



The Use of English Abbreviations on WhatsApp and Instagram amongst University Students in Pakistan

Farwa Mukhtar¹, Dr. Naveed Nawaz Ahmad², Dr. Hafiz Ahmad Bilal³ & Dr. Rabia Faiz⁴

¹MPhil English (Linguistics), Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Email: farwaawan424@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Email: naveed.nawaz@uos.edu.pk

³Professor of English, Higher Education Department, Punjab, Email: ahmadbilal.uos@gmail.com

⁴Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Sargodha, Email: rabia.faiz@uos.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: September 08, 2025
Revised: October 02, 2025
Accepted: October 15, 2025
Available Online: October 28, 2025

Keywords:

Abbreviation, Pakistan, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Rabia Faiz

Email:

rabia.faiz@uos.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of WhatsApp and Instagram abbreviations among university students in Pakistan. Students want to fit in with the trending styles of writing. However, they use abbreviations or short form of words to save their time and follow the trend. This study explores the unconventional spelling of some words used by university students on WhatsApp and Instagram. Data were collected by using a mixed-method approach, including observation of WhatsApp chats and comments on Instagram posts of 35 students of University of Sargodha and online questionnaire to find gender-based differences in the frequency of abbreviation use between males and females. The findings reveal that abbreviations provide efficient communication, they also simplify language and reduce vocabulary development. It also affected grammatical accuracy. The limitations of the study include using a relatively small sample of 35 students and focusing only on WhatsApp and Instagram abbreviations, excluding other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The study recommends that future studies should aim to focus on a larger sample and explore a broad range of social media platforms. It also recommends that future studies should aim to focus on the broad range of universities, not at a specific university.



Introduction

Social media lowers the linguistic barrier and allows people to use language freely (Almutilibi, 2023). This article deals with the abbreviations used by people to easily convey their meanings in the short period of time. This study investigates how university students use abbreviations on WhatsApp and Instagram. In this way social media platforms play a crucial role. WhatsApp,

Instagram, and Facebook are the media platforms that people are more interested in (Verlin, 2022). “The fast-paced nature of social media promotes brevity and creativity, encouraging users to develop abbreviations, emojis, and internet slang” (Xolmatova & Nigora, 2023). With the passage of time social media users prefer short forms to communicate with others. Students use abbreviations to make their communication more efficient and to save time. Abbreviations portray identity construction and individual belonging. In social media platforms, WhatsApp and Instagram are used mostly by students for instant messaging. WhatsApp is an app used by people to send messages, voice notes, photos and videos. While Instagram is an app which is used for interaction on larger level, where users upload their posts, see others and also comment on them. Users also send and receive messages through this app. Standard English does not accept the abbreviations used by people in whatsapping (Zayyun, 2021; Yunusa, 2021). Because these type of forms or slang words can be used on social media platforms but could not be accepted in standard writings.

In some countries the use of abbreviations are even more complex such as in Pakistan and many other countries, where English is not the first language, they combine English with their local languages. For instance, in Pakistan students often use IA for insha Allah. WhatsApp is also used in learning and teaching of English (Tan, & Yunus, 2023). It is source of motivation for students to communicate effectively with their peers (Tan, & Yunus, 2023). Those who uses WhatsApp and Instagram language, enhances the exposure of vocabulary, reading and writing skills, and linguistic creativity (Mukenge, 2024). “Furthermore, there is a language revolution trending on social media which has given rise to what the Britannica encyclopedia captions as a truncated variety of language” (Nikade, 2022, p.11). Some critics argue that abbreviations lead to the decline of language, because the use of abbreviations reduce the vocabulary of Standard English. The frequent use of abbreviations may impact the students’ spelling or formal writing skills. While others reject this view by stating that using abbreviations in a language is a natural process. Researchers are all interested in studying the increasing use of abbreviations. They also study the relation among individuals’ ability to use language and social communication.

