

HUMOR STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS IN STUDENT WHATSAPP GROUP CHATS: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON THE GTVH

Hazna Aulia Syahida
English Literature Study Program
Institute of Prima Bangsa
haznaauliasyahida@gmail.com

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Abstract. This study explores the humor strategies and their social functions in student WhatsApp group conversations using the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) developed by (Attardo, 1994). The focus is on the Logical Mechanism (LM) parameter to identify how humor is constructed through patterns such as irony, absurdism, and wordplay. Additionally, the research investigates the social functions of humor particularly social management and decommitment within the socio-pragmatic context of informal academic communication. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, 30 humorous utterances were collected through direct observation and documentation (transcription) of naturally occurring interactions from a student WhatsApp group and analyzed according to their Logical Mechanism and social functions through three stages of data analysis: data reduction, data analysis, and drawing conclusions. The findings reveal that irony is the most frequently used humor strategy, followed by absurdism and wordplay. The dominant social function found is social management, indicating that humor primarily serves to strengthen group solidarity, reduce tension, and foster a relaxed atmosphere. Decommitment also appears in several cases, where humor allows speakers to retreat from serious statements without disrupting social harmony. The study concludes that humor in digital student interaction is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a social tool for maintaining group cohesion and navigating academic stress.

Keywords: General Theory of Verbal Humor, Logical Mechanism, Social Function, Socio-pragmatics, Verbal Humor

Abstrak. Penelitian ini membahas strategi humor dan fungsi sosialnya dalam percakapan grup WhatsApp mahasiswa dengan menggunakan kerangka General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) yang dikembangkan oleh (Attardo, 1994). Fokus utama terletak pada parameter Logical Mechanism (LM) untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana humor dibangun melalui pola seperti ironi, absurdisme, dan permainan kata. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menelaah fungsi sosial humor khususnya social management dan decommitment dalam konteks sosiopragmatik komunikasi akademik informal. Dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, sebanyak 30 data ujaran humor dikumpulkan dari grup WhatsApp mahasiswa dan dianalisis berdasarkan Logical Mechanism dan fungsi sosialnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ironi merupakan strategi humor yang paling sering digunakan, diikuti oleh absurdisme dan permainan kata. Fungsi sosial yang paling dominan adalah social management, yang menunjukkan bahwa humor berperan penting dalam mempererat solidaritas kelompok, meredakan ketegangan, dan menciptakan suasana santai. Fungsi decommitment juga muncul dalam beberapa kasus, di mana humor digunakan untuk menarik diri dari pernyataan serius tanpa mengganggu keharmonisan sosial. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa humor dalam interaksi digital mahasiswa bukan hanya fenomena linguistik, tetapi juga alat sosial untuk menjaga keakraban kelompok dan menghadapi tekanan akademik.

Kata kunci: General Theory of Verbal Humor, Logical Mechanism, Social Function, Sociopragmatics, Verbal Humor.

INTRODUCTION

Humor is an essential component of human communication that extends beyond mere entertainment to fulfill important social and interactional functions. In everyday interactions, humor serves as a means of building interpersonal closeness, reducing tension, and maintaining harmony among participants. In contemporary society, the use of humor has increasingly shifted into digital communication environments, particularly through instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp. Among students, WhatsApp groups function not only as a medium for exchanging academic information but also as a dynamic space for social interaction, where humor is frequently employed to respond to academic tasks, express frustration, or simply create a relaxed and supportive atmosphere. This aligns with (Damanik & Siregar, 2021), who emphasize that humor in student WhatsApp groups functions as a social management tool to conform to social norms and manage interpersonal interactions effectively. The presence of humor in such digital interactions reflects the evolving nature of communication practices in the digital age, where language is used creatively to adapt to new social contexts.

