

## Students' Language Preferences in Social Media



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**ABSTRACT:** In the digital era, social media platforms have become essential spaces for communication, self-expression, and identity formation. This study examines university students' language preferences on social media, explores the factors influencing these choices, and analyzes the implications for communication and identity. Utilizing a qualitative research design, data were collected from 105 university students through a questionnaire comprising both close-ended and open-ended questions. The findings reveal that Bahasa Indonesia is the most frequently used language on social media, followed by regional languages such as Javanese and Sundanese, and foreign languages like English. Participants' language choices are influenced by factors such as comfort, habit, audience adaptation, and the desire for creative expression. A significant number of participants engage in translanguaging, combining multiple languages within a single post to express specific meanings, adapt to different audiences, and showcase their linguistic dexterity. The study also highlights the profound impact of language use on participants' sense of identity, with language choices reflecting cultural background, personal values, and social affiliations. Additionally, participants adjust their language use based on the social media platform, considering audience, content type, and platform norms. These findings provide valuable insights into the sociolinguistic trends in digital communication, particularly within multilingual settings, and underscore the importance of linguistic flexibility in expressing identity and navigating different social contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Media, Language Preferences, Multilingualism, Translanguaging, Identity Formation,

### I. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media platforms serve to be essential areas for communication, self-expression, and identity formation. For students, these platforms serve as dynamic environments where linguistic preferences and practices reflect broader sociolinguistic and cultural trends, extending beyond just a means for social interaction. The selection of language on social media is often intentional, shaped by individual identity, target audience, platform affordances, and sociocultural contexts. Researchers can gain valuable insights into how language, identity, and technology intersect in the modern era by examining these decisions. The multilingual features found in various student populations improve the linguistic diversity present on social media platforms. In multilingual communities, students often navigate between languages or integrate them in distinctive manners to overcome social, academic, and cultural barriers. Translanguaging behaviors allow individuals to utilize their whole language repertoires to accomplish communication objectives (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Social media establishes a distinct environment where these activities are both enabled and amplified, as users may adjust their linguistic selections to various audiences, from close friends to broader online communities. This phenomenon highlights the complicated relationship between language use and identity formation in digital environments.

Many research studies have investigated the impact of social media on language preferences and practices. (Androutsopoulos, 2015) highlights the notion of "networked multilingualism," wherein social media users engage in adaptable and hybrid language practices influenced by context and audience. Brenda & Herring (2007) examine the impact of digital platform features, including text formatting and emoji usage, on linguistic patterns and the enhancement of creativity. The findings underscore the significance of understanding student engagement with social media, both as consumers and as active creators of linguistic and cultural meaning.

The use of English as a lingua franca on social media is particularly notable within the framework of globalization. Although English frequently prevails in online environments, students in multilingual settings prioritize the use of local or regional languages to reinforce cultural identity and foster a sense of belonging. This dichotomy illustrates the tension between global and local identities, where linguistic choices on social media indicate adherence to global trends while maintaining cultural connections. The ability to switch between languages and integrate them within a single post or interaction highlights the adaptable and performative nature of language use in digital environments (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

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This study aims to examine students' language preferences on social media, explore the factors influencing these choices, and analyze the implications for communication and identity. This study examines student management of linguistic diversity in digital contexts, enhancing the understanding of language practices in today's digital age. The findings aim to better understand the ways in which digital communication reflects and impacts broader sociolinguistic trends, especially within multilingual settings.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Social Media and Language Practices

Social media has experienced considerable evolution since its beginnings, transitioning from basic text-based forums to multimedia-rich platforms that facilitate immediate contact and worldwide connection. Early platforms like MySpace and Friendster established a foundation for modern huge companies such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which currently accommodate billions of users globally. These platforms have transformed communication standards, providing new ways for individuals to express themselves, develop communities, and share information. The emergence of these platforms has transformed both interpersonal interactions and the perception and use of language in digital settings.

