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PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF SPEECH ACTS IN AI-GENERATED SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence has expanded the production of social media texts that imitate human communicative behaviour. This article examines the pragmatic functions of representative, directive, expressive, commissive and declarative speech acts in AI-generated social media content. The study combines a review of Speech Act Theory with a small qualitative analysis of fifteen illustrative AI-generated messages prepared for informational, promotional, educational, customer-service and institutional contexts. The examples were classified according to their dominant illocutionary force and interpreted in relation to audience engagement. The analysis shows that representative and directive acts are especially productive because AI systems readily generate informative statements, recommendations and calls to action. Expressive and commissive acts are also linguistically well formed, but their credibility depends on the human or institutional agent behind the message. Declaratives remain limited because their validity requires recognized authority rather than linguistic form alone. The findings suggest that AI can reproduce conventional speech-act patterns effectively, while contextual sensitivity, responsibility and emotional authenticity still require human supervision.

Keywords

speech acts, pragmatics, generative artificial intelligence, social media, digital discourse, audience engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital communication is increasingly shaped by generative artificial intelligence. Social media managers, educational institutions, businesses and individual users employ AI tools to draft posts, answer questions, prepare announcements and adapt messages for different audiences. As a result, online discourse is no longer produced only by identifiable human speakers. It may be generated, edited or reformulated by an artificial system before reaching readers. This development makes pragmatic analysis particularly important because the success of a social media message depends not only on grammatical correctness, but also on what communicative action it performs and how that action is interpreted.

Speech Act Theory provides a suitable framework for examining language as action. Austin distinguished between the production of an utterance, the act performed through it and its effect on the hearer [1, pp. 94-108]. Searle later systematized illocutionary acts into representative, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative categories [2, pp. 12-20]. These categories remain useful in digital environments because a post may inform, request, promise, apologize, congratulate or officially announce a change even when it consists of only a few sentences.

Recent research has begun to examine whether AI-generated language can serve as material for pragmatic analysis. Chen, Li and Ye compared AI-generated conversations with human language data and found that AI output can display strong pragmalinguistic performance, although sociopragmatic appropriateness remains dependent on contextual design [3, pp. 14-30]. Research on social media discourse also confirms that speech acts are central to interaction across platforms and that their forms vary according to public or private context,

platform conventions and audience relationships [4, pp. 359-383]. These findings indicate that the linguistic form of a speech act cannot be evaluated separately from the conditions in which it is produced and received.

The purpose of this article is to identify the main pragmatic functions of speech acts in AI-generated social media content and to explain how these acts may influence audience interaction. The study focuses on the linguistic realization of speech acts rather than on the technical architecture of AI systems. It also considers the limits of assigning intention, emotion and institutional authority to automatically generated texts.

MAIN PART

Speech acts in AI-mediated social media discourse

AI-generated social media messages are typically produced in response to a prompt that specifies topic, audience, tone and purpose. The resulting text therefore reflects an intended communicative function supplied by a human user or institution. Even though the system itself does not possess personal intentions in the human sense, the text can still be interpreted as performing an illocutionary act. In practical communication, readers respond to the words presented to them, while responsibility for the message remains with the person or organization that publishes it.

Representative speech acts assert, describe or explain a state of affairs. They dominate informational and educational content because AI systems are frequently asked to summarize a report, explain a concept or announce factual details. A sentence such as “The registration period closes on Friday” commits the publishing account to the truth of the information. Its pragmatic effectiveness depends on accuracy, clarity and the authority of the source. Crystal notes that digital language combines established linguistic functions with new technological conditions, making credibility and audience interpretation central to online communication [5, pp. 17-25].

Directive speech acts attempt to make the audience perform an action. Social media posts commonly ask users to register, comment, share, subscribe or follow a link. AI tools can produce direct imperatives, polite requests and indirect recommendations. The choice among these forms affects how the message is perceived. “Register now” is concise and promotional, whereas “You may wish to register before Friday” softens the request. In both cases, the text aims to influence behaviour, but the interpersonal effect differs.

Expressive speech acts communicate an attitude or emotional response, including gratitude, sympathy, apology and congratulations. AI-generated forms such as “Thank you for your valuable feedback” are conventional and usually appropriate in routine interaction. Their limitation concerns authenticity: the language expresses an institutional or user-authorized attitude rather than an emotion experienced by the system. Tagg emphasizes that digital communication involves identity work and relationship management, not merely information transfer [6, pp. 69-84]. Therefore, an expressive act may be grammatically correct yet pragmatically unsuccessful when it sounds formulaic or insensitive to the situation.

