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HASHTAG AS A TOOL TO INTEGRATE OFFLINE AND ONLINE REALITY

Violetta Gaputina (a), Ekaterina Budnik (b)*
*Corresponding author

(a) Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, Moscow, Russia, vagaputina@pushkin.institute
(b) Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, Moscow, Russia, eabudnik@pushkin.institute

Abstract

The article discusses the issue of activating a hashtag in the offline space. The relevance of the study is due to the fact that today the hashtag goes beyond social networks, expanding the scope of its distribution and increasing its functionality. It turns into an almost universal semiotic structure that participates in virtual and real communication and connects them, forming the "mixed reality", mediated by new technologies. The study aims to examine the correlation of offline hashtags with their actualization in the online space, as well as to identify their functionality and illocutionary strength. The use of a general scientific observation method made it possible to delimit the research material by zones of fixing hash symbols: printed periodicals, commercials, broadcasts of federal Russian channels, social networks ergonyms, texts on posters of the state project "Stopcoronavirus", food, clothing, cosmetics and jewellery items. Using the method of continuous sampling, the cases of using hashtags in the indicated actual material were identified. Using the method of contrastive analysis, the method of qualitative description, the method of pragmatic analysis, it has been proven that a hashtag is a productive unit of communication capable of organizing the behaviour of a society both online and offline. Also, the widespread use of the hashtag is becoming a fashionable language trend due to the indicating function, which contributes to the attractiveness of the transmitted information.

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1. Introduction

In modern society, the hashtag is a phenomenon that has gained extreme popularity and does not need to be explained. First appeared in the 1990s in the Internet messaging service IRC (Internet Relay Chat) to mark the topics discussed by users, the hashtag instantly spread on all social networks (Twitter, Instagram, VK, Facebook, Pinterest), and then settled in other genres (blogs, electronic media) ... The use of the hashtag on the network has become so frequent that in 2012 the search engines Google (USA) and Yandex (Russia), scholar s from Pushkin State Russian Language Institute and the American Dialectological Society (ADS) awarded the graphic designation of the hashtag (#) the status of the Internet word of the year.

Today the hashtag goes far beyond the Internet space, becoming a kind of symbol of the era and a particular mainstream. As Solis (2011) noted, the hashtag is becoming a conceptual analogue of the brand. It is used in print and television journalism, advertising communication and political actions, it is an indispensable element of various events, contests and flash mobs. Such an expansion of the lattice sign indicates the expansion of its functionality, which necessitates the study of hashtag actualization both online and offline.

2. Problem Statement

Traditionally, a hashtag is described as a tag, keyword or several words used in microblogging and social networks to identify a topic and distribute messages on these topics in the users' news feed. However, in our opinion, such a definition does not reflect the full understanding of the hashtag functionality that it has today. First, in addition to a thematic marker, a hashtag can be a geotag, a tool for promoting a brand or product, a means of self-expression and self-presentation, as well as an evaluative response to any events or even a call to action (Lebedeva & Astakhova, 2019; Patrusheva, 2018). Secondly, the hashtag has long ceased to be an exclusively Internet element. It has turned into a universal semiotic structure participating in virtual and real communication and connecting them. According to the Russian scholar Moroz (2017), online and offline reality are no longer demarcated spheres, merging into the so-called mixed reality mediated by new technologies. The tasks of the authors of this article include the study of this border area of a new communicative unit functioning - a hashtag.

