

استقصاء المفارقة وتأثيراتها الوجدانية: دراسة تداولية دعم إيلون ماسك لترمب على منصة أكس

Exploring Irony and Affective Effects: Pragmatic Analysis of Elon Musk's Support for Trump on X

Ass. Lect. Taghreed Abdulsalam

م.م تغريد عبد السلام

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية وآدابها ، كلية الآداب الجامعة المستنصرية

College of Arts Department of English language and Linguistics Mustansiriyah University

taghreed.s@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq

Abstract

The present study explores the pragmatic nature of irony and the affective effects it triggers in Elon Musk's digital support for Trumps 2024 presidential elections campaign. Being the CEO of X, Musk's posts are highly influential as they reach all X audience. Drawing on relevance theory and multimodal pragmatics, the research examines how Musk employs irony to convey implicit political messages and evoke emotional responses. The study focuses on Elon Musk's tweets related to Donald Trump during election campaigns, with a specific emphasis on ironic content. Data was gathered from Musk's official X account, filtering posts using key words like; *Trump, president, must win, elections 2024*, and similar phrases indicative of potential sarcasm or irony. Audience interactions, including replies, retweets and engagement

metrics, were analyzed to assess affective effects. Two schedules were developed to organize the tweets by date, theme, and multimodal elements, such as images or memes, ensuring a comprehensive selection of relevant data for linguistic and pragmatic analysis. The analysis integrates linguistic multimodal framework to investigate the interplay of text, images and key words in creating propositional and non-propositional effects, such as humor and sarcasm, which are meant to maximize support and polarization. The study also considers the role of irony in shaping public discourse and its sociopolitical implications, particularly in online political communication. Preliminary analysis suggests that Musk leverages irony not only as a rhetorical device but also as a tool for emotional engagement, amplifying his influence on audience perception and public debates. The findings highlight the complex interplay between irony, affective resonance, and audience interaction, offering insights into how digital communication strategies can impact sociopolitical narratives. The findings also show that the affective effects triggered by irony maximize memorability and persuasiveness in Musk's digital discourse.

Keyword: Affective Effect; Digital Discourse; Irony; Pragmatics;

الخلاصة

تستكشف الدراسة الحالية الطبيعة التداولية للمفارقة والتأثيرات العاطفية التي تثيرها في الدعم الرقمي لإيلون ماسك لحملة الانتخابات الرئاسية لترامب في عام ٢٠٢٤. بصفته الرئيس التنفيذي لشركة أكس، فإن منشوراته مؤثرة للغاية لأنها تصل إلى جميع جمهور أكس. بالاستعانة بنظرية الصلة والتداولية المتعددة الوسائط، يدرس البحث كيفية استخدام ماسك للمفارقة لنقل الرسائل السياسية الضمنية واستحضار الاستجابات العاطفية الجماهيرية. تركز الدراسة على تغريدات إيلون ماسك المتعلقة بدونالد ترامب أثناء الحملات الانتخابية، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على المحتوى الساخر. تم جمع البيانات من حساب ماسك الرسمي على أكس، وتصفية المنشورات باستخدام كلمات رئيسية مثل؛ يجب أن يفوز ترامب، الرئيس، انتخابات ٢٠٢٤، وعبارات مماثلة تدل على السخرية المحتملة أو المفارقة. تم تحليل تفاعلات الجمهور، بما في ذلك الردود وإعادة التغريد ومقاييس المشاركة، لتقييم التأثيرات العاطفية. وقد تم تطوير جدولين لتنظيم التغريدات حسب التاريخ والموضوع والعناصر المتعددة الوسائط، مثل

الصور أو الميمات، مما يضمن اختياراً شاملاً للبيانات ذات الصلة للتحليل اللغوي والتداولي. يدمج التحليل الإطار اللغوي المتعدد الوسائط للتحقيق في التفاعل بين النصوص والصور والكلمات الرئيسية في خلق تأثيرات اقتراحية وغير اقتراحية، مثل الفكاهة والسخرية، والتي تهدف إلى تعظيم الدعم والاستقطاب الجماهيري. كما تبحث الدراسة في دور المفارقة في تشكيل الخطاب العام وتداعياته الاجتماعية والسياسية، وخاصة في التواصل السياسي عبر الإنترنت. يشير التحليل الأولي إلى أن ماسك يستفيد من المفارقة ليس كأداة بلاغية فقط ولكن كأداة للمشاركة العاطفية أيضاً، مما يزيد من تأثيره على تصور الجمهور والمناظرات العامة. تسلط النتائج الضوء على التفاعل المعقد بين المفارقة، الصدى العاطفي والتفاعل الجماهيري، مما يوفر رؤى حول كيفية تأثير استراتيجيات الاتصال الرقمي على السرديات الاجتماعية والسياسية. تُظهر النتائج أيضاً أن التأثيرات العاطفية التي تسببها المفارقة تعمل على توسيع الاستنكار والإقناع في الخطاب الرقمي.

1. Introduction

Social media platforms have transformed the dynamics of political discourse, offering influential figures an unparalleled ability to shape public opinion through concise and multimodal communication. Among these figures, Elon Musk stands out for his adept use of humor, irony, and emotionally charged content to engage audiences and amplify political messaging. This study focuses on Musk's support for Donald Trump during the U.S. presidential election campaigns, analyzing his tweets through the lens of pragmatics and affective communication. Drawing on relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995); (Wilson, 2013), this paper investigates how Musk employs irony to evoke layered interpretations, fostering emotional resonance and engagement. Additionally, it examines how multimodal elements text, images, and context optimize relevance and construct persuasive narratives. By integrating audience interaction metrics, the analysis also explores the affective effects of Musk's tweets in influencing public sentiment and amplifying political alignment. Through a comprehensive linguistic, multimodal, and audience-focused

framework, this research aims to contribute to the growing field of pragmatic studies in digital communication. By contextualizing Musk's tweets within theoretical insights on irony, affective communication, and multimodal pragmatics, the study aims to reveal the strategic interplay of humor, emotion, and engagement in shaping contemporary political discourse.

To structure this exploration, the study seeks to answer the following research questions that address Musk's manipulative use of irony and its impact on political communication:

Research Question 1: How does Musk use irony to communicate political stances?

Research Questions 2: How do these affective effects impact public discourse and audience reactions?

These questions guide the research toward a deeper understanding of how irony, as used by a high-profile influencer, operates in digital media to evoke emotions.

