



## Social Media Influence on the Language Varieties of Adolescents

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### Article Info

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### ABSTRACT

The widespread use of social media has transformed adolescents' communication practices by encouraging the emergence of diverse language varieties in digital interactions. This study aims to describe the language varieties used by adolescents in social media communication and identify the dominant forms of language employed across digital platforms. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed involving 30 adolescents aged 13–18 years who actively used Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, while linguistic data were collected through structured observation and documentation of comments, captions, status updates, and instant messages. The data were classified into four language categories slang, abbreviations, code-mixing, and formal language and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that slang was the most frequently used language variety (40%), followed by abbreviations (25%), code-mixing (20%), and formal language (15%). These results indicate that adolescents predominantly use informal and expressive language in digital communication while adapting their language choices to online interaction contexts. This study contributes to the field of digital sociolinguistics by providing quantitative evidence on the distribution of adolescent language varieties across multiple social media platforms and offers insights for educators to promote context-appropriate language use in both digital and formal communication.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language continuously evolves in response to social, cultural, and technological changes. In the digital era, the rapid expansion of social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) has transformed the way people communicate, particularly adolescents. Social media enables users to communicate instantly across geographical boundaries while simultaneously encouraging the emergence of new linguistic forms, including slang,

abbreviations, code-mixing, emojis, and internet-specific expressions. These developments have attracted increasing scholarly attention because they demonstrate how digital environments reshape language use and communication practices among younger generations.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language variation is a natural consequence of social interaction and reflects differences in speakers' identities, social relationships, and communicative contexts. According to Labov (1972), language variation occurs because speakers continuously adapt their linguistic choices to different social environments. In digital communication, these variations become more dynamic since social media allows users to negotiate identity, establish group membership, and express emotions through innovative linguistic forms. Consequently, adolescents frequently employ informal language styles that differ from those used in formal educational or professional settings.

The phenomenon can also be explained through the perspective of Digital Sociolinguistics, which examines how digital technologies influence language practices and social interaction. According to Androutsopoulos (2015), digital communication has fundamentally transformed the production, distribution, and interpretation of language by creating new communicative spaces in which users continuously adapt linguistic resources to online environments. Social media therefore functions not merely as a communication platform but also as a sociolinguistic environment where language innovation develops rapidly through everyday interaction.

Another relevant theoretical perspective is Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). Herring (2007) explains that communication through digital media differs from face-to-face interaction because it encourages brevity, speed, creativity, and multimodal expression. As a consequence, users frequently simplify words, create abbreviations, combine multiple languages, and employ non-standard linguistic expressions to communicate efficiently. These characteristics make social media one of the primary factors influencing adolescents' language behavior in the digital era.

Language use on social media is also closely associated with the construction of language identity. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that language functions not only as a communication tool but also as a resource for constructing and negotiating identity. Adolescents often adopt slang expressions, internet vocabulary, and code-mixing to strengthen peer relationships, demonstrate membership in particular online communities, and express personal identity. Therefore, linguistic choices on social media should be understood as social practices rather than merely deviations from standard language norms.

Previous studies have consistently reported that social media influences adolescents' language practices. Firmansyah (2018) emphasized that technological development contributes to changes in language acquisition and language use. Octorina et al. (2018) found that social media has become an inseparable part of adolescents' daily communication, influencing their linguistic habits. More recently, Anggraini and Usiono (2025) reported that intensive social media use tends to reduce language politeness because adolescents increasingly prefer informal expressions over standard language. Similarly, Prasetyaningrum (2024) found that informal language dominates adolescents' online interactions. International studies have also demonstrated similar findings.

Hilte (2023) showed that adolescents frequently adapt their linguistic behavior in instant messaging according to their communication partners, while McNeilly et al. (2023) reported that smartphone-mediated communication significantly shapes adolescents' everyday language practices and emotional expression.

Although these studies have provided valuable insights into adolescents' language behavior in digital environments, several important limitations remain. First, previous research has primarily focused on individual linguistic phenomena, such as slang, language politeness, or code-mixing, rather than examining the overall distribution of language varieties used across multiple social media platforms. Second, many studies employ qualitative approaches that describe linguistic behavior without quantitatively measuring the proportion of different language varieties. Third, relatively few studies have integrated the perspectives of digital sociolinguistics, computer-mediated communication, and language identity into a single analytical framework to explain why adolescents adopt particular language varieties in online communication. Consequently, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding the quantitative distribution of adolescent language varieties within contemporary digital communication environments.

