

# The Impact of Internet Slang on Social Power Structures: An Analysis Through Foucault's Theory

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**Abstract.** Internet slang makes communication faster and easier. Many groups, especially the young use it frequently in online communication. With the development of internet slang, people can find that internet slang may become an effective tool for marginalized groups to promote their discourse power and the social power structures may be changed. This research examines the rise of internet slang and its effects on social power structures. Using Michel Foucault's theories of power and knowledge to analyze the relationship between internet slang and discourse power. It explores the rhetorical mechanisms of internet slang, particularly how language influences people's emotions. Meanwhile, it also considers how social identities and authority are influenced by internet slang. By applying Foucault's theory, the paper explores these interactions in the context of power dynamics and the construction of knowledge. The findings are summarized in the conclusion, which offers perspectives for future research, solutions to study limitations, and emphasizes the significant role of internet slang in breaking the monopoly of discourse power that was controlled by authorities.

**Keywords:** Internet Slang, discourse power, social power structures.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

#### 1.1.1. The Rise of Internet Slang

In the digital age, Internet Slang has become extremely popular. Internet Slang has been frequently used in social media. For example, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and TL;DR (Too Long; Didn't Read) and other Internet Slang often appear in people's online chats. With the development of social media, many young people can communicate online more easily than before. The use of internet slang can not only promote communication efficiency, but also make the chat atmosphere more relaxed. Firstly, the rise of Internet Slang is mainly due to the popularity of social media. Secondly, the brief words of Internet Slang make people's online communication more efficient. Moreover, many Internet Slang is humorous, which makes them more acceptable. Finally, the use of Internet Slang can also give young people a sense of belonging.

#### 1.1.2. Influence of Social Power Structures on Discourse Power

The social power structure has a profound impact on discourse power. It will affect the allocation and competition of discourse power. In a society where few people control the most of discourse power, only the upper class have right to speak their views. Ordinary people's opinions are neglected. This is because the upper class has more resources and influence. Their decisions can easily have a great impact on the whole society.

On the contrary, in a society that a large part of discourse power are distributed to many ordinary people, public's opinions can be conveyed and disseminated. This change in the power structure promotes the diversification and democratization of the discourse power. The emergence of Internet slang has changed the distribution pattern of discourse power. It enables all kinds of voices and opinions to be disseminated in a humorous form. Individuals can express their own opinions through Internet slang on the Internet, and at the same time, they can also receive other people's opinions through it. This change weakens the traditional power structure's control on discourse power.

## 1.2. Research Purpose

The research purpose of this paper is to explore how internet slang change discourse power structures, using Foucault's theory to explain how internet slang becomes popular and spreads. Nowadays, internet slang has been used commonly by young people. They voice their opinions by using Internet slang. The fast spread of information on the internet helps them to express their views to the whole world which largely promotes their discourse power. The use of internet slang reflects the dynamic and evolving nature of language in the digital age. Internet slang has become a tool for marginalized groups to enhance their discourse power. The young people can use Internet slang to challenge traditional power hierarchies and promote their social status. By revealing the process of how internet slang changes the social power structure, we can better predict the evolution of social power structure and learn a lesson from history.

## 1.3. Research Significance

Through Foucault's theory, we can conclude that internet slang has become a tool that challenges traditional power structures. The public uses internet slang to enhance their discursive power. Traditional language paradigms are typically controlled by traditional culture, authoritative institutions. However, the popularization of internet slang is often bottom-up, which reflects the voices of grassroots or marginalized groups. Studying these changes can reveal how power structures shift in the digital age. If ordinary people can make good use of their creativity, the monopoly of discourse power can be broken, and their discourse power will be promoted. Internet slang challenges linguistic norms. On one hand, new forms of expression add vitality and creativity to language. On the other hand, they may be seen as a disruption of linguistic standards. Researching these phenomena helps us understand how modern society strikes a balance between free expression and linguistic regulation.

