

Beyond LOL and OMG: Slang, Acronyms, and Confidence in Selected EFL Learners' Social Media Communication

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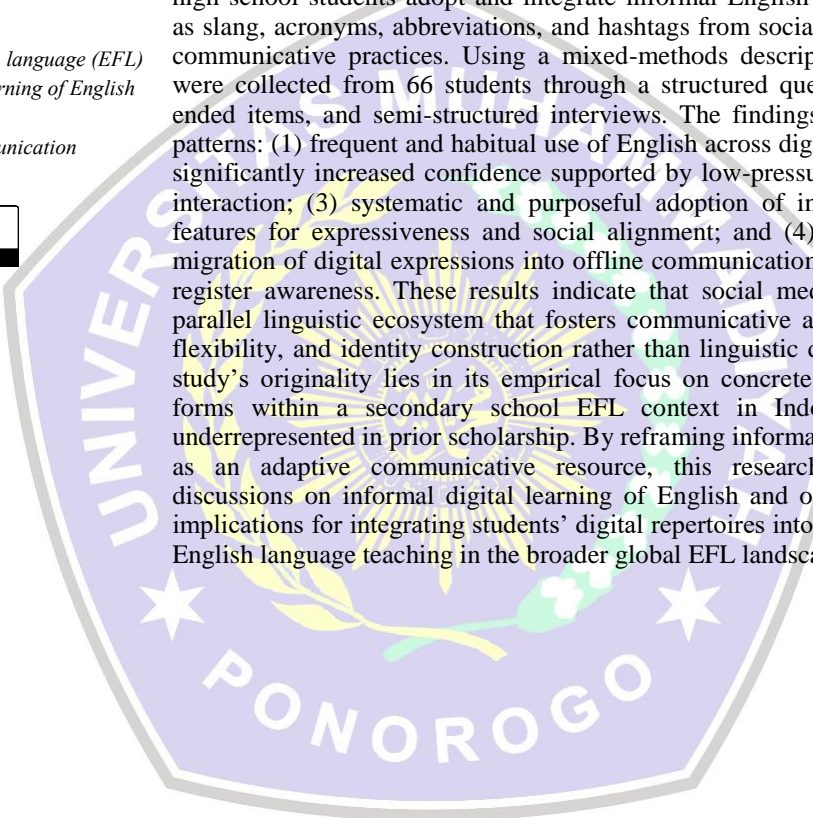
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ABSTRACT

English development in the digital age increasingly unfolds within the dynamic, multimodal spaces of social media rather than exclusively in formal classrooms. Yet, empirical evidence detailing how specific digital linguistic features influence adolescent learners in non-Western EFL contexts remains limited. Addressing this gap, this study investigates how Indonesian senior high school students adopt and integrate informal English expressions such as slang, acronyms, abbreviations, and hashtags from social media into their communicative practices. Using a mixed-methods descriptive design, data were collected from 66 students through a structured questionnaire, open-ended items, and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal four key patterns: (1) frequent and habitual use of English across digital platforms; (2) significantly increased confidence supported by low-pressure, asynchronous interaction; (3) systematic and purposeful adoption of informal linguistic features for expressiveness and social alignment; and (4) cross-contextual migration of digital expressions into offline communication accompanied by register awareness. These results indicate that social media operates as a parallel linguistic ecosystem that fosters communicative agency, pragmatic flexibility, and identity construction rather than linguistic deterioration. The study's originality lies in its empirical focus on concrete digital linguistic forms within a secondary school EFL context in Indonesia, a setting underrepresented in prior scholarship. By reframing informal digital language as an adaptive communicative resource, this research contributes to discussions on informal digital learning of English and offers pedagogical implications for integrating students' digital repertoires into context-sensitive English language teaching in the broader global EFL landscape.



1. Introduction

A single notification can now carry language across the world in seconds. No longer confined to classrooms, textbooks, or formal exchanges, language in the digital age reshapes how people construct meaning, express identity, and engage in global discourse. Social media platforms have become evolving linguistic spaces where language is continuously created and adapted. Through multimodal interactions that combine text, visuals, audio, and symbols, users blur the lines between spoken and written communication. In these spaces, informal language such as slang, abbreviations, acronyms, and hashtags naturally thrives, reflecting creativity and immediacy. For EFL learners, this shift offers broader exposure and participation beyond formal instruction (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021).

Adolescents, in particular, stand at the center of this linguistic shift. Platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube are not merely entertainment venues but interactive arenas where identity, belonging, and expression are negotiated daily. These platforms function as informal sites of language learning, shaping learners' communicative choices and linguistic confidence (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Jannah et al., 2024). Through continuous exposure to authentic and contextually rich English input, learners encounter diverse registers, discursive styles, and pragmatic conventions that are rarely replicated in traditional classrooms (Jannah et al., 2024). Engagement in such environments has been associated with informal digital learning of English (IDLE), fostering motivation, confidence, and communicative fluency through immersive practice (Salam, 2025).

Nevertheless, concerns regarding distraction, credibility of content, and the dominance of informal forms call for thoughtful pedagogical integration to ensure balanced development of vocabulary, grammar, intercultural competence, and digital literacy (Jannah et al., 2024; Salam, 2025; Almoresh & Al-Tamimi, 2024).

