



The Crisis of Meaning in the Age of Meaning: A Literature Review of Semantic Disorders in Social Media

Hajar Aswad

e-mail : ashasamarinda@gmail.com

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda

Abstract: *The digital era has fundamentally changed the pattern of human communication. One of the significant impacts of this change is the occurrence of a crisis of meaning in online interactions, triggered by the semantic bending in the use of language on social media. Phenomena such as memes, irony, and remix culture also accelerate the process of shift and ambiguity of meaning. This article aims to examine the literature on meaning disorders that occur in the digital space, especially on social media. With the literature study method, the author examines theories of meaning, digital language, and the phenomenon of memes as a form of bending meaning. The results of the study show that social media contributes to semantic crises through the production of meanings that are contextual, fragmented, and often ironic. This article also highlights the urgency of semantic literacy and digital communication ethics as a response to the crisis of meaning in the post-truth era.*

Keyword: *Crisis of Meaning, Social Media, Memes, Semantic Disruption, Digital Language.*

Abstrak: *Era digital telah mengubah pola komunikasi manusia secara fundamental. Salah satu dampak signifikan dari perubahan ini adalah terjadinya krisis makna dalam interaksi daring, yang dipicu oleh pembengkokan semantik dalam penggunaan bahasa di media sosial. Fenomena seperti meme, ironi, dan remix culture turut mempercepat proses pergeseran dan ambiguitas makna. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara literatur gangguan makna yang terjadi di ruang digital, khususnya di media sosial. Dengan metode studi pustaka, penulis menelaah teori-teori makna, bahasa digital, dan fenomena meme sebagai bentuk pembengkokan makna. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial berkontribusi pada krisis semantik melalui produksi makna yang bersifat kontekstual, terfragmentasi, dan sering kali ironis. Artikel ini juga menyoroti urgensi literasi semantik dan etika komunikasi digital sebagai respon terhadap krisis makna di era post-truth.*

Kata Kunci: *Krisis Makna, Media Sosial, Meme, Gangguan Semantik, Bahasa Digital.*

Introduction

Developments in communication technology, especially through social media, have created a new environment in the use of language. The variety of languages in the digital world is increasingly mushrooming. According to Burling et al. language is an arbitrary sound signal system used by civilized societies to



collaborate, interact, and recognize each other.¹ Chaer affirms that language is a system that functions as a sign, and currently, language can be heard.² Meanwhile, Keraf stated that language is a communication system that utilizes arbitrary speech symbols (speech sounds) that can be supported by real body expressions. Based on this definition, in simple terms, language can be understood as pronunciation and sound used as a means of communication in a community that is a mutual agreement. Language is essential for the continuity of human interaction, both in person and through various channels such as phones and social media, including: Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Path, Instagram, and others. Language is now not entirely based on traditional structures and meanings, but is undergoing a very rapid change in context.³

In this situation, the meaning becomes increasingly fluid, unclear, and often misleading. The use of language is not only to convey intentions clearly, but it is often manipulated for the purpose of humor, satirism, provocation, or even the spread of false information.⁴ Especially in social media, phenomena such as memes, video clips taken out of context, the large use of concise language, the use of abbreviations and acronyms that are sometimes unusual in everyday language, as well as the use of emojis and graphic images which, although they have the advantage of depicting feelings and emotions in a visual way, can sometimes lead to ambiguity and misunderstanding.⁵ Or the emergence of irony and so on is part of the new discussion practice that also contributes to the crisis of meaning which is the effect of the existence of social media so that it causes misunderstandings among social media users. Social media users not only function as recipients of

¹ Robbins Burling, *Language* (New York: Academic Press, 1993).

² Abdul Chaer, *Linguistik Umum* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2007).

³ M C Dodalwa, “‘Satir’ Antara Kritik Dan Selebrasi: Analisis Reaksi Warganet Terhadap Permohonan Maaf Ratna Sarumpaet,” *Jurnal Pikma: Publikasi Ilmu Komunikasi Media Dan Cinema* 2, no. 1 (2020).

