

The Role of Sarcastic Multimodal Discourse in Articulating Public Opinion on Climate Change

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Abstract

This study investigated the functional role of multimodal sarcasm in articulating public sentiment within climate change discourse. By analyzing the intersection of verbal and visual semiotic resources, this research explored how digital sarcasm serves as a vehicle for socio-political critique. Specifically, it probes the mechanisms through which sarcasm is encoded across visual and linguistic channels, challenging dominant environmental narratives. Utilizing Barthes' (1977) semiotic framework, this study conducted a qualitative analysis of one hundred multimodal artifacts, facilitating a nuanced understanding of how denotative imagery and connotative sarcasm coalesce to form a unified critique of climate inaction. The study investigates how sarcastic discourse functions as a tool for social critique and community building. According to the semiotic analysis, sarcasm is created by an intentional interaction of numerous semiotic modes and contextualized socio-cultural resources. The analyzed data reveals a strategic deployment of rhetorical tropes, including hyperbole, intertextuality, and personification, to give voice to public skepticism regarding official climate policies. These sarcastic techniques encompass comparisons, personification, rhetorical questions, proverbs, intertextuality, and exaggeration. The unique methodological adaptation of Barthes' semiotic approach for analyzing multimodal sarcasm captures the nuanced interaction between specific semiotic modes (e.g., text-image incongruity) in a way that differs from quantitative or computational approaches. This analytical lens situates these authoritative figures as an outgroup, susceptible to ridicule by the ingroup community that bears the adverse consequences of inaction. Optimistically, this investigation will yield significant contributions to subsequent research, providing valuable insights into multimodal semiotic analysis and its function in shaping public discourse.

Keywords: irony, sarcasm, sarcastic techniques, discourse analysis, multimodal semiotic analysis, climate change

I. Introduction

1.1 Background

The noticeable change in the climate has remained a crucial and urgent topic over the last two decades. Climate change is considered one of the most urgent challenges of modern times due to its harmful consequences around the world. When the topic is climate change, it carries serious environmental, economic, and social effects (Deep, 2023). However, the discussion around this issue is no longer limited to scientific or political circles. Today, it has become an essential part of public discourse in the digital world. Exchanging people's opinions on climate change has become easier and more accessible to all individuals as they use social media platforms (Tuitjer & Dirksmeier, 2021; Yaseen & Abu-Arja, 2026).

In this context, sarcasm has come out as a common and effective communication tool in digital discourse. Sarcasm is used in the media and on social media to ridicule politicians and to entertain people (Halversen & Weeks, 2023). It can be a way to criticize people while still being funny, and its meaning is often ambiguous or subject to varied interpretation. Instead of presenting matters and issues directly, individuals resort to sarcasm to express frustration, dissatisfaction, or skepticism about official environmental policies. This rhetorical tool is not limited to written words; it is often integrated with other elements such as images, videos, and emojis, forming what is known as "sarcastic multimodal discourse" (Chubaryan & Danielyan, 2022).

This study addresses this form of discourse with more emphasis on the way of understanding how it is used in the context of climate change. It also shows how this form influences the formation of people's opinions by raising awareness and deepening the division on the issue.

1.2 Problem Statement

There are different ways of delivering news; one of them is through the traditional channels like print and broadcast media, and another more modern one is through using technological tools such as social media and live streaming. Reports and news media use traditional channels as direct methods for disseminating news on climate change to a worldwide audience. These traditional channels and their formal style create a gap in understanding how informal and comic discourse shapes public perception. The researcher of this study claims that the general use of sarcasm, with its multimodal nature, is still under study. While computational detection of multimodal

sarcasm is well researched, its socio-cultural and rhetorical mechanisms, especially how they shape public opinion on climate change, remain less explored from a qualitative perspective. It is also the root of a well-justified minor field. The ambiguous nature of communication can affect public opinion in a major way that is a problem in society. Sarcasm is a tool that can increase people's attention and awareness among unsatisfied individuals in the political field, which serves the climate change effect. The main aim of this study is to fill this gap by providing a systematic analysis of the way sarcasm functions as a vehicle for shaping public attitudes toward climate change. This analysis is achieved by examining its unique linguistic and visual properties.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research questions guiding this study are:

1. How is multimodal sarcasm constructed in online discourse related to climate change?
2. How does the interplay of linguistic and visual semiotic techniques (e.g., hyperbole, intertextuality) function multimodally to convey sarcastic meaning in these posts?
3. What attitudes and sentiments are articulated using sarcasm regarding public engagement and perception of climate change as a critical issue?

