

The Influence of Language Trends in Social Media on Language Centre Students' Communication at the National Defence University of Malaysia: Emoticons, Abbreviations and Hashtags

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Abstract: *In this modern era with the advanced of communication technology, people's use of language trends in social media platforms is likely to increase due to the extensive use of electronic mediated communication (EMC) in daily life. Language trends that are involved in the discussion of this research are emoticons, abbreviations and hashtags. Each of the language trend plays a different role in EMC to enhance the communication process, thus this research aims to identify the roles of language trends in communication. Due to the overly attachment of social media and intensively use of language trends in social media platforms, the language trends are influencing the way people communicate in daily life. Thus, the second objective of this research is to investigate the influence of language trends towards the students' communication. Additionally, the third objective is to seek the respondents' opinion on the influence of language trends towards communication. Meanwhile, the convenience samplings of this quantitative research involved all the 130 Language Centre students of the National Defence University of Malaysia. In this research, result was generated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the findings were analysed by using descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, inferential analysis and thematic analysis. The results of this research revealed that there is a correlation between the roles of language trends and the influence of language trends in communication. In conclusion, this research provides a better insight and raise awareness on how the roles of language trends in social media influence communication.*

Keywords: *Abbreviations, Communication, Electronic mediated communication, Emoticons, Hashtag, Language trends.*

1. Introduction

Social media being the electronically-mediated communication channel is increasingly seen as an effective platform for the exchange of information. This is because social media allow the sharing of information, ideas and interests amongst individuals, communities, organisations around the globe through innovations of internet and portable technologies such smartphones. Besides, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Skype, Line, Telegram, Snapchat, WeChat, Whatsapp and others; serve as highly interactive platforms for people to communicate and express themselves regardless of location and time. As stated by Belal [1], "digital social media in many ways influencing people's life as it expands our social circle and explore new horizon through online connection, though it is changing the approach of communication". It is inevitably a new means of global communication due to the technological progress in the 21st century.

Day after day, access to social media has caused an exponential growth of communication amongst individuals who engage daily in social media platforms or virtual social networks sites. The development and diffusion of language in social media have become a trend. Language trends in social media not only play important roles in electronically-mediated communication but also affect our daily verbal and written communications by changing the way people communicate in daily life. Due to the massive number of social media users who are engaged through these channels, language trends in social media such as emoticons,

abbreviations and hashtags are becoming a widely used communication tool in social media. These language trends convey information effectively, increase individuals' sense of connectedness with the real or online communities, serve as a marketing tool (tagline or slogan) for private or governmental corporations or organisations to market and advertise their products or services. They can even be used as useful tools for governments or other organisations to raise awareness of the public towards certain issues or matters of interest.

It is evident that language trends in social media possess communicative functions and they can be considered as useful tools for communication in this digital age where social media play significant role in people's life in order to connect with the fast changing world of information and communications technologies. Belal [1] said that "the way of speaking and writing of young generation is changing due to the influence of digital social media where the text which we used for communication in the digital social media is basically the production of our speech. The digital social media is not only influencing the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of people but also the communication, writing and speaking". However, language trends are double-edged sword in language acquisition of students as they are exposed to social media language, so intentionally or unintentionally they are following that trend of language acquisition. There are pros and cons in using language trends not only in electronically-mediated communication but in all kinds of daily communications which involved verbal and written communications. Language trends can lead to undesirable misunderstandings, poor writing skills and the loss of important elements in human communication such as intonation and emotion. What is most disturbing is that language trends may lead to the death of written text, perhaps this sounds unbelievable but the possibility exists.

1.1. Research objectives and questions

In order to fulfil the objectives of this research, there are four (4) research questions that must be answered. They are:

1. What are the roles of language trends in communication?
2. What is the influence of language trends in communication?
3. What is the correlation between the roles of language trends in communication and the influence of language trends in communication?
4. What are respondents' opinions on the influence of language trends in communication?

1.2. The National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM)

The National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM) is located in the Sungai Besi Camp, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It is Malaysia's first public university which is tailored to fulfil the requirements and development of the Malaysian Armed Forces. The university is formerly known as the Malaysian Armed Forces Academy or Akademi Tentera Malaysia (ATMA). It was established in June, 1995 with the aim of offering bachelor's degree courses in the fields of engineering, sciences and managements together with military training (Official Portal of National Defence University of Malaysia, n.d.).