1. Theoretical Framework:

2.1 The pragmatics of Irony

From a pragmatic perspective, irony is a complex communicative phenomenon where the speaker expresses a meaning that contrasts with or opposes the literal interpretation of their utterance. It relies on contextual cues and the audience's ability to recognize an implicit, often critical, or humorous intention behind the words. (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) conceptualize irony as an instance of "echoic interpretation", where the speaker echoes a thought or

statement attributed to someone else or a general societal expectation, and simultaneously expresses a dissociative attitude towards it. For example, when someone says, “Great weather we’re having!” during a thunderstorm, they are not only echoing a typical expectation of good weather but also signaling their critical stance toward the discrepancy between expectation and reality. (Wilson, 2013) points out that irony optimize relevance by engaging the audience’s inferential capabilities. In this view, irony is not merely about saying the opposite of what one means but about prompting the audience to infer the intended meaning through cognitive effort, which is rewarded with the satisfaction of understanding the speaker’s true intent. Building on the definition of irony as echoic interpretation, where speakers evoke and subtly reject or comment on others’ thoughts (Sperber & Wilson, 1995); (Wilson, 2013), one can note how this form of communication thrives in social media contexts. Musk’s use of irony in his tweets often involves contrasting visual and verbal cues, creating layered meanings. This understanding will guide our linguistic and pragmatic analysis, which seeks to uncover how Musk’s tweets construct ironic meanings to influence audience perception.

1.2. Relevance of Irony in Communication

Irony plays a pivotal role in communication as it serves several functions, including:

- **Social Critique:** By contrasting literal and intended meanings, irony can highlight social or political incongruities and question norms (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).
- **Affective Impact:** Irony can evoke humor, sarcasm, or indignation, depending on its delivery and context, making it an effective tool for engaging audiences emotionally (Wharton & Saussure, 2023).

- Solidarity Building: Shared understanding of irony fosters a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals, as recognizing the intended meaning requires shared cultural or ideological knowledge (Wilson & Carston, 2019).

In political discourse, irony is particularly powerful as it enables speakers to criticize opponents, signal ideological alignments, and engage their audience in a playful yet poignant manner (Burgers, Konijn, & Steen, 2016). (Burgers, van Mulken, & Schellens, 2012) argue that irony in political communication enhances message memorability and emotional resonance, often aligning with the speaker's goals of persuasion or mobilization.

1.3. Affective Effects in Communication

Emotions play a pivotal role in shaping the interpretation of messages (Wilson & Carston, 2019). Social media content that combines humor, irony, and emotional appeal often produces strong affective effects, amplifying user engagement. These insights will inform our analysis of Musk's audience interactions, focusing on how emotional and affective responses are provoked and reflected in replies, retweets, and engagement metrics.

Affective effects refer to the emotional and subjective impressions that contribute to the meaning-making process in communication. These non-propositional effects, such as emotions, tone, and overall impressions, extend beyond the literal or propositional content of utterances, playing a critical role in shaping how messages are perceived and interpreted. (Wilson & Carston, 2019) emphasize that communication involves not only the transmission of explicit information but also the evocation of implicit emotional and attitudinal responses. Non-propositional effects arise from the interaction of linguistic cues (e.g., tone, prosody, word choice) and contextual factors. For instance,

irony, sarcasm, and humor often function as tools to invoke affective responses, allowing speakers to communicate complex attitudes or emotions indirectly. These effects significantly influence how audiences connect with and interpret a message, often determining its persuasive or rhetorical impact. According to (Wharton & Saussure, 2023), the interplay between linguistic expressions and non-verbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, or emotive punctuation in written text) enriches communication by embedding emotional nuances. This perspective aligns with the broader understanding that emotions are not ancillary to communication but integral to meaning-making. Affective effects often foster interpersonal engagement, establish solidarity or distance, and elicit specific reactions from an audience. In the context of Elon Musk's tweets supporting Donald Trump, non-propositional effects are evident through the use of humor, exaggeration, and visual cues. These elements provoke emotional responses such as amusement, agreement, or even indignation, thereby reinforcing Musk's ideological stance and engaging his audience on an affective level. For example, a tweet depicting a humorous image of Earth exploding, accompanied by the caption "Earth will literally explode if DJT loses," leverages hyperbole to evoke humor while simultaneously underscoring Musk's perspective on Trump's importance. Such use of affective effects amplifies the communicative impact of the message beyond its literal content. By integrating these elements into their framework, pragmatics researchers can explore how affective effects shape political and social discourse, particularly in digital communication spaces where emotional resonance often drives engagement.

1.4. Multimodal Pragmatics

The interplay of verbal, visual, and contextual elements in multimodal communication, as highlighted by (Forceville, 2020), is crucial for understanding Musk's tweets. His strategic use of images, videos, and textual components optimizes relevance and guides audience interpretation. This theory will underpin our multimodal analysis, exploring how these elements work in tandem to convey ironic and persuasive messages.

Multimodal pragmatics explores how meaning is constructed and interpreted through the combination of verbal, visual, and contextual elements in communication. It extends the insights of Relevance Theory, originally developed by (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), by considering the interaction between different modes of communication spoken or written language, visual images, gestures, and other non-verbal cues and their contribution to the relevance of a message. Relevance Theory posits that communicative acts are designed to maximize relevance for the audience, meaning that they aim to provide the most cognitive effect for the least processing effort (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

In multimodal texts, the integration of multiple modalities (such as verbal content, visual images, and contextual cues) plays a crucial role in achieving this maximization of relevance. (Forceville, 2020) demonstrates how multimodal texts combine verbal and non-verbal elements to optimize relevance, with each mode contributing to the overall meaning-making process. Visual elements, for example, can help illustrate, intensify, or even alter the interpretation of verbal messages, particularly in cases of irony, humor, or persuasion. In political communication, especially in the case of Elon Musk's tweets supporting Donald Trump, multimodal texts are frequently employed to engage audiences emotionally and cognitively. Tweets often combine written text with visual

elements such as images, memes, and videos, which can significantly enhance the communicative impact of the message.

According to (Forceville, 2020), the interaction between verbal and visual modes helps convey complex messages more effectively, often using humor, irony, or visual metaphors to draw attention and create emotional resonance. For example, Musk's tweet featuring a picture of an astronaut searching for Earth just before it explodes serves to enhance the humorous yet dire tone of his message about Trump's political importance, illustrating how multimodal communication creates richer interpretations of the underlying message. Additionally, O'Halloran (2011) emphasizes that multimodal pragmatics also accounts for how people use different modes in combination to process and interpret meaning. By studying the interplay of visual elements, spoken or written text, and contextual cues, researchers can better understand how communication operates across various platforms, from social media to advertisements to political discourse. In the context of Musk's tweets, this multimodal approach helps explain why certain tweets resonate with his audience: by combining verbal communication with visual elements that trigger emotional responses, the multimodal text maximizes relevance, increasing the likelihood that the message will be processed and interpreted as intended.

