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## The Influence of Social Media Language on the Quality of EFL Students' Academic Writing

تأثير لغة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على جودة الكتابة الأكاديمية لطلاب اللغة  
الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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### الملخص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تأثير لغة التواصل الاجتماعي على جودة الكتابة الأكاديمية باللغة الإنجليزية. باستخدام تصميم وصفي تحليلي، تم جمع البيانات من 50 طالبة يدرسن اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بجامعة الزاوية من خلال استبيان مغلق ومهام كتابة مقالات أكاديمية. تشير النتائج إلى وجود علاقة طعيفة بين الاستخدام المفضل لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي وتقييمات المقالات المكتوبة. ومع ذلك، هناك ارتباط كبير وسلبى إلى حد ما بين السمات اللغوية الرقمية، مثل الاختصارات والقواعد غير القياسية، وجودة الكتابة الأكاديمية. يشير هذا إلى أن اللغة المستخدمة على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، بدلاً من مجرد استخدامها، هي العامل الأساسي الذي يؤثر على الرسمية والدقة النحوية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على أهمية الوعي اللغوي للطلاب وفائدته في السياقات الأكاديمية. تشمل التوصيات دمج الممارسة التأملية في كتابات الطلاب، حيث يجب أن تشجع المهام الكتابية الطلاب



## The Influence of Social Media Language on the Quality of EFL Students' Academic Writing

على التفكير في اختياراتهم الكتابية ومقارنتها بمعايير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، وتعزيز المراقبة الذاتية والتحكم في اللغة.

## The Influence of Social Media Language on the Quality of EFL Students' Academic Writing

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### Abstract:

This study examines the impact of social media language on the quality of academic writing. Using a descriptive-analytical design, data was amassed from 50 EFL Libyan undergraduate students at Zawia University through a closed-ended questionnaire and academic essay writing tasks. The results indicate that there is a slight correlation between the preferred use of social media and academic writing ratings. However, there is a large and mildly negative correlation between the use of digital linguistic features, such as abbreviations and nonstandard grammar, and academic writing quality. This suggests that the language used in social media, rather than just its usage, is the primary factor that affects formality and grammatical accuracy. In addition, this study highlights the importance of students' linguistic awareness and its benefits in academic contexts. Recommendations include integrating reflective practice in student writing, where assignments should encourage students to reflect on their writing choices and contrast them with social media norms, fostering self-monitoring and language control.

**Key words:** *Social media language, Academic English writing, EFL learners*

### Introduction

The widespread usage of digital communication, particularly among university and high school students, has brought about significant changes in how language is used in educational settings. Informal words and abbreviations, which frequently find their way into students' academic writing, have been popularized by platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook,

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Instagram, and Twitter. Students' daily lives have become more and more integrated with the use of social media platforms in recent years, which has had an impact on both their academic language practices and their communication patterns (Akhiar, et al. 2017). These platforms provide opportunities for creativity and self-expression, but they also introduce informal linguistic patterns that clash with academic standards (Crystal, 2019; Baron, 2020). This digital immersion raises crucial concerns for university students majoring in English regarding the quality, and organization of their academic writing.

The informal nature of social media language, which is frequently distinguished by abbreviations and less syntactic complexity, can have a minor impact on students' academic achievements. Because writing is still a fundamental aspect of academic evaluation, it is now essential to comprehend how social media language interacts with official written expression. Recent studies have found that students' writing habits and sensitivity to formal conventions can be impacted by repeated exposure to social media language, which is defined by the use of emojis, phonetic spellings, abbreviations, and non-standard grammar (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2019). Digital platforms, furthermore, may discourage students from participating in in-depth, organized writing assignments due to the immediacy and conciseness they promote (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2020).

Despite growing interest in digital writing, there remains a research gap in understanding how social media language specifically affects academic writing among EFL learners in non-English-speaking contexts. While some studies have explored general writing challenges (such as Pineteh, 2013; AlMarwani, 2020), few have examined the direct impact of digital communication habits on students' ability to produce coherent, well-organized academic texts in English.

