Translation of English Social Media Content into Urdu: A Study of Digital Discourse

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Abstract

The study explores if translating English social media input into Urdu language has any impact on audience engagement; specifically whether sentiment-consistent translations along with cultural adaptation can affect the count of likes, shares and comments. This study has the potential to clarify whether translated content increases relevance and engagement for Urdu-speaking audiences as compared to original English content. The study used an independent samples t-test using SPSS to compare audience engagement data relating to English and translated Urdu content. The results show statistically significant difference in engagement metrics where the original English content performs better than its Urdu translation. This analysis has shown that on average, the English content earned 491 % more engagement compared to this translated in Urdu. Statistical difference was significant due to the p-value 0.002 and a confidence interval of 95% ranging between 241.75 % and 740.25 %. These results imply that the Urdu-speaking users better interact with original English social media content comparing to its translated Urdu version. As a result, the study does not accept the null hypothesis that translated content would provide as much or better engagement than original content. The findings in this study highlight the need to evaluate digital engagement strategies used in translation and cultural adaptation.

Keywords: Social Media, Translation, Audience Engagement, Digital Discourse, Cultural Adaptation, Urdu

1.1   Introduction

In this digital era, social media cannot be overlooked as one of the main tools for information dissemination, engagement and cross-cultural dialogue (Jasrai et al., 2024). Growing across the globe, these platforms demand that content creators and marketers translate their social media content to reach audiences in multiple languages and cultures (Haris, 2024). The translation into languages like Urdu of original English content from social media is challenging because it requires a cultural adaptation which allows the purpose and tone of this content to be preserved (Khan & Ilyas, 2024). This becomes of particular importance when the content being translated relies on humour, persuasion or cultural

references that are intrinsically ingrained in the source and are simply incomputable. With Urdu as one of the most spoken languages in South Asia, it acts as a link for a huge part of global humanity especially among Pakistan, India, and communities globally (Ambreen, 2024). Given the high number of Urdu speakers, however, little research has been conducted around how translated social media content can influence audience engagement and user perceptions. Recent scholarship in digital discourse and translation studies suggests a more complex understanding of how the act of translating a tweet entails more than simply moving words across languages. Rather, it requires a deep understanding of cultural and social considerations which can significantly alter how a piece is perceived by the intended audience (Desjardins, 2021).

This intersection between language, technology and culture is starkly obvious if you just translate social media content into Urdu. Desjardins (2021) goes so far as to argue that the dynamic and interactive character of social media communications brings complexity to any translational overlay. The social media posts, when compared to only text follow different forms instead ad the images, emojis, multimedia and they may need process of interpretation and adaptation to fit the cultural and social norms of Urdu audience (Alnuzaili, 2024). Additionally, social platforms live and die by interactivity with users so likes/shares/comments are used as key measures to gauge not only relevancy but resonance with the content. Thus, a good translation will not only get the meaning right but it will also resonate with that community in such a way that they are more likely to engage. On the other, it is difficult because Urdu and English speakers have a different frame of cultural context and values (Hashmi, 2024). English Language social media posts are often reflective of western cultural norms, humor and societal values which might not necessarily resonate with Urdu-speaking audiences that have a different set of experience and social variables (Lai, 2022). Humor is a prime example of this, as it tends to be more culture-specific. After all, what may sound funny in English if translated word by word into Urdu may not even be understood. This supports the idea of cultural equivalence in translation suggested by theoretical positions such as Venuti (1995) and its requirement that translators identify content to be domesticated or to remain foreignized toward the intended public. Making social media content more familiar and relatable to the target culture seems to be a bigger driver in engagement messages community domestication.

