

## Code-Switching as a Communicative Strategy among Indonesian University Students on Social Media

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### Abstract

Code-switching, or the alternation between languages within a single discourse, is increasingly visible in Indonesian students' digital communication. This study examines code-switching as a communicative strategy among bilingual students at Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (UNTIRTA), focusing on how and why they alternate between Indonesian and English on social media platforms. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected from captions, comments, and messages produced by 25 active student participants, complemented by in-depth interviews to explore the pragmatic motivations behind their linguistic choices. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of switching and communicative functions, supported by thematic triangulation. Findings reveal that intrasentential switching is the most frequent type, often used to emphasize ideas or convey emotional nuance. Code-switching also serves as a marker of bilingual identity, a signal of social closeness and humor, and a tool for shifting between formal and informal topics. Sociolinguistic factors such as English exposure, academic background, and online community norms strongly influence these practices. The study contributes to digital sociolinguistics by framing code-switching as a strategic communicative act that reflects identity construction, social alignment, and pragmatic adaptation in online interactions.

### Article Info:

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, Code-Switching, Communicative Strategy, Digital Sociolinguistics, Social Media

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## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of code-switching between Indonesian and English among Indonesian university students has become an inseparable part of everyday communication on social media. Across platforms such as Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, and WhatsApp, students frequently blend the two languages spontaneously in statuses, comments, or private messages. Expressions such as “Aku udah ngerjain task-nya tapi belum upload” (“I’ve done the task but haven’t uploaded it yet”) or “Please jangan ghosting aku kayak dosen ngilang pas revisi” (“Please don’t ghost me like the lecturer who disappears during revision”) not only demonstrate bilingual competence but also signal a unique form of linguistic creativity in digital spaces (Nahak & Bram, 2022; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022). Code-switching, which was once mostly found in classrooms or formal settings, has now migrated into the online sphere, where identity, solidarity, and self-expression intertwine within dynamic discourse. This

phenomenon illustrates how language no longer functions merely as a tool of communication but as a component of social and cultural performativity among young people navigating globalization and digital communication (Novianti & Said, 2021; Sahib et al., 2021).

The urgency of examining this phenomenon lies in the fact that code-switching on social media is often misunderstood as an “improper mix” or as a threat to the purity of the Indonesian language. Such views overlook the pragmatic and sociocultural dimensions of the practice. In the context of digital communication, code-switching can instead be understood as a strategy for adapting to one’s audience, building social closeness, expressing community membership, or enhancing emotional expression within a message (Andriani, 2023; Pharamita et al., 2021). Therefore, code-switching is not a sign of linguistic weakness but a complex and meaningful discursive strategy. A deeper understanding of this practice is essential, not only for the development of linguistic and pragmatic studies but also for understanding how young people construct their linguistic identities within transnational digital spaces.

Studies on code-switching have been conducted in various contexts, but most Indonesian research remains focused on formal educational settings or traditional media. For example, Afryanti et al. (2021) and Zalukhu et al. (2021) were among the early works addressing code-switching in Indonesia, focusing on everyday bilingual community interactions. Dewi (2021) and Sihombing and Rani (2023) later developed theoretical frameworks explaining the types of code-switching and their social determinants. However, these studies predate the emergence of social media and thus have not explored the digital dimension that now forms an integral part of youth linguistic life. Globally, S. M. Foster and Welsh (2021) and Jan-Petter and Gumperz (2020) classified code-switching into three major forms, intersentential, intrasentential, and tag-switching, which remain foundational references in bilingual linguistic research.

Recent studies have begun to link code-switching with social identity and digital communication. Kadir (2021) and Sahib et al. (2021) argue that code-switching on social media not only reflects linguistic proficiency but also serves as a performance of social identity tailored to online contexts. M. Foster and Welsh’s (2021) study on Korean university students on Facebook shows that English use functions both as a symbol of global belonging and as a marker of social prestige. In Indonesia, Pratama (2022) and SusyLOWATI et al. (2019) found that students often employ code-switching as a form of self-expression and informal communicative style. These studies provide initial insights into how social media has created new spaces where code-switching becomes part of fluid and creative everyday communication.

