Metaphor in Online Hate Speech: A Semantic Study of Hate Comment on Beyonce's Instagram

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ABSTRACT
This study examines the use of metaphors in hate speech targeting Beyoncé on Instagram, focusing on comments related to the controversy of her alleged involvement with Puff Diddy Using qualitative methods, including semantic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research identifies 41 metaphorical instances (61.2%) from 67 hate speech comments. Dominant types include Gestures or Symbol Metaphors (36.6%) and Provocation Through Metaphor (31.7%), revealing their covert role in disguising hostility. The findings highlight the psychological and emotional harm inflicted through dehumanization, sarcasm, and stereotyping. Public figures like Beyoncé are particularly vulnerable to such attacks due to their prominence. This study underscores the need for advanced detection tools and ethical practices to mitigate metaphorical hate speech. Future research should explore the cultural and psychological drivers behind such behaviour to foster safer digital interactions.

INTRODUCTION

Technology offers numerous convinces and novel approaches to human activity (Al-Kansa et al., 2023). The current technology has brought human beings to a more developed civilization. Almost all the working procedures and tasks run more accessible and faster, not to mention its limitless border. Distance is no longer a severe problem in communication since social media takes its place to alter one's existence (Barlian & Wijayanto, 2021). In this context, social media is one of the biggest innovations that allow individuals to connect and interact in a vast digital space. The use of social media and online news site tends to increase year by year, causing a lot of new information on social media. Everyone is allowed to expose anything through their social media profiles (Sadat et al., n.d.)

Within less than two decades, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter and TikTok have become ubiquitous in the everyday media consumption behaviour of billions of citizens worldwide (Yohanna, 2020.). Social media has a great role in shaping worldview and attitude towards events (Chkheidze et al., 2022). Social media is nowadays a platform that is widely used by people. Social media is not only a place to post daily life, selling products, but it is also used as a means to convey the expression of each individual, be it appreciating or criticizing. Social media has given way to information and *prosumption-oriented* discursive fields wherein individuals construct their own social identities. Although interactivity, multimodality, *user centeredness* and accessibility are the unique aspects of digital media but the fact that digital media as effective spaces for representing extreme self/other representation while being anonymous and free from following social norms, can cause dysfunctional social behaviours such as cyber hate (Ghaffari, 2022) However, it is not uncommon for criticism to cross the line into hate speech that targets the personality characteristics or identity of a public figure. Hate speech is considered a means of using one's own feelings, emotions, attitudes rudely, humiliating and belittling the personality of others (Chkheidze et al., 2023). Hate speech is often used in emphasizing the predominance of one's power and will. In competitive situations, this form of verbal aggression, as well as the hate speech used by public figure, creates a context that affects society (Chkheidze et al., 2022). Hate speech in Indonesia has increased significantly. These incidents often originate from social media platforms such as Instagram (Novernia et al., 2024).

Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms in the world, especially among young adults (Kota et al., n.d.). On Instagram, we often find hate speech in the comment section that attacks individual characteristics, private lives, that mocks physicality, gender and even often we find hate speech related to politics. Instagram is currently the social media platform most associated with online images (and their analysis), but images from other platforms also can be collected and grouped, arrayed by similarity, stacked, matched, stained, labelled, depicted as network, placed side by side (Rogers, 2021). The hate speech that is found is not only hate speech that attacks the individual or group directly, or with words of derogatory insults. Often hate speakers express their hate without directly stating their hatred openly. They often use figurative language, make subtle but negative and piercing comments, and create an emotional impact on the audience.

This study focuses on the hate speech found in the comments of Beyoncé's Instagram posts that are influenced by the issue of the case that is currently in the news, that is, her involvement with P Diddy. Beyoncé is a singer and publ ic figure who has many fans around the world. She has about 314 million followers on her Instagram, and she also received 70 nominations from the Grammy Awards. After rumours of her association with P Diddy spread, many netizens are digging up old videos, including moments from the Grammy Awards.

In the past, the award speeches of the Grammy winners who often mentioned or praised Beyonce were considered normal. However, after the P Diddy issue emerged, this behaviour is now seen as an attempt to protect themselves, the careers and lives out of Beyonce, Jay-Z and P Diddy from being threatened. Instagram users or netizens began to flood comments on Beyoncé's Instagram posts with thank-you notes, but with hidden metaphorical meanings.

