Virtual Space and New Language Practices: Memes, Slang, and Lexical Transformations

Espacio virtual y nuevas prácticas lingüísticas: memes, jerga y transformaciones léxicas

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Abstract

By 2025, over 5. 2 billion people worldwide will use social media, representing approximately 63.9. 9% of the global population, with a growth rate of 4. 4.1% in the past year. Popular platforms include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and WhatsApp. On average, users spend about 2 hours and 26 minutes daily on social media, accessing around seven different platforms. Communication on social media follows the same language norms—lexical, spelling, grammar, and syntax—as spoken language. This article aims to provide an in- depth analysis of lexical innovations in the language landscape shaped by social media and digital communication tools. It focuses on modern vocabulary used across platforms like Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. Special attention is given to modern English, which is the most widely used language in digital communication—approximately 1. 5 billion people speak English, and 52% of the world's most popular websites contain English content. Using scientific and linguistic methods, the article explores how social media influences language at all structural and functional levels: lexical, phonetic, grammatical, syntactic, and graphic. It highlights characteristic lexical changes within groups, including memes, neologisms, abbreviations, acronyms, phraseological units, and hashtags. The functions of different types of lexical innovations on social networks are identified: hashtags promote seamless intercultural communication, neologisms help build group identities, memes serve entertainment and informational roles, and they disseminate prior information through text and graphics. The article also discusses negative effects of social networks on language, such as oversimplification, loss of nuanced expression, emergence of inaccuracies and grammatical errors in spontaneous communication, and potential adverse effects on mental health. Overall, the study shows that modern language practices reflect new concepts in social media culture—such as interactivity, upgrading, and visualization—

that are transforming cultural and religious aspects and driving sustainable language change.

Keywords: social networks, memes, Internet slang, digital communication, Ukrainian language, language changes, folk religiosity, traditional culture.

Resumen

En 2025, más de 5200 millones de personas en todo el mundo utilizan las redes sociales, lo que supone aproximadamente el 63,9 % de la población mundial, con una tasa de crecimiento del 4,1 % en los últimos 12 meses. Las plataformas más populares son Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter y WhatsApp. El tiempo medio dedicado a las redes sociales es de aproximadamente 2 horas y 26 minutos al día, y el usuario medio tiene acceso a siete plataformas diferentes. El lenguaje utilizado en las redes sociales se basa en las mismas normas lingüísticas (léxicas, ortográficas, gramaticales y sintácticas) que el lenguaje hablado. El objetivo del artículo es ofrecer un análisis exhaustivo de las innovaciones léxicas en el espacio lingüístico bajo la influencia de las redes sociales y las herramientas de comunicación digital. El objeto de este estudio es el vocabulario moderno de varios idiomas utilizados en las plataformas sociales (Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram). Se presta especial atención al inglés moderno, que es el idioma más extendido en la práctica comunicativa: aproximadamente 1500 millones de personas hablan inglés, y el 52 % de los sitios web más populares del mundo contienen contenido en inglés. El artículo utiliza análisis científico y lingüístico para investigar las peculiaridades del impacto transformador de la comunicación en las redes sociales sobre el lenguaje en todos los niveles estructurales y funcionales: léxico, fonético, gramatical, sintáctico y gráfico. El artículo analiza los cambios léxicos característicos por grupos: memes, neologismos, abreviaturas y acrónimos, unidades fraseológicas y hashtags. Se determinan las funciones de las diferentes categorías de innovaciones léxicas en las redes sociales, en particular: los hashtags constituyen la base para una comunicación sin obstáculos en un contexto intercultural; los neologismos son medios para construir la identidad de determinados grupos sociales; los memes tienen la función de entretener e informar, difundiendo información previa en formato textual y gráfico. Se identifican los aspectos negativos del impacto de las redes sociales en el lenguaje: la simplificación excesiva y la pérdida de sus matices individuales, la aparición de imprecisiones y errores gramaticales debido a la naturaleza espontánea de la comunicación en las redes sociales, así como posibles consecuencias negativas para la salud mental. El estudio demuestra que el espacio moderno de prácticas lingüísticas innovadoras refleja nuevos conceptos de cultura de la comunicación en las redes sociales, así como de actualización interactiva y visualización, lo que transforma los aspectos religiosos y culturales y promueve cambios lingüísticos sostenibles.

