



## The Use of Swear Words in an Influencer Doctor Health Communication: A Case Study of dr. Tirta

Ihza Amelia Alim\*, Reynaldi Firmansyah Caesar, Ika Nurhayani  
Master's Program in Linguistics, Brawijaya University, Indonesia  
\*email: [ihzaamelia23@gmail.com](mailto:ihzaamelia23@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*This study examines how dr. Tirta, a prominent Indonesian doctor-influencer, uses swear words and what these expressions do in his communication. As social media continues to blur the line between formal expertise and casual interaction, professionals are increasingly adopting styles that would once have seemed out of place. This shift has given rise to “professional influencers” who connect with audiences in more direct and unconventional ways. Focusing on this phenomenon, the study explores swearing not as a lapse in professionalism but as a deliberate communicative strategy. The data consist of spoken utterances collected from videos on dr. Tirta’s YouTube channel that was published in May 2025. These were transcribed and analyzed using the qualitative framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), alongside Andersson and Trudgill’s sociolinguistic model of taboo language. The findings show that dr. Tirta employs swear words across a range of pragmatic functions. Expletive uses express spontaneous emotion, lending his speech a sense of immediacy and sincerity. Abusive forms, such as ‘cangkemmu’ (a coarse term for “mouth”), work less as outright insults and more as a way of flattening social distance. Most notably, the social function dominates, Javanese slang and profanity, are used to build rapport, signal shared identity, and generate what can be understood as covert prestige. Taking together, these patterns suggest that swearing, in this context, is not careless or incidental. It is a calculated stylistic choice that helps shape an approachable, credible, and distinctly modern form of professional communication.*

### Keywords:

Swear Words;  
Pragmatic Functions;  
Sociolinguistics;  
Doctor-Influencers;  
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### INTRODUCTION

The widespread use of social media has reshaped how professionals communicate with the public. Boundaries that once separated formal expertise from casual interaction have become increasingly porous (Gaidzimullah et al., 2025; Zhao & Yu, 2023). In this shifting landscape, a new figure has emerged: the “professional influencer.” These are experts who do more than share knowledge. They cultivate audiences, build trust, and engage through a communication style that often feels personal, immediate, and authentic (Rajput & Gandhi,

[76-94]

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2024). As Ünalmiş et al. (2024) note, such authenticity is not incidental but central to how credibility is constructed in digital spaces.

This transformation is especially visible in the medical field. Doctor-influencers now play a significant role in shaping public understanding of health (Ng et al., 2024). Their responsibilities extend beyond clinical expertise to include the ability to communicate effectively across diverse, digitally mediated audiences. This often requires adapting language to match the social and cultural expectations of those audiences (Ulandari et al., 2025). In some cases, this adaptation involves moving away from the conventions of formal medical discourse altogether.

One striking example is the use of swear words. Language that deviates from professional norms does more than attract attention. It challenges long-standing assumptions about what counts as appropriate or effective communication in healthcare contexts. Previous studies have explored swearing in professional settings, including psychotherapy, where it can influence perceptions of credibility and rapport (Karnowski, 2023; Washmuth et al., 2024). In certain contexts, strategic swearing has even been described as a tool for building therapeutic alliances. At the same time, this stands in contrast to more traditional practices, particularly in cultures where even sensitive but necessary terms are carefully avoided to maintain politeness and emotional protection (Aydın et al., 2024).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the power of swear words does not lie in the words themselves, but in the social meanings attached to them. All language varieties are structurally valid, yet social judgments often position non-standard forms as inferior or inappropriate. These judgments reflect broader social hierarchies rather than linguistic reality. When a public figure deliberately adopts such forms, the choice is rarely neutral. It can signal alignment, resistance, or reconfiguration of social distance. In this sense, swear words become more than expressions of emotion. They become tools for identity work.

Research has also shown that swear words carry measurable cognitive and emotional effects. They are closely tied to emotional processing in the brain, which helps explain their ability to capture attention, intensify expression, and evoke strong reactions (Stapleton et al., 2022). Their impact is learned over time through social conditioning, where they become associated with taboo, sanction, and heightened emotional response. This combination of social meaning and psychological force makes them particularly potent in communication.

In digital contexts, these qualities take on new significance. Studies on social media discourse suggest that informal and non-standard language can foster trust, signal authenticity, and strengthen audience engagement (Mejia & Ngo, 2024). Swearing, in particular, has been shown to serve multiple functions depending on context, ranging from emotional expression to humor, solidarity, and identity marking (Sulpizio et al., 2024; Pramana & Hapsari, 2023). It can operate as a social glue, creating a sense of shared experience, while also acting as a subtle form of resistance against normative expectations.

To frame this study within existing knowledge, it integrates findings from various relevant prior studies. Research on public figure communication in Indonesia, for instance, has previously reviewed related subjects, where Sadasari (2020) analyzed the participation of a *micro-celebrity*, such as dr. Tirta in risk communication during the COVID-19 pandemic through Instagram content. This focus was on communication strategies during a crisis, demonstrating the role of *influencers* in public health.

