

3. Use of Slang and Internet Language among Indian Youths: A Linguistic Perspective

Archita Gagrai, B.A. English (2022-26)

Abstract

In today's fast-paced digital world, the way youth communicate has changed drastically. From texting friends to posting on Instagram, their language consists of slang, abbreviations, emojis, internet-born expressions, and lingos that are often hard for adults to understand. This dissertation explores how youth, particularly in India, use slang and internet language in their daily lives, especially through social media and online chats. By analysing survey responses, the study identifies common patterns, meanings, and reasons behind the use of slang and mixed languages such as English, Hindi, and Hinglish. This research shows that internet language is more than just a trend; it reflects creativity, identity, and the changing nature of language itself.

Keywords: Slang, Internet Language, Linguistics, Lingo, Social Media Language

Introduction

Our language is changing rapidly, especially among young people. With the spread of smartphones, the internet, and social media, the ways in which teenagers talk and write have become more expressive, fast-paced, and creative. The youth today aren't just using English or Hindi; they're combining languages, using emojis, abbreviations, internet slang, and meme references to create a language that feels personal and modern (Crystal, 2011). Whether it's chatting on WhatsApp, sending memes or posting reels on Instagram, or creating content on YouTube, language has become more than just a way to talk; it's a way to show who you are.

This dissertation examines how youth, particularly in India, use what we now call internet language. The goal is to understand why they use it, how they learn and share it, and what it reveals about youth identity, culture, and communication in today's digital spaces. This study also focuses on how Indian youth mix languages, especially English, Hindi, and Hinglish, through their daily language use. This kind of code-switching happens naturally when chatting or posting online and is one of the most interesting features of digital expression among Indian youth (Barnali, 2017).

Why Internet Language?

Many young people feel that the language they use online is more relaxed and expressive than what they use in school or with adults. Internet language lets them show emotions, keep up with trends, and feel connected with their social circle. Using funny slang, emojis like 🤔 or 🧠, or quoting a meme ("girl math", "do it for the plot") lets them speak in a shorthand that others their age understand instantly (McCulloch, 2019). These aren't just jokes or fads; they play a part in shaping how today's youth build relationships, form group identities, and express opinions (Tagg, 2015).

To better understand this topic, here are some important terms that will be used in the study:

1. *Internet Language*: A broad term for online talk of people, including slang, meme phrases, emojis, and abbreviations. Examples include “LOL,” “slay,” or 🤪. These elements make digital communication feel faster and more emotional (McCulloch, 2019).
2. *Slang*: Slang refers to informal, trendy, or creative expressions used by specific groups of people, often young people, that may not be found in a dictionary. It should not be confused with abusive, offensive, or disrespectful language. For example - lit, no cap, etc.
3. *Abbreviations*: Shortened forms like “BRB” (be right back), “SMH” (shaking my head), or “BTW” (by the way). These help keep messages short and casual, especially in fast chats.
4. *Emojis*: Tiny icons that add tone or emotion to a message. For example, 😂 often means “dying of laughter,” while 💅 can express "sass or confidence". Emojis are now often used to replace words entirely (Danesi, 2017).
5. *Lingo*: Slang or certain vocabulary that belongs to a specific group. Teen lingo often reflects online trends and influences from celebrities, influencers, or pop culture.
6. *Meme Language*: This includes phrases, jokes, or images shared online to describe situations. A line like “aur bhai, aa gaya swaad?” is an Indian meme reference that captures a mood in just a few words (Shifman, 2014).

These forms of language are often spontaneous and not strictly grammatical. But that doesn't mean they are meaningless. In fact, they show how language can be flexible, emotional, and deeply connected to someone's social group (Eisenstein, 2013). Unlike formal language used in school or official situations, this internet-driven style helps the youth express how they really feel: whether they're joking, complaining, flirting, or sharing news.

Language Mixing in India

One unique part of internet language in India is the way young people mix multiple languages, mostly Hindi and English, sometimes called Hinglish. This blending happens not only in speech but also in typing and texting. A sentence like “Kal party hai bro, full vibes only 🤪🔥” is a smooth mix of languages and tones (Barnali, 2017). This shows both confidence and cultural familiarity. What might seem like “wrong English” to one person is a smart and expressive form of code-switching, which helps users say things more naturally and personally (Siddappa, 2021).

