

UNVEILING DIGITAL DISCOURSES: A SMILE-BASED SOMELIT ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of digital communication has reshaped how individuals engage with language, creating a dynamic interface between linguistics and communication, forming a rich area for academic inquiry. This study employs the SoMeLit (2024) (Social-Media Literacy Interface Tool) mechanism, integrating Schreurs and

Vandenbosch's (2020) Social Media Literacy (SMILE) framework to explore the interplay between linguistic strategies and communicative practices on social media platforms. For the said purpose, the present research focuses on different public digital platforms i.e., WhatsApp, Twitter, TikTok and Instagram interactions, the research examines how language constructs identities, fosters community, and negotiates power dynamics. Multimodal elements, such as hashtags activism, conversational threads, emojis, meme culture and textual structures, are analyzed to highlight the convergence of visual, verbal, and contextual cues in digital discourse to uncover how positivity bias informs digital discourse. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study examines both quantitative trends and qualitative subtleties in user interactions. Findings reveal the adaptability of linguistic patterns in navigating positivity bias and emphasize the role of immediacy and interactivity in shaping modern communication. Thus, this research contributes to understanding the transformative potential of social media literacy in decoding communication strategies and redefining traditional linguistic norms.

INTRODUCTION

Digital discourse refers to the way people communicate through online and digital platforms. It encompasses a wide range of language forms, including written text, voice messages, emojis, memes, hashtags, slang, abbreviations, and content that mixes visuals with text. This mode of communication is largely shaped by users themselves,

making it interactive and often a blend of casual and formal language. In today's digital age, it has become a central part of how we connect in our personal lives, workplaces, and broader society. Unlike traditional communication methods, digital discourse reflects the fast-moving and multi-layered environment of platforms like Facebook, Instagram,

WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter). These platforms have transformed language use—how it's created, shared, and understood—introducing unique linguistic styles and elements such as emojis, memes, acronyms, hashtags, and creative spellings that merge text with visual content. The phenomenon of digital discourse reflects how language use is shaped by the communicative norms and technological affordances of diverse digital platforms, from instant messaging to video sharing. Factors such as user demographics, cultural backgrounds, and communication contexts significantly influence how linguistic styles, stances, and genres evolve in online environments (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). Digital media have transformed language use by enabling multimodal interaction, redefining authorship, and reshaping power dynamics—prompting discourse analysts to rethink traditional methodologies and frameworks (Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015). New media and digital platforms are reshaping media discourse by transforming audience roles, journalist practices, and multimodal news narratives, demanding broader analytical perspectives beyond traditional journalism (Cotter, 2015).

Social Media Communication

Social media has revolutionized the way we communicate by fostering instant global connections, encouraging real-time conversations, and promoting user-created content. This shift from traditional, passive media consumption to active participation has given rise to new ways of using language. Platforms now support a mix of text, visuals, and audio, leading to the widespread use of emojis, hashtags, memes, abbreviations, and code-mixing. These evolving linguistic forms reflect the dynamic and participatory nature of digital communication in the modern era.

Social media platforms facilitate creativity, connection, and empathy but also serve as surveillance tools, exploiting users commercially. Meikle explores tensions between these aspects, addressing privacy, sharing, and the cultural politics of digital media (Meikle, 2016). Social media lacks a universally accepted definition, and this article examines its features, uses, and effects. It proposes a comprehensive framework to guide future

communication theories and addresses emerging challenges in social media scholarship (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

Social media's influence on interpersonal communication reflects changing lifestyles, where time constraints drive individuals to prioritize mobile and digital communication, reducing face-to-face interactions (Subramanian, 2017). Emojis function as linguistic elements in WhatsApp conversations, acting as signs that facilitate communication through syntactic, semantic, and paradigmatic dimensions, reflecting a semiotic approach to social media interaction (Hasyim, 2019). Social media, especially Facebook, has been widely used in global social marketing programs to raise awareness and engage audiences, though limited efforts foster two-way communication or advocacy (Shawky, Kubacki, Dietrich, & Weaven, 2019).

SoMeLit (Social Media Literacies)

This concept highlights the combination of skills, strategies, and critical thinking individuals use to effectively engage with communication in digital and social media environments. It covers both practical abilities—such as writing posts, using hashtags, and commenting—and deeper critical skills, like assessing the credibility of information and understanding underlying meanings or subtexts. Often referred to as Social Media Literacy (SoMeLit), it encompasses the capacity to read, write, analyze, and interact within online platforms. SoMeLit is particularly useful for exploring how people learn, adapt, and reshape their language practices in the ever-evolving digital landscape.

