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SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON PAKISTANI YOUTH'S LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS: A PREDICTIVE STUDY OF RESULTANT CHANGES

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ABSTRACT

Social media has taken over our lives in this era of technology and globalization in many ways. Among many other impacts on the users, the language choices, and expressions, mostly preferred by youth, are manipulated and affected by such online platforms. With this in view, this research seeks to understand how social media has transformed the language expressions of young Pakistanis. It also focuses on the possible resultant changes in linguistic choices made by youth after being influenced by social media. Data was collected through previous papers to discover the research gaps, and an online survey/questionnaire was administered to fulfil this study's goal. Fifty participants were randomly selected from five educational institutions in Sialkot, Pakistan (Govt. College Women University, NISA College, University of Management and Technology, University of Central Punjab, and Govt. Murray Graduate College). The data was critically, qualitatively, and quantitatively evaluated and analyzed. Furthermore, the research findings have shown that social media language dominates youngsters' linguistic expressions in several ways. A shift could be observed from using the alphabet to signs and symbols impacting the youth's academic and formal linguistic expression in educational institutes.

Keywords: Social media; Slangs; Linguistics expressions; Youth; Language; Communication.

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INTRODUCTION

We live in a technologically loaded modern world with exceptional communication and interaction patterns. In recent years, social media has emerged as one of the most propagated sources of sharing information, ideas and thoughts using different online platforms. Tufail et al. (2021) opine that in the past few years, social networking sites have become the primary means of communication. Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Skype, and a slew of other social media platforms serve various communication purposes. However, English is extensively used on social media, and these platforms have indirectly benefitted English learners. The challenges posed by such a scenario also provide many opportunities for learning innovations. Zahoor et al. (2020) pertinently point out that "Social Networking Sites (SNS) are virtual crowds consisting of people who can make their profiles and share their ideas with the world, particularly in the form of discourse.

Furthermore, social media is used as a learning tool. Students may also use social media to share and discuss their academic materials. Due to major grammar and spelling problems caused by modern internet communication, the language used in student assignments has evolved from professional to informal (Barseghyan, 2013). Barseghyan (2013) further opines that students are more into language misuse, such as using slang terms like LOL, OMG, and IMHO, which is quite prevalent in research papers written at the university level. The development of the internet has allowed learning to transcend the confines of the

traditional classroom setting (p-665)". Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and Skype are now regarded as the most famous and popular social networking sites (SNS), which are utilized for various communicative purposes and facilitate people in the creation and sharing of content throughout the globe. The advent of the internet and the rapid growth associated with electronic communication has transformed traditional methods of connection, interaction and communication (Halim & Maros, 2014). Due to their birth in the digital age and early exposure to technology, today's students and youth can be categorized as members of the Internet Generation (Gallardo-Echenique et al., 2015). Authorities in Pakistan have facilitated the people to use social media smoothly and conveniently, which shows the country's deep and keen concern for technological advancement. Growth in internet users was observed in Pakistan by 17% between 2019 and 2020. At the same time, the rate of social media users increased by +7.0% from April 2019 to January 2020 (Kemp, 2020). These new communication mediums have an unavoidable impact on the users in general and the youth in particular, which demands a research probe to create a culture of awareness about their merits and demerits.

Social media has not only paved the path of innovations in communication but also evolved and stretched language boundaries in new dimensions. This fascinating area has caught the attention of researchers for many years to probe into the involved intricacies and complexities. Due to social networks, most young people use various linguistic terms even in everyday discussions. Social media has given rise to a new pseudo-language that includes expressions like "LOL, ROFL, and LMAO," "Hit me up, what is the move?" and "Sliding into the DM's," as well as the use of Emojis such as, "••". These terms now mean something different than they did ten years ago. Words unique to media platforms have also been developed. Words like "tweet," "blog," "hashtag," and "selfie" are now the new linguistic norms. These terms were never used before the development of social media, but they are now more common than ever, thanks to social media (Heid, 2015). All the neologisms and new expressions mark significant changes in the language used by the youth of Pakistan. The present research work acts as a stepping stone as it explores how social media shapes youth's language by influencing their linguistic expressions. Moreover, it also focuses on the most expected consequences of the impacts. This research study aims to highlight that, in recent decades, the youth, consciously or unconsciously, have started using such expressions that greatly impact language grammar and lexical structure. This predictive study will make the youth aware of the relationship between social media and their linguistic expressions and resultant changes.

