

## PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF INDIRECT CRITICISM IN TIKTOK COMMENTS ON PICHE'S PERFORMANCE IN INDONESIAN IDOL

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**Abstract.** *This study aims to analyze the use of indirect criticism in TikTok comments on the performance of Piche, one of the participants of Indonesian Idol 2025. This research identifies how netizens implicitly convey criticism using pragmatic strategies such as implication, speech actions, and politeness theory. The method used was qualitative descriptive, with data obtained from ten purposively selected comments from @indonesianidol's official account on TikTok. Comments were analyzed using pragmatic traits such as locution, illocution function, and politeness strategies. The results showed that netizens often use rhetorical questions, sarcasm, praise irony, metaphors, and parody to convey dissatisfaction without expressing negative judgments directly. This form of indirect criticism generally has an expressive and assertive illocution function. The most dominant politeness strategy is off-record, allowing commenters to maintain an acceptable social tone while conveying dislikes. In digital communication, these comments reflect the hallmarks of social media discourse: short, creative, and rich in cultural connotations. This study concludes that indirect criticism of social media is not only a form of conflict avoidance but also a complex linguistic strategy shaped by shared knowledge, social norms, and the interactive nature of online communities. This research contributes to understanding pragmatic behavior in digital platforms and insights into how users negotiate meaning and politeness, as well as expression in online public spaces.*

**Keyword:** Criticism, Digital Communication, Pragmatics, Politeness Strategies, Indirect Speech

### Article History

Received: November 2025  
Reviewed: November 2025  
Published: November 2025  
Plagiarism Checker No  
234.872.737  
Prefix DOI : Prefix DOI :  
10.8734/argopuro.v1i2.365  
**Copyright : Author**  
**Publish by : Argopuro**



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## I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become the main space in today's digital society interaction. One of the most popular platforms is TikTok, which allows users to share short videos and receive direct responses through the comment section. This response contains not only praise but also criticism that is often delivered indirectly. Zhao (2022) states that indirect communication strategies, such as sarcasm, irony, rhetorical questions, and subtle metaphors, are widely used on TikTok because they are considered more socially secure and avoid open confrontation in the digital space.

This phenomenon can be observed in netizens' comments on Piche's performance, one of the participants of Indonesian Idol in 2025. In the three videos of Piche's performance uploaded by the official @indonesianidol account, many netizens' comments implicitly conveyed disapproval or negative evaluations, using humorous language styles, satirical comparisons, and metaphorical styles. This form of criticism belongs to the category of indirect criticism, which is the focus of pragmatic studies, especially on speech actions and implications in speech.

Pragmatic studies help to understand the meaning of implicit or indirect speech. Levinson (2018) states that pragmatics focuses on meanings listeners interpret based on context, not just literal meaning. Birner (2012) adds that cultural background, shared knowledge, and communication goals are essential in pragmatic inference. In the digital realm, Herring et al. (2013) shows that online commentary is multimodal and contains mixed illocution functions. Meanwhile, Huang (2014) emphasizes that pragmatic interpretation is linguistic and involves cognitive inference and social norms. This is reinforced by Haugh (2014), who states that politeness depends not only on the speaker's intention but also on evaluating the audience or other users. Within the framework of speech theory, Searle (1969) divides speech into locution (what is said literally), illocution (what is the meaning of speech), and perlocution (effect on the listener). This study uses this approach to identify the function of Illocution in netizens' comments. Meanwhile, the politeness theory from Brown & Levinson (1987) explains the off-record strategy, which is to convey criticism indirectly to avoid threats to the social "face" of the opponent. This strategy is especially relevant in the context of TikTok, where netizens often deliver criticism in a subtle yet meaningful way. This phenomenon is also supported by the findings of Salih et al. (2024) which show that social media users tend to apply pragmatic strategies indirectly to maintain the harmony of interpersonal relationships when delivering criticism. The same thing was also conveyed by Nakula et al. (2024) who explained that politeness strategies in digital comments are generally realized through indirect speech actions that are emotional and emphasize more on relational aspects than explicit clarity.

