

## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS

Ahmad Arif Fadillah<sup>1\*</sup>, Gugum Gumilar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Siliwangi

E-mail: <sup>1)</sup> [fadilah20@yahoo.com](mailto:fadilah20@yahoo.com), <sup>2)</sup> [gugumgumilar@unsil.ac.id](mailto:gugumgumilar@unsil.ac.id)

### *Abstract*

*Social media has become an integral part of the lives of students, particularly those from multilingual backgrounds. This study examines the influence of social media on the identity construction of multilingual students. Adopting a qualitative approach, the researchers interviewed high school students in Indonesia to gain insights into the key factors driving their engagement with mainstream culture through social media use, as well as the subsequent impact on their investment in learning the language of the dominant culture. The findings reveal that the perceived ideologies of social media, the validation of linguistic and cultural capital, and the representation of desired identities are the primary motivational forces behind the students' multilingual social media engagement. Interestingly, the study also found that the students' multilingual social media engagement reshaped their acculturation expectations, attitudes, and access to resources, which in turn influenced their investment in learning and using foreign language, both on social media and in their daily lives.*

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Identity Construction, Multilingual Students, Language Learning*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an increasingly prevalent and influential aspect of modern life, permeating various spheres, including education. As the use of social media continues to grow among student populations, it is important to examine its impact on the identity construction of multilingual learners. (Zhou, 2021) Multilingual students, who navigate multiple languages and cultural contexts, may experience unique challenges and opportunities in their identity formation process, which can be significantly shaped by their social media interactions. (Ige, 2010) For these students, social media platforms can serve as a space for exploring and expressing their multilingual and multicultural identities, allowing them to connect with diverse communities and share their experiences. However, social media can also present potential risks, such as exposure to idealized representations, negative social comparisons, and cyberbullying, which can undermine the development of a healthy and confident identity (Khalaf et al., 2023).

Thus, the influence of social media on the identity construction of multilingual students may not be entirely positive. While social media can provide opportunities for students to connect with diverse communities and explore their linguistic and cultural identities, it can also present challenges (Yau et al., 2019). The constant exposure to idealized representations and the pressure to curate a specific online persona may lead to feelings of inadequacy or a disconnect between one's online and offline selves. Additionally, the potential for cyberbullying and negative social comparisons on social media platforms can undermine the development of a healthy and confident identity,

particularly among vulnerable populations such as multilingual learners (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021). It is crucial to consider the potential drawbacks and to address the need for guidance and support in navigating the complex interplay between social media and identity formation for this student demographic. It is crucial to understand the complex interplay between social media and the identity formation of multilingual students, in order to provide appropriate guidance and support for this vulnerable population (Burke, 2013).

This research paper aims to explore the influence of social media on the construction of identity among multilingual students. The study draws on theoretical frameworks from language socialization and identity, as well as positioning theory, to understand how social media shapes the academic and linguistic identities of these students.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

This research paper is based on a qualitative case study that examines the experiences of multilingual students in their use of social media and its impact on their identity construction. To gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, the researchers employed a range of data collection methods.

The researchers carefully observed and documented the online interactions and engagement of multilingual students within their academic contexts, focusing on how they navigate and utilize various social media platforms as an integral part of their educational experiences. Additionally, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the participating students to gain insights into their personal perspectives, experiences, and reflections on the role of social media in shaping their academic and linguistic identities. The analysis of the collected data was guided by the theoretical frameworks of language socialization, identity, and positioning theory. The study took place in one of the high-school in P city, where a significant population of students come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal the complex and multifaceted ways in which social media influences the identity construction of multilingual students.

### **3.1. Opportunities for Identity Exploration and Affirmation**

The study found that social media can provide multilingual students with a valuable platform to explore, express, and affirm their multilingual and multicultural identities. (Lai et al., 2020) By engaging with diverse online communities, these students are able to share their unique linguistic and cultural experiences, connect with others who share similar backgrounds, and find validation and a sense of belonging. Social media can serve as a space for multilingual students to negotiate and assert their identities, experimenting with different modes of self-presentation and communication in their various languages. (Lu, 2024) Social media platforms can facilitate intercultural exchange and the

development of intercultural competence, which is an important aspect of language learning for multilingual students.

