THE EFFECT OF USING HASHTAGS ON TWITTER TO THE GENERAL STUDENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF MAASAI MARA UNIVERSITY.

BY

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DECLARATION

Declaration by the Student

This research proposal is my original work and has not been presented to any other institution. No part of this research should be reproduced without my consent or that of Maasai Mara University

Name……………………………..

Signature …………………………   Date…………………..

Declaration by supervisor and management

Lecturer's Name…………………………

Signature…………………………

Date………………………

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project report to my loving family; my parents, Alice Msee and Anthony Msee for the support they have given me so far, both financially and emotionally. I also dedicate it to my siblings for the brilliant contribution towards the completion of this research proposal. It's also a dedication to my supervisor Ms Elizabeth Oluoch and the entire Media Film and Communication Department of Maasai Mara University for their constant guidance. To my friends who have supported and inspired me. Finally my lecturers who were able to guide me with the writing of this research proposal.

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ABSTRACT

With the rising rates of using social media platforms, twitter has become an information sharing and communication platform. Television and radio personalities talk about it. It is included in business cards and almost every organization website asks you to follow it. Hashtags, a form of twitter language, are used in Twitter to classify messages, propagate ideas and also to promote specific topics and people. In this study, the researcher present a linguistic-inspired study of how these tags are created, used and disseminated by the members of information networks. The researcher looks into the usage of hashtags in Maasai Mara University (MMU) twitter handle and studies the types of hashtags used and their purpose. The study also looks at the linguistic aspects around the hashtag as well as how the use of these hashtags affects the general communication of the students involved. The researcher identified interesting aspects around the hashtag that led to the belief that there existed a relationship between gender and type of hashtag. The first part of this study builds upon a set of linguistic features to quantify the language of the hashtag. The second part introduces a theoretical framework, which conducts an analysis of the given phenomena under study. Applying this analytical framework, the researcher gathered samples of tweets and looked into the linguistics of twitter hashtags via a quantitative and qualitative approach. The researcher presents several key insights: (1) Twitter hashtag is a content bearing symbol that plays a key role in tweets, (2) Twitter users in the university appear to be developing other uses for the symbol (3) Hashtags command the number of audience a user has and (4) Twitter usage not only affects the students language but all also their social circles. As hashtags are created by the users, they can either be accepted by other members of the network or not. In this manner, some propagate and thrive, while others die immediately afterbirth and are restricted to a few messages.

In this work, the researcher examines aspects of the dissemination of hashtags in Twitter, aiming at understanding the process of propagation of innovative hashtags guided by the linguistic theory

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

MMU- Maasai Mara University

YOLO – You only live once

CMC - Computer Mediated Communications

DAU - Daily Active Users

IRL - In Real Life

KOT- Kenyans on Twitter

LMAO -Laughing My Ass Out

LOL - Laughing Out Loud

MAU - Monthly Active Users

NTV - Nation Television

OMG - Oh My God

TV - Television

YoY - Year on Year

CNN – Cable news network

MDST – Media Systems Dependency Theory

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS USED IN THIS STUDY

☐ **Social media**

This term goes beyond well-known networks such as Twitter and Facebook to include the comment sections on mainstream media sites. It also refers to the interactions where people create, share and exchange information and ideas on virtual communities or networks.

☐ **Social network**

An online platform that enables communication and interaction between people who share interests or networks.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains background information of the study. It provides the problem statement, objectives of the study and the research questions. There will also be a provision of the justification of the study whereby the significance of the study will be stated. This chapter contains the scope of the study as well as its limitations of the same.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Social media has prompted a more subtle way of communication. We share more personal information but also communicate with larger audiences. Our communication styles thus become more informal and more open and this seeps in into other areas of life and culture. Social media is clearly having an impact on language. The words that surround us everyday influence the words we use among our peers. We are moving into a post-printed era. Looking at the characteristics of social media, it is much more like oral culture than written culture. It is so conversational. Twitter, a fast growing social network in Kenya, has its own language. The 140-character limit has resulted to excessive text speak, which involves a whole new language of abbreviations and shortcuts. New words have been introduced and old ones have been given new meanings. Twitter has become a rich playground for experimenting with developing and subverting language. Example of such language is abbreviations like LOL (laughing out loud), shortcuts, hashtags and links which create a new form of information diffusion. According to the *CommunicationsAuthroityOfKenyaKenyaQ32014Statistics*, Kenya has a confirmed 700,000+ monthly active users (MAUs) on Twitter where 2 to 3 times its MAUs do not log in, this means that Kenya has in the region of 1.4 million to 2.1 million users in total. 80% of Twitter users in Kenya access the service on a daily basis. In terms of Daily Active Users (DAUs) therefore the number is approximately 570,000+. Twitter growth has been doubling in Kenya year on year (YoY) which means that in the year (2017) it is estimated that there will be more than 1.4 million Twitter MAUs in Kenya or anywhere between 2.8 million to 4.2 million users in total factoring in those who do not login. Whilst global mobile-based Twitter usage is approximately 75% or 203 million MAUs according to the Q2 2014 results, In Kenya its 93% which would translate to 651,000+ MAUs on mobile and only 7% or 49,000+ MAUs on desktop. These accounts, according to https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/twitter/profiles/kenya/ had the largest following in Kenya for the year 2016. It is however important to note that the results may vary

from when you access the site as new people keep following different users that are of interest to them.

1. Uhuru Kenyatta (@UKenyatta) Followings 29 Followers 1 560 666

2. NTV Kenya (@ntvkenya) Followings 282 Followers 1 220 795

3. Citizen TV Kenya (@citizentvkenya) Followings 161 Followers 1 187 144

4. KTN (@KTNKenya) Followings 107 Followers 1 106 830

5. Daily Nation (@dailynation) Followings 264 Followers 942 564

6. Jeff Koinange, MBS (@KoinangeJeff) Followings 1 304 Followers 811 337

7. Larry Madowo (@LarryMadowo) Followings 1 488 Followers 791 995

8. MaasaiMaraUniversity @MMaraUniversity Following 4 Followers 1,262

The Portlands Communications report named Kenya as the tech hub of Africa in April 2015 despite its 40 per cent unemployment rate. The report further indicated that English was the dominant language on Twitter in Africa, helping bridge national and cultural barriers across the continent. The report found that although showbiz and entertainment dominated the conversations, discussion around politics grew to 10% . "This study demonstrates that the Twitter platform is coming of age with the prevalence of serious debates about politics and government," said Flanagan of Portlands Communications.

1.1.1 TWEETS IN KENYA

The *ÉcolePolytechniqueFédérale de Lausanne,* based in Nairobi, through researchers tried looking for answers as to what tweets say about Kenyans and their city. By mapping trends in Twitter usage, they found that young Kenyans working in the private sector are more up-to-date with their information than the state. According to the research, members of the police, army and the air force barely use Twitter. The same goes for lectures and staff members of MMU, the school's twitter handle barely posts consistently hence less participation from the students towards it. However, general twitter users in the university form a bigger part of youths on social media platforms in Kenya. The nature of young Kenyans' tweets indicates a possible shift in the

use of language within this generation. English is widespread, making up 81% of recorded tweets according to automatic language detection system. Only 5% of tweets were made in Kiswahili. Other languages used included Hindi, Kikuyu, Somali, Luo and the Sheng' dialect, many of which were combined with English.

