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■ Discourse Analysis of Academic Cheating Phenomenon:
A Case Study of Users' Comments on the Kuwaiti News
Account (Al Majlis) on Twitter
١٠١٩ Yousra Mahmoud Elkhashab

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- يتم إعادة تقييم المجلات المحلية المصرية دوريا في شهر يونيو من كل عام و يكون التقييم الجديد ساريا للسنة التالية للنشر في هذه المجلات.

● **Discourse Analysis of Academic Cheating
Phenomenon: A Case Study of Users'
Comments on the Kuwaiti News
Account (Al Majlis) on Twitter**

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● **تحليل خطاب ظاهرة الغش الأكاديمي:**

دراسة حالة على تعليقات مستخدمي حساب (المجلس) الإخباري الكويتي في تويتر

● يسرا محمود الخشاب

باحثة ماجستير في قسم دراسات المعلومات بجامعة الكويت

Abstract

Academic cheating has a devastating effect on societies. This study investigated Twitter users' attitudes towards academic cheating news in Kuwait to understand how they perceive academic cheating. The research analyzed the discourse on two main incidents; the protest against the "anti-cheating regulation" in 2018 and the "cheating group on WhatsApp" incident in 2023. For the case study, the researcher chose Al Majlis Twitter account as the news platform on which the comments have been selected. A total of 1259 tweets were analyzed manually. The findings revealed that users had a negative attitude towards cheating. People viewed cheating as a severe problem that was put in a political and social context. However, some users justified cheating and accused the educational system of the problem. The research has concluded with some suggestions to combat cheating, such as, raising religious awareness among students. Future studies could study other academic misconduct, such as plagiarism. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first to analyze the discourse of social media users about academic cheating.

Keywords: academic cheating - cheating protest - discourse analysis

ملخص الدراسة

للغش الأكاديمي أثرٌ مدمرٌ على المجتمعات، وقد هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على توجهات مستخدمي تويتر نحو أخبار الغش الأكاديمي في الكويت، وذلك للكشف عن تصوراتهم حول الظاهرة، وتبنت الدراسة أسلوب تحليل الخطاب حول حادثتين رئيسيتين، هما: حادثة الاعتصام ضد لائحة الغش عام 2018، وحادثة مجموعة الغش على تطبيق واتساب التي وقعت عام 2023، ولدراسة الحالة، تم اختيار حساب المجلس الإخباري لاستقاء التعليقات، وتحليل 1259 تعليقاً على تويتر حول هذين الخبرين بشكل يدوي، وكشفت النتائج أن المستخدمين لديهم موقف سلبي تجاه الغش، إذ تم اعتبار الغش مشكلة خطيرة وضُعت في سياق سياسي واجتماعي في أغلب التعليقات، وعلى الرغم من ذلك، عزى بعض المستخدمين لجوء الطلبة للغش وبرزوا هذه المشكلة بالنظام المتبع في المؤسسات التعليمية، واختتم البحث بعدد من التوصيات، مثل التركيز على زيادة الوعي الديني في منع ممارسات الغش. ويمكن أن تتناول الدراسات المستقبلية مشكلات أكاديمية أخرى، مثل الانتحال والسرقة العلمية، وعلى حد علم الباحثة، فإن هذه الدراسة هي الأولى من نوعها لتحليل خطاب مستخدمي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي حول الغش الأكاديمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الغش الأكاديمي - الاعتصام ضد لائحة الغش - تحليل الخطاب.

Introduction

People use a significant amount of information related to day-to-day events. In our current information age, people are overwhelmed by many ideas and thoughts, which can form their perspectives and opinions about issues (Kee et al., 2012)¹. To fulfill their needs, people search for information in the news. Inner desires and curiosity prompt individuals to access and consume related information when unusual incidents occur. The closer an event is to people's lives, the more motivated they are to obtain information about it (Brewer et al., 2003)². People primarily depend on social media to receive updated news coverage. It was argued that people might form their opinions or attitudes depending on how media perform news coverage (Detenber et al., 2007)³.

Media have a positive role in encouraging social change and morality within society. Despite the constraints on media, it was perceived that ethics were usually taken into consideration in news stories. Further, social media have the ability to develop values and ethics that are expected to influence people's perceptions (Arias, 2019)⁴. Academic integrity is one of the values promoted within societies using media. Furthermore, countries use different approaches to combat academic dishonesty, such as issuing regulations or policies.

The Protest against the “Anti-Cheating Regulation”

The Ministry of Education issued a new regulation to prevent cheating in high schools in Kuwait in May 2018. The regulation required students who were caught cheating to take new exams in all subjects (failing the entire semester if they cheated in one subject). The regulation entailed rotating schools' principles during exams, and they will be supervising in other random schools. The regulation was intended to combat favoritism that caused cheating. Decision-makers believed that school principals were responsible for the cheating cases. As a reaction, approximately 150 students gathered in front of the Ministry with their parents to express their rejection of the regulation. Students believed the regulation included a strict punishment for less extreme action. Then, 30 students went to the Parliament to protest the next day and explained their situation to the parliament members through media interviews. Many people believed the reaction was

unexpected, questioning why students objected to the regulation. Controversy has polarized people; many used social media to express their opinion about the new regulation and the protest. The issue became more complicated when some students were caught cheating, and the Ministry officially canceled their exams. Those students sued the Ministry in a suit that the administrative court dismissed. From a legal perspective, the punishment was appropriate to fight against the cheating problem in Kuwait (Al Hamoud, 2018)⁵. The debate included opinions from students, parents, parliament members, educators, and public figures. The conflicting points of view were widely presented in the media. This research uses “the cheating protest” and the protest against “the anti-cheating regulation” to refer to the incident.

