital media can also spread misinformation. This, along with public misinterpretation, can heighten tensions and conflicts within communities (Graham, 2014). Therefore, clear and accurate information from the government can help prevent misunderstandings and shape public perception effectively (Djerf-Pierre & Pierre, 2016; Santoso et al., 2020; Sobaci, 2015). As expected, communication methods must be adjusted for clarity and consistency to minimize conflict.

Studies have shown that the effectiveness of government communication through social media depends on proper dissemination strategies. Free-flowing, timely, and interactive communication helps to establish public trust and reduces misinformation (Busch and Amarjargal, 2020; Pérez-Dasilva et al., 2020; Sulistiadi et al., 2020). Governments should regulate digital affordances in public spaces, including social media, as they influence public dynamics and social stability (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2020). According to Lu et al. (2020), the success of government communication through social media lies in how well it manages public space through the disclosure or blocking of information, or an ideal combination of both.

The government must be able to provide information to the public clearly and understandably and block inaccurate information through various techniques, such as information clarification (Lu et al., 2020). Communications on social media also have an impact on these factors since the

amount of information available on social media is continuously increasing; therefore, the governments must actively manage the balance between information dissemination and restriction (Busch & Amarjargal, 2020; Gesser-Edelsburg & Hijazi, 2020; Hassan & Hijazi, 2017). Government communications include not only official press releases but also interactions among leaders on platforms accessible to a wide audience (Prasetyanto et al., 2020; Prasetyanto et al., 2022).

Communication patterns are a vital factor in handling public concerns and implementing solutions (Neely and Collins 2018; Purbokusumo and Santoso 2021; Santoso et al. 2020). For example, public interaction requires ongoing engagement with various community groups, with government involvement being the most essential (Saip et al., 2018; Skarzauskiene et al., 2020). In addition, the government needs a technical understanding of social dynamics, sociocultural diversity, and continually changing media landscapes (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; Iek & Blesia, 2019; Kusumasari & Prabowo, 2020). A common issue in government communication is misunderstanding sociocultural differences across communities and failing to adapt to technological changes, particularly in communication media (Gesser-Edelsburg & Hijazi, 2020; Majumdar, 2017; Saip et al., 2018).

Digital technologies have transformed one-way organisational image management into interactive communication. Social media has disrupted narrative control, requiring real-time engagement with stakeholders (Jankauskaite & Urboniene, 2016). Social media also allows more transparency, co-creation of communication strategies, and responses to feedback (Raman, 2018). It has raised reputation management risks in a dynamic environment while also creating opportunities to build relationships. Organizations must be more vigilant in managing their online presence, as stakeholders expect transparency

and consistency in messaging (Othman & Isa, 2017). They also need to manage social media engagement discreetly (Buhmann et al., 2021). With the rapid evolution of communication channels, organisations use social media to build and maintain a reputation that supports their strategic objectives in the digital era (Aula, 2010). Consequently, organisations devote time and resources to craft and communicate their messages online (Richey et al., 2016).

The Roles of Emojis in Communication

Digital political communication and public relations have transformed how government agencies interact with citizens, emphasising the need for effective engagement on social media platforms (Avery and Graham 2013; Santoso et al. 2020). Unlike traditional communication, these digital methods enable real-time interaction, with emojis, among other things, becoming tools for expressing emotions and building rapport (Graham, 2014; Wagner, 2017). Public organisations, such as Indonesian ministries, strategically use emojis to humanise communication and manage public perception, reflecting an adaptation to digital trends in government communication.

Emojis and emoticons are typographic symbols that convey attitudes or emotions, serving as substitutes for nonverbal cues in text-based communication (Derks et al. 2008; Fujs et al. 2020; Wagner 2017). Today, emojis are often used to communicate social media users' moods when conversing, and these expressions can range from concern to sadness to disappointment (Reifman et al., 2020). Emojis do not symbolise any gender; thus, both women and men use them on social media (Babin, 2020; Beißwenger & Pappert, 2020; Fujs et al., 2020; Peuravaara, 2021; Zappavigna & Logi, 2021). The public uses emojis to express their feelings toward the government on social media, while the government uses them to engage with the public (Darginavičienė & Ignotaitė, 2020; Lotfinejad et al., 2020).

Lain (2019) has explored the potential of Emoji-Based Sentiment Analysis (EBSA) as a tool for governments and law enforcement to detect extremism and terrorism. EBSA identifies patterns by analysing user discussions and emojis, grouping data to recognise individuals engaged in radical or security-related communication. Building on this, Liu et al. (2022) examined emoji usage during the COVID-19 outbreak in China, revealing that government social media accounts used fewer emojis during the pandemic. This shift reflected a deliberate move towards a more formal and professional tone, suggesting that governments strategically adjust their emoji usage depending on the context and gravity of the situation.

Similarly, Pereira-Kohatsu et al. (2019) highlighted the role of Spain's HaterNet tool in detecting hate speech, including negative sentiments expressed through emojis. This study corroborates Lain's findings by demonstrating how emojis can indicate hostility or potential threats in public discourse. While Lain and Pereira-Kohatsu et al. emphasise emoji analysis in monitoring negative or extreme sentiments, Liu's study provides insight into how governments adapt their communication strategies during crises. Overall, these findings underscore the dynamic role of emojis in government communication. Nonetheless, research on the interactive use of emojis in two-way communication between governments and society remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining how government-public interactions on social media, particularly on X, create distinct patterns of emoji-based communication. By mapping frequently used emojis in these interactions, the research interprets their meanings, shedding light on the evolving dynamics of digital government communication.

