Understanding the Role of Language on Twitter: From Hashtag to Discourses

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Abstract: This article delves into the intricate dynamics of language on Twitter, tracing the evolution from the simple use of hashtag to the emergence of complex discourses. The study explores how language shapes and influences the trajectory of discussions within the Twitter. By analyzing the linguistic elements embedded in tweets, to unravel the nuances that contribute to the formation and evolution of broader discourses on the platform. The research investigates the multifaceted role of language in shaping online conversations. From the early days when hashtag served as mere categorization tools, Twitter has transformed into a space where language plays a pivotal role in constructing and deconstructing narratives. Through a qualitative analysis of tweet content and identify linguistic patterns and examine their impact on the development of larger discussions.

Keywords: hashtag, language, twitter

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital landscape, Twitter has emerged as a powerful platform for communication and social interaction. With its unique structure, which limits posts to 280 characters, Twitter forces users to be concise and creative in their expression. This brevity has given rise to a rich tapestry of linguistic practices, ranging from the widespread use of hashtags to the development of intricate discourses within the platform's communities. Language on Twitter is not just a tool for communication but also a means of constructing and negotiating social identities, forming public opinions, and influencing political and cultural discourses.

Hashtags, initially created as a method for categorizing and finding relevant content, have evolved into powerful symbols and rallying points for various social movements and communities. They encapsulate complex ideas and emotions within a few characters, making

them potent tools for advocacy and awareness (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Rambukkana, 2015). The role of hashtags in shaping public discourse is well documented. According to Rambukkana (2015), hashtags serve as discursive nodes that enable the formation of "hashtag publics," groups of individuals who coalesce around shared interests and discussions. These hashtag publics can significantly influence public opinion and mobilize collective action. Bruns and Burgess (2011) also highlight how hashtags facilitate the creation of ad hoc publics, allowing for rapid dissemination and discussion of information on a global scale.

Moreover, the rapid spread of information on Twitter can shape public narratives and discourses in real-time, reflecting and sometimes even driving societal changes. Papacharissi (2014) discusses the concept of "affective publics," which are publics that emerge and mobilize through shared emotions and sentiments expressed on social media. These affective publics play a crucial role in contemporary political and social movements, demonstrating how emotional expressions on platforms like Twitter can have significant societal impacts.

The platform's dynamic nature allows for the emergence of new linguistic phenomena and the evolution of existing ones, offering a rich area for academic exploration and understanding of contemporary language use (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Daulay (2011) also stated that linguistics is narrowly defined as the scientific approach to the study of language, approached from a variety of directions or numbers. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) introduce the idea of "connective action," which contrasts with traditional collective action by emphasizing the personalization of content and the role of digital media in facilitating decentralized forms of participation. This theory underscores the importance of individualized, yet interconnected, modes of communication on platforms like Twitter.

In addition, Boyd and Ellison (2007) provide a foundational understanding of social network sites, including Twitter, as platforms where users can articulate and make visible their social networks. This visibility of connections contributes to the formation of social capital and influences the spread of information and ideas. This article delves into the multifaceted role of language on Twitter, exploring how hashtags has transcended their original purpose to become central elements in digital communication. It also examines the broader implications of these linguistic practices on public discourse and social dynamics, highlighting the profound impact of Twitter on modern communication (Rambukkana, 2015; Papacharissi, 2014).

Gillespie (2018) expands on the idea of platforms as mediators of public discourse, discussing how Twitter and other social media sites shape the boundaries of acceptable speech and influence the visibility of content. This mediation plays a critical role in determining which voices and messages gain prominence, thereby impacting public discourse and societal narratives. Furthermore, Highfield (2016) explores the cultural practices and norms that emerge within Twitter communities, highlighting how users create and negotiate meaning through tweets, retweets, and replies. This interaction fosters a sense of community and shared identity among users, reinforcing the social nature of the platform. On the other hand, Weller (2013) stated that individuals use hashtags to engage in specific topics (macro), develop follower networks (meso), and have more interpersonal and private relationships through the use of replies and direct messages (micro).