A substantial body of scholarship has investigated the pedagogical potential of social media in language learning contexts. Empirical studies demonstrate that exposure to authentic language use on digital platforms contributes positively to vocabulary acquisition, writing fluency, and communicative competence (Desta et al., 2021; Zainal & Rahmat, 2020). Interaction with native and proficient speakers through online networks further enhances learners' pragmatic awareness and real-world communicative skills (Aitamurto et al., 2022). Despite these

contributions, much of the literature concentrates on higher education contexts or discusses language acquisition in broad terms. Secondary school learners, particularly in non-Western settings such as Indonesia, remain underrepresented in empirical investigations (Vraga & Bode, 2020). Consequently, our understanding of how adolescent EFL learners integrate digital language practices into their everyday and academic communication remains limited.

Moreover, although social media has been widely acknowledged as a supportive environment for informal learning, fewer studies have examined the specific linguistic features that learners appropriate from digital platforms. Existing research often emphasizes learners' perceptions or general proficiency outcomes, leaving concrete linguistic forms such as slang, acronyms, abbreviations, and hashtags underexplored (Alhabash & Ma, 2021; Nguyen & Dao, 2024; Aunurrahman et al., 2022). A clearer gap emerges in research addressing how these digital features shape English practices at the secondary school level in EFL contexts (Natsir et al., 2023; Tuyet & Khang, 2020). While some studies highlight instructional strategies that integrate authentic tasks, genre awareness, and affective engagement (Aunurrahman et al., 2022; Tuyet & Khang, 2020; Komara & Tiarsiwi, 2021; Minaflinou & Koutchadé, 2025; Chen et al., 2025), limited empirical evidence documents how students actually incorporate digital linguistic repertoires into their communication. This gap underscores the need for research that triangulates learners' online practices with classroom realities to clarify the linguistic consequences of sustained digital exposure (Nguyen & Dao, 2024; Tuyet & Khang, 2020; Komara & Tiarsiwi, 2021).

Responding to these gaps, the present study situates itself at the intersection of digital discourse, multiliteracies, and EFL pedagogy. It specifically investigates how Indonesian senior high school students adopt and integrate slang, abbreviations, acronyms, and informal expressions from social media into both academic and everyday communication. Grounded in the framework of digital discourse competence and multiliteracies, this study conceptualizes social media not merely as a tool but as a mediating environment that shapes linguistic repertoires and identity construction. Within the Indonesian context, where digital platforms increasingly complement formal instruction (Baetty & Thomas, 2019; Budiharto & Amalia, 2019) and motivation plays a central role in online engagement, examining these practices becomes particularly relevant (Wahyuningsih &

Afandi, 2023; Nurdin et al., 2025; Labibah et al., 2024; Muziatun et al., 2022).

The significance of this study lies in its focus on secondary school learners in a non-Western EFL context and its empirical attention to concrete digital linguistic forms. The primary aim is to explore how social media shapes students' English language practices in both formal and informal domains. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the types of English expressions and linguistic patterns most commonly adopted from digital platforms and to examine how these practices influence learners' confidence and communicative behavior (Nuraeni et al., 2021). By addressing these objectives, the research contributes empirical evidence to discussions on informal digital learning and adolescent language development in Indonesia.

The findings of this study suggest that social media functions as a parallel linguistic arena that complements formal instruction. Students' adoption of slang, abbreviations, and other informal features reflects not linguistic deterioration but pragmatic adaptation to context. Such practices reveal learners' ability to navigate multiple registers and to negotiate meaning across digital and academic environments. Recognizing this adaptability challenges deficit perspectives that view digital language as inherently detrimental. Instead, social media can be understood as a space where communicative confidence, identity exploration, and linguistic experimentation converge (Lee & Dressman, 2021).

In the broader ELT context, these insights carry important pedagogical implications. Integrating students' digital language experiences into classroom instruction may help bridge the persistent gap between formal English education and real-world language use. By acknowledging slang, acronyms, and other digital expressions as part of learners' evolving repertoires, educators can design instruction that fosters critical awareness, register flexibility, and pragmatic competence. Ultimately, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how digital environments reshape English language development in non-Western contexts, encouraging ELT practitioners to harness students' digital engagement as a meaningful resource for language learning rather than viewing it as a peripheral or disruptive influence.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media and Language Learning

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed language learning by extending exposure beyond formal classrooms into

interactive, multimodal digital spaces. Platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and TikTok provide authentic linguistic input and real-time communication, supporting vocabulary development, writing fluency, and communicative competence (Desta et al., 2021; Zainal & Rahmat, 2020). These environments also reduce language anxiety and enhance willingness to communicate by offering low-pressure opportunities for experimentation (Alhabash & Ma, 2021), while learners often demonstrate awareness of contextual differences between informal online discourse and formal academic writing (Khattak & Binu, 2024). Research on slang and platform-specific discourse shows that abbreviations, clipping, and hybrid expressions function as markers of identity, efficiency, and social belonging (Setyowati & Yanottama, 2023; Kurniati & Rusfandi, 2021), with systematic analyses identifying distinct interactional norms across platforms (Sundaram et al., 2023). Rather than signaling linguistic decline, these forms represent adaptive and socially meaningful practices within evolving digital ecosystems (Firmansyah et al., 2024; Rahmtallah, 2020; Khattak & Binu, 2024; Setyowati & Yanottama, 2023; Kurniati & Rusfandi, 2021; Sundaram et al., 2023; Natalia et al., 2025).

