



Social Media and the Transformation of English Communication Styles among EFL Students in Vietnam

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Abstract: This study investigates how social media platforms shape the English communication styles of EFL students in Vietnam. Using a mixed-methods design, it integrates quantitative survey data from 90 English-major students with qualitative insights from seven semi-structured interviews at Trade Union University. The findings reveal that social media serves as a transformative informal learning environment that enhances learners' exposure to authentic English, develops stylistic flexibility, and fosters confidence and creativity through multimodal interaction. However, the study also identifies negative influences such as the overuse of non-standard expressions, grammatical laxity, and the blurring of boundaries between academic and informal registers. The analysis highlights that while social media accelerates communicative competence, it can simultaneously distort stylistic norms without pedagogical guidance. The paper concludes by proposing a reflective, digitally informed pedagogy that integrates style-shifting training, digital literacy, and critical awareness to ensure sustainable EFL learning in the digital era.

Keywords: Social Media; Communication Style; English as A Foreign Language (EFL); Stylistic Competence; Digital Learning; Reflective Awareness; Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Rationale

The rapid evolution of *Web 2.0* and the emergence of participatory digital culture have fundamentally reshaped modes of human communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Jenkins, 2016). In today's interconnected world, social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have become pervasive linguistic environments that extend beyond entertainment. They now serve as multimodal learning ecosystems where individuals engage in real-time linguistic exchanges, negotiate meanings, and co-construct cultural identities. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, these digital platforms offer hybrid communicative spaces where academic and informal registers converge. Unlike traditional classrooms, social media enables continuous exposure to *authentic English* through videos, vlogs, comments, and interactive communities. This environment promotes linguistic flexibility, learner autonomy, and pragmatic competence by encouraging learners to observe, imitate, and internalize native-like discourse patterns (Bandura, 1977; Krashen, 1982).

However, this hybridization also raises concerns. The frequent use of social media for informal communication can blur linguistic boundaries and erode stylistic control. The shift from structured academic writing to spontaneous online discourse often leads to lexical simplification, grammatical inconsistency, and the dominance of non-standard expressions. Such transformations underscore the need to critically evaluate how digital engagement reshapes the stylistic dimensions of English communication among EFL students in Vietnam—a context where digital English learning is increasingly prevalent yet insufficiently researched.

1.2. Problem Statement

While social media platforms provide EFL students with unprecedented opportunities for linguistic immersion, their pervasive and often unregulated use for informal communication has generated

noticeable stylistic tensions between academic and everyday discourse. Data from the field investigation at Trade Union University reveal a complex duality: on one hand, students demonstrate enhanced fluency, spontaneity, and confidence when engaging in English communication online; on the other hand, their linguistic outputs frequently exhibit grammatical laxity, excessive colloquialism, and reduced pragmatic awareness in formal academic contexts. Empirical evidence shows that over 60% of the surveyed students tend to employ abbreviations, slang, and emojis even in classroom discussions or written assignments, suggesting that informal discourse conventions from digital environments are being transferred into academic communication. This phenomenon—described as *academic de-standardization*—illustrates how the boundary between social and academic English is gradually eroding, as digital communication habits redefine what learners perceive as “acceptable” linguistic norms. Furthermore, the instant-reaction nature of social media encourages short, emotionally charged messages rather than carefully structured arguments, thereby diminishing grammatical accuracy and stylistic control.

Beyond linguistic deviations, the study also indicates cognitive and pragmatic shifts. Frequent exposure to fast-paced, entertainment-driven digital content reduces learners’ attention span and reflective depth, making sustained academic dialogue and formal writing more challenging. Simultaneously, a “linguistic imbalance” emerges: students can express themselves fluently in informal online settings but struggle to maintain coherence, politeness, and disciplinary vocabulary in academic communication. Consequently, this digital transformation of communicative behavior is both empowering and constraining—it fosters authenticity, confidence, and creativity, yet simultaneously threatens the integrity of academic English norms. This paradox highlights the need for a systematic investigation into how social media reshapes stylistic competence among Vietnamese EFL learners and how educators can leverage its potential while mitigating its unintended drawbacks.

