

Create, Campaign, and Click: A Genre Analysis of the Interactive Features Used in Hashtag Campaigns on Twitter

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1. Introduction

The late 1990s saw the development and the release of several tools which made it easier for people to create their online content. One of those tools was blogs that formed online records, helping several people create their online presence. At that time, blogging as an online activity has been increasingly popular due to the release of the first free blogging software “Blogger” (Jensen, 2003). By 2005, there was a dramatic shift concerning the way people use the web. They no longer browsed each other’s content, but they began to create profiles, interact with each other, make connections, and generate their own content as well. In 2006, Facebook introduced the option of News Feed where all status updates of the friends of any user were displayed chronologically. Since then, posting updates has been a pivotal feature to many social media websites. In 2007, the self-described microblogging service, Twitter, was launched.

Narratives on Twitter take a different form from other blogging services due to the nature of Twitter as a microblogging service because the participants on Twitter have to express their ideas in 280 characters or less in order to write a single tweet. Twitter allows its users to write the # symbol followed by a word or a phrase to create hashtags. Twitter users can use certain hashtags relevant to the topic of their tweets and they can be accessed by anyone to follow any trending topic on Twitter. Despite the digital preexistence of hashtags, it is in the context of social media post-2005 that the hashtag and the digital linguistic practice of hashtagging have become established in the public awareness. In

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2009, Twitter gave the practice of hashtagging its official status by adding clickable hashtagged lexical items to make them searchable, and in 2010, Trending Topics were added to Twitter homepage to monitor the mechanism of hashtag popularity in real time. Recently, hashtags have spread to other platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

1.1. Online Campaigns and Hashtag Activism

One of the salient functions of social networks is spreading awareness through online campaigns. Shaw (2012) illustrated that “online discourse can be a mode of activism capable of triggering sociopolitical change with or without the help of collective action offline” (as cited in Clark, 2016, 4). Thus, many non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, interest groups, and individuals have started social or political campaigns online to endorse sustainable messages and behavior around the world. The development of internet activism provided a new mechanism of pressure for governments and corporate response in today’s global environment. On Twitter, the creation of campaigns is always launched through hashtags. According to Zappavigna (2011), “hashtags are an emergent convention for labeling the topic of a micro-post and a form of metadata incorporated into posts” (3). Bruns and Burgess (2011) refer to the communities that form around hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter (a hashtag campaign that created the movement Black Lives Matter which campaigns against violence and racism targeting black people in the United States) as ad-hoc publics. They argue that hashtags are “a means of coordinating a distributed discussion between more or less large groups of users, who do not need to be connected” (124). Therefore, a hashtag can provide cohesion in the disorganized discourse of Twitter.

2. Literature Review

During the last few years, several linguists have been conducting extensive research to develop the concept of genre analysis to include more non-fictional texts. Bhatia (1993) paved the way for the practical application of genre theory by suggesting a comprehensive framework for analyzing non-literary genres. In his recent book, Bhatia (2014) stated that it is significant to take a look at the texts of the real world and to start analyzing *unfamiliar genres*. The present study suggests that the tweets written under different themes of hashtag activism belong to the category of unfamiliar genres. In 1990, Swales stated that “a genre comprises a class of communicative events.” He further explained that a communicative event occurs when “language has both significant and

indispensable role” (58). Moreover, he illustrated that a communicative event includes the role of the discourse, environment, and the culture surrounding it.

Following Swales’ steps, Bhatia (1993) expanded his explanation on genre analysis by defining the notion of *non-fictional genre*. His starting point was the definition by Swales (1990), and he then added that the nature of a genre “is primarily characterized by the communicative purpose(s) that it is intended to fulfill” (Bhatia, 1993, 13). The communicative purpose(s) will determine the structure of the genre. Although they agreed on the nature of a genre, they disagreed on the idea that communicative purposes would point the analyst towards a possible difference between genres.

A decade later, Nielsen and Askehave (2005) tried to develop a genre analysis model that is able to capture the essence of genres mediated through the internet. They chose the homepage as a genre because the homepage was a new genre born with the internet, yet it shared several features with already existing genres and discourses from printed and oral media. However, what characterizes the homepage from traditional media is the existence of the genre and the medium. The medium in this case is the web, which is not there in the traditional media. According to Nielsen and Askehave, it is significant to consider the interplay between genre and medium when analyzing web-mediated texts. The medium in this case is the internet which provides a public space “in which anyone with access to the internet is free to share information and establish virtual presence in the cyberspace” (125). They explained that the characteristics of the medium on the internet are *mutli-medianess* and *hyper-reading*. These characteristics have a significant influence on the nature of web-mediated texts. *Multi-medianess* means the integration of various sub-mediums (such as text, images, sound, and animations) into a common format. Hyper-reading means how web texts are related to each other, enabling a non-linear transmission of information. Hyper-reading enables the reader to filter, skim, and scan the text. In this way, the text is delivered through an interactive medium. Their article suggested the need to revisit the traditional genre model and to establish a genre model that captures the essence of text and medium simultaneously.

2.1. Studies on Web-based Genres

It is clear that digital genres borrow heavily from the paper world; and therefore, many scholars examined the shared features between the two genres. For example, Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013) conducted a comparative genre analysis of English business emails in terms of their generic and lexicogrammatical levels. Not only did they investigate four obligatory moves, but they

utilized similar steps to realize these moves in the emails. Similarly, Dillon and Gushrowski (2000) tried to analyze home pages as a new genre with distinctive features using genre analysis. Their findings claimed that the home page might be the first digital information genre. Concerning blogs, Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright (2004) investigated the genre of 203 randomly selected weblogs in order to systematically describe the characteristics of this *new* genre. Their results suggested that the blogs under investigation share similarities with other digital genres, including the personal homepage.

2.2. Articles Written on Hashtag Activism on Twitter

A number of articles discussed hashtag activism on Twitter such as Hayes's article (2017) which brought to light how Twitter has been transformed into a public space for protest and not only a way of circulating news and data. Similarly, Clark's article (2016) on hashtag feminism illustrated how hashtag activism has become a powerful tool for fighting gender inequities around the world. Rentschler (2015) elaborated on the controversy around the popular hashtag #saftyeetipsforladies. She explained how Twitter helped the hashtag resonate by indicating women response to rape culture. Likewise, Williams (2015) argued in her article how feminists of color resisted violence with hashtag feminism. In 2014, Megarry also addressed the online abuse that women receive through the analysis of the Twitter hashtag #Mencallmethings. However, the study neither analyzed the structure nor the discourse of the feminist hashtags. Also, the researchers did not use statistical data to support their argument.

