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Social media and language innovation: a study of slang, abbreviations, and emoticons

Соціальні мережі та мовні інновації: дослідження сленгу, аббревіатур та емотиконів

Summary. *This article examines the impact of social media on the innovation and variation of the English language, focusing on informal digital features such as slang, abbreviations, emoticons, and non-standard spellings. The main aim is to develop a theoretical framework for understanding linguistic variability in online communication and to identify the cultural and technological factors that shape these changes. The research tasks include defining digital language variation, categorizing emerging linguistic forms, and analyzing the influence of social factors such as age, gender, and social status.*

Building on recent studies by Crystal, McCulloch, Danet and Herring, and Lyddy, the study highlights how the internet, particularly platforms like TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook, fosters rapid and user-driven linguistic innovation. The methodology combines qualitative and quantitative approaches, including content and lexical analysis of online language, sociolinguistic profiling through micro-case studies, and statistical evaluation of digital discourse patterns.

Findings indicate that younger users employ informal forms more frequently, including acronyms, emojis, and stylized spellings, while older users tend to maintain more standard language structures. The research also identifies the cultural significance of platform-specific slang and shows how language use is influenced by identity, context, and digital tools.

The study concludes that social media is a powerful force in shaping contemporary English, accelerating the spread of linguistic change through informal, expressive, and creative usage. These insights contribute to the

growing field of digital sociolinguistics and suggest new directions for future interdisciplinary research at the intersection of language, technology, and culture.

Key words. *Social media, language variation, Internet slang, abbreviations, emoticons, digital discourse, sociolinguistics.*

Анотація. У статті досліджується вплив соціальних мереж на інноваційність і варіативність англійської мови, зосереджуючись на неформальних цифрових елементах, таких як сленг, аббревіатури, емодікони та нестандартні орфографічні форми. Основною метою дослідження є розробка теоретичної моделі для розуміння мовної варіативності в онлайн-комунікації, а також визначення культурних і технологічних чинників, які впливають на ці зміни. До дослідницьких завдань належать: окреслення особливостей цифрової мовної варіації, класифікація новітніх мовних форм і аналіз впливу соціальних факторів, таких як вік, стать і соціальний статус.

Спираючись на праці Кристала, МакКаллох, Данет і Геррінг та Лідді, автори підкреслюють, як інтернет – особливо такі платформи, як TikTok, Twitter і Facebook – стимулює стрімкий розвиток мовних інновацій, ініційованих самими користувачами. Методологія дослідження поєднує якісні й кількісні підходи, зокрема контент- і лексичний аналіз онлайн-мови, соціолінгвістичне профілювання на основі мікродосліджень, а також статистичне вивчення дискурсивних моделей.

Результати показують, що молодші користувачі частіше використовують неформальні мовні засоби – аббревіатури, емодзі, стилізоване написання – тоді як старші користувачі переважно дотримуються стандартних мовних форм. У статті також звертається увага на культурне значення платформного сленгу та на те, як мовна поведінка формується під впливом особистісної ідентичності, контексту та цифрових інструментів.

У статті стверджується, що соціальні мережі відіграють вирішальну роль у формуванні сучасної англійської мови, пришвидшуючи поширення мовних змін через неформальне, експресивне та креативне мовлення. Отримані висновки сприяють розвитку цифрової соціолінгвістики та окреслюють напрями подальших міждисциплінарних досліджень на перетині мови, культури й технологій.

Ключові слова: соціальні мережі, мовна варіативність, інтернет-сленг, аббревіатури, емодікони, цифровий дискурс, соціолінгвістика.

Introduction. In the digital age, language is undergoing rapid transformation, especially within online communication platforms such as social media. These platforms have become not only channels of interaction but also vibrant spaces of linguistic creativity. Social media users, particularly younger generations, continuously develop and adopt new forms of expression that differ significantly from standard language norms. Informal features such as abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, and slang dominate everyday online conversations and contribute to the evolution of a distinct digital vernacular. Internet language is not homogeneous; instead, it varies depending on the user, platform, and

