# SPEECH ACTS AS A MEANS OF PUBLIC EVALUATION IN ASYMMETRIC DIGITAL INTERACTION: A CYBERPRAGMATIC STUDY OF COMMENTS ON PUBLIC FIGURES

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**Abstract**

The development of social media has transformed users from passive recipients of information into active participants who can engage in public evaluation of public figures through various forms of comments. Although research on speech acts in social media has expanded, studies examining speech acts as a means of public evaluation within the context of asymmetric digital interaction remain relatively limited. This study aims to describe the forms of speech acts used in comments directed at public figures and to explain how these speech acts function as a means of public evaluation within asymmetric digital interaction. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach from a cyberpragmatic perspective. The data consist of 39 user comments posted on videos uploaded to the Mens Rea TikTok account, collected from December 30, 2025, to January 6, 2026. The data were analyzed through identification, classification based on Searle's speech act theory, identification of illocutionary functions, and cyberpragmatic interpretation. The findings show that representative speech acts were the most dominant (53.85%), followed by expressive speech acts (28.21%) and directive speech acts (17.95%). Representative speech acts were realized through the functions of evaluating, expressing opinions, criticizing, explaining, accusing, and comparing; expressive speech acts through praising, insulting or mocking, complaining, and using sarcasm; and directive speech acts through requesting explanations, suggesting, and appealing. The findings demonstrate that speech acts function not only as linguistic actions but also as a means of public evaluation, enabling social media users to construct, negotiate, and disseminate evaluations of public figures within an asymmetric digital communication environment.

***Keywords:*** *speech acts, public evaluation, cyberpragmatics, asymmetric digital interaction, public figures, social media*

## INTRODUCTION

Social media have evolved and users are now active participants who can assess, criticise and support public figures instead of only receiving information. The shift from one-way communication to many-to-many communication has improved the opportunities for public participation, opinion formation, and public evaluation (Gilardi et al., 2022; Ma & Zhang, 2022). Social media thus becomes not only an information channel but also a battleground for meaning making, agenda setting and public reaction to various issues and public figures.

The relationship between users and public figures is usually asymmetrical and non-reciprocal. This means that public figures have higher visibility, larger followers, and wider communication reach. Most users play the role of consumers, disseminators, or responders to the content produced by more prominent actors (Duffy et al., 2021; Hoffner & Bond, 2022; Wojcieszak et al., 2022). The platform architecture, algorithms, engagement metrics, and follower networks also contribute to this asymmetry, increasing the visibility of messages (Barta & Andalibi, 2024; Guarino et al., 2026). Thus, comment sections are communicative spaces with asymmetric positions and high levels of public visibility.

From a cyberpragmatic point of view, the meaning of digital utterances is not only determined by linguistic form but also by the medium, participant identities, audience and communicative context (Nomaan, 2022; Widiana & Sri, 2024). They engage with large and often unknown audiences, leading to interpretations of messages that are influenced by a range of contextual cues, such as emojis, GIFs, typographical markers, tagging, liking, imagined audiences, and collapsed contexts (Inderasari et al., 2023; Kusmanto & Widodo, 2022). These characteristics set digital communication apart from face-to-face communication, which is usually more direct and reciprocal.

Speech acts are an important way of participating in digital spaces and are used to assess public figures. Expressions of emotion such as criticism, complaints, suggestions, directives, insults, support, etc., are openly expressed and available to a large audience (Alshumaimeri & Alshememry, 2024; Mubarok et al., 2024). Thus, speech acts in social media comments are not only linguistic acts, but also practices of public evaluation, determined by asymmetrical relations and the characteristics of digital communication.