On the other hand empirical research has produced mixed results. Some researchers argue that the use of abbreviations on social media indicates innovation in language, while other claims that the frequent use of abbreviations may impact their formal writing or spellings. Social media users shortened the words to follow the trend. Abbreviations are especially useful for things like text messaging and these help fit more information into smaller area. Students also use abbreviations to make their communication quicker. Abbreviations are also useful because on some platforms there is word limit so students use abbreviations to fully convey their information. Internet communication can be used to effectively and quickly disseminate information, persuade audiences and argue for messages (Dudko, 2024). Although a lot of research has done on the use of abbreviations, but still a research gap exists. The former researchers mostly focus on the Western digital context and do not give much attention to the Asian, African, or Middle Eastern digital communication. There is also a need for corpus based study of abbreviation usage across different regions and platforms. Sometimes the use of abbreviations lead to misunderstanding because not everyone is familiar with every abbreviation used by others. This leads to frustration and confusion for those users who do not understand abbreviations. So, there is a need for further research on the misunderstandings arise from abbreviations. Later studies should aim to focus on these gaps to better understand the language innovations. This study aims to investigate how students in Pakistani university uses abbreviations for instant messaging on WhatsApp and Instagram. It examines how students use abbreviations in their communication to interact with their friends and family. This study further explains, how the frequent use of abbreviations impact their formal

writings. Understanding the use of abbreviations on social media not only enhances our knowledge of digital communication but also provides a deeper understanding of how language evolves with passage of time.

Research Objectives

- i. To analyze the use of abbreviations for instant messaging by university students
- ii. To explore how abbreviations provide efficient communication
- iii. To examine the effects of abbreviations on academic writings
- iv. To examine how students use abbreviations with friends and family

Research Questions

- i. What is the purpose of using abbreviations on WhatsApp and Instagram by Pakistani university students?
- ii. How often the students use abbreviations to save time or to type fast?
- iii. What motivates student to use abbreviations on WhatsApp and Instagram?
- iv. How often the abbreviations are used by male and female students?

Literature Review

“The digital age has significantly reshaped the way language is used, modified, and disseminated” (Shahid et al., 2025, p.1550). The emergence of new techniques in social media platforms influences the way university students communicate. Abbreviations are used by a lot of students, such as “TBH” (To be honest), “tysm” (thank you so much) and “Np” (no problem). Students use these forms to quickly share their thoughts and emotions (Rashid et al., 2025). Studies show that when students talking to their peers or friends, they mainly use abbreviations. Such as (Rashid et al., 2025, p.333) states that, “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”. This study investigates the use of abbreviations by students on social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram. It also examines the dual nature of abbreviations, fast-paced and impact on academic writings. Students used abbreviations for instant messaging or to type fast, but sometimes it also affected their formal writings in the sense that they became habitual of using abbreviations.

Some studies stated that; the excessive use of abbreviations lead to less vocabulary exposure, linguistic simplicity and limiting engagement with formal language settings, which affects the students’ ability to articulate complex ideas (Mukenge, 2024). Although students use these forms in informal context, with peers or friends but it also has an impact on their formal writings. The use of these forms also affect their academic writings. They sometimes use abbreviations in Examination and after that they realize and feel guilty because they became habitual of using short forms.

Some other studies stated that; “vocabulary plays a crucial role in shaping the conveyance of ideas, and the use of slang often mirrors creativity, cultural awareness, and social adaptation” (Rashid et al., 2025, p. 332). Abbreviations are frequently used to create a sense of belonging among users, to save time, and to reflect not only linguistic trends but also generational identity (Rashid, 2025). Students often used abbreviations to type fast or to show efficiency. They often used these forms in informal communication.

Mukenge (2024) studied the use of abbreviations on WhatsApp in Zimbabwe. It focused on the negative impact of abbreviations on academic writings, such as vocabulary development. This study focused on the use of abbreviations on WhatsApp only and did not extend its findings to broader range of social media platforms such as Instagram or Twitter etc. The data is taken from thirty University students only. (Rashid, 2025) used only quantitative method to find the role of slang and abbreviated words among students in Pakistan and did not use the qualitative method for in-depth analysis or deeper understanding. Through this method we can find the frequency of used abbreviations but could not understand why and for which purpose students used them.