Palabras clave: redes sociales, memes, jerga de Internet, comunicación digital, lengua ucraniana, cambios lingüísticos, religiosidad popular, cultura tradicional.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social networks speed up lexical changes by quickly sharing new slang, anglicisms, and abbreviations through constant communication and information exchange. This creates a unique jargon among online communities, making the language simpler, more chaotic in style, and less consistent with spelling norms. Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook help spread neologisms, memes, abbreviations, hashtags, and slang.

Social networks reach a wide audience, allowing the quick spread of new words without any limits of time or space. Data from the Pew Research Center (2019) shows that young people are the most active social media users and influence the growth of online speech and modern language overall. According to the data, 88% of people aged 18 to 29 use social media to communicate. This percentage drops with age: 78% for ages 30 to 49, 64% for ages 50 to 64, and 37% for those 65 and older.

This highlights the importance of defining communication styles on social networks as part of developing innovative language practices by analyzing and organizing stylistic features of communication and overall language dynamics across all functional and structural levels.

The article aims to examine lexical innovations in language shaped by social networks and digital communication tools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pezzuti et al. (2021), Sardinha (2022), and Wei (2020), through research on the multifactorial impact of social media on communication vocabulary in the English-speaking environment, found that new media influence vocabulary, leading to the emergence of new words, abbreviations, and informal expressions. This makes the language more dynamic and less formal, and it also helps strengthen interlingual ties through the exchange of information and experience. This influence is evident in users' spontaneous speech and in the development of a specific, context-dependent communication style.

Sun et al. (2021a) examined user neologisms that convey specific authorial intentions on social media and identified their main motivations: the need for expressiveness and language efficiency, new social communication realities, and the standardization of nominal models to improve consistency in language within particular contexts.

Rueger et al. (2023), studying the structure of new words—which includes components and methods for expressing emotional, evaluative, and expressive aspects of speech—concluded that the vocabulary used in comments or posts is rapidly gaining popularity and spreading among users. In other words, many trendy new words are beginning to dominate both online and offline, directly impacting and transforming the language.

The publications by Calude (2025) and Mukhtar et al. (2024), which conduct an in-depth study of lexical dynamics influenced by social media, are considered relevant. The researchers analyzed several innovative linguistic practices, including memes, hashtags, emojis, and neologisms, and found that the most significant lexical innovations originate from social media. Specifically, hashtags help increase the visibility of publications, attract new audiences, promote important narratives, and facilitate participation in

discussions or challenges; memes are used to express emotions, convey information, and create a shared cultural code among users; neologisms enhance emotionality and expressiveness in communication, help avoid lengthy descriptions, and preserve cultural identity.

ElSherief et al. (2018) identified the main prerequisites for how social media influences the dynamics of modern vocabulary, which contribute to the spread of stylistic features: widespread use of platforms, changes in communication methods toward more informal and practical styles, emergence of new content forms, and active use of emojis and abbreviations, making the language more visual and concise. Dziubina (2016) further explores how social networks manipulate language, using Twitter and its unique language form, twitspeak, as an example. The author highlights how the development of twitspeak has expanded vocabulary, notably through the creation of the verbal noun "twitting" in English. The researcher outlines key characteristics of social network communication, including dialogic, spontaneous, situational anchoring, informality, expressiveness, and brevity.

Jakic et al. (2017) identified the main ways to compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues when expressing emotions on social media, such as animation effects, emoticons, and more. Specifically, non-verbal communication on Facebook is replaced by sign language using interface features like "like" or "rock" – a way to say hello or flirt.