⁴ S Nafinuddin, “Pengantar Semantik (Pengertian, Hakikat, Dan Jenis),” 2020, <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/b8ws3>.

⁵ K S Geraldine and B Manik, “Pragmatik Dan Sistem Kajiannya,” *Jurnal Intelek Insan Cendikia* 2, no. 4 (2025): 7291–95.



information, but also as creators of meanings that are flexible and ambiguous depending on how the language style is used.⁶

Language style is a way of expressing thoughts through language, taking into account in particular the characteristics and personality of the writer (language user).⁷ Widayati and Pradopo emphasized that language expression is a method to convey ideas, emotions, or other goals that produce various language styles.⁸ Simanjuntak and Tarigan also explained that language style is a form of rhetoric, namely the use of words in oral and written form to persuade or influence listeners or readers. Therefore, based on the explanation of the experts above, it can be concluded that language style is an individual's ability to convey something using a certain language to persuade or influence listeners or readers.⁹

Social media has the ability to ignite mass action because it provides an opportunity for individuals to express their thoughts in a variety of ways. These expressions can be conveyed in a serious or humorous tone. In addition, information can be conveyed in the form of writing, images, or videos.¹⁰ One of the popular ways in which internet users spread their ideas today is through memes, a phenomenon that has attracted the attention of many researchers. Many people seek memes primarily for entertainment, but meme creators also frequently share content related to current news. This practice has turned the internet into not only a space for humor but also a medium for learning about events happening around the world. Social media contributes to a crisis of meaning through the rapid circulation and reinterpretation of information, while memes play a significant role in shaping and transforming meaning. This phenomenon has a broad impact on social

⁶ N Hidayat et al., "Media Sosial Sebagai Social Engineering Untuk Membentuk Mindset Masyarakat Dalam Penyelamatan Lingkungan Hidup," *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 17, no. 2 (2023): 954–65.

⁷ Dede Herdiana, "Gaya Bahasa Sebagai Strategi Komunikasi Digital," *Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra* 21, no. 1 (2021): 33–48.

⁸ Sri Widayati and Rachmat Djoko Pradopo, *Stilistika: Pengantar Dan Aplikasinya* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2014).

⁹ T Simanjuntak and H G Tarigan, *Retorika* (Bandung: Angkasa, 2013).

¹⁰ Marcus Funk, "Social Media and Mass Communication," *Journal of Media Studies* 6, no. 2 (2014): 45–60.



communication. This article aims to examine these issues through a literature review that connects semantic theory, semiotics, and digital discourse.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. Data were collected through a systematic search and selection of relevant scientific sources, including reputable journal articles, books on language and communication theory, and case studies discussing semantic disturbance in the context of social media. The selection of sources was based on thematic relevance, academic credibility, and alignment with the focus of the study on meaning crises, language change, and meme practices in the digital era.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involved coding key concepts, grouping related ideas, and identifying recurring patterns and themes found in the literature. The analysis was directed at uncovering how semantic disturbances emerge in social media, particularly in relation to the crisis of meaning, the dynamics of digital language change, and the use of memes as both expressive tools and instruments of meaning distortion.

Methodologically, the research proceeded through several interconnected stages, beginning with the determination of research focus and problem formulation, followed by data collection, literature selection, and thematic classification. The identified themes were then synthesized and critically interpreted using relevant language and communication theory frameworks. The final stage involved drawing conclusions to explain the characteristics of meaning crises in the digital age and to outline their theoretical implications for the study of language, communication, and media culture.

Results and Discussion

Semantic Disturbances in Social Media Social Media

Social media creates a separation between formal and informal communication. On sites like Twitter or TikTok, sentences are often changed, flipped, or delivered in an ironic way. This causes the meaning to become unstable. Expressions that are initially neutral can be interpreted as sarcasm, while comments



that are satirical in nature can be taken seriously. This loss of context gives a greater chance for misunderstandings of meaning. As stated by Ibrahim¹¹, "language in social media platforms has many possibilities for interpretation because it is not equipped with complete contextual elements as in direct interactions". For example, the absence of tone indicators or facial expressions triggers social problems due to unmet expectations on social media. The resulting reactions also vary, depending on each person's understanding of capturing the context of a tweet or tweet created by the user for the audience.

