

## Speech Act Analysis of Promotional Content for Skin Care Products on Tiktok

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze speech act in promotional content for skin care products on TikTok based on John R. Searle's speech act theory. It uses a qualitative approach with a pragmatic analysis design. The research data consist of utterance units found in captions, visual video text, voice-over narration, and spoken utterances in TikTok content uploaded by brand accounts. Data were collected through documentation techniques, while the data were selected purposively based on content suitability, the presence of promotional utterances, contextual clarity, and the feasibility of pragmatic analysis. From 389 initial utterance units, 205 units were selected as core data after the data-cleaning process. The findings show that representative/assertive speech acts are the most dominant category, with 131 units or 63.9%, followed by directive speech acts with 48 units or 23.4%, commissive speech acts with 16 units or 7.8%, and expressive speech acts with 10 units or 4.9%. Declarative speech acts were not found in the data. These findings indicate that promotional content for skin care products on TikTok is constructed primarily through benefit claims, product information, usage experiences, and solution statements, which are then reinforced by invitations, recommendations, warnings, offers, and evaluative expressions.

### Keywords

Speech Act; Searle; Pragmatics; Tiktok; Skin Care Products



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## INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of pragmatic linguistics, promotional content for skin care products on TikTok can be understood as a language practice that not only conveys product information but also performs illocutionary acts through claims, evaluations, personal experiences, recommendations, and invitations directed at the audience (Nasser, 2022; Yus, 2019). On TikTok, utterances are delivered through short video formats that combine spoken utterances, captions, visual text, hashtags, emojis, and product-use demonstrations, so pragmatic meaning is formed not only by the sentences spoken but also by the relationship between verbal and visual elements (Matley, 2018; Scott, 2015; Xie & Yus, 2018). DataReportal shows that TikTok has a

very large adult user reach in Indonesia (Kemp, 2026), while TikTok (2026) notes that users tend to rely on creators as sources of validation, recommendations, and authentic experiences before interpreting the value of a product. In this kind of communicative situation, influencers, KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders), or content creators can be viewed as digital speakers who use language to build closeness, credibility, and persuasive force through utterances that appear spontaneous but have a specific communicative direction (Munaro et al., 2024; Page, 2012). Speech acts can be used to build claims, guide audience evaluation, and generate particular responses, although their effectiveness depends greatly on the fit between the speaker's illocutionary intent and the audience's interpretation (Widayanto et al., 2025).

Promotional content for skin care products on TikTok generally combines product-benefit claims, usage experiences, praise for results, instructions for use, comparisons of skin conditions, testimonials, and invitations to try or buy products. These verbal elements are not sufficient if understood only as promotional messages, because in speech act studies every utterance may perform representative, directive, commissive, expressive, or declarative functions according to the illocutionary force constructed by the speaker (Nasser, 2022; Searle, 1976). The research problem arises because influencer language is often examined from the perspective of message content, whereas how such utterances function as pragmatic actions has not been explained in depth. In fact, utterances such as the claim "cost-effective and style novel," the expression "I LIKE IT," and the invitation "Buy it now" can perform the functions of stating, evaluating, recommending, and directing the audience's actions within a single digital communication event (A. Chen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of speech act theory to the analysis of digital discourse. Abdalhadi et al. (2023) show that Facebook status updates during the pandemic contained various categories in Searle's speech act taxonomy, especially expressive speech acts, which were used to convey emotions, criticism, anxiety, and social responses. Alifia et al. (2025) found that Apple's Instagram captions were dominated by assertive speech acts that conveyed information and built message credibility. Dewi (2021) showed the use of directive and expressive speech acts in Instagram captions for cosmetic products, while Nurmadiyah & Tressyalina (2025) found that Instagram influencer promotions contained many expressive speech acts in the form of praise, thanks, apologies, and congratulations. In studies of influencer and social commerce, G. Chen et al. (2023) showed that influencer marketing videos on YouTube were dominated by assertive

and expressive speech acts, while Wang et al. (2023) emphasized that linguistic features based on speech act theory can influence how audiences respond to digital marketing content.