Despite the expanding number of research on hate speech in digital spaces, few have thoroughly studied how metaphorical language is used to disguise animosity particularly in the context of celebrity culture on sites like Instagram. Most previous research focuses on overt hate speech, however metaphorical expressions typically elude detection due to their implicit and symbolic nature. This study is notable because it uncovers the covert use of metaphors in online hate speech, illustrating how such language can have major psychological and societal repercussions while being unnoticed by automatic moderation systems. Moreover, while past studies (e.g., Ghaffari, 2022; Chkheidze et al., 2023) have studied hate speech generically, they lack deep semantic analysis of metaphorical structures within the speech acts. Therefore, this research fills a gap by integrating semantic and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to evaluate metaphorical hate aimed at an internationally renowned person Beyoncé in the specific situation of allegations involving her supposed association with P. Diddy. This combination of figurative language, celebrity discourse, and digital aggression constitutes a novel addition to linguistic and media studies

Through a semantic approach, this study aims to examine the use of hate speech metaphors found in comments on Beyoncé's Instagram account, especially those influenced by the issue of her association with the P Diddy case. Through a semantic approach, this study will explore how metaphors are used to convey hateful messages that are not only layered, but also manipulate the meaning behind speech that appears to be a form of praise or appreciation. As well as understanding how such metaphors contribute to the intensity of the hate being conveyed, or reinforce the hateful message that is trying to be conveyed.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies language. Semantic studies discuss the meaning of language or the meaning of language. In linguistics, metaphor is included in the field of semantics (Hidayah & Oktavia, 2019). Harara, (2022) says that metaphor is one figurative language that means an analogy of one thing to another. Metaphore is the use of a word or series of words not with the actual meaning (Ruchel, 2018). Then, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in (Monika, 2020) on the classical view, metaphor can be defined as a figure of speech or figure of speech in which a comparison is made between two things that have certain characteristics in common. Where the word or series of words is used to compare 2 things or make similarities between the two, it is also used to convey something by using words that do not have direct meaning or have hidden meaning. (Rahayu, 2019 in Aprilia et al., 2022) metaphorical language style has the meaning of comparing one thing with another without using connecting words as a comparison. Meanwhile, according to Lakoff & Johnson (2003), p.3 in Widiasri & Nur, (2021), metaphors reflect what we experience, feel, and think in everyday life. Conceptual metaphors are the result of mental construction based on the principle of analogy that involves conceptualizing one element to another.

Hate Speech

Hate speech is fundamentally different from speech in general, although it contains anger and attacks and is usually emotional (Abdillah et al., 2023). Hate speech does not have a unified purpose. Hate speech can take permanent forms - e.g. racial epithets, insults, dehumanising metaphors, group defamation and negative stereotypes - but can also take transient forms. Hate speech can exist in various forms: written words, spoken words and audio-visual materials - e.g. gestures, symbols, images, films and video-games. Hate speech is not ascribed to any specific genre or rhetorical style, as it can range from thoughtful comments in a parliamentary speech to improvised sarcastic comments in an online post. Hate speech can involve many negative illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, such as insulting, degrading, humiliating, harassing, threatening, provoking, inciting hatred, hostility or violence and denying, justifying or glorifying acts of genocide. Hate speech is sometimes overt and unconcealed, but ever-increasingly coded and veiled (Becker 2020 in (Guillén-Nieto, 2023).

Speech Act

Speech acts according to Chaer and Agustina (2010) in Mufadhdhal (2021) are defined as individual symptoms that are psychological in nature, where the continuity of the process of these symptoms is determined by the capacity of a speaker's language skills in dealing with certain situations. Locutionary speech acts are speech acts used to express something and Illocutionary speech acts are speech acts identified with performative sentences that explicitly show a certain action or intention (Tarigan, 2009, pp. 35 in Sayibah, 2024). In a semantic context, illocutionary acts in hate speech include actions such as insulting, demeaning, threatening, or provoking. For example, when someone uses dehumanizing metaphors in hate speech, the act is directly intended to demean or humiliate a particular group. These linguistic acts contain semantically clear meanings, although they can sometimes be encoded or disguised. Meanwhile, perlocutionary acts involve the effect or impact of hate speech on the audience, such as arousing hatred, fear, or even violence towards a particular target. For example, the use of negative symbols or stereotypes in hate speech can trigger the audience to take hostile actions or justify acts of violence.

