

Metaphorical political slurs in Arab social media discourse describing Middle East conflicts

Reima AL-JARF¹

Metaphorical political slurs (MPs) have been very common on social media since the Arab Spring, during the Gaza-Israeli war and Syrian revolution. This study aims to analyse and describe the type, structure, meaning and purpose of a sample of Arabic MPs. Results showed general MPs referring to political figures (Khissisi for Sisi); TV channels (Alkhanzeera, "the swine" for Aljazeera); religious, ethnic and racial (Satan's Party for Hezbollah). Structurally, MPs consist of satiric word play as phoneme and word substitution (?aahir salacious for ?ahil monarch); a pejorative produced by combining a general-purpose insult with the name of ethnicity as calling Arabs "a nation of ewes", calling Iranians "fire worshippers"; adding common insulting modifiers to create loaded descriptivism (history's dump). Semantically and pragmatically, MPs express abuse, disparagement, contempt, criticism, and hostility. They refer to personalities, parties, countries or TV channels that the users oppose or dislike in a derogatory, satirical, or insulting manner. Further analyses and examples are given in detail.

Keywords: *metaphorical slurs, political metaphorical slurs, ethnic slurs, racial slurs, religious slurs, Arabic social media, Middle East conflict, hate speech*

1. Introduction

Political slurs² (PSs) are derogatory terms or phrases used to discredit, insult, or delegitimize individuals or groups based on their political affiliation or political views. They are linguistic strategies used to discredit opponents (Karol and Scott 2025). They exhibit multiple meanings as literal, identificatory, appropriation, satire, and banter (Zeman 2022; Technau 2018; Hom 2018). They are context-dependent and can be used in formal or informal settings (Kuřak and Paciorkowski 2025). They contain extra descriptive content, distinguishing them from their neutral counterparts (Bach 2012).

¹ King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, reima.al.jarf@gmail.com

² https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_slur

In addition, an MP refers to metaphors used as an insinuation or allegation about someone, some group, party or country that is likely to insult them or damage their reputation. They are pejorative in some social or cultural groups such as a particular Arab country, a particular faith or ethnic group but not in others.

Different types of PSs exist in the literature such as racial PSs targeting individuals based on ethnicity or race (Placencia 2024; Imraq, Aziz, and Noor 2025); partisan slurs used to discredit, insult, or delegitimize individuals or groups based on their political affiliation (Karol and Scott 2025; Placencia 2024); populist slurs used to ridicule or delegitimize leaders, populist movements, or supporters and frame populism as irrational, simplistic, or dangerous (Jones 2024); animalistic slurs that compare individuals or groups to animals to dehumanize, degrade, or delegitimize them, to imply that the targeted group lacks intelligence, civilization or morality, and to reinforce exclusion, discrimination and social hierarchies (Enock and Over 2023); sexist slurs that demean individuals based on their gender, reinforce gender stereotypes and contribute to systemic discrimination (Cervone et al. 2025); ideological slurs that target political beliefs, such as Fascist; nationalistic slurs that insult people based on nationality or perceived allegiance; party-based slurs used to mock political affiliations; historical and cultural slurs that refer to historical figures or movements; and personalized PSs coined for specific politicians, like *Sleepy Joe*.

Political slurs (PSs) on social media are closely linked to religion, cyber racism, and hate speech, serving multiple functions in shaping discourse and societal dynamics. PSs influence social attitudes, reinforce hierarchies, and contribute to a broader social impact (Diaz-Legaspe 2020; Bianchi 2018; Guercio 2021). They mobilize nationalist sentiment, gather support, and act as a mechanism for attacking and delegitimizing opponents (Imraq, Aziz, and Noor 2025; Bruno 2022; Karol and Scott 2025). PSs are tools of ideological warfare. They deepen polarization, reinforce social exclusion, and preserve social strata and ideological biases (Sidorkina 2025; Diaz-Legaspe 2018; Losada 2021). They uphold cultural biases, play a role in derogation, and enforce the marginalization of target groups (Liu 2019; Orlando and Saab 2020). They exclude minorities and foster dominant group privileges (Croom, 2015). They play a role in dehumanizing, fostering contempt, and stripping individuals of personhood (Jeshion 2018). They consolidate negative stereotypes, and normalize discrimination (Placencia 2024; Cepollaro 2017; Guercio 2021).

PSs are not limited to a particular country, culture or community. Prior studies revealed that PSs are deeply tied to national, political and ethnic identities, shaping discrimination, historical narratives, and digital discourse. Some prior studies focused on racial slurs targeting indigenous leaders in Ecuadorian X/Twitter interactions (Placencia 2024). Ethnic slurs in the Balkan region show how historical tensions shape derogatory language (Ciornei 2021). Radical right-wing online

discourse shows how slurs, slogans, and symbols are used in nationalist movements in Italy, Germany and France (Bruno 2022). Asian slurs and stereotypes exist in the USA (Croom 2018). Partisan slurs in the political speeches are present in media coverage, and social media of the Republican elites (Karol and Scott 2025). Discriminatory language travels with immigrants as in the case of Polish immigrants (Gawlewicz and Narkowicz 2018). Further studies focused on perceptions of negative group labels in Polish (Kuřak and Paciorkowski 2025); how PSs shape public discourse in post-Soviet contexts (Sidorkina 2025); online use of slogans, symbols and slurs by the Italian radical right (Bruno 2022); racial slurs in Malaysian political tweets, highlighting discriminatory rhetoric in digital spaces (Imraq, Aziz and Noor 2025); and ethnic slurs used as war names during the Zimbabwean Liberation Fighters, shaping combatant identity (Barnes and Pfukwa 2007).

