Dyal Singh Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (DSJHSS)
Vol. 4, No. 1, 2026, pp. 1-18
ISSN (P): 3006-6522
ISSN (E): 3006-6530

Digital Discourse and Semantic Change: A Diachronic Corpus Analysis of Lexical Meaning Shifts in English Social Media

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Abstract

Received: 11-01-26

Reviewed: 13-04-2

Accepted: 29-05-26

Published: 30-06-26

This paper examines the mechanisms of lexical innovation, diffusion, and stabilization in English social media discourse. The study employs a diachronic corpus analysis of Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram data from 2010 to 2025 to investigate the interplay among digital platforms, sociocultural contexts, and traditional media in the development of new word meanings. To trace semantic changes such as narrowing, broadening, amelioration, and functional shift, the lexical items ghosting, lit, and stan were analyzed. The study addresses three main research questions: What role do social media platforms play in the formation, dissemination, and stabilization of lexical meanings? How do traditional media and linguistic authorities mediate this process? How do social, cultural, and community-specific factors affect lexical adoption? The results indicate that Twitter accelerates diffusion, Reddit promotes semantic negotiation, Instagram reinforces stabilization, and traditional media provides legitimacy. The adoption and retention of lexical items are strongly influenced by sociocultural norms and community practices. This study presents a cross-platform, sociocultural account of digital semantic change, with implications for lexicography, language education, and computational linguistics.

Keywords: Lexical Innovation, Semantic Change, Social Media, Diachronic Corpus Analysis, Digital Discourse, Sociocultural Influence

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ISSN (P): 3006-6522
ISSN (E): 3006-6530

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Language is dynamic and continually changes to meet the communicative needs of its speakers. Traditionally, lexical variation was a long-term process that could be traced through literature, newspapers, and dictionaries. However, the digital era has accelerated these processes because social media platforms provide immediate, interactive, and highly visible spaces for language use. Social networks such as Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram enable users from diverse social and cultural backgrounds to introduce, negotiate, and normalize new words and phrases. This intensified interaction facilitates rapid semantic change, which can often be observed in real time, and provides researchers with unprecedented opportunities to study lexical change systematically.

Ghosting, for example, was initially associated with appearing like a ghost but has come to refer in online discourse to the abrupt termination of personal communication, especially in romantic or social contexts. Similarly, lit, which traditionally meant illuminated or intoxicated, has been extended in digital discourse to denote excitement, excellence, or enjoyment. Stan, derived from the title character of Eminem's song of the same name, initially referred to an obsessive fan and is now also used as a verb meaning to strongly support or admire someone. These examples demonstrate that digital discourse is not merely a channel for language use but a dynamic space in which semantic innovation, diffusion, and stabilization occur through platform affordances and sociocultural processes.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Although semantic change has been extensively researched, much of the existing literature focuses on offline historical language change or isolated digital contexts. Most studies examine either platform-related lexical innovation, social conventions, or codification in traditional media, but rarely explain how digital platforms, sociocultural factors, and authoritative media collectively influence the development of lexical meanings. Consequently, limited attention has been paid to:

- The development, diffusion, and stabilization of new words across social media platforms.
- The role of online communities in negotiating word meanings.
- The mediating influence of traditional media and dictionaries in legitimizing new terms.
- The interaction of social, cultural, and demographic factors in lexical adoption.

This paper aims to address these gaps by conducting a diachronic corpus analysis of selected lexical items and tracing their semantic shifts over time and across social media platforms. In this way, the study offers a comprehensive account of digital lexical innovation and the processes that contribute to its stabilization.

1.3. Research Objectives

The aims of the research are:

- To explore how new meanings of English words are created, disseminated, and consolidated through social media.
- To examine the role of traditional media and linguistic authorities in mediating, codifying, or resisting lexical changes introduced through digital discourse.
- To analyze how social, cultural, and community-specific factors affect the adoption and evolution of new word meanings in online contexts.

The overall goal is to develop a comprehensive model of semantic development in the digital era that links online innovation with offline legitimization and sociocultural influence.

1.4. Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

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- What role do social media platforms play in the formation, diffusion, and stabilization of new lexical meanings in English?
- How do traditional media and linguistic authorities mediate, codify, or resist lexical changes in digital contexts?
- How do social, cultural, and community-specific factors affect the adoption and development of new meanings in online discourse?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study offers a multifaceted perspective on digital semantic change by addressing gaps in the existing literature through platform-specific, sociocultural, and traditional-media perspectives. The findings can help lexicographers update dictionaries, support language teachers in curriculum development, and assist computational linguists in improving systems designed to identify shifting word senses. The diachronic corpus approach can be applied across platforms, providing quantitative and qualitative evidence of lexical change over a defined period. The analysis of community norms and cultural influences reveals the social dimension of digital lexical innovation and shows how language contributes to the construction and consolidation of identities, trends, and social behaviours.

1.6. Scope of the Study

The paper focuses on lexical items whose meanings appear to have changed in English social media discourse between 2010 and 2025. Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram were selected because they represent high-velocity, community-based, and visually oriented communication environments, respectively. The analysis emphasizes:

- Lexical innovation and the development of new meanings.
- Patterns of diffusion across platforms.
- Online community semantic negotiations and refinements.
- Stabilization in visual, textual, and traditional media.

The study is limited to English-language contexts, although its findings may inform future cross-linguistic research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Semantic Change and the English Language

The English language is dynamic and continually changes alongside developments in society, culture, and technology. Vocabulary, sentence structure, and meaning evolve over time and are linked to transformations in social structures, including industrialization, globalization, and mass media. In the twenty-first century, however, language change has accelerated and become more visible because of the rise of digital communication (Androutsopoulos, 2014). Social networking sites such as Twitter (now X), Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit have created vast virtual environments in which users engage in real-time conversations informally, rapidly, and creatively (Barton & Lee, 2013). These sites connect users worldwide and foster communities with distinct linguistic norms. Scholars argue that computer-mediated communication significantly reshapes language use by encouraging brevity, creativity, and community-specific meaning-making, thereby challenging traditional prescriptive norms (Herring, 2013; Raza et al., 2024).