Therefore, this study is an attempt to address this gap by looking at how social media language affects the academic writing of students in the Faculty of Education at Zawia University. Through a structured questionnaire and a short academic essay writing task, the research aims to assess students' writing skills, grammatical comprehension, and ability to employ academic language. In the end, this research contributes to ongoing

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discussions about academic writing in the digital era and provides useful advice for curriculum developers and teachers who are trying to strike a balance between digital involvement and academic writing.

### **Research objectives**

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate how frequently exposure to social media language affects the lexical choices of EFL students in academic writing.
2. To identify specific linguistic interference in students' formal essays that may be influenced by social media discourse.
3. To explore correlations between students' awareness of social media and the overall quality of their academic writing.

### **Literature review**

The relationship between social media language and academic English writing has attracted increasing scientific attention over the past decade. This relation is a complex and evolving field of inquiry, characterized by concerns between the academic possibilities and documented errors. Researchers have explored how informal linguistic patterns may interfere with students' ability to produce formal academic texts. By critically examining this issue, this part lays the theoretical foundation for contemporary inquiry and highlights the research gap it aims to address. According to a systematic review conducted by Mihert and Joshi (2024), the effects of social media on academic performance are mixed, even though it can aid in collaborative learning and assess to information. Because students frequently have difficulty in applying their digital writing skills to formal academic settings, they may see a decline in their ability to complete structured writing tasks.

Moreover, the relation between academic writing ability and digital communication behaviors has been investigated by numerous scholars. According to Tagliamonte & Denis (2019), adolescents who use instant messaging frequently also use informal writing techniques like sentence fragments and slang terms in their classroom assignments. Thurlow & Mroczek (2020) also claim that social media language undermines traditional writing fluency by emphasizing brevity over elaboration.

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In many cases, social media platforms foster spontaneous modes of interaction that are quite different from conventional academic writing. The language system prioritizes speed and spontaneity over size and accuracy, as evidenced by features like the use of emojis, abbreviations, code switching, and the absence of punctuation (Crystal, 2019; Thurlow & Mroczek, 2020). This linguistic change, according to Baron (2020), contradicts the accepted standards of written communication, particularly for young users who spend a lot of time in online environment.

The academic writing around social media is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, a growing body of research highlights its potential as a creative educational tool. Scholars such as Al-Mulhim and Ismaeel (2024) argue that platforms like Facebook and X can foster sustainable learning by creating a collaborative environment where students engage in social creativity, share sources, and find peer guidance. This perspective is supported by Ceniza (2023) who notes that students find these diverse platforms as beneficial for expanding their items and accessing different data. On the other hand, this positive approach is sharply contrasted with research that notes the adverse consequences of social media misuse. In the same context, digital communication has transformed how students interact with language. Platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok promote brevity, informality, and visual expression, often at the expense of grammatical precision and syntactic complexity (Crystal, 2019; Baron, 2020). Social media encourages linguistic creativity but also fosters habits such as abbreviation, emoji use, and fragmented sentence structures (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2019).

Ali and Roy (2024) introduce a critical view suggesting that as much as social media can increase motivation, its unregulated use often results in learning retardation, and addictive behaviors that reduce the cognitive awareness necessary for academic tasks. Hill et al. (2024) detected an immediate correlation between time spent on social media and time spent on schoolwork, indicating that students interact simultaneously in almost everything especially with visually-driven platforms. This attention division may prevent deeper processing and lead to over cognition, developing a significant challenge for academic performance.

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Beyond cognitive effects, the biggest issue within the literature is the phenomenon of language interference, where the informal, non-standard conventions of digital discourse permeate formal instructional writing. Research always suggests that the problem is not the frequency of social media use, despite the type of language included. Asafo-Adjei et al. (2023) describe this as a process by which non-scientific and non-linguistic content material is covertly incorporated into university students' formal essays. It includes extensive use of abbreviations, and emotions, which although efficient in the digital context, are irrelevant in academic writing.

