

Exploring Language Practices and Thematic Patterns in Social Media Interaction

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Abstract

Social media platforms have changed the structure of communication on a global scale. New communication practices have been introduced. They have changed the way people conceptualize, develop, and share information with one another over the Internet. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms have created new opportunities for people to share ideas and socialize. Sex, race, and class are used as tools of social media engagement to criticize and raise awareness of social issues. This research examines the possibility and limitations of Internet communication practices. It seeks to understand how social media shapes and affects modern communication and the ways people think and express themselves. A qualitative methodology was adopted and content gathered from the most popular social media platforms was subjected to thematic analysis by UCL analysts. The

analysis framework of Braun and Clarke was used as the structure of the study. The analysis demonstrated that social media engagement is highly simplified and multimodal. The study shows how social media creates new ways to develop identities. Personal social media pages may influence and inspire public discourse and critique community issues. This study indicates that a social media page is a highly adaptable tool that people mold and change based on the a multitude of factors, including the audience and intent, reflective of a modern integrated society. This study shows the adaptability of social media once new technology is implemented. This study provides a foundation for future research on Multilingualism.

Keywords: Social media interaction, language practices, thematic analysis, multimodal communication, online identity construction, digital discourse, and multilingualism

Introduction

The emergence of social media has transformed the nature of human communication, creating a digital environment in which language evolves at an unprecedented pace. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Reddit, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become integral to everyday life, enabling individuals to exchange ideas, construct identities, and participate in public discourse regardless of geographical boundaries. Unlike traditional media, where communication primarily flows from institutions to audiences, social media promotes interactive participation, allowing users to become both creators and consumers of information. This participatory nature has fundamentally reshaped linguistic practices, giving rise to new forms of communication characterized by brevity, creativity, multimodality, and immediacy (Crystal 15).

Language has never been a static phenomenon. Throughout history, linguistic practices have evolved in response to cultural, technological, and social transformations. The digital revolution has accelerated this process by introducing communicative forms that were previously unimaginable. Abbreviations, emojis, hashtags, internet slang, memes, GIFs, and

multimodal expressions have become essential components of online discourse. These linguistic innovations extend beyond stylistic variation; they reflect changing patterns of human interaction and demonstrate the adaptability of language to technological environments (Baron 42).

Social media communication differs significantly from conventional written discourse. While traditional writing generally follows established grammatical conventions, digital communication often prioritizes efficiency, emotional expression, and audience engagement. Users intentionally employ shortened expressions such as "LOL," "BRB," and "IMO," combine text with emojis, and use visual symbols to reinforce meaning. These practices should not be interpreted as linguistic decline but rather as evidence of language adapting to new communicative contexts. As David Crystal argues, the Internet has created new opportunities for linguistic creativity without diminishing the fundamental structure of language (56).

The increasing integration of visual and textual elements has also expanded the communicative possibilities available to users. Emojis, stickers, reaction images, and GIFs frequently accompany written messages, enabling individuals to express emotions that might otherwise remain ambiguous in text-based communication. Kress and van Leeuwen contend that contemporary communication is inherently multimodal, as meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic, visual, and symbolic resources rather than through words alone (19). Consequently, understanding social media language requires examining both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication.

Another defining characteristic of social media discourse is its role in identity construction. Online platforms provide individuals with opportunities to present themselves through biographies, captions, comments, photographs, and interactions. These linguistic choices contribute to the creation of digital identities that may reflect personal beliefs,

professional aspirations, cultural affiliations, or political positions. Goffman's concept of self-presentation remains highly relevant in digital environments because users consciously manage the impressions they create through language and visual representation (17). Social media therefore functions not merely as a communication platform but also as a space for continuous identity negotiation.

Language on social media is equally significant in shaping collective experiences and public opinion. Digital conversations increasingly influence discussions related to education, politics, healthcare, environmental sustainability, gender equality, entertainment, and social justice. Hashtags such as **#MeToo**, **#BlackLivesMatter**, and **#ClimateAction** demonstrate how linguistic markers can mobilize communities, organize information, and encourage civic participation. These digital expressions illustrate that language functions simultaneously as a communicative resource and as a mechanism for social action (Papacharissi 68).

The multilingual nature of social media further contributes to linguistic diversity. Users frequently alternate between languages within a single conversation, reflecting cultural identity and audience awareness. This phenomenon of code-switching has become increasingly common in multilingual societies, where digital communication allows local languages to coexist alongside global languages such as English. Blommaert argues that globalization has intensified linguistic mobility, enabling individuals to navigate multiple linguistic and cultural contexts simultaneously (102). Social media therefore represents a dynamic environment in which global communication and local identities intersect.

