

The Pragmatics of Hashtags and Tweets: Call and Response Actions

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Abstract

The article attempts to provide a description of tweets which are posted in response to activist hashtags. It argues that these tweets together with their hashtags can be analyzed as having the discursive function of “call and response” in activist movements. It examines 2300 tweets which are responses to 15 hashtags and demonstrates that these tweets can be classified into different types of speech acts according to Searle’s sub-categorization. The study also argues that tweets responding to such hashtags can be classified into supportive and dismissive responses. Those tweets in totality constitute what can be considered as extended public conversations. They also have a gestalt illocutionary force or they constitute a macro-speech act.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Cyberpragmatics, Activist hashtags, Macro-speech act, Computer-mediated communication

1. Introduction

Social media nowadays play a vital role in people’s lives, constantly connecting them to the whole World. Texting, posting and tweeting have become more widespread. Tweets are written discourse of texting, a genre of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Therefore, it is significant to investigate tweets as research as such area has the potential to uncover the role of hashtags as talk triggers. Recent research focuses

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on how technology has helped to shape the behavior of language users. According to Crystal (2001), linguistic behavior and social media innovations are impactful. In this article, tweets are defined broadly as the responses and reactions that Twitter users post to a hashtag which is a word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#) and is used on social media websites and applications, especially Twitter, to identify messages on a specific topic. Users create hashtags by placing the sign # in front of a word or a phrase. Hashtags can trend and attract users to discussion. Users can search for the most recent posts containing the hashtag. These tweets are typically considered proactive phenomena; creating a narrative discourse rather than just responding to it after hashtag has been created. A narrative discourse refers to the stories that are the means for people to make sense of lived experiences and to construct identities (Bamberg 2005). Therefore, research into tweets as a form of CMC is justified to explore the nature of their discourse function. A hashtag is used to index keywords or topics on social media. However, it is a discursive strategy for framing the issues on Twitter. It leads users to get involved in online widespread conversations and discussions pertaining to a certain topic. Bonilla and Rosa (2015) consider the hashtag as ‘a quick information retrieval system’.

The hashtag is an “indexing system in both the clerical sense and the semiotic sense” by providing a quick information retrieval system and also “marking the intended significance of an utterance”—users of a hashtag are able to simultaneously “file” and frame their comments to add specific meaning (Bonilla and Rosa 2015: 5)

The concept of ‘user response’ is conceptualized to be applied in the internet interactions to measure users’ perceptions and attitudes. Therefore, user responses may emerge as a new genre in CMC. In Twitter, hashtags are discursive devices to summon those user responses; they act together with tweets as call and response devices.

Particular attention in this study is paid to the hashtag as a discursive strategy and the role it plays in the mobilization process of activist movements or campaigns. The study sheds light on how hashtags and tweets work together to spark a widespread discussion and how they direct users towards a certain attitude. It is easy to join conversation by just following a hashtag (Yus 2011: 149), because of algorithm which sends users what they like. It is not used on its own; it is correlated with its tweets. It links tweets and makes conversations more visible. It also connects users’ responses and experiences. Tweets which are responses to activist hashtags create what can be considered as a public conversation which takes place on Twitter. Zappavigna (2011) introduces a linguistic perspective of Twitter as a form of public conversation.

There is, however, a social need among users to engage with other voices in public and private feeds. Hence we see creative use of punctuation to reference other users and tag common topics. These expansions in typographic meaning potential are part of a community-driven movement toward Twitter becoming a form of ‘public conversation’. It is conversation, however, that is multiparty, temporarily fluid and highly intertextual. (Zappavigna 2011: 790)

Public conversation may refer to a public sphere for discourse. The term ‘public sphere’ has been coined by Habermas (1989) to refer to the

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rational-critical debates occurred in salons or coffee shops, where individuals express their opinions and affiliations in a public space. According to Phillips (2019), social media sites can be seen as a public sphere for discourse. She demonstrates the use of Twitter as a public sphere (2019: 56). The concept of ‘public conversation’ is explained by De Moor (2010) as “a conversation with complete strangers purely based on interest, instead of being limited to talking to people currently in one’s circle of friends” (2010: 5). According to Wikstorm (2017:127), “a tweet containing a hashtag links to, and is integrated into, a timeline of other tweets containing the same hashtag”. A user of Twitter may add a hashtag to their tweet to “integrate it into a general conversation about this topic” (2017: 127). Apparently, those tweets can be rich sources for linguistic analysis. Yet little is known so far about the exact linguistic manifestation of activist hashtags and their tweets.