Aligned with the social media context, several studies have focused on the use of taboo words on digital platforms. Anggana Raras Salsabil Suha & Sudarwati (2021) conducted an analysis of taboo words on TikTok. Kurniawanti & Damanhuri (2022) analyzed female English swearing in WhatsApp communications from a sociolinguistic perspective. Furthermore, Nuriah Allailah, Febryanto, & Hasti (2023) researched the analysis of swear words in the Instagram comment column of the @lilnasx account. These studies collectively affirm that taboo language has broad pragmatic functions in digital interaction, ranging from identity markers to violations of politeness maxims. From a theoretical standpoint, early studies laid the groundwork for the functions of swearing. Andersson and Hirsch (1985) classified swearing as a spontaneous expression of emotion. This research complements the framework of Andersson & Trudgill (1990) used in the current study to analyze the pragmatic functions of swearing

Despite this growing body of research, one area remains underexplored. Existing studies tend to examine swearing either in general social media contexts or within traditional professional interactions. There is still limited research that systematically analyzes how a *professional public figure*, particularly in the medical field, uses swear words as part of a deliberate communicative strategy. More specifically, few studies apply a structured sociolinguistic framework, such as that of Andersson and Trudgill, to understand how these expressions function across different pragmatic dimensions in professional digital discourse.

This study addresses that gap by focusing on dr. Tirta Mandira Hudhi, a prominent Indonesian doctor-influencer, is known for his direct and unconventional communication style. With a large following across platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and X, he presents a compelling case of how professional identity can be reshaped through language. His frequent use of Javanese slang and swear words stands in sharp contrast to the traditionally formal and authoritative tone associated with medical professionals (Trudgill, 2000). Rather than undermining his credibility, this style appears to strengthen his connection with audiences.

To examine this phenomenon, the study draws on the sociolinguistic framework of taboo language proposed by Andersson and Trudgill (1990). This framework allows for a dual analysis: first, by classifying swear words according to their source domains, and second, by identifying their pragmatic functions, including expletive, abusive, and social uses. Through

this lens, swear words can be understood not simply as linguistic deviations but as structured and meaningful elements of communication.

Based on this framework, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What source domains do the swear words used by dr. Tirta belong to, based on the classification proposed by Andersson and Trudgill?
2. How are these swear words pragmatically used in dr. Tirta's speech, particularly in terms of expletive, abusive, and social functions?

## METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design to examine how taboo words are used in the speech of dr. Tirta, with particular attention to their forms and pragmatic functions. Rather than treating swearing as incidental, the analysis approaches it as a patterned and meaningful aspect of communication.

To capture a recent and representative snapshot of his language use, data collection was limited to videos uploaded during May 2025. This time frame was chosen deliberately. It provides a complete and contemporary dataset while avoiding the partial and potentially uneven data of an ongoing month. From this corpus, three videos were selected from dr. Tirta's YouTube channel: #ngopenk Recovery Otot dan Serat Itu Saling Berhubungan?! bersama dr. Adrian Setiaji Sp.KFR, AIFO-K; #ngopenk Belajar Lebih Dalam Seputar Sepatu dengan Ahlinya! bersama Dr. Jason CP, MBBS; and #suaratirta Mitos & Fakta Kesehatan: Edisi Spesial Liverpool Juara Liga Inggris (dr. Tirta's YouTube channel: #ngopenk Muscle Recovery and Fiber Are Interconnected?! with dr. Adrian Setiaji Sp.KFR, AIFO-K; #ngopenk Learn More About Shoes with the Experts! with Dr. Jason CP, MBBS; and #suaratirta Health Myths & Facts: Special Edition Liverpool Wins the Premier League). These videos were chosen because they represent varied topics and interactional settings, allowing for a broader view of his communicative style across contexts.

All instances of spoken utterances containing swear words were identified through careful observation and documentation. The selected videos were fully transcribed to form a textual corpus for analysis. In total, the dataset comprises 10 swear word tokens, providing a sufficient basis for qualitative pattern identification while remaining manageable for in-depth interpretation. Although the dataset is limited in size, the focus on naturally occurring discourse and repeated usage patterns allows for meaningful analytical insights.

The analysis follows the qualitative framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three interconnected flows: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The coding and interpretation are guided by the sociolinguistic framework of taboo language, particularly the classification and functional model outlined by Andersson and Trudgill (1990) and Trudgill (2000). The analytical process unfolded in several stages:

### 1. Data Condensation

The first stage involved coding the transcribed data. In the initial cycle, each identified swear word (e.g., *cuk/fuck*, *goblok/stupid*, *bajingan/bastard*) was classified according to its source domain, such as sexuality, body parts, animal names, or excretory functions. In the second cycle, each instance was analyzed in terms of its pragmatic function. Following Andersson and Trudgill's framework, these functions were categorized as expletive (expressing emotion), abusive (directing insult), or social (building solidarity, humor, or group identity). The interpretation of social functions paid particular attention to situational context, including speaker intention, interactional dynamics, and audience positioning.

### 2. Data Display

To support systematic interpretation, the coded data were organized into a matrix. The rows correspond to pragmatic functions (expletive, abusive, social), while the columns list the specific swear words identified in the dataset. Each cell contains selected excerpts that illustrate how a particular word operates within a given function. This structured display makes patterns more visible and allows comparisons across different forms and uses.

