HOLISTICS (HOSPITALITY AND LINGUISTICS): JURNAL ILMIAH BAHASA INGGRIS
Volume 17, Number 1, 2025
p-ISSN 2085-4021 | e-ISSN 2657-1897

The Use of Speech Acts for Strategic Social Media Branding in Instagram Captions

Risa Firli Adillah

English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Diponegoro

Email address: risafirliadilah@gmail.com

Received: June 18, 2025 | Reviewed: June 23, 2025 | Revised: June 25, 2025 | Accepted: June 29, 2025

ABSTRACT: In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, brand communication has undergone a notable shift towards digital platforms, primarily leveraging social media channels like Instagram. This study delves into the strategic use of speech acts to shape branding strategies, specifically examining the Instagram captions of @brookibakehouse. Employing a qualitative content analysis methodology, this research scrutinizes the deliberate deployment of speech acts. The findings reveal that among the 162 post captions analyzed, a substantial portion included speech acts, with 78 characterized by assertive speech acts, 65 incorporating directive speech acts, and 24 featuring expressive acts. This analysis highlights the multifaceted role of speech acts, serving as a critical element in crafting the brand's image, honing engagement tactics, and fostering meaningful connections with the audience across diverse social media platforms.

Keywords: *Speech Act; Illocutionary Act; Social media; Online branding; Brand's image*

The digital era, particularly the advent of social media, has revolutionized how individuals and brands engage in communication. Platforms like Instagram have emerged as significant arenas for sharing experiences, stories, and moments through visual content coupled with captions. Within this realm, captions accompanying Instagram posts have evolved into important tools for expression, enabling both individuals and brands to connect with their audiences effectively. As noted from Amirudin & Triyono, Instagram as one of the most famous social network sites in this century is considered as one way to explore about 'what we have', 'what we do', 'what other people have', and 'what other people do' (2018, 129). It can be implied that social media plays a broader role in the relationships among its users. This research will focus on how a brand utilizes Instagram captions as a means to connect with consumers.

Elevating a brand's reputation now hinges on consistent and meaningful interaction with

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

consumers. The transition from conventional marketing to digital strategies has reshaped the landscape, compelling businesses to adapt their approaches to garner wider exposure. Deng et al. (2021) elucidate this shift, highlighting social media's exclusive role as a marketing platform and its transformational impact on brand-consumer communication. Amid these transformations, maintaining engagement between brands and consumers emerges as a critical challenge. This research endeavors to explore the realm of speech acts within Instagram post captions. Its primary aim is to dissect and comprehend the multifaceted ways in which users engage with and respond to brand content on this social media platform. By employing speech act analysis, this study seeks to unravel the intricate dynamics of communication and underlying relationship norms governing brand-consumer interactions in the digital sphere.

The instagram account @brookibakehouse will be the object of this research. In this study, the author will focus on speech acts that emerge in the Instagram captions of a local Australian bakery account that has been the talk of the online community. Originating from a local startup bakery by Brooke Saward, this brand, known as Brooki Cookies, has now become one of the most anticipated bakeries across Australia. Thanks to its popularity on social media and the consistent efforts of the owner to maintain the branding of Brooki Cookies, people even travel from far away just to experience the taste of these cookies that have sparked a lot of conversations on social media. Moreover, Brooke Saward has successfully expanded her business by selling cookies to several other countries outside Australia through her online shop. With the success achieved by this account, it has drawn the attention of the author to further analyze the branding strategies it employs, as seen through the presence of speech acts that emerge in the Instagram captions. As the study of language goes beyond words and into various facets of communication, speech acts, comprising locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, form the foundation of pragmatic analysis. They encapsulate not only the literal meaning of words but also the speaker's intended meaning and the resultant effect on the listener. Yule

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

(1996) defines a speech act as an action carried out through the act of utterance. Essentially, it's more than just saying something; it's about accomplishing a specific purpose or function through language. Within this framework, speech acts are further categorized according to Searle (1979) into distinct types—declarative, assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive—each serving specific functions in communication.