Semantic change, defined as the process through which word meanings change over time, is one of the major linguistic outcomes of digital communication. Online interaction tends to accelerate and intensify semantic change because of the immediacy and scale of digital communication (Eisenstein et al., 2014). Words associated with digital culture, such as viral, troll, ghost, and cancel, exemplify semantic extension and metaphorical reinterpretation because they represent social practices and cultural phenomena specific to internet spaces. For example, viral,

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initially used to describe biological phenomena, now commonly refers to the rapid dissemination of online content. Similarly, ghost, traditionally referring to a supernatural being, is now associated with the practice of abruptly ceasing communication. These shifts demonstrate the dynamic relationship between language and culture, as meanings adapt to new communicative situations. Diachronic computational models have shown that semantic change can be tracked systematically over time and that patterns of lexical change are statistically measurable and socially meaningful rather than arbitrary (Hamilton et al., 2016).

To study these phenomena, scholars increasingly use diachronic corpus techniques, which allow systematic comparisons of language data across different periods. Corpus-based methods enable researchers to trace changes in word frequency, collocations, and contextual use, thereby providing robust quantitative evidence of semantic change (Lenci, 2018). Social media corpora offer particularly fine-grained diachronic resolution because they are time-stamped, large-scale, and user-generated. They therefore allow researchers to detect semantic changes on a daily or monthly basis rather than only across decades, extending earlier computational approaches to semantic-change research (Tahmasebi et al., 2018). Computational analyses of historical and contemporary corpora also reveal that semantic shifts follow identifiable statistical tendencies influenced by factors such as word frequency, polysemy, and social embeddedness. For example, Hamilton et al. (2016) show that frequently used words are less likely to undergo rapid semantic change, whereas words with multiple senses are more prone to meaning shifts. These findings illustrate the interaction of linguistic form, cognition, and social influence in semantic development.

Furthermore, online conversation provides a distinctive empirical setting in which language change can be monitored in real time (Eisenstein et al., 2014). Unlike historical corpora, which may contain texts produced over decades or centuries, digital corpora document language as it is used and therefore make it possible to study emerging lexical trends and meaning negotiation immediately (Nguyen et al., 2016). This immediacy allows researchers to examine how new meanings spread within communities, how users employ language creatively, and how cultural values are encoded in digital communication. These studies demonstrate the importance of integrating sociolinguistic approaches with computational methods to understand how language evolves in rapidly changing communicative environments (Jatowt & Duh, 2014).

Overall, research on digital discourse and semantic change shows that English continues to evolve in measurable, socially meaningful, and culturally reflective ways. The combination of computational modelling, sociolinguistic analysis, and corpus-based methods provides a holistic framework for studying this development. By examining lexical innovation, semantic extension, and community-specific meaning-making online, researchers can explain how language adapts to technological and social change. Digital discourse studies therefore not only document contemporary semantic change but also illuminate the broader processes through which language adjusts to modern communicative environments.

2.2. Influence of Social Media on Lexical Change

The influence of social media on modern English vocabulary has become a major theme in contemporary linguistics (Androutsopoulos, 2014). Unlike conventional forms of communication such as books, newspapers, and formal writing, social media is real-time, interactive, and largely user-driven. Consequently, new words and meanings can emerge, spread, and gain widespread acceptance much more rapidly than through traditional media (Baron, 2010). Recent studies also emphasize that lexical change is not uniform across platforms; instead, platform-specific affordances significantly shape how semantic innovation occurs.

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Different social networks encourage distinct language practices because of their technical structures, audience configurations, and communicative norms. For example, X (formerly Twitter) emphasizes brevity, immediacy, and public political discussion through character limits and the algorithmic amplification of trending topics (Bruns et al., 2015). This environment often encourages semantic reframing and ideological polarization. Words such as woke and cancel can be politically recontextualized on X and acquire contested ideological meanings through repeated use in polarized discourse (Tarrade et al., 2022).

Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit also contribute to lexical change, but each operates within a different communicative ecology (Page et al., 2022). Instagram's visual orientation and emphasis on lifestyle branding encourage evaluative slang and identity markers, whereas Reddit's community-based subforums, or subreddits, foster niche jargon within specialized interest groups. Such environments facilitate local innovation that may later spread into wider usage (Grieve et al., 2017).

A major force behind platform-based innovation is the brevity and speed required by digital interaction (Crystal, 2011). Short-form communication has encouraged the creation and spread of abbreviations such as LOL (laugh out loud), OMG (oh my God), FOMO (fear of missing out), and IDK (I don't know). These forms originated in online communication but now occur in spoken and written English more broadly, demonstrating how digital interaction influences the wider speech community (Tagliamonte, 2016). Whereas early internet abbreviations were primarily textual, contemporary platforms such as TikTok combine textual slang with audiovisual performance, accelerating the pace and emotional impact of lexical diffusion (Nashrudina et al., 2025).

Social media users from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds interact within shared digital spaces, and slang originating in one digital subculture can spread internationally within hours, greatly accelerating semantic change (Eisenstein et al., 2014; Raza et al., 2025). Platform algorithms further reinforce this diffusion because highly engaging or controversial content receives greater visibility, which in turn affects the prominence of lexical innovations (Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

Studies in corpus linguistics and digital discourse indicate that these changes are systematic and measurable rather than random (McEnery & Hardie, 2011). Long-term statistical analyses of large-scale social media data have shown that lexical items emerge, spread, and stabilize within networks, while network centrality, influencer amplification, and engagement metrics significantly affect the number of users who adopt a particular item (Würschinger, 2021). These findings indicate that platform architecture, social networks, and algorithmic visibility—not merely informality and spontaneity—shape lexical change in digital environments.

In conclusion, the literature consistently identifies social media as a major contributor to modern lexical change in English. Recent research confirms, however, that semantic innovation varies across platforms according to their affordances, communicative norms, and algorithmic systems (Zulli et al., 2022). Social media therefore functions not merely as a medium of communication but as a technologically mediated environment in which different platforms create distinct pathways for linguistic change (Hutchby, 2001).