### 3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

In the final stage, patterns emerging from the matrix were examined and refined through iterative comparison. This process involved identifying recurring tendencies, checking interpretations against the data, and ensuring that conclusions were grounded in multiple examples rather than isolated instances. The aim was not only to describe usage, but to explain how and why dr. Tirta employs swear words as part of his communicative strategy, particularly in shaping his public persona.

To enhance analytical reliability, the coding process was conducted with careful attention to consistency. The categorization of swear words and their functions was reviewed repeatedly during the analysis to ensure alignment with the theoretical framework. In addition, selected excerpts and coding decisions were cross-checked with peers familiar with sociolinguistic analysis to reduce subjective bias and strengthen interpretive validity.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The analysis of dr. Tirta's video data reveals a patterned and purposeful use of swear words rather than random or purely emotional outbursts. A set of recurring expressions emerges across the dataset, including *cuk/jancok* (*fuck*), *jangkrik/jangkrek* (*dang*), *goblok* (*stupid*), *asu* (*bitch*), and *cangkem/cangkemmu* (*watch your fucking mouth*). These expressions can be systematically grouped into several source domains, such as sexuality, animal names, body parts, excretory functions, intelligence, and states of fate.

More importantly, their use is not confined to a single communicative purpose. Instead, dr. Tirta mobilizes swear words across the full range of pragmatic functions identified by

Andersson and Trudgill: expletive, abusive, and social. What stands out is not just the presence of these functions, but how fluidly he moves between them, often within the same interaction.

Table 1 presents a matrix of representative examples, illustrating how specific swear words operate across different contexts and functions.

**Table 1.** Matrix Analysis

Swear words	Sample quote		Source domain	Pragmatic functions
<i>Cuk/Jancok</i> <i>Fuck</i>	"...setahun <i>cuk</i> wah ini repot ah"	"(it took) a year <i>fuck</i> wah this hassle ah"	Sexuality Domain	Expletive Function (Emotional Expression)
	"...itu tubuh yang sudah alarm. <i>Cuk belet ngising cuk, gitu</i> "	"...it's the body that has given the alarm. <i>Fuck</i> want to take a shit <i>fuck</i> , like so"		Social Function (Solidarity & Humor)
<i>Jangkrik/Jang krek</i> <i>dang</i>	"Platnya full length? TPU apa karbon? Karbon?! <i>Woh jangkrik!</i> "	"The plate is full length? TPU or carbon? Carbon?! <i>Woah, dang!</i> "	Animal Names Domain	Expletive Function (Emotional Expression)
	" <i>Jangkre</i> k aku biyen ya makannya cedera parah kan"	"Dang, that's why last time I was badly injured, right?"		Expletive Function (Emotional Expression)
	"...bisa <i>jangkrik</i> bisa jadi dong nyalahin sepatu kali nah..."	"... <i>dang</i> , it could be the shoes..."		Social Function (humorous emphasis)
<i>Asu</i> <i>bitch</i>	"Heel Stack itu ngukurnya di sini <i>asu cuk</i> iya di sini"	"Heel Stack is measured here, <i>bitch fuck</i> , yes here"	Animal Names Domain	Social Function (Solidarity & Humour)
<i>Babi Brutel</i> <i>Filthy pig</i>	"Muka boleh baby face, kaki kayak <i>babi brutal</i> "	"You may have a baby face, but (kick) legs like a <i>filthy pig</i> "	Animal Names Domain	Social Function (Solidarity & Humour)
<i>Ngising</i> <i>shit</i>	"... <i>ngisingnya bebeleng atos tainya keras...</i> "	"... his <i>shit</i> is very hard..."	Bodily Functions and Excretion Domain	Expletive Function (Emotional Expression) Social Function (Solidarity & Humour)

Swear words	Sample quote		Source domain	Pragmatic functions
<i>Silit</i> <i>Asshole</i>	"... <i>silit</i> panas tapi <i>tainya</i> gak keluar..."	"... <i>asshole</i> feels hot, but <i>shit</i> doesn't come out."	Body Parts Domain	Expletive Function (Emotional Expression)
<i>Cangkem/ Cangkemmu</i> <i>Watch your fucking mouth</i>	"...salahin <i>cangkemmu</i> yang makannya enggak enak gitu." "Kalau pertanyaannya susah, tidak bisa difast forward. Yang pertanyaan gampang tak fast forward, soalnya <i>kakean</i> (kebanyakan) <i>cangkem</i> ."	"...blame your fucking <i>mouth</i> for not eating well." "If the question is difficult, it can't be fast-forwarded. The easy questions are fast-forwarded because <i>kakean cangkem</i> (too many mouths or noisy)"	Body Parts Domain	Abusive Function (Insulting)
<i>Goblok</i> <i>Stupid</i>	"...pinter sih, <i>goblok</i> saya itu..."	"(he) is so smart, I'm stupid..."	Intelligence and Ability Domain:	Social Function (Solidarity & Humour)
<i>Badut</i> <i>Clown</i>	"...melihat duel tim <i>badut</i> ya antara MU dan Spurs..."	"...see the <i>clown</i> team duel between MU and Spurs..."	Intelligence and Ability Domain:	Abusive Function (Insulting)
<i>Modar</i> <i>Drop dead</i>	"Seperempat tok (nasi Seperempat piring)?! modar!"	"Just a quarter (plate of rice)?! Drop dead!"	State and Fate Domain	Expletive Function (Emotional Expression) Social Function (Solidarity & Humour)

