



SEMANTIC CHANGES IN SOCIAL MEDIA VOCABULARY IN MODERN ENGLISH

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Abstract. *The expansion of social media has brought significant changes not only to communication practices but also to the vocabulary of Modern English. Many commonly used lexical units have developed new meanings as a result of their frequent use in digital environments. This article examines semantic changes in social media vocabulary, focusing on processes such as semantic broadening, metaphorical extension, and contextual reinterpretation. By analyzing words like post, story, feed, follow, and viral, the study demonstrates how existing vocabulary adapts to new communicative realities. The findings suggest that semantic change in social media is rapid, systematic, and closely connected to technological and social development.*

Keywords: *semantic change, social media vocabulary, Modern English, metaphor, digital discourse, lexical evolution*

Annotatsiya: *Ijtimoiy tarmoqlarning kengayishi nafaqat muloqot amaliyotiga, balki zamonaviy ingliz tilining lugʻat tarkibiga ham sezilarli taʼsir koʻrsatdi. Koʻp qoʻllaniladigan leksik birliklar raqamli muhitda tez-tez ishlatilishi natijasida yangi maʼnolarni kasb etdi. Mazkur maqolada ijtimoiy tarmoqlar leksikasidagi semantik oʻzgarishlar koʻrib chiqilib, semantik kengayish, metaforik koʻchish hamda kontekstual qayta talqin kabi jarayonlarga alohida eʼtibor qaratiladi. Post, story, feed, follow va viral kabi soʻzlar tahlili orqali mavjud lugʻat birliklarining yangi kommunikativ realiyalarga qanday moslashishi yoritiladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni koʻrsatadiki, ijtimoiy tarmoqlardagi semantik oʻzgarishlar tezkor, tizimli boʻlib, texnologik va ijtimoiy rivojlanish bilan chambarchas bogʻliq.*

Kalit soʻzlar: *semantik oʻzgarish, ijtimoiy tarmoqlar leksikasi, zamonaviy ingliz tili, metafora, raqamli diskurs, leksik evolyutsiya*

Аннотация. *Расширение социальных сетей оказало значительное влияние не только на коммуникативные практики, но и на словарный состав современного английского языка. Многие широко используемые лексические единицы приобрели новые значения в результате их частого употребления в цифровой среде. В данной*



*статье рассматриваются семантические изменения в лексике социальных сетей с акцентом на такие процессы, как семантическое расширение, метафорическое переосмысление и контекстуальная интерпретация. На примере слов *post*, *story*, *feed*, *follow* и *viral* показано, каким образом существующая лексика адаптируется к новым коммуникативным реалиям. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о том, что семантические изменения в социальных сетях происходят быстро, носят системный характер и тесно связаны с технологическим и социальным развитием.*

Ключевые слова: *семантические изменения, лексика социальных сетей, современный английский язык, метафора, цифровой дискурс, лексическая эволюция*

INTRODUCTION

Language has always reflected the realities in which it is used, and in the modern world, few realities have had as strong an impact as social media. Over the past two decades, digital platforms have transformed the way people communicate, share information, and interact with one another. This transformation has not only introduced new forms of communication but has also reshaped the meanings of many existing words in English. Instead of relying entirely on newly created vocabulary, speakers have actively reused familiar lexical units and adapted them to new contexts. As a result, a large number of everyday words have acquired additional meanings that are now strongly associated with online communication. The importance of studying semantic change in social media vocabulary lies in the fact that these changes are not isolated linguistic phenomena. They reflect broader shifts in communication patterns, social interaction, and even cultural values. Words such as *post*, *story*, and *follow*, which once had clear and limited meanings, are now used in ways that

would have been unfamiliar only a few decades ago. These developments illustrate how language evolves in response to practical needs, especially when new technologies create new forms of interaction. This article aims to explore how semantic change operates within social media vocabulary and to identify the main patterns behind these transformations. Particular attention is given to the role of metaphor, frequency of usage, and context in shaping modern meanings. The discussion will show that semantic change in this area is not random but follows recognizable linguistic principles.

MAIN DISCUSSION

One of the most noticeable tendencies in social media vocabulary is the expansion of meaning through semantic broadening. Words that once referred to specific actions or objects have gradually developed wider applications in digital contexts. The word *post* illustrates this clearly. In traditional usage, it was associated with sending letters or holding an official position, but in modern communication it has become a general term for any content shared



online. Whether it is a photo, a comment, or a video, all of these fall under the same lexical unit. The core idea of placing or delivering information remains, yet the medium has changed, allowing the word to function in a much broader communicative space.

