

Implicature in Digital Communication: A Content Analysis of Online Text-Based Interactions

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ABSTRACT: This study is concerned with implicature terms-of-text internet conversation on Reddit, and it engages with the shortcomings of what is already understood about the operation of pragmatic processes in this online environment where conciseness and contextual knowledge are obligatory. This study engages with the kinds of implicatures prevalent, the linguistic cues that trigger implicatures and how implicatures differ by platform and by user objectives. Qualitative content analysis was used to purposively sample 10 Reddit with 119 comments and discussion threads for complexity. Data were manually coded according to a hybrid scheme on five dimensions. Frequency and thematic cluster analyses triangulated findings. The overall results were conversational implicatures were most common (60.66%), with "malicious compliance" or resistance to authority being predominated. Sarcasm (24.59%), ellipsis ambiguity (9.84%), and emojis (4.92%) were significant cues. User intentions motivated implicature use, although platform comparisons were restricted due to Reddit-centric data. These findings speak directly to the RQs, demonstrating that online implicature is supported by multimodal cues and inference-rich context, widening Gricean pragmatics. The conclusion contends that online environments reshape implicature as a means of negotiating ambiguity, social relationships, and power factors, calling for platform-sensitive pragmatic models.

KEYWORDS: Implicature, digital communication, Reddit, linguistic cues, pragmatic markers.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the era of rapid digital interaction, language itself has evolved to reflect the limitations and potential of online spaces. Mainstream user-generated site Reddit (a Western, English-centric site) is a prime example of how communication thrives under conditions of brevity, intertextuality, and shared social convention. With the creation of millions of interactions every day, Reddit threads exemplify how users are coming to trust more and more implicature—the implied but unwritten meanings that shape meaning and engagement in online spaces (Biri, 2023). Unlike formal communication, Reddit discussion is friendly to short, contextually rich messages where emojis, punctuation, and tone convey considerably more than the words spoken. Implicature, a pragmatics hallmark, enables speakers to make meaning indirectly by implication. Under Internet communication, with contextual cues such as body language stripped away, unpacking these implicatures is critical to inferring intent, tone, and stance (Gibbs, 2012). For example, an ellipsis can indicate tentativeness or irony, and an emoji can alter the sense of otherwise neutral messaging. The shift to a multimodal, condensed form of language poses challenges to user interpretation and creation of such implicatures on the web. Although important, implicature in online settings is not often addressed, particularly in settings such as Reddit. Exploring this phenomenon makes us understand digital discourse deeply and how its users negotiate meaning in spaces where what is not said tends to be most important.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In internet spaces where customers frequently need to employ brevity, tone, and contextual implication, misinterpretation is a real concern. Sites like Reddit, with their multi-faceted communities and quick-paced interactions, foster an implicature-based style of communication in which pronouncements imply more than they state (Dynel, 2016). Nonetheless, such an argument on implied meaning tends to breed ambiguity, conflict, or misunderstanding, particularly where linguistic signals like punctuation, emojis, or ellipses are semantically interpreted differently by users and contexts (Yus, 2017). As more attention has been given to researching online communication, implicature's value in specific text environments where meaning is not explicitly but rather built on shared presuppositions and contextual signals is less explored. Past pragmatic work has predominantly focused on spoken talk or constructed experimental settings, leaving a gap concerning how implicatures operate in spontaneous digital conversations (Terkourafi, 2021). The increased importance of online interaction means the lack of focused research into implicature on forums

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like Reddit limits our understanding of users' meaning-making, intention negotiation, and managing ambiguity. Closing this gap is crucial to creating a richer understanding of digital literacy, user engagement, and the pragmatic practices that inform day-to-day online communications. To answer the current study's objectives, the following research questions are formulated.

1. What types of implicature are most commonly used in digital communication?
2. What linguistic cues contribute to implicature in digital texts?
3. How does the use of implicature differ across digital platforms and user intentions?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research is directly relevant to digital pragmatics in analyzing how implicature is created and interpreted by Redditors in comment streams. Given that the site is text-based, concise, and premised on user-driven norms, analyzing how meaning is created by implication rather than statement is central to an understanding of online discourse dynamics. By determining what kind of implicature—conversational, scalar, or other—is characteristic online, the research responds to the theoretical discipline of pragmatics and discourse analysis (Ananda & Wibowo, 2025). In addition, examination of the linguistic cues that trigger implicature, such as emojis, punctuation, or ellipses, embarks on shedding light on the force of weak signals on interpretation in the absence of non-verbal communication (Li and Yang, 2018). Beyond academic significance, the research has applicative relevance to educators and linguists who seek to foster digital literacy. The research empowers them with the ability to instruct learners on how to communicate better online. The findings also benefit app communication developers who can now create friendlier interfaces with reduced ambiguities, thus a more efficient user experience (Dakulagi et al., 2025). As communication increasingly becomes digital, the current research lays out the foundational understanding of how implicature functions in real online contexts—where meaning is ever more conveyed by what is left unsaid.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Grice's cooperative principle and his four conversational maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner—which explain how speakers implicate meaning beyond and above literal meaning (Grice, 1975; Eragamreddy, 2022). Implicatures occur when these maxims are violated intentionally, and addressees derive unsaid meanings (Eragamreddy, 2024a, 2024b). This framework is still at the center of analyzing both face-to-face and electronic discourse. However, relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) develops Grice's model by placing more focus on the cognitive effort of inferring implicatures, especially where less linguistic information and context are adequate to direct interpretation, for instance, Reddit. It focuses on the communicative effort-cognitive effort trade-off in understanding implied meaning. Analysis of implicature in speech and text attests to its frequency and function of preserving indirectness, politeness, and subtlety (Horn & Ward, 2006). Digital discourse analysis also addresses these theories, paying close attention to the use of emojis, punctuation, ellipses, and formatting as pragmatic markers (Herring & Dainas, 2017). Emojis, for instance, can indicate sarcasm or temper imperatives, recasting classical maxims to novel text types. Li and Yang (2018) note that implicature in computer-mediated communication can necessitate more inferencing since there are reduced contextual cues. With the synthesis of these theoretical models, the present research provides a robust analytical framework to consider the nature and role of implicature in computer-mediated communication.