## DISCUSSION

Swear words derive their force not from their sounds, but from the social meanings attached to them. As Trudgill (2000) argues, what makes a word taboo is collective agreement, reinforced through socialization. From an early age, individuals learn that certain expressions are inappropriate, often through correction or punishment. Over time, these words become tightly linked to emotional response. This helps explain why swearing can feel immediate, visceral, and difficult to ignore (Stapleton et al., 2022).

Yet swearing is not only about emotion. It also provides deep social reflections. People use it to express frustration, to joke, to insult, or simply as part of everyday interaction (Pramana

& Hapsari, 2023). Its meaning shifts with surrounding contexts, speakers, and audience. In many cases, it functions as a social signal, marking group belonging, shared attitudes, or relational closeness (Washmuth et al., 2024). Precisely because these words are considered inappropriate, their use can be powerful. They break expectations, and in doing so, they draw attention and create impact.

Seen from this perspective, dr. Tirta's language choices are far from random. The findings show a consistent pattern in how swear words are deployed across different communicative situations. Rather than treating them as spontaneous outbursts, it is more productive to understand them as part of a broader communicative repertoire.

### Swearing as Emotional Framing

In its expletive function, swearing allows dr. Tirta to register reactions in real time. Expressions such as "*cuk (fuck)*" or "*jangkrik (dang)*" appear at moments of surprise, disbelief, or mild frustration. These are not carefully constructed statements; they feel immediate and unfiltered. This immediacy plays an important role. It gives the impression that the speaker is responding authentically, rather than delivering a rehearsed or overly polished message.

At the same time, these expressions are not excessive or uncontrolled. The choice of words, often drawn from relatively mild or regionally familiar domains, suggests calibration. They convey emotion without escalating into outright hostility. In this way, swearing becomes a tool for emotional framing, allowing him to highlight key moments while maintaining a tone that remains accessible and engaging.

1:03:44 – 1:03:47

"...setahun cuk wah ini repot ah"

"(it took) a year fuck wah this hassle ah"

Situational context: Filmed in a studio setting, video #ngopenk BELAJAR LEBIH DALAM SEPUTAR SEPATU DENGAN AHLINYA! BERSAMA dr. JASON CP, MBBS (#ngopenk LEARN MORE ABOUT SHOES WITH THE EXPERTS! WITH dr. JASON CP, MBBS). dr. Jason discloses a protracted, one-year temporal requirement for footwear research and development. This utterance acts as an acute extralinguistic catalyst. Sudden cognitive dissonance regarding industrial inefficiency ensues, which directly triggers dr. Tirta swear the swear words externalize profound shock. It is directed at the required manufacturing timeline.

3154 –32:00

"Platnya full length? TPU apa karbon? Karbon?! Woh jangkrik!"

"The plate is full length? TPU or carbon? Carbon?! Woah, dang!"

Situational context: Filmed in a studio setting, video #ngopenk BELAJAR LEBIH DALAM SEPUTAR SEPATU DENGAN AHLINYA! BERSAMA dr. JASON CP, MBBS (#ngopenk LEARN MORE ABOUT SHOES WITH THE EXPERTS! WITH Dr. JASON CP, MBBS). dr. Tirta and dr. Jason discusses orthopaedical shoe specifications. dr. Jason confirms the integration of a premium carbon fibred plate. This explicitly negates the presence of standard polyurethane. This revelation creates a moment of sharp cognitive dissonance for dr. Tirta, triggering a spontaneous expletive as he realizes the shoe's structural reality vastly exceeds his preliminary expectations.

The source domains selected for these outbursts provide specific sociolinguistic justifications. When dr. Tirta utters phrases like "setahun *cuk* wah ini repot ah"; "woh *dang*" ("a year, man, this is a hassle"; "oh, dang"). The use of the animal names domain (jangkrik, which literally translates to 'cricket' but is pragmatically equivalent to 'dang' or 'damn') or the Sexuality domain (*cuk*, equivalent to 'fuck') in these specific contexts is notable, they are utilized to articulate a moderate level of frustration or surprise. In the context of a public persona, expressing these raw and unfiltered emotions makes him appear more genuine and relatable (Ünalmiş et al., 2024). But these outbursts might serve a deeper purpose. In the context of a public persona, such raw and unfiltered emotion can be perceived as more genuine and personal (Ünalmiş et al., 2024).

9:20 – 09:24

"Seperempat tok (nasi seperempat piring)?! Modar!

"Just a quarter (plate of rice)?! Drop dead!"