The “Cheating Group on WhatsApp” Incident

In January 2023, the academic cheating problem was broadly discussed again. Media circulated news about a WhatsApp group that helped students to cheat. Private groups on WhatsApp contained leaked exams with answers. Students join these groups to cheat during exams while they pay for each exam. The Kuwaiti authorities arrested the group members who helped students cheat in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, the government agency responsible for ensuring safety and combating crimes. Although the anti-cheating regulation was still active, the parliament held urgent sessions to discuss the issue and find a solution for academic cheating (“Education Ministry Taking Measures,” 2023)⁶. Politicians released several statements in response to the incident. Again, the media considered the incident critical, and several news stories were published on traditional media and news platforms on Twitter. On the top of these platforms was Al Majlis Twitter account. It is an authorized platform launched in Kuwait in 2012 to produce news coverage and video reports. The account had approximately 1.5 million followers in 2018 and 2.3 million in 2023. Al Majlis has followers worldwide; around 88% of its users are in Kuwait. The Ministry of Information issued license for the account as an electronic newspaper (A. Al Shemeri, personal communication, January 6, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

Al Majlis Twitter account posted news about the cheating protest and the cheating group on WhatsApp incidents. The source created updated information about the events that encouraged users to comment and share their opinions. The research has the following purposes:

1. To examine how people perceived academic cheating by analyzing users' comments on the news of two famous incidents of cheating in high school exams.
2. To explore the attitudes of people towards the two incidents to gain a better understanding of how society views academic cheating.

Research Questions

The research aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What attitudes were presented in the users' comments on Al Majlis account towards the cheating protest?
2. What attitudes were presented in the users' comments on Al Majlis account towards the "cheating group on WhatsApp" incident?

Significance of the Study

The protest against the anti-cheating regulation and the WhatsApp cheating group incident resulted in uncommon reactions. Identifying the attitudes of Al Majlis account users towards the two incidents includes theoretical significance and practical implications. The study helps researchers who wish to study public opinion about the academic cheating phenomenon and the related governmental regulations. The study also provides an understanding of people's perceptions of academic cheating to determine the needed action to combat the phenomenon. Besides, it helps educators and decision-makers to look at the academic cheating problem from multiple angles, such as the political and social context.

This paper is divided into six sections. The first section introduced the background of the protest. The second section highlights the review of the related literature. Section three introduces the methodology used in the study. Then, the paper's findings are presented in section four, followed by the discussion and limitations in section five, and finally, the conclusions in section six.

Literature Review

This literature review briefly introduces a background about cheating in Kuwait and other countries. It shows the difference in students' perceptions of academic misconduct. Then, the literature discusses Twitter as a platform for keeping up with the latest news. It also shows how users' comments on the news could indicate their situation towards different incidents.

Academic Cheating in Kuwait

Academic cheating is a dishonest behavior that includes copying others' works in exams or assignments to deceive the authority by unjustly

improving results (Hadjar, 2019)⁷. The internet has increased school cheating cases (Erguvan, 2021)⁸. In various cultures, people hold different perceptions of what is considered cheating. People from different social and cultural backgrounds have different judgments on what constitutes academic dishonesty, such as the difference between the Ukrainian and American students presented in the study of Lescroart (2013)⁹. The Ukrainian students tolerated academic cheating more than their fellow Americans.

In Kuwait, a parliament is elected by nationals and has the power to propose and pass legislation (Casey, 2007)¹⁰. Cheating in Kuwait has been a complex problem for years. Decision-makers have widely discussed the problem, as many students depend on technological tools to get the answers during exams. A study was conducted to investigate how students in higher education institutions in Kuwait perceive cheating. Surprisingly, the study revealed that 53% of students did not find cheating dangerous to society. Around 50.3% of the students believed cheating is positive and it is considered “collaboration,” as if they were helping their colleagues (Abu Ali & Al Ahmed, 2018)¹¹.

The study of Zakri (2019)¹² showcased a relationship between the ethical behavior of school students and religious beliefs and favoritism. Ethical behavior is also related to the national culture, that is, the values and beliefs of the people in the society. The study also showed that students revoked the “anti-cheating regulation,” as if they considered academic cheating to be accepted.

News on Twitter

While most social media platforms are suitable for reporting news, Twitter is one of the leading platforms used for news. Information on Twitter can reach many people in a short time. Twitter can also deliver breaking news; for example, Twitter was a vital tool for news coverage during the Arab Spring Movement. People can gather and distribute information quickly and easily using Twitter (Vis, 2013)¹³.

