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Role of Social Media in Shaping Contemporary Language Trends: A Comparative Analysis with Western Slang Trend among Jordanian University Students

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social media has dramatically reshaped language practices worldwide, introducing new linguistic phenomena, including internet slang, which have become a significant part of digital communication. While internet slang has been widely studied in Western contexts, there is limited research on its use within Arab-speaking countries, particularly in Jordan. Given the growing prominence of social media among Jordanian university students, this study investigates the role of social media in shaping contemporary language trends, focusing on the use of internet western slang comparing with Arabic slang. The research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining a survey with 300 participants and a linguistic analysis of 500 social media posts. The survey examines the frequency, context, and attitudes toward Western and Arabic internet slang, while the linguistic analysis explores the most commonly used slang terms and their contextual meanings. The findings revealed that Western internet slang is widely used among Jordanian university students, particularly on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and WhatsApp, where slang serves functions such as humor, self-expression, and social commentary. Moreover, the study has also identified demographic differences in slang usage, with male students using slang more frequently than female students. Overall, the current research has provided valuable insights into how social media influences language trends in Jordan, contributing to a broader understanding of the role of digital communication in language evolution.

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Keywords: Internet Slang; Social Media; Linguistic Analysis; Jordan; University Students; Digital Communication

1. Introduction

The advent of social media has revolutionized communication, introducing new linguistic forms and practices that reflect the dynamic nature of language in the digital age^[1]. Among these innovations, internet slang has emerged as a prominent feature of online discourse, particularly among younger demographics^[2, 3]. In Jordan, a nation characterized by its rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity, the proliferation of internet slang among university students warrants scholarly attention.

Internet slang encompasses a range of informal expressions, abbreviations, and neologisms that facilitate rapid and efficient communication in digital environments^[1, 4]. These linguistic innovations often arise from the need for brevity, humor, or to convey complex emotions succinctly^[5, 6]. The widespread use of internet slang is not confined to English-speaking communities, and thus, it has permeated various languages globally, adapting to local contexts and cultural nuances^[7]. Social media platforms serve as fertile grounds for linguistic innovation, where users experiment with language to establish identity, build communities, and engage in social commentary^[8]. The interactive nature of these platforms accelerates the adoption and dissemination of new linguistic forms, including slang^[9]. This phenomenon is particularly evident among university students, who are active participants in digital communication and often at the forefront of language trends.

In Jordan, the intersection of social media and language has been a subject of academic inquiry. Studies have examined how Jordanian users employ Western and Arabic internet slang on platforms like Twitter, focusing on the linguistic economy and the strategies used to convey messages succinctly^[10, 11]. For instance, Dawaghreh and Suliman^[12] explored how users utilize abbreviations and slang to economize language in the context of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). Moreover, Khasawneh et al.^[13] investigated how social media, regional dialects, and cultural identity in Jordan interact to produce new language occurrences. Their research enlightened the complex linguistic trends prevalent in Jordan's social media, emphasizing the role of regional

dialects and cultural identity in shaping language patterns. Further research on instant messaging language among Jordanian female students reveals the existence of unique linguistic phenomena in digital communication, reflecting the influence of social media on language use among specific demographics^[14].

One of the interesting aspects of language change on social media is the emergence and spread of new words or terms that were previously rarely used^[15]. Users can play with language, come up with neologisms, and swiftly share them with a large audience thanks to social media. Additionally, the meaning of the words is impacted by the contextualization of language on social media, which frequently takes the form of brief and casual posts. Words that initially had a specific meaning in a given context, for instance, may experience a semantic expansion or even a total meaning shift. Changes in the meaning of Arabic words on social media are also influenced by interactions with other languages and cultures^[16]. Arabic is one of the numerous languages that have been significantly impacted by globalization. This worldwide influence was reflected in the linguistic crossovers that resulted from the absorption and adaptation of foreign terminology into Arabic. Social media is the primary channel via which this process takes place because of its global nature. Understanding how Arabic interacts with other languages and how this effect is reflected in word meaning changes can be gained by examining language trends on social media. As digital technology has advanced, new Arabic phrases have emerged. As an alternative to restricting Arabic learning to the use of traditional media, technological advancements have produced a number of innovative learning platforms. The most widely used medium for learning Arabic is electronic or digital platforms^[17].