Researchers Herdağdelen and Marelli (2017), Androutsopoulos (2014), and Barrot (2022) have identified the main reasons for lexical changes influenced by social media, including the faster speed of communication (which leads to the creation of new neologisms and abbreviations), the emotional tone of communication (which encourages the use of emojis and abbreviations), globalization (the widespread use of international platforms promotes the spread of anglicisms and borrowings), and the development of communities (particularly subcultures that form within social media communities, impacting the lexicon's dynamics).

Many scholars have examined the overall impact of social media on language and how it continues to shape communication. Notably, conceptual publications by Lantz-Andersson (2018), Seargeant and Tagg (2014), and Schwartz et al. (2013) address these topics. The authors identified the primary structural and functional levels of social media's influence on language: lexical, phonetic, grammatical, syntactic, and graphic.

At the same time, analyzing modern language practices remains important due to the need to monitor social changes amid ongoing cross-cultural assimilation and the necessity to adapt language tools to current demands.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To solve the tasks set in the paper, a combination of general scientific and special research methods was used:
- retrospective analysis – to study the state of scientific research on the problem of the influence of social networks on the development of innovative language practices;
- scientific and linguistic analysis – to study the peculiarities of the transformative impact of communication in social networks on language at all structural and functional levels: lexical, phonetic, grammatical, syntactic, and graphic;

- generalization and systematization – to systematize the conceptual and categorical apparatus and identify key categories and concepts;
- statistical and predictive research – to study the state of development of social networks;
- generalization and grouping – to identify the key areas of influence of communication in social networks on the development of innovative language practices;
- graphic method – for visual generalization of the functions of innovative dynamics of language practices under the influence of social networks.

The chosen methods enabled us to thoroughly examine the impact of social media on developing innovative language practices. They also helped us establish the main criteria and definitions, identify the most influential factors, and critically evaluate the associated risks and negative effects. The study's limitations stem from the difficulties of experimentally verifying theoretical conclusions to reduce bias and obtain more objective and reliable results.

4. RESULTS

An analysis of the development trends of social networks Instagram (from 1 billion users in 2020 to 2 billion in 2024), TikTok (from 700 million in 2020 to 1.5 billion in 2024), and Facebook (from 2.5 billion in 2020 to 3 billion in 2024) shows that the online population is increasing. Overall, social networks have a significant transformative impact on language across all structural and functional levels (lexical, phonetic, grammatical, syntactic, and graphic (Cabré Castellví, 2003)), leading to changes such as lexical, spelling, morphological, syntactic, punctuation, phonetic, and graphic modifications. It is worth exploring these in more detail.

1. ***Lexical changes in language*** mainly include the spread of English borrowings, neologisms, word shortening, acronyms, abbreviations, and expanding the meanings of words. Specifically, influenced by social media, it is useful to distinguish the use of repetitions, interjections, emotionally charged words, omission of words, sound imitation, and the use of stylistically simplified vocabulary such as vulgarisms and slang (Dziubina, 2016).

Most neologisms are created around words like *Twitter, tweet, follow, and Facebook* through their word-formation processes*: twitterazzi, tweetstealer, followorthy, facebooktivist*, and others. Neologisms are new lexical inventions that come from the act of naming and offer fresh ways to describe familiar ideas in creative ways. They include entirely new words in both meaning and form, often made by adding root parts or through borrowings (Kostyk et al., 2025).

Neologisms are the most noticeable signs of lexical change driven by social media. Examples include *influencer* (a person who has a significant impact on a social network's audience), *meme* (a small image used to share an idea or for humor), *ghosting* (completely ignoring someone without explanation), and others. These new words have now been successfully integrated into the English-speaking world (Hnatyuk et al., 2025).

In the context of purpose, neologisms can be differentiated into the main groups:
- nominations of traditional, but not previously defined concepts and phenomena *wild cycling*;
- nominations of completely new concepts and phenomena: *cyberterrorism*;

- neologisms-synonyms: *yucky – disgusting*;
- nominations of phenomena that do not currently exist, but are likely to do so in the future: *cultured meat*.

