PRAGMATICS STRATEGIES IN MEMES: A STUDY OF HUMOR AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN ONLINE CULTURE

[1]Rana May Zuhra, [2]Puspita Maharani, [3]Rahayu Wulandari,[4]Hawa Alfina Salsabila, [5]Deasy Yunita Siregar

[12345]*Tadris Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia*

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This research investigates the role of memes as a communication tool in Indonesia, particularly focusing on their ability to convey social and political criticism through humor. Memes have emerged as a significant medium for expressing public opinion and fostering discourse on national issues. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the study analyzes 15 memes collected from social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. The analysis employs two pragmatic theories: Implicature Theory and Speech Act Theory, to explore the underlying meanings and social implications of these memes. Findings reveal that memes not only entertain but also engage audiences in critical discussions about societal challenges, reflecting a growing trend of using humor as a means of social commentary. This study contributes to the understanding of meme dynamics in non-Western cultures and highlights their potential in shaping public discourse.

Correspondence:

Rana May Zuhra

Ranamayzuhra4@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Memes have evolved into one of the most effective ways to convey humor and social criticism in today's internet age. Memes not only serve as entertainment, but also serve as a tool for understanding national and global issues. Strategic humor has proven successful in public diplomacy around the world to influence public opinion and create stories about international events. According to Kutz-Flamenbaum (2021), "strategic humor is used by states to frame international events in ways that benefit their interests". This shows how humor can be used to convey serious messages in an interesting and memorable way.

Memes in Indonesia are not only used as entertainment, but are also used to voice social and political criticism. In this case, the use of memes shows the dynamics of a society that is increasingly critical of existing problems. For example, during the 2019 general election, memes featuring the fictitious candidate Nurhadi-Aldo went viral and were used to criticize the political polarization that occurred between supporters of the two actual presidential candidates. These memes were not only entertaining but also delivered critical messages that reflected people's dissatisfaction with the current political situation (Rahardi, 2019).

Indonesian memes often show complex social and political realities, giving voice to communities that may not be represented by mainstream media. Memes can draw public attention to important issues and encourage wider discussion by using humor and irony. For example, many memes circulate on social media criticizing potential leaders or policies during elections; this shows how memes can serve as a social mobilization tool and encourage people to more actively participate in the democratic process. Memes also influence public opinion. Memes can influence the way people view certain issues in innovative and relatable ways, resulting in greater collective awareness. Memes, as cultural artifacts, have the ability to reflect on and respond to current societal issues, both on a local and international level.

According to Chernobrov (2022), strategic humour-the use of humor by states and proxy actors-is an important tool in public diplomacy, allowing them to frame international events in a way that supports their interests and challenges the narratives of other actors. The use of humor in this context is not only entertaining but also conveys serious messages that are easily accessible and memorable, and fits well with the competitive new media ecology.

Previous studies have shown that memes can serve as powerful social commentary. For example, Mukhtar (2024) shows how memes reflect social trends and cultural dynamics among the younger generation, as well as their role in building social connections and self-expression in digital communities. Related studies have also shown that memes can serve as representations of criticism and free speech in cyberspace. According to Lutfiputri's (2023) research, meme Instagram accounts such as @ecommurz are used to show resistance to the

oppressive work culture in Indonesian startups. In addition, Purwaningrum (2020) examined how memes became a medium to express opinions and criticize public policies. In this situation, memes not only serve as a means of entertainment but also serve as a tool that encourages netizens to speak politically and socially.

While there are several studies that discuss the use of memes in social and political contexts, there is still a lack of in-depth analysis of the pragmatic strategies used in these memes, with few exploring how elements of humor and social commentary interact with each other in the context of online culture, especially in Indonesia.This research aims to fill this void by studying how elements of humor and social commentary interact with each other in the context of online culture, especially in Indonesia. It also does not thoroughly study the pragmatic strategies used in memes. By looking at how humor and social commentary in memes can function as effective communication tools in the Indonesian cultural context, this research aims to fill this gap. This research aims to fill the gap by analyzing the ways in which memes can be used as a tool to convey critical messages in online culture. As such, this research is expected to provide theoretical benefits for the development of communication science and digital culture, as well as practical benefits for society.