In Kuwait, Twitter provides a large number of news daily. According to the latest report, people in Kuwait are increasingly using social media. Many people use social media to keep updated with local and international news. Twitter is also a primary public platform for information diffusion (Garcia et al., 2014)¹⁴. According to the Kuwait E-Government website (2016)¹⁵, it is estimated that 32% of Kuwaitis use Twitter to get information, and 50% of them shape their understanding of events accordingly.

Many researchers investigated academic cheating in media. For example, Shine (2015)¹⁶ studied how Australian newspapers reported the NAPLAN test, the National Assessment Program for school children. The research found that the media viewed teachers and schools negatively when discussing the test.

Qualitative research was done to study the “cheating scandal” in Atlanta after teachers were accused of helping students cheat. The way media visually and verbally reported the event was studied. The study analyzed the discourse in media to investigate the political or social context of the incident (Freeman, 2015)¹⁷. One study about the Chilean student social movement found that Chilean students used Twitter heavily during the protests. Media use specific descriptions to conduct the coverage (Gracia et al., 2014)¹⁴.

Commenting on Twitter

On social media, people have the ability to interact with each other and share their perceptions and understanding about different events. Users from different social backgrounds produce and use information on media. It was assumed that users’ comments on the news could reveal their shared values and ethics. Young adults engage in ethical thinking while making decisions online (Flores & James, 2012)¹⁸.

Twitter is also a useful tool for interactions with news, it is a wide-used tool for commenting on news. One study investigated the comments written about female sex offenders. The comments on these articles were analyzed and revealed readers’ misunderstandings of the matter due to the shame or blame they attributed (Stutz, 2018)¹⁹.

Twitter is also a popular social media platform. Twitter comments are indications of public opinion and feeling toward newsworthy events. People are interested in reading others’ comments and ideas. A comment tweet on the news contains a user’s response to an opinion regarding a specific piece of news. Subjective or sentimental tweets contain opinions rather than facts. The comment includes the user’s opinion and response to the reported event (Kothari et al., 2013)²⁰.

Several factors motivate people to comment on social media sites. Many people are information-centric; they aim to educate others, clarify points, share experiences, ask and answer questions, and correct information. Having a strong emotional desire to share an opinion also motivates people to comment. Further, people may want to interact with others by debating with or persuading them. A sense of humor also motivates some people to comment on Twitter and share their opinions. People who agree with the

presented news are more likely to share their opinions in comments (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011)²¹.

Other reasons for commenting on social media include self-love and agreeableness. People who agree with the presented news are more likely to share their opinions in comments. Other people use social media comments as a way to pass the time. Some people post their opinions in comments to keep in touch with their followers (Wu & Atkin, 2016)²².

Although the media widely publish news about academic cheating cases in Kuwait, more research about the issue is needed (Erguvan, 2021)⁸. Also, there is a gap in the literature regarding the study of users comments on academic cheating news. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first to address this gap in the literature by examining users' attitudes toward cheating by analyzing their discourse.

Methodology

This study belongs to descriptive research, which accurately describes the characteristics of a phenomenon or an event. It uses a case study from Al Majlis news account on Twitter. Two incidents were selected to collect the comments; the news of the cheating protest and the news of the "cheating group on WhatsApp" incident. With the aim to determine users' attitudes towards academic cheating. A case study is a descriptive research that deeply studies a particular case (Atmowardoyo, 2018)²³. The study conducted discourse analysis to drive meanings from the language and text of users' comments. This methodology was used as it puts the content in a bigger social context (Bloor & Wood, 2006)²⁴. The comments were analyzed qualitatively, while quantitative data were derived to easily recognize the common patterns and generate more meanings from the qualitative data (Sandelowski, 2001)²⁵.

Data Collection

The units of analysis were the comments posted under the news coverage of the incidents. Using advanced searches on Twitter, the researcher collected 1259 comments about the two studied incidents. Specific Arabic keywords such as "regulation and cheating and directors" and "regulation and rotation and cheating" were used to collect the data. The time period was restricted to contain the tweets from May 1st to December 31st in 2018. As the protest took place on 9th of May and the final exams were held on June, the researcher found this time frame to be suitable. In addition to the following video reports published in the following months. Users were encouraged to keep discussing the protest. After filtering the data, 426 comments on six news

posts were included in the analysis. Then, the researcher used the keyword “cheating” and chose January 2023 (from January 1st to January 31st) to collect the WhatsApp cheating group incident comments. The incident happened during the midterm exams, and many posts were published in the following months. However, the researcher identified 833 comments on 19 news posts that were sufficient for the purpose of the study. The search was refined several times to extract the related tweets specifying the date for each incident. All the accessible tweets were included and none were excluded, to the best of the researcher knowledge.

Data Analysis

In this research, the news tweet posted on Al Majlis is considered the predictor, and the attitude presented in the comment is the measured outcome. The analysis involved using three labels of positive, negative, and neutral to classify users' comments on the news coverage of the studied incidents. The positive label referred to the agreement between the user's comment and what is presented in the news. The negative showed disagreement between the user's comment and the news, while the neutral label was given to those comments which do not hold positive nor negative perceptions. The researcher had to use more detailed definitions of the labels in some comments, as will be presented in the following section.