Previous studies are limited in terms of object, platform, speech act category, and analytical focus. Several studies still focus on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Weibo, or text-based social commerce (Matley, 2018; Rahmayanti et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2023), not on promotional content for skin care products on TikTok as a short-video platform that depends strongly on the integration of spoken utterances, visual text, captions, and demonstrative actions. Several studies also discuss only certain speech act categories, such as expressive, assertive, or directive, and therefore have not systematically mapped Searle's full classification in one study of promotional content for skin care products (Alifia et al., 2025; Dewi, 2021; Nurmadiyah & Tressyalina, 2025). On the other hand, studies close to influencer marketing tend to emphasize engagement, audience response, or consumer behavior (Parapaga et al., 2024), whereas the illocutionary function and illocutionary force of utterances have not been positioned as the center of analysis (A. Chen et al., 2023; Fang et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2023).

This study seeks to expand digital pragmatics by examining utterances in promotional content for skin care products on TikTok as communicative events that combine language, context, and multimodal elements. The research focuses on identifying forms of utterance, classifying speech act types based on Searle (1976) explaining illocutionary functions, and interpreting the illocutionary force realized in the utterances (Nasser, 2022). Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how utterances in promotional content for skin care products on TikTok function as pragmatic actions that construct claims, experiences, evaluations, recommendations, and invitations in multimodal digital discourse.

Pragmatics examines meaning in relation to language use in context; therefore, an utterance cannot be understood solely from its grammatical structure or lexical meaning. The meaning of an utterance is formed through the relationship among the speaker, the interlocutor, the communicative purpose, the speech situation, and shared knowledge, which allows the utterance to be interpreted appropriately (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). From this perspective, language is understood as a form of social action because speakers not only say something but also do something through their utterances.

Austin (1962) distinguishes three dimensions of speech acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act concerns the form of the

utterance produced, an illocutionary act concerns the action performed through the utterance, and a perlocutionary act concerns the effect of the utterance on the interlocutor. This study focuses mainly on illocutionary acts because this level reveals the pragmatic functions of utterances, such as stating, requesting, promising, evaluating, praising, suggesting, or directing certain actions. In digital communication, illocutionary force can also be strengthened by stylistic choices, message structure, and certain nonverbal markers that reinforce the force of an utterance (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Ludwig & de Ruyter, 2016).

The speech act classification adopted in this study is based on John R. Searle's taxonomy, namely representative/assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative speech acts (Searle, 1969, 1976). Representatives/assertives are used to state, claim, explain, report, or describe something. Directives are used to request, suggest, command, invite, or encourage the interlocutor to perform an action. Commissives indicate the speaker's commitment to a particular future action or state. Expressives are used to express attitudes, feelings, evaluations, praise, complaints, gratitude, or emotional responses. Declaratives function to change a status or state through an utterance, but they should be interpreted carefully because they are usually related to particular social authority. Carr et al. (2012) and Ilyas & Khushi (2012) show that digital posts can be analyzed as linguistic actions, not merely as short messages. Abdalhadi et al. (2023) show that expressives and assertives are prominent categories in online discourse, while Alifia et al. (2025) show that assertives and directives can function as informative strategies as well as action-directing strategies. G. Chen et al. (2023) also found a dominance of assertives and expressives, highlighting the importance of claims, explanations, and expressions of attitude in constructing illocutionary functions.

The analytical framework in this study proceeds from identifying forms of utterance and determining utterance units to classifying speech act types according to Searle, analyzing pragmatic functions, and interpreting illocutionary force. Through this framework, utterances are analyzed based on the linguistic actions performed by speakers rather than merely on the literal content of the message. The patterns of representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives serve as the basis for understanding how language functions as meaningful action in interaction.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a pragmatic analysis design. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on interpreting utterance meaning,

illocutionary intent, and promotional functions in TikTok content, rather than on testing relationships between variables. The analysis is guided by Searle’s speech act theory, particularly the classification of speech acts into representatives/assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives (Searle, 1969, 1976). In pragmatic studies, utterances are understood as language actions whose meaning depends on the context of use (Yule, 1996).