Thematic perception constitutes another important dimension of digital communication. Every social media interaction communicates not only explicit information but also underlying themes that shape audience interpretation. Discussions surrounding public health, education, environmental issues, technology, gender, politics, and popular culture emerge repeatedly across digital platforms. These themes are constructed through

recurring linguistic patterns, rhetorical strategies, visual representations, and user interactions. Van Dijk maintains that discourse actively shapes social knowledge by influencing how individuals interpret events and construct collective understanding (24). Consequently, analysing thematic perception provides valuable insights into the relationship between language and society.

Although previous research has examined computer-mediated communication, internet linguistics, discourse analysis, and multimodal communication, comparatively few studies have integrated language usage and thematic perception within a single qualitative framework. Much of the existing literature focuses either on isolated linguistic features or on computational analyses of social media data. Such approaches often overlook the broader social meanings embedded within digital communication. There remains a need for qualitative investigations that examine how language choices contribute to recurring thematic patterns across different social media platforms.

The present study addresses this gap by employing Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to investigate language usage and thematic perceptions in social media discourse. Through qualitative analysis of publicly available digital communication, the study explores how linguistic innovations influence meaning-making, identity construction, emotional expression, and public engagement. By integrating perspectives from sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and computer-mediated communication, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how language continues to evolve within contemporary digital society.

Research Objectives

1. To examine patterns of language usage across social media platforms.
2. To identify the dominant themes emerging from digital communication.
3. To analyse how linguistic choices influence thematic perception.

4. To investigate the role of multimodal communication in constructing meaning.
5. To explore the sociolinguistic implications of language use in contemporary social media discourse.

Literature Review

The rapid expansion of social media has generated considerable scholarly interest in understanding the changing nature of language in digital environments. Researchers from linguistics, communication studies, sociology, media studies, and cultural studies have examined how online platforms influence communication practices, identity formation, and public discourse. Existing literature demonstrates that digital communication is characterized by linguistic innovation, multimodal expression, and participatory interaction. Nevertheless, there remains a need for studies that integrate language usage with thematic perception through qualitative analysis.

Language and Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) provides one of the earliest theoretical foundations for studying online language. CMC refers to communication that occurs through digital technologies, allowing individuals to interact synchronously and asynchronously across geographical boundaries. Unlike face-to-face interaction, digital communication lacks many non-verbal cues, leading users to develop alternative linguistic strategies for expressing emotion, emphasis, and interpersonal relationships.

Susan Herring argues that online communication has developed its own discourse conventions rather than simply imitating spoken or written language. Features such as abbreviations, unconventional punctuation, informal vocabulary, and rapid conversational exchanges illustrate that digital discourse constitutes a distinct communicative variety (Herring). These conventions vary according to platform design, audience expectations, and

communicative purpose, demonstrating the flexibility of language within technological environments.

Similarly, David Crystal rejects the notion that internet communication damages language. Instead, he describes online discourse as a creative extension of linguistic practice in which users adapt vocabulary, syntax, and style to suit new communicative contexts (Crystal 27). The emergence of digital expressions, internet slang, and innovative lexical forms reflects the natural evolution of language rather than its decline.

Social Media and Linguistic Innovation

Language on social media evolves continuously in response to technological developments and changing patterns of interaction. Platforms encourage concise communication through character limits, mobile interfaces, and real-time conversations. Consequently, users frequently employ shortened words, acronyms, clipped expressions, and internet slang to maximise communicative efficiency.

Lexical innovation has become a defining feature of digital discourse. Words such as selfie, hashtag, unfollow, viral, ghosting, and doomscrolling have entered everyday vocabulary through widespread online usage. These expressions demonstrate how technological culture influences language development and contributes to the expansion of contemporary English.

Naomi Baron observes that digital technologies have altered writing habits by encouraging conversational styles within written communication (Baron 58). Rather than adhering strictly to formal grammatical conventions, users often prioritise clarity, speed, and interpersonal engagement. Such flexibility illustrates the adaptability of language across communicative settings.

Multimodality in Digital Communication

One of the most significant developments in contemporary communication is the increasing integration of textual and visual resources. Social media messages frequently combine written language with emojis, photographs, GIFs, stickers, hyperlinks, videos, and graphic elements. These multimodal resources contribute to meaning-making by reinforcing emotional tone, contextual information, and interpersonal relationships.

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen argue that meaning is constructed through multiple semiotic modes rather than through language alone (Kress and van Leeuwen 41). Images, colours, layout, typography, and visual symbols all function alongside written text to create comprehensive communicative messages. Their theory of multimodality provides an essential framework for understanding the complexity of social media discourse.

