

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE ON ADOLESCENT VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC REVIEW

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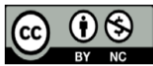
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Abstract

Social media has become an important source of linguistic input for adolescents, influencing how they acquire and use vocabulary in daily communication. While previous studies have emphasized sociolinguistic variation, limited research has examined adolescents' vocabulary development from a psycholinguistic perspective. This study aims to investigate the influence of social media exposure on adolescents' vocabulary development through a qualitative approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and analysis of social media texts involving adolescents aged 13–18 years. The findings reveal that adolescents acquire new vocabulary through repeated exposure to social media content, particularly informal and digital-based expressions. Psycholinguistically, this process involves cognitive mechanisms such as attention, memory, and lexical retrieval. The study concludes that social media plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' vocabulary development and functions as an informal language learning environment.



Keywords: *Social media exposure; vocabulary development; adolescents; psycholinguistics; qualitative study.*

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary development is a crucial component of language acquisition that reflects the interaction between cognitive processes and environmental linguistic input. From a psycholinguistic perspective, vocabulary growth occurs through continuous exposure, processing, and storage of lexical items in the mental lexicon (Fauziah et al., 2023). During adolescence, vocabulary development becomes more dynamic due to increased social interaction and cognitive maturation. In recent years, social media has emerged as a dominant linguistic environment for adolescents, providing extensive exposure to diverse lexical forms such as slang, abbreviations, and informal expressions that differ from standard academic language (Pasaribu et al., 2024).

Several recent studies indicate that social media plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' vocabulary use and linguistic preferences. According to (Pasaribu et al., 2024), frequent engagement with social media platforms influences adolescents' understanding and use of language, particularly through the adoption of non-standard vocabulary and code-mixing practices. Similarly, (Fauziah et al., 2023) argue that platforms such as Instagram and TikTok function as informal learning spaces where adolescents encounter and acquire new vocabulary through repetitive exposure and contextual usage. These findings suggest that social media serves not only as a communication tool but also as a powerful source of lexical input that contributes to vocabulary expansion.

From a psycholinguistic standpoint, vocabulary acquisition through social media involves cognitive mechanisms such as attention, memory encoding, and lexical retrieval. (Fenesiana Claudina Eunike Tabun et al., 2025) emphasize that continuous exposure to digital language affects how young users process and internalize new lexical items, particularly through repeated interaction and contextual reinforcement. In line with this view, (Zai & Sihite, 2024) highlight that the emergence of slang and informal vocabulary on social media reflects adolescents' cognitive adaptation to their digital linguistic environment. These processes demonstrate that vocabulary development in the digital era cannot be separated from the psychological mechanisms underlying language comprehension and production. Social media has emerged as a dominant factor in spreading new slang vocabulary among adolescents, where such vocabulary acts not only as communication tools but also as markers of group identity (Pelia, 2025).

Despite the growing number of studies on language use in social media contexts, most existing research focuses on sociolinguistic variation or general language behavior rather than the cognitive processes involved in vocabulary development. Previous studies tend to describe linguistic forms without sufficiently explaining how adolescents mentally process and integrate digital vocabulary into their lexical system (Fenesiana Claudina Eunike Tabun et al., 2025). From a psycholinguistic perspective, social media exposure influences language behavior even at early stages of language development, affecting how young users process and internalize linguistic forms (Rahmawati, 2024). Therefore, there remains a research gap in qualitatively examining the influence of social media exposure on adolescents' vocabulary development from a psycholinguistic perspective. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how social media exposure affects adolescents' vocabulary development through an in-depth qualitative psycholinguistic analysis.

METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design with a descriptive and interpretive approach to investigate how social media exposure influences vocabulary development in adolescents from a psycholinguistic perspective. Qualitative design allows researchers to understand complex cognitive and social phenomena through rich, contextualized data, rather than numerical measurement, and is appropriate for exploring subjective language experiences in natural settings (Fauziah et al., 2023). A case study framework is applied to focus on selected adolescent participants, enabling in-depth exploration of their vocabulary experiences, similar to approaches used in

recent qualitative vocabulary research (Utami, C. W., & Sumaryono, 2021). By employing this design, the study captures individual meaning-making and psycholinguistic processes that cannot be fully explained through quantitative methods alone.

Participants

Participants are adolescents aged 13–18 years old, purposively selected based on active social media usage and voluntary participation in this study. Adolescents in this age range are at a critical stage of vocabulary expansion and cognitive linguistic development, making them ideal subjects for psycholinguistic analysis of vocabulary acquisition in digital contexts (Pasaribu et al., 2024). Purposeful sampling ensures that participants have sufficient exposure to social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, which provide rich lexical input (Fauziah et al., 2023). A total of 8–12 participants will be engaged to allow for detailed qualitative inquiry, consistent with case study practices in contemporary language acquisition research.