1.4 Significance of the Study

While previous research has established the presence of multimodal sarcasm in climate change discourse (e.g., Gibbs, 2012; Hansen, 2018; Raymond, 2019), these studies have primarily focused on the psychological reception of irony or general content analysis. Nevertheless, the intersection of humor and environmentalism has gained significant academic traction in recent years. Scholars such as Hansen (2018) have highlighted the role of media framing in environmental communication, while Raymond (2019) has explored how satirical humor functions as a tool for political engagement. Furthermore, the cognitive and social dimensions of ironic interpretation have been thoroughly mapped by Gibbs (2012).

This study fills a critical gap by applying a rigorous Barthesian semiotic framework to decode the specific inter-semiotic tension between image and text. Unlike prior research that treats multimodal elements as separate entities, this study investigates how the 'connotative' power of digital memes specifically functions as a tool for public opinion formation. Furthermore, by focusing on recent discourse on X (formerly Twitter), this research provides an updated analysis of how sarcastic tropes have evolved in response to post-2020 international climate policies, offering a unique perspective on the intersection of semiotics and digital activism.

2. Literature Review

This section shows how sarcasm, multimodal semiotic analysis, and social media in climate change are used in discourse. Here, the researcher attempted to use this classification to gradually show the different types of related literature regarding the connection between sarcasm and discourse.

Sarcasm is defined as a form of verbal and non-verbal communication, where the proposed meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning (Gibbs, 2000; Shalevska & Kostadinovska-Stojchevska, 2024). Linguistically, it is a type of irony used to express dislike, disapproval, or mockery (Haiman, 1998). In this study, sarcasm is an ironic contrast between the denotative and the connotative meaning of a statement. It is often strengthened by multimodal signs. Furthermore, different articles and researchers have moved beyond viewing sarcasm as a simple linguistic reversal. They focus on understanding its complex social and cognitive functions. Today, sarcasm needs a shared context and a degree of interpretative skill from the audience to be correctly understood (Alzyod, et al. 2025; Abbasova, 2024).

When we look at the term "sarcasm," it is noticeable that people tend to use this method to express their thoughts directly and indirectly. Using language functions supports this method in expressing opinion. Language contains many ways that can be used to serve this method, such as simile, metaphor, and so on. These usable ways can make communication easier and shorter in this technological world.

With the quick development of technology, people today are widely engaged in digital platforms. They spend a significant portion of their time online. Stemming from this development in the digital era, the social function of sarcasm has become a key area of study. Many researchers look at sarcasm as a way that can serve as a strong tool for social bonding. Polishchuk (2023) states that people build solidarity among an in-group that shares a common perspective or a sense of grievance. On the other hand, Wiggins (2019) claims that people can use it to attack or isolate an out-group, especially authority figures or those with opposing viewpoints. Moreover, Tsakona and Popa (2011) examine how humor is used in political critique. Therefore, this double function makes it relevant to political and social commentary.

With the increasing number of communication platforms, Eslen-Ziya (2022) investigated the effectiveness of using technology in serving environmental matters in Turkey. The researcher selected the needed sample randomly and analyzed it thematically. The results gleaned a rich load of stored data on the crises; however, the researcher presented no effective solutions.

Noticeable in literature and previous studies is the wide research on the relationship between these concepts. While sarcasm is a specific form of verbal irony, it is often employed alongside related rhetorical strategies: for example, hyperbole is used for exaggeration; parody is used for imitation and ridicule; and satire is the use of humor or irony to expose vice. All of these serve the broader function of humor in social and political critique. The analytical approach adopted maintains this distinction while acknowledging their frequent co-occurrence in digital discourse.

From the researchers' perspective, the meaning could be conveyed through a combination of different tools, including textual, visual, and auditory cues (Al-Ali & Khaled, 2025; Yaseen, 2026). The multimodal approach is central to digital communication studies. Tools such as emojis, images, memes, and GIFs that are used in these platforms enrich the content in different ways, thus offering a rich layer of contextual meaning (Wiggins, 2019). Here, it is important to mention that analyzing this interaction of different modes is critical for a comprehensive understanding of sarcasm. Sarcastic discourse is created and interpreted in the modern digital landscape in different ways. Therefore, recent research indicates that the exploration of the multimodal nature of sarcasm remains a key focus.

