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## IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA LANGUAGE ON ACADEMIC WRITING: A STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### **Abstract**

*A qualitative research method was used to examine how social media types the way students write in a university. Using social media platforms (Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter), most university students frequently engage with informal language such as; abbreviated words, emoji's, slang, and shortened forms or expressions. The study also sought to identify the extent to which these aspects of language affect how university students write academically. Through semi-structured interviews with five university students, the results indicated that students experienced grammatical errors, misspelling of words, punctuation errors, incorrect sentence structure, and use of informal style in their written work as a result of excessive exposure to social media language. On the contrary, an additional number of participants indicated that the use of social media language positively contributed towards improving the speed and creativity of their written work. Overall, although the language used on social media is now a normal part of students' communication with one another, it can negatively impact their formal academic writing through the unintentional use of social media language. The researchers recommend that universities have an increased awareness of academic writing and find a balance between creating digital communications and using formal language in writing.*

### **1. Introduction:**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Universities have become an integral part of today's world, and students who attend university are heavily influenced by social media. The popular social media networks of today include WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, and these services offer students opportunity to communicate with one another, keep each other entertained, and share information. Additionally, because these platforms are used so often for communication, students often produce informal language (i.e. abbreviations, slang, emoticons, acronyms, and code-switching) in their online interactions.

Common examples include "u" as opposed to "you," "btw" as opposed to "by the way," and "gr8" as opposed to "great." Although the use of informal language has resulted in faster and easier communication through the use of social media, it is likely having an effect on the students' use of formal English in academic writing.

Academic writing requires a higher level of attention paid to proper grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, coherence, and sentence structure. A growing number of teachers and researchers have observed that many students are not intentionally transferring the informal language they use on social media into the academic writing they produce for their assignments, exams, and research, leading to a growing body of literature pertaining to this phenomenon within the fields

of linguistics and education. The purpose of this study, then, is to investigate the effect that social media has on academic writing among university students.

### 1.2 Problem Statement

Students at university spend a considerable amount of time on social networking sites where informal language is used. Continued use of this style of language could have an effect on student's academic writing skills. In many cases, students do so without even realizing it, which leads them to lack of proper use of abbreviations, informal words, the use of improper punctuation and poor use of grammatical structure when completing formal writing tasks. The aim of this research will be to determine how much social media language affects student's academic writing.

### 1.3 Research Goals

- To explore the effects of social networking site communication on the structure and quality of academic writing.
- To find the common elements of informal communication used in writing by college students.
- To investigate students' beliefs about how social networking sites affect their writing style in a formal setting.
- To evaluate whether informal communication creates grammatical and structural problems within academic writing.

### 1.4 Research Questions

1. What impact does social media syntax have upon the academic paper of undergraduates?
2. What are some instances of the types of social media syntax that are most used by students?
3. How will college students perceive how social media syntax influences them academically?
4. Will the use of social media syntax adversely affect students' formal and grammar writing skills?

### 1.5 Importance of Research

This research is relevant to students, teachers, researchers, and linguists because it offers insight into the impact of digital communication on the use of formal writing. It provides evidence that will assist schools to create an awareness of the academic standards for written work. Finally, it will contribute to sociolinguistics and digital linguistics.

## 2. Literature Review

Across the globe, social media has changed how people communicate with one another. In his book "Language and the Internet," David Crystal argues that the emergence of digital communication has introduced new ways of expressing language including: using abbreviations, creating acronyms, using Emoji, and expressing things informally. When it comes to social media language specifically, it is typically fast-paced, brief, and creative in nature.

Many research studies have shown that excessive use of informal internet language will affect the writing skills of students. Some researchers have stated that students become accustomed to using abbreviations and misspellings of words through excessive use of social media and subsequently apply them in academic writing.

Rosen et al. (2010) found that students that utilize text messaging language extensively tend to make many grammatical errors and punctuation mistakes when writing formally. In a similar study, Aziz et al. (2013) found that social network use impacts spelling ability and sentence structure for certain students.

On the other hand, some researchers do believe that social media has a positive impact on developing students' writing ability because social media provides an opportunity for learners to communicate with one another, be creative, expose themselves to new vocabulary, and collaborate with other learners. Overall, most studies suggest that uncontrolled use of social media language negatively affects the quality of writing produced by students in an academic environment.

