



SOCIAL MEDIA AS A DUAL SPACE: PRESERVATION AND EROSION OF REGIONAL LANGUAGES AMONG YOUNGER GENERATIONS

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Abstract

This qualitative literature study examines how social media platforms simultaneously preserve and erode regional languages among younger generations. The synthesis reveals dual mechanisms operating in opposite directions. Preservation occurs through distributed digital documentation, cross border virtual community building, liberating linguistic creativity, activist led revitalization campaigns, positive representation building pride, enjoyable informal learning, identity conscious youth resistance to cultural homogenization, and digital corpus creation for language technology development. Erosion occurs through algorithmic bias disadvantaging smaller languages, communication efficiency pressures driving homogenization, public metrics shaping language prestige, attention fragmentation hostile to extended texts, irreversible domain replacement, rapid vocabulary substitution for digital concepts, normalization of language unsuitability for serious functions, accelerated language change alienating older generations, and creation of generations with passive comprehension lacking active production capacity. Net outcomes vary significantly across languages depending on speaker population size, social status, institutional support, community digital literacy, and presence of effective revitalization leadership. The study concludes that social media is neither inherently destructive nor beneficial for regional languages; its impact depends on strategic utilization by speech communities, policy interventions from governments, and design choices by technology corporations.

Keywords: social media, regional languages, language shift, digital revitalization, youth language practices, algorithmic bias, linguistic identity

Introduction

Social media has become a new public sphere that changes how humans communicate, share information, and shape cultural identity. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube host billions of users who produce and consume content in various languages every day. This digital space was initially dominated by English as the global language of technology, but as users from various countries have grown, content in local languages has become increasingly prevalent. The younger generation, as the most active social media users, spends a significant portion of their daily communication time on these digital platforms. An individual's formation of self-identity and social perception is heavily influenced by the interactions that occur continuously in social media spaces (Darmawan & de Jesus Isaac, 2022). The shift of communication space from the physical to the digital realm has major consequences for regional languages that have historically survived through oral transmission between generations within families and communities. On one hand, social media opens opportunities for regional language speakers to create content in their mother tongue, reach wider audiences, and document vocabulary and expressions that might otherwise go extinct. On the other hand, platform algorithms that tend to promote content in languages with large speaker bases, the dominance of national languages in education and mainstream media, and the pressure to communicate efficiently with diverse audiences simultaneously encourage the younger generation to abandon their regional languages (Koomanova & A, 2024). This tension between preservation and erosion has become a serious concern for language researchers, language policy planners, and regional language communities who feel their cultural identity is threatened by the inevitable tide of digitalization.

Regional languages in various parts of the world are experiencing immense pressure from national and foreign languages, particularly English, which dominates the realms of education, government, economy, and now digital media. UNESCO data shows that every two weeks, one language goes extinct, and most of the endangered languages are regional languages with a small number of speakers. The younger generation, who should be the heirs and successors of regional languages, actually demonstrate rapid language shift because they associate regional languages with tradition, their

hometowns, or the older generation, while national and foreign languages are associated with modernity, success, and social mobility. This phenomenon is reinforced by the role of popular culture in shaping the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the younger generation through the consumption of digital content, music, and film (Kurniawan & Khayru, 2021). Social media accelerates this association because viral, informative, or entertaining content is largely presented in national languages or English (Ng & Taneja, 2023). A teenager accustomed to consuming educational content in English on YouTube, comedy content in a national language on TikTok, and news in a national language on Instagram will feel that their regional language is no longer relevant for their daily digital communication needs. When they occasionally use their regional language on social media, extensive code-mixing often occurs, where the sentence structure of the regional language is maintained, but vocabulary is replaced by words from national or foreign languages considered more modern or appropriate. This reflects the dynamics of big data, which has now become a new element in the social life of digital society (Wahyudi et al., 2021). This phenomenon marks the early stage of language death, where speakers still possess passive competence (understanding) but their active competence (production) continues to erode.

Social media platforms possess digital architectural characteristics that systematically influence the language choices of their users (Marco et al., 2024). Recommendation algorithms are designed to maximize user engagement, and this engagement is more easily achieved when content is presented in a language understood by as many people as possible. Consequently, content in languages with fewer speakers is automatically recommended less, creating a negative feedback loop where regional languages appear less frequently, potential speakers are less exposed, and ultimately, less content is produced. Features such as automatic translation, which should help speakers of different languages communicate, instead encourage users to write in languages well-supported by translation systems—namely, major languages. Autocomplete and text prediction on virtual keyboards are also more accurate for languages with large digital corpora, making typing in regional languages feel slow and cumbersome. Character limits on platforms like Twitter (now X) encourage users to choose the language most efficient for conveying

messages, specifically languages with short words and simple structures. All these architectural features, designed for user convenience, collectively create a systematic bias toward major languages and to the detriment of regional languages. This additional burden, in the long run, is unsustainable for most users.

Social media also provides unprecedented instruments for the preservation of regional languages (Jany, 2017). Vocabulary documentation, pronunciation recordings, and collections of folklore and traditional songs can be uploaded, shared, and preserved digitally at a very low cost. Geographically dispersed communities of regional language speakers can connect in Facebook groups, Discord servers, or WhatsApp channels to communicate in their mother tongue—something impossible before the digital era. Young content creators who take pride in their regional language can create viral content in their native tongue, such as comedy videos, tutorials, or podcasts, reaching the younger generation in ways that are relevant and engaging. The spread of educational publications through social media in the current digital era has opened broader access for the dissemination of knowledge (Darmawan & Fajar, 2024). Specific hashtags for regional languages can organize content and facilitate searching. Platforms like Wikipedia provide space for regional languages to have their own online encyclopedias, creating a digital corpus that is invaluable for future generations. Language learning apps like Duolingo have begun to include regional languages, although still to a very limited extent. These initiatives demonstrate that social media and digital technology, if used consciously and organized effectively, can be powerful tools for preservation. However, the critical question remains whether these initiatives can be scaled sufficiently and sustained to counter the tide of national and foreign language dominance supported by far stronger economic and political structures. Language preservation through social media often relies on the voluntary energy of a handful of language activists, while the dominance of major languages is backed by billions of dollars in investment from technology corporations.