It can be stated that irony is the way of showing disapproval in a sarcastic way. According to modern research, there are numerous tools available for expressing emotions, irony being one of them. These days, when people depend mainly on technology, irony uses different symbols in all of life's dimensions, such as to show their status and their feelings toward others or certain situations. Moreover, it can be used as a battle call, bringing people together to fight.

Multimodal semiotics remains a current and relevant approach. It is used to understand how meaning is shaped through language and the interaction of various modes such as images, sounds, and gestures (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). This framework is particularly important in the digital era, where communication is rarely purely linguistic. Today, posts are complex texts where the meaning of a verbal comment (e.g., sarcastic text) is frequently dependent on, or enhanced by, additional visual elements like a meme or a GIF, for example (Machin, 2013).

A main theoretical basis for the analysis is the semiotic theory proposed by Barthes, which distinguishes between two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation (Barthes, 1977). Denotation refers to the literal and descriptive meaning of signs, such as a picture of a melting iceberg. Connotation, on the other hand, refers to the socio-cultural associations and any additional emotional meanings associated with that sign, like the melting iceberg conveying a sense of urgency, disaster, and environmental neglect. When the multiple modes are combined, the connotative meanings of each mode interact to create a new layer of meaning and sometimes a richer interpretation. In sarcastic discourse on climate change, for instance, a sarcastic script about rapid climate action combined with a slow-motion video about a political figure may construct a connotative meaning of incompetence and inaction. This is far beyond what either element could convey alone (Al-Ali & Khaled, 2025).

While Barthes' semiotic theory provides the foundational distinction between denotation and connotation, this study further integrates it with multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) to account for the inter-semiotic complementarity between modes. In this framework, sarcasm is not just a linguistic reversal but also a multimodal tension where the visual mode may provide the necessary context to subvert the literal meaning of the verbal mode. For instance, the text-image incongruity functions as a semiotic signifier where the reader must resolve the contradiction to grasp the intended sarcastic meaning. This dual-layered framework allows for a systematic tracking of how socio-cultural myths, as defined by Barthes, are invoked through digital elements like memes to analyze official climate narratives.

While Gibbs (2012) provides a framework for understanding the intent behind sarcasm, and Raymond (2019) discusses its political utility, there remains a need for a specific semiotic analysis using Barthes' model to explain how the visual and verbal modes work together in digital micro-texts like X (Twitter) posts. People use different ways of communicating these days that depend mainly on technology. Combining different tools such as images, emojis, sounds, videos, and gestures as defined by multimodal semiotics. Therefore, combining connotative and denotative messages together strengthens the idea of communication between people and makes it deeper.

People who use social media platforms understand that these platforms have reshaped the view of public discourse. The X platform is a great example that is used easily and effectively by plenty of people around the world (Castells, 2015). On the other hand, however, traditional ways of communication and media facilitated a widespread, user-driven, and highly shared form of communication (Bruns et al., 2026). This environment is known as immediate and blurs the lines between personal and public expression.

For social movements and public opinion formation, social media in all its forms can serve as an influential forum. Wiggins (2019) stated that these different platforms help and enable ordinary people to criticize formal announcements. This challenge happens by bypassing traditional gatekeepers of information. As people used different platforms for communication, information and news spread out in a very fast way. When people use memes and sarcastic posts, they can show strength in their shared opinion in public. On the other hand, other researchers, such as Hansen (2011), claimed that the environment is a central matter in the world that presents numerous challenges. These challenges are the extent of misinformation, the formation of echo chambers, and the potential for toxic online interactions. As a result, examining these platforms in the context of climate change discourse is critical for understanding the full variety of public engagement and its potential impacts.

Using technology in our lives makes communication easier and faster because information spreads very fast, unlike the old, traditional methods of communication where people used to write formally to discuss their points of view and share them with others. As stated, the reliable spread of information has increased these days due to the ease of accessibility to information via different platforms.

Climate change is one of the most frequently discussed topics in daily public communication. In the past, people discussed climate change among local communities and within close geographical proximity. Limited communication channels of scientific data and policy discussions obscured many facts about the issues related to climate change. The primary goal of this communication is to inform the public about scientific matters, highlight the urgency of the issue, and advocate for specific policy changes (Moser, 2010). On the other hand, O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole (2009) stated that this traditional method is inaccessible to the public, leading to indifference and

skepticism. Other researchers have recognized that purely scientific or data-heavy communication can feel abstract and emotionally distant. This can make it difficult for individuals to connect with the issue on a personal level.