The significance of examining language utilization in digital environments is highlighted by the widespread impact of social media on modern communication strategies. Digital interactions on social media platforms frequently obscure the distinctions between formal and informal communication, written and spoken language, as well as local and worldwide communication (Esteron, 2021). These platforms offer an opportunity to examine how language is modified and creatively utilized to accommodate the unique characteristics and limitations of digital contexts. The character limitations on Twitter foster clarity and creativity, whereas the visual features of Instagram and TikTok facilitate the incorporation of emojis, hashtags, and multimedia elements to communicate messages (Zhou, 2021). Fundamental principles essential for comprehending language patterns on social media cover digital communication, audience design, and platform affordances. Digital communication implies the methods of engagement enabled by technology, distinguished by immediacy, multimodality, and global reach (Crystal, 2011). Audience design, as stated by Bell (1984), emphasizes how speakers modify their linguistic selections according to their perceived audience, a concept that retains significant relevance in social media environments because users must navigate between varied and frequently intersecting audiences. Platform affordances, a concept proposed by Hutchby (2001) (Zhou, 2021), define the characteristics and limitations of digital platforms that influence user interactions, including character limitations, multimedia capabilities, and algorithmic content visibility.

As these platforms progress, the linguistic strategies utilized by their users also develop. The analysis of linguistic practices in social media contexts elucidates the flexibility of language, the negotiation of identity, and the influence of digital technology on communication standards. International students frequently utilize social media to maintain connections with their native culture while adapting to their host culture, a process that entails a complex interaction of linguistic preferences and cultural adaptability (Tu, 2018). Moreover, social media platforms function as significant instruments for language acquisition and intercultural dialogue, offering genuine input and opportunity for practice in an atmosphere that is friendlier (Zhou, 2021).

### B. Multilingualism and Translanguaging in Digital Spaces

The rise of digital platforms has significantly shaped the ways in which multilingual individuals communicate and express their identities. Translanguaging, as defined by Garcia and Wei (2014), refers to the practice of using multiple language resources in a fluid and dynamic manner to communicate effectively. This concept challenges traditional views of bilingualism and multilingualism that treat languages as separate systems, instead viewing language practices as holistic and integrated. Social media environments provide fertile ground for such practices, allowing users to engage in flexible and creative language use. These platforms enable users to draw upon their entire linguistic repertoires, blending languages in innovative ways to suit various communicative purposes and contexts (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

On platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, multilingual users frequently blend languages within posts, captions, and comments, demonstrating a sophisticated negotiation of their linguistic repertoires. Androutsopoulos (2015) describes this phenomenon as "networked multilingualism," where social media participants seamlessly switch between languages depending on the communicative context and audience. This practice is not merely a display of linguistic dexterity but also a strategic tool for managing social relationships and identities online (Androutsopoulos, 2015). The affordances of these platforms, such as multimedia capabilities and global reach, further facilitate translanguaging practices, making them central to digital communication. For instance, the use of hashtags, emojis, and multimedia elements can enhance the communicative impact and reach of multilingual posts (Zhou, 2021).

Multilingual practices on social media are closely tied to identity construction and audience engagement. Students often leverage their linguistic skills to establish connections with diverse groups, demonstrate cultural affiliation, or signal membership in specific communities. For example, a student might use English to engage with international audiences while incorporating local phrases or idioms to resonate with peers from their home culture. This strategic language use not only reflects their identities

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but also negotiates their place within different social groups. The ability to switch languages fluidly allows students to navigate multiple cultural contexts and maintain their cultural heritage while engaging with a global audience (Tu, 2018).