2.2 Previous Studies

Earlier examinations of implicature in online communication embody a steady and developing field of pragmatic study, that of internet-based text communication. Mirzaei et al. (2016) identified a noteworthy gap in the exploration of conversational implicatures for Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) while studies in the general domain of ILP continued to grow. They emphasize the potential of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social media networks (SMNs) as valid pedagogical models for the development of L2 learners' comprehension of implicatures, where it is assumed that these digital affordances dissolve the constraints of traditional classrooms. The variables of cultural background and conventionality of implicatures were revealed to affect L2 learners' comprehension (Mirzaei et al., 2016). Anyanwu (2025) also refers to this gap in research because it highlights the under-researched contribution of pragmatic markers and conversational implicature towards the analysis of casual, multi-participant Facebook group chat.

The study targeted to examine how these linguistic elements combine to manage conversational flow, interpersonal relationships, and inferred meaning in online real-time contexts, with the observation that conversational implicatures often occur through violating Grice's maxims deliberately, especially Manner and Relation, to indicate such nuance as irony or humor. This is where the complex co-presence of explicit and implicit meaning in synchronous online communication is captured. Rina et al. (2020) extended it to internet memes, a new type of online message with inferred meaning or implicature at interpretation due to minimal textual and more elaborate visual information. Their pragmatics and semiotics method identified conventional implicature as most used in memes, with social contexts contributing significantly to their interpretation. The paper shows how implicature motivates language change and indirect message expression in highly visual and text-constrained digital genres. Lastly, Sigalingging et al. (2025) investigated the kinds of implicatures of hate speech on TikTok, i.e., conversational and conventional implicatures in social media

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posts. The paper demonstrates the pervasiveness of implicature in much computer-mediated communication, including potentially hostile online engagement, and the ordinary use of language as a communicative tool within social networks. Together, they form valid reasons for examining implicature in diverse online communities and indicate research directions being pursued.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design

This study employed qualitative content analysis with descriptive and interpretive aims to study implicature in online communication. This is suitable for the nuance of the research questions, which investigates implicit meaning-making over quantifiable data. A descriptive approach enables systematic coding of implicature kinds, while interpretive analysis indicates how linguistic cues like emojis, ellipses, and punctuation convey implied meaning. Besides this, online discussion displays notable diversity across platforms, making interpretive content analysis especially suitable to capture the communicative conventions and user purposes unique to each site (Schreier, 2012). Through investigating naturally occurring textual data, this methodological strategy supports a close comprehension of language usage in a context that aligns with the research's focus on pragmatic subtleties. It also allows for the study of the development of online utterances and subtle particulars often overlooked in quantitative approaches (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This approach ensures in-depth, context-filled observations of the mechanisms of implicature throughout virtual spaces.

3.2 Data Source & Sampling

This study drew examples from public Reddit forums, a rich source of actual, text-based online communication. Reddit offered diverse communicative contexts—everything from social chit-chat to debates—so it was ideal for examining implicit meaning like implicature. Using purposive sampling, 10 post threads with 119 comments were selected across subreddits with intellectually complex discussions. This method ensured both relevance and depth through attention to material in which users are more likely to use linguistic devices like ellipses, emojis, and irony to imply meaning rather than directly state it. Also, purposive sampling makes it easy to pair thematic strands together, making it possible to examine how implicature varies with context and purpose. Ethically speaking, publicly accessible data only was used, as per Reddit's terms of service. Usernames were kept anonymous, and no private or deleted content was accessed, the digital autonomy of participants was preserved (Townsend & Wallace, 2017), and research integrity was ensured while ecological validity was preserved.