1.3. Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Assess the impact of social media use on EFL students’ English communication styles at Trade Union University.
2. Identify both the positive and negative linguistic and stylistic influences of social media engagement.
3. Propose pedagogical strategies that foster balanced stylistic development between academic precision and communicative naturalness.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What are the key patterns of social media use among EFL students?
2. How do these patterns influence their English communication styles?
3. What pedagogical implications emerge from these stylistic transformations?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the expanding discourse on *digital communicative style competence* (Han Yu, 2024; Dashti & Abdulsalam, 2025) by providing empirical evidence from Vietnam—a region underrepresented in global EFL scholarship. It bridges theoretical perspectives on communication style (Hymes, 1972; Tannen, 1984; Carbaugh, 2005) with emerging research on multimodal and digital communication (Kress, 2010; Tagg, 2015). By combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, this research not only illuminates how social media mediates stylistic evolution among EFL learners but also proposes a framework for integrating digital literacy and stylistic awareness into English pedagogy in higher education. Ultimately, the findings aim to advance sustainable English education in the digital era, aligning with contemporary goals of communicative competence, learner autonomy, and intercultural adaptability.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Foundations

The concept of **communication style** stems from sociolinguistic and ethnographic traditions that view language as a social practice rather than a mere vehicle of information. Hymes’ (1972) *Ethnography of Communication* emphasizes that communicative behavior is governed by sociocultural norms,

represented in the SPEAKING model (Setting, Participants, Ends, Act sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre). Within this framework, style is not fixed but context-sensitive, adapting to social roles and communicative purposes.

Building on this foundation, Tannen (1984, 2005) defined communication style as the interface between linguistic choice and interpersonal meaning, where tone, pacing, and directness signal solidarity or authority. Her notion of *involvement strategies*-repetition, overlap, and expressiveness-helps explain how individuals construct rapport, particularly in digital discourse where multimodal interaction (e.g., emojis, reactions, voice notes) mirrors features of spoken communication. Similarly, Carbaugh (2005), through *Cultural Discourse Theory*, argues that style reflects the moral and aesthetic values of a speech community. From this lens, the shift of EFL students from formal academic discourse to expressive online communication represents a reconfiguration of identity in response to digital social norms. In the EFL context, especially in Vietnamese higher education, communication style embodies the negotiation between **accuracy** (grammatical and lexical precision) and **appropriateness** (contextual and pragmatic suitability). This dynamic aligns with Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, in which stylistic mastery integrates grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic abilities. Thus, style serves as both a marker of proficiency and an indicator of adaptability across academic and digital registers.

Complementing sociolinguistic perspectives, contemporary theories of **digital communication and multimodality** explain how online environments reshape stylistic practice. Hall's (1976) distinction between high- and low-context communication underscores how meaning in digital spaces is constructed through multimodal signals-visuals, emojis, memes, and design-beyond textual language. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), later expanded by Kress (2010) and Jewitt (2016), propose that multimodal communication involves the interaction of linguistic, visual, and spatial modes, enabling EFL learners to construct hybrid stylistic identities that blend creativity and linguistic experimentation. Moreover, Siemens' (2005) *Connectivism Theory* and Lankshear and Knobel's (2011) *New Literacies Framework* conceptualize learning as a networked, participatory process. Through imitation, collaboration, and feedback, learners co-create stylistic norms within *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998). Social media thus acts as an evolving ecosystem of **connective learning**, where linguistic and cultural resources circulate and reshape communicative norms. Vietnamese EFL students, immersed in such networks, increasingly display hybrid patterns that combine the fluency of informal exchange with the discipline of academic discourse-illustrating what Han (2024) calls *hybrid communication norms*. Overall, communication style in the digital era is **fluid, emergent, and multimodal**-shaped by technological affordances, cultural expectations, and learner agency. Understanding these theoretical foundations provides the analytical basis for examining how social media mediates stylistic transformation at the intersection of language competence, digital participation, and cultural adaptation.

2.2. Social Media as a Linguistic Environment

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok have evolved from entertainment platforms into **informal learning environments** that provide continuous exposure to authentic English, interactive feedback, and global peer connectivity (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These spaces function as what Gee (2017) terms *affinity spaces*-voluntary communities where learners engage in language and culture beyond institutional constraints. For EFL learners in non-English-speaking contexts like Vietnam, SNSs offer accessible opportunities for spontaneous linguistic use and pragmatic awareness. Social media facilitates **authentic linguistic exposure**, enabling learners to encounter natural, unsimplified English in real communicative situations (Gilmore, 2007). By interacting with global users-watching vlogs, commenting, and discussing-students internalize idiomatic expressions, collocations, and discourse markers often absent from textbooks. This process aligns with Krashen's (1982) *Input Hypothesis* and Bandura's (1977) *Observational Learning Theory*, as learners acquire stylistic norms by observing and imitating proficient speakers in multimodal contexts such as short videos or comment threads. However, exposure also leads to hybridized language forms influenced by global digital vernaculars (Barton & Lee, 2013).

