
A Morphological Analysis of Hashtag Neologism on Tiktok and Instagram

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Abstract

This study investigates hashtag neologisms on TikTok and Instagram within the Nigerian social media community. Although there has been extensive research on neologisms and hashtags individually, there is a notable absence of studies specifically addressing “hashtag neologisms”. This research fills the intellectual gap by examining the formation, meaning, and usage of 50 hashtag neologisms collected over three months. Findings reveal two categories: neologisms popularized through hashtags and those potentially originating as hashtags. Various morphological processes were identified, including blending, acronyms, and compounding some of which are characterized by semantic shift. This study contributes to internet linguistics by providing insights into the role of social media in language evolution. It offers a framework for analyzing hashtag neologisms applicable to other contexts and fills the gap in the literature concerning the study of hashtag neologisms on Instagram and TikTok within the Nigerian social media community. The research has implications for showcasing the linguistic creativity of social media users, illustrating how digital platforms facilitate the creation of new words and expressions.

Keywords: hashtag, neologism, morphological analysis, blending, compounding, semantic shift

1. Introduction

Social media platforms have become a hotbed for linguistic innovation, with "hashtag neologisms" being a fascinating intersection of technology and language development. Hashtags, consisting of words or phrases preceded by a hash symbol, are created by users to convey their feelings or organize content, making it easier to search. Neologisms are newly coined words that may not yet be recognized in the official vocabulary of a language but represent new concepts, phenomena, or objects, often formed through various word formation processes. TikTok and Instagram, two of the most popular and influential social media platforms today, frequently feature hashtag usage. These platforms foster linguistic creativity, where hash tags not only group content but also serve as channels for creative expression and community building. For this research, hashtag neologism is defined as new or repurposed words, phrases, or expressions that have gained traction through their use as hash tags on social media. Hashtag neologisms are hereanalysed as linguistic items. These newly coined words, used as hashtags by countless online users, are now extending their influence into offline language. Despite their widespread use and significant impact, hashtag neologisms have received minimal attention and study within the field of linguistics. While there are numerous academic studies on neologisms and hashtags, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically focusing on 'hashtag neologisms', particularly with respect to their formation processes, meanings, and usage patterns. The research gap is of interest because certain terms such as 'adulging' which likely originated or gained popularity through hashtags, have integrated into the English vocabulary. The absence of studies in this area limits our

understanding of how social media through hashtag usage motivates language innovation and the adoption of new terms.

This study therefore aims to identify hashtag neologisms commonly used on TikTok and Instagram within the Nigerian social media community, describe the morphological processes involved in the formation of hashtag neologisms, categorize these hashtag neologisms by types based on their morphological formation, establish the meaning and contextual usage of these hashtag neologisms within the context of both platforms, observe the recurring patterns in the formations of hashtag neologism, formulate possible rules that explain these patterns and provide justification for classifying each term as a neologism.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 briefly reviews concepts relevant to this study. Section 3 gives an overview of the methodology and Section 4 focuses on the presentation and analysis of data. The conclusion is given in section 5.

2. Review of Related Concepts

Internet linguistics is a term popularized by linguist David Crystal. It is a subfield of linguistics that studies language use on the internet, including online communication, social media, and digital discourse. It examines the unique features of online language, the impact of technology on communication styles, and the ways in which language evolves in response to new media (Crystal, 2011). The rise of social media has had a profound impact on the way we communicate and use language. Social media language is characterized by its informality, use of abbreviations, slang, emojis and hashtags. The Nigerian social media community has experienced rapid growth, with platforms like TikTok and Instagram playing significant roles in shaping digital interactions.

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As of January 2023, Nigeria had 31.6 million active social media users, with WhatsApp being the most popular platform, followed closely by Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Statista, 2023).

TikTok and Instagram, in particular, have become hubs for creativity and cultural expression among Nigerian youths. These platforms are not only used for entertainment but also for activism, education, and business. Nigerian creators on TikTok have gained international recognition for their innovative content, often participating in global trends while adding unique local flavors (Guardian Nigeria, 2024). Similarly, Instagram serves as a vital space for influencers, entrepreneurs, and artists to showcase their work and engage with a broader audience. Both platforms (TikTok and Instagram) are characterized by the use of hashtags.