2. Data Selection and Methodology

In this study, the data is drawn from Elon Musk's tweets supporting Donald Trump in the context of the 2024 U.S. Presidential election. The selection focuses specifically on tweets containing ironic content, as this allows for an in-depth examination of how irony is used to convey political messages, particularly in the form of endorsements or criticisms. The tweets analyzed herein were selected based on the following selection criteria:

1. Keywords: Tweets were selected based on specific keywords and phrases related to the political context, such as “Trump,” “2024,” “elections,” “support,” and “America.” Additionally, keywords associated with irony, such as “sarcasm,” “joke,” or “explodes,” were considered crucial for identifying tweets that may carry an ironic tone or humorous edge. Keywords such as “Kamala Harris,” “Biden,” and “teleprompter” were also used to focus on tweets comparing Trump to his political rivals, further contextualizing Musk’s use of irony in political commentary (Wilson & Carston, 2019).
2. Tone: The tone of the tweet was a significant factor in selection. Only tweets with a humorous, exaggerated, or satirical tone were chosen for analysis. This is because irony, as defined in pragmatics, often depends on a contrast between the literal and intended meaning, which can be conveyed through tone. By selecting tweets where the tone suggested a playful or sardonic message, the analysis focuses on how irony is used strategically in political discourse (Sperber & Wilson, 1995); (Wilson, 2013).
3. Memes and Visual Content: Visual content, such as images, videos, and memes, was also considered in the selection process. Multimodal texts where verbal content is combined with images or videos offer a richer source for exploring how irony functions beyond verbal communication alone (Forceville, 2020). Tweets that paired ironic text with relevant images or memes were included, as they offer deeper layers of meaning and emotional resonance, crucial for multimodal pragmatics (O’Halloran, 2011).
4. Audience Interaction: The level of audience interaction, including likes, retweets, and comments, was considered to measure the reach and impact of the tweets. Tweets with higher engagement were prioritized, as they likely resonated more strongly with Musk’s followers, providing insight into how ironic content can stimulate public discourse and influence political opinion. Studies show that visual and verbal elements; which are parts of social media today,

interact often to amplify the effects of humorous and ironic content, making them particularly valuable for analysis in understanding public sentiment (Barthes, 1977).

The analytical framework employed in the analysis is designed to operationalize the theoretical insights discussed. Using relevance theory as a foundation, a three-tiered multimodal pragmatic analysis of irony was conducted, focusing on the interplay of textual, visual, and contextual cues. The analysis was conducted based on the following levels:

1. Pragmatic analysis of ironic content: to show how Elon Musk's use of irony signals a layered meaning, requiring the audience to infer his stance based on shared knowledge or assumptions. For example, Musk's ironic comments often echo societal frustrations (e.g., bureaucracy, political dynamics), requiring readers to decode his underlying critique while navigating their own emotional response.
2. Multimodal Analysis of Verbal, Visual, and Contextual Elements: to show how Musk's tweets are excellent examples: they frequently combine text with memes, visuals, and shared cultural references, enhancing their communicative impact. Drawing on (Forceville, 2020), the framework allows for decoding the interplay between Musk's verbal wit and the visual elements that anchor his messages (e.g., memes or images). These combinations intensify the emotional resonance and amplify the ironic effect, as seen in his meme-driven humor.
3. Audience Interaction Analysis: to study social media engagement metrics (replies, quoted tweets, retweets, likes). These metrics can reveal how

audiences perceive and amplify a message. Musk's tweets, especially those involving irony, often elicit polarized reactions ranging from agreement and humor to critique and frustration. This engagement reflects how his audience navigates the layered meanings in his tweets. Interactivity also serves as a feedback loop, where Musk can gauge public sentiment and recalibrate his messaging strategy. Research has shown that irony thrives in participatory digital environments, as it invites diverse interpretations and emotional responses, increasing its reach and relevance.

3. Analysis

The interplay of irony, multimodal communication, and audience interaction in Elon Musk's tweets reveals a sophisticated approach to political commentary. Musk's use of irony not only critiques and mocks but also creates engagement by employing humor, visual elements, and culturally relevant topics. The following analysis delves into all ten tweets, examining how Musk integrates text, imagery, and contextual references to maximize relevance and affective impact, furthering his rhetorical goals. The focus is on irony as a rhetorical tool in Musk's support for Trump, showcasing how exaggerated praise, sarcasm, and humor construct meaning. Below is a table summarizing of the 10 tweets:

Tweet	Irony Type	Multimodal Elements	Engagement Context	Affective Effects
1. "just did a search for Trump rally... Kamala was	Situational irony.	Screenshot of Google search result.	Highlights perceived media bias,	Evokes frustration toward

the top result”.			prompting agreement from followers.	perceived bias while fostering solidarity among supporters.
2. “Earth will literally explode if DJT loses!”	Hyperbolic irony.	Meme of exploding Earth with caption.	Humorously exaggerates consequences, creating engagement through absurdity.	Combines humor and fear to emphasize the importance of Trump’s reelection.
3. “Wow, the stress of being a president really changed them.”	Visual irony.	Photo comparison of Obama, Trump, and Biden (becoming Harris).	Critiques political figures using humor; absurd transformation provokes thought.	Leverages visual humor to create a lighthearted yet critical commentary on political stress or continuity.
4. “People need social proof. Put a Trump/Vance sign on your lawn and	Social Irony.	Image of Trump/Vance sign on a lawn.	Encourages audience reflection on performative	Evokes self-awareness in followers while

wear MAGA merch.”			expressions of support and conformity.	fostering a sense of community through shared humor and political allegiance.
5. “How is it possible that this person is somehow a candidate for president of the United States?”	Explicit critique, sarcastic irony.	Video of Kamala Harris’s statement.	Targets Harris’s controversial remark, evoking incredulity and humor.	Combines humor and critique to question competence, sparking discussion.
6. “America needs a president who can talk and answer questions without being spoonfed by a teleprompter.”	Implicit irony.	No direct multimodal elements; relies on verbal commentary.	Contrasts Trump’s perceived authenticity with Harris’s scripted communication.	Evokes desire for authentic leadership, aligning Musk with Trump’s perceived strengths.
7. “We have an upside-down system... easier to	Critical and societal irony.	Text commentary highlighting	Critiques immigration policies,	Amplifies emotional resonance