An Illocutionary act is an act of doing something with a purpose and a specific function anyway. Speech acts can be considered as the act of doing something. Perlocutionary act is a follow-growing influence (effect) to the hearer. This speech act can be called by the act of affecting someone (Anwar, 2022)

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, emphasizing semantic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Abdul Malik et al., 2022). The semantic approach is utilized to uncover hidden meanings within comments on Beyoncé's Instagram, specifically those containing metaphors that convey covert hate speech. These metaphors often disguise hateful messages under the guise of praise, gratitude, or appreciation, which may seem positive but carry insinuating or demeaning undertones. CDA enables an exploration of the relationship between the language used in the comments and the social context surrounding the rumors of Beyoncé's involvement with P Diddy. This combined approach aims to reveal how metaphors function as subtle tools for expressing hostility in online interactions. The data for this study were sourced from comments on Beyoncé's Instagram account, which boasts over 314 million followers. Comments relevant to the rumors of Beyoncé's involvement with P Diddy were selected from posts closely related to the issue. These

posts were chosen based on their timing, particularly during periods when the issue gained significant public attention. Data collection was conducted using purposive sampling, targeting comments that appear positive such as expressions of gratitude or appreciation but may conceal hate speech or innuendo. Following data collection, a semantic analysis was conducted to identify the metaphors used and to interpret the hidden meanings behind the comments. This methodological approach ensures a thorough examination of the covert mechanisms of hate speech in the context of social media interactions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data in this study were screenshotted from Beyoncé's Instagram account. This data is representative of comments on the Instagram user accounts of well-known and respected artists, which include hate speech hate and also hate speech comments containing metaphors. The celebrity chosen is Beyoncé. She was chosen because she has 314 million followers and Beyoncé is one of the most well-respected artists in the music industry, with an impressive collection of awards throughout her career.

Table-1 Total hate speech that has been collected

No	Types of hate speech	Total
1	Insults	49
2	Dehumanising Metaphors	11
3	Sarcasm	3
4	Symbols	4
	Total	**67**

From the table-1 above, the study presents the shocking figure of 67 instances of hate speech that were collected from comments. This analysis underlines the prevalence and intensity of online hostility, particularly when it targets a public figure. The breakdown of types of hate speech is given below:

1. insults are dominant with an amazing 49 occurrences, which is the majority of the hateful interactions; these direct attacks reflect the unfiltered aggression that characterizes much of online discourse;

2. dehumanizing metaphors constitute 11 cases, showing how language is used to dehumanize individuals, reducing them to objects or immoral entities;

3. whereas sarcasm is less frequent in the text, at 3 cases, it serves to be a subtle but also cutting tool in mocking others as wit;

4. symbolic Hate manifests in 4 occurrences, utilizing gestures, emojis, or other non-verbal forms to amplify negative sentiments.

These numbers denote the alarming scale of hostility in social media platforms, and with over 73% coming solely from insults, immediate notice shall be given to mechanisms facilitating such toxic behavior in the online sphere.

Table-2 From 67 hate speeches that contain metaphors

No	Metaphors of hate speech	Total
1	Provocation or Incitement Through Metaphor	13
2	Sarcasm or Irony through Metaphor	3
3	Insult through metaphor	2
4	Dehumanising Metaphor	5
5	Negative Stereotypes through Metaphors	1
6	Gestures or Symbol Metaphors	15

7	Transient Form with Situational Metaphors	1
8	Group Defamation with Implicit Metaphors	1
	Total	**41**

According to table-2, among the 67 cases of hate speech, 41 comments importantly used metaphors to disguise their hostile intentions. This analysis has highlighted how metaphors, normally thought of as creative tools of expression, are twisted into subtle yet powerful tools of injury. The metaphorical hate speech distribution is as follows.

Gestures or Symbol Metaphors top the list with 15 occurrences, underlining the power of non-verbal elements in general and emojis and symbols in particular in delivering a hate message with precision and emotive power. Outright Provocation or Incitement Through Metaphor is also a major strategy, showing up in 13 cases. These metaphors will be aimed at stirring anger, fear, or blame and are designed to manipulate public perception.

The dehumanizing metaphors occur in 5 instances, denying the individual their humanity by equating them with immoral or inhuman entities. This is where the psychological impact may be deeper. Irony or sarcasm through metaphor is found in only 3 cases, but cuts sharper because of the way it speaks its mind with praise or humor. Insult through metaphor was identified in 2 cases, where the attack against the person is indirect and is cushioned by a figure of speech.