Regarding the use of PSs in Arabic and Arab countries, few studies in the literature focused on anti-Arab rhetoric, political discourse, and linguistic strategies in Arabic media. For example, Boulouard et al. (2022) used BERT-based deep learning models to classify hate and offensive speech in Arabic social media. Abdelsamie et al. (2024) surveyed machine learning and deep learning approaches used for Arabic offensive language detection. Alhazmi et al. (2024) analysed machine learning models for hate speech detection on Arabic X, using CBOW and N-gram feature engineering. These three studies used AI-based models for hate speech detection, including slurs, although they focus broadly on offensive language and hate speech on social media, and not specifically on PSs; but their AI-driven techniques could be adapted to PS detection.

In another Arabic study, Al-Saeed (2024) investigated the evolution of hate speech in Arab political discourse following the Arab Spring (2011–2024). The author analysed 270 television news reports, social media posts, talk shows, and opinion articles and conducted 11 interviews. Over time, expressions of hatred became subtle and complex rather than direct and explicit. Hate speech was manifested in the use of religious discourse, politics, politicization of identity, and victim narratives as a justification for hate speech. The study concluded with a call for comprehensive policies to counter hate speech while preserving free expression. In addition, educational and media institutions should foster tolerance and pluralism.

Since the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011, emerging metaphorical political slur (MPS's) have been very common on Arabic social media. Many newly-coined MPS's have been also used during the current Middle East conflicts, in general, and all Gaza-Israel Wars, especially that after October 7, 2023. MPS are spontaneously coined by activists, opponents, activists, and Youtubers on social media.

The above literature review shows lack of studies that focus on Arabic metaphorical political slurs (MPSS) on Arabic social media describing the current

Middle East conflicts in the past few years. Therefore, this study aims to analyse and describe MPSs in Arabic social media discourse describing the current Middle East conflicts in terms of their type, phonological and lexical structure, types of evocative images and symbolisms used, the semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical tools used in creating them, their meaning, purpose, and social implications as used by Arabic speakers in different Arab countries. It examines the linguistic and social functions of MPSs, their power dynamics and role in social control.

2. Significance of study

This study is different from prior Arabic studies by Boulouard et al. (2022) Abdelsamie et al. (2024) Alhazmi et al. (2024) which analysed hate speech using AI detection models that require continuous adaptation of and application to new linguistic data. Similarly, this study is different from prior foreign studies in the literature that focused on the USA, Italy, the Balkans, Ecuador, Asia, Malaysia. It analysed MPSs within Arabic social media discourse with a special focus on current Middle East conflicts. It provides unique insights and a localized, culturally contextualized understanding of how MPSs shape narratives about political struggles in the Middle East. Moreover, this study is an addition to the existing literature as it introduces new and emerging MPSs as a discursive tool in Arabic social media, especially that this area is underrepresented in political slur research. Moreover, this study combines linguistics, political rhetoric and media discourse analysis, and bridges the gap between these three areas which is a contribution to multiple fields. This study uncovers how MPSs currently used demonize, delegitimize, and frame political entities that are part of the struggle in the Middle East, which previous studies did not explore in depth.

3. Data collection and analysis

A corpus of 200 Arabic MPS's was collected from social media, especially Facebook and YouTube posts and comments on Arabic media reports and political events. They describe leaders, political parties, ethnicities, religious groups, countries, the media and others. MPS's are spontaneously coined by journalists, political analysts, Youtubers and common people.

In classifying the sample of MPSs, the author did not follow any existing semantic, pragmatic, or speech acts theories, nor any pre-determined theoretical categories that may not match the MPSs in the data. The classification system used in this study is based on the author's own analysis and original insights. It is data-

driven and organically structured. The author started by sorting out MPSs, into categories and giving each category a label that describes it. The MPSs were first classified according to the target of the MPSs which included political figures (El-Sisy, Bashar Assad, Julani, King Abdullah, Erdogan, Trump & Biden, Arab rulers, Israeli leaders, Nawaf Salam, politicians in Lebanon), media (TV channels), countries and states (Iran, Turkey, Israel, Arab countries, Lebanon, Syria), Arab armies, Political and/or opposition parties, Religious MPS's, ethnic and racial MPSs. Then, they were phonologically, lexically and semantically classified into satiric word play, religious MPSs, ethnic and racial MPSs (insults), pejorative descriptions produced by combining the name of ethnicity with a general-purpose insult, and insulting modifiers to create loaded descriptivism and words and phrases that express hatred, derogation, hostility, criticism, contempt, disparagement, abuse, and disrespect towards those they oppose and towards the social and political situation (Al-Jarf 2021b; Al-Jarf 2015; Al-Jarf 2010; Al-Jarf 1998; Al-Jarf 1995).

