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THE SOCIO-PRAGMATIC FUNCTION OF IRONY ON SOCIAL MEDIA (USING EXAMPLES FROM JOHAN DECKMAN'S ART PICTURES ON INSTAGRAM)

Abstract

Irony conveys a tinge of derogation, criticism, and contempt in an attitude, meaning the opposite of what has been said (Grice, 1967). This paper deals with the socio-pragmatic perspective of irony on social media (Instagram), investigating the following issues: 1. Why would a speaker decide to be ironic, and how is irony encoded in their utterance? 2. How can readers grasp ironic intentions in the examples of the studied Instagram account? 3. Despite being negative, can irony serve a positive social function? On that account, we shall try to analyze Johan Deckman's art displayed in photos on his Instagram account. The scope of the creator's intentions and the contents of his utterances will also be inspected. Moreover, this paper studies readers' decoding of irony by analyzing the comment section. From a pragmatic perspective, this research will be carried out through the following components: 1. background knowledge of the creator/reader and their general perception of the world (Colston & Katz, 2005); 2. the situational character of irony (Kotthoff, 2003); 3. the allusional pretense in irony (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995). From a functional perspective, the study is based on the following categories of irony employment: 1. Humor 2. The elevation of the social status 3. Aggression 4. Emotional control (Dews et al., 2009). Based on the researched data, this article also suggests a hypothesis that there is one more category to add to those offered by Dews, Kaplan, & Winner (2009), specifically - "empathic call for change".

Keywords: CMD, humor, Instagram, socio-pragmatic functions of irony, verbal irony

1. Introduction

On the grounds of the rising relevance of social media, the Instagram platform was chosen to inquire into the creation and functioning of irony in art represented by a thematic fusion of non-verbal and verbal forms. As a medium for the global population, Instagram connects people worldwide with different socio-political views and backgrounds. The following questions will be discussed and answered by exploring the empirical data on Instagram: 1. What is irony, and how is it revealed on Deckman's Instagram? 2. What socio-pragmatic functions does irony serve in Deckman's art? 3. How is irony perceived, and what is the function of humor?

1.1. On the socio-pragmatic functions of irony

The pragmatic function of irony as an echo defends the view of verbal irony as a case of echoic "attribution", where the speakers dissociate themselves from what has been said (Sperber & Wilson,

2012). In the "pretense theory", speakers of ironic utterances pretend to be someone else as they employ the words of any person. The mission is achieved as long as their hearers can identify the speaker's pretense and the sentiment behind it (Clark & Gerrig, 1984). However, both theories have problems covering certain ironic expressions. Nakamura et al. (1995) tried to amend these deficits by introducing the "allusional pretense theory", as ironic speakers are not always echoic or pretend to say one thing and mean another (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995). This new notion covers a broader range of ironic expressions as the quality that unites every kind of irony is not an echo or pretense but an allusion - an indirect reference to something else created by the speaker (Garmendia, 2018). "Allusional pretense" suggests three main categories of ironic expression: 1. hyperbole; 2. agreement; 3. rhetorical question (Nakamura et al., 1995). According to this theoretical perspective, irony is characterized by referencing the violated norms or expectations (Garmendia, 2018).

An important pragmatic function in ironic utterance is an "attitude expression"(positive or negative). Several theories claim that verbal irony generally expresses a negative attitude (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995; Sperber & Wilson, 1981). In other words, the speaker "expresses some kind of critique, or a negatively evaluative propositional attitude" (Garmendia, 2010: p.403).

This paper does not deny the existence of positive irony (praise by criticizing). However, based on the studied examples, we follow the explanation predisposed by Garmendia, which claims that attitude expression in irony is essentially negative, as even when the speaker is ironic and positive, the literal meaning mutes this positive meaning and shows a negative tinge (Garmendia, 2018). Another essential aspect to consider in irony detection is 'bridge content', the relation between literal meaning and implicature that has not been explicitly communicated and reveals irony (Garmendia, 2018).

