



## An analysis of word-formation processes and sociological properties of English internet slang on Twitter

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### ABSTRACT

Internet slang is a dynamic language widely used for colloquial communication on social media, especially Twitter. While previous research has focused on its word-formation, this study explores the linguistic processes and sociological properties of internet slang. English slang words were collected from Twitter in 2022 using entertainment-related hashtags and tweets. Digital ethnography and content analysis were employed to categorize the data, using frameworks from Timyam (2010), Yule (2005), and Crystal (2001) for word-formation, along with Mattiello's (2008) model for analyzing speaker-oriented sociological properties. The results identified nine word-formation processes, with multiple processes (46.73%) as the most frequent, which underscores internet slang's ungrammatical, creative, and complex nature by rendering unproductive formations (such as borrowing, affixation, and compounding) more productive. Abbreviations (29.91%), especially initialisms, helped facilitate online communication. All sociological properties were present, with informality and debasement (39.5%) as the most dominant, highlighting reduced formality and expressive conversation. Group- and subject-restriction (26%) reflected users' demographics and affiliations, while time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism (21.4%) indicated generational trends, regional identity, and slang lifespan. Ultimately, internet slang embodies linguistic innovation and is a communicative tool that fosters connection and informality in digital communication.

### KEYWORDS

word-formation processes, sociological properties, internet slang, social media

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### INTRODUCTION

The evolution of electronic messaging has given rise to a new form of communication, and numerous social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, have emerged to facilitate digital interaction. Over 3.6 billion people use social media to communicate using text messages (Dixon, 2022). However, text-based messaging restricts face-to-face interaction—senders cannot show facial expressions, gestures, or body language (Crystal, 2001). Therefore, people use slang to replicate oral speech online. Slang has been defined by Eble (1996) as colloquial words or phrases that reinforce social identity within a group or society. It helps users express themselves vibrantly in short messages online (Izazi & Tengku-Sepora, 2020). As slang evolved in digital interaction, it gave rise to a specialized term: internet slang. Internet slang refers specifically to the variety of slang used online (Robbin, 2020). It transfers daily speech into written forms using word-formation processes

and creates many word variations (Izazi & Tengku-Sepora, 2020). Moreover, sociological aspects associated with internet slang highlight slang's social functions and pragmatic effects (Mattiello, 2008). Both word-formation and sociological properties are features of slang that differentiate it from standard language.

Previous studies have examined word-formation, slang classification, sociological properties of slang, and internet slang in various contexts, including social media platforms such as Twitter in Malaysian (Izazi & Tengku-Sepora, 2020), Nigerian English (Robbin, 2020), and Facebook in Thai (Chanajit, 2017). Although these studies yield varying results, they all agree that netizens utilize internet slang to replicate real interaction. The sociological functions of different forms of entertainment, including novels (Mahmud et al., 2022) and TV shows (Mattiello, 2013), have also been investigated. These studies demonstrate the role of slang in communication by creating liveliness and social identity.

Despite its widespread use, slang is often regarded as improper English and has not been treated as a serious academic subject (Eble, 1996; Widawski, 2015). The rise of social media has led some to believe that internet slang is diminishing the use of standard English (McDonough, 2019). However, social media, particularly Twitter, exposes a variety of linguistic variations (Rett, 2023) and allows individuals to express themselves creatively through informal communication (Izazi & Tengku-Sepora, 2020). Twitter is a social media platform with over 350 million daily users and approximately 200 billion tweets per year as of 2022 (Pikovsky, 2024). It limits a single post to 280 characters and has a large database containing numerous internet slang variations.

However, no research has investigated English internet slang and its social functions on Twitter, particularly aspects of the platform's hashtag system that help communications reach target groups. Previous studies on internet slang have primarily focused on non-English languages, while sociological research has largely centered on offline forms of entertainment. Therefore, this study examines the word-formation processes and sociological properties of English internet slang used on Twitter within entertainment-related hashtags. The findings aim to contribute a deeper understanding of English slang's development and highlight its practical usage.

## Research questions

1. What word-formation processes are used in English internet slang on Twitter?
2. What are the sociological properties of English internet slang used on Twitter?

## Definitions of key terms

1. Tweets are text messages posted on Twitter.
2. Hashtags are words or phrases preceded by a pound symbol (#), highlighting topics in Twitter searches.
3. Tweeters are people who post messages on Twitter.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Slang's characteristics

Slang is difficult to define but can be identified by certain consistent characteristics (Eble, 1996). Four key properties commonly identified by scholars will be reviewed.

First, slang is known for its informality (Green, 2015) and overlaps with other informal varieties, including jargon, dialect, swearing, and colloquial language (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Coleman, 2014; Eble, 1996; Mattiello, 2008); however, it is not equivalent to others. Slang lowers formality (Eble, 1996), does not rely on specialized terms, and can be substituted with standard words (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Sometimes, slang is associated with specific locations (Widawski, 2015). While profanity and slang are both informal (Allan & Burridge, 2006), and slang is sometimes related to taboo subjects, slang is generally less obscene (Eble, 1996). In many ways, colloquialism closely resembles slang, but colloquial words are not necessarily considered slang. Unlike colloquial language, slang is significantly more informal and exclusive, often conveying privacy (Eble, 1996; Mattiello, 2008).

The second distinguishing characteristic is its sociological properties, which foster group solidarity and social identity. Eble (1996) described this characteristic as a social function, recognizing it as an implicit language with secret meanings, creating social identity. According to Mattiello (2008), slang represents the speaker's characteristics, excludes outsiders, and elicits a pragmatic effect from the hearer. Allan and Burridge (2006) suggested that slang marks in-group solidarity, attracting individuals with shared interests. Slang has distinctive sociological aspects related to connectivity; it illustrates the speaker's intention and behavior, and expressing the speaker's personality and reinforcing identification with the group, alongside societal trends (Partridge, 1933).