Attached to humor and sarcasm, narratives and storytelling are used in modern communication these days. The researchers who have investigated irony and sarcasm in literature, such as Al-Ali and Khaled (2025), stated that people are not satisfied with the slow movement toward climate change. People who cannot claim to be politicians in their countries try to use this discourse as a method of showing satisfaction. Analyzing how sarcasm is used in climate change discourse is the main aim of this study. It tries to uncover the underlying public attitudes in scales (Yaseen et al., 2024) that traditional formal communication channels may miss. This disconnection has led to the emergence of modified communication plans.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The qualitative analysis is implemented by the researcher in this study to analyze the selected posts about sarcasm in social media. When qualitative analysis is implemented, in-depth focus will be the core of this method. It is suitable because it gives a rich interpretation of textual and visual data as required in this study by focusing on the meanings and socio-cultural contexts. The research focuses on a specific real-world instance. The discourse of climate change is used to generate deep insights. It can inform broader theoretical understandings of online communication and public opinion. The interpretation design is the aim of explaining how and why sarcasm is used as a communicative strategy.

3.2 Data Collection

A corpus of one hundred multimodal posts featuring sarcastic discourse related to climate change was purposively sampled from X (formerly Twitter). The selection criteria focused on posts where the interplay between linguistic and visual semiotic modes generated a clear sarcastic intent regarding environmental policy. The researcher collected the selected posts over four months from April to July 2025 to ensure replicability. The sample was collected using purposive sampling based on the multimodal content type. Some keywords were determined to select the most relevant content from the X platform. These keywords include climate change, global warming, climate action, and related hashtags. The research kept the posters' profile information in a safe file locked with a password, thereby adhering to ethical guidelines.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The researcher adopted two approaches in analyzing the data on the topic of climate change. The first approach was to use the semiotic theory proposed by Barthes, and the second one was to use the multimodal discourse analysis approach. These two frameworks give an advanced and a comprehensive analysis of the meaning. These frameworks were used to examine the interplay between the different communicative modes in social media data.

After selecting the needed posts based on the purpose of this study, the researcher analyzed them using a multimodal semiotic analysis. What made the analysis easier was the use of Barthes' model because it facilitated finding denotative and connotative meanings of the linguistic and non-linguistic modes. Verbal, nonverbal, and visual images are the semiotic modes that the researcher used to classify the posts into the established literal meaning and the denotation meaning. The visual mode appears if the post contains a text such as "Everything is fine," denoting a state of being. If the post presents a visual image of a person on fire or in a disaster, for example, this is another visual presentation, while nonverbal tools, like an emoji of laughing with tears, denote extreme amusement.

Next, the researcher identified the connotative meaning by analyzing the social, cultural, and emotional meanings. The verbal message such as "Everything is fine" connotes a denied and dangerous complacency. The visual message of a fire connotes urgency. Additionally, it focuses on how the environment is neglected.

Examining contradiction in the relationship between the connotative and denotative meanings is the key to discovering sarcasm. Therefore, the third step is examining the relationship between the connotative and denotative meanings of visual texts. If the contradiction is clearly shown, they are directly contradicted, and sarcasm is confirmed. This incongruity is an essential operational definition of sarcasm used for filtering and analysis throughout this study.

After discovering the sarcasm in the posts, the thematic interpretation is the last step. The researcher coded the posts based on the target critique and the underlying sentiment expressed. The first is about the governments and public indifferences. The second is the frustration, skepticism, and disillusionment about climate change. This process connects semiotic findings to the theme of public opinion.

To sum up the steps, the researcher first investigated the literal meaning (denotation). Then, they found the socio-cultural elements (connotation), which was followed by an analysis focusing on the text (the third element). Finally, in the last step, the researchers found the visual mode of the used images and emojis. Investigating these elements helps to understand how these modes combined to produce meaning when delivering a sarcastic message.

3.4 Data Analysis

A collection of 100 posts was collected, read, and sorted based on their primary form. The researcher categorized them into the categories "Text-Only" and "Text with Images." Then, the researcher deconstructed each post to identify its constituent modes and signs. For example, the text was first analyzed for linguistic cues of sarcasm, and the image was then analyzed for its semiotic meaning.