In digital communication, emojis compensate for the absence of nonverbal cues, replacing facial expressions, tone of voice,

and body language in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) (Beißwenger & Pappert, 2020; Chatzichristos et al., 2020). They help convey emotions, create a sense of closeness, and enhance interactions beyond what traditional text allows (Das, 2021; Beißwenger & Pappert, 2020). As representations of emotion and iconography, emojis have evolved into a language of their own, encapsulating gestures, expressions, and contextual nuances (Massey, 2022; Babin, 2020; Peuravaara, 2021).

Past research has demonstrated that emojis influence communication dynamics differently than other modalities. They enhance emotional expression, improve the clarity of messages, and mitigate the impersonal nature of CMC (Derks et al., 2008; Wagner, 2017). By acting as emotional amplifiers, emojis enable users to convey meaning and sentiment more effectively, thereby addressing the inherent limitations of digital interaction. These unique qualities make emojis pivotal in shaping modern communication, including their strategic use by governments to establish connections and foster trust in public discourse.

According to Zappavigna and Logi (2021), there are two types of relationships between emojis and words: complementary and supplementary. In brief, an emoji is said to be complementary if it appears with words and supplementary if it replaces words. Entity-related emojis are more likely to be used to replace words, whereas sentiment-related emojis are frequently used as complements in messages (Zappavigna & Logi, 2021). According to Alshenqeeti (2016), this strategy is not new, historically, communication has evolved from single images to complex meanings through symbol combinations, as seen in Sumerian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs. Various studies have attempted to interpret emojis, but they ultimately reveal that meanings vary by individual (Peuravaara, 2021; Wagner, 2017). Massey (2022) found that young children interpret emojis in diverse ways. Due to their

influence on trust in communication (Babin, 2020) and of their potential to elicit varied interpretations and unintended responses, the use of emojis requires careful consideration, including in government communications.

Impression Management Theory

Emojis have become a powerful tool for shaping perceptions on social media, allowing communicators to express emotions, build rapport, and emphasise messages. Their use reflects a deliberate effort to manage public impressions, making them a key element of modern communication strategies in virtual spaces. The way audiences interpret messages fits into the broader concept of impression management, whereby activities and symbols are carefully selected for their appropriateness in portraying a particular image. By using emojis, communicators convey subtle nuances in digital interactions, shaping impression formation and management in online spaces.

Since the mid-twentieth century, impression management theory has described how an individual communicates and behaves in public to control how others view them (Harlow, 2018). Impression management entails the idea that every behaviour, look, involvement, etc., reveals aspects of our intent and purpose (Moreno & Jones, 2021). Typically, a person's goal of managing their impression is to establish a social identity, attempting to present oneself as ideal as possible in a social group (X.Liu, 2020). Impression management is common in organisations and community groups as a way to present positive behaviour to others (Allen, 1994; Caillouet & Allen, 1996). Contemporary impression management theory attempts to explain not only an individual's behaviour but also the behaviour of a group of organisations or society, examining communication strategies such as marketing, political or government communication, and social media (Harlow, 2018).

The impression management theory applies not only to established communication

patterns but also to evaluating information and interactions on online platforms like chat rooms, virtual worlds, social media, and online dating (Pearce & Vitak, 2016). Picone (2015) emphasises that there are parallels between offline and online social interaction customs, such as the need for communicative approbation, connection, and belonging, which are frequently manifested by the two modes of communication. Nonetheless, the rapid growth of social networks complicates the analysis of impression management on online media (Hollenbaugh, 2021; Ozanne et al., 2017; Picone, 2015). Public interactions such as tagging, commenting, liking, and sharing serve as indicators for analysing impression management on social media (Hollenbaugh, 2021). Impression on social media can also be represented by the content users upload, the frequency of their interactions, and what they like and share (Bowman, 2015; Wallace & Buil, 2020). These indicators create social media impressions and the direction of user interests (Carley et al., 2016; Ogie et al., 2019; Ozanne et al., 2017; Richey et al., 2016; Wallace and Buil, 2020).

The impression management theory explains how entities shape public perceptions through strategic communication. The typology of impression management techniques proposed by Jones and Pittman (1982) include ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication. The current study uses this typology to explore how Indonesian ministries utilise emojis to maintain a favourable image on social media. Ingratiation involves behaviours aimed at increasing likability or perceived similarity, often through compliments or humour (Cheng et al., 2024; Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007). Ingratiation includes improving others' opinions of oneself by making positive remarks about them (other-enhancement), rendering services or favours to be accepted (favour-rendering), portraying oneself in an attractive or positive light (self-presentation), showing modesty

or self-effacement to be approachable and likable (modesty), name-dropping, situation-specificity, and devaluation of the self with the intent of winning sympathy or support by criticism of the self (Matsumura & Ohtsubo, 2012; Metzler & Scheithauer, 2018; Stratulat, 2019).

Self-promotion highlights personal or organisational achievements to create a favourable impression by showcasing competence and success (Vijayabanu et al., 2019; Parekev et al., 2024), which includes portraying oneself as hardworking, dedicated, and morally upright to elicit admiration. However, it can sometimes lead to unintended consequences such as perceived insincerity (De Cuyper et al., 2014; Fieseler & Ranzini, 2015). Supplication, on the other hand, involves seeking help or portraying oneself as modest and in need, often used to gain sympathy or assistance in culturally appropriate contexts (Lai et al., 2010; Parekev et al., 2024).