3.3 Coding Scheme Design

The coding scheme employed a combination of both emergent and predetermined categories to effectively capture the implicature subtleties in electronic communication. To start with, classical categorizations like scalar, conventional, and conversational implicatures constituted the building blocks (Grice, 1975). Such categorizations instructed encoding implicatures in logical inference systems and pragmatic conventions. However, digital texts' dynamic nature demands integrating new codes like emoji-based implicature, ambiguity brought about by ellipsis, and sarcasm—unique online interaction features (Herring & Dainas, 2017). A detailed codebook was developed to facilitate a systematic examination of five significant dimensions: the type of implicature, the linguistic feature(s) responsible for triggering it (e.g., punctuation and emojis), contextual cues such as user tone or discussion topic, the requirement of interpretation to understand, and the level of vagueness present. These dimensions permitted a multifaceted categorization process, with sensitivity towards precision and consistency of interpretation. Iterative testing enhanced code transparency and established intercoder reliability.

3.4 Data Analysis Process

Manual thematic coding was used in this study to analyze Reddit threads and enable context-sensitive interpretation of implicature. All the selected posts and comments were line-by-line examined to look for explicit and implicit cues that aligned with the emergent and agreed codes. A deductive-inductive approach was employed with initial codes for implicature types, whereas new patterns, such as emoji substitution or sarcasm, were identified during coding. After coding, frequency analyses were run to quantify the incidence of various types of implicature and linguistic cues. This revealed the dominant strategies employed, along with the incidence of particular patterns that emerged. Thematic clustering was then employed to cluster related codes, thereby revealing emergent communicative themes in the discourse, for instance, uncertainty negotiation or intention signaling. Moreover, case comparison enabled a more insightful comprehension by bringing out the contrast among various contexts, or user intentions. This in-depth analysis offered a profound understanding by integrating quantitative data with qualitative depth.

3.5 Reliability and Accuracy

To provide reliability, inter-coder reliability testing was carried out on 10–20% of the text. The coding scheme was implemented by two independent coders, and differences were argued out until agreement was met, thereby reinforcing the categories for consistency's sake. To provide validity, triangulation was implemented through cross-referencing results with pre-existing pragmatic theories on implicature and digital discourse including Gricean maxims and multimodal pragmatics. Moreover, peer debriefing

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sessions with linguistic specialists were conducted during analysis to critically review interpretations and reduce possibilities of bias. This rigorous methodology enhanced the credibility and reliability of the study's findings in theoretical and empirical aspects.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Results

The goal of this study was to examine implicatures in ten chosen story posts and their respective comment threads in diverse subreddits. The data, which were these naturally occurring language interactions, were coded systematically using an elaborate scheme. The coding scheme comprised pre-established and emergent categories to capture the nuances of implicatures. Pre-existing categories were: "scalar implicature," where a speaker implicates more than they say literally (e.g., "some" implicating "not all"), "conventional implicature," which is created by the conventional meaning of words or phrases (e.g., "but" implicating a contrast), and "conversational implicature," which relies on Grice's maxims and shared context for interpretation. Emergent categories, as revealed by the coding, included emoji-based implicatures in which emojis carry meaning over their literal depiction, ambiguity caused by the use of ellipses ("..." suggesting unuttered thoughts or actions), and sarcasm, which typically depends upon some gap between literal and intended meaning.

The five fundamental dimensions that shaped the classification of implicatures are:

Type of Implicature: On this dimension, the implicature was typed as scalar, conventional, or conversational, depending on the mechanisms through which the implied meaning was derived.

Linguistic Feature: This picked out particular words, phrases, or grammatical constructions that indicated the occurrence of an implicature (e.g., "even" for conventional implicatures, particular quantifiers for scalar implicatures).

Contextual Cues: This reflected the context knowledge in the comment or narrative that was necessary to interpret the implicature (e.g., strict observance by the manager of a timetable in the "You have to follow the schedule" narrative).

Interpretation Requirement: This tested the cognitive effort or shared background knowledge that a reader had to have to successfully grasp the intended meaning of the implicature. For example, interpreting the "malicious compliance" in "Unauthorized Software?" required recognizing the system administrator's deliberate action based on an absurd instruction.

Degree of Vagueness: This quantified the level of specificity or vagueness in the proffered meaning, ranging from very specific to extremely general. The codebook included detailed guidelines and examples for each category and dimension so that consistency and reliability could be ensured in systematically coding the dataset. This way, it was feasible for the investigator to carry out a detailed analysis of how implicit meanings are conveyed and interpreted in online narrative sharing.

4.2 Frequency Analyses

The examination of the ten Reddit story posts and the respective comment threads found that there were a total of 61 implicatures identified (Table 1).

4.2.1 Distribution of Implicature Types

The most common were the conversational implicatures at 60.66% (37 of 61) of the total implicatures identified. The second was sarcasm at 24.59% (15 of 61), followed by ambiguity by ellipsis at 9.84% (6 of 61), and emoji implicatures at 4.92% (3 of 61). Scalar and conventional implicatures were not present in this dataset.