This has the potential to create a huge miscommunication in text-based communication interactions or processes. Different levels of comprehension lead to a varied response, which is caused by differences of view or errors in the use of punctuation. Missing a comma in a piece of writing can change the meaning that is intended to be conveyed. Therefore, additional explanations are needed so that the context intended by the sender can be understood by the reader. However, this clarification process makes communication more complicated and layered. Additionally, unclear context often gives readers a double meaning, potentially triggering misinterpretation.

Situations like this can lead to differences of opinion so that the message conveyed is ineffective. Thus, the reaction received may differ from what is expected. The use of text on Twitter/X is generally in the form of threads due to the feature that limits the maximum of 280 characters per tweet. In the premium feature, users can sign up for Twitter/X Blue, which allows them to write up to 4,000 characters in a single tweet. Some users tend to tell their experiences in detail. Excessive detail is sometimes considered unnecessary, making it difficult for readers to understand the information available.¹²

Other factors that cause miscommunication or misinterpretation are also caused by opinions that do not want to be refuted. Every user has the freedom to express their opinions on social media. However, engagement is determined by the

¹¹ Idi Subandy Ibrahim, "Bahasa Media Sosial Dan Krisis Konteks," *Lingua* 17, no. 2 (2020): 101–15.

¹² A H Luthfi, "Analisis Semiotika Kritik Sosial Dalam Balutan Humor Pada Komik Faktap," *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 17, no. 1 (2020): 19–40.



audience that sees the content that appears on each user's timeline. Not everyone is able to respond to text perfectly, so misunderstandings can occur. When criticism arises against users who feel right, communication becomes disrupted. The meaning of a message will be left to the reader, which can result in different interpretations if not clarified directly.¹³

When an issue is hotly discussed, there will be various opinions and responses from the audience. This is a critical time where many distractions can cause errors in absorbing and interpreting messages. It is not uncommon for users' egos and emotions to come into play when digesting the available information, thus creating a subjective response. Both positive and negative responses still have equal possibilities of getting reactions with opposite values. This depends on how the audience is rated and how they understand the data or message before making a decision in the form of a rating.

Memes and Deconstructions of Meaning

Memes show the ways in which meaning is formed, parodied, and altered. In the context of political memes, for example, a character can be attached to an image of a hero or villain, depending on the choice of text and image. The emergence of memes as a new cultural form in a political context not only serves as a symbol of political resistance, but is also considered one of the strategies of certain groups to bring down or defeat other actors. Memes as the result of collective work, where anyone has the freedom to use or modify the same image or text, have become very popular at the time of presidential elections and in various political issues. Research conducted by Rahmat in the ISKI Journal explains that many political memes in Indonesia utilize visual irony that may be difficult to understand without an understanding of the existing social and cultural context.¹⁴ Additionally, memes can serve as a tool to deconstruct official meanings coming from the media or governments, creating a more implied form of social criticism.¹⁵

¹³ D Maharani et al., "Makna Dalam Era Digital: Kajian Semantik Terhadap Bahasa Di Media Sosial Indonesia," *Jejak Digital: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin* 1, no. 4 (2025): 841–62.

¹⁴ Agus Rahmat, "Ironi Visual Dalam Meme Politik Di Indonesia," *Jurnal ISKI* 6, no. 1 (2021): 89–102.

¹⁵ M W Mofferz, "Meretas Makna Post-Truth: Analisis Kontekstual Hoaks, Emosi Sosial, Dan Populisme Agama," *Societas Dei: Jurnal Agama Dan Masyarakat* 7, no. 1 (2020): 3–23.