These techniques influence organisational life, impacting employee well-being, work outcomes, and career success. Effective use of ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification correlates with higher salaries, promotions, and supervisor-rated performance (Chawla et al., 2021; Debus et al., 2024; Vijayabanu et al., 2019). However, the effectiveness of these tactics varies; for example, while self-promotion can enhance perceived competence, it may also negatively affect adaptive performance in some contexts (Parekev et al., 2024). Similarly, supplication, although less commonly studied, has been noted to foster perceptions of humility and relatability but may hinder perceptions of competence (Lai et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2024). By examining how Indonesian ministries employ these strategies through emojis on social media, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of impression management in digital communication, especially by government organizations.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative content analysis following Krippendorff's (2013) guidelines to answer the explanatory research question. Tweets from the ministries' official X accounts were analysed, focusing on both textual and emotional content. Using a thematic analysis approach, tweets were systematically coded and categorised based on recurring themes and emerging patterns. Each tweet was examined for its use of impression management techniques, ensuring alignment with predefined categories such as self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, and supplication.

Data Collection

This research investigates the X message dataset and tweets between 1 January 2021 and 28 February 2022 to examine emoji usage in government communication. With a total of 34 ministries in Indonesia, 12 ministries were randomly selected as subjects of this research. These ministries were selected for their active online presence, high counts of followers, and being active in public discussions. They are: the Ministry of Manpower (@KemnakerRI), Ministry of Finance (@kemenkeuRI), Ministry of National Development Planning (@BappenasRI), Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (@kemenparekraf), Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (@kkpgoid), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (@kemlu_RI), Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (@kementerianESDM), Ministry of Health (@kemenkesRI), Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (@kemkominfo), Ministry of Environment and Forestry (@KementerianLHK), Ministry of Social Affairs (@kemensosRI), and the Ministry of State Secretariat (@kemensetnegRI).

These ministries had the highest public activity records, represented by shares, likes, and other forms of engagement. Some ministries, such as the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy and the Ministry of

Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, have created and distributed information that went viral or was massively followed within the past year. The following are the summarised statistics of the selected ministries in terms of followers, likes, and comments, indicating the engagement metrics.

The Ministry of Manpower had a following of 361,400 with 222 tweets posted, garnering 5,782 likes and 2,376 retweets. The Ministry of Finance had a following of 772,900 with 179 tweets; it received 3,380 retweets and 488 comments. The engagement of people through such likes and retweets means that their emoji usage is important for public engagement. Some ministries, like the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, showed relatable images and caught public attention by using emojis much more appropriately; for example, 48,222 likes and 1,048 retweets out of 136 tweets were obtained through the usage of emojis. However, the Ministry of Social Affairs, with 357,200 followers, only issued 24 tweets during the period studied; moreover, these were minimal and tokenistic in terms of the level of engagement involved, with limited use of emojis. These findings underline the role of emojis in defining digital government communication strategies and in enabling relationships with the public.

An official Application Programming Interface (API) was used to acquire tweet data to access X data. After obtaining access, tweet data were retrieved using a computer language. This procedure resulted in a collection of 1,897 tweets, including emojis (see Table 1). To avoid research bias, the data collection for this study was restricted to key tweets uploaded by multiple ministries. Replies and tweets from the accounts were not used. Data cleansing did not involve the automated removal of punctuation and emojis, as this would alter the original message content. We achieved this by removing tweets that were routinely posted and appeared in more than 10% of the tweets containing

emojis on the government account. The data obtained had no signs of bots, which usually manifest through certain tendencies of high-frequency posting at regular intervals; very generic or off-topic content; minor variability in the form of language used; and a lack of interaction, such as few or no meaningful replies, comments, or likes. Further, many bot accounts have inconsistencies in either the number of followers to engagement ratio or may include automated responses. Out of these, none of the characteristics were found in this dataset; therefore, no cleansing for bot-generated data was required for this dataset.

Data Classification

A codebook was developed both inductively and deductively for the coding process for a comprehensive information analysis. In the deductive approach, researchers based their work on the impression management techniques suggested by Jones and Pittman (1982), including ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication. Ingratiation is defined as the act of making others like oneself through various means such as complimenting, praising, or helping others. Self-promotion is characterised by

showcasing one's competence, achievements, and recognition abilities. Exemplification is a behaviour whereby an individual presents the self as morally superior, devoted, or exemplary, while supplication is associated with displays of humility, modesty, or dependency to evoke sympathy or assistance. Although intimidation indeed forms part of Jones and Pittman's original framework, this study did not apply it to the tweets under review.

These four impression management techniques became the main categories, and subcategories were developed for each category based on the literature. For instance, the category of ingratiation included subcategories such as complementing and thanking others and even guidance. Besides deductive coding, inductive coding was also conducted to grasp the themes and patterns emerging from the data themselves, especially concerning the use of emojis. This inductive process allowed us to highlight nuances and details that were not foreseen in the theoretical framework and ensured that the analysis was comprehensive and bottom-up.

The coding was done manually by two independent coders, who were well-trained in the coding scheme to maintain consistency and

Table 1.
Ministry Profile Tweets

Ministry	Followers	Likes	Retweet	Comments	Tweets	Liked	Post Commented	Post Shared
Manpower	361400	5782	2376	2730	222	214	202	207
Finance	772900	3427	3380	488	179	173	136	177
Tourism and Creative Economy	233800	2642	704	439	304	2599	203	163
National Development Planning	272900	6422	1253	463	651	650	272	594
Maritime Affairs and Fisheries	440000	48222	1048	99	136	136	58	131
Foreign Affairs	228600	1997	1338	98	101	101	67	101
Energy and Mineral Resources	292400	215	56	61	36	33	31	16
Health	686900	7320	4325	1379	74	74	62	69
Communication and Information Technology	1200000	1702	668	274	80	79	61	72
Environment and Forestry	220600	2878	631	246	77	76	57	67
Social Affairs	357200	606	118	76	24	24	20	20
State Secretariat	641500	218	47	12	13	13	10	9

Source: obtained from primary data

reliability. Any disagreements or ambiguities that arose were sorted through discussions and by referring back to the codebook definitions. To ensure inter-coder reliability, Krippendorff's alpha was computed, which is a robust measure of reliability that accommodates varying levels of measurement (nominal, ordinal, interval) and accounts for the possibility of chance agreement. The result, $\alpha = 0.98$, indicated a very high level of agreement between the coders, confirming the consistency and accuracy of the coding process. This combination of deductive and inductive coding methods helped establish the different impression management strategies used by the ministries in their tweets, providing a nuanced understanding of how the Indonesian government utilised impression management techniques and emojis on social media platforms.

