

Sarcasm In The Comments Section of The Instagram Account @pertamina

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of sarcasm in the comment section of the official Instagram account @Pertamina as a form of public reaction to energy services and policy issues. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with a pragmatic orientation, the study analyzed comments, of which 126 were identified as containing sarcastic expressions. The data were examined using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model and classified based on Camp's (2011) framework, which distinguishes propositional, lexical, and illocutionary sarcasm. The findings show that propositional sarcasm dominates (68 instances), followed by lexical (34) and illocutionary sarcasm (24). This distribution indicates that netizens frequently employ sarcasm to express direct and explicit criticism toward Pertamina, a state-owned enterprise responsible for sensitive public services such as fuel pricing and policy transparency. The study's contribution lies in extending Camp's theoretical model to the Indonesian digital context and in highlighting how sarcasm functions as a mechanism of social control and civic engagement. The findings suggest that sarcasm plays a significant role in shaping public discourse and evaluating institutional performance on social media.

Keywords: sarcasm, Instagram comments, pragmatics.

Introduction

Language is the primary means by which humans communicate and convey their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward their social environment (Hariyanto, 2017). In the digital context, social media such as Instagram has become a highly active and dynamic space for communication. The ease of spreading messages, interacting, and responding to public issues makes social media an open arena for various forms of language expression, including sarcasm (Saidillah et al., 2023; Hikmahwati & Farida, 2021). Sarcasm, according to Keraf (2010), is a form of language that is sharper than irony and is often used to convey satire or criticism. Camp (2011) explains that sarcasm can take various forms, ranging from propositional, lexical, to illocutionary. At the same time, Grice (1989) asserts that sarcasm usually works through the violation of maxims of quality so that the intended meaning is opposite to the literal meaning. Thus, sarcasm is a complex pragmatic phenomenon because it requires an understanding of context and the ability to interpret implied meaning (Bryant & Fox Tree, 2002).

The phenomenon of sarcasm is increasingly prominent in digital public discussions. Nasution (2020) states that social media has become an effective medium for people to convey social criticism through humorous but evaluative language. One account that often receives sarcastic comments is the official Instagram account @Pertamina. As a state-owned company that manages energy resources, Pertamina is often in the public spotlight regarding issues such as fuel prices, subsidy policies, and allegations of corruption. This situation has prompted the public to express their dissatisfaction through sarcastic comments containing insults, ridicule, and sharp criticism (Farmida, Ediwarman, & Tisnasari, 2021). Previous studies have discussed sarcasm on various platforms, such as Instagram @tempodotco (Azka Khuluqie, Purwanto, & Triana, 2022) and the Facebook group PT Oy Indonesia (Attazky, Triana, & Anwar, 2020). However, studies on the forms of sarcasm on social media accounts belonging to state institutions, especially Pertamina, are still rare. Previous studies have focused more on the function and meaning of sarcasm, rather than its variations in the context of public institution accounts.

However, these studies have not specifically highlighted the forms of sarcasm that appear on state-owned media accounts, especially those directly related to public services such as @Pertamina. The majority of previous studies have only focused on the function or meaning of sarcasm, not on its linguistic forms in detail, and have not discussed how sarcasm is used by the public to criticize government agencies related to public interests such as fuel prices, subsidies, and

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governance issues. This is where the research gap lies. No study has yet. (1) Identified the detailed forms of sarcasm on the @Pertamina Instagram account, an official account of a state institution that is in the public spotlight. (2) Systematically compared the three categories of sarcasm according to Camp (2011) in the digital space related to public service issues. (3) Explains the function of public criticism of state-owned energy companies through sarcastic strategies, which was not found in previous studies that focused on mass media accounts, community groups, or game applications. Studies on sarcasm in social media have been conducted by several researchers, particularly in the context of politics, economics, and public issues. Research by Khuluqie et al. (2022), Attazky et al. (2020), and Farmida et al. (2021) generally emphasizes the function of sarcasm as a tool for criticism and social expression, rather than the detailed linguistic form of sarcasm. In addition, most previous studies have examined the social media accounts of media institutions or digital communities, so there has not been much research examining sarcasm that appears on the official accounts of public institutions that have a direct relationship with state policy, such as @Pertamina. In fact, this context has different discourse characteristics because public criticism is directed at state institutions that have the authority to regulate the basic needs of the community.

Furthermore, previous studies have not systematically integrated Elizabeth Camp's (2011) classification of three types of sarcasm in analyzing netizen comments. Some studies only group forms of sarcasm in general without theoretically distinguishing between propositional, lexical, and illocutionary sarcasm. Thus, there is an analytical gap regarding how these three forms emerge, function, and are distinguished in the Indonesian digital context. Based on this gap, this study offers a new contribution by analyzing forms of sarcasm structurally and pragmatically using Camp's (2011) framework and applying it to the context of netizen comments on the Instagram account @Pertamina, which represents the dynamics of public criticism of national energy policy. This study not only adds to the understanding of the phenomenon of sarcasm on social media, but also provides a more in-depth linguistic perspective on how the digital community uses language as a means of protest, resistance, and social evaluation.

Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a pragmatic orientation, as it aims to describe linguistic phenomena based on their context of use (Moleong, 2008). The research data consists of netizen comments on the official Instagram account @Pertamina that contain elements of sarcasm, such as satire, ridicule, or irony towards public policy. A total of comments were collected from posts uploaded between March–June 2025, and from these, 126 comments were identified as containing sarcasm. Data collection was carried out using the observe and record method (Sudaryanto, 2015), which involved observing users' posts and comments, then recording comments that met the criteria for sarcasm. Data selection was carried out using purposive sampling (Sugiyono, 2019) based on the relevance of the content of the comments to the context of social criticism and the presence of elements of sarcasm. Data analysis used the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman (in Sugiyono, 2019), which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To identify the forms of sarcasm, this study used Elizabeth Camp's (2011) theory, which distinguishes three types of sarcasm, namely: (1) propositional sarcasm, in the form of direct insults towards a particular object; (2) lexical sarcasm, in the form of wordplay that is positive in literal meaning but negative in contextual meaning; and (3) illocutionary sarcasm, in the form of sarcasm that arises from implicature and the context of speech. From the 126 sarcasm data, 68 data items were classified as propositional sarcasm, 34 data items as lexical sarcasm, and 24 data items as illocutionary sarcasm. In addition, Grice's (1989) principle of conversational implicature is used to interpret the implied meaning in seemingly neutral speech. Data validity is maintained through theory and source triangulation (Moleong, 2008). Theory triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of analysis based on Camp and Grice's theories, while source triangulation is carried out by tracing several @Pertamina posts in the period March–June 2025 to ensure consistent results.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study show that the forms of sarcasm that appear in the comments section of the @Pertamina Instagram account can be divided into three main categories, namely propositional sarcasm, illocutionary sarcasm, and lexical sarcasm. All three serve as a means of expressing social criticism of issues involving Pertamina, such as the quality of fuel oil (BBM), monopolistic practices, and allegations of corruption. The use of sarcasm on social media reflects the dynamics of digital public communication, in which people use irony as a form of creative yet communicative social protest. These findings are in line with Elizabeth Camp's (2011) theory, which classifies sarcasm into three main forms based on the level of directness and linguistic strategies used by the speaker. Of the total 126 comments analyzed, three types of sarcasm were found according to Camp's (2011) classification. Propositional sarcasm emerged as the most dominant form with 68 data, indicating a tendency for netizens to convey criticism directly and explicitly regarding the quality of Pertamina's services and policies. Lexical sarcasm was found in 34 data, characterized by the use of positive words that function contextually as mockery. Meanwhile, illocutionary sarcasm appeared in 24 data, usually in the form of comments that appeared informative or neutral but implied criticism through context.

Thus, claims regarding netizen tendencies can be proven based on this frequency distribution, not just assumptions. The dominance of propositional sarcasm indicates that criticism of Pertamina is more often packaged in a firm, open, and straightforward manner, thereby emphasizing the character of public comments in the discourse on national energy services and policies. In addition, Grice's conversational implicature principle (1989) explains that sarcasm works through violations of the maxims of quality and relevance, resulting in implied meanings that are contrary to their literal meanings. The following table shows the findings on the forms of sarcasm in the comments section of @pertamina's Instagram account.

Propositional Sarcasm

Propositional sarcasm is the most common form found in comment sections. This type occurs when the speaker conveys sarcasm directly and explicitly, without disguising their intentions. According to Camp (2011), propositional sarcasm works at the level of the proposition or content of the sentence, where statements that appear informative actually convey the opposite meaning. Netizens use this form to express their anger and disappointment with Pertamina's policies, especially those related to fuel prices and monopolistic practices. The resulting discourse is straightforward, confrontational, and hyperbolic.

Table 1. Number of instances of propositional sarcasm

No	Propositional Sarcasm
1.	"Yesterday, my car's Pertamina tank was drained. Now my sister's car's Pertamina tank has been drained. What kind of joke is this? Just because they have a monopoly."
2.	"Selling gasoline or selling garbage?"
3.	"There's no competition, so why are you continuing to lose money? Oh, it turns out you're being corrupted."
4.	"All humans are corrupt, the only good thing is their image"

1. "Yesterday, my car's Pertamina tank was drained. Now my sister's car's Pertamina tank has been drained. What kind of joke is this? Just because they have a monopoly."