The analysis took place to understand the public's perception of cheating. It was viewed that while media coverage may influence people's comments, reading others' comments may influence public opinion about the issue. Thus, social pressure could affect people's attitudes toward cheating.

The analysis was conducted after reviewing many types of research designs. The researcher used color coding for labeling and classifying the comment concerning the main published tweet containing the news. To enhance validity, the researcher conducted the analysis twice manually. Despite the long process of conducting manual analysis and the existence of machine learning tools, many studies have shown that these tools face many challenges. Researchers raised the issue of their limitations in analyzing the Arabic language. For example, natural language processing tools may exclude the incorrectly written words, abbreviations, or used slang of Twitter users. Also, attitudes and emotions may need to be clarified in the short text of the tweets (Alqahtani & Alothaim, 2022)²⁶. Hence, the researcher used the manual analysis, then two coders checked the validity of the analysis and confirmed the results.

The comments were filtered according to the following criteria:

- Comments that consisted of emojis and photos were excluded, as the aim was to analyze the text of the comments;
- Unrelated comments were excluded (ex., advertisements);
- Replies to comments were excluded in order to identify the relationship with the primary tweet, not commenters' conversations;
- Some tweets were unavailable because the users had deleted them.

Many comments were related to news stories, such as “quote retweets” or those that did not mention the reference. The study considered only the sentimental tweets on posts that included news coverage, as Twitter comments usually reflect the public opinion (Cao et al., 2012).²⁷

Findings

This research investigated the attitudes of Al Majlis Twitter account users towards two academic cheating incidents. By analyzing the discourse of the comments, the research will reveal people's perceptions of cheating in Kuwaiti society.

The Cheating Protest

In this section, the study examined the comments on the news coverage of the cheating protest from May 1st to December 31st in 2018 to answer the research question. The comments on the six tweets that provided news coverage of the protest were examined. One of the tweets published a photo of the students and wrote, “What is happening in Kuwait? Students want to be allowed to cheat.” This tweet obviously judged the students as “cheaters.” The tweet had 110 comments. As mentioned previously, the number of analyzed tweets was 76 after excluding photos, unrelated comments, replies, and unclear comments. The findings showed that 50% of the comments were negative and did not agree with the tweet's title. Commenters were angry because of this negative judgment of the students. It appeared that the students themselves made most of the comments. Some of these comments accused Al Majlis of “being unfair and lacking credibility.” The students emphasized their right to protest and called the regulation as an “unstudied decision.” They said, “The protest was not aimed at allowing students to cheat, but at canceling some harmful decisions.” Some people paraphrased the news as “students are demanding their rights.” Around 43.4% of the tweets were positive and agreed with the judgment in the tweet. They showed disagreement with the protest. Only 6.5% were neutral and commented in a way that did not indicate their position.

Al Majlis's Twitter account published a 45-second video of a father protesting with his son inside the Ministry of Education. Al Majlis used a quote from the father as a title for the tweet. The title was: "It is your country; you have rights. Is it possible that the Minister, who has a Ph.D., has never cheated?" The video was used to reflect the ideas of the protesting students, who justified cheating by saying that the studies were excessive, they ran out of time, or they faced social problems. When the father in the video asked, "Is it possible that a Minister with a Ph.D. never cheated?" The students in the protest replied, "No" and "Impossible." This reaction reflected the protesting students' understanding of cheating. The father said the following:

"The government and the responsible parties in the Ministry of Education must listen to the protesting students and abolish the cheating regulation. The students have rights and demands in their country. Students know what is correct. Thus, the Minister should implement their request. Is it possible that a Minister with a Ph.D. never cheated? No way. When a student cheats, he may face problems or circumstances that force him to cheat. Their wrongdoing might be a slip from the devil or due to social problems."

There were 335 comments on this video. These comments were analyzed to develop an understanding of how people perceived cheating. The comments were filtered to remove emojis replies and unrelated comments. Other comments were unavailable. The final tally included 102 comments on the video. The criteria for judging the comments were as follows:

- Comments were considered positive when they showed admiration or support for the ideas presented in the video. This was indicated by agreeing with the father's justifications. In addition, comments that showed opposition to the regulation were treated as positive;
- A negative attitude was indicated by comments that showed disagreement with the video. It was also reflected by words implying objections or surprise, referring to the evil nature of cheating and morals or religion. These comments showed negative views on cheating;
- Comments were considered neutral when they revealed both the positive and negative sides of the ideas presented in the video. These comments analyzed the situation without giving a negative or positive opinion.

Around 74.5 % of the comments were negative and did not agree with the ideas presented in the video. Some commenters alleged that it was shameful for a father to say that to his child. Around 17.6% were positive comments.

These users agreed that students cheated because they had some reason to do so. Some comments were only against the regulation. They believed the punishment was strict and did not match the severity of the wrongdoing. They disagreed that students should be deprived of their grades for the whole year if they had cheated in one subject. They believed it was unfair to enforce this regulation. The penalty should be based on the level of education. In high schools, cheaters may be punished by failing the subject (Bwire et al., 2015)²⁸.

In the neutral comments, 7.8%, of people showed other aspects of the problem. They raised the issue of favoritism in applying regulations. For example, one comment asserted that the regulation would be enforced on those who did not have “wasta,” the Arabic word for favoritism or personal connections. They did not refer to the morality of cheating.