Situational context: The video #ngopenk RECOVERY OTOT DAN SERAT ITU SALING BERHUBUNGAN?! BERSAMA dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp.KFR, AIFO-K (The video #ngopenk ARE MUSCLE AND FIBER RECOVERY RELATIONSHIP?! WITH dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp.KFR, AIFO-K) one of the dialogues addresses severe obesity management. In the podcast studio dr. Adrian dictates a restriction limiting carbohydrate intake to exactly one quarter of a plate. This drastic dietary reduction acts as the primary conversational catalyst. dr. Tirta instinctively equates the extreme caloric deficit with imminent starvation. He subsequently deploys a vernacular dysphemism for death to articulate an exaggerated physiological consequence.

In this instance, dr. Tirta deploys *modar/drop dead*, which is strictly categorized within the State and Fate Domain. Based on Andersson and Trudgill's criteria, words in this domain are taboo because casually invoking death, or wishing it upon someone, is a severe violation of social harmony and human empathy. Rather than a literal medical warning, the expletive functions as a hyperbolic outburst to indirectly criticize the crew member's lifestyle and serve as a wake-up call to fix his diet. This is deeply rooted in the aversive conditioning of taboo language (Stapleton et al., 2022) and successfully breaks through the typical clinical

barrier. dr. Tirta frames his medical critique not as an emotionally detached clinical directive, but as blunt, relatable banter that emphasizes his genuine concern.

### Reworking Authority Through “Abusive” Language

At first glance, the abusive function appears to contradict professional norms. Terms such as *cangkemmu* (*watch your fucking mouth*) or *badut* (*clown*) can be interpreted as confrontational or impolite. However, when examined in context, their role is more nuanced. These expressions rarely function as genuine attacks. Instead, they sharpen critique, introduce humor, or dramatize a point.

More importantly, they shift the interactional footing. In traditional medical communication, authority is reinforced through distance. The professional speaks from a position of control, often using formal and technical language. Dr. Tirta disrupts this pattern. By using coarse or informal expressions, he moves away from institutional authority and toward a more conversational stance.

This is where swearing begins to function as a tool for collapsing professional hierarchy. Rather than speaking *to* an audience, he speaks *with* them. Even when he criticizes, the tone suggests familiarity rather than superiority. The result is a form of authority that feels less imposed and more negotiated.

12:30 – 12:33

“...salahin cangkemmu yang makannya enggak enak gitu.”

“...blame your fucking mouth for not eating well.”

Situational context: Filmed in a studio setting, the video #ngopenk RECOVERY OTOT DAN SERAT ITU SALING BERHUBUNGAN?! BERSAMA dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp.KFR, AIFO-K (#ngopenk ARE MUSCLE AND FIBER RECOVERY INTER-RELATED?! WITH dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp. KFR, AIFO-K) content dialogue concerning the rapid onset of metabolic diseases among young night shift workers. Typhoid fever is frequently blamed. dr. Tirta rejects this misattribution. He identifies detrimental dietary intake as the actual pathogenic catalyst. The speaker immediately targets the anatomical point of consumption. He selects a harsh dysphemism for the human mouth. This lexical substitution aggressively condemns irresponsible nutritional choices.

31:05 – 31:13

“Kalau pertanyaannya susah, tidak bisa difast forward. Yang pertanyaan gampang tak fast forward, soalnya *kakean* (kebanyakan) *cangkem*.”

“If the question is difficult, it can't be fast-forwarded. The easy questions are fast-forwarded because *kakean cangkem* (too many mouths or noisy)”

Situational context: Filmed in a studio, the video #suaratirta MITOS & FAKTA KESEHATAN: EDISI SPESIAL LIVERPOOL JUARA LIGA INGGRIS! (#suaratirta HEALTH MYTHS & FACTS: SPECIAL EDITION LIVERPOOL ARE ENGLISH LEAGUE CHAMPIONS!) Audiences submit numerous simple inquiries. dr. Tirta evaluates this verbosity as a disruption. He used a dysphemism for the mouth. This insults their excessive talking. It directly justifies his decision to accelerate the broadcast pace.

The abusive function used by dr. Tirta to directly offend or insult. By using crude Javanese terms like "*cangkemmu*" (a demeaning term for "mouth") to critique ideas or someone else's utterances. The word "*cangkem/mouth*" usage extends beyond a simple body part description. It is frequently considered as impolite or even offensive. Javanese people need to be careful when using these words towards strangers or in public.

By using swear words such as "*cangkem*" (your fucking mouth), dr. Tirta intentionally steps away from polite and professional discourse. The abusive function is utilized by dr. Tirta to directly offend or reprimand. In both instances above, he employs the word *cangkem* (a demeaning Javanese term for "mouth"), which is classified under the Body Parts Domain. According to taboo language criteria, while a mouth is a neutral anatomical feature, substituting the polite register (*mulut/mouth*) with a harsh, dysphemistic equivalent violates established politeness norms. Javanese speakers recognize this term as highly impolite when directed at strangers or used in public settings.

Swear words are not just used by him for disagreeing. But he is also rejecting formal language itself in public communication. Thereby dismantling the traditional power hierarchy between doctor and patient. In a standard medical consultation setting, the language is controlled by the professional. Experts do this to reinforce their authority. dr. Tirta subverts this by adopting the language of the common people, positioning himself not as a superior authority figure but as an equal who engages in candid public communication.