2.3. Empirical Studies on the use of Hashtags on Twitter

Concerning the empirical studies conducted on the use of Hashtags on Twitter, Trillo's study (2017) focused on analyzing the content features of the hashtag campaign: #SayNoStopVAW which was launched by the European Commission in 2016 for the elimination of gender based violence. However, the hashtag gathered limited contributions. Pang and Law (2016) also analyzed the content features of one hashtag which was #WorldEnvironmentDay. Allem et al. (2016) conducted a case study on the efficiency of Twitter as a campaigning tool, and they based their research on the campaign launched by the California Department of Public Health. Likewise, Adi (2015) analyzed the content and the conversation tools around the #publicrelations and #pr hashtags on Twitter. She stated that Twitter has become a sphere for community building and a media outlet for both institutional settings and social movements, and that the most informative tool was Twitter's hashtagging. Maity, Ghuku, Upmanyu, and

Mukherjee (2015) were engaged in a study that quantitatively analyzed both the word level as well as the hashtags of Twitter as they investigated the use of formal and informal expressions on Twitter. Moreover, Wikström (2014) explored the communicative functions served by hashtags on Twitter from a pragmatic perspective. Furthermore, Page (2012) compared the frequency, types and grammatical context of hashtags in a dataset of 92,000 tweets between distinctive groups such as corporations and celebrities and some ‘ordinary’ users of Twitter. She also tried to document the evolving use of Twitter by these groups over time. Zappavigna (2011) investigated the usage of language to build a community on Twitter using the Systemic Functional Linguistic theory. She analyzed the structure and meaning of a dataset of 45,000 tweets extracted in the 24 hours after the announcement of Obama’s winning in the 2008 US presidential elections.

It appears from the previous review that several linguists investigated the language and the structure patterns presented in microblogging services such as Twitter, but a few studies conducted a genre analysis of tweets. Although a number of studies and articles focused on Twitter activism and the use of hashtags to propagate for social and political campaigns, no research has been done on analyzing hashtag campaigning as a distinctive genre. No studies have attempted to compare different hashtags in terms of their interactive features, which may count as a reasonable justification for this study.

3. Rationale for the Study

While most studies have examined the use of hashtags as tools for information organization and retrieval, none has tried to account for the ways users use hashtagging for social, political, and humanitarian campaigns. In their book, *Digital Discourse*, Thurlow and Mroczek (2011) purported the need for revisiting and refining old and established theories in light of the new computer-mediated data derived from the internet. According to this criterion, hashtag campaigns are a suitable candidate for genre status. Therefore, the present study explored the macro-linguistic features used by users online so as to understand how they use extremely public short messages to create and circulate online campaigns.

4. Research Questions

The study focused on analyzing tweets written in top trending hashtags, and the main research question of the study is:

* To what extent does hashtag activism on Twitter represent a distinctive genre in terms of its interactive features?

This main question has been broken down into the following sub-questions:

1- What are the macro-linguistic features to draw attention to a certain campaign?

2- What are the similarities between the selected hashtags in terms of their macro-linguistic features?

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Design

To answer the main research question, the study adopted a mixed-method approach that involved collecting and analyzing the tweets of the hashtag campaigns quantitatively and qualitatively in some phases during the research process. The corpus of the study was divided into 11 sub-corpus: each sub-corpus consisted of a hashtag campaign. This step was followed by a systematic comparison conducted between the corpuses of each hashtag campaign.

5.2. Sample

For the present study, a convenience sampling technique was used. The researcher collected 33,000 tweets (written in English) from public Twitter accounts using eleven of the top trending hashtag campaigns on Twitter. With millions of tweets posted daily, it would be impractical to choose a random sample; as a result, the researcher based her choice on the top trending hashtag campaigns because their linguistic features might be well-represented in this sample. These campaigns were used to propagate for political and social causes from January 2016 until January 2018. Each selected hashtag campaign included the top 3,000 tweets during the active life-cycle of the campaign (the campaign can last for months). The researcher chose seven political hashtag campaigns and they were: #BlackLivesMatter, #FeelTheBern, #MakeAmericaGreatAgain, #NeverHillary, #NeverTrump, #SaveAleppo, and #YemenInquiryNow. In addition, four social hashtag campaigns were explored such as: #Metoo, #InternationalWomensDay, #TimesUp, and #NetNeutrality. To determine the top trending hashtags from January 2016 till January 2018, the researcher used two methods. First, she investigated the media coverage of these hashtag campaigns during this period. The researcher used a second method to gather the top trending hashtags from January 2016 till January 2018, which was through the website: www.statweetics.com (the website is not available anymore). The website tracked the top 500 rankings of hashtags, users, words, locations and

sources by months and years as well. By seeking agreement between the two methods, the researcher combined a list of the top trending hashtags during January 2016 until January 2018.

5.2.1. #MeToo. The first social hashtag campaign that the study explored was #MeToo which started in 2017. The actress Alyssa Milano started a viral campaign on Twitter to invite those who have experienced sexual harassment to respond with “Me too” imitating her (See Figure 1). Her tweet followed the New York Times Oct. 5 investigation by Megan Twohey and Jodi Kantor and (2017) into sexual harassment allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Within hours #MeToo started an online tidal wave as women flooded Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram with their personal accounts of sexual assault, abuse, exploitation and harassment.



Figure 1. First tweet of #MeToo

5.2.2. #TimesUp. Two months later, on New Year’s Day, another powerful hashtag campaign for women’s empowerment dominated Twitter. It started when a group of Hollywood celebrities launched the Time’s Up movement in response to the #MeToo campaign. According to the official Time’s Up website, www.timesupnow.com, the initiative “addresses the systemic inequality and injustice in the workplace that have kept underrepresented groups from reaching their full potential” (“Time’s Up”, 2017). On Twitter, the hashtag #TimesUp spread swiftly (See Figure 2.). While #MeToo explicitly dealt with sexual violence of all kinds, #TimesUp was focused on the inequalities women face in workplace.



Figure 2. A tweet with a picture from #TimesUp

5.2.3. #NetNeutrality. In the same year, on the 14th of December, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted to repeal the net neutrality rules that were set during Barak Obama’s administration. “Net neutrality is the idea that internet service providers should treat all content following their cables and cell towers equally” (Finley, 2018). The vote on the 14th of December divided the US into two poles. Two dissenting votes asserted that it was necessary to restore FCC’s authority to regulate ISPs (Internet Service Providers) to help promote free internet. The three votes who were for the repeal of net neutrality said that the decision was to remove unnecessary regulations. However, Internet users called this repeal “the end of the internet as we know it”. As a result, a digital rights advocacy group launched the hashtag campaign #NetNeutrality to motivate those who oppose getting rid of the regulations (See Figure 3).



Figure 3. A tweet extracted from #NetNeutrality

5.2.4. #YemenInquiryNow. Regarding political hashtag campaigns in 2017, Yemen's Al-Masirah TV unexpectedly urged its audience to tweet using the hashtag #YemenInquiryNow (See Figure 4) to bring awareness of the humanitarian crisis of the country. The United Nations Human Rights Office affirmed that “at least 6,660 civilians have been killed since the bombing started in March 2015” (“Yemen: United Nations Experts”, 2018). Since 2015, a blockade has been put on the country by its neighboring countries led by KSA. According to a report published by the BBC, this reduced the amount of food, aid, medicines and fuel granted to the country. Multiple civilians were on the brink of starvation and sickness.