Additionally, within the interaction between the content plan and the expression plan, social media neologisms should be categorized into lexical innovations (*rainbowlicous*), which combine the novelty of the form with the preexisting meaning; transformation (*troll*), where the novelty of content merges with the novelty of form; and semantic innovations (*on point*), where the new meaning is integrated into the existing form (Davies, 2012).

Regarding the spread of slang, foreign language borrowings are most actively promoted through social media, including *user interactions, online content, and community engagement*. It is worth noting that, for example, in Japanese, the rapid growth of social networks has led to the emergence of a specific type of slang that involves the active adoption of borrowed words – gairaigo, which are written in the katakana alphabet and reflect the general tendency of Japanese youth toward Western culture (Chernova, 2013). Among the most common ways of creating new slang terms on social media are

- foreign language borrowings (*like, fake, friend, use, sub, reboot*)
- abbreviations (*IMHO, spam, LOL*, etc.), which provide information in an encrypted form and may reflect taboo definitions;
- abbreviations (*admin – "administrator", bro – "brother", inet – "Internet"*, or Ukrainian: *info – "information", dyaki – "thank you",* etc.), which are optimized spellings of inconvenient long words, given the need to maintain typing speed while preserving the content of the message.

Acronyms and abbreviations popular on social media save time, speed up communication, and cross cultural gaps. Notably, new lexical innovations have gained popularity: *LOL – laugh out loud, GTG – got to go, NP – no problem, BAE – before anyone else, IDK – I don't know, ICYMI – in case you missed it.*

Given the rise of slang and its incorporation into public spaces, including official ones, the question arises about the need to "normalize" new language terms. Specifically, in 2013, the Oxford English Dictionary selected "*selfie*" as its word of the year based on its criteria. Meanwhile, the word "*Google*" is now widely used as a verb (in Ukrainian, "*google*" means to search the web). Words like "*photobombing*," "*hashtag*," "*emoji*," and several others have become common in English (Aisyah, 2022).

It should be noted that, alongside the trend of word formation, the expansion of a word's meaning is also common. Examples include *"wireless*," *"wall*," and *"like*," which are now used in fundamentally new ways. For instance, the word "add" now means an invitation to connect Facebook accounts, and "*likes*" measure popularity.

Memes are a vital part of digital culture, evolving vocabulary and gaining popularity on social media, becoming recognizable symbols of specific emotions or phenomena (e.g., *Feels good man, Ok boomer*). Memes blend entertainment with information, spreading particular stories through both text and images (Fubara, 2020).

2. ***Spelling changes*** influenced by social media reflect a general trend to move away from traditional spelling rules and lower literacy standards. Information is often shared without capitalization ("*I'm going to America*"), while capital letters are used to indicate accents in words instead of other context-based means (*shudA, proshU*), or to add emphasis and emotional tone: *Proshshu! Daaaaaay!*

3. ***Morphological and syntactic changes*** in language caused by social media are seen as the spread of free, simplified communication, which diminishes the seriousness of language and makes it less standardized. Social media, as an innovative linguistic platform, offers unlimited space for experimentation, which, among other things, weakens language traditions (Hamed, 2023; Page et al., 2022; Reinhardt, 2019, Koliechkin et al., 2025). The tendency toward agrammatism is characteristic.

The dynamics of social media language at the grammatical level is most often manifested in the following dimensions:
- active involvement of punctuation and rhetorical questions, parcellation aimed at expressing personal attitudes: ... *This is just a waste of time, don't you think?*
- incorrect or insufficient punctuation, or their complete absence;
- hesitations: for example, *Um, er, erm*;
- violation of formal and syntactic connection between separate parts of the statement;
- absence of inversion in questions, violation of word order in the sentence: *i fine = I am fine, do you feel better now*?
- the presence of run-on sentences: *Perhaps I should be clearer*....;
- the use of different kinds of interruptions: *take yo shoes off when yu walk in the house..!!*
- violation of coordination between sentence members, omission of words: *i don't know, how ya doin, i got enuf* (Dziubina, 2016);
- active use of interjections: *Ugh, euugh, yikes, yipes*;
- the use of simple, elliptical sentences to create the illusion of real communication and to add dynamics (in particular, on Twitter);
- laconicism, which leads to increased information content: *"I will send her a message on facebook" = "I'll facebook her"*;
- expressiveness of syntactic constructions;
- complication of simple sentences by the use of homogeneous members;
- use of ironic and metaphorical syntactic constructions.

