

American Educational Clickbait on Twitter: A Cyberpragmatic Study

By

Huda Qasim Hamza1

College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq

Email: Hoda.Qasem1203a@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Lina Laith2

College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq

Email: dr.lina@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Abstract

The present study has been conducted to carry out a clickbait analysis of the educational tweets selected from the TED-ED account on Twitter. The current research investigates the analysis of tweets to examine the typical cues or features designed and used by writers to build an information gap to arouse the reader's curiosity to click on the link to complete the missing information. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher utilizes Chen's (2015) framework for detecting clickbait, which includes specific features or strategies such as the use of the unresolved pronoun, unanswered questions, the use of numerals, and so on. The study illustrates that in clickbait, the writer adheres to these strategies to fulfill his aims by provoking our curiosity. The study highlights the features used to identify potential clickbait text for readers and identify the occurrence of the most frequent one through the rate of tweets. The data analysis findings indicate that each tweet does not depend on one strategy or feature but on more crafted pieces of work to create an information gap that readers find impossible to resist.

Keywords: Cyberpragmatics, Clickbait, Tweets.

1. Introduction

The internet has completely transformed the computer and communication nation like nothing before. It serves as a "worldwide broadcasting tool, "a way of sharing information," and "a medium for collaboration and interaction with no regard to geographic location" (Leiner et al., 1997). Additionally, it presents different opportunities to many people all over the world in a variety of ways. Similarly, the other new digital technologies have established themselves in everyday life. That is to say, the widespread availability of this technology enhances people's lives and opens up new possibilities. As a result, people have started to use the internet to access any information and use it for social, educational, and entertainment purposes. Furthermore, the Internet provides two primary benefits: communication and information (Warren et al., 1998). Park (2009) states that the internet serves a variety of purposes, including (i) information storage, (ii) communication without boundaries, (iii) online interactive learning, (iv) electronic/online research, and (v) innovation in the new world, (vi) increased interest in learning, (vii) global education, and (viii) information catalogs.

When the educational element of Internet use is examined, it is clear that students or people in common who look for information can access it rapidly and at a low cost. That is, the Internet is considered a source of information from which everything can be accessed quickly and easily to be reached. In short, the Internet may be utilized to keep up with the current news

from across the world, as well as to obtain any information for several services, such as learning more about a hobby or health. Therefore, it can be said that the Internet is the basis for spreading information quickly to prominent audience members and going beyond the limitation of time and place (Doggruern et al., 2011).

2. Literature Review

This section proposes computer-mediated communication and Cyberpragmatics with two subdivided divisions such as Twitter and clickbait.

2.1 Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Computer-mediated communication studies how human behaviors are maintained or modified by the flow of information through machines (December 1996, p.17-30). It describes a set of communicative transactions between two or more network computers (McQuail, 2005). December (2008) defines CMC as creating, interpreting, and sharing information via telecommunication networks. This can refer to behaviors involving mobile computing devices, such as texting on a cell phone, as well as numerous uses of desktop computers, mainframes (massive, powerful computers meant for multiple simultaneous users), and laptops.

According to Ferris (1997), CMC contains many applications and functions. Moreover, CMC is being used as a word of art by academics in a variety of sectors. The term has a variety of definitions and applications. As a result, when the term is employed, it is not always clear what it means. It was initially characterized as text-based communication using electronic media (Miura & Shinohara, 2005). However, as computer and network technologies have increased, new forms and hybrids of existing forms of interaction have emerged. The essential function of computer-mediated communication is the contribution to the growth of the social community. Also, individuals can use it to extend their socialization beyond regular communication channels. It helps construct identity (individual or group) through naming (e.g., having one's title within their email address), constraining information (e.g., anonymity on online forums), organizing dependencies (e.g., Google Calendar), and archiving one's past (e.g., saved emails). (Resnick, 2002; Bilecen, 2020; Bocheńska & Fatah-Black, 2021; Çelik, 2021).

2.2 Cyberpragmatics

Cyberpragmatic was coined in 2001 to describe a pragmatic cognitive study of computer-mediated communication (Yus, 2011). Its primary interest is to analyze how information is created and inferred with the Internet domain. It is also concerned with how users fill in the information gaps between what they type on the keyboard and what they want to say by using contextual information, which is frequently limited compared to situations where there are many contexts, such as face-to-face interactions. Moreover, the varied forms of communication on the Internet exhibit substantial pragmatic repercussions (connected to changes in accessibility to context). Thus, there are ramifications on the volume and trait of information transmitted and interpreted therein (Yus, 2011).