Marcel Danesi similarly argues that emojis represent an emerging visual language capable of conveying emotional and interpersonal meanings that are often difficult to express through words alone (Danesi 73). Their widespread adoption demonstrates that digital literacy increasingly requires competence in interpreting both verbal and visual forms of communication.

Language, Identity, and Online Communities

Social media has transformed identity construction by providing users with continuous opportunities for self-presentation. Personal profiles, biographies, captions, comments, and interaction patterns collectively contribute to the formation of digital identities. Unlike offline communication, online identities can be revised, edited, and strategically managed over time.

Erving Goffman's theory of self-presentation remains relevant in explaining how individuals perform different social roles depending on audience and context (Goffman 22).

Social media extends this process by enabling users to curate public identities through language and visual representation.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital further explains why particular language choices become socially valuable within online communities (Bourdieu 55). Users frequently adopt specialised vocabulary, hashtags, and stylistic conventions to demonstrate membership within particular cultural, educational, or professional groups. Language therefore functions not only as a communicative resource but also as a marker of social identity and symbolic power.

Multilingual communication also characterises digital interaction. Users regularly alternate between languages within a single conversation, reflecting cultural identity, audience awareness, and communicative purpose. Jan Blommaert argues that linguistic mobility has become increasingly significant within globalised societies, where individuals participate simultaneously in local and international communication networks (Blommaert 118).

Language, Discourse, and Thematic Perception

The relationship between language and thematic perception has been widely examined within discourse studies. Norman Fairclough argues that discourse simultaneously reflects and shapes social reality by influencing how individuals interpret institutions, ideologies, and cultural practices (Fairclough 36). Language therefore plays an active role in constructing public understanding rather than merely describing events.

Similarly, Teun A. van Dijk emphasises that discourse contributes to the production of social knowledge through recurring linguistic patterns and ideological representation (van Dijk 31). Social media amplifies this process by enabling rapid circulation of information, opinions, and narratives among large audiences.

Hashtags illustrate how linguistic markers organise thematic discussions across digital platforms. They categorise information, facilitate content discovery, and encourage collective participation in conversations related to politics, education, environmental protection, health awareness, and social justice. ZiziPapacharissi argues that hashtags contribute to the formation of networked publics by connecting individuals through shared interests and emotional engagement (Papacharissi 82).

Research Gap

The existing literature confirms that social media has transformed language through lexical innovation, multimodal communication, identity construction, and participatory interaction. However, much of the previous research concentrates on individual linguistic features or computational analyses of large datasets. Comparatively fewer qualitative studies examine how language usage contributes to thematic perception across different social media platforms.

Furthermore, many investigations focus on platform-specific communication without providing an integrated understanding of digital language as a broader sociocultural phenomenon. This study addresses these limitations by employing Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to explore the relationship between language usage and thematic perception within contemporary social media discourse. By synthesising perspectives from sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and computer-mediated communication, the research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how language constructs meaning within digital society.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine language usage and thematic perceptions in social media discourse. Qualitative research is particularly

appropriate for investigating communication because it enables researchers to interpret meanings, experiences, and patterns embedded within naturally occurring data. Unlike quantitative approaches that primarily measure frequencies and statistical relationships, qualitative research focuses on understanding how language constructs meaning within specific social and cultural contexts. Since the objective of this study is to explore how users employ language to express emotions, construct identities, and engage with social issues, a qualitative approach provides the most suitable analytical framework.

The research adopts thematic analysis as the principal method of data analysis. Braun and Clarke define thematic analysis as a systematic method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning within qualitative datasets (79). Its flexibility allows researchers to examine linguistic, cultural, and contextual dimensions of communication without restricting the analysis to predetermined theoretical assumptions. This method is particularly useful for analysing social media discourse because digital communication contains diverse linguistic forms, including written text, abbreviations, hashtags, emojis, and multimodal expressions.

Research Approach

The study is guided by an interpretivist research paradigm. Interpretivism assumes that meaning is socially constructed and that language cannot be understood independently of its cultural and communicative context. Social media users continuously negotiate meaning through interaction with other users, making digital communication an evolving social practice rather than a fixed linguistic system. Consequently, the interpretation of online discourse requires careful attention to context, audience, and communicative purpose.

Rather than testing a specific hypothesis, the study seeks to understand how language functions within social media environments and how recurring themes emerge from everyday

communication. This interpretive perspective allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship between linguistic choices and thematic representation.

Data Collection

The data for this study consist of publicly accessible social media posts collected from multiple digital platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Reddit, and public discussion forums. These platforms were selected because they represent different forms of digital interaction while attracting users from diverse cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds.

