

Persuasive Language Strategies in Instagram Influencer Content: A Pragmatic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze persuasive language strategies used by influencers on Instagram from a pragmatic perspective. This research employs a qualitative descriptive design with data consisting of captions, comments, and audiovisual content containing persuasive elements. Data were collected through non-participant observation and documentation, and analyzed using an interactive model including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that influencers utilize various persuasive language strategies, such as directive, expressive, and assertive speech acts, as well as implicatures and credibility construction. Directive speech acts are used to encourage immediate action, while expressive acts and emotional appeals function to build a connection with the audience. In addition, implicature serves as an indirect persuasive strategy that enhances trust and authenticity. The results indicate that language in influencer content is not merely informative but also strategic in shaping audience perception, building trust, and influencing behavior. Therefore, a pragmatic approach provides deeper insights into how meaning and persuasion are constructed in digital communication.

Keywords: *Persuasive Language; Pragmatics; Instagram Influencers; Speech Acts; Digital Communication*

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed patterns of human communication, particularly in the context of social media. Platforms such as Instagram have evolved beyond their initial function as spaces for sharing personal moments into powerful tools for marketing, self-presentation, and audience engagement. In this digital ecosystem, influencers emerge as key figures who actively construct messages and shape public opinion through strategic communication practices. Their ability to influence audiences is not merely based on visual content but also on the effective use of language, especially persuasive language that aims to shape attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Abidin, 2016; Afni Rosalina, Jumino Suhadi, 2025; De Veirman et al., 2017)

Language plays a central role in the process of persuasion, as it enables influencers to deliver messages that are not only informative but also emotionally engaging and socially appealing. In the context of Instagram, persuasive language is often embedded in captions, comments, and audiovisual content, where influencers utilize various linguistic strategies such as direct invitations, emotional appeals, storytelling, and expressions of credibility. These strategies are designed to create a sense of trust and relatability between influencers and their followers, ultimately encouraging audience engagement and consumption behavior (Casaló et al., 2020)

From a linguistic perspective, the study of persuasive language cannot be separated from pragmatics, which focuses on how meaning is constructed in relation to context, speaker intention, and audience interpretation. Pragmatics provides a framework for understanding not only what is said but also what is

implied, intended, and interpreted in communication (Yule, 2022). In influencer content, meaning is often conveyed implicitly through speech acts, implicatures, and contextual cues, making pragmatic analysis highly relevant for uncovering the underlying persuasive strategies used in digital communication (Cutting, 2021; Levinson, 1983)

Speech act theory, as proposed by Austin and further developed by Searle, is particularly useful in analyzing how influencers perform actions through language. For instance, when an influencer recommends a product, they are not only providing information but also performing an illocutionary act intended to persuade the audience to take action. This persuasive function is further strengthened by perlocutionary effects, where the audience responds by liking, commenting, sharing, or purchasing products (Searle, 1969; Thomas, 2013). In addition, the use of politeness strategies contributes to the effectiveness of persuasion by maintaining social harmony and enhancing the speaker's credibility (Leech, 2014).

The increasing influence of social media in shaping consumer behavior has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly in the fields of communication, marketing, and linguistics. Previous studies have shown that influencers play a crucial role in digital marketing by leveraging their social capital and linguistic strategies to engage audiences (Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, 2011; Lou, C., & Yuan, 2019). However, many of these studies focus primarily on marketing effectiveness and audience perception, with limited attention to the linguistic mechanisms underlying persuasive communication. This indicates a research gap in exploring

how language functions pragmatically within influencer discourse.

Although influencer marketing has been extensively investigated from communication and marketing perspectives, studies focusing specifically on pragmatic aspects of persuasive language remain limited. Existing research tends to emphasize consumer responses, engagement metrics, and advertising effectiveness rather than the linguistic processes through which persuasion is achieved. Consequently, there is insufficient understanding of how speech acts, implicatures, and contextual meanings operate in influencer discourse. This gap highlights the need for a pragmatic investigation of persuasive communication in social media environments.

In addition, most prior research tends to adopt quantitative approaches or content analysis methods without deeply examining the contextual meaning and communicative intentions embedded in language use. The lack of qualitative pragmatic analysis creates limitations in understanding how persuasive messages are constructed and interpreted in real communicative contexts. Therefore, this study offers a different perspective by focusing on the pragmatic dimensions of language use in influencer content, particularly through the analysis of speech acts, implicatures, and persuasive strategies in Instagram discourse.

