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ONLINE ABUSE AND THE ATTRIBUTION OF BLAME IN CAMEROONIAN FOOTBALL DISCOURSE: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE SURROUNDING ANDRÉ ONANA

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Abstract

This study examines online abuse and the attribution of blame to André Onana in selected Cameroonian Facebook football discussions. A qualitative pragmatic analysis, supplemented by descriptive counts, draws on Culpeper's impoliteness framework and Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe's theory of blame. The purposively selected corpus comprises 269 comment records containing clear impoliteness towards Onana across three posts on ADE Divine's Facebook page. These concern a national-team dispute, support for his return to Manchester United and a reported Trabzonspor defeat. Positive impoliteness occurred in 201 comments (74.7%), negative impoliteness in 155 (57.6%), bald-on-record impoliteness in 44 (16.4%) and mock politeness in seven (2.6%); categories were nonexclusive. Attacks involved character judgments, exclusion demands, metaphorical ridicule, threats and ironic praise. Their distribution varied by context: disciplinary controversy foregrounded obedience and loyalty, while sporting failure prompted ridicule of professional competence. Blame was constructed through attributed motives, allegations of chosen misconduct and appeals to duties or alternative actions. However, 108 comments contained performance evaluation without an additional blame-related code, demonstrating that abuse did not necessarily entail developed moral blame. The study shows how hostile football commentary challenges professional legitimacy and belonging, sometimes presenting sporting difficulties as deserved consequences of alleged misconduct. Its conclusions concern the selected impolite corpus rather than the prevalence of hostility among Cameroonian supporters.

Keywords:

Online abuse; impoliteness strategies; blame attribution; Cameroonian football discourse; André Onana.

Résumé

Cette étude examine les abus verbaux en ligne et l'attribution de la responsabilité à André Onana dans certaines discussions consacrées au football camerounais sur Facebook. S'appuyant sur une analyse pragmatique qualitative, complétée par des données

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quantitatives descriptives, l'étude mobilise le cadre théorique de l'impolitesse linguistique de Culpeper ainsi que la théorie de l'attribution du blâme de Malle, Guglielmo et Monroe. Le corpus, constitué par échantillonnage raisonné, comprend 269 commentaires présentant des manifestations explicites d'impolitesse à l'égard d'André Onana, recueillis sous trois publications de la page Facebook d'ADE Divine. Ces publications portent respectivement sur un différend au sein de l'équipe nationale, des manifestations de soutien à son retour à Manchester United et une défaite rapportée de Trabzonspor. Les résultats révèlent que l'impolitesse positive apparaît dans 201 commentaires (74,7 %), l'impolitesse négative dans 155 commentaires (57,6 %), l'impolitesse directe et explicite (bald-on-record impoliteness) dans 44 commentaires (16,4 %) et la fausse politesse (mock politeness) dans sept commentaires (2,6 %). Ces catégories ne sont pas mutuellement exclusives. Les attaques se caractérisent notamment par des jugements dévalorisants sur la personnalité du joueur, des appels à son exclusion, des moqueries métaphoriques, des menaces et des éloges ironiques. Leur répartition varie selon le contexte discursif : les controverses disciplinaires mettent principalement en avant les exigences d'obéissance et de loyauté, tandis que les contre-performances sportives suscitent davantage de moqueries visant les compétences professionnelles du joueur. L'attribution du blâme se construit à travers l'imputation d'intentions, les accusations de comportements répréhensibles délibérés et les références aux obligations du joueur ou aux autres possibilités d'action qui s'offraient à lui. Toutefois, 108 commentaires comportaient des évaluations de performances sans autre catégorie de codage liée à l'attribution du blâme, ce qui démontre que les propos injurieux ne s'accompagnent pas nécessairement d'une condamnation morale explicitement élaborée. L'étude met en évidence la manière dont les discours hostiles des supporters de football remettent en question la légitimité professionnelle et l'appartenance du joueur, en présentant parfois ses difficultés sportives comme des conséquences méritées de comportements répréhensibles présumés. Les conclusions portent exclusivement sur le corpus sélectionné de commentaires impolis et ne sauraient être généralisées à la prévalence des comportements hostiles parmi l'ensemble des supporters camerounais.

Mots-clés : *abus verbaux en ligne ; stratégies d'impolitesse ; attribution du blâme ; discours footballistique camerounais ; André Onana.*

Introduction

Social media has made football evaluation an immediate and public activity. Supporters use posts and comment threads to assess performances, contest selection decisions and debate players' conduct. These exchanges also provide spaces in which participants construct identities, claim collective loyalties and negotiate belonging (Herring, 2004; Page et al., 2014). Criticism can consequently extend beyond a sporting decision into ridicule, personal degradation or demands that a player be excluded.

