2016 Internet Slang: A Year in Review: "It was woke"
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In early 2016, the day before the State of the Union, the White House joined Snapchat in a promotional social media blitz. Alongside photos of the Oval Office and the Obamas' two Portuguese water dogs, the account posted a late-night pic of a White House corridor with the caption: "Major Key: get some rest before the big day." Just a few months earlier, DJ Khaled joined Snapchat and began using the phrase to indicate his keys to success, which included weekly pedicures and lots of cocoa butter. Within the span of a couple hundred days, the buzzword jumped from the rapper-producer's feed to the White House's.

That's the way slang works in an age of nonstop online chatter. Black Twitter invents a word and it's repeated with joy by the masses until Taco Bell joins in and signals it's time to move on. The internet falls in love with these terms just as quickly as it rejects them, like a spoiled kid who loses interest in their Hatchimal the second she sees a commercial for a Hatchimal 2.0. (I have no idea what a Hatchimal is.) The web's impossibly fast lingual churn has driven institutions like the Oxford Dictionaries mad, pushing it to select illustrated symbols and dystopian concepts as its words of the year. And as the world's social networks grow more vast, our lingual graveyard gets a little more cramped with antiquities like n00b, YOLO, on fleek. Case in point: By the time Khaled dropped *Major Key* in July 2016, it felt like the phrase had pretty much faded.

Vocabulary has always been extra fluid online, but this year—amid the culture wars of the presidential election, the death of our dearest legends, and modern history's most amazing display of celebrity revenge—it has reached Schrödinger levels. Not all of it originated in 2016, but this is the year it smothered us. Below, a ranking of words that we need to retire by 2017, ranked from least garbage to most garbage. And, mark my words, this is the last time I will ever write the word "garbage" without earnestly referring to discarded waste.

12. **Receipts** ● */re-ceets/* ● *noun "Show me the receipts!"*
Receipts on the internet are similar to receipts in real life in that they offer indisputable proof that something happened. This word and its function has been especially valuable in a year plagued with misinformation, propaganda, hoaxes, and shady celebs. Notable receipts of 2016 include the Kim Kardashian West Snapchat video that proved Taylor Swift is a liar and the 2005 *Access Hollywood* tape in which Trump uttered the words "grab them by the p*****." But Trump is our soon-to-be president and Swift is still rich and famous. Receipts matter much less than "narrative" (which is, ironically, a Swiftism). May I suggest moving on to the term carfax? It's a Beyhive favorite.

11. **Lowkey** ● */loh-kee/* ● *adverb "Lowkey I was down."*
In the true spirit of its definition, the word "lowkey"—a term meant to express a level of subtlety in a person's manner—was lowkey popular long before it went mainstream. You could credit that viral Zola the stripper Twitter tale for helping us fully embrace it. (Highlights: "she lowkey set me up," or "lowkey im cryin.") But what was once a helpful adverb for a decent*Hamilton* joke now feels overused for comic effect. Lowkey I'm over it.

10. **Here for** ● */heer-fawr/* ● *adverb "I am here for* The Young Pope*."*
The tiny boxes that social media affords our thoughts sometimes force us into patterns of shortened speech. In recent history, that subconscious tendency came through in the usage of the word "THIS" as a form of lazy retweet. "Here for ___" is essentially a two-word replacement of "this," a newer way to say you endorse something. It's just as boring.

9. **Extra** ● */ek-struh/* ● *adjective "Why you gotta be so extra?"*
Extra caught fire just in time for a year filled with people doing overly dramatic, excessive things. *The Bachelorette's* Chad was the definition of extra with his excessive bear metaphors, his consumption of deli meats, and his showy weight-lifting regimen. Apple was a little too extra in explaining why it removed the headphone jack from its latest iPhone. LeBron James was preemptively extra in celebrating the Indians' game-tying home run at the World Series. And Trump's RNC stage entrance, among many other stunts, took extra to new heights in the political realm. I'm fond of this one—mostly because it reminds me of this tweet—but it's old now. Byeeeeeeee.

8. **Ship** ● */ship/* ● *verb "I ship Ivanka and Chelsea."*
One of the internet's favorite pastimes is to fantasize about the possibility of celebrity relationships. (One need look no further than the fount of Kate Winslet and Leo DiCaprio romance theories for proof.) And shipping is a convenient verb for publicly endorsing potential hookups as succinctly as possible.