Memes have become a popular form of communication in the digital era, used to convey humor, social criticism, and public opinion quickly and widely. In this context, the pragmatics approach becomes relevant because it is able to explore the linguistic, semiotic, and social strategies used in memes to produce humorous effects and social meanings. This paper discusses empirical observations, material analysis processes, identification theory, and the interconnectedness of verbal processes in dissecting pragmatic strategies in memes as cultural media.

Memes serve as a communication medium that encapsulates cultural nuances and social commentary. Memes often use material processes to convey actions or events in a humorous way. For example, the transformation of everyday situations into humorous content reflects the material process of creating meaning through shared experiences. The use of visual and textual elements in memes facilitates this process, allowing users to engage with social issues critically (Blitvich & Bou-Franch, 2018).

The main theory underlying this study is Pragmatics, which examines how context affects the interpretation of meaning. Levinson (1983) defines pragmatics as the study of language use in relation to context, emphasizing how speakers and listeners infer meaning beyond literal interpretation. This theoretical framework is important for understanding how memes function as a means of humor and social criticism (Pranowo, 2020). The conceptual review reveals that memes are not just humor artifacts, but also tools for social commentary. Memes utilize intertextuality and multimodality to engage audiences. Shifman (2014) discusses how memes can reflect cultural narratives and social values while challenging dominant ideologies (Shifman, 2014).This dual role enhances their effectiveness in entertainment and critique.

The verbal processes involved in meme creation often include irony, sarcasm and wordplay. These linguistic strategies allow users to express complex emotions and criticisms in a concise manner. Research shows that memes often use humor as a means to subvert power structures and facilitate dialogue on social issues (Dynel, 2021) For example, political memes often use satirical elements to comment on governance and public policy.Empirical studies provide concrete examples of how memes function in social contexts. For example, Widiana (2015) analyzed Twitter

memes reflecting students' academic experiences, revealing how irony is used to confront social challenges (Widiana, 2015) Similarly, Plevriti (2014) highlighted how user-generated memes serve as an effective tool for political critique and citizen engagement (Plevriti, 2014).

Despite the growing body of literature on memes, there is still a significant research gap regarding the pragmatic analysis of cross-cultural memes. Most of the existing research focuses more on Western contexts, leaving a significant void in understanding meme dynamics in non-Western cultures such as Indonesia. Future research should aim to explore this area to provide a more comprehensive understanding of global meme culture (Xie, 2022).An exploration of pragmatic strategies in memes reveals the diverse role of memes in online culture as instruments of humor and social commentary. Using a theoretical framework from pragmatics and providing empirical evidence from various studies, this literature review highlights the importance of memes in shaping discourse in Indonesian society. Further research is essential to bridge the existing gaps and enhance our understanding of this dynamic form of communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach that aims to analyze the meaning and messages conveyed through memes, especially in the context of certain social issues such as politics, environment, pop culture. As Frey, Botan, Friedman, and Kreps (1992) stated "conducted for the purpose of solving a particular 'real-world,' socially relevant problem" as stated by the Data used in this study are in the form of a collection of relevant memes taken from social media, namely Instagram, Tiktok and Twitter, which were collected as many as 15 memes both from posts and in the comments column. data is carried out how user interactions in the form of comments on memes are observed to understand the responses that come from audience perceptions (comments) to the content delivered.

The resulting data will be analyzed using two pragmatics models. First, Implicature Theory (Grice) is used to understand the implied meaning in memes conveyed through humor, irony, or other hidden messages. Second, Speech Acts Theory (Austin & Searle) is used to identify speech acts in memes, such as satirizing, praising, or criticizing. With this approach, the research is expected to reveal how memes are used as an effective communication medium in conveying messages related to certain social issues.

FINDINGS

This study analyzes 15 memes taken from social media to explore language use in the context of humor and social criticism in Indonesia. The two pragmatic theories used in this analysis are Implicature Theory (Grice) and Speech Act Theory (Austin & Searle).