Here, irony not only serves as a language style, but becomes a means for social resistance as well as shared humor. For example, the term "sultan" is used not in the literal sense of king, but as a mockery of those who live excessively or flaunt luxury. In this case, words that usually have high value are filled with sarcastic meanings to criticize inequality or lifestyles that are considered less sensitive to social issues. In addition, there is also a form of collective expression that emerges from meme culture that enriches the world of digital semantics. Words or phrases such as "mental health is real," "I'm tired of being strong," or "auto insecure" are part of everyday expressions that connect social media users through similar emotional experiences. These terms have a strong appeal because they come from personal experience but are also public, thus building language-based emotional solidarity.¹⁶

Social media also introduces visual and multimodal forms of language that contribute to the creation of meaning. The use of emojis, GIFs, stickers, and short videos is often an important part of communication and cannot be separated from text. For example, an emoji placed after a certain sentence can change the meaning of the sentence significantly, from serious to funny, or vice versa. This shows that in digital communication, text and visual elements work together to form meaning contextually and simultaneously. The role of this visual element also reinforces the emergence of meaning implied in digital communication. Often, social media users don't directly convey their intentions, but rather express the message through sarcasm, visual analogies, or lead to other content. This kind of communication pattern suggests that meaning does not only exist on the surface of language, but is hidden in a pragmatic layer that can only be understood by certain communities that share the same cultural references.

In using memes accompanied by humor or sarcasm as a medium for expressing criticism, several important considerations must be taken into account to avoid oversimplification or misrepresentation of opinions. Criticism does not always require in-depth analysis or lengthy explanations, as memes and sarcastic

¹⁶ W R Nababan et al., "Tantangan Bahasa Di Era Digital Terhadap Kesalahan Berbahasa Dalam Komunikasi Media Sosial," *Jurnal Bahasa Daerah Indonesia* 1, no. 3 (2024).



expressions can serve as effective and widely disseminated alternatives, although they often invite multiple interpretations. Nevertheless, constructive criticism should remain focused on substantive issues rather than targeting personal matters, as memes frequently risk shifting criticism into personal attacks. In addition, careful attention must be paid to word choice and visual elements to ensure that they are free from verbal violence or sexual connotations, given that internet content is accessible to diverse audiences. Furthermore, caution is necessary to prevent the spread of manipulative messages, as content that tends to mislead or manipulate public perception should not be circulated.

Crisis of Meaning and Disinformation

Ambiguity in the sense that on social media creates opportunities for the spread of misinformation. Deliberately distorted information, such as memes that convey political messages in a sarcastic tone, can lead to misunderstandings. This is exacerbated by the phenomenon of out-of-context sharing, where footage of an image or video is disseminated without explanation, thus creating confusion. This is when the crisis of meaning develops into a social challenge, as expressed by Wibowo in the journal *Semiotics* which states that the inability of users to understand the irony and digital implications leads to significant bias in interpretation.¹⁷

There is framing in shaping public views on a political issue by highlighting certain elements and ignoring other unfavorable parts. This can change the way the audience understands the issue and direct their attention to the proposed solution without questioning the policy or steps taken. In some circumstances, framing can also be used to sideline political opponents by portraying them as indifferent or incapable, which can exacerbate divisions as well as hinder constructive dialogue. Framing also serves to politicize social issues in a way that encourages people to support certain policies or actions that are considered to be in accordance with political interests. For example, the issue of poverty is often framed as a major social threat that can only be addressed with urgent policies.

¹⁷ Wahyu Wibowo, "Ironi Digital Dan Bias Interpretasi Media Sosial," *Semiotika* 17, no. 1 (2023): 67–82.



This approach makes the audience see social problems not as complex systemic issues, but as challenges that require quick and drastic solutions. This shows how framing can simplify complex social issues and encourage support for more popular policies, although not necessarily effective in the long run. In addition, the manipulation of language in the political context can undermine the quality of democracy by reducing transparency and worsening public distrust of political institutions. When politicians use manipulative framing techniques, implications, or forms of speech, they create a narrative that is not entirely based on facts.

Wattimena and Latuheru and Kisesa et al. show that these techniques are often used to influence public opinion without providing adequate information for rational decision-making.¹⁸ The distrust that arises due to this manipulation of language can reduce meaningful political participation, divide society, and undermine accountability in democratic systems. Having good political literacy is essential to counter the manipulation of language in political communication. With a high level of political literacy, people can be more critical in responding to political messages and understanding the strategies used to influence their views. These skills also help audiences to distinguish between accurate and misleading information, as well as reduce the polarizing effects exacerbated by social media. As a solution step, it is essential to raise critical awareness through political literacy education that teaches how to recognize framing techniques, implications, and various other language manipulations that are often used in political communication.