Several previous studies have discussed pragmatic use in TikTok comments. Prahmana, (2023) researched the use of sarcasm and the function of Illocution in netizens' comments. Zhao (2022) discusses politeness and rudeness in TikTok discourse, while Azizah et al. (2024) examine hate speech with a pragmatic approach and forensic linguistics. However, there are significant differences between the three studies and the focus of this study. Pramudya's research focuses on elements of sarcasm and irony aimed at public figures with a sharp language style, in contrast to this research, which focuses more on subtle implicit criticism without the content of sarcasm. Zhao's research raises the issue of politeness and disrespect in general in the digital world without specifically discussing the form of criticism of specific individuals or figures. Meanwhile, Azizah et al.'s research is more inclined toward hate speech that has the potential to violate the law because it is offensive and offensive. On the contrary, this study limits its study to implicit criticism that is still within the limits of social norms and does not aim to harm or degrade the object of criticism legally or ethically.

This study analyzes the form, delivery strategy, and communication function of indirect criticism in TikTok comments on Piche's appearance. The research questions include: (1) What forms of indirect criticism appear in TikTok comments? (2) How is a pragmatic strategy used to convey criticism implicitly? (3) What is the purpose of the communication in the commentary? Theoretically, this research contributes to developing pragmatic studies, especially in digital communication. Practically, the results of this study can be a reference for linguistics students, educators, and social media users to understand the dynamics of indirect communication in the digital space, especially in responding to or interpreting comments that seem light but are full of implicit meaning.

## **II. METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a pragmatic approach. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate to explain the phenomenon of indirect criticism in netizens' comments on TikTok in a contextual and in-depth manner without formulating complex new theories. Descriptive qualitative design is suitable for describing social phenomena in easy-to-understand and straightforward language. This design allows researchers

to explain speech's context, content, and meaning based on the original data without excessive abstraction (Lambert, V. A., & Lambert, 2012).

This method is also suitable for novice researchers because it is flexible and practical. Qualitative descriptive methods are very suitable for use in text- or language-based research, especially when combined with pragmatic analysis (Villamin et al., 2024). Through this approach, researchers can interpret data contextually based on pragmatic theories such as implicit theory from Levinson (2018), speech acts from Searle (1969) and politeness strategies from Brown & Levinson (1987). With this method, researchers can systematically describe the forms of indirect criticism and implicit meanings contained in digital communication without losing their original context.

The research data was taken from the official TikTok @indonesianidol account, specifically three videos featuring Piche's performance in the 2025 Indonesian Idol event. The videos were uploaded on March 10, 11, and 13, 2025. Ten comments containing indirect criticism were purposively selected from the comment column of the three videos based on their suitability with the research focus. The selected comments convey an implicit evaluation using linguistic elements such as rhetorical questions, subtle innuendos, metaphorical expressions, or vague statements.

This study's analysis unit is a TikTok comment unit that contains indirect criticism of Piche's appearance. Each comment is analyzed in depth to identify the pragmatic strategy used, the implicit meaning it wants to convey, and how the comment represents an indirect communication style commonly used by netizens on social media, especially TikTok.

The research instrument consists of two main tools: the researcher himself and the classification sheet. In qualitative research, researchers are the primary instruments that collect, select, interpret, and analyze data. As Creswell & Poth (2018) explain, researchers play a significant role in determining the direction and depth of analysis. Therefore, the researcher's understanding of social theory and context is fundamental.

In addition, this study also uses classification sheets as an auxiliary tool. This sheet records and groups TikTok comments based on speech theory (Herring et al., 2013; Searle, 1969) and politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Saldana (2015) stated that tools such as classification sheets or coding guidelines are invaluable for researchers in organizing and organizing data neatly. He also suggested adjusting the data grouping process to the research objectives to make the analysis results more targeted and meaningful. The combination of the active role of the researcher and this tool makes the analysis process more directed and in-depth.

The data collection technique is done through documentation by saving and reading netizens' comments on TikTok. The data analysis technique uses speech theory from Searle (1969) as the basic framework (locution, Illocution, perlocution), which is complemented by adjustments from Susan Herring et al. (2013) for the context of digital communication and the typical language style of netizens. In addition, the concepts of politeness and disrespectfulness from Brown & Levinson (1987) are also used to look at the strategy of delivering criticism indirectly.