The integration of humor into student WhatsApp conversations highlights the multifunctional role of language as both a communicative and social tool. Humor allows students to reinterpret serious academic situations in a more lighthearted manner, transforming stress and pressure into shared moments of amusement. In this sense, humor becomes a strategic resource for coping with academic demands while simultaneously strengthening group solidarity.

Previous studies have shown that humor in digital communication contributes to maintaining social relationships and managing emotional expression in online environments (Ayu Lestari et al., 2024). Furthermore, the widespread use of instant messaging applications supports this phenomenon. (Anderson & Rainie, 2021) reports that approximately 87% of internet users in developing countries rely on instant messaging platforms for communication, with WhatsApp being one of the most dominant applications. Its accessibility and ease of use make it a primary medium for everyday interaction, including among university students (Ompidan & Oluwalanumi, 2024). In addition, previous research by (Muyassaroh, 2025) and (Harahap et al., 2023) has successfully applied the GTVH framework to digital media, revealing that Logical Mechanisms such as irony and wordplay are highly dominant in constructing online humor. However, most of these studies tend to examine the linguistic forms of humor without directly addressing their social functions. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by combining the analysis of humor strategies and their social impact specifically within the context of digital student conversations.

From a linguistic perspective, the study of humor in digital communication can be effectively examined through a socio-pragmatic approach. Socio-pragmatics, as a branch of pragmatics, focuses on how language use is influenced by social context, including factors such as social status, relational closeness, cultural norms, and group identity. According to (Thomas, 2005b), socio-pragmatics concerns the social rules that determine what is considered appropriate and meaningful within specific communicative situations. From a linguistic perspective, the study of humor in digital communication can be effectively examined through a socio-pragmatic approach. Socio-pragmatics, as a branch of pragmatics, focuses on how language use is influenced by social context, including factors such as social status, relational closeness, cultural norms, and group identity. According to (Thomas, 1995), socio-pragmatics concerns the social rules that determine what is considered appropriate and meaningful within specific

communicative situations. This perspective is particularly relevant in analyzing WhatsApp group interactions, where communication tends to be informal but still governed by implicit social norms and expectations (Nurdiana, 2019). In such contexts, humor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a reflection of shared social values and interactional practices. It plays a crucial role in shaping group dynamics, negotiating meaning, and maintaining interpersonal relationships among participants. In such contexts, humor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a reflection of shared social values and interactional practices. It plays a crucial role in shaping group dynamics, negotiating meaning, and maintaining interpersonal relationships among participants.

The importance of socio-pragmatic analysis in digital humor is further supported by (Damanik & Siregar, 2021), who emphasize that humor in student WhatsApp groups functions as a social management tool. Their findings suggest that humor helps individuals conform to social norms, manage interpersonal relationships, and navigate communication effectively within peer groups. This indicates that humor operates beyond its surface-level amusement, functioning as a strategic mechanism for sustaining solidarity and regulating interaction. Similarly, (Reiter & Placencia, 2005) argue that language serves not only to convey information but also to construct social identity, negotiate relationships, and express one's position within a speech community. In this regard, humor can be understood as a social practice that reflects group identity, shared experiences, and communicative strategies in digital interaction.

This study builds upon previous research on humor in digital communication by specifically examining the relationship between humor strategies and their social functions. While earlier studies have explored humor as a general communicative phenomenon, there remains a need for more focused analysis on how specific Logical Mechanisms contribute to particular social functions in student interactions. Therefore, this research aims to identify the types of humor strategies used by students in WhatsApp group conversations and to analyze how these strategies function socially, particularly in terms of social management and decommitment. Social management refers to the use of humor to maintain relationships and group harmony, while decommitment involves using humor to reduce responsibility or mitigate the seriousness of a statement.

Based on this context, the study addresses two main research questions: (1) how humor strategies based on Logical Mechanism are used in WhatsApp conversations among university students, and (2) what social functions these humor strategies serve in digital student communication. Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to identify and analyze humor strategies using the Logical Mechanism framework of GTVH and to examine the social functions that emerge from these strategies in student interactions.