communication context. Rooted in SMS and early digital communication, contemporary online discourse frequently includes shortened word forms, clippings, contractions, and unconventional spellings. These variations serve multiple functions: they increase efficiency, express identity, convey humor, or simply follow current digital trends. Moreover, the rise of platforms like TikTok has amplified the spread and reinvention of slang, making them key instruments of cultural expression and youth identity. Social factors such as age, gender, and social status play a crucial role in shaping language use on the Internet. Younger users tend to embrace linguistic experimentation and informal expressions more actively than older ones. Additionally, different user groups may adopt certain abbreviations, emoticons, or word replacements as markers of belonging or creativity. This study aims to explore how language innovation manifests on social media through a systematic analysis of slang words, abbreviations, emoticons, and other informal linguistic forms. It also investigates how social variables influence the use of these features in online communication. A growing body of scholarly work has recognized the impact of digital technologies on language use. Geoffrey McCulloch, in *Because Internet: Understanding How Language Is Changing*, investigates how internet users creatively manipulate language. She emphasizes the role of social media in developing new norms of communication that are informal, emotive, and visually enhanced – fueled by emojis, GIFs, and abbreviations [10, p. 145]. Similarly, Danet and Susan, in *The Multilingual Internet*, examine the intersection of language, culture, and digital communication, stressing the diversity and hybridity of online expression across different linguistic communities [6, p. 78]. Studies like those by Lyddy and Sa’aleek [9, 11] also show that digital communication influences not only vocabulary but also grammar, spelling norms, and pragmatic conventions. Their research highlights how the affordances of new technologies – such as character limits, real-time messaging, and platform-specific trends – contribute to the rise of linguistic shortcuts, clippings, contractions, and slang expressions in everyday online communication. Historically, as Algeo [1], Baugh and Cable [2], and Hogg [8] have shown, the English language has always been in flux, adapting to social, political, and technological shifts. The Internet is simply the latest catalyst in a long series of transformative forces. What distinguishes the current moment is the speed, scale, and participatory nature of linguistic change, fueled by social media platforms and user-generated content. This article builds upon these foundational studies by examining how linguistic variation manifests in social media through emerging forms such as slang, emoticons, shortenings, and abbreviations. The study also explores how social factors – such as age,

gender, and status – influence online language practices, contributing to the development of a rich and ever-evolving digital vernacular.

Methodology/Methods. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative strategies to examine linguistic variability in online communities. The research focuses on the dynamics of language innovation in digital environments, particularly within social media platforms.

To explore the phenomenon, the study applies several complementary methods. Content analysis was conducted on a corpus of language samples from public posts on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok to identify non-standard lexical features, including emoticons, acronyms, and informal expressions. These examples were categorized through comparative lexical analysis, pairing digital forms with their standard equivalents to investigate patterns like phonetic simplification and word-digit substitution.

A micro-level sociolinguistic profiling involved analyzing the online language use of four individuals of varying age, gender, and social status to assess how social factors influence linguistic choices. Historical and technological contextualization was used to place language change within broader digital trends, including mobile communication and platform-specific tools like TikTok's short video format.

Quantitative analysis helped determine the frequency and distribution of various informal forms across data samples. Thematic analysis was also employed to explore the social and cultural meanings of slang terms, using definitions from digital sources such as Urban Dictionary.

This integrated methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of how language is creatively adapted in digital communication, offering valuable insights into the relationship between language, identity, and technology.

Results and Discussion. Internet slang does not constitute a homogeneous language variety. Rather, it differs according to the user and type of Internet situation. Coming straight from SMS language, this is a way of replacing entire words or bits of words by their phonetic equivalent embodied into single letters or figures. Here are some examples: 2: too or 4: for, 2moro: tomorrow, 4u: for you, gr8: great, 2nite: tonight, 10q: thank you, da: the, u: you, 10x: thanks, y: why [4, p. 34].

Other common Internet abbreviations and symbols include "<3" which resembles a heart and stands for "love," using "@" in place of the word "at" and using the number "2" instead of typing "to" or "too" ("I <3 you," "I'm @ the store," "I'm going 2 school.") [4, p. 87].

In linguistic morphology, shortening, clipping, and contractions are processes that involve the reduction of a word or phrase. These processes

often occur in informal language use, and they can change the form and sometimes the meaning of the original word or phrase [2, p. 142].

Shortening is the process of reducing a word or phrase to a shorter form, often by removing one or more syllables.

Clipping is a specific type of shortening where a part of a word is removed to create a shorter form.