The Language Centre (LC) is one of the academic centres in the NDUM. The centre was formerly known as the Centre for Liberal and Language Studies (CLLS). The Centre aims at providing language learning and promoting borderless knowledge and skills to ensure professional communication for future leaders of Malaysia. It is very important to investigate the influence of social media language trends in the communication of LC students in the NDUM because the LC aims to produce graduates who are proficient in English as well as foreign languages, thus graduates are expected to have formal and appropriate communication skills which include verbal, non-verbal and written communications.

1.3. Operational definition of terms

1. Emoticons

Emoticons are representations of non-verbal cues in text-based messages, where the communication medium is restricted to transmission of letters and punctuation marks [3]. Emoji is the next generation of emoticon, in the form of image or pictograph that represents emotions and just about everything else [4]. Thus, the term “emoticon” in this research is used to describe both emoticon and emoji as both of them are icons and language trends that people use to communicate in social media.

2. Abbreviations

An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or phrase. There are various types of abbreviations used in social media which include contradictions, clippings, acronyms, letter, misspelling and orthographic representations [5].

3. Hashtags

According to Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis [6], hashtags are tags or words prepended with ‘#’ used in social media to aid in the classification of content such as picture which allow users to search for certain content and at the same time increase visibility of the owner of the content. They even provide brands the ability to promote products and ideas, link tweets to a wider conversation and anchors a photograph by contextualising its content, location and place in time [7].

4. Social Media

According to the Meikle [8], social media are network database platforms which “combine public with personal communication” while Cross [9] stated that social media is a term that describes a variety of technologies being used to involve people in collaboration, and the exchange of information interactively with Web-based content.

5. Communication

Communication is the process of transmitting information and understanding from one person to another [10]. “The definition underscores the fact that unless a common understanding results from the exchange of information, there is no communication” [11]. There are many forms of communication, the form of communication in the discussion of this research is written communication that involves any type of message that makes use of the written word (example: letter, books, essay and others), verbal communication which is the sharing of information between individuals by using spoken word (example: conversation, speech and others) and also electronically-mediated communication.

6. Electronically-Mediated Communication

According to Dunlap et al. [12], people now use a variety of different devices to communicate with each other in this digital age via computers, laptops, mobile phones, tabs and other devices. Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic [13] also stated that EMC is the “predominantly text-based human-human interaction that takes place in a mediated network of computers or mobile telephones” and it is the “channels of communication made possible by the Internet, where human beings exert individual will, conduct business, and form communities” [14]. Thus, the term “electronically-mediated communication” (EMC) in this research encompasses both online and mobile communication which provide the ability for individuals to socialise with others.

7. Virtual Community

Virtual online community or social networking sites offer new means of communication using text and various other media in cyberspace [15]. Based on Somani [16], “a virtual community is a network which works within a social network of individual by any specific media and which have no limit in geographical area as well as political restriction. The aim of virtual community is to achieve socialisation”. For example, people may share their feelings, opinions and knowledge anytime without any restrictions in any virtual communities or social networking sites.

2. Research Scope

This research focuses on investigating the influence of language trends in social media in NDUM LC students' communication. Currently, the LC has a total number of 130 students, where 59 of them are first year students, 39 second year students and 32 third year students. This research involves all the 130 students from the LC as population sample.

This quantitative research is conducted in the National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM) and convenience sampling was used to gather data through hand-delivered questionnaire to all the 130 students of the Language Centre in the NDUM. The data was then analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22.0. This research has several objectives: to identify the roles of language trends in communication, to determine the influence of language trends, to investigate the correlation between the roles of language trends in communication and the influence of language trends in communication, and last but not least, to seek respondents' opinions on the influence of language trends in communication.