1.1.2 TWITTER AND THE MEDIA

Most people prefer twitter due to immediacy - stories are disseminated quickly. Stories are informative and neatly divided into pretty categories and there are no interruptions of commercials. Twitter offers a platform of short story telling. Journalists understand this and they therefore make every word count in the 140-character medium. Twitter further has limit of 100 tweets per hour and 1000 tweets per day. Journalists are using this platform to differentiate themselves by advancing the conversations. Twitter has enabled posting and tagging accounts and creates an environment of continuous partial production. Journalists later turn the partial production into a full production. That is, a story, a project, or an interactive that offers the analysis and context and is shared in a tweet as a link either to a video, full story or photograph. Twitter users check accounts to see if they interest them or if the account they are to follow has witty writing and that it pulls them in before they click the follow button. Media houses therefore, employ entrapment artwork, make sure their tweets are deep and carry weight. They also include the dialogue feature, hashtags, twitter handles, links. Since twitter encourages textspeak, short punchy sentences and the active voice is a popular way to communicate in writing. Kenyans on twitter (KOT) make trend by use of hashtags.

1.1.3 BACKGROUND OF TWITTER HASHTAGS

The hashtag (#) symbol was first proposed by a user named Chris Messina (@chrismessina)in August 2007 in a tweet and followed up with a blog post explaining his proposal. (Messina2007b) His proposal focused on "improving contextualization, content filtering and simply having a better eavesdropping experience on twitter…" He proposed that the symbol be use as means of organizing topics of discussion. Hashtags make the text displayed after it clickable and displays tweets about the same topic. This allows people to follow and participate in discussions. They provide a way to automatically find other tweets related to the ones you are

interested in. The hashtag has been embraced by media houses to keep their audiences entrapped. Hashtags have various functions thereof. They include:

- ➢ Connecting people with similar topic interests
- ➢ Organizing tweets about the same topic
- ➢ Circulating memes
- ➢ Expressing emotion
- ➢ Emphasizing on main content

1.1.3.1 TYPES OF HASHTAGS
1. Tag Hashtags

These kinds of hashtags connect people of a certain locality. In addition, they are meant to start national or international discussions. They are also meant to circulate memes, even the serious memes. An example of such a hashtag is #classof2013 – this aims at bringing together people of that class at that particular year. Another example is #MombasaRoad – this tweet will attract people familiar with the road/route and also those affected by the activity on the road and this only confines to Kenyan people. An example of international discussion that could be started with such a tag is #RioOlympics. This will attract discussions all over the world because it connects anyone who knows about the Olympics.

2. Commentary Hastags

These kinds of hashtags are a tagging system for organizing tweets about a certain topic. They are the main and most talked about hashtags. However, twitter users have gotten more creative and started using it for functions other than tagging. They use it to add meaning to the main semantic content of the tweet. Examples include: Can this award ceremony start already #anxious or why is Sautisoul's latest song so catchy? #iloveit. In both instances, the user(s) mean to add value meaning locally to the semantic content of the tweets. This kind of hashtag uses emocotions anxious for instance, but can also just indicate how an author feels about the content expressed in the message. This hashtag kind also can be part of the main content in a tweet. Example: When I tell your girl am #teamtatted she fall in love The above tweet express the stance of the author towards a particular idea or identity and they seem to be largely

idiosyncratic, created in the moment and not taken from existing repertoire of possible "teams" to affiliate with Other functions of commentary tags include:

➢ Show purported 'problems' of certain groups for example, #djproblems or #socialmediaproblems
➢ Expressing a common emotion in an extremely standardized way for example #YOLO
➢ Expressing memes that become a template people use and add to their own ideas. Example, #ihateitwhen or #stupidthingspeopledo

The hashtags in the examples often add an evaluation to the content of the tweet, but since they have become set sentiments, they circulate and can be used to organize discussions around those sentiments on a larger scale.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Twitter enables an average person to engage in political, social, cultural and economic action. As a consequence of the quick embrace of new media, students have established more personal relationships on the platforms. Twitter has given a holistic experience in terms of engaging audiences in discussions that make them feel part of something. Twitter has restructured writing and dissemination of information. It allows people to structure and nest information into documents differently. Students compile and share personal data with other web surfers. This has enabled user feedback, creative participation and community formation, which has overwritten traditional relationships. However, the linguistic effects of using twitter hashtags cannot be assumed, generally, the language used by students has changed drastically. The effects have also been felt in their academic performance. Online users have digitized their content to bits and have made it available in form of hashtags, videos online or vines, links, and catch on television. This has changed the way people use language and construct basic sentences and is a worry for poor grammar. Social Media has its own language- from hashtags to shortcuts, abbreviations to links. If a word is persuasive enough and feels real enough, you can make a word mean what you want it to mean. Sites such as Urban Dictionary have entries for misspelled words. The content given to audiences is structured to fit the reader's contextual understanding of a given subject.

We also find interconnectedness of ideas and events that keep audience attracted and aligned to their choice of content. It has become the concern of many that the use of twitter hash tags could be affecting academic performances of students in various institutions.

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1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ➢ To find out the kind of hashtags that students use.
- ➢ To find out the effect of hashtags on written and spoken communication among students.
- ➢ To find out if the use of hashtags affects the number of followers among students.
- ➢ To find out how the use of hashtags affects the general performance of students in the communication field.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The subject of twitter language is a continuing debate. Twitter has unique communication mechanisms which enable users to post, repost by editing content which contributes to the variations of twitter's linguistics. The severe length restrictions induce a grammatically incorrect language riddled with acronyms, hashtags etc. The colloquial hashtag that arose 2007 was a way to categorize and tag tweets. That has changed since its use and spread to other social sites like Facebook and Instagram. The narrative does not end there. Its use, the hashtag, has extended to our speech and it is not a wonder to hear someone say something like, 'I have understanding friends. Hashtag blessed!' This is a linguistic tumor. The hashtag has no symbols and if it includes more than one word all words are written as one. This has resulted to students not paying attention to punctuations when writing documents or essays. This research seeks to analyze simple specific linguistic aspects of hashtags it has become a tool on the rise in its use in the university.

1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 SCOPE

This study focuses on showing the variation of twitter linguistics in MMU. Twitter is on a roll in the university and Kenya as a whole. Information is packaged neatly and users do away with commercial adverts in their consumption of information. For a generation interested with brevity and fast information, Twitter is a perfect site. Students can now know what is going on the outside world without watching television or reading newspapers. Information about hostels and opening dates are also available on twitter. Hashtags have contributed greatly to why people love twitter. They have given users a way to add tonal layers in our communication, shift viewpoints from first to third person among other reasons. This has led to less formality in both writing and speaking. In other words, the way language trends develop and words become popular in real life (IRL) is mimicked on twitter. We really are writing how we talk. We are slowly becoming a generation that uses metalinguistic terms in everyday speech all because of twitter hashtags.

1.5.2 LIMITATIONS

The researcher limited the area of study to Maasai Mara University students.

- ➢ The time allocated for this study was limited, making it difficult to gather extensive information. The researcher dedicated time amidst the busy school schedule to make it happen.
- ➢ Financial constraints made the research work challenging. However, through the support of family and friends, the researcher was able to get through and make it happen.

CHAPTER 2

LITERARURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 INTRODUCTION

As social network sites become mainstream, traversing the connections between people to view profiles is no longer the sole or, even primary way of participation. Content is surfaced through streams and each piece of content is embedded with numerous links to other content nuggets. Features like Twitter's "hashtags" allow people to pivot off of topics; clicking on a hashtag will reveal all other posts referencing that term. In this chapter, we look into what scholars around the world have written about Twitter and theories on the same.

