



EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUTH LINGUISTIC BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY FORMATION

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Abstract

This study examines the strong role of social media in shaping the way today's youth use and understand language in today's digital age of AI, science and technology. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have transformed communication by introducing new and creative language styles that include slang, acronyms, and memes. While these developments promote innovative forms of expression, they also raise concerns such as the oversimplification of language and a notable/ gradual decline in linguistic richness. To guide the discussion, the paper draws on two major theories. The first is Modeling Theory, which explains how adolescents adopt behaviors and linguistic patterns they observe on social media. The second is Social Identity Theory, which highlights how online communities and interactions influence young people's self-perception and identity formation. The research follows a mixed method approach, using questionnaires and interviews to explore the role of digital platforms. The findings suggest that social media functions in two ways. It provides opportunities for self-exploration and creative expression, while at the same time creating challenges that may lead to identity conflicts. Although this study does not directly apply the Uses and Gratification Theory, it recognizes its potential for future research. The recent work of Kashif, Nadeem, and Khan (2025), which applied UGT in the context of BookTok, demonstrates how the framework can explain active participation on social media as a means of fulfilling needs related to self-expression and identity building. Future studies on language use among young adults could benefit from adopting a perspective like UGT. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes the importance of awareness and responsible engagement with social media. With proper guidance, young people can use digital platforms as tools for personal development and self-discovery without allowing them to interfere with their educational progress.

Keywords: *Digital Communication, Identity Formation, Language Use, Modeling Theory, Self-Expression, Social Identity Theory, Social Media, UGT*

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1. Introduction

In this modern era, social media has appeared as an effective catalyst for self-expression with identity formation. By 2025, about 5.24 billion individuals globally will be engaged on social media platforms. Approximately 63.9% of the global population uses social media platforms. Surprisingly, they represent 94.2% of the overall internet users. This is a notable rise of 0.5%, amounting to 24 million, relative to the 5.22 billion users recorded in 2024. Social media apps allow users to build and display online personas, presenting curated portrayals of themselves worldwide.

2. Social Media

Social media gained popularity when Chris Shipley, who was the founder of the Guides Wire Group, first employed it at a conference in 2004 (Hayta, 2013). Social media is an interactive and accessible internet hub where individuals openly discuss their daily exposures, ideas, and beliefs (Wikipedia). Social media networks are commonly known as online networking sites. There are many online networking apps globally, which have expanded since 2003 (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). The prevalent social media networks vary by country (McLelland, Yu, & Goggin, 2018). Prominent global social sites comprise Mixi in Japan, QQ in China, and Cyworld in Korea, along with Myspace, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

There are three categories of social media based on their functions (Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008). The first category is software tools for content creation, which encompass blogs, wikis, and podcasts. Secondly, LinkedIn and Facebook facilitate the ongoing survival of existing social networks and the establishment of new connections. The primary function of social media, according to its content, is the spread of information, pictures, audio, video sharing, microblogging, virtual broadcasting, and gaming (Safko & Brake, 2009).

Table 1 summarizes representative types of social media, categorized by their characteristics:

Table 1: Categories of Social Media and Their Features

Classification	Features
Online Journal	A digital publication that people compose on internet sites; also known as a blog.
Social Networking Services	Services that permit people to create personal pages, engage with peers, publish content, and interact.
Wikipedia	This site functions as a digital repository.
Digital Content Community	A network that generates and publishes content, such as YouTube.
Webcast or Podcast	A name derived from <i>broadcast</i> and <i>iPod</i> . It enables individuals to use multimedia files via resources like Spotify and Google Play Music.
Discussion Board	Digital dialogues regarding broader themes, e.g., CSS Forums.
Short-form Blogging	Digital platforms that provide concise information, such as X (Twitter).

Shrestha Lucky (2013) argued that social media functions as an agent for interpersonal relationships, enabling production, propagation, and sharing of ideas and knowledge within online communities and networks. Social network sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat appear to have radically altered dialogue patterns and the language of communication. These apps have created an environment in which traditional communication values are often overlooked in favor of innovative modes of expression that represent speed, concision, and informality.

Therefore, internet slang, abbreviations (e.g., laughing out loud, be right back), emoticons, tags, and funny jokes have emerged key attributes of our standard online vocabulary, revealing the dynamic expansion of language employed to tackle cultural changes and social issues as well.

Language has a key role to play in this methodology, as people choose specific words, thoughts, and concepts that represent their own sentiments and interests. Social media has portrayed its efficacy as a tool for activist campaigns, with keywords like #EndRacism, #ConsentMatters, and #ReleaseImranKhan sparking worldwide discourse that challenges traditional values. These campaigns show how online networks can elevate silent voices, promote unity, and push social reform, all within the linguistic context and online interaction.

2.1. Social Media and the Formation of Youth Identity

We frequently refer to our “identity” as the essence of our being. In this context, individual uniqueness is defined by the distinctions from others. Ludwig said our self-definition and the ethics and beliefs of our digital system impact our lives. Observing a

group of adolescents with their peers and classmates reveals striking similarities in their behavior, speech, and attire. How do we ascertain our identity, and how do others define theirs? Is it feasible to be authentic? Individuality primarily pertains to homo sapiens, along with entities, objects, and compounds throughout the cosmos (Reese, Rosenmann, & Cameron, 2019).

