THE ROLE OF INTERNET SLANG AND ABBREVIATED WORDS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

In the Digital era, internet slang and abbreviations have become a dominant mode of communication among young individuals, particularly university students. This study explores the usage patterns, functions, and implications of internet slang and abbreviated words among university students in Pakistan. The researcher used a quantitative research methodology, using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, and data were collected from 70 students across public and private universities through a questionnaire and presented in graphs. The Result reveals that internet slang is used in informal digital communication, with students differentiating between formal and informal language contexts. While slang enhances social bonding, concerns about its potential influence on academic writing were noted. The study highlights the dual role of internet slang as both a linguistic convenience and a cultural marker within digital communication environments.

Keywords: Internet slang, Digital communication, university students

INTRODUCTION

In today's digitalized world, language is undergoing rapid transformations, especially among younger students who spend a considerable amount of their time online (Rasheed et al., 2024). A prominent shift in communication styles is the widespread adoption of internet slang and shortened words. For university students, particularly in Pakistan, this has become an intrinsic part of their daily interactions via social media platforms, instant messaging applications, and other digital communication tools (Ahmad et al., 2021; Abbas et al., 2025). Trimasturi (2017) observes that young individuals frequently use slang during communication, often moving beyond traditional grammatical and articulation norms. The prevalent use of internet slang among students indicates the evolving linguistic environment shaped by advancements in technology. This research aims to investigate the function, categories, and roles of internet slang and abbreviations employed by university students, with a focus on their communication habits in digital settings such as WhatsApp and Instagram. Internet slang encompasses informal and often playful language utilized in online conversations. This includes acronyms like "LOL" (laughing out loud), "IDK" (I do not know), shortened forms such as "u" for "you," and slang terms that have been adapted or originated within online communities. These expressions are frequently employed to save time, inject humor, or foster a sense of belonging among users. For university students, who often balance academic responsibilities with social lives, this type of language provides a swift and relatable means of communication. The Incorporation of acronyms and abbreviations has become a standard linguistic practice in digital communication, where mutual understanding among peers facilitates smooth interaction (Muliawati & Murfi, 2017; Cheema et al., 2023). Vocabulary plays a crucial role in shaping the conveyance of ideas, and the use of slang often mirrors creativity, cultural awareness, and social adaptation.

In Pakistan, internet accessibility has significantly increased, leading to a parallel rise in smartphone usage and digital communication among students. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook have become primary channels for student interaction. These platforms encourage informal language, where inventiveness and conciseness are often valued more than grammatical precision. Consequently, students adopt and modify internet slang to align with their specific cultural and social contexts. As Yusuf et al. (2022) highlight, slang has evolved into the common spoken and written language of the younger generation, particularly those born in the 2000s. It reflects not only linguistic trends but also generational identity. In Pakistan, characterized by multilingualism and rapidly increasing digital literacy, internet slang acts as a linguistic bridge and a marker of youth culture (Danish 2011; Rezeki, 2018; Jalbani et al., 2023). University students, being digital natives, are particularly susceptible to trends in online communication. Internet slang serves various purposes in its interactions: it can convey emotions, create amusement, build group identity, and even signify affiliation with specific social or cultural groups (Hashmi et al., 2019; Ahmad et al., 2021; Matelo et al., 2024). Furthermore, this form of communication aids students in developing a sense of connection with their peers, enabling them to communicate more freely and informally. The application of such slang is not limited to entertainment or casual chatting; it frequently extends into academic group discussions, digital learning environments, and even semi-formal contexts. As students navigate between different communication styles, their ability to switch between linguistic codes becomes a vital skill in managing both their academic and social personas (Shahwani et al., 2024).

This study aims to explore the significance of internet slang and abbreviated words among university students in Pakistan. It will focus on how and why students utilize these expressions, the social or cultural meanings they embody, and how such language reflects broader patterns in youth communication. By analyzing the usage patterns, contexts, and motivations underlying internet slang, this research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the linguistic behavior of Pakistani university students in the digital age.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The rapid growth of digital communication platforms such as social media, instant messaging apps, and online forums has led to the widespread use of internet slang and abbreviated words, particularly among the youth. University students in Pakistan, being active users of digital technology, often use such informal language in their everyday communication. While this linguistic shift may enhance speed and ease in online interactions, it raises concerns about its impact on students' formal language skills, academic writing, and communication standards. There is a noticeable gap in empirical studies exploring how these language trends influence university students in the Pakistani context, both socially and academically.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To identify the most commonly used internet slang and abbreviations among university students in Pakistan.
- To explore students' perceptions of the impact of internet slang on their language proficiency and academic performance.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant as it addresses a contemporary linguistic phenomenon that directly affects the communication patterns of university students. By understanding the role and influence of internet slang and abbreviated words, educators, linguists, and policy-makers can better comprehend the evolving language dynamics among youth. The findings may contribute to curriculum development, particularly in increasing and empowering digital literacy and communication skills in academic settings. Furthermore, the research may provide insights into maintaining a balance between informal digital expression and formal language proficiency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The way university students communicate has changed with the rise of digital platforms. A lot of students now use internet slang and abbreviations, such as "lol" (laugh out loud), "omg" (oh my god), and "idk" (I don't know), to make communication faster and easier. These short forms are especially common in social media, texting, and messaging apps, where people want to share their thoughts quickly and express emotions (Crystal, 2006; Thurlow, 2003). Studies show that university students use these slang terms mainly when talking to friends or peers. They usually switch to more formal language when communicating in academic or professional settings (Tagliamonte& Denis, 2008). This shows that students know when it is appropriate to use informal or formal language. Also, using slang helps students feel closer to each other and part of a group (Baron, 2008). Internet slang also varies from place to place, with different countries or universities creating their slang (Herring, 2013). While there are concerns that using informal language online could hurt academic writing, research suggests that students still know how to use formal language when needed (Thurlow, 2003).

