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Hashtags as Elliptical Clausal Constructions in Digital News Discourse: A Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The rise of social media has transformed news communication, with hashtags emerging as prominent linguistic tools that shape public understanding and discourse. Despite growing research on digital media, limited attention has been paid to the structural and ideological functions of hashtags as elliptical clausal constructions in news posts. The current study aims to investigate how hashtags in digital news on X function linguistically and ideologically through the lens of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings of the study reveal that hashtags compress complex propositions into minimal forms, enabling news organizations to frame events, obscure agency, and influence audience interpretation, thereby reinforcing dominant ideological narratives. The study recommends further research into cross-platform comparisons and the role of multimodal elements, such as emojis, in conjunction with hashtags, to deepen understanding of digital news discourse practices.

Keywords: Hashtags, Digital News Discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideology, New Media Discourse, X (Twitter)



1. Introduction

The fast development of digital media has greatly changed the process of how news is produced, circulated, and consumed. Social media, especially X (Formerly twitter), has become the epicenter of news sharing, where citizens can get information immediately and engage in candid discussions about what is taking place in the world. In this dynamic digital space, the usage of language has also experienced significant transformation, where the new communicative practices, which are not similar to that of print journalism, have emerged. The hashtag is one of such linguistic features and has become an established part of the digital discourse, particularly in news communication on the internet.

Moreover, hashtags have emerged as complicated semiotic and discursive resources that were originally designed as a technical tool to classify content. They are now taking on a variety of roles, such as structuring information, narratively framing, conveying position and directing the audience of the process. It has become an acknowledged trend among scholars that hashtags can be perceived not as simple indexing apparatuses but as communicational units carrying some meaning, which engage in creating social reality and ideological stance taking (Zappavigna, 2018). Hashtags have become common with digital news under the guise of headlines or lead sentences of news, where they reduce meanings that are complex in nature into concise statements and which shapes how news events are perceived by its readers.

Recent studies in digital discourse studies have implied the importance of hashtags in the process of influencing online interaction, political communication and public opinion. Research has indicated that hashtags may serve as instruments of assessment, identification, and set of persuasion, which may have a wider social and ideological orientation (Mahfouz, 2020; Mayuuf and Mahdi, 2024). The literature has however, been dominated by a lot of research conducted on the sociolinguistic or pragmatic roles of hashtags including identity construction, activism and audience interaction. Very little has been done to focus on their linguistic form especially how they are able to serve elliptical clausal structures that encode whole propositional meanings despite syntactic downgrading.

This is a big gap as far as discourse-analysis is concerned. The phenomenon of ellipsis is well developed in linguistics where the parts of a sentence are not present but can be reconstructed by the surrounding context. In online news narration, hashtags like #JusticeDelayed or #VoicesSilenced are used to imply complete propositions, but the brevity of such hashtags makes them more effective in terms of power, urgency, and ideological resonance. They are not neutral constructions; on the contrary, these elliptical constructions are part of the process of eventualizing, holding accountable, and influencing the interpretations of the readers. Such structures are still under-researched in the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially in the context of digital journalism despite their growing prominence.

The concept of Critical Discourse Analysis elaborated by Fairclough (2003, 2015) offers the helpful tool to analyze the interconnection between media texts and language, power, and ideology. CDA considers discourse as a type of social practice and focuses on the ways in which the linguistic selection reproduces and reenacts social arrangements. To use this framework with hashtags, it is possible to take a detailed look at the involvement of seemingly

minimal linguistic forms in larger ideology within digital news media. Although the CDA has extensively been used in the traditional news texts, political speeches, and institutional discourse, its use in digital news hashtags as linguistic constructions has not been extensively applied.

As a reaction to this gap, the current study examines hashtags as elliptical constructions of clauses in digital news speech in the context of the Critical Discourse Analysis provided by Fairclough. The purpose of the study is to identify how these concise language units help in the meaning-making aspect, ideological positioning, and reproduction of power relations in a current media discourse by examining the hashtags that were used in X news posts that were published by large news houses. By so doing, the research aims at contributing to the current knowledge in digital discourse, through foreshadowing the linguistic and ideological relevance of hashtags in the fast changing context of digital journalism.

