

The Use of Language Styles in Multimodal Texts on the Facebook Account “HT”

Nyoman Elly Swandayani¹, Fathu Rahman², Tetet Sulastri¹, Somadi Sosrohadi¹

¹Universitas Nasional Jakarta, Indonesia.

²Hasanuddin University

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of figurative language in HT’s Facebook posts, focusing on irony and metaphor as strategies for conveying social criticism and humanitarian values. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the data consist of five selected Facebook posts published between September and October 2023. The analysis is conducted using stylistic and digital discourse perspectives, supported by multimodal interpretation of textual and visual elements. The findings reveal that HT consistently employs verbal irony to challenge dominant social assumptions related to dignity, diversity, and moral values, while metaphors are used to conceptualize abstract life experiences such as struggle, social status, and survival. These figurative devices function not only as aesthetic elements but also as persuasive tools that enhance emotional engagement and audience interpretation. Furthermore, the high level of audience interaction indicates that figurative language plays a crucial role in making critical messages more accessible and acceptable in digital spaces. This study concludes that Facebook can serve as an effective platform for ethical discourse, where irony and metaphor operate as powerful communicative resources for social reflection and critique in contemporary digital culture.

Keywords: Figurative language, irony, metaphor, digital discourse, Facebook, stylistics

INTRODUCTION

Along with the rapid development of information and communication technology today, individuals are able to interact without limitations of space and time. One way individuals interact with one another is through various social networking platforms that have grown rapidly as a result of technological advancement. Social media has become an important platform for individuals to engage in various interactive activities, such as building friendship networks, forming specific community networks, sharing ideas and experiences, conveying messages, and even for business, marketing, and promotional purposes (Sosrohadi et al., 2024; Jung et al., 2025; Yaumi et al., 2023). The presence of social media has also made people more willing to express their thoughts and feelings about certain issues or conditions. For users, social networking platforms also serve as a form of entertainment in various forms, such as videos, photos/images, caricatures, and memes (Rahman et al., 2019; Andini et al., 2026; Youngsun et al., 2024).

One social networking platform with a large number of users is Facebook. This platform was first launched in 2004 and became the first social media platform to provide space for users to upload photos/images/videos, with a very wide reach among the general public. This made Facebook highly popular from the beginning of its emergence, including in Indonesia. Ridhwan Mustajab wrote on the online media DataIndonesia.id that “as of August 2023, the number of Facebook users in Indonesia reached 205.4 million.” Meanwhile, based on a survey by the online media katadata.co.id, as reported by Cindy Mutia Annur, in early 2023 Facebook users in Indonesia ranked third largest in the world, after India in first place and the United States in second place. Other countries included in the top ten users after Indonesia are Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Egypt. Besides Facebook, several other popular social media platforms include YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat, TikTok, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat, Douyin, and Telegram.

Facebook was first launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, who is from Westchester County in New York City, United States, along with four of his friends, Harvard University students Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum,

Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes, under the original name The Facebook. Initially, this platform was used only within the limited circle of the Harvard campus in New York City, United States, and was later expanded to other universities in Boston, the Ivy League, and Stanford University. Several months after its launch, The Facebook changed its appearance under the name Facebook Wall, and later became Facebook. In less than one year, the platform became popular among students at various universities in the United States, expanded its network to high schools, and eventually became available to anyone aged at least 13 years.

Facebook is one of the social media platforms that continues to occupy a top position among social network users and has become a digital communication medium for various groups and age ranges. Facebook is expected to bring people together quickly and without the limitations of distance commonly found in face-to-face meetings. This application can also be used to reconnect with family members, alumni of former educational institutions, and others within a single website. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of Facebook as a digital communication medium, to analyze how users interact and express ideas through this platform, and to understand the social functions of Facebook in facilitating communication, networking, and information sharing among its users.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Facebook as a Digital Communication Platform

Facebook is a social media platform with a strong and easily recognizable visual identity, represented by the letter “f” as its official logo. This symbol has become closely associated with Facebook, particularly among its users.



Figure 1. “f” Logo

Beyond its visual identity, Facebook offers a wide range of features that facilitate communication, interaction, and content sharing. These features can be accessed through the main menu indicated by three horizontal lines in the upper-right corner of the interface.



Figure 2. HT

The menu includes options such as video, feeds, memories, groups, friends, events, saved items, marketplace, avatars, fantasy games, gaming, Messenger Kids, pages, reels, as well as additional features such as help & support and settings & privacy. The variety of these features indicates that Facebook functions not only as a

medium of communication but also as a space for social interaction, self-expression, entertainment, and the dissemination of social messages.