### **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This study uses data from three TikTok videos of the official @indonesianidol account uploaded on March 10, 11, and 13, 2025, featuring the appearance of Piche, a participant in Indonesian Idol 2025. Piche's stage style has reaped various reactions, primarily through indirect criticism conveyed through netizens' comments in rhetorical, satirical, and metaphorical styles. Ten comments were selected to be analyzed pragmatically based on the form of speech, implicit meaning, illocution function, politeness strategies, and digital communication characteristics. The results of the classification are presented in the following table:

*Table 1. Classification of TikTok Netizen Comments*

| No | TikTok Comment                                                       | Locution                                      | Illocution (Implied Meaning)                                                      | Illocutionary Function | Politeness Strategy | Digital Features                                |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Why is he always safe? Hehe                                          | A rhetorical question about safety            | Implies contestant is undeserving of being safe                                   | Assertive + Expressive | Off-record          | Rhetorical form + “hehe” softener               |
| 2  | The siomay seller is singing now                                     | Comparing contestants to food vendors         | Mocking vocal quality through humorous analogy                                    | Expressive             | Metaphoric Sarcasm  | Humorous social analogy                         |
| 3  | Singer or an aerobics instructor?                                    | Rhetorical comparison                         | Suggests stage presence is unfit for a singer                                     | Assertive + Expressive | Subtle Sarcasm      | Ironic tone, indirect comparison                |
| 4  | The aura of going home is strong                                     | Statement about someone “going home”          | Suggests contestant will be eliminated due to performance                         | Assertive + Expressive | Off-record          | Indirect metaphor, netizen-coded phrasing       |
| 5  | It is so cool that they should be a café singer.                     | Praising and suggesting café singing          | Suggests not suitable for high-level competition                                  | Assertive + Expressive | Off-record          | Ironic compliment, mock praise                  |
| 6  | Please help Piche go home next week; he already misses his hometown! | Request for Piche to be sent home             | Suggests sarcastically that Piche is not doing well and should be eliminated      | Directive + Expressive | Sarcasm, off-record | Dramatic tone, indirect wish disguised as pleas |
| 7  | A pedicab driver can sing, huh?                                      | Statement about a pedicab driver singing      | This implies that the singer is unskilled or lower class, mocking the background. | Assertive + Expressive | Sarcasm, off-record | Stereotype reference, ironic tone               |
| 8  | This one is good because of the music.                               | A positive statement about the music          | This implies that the singing was not good; only the music saved it.              | Assertive + Expressive | Indirect contrast   | Backhanded compliment, irony                    |
| 9  | 13 ANSWERABLE CALLS FROM SHAKIRA AND ANJELIA for                     | Dramatic statement mimicking emergency alerts | It is an ironic exaggeration mocking how bad the performance was                  | Expressive             | Off-record, parody  | Hyperbole, parody format, caps lock             |

PICHE, LET IS  
GO HOME

|    |                           |                                        |                                                                  |            |                       |                                                            |
|----|---------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | Angkot<br>nightclub vibes | Short<br>phrase<br>implying<br>a scene | Implies the<br>performance<br>was noisy,<br>tacky, or<br>chaotic | Expressive | Metaphoric<br>Sarcasm | Cultural<br>metaphor,<br>visual &<br>social<br>connotation |
|----|---------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|

Based on the classification in Table 1, the following section presents an in-depth analysis of each netizen's comment. The study was carried out by examining the function of Illocution, politeness strategies, and the forms of indirect criticism used, as described in speech theory (Searle, 1969), implication (Levinson, 2018), politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and digital communication style (Herring et al., 2013).

According to Islamiah et al. (2024), expressive speech acts is used to convey the speaker's feelings, such as criticizing, praising, or complaining about other parties. In this context, many comments on TikTok can be categorized as expressive speech acts because they reflect the speaker's emotional response to Piche's appearance. The following description aims to show how netizens build criticism subtly in the context of digital communication such as TikTok.

