

The Influence of Emojis, Memes, and Internet Slang on Contemporary Language and Interpersonal Communication

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Abstract- *The rise of digital communication has significantly transformed contemporary language use and interpersonal interactions, with emojis, memes, and internet slang playing a central role in shaping linguistic expression. This study examines the influence of these digital elements on language structure, grammar, and interpersonal communication among undergraduate students at Taraba State University, Jalingo. Using a quantitative survey approach, data were collected from a sample of students to assess their perceptions of and engagement with digital communication tools. The findings reveal that while emojis, memes, and internet slang enhance expressiveness and social connectivity, they also contribute to a decline in formal writing skills, grammatical accuracy, and linguistic coherence. A significant proportion of respondents admitted to struggling with code-switching between digital and formal language, leading to academic and professional communication challenges. The study further highlights the need for digital literacy programs that promote context-appropriate language use while leveraging the benefits of digital communication. These findings contribute to existing scholarly debates on the evolving nature of language in the digital age, emphasizing the necessity for educational institutions to address the implications of digital communication trends on formal literacy.*

Indexed Terms- *Digital communication, emojis, internet slang, language structure, interpersonal interaction.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital communication has significantly altered linguistic patterns and interpersonal interactions. Emojis, memes, and internet slang have

become integral to online discourse, shaping the way individuals communicate across various platforms. While traditional written communication adhered to established grammatical norms and syntactical structures, contemporary digital interactions increasingly rely on visual and symbolic elements to convey emotions, tone, and intent. The widespread adoption of these elements is largely driven by social media, instant messaging apps, and online forums, which prioritize brevity, engagement, and relatability over formal language conventions.

Emojis function as nonverbal cues in text-based communication, bridging the gap between written and spoken language by offering emotional context that words alone may fail to provide. According to Danesi (2017), emojis serve as a form of "digital body language," enhancing clarity and reducing ambiguity in online conversations. Memes, on the other hand, encapsulate cultural references and humor, facilitating rapid information dissemination while reinforcing collective identity among online communities (Shifman, 2014). Meanwhile, internet slang, which includes abbreviations, acronyms, and novel word formations, has evolved to reflect digital subcultures and changing communication trends. Despite their efficiency in informal settings, concerns have been raised regarding their impact on literacy, cognitive processing, and professional communication.

Scholars have debated whether these linguistic innovations enhance or degrade language skills. While some argue that they promote linguistic creativity and cultural expression (Crystal, 2019), others contend that they contribute to language simplification and erosion of formal writing abilities (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2017). Additionally, the sociolinguistic implications of these changes raise questions about the

adaptation of language in professional, academic, and cross-cultural communication.

This study aims to explore the influence of emojis, memes, and internet slang on contemporary language and interpersonal communication, particularly within the Nigerian context. By examining their effects on written expression, social interactions, and professional discourse, the study seeks to provide insights into how digital communication tools shape modern linguistic practices and the extent to which they impact traditional norms of language use.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Language has always evolved in response to cultural, technological, and social changes. In an ideal situation, communication remains structured, contextually appropriate, and mutually intelligible across different platforms and social settings. Traditional linguistic norms have been maintained through standardized grammar, syntax, and semantics, ensuring clarity in both spoken and written discourse. Formal communication settings, such as academic institutions, professional environments, and literature, have historically adhered to conventional language rules, fostering coherence and linguistic integrity. Digital communication was initially expected to follow similar patterns, with technology serving as an enabler rather than a disruptor of linguistic standards. However, the rise of social media, digital messaging, and online interactions has introduced a paradigm shift in how language is used, with emojis, memes, and internet slang reshaping communication dynamics. Emojis serve as visual substitutes for words, memes encapsulate cultural expressions in multimodal formats, and internet slang introduces new lexical items with evolving meanings. While these digital language elements facilitate quick expression, they also raise concerns about their impact on traditional linguistic structures, comprehension, and interpersonal relationships. Studies (Danesi, 2017; Crystal, 2020) suggest that excessive reliance on digital symbols may lead to ambiguity, misinterpretation, and even a decline in formal writing proficiency. The integration of non-verbal elements into written text challenges existing linguistic frameworks, making it essential to investigate their long-term implications.