After that, the researcher then coded the posts to identify the specific rhetorical devices used to convey sarcasm (e.g., exaggeration, irony, personification, intertextuality). Next, he grouped the findings into emergent themes based on the topics and opinions being satirized. This step connects the linguistic and semiotic findings to the broader context of climate change discourse. Lastly, the researcher analyzed data to address the research questions, drawing conclusions about the role of sarcastic multimodal discourse in shaping public opinion.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

This study was carried out using publicly available social media data, accessed and analyzed in accordance with the platform's terms of use and all relevant institutional/national regulations. Given that the interpretation of sarcasm is inherently subjective, and the analysis involves public content, ethical principles were strictly applied. The anonymity of the users was maintained throughout the research by anonymizing their usernames and profile pictures to adhere to ethical guidelines and mitigate concerns regarding users' privacy and potential for misrepresentation.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Overview

The analysis was conducted on a sample of 100 sarcastic multimodal posts collected from the X platform. The data revealed a clear dominance of multimodal content, where text paired with images, memes, or emojis was significantly more common than text-only posts.

Table 1. Distribution of Sarcastic Techniques in Analyzed Posts (N=100)

Sarcastic Technique	Frequency (Number of Posts)	Percentage (%)
Exaggeration/Hyperbole	35	35%
Intertextuality/Allusion	25	25%
Rhetorical Questions	20	20%
Personification	12	12%
Comparison/Irony/Others	8	8%
Total	100	100%

As shown in Table 1, exaggeration and hyperbole were the most frequent techniques used to express public discontent. These were often paired with visual elements like images or emojis to strengthen the sarcastic message. Intertextuality, specifically through pop-culture references, also played a major role in mocking the perceived failure of leadership. These findings demonstrate that sarcasm on the X platform is a structured and popular way for the public to engage with climate change discourse.

4.2 Sarcastic Techniques Identified

Many linguistic techniques can be used in a clever way to build a sarcastic meaning about the climate change posts that resulted in the analyzed data of social media. These techniques are used alongside other tools and symbols to show exaggeration in the message.

Showing exaggeration and hyperbole is one of the techniques that is used in delivering insufficient responses about climate change. They show that the speakers are not satisfied with the results and consequences of the weather. The poster may post a message that includes a thankful message about tiny efforts about the crisis of climate change and the damages to humanity and the earth.

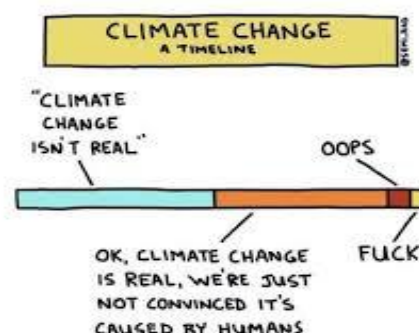


Figure 1. Climate Change: A Timeline

The figure above is a timeline post about climate change. It is used to show attitudes and progress toward climate change during our lifetime. How views shift as the crisis intensifies can appear in the main humor, which stems from sarcasm and irony.

Linguistically, the timeline in Figure 1 utilizes a gradational shift in register. It begins with formal, declarative statements of denial

("CLIMATE CHANGE ISN'T REAL") and moves toward a pragmatic failure signaled by the sudden use of taboo language and interjections (e.g., "OOPS" and "FUCK"). This shift represents a breakdown in the cooperative principle, where the brevity of the final terms creates a sharp contrast with the verbose excuses of the preceding stages, highlighting the linguistic realization of panic over previously ignored facts.

The previous timeline can show irony verbally and visually in the phrase "CLIMATE CHANGE ISN'T REAL." This phrase hides the truth away from readers' eyes. Then, the poster moves to lower the tension of ignorance as stated earlier. This part is considered a partial admission of climate damage with the phrase "OK, CLIMATE CHANGE IS REAL; WE'RE JUST NOT CONVINCED IT'S CAUSED BY HUMANS," which is another way of partially ignoring the crisis about the damage to climate change. This change from outright denial to a more subtle form of inaction is demonstrated in the argument.

The appearance of the two terms "OOPS" and "FUCK" suddenly in the last part of the timeline is not suitable to express the horrible damage caused by climate change. This sudden change from long phrases of excuse to short and sharp phrases creates a strong visual and verbal contradiction. Humor can minimize the problem of climate change by the quick understanding of its sequences that have been ignored for decades. The timeline itself, which is largely filled with denial, ends in a small, panicked moment, subverting the expected structure of a timeline.

The cartoon is a parody of the slow, often political, response to a growing crisis. The timeline shows long sections of denial, the cause of which underscores the length on this line as a waste of time. The small expressions "OOPS" and "FUCK" in the timeline show that some points have no return point. This exaggeration is to show the ignorance of the problem until it is irrevocable. The simple, hand-drawn style makes the message more direct and relatable. The last words in the timeline are useless when it is too late to solve the climate matters.