Personality is an uncertain and dynamic concept. People acknowledge that self-concepts are created and that they possess the autonomy to alter or adjust themselves (Lash & Friedman, 1992; Wolf & Perron, 2003). We posited that personality is a distinctive construct that is sustained gradually and geographically (Buckingham, 2008). In David Buckingham's (2008) book *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*, he examines the concept of self-expression. He suggested that a conventional and role-based perspective on integration views it within similarly ethical ways.

He believes that young people become passive recipients of adult inspiration, portrayed as a "becoming rather than a being." Buckingham stated that "by understanding identity as an ongoing process of self-actualization by young adults, we fail to recognize the stress they encounter to align with" (ibid.). Queries of identity pertain to facts about surroundings, civilization, legacy, and mode of communication. It is not defined by "what defines us" or "our origins," but rather by our self-perception and self-image.

The word "youth" normally refers to teenagers, with other phrases like youngster, adolescent, young individual, and younger generation (Konopka, 1973). Adolescence is a period of personal identity formation. The inner perception of adolescents is influenced through various elements, including peers, chronological age, sex, way of life, and values (Thomas, 2007). In Pakistan, the National Youngsters Policy (updated in 2019) officially defines "youth" as individuals aged 15 to 29 years.

It is a stage of life when adolescents must decide whether to utilize social media, which will have an immediate impact on their relationships and growth (Wing, 2012). Youth encompass the journey toward independence while simultaneously experiencing vulnerability in identity formation. As a result, it is best defined as a definite age group.

When analyzing social media and adolescents, it is crucial to define the demographic referred to as youth. The rise of social media is inducing significant transformations among young individuals, particularly those with diverse identities (National Youngsters Policy Institute, 2018). They engage with the digital world daily. Via online platforms, young individuals express their aspirations, difficulties, as well as afflictions. It reflects and amplifies numerous facets of daily existence (Boyd, 2014).

This universe requires the attributes of youth: not merely a chronological phase but a mindset, a disposition of determination, a vivid imagination, and an overwhelming sense of bravery over fear, as well as a desire for adventure over a life of comfort (Kennedy, Retrieved November 9, 2007).

2.2. Positive Impacts of Digital Media

Currently, online sites are important for teenagers in education, facilitating the acquisition of new trends, enhancement of composition and interactional skills, promotion of cultural heritage, gathering and dissemination of spiritual and diplomatic knowledge, improved lifestyle, and societal growth and development (Merriam Encyclopedia, 2001). A recent report by Common Sense Media reveals that nearly 50% of the 1,500 surveyed young adults regard social media experiences as essential for garnering assistance and direction, relieving a sense of loneliness, expressing creativity, and sustaining relationships among peers and loved ones. 43% indicated that social media usage diminishes emotions of melancholy, tension, or worry. 52% of LGBTQ adolescents indicated that social media mitigates their distress during difficult emotional times.

2.3. Youth as Digital Creators and Influencers

Today's youth is transforming from being passive recipients of digital content to active consumers and producers of content and are also setting trends. Young people have at their fingertips through digital media the tools to speak, to narrate their lives, and inspire others. The transformation has given youngsters the power to create their own digital selves and responsibly mold the experiences of peers. In nations like Pakistan and India, youngsters increasingly are creating content promoting strong lifestyle, research motivation, and peace of mind, entrepreneurship, and citizenship.

An undergraduate in Lahore can possess in him the ability to utilize Instagram app. to promote quality research practices, while a start-up company owner in Mumbai can release reels about business tactics, earning profit and budgeting techniques. Such creators not only inspire others but also enhance their skills in the process. They also fret during tough emotional times. Social media provides the voice representation of muted voices, such as women in villages and ethnic minorities, so that they may narrate their experiences and articulate their capability. Digital producers tend to bring attention to burning topics in society, such as gender equality, care of the planet, and literacy around mental health.

Through the production of content, youth foster:

- Conversation and narration expertise
- Assurance and personal articulation

- Management and transparency

The constructive interaction with digital networks cultivates a society of drive, innovation, and collective development. Through their role as influencers, adolescents are molding digital environments that embody genuine experiences and constructive values.

2.4. Financial Independence through Digital Media

Digital media has provided opportunities for financial liberty. Digital media enables individuals to sell merchandise and services to precise people, which boosts confidence and business awareness. Freelancing produces flexible cash streams in data development, visual branding, and coding. Moreover, digital trading provides access to stock exchanges, allowing people to develop asset acquisition competencies and generate money autonomously. These gateways allow youth, particularly in Pakistan, to develop durable income using digital technologies. Online branding has become a strongly sought-after domain. Young people are vigorously engaged as:

- Digital marketing coordinators and search engine optimization analysts
- Journalists, referral advertisers, email campaign strategists, and pay-per-click specialists

In parallel, freelancing is thriving. Individuals can offer many services on platforms such as Fiverr, Upwork, Freelancer, and Guru, including online art, media creating, online assistance, website creation, and video editing. Furthermore, as internet trading platforms become more accessible, youth financial knowledge is increasing. Apps like Binance, MetaTrader4, OctaFX, and Ku Coin enable educated youth to engage in foreign exchange investment, blockchain currency, equity market assessment, and commodity and contract-for-difference trading.

Enhanced capital participation not merely generates cash, but it also fosters a powerful startup mindset. Learners and alumni are creating and launching online enterprises, running digital shops, and developing private investment holdings, thereby contributing to the online market (Sunitha Kupuswamy, 2012).