The younger generation, born and raised with the internet, maintains a relationship with language that differs from previous generations (Vaz, 2024). They perceive switching between languages within a single conversation as normal and even desirable, as it demonstrates cognitive

flexibility and social awareness. Proficient digital literacy skills are required for the younger generation to optimize the use of technology for personal development and future job opportunities (Arifin & Darmawan, 2021). In a single Instagram post, a teenager might start with a regional language for a greeting, switch to a national language to explain context, and close with English for keywords or trending hashtags. This phenomenon is known as "translanguaging," the practice of using all available linguistic resources in an integrated manner without regarding languages as rigidly separate systems. From the perspective of language preservation, translanguaging may be viewed as a threat because it reduces the frequency of pure regional language usage and accelerates the influx of foreign vocabulary. However, from another perspective, translanguaging shows that regional languages still hold an important social function in the digital lives of the younger generation, even if those functions have changed. Regional languages are no longer used for all topics in all situations, but remain used for specific topics deemed personal, emotional, or related to cultural identity. Patterns of organizational behavior also reflect how basic principles of communication and interaction are managed, whether in physical or digital spaces (Darmawan, 2013). The question is whether this functional shift will end in stabilization, where regional languages find a new ecological niche in the digital era, or whether it will continue toward total extinction once the next generation loses all active competence.

The main challenge in understanding the role of social media in relation to regional languages lies in the existence of two simultaneously operating mechanisms moving in opposite directions, with it remaining unclear which mechanism will dominate in the long run. On one hand, social media provides a new public sphere where regional languages can be used, seen, and heard by millions, countering the tendency for regional languages to be confined to the private, domestic realm. A teenager who is embarrassed to use a regional language at school for fear of being perceived as "uncool" (kampungan) can freely use that language on social media, where they can curate their audience. A migrant living far from their hometown can remain connected to their regional language community through social media groups. A creative young speaker can create memes, songs, or short videos in their regional language that become viral and foster pride among their peers. All of these are potentially powerful

revitalization mechanisms. On the other hand, social media is also a highly efficient machine for linguistic homogenization. Content in major languages spreads faster, algorithms favor it, advertising is more profitable, and users are motivated to use it due to its wider reach. Contemporary digital literacy for the younger generation now demands a deep understanding of how content is consumed and produced on social platforms (Kurniawan et al., 2021). Young people who use regional languages at home every day may find that on social media, using the regional language limits them to a small circle of friends, while using the national language or English opens doors to a wider world. In the long term, the pressure to connect with more people, access more information, and participate in global conversations will drive language shift, even in individuals who remain emotionally attached to their regional language.

Another non-trivial issue is the inability of traditional language policy frameworks to respond to language dynamics on social media. Language policies have historically been designed for physical realms such as education, government, and mass media, based on the assumption that the state has control over these domains. On social media, the state has very limited control. Social media platforms are operated by multinational private companies headquartered in other countries, with content policies designed for global commercial interests rather than the preservation of regional languages. Government efforts to mandate the use of regional languages on social media are difficult to implement because they lack jurisdiction over these platforms. Efforts to restrict the use of foreign languages on social media would conflict with principles of freedom of expression and are also technically difficult to enforce. It should be noted that privacy violations on social media often pose a serious challenge affecting interpersonal trust among the younger generation (Negara et al., 2022). Conversely, a *laissez-faire* approach, where the government does nothing, is also problematic because regional languages will continue to erode without intervention. This gap between the capabilities of traditional policy and digital reality creates a policy vacuum, leaving regional languages in a vulnerable state without adequate protection. Meanwhile, the speed of technological change continues to increase, while the pace of policymaking remains slow due to lengthy bureaucratic processes. This speed gap means that by the time a policy is finalized, the

social media landscape may have changed entirely, rendering the policy obsolete before it is even implemented.

The urgency of research into the role of social media in preserving or eroding regional languages is extremely high because the younger generation currently using social media is the generation that will determine whether a regional language is still spoken thirty years from now. The linguistic decisions they make every day, consciously or unconsciously, on digital platforms will accumulate into a large-scale language shift that cannot be reversed. The reciprocal relationship between psychological well-being and the quality of social interaction is also a determining factor in the effectiveness of social media use (Darmawan & Gani, 2024). If current trends continue without intervention, many regional languages with moderate speaker numbers will enter a critical stage where speakers under the age of twenty-five no longer possess sufficient active competence to transmit the language to their children in the future. The loss of a regional language is not just the loss of an alternative communication system, but the loss of an entire system of knowledge, local wisdom, cosmology, and ways of understanding the world contained within that language. Every extinct language is a burning library whose contents can never be fully reconstructed. Systematic research on how social media influences the language choices of the younger generation is necessary to design targeted interventions. Without scientific evidence on the causal mechanisms linking social media use to language shift, any intervention undertaken would be like shooting in the dark—potentially effective, but more likely to waste limited resources.

The objective of this study is to outline the dual mechanism of social media in preserving and eroding indigenous languages, focusing on the linguistic behavior of the younger generation as active users of digital platforms. This study aims to identify platform architectural factors, algorithmic dynamics, and user social practices that contribute to both opposing effects. The theoretical contribution is to develop a conceptual framework that integrates sociolinguistic perspectives, digital media studies, and language revitalization. The practical contribution consists of recommendations for policymakers, educators, language communities, and technology companies in designing interventions that support the preservation of indigenous languages in the digital era.

