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**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE LANGUAGE OF YOUTH IN
SELECTED LGAs IN RIVERS STATE**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of social media on the language of youth in Obio/Akpor, Ikwere, and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The objectives of the study were to explore how social media influences language practices in both formal and informal contexts, identify the linguistic features adopted from social media, examine the factors contributing to language change, and assess the implications for communication and language teaching. The research was guided by the Sociolinguistic Theory and the Communication Accommodation Theory, which provided the theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between social interaction, media use, and language variation. A survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 311 respondents selected through proportionate sampling. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that WhatsApp is the dominant social media platform among youths, with most participants using it for over five years and spending more than two hours daily. Communication patterns combined both formal and informal expressions, characterized by frequent use of slang, abbreviations, emojis, and hashtags. Although many respondents were uncertain about the direct influence of social media on their offline language, the

study found subtle linguistic effects alongside broader social, cultural, and economic factors driving language change. The study concludes that social media, rather than diminishing language proficiency, can serve as a tool for language awareness and education if effectively integrated into language learning and communication practices. It is therefore recommended that educators and policymakers harness social media platforms to promote standard language use and interactive learning among youths

Introduction

Social media refers to online platforms that allow users to create, share, and interact with content. These platforms revolutionize the way people communicate and share information, enabling global connectivity. Social media platforms facilitate user-generated content, which can take many forms, including text, images, and videos. Additionally, social media platforms provide users with tools and features to customize their content, engage with others, and build online communities. The interactive nature of social media enables users to participate in real-time discussions, share their experiences, and connect with others who share similar interests.

Moreover, social media platforms have transformed the way people consume and disseminate information, with many users relying on these platforms as primary sources of news, entertainment, and social interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The global reach of social media has also bridged geographical divides, enabling people to connect with others across the world. Furthermore, social media platforms have become essential for businesses, organizations, and individuals seeking to build their online presence, promote their brand, and engage with their audience (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Overall, social media has become an integral part of modern life, shaping the way people communicate, interact, and share information. Furthermore, social media platforms have also enabled the creation of online subcultures, where users can connect with others who share similar interests and passions. The use of hashtags, trending topics, and challenges has also facilitated the discovery of new content, ideas, and perspectives. Social media has also become a vital tool for social movements, activism, and awareness-raising, enabling users to mobilize support, share information, and promote social change. As social media continues to evolve, it is likely to have an even more profound impact on the way people communicate, interact, and shape their online and offline lives.

Social media transforms the way people consume and share information, with news and trends spreading rapidly (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media platforms have become an integral part of modern life, enabling users to create and share content, and connect with others across the globe. It changes the way businesses operate, with companies leveraging these platforms to reach customers and build their brand (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). As Boyd and Ellison note, social media platforms provide businesses with opportunities to engage with their audience, promote their products, and build their online presence. Social media also influences language change, giving rise to new forms of language, including neologisms, abbreviations, and acronyms. Additionally, social media platforms have become a primary source of information for many people, with users relying on these platforms to stay informed about current events, trends, and issues. Moreover, social media has also

transformed the way people interact with each other, enabling real-time communication and feedback (Kietzmann et al., 2011). According to Kietzmann et al., social media platforms provide users with a range of tools and features that enable them to interact with others, share content, and collaborate on projects.

The viral nature of social media can also amplify social movements, raise awareness about important issues, and mobilize support for causes. Furthermore, social media has changed the way businesses market and advertise their products, with many companies shifting their focus to social media advertising and influencer partnerships. The impact of social media is also felt in various sectors, including education, healthcare, and politics, where it is used to disseminate information, engage with audiences, and build communities. Furthermore, social media has also raised important questions about privacy, security, and the spread of misinformation. The rapid dissemination of information on social media can also lead to the spread of rumors, fake news, and disinformation, highlighting the need for critical thinking and media literacy in the digital age. Overall, the impact of social media is multifaceted and far-reaching, shaping various aspects of modern life, from communication and information-sharing to business and social interaction.

Moreover, the impact of social media on society is constantly evolving, with new platforms and technologies emerging, and user behaviors changing. As social media continues to shape the way people live, work, and interact, it is essential to understand its effects on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. By examining the impact of social media, we can better navigate the opportunities and challenges it presents, and harness its potential to promote positive change and social good. Additionally, the study of social media's impact can also inform policy, education, and business decisions, helping to ensure that these platforms are used responsibly and effectively. Language Use on Social Media.