This study examines the use of English abbreviations on social media platforms by university students. It explains how male and female students use abbreviations, either to save time, to follow the trend, or just for fun. Based on the gaps in existing literature, this study aims to use both qualitative and quantitative methods, to explore the use of English abbreviations by university students in Pakistan on broader range of social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and Instagram.

Methodology

Research methodology plays a crucial role in research. It is impossible to conduct a research without employing material and methods and is unjust to ignore it (Abbas, 2025). In this study the primary framework was Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory because it examined how language changes when people use it through social media platforms. It also examined that, language used in face to face interaction is different than the language used through digital platforms. Qualitative and quantitative methods are used to examine the use of abbreviations on WhatsApp and Instagram by university students. Observation and online questionnaire are the two main tools, which are used for data collection. Participants include students both male and female from university of Sargodha. Quantitative method is used to find the frequency of abbreviations. A qualitative approach is used for in-depth analysis (Galebole, 2020).

The observation explored the reason of using abbreviations by students, why they use abbreviations and what is the purpose of using it. The online questionnaire focused on the frequency of abbreviations use across gender. The data was collected through online questionnaire and by observing the messages and comments of WhatsApp and Instagram respectively over a period of two weeks. Collected data were analyzed by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Thematic analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. Informed consent was obtained by maintaining ethical considerations and confidentiality throughout the research process.

Analysis

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Theory is used to analyze the data. CMC theory examines how digital platforms influence the choice of language (Bilal et al., 2013). This study examines the use of English abbreviations by Sargodha university students in Pakistan. Students used abbreviations because it is an easy way to convey their thoughts and emotions. In this study CMC theory is used to explain how language changes when users communicate through digital platforms. When users communicate through social media platforms, they use abbreviations to save time or to communicate effectively. This analysis focuses on how social media platforms encourage the use of abbreviations. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data. While other studies implied only quantitative or qualitative method. According to this study female students used abbreviations more than male students, because they wanted to create a sense of politeness in their conversation.

The main argument of the study was that, students of Pakistani University frequently used abbreviations on WhatsApp and Instagram. Although it is fast-paced and simplified language but it sometimes has an impact on the students' academic writings. This study implied mixed method, qualitative and quantitative to collect data. This study uses observation and questionnaire to improve the credibility of findings. The population was of 35 students from Sargodha University and the tools used to collect data were observation and questionnaire.

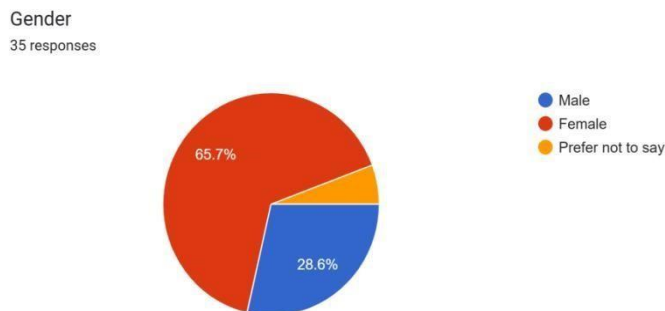
However, the study is limited due to its small sample size, excluding other social media platforms and lack of diversity. By taking large sample size and broad range of social media platforms, the results could be more generalizable. This study focused solely on one university and did not collect data from other universities of Pakistan. This study also has strengths, unlike previous studies, that used only quantitative or qualitative approach, this study implied both qualitative and quantitative methods. While, other studies examined the use of abbreviations only on WhatsApp or Instagram. This study navigates both social media platforms; WhatsApp and Instagram.

WhatsApp abbreviations	Instagram abbreviations
OMG	DM
Order by HEC	UOS
Ppr was easy	FYP
U r a good student	IFSN
dept	SM1

In this table HEC stands for Higher Education Commission, OMG (Oh my God), Ppr (paper), U (you), r (are) and dept (department). Therefore on Instagram students often used DM (Direct message), UOS (University of Sargodha), FYP (For you page), IFSN (Institute of Food science and Nutrition) and SM1 (someone). These are the abbreviations students mostly used on WhatsApp and Instagram. This article is informative and provide valuable insights on the use of abbreviations, although future studies should focus on the broader range of participants and social media platforms.