## 1.4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Questions: 1. Investigate the rhetorical mechanisms of internet popular discourse and its relationship with discursive power. 2. Investigate that how the internet slang become popular. 3. Investigate that how does Foucault's theory of power and knowledge explain the emergence and dissemination of internet slang in society.

Hypotheses: According to Foucault's theory, the development of internet slang is closely linked to power relations, as it both mirrors and shapes societal norms and knowledge within online environments.

## 2. The Relationship between Rhetorical Mechanisms of Internet Slang and Discourse Power

### 2.1. Analysis of Rhetorical Mechanisms

The rhetorical mechanisms are a series of rhetorical strategies which can be used to evoke emotional resonance and promote communication efficiency. For better voices your opinions in the internet platforms, making a good use of rhetorical mechanisms is an effective way. These mechanisms help internet slang spread rapidly. Humor and satire are parts of rhetorical mechanisms. It not only uses humorous language to make its points more easily accepted, but also employs satirical language to criticize immoral phenomena in society. These characteristics make internet slang widely accepted and rapidly spread.

#### 2.1.1. Use of Language Symbol

Language symbols, as a rhetorical mechanism, are frequently used in internet slang. In the internet platforms, we often use abbreviations to chat with others. For example, "lol" means "laughing out loud." These linguistic symbols not only improve efficiency by reducing communication time but

also deliver information within a more casual and relaxed communication environment. The convenience of using language symbols further accelerates the dissemination of internet slang. The application of language symbols plays an important role in internet discourse, making language expression more concise and interactive.

Malaysia is a multilingual country. Its language politics has a long history spanning several centuries [1]. In 2013, during the Lunar New Year, Malaysian opposition politician Teresa Kok released her New Year greetings on YouTube through two satirical videos. These humorous videos use Cantonese and Mandarin, with the theme of a Chinese New Year family reunion dinner. It aims to criticize government corruption and urge viewers (and voters) to "dare to try" new things. In Teresa's Chinese New Year videos, she cleverly employed wordplay to satirize the government's corruption and incompetence. This use of language symbols allows her videos to evade internet censorship.

### **2.1.2. Emotional Appeal and Persuasion**

Emotional appeal and persuasion, as a rhetorical mechanism, can evoke resonance and public emotions. This mechanism relies on mobilizing emotions and expressing feelings, utilizing the unique conciseness, interactivity, and symbolic means of online language to enhance the impact and persuasiveness of information. "FOMO" is an acronym for "Fear of Missing Out". It is an example of emotional appeal. It represents a typical internet slang widely used on social media platforms to express anxiety about missing out on certain activities or events. FOMO can make internet viewers feel fear and anxiety of missing something, evoking resonance in the public.

Many researchers have explored this emotion mechanism. According to Baumeister and Leary's Need to Belong Theory, humans possess a deep-seated need for belonging, and the fear of being excluded or missing important social events is a common human emotional response [2]. The FOMO slang generates influence by stimulating this intrinsic emotional need. Whenever people use or see the term FOMO on internet forums, they may subconsciously feel a sense of anxiety about missing out. Research shows that FOMO triggers complex emotional responses through simple language, effectively influencing people's attitudes and behaviors. Przybylski et al. noted in their study that there is a strong correlation between FOMO and the frequency of social media use, indicating that this emotional slang not only resonates with individuals but also encourages increased reliance on social media [3]. This further illustrates the impact of FOMO as an emotional and persuasive mechanism. It not only stimulates people's anxiety and encourages greater social participation but also enhances the interactivity of online platforms.

## **2.2. Exploration of Discourse Power**

Power structures and discourse power can influence each other. Power structures determine the distribution of discourse power. While the use of discourse power affects the evolution of power structures.