2.5. Negative Impacts of Social Media

Though digital platforms have promoted language creativity and allowed people to show themselves in unique modes, they also have drawbacks. The widespread usage of social media has sparked worries about the loss of conventional grammar. Acronyms and casual writings are popular on online sites, making it harder to balance linguistic criteria in research settings. A Coventry University study observes that frequent social media users were likely to utilize “textisms,” such as the deletion of punctuation in their academic

writing. Educators have also noticed an increase in errors, such as the inappropriate use of homophones and punctuation, indicating a decline in students' formal writing skills.

In 2018, Cambridge Assessment English research found that teens who spent more than three hours a day on social apps were 22% more prone to make grammatical errors. According to a Grammarly poll conducted in 2020, employees who used social media for entertainment daily made 15% more errors in professional writing than those who did not.

2.6. The Effect of Social Apps Usage on Mental Health

The usage of online media can exacerbate emotions of worry and despair, especially among adolescents. The contagious aspect of social networks stimulates the brain's incentive system by triggering dopamine. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter connected to pleasant experiences. Our peers and relatives can "like or praise" what we post, providing us with a dopamine boost. So, if we do not receive that recognition or acceptance, our self-esteem and sense of sufficiency may suffer.

Social media focuses primarily on physical beauty. Numerous social media services, including Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok, allow users to add filters to photographs. Filters may give entertainment, but the ability to easily alter one's physical look and cover faults may result in false perceptions. Continuous exposure to edited photographs might cause increased self-consciousness and unhappiness with one's appearance.

Many people experience FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) when they utilize social media daily. Monitoring your friends and family on social media may lead to the idea that they are enjoying or living a better life compared to you.

The use of social networks has an impact on sleeping patterns. Screens emit blue light, which can disturb melatonin production. This hormone affects sleep, causing difficulty falling and staying asleep, potentially contributing to mood disorders (Silvani et al., 2022). The influence of social media on cognition depends on the amount of time spent using it. Digital media users are likely to face offensive information and peer evaluation. Thus, youth may confront melancholy, low self-belief, and feelings of anxiety (Jan et al., 2017).

According to Elgar et al. (2014), teens who engage in cyberbullying or receive frequent unfavorable criticism on their posts are more prone to encounter negative mental health effects. The anonymity given by social media platforms has allowed the spread of negative attitudes such as virtual bullying and bigoted language, which can harm people's sense of self.

2.7. Shift in Pakistani Youth's Linguistic Behavior

Social media apps are now vital arenas for Pakistani youth to correspond, express themselves, and mediate their roles. The murder of TikTokker Sana Yousaf and the sudden demise of actor Humaira Asghar throw light on how these platforms affect young people's identity formation and linguistic behavior, especially in a setting noted for religious sensitivity, cultural traditionalism, and a lack of emotional literacy.

Language in Pakistani online culture is biased; it is instilled with emotional depth, belief-based meaning, and is often belligerent, particularly on apps like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Young people often criticize others, especially women, using language that is governed by their culture or faith. Sentences like "Allah ki pakar" and "yeh to hona hi tha" show how sacred oration has been changed into a tool of public shame. Internet users often express mockery, criticism, or moral disapproval instead of grief or compassion.

Rather than being a tool for recognition or advocacy, language becomes a tool of supremacy. The tragedy of Sana Yousaf shows how the male attacker's psychological collapse in response to her daring display reflects a broader pattern: young people are unprepared to deal with refusal, loss, or emotional development. Instead of encouraging emotionally harmonious relationships, social media fosters reactive, clingy love, which leads to an abnormal identity based on control rather than association.

This study looks at the connection between identity, language, and social media. It will examine the ways in which these platforms have shaped new linguistic patterns, impacted changes in how people express themselves, and played a significant role in societal transition. The difficulties brought about by the world of digital communication, such as the simplification of language and the blending of personal and professional identities, will also be covered in the paper. This paper aims to clarify how language and identity are evolving in contemporary society because of social media.

2.8. Research Questions

This paper analyzes the following research questions:

1. How is language used artistically on social media?
2. How do social media apps shape the identity of young people?
3. What impact does social media have on the language patterns of young people, particularly in Pakistan?
4. How does social media affect the mental health of adolescents?

5. What steps should be taken to ensure appropriate use of digital media networks?

The study aims to investigate the impact of social apps on the language usage and identity formation of young people, particularly in the context of media and youth linguistics.

3. Literature Review

Social media impacts the lives and linguistic habits of young people in both positive and negative ways. It strengthens social connections while at the same time also creates challenges. For many, it may appear to be merely a source of entertainment, yet it has far-reaching implications, especially for a generation that is growing up in an era defined by interaction, multimedia, and multitasking rather than traditional broadcast media.

Research indicates that 82.6 percent of young people acknowledge that social applications significantly affect their social attitudes. The majority use these sites primarily for social purposes. Digital networking sites are also found to influence vocabulary development. One survey reported that 65 percent of participants believe social media enables them to connect with others, whereas 33 percent believe that young people use these platforms mainly for peer conversations rather than just amusement, which has contributed to a decline in face-to-face participation (Dr. Ajesu Kulandaraj, 2014).

The rapid rise of online media has reshaped identity formation. Digital platforms provide new opportunities for young people to express themselves in multiple ways. Valkenburg and Peter (2011) emphasize that online interaction increases self-disclosure and strengthens interpersonal connections, both of which are vital for adolescent identity development. Erikson's psychosocial theory also highlights that identity is formed through a series of developmental crises experienced across the life span.

