

## Mass Communication in the Digital Age

### *The Impact of Visual Semiotics on Social Media Language and Online Communities*

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**Abstract:** This research analyzes the evolving language practice on social media platforms, with an emphasis placed on the role of language in forming online communities. Utilizing the Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) framework, the research analyzes the impact of linguistic forms like the use of abbreviations, emojis, and visual elements like GIFs and memes on digital discourse. Social media has come to be a lively platform for not only personal expression but also community building because users create shared identities and share information. The study highlights the meeting place of language with sociocultural practice and how semiotics of the visual type, such as emojis, provide emotional resonance and intelligibility to digital communication.

By examining the platforms of WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, the study also finds opportunities and challenges posed by new forms of communication in terms of polarization, disinformation, and the loss of conventional writing skills. Social media allows for global interaction and cross-cultural communication but poses serious challenges in maintaining quality discourse and inclusivity. Lastly, this study illustrates the importance of digital literacy in dealing with the complexities of online communication, offering insightful remarks on how social media is transforming language, identity, and community in the technological era.

**Keywords:** *Social Media Communication, Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA), Visual Semiotics, Digital Literacy, Online Communities.*

#### Cite this Article

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## Background of the Study

Social media has revolutionized communication via new platforms of interaction, information exchange, and language creation. With more than billions of individuals online talking about something each day, social media has revolutionized human communication of ideas, emotions, and opinions. With the introduction of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, new linguistic features such as abbreviations, multi-emoji symbols, and internet language that make up online talk and online groups have evolved (Crystal, 2011). This change has created curiosity among researchers to explore how language comes about in online spaces, shaping relationships among people and groups.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is employed to explain how new media build linguistic structures. Internet communication, as opposed to face-to-face contact, employs textual and visual signs such as emojis, GIFs, and memes to express tone and emotion (Danesi, 2016). Herring (2004) proposes that social media language evolves and changes continuously in line with user behavior and technological development. This fluid development disrupts conventional linguistic models, making available new types of literacy and communication (Herring, 2004).

Additionally, Androutsopoulos (2006) contends that computer-mediated communication promotes sociolinguistic diversity since users mix formal and informal language to aid different online contexts (Androutsopoulos, 2006).

The second most important feature of social media language is its function of building knowledge sharing and public discourse building. In Ahmed et al.'s (2018) view, social media is a shared space of information in which people and institutions trade and share knowledge across the globe (Ahmed, 2018). In the same vein, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that social media allows participatory communication in which citizens can engage with alternative views and therefore develop public discourse (Kaplan, 2010). However, such access is marred by problems such as misinformation, opinion polarization, and echo chambers in which the users primarily communicate with similar users (Cox, 2024).

Secondly, visual semiotics of social media dominate online discourse to a large degree. Danesi (2016) shows how emojis are currently an international language that facilitates the filling of communication gaps across cultures (Danesi, 2016). Kerslake and Wegerif's (2017) study shows that emojis not only enable emotional expressiveness in talk but also impact textual message meaning (Kerslake, 2017). The hybrid nature of the visual and

language illustrates how new media communication is breaking rules of classical text-based conversation, making social media text more multimodal.

Secondly, the network society theory claims that internet activities are transforming new social formations and identities (Van Dijk, 2012). The theory holds that since more and more individuals are linked online, social media power relations shape cultural expression, social movements, as well as social influence. Baym (2011) also discovers that new media enable individuals to make one-to-one connections which are beyond space, and individuals can maintain contact and form virtual communities (Baym, 2011). However, websites also pose ethical concerns regarding data privacy, surveillance, and the digital divide.

Keeping these nuances in consideration, this study tries to investigate evolving social media communication trends, with a particular emphasis on language use and its influence on virtual communities. Through examining the electronic discourse, this research hopes to add to what has been established regarding how language evolves to cope with technology advancement and how online interactions affect social structures and identities.

## Statement of the Problem

Social media has transformed the way humans speak, revealing new linguistic patterns, online conversation, and multimodal communication. While many studies have been conducted into facets of social media jargon, knowledge deficits regarding how these changing influence communication patterns online communities continue to persist. Crystal (2011) does take the linguistic impact of the internet into account but predominantly covers the beginnings of the digital era, forming a gap in knowledge concerning contemporary social media processes (Crystal, 2011)

Androutsopoulos (2006) discusses sociolinguistic diversity in online communication but does not explicitly explore the role of visual semiotics like emojis and GIFs in online interaction (Androutsopoulos, 2006). Ahmed et al. (2018) focus on social media as a knowledge-sharing platform but do not explicitly explore the ideological implications of online discourse (Ahmed, 2018).

Van Dijk (2012) provides the Network Society Theory, explaining how social structures are formed by online interactions, yet without empirical insight into contemporary communication trends, such as algorithmic discourse formation (Van Dijk, 2012). The present study seeks to address these lacunae by examining how social media language use influences online community interaction, discourse formation, and knowledge processes.

### Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

- Examine the evolving linguistic trends in social media communication.
- Discuss the influence of visual elements (e.g., emojis, memes) on online communication.
- Discuss the influence of social media on the organization of online community engagement and knowledge dissemination.

- Identify the challenges and opportunities presented by electronic communication in forwarding meaningful discourse.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative study design to examine social media communication behavior and how it impacts virtual communities. Qualitative methods are optimal for this study since they allow close examination of language practice, discourse structuring, and visual alignment in online communication (Herring, 2004). The study aims to uncover underlying meaning and contextual themes in social media communication via descriptive and interpretive approaches.

The study employs content analysis and discourse analysis in the examination of language patterns, imagery (such as memes and emojis), and knowledge-sharing processes on social media. Content analysis will aim to find recurring linguistic characteristics, whereas discourse analysis will examine how these characteristics structure interaction in online communities. The focus will be on publicly accessible social media posts, text-based communications, and visual communication patterns (Crystal, 2011).

Data for the study will be gathered through non-intrusive digital ethnography by tracking publicly available social media discussions on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Public postings, comments from users, and secondary sources such as peer-reviewed books on digital communications (Ahmed, 2018) will form part of the datasets. Screenshot, text transcript, and metadata will be accessed to ensure a thorough inspection without infringing on participants' privacy.

Purposive sampling will be used in the selection of social media interactions that serve the study's goals, with additional focus on posts exhibiting linguistic usage patterns, emoji, and multimodal communication. Posts with great engagement, discussions on trending topics, and combinations of formal and informal communication modes (Van Dijk, 2012) will be prioritized. The sample will consist of 20-50 posts for utmost diversification of communicative practices.

Thematic analysis will be employed to find out repeated linguistic forms, patterns of discourse, and position of visual items in communication. Levels of engagement such as likes, shares, and comments also will be examined to assess the influence of language on community engagement. Ethical principles will be followed at all times in research, such as participant anonymity and proper crediting of secondary sources (Herring, 2004).

## Theoretical Framework

### Overview of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA)

Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) is a multidisciplinary analytical framework systematically analyzing language in online communication environments. Developed from the initial research of Susan Herring, CMDA offers a methodology toolset for analyzing online discourse drawing upon linguistics, communication studies, ethnography, and discourse analysis. As digital interactions increased, especially on sites like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, CMDA has been central to studying how individuals construct meaning, identity, and

communities through text and visual symbols on the internet (Herring S. C., 2019).

CMDA is unique because it focuses on the nature in which the technology medium shapes communication. CMDA was born in the mid-1990s and has grown hand in hand with digitized environments. According to Herring, 2019, its development was segmented into three time frames: pre-web, web 1.0 and web 2.0. New communicative habits or technical affordances in each time frame demanded different analytical paradigms. During web 2.0, when user-generated content and interactivity were on center stage, CMDA branched out to include investigation of online identity, politeness, humour, and power dynamics in synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (Herring S. C., 2019).

As a theoretical and methodological paradigm, CMDA is based on four broad fields of analysis: (1) structure, (2) meaning, (3) interaction management, and (4) social phenomena. These range from micro-level syntactic details (e.g., abbreviations, emojis, and non-standard grammar) to macro-level discourse functions like identity construction and social group alignment. For instance, structure analysis looks at how participants use orthography and layout to convey tone and emphasis, while interactional analysis illuminates the way participants organise turns, establish coherence, or subvert discourse with irony or sarcasm (Herring, 2004; Androutsopoulos, 2006). The overarching methodological orientation of CMDA is language-based content analysis. This may comprise both qualitative methods, e.g., ethnographic content analysis of internet conversation, and quantitative methods such as frequency counts of discourse markers or emoticons.

Herring (2004) adds that the researcher must select the CMDA tools most appropriate to the environment of discourse that is being researched and the research questions in question. This flexibility has had CMDA applied to study different online environments including chatrooms, discussion boards, Facebook forums, and WhatsApp threads (Herring S. C., 2004).

One of the strengths of CMDA is that it can decode multimodal communication. Online discussion today does not just consist of text but also GIFs, memes, images, and emojis, all of which are engaged in constructing meaning and facilitating interaction. This multimodality is especially in evidence in youth digital cultures in which visual symbolism and textual short-hand dominate as modes of communication. CMDA is especially suitable to untangle how these methods of digital communication operate independently as well as accompaniments to regular text (Androutsopoulos J. , 2020; Danesi M. , 2021).