*Comment 1: "Why is he always safe? Hehe"*



**Figure 1. Netizens' comments implicitly criticize Piche's continued presence in the competition.**

*This comment is a rhetorical question questioning why Piche continues to be in the safe zone. However, if interpreted pragmatically, this comment implies a negative evaluation of Piche's performance, saying his passing is not feasible. This is in line with the implicature theory from Levinson, which states that meaning in speech can often only be captured through social contexts (Levinson, 2018). The function of the Illocution is assertive because it expresses the speaker's belief and is expressive. After all, it subtly expresses a sense of wonder or sarcasm. According to Searle, comments like this are included in indirect speech because the real intention is not conveyed literally (Searle, 1969). The use of "hehe" is a softener or mitigating marker in digital communication, indicating the speaker's efforts to maintain a friendly and non-frontal impression (Herring et al., 2013). This strategy is referred to as the off-record politeness strategy by Brown and Levinson, which is a strategy to convey criticism implicitly so as not to threaten the social image of the criticized party (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The effect of these comments on other readers (proxies) can be varied: some may find them funny, while others capture hidden criticisms that could influence their opinion of Piche.*

*Comment 2: "The siomay seller is singing now."*



Figure 2. The TikTok comment that uses funny metaphors to satirize Piche's vocal quality

This comment states that "the siomay seller is singing." However, in the context of comments on Indonesian idol videos, this sarcastic analogy or metaphor equates Piche's voice with that of an ordinary person not known as a professional singer. The implicit meaning is that Piche's vocal quality is considered low or unsuitable for the talent search event.

According to Levinson, this comment is an example of implicature, an implied meaning understood through a social context. Here, TikTok viewers understand that "siomay sellers" are not real identities but representations of voices that are mediocre, even tend to be funny or unpleasant to hear. So, even though there are no explicit words like "ugly" or "not good," the meaning of criticism is still strongly felt. In terms of speech, this comment is classified as expressive because it conveys the speaker's attitude or emotional evaluation of Piche's appearance. It can also be interpreted as assertive because it expresses an opinion implicitly (Levinson, 2018).

According to Searle, this kind of speech includes the indirect expressive speech act, where the actual intent differs from the literal form (Searle, 1969). This is further reinforced by the use of humor, which is part of the strategy of off-record politeness, which conveys criticism without directly offending (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this case, netizens choose humorous satire to maintain their self-image, avoid direct conflicts, and stay connected to the norms of the online community. From a digital communication perspective, comments like this show the typical style of netizens: short, funny, and containing local cultural connotations. As Herring states, comments in social media tend to use shared cultural codes and multimodal humor to convey meaning indirectly (Herring et al., 2013).

Comment 3: "*Singer or an aerobics instructor?*"



Figure 3. The TikTok comment that uses funny metaphors to satirize Piche's vocal quality

This comment is delivered as a choice question: "*Singer or an aerobics instructor?*" This sentence seems like an ordinary question, but pragmatically, it is a **rhetorical question** that implies a criticism of Piche's **stage style**, which is considered not by the standards of professional singer performance. According to Levinson, this comment contains an **implicature** of meaning that is not directly spoken but can be captured through context (Levinson, 2018). Here, the speaker implies that Piche's performance is more suitable for a gymnastics instructor than a singer, which means that there is an element of **negative evaluation of Piche's stage expression or choreography**.

In terms of the **function of locus**, this comment is **assertive**. It expresses an opinion and is **expressive** because it contains innuendo and a subjective performance assessment. In Searle's **theory of indirect speech**, this comment is not just a literal question but a way of conveying criticism in a more socially safe form (Searle, 1969). This comment also shows an **off-record politeness strategy**: The speaker does not directly state that "your stage style is weird" or "unsuitable for being a singer" but instead conveys innuendo through ironic questions (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This **politeness strategy** is commonly used in public comment spaces such as TikTok so that the message is still conveyed but does not seem offensive. This commentary style also reflects the typical characteristics of digital communication. According to Herring, online communication often uses a concise, metaphorical style and inserts judgments in humor or irony to maintain social engagement and avoid direct social sanctions from other users (Herring et al., 2013).

Comment 4: *"The aura of going home is strong."*



Figure 4. Netizens' comments that contain indirect criticism of Indonesian

This comment seems to be just a general statement about the "aura of homecoming," but the meaning is much more profound if analyzed pragmatically. The phrase *"aura of going home"* implicitly conveys the assessment that Piche's performance is considered not good, so it has the potential to be eliminated. This is an example of an indirect metaphor commonly used in the TikTok netizen community, especially when discussing contestants on a talent search event. According to Levinson, this kind of meaning belongs to implicature because the speaker does not explicitly say "he should go home" but conveys the intention implicitly through a subtle and contextual construction of language (Levinson, 2018). In the framework of speech acts, this comment is assertive. It expresses the speaker's opinion and is expressive because it contains certain emotions or attitudes, such as decreased expectations for Piche's performance (Searle, 1969).