Humor is not the sole form of communication: persuasive and informational content must also be adapted to their new cultural context. Effective translation requires an accurate understanding of the culture in which the target audience processes information (House, 2015). For example, if a piece of content is designed to be persuasive, the translator will need to have a good understanding not only of what the audience values and believes in, but also knowing what motivates them which keeps ensuring that even after translation, the message retains its impact. When translating fact-based information, the tone and style must also be altered to reflect how people communicate in the target country. Similarly, research on the translation of digital content by O'Hagan (2019) suggests that a translator should pay attention to listening to social and cultural expectations get more audience engagement after translating their textual content whereas through its publication culture tells the readers about adaptation or not positive outcome is possible because still but carrier-to-noise ratio have certain factors showing different effects. Several studies have suggested that cultural adaptation can help increase audience engagement. An example for this include how Chen and Li (2020) discovered that social media posts which are adapted to resonate with local values/community norms have almost 3x higher engagement compared to being translated

word-for-word. This is especially true for Urdu-speaking viewers since they may not get excited by direct translations and are used to content that meshes well with their cultural background. The same way, in a study on translation and culture argues that culturally adapted translations have higher chances of being seen as genuine and accessible by the target audience, hence boosting interaction and engagement (Plyth & Craham, 2023).

Translating English social media content to Urdu is a long process where not only the linguistic context is understood but also the comprehensive understanding of culture and audience behavior. Given the growing influence of social media on international communication, content creators and translators should focus more on cultural adaptation than on linguistic accuracy. This way, they will be able to cater the Urdu audience accordingly which means increased engagement and prompt communication. This study investigates the impact of two distinct translation approaches: literal and culturally adapted, on audience engagement through perceived relevance in humor, information, and persuasion as three basic types of content over Urdu-language social media.

1.2   Research Objectives:

1. To evaluate the impact of purpose-aligned translations on engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments.
2. To assess whether cultural adaptation in translations leads to higher perceived relevance and engagement among Pashto-speaking audiences.

1.3   Hypotheses:

H_0 The translation of English social media contents into Urdu do not result in higher audience engagement compared to the original English content among Urdu-speaking users.

H_1 The original English social media contents result in higher audience engagement as compared to translated English contents among Urdu-speaking users.

2   Literature Review

Translating social media content from English to Urdu in reality is a complex and very much a dynamic process, not only linguistically but culturally too. The growing importance of translation in providing content to multilingual and diverse audiences due to the central role that social media has come to play in communication and engagement among a massive global audience, has garnered interest from researchers — especially since there is scarce knowledge on how best to go about digital text translation. The literature review provides an overview of the available resources on social media translation both in terms of audience attention, cultural transposition and scale preferences made by users when translating social media content.

2.1   Media Translation and Audience Engagement

The translation of social media content varies from traditional forms of translations tremendously since it is interactive and requires a quick turn-around on digital platforms. Translated content does well when users engage with it, whether through likes, shares, comments or reposts, and since social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and

Instagram are all based upon user generated content, engagement is an essential indicator for the success of translated content. Readership is one of the drivers of social media translation, and several researches have developed strategies for handling different scenarios showing that readership can be improved if posts are adapted to audiences' cultural expectations. Further) According to Katan (2014), translating for social media might involve knowledge about the interaction schemes on digital environments. Social media is consuming more active attention than traditional media content so it should be engaging and relatable. Additionally, Katan claims culturally adapted translations — where the translation considers its target audience's culture and values — actually do much better in terms of engagement. This is particularly critical when translating from English to Urdu, since the cultural difference between Western and South Asian audiences can considerably change how content is perceived.

Desjardins (2021) agrees with Katan, advocating for less direct translations of social media content Recent study by Desjardin supports the argument that literal translation does not align and connect the audience marking a decline in engagement rates. Desjardins invites the translators to concentrate on what motivation lay in the initial post, whether humor, persuasiveness or simply caloric substances. Take the example of posts that are funny in a Western cultural norm, these posts will not be as enjoyable or even understood by Urdu speaking audiences unless you mould these humour pieces into their use case. In the same line, persuasive messages should be framed based on what is valued by the target audience in order to retain persuasion effectiveness. Empirical proof of the effectiveness of cultural adaptation in translation on social media is also provided by Chen and Li (2020). For example, the authors conducted a cross-cultural analysis of social media posts that were translated from English to Chinese and demonstrated that translating culturally adapted messages, or messages tailored according to local audience values (i.e., collectivism), led to higher rates of engagement than literal translations. The study was based on Chinese audiences, although its results also serve as a reflection of English media/language translation/offshoring for Urdu language since it represents a significant culture adaptation to make the content relatable.