Results and Discussion

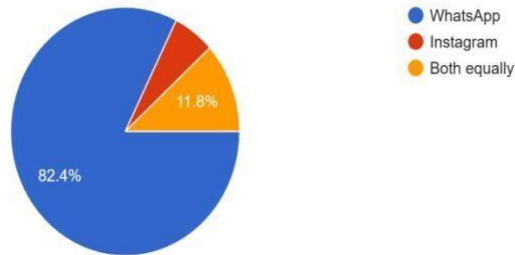
This data is taken from University Students in Sargodha. The results show that females use more abbreviations than males. The data is collected through online questionnaire. The results show that (65.7%) female students use abbreviations, while the ratio of male students is (28.6%). This shows that females used abbreviations more than male students.



The second question asked by students is, on which platform they use abbreviations more. The results in this graph shows that WhatsApp is the mostly used platform as compared to Instagram for instant messaging. This data shows that (82.4%) abbreviations are used on WhatsApp by students, which shows that WhatsApp is the platform, students mostly used to convey their emotions and thoughts. On the other hand (11.8%) students used abbreviations on Instagram for communication.

On which platform do you use abbreviations more?

34 responses

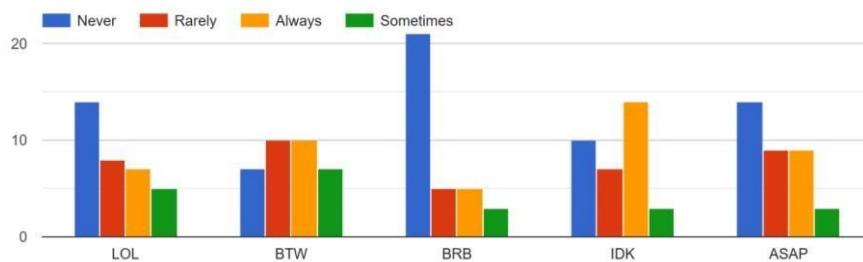


The third question asked by students is that how often they use specific type of abbreviations.

These are the abbreviations used by students such as LOL "laugh out loud", BTW "by the way" ,

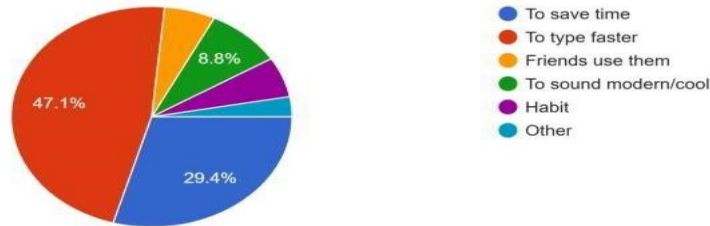
BRB "be right back" , IDK "I don't know" ,and ASAP "as soon as possible". The results show that IDK is the abbreviation mostly used by students. On the other hand 'BRB' is the less used abbreviation by students.

How often do you use these abbreviations?

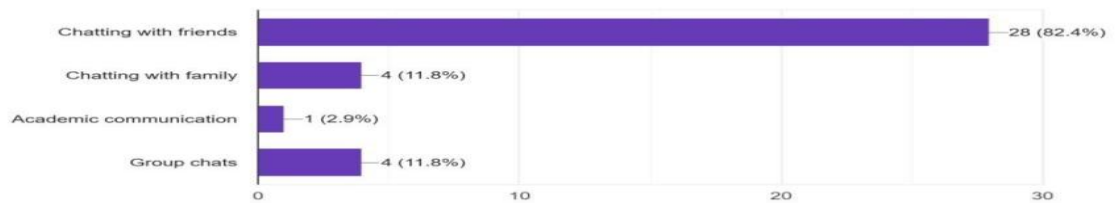


The fourth question asked by students is the purpose of using abbreviations. Students used abbreviations to type fast or to save their time. This graph shows that (47.1%) students used abbreviations to type faster. (29.4%) Students used abbreviations to save time and 8.8% used abbreviations to sound modern or cool.