Some types of PSs mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper are not used in the current classification of the sample of MPSs herein. The classification system used in the current study includes a linguistic analysis of slur meaning and usage, a semanticist vs. non-semanticist approaches, the psychological, social and historical and impact of slurs.

For validity purposes, the categories, classification and labelling were verified by two colleagues majoring in linguistics. Discrepancies were solved by discussion. Results of the data analysis are reported qualitatively.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Targets of MPSs in the current study

(i) *Political figures* such as:

- *El-Sisi*: وسيط العار (agent of disgrace); الخسيسى (a derogatory variation of (el-sisi)); بلحة (date) mocking President Sisi; سيء الذكر (ill-reputed, infamous, or notorious); جار السوء (nasty neighbour); الغباء السيساوي (Sisi-like stupidity).
- *Bashar Assad*: الفار (the rat); الهارب (the fugitive); الفاسد (the corrupt); المجرم (the criminal); الطاغية (the tyrant), بشار الحمار (donkey), بشار الجحش (mule). and so on.
- *Julani (Ahmed El-Shara)*: الإرهابي (terrorist); الصهيوني (Zionist); ايقونة الإرهاب (terrorism icon); داعشي (ISIS affiliated); الدجال (quack); عراب الصفقات الإسرائيلية (architect of Israeli deals); تاريخ الجولاني الأسود (Julani's dark history); الجولاني (Julani as a neo-colonial project); مشروع الاستعمار الجديد (leader of chaos).

- *King Abdullah of Jordan*: ملك البندورة (king of tomatoes).
 - *Nawaf Salam Prime Minister of Lebanon*: الدعي ابن الدعي (pretender and son of the pretender); ليبيض طناجر قدام الإمارات (to whiten pots in front of UAE); عملاء (agents/mercenaries with the rank of prime minister); عبد مأمور عند عبد مأمور (a servant in the service of a servant).
 - *Lebanese officials and politicians*: عندهم تكفير ودعشة ليبرالية (They have liberal Takfir and ISIS); دولة داعشية (an ISIS state); إعادة تدوير الفشل (recycling failure); متكبرون، مغفلون، متعالون، كارهون (scum of the sectarian regime); حثالة النظام الطائفي (arrogant, ignorant, haughty, people-hating, a disappointment scum); كالفيروس (like a virus); تواطؤ بالجريمة (complicity in the crime).
 - *Erdogan*: كردوغان (Kordogan), قردوغان (Qardogan), ايردوغان (Eredogan); العصملي (Ottoman).
 - *Trump & Biden*: المهج/البلياتشو (clown); كرنب (Cabbage); الخبل (madman); حلف (global bully); البلطجي المنوم (hypnotized bully); والتقى المهزجان على ارض السيرك (Satan's pact Musk & Trump); البطة العرجاء (lame duck). (The two clowns met in the oval circus).
 - *Some Muslim Shaikhs*: افياخي الحسيني (Avikhay Alhossainy); شيخ الازعر (rowdy Shaikh for Al-Azhar); شيخ السمبوسة (samosa shaikh for Shaikh Sudais); مفتي الارهابيين (Sheikhs of regret); مشايخ الندامة (sultans' Sheikhs); (terrorists' mufti).
 - *Arab rulers*: حكام العار (rulers of disgrace); عسكرة (military rule); (Zionist Arabs). (militarized state); العرب المتصهينين.
 - *Israeli leaders*: ابن الكلب بن غفير (war criminal); مجرم الحرب (the vile/stunk); (Ben Gvir SOB (insulting phrase); فيخو (Vikho) short for Avichay Adraee).
- (ii) *Media especially T.V. channels* as: حظيرة خنازير الانتاج الإعلامي (Media production pigpen); قنوات العهر (fornication channels); العبرية (the Hebrew Channel) for Al-Arabiya, وكالة امريكا للارهاب (American Agency for Terrorism); اعلام متصهين (Zionist media); اعلام السامسونج (Samsung media).
- (iii) *Cyber warfare* as: الذباب الإلكتروني (electronic flies); الجراد الإلكتروني (electronic locusts); المعيز الإلكتروني (electronic goats).
- (iv) *Countries, States, and Communities*:
- *Israel*: الكيان اللقيط (bastard entity); الاحتلال الفاشي (fascist occupation); الجنسية (Israel is a holy cow in American politics); اسرائيل بقرة مقدسة في السياسة الامريكية (the shit nationality); كيان سرطاني نازي فاشي (a cancerous Nazi Fascist entity).