To address these gaps, the present study adopts an integrated sociolinguistic perspective by combining theories of language variation, digital sociolinguistics, computer-mediated communication, and language identity to examine adolescents' language use on Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. Unlike previous studies, this research quantitatively measures the frequency of slang, abbreviations, code-mixing, and formal language used by adolescents across multiple social media platforms. By integrating established sociolinguistic theories with empirical quantitative evidence, this study contributes to the growing body of digital sociolinguistics literature and provides a more comprehensive understanding of how social media shapes adolescents' linguistic behavior in contemporary digital society.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of social media on adolescents' language varieties and to identify the dominant forms of language used in digital communication. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of digital sociolinguistics, provide empirical evidence regarding adolescent language behavior, and offer practical implications for educators, parents, and policymakers in promoting balanced language use in the digital era.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate the influence of social media on adolescents' language variation. A descriptive quantitative approach was selected because the primary objective of the study was to identify, classify, and quantify the occurrence of different language varieties used by adolescents in digital communication. Rather than examining causal relationships, the study focused on describing observable linguistic patterns and their distribution across social media interactions.

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The research was conducted in Sanggau Regency, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, between January and February 2026. The target population consisted of adolescents who actively used social media in their daily communication.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which respondents are chosen based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives.

The inclusion criteria were:

1. adolescents aged between 13 and 18 years;
2. active users of Instagram, WhatsApp, or TikTok;
3. regularly posting or interacting through comments, captions, status updates, or instant messages.

Based on these criteria, 30 adolescents were recruited as research participants.

### **Data Sources**

The linguistic data consisted of adolescents' language expressions obtained from their social media interactions. The data included language used in comments, captions, status updates, and instant messages shared voluntarily by participants during the observation period. The unit of analysis was not the participant but each linguistic expression identified as representing a particular language variety.

### **Operational Definition of Language Categories**

To ensure consistency during data classification, each language variety was operationally defined before analysis. Slang refers to informal lexical expressions commonly used among adolescents and not generally accepted in formal Indonesian. Abbreviations refer to shortened forms of words or phrases created to facilitate rapid communication in digital environments. Code-mixing refers to the insertion of foreign-language elements, primarily English, into Indonesian utterances without changing the overall grammatical structure. Formal language refers to language that follows standard Indonesian grammar and vocabulary in accordance with formal language conventions. These operational definitions were adapted from sociolinguistic literature on language variation and digital communication to provide consistent coding criteria throughout the study.

### **Research Instruments**

The primary research instrument was a structured observation sheet developed to record the occurrence of each language category. Documentation in the form of screenshots of participants' comments, captions, status updates, and instant messages was collected to support the observation data. Before data collection, the observation sheet was examined by two lecturers with expertise in Indonesian language education and sociolinguistics to ensure that the coding indicators adequately represented each language category. Suggestions provided during the review process were incorporated before the instrument was used in the field.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection was conducted through several sequential stages. First, participants who met the inclusion criteria were identified and informed about the objectives of the research. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Second, researchers observed participants' language use on Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok during the research period. Language expressions appearing in comments, captions, status updates, and instant messages were documented systematically. Third, every linguistic expression was classified according to the operational definitions established before data collection. Each expression was coded as slang, abbreviation, code-mixing, or formal language. Finally, the coded data were tabulated to determine the frequency of each language category.

### **Data Coding and Validation**

To improve the credibility of the analysis, all linguistic expressions were coded using predetermined classification guidelines. After the initial coding process, the classification results were reviewed independently by another researcher with experience in sociolinguistics. Any differences in coding decisions were discussed until agreement was achieved, thereby improving coding consistency and minimizing subjective interpretation. Furthermore, methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing observational records with documentary evidence obtained from participants' social media interactions.

### **Data Analysis**

The coded data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The frequency of each language category was calculated and converted into percentages to describe adolescents' language variation across social media platforms.

The percentage of each language variety was calculated using the following formula:  
where:

P = percentage of each language variety;

f = frequency of occurrence;

N = total number of identified linguistic expressions.

The quantitative findings were subsequently interpreted using sociolinguistic theories concerning language variation, digital communication, and language identity to explain the observed linguistic tendencies.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Personal identities, usernames, and private communication were anonymized to maintain confidentiality. The collected data were used exclusively for academic purposes and were reported only in aggregate form.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

The analysis of adolescents' language use on social media revealed four dominant language varieties: slang, abbreviations, code-mixing, and formal language. The results indicate that informal language overwhelmingly dominates adolescents' digital communication.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Language Varieties Used by Adolescents

Language Variety Frequency (%)	
Slang	: 40
Abbreviations	: 25
Code-Mixing	: 20
Formal Language	:15

As shown in Table 1, slang was the most frequently used language variety (40%), followed by abbreviations (25%), code-mixing (20%), and formal language (15%). These findings suggest that adolescents generally prefer informal and expressive linguistic forms when interacting on social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok.