The role of translinguaging in audience engagement becomes particularly evident in platform-specific contexts. On YouTube, content creators often use translinguaging to reach broader audiences, blending languages to attract both local and international viewers. Similarly, on platforms like TikTok, viral content frequently includes multilingual elements that resonate across cultural and linguistic boundaries. This dynamic reflects the performative aspect of language use on social media, where linguistic choices are tailored to maximize engagement and visibility. The use of multiple languages can also enhance the relatability and authenticity of content, making it more appealing to diverse audiences (Androutsopoulos, 2015)

In addition to fostering engagement, translinguaging practices on social media contribute to broader discussions about language norms and hierarchies. By using local and minority languages alongside dominant global languages, social media users challenge traditional notions of linguistic prestige and assert the value of linguistic diversity. This phenomenon underscores the transformative potential of digital spaces in redefining language norms and promoting inclusivity. The visibility of minority languages on global platforms can empower speakers of these languages and contribute to their revitalization and preservation (Garcia & Wei, 2014)

Through an exploration of these practices, this study aims to shed light on how students navigate linguistic diversity on social media and how their language choices reflect broader sociolinguistic dynamics. Understanding these practices not only contributes to the study of digital communication but also provides insights into the evolving nature of language use in a globalized world. The findings can inform educational practices and policies aimed at supporting multilingualism and digital literacy among students (Zhou, 2021).

### C. Language Preferences and Influencing Factors

Language preferences on social media are shaped by an interplay of sociocultural, technological, and interpersonal factors. Sociocultural influences significantly affect students' linguistic choices, reflecting broader cultural norms and practices (Prudencio et al., 2023). In multilingual societies, for example, local languages may be preferred for personal communication, signaling group identity and cultural affiliation, while English or other global languages might be used for professional networking and broader engagement. The choice of language becomes a reflection of not just individual identity but also societal values and cultural heritage (Crystal, 2011).

Peer networks and community norms also play a crucial role in shaping language preferences. Students are often influenced by their immediate social circles, adopting linguistic styles and practices that align with those of their peers. The desire to belong to specific online communities can drive the adoption of certain linguistic conventions, including slang, abbreviations, or multilingual expressions. Social media groups often develop distinct linguistic cultures that reflect their shared interests, goals, and social dynamics (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Platform-specific affordances further impact language use by offering or limiting communication modalities. For instance, platforms like Twitter, with its character limit, may encourage concise and creative language use, often incorporating emojis and code-switching for brevity and clarity. Conversely, platforms like YouTube and Instagram Stories allow for more extended and multimodal communication, facilitating the blending of visual and textual elements in multilingual storytelling. The design and algorithmic features of each platform shape how students express themselves and interact with their audiences (Hutchby, 2001).

The global reach of social media introduces another layer of complexity to language preferences. While English remains the dominant language for global communication, students often navigate a balance between using English for broader visibility and integrating local languages to maintain cultural connections and resonate with specific communities. This dynamic illustrates the tension between global and local language norms, where users must strategically navigate linguistic choices to achieve their communicative goals (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

Understanding these influencing factors provides insights into the motivations behind students' language preferences on social media. It also highlights the evolving role of digital platforms in shaping contemporary language practices and underscores the importance of examining these dynamics in multilingual societies. By exploring these practices, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how digital communication influences language use and identity construction in a globalized world (Zhou, 2021).

### D. English as a Lingua Franca and Local Language Use

The pervasive influence of globalization has positioned English as the dominant lingua franca in digital communication. On social media platforms, English frequently serves as a bridge language for users from diverse linguistic backgrounds to interact and share ideas. Its widespread adoption is fueled by factors such as the global reach of popular platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, the predominance of English-language content online, and the language's association with technological and cultural innovation. As a result, many students turn to English not only for broader audience engagement but also as a means of participating in global conversations (Crystal, 2011).

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Despite the dominance of English, local and regional languages remain crucial for cultural expression and identity maintenance. Social media provides a platform for students to celebrate linguistic heritage, convey cultural nuances, and foster community connections. The use of local languages can signal authenticity, cultural pride, and solidarity with a particular linguistic group. For instance, in Indonesia, students may switch between English and Bahasa Indonesia to achieve different communicative goals, whether to assert global awareness or express local identity (Zhou, 2021).