2.1. Conceptual framework

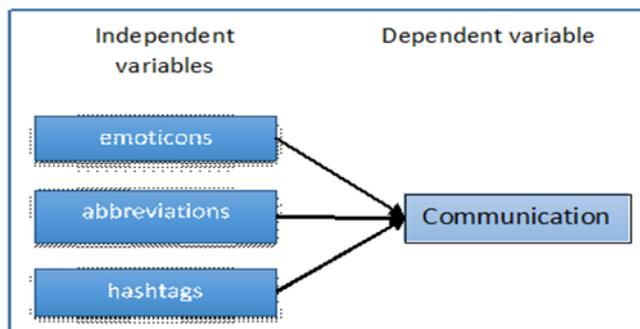


Fig. 1 : Conceptual framework

The figure above is a simple flow chart establishing correlations between the constructs of the study. The independent variables consist of emoticons, abbreviations and hashtags which are being widely used in social media nowadays. In this framework, there is only one dependent variable, which is the communication of the Language Centre (LC) students at the National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM). This research investigates the correlation of the variables mentioned above.

2.2. Research hypotheses

The hypotheses tested are:

H1: Emoticons significantly influence the communication of the LC students at the NDUM.

H2: Abbreviations significantly influence the communication of the LC students at the NDUM.

H3: Hashtags significantly influence the communication of the LC students at the NDUM.

3. Findings

In order to fulfil the objectives of this research, the four research questions were answered.

3.1. Research Question 1:

What are the roles of language trends in communication?

Language trends in social media include emoticons, abbreviations and hashtags. Language trends in social media are very prominent nowadays due to the massive number of social media users, who are extensively attached to EMC. The roles of each language trends are concluded based on the analysis and discussion in Section B of the questionnaire which seek the respondents' opinions on the roles of language trends in communication.

A.1 Emoticons

Based on the analysis and discussion, it could be concluded that the most prominent role of emoticons is to express emotions because respondents use emoticons frequently to convey their emotions. The second popular role of emoticons is to lighten the mood when introducing sarcasm or humour because the respondents claimed that they often use emoticons to perform this role. The third popular role of emoticons is to replace words, this is because there is a diverse array of emoticons that represent not only emotion but also everything else in this world. The fourth popular role of emoticons is to make a bad situation less serious.

TABLE I: Ranking of the Role of Emoticons in Social Media

Ranking	Role of emoticons in social media
1	to express emotions
2	to lighten the mood when introducing sarcasm or humour
3	to replace words
4	to make a situation bad/ serious
5	to convey message pragmatically (subtle meaning or hidden meaning)

The analysis and discussion proved that the respondents are more likely to use emoticons to introduce sarcasm or humour rather than use emoticons to make a bad situation less serious. The least popular role of emoticons is to convey message pragmatically (subtle meaning or hidden meaning) as this role can easily lead to misunderstandings in communication. All of the roles of emoticons obtained high and very high mean scores which indicated that most respondents claimed that they often and always use emoticons in such ways.

A.2 Abbreviations

Next, the most significant role of abbreviations in social media chosen by respondents in this research is the use of abbreviations to save time because abbreviations are short but yet, easily understandable. The second role of abbreviations is to make communication easier during EMC as abbreviations allow users to communicate without lengthy sentences. The third role of abbreviations in social media is due to the limitations of words in certain social networking sites such as Twitter. The role of abbreviation was ranked fourth in this research is to shorten messages. Its usage to shorten the messages in order to save time, make communication easier and accommodate the limitations of words in certain social networking sites. All of the abbreviations roles recorded high and very high mean scores which showed that most of the respondents claimed they often and always use abbreviations in such ways.

TABLE II: Ranking of the Role of Abbreviations in Social Media

Ranking	Role of abbreviations in social media
1	to save time
2	to make the communication easier
3	to follow the limitations of word in certain social networking sites
4	to shorten the message
5	to be an in-group member (sense of belonging in a group/community)

However, the role of abbreviations that was ranked last is “to be an in-group member (sense of belonging in a group/community)” as many of the respondents claimed that they rarely (medium mean score) use abbreviations to gain a sense of belonging in a group.

A.3 Hashtags

Lastly, the most popular role of hashtags in social media chosen by respondents of this research is to promote ideas or raise awareness (Example: #PrayForSyria) where hashtags are usually short and sharp, making them easy to remember and also suitable as event or campaign’s tagline. The role of hashtags in social media ranked second is “to organise content or picture in social networking sites (Example: #UPNM)”, where internet users can obtain related information, contents or pictures online by searching the related hashtags in websites that support hashtags. Next, the third role of hashtags in social media chosen by the respondents is to follow the

trends (Example: #SEAGames2017). All of these three roles of hashtags recorded medium mean scores which indicate that most respondents claimed that they sometimes use hashtags in such ways.