The following is an analysis of the memes according to the relevant pragmatic theories:

No.	Memes	Theories used	Meaning analysis
1.	"Intinya dia cemen cuman berani di belakang. Sekalian pakek rok aja tuh Farhat Abbas."	Implicature Theory (Grice)	This meme implies sarcasm by highlighting someone's lack of courage. The relevance of the offense maxim is seen here, where the implied meaning is more important than the literal information conveyed.
2.	"Lewati jalan rusak diLampung, Jokowi: saya sampai tertidur di mobil karena Mulus"	Implicature Theory (Grice)	This meme uses irony to criticize the state of infrastructure. Although Jokowi's statement seems positive, it is actually a criticism of the poor roads.
3.	"Harusnya ada batu-batu kecil biar pak jokowi jangan ketiduran, keterlaluan nih gubernurnya bikin jalanan terlalu mulus"	Implicature Theory (Grice)	Using sarcasm to satirize the local government, this meme creates an implied meaning that the road is in poor condition.
4.	"Ustaz Bole ke guna pelaris untuk tarik orang pergi ke mesjid"	Speech Act Theory (Austin & Searle)	This meme functions as a satire on the low number of worshipers in mosques. This meme reflects social criticism of

			this phenomenon without direct confrontation, showing speech acts that invite reflection and discussion among the community.
5.	"Lakik kok metic sekalian aja pakek lipstick"	Speech Act Theory (Austin & Searle)	This meme expresses criticism of gender norms in a humorous way. This speech act contains an element of satire against behavior that is considered inappropriate.
6.	"Di tempat kerja gw dulu di Kalimantan, pajero dibuat trabas perkebunan sawit hehe"	Implicature Theory (Grice)	This meme implies sarcasm about the arrogance of a luxury car owner in a context that is common in his area. It shows how humor can be used to mock.
7.	"Mau ke TPS buat nyoblos pakek outfit ini (baju peri gigi) too much gak ya?"	Speech Act Theory (Austin & Searle)	This meme creates a humorous effect by showing the excess of clothing during elections. The speech act here serves to express uniqueness and criticize the dress code.
8.	"Umur udah hamper 2 bulan tapi belum bisa ngomong"	Implicature Theory (Grice)	Using humor to describe situations that are considered funny, this meme shows how infant speech difficulties can be linked to social expectations.

9.	"Bahaya bun kalau gak segera di periksa, adek saya umur 3 hari udah main tong setan"	Implicature Theory (Grice)	This meme uses sarcasm to highlight parents' concerns in a humorous way, creating a reflective effect on parenting.
10.	"Smothing beat Karbu berapa?"	Speech Act Theory (Austin & Searle)	Using visual and verbal humor, this meme expresses criticism of motorcycle repair shops that look like salons, suggesting an absurd situation.
11.	"RX king masuk kesini jadi RX Queen"	Speech Act Theory (Austin & Searle)	This meme uses wordplay to provide a social critique of gender and vehicles, showing how identity can be played with in the context of humor.
12.	"Vibes nya Ramadhan sekali" (foto salah satu idol korea)	Implicature Theory (Grice)	Using cultural references to describe a certain atmosphere, in this video there is a Korean singer who wears casual clothes plus his calm face so that it looks very calm.
13.	"Kapan konser diindo kak, takut kebagian tiketnya"	Implicature Theory (Grice)	Memes describes fans' concerns about the concert, but in fact the author herself will not be attending the event
14.	"Maaf badutnya lagi patah hati"	Speech Act Theory (Austin & Searle)	In this meme, the author uses insinuation to himself that he is a comfort to others despite feeling sad. This

			creates emotional depth through reflective speech acts.
15.	"Emang apapun kondisinya, tidur adalah obatnya"	Implicature Theory (Grice)	Using this humor to highlight the importance of rest, this meme implies that sleep can be the solution to many everyday problems.

The main findings in this study can be grouped into three main points, namely:

1. Language Patterns Used: Many memes use humor that violates Grice's maxim, such as relevance and quality. For example, memes that satirize a person's character or certain social conditions.