Many recent studies show that this kind of language mixing is not a loss of grammar, but a sign of creativity and flexibility. It also reflects India's multilingual reality, where switching languages is just part of life (Clever Type, 2025).

How Social Media Changes the Way Language Is Used

Platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube aren't just for sharing content; they shape how people talk. The kind of message you send in a WhatsApp group chat can be very different from what you post as an Instagram story. On Instagram, for example, captions are often short, clever, and filled with slang or emojis. Meanwhile, WhatsApp might allow for longer, more casual conversation threads (Raj & Mahapatra, 2024). Different platforms support different tones and styles of communication. Instagram is more visual and public, while WhatsApp is usually more private and personal. That's why the same person might speak very differently across different apps, even if talking to the same people. Some scholars argue that this shift in language use towards short, meme-like, and emoji-filled messages has changed the meaning of "writing" altogether. It's now more visual, more emotional, and more immediate than before (Crystal, 2011; Tagliamonte, 2016).

Review of literature

Across the reviewed studies, it is evident that slang has become an essential part of how young people communicate today, especially because of the strong presence of social media platforms that shape their daily interactions (Situmorang et al., 2024). These online spaces promote quick, informal, and creative exchanges, encouraging the use of abbreviations, acronyms, playful spellings, mixed languages, and rapidly circulating internet expressions. Teenagers often use such forms not only to make communication faster and more convenient but also to express emotions more naturally and build closer relationships with peers (Germe et al., 2025). Several studies highlight that slang also functions as a marker of identity, helping young people feel a sense of belonging and cultural alignment with their peer groups and with global online trends (Matias, 2023; Ricaforte, 2022). Research from different regions shows consistent patterns: youth tend to rely on linguistic processes like clipping, blending, compounding, and imitation, which demonstrates how inventive and adaptable their language practices have become in digital spaces (Pongsapan, 2022; Razak et al., 2025).

Despite these positive social functions, many researchers express concern about the consequences of heavy slang use, especially when it begins to appear in academic or professional contexts. Studies report that over-reliance on slang can limit vocabulary growth, weaken formal grammar, and affect the overall quality of students' writing (Xursanova, 2025). Some authors also note that slang may contribute to communication gaps between generations, as older adults often struggle to interpret youth expressions, leading to misunderstandings (Rianto et al., 2024). In certain contexts, researchers worry that frequent slang use may reduce young people's connection to formal national or regional languages, especially when global internet trends dominate everyday speech (Paino et al., 2024). Although slang clearly encourages creativity, humour, and a sense of community, the studies collectively emphasise the importance of balance: young people should enjoy the expressive freedom of slang while still maintaining strong formal language skills so they can communicate effectively across academic, professional, and cultural settings (Situmorang et al., 2024).

Methodology

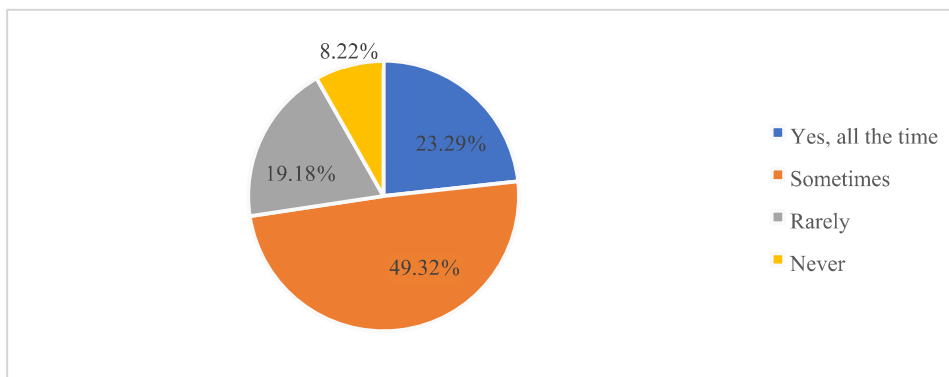
The participants of the study are Indian youth between the ages of 13 and 26 years, as they represent the most active group on social media and digital platforms. A total of 73 valid responses were recorded and used for analysis in this study, collected through a well-structured questionnaire via a Google Forms survey. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was ensured.