3. Research Questions

The works of many foreign and Russian scholars are devoted to the study of the hashtag in the scientific paradigm (Atyagina, 2014; Belovodskaya, 2019; Biyanova, 2019; Boguslavskaya & Boguslavsky, 2017; Budnik et al., 2019; Daer et al., 2014; Gaputina et al., 2019; Gerard, 2018; Gill & Shani, 2018; Hiroki et al., 2020; Kan, 2016; Lebedeva & Astakhova, 2019; Navoloka, 2018; Patrusheva, 2018; Shchurina, 2016;; Solis, 2011; Small, 2011), working in the framework of a particular direction of media linguistics - hashtagging. They focus on the analysis of individual aspects of the functioning of the hashtag in the social networks Twitter (Atyagina, 2014), Vkontakte (Kan, 2016), Facebook (Lebedeva & Astakhova, 2019) Instagram (Navoloka, 2018; Shchurina, 2016), in the blogosphere (Biyanova, 2019). There are number of works with a comparative analysis of the hashtag and the title as a core of focused

information about the media text content (Gaputina et al., 2019), concepts such as hashtag text (Navoloka, 2018) and hashtagging (Patrusheva, 2018) are introduced and disclosed.

Despite the works in the scientific literature devoted to the multidimensional study of the hashtag, it's functioning in offline space has not yet become the subject of detailed research, while its actualization outside of virtual reality needs a detailed description.

4.   Purpose of the Study

This study aims to examine hashtags in the Russian-speaking offline space in correlation with their actualization in the online space, as well as to identify their functionality and illocutionary power. We emphasize that the division into online and offline zones is somewhat arbitrary and necessary as a research technique and does not contradict the point of view of the authors of this article about their close coordination and relationship.

5.   Research Methods

The object for the study was the artefacts of contemporary Russian reality. The use of the general scientific observation method made it possible to delimit the research material by zones of fixing hash symbols: printed periodicals (Russian-language magazines Cosmopolitan and Marie Claire, as well as an advertising catalogue of the Podruzhka cosmetics store), commercials, broadcasts of Russian federal channels (NTV and MATCH), social networks Vkontakte, Instagram and Twitter, ergonyms, posters of the Stopcoronavirus state project, texts on food, clothing, cosmetics and jewellery.

Using the method of continuous sampling, we highlighted the cases of the use of the hashtags in the indicated factual material were highlighted. A correlation was established between the use of hashtags in online and offline communication (the method of contrastive analysis), their functional load was revealed (the method of qualitative description), as well as the inherent influencing potential (the method of pragmatic analysis).

6.   Findings

6.1. Hashtags in political communication

The hashtag's colossal potential was first noted by former Google employee and Uber developer Chris Messina. In October 2007, there was a severe fire in California, the help of which was organized using the #SanDiegoFire tag posted by users on Twitter. This became the starting point for people in different cities and countries to start reacting to events happening in the world through tags in social networks.

Social networks are a very convenient platform for disseminating political information, and hashtags in them act as a unifying symbol, a way of spreading a particular ideology and influencing human consciousness and behaviour, their analogues are slogans or posters at demonstrations. According to experts from the Berkman Center at Harvard University, the importance of cyberspace in social and political life is so great that it should be considered as a rapidly growing element of offline socio-political systems.

One of the most relevant examples of broadcasting political ideology to the masses is the hashtag #stayathome (Instagram - 1.4 million publications). On March 25, 2020, President Vladimir delivered a speech about measures to resist the coronavirus and declared the days from March 28 to April 5 non-working, explaining this by the need to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. Vladimir Putin urged everyone to show responsibility and stay at home. These messages were marked with the corresponding hashtag. At first, in Russian networks, users joked about the wholesale purchase of buckwheat and toilet paper, then users began to publish posts with stories about what they do during the period of self-isolation, why it is important to contact people as little as possible, give advice on how not to get bored in quarantine, they show how they arranged workplaces at home, share life-stories and memes.

Soon, hashtags - variations on the theme of the pandemic, urging not to leave the house, became symbols of the main pages of social networks and icons of Russian federal channels. For example, the hashtag #luchshedoma (it's better to be at home) (here and after all examples in Cyrillic are transliterated to English alphabet, in brackets we give the translation of hashtags) became the symbol for Vkontakte, #sidimdoma (we stay at home) for the NTV and MATCH channels, and Instagram even launched a special sticker for stories.