2.1 LITERARURE REVIEW

Much has been written about linguistic innovations, language variation and language change since Weinreich et al. (1968), which is considered one of the ground works for sociolinguistics. More recently, Troutman et al. (2008) conducted a study with the purpose of simulating language change in a speech community. They built a computational model based on characteristics from language users and from social network structures and tested it in different scenarios, obtaining a probabilistic model that captures many of the key features of language change. Our work extends the traditional way of conducting research on sociolinguistics as we used a corpus of non-natural language data and even so we found compatible results to the ones obtained from natural language data. Kwak et al. (2010) were the first to study in a quantitative way the topological characteristics of Twitter, information diffusion on it and its power as a new medium of information sharing. Their analyses are in some way related to the ones we perform here. Chew and Eysenbach (2010) led a study that investigated the keywords "swine flu" and "H1N1" on Twitter during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic. The goals of this work were to monitor the use of these terms over time, to conduct a content analysis of tweets and to validate Twitter as a trend-tracking tool. They found the existence of variability in the use of the terms, which is a constitutive aspect of human language. Romero et al. (2011) studied the mechanics of information diffusion on Twitter. We analyze hashtags as well, but in a different perspective. Hashtag is the evaluation of the body of the tweet. It's the stance towards what the author has just said, in that it is the method by which the speaker is creating and signalling a relationship with

the proposition they wrote and with the people they are interacting with. (Johnstone, 2009; Hunston & Thompson 2000) In linguistics, Twitter has become a source from which to mine data, and studies have been done which use tweets to follow the diffusion of lexical items (Squires 2012) and the use of symbols such as emoticons (Schnoebelen 2012). Work has also been done on how Twitter can be used to study dialectal variation (Russ 2012). There are also studies of Twitter, and hashtags in particular, from a sociological perspective, including how Twitter is used for the organizing of (inter)national discussions on politics, crises (Heverin & Zach 2010), and creating of publics through the organizing of topical discussion (Bruns & Burgess 2011). Within computer science and information science, there are studies that look at the mechanisms of how hashtags spread. These studies often use that data to feed machine learning models (Huang, Thornton, & Efthimiadis 2010; Chang, 2010). However, previous work on hashtags almost exclusively focuses on tweets as topic/theme hashtags. A search of the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, an open source journal available online, for the word "hashtag," reveals three published articles, all following the spread of information on a certain topic through hashtags, similar to the sociological studies involving politics mentioned above. One of the foremost Twitter researchers in linguistics is Michelle Zappavigna. In her article "Ambient affiliation: A linguistic perspective on Twitter (2011)," she begins by pointing out that the concept of searchable talk is something new, something that was not possible in canonical face-to-face interaction, but has been introduced in computer mediated communication(CMC) through the ability to tag talk with meta-data. Twitter hashtags are a form of in-line meta-data, meaning that they are integrated into messages rather than extraneous to it (as opposed to, for example, the hidden meta-data that is attached to a digital photograph about when it was taken and with what type of camera.) She argues that in-line, searchable meta-data in online communication platforms like Twitter are effecting a cultural shift that lends itself to community-building activity.

The Language of Micro-blogging consists of two sections. The first section considers micro blogging as a semiotic activity and explores its various characteristics. Some of the features that have been addressed are the functions of '@' sign on Twitter as well as "retweets" and "hashtags". Retweeting is mainly a rebroadcast of a user's tweet within one's own account, however, it also "contributes to a conversational ecology in which conversations are composed of public interplay of voices that give rise to an emotional sense of shared conversational

context" (boyd et al., 2011, p. 1). #Hashtags are convention markers for the annotation of the content of the tweet. As Zappavigna puts it, hashtags function as a linguistic marker that says "Search for me and affiliate with my value!" She develops this attributive function of the hashtag and refers to it as "ambient affiliation." The purpose of these types of hashtags is to organize and connect group discussion around topics and to affiliate both the readers and writers of the tweets with an ambient community of other Twitter users interested in the same topic. Zappavigna's concept of ambient affiliation aptly describes the distinction between my Tag and Commentary hashtags. Tag hashtags seek to affiliate with an ambient discussion or community, while Commentary hashtags do not, and rather function on a level local to the tweet, accomplishing more personal interactions Rheingold (1993) put forth one of the first definitions of 'virtual communities,' which he described as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993: 5). Work since then has sought to build on this definition in more concrete ways. The affiliative function of hashtags can be seen as one form of public conversation that, by grouping tweets, can create ad hoc social groups or communities. For example the case of Kenya's #Twitterbigstick and #twitterthumbsup a crowd-sourced initiative that provides feedback and escalates bad service, experiences and bad behaviour by organisations and individuals and also tags commendations and praise. It provides an immediate way of channeling feedback constructively and is currently supported by journalists, some heads of institutions from private and public sectors and social networks opinion leaders, among others. It is seen as a valuable real-time feedback tool. Other Kenyan hash tags "#someone tell CNN" and "#CNN apologiseKenya", which took place in March 2012, following a CNN report that alluded to a "wave of violence that had revisited Kenya", depicting a resurgence of the 2007/2008 postelection violence. The CNN Africa correspondent based in Nairobi apologized for the offending images. Another hashtag is #someonetellCNN when they branded Kenya as a #hotbedofterror and caused an uproar from #KOT On another research, Seltzer and Mitrook (2007) stated that "weblogs incorporate dialogic communication principles to a greater degree than traditional Web sites, potentially making them better suited for online relationship building" (p. 227). They found blogs utilize the dialogic communication principles of conservation of visitors, ease of interface, and usefulness to media, to a greater degree than traditional websites (Seltzer &Mitrook, 2007). Some researchers have argued that blogs possess

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better relationship-building abilities due to this increased opportunity for dialogic communication (Seltzer &Mitrook, 2007). In addition, Kelleher and Miller (2006) looked into organizational "blogs as antecedents to people's perceptions of a corporation's relational maintenance strategies" and means of organizational-public communication (p. 396). They found some support that organizational blogs are valuable in building and maintaining relationships with publics because the blogs convey some sense of human voice to a stiff organizational façade. Their findings reported that consumers found blogs to sound more conversational than corporate websites and that voice correlated with positive relationship outcomes. Sweetser and Metzgar (2007) also looked at blogs as a relationship management tool by using a crisis to rate organizational blogs. Those respondents who viewed organizational blogs thought the organization did a better job at maintaining relationships as well as reported lower levels of crisis for the organization compared to the other experimental groups. Both studies involved the transparency and disclosure aspect that blogs bring to the public relations communication arsenal. Like blogs, Twitter possesses the opportunity for dialogic communication between organizations and publics. In the fields of linguistics and communication, vast researches to examine the styles and structure of language in Twitter have been done. Various analyses have been performed from different angles, such as the usage of grammars (Lakoff 1979), the cognitive process involved in picking word sand the linguistic style (Flower and Hayes1981), the variations across different registers (Biber1991), and the correlation between style and gender (Carroll2008). With the burgeoning use of computers and the Internet, research has turned more toward the language of CMC and that on the Internet (Crystal2001).

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section entails the theory used by the researcher in this study. It gives the interrelated concepts around the study

MEDIA-SYSTEMS DEPENDANCY THEORY

Media-systems dependency theory emerged from a 1976 article by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleurthat attempted to explain why media could have varying cognitive, affective and behavioral effects on different people. Over time, it evolved into a more complex theory that deals with the relationship between media and individuals at the micro level and media and social institutions at a macro level. At the micro level (individuals), MSDT assumes individuals are goal-oriented and active in the selection and use of media content. It suggests three dependency areas, with two subareas each, in which different individuals depend on media to varying degrees:

- ➢ For solitary play and social play;
- ➢ For self-understanding and social understanding
- ➢ For action orientation and interaction orientation.