get in illegally as a murderer than legally as a Nobel laureate? @realDonaldTrump & DOGE will fix this.”		systemic flaws.	drawing engagement through shared frustration.	by contrasting societal priorities, fueling discourse, and promising a future where these issues being solved if Trump was elected.
8. “Voting for Trump is voting for Mars! Unless we stop the slow strangulation by overregulation happening in America, we will never become a multiplanetary civilization.”	Exaggerated Irony. Links Trump to Mars colonization.	Reference to Musk’s public speaking quoted video of his vision for space exploration, and the humorous alien critique of regulations.	Links political and technological progress; appeals to space exploration enthusiasts while critiquing overregulation in a humorous context	Evokes frustration with current policies while inspiring hope by blending futuristic aspirations with political commentary.
9. “They mean it too. Trump must	outrageous sarcasm.	Screenshot of article	Critiques extreme	Generates outrage and

win to preserve the constitution !”		advocating constitutional reform says “Is it time to torch the Constitution?”.	political discourse, framing Trump as a defender of tradition.	alignment by presenting Trump as a bulwark against radical change.
10. “Trump/Vance MUST win. I can't handle 4 years of seeing and hearing Kamala/Walz. That would be cruel and unusual punishment!”	Hyperbolic irony.	Text highlighting “Trump/Vance MUST win,” emphasizing opposition to Kamala/Walz through exaggerated tone.	Appeals to frustrations with opposing candidates and emphasizes humorously exaggerated personal impact.	Evokes humor and shared disdain for opponents, fostering group solidarity and political urgency.

Table no.1

The table above provides a comprehensive overview of Musk’s use of irony, multimodal elements, audience engagement, and affective effects in his tweets supporting Trump’s campaign. The diversity in irony types ranging from hyperbolic and situational to sarcastic and critical highlights the complexity of Musk’s rhetorical strategy. By combining textual elements with visual aids like memes, screenshots, and videos, Musk amplifies the humorous and provocative undertones of his messages. Audience engagement metrics, such as likes and retweets, further underscore the impact of his content in fostering

shared humor and political commentary. To delve deeper into Musk's rhetorical techniques, the following paragraphs will focus on detailed analysis of the first three tweets. These examples illustrate Musk's strategic use of irony, multimodal integration, and audience alignment to reinforce his political endorsements and critique opposing viewpoints.

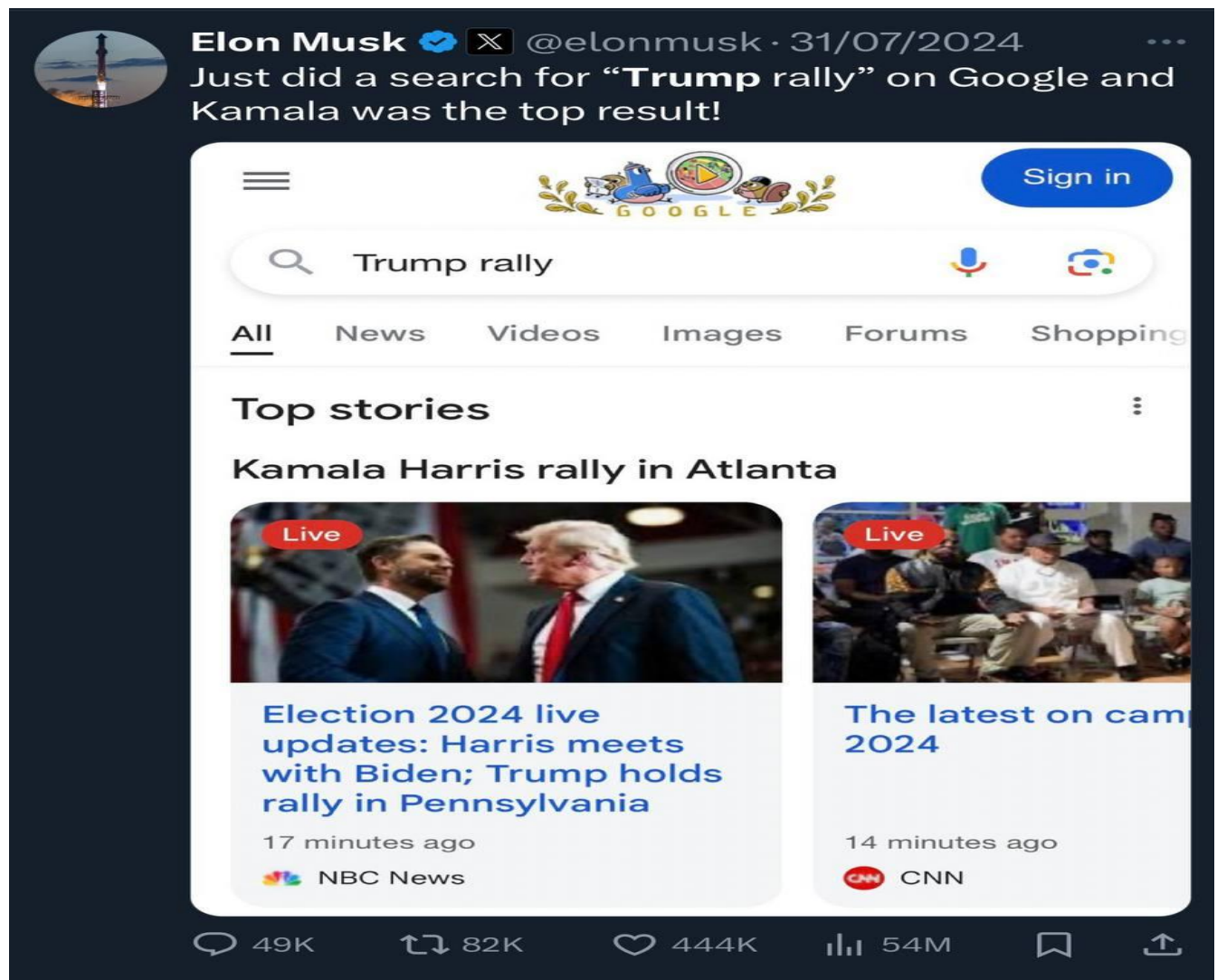


Figure no.1

This tweet in Figure no.1, exemplifies situational irony, as Musk highlights the unexpected and seemingly contradictory result of a search for

“Trump rally,” which instead directs users to Kamala Harris’s rally. By sarcastically emphasizing this discrepancy, Musk implicitly critiques either Google’s algorithm or the broader media landscape. The attached screenshot of the search results serves as the centerpiece of the tweet’s ironic humor. It validates the claim while amplifying the perceived absurdity of the situation. Musk’s use of the phrase “Kamala was the top result!” highlights the disconnection between the search term and the outcome, reinforcing the situational irony. The tweet plays into ongoing narratives about perceived bias in media or technology companies, especially in the context of politics. It likely resonates with Musk’s followers who share skepticism toward large institutions. The combination of humor and political critique encourages retweets, replies, and debates. The humor in the perceived absurdity of the search result elicits amusement and shared frustration from like-minded followers. For others, it may provoke discussion or defensive explanations about search algorithms, creating an emotionally charged environment conducive to viral engagement.