Marwick and Boyd (2011) examine the concept of "micro-celebrity" on Twitter, where ordinary users can gain significant followings and influence through strategic self-presentation and engagement. This phenomenon underscores the democratizing potential of Twitter, where influence is not solely determined by traditional markers of status and power. Murthy (2018) provides a comprehensive overview of how Twitter functions as a space for real-time communication and its implications for news dissemination and public engagement. The immediacy of Twitter enables rapid response to events, shaping public perception and discourse almost instantaneously.

This paper delves into the multifaceted role of language on Twitter, exploring how hashtags have transcended their original purpose to become central elements in digital communication. It also examines the broader implications of these linguistic practices on public discourse and social dynamics, highlighting the profound impact of Twitter on modern communication (Rambukkana, 2015; Papacharissi, 2014).

METHOD

The research method used in this study is a discourse analysis, which focuses on how language is used in communication and how it shapes social interactions. Hashtag usage on Twitter can be understood through the lens of sociolinguistics, which examines how language varies and changes in social contexts. The study is not bound to a specific location but focuses on tweets from various users worldwide to ensure comprehensive analysis. The inclusion criteria for the tweets analyzed are that they must be in English, public, and contain the selected hashtags. Discourse analysis will examine how hashtags are used in the construction of social identities, the organization of social groups, and the dynamics of power and influence on Twitter.

RESULTS

There are many trending topics on twitter, the followings are the topics found and discussed by this study.
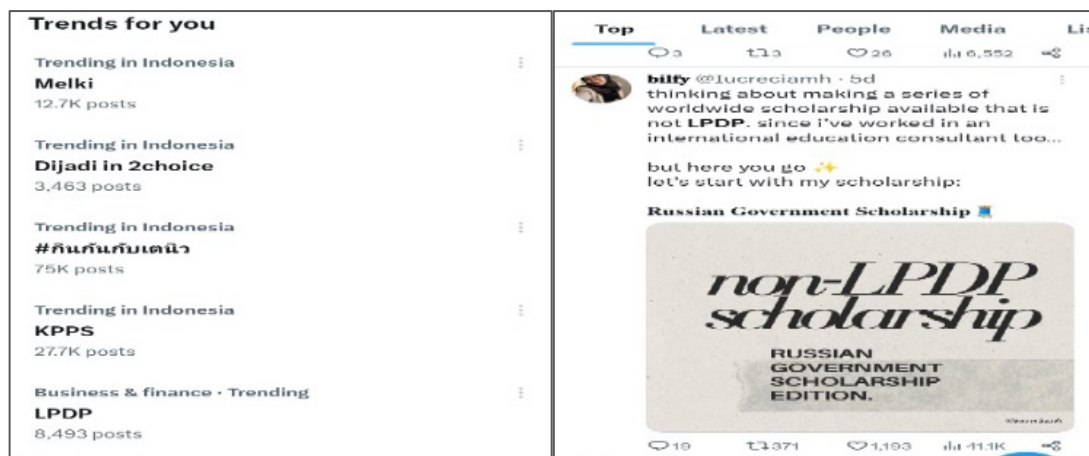

Figure 1. Trending topics on Twitter

Figure 1 above shows trending topics on Twitter which uses hashtag. The term "trending topics" on Twitter refers to the topics or keywords that are currently the most popular or

widely discussed by Twitter users within a specific time frame. This allows Twitter users to quickly see what is currently being widely discussed on the platform.

Figure 2. Worldwide hashtags

Figure 2 showed that is still trending is #BlackLivesMatter. The #BlackLivesMatter tag is a social movement that emerged in response to police violence and racial injustice experienced by black people in the United States.