The use of the word *aura* is also interesting to analyze culturally. In the Indonesian netizen community, this word is often used sarcastically and poetically to convey negative evaluations. This commentary uses an off-record strategy, as described by Brown and Levinson, where the speaker delivers criticism without stating it frontally but wraps it up in metaphors and semi-poetic language (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This allows the writer to maintain a "polite" impression while expressing disapproval in public spaces. In digital communication, comments like this describe the social code that TikTok users mutually understand. As Herring explains, online communication often relies on contextual interpretations, cultural elements, and concise but meaning-dense structures, all evident in this commentary (Herring et al., 2013).

Comment 5: *"So cool, should definitely be a café singer."*



Figure 5. Netizen comments expressing criticism through ironic praise

This comment sounds like a compliment: "Really cool, really good to be a café singer." However, this comment contains implicit criticism in the context of TikTok and talent search events such as Indonesian Idol. By saying that Piche is suitable to be a café singer, the speaker indirectly conveys that his vocal skills are not ideal for a national competition but only for small performances such as in a café. According to Levinson, this comment is a form of conversational implicature, a meaning that is not explicitly stated but can be understood by the reader based on the context (Levinson, 2018). In online communities, comments like this are called backhanded compliments, which are criticism. So, this comment looks "subtle," even though it conveys dissatisfaction.

In terms of speech, this comment is assertive because it expresses judgment and is also expressive. After all, it expresses emotions or attitudes indirectly. This act of speech is included in the indirect speech acts category because its intention differs from its literal form (Searle, 1969). This communication strategy is based on the off-record politeness strategy, which is to convey criticism in a non-explicit way so as not to appear frontal or directly attacking (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In the context of TikTok, comments like this are commonly used because they maintain social politeness but still convey negative evaluations creatively. In the analysis of digital communication, Herring said that this style reflects the multimodal strategy of netizens: short, ironic, and describes the typical style of commentary culture on social media (Herring et al., 2013). This form effectively attracts reactions from other users without involving open conflict.

Comment 6: *"Help Piche go home next week, he already misses his hometown, please!"*



Figure 6. TikTok comments that convey SarcasmSarcasm in the form of dramatic appeal

This comment appears to request Piche to be sent home because he "misses his hometown." However, when viewed pragmatically, this is a form of **sarcasm** that insinuates that Piche does not deserve to stay at the event. This sentence contains an irony that conveys the desire for Piche to be eliminated, but it is disguised as a sentence that seems full of sympathy. According to Levinson, this is a form of **implicature** with a layer of implicit meaning that can only be understood in a social context (Levinson, 2018). TikTok readers know that the real intention is not that Piche misses home but that his performance is considered unworthy of continuing. So, this comment uses **the disguise of meaning** as an indirect communication strategy. In terms of **speech**, this comment contains two functions: **The directive** includes an invitation or request

for Piche to go home, and **the expression is expressive** because it includes emotions in the form of sarcasm and dissatisfaction (Searle, 1969).

The strategy included **off-record politeness**, where the writer used full drama satire rather than direct criticism (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This is to maintain self-image while adjusting to the typical communication style of the TikTok community. Comments like this also reflect the phenomenon of digital communication described by **Herring**: concise, creative, sometimes dramatic comments that often use an exaggerated or theatrical style to convey an indirect but still consequential meaning (Herring et al., 2013). This form is effective in attracting the attention of other users while still maintaining "social politeness."

Comment 7: *"A pedicab driver can sing, huh?"*



Figure 7. Netizens' comments that convey criticism indirectly through satire based on social stereotypes

This comment looks simple, but it has multiple meanings. *A pedicab driver can sing, huh?* is a form of social satire that implicitly compares the singing ability of participants with the image of a pedicab driver. This profession is stereotypically not associated with the world of professional music. Although this comment does not mention the vocals directly, the meaning points to a form of criticism of the overall quality of the performance. This sentence expresses astonishment when, in fact, it implies doubt and a condescending tone. According to Levinson, such meanings are included in contextual implications, which are implicit meanings that depend on cultural background and shared knowledge. In the context of Indonesian TikTok netizens, the reference to "pedicab drivers" immediately arouses a collective understanding that makes the tone of this comment read as a subtle satirism (Levinson, 2018).