This interference culminates in the significant problem of register confusion. Kolo (2025) provides a linguistic basis for this, noting that the language of social media is characterized by an excessive frequency of pronouns and verbs, whereas formal academic writing is mainly noun-heavy and relies on complex sentence construction. Sabillah et al. (2025) observed that the character limits on such platforms encourage reliance on short expressions, which can stagnate university students' ability to elaborate complex arguments and complicate their academic images and ideas. The result is a hybrid, often incoherent, writing style that fails to meet the standards of academic writing.

However, the ability to critically analyze and create digital content, known as media literacy, is more seen as a key component of academic achievement (Tran-Duong, 2023). In today's digital world, students with higher media literacy are better prepared to handle the challenges of academic writing. In contrast, several undergraduate students claim that they get insufficient instruction in digital literacy, particularly in non-English-speaking contexts (Smith & Storrs, 2023). As a result, improving media literacy requires comprehending the distinctions between academic and digital genres, to know what the audience anticipate, and to utilize the right linguistic conventions. Even in formal tasks, students may fall into informal forms if they are not taught purposefully.

A final theme emerging from the literature is the discrepancy between students' self-awareness and their actual learning ability. Many students show high attention to the difference between formal and casual language. Both Al Ghazali (2020) and Songxaba & Sinkuba (2019) found

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that while university students can theoretically discover the conventions of academic writing, they often fail to apply this understanding in practice. This awareness-practice gap suggests that virtual linguistic features are so deeply embedded that they operate at an unconscious level, overriding conscious knowledge at some level between writing and technique. In addition, Hill et al. (2024) highlight an opening in overall performance perception, where multitasking students often overestimate their productivity and the exception in their work. They may feel managing their time effectively when in truth their academic performance suffers.

By synthesizing these themes, it becomes clear that while social media provides opportunities for collaborative expertise, its linguistic conventions form a huge threat to the integrity of academic writing. Although there is increasing interest in media literacy and academic writing, no research has looked at the direct effects of social media language on the academic writing of Libyan EFL students. The majority of current research concentrates on broad writing issues or digital involvement. This research aims to fill that gap by looking at how social media use affects students' capacity to write academic texts in English that are grammatically correct, logically consistent, and professionally appropriate.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical design to look at the effect of social media language on academic English writing amongst English language undergraduate students. The method is streamlined to ensure efficient data collection and significant analysis within a viable setting.

### ***Research design***

A descriptive-analytical technique was selected due to its suitability for exploring language-related patterns without experimental manipulation. This design allows for the statement and interpretation of linguistic capabilities in academic texts stimulated by social media exposure.

### ***Participants***

The sample includes 50 EFL students studying English as a foreign language at Zawia University. The participants had been decided on the use of purposive sampling, ensuring they've everyday exposure to social media

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platforms and are actively engaged in academic writing tasks as a part of their coursework.

### ***Data Collection Instruments***

To examine effect of social media language on academic writing, two carefully decided tools have been employed. A closed-ended questionnaire, which was designed to capture students' social media behavior, language use, and perceived impact on their academic writing. It includes 20 statements structured into four sections, which are social media usage, digital language features, perceived impact on academic writing, and linguistic awareness & self-reflection. A five Likert scale form (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree) was used. Besides employing the questionnaire, an academic essay written in English, provided by each student. These essays serve as primary data for linguistic analysis. Each student was requested to put in writing a 150-200 word academic essay on a decided popular topic. The essays have been written below controlled situations (120 minutes) during class time, without access to digital tools. Instructions had been standardized, emphasizing the need for formal tone, academic structure, and proper grammar.

### ***Validity and reliability of research instruments***

To ensure the credibility of the research findings, this study implemented rigorous strategies to establish the validity and reliability of each data collection instrument.