Why do you use abbreviations?
34 responses



In which situations do you mostly use abbreviations?
34 responses



The fifth question asked by students is, in which situations do they mostly use abbreviations. This result shows that students mostly used abbreviations to chat with friends. They used these forms in informal communication such as with peers and friends. Graph shows that (82.4%) students used abbreviations to chat with friends. (11.8%) students use abbreviations for group chats or chatting with family. Overall findings show that students used abbreviations mostly on WhatsApp. They used abbreviations in informal communication, with peers or friends but sometimes it affects their academic writings.

Students used abbreviations or its types on Instagram as well. This study examines the comments and captions used by students on Instagram, such as:

'Hella fun, birthday bash'

'Thnx for comin' ya'all made my day'

'DM for collaborations & paid promotion'

'beautiful tribute RIP'

These are some comments taken from Instagram which shows how students use abbreviations for efficient communication. They use abbreviations to communicate quickly or to save time.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aims to investigate the use of abbreviations on WhatsApp and Instagram by university students in Pakistan. It shows that students use abbreviations either to save time or to type fast. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory is used to analyze the data. Data collection through questionnaire and observation provided detailed insights into why abbreviations are used by students and either they have impact on their academic writings. Findings revealed that students use abbreviations more on WhatsApp than on Instagram. It also shows that they use abbreviations to save their time, and they mostly used abbreviations in informal communication, with peers or friends. This study recommends that students should not use abbreviations all the time because it

would have impact on their formal writings. They should focus on using full forms and should not use abbreviations in formal writings.

References

1. Abbas, T., Soomro, A. R., & Abbasi, I. A. (2025). The impact of shortened words usage on communication effectiveness among Pakistan's university students. *Journal of Arts and Linguistics Studies*, 3(1), 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.71281/jals.v3i1.207>
2. Almuttalibi, N. (2023). Social media and language evolution: A review of current theoretical efforts on communication and language change. *Nasaq Journal*, 39(1), 1355–1361.
3. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374368096>
4. Bilal, H. A., Mubashra, S., Akram, F., & Shahzada, A. (2013). A sociolinguistic study of varying levels of formality in computer-mediated communication in Pakistan. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(13), 291–296.
5. Dudko, I., & Zaitseva, N. (2024). Modern discourse of Internet communication: Linguistic aspect. *International Journal of Philology*, 28(3), 9-21. <https://doi.org/10.31548/philolog/3.2024.09>
6. Galebole, W. R. (2020). Factors leading to spelling change of English language words on WhatsApp. *American Journal of Communication*, 2(1), 26–40. www.ajpojournals.org
7. Mukenge, C. (2024). The use of English abbreviations on WhatsApp amongst university students in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Modern Languages*, 34(2), 78-104. <https://doi.org/10.22452/jml.vol23no2.5>
8. Nikade, E. C. (2022). Trending writing styles affecting formal communication: A case study of spelling errors on Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. *International Journal of Innovative Language, Literature & Art Studies* 10(1), 10-23.
9. Rashid, M., Ali, F., & Ahmed, S. (2025). The role of internet slang and abbreviated words among university students in Pakistan. *Policy Journal of Social Science Review*, 3(4), 331–342.
10. Shahid, F., Rafiq, N., Farid, S., & Sheeza. (2025). The influence of social media on English vocabulary in Pakistan. *The Cress Journal*, 3(2), 1547–1562. <https://thecrsss.com/index.php/Journal/about>
11. Tan, S. Y., & Yunus, M. M. (2023). Sustaining English language education with social networking sites (SNSs): A systematic review. *Sustainability*, 15(7), 5710. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15075710>
12. Verlin, S. (2022). Abbreviation establishment in Instagram social media. *Indonesian Journal of Research and Educational Review*, 1(4), 588–599. <https://doi.org/10.51574/ijrer.v1i4.753>
13. Zayyanu, Z. M., & Yunusa, Y. (2021). An investigation into effects of social media language on Standard English usage: A case study of WhatsApp. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation*, 2(2), 255-260.