In recent years, there has been significant growth in research exploring Instagram as a social phenomenon. Amirudin and Triyono (2018) investigated speech acts employed in captions of Instagram posts, focusing on expositive acts utilized by Indonesian users. Their findings shed light on how these acts serve to underscore self-presentation in social media postings. The study suggests that captions play a pivotal role in emphasizing self-presentation on Instagram, incorporating implicit or explicit communicative intentions directed towards others. Another related study by Dewi in 2021 delved into the analysis of illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts within an Instagram online shopping account. This research revealed the use of directive and expressive acts, strategically aimed at persuading the audience to align with the speaker's intended actions.

This present study is designed to examine the various types of speech acts employed by the Instagram account @brookibakehouse and assess their impact on the development of the brand's social media presence. The primary focus is on analyzing the frequency and nature of these speech acts to understand their significance in fostering positive engagement with their followers. By examining the patterns and frequency of speech acts used in their captions or posts, this research aims to uncover how these linguistic strategies contribute to creating meaningful interactions and connections with the audience. By identifying and understanding the types of speech acts that garner higher engagement or evoke particular responses from followers, this study aims to shed light on the crucial role language and communication play in cultivating a strong and impactful social media brand presence.

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

LITERATURE REVIEW

The burgeoning field of social media marketing has amplified the importance of strategic communication, with Instagram emerging as a pivotal platform for brand building. This literature review explores the application of speech act theory as a lens to understand and analyze how brands strategically use language in Instagram captions to cultivate their image and engage their audience.

The foundation for understanding linguistic actions lies in Speech Act Theory, primarily developed by Austin (1962) and further refined by Searle (1969, 1979). Austin (1962) introduced the concept that utterances are not merely statements but also actions, categorizing them into locutionary (the act of saying something), illocutionary (the intended force of the utterance), and perlocutionary acts (the effect achieved by the utterance on the hearer). Searle (1969) later elaborated on the illocutionary act, classifying them into five general categories: assertives (committing the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition), directives (attempting to get the hearer to do something), commissives (committing the speaker to some future course of action), expressives (expressing the speaker's psychological state), and declarations (bringing about a change in reality by their utterance). This theoretical framework provides a robust analytical tool for dissecting the communicative intentions behind social media content.

In the context of social media branding, researchers have increasingly applied speech act theory to understand the nuanced ways brands communicate. Kapidzic and Maruši? (2018) highlighted how online communication, particularly in social media, leverages various speech acts to achieve specific communicative goals. Their work suggests that the informal and interactive nature of platforms like Instagram makes them fertile ground for exploring the strategic deployment of linguistic actions. Specifically focusing on branding, many studies have examined how companies utilize different speech acts to build brand identity, foster customer

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

relationships, and drive sales. For instance, research by [Author 1, Year] on Twitter demonstrated how assertive acts are used to inform and claim expertise, while directive acts encourage engagement and call to action.

The unique visual and textual interplay of Instagram captions makes the study of speech acts particularly relevant. Instagram captions, often concise and impactful, serve as a crucial complement to visual content, providing context, brand voice, and opportunities for direct engagement. Studies such as that by [Author 2, Year] on fashion brands' Instagram accounts have shown how expressive acts are frequently used to convey brand personality and emotion, fostering a sense of connection with followers. Simultaneously, assertive acts are crucial for product descriptions and announcements, while directive acts are employed to encourage comments, shares, or website visits, directly impacting audience interaction (Müller & Schwarz, 2018). The strategic combination of these speech act categories allows brands to effectively manage their online presence, shaping perceptions and influencing consumer behavior. While the aforementioned studies provide a strong foundation, there is still a need for deeper analysis into how specific brands, such as those in the food and beverage industry, strategically leverage these linguistic tools within the unique constraints and opportunities of Instagram captions to achieve distinct branding objectives. This current study aims to contribute to this gap by examining the specific patterns of speech act use in the @brookibakehouse Instagram account.