Table 1

Illustration of shortening and their standard form

SHOTERNINGS	Internet variation	Standard form
	Bro	Brother
	Sis	Sister
	Lang	Language
	Fri	Friday
	Feb	February
	Aft	After

Table 2

Illustration of clippings and their standard form

CLIPPINGS	Internet variation	Standard form
	Til	Till
	Wil	Will
	Hav	Have
	Wher	Where
	I'l	I will
	Goin	Going
	Talkin	Talking
	Smilin	Smiling
	Drivin	Driving
	Meetin	Meeting

Table 3

Illustration of contractions and their standard form

CONTRACTIONS	Internet variation	Standard form
	Gd	Good
	Nxt	Next
	Frm	From
	Bt	But
	Wkend	Weekend
	Nw	Now
	Abt	About
	Tmrw	Tomorrow

Unconventional spellings refer to the non-standard or irregular ways in which words are spelled. These spellings often deviate from the standard rules and conventions of spelling in a given language. Unconventional spellings can occur for various reasons, such as dialectal differences, informal or colloquial language use, or deliberate stylistic choices in literature or artistic contexts [2, p. 156].

Table 4

Illustration of unconventional spellings and their standard form

Unconventional spellings	Internet variation	Standard form
	Gud	Good
	Thanx	Thanks
	Plz	Please
	Sum	Some
	Masseg	Message
	Sory	Sorry
	Shud	Should

Word-letter replacement refers to the process by which letters within a word are substituted with other letters or symbols, often for the purpose of creating a shorthand or informal representation of the word.

Word-digit replacement, on the other hand, involves the substitution of letters with numerical digits [6, p. 78].

Table 5

Illustration of word-letters replacement and their standard form

Word – letter replacement	Internet variation	Standard Form
	Y	Why
	U	You
	B	Be
	R	Are
	S	Is
	C	See, sea
	K	Okay
	D	the

Table 6

Illustration of word-digits replacement and their standard form

Word-digits replacement	Internet variation	Standard form
	4	For
	2	Two, too, to
	8	Ate

In linguistic studies, **word combinations** such as «wanna» and «gonna» are examples of contractions, where two or more words are combined to form a single word.

Abbreviations, on the other hand, involve shortening a word or phrase by omitting letters or syllables. Abbreviations are commonly used in written language to save space or time, and they can range from highly formal abbreviations used in academic writing [10, p. 212].

Table 7

Illustration of word combinations and their standard form

Word combination	Internet variation	Standard form
	Wanna	Want to
	Gonna	Going to
	Lemme	Let me
	Dunno	Do not know
	Gotta	Got to

Table 8

Illustration of abbreviations and their standard form

Abbreviations	Internet variation	Standard form
	AFAIK	As far as I know
	ASAP	As soon as possible
	IDK	I do not know
	CMB	Call me back
	LOL	Lough out loud
	IMO	In my opinion
	IRL	In real life

However, the attention should be taken on some of the most widely used acronyms and shorthand terms, that have been identified from researched Twitter and Facebook chat samples [3, p. 111]:

BF: Boyfriend

BTW: By The Way

KTHX: OK, Thanks

BFFL: Best Friends for Life

BRB: Be Right Back

CYA: See You

DBEYH: Don't Believe Everything You Hear

OIC: Oh, I See.

OMG: Oh My God

OTOH: On the Other Hand

BBL/BBS: Be Back Later/Soon

B4N: Bye For Now

BFF: Best Friends Forever

L8R: Later

NM: Never mind

NP: No Problem

FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

FB: Facebook

FYI: For Your Information

ORLY: Oh Really? **GF:** Girlfriend **ROFL:** Roll On the Floor Laughing.
GR8: Great **SMH:** Shaking My Head
HTH: Hope This Helps **SFW:** Safe for Work
ILY: I Love You **TMI:** Too Much Information
IMHO: In My Humble Opinion
TTYL: Talk to You Later **W/O:** Without
J/K: Just Kidding **WYSIWYG:** What You See Is What You Get
YW: You're Welcome

Keyboard-generated icons and smileys emoticon is a pictorial representation of a facial expression using punctuation marks, numbers and letters, usually written to express a person's feelings or mood. Emoticons are generally found in web forums, instant messengers and online games. They are culture-specific and certain emoticons are only found in some languages but not in others [5, p. 49].