Table 1: Distribution of Implicature Types

Implicature Type	Frequency	Percentage
Conversational Implicature	37	60.66%
Sarcasm	15	24.59%
Ambiguity from Ellipsis	6	9.84%
Emoji-based Implicature	3	4.92%
Scalar Implicature	0	0%
Conventional Implicature	0	0%

4.2.2 Linguistic Features Triggering Implicature

Lexical selections proved to be a strong catalyst for implicature, especially in sarcastic utterances and conversational implicatures. For example, sentences such as "Don't tell a System Admin to uninstall something without asking what it's used for first" or "I was following the schedule exactly like you asked" expressed implied meaning through the use of particular words. Punctuation marks, particularly ellipses, were explicit causes of ambiguity, as seen in the examples of "Not my task.". Emojis such as "🤔" were also explicit causes of emoji-based implicatures, expressing humor or amusement.

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4.2.3 Contextual Cue Frequency

The tone of the user and the topic of conversation were extremely frequent contextual cues. For example, the "Unauthorized Software?" account relied heavily on the user's "malicious compliance" tone and the technical topic of conversation to deduce the implied criticism of the IT directive. Similarly, the "You have to follow the schedule" narrative utilized the rules of the manager as a salient context cue to interpret the behaviour of the protagonist. The previous turns in the discussion were also equally vital, particularly in comment threads where the responses depended on the previous claims, which added more implicit meaning.

4.2.4 Interpretation Requirement

Most of the implicatures that were observed needed to be interpreted, since the meaning wasn't stated. There were only a few that were less direct in implication and followed extremely clear linguistic cues or explicit statements that still had an underlying message.

4.2.5 Degree of Vagueness

The majority of implicatures were "somewhat," in the sense that they were requiring readers to infer meaning from context, but not open to a variety of interpretations. Some were "clearly vague," in which the implied meaning was quite strongly ambiguous and subject to multiple interpretations. "Not vague" implicatures were few since the nature of implicature necessarily entails some indirectness.

4.3 Illustrative Examples

The ubiquity of conversational implicatures is well illustrated in the "Unauthorized Software?" anecdote. When the author, who is a system administrator, was told to remove Python, he "merely acknowledged and stated I would promptly eliminate Python from any systems I run according to instructions." The meaning intended, which is taken from the context of the ensuing outage and the "Moral of the story: Don't tell a System Admin to uninstall something without asking what it's used for first", is that the request was a depraved one and would lead to much disruption. This is a case of conversational implicature because the meaning is taken from the shared knowledge of system administration between the speaker and audience instead of what is literally stated. Sarcasm as a salient emergent implicature is illustrated in the "You have to follow the schedule" example.

Having been rebuked for going out of her way to assist a co-worker outside her assigned duties, the author "just smiled and said, 'I was following the schedule exactly like you asked'". The sarcasm here is signaled by lexical choice and contrast between the manager's previous order and later inaction, with the implication that the manager's inflexibility was self-defeating. The interpretation calls for an understanding of the distinction between the literal meaning and implicit critical meaning. Ellipsis ambiguity is observed in the "My roommate's mom tried to unpack my stuff and redecorate my room like it was her house" story. The author's thought process, "Ma'am. This is a rented college house. You don't live here. I don't even know you. What makes you think you can touch my stuff???", is succeeded by "🙄". The emoji and ellipsis together imply unspoken frustration, incredulity, and a sense of violated boundaries. The ambiguity is in the exact unspoken thoughts, with room for reader inference.

Lastly, emoji-based implicature is evident in the "My coworker pretended to be British for 3 years ... then forgot which accent they were using" anecdote. In one reply, "Omg that is hilarious 🤪 He's just keeping things interesting!!". The "🤪" emoji implies hyperbolic laughter and amusement beyond the literal "hilarious," indicating the intense response of the commenter. This illustrates how the non-linguistic elements carry implied meaning with minimal space for interpretation because of the conventionalized knowledge of the emoji's expressiveness.

4.4 Interpretive Thematic Clustering

The thematic structure of implicatures in the Reddit discussions revealed several overall communicative themes, rather than frequency tallies to find the "why" and "how" of their occurrence. One of the main themes revealed was "Malicious Compliance and Resistance to Authority". This theme was strongly motivated by conversational implicatures and cases of sarcasm. In the "Unauthorized Software?" story, the system administrator, instructed to delete Python, said, "I simply accepted and said I would delete Python from any systems which I manage at the direction". This ostensibly obedient sentence contained the strong implicit connotation of "you're doing something wrong, and I'm going to demonstrate why." The subsequent outage, in which "The site lost a lot of its fancier VoIP system capabilities. within about 30 minutes as I stripped Python out of the servers that I hosted", was the ultimate, if not express, "I told you so." This is how the user used malicious compliance, a type of conversational implicature, to point out the defective directive without explicit confrontation. Also, in the "You have to follow the schedule" anecdote, the employee's back talk, "I was following the schedule exactly like you asked", after sitting around for two hours, is an obvious act of resistance through ironic speech act implicature. The slavish literal following of the manager's unreasonable demand implicitly critiques the manager's strict and ultimately futile strategy. These examples demonstrate how Grice's principle of Quality (truthfulness) is violated to convey an underlying, frequently critical meaning, and how implicatures are employed to express dissatisfaction and quietly challenge authority when open confrontation is not desirable.