The main question lying at the basis of the social function of irony is connected to the reasons for its employment in one's speech. On the one hand, it is attributed to softening the tone of criticism (Dews & Winner, 1995). Also, ironic expression is highly effective in fulfilling communication goals and, thus, is more memorable (Kreuz et al., 2009). Furthermore, an ironic utterance might be prioritized over straightforward speech due to its entertaining nature (Dews et al., 2009). According to another study on social functions of irony, the latter is perceived as a humoristic act if applied in an informal setting (Kotthoff, 2003). Thus, humor is a way of expressing irony when one wants to sound less harsh. The American Association for Therapeutic Humor describes the latter as "any intervention that promotes health and wellness by stimulating a playful discovery, expression, or appreciation of the absurdity or incongruity of life's situation" (Sultanoff, 2000, p.8). This focus on the absurdity of life's situation when defining the meaning of humor, links it to the definition of 'situational irony', a paradoxical circumstance the speaker was caught in (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995). Thus, humor in an ironic utterance creates an effect of surprise yielded by the disparity between what is said and what is meant, weakens the critique, and sounds less threatening (Dews et al., 2009). According to Gibbs et al. (2014), humor in irony recognition is met by laughter as a metacommunicative act that signals acknowledgement of pretense (Gibbs et al., 2014). Another study has revealed that over 50% of all ironic utterances in

spontaneous conversations and informal settings were closely associated with laughter (Bryant, 2010), making humor a social category for irony (Gibbs et al., 2014).

Apart from humor, the following social functions of irony were singled out by Dews et al. (2009): aggression, the elevation of social status, and emotional control (Dews et al., 2009). Aggression or aggressive irony is equivalent to sarcastic irony and aims to insult the listener. When "elevation of social status" is employed as a communicative means, the speaker seeks to degrade the reputation of his addressee. Alternatively, employing emotional control while being ironic provides the speaker with a tranquil rhetoric that, in a way, weakens the insult aimed at the listener (Dews et al., 2009). Social and cultural background also play an essential role in figurative language cognition (Colston & Katz, 2005). According to studies in psycholinguistics, mere knowledge of the speaker's/listener's social status or employment background can change the thought process when deciphering ironic utterances. In addition, shared background knowledge between the parties is also one of the determining factors of irony realization (Garmendia, 2018).

2. Computer-mediated discourse (CMD) on Instagram

In the modern world of fast-paced developments in the field of technology, the popularity of computer-mediated communication as a means of social interaction is undeniable. Social networks play an important role in unifying societies through the sharing of ideas, expectations, emotions, and feelings (Trudgill, 2006; Delos Reyes, 2018). Instagram is a robust portal for voicing one's beliefs about various issues. The comment section, accompanying every form of post on the feed, creates opportunities for two-sided communication between the account owner and their followers. Computer-mediated communication is equally important to research as any other means of communication, as the online discourse binds with an individual or their cultural identity and finds its way of being displayed through paralinguistic, verbal, and contextual cues (J. T. Hancock, 2004). For instance, recent studies of Georgian online polylogues have defined general cognitive and verbal processes that include both contradiction and entertainment and confirm "a certain degree of impoliteness accepted by the culture"(Rusieshvili & Dolidze, 2020).

The primary intention to be met when making an ironic statement is to be deciphered correctly by their listeners and to avoid miscommunication (Hancock, 2004). The reaction to an ironic discourse can have two evident outcomes: positive and negative. Positive evidence is detected when the audience has correctly deciphered the implicit intentions of a speaker and responded accordingly, such as by laughing, smiling, or responding with counter-ironic discourse. Negative evidence occurs when the listener has decoded only the literal meaning as the salient meaning (Hancock, 2004).

