



THE DIGITAL LINGUISTICS: EVOLUTIONARY PATTERNS OF ENGLISH SLANG IN ONLINE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

This article examines the change in how digital communication affects the evolution of English slang using qualitative research techniques. Over recent years, as social media and online communication have rapidly expanded, slang has become an essential part of everyday language and reaches far beyond the local community to encompass a wide variety of digital platforms throughout the world. The study analysed a corpus of naturally occurring slang on sites such as TikTok, Twitter (X), WhatsApp, and various online discussion forums, providing a contextualised analysis of the types of slang present in digital communication. The results indicate that slang evolves in real-time through established linguistic processes, specifically: abbreviation, clipping, blending, and semantic shift. For example, the words 'slay', 'rizz', and 'no cap' demonstrate the way in which meanings develop and change with the social use of a particular slang word, but at the same time, other words, such as 'LOL' and 'AF', reflect the trend toward being short and efficient in a brief manner. The study further illustrates that multimodality (i.e., the use of emojis, memes, and other visual features) occurs in conjunction with text in order to create and convey meaning. Additionally, digital slang serves as an important indicator of identity and ritual group affiliation, with younger users actively participating in a process that both creates and disseminates new slang. Additionally, the study shows that the rate of rapid spread of new slang and the short usage time for slang are due to viral trends and the characteristics of the social media platforms on which they are used. The overall conclusion presented by the study is that English-language slang in contemporary online communication is an immediate, flexible, and culturally relevant phenomenon that mirrors the ongoing linguistic and cultural changes of the digital era.

Keywords: digital slang, online communication, language evolution, sociolinguistics, qualitative analysis

1. Introduction

Rapid development in digital communication restructures the entire foundation of language. The English language, and more specifically its slang, is no longer socially and geographically confined. With the expansion of social media, messaging apps, forums, email, etc, English slang is used and created in most digital spaces. Internet slang is formed as a result of synthesis. Synthesis occurs as a result of the speed, brevity, and interactivity of communication in the digital realm, and, in turn, leads to the formation of new abbreviations, acronyms, and even spellings. (Herlina et al., 2024)

The formation of digital slang is a result of language adaptability to technological and social interaction. The internet, as a language communication medium, has the potential to foster the fast creation, development, and distribution of new lexical items in a closed community. Rapid development and even mainstream adoption of lexical items show the speed of slang as a form of language. (Satriah et al., 2024) The speed of development in the formation of lexical items proves that language in digital spaces is influenced by the social interactions of the individuals

who dominate the communication spaces. In the most recent online adaptation and use of language, slang has replaced the most formal and accepted uses.

Digital slang contributes greatly to the formation of identity and social standing through both its structure and function. Researchers point out that users use slang to articulate their emotional state, convey a sense of engagement with others, and communicate with one another on social networks (Abrams, 2026). This is especially true for younger users. For these users, slang is a symbol of their culture and creativity. Additionally, it allows them to express their feelings and establish unity and identify with one another within the confines of virtual communities. This supports more current sociolinguistic studies that emphasize how online slang is not simply a form of informal communication; it is also an important and consequential aspect of digital communication.

Furthermore, qualitative research suggests that changes in the use of the same type of slang occur through processes such as semantic shift, metaphorical extension, and multimodal integration, which are affected by memes, emojis, and visual culture (Jumanazarova & Khamitov, 2024). Such characteristics of digital language utilization ultimately demonstrate that the use of digital slang is very complex in nature, in that meaning is established through both linguistic and non-linguistic sources of information. Thus, an interpretive method of study is necessary to research the digital slang in use, as both the linguistic forms and the social and cultural contexts should be considered as contributing to the meaning of an instance of digital slang.