Nevertheless, most of these studies still emphasize structural linguistic aspects while paying little attention to the communicative functions of code-switching in digital pragmatics. Research by Kandiawan (2022), Nasrullah et al. (2023), and Susanti et al. (2024) explores its functions in social interaction, such as signaling solidarity, marking topic shifts, or emphasizing messages, but the application of these theories to Indonesian social media remains limited. Meanwhile, studies by Jakob (2020) and Ohia (2023) on digital discourse demonstrate that

online code-switching involves not only language choice but also how individuals construct digital personae and position themselves within global communities. In this sense, social media can be seen as a “space of social practice” where language serves simultaneously as a symbol of identity and a tool of social negotiation.

Several Southeast Asian studies have also highlighted this shift. Research by Mirzoyeva and Syurmen (2020) in the Philippines and Hopkyns et al. (2018) in Singapore shows that English use in local contexts often aims not to signal dominance but to expand intercultural communication reach. Similarly, in Malaysia, Arrizki et al. (2020) and Nordin (2023) found that students use code-switching to express solidarity and emotional closeness online. These findings indicate that similar phenomena occur across bilingual societies in Southeast Asia, though the forms and functions vary according to each society’s sociocultural context.

In Indonesia, research on code-switching in social media remains scarce. Studies by Taher (2022) and Taher et al. (2022) on Instagram usage found that students mix Indonesian and English to express modern lifestyles and global connectivity. However, these studies did not examine the pragmatic functions or social motivations underlying such practices. Meanwhile, studies by Mirzoyeva and Syurmen (2020) and Yilmaz (2021) on Twitter show that code-switching often serves humorous or sarcastic functions but do not address how these communicative strategies relate to identity or social relations among users. In other words, most existing research still views code-switching as a surface linguistic phenomenon rather than a complex communicative practice within digital discourse.

This gap presents an opportunity for deeper exploration. Few studies have connected code-switching with pragmatic communication strategies in student social media, especially within regional universities such as Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (UNTIRTA), which reflects an urban–semi-urban social character and active bilingual usage. Most Indonesian studies have focused on large metropolitan universities (Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta), leaving regional contexts underrepresented. Yet, local universities may reveal a more fluid, adaptive, and socially grounded form of bilingualism, rooted in local realities while engaging with global discourses through digital media.

Accordingly, this study seeks to reinterpret code-switching among Indonesian university students on social media, not merely as language mixing but as a communicative strategy serving pragmatic and social functions. The study’s novelty lies in integrating structural linguistic perspectives with pragmatic and digital sociolinguistic analyses. By positioning social media as a new discursive space, the research explores how students construct bilingual identities, negotiate social relationships, and navigate meaning in online interactions. The contextual contribution also lies in focusing on UNTIRTA students, representing bilingual users situated between two worlds: the local and the global, the traditional and the digital.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the types of code-switching used by UNTIRTA students on social media, analyze their underlying communicative functions, and examine the social and linguistic factors influencing these practices. A deeper understanding of code-switching as a communicative strategy is expected to enrich discourse on digital bilingualism

in Indonesia and contribute to the broader fields of social science, language education, and digital sociolinguistics.

### RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using linguistic and pragmatic analysis. This approach is chosen because code-switching cannot be reduced to numerical or statistical representations; instead, it requires a nuanced understanding of the social context, meaning, and communicative intentions underlying students' language use in digital spaces. As H. K. Mohajan (2018) asserts, qualitative research allows scholars to explore complex and subjective social meanings as experienced by participants within their life contexts. Thus, this method is best suited for examining code-switching not merely as a linguistic phenomenon but as a living and dynamic social practice in online student communication.

The research site, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (UNTIRTA), was selected based on sociolinguistic considerations. As a state university in Banten Province, UNTIRTA represents an urban–semi-urban student population navigating between local traditions and global influences. Most students are native Indonesian speakers who actively use English in academic and social media contexts. This environment creates a unique bilingual situation, reflecting a blend of local identity and global aspiration. Moreover, UNTIRTA hosts students from various regions across Indonesia, enriching the social and linguistic diversity under study. Selecting a regional university broadens the spectrum of Indonesian code-switching research, which has thus far been dominated by metropolitan settings.

The study involved 25 active UNTIRTA students from diverse faculties, including Education, Economics and Business, and Law, selected through purposive sampling. Participants were chosen based on their active social media engagement (Instagram, Twitter/X, TikTok, WhatsApp) and frequent use of Indonesian–English mixtures in posts or digital conversations. Purposive sampling ensures that participants possess relevant linguistic experiences aligned with the study's focus. The sample size of 25 participants was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation, where data collection ceases once no new insights emerge (Khan, 2019; Priya, 2021).