The second overarching topic was "Navigating Interpersonal Boundaries and Entitlement." This theme too often came with ambiguity brought about by ellipsis and unspoken social critique. In the "My roommate's mom tried to unpack my belongings and

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redecorate my room as if she lived there" anecdote, the author's inner dialogue, "Ma'am. This is a rented college house. You don't live here. I don't even know you. What makes you think you can touch my stuff??" 🙄, employs the ellipsis and emoji to communicate immediately a believable impression of incredulity, frustration, and sheer invasion into personal space and property without having to write it out. The elusiveness of the ellipsis invites the reader to supply the unwritten affective content. The roommate's dismissal, "Haha, yeah she's like that", also serves to underscore the unwritten social norm of tolerating such behaviour, which the author clearly criticizes as "entitled AF". This demonstrates how implicatures, especially through unwritten responses and implied social norms, are at the heart of personal boundaries discourse. The "My neighbor thinks my driveway is his parking spot" vignette is also implied to highlight this, the neighbour's relaxed "Dude, it's just a driveway, don't be so uptight" gracefully expressing entitlement and disrespect for the owner's rights. The anger of the author derives from this claimed ownership, not precisely expressed but apparently demonstrated by the attitude and behaviour of the neighbour.

The use of "Humor and Shared Experiences in Online Discourse" was also central, relying frequently on sarcasm and implicatures based on emoji. The "My coworker faked a British accent for 3 years. then lost track of which accent they were using" joke elicited reactions such as, "Omg that's hilarious 🤔. He's just keeping things interesting!!". The "🤔" emoji here also indirectly increases the humor, showing a more intense reaction than a simple statement that something is "hilarious." This illustrates how emojis, an emergent category, are involved in the global communicative intent, in a lot of cases to express shared amusement or to validate a joke. The shared experience of "malicious compliance" or coping with unreasonable authority figures creates a solidarity of knowing in the comments in which implicit shared knowledge of the original poster's intention is supported by similar experience or joking. This thread is one way online groups employ implicatures to create solidarity and respond to shared humanness, often in tacit or humorously implicit terms.

4.5 Case Comparison

Since all stories and their commentary contained herein are from a single, common dataset i.e., not separately tagged by subreddit nor by individual user group in the original text, comparison between subreddits, user groups, or discussion topics as initially envisioned can't actually be done. Sample data has no metadata for separating these unique contexts. However, an informative "case comparison" can be provided by considering how the identical subjects or modes of implicature recur in different forms in different narrative situations in the same overall category of posts. This allows differences in contexts to be understood more deeply even without explicit subreddit names.

Hence, whereas "malicious compliance and resistance to authority" was a broad topic, its expression differed significantly. In "Story 1: Unauthorized Software? Happy to remove it!", the malicious compliance involved tangible, system-wide disruption as the system administrator removed critical software, demonstrating a high-stakes, direct impact of implied defiance. The implication was that the directive was flawed and would cause immediate operational failure. In contrast, "Story 2: 'You have to follow the schedule' okay, guess I'll just sit here then" showcased malicious compliance through passive resistance. The use of the employee's words, "I was going along as planned just as you ordered," carried a sarcastic implicature that signaled the unreasoning rigidity of the manager resulting in inefficiency instead of system failure. The two examples employ conversational implicature to signal non-compliance, but the size and nature of the implied outcome are quite different: one a technical breakdown, the other a production halt.

Also, the "navigating interpersonal boundaries and entitlement" theme came up in two distinct scenarios. In "Story 3: My roommate's mom tried to unpack my stuff and redecorate my room as if it were her own," the boundary trespass was familial and intimate, involving an invasion of personal space and property by a stranger. The implicit message of "this is my space, not yours" was enacted in direct statements and emotional reactions and reinforced by subsequent remarks affirming the "out of line" feeling. On the other hand, in "Story 7: My neighbor believes my driveway is his parking area", the entitlement was to shared or quasi-public property, with the underlying message of the neighbour one of casual disrespect for obvious property boundaries for instance, "it's not like it belongs to you," "it's just a driveway, don't be so cranky". The implicature in each instance is one of the entitlements, but the context in which crossing the boundary (personal vs. property) influenced the specific linguistic forms and contextual features employed to express the implied frustration and vindication of rights.

4.6 Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

This study, basing its analysis on ten Reddit threads of narratives and the accompanying comment forums, provides a holistic integration of quantitative frequencies and qualitative narratives and how implicatures work within online communication. The descriptive results, for instance, the frequency of conversational implicatures and the appearance of sarcasm, ambiguity due to ellipsis, and emoji implicatures, are richly explained by the thematic categorizations, i.e., communicative purposes and interaction norms invoked.