According to Burke's analysis of social media involvement, media consumers deliberately quest for personalities with whom they aspire to identify (Burke, 1969). Upon encountering such figures, they assimilate the attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors these personas exhibit because they resonate with their existing convictions or are predisposed towards adopting them (Burke, 1969). This kind of audience involvement is called 'identification', and the theory behind it suggests that identification occurs when one individual shares (or believes that he/she shares) the interests of

another (Brown, 2015). Audience involvement on Instagram is a modern media interaction where followers should repeat the identification pattern when following specific media personas. Within the framework proposed by Burke (1969) and later elaborated by Brown (2015), we believe that the general character of the comments will fall into the positive evidence due to the reasons that followers are already predisposed to be aligned with the ideas shared on the Instagram page they chose to follow. However, audience involvement on Instagram represents a substantial area for scholarly discourse and is a subject of future investigation.

When analyzing CMD polylogues of the pictorial form of data under research, we will rely on verbal texts, punctuation marks, and emoticon/emoji-based interactions due to the scarcity of such cue employment as tone of voice or facial expression in the photo examples chosen for analysis.

3. Methodology

This paper aims to disclose the socio-pragmatic functions of irony on social media. The empirical data were collected from Johan Deckman's Instagram account, which displays pictorial posts of his art (the request for employing examples for the research purpose and delivering them in this article, as well as mentioning the creator's name, has been approved by the owner). Deckman's, as a psychotherapist's, art is therapeutic, the goal of which is achieved through combining three aspects: paradoxes of situational irony, verbal ironic humor, and antique items, such as old books, bags, etc. With sentence-long inscriptions on these items, irony is achieved by creating incongruity between the physical representation of an art and its verbal exposition. Images of art on the Instagram account are exponents of common challenges people face. This unifies its multinational audience around the topics displayed.

Fifty photo examples were collected for socio-pragmatic inspection from the Instagram-page above. 7 out of 50 were encapsulated to showcase results in detail. In order to reveal whether the audience correctly detected irony, the study also observed the comment section under examples as means of computer-mediated discourse. In order to decipher the meanings of comments written in a language other than English, the "see translation" button was used as the platform's instant translation feature. Selected posts were distributed into the following categories: Irony on: book covers, book suppositions, vinyl covers, bags, and posters.

On the stage of qualitative content analysis, research examined relevant peculiarities of ironic utterances, linguistically manifested via appropriate ironic cues of pretense, wordplay, or humor, and incongruity between their verbal and physical manifestations. Showcased examples were grouped into pragmatic categories of 1. rhetorical questions (statement in this case), 2. ironic hyperbole, and 3. ironic agreement (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995). Examples of irony's social function detection were examined through the scope of Dews et al. (2009) categories: humor, the elevation of social status, aggression, and emotional control (Dews et al., 2009).

To examine the quality of irony detection, commentaries on the selected posts were analyzed using positive and negative evidence (Hancock, 2004). Positive evidence occurs when the audience has correctly decoded the hidden intentions of a speaker. Negative evidence unfolds when the listener has inferred the literal meaning as the salient meaning of an ironic utterance (Hancock, 2004). Comments with positive and negative evidence were classified into the following categories: 1. Emojis (positive/negative), 2. Short verbal comments (pos./neg.) 3. Longer comments (pos./neg)

The quantitative method was used to assess the statistical data regarding linguistic means and strategies employed in the examples chosen for the analysis, and the number of negative and positive evidence through the comment section of those examples.

4. Discussion

As mentioned above, this paper discusses the socio-pragmatic functions of verbal irony through Johan Deckman's art displayed on Instagram. Photo examples encapsulate existential problems in life, depicted in paradoxical, witty aphorisms inscribed as titles on various objects. These titles serve as a wake-up call in the face of universally experienced fears in life, pushing their audience towards self-reflection. According to E. Fabian (2006), the employment of irony in psychotherapy triggers a positive effect of creating solidarity between speaker and listener. Based on this theory and studied empirical data, an additional category was suggested as the social function of irony- "empathic call for change", which is irony that creates solidarity and appeals to its "target" to make a positive change in their lives. We will focus on five categories grouped according to the visual representations of the art above: Irony on 1. book covers, 2. book suppositions, 3. vinyl covers, 4. bags, 5. posters.