Research Questions

1. How are hashtags used as elliptical clausal constructions in digital news discourse on X?
2. What ideological meanings and discursive functions are constructed through hashtags in digital news posts?
3. How do hashtags contribute to the representation of social actors, events, and power relations in digital news discourse?

2. Literature Review

The research into the use of hashtags in online communication has grown considerably over the past few years and is no longer restricted to the role of metadata tags, but has turned into a valuable source of linguistic and discursive information. The use of hashtags as semiotic tools, which assist in organizing online communication and promoting socializing, has become well-known. Zappavigna (2018) theorizes hashtags as markers of experience that indicate experiential topics, perform interpersonal relationships, and structure in social media discourse rather than merely markers indicating a topics. By using these functions, the hashtags prove to have a mediating force of meaning and enabling what Zappavigna defines as ambient affiliation, the way of users joining together around shared values and shared discursive experiences in the cyberspace.

Furthermore, the linguistic values of the hashtags have been also further studied with reference to several studies. Mahfouz (2020) considers the linguistic features and communicative roles of hashtags, stating that they have gone past the category of classifying them into devices which add to the post expressive meaning in the digital posts. This viewpoint accentuates the move away of hashtags as tools of indexation to linguistic items that hold pragmatically intense information in the digital discourses. Similar studies have implemented indexical and pragmatic frameworks to show how hashtags index social identities and cultural norms in online

communication, indicating that hashtags are pragmatically dense signs encoding stance, cultural knowledge and evaluative meaning (Training, Language and Culture, 2025).

Moreover, the empirical research about hashtag activism focuses on the social and ideological roles of hashtags to organize an online discourse. Mayuuf and Mahdi (2024) examine the socio-semantic role of hashtags in organizing a conversation on Twitter and note how they play a part in building community and meaning-making negotiation in the sociopolitical environment. This proves that hashtags are not only organizational tools but also discursive practices that can be used to take social action and create identities.

Other than the sociopolitical application, the multimodal use of hashtags has also been explored. The study by Jabeen, Khalid, and Nadeem (2025) examines the work of hashtags and other semiotic resources, including emojis and code-switching used in online posts and concludes that hashtags are indexical refrains that organize user engagement and intertextual connectivity within online discourse. Their results indicate the interaction of hashtags with other modalities to affect the meaning-making processes of digital textuality.

Although this review of literature is extensive, there still exists a significant gap in the linguistic and discourse-analytic strategies that consider hashtags as particular structural phenomena in news discourse. Most of the available research has dealt with sociolinguistic functionality, pragmatic applications, or semiotic functionality in general online communication, but comparatively few have used a systematic discourse analytic approach, like Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to unravel the ideological and judgmental possibilities of hashtags in digital news settings. Moreover, there have been few studies to investigate hashtags as elliptical clausal constructions- linguistic forms which have more propositional meaning even after reduction by syntactic means. This gap implies that there is a necessity of study that links linguistic structure with social meaning and ideological positioning of the analysis of hashtags in digital news discursive.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current research paper assumes the qualitative research design which is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The qualitative method is deemed suitable because the focus of the study is to analyze how semantics, ideology, and power relations are created using language instead of quantifying linguistic features of language. Through the application of the three-dimensional model of CDA that was introduced by Fairclough, the study utilizes hashtags as elliptical clausal structures in online news discourse to explore the study topic.

CDA is especially appropriate in this study since it perceives language as a type of social practice and focuses on establishing the connection between discourse, power, and ideology (Fairclough, 2003, 2015). Because hashtags within the digital news do not represent any neutral piece of linguistic expression but have ideological and evaluative implications, CDA offers an organized tool to find out what kind of implicit assumptions and social meanings are upheld in them.

3.2 Data source and corpus selection

This section concerns the choice of data and corpus, which will be examined in the following subsections.

This study was based on the data collected on X (formerly Twitter), where the news organizations commonly share information about breaking news and influence the discussion of the population. The reason X was chosen was due to its heavy dependency on hashtags as they are also one of the most important tools of framing news events, directing interpretation, and making them more visible.