- *UAE*: تجار العقارات العربية (Arab real estate traders); حكام الخيانات العربية (Arab betrayals).
 - *Arab countries*: حثالة العرب (Arab scum); حثالة الشعوب (scum of all people); العرب المتصهيونون (Arab Zionists); العربان (Bedouin Arabs).
- (v) *Arab armies* as جيوش العار (armies of disgrace); جيش البسكوت والجمبري وفوزية (The army of biscuits, shrimp, and Fawziya).
- (vi) *Political and/or opposition parties* as:
- *Muslim Brothers*: الخرفان المتأسلمين (Islamized sheep).
 - *Hezbollah in Lebanon*: حزب الشيطان (Satan's Party); حزب اللات Allat idol Party; حزب ايران (Party of Iran); الضاحية-ستان (Dahie-stan).
 - *Palestinian Resistance* as described by opponents: حماسستان (Hamas-stan); فتحستان (Fatah-stan); حماس الإرهابية terrorist Hamas; الضاحية ستان (Dahieh-stan).
 - *Terrorist groups in Syria*: هيئة تحرير الشام (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham); هيئة (Tea Stirring body) and هيئة تحريك الشاي (Sham Destruction body) (Sham Destruction body),
 - *Houthis in Yemen*: الحوثيين الإرهابيين (Houthi terrorists); ميليشيا الحوثي (Houthi militia); جماعة الحوثي (Houthi group); and "a global terrorist organization" by the U.S.A.
- (vii) *Sectarian or Religious MPS's* that attack or demean based on religious or sectarian identity. For example:
- *Muslim Brothers*: جردان الاخوان (Brothers' rats); الخرفان المتأسلمين (Islamized sheep), سنستان (Sunni-stan).
 - *Shiites*: Magians; المجرس; الروافض Rejectors; Safavid, الشيعة (Shiite-stan).
- (viii) *Ethnic and racial MPS's* that refer to national or ethnic affiliation as:
- *Palestinians*: الفلسطيني هو مجرد ذيل للاراني (the Palestinian is a tail/appendage of Iran); حيوانات بشرية (human animals), terrorists.
 - *Israeli settlers*: قطعان المستوطنين (herds of settlers); المستخرين (destructive individuals); احفاد القردة والخنازير (grandchildren of monkeys and pigs).

4.2. Phonological and Lexical Structure of MPS's

1) Satiric word play which includes:

Phoneme substitution leading to meaning shifts due to altered sounds:

- الخنزيرة /xan-zi:ra/ & الجزيرة (Aljazeera) where the first syllable was substituted by /xan/ so that the new word means *swine*.
- قردوغان /qirdogan/, كردوغان /kurdoga:n/, ايردوغان /i:r-dogan/ & Erdogan, where /qird-/ means monkey, /kur-/ means small donkey, / i:r-/ means (male sexual organ).
- الاخرائية /ixra:-ʔi:liyya/ & الاسرائيلية /isra:-ʔi:liyya/ where /ʔixra:/ means shit.
- المستخرين /mustaxribi:n/ (destructive individuals) rather than مستوطنين /mustawTini:n/ (settlers). Both words are rhyming.
- عبوة شديدة الانفجار (high-digging devices causing deep holes in the ground) instead of عبوة شديدة الانفجار (high-explosive devices).
- Calling the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar شيخ الازعر (thug) for changing his stance under pressure or failing to uphold his responsibilities.
- هيئة تخريب الشاي (Sham Destruction Body) & هيئة تحريك الشاي (stirring tea) instead of هيئة تحرير الشام Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (Saham Liberation Body). تحرير /taHri:r/ (Liberation) was replaced by تحريك الشاي /taHri:k/ (Stirring Tea) and تخريب الشام /taxri:b/ (Sabotaging Sham). Both rhyme with تحرير (liberation). The substitutions create mockery by altering the original meaning. "Stirring Tea" implies inactivity or triviality, while "sabotaging Sham" implies destruction rather than liberation.

Phoneme interpolation causing meaning shifts due to altered sounds which contribute to new meanings: العربية /ʔarabiyya/ & العبرية /ʔibriyya/ (the Hebrew channel). Interpolation at the word level took place in افيكهاي الحسيني (Avikhay Alhossainy) which combines the first name to the spokesman of the Israeli Army and the last name of a Muslim Shaikh who play a role in disclosing sensitive information. These MPSs imply a demeaning satirical semantic distortion referring to the role played by the enemy.

Phoneme addition causing meaning shifts as in السيبي /si:si/ & الخسيبي /xi:ssi:si/ (the villain) by adding the syllable /xi/ to alter the meaning.

Paronomasia, i.e. using words with similar sounds resulting in an intentional phonetic distortion as in حزب الله /Allah/ & حزب اللات /Allat/. Here, الله (Allah or God) was replace by اللات (Allat), a pre-Islamic Arabian idol. This created a derogatory deformation as the semantic shift carries both religious and ideological implications, mocking the group by associating it with pre-Islamic paganism instead of Islamic ideology.