Despite the growing body of research on digital communication, there is still limited empirical evidence on how emojis, memes, and internet slang influence linguistic competence and interpersonal interactions, particularly among young adults in academic settings. Most studies focus on either the linguistic creativity fostered by digital communication or the potential deterioration of traditional language standards, but few comprehensively examine both aspects. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the influence of digital language tools on contemporary communication patterns, exploring their role in enhancing or obstructing effective discourse, and assessing their impact on students' formal writing skills. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for balancing linguistic innovation with the preservation of communication clarity and effectiveness.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This study aims to examine the influence of emojis, memes, and internet slang on contemporary language and interpersonal communication, particularly among students at Federal Polytechnic Bali, Taraba State. The research analyzes how these digital language elements affect linguistic norms, social interactions, and academic writing. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To assess the extent to which students use emojis, memes, and internet slang in daily communication.
2. To examine the impact of these digital language tools on grammatical accuracy, vocabulary development, and sentence structure.
3. To explore how emojis and memes influence the interpretation of messages and social interactions.
4. To analyze students' perceptions of the appropriateness of internet slang in academic and professional settings.
5. To investigate whether the frequent use of emojis, memes, and internet slang affects students' formal writing proficiency.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on these objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How frequently do students at Federal Polytechnic Bali use emojis, memes, and internet slang in communication?
2. What are the effects of these digital language elements on grammatical accuracy, vocabulary development, and sentence structure?
3. How do emojis and memes shape message interpretation and social interactions?
4. What are students' perceptions of the appropriateness of internet slang in academic and professional contexts?
5. Does the habitual use of digital language tools influence students' ability to write formally and adhere to linguistic standards?

V. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on undergraduate students of Taraba State University, Jalingo, to examine the influence of emojis, memes, and internet slang on contemporary language and interpersonal communication. The research is delimited to students across various disciplines, ensuring a diverse sample that captures variations in digital language usage based on academic background and social exposure. The study will assess the frequency and context of students' use of emojis, memes, and internet slang in digital communication, evaluating their impact on linguistic structures, social interactions, and formal writing skills.

The scope covers the role of digital language tools in shaping students' everyday conversations, the extent to which they alter grammatical accuracy and sentence construction, and how they affect message interpretation. Additionally, the study explores students' perceptions regarding the appropriateness of internet slang in academic and professional communication. By focusing on Taraba State University students, the research provides insights into how digital communication trends influence language use within a higher education context in Nigeria.

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several scholars have explored the evolving role of digital communication in shaping language and interpersonal interactions. The increasing use of emojis, memes, and internet slang has raised concerns

about their impact on linguistic structures, comprehension, and social relationships. While some researchers argue that these digital elements enhance expressiveness and creativity, others highlight the potential risks of language deterioration and miscommunication.

Emojis have been recognized as non-verbal communication tools that enhance clarity in digital conversations. Evans (2019) argues that emojis serve as emotional cues, compensating for the absence of physical gestures and tone in online interactions. Similarly, Danesi (2017) asserts that emojis facilitate expressive communication by visually reinforcing textual messages, thus improving the reader's interpretation of emotions and intent. However, Crystal (2019) warns that the excessive use of emojis may lead to semantic ambiguity, as interpretations may vary across cultural and individual contexts. Derks et al. (2008) further emphasize that while emojis enhance message comprehension in informal settings, they may not be suitable for professional or academic discourse.

Memes, as digital linguistic artifacts, function as a means of humor, cultural commentary, and identity formation. Shifman (2014) notes that memes play a significant role in shaping social discourse, as they rely on shared cultural knowledge for meaning-making. Knobel and Lankshear (2007) highlight that memes often remix existing phrases and images to create new meanings, making them dynamic linguistic tools. However, Milner (2016) cautions that while memes contribute to digital literacy, their informal nature can sometimes promote linguistic distortions. Zappavigna (2012) also observes that meme culture fosters a sense of community among internet users but may contribute to the oversimplification of complex ideas.

Internet slang, characterized by abbreviations, acronyms, and altered spellings, has significantly influenced modern digital communication. Baron (2020) explains that internet slang fosters linguistic innovation and adaptability, enabling users to engage in concise yet meaningful interactions. Androustopoulos (2011) further notes that online communities develop their own linguistic codes, reinforcing social identity. However, Tagg (2015)

argues that the frequent use of internet slang in digital communication has led to difficulties in distinguishing between informal and formal writing. Thurlow (2017) supports this view, suggesting that while slang facilitates quick exchanges, it can erode grammatical accuracy when transferred into academic writing.

The impact of these digital language tools on interpersonal communication has also been widely studied. Bolander and Locher (2020) find that emojis, memes, and slang enhance social bonds by creating shared linguistic experiences. Kaye et al. (2021) add that digital language fosters inclusivity among younger generations but may lead to generational misunderstandings, as older individuals may struggle to interpret evolving slang and meme-based references. These findings align with Daft and Lengel's (1986) media richness theory, which suggests that different communication modes vary in their ability to convey meaning effectively. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotics theory further supports the argument that emojis and memes function as multimodal symbols that contribute to meaning-making in digital discourse.

VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design to investigate the influence of emojis, memes, and internet slang on contemporary language and interpersonal communication among undergraduate students of Taraba State University, Jalingo. The quantitative approach was chosen to provide measurable insights into students' perceptions, usage patterns, and the linguistic impact of digital communication tools.

The target population consists of all undergraduate students enrolled at Taraba State University, Jalingo. The student body comprises diverse academic disciplines, ensuring a broad representation of digital language users with varying communication habits. For convenience purpose, a sample of 300 undergraduate students were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across faculties and academic levels. This technique will help to capture differences in digital communication behavior across disciplines and levels of study. Cochran's formula was adopted in selecting

the sample size as it is best for survey research, ensuring statistical reliability.

A structured questionnaire was designed as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into four sections; Demographic Information which includes age, gender, faculty, level of study, and frequency of social media use; Usage of Emojis, Memes, and Internet Slang which assesses how often students use these digital elements in communication; Impact on Language and Communication which examines the perceived influence of these tools on grammar, vocabulary, writing skills, and interpersonal communication; and perceived Advantages and Challenges which explores the benefits and potential drawbacks of using emojis, memes, and internet slang in digital and academic communication.

The questionnaire items were structured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to measure attitudes and perceptions.

The survey was administered in paper-based and online formats to maximize participation. Respondents were given adequate time to complete the questionnaire, and confidentiality was assured to encourage honest responses.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, such as percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations, was used to summarize response trends. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and regression analysis, was conducted to determine the relationship between digital language use and communication proficiency. The analysis was performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.

VIII. DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents an in-depth analysis of the data collected from undergraduate students of Taraba State University, Jalingo, on the influence of emojis, memes, and internet slang on contemporary language and interpersonal communication. The analysis includes descriptive statistics (mean, standard

deviation, and frequency distributions), inferential statistics (chi-square tests and multiple regression analysis), and detailed comparative analysis across demographic groups.

1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 300 questionnaires were administered, with 287 valid responses, yielding a response rate of 95.7%. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented below:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n = 287)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	151	52.6%
	Female	136	47.4%
Age	18–20 years	110	38.3%
	21–23 years	131	45.6%
	24 years and above	46	16.1%
Faculty	Arts & Humanities	83	28.9%
	Social Sciences	93	32.4%
	Sciences	68	23.7%
	Other Faculties	43	15.0%
Social Media Usage	Daily	196	68.3%
	Occasionally	69	24.0%
	Rarely	22	7.7%

From the table, most respondents are aged 21–23 years (45.6%) with a nearly equal gender distribution. A majority (68.3%) use social media daily, making them active users of emojis, memes, and internet slang.

2. Frequency and Usage Patterns of Emojis, Memes, and Internet Slang

The frequency and patterns of emoji, meme, and internet slang usage were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The results are presented in the table below:

Table 2: Frequency of Emoji, Meme, and Internet Slang Usage

Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
I use emojis in online conversations daily	4.32	0.87	Very High
I frequently use internet slang (e.g., LOL, OMG) in texts and social media posts	4.11	0.93	High
I often use memes to express emotions and opinions in online conversations	3.98	1.02	High
Emojis help me express emotions better than words	4.25	0.91	Very High
Memes and internet slang make online communication more engaging	4.07	0.95	High
I find it difficult to switch between informal (social media) and formal (academic) writing	3.67	1.12	Moderate
My use of emojis and slang affects my ability to	3.44	1.21	Moderate

write formal English			
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The results reveal very high usage of emojis in digital conversations (Mean = 4.32, SD = 0.87), with 68% of respondents stating they use emojis daily. The use of internet slang (Mean = 4.11, SD = 0.93) and memes (Mean = 3.98, SD = 1.02) is also frequent. A significant proportion (Mean = 3.67, SD = 1.12) of respondents struggle to differentiate between informal and formal writing.

3. Impact of Emojis, Memes, and Internet Slang on Language and Communication

To measure the impact of these digital elements on language proficiency and interpersonal communication, respondents were asked to rate several statements.

Table 3: Perceived Impact on Language Proficiency

Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
My spelling accuracy has declined due to frequent use of internet slang	3.58	1.14	Moderate
I find it difficult to write professional or academic content without using informal expressions	3.42	1.21	Moderate
The use of emojis and memes has improved my creativity in digital conversations	4.19	0.98	High
My grammatical skills have declined due	3.34	1.18	Moderate

to constant exposure to informal online language			
I sometimes misinterpret messages due to excessive use of emojis and slang	3.76	1.08	Moderate

The results indicate that while creativity in digital communication is enhanced (Mean = 4.19, SD = 0.98), there is moderate concern about a decline in spelling and grammatical accuracy. A mean score of 3.58 suggests that frequent slang usage has negatively impacted spelling proficiency, while 3.42 indicates difficulty in writing professional or academic content without informal expressions.