Negative Stereotyping by Metaphors, Transient Form with Situational Metaphors, and Group Defamation with Implicit Metaphors occur once each, to show that they are rare but sharp tools in online hostility. This data shows the alarming adaptability of hate speech, whereby metaphors turn apparently innocuous language into masked aggression. The prevalence of such tools requires strong mechanisms for identifying and addressing these masked layers of hostility in online discourse.
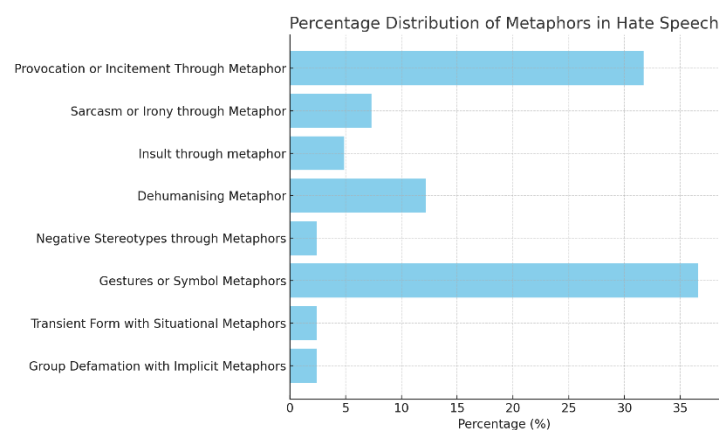

Chart-1 *Percentage Distribution of Metaphors in Hate Speech*

The chart-1 illustrates the proportional use of various metaphorical techniques in the analyzed hate speech. Key observations include:

1. gestures or Symbol Metaphors lead the chart at 36.6%, reflecting their prevalence as subtle yet effective ways to express hostility through non-verbal elements like emojis and symbols;

2. provocation or Incitement Through Metaphor follows with 31.7%, showing the effectiveness of this method in manipulating emotions and inciting negativity among audiences;

3. dehumanizing Metaphors constitute 12.2%, which takes away the target's humanity and multiplies the psychological damage it inflicts; the use of sarcasm or irony through metaphor, though only comprising 7.3%, is a sophisticated way to mask hostility with humor or irony. Insult through Metaphor, at 4.9%, shows how insults can be conveyed through figurative language to protect the speaker from being held directly accountable;

4. rare techniques include Negative Stereotypes Through Metaphors 2.4%, Transient Form with Situational Metaphors 2.4%, and Group Defamation with Implicit Metaphors 2.4% show how versatile hate speech can be masked.

This analysis underlines the complex role of metaphors in digital hate speech; it shows how they can camouflage their hostile intentions under a cloak of creativity. The symbolic and provocative metaphors dominated, thus calling for efficient mechanisms for detection to control their impact in online spaces.

Discussion

This study shows that Beyoncé's popularity not only attracts admiration from her fans, but also makes her a target for hate speech. Much of the hate speech relates to certain stereotypes or is provoked by controversial issues that are often speculative in nature. This phenomenon reflects the broader challenges public figures face in managing digital media. 4 Metaphors with a high frequency of occurrence are as follows:

1. Dominance of Insults and Metaphors

From 67 total hate speeches found, the majority of hate speeches that use or contain metaphors with a significant number (41 comments) show that some users tend to use indirect language to convey hatred. Even though the language is harsh, the exact intent of the hate speech is not clearly displayed or disguised. But there is also hate speech in the form of direct insults (26 comments), showing hatred and insults that are done directly.

Here are some comments that are direct insults that do not contain the following metaphors:

All three of the comments above directly show the intent of the hate speech, which is the hatred towards the public figure, and also directly saying that the song is a bad song.

Hate speech that contains insults and also contains metaphors:

Directly analyzed, the comment contains expressions of dislike or hatred towards Beyoncé and Jay-Z. This comment is categorized as Provocation or Incitement Through Metaphor because it contains serious accusations that are not only personally offensive but also trigger other readers' emotions to also blame Beyoncé and Jay-Z.

According to Mirosław Karwat's Theory of Provocation in the book "Studies in Politics, Security and Society," A provocation is the behavior of someone who wants to trigger anger, aggression, objection, or other attitudes that we normally do not show, and often harm us in such a way. There are two forms of manipulation-provocation. First, deceitful direct control, meaning influencing someone's consciousness,

will, emotions, knowledge, or mental agility. Second, indirect control, that is influencing the conditions of a given subject's functioning that affect his imagination, perspicacity, consistency, and objectively available range of maneuvers (Karwat, 2022).