Social media literacy is essential in today's digital society, where users must navigate a complex media landscape shaped by rapid technological and societal changes, highlighting the need for targeted educational and professional training (Castellano, 2022). Social media literacy models, such as SoMeLit and SMILE, offer comprehensive frameworks for understanding and enhancing users' abilities to critically engage with digital content, emphasizing the importance of decoding, evaluating, and interacting within the dynamic media landscape (Pouti, 2024).

The Social Media Literacy (SMILE) model introduces a novel framework to explore how social

media literacy influences user well-being, focusing on participatory mediation and the positivity bias, with implications for children and adolescents' media interaction (Schreurs & Vandenbosch, 2021). Social media literacy in education remains underresearched, with a need to explore both global and platform-specific skills. The study calls for a "glocal" approach to developing social media literacy and highlights gaps in current educational practices (Manca, Bocconi, & Gleason, 2021).

SMILE (Social Media Interaction Language and Expression)

SMILE is a linguistic framework designed to explore how users communicate on social media using creative, stylized, and symbolic forms of language. It focuses on how individuals employ various strategies—such as humor, irony, emojis, hashtags, memes, and blended language forms—to express emotions, construct identities, and engage with others. This approach examines the stylistic, grammatical, pragmatic, and semiotic elements of online discourse, highlighting how meaning, persuasion, and emotional resonance are crafted through informal yet impactful language choices. SMILE helps us understand the nuanced and expressive ways people interact in digital spaces.

The SMILE model offers a new framework for understanding social media literacy, focusing on its impact on user dynamics, well-being, and participation, particularly concerning the positivity bias on social media (Schreurs & Vandenbosch, 2021). Language models struggle with the distinct nature of social media language. This study presents the SMILE benchmark to evaluate and enhance model performance through domain adaptation, improving understanding across diverse platforms and tasks (Bashlovkina et al., 2023).

Digital media significantly influences how English and other languages interact online, shaping identity and communication practices in multilingual settings, highlighting

English's evolving global role in digital spaces (Lee, 2020).

Emojis function as grammatical elements in digital communication, carrying syntactic, semantic, and paradigmatic meanings that shape interpretation and

interaction on social media platforms like WhatsApp (Hasyim, 2019).

Linguistic Strategies/studies

Social media users creatively manipulate language to inform, entertain, and construct identities across platforms, showcasing strategic, genre-aware, and linguistically innovative communication (Calude, 2023). Functional linguistics has evolved from being seen as a rejection of formalism to a recognized, valuable approach in understanding language, including in digital communication, as social media challenges traditional linguistic frameworks (Deumert, 2015).

Social media communication strategies engage audiences quickly and have lasting impacts on brand identity, trust, and social change, with a correlation between online engagement and offline behavior, influencing purchases, political decisions, and cultural norms (Shvelidze, Karavaieva, & Tomchakovska, 2024). Emojis play a strategic role in social media marketing, with influencers using them to initiate engagement and persuade followers. This study develops a taxonomy of emoji-based rhetorical moves aimed at fostering interaction (Ge & Gretzel, 2018).

Literature Review

Digital Discourse Analysis

Digital discourse refers to the language use and communicative patterns that emerge in online environments. These discourses are shaped by immediacy, brevity, and platform-specific conventions. Digital discourse research explores how language, multimodality, and ideology intersect in social media, influenced by both micro-level practices and macro-level social processes (Thurlow, 2018). Digital media are transforming communication by reshaping language use, social interaction, and meaning making across platforms like Facebook, texting, and online education, demanding new theoretical frameworks for discourse analysis (Tannen & Trester, 2013).

Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) emphasize examining platforms as data sources, theoretical contexts, and spaces of provider- and user-generated discourse, revealing complex communicative paradigms and epistemological

implications (Kopf, 2025). The third wave of digital discourse research emphasizes methodological innovation and empirical depth, encouraging future studies to explore evolving linguistic patterns, technological interfaces, and user interactions (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & BouFranch, 2019).