In this study the sociological properties of slang, as Mattiello (2008) outlined, were applied to examine internet slang. These properties are derived from slang's nature and functions, and categorized as either speaker-oriented or hearer-oriented. Speaker-oriented properties relate to social identity and group solidarity, while hearer-oriented properties concern the listener's interpretation and reaction to slang. These categories are presented in the table below.

**Table 1.** The sociological properties of slang proposed by Mattiello (2008)

No.	Speaker-oriented Properties	No.	Hearer-oriented Properties
1.	Group- and subject-restriction	1.	Playfulness and humor
2.	Secrecy and privacy	2.	Freshness and novelty
3.	Informality and debasement	3.	Desire to impress and faddishness
4.	Vulgarity and obscenity	4.	Color and musicality
5.	Time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism	5.	Impertinence, offensiveness, and aggressiveness

The study primarily focuses on speaker-oriented properties, which align with the research scope and will be discussed further in the methods section.

Third, unlike standard vocabulary slang has a short life span, which differentiates it from other informal language. However, slang has a consistent pattern—it emerges due to its popularity and gains existence briefly as a new vocabulary—but vanishes once its usage decreases (Eble, 1996). Some outdated slang can resurface (Eble, 1996), and some becomes

standard usage when it enters a neutral style, as seen with the word “cool,” which is now a standard term (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Slang is created from existing meanings, words, phrases, cultural knowledge, and sound mixtures (Partridge, 2015).

Fourth, slang uses context to define its meaning (Coleman, 2014). For instance, the phrase “I have a beef” refers to a conflict when used in the context of a dispute, but in a butcher shop, it refers to “the flesh of cattle” as a standard term. Therefore, usage context and implication impact its interpretation (Mattiello, 2008).

### Word-formation processes

Word-formation processes are methods of creating new words to expand vocabulary storage (Timyam, 2010). New words can be formed in three main ways: by modifying existing words, creating entirely new terms, or borrowing from other languages. Word-formation reflects cultural references, trends, and language users’ attitudes, which align with the sociological properties of slang. It involves generating vocabulary that suits current trends and communicative needs. Table 2 presents the word-formation process concepts proposed by Yule (2005) and Timyam (2010) and the selected concepts applied in this research.

**Table 2.** Word-formation processes adapted from Yule (2005) and Timyam (2010)

No.	Yule (2005)	Timyam (2010)	Selected Concepts
1.	Compounding	Compounding	Compounding
2.	Derivation	Affixation	Affixation
3.	Acronyms	Acronyms and initialisms	Acronyms and initialisms
4.	Blending	Blending	Blending
5.	Coinage	Coinage	Coinage
6.	Backformation	Backformation	Backformation
7.	Conversion	Conversion	Conversion
8.	Borrowing	Borrowing	Borrowing
9.	Clipping	Clipping	Clipping
10.	Multiple processes	N/A	Multiple processes
11.	N/A	Reduplication	Reduplication
12.	N/A	Onomatopoeia	Onomatopoeia
13.	N/A	Alternation	Alternation
14.	N/A	Stress and tone replacement	N/A

Yule’s model outlines ten common word-formation processes. However, it omits elements frequently found in internet slang, such as onomatopoeia, reduplication, and initialisms, both of which appeared in studies by Chanajit (2017) and Izazi and Tengku-Sepora (2020), as well as alternation, a fundamental feature of English grammar. To address these gaps, this study incorporates Timyam’s model, which extends Yule’s framework to include reduplication, onomatopoeia, initialisms, and alternation. Timyam’s broader approach provides valuable support and complements Yule’s model, offering a more comprehensive framework. Together, these two models form the theoretical foundation of this study.

## Related studies

Previous studies on social media have explored slang in various languages, including Malaysian, Nigerian English, and Thai. Robbin (2022) investigated the code-mixing of English and Nigerian slang among undergraduates on Twitter, emphasizing slang usage and its effect on academic writing. Questionnaires were distributed to 40 students, and 94 Twitter poll responses were gathered. The study revealed that slang phrases like “OMG,” “O loud gan,” and “oshe” were frequently used. Participants believed that slang enriched their social identity, yet they viewed it as a negative influence on formal writing. The regular use of slang in daily life has led to its unintentional integration into academic work, highlighting its influence on language habits.

Izazi and Tengku-Sepora’s (2020) study focused on internet slang trends among Malaysians on Twitter. The research employed qualitative methods and digital ethnography. Relevant internet slang was identified through manual clustering, using *Makan* as a keyword to locate tweets, which resulted in 2,500 tweets. Content analysis examined internet slang based on Craig’s (2003) and Barseghyan’s (2013) classifications. The findings showed that Malaysians primarily used shortenings on Twitter due to character limitations, which prompted users to simplify language by omitting vowels and consonants to save typing time and respond instantly. Malaysian Twitter users creatively utilized slang to express themselves and enhance conversations.

Chanajit (2017) examined Thai slang on Facebook pages, uncovering its word-formation and meaning relationships. Data comprised 3,584 tokens collected from 50 pages between 4:01 PM and 8:00 PM. The study applied Katamba’s (1993) word-formation and Cruse’s (1986) lexical semantic concepts. The results indicated that reduplication was the most productive, serving sarcasm, emphasis, and rhythmic effects. Regarding semantic meaning, synonymy was the most common. Additionally, Netspeak features such as altered spelling appeared in many Thai slang expressions. The researcher noted numerous Thai slang terms involved more than two word-formation processes, illustrating the language’s creativity. Thai slang studied reflected social norms, trends, and mass media influences. However, the research concentrated on collecting data within a limited time frame, which may have omitted slang used outside this period.

Previous studies focused on the sociological properties of slang in media such as novels and TV shows. Mahmud et al. (2022) investigated slang’s semantic meaning in *Black Mass*, a novel about a South Boston mafia group in the late 1970s. They employed a descriptive qualitative method to examine hearer-oriented properties of slang (Mattiello, 2008). Findings revealed that the most common properties were freshness and novelty, showing that slang evolved through innovation. The authors noted that the writing style and characters’ professions might have influenced slang development, as mobsters created specific terminology to avoid law enforcement detection.