This study is limited by its sample size and sampling method, as the participants were selected through convenience sampling and may not represent all Indian youth. Responses are also self-reported, which may influence accuracy. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the patterns and purposes of slang use among Indian youth in the digital era.

Data Analysis

This section is entirely descriptive in nature, based on data collected through a well-structured questionnaire administered to 73 respondents via a Google Forms survey.

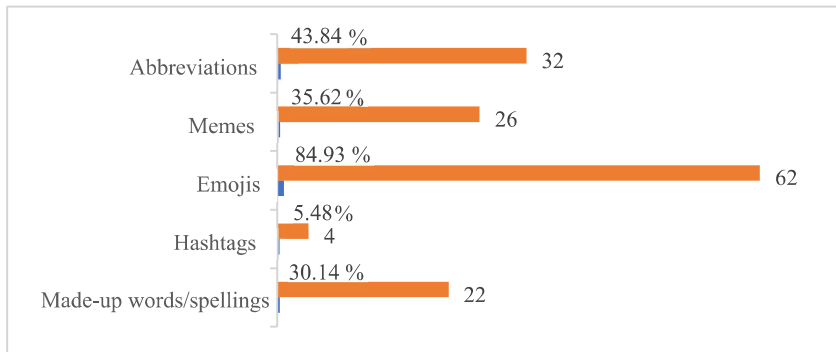
Figure 1: Use of slang or internet short forms while chatting online



Almost half of the respondents (49.32%) said they sometimes use slang or short forms while chatting online. About 23.29% admitted to using slang all the time, showing that it is a regular part of communication for a significant group. On the other hand, 19.18% reported using slang rarely, and only 8.22% said they never use it.

This suggests that slang and internet short forms are widely used among Indian youth, with most respondents engaging in it at least occasionally, and only a very small portion completely avoiding it.

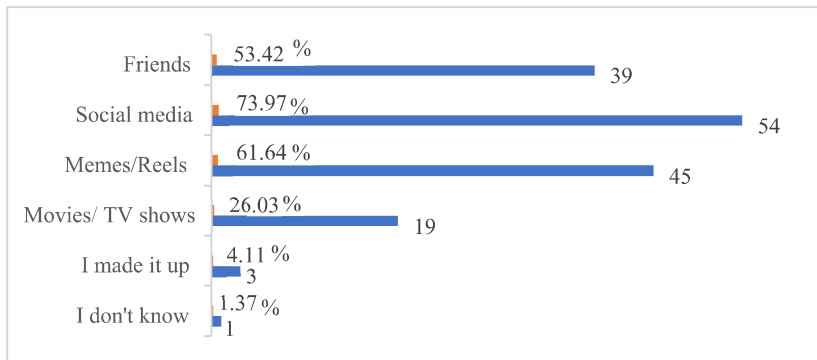
Figure 2: Commonly used elements while chatting/posting online



The graph illustrates the commonly used elements while chatting/posting online by the respondents. Since respondents could choose more than one option, the percentages add up to more than 100%.

The graph shows that emojis (84.93%) are by far the most used element in online communication, making them a key part of how Indian youth express emotions and reactions. Abbreviations (43.84%) and memes (35.62%) are also widely used, showing that short forms and pop culture references play a strong role in digital conversations. About 30.14% of respondents enjoy using made-up words and creative spellings, which reflects how slang keeps evolving. Only 5.48% reported using hashtags, suggesting that hashtags are less popular compared to other forms of internet language. This highlights that young people use a mix of different elements depending on the platform and context.

Figure 3: Sources from which respondents learned or picked up slang/internet words