### **3. Research Methodology**

Qualitative research was utilized to gain insight into the opinions, emotions, and past experiences of the participants. The researcher used this method because they were trying to understand how the participants view and deal with a defined issue (study) on a daily basis. The researcher used the qualitative method to understand how social media influences students' ability to communicate well in academic writing. Instead of having set responses (e.g., yes, no), the researcher allowed participants to share their views on a variety of different topics.

This method also provided the researcher with a wealth of descriptive, substantive, and meaningful data regarding their use of language, grammar, and vocabulary; along with their writing behaviors. The researcher conducted interviews and open-ended dialogues with participants to further enhance the understanding of the participants' linguistic behaviors and styles of communication. Qualitative research also provided opportunities for flexibility within the research process so that the researcher could ask more questions if necessary. Therefore, using the qualitative method for understanding the students' experiences with regard to social media and academic writing was the most appropriate way to accomplish this goal.

#### **3.1 Participants**

This research will include all university students who actively utilize social networking platforms in their daily communication. University students were selected as the target population for this study because they represent one of the largest groups of users of digital communication technology, including WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter. In addition to using social media for communicating socially, university students use social media in their daily lives to communicate while completing academic writing tasks such as assignments, presentations, reports, as well as assessments (exams) that require the submission of written academic work.

Consequently, university students provide the unique opportunity to research the relationship between informal digital communication and formal academic writing as both forms of communication occur at the same time. Furthermore, the study population will consist of university students from a variety of disciplines and educational levels who spend a considerable amount of time using social media. Because social networking platforms are now an established part of university students' social and academic lives, this study is important in understanding the relationship between social media frequency of use and the academic language used within the writing process. As such, university students are the most appropriate population for this research.

#### **3.2 Population**

This study will examine the university student population who frequently engage in using social media sites daily. Due to their high level of usage for digital communication technology (ie: WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter), university students were chosen as a population for this research project. In addition, university students are constantly using digital technology to communicate while performing academic writing tasks (assignments, presentations, reports, exams). As such, the researcher will be examining university students who are participating in formal academic writing and informal digital

communication. This makes them the ideal participants to examine the impact of social media language on academic writing practices.

The population is made up of university students from various academic backgrounds and educational levels who are regularly and extensively utilizing social networking applications. As social media has become an integral part of university students' social and academic lives, an examination of this population provides insight into their online communication patterns and academic language use. This is why university students were selected to be the primary research population of this study.

### 3.3 Sampling Methods

This research study utilized a purposive approach for selecting participants in order to gather data. Purposive sampling is a non-probability type of sampling where researchers select participants based upon pre-defined characteristics relevant to their research topic. The researcher selected five individuals attending college/university that regularly use social media as part of their daily communication and also engage in some type of academic writing. The rationale behind these individuals being selected was due to their ability to provide rich, descriptive information and personal experiences pertaining to how social media may impact academic writing.

Through the use of purposive sampling techniques, the researcher concentrated on those individuals who were well versed in both informal written communications (like social media) as well as formal use of written language within an academic context. Overall, this study's goal was to collect qualitative, in-depth data rather than rely on quantitative or numerical based data - therefore, the sample size was kept small and purposely chosen to ensure a high level of quality and relevance of data received. As a result, through the use of purposive sampling, the researcher was able to obtain significant and meaningful information regarding students writing behaviors, language selection, and opinions about using social media types of communication.

### 3.4 Data Collection

The primary data collection method for this research project was semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen because it is one of the most efficient ways to obtain in-depth and detailed information from participants. Semi-structured interviews offer a mixture of both structured and unstructured question types (i.e., enabling the researcher to have prepared directive questions as well as allowing for open-ended responses from participants). The flexibility of this method facilitates greater exploration of the relationship between social media language and academic writing.

All of the interview questions were developed based on the study's research objectives and research questions and included some open-ended items, allowing participants to freely convey their feelings and views to the interviewer without constraints. This approach encouraged participants to give thorough explanations about their use of social media, their writing habits, their preferences for language, and their experiences with academic writing. Because the interviews were open-ended in nature, participants were also able to provide their own examples of how they believed social media language has impacted their formal writing practices.