From the point of view of speech, this comment is assertive because it conveys an opinion implicitly and expressively and expresses an emotional attitude in the form of distrust or ridicule. According to Searle's theory, expressive speech reflects the speaker's attitude to a condition, even if conveyed indirectly (Searle, 1969). The politeness strategy used is off-record, namely conveying criticism indirectly so as not to appear to be attacked frontally. This is in line with the view of Brown and Levinson, who state that off-record strategies are used to avoid threats to the face of others while still conveying the intent (Brown & Levinson, 1987). From the perspective of digital communication, Herring explained that short comments that contain social references and double meanings are a hallmark of social media. This communication style combines cultural connotations, irony, and emotional connectedness in short sentences easily recognizable by the user community (Herring et al., 2013).

Comment 8: *"This one is good because of the music."*

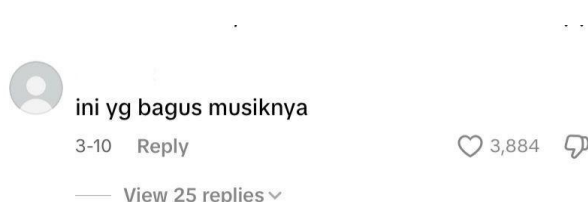


Figure 8. Netizens' comments that convey an implied evaluation with selective praise

This comment conveys that the performance is good because of the music. However, implicitly, this comment implies that another part of the performance, namely the vocals, is not good. This is an example of selective praise that implies criticism, or, in pragmatic terms, contrastive implicature, when focusing on one aspect indirectly criticizes another (Levinson, 2018). This comment is considered assertive speech because it expresses an opinion and contains an expressive element that implies dissatisfaction. According to Searle, this kind of comment can be classified as indirect speech because the intention is not expressed explicitly but interpreted by the listener (Searle, 1969).

In terms of communication strategy, this comment uses off-record politeness by conveying criticism indirectly (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The speaker does not explicitly mention the performance's weaknesses but emphasizes one positive aspect (the music) to imply that the other (vocals) does not stand out. This comment form also illustrates a typical communication style on social media such as TikTok. According to Herring, this style belongs to the multimodal and meaning-dense digital communication pattern, where negative innuendo or evaluation is often packaged as praise, comparison, or partial commentary (Herring et al., 2013).

**Comment 9: "13 ANSWERABLE CALLS FROM SHAKIRA AND ANJELIA for PICHE, LET'S GO HOME"**



Figure 9. Netizens' comments that convey criticism through parody and hyperbole style

These comments mimic the style of emergency announcements or system notifications, such as "13 missed calls." Shakira and Anjelia's names mentioned in the comments have a special meaning because they have both been eliminated from the previous competition. These comments imply that they "called" Piche to catch them home, making this comment a form of sarcasm and layered irony against Piche's performance that was deemed untenable. In the framework of implicature, these comments contain strong implicit meanings. They can only be understood in the social context of the TikTok community and the shared knowledge of contestant elimination. There was no vocal criticism, but pragmatically, it was clear that the intention was: "Piche should have gone home." (Levinson, 2018).

This comment expresses the locus's function because it conveys emotions. At the same time, it is an indirect directive because it encourages netizens to think that Piche should follow the two contestants who have been eliminated (Searle, 1969). Phrases such as "Let's GO HOME" invite the reader to participate in the opinion without conveying it directly. This communication strategy is included in off-record politeness because the intention of criticism is wrapped in humor and parody so that it does not feel frontal (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This comment also uses typical netizens' language, such as capital letters, dramatization, and text structures resemble alerts, in accordance with the characteristics of digital multimodal communication (Herring et al., 2013). This comment, by mentioning the names of the eliminated contestants, shows the linguistic creativity and social intelligence of netizens, who can deliver sharp criticism in a subtle, funny, yet effective way.