Despite these insights, notable gaps remain. Much of the literature concentrates on higher education contexts, leaving secondary school learners underexamined (Salfin et al., 2024), even though adolescents are among the most active digital users. In addition, many studies focus on general outcomes such as motivation or proficiency without systematically documenting the specific linguistic features adopted from social media. Empirical evidence detailing how slang, acronyms, hashtags, and informal expressions are incorporated into learners' repertoires, particularly in non-Western EFL contexts like Indonesia, is still limited. Given Indonesia's multilingual environment, findings from Western settings cannot be assumed transferable. By focusing on secondary school learners, analyzing concrete digital linguistic forms, and situating the inquiry within a non-Western context, the present study addresses these gaps and offers pedagogically relevant insights for integrating digital practices into English language teaching.

2.2 Informal Language and Identity Construction in Digital Spaces

Social media operates not only as a communication tool but also as a space for identity negotiation, where adolescents experiment with linguistic styles to express affiliation and stance (Nuraeni et al., 2021; Androutsopoulos, 2020).

Informal expressions such as slang, acronyms, and hashtags function as semiotic resources for constructing digital personas and signaling group membership. While some scholars caution that frequent exposure to informal forms may weaken formal accuracy, others argue that engagement with diverse registers strengthens pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence (Lee & Dressman, 2021). From this perspective, learners develop register flexibility, moving strategically between informal digital discourse and formal academic language. However, most research in this area has been conducted in Western contexts, leaving Indonesian adolescents in multilingual EFL environments relatively understudied.

Another unresolved issue concerns whether digital linguistic features remain confined to online communication or extend into offline and academic contexts. Limited empirical work has examined how such forms influence broader communicative behavior. The present study addresses these gaps by investigating how Indonesian senior high school students adopt slang, acronyms, abbreviations, and hashtags from social media and how these practices relate to confidence, identity construction, and communicative flexibility. Its novelty lies in integrating concrete digital linguistic features with learner confidence and identity formation within a non-Western secondary EFL context. By framing informal digital expressions as indicators of pragmatic adaptability rather than deficiency, the study provides important implications for ELT, encouraging educators to leverage students' digital repertoires to promote register awareness, critical digital literacy, and context-sensitive language use.

3. Method

This study employed a mixed-methods descriptive design to explore how social media shapes English language practices among Indonesian senior high school students. Quantitative data identified patterns in students' use of slang, acronyms, abbreviations, and other informal expressions, while qualitative data added contextual depth and interpretation. Integrating both approaches strengthens validity through triangulation and enriches understanding of these linguistic practices. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Dörnyei, 2010; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010).

3.1 Participants

The participants consisted of 66 senior high school students from two schools in Ponorogo, Indonesia. A convenience sampling technique was applied due to accessibility and participants' active engagement with social media, which served as a

primary inclusion criterion. Although this method limits generalizability, it is appropriate for exploratory research in educational contexts (Dörnyei, 2010). All students reported frequent use of platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which are widely used among Indonesian adolescents (Purboningsih et al., 2024). Informed consent was obtained from students and school authorities, and anonymity was maintained throughout the study.

3.2 Instruments

1) Quantitative Instrument

Data were primarily collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of two sections. Section A examined general English language practices on social media, including frequency of use and confidence levels. Section B explored specific linguistic features adopted from digital platforms, such as slang, acronyms, abbreviations, and hashtags. Items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," allowing nuanced assessment of students' practices (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Content validity was ensured through expert review (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

2) Qualitative Instruments

To complement the survey data, the questionnaire included open-ended items inviting students to describe their experiences using English on social media. In addition, brief semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive subset of participants to explore motivations, perceived differences between online and classroom English, and reflections on adopting informal digital expressions. These qualitative tools provided deeper insight into identity construction, confidence, and communicative flexibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected during the second semester of the academic year. The questionnaire was distributed via an online survey platform to ensure efficient and independent responses (Vraga & Bode, 2020). Following the survey, selected participants participated in 15–20 minute interviews conducted face-to-face or online with consent. The sequential design allowed preliminary quantitative findings to inform qualitative inquiry, enhancing coherence and triangulation.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to identify patterns in English language use and the adoption of informal expressions (Alhabash & McAlister, 2015). This approach provided a clear overview of observable trends without inferring causal relationships. Findings were interpreted in relation to broader research on digital language learning (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2022; Purboningsih et al., 2024).

