

Relevance of Hashtags as Frames of Social Media Messages

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Abstract: Not so long ago, newspapers, television and radio were the main sources of news. "The Medium is the Message" famous quote of Marshall McLuhan. Although he did not propose the theory in this era of social media, but still this words can be applied to this modern era to draw some conclusions on information exchange. This paper deals with the most trending word of social media "Hashtags" exploring the interactivity, relevance and impact of hashtags as powerful social media messages.

IndexTerms - Hashtag,information exchange,social media,message.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, Social media platforms are flooded with hash (#) coupled with messages for social concern. Hash (#) Symbol is a pound sign, a sharp note in music notation, a symbol in tic-tac-toe board, etc.

When it comes with the current upgradation of technology this hash symbol, i.e., hashtag, it is used to draw attention, to promote brand, to organize events of social concern, so on and so forth. It is an epithet of information in social media, to find posts or information related to a specific content. Hashtags exhilarate social media users to delve into content that draws their attention, i.e., to selectively filter information.

Chris Messina, the former Google designer first proposed Twitter to adopt the hashtag - or "pound" symbol by his tweet on August 2007 (Kolovich, 2014). Hashtags exists with a reverse grammar behind its creation, it is usually created by prefixing the hash symbol in front of the word or phrase with no spaces, punctuation or special characters. Capitalization is used as an option for increasing the readability criteria.

In todays world of social media, users get easily drowned because of information overload. It helps users to percolate selective perception of information. Hashtags are predominantly used on social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google+ and Pinterest.

Using Hashtags have lots of advantages to list a few:

- Hashtags process of research on a particular topic
- Hashtags compels action
- Hashtags are clearly distinctive
- Hashtags improve viewer ratings
- Hashtags becomes link to search queries

Hashtags were extremely of great help during protest of Jallikattu in Tamilnadu (E.g., #Jallikattu, #BanPETA, #JusticeForJallikattu,#WeDoJallikattu, #IsupportJallikattu, #WeDidJallikattu, #SaveOurCultureJallikattu, #MarinaProtest).

One of the most prominent hashtags of 2007 was the #MeToo by a global movement for men and women to share their stories on sexual abuse and harassment

Hashtags are used not only for information related to public interest but also its used to join in conversations and happening events, e.g., #WorldCup, #GameofThrones, etc. Due to uprising trend of hashtags, a hashtag holiday calendar also exist online with hashtags given for special days, e.g., #WorldMusicDay, #WorldPhotographyDay, #NationalAuthorsDay, #RakshaBandan, #FriendshipDay, #ChristmasShopping.

II. FRAMING THEORY

The concept of framing was first postulated by Gregory Bateson in 1972. According to him "Psychological frames" is a "spatial and temporary bounding of set of interactive messages" (Bateson, 1972). Framing is the practice of thinking about story content within familiar context.

Framing theory suggests that how information is presented to the audience, i.e., the frame, influences the choices people make about processing the perceived information. Frames are abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings.

Framing is a quality of communication that leads others to accept one meaning over another. It is the process by which a communication source defines and constructs an issue or controversy.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

On average, users upload millions of photos with posts to social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. Locating and recalling specific information amidst huge post is a tremendous task. Contemporary search engines retrieve images based on text-based queries (Datta et al., 2008). This kind of textual description is possible in search engines because of its proper indexing of information whereas in social media which constitute a greater part of web pages. Information cannot be effectively indexed because of various structural protocol.

As a result of this drawback, the technique of Automatic Image Annotation (AIA) emerged (Hanbury, 2008). AIA is the process of extracting information by assigning one or more semantic concepts or a low-level character to a particular information, i.e., AIA tags are pairs of images with related tags.

Hashtags are a new innovation in web pages, users started to use them with Internet Relay chat in order to categorize them in groups. According to Small (2011), hashtags are used to organize knowledge and for easy access of information.

Framing theory help audiences to shape their views on matter related to social concern. Frame influence audience responses (Entman, 1993). Gitlin (1980) defined this theory of framing as “Frames are ways of presenting information of what really matters to public”. Frames are story lines that convey thought, motion and action (Nisbet, 2010).

IV. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to find

- To explore and understand the interactive concept of Hashtags.
- To identify the relevance of hashtag as a frame proportional to the framing theory.
- To critically analyse the impact of hashtags.

V. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods are designed in a manner that they help reveal the behaviour and perception of a target audience with reference to a particular topic. The study was an open-ended questionnaire-based survey system, with 100 respondents. The questions were based on the parameters channelized as the objectives.

VI. FINDINGS

6.1. Interactive Concept of Hashtags

According to the respondents, the interactivity of the hashtags can be judged by its social presence during times of public importance. Many respondents believed that these hashtags help categorize information according to their priority. Respondents also believe that hashtags are a form of exploring media space gaining lot of followers and thereby creating trends on the platform.

6.2. Relevance of Hashtag as a Frame

Use of hashtag helps to share content of relevant topic. This usage helps in widening the reach of the message. Respondents believe that hashtag create movement in social media. It is a good supporting factor in the social media platform encouraging public to express their opinions on a particular topic of concern.

6.3. Impact of Hashtag

Usage of Hashtags creates activism by media users and outlets mainly in social networks creating Internet activism. Hashtags create a greater impact when used along with other hashtags. It creates a managing platform to search for particular issue and getting more information on it. Trending hashtags when used by celebrities and governmental authorities create a greater impact and the audiences are automatically driven and thereby creating a huge impact.

VII. CONCLUSION

Hashtag in a tweet starts with a ‘#’ symbol used before the trending word or phrase related to the particular issue or problem. Hashtags helps in categorizing the tweets into different topics of concern. The findings clearly reveal that the hashtags are interactive and relevant and also creates a huge impact in society when used with other hashtags thereby increasing the message effectiveness.

The paper is limited in portraying the hashtags as frame of social media messages, further research can be carried out in finding the effectiveness of hashtags with respect to a particular cause of public interest.

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