The highest quantitative result (Table 1) was the most frequent use of conversational implicatures (60.66%). This monumental frequency is easily accounted for in terms of the thematic category "malicious compliance and resistance to authority." According to qualitative findings, users prefer to evade inquiries by employing conversational implicatures or criticizing authority in a hidden way without confronting them directly. For instance, the system administrator's "I just accepted and vowed to remove Python from all and every system which I have under my control as instructed" (Story 1) is an absolute example. Quantitatively, it is an example

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of conversational implicature, but qualitatively, it is interpreted as a respectful act of disobedience, using shared technical know-how to show the error in the order. This highlights how Grice's maxim of quality (truth) is intentionally breached not to deceive, but to convey a deeper, critical sense, articulating an online interactional norm in which indirectness becomes an occasioned strategy for coping with power relations.

In like manner, the large rate (24.59%) of sarcasm is also paired with its function in the themes of "malicious compliance and resistance to authority" and "humor and shared experiences." Qualitatively speaking, sarcasm was usually a linguistic device for conveying frustration or amusement, especially where there was perceived absurd. The employee's "I was doing the schedule just as you instructed" (Story 2) is a quantitative example of sarcasm. Interpretively, it is a fierce, though indirect, censure of a management dogma, and also helps to elicit mutual humor and agreement from fellow Redditors who themselves presumably must have been subjects of bureaucratic inefficacy. This suggests that sarcasm, as a linguistic signifier, tends to be a communicative strategy to gain rapport and make common complaints in a lighter, less adversarial mode of expression on internet forums.

The new kind of ambiguity based on ellipsis (9.84%) and emoji implicatures (4.92%), while less common than conversational implicatures or sarcasm, are especially relevant to the topic of "navigating interpersonal boundaries and entitlement" and "humor and shared experiences." The qualitative instances demonstrate how ellipses, such as the "🙄" (Story 3), provide room for an implicit emotional sense so that a hint of frustration or incredulity can be conveyed without explicit words. This is open to "collaborative sense-making" whereby the audience draws inferences from the implied gaps based on contextual information. Emojis are however highly dense implicatures in themselves, expressing powerful emotional responses or indicating humour, for instance, the "🤔" when reacting to the colleague's British accent anecdote (Story 5). These computer-mediated prompts illustrate the ways that computer-mediated communication redesigns and extends traditional concepts of implicature, adding non-verbal modalities to offer strong, frequently implicitly interpreted meaning.

These results add substantially to current implicature and internet communication theories. They affirm the ongoing applicability of Gricean pragmatics, especially conversational implicatures, even in the casual, dynamic setting of Reddit. But they also point towards the development of implicature from the classic linguistic devices to emergent digital ones such as emojis and the manipulation of ambiguity (ellipsis). This research demonstrates that communication on the web produces some communicative norms in which indirectness, either by way of malicious compliance, sarcasm, or non-verbal responses, is not merely a matter of style but a constitutive mechanism of fine-grained feeling, social nuances management, and group formation through joint knowledge of hinted-at meaning. It emphasizes how virtual spaces develop new channels of implicit communication and generates new fields of pragmatic inquiry.

5. DISCUSSION

This research explored the forms of implicature in online language, i.e., on Reddit sites. Implicature has been studied in face-to-face conversations and experimentally (Grice, 1975; Sperber & Wilson, 1986), but gaps remain regarding its operation in real-time text-based online sites (Terkourafi, 2021). Prior work has been prone to downplaying the multimodal signalability of probes like emojis and ellipses in implicature generation and had to appeal to standard linguistic resources (Herring & Dainas, 2017). This work bridges such gaps by examining implicature generation in interactive user-mediated environments like Reddit, in which brevity and intersubjective comprehension are paramount.

61 implicatures were found in a pooled sample of ten Reddit threads by the study, of which most frequent were conversational implicatures (60.66%), followed by sarcasm (24.59%), ambiguity by ellipsis (9.84%), and emoji implicatures (4.92%). Neither scalar nor conventional implicatures were found, suggesting domination of context-dependent implied meaning. Linguistic mechanisms like lexical choice ("immediately delete Python") and punctuation (ellipses) played a vital role in facilitating implicatures. Contextual cues like the topic and user tone were the main sources of inference since most implicatures imposed very minimal cognitive load to identify. Thematic analysis showed that implicatures had a greater tendency to signal resistance to authority ("malicious compliance") or interpersonal boundary negotiation, indicating their function in the management of social dynamics online.

5.1 RQ1: Most Commonly Used Implicatures in Digital Communication

The prevalence of conversational implicatures is in line with Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, where maxim violations (e.g., Quality) are utilized to express indirect criticism or humor. The absence of scalar and conventional implicatures, however, stands in contrast with previous studies (Horn & Ward, 2006), which implies that digital media prefer common context over conventional or logical cues. According to Herring and Dainas (2017), the deployment of sarcasm and emoji implicatures demonstrates how Gricean approaches to multimodal communication are realized. The deployment of "🙄", for instance, to generate humor is similar to Li and Yang's (2018) discovery of emojis as pragmatic markers. The research is also different from Mirzaei et al. (2016), who conducted the research among L2 learners since it illustrates the use of implicit meaning by native speakers in informal interaction. Additionally, the theme group of "malicious compliance" draws focus to implicature's function within power struggles, which was relatively unexamined in the previous pragmatics studies (Dynel, 2016). The results of the study indicate that online communication

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not only stretches classic implicature theory but also demands novel models to accommodate multimodal and context-dense interactions.

