"I spk digit lng – do U?" – Influence of Social Media on Student Writing Habits

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ABSTRACT

Social media is flooding our lives today and it is unavoidable. It is influencing our writing and even learning abilities. However, due to the research so far it showed that students and other adolescents are learning other languages through those social media tools, and they are even trying to improve their grammar and vocabulary when writing online posts or simple messages. **Did social media apps ruin us or is it improving our literature skills?** As a method for collecting necessary data, content analysis was used as a main tool. Overall research showed that people are more observant when it comes to texting and posting online, and that it also reflects on school assignments as they practice writing not only during school time but all the time through social media. Contradicting the popular opinion that social media is decreasing our writing skills, it may as well help to improve.

Key words: social media, influence, written skills, Millennials, corpus analysis, digital language,

INTRODUCTION

Today's Workplace

Due to the prevalence of social media it affected every corner of our life, even work. Many argue that it is both helpful in terms of instant communication with other company employees and quick information sharing; in the other hand it occupies people with non-work related content (Forsgren&Byström, 2015). In most cases use of social media is not coherent with work activities, rather used for personal entertainment, such as scrolling through social networking services or to communicate externally with family and friends while on job.

However, there is a growing trend in internal usage of social media. Firms and companies are allowing its presence among the employees to create a network of connections between people from all corners of the company. That helps not only to manage the existing acquaintances to remain in touch and share information relevant to business but also to build new relationships with people from other departments that may have similar interest. Anyone from the organization can be reached and linked up to improve organizations social aspects among employees (Richter and Riemer, 2009). Forsgren and Byström came to conclusion that social media overall are useful when it comes to connecting people and speed up sharing of job related information, but that it is also distracting from work when used for external purposes.

Social media are believed to be a distraction in work culture. The ability to speak with someone who is not there is enhanced with the rise of the Internet, Smartphones and social media, and people are abusing that privilege when they should be working. Even though research by Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen (2012) found out that same percent of people who work and use social media said that it either helps with productivity, multi-tasking and faster

performance or, on the other hand, that it is time wasting, challenging and distracting from actual work and thus increasing the amount of time needed to get the work done.

Article by K.J.Thomas&M.Akdere (2013) researched the usage of social media through Human Resource Development (HDR) and they believe that social media should be more utilized through that department and also refer to social media as a "collaborative media". Through research they came to conclusion that HRD with the proper implementation of the collaborative media learning would speed up, productivity would be increased and knowledge can be gained. That may be a challenge for the employees that are less familiar with technology and more time and effort is needed for them to learn.

People will use social media in workplace whether it is required or not, so some organizations are implementing collaborative media not only to gain customers attention and to communicate via that, but also to improve the inter-organizational learning. All the marketing and advertisements go through social media and companies thrive on that, as almost every human being has at least one social/collaborative media tool. Companies who utilized social media to fasten learning within organization and outside to promote themselves, reported they benefited by expanding their business, revenue and knowledge (Henneman, 2010, p.4).

Millenials as Technological Natives

As social media is more present than ever, with all this possibility of communicating via Smartphones and other technological devices, people are constantly typing messages on their phones. Sending text messages from numerous social media platforms to family, friends, colleagues and others became our daily routine and we spend great deal of our time typing and writing messages in virtual world; it is a rare case to write something on a piece of paper these days. Survey questioning the amount of time spent on social media was

distributed to students and it showed that approximately 8 hours a day is spend on social media, most of it writing and communicating (Alvermann& Harrison, 2016).

What will be argued about in this research paper is whether social media impacts positively or negatively on our writing skills. Are we able to draw the line and know the difference when to use formal/business writing style and when is it appropriate to use informal, not professional style?

Most influenced by digital writing are adolescents, growing up parallel with the rise of technology and the usage of social media in terms of communication. Many professors, linguists and researchers in that field are blaming technological communication for the declining in adolescents' literacy abilities (Risto, 2014). A studies and researches made by The National Assessment for Educational Progress – NAEP, found out that less than 20% of American students have performed at a proficient level of writing and the rest of the students scored with basic level of writing.