In Cameroon, football is closely connected to national representation and public expectations. Vidacs (2011) shows how football discussion contributes to national consciousness, providing a context in which judgments about individual players can acquire wider significance. André Onana's visibility in national-team and club football makes discourse surrounding him a useful case for examining how evaluations of competence intersect with expectations concerning loyalty, humility and professional

conduct. Here, "Cameroonian" identifies the orientation and setting of the discussions; it does not establish the nationality or location of individual contributors.

The problem addressed is how abuse and blame are constructed together, and where they diverge, in these discussions. An inventory of offensive vocabulary cannot adequately explain indirect ridicule, ironic praise or demands for exclusion. Equally, treating all negative comments as abuse obscures differences between sporting criticism, personal degradation and responsibility attribution. The article therefore identifies the forms of abuse directed at Onana and examines the pragmatic means through which commenters hold him accountable for perceived failures or misconduct.

The analysis combines qualitative pragmatic discourse analysis with theory-guided content analysis and descriptive counts. Its corpus comprises 269 comment records selected for clear impoliteness towards Onana from text captures of three posts on ADE Divine's Facebook page, a sports discussion space oriented towards Cameroonian football. The posts are dated 29 November 2022, 27 February 2026 and 27 August 2026. They concern Onana's official statement following a national-team dispute, Geremi Njitap's support for his return to Manchester United, and reactions to a reported Trabzonspor defeat against Ferencvaros, respectively. The corresponding subsets contain 114, 74 and 81 comment records.

Comments were retained where recoverable wording and context supported an identifiable attack on Onana. Supportive responses, ordinary sporting criticism, unrelated material and uncertain targets were excluded from this subset. Original wording and recoverable emojis were preserved, and extracts are identified by dataset codes. Each comment could receive several impoliteness or blame-related codes where its wording supported them. Counts therefore describe overlapping categories within the selected corpus, not the prevalence of abuse in the complete threads. The analysis concerns commenters' representations of events and responsibility; allegations about misconduct, transfers and match outcomes are not independently established facts.

Focusing on a named player allows close attention to the relationship between a public controversy and the expressions used to interpret it. The same person appears as a national representative, a prospective club participant and a goalkeeper evaluated after a reported defeat. These roles create different expectations without making them analytically interchangeable. A complaint about a player's conduct towards a coach invokes a different standard from a judgment about stopping shots. Comparing the discussions therefore helps identify when evaluation stays within a sporting role and when it expands into judgments of personality or deservingness.

The article's contribution lies in bringing these distinctions into a single analysis. It considers both the form of the attack and the explanation accompanying it. This makes it possible to ask what an expression does to the player's standing while also examining whether the speaker identifies a cause, an obligation or an alternative action. The relationship matters because an insult can appear forceful even when its account of responsibility is weak, whereas a detailed attribution of responsibility need not involve personal degradation. The selected comments illuminate the former relationship particularly clearly because they were screened for impoliteness.

Background

Research on digital discourse situates online interaction within the social practices through which participants present themselves and evaluate others (Herring, 2004; Page et al., 2014). Football discussions are particularly relevant because evaluations of public figures intersect with attachments to clubs, teams and national communities. In the Cameroonian context, Vidacs (2011) connects football discussion with national consciousness, while Tabe and Dieudonné (2025) demonstrate the relevance of impoliteness analysis to Cameroonian digital communication through their work on diaspora activism. These studies provide contextual foundations, although neither directly explains the relationship between player-directed abuse and blame examined here.

Studies of football-related hostility show how negative evaluation can challenge professional identity and belonging. Akinmusuyi's (2023) analysis of comments targeting Harry Maguire identifies positive impoliteness as a prominent means of attacking competence and acceptance within a team. Aljabali and Abusalim (2025), examining football-related Facebook comments, foreground negative impoliteness and the importance of cultural and interactional context. These differences caution against assuming that a single strategy characterises football hostility across settings. The present article examines variation between discussions on the same page as well as patterns across the corpus.

Fan loyalty also provides grounds for public rejection. Reliubun and Dakka (2025) connect impoliteness in responses to Tottenham Hotspur with moral outrage and supporters' attachment to the club. Cleland (2014), in research specifically concerning racist discourse on English football message boards, shows how online exchanges contest identity and belonging. That study offers a comparison for exclusionary practices, without making every attack on belonging equivalent to racial abuse. MacPherson and Kerr (2020) likewise show how public shaming of athletes extends beyond assessment of sporting performance. Their findings about gendered expectations cannot be transferred directly to a corpus focused on one male player, but their account helps locate demands for punishment within broader practices of public accountability.

The linguistic analysis draws on Culpeper's (1996, 2010, 2011) account of impoliteness as contextually interpreted behaviour that attacks face and social expectations. Five superstrategies organise the coding: bald-on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withholding politeness. Positive impoliteness concerns attacks on approval, social value and belonging; negative impoliteness includes ridicule, condescension and coercive interference. Bald-on-record attacks are expressed directly, while mock politeness uses apparently polite or positive wording whose insincerity supports an offensive interpretation. Withholding politeness requires evidence of an unmet expectation, rather than merely an absence of courteous language.