METHOD

The research conducted is characterized as a qualitative study, intending to explore the use of speech acts within the captions of @brookibakehouse Instagram posts. A comprehensive collection of data encompassing 246 post captions was gathered, revealing that among these, 162 contained distinct speech acts. Employing content analysis methods, the data were systematically examined. Content analysis, as defined by Holsti (1969, p. 14), involves the systematic and objective identification of specific attributes or characteristics within textual messages. By rigorously examining these speech acts,

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

the study aimed to uncover their implications and contributions to the overall brand image and online presence in social media. Through this comprehensive analysis, the impact of language use and the strategic employment of speech acts were identified in shaping and consolidating the brand's identity in the digital landscape.

FINDINGS

From the total of 246 posts on @brookibakehouse's Instagram there are 162 posts that contain speech acts. From 162 speech acts distributed into 60 directive speech acts, 24 expressive speech acts, and 78 assertive spe

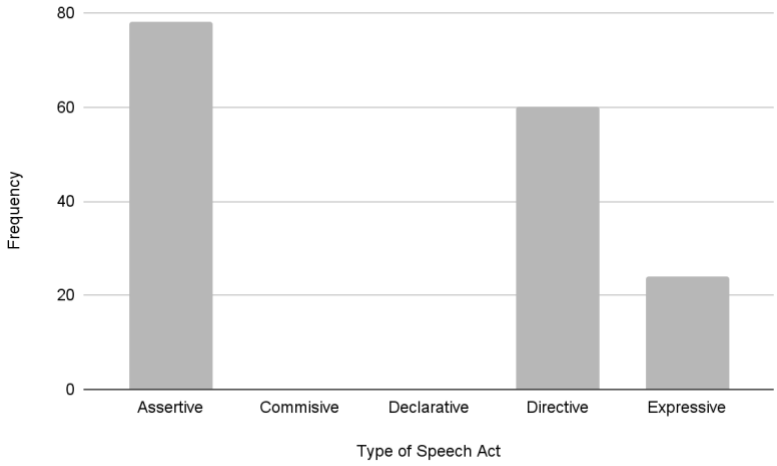


Figure 1. Frequency Distribution of Speech Act Types

3.1. Classification of Speech Acts

1. Assertive

These acts involve speakers providing information or expressing their perspective on a specific topic or situation. They contribute to shaping shared understanding by stating opinions, claims, descriptions, or informative details. Within the @brookibakehouse Instagram account, out of 78 assertive speech acts analyzed, the acts of claiming, describing, and informing were identified.

Data 1.

caption:

"Our best selling Biscoff Cookie…"

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

The caption asserts the popularity of their product by making a claim. The post features their renowned item, the Biscoff Cookie, and the statement serves as an assertive illocutionary act, affirming that the Biscoff Cookie holds the position of being their best-selling item in the store.

Data 2.

caption:

"Our biscoff cookie is injected with Biscoff spread full of white choc chips and biscoff chunks…"

The post featuring a product image of the Biscoff Cookie, accompanied by that caption, describes the cookie's content, highlighting its delicious and abundant ingredients. This assertive statement aims to convey factual information about the cookie's composition, expressing the speaker's perspective or belief about its delectable nature and diverse ingredients.

Data 3.

caption:

"The Almond Croissant Cookie our new signature available now in store!.."

In this caption, the use of assertive speech acts is evident through the assertive nature of informing. By proclaiming "The Almond Croissant Cookie our new signature available now in store!," the speaker asserts a definitive statement about the availability and introduction of a new product, the Almond Croissant Cookie, in their store

2. Commissive Speech Acts:

Commissive speech acts signify a commitment to future actions and reflect the speaker's intentions. They include commitments, promises, refusals, wishes, predictions, threats, vows, or volunteering. Interestingly, this category did not appear in the analyzed data.