Results

We analysed the data by calculating the percentage share of each category and sub-category to assess the content and emojis used in ministry tweets and the prevalence of each impression management approach. In this study, we applied organisational discourse analysis to uncover the underlying themes, patterns, and concepts (Grant et al., 2004). Additionally, we identified the possible connections between categories.

Figure 1 shows the distribution across Indonesian ministries, which plots four impression management strategies: ingratiation, supplication, exemplification, and self-promotion. These findings reveal a diverse application of impression management strategies tailored to the ministries' roles and audience expectations.

Table 2.
Impression Management Technique Codes

Category	Sub-Categories	Example of Tweets
Ingratiation	Complementing (😊 🙌), Praising (👏 🌟), Thanking Others (🙏 😊), Helping Others (❤️ 🤝), Being Compassionate (💕 😊), Acting Cheerful (😊 🌈), Addressing the Audience (📢 👀), Seeking Affinity (👉 🤝) and Offering Guidance (🔍 😊)	@KemnakerRI on 21 February 2022 👤: Is it true that JHT funds are used by the Government? 👤📢: That's not true, friend. Here's the explanation 😊
Supplication	Depending on Others (🙏 🙌), Appearing Humble (😊) Appearing Modest (😊 🙏)	@KementerianLHK on 17 Sept 2021 May new shoots grow and become new hopes for future generations. 😊🙏 Good morning at #JumatBerkah #SobatHijau, take care of your health, cleanliness and obey health protocols. 🙏 #PersemaianPermanen South Lampung, BPDASHL WSS
Exemplification	Committing to a cause (🙏 🤝), Having High Moral Standards (👏 🌟), Presenting Oneself as Role model (😊), Dedicated Oneself (🙏)	@kkpgoid on 20 December 2021 Good morning #SahabatBahari, make the most of your time, because we don't know when the journey will end. Therefore, let's make the most of our time and do our best. Let's make the most of our time 😊 # K K P G O I D # M E N T E R I K K P #SAKTIWAHYUTRENGGONO
Self-Promotion	Competence (📊), Knowledgeable (🧠), Abilities (💪) and Accomplishments (🏆), Boasting (🌟), Name Dropping and Playing an Important Role in Society (👤 🌟)	@kemlu_RI on 27 December 2021 #SahabatKemlu, here are the developments #COVID19 in the world & protection of Indonesian citizens as of 12/27 at 08.00 WIB. Additional Indonesian citizens confirmed and recovered from COVID19 in GB & QA. Total Indonesian citizens confirmed abroad is 7223: 5915 recovered, 271 died & 1037 under treatment. #NegaraMelindungi

