

The Attitude of Yemeni Students in Aurangabad towards the Nature of Hashtags' Language and its Role in Making Public Opinion

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Abstract: Hashtags are considered a new way of communication that are used by people electronically on different social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. This study examines the attitude of Yemeni students towards the nature of hashtags' language and its role in making public opinion. This study focuses on the Arabic hashtags' language. The data was collected quantitatively and qualitatively. The questionnaire with close-ended questions and open-ended questions was administered to 50 students. The results revealed that the hashtag's language must be short and simple with catchy words. There are two types of hashtags' in Arabic language; hashtags with one sentence and hashtags with two or more sentences. The students seemed to have a positive attitude towards the use of hashtags and towards their role in making public opinion. This study recommended that further studies have to be undertaken on the hashtags' language whether from a semantic, syntactic or morphological perspective.

Keywords: Attitude, Hashtag, Arabic hashtag, Public opinion.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Hashtags are used widely on social media platforms especially on Twitter and Facebook. Hashtags are a new way of communication that is used electronically for different purposes in order to achieve specific goals. This study tends to investigate the attitude of Yemeni students towards the nature of Arabic hashtags and its role in making public opinion. The hashtags in Arabic are not given attention by the linguists. So this study will direct the linguists to pay attention towards the nature of hashtags' language. Accordingly, this study tries to explore the students' attitude towards the language of hashtags, their reaction to hashtags, and the impact of hashtags on the community. Due to political issues which started in Yemen in 2015 and continued till date, it was noticed that there is a wide use of hashtags among Yemeni students abroad. The hashtags were used for different purposes such as political, patriotic, ethical and humanitarian purposes.

1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

This study aims to:

- Investigate the nature of hashtags' language.
- Examine the attitudes of Yemeni students towards using hashtags.
- Identify the impact of hashtags on public opinion.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- To which extent Yemeni students use the hashtags on social media platforms?
- What is the attitude of students towards the use of hashtags?
- What is the attitude of students towards the nature of hashtags' language?
- Do the hashtags achieve their goals and play an important role in making a public opinion?

1.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Data in this study was collected quantitatively and qualitatively. The questionnaire used for this survey is divided into two parts; the first part consists of closed-ended questions while the second part consists of open-ended questions. The questionnaire was first carried out in Arabic language because the mother tongue of students is Arabic, then it was translated to English. The questionnaire was implemented online and answered by 50 students. The informants of this study are the Yemeni students in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India. The participants were selected randomly. The descriptive statistical analysis has been used to address the questions of this study. Mean, standard deviation and frequency distribution are the three measures of descriptive statistical analysis used in the present study to measure the data numerically.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF ATTITUDE

An attitude refers to the evaluation of people for specific objects or things, it shows the behaviour of people as liking, disliking, and agreement or disagreement towards situations, ideas and actions. Allport (1935) proposed that an attitude is “a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual’s response to all objects and situations with which it is related” (qtd.in Byrka, 2009:2). Oskamp and Schultz say that “Attitude is a preparation for behaviour, a predisposition to respond in a particular way to the attitude object. The term attitude object is used to include things, people, places, ideas, actions, or situations, either singular or plural” (Oskamp and Schultz 2005:8). Oskamp and Schultz summarize the concept of attitude thus: “An attitude is a predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given attitude object” (Oskamp and Schultz 2005:9). Oskamp and Schultz classified the attitude into three components:

- 1 An affective (emotional) component. This refers to the feelings and emotions one has toward the object. For instance, "Riding a motorcycle is fun." "Riding a motorcycle is exciting."
- 2 A behavioral component, consisting of one's action tendencies toward the object. For example, "I ride motorcycles every chance I get." "If I had the money, I would buy a motorcycle."
- 3 A cognitive component, consisting of the ideas and beliefs that one has about the attitude object. For example, "Motorcycles are fast." "Riding a motorcycle instead of a car saves gas."

An attitude may be positive or negative towards the situations, ideas or things. This study tries to investigate the Yemeni students’ attitudes towards the nature of hashtags’ language. Hashtags in Arabic language may be different from English. A few studies have been carried out on English hashtags, but no studies have been conducted on hashtags in Arabic language.