New words and phrases emerge to describe digital concepts, reflecting the dynamic nature of language in the digital age (Crystal, 2001). According to Crystal, the internet and social media have given rise to new forms of language, including neologisms, abbreviations, and acronyms. Emojis and emoticons convey emotions and tone in text-based interactions, enabling users to express themselves in innovative ways (Danesi, 2016). As Danesi notes, emojis and emoticons have become an integral part of online communication, allowing users to convey complex emotions and ideas concisely. Informal language is prevalent on social media, with users employing slang, colloquialisms, and abbreviations, reflecting the shift towards informality in online communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media platforms have enabled users to create and share content in a more informal and interactive way, changing the way people communicate. Users also adopt unique language styles, blending formal and informal language, and incorporating visual elements to convey meaning and enhance communication. Furthermore, social media platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of language trends, memes, and viral challenges, which can quickly influence language use and cultural references. Additionally, the use of hashtags, acronyms, and abbreviations enables users to convey complex ideas and emotions concisely. Social media language is often characterized by its creativity, flexibility, and adaptability, allowing users to express themselves in innovative ways. The blending of languages, dialects, and language styles on social media also reflects the diversity of its user base, creating a unique linguistic landscape.

As social media continues to evolve, it is likely that language use on these platforms will continue to adapt and change, reflecting the dynamic nature of online communication.

Some popular social media platforms include Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp. These platforms have become part of teenagers' digital identities, and users employ language to signify closeness and solidarity among peer groups. Social media platforms also enable users to connect with people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and languages. Additionally, these platforms provide users with opportunities to express themselves creatively, share their experiences, and engage with others who share similar interests. Furthermore, social media platforms have become integral to modern communication, influencing how people interact, form relationships, and maintain social connections.

Moreover, social media platforms offer various features, such as hashtags, trending topics, and live streaming, which facilitate real-time discussions and information sharing. Users can also curate their online personas, showcasing their personalities, interests, and values. The widespread adoption of social media has transformed the way people consume information, with many relying on these platforms as primary sources of news, entertainment, and social interaction. As a result, social media has become an essential aspect of modern life, shaping language use, social norms, and cultural practices.

The use of non-standard language on social media raises questions about its impact on language competency. According to Crystal (2001), the internet and social media have given rise to new forms of language, which can be both creative and challenging for language users. Youths must navigate between informal and formal language environments, and it's unclear whether social media promotes language creativity or inhibits formal language competency. As Kessler (2013) notes, the frequent use of abbreviations, acronyms, and emojis may lead to a decline in spelling and grammar skills, potentially affecting language development and proficiency. Furthermore, the informal nature of social media may blur the lines between formal and informal language, making it challenging for youths to distinguish between appropriate language use in different contexts (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Moreover, excessive social media use may lead to a reliance on autocorrect and predictive text, potentially hindering language users' ability to spell and write correctly without technological assistance. The brevity and informality of social media posts may also influence language users' writing style, potentially affecting their ability to express complex ideas and arguments in a clear and coherent manner. The constant exposure to abbreviated language forms may impact the development of linguistic complexity, potentially affecting users' ability to articulate nuanced ideas and perspectives.

The impact of social media on language competency may vary across different age groups, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic contexts. Some individuals may adapt to the changing language landscape with ease, while others may struggle to navigate the differences between online and offline communication. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for educators, policymakers, and language learners seeking to harness the potential of social media while mitigating its potential drawbacks.

This study investigates the role social media plays in shaping English language use in young adults and its consequences for language competency. It explores how social media influences language development, language attitudes, and language practices. The study also

examines the relationship between social media use and language proficiency, communication skills, and language identity.

This paper looks at several key areas, including how social media affects language development, such as vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. It also explores how social media shapes young adults' attitudes towards language, including their perceptions of language use and norms. Additionally, it examines how social media influences language practices in different contexts, including online and offline communication.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey design. This design was appropriate because it allowed for the collection of data from a representative sample of youths in the selected LGAs to determine how social media usage influenced their language habits. The survey approach enabled the researcher to gather both qualitative and quantitative data on patterns, preferences, and attitudes related to language change.