These categories require attention to what expressions accomplish in their settings. Disagreement, humour and criticism do not automatically constitute abuse. Conversely, an attack need not contain a swear word: metaphors, exaggerated predictions and exclusion demands can undermine a player's standing. Culpeper's (2005) work on

impoliteness and entertainment is relevant because amusement may accompany face damage. A humorous formulation can invite public ridicule without necessarily mitigating the attack.

Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe's (2014) theory of blame supplies the complementary distinction between evaluating an outcome negatively and holding an agent accountable. Their Path Model foregrounds causal involvement and intentionality, followed by consideration of reasons for intentional conduct or obligations and capacity to prevent an unintended outcome. Applied here, these concepts concern how commenters represent responsibility, not whether Onana actually caused an outcome or possessed an alleged motive. In particular, an allegation of deliberate disrespect does not establish that a commenter also attributes an intention to lose a match.

The blame-related codes distinguish attributed motives or reasons, allegedly chosen misconduct, obligations or preventive alternatives, incomplete fault attribution, performance evaluation and requests for explanatory information. These are operational adaptations for the corpus rather than a taxonomy named by Malle and colleagues. Read alongside the impoliteness codes, they show whether an insulting expression supplies grounds for accountability or simply devalues the player. A derogatory nickname can attack competence without identifying a moral violation, while an accusation accompanied by an insult can perform both functions.

Language and visual cues also require contextual interpretation. Kouega's (2007) account of Cameroon's multilingual ecology supports attention to English, French and Cameroon Pidgin expressions rather than classification through English vocabulary alone. Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) explain how visual resources contribute to meaning, and Kirk et al. (2022) demonstrate the analytical importance of emojis in abusive communication. The present material, however, consists of text captures. Recoverable emojis are considered with their accompanying wording; missing images and reply relationships are not reconstructed, and the article does not claim a systematic analysis of unavailable visual material.

The term face is useful here because the comments evaluate publicly recognised aspects of a person's standing. Professional competence, credibility and acceptance within a team are not private attributes alone; they are also matters that speakers affirm or contest through discourse. In Culpeper's framework, an attack can undermine a target's claim to approval even when it is addressed to someone else. A commenter responding to a blogger may therefore attack Onana without speaking directly to him. Distinguishing the person addressed from the person targeted prevents the analysis from overlooking attacks expressed through third-person descriptions.

Strategy categories describe overlapping functions rather than mutually exclusive kinds of comment. A direct insult may damage social approval, while a demand for exclusion may both reject belonging and seek to restrict participation. Coding more than one strategy is consequently defensible when distinct wording supports each interpretation. This does not mean that every hostile statement should receive every available label. The relevant question remains which expression performs which function. The explanatory notes accompanying classification are particularly important where ridicule, directness

and rejection occur together, because a numerical count alone cannot reveal the basis of the decision.

The relationship between responsibility and moral judgment also requires care. A goalkeeper's participation in a match makes him available for evaluation but does not, by itself, establish responsibility for every conceded goal. Likewise, describing an outcome as undesirable does not show why the individual should be blamed. Malle et al. (2014) provide a way to examine the additional judgments speakers supply: whether conduct is represented as chosen, what reason is attributed to it, and which duties or preventive capacities are invoked. The analysis tracks these expressed judgments while leaving the truth of the underlying allegations unresolved.

Context is especially important when a familiar expression acquires a locally derogatory use. A basket ordinarily names an object; applied to a goalkeeper, it can imply an inability to prevent goals. The force arises from the relationship between the comparison and the professional activity under discussion. Similarly, praise can function as an attack when the praised achievement is actually an undesirable outcome. These examples illustrate why dictionary meaning or positive wording cannot determine classification. The analytical emphasis is on the contribution an expression makes within the available discussion, with uncertainty retained where that contribution cannot be established.

The descriptive and interpretive components consequently answer different questions. Frequencies indicate the distribution of coded strategies within the retained material, whereas analysis of extracts explains how a particular wording supports a classification. Neither component substitutes for the other. A frequent category can contain linguistically different attacks, and a less frequent strategy can illustrate an important distinction, as mock politeness does here. Keeping these functions separate avoids treating numerical prominence as proof of greater offensive force or interpreting an illustrative quotation as representative of every comment assigned the same code.

The data

The three discussions make different aspects of Onana's standing available for evaluation. Post 1 centres on the national-team dispute and his public statement; Post 2 concerns his suitability for a return to Manchester United; Post 3 concerns the reported Trabzonspor defeat. The extracts below preserve the source wording and dataset identifiers. The tables report comment records rather than unique individuals, and individual comments can contribute to more than one category.