While there is increasing research on speech acts in social media, previous studies mainly focus on classifying the forms and functions of utterances. Studies involving asymmetrical interaction, cyberpragmatics and speech acts as practices of public evaluation of public figures are still few. Thus, the present study aims to describe the speech acts used in comments addressed to public figures and explain their functions as means of public evaluation within the framework of asymmetrical digital interaction. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, the link is made between the forms of utterances and

the specific features of the medium and the communicative relationships that lie at the base of the interaction.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Digital Disparity and Public Personalities

Social media interactions with public figures and audiences are often situated in asymmetrical relationships, as the distribution of messages and the accessibility of communication are shaped by the algorithmic architecture of digital platforms. Through algorithmic audiencing, it becomes evident that algorithms determine not only who speaks, but also who listens and which messages are visible (Riemer & Peter, 2021). Public figures have the ability to reach a wide audience and the audience responds through comments, criticism, support and expressions of emotions (Aporbo et al., 2024). This renders social media a communicative space that is not exactly reciprocal and marked by unequal distribution of visibility.

Digital asymmetry is also reflected in differences in message control, communication reach and vulnerability between public figures and audiences. Algorithms may increase the spread of messages by public figures, but they can also allow audience responses to spiral into collective criticism, pile-ons, shaming, and other forms of digital hostility (Aporbo et al., 2024). Comment sections, then, are not just spaces for reacting to the messages of public figures. They are sites for the intersection of unequal communicative positions and broad audience participation. These features are important for understanding how the users' utterances are directed, interpreted and circulated in digital communication.

### Cyberpragmatics and Speech Acts on Social Media

Internet-mediated communication is viewed by cyberpragmatics as an interaction with contextual features that differ from those of face-to-face communication (Olshtain & Treger, 2023). In digital environments, participants may build their identities, decide how to present themselves and interact with wide audiences, which are not necessarily familiar to them (Olshtain & Treger, 2023). Austin-Searle's speech act framework is still used to understand digital communication as representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives (Abdalhadi et al., 2023). But the interpretation of digital

speech acts must take into account the affordances of the medium and the multimodal resources that accompany utterances.

Previous research has shown that speech acts on social media have forms and strategies that are influenced by digital contexts. For example, suggestions are often made indirectly to minimise the threat to face, and online complaints may become more aggressive and escalating because of the participatory and multimodal nature of social media (Alghamdi et al., 2026; Vladimirou et al., 2021). Emojis and other multimodal resources can also serve as pragmatic cues that add meaning to text-based utterances (Ge-Stadnyk, 2021). The results show that the study of speech acts in social media needs to be connected to linguistic forms, multimodality and the characteristics of digital interaction.

**Speech Acts as a Form of Public Appraisal**

Speech acts on social media can serve as a vehicle of public evaluation of policies, institutions and public figures. Criticism of government policies can be expressed in the form of sarcasm, problem identification, complaints, and negative assessments, which can indicate the lack of trust in the government–citizen relationship (Alshakhanbeh & Alghazo, 2022). The use of speech acts in Twitter communication by governments is also related to institutional positions and orientations, while journalists may use impoliteness strategies in public debates in accordance with their ideological positions (DePaula & Hansson, 2025; Iranzo-Cabrera et al., 2025). This also means that speech acts are not just about information, but about attitudes and appraisals toward the objects of communication.

Public evaluation in digital spaces can also become collective practices that create solidarity, group identity, and the boundaries of in-groups and out-groups. Debates and hostility across social media platforms can be increased by patterns of toxic interaction and opposing sentiments (Avalle et al., 2024). Toxic speech can act as a positioning act in the construction of intergroup relations (Morales et al., 2026). Criticism and complaint are therefore not just evaluations of their targets, but a way of building solidarity between users who share similar evaluations (Olshtain & Treger, 2023). Therefore, speech acts in comments directed to public figures can be interpreted as practices of public evaluation

that simultaneously reflect relational dynamics, collective identity and the circulation of meaning in digital spaces.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research used a descriptive qualitative approach from a cyberpragmatic perspective to analyse the use of speech acts in comments addressed to public figures on social media. The qualitative method was chosen because of the study's goal to analyse the meanings and functions of speech acts used by social media users in digital communication settings. We have taken a cyberpragmatic perspective to understand how utterances are produced, understood and function in online communication environments characterised by asymmetrical interaction, multiple publics and high visibility.