The population of the study is 150,631. This population consists of youths between 18 to 30 years from three Ikwere speaking local government areas: Obio/Akpor, Emohua, and Ikwere. This study utilized a sample size of 398 youths from three selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Rivers State, Nigeria: Emohua, Ikwerre, and Obio/Akpor. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

Where:

n = Sample Size

N = Total Population

e = Margin of Error (0.05)

Based on the total population of the three LGAs (N = 848,564), the sample size calculation yields. Data was collected by distributing the questionnaire electronically (via WhatsApp and Facebook platforms). The researcher ensured proper instruction was provided and assisted respondents where necessary. Consent was obtained, and confidentiality assured.

The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, tables, and percentages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media refers to online platforms that allow users to create, share, and interact with content in virtual communities, facilitating dynamic and interactive communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These platforms, including Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp, are designed for interpersonal communication and information dissemination, enabling users to connect with others across geographical boundaries (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Twitter

Twitter's microblogging format especially with its character limits has encouraged users to express ideas in short, compressed forms, giving rise to abbreviations, hashtags, and inventive word play (Maity, Ghuku, Upmanyu, & Mukherjee, 2015). Over time, Twitter itself develops linguistic norms: running texts (strings of words joined without spaces), evolving hashtag conventions, and fewer out-of-vocabulary words as the platform matures (Maity et al., 2015). Because tweets are public and often retweeted, new phrases and digital slang can

spread rapidly across large audiences, reinforcing how linguistic innovation in this space impacts broader discourse.

TikTok

TikTok is distinct in blending audio-visual media with text, captions, and speech, creating hybrid communicative forms. A study of TikTok language revealed that users frequently mix local and global linguistic variants and use playful, humorous, or contrasting expressions in captions and comments (Purnami, 2022). The platform's fast pace encourages linguistic experimentation: users repurpose sounds, memes, captions, and fragments of speech to produce content that resonates culturally and expressively. Because videos can go viral, novel linguistic patterns can spread swiftly, influencing how younger generations speak and write beyond the platform.

Facebook

Facebook offers a versatile space for extended posts, commenting, and sharing multimedia content. While it allows more elaborate expression than microblog platforms, users still infuse informal features like emojis, slang, and shortened forms to maintain conversational tone. The platform supports linguistic variation through groups and communities, where dialects, proverbs, and cultural expressions circulate and gain legitimacy through repeated use. In effect, Facebook acts as a bridge between casual, social speech and more formal writing, facilitating a continuum of registers rather than strictly segregated styles.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is primarily a private, conversational platform users engage in real-time, informal dialogues with friends, family, or small groups. This intimacy encourages the use of colloquial language: abbreviations, emoticons, code-switching between English, Pidgin, or indigenous languages, and even voice notes that merge speaking and writing. Because many conversations are habitual and frequent, linguistic features adopted in WhatsApp chats often become internalized, pressing their influence into more formal domains. In multilingual contexts, WhatsApp becomes a space where linguistic identities are negotiated, solidified, and adapted in everyday interaction.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media platforms provide a unique environment for informal language use, often characterized by abbreviations, slangs, emojis, gifs, and memes, which have become integral to online communication. The informal nature of social media language use allows for creative expression and flexibility, shaping the way individuals interact and convey meaning in digital spaces (Crystal, 2011).

As Lee (2015) points out, social media platforms have given rise to new forms of language use, such as hashtags, trending challenges, and viral content, which can spread rapidly and influence language use beyond online contexts. For instance, the use of hashtags on Twitter has become a popular way to categorize and make posts discoverable, while trending challenges on TikTok have created new opportunities for creative expression and community engagement (Lee, 2015). Moreover, social media language use is often marked by brevity, informality, and a blend of visual and textual elements, which can lead to new forms of storytelling, identity formation, and community building (Georgakopoulou, 2017).

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According to Jones and Hafner (2012), social media platforms have enabled users to create and share multimodal content, combining text, images, and videos to convey meaning and express themselves. This has led to the development of new linguistic styles, such as "netspeak" or "textese," which are characterized by abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons (Crystal, 2001). As social media continues to evolve, it is likely to have a lasting impact on the way we communicate, interact, and use language (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011).