In conclusion, internet slang and abbreviations help university students communicate more easily and build social connections. However, they are aware of when to use different types of language based on the situation. More research is needed to understand how these informal communication styles affect academic writing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology as the specific techniques that researchers employ to gather data and ultimately address the central question of their research (Rasheed, Zafar & Munawar, 2024; Maitlo et al., 2025; Ahmad et al., 2025). The present study adopted a quantitative research design, employing a 5-point Likert scale survey design to examine the utilization and perception of internet slang and abbreviations among university students enrolled in the public and private universities in Pakistan. This methodological approach facilitated the systematic collection of standardized data information regarding the widespread usage and attitudinal orientations within a mixed student population.

SAMPLE & DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

In this survey, students' participation was publicly administered at the university. A total of seventy (70) students constituted the study sample. The primary data collection instrument utilized in this study was a researcher-developed, self-administered, quantitative 5-point Likert scale questionnaire with multiple options (agree, strongly agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). The instrument was structured into three distinct sections: (A) Demographic Information, (B) Field of Study of Respondents (C) Quantitative results.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Data was collected online. The questionnaire was disseminated via Google Forms and was shared with WhatsApp groups of universities in which students were added, to focus on the quality of data. Participation was voluntary, and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality were provided to all respondents to ensure ethical Consideration while data collection.

## SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

GRAPH: 1
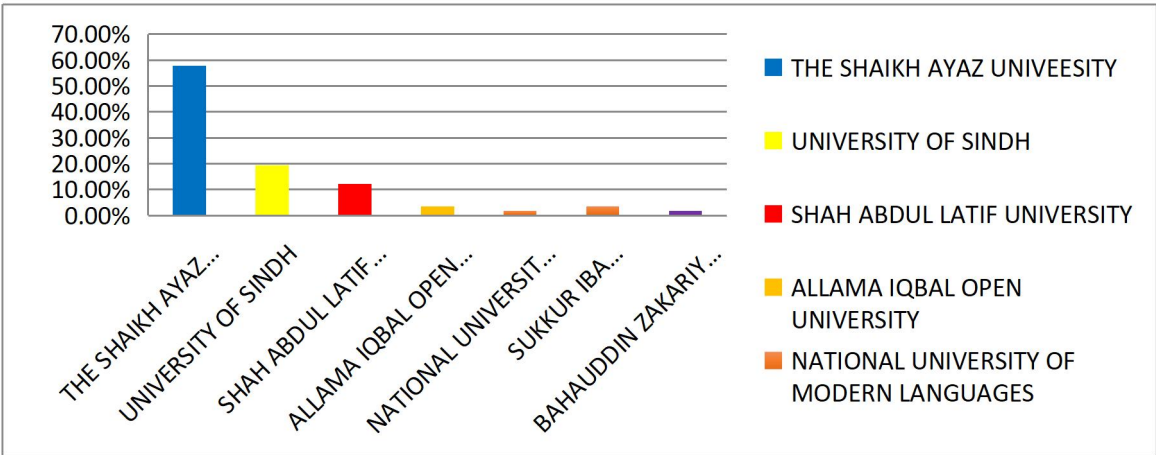
This graph presents the universities from which the data was collected. All are Pakistani institutions and include: The Shaikh Ayaz University, Shikarpur; the University of Sindh, Jamshoro; the Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur; the Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad; the National University of Modern Languages; the Sukkur IBA University, Sukkur; and Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. Students from these universities participated in the study.
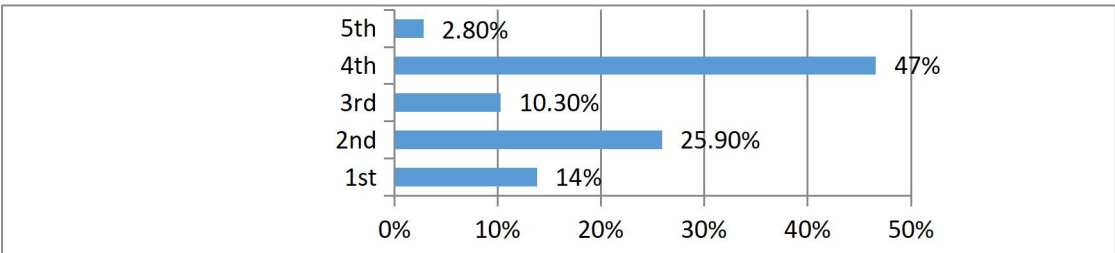
GRAPH: 2
FIELD OF STUDY (OF PARTICIPANTS)
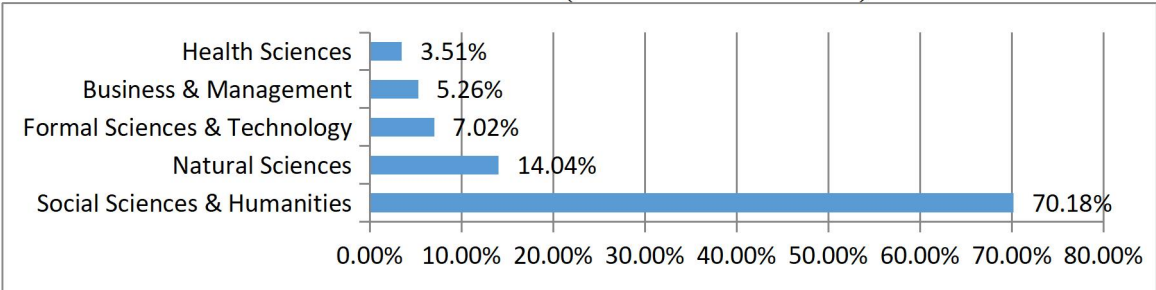
This chart illustrates that 70.18% of participants were from social sciences, 14.04% were from natural sciences, and 15% were studying in other fields.
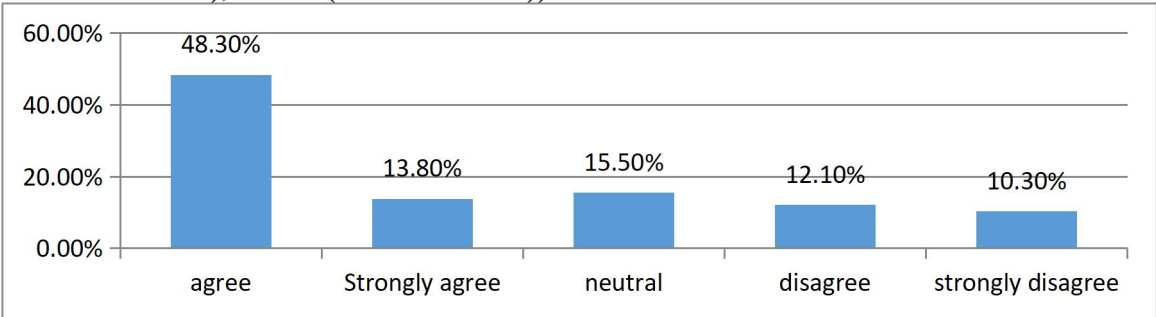
GRAPH: 3 STUDENT'S ACADEMIC YEAR

The data was collected, 47% of students are from 1st year, 25.90% from 2nd year, 10.30% from 3rd year, and 16.8% were in 4th year and fifth year of their degree.

SECTION C: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

GRAPH: 4
I FREQUENTLY USE INTERNET SLANG (E.G., LOL (LAUGH OUT LOUD), BTW (BY THE WAY), OMG (OH MY GOD)) IN MY ONLINE COMMUNICATION.