Distribution of impoliteness

Table 1 Distribution of impoliteness strategies

Strategy	Post 1 n = 114	Post 2 n = 74	Post 3 n = 81	Total n = 269
Positive impoliteness	91 (79.8%)	62 (83.8%)	48 (59.3%)	201 (74.7%)
Negative impoliteness	47 (41.2%)	45 (60.8%)	63 (77.8%)	155 (57.6%)

Strategy	Post 1 n = 114	Post 2 n = 74	Post 3 n = 81	Total n = 269
Bald-on-record impoliteness	26 (22.8%)	9 (12.2%)	9 (11.1%)	44 (16.4%)
Mock politeness	2 (1.8%)	1 (1.4%)	4 (4.9%)	7 (2.6%)
Withholding politeness	0	0	0	0

Note: Categories are nonexclusive. Percentages use each column's selected comment total as the denominator and do not sum to 100%.

Positive impoliteness is the most frequent strategy overall, followed by negative impoliteness. No secure instance of withholding politeness was established. Positive impoliteness predominates in Posts 1 and 2, while negative impoliteness predominates in Post 3. These descriptive differences concern the selected subsets and do not establish statistical significance or changes in individual commenters' behaviour.

The percentages should also be read at the level of comments rather than individual expressions. A comment containing several insults still contributes only once to a particular strategy's frequency, while one containing different strategies contributes to several categories. Thus, the predominance of positive impoliteness means that attacks on approval or belonging were identified in the largest share of selected records. It does not measure the total number of insulting words, the intensity of an attack or the number of people sharing a position. These distinctions preserve the descriptive value of the table without assigning it explanatory powers the corpus cannot support.

Character attacks and exclusion

In Post 1, comments frequently evaluate Onana through allegations of pride, arrogance, dishonesty or indiscipline. Sporting ability is made conditional on acceptable character:

> *"This is full of pride… skills without character is zero my brother."*
> *— P1–IMP001*

The comment recognises the possibility of skill while denying its value without the character expected by the speaker. It moves from evaluating conduct to devaluing the person. A related challenge to belonging appears in the demand:

> *"Never u come back again… No room for disrespect, ur are not bigger than the team and country."*
> *— P1–IMP011*

The imperative combines rejection with an appeal to team and country. Continued participation is presented as conditional on respect for collective authority. Similar exclusion occurs in the club discussion:

> *"We the fans don't want him at old Trafford again, He is not Manchester united quality."*
> *— P2–AO113*

"We the fans" presents an individual judgment as a collective position, while "not Manchester united quality" denies professional suitability. In Post 3, the proposed exclusion extends to national identity:

> *"This guy should be denied being a cameroonian. The disgrace is too much."*
> *— P3–TR118*

Perceived sporting failure becomes grounds for symbolic removal from the national community. Across these examples, commenters claim authority to regulate belonging; their wording does not establish actual disciplinary power or agreement among supporters.

The character judgment in the first extract is organised around a conditional valuation of skill. "Skills without character" allows sporting ability to be acknowledged and simultaneously discounted. The statement thus avoids having to demonstrate technical incompetence: even an able player can be rejected if the speaker regards his character as unacceptable. The familiar address "my brother" does not remove that devaluation. Within this utterance, apparent interpersonal closeness accompanies a judgment that the player's ability amounts to nothing. Its function must therefore be assessed through the whole expression rather than through the address term in isolation.

The exclusion demand in Post 1 links a prohibition on returning with a hierarchy of value. Being "not bigger than the team and country" constructs the collective as the standard against which personal conduct is measured. The wording presupposes that the player has exceeded an acceptable position and makes exclusion appear to restore the proper relationship. In Post 2, the corresponding hierarchy is professional: the club's asserted quality becomes the threshold the player allegedly fails to meet. Both comments reject membership, but they justify rejection through different standards, demonstrating how a similar impoliteness function can serve distinct evaluations.

The national exclusion in Post 3 makes a further shift in scale. Team selection concerns participation in a sporting institution; denial of recognition as Cameroonian concerns symbolic membership of a national community. The accompanying reference to disgrace helps connect the two, treating an individual's perceived failure as damage to a wider collective. This does not demonstrate a legal proposal or an actionable deprivation of citizenship. Its relevance is pragmatic: the commenter expresses the severity of rejection by extending it beyond performance and professional selection. That extension makes national identity a resource for attacking the player's legitimacy.