- 2) *Word substitutions in which semantic distortions* are used to reframe the connotative meaning of the MPSs: الاخوان & الخرفان المسلمين / الجردان المسلمين / الجردان المسلمين / jirtha:n/, /xirfa:n/ & /?ixwa:n/ respectively; الخيانات دولة تاجر العقارات / امارات العربية & العربية / aqa:ra:t/, /xiyana:t/ & ?ima:ra:t/; (Media production pigpen) & (Media Production City) where city was substituted by pigpen. In most of the examples herein, the original word/phrase rhymes with the resulting MPS. At the same time, it reinforces the intended negative meaning. The meaning shifts were due to word substitution. The original and the resulting MPS are related and can only be understood together.
- 3) *Word clipping, splitting or shortening* as in النتن /nitin/ clipping of Netan-yahu & افيخو /afi:xo/ short for Avichay Adraee, spokesman of Israeli Army. In وسخ (dirty *Yahu); نجس ياهو (unclean/impure *Yahu, the first element was substituted by the short lexemes وسخ , نجس , نتن which mean unclean.
- 4) *Use of Binomials* such as: (i) العمشات والحمزات Al-Amshat & Al-Hamzat are two Syrian Armed factions, accused of corruption and abuses. This slur generalizes the factions, making them sound collectively responsible. (ii) العوام والهوام (Al-Awam & Al-Hawam) means common people and (insects, pests or vermin) implying that some groups are insignificant or harmful. (iii) لا جولاني ولا غولاني neither Julani (Ahmed Shara) nor Ghoulani (the Israeli Brigade or ogre-related), rejects al-Julani, leader of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, and distorts his name into غولاني (Ghoulani) or likening him to a ghou (غول) (ogre), a mythical creature associated with excessive power. This binomial balances two similar-sounding words to reinforce rejection. (iv) شبيح نبيح (Shabeeh) & نبيح (Nabeeh) referring to pro-Assad militia members as loud, aggressive, and blindly loyal people. These MPSs use rhyme, sound play, metaphor, parallelism and opposing meanings to create a sharp critique and reinforce political narratives (Al-Jarf 2016).
- 5) *Pejorative lexical items created by blending words or adding foreign suffixes* as صهيو (Zio-) referring to Zionism with other political or ideological labels as صهيو-امريكي (zio-American), صهيوصفوية (Zio-Safawi), ماسو صهيوني (Maso-Zionist) for ideological framing to imply U.S.-Israeli collusion in Middle Eastern affairs, a secret global agenda, and to delegitimize opposing religious or political groups. In other examples, -stan is added to create lexical hybrids as حماسستان (Hamas-stan), فتحستان (Fatah-stan), شيعستان (Shia-stan), سنيستان (Sunni-stan) that are often used in sectarian debates. They imply the transformation of a region into a place dominated or strongly influenced by

an ideology or a group. This usage is pejorative, reflecting criticism or a biased viewpoint. It mockingly frames certain movements as separate entities. In a third set, اخوانجي (Ikhwanji) (related to Muslim Brothers), وطنجي (watanji) (patriotic), ثورجي (thouraji) (rebel/ revolutionary) are used to mock Muslim Brother's supporters, blind patriotism and revolutionaries. They imply fanaticism, blind loyalty, and excessive nationalism. عسكريتاريا (militaritaria) is a mocking term for military-dominated countries. It implies authoritarianism. الدم قراطية (blood-cracy) is a satirical twist on ديمقراطية (democracy), implying that democracy leads to violence or bloodshed (Al-Jarf, 2023a; Al-Jarf, 2021b; Al Jarf, 2011).

- 6) *Use of vivid and evocative images and symbolisms* to convey strong negative connotations. Many examples in the sample use animalistic MPSs in which individuals or groups are compared to "sheep, donkeys, dog, monkey, snake, rats, cow, fly, locust, goat" to imply negative traits, to strip individuals or groups of their humanity, to dehumanize and demean them, portray them as harmful, or imply deceit, filth, and savagery. They also denote hidden danger or frame opponents as weak or deserving of harm. Examples of animalistic MPSs are حيوانات بشرية (human animals); ابن الكلب بن غفير (SOB son of a bitch ben Gvir); الخنازير رجعوا يقصفوا غزة (the pigs are bombing Gaza); البغل فطس (the mule has passed away); and غارات وحشية (brutal air strikes). Muslim Brothers are called جردان الاخوان (Brothers' rats); الجولاني وجردان الإخوان (Al-Julani and the Muslim Brother rats). These are used to dehumanize political opponents. Qirdogan & Kirdogan are slurs used for Erdogan where Qird is monkey and Kir is donkey. الخنزيرة (swine) is a slur for Aljazeera, أمة النعاج (a nation of ewes), اسرائيل بقرة مقدسة في السياسة (Israel is a holy cow in American politics), and تغول نفوذ نتنياهو (excessive use of power). Opponents of Bashar Assad call him بشار الحمار (donkey), بشار الجحش (mule). These MPSs are personal insults and are used to mock the Syrian President. In Arabic culture, donkeys and mules symbolize foolishness and stubbornness. Predatory imagery as رأس الأفعى (snake's head) suggests hidden danger. غارات وحشية (savage/brutal air strikes) mocks death and destruction and highlights excessive aggression. Cyber MPSs as الذباب الإلكتروني (electronic flies), الجراد الإلكتروني (electronic locusts) and الغنم الإلكتروني (electronic goats) are often linked to political entities or interest groups. They aim to influence debates or silence critics. They use likes, shares, and comments to make certain viewpoints appear more popular and harass or discredit opposing individuals or movements.

MPSs containing *disease imagery* (e.g., virus, cancer) like إسرائيل كيان سرطاني (Israel a cancerous entity) suggest that individuals or ideologies are harmful or corrupt and need to be eradicated.

