Uncovering Factors Influencing Millennials' Use of Non-Standard Words in Twitter

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ABSTRACT

Social media communication has its own language features and one aspect is modified spelling of standard words. Social media users use shortened words with full awareness of the meanings, and new non-standard words are constantly added to the repertoire of social media language. A pertinent question is whether social media users learn these non-standard words to use or whether they also contribute to the vocabulary used in social media communication. The study examined Malaysian millennials' use of non-standard words in Twitter and their reasons for shortening words. For the non-standard words, data were collected from 200 active Twitter users whereas data on reasons for shortening words were collected from 30 users. The results showed that the Malaysian millennials frequently used non-standard spelling of words. The three top words were "*ni*" (this), "*nak*" (want), and X (negation). The main reasons for the Twitter users to shorten words were the 280-character limit per tweet, user convenience, and characteristics of words. The Twitter users felt free to create new spellings of standard words at times for fun, but most of the time, they use the common non-standard words. The Malaysian millennials reported that they were inclined to shorten long and complex words, and words with many vowels. The study suggests that Twitter users balance between speed in communication and preservation of meaning when using non-standard words.

Keywords: *Social media, Twitter, non-standard words, word formation processes, shortening of words.*

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has become a powerful medium of communication globally, extending into remote areas wherever there is connectivity. As of December 2021, there are 4.95 billion internet users in the world, of which 29.03 million are in Malaysia (Statista, 2022). In other words, 88.77% of the 32.7 million Malaysian population are internet users in the year 2021. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have made relaying of information almost instantaneous. As a result, letter writing and emails are now only relevant for official purposes of communication. Social media is gradually taking the place of face-to-face communication as well. However, social media are used not only for personal purposes, but also for increasing sales, building reputation or even for creating awareness about current issues (Bisera & Elena, 2018). For example, over the past decade, public figures, companies and organisations have turned to Twitter as a tool for rapid dissemination of information with a similar impact of word-of-mouth method (Jansen et al., 2009).

The language in social media communication warrants investigation because the creation of new words happens at a faster pace in digital communication than in face-to-face communication. In social media communication, the spelling of words has been intentionally