Book covers:
Example 1. "How to be sorry but not sorry enough not to do it again"
This title is written on an antique book cover. In this example, the ironic effect is achieved through multilayered pragmatic dimensions. The first dimension is a situation where the bridge content should describe a person who constantly does something to regret later. The second dimension opens up on a verbal basis- "sorry-not sorry" creates a clash, describing a person "in repentance" but "not really". However, the primary conflict is created by "how-to" at the beginning of the sentence, as it is written as advice that should NOT be taken. Another bridge content could be that such a behavior becomes a "routine, " and you could write a book on how to "master" it. Now let us look at the artist's attitude expression and which socio-pragmatic functions of irony he employs. Deckman alludes to storylines of "temporary and superficial regrets", creates the book with a rhetorical statement, and pretends to align with the content. However, it implies the opposite and thus expresses a negative attitude. A person seeing the statement on the book cover could feel mocked or derogated. However, this conclusion might be too harsh to attain. The very incongruity between the verbal expression "how to do something that hurts me over and over again" and the book's physical representation makes the reader think and rethink its function to be eye-opening and

ironically humorous rather than scornful. Another word for it is self-ironic! Thus, this post pragmatically functions as a 'rhetorically ironic statement'.

The picture of this antique book cover collected 160 comments from multinational followers of the Instagram page and was classified according to the classification suggested in this article: 1. Emojis(pos./neg.), 2. Short verbal comments(pos./neg.) 3. Longer comments(pos./neg). Most comments detected positive evidence, meaning that readers decoded irony correctly. This was revealed through positive emoji commentaries such as "laughing", "applauding", and "heart" emoticons, and supportive verbal forms. Short verbal comments such as "so good", "ha-ha, my life?" prevailed over longer ones. Long comments read: "First you laugh at the joke. Then you recognize the truth behind the joke and possibly see it in yourself, but because it started with humor, now I can face an unpleasant truth from a softer, much safer position than if someone had sat me down and said, 'You have a problem'". This comment genuinely describes the whole thought process of deciphering irony and leads us to the role of humor in irony realization and, lastly, should serve as evidence to the positive social function, or the hypothesized category of irony- "empathic call for change". However, the example above should also carry the notes of 'emotional control', the category presented by Dews et al. (2009). Emotional control presents itself when the ironist exhibits a degree of self-control by delivering a remark in a jesting or subtly positive manner. If, as posited, ironic remarks are perceived as more humorous than literal statements. If they engender less disparity in status and are less condemnatory than straightforward remarks, it logically follows that irony should mitigate feelings of defensiveness and offence in recipients.

Additionally, it stands to reason that irony should have a less detrimental impact on the rapport between the speaker and the addressee (Dews et al., 2009). This makes readers detect empathy on the speaker's behalf. Thus, the social function of irony overlaps three categories here: humor, emotional control (Dews et al., 2009), and empathic call for change (the category suggested in this article).

Example 2. *"How not to be fooled by the person in front of you".*

The title is inscribed on a particular book cover that blurrily reflects the person standing before it. Irony in this example is achieved through a rhetorical statement, but the instruction is adverse: "how not to". The most salient ironic meaning here is inferred by the combination of the title, "How not to be fooled by the person in front of you", and the art's physical appearance - the book with an aluminum foil cover that reflects anyone looking at it. The bridge content of this example might refer to a paradoxical situation where we lie to ourselves to achieve results that do not bring contentment. Illusional pretense lies in the author's implied intention, meaning that the person should be worried about not being fooled by himself. From a pragmatic standpoint, the attitude of a creator is negative, as it refers to the vanities of humankind. This title would bring a smile to a reader due to self-irony detection.