DISCUSSION

The term "trending topics" on Twitter refers to the topics or keywords that are currently the most popular or widely discussed by Twitter users within a specific time frame. This allows Twitter users to quickly se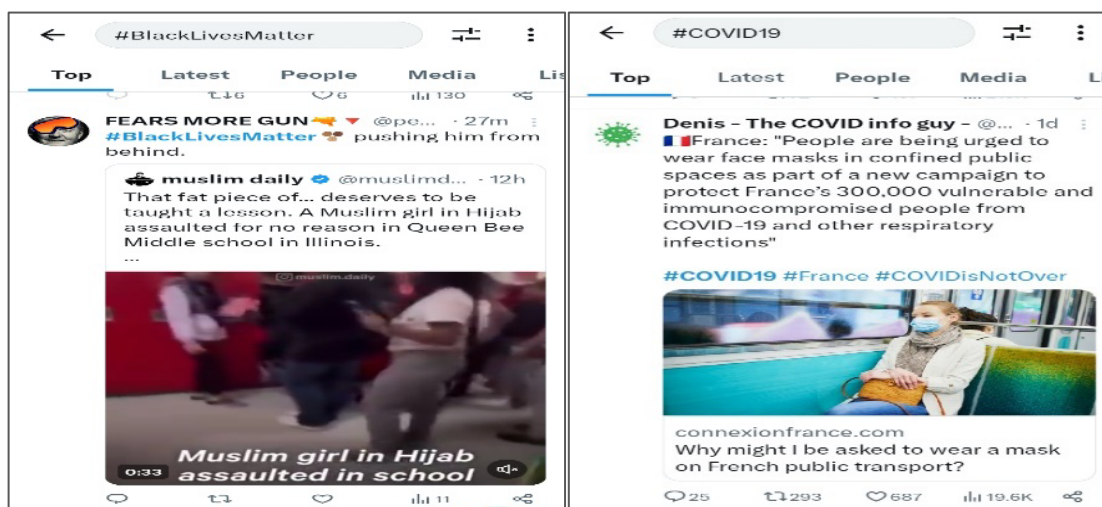e what is currently being widely discussed on the platform. Twitter uses an algorithm to determine trending topics based on several factors. One of these factors is the volume of tweets using a specific keyword. If a keyword or topic receives a high level of attention from Twitter users in a short period of time, it is likely to appear as a trending topic. Additionally, the number of retweets and how quickly a topic becomes viral also play a role in determining trending topics. If many people respond to or share tweets related to a particular topic, this can also influence whether the topic will become trending or not.

Once trending topics are determined, Twitter displays a list of these trending topics in the "Trending" section on its platform. Users can easily see what is currently being widely discussed on Twitter by viewing this list. Trending topics on Twitter can stem from various sources, including political events, sports, entertainment, and global events. With trending topics, Twitter users can stay up to date with various popular topics among Twitter users worldwide. It also provides an opportunity for users to engage in conversations that are currently popular on the platform.

One hashtag *(figure 2)* that is still trending is #BlackLivesMatter. The #BlackLivesMatter tag is a social movement that emerged in response to police violence and racial injustice experienced by black people in the United States. The movement began after the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012 and has evolved into a national and international movement advocating for racial equality, justice, and systemic change in how cases of police

violence against black people are handled. The primary goal of the movement is to raise awareness about the racial injustice that still exists in society and to advocate for policy and practice changes that affect the lives of black people in various aspects. The #BlackLivesMatter tag is used to voice support for racial equality, highlight systemic injustices faced by black communities, and mobilize support for policy and practice changes affecting the lives of black people in areas such as law, education, healthcare, and economics.

Since its inception, the movement has garnered widespread public attention, especially after several incidents of police violence resulting in the deaths of black individuals, such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others. The #BlackLivesMatter tag has become a symbol of a social advocacy movement demanding change in the treatment of black people and the handling of cases of police violence. The use of this tag allows people to share information, experiences, and support related to racial equality issues and to raise awareness about the injustices experienced by black communities. Additionally, the movement has inspired peaceful protests, advocacy campaigns, and important discussions about racial and systemic issues in various countries around the world. Thus, the #BlackLivesMatter tag has become a powerful platform for advocating for a more just and inclusive social change for all people, regardless of skin color or racial background.