Also another research (Hoover, 2013) that compared exams which were distributed to students in several English-based universities worldwide showed the results that China students overtook American students in the proficiency of written English, meaning that they scored better when it comes to grammar, spelling and punctuations. Consequently many professors are throwing guilt for those errors on technological communication and students' constant use of such.

Students have been impacted by technological communication and writing, in several different grammar samples. For instance, a research showed that many students are inclined to write as they speak or spell as they hear the words being pronounced. Many times there are missing vowels, incorrect spelling or missing of double consonant and also wrong tenses are implemented in sentences (Bahr, Silliman, Berninger and Dow, 2012).

The most common factor that is used when communicating via Smartphone is completely dropping the vowels and spelling the word only with consonants. That is popular use of abbreviations among not only students but the whole society. As can be noticed on Internet, most posts or 'memes' are written with abbreviations, also no punctuations are used and sometimes other spelling errors slides into. And as those posts and memes are largely popular to any user of social media, they see and read these things everyday in large numbers, so as people see more of posts like that (no punctuations, constant abbreviations, spelling errors) it starts to seem as it is normal and common to write like that and post publicly for all audience across the world (Bahr, Silliman, Berninger and Dow, 2012).

New Language - "Digit Lng"

David Crystal, the lead researcher in the field of linguistics and communication, stated in his book 'Language and the Internet' that "*Language is the heart of the Internet*" (pg.237, 2007). He argues that the writing on Internet is neither writing nor speaking, he rather introduces that as a "*fourth dimension*". Before the communication through social media there was speech, writing and singing; in addition D. Crystal reefers to the 'fourth dimension' as "technologically-mediated language". The whole communication on the Internet or over Smartphones he appoints as 'Netspeak'. As everything is moving on the Internet, he believes that even direct face-to-face communication in the future won't be the primary medium of communication, rather it will be replaced with technological. D. Crystal in his book wrote that he found out that with social media people are learning much quicker to adapt to any changes in language and he sees it as a potential, as a positive aspect.

David Crystal gave a speech which is available on YouTube, "The Effect of New Technologies on English". He said that people are arguing that the English language is not the same as 20 years ago however in his statement it is the same. The difference exists only

on Internet in written format. He used SMS texts and Twitter as examples. SMS text has a limit of 160 characters and in case you go pass that you pay as you are sending second SMS and so on. So to be able to fit something people wanted to write down in the text they started using abbreviations. Twitter had a boom in 2006 with millions of users who read other peoples' posts; limit to one post is 140 characters and people were really hooked up on Twitter. In order to express themselves they needed to fit their mind in those 140 characters and how else but with the use of abbreviations and emoticons. With a collection of posts and text messages he even found out that only 10% of each text is written with the use of abbreviations and the rest are normal words so he doesn't understand the whole complaining on how social media and Internet are "ruining English language".

Virtual world, the one we live through social media and new technologies, according to David Crystal, may become more visual and graphic than textual. In his book *Language and the Internet, Chapter 6 "The Language of Virtual Worlds"* Crystal stated that virtual world and texting will become more like our real world and real communication. He compared social media applications that serve as chatting platform to "informal face-to-face communication" and said it is more difficult to study those chat platforms than real conversation. For public writing that is visible online to anybody people are using words and language more effectively as it is considered as a public statement. More informal way of communication is in a closed conversation and that is harder to study and investigate (Crystal, 2006).

College Students and the use of the New Language

Today one of the questions that pop up when discussing the social media is their positive or negative influence. In a research made in (2016) Azerbaijan by Milana Abbasova, PhD professor on Khazar University she is discussing whether it has an impact on knowledge

and studying of Azerbaijan students, primarily focusing on English language. Several researches so far showed that usage of social media had actually a positive influence on students when learning foreign languages (Bicen, 2015; Crystal, 2014). Students went through interviews and they almost unanimously stated that social media helps them with learning language and in addition makes it more interesting.

Considering the development of technologies and easy access to Internet and therefore using the social media, younger generations are spending a significant amount of time on those. So far researches showed positive impact rather than negative when it comes to learning foreign languages through social media, and also verbal skills are enhancing. Abbasova's research was made on 104 students overall from different fields of study. Firstly, when talking about vocabulary, half of participants agreed that they try to use richer vocabulary when sharing messages with others on. In the other hand mere 60% stated that they don't see any development in their vocabulary even though they are active on social media. Secondly in the case of grammar most of them think that social networks helped them improve their grammar, but the researches still showed that social networks negatively influence on grammar section of English language, due to abbreviations and omitting vowels. More writing improves writing skills but in this case of social media, lot of students are avoiding grammar rules and are also avoiding long sentences (Abbasova, 2016).