Figure no. 2

The tweet in Figure no.2 above, is accompanied by an image of an astronaut witnessing Earth's explosion, with the caption, "Oh no, the economy.". The tweet employs hyperbolic irony, exaggerating the stakes of Trump losing the election to a cataclysmic event. By pairing the absurd claim of Earth exploding with a sarcastic reference to the economy, Musk mocks doomsday political rhetoric while making an ironic critique of economic fears tied to election outcomes. The image of the exploding Earth adds a dramatic and humorous visual layer, enhancing the absurdity of the claim. The astronaut meme, widely recognizable in internet culture, further reinforces the tweet's ironic tone. This tweet plays on widespread fears of economic instability while engaging with popular meme culture, making it relatable to a broad audience. Its humor invites interaction through likes, retweets, and comments, amplifying

its reach. It also elicits amusement through its exaggerated and absurd imagery, while simultaneously provoking reflection on political rhetoric's tendency to dramatize issues. At the same time it combines humor with a subtle critique, resonating emotionally with Musk's audience.



Figure no.3

The previous tweet in the Figure no.3 above contrasts images of Obama visibly aging, Trump staying the same, and Biden “becoming” Kamala Harris. The tweet utilizes sarcastic irony, with a twist of visual humor. By implying that Biden transforms into Kamala, Musk pokes fun at perceptions of Biden’s

perceived reliance on Harris, mocking the idea of her overshadowing his leadership. The humor heavily relies on the visual elements, with the juxtaposed images creating a striking and comedic comparison. The implication of Kamala's increasing role is communicated visually, requiring minimal textual elaboration. The tweet draws on a running narrative of Biden's age and leadership being questioned, making it topical and polarizing. The use of a meme-like structure enhances its shareability, increasing its appeal across different audience segments. The sarcastic humor generates both laughter and controversy. For Trump supporters, it reinforces their critique of the Biden-Harris administration. For detractors, it may provoke frustration or defensiveness, yet its provocative nature ensures high engagement and emotional response.

4.1 Audience Interaction and Emotional Impact

Audience interaction plays a critical role in amplifying the reach and influence of ironic communication on social media platforms. Elon Musk's tweets, characterized by their sharp wit and layered irony, not only do they provoke immediate engagement but they also elicit a range of emotional responses from his followers. These interactions manifesting as likes, retweets, comments, and memes highlight how Musk's use of humor and sarcasm contributes to shaping online discourse. These metrics provide valuable insights into the extent of humor-driven discourse, the polarization of reactions, and the formation of tribalistic dynamics within his follower base. The following table presents a quantitative overview of the 10 tweets analyzed earlier, offering a clearer picture of their reach and engagement levels. This data will serve as the foundation for exploring how Musk's use of irony shapes audience behavior and emotional responses. The selection of these tweets is grounded

in three key criteria that align with the objectives of this research. First, the author of the tweets, Elon Musk, is an influential and powerful figure, not only as a global entrepreneur but also as the owner of X, which amplifies the reach and impact of his statements. Second, the tweets exhibit exceptionally high levels of audience interaction, demonstrated by significant numbers of likes, comments, retweets, and views, underscoring their relevance and engagement within the platform. Third, the tweets address critical political and social issues, such as the U.S. elections, leadership debates, and cultural commentary, which resonate with polarized public discourse and fuel widespread conversation. These factors collectively validate the importance of analyzing these tweets to understand the dynamics of audience interaction, emotional impact, and their broader societal implications.

Tweet	Likes	Comments	Retweets	Total Views
1. "Just did a search for "Trump rally"... Kamala was the top result."	444K	49K	82K	54M
2. "Earth will literally explode if DJT loses!"	207K	6.8K	14K	31M
3. "Wow, the stress of being a president really changed them"	915K	35K	106K	99M
4. "People need social proof. Put	244K	12K	37K	39M

a Trump/Vance sign on your lawn and wear MAGA merch.”				
5. “How is it possible that this person is somehow a candidate for president of the United States?”	494K	52K	102K	95M
6. “America needs a president who can talk and answer questions without being spoonfed by a teleprompter.”	146K	11K	26K	21M
7. “We have an upside-down system... easier to get in illegally as a murderer than legally as a Nobel laureate?”	180K	7.6K	38K	25M
8. “Voting for	68K	6.6K	12K	12M

Trump is voting for Mars!"				
9. "They mean it too. Trump must win to preserve the constitution!"	110K	5.9K	23K	11M
10. "Trump/Vance MUST win. I can't handle 4 years of seeing and hearing Kamala/Walz."	708K	31K	91K	78M

Table no. 2

The table of engagement metrics provides clear evidence of the substantial audience interaction generated by Musk's tweets, reinforcing their role in shaping political and cultural discourse. By analyzing tweets 8, 9, and 10 in greater detail, we can observe how Musk employs irony, humor, and hyperbole to provoke emotional responses and amplify engagement. These tweets were selected not only for their high interaction numbers but also because they highlight Musk's strategic use of language to foster humor-driven discourse, promote tribalism, and provoke polarization. The following analysis explores the rhetorical elements, multimodal strategies, and affective effects of these tweets to demonstrate their broader impact on audience behavior and digital conversation.