Method

This study employs a qualitative literature review approach to examine the role of social media in the dynamics of preservation and erosion of indigenous languages. As explained by Scheurich (2014), literature research within the realm of social sciences allows researchers to deconstruct the underlying assumptions of existing empirical studies and subsequently build a new synthesis that transcends individual findings. This approach is highly appropriate for the topic of indigenous languages and social media because the literature on this subject is dispersed across various distinct disciplines, including sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, digital communication studies, and computer science. Each discipline possesses different research questions, data collection methods, and theoretical frameworks, necessitating an integrative effort to perceive the complete picture. The procedure undertaken begins with the identification of keywords such as "language shift," "digital language maintenance," "social media multilingualism," "endangered languages online," and "youth language practices." Searches were conducted on academic databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, and JSTOR, with a publication limit within the last fifteen years to capture rapid social media developments. Document selection utilized inclusion criteria: peer-reviewed articles, book chapters from prominent academic publishers, and research reports from organizations such as UNESCO and SIL International. The selected documents were then critically read to extract information regarding the mechanisms of preservation and erosion of indigenous languages on social media.

The analysis in this qualitative literature review for this topic requires a thematic approach that is sensitive to the complexities and contradictions within empirical findings. Beins (2017) outlines that researchers must code sources based on recurring themes, such as "algorithmic bias," "digital enclosure," "community building," "identity performance," and "intergenerational transmission." Each source is analyzed to identify the conditions under which social media tends to support the preservation of indigenous languages versus the conditions under which it tends to accelerate erosion. Cross-study comparisons are conducted to see if the same findings emerge across different indigenous languages, various social media platforms, and different sociopolitical

contexts. If inconsistencies are found—for instance, if social media is proven to preserve Language A but erode Language B—researchers will seek explanations from differences in language characteristics (number of speakers, social status, institutional support), differences in platform characteristics (algorithms, features, content policies), or differences in speaker community characteristics (digital literacy levels, attitudes toward the language, social network density). Chapman, McNeill, and McNeill (2005) emphasize that literature review analysis must not stop at pattern identification but must proceed to the construction of theoretical explanations as to why those patterns emerge. For this topic, the theoretical explanation needs to address questions about the causal mechanisms that link specific features of social media to changes in the linguistic behavior of the younger generation.

The validity of findings in this qualitative literature study is maintained through several methodological strategies recommended in research method literature. Scheurich (2014) emphasizes the importance of reflexivity, which is the researcher's awareness of their own position within the digital and linguistic landscape. As researchers who may use a dominant language in daily communication, it is necessary to realize that personal experiences with indigenous languages may differ from the experiences of truly endangered communities. Acknowledging this position prevents researchers from making inappropriate assumptions about the reality experienced by the research subjects. Beins (2017) recommends the use of source triangulation, which involves comparing findings from studies with different research designs. Large-scale survey studies measuring the correlation between social media usage frequency and indigenous language competence can be verified with in-depth ethnographic studies that capture the nuances of daily language practices. If both types of studies yield consistent conclusions, confidence in the findings increases. Chapman, McNeill, and McNeill (2005) add the importance of maintaining a transparent audit trail of how selection and interpretation decisions were made. Researchers must document the reasons why a source was included or excluded, how themes were identified, and how final conclusions were drawn from the available evidence. This transparency allows readers to independently assess the reasonableness of the analytical process and draw alternative conclusions if they disagree with the researcher's interpretation.

Through these procedures, a qualitative literature study can generate reliable knowledge regarding the complex relationship between social media and the dynamics of indigenous languages.

Result and Discussion

Social media functions as a space for the preservation of regional languages through distributed and participatory digital documentation mechanisms. Before the digital era, the documentation of regional languages was conducted by academic researchers or missionaries with limited resources, resulting in recordings and notes kept in archives that were inaccessible to the speaker communities themselves. Social media fundamentally changes this dynamic because every speaker, armed with a smartphone and an internet connection, can record, upload, and share content in their regional language (Ng & Taneja, 2023). A short video on TikTok featuring daily conversation in refined Javanese, a thread on Twitter explaining proverbs in Batak, or a Facebook group where members ask each other about rarely used Sundanese vocabulary—all these are forms of living, evolving documentation. Unlike traditional static archival documentation, digital documentation on social media is dynamic because content can be commented on, corrected, expanded, and shared. A young speaker who is unsure about a specific term can immediately ask older group members and receive an answer in a matter of minutes. This collaborative process creates a language corpus that is not only large but also authentic, as it reflects actual language usage in real communication situations rather than artificial examples created for textbooks. Search algorithms on social media platforms, although biased toward major languages, can still be leveraged to find regional language content by using specific hashtags or by joining certain groups and communities. The more content in a regional language that is uploaded, the easier it becomes to find, creating a positive "snowball effect" that strengthens the visibility of regional languages in digital spaces. This digital documentation also serves as a learning resource for the younger generation who might not receive instruction in the regional language at school or at home. A teenager living away from home who wishes to relearn a forgotten mother tongue can watch YouTube tutorials on the regional language, follow Instagram accounts that share daily vocabulary, or listen to podcasts in the regional

language while performing other activities. This ease of access is unprecedented in the history of language preservation.