The corpus is composed of the news posts of national and international news organizations that are verified. These are the accounts chosen because of their institutional power and control of the masses. The data used will consist of posts that correspond to socio-political matters, topical issues, and significant events because they are often covered by ideologically colored hashtags.

In order to be relevant and analytical:

Only the posts that include hashtags that serve as meaningful units of language were chosen.

Hashtags that were categorizing and trending only but had no semantic content were not considered.

The information has been gathered during a recent period (2023-2025) to be accurate to the current digital news practices.

Compressed evaluative or propositional meanings, which have elliptical structures in terms of clausal forms, were chosen to use a purposive sampling technique and identify hashtags with such structures.

3.3 Unit of Analysis

The main unit of analysis in this research is the hashtag, which is considered to be an elliptical clausal structure. The study does not understand hashtags as isolated lexical items, but as condensed clauses which have full meanings implied by the use of ellipsis. Namely, subject-predicate relations and evaluative stances are implicitly coded in such hashtags like #JusticeDelayed or #VoicesSilenced.

All the hashtags are examined concerning news text, the socio-political situation in which it is manifested. It's connoted ideological sense. This method enables one to gain a better insight into the role of linguistic economy in the digital discourse meaning construction.

3.4 Analytical Framework

The three-dimensional framework by Fairclough (2003, 2015) is used to analyze the discourse since it considers three levels of discourse at once, and these levels are interrelated:

Textual Analysis (Description)

The text has several separate adjectives. On the textual level, the analysis is conducted on the linguistic aspect of hashtags, which are:

Elliptical structures

Lexical choices

Abstraction and nominalization.

Evaluative and emotive meanings.

The step determines the roles played by hashtags as condensed clauses and meaning creation through linguistic omission and abridgement.

Discourse Practice (Interpretation)

On this level, the paper discusses the production and interpretation of the hashtags in the digital news discourse. Attention is given to:

The informational intention of hashtags.

Their influence in narrating the news.

Intertextual relations, interdiscursive relation.

Performance positioning and engagement.

This phase examines the mediation of hashtags between the journalists, the institutions and the readers.

Social Practice (Explanation)

The last step is centered on the ideological and social implication of using a hashtag at large. The analysis investigates:

The way power relations are made or reproduced.

The representation of social actors and events.

The legitimization and challenge of dominant ideologies.

This level relates linguistic options to wider socio-political situations, uncovering the ideological labor involved by hashtags in the news discourse online.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was done systematically:

Official news accounts data of X.

Extraction and recognition of hashtags of elliptical form.

Semantic and discursive categorization of hashtags.

Linguistic feature and ellipsis textual analysis.

Analysis based on the CDA framework by Fairclough.

Contextual description to associate the findings with the social and ideological processes.

In order to improve analytical rigor, repetitive reading and cross-checking were used in order to create consistency in the interpretation.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The data utilized in this research were all publicly available posts on social media published by authoritative news companies. No personal user information was enclosed. Where anonymity was required, user anonymity upheld and the study followed ethical standards in digital discourse research.

3.7 Research Rigor and Validity

In order to achieve credibility and reliability:

The theoretical framework used in the analysis was a well-established one (Fairclough CDA). Data selection was done using clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Textual evidence was used to back up interpretations. The analytical procedure was also well-recorded in order to improve transparency and reproducibility.

4. Data Analysis

This section presents a detailed analysis of hashtags used in digital news discourse on X, examined through the lens of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analysis focuses on how hashtags function as elliptical clausal constructions, how they contribute to meaning-making, and how they reflect ideological positioning in news discourse.

The analysis is organized according to Fairclough's three-dimensional model:

1. Textual Analysis
2. Discursive Practice
3. Social Practice

Overview of the Dataset

The dataset consists of news posts collected from verified news organizations on X between 2023 and 2025. The posts were selected based on the presence of hashtags that demonstrate clausal ellipsis and ideological meaning.