Furthermore, such a response was indicated through all of the 49 commentaries, showing positive evidence of irony perception. Reactions showed admiration and recognition. The fact that the examples discussed so far showed positive evidence in comments can be explained by Burke's 'identification' of the followers with the media persona. The latter was exposed through categories

of positive emoji and short and more extended responses. Emojis detected were: 'smiling', 'heart', and 'clapping'. Short verbal comments: "so good!", "genius" …and longer ones included: "Love the fact that the cover is actually the mirror", and "Oh, she fools me every day." The social function of irony in this example is to evoke humor through self-irony, emotional control, and an empathic call for change. When irony is employed through emotional control, individuals demonstrate their capacity to deliver humor or positive commentary cleverly, indicating adept emotional management. Should ironic remarks indeed be perceived as more humorous than straightforward statements? If they result in reduced tension and emotional distress, it is plausible to infer that irony may contribute positively to interpersonal relationships. The pragmatic function falls into the category of a rhetorical statement.

Book suppositions:

Example 3. "Your chances of changing the world" vs "Your chances of changing yourself"
This example represents two books lying side by side. The first is a brochure titled "Your chances of changing the world," and the second, much thicker, reads "Your chances of changing yourself." To decode irony, we need to delve into its multidimensional pragmatic representation. The implied meaning alludes to the shared ambitions of humanity to change the world when, in fact, the change starts within an individual. Ironic meaning is only inferred by looking at the volumes of each book, and according to these visuals, the chances of changing the world (thin book) equals 1-2%, when the chances of changing yourself are exceedingly higher (thick book). This hints at where one should start if one wants to create a positive change in the world and, indirectly, alludes to the circumstance where we avoid doing the inner work. The irony functions here should be humor and an empathic call for change. The purpose is revealed through the pragmatic category of a rhetorically ironic statement. This implication is decoded and shared by followers through comments. The evidence here is 99% positive and confirms the importance of shared background knowledge when decoding irony that might also be linked to Burke's 'identification' theory. Among 132 comments are verbal statements such as "change yourself = change the world" and "some artworks are like flying selves that fulfil others such as mirror-souls, you got this philosophy which transcends cultures and differences. Thank you for sharing it!"; and comments containing "heart", "applause"… emojis denoting the writer's approval and their accordance with the implied idea of irony serving a positive purpose.

Vinyl covers:

Example 4. "Repetition of things I really shouldn't be telling myself"
Example 4 is placed on a vinyl cover to represent a metaphoric form for the thought process. Bridge content represents individuals who have developed negative thought patterns. Situational irony is created by combining the bridge content with a musical plate that plays "thoughts" instead of songs. The irony lies in the paradox of desirable circumstances versus reality. The creator uses ironic humor, agreeing that there is a problem that should be solved. The audience detects allusional pretense, which is expressed through positive evidence in the comments section, 42 in total. This

post detected positive evidence, with comments as ironic extensions of ex.4, expressed in "heart", "clap"… emojis, as well as verbal texts such as "sad, but strangely comforting", "I love it"… meaning that viewers have positively accepted irony. Thus, its social function, being emotional control and an emphatic call for change, is justified. Oddly enough, the pragmatic function of irony, expressed through rhetorical statements, is to ridicule a person caught in a negative thinking pattern. However, the social function is to empathize and affiliate. Burke's theory of 'identification' could explain the lack of negative evidence.

Bags:

Example 5. "The Gucci bags in my hands" (handbag) vs "The bags under my eyes" (traveling suitcase)

The example above represents a small handbag with an inscription: "The Gucci bags in my hands" placed above a large suitcase with the title "The bags under my eyes". The irony is created by the collaboration of verbal and visual representations, giving the bridge content that the Gucci bag representing social status and financial abundance isn't worth it if it comes at the expense of health. We can infer this idea through the physical representation of the art, as the bag representing "bags under the eyes" significantly prevails in size "the Gucci bag". From a pragmatic standpoint, the creator's negative attitude is realized through a rhetorically ironic statement. However, the social function is to empathize (empathic call for change) and show the bare truth by supposing differently sized bags and title inscriptions. Comments on the post, 38 in total, revealed positive evidence expressed in "laughing", "clapping", and…emojis. Some of the longer verbal texts extended the initial irony: "the bags under my eyes are Prada" or agreed to it: "This is so me today", "a fair trade: time for status."