Hashtags are words, phrases, and sentences that are preceded by and used together with a hash (#) symbol on social media platforms (Sprout Social, 2023). They allow users to easily find and engage with content related to specific topics or conversations. Hashtags may contain acronyms, phrases, and words. The first recorded hashtag #barcamp was credited to social designer Chris Messina in 2007. He created this hashtag with the purpose of categorizing content according to topic. Hashtags have certain characteristics that define them as listed below:

- i) A hashtag must begin with a hash (#) symbol. For example: #corn, #kiara.
- ii) A hashtag cannot contain spaces, even if it includes a sentence. If a space is included, only the text up to the space is considered. For example: the phrase "I love Kiara" would be represented as #ilovekiara.

- iii) Hashtags on most social media platforms are not case-sensitive, meaning #Kiara, #kiara, and #Kiara all lead to the same search results but on TikTok hashtags are case sensitive.
- iv) Hashtags can include alphanumeric characters (letters and numbers), but special characters (like &, \$, %) are generally not supported. However, some platforms allow underscores (_) and periods (.) within hashtags.
- v) Length limitations: While specific length limits can vary across platforms, hashtags are typically limited in length to ensure readability and functionality. For instance, Twitter allows hashtags up to 280 characters, while Instagram has a limit of 30 hashtags per post.

These characteristics highlight the essential rules and format requirements that define hashtags.

Hash tags are characterised by the following functions:

- i) Improve content discoverability: Hashtags make it easier for users to find your content by allowing them to search for and follow specific topics or conversations.
- ii) Increase engagement: Posts with at least one relevant hashtag tend to see higher engagement rates, as they reach a more targeted and interested audience.
- iii) Build community: Hashtags can help you connect with others who share your interests or are part of the same community. This can lead to valuable networking opportunities.
- iv) Track campaign performance: Branded or campaign-specific hashtags allow you to measure the reach and impact of your social media efforts.

On Instagram and Tiktok, hashtags are essential for finding content and connecting with communities. They allow users to dive into various topics and interests just by tapping on a hashtag. Whether it is #skincare or #travelphotography, hashtags help bring together

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users who have similar passions, nurturing a sense of belonging on the platform. It has been observed that new words are birthed via the use of hashtags on social media. New words in the early phase of their life cycle are called neologisms (Onyedum, 2012)

Neologism is a new word that is not yet recognized in the vocabulary of a language but represents concepts or things and is most times created through word formation. Igbokwe (2017) asserts that neologisms are newly coined words or expressions that arise to fill lexical gaps, often triggered by the emergence of new technologies, cultural trends, or social phenomena. Crystal (2003) defines a neologism as a word, term, or phrase that has been recently created - 'coined' - often to apply to new concepts, to synthesize existing concepts, or to make older terminology sound more contemporary. As Kerremans & Prokić (2023) observes, it is usually difficult to precisely decide how often new words have to occur to count as neologisms, and how often they are allowed to occur before they no longer count as a neologism but are considered established words. The time it takes for a neologism to enter a dictionary can vary widely as there is no specific time frame for a neologism to be added to a dictionary. It depends on how quickly the word gains widespread use, a consistent meaning, and shows staying power (Schmid, 2008). Some words might make it into the dictionary within a few years, while others might take much longer or never make it at all. Neologistic formations, draw on processes like blending, clipping, compounding, eponyms, affixation, back formation, borrowing, acronyms/initialisms and semantic extension to expand the lexical repertoire.

The term hashtag neologism is here defined as new or repurposed words, phrases, or expressions that have gained traction through their use as hashtags on social media. Not all neologisms become

permanent additions to the lexicon. The lifecycle of digital neologisms often follows a pattern. This categorization is based on Jiang et al. (2021) in their book 'Neologisms are epidemic: Modeling the life cycle of neologisms in China 2008-2016'. It can also be applied to the lifecycle of hashtag neologisms. The authors recognized these stages in the lifecycle of a neologism:

1. Creation: A word is coined, often in response to a new concept or phenomenon. This stage is driven by the need to describe something novel, whether it's a technological innovation, cultural trend, or social movement.

2. Propagation: The word spreads through social media and online communities. During this phase, the neologism gains traction as it is shared, retweeted, and used on various online platforms. The speed and reach of digital communication play a crucial role in this propagation.

3. Establishment: The word gains wider recognition and usage. It starts appearing in mainstream media, academic discussions, and everyday conversations. This stage is marked by the word's acceptance beyond its initial niche community.