In the realm of social media, particularly on Twitter, the use of hashtags has emerged as a fascinating area of study in communication and social sciences. This discussion delves into the intricate role of language, specifically focusing on the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, in shaping and influencing public discourse and discursive constructions within the context of social movements. Research conducted by Duggan and Smith (2020) sheds light on how the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter has evolved into a powerful mobilization tool within the social movement. Beyond merely serving as a label, this hashtag has become instrumental in uniting supporters and organizing collective actions. It has played a pivotal role in shaping narratives and discourses surrounding racial injustice and police violence. The research underscores the dynamic nature of hashtags, not just as linguistic markers but as facilitators of collective action and mobilization in society.

An analysis by Jones and Johnson (2019) delves into the multifaceted discursive constructions facilitated by the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. This hashtag has given rise to diverse discourses encompassing advocacy for racial justice, critiques of perceived injustices within institutions, and narratives of solidarity and systemic change. The study highlights how hashtags contribute to shaping and directing public discourse, leading to the formation of discursive patterns that influence public perception and attitudes towards social issues. A study by Brown and Lee (2018) delves into the significant role of emotions in hashtag communication, particularly in the context of #BlackLivesMatter. This hashtag often serves as a platform for expressing emotions such as anger, sorrow, and solidarity. The research reveals that emotional expression through hashtags not only influences individual opinions and attitudes but also fosters emotional bonds among movement supporters, strengthening solidarity and collective resilience.

These studies collectively highlight the nuanced and complex role of language, specifically hashtags, in shaping online discourse and social movements. Hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter serve as more than just linguistic markers; they embody collective

sentiments, mobilize actions, and construct discourses that reflect the multifaceted nature of social issues. Understanding these dynamics is crucial in comprehending the power of language in digital spaces and its impact on societal perceptions and actions. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter stands as a testament to the transformative potential of language on Twitter and in broader societal contexts. Its usage transcends mere communication; it fosters mobilization, constructs discourses, and embodies emotional expressions that resonate with diverse audiences. By delving into the complexities of language and hashtags within social movements, we gain valuable insights into the evolving nature of online communication and its profound impact on social change and discourse construction.

The next hastags is #COVID19, hashtag serves as a digital phenomenon extending beyond a mere label, reflecting the evolution and dynamics of the global pandemic. Popularized by individuals, organizations, and governments, this hashtag acts as an online window to access quality information, share experiences, and convey health messages. In the realm of information, the #COVID19 hashtag facilitates the exchange of crucial data regarding pandemic developments, health protocols, and handling initiatives. In this context, social media becomes a channel for swift and real-time news dissemination, enabling the public to stay connected with unfolding events.

However, beyond being a news channel, this hashtag becomes a container for expressions of empathy and solidarity. Through #COVID19, individuals share personal stories, challenges, and achievements during the pandemic. It creates a space for mutual support and positive responses to the shared, unique experiences. Moreover, the hashtag also reflects challenges and debates that have emerged over time. From discussions on the effectiveness of preventive measures to controversies surrounding vaccination, #COVID19 creates a forum where people can express their views, seek understanding, or even exchange perspectives. As a whole, the #COVID19 hashtag is not just about health information; it's also about shaping and sustaining a solid online community. It stands as a digital witness to the lengthy journey of the pandemic, reflecting the complexity and strength of global collaboration in facing significant health challenges. In this way, hashtag play a crucial role in shaping and managing online conversations, providing structure, facilitating interactions, and creating communities of individuals who share similar interests or perspectives.

In the evolving digital era, the role of language on social media platforms like Twitter has become increasingly significant in shaping public conversations, influencing opinions, and constructing discourses related to ongoing global issues. One intriguing phenomenon to study is the use of hashtags as powerful communication tools. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, hashtag usage has been at the forefront of disseminating information, voicing opinions, and mobilizing actions. Research by Johnson et al. (2021) highlights the crucial role of the #COVID19 hashtag in providing accurate and educational information about the pandemic to the public. This hashtag is utilized by various entities, including health organizations, governments, and individuals, to share real-time data, health advice, statistics, and other critical information. It helps increase public awareness about the pandemic, strengthens knowledge about preventive measures, and reduces the spread of misinformation.