The hashtag has many functions. First, it has a search function; users can search for the most recent posts containing the hashtag. Zappavigna (2011) describes the situation as a ‘cultural shift’. Second, she points out that “[by] enabling users to affiliate online, social networking sites (SNS), accessed by millions worldwide, afford a new form of sociality in which language maintains a pivotal role” (2011: 789). Third, another function of the hashtag is that it preserves the topic of the conversation. Therefore, research into tweets as a form of CMC is justified to explore the nature of their discourse function. According to Zappavigna (2011), a hashtag functions as a topic marker. She explains that hashtags, “as they are used on Twitter, are a form of ‘inline’ metadata, that is, ‘data about data’” (2011: 791). Apparently, there is an ‘attributive relationship’ between the hashtag and the tweets. She explains that the topic tag is “a keyword for a tweet on this topic” (2011:

791). Wikstrom (2014) also considers hashtags as markers of a timeline of tweets containing the same hashtag; in other words, users add a hashtag to their tweets to join a public conversation.

This study focuses specifically on activist hashtags. These hashtags are used to circulate activism discourse and mobilize the public to constitute public opinion or organize collective action or movement slogans. Against this background, I set out to achieve better understanding of activist hashtags, with focus on three questions:

- 1) Can tweets replying to activist hashtags be viewed as speech acts?
- 2) What are the different types of speech acts that can be seen in the tweets?
- 3) Can the activist hashtag together with the responding tweets be viewed as a macro-speech act?

2. Literature Review

Before studying the possible account of tweets as speech acts, it is paramount to identify the studies which deal with hashtags and tweets and their discourse function. A huge mass of literature has been undertaken into cyberpragmatics; a term coined by Yus (2001) to apply pragmatics to Internet users' interactions (Yus 2011). There is little research in the field of cyberpragmatics. This paper moves to more specific areas, particularly hashtags and tweets as call and response actions on Twitter. Over the past few years, many studies have contributed to the literature on hashtags and Twitter. One of these studies is Zappavigna (2011), which describes hashtags as 'searchable talk' and 'ambient affiliation'. Zappavigna used a Systemic Functional Linguistics approach to analyze the structure and meaning of tweets. Zappavigna (2015) also introduces research into how meanings are made with social metadata. In addition, Wikstrom (2014)

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explains the communicative function of hashtags and uses speech act theory. Moreover, Albu (2016) discusses the linguistic strategies the UKIP candidates used in “call for action” tweets sent during the 2014 European Elections. Similarly, Scott (2015) argues that hashtags contribute to relevance by providing contextual assumptions and guide the readers’ inferential processes. Because a user has no information about who will read a message and at what time they will do so, a hashtag may guide the reader to derive both explicitly and implicitly communicated meaning. Therefore, twitter provides users with strategies that they might use to make their utterance optimally relevant. It allows users to make context assumptions accessible to their readers. Hashtags narrow the gap between the tweeter’s cognitive environment and the readers’ cognitive environment (Scott 2015). They “allow users to “track content and updates more relevant and interesting to them without exerting a great deal of extra effort or learning any kind of extraneous of [sic] syntax” (Messina, 2007).

While the main function of hashtags is to connect, coordinate and promote content or access content (Yus 2011), they seem to have other functions. They act as guides to the readers’ inferential processes when interpreting the utterance. Scott (2015: 11) gave the example of #vulnerability in a tweet about the patient-doctor relationship in hospital. It is unlikely that anyone interested in that topic would search for it using the hashtag #vulnerability. Such hashtags are generally added after the main content of the tweet. They are not part of the message. Their function is to guide the readers in making certain contextual assumptions to guide the readers’ interpretation. Moreover, Daer et al. (2015) discussed the rhetorical function of the hashtags as they are sometimes used to emphasize or call attention to something. An example is the

hashtag #lateafternoon that is used to add emphasis or call attention to something in the post (2015: 13). Wikstrom (2017) also investigates linguistic and metalinguistic practices in Twitter discourse.

Features of digital media help to circulate the discourse. According to Baym (2010: 7), interactivity, temporal structure, social cues, storage, replicability, reach and mobility are seven features that distinguish digital media. The temporal structure is said to characterize the medium of communication in the internet; it allows synchronous and asynchronous communication. In addition, social cues are available on Twitter. They refer to the context and identities of users. They show meaningful operators such as @ mentions, retweets (RT) and hashtags #. The hashtag, one of these operators, is said to have many functions. Zappavigna points out that “the hashtag seems to intensify a ‘call’ to affiliate with the values in the tweet by rendering the tweet more ‘searchable’”(2011: 799). In light of the discursive function, hashtags are said to be:

- 1) tools for making a writer’s post searchable (Zappavigna 2015);
- 2) markers and indicators of context (Hougaard 2016); and
- 3) devices to help the reader decipher the writers’ intentions (Hougaard 2016).