This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the field of pragmatics and socio-pragmatics by applying GTVH to real-life digital communication, demonstrating how humor operates as both a linguistic and social phenomenon. It also expands the understanding of Logical Mechanism as a key parameter in humor analysis and highlights its relationship with social functions in informal discourse. Practically, the findings provide insights into how students use humor to manage academic stress, maintain peer relationships, and navigate social dynamics in digital environments. In addition, this study may serve as a reference for future researchers interested in exploring humor in various online contexts, linguistic settings, or discourse communities, thereby contributing to the broader development of humor studies in contemporary communication.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive case study approach. According to (Creswell, 2018), qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human issue. The data consist of text-based humorous utterances taken from the WhatsApp group “7A NO DOSEN,” used by students of Class A, batch 2021, in the English Study Program. The data were collected through observation and documentation of naturally occurring interactions during the 2024 academic year. Data analysis was conducted using the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), with a specific focus on the Logical Mechanism parameter to identify humor strategies such as irony, absurdism, and wordplay. The analytical procedure followed (Sugiyono, 2013) qualitative data analysis technique, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Specifically, data reduction involves selecting and filtering the documented conversations to focus only on utterances containing verbal humor. Data display and analysis consist of identifying the humor strategies based on Logical Mechanism (LM) and examining their social functions in the group interactions. Finally, conclusion drawing formulates the final findings based on the research objectives regarding humor forms and functions in the WhatsApp group.

The context of this study is a WhatsApp group consisting of university students from Class A of 2021, with data collected from conversations occurring throughout the year 2024 during their final academic semester. This period is characterized by increased academic demands, including coursework, internships, and thesis preparation, which often generate stress and intensive interaction among students. This specific group and phase were selected because their communication becomes highly dynamic and expressive under academic pressure, providing a rich context for examining naturally occurring verbal humor in digital student interaction. The data analyzed in this study are limited to text-based interactions and exclude non-verbal elements such as emojis, stickers, images, and voice notes in order to maintain a clear focus on verbal humor.

To analyze humor systematically, this study adopts the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) proposed by (Attardo, 1994), which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the structure of verbal humor. GTVH identifies six knowledge resources that contribute to humor construction: Script Opposition (SO), Logical Mechanism (LM), Situation (SI), Target (TA), Narrative Strategy (NS), and Language (LA). Among these parameters, Logical Mechanism (LM) is considered central, as it represents the underlying reasoning or strategy that generates the humorous effect. Logical Mechanism includes various forms such as irony, absurdism, and wordplay, which reflect different ways of manipulating meaning to create humor. Focusing on LM allows for a more detailed examination of how humor is constructed at the cognitive and linguistic levels, particularly in naturally occurring digital discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes 30 humorous utterances found in a students' WhatsApp group conversation using the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), with a particular focus on the Logical Mechanism (LM) parameter and the social functions of humor. The findings indicate that humor in students' digital interactions does not occur randomly but is constructed through specific linguistic mechanisms and serves clear social purposes within group communication.

The analysis reveals three dominant logical mechanisms: irony, absurdism, and wordplay. Irony is the most frequently used mechanism, primarily functioning to highlight

academic pressure through a contrast between serious situations and non-serious responses. Absurdism is characterized by exaggerated and illogical expressions that allow students to release frustration toward demanding academic conditions in a humorous way. Wordplay appears less frequently and involves creative linguistic manipulation, particularly by transforming academic terms into lighter and more humorous expressions. These mechanisms are commonly supported by script oppositions such as serious vs non-serious, expected vs unexpected, and academic vs every day, which create incongruity and trigger humorous effects among group members.