In the previous section, the author of this research tried to compile the existing information available on the topic of the influence of the social media on the literacy levels among adolescent population. In the following section, the author will try to assess the impact on a specific adolescent population – the students of the RIT Croatia, Dubrovnik Campus.

METHODOLOGY

For this research a Corpus-linguistic method was used as a mean of collecting necessary data. This method is used when studying and analyzing language, from a perspective of comparing grammatical and verbal. It is a study of language which observes a "*real world text*" and searches for differences against the "*natural language*" and the relation between the two. Corpus linguistics is an approach where any random or specifically chosen texts or writings have been collected with a goal of analyzing certain techniques of usage of language, grammar or lexical pattern.

This method is based on studying a real communication, whether in written form or orally, in order to interpret the data. Focus is on collecting the data, and with the rising development of computer and technology, it enabled digital storing of the data so later it could be retrieved and analyzed. Corpus Linguistics was first introduced in 1800 and grown exponentially since 1990's with the development of World Wide Web and is focused on a 'language as a collection of data' (Vaughan, 2015).

Purpose of this research was to collect data, such as text messages and E-mails for the sake of analyzing the grammatical and vocabulary part in order to examine whether there is or isn't a shift between formal and informal writing. Examination of the collected data was divided in several sections: use of emojis, abbreviations, punctuation, big or small letter, numbers mixing with letters, mixing the two languages and grammatical/spelling errors.

Intended audience for this research was the RIT college students, freshmen and seniors. From each year of study 20 participants, ages from 18 to 25 shared their data willingly to participate in this research. This population was selected for secondary research to investigate whether writing style, from informal to formal, changed during 4 years of education and because those generations grew up with the technology and Smartphones.

Response rate was low and hard to collect the data as some students didn't respond and thought it was crossing the privacy boundaries.

To collect the data, a form needed to be signed from the side of researcher as consent that no information from the texts or E-mails will be used for any other purposes except to do the research. The form was handed to any willing participant personally by researcher and small number of students actually sent the data to participate due to the sensitive and private data. After receiving enough materials to go further with research all the factors needed to be taken in consideration, from grammar to emojis, in order to check whether social media influenced writing skills and did they improve or stayed the same during the education at RIT.

RESULTS

After analyzing the data collected from 15 Senior students and 15 Freshman students, results did differ. Data was divided in two sections: E-mails and textual messages from both groups. What this research intended to find, alongside the difference between the 2 study groups, was to check both freshman and senior students writing styles with YES/NO scale in terms of analyzing the data. For all two sections content was analyzed with the same pattern. Each table (2 for Freshman and 2 for Senior students) analyzed the usage of Emojis, Spellchecking, Grammar, Abbreviations, Mixing Language, Punctuation, Capitalizations and Letters Instead of Numbers. Also for E-mails, 'Greetings and Farewell' category was implemented as it is actually an important part of such type of texting. If student used emojis in his/her presented textual message or E-mail then number 1, meaning YES, would fill that cell in the table; if not number 2 stands for NO. There were several examples where some of those categories don't apply to selected content and 0 replaced the "not applicable" part.

In Table 1.1 (see below) was described the style of writing form the group of Freshman, where from those 8 categories, only 1 category scored over 50% meaning that the answer was YES more than NO. In this case more freshman students are using abbreviations, 53% of those from the study group. All other categories were below 50% which means, when texting they don't care as much about professionalism and the grammatical or punctual part of the texts. Even the Emoji part is in higher usage than with the Freshman group, however, everything else is on most cases checked and in order. Only Punctuation category was low in both groups. Possible reason for the lack of punctuations in the text messages could be, when starting new sentence people (in this case RIT students) probably hit "Enter" and start new text thread so punctuations are avoided. What was found out through that part of research was that only sentences which are questions usually end up with question mark.