#### ***Validity of the questionnaire***

The questionnaire turned into examined for three types of validity. The first type is face validity, wherein each item became reviewed for clarity, relevance, and direct alignment with the questions of the study. the language was handy to undergraduate students and loose from ambiguity. The second type is content validity, wherein items have been distributed across four thematic domains, which are social media usage, digital language features, perceived impact on academic writing, and linguistic awareness & self-reflection. The third type is provided in construct validity, where the structural organization of the questionnaire displays theoretical sub-constructs associated with the primary variable, digital language interference.



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### *Reliability of the questionnaire*

To determine internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for each domain using statistical software (SPSS) after data entry.

**Table (1) Reliability of the Questionnaire Using Cronbach's Alpha**

|   | Domain                                 | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|----------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 | Social Media Usage                     | 5               | 0.82             |
| 2 | Digital Language Features              | 5               | 0.78             |
| 3 | Perceived Impact on Academic Writing   | 5               | 0.85             |
| 4 | Linguistic Awareness & Self-Reflection | 5               | 0.76             |

$\alpha \geq 0.70$ : Acceptable consistency

$\alpha \geq 0.80$ : Strong consistency

Table (1) indicates that all domains exceed the 0.70 threshold, indicating strong internal consistency.

### *Validity of the Writing Rubric*

The rubric consists of five virtually defined criteria presented in language formality, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary appropriateness, logical structure, and task completion, all intently associated with academic writing standards. These criteria measure textual signs of digital interference and writing proficiency. Expert review confirmed the rubric's coverage of the intended construct.

### *Reliability of the Writing Rubric*

Reliability turned into addressed via the consistent scoring procedure, intra-rater consistency, which was measured to evaluate the researcher's consistency in making using the rubric to evaluate academic essays. Weighted Kappa coefficients have been calculated for each of the 5 criteria, along with the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) for the total score.

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**Table 2: Rubric Reliability (Intra-Rater Consistency)**

|   | Criteria                   | Range     | Weighted Kappa | 95% Confidence Interval | Agreement Level       |
|---|----------------------------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Language Formality         | 5         | 0.86           | (0.77 – 0.92)           | Almost Perfect        |
| 2 | Grammatical Accuracy       | 5         | 0.83           | (0.73 – 0.90)           | Almost Perfect        |
| 3 | Vocabulary Appropriateness | 3         | 0.78           | (0.65 – 0.87)           | Substantial           |
| 4 | Logical Structure          | 4         | 0.81           | (0.70 – 0.88)           | Almost Perfect        |
| 5 | Task Completion            | 3         | 0.89           | (0.80 – 0.94)           | Almost Perfect        |
|   | <b>Total Score</b>         | <b>20</b> | <b>0.85</b>    | <b>(0.76 – 0.91)</b>    | <b>Almost Perfect</b> |

The findings demonstrated a high-quality level of agreement for most of the criteria, with Weighted Kappa values ranging from 0.78 to 0.89. The highest level of agreement was determined for task completion, with a value of 0.86, followed by language formality with a value of 0.86. The lowest level of agreement was for vocabulary appropriateness with a value of 0.78. The ICC value for the total score turned into 0.85, indicating excellent consistency in the average evaluation of the essays. These findings advise that the rubric used in this study has high reliability, and the researcher's scoring method was characterized by consistency.

### Analysis of results

This section provides the findings derived from the study tools, gathered from EFL students. The data is analyzed statistically and visually to discover the impact of social media language on formal academic writing.