The graph shows how much internet slang and abbreviated is used48.30%participants agree, 13.80% of participants strongly agree, indicating its widespread adoption in digital communication.
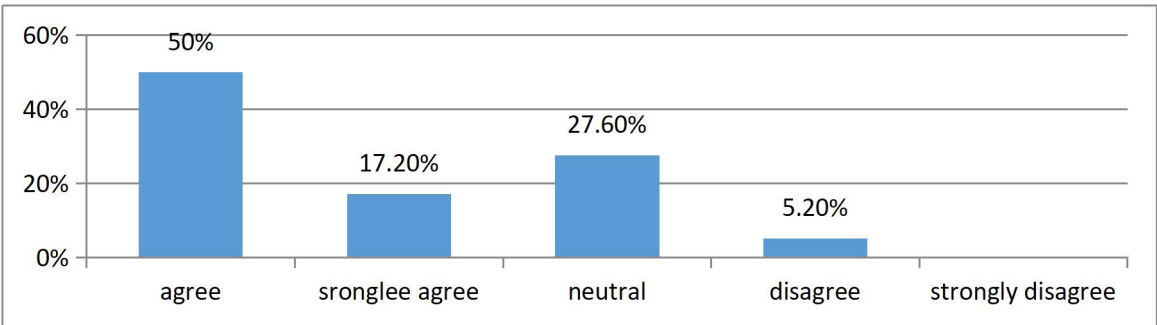
GRAPH: 5
I USE ABBREVIATED WORDS (E.G., "U" FOR YOU", "ASAP" AS SOON AS POSSIBLE") REGULARLY WHILE CHATTING OR TEXTING.
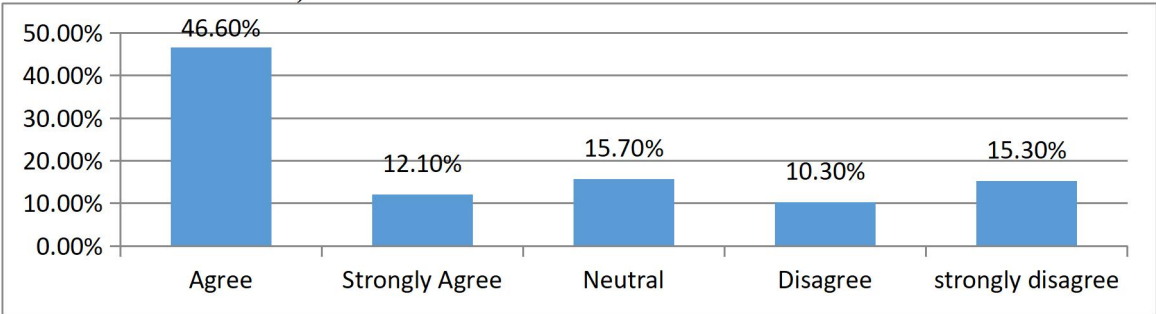
This graph shows the usage of abbreviations in daily conversation. 46.60% of participants agree, while 12.10% of participants strongly agree, totaling 58.70% positive responses, indicating the trend of shorthand in digital conversations.
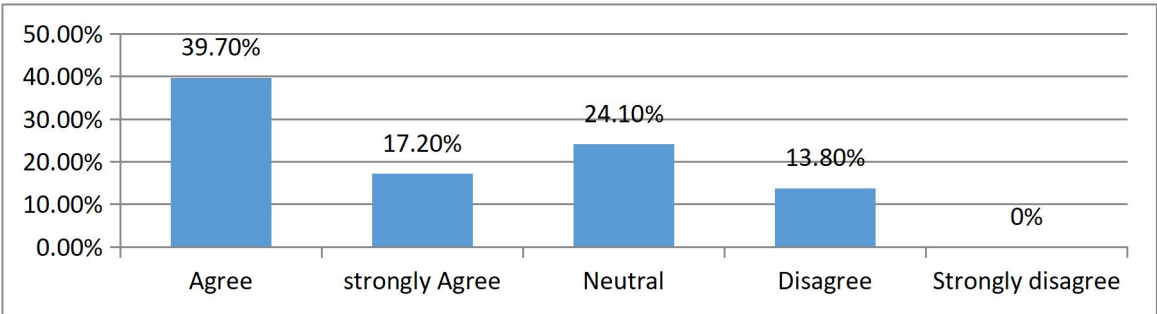
GRAPH: 6
### ABBREVIATED LANGUAGE HELPS ME EXPRESS EMOTIONS OR TONE BETTER IN DIGITAL MESSAGES:

This graph illustrates that 50% of participants agree, 17.20% of participants strongly agree, 27.60% of participants were neutral, and 5.20% disagree, showing a positive response about believing that abbreviation expressions in digital conversations enhance emotional expression in digital messages.

GRAPH: 7
### USING INTERNET SLANG HELPS ME FEEL CONNECTED TO MY PEERS:

This graph illustrates that responses from participants that 39.7% agree, 17.2% strongly agree, 24.1% were neutral, 13.8% disagree, and % strongly disagree. The positive response of totally agree and strongly agree indicates that 56.90% of participants believe slang plays a role in fostering peer connection.

GRAPH: 8
### USING INTERNET SLANG MAKES COMMUNICATION QUICKER AND EASIER.
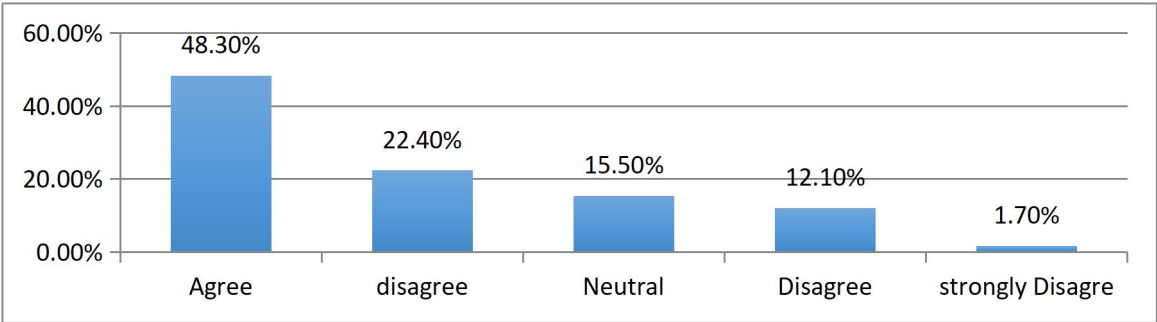
This graph illustrates that 48.30% of participants agree, 22.40% strongly agree, 15.50% neutral, 12.10% disagree, and 1.70% strongly disagree. The average response is positive, which is 70.70%, suggesting that slang helps students communicate faster.