The data in this study consist of utterances in promotional content for skin care products uploaded by brand accounts on TikTok. The speakers in the digital content include brand narrators, models, doctors, influencers, KOLs, and content creators who appear in the promotional content. The research data consist of utterance units found in captions, overlay text or visual video text, voice-over narration, and spoken utterances. Visual elements in the videos are not treated as forms of utterance to be analyzed, but are used as supporting context for understanding the communicative situation and promotional direction.

Data collection was carried out during April 2026 on TikTok content that was still accessible at the time of documentation. The selected materials consisted of promotional content for skin care products that clearly contained verbal or written utterances and presented promotional contexts that could be analyzed pragmatically. Content was excluded if it was unrelated to skin care products, did not contain adequate promotional utterances, displayed only visuals without clear utterance units, or had a communicative context that was too ambiguous to be classified according to Searle’s speech act categories.

Table 1. Data Sources

Brand Account	Number of Content Items	Product in the Content	Types	Number of Initial Utterance Units
Facetology	5	Serum/brightening serum, facial wash		73
Glad2Glow	5	Lip care, body serum/body tone up, brightening serum, moisturizer		80
Scarlett Whitening	5	Sunscreen, body serum/brightening body serum		78
Somethinc	5	Sunscreen, serum, micellar water, cleanser, toner, moisturizer, lip care		73
Wardah	5	Day/anti-aging moisturizer, sunscreen, spray sunscreen, serum, collagen moisturizer		85
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>			<b>389</b>

The data collection technique involved documenting TikTok content relevant to the research focus. Data were selected purposively based on product suitability, the presence of promotional utterances, contextual clarity, and the feasibility of pragmatic analysis. Content that did not contain adequate utterances or did not show a clear illocutionary function was excluded from the main data, in accordance with the principle of data depth in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data analysis was carried out by identifying content forms, sorting utterance units, classifying linguistic forms, determining speech act types, and interpreting pragmatic and promotional functions. The results of the analysis are presented in a table containing the data code, form of utterance, utterance unit, linguistic form, speech act type, pragmatic function, and promotional function. These stages are in line with qualitative analysis, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). To maintain data validity and analytical credibility, repeated checks were conducted on the selected utterance units. Each utterance unit was rechecked against the video context, including captions, visual text, voice-over narration, spoken utterances, and the accompanying promotional situation, so that speech act classification was not based solely on the literal form of the sentence. In addition, the categorization results were discussed by the researchers/coders to check consistency in determining speech act types, pragmatic functions, and promotional functions. The entire process of sorting, coding, category changes, and reasons for categorization was documented as an audit trail so that the analytical process could be traced transparently.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During the data-cleaning stage, 205 of the 389 initial utterance units were selected as core data related to the promotion of skin care products on TikTok. Only verbal and written utterances were counted, including captions, visual video text, and spoken utterances. Visual elements, facial expressions, gestures, and emojis were not counted as speech act units but were used as supporting context.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Speech Act Types

Speech Act Type	Number of Units	Percentage	Functional Tendency
Representative	131	63.9%	Stating product claims, benefits, experiences, skin conditions, and usage information.
Directive	48	23.4%	Inviting, suggesting, warning, requesting responses, and directing audience actions.
Commissive	16	7.8%	Offering, expressing willingness, giving products, or building expectations for the

Speech Act Type	Number of Units	Percentage	Functional Tendency
			launch of new products.
Expressive	10	4.9%	Showing liking, surprise, satisfaction, or verbal emotional responses.
Declarative	0	0%	Not found in the data.
<b>Total</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100%</b>	-