Figure no.4

This tweet in Figure no.4, reflects Musk's strategic use of hyperbolic irony to connect two seemingly unrelated ideas: Donald Trump's victory and the colonization of Mars. By framing a Trump win as a prerequisite for achieving interplanetary civilization, Musk exaggerates to humorous effect while making a pointed critique of what he perceives as stifling overregulation in America. This style of irony highlights Musk's ongoing focus on space exploration and deregulation, two themes that resonate deeply with his audience. While the tweet itself lacks visuals, its content is inherently vivid. The phrase "voting for Mars" evokes futuristic imagery that aligns with Musk's brand as a visionary leader. Additionally, its playful tone invites audiences to engage

humorously while subtly reinforcing his ideological stance. The engagement metrics for this tweet are 68K likes, 6.6K comments, 12K retweets, and 12M views. These numbers indicate that while the tweet performed moderately compared to others, it still captured significant interaction, particularly from users aligned with Musk's ambitions for space exploration. Affective effects include humor-driven discourse, as users responded with playful exaggerations or memes, and polarization, as critics dismissed the tweet as unserious or ideologically charged. Musk's supporters, however, interpreted it as a critique of bureaucratic inefficiency, fostering solidarity among followers who resonate with his calls for progress and deregulation.



Figure no.5

In this tweet as seen in Figure no.5, Musk uses straightforward irony to amplify a political message, blurring the line between sarcasm and endorsement. The phrase “They mean it too” acknowledges Trump supporters’ passionate resolve, while the emphatic “must win” appears almost unironically urgent. The deliberate ambiguity creates room for multiple interpretations, amplifying the tweet’s engagement potential. This tweet’s simplicity void of visuals or additional multimodal elements relies solely on its brevity and directness to make an impact. By referencing the preservation of the Constitution, Musk taps into a deeply polarizing narrative that carries strong affective undertones. Engagement metrics for this tweet are 110K likes, 5.9K comments, 23K retweets, and 11M views, demonstrate its ability to provoke substantial interaction despite its concise form. Affective effects include polarization, as supporters view the statement as validation, while opponents interpret it as Musk aligning himself with Trump. The tweet also fosters solidarity among Trump supporters, reinforcing collective identity through a shared sense of urgency. For critics, the ambiguity may provoke outrage, adding to the cycle of attention and discourse Musk’s tweets often generate.



Figure no.6

This tweet in Figure no.6, demonstrates Musk's mastery of sarcastic hyperbole, framing a potential Kamala Harris/Walz administration as "cruel and unusual punishment." By borrowing terminology associated with legal and moral extremes, Musk injects humor into a political critique, softening its tone while amplifying its impact. The juxtaposition of hyperbolic humor with a pointed political statement allows Musk to engage audiences across ideological divides those who take the critique seriously and those who share it for its comedic value. Despite its text-only format, the tweet's rhetorical strength lies in its exaggerated language, which creates vivid imagery and emotional resonance. Phrases like "MUST win" convey urgency, while the humor makes the message more palatable to a broader audience. The Engagement metrics for this tweet are notably high 708K likes, 31K comments, 91K retweets, and 78M views, making it one of the most widely interacted tweets in the dataset. These numbers validate the tweet's significant reach and emotional impact. The affective effects include humor-driven discourse, as audiences engaged with its comedic tone, and polarization, as opponents critiqued the exaggeration while supporters amplified the sentiment. Additionally, the tweet fosters tribalism, strengthening bonds among Musk's followers and Trump supporters who see the humor as a reflection of their frustrations with the opposing political figures. Tweets 8, 9, and 10 exemplify Musk's ability to blend irony, humor, and political commentary to maximize engagement. Whether through hyperbolic exaggeration, ambiguous endorsement, or sarcastic humor, these tweets provoke emotional reactions that range from humor and solidarity to outrage and polarization. The high engagement metrics underscore the effectiveness of Musk's rhetorical strategies, further solidifying his influence as a powerful communicator in the digital sphere.

4. Result Discussion

5.1 Irony as a Tool for Emotional and Political Engagement

Irony, as a rhetorical tool, serves a central role in Elon Musk's political commentary on X, enabling him to blend humor, critique, and satire in ways that maximize audience engagement. Across the ten tweets analyzed, Musk uses irony to create layered messages that simultaneously entertain, critique, and provoke, encouraging emotional responses such as humor, solidarity, and even outrage. This strategic use of irony fosters deeper interaction with his audience, while also amplifying his messages to reach broader segments of the public. One of Musk's key strategies is using humor-driven irony to formulate his critiques while making sure for them to be more palatable and have a wide resonance. For instance, in Tweet 8; "Voting for Trump is voting for Mars!", Musk employs exaggeration and playful absurdity to associate Trump's political success with space exploration. At first glance, the tweet appears lighthearted and humorous; however, beneath this surface humor lies a critique of American overregulation and its perceived impediments to innovation. By presenting his political viewpoint in this ironic and humorous tone, Musk reduces the likelihood of backlash while encouraging engagement in the form of likes and shares. The numbers in this case 12 million views and significant likes highlight how humor allows the message to resonate across diverse audience segments. Similarly, Musk's use of irony often amplifies affective effects like solidarity and tribalism among his followers. In Tweet 4; "People need social proof. Put a Trump/Vance sign on your lawn and wear MAGA merch.", Musk uses an ironic yet affirmative tone to subtly endorse a specific political action. The phrase "social proof" injects a sense of humor while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of collective behavior.

This combination of irony and direct suggestion invites Musk's audience to engage both emotionally and practically, fostering a sense of solidarity within politically aligned groups. The high levels of interaction 244K likes and 39 million views demonstrate how irony can motivate specific audience behaviors while reinforcing shared identities. Musk also employs irony to critique political figures and systems with biting sarcasm. In Tweet 10 "Trump/Vance MUST win. I can't handle 4 years of seeing and hearing Kamala/Walz. That would be cruel and unusual punishment!" Musk's hyperbolic language turns political frustration into an ironic commentary. By borrowing the legal phrase "cruel and unusual punishment," Musk infuses humor into a pointed critique, allowing his audience to both laugh and engage with his underlying political stance. This tweet's remarkable 78 million views and 708K likes illustrate how Musk's irony resonates strongly, drawing attention while reinforcing existing sentiments. In other cases, Musk uses irony to provoke his audience, blurring the line between humor and outrage. For example, Tweet 2; "Earth will literally explode if DJT loses!", is a clear exaggeration, intended to mock extreme political rhetoric. While the absurdity of the statement generates humor, it also critiques the hyperbolic discourse surrounding modern elections. This dual effect encourages audiences to engage deeply, whether to laugh at the irony, criticize Musk's exaggeration, or align with his critique. With 31 million views and significant retweets, the tweet highlights how irony can simultaneously entertain and provoke emotional responses across different audience segments. Musk's ironic tone often fosters polarization, inviting his followers to interpret his messages through their existing political and emotional lenses. In Tweet 5; "How is it possible that this person is somehow a candidate for president of the United States?", Musk leaves the subject of his critique ambiguous. This strategic vagueness allows audiences to project their own interpretations onto the tweet, amplifying its engagement through comments and shares.