7. **Tea** ● */tee/* ● *noun "Spill the tea."*

Online (and [in reality television](#)), tea is neither herbal nor caffeinated, but hot gossip. Its usage is inextricably tied to a meme in which [Kermit the Frog sips a Lipton beverage](#) next to words that say, "That's none of my business." It was a fine meme, a fine word, and [a decent way](#) for LeBron to throw some lowkey shade. (This is the last time I get to use any of these words, let me live.) That is, until *Good Morning America* stepped in and erroneously labeled the meme #tealizard. The internet lost its mind over how uncool that was, there were many [takes](#), and the word lost its magic forever. I still might buy [that hat, though](#).

6. **Unicorn** ● */yoo-ni-kawrn/* ● *noun "Giannis Antetokounmpo is a total unicorn."*

This term has various definitions across sports, tech, and relationships that all hint at something rare. A unicorn in basketball is someone like Antetokounmpo, who is as tall as most centers and who can handle the rock like a guard, shoot from just about anywhere on the court, and run the floor as if he were six inches shorter than he actually is. A unicorn in tech is a company valued at over $1 billion. (In Canada, it's [a narwhal](#), which is very embarrassing for everyone.) A unicorn in the dating world is [apparently](#) a woman who dates a couple. In all of these cases, this word is insidery and vague. We can do better.

Also, technically unicorns don't exist.

5. **Lit** ● */lit/* ● *adjective "The liquor store on election night was lit."*

Lit is a helpful term in communicating whether a physical environment is exciting, active, and/or worth visiting at 3 a.m. For a minute, it was also a funny way to describe niche Twitter threads, comment sections, or Slack channels. Part of its success is obviously due to the fact that the shorthand for lit is the fire emoji. But the second Spotify named [a generic rap playlist](#) "It's Lit," it was time to move on.

4. **Fam** ● */fam/* ● *noun "C'mon fam."*

A word directly used to describe your peoples, someone you consider family. But more often it's a jumping pad from one nonsensical sentence to the next, often heard around club promoters and paired with "lit AF" for emphasis.

3. **Garbage** ● */gahr-bij/* ● *noun "I thought* Arrival *was a garbage movie, come at me."*

My colleague Kate Knibbs has already written an [extensive explanation](#) of how "trash," "garbage," and "dumpster fire" suddenly became casual internet speak. I'll admit these words are fun insults to throw at any company, content mill, or politician who has wronged us. The Associated Press seems to agree, based on its decision to make the word [dumpster lowercase](#) for ease of use. But it lost its jovial quality on election night, when *BuzzFeed* began throwing memes of the evening into a virtual dumpster fire on [its live Twitter broadcast](#) as Trump took the swing states. (I suspect there is no remaining evidence of this broadcast because of how embarrassing it was.) There's something too simplistic and playful about labeling the slow and deliberate dismantling of America's democracy as "trash."

2. **Cuck** ● */cək/* ● *noun/verb "Ted Cruz got cucked."*

I stand by my theory that the kind of people who like to say "cuck" are also the kind of people who probably take pleasure in not wearing deodorant on a crowded bus. Spoken aloud, the word resembles the sound of a bone getting dislocated or a single gross fart, and no one should be forced to hear it. Its origins aren't any more charming: It's short for "cuckhold," which is slang for a guy who lets his wife have sex with other men. Put to use, it's a more graphic version of the Khaledism "Congratulations, you played yourself." There's more: It began as Redditor slang and was slowly co-opted by—*GQ* [said it](#), don't @ me—"angry white men." We can mourn the loss of Pepe the Frog all we want, but this was never a lovable internet term. Shut it down.

1. **Woke** ● */wohk/* ● *adjective "Matt McGorry is a little too woke."*

With a heavy heart, I arrive at the year's most raggedy word: woke. At its best, it was a kind of jokey slang for someone who's aware of inherent economic, gender, racial, and other inequalities. For most of 2016, woke existed in a strange middle territory. It was easy to mock if used too casually, but efficient as a semi-sarcastic way to categorize an emerging category of celebrities, brands, television shows, and movies that either successfully or unsuccessfully highlighted the struggles of minorities. My *Ringer* [colleagues](#) [and I](#) sometimes used it in the latter way, but subtleties are often lost among the comment-section dregs. And, with the help of [Twitter's custom-made #StayWoke T-shirts,](#) the word has lost all of its original verve. If anything in this world is true, it's that the internet can't let anything good stay for long.