According to Scott, Twitter service did not start with hashtags in its original version, but since 2009, hashtags have been widely introduced as ‘a system to tag and track content on the site’ (Scott 2015: 12). Therefore, the hashtag is repeatedly referred to as having three main functions: first, to make the Tweet searchable (Zappavigna 2015), and to ‘coordinate content over a longer timeframe’ (Scott 2015:12); second, to mark

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keywords or topics; and third, to guide ‘the reader’s inferential processes when interpreting the utterance’ (Scott 2015: 13). Meta-communication guides the readers’ understanding of a Tweet (Page 2012; Kunneman, Liebrecht & Bosch 2014; Scott 2015; Hougaard 2015). In addition, the dialectical relationship between hashtags and their tweets (collaborative process) can be expressed at two levels:

- 1) micro level: decoding the impact of a text’s punctuation; and
- 2) macro level: it resembles headline/keyword (identifying the overall theme)

In addition, the whole tweets which are posted as responses to a hashtag may undergo discourse-purpose-specific particularization. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) introduce the systemic functional model which is utilized by Zappavigna (2011) to describe the language used on Twitter. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), language has three functions; ideational, interpersonal and textual. Depending on their discourse-specific purpose, those particularized tweets can be described to have multi-functional discourse: it is ideational since users represent their experience of the world and it is interpersonal as it is established to maintain relationships among users. Consequently, Zappavigna (2011) considers coupling interpersonal function and ideational function to construe affiliation on Twitter. The context of a hashtag is functionally diversified as the contribution of field (the topic), tenor (interpersonal function) and mode (linguistic elements). As for the field, users are just tweeting about various topics and interacting with their followers and fans. As for tenor, Twitter is a multi-blogging platform where news cracks first and goes viral. It is a trendy platform used almost by users.

Verified accounts reflect the true identity and enhance trust relationships among users. Users can follow others of the same interests. As for the mode, Twitter is a social network that is used to communicate through a short post of 140 words called tweets.

3. Activist Hashtags and Tweets

The world in the age of media and advertising is moving towards democracy. Despite the financial difficulties, more people are living in democratic societies we have never had before. It could have taken months to organize a demonstration or collect a petition. Throughout the financial crisis in 2008 people witnessed the power of social media. Ordinary people utilized social networking sites, such as Twitter, to make their protest or opposition effective. The successful protests and movements in the digital age were not organized by labor union or established institutions or associations. They were organized by an ad-hoc group of citizens that probably did not know each other. Famous uprising or movements have been created by people who had never been active in political life. They did it just by creating a hashtag to which thousands of users have responded. This has changed politics for ever. Nowadays political leaders know that their decisions can lead to a popular uprising or movement. An activist hashtag builds up public support for a cause or a marginalized group of people. It also enhances the framing of issues related to marginalized people or the representation of victimized people. In fact, an activist hashtag creates a new form of collective of collective identity (Cf. Yus 2011: 37). On the other hand, opponents of ‘hashtag activism’ describe the phenomenon as ‘slacktivism’. They claim that online activists are active online with little personal effort. Donald Trump, for example, has been accused as the perfect politician for a

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digital age. Dadas (2017: 31) discusses the use of hashtags to “bring attention to a cause; at the same time, they also run the risk of oversimplification by backgrounding important contextual information”. People also may not trust how huge tech companies can control what they see online.

In activist movements users post hashtags to constitute public conversations and create campaigns. Activist hashtags are defined as those hashtags which are created by media outlets to mobilize people through circulating discourse on a certain movement. In the last few years, research on activist hashtags has grown considerably. Ames and McDuffie (2023) explore case studies of hashtag activism on social justice movements. Hougaard (2018) argues that activism is one of the most important uses of Twitter. Activist hashtags provide an expression of solidarity as they imply shared narratives. The term can be defined as the act of showing support for a cause and mobilizing people. Demonstrators in Tahrir Square uprising or in Occupy Wall Street protests, for example, use hashtags to mobilize people (Augenbraun 2011). Then, activist hashtags have been used by marginalized groups to advance counter-narratives. Jackson et al. (2020), for example, point out how hashtag activism mobilizes, narrates and legitimizes those seeking race and gender justices. Moreover, Jackson et al. (2019) investigate how women have utilized Twitter to create and sustain narratives that defend rights against gendered violence. Examples include #YesAllWomen, #SurvivorPrivilege, #TheEmptyChair, #WhyIStayed and #MeToo. Each of these hashtags accumulates women’s experiences with interpersonal and institutional violence. Historically, culture in the US enabled gendered violence and “narratives of online gendered violence have held victims accountable” (2019: 2). Feminist activists created narratives on

social media to defend women's rights. Such hashtags seem to have created and sustained hashtag activism. Jackson et al. argue that "the internet has enabled networks of solidarity beyond geographic boundaries, fostered consciousness raising, and provided a forum for storytelling with less physical risk" (2019:3). Such violence against women sparked a debate about men's entitlement and violent behavior toward women. "The #YesAllWomen network provided a place to candidly discuss the harassment they experienced and find solidarity in other stories like their own" (2019: 6). This hashtag documented the widespread nature of patriarchal and misogynistic thinking. #GirlsLikeUs, which appeared in 2012, is another example of feminist advocacy on Twitter. Such online critique illustrates the power of hashtags as a user-generated phenomenon. #WhyIStayed, for example, trended in 2014 in defense of domestic abuse victims. On Twitter's 10-year anniversary, it issued a list of the most used hashtags related to social causes. "Two of the top three were related to issues of race. According to Twitter, #Ferguson was the most used social-issue hashtag in the 10-year history of the platform, while #BlackLivesMatter was third" (DeMars and Tait 2019: 118)