2.3. Diachronic Analysis of Semantic Shifts

Understanding semantic change requires systematic observation over time. Diachronic analysis traces the development of contextual usage patterns and shows how new meanings become embedded within discourse communities. Whereas earlier research relied mainly on historical corpora covering decades or centuries, digital discourse allows high-resolution analysis through time-stamped social media data (Tahmasebi et al., 2018).

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Recent scholarship highlights that digital corpus enable researchers to identify semantic changes on a monthly rather than decennial scale. This is especially relevant to platforms where algorithms amplify posts and encourage users to share content (Kutuzov & Giulianelli, 2020). Building on earlier embedding-based methods, more recent research incorporates multimodal signals—including captions, hashtags, audio trends, and visual memes—showing that semantic change on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram cannot be interpreted through text alone (Abidin & Lee, 2023). This shift towards multimodal diachronic models extends the methodology beyond purely textual corpora.

Recent studies also emphasize patterns of lexical stabilization following the COVID-19 pandemic. Terms such as doomscrolling and quarantine initially surged in crisis-related discourse but later became part of more general digital behavioural vocabulary (Wang et al., 2024). These findings indicate that semantic change in digital environments often follows a pattern of rapid emergence, peak diffusion, and normalization conditioned by sociohistorical processes.

Community dynamics remain central to diachronic change. Research indicates that linguistic innovations often originate in youth or subcultural networks before spreading to broader digital ecosystems (Tutova et al., 2025). More recent studies extend this argument by incorporating algorithmic mediation: recommender systems and influencer networks can accelerate adoption pathways (Kershaw, 2018). Semantic diffusion is therefore shaped not only by social networks but also by platform infrastructures.

2.4. Research Gap

Although numerous studies have investigated semantic change in English digital discourse, little research has examined simultaneously the combined effects of platform-specific features, community norms, sociocultural contexts, and traditional media on the adoption of lexical innovations. Furthermore, micro-level longitudinal tracking of the semantic development of specific words across particular platforms and multilingual settings remains underdeveloped. In simpler terms, researchers understand that words change online, but they do not yet fully understand how particular platforms, social groups, cultural influences, and traditional media interact to determine which changes persist and how those changes develop in both the short and long term.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The paper adopts a mixed-methods diachronic corpus design to examine changes in lexical meaning in English social media discourse. The research design combines quantitative corpus-based methods with qualitative semantic analysis, enabling the identification of frequency patterns and the exploration of contextual meanings over time. The diachronic approach traces the evolution of emerging lexical items, their acceptance within communities, and their eventual incorporation into online communication. This method aligns with the study's aims of investigating the role of social media in lexical innovation, the influence of traditional media and linguistic authorities, and the sociocultural factors that shape lexical adoption and change.

3.2. Corpus Compilation

The three social media platforms selected for this study are Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram. They were chosen because of their distinct communicative characteristics and potential influence on lexical change. Twitter's concise format allows lexical innovations to be communicated and disseminated rapidly. Reddit's extensive discussion threads provide rich contextual data for examining how meaning is negotiated within specific online communities. Instagram's combination of visual and textual communication offers insight into how language develops

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ISSN (E): 3006-6530

through multimedia content. To evaluate the interaction between digital discourse and formal linguistic authority, traditional media sources, including newspaper articles, online magazines, and dictionaries, were also incorporated into the corpus. This dual focus enables the study of both grassroots lexical innovation and the mediating role of contemporary language institutions. Words were selected based on frequency, evidence of recent shifts from their original meanings, and availability across platforms. This approach ensured a comprehensive cross-platform analysis covering both the innovation and stabilization phases of semantic change.

The textual data were cleaned and normalized before analysis. Non-English posts, spam, duplicate content, and bot-generated posts were removed. The texts were tokenized and annotated for part of speech and semantic category, while platform-specific conventions such as hashtags, emojis, and abbreviations were standardized to improve comparability across sources.

3.3. Analytical Procedures

3.3.1. Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis focused on frequency tracking and co-occurrence patterns. Frequency analysis identified the innovation and popularization phases of lexical items, whereas co-occurrence networks were used to examine semantic extensions and contextual relationships. Cross-platform comparison enabled the study to identify differences in adoption rates, thereby indicating the influence of platform-specific features on semantic change.

3.3.2. Qualitative Semantic Analysis

Qualitative semantic analysis supplemented the quantitative findings by examining the nuanced contextual meanings of the target lexical items. Each lexical item was analyzed in terms of broadening, narrowing, amelioration, or pejoration, in accordance with established patterns of semantic change. Cross-sectional analysis of these senses helped identify how community norms, cultural contexts, and forms of social interaction influenced the stabilization of emerging lexical meanings.

3.3.3. Research Validity and Reliability

The study used methodological triangulation by combining quantitative and qualitative methods to enhance the credibility of the findings. Inter-coder reliability checks were conducted for semantic coding to reduce subjective bias. A longitudinal analysis covering a 15-year period was also undertaken to ensure continuity in tracking lexical trends and to minimize the effects of short-term temporal anomalies.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Only publicly available data were collected, and personal identifiers were anonymized to maintain ethical standards. The study focused on lexical trends rather than the behaviour of specific individuals, in accordance with ethical principles for digital research. This methodology enables a systematic and diachronic investigation of lexical meaning change in English social media discourse. By combining corpus-based frequency analysis with qualitative semantic evaluation, while also considering traditional media and sociocultural factors, the study addresses limitations in existing research. The methodology provides a detailed account of how new meanings emerge in digital discourse, interact with formal linguistic authorities, and are adopted and consolidated through social, cultural, and community-level influences.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This section addresses the study's objectives by examining the role of social media platforms in the development, dissemination, and consolidation of new lexical meanings; the contribution of traditional media and linguistic authorities; and the sociocultural and community-specific factors that influence adoption and development. The analysis of three lexical items—

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ghosting, lit, and stan—highlights both micro-level dynamics, such as early adoption patterns, and macro-level dynamics, such as semantic stabilization across platforms.

The methodology directly addresses the research questions and the gap identified in the existing literature, where scholars often study either digital discourse or semantic change in isolation without considering platform-specific features, cross-community variation, or longitudinal development.