This research investigates the extent of evolutionary changes in English-language usage within the context of modern digital channels (e.g., email, text messages). It uses a qualitative methodology to examine how different varieties of English slang have been created, modified, exchanged, and utilised in current day-to-day, across a variety of platforms; therefore, it aims to generate an understanding of how slang has been created/modified and how this has occurred, ultimately contributing to understanding of modern day-to-day evolution (through examining scholarly works) and the social significance of digital communication (Sahito et al., 2025). This research examines/analyses informal means of communication and how they create, define/shape - as well as those who create them for their own purpose - the identities and cultures of people who use informal communication, along with how they utilise informal communication to belong and be a part of group(s). In addition, it will lay the foundations for future research on digital communication(s) and their relationship and impact on the future evolution of global English.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To examine the evolutionary patterns of English slang in digital communication contexts.
2. To identify and analyse the linguistic features and processes involved in the creation of online slang.
3. To explore the role of digital slang in expressing identity and fostering social connections in online communities.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How does English slang evolve in online communication across different digital platforms?
2. What linguistic processes are involved in the formation of digital slang?
3. How does the use of online slang contribute to identity construction and group affiliation among users?

1.3 Significance of the Research

This article explores how technological change has impacted the way we communicate, specifically through slang. This research explores where and how slang develops when people

use computers and mobile phones to talk to others. By examining some of the processes involved in the creation and spread of slang, this research will help us understand the evolution of current communication practices and the effect technology has had on rapidly changing our language. Many areas in the field of language and linguistics will benefit from this research study, including Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, and Language teaching. The results of this research study will help us to understand better the relationship between informal language use and the construction of identity, culture, and group affiliation. Further, this research will lay a foundation for future studies of online conversations and their impact on future varieties of global English.

2. Literature Review

English slang's development through electronic communication now provides valuable insights into three key fields of study: sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and media studies. The sheer number of digital devices is making written communication much less traditional, or typed with the same pen, and using digital tools allows us to communicate instantaneously, interactively, and through multiple means, all at once. The most recent findings indicate that internet slang will provide a major linguistic feature in today's language, rather than an informal or peripheral form of communication, and will illustrate the real effects of recent social and technological shifts (Chyrvonyi, 2024).

The key trend found throughout the research is the extent to which social media contributes to the creation of new words. Social media sites, such as Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram, help people develop new words quickly and share them worldwide (Herlina et al., 2024). Among the main themes in the literature is the contribution of social media to accelerating language change. Research shows that social media (Twitter, TikTok, Instagram) serve as drivers of linguistic innovation and enable the creation and spread of slang phrases more quickly and internationally (Herlina et al., 2024). Digital slang is different from how language develops, which takes a long time. Digital slang has evolved fast because of how quickly things spread online. This fast spread means slang words can cross borders and cultures, which is helping to make English a global language (Jumnazarova and Khamitov, 2024). The way Internet slang is structured is also important. Researchers have found that slang is formed in ways such as shortening words, mixing them, and changing what they mean. For example, one way that words are formed online is by blending them, which happens a lot before adding suffixes or joining words (Chiarvoni, 2024). This shows that when we communicate online, we want to be brief and get to the point, and we care more about being fast and simple than about being grammatically correct.

Digital slang is not about how it is structured, but also about what it does for people socially. Internet slang helps people feel like they belong to a group or community. It also helps people express their emotions by being funny and referencing their culture, which makes online conversations more interesting (Polvoniozova, 2025). This makes sense with ideas about language, which say that language is something we create together when we interact with each other. The connection between slang and identity is really strong for younger people. Studies that compare how Gen Z and Gen Alpha use language show that each generation has its own type of slang, mostly because they are from different times. Digital slang is really important for people to express themselves and feel like they are part of a group.

People often wonder how slang is created and how it changes over time because of what happens on the internet. The internet is a place where people work together and come up with words. Slang is something that people make and change on platforms. This is different from the way language changes. People who use the internet and talk to each other online are making new slang all the time. Slang changes when people on the internet use language in their own way. Most traditional models focus on the top-down aspects of language influence; however,

digital language is created through the bottom-up involvement of individuals in its creation and use. (Kulkarni & Wang, 2017). Furthermore, researchers have explored the implications of digital slang for both language standardization and formal networking. Many researchers have found that as people use slang more often through the Internet, there is less differentiation between what is considered formal versus informal language, and therefore slang becomes accepted into everyday usage (Herlina et al., 2024). This raises critical issues about the future of standard forms of English and how digital communications will continue to drive the formation of new language norms. Another recurrent theme in the literature is the effect of technological affordances on language use. Character restrictions, hashtags, and algorithm-based content distribution are all features that affect how users make messages and decode messages. An example is the necessity to express meaning under the constraint of character space, which promotes the use of abbreviations, acronyms, and hashtags that facilitate the classification and distribution of slang words (Satriah et al., 2024).