Research Questions

1. What impacts does social media have on the linguistic expression of the youth of Pakistan?
2. How does social media shape today's youth's linguistic preferences to tomorrow's unique and different young generation's linguistic expression?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Living languages are always dynamic, but languages have been going through rapid transformation in the 21st century due to many factors. Chomsky (2014) argues that because of the changes in our contemporaries, our language is continually, inevitably, and naturally altering, transforming, and becoming more adaptable to its users. Herring (2001) observes that innovative factors fundamentally influence language. They include synchronicity, granulation (length of content), multi-methodology (for example, whether realistic or sound are incorporated), and other non-semantic factors, such as members' connections, desires, and levels of inspiration. Nowadays, social media influences language in all the mentioned ways, mainly based on non-semantic factors. These changes in the 21st century stand unparalleled in human history due to excessive social media communication practices.

Social media communication has some unique characteristics. According to El-Badawy & Hashem (2015), social media is a platform that enables two-way communication between people. Anyone having an online account can communicate their ideas with other social media users. Clement (2020) estimates that during

the fourth quarter of 2019, Twitter had 152 million paid daily active users globally, bringing the anticipated 3.6 billion social media users in 2020 to around 4.41 billion in 2025. The popularity of social media sites like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter has quickly increased, indicating that the actual number of users may even exceed the estimates. In terms of education and employment chances, social media is crucial. Teenagers primarily communicate with their friends and relatives on social media. Students might use social media to access new web resources that improve their learning abilities (Ali et al., 2016). Such rapid transformation in the communication medium is not without drastic impact in various ways.

Attila (2017) claims that the creation and rapid growth of social media networks as a popular activity has prompted the development of a unique language system required for effective communication. Social media can both help and hurt natural language processing, according to Baldwin (2012). While he attributes "spelling errors, the free-form adoption of new phrases, and regular violations of English grammar conventions" to social media, he also mentions the benefit of "lexical normalization" in the same linguistic context. Higher education students, in particular, need to be aware of the effects and side effects of new variations in linguistic expressions so that they can control the harm and promote positive outcomes.

Social media has negatively influenced the academic expression of the youth in educational institutes. The five interrelated "literacies" of attention, engagement, collaboration, network awareness, and critical consumption have been used by Cummings (2011) to explain how social media has affected higher education. Over the past five years, the number of SNS users has significantly expanded, notably among students and teens (Aydin, 2012). The text in the messages is a mash-up of real words, abbreviations, shortenings, and short structures that are standard for SMS text messaging language. Shortis (2001) argues that they are truncated, misspelled, or replaced with a shorter string of continuous characters that are phonetically equivalent when they occur back-to-back in a word. Many users have developed internet slang for communication and thinking expression on SNSs and mobile networks. An entirely different language has come into existence and is being used on social media rather unthinkingly. According to Swan (2017), kids' usage of grammar and spelling has reportedly been negatively impacted by social media.

Communication and interaction on social media have given rise to a new linguistic norm called internet slang. The overuse of internet slang terms like ROFL (roll on the floor laugh) and LOL (laugh out loud) negatively impact the traditional or formal English language (Zainal & Noor, 2020). Additionally, it is common to see social media users use informal contractions, short words that people use in casual speech. Examples include "gonna," "whatcha," "ain't," "gimme," and others. In writing and "proper speech," informal contractions are not acceptable. Informal contractions may inspire learners to use them in their writing. According to Will (2014), acronyms are now frequently used in place of full sentences, such as lol (laugh out loud), gd 9t (good night), and TGIF (thank God it is Friday). These acronyms are created by taking the first few letters of other phrases and combining them to generate a new word. Ekah (2007) claims the same thing, claiming that social media texting informal vocabulary is slowly but steadily intruding on official texts. Giraldo et al. (2018) contend that they are an environment that supports working with ultra-fast responses, where it is also possible to communicate with multiple groups of people at once. As a result, they claim that reading speed has increased proportionally to response speed through signs, symbols, and abbreviations, which promote time efficiency. The studies mentioned above show that the unique language system of social media is not just limited to its platforms only but poses a challenge to natural language. Mehmood and Taswir (2013) contend that the usage of slang words causes students to go from a formal to a more informal writing style, where they suffer from a lack of a concise and refined linguistic framework and ultimately suffer writing-related language damage. In this regard, no significant work has been added about the influence of social media on the linguistic choices of Pakistani youth. Therefore, researchers need more data on how and to what extent current and future youths' linguistic preferences will differ. In order to fill this gap, this study has been conducted.

METHODOLOGY

For this research project 'Mixed Method Approach' was used by researchers. A survey with qualitative and quantitative items was used for data collection. This online questionnaire/survey was designed to identify how social media language could affect the linguistic lifestyle of the youth. There were ten items in the questionnaire. The Likert scale was used to identify how much social media has penetrated youth's life. It also aimed to determine the future outcomes, except for one item, viz., item number 6, which had a unique purpose, i.e., to identify why respondents prefer to use the language of social media even in their daily interaction. The questionnaire was sent to two established scholars for review in the light of research objectives and questions, and it was modified in the light of their feedback. The youth of Sialkot was the population for this study, while the fifty random students from five different educational institutions were considered as the sample of the study. The items in the research tool intended to find the social media influence on the linguistic expressions of the youth. Livingstone (2005) discovered that younger generations had greater access to new media and thus consumed it more than older generations. The usage of short forms, signs, and emoticons have been increased over decades. Trends of this kind seem to affect linguistic behaviour, sometimes perceived as negative and at other times positive. Emojis, a more practical visual language used to send messages and communicate emotions and thoughts, makeup 49% of the text used in social media, according to Morris (1938). These practices can have a macro-level impact on the grammatical, syntactical and lexical structure of the language, which has been the focus of this study. Bringing this linguistic landscape into the research focus is useful and informative as it will promote a culture of awareness among the concerned stakeholders.