Furthermore, Mattiello (2013) conducted a qualitative study of American slang in the sitcom *Friends*, emphasizing its word-formation processes, meanings, and sociological properties. The study applied Mattiello’s (2008) concept of slang’s sociological properties. Slang was classified into three types: forms that followed grammar rules, those that violated them, and those that both complied with and violated rules. Speaker-oriented properties reflected the speakers’ traits with markedly lowered discourse levels; the slang included taboo topics, concealed information, and highlighted regional differences. Meanwhile, hearer-oriented properties focus on the hearer’s reaction to the slang and its impact. Characters used slang to appear humorous, creative, and bold, often with a musical or

aggressive tone. *Friends* popularized slang among the general American public, who adopted it to seem trendy, bond with friends, and express stylistic choices.

To conclude, to date, no research has investigated English slang usage on Twitter by examining both word-formation processes and the sociological properties of slang. Hence, this study used both concepts to examine internet slang on Twitter.

## METHODOLOGY

The research examined the word-formation processes and sociological properties of English internet slang on Twitter. Between August 2023 and October 2023, a total of 214 internet slang words were selected and collected from 400 tweets. A mixed-methods approach was employed to integrate two forms of data. The data were presented quantitatively in percentages and frequencies, and the results were analyzed qualitatively. Digital ethnography was employed to gather data from digital sources and to engage with the data through text interpretation (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017). Content analysis was also utilized to interpret text generated by various sources, describing the frequency of textual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher created a Twitter account to immerse themselves in the Twitter community, to observe texts, and to collect data. The tweet collection was based on purposive sampling, using inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria factored public English tweets containing at least one slang word. Exclusion criteria were applied to avoid spam and protected or private tweets.

Using hashtags to find relevant tweets helped reach a specific group with particular interests. The *Getdaytrends* website (<https://getdaytrends.com/>) was used to track the popularity of hashtags in tweets and select the top 10 hashtags: 1. #SmackDown, 2. #LoveIsland, 3. #Oscars, 4. #90DayFiance, 5. #GRAMMYs, 6. #TheBachelorette, 7. #SistasOnBET, 8. #VMAs, 9. #AEWDynamite, and 10. #AbbottElementary. These hashtags were chosen according to the hashtag selection criteria: they were the longest-trending on *Getdaytrends*, had trended for at least one year, were in English, and were related to entertainment topics popular since 2022.

Internet slang found in tweets was selected based on common properties established by various linguists (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Eble, 1996; Partridge, 1933): informal words commonly found in online contexts, having in-group meanings, and possessing a certain time of use served as the criteria for selecting internet slang. Cambridge Dictionary, Oxford Dictionary, and Merriam-Webster Dictionary were used to verify the properties of internet slang. Also, online dictionaries, including *Slang.net* (<https://slang.net/>), *Urban Dictionary* (<https://www.urbandictionary.com/>), and *Dictionary.com* (<https://www.dictionary.com/>), were used to cross-check internet slang definitions and confirm that the selected words were indeed slang.

Data were analyzed using content analysis to identify the frequency of results, employing a deductive coding approach. Codes were pre-established based on theoretical frameworks, including word-formation processes from Yule (2005) and Timyam (2010), resulting in the 13 codes presented in Table 3. While doing the research, additional abbreviations emerged not covered by Yule or Timyam. This led to incorporating Crystal's (2001) Netspeak features, including acronyms, reducing words to letters, and rebuses—alongside existing models, which change “acronyms and initialisms” into “abbreviations” and merge the processes.

**Table 3.** Word-formation processes codes (Crystal, 2001; Timyam, 2010; Yule, 2005)

No.	Word-formation Processes
1.	Compounding
2.	Affixation
3.	Abbreviations
4.	Blending
5.	Coinage
6.	Backformation
7.	Conversion
8.	Borrowing
9.	Clipping
10.	Multiple processes
11.	Reduplication
12.	Onomatopoeia
13.	Alternation

To analyze the sociological properties, codes were derived from Mattiello's (2008) concept of speaker-oriented properties, which are presented as five codes in Table 4. This concept was used to examine the functions of internet slang. However, hearer-oriented properties were not examined as they concern the hearer's reactions to the speaker's use of slang; interpreting these reactions solely from text can be inaccurate, as it is not possible to consider facial expressions and body language.

**Table 4.** Sociological properties of slang: Speaker-oriented properties codes (Mattiello, 2008)

No.	Speaker-oriented Properties
1.	Group-and subject-restriction
2.	Secrecy and privacy
3.	Informality and debasement
4.	Vulgarity and obscenity
5.	Time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism

To minimize researcher bias during data analysis, intercoder reliability was applied, with experts acting as coders. The coders underwent training through practice coding and subsequently coded 30% of a subset of the data. The results obtained by the coders and the researcher were compared to calculate the percentage agreement using Miles and Huberman's (1994) method, yielding a suitable level of agreement.

## RESULTS

### Word-formation processes

A total of 214 internet slang words were studied. The word-formation processes used in English internet slang were analyzed using the adapted theories of Yule (2005), Timyam (2010), and Crystal (2001). The results of word-formation in English internet slang on Twitter, as percentages and frequencies, are shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5.** Total number of word-formation processes in internet slang

No.	Word-formation Processes	Frequency	Percentage
1	Multiple processes	100	46.73%
2	Abbreviations	64	29.91%
3	Affixation	29	13.55%
4	Compounding	8	3.74%
5	Clipping	8	3.74%
6	Borrowing	2	0.94%
7	Alternation	1	0.47%
8	Backformation	1	0.47%
9	Conversion	1	0.47%
10	Coinage	0	0%
11	Blending	0	0%
12	Onomatopoeia	0	0%
13	Reduplication	0	0%
	Total	214	100%

As shown in Table 5, multiple processes (46.73%) are the word-formation process most frequently used in creating internet slang, followed by abbreviations (29.91%), and affixation (13.55%). However, some word-formation processes were not found in this study, including coinage, blending, onomatopoeia, and reduplication.