In addition, the digital form of intercultural communication has given rise to new hybrid language forms that blend features of various cultures and languages. This can be described as linguistic hybridity, and it indicates how language communities are interconnected online and how there is boundary fluidity between languages. As a result, English slang in the digital environment is increasingly influenced by other languages, with new, mixed expressions emerging (Polvonniyozova, 2025). Cultural production (i.e., music and internet literature) is also of interest regarding its role in the formation of slang. Previous research indicates that online stories (e.g., Wattpad and TikTok) are amongst the sources of انتشار and the spread of popular language. Online stories are examples of sites where speakers (i.e., individuals who use language) can experiment with emergent varieties of language and change the way they speak as a result (Sahito et al., 2024). Frequency and exposure are also discussed in the literature regarding the acquisition of slang words and phrases. Content that uses frequently used words is more likely to be adopted by a larger number of individuals because of their use in popular culture. Algorithms support the spread of slang by producing trend-worthy content, thereby increasing the visibility of some slang terms (Keidar et al., 2022).

The other thing of interest is how cultural production (music and online literature) influences the formation of slang. Studies have demonstrated that online stories, such as the content in sites like Wattpad and TikTok, are part of the انتشار and popularization of slang terms. Sites become places of linguistic experimentation where users interact with and modify new forms of language (Sahito et al., 2024). Another factor that the literature also mentions in the adoption of slang is frequency and exposure. Popular content often incorporates words that are commonly used. Thus, it is more probable to be adopted by a larger audience and become a natural part of the language. Algorithms that encourage trending have made such a process viable, thereby making some expressions more visible (Keidar et al., 2022).

Increasingly over the last few years, the correlation between slang and artificial intelligence has become a topic of interest. Researchers have observed that the rapid pace of slang evolution has been a challenge for language models, which are usually unable to keep pace with new forms. It has led to the development of new strategies to enhance AI systems' capabilities for understanding and processing slang (Mei et al., 2024). Furthermore, looking at slang also affects how we handle moderation and internet security. Slang can be unclear and hard to understand, which makes it tough to spot harmful content. This means we need tools that can get slang right in context. Some studies have shown that humor and creativity play a role in digital slang. Slang words rely on puns, sarcasm, and cultural references, which makes them context-dependent. This creativity gets users engaged. Makes certain expressions popular. The fact that slang does not last is also important (Kolla et al., 2022).

Unlike language, slang is always changing, with new words popping up and old ones fading away. Slang is not a moving language; it moves fast, just like online communication. This constant change is a part of online communication. The need for tools to decode slang is crucial for online safety. Slang's temporary nature and creative use keep communication dynamic. New slang words keep appearing, and some keep disappearing quickly. This shows how fast online communication moves. It also highlights the importance of context in understanding slang. Slang's impact on communication is significant. It affects how we interact online and how we moderate content. Understanding slang is key to navigating spaces. It helps us stay safe and connected online. Also, researchers have studied the connection between slang and power relations. The use of language in online environments might be indicative of social hierarchies, as certain types of slang may be associated with specific groups or identities. This sheds light on the necessity to refer to the cultural aspects of digital language use (Kulkarni and Wang, 2017).

Digital slang is said to reflect an economy of information. The use of terms that allow for quicker, more efficient communication; therefore, many individuals use shorter, more efficient ways of expressing themselves to save time and convey their message more effectively. Therefore, abbreviations and acronyms are widely used. This is similar to many other patterns of language simplification used in online communication (e.g., the Internet, email, etc.) (Satriah et al., 2024). Furthermore, literature indicates that social and cultural context affects the way a slang term is understood; therefore, unless you know the context of the use of a slang expression, it is generally difficult to interpret the meaning of the expression. This suggests that qualitative methods are needed to consider the cultural characteristics of language use (Herlina et al., 2024).