Balancing global and local identities in linguistic choices often requires students to navigate complex sociolinguistic dynamics. When crafting posts, captions, or comments, students may use English to address a wider audience while simultaneously incorporating phrases, idioms, or cultural references in local languages to maintain connections with their immediate communities. This dual approach allows them to straddle global and local communication spaces, creating hybrid linguistic expressions that resonate across multiple contexts (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

The integration of local and global language practices is further facilitated by the affordances of digital platforms. On platforms such as Instagram or TikTok, where content often goes viral across linguistic boundaries, students blend English with regional dialects, slang, or cultural markers to attract diverse audiences. This multilingual communication strategy not only enhances audience engagement but also redefines linguistic hierarchies by showcasing the value and creativity inherent in local languages (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Understanding how students negotiate these linguistic balances on social media sheds light on broader sociolinguistic trends in digital spaces. It highlights how English functions as both a tool for global participation and a linguistic canvas for local expression, ultimately reflecting the complex interplay between globalization and cultural preservation. This dynamic underscores the importance of examining not only the rise of English as a lingua franca but also the persistent and evolving role of local languages in shaping digital communication and identity (Hutchby, 2001).

### E. Implication for Identity and Communication

Linguistic preferences on social media are instrumental in shaping digital identities. As students navigate different platforms, their choice of language becomes a performative act that reflects their self-presentation and social affiliations. By selecting certain languages or language combinations, users signal membership to particular cultural, social, or professional groups. The strategic use of English, for instance, can project a cosmopolitan and globally connected identity, while the integration of local languages asserts cultural heritage and fosters intimacy within specific communities. These linguistic practices demonstrate how digital spaces serve as arenas for identity performance and social positioning (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

The negotiation of cultural and linguistic identities is a dynamic process influenced by the affordances of social media platforms and the diverse audiences they accommodate. Students often face the challenge of reconciling their local cultural identities with the global visibility that social media provides. This negotiation may manifest as code-switching between languages or as creative translanguaging practices that blend linguistic resources to suit both local and international audiences. For example, a student posting on Instagram may use English for captions to reach a broader audience while incorporating regional expressions or hashtags to maintain cultural authenticity (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

Moreover, these linguistic choices are often shaped by audience design. Users must consider who their audiences are—both immediate and potential—and tailor their language use accordingly. The ability to seamlessly shift between languages enables students to navigate diverse social contexts, maintain relationships with varied groups, and assert multifaceted identities. This fluidity reflects a broader sociolinguistic adaptability, where language serves as a tool not only for communication but also for identity negotiation and cultural expression (Bell, 1984).

As digital communication continues to evolve, the future of multilingual interaction on social media is poised for further transformation. Emerging technologies, such as automated translation tools and voice-to-text features, are reshaping the way users interact across language barriers. While these technologies may facilitate communication, they also raise questions about the preservation of linguistic diversity and the authenticity of cultural expression. The challenge for future digital environments will be to balance the efficiency of global communication with the richness and uniqueness of local linguistic practices (Crystal, 2011).

Ultimately, multilingual communication in social media environments underscores the complexity of identity construction in a globalized world. The interplay between linguistic preferences and digital identity reflects not only individual agency but also broader sociocultural dynamics. Understanding these practices provides valuable insights into how students navigate the tensions between global connectivity and cultural rootedness, paving the way for a deeper appreciation of linguistic diversity in digital spaces (Zhou, 2021).

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore university students' language preferences on social media. The research seeks to understand how linguistic choices reflect identity construction and negotiation within digital communication environments. The methodological approach emphasizes gaining insights into participants' language practices and their motivations for translanguaging.

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### B. Participants and Sampling

The study involved 105 university students selected through random sampling to ensure a diverse representation of language backgrounds, social media habits, and communication preferences. Participants were drawn from a variety of academic disciplines to capture a broad range of language experiences in digital contexts.