Because this video was not typically published in Kuwaiti media, the researcher investigated the comments further. Some studies have found that social media users try to reflect the best side of agreeable issues. Thus, the researcher analyzed the comments further to understand why people disagreed with the presented ideas. The researcher examined how people viewed the father's claims in the video.

After reviewing the 76 negative comments, the researcher found that 21 comments mentioned that they disagreed. The other 55 comments supported this disagreement with an explanation.

In this analysis, only a clear perspective was considered. After exploring the comments several times, the following explanations emerged:

- Logical: supporting their view with the irrational or unconvincing claims of cheaters;
- Ethical: supporting their view with morals;
- Religious: supporting their view with religious orders or quotes and;
- Patriotic: supporting their view with patriotism.

Many comments (38.2%) referred to logic in their explanation. These comments asserted that the claims of the cheaters were illogical. Further, they indicated that protesting against a regulation aimed at compacting cheating was irrational. The comments in this section used words and expressions of surprise like “Are you serious?” “I cannot believe it,” and “Are you kidding?” They also showed that prohibiting cheating was a necessary step the Ministry took.

The second most frequent perspective was ethics. This category of comments constituted 29% of the tweets. The comments focused on the idea that fathers should be role models.

Commenters explained that fathers should not encourage their children to cheat. They also emphasized that it was shameful to defend cheaters and that the protesters should feel embarrassed to be there. Some expressions reflected the ethical nature of the comments, such as, “Students should be raised to respect morals,” or “what happened to people? Where are the ethics?”

The third group of comments mentioned religious concepts. Around 18.1% of users considered cheating religiously forbidden (Haram). For example, most comments in this section included an excerpt from the Hadith by Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), “Not from us who cheats.” They said that it was not only a regulation but also an obligation of our religion.

Since the father in the video mentioned that students had rights in their country, a patriotic perspective also surfaced. Around 14.7% of comments reflected the negative consequences of cheating on the country. For example, “Do you want your country to lose a generation?”

One of the first tweets related to the protest included a photo of students on their way to the Ministry of Education to protest. The tweet stated, “A number of students are protesting in front of the Ministry of Education because of the Ministry’s decision.”

The second tweet received 195 comments. Only 148 tweets were analyzed after excluding the replies and unrelated tweets. It was noted that some people asked whether this protest was real.

- The positive comments supported the protest and believed the regulation was unfair;
- The negative comments opposed the students’ attitudes;
- The neutral comments stated that the regulation was over-punishing students. They did not offer a clear positive or negative viewpoint. Some even referred to practices in other academic institutions.

The analysis showed that 73.6% of the commenters had a negative attitude toward the protest. The comments reflected the strange nature of the event. They judged the students as cheaters because they protested against this regulation. Of the comments, 18.9% were neutral. Most comments showed an aversion to cheating but stated that the regulation was unfair. Others just analyzed the situation or stated that other aspects should be considered. Only 7.4% of the comments supported the protest and the students.

Another critical tweet involved news coverage of the students' protest in front of the parliament. The tweet stated, "A number of students are protesting in front of the parliament to oppose the new cheating regulation." About 104 comments were found under this tweet. After refining the data, 73 comments were left, 80.2% of which showed a negative attitude, 10.9% of which were positive, and 8.2% of which were neutral.

One tweet covering the protest quoted the Minister as stating, "Whenever a student is deprived of taking their exams, or a cheating report is written unfairly, the student can contact me personally to remove this injustice." This post had only 13 comments, two unrelated to the quote. Surprisingly, 63.6% were negative comments and disagreed with the Minister's statement. For example, users commented, "students would not be able to meet with the Minister." Others interpreted the quote as evidence that "the Minister did not trust the committees in the schools," and one comment said, "Molly-coddle the students." Around 36.4% were neutral, as they were explaining the regulation. One of the comments was, "You will get yourself in trouble," as the Minister would have to deal with many cases. That comment was difficult to classify, but it could be considered negative. No comments were positive or agreed with the quote.

Another tweet said, "The Minister of Higher Education faces students' objections: I will not retract my decisions to protest the educational process in Kuwait." This tweet used another quote from the Minister had 25 comments. After filtering the data, only 16 comments were considered. Most comments (68.7%) supported the quote, while 25% disagreed with the decision and quote. Only 9% were neutral.

The "Cheating Group on WhatsApp" Incident

In this section, the tweets covering the WhatsApp cheating group incident were analyzed to answer the second research question. Al Majlis posted 19 tweets about the incident in January 2023. After applying the criteria, around 833 comments were eligible for analysis after applying the filtering criteria.

Al Majlis posted a suggestion from a well-known university professor and lawyer. The posted suggestion was: "All students whose numbers are available on the WhatsApp group of cheating should fail their exams, if they cheat again, they should fail all the subjects." This tweet had 91 comments, and 69 comments were included in the analysis. Around 59.4% of the comments were positive as they supported the lawyer's statement. Around 23.2% of the users had neutral attitude. They mentioned other ways to combat cheating, such as using open-book exams. Around 17.4% had

negative attitude. Those users were showing the reasons of their objections. Some said that students are just children, and the punishment should not be that strict. Others argued that “it is difficult to determine who cheated, even if their phone numbers were available on the group.” Also, the users accused the teachers of facilitating cheating and blamed the whole educational system and curricula.