Qualitative data from open-ended responses and interviews were analyzed thematically. Responses were coded inductively to identify recurring themes related to digital identity, register awareness, and confidence. The integration of statistical trends and thematic insights strengthened interpretive validity and provided a more nuanced understanding of students' linguistic practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The study adhered to ethical standards in educational research. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and no personal identifying information was collected. However, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias (Dörnyei, 2010; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010), and the use of convenience sampling with a

limited sample size restricts generalizability. Future research may incorporate discourse analysis of authentic social media interactions to further validate reported practices.

4. Results

This section presents the key findings from the analysis of 66 senior high school students' responses to the questionnaire on their English language practices on social media. The results are categorized according to the research questions, focusing on students' general use of English on social media and the adoption of specific linguistic patterns from digital communication. The analysis highlights the most prominent trends and provides an in-depth interpretation of the findings.

4.1 Frequent Use of English on Social Media

To examine the extent to which English is embedded in students' digital communication practices, five survey items measured frequency of use across general interaction, peer communication, academic exchange, and confidence. The analysis sought to determine whether English operates merely as exposure to global content or as an integrated communicative resource within students' everyday digital routines. Table 4.1 presents the distribution of responses.

Table 4.1 Students' English Language Practices on Social Media (N = 66)

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	A + SA (%)
A1. Use English when interacting on social media	0	14	0	28	24	78.8%
A2. Use English when commenting/replying to posts	0	10	4	30	22	78.8%
A3. Use English for academic-related communication online	1	8	6	29	22	77.3%
A4. Use English when communicating with friends online	0	12	5	31	18	74.2%
A5. Feel confident using English on social media	0	9	7	34	16	75.8%

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree.

The findings demonstrate consistently high levels of English use across communicative contexts. Between 74.2% and 78.8% of participants selected Agree or Strongly Agree for Items A1–A4. Nearly four out of five students reported regularly using English when interacting (A1) and when commenting or replying to posts (A2). Academic-related digital communication (A3) shows similarly strong engagement at 77.3%. Minimal disagreement and low neutrality indicate that English use is habitual rather than situational.

Importantly, English is not confined to performative public spaces. Its presence in peer communication (A4) and the accompanying high confidence levels (A5) suggest that English functions as a routine communicative medium within students' digital ecosystems.

The quantitative dominance of positive responses is substantiated by qualitative evidence from open-ended responses (OE) and semi-structured interviews (INT), strengthening the interpretive validity of the findings.

English as a Normative Digital Medium

Students frequently described English as aligned with platform expectations:

“Sebagian besar postingan yang saya lihat pakai bahasa Inggris, jadi saya otomatis membalas pakai bahasa Inggris.”
[“Most posts I see are in English, so I automatically reply in English.”]
(S12-OE)

“Kalau topiknya internasional, rasanya lebih cocok pakai bahasa Inggris.”
[“If it’s a global topic, it feels more appropriate to use English.”]
(S27-OE)

Interview data further illustrate this normalization:

“Di Instagram itu rasanya lebih natural kalau pakai bahasa Inggris. Lebih sesuai dengan platformnya.”
[“On Instagram, it feels more natural to use English. It matches the platform.”]
(S07-INT, 08:15)

“Bahasa Inggris itu seperti bahasa media sosial. Jadi saya mengikuti kebiasaan itu saja.”
[“English is like the language of social media. I just follow that habit.”]
(S19-INT, 12:43)

These narratives align directly with the high agreement levels in Items A1 and A2, indicating that English use is influenced by perceived global norms and audience orientation.

Extension into Academic Digital Communication

The strong positive response to Item A3 is reinforced by participants’ accounts of using English in structured academic interaction:

“Di grup kelas WhatsApp, kadang kami menjelaskan tugas pakai bahasa Inggris.”
[“In our class WhatsApp group, sometimes we explain assignments in English.”]
(S03-INT, 05:26)

“Kalau membagikan link tugas sekolah, saya sering menulis penjelasannya dalam bahasa Inggris.”
[“When sharing links for school tasks, I often write the explanation in English.”]
(S34-OE)

These excerpts demonstrate that English use extends beyond entertainment and becomes embedded in collaborative academic exchanges conducted digitally.

Habitual and Spontaneous Engagement

Participants consistently framed English use as spontaneous:

“Saya tidak merasa sedang latihan bahasa Inggris. Saya hanya menggunakannya saja.”
[“I don’t feel like I’m practicing English. I just use it.”]
(S14-INT, 15:02)

“Mengetik kalimat pendek dalam bahasa Inggris itu lebih cepat dan mudah.”
[“Typing short English sentences is faster and easier.”]
(S22-OE)

Such reflections help explain the minimal negative responses in the survey. English appears routinized within digital communication rather than strategically deployed as formal practice.

The triangulated findings above reveal three central patterns. First, English use is frequent and normalized within students’ digital communication environments. Survey distributions and qualitative narratives converge to indicate structural integration rather than incidental exposure. Second, students engage in active linguistic production, generating responses, captions, and academic messages rather than merely consuming English content. Third, English demonstrates contextual expansion, operating across informal peer interaction and academic collaboration. This indicates developing register flexibility and adaptive communicative competence.