### C. Data Collection Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a questionnaire consisting of 23 questions designed to assess language preferences and practices on social media. The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

1. **Close-Ended Questions:** These questions capture quantitative data on language usage patterns, such as the frequency of language switching, platform-specific language choices, and the perceived importance of English and local languages.
2. **Open-Ended Questions:** These questions provide qualitative insights into the motivations for language choices, and whether the use of translanguaging affect their identity.

### D. Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms to maximize accessibility and participation. Before completing the survey, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the confidentiality of their responses. Data collection took place over a period of October-November 2024.

### E. Data Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of the study, data from open-ended questions were analyzed thematically. This involved coding responses to identify patterns, themes, and recurring motifs related to language preferences and identity negotiation. Close-ended question responses were summarized to provide contextual insights and support thematic findings.

### F. Ethical Consideration

The study adheres to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process, and they were given the right to withdraw from the study at any point.

## IV. DISCUSSION

### A. Language Preferences on Social Media

The analysis of language preferences on social media among the participants reveals that Bahasa Indonesia is the most frequently used language. This is followed by regional languages such as Javanese and Sundanese, and foreign languages like English. The preference for Bahasa Indonesia is predominant, reflecting its status as the national language and its widespread use in daily communication. The use of regional languages indicates a strong connection to cultural and linguistic heritage, while the use of English highlights the influence of globalization and the desire to reach a broader audience.

Participants provided various reasons for their language choices on social media. The most common reasons include comfort and habit, as many participants prefer to use languages, they are familiar with and use regularly in their daily lives. Audience adaptation is another significant factor, with participants adjusting their language based on their audience to ensure effective communication. Additionally, some participants use translanguaging to express creativity or convey specific meanings that may not be easily expressed in a single language. This practice allows them to navigate between languages fluidly, reflecting their multilingual capabilities and the dynamic nature of digital communication.

The data indicates that language preferences on social media are influenced by a combination of personal comfort, audience considerations, and the desire for creative expression. These findings provide valuable insights into the sociolinguistic trends in digital communication, particularly within multilingual settings.

### B. Translanguaging Practices on Social Media

The analysis of translanguaging practices among the participants reveals that a significant number of them engage in translanguaging when posting on social media. This practice involves combining two or more languages within a single post. The data indicates that while some participants frequently use translanguaging, others do so occasionally or rarely. This variation in usage reflects the diverse linguistic backgrounds and communication needs of the participants. The ability to switch between languages fluidly allows participants to navigate different linguistic contexts and audiences effectively.

Participants provided various reasons for using translanguaging on social media. The most common reasons include the desire to express specific meanings that may not be easily conveyed in a single language, and the need to adapt to different audiences. Translanguaging allows participants to navigate between languages fluidly, reflecting their multilingual capabilities and the dynamic nature of digital communication. Additionally, some participants use translanguaging to showcase their creativity and linguistic dexterity, while others do so out of habit or social environment influences. This practice enables them to communicate more effectively and authentically, catering to the linguistic preferences of their diverse audiences.

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The data indicates that translanguaging is a prevalent practice among the participants, driven by a combination of communicative needs, audience considerations, and personal preferences. These findings highlight the importance of linguistic flexibility in digital communication and the role of translanguaging in expressing complex ideas and identities. The ability to switch between languages seamlessly not only enhances communication but also reflects the participants' multilingual identities and their ability to engage with a broader audience.

### C. Impact of Language Use on Identity

The analysis of participants' perceptions regarding the impact of language use on their identity reveals diverse viewpoints. A significant number of participants believe that the language they use on social media does indeed influence their identity. They feel that the choice of language reflects their cultural background, personal values, and social affiliations. For these participants, language is not just a tool for communication but also a means of expressing and reinforcing their identity.

Several themes emerge from the participants' responses. One prominent theme is the idea that language use on social media helps to showcase one's cultural heritage and linguistic diversity. Participants who use regional languages or a mix of languages feel that this practice highlights their unique cultural identity and connects them to their roots. Another theme is the role of language in shaping perceptions and interactions. Participants believe that the language they use can influence how they are perceived by others and how they interact with different social groups.