Data for the research were drawn from the comment section of video posts on the TikTok account Mens Rea, a platform that discusses social and political issues regarding public figures. This account was selected because it consistently produces content that is critical of social and political issues and that elicits a range of responses in the comment sections. The comments were gathered during the seven days following the release of the videos, from December 30, 2025 to January 6, 2026. The data was composed of comments made by users in response to the issues and public figures in the videos.

Data collection was carried out through non-participant observation with simak and note-taking techniques. They then read through all the comments posted on the selected posts and identified those relevant to the research interest. The corpus was stripped of comments that only contained emojis, symbols, spam, promotional content, or content that was not related to the topics being discussed. This selection process led to 39 comments being considered as data for research.

The unit of analysis was a single comment made by a TikTok user. Each comment was treated as an individual utterance and the dominant speech act was identified. The analysis was based on Searle's speech acts: representatives, directives, expressives, commissives and declaratives. In addition to identifying speech act types, the study also investigated more specific illocutionary functions such as evaluating, criticising, accusing, comparing, praising, mocking, suggesting and requesting clarification.

Data analysis was done in four phases. The first phase was the data identification. Comments with speech acts related to the objectives of the research were selected. The

second stage was to classify the data into the speech act categories of Searle. In the third stage, the illocutionary functions of each utterance were determined to give a more detailed description of the forms of public evaluation performed by the users of social media. The fourth stage was the cyberpragmatic interpretation, which explored the relationship between the forms of speech acts, the properties of the digital medium and the asymmetrical interactional context that supports the production of the utterances.

In an effort to ensure analytical reliability, coding was done iteratively against the operational definitions of each speech act category and illocutionary function. In interpreting data, attention was paid to the context of the utterance, the topic of discussion, the relationship between users and public figures, and the characteristics of digital communication, which influence the production and reception of comments. Thus, the analysis focused on the linguistic elements of the utterances, as well as their social and digital contexts, allowing a more complete understanding of speech acts as public evaluation in asymmetrical digital interaction.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Speech acts as a tool for public evaluation in asymmetric digital interaction

Analysis of 39 comments posted by TikTok users on videos from the Mens Rea account reveals that social media users use speech acts to publicly evaluate public figures and political issues. Three types of speech acts were identified, namely representatives, expressives, and directives. Representative speech acts were the most frequent category, followed by expressives and directives, as can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of Speech Act Types**

| Speech Act Type | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Representative | 21 | 53.85% |
| Expressive | 11 | 28.21% |
| Directive | 7 | 17.95% |
| Total | 39 | 100% |

The data in Table 1 show that the most dominant type used by social media users was representative speech acts (21 data points, 53.85%). This finding shows that the

comment section of TikTok is mainly used as a space to express opinions, judgements, and criticism of public figures and political issues, rather than a space for reciprocal dialogue. Asymmetrical digital interaction does not require users to expect direct responses from public figures but does allow the potential of comments to be used to communicate evaluations to a wider audience.

**Representative Speech Acts as a Form of Public Evaluation: Dominance**

Representative speech acts consisted of 21 data points, accounting for 53.85% of the total data. These speech acts were achieved through various functions such as evaluation, expression of opinions, criticism, explanation, accusation and comparison. The distribution of these functions is given in Table 2.

**Table 2. Functions of Representative Speech Acts**

| Function | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Evaluating | 10 | 47.62% |
| Expressing an opinion | 4 | 19.05% |
| Criticizing | 3 | 14.29% |
| Explaining | 2 | 9.52% |
| Accusing | 1 | 4.76% |
| Comparing | 1 | 4.76% |
| Total | 21 | 100% |

The findings in Table 2 show that evaluating was the dominant function of representative speech acts, accounting for 10 data points (47.62%). This finding indicates that users primarily employ representative speech acts to express judgments, opinions, and positions toward public figures and the issues under discussion. In the context of asymmetrical digital interaction, representative speech acts function as a principal means through which users articulate their positions and conduct public evaluation without requiring direct interaction with the targeted public figures. Thus, these utterances do not merely convey information or personal opinions but also contribute to the construction and circulation of public judgments in the digital sphere.