In particular, the action and interaction orientation dependencies assume that people act purposefully in deciding how they will behave to obtain goals. As Ball-Rokech et al. pointed out, orientation dependency is closely related to understanding dependency. Both these dependencies require the acquisition of information for specific goals that often involve complex topics and issues; because of that specificity and complexity, the information needs to be detailed and in-depth. Although MSDT has been used as the theoretical basis for some studies of the Internet, no published research was found that also addresses the particular relationship (e.g., displacement vs. complementarity) between the Internet and more traditional media with MSDT as a framework. However, in 1993 Lacy et al. used MSDT and uses and gratifications concepts to create a typology of media uses from an economic perspective, and in 2000 Lacy extended this typology to a wider range of information. This approach hypothesized a media mix, represented by a matrix of uses and media types, for each person. The particular mix of media for meeting an individual's goals varies from person to person and across time. The media mix is a subdivision of a larger information mix, which includes interpersonal communication as an information

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source, for fulfilling an individual's goals. This mix does not assume that a single medium is the sole source of all the information a person needs to reach a goal or fulfill a need. However, the typology suggests that the mix is relatively stable, with some variation, during the short run. The mix goes through major shifts when disruptions occur in the availability of existing media and when new media products are made available.

Both MSDT and the media-mix model indicate that the development of the Internet would introduce new sources of dependency for information. Neither suggests that the use of the Internet will displace traditional media for everyone, although it might for some. Rather, the two approaches suggest that some people will replace the time spent with existing media for time spent online, and that this displacement may vary with the type of dependency motivating the Internet use.

Uses of the Internet

Although little research has been published addressing individual dependency on the Internet, scholars have begun to examine how and why people use the Internet. Some have applied the "uses and gratifications" approach to the study of the Web. For example, in 2000 Papacharissi et al. studied people's motivations for "computer-mediated communication" in general, compared to interpersonal communication, and identified five dimensions via factor analysis: interpersonal utility, information seeking, passing the time, convenience, and entertainment. More narrowly, a 2001 survey of 98 U.S. Adults identified five primary factors for Web site use: search, cognitive, new and unique, social, and entertainment. An even more narrowly focused study in 2002, analyzed an online survey of 308 U.S. adults about using the Web for political information and found four primary motivations: guidance information-seeking, surveillance, entertainment, and social utility. Despite their focus on "new media," researchers have found that some of these uses and motives are common to traditional media.

Researchers point out that the Internet is used in a manner similar to other, more traditional media, a conclusion supported by research that found people seeking the same broad content areas (politics, sports, business, health, science) online as they seek in traditional media. This research indicates at least some people might be substituting information acquired online for information gained from traditional media.

The uses and gratifications approach aims to identify motivation for the individual use of media content. However, this approach has often been viewed as limited for a number of reasons. For example, the specific uses and gratifications that have been identified often vary from study to study, which highlights the theoretical nature of much uses and gratifications research. In addition, surveys are limited in their ability to identify internal gratifications. In many ways, media-dependency systems theory is more attractive when compared to the Uses and Gratification for explaining the micro-relationship between individuals and media for a variety of reasons. It is a theoretical approach to studying how people interact with media, and the theory covers a much wider range of behaviors toward media. It becomes even more attractive given that many of the uses (if not gratifications) identified through research fit within the six individual areas of media dependency in the MSDT typology. The growing use of the Internet reflects many factors, but at least four characteristics of the Internet stand out when compared to traditional media: 1. The Internet features almost instantaneous delivery of information, which makes it faster than traditional print media. The Internet is interactive, which allows more immediate feedback than any other medium. The Internet allows for the distribution of multimedia content, which many media do not. Accurate news is the utmost priority of responsible media because it makes it live up to higher values. Communicating media can however have an increasingly positive or negative influence on processes of social communication and societal change. According to Ball Rokeach and Melvin Defleur' the more a person depends on media to meet needs, the more important media will be in a person's life, and therefore the more effects media will have on a person. In the recent past, it's become evident that most people depend on media for more information especially during a crisis or an important change like the elections period Dependency theory is a mass communication theory that seeks to explain the long-term effects of media on the audiences and a society. This theory states that the more dependent an individual is on the media for having his or her needs fulfilled, the more important the media will be to that person. The originators of this theory are Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur. The theory of media dependency came about because the inventors saw the need to integrate the findings of a large body of media effects research that had been done at that point. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1975) suggest that a general theory of the effects of mass communication is lacking and that it is important to move toward a higher level of abstraction in order to understand where our research and analyses appear to be leading us.

(DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach P.256). This need came about because ―the majority of scientific evidence gathered through lab and survey research show that media have little direct influence on people, yet many notable scholars and most people know that the coming of new media to a society makes a tremendous difference in the lives of people. So DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1975) purport that the kinds of effects that occur and are measurable are not those that are easily detected in laboratory experiments, or in before-after studies of people who have been exposed to specific messages. (p. 260) Instead these effects are the kind that enlarge people's belief systems, change people's attitudes, motivates delicate shifts in individual or collective sentiments as well as other kinds of society-wide changes (DeFleur& Ball-Rokeach, 1975, p. 260). They further recommend, instead of looking solely at the individual to assess media effects that it is worthwhile to consider the entire social framework within which the media function. The central point of the theory is that people in modern society depend on the media to comprehend and understand the world around them. This basic idea was, developed by Melvin Defleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach in the mid-1970s in their article "A dependency Model" or "Mass- Media Effects."Dependency theory conceives of dependency as a relationship in which the fulfillment of one party's needs and goals is reliant on the resources of another party. The main focus of this theory is the relationship between the media and its audiences. In the recent world of online news and online everything, audiences depend on the media for a range of needs from political to fashion to sports among others. For example, during elections, people would want to know how their political candidate is fairing in terms of votes, and the most viable place to source for this information is through media. Apart from this, Defleur and Ball-Rokeach (p 302) note how political candidates depend on the media to communicate their message. In Western society, it would be impossible for politicians to reach people in direct meetings. In Kenya, this applies as well. Candidates of political office constantly struggle to convince people that their versions of what should be done will lead to the best consequences. They also note that the level of media dependency varies according to a society's level of modernization. For instance, in modernized countries like the United States, there are many media outlets and they serve highly centralized social functions.

As such, the media have a greater opportunity to serve needs and exert effects in contemporary America than in a third world country. In Kenya, we got media freedom in 1990 when multi-party regime came into practice. A significant growth on media freedom has been seen so far and

this has seen a level of media dependency from Kenya being developed. This was most evident during the post-election violence (PEV) in the period 2007-2008. The magnitude of the inter-clan clashes was much higher as compared to the PEV in 1992, all because of media. According to Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur the cognitive, behavioral and affective consequences of media use are premised upon characteristics of both individuals and their social environment First, the cognitive is affected mostly when the information being received by people is not sufficient hence people seek more information from the media. When there is high ambiguity, stress is created, and audiences are more likely to turn to mass media to resolve ambiguity. Ambiguity might be especially prevalent during times of social change or conflict. A good example is during the 2007/2008 post election violence in Kenya. Most people heard that Hon. Mwai Kibaki had been announced as the new president of Kenya. In Nairobi, this could be seen by the citizens who had flocked KICC to verify for themselves. The people who were at KICC then rang to their counterparts from various parts of the country. To clarify the matter, most people ran to the nearest places where they could access the T.V sets just to confirm the news and clear out the ambiguity. Hence the media dependency theory played out pretty well in this scenario. Secondly, the affective is also mentioned by Ball-Rokeachand DeFleur as a possible way in which an audience can be affected by the Media. There is the desensitization, the creation of anxiety and fear due to exposure to bad news and feelings of alienation due to the degree of positive or negative news from the media about a certain group or a certain issue. A good example is during the terrorist attack that happened in Kenya in west- lands at the west gate mall on 21st of September 2013. The Media brought news about how bad the situation is, people are being shot dead, children have been shot dead, the police are not helping much and people are dying. This was a very scaring moment for the whole country. The following day, this was Sunday 22nd September, the Sunday Nation newspaper's front page had a very nasty photograph of a man who had opened wide his mouth with lots of blood all over his face. This created a lot of panic and on face book; people really disliked this photo since it showed pain and horror. With such kind of news from all kind of media, both print and electronic, people feared to visit Malls especially Nakumatt malls. It also made people fear Muslims as they were depicted as the terrorists. Lastly, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur also identify behavioral as one of the effects of media dependency. People either activate a certain behavior or deactivate due to messages received from the media.Behavioral effects are largely thought to work through cognitive and affective effects.