Data Collection

Both primary and secondary procedures were used to get the data. Primary information was gathered through an online questionnaire, while secondary information came from books, articles, and websites. The secondary data served the purpose of building the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study and identifying the research gaps.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was gathered in the form of responses to the questionnaire. The questions were hypothetically divided into three sections (refer to the appendix); the first section revealed a general approach toward social media. The second section aimed to explore the practices of the participants, and the third section was the heart of this research study— the major section intending to highlight the participants' opinions and provide an opportunity to go to the depth of the issue in a qualitative manner.

Table 1. Questionnaire items.

Questionnaire Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social media is changing your word choices and the way of using language	37.5%	62.5%	0%	0%
Consciously or unconsciously, you use the language of social media in your conversations	17.5%	62.5%	20%	0%

Everyone who responded to the first question in Table 1 agreed that social media affected and altered the way young people used the language. The result showed that most of the responses ranged between agree and strongly agree. Only a few disagreed, but there was no strong opposition. The second query focused on how individuals used social media jargon in their day-to-day interactions. Most respondents, about 62.5%, agreed with this statement, 17.5% strongly agreed, and 20% disagreed. More than half of the participants seemed to be under the influence of social media in their language choices in general and academic expression in particular.

Table 2. Questionnaire items.

Questionnaire Items	Often	Sometimes	Never
Do you use slangs, short forms, and abbreviations in formal and informal settings?	40%	35%	25%
Do you use emoticons and signs while communicating your message?	55%	25 %	20%
Do you prefer to correct spelling and grammatical mistakes on social media platforms?	30%	50%	20%
Do you prefer to use trendy social media terms in your daily conversations	50 %	30%	20%

The four questions in Table 2 were designed to help researchers understand how social media shaped young people's language expression and choices. In response to question number, 1,2, and 4, many participants opted for using slang, abbreviations, short forms, emoticons, trendy terms, and signs used on social media. Only 20-25% took a different stance in this regard. While the response to question three showed that 30% of students focused on correcting spelling and grammatical mistakes on social media most often, but 50% did it occasionally, and 20% did not bother about it at all. Responses show the impact of social media on linguistic expression and how it is transforming the linguistic cognition of the youth in Pakistan. The responses and results to the items mentioned above have a thematic flow with the items in the following section.

Table 3. Questionnaire items.

You prefer to choose social media language because	It is time-saving. 50%	It is easy. 27%	It is new. 23%
Rules and regulations of a language can be ignored if thought can be conveyed without these.	Yes 45%	No 30%	Neutral 25%
Would you avail yourself the opportunity to use language more freely (beyond any rules and restrictions) like social media language	Yes 50%	No 10%	Neutral 40%
It is fine to convey a message with signs and symbols instead of the alphabet.	Yes 80%	No 20%	Neutral 0%

Table 3 comprises the main questions that helped address the research objectives. Question No. 1 aimed to determine the reasons behind social media expressions' popularity. Half of the participants reasoned, 'it is precise', whereas 27% reasoned, 'it is easy to use', and 23% reasoned the neologism and emergence of new expression by responding, 'it is new'. This reveals that people prefer to communicate more in fewer words. The response to question No. 2 showed that nearly half of the respondents preferred the speedy transfer of thought/idea over the proper expression. At the same time, 30% of them turned against the slavish following of the accuracy rules in expression. They seem to believe that rules and regulations are of no value if thought is being able to pass on without them, while 25% were neutral, which showed their state of confusion or lack of interest in it. The main purpose of the third question was to reveal the participants' take on language. Results showed that half of the respondents had no issue using a language more freely beyond the restrictions, while 10% turned against it, and 40% had a neutral approach. The responses to question 4 showed people's opinions regarding the use of language. Responses showed a conflicting stance among the youth between using signs and symbols and the alphabet. The majority, about 80%, agree that signs are enough if they can convey the message, as they tend to lessen the need for the alphabet, while 20% did not agree with it. These answers show that with technological advancements, people are also eager to adopt the advances in language, and there is little resistance among the youth to such rapid changes.