## Comment 10: "Angkot nightclub vibes."



Figure 10. Netizens' comments that use cultural metaphors as a form of aesthetic criticism of Piche's appearance

This comment is very short but full of meaning. The phrase "Angkot nightclub vibes" is a cultural metaphor that implies that Piche's appearance is flashy, crowded, or even "tacky," similar to the night atmosphere in an angkot decorated with colorful lights and loud music. Although he does not mention the vocals directly, this comment leads to an aesthetic critique of the overall performance. According to Levinson, such meanings include contextual implicature, an implicit meaning that depends on cultural background and shared experiences. This comment is understandable because Indonesian TikTok netizens collectively understand "*angkot vibes*" and their aesthetic associations (Levinson, 2018).

From the point of view of speech, this comment is expressive because it conveys personal attitudes and perceptions of performance. However, its very indirect form also makes it part of the act of indirect speech because the meaning of criticism can only be understood through context and common knowledge (Searle, 1969). The communication strategy is off-record politeness, in which the speaker metaphorically conveys criticism without explicitly mentioning the shortcomings (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This gives the reader room for interpretation but conveys a precise negative evaluation. In the perspective of digital communication, Herring said that using metaphors like this is typical of social media. It combines visual, social, and emotional connotations in one short phrase that is easy to understand and relate to the community (Herring et al., 2013).

Based on an analysis of ten TikTok netizens' comments on Piche's appearance, it can be concluded that indirect criticism on social media is very diverse regarding language style, communication strategy, and pragmatic function. Netizens creatively convey disapproval or negative evaluations, such as rhetorical questions, sarcasm, cultural metaphors, and parodies. Most of the comments are packaged with off-record politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), indicating an attempt to maintain a polite impression, avoid direct conflict, and conform to the norms of online communities. The hidden meanings in the commentary are understood through implicature, which shows that social context plays a significant role in interpreting the speaker's intentions (Levinson, 2018).

In addition, the dominant functions of Illocution are assertive and expressive, with some commentaries also containing indirect directive functions, depending on how criticism is constructed (Searle, 1969). These commentary styles reflect the hallmarks of multimodal and contextual digital communication, which rely not only on words but also on the way, form, and tone of delivery (Herring et al., 2013). Thus, this discussion shows that indirect criticism is a form of conflict avoidance and a complex linguistic strategy highly adaptive to the digital environment. This analysis reinforces the importance of pragmatic studies in understanding communication dynamics on social media.

These findings also align with Haugh's view, which states that politeness and rudeness in digital communication depend on the speaker's intention and how the audience evaluates the comments (Haugh, 2014). In a public space like TikTok, ambiguous or humorous comments can be understood differently depending on community norms and social expectations. Thus, the interpretation of indirect criticism is interactive, and the final result is formed through responses and interpretations from readers or other users.

#### IV. SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

This study aims to identify the form, delivery strategy, and communication function of indirect criticism in TikTok's comments on Piche's performance in the *Indonesian Idol 2025 event*. Based on the analysis results, the three objectives were successfully answered by elaborating on the data in the results and discussion section. The study's findings show that netizens' comments contain various forms of indirect criticism, such as rhetorical questions, subtle sarcasm, ironic praise, cultural metaphors, and parodies. This delivery style reflects netizens' creativity in conveying dissatisfaction without confronting them directly. The most widely used pragmatic strategy is *off-record politeness*, which conveys implicit criticism to maintain politeness and social image. This strategy is often combined with assertive and expressive Illocution, which conveys opinions, emotional attitudes, or insinuation in an entertaining and social media way.

This research's advantage lies in applying classical pragmatic theory to actual and relevant digital communication. It also presents authentic examples of netizens' discourse that can enrich pragmatic studies in the social media era. However, the scope of this study is still limited to one platform, one object, and a limited number of comments, so the findings cannot be generalized widely.

For further development, the research should be extended to other digital platforms or directed to examine the impact of perlocution from indirect criticism on the recipient of comments. In addition, educators and academics can use this research as teaching materials in pragmatic learning, especially those related to speech, politeness, and communication in the digital context. Understanding the meaning implied in netizens' comments is essential for social media users and content creators to maintain wise, polite, and healthy online interactions.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research is supported by guidance from lecturers of the Pragmasemantics course and various literature sources referenced in this study. The authors also expressed gratitude for the university's academic facilities and technical assistance. Special thanks were conveyed to online data taken from TikTok as the primary data source. Feedback and discussion during lectures also made an essential contribution to the preparation of the final analysis of this research.

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