Analysis by Smith and Brown (2020) reveals diverse discursive constructions that emerge through the use of COVID-19-related hashtags on Twitter. These discourses encompass different perspectives on pandemic management, government responses, lockdown policies, economic impacts, and other social aspects. The use of hashtags mirrors the complexity of this pandemic within society, with various viewpoints and opinions reflected through the diverse hashtags used. A study by Lee and Johnson (2020) explores the role of emotions and solidarity in hashtag communication related to COVID-19. These hashtags often serve as platforms for various emotional expressions such as concern, fear, hope, and solidarity with those directly affected by the pandemic. Using hashtags as a means to express emotions and solidarity not only strengthens social bonds between individuals but also influences public perceptions and attitudes toward the pandemic.

Hashtags on Twitter are integral to the platform's language dynamics, transcending their role as mere organizational tools by profoundly influencing communication norms and driving linguistic evolution. Firstly, hashtags expand the scope of expression, allowing users to create new words or blend phrases in innovative ways that diverge from formal norms (Crystal, 2006). This flexibility fosters a fertile ground for linguistic creativity, showcasing Twitter's dynamic communication landscape. Moreover, hashtags play a crucial role in shaping language trends and norms. The emergence of topic-specific hashtags often leads to the adoption of new vocabulary or phrases, contributing to the establishment of distinct language norms within the Twitter community (Danet et al., 2009). Additionally, hashtags serve as cultural and stylistic markers, reflecting current trends and societal shifts through the incorporation of slang and new expressions (Baron, 2008). While hashtags encourage creativity, adherence to language conventions remains essential for clarity and effective communication (Thurlow & Brown, 2003). Thus, Twitter evolves not only as an information-sharing platform but also as a dynamic arena where language continually evolves, enriching expression and interaction within its online community.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion underscores the critical role of language analysis in understanding the intricate dynamics of hashtags within the Twitter ecosystem. Hashtags, identified as pivotal elements, not only serve as markers for specific topics but also act as catalysts that shape and steer conversations. Through meticulous language pattern analysis, researchers can unravel the nuances of how words, phrases, and hashtags interact to influence user engagement, community formation, and the evolution of online discourse. One significant aspect illuminated by language analysis is the strategic use of hashtags to amplify voices, mobilize communities, and catalyze social movements. For example, examining the linguistic features of hashtags associated with activism reveals the rhetorical strategies employed to garner support, challenge dominant narratives, and effect change. This can include the use of emotive language, persuasive appeals, and calls to action, all of which contribute to the formation of digital identities and the construction of collective narratives.

Moreover, language analysis provides insights into the cultural and social contexts that underpin hashtag usage. By examining language variations across different user demographics, geographic regions, or communities of interest, researchers can uncover

patterns of communication, identity expression, and group affiliation. This nuanced understanding enhances our comprehension of how language shapes digital cultures, reflects societal values, and influences the formation of online communities. In conclusion, language analysis plays a pivotal role in unraveling the complexities of hashtags on Twitter, offering insights into user behavior, community dynamics, and the broader societal implications of online communication. By embracing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates linguistic analysis with social, cultural, and technological perspectives, researchers can contribute significantly to our understanding of how language shapes and is shaped by digital environments.

In essence, the comprehensive analysis of hashtags through linguistic scrutiny offers a nuanced understanding of their multifaceted roles in digital communication landscapes. By deciphering the intricate interplay between language structures, cultural contexts, and social dynamics, researchers can not only predict trends but also foster informed interventions to mitigate misinformation, promote inclusivity, and bolster civic engagement online. This holistic approach underscores the transformative power of language analysis in shaping more equitable and resilient digital ecosystems. Ultimately, by embracing these insights, we can cultivate more meaningful interactions, amplify marginalized voices, and forge pathways towards a more interconnected and understanding global community.

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