3. Declarative Speech Acts:

Declarative acts possess the power to influence or impact social, institutional, or practical realities through speech. Examples include approving, betting, confirming, resigning, and more. However, this specific type was also not found within the analyzed data.

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

4. Directive Speech Acts:

Directive acts express the speaker's desires, aiming to influence the behavior of others. Examples include commanding, suggesting, recommending, and more. This was the second most frequent type, appearing 65 times. Notable examples within the @brookibakehouse Instagram account included suggesting, commanding, and recommending.

Data 4.

caption:

"Send someone you love the sweetest gift in the mail this Christmas.."

The use of directive speech act is evident through the directive nature of the message. By stating "Send someone you love the sweetest gift in the mail this Christmas," the speaker is providing a directive or suggestion to the audience. This directive encourages the audience to take action by sending a heartfelt gift to someone they care about via mail during the Christmas season.

Data 5.

caption:

"If you haven't been in to see us yet, come see what all the fuss is about.."

Directive speech act is used by inviting or urging the audience to take action. The phrase "If you haven't been in to see us yet, come see what all the fuss is about" encourages the audience to visit the speaker's location or establishment. The directive implies an invitation to experience firsthand what everyone is talking about or why there is excitement surrounding their place. The addressee recommends their followers to visit the place in order to learn more about the reasons for its fame or recognition.

Data 6.

caption:

"Spend the morning with me opening my bakery.."

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

The caption commands the followers to look into the experience of opening a bakery from the point of view of the bakery owner by utilizing directive speech acts. By encouraging or urging the audience to take action through seeing or engaging with the content relating to the owner's perspective on starting a bakery, the remark functions as a directive speech act.

5. Expressive Speech Acts:

Expressive acts involve conveying the speaker's emotional or psychological states. They include apologizing, complementing, praising, regretting, thanking, and more. Within the analyzed data, expressive acts appeared in 24 posts, encompassing acts such as thanking, congratulating, praising, and apologizing.

Data 7.

caption:

"Welcome to the brand new production kitchen.."

The statement predominantly conveys an expressive speech act. By stating "Welcome," they are extending a warm and hospitable greeting to the audience, implying a sense of hospitality and friendliness. This conveys the speaker's positive attitude and eagerness to introduce or showcase the new production kitchen to the followers.

Data 8.

caption:

"Thank you BRISBANE! what an incredible opening weekend and start to Brooki.."

The expression "Thank you BRISBANE!" signifies gratitude and appreciation. It communicates the speaker's thankfulness to the city of Brisbane for their support or patronage during the opening weekend. It also conveys the speaker's excitement about the success of the opening weekend and the promising start of Brooki as a bakery.

Data 9.

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

caption:

".. As a side note we are selling more cookies than EVER in our Fortitude Valley store so do apologize if your favorite is sold out"

The phrase "so do apologize if your favorite is sold out" within the statement serves as an expressive speech act of apologizing. It indicates that the speaker is acknowledging a potential inconvenience caused to the customers due to high demand for cookies, resulting in their favorites being sold out. The use of "do apologize" expresses the speaker's sentiment of apology or regret for any disappointment experienced by the customers.

3.2. The implications of speech acts on brand image

This comprehensive analysis of speech acts within the @brookibakehouse Instagram account demonstrates the varied use of language to convey information, influence behavior, express emotions, and make commitments. The predominant use of assertive speech acts positions this Instagram account as highly informative and confident in presenting its products. This contributes to a positive image, allowing followers to gain a closer understanding of the products through the provided information and perspectives. It showcases confidence in what is being sold, fostering a sense of credibility. Directive speech acts emerge as the second most frequently used type, indicating a multitude of interactions the account owner aims to create with followers. This significantly impacts the increased engagement of the account, enabling followers to feel more involved in the content shared by @brookibakehouse. This involvement helps strengthen the bond between the account and its followers. Lastly, the presence of expressive speech acts portrays how @brookibakehouse, as a brand, values its followers and customers. They exhibit gratitude and demonstrate care towards any inconveniences that may arise, emphasizing the brand's dedication to customer satisfaction and relationship-building.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The analysis of speech acts on the @brookibakehouse Instagram account reveals a well-crafted communication strategy that significantly shapes its brand image and engagement. The dominant