Social Response to the Crisis of Meaning

The online community showed a variety of reactions to the crisis of meaning. Some individuals add a tone marker such as "/s" (sarcasm) or "/j" (joke) to explain their meaning. On the other hand, platforms are starting to implement systems to verify facts and organize content. However, there are still many crises

¹⁸ Reza A A Wattimena and John Latuheru, "Post-Truth Dan Bahasa Politik," *Jurnal Filsafat* 31, no. 2 (2021): 145–60; Allan Kisesa, "Political Framing and Language Manipulation in Digital Media," *Journal of Political Communication* 12, no. 1 (2024): 55–72.



of meaning that take place because users often rely on instinct when reading digital messages, instead of conducting in-depth analysis. Therefore, improving pragmatic literacy is indispensable, namely the ability to understand meaning in complex digital contexts.¹⁹

The role of the media in providing enlightenment to the community and functioning as an educational tool has a great impact on social change through changes in individual perspectives. Social changes related to the way of thinking are shown by the emergence of new perspectives in society. Attitude transformation starts from a shift in mindset in the community. The media plays a role as a teacher in conveying information and adapting to diverse audiences, both in terms of socio-economic, cultural, and other factors so that the information can be well received by the community. This shift in thinking is part of the process of building the identity and character of the Indonesian nation that is expected for the future. With the emergence of social media as the latest technology, of course, human lifestyles have also changed.²⁰

Some of the changes include increasing efficiency and effectiveness in obtaining information. Because of this, people are becoming increasingly dependent on social media, and this has an impact on their daily lives. Accessing social media continuously has become a new need to continue to bring in information, because social media is now a more up-to-date source of information compared to other media. Walter Lippmann stated that the world out there and the images in our minds form meaning; He emphasized that social media's interpretation of events can significantly change the way people perceive reality and their actions. The reality presented by the media is a symbolic reality because the true truth cannot be achieved directly. The potential of social media to construct reality in the minds of audiences is then leveraged to build public opinion, including political propaganda, promotion, and public relations.

¹⁹ V U Pratiwi, "Sarkasme Pada Meme Di Media Sosial Instagram," *GERAM: Gerakan Aktif Menulis* 10, no. 1 (2022): 10–17.

²⁰ R Salam, "Partisipasi Citizen Jurnalis Pada Media Online Makassar.Terkini.Id" (Universitas Hasanuddin, 2023).



Conclusion

The crisis of meaning in the digital era is closely linked to the dynamics of language and social interaction. This phenomenon is driven not only by rapid technological development, but also by the way users engage with meaning in a digital environment that is fluid, fast-paced, and open to multiple interpretations. Social media has become a fertile space for meaning distortion through the circulation of memes, the spread of misinformation, and the widespread use of irony and sarcasm. These conditions highlight the urgency of developing a deeper understanding of how language operates in digital spaces, particularly in shaping perception, interpretation, and public discourse.

The findings of this study indicate that addressing the crisis of meaning requires a cross-disciplinary approach that integrates linguistics, communication studies, and digital cultural studies. Such an approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and disrupted in online interactions. For the digital native generation, strengthening awareness of meaning cannot rely solely on individual competence, but must be supported by systemic efforts across educational, media, and social environments.

In the field of education, meaning literacy and contextual literacy need to be integrated into the curriculum, especially in language, communication, and civic education. Learning should go beyond technical reading and writing skills to include critical interpretation of digital texts, understanding social media discourse, recognizing irony, sarcasm, and memes as language practices, and identifying distortions of meaning in online and viral content. At the same time, media institutions and digital platforms are expected to promote responsible language use by providing digital literacy features, contextual markers for humorous or satirical content, and moderation policies that consider not only technical violations but also misleading meanings. Within the family and social environment, open and dialogical communication plays a crucial role in guiding the digital generation to engage critically, reflectively, and ethically with language and meaning in the digital space.



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