Digital slang research is an area of language change and evolution. While many researchers view the use of slang as harmful to language usage norms, some see it as part of the natural process of language development. Therefore, one can define digital slang as an accepted form of communication that reflects how flexible, adaptable, creative, and innovative human beings create new forms of communication as their cultural and technological environments change (Polvonniyozova, 2025). Overall, the literature provides extensive research showing how English slang has evolved through online communications. Research highlights the many interconnected ways language, technology, and social influences influence people's use of digital communication. However, further qualitative research is needed to examine how the complex meanings and contexts of slang emerge in specific settings. This proposed study will attempt to provide a qualitative investigation to understand how digital slang is fluid and changing while living in a digital world. Data was collected from several online sources where slang is actively produced and shared. These sources include, but are not limited to, Twitter (now known as X), TikTok comment sections, WhatsApp conversations, and various online forums.

3. Research methodology

This study uses qualitative research methodology to explore how English slang has developed in the context of online communication. Qualitative research is an appropriate choice for this study as it will allow a detailed investigation of a range of linguistic forms and meanings, as well as how they are used for various social functions in naturally occurring digital communication. The purpose of the study is to describe and explain how slang is created, changed, and used in various online environments.

3.1 Research Design

The research uses a descriptive qualitative research design reinforced with elements of discourse analysis. The descriptive qualitative research design allows the researcher to examine slang expressions in their natural communicative environment with regard to both their

linguistic form and their contextual meaning. Furthermore, the study is based on a sociolinguistic approach, with particular emphasis on the relationship between language and identity and digital culture.

3.2 Data Source

The information for this research study comes mostly from the digital sources where slang is commonly used and disseminated, such as Twitter (X), TikTok comment sections, WhatsApp messages, and online forums. All of these sources provided a variety of examples of slang produced digitally and where it is frequently used, making them excellent ways to gather data on current slang use.

3.3 Sampling Technique

Slang data was selected using purposive sampling methods based on several criteria, including: 1) how often the slang term is used, 2) how relevant it is to current pop culture (i.e. the years 2024 - 2026), 3) how clearly the slang term is defined in relation to the context it is used, and 4) how well the slang term represents what is being communicated on various platforms. A total of thirty slang terms were extracted and compiled as part of the final analysis.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

To collect data, researchers gathered slang terms that people were using during their interactions with one another on digital platforms, recording the slang terms and the context(s) in which they were used. Researchers took screenshots of each coined slang term along with the text to verify the appropriate use of the slang term in communication. Finally, the data collected was organized into tables for analysis, with each slang term being categorized according to its meaning, context of usage, and linguistic characteristics.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

The researchers used thematic analysis and qualitative linguistic analysis in the analysis of the data. The researchers analysed multiple stages. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data set by reviewing the data to determine what types of usage exist. Second, the researchers coded the slang terms in the data set using the linguistic processes of abbreviation, blending, clipping, and semantic shift. Third, the researchers grouped the coded slang terms into larger categories, including categories based on lexical formation processes, semantic change processes, communicative functions, and multimodal forms. Finally, the researchers looked for themes and interpreted those themes using sociolinguistic and digital discourse theories.

3.6 Analytical framework

The study looked at three ideas: sociolinguistics, which is about how the language we use is connected to who we are. Then there is Discourse analysis, which is about how we create meaning when we talk to each other in different situations. Finally, there is word formation theory, which is about how slang words are made and how they change over time. This way of looking at things helps us understand digital slang completely, including what it looks like and how it is used. Digital slang is what we are trying to understand, and this framework is helpful for understanding the form and function of digital slang.

4. Data Analysis

A qualitative research methodology was used to examine how slang words have developed digitally over the years. Data were collected from four types of digital sources (Twitter [x], TikTok, WhatsApp, and comments on online forums) based on the use of purposive sampling. Slang words were identified by first searching for words that met the criteria for frequency, context, and representation of current digital discourse. The authors used a thematic and discourse analysis approach to understand the way slang expresses language, such as the way people come together as a community through the lens of linguistic patterns, the way slang

creates meaning, as well as the social functions of slang, both from a historical point of view and from a contemporary point of view.