From a pedagogical perspective, social media supports **connective learning**, consistent with Siemens' (2005) *Connectivism Theory*. Learning occurs through participation and co-construction within networked communities, where students share content, provide feedback, and co-create meaning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This collaborative model shifts learners from passive recipients to active contributors

of stylistic norms. In Vietnam's higher education setting, English learning groups and digital clubs exemplify peer-driven ecosystems that promote motivation, reflection, and *learning social capital*-trust and reciprocity fostering collective linguistic growth (Woolcock, 2001; Dashti & Abdulsalam, 2025).

A defining outcome of such engagement is **stylistic hybridization**, the blending of academic, conversational, and digital registers into flexible communicative repertoires (Tagg, 2015; Han, 2024). Learners mix formal syntax with colloquial lexis, emojis, and multimodal cues to express identity and stance (Androutsopoulos, 2014). While this fosters creativity and authentic voice, it can also blur distinctions between academic and informal styles, leading to *register drift* (Thorne, 2013). Therefore, EFL pedagogy must cultivate **style-shifting competence**, the ability to navigate effectively across contexts (Biber & Conrad, 2019). In sum, social media functions as a **dynamic linguistic ecosystem** that accelerates exposure, interaction, and reflection. Through active participation, learners not only acquire vocabulary and grammar but also develop stylistic flexibility, intercultural awareness, and the pragmatic adaptability essential for communication in a globalized digital era.

2.3. Empirical Studies

A growing body of empirical research has examined how social media shapes English learning and communication styles in EFL contexts, particularly through mechanisms of **authentic exposure**, **connective learning**, and **stylistic adaptation**. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that digital platforms serve as both accelerators of communicative competence and catalysts of stylistic transformation. Studies on **informal and participatory learning** emphasize the potential of SNSs to support incidental language acquisition through observation, imitation, and peer interaction. Siemens' (2005) *Connectivism Theory* and Lave and Wenger's (1991) *Communities of Practice* framework have been widely applied to explain how learners construct knowledge and develop discourse competence within digital networks. Empirical findings confirm that social media use enhances learner motivation, exposure, and pragmatic awareness (Kabilan et al., 2010; Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Reinhardt & Zander, 2019). In Vietnamese contexts, students frequently report improved listening and pronunciation through interaction with online materials, perceiving SNSs as authentic yet low-pressure environments for language practice.

Evidence from Asian EFL settings further supports the value of **authentic linguistic exposure** in developing pragmatic competence. Studies by Gilmore (2007), Tagg (2015), and Reinhardt (2020) highlight how engagement with real-life digital discourse-vlogs, comments, short videos-promotes comprehension of idiomatic usage, speech acts, and cultural nuance. In line with *Social Learning Theory* (Bandura, 1977) and *Affective Filter Hypothesis* (Krashen, 1982), learners improve fluency through imitation in informal, anxiety-free settings. Yet, this authenticity can produce unintended stylistic spillover: Lee (2020) and Dashti & Abdulsalam (2025) note that overexposure to non-standard forms (slang, emojis, abbreviations) sometimes weakens grammatical and stylistic control in academic communication. Social media also facilitates **peer collaboration and social capital development**.

Putnam (2000) and Woolcock (1998) describe how bonding and bridging ties in online learning communities enhance cooperation, feedback, and intercultural sensitivity. Empirical studies in Vietnam and the Gulf region (Dashti & Abdulsalam, 2025) show that Facebook and Discord learning groups foster motivation, collective reflection, and learner autonomy, effectively transforming students from passive consumers into co-creators of linguistic norms. A particularly notable trend across studies is the emergence of **stylistic hybridization**, the fusion of academic, conversational, and digital registers into fluid communicative repertoires (Han, 2024; Tagg, 2015). Learners mix formal vocabulary with colloquial expressions, emojis, or memes to construct identity and stance online (Androutsopoulos, 2014). While this hybridity enables creative expression, it can also blur the boundaries between formal and informal English, leading to "register drift" (Thorne, 2013). Findings from Trade Union University mirror this tension: although students gain confidence and fluency through social media, many display reduced awareness of stylistic appropriateness in academic writing and presentations. Overall, empirical evidence underscores that social media functions as a **double-edged linguistic environment**-enhancing authenticity, engagement, and autonomy while challenging learners' control over academic style. The Vietnamese case contributes to this global discourse by illustrating how digital participation transforms not only communicative competence but also learners' stylistic consciousness. These findings reinforce the need for pedagogical models that integrate social media critically, fostering both creativity and contextual awareness in EFL education.