At a broader level, the data suggest a reconfiguration of the linguistic ecology in which English operates. Rather than being confined to institutional instruction, English functions as a digitally mediated communicative resource embedded in everyday interaction. Students’ characterization of English as “natural,” “automatic,” and “matching the platform” reflects reduced psychological distance from the language. The convergence of statistical dominance and narrative evidence positions social media as an informal yet sustained language-learning ecosystem. Within this ecosystem, exposure, production, identity alignment, and communicative practice intersect. English is not experienced as a foreign academic requirement but as a lived, socially meaningful medium of participation.

4.2 Increased Confidence in Using English on Social Media

To examine the affective dimension of digital language engagement, Item A5 specifically measured students’ perceived confidence in using English on social media. While Section 4.1 established the frequency of English use, this subsection explores whether such engagement is accompanied by psychological readiness and communicative self-

assurance. Table 4.2 presents the distribution of responses.

Table 4.2 Students' Reported Confidence in Using English on Social Media (N = 66)

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	A + SA (%)
A5. Feel confident using English on social media	0	9	7	34	16	75.8%

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree.

The data indicate that 75.8% of students reported feeling confident using English on social media, with 34 selecting Agree and 16 selecting Strongly Agree. Only 9 students expressed disagreement, and no respondent selected Strongly Disagree. The relatively small proportion of neutral responses further suggests that students have formed clear perceptions regarding their confidence levels.

This distribution reveals that confidence is not a marginal outcome but a dominant affective pattern accompanying frequent English use in digital contexts. The survey findings are reinforced by qualitative evidence from open-ended responses (OE) and semi-structured interviews (INT). These insights clarify the underlying factors that shape participants' confidence and the experiences that contribute to its development.

Social Media as a Low-Pressure Environment

Several students explicitly contrasted social media with classroom settings:

“Kalau di media sosial saya lebih berani pakai bahasa Inggris karena tidak dinilai.”
[“On social media, I am braver using English because I am not being graded.”]
(S18-OE)

“Di kelas kadang takut salah, tapi di Instagram lebih santai.”
[“In class I'm sometimes afraid of making mistakes, but on Instagram it's more relaxed.”]
(S09-INT, 06:41)

These statements align with the strong agreement in Item A5, indicating that reduced evaluative pressure contributes to increased confidence.

Freedom to Experiment and Self-Regulate

Participants also described the technical affordances of digital communication as supportive:

“Kalau salah, saya bisa edit dulu sebelum kirim.”
[“If I make a mistake, I can edit it before sending.”]
(S25-OE)

“Saya bisa berpikir dulu sebelum membalas, jadi lebih percaya diri.”
[“I can think first before replying, so I feel more confident.”]
(S11-INT, 11:02)

This suggests that asynchronous communication enables self-monitoring and reduces performance anxiety, reinforcing students' sense of control over language production.

Confidence Through Repetition and Exposure

Students also linked confidence to repeated use:

“Karena sering pakai bahasa Inggris di media sosial, sekarang rasanya lebih biasa.”
[“Because I often use English on social media, now it feels more normal.”]
(S33-OE)

“Awalnya ragu, tapi setelah sering komentar pakai bahasa Inggris jadi terbiasa.”
[“At first I was unsure, but after often commenting in English I got used to it.”]
(S06-INT, 14:18)

These reflections indicate that confidence develops progressively through sustained participation.

The triangulated findings highlight three interrelated dimensions of increased confidence. First, reduced evaluative pressure allows students to express themselves more freely than in classroom settings. Second, interactional affordances such as editing, delayed responses, and self-regulation before posting reduce anxiety and enhance perceived competence. Third, confidence develops through repeated engagement, as familiarity strengthens willingness to participate. This cyclical process suggests that frequency of use and confidence reinforce one another.

Importantly, the data indicate that confidence in digital spaces is not superficial. Students describe genuine shifts in comfort levels, moving from hesitation to habitual engagement. The absence of strong negative responses in the survey and the consistent emphasis on reduced fear in interviews

suggest that digital contexts lower affective barriers to participation. Moreover, confidence is closely tied to communicative agency. Students report greater willingness to initiate comments, respond publicly, and participate in discussions when using English online. This increased agency signals not only emotional readiness but also expanding communicative competence.

Overall, the convergence of statistical evidence and qualitative narratives positions social media as a psychologically enabling environment for language use. The findings indicate that digital interaction does not merely increase exposure but fosters affective readiness, communicative risk-taking, and sustained engagement. Confidence in this context is not incidental; it is structurally supported, socially

reinforced, and progressively developed through routine participation.

4.3 Adoption of Informal English Expressions and Linguistic Features

To examine the extent to which students appropriate informal digital language forms, five questionnaire items measured the adoption of slang, acronyms, abbreviations, hashtags, and related linguistic features encountered on social media. While Sections 4.1 and 4.2 established frequency and confidence, this subsection focuses on the qualitative nature of language use, specifically whether students actively integrate informal English expressions into their communicative repertoire. Table 4.3 presents the response distribution.

