

Persuasive Illocutionary Speech Acts in Canva Advertisements on the Platform: A Linguistic Approach

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the types and functions of illocutionary speech acts used in Canva digital advertisements and their role in persuasive communication. The data consist of verbal texts extracted from 15 Canva advertisements published in June 2025. Using a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in Searle's speech act theory, this study examines assertive, commissive, directive, and expressive speech acts. The findings reveal that commissive speech acts dominate Canva advertisements, emphasizing promises and commitments to users, followed by assertive acts that enhance credibility. Expressive and directive acts appear less frequently, indicating a preference for soft persuasion strategies that maintain user autonomy. Data reveals commissive speech acts dominate Canva's approach at 89%, primarily through commitments to user empowerment and creative support. Assertives follow at 67%, establishing credibility through factual claims about design capabilities and platform accessibility. Expressives appear in 33% of cases, often reinforcing user confidence through value affirmations. Notably, directives remain minimal at 22%, suggesting strategic avoidance of overt persuasion tactics that might compromise perceived user autonomy. Practical recommendations include enhancing expressive elements during onboarding sequences where user anxiety peaks, embedding verifiable data within assertive claims about design outcomes, and refining commissive language for clearer expectation management regarding platform capabilities.

INTRODUCTION

In a period where digital technology carries on moulding human interactions and consumer decisions, advertising moves beyond simple persuasion. It acts as a form of discourse. This discourse influences perceptions and steers decisions. The move away from conventional media like newspapers, radio and television towards interactive digital platforms shows a growing need for linguistic research into persuasive strategies. It is at the centre of this transformation. It helps people and businesses to make attractive promotional content that uses strong language. The transformation from conventional marketing to digital strategies has reshaped the landscape, forcing businesses to change their

strategies to increase their visibility (Adillah, 2025). Canva is different from conventional media because it gives persuasive communication tools to everyone, not just the designers and advertising agencies that usually use them. Everyday users can whip up ads without much hassle. This broadening of design and language skills offers a fresh lens for examining illocutionary acts. The messages that emerge blend polished professional techniques with the spark of amateur ingenuity.

Research suggests that exploring illocutionary speech acts in Canva ads holds real value. It bridges linguistics and marketing communication. From a pragmatic angle, these acts reveal how language pushes beyond surface meanings to hit specific aims. In ads, that often means swaying, nudging, or even steering audiences toward choices that benefit the seller. Studies indicate that various media bring out distinct illocutionary strengths. Television spots, for instance, lean on expressive and assertive moves. Social media efforts, by contrast, spotlight directives and commitments. Canva ads, though, strike a different note. As semi-pro, user-friendly digital products, they create a mixed discourse style. It calls for deeper scrutiny. Good advertisements use simple language so that customers can understand them (Saputri et al., 2021) Studies on speech acts in a pragmatic context emphasize the relationship between language and action. Context is the main element in understanding the true meaning of an utterance (Indonesia et al., 2025) This is where illocutionary speech acts play an important role. The introduction of the principle of illocutionary acts is based on Searle's (1968) statement that an illocutionary act is the performance of a particular verbal function. He asserts that language is central to the illocutionary act (Mohammed, 2024). However, research on the use of illocutionary speech acts in the context of digital advertising, especially those created through design platforms such as Canva, is still limited. As (Saputri et al., 2021) An Analysis of Illocutionary Acts in Beauty Product Advertisements in Television Broadcast This study analyzes illocutionary speech acts in beauty product advertisements broadcast on television. The results show that beauty advertisements widely use commissive (such as promises of instant results or brighter skin) and expressive (such as praise of the product) speech acts. In addition, directives (such as an invitation to buy or try the product) are also often used to influence consumer decisions. These findings are in line with my research, which also explores the use of illocution in advertisements, however, the research is limited to television advertisements and beauty products, whereas my research focuses on digital advertisements on Canva covering a wide range of product types. The key differences lie in the media used and the terrain of the advertising.

This study is guided by three main research questions. First, it seeks to identify the predominant types of illocutionary speech acts employed in Canva advertisements. Second, it aims to examine how these speech acts are used strategically to achieve persuasive purposes in digital advertising discourse. Third, this study explores how the illocutionary strategies found in Canva advertisements differ from those commonly used in traditional advertising media. Previous studies on illocutionary speech acts have focused primarily on traditional advertising media, such as television, newspapers, banners, and social media. While these studies offer valuable insights into persuasive language strategies, they

have not addressed digital advertisements created through design platforms like Canva, where users actively participate in constructing advertising discourse. This study fills this gap by examining how illocutionary speech acts function in Canva advertisements, which combine professional design templates with user-generated content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of language strategies employed in such advertisements necessitates an understanding of illocutionary speech acts. In the domain of linguistic pragmatics, an illocutionary act is defined as the action initiated by a speaker through the utterance of a statement, with the intention of carrying a specific social intention and function that extends beyond the literal meaning of the words used. According to John Searle's theory, the illocutionary force constitutes the essence of a speech act, defined as "the use of a sentence to state something with a particular intention." The pragmatic power of an utterance to influence a hearer or reader is constituted by its intended function, which can be one of the following: promising (commissive), directing or requesting (directive), stating or asserting (assertive), expressing a psychological state (expressive), or bringing about a change in status (declarative). In the context of advertising, illocution is the primary mechanism through which language is transformed from mere information delivery into a tool of persuasion.