**Evaluation as a public practice**

Social media users use evaluative speech acts to assess the attitudes, actions or positions of the individuals or groups being discussed. Logi & Zappavigna (2023) In the present data, such evaluations are mostly directed toward public figures, political groups and social phenomena discussed in the videos. Such utterances show that users use language not only for sharing personal opinions but also for generating public judgements about what they talk about . The following utterances illustrate this function.

| No. Data | Tuturan | Konteks | Target Evaluasi |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *Gua kira panji ngebela anis, pas gua liat fullnya ternyata dia ngebela rakyat indonesia* ❤□ *@samsudinali_*<br><br>[At first I thought Panji was defending Anies, but after watching the full video, I realised he was defending the Indonesian people. ❤□] | After watching the whole content, the speaker replies to Panji's video. | Panji's support for the Indonesian people. |

In Data (1), the speaker has a more comprehensive understanding of the content presented in the video so the speaker has a positive evaluation of Panji. The evaluation is seen in the utterance *ternyata dia ngebela rakyat Indonesia* ("it turns out that he is defending the Indonesian people") which reflects appreciation for Panji's perceived alignment with public interests. The data indicate that the social media public evaluation is not always negative but can also be in the form of recognition and support for public figures perceived to be advocating for society. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, this evaluation is achieved through the speaker's inferential process in interpreting the overall video content, and the meaning of Panji's stance is constructed through the interaction of

digital content, sociopolitical context and the speaker's prior knowledge (Olshtain & Treger, 2023; Yus, 2011).

**Ideological Position in Opinion Expressing**

Expressive statements of opinion express the speaker's views or beliefs about issues under discussion. The present data on these opinions are generally on political practices, policies and social conditions which attract public attention. Such utterances reveal how social media users orient themselves to controversial public issues through voicing personal judgements and beliefs (Alshammari & Alyousef, 2025). The following utterance exemplifies this function.

| No. Data | Tuturan | Konteks | Target Evaluasi |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | *Indonesia masih menganut politik balas budi dan money. mereka yang di berikan jabatan bukan karna dia layak tapi karna budi @ultraman_bukan*<br><br>[Patronage politics and money politics are still practiced by Indonesia. The people who get the jobs don't get them because they're qualified, they get them because of personal favours.] | Replying to a video about allocation of political practices, public positions. | Appointment of public officers as patronage politics. |

Speaker's opinion related to political practices that are considered still happening during the process of appointing public officials in Indonesia. The statement *Indonesia masih menganut politik balas budi dan money* (Indonesia still practices patronage and

money politics) offers this perspective that the speaker believes that appointments are made on the basis of political ties, not competence (Masiulionytė et al., 2025). The data suggest that social media users use comment sections to voice critical opinions on political practices they perceive as inconsistent with meritocratic principles. From the cyberpragmatic perspective, this opinion is an inference based on the sociopolitical knowledge and experience of the speaker. Hence, the comment section is the arena for the construction and negotiation of meanings about power relations in the digital sphere.

**Critiquing Critique as a Form of Social Control**

Critical speech acts are used to evaluate actions, policies or responses by specific parties that are seen as not meeting public expectations. The criticism in the present data is mostly aimed at practices that are perceived to restrict the possibilities of voicing opinions and controlling the actions of the government. Such criticism illustrates how social media comments provide a space in which users can publicly question the actions of people in authority (Lailiyah, 2024). This function is seen in the following statement.

| **No. Data** | **Tuturan** | **Konteks** | **Target Evaluasi** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | *kritik dikit Dibilang anak abah, pemerintah kalo salah, terus ga ada yang mengkritik nanti seenak jidat buat kebijakan, @laluh*<br><br>[A little criticism and you are tagged 'Abah's child'. "When the government makes mistakes and no one criticises, then they will do policies as they want.] | Respond to government criticism. | The labelling of people who criticise government. |