Figure 4. A tweet extracted from #YemenInquiryNow

5.2.5. #MakeAmericaGreatAgain. In 2016, social media played a pivotal role in the US presidential campaigns, helping candidates and political parties to incorporate them to interact and influence voters. According to Twitter, “people in the U.S. sent 1 billion Tweets about the election since the primary debates began in August [2015]” (Coyne, 2016). Hashtag campaigns were one of the basic tools that were used to “disseminate campaign information, promote candidates, and mobilize voters” (Bai, 2017). The PEORIA project stated that one billion tweets were sent from the primary debates in August up to the Election Day; over 75 million tweets were sent on Election Day (Cohen, 2016). Borrowing the statement from President Ronald Reagan during 1980s, Trump revived “Make America Great Again” and used #MakeAmericaGreatAgain and #MAGA as his political hashtags of 2016 (See Figure 5).



Figure 5. A Trump supporter via #MakeAmericaGreatAgain

5.2.6. #BlackLivesMatter. Although the hashtag was launched on Twitter in 2013, #BlackLivesMatter has been one of the most substantial political hashtag campaigns in 2016, (Cohen, 2016). “The slogan was a rallying cry for an incipient movement crystallized in 2014 during the Ferguson, Missouri uprisings against police brutality” (Rickford, 2015, p.1). The movement Black Lives Matter (BLM) was born as a Twitter hashtag campaign when George Zimmerman was found not guilty by a Florida jury in 2012 when he killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black youth. BLM stirred several discussions during the presidential campaigns and the candidates attempted to profiteer from the movement and gain its support in their campaigns.



Figure 6. A tweet extracted from #BlackLivesMatter

5.2.7. #FeelTheBern. The third most used Twitter hashtag of 2016 was Bernie Sanders’ #FeelTheBern (See Figure 7). The hashtag was originally coined by Winnie Wong, the founder and digital strategist for “People For Bernie”, a group of activists on Facebook campaigning for Sanders (Grossman, 2016). Wong also made clear that “a hashtag should never be the driving force of the campaign.” People should be. Sanders afterwards entered the race, fully embraced the message behind his campaign, and made it his catchphrase. Despite Sanders losing the nomination, Twitter users still post with #FeelTheBern: and have done so 177,476 times since July the 29th, the day after the Democratic National Convention (Cohen, 2016).



Figure 7. A supporter tweeting about #FeelTheBern

5.2.8. #NeverTrump. Another counter hashtag surfaced during the US presidential elections was #NeverTrump (See Figure 8). In a study by Bovet, Morone, and Makse (2018) on Twitter trends during the US elections, they investigated the number of hashtags that represented the online war between the two candidates: Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The #NeverTrump was one of those anti-Trump hashtags which started as a movement with different names such as: The Stop Trump Movement, The Anti-Trump, Dump Trump or The Never Trump Movement. “Concerns about Trump’s experience, intelligence, ideological convictions, and controversial statements led several voters to join the movement” (Johnson, McCray & Ragusa, 2018).



Figure 8. A tweet against Trump with the hashtag #NeverTrump

5.2.9. #NeverHillary. On the other hand, as Hillary Clinton declared victory in 2016 as a nominee for presidency, pro-Bernie Sanders groups took to Twitter to launch a counter-campaign, saying they would rather vote for Donald Trump

than Hillary Clinton (See Figure 9). They started a number of similar hashtags such as #ifwebernyoubernwithus which meant that if you voted Hillary you deserve Trump. However, at the end, following the final primary election, there was strong polarization between the two hashtags: #NeverHillary and #NeverTrump. It was similar to a virtual war between the two parties.

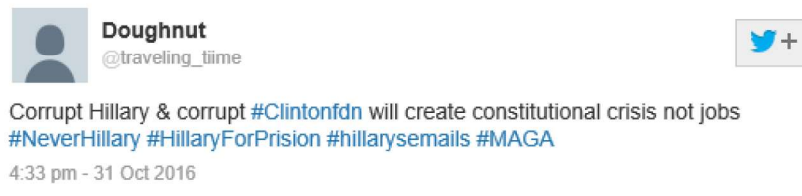


Figure 9. A tweet against Hillary Clinton with the hashtag #NeverHillary

5.2.10. #InternationalWomensDay. One of the social hashtag campaigns that dominated 2016 was #InternationalWomensDay. Although the international women’s day is officially recognized by the United Nations since 1975, multiple activists seize the opportunity every year on the 8th of March to launch the hashtag #InternationalWomensDay (See Figure 10) to empower and “honor the amazing women who made a difference, both on and off Twitter” (Maffs, 2016). Therefore, several Twitter users used the hashtag to tweet about the impact of women in their lives, women’s rights and gender equality.

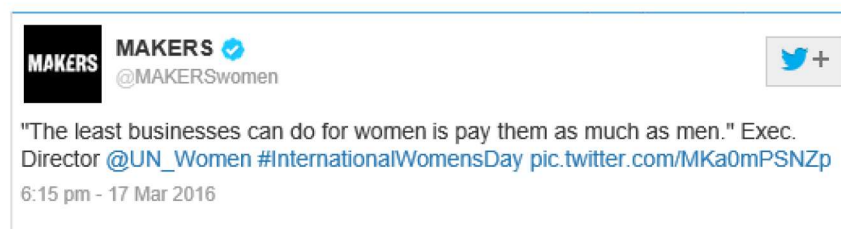


Figure 10. A tweet celebrating #InternationalWomensDay

5.2.11. #SaveAleppo. Since 2011, Syrians have taken to Twitter to highlight how disastrous the situation is in Syria. According to the UN, more than 400 thousand people have been killed and there are more than 5.5 million Syrian refugees as “it was the world’s biggest producer of refugees” (United Nations: Refugees, 2018). As reported by the BBC, the government forces narrowed in on rebel-held neighborhoods of Syria’s besieged city of Aleppo; therefore, the hashtag campaign #SaveAleppo (See Figure 11) was launched by activists around the world to raise awareness about the desperate situation in Aleppo, Syria (Sini, 2017).



Figure 11. A tweet endorsing the #SaveAleppo campaign

5.3. Data Analysis

Once the data collection was complete, the researcher analyzed each hashtag campaign separately based on the two frameworks of the study.

5.3.1. Theoretical Framework

The study was grounded on the merging of two models of analyzing unfamiliar genres: the first model is the one suggested by Bhatia (1993), and the second one was Neilsen and Askehave (2005) new framework on digital genres.

First, in order to analyze unfamiliar genres, Bhatia (1993) proposed a model that is composed of seven steps. However, not all steps may be relevant for all texts. The steps were described as following:

Step 1: Placing the Given Text in a Situational Context. This step means that the reader should attempt to define a situational and cultural context for the text without any considerations than reading through the text.

Step 2: Surveying Existing Literature. It means that the analyst should investigate the relevant literature written about the genre theory, theoretical frameworks, and the related genres to the genre the analyst will investigate.