GRAPH: **9**
## I USE MORE INTERNET SLANG WITH FRIENDS THAN IN PROFESSIONAL OR ACADEMIC CONVERSATIONS.
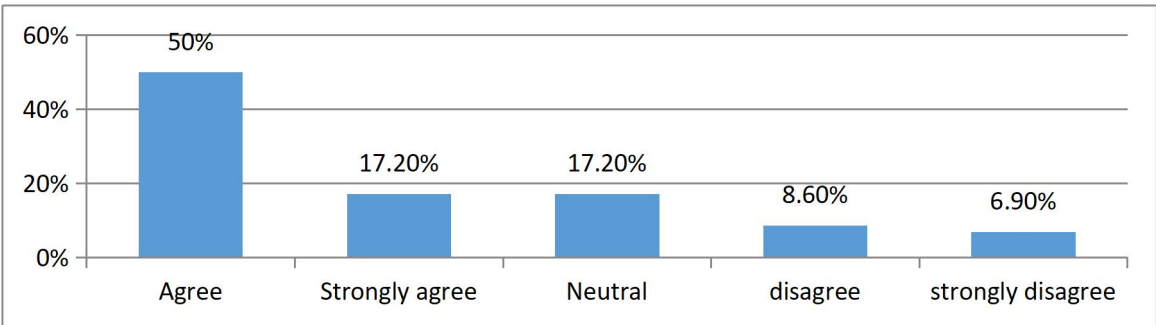
A majority of respondents (67.2%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they tend to use more Internet slang with friends than in formal contexts, suggesting that the use of such language is largely context-dependent. 17.20% of students were neutral, and 15.5% of students university disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that most participants consciously limit their use of slang in professional or academic settings.

GRAPH: 10
THE OVERUSE OF SLANG AND ABBREVIATIONS AFFECTS STUDENTS' GRAMMAR AND SPELLING.
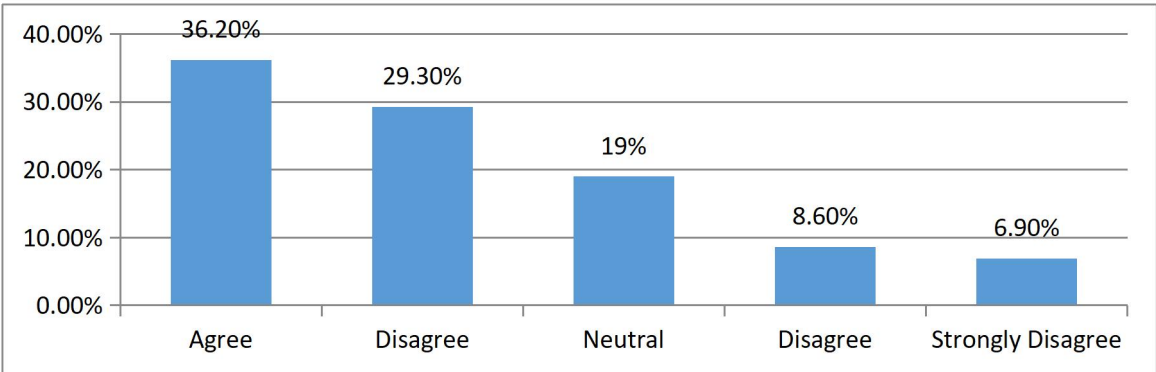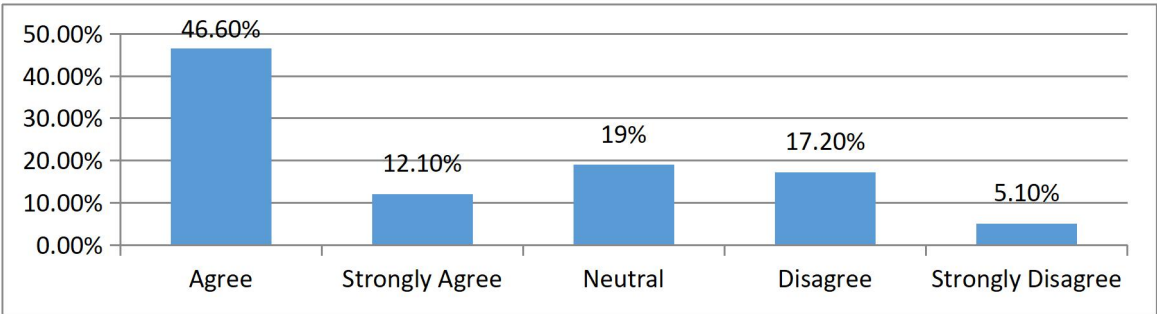

This graph illustrates 36.20% agreed and 29.30% strongly agree that overuse of slang in digital communication leads to a negative impact on students' writing, like grammar and spelling mistakes. However, 19% of participants maintained a neutral stance, indicating uncertainty or a lack of strong opinion on the matter. 8.6% disagreed and 6.9% strongly disagreed, suggesting that some respondents do not see a direct link between informal digital language and a decline in writing accuracy.