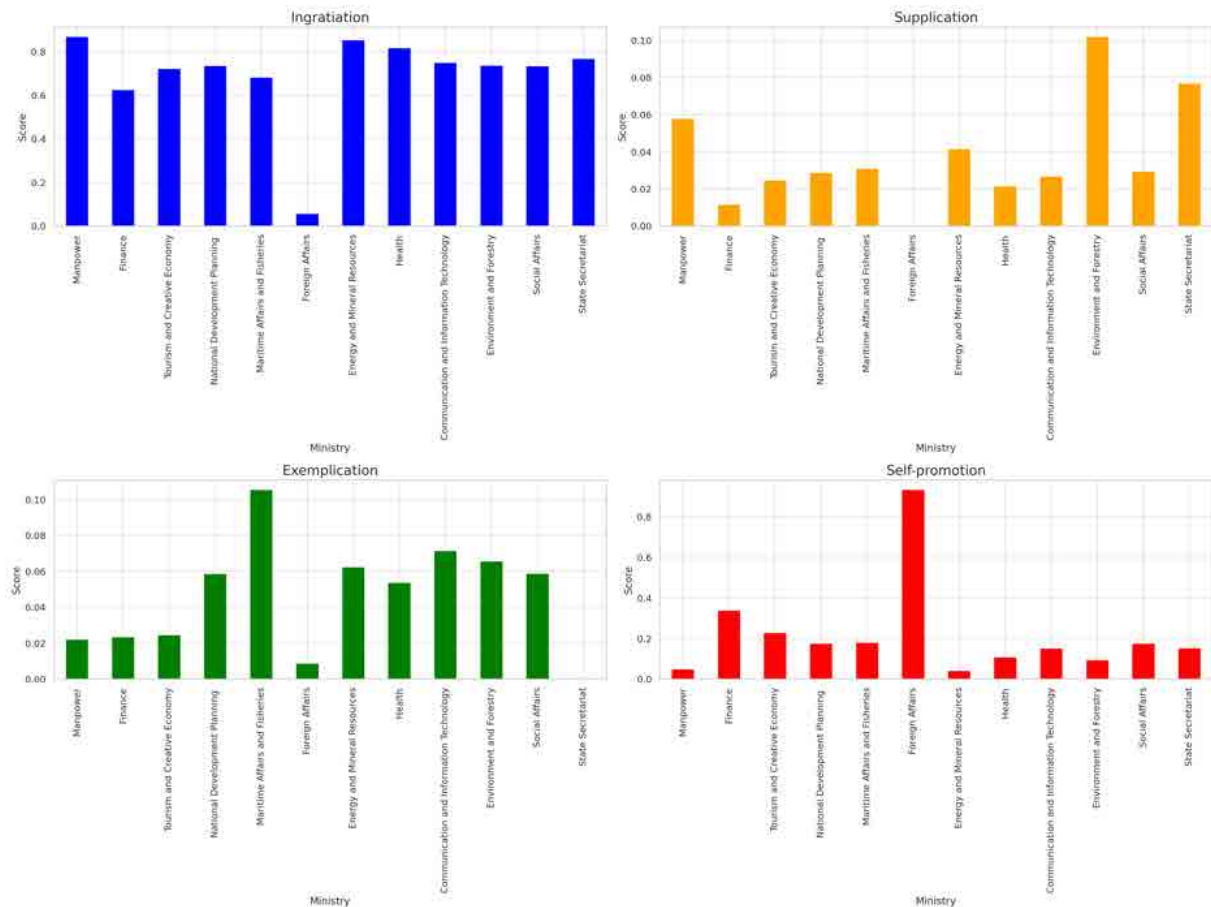


Figure 1. Comparison of Impression Management Strategies Across Indonesian Ministries

Source: Author's Analysis

Ingratiation

Each ministry has a high rate of ingratiation, with the Ministry of Manpower ranking first with an ingratiation rate of 87.02 percent, followed by the Ministries of Energy and Mineral Resources (85.42 percent), health (81.72 percent), and Communication and Information (75 percent). Almost every ministry showed a high percentage of ingratiation strategies (above 65%), with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) having the lowest rate of 5.68%, as shown in Figure 1. Ingratiation aims to increase social actors' attractiveness (Haber & Brouer 2017; Kuen Tsang 2015; Matsumura & Ohtsubo 2012). Some researchers categorise this behaviour as attraction seeking because it demonstrates the efforts of social actors or institutions to attract the attention of the public (Kuen Tsang,

2015; Vijayabanu et al., 2019; Sibunruang & Kawai, 2021). According to previous studies, there are numerous ingratiation strategies, such as other-enhancement, favour-rendering, self-presentation, modesty, name-dropping, situation-specificity, and self-deprecation (Matsumura & Ohtsubo, 2012; Metzler & Scheithauer, 2018; Stratulat, 2019). The unique aspect is that this behaviour is implemented differently in each country based on its culture. In the United States, conformity, favour rendering, and self-presentation are the most effective strategies, whereas in Hong Kong, modesty is a common pattern (Tsang, 2015).

The Indonesian ministries practice ingratiation behaviour through other enhancement and self-presentation tactics by thanking, praising, and engaging with the audience. For example, the Ministry

of Manpower (@KemnakerRI), with the highest percentage of displaying ingratiation behaviour, has frequently used emojis to convey acting cheerfully at 35.24%, followed by guiding at 29.84%, and addressing the audience at 23.88%. A tweet dated February 22, 2022, says, "Did you know that you can now claim JKP? 😊 Let's check out the thread below 😊". It used happy emojis and an appealing tone to make it warm and friendly. Another example from February 21, 2022, is "Want to own a house with low interest? FYI, participants in the JHT program can get a house with low interest rates 😊" which shows that through the favour-rendering strategy, the information is communicated positively.

During this period, @KementerianESDM employed more audience-addressing strategies at 53.66% and an upbeat tone of 31.76% since the self-presentations were situational, with approaches aimed at relatability and engagement. A tweet from July 23, 2021, is as follows: "WORKSHOP ALERT! Hello, friends 🙌 Waste to Energy may not be new for you, but do you know how it is being implemented across Asia-Pacific countries?". The use of friendly greetings and casual language exemplifies the effort to connect with and engage the audience. Acting cheerfully (47.37%) and addressing the audience (22.37%) was done in a similar pattern by @KemenkesRI. One tweet, on 17th March 2021, says, "Hi, thank you for your recommendation 😊❤️ #Healthies Let's follow this good message from the song by consistently implementing health protocols in all our activities. Good health starts from small things, from ourselves. Stay healthy 😊" which shows other-enhancement and self-presentation through a positive, inclusive tone, supported by emojis and supportive language. The Ministry of Communication and Information (@kemkominfo) also used ingratiation strategies frequently to address the audience at 40.48%, acting cheerfully at 23.81%, and giving praise at 22.61%. For instance, on

February 5, 2022, they tweeted, "Hey friends who just graduated and want to sharpen your ICT skills, this is the moment! 🙌 The Fresh Graduate Academy (FGA) training program is open for registration! FREE!!! 🙌". The use of exclamation marks, emojis, and second person establishes engagement to praise as a strategy of ingratiation to create good impressions and experiences in interactions.

A significant difference is observed only in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has the lowest ingratiation rate (5.68%). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs predominantly used emojis to express gratitude, accounting for 76.92% of its ingratiation behaviour. Other ministries exhibit similar patterns, emphasising acting cheerfully, providing direction, addressing the audience, and praising. Institutions often use strategies like cheerfulness and engagement to appear more approachable and friendly to their service recipients (Kuen Tsang, 2015; Stratulat, 2019). Utilising complementary strategies is also an effort to add a friendly impression to the rendering services. These strategies are consistent with Indonesian culture, which encourages friendliness in communication. Government agencies use them to form a positive image in their public communication.

Indonesian ministries also emphasise their public service role by offering guidance to those who are confused or facing problems. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses gratitude to service users and other parties, it appears more formal (as evidenced by the low percentage of ingratiation), and emojis are used as supplements. The results of this study confirm the findings of previous research that shows how ingratiation aligns with a country's culture. This is evident in the ingratiation tactics used by each ministry, which emphasize closeness and friendliness, aligning with Indonesian cultural norms.