TABLE III: Ranking of the Role of Hashtags in Social Media

Ranking	Role of hashtags in social media
1	to promote ideas or raise awareness
2	to organise content or picture in social networking sites
3	to follow the trends
4	to increase visibility in social networking sites
5	to express emotion

Two roles of hashtags were ranked last based on the analysis are: to increase visibility in social networking sites and to express emotion (Example: #FeelingStress). These two hashtag roles were ranked last and obtained low mean scores which indicated that most respondents claimed that they rarely use hashtags to perform the role.

3.2. Research Question 2:

How do the language trends influence the Language Centre students' communication at the National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM)?

Language trends in social media are very prominent nowadays due to the widespread use of social media especially in EMC. Therefore, the use of language trends in one way or another are influencing students' communication. The influence of each language trends to LC students communication is concluded based on the analysis and discussion of Section C in the questionnaire which seek the respondents' opinions on the influence of language trends in communication.

B.1 Emoticons

Firstly, the influence of emoticons in communication having the highest agreement amongst the respondents is "emoticons can lead to misunderstanding due to the different perception and interpretation" of emoticons. Secondly, the influence of "emoticons fail to convey people's true emotions and people who use emoticons might hide their inner feelings in communication". The influence of emoticons ranked third is "emoticons lead to the loss of important elements in communication such as intonation, volume and the stress placed on particular words". Meanwhile, the influence of emoticons in communication ranked fourth is "emoticons over-simplify a person's emotions in communication". The influence of emoticons in communication having the least agreement amongst the respondents is "emoticons are minimising the chances of writing as they are substituting and replacing written text in communication". However, all the influences of emoticons in communication scored high mean scores which indicated respondents' agreement to all of the statements. The ranking of the influence of emoticons in communication is shown in the table below.

TABLE IV: Ranking of the Influence of Emoticons in Social Media

Ranking	The influence of emoticons in social media
1	lead to misunderstanding in communication
2	fail to convey people's true emotions and people who use emoticons might hide their inner feelings in communication
3	lead to the loss of important elements in communication such as intonation, volume and the stress placed on particular words
4	over-simplify a person's emotions in communication
5	minimise the chances of writing as they are substituting and replacing written text in communication.

B.2 Abbreviations

The most prominent influence of abbreviations in communication is the use of abbreviations leads to poor writing skill and the second influence which is the use of abbreviations can lead to miscommunication due to the different interpretation on abbreviations. Both were ranked first as both the items scored the same mean score. The influence of abbreviations in communication which ranked third is the use of abbreviations destroy students' ability to use crucial mechanics of writing, such as grammar, syntax, punctuation, and capitalisation. While the influence of abbreviation in communication ranked fourth is unintentional use of abbreviations in

speaking such as in oral presentation and interview (Example: “asap”, short form for the phrase “as soon as possible”). The influence of abbreviations in communication having the least agreement from respondents is unintentional use of abbreviations in academic writing such as essay and assignment (Example: “bcs”, short form for the word “because”). However, all of the influence of abbreviations in communication scored high mean scores which indicated respondents’ agreement to all of the statements. The ranking of the influence of abbreviations in communication is shown in the table below.

TABLE V: Ranking of the influence of abbreviations in Social Media

Ranking	The influence of abbreviations in social media
1	lead to poor writing skill
2	lead to miscommunication due to the different interpretation on abbreviations
3	destroy students’ ability to use crucial mechanics of writing, such as grammar, syntax, punctuation, and capitalisation
4	unintentionally use of abbreviations in speaking such as in oral presentation and interview
5	unintentionally use abbreviations in academic writing such as essay and assignment

B.3 Hashtags

Last but not least, the influence of hashtags having the most agreement from respondents of this research is “lead to misunderstanding due to the different interpretation on hashtags”. Secondly, the influence of hashtags ranked second is the use of hashtags replace individualistic and well-thought out narratives which lead to poor writing skills (Example: People tend to use hashtags to summarise thoughts and emotions such as #happy). Next, the third influence of hashtags in communication is that the respondents use hashtags in social media sites that do not support tagging such asWhatsapps and blog post. These three influences of hashtags mentioned above recorded high mean scores which means that most of the respondents agree on the influence of hashtags in communication. On the other hand, two influences of hashtags recorded low mean scores, being ranked fourth and fifth, indicating that the respondents of this research disagree with the statement. The fourth influence of hashtags disagreed by the respondents is the use of hashtags in the expression of emotion and thought in written communication (Example: #Awesome). The influence of hashtags ranked last is the use of hashtags in daily oral communication (Example: speak out loud #1UPNM). The ranking of the influence of hashtags in communication is shown in the table below.