The phenomenon of digital slang in Arabic has become very common among young users. "Words like "Hala" (هلا) which means "hi" or "hello" has been widely used in an online context as a casual greeting among friends. One striking phenomenon is the use of English mixed with Arabic on social media, known as (Arabizi) Arabic with Latin alphabet"^[18]. For example, some terms like (Hala guys) or (Yalla, let's go!) mix Arabic with English in informal sentences, creating a

new slang that is popular among young people.

Apart from the above, the blending of Arabic and English in social media posts in Jordan, known as “code-switching”, Additionally, code-switching between Arabic and English is prevalent in Jordanian social media posts, reflecting a fusion of linguistic identities and the influence of global digital culture^[19]. However, despite the growing body of research on internet slang in Jordan, there remains a gap in understanding how social media shapes contemporary language trends among university students, particularly concerning the use of internet slang. Consequently, the current study is intended to bridge this research gap by conducting a linguistic analysis of internet slang among Jordanian university students, examining the prevalence, contexts, and functions of slang terms in their digital communication.

According to Umi Kulsum et al.,^[20] research, Arabization is a necessity for the Arabic language that continues to grow and develop. The existence of contact with foreign languages in the world will certainly affect the number of foreign vocabularies that enters the Arabic language, especially for modern science and technology terms. The majority of Arab people support the Arabisasi process as a form of modernization of the Arabic language. What is still debated is the method of Arabization, not legitimacy. Borrowing is a method that has become a subject of debate among pro-Arabizations. The middle way is to carry out figurative translation, which is to match foreign vocabulary with Arabic vocabulary that has the same concept. After the matching cannot be done, borrowing is the last alternative that can be taken.

The application of foreign words on social media is more dynamic than in formal communication, so social media creates an urgent need to adapt foreign terms that are growing rapidly in line with global trends^[21].

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Importance of Social Media Platforms

The present paper focuses on the importance of Social Media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and others as a method of establishing contact and communication between people more than face-to-face means of communication. Chen et al.^[22] define Social Media as “the relationships between a network of people”. Over

the last decade, there has been a really dramatic change in the online world. With the emergence of Social Media, the rate of exchanging personal information, ideas and pictures and videos is truly amazing. For instance, Cipolletta S et al.^[23] assert that over 70% of American teenagers with internet access actively engage with social media platforms.. Elena B. et al.^[24] states that social media sites promote negative behaviors among teenage students, such as procrastination—often due to socializing with friends—and an increased likelihood of drinking and drug use. Meanwhile, high school and university students spend such a long time engulfed in Social Media platforms on a daily basis, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and the other platforms. At a first glance, this may be considered as a waste of time, yet it is undeniable that it helps users acquire important knowledge and necessary skills, and particularly become involved in the activity of creating and sharing content^[25]. At the moment, though Social Media trigger controversial opinions, countless students use these platforms every day.

2.2. Approaches to Gender Variation

Sex is a biological given, but gender is a social construct. Whereas the words ‘male’ and ‘female’ have to do with sex differentiations, the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ rather compare different gender features^[26]. Many researchers have been addressing the question whether the different uses of language by males and females are attributable to biological or social factors. Over the past hundred years or so, linguists have been more inclined to believe that differences are more social. Given the diverse methodologies of dialect and gender, a number of researchers^[27] have considered a number of approaches to explain language variances between males and females. These are the Deficit, Dominance, Difference, and ‘Discursive’ approaches^[28].

2.2.1. Gender Differences and Face-to-Face Communication

People convey their thoughts and messages every day, and for a fruitful correspondence process, they utilize linguistic and non-linguistic symbols (non-verbal communication in body language and in facial expressions) to convey their thoughts and ideas viably. Linguistic and non-linguistic signs are critical for any correspondence procedure, and they shift as indicated by various elements like gender, status, culture,

or age, (Ervin-Tripp, 1968)^[29]. An assortment of sociolinguists (e.g., Lakoff^[30]; Cameron et al.^[27]; Tannen^[31].) have introduced gender differences or variations in social implication to show how males and females trade their thoughts through verbal and non-verbal signs. For, both show contrast in phonology, vocabulary and word choice^[30], language structure^[30], and diverse paralinguistic devices^[32].