Some MPSs in the sample contain *food imagery* as in جيش البسكوت والجمبري وفوزية (Biscuit, Shrimp, and Fawziya Army). This MPS is derogatory and critical of military forces and mock the army as weak or ineffective. حقوق الانسان والبتنجان (eggplant and human rights) is a humorous and critical twist. It uses satire to mock the concept of human rights as meaningless or hypocritical. Eggplant implies something is trivial and unimportant. The phrase implies that no human rights exist or that the human rights slogan is a fallacy. بتنجان /bitinga:n/ rhymes with انسان /?imsa:n/ to make it memorable. كرنب /krumb/ (cabbage) is a clever and humorous linguistic twist. It is an example of wordplay and imagery. It is being used playfully for Trump because both words rhyme and there is a visual similarity between Trump's distinctive hairstyle and facial expressions with the round shape of a cabbage. هيئة تحريك الشاي (Hay'at Tahreek al-Shay) is a humorous distortion of هيئة تحرير الشام (liberation) with تحريك (stirring) and الشام (Sham) with الشاي (tea). This makes it sound trivial, as if the militia's role is merely stirring tea instead of engaging in serious action.

Moreover, metonyms containing *inanimate objects* imagery are used to dehumanize, condemn opponents, looking at opponents as agents of evil as in America's puppet; مزبلة التاريخ (history's dump); America's tail; الشيطان الأكبر (Big Satan); سلاح الشيطان (Stan's weapon); حزب الشيطان (Satan's Party); حزب اللات (Allat Party); مخطط الشياطين (Satans' plan); صفقة الدم (blood bargain/deal).

In MPSs as زلزال سياسي (political earthquake); طوفان الاقصى (AlAqsa Flood); فتح باب جهنم (like hell); سياسة التجويع (starvation policy), individuals or groups are compared to *destructive forces as floods, earthquakes, storms, or plagues*, framing them as causing chaos or suffering. Such MPSs suggest instability, upheaval, and overwhelming and uncontrollable damage.

4.3. Semantic, Pragmatic and Rhetorical Tools

Semantic tools are meaning-based, pragmatic tools are context and intent-based, whereas rhetorical tools are persuasive and strategic which are described below.

- (1) *Use of Dysphemisms* in numerous examples in the sample. For example, opponents refer to Bashar Assad, his regime and followers as الرئيس المخلوع (deposed president); الفلول (remnants of the old regime); الشبيحة (militias/

individuals who supported Bashar Assad); قوات الأسد (Assad forces); نظام الأسد (Assad regime); النظام العلوي (Alawite regime); رأس النظام (head of the regime); النظام البائد (obsolete regime). These MPSs delegitimize and frame the former leader as disgraced, irrelevant, refer to loss of legitimacy and power, and the government as a dictatorship rather than a state institution. Similarly, opponents of Julani use MPSs to discredit him as in تاريخ الجولاني الأسود (the black history of Al-Julani); عراب الصفقات الإسرائيلية (the architect of Israeli deals); مشروع (the leader of chaos in Syria); زعيم الفوضى لسوريا (the leader of chaos in Syria); الميليشيات الجولاني (Al-Julani's militias); الجولاني وجرذان الاخوان (Al-Julani and the Brother-hood rats); سقوط ايقونة الخراب (the fall of the icon of destruction), ديمقراطية الخراب (democracy of destruction). These slurs use ideological conflicts as a reference, discredit al-Julani by emphasizing his past actions that are perceived as harmful. They suggest collusion with Israel, accuse him of betrayal and frame foreign influence as modern imperialism. They mock governance, portray his system as corrupt or dysfunctional. They frame him and his followers as an armed faction and as a source of devastation rather than a legitimate force. Some MPSs mock the so-called democratic systems that have led to instability, corruption, or destruction, implying that democracy has failed to bring real progress. Likewise, Arab and Palestinian opponents of Netanyahu use MPSs as الصهاينة الى مزابل التاريخ (Zionists will be relegated to history's dumps); تغول نفوذ نتنياهو (Netanyahu's excessive influence, intrusion, or domination); الجرائم الوحشية (brutal crimes), مجرم حرب (war criminal). Such MPSs strip him of historical significance. Dysphemic MPSs are deliberately harsh or offensive. They are used to devalue, insult, or delegitimize political figures, groups, or ideologies.

- (2) *Use of pejoratives produced by combining a general-purpose insult and the name of an ethnicity* as in calling Arabs أمة النعاج (a nation of ewes). This MPS implies dehumanization, passivity, cowardice, or blind obedience. It criticizes Arabis for lacking resistance, or independent decision making. It reflects political frustration. وسطاء العار (mediators of shame) implies that negotiators or intermediaries are acting disgracefully and are betraying a cause. ظاهرة صوتية (Arabs are a vocal phenomenon. It is applied to politicians or activists who talk but do not act. It suggests political ineffectiveness, empty rhetoric without action. MPSs like الرافضة (Rejectors) and المجوس (Magians) carry religious and ideological weight. They are examples of sectarian, religious labelling, with a historical reference and ideological framing. They are used pejoratively in sectarian discourse to attack Shiites, implying ideological deviation, a derogatory

or exclusionary manner. These slurs reflect deep-rooted political, ideological, and sectarian tensions, shaping discourse in conflicts and power struggles.