In addition, CMDA is interested in the socio-linguistic validity of internet language. A very common example is Akujobi and Eze (2021), who employed CMDA to investigate Facebook and WhatsApp group chats among Nigerian university students and discovered how students utilize abbreviations, stylized spellings, initialisms, and emojis to attain social closeness and group affiliation (Akujobi, 2021). These e-discourse characteristics demonstrate wider socio-cultural processes and youths' linguistic innovation, shining a light on CMDA's potential for revealing underlying patterns of language conduct amid particular communities.

CMDA is highly suited to this study as it takes into account the textual, visual, and interactive nature of social media discourse.

Other discourse analysis approaches that deal only with oral or written communication do not care about the multimodal nature of internet communication, such as text, emojis, memes, and GIFs (Herring S. C., 2004). Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) is framed around four fundamental levels of linguistic analysis, structure, meaning, interaction, and social practice. These serve as windows into additional levels of communicative action within electronic environments. Stratification enables the possibility of a multi-leveled approach in balance between micro-linguistic processes and macrosocial processes.

**Structure Level:** At this level, CMDA examines the surface structure of online text, such as typography, syntax, morphology, and formatting style. These structural signs are likely to represent genre conventions online, i.e., the use of a lot of emojis, uppercase letters for emphasis, or abbreviations (e.g., "LOL", "u" as a substitute for "you"). Structural analysis detects tendencies

which characterize the orality, expressiveness, and formality of communication in media such as WhatsApp or Twitter. As Herring (2019) pointed out, these text features are both medium- and communicative function-determined and form the basis for subsequent analysis (Herring S. C., 2019).

**Meaning Level:** CMDA subsequently looks at meaning within context of semantic and pragmatic properties of internet language. This includes how users achieve speech acts, infer meaning from contextual information, and balance implicature and politeness. Social media posts regularly depend on shared background information or symbolic communication (e.g., memes or hashtags) in an attempt to be decipherable. Pragmatic elements such as humor, irony, and indirectness occupy the foreground in the identification of meaning of web language, especially asynchronous language.

**Level of Interaction:** This level is concerned with turn-taking, timing, coherence, and response patterns in threaded or synchronous interaction negotiation of discourse. Tools such as topic switching, quoting, or tagging is used in controlling coherence in sites like Reddit or Facebook. Ethno methodological research, such as conversation analysis, serves to make visible how users cooperatively construct meaning and negotiate interactional problems such as repair and overlap in online environments. John (2025) writes about how participation structures emerge by means of such intermediaries, particularly in larger-sized multiparty interactions such as forums or chat groups (Ologunbe, 2025).

**Social Practice Level:** The highest level of CMDA addresses itself to critical discourse analysis of discourse as a site of social identity construction, struggle over power, and group formation. It involves research into how users construct group membership, battle over ideologies, and enact cultural norms online. Some of its issues are gender representation, conflict resolution, and online activism. As per Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015), online language is grounded in a general network of social structures and must be accounted for on the basis of its sociocultural functions.

Thus, CMDA facilitates detailed investigations of online communication from microlinguistic structures to macro-social influence. Its multi-disciplinary nature permits us to examine how individuals recontextualize language, meaning, and routines to interaction into online spaces with strict attention to the constantly evolving character of internet talk (Herring S. C., 2015).

## Supporting Theory: Internet Linguistics (David Crystal)

David Crystal's Internet Linguistics is a very significant auxiliary model to Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) when used to study how language emerges in virtual communities. Internet Linguistics is very concerned with how the structural, stylistic, social, and communicative shifts are occurring in language due to mass uses of the internet. Crystal (2011) categorized Internet Linguistics into four broad categories: sociolinguistics, stylistics, discourse analysis, and applied linguistics, all of which intersect with CMDA's structure, meaning, interaction, and social practice dimensions (Crystal, 2011).

Among the basic assumptions of Internet Linguistics is that online communication produces hybridized language varieties, not exclusively spoken or written but a unique blend of both. This is a principle within WhatsApp and Facebook messaging among young people in Nigeria in which messages typically blend phonetic spellings, abbreviations, emojis, and code-switching, reflecting what Crystal has described as "a new variety of electronically-mediated English" (Crystal D. , 2020). Researchers like Danesi (2021) and Thelwall (2021) have affirmed that communication online is multimodal in nature, whereby text, pictures, gifs, and emojis serve to enhance each other in terms of affecting and expressing intent, particularly within populations of youth (Danesi M. , 2021; Thelwall, 2021).

Internet Linguistics also considers the visual grammar of online communication, a field investigated extensively by recent emoji semiotics research (Evans, 2020; Danesi M. , 2021). These visual elements have developed from mere add-ons to core meaning-making tools, often replacing words in online contexts. For example, the emoji "🙏" may convey gratitude, supplication, or simply a plain "thank you," depending on its syntagmatic and cultural setting.

Internet Linguistics is aware of creative manipulation of grammar, punctuation, and spelling to express tone, identity, or membership. Informality in online discourse is not a sign of linguistic decay but functionally rational and contextually conditioned linguistic change, Shortis (2022) argues. Students will write "u r gr8" instead of "you are great," employing phonological stylization, clippings, and digit substitutions that are linguistically innovative (Shortis, 2022). This is attested to by research conducted by Lyddy et al. (2020), who observed that digital literacy among youth not only creates new syntactic norms but also rhetorical strategies that are effective, context-sensitive, and culture-specific (Lyddy, 2020).

Another significant contribution of Internet Linguistics is linguistic democratization. Crystal (2021) claims that internet communication has de-centered the authority of language, which allows non-standard dialects, youth codes, and multilingualism (Crystal D. , 2021). In multilingual African societies, such as Nigeria, internet users will regularly switch between English, Pidgin, and local languages within one line of conversation. Ogbodoh (2019) agrees that this linguistic hybridity symbolizes evolving sociolinguistic norms online and warrants systematic scholarly attention through models such as Internet Linguistics and CMDA (Ogbodoh., 2019).

In addition, the application of Internet Linguistics in practice is essential in learning contexts. Scholars like Warschauer (2020) and Tagg (2021) note that there is a teaching necessity of transferring

to learners the distinction between casual online language and academic writing, as continuous exposure to the former has effects on syntax, spelling, and overall textual cohesion (Warschauer, 2020; Tagg, 2021). This is confirmed by Akujobi & Eze (2021), who warn that the informal features of e-discourse (e.g., clippings, lack of punctuation, wrong capitalization) can do damage to students' formal writing ability if not controlled in classroom practice (Akujobi, 2021).

Overall, Internet Linguistics presents a broad, flexible, and holistic model that meets CMDA's stress on structural and social aspects of computer-mediated use of language. Its relevance becomes increasingly evident in newer research into social media, computer literacy, visual language, and young people's communication, especially in multi-cultural settings like Nigeria. Not only does the theory enhance our knowledge of linguistics but it also enhances the cultural and educational requirements of exploring cyber discourse during the 21st century.

## Application of CMDA to Social Media Platforms

Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) is being used more and more to examine social media websites to determine the structural, pragmatic, and sociocultural tendencies of online communication. As a pervasive medium of expression, identity performance, and public discourse through social media, CMDA provides researchers with an interesting analytic model for examining online discourse.

CMDA is also extremely useful in examining language variation on media like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, with their respective communicative affordances and constraints (Herring S. C., 2015). The structural level of CMDA becomes required in examining how internet users conventionally appropriate traditional writing practices to fit platform-specific contexts. On WhatsApp and Facebook, Nigerian undergraduate students, for instance, will tend to employ abbreviations, initialisms, emojis, and phonetic spellings to conserve space and speed up communication. As Akujobi and Eze's (2021) made clear, features like "u" instead of "you," bro instead of brother, "4rm" instead of "from," and "lol" instead of "laugh out loud" are some examples, where linguistic creativity and site-specific tradition is seen. These surface forms are indicative of a wider linguistic trend towards hybridized and informal writing styles in online youth cultures (Akujobi, 2021). The pragmatic level of CMDA looks at the process through which meaning is negotiated contextual markers, humour, sarcasm, and intertextuality. On social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram, for example, meaning is often multimodal, combining captions with emojis, hashtags, memes, and GIFs to reinforce or recontextualize text. Androutsopoulos (2020) discusses that CMDA allows analysts to examine how users construct layered meanings in such digital texts, typically drawn from platform vocabularies, i.e., "#mood" or "POV," as indexical signs within youth subcultures (Androutsopoulos J. , 2020).

Interaction management, the second main facet of CMDA, is at the heart of social media research. Interactional coherence on WhatsApp is provided through turn-taking conventions, voice messages, emojis, and quoted messages. Multimodal resources are used by users to respond to interruptions, repairs, or clarity requests. Bolander and Locher (2021) illustrate how these kinds of discourse strategies are enacted to establish solidarity and



closeness in closed group talk and face and power management in delicate interactions (Bolander, 2021). Double ticks, read receipts, and threading of replies impact interaction patterns and conversational norms more.