### *Multiple processes*

Multiple processes are the most frequently used word-formation type when there is more than one word-formation process in a word. Word-formation processes that are infrequently used individually are often present in multiple processes. Borrowing, affixation, and compounding have occurred frequently in multiple processes. The analysis also revealed that most internet slang words combine two word-formation methods: For instance, internet slang with two word-formation types such as “vibe” (borrowing + clipping, ‘a distinctive emotion’); “douchebag” (borrowing + compounding, ‘an obnoxious person’); “shook” (alternation + conversion, ‘shocked’); and “mind-boggling” (compounding + affixation; ‘overwhelming’).

Internet slang can even have seven word-formation approaches in a single word. The term “Twitter stans” (a superfan of celebrities on Twitter) involves onomatopoeia, conversion, blending, affixation, clipping, borrowing, and compounding. “Twitter” is an imitative sound of a bird and was converted from a verb into a noun as the social media name. “Stan” is a blend between “stalker” and “fan.” The word “stalker” is formed by adding the suffix “-er,” and the word “fan” is a clipped form of the word “fanatic,” borrowed from the Latin word *fanaticus* (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). “Twitter” and “stan” combine through compounding to form “Twitter stan,” with -s added for the plural.

### *Abbreviations*

Abbreviations, a word-formation process that shortens existing words to create new forms, is one of the word-formation approaches popularized by modern electronic communications

(Blake, 2019). This study focuses on four types of abbreviations: acronyms, initialisms, reducing words into letters, and rebuses.

Acronyms combine the initial letters of words, phrases, or sentences into a short word that can be pronounced (Crystal, 2001; Timyam, 2010). One example found in the study is “GOAT,” pronounced as [goot], abbreviated from the initial letters of “Greatest Of All Time.” Initialisms are formed by taking the initial letters of compound words, phrases, or expressions and abbreviating them into a sequence of letters (Blake, 2019; Timyam, 2010). Many words in the study are initialisms such as “Istg” (I swear to god), “LFG” (Let’s Fucking Go), and “fr” (for real).

Reducing words into letters involves omitting vowels but keeping consonants; however, if the word is easily recognizable, it can also drop consonants (Crystal, 2001, 2008). All the internet slang found in this study is reduced to three letters. Most internet slang terms omit vowels and some even dropped the consonants such as “Asl” (as hell), “nvm” (never mind), and “asf” (as fuck). Rebuses are created by using letters or numbers as the sound value to replace the syllable of a word (Crystal, 2001). Also, rebus words can combine initial letters and rebus. The study found rebus slang comes from both phrases and individual words, such as “Yt” (whitey), “ytf” (why the fuck), and “cya” (see ya).

### *Affixation*

Affixation creates words by adding prefixes and suffixes to a base word (Timyam, 2010). Suffixes were the only form of affixation shown in the study. Derivational suffixes words such as derivational suffix -er “baller” (a basketball player), -ie “hottie” (a sexually attractive person), and -y “goofy” (ridiculous); inflectional suffix words such as -ed “slayed” (to do something exceptionally well) -y and -s “titties” (female breasts) and -ing “frigging” (fucking); and both derivational and inflectional suffix words such as -ie and -s “Swifties” (Taylor Swift’s fans).

### *Compounding*

Compounding is combining two or more existing words into a new one. The study identified only compound nouns and compound adjectives. Three types of compound nouns were identified: “nutjob” (noun + noun, ‘crazy person’); “fuckboy” (verb + noun, ‘a man with many casual sexual partners’); and “beatdown” (verb + preposition, ‘a group of wrestlers severely beat up another wrestler’). The study identified one compound adjective: “hardcore” (adjective + noun, ‘extreme’).

### *Clipping*

Clipping is reducing the syllables of the existing words into a shorter form. This process cuts the initial or final syllables and retains the remaining ones (Timyam, 2015). In this study, most internet slang removed the final syllables. For instance, “bro” (brother), “sis” (sister), and “hun” (honey). The only example of initial syllable clipping is “coz” (because).

### *Borrowing*

Borrowing involves adopting words from other languages. For instance, “douche” and “tuchus.” *Douche* means “an obnoxious person” is borrowed from French “douche” and Italian *doccia* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). *Tuchus*, meaning “a person’s buttocks,” is borrowed from Yiddish (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), a language used by Ashkenazi Jews (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023).

### *Alternation*

Alternation forms new words by replacing one segment or a certain sound in the base with another (Timyam, 2010). In English, it is usually used in irregular plural nouns, past tense, and past participle verbs. The only example of alternation in this study is “ate.” It is the past tense form of “eat” where [i] is substituted with [eɪ]. The verb is transformed into an adjective, meaning “performed exceptionally well.”

### *Backformation*

Backformation creates new words by removing a perceived affix from an existing word (Timyam, 2010). The internet slang *wack* or *whack*, meaning “bad,” is derived through backformation from “wacky” and “whacky” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). When the supposed affix -y is removed, the word becomes wack or whack—the two words have the same meaning, despite their different spellings, and both continue to function as adjectives.

### *Conversion*

Conversion creates new words by changing a word’s grammatical category without altering its form, often resulting in a shift in meaning (Timyam, 2010; Yule, 2005). The internet slang *cringe*, meaning “something embarrassing,” exemplifies conversion in this study. Its base form was a verb, then shifted to an adjective in modern-day usage.

## **Sociological properties of internet slang**

Internet slang’s functions were investigated by implementing Mattiello’s (2008) sociological properties, specifically speaker-oriented properties, shown in Table 6 below.

