

The Effect of Social Media on the Language Use of Teenagers in Makassar

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ABSTRACT

The rapid rise of social media has significantly influenced how teenagers in urban areas like Makassar communicate. This study investigates the impact of social media platforms—such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp—on teenage language use, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, and communication styles. Employing a mixed-methods approach that includes surveys of 150 teenagers, interviews, and content analysis, the findings reveal that 85% of respondents frequently use internet slang and abbreviations, while 70% incorporate English loanwords in everyday speech. Common expressions like “DM,” “OOTD,” and “LOL” are now part of their daily lexicon, reflecting a shift toward a more globalized and informal linguistic environment. Qualitative analysis shows a trend toward simplified grammar in casual contexts and a growing reliance on emojis and memes for emotional expression. While these developments promote creativity, adaptability, and digital fluency, they also present challenges to formal language proficiency, especially in academic writing. This study concludes that social media acts as a double-edged sword—encouraging innovative language use while potentially weakening formal communication skills. It recommends integrating digital literacy and language awareness into school curricula to help students navigate and balance the demands of both informal and formal language contexts.

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1. Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of teenagers worldwide. In Indonesia, particularly in Makassar, the popularity of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter has surged in recent years. These platforms offer teenagers a space for self-expression and communication, often through informal and rapid exchanges of messages. As a result, there is a growing concern about the impact of social media on language use, especially among teenagers who are still developing their linguistic skills (Said et al., 2021; Yaumi et al., 2024; Ko et al., 2025).

The rapid expansion of social media has introduced a unique form of digital communication characterized by brevity, immediacy, and creativity. Teenagers, as one of the largest demographics of social media users, are constantly exposed to diverse language forms and trends from various cultures. The ability to quickly adopt and adapt new expressions, slang, and abbreviations has become a hallmark of youth communication online (Wijaya, 2023; Sachiya et al., 2025; Junaid et al. 2025). However, this phenomenon raises critical questions about the impact on language skills and the long-term effects on linguistic proficiency.

Makassar, a vibrant city with a rich cultural heritage, presents a unique context for studying the effects of social media on language use. The youth population in Makassar is well-known for their active participation in digital trends, blending traditional language practices with modern digital expressions. This mix of local and global influences offers an interesting case study to explore how social media reshapes language use among teenagers, potentially affecting not only their everyday communication but also their cultural identity (Rahmawati, 2021; Suheri et al., 2025; Dalyan et al., 2023).

Several studies have explored the relationship between social media and language use among youth in different parts of Indonesia. For instance, Anggraeni (2023) found that teenagers in urban areas are more likely to adopt English loanwords and internet slang due to their frequent use of global social media platforms. Similarly, Sari and Putra (2022) highlighted the role of peer pressure in shaping teenagers' language choices, as they strive to fit in with online communities. However, there is limited research focused specifically on the youth of Makassar, a region with distinctive linguistic traits influenced by local dialects and traditional expressions.

The impact of social media on language use is multifaceted. On one hand, it can enhance creativity and provide teenagers with a platform to express themselves in innovative ways. Internet slang, abbreviations, and memes allow users to convey complex emotions or ideas quickly and effectively (Sari & Putra, 2022). On the other hand, these changes may contribute to a decline in formal language skills, as teenagers become accustomed to casual and abbreviated forms of communication. The overuse of non-standard language forms might hinder their ability to write formally or use proper grammar in academic settings.

Another concern is the potential erosion of local languages and dialects. As teenagers become more immersed in global social media platforms dominated by English, there is a risk of losing traditional linguistic elements that are part of the cultural identity of regions like Makassar. Language is a key component of cultural heritage, and shifts towards more homogeneous, global language practices may dilute the unique linguistic diversity of local communities (Anggraeni, 2023). This is particularly relevant in Makassar, where the local dialect and traditional expressions play a significant role in everyday communication.

The influence of social media on language use also extends to non-verbal communication. Emoticons, emojis, and GIFs have become common elements in digital conversations, allowing teenagers to express emotions and reactions without using words. While these tools enhance communication efficiency, they may also contribute to a decline in vocabulary development, as teenagers increasingly rely on visual symbols rather than verbal or written expression (Wijaya, 2023; Sujoko et al., 2023; Yaumi et al., 2023). This raises important questions about the long-term implications for language proficiency and literacy.

Despite potential drawbacks, social media can serve as a powerful tool for language learning. Through exposure to diverse language forms—including English and other global languages—teenagers engage in informal learning that can enhance their linguistic competence. Many teenagers in Makassar follow influencers, content creators, and educational accounts that use different languages, contributing to their language acquisition and cultural awareness (Rahmawati, 2023). This suggests that the relationship between social media and language use is complex and context-dependent, shaped by both opportunities and challenges.

