

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study addresses the intersection of social media usage, abbreviations, and students' writing skills, focusing on how informal communication styles, especially abbreviations, impact academic writing. Social media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram are crucial in facilitating shorthand language, where abbreviations are commonplace. The growing influence of these digital communication tools raises questions about their impact on formal writing skills among students. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how social media use, specifically the adoption of abbreviations, affects the academic writing abilities of students at Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin.

Social media platforms have become integral to students' daily communication, fostering a unique linguistic environment characterized by abbreviations and slang. According to Kauser and Awan (2019), the frequent use of acronyms and informal expressions in online interactions has permeated students' writing practices, potentially affecting their proficiency in Standard English. This linguistic shift raises concerns about the inadvertent incorporation of informal language into academic writing, thereby challenging traditional literacy norms. The phenomenon of "brain rot," as discussed by The Atlantic (2025), highlights the potential cognitive implications of consuming unchallenging online content, which may manifest in contemporary speech and writing patterns. This trend underscores the need to examine how habitual exposure to informal language on social media platforms can influence students' ability to engage with complex texts and articulate ideas formally.

Another critical aspect of the impact of social media abbreviations on students' writing skills is the shift in cognitive processing of language. Studies have suggested that students who frequently engage in social media communication tend to prioritize speed over accuracy in their writing (Adeyemi & Bello, 2021). This preference for rapid communication often results in neglecting essential writing conventions such as punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structure. Over time, the habitual omission of these elements in digital communication may spill over into academic writing, making it challenging for students to differentiate between formal and informal writing contexts. Consequently, the quality of students' written assignments, essays, and reports may decline, raising concerns among educators and language professionals about the long-term effects of this trend on literacy development.

In addition to grammatical concerns, social media abbreviations have been linked to a reduction in students' vocabulary range. Research by Chukwu and Adekunle (2022) highlights that students who rely heavily on shorthand expressions, emojis, and acronyms in digital communication may struggle with lexical diversity when constructing formal texts. Since social media platforms encourage concise and often simplified language, students may become less exposed to complex

sentence structures and academic vocabulary. This limitation can negatively impact their ability to express nuanced arguments and engage critically with academic content. Without intentional efforts to bridge the gap between digital communication and academic literacy, students may face challenges in professional and academic writing, ultimately affecting their overall academic performance.

Empirical studies have demonstrated a correlation between the use of internet slang and a decline in academic writing quality. Research published in the *American Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* (2023) indicates that the prevalence of internet slang in students' writing is associated with decreased literacy skills, including grammar and vocabulary proficiency. This suggests that the normalization of informal language through social media may undermine students' capacity to adhere to academic writing conventions.

Furthermore, the infiltration of social media language into formal writing contexts has been observed globally. For instance, the *Financial Times* (2024) reports a significant decline in literacy skills among adults in various countries, attributing this trend to the consumption of short-form content facilitated by technological advancements. This global perspective reinforces the relevance of investigating the specific impact on students at Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin, to develop targeted educational interventions.

In conclusion, the integration of social media abbreviations into students' writing practices presents a multifaceted challenge to academic literacy. Addressing this issue necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes raising awareness among students about the distinctions between informal and formal language registers, incorporating digital literacy into the curriculum, and encouraging critical engagement with online content. By understanding and mitigating the influence of social media language on academic writing, educators can better prepare students to navigate the demands of both digital communication and scholarly discourse.

### 2.1.1 Social Media as a Linguistic Space

Social media platforms have transformed how young people communicate, often emphasizing brevity and informality, which leads to the widespread use of abbreviations and slang. Research indicates that these platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter, are fostering a new language norm where informal language, including abbreviations, is dominant (Akinyemi & Olaniyan, 2022). This has created a parallel form of communication that is deeply ingrained in daily interactions among students. Abbreviations like “lol” (laugh out loud), “omg” (oh my god), and “smh” (shaking my head) are now common, even in academic contexts. While these language shortcuts help with quick communication online, they can influence students to adopt informal language habits in academic writing, potentially compromising clarity and the formal tone expected in assignments (Oladipo, 2021).

Language evolution through social media is not solely about convenience; it also reflects creativity and cultural shifts. Researchers argue that this transformation is reshaping the linguistic identity of younger generations. According to Adewale and Akinyemi (2021), digital

platforms are fostering a global linguistic culture while simultaneously encouraging localized expressions and slang, which vary across communities. In Nigeria, abbreviations such as “abi” (right?) and “biko” (please) are often blended with English in online communication, showcasing a unique hybrid of global and local language use.