2. Effect on Audience: Utterances in memes can trigger diverse reactions, from laughter to self-reflection. Memes often create collective awareness about social issues.

3. Theory of Dominance: Implicature theory is more dominant for memes that focus on implied meanings, while speech act theory is more relevant for memes that directly convey criticism or requests.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that memes not only serve as entertainment, but also as a communication tool to convey social and political criticism in an interesting and easy-to-understand way. This finding is important as it highlights how elements of humor and social commentary can interact with each other in the Indonesian cultural context.

Comparison with previous research shows that although many studies have addressed the use of memes in social and political contexts, this study fills the analytical void by providing an in-depth look at the pragmatic strategies used in memes. Most previous studies focus more on political or cultural contexts without exploring the interaction between humor and social commentary in detail.

For example, Rahardi's (2019) research stresses the use of memes as political criticism during general elections, while Mukhtar (2024) highlights the role of memes in building social connections among the younger generation. However, few studies have specifically analyzed how these elements interact with each other in a pragmatic context.

By using a systematic pragmatic approach, this study provides new insights into how memes can be used as an effective communication medium to convey important messages related to social issues. The findings open up opportunities for further research into the dynamics of digital culture and its influence on global society.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that memes in Indonesia serve as an effective communication tool to convey social and political criticism, utilizing humor and

social commentary to attract public attention. Memes not only entertain but also create collective awareness on important issues. Recommendations for future research include further exploration of pragmatic strategies in memes, as well as the development of educational media to increase public understanding of the use of memes as a tool for constructive criticism in social and political contexts.

REFERENCES

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.

Blitvich, P. G. C., & Bou-Franch, P. (2018). *Menganalisis wacana digital: Wawasan baru dan arah masa depan*.

Chesebro, J. W., & Borisoff, D. J. (2007). What makes qualitative research qualitative? *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 8*(1), 3–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/17459430701617846

Chernobrov, D. (2022). Strategic humour: Public diplomacy and comic framing of foreign policy issues. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 24*(2), 277–296.

Dynel, M. (2021). Multimodal Voices Behind the Face Mask: COVID-19 Memes Gone Viral. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 178, 52-67. DOI:

Dynel, M. (2021). Desperately Seeking Meaning: Sincere Insults and Jocular Mockery on Social Media. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 40(1-2), 34-53. DOI: 10.1177.

Frey, L. R., Botan, C. H., Friedman, P. G., & Kreps, G. (1992). *Interpreting communication research: A case study approach*. Prentice Hall.

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Speech acts* (pp. 41–58). Academic Press.

Lutfiputri. (2022). Meme as a tool for resistance towards hustle culture: A critical discourse analysis. *Ultimacomm, 14*(2).

Mukhtar, S. (2024). Memes in the digital age: A sociolinguistic examination of cultural expressions and communicative practices across borders. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30*(6), 1443–1455. https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i6.5520

Plevriti, V. (2014). Satirical user-generated memes as an effective source of political criticism (Master's thesis). London School of Economics and Political Science. http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/915/

Pranowo, P. (2020). Javanese local wisdom towards a global context: A study of pragmatic meaning. [PDF Article]. Sanata Dharma University Repository. https://repository.usd.ac.id/38677/ .

Purwaningrum, P. W. (2020). Meme sebagai representasi kritik dan kebebasan berpendapat di ruang siber. Wanastra: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra, 12(1), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.31294/w.v12i1.7189

Rahardi, H. R., & Amalia, R. M. (2019). Meme as political criticism towards 2019 Indonesian general election: A critical discourse analysis. *Studies in English Language and Education, 6*(2), 239–250.

Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.

Shifman, L. (2014). The Cultural Logic of Photo-Based Memes. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 13(3), 340-358.

Widiana, R. (2015). Pragmatic Meaning in Meme Comics. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 9(1), 1-12. DOI: 10.24002.

Xie, C. (2022). A Pragmatic Review of Internet Memes. *Journal of Linguistics and*

Literature, 15(1), 23-40.