**Table 6.** Total number of speaker-oriented properties used in internet slang

Sociological Properties of Internet Slang			
No.	Speaker-Oriented Properties	Frequency	Percentages
1.	Informality and debasement	214	39.5%
2.	Group- and subject-restriction	141	26%
3.	Time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism	116	21.4%

4.	Vulgarity and obscenity	62	11.4%
5.	Secrecy and privacy	9	1.7%
	Total	542	100%

As shown in Table 6, the most commonly found speaker-oriented property in this study is informality and debasement (39.5%). The second most frequently found property is group- and subject-restriction (26%), followed by time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism (21.4%). Less common properties are vulgarity and obscenity (11.4%), and secrecy and privacy (1.7%). An internet slang word can have more than one speaker-oriented property. Hence, the number of speaker-oriented properties can have repeated occurrences. For instance, the internet slang term “af” (as fuck) may embody four speaker-oriented properties: informality and debasement; group- and subject-restriction; time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism; and vulgarity and obscenity. These properties can coexist within one slang word. The following section will discuss these speaker-oriented properties in greater detail.

### *Informality and debasement*

Informality and debasement are the most prominent characteristics of internet slang. Slang is recognized for its informality. It reduces formality, establishes friendliness, and conveys closeness. These traits are commonly found in relaxed conversations where unconventional language is used (Mattiello, 2008).

Informality is a crucial aspect of slang, exemplified by internet slang terms such as “idk” (I don’t know), “bullshit” (nonsense), and “bussin” (superb). These terms are considered informal, and abbreviations are generally not accepted in formal writing (Partey et al., 2018). Vulgar words sometimes emerge as slang.

### *Group- and subject-restriction*

Group- and subject-restriction are slang used within a specific group to enforce solidarity and reveal social identity. The slang in these properties displayed the speakers’ age, gender, and interests (Mattiello, 2008). The results indicated that tweeters used in-group vocabularies to mark their social identity and express their characteristics. Gender, age, and interests can be determined by the user’s internet slang, as detailed in the following discussion.

Internet slang such as “stacked” and “beatdown” reflects the speaker’s interests and group identity, especially in sports contexts among those familiar with the field. *Stacked* may refer to “a sports team with talented members” (Wiktionary, 2024), but it can also mean “women with large breasts,” depending on context (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In professional wrestling, *beatdown* describes “a staged situation where two wrestlers physically attack another to establish character” (PWTorch.com, 2011).

Although there is no face-to-face interaction, vocabulary can reveal the speaker’s age. Internet slang on Twitter, such as “wtf” (what the fuck), “bro” and “sis” are used by predominantly young adults. The study revealed a few internet slang words indicative of the speaker’s gender, with the term “pumped” (excited) predominantly used by men and “BFF” (best friend forever) often used by women. The study also included LGBTQ+ slang, which indicates speakers’ orientation rather than their gender, using terms such as “slayed” and “ate.”

### *Time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism*

Slang in these properties exhibits the speaker's generation, regional origin, and the slang's life. The properties of time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism will be discussed respectively.

Internet slang terms often identify the speaker's generation. Most terms found in this study falls mainly within a specific time-restriction, from Generation Z. Internet slang words such as "banger" (excellent), "Asl" (as hell), and "mid" (average) are predominantly used by Gen Z. Other generations including Millennials and Generation X, were also found. However, their internet slang is less frequently noted. Millennial speakers used "lit" (exciting) and "totes" (totally). Gen X internet slang words included "trippin" (overreacting) and "hella" (very).

The life-span of slang is often short, but some terms, such as "chap" or "grub," have a long or recurring life (Mattiello, 2008). The ephemerality of internet slang can be categorized into three types, according to Mattiello (2008): slang with a long life, slang with a brief life, and slang that has become a standard term. Dictionaries were used to examine and determine the etymology of internet slang. The study identified some internet slang with a long life that can be categorized into three periods: Slang from the 1500s includes "bitch" (unpleasant person) and "bro"; from the 1700s includes "bloody" (very) and "titties"; and from the 1900s, "sus" (suspicious behavior) and "beefcake" (an attractive man with big muscles). Notably, "sus" has gained recognition just recently, in 2020.

Slang often reflects regional variation, particularly between American and British English (Mattiello, 2008). This study found that most internet slang originates from American English and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Terms such as "sucks" (bad), "OG" (original gangster), and "jack shit" (anything or nothing) are linked to American usage. AAVE significantly shapes internet slang, contributing popular terms such as "woke" (being socially aware), "ate," "capping" (lying), "salty" (bitter), and the suffix "-ass." British slang appears less frequently such as "cancelled" (to stop supporting someone), "piss off" (to dismiss), and "cracking" (excellent).

### *Vulgarity and obscenity*

Vulgarity and obscenity are associated with taboo subjects, bad language, and sexual connotations. Internet slang containing taboo subjects found in the study was identified and characterized into three groups: The first group consists of internet slang with sexual connotations, such as "bang" (sexual intercourse), "fuck boy" (man who disrespects women and only seeks sexual intercourse), and "cock blocking" (blocking someone's sexual advances). "Cock," is a crude term for male genitalia.

The second group is internet slang related to excretion, such as "piss off" and "bull shit," which makes reference to urine (piss) and feces (shit). However, these words are often not used to reference excretion; instead, they express anger, sarcasm, or annoyance.

The last group is blasphemous expressions, the act of speaking irreverence toward God (Christianity.com, 2020), such as "istg" (I swear to god), "fgs" (for God's sake), and "wth" (what the hell). In the study, these words usually used to express frustration towards TV and award shows.

Moreover, slang in these properties usually contains a particularly coarse term. The word "fuck" is used as an intensifier (Mattiello, 2008). It expresses anger, irritation, or

suggestive topics. Tweeters employed the word “fuck” in various internet slang terms such as “Ffs” (For fuck’s sake), “fucking,” and “fkd up” (fucked up). Euphemistic forms of “fuck” were also common (e.g., “frigging” or “fricken”). Other vulgar slang words can also be found, such as “titties,” “bloody,” and “dumbass.” While they do not fit into those categories, they are still considered crude.