The phenomenon of digital linguistic evolution reflects how language, identity, and culture dynamically intersect through multimodal tools like emojis and gestures in online communication, influenced by sociocultural, cognitive, and technological factors (Danesi, 2017). Digital media reshape communication practices, requiring discourse analysts to revise traditional methods and develop new theoretical frameworks to understand evolving multimodal, interactive, and socially embedded digital interactions (Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015).

Digital discourse is shaped by users' strategic use of multimodal resources, enabling identity construction, task management, and ideological expression across evolving communication platforms (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2018).

Digital academic discourse reshapes scholarly communication by blending traditional practices with digital platforms, influencing language, authorship, and community engagement within evolving academic networks (Kuteeva & Mauranen, 2018).

Social Media Communication

Social media communication is informal, participatory, and often visual. It is defined as user-generated content designed for interaction, branding, or personal expression. It is an evolving discourse practice influenced by trends, memes, and rapid user feedback. Linguistic strategies in social media marketing shape rapid, wide-reaching communication, highlighting the role of language in digital business interactions amid growing digitalization (Yurchenko & Ugolnikova, 2021). User-generated social media communication positively affects brand equity and attitude, while firm-created communication influences only brand attitude. Both brand equity and attitude drive purchase intention, with structural differences across industries (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

The study explores Greeklish use on YouTube, revealing how technological convenience and informal digital communication norms drive language adaptation in social networks (Laghos, Masoura, & Skordi, 2012). The study investigates communicative strategies within social media discourse, identifying how various text types—news, educational, and entertaining—shape strategic language use and influence audience engagement in digital spaces (Klemenova & Ereshchenko, 2020). Social media reshapes organizational communication by offering new tools for information exchange, though its implementation requires addressing communicational needs, potential constraints, and associated risks (Badea, 2014).

Social media is reshaping risk and crisis communication by offering both opportunities and challenges, prompting the need for strategic frameworks to guide its effective use by crisis managers and emergency services (Wendling, Radisch, & Jacobzone, 2013). Social media use enhances employee performance through improved vertical (LMX) and horizontal (TMX) communication, with task complexity moderating these relationships and highlighting the nuanced effects of workplace social exchanges (Chen & Wei, 2020). Social media reshapes firm-customer dynamics, yet organizations struggle to measure its strategic impact; a proposed ecosystem model helps conceptualize social media interactions to align initiatives with performance goals (Larson & Watson, 2011).

Framing strategies in brand posts on social media significantly affect user interaction, revealing that brands often misuse appeal types, thus underutilizing social media's full communication potential (Wagner, Baccarella, & Voigt, 2017). Social media transforms activist communication by accelerating its speed and enhancing its visual nature, while corporate platform architectures limit activists' control over content and data during protests (Poell, 2014).

Social media is transforming international recruiting in higher education, prompting the use of digital ethnography to explore communication norms, tool effectiveness, and evolving practices among university professionals (Merrill, 2011). Social media influencers play a crucial role in strategic

communication by using their influence and relationships to align with organizational goals. This paper presents a conceptual framework for understanding their communication strategies (Enke & Borchers, 2021).

Social media fosters knowledge sharing and communication skill development, especially among students, while reshaping interpersonal and community interactions in the evolving digital communication landscape (Baruah, 2012). Social media's growing academic relevance is evident in its increasing research presence across communication disciplines, highlighting evolving patterns, theoretical focus, and future technological integration (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012).

Social Media Literacies (SoMeLit) Model

The shift towards a new conceptual framework of social media literacy (SoMeLit) highlights the growing importance of understanding how users' self-construction on social media influences their choices and interactions with content. This dynamic relationship is shaped by evolving platform characteristics, as well as the values and decisions users make, which ultimately impact their digital reality (Cho, Cannon, Lopez, & Li, 2024). Social media reshapes language and literacy by introducing new vocabulary and discourse styles, simplifying grammar, and influencing reading and writing habits—offering both learning opportunities and challenges (Ezeudo, 2024).

Social media literacy in Singapore is explored through four competencies: technical, social, privacy-related, and informational, revealing disparities in perceived social media literacy across socioeconomic factors through focus groups and national surveys (Tandoc Jr et al., 2021). Confusion persists in distinguishing between information, media, and digital literacy, with difficulties in conceptualizing and assessing these literacies. The study emphasizes the need for clearer definitions and frameworks in media education (Wuyckens, Landry, & Fastrez, 2022).