Data collection in this study employed three complementary techniques: documentation, in-depth interviews, and online observation. The documentation process involved gathering screenshots of participants' social media posts that contained instances of code-switching, such as captions, comments, and private messages, with full participant consent and ethical approval (Stanley, 2023), thereby ensuring the authenticity of naturally occurring linguistic data. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' subjective understandings of their motives, functions, and the meanings they associated with code-switching; the semi-structured format of these interviews allowed a balance between flexibility and thematic focus. Meanwhile, online observation was used to monitor public social media interactions, providing a broader communicative context that helped situate individual code-switching practices within the dynamic flow of digital discourse.

Data analysis proceeded concurrently with collection, following the interactive analysis model (Cheron et al., 2022) encompassing data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Linguistic data were classified into three types of code-switching (Bazen et al., 2021): intersentential, intrasentential, and tag-switching. Each instance was further analyzed using D. Mohajan and Mohajan's (2022) communicative function framework, quotation, addressee specification, interjection, reiteration, and message qualification. Interview data underwent thematic analysis to identify emerging themes related to social motives, identity, and communicative strategies.

To ensure validity and reliability, both data and theory triangulation were employed. Data triangulation compared linguistic documentation, interviews, and observations to prevent single-source bias (Alam, 2020). Theoretical triangulation integrated sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspectives, reinforcing that code-switching cannot be understood purely structurally but must be examined as part of communication strategy and identity construction in digital spaces. The entire analytical process was reflective and iterative, maintaining sensitivity to social context, communicative intent, and participant meaning-making.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Patterns of Code-Switching on Social Media among UNTIRTA Students

The phenomenon of code-switching in the digital interactions of students at Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (UNTIRTA) reveals a dynamic linguistic landscape, particularly within the context of bilingual communication on social media. Based on an analysis of 25 active participants using platforms such as Instagram, X (Twitter), TikTok, and WhatsApp, intrasentential switching emerged as the most dominant form of code-switching in their online communication. This pattern demonstrates syntactic integration between Indonesian and English, produced spontaneously and often unconsciously by the speakers. Most students used this form to reinforce meaning, emphasize emotion, or enhance stylistic expression in digital conversations. Conceptually, this finding aligns with the classification proposed by Prasasty (2022), which distinguishes three main types of code-switching: intrasentential, intersentential, and tag-switching. The data showed that intrasentential switching occurred most frequently, followed by intersentential and then tag-switching, which appeared relatively rarely. These findings also correspond with contemporary studies by Candilas et al. (2023), who argue that code-switching on social media should no longer be viewed as a "linguistic error" but as a form of linguistic intimacy, an expression of emotional and social closeness enabled by linguistic flexibility. Among UNTIRTA students, this practice reflects the identity of a digitally native generation navigating two linguistic worlds: Indonesian as a marker of local belonging and English as a symbol of global connectivity.

The quantitative distribution of code-switching types is summarized in Table 1, derived from the analysis of students' posts, comments, and conversations.

**Tabel 1** Distribution of Code-Switching Types on UNTIRTA Students' Social Media

Type of Code-Switching	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Intrasentential Switching	126	65.6
Intersentential Switching	49	25.5
Tag-Switching	17	8.9
Total	192	100

Source: Field analysis, 2024

As shown in the table, intrasentential switching dominates with 65.6%. This type frequently appeared in mixed sentences such as “Aku udah ngerjain task-nya tapi belum upload” (I’ve already done the task but haven’t uploaded it yet) or “Nanti aku join meeting ya, masih di jalan” (I’ll join the meeting later, I’m still on the way). Such structures indicate that students have internalized the grammatical systems of both languages, switching fluidly not out of confusion but to achieve particular expressive effects. Online field observations within the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) community revealed that this phenomenon often occurs in informal and familiar contexts. For example, students participating in online discussion groups frequently used mixed Indonesian–English utterances to mark topic shifts or add humorous nuances. One observed example was: “Guys, don’t forget to bring the proposal, besok presentasi di kelas Bu N.” (Guys, don’t forget to bring the proposal; tomorrow we have a presentation in Ms. N’s class.) Here, the switch to English was not due to lexical limitations but to create a more professional or “smart casual” tone commonly associated with a modern academic identity.

