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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A HINDRANCE TO THE WRITING SKILLS OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

**LAS REDES SOCIALES COMO UN OBSTÁCULO PARA LAS
HABILIDADES DE ESCRITURA DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE
INGLÉS**

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Social Media as a Hindrance to the Writing Skills of English Learners

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact that social media has had in the writing skills of young people. It focuses on how the rise of social media language has changed the way in which people use the English language at the time of writing. Moreover, it explores the impact of abbreviations, dialects, slang, and new terms and their effect on the way people perform their written abilities. As well as how all these features impact the communication and academic performance of youths.

Keywords: *English, social media, writing, academics, communication*

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Las Redes Sociales como un Obstáculo para las Habilidades de Escritura de los Estudiantes de Inglés

RESUMEN

Este estudio explora sobre el impacto que las redes sociales han tenido en las habilidades de escritura de los jóvenes. Se centra en cómo el auge del lenguaje de las redes sociales ha cambiado la forma en que las personas utilizan el inglés al momento de escribir. Además, explora el impacto de las abreviaturas, los dialectos, la jerga y los nuevos términos y su efecto en la forma en que las personas desarrollan sus habilidades escritas. Asimismo, la manera de cómo todas estas características impactan en la comunicación y el desempeño académico de los aprendices de inglés.

Palabras claves: inglés, redes sociales, escritura, académico, comunicación

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INTRODUCTION

Social media is known as websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using technological devices (Cambridge). These platforms are used all around the world, and now are part of people's lives. Consequently, their usage can have either a positive or negative impact on them. Among platforms, some are more used than others and they contain different demographics. For instance, numerous websites are mostly used by teenagers and young adults, such as TikTok and Twitter. Meanwhile, websites like Facebook are predominantly used by older generations.

As mentioned previously, social media has had a grasp on the younger generations for years. Meaning that it has impacted their lives in multiple ways. Plenty of studies examine how it affects their social life, self-perception, and even day-to-day habits. Nonetheless, it is crucial to discuss how social media also affects their academic life. It is known that the internet and its platforms have been implemented in schools and universities in order to improve the learning of their students. But younger generations make use of these websites for more than academic learning, which has shown to have a negative impact on their academics. The usage of social media language can hinder young people's writing skills because it affects their grammar, communication, and academic skills.

To develop the argument of how social media has a negative impact on academics and social life of younger generations, it is imperative to narrow it down. When it comes to academics, there are many fields that can be impacted by the usage of the platforms. In this case, it is essential to focus on how it affects the writing skills of the targeted population. This has its main focus on the way the language used in social media can go beyond the platforms and have an effect on the school performance, and even communication, of students.

To dive deeper into this issue, it is relevant to take into account that these platforms, and language overall, are in constant change. Thus, it is impossible to think that the language used now will not change as the time goes by. To have such changes does not pose a threat itself, since it is something that has been happening since ancient times. Nevertheless, the problem arises when this change has an unfavorable effect in such a skill as important as writing. Therefore, it affects how people



communicate with each other and how well they develop academically. Furthermore, it is crucial to investigate the change in the writing skills of people. It is a problem that is not paid attention to. Nowadays, people are so used to the language change of social media, that implementing it in their lives is something as common as using regular language. Nevertheless, it is imperative to pay close attention to it because of its negative effect on young people; taking into account the different ways in which implementing these changes causes miscommunication issues.

This research focuses on how social media language usage can hinder the writing skills of young people through the usage of slangs, abbreviations, dialects, and bad grammatical structures. This will be done by researching on the different topics and how they have altered the way in which they write, whether it is in informal or formal settings. Moreover, it is imperative that the research demonstrates how these changes are shown in the development of individuals and the impact it has on them. The main focus is to show that grammatical mistakes on social media hinder people's writing skills and how it happens.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Language Change

“Written language has been forced to adapt to meet the demands of synchronous conversation, resulting in a creative burst of new forms, such as emoticons, abbreviations, phonetic spellings, and other neologisms.” (Eisenstein 1). This quote describes the different changes that language has had to go through to adapt itself to the newer generations. As it was mentioned in the previous point, there are multiple new phrases and terms that have been coined by Gen Z. This is just a fragment of it since language has been forced to evolve in many ways. In this section of the research the impact of trends, slangs, abbreviations, and dialects will be discussed more in depth. Alongside this it will be discussed how they have affected the way in which people use the language nowadays.