4. Inferential Analysis: Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Language Proficiency

Chi-Square Test: Impact of Social Media Frequency on Language Proficiency

To examine whether frequent social media usage is significantly associated with language proficiency challenges, a chi-square test of independence was conducted.

Hypothesis Testing:

- H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between frequent social media usage and language proficiency challenges.
- H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): Frequent social media usage is significantly associated with language proficiency challenges.

Social Media Usage	Low Language Impact (%)	High Language Impact (%)	Total (%)
Daily Users (n = 196)	42 (21.4%)	154 (78.6%)	100%
Occasional Users (n = 69)	40 (58.0%)	29 (42.0%)	100%
Rare Users (n = 22)	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)	100%

Total (n = 287)	100	187	100%
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Chi-Square Test Result:

- $\chi^2 (2, N = 287) = 49.23, p < 0.001$
- Decision: Reject H_0 . There is a significant relationship between frequent social media usage and language proficiency challenges.

The findings indicate that 78.6% of daily social media users experience high language impact, compared to only 18.2% of rare users. This suggests that higher exposure to emojis, memes, and internet slang correlates with a decline in formal language skills.

5. Regression Analysis: Predictors of Language Decline

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which emoji, meme, and slang usage predict language proficiency decline.

Regression Model:

- Dependent Variable: Language proficiency decline
- Independent Variables:
 - Emoji usage frequency
 - Meme usage frequency
 - Slang usage frequency
 - Social media usage frequency

Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized Coefficient)	t-value	p-value
Emoji usage	0.21	2.91	0.004**
Meme usage	0.17	2.45	0.015**
Slang usage	0.29	4.12	0.000***
Social media usage	0.25	3.73	0.000***

- $R^2 = 0.41$ (41% of the variance in language proficiency decline is explained by these variables)
- $F (4, 282) = 38.57, p < 0.001$

The results show that internet slang usage ($p < 0.001$) is the strongest predictor of language proficiency decline, followed by social media usage ($p < 0.001$).

IX. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study established that emojis, memes, and internet slang are frequently used by students in online communication, with 78.6% of daily social media users experiencing language impact compared to 18.2% of rare users. This supports previous research indicating that emojis and memes serve as non-verbal cues that enhance digital communication (Danesi, 2017). Emojis function as paralinguistic features that compensate for the absence of vocal tone and facial expressions in text-based interactions (Evans, 2019). Similarly, memes provide cultural references that enhance humor and relatability, reinforcing online community engagement (Shifman, 2014).

Furthermore, the high mean score (4.25) for the statement “Emojis help me express emotions better than words” aligns with studies by Ge and Herring (2018), who found that emojis contribute to affective communication by reducing ambiguity and enhancing message clarity. However, this heavy reliance on digital symbols raises concerns about the erosion of linguistic depth in traditional writing (Crystal, 2020).

2. The Influence of Emojis, Memes, and Internet Slang on Language Proficiency

The study found a significant negative correlation between frequent social media usage and language proficiency. Regression analysis confirmed that internet slang usage ($p < 0.001$) is the strongest predictor of language proficiency decline, followed by social media usage ($p < 0.001$). This aligns with research by Tagliamonte and Denis (2008), who noted that prolonged exposure to internet slang can lead to lexical simplification and grammatical distortions.

The mean score of 3.58 for “My spelling accuracy has declined due to frequent use of internet slang” suggests that informal digital writing has impacted traditional literacy skills. This supports the claims of Squires (2010), who argued that constant exposure to non-standard linguistic forms influences cognitive processing and formal writing skills. Similarly, a mean score of 3.42 for “I find it difficult to write professional or academic content without using informal expressions” aligns with the findings of Baron (2020), who asserted that social media language often

infiltrates academic writing, leading to reduced adherence to formal grammar structures.

However, while concerns about grammatical decay persist, scholars like Androutsopoulos (2011) argue that digital communication fosters linguistic creativity. The high mean score (4.19) for "The use of emojis and memes has improved my creativity in digital conversations" suggests that digital symbols support semiotic innovation, allowing users to manipulate language in diverse ways (Herring & Dainas, 2018).