Social practice level is maybe the advanced use of CMDA on social media. This level looks at how social identities are enacted by users, how relationships are negotiated, and how ideological discourses are enacted. Nigerian youth on WhatsApp, for instance, constantly move between English, Pidgin, and local languages in enacting in-group identity and cultural membership. Such multilingual talk not only confirms identity but is also used to get into social purposes such as humor, criticism, or resistance, especially in politically inflected discourse. Ogbodoh (2019) recognizes how such discursive practice on Facebook reflects the intersection of language, technology, and cultural politics (Ogbodoh., 2019).

The second common application of CMDA is the study of gendered cyber communication. CMDA was employed in recent studies (Weng, 2022; Kim, 2020) in order to analyze how male and female players utilize various approaches in cyber discourse. These encompass the use of various intensities of expression of feelings, subject management, and linguistic politeness on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. Weng (2022) finds that interactional alignment in the deployment of emoji support or inclusive pronouns is higher between women and that men prefer to control by making use of directive or competitive language within post threading (Weng, 2022). CMDA has also been applied in studying digital activism and political rhetoric. Hashtag campaigns like #BlackLivesMatter or #EndSARS have been analyzed with reference to CMDA to disassemble syntactic condensation, metaphoric implication, and symbolic opposition within consumer-generated messages. Li (2020) and Kim & Chen (2020) both demonstrate that such discourses in genres are not only expressive but also serve as a resistance mechanism, a means of forming groups, and identity creation for dominated people laboring under an oppressive regime (Li, 2020). In addition, CMDA's flexibility is evident in how it may be applied to multimodal and asynchronous material. On TikTok and Instagram, where visually it is remixed material, CMDA is extended to include image-text alignment, sound effect, and performance gesture as semiotic resources. Danesi (2021) expands CMDA even further by including semiotics and Internet Linguistics and arguing that emojis and visual tropes are of grammatical status in online language and must be analyzed as such (Danesi M. , 2021).

Methodologically, CMDA has come to accommodate the extent and complexity of big data. Corpus-based CMDA analysis now analyzes hundreds of tweets, Facebook posts, or WhatsApp messages with computer-aided tools and hand tagging. Programs such as NVivo, AntConc, and Python libraries enable researchers to label discourse features at structure and interactional levels while being grounded in CMDA's qualitative tradition (Tagg, 2021; Li, 2020). These hybrid methods blend traditional discourse analysis with digital humanities, expanding the analytical capabilities of CMDA.

Generally, the application of CMDA to the social media sites changes the way scholars view digital discourse. Its sensitivity to different orders of analysis, structural, pragmatic, interactional, and social discloses the way users purposefully and creatively construct communication in line with who they are, with whom they communicate, and under which sociocultural conditions. It

continues to be a central paradigm for internet communication research, particularly in linguistically and culturally diverse environments such as Nigeria where online talk is an expression of a vibrant interaction between global and local linguistic practice.

## Global Studies on CMDA and Digital Discourse

Internationalization of CMDA in the last decade or so has generated robust insight into online communication both within cultures and across platforms. Since CMDA has evolved into a robust methodology, researchers globally have used it to study social interaction among online communities like WhatsApp, Facebook, QQ (China), WeChat, and Reddit. This has unveiled reach of the discipline to non-Western contexts, showing CMDA to be highly adaptive in multilingual, multicultural internet environments. Herring and Androutsopoulos (2020) observed that CMDA's focus on structure, meaning, interaction management, and social behavior provides the methodological rigor necessary to analyze both linguistic and sociocultural aspects of online communication across diverse contexts (Androutsopoulos J. , 2020). The adaptability of CMDA can be evidenced through its global application to research studies investigating digital discourse communities. For instance, Li (2020) utilized CMDA in the examination of Chinese QQ chat room discourse among English language teachers, with the uncovering of the mechanisms through which virtual community identities are stabilized. Having taken a netnographic stance, this study demonstrated how discursive practices such as turn-taking, politeness strategies, and interactional coherence mirror offline social structure between members. These findings demonstrate the application of CMDA to analyze educational online discussion forums with a specific focus on how the use of language facilitates knowledge-sharing and shared identity.

Scholarship in Africa has also started embracing CMDA in the explanation of localized online interaction. In a Nigerian study at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, CMDA was applied in analyzing WhatsApp and Facebook groups' discursive structure to describe the influence of social media on the use of English in formal domains and on sociolinguistic identity. The study confirmed that CMDA enabled the identification of new digital linguistic variation like abbreviations, emojis, and hybrid code-switching between English and indigenous languages. These factors are not only reflective of linguistic creativity but also extend identity performance to contexts of postcolonial digital spaces.

Secondly, Li (2020) accounts for how CMDA makes possible the study of interactional strategies in synchronous as well as asynchronous communication. In online communities, particularly in Asia, speech-acts, quotation, and conversation floor management are at the heart of communal solidarity. CMDA reveals that these practices differ sharply across cultures and affect message construction and interpretation. Indirect politeness strategies prevalent in East Asian environments, for example, organize online interaction, and CMDA provides the tools to explain such culturally particular events (Li, 2020).

In the online Arabic context, researchers have used CMDA to examine gendered communication patterns on social media. Females use more emotional language and appreciative feedback than their male counterparts, a pattern that mirrors common cultural gender norms. Researchers can chronically capture such patterns at structural and interactional levels with the aid of

CMDA, thus exposing the interrelated nature of gender, culture, and digital communication (Herring S. C., 2020).

CMDA has also been employed in North America and Europe to analyze Twitter and Reddit political discussion. For example, CMDA has been employed by Chen and Kim (2021) to examine U.S. political online participation with sensitivity to how ideological position is expressed through language use and actualized through platform affordances such as hashtags, retweets, and mentions. Based on their analysis, CMDA can bring out subtextual messages and power dynamics in political discourse, tracing profound comprehension of online activism and opinion construction (Chen, 2019).

Last but not least, CMDA's cross-cultural applicability is attained by methodological flexibility. Whether micro-scale class WhatsApp group communication in Nigeria or macro-scale United States sociopolitical discourse, CMDA is receptive to various modes of data and research. Herring, 2019 describes, how it is very much this flexibility that makes CMDA a paradigm worldwide in which to analyze 21st-century digital discourse.

## **Nigerian and African Social Media Linguistics Research**

Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) and social media linguistics have, in recent times, acquired broader application in Africa, courtesy of Nigeria in general. As online media increasingly remediates communication on the continent, researchers have turned to CMDA as a bountiful model for studying how online discourse remaps and recasts language, identity, sociocultural values of the societies. Such studies continue to describe how social media technologies are integrated into local communication habits, youth agency, and informal learning. As an example, Akafa et al. (2024) conducted a cross-sectional study among Nigerian adolescents in Abuja to explore to what extent Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram influence teen communication behavior (Akafa, 2024).

Their result shows that emojis, GIFs, memes, and abbreviations (e.g., "hbd" for "happy birthday"), and image messaging not just serve as resources of expression but as indicators of cultural identity and group membership. The study illustrates that Nigerian teenagers' online communication is at the same time mediated by worldwide internet culture and local language usage, as per a hybridized discourse mediating between CMDA and Internet Linguistics orientations. In yet another significant contribution, a study in the IGWEBUIKE Journal of African Studies examined Facebook and WhatsApp group discussions' sociolinguistic features among Nigerian university students. Based on Susan Herring's CMDA and David Crystal's Internet Linguistics, researchers conducted a study of discourse at several levels, including structural, interactional, and socio-pragmatic. Researchers found that students employ digital affordances like typographical stresses (e.g., ALL CAPS), emoticons, casual punctuation, and short codes in creating authentic digital communities. The study also evoked the employment of local language codes and Pidgin English in daily contexts, signifying that African online communication rests strongly on cultural hybridity and performative linguistic self (Igwebuike, 2021).

Similarly, Subair (2020) studied the impact of social media communication on formal academic writing by senior secondary school learners in Kwara State. The research revealed that

extensive use of textese, emoticons, and code-switching on the internet had a dual effect: while it facilitated interaction and co-construction of meaning in group discussion, it also introduced informal syntactic structures into classroom essays and examination students' scripts. To CMDA, this puts the issue of how practices from online discourse communities carry over to classic formal literacy contexts into the forefront, and linguists and educators alike must give closer attention (Subair, 2020).

Broadening the frame to beyond Nigeria, Ekdale and Tully (2019) examined the discursive function of social media in Kenyan and Nigerian elections. Their article considered how digital linguistic practice, in the form of hashtag activism, meme-circulation, and intertextual remixing, were used as political subversion and participation instruments (Ekdale, 2019). According to CMDA, they imagined such discourses both as political opinion claims and strategic identity performance and resistance actions, matching instances in Herring's interactional and social practice levels.

Moreover, Matanji (2022) examined how mobile-centered communication platforms like WhatsApp and Twitter have impacted civic and youth participation across Sub-Saharan Africa. Using CMDA, the study revealed how hashtags like #AmINext in South Africa and #EndSARS in Nigeria are not merely discursive identifiers but socially situated practices that summon shared knowledge. Discourse patterns of the movements incline towards repetition, capitalization, and syntactic abbreviation to ensure emphasis, urgency, and solidarity (Matanji, 2022).