B. Previous Studies on Language Use and Style on Facebook

Several studies have examined Facebook as a medium for linguistic analysis, particularly in relation to language style. Paramita (2019) conducted a study entitled “*An Analysis of the Use of Sarcastic Language by Netizens on Facebook.*” This study aimed to analyze the forms and meanings of sarcastic language used by Facebook users in order to promote more ethical and responsible language use on social media. Using a qualitative descriptive method and a sociolinguistic approach, the study found various forms of sarcastic expressions, including opinion statements, rejections, prohibitions, information delivery, emphasis, commands, questions, and statements of equivalence.

Another study was conducted by Budi (2023) in an article entitled “*Satirical Language Styles on Social Media,*” published in the *Sinestesia Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1. This research aimed to describe satirical language styles—namely irony, sarcasm, cynicism, and satire—used across several social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with observation and note-taking techniques, the findings revealed that social media users frequently employ these four types of satirical language as expressive and communicative strategies.

In addition, Muhklisin, Maryaeni, and Pratiwi (2016) conducted a study entitled “*Forms of Language Style in Facebook Communication within a Male Artists’ Community,*” published in the journal *Pendidikan: Teori, Penelitian, dan Pengembangan*, Vol. 1, No. 6. This study focused on a Facebook community of male artists in the Greater Malang area. The results indicated that comparative language styles, particularly personification and simile, were the most dominant forms used by members of the community.

C. Research Gap and Focus of the Present Study

Although previous studies (Muhklisin et al., 2016; Paramita, 2019; Budi, 2023) have explored sarcastic, satirical, and comparative language styles on Facebook, most of them concentrate on general users or specific online communities. Limited attention has been given to the use of figurative language by public intellectuals or professional writers in conveying humanitarian messages through social media. This study addresses this gap by focusing on Facebook posts by HT (Herry Tjahjono), a book author, *Kompas* columnist, and Corporate Culture Therapist. HT is known for delivering humanitarian messages through refined and polite language, frequently employing figurative styles such as irony and metaphor to soften criticism. Therefore, this study aims to identify the types of language styles used in HT’s Facebook posts and to analyze their communicative functions in delivering humanitarian messages in digital discourse.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method. According to Moleong (2010), qualitative research aims to describe and interpret research objects by presenting data in the form of descriptive narratives supported by direct data excerpts. In this study, the data consist of documented Facebook posts that contain the use of figurative and satirical language, particularly irony and metaphor. These posts were collected through documentation techniques by selecting relevant uploads from Facebook that reflect the research focus. The analyzed data are then presented in the form of detailed narrative descriptions that explain the types and functions of the language styles identified.

The data analysis is grounded in stylistic theory, as the study of language style in linguistics is commonly referred to as stylistics. Aminuddin (1995) defines stylistics as a field of study that systematically examines and describes language style. Furthermore, Aminuddin (1995) explains that language style refers to the way a writer expresses ideas or opinions to achieve certain purposes and to create particular effects on readers. Similarly, Pradopo (2005) states that language style involves the utilization of linguistic resources in speaking or writing, or the use of specific language varieties to produce particular effects. Tarigan (1985) describes language style as a form of rhetoric, namely the use of words in speech and writing to persuade or influence listeners or readers.

In rhetorical language styles, expressions such as metaphor, simile, and personification are used to affect the audience’s emotions and thoughts.

In this study, metaphor and irony are the primary stylistic devices analyzed. Pradopo (2014) defines metaphor as a form of figurative language that involves implicit comparison without using explicit comparative markers such as *like*, *as*, or *similar to*. Meanwhile, irony is understood as a rhetorical language style in which the intended meaning of an expression differs from or contradicts its literal meaning. Landy (1972) classifies irony into three types: verbal irony, which occurs when a speaker says something opposite to what is actually meant; situational irony, which arises when there is a contrast between expectations and actual outcomes; and dramatic irony, which occurs when the audience possesses knowledge that a character in the narrative does not.

Within stylistic analysis, irony is considered an expressive device that creates a discrepancy between literal meaning and intended meaning. It may appear through the use of opposing words, through a mismatch between words and context—where expressions with positive or neutral meanings convey negative implications due to context—or through the reversal of readers’ expectations to produce a surprising effect. Irony is frequently employed not only to create humor but also to convey criticism, reflection, and deeper meanings in an indirect and nuanced manner.