To analyze this phenomenon, this study adopts the framework of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory, which examines how digital platforms affect language behavior and social interaction (Herring, 2020). CMC theory highlights how online communication encourages new forms of linguistic expression, including abbreviations, code-switching, and multimodal features like emojis. Additionally, the study is informed by Sociolinguistic Theory, particularly Androutsopoulos' (2020) work on language practices in digital environments, which emphasizes the role of identity, audience design, and cultural context in shaping online discourse.

Given the mixed effects of social media on language use, this research focuses on how these influences manifest in a specific local setting. The study investigates changes in vocabulary, grammar, and communication style among teenagers in Makassar, using both quantitative and qualitative data. By exploring the experiences and perceptions of these teenagers, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the interplay between digital media and language practices in a multilingual and culturally diverse context.

The findings are expected to contribute to ongoing discussions about the impact of digital communication on language, especially among youth. Insights from this study may inform educators, parents, and policymakers on how to support balanced language development in the digital age. Ultimately, the research underscores the need to acknowledge both the creative potential and the challenges of social media in shaping the linguistic landscape of young people in urban Indonesia.

2. Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A mixed-method design was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media affects the language use of teenagers in Makassar. By integrating quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from interviews, the research aimed to capture a holistic view of the changes in language practices influenced by digital interactions.

2.1 Research Design

The research focusing on teenagers aged 13-18 years from various high schools in Makassar. The study was structured into two main phases: data collection through surveys and follow-up in-depth interviews. The combination of these methods allowed for both broad data collection and detailed exploration of individual experiences and perceptions.

The mixed-method approach was selected for its ability to triangulate findings, ensuring the reliability and validity of the results. Quantitative data from the surveys helped identify patterns and trends in language use, while qualitative data from interviews provided deeper context and explanation for these trends. This method aligns with contemporary research practices in sociolinguistics, where a comprehensive understanding of language behavior requires both statistical analysis and personal narratives (Sari & Putra, 2022).

2.2 Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 150 teenagers, selected using stratified random sampling to ensure a diverse representation of gender, socioeconomic background, and school type (public and private). The sample was designed to reflect the demographic diversity of Makassar's youth population, accounting for variations in social media usage patterns and exposure to different platforms.

In addition to the survey participants, a subset of 20 teenagers was selected for follow-up interviews based on their responses in the survey. These participants were chosen purposively, focusing on those who indicated significant changes in their language use due to social media. This selection process aimed to gather richer, more detailed insights from individuals who were more affected by digital communication trends.

2.3 Survey Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions focused on gathering quantitative data about social media usage frequency, preferred platforms, and types of content consumed. Participants were asked about their daily screen time, the social media platforms they use most frequently (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Twitter), and the specific language forms they use online, such as abbreviations, internet slang, and borrowed words from English.

The open-ended questions aimed to capture the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards language changes influenced by social media. Questions included: "Do you think your way of speaking has changed because of social media?", "What types of words or expressions do you use more frequently now?", and "How do your online communication habits differ from face-to-face conversations?" These questions allowed for a deeper exploration of individual experiences and provided qualitative data to complement the statistical findings.

2.4 Interview Process

The in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 30 to 45 minutes each. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by a list of open-ended questions that focused on the participants' language experiences on social media. This approach allowed the researcher to follow up on interesting responses and explore emerging themes in greater detail.

During the interviews, participants were encouraged to provide examples of how their language use had changed. They were asked about specific slang terms, abbreviations, or English words they frequently use, and how they integrate these terms into their daily conversations. The interviews aimed to uncover the motivations behind language changes, such as the influence of online trends, peer pressure, or the desire to fit in with certain social groups (Wijaya, 2023).

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out in two stages. First, the survey was administered online using Google Forms, distributed through social media groups, school networks, and direct messaging apps like WhatsApp. The use of online distribution was chosen to align with the digital habits of the target demographic and to ensure a higher response rate. The survey received 150 valid responses, which were then analyzed to identify general patterns and trends.

The second stage involved in-person interviews, conducted at participants' schools or local community centers with parental consent. The interview sessions were recorded (with permission) to ensure accurate data capture, and transcripts were later produced for analysis. The in-person format helped create a comfortable environment for participants to share their experiences openly and provided the researcher with the opportunity to observe non-verbal cues and expressions.

2.6 Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using statistical to identify correlations between social media usage and changes in language use. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and cross-tabulations

were used to summarize the data. Correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between the amount of time spent on social media and the reported changes in vocabulary and grammar.