Erikson (1968) identifies adolescence as a critical stage for identity development. Social media platforms, as spaces for social interaction and personal expression, amplify this process. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory also provides an important perspective by explaining that young people derive identity from group membership. This highlights the centrality of social interaction in shaping self-concept and creating a sense of belonging.

Several studies highlight the positive role of social media in identity development. Seabrook et al. (2016) found that youth who actively use social media experience greater social connectivity and higher levels of self-esteem. Huang and Su (2018) further argue

that platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat enable cross-cultural communication, helping teenagers integrate diverse aspects of their identities and fostering inclusivity, especially for marginalized groups.

Despite these benefits, many scholars caution against the negative impacts of social media. Perloff (2014) points out that exposure to idealized images of peers can reduce self-esteem and increase anxiety. Frison and Eggermont (2016) emphasize that the pressure to conform to online social norms often intensifies stress, depression, and uncertainty about identity.

3.1. The Impact of Cyberbullying on Youth

Cyberbullying, defined as harassment through emails, online chats, and social media sites (Patchin and Hinduja, 2011), has become a critical psychological health risk in modern society. Unlike conventional bullying, cyberbullying can take place at any time and in any context, making it impossible for victims to escape its effects. The anonymity of online spaces often empowers offenders, while victims face humiliation, rejection, and fear of retaliation.

A Pew Research Institute study (2023) reported that 60 percent of American students experienced harassment online, including name-calling, false rumors, and degrading content. Many cases go unreported due to fear of social exclusion. Evidence strongly connects cyberbullying with depression, anxiety, isolation, and suicidal ideation. Research conducted by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (2017) confirmed that youth exposed to daily online harassment displayed heightened levels of emotional distress. A World Health Organization study across 43 countries revealed that victims of cyberbullying are more likely to suffer from poor self-esteem and suicidal thinking.

A well-known case is that of Megan Meier, a 13-year-old from Missouri who was harassed on MySpace in 2006. She endured sustained emotional abuse by an individual operating a false account and ultimately took her own life. This case highlights the tragic real-life consequences of online victimization. As internet use continues to grow, addressing cyberbullying requires targeted interventions, stronger policies, and accessible mental health support systems (Deborah Richards, 2015).

3.2. Theoretical Frameworks

This research draws on two major theories: the modelling theory and the social identity theory.

The modelling theory, rooted in observational learning, explains how young people adopt behaviors they observe online. DE fleur and Dennis (1994, cited in Fourie 2001)

argue that media users, especially adolescents, tend to emulate the conduct of models presented in digital media. According to this theory, media users experience activities demonstrated by role models, identify with these figures, and replicate their actions in real life. When such behaviors are positively reinforced, they are more likely to be repeated. For example, a teenager who admires an influencer on Facebook may adopt the influencer's style, mannerisms, or attitudes. This desire for recognition is reinforced by peer validation, pushing adolescents to internalize and replicate what they observe.

The social identity theory, introduced by Tajfel (1982), emphasizes that individuals categorize themselves and others into groups, derive dignity and self-worth from their membership in those groups, and shape their personal identity in relation to others. This perspective highlights the dual function of social media: it offers young people belonging through group affiliation but also exposes them to exclusion through out-group comparisons. Together, the modelling theory and social identity theory explain how social media affects both language use and identity development, revealing the centrality of digital interactions in the construction of self-concept.

4. Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the impact of social media on youth language and identity formation.

The quantitative phase involved the use of a structured online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. It contained 14 multiple-choice questions covering demographic details, patterns of social media usage, linguistic practices, and identity-related experiences. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews and the analysis of WhatsApp chat samples, which provided contextual depth and complemented the survey findings.

The study population comprised university students between the ages of 18 and 25 from both urban and rural areas. A stratified sampling technique ensured proportional representation of both groups. The urban stratum included students from the University of Okara in Renala Khurd and Okara city, while the rural stratum consisted of students from surrounding areas such as Ravi riverside villages and Harappa. In total, 100 students participated in the quantitative survey, while 10 to 12 students took part in the qualitative interviews.

Data collection was carried out both online and in person. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and through WhatsApp calls, based on participants' preferences.

Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and was audio recorded with informed consent.

The questionnaire and interview guide were developed after a careful review of relevant literature. Faculty members from the department of languages and literature assessed the instruments for validity, and a pilot test was conducted with five students. Based on feedback, adjustments were made to improve clarity and reliability.

Ethical considerations were given priority. Participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the research, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidential handling of all personal data. Informed consent was obtained by digital means, and all responses were stored securely strictly for academic use only.

5.Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the survey were examined by using analytics to identify broad trends in social media usage and language behavior. Thematic analysis was performed to evaluate qualitative data gathered through interviews. Interviews were recorded and analyzed again to identify common themes. Central topics, such as digital identity, emotional expression, linguistic innovation, peer influence, and online presentation, were classified and analyzed in relation to the study questions.

5.1. Limitations

The tiny sample size and exclusive emphasis on one university limited the scope of this investigation. The results may not be applicable to Pakistan's full youth population. Furthermore, participants' difficulty in sharing personal thoughts during interviews may have influenced the profundity of their responses.

5.2. Summary Line

This mixed-methods technique allowed the researcher to gain quantitative and qualitative insights into the influence of social media on youth language behavior and identity in the online era.