In addition to irony, this study also considers satirical language as an important stylistic element. Satire is a form of expression in which writers employ indirect and often subtle criticism to address particular targets, such as social behavior, policies, or societal conditions. Satirical language functions as a means of voicing dissatisfaction or disagreement and plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and articulating critical perspectives on various aspects of social life. Through stylistic analysis of irony and metaphor, this study seeks to reveal how language style functions as a strategic tool for conveying humanitarian messages on social media.

RESULTS

Findings

The findings of this study reveal that figurative language, particularly irony, is strategically employed in HT’s Facebook posts to convey humanitarian messages and social criticism. Through the use of verbal and situational irony, HT constructs meaning that challenges dominant social perceptions related to dignity, social status, and moral behavior. The analysis demonstrates that language style functions not merely as an aesthetic element but also as a communicative strategy to influence readers’ perspectives and encourage ethical reflection within digital discourse.

Data 1



Manners and character are what determine a person’s dignity.

This sanitation worker is more dignified—although “only” a street person, with no possessions—than a

wealthy “garbage thrower” who owns a car.

Dignity cannot be bought or replaced with any amount of money.

By: HT

Image: Pucuk Paran Sih

HT (posted on October 14, 2023)

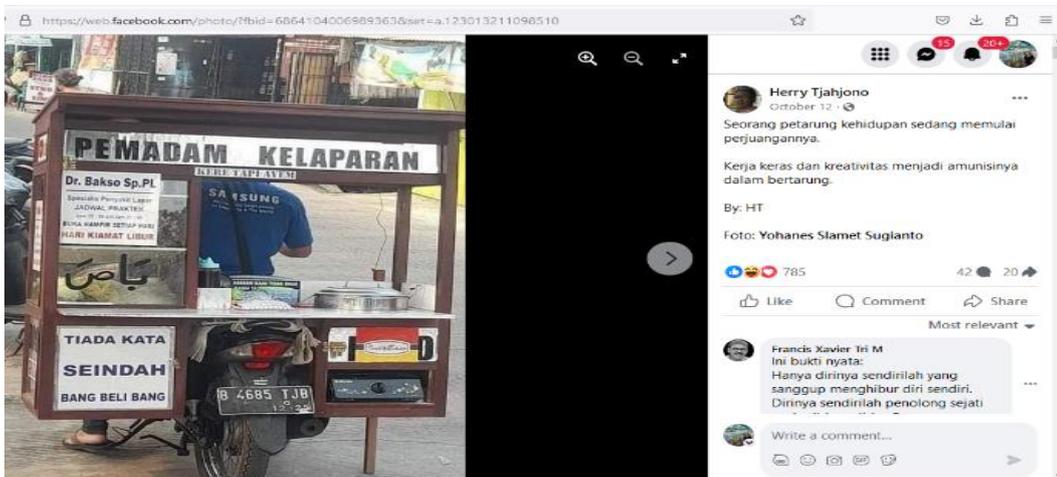
This image and written post received responses from readers, with 186 users reacting with “like” and “love” emojis, and 8 users sharing it with others.

Through this post, the author depicts an ironic situation in which a person driving a car carelessly throws garbage onto the street, while a sanitation worker—often commonly referred to as a “garbage man”—is actually cleaning the waste. In the statement, *“This sanitation worker is more dignified—although ‘only’ a street person, with no possessions—than a wealthy ‘garbage thrower’ who owns a car,”* the author emphasizes that behavior reflecting human dignity is not directly proportional to one’s socio-economic class.

The author also employs verbal irony by using the commonly applied term “garbage man” to refer to a sanitation worker, but assigning it an opposite meaning. Ironically, the term “garbage thrower” is directed at the wealthy individual, even though the actual duty of a sanitation worker is to clean garbage, not to throw it away.

The use of verbal and situational irony functions as satire, criticizing irresponsible behavior and exposing misplaced assumptions about social worth. Dignity, the post suggests, is not a matter of money. It is a matter of conduct. The contrast is deliberate and uncomfortable: the one labeled a “garbage man” preserves dignity, while the one shielded by wealth produces waste—both literal and moral.

Data 2



A fighter of life is beginning his struggle.

Hard work and creativity become his ammunition in the fight.

By: HT

HT (posted on October 12, 2023)

This image and written post received responses from readers, with 785 users reacting with “like,” “laugh,” and “love” emojis, and 20 users sharing it with others.

The author employs words with metaphorical meanings, as follows:

1. The word “fighter” in the sentence *“A fighter of life is beginning his struggle”* functions as a metaphor for a person who is working to earn a living by selling meatballs (as shown in the image).