The following theories are the foundation of cyberpragmatics (Yus, 2011, p. 14):

On the Internet, the “addresser users” have communicative intentions and devise their utterances with the expectation that these intentions will end up being relevant to the other users and that their utterances interpret correctly.

Internet users use inferential strategies when they interpret messages on the Net, and these do not differ from the ones used to comprehend utterances in conversations shaped by physical co-presence.

Internet users expect their interlocutors to be able to access the necessary amount of contextual information that will allow them to arrive at a correct interpretation of their utterances.”

1) The attributes of the different cyber-media (chat rooms, e-mail, messenger, web pages, social networking sites...) Influence the quality of the user’s access to contextual information, the amount of information obtained, the interpretation selected, the cognitive effects derived, and the mental effort involved in getting these effects.”

2.2.1 Twitter

Twitter is a social networking site that enables people to share information in a real-time setting (Mistry, 2011) by posting short comments about their experiences and thoughts (Bristol et al., 2010). Additionally, tweets or public messages posted and received via Twitter are limited to 140 characters and may contain links to other websites, blogs, web pages, photos, videos, and other online content. According to Mollett et al. (2011, p.1), "thousands of academics and researchers at all levels of experience and across all disciplines already use Twitter daily" despite the brevity imposed by this media medium, Twitter use is extensively employed in various settings.

Users create a profile and a Twitter "name" (for example, @OTprofile) after making a Twitter account (www.twitter.com), after which they can send and receive tweets from any computer or mobile networked device. When a tweet is sent, it immediately shows in the user's and everyone else's Twitter "feed." This can be done by using keywords, which are frequently identified by user-defined hashtags, denoted by a starting "#" sign (for instance, "occupation" or "journal"). According to Bristol et al. (2010), hashtags help locate specific conversation topics, and some hashtags are used for occupational therapy since they are related to the field.

As a tool for communication, Twitter enables the free exchange of ideas between individuals interested in related fields of knowledge domestically and internationally. It also gives users the chance to engage in critical debate.

2.2.2 Clickbait

Clickbait is a headline or title of a news story. The purpose of this title is to attract the reader’s attention to read the information contained. Accordingly, Merriam-Webster defines clickbait as a headline that lets readers click on the link related to controversial content (2017). The term "clickbait headline" is derived from the term "headline," which is used in traditional web advertising to persuade viewers to click on the link it contains (Potthast, Köpsel, Stein, & Hagen, 2016). Furthermore, it is sometimes described as a “headline teaser, “a new form of an online news article (Pogue, 2014). Added to that, a fact that brings clickbait work successfully is the “curiosity gap,” and readers can fulfill this gap by clicking on the link.

Moreover, in Loewenstein's Information-Gap Theory, when there is a knowledge gap, curiosity evolves into attention. Curiosity is a feeling of deprivation brought on by this gap. To lessen or eliminate the sense of poverty, this curiosity subsequently drives people to seek out

the missing information (Bloom & Hansen, 2015).

