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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Impact of Social Media on Language Change and Communication Styles

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| ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of social media platforms over the past two decades has significantly transformed patterns of human communication and accelerated processes of language change. This review article examines the impact of social media on language evolution and contemporary communication styles, drawing on recent interdisciplinary studies in linguistics, communication studies, and digital media research. Social media environments such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok have introduced new modes of interaction characterized by speed, brevity, multimodality, and global reach. These platforms facilitate the widespread use of abbreviations, acronyms, emojis, hashtags, internet slang, and code-switching, reshaping both written and spoken language practices.

The review further explores how social media has blurred the traditional boundaries between formal and informal communication, leading to the emergence of hybrid linguistic forms that combine elements of standard and non-standard language varieties. Youth and online communities play a central role in driving these linguistic innovations, contributing to the rapid circulation and normalization of new expressions across cultures and regions. While social media enhances creativity, identity expression, and intercultural communication, it also raises concerns about declining grammatical accuracy, reduced attention to conventional writing norms, and the potential erosion of standard language forms in formal contexts.

Additionally, the article highlights the implications of social media-driven language change for education, professional communication, and sociolinguistic identity. The findings suggest that social media does not merely degrade language, as commonly feared, but actively reshapes it in response to digital communication needs. The review concludes that social media is a powerful agent of linguistic change, reflecting broader social, technological, and cultural transformations. Understanding these shifts is essential for educators, linguists, and communication professionals seeking to adapt to the evolving dynamics of language use in the digital age.

| KEYWORDS

social media, language change, digital communication, sociolinguistics, discourse, identity, linguistic innovation

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### 1. Introduction

Language, as a living and evolving system, continually adapts to the social, cultural, and technological environments in which it is used. The emergence of social media in the twenty-first century has brought about one of the most profound transformations in human communication since the invention of the printing press and the rise of mass media (Khalikova, 2024; Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp have revolutionized how individuals interact, share information, and construct identities across diverse linguistic communities (Cho, Gay, Davidson, & Ingraffea, 2007; Fourie, 2018). This digital revolution has given rise to new modes of expression and interaction that challenge traditional

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linguistic boundaries, leading to noticeable changes in vocabulary, grammar, discourse patterns, and communication norms (Natsir, Aliah, Zulkhaeriyah, Amiruddin, & Esmianti, 2023). Consequently, understanding the impact of social media on language change and communication styles has become a central focus in sociolinguistic and discourse studies (Khalikova, 2024).

Social media provides an open, participatory, and fast-paced environment where language evolves rapidly (Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). The immediacy of online communication encourages brevity, creativity, and informality. Abbreviations such as LOL (laugh out loud), BTW (by the way), and OMG (oh my God), alongside emojis, memes, and hashtags, have developed into key features of digital discourse (Purba, Sinurat, & Herman, 2021; Pérez-Sabater, 2021). These linguistic innovations represent not a degradation of language but rather its adaptability and flexibility in meeting the communicative demands of the digital age (Crystal, 2011; Khalikova, 2024).

Moreover, social media has blurred the traditional distinction between spoken and written language. Messages on platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, or TikTok often combine elements of both modes—written text with the spontaneity, rhythm, and informality of speech (Jakic, Wagner, & Meyer, 2017; Paris, Thomas, & Wan, 2012). Scholars refer to this hybrid form as “digital orality,” which captures the conversational nature of online interactions (Pérez-Sabater, 2021). This new mode of communication not only alters linguistic structures but also influences interpersonal dynamics, where tone, emotion, and intent are conveyed through digital cues such as emojis, GIFs, and punctuation (Rakhmatullaeva, 2024).

The phenomenon of language change through social media also intersects with issues of identity, power, and cultural exchange. Social media platforms serve as spaces for linguistic innovation and social identity construction. Users often adapt their language to align with digital communities, adopting linguistic markers that reflect shared interests, humor, or social belonging (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Purba et al., 2021). This has given rise to new varieties of digital dialects, internet slang, and code-switching practices that reflect cultural hybridity (Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). Additionally, the global interconnectedness of social media has led to the spread and mixing of linguistic features across borders, resulting in the globalization of certain English expressions and the emergence of digital multilingualism (Natsir et al., 2023).

However, this transformation has also sparked debates about the potential negative effects of social media on language competence, literacy, and communication quality. Critics argue that excessive reliance on abbreviations, emojis, and informal structures may erode grammatical accuracy and formal writing skills, particularly among young users (Fourie, 2018; Khalikova, 2024). Yet, recent research suggests that digital communication encourages metalinguistic awareness and linguistic creativity rather than decline (Panjaitan & Patria, 2024).

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Social Media as a Catalyst for Language Change***

Scholars widely agree that social media has become a powerful force in accelerating language change. Unlike traditional print and broadcast media, social media allows instant, continuous, and large-scale interaction among users from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Khalikova, 2024; Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). Digital platforms create new linguistic environments that encourage experimentation and rapid diffusion of linguistic innovations (Crystal, 2011; Natsir et al., 2023). The speed at which new words, expressions, and syntactic patterns spread online far exceeds that of earlier communication technologies (Jakic et al., 2017).