Figure 2. Hotel Room Message

Figure 2 presents a common request in hotels—a wake-up call. The double meaning of the phrase shows humor stems from it. They create a strong example of visual and verbal irony. The figure is presented to show a man in his room asking for a literal wake-up call, meaning he wants the receptionist to wake him up at a specific time the next day. However, the response he receives is a figurative wake-up call, meaning a person or thing that causes people to become acutely aware of an undesirable condition and take action to address it, which, in this case, is climate change.

The sarcasm in Figure 2 is rooted in the lexical ambiguity of the phrase "wake-up call." The man's request is a directive speech act seeking a literal service, but the receptionist responds with an assertive speech act providing alarming climate data. The linguistic sarcasm emerges from this functional shift, where a routine conversational script is hijacked to deliver a high-stakes environmental warning, forcing the reader to resolve the tension between the mundane and the catastrophic.

The receptionist answered the phone and responded in an unexpected way to the man. She wanted to send him a warning message saying, "The 15 hottest months on Earth in the last 100,000+ years all happened in the LAST 15 months." This statement's message is a way of alarming that suddenly made its way into the conversation to change the context and highlight the importance of climate change.

In this post, the man made a simple request, but he was shocked to find out that it is his responsibility to wake up the whole world to see the damage of climate change on humanity. This is a parody cartoon about climate change. The man's casual request for a simple wake-up call is met with an overwhelming and frightening reality. The post hints that the world is sleeping on the subject of climate change and someone should make a move to wake it up. The humor lies in the jarring contrast between the everyday request and the global, catastrophic information provided. The message in the post looks simple and funny, but it sends a warning to humanity to implement a quick action regarding this issue.

Another way that can be used in expressing sarcasm in the media is using rhetorical questions. They are used to expressing the feeling that government officials are liars and do not follow through on their promises about the needs of the people. The post may show a flood in a city, and the comment attached to that situation is a question by an official person, like, for example, "Is this what they meant by 'mild weather fluctuations'?" This technique makes the reader know the obvious irony and joins the user in their shared skepticism.



Figure 3. Formal Talk by an Official

Figure 3 simply shows a visual contrast to highlight a common human desire to change without personal sacrifice. In the post, a politician asks a crowd of people, “Who wants change?” The crowd actively raises their hands because they are looking for a different or better future. This type of post is used to represent a desire for external improvements from society, government, or others.

Interestingly, the second part of the post shows the opposite. The crowd is full of disappointment after the politician asks the same crowd of people, “Who wants to change?” with emphasis on “to.” This is because the politician is suggesting that, in order to get change, people often have to change themselves, which is hard for the crowd to accept. The irony appears in this shift in posture from enthusiasm to withdrawal. While people desire a better world, they are often unwilling to make the personal sacrifices, adjustments, or efforts required to achieve it.

This cartoon functions as a subtle critique of hypocrisy and inaction. It parodies the disconnection between a public's stated desire for progress and their reluctance to accept personal responsibility. The humor stems from the swift and complete shift in the crowd's attitude, which perfectly illustrates the difference between advocating for change and actually acting as an agent of it.

Another way of presenting irony and sarcasm in multimedia is using intertextuality and allusion. Sarcasm can also be constructed through allusions to well-known cultural contexts. They can contain proverbs, movies with quotes, or songs. Users create a sarcastic dual meaning by re-contextualizing these familiar phrases. To clarify this, in the example below, a post of a politician is commenting on the disaster of climate change, saying, “Houston, we have a problem.” This familiar phrase is to imply a major failure in leadership regarding the climate.



Figure 4. A Leadership Warning

As there is no response or action toward climate change, this post used sarcasm and intertextuality to comment on the political response toward this change. The humor exists in the clash between the well-known phrase and the serious situation depicted. Mentioned in the picture is a famous quote from the movie *Apollo 13*. It was said by the astronauts to report a major crisis in space. By showing a politician who is discussing climate change mentioning this in his speech, the post creates a powerful sarcastic dual meaning.

The phrase functions as an understatement. The problem shown on the screen is not a simple issue but a global crisis, represented by a graph with an arrow pointing toward skyrocketing temperature. The humor stems from the ironic mismatch: the politician's seemingly calm, movie-like acknowledgment completely trivializes the massive, urgent problem right behind him.

The elements that can be seen in the posts enrich the sarcasm. The red rising line in the graph titled “GLOBAL TEMPERATURES”

emphasizes the uncontrolled nature of the crisis. The politician's confused and slightly panicked expression contrasts sharply with the casualness of his words, suggesting a state of denial or helplessness. The formal setting, with the UN logo and news cameras, highlights that this is a global issue being handled by world authorities.