4. Data and Methodology

The type of data used in the study consists of actual instances of 2300 live tweets in English which are responses to 15 world trending hashtags. The data are drawn from 15 hashtags with their responding tweets. They contain only texts; therefore, multimodal data such as images and videos are not considered. The criteria of data selection depend on: (1) Trending hashtags in the world in the period from 2014 to 2019, (2) Twitter analytics and metrics to identify the hashtags which show a high

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percentage of participation (more than 10000 tweets); and (3) Activist hashtags which support a cause or a group of marginalized people. These criteria were applied cumulatively. Geographic dimension is not included; i.e. the country of the trending hashtag is not a criterion because social media communication goes beyond geography.

In order to gain a better and more thorough academic understanding of tweets which are responses to a hashtag, I undertook an empirical quantitative study which handles data taken from the ‘real world’. First, I searched famous hashtags in the period from 2014 to 2019. Data were collected by inputting hashtags into Google Search to ascertain the top hashtags which were used. Then, samples of 2300 tweets which are responses to 15 hashtags were collected. Then, I categorized the responding tweets into supportive and dismissive responses. Speech act analysis was drawn upon as a technique to examine the manifestation of hashtag users’ attitudes. Using Searle’s speech act taxonomy (Searle 1976), a list of five speech act categories was introduced to analyze internet activism. I employed his classification because he emphasized beliefs, intentions and psychological interpretation.

5. Activist Hashtags and Tweets as Speech Acts

In spite of the distancing effect of internet-mediated communication (time – space – culture) as opposed to face-to-face spoken interaction, speech act theory may provide a satisfactory analysis of activist hashtags and tweets. The tweet as a speech act would appear to be a good starting point to investigate internet users of supportive or dismissive stances. This theory may explain tweets in terms of the rules governing their use in performing various speech acts. Activist tweeters perform speech acts when they declare their stances towards a cause. A tweet responding to an

activist hashtag is a unity of the following components: (1) locutionary act – the posting of the tweet (they are considered locutionary though written); (2) illocutionary act – an action intended by the user and (3) perlocutionary act – the influence on the whole cause or campaign. The tweets in this study are analyzed as speech acts or illocutionary acts intended by their users to express one or multiple kinds of specific illocutionary force. Vosoughi and Roy (2016) identify tweets as speech acts. They argue that “knowing the speech acts behind a tweet can help improve analysis of tweets and give us a better understanding of the state of mind of the users (Vosoughi and Roy 2016: 711).

This study argues that tweets responding to activist hashtags can be analyzed as speech acts; they refer to users’ attitudes and denote actions by users who voice out their attitudes by posting tweets. Speech acts in this study are classified according to Searle (1976: 10-15):

- 1- Declaratives
- 2- Representatives
- 3- Commissives
- 4- Directives
- 5- Expressives

Tweets together with their hashtags may constitute a public conversation. The current study assures the ‘attributive relationship’ between the hashtag and the tweets; by posting a particular tweet in the public conversation, a user is actively involved in the ongoing collaborative conversation in a particular direction. Users can be described as active participants in the interaction. Their tweets may take up their stances in a number of ways, confirming and incorporating their responses into the development of the hashtag discourse which can be said to have an illocutionary force. Discourse is a relational construct, relating separate

tweets locally as well as globally with hashtags. This type of discourse is a multilayered construct; one tweet together with its replies constitutes one discourse unit. The whole number of user responses to a hashtag constitutes a whole discourse in which each tweet contributes to its development. Tweets function beyond simply responding to hashtags or signaling their acceptance. Instead, tweeters contribute to the moment-by-moment collaborative production of a macro-speech act. Van Dijk (1992) defines the macro-speech act as “the global speech act performed by the utterance of a whole discourse, and executed by a sequence of possibly different speech acts” (1992: 215). The analysis of discourse is originally concerned with the nature of the connectedness between parts and whole or, in other words, between tweets and the hashtag. Therefore, a macro-speech act can be realized at the level of the gestalt narrative (discourse as-a-whole) which consists of all the tweets. Analogously to the (micro) speech act of a single tweet, the communicative meaning of discourse (the whole tweets which are posted as responses to a hashtag) with an illocutionary force depends on the context which is initiated by the hashtag itself. In terms of speech acts, hashtags also have illocutionary force; that is to request responses from users.