GRAPH: 11
## I BELIEVE INTERNET SLANG AND ABBREVIATIONS SHOULD BE AVOIDED IN FORMAL WRITING.
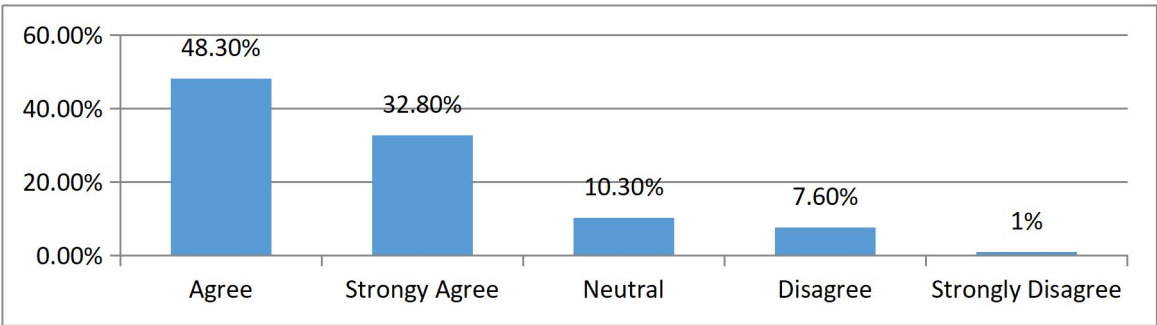
This graph presents responses from participants, where 48.3% agreed and 32.8% strongly agreed. Overall, 80% of participants expressed the view that slang and abbreviations should be avoided in formal writing, emphasizing on inappropriateness in academic and professional contexts. On the other hand, 10.3% of participants remained neutral, while 7.6% disagreed, and only 1% strongly disagreed.

GRAPH: 12
INTERNET SLANG IS A NATURAL PART OF EVOLVING DIGITAL COMMUNICATION.

This graph illustrates responses from participants. The majority of responses (46.60% agreed and 12.10% strongly agreed) view slang as an inevitable evolution of language in the digital age. 19% were neutral, 17.20% disagreed, and 5.20% strongly disagreed on the point that slang is part of evolving digital communication.

GRAPH: 13
I OFTEN ENCOUNTER INTERNET SLANG THAT I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.
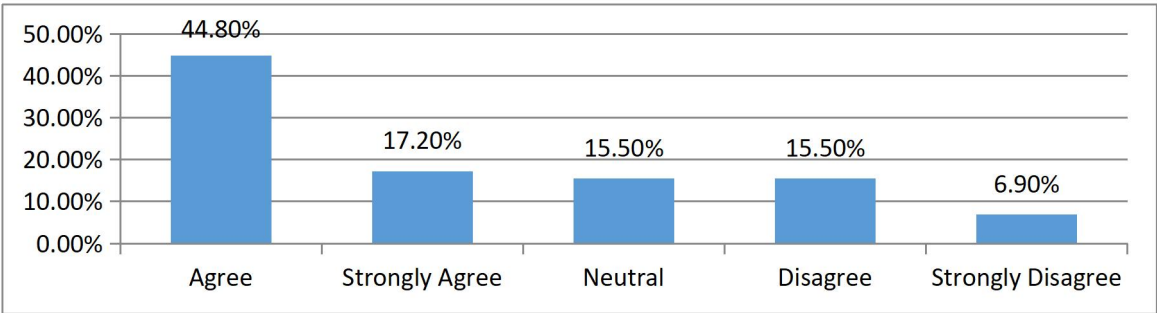
This graph illustrates the responses above statement. The replies suggest that most students (44.80% agreed, 17.20% strongly agree) face challenges with unfamiliar slang, indicating its dynamic and sometimes exclusionary nature. However15.50% agreed, 17.20% strongly disagreed, and 15.50% were neutral.

GRAPH: 14
### INTERNET SLANG AND ABBREVIATIONS MAKE MESSAGES LESS CLEAR OR CONFUSING.
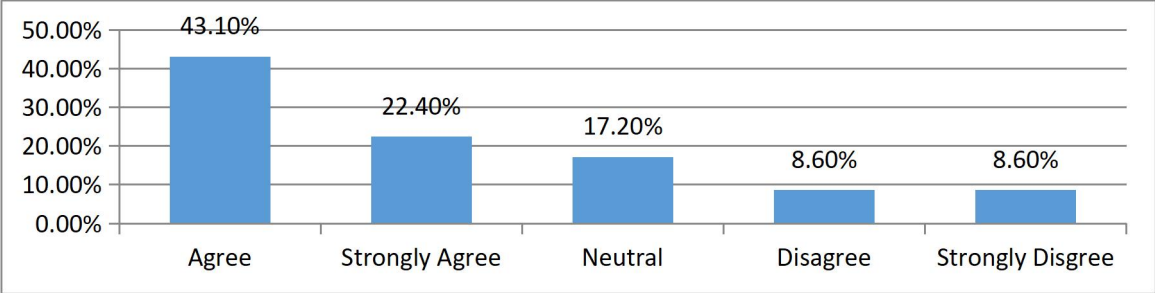
This graph represents the responses from participants. The majority of students (70.2% agreed, 22.4% strongly agreed) associate Internet slang and abbreviations with reduced clarity. However, 8.60% agreed, 8.60% strongly disagreed, and 17.20% were neutral.