Step 3: Refining the Situational/Contextual Analysis. In this step, Bhatia focused on the generic conventions that govern the text. It means that the analyst should define the sender, receiver, and function of the text. A description of the linguistic background for the genre in question should follow and, finally, the topic or theme of the text can be defined.

Step 4: Selecting a Corpus. It is important to select different texts in accordance with the level of analysis which may be quite detailed or less exploratory. This step is important to quantify the shared lexicogrammatical and structural features in the text.

Step 5: Studying the Institutional Context. A good genre analyst then attempts to study the institutional context, including the system and /or methodology (e.g., face to face communication, pen and paper, or a meeting), in which the genre is used and the rules and conventions (linguistic, social, cultural, academic, or professional) that govern the use of language in such institutional settings.

Step 6: Levels of Linguistic Analysis. Afterwards, the analyst should choose the appropriate theoretical framework for his/her analysis. The genre analyst then determines the most significant features of language that are prevalent in the text. The analysis may focus on three different levels: analysis of lexico-grammatical features, analysis of textualization (language choice and formality of the text), and structural interpretation (formatting devices) of the text-genre.

Step 7: Specialist Information in Genre Analysis. This step means that the genre analyst should consult a specialist within the field of the text-genre in order to get a second opinion on his results. Also, while analyzing any text, it is important to consider the views of Bhatia and the views of Swales in order to make a connection between the genre concept and the genre analysis.

5.3.1.1. Macro-textual Analysis of the Tweets. The second model used in the study was by Nielsen and Askehave (2005), and it was chosen to better suit the nature of the digital genre under investigation because the affordance of hyperlinking texts to other texts to form nonlinear texts offered new ways to reinterpret digital discourse (Tiainen, 2012). According to the model devised by Nielsen and Askehave (2005) on analyzing web genres, it is significant to reconsider the navigating mode of digital texts (the ability to skim, scan, and move to relevant web pages and sub-sites allowing the reader to travel from one link to another). Thus, Nielsen and Askehave's model of genre analysis was comprised of two modes: the reading mode (the text must be characterized in terms of its communicative purpose, moves, and rhetorical strategies), and the navigating mode (the medium must be characterized in terms of its communicative purpose, links, and rhetorical strategies). The present study analyzed the data in terms of its navigating mode which included the interactive features used in each hashtag campaign. Therefore, the study investigated certain structural interactive features associated with the digital nature of the tweets such as different types of URLs, hashtags, and @Mentions. In the model proposed by the study, hashtags were divided into 9 categories and URLs into 6 categories.

5.3.1.1.1. URLs. From empirically observing the corpus, the researcher noticed the abundance of URLs attached to the tweets. A URL (Uniform Resource Locator) is an address of a specific web page or a file on the Internet. To investigate the URLs used in the tweets of each hashtag campaign, the researcher categorized URLs into the following groups: links to videos, pictures, Facebook links, Tumblr links, Instagram links, embedded tweets, and other links.

5.3.1.1.2. Hashtags. It was noticeable that several Twitter users attached a number of hashtags to their tweets. Hashtags were clustered into ten groupings based on the theme of each hashtag: the main hashtag, variations of the same hashtag, hashtags of organizations, other related hashtag campaigns, hashtags of location, hashtags of celebrities and politicians, hashtags of time, one-word hashtags, and other popular hashtags.

5.3.1.1.3. @Mentions. Another interactive feature which appeared during the initial inspection was the use of mentions to other accounts on Twitter. A @Mention is a feature on Twitter that can tag one or different accounts to the tweet. Users can use @Mentions to mention the verified accounts of celebrities, media news, politicians, organizations, companies, and sometimes ordinary users.

6. Analysis and Results

This section aims to answer the first research and second research sub-question as it determines the types and the number of the macro-linguistic features (i.e., the interactive features) used in each hashtag campaign.

6.1. The Proportions of the URLs Used in All Campaigns

What stands out in Table 1 is that all the hashtag campaigns involved diverse URLs. They were explored and listed into seven types. Links to pictures topped the list as they made up 45% of the total result, followed by embedded tweets and other links. Tumblr links had the lowest proportion (n=30). Video links were most posted in the campaign #InternationalWomensDay forming 18% of the total instances, followed by #FeelTheBern and #MakeAmericaGreatAgain. However, video links were least utilized in #YemenInquiryNow. As for Facebook links, they were most tweeted in the campaign #SaveAleppo as they formed 30% of the total instances. This was followed by #InternationalWomensDay and #YemenInquiryNow. Facebook links were less frequently posted in #Metoo (7 times). Instagram links were most tweeted in the campaign #SaveAleppo accounting for 39% of the total. #InternationalWomensDay and #BlackLivesMatter were the next in place. Surprisingly, #YemenInquiryNow had only one Instagram link, and no one posted any Instagram links in the #Metoo hashtag campaign (0%). As for Tumblr links, while they were mainly tweeted in the campaign #InternationalWomensDay (90%), they were least posted in #NeverHillary and #NetNeutrality. Barely did the other campaigns include Tumblr links in their

tweets. In contrast, links to pictures were heavily shared in the campaign #Metoo and were present in 17% of the total instances. The following campaigns were #YemenInquiryNow and #InternationalWomensDay; however, links to pictures were least utilized in #TimesUp (260 times). Also, embedded tweets were highly employed in the campaign #FeelTheBern with 19% of the total instances. They preceded #NeverTrump and #NeverHillary, but embedded tweets were least utilized in #YemenInquiryNow. Some other miscellaneous links were most posted in the campaign #NetNeutrality accounting for 36% of the total result. The two campaigns: #BlackLivesMatter and #YemenInquiryNow involved a fewer number of other links, yet the number of these links was the lowest in #SaveAleppo (11 links). Examples of these URLs are presented below:



Figure 12. An example of a tweet with a video link. Retrieved from: <https://mobile.twitter.com/jonnyrubberman/status/714126841045454848>



Figure 13. A tweet with a link to an organization. Retrieved from: <https://mobile.twitter.com/ySTna0rcIhZsCQ7/status/928887976695943168>



Figure 14. A tweet with a link to a picture. Retrieved from: mobile.twitter.com/ySTna0rcIhZsCQ7/status/928887976695943168



Figure 15. An embedded tweet. Retrieved from: <https://mobile.twitter.com/emilykholcomb/status/79236199851216486>



Figure 16. A tweet with a Tumblr link. Retrieved from: <https://mobile.twitter.com/BananaData/status/710103587783909378>

Table 1. The number and percentage of occurrence of URLs used in the eleven campaigns