TABLE VI: Ranking of the influence of hashtags in social media

Ranking	The influence of hashtags in social media
1	lead to misunderstanding due to the different interpretation on hashtags
2	the use of hashtags replace individualistic and well-thought out narratives which lead to poor writing skill
3	use hashtags in social media sites that do not support tagging
4	the use of hashtags in the expression of emotion and thought in written communication
5	the use of hashtags in daily oral communication

3.3. Research Question 3:

What is the correlation between the roles of language trends in communication and the influence of language trends in communication?

The correlation between the roles of language trends in communication and the influence of language trends in communication is measured by the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, r .

TABLE VII: Correlation between the Independent Variables and Dependent Variable

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	DEPENDENT VARIABLE	PEARSON CORRELATION, r (Strength of Correlation)	SIGNIFICANT VALUE p
Emoticons	Communication	0.243 (Low and Positive)	0.005
Abbreviations	Communication	-0.370 (Low and Negative)	0.675
Hashtags	Communication	0.735 (High and Positive)	0.000

First of all, the result indicated that the roles of emoticons in social media and the influence of emoticons in communication have low and positive correlation ($r = 0.243$) which reveals that there is a positive relationship between the two variables at a low level. The increment of the roles of emoticons in social media leads to the increment of influence of emoticons in students' communication. The result of this correlation is significant as the p-value is ≤ 0.05 .

Secondly, the roles of abbreviations in social media and the influence of abbreviations in communication have a low and negative inverse correlation ($r = -0.370$) which shows a negative relationship between the two variables at a low level. The increment of the roles of abbreviations in social media can lead to the decrement in the influence of abbreviations in communication. Unfortunately, the result has weak evidence because the p-value of this correlation is 0.675 which violated the significant value of $p \leq 0.05$. Thus, the low negative correlation between abbreviations and communication is not statistically significant. The researcher may need a larger sample size or more sensitive measure of the variables in order to get a significant p-value which supports the correlation [17]. Hence, the insignificant correlation between these two variables is due to the limitations of this research.

Last but not least, the roles of hashtags in social media and the influence of hashtags in communication have a high and positive correlation ($r = 0.735$) which indicated that there is a positive relationship between the two variables at a high level, the strength of the association between the two variables is also high. The increment of the roles of hashtags in social media leads to the increment of influence of hashtags in students' communication. The result of this correlation is significant as the p-value is ≤ 0.05 .

3.4. Test of hypotheses

Based on the analysis of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, H1 is accepted as there was a low and positive correlation between the roles of emoticons and communication which indicated that the increment of the role of emoticons will lead to the increment of the influence of emoticons in communication. Next, the analysis result also confirmed H2 as there was a low and negative correlation between the roles of abbreviations and the influence of abbreviations in communication. Lastly, the analysis result showed that there was a high and positive correlation between the role of hashtags and the influence of hashtags in communication, thus H3 is accepted.

3.5. Research Question 4:

What is respondent's opinion about the influence of language trends in communication?

Thematic analysis is used to analyse the open-ended question in Section C of the questionnaire which seeks the respondents' opinions on the influence of language trends in communication. The responses collected were read thoroughly. The researcher chose the best 15 responses from the 130 questionnaires and themes that emerged from extensive reading of the responses are: "help", "neutral" and "do not help".

There are many reasons why respondents claimed that the influence of language trends "help" in communication. One of the most popular reason is that language trends help them to save a lot of time during

communication not only in EMC, but also in written communication or speaking. The use of language trends is not only interesting but also understandable for the respondents who often used them in communication. For example, some of the respondents claimed that emoticons helped to convey their emotions without typing words while abbreviations helped to save their time without typing or saying or writing the lengthy full sentence during communication. An example of student's response is given below.