Technology has had multiple impacts on society. Some can recognize how it has changed interactions, ways of living, skills, work, education, and even self-perception. But among all of these, it is important to highlight the impact they have on skills and interactions. These two factors have been affected by the usage of social media and the language this includes. It can be pointed



out that the lexicon that young people, also known as Gen Z, use on a day-to-day basis is influenced by the one they are familiar with on social media. This change won't be stopped since human speech is in constant evolution. Therefore, the modifications on the way of writing or speaking will always be present in the lives of young individuals. Moreover, it is imperative that the social media platforms with the biggest impact be identified to see how modern language works. The most popular platforms among them are Twitter, TikTok and Instagram. Each one of them has collaborated to the modernization of the English language.

To start off, it is relevant to argue about the impact of slang in communication. Slang is informal language that is usually spoken rather than written, used especially by particular groups of people (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). They have been present in language for decades and they come and go with the generational change. Based on this it can be noticed that many phrases or words that were used as slang in the 80's or 70's do not exist anymore, or at least are not used by people aside from the older generations. Just as older slang words were constantly used in colloquial language, nowadays new ways of using them are arising. Gen Z has a different way of communicating, and with the impact that social media has on their life they tend to take slang words from social media and adapt them to their day-to-day conversations. To illustrate this point, words such as *cap*, *slay*, *simp*, *cringe* and more can be added to the amount of slang used by young generations.

On the other hand, it is crucial to mention abbreviations too. In this case, it is a more complex topic since they can cause problems at the time of performing successful communication. Abbreviations can be seen as phrases that are shortened to make the communication process faster. They collect popular phrases and use the initial of each word to create a shorter one. For instance, a quite popular abbreviation is *brb* which stands for *be right back*. This is a term that is used by many people regardless of their generational gap. Nevertheless, it should be considered that the popularity of certain abbreviations depends on their usage in social media. There are some that are basically fixed in the informal English language, especially when it comes to texting. Such as *u2* (*you too*), *ru* (*are you*), *nvm* (*nevermind*), *tbh* (*to be honest*), *etc.* These are unchanging and used by many generations in an attempt to make communication faster.



The latent abbreviations vary depending on which social media platform each person uses. There are some abbreviations that are more prominent in Twitter, just as others are more fit for Instagram, and so on. In the case of the targeted population, they are known for using multiple social networking sites at the same time; therefore, they implement a mix of abbreviations to their day-to-day language. The problem of combining this feature of speech is that it can cause many issues among the virtual population. For instance, the word *ijbol* (*I just burst out laughing*) is mostly used by Twitter users; meanwhile, networks such as TikTok and Instagram use terms such as *fyp* (*for you page*) and *tbt* (*throwback thursday*). Using a combination of such words can cause miscommunication between people, mostly because not everyone understands what they stand for. Therefore, when people alter their speech in this way, they can do more harm than good to their communication process, whether it is online or offline.