Researchers have noted that social media platforms significantly impact language use, social relationships, and cultural norms, especially among young people. According to Lee (2015), social media's influence on these aspects of human interaction is profound. For instance, social media can shape language attitudes, identity formation, and community membership, particularly in multilingual and multicultural contexts, as highlighted by Blommaert & Rampton (2011). They emphasize that language use on social media reflects complex identity negotiations and power dynamics.

Moreover, social media facilitates language learning and cultural exchange by providing opportunities for users to engage with diverse languages and cultures. Lamy & Goodfellow (2014) contribute to this discussion by exploring how social media can be leveraged for language learning, promoting intercultural communication and understanding. Their work underscores the potential of social media to enhance language skills and foster global connections.

Social media's impact on language is multifaceted, with the emergence of new vocabulary, expressions, and grammatical structures. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have given rise to a unique digital language, characterized by nonstandard grammar and acronyms like "LOL" (laugh out loud) and "TNX" (thanks). This phenomenon raises questions about the relationship between language, culture, and technology.

Furthermore, social media's influence on social relationships is complex, with both positive and negative effects. On one hand, social media enables users to connect with others across geographical boundaries, fostering relationships and community building. On the other hand, excessive social media use can lead to superficial interactions, decreased attention spans, and increased feelings of loneliness and isolation.

In addition, social media has blurred the traditional distinctions between spoken and written language by encouraging users to communicate in ways that resemble face-to-face interaction. Features such as instant messaging, voice notes, reaction buttons, and live-streaming create a sense of immediacy that mirrors real-time conversation, while still retaining elements of written text. This hybrid form of communication has introduced new discourse patterns, interactive norms, and conversational structures, enabling people to express tone, emphasis, and social cues that were previously difficult to convey through writing alone. As a result, digital communication has become more dynamic, flexible, and expressive, allowing individuals to negotiate meaning in more nuanced and creative ways.

Furthermore, social media has played a significant role in giving marginalized voices and minority language communities greater visibility and representation. Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp allow speakers of indigenous or minority languages to share content, create communities, and preserve linguistic heritage in ways that were not possible before the digital era. Through user-generated content, online storytelling, and the sharing of culturally

rooted expressions, social media becomes a tool for safeguarding linguistic diversity and resisting the dominance of major global languages. This democratization of linguistic space empowers individuals to assert their identities, strengthen cultural pride, and participate in global conversations on their own terms.

Another important aspect is the influence of social media algorithms, which shape what users see, share, and engage with. These algorithmic systems indirectly affect language use by amplifying certain linguistic styles, trends, or expressions based on popularity and engagement. Viral content, memes, and trending hashtags often spread rapidly because algorithms prioritize highly interactive posts, resulting in widespread adoption of particular vocabulary, humour styles, or communication patterns. Over time, this can create new norms of expression and pressure users to adapt to digital linguistic trends in order to be seen, understood, and socially relevant online.

Social media has also transformed the way language reflects and constructs social identities. Young people, in particular, use language online to signal group membership, express individuality, and negotiate status within peer networks. The strategic use of slang, emojis, abbreviations, or code-switching helps users position themselves within specific online cultures, such as gaming communities, fan groups, or activist movements. These linguistic choices are not random; they are deeply tied to users' desire to belong, differentiate themselves, and craft specific digital personas. Therefore, the linguistic landscape of social media becomes a space where identity is constantly performed, negotiated, and reshaped.

Social media has also accelerated the pace at which linguistic innovations spread across different regions and demographic groups. A word or expression that emerges within a small online circle can rapidly gain global visibility through shares, reposts, and algorithm-driven amplification. This rapid diffusion process allows linguistic variants to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries far more quickly than in traditional face-to-face communication. As a result, languages experience faster cycles of change, adoption, and obsolescence, creating a dynamic environment where linguistic creativity thrives and where users constantly adapt to evolving communication trends.

This chapter presents the results and analysis of data collected from three hundred and eleven (311) participants drawn from Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre, and Emohua Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Rivers State. The aim of the chapter is to analyze the demographic characteristics of respondents, their social media usage patterns, and the perceived influence of social media on language use, communication, and language teaching. Data were presented in frequency tables and percentages for clarity, and statistical tests such as chi-square were used to determine significance.

The findings of this chapter address the research objectives, which include examining how social media affects language use among youths, identifying linguistic features adopted from social media, and determining the implications of these changes for communication and language education.