As these digital language practices seep into formal communication, students may struggle to differentiate between the informal language used on social media and the formal structures required for academic work. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of language use on social media and its effects on writing skills is vital for identifying educational strategies that can mitigate the negative impact on students’ academic performance

### 2.1.2 Abbreviations as a Byproduct of Digital Communication

The prolific use of abbreviations in digital communication stems from the need for quick, efficient exchanges in fast-paced online environments. Platforms like Twitter, which restrict users to short posts, naturally promote brevity, encouraging the use of abbreviations. Studies show that students frequently use shorthand like “brb” (be right back), “idk” (I don’t know), and “bff” (best friends forever) in their daily interactions, often without considering the implications for academic communication (Johnson, 2020).

The pervasiveness of abbreviations is particularly pronounced among students, who are frequent users of social media platforms. While these linguistic adaptations enhance efficiency, they also present challenges in formal writing contexts. Research by Adebola (2020) found that students often unconsciously incorporate digital abbreviations into academic assignments, resulting in reduced clarity and coherence. For example, terms like “BTW” (by the way) or “ASAP” (as soon as possible) may appear in essays, highlighting the influence of informal digital habits on formal communication practices.

The problem arises when these abbreviated forms become second nature to students and inadvertently affect their academic writing. For instance, a student may write “pls” (please) or “u” (you) in an academic paper, reducing the formality and professionalism expected in such work. This can lead to miscommunication and a decrease in the quality of academic writing (Adetola, 2021). Understanding how these digital language habits spill over into academic writing is crucial for designing interventions that encourage students to adopt more formal language in academic contexts.

Despite these challenges, some scholars argue that the use of abbreviations reflects a form of linguistic creativity and adaptability. According to Akinbiyi (2021), young people’s ability to navigate between formal and informal registers showcases their linguistic dexterity. This adaptability underscores the dual role of abbreviations: while they simplify communication, they also necessitate an awareness of appropriate contexts. Thus, promoting digital literacy can help students manage the dichotomy between social media habits and academic expectations.

### 2.1.3 Writing Skills and Academic Standards

Writing skills are fundamental for academic success. They help students communicate complex ideas clearly and cohesively. Proper grammar, spelling, syntax, and structure are essential for crafting high quality academic papers. However, the increasing influence of informal language on social media is eroding these fundamental skills. Students, who are frequently exposed to the informal language of social media, may find it difficult to switch back to the formal writing style required for academic tasks.

The incorporation of social media conventions, such as abbreviations and slang, into academic writing can compromise the quality of students' work. Adewole (2022) notes that frequent exposure to informal language norms reduces students' attention to detail, resulting in errors in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. These issues are further compounded by the declining emphasis on formal writing practices in educational settings, where digital communication is often prioritized over traditional literacy skills.

Students may struggle with maintaining formal standards, particularly in grammar and vocabulary, when they are accustomed to the informal communication style of social media. This underscores the need for focused educational initiatives that help students make the distinction between casual and academic writing, ensuring that their communication aligns with academic expectations (Oladipo, 2021).

Nevertheless, educators play a crucial role in mitigating these effects. By integrating writing workshops and grammar tutorials into the curriculum, institutions can help students strengthen their writing capabilities. Research by Egbebi and Musa (2020) suggests that combining traditional teaching methods with digital literacy initiatives can significantly enhance students' ability to differentiate between informal and formal writing styles.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in three primary theories: Social Learning Theory, Linguistic Relativity Theory, and Diffusion of Innovations Theory. These theories help explain the dynamics between social media, abbreviation use, and the effects on students' writing skills. Social Learning Theory focuses on how students learn language from their social environment. Linguistic Relativity Theory explores how language shapes thought and behavior, and Diffusion of Innovations Theory examines how new linguistic practices, like abbreviations, spread within social groups.

### 2.2.1 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura (1977), posits that people learn behaviors and language through observation and imitation of others, particularly those in their social environment. Social media platforms serve as such environments where students are exposed to informal language usage. The language behaviors, including the use of abbreviations, are modeled by peers and influencers online, making them more likely to be adopted by students. According to Miller and Gonzalez (2020), students often mimic language patterns they observe

online, using abbreviations like “smh” (shaking my head) or “omg” (oh my god) in their everyday communication.

The theory is particularly relevant to understanding how digital communication habits are transferred into academic writing. As students observe peers and influencers using shorthand on social media, they subconsciously incorporate these practices into their own language use. Over time, these informal language habits can infiltrate academic contexts, diminishing the quality of their written work. Bandura’s theory underscores the importance of understanding how external influences, like social media, shape students' linguistic behaviors and stresses the need for interventions that encourage students to use formal language in academic settings (Miller & Gonzalez, 2020).