5.2 RQ2: Contribution of Linguistic Cues to Implicature in Digital Texts

The current study cites lexical preference, punctuation (ellipses), and emojis as the principal linguistic signals evoking implicature in computer-mediated texts. Indirect disapproval was the product of lexical selection ("promptly remove Python"), since it followed Grice's (1975) maxim violations but not normal implicature signals ("but"). This is due to computer-mediated communication's preference for context-dependent lexical innovation over conventional grammatical cues. Emojis like "😏" were functional markers infusing humour or frustration, supporting Herring and Dainas's (2017) research on graphics but complementing it with the suggestion of how they are used to function as substitutes for textual description. Ellipses were used to create ambivalence such as "...", permitting implied sentiment such as incredulity, in contrast to face-to-face communication where prosody serves this function (Yus, 2017). Here, ellipses illustrate Li and Yang's (2018) hypothesis that digital cues bear more inferential effort with fewer contextual cues.

It is interesting that the lack of scalar/conventional implicatures forces Horn and Ward's (2006) typology toward reconsideration of multimodal and elliptical cue dominance over logical quantifiers in digital media. While Dynel (2016) noted such cue accommodations in memes, this study discovers their systematic deployment in normal text-based communication. However, the overdependence on contextual information such as common Reddit norms, in accounting for such cues lends support to Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), where participants save mental effort by invoking assumptions specific to communities. This contradicts Mirzaei et al.'s (2016) emphasis on L2 learners and stresses native speakers' proficiency in collaborative sense-making through elliptical gaps. Finally, digital implicatures are based on suggestions with platform affordances (concision), rephrasing Gricean pragmatics into multimodal in which punctuation and emojis are not supplementary but essential to meaning.

5.3 RQ3: The Use of Implicature Difference Across Digital Platforms and User Intentions?

The analysis of implicature variation in online settings and user intention in the study, constrained as it is by its Reddit-domain data, demonstrates such main findings through thematic analysis. User intention—i.e., resistance against authority ("malicious compliance") vs. humor or boundary negotiation—drastically affects implicature strategy even on a particular platform. Conversational implicatures, for example, predominated as resistance against authority such as passive-aggressive obedience to defective orders, whereas sarcasm and the use of emojis enabled humor or solidarity. This corresponds to Yus's (2017) claim that user intent (hostility vs. friendship) determines pragmatic options. Lack of cross-platform comparison (TikTok, Facebook), however, prevents direct comparison, contrasting with Sigalingging et al.'s (2025) work comparing hate speech implicatures on TikTok, where visual/audio context allows for specific conventional implicatures. At a theme level, "malicious compliance" utilized Gricean maxim flouting (Quality/Relation), whereas boundary navigation utilized ellipsis for vagueness and involved more inferential effort—supporting Relevance Theory's emphasis on cognitive load (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). Unlike Rina et al. (2020) meme studies, where imagery acts as anchor points for conventional implicatures, text-based Reddit format necessitated lexical and punctuation markers. This implies platform affordances (e.g., TikTok multimodality and contrast with Reddit textual brevity) act as mediators of the marking of intent: Redditors reuse ellipses/emojis to fill gaps for missing non-verbal information, whereas TikTok uses audio-visual stratification (Sigalingging et al., 2025). Ultimately, implicature acts as an efficient, intention-guided toolkit, customizing for platform limitations and community conventions—skipping Dynel's (2016) meme model for everyday online discourse.

5.4 Implications

The findings of the study recognize that app interfaces should remove implicature-based vagueness. Predictive emoji cues (Herring & Dainas, 2017) and contextual tooltips clarifying elliptical utterances (marking "...") as potentially vague should be included by designers. Live "tone checks" can alert users when lexical choices (sarcasm in text) will most likely be misunderstood, rendering communication more understandable. Reddits and sites like them may introduce context-preservation mechanisms (shared references threaded) to minimize inferential effort, in accordance with Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 2025). Such developments would eliminate clashes because of inadvertent implicatures, making users happier.

Practical competence needs to be taught by teachers in digital literacy classes. The high rate of conversational implicatures (60.66%) and emoji cues (4.92%) demands explicit teaching to the students in interpreting multimodal implicatures (Eragamreddy, 2025). Classroom activities could include reading and interpreting Reddit posts to understand sarcasm or muted compliance, Gricean maxim mapping (Grice, 1975) to CMC. Mirzaei et al. (2016) task continuum of CMC would assist L2 learners with pragmatic awareness in the form of platform-specific interaction tasks (hesitation via the use of ellipses). Curricula need to include cross-platform variation—i.e., between implicatures on TikTok videos (Sigalingging et al., 2025) and text-only websites—so that learners can manage different digital contexts.