6. Results

The results stem from data collected using a mixed-method approach to study how social media platforms impact linguistic behavior and self-concept among Pakistani youngsters. This study centered on university students aged 18 to 25 from both urban (Okara City, Renala Khurd) and rural (Sahiwal, Harappa, and Ravi riverside villages). The

study aimed to examine how young languages are transforming on social media, how they impact self-presentation, and identity formation among young people from different backgrounds. The data was collected using an online questionnaire (n = 100 participants) and semi-structured interviews (n = 12). This section first includes quantitative findings based on questionnaire responses, followed by qualitative findings collected from interviews.

6.1. Quantitative Findings

A structured questionnaire was delivered to 100 university students to determine how social media impacts language and identity expression. The questionnaire consists of multiple-choice questions, and the responses of respondents are given below:

No.	Questions	Options	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	What is your age group?	18–20 years	23	23%
		21–23 years	45	45%
		24–25 years	32	32%
2	What is your gender?	Male	50	50%
		Female	50	50%
3	What is your background?	Urban area	53	53.6%
		Rural area	45	46.4%
4	Which social platform do you use often?	Facebook	12	12%
		Instagram	31	31%
		YouTube	18	18%
		Snapchat	14	14%
		TikTok	25	25%
5	How much time do you spend on social sites per day?	Less than 1 hour	5	5%
		1–3 hours	33	33%
		4–6 hours	46	46%
		More than 6 hours	14	14%
6	What is your main aim of using digital media?	Self-branding	9	9%
		For entertainment	53	53%
		Education/learning	19	19%
		News & updates	10	10%
		Communication with friends/family	9	9%

7	To what extent has social media influenced your personal identity?	No impact	14	14%
		Slight extent	8	8%
		Great extent	39	39%
		Moderate extent	39	39%
8	How often do you compare yourself with influencers or peers online?	Often	38	38%
		Never	23	23%
		Rarely	8	8%
		Sometimes	31	31%
9	Do you feel stress to show a certain image of yourself digitally?	Agree	31	31%
		Neutral	13	13%
		Disagree	13	13%
		Strongly agree	43	43%
10	Have social media apps ever made you feel insecure about your lifestyle, look, or achievements?	Never	15	15%
		Rarely	15	15%
		Yes, frequently	46	46%
		Yes, occasionally	24	24%
11	Do you mix English with Urdu when chatting or posting online?	Often	21	21%
		Never	6	6%
		Always	55	55%
		Sometimes	18	18%
12	Which language style do you mostly use online?	Formal language	27	27%
		Informal/casual language	40	40%
		Slang & abbreviations (LOL, BTW, Tbh)	30	30%
		Emoji & GIF-based communication	3	3%

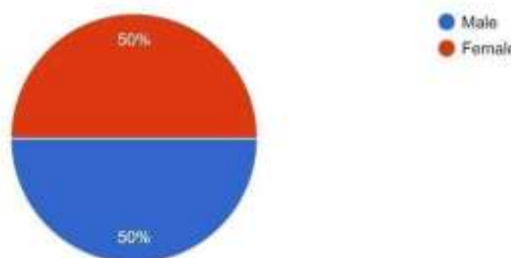
13	Have you adopted new slang or expressions from social media trends?	No	16	16.2%
		Yes, frequently	55	55.6%
		Yes, occasionally	28	28.3%
14	Do you think your online language style affects how others perceive your personality?	Agree	38	38%
		Neutral	12	12%
		Disagree	5	5%
		Strongly agree	45	45%

6.2. Interpretation of Quantitative Findings

6.2.1. Gender Representation

The sample was systematically proportionate, with 50% males and 50% females. This equal representation reduces gender bias in responses and enables more accurate comparative analysis. The tiny majority (53.6%) came from rural areas, while 46.4% were from cities. This combination offers an understanding of how social media affects youth from various socio-cultural backgrounds.

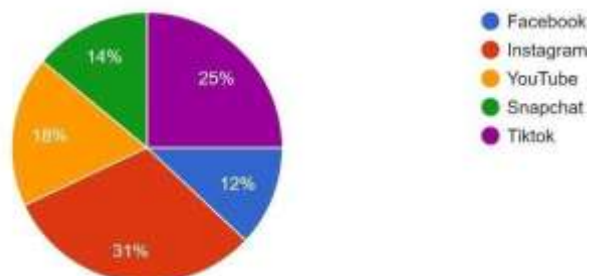
What is your gender?
100 responses



6.2.2. Most Used Social Media Platforms

Instagram became the most popular platform (31%), followed by TikTok (25%), and YouTube (18%). Facebook (12%) and Snapchat (14%) were less popular, indicating a youth preference for visually vibrant and short-form material.

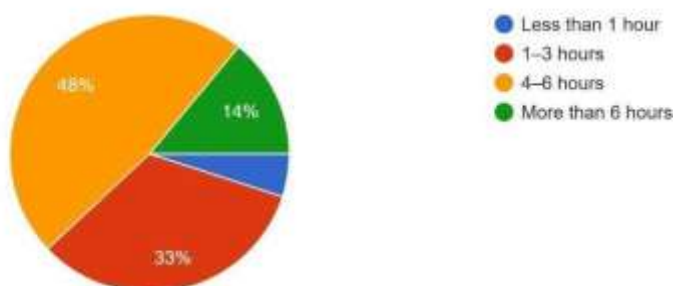
Which social media platform do you use the most?
100 responses



6.2.3. Daily Usage Hours

The majority (48%) spend 4–6 hours every day on social media, while 33% spend 1–3 hours. Only 5% use it for less than an hour. This strong involvement demonstrates the immersive nature of digital platforms for young people.