Results from table 1.2 show that Senior students at RIT Croatia Dubrovnik pay more attention to overall context of the messages, not just their meaning. Seniors, unlike the Freshman students, had 3 categories where they had score below 50%, but still it was over 40%. Senior students even in regular and casual typing to their friends or family members tried to be more professional.

The actual difference between Freshmen and Seniors, is that Senior students do more spellchecking and are more grammatically correct when writing both E-mails and Assignments than Freshman, who still need to learn to be more careful when to make the transition from informal to formal. More formal style is missing in texts and documents which are meant to be professional. Freshman students are lacking the greeting and farewell parts of E-mails and some students still write them in native, Croatian language, even though it is obligatory to write in formal English. The transition between Freshman and Senior was much more visible when E-mails were analyzed. Almost every Senior had a greeting and farewell part and fully spellchecked, and in order to send, while Freshman students are less

formal when dealing with E-mails (Tables 2.1 and 2.2). Hopefully during the education writing E-mails will shift to more professional.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

As previously mentioned, purpose for conducting this research was to observe if student writing skills were influenced by all the social media which has flooded the world. Millenials are most under its influence as they are growing up with the technologies and there is no escape. Form young ages children have and use Smartphones and are surfing on Web. Lead researcher in the field of linguistics, David Crystal is not rejecting social media and the rise of technologies as do other Baby Boomers and Generation X. They are arguing that it will inevitably ruin people and make them lazy and unwilling to read or even learn; they are under impression that all Millenials do is swiping down pictures on Facebook and Instagram. On the other hand David Crystal in his book "*Language and the Internet*" had arguments that prove that younger generations are learning, reading and writing even more than they did before the rise of technologies. What influences Millenials to enhance their writing skills?

It has became a stereotype that Millenials are only wasting time using Smartphones and social media; truth is that through such they are leaning new words, new languages and when on social media they are constantly reading something, even writing. Problem may occur when individuals don't know English grammar or are too lazy to correct their sentences. Research done in Azerbaijan showed that students are not only reading more, they are learning new things and with the help of social media they are improving their grammar in English, as students in Azerbaijan aren't English native speakers (Abbasova, 2016).

The unfortunate obstacle for this research to be full and 100% accurate, is that it should've been longitudinal study. One group of current Freshman students should be studied through course of 4 years; since enrolling until their graduation; and over the years their

texting, writing assignments and E-mails should be monitored to check the changes from year to year. Prior to the lack of time, this research was made as a comparative and observed the difference between Freshman and Senior students of 2018/2019 generation.

As Seniors are longer impacted by the RIT community and social media, their overall texting and writing enhanced and is better than writing habits from current freshman generation 2018/2019. Due to constantly being "on the web", Millenials are more likely to improve their writing skills and pay more attention to the structure of their text messages. Seniors are more inclined to leave a good impression when putting their words in written sentences than be 'sloppy' and lazy when writing. This research gathered small amount of data, however still significant to prove that over the period of time spent at college with professors and influence of media, writing skills can change for better.

Contradictory the popular opinion that younger generations are reading and writing less, they are actually reading and writing more than before. Of course negative sides exist – hours spent looking down at Smartphones and endless scrolling of pictures and posts, and avoiding the punctuation marks and capital letters as influenced by popular "memes". If looking from other perspective, Millenials are spending more time reading those posts and memes and mentioned previously through research, some students reported they even learned new words, phrases or even different language. Not everything about social media is bad, people just have to make a good use of it and turn it into a learning component.

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APPENDIX

*Collected data is personal for each participant of this research and due to the sensitivity of messages and texts, researcher signed a consent that it will not be displayed.

Table 1.1 Freshman Text Messages - Amount of usage of each category per text

(In percentages)

	EMOJIS	NUMBERS INSTEAD LETTERS	MIXING LANGUAGE	ABB.	CAPITALIZATION	GRAMMAR	PUNCTUATION	SPELLCHECKING
YES	40	33.3	20	53.3	20	33.3	26.7	40
NO	60	66.7	80	46.7	73.3	66.7	73.3	60
N/A	/	/	/	/	6.7	/	/	/

EMOJIS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	6	40
	2	9	60
	Total	15	100

NUMBERS INSTEAD OF LETTERS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	5	33.3
	2	10	66.7
	Total	15	100