Children's use of social network sites evolves with age, influencing their understanding of risk and reality. This study examines how social media literacy develops, focusing on children's changing engagement with SNSs as they mature (Livingstone,

2014). Social media enhances language learning by enabling interaction with native speakers, providing diverse resources, and boosting motivation, though it may also cause distractions and information overload (Umirov, 2022). Media literacy education fosters critical thinking, emphasizing independent analysis and contextual understanding of media. Successful programs require collaboration among educators, administrators, and parents to promote informed, critical media consumption (Brown, 1998).

Children's development of social media literacy progresses through stages, from understanding risks to navigating online interactions, influenced by their evolving peer and parental relationships, emphasizing the need for age-appropriate media education (Livingstone, 2014). The field of media literacy education has evolved globally, with emerging scholars shaping its development in response to digital media, civic activism, and media-related disorders, highlighting the interdisciplinary growth of this area (De Abreu et al., 2017).

SMILE: Social Media Interaction Language and Expression Model

The SMILE model dissects social media interactions into emotional expression, identity construction, engagement tactics, and linguistic creativity. Developed for digital linguistics, it offers a systematic lens for analyzing the microstructures of communication, such as tagging, capitalization, code-switching, and emoji usage. Smiling face emojis in virtual communication often enhance perceived politeness and mitigate impoliteness. Their interpretation varies by age, gender, and cultural context, influencing how politeness is managed in digital interactions (Yang, 2024).

Digital media has transformed language styles and communication by integrating text, image, and video, reshaping how individuals express and interact across platforms like social media, blogs, and online news (Han, 2024). Social media significantly aids English language learning in Pakistan by enhancing vocabulary and grammar through exposure to English content, yet challenges persist due to informal communication styles (Malik & Qureshi, 2024).

Linguistic Strategies in Social Media

These include formal and informal devices used to make communication effective in online platforms—emojis, acronyms, ellipsis, slang, and stylistic variants. Linguistic studies on social media predominantly emphasize sociolinguistics and pragmatics, revealing trends, methods, and themes like identity, ideology, and multilingualism through cross-disciplinary, mixed-method approaches (Sun, Wang, & Feng, 2021). The book explores updated linguistic frameworks and ethical practices for analyzing multimodal language use on social media, including emerging phenomena like fake news, hate speech, and global multilingual interactions (Page et al., 2022).

Influencers' speech acts, including expressive and directive strategies, significantly influence audience engagement on social media, with effectiveness varying by influencer type, suggesting firms should tailor speech acts to influencer categories for optimal campaign success (Fang, Shin, & Huang, 2025). This study analyzes how language and narrative structures in Pakistani digital news have evolved from 2019 to 2023, showing increased vocabulary diversity, shifting sentiments, and the incorporation of advanced media elements (Nazeer, Hussain, & Jamshaid, 2024).

Statement of Problem

Social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram have reshaped digital communication through brief, expressive, and multimodal language use. Traditional linguistic models fail to capture the complexity of hashtags, emojis, and symbolic captions in constructing digital discourse and identity. Existing studies often isolate features or overlook platform differences. This research addresses the gap by applying the SoMeLit and SMILE models to provide an integrated, platform-sensitive analysis of linguistic strategies, revealing how users shape meaning and engagement in evolving digital spaces.

Research Objectives

- To identify the most common linguistic strategies used in social media communication.
- To apply the SoMeLit and SMILE frameworks to analyze the Twitter and Instagram posts.

Research Questions

- What linguistic strategies are dominant in digital discourse on Twitter and Instagram?
- How do the SoMeLit and SMILE frameworks explain the nature and functions of these strategies?

Research Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative content analysis approach** to investigate how users deploy linguistic strategies across social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Instagram. The research aims to uncover the layered nature of digital discourse by examining both the **thematic intentions** behind posts (using the SoMeLit framework) and the **stylistic and expressive techniques** embedded in them (through the SMILE model). Together, these models allow for a dual-perspective analysis that captures the *what*, *how*, and *why* of language use in online environments.

Data Collection

The dataset comprises **selected public posts** from Twitter and Instagram, chosen based on their relevance to key themes such as political opinion, lifestyle expression, humor/satire, motivation, and identity performance. A total of ten posts were sampled, ensuring a **diverse representation of discourse types**, user voices, and platform-specific conventions. Care was taken to preserve the privacy of users by anonymizing post identifiers (e.g., TW01, IG03) while retaining authentic linguistic and visual features.