The cartoon suggests that politicians and the public might be treating climate change with an inappropriate casualness. It uses a pop culture reference to show how unprepared or detached politicians can be when faced with a true emergency.

The last technique is the way of using personification and anthropomorphism in the posts. This way is considered attributing human actions or emotions to nonhuman entities. The post may show how the planet, which is given human-like qualities, suffers from natural disasters. This can create humorous effects about a critical situation. An image of a wildfire with a caption like, "The Earth is just a little upset; she'll calm down soon," is a clear example of ridiculing efforts to downplay severe environmental events.



Figure 5. Dying Earth

The last figure uses personification to create a critical and humorous effect. Specifically, it attributes human qualities and emotions to the Earth to comment on the state of the planet through visual personification.

The cartoon depicts the Earth as a humanoid figure lying on a hospital bed. The planet exhibits a tired, sad, and sick facial expression, with heavy bags under its eyes. It is attached to various medical machines with wires and tubes, suggesting that it is a patient receiving treatment for a serious illness. This state of treatment implies that the Earth is not naturally healthy but is sustained by artificial means. The Earth is no longer a simple object but a suffering being.

The image in the post can send an implied narrative and irony without text. The wires and machines attached to the Earth could represent technology and industry. They refer to both the cause of the illness and the means of its temporary treatment. The earth seems exhausted with a pale face to convey exhaustion and pain. The irony lies in the subtle message: humanity's pursuit of progress and comfort has made the planet sick, and our only solution seems to be more of the same—more technology and intervention. The cartoon satirizes the idea that we can simply remediate the Earth, expecting a full recovery. It suggests that the planet is in a critical condition and that its continued health is not guaranteed.

These techniques demonstrate that sarcasm is not merely a tool for humor but functions as a sophisticated discursive strategy for expressing public sentiment and critically engaging with complex and sensitive topics.

4.3 The Role of Multimodality

The data collected for analysis indicate that there are few text-only posts. If the post contains visual gestures, the focus is related to multimodality. This interaction between linguistic and visual elements can create a strong sarcastic meaning. These elements are images, memes, and emojis, and they help in showing more layered messages than could be conveyed in isolation. The visual elements in the posts serve the reader in understanding the ambiguity of hidden messages. When the post states that "Everything is fine," the reader feels nothing toward this statement. While when it is paired with a photo of a raging wildfire or a flooded city, it becomes sarcastic. This is shown in the visual-verbal irony in Figure 2, where the man requested a wake-up call, which is starkly contradicted by the alarming climate data. This creates the necessary tension for sarcastic interpretation. This strategic juxtaposition is a core component of how multimodal sarcasm functions on platforms like X.

In addition to the linguistic and visual modes, emojis, GIFs, and other non-verbal cues serve as digital equivalents of tone of voice or facial expressions. Some emojis, such as the crying-laughing emoji 😂 or the rolling-eyes emoji 🙄, inserted after a statement, signal a sarcastic intent. These emojis guide readers toward the connotative meaning of the words rather than the denotative meaning of the words. The combination of these elements transforms the post from a simpler to a more complex one that requires the audience to process multiple modes of communication simultaneously to grasp the full sarcastic message. This highlights how digital discourse moves beyond traditional linguistic analysis and necessitates a multimodal approach to fully understand its communicative power.

4.4 Thematic Analysis of Public Opinion

There are different key themes in the analysis of sarcastic discourse. They uncover people's disappointment about climate change. They reflect deep feelings toward crises and show how people are eager to reverse climate change for a better future. They want to show their ill feelings against the ignorance of the disaster. The main concern of this article is to criticize politicians' and formal institutions' responses toward climate change sarcasm. The purpose of using sarcasm in public posts that are announced on formal sites. They try to mislead people in general.

This discourse can frame the actions of people in authority as performative rather than substantive. They suggest using the posts that give priority to public relations over honest change. Figure 4 presented this critique in a powerful way as “A Leadership Warning.” Here the politicians’ use of a trivial quote was used to satirize the leadership’s inadequate and detached response to a catastrophic climate crisis.

Sarcasm is also used to call out public indifference and a perceived lack of personal responsibility. Users might post sarcastic comments about individuals who deny climate science or who engage in wasteful behavior, highlighting the absurdity of such attitudes through humor. Figure 3, the “Formal Talk from an Official Management,” exemplifies this by using visual contrast to critique the public’s widespread desire for external change versus their clear unwillingness to enact personal change. This theme often reflects a divide within the public, where some use sarcasm to shame or pressure others into taking the issue seriously.