### *Secrecy and privacy*

Secrecy and privacy are properties that characterize the speaker as part of an exclusive group, akin to group- and subject-restriction, but with greater exclusivity. Slang within this group is secretive and obscure to outsiders, fostering intimacy and minimizing outside intrusion. It is commonly used by drug dealers and users of illegal narcotics (Mattiello, 2008).

The findings in this study revealed no drug slang, but some internet slang was identified and can be categorized into five groups, used exclusively by certain communities: For example, “beat down” is used by wrestling fans, and “scammys” insults the Grammy Awards show, reflecting feelings of being scammed by that award show. Terms such as “Swifties” and “blondie” indicate fans of Taylor Swift, while “baby back bitch” is used to insult a male contestant on *The Bachelorette*. Additionally, “rt” (retweet) relates to Twitter’s repost function, and “Twitter stans” refers to devoted celebrity fans on the platform.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Word-formation processes in English internet slang**

To address the first research question, the 214 English internet slang terms studied revealed nine types of word-formation. The most frequently used word-formation process was multiple processes, followed by abbreviations and affixation. Less productive types included compounding, clipping, borrowing, backformation, conversion, and alternation. Given the prevalence of multiple processes and abbreviations, the following discussion will focus on these aspects. Notably, due to the trending hashtags related to American shows, the results were limited in that they featured primarily American slang.

The fact that multiple processes emerged as the most productive word-formation type in this study underscores that many internet slang terms do not follow a single morphological process. Instead, they result from a blend of two or more processes, reflecting internet slang’s dynamic and creative nature. This aligns with Chanajit’s (2017) findings on Thai internet slang, where multiple processes also were prevalent. Although English and Thai differ linguistically, both demonstrate how multiple processes foster innovation in internet slang formation across languages. The prevalence of multiple processes underscores the complexity and adaptability of slang. However, prior research has often overlooked their intricate layering, underestimating the complexity of internet slang formation. Multiple processes expose less productive ones, such as borrowing, which often blends into the target language when it occurs alone but becomes clearer in combination. Multiple processes thrive on combination, making them highly productive and reflective of evolving digital networking. The following paragraph explores how borrowing, affixation, and compounding contribute to the productivity of multiple processes in this study.

Borrowing most frequently occurs and plays a significant role in multiple processes. As Bryson (as cited in Yule, 2005) stated, borrowing is a common method of introducing new terms into English. This study further supports this claim, demonstrating that many internet slang terms originate from loanwords. The productivity of loanwords in developing English is rooted in a long history of borrowing—more than 60% of English vocabulary is derived from loanwords, borrowed from as many as 300 languages (Blake, 2019; Timyam, 2015). In this study, most loanwords come from French, reflecting the historical connection between the two languages within the Indo-European family (Timyam, 2015). Following the Norman Conquest and into the 14th century, English adopted numerous French words, many of which retain their original pronunciation and spelling, such as “pissing” (annoyed) from *pisser*, “bougie” (high-class) from *bourgeois*, and “beefing” (dispute) from *beof* (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). While loanwords often blend seamlessly into English, their origins remain significant in shaping modern vocabulary, including internet slang.

Affixation is the second most frequent and distinct approach among multiple processes. The research identified several internet slang expressions with suffixes that are ungrammatical or violate grammatical morphology, aligning with Mattiello’s (2013) findings regarding “-ie/-y” and “-o.” Interestingly, some inflectional suffixes, including “-eth” and “-s,” are used beyond their typical grammatical boundaries.

Diminutive suffixes -ie/-y and -o often form pet names or familiar terms, such as “cutie-patootie” (an adorable person), “bestie” (a close friend), and “kiddo” (a child). These suffixes convey pragmatic features by breaking grammatical rules without having a semantic function (Mattiello, 2013), yet they express a sense of friendliness. While -eth and -s are distinctively different, they are typically inflectional but function derivationally in slang. In “bananas” (being excited), the inflectional suffix -s derives an adjective, but morphologically, -s does not act as an adjective. This word functions like other adjectives in English and has been used since 1957 (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). “Shooketh” (to be surprised), popularized by YouTuber Christine Sydelko, uses -eth to intensify expressions of shock and to convert the verb into an adjective. The inflectional suffix -eth traditionally denotes third-person verbs in Early Modern English (Madison, 2022).

These suffixes deviate from traditional norms, demonstrating how language users adapt grammar to emphasize meaning over correctness. The ungrammatical suffixes ie/-y, -o, and -s were first noted in spoken slang by Mattiello (2008) before spreading online. However, -eth has not been documented in previous studies due to a lack of English-language research on social media. Its emergence reflects how slang can develop from internet trend influences, yet its longevity remains uncertain, as sudden slang may quickly fade.

Compounding is the third productive approach among multiple processes. It is generally significantly effective in English, contributing to the creation of new internet terminologies (Crystal, 2001; Yule, 2005), and is found in many other languages (Timyam, 2010). The research findings correspond with Chanajit’s (2017) results, indicating that compounding frequently occurs within multiple processes. Despite linguistic differences, it has been demonstrated that compounding serves as a universal method for generating words within social media.

Slang characteristics are evident in compound words, particularly when intending to exclude outsiders and display creativity. Exocentric compounds emphasize the exclusionary nature of slang, such as “hoe bag” (a promiscuous woman) and “beefcake.” These words have meanings unrelated to their individual parts, potentially confusing those unfamiliar with slang. Rhyming compounds exhibit slang’s creative use of sound and rhyming (Eble, 1996), as seen in Cockney rhyming slang (Mattiello, 2008). It is also applied in internet slang

expressions such as “cutie-patootie” and “artsy-fartsy” (pretentiously artistic); the diminutive suffixes -ie/-y and -sy create the rhyming effect. This captures the reader's attention and showcases creativity, suggesting an ongoing evolution of the process.