This comment belongs to a form of manipulation-provocation with two aspects, deceptive **direct control**. The user tries to influence the audience's emotions, consciousness and will to see Beyoncé and Jay-Z negatively. **Indirect control**, the user through framing directs the reader's imagination to associate these two figures with serious criminal charges, even without clear evidence. These comments not only reflect personal hatred but also serve as tools of provocation that influence public perception, especially by utilizing inciting and accusatory metaphors. This research shows how hate speech on social media often employs deep metaphorical strategies to manipulate readers' emotions and awareness.

2. Gestures or Symbol Metaphors

According to Jellyan (2019) when talking about symbols, at the same time we also talk about metaphors, which are one type of symbols referred to as spoken symbols. In this case, metaphors are not limited to verbal expressions, but can also be visual elements such as symbols or gestures. Therefore, in the context of hate speech, the use of emoticons or visual gestures can be considered a symbolic form of metaphor designed to amplify negative emotions.

The use of Gestures or Symbol Metaphors was found in 15 cases in this data, showing that hateful expressions on social media often use non-verbal elements such as symbols or gestures. These symbols and gestures not only serve as emotional amplifiers but also contain deep metaphorical meanings. The following is a detailed analysis of some of the comments that contain Gestures or Symbol Metaphors:
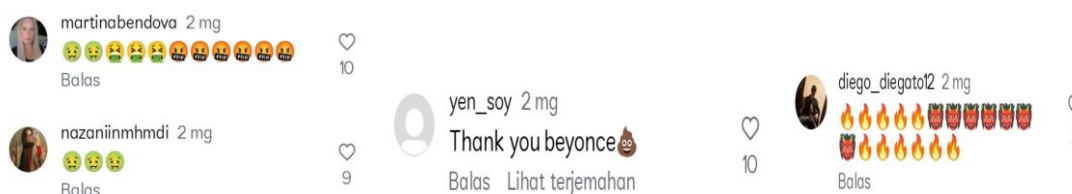
Data 1

In the first comment, there are emoticons that show gestures of disgust, vomiting, and anger that emphasize the user's dislike and disgust towards Beyoncé. These emoticons are used to intensify the disgust towards Beyoncé. In Jellyan's theory, this emoticon acts as a visual symbol that articulates metaphors of disgust and hatred. The use of this emoticon clarifies the implied meaning to be conveyed without the need to use many words.

Data 2

The dislike is emphasized in the emoticons included in the comment. Where the public figure is compared to poop that is disgusting and unappreciated. In a metaphorical context, this emoticon is a powerful symbol of hatred, reinforcing the message that the target is considered worthless.

Data 3

In the third comment, hate is emphasized with emoticons of the devil and fire. Where the metaphorical meaning contained is stating that the artist has a character that resembles the devil. The use of these emoticons carries the metaphorical meaning that the artist is associated with an evil or

demonic nature. Fire reinforces the negative connotation by implying destruction or punishment. In Jellyan's view, these emoticons are visual symbols that create metaphors of hatred towards the target.

Therefore, emoticons as a form of visual symbols become an effective expressive tool to articulate feelings of hatred that are not only visible to the reader but also felt through deep metaphorical associations. This suggests that symbols, both verbal and visual, are key elements in hate speech on social media.

3. **Dehumanization Metaphors**

5 cases of dehumanizing metaphors were found in the data collected. Dehumanizing metaphors are intended to convey hatred that is very degrading, by describing the subject with something dehumanizing. The impact of these dehumanizing metaphors will worsen or further emphasize the negative effects of the speech. Haslam (2006) in Farhan 2024.) talks about dehumanization, described in Dehumanization: An Integrative Review, defines dehumanization as the denial of the essence of one's humanity. He classifies dehumanization into two main forms: **Animalistic** dehumanization, which is when humans are equated with animals, so that they are considered to be without intelligence, morality, or other attributes that are unique to humans. **Mechanistic** dehumanization, which is when humans are treated like machines or objects that lack emotion, warmth, or the traits that make them "alive."
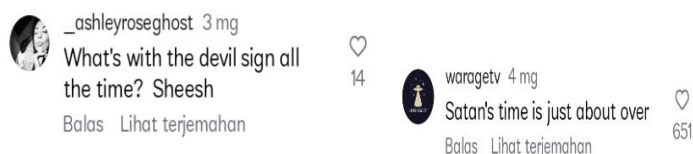
In the data above, the subject (Beyoncé) is equated with satan or evil, which describes traits such as heartless, malicious, cruel, greedy and inhumane. This clearly falls under the animalistic category as the association with satan removes aspects of the subject's humanity and replaces them with attributes that are completely contrary to human nature. While satan is not a literal animal, this association leads to animalistic dehumanization as the subject is positioned as an entity that falls outside the human category, without morality or common sense. Satan as a symbol is the antithesis of ideal human nature.