### 2.2.2 Linguistic Relativity Theory

Linguistic Relativity Theory, also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, asserts that language shapes the way individuals perceive and think about the world. This theory is relevant to the study of social media’s impact on students’ writing because the use of abbreviations and informal language can influence how students think and write. As Adewole (2021) notes, frequent exposure to shorthand language on social media simplifies communication but can limit students' cognitive and linguistic flexibility, especially when writing academically.

By relying heavily on abbreviations, students may not develop the cognitive depth needed for formal writing, which requires clear, precise language to express complex ideas. Linguistic Relativity Theory helps explain why students who frequently use abbreviated language on social media might find it difficult to engage with more sophisticated writing. The language they use on social media shapes their thought processes, limiting their ability to effectively engage with academic writing (Akinyemi & Salami, 2021). The theory suggests that students need to be aware of how language influences their thinking and must be taught to distinguish between informal and formal writing styles.

### 2.2.3 Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Everett Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovations Theory (2003) explains how new ideas, behaviors, and practices spread through social networks. Social media, as a vast communication network, has facilitated the rapid diffusion of abbreviations and informal language. The adoption of abbreviations, such as “tbh” (to be honest) or “brb” (be right back), has become widespread among students, contributing to the normalization of these language features in everyday communication.

Rogers’ theory explains how innovations, like abbreviations, are first introduced and then gradually spread through social networks. As students observe their peers using abbreviations in digital communication, they are more likely to adopt these shorthand forms themselves. Over time, the use of abbreviations becomes widespread, influencing not only digital communication but also students' academic writing. Diffusion of Innovations Theory suggests that the spread of abbreviations, once adopted by early users, becomes a cultural norm. However, this widespread

adoption can create challenges when these informal practices are transferred into academic writing, where formal language is expected. Educators must act as “opinion leaders” to help students recognize the differences between informal and formal communication (Rogers, 2003).

### 2.3 Review of Related Studies

This section provides an indepth analysis of existing studies relevant to the research focus. It examines the influence of social media on language use, the impact of abbreviations on academic writing, and the awareness of formal writing standards among students. The review highlights key findings from previous research and identifies gaps that this study aims to address.

#### 2.3.1 Studies on Social Media's Influence on Language

Social media platforms have fundamentally transformed how language is used and perceived, particularly among younger generations. Research by Akinyemi and Olaniyan (2022) shows that social media has created a new linguistic paradigm characterized by brevity, informality, and creativity. This digital language often incorporates abbreviations, emojis, and memes, fostering a communication style distinct from traditional language use.

Studies reveal that students immersed in social media are prone to adopting the informal language norms of these platforms, such as using abbreviations like “gr8” (great) or “ttyl” (talk to you later), even in contexts where formal language is required. Oladipo (2021) found that these practices often blur the lines between casual and professional communication, leading to a decline in the adherence to grammar and structure in academic writing. Additionally, Johnson (2020) notes that the increased reliance on abbreviations reduces students' exposure to conventional vocabulary, negatively impacting their linguistic development. These findings underscore the need for educational strategies to help students navigate the linguistic challenges posed by social media.

#### 2.3.2 Challenges of Abbreviation Use in Academic Writing

The frequent use of abbreviations on social media has significant implications for academic writing. Abetola (2021) identifies that students often struggle to transition from informal to formal language, inadvertently incorporating abbreviations into their academic work. This habit can lead to poorly structured essays, unclear arguments, and reduced academic credibility. For instance, students might use terms like “pls” (please) or “b4” (before) in assignments, undermining the formal tone expected in academic communication.

Research by Adewale (2020) further highlights the role of social media in diminishing students' grammatical proficiency. The convenience of abbreviations can make students less attentive to details such as punctuation, sentence structure, and spelling. As academic writing demands precision and coherence, the infiltration of informal language norms can significantly affect students' academic performance. These studies emphasize the importance of reinforcing formal writing conventions through targeted educational interventions.

### 2.3.3 Awareness of Formal Writing Standards Among Students

Despite their frequent use of social media, many students are aware of the distinction between informal and formal writing. However, bridging this gap remains a challenge. According to Olaniyan (2021), students often lack sufficient training in formal writing practices, making it difficult for them to apply these standards effectively in their academic work. Furthermore, Miller and Gonzalez (2020) argue that the informal habits formed through digital communication can become deeply ingrained, making it harder for students to adhere to formal conventions. Educators have a pivotal role in helping students navigate these challenges. Programs that emphasize grammar, vocabulary development, and formal writing techniques have been shown to improve students' academic writing skills. For example, Johnson (2020) recommends incorporating digital literacy training into the curriculum to help students understand the differences between informal and formal language use. This approach not only enhances students' writing abilities but also prepares them for professional communication beyond academia.