The 52K comments on this tweet reflect how irony can serve as a catalyst for discourse, as users react, debate, and align their views around Musk's message. Overall, Musk's use of irony across the ten tweets analyzed showcases its power as a tool for emotional and political engagement. Whether through humor, critique, or provocation, irony allows Musk to disarm critics, engage supporters, and amplify his political messaging. By crafting statements that are both entertaining and thought-provoking, Musk maximizes audience interaction while fostering affective responses such as humor-driven discourse, solidarity, and polarization. His ironic tone not only enhances his influence as a public figure but also underscores the role of rhetoric in shaping digital political conversations. Overall, Musk's use of irony across all ten tweets analyzed demonstrates its effectiveness in enhancing emotional and political engagement. Whether through humor, critique, or provocation, irony allows Musk to navigate complex political terrain while maintaining his audience's attention and interaction. By leveraging humor to soften critiques, fostering solidarity among supporters, and provoking debate through exaggeration and ambiguity, Musk amplifies his political messaging while engaging diverse emotional responses. This ability to entertain, critique, and mobilize highlights the significant role of irony in shaping digital political conversations and reinforcing Musk's influence as a key figure in online discourse.

5.2 Impact on Public Discourse

Irony, as employed by Elon Musk in the analyzed tweets, plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of political figures, particularly Donald Trump, and influencing the broader landscape of political debates. By blending humor, critique, and exaggeration, Musk not only captures widespread attention but also frames political narratives in ways that resonate deeply with his audience.

This rhetorical strategy carries significant implications for how irony shapes digital political discourse, fostering engagement, driving polarization, and redefining modes of political communication. One of the most impactful aspects of Musk's use of irony is its ability to shape perceptions of Trump by presenting him in unconventional and often exaggerated contexts. For example, in Tweet 8; "Voting for Trump is voting for Mars!", Musk connects Trump's political success to the far-reaching vision of space exploration. While humorous and lighthearted, the tweet casts Trump as a symbol of innovation and forward-thinking progress, aligning with Musk's broader critiques of overregulation and stagnation. Such statements contribute to framing Trump positively among audiences who value technological advancement and aspirational rhetoric.

By leveraging irony to tie Trump's image to grand narratives like space exploration, Musk amplifies political messaging in ways that resonate beyond traditional partisan divides. At the same time, irony serves as a vehicle for critique, offering Musk a tool to challenge political opponents and satirize the current state of political discourse. In Tweet 10; "Trump/Vance MUST win. I can't handle 4 years of seeing and hearing Kamala/Walz. That would be cruel and unusual punishment!", Musk adopts hyperbolic sarcasm to convey disapproval of specific political figures. While the humor softens the critique, it simultaneously reinforces negative perceptions of Kamala Harris and other opponents by framing their leadership as unbearable. This satirical exaggeration resonates strongly with Musk's audience, particularly those who share his political leanings, shaping how these figures are discussed and perceived in public debates. Beyond individual tweets, Musk's ironic tone has broader implications for online political discourse, contributing to increased polarization and tribalism. Irony allows Musk to blur the lines between

entertainment and critique, appealing to supporters while alienating those who oppose his views. For instance, Tweet 2; “Earth will literally explode if DJT loses!”, uses absurd exaggeration to mock alarmist rhetoric, but the humor itself can amplify existing divisions. Supporters may interpret the statement as a clever jab at hyperbole in politics, while critics may see it as an endorsement of Trump’s campaign. This dual interpretation underscores how irony can intensify echo chambers by reinforcing pre-existing biases and fostering group solidarity, ultimately deepening ideological divides. However, irony’s role in public discourse extends beyond polarization, as it also introduces new dynamics to political communication. Musk’s tweets illustrate how irony can break through the noise of traditional political rhetoric by offering sharp, memorable critiques that are easily shareable. This is particularly evident in Tweet 4; “People need social proof. Put a Trump/Vance sign on your lawn and wear MAGA merch.”, where Musk humorously critiques the idea of collective action while simultaneously encouraging it.

By presenting serious ideas through an ironic lens, Musk engages audiences who might otherwise disengage from overtly political statements. The shareability of these tweets, reflected in their high retweet and like counts, demonstrates irony’s effectiveness in spreading political messages across digital platforms. Furthermore, Musk’s strategic use of irony highlights a shift in how political debates unfold in online spaces. Unlike traditional political rhetoric, which relies on clarity and direct messaging, irony introduces ambiguity, inviting audiences to interpret statements based on their own perspectives. For example, Tweet 5; “How is it possible that this person is somehow a candidate for president of the United States?”, deliberately avoids naming the subject of criticism. This vagueness fuels speculation, drives engagement, and encourages audiences to project their own interpretations. In this way, irony

becomes a powerful tool for sparking conversations, mobilizing support, and maintaining relevance in the ever-evolving digital political arena. In conclusion, Musk's use of irony in the ten analyzed tweets underscores its transformative impact on public discourse. By shaping perceptions of political figures, fostering humor-driven engagement, and amplifying ideological divisions, irony emerges as a dominant rhetorical strategy in online political communication. While it can entertain, provoke, and critique, irony also carries the potential to polarize audiences and reinforce echo chambers. Musk's ability to leverage irony as both a humorous and critical tool highlights its growing significance in shaping modern political narratives and influencing how public debates are conducted in digital spaces.

5.3 Ethical and Sociopolitical Considerations

The use of irony as a rhetorical strategy in Elon Musk's tweets brings forth significant ethical and sociopolitical considerations, particularly regarding its potential to be misinterpreted and the responsibilities that accompany public influence. While irony enhances engagement and allows for humor-infused critique, it also carries inherent risks that can impact public discourse, such as the spread of misinformation and the deepening of societal polarization. These risks underscore the ethical responsibilities of influential figures like Musk, whose words have a far-reaching impact on political narratives and audience perceptions. A key ethical concern stems from the ambiguity of irony, which often relies on subtle cues and audience interpretation. For example, in Tweet 2, "Earth will literally explode if DJT loses!"; Musk's exaggeration is clearly intended as a humorous jab at alarmist rhetoric. However, irony is not universally recognized, and audiences may interpret such statements differently depending on their biases, cultural contexts, or familiarity with Musk's style. For

some, the hyperbolic nature of the tweet may be obvious; for others, it could appear as an endorsement of extreme political sentiments. This risk of misinterpretation highlights how irony, when poorly understood, can inadvertently contribute to the spread of misinformation or confusion.