4. Lexicalization: In some cases, the word becomes established in the broader lexicon and may be added to dictionaries. Lexicographers look for evidence of widespread and sustained use before including a neologism in a dictionary. This stage signifies the word's transition from a novel term to a recognized part of the language.

5. Obsolescence: Some neologisms may fall out of use as the phenomena they describe become outdated or irrelevant. For instance, early internet terms like 'cyberspace' have seen a decline in usage as more specific terms have emerged.

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Algeo's (1980) categorization of word formation methods can be applied to hashtag neologisms. The categorization includes:

1. Borrowing: e.g., #schadenfreude (borrowed from German)
2. Creating from existing elements: e.g., #adulthood (adding -ing to "adult")
3. Shortening: e.g., #tbt (Throwback Thursday)
4. Shifting meaning: e.g., #goals (repurposed to express admiration)

Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have accelerated the creation and spread of these neologisms. As McCulloch (2019) observes, "The internet has revolutionized the speed at which new words can spread" (p. 98). This is particularly evident in the rapid adoption of hashtag neologisms like #selfie, which was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013, just a few years after its first use on social media (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). The rapid spread and adoption of neologisms on social media platforms highlight the dynamic nature of language and its ability to evolve in response to new communication needs.

Hashtag neologisms employ various word formation processes. Blending, as seen in #BookTok, is particularly common, as parts of existing words are combined to create new terms (Caleffi, 2015). Other processes include compounding (#throwbackthursday), derivation (#adulthood), and abbreviation (#ootd - outfit of the day). These processes allow users to create concise, memorable tags that fit platform constraints while conveying complex ideas.

The meaning of hashtag neologisms often extends beyond the sum of their parts. For instance, #BookTok does not simply refer to books on TikTok, but encapsulates an entire community and culture around reading and book discussions on the platform.

Zappavigna (2015) notes that hashtags can develop rich, context-dependent meanings that evolve through community use.

Hashtags serve multiple pragmatic functions. Beyond categorizing content, they can express emotions, create in-group solidarity, or signal irony. For example, #blessed might be used sincerely or ironically, depending on context. Scott (2018) argues that spoken hashtags have even developed distinct pragmatic functions, illustrating how these linguistic innovations transcend their original digital context.

In the case of #BookTok, its pragmatic function extends to community building, content discovery, and even influencing book sales and publishing trends. This demonstrates how hashtag neologisms can have real-world impacts beyond their linguistic innovations.

By looking at hashtag neologisms through these linguistic perspectives, we can gain a clearer insight into how they are created, what they mean, and their cultural importance in online conversations.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine hashtag neologisms on Instagram and TikTok within the Nigerian social media community. It focuses on analyzing the formation, meaning, and usage of newly emerged hashtags. Random sampling was used, with the researcher observing content on both platforms over eight months to identify novel hashtags based on their distinctiveness and usage. Each identified hashtag is documented with details such as morphological type, meaning, context, and justification for being considered a neologism, using the Oxford Dictionary as a reference.

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Data analysis combines qualitative methods, such as categorizing morphological processes and analyzing contextual usage. It also includes quantitative techniques like frequency counts and visual representation. Data are presented in structured formats, and ethical standards are maintained by using only publicly available data.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

This study utilizes both qualitative and quantitative approaches to thoroughly examine the hashtag neologisms identified on Instagram and TikTok within the Nigerian social media community. The analysis begins with a qualitative description of Instagram hashtag neologisms, focusing on their morphological formation, meanings, contextual usage, and justification as neologisms. This is followed by a similar examination of TikTok hashtags, highlighting the linguistic creativity and platform-specific innovations. Together, these analyses aim to reveal patterns in how new hashtags emerge and function as tools of communication in these digital spaces.

Table 1 Instagram Hashtag neologisms

S/N	Hashtag	Morphological process	Meaning on Instagram	Contextual Usage
1)	#sdd (Super Double Drawn)	Acronym	Type of hair extension	Used to tag posts related to high quality hair extensions

2)	#work wear	Compounding work + wear	Fashion related to professional attire	Used to tag posts that showcase professional and office-appropriate outfits	Not found in OD
3)	#house hunt	Compounding (house + Hunt)	Content related to searching for house.	Used to tag posts that document the process of looking for a new home.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary.
4)	#ootdfashion	Compounding(ootd+fashion)	Showcasing daily fashion outfits	Used to tag posts that display daily fashion choices.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “OOTD” with “fashion” to create a new term specific to the platform.
5)	#owambe	Borrowing from Yoruba language	Refers to a large, lavish Nigerian party.	Used to tag posts related to Nigerian parties and celebrations.	Borrowed term not found in the Oxford Dictionary.