How many hours per day do you spend on social media?
100 responses

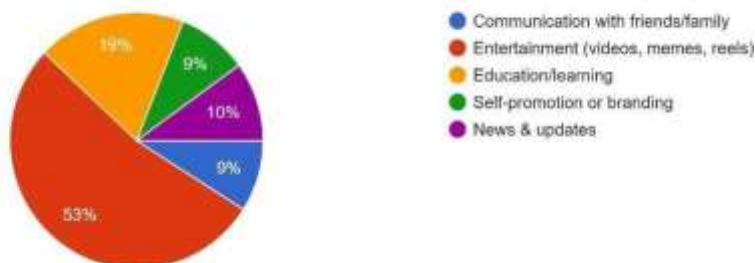


6.2.4. Main Purpose of Social Media Use

Entertainment (53%) outperforms education (19%) and communication (9%). This implies that social media is largely viewed as a recreational pastime rather than an academic or solely communication tool.

What is your main purpose of using social media?

100 responses

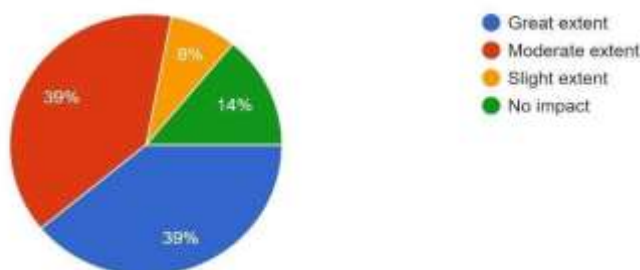


6.2.5. Influence on Personal Identity

78% of respondents say social media has some influence on their personal identity. Only 14% saw no impact, demonstrating the widespread influence of digital places on self-concept.

To what extent has social media influenced your personal identity?

100 responses

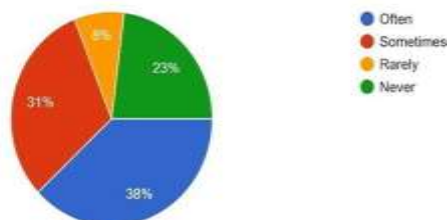


6.2.6. Comparison with Influencers/Peers

A total of 61% admit to comparing themselves to influencers or peers on rare occasions, with 38% doing so on a regular basis. This suggests that idealized portrayals online have a considerable influence on self-evaluation.

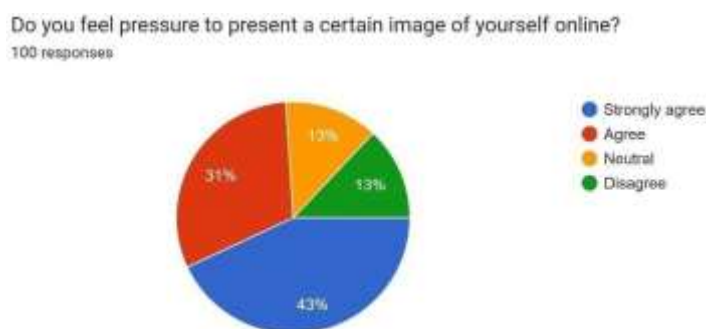
How often do you compare yourself with influencers or peers online?

100 responses



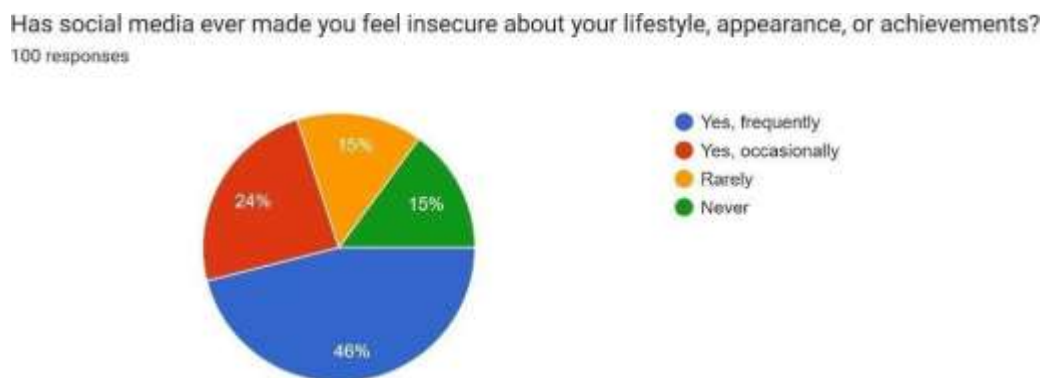
6.2.7. Pressure to Present a Certain Image

56% feel pressed to present a specific image online (43% strongly agree, 31% agree), with 26% remaining neutral. This lends credence to the notion that carefully managed self-presentation is the dominating social media norm.



6.2.8. Feelings of Insecurity

46% reported experiencing frequent insecurity about their lifestyle, appearance, or achievements because of social media exposure. This is consistent with prior studies on influence-driven self-comparison.

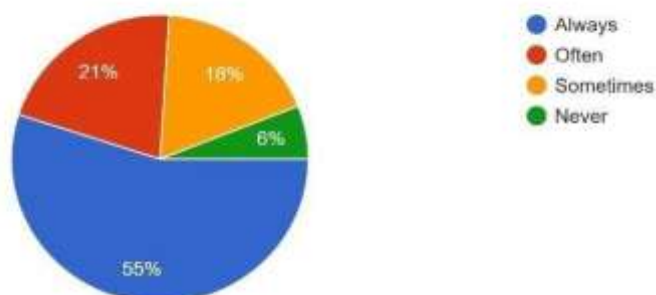


6.2.9. Code-Mixing(English & Urdu)

A staggering 55% always use English and Urdu in internet conversation, while only 6% never do. This indicates the predominance of bilingual hybrid language in digital situations, indicating both identity hybridity and efficiency of expression.