Data Collection Procedures

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis of social media text interactions. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in psycholinguistic and educational research to elicit participants' cognitive processes, perceptions, and interpretations of language use (Utami, C. W., & Sumaryono, 2021). Observational data of participants' media feed interactions will help contextualize actual vocabulary exposure, similar to ethnographic social media studies where researchers analyze online behavior and communication patterns (Netnography concept, qualitative social media research). Additionally, document analysis of social media comments, captions, and posts allows for triangulation of data sources to strengthen credibility, a standard practice in qualitative methodology (Fauziah et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

Collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns within data to interpret meanings related to vocabulary use and development. Thematic analysis is appropriate for psycholinguistic qualitative studies as it helps reveal cognitive and social patterns underlying language use (Utami, C. W., & Sumaryono, 2021). Data coding will follow a stepwise process: initial open coding to identify vocabulary phenomena, followed by axial coding to link codes with psycholinguistic concepts such as lexical acquisition processes, mental storage, semantic shifts, and retrieval strategies. Triangulation including interviews, observations, and textual analysis will be used to enhance the trustworthiness of findings, consistent with qualitative best practices (Fauziah et al., 2023).

Ethical Considerations

This study ensures that all ethical requirements are met, including informed consent from participants (and guardians for minors), anonymity, and confidentiality of respondent information. Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Ethical guidelines for social media research emphasize respect for privacy and responsible handling of online data, especially when involving

minors (Utami, C. W., & Sumaryono, 2021); (Fauziah et al., 2023). All collected digital artifacts (e.g., screenshots of posts/comments) will be anonymized before analysis to protect participant identities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Vocabulary Acquired through Social Media

The findings indicate that adolescents acquire various types of vocabulary through social media exposure, including slang expressions, abbreviations, loanwords, and code-mixed lexical items. Participants frequently reported encountering new vocabulary through captions, comments, and short video content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. These lexical items were often adopted into their daily communication without explicit instruction. Similar findings were reported by Fauziah et al. (2025), who found that repetitive exposure to informal lexical forms on social media facilitates incidental vocabulary acquisition. In addition, Pasaribu et al. (2025) observed that adolescents tend to internalize non-standard vocabulary due to its high frequency and contextual relevance in digital interactions.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, these findings suggest that vocabulary acquisition through social media occurs implicitly, supported by repeated exposure and contextual inference. According to (Tabun et al., 2025), implicit lexical learning in digital environments relies heavily on cognitive processes such as attention and semantic association. Furthermore, (Zai & Sihite, 2024) argue that slang and informal vocabulary function as cognitive shortcuts that simplify communication among adolescents, making them more likely to be stored and retrieved from the mental lexicon. This explains why participants were able to recall and use newly acquired vocabulary fluently in spontaneous speech.

Patterns of Vocabulary Usage among Adolescents

The results also reveal distinct patterns in how adolescents use vocabulary obtained from social media. Most participants demonstrated a tendency to use informal and digital-origin vocabulary primarily in peer communication, while maintaining more standard vocabulary in academic or formal contexts. This selective usage indicates that adolescents possess pragmatic awareness regarding appropriate language choice depending on context. Pasaribu et al. (2025) similarly found that adolescents exhibit code-switching behavior when navigating between digital and academic environments. Meanwhile, Fauziah et al. (2025) emphasize that such adaptive language use reflects developing metalinguistic awareness among adolescent users of social media.

Psycholinguistically, this pattern supports the notion that vocabulary development is not merely additive but also strategic. Adolescents appear to categorize lexical items based on contextual suitability, storing them in distinct functional domains within the mental lexicon. According to Tabun et al. (2025), this cognitive organization enables adolescents to retrieve vocabulary efficiently based on communicative demands. Samohouni and Sihite (2024) further explain that social identity and group belonging influence lexical choice, reinforcing the repeated use of certain vocabulary forms within peer groups. Thus, vocabulary usage patterns reflect both cognitive processing and social alignment.

Influence of Social Media Exposure on Vocabulary Development

The findings demonstrate that sustained exposure to social media significantly contributes to adolescents' vocabulary expansion, particularly in terms of lexical diversity and familiarity with emerging expressions. Participants reported learning new words more frequently from digital platforms than from formal learning materials. This aligns with the findings of Fauziah et al. (2025), who argue that social media functions as an informal learning environment that accelerates vocabulary acquisition through multimodal input. Similarly, Pasaribu et al. (2025) highlight that continuous digital interaction increases adolescents' lexical repertoire, although it may shift dominance toward informal vocabulary forms.

In discussing these results, it is important to consider the psycholinguistic mechanisms underlying digital vocabulary learning. (Tabun et al., 2025) assert that repeated exposure combined with emotional engagement enhances memory retention of lexical items. Additionally, Samohouni and Sihite (2024) suggest that the social reinforcement of vocabulary through likes, comments, and peer validation strengthens lexical consolidation. Therefore, the influence of social media on vocabulary development is not merely quantitative but also qualitative, shaping how adolescents process, store, and retrieve vocabulary within their cognitive system.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social media exposure has a meaningful influence on adolescents' vocabulary development. Adolescents acquire new vocabulary through frequent and contextual interaction with digital content, particularly informal expressions, slang, and code-mixed forms. From a psycholinguistic perspective, this vocabulary acquisition process involves cognitive mechanisms such as attention, semantic association, memory retention, and lexical retrieval. The findings also indicate that adolescents demonstrate pragmatic awareness by selectively using social-media-derived vocabulary mainly in informal peer communication while maintaining standard language in formal contexts. These results highlight social media as a significant informal learning environment that shapes adolescents' lexical development. However, this study is limited by its qualitative scope and participant size; therefore, future research is encouraged to explore different age groups, cultural contexts, and mixed-method approaches to provide more comprehensive insights.

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