Table 4.3 English Expressions and Linguistic Patterns Adopted from Social Media (N = 66)

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	A + SA (%)
B1. Use slang expressions	0	11	6	29	20	74.2%
B2. Use acronyms/abbreviations (e.g., LOL, OMG)	1	9	7	31	18	74.2%
B3. Adopt informal expressions from online content	0	13	5	30	18	72.7%
B4. Use hashtags/emojis in English posts	0	10	6	33	17	75.8%
B5. Apply informal expressions in daily digital interaction	0	8	9	32	17	74.2%

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree.

The results reveal consistently high levels of adoption of informal English expressions. Between 72.7% and 75.8% of respondents selected Agree or Strongly Agree across all five items. In Item B1, 49 students (74.2%) reported frequent use of slang expressions. Similarly, 49 students (74.2%) confirmed regular use of acronyms and abbreviations in Item B2. Hashtag and emoji usage (B4) shows the highest agreement level at 75.8%.

The low proportion of negative responses across items indicates that informal linguistic features are not peripheral but widely normalized components of students' digital communication practices. The statistical pattern is strongly reinforced by qualitative evidence from open-ended responses (OE) and interviews (INT).

Active Integration of Slang and Acronyms

Students described intentional incorporation of informal expressions:

“Saya sering pakai kata seperti ‘OMG’, ‘LOL’, atau ‘literally’ kalau komentar.”
[“I often use words like ‘OMG’, ‘LOL’, or ‘literally’

when commenting.”]
(S21-OE)

“Kalau lihat influencer pakai slang tertentu, saya ikut pakai juga.”
[“If I see influencers using certain slang, I also use it.”]
(S15-INT, 09:34)

These excerpts align with the high agreement in Items B1 and B2, indicating that adoption is both frequent and socially influenced.

Functional Value of Informal Expressions

Students emphasized communicative efficiency and expressiveness:

“Singkatan itu lebih cepat dan tidak terlalu formal.”
[“Abbreviations are faster and not too formal.”]
(S30-OE)

“Dengan slang, rasanya lebih ekspresif dan tidak kaku.”
[“With slang, it feels more expressive and less rigid.”]
(S08-INT, 12:11)

These responses suggest that informal expressions are valued not merely for imitation but for pragmatic effectiveness in digital interaction.

Hashtags, Emojis, and Identity Alignment

Students also linked informal features to participation in digital culture:

“Hashtag bikin postingan terasa lebih global.”
[“Hashtags make the post feel more global.”]
(S42-OE)

“Kalau pakai emoji dan bahasa Inggris, rasanya lebih sesuai dengan tren.”
[“When using emojis and English, it feels more aligned with trends.”]
(S17-INT, 16:02)

These accounts substantiate the strong agreement observed in Item B4 and indicate that informal features serve social positioning functions.

The triangulated findings reveal four key patterns. First, the use of informal English expressions is widespread, with about three-quarters of participants integrating slang, acronyms, and hashtags into digital communication. Second, students appropriate these forms selectively rather than imitating them passively, choosing expressions that are socially relevant, expressive, or efficient. Third, informal features serve pragmatic purposes, including brevity, emotional nuance, and alignment with digital norms. Fourth, hashtags and emojis reflect identity positioning within global digital discourse, linking linguistic choices to social belonging.

Table 4.4 Adoption of Digital Language Forms Across Contexts (N = 66)

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	A + SA (%)
B3. Use informal digital expressions in daily/offline communication	0	13	5	30	18	72.7%
B4. Use hashtags/emojis in broader communication contexts	0	10	6	33	17	75.8%

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree.

Importantly, students shift flexibly between formal and informal registers. Interview data indicate awareness of contextual boundaries, as they distinguish between classroom writing and online interaction. This suggests developing register sensitivity rather than a decline in formal competence. Together, the findings position social media as a dynamic space for linguistic experimentation, where informal expressions operate as legitimate communicative resources.

Overall, the findings suggest that informal English expressions have become embedded within students’ communicative repertoires. Through repeated exposure, active production, and social alignment, these linguistic forms function as tools for efficiency, expressiveness, and identity construction in digital spaces.

4.4 Integration of Digital Language into Daily Communication

Beyond online interaction, the study examined whether informal English expressions adopted from social media extend into students’ offline communication. While Section 4.3 established the widespread adoption of digital linguistic features, this subsection investigates the permeability between digital and face-to-face domains. Items B3 and B4 specifically capture whether slang, hashtags, and related informal expressions are used beyond online platforms. Table 4.4 presents the relevant distribution.

The findings indicate that digital language forms are not confined to social media platforms. In Item B3, 48 students (72.7%) reported using informal digital expressions in daily or offline communication. Similarly, 50 students (75.8%) agreed that they incorporate hashtags or emoji-based expressions in broader communicative contexts.

The relatively low proportion of disagreement and neutral responses suggests that migration of digital language into offline interaction is not marginal but structurally present in students' communicative behavior. The quantitative evidence is reinforced by qualitative accounts demonstrating how and why digital expressions are integrated into everyday communication.