GRAPH: 15
I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO AVOID SLANG WHEN WRITING FORMAL EMAILS OR ASSIGNMENTS
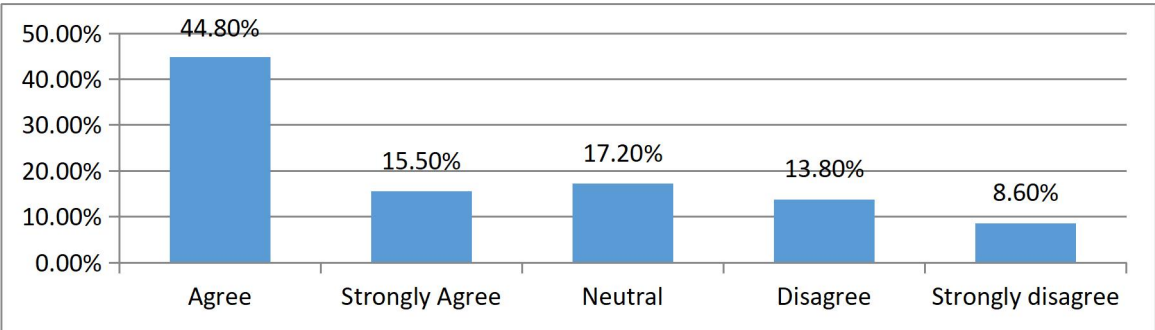

This graph illustrates the response from participants. The majority of students (44.80% agree, 15.50% strongly agree) said that they find it difficult to avoid slang when writing formal emails, however 13 80% agreed, 17.2 20% strongly disagreed, and 8.60 % were neutral.

GRAPH: 16
MY ACADEMIC WRITING HAS BEEN INFLUENCED BY MY USE OF SLANG IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION.
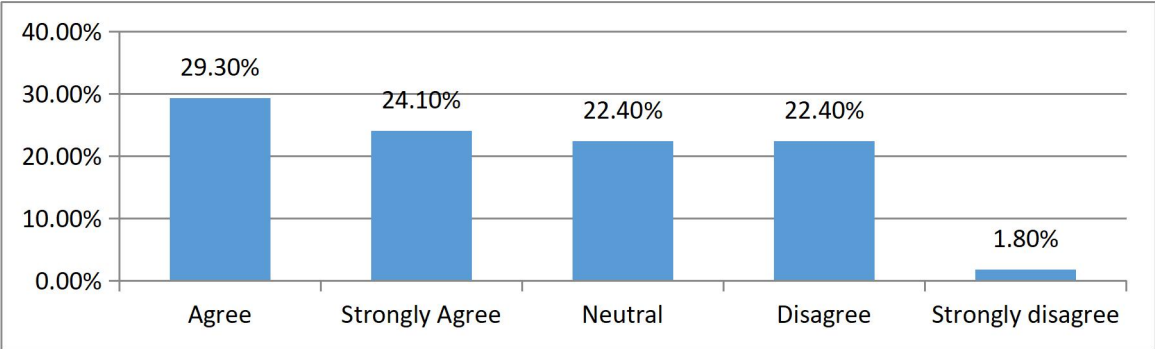
This graph illustrates the response from participants. The majority of students (29 30% agreed, 24.10% strongly agreed) believe that their academic writing has been influenced by the use of slang in digital communication. 22.4% of participants remained neutral, suggesting uncertainty or a balanced perspective. Another 22.4% disagreed, and a small minority of 1.8% strongly disagreed. These findings indicate that more than half of the students recognize a notable impact of slang from digital communication on their academic writing.

GRAPH: 17
THE USE OF INTERNET SLANG IS COMMON AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN
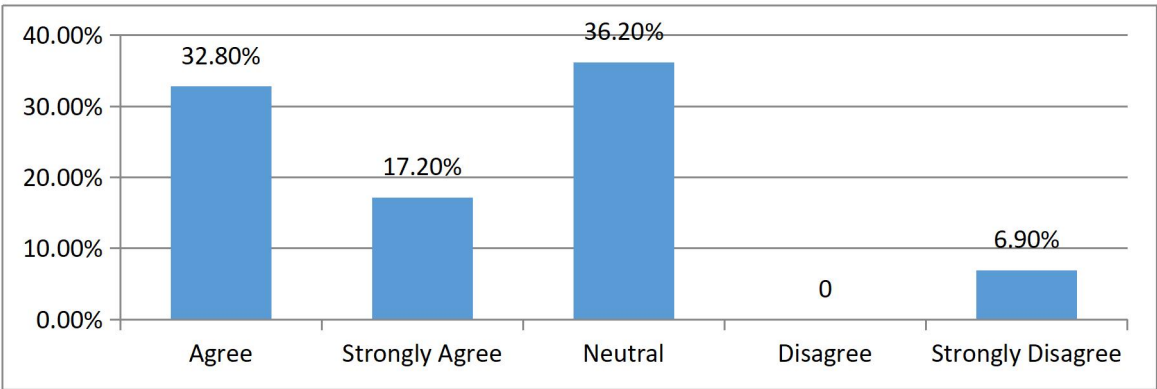
This graph shows the responses from university students: 30.20% agree and 17.20% strongly agree that the use of slang is common among university students in Pakistan. However, a considerable number (36.20%) of participants responded neutrally, while 9.50% disagreed and 6.90% strongly disagreed with the prevalence of slang in Pakistani student culture.