In terms of social function, humor most frequently serves as social management, indicating that it is used to maintain interactional harmony, reduce tension, and strengthen solidarity within the group. Decommitment is also observed, though to a lesser extent, allowing speakers to minimize responsibility, express uncertainty, or soften potentially face-threatening statements through humor. No instances of mediation or de-functionalization are found, suggesting that humor in this context is not employed to resolve conflict but rather to manage emotions and social relationships among students in digital academic communication.

Table 1. Frequency of Humor Strategies Based on Logical Mechanism and Social Function Found in WhatsApp Group Chat

No.	Logical Mechanism	Frequency	Percentage	Social Function	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Irony	15	50%	- Social Management - Decommitment	10 5	33,3% 16,7%
2.	Absurdism	12	40%	- Social Management - Decommitment	7 5	23,3% 16,7%
3.	Wordplay	3	10%	Social Management	3	10%
Total		30	100%		30	100%

A. Irony

According to Green (2018), irony involves conveying a contradiction between literal and intended meanings to highlight an absurdity. Based on Attardo's (2010) framework, this strategy is utilized to manage peer interactions and social standing.

Data 1:

- A: *"Tugas Mr. A itu deadlinenya kapan sebenarnya?"*
(What is the actual deadline for Mr. A's assignment?)
- B: *"Info tugas Mr. A deadlinenya 15 Mei, di grup bilang 15 Juni itu typo."*
(The info says the deadline is May 15th, the group said June 15th was a typo)
- C: *"Typonya jauh banget anjir dari Mei ke Juni."*
(That's a huge typo from May to June, damn)
- B: *"Emang kita Roro Jonggrang yang kerja semalem besok langsung jadi."*
(Do you think we are Roro Jonggrang who can finish everything overnight?)

A: "HAHAHA"

The speaker utilizes the Logical Mechanism of irony by drawing an implausible comparison between students and the mythological figure Roro Jonggrang to highlight an unrealistic deadline. Functionally, this serves as social management. Instead of complaining aggressively, the speaker wraps their frustration in a culturally specific contradiction, safely reducing academic tension and strengthening peer solidarity through shared amusement.

Data 2:

A: "*Gue ngerjain quiz translation salah semua jir.*"

(I got all the translation quiz answers wrong, damn)

B: "*Berarti bukan salah soal, tapi salah jurusan.*"

(That means it's not the test questions that are wrong, but your choice of major)

C: "*BENER SIH WKWK*" (THAT'S TRUE LOL)

Responding to academic failure, the speaker employs irony by making an extreme, non-literal remark ("*salah jurusan*"). The humor arises from the sharp contrast between the surface meaning and the playful intent. Socially, this functions as decommitment. The exaggerated irony softens the reality of failure, providing a conversational shield that distances the speaker from negative judgment while fostering group closeness.

Data 3:

A: "*Tolong dong make sure ke dosennya, masuk jam berapa.*"

(Please make sure with the lecturer what time class starts)

B: "*Mahasiswa telat dihukum, dosen telat dimaklum wkwk.*"

(Students are punished for being late, lecturers are excused for being late lol.)

C & D: "*wkwkwkw.*" (lol)

This utterance operates on irony by presenting a symmetrical sentence that exposes a double standard between students and lecturers. Framed as a neutral rule, the irony critiques academic inequality. This acts as social management. The humor enables the speaker to safely express subtle resistance without triggering conflict, maintaining group harmony.

Data 4:

A: "*Guys, punten ya saya minta uang untuk bensin.*"

(Guys, excuse me, I need to ask for gas money)

B: "*Buat yang terlibat sama penyusunan urusan buku ini, kalau aku setuju aja.*"

(For those involved in compiling this book, I'm fine with it)

C: "*Kalau saya sih setuju, asalkan jangan buat donasi ke Agus.*"

(I agree, as long as it's not used to donate to Agus)

D: "*Nah ini lucu nih wkwkwkwk.*"

(Now this is funny lol)

The speaker responds to a contribution request with a playful warning referencing a viral outside event ("Agus"). This irony transforms a mundane moment into insider humor. Functionally, it serves as social management by utilizing shared group knowledge to reinforce group identity and collective amusement.