Social media platforms can facilitate intercultural exchange and the development of intercultural competence, which is an important aspect of language learning for multilingual students. As one student noted, "Social media allows me to connect with people from different cultures and backgrounds. It helps me understand different perspectives and become more open-minded." Thus, the opportunities for identity exploration and affirmation on social media can contribute to the overall development and well-being of multilingual students.

### **3.2. Online interactions and engagement of multilingual students within their academic contexts**

As observed in the study, the online interactions and engagement of multilingual students within their academic contexts reveal the complex ways in which social media shapes their academic and linguistic identities. The researchers found that multilingual students often utilized social media platforms to actively engage with course materials, connect with classmates and instructors, and participate in academic discourse. This online academic engagement allowed them to navigate and negotiate their positioning within the academic community, shaping their sense of academic identity.

For instance, one student shared, "I feel more confident in expressing my ideas on social media, especially when participating in class discussions. It allows me to refine my thoughts and practice using academic language before speaking up in class."

Through these online interactions, multilingual students were able to practice and improve their linguistic skills, while also constructing and asserting their academic identities within the virtual learning environment. This is in line with Tran (2021) and Barak et al. (2016) findings that virtual academic communities can influence the academic identity of international students. At the same time, the study also highlighted the potential challenges that may arise from the interplay between social media and the academic identities of multilingual students.

### **3.3. What Identity the Students Would Like to Present in Their Social Media**

The study found that multilingual students often curate and present specific identities on their social media platforms, which may or may not align with their offline or academic selves. Many participants expressed a desire to portray a more confident, linguistically competent, and academically successful version of themselves on social media, in contrast to the struggles and insecurities they may experience in their everyday academic lives.

As one student explained, "On social media, I can show a side of myself that I don't always feel comfortable expressing in the classroom. I can use my languages more freely and highlight my academic achievements."

This strategic self-presentation on social media can be seen as a means for multilingual students to assert their desired identities, which may not always be fully reflected in their offline academic experiences. However, the study also cautioned that this discrepancy between online and offline identities could potentially lead to challenges, as students may struggle to reconcile their virtual and real-world selves.

### **3.4. Challenges and Pitfalls**

The findings suggest that social media can also pose challenges for the identity construction of multilingual students. Social media platforms can expose these students to more dominant cultural narratives and ideologies, which may conflict with their own linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

As one student expressed, "Sometimes I feel like I have to change the way I speak or present myself on social media to fit in with the mainstream culture. It can be difficult to maintain my own identity and values."

Furthermore, the researchers observed that the design and organization of online academic environments, such as the virtual classrooms, can also have a significant impact on the students' academic identity formation. Disorganized or poorly designed online courses may hinder the students' ability to effectively navigate the academic discourse and fully engage with the learning process, potentially undermining their sense of academic identity.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study underscore the complex and multifaceted ways in which social media influences the identity construction of multilingual students. Social media offers valuable opportunities for these students to explore and affirm their identities, as well as engage in academic discourse. However, it also presents challenges that may negatively impact their linguistic and academic identities, as students may struggle with balancing the diverse cultural norms and pressures they encounter online.

To better support multilingual students, educators should implement digital literacy programs that help them critically analyze and navigate the online environment, enabling them to maintain their linguistic and cultural identities while engaging with diverse perspectives. Additionally, designing inclusive and accessible online learning platforms will allow multilingual students to fully participate in academic discourse and assert their academic identities without feeling the need to conform to dominant cultural norms. Encouraging students to share their unique linguistic and cultural experiences on social media can further empower them to celebrate their multilingual and multicultural identities. Collaboration between educators and researchers is essential to further explore the nuanced interplay between social media, identity, and academic experiences, ensuring that educational policies and practices adapt to the evolving digital landscape. By addressing these considerations, teachers and researchers can better support the identity development and overall well-being of multilingual students in the complex world of social media.

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