- (3) *Loaded descriptivism with common insulting modifiers* as in مزبلة التاريخ (history's dump) الشيطان الأكبر (Grand Satan), أذنان أمريكا (America's tail), النظام البائد (obsolete regime), الفلول (remnants of the past regime), الديمقراطية الخراب (democracy of destruction); وسخ ياهو (dirty Yahu). Such MPSs dehumanize political figures, imply irrelevance or disgrace. They imply that obsolete, or disgraceful leaders, regimes, or ideologies will be forgotten or condemned by history. The analogy between the USA and Satan was originally coined by Iranian leader Khomeini to portray the USA as evil and a corrupting force in global politics. It is still used in anti-Western rhetoric. America's tails & puppets of America imply that leaders are servants of foreign powers, rather than independent. They imply a foreign influence, and that leaders or groups lack independence and act as agents of American policy. They imply that the former rulers were oppressive or corrupt and supporters of the past regimes try to maintain influence despite political change. These slurs reflect deep political tensions and ideological conflicts and are often used in propaganda and social media debates.
- (4) *Exaggeration* is used as an MPS strategy. It amplifies certain traits or behaviours to create a more damaging description. These MPSs inflate perceptions of brutality, tyranny, corruption, or historical disgrace. As in labelling some political figures or actions as ديكتاتور (dictator); طاغية (tyrant); الإرهابي (terrorist); عراب الصفقات (architect of deals); الفاسد (corrupt); تغول (excessive aggression); الجرائم الوحشية (brutal crimes); نازي (Nazy); فاشي (Fascist); مجزرة (massacre); إبادة جماعية (genocide). These MPSs are commonly used in propaganda, political, and ideological conflicts. They strip figures and regimes of legitimacy, and frame them as violent, tyrannical, corrupt, or disgraceful.
- (5) *Use of sarcastic and funny MPSs*. For example, the shortened/clipped name فيخو (Vikho short for Avichay Adraee), the Israeli army spokesman serves to mock or diminish his authority as an Israeli political figure. He is given a pejorative nickname. The use of sarcastic and funny MPSs is common in partisan and populist slurs, where opponents are framed in ways that evoke ridicule. Another example is إعلام سامسونج (Samsung Media) which refers to the pro-government media, that is accused of transmitting news and instructions automatically without any analysis or verification, just like a Samsung mobile that sends information without thinking about it. The use of خيش الاختلال (burlap disruption), instead of occupation army, metaphorically suggests something weak, rough or

crude. الاختلال (disruption) reinforces the idea of disorder, framing the Israeli occupation as causing chaos rather than order. Regarding حقوق الانسان والبتنجان (eggplant and human rights); جيش البسكوت والجمبري وفوزية (Biscuit, Shrimp, and Fawziya Army); calling Trump كرنب /krumb/ (cabbage), هيئة تحريك الشاي (tea-stirring body), these were discussed above.

4.4. Purposes of Arabic MPSs describing Middle East conflicts

Phonologically, semantically and pragmatically, MPSs express abuse, disparagement, contempt, criticism, hostility and/or disrespect. They show disapproval, anger at the group, party, or political events, and personalities they oppose. They heighten and prejudice people's opinion by using loaded language. They denounce the party they oppose and honour the one they support. Social media users, Youtubers, activists, journalists, use MPSs to propagate their messages, provoke thinking, or attract more supporters. MPSs serve as powerful rhetorical tools, as they simplify complex issues into emotionally charged language that can be easily understood. They aim to attract attention, initiate debate, or challenge the status quo in their country or society. They depict their opponents as threatening or evil and create a sense of fear or urgency for dealing with opponents. MPSs in this study are deeply rooted in the Arabic political, social, or cultural context in which they are used, making them more effective and resonant with the Arab receivers in a particular country where specific MPSs are used. MPSs reduce complex political issues or identities to simple, easily digestible images or ideas, often oversimplifying and distorting reality. They amplify certain characteristics or actions to create a more damaging description. They depend on vivid and evocative images to create a powerful mental picture and stimulate images of danger and deceit. They suggest that opponents are evil forces that need to be eradicated. They enkindle supporters against a perceived internal threat. MPS's can be a double-edged sword. While they might engage people and foster solidarity among like-minded people, they can also polarize discussions, spread misinformation, or alienate those with differing points of view. The spread of social media amplifies both the positive and negative effects of MPSs. They can also lead to misunderstanding, harm, and division in the society and escalate tensions. They can hinder constructive dialogue, acceptance and mutual understanding.

5. Comparison with Prior Studies

The current study collected a sample of Arabic MPSs to explore their types, phonological, lexical, semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical structure and purpose of using them. Unlike prior studies, data analysis in this study was based on the author's own classification of real MPS usage rather than semantic, pragmatic and speech act theories. It was based on a bottom-up rather than top-down classification. This study analyses the phonological and lexical structure of MPSs as satiric word (phoneme substitution, phoneme interpolation, phoneme addition, and paronomasia), word substitution, word clipping, splitting or shortening, use of binomials and vivid and evocative images and symbolisms (animals, diseases, inanimate objects, food and destructive forces). The study also describes semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical tools used as dysphemisms, pejoratives, loaded descriptivism with insulting modifiers, exaggeration, sarcastic and funny MPSs.