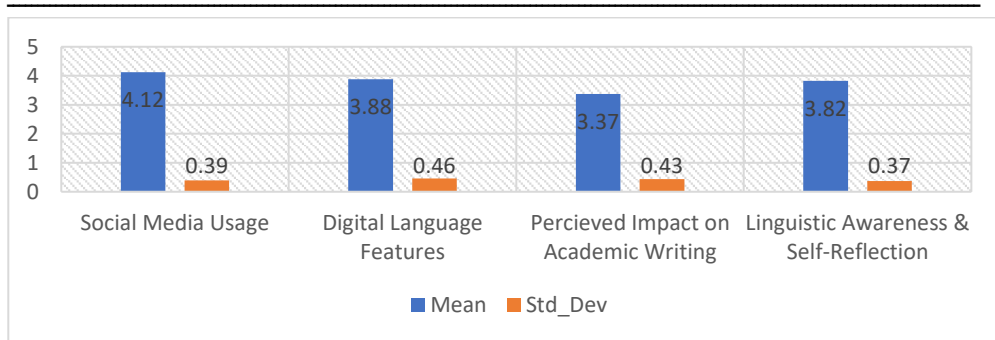
#### *Questionnaire results analysis*

As mentioned before, the questionnaire was divided into four important domains, which captured students' habits and perceptions. The descriptive statistics for all these domains are presented below.

**Table (3): Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire Domains (N =50)**

|   | Domain                                 | Mean | S. D | General Trend |
|---|----------------------------------------|------|------|---------------|
| 1 | Social Media Usage                     | 4.12 | 0.39 | Very High     |
| 2 | Digital Language Features              | 3.88 | 0.46 | High          |
| 3 | Perceived Impact on Academic Writing   | 3.37 | 0.43 | Moderate      |
| 4 | Linguistic Awareness & Self-Reflection | 3.82 | 0.37 | High          |

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**Figure (1): Mean and S. D Values Across All Four Questionnaire Domains**

In table (3) and figure (1), the results imply that most of the participated students are aware about digital habits. However, they still show signs of linguistics transfer into academic writing. It has been presented that the participants have very high rates of social media usage ( $M=4.12$ ), with a clear tendency to use informal linguistic features such as abbreviations and emojis ( $M=3.88$ ). Interestingly, the participated students exhibit suitable linguistic awareness and self-reflection of the differences between formal and informal language ( $M=3.82$ ), but their perception of the actual negative effect on their academic writing was moderate ( $M=3.37$ ). these results indicate that participants who frequently use informal virtual language generally tend to carry out worse in academic writing, although they reveal clear awareness.

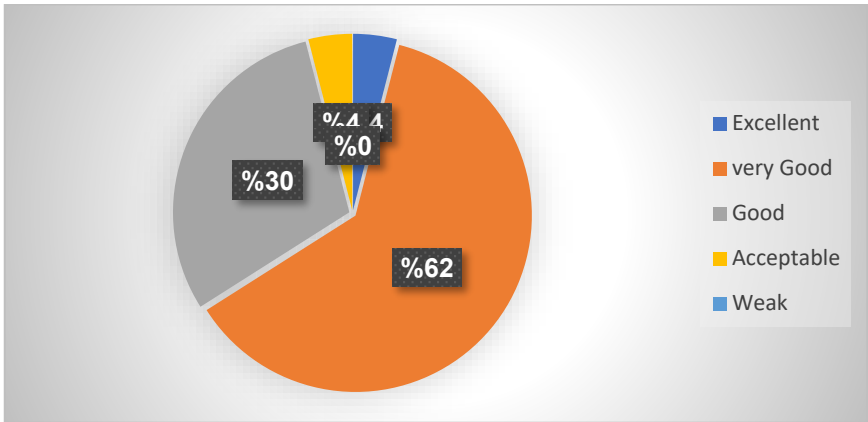
### *Academic essay analysis*

Students' academic essays have been evaluated based on criteria along with language formality, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary appropriateness, logical structure, and task completion.

**Table (4): Distribution of Writing Quality (N =50)**

| Quality Level             | Students | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|----------|----------------|
| Excellent (18-20 points)  | 02       | 04%            |
| Very Good (15-17points)   | 31       | 62%            |
| Good (12-14 points)       | 15       | 30%            |
| Acceptable (10-11 points) | 02       | 04%            |
| Weak (<10 points)         | 0        | 0%             |

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**Figure (2): Percentages Distribution of Academic Writing Quality**

Table (4) and figure (2) show that almost all of participated students (62%) fall into the very good category, followed by the good category (30%). Despite these outwardly wonderful findings, qualitative analysis of the essays discovered clear digital language interference.