Migration of Slang into Face-to-Face Interaction

Students explicitly described transferring online expressions into spoken conversations:

“Kadang saya pakai kata seperti ‘literally’ atau ‘random’ saat ngobrol langsung dengan teman.”
[“Sometimes I use words like ‘literally’ or ‘random’ when talking directly with friends.”]
(S26-OE)

“Kalau lagi bercanda, saya sering bilang ‘no comment’ atau ‘whatever’ seperti di media sosial.”
[“When joking, I often say ‘no comment’ or ‘whatever’ like on social media.”]
(S10-INT, 07:52)

These statements substantiate the high agreement in Item B3, confirming that informal digital expressions migrate into spoken discourse.

Hashtags and Digital Framing in Offline Talk

Participants also described the symbolic use of hashtags in offline settings:

“Kadang kami menyebut hashtag secara langsung untuk lucu-lucuan.”
[“Sometimes we say hashtags out loud just for fun.”]
(S41-OE)

“Kalau situasinya dramatis, ada teman yang bilang ‘hashtag awkward’.”
[“If the situation is dramatic, a friend might say ‘hashtag awkward.’”]
(S18-INT, 13:19)

These excerpts demonstrate that digital conventions are recontextualized into oral interaction, often with humorous or expressive intent.

Contextual Awareness and Register Sensitivity

Importantly, students indicated selective usage rather than indiscriminate transfer:

“Saya tidak pakai bahasa seperti itu saat presentasi resmi.”
[“I don’t use that kind of language during formal presentations.”]
(S05-OE)

“Kalau situasinya formal, saya kembali pakai bahasa yang lebih resmi.”
[“If the situation is formal, I return to more formal language.”]
(S14-INT, 10:44)

These reflections suggest awareness of contextual boundaries, indicating adaptive rather than uncontrolled integration.

The triangulated findings reveal three key patterns. First, there is clear *cross-contextual migration* of digital linguistic features from online platforms into face-to-face interaction. Approximately three-quarters of participants report such integration, and qualitative accounts confirm its presence in everyday speech. Second, digital expressions are *recontextualized rather than replicated verbatim*. Hashtags and slang are adapted for humorous emphasis, emotional expression, or peer bonding, suggesting creative appropriation. Third, students demonstrate *register awareness and situational sensitivity*. While informal expressions are integrated into daily communication, participants report restricting their use in formal academic contexts. This indicates linguistic flexibility rather than erosion of formal norms.

The findings suggest that digital language functions as an expandable communicative repertoire. Rather than existing in isolation within online platforms, informal expressions circulate across communicative domains, reshaping everyday speech patterns. This permeability reflects the evolving relationship between digital discourse and lived interaction. Importantly, the integration observed here does not signal indiscriminate blending of registers. Instead, students appear to navigate contextual appropriateness strategically. Digital language becomes an additional expressive resource within their linguistic toolkit, deployed selectively according to relational and situational cues.

Overall, the convergence of statistical dominance and narrative evidence indicates that social media influences linguistic behavior beyond the digital sphere. Informal English expressions are normalized, creatively adapted, and incorporated into daily communication practices. The boundary between digital and offline language use is

therefore not rigid but fluid, reflecting adaptive communicative competence shaped by participatory digital culture.

5. Discussion

This study set out to examine how social media shapes the English language practices of Indonesian senior high school students, with particular attention to the adoption of slang, acronyms, hashtags, and informal expressions. Four key findings emerge. First, English is frequently and habitually used across social media platforms. Second, students report heightened confidence when using English in digital spaces. Third, informal linguistic features are systematically adopted rather than incidentally imitated. Fourth, digital language forms migrate into offline communication while students maintain awareness of contextual appropriateness. Collectively, these findings position social media not merely as a supplementary exposure site but as a parallel linguistic ecosystem that reshapes communicative practice.

The high frequency of English use observed in this study resonates with prior research emphasizing the affordances of social media for authentic language engagement beyond classroom boundaries (Dewaele & Li, 2020; Zainal & Rahmat, 2020). Students' consistent use of English in commenting, responding, and interacting aligns with the notion that digital platforms facilitate real-time communicative competence development (Lee & Dressman, 2021; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2022). Importantly, however, this study extends earlier work by demonstrating that English use is not confined to receptive exposure. Students actively produce language, negotiate meaning, and align their linguistic choices with platform norms. In doing so, they participate in what Sundqvist & Sylvén (2022) conceptualize as extramural English engagement, where learning occurs through voluntary, meaningful interaction rather than formal instruction.

Equally significant is the affective dimension revealed in the findings. The reported increase in confidence supports arguments that digital environments lower emotional barriers and create psychologically safer spaces for experimentation (Dewaele & Li, 2020). Students' ability to edit messages, delay responses, and engage asynchronously reflects the affordances of computer-mediated communication (Sujarwo, 2026; Isdendi et al., 2023). Such affordances reduce anxiety and enhance willingness to communicate, reinforcing language self-efficacy (Dinihari, 2026; Sari et al., 2024). These findings align with research suggesting that digitally

mediated composition fosters multimodal literacy and strengthens expressive confidence across linguistic forms (Sari et al., 2024; Sujarwo, 2026). The present study adds empirical nuance by demonstrating how these psychological and structural affordances operate within a secondary school EFL context in Indonesia.