Hashtag Campaigns	Video Links		Facebook Links		Instagram Links		Tumblr Links		Links to Pictures		Embedded Tweets		Other Links	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
#BlackLivesMatter	138	14%	32	6%	47	9%	0	0%	638	8%	527	10%	377	16%
#NeverTrump	46	5%	25	5%	9	2%	0	0%	337	4%	839	16%	158	7%
#TimesUp	48	5%	21	4%	12	2%	0	0%	260	3%	235	5%	194	8%
#MeToo	42	4%	7	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1271	17%	97	2%	207	9%
#NetNeutrality	56	6%	21	4%	15	3%	1	3%	452	6%	462	9%	840	36%
#SaveAleppo	60	6%	152	30%	203	39%	0	0%	854	11%	468	9%	11	0%
#MakeAmericaGreatAgain	146	15%	23	5%	44	9%	0	0%	706	9%	531	10%	39	2%
#YemenInquiryNow	5	0%	38	8%	1	0%	0	0%	1221	16%	128	3%	352	15%
#FeelTheBern	171	17%	34	7%	21	4%	0	0%	490	6%	976	19%	68	3%
#InternationalWomensDay	185	18%	142	28%	160	31%	27	90%	1065	14%	179	4%	38	2%
#NeverHillary	104	10%	11	2%	3	1%	2	7%	379	5%	670	13%	69	3%
Total	1001	100%	506	100%	515	100%	30	100%	7673	100%	5112	100%	2353	100%

Table 2. The number and percentage of occurrence of hashtags used in the eleven campaigns

Hashtag Campaigns	Main Hashtag		Variations of the Same Hashtag		Organizations		Other Related Hashtags		Location		Celebrities or Politicians		One-word Hashtag		Other popular Hashtags		Time	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
#BlackLivesMatter	6022	10%	354	29%	0	0%	4720	15%	444	6%	582	8%	5800	19%	2981	16%	200	45%
#NeverTrump	3003	5%	0	0%	0	0%	2039	6%	38	0%	498	7%	1141	4%	769	4%	0	0%
#TimesUp	2731	5%	28	2%	0	0%	1290	4%	87	1%	323	5%	2166	7%	1818	10%	8	1%
#MeToo	6050	10%	0	0%	0	0%	2230	7%	220	3%	1218	17%	2927	9%	3131	17%	27	6%
#NetNeutrality	6080	10%	222	18%	0	0%	776	2%	115	1%	42	1%	3557	11%	2426	13%	16	4%
#SaveAleppo	6055	10%	73	6%	0	0%	2897	9%	2818	36%	188	3%	2462	8%	1684	9%	8	2%
#MakeAmericaGreatAgain	3002	5%	0	0%	0	0%	2803	9%	99	1%	703	10%	1391	4%	554	3%	20	4%
#YemenInquiryNow	5993	10%	0	0%	508	100%	324	1%	3274	42%	19	0%	599	2%	114	1%	3	1%
#FeelTheBern	6351	11%	0	0%	0	0%	8624	27%	275	4%	2250	31%	5425	17%	2218	12%	9	2%
#InternationalWomensDay	5998	10%	540	44%	0	0%	1065	3%	145	2%	26	0%	3118	10%	1164	6%	38	9%
#NeverHillary	6645	11%	0	0%	0	0%	3734	18%	238	3%	1300	18%	2707	9%	1870	10%	120	27%
Total	57916	100%	1217	100%	508	100%	32522	100%	7753	100%	7151	100%	51293	100%	18729	100%	447	100%

Table 3. The number and percentage of occurrences of @Mentions used in all hashtags

Hashtag Campaigns	N	(%)
#BlackLivesMatter	3096	10%
#NeverTrump	2620	9%
#TimesUp	1716	6%
#MeToo	3054	10%
#NetNeutrality	4229	14%
#SaveAleppo	1504	5%
#MakeAmericaGreatAgain	3485	12%
#YemenInquiryNow	624	2%
#FeelTheBern	3902	13%
#InternationalWomensDay	4018	13%
#NeverHillary	1887	6%
Total	30135	100%

Table 4. Comparison of the number and percentage of every interactive feature used in all campaigns

Hashtag Campaigns	URLs		Hashtags		Mentions	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
#BlackLivesMatter	1759	10%	21103	13%	3096	10%
#NeverTrump	1414	8%	7488	5%	2620	9%
#TimesUp	770	4%	8449	5%	1716	6%
#MeToo	1624	9%	15783	10%	3054	10%
#NetNeutrality	1847	11%	13234	8%	4229	14%
#SaveAleppo	1748	10%	16185	10%	1504	5%
#MakeAmericaGreatAgain	1489	9%	8572	5%	3485	12%
#YemenInquiryNow	1745	10%	10834	7%	624	2%
#FeelTheBern	1760	10%	25152	16%	3902	13%
#InternationalWomensDay	1796	10%	12096	8%	4018	13%
#NeverHillary	1238	7%	18634	12%	1887	6%
Total	17190	100%	157530	100%	30135	100%

6.2. The Proportions of Hashtags Used in All Campaigns

Table 2 shows the distribution of hashtags across the eleven campaigns. The main hashtag had the highest proportion with 37% of the total instances, followed by other related hashtags and one-word hashtags; however, the hashtag with the least proportion was time hashtag. Based on this table, the use of the main hashtag was the highest in the campaign #NeverHillary, followed by #FeelTheBern and #NetNeutrality. Variations of the main hashtag were most posted in the campaign #InternationalWomensDay and were present in 44% of the total instances. This was followed by #BlackLivesMatter and #NetNeutrality. Similar to the first category of hashtags, variations of the same hashtag were least utilized in #TimesUp. Notably, hashtagging organizations only happened in the campaign #YemenInquiryNow. As for other related hashtag campaigns, they were most tweeted in the campaign #FeelTheBern accounting for 27% of the total instances. #NeverHillary and #BlackLivesMatter followed in order. However, other related hashtag campaigns were least utilized in #YemenInquiryNow.

Remarkably, hashtags of location were most posted in the campaign #YemenInquiryNow with 42% of the total instances followed by #SaveAleppo

and #BlackLivesMatter. Hashtags of location were least utilized in #NetNeutrality (115 times). Hashtagging celebrities or politicians had the highest frequency in the campaign #FeelTheBern, accounting for 31% of the total instances. This was followed by #NeverHillary and #Metoo. However, hashtagging celebrities and politicians was least utilized in #InternationalWomensDay. A one-word hashtag was the top in the campaign #BlackLivesMatter forming 19% of the total instances. The following frequency occurred in #FeelTheBern and #NetNeutrality, and the lowest frequency was in #YemenInquiryNow. As for the category of other popular hashtags, the majority of this category happened in the campaign #Metoo (17%), followed by #BlackLivesMatter and #NetNeutrality. They were least utilized in #YemenInquiryNow. Lastly, hashtags of time were most employed in the campaign #BlackLivesMatter. That was followed by #NeverHillary and #InternationalWomensDay. Examples of the top ten used hashtags in some campaigns are shown below:

N	Other Related Hashtags / Campaigns
4720	
255	#blacktwitter
182	#theresistance
166	#maga
131	#takeaknee
130	#metoo
116	#alllivesmatter
107	#blacke
106	#africanamericans
98	#antifa
79	#cnn

Figure 17. An excerpt from the top ten related hashtags used in #BlackLivesMatter

N	Celebrities
323	
86	#azizansari
52	#woodyallen
22	#oprah
13	#trump
12	#larrynassar
6	#elizadushku
6	#jamesfranco
6	#natalieportman
6	#rebeccahall
6	#selenagomez

Figure 18. An excerpt from the top ten hashtags of celebrities in #TimesUp

N	Location
2818	
1415	#aleppo
668	#syria
144	#iran
71	#russia
54	#paris
48	#london
46	#israel
32	#indonesia
27	#turkey
26	#aleppoe

Figure 19. An excerpt from the top ten hashtags of location used in #SaveAleppo

6.3. The Proportions of @Mentions Used in All Campaigns

Concerning the use of @Mentions, as predicted (See Table 3), the campaign #NetNeutrality included the highest number of @Mentions forming 14% of the total instances. The two campaigns #InternationalWomensDay and #MakeAmericaGreatAgain followed it in order. However, @Mentions were least utilized in #SaveAleppo.