All these studies point to the fact that African social media linguistics is not an obligatory mimicry of Western digital culture but an active place of remaking of culture, articulation of identity, and linguistic imagination. The African digital sphere is a rich landscape for CMDA use, where the society, technology, and language come together in locally contingent ways. At its center are young people, African digital discourse is an active negotiation between global norms and local communicative values.

## **Social Media, Youth Identity, and Community Engagement**

Social networking sites have evolved as a main site for negotiating youth identity and creating community in African societies, as well as around the globe. Young users of the net currently employ virtual discourse not merely as a communication exchange mechanism but also as a performing tool for self-expression and group action, collective identity construction. In Akafa et al. (2024) research on secondary school teenagers in Abuja, Nigeria, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok were discovered to be loci of centrality where young people construct individual narratives, align with peer groups, and engage in discussions that go beyond physical social spaces. These loci, facilitated by digital media such as emojis, hashtags, memes, and short videos, have become linguistic and symbolic loci for the construction of social identity (Akafa, 2024).

Notably, the study brought to light the fact that teens' digital communication is stylized and multimodal forms of language that include abbreviations (i.e., "omg," "idk"), phonetic spellings, voice notes, and gifs that are all applied as cues of identity in communication. CMDA provides a tangible ground for the above characteristics to be analyzed under its structures and levels of engagement, laying bare how digital language is strategically

deployed to convey being included, in line, or resistant within peers on the net.

However, the very same digital habits that foster connectivity can also be detrimental to the well-being of young people. Keles et al. (2020) pointed out that excessive use of social media, particularly on visually optimized media like Instagram and TikTok, may lead to increased anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues because of relentless peer comparison and pressure to perform. These affective effects are a part of the overall sociocultural effect of virtual spaces that reinforce some ideals of beauty, success, and popularity (Keles, 2020). From a CMDA perspective, it reveals the embedded social practices that are intrinsic to digital discourse, i.e., how images and language are used to reinforce social hierarchy or overturn it.

Linguistically, Igwebuike (2021) studied how Nigerian university students' informal WhatsApp group messages are spaces of "digital kinship." These online environments borrow extensively from compressed text forms, shared slang terms, emojis, and local language expressions to enact solidarity and intimacy. Such characteristics have a tendency to function as indexical markers, signaling membership, shared knowledge, or social distance (Igwebuike, 2021). CMDA's practical and interactive analytic levels are particularly useful to breaking down such phenomena, focusing on how youths draw on turn-taking, affirmation ("true talk," "na you sabi"), and group narratives for the establishment of a collective experience of common citizenship.

Sociopolitically, Ekpe (2017) focused attention on the way hashtag campaigns like #TheAfricaTheMediaNeverShowsYou can serve as strong counter-narratives organized by African youths. These movements use digital discourse as a space to challenge global stereotypes, celebrate African achievements and beauty, and redefine national and continental identities. Young Africans utilize the hashtag configuration and what they post under it, and thus are engaged in a form of digital cultural activism. CMDA allows researchers to examine not just surface language but also the ideological positioning present in such discourse (Ekpe, 2021).

In addition, Matanji (2022) pointed out that Twitter and WhatsApp serve as breeding grounds for youth influencers, micro-celebrities, and champions to build niche online groups. These influencers normally embody identity and interaction using ornamented language, capitalization, emoji placement to emphasize meaning, or recutting of local proverbs and idioms of old. These choices form affinity between like-minded followers while ensuring ideological coherence for movements like #EndSARS or the anti-climate change movement. This discursive use of dynamic highlights the social practice level of CMDA, where the use of language cannot be separated from sociopolitical identity and mobilization (Matanji, 2022).

In short, CMDA offers a multi-aspect approach to examining how African youth employ digital media to perform, negotiate, and claim identity. It enables the researcher to analyze linguistic creativity, discourse structure, social alignment, and ideological framing in digital spaces. As a result, youth and social media in Africa reveal not just new forms of communication but also complex social ecosystems in which language, identity, and engagement co-evolve.

## Visual Semiotics in Online Discourse: Emojis, Memes, and GIFs

The advent of online communication has indicated a move away from textually only exchange to non-textual exchange. Memes, GIFs, and emojis have also become integral visual semiotic signs as signifiers of emotion, ideology, sense of humor, and social signals. Visual semiotics involve explaining how meaning is constructed through use of signs and symbols, and in internet discussion, they assume the shape of vital meaning deliverers instead of textual information. Jebaselvi and Evangaline (2023) mention that memes and emojis have transformed language into a hybrid visual-textual system, which enables multi-layered communication, sometimes replacing or supplementing traditional verbal statements (Jebaselvi, 2023).

Emojis are digital facial expressions and movements that mimic human non-verbal signals in computer-mediated communication. Danesi (2021) theorizes emojis as a "universal language" that transcends cultural and linguistic differences, making it easier for users to express complex emotions in concise forms (Danesi M., 2021). For example, a heart symbol ❤️ may convey affection, whereas the crying-laughing face 😂 conveys playful intent. These semiotic signs also avoid misinterpretation in text messages, where emotional tone might otherwise be ambiguous. Their ubiquity and context-dependent use make them culturally embedded symbols that shift with digital styles and user cultures.

Memes, as image-text hybrids that are posted on social media platforms, are units of cultural information. They encapsulate satire, critique, and commonality in rich, iterable formats. Jebaselvi and Evangaline (2023) state that memes are more than just amusing images, but also socio-political observations (Jebaselvi, 2023). The "Distracted Boyfriend" meme, for instance, has been recycled to illustrate various ideological or economic dilemmas. Such a visual-verbal hybridity approximates Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) visual design grammar, wherein layout, colour, and iconography control meaning-making in online environments.

GIFs, or image loops animated, serve to add an additional level of expressiveness through the addition of movement to online images. Twitter and WhatsApp deploy GIFs such as Oprah applauding or Michael Jackson popcorn as a way of signaling applause or expectation, respectively (Opara, 2021). Jones and Hafner (2021) argue that GIFs demonstrate multimodal literacy since they compel users to comprehend movement, timing, and visual context to derive meaning or to communicate it (Jones, 2015). The semiotic value of GIFs is not only what they depict, but also how they are utilized in context, such that they are indexical signs by context, creating community in-group knowledge.

The visual semiotic elements also play vital roles in online identity performance and social bonding. For instance, usage of emojis or memes used within young online groups would signal group membership, intersubjectivity of humor, or identification with generation. Within a Nigerian university WhatsApp group discussed by Igwebuike (2021), regular use of slang emojis and meme stickers like the "omo x100" GIF set up a linguistic identity distinct from formal academic language. (Igwebuike, 2021) These routines demonstrate how visual semiotics enables encoding insider knowledge and social affiliation in internet language.

In addition, visual considerations affect the interpretive dynamics of online discourse. Placing a rolling-eye emoji 🙄 at the end of a statement can alter the tone of the statement from somber to sarcastic, changing its reception. Visual sequencing in memes, e.g., a three-panel cartoon, guides narrative interpretation, leveraging



semiotic theories of framing and visual hierarchy. Jebaselvi et al. (2023) assert that such organization introduces a new grammar of engagement whereby timing, repetition, and virality inform meaning-making processes online (Jebaselvi, 2023).

In summary, the use of emojis, memes, and GIFs indicates the importance of visual semiotics in internet communication. They are not mere embellishments but very semiotic tools used to build, change, and invert meaning in internet communication. Their analysis with theories such as Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, Crystal's Internet Linguistics, and CMDA (Herring, 2004) offers key remarks concerning how digital natives create and read language in the age of visual convergence (Herring S. C., 2004). Social media sites constantly evolving, thus will do the richness and complexity of online interaction visual semiotics.

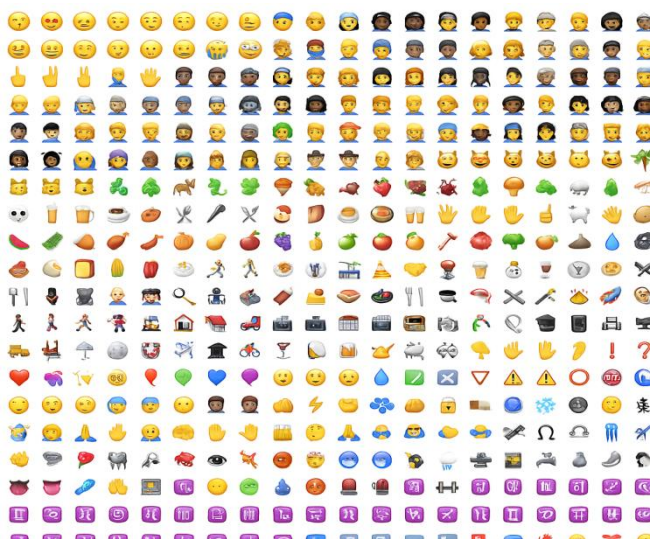


Figure 1

## Digital Literacies, Knowledge Sharing, and Sociolinguistic Implications

Digital literacies are at the forefront of communication practice nowadays, especially within networked cultures where the sharing of knowledge is increasingly done via social media and other digital venues. Digital literacy is no longer just a skill that involves web browsing or word processing; it is the ability to think critically about, generate, and circulate content across digital platforms (Jones, 2015). Scholars argue that digital literacy competencies are not only important for accessing information, but also for existence in society, identity building, and agency in a globalized world.