Category	Description
Platform	X (formerly Twitter)
Data Type	Digital news posts
Time Frame	2023–2025
Total Posts Analyzed	60
Total Hashtags Extracted	110
Type of Hashtags	Evaluative, ideological, event-based
Analytical Framework	Fairclough's CDA

4.1 Textual Analysis

The linguistic and structural features of digital news discourse hashtags are the level of analysis that is concerned with the textual level. With the help of the framework developed by Fairclough, (2003, 2015), this step will investigate how the use of language at a micro-level helps in creation of meaning and ideological stance. Hashtags in this paper are considered elliptical clausal structures, i.e. they look like a unit of lexicon, but they perform the role of a compressed clauses that signify heuristic propositions.

A sharp inspection of the data shows that the hashtags often lack the grammatical structure as they do not include subjects, auxiliaries, and verbs but instead it is up to the context to interpret it. An example is the hashtag, like JusticeDelayed or VoicesSilenced, implicitly representing entire propositions, like Justice has been delayed or Voices have been silenced. Such an ellipsis makes it even shorter and more powerful and leaves the message to interpretation. This compression is especially appropriate to digital texts such as X, where the size of the character and a fast rate of consumption are the determinants of language selection.

Lexically the hashtags mostly include abstract nouns, evaluative adjectives and emotionally charged lexemes. Generalization and ideological abstraction is made possible by the abstract nouns like justice, freedom, democracy, and silence, and through the complex socio-political realities are simplified into simplified concepts. The use of evaluative language, e.g. failed, threatened, or silenced, presents implicit judgment, putting the reader on this or that side, without necessarily making a comment on it. This is what Fairclough refers to as the ideological role of the lexical choice in discourse.

Nominalization is another textual characteristic that is more apparent and only distorts the agency blurring the focus on actors and putting more on the actions or the results. Indicatively, in hashtags such as #RightsViolated or #DemocracyUnderThreat the lack of an identifiable agent makes social or political participants responsible. This linguistic tool adds to the concept of ideological naturalization suggested by CDA, in which situations are seen to be unrelated to human-generated action and, thus, less questionable.

Semantic salience and readability are also increased by the capitalization of hashtags. The capitalized compound hashtags visually divide the lexical items, with the embedded clause becoming more accessible without losing its compressed variant. This stylistic device supports the persuasive and focus-making role of hashtags in the news discussion.

Altogether, the textual analysis helps to reveal that hashtags are not some random or ornamental things but the well-planned pieces of language. Their elliptical structure, use of language, and constriction of grammar make them effective sense-creating machinery in digital news stories.

Linguistic Feature	Example Hashtag	Implied Meaning	Discursive Function
Nominal Ellipsis	#JusticeDelayed	Justice has been delayed	Evaluative framing
Agent Deletion	#VoicesSilenced	Someone silenced voices	Obscures responsibility
Abstract Nouns	#DemocracyCrisis	Democracy is in crisis	Ideological generalization
Evaluative Lexis	#SystemFailed	The system has failed	Judgment & stance
Capitalization	#RightsDenied	Rights are being denied	Emphasis and clarity

Table 4.1: Textual Features of Hashtags as Elliptical Clauses

4.2 Discursive Practice

The level of discursive practice analysis is concerned with the production, dissemination and comprehension of hashtags in digital news discourse. Fairclough (2003) notes that this dimension looks at the text production, distribution and consumption processes with focus on the working of discourse in social and institutional settings. In the current research, hashtags are addressed as a discursive resource which is used strategically by the news agencies to select events, direct viewers to interpret them and create specific versions of reality.

Hashtags are communicative tools serving as linguistic tools in digital news environments like X. Their manufacturing is conditioned by the institutional patterns of journalism, platform affords, and viewer anticipations. News outlets are not using hashtags to group information, but they are predetermining a particular viewpoint and are guiding the population. Due to the high visibility and searchability of hashtags, the entry points to hashtags are discursive in nature, and readers can use them to read and interpret news narratives. In that way, they are influential in the constructed information consumption and circulation.

Another outstanding aspect that is seen in the data is the framing role of hash tags. Hashtags lead readers to a certain interpretation of news events by summarizing complex events in brief, evaluative expressions. As an example, a hashtag like #JusticeDelayed puts a legal problem into a moral failure context, instead of a delay in the process. This framing effect affects the perceptions of responsibility, urgency and legitimacy among the audiences. By these means of framing, the news discourse covertly sets the readers in particular ideological stances even though it still looks objective.