Table 9

Illustration of emoticons and their meanings

Emoticons	Internet variation	Meaning
	: -)	Smile, happy face
	: =(Crying
	: - :	Straight face, no expression
	%-) %)	Drunk, confused
	\o/	Cheer "Yay, yay."
	O _O	Surprised, shocked

Usually, and in most cases, the younger generation uses all these variations the most. Over the past twenty years, the Internet has radically transformed the way people communicate, both locally and globally [7, p. 45].

Language variety on social media platforms is greatly influenced by social factors, including age, gender, and social standing. These elements have an impact on how people express themselves and interact with others through language in online settings [10, p. 145].

The experiment was conducted to investigate the variability of usage the language depending on people's age, gender and social status. The experiment involved 4 participants.

The results of the experiment showed that Person 1, Person 2, and Person3 used a lot of abbreviations and acronyms, while person 4 tried to communicate more formally, almost never using informal communication.

Table 10

Characteristics of the people who participated in the experiment

Person	Name	Age	Social status	Country
Person 1	Jackson	21 years old	Student	The USA, Texas
Person 2	Amanda	18 years old	Worker	Great Britain
Person 3	Sophia	20 years old	Student	The USA (but was born in Poland)
Person 4	Melania	42 years old	Worker	The USA, California

It can be concluded that age has a great influence on the language usage in social media. Also, Person 3 used less informal vocabulary than Person 1 and Person 2 (they are all almost the same age) and tried to write always formally, rarely using abbreviations and acronyms, as she is not a native speaker.

Table 11

Variations of words used by people in online communication

Standard form	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4
By the way	By d way	Btw	Btw	By the way
Because	Bec	Bcoz	Bcoz	Because
Me too	M 2	M 2	Me 2	Me 2
Thank you	Tnx	Ty	Thanx	Thank you
I am sorry	Sorry	Am sori	I'm sorry	I'm sorry
Together	2gether	2gther	Together	Together
See you later	C u latr	Cu later	See u latr	See you later
You	U	U	U	You
Before	B4	B4	Before	Before
What	?	Wat	What	What
Tomorrow	Tmrw	2morrow	Tom	Tomorrow
Good morning	Gudam	Good morn	Good mor	Good morning
Good bye	Gudbye	Gud bye	Bye	Bye
Congratulations	Congrats	Congrats	Congrats	Congrats

Compared to older users, younger users tend to use more slang, acronyms, and casual language. Additionally, they could be more inclined to pick up on the latest linguistic fads and idioms that are trending on social media. On the other hand, older users could choose formal language and standard spelling and grammar. Gender may also have an impact on language use on social media. Men may speak more directly and assertively, whilst women may speak more expressively and emotionally. The subjects and information that people are more likely to discuss online might also be influenced by their gender.

On social media, people with greater social standing or those who are thought to have more social influence may use language differently. They might speak in a more formal manner in order to uphold a particular character or image, or they might speak in a way that communicates their social class and cultural capital.

New slang terms and expressions are continuously being created by social media users to describe their interactions, experiences, and feelings. Slang is frequently used in social media posts to give them humor and originality. Slang terms that are playful or fun can be used by users to enhance the entertainment value of their content. Memes are an excellent illustration of this, as they frequently make use of slang and internet humor. Slang differs from usual English speaking significantly and breaks a lot of English-speaking rules. It's also constantly changing and evolving [10, p. 150].

Among the most commonly used slang words are:

1. **Dude.** The slang word *dude* most typically refers to a man, but in some cases can also refer to a woman. "*Hey, dude! How have you been?*" [12].

2. **Bro.** Similar to *dude*, the slang term *bro* refers to a male friend. It is also a short form for brother. It's a casual term that is typically used in informal settings. *Bro* can also be used as a form of address [12].

3. **Chill.** *Chill* is used to refer to someone calm and collected in their demeanor. "*Wow, she's so chill*" [12].

4. **Cringey (or cringe).** The slang word *cringey* is used when someone acts/ or is so embarrassing or awkward, it makes you feel extremely ashamed and/or embarrassed. "*Thinking back on my high school self is so cringey*" [12].

5. **Dead.** *Dead* is used to refer to someone overwhelmed with laughter (used in response to something extremely funny). "*Dude, I'm dead. That's so funny*" [12].

6. **Flex.** As far as urban slang, the definition is «to show off.» Used by many rappers, most notable Ice Cube and the Geto Boys. Originated in the urban community, and has been used for quite some time. «...*no flexin'*, didn't even look in the nearest direction as I ran the intersection. (This is said because Ice is trying to get away from some people who tried to kill him the other day In the song, of course)» [12].