In African, and by extension Nigerian, contexts, digital literacy practices are situated within informal learning and peer networks. Igwe and Ononye (2020) argue that social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook are now central tools of informal knowledge sharing in public institutions. Their quantitative survey of Delta State government officials indicated that spaces traditionally considered entertainment hubs are now collaborative professional spaces that enable rapid information exchange, explanation of policy, and public service feedback loops (Igwe, 2020). The sociolinguistic costs of digital literacies are significant. Digital literacies are not neutral; they are accumulated through power, culture, and language. Scholars such as Dooly and Darwin (2022) argue that digital literacies can be understood only by means of critical analysis of how practices of language in the web are mediated by social norms, identity negotiations, and platform affordances. Their work points out the need to look at digital

literacies both as technical competencies but as ideological constructions of power and access (Dooly, 2022).

One of the salient issues of concern for study of digital literacy is language hybridity in the knowledge practice. Multilingual African societies' social media actors will often trans-languagemix English, Pidgin, and local languages code-switching in efforts to communicate productively and expressively succinctly. For instance, Subair (2020) describes that Nigerian older secondary students are likely to blend formal and informal language in WhatsApp communication for affiliation and cueing humour or sarcasm (Subair, 2020). These behaviors signal not just linguistic creativity but also adaptive literacy, demonstrating how users take up digital technology in order to gain social belonging and epistemic participation.

At the teaching end, digital literacies guide knowledge sharing and internalization within classroom settings. Jones (2022) writes that classrooms need to shift in order to be able to harness students' literacy practices outside school. Such things as memes, YouTube videos, and digital story are becoming more and more part of academically legitimated expression by digitally literate students. All of this calls teachers to blend official literacy demands with students' daily digital practices in a bid to promote higher engagement and participation (Jones R. H., 2021).

Moreover, scholarship from both global and African contexts indicates digital literacies as impetuses of civic and activist knowledge. Matanji (2022) documents how social media sites and mobile technology have been utilized as instruments of political education and mobilization for protest by youths across African nations (Matanji, 2022). This has witnessed the emergence of hashtags such as #EndSARS, #FREEVDM and #FeesMustFall, which are repositories of knowledge and catalysts of civic engagement. The capacity to curate, remix, and share political information in virtual environments is a type of "critical digital literacy" that transcends passive reception to active sociopolitical engagement.

Similarly, the sociolinguistic aspect of digital literacy illustrates how power operates in virtual knowledge spaces. Digital space access is predisposed to being unequal, filtered through socioeconomic status, geography, and education. Hargittai (2020) cautions against universalizing the convention that all young people are "digital natives." Her research indicates that disparities

in access, exposure, and mentoring influence varying levels of digital literacy even among age cohorts. Her observation is aligned with that of Epstein et al. (2020), who contend that the

Conceptualization of the digital divide just as a question of access is misleading Debunking misconception about knowledge inequality and systemic exclusion (Hargittai, 2020; Epstein, 2020).

Multimodality of digital communication-embracing text, audio, image, and video-beckons new kinds of multimodal literacy competences. Kern (2021) finds that people need to work within modes of meaning-making as reading and writing evolve. This means interpreting emojis, understanding trending virality, and making sense of platform-specific genres like TikTok challenges or through Twitter threads. These multimodal modes significantly influence how users understand the world and spread that understanding to other people (Kern, 2021).

In the context of sharing knowledge, platforms like YouTube, Reddit, and Nairaland are secondary "schools" where users collaboratively build on knowledge through the mediums of



comments, critique, and peer education. Ahmed et al. (2018s) determined that in African universities, social media enables learners to collaborate in addressing problems and build on content knowledge through crowdsourcing and peer review (Ahmed, 2018).

In total, digital literacies are at the heart of today's knowledge economies and have far-reaching sociolinguistic implications. They construct people's learning, what they learn, and who has the right to add to knowledge production. For African youth, digital literacies hold promise of empowerment coupled with issues of digital exclusion. Therefore, an understanding of digital literacies on the basis of methodologies such as Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) and Internet Linguistics is central in comprehending the shapes of language, identity, and knowledge on the internet. With the change of platforms comes the need to change our theoretical and methodological tools for their study.

## Challenges and Opportunities in Online Language Use

The increasing prominence of electronic communication, especially through social media, presents both linguistic threats and opportunities. The most long-lasting threat is the erosion of formal writing skills in the face of dominance by informal, abbreviated, and visually enhanced electronic language. Studies have shown that students tend to borrow e-discourse features such as abbreviations, phonetic spellings, and relaxed grammar from internet communication to academic writing and create what scholars call "hybridized constructions" (Akujobi, 2021). This phenomenon is most prevalent among undergraduate students in Nigeria who use WhatsApp and Facebook extensively, where brevity and creativity are more appreciated than grammatical correctness. The pressure that arises between formal linguistic conventions and evolving digital norms calls for deliberate pedagogical interventions reaffirming the differences between academic and informal registers.

However, the multimodal and informal nature of online communication also opens up new spaces for linguistic creativity and sociolinguistic prominence. Jebaselvi and Evangaline (2023) argue that social media has facilitated the emergence of a digital vernacular of acronyms, emoticons, and hashtags as modes of community creation and identity performance (Jebaselvi, 2023). These linguistic structures allow individuals to participate in shared cultural expression and offer innovative solutions to conventional textual norms. For instance, memes and emojis make it possible to convey affect, satire, or socio-political commentary in visually successful ways. While these innovations subvert traditional literacy paradigms, they also augment digital communication by enlarging the expressive range of language across media like Twitter and Instagram.

Another challenge to online language use is the decline of linguistic diversity due to the advent of global digital norms. Social media platforms favor English and other dominant global languages, which can marginalize indigenous languages to the fringes of online communication. However, writers like Matanji (2021) contend that young Africans are reclaiming control over cultural histories by incorporating local idioms and blended languages into online content. The local linguistic resistance in this regard has led to the formation of distinctive digital selves and new emphasis on vernacular speech (Matanji, 2022). But this type of hybridity is often not visible in formal processes, and this points to

inclusive digital policy-making that can privilege linguistic diversity and preserve cultural authenticity.

Besides, the immediacy and anonymity of digital communication predispose to linguistic incivility and polarization. Internet forums, although they provide a democratization of voice, also amplify toxic speech such as cyberbullying, trolling, and disinformation. Jebaselvi et al. (2023) advise that this toxic drift in digital communication undermines cohesiveness and trust in online communities (Jebaselvi, 2023). Linguistic aggression, typically hidden behind pseudonyms, not only erodes online civility but also causes mental health problems among users, especially youths. The challenge, therefore, is to construct digital literacies that promote respectful communication and critical evaluation of online content, thereby healthier communication ecologies.

Pedagogically, the employment of language online offers room for communicative competence development, particularly in second language acquisition. According to Jones (2021), the online age provides for the ability of students to collaborate with actual language material in the moment and via multiple modalities like text, video, and interactive media. Such exposure will most likely reinforce vocabulary acquisition, pragmatic awareness, and intercultural communication. The possibility is a challenge, however, if students are not able to draw a line between informal digital tradition and formal scholarly expectations (Jones R. H., 2021). Teachers must, as such, incorporate digital code-switching practices and discourse analysis in the curriculum so that students are able to crossover these linguistic borders successfully.

Computer-mediated discourse (CMD) also has a possible potential to facilitate marginalized discourses to speak in the public sphere. WhatsApp and Facebook have evolved into cyber town halls where members of the public, especially those overlooked by the mainstream media, can air their experiences, agitate for changes, and negotiate common meanings. According to Akujobi and Eze (2021), these platforms give Nigerian undergraduates a sense of empowerment in the digital world since they utilize the practice of e-discourse features in expressing solidarity, condemning institutional practices, and circulating informal knowledge (Akujobi, 2021). While this is an attractive language democratization, it also brings issues of credibility of information as well as issues of the digital divide, particularly among users whose literacy or exposure to technology is limited.

One of the new issues is the increasing use of surveillance tools and data mining techniques in internet communication, which has ethical as well as linguistic consequences for digital privacy and performativity. Jones (2015), as cited in Digital Literacies, states that people are now compelled to construct identities in an "attention economy" where linguistic self-presentation is an algorithmically managed strategic performance on the basis of visibility and audience metrics (Jones R. H., 2015). This performative messaging, as much as it provides visibility, has the tendency to complicate users towards normative speech habits and stylized identities at the cost of authenticity and expressiveness in digital communication. As such, online uses of language represent a site of negotiation between expression, platform constraint, and algorithmic control.