Intertextuality is another significant theme of discursive practice. Hashtags can tend to connect single news updates with larger discursive networks that are going through the digital media. By repeating itself in posts, a hashtag gains its power in meaning through repetition and association. This intertextual aspect enables hashtags to be used as collective interpretive tools in that the audience can relate two different events using a similar ideological discourse. By doing so, hashtags facilitate the replication of dominant discourses in the digital form of the public.

At this level, the interpretive role of the audience also plays the central role. Hashtags encourage readers to engage in meaning-making processes by appealing to their prior knowledge and beliefs regarding social beliefs as well as to be exposed to existing conversation. Due to the elliptical and contextual nature of hashtags, their meaning depends on common socio-political context. Such open-mindedness enables news houses to convey assessative meanings in an implicit manner, minimizing the chances of explicit bias but still influenced the audience.

Also, hashtags promote discursive circulation and amplification. The fact that they are clickable means that a certain frame or a story can prevail over the rest due to its speedy spread. Consequently, hashtags are not just discursive units but discursive power generators as well.

They define what issues become visible, what they are named and how they are discussed in the popular discourse.

These practices are viewed through the CDA lens of institutional power of the media organizations to regulate discourse. Selective application of hashtags shows the application of language in strategic ways to validate certain views and put other viewpoints in the background. Hashtags help to normalize certain ideological standpoints of digital news, through repetition, framing, and intertextual connection.

Overall, the analysis of discursive practices shows that hashtags can be discussed as powerful mediators between the news producers and consumers. They influence the process of interpretation, determine engagement, and are involved in the process of creating social reality. Their apparent simplicity hides their important role in the creation and distribution of ideology in digital journalism today.

Discursive Function	Example Hashtag	Discursive Role	Interpretive Effect
Framing	#JusticeDelayed	Frames legal events as moral failure	Encourages critical stance toward institutions
Evaluation	#SystemFailed	Encodes negative judgment	Positions audience emotionally
Intertextuality	#DemocracyUnderThreat	Links multiple news events	Builds ideological continuity
Audience Alignment	#VoicesSilenced	Invites empathy and solidarity	Aligns readers with marginalized groups
Agenda Setting	#CrisisContinues	Sustains media attention	Reinforces issue salience

Table 4.2: Discursive Functions of Hashtags in Digital News Discourse

4.3 Social Practice

On the social practice level, Critical Discourse Analysis of Fairclough studies how discourse is not only a reflection but also a reproduction of the larger social structures, power relations, and ideological processes as well. Regarding the digital news discourse, hashtags are not only a means of using language but also a social instrument and a part of the reality building, keeping the dominant presence, and molding the consciousness. This level of analysis places the use of

hashtags in broader social-political and institutional frames that can demonstrate how language is involved in the reproduction of ideologies.

The results of this paper show that hashtags in digital news discussion are important to naturalize a specific worldview. Hashtags tend to conceal ideological positioning by introducing evaluative meanings in concized and unobtrusive forms. As an example, the hashtags like #JusticeDelayed or #DemocracyUnderThreat offer complicated political facts as the self-evident truths and discourage alternative ways of interpretation. This is in line with the argument that ideology has best effect when it seems commonsensical as opposed to being contested (Fairclough).

One of the trends that are apparent in the data is the systematic obscuring of agency. Responsibility of actions or results is often removed or backgrounded through the nominalization and the use of elliptical constructions. This language device enables the institutions and people in power to go nameless; nevertheless, they can express their judgment of an evaluation nature. Therefore, the social actors are erased or mentioned vaguely, and this restricts the possibility of critical examination and strengthens the status quo of dominance. These acts of discursivity help cause naturalization of dominance as CDA refers to it.

In addition, hashtags also serve as instruments of ideological circulation and supporting. These repetitions by being used in several news posts enable some stories to stand out over others. Hashtags are a part of the agenda-setting processes in that they through the use of repetition and visibility make a difference in the way issues are viewed to be important and the manner in which they are framed. It is an indication of how the media is a strong social institution that only reports reality but also constructs it.