0:56 – 1:04

"...melihat duel tim badut ya antara MU dan Spurs..."

"...see the clown team duel between MU and Spurs..."

Situational context: Filmed in a studio, the video #ngopenk RECOVERY OTOT DAN SERAT ITU SALING BERHUBUNGAN?! BERSAMA dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp.KFR, AIFO-K (#ngopenk ARE MUSCLE AND FIBER RECOVERY INTER-RELATED?! WITH Dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp.KFR, AIFO-K) dr. Tirta declares his allegiance to a football club. He previews an impending fixture between two rival teams. The speaker categorises both opposing clubs as clowns. This specific lexical choice operates as an abusive pragmatic function. The derogatory categorisation entertains his audience whilst establishing a tribal sporting hierarchy.

His use of words like "*badut*" (clown) to insult football teams further illustrates this point. Within this theoretical framework, *badut* is classified under the Intelligence and Ability Domain. *Badut/clown* itself is not a swear word, but nowadays people online use this term to insult someone's intelligence, this equivalent to "*goblok*" (stupid). This is not the language expected of a proper expert. Rather, it is the language of common people used in everyday conversation. This choice of vocabulary might be a calculated move to signal that he belongs to the same community as his audience. With this, dr. Tirta can show himself as sharing common people's passions and frustrations. This usage of informality serves to strengthen his connection with them. By using swear words like this, his professional persona is more approachable and less intimidating. He critiques health topics, and is not seen as out of touch with common people's condition. This can be interpreted as a strategy that enhances his relatability among a younger demographic in Indonesia.

### **Social Function and the Construction of Solidarity**

The most prominent pattern in the data lies in the social function of swearing. Expressions such as *asu/bitch*, *cuk/fuck*, and *goblok/stupid* are frequently used in ways that signal camaraderie, humor, and shared cultural grounding. Their meaning shifts from literal insult to markers of inclusion.

This dynamic becomes clearer when viewed in relation to local linguistic practices. In the East Javanese Arek context, many of these expressions have undergone a process of pragmatic softening. Words that might be considered harsh in other settings are reinterpreted as signs of closeness, particularly within peer groups and informal "tongkrongan/hangout" culture. In this sense, swearing operates as a form of social alignment.

Here, the concept of covert prestige is particularly relevant. By using non-standard and regionally marked language, dr. Tirta signals affiliation with everyday speech communities rather than institutional authority. This is not an accidental stylistic choice. It is a way of positioning himself as both expert and insider. The implicit message is one of shared ground: he understands the audience not only as patients, but as participants in the same social world.

### **Swearing as a Deliberate Identity Strategy**

Taken together, these patterns point to a broader communicative strategy. Swearing is not simply expressive, nor merely decorative. It plays a central role in how dr. Tirta constructs his public persona.

By combining medical expertise with informal, and at times taboo, language, he creates a hybrid identity. He remains recognizably a doctor, yet he avoids the distance typically associated with that role. This balance is carefully managed. Moments of technical

explanation are often followed by colloquial or even crude expressions, creating a rhythm that alternates between authority and accessibility.

In this sense, swearing becomes a mechanism for recalibrating professional identity. It allows him to retain credibility while softening its boundaries. The use of self-directed expressions, such as calling himself *goblok/stupid*, further reinforces this effect. These moments of self-deprecation reduce asymmetry, making expertise feel less hierarchical and more approachable.

Another important function lies in translation. When discussing sensitive topics, particularly those related to bodily functions, dr. Tirta often replaces formal medical terminology with vivid, everyday language. This shift does more than simplify information. It removes the intimidation often associated with clinical discourse and invites the audience into a more comfortable interpretive space. In doing so, he acts as a mediator between specialized knowledge and everyday understanding.

53:35 – 53:37

"Heel Stack itu ngukurnya di sini asu cuk, iya di sini"

"Heel Stack is measured here, bitch fuck, yes here"

Situational context: Filmed in a studio setting, the video with title #ngopenk BELAJAR LEBIH DALAM SEPUTAR SEPATU DENGAN AHLINYA! BERSAMA dr. JASON CP, MBBS (#ngopenk LEARN MORE ABOUT SHOES WITH THE EXPERTS! WITH dr. JASON CP, MBBS) contains a discussion about a manufacturer intentionally exploiting a topographical measurement protocol to subvert maximum stack height restrictions. The revelation of this anatomical deceit acts as a trigger. The speaker registers severe psychological conflict. dr. Tirta discovers the intentional corporate deception and voices his frustration using swear words *asu*.

49:41 – 49:42Z

"...pinter sih, goblok saya itu..."

"(he) is so smart, I'm stupid..."