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6)	#styleinspo	Compounding (Style + Inspiration)	Fashion inspiration.	Used to tag posts that provide fashion ideas and inspiration.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “style” with “inspo” (short for inspiration) to create a new term specific to the platform.
7)	#qotd	Acronym formation (Quote Of The Day)	Daily quotes.	Usage in context: Used to tag posts that share inspirational or motivational quotes.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Acronym specific to social media content.
8)	#explorepage	Compounding (Explore + Page)	Content aimed at appearing on Instagram’s Explore page.	Used to tag posts that are intended to gain visibility on the	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “explore” with “page” to create a

				Explore page.	new term specific to the platform.
9)	#donor hairs	Compounding (Donor + Hairs)	Refers to hair gotten from one donor for extensions or wigs.	Used to tag posts related to wigs and extensions that has not been chemically processed.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “donor” with “hairs” to create a new term.
10)	#edgecontrol	Compounding (Edge + Control)	Hair product used to style and hold edges.	Used to tag posts that showcase or discuss edge control products.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “edge” with “control” to create a new term.
11)	#booknow	Compounding (Book + Now)	Encouragement to make a reservation or appointment.	Used to tag posts that promote booking services or events.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “book” with “now” to create a new term.

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12)	#mua	Acronym formation (Makeup Artist)	Refers to makeup artists.	Used to tag posts related to makeup artistry and services.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Acronym specific to the beauty industry on social media.
13)	#skinprep	Compounding (Skin + Prep)	Skincare preparation routines mostly before makeup application	Used to tag posts that showcase skincare routines and products.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “skin” with “prep” to create a new term.
14)	#bridal glam	Compounding (Bridal + Glam)	Glamorous bridal makeup and styling.	Used to tag posts that showcase bridal makeup and fashion.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “bridal” with “glam” to create a new term.
15)	#lashtech	Compounding (Lash + Technician)	Refers to professionals who specialize in eyelash extensions.	Used to tag posts that showcase eyelash extension services and techniques.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “lash” with “technician” to create a new term.

16)	#loctician	Blending (Locs + Technician)	Refers to professionals who specialize in dreadlocs	Refers to professionals who specialize in dreadlocs	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “locs” with “technician” to create a new term specific to the platform.
17)	#bestseller	Compounding (Best + Seller)	Refers to products that are selling exceptionally well.	Used to tag posts that promote top-selling products.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “best” with “seller” to create a new term.
18)	#muainlagos	Compounding (Makeup Artist + inLagos)	Refers to makeup artists based in Lagos.	Used to tag posts that showcase makeup artistry services in Lagos.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “MUA” with “in Lagos” to create a new term specific to the platform.
19)	#beachlife	Compounding (Beach + Life)	Refers to a lifestyle associated with the beach.	Used to tag posts that showcase beach activities and lifestyle.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “beach” with “life” to create a new term specific

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					to the platform
20)	#glueless	Derivation (Glue + Less)	Refers to wigs that do not require glue for application.	Used to tag posts that showcase glueless wigs.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “glue” with “less” to create a new term specific to the platform.
21)	#bibleverse	Compounding (Bible + Verse)	Refers to verses from the Bible.	Used to tag posts that share or discuss Bible verses.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “Bible” with “verse” to create a new term.
22)	#gymhumor	Compounding (Gym + Humor)	Refers to humorous content related to gym and fitness.	Used to tag posts that share funny gym-related content.	Justification as a neologism: Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “gym” with “humor” to create a new term specific

					to the platform.
23)	#family goals	Compounding (Family + Goals)	Content showcasing ideal family moments and relationships.	Used to tag posts that highlight positive family interactions and aspirations.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “family” with “goals” to create a new term specific to the platform.
24)	#asoebi	Borrowing from Yoruba language	Refers to a uniform dress traditionally worn in Nigeria during ceremonies.	Used to tag posts that showcase traditional Nigerian attire for events.	Borrowed term not found in the Oxford Dictionary.
25)	#couplegoals	Compounding (couple + goals).	Refers to idealized or aspirational aspects of romantic relationships.	Used to tag posts showcasing romantic moments, relationships, milestones, or	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines two existing words to create a new term