2. The word “ammunition” is used to refer to “hard work” and “creativity.” According to the *Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language* (KBBI), ammunition refers to materials used in firearms, such as gunpowder, bullets, and explosive substances fired at enemies, including bombs, grenades, and rockets. The choice of the phrase “hard work” and the word “creativity” as ammunition serves as a metaphor for explosive materials used to attack an enemy. The image shows that the meatball vendor displays various written slogans as a form of creativity, such as “hunger extinguisher,” “poor but peaceful,” “no words are sweeter than ‘brother, buy some, brother,’” and “Dr. Bakso, Sp.PL, Specialist in Hunger Diseases, Open almost every day, Closed on Judgment Day.” These creative word choices function as “ammunition” used to “shoot” the vendor’s “enemy,” namely potential customers.

The use of comparative language in the form of metaphor aims to influence the readers’ emotions and thoughts by conveying that everyone struggles for life and livelihood as if they were in a battlefield, relying on their own “ammunition” to survive.

Data 3



Let’s laugh for a moment...

Learn to laugh at the complexity of our own lives.

By: HT

HT (posted on October 11, 2023)

This image and written post received responses from readers, with 554 users reacting with “like” and “laugh” emojis, and 12 users sharing it with others.

The author employs analogy through an image depicting a technician attempting to repair a telephone network. The image shows cables intertwined with one another, forming an absurd and chaotic structure. Through the use of metaphorical language in the caption, particularly in the statement “learn to laugh at the complexity of our own lives,” the author conveys the message that life is complicated, much like the tangled cables shown in the image, and invites readers to laugh at life’s complexities.

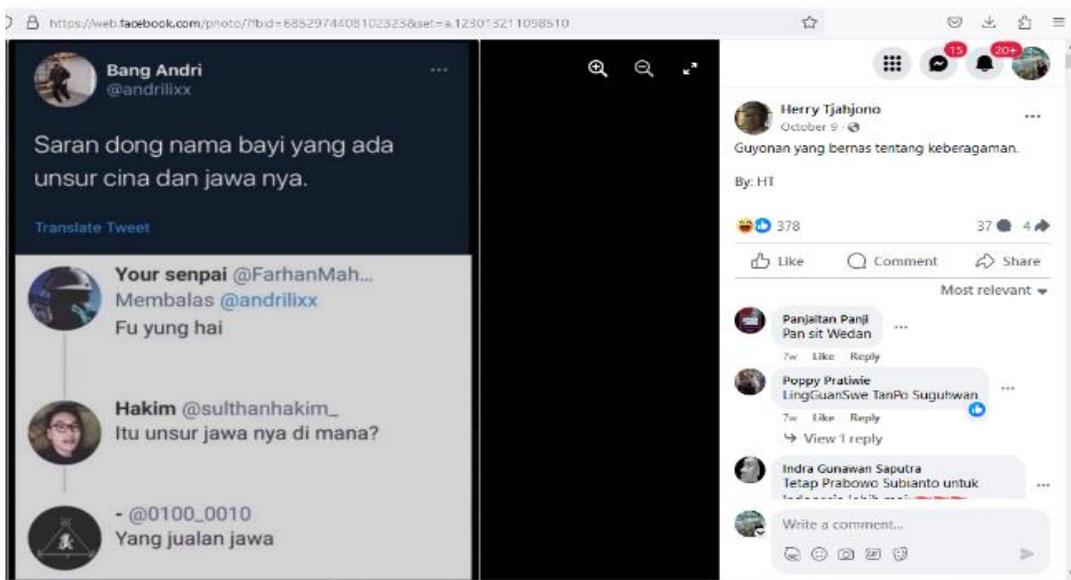
The quoted dialogue between a customer experiencing telecommunication service disruption and a technician working to repair the network further reinforces the idea that each individual has their own “complexity of life.”

The customer complains about being unable to use the telephone for two days due to unresolved damage, while the technician explains that repairs have been ongoing for two days.

The author uses metaphor by comparing the “complexity of life” to the “tangled cables” shown in the image. At the same time, through the phrase “*learn to laugh at the complexity of our own lives,*” the author employs verbal irony and situational irony, as the phrase “*complexity of life*” carries connotations of difficulty and struggle, which contrast with the act of “laughing.”