Situational context: Filmed in a studio setting, the video with title #ngopenk RECOVERY OTOT DAN SERAT ITU SALING BERHUBUNGAN?! BERSAMA dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp.KFR, AIFO-K (#ngopenk ARE MUSCLE AND FIBER RECOVERY INTER-RELATED?! WITH dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp. KFR, AIFO-K) contains dialogue about Iliotibial Band syndrome. dr. Tirta forgets the full anatomical nomenclature while the guest promptly supplies it. The speaker subsequently issues a self-deprecating dysphemism. He labels his own cognitive lapse. This self-inflicted insult establishes immediate conversational parity and diffuses potential professional embarrassment.

To fully grasp the mechanics of this solidarity, it is essential to explicitly link these utterances to their source domains and contextualize them within the East Javanese Arek subculture. Words drawn from the Sexuality Domain (such as *cuk/fuck*) and the Animal Names Domain (such as *asu/bitch* and *jangkrek/dang*) often lose their literal, aggressive edge in this specific regional context. Instead, they function as vital markers of egalitarian camaraderie, heavily associated with local *tongkrongan* (hangout) culture.

The frequent use of Javanese slang and swear words such as “*Asu (bitch), Goblak (stupid), Cuk/Jancuk (fuck), and Jangkrek (dang)*” is an example of seeking *covert prestige*. As described by Labov (as cited in Trudgill, 2000), non-standard linguistic varieties often carry their own form of prestige within specific social groups. Unlike overt prestige, which is gained from using standard high-status language, the *covert prestige* is achieved by deliberately using non-standard forms to signal solidarity and belonging. By including these swear words in his medical advice, dr. Tirta is able to align himself with his predominantly young Indonesian audience. Many of them are using these swear words in their daily lives. It is a powerful linguistic signal that conveys “I am one of you”. This act destroys boundaries of the social status inherent in *professional communication*. This act also cultivates a strong sense of shared identity and in-group membership that formal language could never achieve. This aligns perfectly with studies showing that authentic informal language is an important strategy for building audience trust and engagement on social media (Mejia & Ngo, 2024).

By deliberately choosing a hyper-local regional dialect on a national broadcasting platform like YouTube, dr. Tirta transforms a public health broadcast into what feels like a private, exclusive conversation among close peers. This deliberate rejection of standard Indonesian medical discourse further amplifies the covert prestige he acquires from his audience.

### **Rethinking Professional Communication in Digital Contexts**

These findings contribute to a broader reconsideration of what counts as effective professional communication in the digital era. Conventional norms tend to equate professionalism with formality, restraint, and linguistic distance. However, the case of dr. Tirta suggests that alternative models are not only possible but effective.

Strategic swearing, when used with sensitivity to context and audience, can enhance relatability, foster trust, and sustain engagement. Rather than undermining professionalism, it redefines it. Communication becomes less about maintaining distance and more about building connection.

This does not mean that all forms of swearing are appropriate in all contexts. Its effectiveness depends on timing, audience expectations, and cultural norms. However, when deployed deliberately, as seen in this study, it can function as a powerful communicative resource, one that bridges the gap between expertise and everyday experience.

16:13 – 16:14

"Muka boleh baby face, kaki kayak babi brutal"

"You may have a baby face, but (kick) legs like a filthy pig."

Situational context: in a studio setting, video titled #ngopenk RECOVERY OTOT DAN SERAT ITU SALING BERHUBUNGAN?! BERSAMA dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp.KFR, AIFO-K (#ngopenk ARE MUSCLE AND FIBER RECOVERY INTER-RELATED?! WITH Dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp. KFR, AIFO-K) dr. Tirta describes the physical appearance of his guest. He initially compliments the youthful facial features of the interlocutor. He then abruptly shifts to a dysphemistic description of the guest's feet using an animalistic metaphor. This structural contrast is utilised to establish rapport through informal mockery.

05:22 – 05:25

"...ngisingnya bebeleng atos, tainya keras..."

"... his *shit* is very hard ..."

Situational context: #ngopenk RECOVERY OTOT DAN SERAT ITU SALING BERHUBUNGAN?! BERSAMA dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp.KFR, AIFO-K (#ngopenk ARE MUSCLE AND FIBER RECOVERY INTER-CONNECTED?! WITH dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp. KFR, AIFO-K.) dr. Tirta explains regarding appendicitis and dietary fibre deficiency. He deliberately translates the formal medical symptom of irregular defecation into vulgar vernacular. This lexical substitution manifests immediately prior to introducing a medical specialist. The visceral description dismantles clinical taxonomy to create an abrupt conversational hook.

16:11 – 16:14

"...silit panas tapi tainya gak keluar.."

"...ass feels hot, but shit doesn't come out."

Situational context: in a studio setting, the video titled #ngopenk RECOVERY OTOT DAN SERAT ITU SALING BERHUBUNGAN?! BERSAMA dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp.KFR, AIFO-K (#ngopenk ARE MUSCLE AND FIBER RECOVERY INTER-CONNECTED?! WITH dr. ADRIAN SETIAJI Sp. KFR, AIFO-K.). dr. Tirta delivers the exposition details of an acute defecation problem. The speaker abruptly substitutes a clinical term with a vulgar body part reference. This dysphemism actively dismantles diagnostic detachment. It operates as a discursive hook that grounds the medical explanation for general audiences.