In data (3) the speaker condemns the negative labeling of people who voice criticism of the government. This criticism is articulated in the utterance *kritik dikit dibilang anak abah* (a little criticism and you're called a 'Abah's child), which is a refusal to delegitimize critical voices in the digital public sphere. This finding shows that criticism is framed as a kind of public oversight of the government to keep policies open for public evaluation (Lailiyah, 2024). From a cyberpragmatic perspective, the interpretation of the criticism is built on the speaker's inference concerning the practice of political labeling that has emerged on social media. Thus criticism is not just an expression of disagreement, but a form of civic participation in the oversight of government conduct.

**Explaining as an Effort to Make Sense**

The speech act of explaining is used to communicate an understanding, rationale or interpretation of an event, action or phenomenon under discussion. The research data utilizes explanations to construct meaning of the underlying actions of public figures and political phenomena that form the subject of discussion (Sun & Liu, 2023). This can be seen in the following utterance

| No. Data | Tuturan | Konteks | Target Evaluasi |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4. | *tujuan bang Panji ini rakyat biar milih pemimpin itu gak asal2an lagi, hanya dikasi janji2, sembako Krn tampang, dikasi pencitraan baik langsung dianggap orang suci bolonkuada8*<br><br>[What Panji is trying to do is to encourage people to be more careful in selecting leaders, not just because of | Answering the purpose of Panji's criticism | The way voters choose political leaders |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | promises, basic necessities, or their public image] | | |

In data (4) the speaker explains the aim of Panji's criticism by telling it to the people's behavior when they choose the leaders. This is explained through the utterance *tujuan bang Panji ini rakyat biar milih pemimpin itu gak asal2an lagi* (Panji's aim is to encourage people to be more careful when choosing their leaders), which is the speaker's reading of the message that is expressed in the video. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, this utterance demonstrates that the meaning is not only derived from Panji's speech, but also constructed through the speaker's inference process based on the video context and his sociopolitical knowledge. This finding shows that social media users are active participants in the construction and interpretation of meaning of public figures' communicative intentions in digital spaces (Kartika et al., 2025).

**Accusation as a Negative Evaluation of Public Figures**

Accusation as a speech act is used to attribute negative actions, motives or intentions to a particular party based on the beliefs of the speaker. The data studied also include accusations against public figures whose personal interests seem to be at stake in the exercise of political power (Lailiyah, 2024). This is evident in the following utterance.

| **No. Data** | **Tuturan** | **Konteks** | **Target Evaluasi** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5. | *Presiden dan wakilnya sama2 pengen nguasai kekayaan negara , saya tidak memilih (anachoirijani)*<br><br>[Both the president and the vice president want to control the country's | reacting to the current government situation. | Leadership of the president and vice president. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | wealth. “I didn’t vote for those guys.] | | |

In data (5) the speaker accuses the president and vise president of wanting to control the wealth of the country. The accusation is expressed in the phrase *pengen nguasai kekayaan negara* (wanting to control the country’s wealth), which is a negative judgment of the motives behind the leadership of the two figures. From a cyberpragmatics perspective, this accusation is not based on information explicitly stated in the video, but rather on the speaker's inference, constructed from their knowledge, experience and interpretation of the ongoing political situation. This finding provides evidence that social media users are actively producing meaning and negative evaluations of public figures through interpretive processes that take place in digital communication spaces (Sun & Liu, 2023).

**Comparisons as a tool to assess relationships**

Comparison is a speech act that is used to evaluate a person or issue by comparing it with another party which is believed to have different characteristics. The research data applies comparison in showing the speaker’s favorite public figure based on their assumed contributions and position (Asilady et al., 2025). This can be seen in the following statement.

| **No. Data** | **Tuturan** | **Konteks** | **Target Evaluasi** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6. | *ttep lebih baik gibran drpd panji.. gibran mantan walikota,skrang wapres ,,sbalik'ny apa yg sudah di beri'kn panji ke negara ? sridelianafadilah* | Public Figures in Comparison | Panji’s contributions and Gibran. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | [Gibran still better than Panji. Gibran, a former mayor, is vice president now. "What has Panji done for the country?] | | |