The dataset include publicly available captions, comments, discussion threads, hashtags, and short textual posts written in English. To ensure consistency, the study excludes private conversations, direct messages, password-protected communities, and deleted content. Only publicly accessible material was considered appropriate for analysis.

The selected posts address a wide range of contemporary topics, including education, environmental awareness, mental health, technology, politics, entertainment, gender equality, lifestyle, and everyday experiences. This diversity allows the research to capture different linguistic styles and thematic patterns across social media communication.

Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework.

Phase One: Familiarisation with the Data

The researcher repeatedly examined the collected posts to develop familiarity with the content. During this stage, initial observations regarding language use, recurring expressions, communicative strategies, and emerging themes were recorded through analytical notes.

Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes

The second phase involved systematic coding of significant linguistic features. Codes included abbreviations, emojis, internet slang, hashtags, expressions of humour, emotional language, persuasive strategies, identity markers, and references to social issues. Coding focused on meaningful segments of communication rather than isolated words.

Phase Three: Searching for Themes

Related codes were organised into broader thematic categories. Similar linguistic patterns were grouped together to identify recurring concepts across the dataset. This inductive process allowed themes to emerge naturally from the data rather than being imposed by the researcher.

Phase Four: Reviewing Themes

Each preliminary theme was examined carefully to determine whether it accurately represented the coded data. Themes with overlapping meanings were combined, while unsupported or inconsistent themes were removed. This stage improved the coherence and reliability of the analysis.

Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes

The refined themes were clearly defined according to their central characteristics and analytical significance. Each theme represented a distinct dimension of language usage and thematic perception within social media communication.

Phase Six: Producing the Analytical Report

The final phase involved interpreting the themes in relation to previous scholarship on digital communication, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and multimodality. The discussion connected empirical observations with existing theoretical perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of language practices in social media.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure methodological rigour, the study followed the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba.

Credibility was enhanced through repeated engagement with the data and systematic coding procedures. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research design, sampling strategy, and analytical process, allowing readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability was maintained by documenting each stage of the analytical procedure, ensuring transparency and consistency. Confirmability was achieved by grounding interpretations in the collected data while minimising subjective bias through careful documentation of analytical decisions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations remained central throughout the research process. Only publicly accessible content was analysed, and no attempt was made to identify individual users. Usernames, profile photographs, personal identifiers, and sensitive information were excluded from the dataset to protect privacy. Where examples were discussed, they were paraphrased to preserve anonymity while retaining their communicative meaning.

The study recognises that ethical responsibility extends beyond legal accessibility. Therefore, the analysis was conducted with respect for user privacy and in accordance with accepted principles of internet-based qualitative research.

The methodology provides a systematic framework for examining language usage and thematic perceptions in social media. By combining an interpretive perspective with qualitative thematic analysis, the study establishes a rigorous foundation for exploring how language functions within contemporary digital environments. The following section presents the findings of the thematic analysis and discusses their implications in relation to existing scholarship on digital discourse and social media communication.

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the selected social media dataset identified five recurring themes that characterize contemporary digital communication: (1) linguistic simplification and communicative efficiency, (2) multimodal emotional expression, (3) identity construction through language, (4) hashtag-mediated participation, and (5) public discourse and social engagement. These themes illustrate that social media language is not merely a medium for exchanging information but also a resource for constructing meaning, negotiating identity, and participating in collective conversations. The findings support previous research in computer-mediated communication while also demonstrating how thematic patterns emerge through everyday linguistic practices.

Synthesis of Findings

Taken together, the five themes demonstrate that social media language is dynamic, adaptive, and deeply embedded within contemporary social life. Linguistic simplification facilitates efficient communication, multimodal resources enrich emotional expression, identity construction reflects the social functions of language, hashtags strengthen collective participation, and public discourse illustrates the role of communication in shaping social awareness.

The findings align with major perspectives in sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and computer-mediated communication by demonstrating that language evolves continuously in response to technological innovation and changing communicative practices. Rather than replacing traditional forms of communication, digital discourse expands the linguistic repertoire available to users, allowing them to combine textual, visual, and symbolic resources in increasingly sophisticated ways.

Furthermore, the study highlights that thematic perception is closely connected to linguistic choice. Themes do not emerge independently of language; instead, they are

constructed through vocabulary, rhetorical strategies, visual symbols, interaction patterns, and shared cultural references. This relationship confirms that analysing language provides valuable insights into broader social, cultural, and communicative processes operating within digital environments.

The findings therefore contribute to a growing understanding of social media as a complex linguistic ecosystem in which communication, identity, participation, and meaning-making continuously interact. By integrating thematic analysis with perspectives from digital discourse studies, the research offers a comprehensive account of how language functions within contemporary online communities.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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