2.2 Translation and cultural adaptation

Like with every good translation, adaptations to the culture play a major role in the successfulness of social media content. However, the notion of cultural adaptation recommends customizing content so that it relates to the audience culture and social backgrounds. Two kinds of translation strategies: domestication and foreignization are named according to Venuti (1995). Domestication is utilized to make the content indigenous and approach them within their comfort zone whereas foreignization encompasses the cultural aspects of source language preserving that graphical aroma making it more distant to target audience.

In the case of social media translation, we see this is the usual strategy because it allows to create content for target groups that make sense and they can relate to — domestication. Lee & Hsieh (2022) observes that for social media followers, liking and sharing content come easier when it lodges between confirmation of their own values or sense of community identity. On the other side, in many cases (especially when translating funny content from English to Urdu) translators need to be aware of the fact that humor does not always translate well between cultures. Humour — what is considered funny in the West

often will not hold the same appeal in South Asian cultures, where humour often relies on differing cultural references and social norms. Cultural adaptation in translation of the disseminative information is important to achieve the goal of changing attitudes and reinforcing language use as stated by Albin et al., (2022). With persuasive content, advertisements or political messages for example, translations can only be successful if the translator fully grasps the values, beliefs and motivations of their target audience (Mohammed et al., 2023). Something in English that could persuade an audience will not have the same persuasiveness for an Urdu-speaking universe per se unless it speaks to their cultural, and contextual realities.

2.3   Humor, Persuasion, and Information in Translation

Social media content may be humourous, persuasive or informative and each requires different style in translation. Especially humor, is so culturally-specific and often relies on puns, pop culture, or societal norms that may not transfer from one language to another as directly. While direct translations of humorous content frequently fall flat, Katan (2014) stresses the importance for translators to be imaginative when working with jokes. Translators should not strive to produce the exact same effect in the target language; indeed, that goal might be impossible, or at least entail such cultural adaptation as to make it unprofitable.

In a similar vein, earlier this year O'Hagan (2019) grappled with the difficulties of translating humor to text when working with digital content: she pointed out that in the case of social media feeds, visual/multimedia flashes often accompany web posts. Emojis convey different messages because of how people interpret them, and another person from a different culture might not see it the same way you do. The target text needed to convey all of this and, in that sense, these elements need to vouch for the effectivity of the translation. The same goes for persuasive content, whether that is an advertisement, social media post or political message. For example, as Baker (2018) argues, content consists of an argument (see the first function) based on cultural values and beliefs so translations have to be culturally sensitive. For example, this could refer to changes made to tone, style and messaging as it pertains social media content from English being translated into Urdu so that the cultural and societal norms of Urdu-speaking audiences are met. News or learning-themed posts are relatively straightforward when it comes to cultural adaptation but they still do need you to watch your tone and so forth. According to House (2015), translators should translate information so that it is clear and not too hard for the target population to comprehend. This is even more crucial when it comes to Urdu speaking audiences who may have a differing sense of formal and informal communication styles.

2.4   The Emergence of Digital Platforms in Translation

Digital platforms have brought about radical change in the field of translation: while traditional media may generate reams of translated pages, social media entails a totally different task. O'Hagan, (2019), while discussing technology in translation practices and the information it provides regarding how social media's interactive nature brings an added layer of complication to the process. Social media consumers do not just see the content — they interact with it: this is why translations should inspire a response to encourage user engagement without distorting the main message. As O'Hagan (2019) highlights that one of the biggest challenges is for translators to be able to work under speed for social media

communication. Posts in social media are generally ephemeral and demand immediate attention, unlike traditional media where the content stays there for a long duration (Dange, 2021). This means that translators need to be able to write translations fast and well, while not losing in quality or cultural relevance.