Empirical Review

Research on illocutionary speech acts has been conducted in various contexts, providing a deep understanding of their role in communication. For example, As (Putra et al., 2021) research entitled *Illocutionary Speech Acts in the Discourse of Advertisements in Sindo Newspaper* found that advertisements in print media often use assertive (such as product claims) and directive (such as calls to purchase) speech acts to influence readers. These findings are consistent with the focus of my research, which is to analyze illocutionary strategies in advertisements, but the study is limited to print media, while my research focuses on digital platforms such as Canva, which offers a unique combination of visual and verbal elements.

Another study, as (Zahirah & Ramdhani, 2023) *Illocutionary Acts in Commercial Advertisements and Its Contribution to Teaching Speaking*", shows that commercial advertisements make extensive use of commissive (such as promises of product benefits) and expressive (such as expressions of pleasure) speech acts to capture consumers' attention. This finding is relevant to my research, which also examines commissive and expressive speech acts, but the research emphasizes pedagogical aspects, while my research focuses on persuasive effectiveness in the context of digital design.

Meanwhile, (Fadlilah, 2022) *Illocutionary Speech Acts in Banners on Social Interaction and Language Politeness as Teaching Materials for Junior High School Level* found that advertising banners often use polite and persuasive speech acts, such as subtle invitations (directive) and expressions of appreciation (expressive). These results are relevant to my research, especially in terms of the use of directive and expressive, but the study focuses more on physical media such as banners, while my research explores digital advertising on Canva. The study by (Yustita et al., 2022) titled *The Illocutionary Speech Act of Public officers in Electronic Media to Increase the Value of Student Character Education* found that public officers frequently use premonitory and suggestive speech

acts to impact cult. Although the context is different, this study shows how illocution is used for persuasive purposes, which is in line with the focus of my research.

The research (Widyaningsih et al., 2024) *Illocutionary Speech Acts in Advertisements in Public Spaces and Their Integration in Learning Advertising Texts in Junior High School* discloses that advertisements in public spaces use a lot of directives and commissives. These results are similar to the focus of my research, but the research is limited to physical advertisements, while my research explores digital advertisements on Canva. Meanwhile, (Komalasari et al., 2022) *Directive Speech Acts on Commercial Advertising Discourse of Electronic Media and Its Implementation as Indonesian Language Teaching Material in Junior High Schools* found that advertisements in electronic media often use directives (such as calls to purchase) and assertives (such as product claims). These results are in line with my research, but the study emphasizes more on the pedagogical aspects, while my research focuses on persuasive strategies in digital design.

Finally the study (Fadlilah, 2022) *Analysis of Speech Act of Instant Noodle Advertisement 50th on Television* identified that instant noodle advertisements on television widely use commissive and suggestive speech acts. These results are relevant to my research, but the research is limited to one type of product and television media, while my research covers various types of advertisements on the Canva platform.

This article analyses the use of illocutionary speech acts in persuasive advertisements created on the Canva platform. Specifically, the study aims to identify which types of illocutionary speech acts are generally used in Canva announcements, including directive, commissive, assertive and expressive acts. Additionally, this article aims to uncover the linguistic strategies used by ad creators in combining verbal and visual elements to create persuasive messages. This research analyses examples of Canva ads to understand how illocutionary speech acts influence audience perceptions, emotions and actions. In addition, this article aims to provide practical recommendations for graphic designers, marketers, and businesses to use illocutionary strategies to increase the effectiveness of their advertisements. Through a pragmatic linguistic approach, this article aims to make a theoretical contribution to the understanding of the mechanisms of persuasion in the context of digital media, while at the same time offering applicable insights that can be used in everyday advertising practice.

This composition provides multiple benefits, both theoretical and practical. For academics, this exploration enriches the study of realistic linguistics, especially in the environment of conclusive converse in digital media. For practitioners, such as designers and marketers, this article provides practical insights into the use of illocutionary strategies to increase the effectiveness of Canva ads. Thus, this article not only contributes to the advancement of science, but also provides applicable solutions for the creative industry.