Looking closely at the first excerpt, dr. Tirta utilizes the Animal Names Domain (babi brutal/filthy pig) not as a malicious attack, but as a mechanism for parasocial bonding. In internet culture, this form of informal mockery or "roasting" signals mutual respect and conversational parity. When viewers watch him affectionately insult his peers, they are

invited into a dynamic where traditional professional boundaries are temporarily suspended.

dr. Tirta's use of swear words also serves to normalize sensitive or complex medical topics. By employing informal and direct phrases such as "*babi brutal*" (which means filthy pig) or talking bluntly about excretory functions such as *ngising* and *silit* (*shit and asshole*), he strips away the stiff formal language that can make health discussions intimidating or boring. While these words may seem crude, their use in a humorous or casual context signals that the conversation is taking place among equals. Audiences might also perceive this as akin to a form of "roasting" or friendly banter. This directly counters the public's potential perception of doctors as unapproachable figures. This strategy is highly effective in the context of digital influencers, where establishing an emotional connection and an authentic online presence is important for success (Rajput & Gandhi, 2024). dr. Tirta constructs an identity that is perceived as more authentic and trustworthy by choosing a language that is deliberately impolite by traditional standards. This is due to flouting conventional professional norms. By doing that norm, he demonstrates a high level of virtual communicative competence, which is the ability to adapt language style to the specific platform and audience to maximize connection and influence (Ulandari et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of utilizing terms from the Bodily Functions and Excretion Domain relies heavily on the rhetorical shock value of juxtaposing "high" and "low" linguistic registers. The audience is fully aware of dr. Tirta's status as a highly qualified medical doctor. Therefore, his abrupt shift from expected high-register medical taxonomy to low-register, visceral vulgarity creates a highly effective conversational hook. In this dynamic, he acts as a linguistic translator, actively converting formal diagnostic symptoms into hyper-accessible vernacular to ensure maximum audience retention.

Language is not only a medium to convey medical information, but also a means to build empathy, trust, and comfort in professional interactions (Washmuth et al., 2024). Adapting the communication style to the patient's social and cultural background is essential. In some contexts, the local dialects' use and swear words could create a closeness and familiarity. Although the general opinion said that swearing is unprofessional in a clinical environment, as mentioned by Ulandari et al. (2025), explored its potential to have a positive impact if used in a strategic manner. This approach is called strategic swearing. This means that, in the right context, by the right patient and for the appropriate rationale, swearing can provide medical benefits.

## CONCLUSIONS

The effectiveness of dr. Tirta's communication lies in his ability to translate complex and often sensitive medical information into language that feels immediate, familiar, and approachable. By drawing on localized Javanese slang and expressions from domains such as animal names and bodily functions, he reframes topics that might otherwise feel distant

or uncomfortable. Discussions of strict diets or digestive issues, for instance, are no longer confined to clinical terminology but are rendered in language that resonates with everyday experience. This shift from formal medical register to more visceral, colloquial expression does more than capture attention. It lowers barriers to understanding and invites the audience into the conversation.

At the core of this approach is a consistent and strategic use of swear words across multiple pragmatic functions. As outlined by Andersson and Trudgill, these expressions operate as expletive, abusive, and social resources, each serving a distinct communicative role. Expletive uses convey spontaneous emotional reactions, lending his speech a sense of immediacy and sincerity. Abusive forms, while seemingly confrontational, are often employed to sharpen critique or introduce humor, subtly reworking interactional dynamics. Most significantly, the social function dominates. Through the use of Javanese slang and profanity, dr. Tirta builds rapport, signals shared identity, and cultivates a sense of closeness with his audience.

These patterns point to something more than stylistic preference. Swearing, in this context, functions as a deliberate identity strategy. It allows dr. Tirta to renegotiate what it means to speak as a medical professional in a digital environment. Rather than maintaining authority through distance and formality, he collapses that distance, positioning himself as both expert and peer. In doing so, he draws on covert prestige, aligning his language with everyday speech practices while retaining the credibility of his professional role. The result is a form of communication that feels both knowledgeable and accessible.

More broadly, this study highlights a shift in how professional communication is understood in the digital age. Audiences may respond less to rigid markers of formality and more to signals of authenticity, relatability, and cultural alignment. Dr. Tirta's communicative style suggests that informality, when used thoughtfully, does not undermine professionalism but can instead reshape it. For professionals operating in online spaces, this points to the importance of what might be called context-sensitive communicative competence: the ability to adapt language in ways that resonate with specific audiences without losing clarity or credibility.

At the same time, this study is limited in scope. It focuses on a single public figure within a particular cultural and linguistic context. Future research could extend these findings in several directions. Quantitative studies, such as audience surveys or sentiment analysis of viewer responses, could provide insight into how different groups perceive and interpret this style of communication. Comparative research across other doctor-influencers, both within Indonesia and in different cultural settings, would help determine whether this approach reflects a broader trend. Longitudinal studies could also track how language use evolves over time in relation to audience engagement and shifts in public persona. Taken together, these avenues suggest that professional identity in digital spaces is not fixed but

continuously negotiated. Language, including forms often dismissed as inappropriate, plays a central role in that process.

## STATEMENTS OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest in any part of this research or its publication.

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