Although such limitations occur, online language use also has vast potential for grassroots community education and knowledge sharing. Ahmed et al. (2018) speak of how online informal spaces offer the potential of learning among peers within the exchange of stories, co-authoring, and sharing of grassroots intelligence

(Ahmed, 2018). Such forms of interaction, typically not emphasized much in formal education, are a source of needed scaffolding of critical thinking, empathy, and linguistic flexibility. These spaces are even more empowering to youth from marginalized groups, where they can take up agency and visibility in practice.

The tasks of the future of language teaching will be situated in the legitimation of these informal sites of learning into formal curricula and legitimating as authentic sites of literacy learning. In one word, the domain of online language use is marked by a dynamic tension between threats and opportunities. The creation of informal, multimodal, and frequently hybridized language varieties additionally, complicates language capacity and academic literacy definitions through orthodox models.

However, at the same time, these processes enhance expressiveness available to users; expand participatory inclusion, and lay open expression and knowledge to democratization. Researchers, educators, and policymakers therefore have to balance maintenance of formal forms of language with an appreciation of new digital literacies to navigate this dangerous landscape.

## Data Analysis

### Analysis of Facebook Data and Instagram

#### 1. Evolving Linguistic Trends in Social Media Communication

Social network websites have seen the evolution of language use, with individuals using more casual conversation, emojis, and shorthand when they speak. The Facebook updates in this dataset provide an interesting snapshot of how language is evolving in cyberspace.

- Informality and Abbreviations: Comments from users such as “¡Les mando un abrazo grande!” (I send you a big hug!) and “Te Amo Leo” (I love you Leo) exemplify the informal tone that is common on social media. The use of phrases like “Feliz cumple” (Happy Birthday) and “Te Amo” reflects how users engage in short and expressive forms of communication that prioritize emotional connection over formal structure. One user writes:

- “El mejor jugador de todos los tiempos 🐐🔥” (The best player of all time 🐐🔥) Instagram championsleag....

This phrase uses both informal language and a **visual element** (the goat emoji) to emphasize the admiration for Messi”.

**Multilingualism and Code-Switching:** The remarks reflect a blend of English and Spanish, reflective of how social media facilitates cross-linguistic interaction. For example:

“Messi, siempre Messi 🔥” (Messi, always Messi 🔥) Instagram championsleag....

The merging of languages reflects a linguistic fluidity that is increasingly frequent on sites where users from multilingual backgrounds take part in worldwide discussions.

- Abbreviations and Emojis: The widespread use of emojis like “❤️”, “🔥”, “🐐”, and “👑” in the comments illustrates the departure from traditional text-based

communication toward visual literacy. For instance, one user comments:

- “@car.rocuzzo 🙌🙌🙌🙌” Instagram championsleag....

Here, the clapping emojis emphasize the excitement and joy around Messi’s birthday, transcending the limitations of text and adding an emotional tone.”

This reflects your research objective of examining evolving linguistic trends in social media communication by analyzing how language on social media is dynamic and evolving, with informal, multimodal expressions becoming the norm.

#### 2. Influence of Visual Elements (e.g., Emojis, Memes) on Online Communication

Visual elements are integral to social media communication, and the data reveals how emojis, memes, and GIFs are becoming increasingly central to digital conversations.

- Emojis as a Language: Emojis are not just decorative but play a crucial role in expressing emotions and reinforcing the tone of a message. For example, the goat emoji “🐐” is frequently used to refer to Messi as the Greatest of All Time (GOAT), with one user commenting:

- “El mejor jugador de todos los tiempos 🐐🔥” (The best player of all time 🐐🔥) Instagram championsleag....

This not only expresses admiration for Messi but also adds intensity and enthusiasm to the message through the combination of text and emojis”.

- Emojis for Emotional Amplification: Emojis serve to **amplify emotions** in a way that text alone cannot. A comment such as:

- “❤️🔥🔥” (heart and fire emojis) Instagram championsleag....

expresses not just admiration but passion and intensity. These visual cues shape the way messages are understood by users, adding layers of meaning and emotional context to simple text”.

- Visual Representation of Identity: The use of visual elements, especially emojis, helps to construct digital identities. For instance, users who follow Messi’s social media posts are engaging in a shared discourse about his greatness. The use of the GOAT emoji symbolizes the collective agreement within this community that Messi is unparalleled. One comment says:

- “Feliz cumpleaños Leo ❤️🔥” (Happy birthday Leo ❤️🔥) Instagram championsleag....

The visual heart and fire emojis emphasize affection and admiration, creating a sense of belonging within the online community of Messi fans”.

- This analysis supports your research objective of discussing the influence of visual elements in shaping online communication, showing how emojis and visual signs contribute significantly to the emotional tone and meaning of social media posts.

### 3. Influence of Social Media on the Organization of Online Community Engagement and Knowledge Dissemination

Social media plays a central role in fostering community engagement and knowledge-sharing, as seen in the Facebook data analyzed.

- **Engagement and Discourse:** The number of likes, comments, and shares on posts about Messi's birthday illustrates how social media fosters engagement and interaction. For example, the comment:
  - “¡Te amo Leo!” (I love you Leo) has over 6,000 likesInstagram championsleag.... This engagement indicates the global reach of social media platforms and their ability to create communities around shared interests”.
- **Public Discourse and Collective Identity:** Many comments reflect a shared identity centered around admiration for Messi. One comment states.
  - Feliz cumpleaños al MÁS GRANDE DE LA HISTORIA [10]AR” (Happy birthday to the greatest of history [10]AR) Instagram championsleag.... This highlights how users unite in celebrating a shared cultural figure. Social media enables individuals to participate in public discourse, where they can express collective values and beliefs, thereby shaping community engagement.
- **Knowledge Dissemination:** Through posts, users are not only celebrating but also sharing knowledge about Messi's achievements and legacy. A comment like:
  - El mejor jugador de todos los tiempos 🐐🐐” (The best player of all time 🐐🐐)Instagram championsleag.... helps to spread information about Messi's unparalleled status in football, further disseminating knowledge across the global community of football fans”.

This illustrates the influence of social media in facilitating both community engagement and knowledge-sharing, aligning with your research objective of understanding how social media contributes to community-building and the dissemination of knowledge.

### 4. Challenges and Opportunities Presented by Electronic Communication in Forwarding Meaningful Discourse

While social media fosters positive engagement, it also presents challenges related to polarization and the quality of discourse.

- **Challenges: Opinion Polarization and Echo Chambers:** A challenge evident in the data is the polarization of opinions around Messi and Ronaldo. One user comments:
  - Ronaldo would have fooled us all if Messi wasn't born”Instagram championsleag.... This highlights how social media often creates echo chambers, where users interact primarily with those who share their views. This can limit exposure to diverse perspectives, leading to the reinforcement of biases”.
- **Opportunities: Global Connections and Community Formation:** Despite the challenges, social media offers

significant opportunities for global connection and the creation of virtual communities. The comments about Messi's birthday show how fans from different countries and cultures can unite around a common interest, transcending geographic boundaries. One user writes.

- “¡Te amo Leo!” (I love you Leo)Instagram championsleag....

This universal admiration for Messi highlights how social media can foster cross-cultural dialogue and create spaces for people to connect over shared passions.

The challenges of polarization are offset by the opportunities that social media provides for global connection and the building of inclusive digital communities.