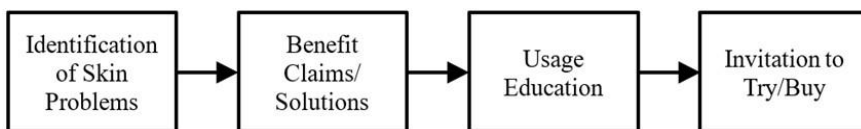
Representative speech acts are the most dominant category. These speech acts appear in statements about benefits, ingredients, texture, usage results, suitability for skin types, and solution claims. Directive speech acts appear in invitations to watch, buy, or try products, as well as in warnings to be careful and instructions to follow product-use procedures. Commissive speech acts appear in the form of offers, product giveaways, or announcements of products to be released. Expressive speech acts appear in the form of emotional evaluations, such as liking, admiration, satisfaction, or dislike. Declarative speech acts were not found because there were no utterances that changed the formal status of a situation through institutional authority.

Table 3. Formulation of Selected Data Analysis

Data Code	Form of Utterance	Utterance Unit	Linguistic Form	Speech Act Type	Pragmatic Function	Promotional Function in the Utterance
D-01	Written caption	"Kalo kulit kamu sensitif & sering kemerahan"	Conditional clause	Assertive	Identifying the audience's problem	Determining the product promotion target
D-02	Visual video text	"Somethinc Calm Down Series SOLUSINYA!"	Conditional clause	Assertive	Stating a solution to a skin problem	Positioning the product as an answer to the audience's needs
D-03	Written caption	"Yuk tonton videonya sampai habis"	Imperative invitation	Directive	Inviting the audience to watch the content	Maintaining audience attention
D-04	Spoken utterance	"yang penting itu bukan jumlah layer-nya tapi cara dan urutan pemakaianny"	Declarative (education)	Assertive	Providing an educational explanation	Building credibility through education

Data Code	Form of Utterance	Utterance Unit	Linguistic Form	Speech Act Type	Pragmatic Function	Promotional Function in the Utterance
		a"				
D-05	Spoken utterance	"kamu perlu berhati-hati dengan kandungan exfoliator seperti AHA BHA, retinol dan juga vitamin C"	Indirect warning	Directive	Giving a usage warning	Presenting careful promotion
D-06	Written caption	"Dapatkan sekarang juga di Official Online Store Glad2Glow!"	Imperative invitation	Directive	Directing purchasing action	Encouraging purchase through the official channel
D-07	Written caption	"Razia Bibir Orang-Orang di Blok M!"	Nominal phrase/situational label	Assertive	Framing the promotional situation	Making the promotion feel spontaneous
D-08	Written caption	"Obsesi baru untuk bibirmu akan segera hadir..."	Declarative (pre-launch)	Commissive	Building expectations	Creating anticipation for a new product
D-09	Spoken utterance	"dia ada sensasi saljunya gitu"	Declarative (sensory claim)	Assertive	Explaining sensory experience	Highlighting the product sensation
D-10	Spoken utterance	"nggak suka"	Declarative (evaluation)	Expressive	Stating a spontaneous evaluation	Creating a contrast/humor effect

The pattern shown in Figure 1 indicates that promotional utterances for skin care products on TikTok generally begin by introducing a skin problem, continue by presenting benefit or solution claims, proceed to usage explanations, and end with a call to action.



### Figure 1. General Pattern of Speech Acts in Promotional Content for Skin Care Products

The dominance of assertive speech acts shows that promotional content for skin care products on TikTok is constructed more through claims and information than through direct commands to buy.. Within the framework of Searle (1976), representatives/assertives commit the speaker to the proposition stated, such as claiming, explaining, reporting, or stating an opinion. This finding is in line with Nasser (2022), who shows that representatives are dominant in online reviews because speakers attempt to describe, evaluate, and convince readers. A similar tendency was also found by Alifia et al. (2025), namely that brand captions on Instagram use many assertive speech acts to convey information and build credibility. In these data, assertives not only function to convey product information but also frame the product as a solution to skin problems. Utterances about sensitive skin, redness, light texture, SPF, active ingredients, or moisturizing effects work as illocutionary acts that lead the audience to accept the relevance of the product. Thus, assertives become the basis of persuasion because the audience is first given reasons before being directed toward action.