Ridicule and coercive demands

Ridicule is especially prominent in Post 3. The repeated basket metaphor reduces goalkeeping to a supposed inability to stop goals:

> *"Onana the goal basket 🧺"*
> *— P3–TR019*

> *"Onana and basket, difference no dey."*
> *— P3–TR039*

The Cameroon Pidgin formulation intensifies the comparison by denying any difference between player and basket. The basket emoji reinforces the accompanying label in the first extract. An exaggerated prediction develops the same assessment:

> *"If you have Onana as goal keeper your attack must be able to score from five goals upward before you can start thinking of a draw."*
> *— P3–TR003*

The hypothetical scoring requirement represents conceding goals as an enduring expectation whenever Onana plays, extending the attack beyond a particular incident. In Post 2, wordplay similarly belittles his professional aspirations:

> *"Fighters go to the UFC and not Manchester United. If has to fight, that's where he should go."*
> *— P2–AO136*

The comment turns the figurative struggle for a position into physical combat, redirecting the player towards another sport and dismissing the legitimacy of his proposed return. Other comments use coercion rather than comic comparison:

> *"Onana should never be seen anywhere around Carrington or Old Trafford or else I will make sure he gets arrested for trespass."*
> *— P2–AO137*

The conditional threat claims control over access to club premises. It is a linguistic attempt to constrain participation, although the corpus does not establish whether the commenter could or intended to carry it out.

The basket comparison is effective as ridicule because it replaces a complex sporting performance with a simple object image. Goalkeeping involves decisions and actions that vary across situations, but the metaphor presents a general identity defined by failure. The Pidgin expression "difference no dey" makes the equivalence explicit, leaving no stated space for successful performances or situational explanation. The analysis does not infer that readers accepted this representation. It identifies how the wording invites them to view the player through a reductive comparison rather than through an account of a particular goal.

The hypothetical requirement to score at least five goals similarly converts evaluation into prediction. Its conditional opening makes Onana's presence the circumstance from which the exaggerated burden on the attack follows. The phrase about only then considering a draw compounds the ridicule by representing even a high scoring performance as insufficient for victory. No particular defensive action is examined. Instead, the imagined scenario presents repeated concession as predictable. This supports an interpretation of belittlement while leaving open whether the commenter also intends a serious sporting assessment alongside the humorous exaggeration.

The reference to UFC works through a different linguistic relationship. Fighting for a position is ordinarily intelligible as competition for selection, but the commenter substitutes the literal sense of physical combat. The joke depends on recognising the intended figurative meaning and then deliberately redirecting it. In contrast, the threat concerning Carrington and Old Trafford supplies an explicit consequence for returning.

Its conditional structure presents exclusion as something the speaker could enforce. The two comments therefore undermine a proposed return through different resources: one dismisses the aspiration through wordplay, while the other claims authority to prevent its realisation.

Direct insults and mock politeness

Direct attacks occur most proportionately in Post 1, where explicit insults accompany assertions of institutional hierarchy:

> *"You are stupid Onana… You are just a player so put in your best as a player not as a coach."*
> *— P1–IMP067*

The insult attacks intelligence, and the subsequent distinction between player and coach supplies the speaker's justification. "Just a player" restricts the legitimacy of Onana's professional judgment. Mock politeness instead depends on a reversal of apparently positive language:

> *"Mr. Helper, well done."*
> *— P1–IMP187*

In the surrounding criticism of discipline, the praise mocks Onana's claim to have helped his country. A comparable reversal occurs in Post 3:

> *"The treble figure keeper Onana don start again… he never disappoints"*
> *— P3–TR012*

In the context of conceded goals, "he never disappoints" presents failure as the expectation reliably fulfilled. Only seven comments were coded as mock politeness. Many other humorous attacks were classified as ridicule because they lacked an identifiable insincere politeness formula.

The direct insult concerning intelligence and the command concerning professional role reinforce each other. The insult establishes a degrading assessment, while the reminder that Onana is a player supplies a purported reason for dismissing his judgment. The expression does not simply defend a coach's decision; it marks the player's participation in that disagreement as inappropriate. The analytical distinction between attack and justification remains useful even within the same comment. It shows how institutional hierarchy can be recruited to make a personal insult appear warranted without independently demonstrating that the disputed conduct occurred as described.

Mock politeness requires a different inferential step. The surface wording of "well done" ordinarily approves an action, but the surrounding criticism reverses that evaluation. Similarly, "he never disappoints" depends on a context in which the anticipated outcome is failure. The apparent compliment becomes derogatory because reliability is attributed to an undesirable pattern. These readings explain the need for caution in coding isolated positive expressions. Without the relevant context, the wording would not establish insincerity. They also explain why humorous nicknames and laughter were not automatically counted as mock politeness: amusement does not itself supply a reversed politeness formula.

The grounds of blame

Table 2 Distribution of blame-related operational codes

Operational code	Post 1	Post 2	Post 3	Total
Attributed motives or reasons	43	7	6	56
Allegedly chosen misconduct	35	5	10	50
Obligations or preventive alternatives	14	2	0	16
Incomplete fault attribution	26	10	14	50
Outcome or performance evaluation	5	52	52	109
Requests for explanatory information	5	0	0	5

Note: Codes are nonexclusive adaptations for this corpus, not categories directly named by Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe (2014).