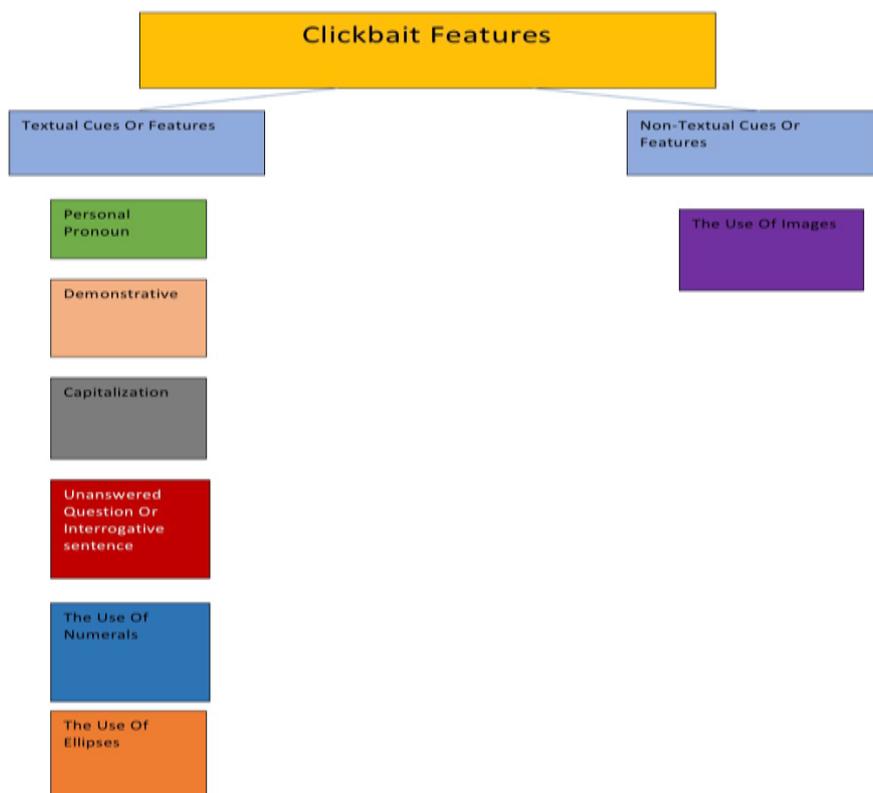
3. Methodology

In this study, the researcher used a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Furthermore, this combination is consistent with the investigation of this study because the researcher analyzed clickbait “tweets “produced by the TED-ED account on Twitter. Concerning the quantitative method supplied several the data by counting the frequency of each feature. At the same time, the qualitative approach presents the contextualized examination of the findings and results found in the study.

The researcher collects the data from the Twitter account, particularly the TED-ED account @TED-ED. The researcher chose twitter for this study because Twitter accounts contain many hybrids provided by the same account. Also, the account can be verified, which means it can be the official account of the person.

The data analysis will examine the type of features used by the writer and the reason behind using them by applying the Chen model (2015), which consists of textual (forward referring reference devices, unresolved pronouns, affective language, action words, suspenseful language, overuse of numerals and use of reverse narrative) and non-textual (images, videos) components associated with clickbait. The research focuses on some of these features in his study, namely the use of numerals, interrogation, capitalization, demonstrative, personal pronoun, and ellipsis. Concerning non-textual features include the use of images. The following framework shows the characteristics or features of detecting clickbait:

Theoretical Framework of The Model of Analysis:



4. Analysis And Results



Tweet 1:

In the tweet above, the writer uses several features that work together to detect clickbait. As for the first feature, the writer uses the “forward reference, “and there are two cues to identify this feature: the first one is the use of the personal pronoun such as” first-person pronoun” (I) that is not used to replace the writer’s name; instead, is how he refers to himself. Added to that, he can use (I) to convey his opinion or point of view, which can make his speech more subjective. Also, using the first-person pronoun gives us the impression that the writer is meant to show compassion to the readers or narrate a story. Here, the writer, as illustrated in the tweet, chooses the less traveled road without mentioning which one of them was less traveled. By doing so, he tries to create an information gap to provoke the reader's curiosity. As a result, he is sharing something with us, and we are led to believe that relevant insight into the writer’s experience is just a click away. The second cue for defining referring expression is using the demonstrative word “this. “The purpose of using such a cue is to point us to the main article or video and denotes what we should expect to find there. Therefore, following the link, we hope to see more information about Robert Frost’s work. Moreover, the demonstrative pronoun points us to the source of information that will fill the information gap and satisfy our curiosity.

Another feature used in this tweet to detect clickbait is “ellipsis. “The use of this feature is like a trick to arouse the reader’s curiosity and thinking to let him identify what is missing and finalize his interest in completing the article or story. Consequently, the most obvious feature that is included by the writer to attract attention and is filtered before the full article is read is the use of “audiovisual elements” like images. This will help readers integrate some information from the image in the associated article. In addition to that, clickbait usually incorporates the use of images as a way to interest readers through incomplete information.



Tweet 2:

In terms of linguistics, the writer uses “capitalization” as a feature for detecting clickbait. This indicates that he is explicitly referring to the text or video in the linked article. Furthermore, the label “NEW VIDEO” helps to emphasize to the readers that there is something new or significant. Also, this strategy is known as “general nouns with implicit discourse deictic reference. “For instance, the writer can use a general noun phrase in the tweet to infer parts of the address in the article or video. That is, the tweet refers to the article as a text by providing a label to let readers expect or think about what they will find in the link. As for audiovisual elements or features, the images included in this tweet by the writer attract the reader’s attention and allow them to integrate some information from the image.



Tweet 3:

In the tweet above, the writer uses “capitalization” as a feature for detecting clickbait. This denotes that he is explicitly referring to the text or video in the linked article. Similarly, the label “NEW VIDEO” helps emphasize to the readers that there is something new or noteworthy. Moreover, this strategy is known as “general nouns with implicit discourse deictic reference. “For instance, the writer can use a general noun phrase in the tweet to indicate parts of the speech or text in the article or video itself. The tweet refers to the article as a text by providing a label to let readers expect or think about what they will find in the link. As for the audiovisual elements or features, the images included in this tweet by the writer attract the reader’s attention and allow them to integrate some information from the image.