7. **GOAT.** An acronym meaning Greatest (G) Of (O) All (A) Time (T). It is usually used to describe someone or something as being the best compared to anything else. (Typically used in a sarcastic manner). "*You bought us all donuts??? Bro, you're the goat*" [12].

8. **Troll.** The slang word *troll* refers to one who posts a deliberately provocative message to a newsgroup or message board with the intention

of causing maximum disruption and argument. *“Don’t respond to trolls in the comments. You’re just giving them what they want”* [12].

9. **L.** L mean «loss» or «lose». *“Sorry, Caleb, but Sarah won that game. Just take the L.”* [12].

10. **W.** «W» as an abbreviated term for a win in a competition. *“I’m confident that Auburn will stomp Georgia this season and bring home another W.”*[12].

Due to users’ constant creation and popularization of new terms and expressions, TikTok has developed into a slang a lot. The platform has become an explosion of linguistic innovation and creativity due to its short-form video format and viral trends.

One of the most widely used slang term of recent months is **Delulu**. Delulu originated in the K-pop community and is shorthand for the word “*delusional*”. It can be applied to any situation where you feel someone is being entirely unrealistic. *“I can’t believe you think that’s true, you’re so delulu, LOL”* [12].

The slang word **coded** something or someone, that has stereotypical traits based on race, gender, sex, sexual orientation or age. *“I hate that character SO much! They are totally ‘black coded’”* [12].

The phrase that originated in Tiktok and gained wide popularity is **Roman Empire**. That is a slang expression for something that someone constantly thinks about (used especially by girls on TikTok), inspired and popularized by the belief that most men often think about the actual Roman Empire and its legacy. *“My Roman Empire is the fact that my mom dated Ethan Hawke in college”* [12].

Another popular youth slang is **side eye**. The expression has gained lots of popularity through TikTok. This slang word refers to someone regarding you with suspicion and giving you the side eye. It gained popularity through the “bombastic side eye” trend on TikTok [12].

A **CEO (Chief Executive Officer)** is defined as the highest-ranking person in an organization and handles major decisions. But if someone is called a CEO on TikTok, it means **this person is the leader or most talented** at something. *“I’m the CEO of self-sabotage”* [12].

A **glow up** is a drastic transformation, usually in physical appearance. It describes the process of becoming an improved version of yourself and appearing more confident, motivated, and attractive. The term often applies to teenagers and young adults. *“She has really had a glow up since the last time I saw her!”* [12].

The word **based** is used when you agree with something; or when you want to recognize someone for being themselves, i.e. courageous and unique or not caring what others think. Especially common in online

political slang. «Dude, I think that Nietzsche might be my favourite philosopher». «That's **based**, bro» [12].

Slang is one of effect of social life in language it is part of language variety which are informal which used to communication as members in social community.

Conclusions. This article has explored the dynamic and complex nature of language variation in social media, focusing on the creative use of slang, abbreviations, contractions, emoticons, and non-standard spellings. Through analysis of examples drawn from platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, the study has demonstrated how digital communication fosters new linguistic forms that reflect both functional needs and social identities. These language innovations are largely shaped by cultural trends, technological affordances, and user preferences – particularly among younger generations, who tend to adopt informal and playful styles of expression. A key finding is the influence of social factors such as age, gender, and social status on language choices in digital contexts. While younger users often prefer acronyms, emojis, and slang, older users tend to employ more formal and standardized forms. Additionally, the rise of platform-specific slang – especially from TikTok – illustrates how digital communities actively generate and circulate new terms that often transcend online spaces and enter everyday speech. The findings presented in this article contribute to our understanding of how language evolves in response to technological change. However, several avenues remain open for further research. Future studies could explore cross-linguistic variations, platform-specific language norms, and the pedagogical implications of informal digital discourse. Large-scale corpus analysis, cognitive studies on emoji and meme interpretation, and examinations of language's role in online identity and activism would also enrich the field. Overall, the language used on social media is constantly changing and shows how flexible and creative modern communication can be. People, especially younger users, adapt language to fit fast, casual, and expressive online conversations. New slang, abbreviations, and symbols make communication quicker and more personal. As social media platforms grow and evolve, so will the ways people use language. This makes online communication an important area for future research in language, culture, and technology.

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