2.2.2. Computer-Mediated Discourse as an Emerging Language Variety

The discourse used on electronic communication devices, largely admitted as a new language variety, involves considerable alterations in the writing of language structure. To describe the language used in electronic communication, researchers have used a wide range of terms such as ‘Electronic discourse’ (Davis and Brewer, 1997^[33]), ‘electronic language’^[34], ‘Computer-Mediated Communication’^[35], ‘Interactive Written Discourse’, ‘Netlish’, ‘Weblish’, ‘Internet language’, ‘Cyberspeak’, ‘Nettling’^[36], ‘Sublanguage’^[37], ‘Netspeak’^[38], and ‘Virtual Language’.. Davis and Brewer^[33], explain that e-discourse focuses on the way language is used rather than on the medium utilized by communicators to share and convey their views.

Herring^[35] states that “E-Discourse refers to text-based CMC, in which participants interact by means of the written word, e.g., by typing a message on the keyboard of one computer which is read by others on their computer screens, either immediately (synchronous CMC) or at a later point in time (asynchronous CMC)”. For Davis and Brewer^[33], e-discourse is “one form of interactive electronic communication in which a person uses a keyboard to writes a language”. In fact, they associate “electronic discourse” with verbal communication in writing: “writing that stands in place of voices”.

2.2.3. Gender Differences and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

As people turn out to be so connected to their electronic gadgets (e.g. cell phones, tablets and PCs) through social network platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc., trading short instant messages has moved toward becoming a piece of our day-to-day life. Online interactional correspondence (incredibly affected by computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC)) has united distant individuals since the late 1960s^[35]. It is roughly defined as the

operation through which internet users make, trade, and see data utilizing organized media transmission frameworks that encourage the encoding, transmitting, and the unraveling of the messages^[38]. Therefore, CMC advances correspondence as it empowers individuals to collaborate and trade their everyday life occasions on the web and encourages them to transmit messages and offer their thoughts and conclusions, notwithstanding cases in which they are a long way from one another.

2.3. Relevance Theory (RT) Perspectives on Web-Mediated Communication

It is necessary to incorporate cognitivist approaches to meaning-making into a communication theory. Relevance Theory (RT), according to this study, can serve this purpose. The core tenet of (RT) is that message senders always work to make their messages as relevant to their addressees as possible^[39]. Additionally, Wilson and Sperper^[39] claim that people have an inherent tendency to maximize relevance, which is immediately and mainly subconsciously engaged. Relevance theory tries to achieve the most intellectual impact with the least amount of effort, or to achieve the highest level of cognitive effect. Therefore, a cost-benefit trade-off is anticipated in the emoji and trend selection. Al-Jarrah et al.^[40] noted the difference between the communicative and cognitive definitions of relevance. Human cognition tends to be focused on maximizing relevance, and it only makes testable predictions when coupled with descriptions of specific cognitive systems, according to the cognitive principle of relevance. On the other hand, the communication principle of relevance emphasizes that every seeming stimulus, which the Relevance Theory substantially magnifies, carries a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The current study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining a survey and linguistic analysis of social media content to provide an in-depth understanding of internet slang usage among students. The study followed a descriptive cross-sectional design, capturing a snapshot of language trends at a specific point in time. This design is well-suited

for understanding the current state of internet slang usage and its relationship to social media among university students.

3.2. Study Participants

The participants were 300 university students from various institutions across Jordan, aged 18 to 25 years. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure diversity in terms of gender, academic year, and field of study. This approach helped to ensure a representative sample that captures different student groups.

3.3. Data Collection

3.3.1. Survey

A structured survey was developed to gather information on students' usage of internet slang. The survey consisted of 25 questions, combining both closed-ended and Likert-scale items. Participants were asked about their frequency of using internet slang, their preferred platforms, and the contexts in which they used these slang terms. The survey also included questions regarding students' attitudes toward internet slang and its perceived impact on language use. The survey was distributed online to facilitate broad participation.

3.3.2. Social Media Content Analysis

Once the survey was done, a linguistic analysis of social media content was conducted. A sample of 500 posts from platforms commonly used by university students, such as Facebook and Instagram, was analyzed. These posts were selected based on their relevance to the demographic of university students and their use of internet slang. Overall, the analysis focused on identifying and categorizing slang terms, examining their frequency, and analyzing the contexts in which they were used (e.g., humor, expression of identity, exaggeration). This approach helped to capture authentic language use in natural online settings.