The concept of speech acts is usually applied to single sentences. Thus, the posting of a tweet is interpreted as a speech act, given the appropriate discourse. However, the notion of a macro-speech act, or that of gestalt illocutionary force, seems to apply to a sequence of tweets, viz. of a whole discourse or conversation, at least at a more global level. Users may support or dismiss a cause by circulating the whole discourse. This study focuses on the macro-level of a global speech act, performed by the utterance of the discourse as a whole. It argues that in a sequence of tweets a number of speech acts may be functionally related to form a

composite speech act; it views a sub-sequence of speech acts as a unit. In other words, it shows the speech acts, viz. the responses, i.e. together functioning as a macro-speech act or when component acts form one global act.

This paper investigates this kind of pragmatic macro-structures of discourse. The notion of a macro-speech-act is necessary in order to understand the global meaning of the hashtag and its tweets. One of the implications of this study is the significance of explicitly linking hashtags and tweets in order to circulate a discourse or conversation and to create composite actions, and how such composite actions are linked with the notion of a macro-speech act.

[M]acro-structures are introduced as a necessary component in complex information processing. In order to be able to plan, execute, control discourse in production, and to understand, store, retrieve and reproduce discourse, a macro-level of processing must be postulated. A normal language user is unable to store and retrieve all individual sentences (propositions) of a discourse, and yet understands the discourse as a coherent whole, being able to recall and summarize it without necessarily having access to the individual propositions. (van Dijk 1977:9)

There is a relationship between sequences of tweets of a discourse and the sequences of speech acts accomplished by uttering that discourse in a certain context. Van Dijk assures that there is “non-trivial correlation between clause/sentence boundaries and speech act boundaries” (1977: 102). Van Dijk (1977) discusses how pragmatic macro-structures are constructed. The rule is to relate action sequences with their

corresponding macro-act through ‘generalization’: given a sequence of actions, one may map them onto their common super-act. Users may have posted various speech acts, such as declaring their attitudes, promising, etc. But together they would entail the super-act of supporting the cause. Depending on the context, one would choose the most informative, hence the most immediate super-act concept to describe the whole discussion. The concept of ‘coherence’ is useful in the continuity of senses. Ulbaek (2001) introduced the term ‘pipelines’ to refer to meaningful relations in discourse; propositions which create pipelines of information. The second rule would be one of ‘deletion’ in which less frequent acts would not be counted. This means that in actual processing the operations are also based on inductive inference. By accomplishing or interpreting a sequence of speech acts in the form of tweets one may assign certain subsequences to a more global (speech) act.

6. Analysis and Results

This section is concerned with presenting a content-based and category-based analysis of the hashtags and tweets utilized in this study. First, I categorize in Table 1 the different types of tweets which are responses to activist hashtags into supportive and dismissive responses:

Table 1. Overview: Types of speech acts in 2300 tweets

Type	of	Tweets
Frequency		
Supportive		2170
• Declarative		703
• Expressive		901
• Representative		515

• Commissive	12
• Directive	39
Dismissive	130
• Declarative	30
• Expressive	69
• Representative	28
• Commissive	0
• Directive	3
Total no. of tweets	2300

It is noticed that most tweets categorized as supportive are more frequently used than tweets classified as dismissive. In addition, supportive responses with declarative, expressive and representative illocutionary force have the overall frequency of 2119 tweets. The results are in line with Zappavigna's (2011) argument that hashtags are the best way to search for topics. When users utilize a hashtag, they integrate into an ongoing public conversation by adding the hashtag into their tweets. Contrarily, opponents of the hashtag also add the same hashtag to their tweets to attack the hashtag. Below is a sample of the data to prove that tweets can be viewed as speech acts and constitute a public conversation with a macro-speech-act.

The first four examples are tweets on the hashtag #MeToo, which was created as resistance against sexual harassment in the workplace. It spread virally in October 2017 on Twitter. It was popularized by American actress Alyssa Milano in 2017. She encouraged victims of sexual harassment to tweet about this topic. Since that time, the tweets on this hashtag have constituted a prolonged live worldwide conversation. Example (1) represents the onset of the trending discussion. This tweet is

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an invitation to post on this issue. It can be categorized as a composite speech act as it has declarative and directive illocutionary forces since it declares an attitude and calls for responses.

Example (1)

If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet. (Milano 2017)

Few hours after the previous tweet, the hashtag #MeToo became a trending topic. Users tweeted their own endless #MeToo stories. They provided supportive tweets responding to the hashtag. The following tweet is meant to display the continued attention of the user. The use focuses more on the content of what she said rather than her exact words. It is also an indirect **declarative** speech act as the user acknowledges and repeats the topic.