These refer to instances in which audiences would have otherwise done something, but don't do or do as a consequence of media messages. For example, the media really publicized how people from the Kikuyu community were being slaughtered in rift valley during the post election violence in the period 2007/2008. As a result most Kikuyu given a chance, would not buy land anywhere near Eldoret or Timboroa or Kericho for fear of a repeat of the same post election violence. We reckon that in 1990, just before Kenya became a democratic country, there was very little media freedom and thus during the 1992 multi-party elections, the inter-tribal fights were not as fierce as what was experienced in 2007/2008 as people did not hear much or see much to fuel the hatred and violence. Focusing on Twitter, the same can be said. Audiences greatly depend on this site for first hand news. The media understand this and as a result serve their audiences with chunks of information as it unfolds. They add links (related or full article of the story) and videos to explain a happening, trending topic or basically news bulletin. They captivate the audience by engaging them in conversations using their hashtags and conversational tweets that leave statements open for discussions. Looking at twitter lingo, which includes:

☐ The @ symbol- used to mention a twitter account

☐ The # symbol that is used to create a community of people with similar interests in some topics or start discussions in the site

☐ The abbreviations an acronyms

☐ The RT for retweet to quote what someone else has said among others, which is a result of the length constricted site, has major effect on the audience.

Constant sentence shortening has resulted in new acronyms and abbreviations that we now use in our everyday life. Common acronyms include: OMG, LOL, LMAO. Three years ago, LOL, LMAO and OMG were added to the Oxford Dictionary as actual words and became part of the English language. These are long-term effects of the social media. Abbreviated symbolic writing method increases speed and brevity of writing as compared to a normal method of writing. Textspeak, a new version of shorthand so to say, is dominant in our conversations. We find ourselves shortening words like "You're" to "Your" this destroys our basic English sentence construction. Hashtags apart from their basic use (see above), they have now evolved to become

almost a regular part of everyday conversation. Listening to some conversation, people confidently use hashtags to express feelings or mood or just to state something. The twitter lingo has a huge impact not only to our written but verbal conversations due to the dependency we as the audience have shown since its introduction. The English language will continue evolving and changing with our society and social media, such as twitter, will continue to be a big part in this.

2.3 SUMMARY

So media dependency theory assumes that individuals in modern society become increasingly dependent upon mass media as a source of news and information. The level of dependency relationship and the strength of the media effects hinge on the stability or instability of the society and the degree of societal importance placed upon mass media as an information source. Relationships and interactions among media, society and audience are demonstrated, along with media effects. News in time of crisis serves as a good example of dependency theory in action.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methods and procedure used to carry out the study. The research design, data collection method, research instruments, target population, sampling techniques and data analysis procedure are described in this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

In this study, the researcher used the quantitative design. This method would give the quantitative analysis of the study. The purposive sampling examines the level of interaction that goes on in the tweets that Maasai Mara university students use.n and the types of hashtags that dominate and why as well as seeking to find out if the hashtags perform their intended purpose. This would enable the researcher get tentative answers to the hypothesis based on the observations made during the study.

Although this study adhered mainly to the qualitative approach, the nature of some of the information gathered required the use of the quantitative approach. The researcher quantified the language on twitter in the use of hashtags. The decision to use both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry in the study was based on the need to draw out a holistic picture, identify key patterns and draw out rich descriptions from the phenomena under study.

3.2 Target Population

The target population included @MMaraUniversity followers who participate in conversations by engaging in the hashtag of the day. Followers were categorized into the groups below:

Those included in the target population.

A percentage of students in Maasai Mara University

A percentage of youths in Narok town

A percentage of staff workers in the campus.

3.3 Sampling Design and Procedures

This study made use of non-probability sampling by employing purposive sampling. The researcher employed the use of non-probability sampling because as Saunders et al. (2003, p175) says, "Purposive or judgmental sampling enables you to use your judgment to select cases that will best enable you to answer your research questions and to meet your objectives." This type of sampling is often used when a researcher is working with small samples such as in a case study, as well as in cases when a researcher wishes to select cases that are mainly informative. The Purposive Sampling method was based on the fact that not all students with twitter accounts follow Maasai Mara on their twitter handle. A total of 115 students that followed Maasai Mara university twitter handle, comprising of both genders were the ones included in the study. The researcher arrived at this number due to the percentage of numbers that would representative data representation for the whole school. They would be representing people who have experienced the phenomena being studied. Despite this method saving on money and time and allowing the researcher select samples based on the purpose of the study and knowledge of a study, purposive sampling makes it hard for the researcher to defend the representatives of the samples.

3.4 Research Instruments
Observation

The researcher used the participation observation method and questionnaires. The researcher has been an owner of a twitter account for a period of 3 years. The researcher is a moderate but not an avid user of the site. For this study, the researcher captured tweets that contained the (#) symbol from 9.00pm to 10.00pm. This time was chosen in order to get a representative sample that did not exclude those who cannot use Twitter at work. This time was also considered as NTV air their English news at that time.

Questionnaires

Kothari (2004) defines a questionnaire as a method for elicitation, recording, and collecting of information. The researcher chose the self-administered questionnaire method for all correspondents as it will be inexpensive and allowed the respondents to complete the questionnaire at a convenient time. A questionnaire is a printed form containing a set of questions for gathering information administered by the researcher or his or her assistants, or self-administered under supervision or unsupervised. The questionnaires will be answered bed by

each of the individual respondents independently. The questionnaires were distributed systematically to student representatives of all schools and department. The open ended questions provided a simplistic view of things.

Questions samples in the questionnaire

- ➢ Are you in any social media platform?
- ➢ How many friends do you have on your twitter account?
- ➢ How effectively are students building stronger social relationships with each other on Twitter through hashtags?
- ➢ How interactive are the posts on Twitter?
- ➢ How has language been affected through hashtags on twitter?

3.5 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

This study maintained reliability by carefully and clearly presenting the steps taken under the methodology section as well as the presentation of findings in order to ensure that if a similar study was conducted under similar conditions, similar responses and measurements would be obtained. The reliability of the research instruments was determined through pilot testing (pre-testing of research instruments before the actual study) as well as expert opinion.

3.6 Data Analysis

The research approach of the work includes both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data entailed pre-coding, categorising and summarising data in line with the research objectives was analyzed using. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis method, which gave an account of the data that allowed for making final conclusions and recommendations.

3.6.1 Qualitative analysis

The researcher collected a random sample of tweets from a 60 minute time period starting at 9:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 18, 2016 from the nation television twitter handle. The researcher chose a time after the normal working day in order to get a representative sample that did not exclude those who cannot use Twitter at work. From the random sample of tweets, the researcher looked at only tweets that contained hashtags. The researcher excluded gender ambiguous names- people who choose not to list their real names on Twitter. Retweets (RTs) were eliminated because they had not been authored by the users.

3.6.2 Quantitative Results

In this section, the researcher quantitatively investigated the linguistic style and aspects of Twitter's hashtag. The researcher first considered some components of grammar to help know what language is used when writing hashtags. This was in regard to the research objective number two of the study.

3.7 Ethical Issues

The researcher ensured that not only positive disclosures were made from the study and that the researcher did not go native. Thus the researcher ensured integrity and honesty in the conduct of the research.