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Table 2 TikTok Hashtag Neologism

S/ N	Hashtag	Morphological process	Meaning on Instagram	Contextual Usage	Justificati on as Neologism
26)	#OOTD	Acronym (Outfit Of The Day)	Showcasing daily outfits	Used to tag videos or photos that display what someone is wearing on a particular day.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Acronym specific to social media fashion content.
27)	#foodietok	Blending (foodie + tok)	Content related to food enthusiasts and their culinary adventures.	Used to categorize videos that showcase food reviews, recipes, and food-related experiences .	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Blends “foodie” with “tok” in TikTok to create a new term specific to the

					platform.
28)	#GRWM	Acronym formation (Get Ready With Me)	Videos where users show their preparation routines.	Used to tag videos where users share their morning or evening routines, makeup tutorial.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Acronym specific to social media content.
29)	#momtok	Blending (mom + tok)	Content related to motherhood and parenting.	Used to categorize videos that share parenting tips, experiences , and stories.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “mom” with “tok” to create a new term specific to the platform.
30)	#fitcheck	Compounding (fit + check)	Checking and showcasing one’s outfit.	Used to tag videos where users show off their outfits.	: Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “Fit” (short for outfit) with “Check” to create a

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					new term.
31)	#hairvlog	Compounding (hair + vlog)	Videos related to hair care and styling	Used to tag videos that document hair care routines, styling tips, and product reviews.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “hair” with “vlog” to create a new term.
32)	#wigtok	Blending (wig + TikTok)	Content related to wigs and hairpieces.	Usage in context: Used to categorize videos that showcase wig styling, reviews, and tutorials.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Blends “wig” with “tok” in TikTok to create a new term.
33)	#fashion vendor	Compounding (fashion + vendor)	Content related to fashion sellers and suppliers.	Content related to fashion sellers and suppliers.	: Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “fashion” with “vendors” to create a new term.
34)	#POV	Acronym	Indicates a role-playing video	Signals a specific video format	Semantic shift of acronym. Meaning

				where the viewer is meant to imagine themselves in a scenario.	extension of existing meaning that is not found in the Oxford Dictionary .
35)	#CleanTok	Blending (Clean + Tok)	Content related to cleaning and organization .	Used to categorize videos that showcase cleaning tips, routines, and hacks.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “clean” with “Tok” in TikTok to create a new term specific to the platform.
36)	#bohobraids	Compounding (boho + braids)	Braided hairstyles with a bohemian style.	Used to tag videos that showcase bohemian-style braided hairstyles.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “boho” with “braids” to create a new term.
37)	#acneprone	Compounding (acne + prone)	Refers to skin that is prone to	Used to tag videos that discuss	Not found in the Oxford

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			acne	skincare routines and products for acne-prone skin.	Dictionary . Combines “acne” with “prone” to create a new term.
38)	#fitfam	Blending (fit + fam)	Refers to a community of fitness enthusiasts.	Used to tag videos that showcase fitness routines, tips, and community activities.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Blends “fit” with “fam” in family to create a new term.
39)	#microtwist	Compounding (micro + Twist)	Refers to a type of small, twisted hairstyle	Used to tag videos that showcase or discuss micro twist hairstyles	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “micro” with “twist” to create a new term.
40)	#christiangirl	Compounding (christian + girl)	Content related to Christian faith and lifestyle for girls.	Used to tag videos that showcase Christian faith, lifestyle, and	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “Christian

				community activities.	” with “girl” to create a new term.
41)	#schooltoks	Blending (school + toks)	Content related to school life and education.	Used to tag videos that showcase school experiences, tips, and educational content.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Blends “school” with “toks” in Tiktok to create a new term.
42)	#familygoals	Compounding (family + goals)	Content showcasing ideal family moments and relationships.	Used to tag videos that highlight positive family interactions and aspirations.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “family” with “goals” to create a new term.
43)	#FashionTok	Blending (Fashion + TikTok)	Content related to fashion and style.	Used to categorize videos that showcase fashion trends, outfits, and styling tips.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary. Combines “fashion” with “tok” in Tiktok to create a new term.
44)	#frontal	Derivation(suffix	Refers to a	Used to	While