In data (6), the speaker compares Gibran and Panji to emphasize a positive evaluation of one of the figures, who is perceived as more deserving. The comparison is expressed through the utterance *gibran mantan walikota, skarang wapres* (Gibran is a former mayor and is now vice president), which is used as a basis for questioning Panji's contribution to the country. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, this evaluation is constructed through an inferential process that connects public office with the level of an individual's contribution, even though such a relationship is not explicitly stated in the video (Salam-Salmaoui & Salam, 2023). This finding demonstrates that social media users employ comparison strategies to construct evaluations of public figures based on their interpretations of perceived status, experience, and contribution.

**Expressive Speech Acts and Users' Emotional Positioning**

In addition to representative speech acts, the study identified 11 expressive speech-act data points, accounting for 28.21% of the total data. Expressive speech acts are used by users to express psychological attitudes and emotional responses toward public figures and the issues under discussion, including praise, support, mockery, sarcasm, and complaints. This finding demonstrates that public evaluation on social media is not expressed solely through cognitive judgments but also through affective expressions that reflect users' positions, attitudes, and emotional engagement with the public issues being discussed.

**Table 3. Functions of Expressive Speech Acts**

| Function | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Praising | 5 | 45.45% |
| Insulting/Mocking | 4 | 36.36% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Complaining | 1 | 9.09% |
| Sarcasm | 1 | 9.09% |
| **Total** | **11** | **100%** |

Table 3 shows that expressive speech acts are used by social media users to express psychological attitudes and emotional responses toward public figures and the issues under discussion. Through these speech acts, users not only convey support and appreciation but also express disagreement, disappointment, or rejection toward particular parties. These findings indicate that social media comment sections function not only as arenas for cognitive evaluation but also as spaces for affective expression, enabling users to display their emotional positions and social affiliations within public discourse.

**Praising as an Expression of Support for Public Figures**

The speech act of praising is used to convey appreciation, recognition, or positive evaluation of an individual based on their attitudes or actions. In the research data, praise is generally directed toward public figures who are perceived as courageous in expressing criticism of social and political conditions. This can be seen in the following utterance.

| **No. Data** | **Tuturan** | **Konteks** | **Target Evaluasi** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7. | *salut bang. diam tertindas atau berdiri melawan hak & sekutu*<br><br>["Respect, brother. "Shut up and stay oppressed or rise up and fight injustice and its friends."] | Supporting the video's content. | Courage of Panji to voice the criticism. |

In data (7), the speaker praises Panji for his courage in voicing criticism through the uploaded video. The praise is expressed through the utterance *salut bang* (respect, bro),

which represents appreciation for Panji's attitude, perceived as courageous in taking a stand against injustice. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, this appreciative meaning is constructed not only through the lexical choice but also through the speaker's understanding of the context of the criticism conveyed in the video. This finding demonstrates that social media users employ the speech act of praising to express support for public figures who are perceived as representing values, attitudes, or aspirations with which they identify (Shukrun-Nagar & Livnat, 2024).

**Insulting and Mocking as Expressions of Public Rejection**

The speech acts of insulting and mocking are used to demean, discredit, or convey negative evaluations of particular parties. In the research data, insults and mockery emerge as forms of rejection toward differing political views and as means of undermining the credibility of the targets of the comments (Gao et al., 2024). This can be seen in the following utterance.

| No. Data | Tuturan | Konteks | Target Evaluasi |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8. | *dari pada kayak kamu, cuma budak capres yg kalah ?? (arsyanendra_19)*<br><br>[Just a slave to the losing presidential candidate, instead of someone like you?] | Addressing different political views. | Panji, whom some see as sympathetic to the losing presidential candidate. |

In the data (8) the speaker is mocking a party that is thought to be aligned with a presidential candidate that lost the political race This mockery is performed by uttering *cuma budak capres yg kalah* (just a servant of the losing presidential candidate) to insult and delegitimize the position of the target of the comment. The cyberpragmatic perspective implies that the meaning of the mockery is constructed based on the joint knowledge of the political context of the interaction, which enables the audience to

comprehend the negative implications of the label used (Robles & Xiong, 2024). This finding suggests that the users of social media use the insulting and mocking speech acts as a way to express their rejection of the parties with different political views in the spaces of digital interaction.