Data 5:

- A: "*Itu bener tah deadline Caruban tanggal 30? H-4 jir baru ngasih info.*"
(Is it true the Caruban deadline is on the 30th? They only gave info 4 days before, damn)
- B: "*Pake sistem kebut semalem juga jadi wkwk.*"
(We'll just use the overnight speed-work system and it'll be done lol)
- C: "*Semua akan mepet pada deadlinenya wkwk.*"
(Everything will end up right on the deadline lol)

Facing short-notice deadlines, the speakers use irony through understatement ("*sistem kebut semalem*") to feign acceptance of an unreasonable situation. This acts as social management, allowing students to voice criticism indirectly and convert shared academic pressure into an enjoyable, bonding interaction.

B. Absurdism

Couder (2019) explains that absurdist humor generates comedy through incongruity and illogical scenarios, which helps students navigate communicative pressures in digital interactions.

Data 1:

- A: "*Guys, Metopen UTS nggak?*" (Guys, is there a midterm for Metopen?)
- B: "*Ada tugas mingguan seperti biasa, kata Miss nya.*"
(There's a weekly assignment as usual, according to the Miss)
- C: "*Apa nggak menyala otaknya wkwkwk, UTS + tugas mingguan?*"
(Won't our brains catch fire lol, a midterm plus weekly assignment?)
- B: "*Bentar lagi juga meledak wkwk.*" (It's going to explode any minute now lol.)

Confronted with a heavy workload, the speaker uses absurdism by substituting a rational response with an impossible physical reaction ("*otaknya meledak*"). From a socio-pragmatic perspective, this serves as social management. By escalating the situation to a comically irrational level, the speaker transforms personal academic fatigue into a shared group experience, relieving stress.

Data 2:

- A: "*Deadline minggu ini numpuk semua.*" (This week's deadlines are piling up.)
- B: "*Iyaa jir capek mikirin mana dulu yang harus diabaikan.*"
(Yeah damn, I'm tired of thinking about which one to ignore first.)
- A: "*Wkwkwk ujung ujungnya diabaikan semua.*" (Lol it ends up all being ignored.)

Instead of offering a rational way to prioritize tasks, the speaker proposes an absurdist, self-defeating solution: choosing which assignments to ignore. This operates as decommitment. The deliberate defiance of rational problem-solving allows the speaker to distance themselves from academic expectations and admit overwhelm without losing face.

Data 3:

- A: "*Gais Caruban wajib pake jas almet?*"
(Guys, is wearing the university blazer mandatory for Caruban?)
- B: "*Iya disuruhnya mah.*" (Yes, that's what is instructed.)
- A: "*Kalo jas ujan gabolet?*" (What about a raincoat, is it not allowed?)

C: "*Boleh diusir wkwkw.*" (You're allowed to get expelled lol.)

Responding to a formal dress code, the speaker proposes an absurd alternative (a raincoat), followed by an exaggerated risk of expulsion. Functionally, this is social management. This irrational exchange challenges rigid academic norms in a harmless, humorous way, breaking the formality and reinforcing social closeness.

Data 4:

A: "*Eh kalau ngga liat presensi Public Speaking aja ga sih? Atau Techno disamain aja?*"

(Hey, what if we just check the Public Speaking attendance? Or make Techno the same?)

B: "*Gatau lah, kaya gini aja saya pusing, mau dangdutan aja.*" (I don't know, this is giving me a headache, I just want to go dangdut dancing.)

A: "*wkwkw mood.*" (lol mood.)

Facing academic confusion, the speaker employs absurdism by suggesting an entirely irrelevant leisure activity ("*mau dangdutan aja*"). Functionally, this demonstrates decommitment. The absurd exaggeration helps the speaker evade the pressure of providing a serious solution, protecting their self-image while actively contributing to collective amusement.