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		ation)	type of wig or hairpiece that has a lace at the front of the hair from ear to ear.	categorize videos or posts showcasing , reviewing, or discussing this specific type of wig.	“frontal” exists as a word with its meaning. Here, it is use to describe a specific type of wig which is different from its original meaning. This represents a semantic shift. This meaning is also not found in the Oxford Dictionary .
45)	#summer 24	Blending	Refers to content related to the summer of 2024.	Used to tag videos that showcase summer activities, trends, and events for the year 2024.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Blends “summer” with “24” in the year 2024 to create a new term

					specific to the platform.
46)	#content creator	Compounding (content creator) +	Refers to individual who produce and share original content on social media.	: Used by individuals to identify themselves as producers of online content, or to tag posts about the process of content creation.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “content” with “creator” to describe a relatively new profession/role in the digital age.
47)	#smallbusinessowner	Compounding (Small Business Owner) +	Content related to individuals who own and operates small scale businesses.	Used to tag posts about entrepreneurship, small business challenges and successes, advice for running a small business, or to identify oneself as a small business own.	Combines “small business owner” into a single hashtag to create a new term. Not found as a single word in the Oxford Dictionary .
48)	#goviral	Compounding	Content	Used by	Not found

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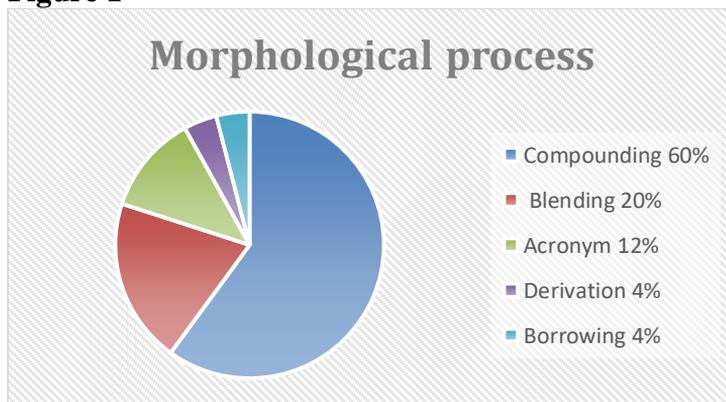
		(go + viral)	aimed at becoming widely popular.	creators to tag videos that are intended to gain widespread attention and shares.	in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “go” with “viral” to create a new term specific to the platform.
49)	#bosslady	Compounding (boss + lady)	Content related to a woman in a position of authority, leadership, or who runs her own business.	Used to tag posts that showcase female empowerment and leadership	Combines “boss” with “lady” to create a new term.
50)	#BookTok	Blending (Book + Tok)	Refers to the book-loving community where users share book recommendations, reviews, and literary-related content.	Used to tag post featuring book reviews, reading challenges, literary discussions , bookshelf, tours, or any content related to reading.	Not found in the Oxford Dictionary . Combines “Book” with “Tok” in TikTok to create a new term specific to the

					platform.
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The data presented above has been organized to show how many neologisms fall into each word-formation category for both Instagram and TikTok. This classification covers five types: compounding, blending, acronym formation, derivation, and borrowing, with overall totals calculated for each platform. On Instagram, compounding accounts for the largest number with 18 examples (such as #workwear, #familygoals, and #explorepage), followed by three instances of acronym formation (#QOTD, #MUA, #SDD), one blended term (loctician), one derived form (#glueless), and two borrowed terms (#owambe, #asoebi). On TikTok, there are 12 compounded hashtags (like #hairvlog, #fitcheck, and #bosslady), nine blends (#FoodTok, #BookTok, #momtok, etc.), six acronyms (#OOTD, #GRWM, #POV), and one derivative (#frontal), illustrating how different platforms vary in their use of creative word-formation strategies.

Representation of Data in charts

Figure 1



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This pie chart above shows the percentage of the data each morphological process accounts for. As seen in the total above, the chart shows that the most common morphological process used in the hashtag neologism is compounding, while the least common is derivation and borrowing respectively.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The initial part of the analysis is qualitative, focusing on identifying the types of word formation used in hashtag neologisms. It examines the meaning of these hashtags within their respective platforms, their contextual usage, and why they qualify as neologisms. This section reveals that not all morphological processes contribute to the creation of hashtag neologisms. The processes observed in the data include compounding, blending, acronym formation, derivation, semantic extension, and borrowing. Among these, compounding is the most prevalent method for forming hashtag neologisms within the Nigerian social media community on TikTok and Instagram. There are 18 compounds on Instagram and 12 on TikTok, totaling 30 hashtag neologisms formed through compounding. This finding aligns closely with a similar study by Danilaitis (2021), where compounding accounted for a majority of the hashtags examined. Following compounding in frequency is blending, which accounts for 10 of the 50 hashtags analyzed. Acronym formation represents six instances, while borrowing and derivation each account for two. These results address research questions three and four.