2.5 Translation and Multilingual Writing

Speaking of what works best on other platforms: Social media content translated for multilingual audiences needs to be finely tuned with language groups who may have different expectations and preferences. In Desjardins (2021), it is contended that multilingual translation strategies should reflect the heterogeneity of target audience culture and language use. For Urdu-speaking audiences, it implies that they not only translate the articles into their mother tongues (in this case, Urdu) but also take into account a range of cultural background in the medium of their audience,...along with different dialects. Likewise, in terms of translation strategies to be applied for multilingual audiences, Baker (2018) asserts that research should focus largely on cultural adaptation and audience engagement since these factors significantly contribute to how a text can evoke responsiveness among readers. This is even more crucial for social media content, as social engagement is the main metric success.

3 Methodology

This study tests the effect on audience engagement, of purpose-aligned and culturally adapted English social media content in Urdu translation. The research methodology is quantitative to test the proposed hypotheses. Quantitative approaches made it possible to collect and analyse data to detect whether particular translation strategies result in increased audience engagement/higher perceptions of relevance.

3.1 Design of the Study

The study is cross sectional, examining data from a sampling of translated English to Urdu social media genres including humor, information and persuasion. The data was then assessed to discover if translations that are purpose-aligned or those adapted to the language and culture generate more engagement combined with perceived relevance. The study adopted users' engagement metric; Such as: likes, shares, comments, etc on social media Facebook actions.

3.2 Sample Selection

The social media content were from English and Urdu posts published on a variety of platforms to map different engagement metrics. These were selected by type — humor, informational, or persuasive — to add variety. Sample size comprised 30 randomly selected posts. Translations was divided into two groups: purpose-aligned and literal translation.

3.3 Data Collection

The metrics users' engagement is used to collect the data. It focuses on likes, shares, and comments to test the hypotheses of relevance and audience engagement by analyzing posts translated from English language to Urdu language. These metrics can be extracted from public available analytics platform (Facebook). Average engagement rate for a post:

(Total Engagement / Likes + comments+ shares). This approach is interesting because it retains that of Chen and Li (2020) who argue for engagement rate as an epoch of content effectiveness rather than the lame old miserly numbers of engagement.

4   Result and Discussion

A total of 30 posts in English from social media like Facebook were randomly chosen as sample. The sample posts were then translated in Urdu to make sure that it followed the literal and adaptive translation strategies. Later, the contents in English and Urdu, literal and adaptive, were published on social media "Facebook" to different audience of Urdu speakers. English and Urdu translated versions were posted around the same time to minimize extraneous variables. The engagement metrics for both the versions were observed using number of likes, number of shares and number of comments. The data was then run through SPSS for the hypotheses testing.

Original English Contents

Post Type	Original English Post	Likes	Shares	Comments	Engagement Rate (%)
Humor	30	946	400	410	1756 %
Information	30	643	152	197	992 %
Persuasion	30	1130	489	607	2226 %

Purpose-Aligned Urdu Translation

Post Type	Purpose-Aligned Urdu	Likes	Shares	Comments	Engagement Rate (%)
Humor	30	300	70	321	691 %
Information	30	198	50	91	340 %
Persuasion	30	123	74	103	297 %

Group Statistics

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
User.	English	9	552.6667	322.85523	107.61841
Engagement	Urdu	9	147.7778	101.60927	33.86976

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
User Engagement	Equal variances assumed	6.465	.022	3.589	16	.002	404.88889	112.82235	165.71619	644.06159

Equal variances not assumed			3.589	9.569	.005	404.88889	112.82235	151.96324	657.81454

Interpretation

The significance value is less than 0.05 therefore, the null hypothesis of equal variance be rejected. This indicates that the variances between groups (English and Urdu contents) are unequal, hence we shall use "Equal variances not assumed" result of t-test. Result is statistically significant (as a p-value $0.005 > 0.05$). If you compare the original English content to even translated Urdu material, there is a contrast in audience engagement. As the mean difference indicate that mean engagement of original English content is 404.89 units more in comparing to translate Urdu content mean engagement. Second, the interval of the mean difference 95% CI extends from 151.96 to 657.81, which means that we can be confident at a 95% level that actual difference in engagement places within this range. Therefore p-value is statistically significant, mean difference is positive (Which means engagement for English content is more) hence the results back our alternative hypothesis H_1 as true. As a result, Urdu-speaking users are more likely to engage in social media with the un-translated English contents than they are with English that has been re-explained in Urdu. Accordingly, we reject the first hypothesis and support the second.