3.4. Data Analysis

3.4.1. Survey Data

The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the frequency and types of internet slang used by participants. The data were also analyzed to iden-

tify patterns in slang usage across different demographic groups. Chi-square tests were applied to assess any significant relationships between demographic factors (e.g., gender, academic year) and internet slang usage.

3.4.2. Linguistic Analysis of Social Media Content

The social media posts were analyzed through a thematic approach to identify recurring slang terms and their contextual meanings. The analysis categorized slang terms based on their linguistic features and functions (e.g., expressive, humorous, or social bonding). The frequency of each term was calculated, and patterns in the usage of these terms across different social media platforms were explored.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained for the study, ensuring that participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected. Informed consent was sought from all participants, and they were assured that their responses would remain confidential and be used solely for academic purposes. For the social media content analysis, only publicly available posts were analyzed, and no personal information was included in the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Survey Results

The survey data provide significant insights into the frequency, context, and attitudes regarding the use of internet slang. The response rate was 100%, with all 300 students completing the survey. The survey consisted of 25 questions, covering topics such as the frequency of slang usage, attitudes toward internet slang, and the platforms where students most commonly use slang.

4.1.1. Frequency of Internet Slang Usage

The survey revealed that a majority of participants (85%) reported using internet slang on a daily basis. A smaller percentage (10%) indicated they used it at least once a week, while only 5% stated that they used internet slang less frequently than that. The most common reason cited for using internet slang was convenience and brevity (60%), while 25% of respondents mentioned that it was used for hu-

mor or emphasis. The remaining 15% reported using slang for self-expression and to connect with their peers. In terms

of the frequency of specific terms, **Table 1** presents the most commonly used internet slang terms among participants.

Table 1. Most Commonly Used Internet Slang Terms.

| Slang Term | Frequency of Usage (%) | Context of Use |
|------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| “LOL” | 95% | Humor/Emphasis |
| “Yolo” | 78% | Self-expression |
| “FOMO” | 65% | Social commentary |
| “Lit” | 50% | Excitement/Expression |
| “BFF” | 47% | Friendship/Social bonding |

As shown in **Table 1**, the term “LOL” was the most frequently used, with 95% of students indicating that they employed it in their online communication. The use of “Yolo” (You Only Live Once) was widespread among 78% of participants, often used to express a sense of carefree living or to justify impulsive actions. “FOMO” (Fear of Missing Out), a term related to social anxiety, was used by 65% of respondents, reflecting a trend where students engage with their peers online, constantly aware of others’ activities. Terms

like “Lit” and “BFF” were also commonly used, typically to express excitement or signify close friendships.

4.1.2. Demographic Differences in Slang Usage

The survey also revealed significant differences in slang usage across various demographic categories. **Table 2** illustrates the variation in slang usage by gender, showing that male students were more likely to use internet slang on a daily basis compared to female students.

Table 2. Slang Usage by Gender.

| Gender | Daily Usage (%) | Weekly Usage (%) | Less Frequent Usage (%) |
|--------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Male | 90% | 8% | 2% |
| Female | 80% | 15% | 5% |

From **Table 2**, it is evident that male students used internet slang more frequently than females, with 90% of male participants reporting daily usage. In contrast, 80% of female participants used slang daily. These differences may be attributed to varying social dynamics, with male students often engaging in more informal or playful exchanges online. In contrast, female students might be more conscious of formal or conventional language use in specific contexts.

4.1.3. Platforms of Usage

The survey also examined which social media platforms students most frequently used for communication. **Table 3** shows that Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp were the most popular platforms for slang use, with Instagram emerging as the top choice.

As reflected in **Table 3**, Instagram was the most popular platform for slang usage (65%), followed closely by Facebook (60%) and WhatsApp (55%). These findings suggest that students tend to use platforms that emphasize visual

communication, where informal language and slang can help reinforce online personas. Twitter and Snapchat, while still commonly used, had comparatively lower percentages of slang usage.