Socio-politically, the commodification of discourse is also made possible by hashtags. Visibility, engagement and circulation are the key elements of production of news in the digital media economy. Hashtags increase reach of content and engagement metrics that subsequently affect editorial decisions. Consequently, the ideological framing gets mixed with platform-based logics, in which emotionally appealing or morally judgmental hashtags will be popular due to their spreadability. This business side of discourse also adds to the ideological influence of discourse.

The discussion further shows that hashtags aid in replicating dominant ideological accounts especially those concerning governance, justice, and social discord. News discourse restricts the acceptable set of interpretations by remaking events in similar terms of evaluation. Other views are pushed aside and the hegemonic discourse becomes normal. It is the process that shows the thoughts of Fairclough regarding discourse as constitutive and constituted at the same time by social structures and creating them.

Social Function	Example Hashtag	Ideological Effect	Discursive Outcome
Naturalization of ideology	#JusticeDelayed	Presents judgment as factual	Normalizes critique
Obscuring agency	#RightsViolated	Removes responsible actors	Limits accountability
Agenda setting	#CrisisContinues	Sustains issue visibility	Controls public focus
Ideological reinforcement	#DemocracyUnderThreat	Reaffirms dominant values	Shapes political perception
Commodification of discourse	#BreakingNews	Maximizes engagement	Prioritizes visibility over depth

Table 4.3: Social and Ideological Functions of Hashtags in Digital News Discourse

The social practice analysis demonstrates that hashtags operate as powerful ideological instruments in digital news discourse. Their elliptical structure, evaluative nature, and repetitive circulation enable them to shape public understanding while concealing the mechanisms of power behind seemingly neutral expressions. Through framing, omission, and repetition, hashtags contribute to the reproduction of dominant ideologies and institutional authority.

By situating hashtags within broader socio-political and media contexts, this study confirms that digital news discourse is not merely informative but deeply ideological. Hashtags function as sites where language, power, and technology intersect, making them critical objects of analysis in contemporary discourse studies.

These results of the research demonstrate that hashtags used in digital news discourse serve as substantive elliptical clausal structures and not an indexing resource. In linguistics, hashtags were observed to reduce entire propositions to small units by use of ellipsis, nominalization, and evaluative lexical selections. These constricted forms enable the news organizations to present sophisticated evaluations, feelings, and positions on a shrinking textual format. It was revealed that agents and verbs are often absent in the hashtags, which are foregrounding outcomes but backgrounding responsibility. With the help of this linguistic strategy, the ideologically loaded meaning of news discourse is presented in an implicit and apparently neutral way. Consequently, hashtags are effective frames that direct the readers to interpret events in a specific manner and still present an illusion of objectivity.

On the discursive and social levels, the results reveal that hashtags are influential in ideological discourse and in strengthening the mainstream viewpoints in the digital news discourse. Hashtags are part of agenda setting, intertextual cohesion, and normalization of specific opinions through repeated use. The flow of their circulation among the posts enables certain interpretations to be seen and others to be pushed aside. Besides, the paper demonstrates that hashtags are involved in the reproductive process of power relations because they regulate the representation of events, actors, and social issues. News organizations can shape the opinion of people without necessarily arguing by integrating evaluation in their condensed linguistic forms. On the whole, the results can be summarized as having shown that hashtags are powerful discursive methods that facilitate the process of mediation of meaning, ideology and power in the modern digital journalism.

Conclusion

This paper has revealed that hashtags in online news speech are not just mere tools of categorization, but elliptical clausal structures that are pivotal in determining meaning, ideology, and perception. By the use of the Critical Discourse Analysis, the analysis of hashtags demonstrated how the complex socio-political meanings are reduced in size to a small linguistic structure, which allows news organizations to frame events, obscure agency, and direct audience interpretation. The results indicate that hashtags lead to the replication of power ideological discourses by making certain opinions seem natural and shaping the way issues are portrayed in the online social realm. Revealing the discursive and ideological roles of hashtags, this research study will be valuable to the comprehension of digital journalism as a language practice and emphasize the necessity to analyze new linguistic practices in new media settings critically.

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