Data 5:

A: "*Kata Mr. T kenapa selalu ada problem pas mata kuliah dia.*"

(Mr. T asked why there is always a problem during his course.)

B: "*Kutukan.*" (A curse.)

C: "*HAHAHA, tadi saya pengen jawab kaya gitu.*"

(HAHAHA, I wanted to answer that earlier)

Explaining technical glitches with a mystical cause ("*kutukan*") departs entirely from rational thinking, representing absurdism. This serves as social management. The imaginary explanation channels annoyance into shared laughter, effectively reducing group irritation without becoming overly serious.

C. Worldplay

Gibbs, Jr. (2018)** defines wordplay as the intentional manipulation of linguistic items, phonetic similarities, or semantic ambiguities to create humor. In this context, it frequently serves to maintain social harmony.

Data 1:

A: "*Ada yang ambil maxim violations nggak?*" (Is anyone taking maxim violations?)

B: "*Sayaambilnya Maxim ke pecilon.*" (I'm taking Maxim to Pecilon.)

C: "*Ngaco nih wkwk.*" (You're talking nonsense lol.)

The speaker utilizes wordplay by intentionally misinterpreting the academic pragmatics term "maxim" as a ride-hailing application. Functionally, this serves as social management. By twisting a serious academic question into an out-of-context geographical reference, the speaker breaks the ice, transforming a rigid topic into a shared, relaxing moment.

Data 2:

- A: "*Tugas Accuracy and Acceptability katanya deadline jam 9?*"
(Is the deadline for the Accuracy and Acceptability assignment at 9?)
B: "*Iya hari ini tuh Quality sama itu si Asep.*" (Yes, today is Quality and that guy Asep.)
C: "*Asep apa?*" (Asep who?)
B: "*Acceptability, soalnya kepanjangan bingung.*" (Acceptability, because it's too long and confusing.)
A: "*wkwkwkw.*" (lol)

The speaker employs wordplay by exploiting the phonetic similarity between the complex academic term "Acceptability" and the common human name "Asep". This operates as social management. The playful simplification reframes a dry academic discussion into something casual, softening the conversational tone and shaping positive group dynamics.

Data 3:

- A: "*Guys kalo SK udah keluar belum sih?*" (Guys, has the SK been released yet?)
B: "*SK apa tuh? jual beli tanah atau motor?*" (What SK? Land or motorcycle purchase deeds?)
C: "*Adanya SKCK buat lamar kerja.*" (There is only a police clearance letter (SKCK) for applying for a job.)
A: "*SK bimbingan maksudnya anjir wkwk.*" (I meant the thesis supervision letter, damn lol.)

The speakers use wordplay by broadening the academic acronym "SK" (thesis supervision letter) to include unrelated public discourse meanings like property deeds or police letters (SKCK). This serves as social management. The deliberate semantic shift generates a comical misunderstanding that temporarily distracts the group from academic seriousness, reinforcing group familiarity through collective laughter.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that humor in students' WhatsApp group conversations is not merely used for entertainment, but functions as a strategic and socially meaningful practice in digital interaction. By applying a socio-pragmatic perspective and the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), particularly the Logical Mechanism parameter, the findings show that humor is systematically constructed through irony, absurdism, and wordplay to respond to academic pressure and everyday peer experiences.

The results indicate that humor primarily serves a social management function, as proposed by Attardo (1994), enabling students to maintain group harmony, reduce tension, and strengthen interpersonal solidarity. Decommitment is also present, allowing speakers to soften statements, express uncertainty, or distance themselves from responsibility in a socially acceptable way. The absence of mediation and de-functionalization suggests that humor in this context is less oriented toward conflict resolution and more focused on emotional regulation and relational maintenance. Overall, this study confirms that humor in digital student communication reflects both linguistic creativity and the ongoing negotiation of social relationships within peer groups. Discussion or Results and Discussion section.

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