The directive hashtag, designed to regulate mass behaviour by the authorities, has become so widespread that it has gone far beyond the Internet communities. Thus, on the walls of the city and municipal buildings, posters with a series of pictures of the Stopcoronavirus state project, instructions for survival and precautionary measures, as well as memos in case of illness, lists of important phone numbers and links appeared; all - with hashtags of the relevant subject, for example, this inscription on one of the posters: "Avoid crowded places. #etospasaetzhizni (it saves lives). They instantly appeared on the network, among them - a vast number of doctors' photos reposts from the global flash mob with the hashtag #ostavaisyadomaradinas (stay at home for us). T-shirts with prints with hashtags on the topic of pandemic and self-isolation have even appeared on sale (Figure 01 shows a model from the website of the Lamoda online store). Thus, the slogan with the grid icon that rallied people online started to mobilize their offline behaviour.

Figure 01. Hashtag as an integrative tool

6.2. Hashtags in journalism

In print journalism, in particular, in glossy magazines, hashtags have appeared due to their ability to update the trend of goods and services. So, the widespread use of a hashtag in magazines is the advertising of various products, an announcement of the launch of a project that needs to be promoted. For example, on the spine of the Cosmopolitan magazine issues for 2019, we find the hashtag #silavzhenschine (the power is in a woman), associated with the annual award of the same name. Here the hashtag performs an integrative function, uniting girls and women, whose achievements change the country for the better in different directions, and is also a tool for promoting the publication. The July-August 2020 issue of the Russian-language edition of the "Marie Claire" magazine is dedicated to the #Myprotivnasiliya (we are against of violence) project in support of victims suffering from violence and not protected by the law. On the pages of the magazine, well-known personalities such as State Duma deputy Oksana Pushkina, actress Regina Todorenko, journalist Evelina Khromchenko stand on the side of the victims of abuse and urge them to vote for the adoption of a law against domestic violence. The hashtag, which served as a response to the existing problem in society and expressed a negative assessment, simultaneously serves as an element uniting the project participants, and a call to take any action about gender discrimination.

The above examples show that hashtags in the mass media (as well as in the political sphere) are a factor influencing human behaviour both in real life and in virtual life. the hashtag has become a new form of self-expression: the invention of an original and popular hashtag is a matter of special pride for users (Shchurina, 2016). Every person who wants to participate in the organized competition or support any action, by all means, publishes posts on social networks, marking them with the appropriate hashtag. Interestingly, the content of social communities displayed when searching for these tags does not always have anything to do with competitions or promotions launched by magazines. For example, on Instagram, a search query for the tag #silavzhenschine (1.9 thousand publ.) Finds photographs of women (often with their families, children), asserting their feminine power, as well as jewellery (for example, from the jewellery boutique @ goldenorchidofficial). Obviously, in the latter case, the hashtag # silavzhenschine is used as a technique to attract the attention of potential buyers. According to scientists, in such a semantic multi directionality, the specificity of hashtags is manifested, creating a certain "mental palette", the dominant colour of which will be determined based on the verbal sign, since the language, in this case, will act as a model for understanding the world (Lebedeva & Astakhova, 2019).

Our observations made it possible to identify cases of journalists using the lattice sign as a fascinating technique that contributes to the attractiveness of broadcast information. For example, the articles in the Russian edition of the magazine "Marie Claire" (ed. February 2019, Chief Editor Anna Burashova) represents the headings as a combination of a hashtag sign with a word form, phrase or sentence. The words are separated from each other by a space (which is not typical for writing hashtags on the network): #ne skromno (not shy), #bol'she raznykh (more different), #pozvolitel'naya roskosh (affordable luxury), #bez kompromissa (no compromise), #call me by my name.

A magazine that advertises products of the "Podruzhka" chain of cosmetics stores in Russia uses the design of headings with hashtags, where the hashtag is in front of each name of the subheading, for example, moda#detali, interview#zvezda, ukhod#novinki, ukhod #mneniye, volosy# trends, and many of

them are hybrid Russian-English and English-Russian collocations (moda#lookbook, makeup#novinki, makeup#gid, beauty#ingredient, etc.), or English-language names (beauty#woweffect, digest#summer, nails#hype). In the examples, hashtags do not carry any utilitarian meaning; most likely, their use is dictated by the desire of editors to design magazine pages creatively and attract the attention of readers.