Many researchers look at sarcasm as a tool to articulate a feeling of powerlessness in the face of a global crisis. They add that sarcasm allows users to express their anxiety and frustration. This type of discourse often creates a sense of shared community among citizens who feel that their voices are unheard and that their actions are too small to make a difference. These points of sarcasm serve as a form of collective emotional release. A notable theme involves the use of sarcasm to challenge or ridicule scientific data and warnings. In these instances, sarcasm functions as a tool of denial, attempting to undermine the credibility of climate science by framing it as alarmist or hyperbolic. This highlights how sarcasm can be co-opted for varied ideological purposes, extending beyond progressive critique.

5. Discussion

This study’s focus is on sarcasms in multimodal climate change discourse. The findings of this study reinforce and extend existing literature in a number of key areas. The previous research recognizes that the use of sarcasm serves as a guide for criticism. This is consistent with the research of Tsakona and Popa (2011). They stated that humor is a powerful tool used for political critique. The discussion further shows how such criticism is political, deeply social, and emotional. This also serves as a symptom of a mass disappointment with authority figures and a shared anxiety among the population.

The emphasis of this study is on multimodality, and it directly confirms the theoretical foundations stated by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001). Some researchers, such as Al-Ali and Khaled (2025), applied these theories practically in their research to highlight their importance in the discourse field. Their findings mentioned that sarcasm in the digital sphere is rarely purely linguistic. On the other hand, it is considered a clever method of integrating the post and its elements to deliver the needed message. The visual element provides the necessary contextual clues for the sarcasm to be correctly interpreted. Wiggins (2019) reinforced this idea that contention is central to digital communication.

Finally, the thematic analysis of public opinion on climate change aligns with the findings of both O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole (2009), who stated the issue of the public’s emotional detachment from traditional climate communication. This emotional detachment is still available in the field of research, showing that information does not change public attitudes. It is also ignored by scientists and communicators. This research mentioned that sarcastic discourse might be a response to this emotional absence. It provides a more relatable and engaging way for individuals to process and express their feelings about the crisis. Rather than simply being a tool for trivialization, sarcasm, in this context, serves as a complex communicative strategy for social cohesion and collective sense-making.

6. Conclusion

There are many dimensions in this study. As stated earlier, this study is about discourse analysis. This means it analyzed the use of sarcastic multimodal discourse in the context of climate change on social media. By looking at the previous sections, it can be seen that the findings of this study can confirm that sarcasm sends different messages. It is not only a silly form of communication that let people feel funny, but also it is a sophisticated discursive strategy. The study found that users join a variety of rhetorical techniques (such as hyperbole, rhetorical questions, and intertextuality) with multimodal elements (images, memes, and emojis) to construct their messages. This appeared through a multi-layered analysis.

The strength of this appears at the point of proving that sarcastic discourse primarily serves as a powerful tool for critique and public opinion formation. It helps enable a popular form of engagement where people can express disappointment with an observed lack of official action. It also appears in showing voiced skepticism toward corporate and political figures. Finally, it appears to make sense of a complex global issue. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that sarcastic multimodal discourse is a significant component of modern public communication. It reflects and shapes attitudes toward one of the most pressing issues of our time.

This study is useful and significant to applied linguistics, multimodal semiotics, and climate change communication. It provides substantial contributions to these fields. The study offers an analytical framework for understanding the complexities of digital discourse. This contribution comes by focusing on the underexplored phenomenon of multimodal sarcasm. Therefore, it is implemented to provide theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions.

The results of this study have some limitations; the methodological limitations are one of the limitations of this study. The sample of this study consisted of 100 posts, which means that this sample is not representative of the broad scope of public discourse.

Overall, the contribution of this study is its demonstration of the mixture of linguistic and visual elements. This mixture can build a unified and multimodal approach to modern communication over traditional linguistic analyses. Applying qualitative design in this study aids in analyzing a large corpus of social media data. It also offers an applicable model for future research on digital discourse. Moreover, it can provide clear guidance for other studies who are interested in the same field and data analysis. Finally, future researchers may conduct a comparative analysis of sarcastic discourse that is more focused and significant if carried out across different social platforms (e.g., TikTok

and Facebook).

Declaration of the Use of AI

The researcher declares that he has never used any AI tools when writing the content of this article.

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