Furthermore, it is vital to note that these platforms create trends that many are willing to follow. Many of these language ‘trends’ come up randomly in these applications when one person comes up with a term and people who consume their content decide to implement said terms in their regular language. To illustrate, the platform ‘TikTok’ has come up with many expressions in the years it has been popular (2019-2023). Among these it can be noted concepts such as *blueberry milk nails*, *cappuccino makeup*, *vanilla girl makeup*, and more. All of them are used to refer to something related to beauty that already exists. TikTok users rebrand these already-coined concepts and exchange them for a new name to create trends that many will follow. The action of rebranding is not bad itself, but it becomes a problem when people start mistaking the trending phrases as the actual concepts. This can also be seen when people try to avoid the regulation rules of the websites and create new words to refer to words that already exist. An example of this can be seen in the application ‘TikTok’ where the word ‘suicide’ is linked to negative connotations and hence prohibited to be used in comments and videos. To cope with these regulations, the users came up with the word ‘unalive’ to refer to the term. This innovation of language conditioned young people to associate and use the word ‘unalive’ as if it was the original term; therefore, creating a quite inappropriate change in their way of applying the language.



To conclude with the importance of the language change, dialects have to be addressed. There are certain variations that are used by different communities on social media. It is crucial to remember that cultural factors play a big role in the diffusion and use of dialects (Einstein 2). For instance, in the discussed websites such as Instagram and TikTok, dialects are not predominant. On the other hand, Twitter is a network that has a vast cultural diversity which leads users to use a mix of language combinations, including dialects. The most prominent one is African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Many users use AAVE despite not belonging to the community who is meant to use this regional variation. Thus, it has been taken as a part of social media language rather than a linguistic regional variation. This can be seen in the constant use of words such as *period, sassy, wig, yass, etc.* Also, the way in which AAVE changes the grammar of the sentences from a formal structure to a heavily informal one. The problem with using such dialects is that people who are not meant to appropriate it make a drastic change in their way of using the English language. By replacing daily words with dialectal changes, they will prompt miscommunication and improper grammatical structures to prevail in social media.

Learning Process

The information provided in the first part of this discussion serves as an example on how this ‘modernization’ of language has an impact on young people’s language usage. Among this, it does not only affect the way they express themselves in social media, but also how it can influence the way they learn the language. It is known that social media has grown and implanted itself in the lives of millions of people, which is why many look for a way to take advantage of it. In the education field many institutions aim to teach English with the help of social media. According to research made by Ariantini Kadek P., et al (2021), the usage of platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have been frequently applied as an English learning method through various activities. This shows that many try to include modern methods of teaching and learning using the technological resources available. Therefore, affirming that social media has an impact on people beyond their leisure time.

Even though using social media as a teaching method can be fruitful for some students, it is not the case for all of them. There are many individuals who are not being taught through these



platforms in academic institutions. Several people learn a second language, such as English, by themselves. In the case of this group of people, learning words and sentence structures through social media can be confusing and even detrimental for their learning process. When people try to learn a new language by themselves, stumbling across informal language can be prejudicial for them because it can be confused as the proper way to use the language. Consequently, they might tend to change words, invent new ones, use slang inappropriately and learn improper grammar. Therefore, it is evident how the new forms of writing that can be seen on such platforms can have a negative impact.

The process of using social media as a learning tool can be directly linked to the detriment of people's writing skills. This is because platforms introduce language variations to people, and many learn to use them in an improper way. When individuals do not have guidance in their learning process, they are prone to learn improper grammar, punctuation mistakes, informal registers, and new terms. This is not bad, but it can be seen as an issue because many are not aware that said variations should be avoided in different social contexts. Therefore, numerous people tend to commit the mistake of taking social media language to their day-to-day communication. This causes difficulties because by not applying the English language as it is supposed to be done, their learning process is not successful, and their communication skills will also be affected.

Final Results

This research shows the different ways in which language change has been incorporated in the lives of many people and how it has altered their writing patterns. By giving examples of the different variations that are brought by abbreviations, slang, dialects, and new terms, it is easier to understand how big the change is. It is not something that can be established as a minor change; since many individuals use social media language in their day to day and it brings more problems than anything else. Many would wonder, why is it so relevant if it is only used in social media? The issue is that many bring that language out of the internet and apply it into their daily communication process as well as their academic life.