Figure 2 shows a heatmap graphically depicting the density and extent of ingratiation strategies employed by Indonesian ministries.



Figure 2. Heatmap of Ingratiation Indicators by Ministry
Source: Author`s Analysis

Each cell represents one of the ingratiation behaviours complimenting, praising, thanking others, acting cheerfully, or addressing the audience by each ministry. Darker shading at higher values offers a clear visual representation of behavioural trends. For example, "thanking others" is most prominent in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (0.77), likely reflecting a strategic focus on goodwill. The Ministry of Health emphasizes "acting cheerful" (0.47), possibly to convey positivity in health communications. In contrast, "helping others" and "offering guidance" are underrepresented

across most ministries, suggesting a potential gap in strategic engagement. The heatmap offers a complete yet brief representation by condensing large datasets into one interpretable image. It offers a clear, at-one-glance comparison between ministries and their ingratiation strategies that reveal patterns, outliers, and commonalities. The heatmap links quantitative data with qualitative insights, strengthening the analysis of impression management strategies in government communication. It visually summarises ingratiating behaviours, aiding

readability and reinforcing findings concerning theoretical frameworks.

Supplication

In contrast to the strategy of ingratiation, which has a high percentage in this instance, supplication behaviour has a relatively low percentage in each Indonesian ministry. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry has the highest percentage at 10.22%, followed by the Ministry of State Secretariat (7.69%) and the Ministry of Manpower (5.80%). The Ministry of Finance (1.17%), Ministry of Health (2.15%), and Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (2.4%) had the lowest percentage of applications. This strategy is used to demonstrate the weakness of a person or institution to gain the sympathy of other parties (Arif, 2011; Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2018) or to demonstrate their misfortune and develop meek and charitable characteristics (Siwek, 2018; Stewart, 2018; Stewart et al., 2020). Supplication is often seen as a passive strategy involving actions aimed at shaping how a person or group is perceived by others.

The strategy also reflects patterns of modesty, humility, or reliance on support in Indonesian ministries' public communications. The Ministry of Manpower (@KemnakerRI) displays such humility, with 14.29% of the communication showing this pattern. An example is "Rekanaker, remember, no matter how small the achievement, always be grateful 😊. With gratitude, life feels more joyful 😊. What motivates you at work on this #JumatBerkah?". The posting here is modest and humble, invites similarities with readers, and is as 'down-to-earth' as possible. Smiling emojis reinforce friendliness and humility, aligning with supplication strategies to foster closeness with the public. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (@Kemenparekraf) also applies supplication strategies by emphasising public engagement to support tourism and the creative economy. For instance, a tweet says,

"#SobatParekraf, did you know that there's a music event serving as a barometer for *keroncong* festivals in Indonesia and internationally? It's true! It's called the Solo Keroncong Festival! 😊 This festival is back this year! 🎵🎶". It uses party face and party popper emojis to show enthusiasm and excitement. This post asks for public participation and support in the event and shows how the ministry relies on collective involvement in its goals.

Similarly, the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas also relies on the cooperation of the general public. For example, a tweet on December 23, 2022, is as follows: "#DevelopmentPartners, check out the summary of the latest regulations on COVID-19 prevention during the Christmas 2021 and New Year 2022 holiday period, detailed in the Ministry of Home Affairs Directive No. 66/2021 📄. Let's comply for the common good 😊." Some of the emojis used in this post are notepad for emphasising that it is detailed information and smiling face to set a positive and collaborative tone that encourages public compliance and shared responsibility for community health measures. By appealing to collective support, the ministry adopts a community-focused supplication approach. These examples illustrate how different ministries use supplication to cultivate humility, express gratitude, and encourage public participation, all through relatable and non-threatening messages.

All ministries in Indonesia followed the same pattern of humility (except for the Ministry of Manpower). Appearing humble is a pattern that frequently appears in supplication strategies (Abokhodair et al., 2020; Siwek, 2018; Stewart, 2018). Like modesty, this approach fosters closeness with others. Indonesian ministries use emojis on social media to build communities, making government agencies feel more relatable. A humble appearance is a common tactic in supplication strategies. These include the Ministries of Finance,

Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Communication and Information, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of State Secretariat, with a modest percentage of 100%. The Indonesian ministries predominantly use an "appearing humble" pattern in their supplication strategies, which is used to show closeness to their audience (Abokhodair et al., 2020; Siwek, 2018; Stewart, 2018). They demonstrate modesty by fostering a sense of community and connection with the public, strengthening their relationship with citizens. This feature was commonly used by the ministries in building their dependable and accessible images on social media.

Self-Promotion

Self-promotion emerges as the second most frequent strategy used by Indonesian ministries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) primarily emphasizes "knowledgeable" content, accounting for 93.45% of its shared posts, highlighting its expertise and global awareness. An example tweet from MoFA reads, "#SahabatKemlu, here are the global #COVID19 developments & protection for Indonesian citizens as of 02/22 at 08.00 WIB. Additional cases confirmed in es (Spain) & uz (Uzbekistan), recoveries in , and kw(Kuwait), es(Spain) & uz (Uzbekistan). Total confirmed overseas cases are 8,825: 7,273 recovered, 279 deceased & 1,273 under treatment #NegaraMelindungi.". This tweet is a good example of how MoFA gives importance to knowledge dissemination and updates about public health and citizen protection. By presenting itself as a source of knowledge and authority on international matters, MoFA reinforces its impression management strategy of self-promotion through expertise.