One tweet reported a statement for a well-known leader in the Ministry of Education; he suggested: “let’s cut off the internet service during the exams in all school areas.” This tweet had 198 comments, and only 146 comments were analyzed. User’s attitudes were mostly negative, with a percentage of 83.7. Most users believed it was an illogical solution to a severe problem. They also believed that other residents would be suffering whenever exams were sat. Only 10.3% supported the suggestion and believed it would reduce cheating cases. 6% of the comments had a neutral attitude, as they did not reveal agreement or disagreement with the suggestion. Instead, some of them reported other educational problems, like unprofessional teachers.

Another tweet reported information about cheaters: “The investigations revealed that 40,000 students cheated in the first academic semester, students paid 3 million Kuwaiti Dinars for cheating networks. Each student who enters the “group” pays 60-70 in advance to those who steal exams.” The tweet received 114 comments, 78 comments were analyzed. Around 64.1% of the users were unsatisfied with the tweet and held a negative attitude towards cheating. It was clear that many users supported their opinions on the importance of “equal opportunities,” which will not be achieved when students cheat. The users asserted, “all students should be fairly given higher educational and job opportunities.” Also, they believed in the necessity of “cheaters receiving a harsh punishment.” Some users also discussed their point of view from a religious or patriotic perspective. Around 25.6% were neutral and did not clarify their perception of the tweet. On the other hand, 10.3% questioned the numbers mentioned in the tweet, and reflected upon other educational issues, such as the qualifications of teachers.

A parliament member proposed a law to combat cheating. Al Majlis posted the law in a tweet that says: “All criminals who steal the exams will be imprisoned from two to seven years, and a fine of 10,000 to 20,000 Kuwaiti Dinars for everyone who prints or publishes exam questions and answers with the intention of cheating, while students will be considered to have failed in all subjects.” The tweet had 75 comments, 56 of which were analyzed. Around 64.4% of the comments were negative; users indicated that the law is too strict and that the parliament should work on other social

problems. Around 19.6% of users had a positive attitude and supported the proposed law, 16% of users did not clearly indicate a positive or negative reaction (had a neutral perspective).

One tweet included important news: “The Ministry constitutes a committee to fight cheating.” The tweet had 66 comments. The study analyzed 40 comments based on the criteria after filtering the total number. Around 77.5% were negative; they were not optimistic about the committee. They thought “the government will not do anything about the problem.” Others said “It is too late.” While 5% only were positive about the committee. 17.5% were neutral comments reflecting other problems such as the quality of teaching and curricula but did not give positive nor negative sentiments.

A following-up tweet showed: “The Minister of Education cannot attend the anti-cheating session.” The tweet received 58 comments, 30 were left after applying the criteria. Users strongly criticized the Minister’s situation. 81.7% of users had a negative attitude, and the opposition was mainly viewed from a political perspective. Users said, “Why he is not doing his job? “Does the Ministry support cheating? Around 15% of users had a neutral attitude, ignored the tweet's content and suggested solutions for eliminating cheating. Only 3.3% had a positive attitude and found an excuse for the Minister.

A tweet reported: “The Ministry of Education decided to deny 152 students from high school exams as they were caught cheating in the (Islamic Education subject) test.” The tweet had only 20 comments, 9 of which were analyzed. The tweet triggered a religious perspective due to the nature of the situation, and all comments were positive. Users supported the punishment and justified their opinion with religious sayings. They were also surprised by the incident.

Al Majlis tweeted a video for a famous religious figure with a tweet that said: “It is not religiously permissible for a teacher to help students cheat in exams; students should inform the school administration if any teacher supported cheating” In this tweet, the news touched upon the complicated cheating situation in Kuwait. Teachers were usually accused of supporting cheating, not stopping it. The tweet had 29 comments, 19 were analyzed. 52% of the comments were positive and supported the religious perspective that refused to cheat. Surprisingly, some users showed that school principals and administrators urge teachers to help students cheat. Around 26.3% were neutral comments that elaborated on personal experiences of cheating, such as “I have a teacher who helps me in exams.” Around 21.7% were negative comments and thought: "It is considered support, not cheating.”

Another tweet published: “1741 students were denied from performing exams as they were caught cheating, and “the Ministry is examining the possibility of blocking the internet service in schools by installing modern devices to prevent signals. 35 comments were posted; 23 comments were eligible for analysis. The positive and negative comments were equal, with a percentage of 39.3 for each. The negative comments were not supporting the punishment. They again mentioned the teachers’ qualifications and other educational system problems. The positive comments touched on morality and equal opportunities. 21.4% of the comments were neutral, showing other solutions to stop cheating, such as having standardized tests when applying to universities.

In a related tweet, Al Majlis said, “The Ministry of Education revoked around 4,000 male and female students’ exams due to cheating in the first semester exams; those who helped the students cheat are accused of money laundering.” 27 comments were found on the tweet, 18 comments were analyzed. The analysis revealed that 44.6% of the comments were negative and asked for an explanation of why those people were accused of money laundering. Around 27.7% were positive, and the same percentage were neutral.