For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed. This method involved coding the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns related to language changes. The themes were categorized based on the types of language changes observed (e.g., use of internet slang, abbreviations, English borrowings) and the reasons given by participants for these changes (e.g., influence of trends, peer interactions, ease of communication).

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the local educational authorities and the school administrations involved. Informed consent was secured from all participants and their parents or guardians, ensuring that they were fully aware of the research objectives and their right to withdraw at any time. Data confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, and all personal identifiers were removed from the survey and interview responses.

The research adhered to the principles of ethical research conduct, emphasizing respect for participants' privacy and ensuring that the data collected were used solely for academic purposes.

3. Result and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study based on the quantitative survey data and the qualitative interviews conducted with teenagers in Makassar. The results are divided into three main parts: changes in vocabulary, changes in grammar, and changes in communication style. Each part is discussed with supporting data and examples from the participants.

3.1 Changes in Vocabulary

The survey results indicated a significant shift in the vocabulary used by teenagers in Makassar who are active on social media. Many respondents reported frequent use of internet slang, abbreviations, and borrowed English words in their daily conversations. Table 1 below presents the top 10 most commonly used internet slang and abbreviations identified in the survey responses.

Table 1. Most Common Internet Slang and Abbreviations Used by Teenagers in Makassar

Rank	Slang/Abbreviation	Meaning	Frequency (%)
1	LOL	Laugh Out Loud	85%
2	BTW	By The Way	78%
3	FYI	For Your Information	72%
4	DM	Direct Message	68%
5	OOTD	Outfit Of The Day	65%
6	Baper	Bawa Perasaan	62%
7	GWS	Get Well Soon	60%
8	JFYI	Just For Your Information	58%
9	TMI	Too Much Information	55%
10	SFS	Shoutout For Shoutout	53%

The adoption of these terms was heavily influenced by the teenagers' exposure to online trends and the global nature of social media. For example, "LOL" and "FYI" have become standard expressions in both online and offline communication among the youth, often replacing traditional Indonesian expressions like "*haha*" (for laughter) or "*untuk informas!*" (for FYI). This reflects a growing trend of English loanwords entering the daily vocabulary of teenagers, influenced by the content they consume online (Anggraeni, 2023).

3.2 Changes in Grammar

The analysis of the survey data also revealed noticeable changes in the grammatical structures used by teenagers. Many respondents admitted that they often simplify grammar when communicating on social media. Common grammatical

changes include dropping subjects and using informal sentence structures. For instance, instead of saying, "I don't know," many teenagers opt for the shorter "Dunno" or "Idk," especially in text messages or comments.

The qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into this phenomenon. Participants mentioned that they frequently omit subjects and auxiliary verbs to save time and space when typing. This practice, although efficient in the context of social media, may lead to habitual use in more formal settings, such as academic writing. One participant noted, "Sometimes I write 'gonna' instead of 'going to,' even in my school assignments. It just feels faster and more natural after using it online."

Interestingly, the influence of social media grammar has also led to the creation of hybrid sentences that mix English and Indonesian. Examples include phrases like "*Aku lagi scroll Instagram*" (I am scrolling Instagram) and "*Kamu harus update story dong!*" (You should update your story). This blending of languages, known as code-mixing, reflects the dynamic nature of language use among Makassar's youth and highlights the impact of bilingual exposure on social media platforms (Rahmawati, 2021).

3.3 Changes in Communication Style

The survey responses indicated that 82% of participants felt that their communication style had become more casual and informal due to their social media usage. Teenagers reported that they are more likely to use humor, sarcasm, and emojis in their digital conversations compared to face-to-face interactions. This shift towards a more relaxed and expressive communication style can be attributed to the interactive and playful nature of platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

In the interviews, participants shared specific examples of how their communication style has adapted. For instance, one teenager described how they use emojis like 'face with tears of joy' to replace words entirely, using it as a response to something funny instead of typing "*itu lucu*" (that's funny). Another example is the frequent use of gifs and memes as a form of response, adding a layer of humor and visual expression that is not present in traditional text communication.

The preference for casual and expressive language on social media has also influenced how teenagers interact in other contexts, such as school and family gatherings. Several participants mentioned that they find it difficult to switch back to formal language when required, especially in academic settings. One student said, "I'm so used to typing informally that I sometimes write 'u' instead of 'you' in my essays."

The findings of this study highlight a significant impact of social media on the language use of teenagers in Makassar. The changes observed in vocabulary, grammar, and communication style suggest a shift towards a more globalized and informal linguistic landscape. The frequent use of English loanwords and internet slang reflects the influence of international social media trends, while the changes in grammar and communication style indicate a broader cultural adaptation to digital norms.