Additionally, it is important to recognize a key part of social media syntax—a hashtag, which is a clickable keyword starting with "#" used to categorize content effectively on a social network. Hashtags serve as markers for specific topics, connecting platform users through shared interests and grouping related messages (e.g., *#FOMO, #ThrowbackThursday*). Among popular modern English-language hashtags on social media, the most common are short and simple, such as *#me, #selfie, #fun, #swag, #smile, #happy*, and others.

4. ***Punctuation and phonetic and graphic*** modifications of the language under the influence of social media have found practical expression, first of all, in:
- the active use of numerous punctuation marks, which serves as a way of expressing emotional states: *wow !!!!!!, you know* .....;
- using a series of interrogative or exclamatory sentences: *This story is the most amazing story ever told!!! Mr. Marriott, you are not just fortunate and prosperous, but more importantly, highly blessed and favored by God!!! I wish you and your family continued success and a blessings forever!!!* (Dzyubina, 2016);

- use of capital letters to emphasize accents (*it's Right*), or to intensify expressiveness or emotionality (*NOOO!*);
- the use of replication (repeated repetition of one letter at the end of a word – *Yessss, hushhhh*) for the purpose of emotional and semantic emphasis;
- active use of punctuation patterns, emoticons, mathematical symbols to express emotions and feelings, and maximize the visualization of a text message;
- displaying individual letter combinations with numbers: *4 U (=for you)*.

In general, the dynamics of language practices under the influence of social media serve several functions (Table 1).

Table 1. Functions of the innovative dynamics of language practices under the influence of social media

Function	Characteristic features	Examples
adaptive	gradual integration of definitions of new realities, phenomena, technologies, means of communication interaction	neologisms *emoji, podcast, streaming, cloud computing*
communication	ensuring concise, effective, fast communication by minimizing the number of words used, simplifying the way of expressing thoughts, optimizing information exchange processes	abbreviations *FF – Follow Friday, RT – Retweet, BRB – be right back*
socio-cultural	reflection of trends in socio-cultural development, public sentiment, interpretation of behavioral patterns, symbolism of certain social groups	*vibe, FOMO – fear of missing out, YOLO – you only live* once
globalization	intercultural adaptation and overcoming cultural barriers, combining different categories of users	*viral, app, stream, cloud*
creative	Improvement of language tools and forms of speech as a response to the need to express complex messages in the shortest possible time	*I had to write a tweetstorm to explain my thoughts on this issue, Tweetstorm*
transformational	integration of new lexical items into everyday use or formal communication	*App (Application), vlog (videoblog)*

Source: author's development

It is important to recognize that lexical innovations on social media, as symbols of socio-cultural change, may lose relevance or meaning (e.g., *planking*). Simultaneously, some words continue to be used even if their original meanings shift (e.g., *viral*). This demonstrates the ability of social media lexical innovations to adapt to new contexts (Hnatyuk et al., 2024).

Overall, innovative language practices influenced by social media contribute to vocabulary evolution, explain new social phenomena, and incorporate them into everyday

communication not only online but also in daily interactions (Diakiv et al., 2025). Social networks heavily impact traditional culture and even folk religiosity, changing how people communicate, share information, and form social values. The media help spread trends and cultural globalization quickly but can also lead to the decline of traditional norms and the spread of misinformation. Specifically, information bubbles develop, limiting access to diverse viewpoints and reinforcing prejudice. Social media can also promote excessive consumption and pressure trends, resulting in the loss of unique cultural practices in favor of global standards.