Example (2)

All too pervasive... Me too. #MeToo #TogetherWeRise
(Dawson 2017)

The primary goal of the tweet was to declare the user's attitude. Users continue with their stories. Example (2) shows that a user responds to the hashtag with the intent to reinforce the cause by undertaking responsibility and defending women who are harassed. The tweeter in example (3) created the supportive hashtag #HowIWillChange. The tweet is an indirect **expressive** speech act, and is posted to support women. This hashtag was meant to be a wake-up call for men, who turned a deaf ear to inappropriate behavior from their peers,

Example (3)

Guys, it's our turn. After yesterday's endless #MeToo stories of women being abused, assaulted and harassed, today we say #HowIWillChange. (Law 2017)

In example (4) another user mentions the opponents' point of view that women are using this hashtag to get significance. The analysis of the tweet reveals that the argumentative tweets generate a contrastive negative campaigning argumentative orientation which allows the opponents to foster a negative image of the campaign. It is an example of a dismissive response; the user clarifies the situation by acknowledging the topic.

Example (4)

Life coach Tony Robbins says women are using #MeToo to make themselves 'significant' – but this brave sexual abuse survivor called him out (Now This News 2018)

All the previous tweets show examples of public conversation, in which each user describes her/his attitude. They actively participate in the interaction. The whole discourse of the hashtag #MeToo can be understood by generalization as a composite macro-speech act with **declarative** and **expressive** illocutionary forces. The following example is about the hashtag #YesAllWomen. It was created in 2014 to support women's rights. Users have been actively discussing women's safety when they are walking home alone. They, for example, were obliged to hold their keys in their fist between the fingers to feel safe.

Example (5)

I shouldn't have to hold my car keys like a weapon & check over my shoulder every few seconds when I walk at night #YesAllWomen. (Bush 2014)

In 2012, Janet Mock, the trans advocate, author, director and TV host, became an outspoken activist because of the murders and suicides of queer and trans youth. The hashtag #TransLiberation has been created to support them. Jennicet Gutierrez, an activist for transgender rights and immigrant rights, utilized the hashtag. In the following example, she posts the tweet to participate in the cause. The tweet means if marginalized people exist, so they are resisting.

Example (6)

My existence is my resistance #TransLiberation
#Not1More #NiUniMas #liberationnotdeporation
(Gutierrez 2015)

Another activist hashtag is #WhyIStayed. It became trending in 2014 in defense of women who suffer from domestic abuse victims. It is not just one story, but over 250000 stories of survival, triumph, and healing. Example (7), which can be viewed as a **representative** speech act, shows one of the supporting tweets.

Example (7)

I was determined to make it work, wanted kids to have their dad, convinced myself that what he did to me wasn't affecting them #WhyIStayed (Miller 2014)

#WhyILeft has been created as a hashtag of counter-narrative in 2014 to defend women leaving home because of domestic violence. The tweet in example (8) is used to develop the discussion.

Example (8)

#Whyistayed it was easier for me to expect the worse than face the unknown #whyileft I finally realized I deserved to respect myself. (Moranis 2014)

In 2014, the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls has been also created to support the return of Nigerian school girls kidnapped by a militant Islamist group. Consider the following example.

Example (9)

Our prayers are with the missing Nigerian girls and their families. It's time to #BringBackOurGirls (First Lady-Archived 2014)

In 2015, a hashtag succeeded to change the Oscars. The hashtag #OscarSoWhite has been created to bring the attention to the lack of diversity in the Oscar nominations.

Example (10)

#OscarSoWhite they asked to touch my hair (April 2015)

All the 20 acting nominations for the Academy Awards were given to white actors. After five years, the Academy responded by adopting a strategy of inclusion. The Academy announced in June 2020 that the new 2020 members class was 45% women, 36% underrepresented ethnic/racial communities and 49% international from 68 countries.

Another hashtag is #TakeAKnee which has been trending in 2016. It was created as an anti-racism hashtag activist movement. The football player, Colin Kaepernick, started the movement by taking a knee during the national anthem to protest against police brutality. Taking the knee is a symbolic gesture against racism. He posted the following tweet to protest against racism.

Example (11)

My brother @kstill continued his protest of systemic oppression tonight by taking a knee. Alber Wilson @iThinkIsee12 joined him in protest. Stay strong brothers #takeaknee (Kaepernick 2018)

The following examples are tweets in which users provided specific responses to the hashtag #panamapapers. The Panama Papers scandal was considered one of the biggest document leaks in history. This hashtag was created to raise discussion about leaked confidential documents of offshore entities in 2016. The user in example (12) posted the tweet to refer to millions of leaked documents; it is a **representative** speech act in which users assert the topic of the hashtag.

Example (12)

The #panamapapers is the largest leak in history revealing world leaders and business people hiding trillions in offshore havens. (Anonymous 2016)

Users of # PanamaPapers showed resistance to offshore entities. Example (13) also points out that the user responds with another supportive tweet which can be considered as an **expressive** speech act.