The use of metaphorical comparison aims to influence readers’ emotions and thoughts by suggesting that personal life complications, like tangled cables, can arise if not properly managed from the outset. Meanwhile, the use of verbal and situational irony serves as a form of satire, offering criticism and conveying the message that by laughing at life’s complexities, individuals learn to reflect inwardly and develop self-awareness.

Data 4



A meaningful joke about diversity
 HT (posted on October 9, 2023)

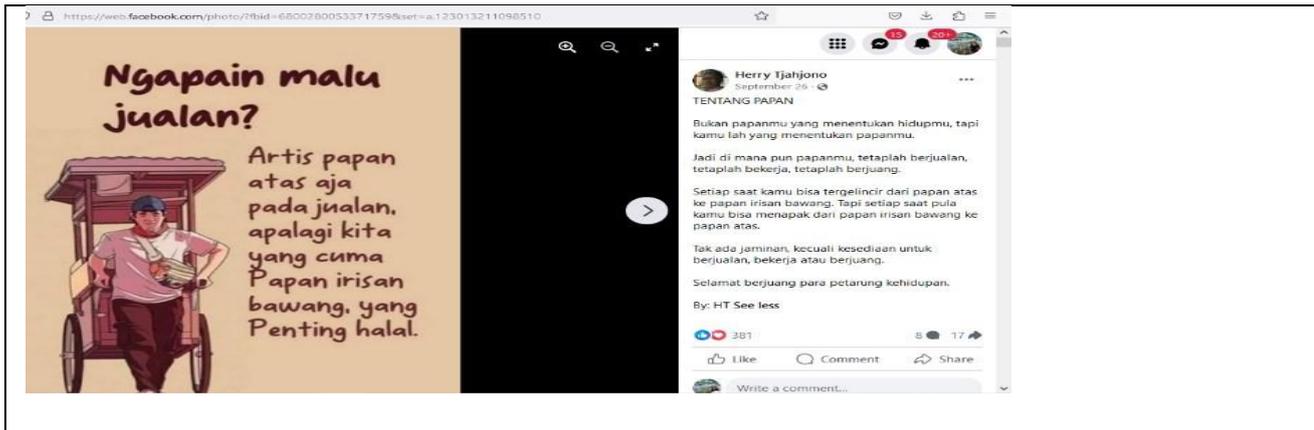
This image and written post received responses from readers, with 378 users reacting with “like” and “laugh” emojis, and 4 users sharing it with others.

Through this post, the author emphasizes that diversity in Indonesia can be understood and experienced through humor as part of everyday life. Through the phrase “*a meaningful joke about diversity,*” the author conveys a satirical message about social conditions in which people tend to interpret diversity as a difference that separates individuals from one another, rather than as a form of Indonesia’s cultural richness. According to the *Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language* (KBBI), the word “*bernas*” means “substantial” or “rich in content,” particularly when referring to speeches, advice, or discourse. The communication presented in the image illustrates a form of humor that is rich in meaning and content about diversity.

Over the past decade, the concept of diversity has become a sensitive topic of discussion in Indonesia, as it is closely related to identity issues such as religion, ethnicity, and politics. Through the use of verbal irony, the author attempts to reframe diversity as a subject that can be approached through light-hearted humor. The dialogue depicted in the image shows a relaxed and fluid form of joking about ethnic diversity.

The use of verbal irony in this post functions as a form of satire aimed at criticizing divisive perspectives and conveying the message that diversity is a valuable asset rather than a factor that separates one individual from another.

Data 5



HT (posted on September 26, 2023)

This image and written post received responses from readers, with 381 users reacting with “like” and “love” emojis, and 17 users sharing it with others.

Through this post, the account author employs metaphorical language to compare a person’s social status to a “board” (*papan*) in the statement, “*It is not your board that determines your life, but you are the one who determines your board.*” This statement responds to the accompanying image and text depicting a person pulling a cart to sell goods, with the caption “*Why be ashamed of selling?*” The emphasis on the phrases “*upper board*” and “*onion-slicing board*” functions as a metaphor for upper and lower social status, respectively.

The use of metaphorical comparison aims to influence readers’ emotions and thoughts by conveying the message that everyone has the right to earn a living in any way, as long as it is done properly and lawfully (*halal*).

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the five findings, this study demonstrates that HT consistently employs figurative language—particularly irony and metaphor—as an effective rhetorical strategy to convey humanitarian messages and social criticism on Facebook. These findings reinforce recent studies in digital discourse which argue that language use on social media is not random, but strategically designed to influence interpretation, emotion, and social engagement (Zappavigna, 2021; Tagg & Seargeant, 2020).