Table 1 Socio-demographic Information of Study Participants

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentages (%)
Location		

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Emohua	94	30.23
Obio/Akpor	116	37.28
Ikwere	101	32.48
Gender		
Male	40	12.9
Female	271	87.1
Age		
18-25	6	1.9
26-30	211	67.8
31 and above	94	30.3
Education		
Secondary	14	4.5
Bachelor	274	88.1
Masters	21	6.8
PhD	2	0.6
Occupation		
Student	16	5.1
Employed	227	73.0
Unemployed	13	4.2
Self employed	55	17.7
Total	311	100

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 311 participants. The results show that most respondents were from Obio/Akpor (37.28%), followed by Ikwere (32.48%) and Emohua (30.23%). A large majority were females (87.1%), while males constituted 12.9%. Most participants were aged 26–30 years (67.8%), indicating that the study involved mainly young adults. In terms of education, 88.1% held Bachelor's degrees, showing a highly educated sample. Regarding occupation, 73% were employed, 17.7% self-employed, 5.1% students, and 4.2% unemployed. Overall, the table shows that the respondents were predominantly young, educated, and employed females drawn mainly from Obio/Akpor LGA.

Table 2 Social Media Usage Patterns among Youths in Selected LGAs of Rivers State

Variables	n (%)	Chi square	P value
Most used social media platform			
Whatsapp	290 (93.2)	143.0	<0.0001
Facebook	21 (6.8)		
Duration of social media use			
Less than 1 hour	40 (12.9)		
1-2 hours	19 (6.1)	148.1	<0.0001
More than 2 hours	252 (81.0)		
How long on social media use ?			

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Less than 1 year	0 (0.0)				
1-5 years	17 (5.5)		238.2		<0.0001
More than 5 years	294 (94.5)				
Social Media					
Communication Mode					
Formal	2 (0.6)				
Informal	2 (0.6)		253.3		<0.0001
Both	307 (98.7)				
Uses slang on social media?					
Yes	33 (10.6)				
No	18 (5.8)		137.2		<0.0001
Sometimes	236 (75.9)				
Rarely	24 (7.7)				
Frequency of abbreviations/acronyms use					
Often	17 (5.5)				
Sometimes	217 (69.8)				
Rarely	57 (18.3)		10.70		0.0011
Never	20 (6.4)				
Total	311 (100)				

Table 2 below shows patterns of social media use among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State. WhatsApp is the dominant social media platform (93.2%), with Facebook used by only 6.8% participants, showing a strong WhatsApp preference. Most users (81%) spend more than 2 hours on social media daily, and a significant portion (94.5%) have used social media for more than 5 years. Communication is mostly both formal and informal (98.7%), which highlights diverse usage styles. About 75.9% of study participants use slang sometimes, and 5.5% often use abbreviations or acronyms. The chi-square and p-values (<0.05) indicate these patterns are statistically significant. The data suggests youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State are heavy, long-term social media users with varied communication modes.

Table 3 Social Media Influence on Language Use among Youths in Selected LGAs of Rivers State

Variables	n (%)	Chi square	P value
Social media influences offline language use?			
Yes	36 (11.6)		
No	61 (19.6)	77.75	<0.0001
Unsure	214 (68.8)		
Noticed language changes due to social media?			

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Yes	44 (14.1)		
No	260 (83.6)	5.338	0.0209
Unsure	7 (2.3)		
Total	311 (100)		

Table 3 illustrates social media influence on language use among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwere and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State. It reveals that most youths (68.8%) are unsure if social media influences their offline language use, while only 11.6% acknowledged influenced, showing uncertainty in perception. Similarly, 83.6% of participants indicated they have not noticed language changes due to social media, with just 14.1% affirming such changes. The chi-square values and p-values (<0.05) indicate these findings are statistically significant. This suggests that while social media's impact on language is debated among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwere and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State, a notable portion recognizes its influence on language use.