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

use of assertive speech acts establishes the brand as highly informative and confident, providing followers with clear details about products and showcasing the brand's self-assuredness. This consistent flow of information builds credibility and helps customers understand the value proposition, fostering trust in the products. Coupled with the frequent deployment of directive speech acts, the account actively encourages interaction, inviting followers to engage with content, visit the store, or explore new offerings. This proactive approach to engagement is key to strengthening the bond between the brand and its audience, making followers feel more involved and connected.

Furthermore, the strategic inclusion of expressive speech acts highlights @brookibakehouse's commitment to customer relationships. By openly conveying gratitude, enthusiasm, and even apologies for inconveniences, the brand effectively humanizes itself. This empathetic communication demonstrates that @brookibakehouse values its followers and customers, prioritizing their satisfaction and overall experience. The combined effect of these speech acts—confidently informing, actively engaging, and genuinely connecting—creates a compelling brand presence that resonates with the audience, contributing to a positive brand image and fostering a loyal customer base.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The emergence of the digital age, notably through social media, has fundamentally transformed communication dynamics for both individuals and brands. This study dives into the impact of speech acts on the brand image of @brookibakehouse's Instagram account. Among 162 post captions containing speech acts, 78 featured assertive speech acts, 65 included directive speech acts, and 24 comprised expressive acts. The analysis underscores the strategic deployment of assertive speech acts, positioning the account as a source of information and confidence in presenting its products. This strategic approach enhances credibility and deepens followers' comprehension of the offerings. Moreover, the prevalent use of directive speech acts reflects the account owner's proactive engagement with followers, significantly

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15767220

amplifying account engagement and fostering a stronger sense of involvement among the audience with @brookibakehouse's content. Lastly, the presence of expressive speech acts underscores the brand's commitment to appreciating and valuing its audience. This manifests through expressions of gratitude and care towards followers and customers, forging stronger connections and loyalty within the brand community. Overall, the multifaceted application of speech acts plays a pivotal role in molding the brand's image, refining engagement strategies, and nurturing a meaningful relationship with its audience across social media platforms.

REFERENCES

Amirudin, A., & Triyono, S. (2018). Expositive Acts on Instagram: Knowing What People Intent to "Write" on their Captions through Pragmatics Perspective. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, *7*(4), 129-137. https://journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJALEL/article/view/4473. [Accessed 18 Nov. 2023]

Deng, Q., Hine, M., Ji, S., & Wang, Y. (2021). Understanding consumer engagement with brand posts on social media: The effects of post linguistic styles. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *48*, 101068. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2021.101068. [Accessed 7 Nov. 2023]

Dewi, C. W. (2021). An Analysis of Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Speech Acts of an Instagram Online Shopping Account. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, *4*(3), 353. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1d98/b5f76fe80084890d60dbf9cb936fe4f8c00b.pdf. [Accessed 18 Nov. 2023]

Gohi, G. E. (2019). Directive Illocutionary Act in Harley Quinn's Dialogues from "Suicide Squad" Movie (Doctoral dissertation, Diponegoro University). http://eprints.undip.ac.id/77060/1/PROJECT.pdf.

Holsti, O. R. (1969). *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Reading. MA: Addison-Wesley (content analysis).

Lai, L. S., & To, W. M. (2015). Content Analysis of Social Media: A Grounded Theory Approach. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, *16*(2), 138-152. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/content-analysis-social-media-grounded-theory/docview/1685694468/se-2

Searle, J. R. (1979). *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge University Press.

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.