### Discussion

The predominance of slang reflects adolescents' tendency to communicate in ways that emphasize solidarity, familiarity, and group identity. Abbreviations were frequently employed to facilitate faster communication, whereas code-mixing primarily involved the incorporation of English lexical items into Indonesian expressions. In contrast, formal Indonesian was relatively uncommon, indicating that adolescents rarely adopt standard language conventions during everyday online interactions.

The predominance of slang observed in this study reflects the dynamic relationship between language and adolescent identity in digital environments. From the perspective of Language Variation Theory (Labov, 1972), linguistic variation naturally emerges because speakers adjust their language according to social contexts and communicative purposes. Social media provides adolescents with an informal communication environment in which linguistic creativity is encouraged rather than constrained by formal language norms. Consequently, slang functions not only as a communication tool but also as a marker of social identity and group membership.

These findings are further supported by Language Identity Theory proposed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), which argues that language is an important resource for constructing and negotiating identity. Adolescents intentionally employ slang to strengthen peer relationships, express individuality, and demonstrate belonging to particular online communities. Therefore, the dominance of slang should not merely be interpreted as language deviation but rather as a sociolinguistic strategy for identity construction in digital communication.

The substantial use of abbreviations (25%) can be understood through the framework of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). According to Herring (2007), digital communication encourages efficiency because users often exchange messages rapidly through smartphones and

social networking platforms. The use of shortened words and acronyms minimizes typing effort while maintaining communicative effectiveness. This finding demonstrates that technological affordances significantly shape linguistic behavior by promoting concise and efficient communication styles.

Similarly, the occurrence of code-mixing (20%) reflects the influence of globalization and increasing exposure to multilingual digital content. Adolescents frequently encounter English-language videos, music, games, and social media influencers, leading to the incorporation of English vocabulary into everyday Indonesian communication. From the perspective of Digital Sociolinguistics (Androutsopoulos, 2015), online communication environments facilitate continuous interaction between local and global linguistic resources. Consequently, code-mixing becomes a natural outcome of digital communication rather than merely an indicator of foreign language preference.

The relatively low proportion of formal language (15%) indicates that adolescents distinguish between informal and formal communication contexts. Although standard Indonesian remains important in educational and official settings, social media interactions are generally characterized by spontaneity, emotional expression, and interpersonal closeness. This finding suggests that adolescents demonstrate communicative adaptability by selecting language varieties that are appropriate for specific interactional contexts.

Compared with previous studies, the present findings both confirm and extend existing knowledge. Consistent with Anggraini and Usiono (2025) as well as Prasetyaningrum (2024), informal language dominates adolescents' online communication. However, unlike earlier studies that primarily described linguistic phenomena qualitatively, this research provides quantitative evidence regarding the relative distribution of different language varieties across multiple social media platforms. This quantitative perspective contributes additional empirical support to the growing literature on adolescent language behavior in digital environments.

The findings also contribute theoretically to the field of digital sociolinguistics by integrating theories of language variation, computer-mediated communication, and language identity within a single analytical framework. Rather than viewing slang, abbreviations, and code-mixing as isolated linguistic phenomena, this study demonstrates that these language varieties emerge through the interaction of technological affordances, peer-group identity, and globalization. This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive explanation of adolescent language behavior in contemporary digital communication.

From a practical perspective, the findings have important educational implications. Schools should recognize that adolescents' extensive use of informal language on social media does not necessarily indicate declining language competence. Instead, educational institutions should encourage context-sensitive language awareness, enabling students to distinguish between appropriate language use in informal digital communication and formal academic or professional settings. Parents and educators should also promote digital literacy programs that emphasize balanced language practices while respecting the natural evolution of adolescent communication in the digital era.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides a quantitative description of the language varieties used by adolescents in social media communication. The findings indicate that slang was the most frequently observed language variety, followed by abbreviations, code-mixing, and formal language. These results suggest that adolescents tend to prefer informal and expressive forms of communication when interacting through digital platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. Rather than demonstrating a causal relationship, the findings illustrate the distribution and characteristics of language variation within the observed social media interactions.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing field of digital sociolinguistics by integrating the perspectives of language variation, computer-mediated communication, and language identity to explain adolescents' linguistic behavior in online environments. The quantitative description of different language varieties also provides empirical evidence that complements previous qualitative studies on adolescent communication in digital contexts.

The findings have practical implications for educators, parents, and policymakers. Since adolescents naturally adapt their language according to communication contexts, language education should emphasize context-appropriate language use rather than discouraging informal digital expressions. Schools may incorporate digital literacy and sociolinguistic awareness into language learning to help students distinguish between informal communication on social media and the use of standard Indonesian in academic and professional settings.

This study has several limitations. The research involves a relatively small number of participants from a single geographical area and employed descriptive statistical analysis, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future studies are therefore encouraged to include larger and more diverse samples, investigate additional social media platforms, and employ inferential statistical techniques to examine relationships between social media use and language variation more comprehensively.

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