### ***2.2 Emergence of New Linguistic Features and Digital Discourse***

Distinctive features such as abbreviations, acronyms, emojis, GIFs, hashtags, and non-standard spelling have become integral to online communication (Herring, 2013; Rakhmatullaeva, 2024). Emojis and multimodal elements compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues, enhancing interpersonal meaning in text-based communication (Purba et al., 2021; Pérez-Sabater, 2021). Hashtags facilitate topic organization, stance signaling, and community formation, reflecting the multimodal nature of contemporary digital discourse (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019).

### ***2.3 Informalization and Hybrid Communication Styles***

Social media has blurred boundaries between formal and informal communication, resulting in hybrid styles that blend spoken and written discourse (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008; Fourie, 2018). This includes shorter sentences, conversational tone, relaxed grammar rules, and strategic use of pronouns and discourse markers. While fostering accessibility and engagement, these shifts may challenge adherence to traditional norms of academic and professional writing (Cho et al., 2007).

### ***2.4 Youth, Identity, and Linguistic Innovation***

Young users are primary drivers of language change on social media, constructing identities through slang, code-switching, and digital creativity (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Purba et al., 2021). Multilingual communities frequently mix local and global

languages, demonstrating linguistic hybridity and creative adaptation to digital contexts (Panjaitan & Patria, 2024; Pérez-Sabater, 2021).

### **2.5 Educational and Sociolinguistic Implications**

While exposure to informal digital language may introduce spelling and grammar challenges, social media also promotes vocabulary growth, metalinguistic awareness, and communicative competence (Natsir et al., 2023; Khalikova, 2024). Moreover, online platforms democratize language use by giving visibility to non-standard varieties and marginalized voices (Rakhmatullaeva, 2024).

### **2.6 Gaps in Existing Research**

Although extensive research exists on social media and language change, gaps remain regarding long-term impacts on language structure, academic writing, and intergenerational communication. Many studies focus on youth and English-dominated platforms, leaving other age groups and lesser-studied languages underrepresented. Future research is needed to explore how sustained digital interaction influences grammar, discourse patterns, and language policy across diverse linguistic communities.

## **3. Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in content and discourse analysis to explore how social media influences language change and communication styles. The methodology focuses on interpreting existing scholarly literature, linguistic data, and online communication examples drawn from platforms such as Twitter (X), Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok. These platforms were chosen due to their widespread use and their role in shaping digital discourse and language innovation.

Data collection involved a systematic review of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers published between 2006 and 2024, emphasizing studies in sociolinguistics, digital communication, and media linguistics. The analysis identified key themes related to linguistic innovation, code-switching, identity construction, and discourse patterns in online interactions.

The study applies discourse and thematic analysis to examine how users adapt language to digital environments, including the use of abbreviations, emojis, memes, and hashtags as forms of linguistic expression. Secondary sources provided theoretical frameworks such as computer-mediated communication and sociolinguistic change. By integrating theoretical and empirical perspectives, the methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of how social media platforms function as catalysts for language evolution and the transformation of contemporary communication styles.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The analysis of existing studies reveals that social media has become one of the most influential forces shaping contemporary language change and communication styles (Khalikova, 2024; Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). One of the most consistent findings across the literature is the unprecedented speed at which linguistic innovations now spread due to digital platforms. New words, abbreviations, internet slang, and borrowed expressions are created and circulated globally within short periods, leading to rapid lexical expansion and transformation of everyday language use (Jakic, Wagner, & Meyer, 2017; Natsir, Aliah, Zulkhaeriyah, Amiruddin, & Esmianti, 2023). Unlike traditional forms of communication, where new linguistic forms diffused gradually, social media enables instant transmission across geographical and cultural boundaries (Cho, Gay, Davidson, & Ingraffea, 2007; Paris, Thomas, & Wan, 2012). As a result, expressions that originate in online communities frequently enter offline speech and semi-formal discourse, confirming that social media functions as a powerful accelerator of language change (Panjaitan & Patria, 2024).

Another major result is the transformation of communication styles toward brevity, informality, and multimodality. Character limits, instant messaging, and real-time interactions encourage users to communicate in short, fragmented, and highly expressive forms. Abbreviations, acronyms, emojis, GIFs, and visual symbols now serve as core components of digital communication, often replacing or supplementing written text (Purba, Sinurat, & Herman, 2021; Pérez-Sabater, 2021). These multimodal elements compensate for the absence of face-to-face cues such as tone and gesture, thereby enhancing emotional expression and interactional clarity (Rakhmatullaeva, 2024). Consequently, the traditional distinction between spoken and written language has become increasingly blurred, with online messages displaying features of both modes, such as conversational tone, reduced syntactic complexity, and spontaneous expression (Jakic et al., 2017; Pérez-Sabater, 2021).