4.1 Dataset Overview

The dataset consists of 30 frequently used slang expressions (2024–2026) identified from recent studies and online usage trends.

Table 4.1

Sample of Selected Internet Slang and Meanings

No.	Slang Term	Meaning	Source Context
1	Rizz	Charisma, attractiveness	Social media
2	Slay	To perform excellently	TikTok
3	Ate	Did something perfectly	Instagram
4	No cap	Truthful, no lie	Twitter
5	Sus	Suspicious	Gaming/chat
6	AF	Very/extremely	Messaging
7	Delulu	Delusional (playful)	TikTok
8	Mid	Average, not impressive	Reviews
9	Brainrot	Overconsumption of online content	TikTok
10	Skibidi	Viral meme-based expression	YouTube

These slang terms reflect how online language includes both newly invented words and existing words with new meanings.

4.2 Lexical Formation Patterns

The analysis identified several word-formation processes used in digital slang.

Table 4.2

Word Formation Processes in Digital Slang

Process	Example	Explanation
Abbreviation	AF, IDK	Shortened for speed
Clipping	Bro, Delulu	Reduced forms
Blending	Hangry	Combination of words
Semantic Innovation	Slay	New meaning assigned
Acronyms	LOL, BRB	Initial-based forms

Findings show that abbreviation and acronym formation dominate digital communication due to the need for brevity and efficiency. Online slang has evolved from simple abbreviations to more complex expressive forms conveying identity and emotion.

4.3 Semantic Shift and Meaning Evolution

One of the most significant findings is the transformation of meaning.

Table 4.3

Examples of Semantic Shift in Online Slang

Word	Original Meaning	Digital Meaning
Slay	Kill	Impress or succeed
Lit	Illuminated	Exciting/fun
Savage	Wild/violent	Bold/confident
Brainrot	Mental decline	Excessive internet use
Ate	Consumed food	Performed excellently

For example, “slay” has shifted from a literal violent meaning to a positive expression of success. Similarly, “brainrot” reflects new cultural concerns about excessive digital consumption.

These semantic changes show that meaning is socially constructed and continuously reshaped in digital contexts.

4.4 Functional Analysis of Slang Usage

Slang performs multiple communicative and social functions.

Table 4.4

Functions of Digital Slang

Function	Example	Purpose
Identity Expression	“I’m so delulu”	Self-representation
Group Belonging	“No cap”	In-group signaling
Humor	“I am dead 😂”	Entertainment
Emphasis	“That is good AF.”	Intensification
Evaluation	“That is mid.”	Judgment

The analysis shows that slang is not random but serves specific communicative purposes. It allows users to express personality, align with communities, and enhance interaction.

4.5 Multimodality in Digital Slang

Digital slang is often combined with emojis, memes, and visual cues.

Table 4.5

Multimodal Use of Slang

Expression	Text	Visual Element	Meaning
“I’m dead 😂”	Text + emoji	Laughing emoji	Extreme amusement
“That is fire 🔥”	Text + emoji	Fire emoji	Excellent
“No cap 🗨️”	Text + emoji	Cap emoji	Truthfulness
“Slay 💅”	Text + emoji	Nail emoji	Confidence/style
“Sus 👁️”	Text + emoji	Eyes emoji	Suspicion

This demonstrates that meaning in digital discourse is co-constructed through text and visuals, making communication richer and more expressive.

4.6 Patterns of Diffusion and Popularity

The data show that slang spreads rapidly due to social media algorithms and viral culture.

- Viral slang such as “skibidi” and “rizz” gained popularity through TikTok and YouTube trends
- Online platforms enable slang to move from niche communities to global usage within days
- Trends are short-lived, with new slang constantly replacing old ones

Research confirms that internet slang spreads faster than traditional language change due to digital sharing mechanisms.