By contrast, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) employs a more varied self-promotion strategy, with 33.92% of its tweets emphasising

competence and societal contributions, including name-dropping and highlighting achievements. For example, one of those mentions, "The government increased health handling allocation to Rp214.95 trillion and social protection to Rp187.84 trillion 🏠". This increase is funded by refocusing 2021 budget expenditures and the 2020 surplus balance (SAL) 💵". In this context, MoF has been shown to take part in managing people's money and indicate its commitment to the social welfare of society. This tweet highlights MoF's financial expertise and the positive impact of its policies by incorporating emojis like flying money and dollar bags. Also, the other tweet says, "For your information, this agreement aligns with one of the main missions of BPD LH, which is gathering conservation funds sourced from grants and donations, both domestic and international 💵 🇮🇩". This tweet not only highlights MoF's competence but also underscores its commitment to sustainability and environmental awareness, reinforced by visual emojis like dollar bags and leaves.

This contrast highlights how each ministry tailors its digital communication strategy to align with its specific objectives, MoFA prioritises authoritative knowledge, while MoF balances expertise with financial achievements and social contributions. The lower emphasis on self-promotion by other ministries, such as Energy and Mineral Resources or Manpower, suggests varying levels of reliance on impression management techniques to establish credibility and public trust.

This finding underscores the prominence of self-promotion in government communication, with MoFA and MoF leading in its application. Their emphasis on expertise, achievements, and societal contributions suggests a deliberate effort to reinforce credibility and public trust through digital platforms. The MoFA was very active in tweeting about their knowledge in international relations and achievements in diplomacy, often using

relevant emojis to construct their image and status. Similarly, the MoF uses X to broadcast its fiscal achievements and future budgeting plans; thus, it shows that it is capable of keeping good caretaking of the country's finances. All the ministries try to position themselves as public organisation characterised by optimistic attitudes, competencies, and capabilities. In this way, they are performing impression management, which means that they create with consciousness an image of themselves that can be perceived from social networks (Davidson et al., 2004; Hamza & Jarboui, 2021; Lin et al., 2015).

The use of emojis in these tweets creates a friendly atmosphere and sends the message of competence and professionalism, thus increasing public trust, transparency, and a positive image. Previous studies have also pointed out that social media provides users with opportunities to employ different means of self-presentation strategies, which helps balance the demands of impression management with a desire to sincerely present their ideal selves (Benthaus, 2014; Willecke, 2020; Yang & Liu, 2017). This study evidences that these strategies' usage finds proficient employment by the ministries because much variation can be noted in employing emojis to better the image the public holds about them, as was noted by Moreno and Jones (2021) and Sun et al. (2021).

Exemplification

Exemplification was a less used strategy in this study; it takes up only 4.63% of the tweets. Apart from the Ministry of the State Secretariat, less than 11% of all the ministries made use of this approach. The Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) took the lead in exemplification strategies since 10.56% of their tweets displayed behaviours that present themselves as good examples, committed to causes, or showing dedication. This aligns with the theoretical framework

where individuals or organisations construct a respected identity by demonstrating moral worthiness and conscientiousness (Allen, 1994; Caillouet & Allen, 1996). These actions align with what Conway et al. (2015) and Weiss et al. (2009) have stated regarding loyalty and discipline to act in expectation from society, which is underlined by symbolic artifacts such as emojis and visual illustrations.

By contrast, MoF has portrayed its identity in diverse manners. One of these is the demand for a cause and dedication to the service of the public. From MoF, a tweet says, "This is the first toll road on the island of Kalimantan. 🤗 The Balikpapan-Samarinda Toll Road is #Ours, built together by the Government and Businesses 🏗️". The message underlines leadership in infrastructure development with an appeal for collaboration, portraying the ministry as an example. Another tweet goes: "#MenkeuSMI was named 'The Most Popular Leader in Social Media 2021' in the Minister category. 😊 #MenkeuSMI is considered to have established a positive reputation for @KemenkeuRI in the public eye," regarding @KemenkeuRI, since this demonstrates exemplary influence and recognition by the people. The following tweet is similar: "APBN 2021 performance has improved. ✨ Fiscal deficit reduced. ▼ As of November 30, it was at 3.63% of GDP. Moving forward, we are optimistic about returning to fiscal discipline with a deficit target below 3% of GDP 🙌". It expresses fiscal discipline commitment. Performance-enhancing emojis have been used to highlight achievements in performance and commitments. This shows the prioritisation of the Ministry for credibility and accountability.

The Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries also applied exemplification to display national pride and caring for the environment. The text of one tweet reads, "#SahabatBahari, did you know that Indonesia's maritime pride is reflected in the G20 logo? Curious to know where? Watch this video. Are you proud of our

marine wealth? 😊 #G20KKP #KKPAccelerate #MinisterKKP #SaktiWahyuTrenggono,”. This message is to build up the collective pride in the maritime identity of Indonesia. Another tweet says, “Let’s start caring for the health of Indonesia’s seas, as care is what preserves its beauty for generations to come. That way, we can showcase to the world how amazing Indonesia’s oceans are! 😊,” Here, the ministry appeals for public involvement while projecting a role model status in environmental preservation.

The use of emojis highlights how ministries deliberately shaped their public image to align with their intended identity. Those emojis have served here as visual aids that underline moral worthiness, commitment, and dedication to greater causes. This intentional use of symbolic elements highlights the fact that ministries position themselves for competitiveness in a digital space, as earlier determined by El-Badawy and Chahine 2016, 2017. This strategy, though less frequent, helped ministries reinforce their credibility with superiors and organizations by presenting themselves as moral guides and reliable public institutions.

Discussion

Mapping the Emoji Utilisation in the Indonesian Government Bodies’ Online Presence

The effectiveness of emoji use in communication varies by ministry, depending on the patterns and strategies discussed. This study maps government agencies’ communication effectiveness across four quadrants, based on a detailed content analysis of emoji usage and engagement strategies on social media (See Figure 3).