6.3. Hashtags in advertisements

This year, a commercial for Danone curd appeared on Russian television screens, in which the hashtag #mamayapoyel (mom, I have eaten) appears, referring to the popular questions of caring mothers about whether their child has eaten (a frame from the video is shown in Figure 02). The video appeared on the occasion of the launch of a line of dairy products, on the packaging of which, in addition to the hashtag # mamayapoyel, you can see the hashtags #mamayablogger (mom, I am a blogger), #mamayaostauysdoma (mom, I will stay at home), #mamayauzhebolshoi (mom, I am not a kid). Copywriters used precedent texts often used by children in everyday communication with their mother (as the hashtag #mamayaostauysdoma), it seems to have appeared during the period of self-isolation) as a marketing ploy to increase brand awareness and ensure marketability products, and the hash sign as a reference to a popular Internet meme and its variations ("Mom, I have eaten and I am dressed warm," etc.). Simultaneously with the launch of the line of yoghurts, Danone announced the contest #mamayapoyel i hochunamore (https://mamiapoel.ru/winners) (mom, I have eaten and I want to travel to the sea). To participate, it was necessary to register promo codes from product packages on the company's website, as well as to take part in a challenge: it was necessary to make a photo with a spoon and a funny expression on one's face and post it on Instagram, marking the Danone company account @mam_ia_poel and the hashtag #mamayapoel.

Figure 02. Hashtag as a marketing tool

The appearance of hashtags on the packaging of retail products is an expected trend. The computerization of society has led to an increase in the demand for the use of Internet symbols in everyday life, and they appear more and more often on various objects of the surrounding reality: advertising banners, in advertisements, on the signs of various institutions, clothes, cosmetic products and

accessories. Such a variety of localization of the hash symbol allows us to speak of it as an element of the modern linguistic landscape.

6.4. Hashtags in the language landscape

A linguistic landscape refers to the use of a language in written text form in a particular territory and, thus, giving it visibility in public life (Gorter, 2006, p. 2). Administrative buildings (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25), as well as spontaneous inscriptions, for example, graffiti, personal advertisements, texts on clothing and souvenirs.

As we have already noted, the hash symbol is one of the most popular ways of naming in ergonomics. So, in Russia, there are restaurants with the names #sibirsibir, #фарш, loft #ПРОСТРАНСТВО, coffee shops # coffee-coffee, # waffle, ophthalmological clinic # vision2100. In Nizhny Novgorod, one of the cafes is called "Hashtag".

In our opinion, the use of hashtags as a style-forming element in the design of cosmetic products, clothing and jewellery is of a particular interest. So, figure 03 shows a model of women's earrings from the Russian brand "SOKOLOV". As conceived by the designers, the use of the engraved hashtag #pushkin should give the product the most significant originality and modern look.

Figure 03. Hashtag as a tool for fascinating

All of the above allows us to speak of hashtags as symbols with cultural relevance. They can connect the intellectual and emotional levels before launching the three bases of social media: action, reaction, change (Solis, 2011).

7. Conclusion

Thus, the analysis of the collected factual linguistic material allowed us to draw several conclusions. A notable feature of the verbal part of the offline space is the use of hashtags. The increase in demand for their use in real life is due to the process of computerization of society, as well as the ability of hashtags to perform several specific functions. First, the hashtag acts as a unifying symbol, a way to articulate people's own political identity and aggregate it, a means of regulating mass behaviour

both in the online sphere and in real life. Secondly, the hashtag is a powerful marketing tool that can update the trend of products, services, events, contests and flash mobs. Thirdly, the hashtag is becoming a fashionable linguistic trend and style-forming element due to the existing fascinating potential, which contributes to the attractiveness of images perceived by the "media person".

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