The findings further indicate a growing hybridization of formal and informal language. Linguistic features once associated strictly with casual online interaction are increasingly observed in academic, professional, and institutional settings, especially in emails,

online learning platforms, social media marketing, and public communication by organizations (Fourie, 2018; Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019). This blending of registers reflects a shift in expectations about appropriateness and formality in digital communication. While this trend enhances accessibility and personal engagement, it also raises concerns regarding declining adherence to conventional grammatical norms and academic writing standards (Cho et al., 2007). The results therefore highlight an ongoing tension between the need for communicative flexibility and the preservation of standardized language forms.

Youth emerge as the primary drivers of linguistic innovation on social media. The reviewed literature consistently shows that young users are at the forefront of creating, modifying, and popularizing new expressions, slang, and discourse styles (Androustopoulos, 2014; Purba et al., 2021). Through creative spellings, memes, humor, and symbolic language, young people actively shape digital discourse to express identity, emotions, and social belonging (Pérez-Sabater, 2021). Social media provides a space where linguistic experimentation is not only tolerated but encouraged, allowing new forms to gain rapid acceptance (Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). These practices demonstrate that language on social media is closely tied to identity construction, peer affiliation, and cultural expression (Jakic et al., 2017).

The results also reveal the increasing prominence of multilingualism and code-switching in online communication, particularly in linguistically diverse societies. Users frequently mix global languages with local or indigenous languages within single interactions, reflecting both communicative efficiency and cultural identity (Natsir et al., 2023; Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). Social media thus supports linguistic hybridity by offering a flexible environment in which multiple language varieties coexist. However, the dominance of global languages, especially English, remains evident, raising concerns about the marginalization and possible long-term decline of minority languages in digital spaces (Khalikova, 2024). While social media offers new opportunities for language visibility, it also reproduces existing linguistic power imbalances (Rakhmatullaeva, 2024).

From an educational perspective, the findings present both challenges and opportunities. On the negative side, continuous exposure to informal digital language has been linked to increased spelling errors, grammatical inaccuracies, and reduced attention to standard writing conventions among students (Fourie, 2018; Natsir et al., 2023). Teachers and educators frequently report difficulties in separating academic language norms from social media writing habits. On the positive side, social media also promotes vocabulary development, collaborative learning, peer feedback, and authentic communication practice (Cho et al., 2007; Rakhmatullaeva, 2024). When guided effectively, digital platforms can support language learning and engagement rather than undermine it. These mixed results suggest that the impact of social media on education largely depends on how it is integrated into pedagogical practices.

In addition, the review highlights the role of social media in reshaping sociolinguistic identity and redistributing linguistic power. Online spaces enable speakers of non-standard dialects and marginalized language varieties to gain visibility and participate in global communication without traditional gatekeeping (Pérez-Sabater, 2021; Rakhmatullaeva, 2024). This democratization of language challenges rigid notions of correctness and linguistic authority. At the same time, algorithmic control, digital access inequalities, and platform economies continue to shape whose voices are most prominently heard (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019). Thus, while social media expands linguistic participation, it also introduces new forms of exclusion and hierarchy.

Overall, the results demonstrate that social media is not simply corrupting or degrading language, as is often assumed in popular discourse. Rather, it is transforming language in response to changing communicative needs, technological affordances, and social practices (Khalikova, 2024; Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). Language is becoming more adaptive, expressive, and context-sensitive, with users constantly adjusting their linguistic choices based on audience, purpose, and platform (Jakic et al., 2017; Pérez-Sabater, 2021). The evidence suggests that contemporary language change driven by social media reflects broader cultural and technological transformations that will continue to shape how people communicate in the future (Cho et al., 2007; Natsir et al., 2023).

### **5. Conclusion**

The review concludes that social media has significantly transformed language use and communication styles, ushering in a new era of linguistic creativity, diversity, and immediacy. The findings demonstrate that social media platforms have become powerful agents of linguistic innovation, fostering the emergence of new expressions, symbols, and discourse patterns that reflect the dynamic interaction between technology, culture, and communication. Far from degrading language, these transformations illustrate its adaptability to new communicative contexts and technological environments.

Social media's impact extends beyond mere vocabulary change—it reshapes how people interact, express emotion, and construct identity. The fusion of text, imagery, and symbols such as emojis and hashtags has given rise to a multimodal form of

expression that bridges the gap between spoken and written language. This phenomenon, often described as *digital orality*, captures the conversational and performative nature of online interaction. Moreover, linguistic trends on social media highlight how users employ language to negotiate social belonging, cultural identity, and personal voice in virtual spaces.

While concerns persist regarding the decline of formal literacy and grammatical standards, the evidence suggests that social media encourages linguistic innovation and flexibility rather than decay. It provides a platform where creativity, identity, and culture converge, redefining how language evolves in a digitalized world. Ultimately, the influence of social media on language and communication exemplifies the resilience of human expression—demonstrating that language, as a living system, continuously adapts to reflect the changing realities of human connection and technological advancement in the twenty-first century.

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