Findings

Social media has influenced the linguistic choices and expression of the youth in one way or other. This hints that social media language would prevail over natural language in the future, as 50% opted for a lawless language while 40% did not seem to care about it. Signs and symbols usage seem to dominate the alphabet, as 80% of users opted for them. Nevertheless, findings also revealed that social media did not negatively impact grammar and spelling, as 80% of participants preferred to correct mistakes regarding these. This may be due to academic requirement pressure, which does not let them flow fully with the current.

This study has explored possible changes in the linguistic expression of Pakistani youngsters, which can occur by encountering social media. The findings highlighted that youth seemed more attracted to a lawless language than a language with rules and regulations. That is why they are getting influenced by social media in one way or other. The language used on social media has been said to be gradually replacing language used in everyday situations. So, many changes can dominate the linguistic expression of youth in this regard. Moreover, signs and symbols seem to compete with the alphabetical system. Responses reveal that signs and symbols are equally powerful as the alphabetical system since they can convey more using less. Hence, we may witness a language comprising signs, symbols and short forms only in the future. In this regard, the preferences of youth can be changed if they are made aware of doing it at the right place, at the right time and take into account the context constraints.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sameen et al. (2021) highlight that “motivation is a crucial factor in modern-day learners. Learning has matured over the years and has drastically changed from what it used to be a few years ago. The information age (the age of technology) has brought countless blessings to modern-day learners” (p-110). Social media is a powerful platform shaping various aspects of users' lives, especially the youth in academia and their linguistic expression choices. Masood et al. (2002) also believe that “other factors, such as parental influence and media, can positively impact language proficiency” if they are handled with great care and cation”. The preset study has highlighted the possible harms of social media in the language development of the youth in Pakistan. Whatever they encounter on social media, Pakistani youngsters are more negatively impacted by the new linguistic expressions. The most visible effect of social media on young people is the growing desire to say more with less effort. As students combine text language with formal or Standard English, Mphahlele & Mashamaite (2005) contend that using shorthand in text messages damages students' language acquisition. This contradicts the findings by Zahoor et al. (2020) that Social Media does not seem to impact the lexical structure and meaning of discourse negatively. Results of this study, however, indicate that, with a few exceptions, their decisions are generally influenced by formal and informal environments. Training them to maintain the distinction between the formal and informal contexts is needed so that they are mindful of the most suitable linguistic expressions. As social media is swiftly and continuously changing language, we want to encourage future academics to investigate the effects of social media on linguistic expression. Moreover, we suggest modifying the population sample for clearer results. An empirical investigation is also required to know the affected language areas due to social media linguistic practices. Future research may also consider Error Analytical Paradigm and combine it with Discourse Studies for a profound interdisciplinary research probe into the prevailing linguistic landscape in educational institutes to keep the youth well-informed, well-directed and target-oriented.

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APPENDIX

The questionnaire has been provided below for further clarification.

Social Media Influence on Pakistani Youth’s Linguistic Expressions: A Predictive Study of Resultant Changes

We are studying "Social Media Influence on Pakistani Youth’s Linguistic Expressions: A Predictive Study of Resultant Changes". The enclosed questionnaire must be completed with your kind cooperation and close attention to reflect your ideas and experiences accurately. It is guaranteed that the information provided by the appreciated respondent will only be used for the study. The supplied data will be evaluated anonymously and only used for the study. Any private information the respondent provides will be kept private and not published. The questionnaire can be completed at any time. However, participants are free to stop and withdraw at any point while completing the questions. Your assistance in supplying useful and significant information will be much appreciated.

Please provide the following information.

Name.....Age.....Qualification.....
 Institution.....Province|City.....YourDevice.....Email.....

Instructions: Please read the following items carefully and then share your preference. You are free to choose, as there is no wrong or right answer. Please answer all the items.

1.	Social media is changing our words choice and way of using language	Strongly agree 4	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree. 1
2.	Consciously or Unconsciously, you use the language of social media in your daily conversations	Strongly agree 4	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1

3.	In formal and informal settings, you use common social media slangs, short forms and abbreviations.	Often 3	Sometimes 2	Never 1
4.	You prefer to use signs and emoticons while communicating your message.	Often 3	Sometimes 2	Never 1
5.	You try to correct spelling and grammatical mistakes on social media platforms.	It is time-saving 3	Easy 2	It is new 1
6.	You prefer to use the new trendy social media terms in your conversation.	Often 3	Sometimes 2	Never 1
7.	You prefer to use social media language because	It saves time 3	Easy 2	It is new 1
8.	Rules and regulations of a language can be ignored if thought can be conveyed without these.	Yes 3	No 2	Neutral 1
9.	You would avail yourself the opportunity to use language more freely (beyond any rules and restrictions), like social media language.	Yes 3	No 2	Neutral 1
10.	It is fine to convey a message with signs and symbols instead of the alphabet.	Yes 3	No 2	Neutral 1