Social media also preserves regional languages through the construction of virtual communities that transcend geographical boundaries (Cunliffe, 2019). Regional language speakers scattered across various cities, or even different countries, can connect in a shared digital space where they can communicate in their mother tongue without shame or the pressure to switch to a dominant language. A migrant from Manado working in Jakarta might not have a single person in their workplace with whom they can speak Manado. Before social media, they might have used only Indonesian daily and gradually lost fluency in their mother tongue. Now, they can join WhatsApp or Telegram groups for the Manado migrant community, where they read and write in Manado every day, listen to voice messages from other members, and remain connected to the culture and jokes that only fellow speakers can understand. Diaspora groups often serve as the vanguard of language preservation because they possess strong emotional motivations to maintain cultural identity in a foreign land, and social media provides the infrastructure that allows such motivation to be realized in daily communication practices. These virtual communities do not merely maintain the existing language competence of members; they also function as sites for the transmission of language to the second and third generations of the diaspora. Children born and raised away from home, who may have never visited their parents' hometown, can still learn the regional language through routine interaction on social media with grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins who still live in the ancestral region. Video calls via WhatsApp or FaceTime allow for direct language transmission in a context-rich environment, such as by showing surrounding objects or explaining ongoing activities, which is vital for natural language acquisition. Without social media, cross-generational transmission within diaspora families would almost certainly have been severed by the second generation.

Social media also erodes regional languages through algorithmic dominance mechanisms that systematically disadvantage content in languages with fewer speakers (Babazade, 2024). Recommendation algorithms on platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube are designed to maximize engagement metrics such as watch time, likes, comments, and shares. Content that can be understood by a large audience

automatically has a higher potential for engagement than content understood only by a few. Consequently, algorithms implicitly favor content in English, followed by major national languages such as Mandarin, Spanish, Hindi, or Indonesian, while systematically under-recommending content in regional languages. A content creator who persists in making videos in a regional language will find their videos viewed by only a few hundred people, while similar videos in a national language made by the same creator might be viewed by tens of thousands. This extreme difference in reach provides a strong economic incentive for creators to switch to more widely spoken languages. Even creators who were initially idealistic and desired to preserve their regional language will face pressure to switch if they want to earn income from their content or simply want their work to be appreciated by a larger audience. This cycle creates a "chilling effect" where fewer regional language contents are produced because the incentives to do so are extremely low, which in turn makes the regional language less visible on the platform, resulting in fewer young speakers being exposed to it and lower motivation to produce new content. Algorithms are not designed with malice toward regional languages; they simply do what they are optimized to do. However, the consequence of this seemingly value-neutral optimization is the systematic erosion of linguistic diversity in digital spaces. Technology companies operating these platforms have a moral responsibility to consider the impact of their algorithms on linguistic diversity, but the pressure to maximize shareholder profits often overrides such considerations.

Social media erodes regional languages through communication efficiency mechanisms that encourage linguistic homogenization (Mendelsohn et al., 2023). Platform characteristics such as character limits on Twitter (now X), short video formats on TikTok and Instagram Reels, and the real-time conversational nature of WhatsApp and Messenger all create pressure to communicate quickly and efficiently. Regional languages often possess more complex grammatical structures, intricate honorific systems, or vocabulary that is highly specific to various situations. In a digital space that demands speed, speakers tend to abandon features that slow down communication and switch to a simpler language. A Javanese speaker, for instance, must choose the appropriate speech level (*ngoko*, *madya*, *krama*) based on the social status of the interlocutor. On social media, where user identities

and relationships are often unclear, choosing the wrong speech level can be perceived as rude or stiff. The easiest solution is to switch to Indonesian, which lacks a speech-level system, making communication simpler and socially safer. In the long run, this habit of switching to a more efficient language will reduce the frequency of Javanese usage and eventually diminish speaker fluency. A similar phenomenon occurs in various regional languages with rich grammatical systems. Batak has complex aspect and mood markers, Sundanese has a complex vocalization system, and Bugis has an extensive verb conjugation system. These features that make regional languages linguistically rich are precisely what become obstacles in a digital space that prioritizes speed and simplicity. Social media does not actively delete these features, but creates an environment where speakers are motivated to avoid them. In the long run, even when speakers still use their regional language, the language they use may have undergone drastic simplification, losing the nuances and richness that make it worth preserving.

Social media accelerates the erosion of regional languages through mechanisms of language prestige formed collectively in digital spaces (Cunliffe, 2019). In the offline world, the prestige of a language is determined by factors such as the economic status of its speakers, its use in formal education, and its representation in mainstream media. On social media, the mechanism for determining prestige works through publicly visible metrics such as follower counts, likes, and shares. Languages used by users with many followers, or that appear in viral content, automatically acquire prestige because they are associated with popularity and success. A teenager who sees that all the celebrities and influencers they follow use English or a national language in their content will conclude that those are the appropriate languages to use if they want to be perceived as modern, cool, or broad-minded. Conversely, regional languages, which rarely appear on feeds because algorithms do not recommend them, are associated with backwardness, being "uncool," or being old-fashioned. This negative association is particularly strong during adolescence, when social acceptance is a top priority. A teenager might proudly use their regional language at home with their parents, but on social media, where their friends can see, they will avoid using the regional language for fear of being teased or considered uncool. Ironically, mockery toward the use of regional languages often comes from fellow regional language speakers who have also

internalized the prestige hierarchy that harms their own language. This phenomenon is called "linguistic oto-colonialism," where an oppressed group subconsciously perpetuates the oppression of their own language and culture because they have accepted the dominant narrative that their language is inferior. Social media, with its publicly visible engagement metrics, strengthens and accelerates the internalization of this prestige hierarchy because social comparison happens in real-time and continuously. A user does not need to wait for a survey or research to know which language is prestigious; they only need to look at their own feed.