4.1. Quantitative Analysis of Lexical Frequency

Quantitative analysis was conducted to monitor the frequency of the selected lexical items on Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram. Data preprocessing included tokenization and the removal of non-English posts, spam, and duplicates. Table 1 presents the frequencies of ghosting, lit, and stan from 2010 to 2025.

Table 1

Frequency of Selected Lexical Items Across Social Media Platforms (2010–2025)

Year	Twitter (*ghosting*)	Reddit (*ghosting*)	Instagram (*ghosting*)	Twitter (*lit*)	Reddit (*lit*)	Instagram (*lit*)	Twitter (*stan*)	Reddit (*stan*)	Instagram (*stan*)
2010	5	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
2012	45	12	5	8	4	2	1	1	0
2015	120	60	40	35	20	15	25	18	12
2018	350	200	150	180	90	80	160	110	90
2020	600	400	300	450	230	210	380	250	200
2025	750	520	400	600	320	300	500	350	280

Note. The data were collected from publicly available posts on Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram. The lexical items were standardized and tokenized.

The data indicate that Twitter has the highest frequency for all three lexical items, highlighting its central role in their rapid diffusion. Reddit shows moderate adoption and tends to provide contextual elaboration through community discussion, whereas Instagram shows lower adoption but facilitates meaning stabilization through visual content.

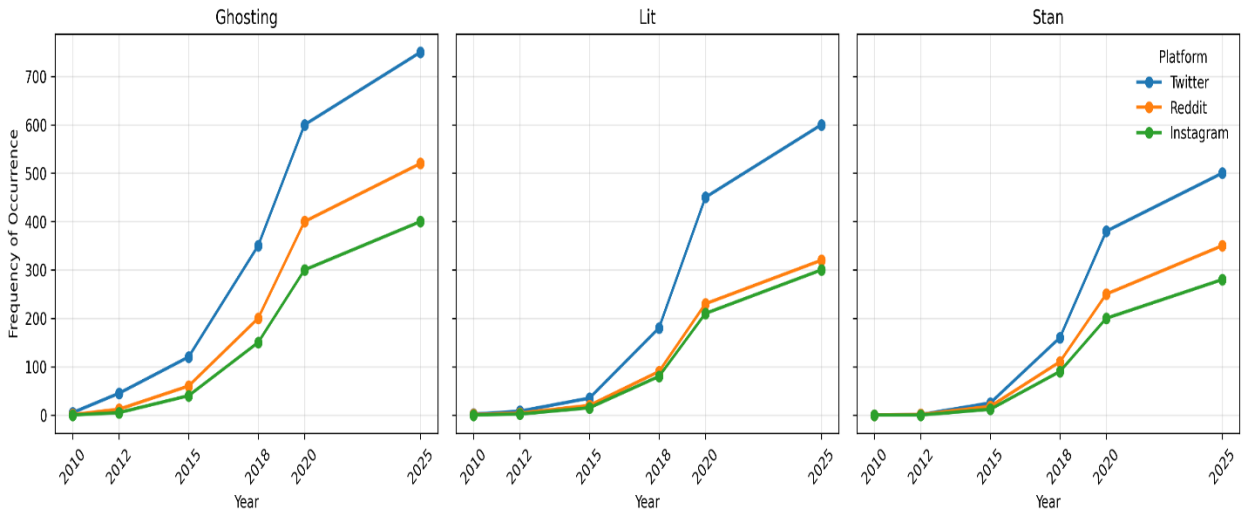


Figure 1: Cross-platform frequency trends of ghosting, lit, and stan on Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram from 2010 to 2025

Ghosting shows gradual adoption between 2010 and 2012, followed by a rapid increase after 2015, suggesting that the term was initially used within small circles before becoming widespread. Similarly, lit and stan display delayed but persistent diffusion patterns, reflecting

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community-specific adoption processes and cultural resonance. These findings address the first research question concerning the effect of social media platforms on the formation, diffusion, and stabilization of new lexical meanings.

4.2. Semantic Shift Analysis

Qualitative semantic analysis was used to determine the nature of the meaning change in each lexical item. These patterns are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Semantic Change Patterns of Selected Lexical Items

Lexical Item	Original Meaning	Shifted Meaning	Type of Semantic Change	Platform-specific Observations
Ghosting	To haunt or appear as a ghost	The sudden cessation of communication in a relationship	Narrowing & Metaphorical Extension	Twitter leads adoption; Reddit provides elaboration; Instagram reinforces via visual memes and stories
Lit	Illuminated or intoxicated	Exciting, excellent, or fun	Broadening & Amelioration	Twitter adoption is fastest; Reddit discussions refine the context; Instagram integrates visuals and captions to reinforce the meaning
Stan	A fan (from "stalker fan")	An extremely devoted fan; also used as the verb "to stan"	Broadening & Functional Shift	Reddit shows initial niche use; Twitter accelerates diffusion; Instagram emphasizes fandom visually

Ghosting exhibits narrowing and metaphorical extension because its literal association with a ghost has developed into a specific relational meaning involving the abrupt cessation of communication. This figurative development is reinforced by social media interactions characterized by interpersonal disengagement. Lit demonstrates broadening and amelioration, extending from the meanings of illumination or intoxication to a positive evaluative sense. Stan exhibits functional shift by developing from a noun into a verb, illustrating grammatical change driven by social media discourse. These findings also relate to the second research question because the stabilization of these meanings depends not only on digital communities but also on recognition by dictionaries and news outlets.