Interviews reinforced these findings. One informant, identified as A.R., stated that code-switching had become habitual through extensive exposure to English-language media, and thinking or writing in two languages simultaneously felt natural on platforms like Instagram or Twitter. Another informant, L.S., noted that using English made messages feel “lighter” and “less serious,” especially when discussing personal topics. These views indicate that intrasentential switching functions not only as a linguistic tool but also as an index of digital everyday communication style. From the perspective of digital bilingualism, social media serves as a discursive space where linguistic identities are dynamically negotiated (Candilas et al., 2023). UNTIRTA students use code-switching not merely to display bilingual competence but as a social practice to construct closeness, humor, and even symbolic authority in digital spaces. In this context, English symbolizes prestige and global connection, while Indonesian maintains warmth and local rootedness. The combination creates a fluid and inclusive communicative style that reflects the ethos of digital natives.

Aside from intrasentential switching, the study identified intersentential switching at 25.5%, typically appearing in social media captions. Sentences such as “Hari ini capek banget. But I’m proud of myself anyway.” (I’m really tired today. But I’m proud of myself anyway.) demonstrate inter-clausal language shifts for emotional emphasis. Such switching reflects what Romanowski (2024) defines as emblematic switching, the use of a second language to strengthen emotional tone or signal a change in discourse mood. Meanwhile, tag-switching appeared least frequently (8.9%), usually as brief insertions like “you know,” “right?” or “by

the way.” Though less frequent, these expressions functioned as social rapport markers, signaling familiarity and shared linguistic background. Instances like “Lucu banget videonya, right?” (The video is so funny, right?) or “Kamu telat lagi, as always!” (You’re late again, as always!) illustrate how English tags reinforce interpersonal warmth and camaraderie among peers.

The forms and functions of code-switching, therefore, cannot be separated from the digital social contexts in which they occur. UNTIRTA’s academic environment, characterized by diverse majors and widespread exposure to English-language materials, from lectures to music, films, and global media, shapes these linguistic habits. Observations revealed that many students follow international accounts or produce bilingual content as part of academic engagement and personal branding. This further supports the conclusion that intrasentential switching operates as a performative discourse (Ismadi et al., 2021), through which language becomes a vehicle for displaying social identity and symbolic competence.

### **Communicative Functions and Pragmatic Strategies in Code-Switching**

The communicative functions and pragmatic strategies underlying code-switching among UNTIRTA students reveal complex social dimensions. Analysis of posts, comments, and interview data from 25 participants indicates that code-switching is not merely spontaneous language mixing but a socially meaningful communicative strategy. In digital communication, language operates as a tool for identity construction, social alignment, emotional expression, and contextual adaptation. This aligns with Bratcher and Cabosky’s (2024) view that code-switching indexes shifts in contextual meaning, as well as with Candilas et al. (2023), who identify its social and pragmatic dimensions.

The most prominent function observed was identity marking. Students strategically used English to construct a modern, global, and educated self-image. On platforms such as Instagram or X (Twitter), English often appeared in captions or comments expressing aspirational identities, for example, “Chasing dreams, one step at a time” or “Still learning, still growing.” These linguistic choices go beyond demonstrating proficiency; they project an image of a globally oriented young adult. One participant, N.S., explained that using English online was “a way to show that we are part of a larger world.” It made her feel confident and “more professional” in digital interactions, reflecting the process of conscious linguistic self-positioning (Yusuf et al., 2024).

A second major function was emphasis. Students frequently switched to English to intensify emotional meaning or highlight specific points, as in “Aduh deadline-nya mepet banget, this is crazy!” (Oh no, the deadline is so close, this is crazy!) or “Aku udah belajar semalaman, but still confused!” (I’ve studied all night, but I’m still confused!). According to participant A.R., English words such as tired, excited, or confused felt “more natural” in digital contexts due to frequent exposure to global media. This illustrates pragmatic accommodation (Diko, 2024), where speakers adjust linguistic choices to more precisely express affective nuance.

A third key function, solidarity and humor, emerged prominently in casual online exchanges. Code-switching served to foster camaraderie and a relaxed atmosphere, as seen

in comments like “Classic you, bro!” or “You’re so done, man!” Following Manivannan and Maruthy (2024), such language use represents a semiotic resource for signaling style and personality rather than conveying information. As informant L.S. observed, English expressions make conversations feel more “fun” and “less rigid,” reinforcing code-switching as a means of symbolic solidarity among linguistically similar peers.