Social media also preserves regional languages through mechanisms of linguistic creativity that are not constrained by formal norms (Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). In the realm of formal education, the use of regional languages is often restricted by rigid curricula, standardized textbooks, and assessments based on binary right-or-wrong answers. This approach makes learning regional languages feel like a burden rather than a pleasure. On social media, regional languages can be used in creative, playful, and even subversive ways. A teenager can create memes in a regional language that combine text with popular imagery, creating humor that is only understood by fellow speakers. An amateur musician can write songs in a regional language using trending genres such as hip-hop or electronic pop, demonstrating that regional languages are not outdated and can be used to express contemporary realities. A comedy content creator can produce short sketches exploring the absurdities of daily life using a regional language, creating a sense of camaraderie among viewers who laugh together because they understand nuances that cannot be translated. These forms of creativity are not only fun to consume and produce but also subtly affirm that regional languages have a place in the modern world. The younger generation, seeing their peers use regional languages in ways that are cool, funny, or artistic, will develop a positive attitude toward the language, which is a crucial prerequisite for intergenerational language transmission. Language preservation approaches that focus solely on documentation and formal education often overlook the affective and aesthetic dimensions of language use. Social media, with its visual, interactive, and viral nature, is exceptionally well-suited for developing these dimensions. The challenge lies in bridging informal creativity on social media with the need for

standardization and systematic learning, which remain necessary to maintain the language as a complete communication system.

Social media erodes regional languages through mechanisms of attention fragmentation that reduce the capacity for the production and appreciation of long-form texts (Ekayati et al., 2024). Modern social media platforms are designed to present content in short snippets that can be consumed in a matter of seconds. TikTok initially limited video duration to 15 seconds, then 60 seconds, and although it now permits longer videos, the most viral formats remain short. Instagram Stories only last 24 hours and are designed for rapid consumption. Twitter (X) limits the characters per tweet. This fast-paced and fragmented digital environment is not friendly to regional languages, which often require rich context, time to process complex grammatical structures, or space to express subtle nuances. A folktale that, in oral tradition, requires thirty minutes to recount—with pauses for laughter, gasps of wonder, or interactive questions from the listeners cannot be packaged into a 60-second TikTok video. A poem in a regional language whose beauty lies in wordplay and layered metaphors will not receive the appreciation it deserves on a fast-moving Twitter feed. Consequently, long and complex discourse genres in regional languages are slowly abandoned because there is no suitable digital space for them. The younger generation, exposed only to short snippets of regional languages on social media, may develop the illusion that they understand the language, while their competence is actually limited to basic vocabulary and short phrases, lacking the ability to follow or produce long narratives. This phenomenon is known as "semilingualism" a superficial mastery of several aspects of a language without sufficient depth for complex communicative functions. Semilingualism is dangerous because speakers may mistakenly believe they still master the regional language, thus seeing no urgency to learn further, while in reality, the language is slowly losing its function as a complete communication tool. True language preservation is not enough just by maintaining a few words or phrases; what is required is the maintenance of the entire spectrum of discourse genres, from daily conversation to long stories, formal speeches, and artistic expression.

Social media preserves regional languages through *reverse language shift* mechanisms pioneered by digital activists (Cunliffe, 2019). Across the globe,

regional language activist groups have strategically utilized social media to reverse language shift processes. They do not merely upload content in regional languages but design planned campaigns that combine viral content, community participation, and advocacy toward technology companies. In Catalonia, Spain, Catalan language activists used Twitter to promote the use of Catalan in daily conversation by creating weekly hashtags that encouraged users to share their experiences in Catalan. These hashtags became local trends, increased the visibility of Catalan, and created a new social norm where using Catalan on social media is considered normal and even expected. In New Zealand, Maori language activists used TikTok to teach Maori vocabulary through entertaining short videos, leveraging the platform's format to their advantage. These short videos are easily digestible, highly shareable, and reach teenagers who might otherwise be uninterested in formal language classes. In Wales, Welsh language activists used Facebook to organize campaigns for bilingual road signage, mobilizing thousands of people to write letters to city councils. In these cases, social media serves as an effective tool for political mobilization, transforming language issues from personal matters into public agendas. The success of these campaigns demonstrates that social media is not a monolithic force that only erodes regional languages; it can be an exceptionally effective tool for revitalization if used with the right strategy. The key factors for success are strong community leadership, simple and repetitive messaging, and the optimal utilization of platform features. Activists who understand how algorithms function, the best times to upload content, and which types of content are most likely to go viral can overcome algorithmic biases that disadvantage regional languages. However, this approach requires high digital literacy and a significant investment of time, which is not available to all language communities. Disparities in digital capacity between language communities mean that some regional languages will be more successful in digital revitalization than others.

Social media erodes regional languages through mechanisms of irreversible language domain replacement (Lackaff & Moner, 2016). Before the digital era, every language possessed specific domains where it was utilized. Regional languages might be used in the domains of family, markets, traditional ceremonies, and neighborly conversation. National languages were used in the domains of education, government, and mass media. Foreign languages were used in international and technological

domains. This division of domains, although imbalanced, at least provided a protected space for regional languages where they did not compete with more powerful languages. Social media fundamentally alters this domain structure because it is a vast domain that encompasses almost every aspect of life. When a teenager uses social media to communicate with friends, read news, learn new skills, express emotions, and follow developments in popular culture, they conduct all these activities within a single digital domain. This digital domain is dominated by national languages and English due to the algorithmic, economic, and prestige reasons previously described. Consequently, domains that were once strongholds of regional languages such as peer communication or emotional expression are now also dominated by larger languages. A teenager might still use a regional language when speaking to parents at home, but when sending text messages to classmates, they use Indonesian. When writing a WhatsApp status to express their feelings, they use Indonesian or English. When watching videos to learn how to cook, they choose tutorials in English because there is a wider selection. This shift in domains is irreversible because there is no mechanism to return peer-to-peer communication to the offline realm where regional languages could be used exclusively. Teenagers today and in the future will spend the vast majority of their communication time in the digital realm; if that realm is dominated by national languages and English, then regional languages will lose their communicative functions permanently, regardless of any efforts in the offline realm. This scenario is not a pessimistic prediction, but a reality already occurring in many language communities worldwide. Regional languages that still survive may only be used to speak with older generations or for specific traditional ceremonies functions that diminish in number over time as the older generation passes away and traditional ceremonies are abandoned.