GRAPH: 18
THE USE OF SLANG COMMUNICATION REFLECTS THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF YOUTH IN PAKISTAN.
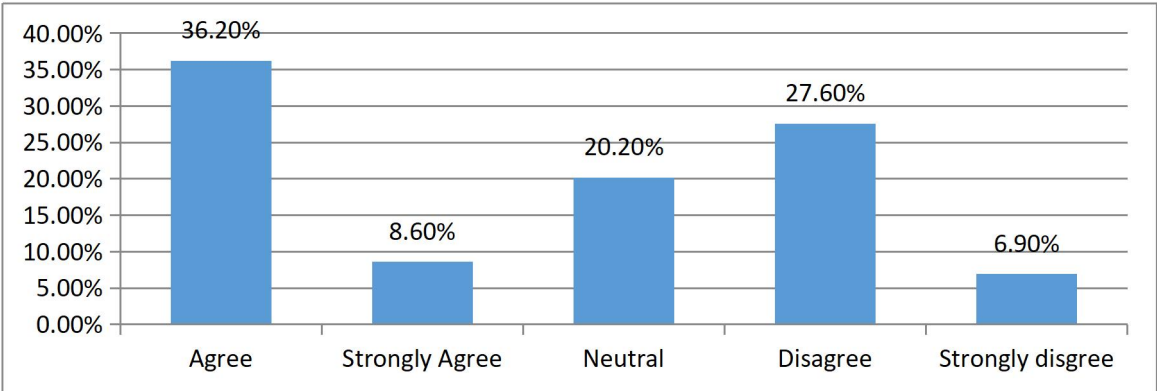
This graph illustrates participants' responses to this statement. A significant portion of students, 36.2%, agreed with the statement, while 8.6% strongly agreed. On the other hand, 27.6% disagreed and 6.9% strongly disagreed. Meanwhile, 20.2% of the respondents remained neutral, indicating a moderate level of uncertainty or indecision among some students regarding the cultural implications of slang usage.

DISCUSSION
The above findings of this investigative study provide insights into the role and perception of internet slang and abbreviated language among university students in Pakistan. The results indicate a high level of engagement with Informal language, with the majority of participants regularly using internet slang and abbreviations. This suggests that informal language is deeply embedded in students' digital interactions.

One key finding is that students perceive slang and abbreviations as tools for increasing emotional expression and making faster communication. Over 67% of participants believed that slang contributes to clear emotional tones and faster interaction, which aligns with global research that associates digital shorthand with increased efficiency in online discourse. A considerable number of participants accept that slang affects their grammar, spelling, and formal writing habits. In this survey, over 65% agreed or strongly agreed that the overuse of slang has

impacted their writing skills. In comparison, 60.3% admitted difficulty in avoiding slang in formal contexts such as academic writing or professional emails. An Interesting contrast emerged regarding the contextual awareness of students. While slang is common in informal settings, most respondents were cautious about using it in formal communication, suggesting that students possess the pragmatic competence to distinguish between different communication environments (Dansieh 2011). Another finding was that over half the students recognized slang as part of digital linguistic evolution, a smaller portion connected it to cultural identity, showing a divided perception on whether slang usage is merely functional or symbolic.

Finally, the new slang existence indicates the ever-changing and dynamic nature of digital language. This element of novelty creates confusion surrounding slang, particularly in a diverse student population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Universities should encourage students to balance the use of internet slang and formal language, helping them distinguish between casual communication and academic or professional writing.
- Organize workshops that focus on digital communication skills, educating students on when the use of slang is appropriate and when standard language is required.
- Language courses should include modules that explore modern internet linguistics, including the origins, uses, and impacts of slang, to make students more critically aware of their communication choices.

CONCLUSION

This research establishes the prevalent use of internet slang and abbreviated language by Pakistani university students for key communicative purposes such as emotional expression, peer connection, and efficient communication. While students appreciate its convenience and cultural relevance in informal settings, they understand its limitations in formal academic work. These findings suggest a necessity for educational approaches that foster contextual awareness and the development of strong formal writing skills alongside students' informal digital communication practices. Ultimately, this study highlights the dual nature of internet slang as both a modern communication enabler and a challenge to traditional language norms, particularly in academic contexts.

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