Table 3. Platforms Most Used for Slang Usage.

| Platform | Percentage of Usage (%) |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| Instagram | 65% |
| Facebook | 60% |
| WhatsApp | 55% |
| Twitter | 40% |
| Snapchat | 30% |

4.2. Linguistic Analysis of Social Media Posts

The second method of data collection involved a content analysis of 500 social media posts to examine how internet slang is used in natural online communication. A systematic coding process was employed to identify slang terms and categorize them based on their functions and contexts.

4.2.1. Prevalence of Internet Slang in Social Media Posts

The analysis of the 500 posts revealed that internet slang was present in 450 of the posts, equating to a usage rate of 90%. The most common terms identified included “LOL”, “YOLO”, “BFF”, “FOMO”, and “lit.” These terms appeared across a variety of contexts, including humor, social commentary, and self-expression.

4.2.2. Contexts of Internet Slang

Humor and Emphasis

Terms like “LOL” (laugh out loud), “ROFL” (rolling on the floor laughing), and “OMG” (oh my god) were most frequently used in humorous or exaggerated contexts, often to add emotional intensity to posts. This aligns with the survey findings, where 60% of respondents indicated that they used slang to add humor or emphasize their thoughts.

Identity Expression

Terms such as “YOLO” and “BFF” were frequently used to express individuality and forge social bonds. These terms, often associated with youth culture and modern identity expression, were particularly popular among posts about personal experiences, travel, and friendship.

Social Commentary

Terms like “FOMO” were used in posts that reflected on social dynamics, highlighting feelings of exclusion or anxiety about missing out on social events. This usage was especially evident in posts related to social gatherings, parties, and group activities.

4.2.3. Frequency of Internet Slang in Different Platforms

The frequency of internet slang usage varied across social media platforms. **Table 4** provides a breakdown of the frequency of slang usage by platform.

Table 4. Slang Usage Across Social Media Platforms.

| Platform | Slang Usage (%) |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Instagram | 75% |
| Facebook | 70% |
| WhatsApp | 60% |
| Twitter | 55% |
| Snapchat | 50% |

As shown in **Table 4**, Instagram led in slang usage (75%), followed by Facebook (70%) and WhatsApp (60%). The prevalence of internet slang on these platforms reflects the informal nature of their communication, where students feel more comfortable using slang to communicate in an easy-going manner. On platforms like Twitter and Snapchat, where brevity is prioritized, slang was also commonly used, though to a lesser extent.

All in all, the results of the survey and social media content analysis suggest that internet slang plays a significant role in shaping contemporary language trends among Jordanian university students. The widespread daily usage of slang reflects its deep integration into students’ digital communication. As highlighted in the survey, the most frequently used terms, such as “LOL”, “Yolo”, and “FOMO”, suggest that slang serves multiple functions, including humor, self-expression, and social commentary.

The demographic analysis reveals that while there are some differences in slang usage between male and female students, the overall trend indicates that slang is predominantly used by both genders in informal communication. Male students, however, appear to use slang more frequently, which may be indicative of differences in social interaction styles or peer group dynamics. Besides, social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp are the primary venues for slang usage, reinforcing the idea that these platforms encourage informal, expressive communication. The linguistic analysis of posts on these platforms further illustrates how slang contributes to the creation of online identities and social bonds. Finally, the study also emphasizes that while slang serves as a tool for humor and self-expression, it is also reflective of broader social dynamics, particularly in the context of social media. Terms like “FOMO” and “YOLO” are not only expressions of individual sentiment but also indicate the pervasive influence of social media on students’ perceptions of social inclusion and exclusion.

5. Conclusion

To put it succinctly, the current study has attempted to shed light on the dynamic role of social media in shaping language trends, particularly focusing on the widespread use of internet slang among Jordanian university students. Using a combination of survey data and linguistic analysis of

social media content, the research provides comprehensive insights into how slang terms function in various contexts, such as humor, self-expression, and social commentary. The findings have highlighted the pervasive nature of internet slang on popular platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, as well as demographic differences in usage patterns, particularly among gender groups. It was noted that male students, in particular, were found to use internet slang more frequently, reflecting potential variations in communication styles across genders. Hence, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on language in the digital age while also offering a unique perspective on how internet slang is integrated into the cultural and linguistic fabric of Jordanian youth. Finally, it has been recommended that future researchers can further explore the impact of regional dialects and the interaction between Arabic and English in shaping digital language practices, providing a more nuanced understanding of language evolution in the Arab world.

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Data will be made available on request.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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