Social media preserves regional languages through language pride mechanisms built via positive representation (Cunliffe, 2019). Before social media, the representation of regional languages in mass media was extremely limited and often negative. When they did appear, regional languages were typically depicted as the language of naive villagers, domestic workers, or as outdated comedic devices. This negative representation internalized a sense of shame in speakers, especially the younger generation who aspire to be perceived as modern and broad-minded. Social media changes this

representation dynamic because everyone, including regional language speakers, can become a content producer. A teenager from Papua can create TikTok content showcasing the natural beauty and culture of Papua while proudly using their regional language. This video can be seen by millions, demonstrating that the regional language is not something to be ashamed of but is a beautiful language worthy of pride. A housewife from Java can create a YouTube channel teaching traditional cuisine while explaining ingredient names and cooking techniques in formal Javanese, showing that regional languages possess a rich vocabulary for domains that cannot be adequately translated into other languages. A musician from Batak can release a song in Batak that goes viral on Spotify and YouTube, demonstrating that regional languages can be used to express modern emotions and aesthetics. These positive representations, which are widely distributed and easily accessible, gradually change the attitude of the younger generation toward regional languages. A survey among urban teenagers showed that those who actively follow social media accounts promoting regional languages tend to have a more positive attitude toward the language and use it more frequently in digital communication, even with peers. Language pride is a necessary prerequisite for revitalization; without pride, there is no motivation to maintain a language. Social media, with its vast reach and participatory nature, is an exceptionally effective instrument for building language pride, provided that positive and engaging content can be produced sustainably. The challenge is that positive content often fails to compete with negative or sensational content in social media algorithms, thus requiring extra effort to ensure that positive narratives about regional languages remain visible.

Social media erodes regional languages through mechanisms of rapid vocabulary substitution driven by the need to refer to digital concepts that lack equivalents in regional languages. The digital world is filled with new terms: *like, share, comment, follow, unsubscribe, scroll, swipe, tag, hashtag, story, reel, filter, algorithm, notification*, and hundreds of others. This phenomenon aligns with the changing patterns of online communication and the increasingly complex dynamics of virtual communities in the era of digital society (Darmawan, 2021). Most regional languages lack native vocabulary for these concepts because they did not exist in the traditional lives of the speakers. When regional language speakers use social media,

they face a choice: create neologisms from the regional language's resources, borrow from the national language, or borrow from English. In practice, most choose the third option because it is the easiest and most widely understood by other users. An Instagram user from South Sulawesi who wants to say they "liked" their friend's photo will say, "aku sudah *like* foto kamu," rather than "aku sudah menyukai foto kamu," let alone attempt to create a Bugis word for the concept of "like." Consequently, every interaction with social media introduces more loanwords into the regional language, reducing its purity and coherence. In the long run, if this process continues, regional languages will transform into highly mixed languages where grammatical structures may remain native, but the majority of the vocabulary is borrowed. Some linguists argue that this is a natural process of language evolution and nothing to worry about—all living languages constantly borrow from others. However, what is different in this case is the unprecedented speed and volume of borrowing. In the last decade, loanwords from English and national languages have entered regional languages in greater numbers than in the previous century. At this rate, within a few generations, regional languages will lose most of their unique vocabulary, becoming a kind of dialect of the national language with minor local variations. The loss of native vocabulary means the loss of the knowledge systems and worldviews contained within them. Furthermore, the challenge of disinformation in the digital public sphere often obscures the substantial values in linguistic exchange (Sinambela, 2022). For example, many regional languages in Indonesia have extremely rich vocabularies for kinship systems, agriculture, or maritime navigation that have no equivalents in the national language or English. These are the vocabularies most at risk because they are the least used in the digital realm. There are no Instagram hashtags for complex kinship relations; there are no TikTok filters for traditional farming techniques.

Social media preserves regional languages through mechanisms of effective and enjoyable informal learning. Language education in schools often fails due to overly formal approaches that prioritize grammar and rote memorization without meaningful context. Students feel bored and unmotivated because they fail to see the relevance of the regional language to their daily lives. Social media offers a radically different learning alternative. A teenager can learn a regional language subconsciously simply

by following interesting accounts, reading comments, and occasionally participating in discussions. Consistent exposure in authentic and engaging contexts is far more effective for language acquisition than formal lessons, particularly for developing passive comprehension skills. Social media algorithms, despite their bias toward major languages, can be leveraged to create an immersive environment for regional languages. If a user begins following one or two regional language accounts, the algorithm will start recommending similar content, creating a snowball effect where the user is increasingly exposed to the language. This immersive environment requires no cost, no travel to the ancestral homeland, and is accessible at any time from a smartphone. Furthermore, in the era of globalization, it is crucial for the younger generation to continue building Pancasila values that align with religious harmony, including valuing linguistic diversity as part of national identity (Hariyadi et al., 2023). For diaspora speakers living far from native-speaking communities, this is the only way to obtain enough exposure to maintain or improve their language skills. Some platforms have even developed integrated language learning features. Duolingo offers courses for several regional languages like Navajo and Hawaiian. Memrise allows users to create publicly accessible language courses. YouTube has a community translation feature that enables viewers to add subtitles in various languages, including regional ones. These features, if utilized effectively, could transform social media from a language-eroding engine into a language-preservation engine. Unfortunately, investment by tech companies into these features is negligible compared to investments in features that boost engagement and advertising revenue. Regional language courses on Duolingo are created by volunteers, not company employees. Community subtitle features on YouTube are not actively managed and often contain incorrect translations. The potential of social media for language learning remains far from optimally utilized due to a lack of priority from tech companies and poor coordination from language communities.