2.4. Conceptual Framework

Building on the preceding theoretical discussion, this study proposes an **integrative conceptual framework** examining how **social media usage** influences **English communication style** among EFL students through the mediating role of **linguistic and reflective awareness**. The model synthesizes key insights from *Communication Style Theory* (Hymes, 1972; Tannen, 2005), *Multimodality and Digital Communication Frameworks* (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2016), and *Connectivism Theory* (Siemens, 2005). Within the digital learning ecosystem, social media platforms provide learners with continuous access to authentic input, multimodal interaction, and peer collaboration. These experiences enhance **linguistic awareness**, the ability to notice and adapt to tone, register, and structure-and **reflective awareness**, the capacity to critically evaluate language use across contexts (Han, 2024; Reinhardt, 2020). Together, these processes cultivate **stylistic competence**, allowing learners to balance informal digital fluency with formal academic precision.

The model posits three main constructs:

- **Social Media Usage (X_1)**: Frequency, purpose, and intensity of SNS-based English use, including exposure, interaction, and content creation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).
- **Linguistic and Reflective Awareness (X_2)**: A mediating variable representing sensitivity to grammatical accuracy, stylistic norms, and pragmatic appropriateness.
- **English Communication Style (Y)**: Observable stylistic performance encompassing fluency, register control, politeness, and multimodal expressiveness.

Conceptually, frequent and purposeful social media engagement enhances awareness ($X_1 \rightarrow X_2$) through authentic exposure and collaboration, while increased awareness improves communication style ($X_2 \rightarrow Y$) by fostering adaptability and pragmatic balance. Conversely, excessive or unguided use may promote non-standard habits and stylistic inconsistency. Contextual factors such as **motivation**, **digital literacy**, and **academic orientation** may moderate these relationships. The framework thus identifies linguistic and reflective awareness as the **core mediating mechanism** linking digital participation to stylistic transformation. It provides a theoretical foundation for both the **quantitative analysis** (variable measurement and correlation testing) and the **qualitative exploration** (interpretation of learner experiences), highlighting social media as both a **catalyst for innovation** and a **potential disruptor** of academic language norms.

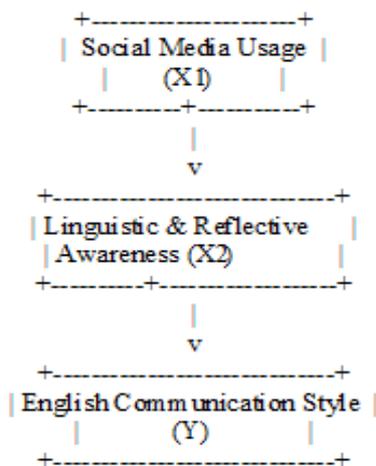


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a **mixed-method design** integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore how social media usage shapes English communication styles among EFL students at Trade Union University, Vietnam. The **quantitative strand**, a structured survey-identifies measurable trends and correlations, while the **qualitative strand** provides contextual insights into learners' stylistic adaptation.

The survey measures three constructs based on the conceptual model:

- **Social Media Usage (X_1):** frequency, diversity, and intensity of SNS-based English interaction;
- **Linguistic and Reflective Awareness (X_2):** sensitivity to stylistic norms, grammatical precision, and contextual appropriateness;
- **English Communication Style (Y):** fluency, flexibility, and pragmatic control across academic and digital contexts.

Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A pilot test confirmed reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78-0.86$).

The qualitative phase involved **semi-structured interviews** with seven students showing diverse patterns of SNS engagement, focusing on reflective awareness, perceived benefits and risks, and style-shifting between informal and academic registers.

Both strands followed a **convergent parallel design** (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), enabling triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings for enhanced validity and depth.

3.2. Participants

The study involved **90 English-major students** (85% female, aged 19-22, $M = 20.4$, $SD = 1.1$) from the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Trade Union University. Participants were in their 2nd-4th years, having completed core linguistic and translation courses.