Another significant pragmatic function was topic shifting. Students often switched from Indonesian to English to signal transitions between serious academic discussion and casual talk, as in “Jangan lupa baca jurnal ini dulu ya, nanti kita bahas pas rapat. By the way, ada yang udah makan belum?” (Don’t forget to read this journal first, we’ll discuss it in the meeting. By the way, has anyone eaten yet?) This aligns with Sinclair and Fernández’s (2023) notion of contextualization cues, where linguistic elements mark changes in interactional frame. In the digital environment, where multiple conversational layers coexist, such cues are essential for maintaining coherence.

Finally, the data suggest that code-switching among UNTIRTA students reflects communicative adaptability (Archila et al., 2021), the ability to adjust linguistic style according to context, audience, and platform. Students’ bilingual academic environment and global exposure have normalized English as part of everyday discourse. Code-switching thus operates not only as a communicative strategy but also as a performative act that enacts lifestyle and values. Through linguistic hybridity, the blending of Indonesian and English expresses plural, fluid identities emblematic of Indonesia’s digitally connected youth.

### **Sociolinguistic Factors Influencing Code-Switching Practices**

The sociolinguistic factors influencing the code-switching practices of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (UNTIRTA) students on social media reveal a close interrelation between social, cultural, and technological dimensions. Based on the results of in-depth interviews and digital observations, the phenomenon of code-switching does not occur randomly or due to limited language proficiency but is instead the result of complex social processes in which students navigate identity, norms, and communicative expectations within a bilingual digital environment. In this context, code-switching functions as a dynamic medium of self-expression, not merely a linguistic choice, but a reflection of lifestyle, academic orientation, and exposure to global flows.

One of the most dominant factors is exposure to English through digital media. Almost all research participants admitted that their ability and habit of using English on social media were inseparable from their routine consumption of international online content such as films, songs, videos, and other media. Observations on participants’ personal accounts showed that most followed global content creators on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, which use English as their primary language. This exposure indirectly shapes their mindset and linguistic habits. In an interview, M.R., an Economics student, explained that he often used English phrases such as “so true,” “can relate,” or “literally me” because he was so accustomed to hearing them from the content he watched daily. He stated that “those sentences are already stuck in my head, so they just come out naturally.” This phenomenon illustrates what Altun (2021) calls linguistic cosmopolitanism, a condition in which individuals



use a global language such as English to signify their connectedness to the world without abandoning their local identity.

Field observations on campus also reinforced these findings. Students were often seen using English in casual conversations, especially when discussing topics related to technology, entertainment, or popular culture. In public spaces such as the campus cafeteria and garden, sentences like “Eh, that movie was so good” or “You know what, I can’t stop watching that series” were frequently heard. The use of English occurred not only in digital spaces but also permeated offline interactions as part of everyday communication styles. This phenomenon shows that media exposure not only changes how students understand language but also forms a new linguistic habitus, in which switching between two languages becomes natural and reflexive.

Apart from media exposure, academic background also plays a significant role in determining the frequency and form of code-switching. Students from foreign language-based or internationally oriented majors, such as English Education and International Business, demonstrated higher intensity of code-switching compared to students from other majors. In an interview, S.F., a student of English Education, stated that she often mixed Indonesian and English in her social media posts because she was “used to thinking in two languages.” She added that “writing captions in a mix feels more natural and expressive.” This aligns with Abdullah and Hussin’s (2021) argument that one’s language choice often reflects the rights and obligations set within a given community, in this case, language program students view the use of English as part of their academic identity.

Interestingly, however, students from non-language majors also exhibited similar tendencies, although with lower intensity. Based on observations in a WhatsApp group of the Faculty of Engineering, for instance, several examples of code-switching were found in informal contexts, such as “Guys, jangan lupa report-nya dikumpulin hari ini ya. Don’t be late!” or “Bro, udah finish coding-nya?” These sentences indicate that code-switching has become part of the linguistic repertoire of students across disciplines. This is consistent with Archila et al. (2021), who assert that digital bilingualism among young Asians is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also an expression of digital cosmopolitanism, in which English serves as a social bridge that signals familiarity and equality in online spaces.

Another highly influential factor is online community norms. Social media forms a social ecosystem in which linguistic style becomes a marker of membership and social acceptance. Within student online communities, mixed-language use is perceived as a modern, casual, and inclusive communication style. An interview with L.N., a Communication Science student, revealed that she felt “weird” using only formal Indonesian on social media because it was “considered too stiff.” She stated that “using a bit of English feels like a sign that we’re up to date and sociable.” This confession shows that language choice on social media is not merely an individual decision but also a response to implicit social pressures within online communities.