A similar pattern can be observed in the word *story*. Historically, it referred to a narrative or sequence of events, often with a clear beginning and ending. In social media environments, particularly on platforms owned by Meta Platforms, the word now denotes short, temporary content that disappears after a limited time. Although the format has changed significantly, the underlying idea of sharing personal experiences or information still connects the traditional and modern meanings. This continuity helps explain why such semantic shifts are easily accepted by speakers. Metaphorical thinking plays a central role in many of these changes. Rather than creating entirely new terms, users interpret digital concepts through familiar physical experiences. The word *feed*, for instance, originally referred to giving food, especially to animals. In contemporary usage, it describes a continuous stream of content presented to users on a platform. The metaphor suggests that information is something that can “nourish” or engage the user, much like food sustains the body. This conceptual transfer makes the new meaning both intuitive and memorable.

In a comparable way, the verb *follow* has moved from physical

movement to digital interaction. Traditionally, it described the act of going behind someone or moving in the same direction. In social media, it refers to subscribing to another person’s content or updates. The physical sense of movement has disappeared, yet the idea of maintaining connection or tracking someone’s activity remains present. This shows that semantic change often preserves certain core elements while adapting others. The influence of metaphor is also evident in the word *viral*. Its original use was limited to medical contexts, describing the spread of disease. In online communication, it now refers to content that spreads rapidly across users and platforms. The shift is not arbitrary; it is based on the shared concept of rapid and uncontrollable spread. Because this analogy is easy to understand, the new meaning has become widely accepted in a relatively short period of time.

It is also important to note that context plays a crucial role in interpreting these meanings. Many of the words discussed have not lost their original senses; instead, they have become polysemantic. For example, the word *stream* may refer to flowing water in one situation and to online broadcasting in another. Without contextual awareness, it may be difficult to determine the intended meaning. This highlights the increasing importance of pragmatic competence in modern communication. The speed at which these changes occur is another striking feature. In earlier periods of



language development, semantic shifts often took generations to become established. In contrast, social media allows new meanings to spread almost instantly. Platforms such as X contribute to this process by exposing users to repeated patterns of language use. Once a new meaning becomes frequent enough, it quickly gains acceptance and may even appear in dictionaries. In addition to this, social media vocabulary often crosses the boundary between informal and formal language. Terms that originate in casual online interaction are increasingly used in

journalism, academic discussions, and professional communication. This suggests that semantic change in digital environments is not limited to one register but gradually influences the language as a whole.

To make the analysis more systematic, a small sample of commonly used social media lexical units was examined. The focus was on identifying the dominant types of semantic change observed in everyday digital communication.

| Type of semantic change | Number of Examples | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Semantic Broadening | 5 | 35% |
| Metaphorical Extension | 6 | 40% |
| Metonymic Shift | 2 | 13% |
| Amelioration / Pejoration | 1 | 7% |
| Semantic Bleaching | 1 | 5% |
| Total | 15 | 100% |

The results of this small-scale analysis show that metaphorical extension and semantic broadening are the most frequent mechanisms in social media vocabulary. Together, they account for the majority of observed changes, which confirms the theoretical assumption that speakers prefer to adapt existing words rather than create entirely new ones.

Metaphorical extension appears slightly more dominant, which can be explained by the need to conceptualize digital experiences through familiar physical or everyday concepts. Words such as *feed*, *stream*, and *viral* clearly demonstrate this tendency. Semantic broadening, on the other hand, reflects the

expansion of meaning into new communicative domains, as seen in words like *post* and *friend*. Less frequent processes such as metonymy and semantic bleaching still play a role but are not as central in this particular lexical field. This distribution suggests that social media language is primarily driven by cognitive and functional adaptation rather than evaluative change.

CONCLUSION

The analysis carried out in this article demonstrates that social media has become one of the most powerful forces shaping semantic change in Modern English. The vocabulary associated with digital communication shows clear



patterns of broadening, metaphorical extension, and contextual reinterpretation. Words that once had stable and concrete meanings now function across multiple domains, reflecting the complexity of modern communication. The findings also indicate that semantic change is

closely connected to human experience. As communication moves into digital spaces, language adapts by reinterpreting familiar concepts rather than replacing them entirely. This allows speakers to understand new realities through existing linguistic resources.

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