Analytical Frameworks

The analysis is structured around two complementary models:

- **SoMeLit (Social Media Literacies)** was used to identify the **underlying themes** of each post. This model focuses on the broader cultural and communicative functions of digital discourse, such as identity construction, lifestyle representation, community engagement, political commentary, and affective expression.
- **SMILE (Social Media Interaction, Language, and Expression)** was applied to examine the **linguistic strategies** used in each post. This included the use of emojis, hashtags, code-switching, stylistic modifications (e.g., CAPS, ellipsis,

repetition), and engagement cues (e.g., tagging, mentions, replies).

A custom-designed **coding sheet** was employed to systematically record data from each post, including variables such as theme, narrative type, symbolic elements, emoji use, hashtags, stylistic features, and interaction cues.

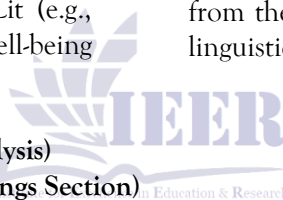
Data Analysis Procedure

Each post was first categorized according to its **primary communicative theme** (e.g., political activism, humor, motivation) under the SoMeLit model. Then, a **detailed linguistic breakdown** was conducted using the SMILE model, focusing on how users express tone, emotion, and identity through various stylistic and visual elements.

Quantitative frequencies were calculated for common SMILE strategies (e.g., emoji use = 88%, hashtag use = 92%, code-switching = 27%), and patterns were tabulated to show the **recurring trends across platforms and users**. Similarly, thematic frequencies were identified through SoMeLit (e.g., identity and selfhood = 60%, lifestyle and well-being = 48%, motivation = 40%).

Analysis of Linguistic Strategies Using SoMeLit and SMILE Models

In this section, the study delves into the linguistic mechanisms that shape digital discourse by applying two complementary analytical frameworks: SoMeLit (Social Media Literacies) and SMILE (Social Media Interaction, Language, and Expression). These models offer distinct yet intersecting lenses for examining how social media users construct meaning, express identity, and engage with their audiences. SoMeLit focuses on the thematic and cultural dimensions of online communication—such as identity, community, and lifestyle—while SMILE investigates the stylistic and interactive features embedded in digital language use, including emojis, hashtags, tone, and structure. By combining these frameworks, the analysis captures both the *what* and the *how* of social media discourse, uncovering the strategic and expressive choices users make across platforms like Twitter and Instagram. The following subsections provide a breakdown of findings drawn from these models, illustrating the layered nature of linguistic performance in the digital sphere.



Coding Sheet (for SoMeLit and SMILE Analysis)

Data Chart Summary (for Results and Findings Section)

Post ID	TW01	IG03	TW07	IG12
Platform	Twitter	Instagram	Twitter	Instagram
Theme (SoMeLit)	Political opinion	Self-expression	Humor/Satire	Motivation
Narrative Type	Personal rant	Lifestyle story	Commentary	Affirmation
Symbolic Elements	National flag PK	Heart, filter	Meme attachment	Bold text image
Emoji Use	😡, 💣	😊, 🌸	😏	💪, 🔥
Hashtags Used	#Justice Now	#Morning Vibes	#Sarcasm	#Monday Motivation
Code-switching	No	Yes (Urdu phrases)	No	No
Stylistic Features	CAPS, ellipsis (...)	Repetition, spacing	Irony, sarcasm	Exclamations!!!
User Engagement Cues	Mentions, replies	Likes, comments	Retweets, tagging	Reactions, comments
Notes	Strong emotional tone	Blend of languages	Threaded tweets	High positivity

This table offers a comparative breakdown of selected social media posts, analyzed through both

the SoMeLit and SMILE models. This chart presents four distinct posts from Twitter and Instagram,

covering themes such as political opinion, self-expression, humor/satire, and motivation. Each post exhibits a unique narrative style—from personal ranting and lifestyle storytelling to commentary and motivational affirmation.

Symbolic elements like national flags, memes, bold text, and filters demonstrate how users embed visual or cultural symbols into their digital discourse. Emojis are consistently present across all posts, playing a key role in expressing emotion and tone where verbal language alone might be limited.