Inclusion criteria required that participants: (1) were enrolled in English-major programs; (2) used English regularly on at least one SNS (TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, or Instagram); (3) engaged in English-related SNS activities ≥ 3 times per week; and (4) provided informed consent.

All 90 students completed the online survey via Google Forms. A subsample of **7 students (SV1-SV7)** was purposively selected for interviews based on variation in SNS engagement and stylistic confidence. Ethical standards were strictly observed to ensure anonymity, voluntary participation, and confidentiality.

3.3. Instruments

- **Survey:** 15 five-point Likert items measuring social media habits, perceptions, and stylistic effects (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78-0.86$).

- **Interviews:** Semi-structured discussions with seven participants to explore reflective awareness, linguistic shifts, and adaptation strategies.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using **SPSS 26.0**, applying descriptive and correlation analyses to examine relationships among X_1 , X_2 , and Y .

Qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed thematically following **Braun and Clarke's (2019)** six-step framework. Five dominant categories emerged: usage patterns, positive impacts, risks, stylistic changes, and self-regulation.

Findings from both strands were integrated through triangulation for comprehensive interpretation.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

All procedures complied with institutional ethical standards. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Data were anonymized, and personal identifiers removed to ensure confidentiality and research integrity.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Positive Influences

The findings reveal several positive influences of social media use on EFL students' English communication styles, highlighting its potential as a transformative linguistic environment that complements formal instruction.

(1) Increased exposure to authentic English and pragmatic competence.

Social media platforms expose learners to diverse linguistic inputs across global contexts, offering real-time examples of idiomatic expressions, politeness strategies, and discourse markers (Reinhardt, 2020;

Godwin-Jones, 2018). This authentic exposure strengthens learners' pragmatic competence by enhancing their ability to interpret meaning beyond literal structures—such as tone, implicature, and humor. Students reported that regular engagement with English-speaking content on YouTube and TikTok improved their comprehension of conversational rhythm and contextual nuance, aligning with previous findings on informal digital immersion (Kabilan et al., 2010).

(2) Enhanced linguistic reflexes and natural fluency through imitation and peer interaction.

Participants described social media as an interactive environment fostering imitation-based learning, where exposure to native speakers' tone, rhythm, and phraseology facilitates *linguistic reflexes*—the spontaneous recall and use of appropriate expressions in context. These results support Bandura's (1977) *Social Learning Theory*, suggesting that observation and repetition within online communities accelerate natural fluency. Quantitative data confirmed moderate-to-strong correlations between frequency of SNS use and perceived communicative spontaneity ($r = .46, p < .01$), indicating that imitation and interaction significantly contribute to stylistic fluidity.

(3) Boosted confidence, creativity, and learner autonomy through multimodal engagement.

Informal interaction in multimodal settings (text, video, image, emoji) encourages self-expression and experimentation without the anxiety typically associated with classroom performance (Krashen, 1982). Students reported higher confidence when communicating in English online due to reduced fear of error and peer judgment. Furthermore, multimodal affordances—such as captioning, visual storytelling, and emoji use—enhanced creative expression, enabling learners to integrate emotional and aesthetic dimensions into language use. This aligns with Han's (2024) concept of *hybrid communication norms*, where linguistic and visual resources are blended to achieve expressiveness and authenticity.

(4) Formation of digital learning communities fostering social capital and collaboration.

A notable outcome was the emergence of informal learning networks in which students exchange resources, correct one another's usage, and provide feedback. These *digital communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998) cultivate both *bonding* and *bridging* social capital (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 1998), reinforcing collective motivation and peer accountability. Qualitative data revealed that students viewed these communities as “safe zones” for practice-spaces where they could negotiate meaning collaboratively and gain a sense of belonging. This cooperative dynamic not only enhanced linguistic competence but also nurtured reflective awareness and intercultural empathy, key components of sustainable communicative development.

Overall, these positive influences illustrate that social media serves not merely as a leisure platform but as an evolving *informal learning ecology*. It enables authentic exposure, collaborative learning, and stylistic experimentation that collectively enrich EFL learners' communicative repertoire. However, as subsequent sections discuss, these benefits coexist with emerging challenges of stylistic inconsistency and academic-informal boundary blurring, underscoring the need for guided pedagogical integration.

4.2. Negative Influences

Despite the substantial benefits of social media as a source of authentic linguistic exposure and interactive learning, the findings also reveal several **adverse linguistic and cognitive effects** associated with its overuse and uncritical adoption. These negative influences underscore the paradox of digital engagement in EFL learning—where communicative fluency can expand at the expense of stylistic and academic control.