METHOD

Research Design

This research was done using qualitative descriptive methods (Widyaningsih et al., 2024). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore linguistic meanings and strategies in detail, especially in the context of complex and creative language use in advertisements.

Data source

The data consisted of the verbal content from 15 digital advertisements published by Canva during the first week of June 2025.

Data collection

This research involved starting with data collection through document observation, which involved collecting examples of Canva ads that contained persuasive elements. The advertisements were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) presence of persuasive verbal elements; (2) relevance to Canva’s core features; (3) representation of diverse product categories. The ads were documented using screenshots.


Data analysis procedure





This study's unit of analysis is sentences and slogans with illocutionary force. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis based on Searle’s classification of illocutionary speech acts.





Once the data was collected, data reduction was performed by focusing on persuasive texts in the ads that were hypothesized to contain illocutionary acts. These texts were then grouped based on their persuasive functions and categorized based on the types of illocutionary speech acts using Searle's theory, which includes directive (invitation or command), commissive (promise or offer), assertive (statement or claim), expressive (expression of emotion or appreciation), and declarative (statement that changes status).

After data reduction, the data presentation phase was carried out using qualitative content analysis with a pragmatic approach. The analysis steps included: (1) identifying and isolating persuasive texts in the advertisements, (2) categorizing the texts based on the types of illocutionary speech acts according to Searle's theory, (3) analyzing the functions and persuasive strategies of each speech act, and (4) interpreting the results in the context of the purpose of the advertisements. The findings are then presented descriptively to provide a comprehensive understanding of how illocutionary speech acts are strategically used in Canva advertisements to create persuasive and impactful messages. Finally, the study ends with a conclusion in which the researcher summarizes the main findings, relates them to the research objectives, and discusses their implications in the broader context of advertising and pragmatics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Content	Text excerpt	Analysis of Searle theory
 <p>Curi perhatian dengan konten premium</p>	<i>Curi perhatian dengan konten premium</i>	his is expressive. Expressing a positive attitude through the metaphor of <i>Curi</i> and the value of <u>premium</u>
	<i>Dengan satu langganan...tanpa batas</i>	It’s a commissive. Promise of creative freedom as Canva's commitment (Searle: Speaker commitment)
	<i>100 juta-an stok foto, video...</i>	This is assertive. Factual claim about feature (Searle:State representation)
Content 02	<i>Buat kreasi desain baik</i>	This is assertive. <i>Professional A</i> statement that affirms the user's ability (Searle: Representation of reality)

 <p>Buat kreasi desain bak Profesional</p> <p>Tingkatkan produktivitas dengan alat yang praktis. Dapatkan paket Canva Pro 1 hari, harga mulai Rp14.000.</p> <p>Aktifkan paket sekarang</p>	<p><i>Tingkatkan produktivitas</i></p>	<p>It's a commissive. Promise of improved outcomes (Searle: Commitment to future benefits)</p>
<p>Content 03</p>  <p>Kekuatan super media sosial</p> <p>Libatkan pengikut Anda dalam segala hal yang Anda butuhkan untuk membuat desain, animasi, dan video profesional, serta masih banyak lagi.</p> <p>Mengubah ukuran desain dengan cepat</p> <p>Lupakan kesulitan dalam mengubah ukuran desain Anda untuk berbagai platform. Biarkan Canva mengurusnya untuk Anda dengan satu ketukan.</p>	<p><i>Kekuatan super media sosial</i></p>	<p>This is assertive. Claims of platform superiority (Searle: State representation)</p>
<p>Content 04</p>  <p>Pemasaran menjadi mudah</p> <p>Biarkan kreativitas Anda mengalir dengan akses ke seluruh pustaka konten kami, tanpa perlu membayar biaya tambahan apa pun.</p> <p>Menginspirasi kreativitas</p> <p>Dengan lebih dari 90 juta+ gambar dan grafik, Anda tidak akan kehabisan gambar untuk digunakan, untuk mewujudkan desain Anda.</p>	<p><i>Pemasaran menjadi mudah</i></p>	<p>Statements that emphasize ease (Searle: Representation of states)</p>
<p><i>libatkan pengikut anda...</i></p>	<p><i>libatkan pengikut anda...</i></p>	<p>It's a commissive. Promise interactive benefits (Searle: Commitment to feature provision)</p>
<p><i>Biarkan Canva mengurusnya</i></p>	<p><i>Biarkan Canva mengurusnya</i></p>	<p>It's a commissive. Offer automated solutions (Searle: Commitment of action_future)</p>
<p><i>ubah ukuran desain dengan cepat</i></p>	<p><i>ubah ukuran desain dengan cepat</i></p>	<p>This is assertive. Efficiency statement (Searle: Representation of ability)</p>
<p>Content 05</p>  <p>Terlihat profesional</p> <p>Tidak bisa mendesain, tidak masalah. Mulai mendesain dengan berbagai alat dan template kami.</p> <p>Konsistensi merek dalam sekali klik</p> <p>Pertahankan merek pada desain tanpa repot, dengan KIT Merek. Cukup tambahkan warna, logo, dan font merek pada desain Anda.</p>	<p><i>terlihat profesional</i></p>	<p>Statements that confirm results (Searle: State representation)</p>
<p><i>tidak bisa mendesain, tidak masalah</i></p>	<p><i>tidak bisa mendesain, tidak masalah</i></p>	<p>Calming users (Searle: Expression of attitude)</p>