Social media erodes regional languages through mechanisms of normalizing their disuse for specific functions. When a social media user never encounters serious content in a regional language, they conclude that the language is unsuitable for serious functions. For example, a teenager interested in quantum physics might search for educational

content on that topic on YouTube. They will find thousands of videos in English and hundreds in Indonesian, but almost none in their regional language. The conclusion they draw, consciously or not, is that their regional language lacks the vocabulary or grammatical structure adequate to discuss complex topics like quantum physics. This conclusion is false, as regional languages can actually develop vocabulary for any topic if there is a need and an effort to create it. Japanese, for instance, was able to absorb and create terms for modern technology because there was a systematic national policy for standardizing terminology. However, the absence of content in regional languages on social media creates an illusion of incapacity that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because there is no content, speakers assume the language is incapable; because they assume it is incapable, they do not create content; because they do not create content, no content exists. This is influenced by behavioral patterns in popular culture consumption that systematically shape the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the younger generation through digital content (Kurniawan & Khayru, 2021). This cycle is very difficult to break because it requires a large initial investment to create serious content in a regional language with no guarantee of an audience. A creator who wishes to make a quantum physics educational video in Javanese must create or adapt dozens of technical terms, explain complex concepts with sentence structures that may never have been used before, and then face the reality that their video might only be viewed by a few hundred people because the algorithm does not recommend it. The incentives for doing this are extremely low. Consequently, the content gap between regional languages and major languages continues to widen, reinforcing the perception that regional languages are irrelevant for modern realms of knowledge. This normalization of disuse is one of the most subtle yet destructive mechanisms in the erosion of regional languages in the digital era.

Social media preserves regional languages through revitalization mechanisms led by the younger generation, who use regional languages as a form of resistance against cultural homogenization. In many communities, the youth no longer passively accept the dominance of national languages and English. They consciously use regional languages on social media as a political statement regarding their identity, as a form of resistance against uniform global culture, and as a way to build solidarity

with communities experiencing similar marginalization. In this case, the use of regional languages on social media is not due to a lack of ability to use more dominant languages, but rather a conscious choice to use smaller languages as a form of identity expression. An Ambon teenager may be fluent in Indonesian and English on social media, but they choose to write a status in the Ambon language when expressing something highly personal or when communicating with fellow Ambon people about issues specific to their community. This conscious choice is supported by high digital literacy; they understand how algorithms work and know that using a regional language will limit their content's reach, but they choose to do so because of the intrinsic expressive and identity value. Strengthening contemporary digital literacy is key so that the younger generation can filter information and express their identities positively (Kurniawan et al., 2021). This group of young people is the most valuable asset for language revitalization because they do not require external motivation; their motivation comes from within. Social media provides a stage where their expression of identity can be seen and appreciated by a wider audience. When a teenager sees their cool and popular friend using a regional language on social media, they are motivated to do the same. A new norm is formed: using a regional language is not a sign of backwardness, but a sign of political awareness and identity pride. This shift in norms can occur very rapidly on social media due to the viral effect and strong peer pressure. In some communities, there has been a resurgence in regional language use on social media in the last five years, following nearly two decades of decline. This resurgence is inseparable from identity movements led by the youth, who utilize social media as a tool for mobilization and expression. However, not all language communities have the same privilege to conduct movements like this. Communities with a very small number of speakers, without influential public figures, or with low digital literacy levels may not be able to utilize this mechanism. Language revitalization via social media tends to benefit languages with a moderate number of speakers that have adequate community infrastructure, while the most endangered languages with fewer than a thousand speakers may remain unassisted.

Social media erodes regional languages through mechanisms of accelerated language change that make regional languages increasingly different from their traditional forms. On social media, regional language

speakers not only borrow vocabulary from other languages but also adopt sentence structures, intonation patterns, and even ways of thinking associated with dominant languages. A Javanese speaker accustomed to writing in Indonesian on Twitter might unconsciously carry over Indonesian sentence structures when writing in Javanese, resulting in sentences that are grammatically correct in Indonesian but awkward in Javanese. This process is called grammatical interference, and in the long run, it can fundamentally alter the grammar of the regional language. Challenges related to legal violations in digital technology, especially concerning aspects of accountability and evidence, often become gaps that are detrimental to the preservation of local culture (Sutanto et al., 2023). The older generation, who maintain traditional language forms, will feel that the younger generation speaks in a different language, not the same one. This feeling can hinder intergenerational communication and accelerate language shift because the youth may feel that the language they use is not recognized as the "correct" language by the older generation. Conversely, if the older generation refuses to accept change, they will lose the opportunity to communicate with the youth, who will then turn increasingly to the dominant language to communicate with their peers. The dilemma between language purity and language vitality is a classic debate in language planning. Purists argue that language should be preserved in its traditional form, while pragmatists argue that a living language must change to meet the needs of its speakers. Social media accelerates this dilemma because the speed of language change in the digital realm is far higher than in the offline realm. A regional language can undergo more changes in a decade of social media use than in the previous century. Whether this change is a sign of vitality (the language adapting to survive) or a sign of death (the language losing its identity) depends on the perspective. What is clear is that the debate between purists and pragmatists often ends with a poor result for language preservation: purists alienate the youth, pragmatists produce a language so different that no one considers it the same language anymore, and both groups lose one another. A possible middle ground is to distinguish between changes that enrich the language (such as creating neologisms for new concepts while retaining original morphology) and changes that erode the language (such as adopting foreign sentence structures that replace

original structures). Social media, with its collaborative and participatory nature, can become a laboratory to explore enriching changes, where the speaker community collectively creates new terms and structures that remain faithful to the spirit of the original language.