Table 4 Linguistic Features and Factors Influencing Language Change among Youths in Selected LGAs of Rivers State

Variables	n (%)	Chi square	P value
Common linguistic features adopted from social media?			
Emojis	278 (89.5)	222.9	<0.0001
Abbreviations	18 (5.8)		
Hashtags	9 (2.9)		
Combination of above	6 (1.8)		
Social media affects language proficiency?			
Yes	90 (28.9)	21.51	<0.0001
No	211 (67.8)		
Unsure	10 (3.3)		
Factors influencing language change			
Social factor	279 (89.6)	234.4	<0.0001
Cultural factor	24 (7.7)		
Economic factor	6 (1.9)		
Combination of above	2 (0.8)		
Total	311 (100)		

Table 4 presents linguistic features and factors influencing language change among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State. Emojis are the most common feature adopted from social media (89.5%), while abbreviations and hashtags are less used. Most participants (67.8%) believe social media does not affect language proficiency, but a notable 28.9% say it does. Social, cultural, and economic factors significantly influenced language change, as shown chi-square values and p-values (<0.05). This suggests social media impacts language, but broader social factors also play a key role in shaping language trends among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State.

Table 5 Implications of Social Media-Induced Language Change on Communication and Language Teaching Among Youths in Selected LGAs of Rivers State

Variables	n (%)	Chi square	P value
Social media has implications for communication/teaching?			
Yes	91 (21.3)	21.99	<0.0001
No	210 (67.5)		
Unsure	10 (11.2)		
How social media can promote standard language			
Language	304 (96.9)		

Awareness/Education			
Guidelines/Resources	1 (0.4)	263.6	<0.0001
Use of Algorithms	5 (2.2)		
Formal/Informal switches	1 (0.4)		
Social media can impact future language use?			
Yes	52 (16.7)		
No	195 (62.7)	0.4446	0.5049
Unsure	64 (20.6)		
Total	311 (100)		

Table 5 reveals implications of social media-induced language change on communication and language teaching among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State. Most participants (67.5%) of youths believe social media has no implications for communication or teaching, while 21.3% think it does. Almost all respondents (96.9%) agreed that social media can promote standard language mainly through language awareness and education. Very few consider other factors like guidelines, algorithms, or formal/informal switches important. Opinions are divided on whether social media will impact future language use, with most unsure or saying no. This suggests youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State see social media more as a tool for language promotion than a factor drastically changing communication or teaching.

Discussion of Findings

The socio-demographic analysis reveals that the majority of participants were females (87.1%), while males accounted for only 12.9%. Most respondents were between 26 and 30 years old (67.8%) and held Bachelor's degrees (88.1%), showing that the sample comprised mostly young, educated adults. In addition, most of them were employed (73%), suggesting a relatively stable and socially active group. The highest number of participants came from Obio/Akpor (37.28%), followed by Ikwerre (32.48%) and Emohua (30.23%).

Findings on social media usage patterns indicate that WhatsApp is overwhelmingly the most used platform (93.2%), while Facebook use is minimal (6.8%). Most participants (81%) spend more than two hours on social media daily, and 94.5% have been active users for more than five years. This demonstrates that youths in these LGAs are long-term, heavy users of social media. Furthermore, most communicate in both formal and informal styles (98.7%), showing that social media provides a space for flexible communication. A significant number of respondents (75.9%) sometimes use slang, while 69.8% sometimes use abbreviations or acronyms, reflecting the integration of informal linguistic features into everyday interactions.

Regarding the influence of social media on language use, most respondents (68.8%) were unsure whether it affects their offline language, while 11.6% believed it does. Similarly, 83.6% reported not noticing any language changes caused by social media. This suggests that while social media interaction is frequent, many youths may not consciously recognize its subtle influence on their speech or writing. Nonetheless, the statistical significance of the findings implies that social media does play a role, albeit one that users may not be fully aware of.

Analysis of linguistic features revealed that emojis are the most commonly adopted element from social media (89.5%), followed by abbreviations and hashtags. Although most respondents (67.8%) believe social media does not affect language proficiency, a significant minority (28.9%) think it does. Moreover, social factors (89.6%) were identified as the major drivers of language change, followed by cultural and economic influences. This shows that while digital communication shapes expression, broader social interactions and community norms also contribute significantly to language evolution.

Finally, in examining the implications of social media-induced language change, 67.5% of participants felt there were no major implications for communication or teaching, though 21.3% acknowledged some effects. Interestingly, an overwhelming 96.9% agreed that social media can promote standard language through awareness and education. However, opinions were divided on whether social media will influence future language use, with most participants either unsure or disagreeing. This indicates that while youths view social media as a learning and awareness tool, they may not see it as a major driver of linguistic transformation in the long term.