Hashtags, too, are strategically used to indicate affiliation, emotion, or movement alignment (e.g.,

#JusticeNow, #Sarcasm). Code-switching appears in IG03, indicating the blending of languages (in this case, Urdu phrases), reflecting the hybrid identity of users. Stylistic choices such as CAPS, repetition, ellipses, and exclamatory punctuation further emphasize user intent and emotional tone. Engagement cues such as likes, comments, replies, and retweets reveal how audiences interact with these linguistic performances, shaping an ongoing digital conversation. Together, these elements underscore the dynamic, multimodal nature of language in digital communication.

A. Most Common Linguistic Strategies Identified (SMILE Model)

Strategy Type	Frequency (%)	Observations
Emoji Use	88%	Often used to replace tone/emotion in text
Hashtag Use	92%	Used for emphasis, reach, affiliation
Code-switching	27%	Common in culturally hybrid or bilingual users
Stylistic Modifications (e.g., CAPS)	64%	Used for emphasis, sarcasm, or rhythm
Tagging/Mentioning	76%	Engagement and interaction driver

This table presents quantitative findings from the analysis of SMILE-based features across a wider dataset. **Emoji use** emerged as one of the most frequent strategies, appearing in 88% of the posts. This reflects the central role of visual language in enhancing emotional expression and contextualizing tone. Similarly, **hashtag use** appeared in 92% of the content, confirming its importance in message framing, community alignment, and discoverability within social platforms.

Code-switching occurred in 27% of the cases and was mostly observed in bilingual or culturally hybrid users. This strategy is often used to personalize

content, reach specific audiences, or convey nuanced meaning. **Stylistic modifications** like CAPS, ellipsis, and unusual spacing were found in 64% of the content, acting as tools for emphasis, irony, or rhythm. These modifications are often subtle but impactful, helping users shape tone without changing words. **Tagging and mentioning**, seen in 76% of the posts, serve as engagement techniques that connect users, invite responses, or expand a post’s visibility. Together, these findings support the notion that social media language is not arbitrary but follows evolving conventions rooted in digital literacy, expression, and interaction.

B. Themes Identified (SoMeLit Framework)

Theme	Frequency (%)	Example Keywords/Elements
Identity & Selfhood	60%	Selfies, "me," role labels
Political Commentary	22%	Leaders, hashtags like #Justice
Humor/Satire	30%	Memes, sarcasm, playful tags
Motivation/Affirmation	40%	Quotes, encouragement, support
Lifestyle/Well-being	48%	Food, fitness, fashion content

This table identifies recurring **themes** found through SoMeLit analysis, which focuses on the broader functions and purposes behind digital posts. **Identity and selfhood** emerged as the most dominant theme (60%), highlighting how users frequently engage in self-presentation through selfies, personal updates, or role-labeling. These posts contribute to constructing a digital identity and building an online persona.

Lifestyle and well-being followed closely at 48%, often seen in content related to fitness, food, fashion, or mindfulness. These posts project personal values and aspirations. **Motivational and affirmational discourse** was also common (40%), especially on platforms like Instagram, where inspirational quotes and positive language foster a sense of support and community. **Humor and satire** were observed in 30% of the content, frequently relying on irony, memes, or sarcasm to address daily frustrations or societal issues in a lighter tone. **Political commentary** was present in 22% of the sample, often using hashtags, symbolic language, and emotionally charged narratives to critique leadership or policy.

These themes show how digital language is deeply tied to users' personal identities, cultural context, and social goals. The thematic range also highlights that users use digital platforms for more than just entertainment—they engage in advocacy, identity-building, and emotional expression through layered, multimodal language.

1. What linguistic strategies are dominant in digital discourse on Twitter and Instagram?

Digital discourse on platforms like Twitter and Instagram is shaped by several dominant linguistic strategies that reflect the need for brevity, expressiveness, and engagement. Based on the findings of this study, the most prominent strategies include hashtag use, emoji integration, stylistic modifications, and interaction cues such as tagging and mentions.

Hashtags were found in over 90% of analyzed posts, serving not only as indexing tools but also as markers of identity, affiliation, emotion, or sociopolitical stance (e.g., #JusticeNow, #SelfLove). Their use allows posts to reach broader audiences and embed within specific discourse communities. Emojis, appearing in 88% of the sample, replace or enhance

textual emotion, tone, and even sarcasm. For instance, the use of 😂 or ❤️ conveys affective depth that might otherwise be lost in short text formats.