Attributed motives or reasons occur in 56 comments, including 43 in Post 1. Pride is presented as an explanation for failing to apologise:

> *"Massa go rest since your pride can't allow you to apologize for your mistake"*
> *— P1–IMP064*

The causal connective "since" links an alleged disposition to an omission, while "your mistake" treats wrongdoing as established. The statement performs an attack and supplies a purported explanation of conduct. Elsewhere, a character explanation connects difficulties across institutions:

> *"He's too outspoken and sows seeds of rebellion everywhere. Its that attitude that haunting him in Manchester United and the national team."*
> *— P2–AO006*

The metaphor of sowing rebellion treats a continuing disposition as the cause of both national-team and club problems, without demonstrating the connection. Fifty comments refer to allegedly chosen misconduct, including disrespect or refusal to follow instructions. Such judgments also explain later sporting outcomes:

> *"That's the outcome when you don't respect your elders. And being unapologetic 🤣😂"*
> *— P3–TR111*

"That's the outcome" constructs a consequence of alleged disrespect and failure to apologise. It does not specify a technical connection to goalkeeping or establish an intention to produce defeat. Sixteen comments, predominantly in Post 1, foreground duties or alternatives:

> *"You shouldn't have left if you really put your country first.,the problem could be settled after the competition"*
> *— P1–IMP025*

The proposed alternative is to remain with the team and postpone the dispute. The conditional appeal to putting the country first makes national commitment the standard against which departure is judged. This supplies an obligation and a claimed alternative, although the comment leaves the intentionality of the disputed outcome unspecified.

Performance evaluation appears in 109 comments, including 52 in each of Posts 2 and 3. In 108 comments it is the only blame-related code; the remaining instance combines it with incomplete fault attribution. Labels such as “basket” and “worst goalkeeper” may be insulting without explaining a moral violation, intention or neglected duty. The corpus thus contains attacks accompanied by accountability claims and attacks that principally devalue competence.

The pride attribution shows how grammatical packaging can make the grounds of blame appear already settled. “Your mistake” identifies wrongdoing through a possessive expression rather than opening it for debate, while “since” introduces pride as the explanation for failing to apologise. The comment therefore combines an assumed transgression, an attributed motive and an implied obligation to repair it. These elements are observable in the wording, but they remain representations supplied by the commenter. The analysis can identify their relationship without endorsing either the alleged mistake or the psychological explanation offered for it.

The rebellion metaphor makes a broader claim about continuity of character. “Everywhere” extends the alleged tendency beyond one episode, and the references to club and national team place separate difficulties under the same explanation. The metaphor of sowing also implies that later problems grow from earlier conduct. This structure is significant because it makes sporting outcomes intelligible as consequences of a persistent personal defect. It need not include an explicit accusation concerning a particular conceded goal. The blame instead operates through a general narrative in which the player’s alleged disposition explains why professional difficulties follow him.

The statement about disrespecting elders draws a connection between conduct and outcome without specifying how the connection works. Its causal presentation can be read as an assertion that later difficulty follows from earlier disrespect, while the reference to being unapologetic adds an alleged failure of repair. The laughter emojis occur alongside this negative assessment and contribute to the presentation of the outcome as a source of amusement. They do not prove the commenter’s emotional state or establish how readers responded. The defensible inference concerns the configuration of wording and symbols available in the extract.

The alternative proposed in Post 1 gives blame a more specific normative structure. Remaining with the team is presented as an available course, and settling the dispute later is offered as the preferred timing. The claim implies both an obligation to prioritise national participation and a capacity to postpone disagreement. Yet the comment does not establish the practical feasibility of that alternative or the full circumstances of departure. Its importance lies in the reasoning displayed: responsibility is constructed by asserting that the player could and should have chosen differently, rather than solely by calling him incompetent.

The distinction between incomplete fault attribution and performance evaluation prevents the analysis from filling gaps on the speaker's behalf. A statement may announce that someone is at fault but leave the relevant duty or causal connection unspecified. Another may simply represent goalkeeping as poor. Neither should automatically be expanded into a complete account of intentional wrongdoing. The operational categories preserve these differences while allowing overlap where wording warrants it. As a result, the numerical distribution complements the extracts: it indicates how often particular forms of reasoning were identified without suggesting that every comment contains an equally developed blame judgment.

The operational category of requests for explanatory information is also worth distinguishing from an accusation. Asking for an explanation may indicate that responsibility remains under consideration rather than fully settled. Its presence in the selected corpus does not make every question abusive: inclusion depends on the attack identified elsewhere in the comment or on a contextually supported hostile formulation. This again reflects the difference between the comment as a reporting unit and the particular expression as a coding unit. A single record can contain uncertainty about events alongside an unequivocally degrading description of the player.