Posters:

Example 6. "I'm the most humble person in the world"

These are verbal posters written in capital letters. Example 6 also includes a physical item - a single chair incorporated in the picture. Verbal irony here is encoded in a contradiction created by specific word choices. Example 6 describes a humble person who thinks of themselves and the hyperbolic way of expressing the thought (the most humble). If one thinks of themselves as a humble person, the very meaning of which is "not proud or believing that you are important"(Cambridge online dictionary), contradicts the way it is expressed: "I am the most… in the world," meaning "first and the best". The irony behind the art expresses the negative attitude towards humbleness disguised in arrogance, and the single chair placed below the poster intensifies the implication. As for the comment section, Example 6 collected 44 comments with 100% positive evidence. Some of the comments were extensions of the initial irony: "a true humble brag", "you deserve a nice slice of humble pie for your achievement", "The chair is for: "sit down, be humble", and "clap", "heart"…emoticons denoting correct detection of irony and affiliation to the context. The pragmatic function here is ironic hyperbolae. This example of art derives from a situational irony, expressed in verbal and physical forms through ironic humor. The strength of such an

expression is that it does not have a specific target. Deckman alludes to the general paradoxes of life, pretending to be the person who suffers from them, as the verbal representation is expressed in the first-person pronoun; the underlying meaning is revealed through humor and status elevation. Elevation of social status as the social function of irony is present when criticism conveyed by the speaker amplifies their significance, as it implies that the recipient of criticism should have behaved differently. Conversely, ironic criticism may appear less weighty, as the ironic tone may be interpreted as humor rather than a sincere critique. At the same time, this creates space for a viewer. When reading the captions written in the first-person pronoun, it is taken as self-irony, expressed in a humorous way; hence, the bare truth becomes less harsh, "saves the relationship with the reader, and leaves space for thinking, which leads to its social function as "emphatic call for change". The employment of humor makes the irony more memorable and elevates the chances of making people ponder over their actions, inactivity, and reactions (Kreuz et al., 2009).

Example 7. "Keep dancing to the rythm of your continuous mistakes".

The last example combines verbal and physical representations: words on canvas are written in capital letters and the canvas is placed above the keyboard. The irony is revealed through the contradicting wording, such as "keep dancing to…" and "your continuous mistakes". The pragmatic function is set in ironic agreement and expressed in allusional pretense as it has affirmative wording (keep dancing), meaning the opposite. The physical element of a keyboard intensifies the hidden meaning. Bridge content should allude to repeated mistakes that become so routine that you can feel the rhythm turning into a familiar tune.

Moreover, an interesting technique is used here: a deliberately misspelt word "rhythm", with the missing letter 'h'. Without noticing the mistake, our brain can predict what will come to form a familiar, coherent context (Moss, 2020). The same could apply to our mistakes—they become a familiar pattern that we "keep dancing to" without even noticing. Example 7 is somewhat an extension of Example 1, "How to be sorry but not sorry enough not to do it again", as the same bridge content could be applied here. Attitude expression is negative; the artist criticizes detrimental behavior. However, he does not mean to mock; on the contrary, the social function of the art is to show the "bare truth", empathize, and call for change. The digital representation of this exhibit collected 61 responses through the comment section. 100% of reactions by the audience fall into the category of positive evidence, as they do not feel insulted or threatened. Comments express approval and acknowledgement of the message with verbal and emoticon (clap, heart, laughing) affirmations.

5. Results

Through an examination of Deckman's artworks, it becomes evident that irony serves multiple socio-pragmatic functions. Pragmatically, the irony is realized through three categories of Nakamura et al. 'allusional pretense' theory (1995): irony as a rhetorical device (ex 1-5.), ironic hyperbolae (ex. 6) and ironic agreement (ex.7). Examples highlight paradoxes, critique societal norms, and prompt introspection. For instance, titles like "How to be sorry but not sorry enough not

to do it again" and "Keep dancing to the rhythm of your continuous mistakes" challenge conventional wisdom and invite viewers to reconsider their actions. The social function of irony fosters empathy, initiates dialogue, and may even inspire change. This goal is realized through the social categories of humor, emotional control (Dews et al., 2009), and an emphatic call for change (suggested in this article).