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of persuasive language analysis and pragmatic theory within the context of Instagram influencer communication. While previous studies have primarily examined influencer effectiveness from marketing and consumer behavior perspectives, this study focuses on the linguistic mechanisms underlying persuasion. Specifically, it investigates how speech

acts, implicatures, and contextual meanings are strategically employed to influence audience attitudes and behaviors. By providing a qualitative pragmatic analysis of authentic Instagram content, this study contributes new insights into the relationship between language, persuasion, and digital communication.

The phenomenon of persuasive language in social media is also closely related to broader sociocultural dynamics, such as globalization, digital identity, and consumer culture. Influencers often construct identities that reflect aspirational lifestyles, which are communicated through carefully crafted language and narratives. These identities not only influence audience perception but also shape cultural norms and values, especially among younger generations who are highly active on social media platforms (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Khamis et al., 2017). As a result, analyzing the language used by influencers becomes essential for understanding the interplay between language, identity, and power in digital communication.

Recent studies have increasingly examined the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer attitudes and online engagement. For example, (Lee, S., & Kim, 2021) found that influencer credibility, attractiveness, and perceived authenticity significantly affect consumers' trust and purchase intentions. Similarly (Zeng et al., 2024) demonstrated that influencer endorsements are often perceived as more relatable and trustworthy than traditional celebrity endorsements. Furthermore (De Veirman et al., 2017) argued that the commercialization of social media influencers has transformed digital communication into a strategic persuasive practice where authenticity functions as a key marketing asset. More

recently, emphasized that the perceived congruence between influencers and endorsed brands enhances audience engagement and persuasion effectiveness.

Despite these contributions, previous studies have predominantly focused on marketing outcomes, consumer behavior, and advertising effectiveness. Limited attention has been paid to the linguistic mechanisms through which persuasion is constructed in influencer discourse. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining persuasive language strategies from a pragmatic perspective, particularly through speech acts, implicatures, and communicative intentions in Instagram content. This approach provides a deeper understanding of how persuasion operates linguistically within digital communication contexts.

Based on the background described above, the problems of this research can be formulated as follows: what types of persuasive language strategies are used by influencers in Instagram content, how these strategies can be analyzed from a pragmatic perspective, and what functions these strategies serve in influencing audience behavior. These questions are essential for understanding the role of language in digital persuasion and for providing insights into how communication strategies are constructed and interpreted in social media contexts.

In line with these problems, the objectives of this research are to identify the types of persuasive language strategies used by influencers on Instagram, to analyze these strategies using a pragmatic framework, and to explain their functions in influencing audience attitudes and behaviors. Through this study, it is expected that a deeper understanding of linguistic

practices in digital communication can be achieved, particularly in relation to persuasion and audience engagement.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore persuasive language strategies used by influencers on Instagram from a pragmatic perspective. Qualitative research is considered appropriate for this study because it aims to understand linguistic phenomena in depth and within their natural context, particularly how meaning is constructed and interpreted in digital communication (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dornyei, 2007)

The subjects of this study are Instagram influencers who actively produce content related to lifestyle, beauty, or product promotion. The data consist of textual and audiovisual materials, specifically captions, comments, and selected video content that contain persuasive elements. These materials are chosen because they represent authentic language use in real communicative situations, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of pragmatic meaning and persuasive strategies (Kozinets, 2020)

The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling, where data are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria include influencers with a significant number of followers, active engagement rates, and consistent use of persuasive language in their content. A total of 10–20 posts are selected as the primary data for analysis, ensuring sufficient representation of linguistic variation and communicative intent (Etikan et al., 2016)

The selected influencers represent various content categories, including beauty, lifestyle, health, and product promotion. The observation

period covered posts published between January and March 2025. A total of 20 Instagram posts containing explicit or implicit persuasive messages were analyzed. Each post was coded according to speech act categories, persuasive techniques, and pragmatic functions to facilitate systematic interpretation.

The main instrument of this research is the researcher, supported by documentation tools such as screenshots and note-taking techniques. The researcher plays a central role in identifying, classifying, and interpreting linguistic data, which is a common characteristic of qualitative research (Miles et al., 2020). The use of documentation techniques enables systematic data collection from Instagram posts, ensuring that the data are accurately recorded and analyzed.

The variables analyzed in this study focus on persuasive language strategies and their pragmatic functions. These include types of speech acts (such as directives, assertives, and expressives), implicatures, and persuasive techniques such as emotional appeal, credibility, and direct invitation. These variables are examined to understand how influencers construct persuasive messages and how these messages function in influencing audience behaviour (Searle, 1969; Yule, 2022).