Example (13)

What should shock the most about #PanamaPapers is this is just one law firm, in one offshore tax haven... just imagine the rest. (Simonarson 2016)

The user expresses his feeling and attitude about the Panama Papers by using the expression ‘just imagine the rest’. In the following example, the user utilized the scandal to attack the Iceland prime minister. It is a **commissive** speech act, in which he promises to expose Iceland prime minister.

Example (14)

Iceland prime minister will resign tomorrow. We will make him. #PanamaPapers (Arnalds 2016)

David Cameron, the former prime minister, was asked to crack down on offshore tax havens. Opposition figures demanded to end tax secrecy. Natalie Bennett, the Green Party leader, posted the following tweet to expose the corruption.

Example (15)

Can understand young people asking why they should pay back student loans, given corruption exposed #panamapapers. 1% hasn't played by rules (Bennett 2016)

Another user attacked the UK prime minister. His tweet can be categorized as a **representative** speech act in example (16). The user elaborates on the hashtag by claiming that UK MPs are 'holding offshore assets'.

Example (16)

No surprise our MPs aren't acting in our best interests. #panamapapers UK MPs 'holding offshore assets' ... (Brekkie 2016)

Both tweets in examples (15) and (16) have the illocutionary force of asserting that corruption exists in governments. Another supportive response comes from Edward Snowden who leaked highly qualified information from the National Security Agency. He refers to Iceland's PM in his tweet. His tweet in example (17) is meant to reinforce the hashtag #panamapapers against corruption.

Example (17)

The exact moment Iceland's PM realizes journalists found his secret:... #panamapapers (Snowden 2016)

In the following example, Patrick Watson, an American journalist, is calling for a response by implicating the phrase “something fishy here”. It is a dismissive response; it is a **representative** speech act which has the illocutionary force of asserting that the leak campaign is suspicious.

Example (18)

That the corruption shown by #PanamaPapers exists should surprise no one. That it would leak is the surprise. Something fishy here. (Watson 2016)

The whole discourse of the hashtag #PanamaPapers can be understood as a public conversation with a composite macro-speech act with representative illocutionary force; i.e. asserting corruption in authorities.

Another hashtag is #TheyAreUs. The world dealt with the attacks on Muslims worshipping at their mosques in New Zealand in 2019. Twitter users spoke out with this trending hashtag. The hashtag was inspired by the New Zealand Prime Minister’s comments at a press conference. The following three examples; i.e. (19), (20), (21), are supportive responses to #TheyAreUs. These can be viewed as **expressive** speech acts as users sympathize with victims of the attack. A famous Rugby team commented by posting the following tweets.

Example (19)

In honor of the victims of the Christchurch terror attacks, the AllBacks7s will wear their white jerseys and have a moment silence before we play Australia in our opening pool game. (All Blacks Sevens 2019)

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Notice in the next example, more hashtags such as #NewsZealand, #Christchurch and #Kiwi have been added to the tweet to guide the readers to construe context and to relate issues. In the following example, Fahim Al Qasimi, an Arab politician, posted a tweet to support tolerance.

Example (20)

My wife is from #NewsZealand. We were married in a mosque in NZ. My sons are half #Kiwi. The news of #Christchurch brought tears but thanks to @jacindaardern, I can tell my sons to be proud of their heritage & the tolerance & acceptance shared by our countries. #theyareus (Al Qasimi 2019)

Many users posted condolence tweets to support victims in New Zealand attacks. The following example is an example of these tweets.

Example (21)

Was truly humbling to have given our deepest love and condolences to our brothers and sisters at the mosque in Christchurch. An experience we will never forget...#TheyAreUs (Luke 2019)

No dismissive tweets have been founded in the responses to New Zealand attack. The whole discourse of the hashtag #TheyAreUs can be understood as a public conversation with an expressive macro-speech-act.

Another activist hashtag is #realDonaldTrump. It was created among Donald Trump's exponents after winning the presidential elections

in 2016. Example (22) is a sample of his exponents' tweets which can be seen as a supportive response.

Example (22)

Support from your Miami folk! #realDonaldTrump
#QAnon #WWG1WGA (Mark 2019)

Contrarily, Trump's opponents disagree and deny the hashtag. Although there are many supportive tweets or responses, there are many dismissive ones. The following tweets are examples of their tweets which can be seen as dismissive responses.

Example (23)

I voted for you! I am SO Tired of your promises to shut down our borders and here we are still talking and delivering on an empty promise. SOOOOO DISAPPOINTED...GET THAT BORDER SHUT DOWN. (Esparza 2019)

Example (24)

Yes, sadly so. The shoe is now on the other foot. Now you can appreciate how Bad Obama felt. Not nice. That's why i voted for you. You werent a politician. But now youre in israel's pocket just like the rest of em. (Phillips 2019)

Users in both examples (23) and (24) declare that they voted for Trump. However, they were disappointed. In example (25) the tweet shows a

directive speech act in the form of many imperatives such as ‘stop’, ‘stay off’ and ‘think’.