### **2.2.1. Social Status and Discourse Power**

The emergence of internet slang has become a method for marginalized groups to promote their discourse power. In the past, people with higher social status had more discourse power. Their words can have more influence than ordinary people. Discourse power can have an impact on the social status of individuals. Social structures' power is not unchanging. It can be affected by discourse power. People with low social status can enhance their discourse power through internet platforms. With the development of the internet, ordinary people can voice their opinions. An unjust encounter that happens in ordinary people can spread rapidly through the internet. A number of people will comment and share with their friends, thereby enhancing ordinary people's discourse power. Although authorities and government still have great control of discourse power, the emergence of internet platforms has become an effective tool to promote public discourse power. As Asen pointed out, the internet provides equal opportunities for different social identities to voice their views, enabling marginalized groups to participate in public discussion [4]. Such as the MeToo movement is just a

successful case. Female collectively voice their worries about harassment and gender inequality. Over time, this has changed public perceptions of gender violence and, to some extent, influenced related laws and policies. This expansion of online discourse power demonstrates how marginalized groups can reconstruct their social identities and challenge traditional power structures through discourse struggles on social media.

### **2.2.2. Internet Platforms can Influence Discourse Power**

Internet platforms can greatly influence discourse power structures. The information age, the dissemination of information is no longer as slow as it was before. In the era without radio and the internet, information was transmitted very slowly, which prevented many people from receiving on time news, leading to most of discourse power being controlled by elites. However, with the rise of the internet in the information age, ordinary people now have the opportunity to voice their opinions on online forums. The discourse power of ordinary individuals has significantly increased compared to the past. The rise of the internet allows information to spread globally in a short time. The scale and speed of information dissemination provides unprecedented convenience for the shaping of discourse power. The public's discourse power has been amplified by online platforms. For instance, news about wars between countries resulting in civilian casualties' spreads rapidly across the internet to the whole world. For instance, "Cancel Culture" refers to the collective boycott or "canceling" of celebrities, brands, or individuals by the public. It is usually because their actions or remarks are considered offensive, immoral, or inappropriate by the public. This reflects the public's mistrust and scrutiny of power in the digital age, providing ordinary people a way to criticize and evaluate public figures, companies, or institutions through social media. This phenomenon also shows that the public is now clearly aware that internet slang is an effective tool for enhancing their discourse power. It is likely that such instances will become more frequent in the future. With the support of online platforms, the public's discourse power has been amplified. People will unite through internet platforms to voice their opinions and present their legitimate demands to the government and elites.

Although online platforms have amplified the public's discourse power, the control of that power still lies in the hands of a few. Many internet platforms monitor and censor the content posted by users. If the content does not comply with regulations, these views will not be seen by others. This suggests that true discourse power is not in the hands of the public. Algorithms, as a crucial mechanism for content distribution on platforms, determine which information gets amplified and disseminated. The algorithms of these internet platforms assess users' preferences and push content that they like to see. This creates an "information cocoon," which means people only see what they want to see. This algorithm-driven dissemination model appears decentralized on the surface but actually it leads to a new concentration of discourse power [5].

## **3. The Process of Internet Slang Becoming Popular**

### **3.1. An Analysis of the Popularity of Internet Slang**

#### **3.1.1. The Evolution of Hot Topics**

The evolution of hot topics are these stages [6, 7]. Initially, a several captures public attention. As discussions emerge, various opinions and reactions develop, leading to the increase of related content. Over time, people may pay less attention to this topic, because of the emergence of other topics which interest them more. Ultimately, the once hot topics are no hotter.

In order to understand how long people generally pay attention to hot topics. This research conducted a survey with 30 participants. As shown in Table 1, this survey asked students, teachers, and workers about the duration of their attention when they are interested in some hot topics. Below are the results:

**Table 1.** The result of survey

Attention Duration	Number of People	Percentage (%)
1day	4	13.33%
5day	9	30.00%
10day	10	33.33%
30day	5	16.67%
More than 90day	2	6.67%

### 3.1.2. User Engagement and Topic Dissemination

Internet users participate in the spread of topics by first engaging with a event that captures their attention [8]. They create related content and share it across various internet platforms. This sharing sparks discussions, attracting more users and leading to a wider reach. As discussions grow, users will interact with each other's comments. They comment, like, and share, creating a chain reaction. Public figures often join in, amplifying their reach. This leads to more people's participation, as the topic gains more influence. Over time, new perspectives and opinions emerge, enriching the conversation. Memes and humor can also play a role, making serious topics more attractive. Ultimately, this continuous engagement influences people's views, demonstrating the power of collective voices.