Another tweet included, “The Public Prosecution and the Ministry of Education are coordinating to discuss the fate of the students who benefited from cheating, after listening to the statements of those accused of leaking high school exams.” 68 comments were found, 43 were analyzed. The positive comments were 69.7%, users thought that “there should be equal opportunities, cheaters should not be equal with hard-working students.” Around 20.8% were negative, saying that “students should not be blamed for the problem. Some comments indicated “they will never do any positive solution about the problem.” 9.5% were neutral, mentioning other educational problems.

Al Majlis tweeted a statement from a parliament member who talked to the Minister and said: “Never protect those who have leaked the exams, and you must fight the phenomenon of the fake success and inflated final grades.” The tweet had 23 comments, 10 comments were analyzed to reveal that 50% had a negative attitude, as they did not believe the warning. 40% were positive, and 10% were neutral.

One tweet indicated: “Powerful people are pushing school principals in Jahra to help students cheat; the committee head returns the cell phone to a student during the test and apologizes to him.” The tweet showed that favoritism is increasing the cheating problem. 37 comments were posted, with 20

comments analyzed. Around 80% were negative and refused cheating and favoritism. 20% were neutral, highlighting other educational problems.

The Kuwaiti parliament has a “committee of values and combating negative phenomenon,” which is responsible for ensuring society's morality. Al Majlis tweeted about a meeting between government representatives to discuss cheating. The tweet read: “Yesterday, some leaders warned against the cheating phenomenon in schools in the meeting of the committee of values.” 19 comments were analyzed out of 38 comments. Around 74% were negative comments, showing that “all meetings and sessions are useless.” 17% of the comments were positive, 9% were neutral. Again, many comments were about the quality of teaching and private tutoring.

A general tweet proclaimed that “the president of the parliament adds two topics to the agenda; the first is the street damage, and the second is the low quality of education and cheating.” This tweet included two main problems with 20 comments, 13 comments about cheating were analyzed. Around 53.8% were neutral and suggested that parliament should be discussing other problems. While 38.4% of comments were negative and did not trust the success of the session’s results, 7.8% were positive, encouraging the parliament to find a solution.

Al Majlis also posted a video for a parliament representative who said: “The social media have discussed the cheating problem, so the Ministry of Education started looking for a solution... one student says to the teacher: why don’t you let me cheat? Everyone cheats!” The tweet had 17 comments, and only 8 were eligible for analysis. Most comments were negative 87.5%, the positive comments constituted 12.5%, and no neutral comments were found. In this case, the negative comments reflected the ideas of those who refused to cheat and viewed it as a negative phenomenon.

Another tweet indicated a quote from the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education: “The Ministry knew about the cheating incident from newspapers; nothing was noticed about cheating in the last 5 year.” The tweet had 145 comments, 101 comments were included, and they were all from a negative perspective (100%). All users had negative attitudes toward the Ministry and its leaders. Most of these comments were sarcastic and included memes to mock the situation. “How come you did not know about cheating?” “Why did you have the regulation?” they said. Again, this result reflected the unstable relationship between the Ministry and users.

One tweet indicated: “Members of a network that leaked exams were arrested, 3 of them are Kuwaiti nationals, and they work in the Ministry of

Education.. they get 150 Kuwaiti Dinars for each subject.” The tweet had 52 comments, 33 comments were analyzed. Most users supported the authority’s action and requested a strict punishment for criminals (54.3% were positive comments). The tweet shed light on the nationalities of the involved members. Hence, around 36.6% of the comments discussed how the media depicted the incident and described those members with a neutral attitude. Around 9.1% were negative comments and were “not optimistic about the punishment that they might get.”

Al Majlis tweeted news about: “Conducting 70 surgeries to remove cheating ear pieces from students’ ears in one day.” The tweet indicated the use of technology in cheating. 146 tweets were found, 98 were analyzed. In this tweet, many people were surprised with the news and had a negative attitude towards it (83.7%). Most of the comments justified their surprise with the ability of students to suffer a medical condition to get higher grades. Parents were also blamed for having helped their children in their wrongdoing. Other users asked for punishment for those students, indicating the importance of coordination between hospitals and the Ministry of Education to combat the phenomenon.

Of the comments, 12.2% had a neutral attitude and did not indicate a clear attitude toward the news. Around 4.1% of users justified students’ intentions to cheat by the difficult exams, in an attitude that is considered positive and supported cheating.

The findings show that users viewed cheating from negative lenses. These findings could influence public opinion and their understanding of cheating as a problem.

Discussion

This study aimed at investigating the users’ comments about two main events regarding academic cheating in Kuwait. Al Majlis’s Twitter account was examined as a medium of social media that people highly use. The researcher conducted discourse analysis to determine the attitude of people regarding the cheating protest incident and the WhatsApp cheating group incident. The researcher analyzed 426 comments on six tweets about the cheating protest. The study also analyzed 833 comments on 19 tweets about the WhatsApp cheating group and the following actions taken by the government.

