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SEMANTIC AND COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS OF HASHTAGS

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Abstract:

This article analyzes the logical and communicative functions of hashtags, which we encounter daily in virtual communication. On social networks, hashtags do not merely indicate the topic of a text but serve as a bridge uniting thousands of users around a single idea. The article highlights the role of this symbol in our language, the meanings it carries, and its impact on our virtual speech from a linguistic perspective.

Keywords: Hashtag, virtual communication, social network discourse, graphemic unit, semantic and communicative functions, digital communication.

Introduction

As technology integrates deeper into our lives, the vast majority of our daily communication has shifted from physical reality to the virtual space. This process has not only increased the speed of communication and expanded the volume of messaging to an unprecedented scale, but it has also shaped entirely new formats of interaction. Social networks, blogs, and messengers have taken people beyond the confines of simple text messaging, introducing various multimodal methods of expression into daily life—such as short videos, emotion-conveying stickers, information-grouping hashtags, and interactive polls. Consequently, incredibly

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rich, new fields of analysis have emerged for traditional linguistics, communication theory, sociology, and media studies.

Among these digital innovations, the hashtag stands out as the most popular and communicatively effective. Evolving beyond a simple symbol, it has completely blurred the traditional boundaries between text, visual elements, and metadata, redistributing the communicative tasks of information delivery.

A hashtag is the "#" symbol placed before a word, phrase, or string of numbers; it was initially developed to mark the digital footprints of a specific topic, idea, or event and make them easily searchable. In its modern form, this practice was first proposed and widely adopted in 2007 on the Twitter (now X) platform to group open conversations. Within a short time, due to its convenience, it became the most important informational navigation symbol across almost all global platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and TikTok.

Technically, hashtags are not just a display of user creativity and linguistic invention; they are crucial systemic elements that are directly indexed, sorted, and machine-processed by platform algorithms. This makes the visibility, spread rate (trending potential), and lifespan of hashtags in the information space directly dependent on a platform's internal rules and algorithmic adjustments.

From the perspective of modern linguistics, hashtags are studied as a special graphemic unit, yet their true linguistic nature is much more complex and multi-layered. Hashtags easily break strictly established morphological and syntactic boundaries. By combining several independent words without any spaces, they form entirely new lexical units, thereby maximizing the morphological and discursive capabilities of any language.

The writing styles widely used in hashtags also impose a series of tasks on information technology:

- Capitalizing each word (**CamelCase**).
- Connecting words with underscores (**snake_case**).
- Directly combining words without any punctuation.

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These styles require complex mathematical approaches for automatic tokenization (segmenting text) and search engines. Furthermore, they can cause significant cognitive challenges in visual perception and auditory comprehension. In particular, screen reader programs designed for visually impaired users require constantly improving artificial intelligence solutions to correctly read hashtags by syllables and logically separate the words within them.

In terms of semantics—carrying meaning and content—hashtags perform the following essential functions in modern discourse:

- 1. Topic Designation and Categorization:** Indicates the specific field or topic to which a published post belongs. This helps filter desired information out of the surrounding information noise.
- 2. Creating Context and Background:** Logically connects an isolated, often very brief text or a single image to a broader social, political, or cultural phenomenon.
- 3. Generalizing Ideas (Clustering):** Chains together thousands of posts from different corners of the world, written in various languages, under one common global idea or process.
- 4. Expressing Emotion and Pragmatic Attitude:** In many cases, a hashtag is not merely informative; it serves as a compact tool for conveying the author's mood, irony, sarcasm, or final definitive conclusion.

Observing the role of hashtags in communication and the behaviors they trigger reveals cross-platform differences: some social networks use hashtags primarily as a central mechanism for search and discovery, while on others, they act more as tools for setting trends, amplifying campaigns, or encouraging user engagement. Furthermore, hashtags are vital for public policy and social movements; they organize micro-activism, unify visual and textual content, and become the primary vehicle for the rapid spread of campaigns. However, the misuse or "hijacking" of hashtags—diverting them from their target topic—creates communicative risks.

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Discursively, hashtags redefine text structure and authorial stance: they anchor a post as a brief, focused concluding gesture, while simultaneously uniting multiple contexts (political, commercial, cultural, or personal), leading to a layering of content. Discourses created via hashtags often occur simultaneously in multiple languages, making issues of translation, localization, and encoding highly relevant; meanwhile, platform moderation policies and automated filters can restrict or redirect these discourses.

In conclusion, hashtags are not merely decorative elements of social networks but strategic tools of modern digital communication: they organize information, support advocacy and marketing campaigns, build communities, and stimulate linguistic innovation. Future scientific research is expected to provide deeper insights into the algorithmic impact of hashtags, their semantic shifts within cultural contexts, legal and ethical limitations, and their long-term linguistic footprints.

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