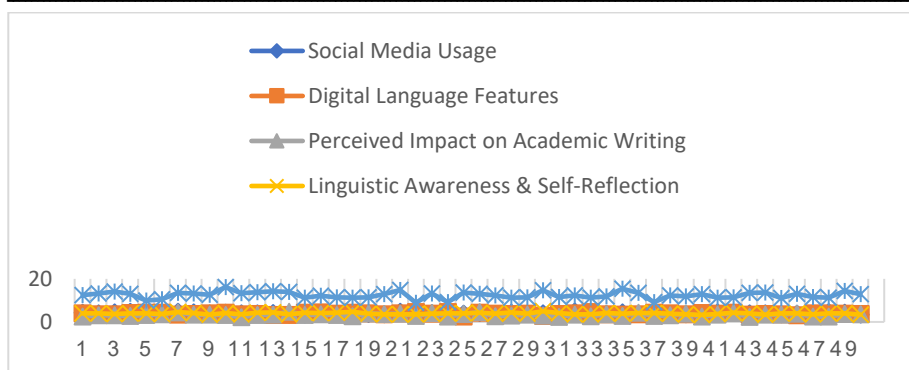
### *Comprehensive correlation analysis*

Pearson's *r* correlation coefficient was used to examined the relationship among all four questionnaire domains and academic writing performance

**Table (5) Correlation Coefficients Between Variables**

|   | Variable vs. Writing Score             | Correlation (r) | Interpretation                                         |
|---|----------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Social Media Usage                     | -0.047          | Negligible correlation (Not statistically significant) |
| 2 | Digital Language Features              | -0.532          | Moderate negative correlation (Significant)            |
| 3 | Perceived Impact on Academic Writing   | -0.174          | Weak negative correlation                              |
| 4 | Linguistic Awareness & Self-Reflection | 0.024           | Negligible correlation (Not statistically significant) |

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**Figure (3): Correlation Analysis: Questionnaire Domains vs. Academic Writing Score**

As presented in table (5) and figure (3), the results indicate that the variable of digital linguistic features has the most negative impact on academic writing quality ( $r = -0.53$ ). In contrast, the intensity of time spent on social media alone did not show a strong effect ( $r = -0.047$ ), suggesting that the quality of language used is more critical than the quantity of time spent on platforms.

### Discussion of results

The current study aimed to investigate the effect of social media language on academic English writing among Libyan undergraduate students, guided by three main research questions. The findings from each the closed-ended questionnaire and the academic writing tasks provide converging proof that informal digital language notably impact formal writing practices.

The findings of the study highlight an important digital linguistic interference in academic writing, wherein informal digital habits permeate formal academic contexts. The substantial negative correlation ( $r = -0.53$ ) between digital linguistic features and writing scores suggests that the type of language used online is more destructive than the time spent. Conversely, the negligible correlation ( $r = -0.047$ ) for social media usage indicates that the mere act of using social media. Without thinking about the linguistic features adopted, does not appreciably impact academic writing quality. This difference is crucial, in which the trouble lies not in the presence of social media, but in the linguistic interference it introduces. This is strongly

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supported by Asafo-Adjei et al. (2023), who found that informal and poorly constructed content from social media is often infiltrates students' academic writing, negatively affecting their overall performance. Moreover, Sabillah et al. (2025) emphasize that even platforms like Twitter can improve vocabulary via global interaction, they concurrently lead to a lack of attention to proper language structure and an over-reliance on abbreviations, which reduces the depth of academic expression. In contrast, these results do not align with Ceniza's (2023) study, where he notes that students perceive platforms like Facebook and YouTube as supportive to their academic writing skills regarding grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and cohesion.