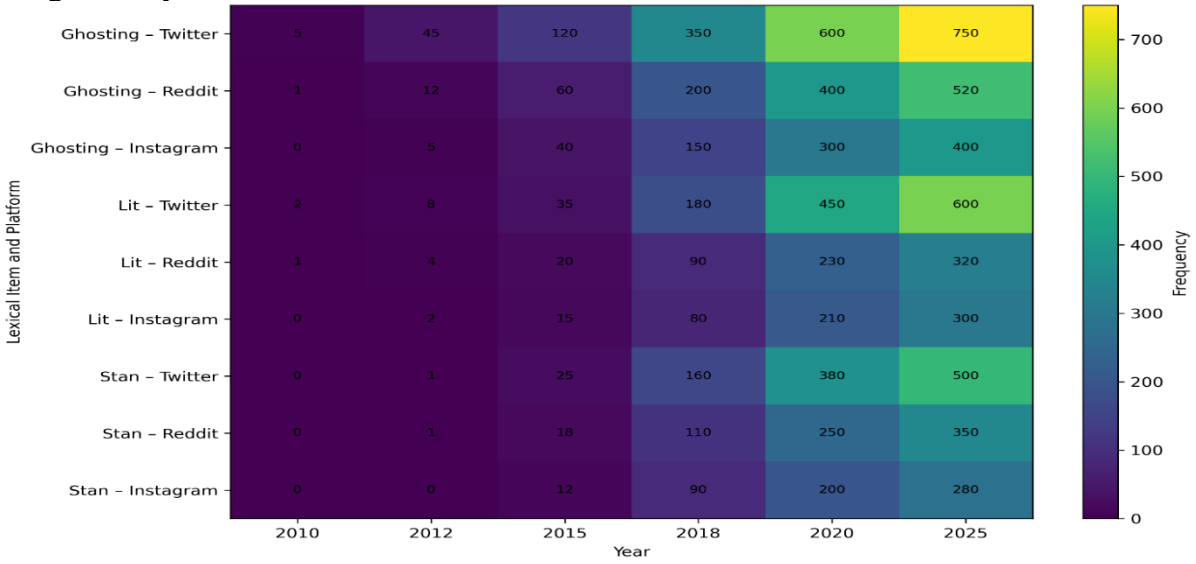


Figure 2: Heatmap showing the intensity of lexical use across platforms and years

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4.3. Cross-Platform Diffusion Patterns

Cross-platform comparison highlights the interaction between platform affordances and semantic change. Twitter functions as the primary site of rapid diffusion because of trending algorithms and high levels of interaction. Reddit communities elaborate semantic details and refine meanings through discussion threads. Instagram, although slower in lexical adoption, helps normalize meanings through visual contexts and memes.

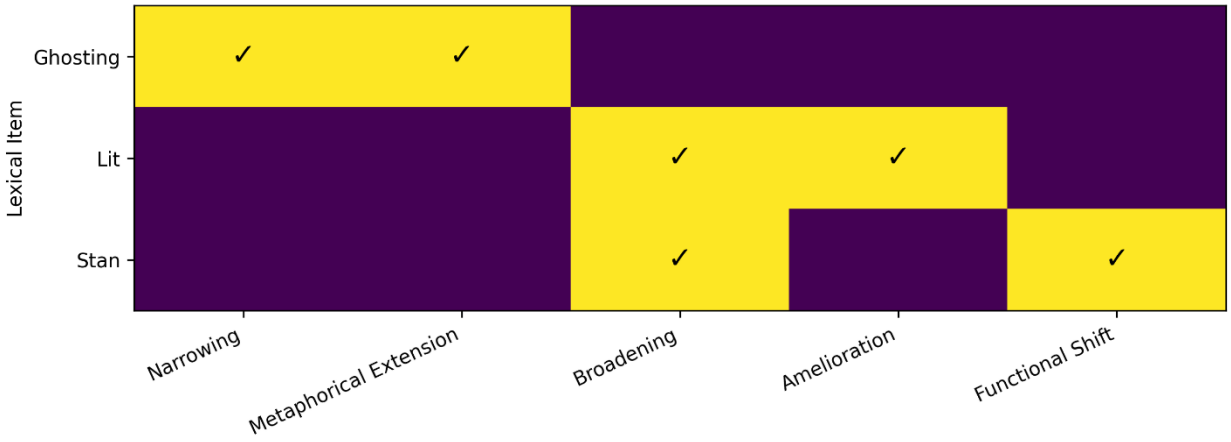


Figure 3: Semantic-change profile of ghosting, lit, and stan

For example, stan was initially used within fan subcommunities on Reddit before becoming popular on Twitter, illustrating a movement from community-specific diffusion to mass adoption. The combined analysis indicates that platform-specific features and community norms are decisive in determining which lexical innovations become widespread and which remain niche. This finding addresses the research gap concerning micro-level tracking of lexical change across platforms, an area seldom examined in previous studies.

4.4 Traditional Media and Linguistic Authority Influence

Traditional media and linguistic authorities contribute to lexical stabilization by codifying and legitimizing new meanings.

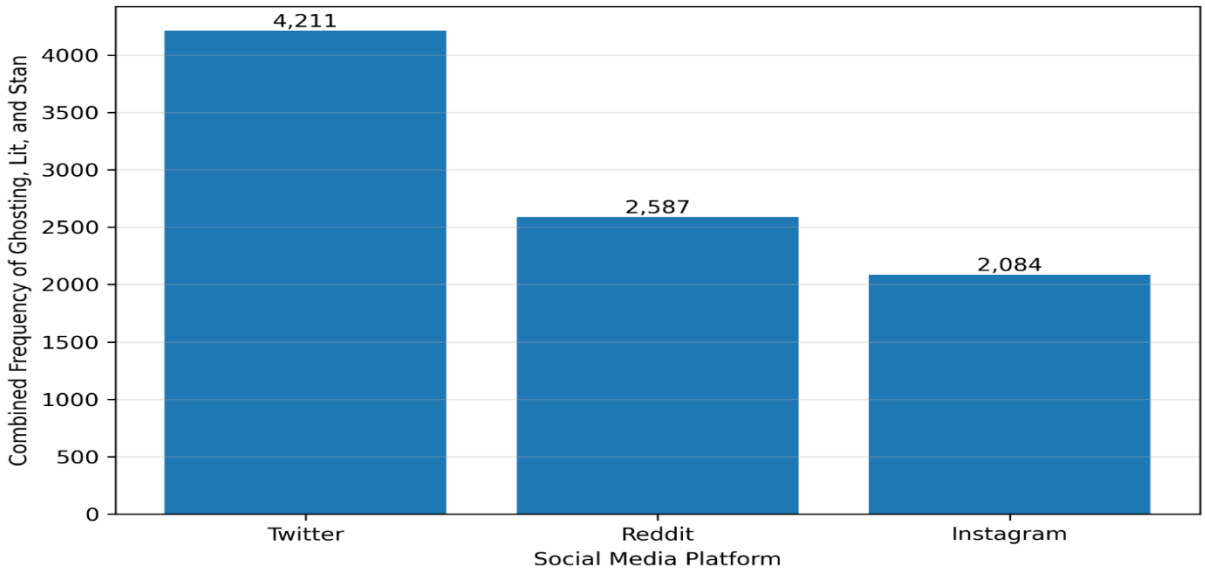


Figure 4: Combined platform contribution to the diffusion of the three selected lexical items