In exploring the classification of hashtag neologisms, it is apparent that although hashtags and neologisms have both been studied extensively, the specific term 'hashtag neologism' has not been

widely used in existing literature. Hashtag neologisms are either new or repurposed words and phrases that gain popularity through their use as hashtags on social media. This combination is important because some neologisms have become mainstream English terms largely due to their popularity as hashtags, for example, #adulthood.

What distinguishes hashtag neologisms from other neologisms is the inclusion of the hash symbol (#). For instance, #GRWM is a hashtag neologism. Based on observed trends, hashtag neologisms seem to develop in two ways. First, some neologisms gain widespread use through hashtags, even if they did not start as hashtags. Hashtags act as tools that amplify the reach of these terms, especially when used by public figures who can influence their audience. An example is #skinprep, a blend of 'skin' and 'prep' (preparation), commonly used by makeup artists to describe preparing the skin for makeup.

Secondly, some neologisms may originate directly as hashtags, though definitive proof is limited. People often create hashtags spontaneously based on moods or video content, which sometimes leads to new neologisms gaining traction, especially if started by influential users. For instance, while it cannot be confirmed that 'adulthood' originated as a hashtag, its rapid spread via social media and hashtag usage suggests this may be the case. Further investigation is needed to trace the precise origins of such terms.

If hashtag neologisms become part of everyday vocabulary, they represent a significant linguistic development that deserves attention. Additionally, an interesting trend in hashtag creation is the repurposing of existing words to convey new meanings within digital spaces. This semantic extension involves words being used in novel or expanded ways that differ from their traditional

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dictionary meanings. For example, ‘POV’ (Point of View) on TikTok refers to a style of role-playing video, and ‘frontal’ describes a type of wig. While these words exist in dictionaries, their social media meanings are new, justifying their classification as hashtag neologisms.

In analyzing the data, recurring patterns were observed in TikTok hashtags, which differ from the morphological processes involved in their formation. Many hashtags follow a formula where a topic is combined with the suffix ‘tok’ to create community-specific hashtags on TikTok. Examples include #momtok, #foodtok, and #cleantok. This pattern reflects how users adapt language to suit platform-specific contexts.

The hashtag neologisms observed in this study strongly illustrate the ‘notion of need’ in language evolution, which suggests that new words emerge to fulfill communicative demands, often to replace outdated terms or express new ideas. For instance, hashtags like #booktok and #FYP provide platform-specific vocabulary that helps users categorize and navigate content. Others, such as #OOTD (Outfit of the Day) and #GRWM (Get Ready With Me), offer concise ways to engage with trending topics, fostering a sense of community. Tags like #fitfam create connections around shared interests, while hashtags such as #glueless and #lashtech describe new techniques or professions emerging from technological innovation. Cultural expression is also evident in borrowed terms like #asoebi, which help users celebrate heritage and promote diversity.

5. Conclusion

This study has offered significant insights into the formation, meaning, and usage of hashtag neologisms on TikTok and Instagram within the Nigerian social media community. Through both qualitative and quantitative analyses, it identified key morphological processes such as compounding, blending, acronym formation, derivation, and borrowing that shape these neologisms, with compounding emerging as the most prevalent method. The research also revealed unique platform-specific patterns, particularly on TikTok, where a distinct formula for hashtag creation reflects how language adapts to digital environments.

By examining the meanings and contextual applications of these neologisms, the study deepened our understanding of how social media users creatively coin and repurpose words to meet new communicative demands. This linguistic innovation reflects broader cultural trends and the dynamic evolution of language in digital spaces. Moreover, the study addressed a gap in the literature by focusing on the Nigerian social media community, highlighting how local culture and language intersect with global digital practices.

The findings underscore the ‘notion of need’ in language change, illustrating how users develop new terms to express emerging social realities, foster community identity, and engage with evolving trends. Ultimately, this research contributes to a broader understanding of language evolution in the digital age, showing how social media platforms serve as fertile grounds for linguistic creativity and adaptation.

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