

## Influence of Social Media on Contemporary Lexical Change

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### *Abstract:*

This thesis explores the profound influence of social media on contemporary lexical change, examining how digital communication platforms shape language evolution in the 21st century. As social media becomes an integral part of daily life, its impact on language use, creation, and transformation has garnered significant academic interest. This study employs a multidisciplinary approach, integrating linguistics, sociolinguistics, and media studies to analyze various dimensions of lexical change, including the emergence of neologisms, shifts in semantic meaning, and changes in language usage patterns. The study begins by mapping the landscape of contemporary lexical change, identifying key phenomena such as neologisms, semantic shifts, and the emergence of new language varieties. Using a mixed-methods framework, the research analyzes a corpus of social media posts, focusing on user-generated content that exemplifies linguistic creativity and innovation. Through quantitative analysis, patterns of lexical change are quantified, while qualitative case studies illustrate the contextual factors driving these shifts.

*Key words:* social media, transformation, lexical change, platforms, communication, slang, linguistic diversity.

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**Introduction:** This thesis investigates the influence of social media on lexical change, focusing on how digital communication shapes and transforms language in real-time. As users generate and share content across diverse platforms, they contribute to a collective lexicon that reflects both individual and cultural identities. This phenomenon raises critical questions about the nature of language itself: How do new words emerge in digital spaces? What factors contribute to shifts in meaning and usage? And how do these changes interact with traditional language norms? Lexical change is not a new phenomenon; it has been a constant feature of language throughout history. However, the pace and nature of change in the context of social media are unprecedented. Neologisms, or newly coined terms, often arise spontaneously in response to viral events, memes, or social movements, reflecting the immediacy and fluidity of online discourse. Moreover, semantic shifts where existing words acquire new meanings are frequently observed as users adapt language to fit contemporary contexts. This dynamic interplay between language and social media calls for a nuanced exploration of the mechanisms behind lexical innovation and the social factors that drive these changes.

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Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study analyzes a corpus of social media interactions, focusing on user-generated content that exemplifies linguistic creativity. Through quantitative analysis, the research identifies patterns of lexical change, while qualitative case studies offer insights into the sociocultural contexts that influence language use. By examining these dimensions, this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of how social media serves as both a mirror and a catalyst for linguistic evolution.

Literature review: The way individuals communicate has changed as a result of the expansion of social media platforms during the past two decades. These platforms have given people new ways to interact and exchange knowledge across cultural and geographical borders. As a result, social media language is a dynamic and quickly changing part of online communication [1, 42].

Social media has profoundly transformed communication in various ways:

1. Instant Connectivity

Global Reach: Social media allows users to connect with people across the globe instantly, breaking geographical barriers.

2. Diverse Platforms

Different platforms cater to various types of communication (e.g., Twitter for brief updates, Instagram for visual content), influencing how messages are crafted and consumed.

3. User-Generated Content

Users can create and share content easily, shifting the power of information dissemination from traditional media to individuals.

Social Networking Sites made it possible for people to increase their connections, social relations; especially among people with similar interests, activities, social backgrounds and real-life connections and they allow their users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks. These platforms cut across all age groups with a variety of educational, cultural, professional, social and linguistic backgrounds due to their free availability, open accessibility and flexibility of language use thus leading to an exponential increase in users with many users being active on multiple platforms [3, 151].

Social media has significantly influenced language and led to various lexical changes, reflecting broader shifts in communication styles, cultural norms, and technological advancements. Here's a detailed exploration of how social media impacts language;

1. Creation of New Vocabulary

Neologisms: Social media has spawned numerous neologisms—new words or expressions that arise from the unique ways users interact online. Terms like "selfie," "hashtag," and "influencer" have emerged to describe specific social media phenomena.

Acronyms and Abbreviations: Platforms like Twitter, with its character limit, have popularized the use of acronyms (e.g., "LOL" for "laugh out loud," "BRB" for "be right back") and abbreviations, making communication quicker and more efficient.

2. Evolution of Existing Words

**Semantic Shift:** Many existing words have taken on new meanings in the context of social media. For instance, “friend” now often refers to a digital connection rather than a personal acquaintance.

**Polysemy:** Words can acquire multiple meanings based on context. For example, “ghosting” originally referred to disappearing from someone’s life suddenly but now commonly describes cutting off digital communication.

### 3. Emojis and Visual Language

**Visual Lexicon:** Emojis and GIFs have become integral to online communication, supplementing or even replacing text. This shift towards visual expression changes how meaning is conveyed and interpreted.