Observation of student interactions on the X (Twitter) platform illustrates this phenomenon clearly. For example, in light discussions about campus issues, many comments

contained mixed-language expressions such as “Kampus lagi chaos banget, literally no one’s ready for this” or “Birokrasi kampus tuh sometimes too much to handle.” Such utterances indicate that the use of English has become part of a shared expressive norm recognized by the community. According to Diko (2024), this practice reflects a sociolinguistic scale, where language choice functions to position speakers within a particular social hierarchy, in this case, as part of a globally literate and digitally savvy youth group.

Beyond these three main factors, analysis also found that cross-cultural interaction experiences further strengthen students’ tendencies to code-switch. Some participants who had joined student exchange programs or international academic activities demonstrated greater ease and confidence in switching languages. R.D., a Law student who had attended a student conference in Malaysia, stated that after the experience, he felt more confident using English in online conversations. He considered the ability to switch between two languages as a form of flexibility that “makes people look more competent.” This phenomenon illustrates how social experience influences one’s linguistic capital, in which the ability to use English functions as a symbolic form of social and intellectual status among university students.

From these observations and interviews, it can be concluded that code-switching among UNTIRTA students represents a form of linguistic adaptation to increasingly global social and digital dynamics. Code-switching is not merely a reflection of language ability but also a social strategy to navigate identity, adapt to community norms, and demonstrate membership within global networks. This phenomenon shows that students are not passive recipients of globalization’s influence but actively negotiate their positions through language. In this context, code-switching becomes a symbol of linguistic cosmopolitanism, a form of linguistic cosmopolitanism in which language is used not to replace local identity but to expand the scope of social and cultural interaction in digital spaces.

### **Code-Switching as a Representation of Students’ Digital Identity**

The code-switching phenomenon among Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (UNTIRTA) students on social media functions not only as a communication strategy but also as a form of digital identity representation. Through the alternation between Indonesian and English, students construct flexible, modern, and globally oriented self-images. Code-switching becomes a performative tool through which their linguistic identities are negotiated and displayed to online audiences. In this context, linguistic practice is not merely a communicative act but also a semiotic act of identity, where language choice carries symbolic meaning that marks social membership and cultural orientation in digital spaces.

Findings from in-depth interviews show that students consciously or unconsciously use code-switching to construct and present particular digital personas. For example, S.N., an English Education student, stated that she often mixes Indonesian and English in her Instagram posts because “using full Indonesian feels too formal, but full English sounds too Westernized.” She explained that language mixing creates a balance between “a relaxed local style” and “a modern impression” that she wants to convey. This demonstrates how students use code-switching to negotiate their identities between two worlds: Indonesian locality and

the globality of English. Such identity is not static but formed through continuous interaction between social context, technology, and linguistic choice.

Observation of student activity on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter) revealed that forms of code-switching are often used to reinforce certain self-images. For instance, in posts about campus activities, captions such as “Finally done with the presentation! Proud of my team 🙌🌟” or “Ngopi dulu before tackling another deadline” (Having coffee first before tackling another deadline) were commonly found. The use of English in particular parts serves to highlight aspects of achievement, professionalism, and a productive lifestyle, while Indonesian remains to maintain closeness with the local audience. In this context, language choice becomes an element of digital performativity, a way of presenting oneself through linguistic actions that are both symbolic and social (Sinclair & Fernández, 2023; Widiastuti et al., 2021).

Code-switching on social media also reflects students’ efforts to create self-images aligned with the expectations of online communities. In an interview, R.A., a Communication Science student, admitted that he mixed languages not only out of habit but also because “writing captions fully in Indonesian sometimes looks too serious, while adding some English makes it lighter and more relatable.” He added that using English made posts feel more “catchy” and easily accepted by followers who also communicate in similar styles. This demonstrates social awareness in linguistic practice: students adjust their linguistic choices to align with the expressive norms of their digital communities. Thus, code-switching becomes part of identity performance, a linguistic strategy used to present a desired version of the self in online public spaces.

This phenomenon becomes even more interesting when viewed from field observations on campus. In informal situations such as cafeteria discussions or student organization activities, students often code-switch in spoken conversations, which are then reproduced digitally. For example, a group of Economics students discussing a group assignment were heard saying, “Let’s finish this tonight, guys, biar nggak kejar deadline lagi” (so we don’t have to chase the deadline again). Later, one of them uploaded a photo of the activity on Instagram with the caption, “Teamwork makes the dream work 🌟 #productiveweekend.” It is evident that their spoken linguistic practices naturally transfer into digital contexts, reinforcing the continuity between offline and online identities. This observation indicates that students’ digital identity representation is not entirely separate from their real-world social identity; the two interact and form a unified performative whole.