Example (25)

Please stop with the childish comments. Stay off social media. I’m so sorry I voted for you. Please Mr President think before speaking. (Mary 2019)

The tweet in example (26) points out that the user utters an impolite expression to show anger. It also includes other hashtags such as #taxes and #taxreform to enrich discussion in this global conversation about Trump.

Example (26)

@realDonaldTrump I voted for you and you royally fucked me with your tax reform. Thought you were supposed to HELP the middle class, not take more money out of your pockets. #taxes #taxreform (Selby 2019)

Another dismissive tweet can be seen in example (27) in which the tweeter expresses sorrow for voting for Trump.

Example (27)

When will they investigate Hillary? You’ve been promising that for almost 3 years. And what happened to you being the pro 2nd amendment president? I wouldn’t expect that president to pass unconstitutional gun bans by

executive fiat. I'm starting to feel sorry I voted for you.
(Paine 2019)

Most of Trump opponents' tweets are in reply to the hashtag #realDonaldTrump. These tweets can be understood as dismissive responses which can be seen as declaratives. In fact, such hashtags as #realDonaldTrump is an argumentative one which is difficult to decide as a speech act. Apparently, hashtags can be said to help users find, follow, and contribute to a conversation. Users post to react and to express their attitudes in the topic. It is clear from the previous examples that users add a hashtag to contribute to an ongoing public conversation whether with supportive or dismissive responses. Users' tweets carry illocutionary forces; they post either to acknowledge, support or deny a topic which is represented by a hashtag.

7. Discussion

The study argues that activist hashtags and tweets are all about call and response. The fact that a hashtag is an invitation to participate by posting tweets suggests that hashtag performs the function of a directive speech act. The manifestation of hashtag users' attitudes can be seen as two types; the content analysis brings forward two main types of tweets: supportive and dismissive responses. The fact that supportive tweets are frequently used in hashtag activism ensures that the activist hashtag achieves its goals. The concept of "call for action" hashtags which is fostered by both the hashtag and tweets is a key concept in circulating the discourse. Although brevity is considered as a constraint, it results in condensed powerful phrases in the coinage of the hashtag. It enhances meaning derivation and interpretation. Users process information

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explicitly and implicitly. They undergo some referential effort in order to reach the intended meaning. Notice how the phrase MeToo is processed implicitly. The MeToo collocation is a very powerful phrase; it is intended to persuade the victims of harassment to support the campaign. The phrase is built around the implicit meaning “there are many intimidated victims of sexual harassment”. Therefore, the hashtag was successful though it is short and easy to understand. All in all, hashtags together with their tweets play the role of discursive devices with illocutionary forces. The main function of “call for action” hashtags is to set up campaigns and help people get involved in the cause. Hashtags give the users the opportunity to address a wider and collective audience. They are also a chance to set up individual initiatives and shape a global conversation about the campaign.

The main purpose of a hashtag is to circulate a discourse on a certain proposition and support a cause or activist movement. Including an activist hashtag with posts helps to support or dismiss the cause; responses to activist hashtags can either be supporting or dismissive. ‘Hashtag activism’ is a notion that is used to refer to the use of Twitter’s hashtags to show support for a cause. It enables people to access online platforms and create movements. In case there are many supportive and dismissive responses in the same hashtag movement, it turns to be an argumentative hashtag. It is a type of hashtag that presents arguments about both sides of a cause. An example is #realDonaldTrump which attracted posts from opponents and exponents of Trump. All in all, activist hashtags are tools to support a cause and mobilize people.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, the study argues that user responses to hashtags on Twitter may constitute a new genre in computer-mediated communication. It examines activist hashtags and categorizes them to understand how conflicting stances are presented. Activist hashtags are used to mobilize users through the digital platform (Twitter). The findings from the content analysis prove that tweets that are responses to activist hashtags can be classified into supportive and dismissive. It is also noticed that supportive hashtags are more frequent than dismissive ones. One of the findings of the study is that those tweets can be interpreted as having macro-speech acts. This conversation can also be said to function as a supportive tool through which users express their stance toward the content of the hashtag. Users show a variety of speech acts in their tweets such as declaratives, representatives, commissives, directives, and expressives.

The study also asserts the role of the activist hashtag in maintaining the public conversation. Moreover, an argumentative hashtag is that one that includes supportive and dismissive tweets as responses. Throughout the discussion I have highlighted the ‘attributive relationship’ between the hashtag and the tweets. Twitter facilitates the ‘call and response’ actions in activist campaigns. In sum, hashtags and tweets can be seen as macro-speech act in activism. Future work in this area is needed to determine the additional pragmatic roles of hashtag and tweets in mobilizing people in activism. The discursive function of hashtags illustrated in this article seems to integrate our understanding of macro-speech acts into a more general picture of cyberpragmatics.

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