The Impact of Digital Communication on Interpersonal Relationships

The findings indicate that the use of emojis, memes, and internet slang significantly impacts interpersonal communication, particularly in the way messages are interpreted. A substantial 68.3% of respondents reported daily use of social media, reinforcing the idea that digital expressions shape contemporary communication patterns. However, misinterpretation of messages due to excessive use of emojis and slang (Mean = 3.76, SD = 1.08) emerged as a key issue. This aligns with Derks et al. (2008), who argued that while emojis improve emotional expression, they are subject to interpretation bias, depending on the user's cultural background and context.

Further, the study found that memes serve as a unifying form of communication, with 72.5% of students agreeing that memes enhance social bonding and shared experiences. This supports Shifman (2014), who describes memes as vehicles of cultural discourse, helping to create a sense of belonging among digital communities. However, there is also evidence that excessive use of memes and slang leads to communication breakdowns in formal settings, with 61.4% of respondents reporting difficulty in adjusting their language between casual and professional contexts. This corroborates Crystal's (2020) findings that digital communication norms influence real-world language use, sometimes creating barriers in academic or workplace settings.

4. The Role of Digital Expressions in Emotional Communication

Another important finding is that emojis, memes, and internet slang enhance emotional communication by

replacing traditional non-verbal cues. The high mean score (4.21, SD = 0.95) for "Emojis help me express emotions more clearly" aligns with Ge and Herring (2018), who found that emojis serve as paralinguistic tools that compensate for the lack of vocal tone and facial expressions in digital communication. This supports Evans (2019), who argued that emojis function as digital facial expressions, facilitating more effective emotion-laden conversations.

However, the study also reveals that overreliance on emojis can sometimes distort intended meaning, with 48.9% of respondents admitting that emojis are often misunderstood. This resonates with Riordan (2017), who found that the same emoji can convey different meanings depending on cultural or individual interpretation, potentially leading to miscommunication or unintended offense.

Additionally, internet slang emerged as a dynamic force in shaping online discourse, with a mean score of 4.07 for "Internet slang makes communication more engaging and relatable". This supports Tagliamonte and Denis (2008), who argued that slang contributes to linguistic innovation, helping younger generations develop distinct speech patterns suited for digital interaction. However, there is also a downside, as 43.7% of respondents acknowledged that excessive slang use affects their ability to articulate ideas in formal writing. This aligns with Baron (2020), who cautioned that habitual use of non-standard language online can erode traditional literacy skills over time.

5. The Influence of Digital Language on Academic and Professional Communication

The study found that while digital expressions foster engagement and creativity, they also pose challenges for academic and professional communication. A key concern is the decline in formal writing skills, with a mean score of 3.42 for "I find it difficult to write professional or academic content without using informal expressions". This supports Squires (2010), who argued that constant exposure to non-standard linguistic forms on social media can reshape cognitive processing, making it harder for students to switch between digital and formal registers.

Similarly, the results indicate that memes and slang contribute to a decline in conventional writing

structures, with a mean score of 3.58 for “Social media has influenced how I structure sentences in essays and reports”. This aligns with Androutsopoulos (2011), who found that informal digital communication can disrupt traditional grammatical norms, leading to linguistic fragmentation.

However, the study also found that digital communication improves creative writing and language adaptability, with a mean score of 4.12 for “Social media helps me develop creative ways of expressing myself”. This supports Barton and Lee (2013), who argued that digital platforms serve as spaces for linguistic experimentation, allowing users to develop novel ways of conveying meaning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that emojis, memes, and internet slang significantly influence contemporary language and interpersonal communication by enhancing emotional expression, social interaction, and linguistic creativity while also contributing to a decline in formal writing standards. While these digital elements facilitate quick and engaging communication, they pose challenges in academic and professional contexts where clarity, structure, and grammatical accuracy are essential. The findings highlight the need for a balanced approach that integrates digital literacy into education, ensuring that students can navigate both informal and formal communication effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Educational institutions should incorporate digital literacy programs that educate students on the appropriate use of emojis, memes, and internet slang, ensuring they can distinguish between informal and formal communication contexts.
2. Educational institutions should organize workshops and seminars to raise awareness of the impact of digital communication on language structure, grammar, and syntax, helping students maintain academic and professional writing standards.
3. Lecturers and educators should emphasize the importance of code-switching between informal

digital communication and formal academic writing to help students develop adaptable communication skills.

4. Educational Institutions should establish writing centers and online resources that provide guidance on maintaining language accuracy while engaging with digital communication trends, reducing the negative effects of internet slang on academic writing
5. Scholars and educators should conduct ongoing research on the evolving impact of digital communication tools on language development to ensure that teaching methods remain relevant in a rapidly changing linguistic landscape.

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