Social media has a dual effect on religiosity: it provides access to religious content and promotes community building, creating opportunities for spiritual education and evangelism; however, it also introduces harmful challenges to the authenticity of religious experience—such as superficial views of faith, dependence, lower self-esteem, depression, and the spread of misinformation.

5. DISCUSSION

The scholarly discussion about how social media influences the development of innovative language practices and changes in the modern lexicon is reflected in various researchers' interpretations of the features, benefits, and challenges of this process. Specifically, Ge and Gretzel (2018) highlight the main language changes driven by social media, including expressiveness, brevity, and the active use of emojis and slang, which make language more emotional, spontaneous, and reduce its formal tone. Researchers argue that social media accelerates communication and information sharing and actively influences self-expression. These findings should also consider potential related challenges: risks of language distortion, deterioration of grammatical structure, and significant negative impacts on the mental health of social media users.

Sun et al. (2021b) highlight the potential of social media to create new forms of vocabulary, focusing on key areas of language change: expressiveness and conciseness while keeping the clarity of short messages; the rise of new words, interjections, and abbreviations used in everyday communication; the dominance of informal, conversational speech; the active growth of slang and the use of visual elements (gifs, emojis, etc.) that complement or even replace verbal communication. The authors argue that this helps preserve the benefits of traditional vocabulary and ensures compatibility with modern society's needs for quick information sharing and enhanced communication tools.

The current study shows how social media influences the development of innovative language practices. Similar conclusions were reached by Kramsch (2014), who highlighted the positive aspects of lexical change—such as encouraging language experiments to expand modern vocabulary, spreading information and knowledge through social platforms, improving users' communication skills, enabling self-expression, and fostering cross-cultural connections. The research findings should also consider the negative effects of language changes under social media's influence, including the oversimplification of language and the loss of subtle meanings, the appearance of inaccuracies and grammatical errors due to the spontaneous nature of social media communication, and possible negative impacts on mental health caused by changes in social media language and excessive content consumption.

Rahmatdildaevna Kurmanbekova et al. (2023) identify the most distinctive feature of social network language as the merging of spoken and written communication, making their boundaries less clear. We should agree with the authors that there are strong reasons to distinguish a special language style—the style of social media—which can have both positive and negative effects on the overall development of the language.

Chancellor and De Choudhury (2020) emphasize specific lexical changes at certain structural levels that extend beyond social media, affecting other areas of language use. The authors describe these processes as widespread, arguing that overall literacy is declining due to the spread of a simplified approach to literary language norms and the dominance of non-standard features in everyday speech.

Analyzing the study by Sundaram et al. (2023), it is clear that English is the most posted language on social media, followed by Japanese, and then Spanish.

It should be noted that this study has certain limitations: a small sample size for the review and the resource demands of long-term research. Future studies should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of language-dynamics monitoring systems on social media in preserving literacy narratives and traditional structures.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The modern language is characterized by constant change due to the addition of new words and ways of expressing the communicative and cognitive needs of today's society. Modern social networks provide a supportive environment for creating new concepts and vocabulary, emphasizing visualization. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook generate various neologisms, memes, hashtags, abbreviations, and slang used in mainstream communication. By expanding the vocabulary with new phrases, abbreviations, acronyms, and stylistic features, social networks enhance the modern lexicon, giving it qualities of informal, unofficial communication, flexibility, adaptability, and multifunctionality.

In general, social media has a practical, transformative effect on language at all structural and functional levels: phonetic, grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and graphic. Different categories of lexical innovations serve their own functions: hashtags facilitate smooth communication in an intercultural context, neologisms help construct the identities of specific social groups, and memes serve both entertainment and informational purposes by disseminating precedent-setting information through textual and graphic means.

Although social media's influence on language brings several challenges, such as oversimplification, loss of nuance, and the emergence of inaccuracies and grammatical mistakes from spontaneous communication, along with possible negative effects on mental health, the lexical changes on platforms like Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram are transforming traditional communication practices and becoming a vital part of linguistic evolution.

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