MIXING LANGUAGE

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	3	20
	2	12	80
	Total	15	100

ABBREVIATIONS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	8	53.3
	2	7	46.7
	Total	15	100

CAPITALIZATION

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	0	1	6.7
	1	3	20
	2	11	73.3
	Total	15	100

GRAMMAR

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	5	33.3
	2	10	66.7
	Total	15	100

PUNCTUATION

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	4	26.7
	2	11	73.3
	Total	15	100

SPELLCHECKING

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	6	40
	2	9	60
	Total	15	100

Table 1.2 Senior Text Messages - Amount of usage of each category per text

(In percentages)

	EMOJIS	NUMBERS INSTEAD LETTERS	MIXING LANGUAGE	ABB.	CAPITALIZATION	GRAMMAR	PUNCTUATION	SPELLCHECKING
YES	46.7	46.7	66.7	53.3	60	66.7	40	73.3
NO	53.3	53.3	33.3	46.7	26.7	33.3	60	26.7
N/A	/	/	/	/	13.3	/	/	/

EMOJIS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	7	46.7
	2	8	53.3
	Total	15	100

NUMBERS INSTEAD OF LETTERS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	7	46.7
	2	8	53.3
	Total	15	100

MIXING LANGUAGE

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	10	66.7
	2	5	33.3
	Total	15	100

ABBREVIATIONS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	8	53.3
	2	7	46.7
	Total	15	100

CAPITALIZATION

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	0	2	13.3
	1	9	60
	2	4	26.7
	Total	15	100

GRAMMAR

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	10	66.7
	2	5	33.3
	Total	15	100

PUNCTUATION

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	6	40
	2	9	60
	Total	15	100

SPELLCHECKING

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	11	73.3
	2	4	26.7
	Total	15	100

Table 2.1 Freshman E-mails

(In percentages)

	EMOJIS	NUMBERS INSTEAD LETTERS	MIXING LANGUAGE	ABB.	CAPITALIZATION	GRAMMAR	PUNCTUATION	SPELLCHECKING	GREETING AND FAAREWELL
YES	33.3	20	13.3	0	73.3	73.3	66.7	73.3	46.7
NO	66.7	80	86.7	100	26.7	26.7	33.3	26.7	53.3

EMOJIS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	5	33.3
	2	10	66.6
	Total	15	100

NUMBERS INSTEAD OF LETTERS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	3	20
	2	12	80
	Total	15	100

MIXING LANGUAGE

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	2	13.3
	2	13	86.7
	Total	15	100

ABBREVIATIONS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	0	0
	2	15	100
	Total	15	100

GREETINGS AND FAREWELL

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	7	46.7
	2	8	53.3
	Total	15	100

CAPITALIZATION

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	11	73.3
	2	4	26.6
	Total	15	100

GRAMMAR

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	11	73.3
	2	4	26.7
	Total	15	100

PUNCTUATION

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	10	66.7
	2	5	33.3
	Total	15	100

SPELLCHECKING

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	11	73.3
	2	4	26.7
	Total	15	100

Table 2.2 Senior E-mails

(In percentages)

	EMOJIS	NUMBERS INSTEAD LETTERS	MIXING LANGUAGE	ABB.	CAPITALIZATION	GRAMMAR	PUNCTUATION	SPELLCHECKING	GREETING AND FAAREWELL
YES	0	20	0	0	80	86.7	100	93.3	80
NO	100	80	100	100	20	13.3	0	6.6	20

EMOJIS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	0	0
	2	15	100
	Total	15	100

NUMBERS INSTEAD OF LETTERS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	3	20
	2	12	80
	Total	15	100

MIXING LANGUAGE

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	0	0
	2	15	100
	Total	15	100

ABBREVIATIONS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	0	0
	2	15	100
	Total	15	100

GREETINGS AND FAREWELL

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	12	80
	2	3	20
	Total	15	100

CAPITALIZATION

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	12	80
	2	3	20
	Total	15	100

GRAMMAR

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	13	86.7
	2	2	13.3
	Total	15	100

PUNCTUATION

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	15	100
	2	0	0
	Total	15	100

SPELLCHECKING

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	14	93.3
	2	1	6.7
	Total	15	100