This section of the work presents and discusses the analysis of the study. The data is analyzed on the basis of the samples taken by the researcher. The analysis gives a clear elaboration of the data. The findings presented are informed mainly by the research objectives. The research objectives are listed below:

- ➢ To find out the kind of hashtags our media houses use.
- ➢ To find out the effect of hashtags on written and spoken communication
- ➢ To find out if the use of hashtags affects the number of followers

3.8 Variables Included In the Study

The dependent variable in this research topic is: 'general student academic performance.'

The independent variable is: 'effects of using twitter hashtags.'

The general academic performance of students depends on using twitter hashtags in their day to day activities.

Independent Variables

Internal Factor Groups:

These factors are characteristics of the tweet within which the hashtag token occurs, as well as how the hashtag itself interacts with other internal elements of the tweet. The use of twitter hashtags is included here.

Syntax: The Syntax factor group measured whether the hashtag was part of the syntax of a sentence, outside the syntax of a sentence, or undetermined because the tweet does not contain any sentential material. The third value for this factor group, undetermined, is applied when there is no linguistic material in the tweet that the hashtag could possibly be a part of. This happens when the entire contents of the tweet consists solely of one or more hashtags, @ terms, and/or URL's.

URL: The URL factor group indicates whether the hashtag concurs in a tweet with a URL, which is a link to content elsewhere on the web (e.g. an address like 'pic.twitter.com/bBjZBpU9e8'). This could be a link to a website with either an article or a story on the same issue, a photo, or anything else on the web.

AT: The @ [AT] factor group indicates whether the hashtag concurs in a tweet with an @, a symbol that refers to another user on Twitter and links them to the tweet (e.g. 'Have you considered banning the internet?' I asked @EzekielMutua.

Position: The position factor group indicates whether the hashtag occurred at the beginning, middle, or at the end of the tweet.

External Factor Groups:

These factors are characteristics of the author of the tweet in this case @MMaraUniversity and its followers that contains the hashtag Gender: Gender of participants (*Male or Female*). Gender was determined based on the probability that a name was male or female as it appeared.

Account Age: Account age is the number of days the author's Twitter account has been in existence *(range: from 730 to 1825 days that translates to 3-5 years).* The researcher used a website that looks up the account age of public Twitter accounts to collect this data. The internal and external factor groups have different types of expected relationships to hashtags. Speaker gender is an external factor group, as gender is inherently independent of the Tag vs. Commentary opposition. Notably, women would use hashtags to provide comments at a greater percentage of the time than men. The relationship between +/- URL and Tag/Commentary is not causative rather correlative. A Tag (as opposed to a Commentary) and a URL have overlapping functions; they both refer to outside content on the web. This could be likewise true of @terms, in that they reference entities outside of the tweet. With regard to the "multiple" factor group (a group sensitive to how many hashtags there are in the tweet), the more hashtags there are in a tweet, the more likely they are to be Tags. This is because of the nature of Tags and Commentaries. Tags are shorter**,** and listing a series of topic labels is a common practice for making something findable by keywords. Syntax and positions are overlapping predictors. The nature of a Tag makes it easier to insert into the syntax of the sentence. Similarly, there is a clear hypothesis regarding the position of a hashtag in a tweet: Commentaries ordinarily act as evaluations of the main body of the tweet and are more likely to come at the end, and follow the sentiment that they are evaluating.

The external factor groups are all characteristics of the users who author the tweets that include the hashtag tokens. They largely do not have built-in expectations with regards to their correlations with uses of types of hashtags. In the case of gender, the researcher hypothesized from the results of previous work that female users would tend to use more. Commentary hashtags and male users would tend to use more Tag hashtags. For number of followers, the researcher hypothesized that the more followers a user has, the more power   using a Tag hashtag would have, and therefore the more they would be used. Account Age measures a Twitter user's habits. That is to mean how often they use Twitter, how often they use hashtags, and how long

they have been a Twitter user and generally it gives a profile of a particular user's entrenchment in Twitter.

Dependent Variable

The researcher read each tweet and used the context of the tweet (and the context of the author's surrounding tweets that did not contain hashtags) the best that the researcher could to determine whether a particular hashtag was fulfilling a Tag or a Commentary function to connect to a larger discussion or community, in other words, whether it could be reasonably expected to have ambient affiliation (Zappavigna 2011) or not. However, when things were meant to tag a topic, even if it might not connect to a much larger body, it was still coded as a Tag. Some examples of hashtags coded as Tag include hashtags for people, events, companies, television shows, etc. and also functional hashtags that do something within the program, e.g. #SeremMustGo. When hashtags are meant to be a topic tag, even if it might not connect to a larger body, they are still Tags. That's why context is also a tag, it still picks out a particular topic that the tweet is about, unlike *Commentary* hashtags. For the context hashtags, in this case the hashtags are the subject of the evaluation of the main body of the tweet, like in Zappavigna's theory, whereas with #commentary, it is the opposite way around: the hashtag is the evaluation of the body of the tweet. Commentary hashtags don't pick out a topic; they are messages within themselves. To make these fine determinations to the best ability, the researcher searched the internet for context if the researcher didn't understand something being said in the tweet, and clicked on all the URLs included in the tweets to see what was being referred to.

3.9 Usage of Singular Pronouns

The use of singular pronouns is a quick and useful way of analyzing the language of Twitter hashtag due to the conversational nature of the medium. To analyze this assumption, the researcher first choose 10 users at random for each pronoun such that each user had at least 10 tweets that contained one or the other form of that pronoun. The researcher then computed the percentage of use of the regular form versus the informal (shortened or lowercase) form. In this case was 'you're' vs 'your'.
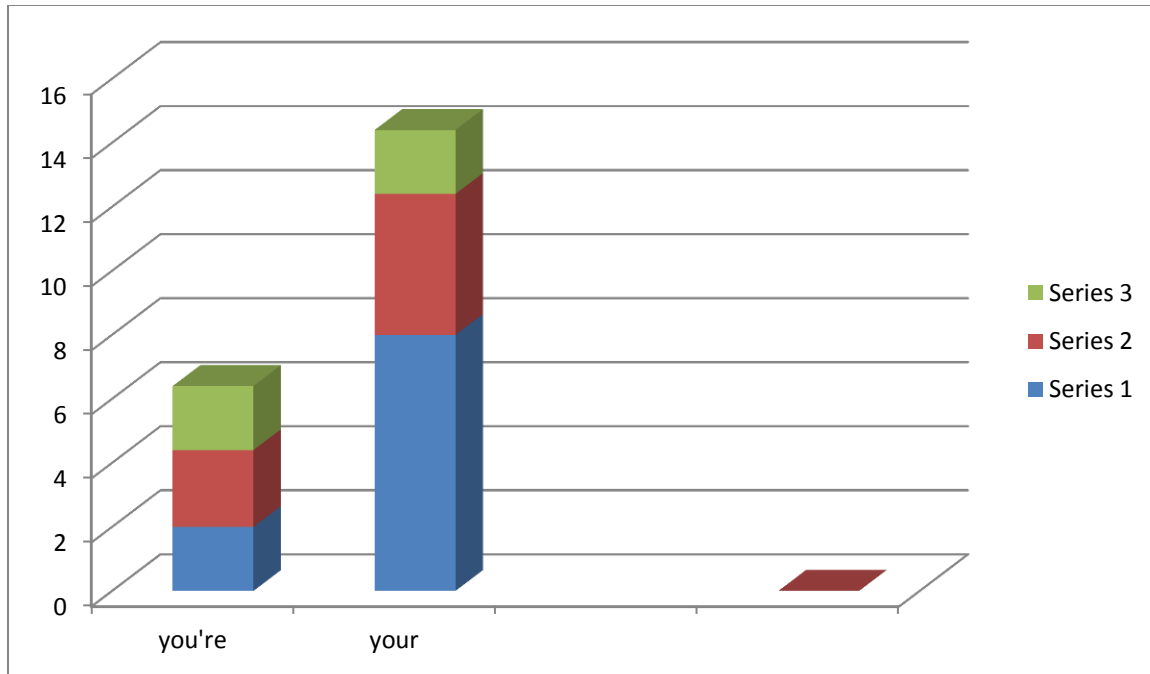
Figure 1: usage of singular pronoun

A strong point that can be made is that Twitter, space-restricted medium, leads to a degradation of language. Users tend to lean on the informal text as each letter/symbol counts. Also as earlier stated in chapter one, the hashtag does not recognize anything that comes after a punctuation, thus a hashtag with #i'm does not recognize the 'm' but only recognizes the #i as part of the hashtag. We can conclusively say that punctuation in word thus doesn't matter which affects the students' written language.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter showcases the analysis of data collected from the various intruments used in this research. The instruments that include questionares, interviewes and observation highly depended on the cooperation of various respondents that were a target audience in this study.