**Complaints as an Expression of Public Dissatisfaction**

Complaining, as a speech act, is used to express disappointment, sadness or displeasure with a situation perceived as inconsistent with the speaker's expectations. Research data indicates that complaints are made in response to treatments considered inappropriate for public figures (Olshtain & Treger, 2023). We can see this in the following utterance.

| No. Data | Tuturan | Konteks | Target Evaluasi |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9. | *Menangis saya lihat presiden saya dan wapres saya di olok olok (45_boy*)<br><br>[Seeing my president and vice president being mocked makes me cry.] | Answering criticism of the government. | The president and vice president being poorly treated and disrespected. |

In data (9), the speaker expresses disappointment toward an action perceived as demeaning the president and vice president. The complaint is expressed through the utterance *Menangis saya lihat presiden saya dan wapres saya di olok olok* (It makes me cry to see my president and vice president being mocked), which represents the speaker's sadness and disagreement with the criticism directed at the two figures. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, the emotional meaning of this utterance is constructed through the speaker's interpretation of comments and criticism circulating in the digital space. Thus, the response is directed not only toward the content of the criticism but also toward the social impact it generates (Lu & Liang, 2024). This finding demonstrates that

social media users employ complaining speech acts to express disappointment toward communicative practices perceived as undermining the dignity of public figures.

**Sarcasm as an Indirect Evaluation Strategy**

The speech act of sarcasm is used to convey evaluations or criticism indirectly through expressions containing implicit meanings. In the research data, sarcasm is used to respond to parties perceived as being unable to accept or move on from the outcome of a political event (Dynel, 2021). This can be seen in the following utterance.

| **No. Data** | **Tuturan** | **Konteks** | **Target Evaluasi** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | *Masih sakit hati mas□(akarpandan)*<br><br>[Are you still mad, bro? □] | MIn response to political differences. | A user who seemed disappointed at a political result. |

In (10) the speaker indirectly conveys a negative view of another user with a different political view. The sarcasm can be seen in the statement *masih sakit hati mas*□ (still bitter about it, bro? □) which shows that the subject of the comment still has disappointments about a particular political outcome. From the cyberpragmatic perspective, the meaning of the sarcasm is constructed not only by the verbal elements, but also by the contextual cues of the use of the □ emoji, which reinforces the mocking and dismissive tone. This finding suggests that social media users use a combination of textual and visual symbols to communicate implicit evaluations in digital interaction (Boutet et al., 2021).

**Directive Speech Acts and Limited Dialogic Orientation**

Directive speech acts accounted for 7 data points or 17.95% of the total data analyzed. These speech acts are used by users to request explanations, to ask questions, to make suggestions or to make appeals about the problems or public figures under discussion. The presence of directive speech acts, although with a lower frequency than representative and expressive ones, shows that some users still employ the comment

section as a way to seek clarification and express expectations toward the parties under discussion.

**Table 4. Functions of Directive Speech Acts**

| Function | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Asking for clarification | 5 | 71.43% |
| Suggesting | 1 | 14.29% |
| Appealing | 1 | 14.29% |
| **Total** | **7** | **100%** |

The social media users use directive speech acts to get information, ask for clarification and express expectations about the issues and public figures being discussed, as shown in Table 4. The presence of such speech acts shows that some users still use the comment section as a space for responding and interaction, though the communication is not fully symmetric. Their lower frequency in comparison to representative and expressive speech acts suggests that users are more likely to perform evaluation and express attitudes than to engage in a direct dialog with public figures in an asymmetric digital communication space.