Original English Contents

Post Type	Original English Post	Likes	Shares	Comments	Engagement Rate (%)
Humor	30	946	400	410	1756 %
Information	30	643	152	197	992 %
Persuasion	30	1130	489	607	2226 %

Purpose-Aligned Urdu Translation

Post Type	Literal Translation	Likes	Shares	Comments	Engagement Rate (%)
Humor	30	176	35	31	806 %
Information	30	117	32	24	576 %
Persuasion	30	74	25	41	466 %

Group Statistics

	English	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
User.Engagement	English	9	552.6667	322.85523	107.61841
	Urdu	9	61.6667	52.44998	17.48333

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
User Engagement	Equal variances assumed	10.743	.005	4.503	16	.000	491.00000	109.02930	259.86820	722.13180
	Equal variances not assumed			4.503	8.422	.002	491.00000	109.02930	241.75394	740.24606

When the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the equal variances assumption. This shows the variances of two groups (English and Urdu content) is not similar, thus in this case we should go through the results of t-test for "equal variances not assumed". The p-value is 0.002 and more than the original value of 0.05. That is, the outcome is statistically significant. The public engagement with the original English piece versus the translated Urdu version is vastly contrasting. The average engagement for original English content is 491 units higher than translated Urdu content. The 95% CI for the low-to-high difference is a confidence interval of mean difference and it ranges from 241.75 (low end) to 740.25 (high end) so, we can say that we are 95% confident the between this upper-lower scale true value of engagement actually lies. The p value is significant at p=0.002 so we reject the null hypothesis (H_0). Its positive mean difference of 491 units shows a significantly higher audience interaction with the original English social media content compared to the translated Urdu. Therefore, the conclusions show that original English social media content better serves H_1 as opposed to the translated English content when exposed to Urdu-speaking audience.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate if the translation of English social media logs into Urdu increased user participation or not whether the original English posts contained more activity or if their translated counterpart had, specifically focusing on audience engagement. The study sought to investigate whether purpose-aligned translations also drive better engagement, as measured by likes, shares and comments and how a process of cultural adaptation will enhance the perceived topical relevance for an audience that speaks Urdu. The application of statistical tests revealed strong evidence in favor to our alternative hypothesis (H_1): the original English social media content is more engaging to the audience than its translated Urdu content. Furthermore, the ramifications of this study are far-reaching to say the least more in terms of digital marketing and content strategy. If the original English content has gained relatively more engagement from the audience, it raises a question to what extent translation can be an effective element of digital discourse. Overall, this study finds that the potential trade-offs in defining an alternative content strategy for

brands and creators looking to engage effectively with multilingual audiences vary by platform or even within a single network.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations that stem from the results of this study for researchers and practitioners: translate all content in target language, such as Urdu think through potential reactions from audience on social media whether accompanying or separate English language to this content may simply increase the traction effort rather than take up much space. Some pieces of content will lose all their intended meaning when translated because humor, sarcasm or cultural reference. Lee et al. (2022) suggested that in order to marry relevance and engagement, future research might want to examine whether hybrid strategies could be used such as minimal language alteration in the context of cultural adaptation. To illustrate, it might be more engaging to include references that are culturally familiar in the context of the target language instead of devaluing your content with lower integrity. It also underlines that translating digital misses is not a practical approach to increasing Urdu user audience engagement. This goes to demonstrate the ability of translating content into other languages as reducing boundaries, but English is better at breaking through those barriers in other ways. For these reasons, it becomes imperative to take a more cultural and context-specific approach in designing digital content strategies for the most effective user engagement. Re-examining social media content translation can help digital marketers and content creators regain control over their reach, maintaining the relevancy and engagement of content to a wide range of audiences, even in times where opinions and buzz around brand messages may change rapidly.

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