Do you mix English with Urdu when chatting or posting online?

100 responses

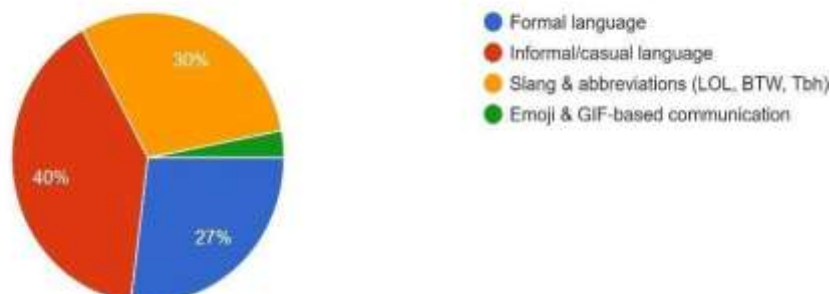


6.2.10. Online Language Style

The most used language is informal/casual(40%), followed by formal(27%), and slang(30%). Only 3% communicate primarily with emoji or GIFs. This shows that, while informal language predominates, formal registers still play a role in teenage communication.

Which language style do you mostly use online?

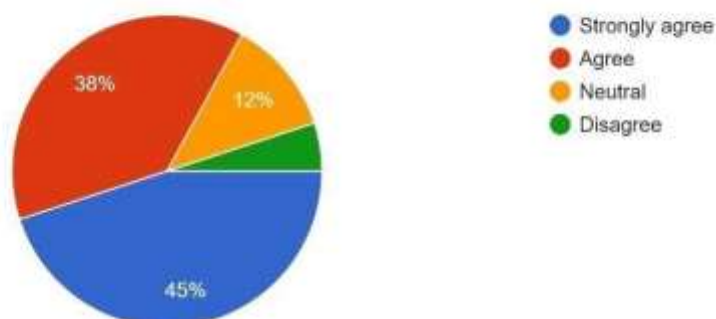
100 responses



6.2.11. Adoption of New Slangs

Eighty-three percent have acquired jargon or expressions based on social media trends, with 55% doing so regularly. This demonstrates the infectious effect of digital culture on linguistic innovation.

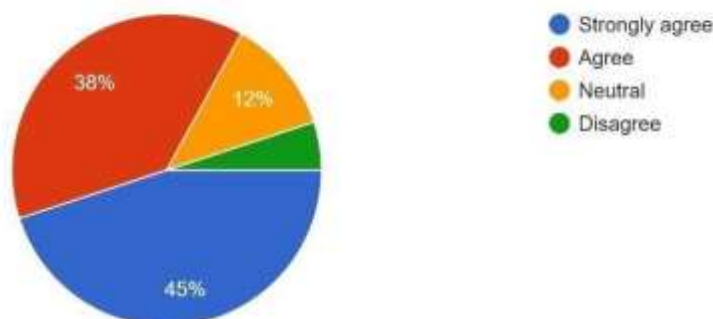
Do you think your online language style affects how others perceive your personality?
100 responses



6.2.12. Perceived Impact of Language Style on Personality

83% believe their online language style influences how others perceive their personality (45% strongly agree, 38% agree). This suggests a high level of awareness among young people about the social performance of language online.

Do you think your online language style affects how others perceive your personality?
100 responses



6.3. Qualitative Findings

In-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 university students revealed how social media platforms affect not just how young people speak, but also how they perceive themselves. Using thematic analysis, three significant themes emerged that emphasize the psychological, social, and linguistic transitions that Pakistan's youth are experiencing today.

6.3.1. Code-Mixing as a Sign of Digital Identity

Most interviews indicated that their online communication is a seamless blend of Urdu and English, commonly known as Roman Urdu. This is more than just convenience; it has evolved into a digital trademark linguistic identity that reflects both modernity and cultural roots.

Example:

A 21-year-old student from Okara expressed that writing "Ap kia ka rahay ho?" instead of "What are you doing?" feels more personal. "It's not about grammar; it's about how I sound to my pals."

This code-mixing frequently extends beyond texts to Instagram captions, TikTok video comments, and memes, resulting in a linguistic style that is casual, humorous, and distinctly youthful.

Insight: Roman Urdu is no longer "broken English," but rather a chosen identity influenced by online culture.

• **Performative Self-Presentation: Speaking to Be Seen**

Many individuals claimed they intentionally tailor their words online to appear cool, confident, or popular. For them, language is more than just communication.

Example:

A female student from Harappa shared that she now uses terms like "vibe check" and "mood" in her stories due to positive feedback. "Even my emoji has changed! I now use stickers like:"



Linguistic Adaptation for Online Survival: "Talk Trendy, Get Noticed"

Students frequently believe that online survival entails linguistic adaptation, from using fashionable terminology like "on fleek," "lit," or "dead" to adopting worldwide TikTok buzzwords like "POV" or "main character energy."

Insight: Social media has transformed language into a currency of attention; talk trendy and get noticed.

• **Emotional Pressure and Self-Comparison: "Am I Good Enough?"**

Almost every student reported feeling uneasy when their posts received fewer likes or were

compared to others' digital personas, particularly influencers or peers with polished content.