The data also indicates that linguistic flexibility, such as the ability to switch between languages or use translanguaging, plays a crucial role in identity expression. Participants who engage in translanguaging feel that it allows them to navigate different cultural contexts and communicate more authentically. This flexibility is seen as a reflection of their multifaceted identities and their ability to adapt to various social environments.

The data suggests that language use on social media has a profound impact on participants' sense of identity. It serves as a means of expressing cultural heritage, shaping social interactions, and showcasing linguistic diversity. These findings underscore the importance of considering language practices in understanding digital identities and sociolinguistic trends.

### D. Platform-Specific Language Use

The analysis of platform-specific language use among the participants reveals that a notable number of them change the language they use depending on the social media platform. This indicates that participants are mindful of the different audiences and contexts associated with each platform, and they adjust their language use accordingly to ensure effective communication. The data shows that while some participants consistently use the same language across all platforms, others strategically switch languages to better suit the platform's audience and purpose.

Participants provided various reasons for changing their language across different social media platforms. One common reason is the nature of the audience on each platform. For instance, participants may use Bahasa Indonesia on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where they interact with a broader local audience, while switching to English on platforms like LinkedIn to engage with a more professional and international audience. Another reason is the type of content being shared. Participants may choose to use regional languages or a mix of languages for informal and personal posts, while opting for more formal language for professional or public posts. This strategic language choice helps them communicate more effectively and resonate with their intended audience.

The data also indicates that participants adapt their language use to align with the norms and expectations of each platform. For example, they may use more casual and conversational language on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, which are known for their informal and interactive nature. In contrast, they may adopt a more formal tone on platforms like LinkedIn, where professional networking and career-related content are prevalent. This adaptation to platform norms demonstrates the participants' awareness of the different linguistic landscapes of social media and their ability to navigate these spaces effectively.

The data suggests that platform-specific language use is a strategic practice among participants, driven by audience considerations, content type, and platform norms. This adaptability highlights the participants' awareness of the diverse linguistic landscapes of social media and their ability to navigate these spaces effectively. By adjusting their language use based on the platform, participants can enhance their communication, engage more meaningfully with their audience, and maintain their linguistic and cultural identity.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to examine students' language preferences on social media, explore the factors influencing these choices, and analyze the implications for communication and identity. The findings provide valuable insights into the sociolinguistic trends in digital communication, particularly within multilingual settings. The analysis revealed that Bahasa Indonesia is the most frequently used language on social media among the participants, followed by regional languages such as Javanese and Sundanese, and foreign languages like English. The preference for Bahasa Indonesia reflects its status as the national language and its widespread use in daily communication. Participants' language choices are influenced by factors such as comfort and habit, audience adaptation, and the desire for creative expression.

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A significant number of participants engage in translanguaging, combining two or more languages within a single post. This practice allows them to express specific meanings, adapt to different audiences, and showcase their creativity and linguistic dexterity. Translanguaging reflects the participants' multilingual capabilities and the dynamic nature of digital communication. The study found that language use on social media has a profound impact on participants' sense of identity. Many participants believe that their language choices reflect their cultural background, personal values, and social affiliations. Themes such as showcasing cultural heritage, shaping perceptions and interactions, and linguistic flexibility play a crucial role in identity expression.

Participants adjust their language use based on the social media platform, considering audience, content type, and platform norms. For instance, they may use Bahasa Indonesia on platforms like Instagram and TikTok for a local audience, while switching to English on LinkedIn for a professional and international audience. This strategic language choice helps them communicate more effectively and resonate with their intended audience.

The study highlights the importance of linguistic flexibility and the role of language in expressing identity and navigating different social contexts. These findings contribute to a better understanding of language practices in today's digital age and the ways in which digital communication reflects and impacts broader sociolinguistic trends.

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