When it comes to academic writing, many believe that the usage of social media does not affect the students' performance while writing. However, there are different studies that have proven that social media has a negative impact on the academic performance of students. For instance, research done by Omoera Osakue S., et al (2018), has found that the writing skills of Nigerian students who have been learning English as a second language have been affected using abbreviations that social media has introduced to them.

Consequently, expressions such as 'u' for 'you' 'gr8t' for 'great', 'ur/urs' for 'your/yours', among other deviational patterns, have crept into their writing consciousness in classes and examinations, which make a lot of 'sense' in informal settings among the youths, but smacks of sub-literacy in formal writing situations under which they are being trained. (Omoera, 2018, p. 60)

The excerpt taken from Omoera Osasuke S, et al's (2018) research, shows that in many instances people do not separate their social media language from real life. And when they apply the words, they have learned in such sites in their school papers it causes issues for them. This is harmful because the students bring social media language into their academic papers. This is a serious problem since students commit grammatical and spelling errors in their formal papers. Moreover, for students who are learning a new language the process of learning properly is essential. Nonetheless, many do not apply the knowledge they acquire from school, and instead they choose to follow the language variations found in social media. Additionally, it can be said that the usage of abbreviations on school papers is worrying since students are not fulfilling their duties by using informal language. This is relevant because they need to separate their informal language from the situations when formality is needed. Thus, making such mistakes because of the influence of social media shows how detrimental it is for their writing skills.

Furthermore, it is imperative to mention that social media does not only affect the academic performance of people, but also the way in which they communicate. Nowadays, it is the norm to communicate via texts and emails, depending on the social context. Because of how normalized social media language is, people tend to include its different variations in their written communication. This can be problematic since it is known that everyone communicates with



people from different cultures and age groups. Thus, it needs to be taken into consideration that not everyone uses the same platforms and terms. Therefore, when someone uses variations such as slang and abbreviations with a person who is not acquainted with them, it will cause miscommunication. This destroys the main purpose of communication, which is to convey a message properly, which is why people should separate the language they use on different sites with the language they use while communicating in the real world. Those are some of the reasons why using social media in the wrong way can cause many different problems.

In closing, it can be said that social media has brought many changes to people's lives. One of those changes involves the way in which language has been altered by said platforms. This has brought innovative terms for the younger generations to express themselves; nonetheless, it has also affected the way in which they execute their writing whether it is in formal or informal settings. This generates negative consequences since people become dependent on using terms that have been coined in networking sites and forget that they should not be applied in every social situation or context. Consequently, they use improper terms and structures in settings that require the use of proper English. For instance, while emailing, texting, and writing academic papers. Thus, showing how their writing skills are affected by social media language.

CONCLUSIONS

The rise of social media has brought many changes to society and its way of living. Aspects such as communication and self-expression have faced developments with the arrival of social platforms. This has also affected the way in which they write since with the arrival of cellphones, networks, language kept evolving. Thus, it can be confirmed that the way in which people write has been affected by the language used in social media; therefore, their writing skills have undergone changes that harm their communication and skills. Through this research, numerous changes in language could be found, such as the implementation of abbreviations, slang, dialects, and new terminology. Moreover, it was analyzed how all the lexical innovations have modified the way in which people, specifically younger generations, use the language. This directly affects the way they write and communicate since they use terms specific to social media in their day to day.



With the implementation of social media in everyday life, many improvements have been made. Nonetheless, it has also brought negative repercussions to the lives of many. One of them is the detrimental effects that it caused on people's writing skills. Many would think that it is an irrelevant topic or that it is not as crucial to society as other negative aspects. Nevertheless, writing is a core aspect of communication and academic performance; and it is relevant to address how it has changed and how it affects people. This research was able to find the different ways in which this skill is affected. By normalizing language change, grammatical errors and punctuation mistakes, people brought drastic changes to the way they write and communicate. This brought issues such as bad academic performance and miscommunication at the time of using written speech.

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