Example:

A Sahiwal student commented, "My friend posted a reel with aesthetic quotes in English and received 300 likes. Mine included Urdu poetry and received only 30. I removed it. I wondered whether my style wasn't 'classy' enough."

This type of social comparison not only lowers self-esteem, but it also alters how young people communicate and write online, often leading them to forsake their real linguistic identity in favor of what is popular.

Insight: The algorithm determines not only visibility, but also lexicon, tone, and confidence



Fig.1



Fig.2

6.3.2. Identity Crisis Signs

In Fig. 1: Signs include comparing one's appearance to that of an influencer, feeling insufficient to meet beauty standards, and language conveying emotional vulnerability. ("I feel like my pics are trash.")

In Fig. 2: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), perceiving self-worth through Instagram aesthetics. Measuring social media participation determines social value.

These interviews reveal a significant link between language, self-performance, and emotional experience in the digital world. Social media is no longer a passive reflection of identity; it is now an active force that shapes, modifies, and frequently distorts the self. In a world dominated by likes, filters, reels, and retweets, today's youth are not only changing their lexicon but also redefining themselves, often unintentionally. Each post becomes a performance, each phrase a branding tool, and each emoji a silent message of acceptance.

7. Discussion

The findings reveal a complicated connection between digital media use, identity development, and linguistic behavior among undergraduates. The research also demonstrates that digital platforms have evolved from simple communication tools to important venues for identity development, negotiation, and, in some cases, restoration.

According to the findings, more than half of the participants (56%) feel pressured to construct a specific online persona, and 78% recognize social media's major impact on their personal identity. This is consistent with Goffman's concept of self-presentation, in which individuals act as performers, carefully creating their "front stage" to meet societal expectations. Respondents' favorite platforms, Instagram and TikTok, naturally support curation through visual filters, trend-centric content, and follower engagement metrics.

Social comparison appeared as a major subject, with 61% admitting to comparing themselves to influencers or peers at least occasionally. This tendency aligns with Festinger's Social Comparison Theory, which holds that people judge themselves in comparison to others, potentially leading to increased insecurity. The fact that 46% of respondents expressed feelings of uneasiness about their lifestyle, appearance, or achievements suggests that the impact of these comparisons goes beyond immediate emotional reactions and can have long-lasting consequences for self-expression.

The research findings also indicate a substantial shift in language behavior. The majority (55%) said they always blend English and Urdu, while only 6% never did. This code-mixing reflects both Pakistan's bilingual environment and the influence of international media. Such linguistic hybridity can be interpreted as a form of identity signaling in which people align with global youth culture.

83% of those questioned agreed to using slang or phrases that were viral on social media. This demonstrates how internet sites act as tools for language change, as viral catchphrases, hashtags, and memes quickly embed themselves into common speech. With brevity, wit, and relatability often taking precedence over grammatical accuracy, the extent of informal and casual language (40%) over formal registers indicates a larger informalization of communication in the digital world.

The striking finding of the data may be the emotional price of online interaction. Digital media provides people the chance to express themselves, but it also creates zones where identity is constantly contrasted, accepted, or disapproved of depending on public metrics such as likes and comments.

The substantial rates of peer comparison and the uncertain feelings that 46% of respondents indicated point to a risk of identity crisis, particularly for youngsters who are still figuring out who they are. These findings are consistent with global research, including Pew Research (2025), which states that most teenagers endure pressure to follow trends and look impressive online. This is seen in Pakistan, where people often use code-mixed language, prioritize entertainment-driven content, and present themselves in a carefully groomed manner. Such actions can foster social engagement and creativity, but they also provide an environment conducive to linguistic decline and identity instability.

8.Conclusion

The research highlights how social media influences social interactions and self-concept through a mixed-method approach. The results underline how crucial it is for young people to use social media in an appropriate manner, raising awareness among parents, educators, and mental health professionals who aim to encourage the formation of positive identities. Social apps have some disadvantages that need to be considered, even though they offer benefits like promoting knowledge, encouraging engagement, and supporting the voices of overlooked people. To ensure beneficial use, young people should be educated on appropriate usage.

8.1. Suggestions

Youth avoiding the detrimental effects of social media use demands a comprehensive approach, including several initiatives. Below is a synopsis of the most vital steps:

8.1.1. Rules and Conditions of the Regulatory System

Clear guidelines must be created by the government to protect users from online harassment. Australia, for example, has implemented strong rules that disallow youth under the age of sixteen from using popular social media apps, with dire consequences for violations. States in the US, including Utah and Connecticut, have passed laws requiring age restriction verification and parental approval for teens.

8.1.2. Education and Digital Literacy

Encouraging youth with digital education is important. Programs that educate students on the pros and cons of social media should be put in place by educational institutions. These programs should also promote critical and balanced connectivity with their digital platforms. This tactic encourages appropriate and knowledgeable digital behavior.

8.1.3. Intense Parental Involvement

Parents need to carefully monitor what their children are doing online. By monitoring, parents can limit screen time and have open conversations about safe internet use with their kids, fostering the formation of positive digital habits.

8.1.4. Technical Assistance

Apps that track screen time can be useful in managing risky online behaviors. The development of these solutions to encourage improved digital attitudes is gaining momentum in Pakistan and other countries. By using these strategies, we can create a safer digital environment where youth can use social media to their benefit while lowering their risk (Kulan Daraj, Dr. A. Jesu, 2014).

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