Despite the negative interference, social media possesses a sustainable learning capability. Al Mulhim and Ismaeel (2024) argue that social media platforms can function as fertile environments for ongoing academic support and social constructivism. Ali and Roy (2024) highlight this duality, noting that while social media can bolster motivation, student engagement, and collaborative abilities, its misuse often impairs cognitive focus and addition, which ultimately compromising students' rigorous academic achievement. Moreover, Sabillah, et al. (2025) emphasize that the reliance on abbreviations on platforms such as X extensively reduces the intensity of expression In English communication of students.

The tendency of undergraduate students to use informal tone and personalization of their essays reflects a blurring of register boundaries. According to Kolo (2025), social media language is characterized by using a higher frequency of pronouns, verbs, and adverbs compared to academic writing, which favors nouns and prepositions. This is a direct result of exposure to digital communication, in which the informal tone of social media is inappropriately transferred to formal academic settings. This is similarly complicated by using social media multitasking, as discussed by Hill, et al. (2024), who located a high-quality correlation between time spent on social media and time spent on schoolwork, suggesting that students regularly use each concurrently. This multitasking particularly on visually engaging platforms like TikTok, can result in a discrepancy among students' perception in their overall performance and their real academic reality.

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Despite the high awareness ( $M = 3.82$ ), the insignificant correlation ( $r = 0.024$ ) for linguistic awareness and control indicates that awareness alone does not translate into consistent application, and students struggled to maintain formality. This gap displays the findings of Al Ghazali (2020), who noted that students perceive social media as beneficial for verbal habits, while they are deeply ingrained. This is further complicated by using what Asafo-Adjei et al. (2023) describe as addition to social media, which does not only interfere with study time, but also diminish the cognitive attention required for rigorous academic writing.

These findings bridge the gap between previous qualitative insights and quantitative verification, suggesting that the impact of digital language is modifiable via awareness training and explicit academic writing instruction. Besides, the variability in writing performance shows that social media does not universally degrade academic standards, but its affect is based on individual linguistic regulation.

In short, integrating quantitative questionnaire data and qualitative writing evaluation paints a consistent photo that digital linguistic behavior, especially informal expressions acquired via social media, decrease the formal high-quality of academic writing unless balanced by excessive metalinguistic awareness.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The current study has explored the effect of social media language at the quality of academic writing among undergraduate students via a combination of questionnaire data and performance-based writing evaluation. The results verify that frequent exposure to informal digital expressions can lead to measurable deterioration in the formality and structure of academic writing. Writing samples established various degrees of interference, starting from informal abbreviations to syntactic laxity. However, questionnaire outcomes found out that students with low linguistic awareness have been more liable to such patterns. Notably, this study highlights that this influence is not consistently the same across all individuals. That is, students demonstrating stronger metalinguistic awareness showed greater control over their academic tone, regardless of their levels of digital engagement. Moreover, digital linguistic features

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consider basic factor in lowering academic writing formality. Thus, social media exposure does not guarantee terrible writing overall performance, the decisive factor is students' capability to consciously alter their linguistic decides. This suggests that virtual interference is not an irreversible result of online engagement, rather a modifiable phenomenon. It can be concluded that this study contributes to grow this literature on digital language affect by means of imparting empirical, bilingual proof that bridges theoretical views with practical implications in academic writing practice. It affirms that awareness-constructing and focused pedagogical interventions can meaningfully support students' academic writing resilience in digital surroundings.

Based on the explored results, it is recommended to contain metalinguistic awareness into writing education. In other words, academic writing instruction have to explicitly address informal digital language interference, training students to recognize and consciously avoid non-academic formal structures and abbreviations. Furthermore, it is recommended to enhance teacher training on digital linguistic styles. Teachers should be geared up with frameworks for figuring out and addressing informal language styles that students may unconsciously transfer into academic contexts. The researcher, moreover, recommends to combine reflective exercise in student writing, in which assignments need to encourage students to reflect on their writing alternatives and contrast them with social media norms enhancing self-monitoring and language control.

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