



شبكة المعلومات الجامعية
التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكروفيلم

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



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شبكة المعلومات الجامعية التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكروفيلم



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جامعة عين شمس

التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكروفيلم

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A Linguistic Analysis of Social Attitudes in Selected Facebook Posts and Comments

(A Study of Form and Function)

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved family who encourage me to pursue my dreams personally and academically. They have always been the light of my life, my anchor and my strength. I wish I would be able to repay them back some of the love and encouragement they gave me by being a better person and achieving higher positions in life.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Abstract

This research attempts to investigate Egyptians' social attitudes related to some events that took place in Egypt and worldwide through the analysis of Egyptians' Facebook posts and comments in some Facebook public pages. The researcher analyzed 24 posts and some comments using the Echoic Mention theory of verbal irony by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (2012) for the analysis of the text in the posts as well as the Multimodal theory for the analysis of the images found in the posts and comments by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006). The results show a clear connection between the ironic utterances found in the posts and the images accompanying these posts.

Key words: Facebook, posts, Echoic Mention theory, verbal irony, Multimodal theory.

1.1. Introduction

Whenever the word *social media* is heard, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and so many others immediately come to mind. Since the upgrade of the web 2.0, which is the second generation of the World Wide Web, the unique features that it provides such as more user interaction, and greater level of accessibility, as well as other dynamic and interconnected features, (Christensson 2008), social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook and so many others have thrived in an unprecedented way bursting with hundreds of thousands and even millions of users.

According to Statista, Facebook has over 2.19 billion users in the first quarter of 2018! (Statista "Number of Monthly active", 2018). This makes Facebook "the largest social app in terms of logged in users compared to YouTube 1.5 billion users, WeChat's 889 million, Twitter 328 million and Snapchat 255 million" (Costine, 2017). Such numbers may be the reason that many scholars in different fields and areas of expertise such as sociology, psychology and linguistics have recently tried to observe, analyze, and shed light on some phenomena related to social media in their research.

Facebook, among many other social apps, allows users to like, share, post and comment on mostly everything and any topic starting from the color of Kardashian's dress to the current political and economic events taking place all over the world. This is no different in many parts of the world, especially in the Arab world, and Egypt in particular. According to Dennis and Wood (2017),

“Arab nationals are more likely than Americans to get news from social media. Moreover, “younger Arabs are more likely to trust it than their older compatriots” which means according to their survey in seven key nations including Egypt that “eight in 10 Arab nationals (79 percent) say they get at least some news from social media” (Dennis & Wood, 2017).

As for Egypt, in an article written by Cairo Scene a website that covers different topics about Egypt and the Egyptian society, it was mentioned that “Egyptians are addicted to social media, because according to the latest statistics 14 million of us cannot stop posting, chatting and liking everything in sight”. The article also discussed the largest age groups among Egyptians that use Facebook and some of the popular pages the Egyptians follow. The author stated that such huge numbers might have left many experts questioning whether the country is facing a growing problem of social media addiction, fueled by high-speed internet access and the instant gratification of 2014 smart phone technology (Egypt Addicted to Social Media, 2018).

Whether addicted to Facebook and other means of social media or not, one cannot deny the role social media played in some Arab countries during the period of the Arab uprisings. This was discussed in the report of the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) (2011):

While it sounded like a catchy sound bite, Tunisian activists were not calling the uprising in their country a “Twitter Revolution.” yet no one was denying the pivotal role of the micro-blogging site either, or the role that social media will continue to play in Tunisia, Egypt, and the rest of the Arab world (p.16).

The report from CIMA accentuates the undeniable connection between Facebook and other means of social media and the way it allowed people from different Arab countries to express their social attitudes towards real events taking place in their countries, which eventually helped them change the fate of their countries forever. As to how do individuals and people in general form their attitudes and the criteria that measure the strength of such attitudes is discussed in Visser and Mirabile’s (2004) study. Visser and Mirabile (2004) argued that people who belong to the same social networks show increased levels of attitude strength and certainty and this does not apply only to groups of people but to individuals as well. Therefore, they explained that:

People do not form or maintain their attitudes in isolation—they do so within a rich social context. Attitudes are held by people, who are embedded within elaborate social networks, by people, who occupy specific social roles, by people who stand in particular power relations to one another, and by people who identify with certain social groups or categories. (p.779)

The content of posts and comments on Facebook varies greatly from actual written words to visual content such as images, stickers, short clips, emojis and GIFs. Such non-verbal content has increased recently in both posts and comments, the matter that urged some linguists to use the term “graphicons” meaning graphics plus icons to refer to such content (Herring and Dainas, 2017, p.2185). In their paper to the Fiftieth Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences HICSS, Herring and Dainas (2017) mentioned that people are quickly adapting new methods in Computer Mediated Communication Discourse (CMCD) and therefore, the two scholars attempted to analyze the frequency and the pragmatic function of each of these graphicons.

1.2. Aim of the study

This study aims at identifying some of the features of digital discourse through the analysis of Egyptians’ social attitudes on Facebook reflected in some of the posts and comments. It also investigates the function of mixing visual and verbal content in some posts and comments as well as the role this content plays in depicting social attitudes in the Egyptian community. Moreover, the study attempts to compare and contrast the number of posts with visual images to that of other posts with verbal elements only.

1.3. Research Questions

Since its launching in 2006, Facebook among other applications of social media has always been the focus of much research in the field of linguistics. This thesis focuses on analyzing the language used by Egyptians to express their attitudes towards certain events taking place in society through their posts and comments. Therefore, the current study attempts to answer the following questions regarding social attitudes:

1. What are the functions of mixing verbal and visual tools to convey meaning in digital discourse?