2.2. THE CONCEPT OF HASHTAG

Hashtags are expressions that are preceded by (#) in order to be searchable. Caleffi says “use of hashtags was introduced on Twitter as a way to classify messages (tweets) according to the topic, thus allowing users to easily search for specific content and share information related to it” (Caleffi 2015:46). Bruns & Burgess (2011) declare that hashtags are “short words or phrases that follow the hash or pound sign (#), such as #StopDiabetes, #HIV, or #MarchforBabies, are used on social media platforms to brand advocacy movements, archive messages for the movement, and allow those not personally connected to a user to see and comment on messages that use the hashtag” (qtd. in Saxton et al 2015: 153). According to Shapp “The hashtag was originally proposed as a tagging system, as a way to organize tweets about a certain topic” (Shapp 2014:6). Previously hashtags were used in twitter to categorize messages, but nowadays hashtags are used to make public opinions, to deal with any issue in the community as political, ethical issues, etc. Munuku et al. (2017) study the influence of framing of the hashtag on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya. His study focused on hashtags formulated in English and Kiswahili languages. He found that 60% of hashtags are non-ordered, the well worded and emotive hashtags have more influence on opinion formation. Catchy words attract people’s attention regardless of the grammatical structure.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire is divided into three sections: the first section examines the use of hashtags among Yemeni students, the second section focuses on the students’ attitudes towards the nature of hashtags’ language and the last part identifies the role of hashtags on making public opinion.

3.1. THE USE OF HASHTAGS AMONG YEMENI STUDENTS.

The first section of the questionnaire was about the extent of using hashtags among Yemeni students in Aurangabad.

Table (1): Frequency Distribution of Using Hashtags (n=50)

Statement		Yes	NO
1. Have you ever used the hashtags?	N	35	15
	%	70%	30%

As shown in table 1, results reveal that 70% of students use hashtags. Hashtags nowadays have become a great source for making public opinion. One can convey his message to others easily using hashtags on Twitter and Facebook.

The majority of educated people use hashtags to express their feelings towards any issue. The results also show that only 30% of participants don't use hashtags in their life, but even if they don't use hashtags, they have been affected by the hashtags that they have read on Twitter or Facebook.

3.2. THE ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS TOWARDS USING HASHTAGS AND THE NATURE OF HASHTAGS' LANGUAGE

For this section, five statements have been given to students to tick the most appropriate choice. The first statement is about the attitude of students towards the use of hashtags in general

Table (2): Descriptive Statistics of Students' Attitude towards Using Hashtags (n=50)

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree	Natural	Disagree	Strongly disagree	mean	SD
2. I am not interested in the hashtags, there is no benefit of using them.	N	3	8	15	21	3	2.74	1.00
	%	6%	16%	30%	42%	6%		

An attitude can be of two types: positive attitude or a negative attitude. The results in table 2 show that only 22% of students have a negative attitude towards the use of hashtags where 48% of them have a positive attitude. 30% of students have a natural opinion towards the use of hashtags. The mean score of this item is 2.74 with std. deviation 1.00, these results show that students have a slightly favourable attitude towards the use of hashtags.

Table (3): Descriptive Statistics of Students' Attitude towards the Nature of Hashtags' Language. (n=50)

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree	Natural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	mean	SD
3. Hashtags can play an effective role in making public opinion even if it is simple words or colloquial language.	N	3	34	4	9		3.62	.85
	%	6%	68%	8%	18%			
4. Hashtags will be more successful when it is formulated in a simple language.	N	14	34	2			4.24	.51
	%	28%	68%	4%				
5. Hashtags must be short in order to attract the readers' attention	N	25	24	1			4.48	.54
	%	50%	48%	2%				
6. It is important to select a catchy word to achieve the goal of the hashtag.	N	25	21	4			4.24	.64
	%	50%	42%	8%				

The statements 3-6 examine the students' attitude towards the nature of hashtags' language (i.e. hashtags in Arabic language). The mean score of item 4 was 3.62 with std. deviation 0.85. This reveals the response of strong agreement towards an effective role of hashtags in making public opinion even if it is simple words or colloquial language. The mean score of item 4 was 4.24 with std. deviation 0.51. The results of item 4 emphasize the results of item 3, it indicates that the simple language plays an important role in the success of hashtags. Item 5 examines the size of hashtags, "Hashtags must be short in order to attract the readers' attention". It was given the highest score with mean 4.48 and std. deviation 0.54. The results of item 5 indicate the response of strong agreement towards the shortness of hashtags. Students agree that the short hashtag is more effective than the long hashtag. Item 6 examines the kind of words that has to be used in the hashtags "It is important to select a catchy word to achieve the goal of the hashtag". This item was also given a high score with mean 4.24 and std. deviation 0.64. This indicates the response of strong agreement towards using catchy words in the hashtags. Participants agree that catchy words achieve the goal of hashtag more than normal words do.