Commissive speech acts commit the speaker to a future course of action. Customer-service accounts often publish statements such as “We will review your request within two working days.” AI can generate such promises easily, but it cannot guarantee their fulfilment. The commitment belongs to the organization that authorizes and publishes the response. For this reason, human verification is essential whenever an AI-generated text creates expectations about deadlines, refunds, services or future decisions.

Declarative speech acts change an institutional situation through their successful performance. Examples include officially opening an event, approving a decision or announcing a new status. AI may draft the wording of a declaration, but the act becomes valid only when issued by an authorized person or institution. A generated sentence such as “The competition is officially closed” has no institutional force if it is published without legitimate authority. This category clearly demonstrates the difference between producing an acceptable linguistic form and possessing the social power required to perform the act.

Material and method of the illustrative analysis

To demonstrate these functions, fifteen short social media messages were generated for five communicative contexts: information sharing, educational promotion, customer service, audience engagement and institutional announcement. Three messages were considered in each context. The examples were manually

classified according to their dominant illocutionary force. Because one message may perform several functions at once, classification was based on the primary action expected to be recognized by the audience. The sample is illustrative rather than statistically representative; its purpose is to show how conventional speech-act categories operate in AI-assisted social media writing.

Table 1. Illustrative speech acts in AI-generated social media messages

AI-generated message	Dominant speech act	Pragmatic function
“The webinar begins at 3 p.m. on Thursday.”	Representative	Provides factual information
“Save your place by completing the form today.”	Directive	Encourages registration
“Thank you for sharing your experience with us.”	Expressive	Acknowledges the audience
“We will send the updated schedule tomorrow.”	Commissive	Creates an expectation of future action
“The application period is now officially closed.”	Declarative	Announces an institutional change

Discussion of the illustrative results

The sample demonstrates that a single social media environment accommodates all five categories, but their pragmatic conditions differ. Representatives and directives are the most straightforward for AI generation because they rely on recognizable linguistic patterns: declarative sentences for information and imperatives or modal constructions for recommendations. These acts are also directly connected with common platform goals, including informing users and increasing participation.

Expressive and commissive acts require closer supervision. An expression of thanks may strengthen rapport, but a generic phrase can appear impersonal when a user has described a serious problem. Similarly, a promise may reassure the audience, yet it can damage trust if the responsible organization cannot fulfil it. The pragmatic force of the message therefore depends on institutional practice as well as wording. Chen, Li and Ye likewise show that apparently successful AI-generated language must be assessed at both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic levels [3, pp. 24-28].

The declarative example confirms that social context is indispensable. The sentence has the grammatical appearance of an official announcement, but its force is derived from the status of the publishing account. Speech acts in social media cannot be classified only through isolated verbs or sentence patterns. Jegede's corpus-based analysis similarly demonstrates that speech-act strategies vary across platforms and interactional settings [4, pp. 374-379].

Audience engagement also depends on tone, transparency and cultural appropriateness. A highly direct instruction may be effective in a commercial advertisement but appear impolite in an educational or professional community. AI prompts should therefore specify not only the desired content but also the relationship between writer and reader, the degree of formality and the likely cultural expectations. Human review remains necessary when a message deals with sensitive topics, conflict, apology, institutional responsibility or public trust.

Another issue is disclosure. Social media users may assume that a fluent and personalized message has been written by a person. When AI contributes substantially to communication, organizations should establish clear editorial responsibility. The central ethical question is not simply whether AI can generate a speech act, but who is accountable for its truth, appropriateness and consequences.

CONCLUSION

Speech Act Theory offers a productive framework for analysing AI-generated social media content. AI systems can reproduce the linguistic patterns of representatives, directives, expressives, commissives and declaratives with considerable fluency. However, the successful performance of these acts depends on factors that extend beyond sentence structure, including factual reliability, interpersonal context, institutional authority and the audience's expectations.

The illustrative analysis showed that representative and directive acts are particularly compatible with routine AI-assisted writing. Expressive and commissive acts require human attention because emotional authenticity and the fulfilment of commitments cannot be guaranteed by generated language. Declarative acts reveal the strongest dependence on external authority: AI may formulate an announcement, but only an authorized institution can make it valid.

Thus, generative AI should be treated as a drafting and language-support tool rather than as an autonomous communicative agent. Its effectiveness increases when human users provide context-rich prompts, verify factual content

and accept responsibility for the final message. Further studies may compare larger corpora of human-written and AI-generated posts, examine speech acts across languages, and investigate how audiences perceive disclosure, politeness and trust in AI-mediated communication.

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