<p>Content 06</p>  <p>Penghapus latar belakang gambar Hapus latar belakang gambar yang mengganggu dalam sekali klik. Terlihat rapi. Tanpa repot.</p>	<i>Hapus latar belakang...sekali klik</i>	Promise of convenience (Searle: Commitment to a solution)
	<i>terlihat rapi</i>	Claim of results (Searle: Representation of circumstances)
	<i>tanpa repot</i>	Touching on negative emotions (Searle: Expression of attitude)
	<i>Hapus latar belakang...sekali klik</i>	Promise of convenience (Searle: Commitment to a solution)
<p>Content 07</p> <p>Bergabunglah bersama ratusan organisasi yang membuat desain menggunakan Canva</p>  <p>Fitur yang tersedia di Pro</p> <p>Desain dan Publikasi</p> <p>Gunakan gratis seluruh isi pustaka konten kami</p> <p>Akses ke semua fitur Studio Ajaib</p>	<i>Bergabunglah bersama ratusan organisasi</i>	Social value promise (Searle: Association commitment)
	<i>Daftar brand (Anytime Pitness, Pinterest)</i>	Credibility evidence (Searle: Fact representation)
	<i>Gunakan gratis seluruh pustaka</i>	Access promise (Searle: Provision commitment)
	<i>Akses ke semua fitur Studio Ajaib</i>	Exclusive feature promise (Searle: Capability commitment)
<p>Content 08</p>  <p>Aktifkan paket untuk menggunakan template ini</p> <p>Dapatkan template terbaik kami</p>	<i>Aktifkan paket untuk template ini</i>	Action commands (Searle: Attempts to direct behavior) Quality promises (Searle: Commitments to provision)
	<i>Dapatkan template terbaik</i>	Quality promises (Searle: Commitments to provision)
<p>Content 09</p>  <p>Buat kreasi desain bak Profesional</p> <p>Berikut ini yang dapat Anda lakukan selanjutnya</p> <p>RANCANG PROYEK BERSAMA TEMAN</p>	<i>Buat kreasi desain bak Profesional</i>	Competency claims (Searle: Representation of circumstances)
	<i>Rancang proyek bersama teman</i>	Collaboration promises (Searle: Facility commitments)
	<i>Buka template kerja kelompok</i>	Navigation guides (Searle: Attempts to direct)

Source : Canva Platform

The analysis indicates that commissives are by far the most commonly presented modal verb in Canva advertising tactics with 89% of ads featuring them (whether as the main act or otherwise), and even more than half run with the act as the primary act, indicating the relative importance Canva places on marketing the offers that are traditionally associated with promises, and other advantages like discounts they provide or giving you access to experience features normally reserved for paid subscribers. Assertives occur in survey ads in 67% of ads in total, and served mainly as to help

credibility via fact or ability. Expressives though used considerably less often - at 33% - were especially critical for marketing efforts suggesting reassurance of a user who is insecure about ability or conveying a path that could help the reader gain access to excitement, while directives were in only 22% of ads, and only present where the ad contained a "call to action" using 'Bergabunglah' (Join Us) but not further than that. These distributions conveyed a story about the type of tactics Canva was running; for the most part, advertising promises and offers as the persuading anchor to the advertisements and supplementing with fact, reversion to emotion occasionally and of course, a clearly subordinate role for command and directive.

Table 1. Frequency of type illocutionary act in Canva

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Commissive	13	89%
Assertive	10	67%
Expressive	5	33%
Directive	3	22%

The findings suggest that Canva advertisements primarily use commissive speech acts to persuade users by making promises and commitments. These results support pragmatic theories that view persuasion as a trust-based communicative process rather than a direct command. The results of this study contribute to advertising discourse studies by highlighting Canva as a hybrid digital advertising platform that softens persuasive language to align with user autonomy and expectations.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Canva advertisements primarily use commissive speech acts, supported by assertive acts to increase credibility. Expressive and directive acts play minor roles. These findings confirm the continued relevance of classical illocutionary speech act theory for analyzing contemporary digital advertising discourse. This study contributes to the fields of pragmatic linguistics and advertising studies by demonstrating how persuasion is adapted on user-centered digital platforms.

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