The investigation examines the conveyed message, audience engagement, and the identity ministries project through emoji use. Communication effectiveness was measured by how consistently ministries used emojis to convey clear messages aligned with their objectives and audience reception through likes, shares, and comments. As noted, effective social media communication requires messaging that resonates with the audience. In line with Busch and Amarjargal (2020) and Lu et al. (2020), a clear messaging strategy needs to be visually catching for public communication. According to Paliszkievicz (2016), messaging consistency



Figure 3. Emoji Utilisation in the Indonesian Government Bodies’ Online Presence

Source: Author’s Analysis

is important to ensure transparency and trust in the digital public sphere. This suggests that emoji-based communication strategies must align with audience preferences while staying focused on the organisation's broader goals to be effective.

The green quadrant represents ministries that maintained high engagement and effectively used emojis consistently to enhance their messaging. The public was responding relatively well to the postings in quadrant. The Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Environment and Forestry also deliberately use emojis to make them appear more accessible and their messages more attractive.

In contrast, the red quadrant shows very high engagement but with low effectiveness in communication by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of State Secretariat. This situation arises when the public is interested in the ministries' messages, but using emojis may not be appropriate, potentially leading to misinterpretation or confusion.

The yellow quadrant includes the Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Communication and Information, which are characterised by a lower level of public engagement compared to the other groups. For instance, the index rating of the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas stands at 36.81, indicating that they fail to involve the public because of the nature of their current public communication through social media. While this index measures public interaction, it does not confirm the effectiveness of these strategies. Ministries should reassess their approach, incorporating emojis and other tools more effectively to strengthen their online presence and public engagement.

The purpose of this mapping was to show how different ministries use emojis to

handle impressions. The map illustrates how ministries use emojis to shape their organisational identity, making messages more relatable and fostering public engagement. The green quadrant ministries manage to integrate emojis to enhance communication and connect with audiences effectively. On the other hand, ministries in the red quadrant manage to capture attention but fail to bring clarity and alignment in their messaging. Those located in the yellow quadrant receive very limited engagement, with room for better utilisation of emojis in their public presence. Overall, this study shows that emojis may be a substantial part of building how governmental agencies communicate and engage with the public. While some ministries have successfully used emojis to convey the intended identity and to attract engagement, others have yet to optimise them.

Theoretical Underpinnings

These results showed that impression management strategies expressed through emojis were associated with higher communication and engagement outcomes. Impression management theory has been applied to the analysis of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) patterns, in which communication approval, affiliation, and belonging are considered as a form of communication between two parties (Picone, 2015). The research suggests that communication approval can be achieved by combining ingratiation with specific communication patterns, such as giving direction. Some ministries use guidance to seek approval from the public by providing relevant service directions. Other patterns, like addressing the audience, help map audience affiliations and tailor responses based on their needs.

The findings show that ingratiation emerges as the most dominantly implemented impression management strategy by Indonesian ministries, especially by the Ministry of

Manpower. It shows the intention of being friendly, approachable, and agreeable to the intended audience. Impression management theory postulates that such entities often adopt that behaviour to enhance attractiveness and construct a desired image (Maher et al., 2018). Methods of ingratiation the expression of cheer, giving direction, addressing an audience directly, and praising serve to underline the will of the ministries to step into public space in a manner corresponding to the cultural expectations from Indonesia, namely friendliness and approachability. Such traits thus indicate that social media in Indonesian government agencies serves to shape public perceptions while reinforcing the government's commitment to a positive and cordial image.

On the other hand, supplication, though rarely used, plays a strategic role in portraying ministries as humble and approachable. This approach builds rapport by encouraging audience sympathy, aligning with impression management theory, which suggests that actors may reveal vulnerabilities to evoke pity (Nagy et al., 2011). The use of supplication in the speech accordingly acts to balance out the authority of these ministries with modesty to make their presence more relatable to the audience.

Exemplification, used sparingly, demonstrates that the ministries do not overstate their role model status, perhaps to avoid even the appearance of insincerity or overconfidence. The careful approach adds to impression management theory by showing how an organisation would like to appear trustworthy while it socialises the values and performances of the entities (Bigsby et al. 2019). This limited use would infer that the ministries are rather cautious not to promise anything they might not be in a position to keep and thus protect their public face.

This is the second most frequent strategy, highlighting the ministries' efforts to showcase their competencies and achievements, aligned with the impression management perspective,

where organisations present themselves as competent and successful in retaining authority and respect (Evans et al., 2005). With self-promotion, ministries would have been signalling a commitment towards serving citizens but would have proved the actual outcomes of what is being done in reality (Pollitt, 2006).

Indonesian ministries use a blend of ingratiation and supplication to project friendliness and politeness, mixing strategies to shape their identity. This approach adds depth to computer-mediated communication theories by incorporating emotions such as cheerfulness, modesty, and politeness. Emojis and symbolic expressions further reinforce rapport-building. The findings align with impression management theory, confirming that maintaining a positive public image is central to government communication. In this case, the ministries appear approachable and courteous to the public (Bowman, 2015; Wallace & Buil, 2020).

Thus, the impression management performed by Indonesian ministries within the framework of the "second model" is between ingratiation and supplication, with the prevailing friendliness and politeness expressed using emojis. This aligns with the politeness and respect inherent in Indonesian culture, as noted by Karomani (2017), who highlighted humility and modesty as key traits in Indonesian communication. While the models of assertive self-promotion in the West focus on the self and its achievements, and the way to assertiveness is emphasised, in the Indonesian model, a more friendly and approachable appeal resonates more with the cultural preference for harmony and communal values (Karomani, 2017; Pratiwi et al., 2023).

This ingratiation strategy highlights the use of subtle compliments and the ministries' efforts to foster friendliness and build trust. For example, Pratiwi et al. (2023) discussed

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