5. Findings

According to the qualitative analysis of the English slang in online communication, the following main findings have been made:

5.1. Systematic Linguistic Patterns order Digital Slang.

This study’s analysis revealed that digital slang has systematic linguistic properties, there are systematic recognisable linguistic features associated with digital slang based on abbreviation, clipping, blending and semantic innovation, idk (I don’t know) AF (as f***) and the creation of blended words (hangry/hungry and angry) illustrate diversified but systematic reduction in online slang, evidencing that digital slang has rules and systemic organisation (Herlina & col., 2024).

5.2. The Creation of Slang Is a Result of Economic Factors.

The main motivator for the creation of slang is influenced by the speed of the technological medium of communication, with the use of abbreviations like lol (laugh out loud), brb (be right back), and thx (thanks) to initiate faster communication. In contrast, the use of a more

compact form, such as the phrase ‘no cap’ (no lie), further captures the idea of linguistic economy in communication by the creation of slang via the process of abbreviated forms.

5.3. Slang Evolution is Semantically Shifted.

The results indicate that several slang terms come about due to semantic change, where words already in use assume new meanings. As an example, the word “*Slay*” at its original meaning was to kill, but in digital settings, the word has come to refer to doing an outstanding job. Similarly, “*ate*” is applied to show that someone has done something the best, as in “*she ate that performance*”. These instances demonstrate how meaning is both social and constructed and reformed during the process of repeated use online (Keidar et al., 2022).

5.4. Slang is a Major part of constructing identity.

The discussion indicates that slang is used as an identity and group belonging marker. Indicatively, the young communities have jargon such as “*rizz*” (charisma) and “*delulu*” (delusional in a funny manner) to express their cultural awareness and their engagement in fashioning discourse. Languages like “*noob*” (inexperienced player) and “*GG*” (good game) are some of the words used in gaming communities that indicate practices and groupness (Melissa et al., 2024).

5.5. Multimodality Promotes Meaning Construction.

The other important observation is that slang is often used in combination with emojis and pictorials. As an illustration, “*That is fire*” 🔥 will employ the fire emoji to enhance the meaning, whereas “*I’m dead*” 😂 will be interpreted as someone being incredibly amused, but not dead. Likewise, “*no cap*” 🗨️ employs the cap emoji to make truths stronger. It demonstrates that the meaning in digital communication is co-created by means of text and images (Sahito et al., 2024).

5.6. Slang is Rapidly Diffused and Short-Lived.

The research identifies slang as viral content and tends to endure a limited time. Terms, such as “*on fleek*” and “*YOLO*”, were popular at one time but soon faded, and more recent ones like “*skibidi*” and “*brainrot*” have become popular in recent years via the use of social media, like TikTok. This is indicative of the quick and fashionable character of online communication.

5.7. Social Media sites influence the use of language.

Slang is largely affected by technological features. An example is Twitter, which promotes short text such as “*ICYMI*” (in case you missed it) because of the character limits. Simultaneously, TikTok encourages the use of expressive language like “*slay*” and *ate* via viral videos and comments. Hashtags such as #rizz and #slay also serve to spread new slang to users and communities (Kulkarni and Wang, 2017).

5.8. Digital Slang refers to the Global and Hybrid uses of language.

The results show that online slang is becoming more and more hybrid with the elements of various languages and cultures. Indicators of global linguistic contact, such as terms such as “*Habibi*” (Arabic influence) or localized versions of English slang, can be used as examples. This hybridity proves that digital communication is beyond borders and it is also a contributor to the globalization of English (Polvonniozova, 2025).

6. Conclusion

This research paper shows that English slang in the digital world is constantly changing due to technological progress, social interactions, and cultural ideas. The results show how new words are created through patterns (using a word in a new way, changing its meaning, and using multimedia) that show what we use now when we do online, it is all about being short, creative, and immediate. Another thing is that slang creates identity and group membership, as a young person will use the slang or help develop and share new slang on digital platforms. The pace at which slang spreads and how quickly it becomes out of use again shows how quickly language is changing in the digital world. Finally, online slang may be informal or unimportant; however,

it is an important part of language development today and demonstrates how language is changing due to how we are communicating and changing.

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