The systematic adoption of slang, acronyms, and hashtags further underscores social media's role in shaping linguistic repertoires. Rather than signaling deterioration of formal competence, the findings suggest pragmatic adaptation to context, echoing Alhabash & McAlister's (2015) perspective on digital communicative effectiveness. The integration of informal expressions reflects awareness of digital norms and identity positioning, consistent with research on identity construction in online discourse (Fuciu, 2022; Nuraeni et al., 2021). Students' selective appropriation of slang aligns with studies indicating that digital language practices are socially meaningful and function as markers of affiliation (Lee & Dressman, 2021; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2022). At the same time, the data demonstrate register sensitivity, reinforcing arguments that exposure to diverse linguistic contexts enhances rather than weakens sociolinguistic competence (Lee & Dressman, 2021).

Another noteworthy contribution lies in the migration of digital expressions into offline communication. This finding supports the view that computer-mediated communication constitutes a distinct yet influential genre capable of shaping broader communicative habits (Sujarwo, 2026; Isdendi et al., 2023). The permeability between online and offline language use reflects the evolving ecology of communication in the digital era (Sari et al., 2024; Sujarwo, 2026; Pujianti, 2024; Pujianti et al., 2024). Rather than representing uncontrolled blending of registers, students demonstrate adaptive flexibility by restricting informal expressions in formal contexts. This flexibility indicates developing pragmatic awareness and digital literacy, echoing research on contextual language differentiation (Khattak & Binu, 2024).

Despite these contributions, several gaps warrant reflection. First, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential response bias, as noted by Dörnyei (2010) and Dörnyei & Taguchi (2010). Although triangulated with qualitative insights, future studies would benefit from incorporating discourse analysis of authentic social media posts to capture naturally occurring linguistic practices. Second, the geographical focus on Ponorogo limits broader generalization. Cultural

factors significantly shape language use (Vraga & Bode, 2020), and comparative studies across Indonesian regions or cross-national contexts would illuminate sociocultural variability in digital language adoption.

The novelty of this research lies in three areas. It empirically documents concrete digital linguistic features rather than examining social media use in general terms. It focuses on secondary school learners, an underrepresented population compared to university students. It situates the investigation within a non-Western EFL context, contributing localized insight to a field often dominated by Western data. By foregrounding slang, acronyms, and hashtags as legitimate components of evolving communicative repertoires, the study challenges deficit perspectives that frame digital language as inherently problematic.

From an ELT perspective, the implications are substantial. Recognizing social media as a parallel language-learning arena invites educators to integrate students' digital experiences into pedagogical design. Rather than prohibiting informal expressions, teachers can leverage them to develop register awareness, pragmatic competence, and critical digital literacy. Integrating authentic digital discourse tasks may bridge the persistent divide between formal instruction and lived language use, aligning with calls for multiliteracies-oriented pedagogy (Lee & Dressman, 2021). At the same time, ethical awareness and responsible online engagement should be incorporated, reflecting critical digital literacy frameworks (Pujianti, 2024; Pujianti et al., 2024). Such integration acknowledges that language development in the 21st century is inseparable from digital participation.

Future research should use longitudinal designs to examine how sustained engagement with digital platforms influences language proficiency. Comparative studies across urban, rural, and cultural contexts would deepen understanding of sociocultural factors shaping digital language practices. Further study of multimodal elements such as emojis, memes, and short-form video captions could clarify how visual resources support pragmatic competence and identity construction. Corpus-based or discourse-analytic analyses of authentic student content may also illuminate the link between digital linguistic innovation and formal language development.

In sum, this study affirms that social media is not a peripheral distraction from English learning but an influential communicative domain that shapes linguistic confidence, identity construction, and pragmatic adaptability. Understanding this

transformation requires moving beyond binary assumptions of formal versus informal language and recognizing the fluid, context-sensitive repertoires that characterize contemporary EFL learners.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that social media operates as a dynamic linguistic ecosystem that significantly shapes the English language practices of Indonesian senior high school students. The findings reveal sustained use of English across digital platforms, increased communicative confidence, systematic adoption of informal features such as slang and acronyms, and the migration of digital expressions into offline interaction. These patterns indicate that English is no longer confined to formal classroom instruction but circulates fluidly across digital and everyday communicative spaces. By empirically documenting specific linguistic features within a non-Western secondary EFL context, this study challenges deficit perspectives that frame digital language as detrimental. Instead, the findings highlight students' register awareness, pragmatic flexibility, and adaptive multilingual competence, positioning informal digital expressions as contextually appropriate communicative resources rather than linguistic decline.

Pedagogically, this study highlights social media as a complementary space for language development. Integrating authentic digital discourse into ELT can foster register awareness, communicative agency, and critical digital literacy, bridging formal instruction and real-world use. However, reliance on self-reported data and a geographically limited sample restricts generalizability. Future research should employ longitudinal and discourse-analytic approaches to examine authentic digital texts, explore multimodal elements such as emojis and memes, and conduct cross-cultural comparisons to clarify how sociocultural contexts shape digital language adoption. Overall, the findings affirm social media as a formative domain influencing linguistic identity, confidence, and pragmatic competence in the contemporary EFL landscape.

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