This comment expresses a complaint through sarcasm. The use of the word "funny" literally means humorous, but in this context, it functions as a satire that implies irritation with Pertamina's service. The phrase "just because you have a monopoly" reinforces criticism of Pertamina's dominant position, which is considered uncompetitive and irresponsible. In a pragmatic framework, this comment constitutes a violation of the maxim of quality (Grice, 1989) to emphasize a meaning opposite to its literal meaning.

2. "Selling gasoline or selling garbage?"

This comment is in the form of a rhetorical question, which pragmatically does not require an answer. The function of the question is not to seek information, but to emphasize criticism of the quality of the fuel. The use of the word "trash" is a form of hyperbole that expresses extreme dissatisfaction with the product.

3. "There's no competition, so why are you continuing to lose money? Oh, it turns out you're being corrupted."

This statement shows an ironic sentence structure containing two propositions: first, the factual statement "no competition, yet continuous losses"; second, the sarcastic conclusion "eh, turns out it's corruption". The use of the conjunction "eh" serves as a trigger of surprise that reinforces the effect of irony. This form shows social criticism that points to issues of morality and corporate governance.

4. "All humans are corrupt, the only good thing is their image"

The above data shows a form of harsh social criticism. The sentence "corrupt people are all good" indicates the assumption that many people, especially in certain environments, are accustomed to corrupt behavior. Meanwhile, the phrase "only good for image" implies that the goodness shown is only to look good in front of others. The word "image" here describes the attitude of pretending to be good in order to gain sympathy. Thus, this sarcasm mocks people or parties who appear good on the outside but are not sincere.

Illocutionary Sarcasm

Illocutionary sarcasm operates at the level of illocutionary force, where the meaning of the sarcasm is not apparent literally, but is implied through the context and the speaker's intention. This form shows the pragmatism of society in packaging criticism without losing its communicative effect. According to Camp (2011), illocutionary sarcasm is characterized by

tension between the form of speech and the actual intention. Structurally, the sentence appears neutral or polite, but the context makes it sarcastic.

Table 2. Number of instances of illocutionary sarcasm

No	Illocutionary Sarcasm
1.	"My motorbike is sputtering, man."
2.	"In addition to the facilities being okay, the fuel must also be maintained."
3.	"Events using corrupt money are very helpful for Pertamina to continue adulterating fuel. Thank you, everyone."

(7) "My motorbike is sputtering, man."

This comment is literally a technical complaint, but pragmatically it is a satire on the poor quality of fuel. The speaker does not explicitly mention Pertamina, but the context of the post makes the reader understand the meaning. This shows how *contextual implicature* works in illocutionary sarcasm (Grice, 1989).

(2) "In addition to the facilities being okay, the fuel must also be maintained."

This statement has a directive form, as if giving advice to Pertamina. However, its meaning implies subtle criticism that the current facilities and fuel quality are inadequate. This form shows that illocutionary sarcasm serves to convey criticism without causing direct conflict.

(3) "Events using corrupt money are very helpful for Pertamina to continue adulterating fuel. Thank you, everyone."

This comment uses an ironic form of gratitude. The positive expressions "very helpful" and "thank you all" actually mock the practices of fund misuse and fuel blending. The ironic meaning arises from the contradiction between the positive literal form and the negative social reality. This demonstrates the main characteristic of illocutionary sarcasm according to Camp (2011), namely the interplay between polite forms and the intention to mock. This form of sarcasm demonstrates the pragmatic ability of society to utilize indirect strategies to continue expressing criticism in the open public sphere. In line with Attazky, Triana, & Anwar (2020), illocutionary sarcasm is used by netizens to express protests politely without losing the power of the message.

Lexical Sarcasm

Lexical sarcasm is a form of sarcasm that arises through the use of words or phrases that have a positive literal meaning but a negative or sarcastic connotative meaning. In this context, speakers utilize lexical play to create an ironic effect. According to Elizabeth Camp (2011), lexical sarcasm occurs when speakers utter sentences that are semantically neutral or positive, but are spoken in a context that gives them the opposite meaning. Camp refers to this form as lexical sarcasm, which is sarcasm that operates at the level of word or phrase meaning, rather than at the level of sentence structure or speech act. In other words, the power of sarcasm does not lie in the content of the proposition, but in the contrast between the literal meaning and the communicative intent.

Table 3. Number of instances of lexical sarcasm

No	Lexical Sarcasm
1.	"This is so cool! The creative team is awesome."
2.	"The content is really funny."
3.	"1 quadrillion is better spent buying emyu, there's still more left over."

1. "This is so cool! The creative team is awesome."