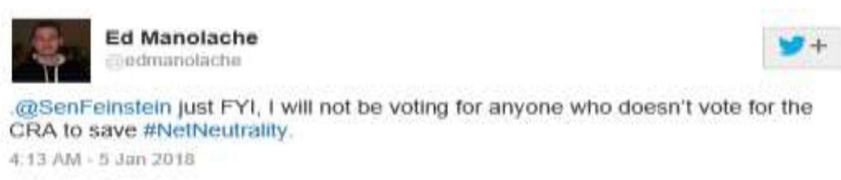


Figure 20. A tweet mentioning the official account of US senator Sen Dianne Feinstein in #NetNeutrality. Retrieved from:

<https://mobile.twitter.com/edmanolache/status/949176993785946113>



Figure 21. A tweet mentioning the official account of Donald Trump in #MakeAmericaGreatAgain. Retrieved from:

<https://mobile.twitter.com/JerryMorton/status/792827093776232449>

6.4. A Comparison of Proportions of the Macro-linguistic Strategies Used in All Campaigns

This section answers the second sub-research question by illustrating the similarities between the eleven research campaigns in terms of their macro-linguistic features. Data from Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 can be compared together (see Table 4). This shows that the most used macro-linguistic feature was hashtags, and @Mentions and URLs followed in order. Hashtags were most used in #FeelTheBern forming 16% of the instances, followed by #BlackLivesMatter and #NeverHillary. They were least used in #NeverTrump. URLs were most used in #NetNeutrality forming 11% of all instances. This was followed by #InternationalWomensDay and #BlackLivesMatter, and least tweeted in #TimesUp.

7. Discussion

Concerning the first sub-research question, the results provided ample evidence of the existence of three interactive features: hashtags, URLs, and @Mentions. The analysis of these features was necessary to identify the structural aspects of this genre and investigate the common features between the campaigns.

7.1. The Use of the URLs in All Campaigns

7.1.1. Links to Pictures. The use of URLs was prevalent in all hashtag campaigns, yet links to pictures were the most prominent links in the list of URLs because the use of pictures suits the nature of micro-blogging services more than other links. In Twitter, the user can see the picture attached to the tweet without having to be directed to another URL or a new page. Hashtag activists embrace now the power of multi-media and photos to propagate for their hashtag campaigns because they realize that “visuals have been an essential part of propaganda efforts, as images are often more effective than words in capturing the attention of the public and crystalizing sentiments” (Seo, 2014). Links to pictures were most shared in the campaign #Metoo as pictures allowed the message of the campaign to get across different cultures and countries swiftly than written words, and they highlighted the commonality of this message. The participants in #Metoo used photos of famous figures, politicians, and celebrities who were accused of sexual harassment to scandalize them; therefore, their images grabbed the attention of other users who participated in the hashtag campaign or just followed it. Some users posted pictures of #Metoo signs that were carried by activists who took to the streets, so other users could feel the

magnitude and the influence of the campaign. As predicted, #YemenInquiryNow followed #Metoo in ranking regarding the use of pictures.

Since #YemenInquiryNow was deliberately launched as an international campaign, it was crucial to drum up the support of the international community by sharing pictures of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Pictures of starved Yemeni children were heavily shared, too. These pictures could disseminate information about the violations and abuses committed by all parties in the Yemen conflict even if the users who stumbled upon the hashtag campaign had no idea about its content and language. They could make a connection between the pictures shared and the name of the country in the hashtag itself. These findings were similar to the findings of a study conducted by Seo (2014) on the use of visual propaganda via Twitter images during the 2012 Israeli–Hammas conflict where Hammas supporters resorted to the emotional propaganda by sharing images of crying babies and innocent, suffering civilians. Then, #InternationalWomensDay followed the two campaigns in the use of pictures as users tended to celebrate the day by sharing pictures of influential women in all fields. In addition, users shared pictures of women’s marches, protest rallies, and flash mobs around the world, calling for gender equality (“International Women's Day around the world”, 2016). The use of pictures in #SaveAleppo followed in the list of ranking because the campaign is similar to #YemenInquiryNow concerning its humanitarian goals (Kunzru, 2017).

Nonetheless, pictures were shared via Instagram links (which is a picture sharing platform) as Instagram links were most tweeted in #SaveAleppo. By sharing pictures of the crisis, activists in Syria wanted to draw the attention of the world to the carnage in Syria caused by chemical-weapons attacks. Surprisingly, pictures were least utilized in #TimesUp because the campaign activists might have focused on narrating different stories of sexual harassment at work rather than sharing visual content. They might have recognized that most users already knew the theme of the campaign since it is closely related to #Metoo; thus, there was no need to share more pictures. It, therefore, appears that the use of pictures peaked in the campaigns in an attempt to appeal to the emotions of Twitter users.

On the other hand, video links were not shared as heavily as pictures in humanitarian campaigns because videos take more time to download; thus, “images perform better than videos” (“What Type of Content Gets Shared the Most on Twitter?”, 2019). Due to the nature of Twitter, users might prefer to utilize images rather than videos because an image does not need time to be

downloaded; others users can see it immediately on their timelines attached to the original tweets.

7.1.2. Embedded Tweets. Embedded tweets were the second most posted URL links. Embedded tweets refer to the tweets that users copy to their accounts but usually with a comment. Instead of merely retweeting a tweet, users can quote any tweet and add a caption. This feature lets users indirectly interact with the original tweet but on their personal accounts; moreover, embedded tweets are clickable as they direct any user to the original tweet. They were most utilized in #FeelTheBern, followed by #NeverTrump, #NeverHillary, and #MakeAmericaGreatAgain. Interestingly, the four campaigns had political aims, and they were part of the US presidential hashtag campaigns. The reason behind that might be that users participating in these campaigns tended to comment on the tweets of their political opponents by embedding their tweets rather than replying to their tweets in a Twitter thread. They wanted to state their political stance intelligibly by commenting on, attacking, endorsing, or even ridiculing the tweets of the opposing camps. The use of US political hashtag campaigns was similar to a virtual war where users “tweeted their support of their favorite candidate or their derision of the one they opposed” (Gaudin, 2016). Bridget Coyne, Twitter's senior manager of government and politics, named this election in a Twitter blog post as the “Twitter Election” as most voters, candidates, officials, and journalists moved their heated political debates to the platform of Twitter (Coyne, 2016). Notably, the most retweeted tweet during the entire elections was a tweet by Hillary Clinton that included an embedded tweet posted by Donald Trump (See Figure 22). Embedded tweets had the least frequency in #YemenInquiryNow as this kind of humanitarian hashtag campaigns does not usually trigger conversations or debates among users. Participants in these campaigns usually do not comment on each other’s tweets; they prefer to share posts of support, solace, and assistance instead.