Deckman's attitude and expression within his art reflect a critical yet compassionate stance towards human nature. From a pragmatic standpoint, Deckman's attitude is negative, as the verbal representation of examples means criticizing. However, rather than simply ridiculing or deriding, this art invites viewers to confront the complexities of life with humor and humility. Thus, it fosters the social function of irony as a positive phenomenon.

Humor plays a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of irony. Deckman makes the underlying messages more palatable and relatable to the audience by infusing irony with humor. Humor allows viewers to engage with potentially uncomfortable truths in a lighthearted manner. Furthermore, humor should function as the unifying factor bridging the realms of emotional control and an emphatic call for change.

The reception of irony in Deckman's art is overwhelmingly positive- emoji reactions, along with verbal affirmations, indicate a high engagement and resonance with the artwork's ironic elements. Positive reception suggests that due to the shared background knowledge between the audience and the creator and Burke's 'identification' theory (Burke, 1969), Deckman's art effectively resonates with its audience and prompts the further study of follower engagement with a media persona on Instagram.

6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the process of decoding irony and its socio-pragmatic functioning on Instagram. The social function of irony was examined through the following components: humor, aggression, irony as an elevation of social status, irony as emotional control (Dews et al., 2009), and irony as an empathic call for change (hypothesis suggested in this paper). The following pragmatic paradigm consisting of three layers was applied to the ironic instances:
1. Shared background knowledge between the speaker and his audience (Colston, Katz, 2005)
2. The situational character of irony (Kotthoff, 2003)
3. Insincerity or allusion pretense in samples of irony (Kumon- Nakamura et al., 1995)

Bridge content and the creator's attitude expression (Garmendia, 2018) were discussed. The commentary section was investigated according to the positive and negative evidence (Hancock, 2004; Clark, 1996), and the results were examined through the scope of Burke's (1969) 'Identification' theory. The pragmatic function of irony was also studied through the following categories: 1. ironic agreement; 2. ironic hyperbole; 3. rhetorically ironic statement/question (Kumon- Nakamura et al., 1995). 7 instances with interactions through comments were brought up for the detailed discussion. The empirical data under study were divided into five thematic categories: irony on 1. book covers, 2. book suppositions, 3. vinyl covers, 4. bags, and 5. posters.

The pragmatic function of allusion pretense was detected through self-ironic expressions using the first-person pronoun and situational irony; examples of ironic agreement (Ex.7), hyperbole (Ex. 6), and rhetorically ironic questions/statements (Ex. 1,2,3,4,5) have also been found.

The study aimed to show how irony is revealed on Instagram and what the significance of humor in irony is on social media. The employment of humor makes an ironic discourse more memorable as it aims at a higher purpose of a wake-up call and works as a positive social function of an "emphatic call for change". No evidence of irony's social function as "aggression" has been found. Instead, all of the 7 showcased examples bore the function of "emphatic call for change", with some examples merged with humor (Ex. 1,2,3,6), emotional control (Ex. 1,4) or elevation of social status (Ex. 7).

As for the comment section, positive evidence vastly prevailed over negative ones (98%-2%), showing the importance of shared background knowledge in irony detection and producing the need for future investigation of audience involvement in engaging with a media persona on Instagram. The theory of 'identification' (Burke, 1969), which suggests that people follow media personas if they share or wish to adopt their attitudes, values and beliefs, was revealed through extension of initial irony in comments, positively worded sentences and approving emojis. The fact that irony in Deckman's art was perceived as a wakeup call by the majority of people writing comments has also supported the ground for our hypothesis that irony can serve a positive social function of "emphatic call for change".

Based on the findings, irony may help conceal feelings of hostility and create an environment of solidarity (E, Fabian, 2006). Irony makes the expression more memorable and effective when the speaker intends to achieve important communicative ends (Kreuz et al., 2009). If addressed to common problematic issues, irony loses the cultural identity it was created in and becomes a universally understood phenomenon.

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