Topics addressed during the interviews included: what social media platforms participants use most often; what types of abbreviations/slang they most often use; and if they believe they accidentally write in an informal style.

Research Questions that asked during interviews

1. What's your main social media platform?
2. Online communication- do you use abbreviations/slang?
3. Have you implemented social media vernacular unintentionally in academics?

4. Has social media had an effect on your grammar/spelling/interpersonal communication?
5. What's your view of the connection between social media and academic writing?

#### **4. Data Analysis and Findings**

##### ***Respondent 1***

The respondent indicated they primarily use WhatsApp and Instagram for communication. They also stated that they are regularly using the abbreviations "u", "lol", and "idk" while engaging in social media communication. They indicated that sometimes these short forms appear within a formal context when writing in the classroom.

##### ***Quote from Participant:***

"Sometimes I write short words in my assignments without even realising it, because I'm so used to using these words every day through social media."

##### ***Analysis:***

This observation implies that regular usage of language associated with social media generally affects the writing process in a way that is not initially recognized.

##### ***Respondent 2***

Respondent 2<sup>nd</sup> stated that social media impacts the way that participants use punctuation and how to write a complete sentence.

##### ***Quote from Participant:***

"I tend to leave out commas and periods when I am texting, so this carries over into how I send text messages for academic purposes."

##### ***Analysis:***

This comment stresses the fact that informal text communication creates a lack of awareness regarding proper grammar during digital communications, which leads to diminished grammatical accuracy in academic contexts.

##### ***Respondent 3***

Respondent 3<sup>rd</sup> believes that social media has positive and negative effects in our daily life. It depends on our use .

##### ***Quote from Participant:***

"Social media encourages good communication practices and promotes creativity, but overusing informal language can lead to using poor formal writing."

##### ***Analysis:***

This response indicates that social media allows for greater exposure to simple and complex forms of language; however, exposure to informal writing may also diminish the standard of academic or formal writing.

##### ***Respondent 4***

4<sup>th</sup> respondent stated that they have a tendency to use informal language, such as emojis, filler words, and acronyms, while participating in socially relevant communications, to a large degree.

##### ***Quote from Participant:***

"I'm so used to typing quickly and informally that it is difficult to write formally at times."

##### ***Respondent 5***

This respondent was very adamant that students need to communicate differently in academic writing than they would in relation to social media messaging.

##### ***Quotes from participant:***

"Students must understand that creative writing and informal chat are completely different writing styles."

##### ***Interpretation:***

This participant was underscoring the necessity for language awareness and how language is affected by context.

**Analysis:**

This is a reflection upon how the habits of digital communication influence the manner in which one writes in a formal context.

**5. Findings**

- Students often use slang and abbreviations while communicating on social media.
- Students may not be aware that they use these same types of words when writing academically.
- Writing on social media in an informal communication mode will negatively affect students' grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Although students can differentiate between formal and informal language, they have difficulties maintaining this distinction while writing academically.
- Having access to social media provides students with greater confidence and creativity in their written communication.

**6. Conclusion**

This research investigated how the social media language used by students has impacted their academic writing. As the popularity of social media continues to grow, many students now interact with each other through social media on a daily basis. The use of social media applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter and so on all promote the use of informal language styles such as abbreviations, slang words, emojis, acronyms, and shortened spellings, and nonstandard grammar. Furthermore, since university students dedicate a large amount of time using these platforms, it is important to understand how social media language is affecting their formal academic writing.

The results show that social media language has had an effect on how students write. Most participants reported using abbreviations and informal expressions when communicating online and that these forms of language occasionally appear unintentionally in academic assignments, exams, classroom notes or formal writing tasks. In addition, many students use shortened words, casual language and relaxed grammar as a result of their frequent usage of digital communication methods. As a result of this, the distinction between formal academic language and informal social media language is becoming less distinct. The final conclusion of the study indicates that social media language has impacted multiple aspects

**6.1 Recommendations**

- Higher education institutions should provide academic writing workshops for students.
- Educators should help their students become familiar with the differences between formal and informal writing.
- Students should take care to proofread their assignments prior to submitting them for assessment.
- Educational institutions should foster correct grammatical and punctuation usage.
- Future studies should focus on conducting quantitative or mixed-methods studies on the topic of writing using large sample sizes.

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