In my opinion, I think the influence of language trends in communication has made our communication more interesting and it also can save our time. Besides, we can understand each other without typing words. For example, I <3 U, we know the meaning behind this abbreviation and emoticons. (Respondent 22)

Apart from that, some respondents had a "neutral" stand on this discussion as they think that the influence of language trends on communication neither help nor do not help because of the pros and cons depending on the situation of how and when language trends are being used. Most of the respondents having a neutral stand on this issue think that language trends can only help when people use them appropriately and correctly in the sense that people apply language trends in places or sites that support them. People should avoid using language trends in formal communication or formal occasion. For example, abbreviations can be used during casual speaking or written conversation with friends but must not be used during examinations or formal oral presentation.

The language trends in our communication is neither good nor bad, it depends on where and how we use it. If someone can differentiate clearly the use of social media literacies and proper languages then will not be an issue because the language trends are helpful to save time during informal texting but it is not appropriate in professional occasion and formal situation. (Respondent 9)

Lastly, there are also some respondents who claimed that the influence of language trends "does not" help communication. The reasons they included in their responses are language trends are just social media literacies that are informal and only supported by social media platforms, they should not penetrate into daily communication. The respondents think that the extensive attachment of social media and extensive use of language trends will probably lead to poor writing skill especially for students. This is because students are so used to the language trends which neglect accurate spelling, correct sentence structure and grammar principles. For example, students nowadays tend to code mix between various languages without taking account the spelling, structure and grammar of the sentence.

I don't think all that will help communication very much as it will make our communication become informal. It damaging the prestigious form of language even though it simplifies communication and save time. In my opinion, saving the formalities in our communication will ensure our thinking to be of the utmost quality and improve our ability to use standard language to the fullest. I would not hesitate to eliminate the use of language trends in our communication. (Respondent 27)

In conclusion, the thematic analysis of this research analyses only the open ended-question in the questionnaire which is the item "what is your opinion about the influence of emoticons, abbreviations and hashtags in our communication? Does it help communication or otherwise?"

4. Implication

This research paper has highlighted some implications. Firstly, language trends can be seen as useful tools for EMC and online information transmission to communicate virtually with the worldwide internet users. This research benefits the internet users to explore more on the roles of language trends in social media platforms to increase the efficiency of online communication and further understand the roles of language trends in social media in order to avoid misusing language trends.

This research helps users of social media especially students to gain insights and raise awareness on the negative influences of language trends in communication and language. Students must understand that the use of language trends is informal and language trends are social media literacies that are only supported by the internet and social media platforms. Students who are extensively attached to social media should have the

ability to differentiate between the proper language and also the social media language. Internet and social media encourage fast and abbreviated language to accommodate the concept of speedy information exchange in modern communication technology, however, communicating in the proper language is everyone's responsibility so as ensure proper language does not deteriorate.

Moreover, this research paper implied that students must be aware that the over use of language trends can lead to poor writing skills in the sense that students might neglect the accurate spelling, correct sentence structure and grammar rules in proper writing. They must realise that these language forms are not accepted in formal writing such as academic writing and during examination. Students must ensure that they will not get confused between the formal or proper language and informal social media language trends; they should know when those language forms can be used depending on the situations because proper language use in written and verbal communication is not only vital for student success, but also an essential criteria for success in the workforce.

Last but not least, this research paper encourages the users of language trends to be aware of the issues of linguistic and cultural relativism when using language trends universally. People must understand that language trends in social media are not universal and they cannot be applied for everyone in every situation. This is because undesirable misunderstanding and miscommunication are also an issue. Using language trends in communication may result in people not understanding the meaning of language trends or have different interpretations of language trends. Students must have the knowledge and communication skills to avoid misunderstanding and miscommunication in their workplace after they graduated from the university.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research was carried out with the main intention to provide a better insight and raise awareness on how the roles of language trends in social media influence communication. Precisely, this research focused on three common language trends in social media which are emoticons, abbreviations and hashtags. This research adopted quantitative methods and convenience sampling via hand-delivered questionnaires distributed to targeted respondents during their free time. The findings of this research was generated using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. The statistical analysis demonstrated a proper and clearer concept of respondents' background, central tendencies, reliability and the significant relationship between the variables. Overall, the research objectives and research questions were successfully achieved and answered in this research.

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