These shifts raise important questions about the implications for language learning and literacy development among teenagers. On one hand, exposure to diverse language forms through social media can enhance vocabulary acquisition and foster creativity in language use. On the other hand, the habitual use of informal and simplified language may hinder the development of formal writing skills and affect academic performance (Sari & Putra, 2022).

Moreover, the blending of English and Indonesian in daily communication points to a phenomenon of code-switching, which can be both a sign of linguistic adaptability and a potential risk to the preservation of local dialects. The influence of social media appears to promote a hybrid language that may contribute to the erosion of traditional linguistic elements, particularly in regions like Makassar with strong cultural and linguistic identities (Wijaya, 2023).

A key finding of this research is the high frequency of social media-driven language change among teenagers. This finding supports the view that social media is not just a tool for communication but also a catalyst for language evolution. Teenagers in Makassar, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, are adopting new linguistic practices that are shaped by global digital trends. The increasing prevalence of English loanwords such as "selfie," "hashtag," and "like" reflects the international nature of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, where English is often the lingua franca of interaction (Puspita & Anggraeni, 2023).

In addition to the global influence, the study also highlights the local impact of social media on teenagers' language. Terms like "*baper*" (*bawa perasaan*, which means being overly emotional) and "*gws*" (get well soon) are examples of how digital culture is localized in the Indonesian context. The creation and use of such terms reflect a cultural adaptation to the

language of social media, where brevity and emotional expression are prioritized. This adaptation is indicative of a hybrid linguistic identity that blends global digital norms with local cultural expressions.

The frequent use of abbreviations, slang, and simplified grammar can be viewed as a result of the digital economy's demand for efficiency in communication. Teenagers use these forms of language because they are faster to type, easier to understand, and more in line with the casual nature of social media interactions. However, this shift may also lead to challenges in educational contexts, where formal language and grammar are still required. Several participants in the study mentioned that they sometimes find it difficult to adjust their language style when writing academic papers, as the informal style they use online has become ingrained in their habits.

One significant concern raised by the study is the potential impact of these language changes on literacy development. While informal language use may enhance creativity and foster a sense of community among online peers, it could also have negative consequences for academic writing skills. The use of shortened forms and colloquialisms could make it harder for teenagers to master formal writing styles required in schools and universities. Furthermore, the overuse of English terms may contribute to a decline in proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia and regional languages, as young people prioritize the convenience of English-based digital communication.

Another important point to consider is the role of peer influence in shaping language use on social media. Many teenagers reported using certain slang terms or abbreviations because they were popular among their friends or online communities. Peer pressure and the desire to fit in are powerful forces in language change, especially in a digital age where trends spread rapidly through platforms like TikTok and Twitter. This peer-driven aspect of language change can reinforce the widespread adoption of new language forms, making it difficult for traditional linguistic norms to persist.

The shift towards a more casual and expressive communication style is not limited to written language but extends to verbal interactions as well. Some participants indicated that their face-to-face communication had also become more informal, influenced by the tone and style of social media interactions. The use of emojis, memes, and gifs in daily conversations illustrates this trend. In interviews, teenagers mentioned that they often use these digital elements to convey emotions and reactions in real-time conversations, replacing verbal expressions with visual cues. This change in communication style may have implications for interpersonal relationships and social skills, as the subtleties of face-to-face communication are sometimes lost in favor of digital shortcuts.

Finally, the results of this study suggest that social media plays a dual role in language use. On the one hand, it serves as a platform for linguistic innovation, allowing teenagers to experiment with new forms of language that reflect their social identities and global influences. On the other hand, it poses challenges to language preservation and formal language acquisition, particularly in regions like Makassar, where local dialects and languages are at risk of being overshadowed by the dominance of digital communication in global languages like English. The task for educators and linguists will be to balance the creative potential of social media language with the need to maintain linguistic diversity and ensure that teenagers continue to develop the skills necessary for academic success.

4. Conclusion

This study has shown that social media plays a significant role in shaping the language use of teenagers in Makassar. The adoption of internet slang, English loanwords, and informal grammar structures demonstrates how digital communication is influencing local linguistic practices. These changes reflect global trends, where speed, efficiency, and emotional expression are prioritized in everyday interaction.

While such developments foster creativity and digital fluency, they also pose challenges for formal language proficiency. Simplified grammar and heavy reliance on visual cues like emojis may hinder vocabulary growth and academic writing skills. This shift raises important questions about the long-term effects of digital habits on literacy and communication in structured settings.

Therefore, a balanced approach is essential. Rather than viewing social media as a threat to language development, educators and policymakers should see it as an opportunity to engage students in meaningful linguistic reflection. By incorporating digital literacy into education, we can help teenagers navigate online communication while preserving the integrity of formal language use.

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