Twitter also popularizes uncommon words and changes their meanings and functions in slang contexts, such as “rent-free” (something occupying the mind), “lowkey” (secretly), and “-ass.” *Rent-free* and *lowkey* are compound adverbs combined with another adverb or a different part of speech that functions adverbially (Nordquist, 2019). They are usually unproductive and function as adverbs of manner and degree. Interestingly, -ass in slang functions as a suffix in compounds, as noted by Widawski (2015) and Siddiqi (2011), acting as a bound morpheme. “-Ass” is a highly productive suffix in American English and is associated with AAVE. It is used to form nouns, verbs, and especially adjectives, serving as an intensifier to express a high degree of something. While compound words with “-ass” are often ephemeral, words such as “*dumbass*,” “*smart-ass*,” and “*brokeass*” have been recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) since the 1930s and remain in use today.

Furthermore, abbreviations are the second most common individual word-formation method and are frequently found in previous social media research (Chanajit, 2017; Izazi & Tengku-Sepora, 2020; Robbin, 2020). Their popularity stems from efficiency and typing convenience, as they save energy and time on a small keypad (Crystal, 2001). This fosters smoother conversations on trending topics. Twitter's character limit encourages users to favor shortened forms to save space.

The most common type of abbreviation is the initialism, which is the simplest way to abbreviate phrases or words into a few letters. Initialisms effectively express emotions and actions concisely, as seen in “OMG” (Oh My God), “Smh” (Shaking my head), “LOL” (Laughing Out Loud), and “Wth (What the hell).” These forms help convey feelings such as excitement, disappointment, humor, and frustration, as Twitter lacks facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. They are helpful in this medium because they replicate aspects of real-life conversation. This idea aligns with the observations of Crystal (2011), Chanajit (2017), and Izazi and Tengku-Sepora (2020) on the differences between online and real-life language.

Interestingly, English abbreviations are increasingly adopted globally, as evidenced by Izazi and Tengku-Sepora's (2020) study in Malaysia and Robbin's (2020) study in Nigeria. This indicates that the internet enhances the globalization of English slang, promoting uniform digital communication across cultures.

Other abbreviations, such as acronyms, reducing words to letters, and rebuses, are less productive than initialisms. Acronyms and rebuses have consistent structures, whereas reducing letters lack a standard pattern, depending on the texter's style, according to Crystal (2008) and Izazi & Tengku-Sepora (2020). These findings are consistent with Crystal's and Izazi & Tengku-Sepora's observations in the words “asf” (as fuck) and “asl” (as hell). Usually, this process does not retain the whole word in the abbreviated form, only some letters. However, both words retain the whole word ‘as’ without omission. It is uncertain why the word “hell” from “asl” is reduced to only the letter “l.” Still, these examples demonstrate the importance of consonants in reducing letters, as they convey more informational value than vowels. These variations highlight the evolution of internet slang, shaped by typing efficiency and platform-specific conventions.

The data demonstrates how internet slang evolves beyond traditional linguistic norms and extends into everyday communication. The findings highlight its flexibility, showing that internet slang often disregards standard grammar to meet users' communicative needs. Its innovation stems from social trends rather than linguistic rules. Many terms arise through

multiple processes and spread rapidly due to the convenience of the internet. The simplicity and accessibility of internet slang make it preferable for users, which can lead users to adopt it inadvertently in formal contexts. While internet slang fosters social bonding and helps establish social identity, its widespread use can blur the boundaries between casual and formal writing, potentially weakening users' ability to adhere to traditional linguistic norms in academic or professional settings. When used appropriately, internet slang can facilitate interaction, but excessive use may reduce proficiency in formal writing.

### **Sociological properties of English internet slang**

To address the second research question, the English internet slang on Twitter exhibits all of the speaker-oriented properties. The findings show that informality and debasement are the most frequently occurring speaker-oriented properties, followed by group- and subject-restriction, time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism. The less commonly found properties are vulgarity and obscenity, and secrecy and privacy. The distinguished findings will be discussed in the paragraphs below.

First, informality and debasement are the most significant speaker-oriented properties in internet slang, present in every word. Scholars have generally described slang as colloquial, stylistically lower than standard language, and unconventional (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Eble, 1996; Green, 2015; Partridge, 1933), which aligns with the findings of this research that emphasize the importance of informality in slang. Moreover, as noted by Izazi and Tengku-Sepora (2020), interactions on Twitter are generally informal, further encouraging the use of internet slang. Twitter is perceived as a relaxed environment, as evidenced by the prevalence of internet slang. Slang typically appears in casual conversations (Mattiello, 2008) and when individuals find formal language unsatisfactory (Coleman, 2014); Twitter is an ideal platform for informal discourse and motivates users to adopt internet slang. This sociological property decreases formality, fosters friendliness, and encourages social exchange, reinforcing the notion that slang is aligned with informality. Using slang online also allows speakers to replicate real-life conversations, consistent with Crystal's perspective (2001), as internet writing often mirrors spoken language to compensate for the absence of face-to-face communication, with abbreviated words reflecting expressions or emotions.

Secondly, group- and subject-restriction are the second most common properties. Internet slang reflects the speakers' interests, identities, and demographics. This property serves a social function by identifying group membership and traits (Eble, 1996), a key aspect of slang. The following paragraph will discuss how internet slang showcases speakers' groups and interests, gender, and age.

The speaker's interests are shown through internet slang, influenced by online culture, technology, entertainment, and sports. This aligns with Chanajit (2017), Mahmud et al. (2022), and Robbin (2020), who state that internet slang derives from various influences. Although the study focuses on entertainment hashtags, most internet slang is Netspeak, which reflects the speaker's familiarity and membership in online communities. Netspeak often appears abbreviated, a notable characteristic of the language (Crystal, 2001), such as "rt" and "TL" (timeline). Many words gained new meanings in the internet context, such as "haters" (online critics) and "simp" (being overly attentive toward someone). Hashtags express interests and connect audiences, such as #VMAs and #GRAMMYS for music, #Oscars for film, and #SmackDown and #AEWDynamite for sports.