In the context of digital sociolinguistics, code-switching also functions as a form of symbolic alignment, an effort to assert social membership and certain values through language. Students who actively use English in online interactions tend to be perceived as globally aware, modern, and well-educated individuals. This was expressed by F.K., a Management student, who said that “using mixed English is like showing we understand the outside world, not just the local one.” This illustrates how English functions as a symbol of social status and cultural capital, legitimizing certain identities in social media spaces. This view aligns with Bratcher and Cabosky’s (2024) concept of symbolic capital, which explains

that mastery of prestigious language forms can elevate one's social position within a given community.

However, digital identity formed through code-switching is not only related to social status but also to a sense of familiarity and solidarity. Within online student communities, mixed-language use serves to express group membership and camaraderie. For instance, in comment sections of friends' posts, students often use expressions like "You slay, bestie!" or "Gila keren banget, proud of you!" (That's so cool, proud of you!) that harmoniously combine local and global linguistic elements. This style reflects digital solidarity articulated through linguistic expression. According to Yusuf et al. (2024), such practices show that language on social media functions as an indexical resource, each word, phrase, or language mix carries social indices that signify affiliation, attitude, and interpersonal relationships.

Furthermore, code-switching reflects the fluid dynamics of identity in digital globalization. Students are no longer bound to a single linguistic identity; they move flexibly between two languages to adapt to diverse audiences. Observations of students active in international online communities found that they adjusted their linguistic style according to context: full-English posts for global audiences and mixed Indonesian–English posts for local social circles. This reflects translingual practice, where language boundaries are no longer rigid but creatively utilized to achieve specific communicative and social goals.

Code-switching as a representation of digital identity also demonstrates a high degree of metalinguistic awareness. Several participants stated that they chose specific words or phrases to evoke particular emotional tones. D.M., a Psychology student, said that "using English feels more neutral and softer when talking about something sensitive." She illustrated this by saying that writing "I'm not okay lately" feels lighter than "Aku lagi nggak baik-baik aja" (I'm not doing well lately). This language choice reflects an affective strategy that shows sensitivity to the social meanings embedded in each language form. In this context, English functions as a means to maintain emotional distance while presenting oneself in a way perceived as more universal and socially acceptable in online public spaces.

### **Code-Switching as a Communication Strategy in the Digital Era**

The phenomenon of code-switching among students at Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (UNTIRTA) demonstrates that language is no longer merely a tool for conveying messages but serves as an adaptive and reflective social communication strategy that responds to the dynamics of the digital age. Within the multimodal and interactive context of social media, the alternation between Indonesian and English is not a manifestation of linguistic confusion or lack of fluency, but a pragmatic strategy consciously employed to adapt to context, audience, and communicative intent. Students use code-switching to negotiate meaning, build social connections, assert identity, and reinforce their messages in digital spaces. As stated by Ramba and Abu Bakar (2024), communication in digital media requires pragmatic adaptation, that is, the ability of users to adjust their language choice, style, and symbols in accordance with the constantly shifting social situations of online environments.

In interviews, several informants revealed that using mixed language serves as an effective way to reach diverse audiences while maintaining a casual and contextually

appropriate tone. For instance, A.P., a Communication Science student, mentioned that he often uses English in his posts because “my followers are mixed, some are local classmates, and others are international friends.” He added that when he writes in English, such as “Feeling grateful for today’s opportunity!”, he intends to convey a universal message that anyone can understand. However, he still adds Indonesian phrases in comments or stories to maintain closeness with local friends. This statement illustrates how students adapt their linguistic style to their social context and audience composition, making code-switching a strategic form of communication that integrates linguistic and social awareness.

Observations of students’ social media activity further reinforce these findings. On platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, many posts use mixed language contextually to enhance the intended message. For example, a student sharing motivational content wrote the caption: “Struggling, but still moving forward. Semangat buat kalian yang lagi berjuang juga!” This expression reflects a pragmatic balance between two languages: English is used to emphasize emotional universality and expressive strength, while Indonesian reinforces emotional closeness with the local audience. In such practices, students display digital linguistic intelligence, an awareness that each language carries distinct meanings and social associations, allowing them to optimize message impact through code-switching.