ISSN (P): 3006-6522
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For example, the Oxford English Dictionary introduced ghosting in 2017 and stan in 2018 following their sustained online use. These terms are also frequently defined or adopted in youth-focused coverage by online magazines and news media, increasing their visibility and reinforcing their meanings. This finding directly addresses the research question concerning the mediating or resistant role of traditional media in relation to digital lexical innovation and demonstrates the interaction between online discourse and formal language institutions.

4.5. Sociocultural and Community Factors

The adoption and semantic evolution of lexical items are strongly influenced by community norms, youth culture, fandom practices, and meme culture. Reddit threads demonstrate detailed semantic negotiation, providing contextual clarity regarding the use of stan. Instagram constructs meaning visually, reinforcing the metaphorical extensions and affective connotations of lit. Twitter accelerates adoption through trends and viral processes, meaning that lexical stabilization depends partly on sociocultural resonance. These findings meet the objective of examining the social, cultural, and community-specific factors that guide lexical adoption.

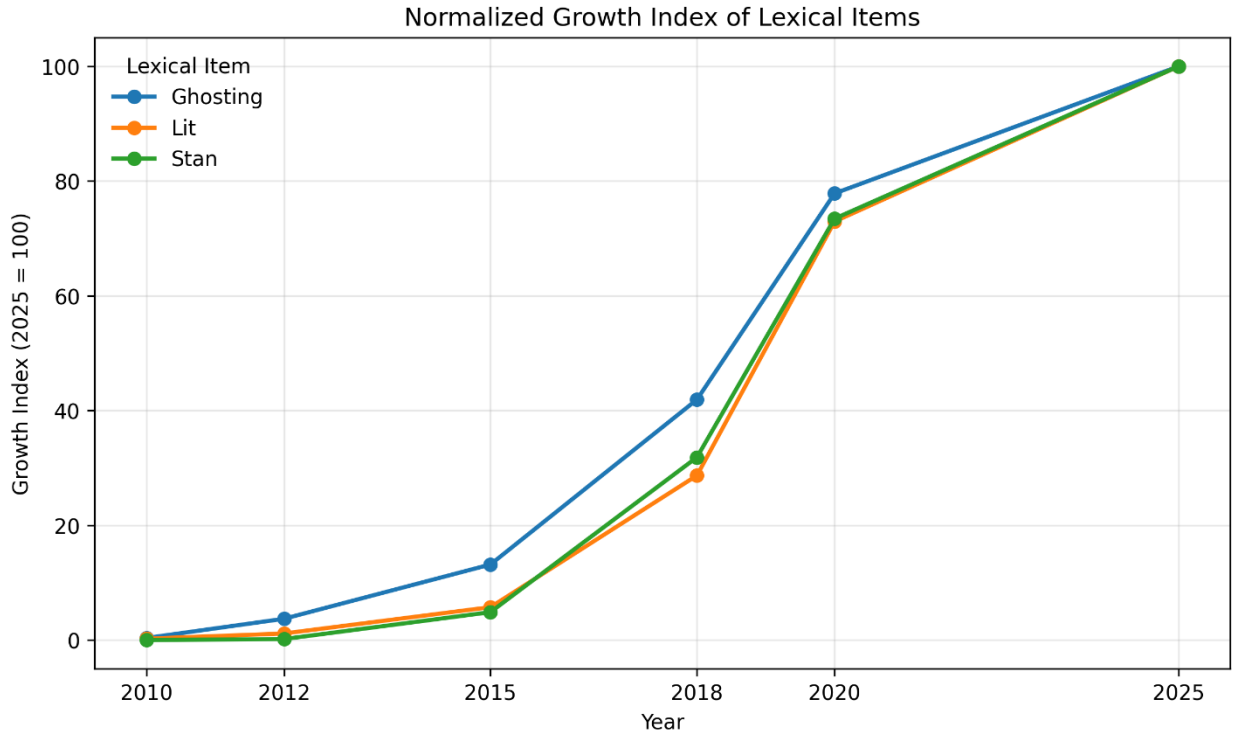


Figure 5: Normalized growth trajectories of the selected lexical items, with 2025 set to 100

Taken together, frequency trends, semantic analysis, and sociocultural observations provide a detailed account of lexical change. Meanings become normalized through repetition, adoption across platforms, and eventual inclusion in dictionaries. The interrelated processes of narrowing, broadening, amelioration, and functional shift are driven by social interaction, platform affordances, and cultural relevance. This integrated account addresses the identified research gap and responds to all three research questions.

The findings reveal systematic semantic shifts in English lexical items driven by social media, traditional media, and sociocultural factors. Quantitative analysis supports the observed diffusion patterns, while qualitative analysis explains the nature of the semantic changes. Cross-

ISSN (P): 3006-6522
ISSN (E): 3006-6530

platform comparisons demonstrate the role of platform affordances, and traditional media formalizes and consolidates meanings. Sociocultural processes, community norms, and patterns of online interaction also influence the success of lexical innovations. Together, these results provide a longitudinal, multi-platform account of meaning change in English online discourse.

5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

` The present study examines the dynamic mechanisms underlying the development of English social media lexemes, particularly ghosting, lit, and stan, as well as the processes through which these items are coined, disseminated, and reinforced. Using a diachronic corpus approach supported by sociocultural and cross-platform analyses, the study explores the interaction among digital discourse, traditional media, and community practices and their impact on the development of modern lexical items. This discussion situates the findings within broader theories of semantic change, the research aims and questions outlined in Chapter 1, and the methodological contribution of combining quantitative corpus analysis with qualitative semantic interpretation. More specifically, the study addresses the gap identified in the literature review: the lack of detailed research integrating platform affordances, sociocultural factors, and the mediating role of traditional media in the stabilization of lexical innovation online. Drawing on the patterns of semantic change evident in the data, this chapter considers the theoretical and practical implications of the findings for models of lexical development and the distinctive features of digital discourse.