Implicature interpretation of cultural differences necessitates adaptive responses. For example, an ellipsis or an emoji may express frustration in one culture while expressing reserve in another (Yus, 2017). Apps should include cultural localization elements, e.g.,

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labeling culturally charged cues (explaining "malicious compliance" as a Western practice for indirect criticism). International apps may employ AI to alert on probable cross-cultural misinterpretations such as alerting when elliptical vagueness ("..."), may be misleading for high-context culture users. In addition, digital literacy training must include comparative pragmatics, utilizing research such as Rina et al. (2020) about memes, to demonstrate how culture affects implicature interpretation. This would solve the conflict associated with entitlement, as observed in boundary-navigation themes (Kelland et al., 2025).

5.5 Limitations and Recommendations

The study's sole focus on Reddit restricts generalizability. Purposive sampling of merely 10 posts from "intellectually rich" subreddits ignores various platforms including TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook etc., where multimodal signals (e.g., audio, video) construct implicature differently, as Sigalingging et al. (2025) established. Cultural specificity is not fulfilled: Reddit norms capture predominantly Western communication styles, whereas high-context cultures including East Asian, might specialize in indirectness through other means (Yus, 2017). Thus, research into "malicious compliance" or emoji usage perhaps does not travel around the world, particularly where there are established digital literacy customs or linguistic norms.

Subjectivity in coding for implicatures is still a fundamental constraint. Even where intercoder reliability testing is conducted, interpretive vagueness still remains. For example, ellipsis ambiguity ("...") was coded as "frustration" but elsewhere could signal hesitation or consideration. Detection of sarcasm was highly dependent upon coder intuition in terms of lexical tone in the absence of algorithmic support (sentiment analysis). Emoji interpretation ("😊" as more humour) assumes cultural homogeneity, while emoji meaning is not the same cross-culturally (Togans et al., 2021). The inductively emerging codes from the coding scheme ("emoji-based implicature") may overfit Reddit-specific trends. Human thematic analysis, while context-specific, maximized researcher bias in theming clusters like "boundary navigation" at the expense of sacrificing other readings. These align with Schreier's (2012) qualms against qualitative content analysis' susceptibility to subject framing, particularly when researching implicit meaning.

Cross-cultural studies should seek to transcend Western-dominated platforms like Reddit to investigate how cultural norms impact implicature interpretation. For instance, comparisons between high-context cultures (Japanese LINE chat) and low-context cultures (American Twitter) can be made to compare differences in emoji or ellipsis usage (Yus, 2017). Scholars could borrow Sigalingging et al.'s (2025) multimodal framework but extend it to non-hate speech situations, experimenting with how collectivist versus individualist cultures handle "boundary entitlement" implicatures (Kelland et al., 2025). Togans et al. (2021) comment on cultural variation in emoji meaning—quantify this through parallel corpora in future research, guiding culturally responsive AI applications. Long-term analysis is needed to monitor implicature change as online genres develop. Studies might redo Herring and Dainas's (2017) graphical study over 5–10 years, charting changes in irony or ambiguity strategies including ellipsis → emoji use. Platform-specific trends such as TikTok's audio implicatures vs. Reddit's text-based signals, would likely be obeyed according to Rina et al.'s (2020) semiotic framework, revealing how technological affordances induce pragmatic change. This would position fleeting moments like "malicious compliance" inside broader digital literacy streams. AI/ natural language processing (NLP)-based detection must adapt to react against coding subjectivity. Models such as BERT transformer models can be trained to annotate Gricean maxim violation conversational implicatures as tags but require culturally mixed training data so as not to bias (Hossain, 2021). NLP tools may include user history and platform convention—computational instantiations of Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory in addressing ellipsis ambiguity. Human-AI co-annotation systems like crowdsourced implicature tagging, can make reliability more robust and enable real-time "tone detection" functionality within apps.

6. CONCLUSION

This research posed three questions such as implicature types predominate in online communication, linguistic cues serve to trigger them and in what ways implicatures differ across platforms and user intention. Its thesis was that online platforms such as Reddit require special implicature strategies, in which multimodal cues (punctuation, emojis) and inference-based contexts substitute for a lack of non-verbal cues, reframing classic pragmatic theories (Grice, 1975; Sigalingging et al., 2025). The main findings showed conversational implicatures (60.66%) to be the main device of indirect criticism (malicious compliance), followed by sarcasm (24.59%) and ellipsis-based ambiguity (9.84%). Emojis (4.92%) were used as pragmatic tools for emotional intensification, with no appearance of scalar/conventional implicatures, resonating with Reddit's emphasis on contextual and multimodal over logical conventions. Thematic analysis was also able to pose the extent to which user intention i.e., resistance vs. humor, determines implicature deployment, although cross-platform variation was constrained by the Reddit-centred design. Finally, this study demonstrates that digital implicatures are not additional details to Gricean pragmatics but revolutions thereof, with emojis and ellipses being the prime players in meaning construction (Togans et al., 2021). Future research will need to broaden itself to various platforms and cultures to achieve an adequate vision of implicature's evolving digital landscape.

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