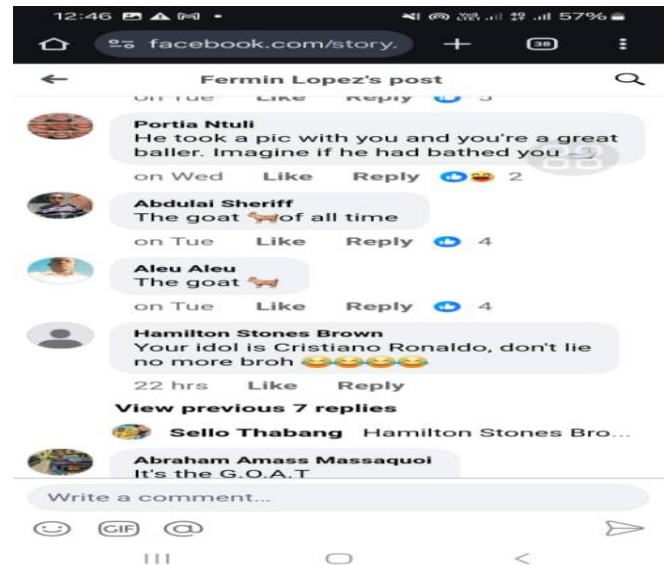


Image 1

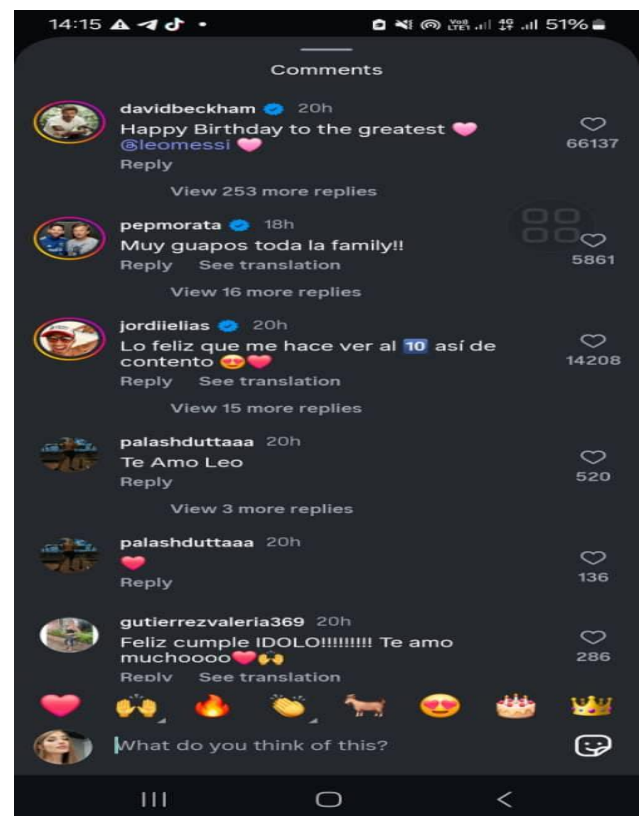


Image 2

# Analysis of WhatsApp

## 1. Evolving Linguistic Trends in Social Media Communication

WhatsApp participants typically use text along with emojis to convey messages in a concise and powerful way. Emojis are used not just as decorative elements but also as emotional indicators and context enhancers, usually determining how messages are understood.

- **Conversational and Informal Language:** As a messaging app that is private, WhatsApp discussions are inherently casual. People use emojis to replace words or convey emotions without having to type out lengthy explanations. For example: "What if they search with the parent name on the DS-160?" This text-based question is casual, and though it doesn't explicitly use emojis in the message, in follow-up responses, users might include emojis to show emotional reactions, reinforcing how informal language and emojis work together in private, quick exchanges.
- **Abbreviations and Use of Emojis:** WhatsApp conversations often include abbreviations and emojis to simplify communication. The common use of "😂" or "👉" for laughing indicates a quick emotional reaction without needing a lengthy response. For example, when discussing sensitive topics like visa applications or frustration:

"I beg return it 😂😂😂"

The laughing emojis help to soften the tone of a request that may otherwise seem direct or demanding. Here, the emojis act as a buffer, signaling that the request is lighthearted and not to be taken too seriously. This reflects the informal, emotional tone typical of WhatsApp communication.

## 2. Influence of Visual Elements (e.g., Emojis, Memes) on Online Communication

WhatsApp's use of emoji's is central to how meaning is conveyed. Emoji's are used to communicate emotional states, add nuance, and strengthen the impact of text, allowing users to engage with one another more expressively.

- **Emojis as Emotional Amplifiers:** Emojis serve as emotional amplifiers. For example, when a user writes:

"😂😂😂😂😂😂"

The sequence of crying and laughing emojis indicates a mixed emotional reaction to a situation. This sequence implies that the user finds something extremely funny but also deeply emotional. The emojis transcend the limitations of text by adding visual emotional cues, making it easier for the receiver to understand the depth of the sender's feelings.

- **Emojis as Commentary and Response:** Emojis also act as responses to comments, often substituting verbal expression. For example, a user may respond to a statement with:

"Return it for me 😂"

The sweat smile emoji (😓) indicates embarrassment or awkwardness, suggesting that the user is making a request but acknowledges that it might seem unreasonable or uncomfortable. The receiver understands this emoji as a signal of humor and light-heartedness, indicating that the request is not to be taken seriously or as a high demand.

- **Social and Cultural Meaning of Emojis:** Certain emojis have profound cultural meanings and are used to express shared social understandings. For example: "😭❤️" (crying face and broken heart).

These emojis are conventionally recognized to express sadness or emotional pain. If a user posts this combination as a response to a situation, the receiver is aware that the sender is expressing emotional pain or heartbreak without the need for explanation. In WhatsApp communication, these visual symbols provide a cue to the sender's emotional state. Emotional state, enabling users to comprehend and engage in the conversation more empathetically.

## 3. Influence of Social Media on the Organization of Online Community Engagement and Knowledge Dissemination

WhatsApp is a platform that encourages close group interaction, fostering close-knit communities where information and affective content are shared and discussed. Emoji's play large role in this.

- **Establishing Community Identity and Shared Emotional Language:** The use of emojis in group chat is a primary vehicle for building community identity. For example, one message says:

"😂😂" WhatsApp data the emoji's indicate shared understanding of the scenario, indicating that the group is aware of the humor and affective significance of the content being shared. Emoji's help build a collective emotional experience, with the mood and context being understood by the entire group. This collective use of emoji's enhances the feeling of group unity and shared values.

- **Knowledge Transmission:** Emoji's may also serve as knowledge transmission indicators. For example, when sharing information or updates, users will employ emoji's to highlight key points or emphasize critical details. A user might say:

"Got placed on AP 😓" WhatsApp data the sweat emoji (😓) suggests that despite the user being put on administrative processing, they are taking the news lightly. It shows that they are not weighed down, even when the moment could be critical. The application of this emoji makes it easy for the team to pick up on the emotional context of the news, which is a method of knowledge sharing about the visa procedure.

## 4. Challenges and Opportunities Presented by Electronic Communication in Forwarding Meaningful Discourse

While WhatsApp provides a platform for **intimate communication**, it also introduces challenges and opportunities for communication.

- **Challenges: Misinterpretation and Overuse of Emoji's:** Emoji's can sometimes lead to miscommunication,



especially when used excessively or inappropriately. For instance, a user might write:

"Please return it ☹"

While the pleading face emoji (☹) implies desperation, it might be misinterpreted by the receiver if they are not familiar with the sender's tone or situation. Emoji's can create ambiguity in the **tone** of a message, making it challenging for the receiver to fully grasp the sender's true intent.

- Opportunities: Facilitating Cross-Cultural Communication: Emoji's offer an opportunity **to** bridge language barriers and foster cross-cultural understanding. For example:

"🙏" (folded hands emoji)

This emoji is widely recognized across cultures as a symbol of prayer, gratitude, or request. When used in WhatsApp messages, it allows users from different linguistic backgrounds to engage in meaningful conversations without needing to explain complex concepts through text.

- Building Emotional Connections: Emojis enable users to express emotions and form emotional bonds with others, even in the absence of face-to-face interaction. For instance:

"I'm so grateful for everything 😇"

The angel emoji (😇) conveys a sense of thankfulness and purity, enhancing the emotional impact of the message. This fosters a positive interaction, making the receiver feel appreciated and valued.

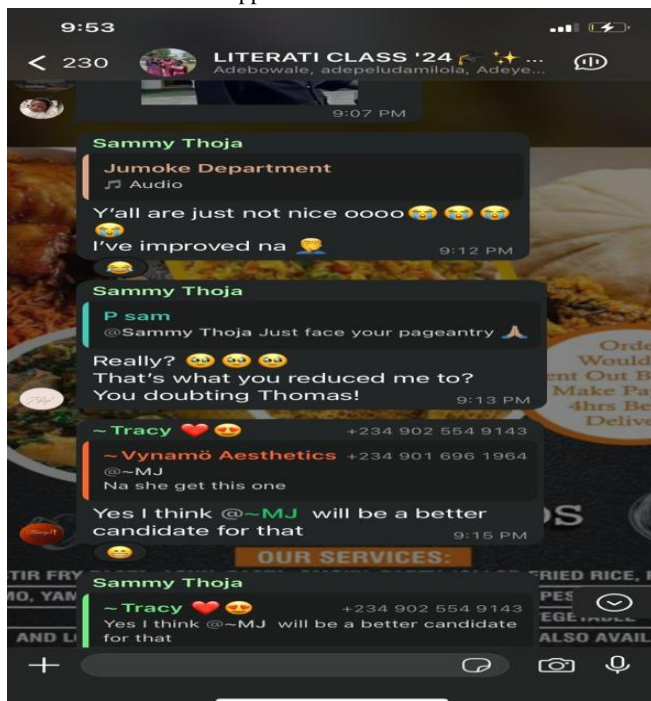


Image 3

## Analysis of Data in Relation to Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA)

Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA), which was developed by Susan Herring (2004), is a systematic approach to the

study of language use in computer-mediated communication (CMC) environments. It is concerned with the linguistic, social, and communicative properties of online discourse, and hence is a perfect theory to examine the data gathered from Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp in your research. CMDA emphasizes the influence of text and image in online communication on the interpretation of messages and social interaction.

In this conversation, I show how WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram data provide evidence for the major tenets of CMDA, especially linguistic features, patterns of social interaction, interactional dynamics, and multimodal communication.