Ironic framing emerges as a dominant stylistic strategy in posts addressing moral values, dignity, diversity, and life complexity. In Data 1, verbal and situational irony are used to reverse dominant social assumptions by contrasting wealth with ethical behavior. This finding aligns with Dynel’s (2021) argument that irony in online discourse functions as an indirect evaluative stance, allowing speakers or writers to criticize social behavior while maintaining politeness and humor. Similarly, in the post discussing diversity (Data 4), verbal irony is employed to transform a socially sensitive issue into light-hearted humor. This supports Zappavigna’s (2021) claim that irony on social media often serves as a bonding mechanism, enabling users to negotiate sensitive identities and ideologies without overt confrontation.

Metaphor becomes a quiet but powerful engine of meaning across the posts, shaping how struggle, dignity, and survival are understood, particularly in posts depicting life struggles and social realities (Data 2, Data 3, and Data 5). Life is metaphorically conceptualized as a battlefield, tangled cables, or social “boards,” allowing abstract experiences to be understood through concrete imagery. This pattern supports Gibbs’ (2023) view that metaphor remains a fundamental cognitive and communicative tool in contemporary discourse, especially in digital environments where visual and verbal elements interact. The use of metaphor in HT’s posts also reflects Kress’ (2020) social semiotic perspective, which emphasizes that meaning-making in digital texts is multimodal, relying on the interaction between language, image, and cultural context.

The findings further indicate that figurative language in HT’s posts serves a persuasive and ethical function. Metaphors such as “ammunition” for hard work and creativity, or “boards” for social status, legitimize honest

labor and challenge social stigma. This observation is consistent with recent rhetorical studies suggesting that figurative language in digital narratives often functions as moral framing rather than mere ornamentation (Charteris-Black, 2021). Instead of delivering moral instructions directly, HT invites readers to reflect through symbolic comparison and narrative implication.

Audience engagement is another significant aspect revealed in this discussion. All five posts received considerable reactions and shares, suggesting that irony and metaphor enhance emotional resonance and message accessibility. According to Zappavigna and Martin (2022), affective engagement on social media is closely linked to evaluative language and figurative expression, which help audiences connect personal emotions with broader social meanings. Humor and irony, in particular, allow critical messages to be received without triggering defensive responses.

Overall, this discussion confirms that HT's Facebook posts exemplify contemporary digital humanitarian discourse, where figurative language operates as a strategic communicative resource. Through irony and metaphor, HT successfully challenges social hierarchies, normalizes struggle, and promotes ethical awareness. These findings contribute to recent stylistic and digital discourse studies by demonstrating that social media platforms, when used creatively, can function as powerful spaces for moral reflection and social critique in the digital age.

Beyond their stylistic and rhetorical functions, HT's posts also generate notable audience responses, which offer insight into how figurative language operates affectively in digital spaces. The predominance of "like" and "laugh" reactions suggests affective alignment rather than passive consumption. Laughter, in particular, indicates that irony functions as a shared interpretive space, allowing audiences to engage with criticism without resistance. The act of sharing further implies that the message is perceived as socially relevant and worth circulating beyond personal timelines. These patterns indicate that figurative language not only shapes meaning but also facilitates circulation and resonance in online humanitarian discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the use of figurative language in HT's Facebook posts by analyzing five selected data sets. The findings demonstrate that irony and metaphor are the dominant stylistic devices employed to convey moral messages, social criticism, and humanitarian values. Irony is primarily used to question social hierarchies, redefine dignity, and address sensitive issues such as diversity and social inequality in a subtle and humorous manner. Meanwhile, metaphor functions as a cognitive and rhetorical tool to simplify complex life experiences and legitimize honest labor and personal struggle. The integration of textual and visual elements in the posts further strengthens the persuasive power of figurative language, enabling readers to interpret messages beyond their literal meanings. Audience engagement, reflected through reactions and shares, indicates that irony and metaphor enhance emotional resonance and facilitate wider dissemination of critical messages without provoking confrontation.

Beyond stylistic analysis, this study highlights how everyday digital texts can become sites of ethical negotiation. Even brief Facebook posts, when shaped by irony and imagery, can invite moral reflection in contemporary society. HT's Facebook posts demonstrate that irony and figurative imagery allow social criticism to circulate without hostility, fostering reflection rather than confrontation. In an era marked by polarization and discursive aggression, such rhetorical strategies offer an alternative model for humane digital communication. Future studies may further explore how audiences internalize and reproduce these ethical frames across platforms and cultural contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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