4.2 Presentation of Findings

4.2.1 Response Rate

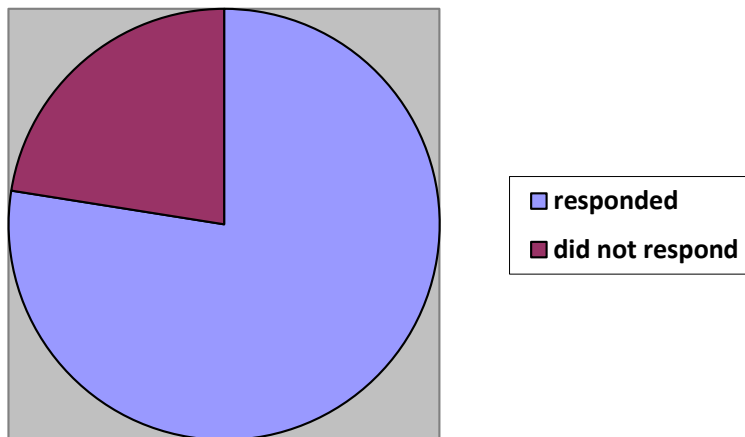| Category	Response	Percentage
Responded	62	77.5%
Did not respond	18	22.5%
Total	**80**	**100**

Table 4.2.1 Response Rate

Figure 4.2.1 Response Rate.

Table 4.1 and figure 1.1 indicate the rate at which the response was rendered. Out of the 80 questionnares that were given out, 62 were returned. 18 questions were marked as null and void. That means that 77.5% of the students responded while only 22.5% of them did not respond. 80 students were used to sample data in this study through questionnaires. The rest of the data was collected through interviews and observation that will be showed later on in this chapter.

4.2.2 Response rate according to Gender

Category	Number	Percentage
Male	78	67.83%
Female	37	32.17%
Total	**115**	**100**

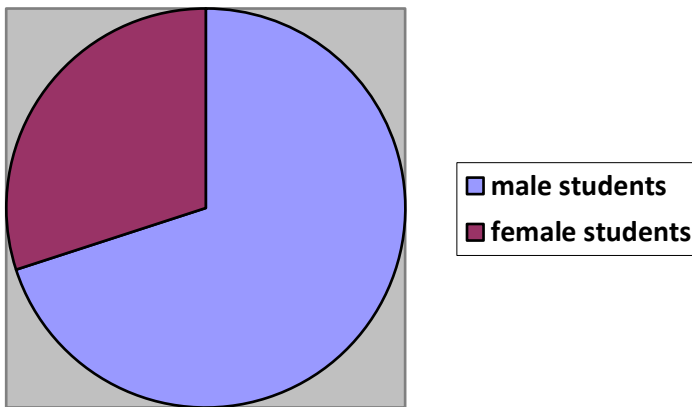**Table 4.2.2 Response by Gender**

Figure 4.2.2

As shown in table 4.2 and figure 4.2, more female students compared to male students were willing to take part in the research. A bigger percent of those who did not return the questionnaires were female students.

4.2.3 Response rate according to year of study.

During the research and circulation of questionnaires to gather information the third year students had already left the school for their attachments. However, the information gathered from them was rather through observation on their twitter handles. Data collected on the effects of using twitter hash tags to the general performance of students was well represented or

distributed from the remaining students in session. The table and figure below will show the rate of response in percentage according to the year of study.

| Category	Year of study	percentage
1	First years	62%
2	Fourth years	38%

Table 4.2.3
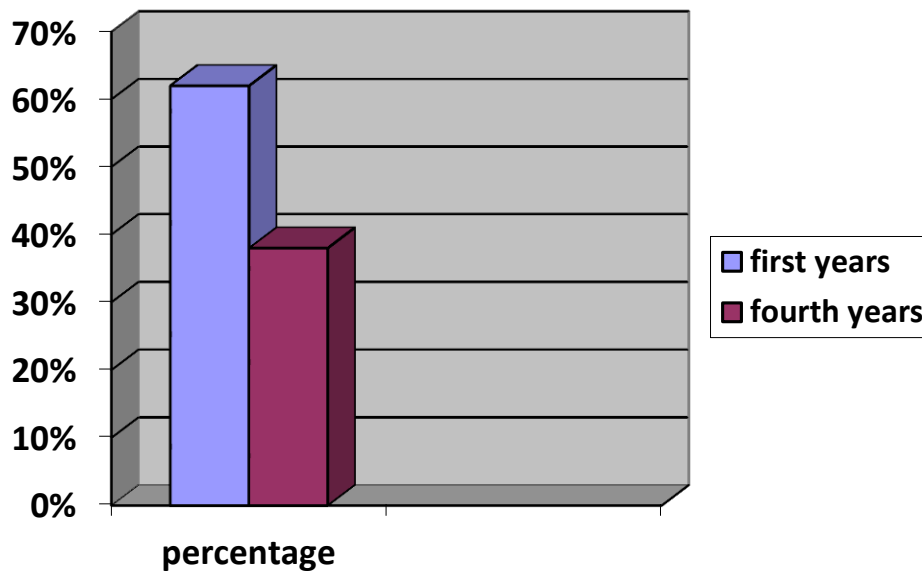
Figure 4.2.3

It can be observed from table 4.2.3 and figure 4.2.3 that a 62% of the students who participated in the research data collection were first years. The remaining 38% were fourth years. Most fourth years were reluctant to take part of the data collection process with the excuse of being busy with their projects too.

4.2.4 Rate of using hashtags by twitter users.

Among the twitter users that were used in the research, a big percentage of them used twitter hashtags in their twitter handles. Some of the reasons for using hashtags were highlighted in interviews and answered in questionnaires. They included: saving time, providing a platform for news to trend and generating traffic. The rates of using twitter that are showcased in the table and figure bellow.

Category.	Percentage
Hashtag users	94.6%
Non users	5.4%

hashtag users

non users
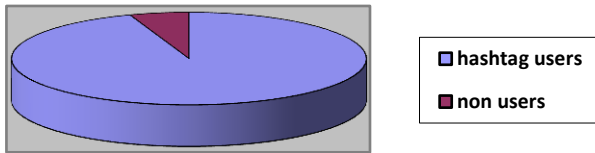
Table 4.2.4
Figure 4.3

4.4 Effects of using hashtags on twitter to the social interactions of students.

Most students who use hashtags on twitter also reported to makes friends within the school and create social circles that would create opportunities to talk about the trending hashtags. With a common language (twitter hash tags) being something of common interest, social circles are created with common topics.