Tweet 4:

In the tweet above, the use of “unanswered questions “ is another feature used by the writer to evoke the reader’s curiosity to read and investigate what follows the title. Additionally, the purpose of using such a feature is to attract the reader’s attention by supplying unavailable information. Furthermore, using an interrogative structure is a formidable force because it draws its persuasive power directly from the curiosity gap. Even though such questioning is frequently deceiving, our desire to find the missing piece of information that includes in the main body of the article is compelling. Further features used by the writer to attract the reader's attention are the usage of images. Here, the image can convey some information related to the text in the associated article.



Tweet 5:

The use of “cardinal numbers “is another strategy utilized by the writer in this tweet. This indicates that the text continues incomplete information to arouse readers' curiosity through a form of cognitively provoked deprivation caused by the awareness of knowledge or information gap. Additionally, the purpose of using such a strategy is like an invitation to let readers click on the link to complete the list of ten videos to help students understand the science of climate change and its impact. For instance, readers will form a hypothesis about what information is in the article. Further, they know that the associated article will include the ten videos as it is illustrated in the tweet or text. In short, the usage of this strategy indicates

that highly relevant information exists while not providing us with the input itself. Instead, we are promised that it is just a click away.

Concerning audiovisual elements or features, the images included in this tweet by the writer attract the reader's attention and allow them to integrate some information from the image.



Tweet 6:

In this tweet, we have referring expression, which uses a second-person pronoun (you). The second-person pronoun (you) is used to address the reader directly. This motivates the readers to position themselves as part of the intended audience. In addition, the tweet looks to be directed personally to us, and we are persuaded that if we click on the link and engage with the information, we will discover something about ourselves. Furthermore, the use of the second-person pronoun helps to create an information gap, but not just any information gap. It leads to an information gap about us, which we are inclined to regard as having potential relevance. Concerning audiovisual elements, the image includes questioning what machiavellian means to let readers connect between the image and the information involved inside the article, as well as guiding perceptions through the closeness of images to the tweet, which is one acknowledged means of efficacy in manipulating emotion in readers. It is found that clickbait often incorporates the use of images as a way to interest readers through incomplete information. The writer uses the image to attract attention and is processed before the entire article is read. Moreover, Readers spontaneously integrated information from a tweet with an image in the associated article.

5. Findings and results

This section is about the statistical analysis and discussion of the data under scrutiny.

Table 1 below clarifies the frequencies and percentages of the six samples of tweets analyzed above.

No	Features	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Personal pronoun	5	35%
2.	Demonstrative	1	5%
3.	Capitalization	2	10%
4.	Interrogative or unanswered question	4	20%
5.	Use of numerals	1	5%
6.	Ellipsis	1	5%
7.	Images	6	30%
Total		20	100%

Table 1: The Frequency of Occurrence of Each Feature

The table shows that clickbait identifies through a consideration of some existence of linguistic and non-linguistic features, such as the ones shown in the table (the use of the personal pronouns, the use of numerals, forward-referring expressions like capitalization, interrogative, demonstrative, the use of ellipsis, and images which referred to as non-linguistic or non-textual features. Additionally, these variables or features help identify the percentage of clickbait. Furthermore, the table shows that these features can recognize clickbait content for readers. The analysis of clickbait in the six tweets has raised the following points. First, concerning textual cues, personal pronouns have the highest frequency of occurrence (5) in which the writer wants to direct his speech to the readers. The next rank of frequency of occurrence throughout the tweets is the use of unanswered questions that occurs (4) times to provide incomplete information. As for the rest of the cues, such as demonstrative, numerals, and ellipsis, each occurred (1).

The data also includes non-textual cues, like the use of images that occurs (6) to interest readers and attract their attention. All the results stand by the study's hypothesis that the writer uses specific strategies to create gaps in information to arouse the reader's curiosity to click on the link.

6. Conclusion

The use of clickbait is an inevitable consequence of evaluating the news consumption model that comes with an increasingly digital and social media-mediated landscape. For the writer to earn revenue, he must direct or drive people to a particular website; to do so, he must provoke readers' curiosity. In this study, the researcher found out how clickbait can arouse readers' curiosity and entice them to click by using some strategies. Additionally, the researcher examines clickbait strategies to understand how they manipulate our pragmatic procedure and our natural tendency to look for the information that is related to us. Furthermore, the data analysis indicates that each tweet does not depend on one strategy or feature but on more crafted pieces of work to create an information gap that readers find impossible to resist.