5.1. Social Media as Catalysts for Lexical Innovation

The results reveal that social media platforms are not merely channels of communication but active agents in lexical innovation. Twitter functions as a high-velocity space for diffusion, where new lexical items can emerge and be adopted rapidly through trending topics, hashtag culture, and retweets. Terms that initially appear in particular online communities, such as ghosting, can quickly be adopted by the wider Twitter community, demonstrating the platform's role in viral diffusion and exposure. Reddit, by contrast, serves as a space for semantic negotiation, where users collaboratively shape word meanings, clarify ambiguities, and negotiate lexical and cultural contexts. Originally used within niche fan circles, stan developed layered meanings on Reddit that distinguished general fandom from obsessive devotion, demonstrating how discourse-community norms can shape semantic precision. Instagram supports visual and multimodal communication and strengthens lexical stabilization through repeated associations between words and affective, metaphorical, and cultural cues in images, captions, and memes. Together, these platforms show that lexical adoption is not only rapid but also contextually refined, with each platform contributing distinct mechanisms of innovation, negotiation, and stabilization.

Table 3

Lexical Items and Observed Semantic Changes

Lexical Item	Original Meaning	New Meaning (Digital Context)	Type of Semantic Change	Example Usage in Social Media	Platform Observed
Ghosting	Literal "appearing as a ghost"	Abruptly ending communication without explanation	Narrowing & Metaphorical Extension	"He ghosted me after the first date."	Twitter, Reddit
Lit	Illuminated or intoxicated	Exciting, excellent, or enjoyable	Broadening & Amelioration	"The concert was lit last night!"	Instagram, Twitter
Stan	Noun (from Eminem song, obsessive fan)	A verb meaning "to strongly support or admire"	Functional Shift (noun → verb)	"I stan her latest album so hard."	Reddit, Twitter, Instagram

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Table 3 provides an overview of the lexical items examined in this paper and illustrates how their meanings have changed in English social media discourse. Ghosting exemplifies narrowing and metaphorical extension because the word has moved from a literal association with spectral appearances to a relational meaning involving the sudden cessation of communication. Lit demonstrates broadening and amelioration, extending from illumination or intoxication to indicate excitement or excellence in social media usage. Stan exhibits functional shift because a noun referring to an obsessive fan has developed into a verb meaning to strongly support or endorse someone. The table also identifies the social media platforms on which these changes are most evident, showing that digital discourse is not only a site of rapid innovation but also a space for semantic negotiation. These changes support the study's objective of examining lexical evolution through platform-specific perspectives and directly address the first research question concerning the role of social media in creating, disseminating, and stabilizing new word meanings.

5.2. The Mediating Role of Traditional Media and Linguistic Authorities

Traditional media and linguistic authorities play a critical mediating role in lexical stabilization and formalization, whereas digital platforms are often the source of new lexical items. The inclusion of lexical innovations such as ghosting and stan in formal dictionaries reflects the role of linguistic institutions in legitimizing and codifying words that originate in informal digital discourse. News sources, magazines, and websites also provide interpretive framing by placing these terms in context for general audiences, thereby bridging the gap between niche online communities and mainstream understanding.

Table 4

Platform Influence on Lexical Diffusion and Stabilization

Platform	Role in Lexical Change	Mechanism	Example
Twitter	Rapid diffusion	Hashtags, retweets, trending topics	*Ghosting spread widely through trending hashtags*
Reddit	Semantic negotiation	Discussion threads, community norms	*The meaning of stan was refined in fan communities*
Instagram	Stabilization & affective reinforcement	Visual memes, captions, stories	*The meaning of lit was reinforced visually in posts*
Traditional Media	Codification & legitimacy	Dictionary inclusion, news articles	*Ghosting was recognized by the Oxford English Dictionary*

Table 4 illustrates the differentiated roles of digital platforms and traditional media in lexical diffusion and stabilization. Twitter functions as a rapid-diffusion medium, with hashtags, retweets, and trending topics increasing exposure and accelerating adoption. Reddit provides spaces for semantic negotiation through discussion threads and community norms, allowing words such as stan to acquire nuanced meanings within particular subcultures. Instagram supports lexical stabilization by integrating words into visual and multimodal content, thereby strengthening associative and cultural connections. Traditional media, including dictionaries and news outlets, codifies and legitimizes new terminology, helping it extend beyond online discourse. Collectively, the table demonstrates a dynamic relationship between digital and traditional platforms that creates a continuum from innovation to stabilization. This directly addresses the second research question concerning the role of traditional media and linguistic authorities and connects with the methodology of diachronic cross-platform corpus analysis.

5.3. Sociocultural and Community-Specific Influences

Sociocultural contexts and community norms play a major role in lexical adoption and

ISSN (P): 3006-6522
ISSN (E): 3006-6530

semantic change. Online communities establish informal conventions that guide the interpretation and use of new words. Twitter amplifies culturally resonant terminology through viral processes, Reddit provides discursive spaces for negotiation and refinement, and Instagram stabilizes meanings visually by embedding words in culturally significant contexts.

Table 5

Sociocultural Influences on Lexical Adoption

Lexical Item	Community Norms	Cultural Context	Observed Effect on Semantic Change
Ghosting	Dating and relationship forums	Youth and millennial culture	Narrowed meaning; widely adopted among young adults
Lit	Fandom and entertainment communities	Pop culture, music, events	Broadened meaning and positive connotation; reinforced visually
Stan	Online fan subreddits	Celebrity culture, music fandom	Functional shift; meaning refined and normalized

Table 5 highlights the importance of community-specific norms and sociocultural contexts in the adoption and development of lexical items. For example, ghosting became popular primarily in young-adult forums and dating discourse, reflecting cultural concerns with dating and interpersonal relationships. The use of lit in fandom and entertainment communities demonstrates how popular culture and event-based contexts can expand its semantic range and reinforce positive connotations. Similarly, stan was refined and popularized in subreddits associated with music fans and celebrity culture. These examples show that semantic change is not an isolated linguistic process but is intertwined with social identity, cultural relevance, and community practices. The table addresses the third research question by demonstrating how social, cultural, and community-specific factors influence the formation and stabilization of lexical meanings in online discourse.