4.5 Effects of using twitter hashtags to the general performance of students.

From the data collected through interviews, most students' linguistic performances were really affected by the use of hashtags on twitter. This mostly stem from the fact that hashtags do not mind grammar or tense. An example of such a hashtag is #maizeisback when others trend as #uhurutoplayedus. The formation of a hashtag requires that one ignores any space that should appear between two words. Like stated before, twitter being space-restricted leads to language degradation. Moreover, punctuation that comes after the hashtag is not recognized as part of the hashtag. A huge percent of the students also indicated spending a lot of time online meaning that too much time was spent on twitter rather than academic work even during exams, the addictive nature of twitter was shown here. However, communication students, especially journalism students had positive things to say concerning the use of twitter. According to them, twitter enabled them to be updated with current events making local as well as international news, something that is vital for communication in general. The table below shows an approximation of hours that students used on twitter per day in relation to academic performance.

category	Hours spent on twitter per day
Excellent students	2 – 5 hrs
Average students	5- 10 hrs
Bellow average students	Above 10 hrs

4.6 Messages directed to a wider audience

The researcher identified some audience-based factors that characterize the intended audience of the message. Here the researcher asked the following questions:

➢ Does the message begin with a hashtag?
➢ Does the message contain a hashtag, but not at the beginning?

Hashtags target virtual, ad hoc communities of users with similar interests as mentioned

4.6.1 Messages directed to a limited audience

Here the researcher asked the following questions:

➢ Does the message begin with a username mention?

➢ Does the message contain a username, but not at the beginning?

The researcher observed that messages beginning with username mentions were often used as interactional replies and were not visible by default to other followers of the author. Messages that mentioned a user name internally create a special notification to the recipient. The researcher noted that reporters who reported the story were mentioned at the end of the tweet. Therefore, the researcher concluded that a positive weight on these predictors suggests that local linguistic variables including style shifting like informal language, slang and abbreviations use were more likely to appear in messages that targeted a limited audience. In this case, students.

4.7 Quantitative Result

In this section, the researcher quantitatively investigated the linguistic style and aspects of Twitter's hashtag. The researcher first considered some components of grammar to help know what language is used when writing hashtags. This was in regard to the research objective number two of the study.

Intensifiers	So	Very	Really
Number of tweets	**4**	**8**	**13**
Gender Usage in Percentage	M-50%	M-62%	M-23%
	F-50%	F-38%	F- 77%

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study intended to investigate the effects of using hashtags in twitter to the general student academic performance. It presents a summary of main findings and it attempts to answer the specific questions that were investigated. In addition, recommendation for possible action and suggestions for further research are given. The chapter provides a summary of findings obtained in the study. It presents an overview of the findings from the data gathered through interviews, questionnaires and participatory observation.

5.2 Summary of findings

This study showed that by simply adding a hash symbol (#) before a string of letters, numerical digits or underscore signs (_), it is possible to tag a message, helping other users to find tweets that have a common topic. Hashtags allow users to create communities of people interested in the same topic by making it easier for them to find and share information related to it (Kricfalusi, 2009). This in turn leads them to creating a common language of use that can be encoded and decoded by the users themselves. Through this research, the researcher also found out that students were more interested in tweets that concerned them as individual or the whole country rather than those specifically related to Maasai Mara University as an institution.

This study has shown that there are at least two distinct pragmatic functions that hashtags on Twitter perform: Tagging and Commentary. The original purpose of hashtags was creating communities and discussions and building affiliation through language. Users however have found new ways of using hashtags for interpersonal communication that also may build community or groups of practice and on a more local level. Commentary hashtags, which were more frequent in this study, raise the question of why a user would choose to put that content in a hashtag versus just writing the content in prose. What's the motivation for putting additional semantic content in a hashtag rather than as another sentence in the main body of the tweet? By using a hashtag, a user implies that something is "tweetable" and shows that the user is part of a twitter community. The user thus uses the format and information structure that makes it

specifically identifiable as a tweet. The researcher gave evidence through finding a correlation between the type of hashtag use and gender by the names provided in the twitter accounts and the display pictures to determine the gender representation. This was essential for the twitter users that were not available in person for questioning. For the students who were in session; first years and fourth years, the questionnaires and interviews were used. Hashtags, from the findings, are a crucial part of tweets and are used as a means to bring together users, in this context, students with similar interests. "Messages that contain hashtags have a higher likelihood of reaching an audience outside a users follower set," (Naaman, BecKer and Gravano, 2011).

5.3 Conclusions

The use of hashtags on twitter greatly affects the general performance of students. Even though the effect is mostly on linguistic performances, it is felt throughout the education sector. This is mostly because the Kenyan education system is set using English as the main language. A hashtag like #maasaimarachronicles would trend not only to the students with twitter handles, but also other Kenyans on twitter.

In this study, the researcher gave a description of the uses of hashtags on Twitter. It is clear that they are currently being used for more than their original function of tagging topics and entities to organize discussion. Examples have been given of hashtags being used for tagging of concrete entities as well as topics, on both the global and local level like those only familiar to the students of Maasai Mara University. With Commentary tweets, the evaluative role of hashtags towards the main body of tweets has been illustrated, as well as how hashtags are sometimes used to encode part of the main semantic content of the tweet. A quantitative analysis was done that showed the performance of gender roles in the use of Tag and Commentary. The researcher observed that tweets are similar in structure to "narratives" and hashtags can contribute to the "tellability" or "tweetability" of a tweet. This study examined, through a language-based approach, some issues concerning the formation and the usage of hashtags on Twitter. The researcher used a linguistic theory to understand the behavior of the audiences. The analysis showed not only qualitative, but also quantitative aspect of the phenomena and it revealed aspects about the hashtag.

5.4 Recommendations

This study has sought to identify the use of hashtags as a site of linguistic and pragmatic variation. The researcher explored and described the phenomena with the aim of supporting future research in creative expression on twitter and other computer-mediated communications. This research can also be useful to for further investigations as to why people crave for social relations rather than forging actual relationships between people that they can see and touch.

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RESEARCH BUDGET

TASK/ITEM	AMOUNT
Printing and Typing	1,500.00
Binding	2,400.00
Photocopies	800.00
Transport	600.00
Miscellaneous	1,500.00
Total	**6800.00**

WORKPLAN

ACTIVITY	JAN 2017	FEB 2017	MARCH 2017	APRIL 2017
Questionnaires Design and Testing	▇			
Data Collection		▇		
Analyzing Data and Report writing			▇	
Project Submission				▇

Questionnaire

Dear respondent,

My name is Melody Ajiambo Msee. I am an undergraduate taking Bachelor of Science in communication and public relations. I am currently conducting a study on the effects of using twitter hashtags to the general performance of students. The purpose for this questionnaire is to assist in the collection of data for this study. The information that you will provide will be used only for academic purposes and will be treated and considered with total confidentiality.

Tick to the answer(s) of your choice.

1. Which social media platforms are you in?
   Facebook ☐ Twitter ☐ LinkedIn ☐ Tumblr ☐ Instagram ☐ any other

2. How many followers do you have on your twitter account?
   Less than 100 followers ☐ more than 100 followers ☐

3. On a scale of 1-5, how interactive are our posts on Twitter?
   1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

4. According to the social media platform(s) you have selected above, how long do you stay online in a day?
   Less than 1hr ☐ 2-5 hours ☐ 5- 10 hours ☐ above 10 hours ☐

5. What do you use to access the internet?
   Data bundles ☐ Wi-Fi connection ☐

6. How often do you use twitter hashtag?
   Once in every tweet ☐ twice in one tweet ☐ countless times ☐

7. How would you gauge your academic performance on linguistics in relation to using twitter hashtags?
   Below average ☐ Average ☐ Excellent ☐

8. Do you agree that you agree that twitter hashtags in a way, affects the language of its users?

I disagree ☐   I strongly disagree ☐   I agree ☐   I strongly agree ☐

9. If you agree in question above, to what extend have you been affected on a scale of 1-5

1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