Certain genders often use specific internet slang terms, however, the study found a decrease in gender-specific slang overall. Many address terms were identified and used to reinforce solidarity, including “babe,” “fam,” “homie,” and “hun,” without indicating the speaker’s gender. While “dude” and “bro” were initially male-centric, they have become more gender-neutral due to increased use by both genders (Luu, 2015). Moreover, the LGBTQ+ community now plays a significant role in internet slang, with many terms arising from this group. Historically, LGBTQ+ slang provided a protective code during oppression (Gill, 2003). In the 21st century, LGBTQ+ identification faces less stigma. Terms such as “slayed,” “ate,” and “sis” have entered mainstream usage, largely popularized by *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (Nele, 2024), making them more accessible but diminishing LGBTQ+ slang’s exclusivity (Van de Ven, 2021). Notably, internet slang cannot reliably reveal speakers’ gender or sexual orientation on social media, as anyone can adopt these expressions.

Most trending internet slang originates from young people. The speaker’s age, as indicated by the use of internet slang on Twitter, is typically associated with younger users, especially those in Generation Z. Older generations tend to use less slang. This aligns with Mattiello’s (2008) assertion that young people are generally innovative and up-to-date with their vocabulary usage, often inventing many slang words.

Thirdly, time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism are the third most commonly used properties. Time-restriction is associated with the speaker’s generation. As discussed, young people dominate the use of internet slang on Twitter, often representing Generation Z—born between 1997 and 2012 (Eldridge, 2024). They have grown up with full internet access and spend an average of 2 hours and 55 minutes daily on social media, making them the most active internet users (Viens, 2019). Gen Z drives the rapid spread of slang from various groups, including LGBTQ+, African Americans, and older generations (Rett, 2023), as seen with the term “banger,” derived from the “head-banger” of Generation X.

Ephemerality reflects slang’s lifespan. Long-lived terms such as “bitch” (1500s) and “titties” (1700s) have persisted for over a century, supporting Eble’s (1996) and Coleman’s (2014) ideas that slang can remain informal for long periods, suggesting that some slang may endure longer than expected. Notably, the term “sus,” first used in the 1920s, resurfaced in 2020 from the game *Among Us*, which adapted its definition to fit its context. This further supports Eble’s (1996) claim that slang has multiple lives and can be inconsistent.

Lastly, localism refers to the speaker’s regional origin. American English slang was prevalent in this study; indeed, in 2023, the United States had over 64.9 million Twitter users (DataReportal, 2023) who used the platform for self-expression (Roach, n.d.), resulting in an increase in tweets from them. The influence of American mass media is evident in trending hashtags such as #SmackDown, #90DayFiance, #AbbottElementary, and #SistasOnBET.

Subgroups of a society play a significant role. Many internet slang terms on Twitter originate from the African American community, aligning with Jackson’s (2019) view that Twitter is strongly influenced by this demographic, and Blake’s (2019) observation that African American slang is disseminated through the media. AAVE slang is rooted in the historical significance of African slaves (Widawski, 2015). Some view the universality skeptically, in that the popularity of African American slang has led to its adoption by non-African Americans, risking a loss of meaning and undermining its cultural significance (Chery, 2022).

Overall, the results suggest that internet slang serves a social function by indicating the speaker’s various characteristics, and various factors, including trends, mass media, and communities, can influence the development of internet slang. Due to its accessible nature,

Twitter also plays a role in exposing English internet slang globally. As evidenced in Izazi and Tengku-Sepora's (2020) and Robbin's (2020) findings, Malaysians and Nigerians incorporate English internet slang into their vocabulary (e.g., "omg," "lol," or "idk"), but often they code-mix English internet slang with their native language. This demonstrates how English slang is localized and adapted to reflect regional identity. It is also undeniable that American slang, particularly AAVE, remains especially dominant on Twitter, with a few instances of other English slang variations, such as British slang. This dominance reflects the powerful influence of the U.S. mass media on global discourse, which overshadows other slang variations. Still, the localized use of English slang in other countries highlights how speakers creatively engage with and adapt slang to fit their language and cultural context.

## CONCLUSION

The study addressed the research questions by examining the word-formation processes and sociological properties, specifically speaker-oriented properties, used in English internet slang on Twitter, providing new insights into this topic. The findings revealed that multiple processes were the most frequently occurring type of word-formation, indicating that internet slang has a complex structure that often involves several methods to create a single slang term. Borrowing, affixation, and compounding were prominent methods within these multiple processes. They highlight the history of English borrowings, ungrammatical formations, and the creativity inherent in internet slang. Moreover, abbreviations facilitate expedited communication, replicating casual conversation and saving time.

Informality and debasement were the most frequently employed speaker-oriented properties of internet slang, underscoring the core features of slang as amplified by Twitter's 128-character limit. Group- and subject-restrictions demonstrate how Netspeak and hashtags foster solidarity and speaker identity, with the increasing visibility of LGBTQ+ slang. Time-restriction, ephemerality, and localism reflect changes in time and society. Generation Z's tech-savviness accelerates the rapid and innovative spread of internet slang. American media and African American slang significantly influence Twitter, serving as primary sources of internet slang. However, the dominance of American media has resulted in hashtags being mostly associated with American shows, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other slang variations. Despite the ephemeral nature of slang, several terms demonstrate longevity. Consequently, internet slang has become a widely adopted linguistic tool used by diverse communities worldwide.

While it is often viewed negatively in formal contexts as a deviation from standard language, its social functions—such as signaling group identity and facilitating communication—enable individuals to engage within digital spaces. Nevertheless, its global use raises concerns about the cultural appropriation of slang with cultural significance.

## Limitations and recommendations

The study focuses on speaker-oriented properties and entertainment industry-related hashtags; however, examining hearer-oriented properties could provide a fuller picture. Future studies might consider using user interviews or surveys to capture audience perceptions of internet slang. To gather more information, researchers should expand the scope of hashtags, such as gaming, sports, politics, etc.

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