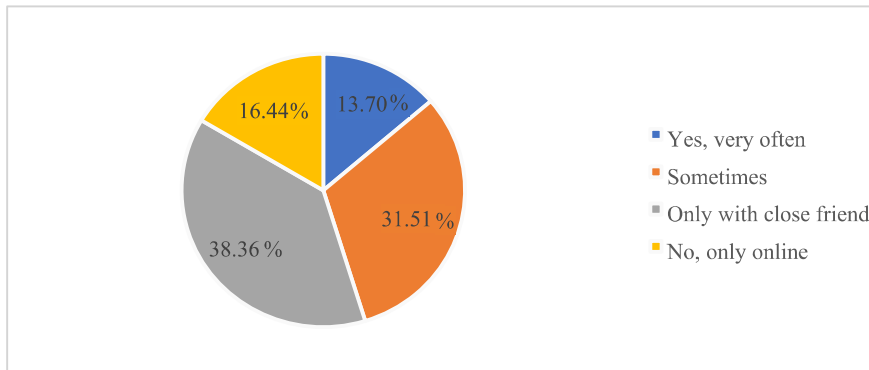


The graph illustrates the sources from which respondents learned or picked up slang/internet words. Since respondents could choose more than one option, the percentages add up to more than 100%. Most respondents reported learning slang and internet terms from social media (73.97%), indicating that platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube are the most influential in shaping youth language. Memes and reels (61.64%) and friends (53.42%) were also major sources, highlighting how slang spreads quickly through both online trends and peer conversations. Meanwhile,

movies/TV shows (26.03%) had a moderate role in influencing language, while very few respondents said they made up slang themselves (4.11%) or were unsure of its origin (1.37%).

This shows that slang is mostly picked up through digital spaces and social interactions, with social media acting as the strongest driver of internet language among Indian youth.

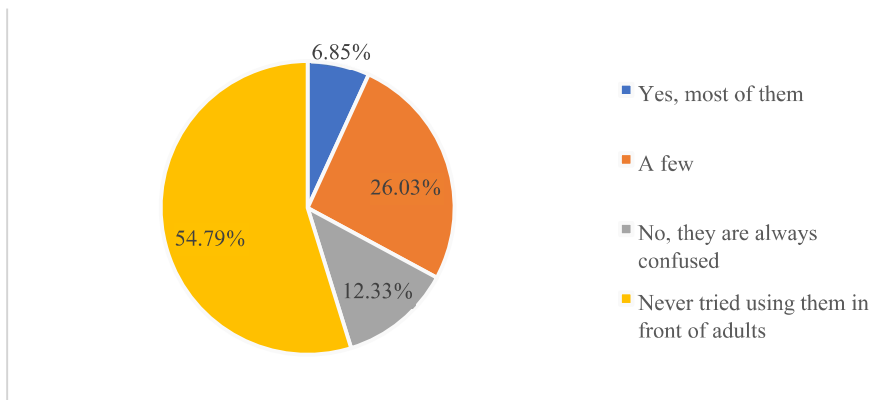
Figure 4: Use of slang or internet words in face-to-face (offline) conversations



The results show that most respondents use slang offline mainly with close friends (38.36%), suggesting that such language is more common in trusted or casual circles. About 31.51% said they use slang sometimes, while 13.70% reported using it very often in face-to-face conversations. On the other hand, 16.44% said they use slang strictly online, avoiding it in offline communication.

This indicates that while slang is widely used in digital spaces, many young people also carry it into offline conversations, especially within their friend groups, showing how internet language has blended into everyday speech.

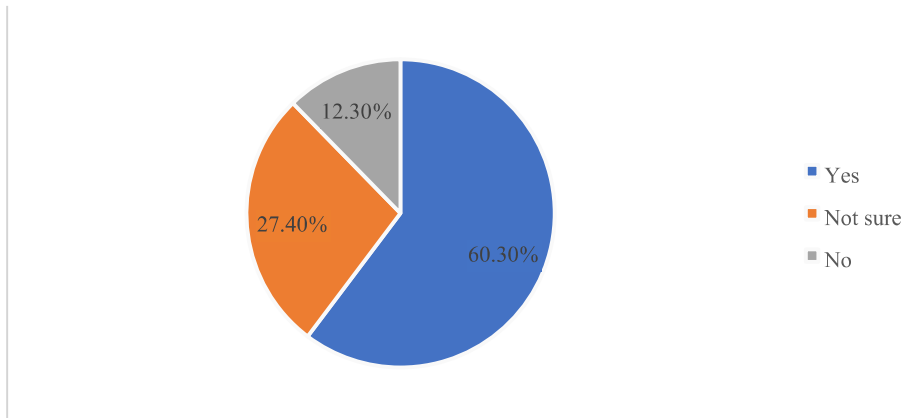
Figure 5: Parents' and teachers' understanding of slang or internet words used by respondents



More than half of the respondents (54.79%) said they never try using slang in front of adults, showing that young people often keep this language limited to peers. About 26.03% felt that parents or teachers understood a few words, while only 6.85% said adults understood most of the slang they use. On the other hand, 12.33% reported that adults are always confused by slang terms.