Summary

Demographic Profile:

Most respondents were young (26–30 years), female, and university graduates, with a majority employed and residing mainly in Obio/Akpor LGA.

Social Media Usage:

WhatsApp emerged as the dominant platform among youths, with most users spending over two hours daily and having used social media for more than five years. Communication tends to blend formal and informal styles, with frequent use of slang, abbreviations, and emojis.

Influence on Language Use:

While many respondents were unsure about the influence of social media on their offline language, statistical evidence indicates that such influence exists, especially through informal expressions and digital linguistic features.

Linguistic Features and Change Factors:

Emojis, abbreviations, and hashtags are common linguistic innovations adopted from social media. Social and cultural factors significantly contribute to language change, alongside the influence of social media interactions.

Implications for Communication and Teaching:

Most youths perceive minimal negative implications of social media on communication or language teaching. However, they recognize social media's potential to promote standard language through awareness, education, and exposure to diverse linguistic forms. Data were collected from 311 participants through questionnaires and analyzed using frequency tables, percentages, and chi-square tests.

Findings revealed that most respondents were females aged between 26–30 years, with a majority holding Bachelor's degrees and being employed. WhatsApp emerged as the most used social media platform, and most participants had been active on social media for over five years, spending more than two hours daily. Communication on these platforms was predominantly a

mix of formal and informal expressions, with a frequent use of slang, abbreviations, and emojis consistent with recent findings on the integration of digital features into youth language use (Dozie & Ojilere, 2025; Temple & Fayigbe, 2025). Although most respondents were unsure about the direct influence of social media on their offline language, the data indicated that social media interactions subtly affect the way youths communicate. Emojis, abbreviations, and hashtags were among the most common linguistic features adopted echoing earlier research showing that informal digital orthographies are increasingly present in youth language practices (Thonyuha, Kolapo & Yayi, 2024). The study also found that social, cultural, and economic factors significantly contribute to language change among youths. In terms of implications, most respondents believed that social media has minimal negative impact on communication or teaching. However, the majority agreed that social media can be a tool for promoting standard language through awareness and educational engagement a position supported by research on social media's potential in language promotion and preservation in Nigeria (Ugwu, 2024).

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is evident that social media plays an increasingly significant role in shaping communication patterns among youths in Rivers State, even though its influence may not always be consciously recognized. The dominance of WhatsApp as a communication platform shows that social media has become an integral part of youths' daily interactions.

This paper concludes that social media has introduced a range of new linguistic forms such as emojis, abbreviations, acronyms, memes, slang expressions, and hybridized language structures that have subtly but noticeably influenced the communication patterns of youths. These forms serve various communicative functions, including expressing emotions, signalling identity, enhancing conversational speed, and fostering in-group solidarity. Rather than indicating a deterioration in language proficiency, these innovations point to an evolving and adaptive communication style in which young people skillfully blend formal and informal linguistic elements depending on context, audience, and communicative purpose. This demonstrates the flexibility of language and the ability of youths to navigate multiple linguistic registers with ease.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that social media, when used intentionally and constructively, can function as a powerful platform for promoting language awareness, creativity, and digital literacy. Many youths actively engage in reading, writing, storytelling, and content creation online, which exposes them to diverse vocabulary, new communicative strategies, and rich cultural expressions. While legitimate concerns exist regarding non-standard spellings, excessive abbreviations, and the potential for reduced attention to formal writing norms, the overall impact of social media on language use appears to be more adaptive, generative, and context-dependent than destructive.

In light of these insights, the study recommends that social media be strategically harnessed as a supportive tool in language education. Teachers, parents, and policymakers can incorporate digital platforms into instructional practices to enhance students' communication competence, encourage creative expression, and promote critical awareness of different language varieties. Integrating social media into language learning environments can also help

bridge the gap between classroom language and real-world communication, making learning more engaging, relevant, and meaningful to young people.

Ultimately, this paper reinforces the idea that language is dynamic and constantly evolving, and that digital communication platforms are simply the latest catalysts shaping contemporary linguistic practices. By embracing the educational potential of social media while guiding youths toward responsible and context-appropriate usage, stakeholders can foster more effective, inclusive, and literate communication in the digital age.

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