**An Appeal for Explanation as an Effort at Public Clarification**

Asking explanation is the speech act to obtain information or clarification of a message that the speaker does not fully understand. The research data includes requests for clarification as a response to video material that communicates a certain meaning or intention that the audience does not yet understand. This is demonstrated in the following utterance.

| No. Data | Tuturan | Konteks | Target Evaluasi |
|---|---|---|---|
| 11. | *berkali2 muter video nya...letak lucunya dmna?? putri meion* | Did you want to clarify what was in the video? | What the video is saying. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | [I've seen the video a few times now, where's the funny part?] | | |

In (11) on data the speaker asks for an explanation of what message the video is supposed to convey. The request is realized in the utterance *letak lucunya dmna??*, which points out that the speaker has not understood the relevance or the funny part that other users see. This utterance, from the cyberpragmatic perspective, involves an inferential gap in the interpretation of the same digital message between the content creator and the audience. This result indicates that meaning-making in digital communication is highly dependent on users' ability to associate the information they encounter with the context, shared knowledge and assumptions underlying the message.

**Recommendation: A method of participating in public oversight**

The speech act of suggesting is used to make suggestions or recommendations about actions which are thought to be more appropriate to be carried out in the future. Suggestions are voiced as a form of civic participation in response to problems of leadership and political processes at the national level in the research data (Hussain & Hussain, 2026). This is shown in the following utterance.

| **No. Data** | **Tuturan** | **Konteks** | **Target Evaluasi** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12. | maunya presiden jgn lagi orang Jawa. (Ombehku)<br><br>[I want the next president to be not Javanese.] | Indicating a preference in the presidential election. | Representation of the national leadership. |

In data (12), the speaker offers a suggestion regarding the desired criteria for leadership in the upcoming presidential election. The suggestion is expressed through the utterance *maunya presiden jgn lagi orang Jawa* (I would prefer the next president not to be Javanese), which represents a desire for leadership representation from other regions

of Indonesia. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, the meaning of this utterance lies not only in the form of the suggestion but also in the inference that connects geographical identity with the distribution of political power in the national context. This finding demonstrates that social media users utilize the comment section to express political aspirations and evaluate existing patterns of leadership representation (Hussain & Hussain, 2026).

**Appealing as a Form of Invitation to the Public Audience**

The speech act of appealing is used to encourage or urge others to take a particular action in accordance with the speaker's perspective. In the research data, appeals are expressed as a form of political participation intended to influence the audience's choices and attitudes toward issues of national leadership. This can be seen in the following utterance.

| No. Data | Tuturan | Konteks | Target Evaluasi |
|---|---|---|---|
| 13. | Jangan sampai Jokowi dan kelompoknya berkuasa lagi di pemilu yang akan datang (juned)<br><br>[Let's not let Jokowi and his political group seize power again in the next election.] | Appeal in the coming election. | Jokowi's leadership and his political bloc. |

In data (13), the speaker appeals to the audience not to vote again for the political group associated with Joko Widodo in the upcoming election. The appeal is expressed through the utterance *Jangan sampai Jokowi dan kelompoknya berkuasa lagi di pemilu yang akan datang* (Let us not allow Jokowi and his political group to regain power in the upcoming election), which represents both an appeal and a negative evaluation of the current or former administration. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, the meaning of this

appeal is constructed through inferences derived from political experiences, shared knowledge, and the speaker's perception of the prevailing governmental conditions. This finding demonstrates that social media users employ comment sections not only to express opinions but also to influence the political attitudes of other audiences through appeals based on evaluations of particular political figures and groups.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that comments directed at public figures on social media serve as a space for public evaluation within asymmetric digital interactions. The dominance of representative speech acts indicates that users are more likely to express evaluations, criticism, support, and political positions than to engage in direct dialogue. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, the meaning of comments is constructed through the interaction of linguistic elements, digital context, shared knowledge, and sociopolitical experiences, including indirect strategies such as sarcasm, mockery, and comparison. These findings affirm that speech acts on social media function not only as linguistic actions but also as a means of public participation in shaping opinions and public discourse.

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