Data collection is conducted through non-participant observation and documentation. The researcher observes influencer content without direct interaction and systematically collects relevant posts for analysis. This approach allows for an objective examination of naturally occurring language use in digital contexts (Androustopoulos, 2014; Herring, 2004).

The data analysis technique follows the interactive model proposed

by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, relevant linguistic data are selected and categorized based on persuasive strategies. In the data display stage, the data are organized into tables or descriptive forms to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions are drawn by identifying patterns, meanings, and functions of persuasive language within the selected content (Miles et al., 2020).

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies triangulation techniques, particularly theoretical triangulation, by comparing findings with existing theories of pragmatics and persuasion. This method enhances the credibility and reliability of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Overall, this research adopts a pragmatic analytical framework to examine how persuasive language strategies are used by influencers on Instagram, focusing on meaning, context, and communicative intention rather than statistical generalization. Therefore, no complex statistical model is applied, as the emphasis is on qualitative interpretation and linguistic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study along with a discussion of persuasive language strategies used by influencers on Instagram. The analysis focuses on how language is employed pragmatically through speech acts, implicatures, and persuasive techniques to influence audience behavior.

Based on the data collected from selected influencer posts, several dominant persuasive language strategies were identified, including directive speech acts, expressive speech acts, emotional appeals, credibility

construction, and implicit persuasion through implicature. These strategies demonstrate how influencers construct meaning not only explicitly but also implicitly within digital discourse.

One of the most frequently used strategies is directive speech acts, which function to encourage or direct the audience to take specific actions. For example, in a caption such as:

“Guys, you **HAVE** to try this skincare! I’ve been using it for a week and my skin is glowing. Check the link in my bio now!”



Figure 1. Persuasive Language through Directive Speech Act

Caption:

*“Guys, you **HAVE** to try this skincare! I’ve been using it for a week and my skin is glowing.*

Check the link in my bio now!”

This finding supports Searle’s (1969) classification of directive speech acts, which are intended to make the hearer perform a future action. In the context of influencer communication, directive expressions are frequently employed to encourage engagement and purchasing behavior. The result also aligns with (Lou & Yuan, 2019), who

This utterance reflects a directive speech act, particularly in the phrase “you **HAVE** to try” and “check the link in my bio,” which explicitly instruct the audience to act. According to speech act theory, this type of utterance carries an illocutionary force aimed at influencing behavior. The persuasive effect is strengthened by the use of emphasis (capital letters) and urgency markers such as “now,” which create a sense of immediacy (Hyland, 2005).

found that persuasive recommendations delivered by credible influencers significantly affect consumer intentions.

The caption above reflects the use of directive speech acts, particularly through expressions such as “you **HAVE** to try” and “check the link in my bio now,” which directly encourage the audience to take action. According to speech act theory, directive utterances function to influence the listener’s behavior. The use of capitalization in “**HAVE**” serves as an emphasis strategy that strengthens the persuasive force of the message.

Additionally, the statement “my skin is glowing” represents an assertive speech act that provides a positive claim about the product based on personal experience. This combination of directive and assertive strategies enhances persuasion by appealing to both action and credibility. The presence of urgency markers such as “now” further increases the likelihood of audience response, aligning with persuasive communication strategies in digital media.

Another prominent strategy is the use of expressive speech acts combined with emotional appeal. Consider the following example:

“I’m so in love with this product It literally changed my daily routine and made my life so much easier!”

In this case, the influencer expresses personal feelings and satisfaction, which serves to build emotional connection with the audience. This aligns with the concept of affective persuasion, where emotional language

plays a key role in influencing audience perception (Jin et al., 2019). The use of emojis further enhances the emotional tone and reinforces the intended meaning, which is common in computer-mediated communication (Herring, 2004)

Implicature also plays a significant role in persuasive communication. For instance:

“I don’t usually recommend products unless they’re really worth it... and this one definitely is.”

Although the influencer does not directly instruct the audience to purchase the product, the implied meaning suggests high credibility and trustworthiness. This is an example of conversational implicature, where meaning is inferred beyond the literal expression (Levinson, 1983). Such indirect persuasion is often more effective because it allows the audience to feel autonomous in their decision-making process.



Figure 2. Persuasive Language through Implicature and Credibility

Caption:

“I don’t usually recommend products, but this one is amazing...”