## 3.2. Exploration of Meaning

### 3.2.1. The Impact of Internet Slang on Public Opinion

Internet slang has a big impact on public opinion [9]. It makes discussions more accessible, allowing users to express views and emotions with the use of internet slang. For example, terms like "lit" and "FOMO" resonate with younger internet users, creating a sense of shared experience. Text analysis of social media posts shows that the use of slang encourages people to comment and participate in. This inclusivity empowers marginalized people and challenges dominant narratives, fostering collective expression that can influence social views and drive social change.

### 3.2.2. Cultural Identity and Social Change

Internet slang plays a vital role in shaping cultural identity and driving social change [10]. This shared vocabulary allows people to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences authentically. Terms like "woke" and "lit" not only convey meaning but also foster a sense of belonging among users. As these slang terms gain influences, they become symbols of awareness, encouraging discussions about social issues. This enables users to challenge dominant cultural narratives, thus inspiring collective action and promoting social transformation. This shows that language can be a strong way for people to express their culture and drive social change. It brings communities together and supports movements for fairness and equality [11].

## 4. The Application of Foucault's Theory of Power and Knowledge in Internet Slang

### 4.1. Overview of Foucault's Theory of Power and Knowledge

Foucault's theory of power and knowledge examines how knowledge shapes power dynamics in society [12]. He suggests that power is not just a force that represses but also produces knowledge, influencing social behaviors. This relationship suggests that what is considered "true" knowledge is often determined by those authorities. Through textual analysis of his writings, we can see how discourses establish boundaries for acceptable thought and behavior. This understanding helps reveal how individuals can challenge these power structures effectively.

## 4.2. Interpretation of Internet Slang from Foucault's Theory

From Foucault's viewpoint, we can find that internet slang can disrupt traditional power structures. It allows users to create a distinct language that reflects their identities and social realities. When people use internet slang, they can object to popular ideas and question social rules [13]. This language helps create a sense of belonging and unity, especially among marginalized groups. Through internet slang, users voice their views, making it an effective tool for social engagement and transformation [14].

## 4.3. The Explanation of Foucault's Theory: The Relationship between Discourse Power and Internet Slang

Foucault's theory provides insight into the relationship between discourse power and internet slang. He argues that language is a tool of power that shapes how we think and act. Internet slang serves as a form of informal communication that can challenge dominant cultural narratives. By using internet slang, individuals, particularly those from marginalized countries, can express their viewpoints freely [15]. This form of language disrupts traditional power structures by creating space for alternative voices. As internet slang spreads, it influences public opinion and redefines social norms, highlighting the dynamic interplay of language and power in digital culture.

## 5. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that internet slang has changed discourse power structures allowing people to “speak loud” on the internet. It empowers marginalized voices and challenges dominant narratives by providing a platform for collective expression. The use of informal language fosters community, enhances engagement, and encourages discussions around important social issues. It is evident that internet slang shapes public opinion and plays a significant role in breaking the monopoly of discourse power that was controlled by authorities. From this research, we can understand that internet slang has become an important tool to facilitate social communication. It accelerates the evolution of topics and promotes the efficiency of communication. With the development of technology, we can explore how the new technology influences the development of internet slang. Investigating the impact of different social media platforms on language use may yield valuable information. Additionally, exploring the relationship between internet slang and social movements may provide insights about how language shapes activism and public discourse. This study gives important insights but also has limits. It mainly looks at one group of people, which might not show the views of all internet slang users. Future studies should include more different groups to get different opinions. Long-term studies could help us see how internet slang changes over time and affects culture and social issues. Moreover, exploring the attitude of people using internet slang from different countries could enrich the findings.

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