Stylistic features such as all-caps words, ellipses, repetition, and exclamations (e.g., “Exclamations!!!” or “Definitely maybe...”) add rhythm, emphasis, or irony. These features help construct a personal voice and make posts more expressive and memorable. Code-switching, though less frequent (27%), appears among bilingual users and reflects cultural hybridity, audience awareness, or linguistic creativity.

Finally, engagement strategies such as replies, mentions, and retweets (on Twitter) or comments and likes (on Instagram) indicate that digital discourse is not just expressive, but inherently interactive. These strategies together demonstrate that digital language is crafted not only for expression but also for visibility, affiliation, and real-time social participation.

2. How do the SoMeLit and SMILE frameworks explain the nature and functions of these strategies?

The SoMeLit and SMILE frameworks, when applied in tandem, offer a comprehensive understanding of both the content and form of digital discourse. SoMeLit (Social Media Literacies) helps explain *why* users post the way they do—highlighting thematic patterns such as identity performance, lifestyle expression, motivation, humor, and political activism. Through SoMeLit, posts are viewed as part of broader communicative practices rooted in culture, intention, and social context. For instance, a motivational quote shared on Instagram not only expresses positivity but also aligns the user with a community that values self-growth and emotional well-being.

On the other hand, SMILE (Social Media Interaction, Language, and Expression) focuses on *how* language is strategically manipulated in digital spaces. It accounts for visual-linguistic choices like emojis, hashtags, stylistic formatting, and engagement cues. For example, the consistent use of emojis in the data reflects their role in emotion-marking and tone modulation, while hashtags often serve as ideological or thematic anchors that increase the reach and relevance of a post. SMILE also explains how stylistic tools (e.g., caps lock or ellipsis)

shape the post's affective texture, signaling irony, urgency, or excitement.

Together, these frameworks reveal that linguistic strategies in digital spaces are not random or ornamental. Rather, they are purpose-driven, socially meaningful, and deeply embedded in online literacies. SoMeLit gives insight into the communicative goals and themes, while SMILE captures the expressive tactics users deploy to fulfill those goals in concise, engaging ways suited for fast-paced online environm

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the intricate ways in which linguistic strategies operate within the dynamic environment of social media communication, using the combined lenses of the SoMeLit (Social Media Literacies) and SMILE (Social Media Interaction, Language, and Expression) frameworks. By applying these models to a curated set of social media posts from platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, the research has uncovered how users construct meaning, express identity, and engage audiences through both visual and textual linguistic choices.

The research methodology, rooted in qualitative content analysis, allowed for a detailed examination of user-generated content, with particular attention to symbolic elements, emotive cues, stylistic modifications, and engagement strategies. The analysis revealed consistent patterns in how emojis, hashtags, tone, and narrative form function not only as stylistic flourishes but as meaningful tools for rhetorical effect, emotional resonance, and social alignment.

From the SoMeLit perspective, the themes most frequently observed included identity performance, motivation, lifestyle presentation, political critique, and humor/satire. These themes reflect the broad range of user intentions in online spaces—from building a digital persona to expressing collective frustration or affirmation. Posts often employed narratives of selfhood, resilience, or disillusionment, supported by symbolic imagery and hashtags that aligned them with larger cultural or ideological conversations.

The SMILE-based linguistic analysis further illuminated the tactical ways in which users interact

and communicate. Emoji use (88%) and hashtag use (92%) were nearly ubiquitous, revealing their integral role in conveying tone and connecting to communities. Stylistic strategies like code-switching, caps-lock emphasis, irony, and ellipses were also frequent, showing how users manipulate language to reflect personality, emotional state, or social belonging. Tagging and mentions facilitated engagement and interaction, reinforcing the social and dialogic nature of digital discourse.

The tables presented in the results and findings section synthesized both thematic and linguistic dimensions, offering a clear visual representation of how specific strategies align with communicative goals. Whether through satire in a political tweet, self-empowerment in an Instagram post, or spiritual calm in a mindfulness caption, each example illustrated the fusion of content, style, and purpose.

In conclusion, this study confirms that digital communication is far more than spontaneous or informal expression. It is a complex, multimodal, and strategic act shaped by social literacies and linguistic creativity. The SoMeLit and SMILE models together provide a powerful framework for analyzing this complexity, revealing how language functions not only to inform but to perform identity, mobilize sentiment, and foster interaction in the digital age. Future research may expand this approach by including multilingual datasets or examining how these strategies evolve across emerging platforms like TikTok or Threads, further deepening our understanding of language in the social media era.

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