Figure 22. *The most reposted tweet during the US 2016 elections. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2uaVrse>*

7.1.3. Other Links. Other miscellaneous links were shared by Twitter users, and they included links to news sites, articles, op-eds, organizations, or online petitions. They were most posted in the campaign #NetNeutrality because Twitter provided an Express Link (See Figure 23) where users could express their comments on net neutrality on the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) site. Users reacted to this Express Link by sharing and retweeting it several times and urging other Twitter users to join the campaign. They shared other websites that explained the idea of net neutrality in simple terms since its concept was not clear enough to multiple internet users. The two campaigns #BlackLivesMatter and #YemenInquiryNow followed in list of the number of the shared miscellaneous links. Concerning #BlackLivesMatter, most activists shared links of articles supporting the campaign. However, in #YemenInquiryNow, activists shared links of online petitions that demanded the US to stop funding KSA against Yemen, and several online petitions that asked for an international inquiry on Yemen, which was the main target of the campaign.



Figure 23. An express link provided by Twitter for users to comment on net neutrality

The use of URLs in hashtag campaigns agrees with the results of Herring et al. (2004) on traditional web blogs as they contained hyperlinks to external events. Therefore, the tweets shared some of the structural features of traditional web blogs concerning the use of images, videos and news websites. Traditional web blogs also had a “comments section” which is similar to the use of embedded tweets in micro-blogging. Moreover, it agrees with the findings of Hong, Convertino and Chi (2011) who conducted a large scale study on the language of Twitter as they found that 21% of 62 million tweets contained URLs.

7.2. The Use of Hashtags in All Campaigns

7.2.1. The Use of the Main Hashtag. The manual examination of the hashtag campaigns showed that a wealth of different hashtags was available and used in all campaigns. The researcher classified the hashtags used in the eleven campaigns into nine types: the main hashtag, variations of the same hashtag, other related hashtags, hashtags of organizations, hashtags of celebrities and

politicians, hashtags of time, hashtags of location, one-word hashtags, and other miscellaneous hashtags. The use of the main hashtag topped the list for obvious reasons because through the use of the main hashtag, participants could affiliate themselves to the hashtag campaign as “the culture of activism on Twitter is shaped by the searchability of the hashtag” (Simpson, 2018). Without the main hashtag, their tweets would have not been included in the campaign. Remarkably, the number of the main hashtags in all campaigns exceeded the number of the tweets in each hashtag, and this indicates that users tended to post the main hashtag more than one time in the same tweet to corroborate the importance of their calls through tweeting. This repetition may function as a verbal cue that could reflect the vocal attitude of the participants, which may happen in real life. A hashtag campaign is similar to a virtual street march where participants could shout for their causes; therefore, it is suggested that repeating the main hashtag may serve as a virtual shout to grab the attention of other users to the campaign.

7.2.2. Other Related Hashtags. Other related hashtags followed in the list although they formed nearly half of the number of the main hashtags. Users believed it was necessary to connect popular related hashtags to the main hashtag campaign so as to widen the scope and the target of the campaign. By sharing other popular hashtags, they could grab the attention of other participants in similar campaigns. Usually, they share hashtags of related causes and themes. However, this was not the case in #FeelTheBern as users utilized hashtags related to other similar political campaigns such as #maga (Make America Great Again), #imwithher (“her” here stands for Hillary Clinton), #draintheswamp (a catchphrase by Trump supporters), and #trumptrain (a hashtag by Trump supporters). These findings are indicative as the campaign of #FeelTheBern seemed to be hijacked by the opposing political camps. Hijacking a campaign is part of the political “hashtag wars” that usually happen during political tensions to obtain control over the initial hashtag campaign (Hadgu, Garimella, & Weber, 2013). Similarly, the same incident occurred in #MakeAmericaGreatAgain but with a fewer number of opposing hashtags such as #imwithher and #gohillary. The later hashtags were from the opposing teams of the main hashtag. Also, it happened in #NeverTrump. The rest of the campaigns did not have similar cases of hashtag hijacking.

As expected, participants in #Metoo and #Timesup referred to both campaigns in their tweets since both hashtag campaigns were related to each other. As for #BlackLivesMatter, the hashtag campaign was not new because it

was started in 2013; therefore, it had a large number of related hashtags that emerged over the following years until 2016. In addition, the hashtag was revived again during the US 2016 elections as the campaign leaders insisted to engage the presidential candidates in the movement, and they made prominent appearances at their campaign rallies (Speiser, 2015).

7.2.3. Variations of the Same Hashtag. Upon close examination, it appears that some tweets included the hashtag campaign and different variations of the same hashtag campaign through posting the acronym of the campaign such as #InternationalWomensDay (#iwd) and #BlackLivesMatter (#blm), adding another indicative word as in #NetNeutrality (#savenetneutrality), or adding the word “now” as in #SaveAleppo (#savealepponow), and #Timesup (#timesupnow). These variations are less popular than the main hashtags; hence, users tended to link these variations to the main hashtag campaign to foster the relation between the main hashtag and its variations, and to draw the attention of other users that the campaign and its available variation shared the same target.

7.2.4. Hashtags of Organizations. Hashtagging organizations and NGOs only appeared in #YemenInquiryNow as Twitter users hashtagged humanitarian and international organizations such as #UN, #HR, #UNICEF, #HRW, and other organizations. It was predictable that the participants tended to hashtag these organizations as a call for help since these organizations have their official Twitter accounts, and “the largest of these organizations have adopted messaging as part of their Public Relations and Communications functions” (Tapia, Bajpai, Jansen, Yen, & Giles, 2011, p.3). Although #SaveAleppo was similar to #YemenInquiryNow in its humanitarian goals, surprisingly, participants in #SaveAleppo avoided hashtagging organizations. Probably, this is because in #YemenInquiryNow, Twitter users asked for an urgent international inquiry in Yemen; they needed to address international organizations by any possible means. The use of the word “now” in the hashtag itself corroborates this idea, as well. This emphasizes the role and the power of micro-blogging in covering and commenting on disasters and conflicts. The average user does not have to wait for their governmental representatives or journalists to voice their concerns towards international organizations. They can simply hashtag the organization and describe the specific details of the crisis they are tweeting about.