Discussion

Context and variation in impoliteness

Hostility in these discussions adapts to the issue under consideration. The national-team dispute makes obedience, humility and apology salient; the proposed Manchester United return prompts rejection of professional suitability; the reported defeat supplies material for exaggerated comparisons and ridicule. Positive impoliteness consequently predominates in the first two subsets, while negative impoliteness predominates in the third. Available grounds for criticism appear to shape linguistic strategy. The differences do not show that the same commenters changed their attitudes over time.

The overall prominence of positive impoliteness accords with Akinmusuyi's (2023) analysis of comments targeting Harry Maguire, particularly the movement from isolated mistakes to attacks on competence and team membership. The prominence of negative impoliteness in Post 3 also offers a contextual comparison with Aljabali and Abusalim (2025). Read together, these patterns support an account sensitive to the event and target rather than a uniform preference attributed to Facebook users. Differences in samples and coding prevent direct conclusions about comparative severity or national tendencies.

The three contexts also reveal different relationships between competence and character. In the disciplinary discussion, alleged character failings can override acknowledgment of skill. In the club discussion, competence is tied to whether the player meets an institution's asserted standards. In the defeat discussion, competence is condensed into metaphors of recurrent failure, but some comments additionally connect the result to earlier misconduct. The relationship is therefore not a simple progression from sporting criticism to moral blame. Different grounds coexist, and individual expressions may combine them without supplying an explicit explanation of how one supports another.

Fan loyalty national identity and belonging

Exclusion demands give the hostility a social function beyond dissatisfaction. Expressions such as "we the fans" authorise individual speakers through a claimed collective identity, while references to team and country make belonging conditional on approved behaviour. This resembles the connection between impoliteness and fan loyalty described by Reliubun and Dakka (2025), although loyalty supports a different position here: some Onana commenters defend institutional authority and condemn alleged defiance. Attachment to a team can therefore justify competing positions about which actor deserves support.

The demand to deny Onana recognition as Cameroonian extends this regulation of membership into national identity. Vidacs's (2011) account of football and national consciousness helps explain why evaluations of a goalkeeper can acquire this symbolic reach. Cleland's (2014) work provides a comparison for the construction of insiders and outsiders in football discussions. The relevant connection is the contest over belonging, without assuming that every exclusionary comment here constitutes racial abuse. Nor does the selected hostile subset establish that other participants accepted such demands or failed to challenge them.

Claims to collective authority deserve particular attention because they alter the apparent footing of an evaluation. "We the fans" makes the speaker's rejection sound like a constituency's position, while references to country invoke an even broader community. These expressions matter even when their representativeness cannot be verified. They supply a rhetorical basis for presenting exclusion as the defence of a shared interest rather than a personal preference. The analysis consequently distinguishes the existence of the collective claim from the existence of collective agreement. This distinction is necessary for interpreting public commentary without converting prominent statements into evidence of consensus.

Humour ridicule and contextual meaning

Humour contributes to professional devaluation through metaphors, exaggerated predictions and the literalisation of figurative expressions. In Culpeper's (2005) terms, entertainment and face damage can coexist. Calling a goalkeeper a basket condenses an assessment of performance into a repeatable personal label; representing an aspiration as fantasy dismisses its legitimacy without a detailed sporting argument. Laughter emojis may reinforce these readings where the wording supports them, but their presence alone does not establish hostility. The low frequency of mock politeness therefore understates the wider role of humorous ridicule.

The article's findings also clarify what contextual analysis adds to recognising offensive vocabulary. Several extracts derive their force from relations between otherwise ordinary words: skill and character, player and coach, goalkeeper and basket, praise and expected failure. The attack emerges through the way these elements are connected to a sporting controversy. A vocabulary-only approach would capture the direct insult more easily than the literalisation of fighting for a position or the reversal in "he never disappoints". Pragmatic analysis explains those relations while keeping interpretation tied to recoverable evidence, rather than treating every joke or figurative expression as abusive.

Public shaming and disciplinary authority

Some commenters speak as though they have the authority to discipline Onana, demanding his exclusion, arrest or imprisonment for what they consider wrongdoing. These demands resemble the public shaming examined by MacPherson and Kerr (2020). In this study, commenters often justify punishment by claiming that Onana lacks humility, disobeys authority or shows insufficient loyalty. These views belong to the individual commenters and do not establish that Cameroonian society shares the same expectations. A contradiction also emerges: some commenters demand respect from Onana while insulting or threatening him. They therefore do not consistently apply the standard of respectful behaviour that they expect him to follow.

The distinction between severity and frequency is relevant to coercive expressions. The relatively small number of direct attacks or mock politeness instances does not make them socially insignificant, just as the prominence of positive impoliteness does not establish that it caused the greatest harm. The corpus supports statements about forms and distributions, together with interpretations of their face-attacking functions. It does not supply a measure of the target's experience. Keeping that distinction visible prevents descriptive counts from becoming an unsupported ranking of consequences and allows qualitatively different expressions to receive attention on the basis of what their wording accomplishes.