**Contextual Interpretation:** Emojis can change the tone or nuance of a message significantly. For example, a simple smiley face can convey warmth, sarcasm, or irony, depending on the context.

### 4. Influence of Internet Slang

**Informal Language:** Social media encourages a more casual, conversational style of communication. Slang terms often reflect current trends, memes, or cultural references, such as “stan” (to be an ardent fan) or “lit” (exciting or excellent).

**Viral Language:** Terms can go viral, entering common usage rapidly. Phrases like “on fleek” (on point) gained popularity through social media before being widely adopted in everyday language.

### 5. Language and Identity

**Cultural Expression:** Users often adapt language to reflect their identities, cultures, or subcultures, leading to the incorporation of dialects, regional slang, and even code-switching (alternating between languages or dialects).

**Inclusivity:** Social media has led to greater awareness and acceptance of diverse identities, influencing language to be more inclusive. Terms like “they/them” as singular pronouns are increasingly recognized and adopted.

### 6. Global Influence and Language Mixing

**Lingua Franca:** English often serves as a lingua franca on social media, leading to its widespread use and the blending of other languages into English. This mixing creates hybrid forms of language, often termed “Engrish” or “Spanglish.”

**Cultural Borrowing:** Languages borrow words and phrases from one another, reflecting globalization. Terms from other languages (like “déjà vu”/“schadenfreude”) gain popularity through social media exposure.

### 7. Impact on Writing Style

**Conciseness:** Social media encourages brevity, leading to shorter sentences and less formal writing. This trend is particularly evident in platforms with character limits.

**Creative Punctuation:** Users employ creative punctuation, such as excessive exclamation marks or ellipses, to convey tone or emotion, affecting how written communication is interpreted.

### 8. Misinformation and Language Manipulation

**Manipulative Language:** Social media platforms can amplify misleading information, leading to the creation of euphemisms or politically charged language (e.g., “alternative facts”).

**Hashtag Activism:** The use of hashtags can shape discourse around social issues, creating new lexicons that encapsulate movements.

#### 9. Influence of Influencers

**Trendy Language:** Influencers shape language trends by popularizing specific phrases, slang, or jargon. Their reach can rapidly normalize new lexicon among their followers.

#### 10. Generational Differences

**Youth Language:** Younger generations often create their own slang and language trends on social media, which may not be understood by older generations. This can lead to a dynamic and evolving language landscape.

Leech and Svartnik have also referred to a Canadian writer Marshall McLuhan, who has made the prediction that modern electronic media will result in world becoming, as he called it, “a global village”. Furthermore, they have concluded that the English language could be considered “a working tongue of that village” In the Internet world, it is no different – English is a leading language, which enables people all around the globe to communicate and give their input online. It has integrated itself into everyday lives of most people, allowing anyone to share their opinions, creative ideas and knowledge with others in an interactive manner. With first appearances of the blogs in the late 90s, the Internet as known today has truly begun to develop and, by early 2000s, over half a billion people worldwide were using it. This evolution was then additionally sped up with the launching of smartphones that were developed a couple of years later, enabling access to an astonishing amount of information in only couple of clicks. Along with smartphones, various so-called mobile apps were developed and each of them had a different purpose – some were for listening music, other ones for editing photographs and some were nothing more than fun mobile games [2, 1-2].

While social media has globalized English, it also poses a risk to linguistic diversity. The dominance of English online can marginalize other languages and dialects, leading to cultural homogenization. It is crucial to promote multilingualism on social media platforms, ensuring that all languages have a space in the digital world.

The influence of social media on the English language is undeniable. It has transformed the way we communicate, express ourselves, and perceive language. As we navigate this changing linguistic landscape, it is important to embrace these changes while also recognizing the value of linguistic diversity and traditional language forms. Social media is not just a tool for communication; it is a catalyst for linguistic innovation and cultural exchange.

Social media has introduced a plethora of new words and expressions into the English lexicon. Terms like “selfie,” “trending,” and “viral” are direct products of the social media age. These platforms also facilitate the rapid spread of new terms, often from specific subcultures or communities, into mainstream usage. Moreover, the visual nature of platforms like Instagram and Snapchat has led to the popularization of image-based communication, influencing the way we express emotions and ideas [4].

The impact of social media on lexical change is profound and dynamic, continually reshaping language through the introduction of new vocabulary, evolving meanings, and innovative forms of expression that reflect the complexities of modern communication and cultural exchange.

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