3.3. THE ROLE OF HASHTAGS ON MAKING PUBLIC OPINION

Hashtags play a crucial role in making public opinion. It is used on a number of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. As illustrated in table 4, the highest average was given to item 7 "hashtags play an important role in making public opinion towards any issue" with mean 4.06 and std. deviation 0.62 followed by item 8 "hashtag achieves its goal if it is interacted with on a large scale" with mean 4 and std. deviation .72. The lowest average in this

section was given to item 9 “all the hashtags that I have publicized achieved their goals” with mean 3.08 and std. deviation .83. The results in this section indicate the response of strong agreement towards the hashtags’ role in making a public opinion and also towards the hashtags’ role in achieving the goals they formulated for.

Table (4) Descriptive Statistics of the Role of Hashtags on Making Public Opinion

Statement		Strongly agree	Agree	Natural	Disagree	Strongly disagree	mean	SD
7. Hashtags play an important role in making public opinion towards any issue.	N	10	34	5	1		4.06	.62
	%	20%	68%	10%	2%			
8. Hashtag achieves its goal if it is interacted with on a large scale.	N	11	30	7	2		4	.72
	%	22%	60%	14%	4%			
9. All the hashtags that I have publicized achieved their goals	N	1	15	22	11	1	3.08	.83
	%	2%	30%	44%	22%	2%		

The students also were asked open-ended questions to express their ideas freely about the nature of hashtags’ language. Students were asked about the nature of hashtags’ language they have publicized or were affected by? Do the hashtags use standard or just simple language? The answers of students were as the following:

Student 1: The language of hashtags were simple words and simple language.

Student 2: It is a simple language. Hashtags were written in a colloquial language.

Student 3: It is a simple language with catchy words. It is a non-standard language where it can be understood by normal people.

Student 4: It is correct grammatically and well-ordered but with a simple formulation.

Students also were asked about the grammatical rules that they think must be considered during the formulation of hashtags to be more effective. Their answers are as the following:

Student 1: Three roles that must be considered when formulating the hashtag; clarity, effective words, and simple language.

Student 2: Grammatical rules are not important; the most important thing is the theme of the hashtag.

Student 3: Hashtags must be semantically and syntactically correct with easy language that can be deciphered by ordinary people.

Student 4: Hashtags must be short, accurate and simple language.

In addition, participants were asked whether the hashtags they have used are composed of one sentence or more than one sentence. And which one does achieve the hashtag’s goal? Hashtags in Arabic language are not the same as in English. The researcher has noticed that some hashtags are one sentence, and other hashtags are two, three or four sentences. Students were asked about the syntactic structure of hashtags they have publicized: Is it one sentence or more and which one is better for achieving the goal: one sentence or more than one? The participants’ answers are the following:

Student 1: The syntactic structure of hashtags depends on the purpose of the hashtag. In one case, one sentence is sufficient but in other cases, one sentence is not sufficient, it must be two or three short sentences to fulfill the purpose of the hashtag.

Student 2: Hashtags can be one sentence or more. It depends on the purpose of hashtags.

From the answers above it can be concluded that hashtags in Arabic can be one sentence or more. This depends on the type and purpose of the hashtag. Sometimes one sentence fulfils the purpose of the hashtag and in another case, hashtags need to be more than one sentence. But the sentences of hashtags must be short, simple and suitable for normal people.

4. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS:

4.1. FINDINGS:

The aim of this research was to investigate the attitude of Yemeni students towards the nature of hashtags' language and its role in making public opinion. The results of this study can be summarized as follows.

- The majority of Yemeni students and educated people use hashtags widely on a number of social media platforms such as Twitter, and Facebook.
- Yemeni students have a positive attitude towards the use of hashtags and their role in making public opinion.
- Hashtags play an important role in making public opinion regardless of their language.
- The language of hashtags must be short and simple with catchy words.
- Two types of Arabic hashtags are used by Yemeni students: hashtags with one sentence and hashtags with two or more sentences.

4.2. CONCLUSION:

It can be concluded that the language of hashtags has to be short and simple with catchy words in order to achieve their goals. The language of hashtags has to be semantically and syntactically correct, but it must be formulated in a simple language that can be understood by ordinary people. Arabic hashtags are different from English hashtags where one sentence sometimes is not sufficient to fulfil the purpose of the hashtag. English and Arabic hashtags are new topics. So, this study strongly recommends the linguists to study the hashtags' language semantically, syntactically and morphologically.

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