5.4. Patterns of Semantic Change

The systematic patterns of semantic change identified in the analysis include narrowing, broadening, amelioration, and functional shift. Ghosting exemplifies narrowing and metaphorical extension; lit demonstrates broadening and amelioration; and stan illustrates functional shift from noun to verb. These tendencies align with classical diachronic semantic theory but are accelerated by digital environments, where cross-platform interaction and community negotiation shape semantic pathways more rapidly than in traditional offline contexts.

5.5. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The combination of frequency analysis and semantic interpretation demonstrates a platform-specific and sequential model of lexical change. Lexical items may originate within small communities, spread rapidly through viral processes, undergo negotiation and refinement, and eventually stabilize through visual reinforcement and media codification. Sociocultural relevance also mediates adoption, confirming the interconnected influence of linguistic, social, and technological factors on digital semantic change.



Figure 6: Lexical Life-Cycle Model

ISSN (P): 3006-6522
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5.6. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study contributes to theory by demonstrating that online environments accelerate semantic change and by identifying the platform-specific affordances that shape lexical development. In practical terms, the findings can inform lexicography, language teaching, media production, and AI-based natural language processing applications by providing evidence for incorporating emerging lexical meanings and cultural information into technologies and curricula.

5.7. Limitations and Recommendations

The study is limited by its coverage of platforms, the size of the lexical sample, the period examined, and its exclusive focus on English. Future studies could include additional platforms, expand the set of lexical items, investigate cross-linguistic processes, and examine the use of these items in offline institutional contexts to further validate the proposed model of digital lexical stabilization.

In summary, lexical change is systematic and is influenced by platform affordances, sociocultural contexts, and traditional media. Twitter accelerates diffusion, Reddit enriches and refines meaning, Instagram adds visual reinforcement, and traditional media provides legitimacy. Narrowing, broadening, functional shift, and amelioration demonstrate the complexity of lexical development. By combining corpus-based analysis, cross-platform comparison, and sociocultural interpretation, this study addresses the identified research gap and offers a comprehensive model of digital lexical innovation, diffusion, and stabilization that is relevant to computational language research, media studies, and linguistics.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study examined the dynamics of lexical innovation, diffusion, and stabilization in English social media discourse. It employed a diachronic corpus analysis of Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram to investigate how digital discourse and sociocultural contexts influence the creation of new word meanings and provide insight into language development over time. The study addressed three questions: (1) How are lexical items created and disseminated on social media? (2) What roles do traditional media and linguistic authorities play? and (3) How do community and cultural factors shape the adoption and evolution of lexical items?

The analysis focused on the terms ghosting, lit, and stan and traced their development over time and across media. The findings demonstrate that social media platforms drive rapid lexical change, although each platform contributes differently: Twitter accelerates diffusion, Reddit facilitates semantic negotiation, and Instagram provides visual and affective stabilization. Traditional media and linguistic authorities codify and legitimize these changes, helping to integrate them into mainstream English. Sociocultural and community norms strongly influence which items are adopted, refined, and stabilized, supporting the close relationship between semantic change, cultural relevance, and social identity.

The research was successful in meeting its research objectives and questions:

Social media influence: New lexical meanings are generated, disseminated, and consolidated through social media. Viral mechanisms, trending topics, discussion threads, and multimodal content accelerate adoption and influence semantic precision and nuance.

The role of traditional media and linguistic authorities: Traditional media and dictionaries play important roles in legitimizing and codifying digital lexical innovations. By connecting niche groups with mainstream audiences, they help widely used online words acquire formal recognition and established meanings.

Sociocultural and community influence: Community norms, cultural identity, fandom practices, and demographic factors affect the acceptance, modification, and stability of new lexical

ISSN (P): 3006-6522
ISSN (E): 3006-6530

items in online settings. These factors help explain why some words persist while others remain short-lived.

By combining diachronic corpus analysis with qualitative interpretation, the study provides a holistic account of digital semantic change. This integrated approach differs from studies that focus on only one dimension, such as platform-specific, sociocultural, or media-mediated change.

6.1. Key Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics, digital discourse and lexicography in different ways:

- The paper provides systematic corpus-based evidence of semantic change across several platforms over a 15-year period, illustrating lexical change in real time.
- It identifies the platform-specific roles of lexical items within a life cycle of emergence, diffusion, negotiation, and stabilization.
- The study connects online word use with community norms, cultural practices, and demographic variables, thereby identifying the social dimensions of semantic change.
- The findings may inform dictionary updating, language education, and artificial-intelligence-driven natural language processing applications that require current information about variations in word meaning.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research may build on the present study by:

- Investigating platform-specific effects on lexical change by including additional social media platforms.
- Conducting cross-linguistic research to determine whether similar patterns of digital semantic development occur in other languages.
- Using larger sets of lexical items and idiomatic expressions to examine a broader range of digital innovation.
- Exploring how multimodal content, including images, memes, and videos, can stabilize, reconstruct, or reshape word meanings.
- Examining the effects of algorithmic recommendation systems on the diffusion and use of lexical items.

In conclusion, this paper demonstrates the semantic significance of digital discourse and shows how social media platforms act as catalysts for meaning change, how communities negotiate meaning, and how traditional media and linguistic authorities provide legitimacy. The identified patterns of semantic shift—narrowing, broadening, amelioration, and functional shift—are systematic rather than random. Together, corpus-based analysis, cross-platform comparison, and sociocultural interpretation provide a comprehensive account of lexical innovation and stabilization in English social media discourse.

The study enhances understanding of language change in the digital age and provides a foundation for applying this knowledge in lexicography, language teaching, and computational linguistics. By addressing the identified gap in the literature and answering the research questions, it clarifies the interconnected roles of technology, society, and media in the development of modern English.

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