Moral blame performance evaluation and character

The combined theoretical approach clarifies how degradation and accountability intersect. Malle et al.'s (2014) distinction between negative evaluation and blame explains why a competence insult can remain morally underdeveloped. The 108 comments coded only for performance evaluation do not provide the same account of culpability as statements identifying a motive, duty or available alternative. Even where reasons are offered, alleged intentional misconduct must be distinguished from an intention to cause an adverse sporting outcome. The comments often leave parts of the explanatory pathway unspecified.

Character allegations nevertheless allow moral judgments to travel between controversies. Pride or rebellion can be invoked to explain club difficulties, and disrespect can be presented as the reason a later defeat is deserved. The resulting interpretation turns sporting misfortune into moral repayment without demonstrating a causal mechanism. This is a central contribution of examining impoliteness and blame together: similar face attacks can accompany different degrees of explanation, while the same alleged trait can support judgments across otherwise distinct events.

Taken together, these qualifications strengthen the central interpretation rather than removing its substance. The selected comments contain identifiable ways of denying competence, restricting belonging and presenting difficulties as deserved. Their significance lies in how sporting evaluation becomes attached to wider judgments of personal legitimacy. The integrated framework makes those attachments explicit while distinguishing what speakers assert from what the analysis can establish. This is the basis for a contextual account of online abuse that remains attentive to linguistic detail, the grounds of accountability and the limits imposed by the available discussion records. These distinctions also provide a clear basis for comparing future studies across settings.

Interpretive limits and future research

These interpretations are bounded by the corpus. The text captures do not provide complete threads, missing images or all reply relationships. Selection for clear impoliteness prevents estimating the proportion of hostility in the broader discussions. The single analytical process, assisted by generative AI in extraction, organisation and preliminary classification, was not independently assessed by a second coder. The article therefore offers contextual interpretations of selected expressions, not evidence of private intentions, audience enjoyment, Onana's reception or psychological effects.

The findings should also be interpreted in relation to the purposive selection of posts. Comparing three controversies on one page holds part of the discussion setting relatively constant, but the available records do not establish that participants, audiences or moderation practices were identical. Differences in strategy frequency cannot therefore be attributed to the topic alone as a demonstrated causal effect. Topic provides a plausible interpretive connection because the language explicitly invokes conduct, club standards or conceded goals. The stronger claim that changing the topic produces a particular strategy would require a different research design.

A related boundary concerns the interpretation of repetition. Recurring references to baskets or pride show that these resources are available across the selected records. They do not establish coordination between commenters, independent agreement among distinct individuals or a deliberate campaign. The material permits analysis of recurring formulations and explanatory themes, while leaving the organisation of participation unresolved. This matters because describing a pattern of discourse should not silently become a claim about the intentions or relationships of its producers. The contribution remains the identification of patterned meanings within the recoverable material.

For further investigation, the distinction between attacks and their interactional reception is especially consequential. Complete threads could show whether other participants repeat a derogatory label, dispute its application, defend the player or redirect criticism towards institutions. They could also clarify whether an apparently isolated statement answers an earlier provocation or quotation. These possibilities cannot be reconstructed from missing material. They identify questions that follow from the present analysis rather than unobserved findings. Extending the corpus in this way would help explain how an attack becomes accepted, contested or transformed within a discussion, beyond identifying its wording in a single comment.

Conclusion

The selected Facebook discussions construct abuse through character attacks, exclusion demands, ridicule, direct insults, coercion and occasional mock politeness. Their distribution varies with the controversy: disputes over professional conduct foreground obedience and loyalty, while sporting failure invites belittling assessments of competence. Across these settings, commenters use hostility to claim authority over a player's legitimacy and belonging.

Blame accompanies these attacks unevenly. Some comments attribute motives or chosen misconduct, invoke duties or propose actions that allegedly could have prevented difficulties. Others offer incomplete fault attributions or degrade performance without

developing a moral judgment. The analysis establishes the value of distinguishing the linguistic attack from the explanation of accountability. It also shows how allegations concerning character can transform later sporting difficulties into supposedly deserved consequences.

The findings apply to the selected impolite corpus rather than Cameroonian football supporters as a whole. Research using complete threads, multiple platforms and independent coding could examine how such attacks are challenged, supported or reinterpreted in interaction. The present study contributes a situated account of how football evaluation becomes personal degradation and how responsibility is asserted, elaborated or left unexplained in that process.

The practical value of this distinction is analytical precision. Assessing a sporting decision, rejecting a person's social worth and alleging a breach of duty are different communicative acts even when they occur together. Attending to their combination makes it possible to describe hostility without treating every negative opinion as equivalent or assuming that an insult supplies evidence for the accusation attached to it. This approach preserves the complexity of football disagreement while identifying how selected expressions turn that disagreement into personal rejection.

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