4. **Sarcasm or Irony through Metaphor**

Sarcasm is mocking and often involves hard labor to achieve savage disappointment, although it can also be softer as an increase in politeness and a reduction in hostility around criticism (Dews & Winner, 1995 in Author et al., 2022). Sarcasm is a contradiction between positive sentiment and a negative situation. In the data analysis, 3 cases of Sarcasm or Irony through Metaphor were found, with two main examples:
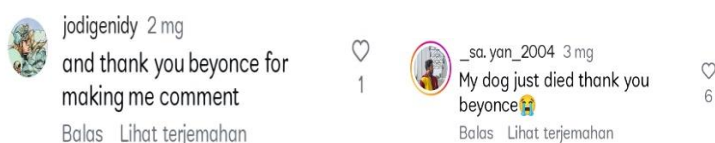
Data 1

The first comment looks like a positive sentiment, but it actually contains sarcasm because the comment is not made purely from the heart or pure gratitude. This comment is a mockery and emphasizes how everyone should be grateful to Beyoncé even if it is not something important. In accordance with Dews and Winner's theory, this comment uses the contradiction between a positive tone (thank you) and negative feelings towards the situation to convey a veiled criticism.

Data 2

This comment connects a negative event (the death of the dog) with an irrelevant statement of gratitude towards Beyoncé. The sarcasm here arises from the absurdity and contradiction between the positive sentiment (thank you) and the sad situation (dog just died). According to theory, this comment uses irony to create a deep sense of mockery, implying that Beyoncé is the cause of the bad feelings, even though there is no real connection logically.

CONCLUSION

This study has brought to the fore an alarming prevalence of metaphors as tools of hate speech on social media, highlighting how potent these can be in veiling hostility behind a screen of creativity. Out of 67 cases of hate speech analyzed, as many as 61.2% (41 comments) involved metaphorical elements; 36.6% involved Gestures or Symbol Metaphors, and 31.7% involved Provocation Through Metaphor. These findings show how metaphors turn language into sharp instruments of psychological manipulation, which subtly embed hate in forms that evade immediate detection.

The findings underline how insidious metaphorical hate speech is, extending from direct insults to dehumanization, sarcasm, and stereotyping, which enhances the effect. Beyoncé is a global celebrity with more than 314 million followers across social media platforms, demonstrating how fame is a double-edged sword in the digital age: it brings in wider influence but also invites ceaseless scrutiny, provocation, and hostility. This study highlights how public figures are disproportionately targeted, with metaphors weaponized to strip away their humanity, incite aggression, and manipulate audience perceptions.

However, this study is not without limits. First, it focuses primarily on a single case study Instagram comments aimed at Beyoncé in response to a specific controversy which may restrict the generalizability of findings to other celebrities, platforms, or sociocultural situations. Second, the data collection relied on purposeful sampling without longitudinal tracking, which may have excluded evolving patterns of metaphorical hate over time. Lastly, while semantic and CDA techniques gave valuable qualitative insights, adding sentiment analysis or machine learning could boost the identification of latent hate in future studies. Future study should therefore examine bigger datasets, incorporate comparison instances across other digital platforms, and utilise mixed-method approaches to capture the developing dynamics of metaphorical hate speech more fully.

The gravity of the finding demands urgent action. Mechanisms for identifying hate speech at present are inadequate for dealing with its metaphorical dimensions, which disguise malign intention beneath layers of subtlety. Advanced semantic and contextual analytical tools are urgently required for the detection of these masked hostilities. Furthermore, this implies a need to educate the public about media literacy and ethics in digital communication with a view to empowering them and reducing the propagation of toxic interactions.

Beyond detection, this study calls for deep exploration of the psychological, cultural, and societal drivers of metaphorical hate speech; future studies should address, among other things, motivations for engaging in such behavior and what structural conditions enable it to happen. Only by understanding the roots can effective intervention strategies be developed that guarantee healthier and respectful online discourse. This work is a crucial step toward the unmasking of the mechanisms of hate speech and the call for a safe and inclusive digital space.

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