Comments on social media sites such as Twitter can reveal people’s attitudes and opinions towards news. Tweets can collect people’s opinions on social trends and reflect public opinion (Cao et al., 2012)²⁷. The attitudes of users in this study varied. It was clear that most commenters had a negative attitude

toward academic cheating, which reflected their adherence to social values and ethics. People believe academic cheating is not religiously acceptable and violate the equal opportunities principle. Those people asserted the importance of stopping cheating in schools to ensure a brighter future for the country.

On the other hand, some people justified students' cheating and blamed the educational system, including the quality of teaching and curricula, for encouraging students to cheat. Some of those people denied students responsibility for academic cheating. This result was also found in other studies like Flores and James (2012)¹⁸ research. Some students defended their intentions to cheat by the unfairness of the assessments in schools. Also, participants believed that cheating is not harmful, which was also evident in some of the individuals' comments in our study. Some users did not encourage the government to have strict punishment. In all cases, cheating was put in a "bigger picture" of social and political context. Some people accused the authority of not being "serious" in addressing the cheating problem. Parents were also responsible for finding a solution for what was happening in schools.

Despite the five-year gap, no clear differences in users' attitudes towards cheating were found between the two incidents. Unlike other studies, this study showed that most people in Kuwait perceive academic cheating as a serious problem. For example, another study based on the Ethiopian culture revealed that students tolerate academic cheating and do not view it as severe (Dejene, 2021)²⁹.

Although two posts covering the protest used neutral language, the comments were negative. The post that included the Minister's quote emphasizing the importance of the regulation to protect the country had positive comments. Many people view cheating as a threat to the country. However, when Al Majlis used highly negative language against students stating that they wanted to cheat, most of the comments did not agree with the statement; they instead highlighted other demands that were not mentioned and accused the account of being biased. The contributors emphasized that the students were not asking to cheat. This conflict could have decreased Al Majlis's credibility, affecting how users perceived other posts. However, the results led to the same conclusion that people refused to cheat, and reflected that in their comments (Stutz, 2018)¹⁹. The tone of voice used in the news were encouraging the conflict between different parties.

Few commenters referred to a reason for rejecting cheating. For those who expressed such reasons, four perspectives or explanations were given. The

logical explanation was the most frequent, as the ideas in the video were not convincing, and the justifications were not accepted. The second statement showed an understanding of ethics and morality that was also clear in other comments, which mentioned the “equal opportunities” that should be present in society.

The third view was related to religion, indicating the need to follow religious teachings. That was an expected result as people in Kuwait are considered religious (Al-Issa & Dens, 2021)³⁰. However, another study in Indonesia found that religion did not affect the cheating behavior of Muslim students. The perception of cheating is more likely to influence the behavior, as religious values differ from real-world values (Hadjar, 2019)⁷. Finally, affiliation and belonging to the country was stated as a reason to reject cheating. These findings highlight that some commenters understand the consequences of cheating on the country, as mentioned above.

In Kuwait, people also showed less trust in governmental operations in response to social problems. They used social media to express their dissatisfaction with some decisions (Al Rasheed, 2020)³¹. The analysis in this study also revealed the tension between citizens and governmental representatives. In many instances, people needed to trust the government or parliament's actions to combat cheating. For example, a quote from the Minister stated that the regulation would be implemented fairly, and any student who faces injustice is welcome to complain to the Ministry. The post had negative comments, and commenters appeared to be upset. The reason for this reaction is the negative experience of people complaining in Ministries; this is not directly related to the cheating regulation or the protest. This conclusion was clear in the comments. Another example was users' reaction to the governmental committee formation to discuss solutions to academic cheating. Users did not trust the government to apply an appropriate punishment. People believe that the absence of punishment will lead to more cheating cases. This idea is approved by research. Students who did not hear about others being punished because of cheating were more likely to cheat. Because the school lacks a severe punishment for cheating, students are motivated to cheat (Dejene, 2021)²⁹.

The study was limited by the relatively short comments that may need a more precise context in some cases. Analyzing a larger number of comments using developed software that could accurately depict the Arabic slang would result in better validity. The researcher tried to overcome this limitation by investigating two different incidents. The researcher also examined some

hashtags and the content of tweets to ensure the correct understanding of tweets.

Conclusions

This study examined people's attitudes towards academic cheating in Kuwait by investigating comments about a protest led by students against an anti-cheating regulation and the incident of leaking exams through a WhatsApp group. Discourse analysis was used to determine their positive, negative, or neutral attitude toward the news posted on Al Majlis Twitter account. Findings have shown that people perceived academic cheating as a serious problem and had a negative attitude toward it in most cases. Examining how people conceive academic cheating is critical, as it has profound ethical and social implications. To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first paper to discuss academic cheating in Kuwait's social media and to reflect upon users' comments.

The findings could be used by media, education or social sciences researchers who wish to study the topic further. Considering the influence of media on people's values, media institutions could activate their social responsibility to combat academic cheating. Decision-makers could address people's concerns about the educational system. Justifications for cheating mentioned by individuals in this research should be addressed by teaching institutions. In a society like Kuwait, cheating could be eliminated by encouraging honesty as a religious value and raising religious awareness. Future studies could examine other academic misconduct, such as plagiarism. Further analysis could be done to determine students' perceptions of academic cheating.

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