References

- Bristol TJ, Billings DM, Kowalski K (2010) Twitter: consider the possibilities for continuing nursing education. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, 41(5), 199-200.
- Bloom, J. N., & Hansen, K. R. (2015, January). Click bait: Forward-reference as lure in online news headlines. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 87-100.
- Çelik, A. (2021). 'Keep your mouth shut in the day and your door shut at night.' Intra-Kurdish Violence in the Shadow of the State: The case of Hizbullah in Kurdistan of Turkey. *Kurdish Studies*, 9(1), 37-57. <https://doi.org/10.33182/ks.v9i1.563>
- Chen, Y., Rubin, V. L., & Conroy, N. J. (2015). News in an Online World: The Need for an "Automatic Crap Detector". In *Information Science with Impact: Research in and for the Community (ASIST2015)*, November 6-10, St. Louis
- December, J. (1996), Units of Analysis for Internet Communication. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 1, 0. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.1996.tb00173.x> *Open Praxis*, vol. 9 issue 1, January-March 2017, pp. 17–30
- December, J. (n.d.). What is Computer-mediated Communication? Retrieved April 20, 2008, from <http://www.december.com/john/study/cmc/what.html>
- Dogruev, N., Eyyam, R. & Menevis, I. (2011). The use of the internet for educational purposes., 28(none), 606–611. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.115
- Ferris, P. (1997). What is CMC? An overview of scholarly definitions. Retrieved April 20, 2008, from <http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1997/jan/ferris.html>
- Bilecen, T. (2020). The Struggle to Unite Diaspora Alevi and the Working Class: Alevism in the Kavga/Kervan Magazine. *Kurdish Studies*, 8(1), 91-112. <https://doi.org/10.33182/ks.v8i1.513>
- Leiner, B.M., Cerf, V.G., Clark, D.D., Kahn, R.E., Kleinrock, L., Lynch, D.C., Postel, J., Roberts, L.G. and Wolff, S., 1997. Brief History of the Internet. [online] Available at: <<https://www.internetsociety.org/internet/history-internet/brief-history-internet/>> [Accessed 24 February 2018].
- McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Miura, A., & Shinohara, K. (2005). Social intelligence design in online chat communication: a psychological study of congestion effects. *AI & Society*, 19(1), 93-109.
- Mistry V (2011) Critical care training: using Twitter as a teaching tool. *British Journal of Nursing*, 20(20), 1292-96.
- Mollett A, Moran D, Dunleavy P (2011) Using Twitter in university research, teaching and impact activities. A guide for academics and researchers. London School of Economics and Political Science Public Policy Group
- Merriem-Webster. (2017). Retrieved April 12, 2017, from [merriem-webster.com: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clickbait](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clickbait)
- Bocheńska, J., & Fatah-Black, K. (2021). An Intellectual on a Mission: Abdullah Jalal Fatah, his dissertation on Kurdish culture (1978) and heritage making inspired by Józef Chałasiński and Polish academia. *Kurdish Studies*, 9(2), 155-173. <https://doi.org/10.33182/ks.v9i2.577>
- Park, H. W. (2009). Academic Internet Use: Issues and Lessons in e-Research. A paper presented to the Communication and Technology Division, the 59th Annual ICA (International Communication Association) Conference, Chicago, Illinois USA (Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile, May 21-25, 2009).

Pogue, D. (2014, May 21). yahoo tech. Retrieved April 12, 2017, from yahoo:
<https://www.yahoo.com/tech/you-have-no-idea-whats-behind-these-clickbait-86284798014.html>

Potthast, M., Köpsel, S., Stein, B., & Hagen, a. M. (2016). uni-weimar.de. Retrieved from https://www.uni-weimar.de/medien/webis/publications/papers/stein_2016b.pdf

Resnick, P. (2002). Beyond bowling together: Sociotechnical capital. In J. M. Carroll (Ed.), *HCI in the new millennium* (pp. 247- 272). New York: Addison-Wesley.

Warren, A., Brunner, D., Mayer P., & Barnet, L. (1998). *Technology in Teaching and Learning: An Introductory Guide*. London: Kogan Page.

Yus, Francisco. 2011. *Cyberpragmatics. Internet-Mediated Communication in Context*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.