This indicates a clear generational gap in understanding internet language. Young people are aware of this gap and often avoid using slang in front of parents or teachers, keeping it mainly for online or peer-group communication.

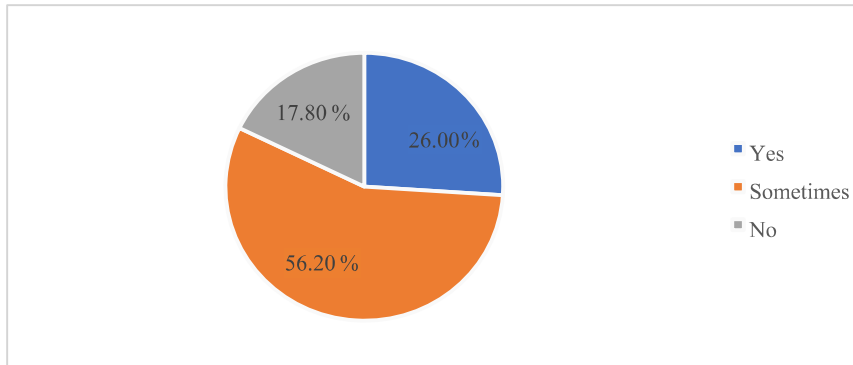
Figure 6: Perception of Slang and Internet Language in Destroying Proper English



Most respondents (60.3%) believe that slang and internet language are damaging proper English. This suggests that many people feel the casual use of slang, emojis, and memes might be reducing the seriousness or correctness of the language. 27.4% are unsure, which shows uncertainty about whether these trends affect the core of the language. Only 12.3% disagreed, meaning they see slang and internet expressions as harmless or simply an evolution of communication.

In simple terms, most people are concerned that internet language could harm proper English, though a smaller group sees it as just a natural and fun part of modern communication.

Figure 7: Comfort in Expressing Emotions through Internet Language (slang, emojis, memes) than formal words



From the data, it's clear that most respondents (56.20%) feel comfortable using internet language to express their emotions at least sometimes. Around 26% openly prefer it and find it easier than formal words, showing how much slang, emojis, and memes have become part of daily communication. On the other hand, only 17.80% do not rely on internet language for expressing emotions, preferring more traditional or formal words.

In simple terms, the majority lean toward using internet language, whether always or occasionally, because it feels more relatable, fun, and expressive.

Conclusion

The study clearly shows that slang and internet language have become an essential part of the communication style of Indian youth, both online and offline. The widespread use of emojis, abbreviations, memes, and mixed languages like Hinglish demonstrates how deeply digital culture is shaping everyday conversations. Social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube play a powerful role in spreading new trends, influencing how young people express emotions, build friendships, and form their identities. The data reveals that most respondents learn slang from social media and peer groups, showing how digital spaces and social circles work together to create a constantly evolving linguistic environment.

At the same time, the findings highlight an interesting balance in youth communication. While many young people enjoy using slang and internet language because it feels natural, expressive, and relatable, they are also aware of when and where it is appropriate. Many respondents avoid using slang in front of parents or teachers, which shows that young people can switch between informal digital language and more formal language depending on the situation. This ability to code-switch reflects linguistic maturity rather than carelessness. It also proves that internet language is not replacing traditional language; instead, it exists alongside it, serving different purposes in different contexts.

However, the data also indicates concerns. Many respondents believe that excessive use of slang and short forms might affect proper English, especially in academic or professional settings. This suggests that while internet language is creative and enjoyable, young people themselves recognise the importance of maintaining strong formal language skills. The generational gap revealed in the study further shows that slang often acts as a language of in-groups, easily understood by peers but confusing for adults. This gap highlights how fast language is changing in the digital age and how communication styles differ across generations.

Overall, this study concludes that slang and internet language are not simply casual or careless forms of speech; they are meaningful expressions of youth culture in a technology-driven world. They reflect creativity, identity, humour, and belonging. At the same time, they remind us that language is always evolving, shaped by the tools we use and the communities we belong to. For Indian youth, internet language has become a unique space where languages mix, emotions are expressed visually, and conversations feel faster and more personal. If young people maintain a balance between informal digital language and formal communication, slang can continue to enrich, not weaken, how they express themselves.

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