In highly polarized online environments, subtle humor can be weaponized to support extreme narratives or distort political realities. The risk of fostering polarization is another critical sociopolitical consideration. Musk's tweets often rely on irony to critique political figures or ideologies, which can deepen divisions between opposing groups. For instance, Tweet 10; "Trump/Vance MUST win. I can't handle 4 years of seeing and hearing Kamala/Walz. That would be cruel and unusual punishment!", uses humor to critique specific political figures while resonating with a partisan audience. While such statements may be intended as lighthearted or satirical, they can alienate those who feel personally targeted or whose political beliefs align with the criticized figures. This dynamic contributes to the growing tribalism in online spaces, where irony serves as a tool not only for engagement but also for exclusion, reinforcing ideological echo chambers. Influential figures like Musk bear a heightened responsibility in navigating these ethical risks due to their vast platforms and devoted followings. As the owner of X and a globally recognized public figure, Musk wields substantial influence over digital political discourse. His ironic tweets often achieve viral status, evidenced by their high interaction metrics, as seen in Tweet 3; "Wow, the stress of being a president really changed them.", which garnered 915K likes and 99M views. Such reach amplifies the potential for both positive engagement and harmful consequences.

By using irony to engage audiences, Musk must remain cognizant of his ability to shape public opinion and the ripple effects his statements may have on societal discourse. Moreover, Musk's use of irony raises questions about the ethical responsibilities of influencers in maintaining a balance between entertainment, critique, and accountability. While irony offers a creative way to address political issues, its misuse or overuse can erode trust in public communication. For example, Tweet 5; "How is it possible that this person is somehow a candidate for president of the United States?", avoids direct clarity, relying instead on audience speculation. While this ambiguity enhances engagement, it can also promote cynicism or disillusionment with political processes, as audiences may become more focused on the humor or controversy rather than the substantive issues at hand. This trend points to a broader challenge: influencers must consider whether their use of irony contributes meaningfully to public discourse or simply fuels polarization and confusion.

5. Conclusion

This study examined Elon Musk's use of irony in his political tweets, focusing on how he communicates his stances, the affective effects these tweets evoke, and their broader impact on public discourse. The research aimed to address three key questions: How does Musk employ irony to express political views? What emotions and impressions do these tweets generate? And how do these emotional effects influence public discourse and audience reactions?

The findings reveal that Musk strategically uses irony as a rhetorical tool to indirectly yet powerfully communicate his political stances. By employing hyperbole, sarcasm, and humor, he critiques political figures, policies, and ideologies while maintaining plausible deniability. For instance, in Tweet 2, “Earth will literally explode if DJT loses!”, Musk mocks alarmist rhetoric, signaling his support for Trump while using exaggerated humor to avoid explicit partisanship. This approach allows Musk to engage his audience without alienating broader segments through overt political declarations, thereby amplifying the impact of his messages.

In response to the second research question, Musk’s ironic tweets evoke a range of affective effects, including humor, critique, outrage, and solidarity. Tweets like “Wow, the stress of being a president really changed them” (Tweet 3) use visual irony to generate humor, while others, such as “How is it possible that this person is somehow a candidate for president?” (Tweet 5), lean toward sharp critique. These emotional appeals elicit diverse audience reactions, from laughter and agreement to frustration and polarization. Musk’s humor softens the delivery of political critique, making his tweets more engaging and shareable, while his biting sarcasm often polarizes audiences, fueling debate and ideological division.

Broadly, these findings underscore the dual role of irony in digital political discourse. On the one hand, Musk’s use of irony fosters humor-driven engagement, making complex or controversial political topics more accessible and encouraging audience participation. On the other hand, his irony amplifies ideological divides and contributes to polarization, as like-minded individuals rally around shared sentiments while critics are further alienated. This dual nature of irony highlights its power as a rhetorical strategy and its potential

societal consequences, particularly when wielded by influential figures in digital spaces like Musk. The study thus provides valuable insights into the broader sociopolitical implications of irony in online communication and its role in shaping public discourse in an increasingly polarized digital age.

References

- Burgers, C., Konijn, E., & Steen, G. (2016). Humor patterns and functions in online communication. *Journal of Pragmatics*, pp. 33–48.
- Burgers, C., van Mulken, M., & Schellens, P. (2012). Perspective taking and persuasion by irony: Different types of ironic criticism influence different types of readers. *International Journal of Humor Research*(3).
- Forceville, C. (2020). *Visual and multimodal communication: Applying the relevance principle*. Oxford University Press.
- Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1995). *Relevance: A central issue in the philosophy of language*. Basil Blackwell Publishing.
- Wharton, T., & Saussure, L. (2023). *Pragmatics and emotion*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, D. (2013). *Irony and metarepresentation*. (I. D. Sperber, Ed.) Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, D., & Carston, R. (2019). Pragmatics and the challenge of ‘non-propositional’ effects. *Journal of Pragmatics*, pp. 31–38.

- Altahmazi, T. H. (2024). *Humorous but hateful: Irony and impoliteness in digital media*. Internet Pragmatics, 7(2), 219–248. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ip.00106.alt>
- Burgers, C., Konijn, E. A., & Steen, G. J. (2016). *Humor patterns and functions in online communication*. Journal of Pragmatics, 94, 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2016.01.004>
- Colletta, L. (2012). *When irony matters*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Forceville, C. (2020). *Visual and multimodal communication: Applying the relevance principle*. Oxford University Press.
- Meyer, J. C. (2000). *Humor as a double-edged sword: Four functions of humor in communication*. Communication Theory, 10(3), 310–331. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2000.tb00269.x>
- Pilkington, A. (2000). *Poetic effects: A relevance theory perspective*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1995). *Relevance: Communication and cognition* (2nd ed.). Blackwell Publishing.
- Wharton, T., & Saussure, L. (2023). *Pragmatics and emotion*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, D., & Carston, R. (2019). *Pragmatics and the challenge of ‘non-propositional’ effects*. Journal of Pragmatics, 145, 31–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2019.01.017>
- Yus, F. (2023). *Irony, humor, and the relevance-theoretic approach to digital communication*. Internet Pragmatics, 6(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ip.00106.alt>

Zappavigna, M. (2012). *Discourse of Twitter and social media: How we use language to create affiliation on the web*. Continuum International Publishing Group.