Directive speech acts occupy the second position. They appear in the form of invitations, suggestions, warnings, questions, and instructions. This finding is in line with Dewi (2021), who shows that captions promoting cosmetic products use directives to encourage audiences to respond, use products, or become involved in promotions. A. Chen et al. (2023) also show that speech acts in digital promotion can influence audience interest and responses, especially through directive and assertive speech acts. However, this study does not measure marketing effects; its focus remains on the illocutionary functions of utterances.

Commissives in the data occur less frequently, but they play a role in building expectations. Utterances that offer products or announce products to be released show the speaker's commitment to future action. This finding is consistent with Nasser (2022), who shows that commissive speech acts in digital discourse are often low in frequency but still have a persuasive function. In the promotion of skin care products on TikTok, commissives mainly function as offers, promotional promises, or means of creating anticipation for a product. Expressives are not dominant either, but they help build a sense of closeness between the speaker and the audience. This finding differs from Nurmadiyah & Tressyalina (2025), who found that expressive speech acts, especially expressions of praise, were dominant in the promotion of goods and services by Instagram influencers. Rachmad & Rohmah (2022) also show

that expressives in influencer discourse can build identity and social relations. This difference indicates that the TikTok data on skin care product promotion in this study emphasize product claims and calls to action more than emotional expressions.

The absence of declaratives is a theoretically appropriate finding. Searle positions declaratives as speech acts that require institutional authority to change the status or state of a situation. Expressions such as “solusinya,” “wajib,” or product-superiority claims cannot be categorized as declaratives; these forms are more appropriately interpreted as evaluative assertives or persuasive directives. The absence of declaratives is also in line with Abdalhadi et al. (2023) and Nasser (2022), who show that declaratives are often absent from social media discourse. In general, the pattern of presenting a skin problem, offering a solution, providing education, and making an invitation shows that the promotion of skin care products on TikTok operates as a gradual linguistic action. Assertives build claims and credibility, directives guide audience action, commissives build expectations, and expressives provide a relational dimension. In social media contexts, captions, hashtags, emojis, and visuals help in interpreting utterance intent, but they are not the main speech act units. This is in line with studies that position digital elements as contextual markers and pragmatic force markers in computer-mediated communication (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Matley, 2018; Scott, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that promotional content for skin care products on TikTok is constructed through speech acts that function as persuasive communication strategies. These speech acts not only convey product information but also generate pragmatic force that encourages the audience. Based on Searle’s speech act theory, utterances in promotional content tend to perform representative/assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive functions, especially through product-benefit claims, invitations to use products, recommendations, affirmations of product superiority, and evaluations of product-use experiences or results. These findings show that the promotion of skin care products on TikTok does not operate solely through visuals, but also through the construction of utterances directed at shaping audience perception, trust, and interest in the products. This study has limitations in terms of data scope, as it focuses only on TikTok content that met specific criteria, namely promotional content for skin care products that clearly presented utterances. Therefore, the findings are not intended to be generalized to all forms of digital promotion. In addition, video visuals were used only as supporting multimodal context, not as the main utterance units. Another limitation lies in the nature of

qualitative analysis, which requires researchers' interpretations of context, illocutionary function, and the pragmatic intent of utterances, making categorization accuracy an important aspect of maintaining analytical validity. Future research can expand the data sources by comparing content from influencer accounts, KOLs, content creators, and official brand accounts for skin care products so that variations in speech act strategies can be examined more clearly. Subsequent studies can also analyze audience responses through comments to examine the relationship between forms of promotional speech acts and public reception. Methodologically, future research should continue to distinguish clearly between utterances as the main units of analysis and visuals as supporting context so that the focus of pragmatic inquiry does not shift away from language.

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