(1) Overuse of non-standard forms, slang, and emoji in academic contexts.

Quantitative data show that approximately **60% of surveyed students** reported using informal linguistic features such as abbreviations (“u,” “btw”), slang, or emojis in their academic writing or classroom discussions. This phenomenon, often described as *linguistic spillover*, occurs when informal discourse conventions from digital environments migrate into formal settings (Tagg, 2015; Lee, 2020). Interviews revealed that many students perceived such usages as “natural” or “expressive,” indicating a shift in their perception of stylistic appropriateness. While this reflects increased expressiveness, it simultaneously erodes awareness of genre boundaries—a key component of academic literacy (Hyland, 2009).

(2) Grammar and politeness degradation due to informal online discourse.

The omnipresence of casual online communication fosters tolerance for grammatical inaccuracy and directness that may be inappropriate in academic or intercultural contexts. Frequent exposure to

truncated syntax, missing punctuation, or emotive speech acts reduces attention to grammatical accuracy and politeness strategies. Several interviewees admitted that they “no longer notice mistakes in casual English,” suggesting a form of *norm desensitization*. This aligns with prior studies reporting that unmonitored digital interaction can weaken form-focused attention (Crystal, 2011; Han, 2024). Over time, such stylistic erosion risks diminishing learners’ pragmatic competence-especially their ability to convey respect, hedging, and politeness in formal English.

(3) Reduced attention span and shallow information processing.

Another recurrent concern among participants was the decline in sustained concentration and analytical depth. The fast-paced, fragmented nature of digital content-especially short-form videos-was found to shorten learners’ attention spans and reduce their capacity for reflective processing. This pattern echoes findings by Carr (2010), who warns that hyperlinked, rapid media consumption promotes *surface-level cognition*. Students reported difficulty maintaining focus during long reading or writing tasks, often preferring “scrolling and skimming” to in-depth engagement. Such habits not only hinder academic performance but also impede the reflective awareness necessary for stylistic refinement.

(4) Linguistic imbalance between everyday and academic English.

While students demonstrated high fluency and spontaneity in everyday online English, many struggled to transfer these skills into formal communication. This **stylistic imbalance** manifested in difficulties constructing coherent essays, presentations, or reports that adhere to academic conventions. As one interviewee noted, “It’s easy to comment online, but hard to write a formal paragraph.” This discrepancy illustrates what Han (2024) terms the “*register gap*”—a divergence between digital fluency and academic discipline. Without pedagogical scaffolding, frequent exposure to informal language may entrench non-standard norms, leading to inconsistent register control and hindered stylistic adaptability. Collectively, these findings highlight that uncritical engagement with social media can blur linguistic norms, weaken academic discourse competence, and fragment learners’ cognitive focus. While digital participation promotes fluency and creativity, it must be counterbalanced by structured pedagogical interventions that cultivate *stylistic awareness*, *register sensitivity*, and *critical digital literacy*. Addressing these challenges is essential for sustaining the positive effects of social media use while mitigating its potential to destabilize formal English development in higher education.

4.3. Interpretations

The overall findings suggest that **social media functions simultaneously as an accelerator and a distorter of communicative competence**. On one hand, it expands learners’ linguistic exposure, fosters creativity, and enhances pragmatic fluency through multimodal interaction and peer collaboration. On the other, it normalizes informal discourse patterns that can erode grammatical accuracy and stylistic control in academic settings. This duality highlights the paradoxical nature of digital participation in EFL learning: what empowers expression may also dilute linguistic discipline. These results resonate strongly with **Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis** and **Bandura’s (1977) Social Learning Theory**. Social media lowers anxiety and facilitates natural acquisition by providing low-pressure environments for observation, imitation, and spontaneous practice—thus reducing the affective filter and accelerating fluency. However, the absence of corrective feedback and formal scaffolding means that learners often internalize non-standard norms, confirming that exposure alone does not ensure accuracy. Consequently, **guided reflection and contextual awareness** emerge as essential mediating factors. Learners must be encouraged to reflect critically on linguistic form, register, and audience, transforming incidental imitation into conscious stylistic control. This interpretation aligns with contemporary perspectives on *reflective digital literacy* (Han, 2024; Reinhardt, 2020), which emphasize that effective language learning in online spaces depends not merely on participation but on mindful engagement with discourse conventions. In essence, social media constitutes a *double-edged pedagogical environment*—a site of accelerated learning and stylistic innovation, yet also of potential linguistic drift. Sustainable EFL pedagogy, therefore, should not restrict digital use but integrate it systematically, equipping learners with the metacognitive tools to balance authenticity, accuracy, and appropriateness across communicative domains.

6. Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

The findings highlight the necessity of a **pedagogical reorientation** that bridges the gap between digital fluency and academic precision. As social media increasingly shapes learners’ linguistic behavior,

English language education must move beyond traditional grammar-based models toward frameworks that integrate **digital literacy, reflective awareness, and stylistic adaptability**. The following recommendations are proposed to promote balanced and sustainable communicative competence in higher education.

(1) Integrate digital literacy and style-shifting training into English communication curricula.

EFL programs should incorporate explicit instruction on *digital stylistics*-training students to recognize, compare, and adapt language use across platforms and contexts. Classroom activities may include analysis of online discourse samples, register-shifting exercises, and peer review of digital communication tasks. By teaching learners how to consciously shift between informal and academic registers, educators can transform social media exposure into an opportunity for deliberate stylistic practice rather than passive imitation.

(2) Encourage engagement with authoritative learning channels.

Students should be guided toward **trusted and pedagogically oriented digital sources** such as *BBC Learning English, TED-Ed, Grammarly, or the British Council's LearnEnglish* platform. These channels expose learners to accurate, contextually rich, and stylistically diverse English while maintaining authenticity. Incorporating such content into coursework not only strengthens linguistic accuracy but also helps recalibrate stylistic norms away from non-standard online usage. Teachers can use curated digital materials for listening comprehension, vocabulary development, and discourse analysis to reinforce critical language awareness.

(3) Promote reflective tasks contrasting “academic vs. informal” registers.

Reflective learning should become a core component of language pedagogy in the digital era. Activities such as comparative writing tasks, self-assessment journals, or peer discussions on tone and appropriateness can deepen students’ understanding of register differentiation. For instance, learners may analyze how the same message changes when expressed in academic writing, social media comments, or professional emails. This practice cultivates **reflective stylistic awareness**, empowering learners to control linguistic choices intentionally and ethically (Han, 2024; Reinhardt, 2020).

(4) Develop frameworks for digital communicative competence.

Institutions should adopt or design comprehensive frameworks that integrate *linguistic, pragmatic, and ethical* dimensions of communication in digital contexts. Such frameworks-aligned with CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) and UNESCO’s digital literacy guidelines-should emphasize critical awareness of language authenticity, online etiquette, and intercultural sensitivity. The goal is to foster learners who are not only proficient users of English but also responsible communicators capable of maintaining stylistic and moral integrity in global digital spaces. In summary, effective pedagogy must treat social media not as a linguistic threat but as a transformative learning resource. By embedding **reflective digital literacy, ethical awareness, and style-shifting competence** into English education, universities can equip learners with the adaptability and critical discernment necessary for communicative success in both academic and digital domains.

4. CONCLUSION

Social media has emerged as both a catalyst and a disruptor of stylistic development in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. The findings of this study demonstrate that Vietnamese university students actively engage with digital platforms as informal spaces for language practice, resulting in greater fluency, confidence, and pragmatic sensitivity. Yet, this same environment fosters linguistic hybridity and stylistic drift-where informal discourse conventions encroach upon academic communication norms.

This duality underscores the complex role of social media in shaping modern communicative behavior. On one hand, it democratizes linguistic exposure and fosters learner autonomy; on the other, it challenges the maintenance of accuracy, coherence, and register control. The study affirms that **linguistic and reflective awareness** acts as a mediating mechanism linking digital participation to stylistic competence, suggesting that conscious reflection must complement incidental exposure to ensure sustainable learning outcomes. Pedagogically, social media should be repositioned not as a linguistic threat but as a dynamic learning resource. English education in Vietnam-and similar EFL contexts-must therefore integrate digital stylistics, critical reflection, and style-shifting competence into

curricula to help learners navigate fluid communication boundaries. By doing so, educators can transform social media from a site of linguistic drift into a bridge connecting authentic digital fluency with academic integrity. Ultimately, this study contributes to the emerging global discourse on **digital communicative style competence**, providing empirical evidence from an underrepresented Southeast Asian context and offering insights for developing resilient, ethically grounded, and stylistically adaptive communicators in the digital age.

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