Literally, the expressions "so cool" and "awesome" are words that have positive evaluative value. However, in the context of @Pertamina's post, these comments were not intended as praise, but rather as a form of mockery of the quality of content that was considered inadequate. Sarcasm arises from the contradiction between the positive lexical meaning and the

negative communicative intent, so this example is accurately categorized as lexical sarcasm according to Camp's (2011) framework. There are no other speech acts that indicate an advisory or neutral statement, so this comment does not constitute illocutionary sarcasm.

2. "The content is really funny."

This data is a form of lexical sarcasm. Literally, the statement expresses a positive assessment, namely that the uploaded content is very entertaining. However, when examined in context, this comment I actually intended as sarcasm. The speaker does not really think the content is funny, but rather expresses dissatisfaction and disappointment with the quality of the content, which is considered irrelevant, bland, or disappointing. The choice of the phrase "really funny" functions as an evaluative hyperbole that disguises criticism through positive expression. The contradiction between the literal meaning (praise) and the actual intention (sarcasm) reflects the characteristic of lexical sarcasm as described by Camp (2011). In the context of the @Pertamina Instagram account, this comment reflects the strategy of netizens in conveying social criticism through ironic humor, thereby remaining communicative in the digital public sphere.

3. "1 quadrillion is better spent buying emyu, there's still more left over."

This comment is a form of lexical sarcasm. The number "1 quadrillion" is used to exaggerate the magnitude of the losses caused by fuel adulteration. The speaker sarcastically compares it to "buying emyu (Manchester United)" to show how huge the losses are. The word "mending" is used sarcastically, not to give advice, but to mock Pertamina's negligence. This sarcasm uses humor to convey sharp criticism of the state's losses due to policies that are considered incompetent.

The findings regarding the dominance of propositional sarcasm cannot be separated from the socio-political context of Indonesia, particularly Pertamina's position as a state-owned enterprise (BUMN) that holds a strategic role in national energy provision. As an institution responsible for highly sensitive public needs such as fuel prices, energy subsidies, and distribution policies Pertamina frequently becomes the target of public criticism during periods of economic turbulence, price increases, or corruption allegations. In Indonesia's increasingly open digital political culture, the public tends to use sarcasm as a form of social control and a channel for expressing dissatisfaction that is perceived as safer than direct, confrontational criticism. This dynamic explains why propositional sarcasm appears more dominant: comments become a medium for articulating public frustration toward a state institution considered unresponsive. In addition, the use of lexical and illocutionary sarcasm reflects Indonesian linguistic strategies when interacting with institutions that hold authority. Socially and culturally, Indonesians often prefer humor, subtle insinuations, or irony as a way to reduce tension when expressing criticism a characteristic of high-context communication styles. These findings align with broader patterns of Indonesian communication, in which humor-based or indirect criticism is used to maintain politeness while still effectively conveying disagreement. Thus, the linguistic analysis in this study not only describes patterns of language use but also reflects wider dynamics of public discourse related to transparency, public trust, and the relationship between citizens and the state.

Conclusion

This study concludes that sarcasm in the @Pertamina Instagram comment section represents not only a linguistic strategy but also a socio-pragmatic response shaped by Indonesia's digital civic space. Through Camp's (2011) framework, three forms of sarcasm propositional, lexical, and illocutionary were identified, with propositional sarcasm being the most dominant. This distribution demonstrates that social media facilitates a mode of direct public criticism toward state institutions involved in essential services. Theoretically, this study extends the application of Camp's classification of sarcasm into the domain of Indonesian digital discourse, showing that her tripartite model remains valid but requires contextual refinement. The findings reveal that in highly politicized online environments, propositional sarcasm becomes more salient as a form of collective resistance, suggesting that the hierarchy of sarcastic forms in digital contexts may differ from face-to-face communication. Furthermore, the study contributes to pragmatics by highlighting how Indonesian netizens rely on context-rich inferencing, blending humor, cultural norms of indirectness, and socio-political awareness to construct sarcastic meaning. These patterns illustrate that sarcasm online is not merely a linguistic inversion but a multimodal pragmatic act shaped by public sentiment, institutional trust, and digital affordances. In addition, this study enhances theoretical discussions in digital discourse studies by demonstrating that sarcasm in comment sections functions as a mechanism of symbolic accountability enabling users to articulate public frustration and exert discursive pressure on state institutions. This suggests that sarcasm in online civic spaces plays a broader social function than previously emphasized in traditional irony research. Overall, the study advances theoretical understanding of sarcasm by demonstrating how pragmatic categories operate differently in digital, politicized contexts. It also confirms that social media serves as a fertile arena where sarcasm is not only a stylistic choice but an instrument of public negotiation, emotional release, and civic engagement. Future research may build on these insights by comparing multiple institutional accounts or integrating computational methods to explore sarcasm at scale.

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