### 1. Structural Analysis: Linguistic Features of Social Media Communication

- Informal Language and Abbreviations: Social media platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram thrive on informal communication, where users employ abbreviations and shorthand to facilitate quick and efficient exchanges. For example, in WhatsApp, we see phrases like:
  - "Just pray, let grace find you..."  
This informal phrasing highlights the concise nature of communication in digital spaces. CMDA emphasizes that such informal communication is a crucial feature of CMC, where users prioritize speed and brevity over formal linguistic structures.
- Emojis as Textual Enhancers: CMDA also considers the role of visual elements such as emojis in shaping discourse. Emojis serve as emotional amplifiers that enhance the meaning and tone of textual messages. For example, users on Instagram and Facebook often use emojis like:
  - Feliz cumpleaños Leo 🎂🔥" (Happy birthday Leo 🎂🔥) Instagram championsleag...tiktok Emojis in this context reinforce emotional tones, helping the receiver understand the sender's feelings more clearly. Textual shorthand, such as emojis replacing words, is a central feature of CMC, and CMDA addresses how these elements contribute to the interpretation of messages.

### 2. Meaning-Based Analysis: How Meaning is Constructed in Online Communities

CMDA also involves a meaning-based analysis, which looks at how meaning is constructed and interpreted in online interactions. The data from your social media platforms provide key insights into how social media discourse is shaped by shared meanings, symbols, and cultural references.

- Cultural and Social Signifiers: Emojis and language on platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp often carry shared meanings within specific communities. For instance, in the football community, emojis like the goat emoji 🐐 are commonly used to symbolize "Greatest of All Time", particularly in reference to Messi. A comment such as:
  - "El mejor jugador de todos los tiempos 🐐🔥" (The best player of all time 🐐🔥) Instagram

This emoji serves not only as a linguistic marker but also as a cultural reference understood by the community of Messi fans. The use of emojis helps establish social meaning and group identity, which CMDA highlights as a key aspect of online communication.

- **Contextual Meaning through Emojis:** In WhatsApp, emojis like the crying face (😭) and laughing emojis (😂) serve as contextual signifiers of emotional states. For example, a user writes:
  - “I beg return it 😂😂😂”
 The series of laughing emojis transforms a simple request into an emotionally charged comment, emphasizing humor and light-heartedness. CMDA shows how emojis are integral to the construction of meaning in CMC, often carrying more emotional weight than text alone.

### 3. Interactional Analysis: Patterns of Interaction and Engagement

CMDA also examines patterns of interaction and the dynamics of online conversations. Social media platforms provide ample examples of interactional dynamics that shape how users communicate with one another.

- **Interactivity and Engagement:** In the data, we observe a high level of engagement through likes, shares, and comments, particularly on platforms like Instagram and Facebook. For example, the comment:
  - “¡Te amo Leo!” (I love you Leo)Instagram championsleag...
 Has over 6,000 likes and multiple responses. This interactivity is an essential feature of social media, which CMDA highlights as contributing to the interactional nature of online communication. Likes and comments serve as feedback mechanisms that shape the direction of the conversation, fostering engagement and participation within online communities.
- **Turn-Taking and Response Patterns:** On WhatsApp, users engage in **quick turn-taking**, responding almost instantaneously to each other's comments. For example:
  - “What if they search with the parent name on the DS-160?”whatsapp data
 Another user responds: “Just pray, let grace find you...” This back-and-forth exchange reflects the rapid conversational style typical of WhatsApp, where instant responses and concise comments are the norm. CMDA explains how this interactional turn-taking and the speed of exchanges are a significant feature of CMC, shaping the flow of discourse and contributing to the dynamics of online communication.

### 4. Social and Cultural Analysis: Identity Construction and Community Building

CMDA also explores the social and cultural forces that shape online communication. The data shows how social media platforms

serve as spaces for identity formation and community building, both of which are central to your study.

- **Identity Construction through Shared Discourse:** On platforms like Instagram, users often construct their identities by participating in shared discourse. For example, the repeated use of the goat emoji 🐐 to refer to Messi helps reinforce a collective identity among Messi fans. The comment:
  - “Feliz cumpleaños al MÁS GRANDE DE LA HISTORIA [10]AR” (Happy birthday to the greatest of history [10]AR)
 Illustrates how fans collectively shape their identity through the shared admiration of Messi, creating a virtual community bound by common interests. CMDA emphasizes how these shared symbols (emojis, language) help to construct and reinforce social identities in online communities.
- **Global Connections and Cross-Cultural Dialogue:** The blend of multiple languages (Spanish, English) in the data demonstrates how social media platforms enable cross-cultural interactions. Comments like:
  - “Te amo Leo ❤️🐐” (I love you Leo ❤️ 🐐)Instagram championsleag...tiktok
 Transcend language barriers and contribute to the formation of a global fan base. CMDA highlights how CMC platforms allow for the creation of global communities where cultural exchange and dialogue are central to social interaction.

## Summary of the Findings

This study explored the social media communication dynamics with a focus on how visual and language use affect interaction, identity, and knowledge sharing on digital media. Using the Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) model, the research presented an overall appreciation of how language differs on online discourse and its impact on online groups.

**Emerging Patterns of Language on Social Media:** The research demonstrated that language usage on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp is increasingly informal and shorthand, with users employing abbreviations, colloquial language, and emojis. This trend indicates the adaptability of language to support the fast, short pattern of communication sought by digital consumers. Social media speech appreciates evoking emotions and brevity, which goes against traditional, formal communication.

**The Contribution of Visual Components (Emojis, Memes, GIFs):** Visual semiotics form the foundation of digital communication. Emojis, memes, and GIFs are not only additions but have critical parts to play in enhancing emotional expressiveness, expressing tone, and affirming social identity. For instance, the prevalence with which Messi is referred to with the use of emojis like the "GOAT" 🐐 symbol illustrates the way visual components contribute to meaning-making, add emotional depth, and contribute to the construction of global affiliations between fan communities. All these elements also show the multimodal nature of online debate, where textual, visual, and affective elements merge.

**Community Formation and Sharing of Knowledge:** Social networking sites make it possible to form virtual communities that share a common interest. The research demonstrated how engagement measures such as likes, shares, and comments facilitate the diffusion of debate and formation of communities. It is not just information that is being consumed, but knowledge-sharing processes wherein content is being created, disseminated, and legitimized through interaction of users. However, the study also showed the traps of echo chambers and opinion polarization where the users interact with the same opinions, limiting exposure to different views.

**Challenges and Opportunities of Electronic Communication:** Although social media facilitates global interconnectedness and exchange of ideas, it is also fraught with challenges such as the downgrading of formal writing skills and likelihood of disinformation. The study confirmed that digital competency, particularly among youth, is two-edged, on one hand, it enables innovative linguistic expression and group participation; on the other, it results in the downgrading of formal writing and academic skills.

## Conclusion

The study affirms that online discourse on social media is a vibrant discipline where language is incessantly recreated through technological advancement, platform design, and user practice. Multimodal features like emojis, memes, and GIFs have endeavored online chatter to be emotionally denser in content and expression. They are now mainstream business of conveying meaning, establishing tone, and establishing collective identity in online communities.

Whereas social media are dominated by in-the-lab-talk style currents of language, this trend is indicative of a broader cultural shift toward more participatory, expressive modes of communication. But this trend also brings with it significant dangers, particularly in the area of digital literacy. The relaxed writing habits social media participants take up are liable to overflow into more formal settings of composition and undermine academic and professional standards for writing.

Social media is also essential to knowledge exchange and public discourse since it allows users to discuss a broad scope of topics, share information, and add to world discourse. Nonetheless, potential echo chambers and polarization of opinions are pressing issues that have to be addressed by future research and policy discussions.

## Future Study Recommendations

From the findings of this study, several recommendations could be formulated for future research in social media linguistics and e-discourse.

**1. Investigating the Impact of Social Media on Academic Writing Skills:** Future studies can investigate the sustained impact of social media communication on formal writing abilities among students. Research may investigate how online language impacts learning and suggest pedagogical interventions to close the gap between online informal communication and formal academic writing.

**2. Analyzing the Application of Visual Elements in Multimodal Communication:** While in this study emojis, memes, and GIFs were employed, further research is required into how

other visual semiotic elements contribute to meaning in online communication. Future studies can broaden the scope of research to explore images, videos, and infographics too, remembering their contribution to discourse creation and user interaction.

**3. Cross-Cultural Social Media Communication:** Since social media are worldwide, research in the future needs to explore how language and visual content vary by culture. Cross-country comparative research on how different cultures use social media to create communities and disseminate information would be enlightening about the universality or cultural specificity of digital communication practices.

**4. Defeating the Dangers of Misinformation and Echo Chambers:** There is one more important future research agenda concerning the impact of social media algorithms on echo chambers creation and misinformation dissemination. Scholars can examine how user behavior and the design of the platform facilitate the amplification of biased or misinformation and explore the means to counteract these dangers without compromising free speech.

**5. Digital Literacy and Inclusion:** Future research needs to explore the connection between social inclusion and digital literacy. Research can experiment with how users from underrepresented groups utilize social media and how to modify digital literacy programs to make the groups take a greater active role in online communities.

**6. Longitudinal Studies of Social Media and Identity Development:** Finally, longitudinal studies of how social media impacts long-term identity development would provide us with better information on the long-term social and psychological consequences of online communication. These studies would have been conducted based on how adolescents use social media to construct social belonging and identity, considering the fluid dynamics of digital spaces.

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