

The Influence of Social Media Platforms on the Literacy Level of Their Users

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ABSTRACT

Popular social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook and others have become very popular among youngsters. People, particularly, the youth spend a huge part of their time on these platforms and they not only get influenced by these websites in their writing styles, but also try to create coinages and shortened versions of the language on their own. Using abbreviations, for example, "U" for "you", "Txs" for "thanks", "NP" for "for no problem" etc. has become commonplace in messaging. Some social media users even change grammatical structure of sentences. This article will try to explore the impact of using social media on student's academic writing style as well as on grammar in the long run.

Introduction

Thanks to recent developments in technology, it has now been feasible to communicate for people with their family, friends or people living abroad or far away from them in no time. SMP (social media platforms) are created in such an attractive way that draw the attention of people, making individuals flitter hours scrolling through information available on the media. The usage of these platforms is so convenient that people, especially youngsters, enjoy spending time on these websites; they chat with their friends or discuss about a popular topic on the news feed. It is commonplace for humanity trying to make tasks easier, making them more convenient, therefore young people are using many abbreviations while texting with the purpose of saving time, however, this creates challenge for readers who are not familiar with so-called "social media" language, including parents and teachers. One study surveyed students to find out if their academic writing and grammar are influenced by social media usage, although students interviewed affirmed that this did not have any impact on their writing skills or grammatical knowledge, the survey showed that students were introducing shortened forms of words consciously or unconsciously in their writing assignments. Since social media platforms is highly addictive, users develop a compulsive need to check their notifications, posts, updates and respond to messages, leading to decreased productivity and disrupted sleep patterns. This, in turn, prevents students to work deeply, which is one of the key factors to achieve academic success. Being an adolescent myself, I turn to "social media mode" whenever I interchange on social media with my friends in my own language or English, even though I respect languages and try to follow linguistic rules. In my view, it is peer pressure or FOMO (Fear of

Missing Out) that makes me use this type of “writing”, oftentimes I make basic spelling and grammatical mistakes and I do not bother to correct my messages thinking that these mistakes “save my time” or “everyone does so”. Social media sites have made it possible for people from different walks of life to open their blogs, websites and people who share the same interests follow their bloggers, and if these people make mistakes when they are posting information, this leads to a conventional misconception that such a writing style is right to use. This is observed in earlier research of Freeborn Odiboh who argued that “some posts seen on social media spaces do not do credit to the writing ability or expressional capacity of those who send them to the media space. The dent or damage that such errors do to the perception by others; and image of the writer of such posts with grammatically skewed structure is incalculable” (Prof Freeborn Odiboh 9 July 2015 on his Facebook page). This shows that social media users presume that they are using correct way of writing, having seen that it being used everywhere even if the case is vice versa. Another concern is that because the majority of social media users are the youth, it may be a real challenge for somebody who is not socially active to read and comprehend their texts and messages. Common used abbreviations in texting include:

- FTFY – Fixed that for you
- FTI – For your information
- G2G or GTG – Got to go
- GG – Good game
- HIFW – How I feel when
- HBD – Happy birthday
- FB – Facebook
- YT – You tube
- DM – Direct message
- TIL – Today I learned
- TBH - To be honest

Although on the face of things, these abbreviations may save up time, they may cause confusion between people communicating, for instance abbreviation “LOL” stands for “Laugh out loud”, yet it might be interpreted by users in another way, such as “Lots of love”. The worst case scenario is the presence of such a language in students’ exam papers and homework assignments. Humphreys (2007) while looking at the United Kingdom experience on what he calls “...How texting is wrecking our language,” notes that: It began with some fairly obvious and relatively inoffensive abbreviations: ‘tks’ for ‘thanks’; ‘u’ for ‘you’; 4 for ‘for’. Furthermore, sometimes students omit some words in a sentence in their assignments, for instance, instead of writing “I am learning English”, they use “learning English”. Indeed, students may be in favor of using “texting” language in the classroom as well, with the thought in mind that it is more fun and easier to use, yet applying this language is totally unacceptable in academic papers and assignments.

Conclusion

With the passage of time, it is inevitable that changes occur in any language. However, it seems unreasonable to introduce the elements of “invented” writing style in the process of using social media to academic writing. This writing style would be a poor substitute for well-thought-out grammar and linguistic rules and it would be challenging for teachers to check the assignments of students. It is logical to think that necessary steps should be taken to address this issue and preserve patterns of the language.

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