Code-switching also functions as a strategy of social alignment, where students adjust their language to create more effective social relationships with specific groups. R.N., a student from the Faculty of Economics, explained that in organizational WhatsApp groups, he tends to combine Indonesian and English to sound “more professional but still relaxed.” He gave an example of a common message he writes: “Guys, please make sure the report is done by tonight, ya. Jangan sampai telat submit lagi.” He explained that the English introduction makes the instruction sound more polite and assertive, while the Indonesian insertions preserve a sense of familiarity. Such practices demonstrate high pragmatic awareness, where students select words not only for their literal meaning but also for their social impact on interpersonal relationships. Within the framework of digital sociolinguistics, this confirms that online communication is contextually embedded, shaped by social norms, personal relationships, and the expectations of digital communities (Bratcher & Cabosky, 2024).

From field observations, it is evident that code-switching as a communicative strategy does not occur solely in online spaces but is rooted in everyday communication habits. On campus, students often switch languages spontaneously in face-to-face conversations, for instance, during discussions in cafés or open spaces. In one instance, a group of students discussing their presentation was heard saying, “Aku udah kirim file-nya ke grup, please check ya, biar nanti nggak double kerja.” This utterance was later reproduced in one member’s Instagram post with the caption, “Teamwork makes everything easier 🤝.” This pattern shows that communicative strategies through code-switching form part of social routines that move across media, from spoken to digital communication, without losing their original pragmatic function. This reinforces Widiastuti et al.’s (2021) assertion that linguistic practices in the digital era are trans-contextual, connecting offline and online interactions in a continuous social identity performance.

Furthermore, code-switching serves as a tool to enhance communicative intent, especially in persuasive and emotional contexts. Students use English to add expressive strength to certain statements. For example, in posts about personal achievements, captions such as “Finally done with my thesis! It’s been a tough journey.” or “So proud of myself for not giving up.” frequently appear. These expressions demonstrate that English is not used merely as a linguistic ornament but as a means to intensify emotional tone and convey a universal impression. In an interview, D.S., a Psychology student, explained that expressing feelings in English feels “lighter and more neutral,” particularly when discussing personal or sensitive topics. She felt that using English helps her maintain emotional distance while still expressing herself freely. This illustrates that code-switching functions not only as a social strategy but also as an emotional one, helping speakers manage their self-presentation and feelings in public digital spaces.

From a theoretical perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates a transformation in the function of language in the digital era. Language is no longer understood solely in structural terms but as a social and symbolic resource strategically employed to achieve communicative goals. Studies in digital sociolinguistics affirm that social media users actively construct social meaning through linguistic practices that are contextual, adaptive, and multimodal (Abdullah & Hussin, 2021; Prasasty, 2022). Among UNTIRTA students, code-switching illustrates how Indonesian youth navigate the complexities of global digital spaces without losing their local roots. They use English to assert their presence in global communities while maintaining Indonesian as a language of warmth and social intimacy.

Code-switching in students’ social media practices can also be seen as a form of communicative intelligence in an era of globalization. In an increasingly interconnected digital world, the ability to switch languages effectively reflects a new form of communicative competence, not only grammatical proficiency but also awareness of social norms, digital contexts, and global audiences. Code-switching serves as evidence of students’ capacity to navigate multiple layers of meaning and social expectation within a single communicative act. In other words, they are not only linguistically bilingual but also socially and digitally bi-contextual.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that code-switching among bilingual students at Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University is not a spontaneous linguistic phenomenon but a conscious and meaningful communication strategy within an increasingly transnational digital ecology. The alternation between Indonesian and English on social media serves as a form of pragmatic adaptation that enables students to adjust to diverse audiences and communicative purposes, from expressing social closeness and emotions to performing cosmopolitan identities. Code-switching provides a performative space for students to negotiate their digital identities as individuals grounded in local culture yet connected to global discourses. In this context, code-switching does not reflect linguistic deficiency but rather social intelligence and strategic competence in using language as a tool for self-representation and

social networking. These findings enrich the field of digital sociolinguistics by showing that linguistic practices on social media are inseparable from the construction of identity and the negotiation of social relations in digital spaces. This study also illustrates how Indonesian youth navigate the dynamics of linguistic globalization in reflective, adaptive, and creative ways, making code-switching both a symbol of communicative competence and an agent of identity formation in the digital era.

### ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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