The use of implicature in this example confirms Levinson’s (1983) view that speakers often communicate meanings indirectly. Such indirect persuasive strategies are particularly effective in social media contexts because they preserve audience autonomy while simultaneously conveying positive evaluations of products or services.

This caption demonstrates the use of implicature and credibility (ethos) as persuasive strategies. The phrase “I don’t usually recommend products” implies that the influencer is selective and trustworthy, thereby enhancing credibility. Rather than directly instructing the audience, the influencer conveys meaning implicitly, allowing the audience to infer that the product is worth trying.

From a pragmatic perspective, this is an example of conversational implicature, where the intended meaning goes beyond the literal expression. Such indirect persuasion is often more effective because it creates a sense of authenticity and autonomy for the audience in making decisions.

Another important finding is the construction of credibility (ethos) through language. Influencers often emphasize personal experience, expertise, or authenticity, as seen in the following example:

“As someone who has struggled with acne for years, I can honestly say this is one of the best products I’ve tried.”

This statement builds credibility by highlighting personal experience, which increases audience trust. According to (Lou, C., & Yuan, 2019), perceived credibility is a key factor in influencer effectiveness. Linguistically,

this is realized through assertive speech acts that present information as factual and reliable.

Furthermore, the study found that influencers frequently combine multiple persuasive strategies within a single caption. For example:

“Honestly, this is a game changer! You should definitely try it if you want quick results. I’ve already seen a difference in just 3 days!”

This caption integrates expressive (enthusiasm), directive (suggestion), and assertive (claim of results) speech acts simultaneously. Such combination enhances persuasive power by appealing to emotion, logic, and action at once (Hyland, 2005)

From a pragmatic perspective, these findings indicate that meaning in influencer communication is highly context-dependent. The effectiveness of persuasive language is influenced by factors such as audience expectations, platform norms, and the relationship between influencer and followers. This supports the view that pragmatics is essential for understanding digital communication, as it considers both linguistic and extralinguistic elements (Tagg, 2015)

In relation to previous studies, the findings of this research support the argument that influencer communication relies heavily on authenticity, emotional engagement, and strategic language use (Casaló et al., 2020) However, this study extends previous research by providing a detailed pragmatic analysis of how these strategies are linguistically realized, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of persuasion in social media contexts.

Overall, the results show that persuasive language in Instagram influencer content is not merely about delivering information but about constructing meaning through strategic use of language. Influencers employ a

variety of pragmatic strategies to influence audience perception and behavior, making language a powerful tool in digital communication (Afni Rosalina, Jumino Suhadi, 2025).

Overall, the findings indicate that influencers employ multiple persuasive language strategies, both direct and indirect, to influence audience perception and behavior. Directive speech acts are used to encourage immediate action, while implicature and credibility are employed to build trust and subtly persuade the audience.

These results support previous studies that highlight the importance of authenticity, emotional engagement, and linguistic strategy in influencer communication. However, this study contributes a deeper understanding by focusing on the pragmatic mechanisms underlying these strategies, particularly how meaning is constructed and interpreted in digital contexts.

From a broader perspective, the study confirms that persuasive language in social media is not merely informational but also strategic and context-dependent. Influencers carefully construct their messages to achieve perlocutionary effects, such as audience engagement, trust-building, and behavioral change. This reinforces the significance of pragmatics in analyzing contemporary digital communication.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that persuasive language strategies used by influencers on Instagram are systematically constructed through pragmatic elements such as speech acts, implicatures, and credibility-building techniques to influence audience behavior. The findings reveal that directive speech acts are predominantly used to encourage direct action, while expressive speech acts and emotional

appeals function to build personal connection and engagement with the audience. In addition, implicature serves as an indirect yet powerful persuasive strategy by allowing audiences to infer meaning, thereby increasing trust and authenticity. The construction of credibility through personal experience further strengthens the persuasive impact of the message. Overall, the study demonstrates that influencer communication is not merely informational but highly strategic, where language is deliberately employed to achieve perlocutionary effects such as shaping audience perception, building trust, and encouraging behavioral responses. These findings highlight the importance of pragmatic analysis in understanding how meaning and persuasion operate within digital communication contexts, particularly in social media environments. Theoretically, this study contributes to pragmatic scholarship by demonstrating how speech acts and implicatures function as persuasive mechanisms in digital discourse. Practically, the findings may assist influencers, marketers, and digital content creators in developing more effective communication strategies while maintaining authenticity and audience trust. Future studies may expand the analysis to other social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook to compare persuasive language practices across digital environments.

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