7.2.5. Hashtags of Location. Similarly, #YemenInquiryNow had the highest number of hashtags of location. Users in humanitarian hashtag campaigns prefer

to use the location of the country that has a crisis to make their tweet visible to other users who might search for the news of this country using its hashtag. This is because multiple users search for the news of any country by typing its name preceded by the hash sign. In #YemenInquiryNow, the hashtag #yemen was posted 2,797 times, which means that more than half of the tweets in this campaign contained hashtags of location. #Saudi, #Saada, and UK were hashtagged too. There were various hashtags for KSA in such as #Saudi, #SaudiaArabia, #SaudiaaArabia, and #KSA as most users needed to draw attention of other users to the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen by hashtagging Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Likewise, in #SaveAleppo, the hashtag #Aleppo was tweeted for 1415 times and #Syria for 668 times. Other countries were hashtagged as well such as #iran, #russia, #paris, #london as these were the countries that were involved in the Syrian Civil War.

7.2.6. Hashtags of Celebrities and Politicians. The highest frequency of hashtagged celebrities and politicians happened in the campaign #FeelTheBern. #trump, #bernie, #hillary were the top three hashtagged politicians in #FeelTheBern. It was quite expected that users in the US political hashtag campaigns would hashtag politicians from their opposing camps. This happened in #NeverHillary too where again #trump, #bernie, and #hillaryclinton topped the list of hashtagged celebrities and politicians. Similarly, in #BlackLivesMatter followed as #trump, #ericagarner and #bernie topped the list. That was part of the conflict of the US elections on Twitter as users tended to hashtag all the prominent figures of the campaigns to enable other users to join the discussion or follow their online debates or commentary by clicking on the hashtag of that politician. In addition, by hashtagging a certain politician or celebrity in their tweets several times, users could turn a hashtag into an official trending one that would be easily tracked. It is suggested that this was part of the strategies users adopted to dominate the trending hashtags during the campaigns by hashtagging their presidential candidate. These techniques made the candidates and their supporters fight on Twitter “as if it were a contested state” (Fottrell, 2016). In #Metoo, #trump, #oprah, and #azizansari topped the list of hashtagged celebrities and politicians. The list of #Metoo included all the celebrities and politicians that were accused of sexual misconduct such as Donald Trump, Aziz Ansari (the American actor and stand-up comedian), Harvey Weinstein, Bill Clinton and James Franco. Moreover, it included #Metoo supporters such as Oprah Winfrey and Meryl Streep. Twitter users needed these names to flash out in their tweets by hashtagging them.

7.2.7. One-word Hashtags. A one-word hashtag occupied the third ranking in the list of hashtags. In #BlackLivesMatter, the top one-word hashtags were #resist and #racism, which were clearly related to the theme of the campaign. In #FeelTheBern, the top one-word hashtags were #vote and #deme, and in #NetNeutrality, the top one-word hashtags were #congress and #internet. It is obvious that these words were closely related to the themes of each hashtag campaign.

7.3. The Use of @Mentions in All Campaigns

Users resort to @Mentions instead of hashtags because they need the verified accounts to see and acknowledge their tweets, which usually happen in most cases. In #NetNeutrality, users utilized @Mentions because they had to address the Congress members directly as the theme of the campaign revolved around urging the Congress members to listen to their demands. That is why #NetNeutrality had the highest proportions of @Mentions. In #InternationalWomensDay, the use of @Mentions was different because the hashtag had a rather celebratory function; Twitter users mentioned accounts of influential women to celebrate their achievements and accomplishments. On the other hand, in #MakeAmericaGreatAgain, most participants used @Mentions to mention the verified account of Donald Trump to support him and comment on his controversial tweets. These findings agree with those of Hong et al. (2011). They also agree with the findings of Honeycutt and Herring (2009) who studied the functions of the @ symbol in English as a marker of addressivity and collaboration. However, in hashtag campaigns, @Mentions were not posted to initiate conversations since the participants in these campaigns may be more concerned to participate in an online movement rather than to talk to each other.

8. Findings

An analysis of 33,000 tweets of the eleven different hashtag campaigns revealed that hashtag campaigning represents a distinctive genre that has one main communicative purpose which is promoting for a certain cause. This cause can be a political, social, or humanitarian one. Also, not all hashtag campaigns depended on the same macro-linguistic strategies in the same degree.

8.1. Hashtags

First, the use of different kinds of hashtags topped the list of interactive features. The use of the main hashtag was dominant; it was even repeated in the

same tweet for emphasis. Other related hashtags followed in order to relate the theme and ideology of the main campaign to other campaigns and to seize the attention of other users. One-word hashtags were the third top used hashtags for various reasons as they functioned as stance, topic, and typographical markers. Nonetheless, other popular non-related hashtags were used only to grab attention to the campaign and widen its scope. Hashtag hijacking or hashtag crusades were noticeable in political campaigns as the campaigns did not only involve ideologically similar cliques, but they included caucuses of the opposing camps. Also, hashtagging organizations, celebrities, and politicians took place to connect the tweet to them so as to make the tweet visible to the users who might search for their official accounts or names on Twitter. The majority of hashtags served the key communicative purpose of hashtag campaigning which was propagating for its cause and making the tweets visible and popular on Twitter.

8.2. @Mentions

The use of @Mentions, which were the second most used interactive features in the hashtag campaigns, differed from the use of them in other past studies. In the present study, the majority of @Mentions to accounts of celebrities, politicians, and organizations happened to seize the attention of their verified accounts, create an association between the hashtag campaign and those accounts, and affirm the membership of Twitter communities by using the conventions of hashtag campaigning. They were not used for conversational purposes like ordinary tweeting.

8.3. URLs

URLs were the least utilized interactive features, yet they created a digital connection between this genre and other genres on the web. Links to pictures were the most prominent links in the list of URLs because they can appeal to the emotions of users, and they can be easy to download in comparison to videos. Embedded tweets were the second most posted URLs; however, they happened mostly in political hashtag campaigns as they helped users to firmly emphasize their political stance. Other Links, Facebook links, Instagram links and Tumblr links were shared by Twitter users to link their hashtags to external sources that endorsed their point of view. They resembled tools of digital coherence tools as they conglutinated the genre of hashtag campaigning to other genres on the web.

9. Conclusion

As Toms (2005) illustrated, it is necessary to investigate the form of any digital text because this form resembles a physical landscape that “contains distinctive, salient features that inform users about [the] document's identity” (20). In addition, the ability to recognize the structural features of any digital genre enhances the user’s experience and makes it easy for them to create similar digital content. According to Toms and Campbell (1999), “the user’s effective use of digital documents depends on the ability to recognize the formal cues which distinguish different types of genres” (2). Therefore, it was necessary to schematize the prominent macro-linguistic features of the tweets in the sample to pinpoint the salient structural features of hashtag campaigns that helped in creating the communicative situation of the genre presented. Since tweeting is a form of micro-blogging, it shares some structural features with traditional blogs. Moreover, it is evident that internet users make the utmost use of these structural features in the times of political upheavals. Therefore, it would be useful for media producers, corporations, organizations, and ordinary internet users to make use of these successful macro-linguistic features to guarantee the success of their online social and political messages within the constraints of 280 characters limit.

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