The types of MPSs detected in the current study are partially similar to those mentioned in prior studies such as racial slurs by Placencia 2024; Imraq, Aziz, and Noor 2025; animalistic slurs by Enock and Over 2023), populist (Jones 2024), partisan slurs (Karol and Scott 2025; Placencia 2024), ideological nationalistic, historical, cultural, party-based slurs. No sexist slurs like those mentioned by Cervone et al. (2025) were found. This study contributed new types of slurs as those containing food, diseases, inanimate objects, destructive forces, cyber MPSs, dysphemisms, pejoratives, loaded descriptivism with insulting modifiers, exaggeration, sarcastic and funny MPSs.

The types of MPSs detected in this study are partially consistent with those found in prior studies on Arab Spring discourse by the author such as political (in)correctness, the cancel-culture attitude and religious sectarian language after the Arab Spring (Al-Jarf, 2023b); emerging political expressions in Arab Spring media (Al-Jarf 2022a) and sectarian language and perception of the "other" after the Arab Spring (Al-Jarf 2022b).

Bell (2021) indicated that MPSs are embedded in media discourse to discredit opposition groups. Political elites, political analysts, Youtubers and even common people use slurs to manipulate public opinion. The purposes of PMSs in the current study are similar to those described in prior studies by Diaz-Legaspe (2020); Bianchi (2018); Guercio (2021); Imraq, Aziz, and Noor (2025); Bruno (2022); Karol and Scott (2025); Sidorkina (2025); Diaz-Legaspe, (2018); Losada (2021); Liu (2019); Orlando and Saab (2020); Croom (2015); Jeshion (2018); Placencia (2024); Cepollaro (2017); Guercio (2021). MPSs play a role in shaping discourse and societal dynamics. MPSs influence social attitudes, mobilize nationalist sentiment, gather support, attack and delegitimize opponents. They deepen polarization, reinforce social exclusion, and

preserve ideological biases. They play a role in derogation, marginalize target groups, exclude minorities, dehumanize, foster contempt, reinforce negative stereotypes, and legitimize derogatory content.

6. Recommendations

The sample of Arabic MPSs collected from social media and reported in this study are closely linked to hate speech and cyber racism, estrangement and lack of acceptance and understanding. MPSs in this study serve many purposes and offer insights into political language, ideology, and persuasion. They aim to shape the public's perceptions of political opponents, delegitimize and reinforce stereotypes about minority and ethnic groups living in the same country. They frame political figures, issues and events using emotionally charged language, affecting how the public interpret policies or candidates. MPSs operate at a deep cognitive level, triggering associations that influence common people's behaviour and political views. Studying PMSs helps track shifts in political discourse on social media, revealing changes in target audience values and beliefs. They highlight political humour and satire that contribute to polarization. By analysing metaphorical slurs, researchers uncover how language moulds public opinion and policy debates.

To alleviate the harmful effects of MPSs on social media users, especially the young generation, this study recommends educating the public to critically analyse and question the language used in political discourse on social media, solve conflicts by constructive dialogue through meetings, and campaigns that advocate national unity and civil peace, and foster environments where differing opinions are accepted and can coexist. Political discussions should be approached with care and respect, empowering positive narratives that address MPS's calmly and factually to neutralize their effect and help avoid heightening tensions. Instead, focusing on informed and respectful discussions can lead to better understanding and cooperation.

To combat MPSs on social media, students and instructors from different Arab countries, different social, ethnic and religious backgrounds enter into dialogue with each other on the X platform to gain knowledge of the reality the current Middle East conflicts and to critically reflect on them. The learning environment on the X platform should be characterized by mutual respect, trust and support of one another. Since MPSs are very common on social media, developing critical awareness of the reality of conflicts in the Middle East through reflection and action, and raising students' critical awareness will help interpret hate and derogatory speech, and help them understand related news. The students may gather information about Middle East conflicts to build up a picture of the real situation. They can get up-to-date

information from multiple sources to get multiple points of views. They can monitor bias on social media platforms, verify information, examine the source, oppose hate content with counter-narratives. They can send out consistent informed counter-hate textual messages to each other to help promote facts, encourage salutogenic behaviours, calm down fears and discourage students from becoming biased. Students may use art and culture for creating counter narratives to counterbalance one-sided narratives and overgeneralizations by hate speakers. Students' global awareness can raise by bringing the outside world to the students' learning environment through publishing and watching videos about current Middle East conflicts. The students can comment on and discuss video content. Instructors can encourage students to understand the Islamic view of the other to teach understand, tolerance and acceptance. Students can search for and tweet examples of conflicts that took place throughout history for comparison purposes (Al-Jarf, 2021a).

Social media platforms as Facebook and YouTube can play a role by moderating racial and sectarian content and setting guidelines that discourage the use of MPSs. Algorithms can be adjusted to prioritize constructive content.

These strategies are believed to be effective in reducing the harmful and negative effects of social media MPSs on the public.

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