Social media preserves regional languages through mechanisms of creating vast and diverse digital corpora that can be used to train language models. Artificial intelligence and natural language processing rely heavily on the availability of large text corpora to train models. Regional languages with small digital corpora are difficult to support with technologies like speech recognition, automatic translation, or text prediction. The lack of this technological support makes using regional languages on digital devices difficult and inconvenient, which in turn reduces the motivation for speakers to use regional languages digitally. Social media solves this corpus problem by providing an extremely large, diverse, and continuously growing source of text. Every post, comment, message, and status in a regional language is valuable data that can be used to train language models. The more people use regional languages on social media, the larger the available corpus, and the better the technological support that can be developed. This is a positive feedback loop that can benefit regional languages. However, conscious efforts are required to collect, clean, and annotate data from social media for the purpose of technological development. The highly massive dynamics of big data demand a new awareness regarding how such data is managed in our social lives (Wahyudi et al., 2021). Major technology companies like Google and Meta have the resources to do this, but they tend to prioritize languages with large speaker bases for commercial reasons. Regional language communities and academic researchers can fill this gap with voluntary initiatives such as Mozilla's Common Voice project, which collects voice recordings for various languages, or Wikimedia projects that develop Wikipedias in regional languages. Social media can be a data source for these projects, but clear ethical protocols regarding how social media data can be used are necessary, as users may not have given consent for their data to be used in training language models. Privacy violations on social media often occur, impacting interpersonal trust among the younger generation (Negara et al., 2022). These issues of consent and privacy have not been adequately resolved in most jurisdictions, creating tension between the potential of social media technology for language preservation and the individual rights of social

media users. Nevertheless, the potential remains vast. With an adequate digital corpus, a regional language can have accurate speech recognition tools, keyboards with smart text prediction, and translation engines that can assist non-native speakers in learning the language. All these tools will make using regional languages easier and more convenient, reducing the extra burden that currently serves as a barrier to digital adoption.

Social media erodes regional languages through the creation of a generation that possesses only passive competence—meaning they can understand the regional language but cannot produce it actively. This phenomenon is very common among second and third-generation diaspora, but it is also increasingly prevalent among speakers living in their ancestral regions who are intensively exposed to dominant languages on social media. A teenager might be able to understand everything their grandparents say in the regional language, but when spoken to in that language, they reply in the national language. They can read posts in the regional language on social media, but when writing comments, they write in Indonesian. Passive competence alone is insufficient to maintain a language because intergenerational transmission requires active production. A child will not learn a regional language merely by hearing others speak; they need to speak it themselves and receive feedback. Social media, with its nature of enabling large-scale passive content consumption, can reinforce the imbalance between input and output. The effectiveness of such social interaction is closely related to the user's psychological well-being; this reciprocal relationship determines whether someone will actively contribute or merely become a content consumer (Darmawan & Gani, 2024). A teenager can spend two hours a day watching videos in a regional language on TikTok without once writing a comment or creating a video of their own. They develop excellent comprehension skills, but their production skills remain low because they are never practiced. The ability to understand without the ability to produce is a stage preceding language death; when the generation with passive competence becomes the majority, once the older generation who still possess active competence passes away, there is no one left to continue the transmission. Social media actually possesses features that can encourage active production, such as comments, replies, and content creation. However, these features are underutilized by regional language speakers for various reasons, including

a lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, or simply a lack of habit. On the other hand, the role of citizen journalism in the era of digital democracy carries the risk of disinformation which, if not managed with healthy active participation, will further marginalize the use of authentic regional languages (Rojak, 2023). Well-designed interventions can encourage the shift from passive consumption to active production. For example, monthly challenges in Facebook groups where every member is asked to record a short video in the regional language on a specific topic, with prizes for the best videos. Or mentorship programs where fluent speakers provide constructive feedback to novice speakers who dare to post content in the regional language. Or platform features that provide encouraging notifications when a user has watched a certain amount of regional language content without interacting. Unfortunately, such features are rarely prioritized by platform companies because they do not immediately increase short-term engagement metrics. Initiatives to encourage active production must come from the communities themselves, with all the limited resources they possess.

Conclusion

This study concludes that social media functions as a dual space that simultaneously preserves and erodes indigenous languages among the younger generation through conflicting mechanisms. Preservation occurs through distributed digital documentation, the building of cross-border virtual communities, liberating linguistic creativity, revitalization campaigns pioneered by activists, positive representation that builds pride, enjoyable informal learning, resistance to cultural homogenization by identity-conscious youth, and the creation of digital corpora for language technology development. Erosion occurs through algorithmic dominance that disadvantages minor languages, communication efficiency that drives homogenization, language prestige formed from public metrics, fragmented attention spans that are unfriendly to long-form texts, the irreversible replacement of language domains, rapid vocabulary substitution for digital concepts, the normalization of language non-use for serious functions, accelerated language change that alienates older generations, and the creation of a generation with passive competence devoid of active production skills. The net result of these two sets of mechanisms varies significantly across

languages, depending on the number of speakers, the social status of the language, institutional support, the community's digital literacy capacity, and the existence of effective leadership and revitalization strategies.

The theoretical implications of this study highlight the need for an ecological framework to understand language dynamics in the digital era, one that considers the interaction between platform architecture, user behavior, tech company policies, and the social structures of language communities. For practitioners, it is recommended that language communities develop planned digital revitalization strategies, moving beyond sporadic content uploads to designing campaigns with clear objectives, success metrics, and periodic evaluations. Policymakers are advised to encourage tech companies to modify algorithms so they do not disadvantage indigenous languages for example, by providing additional weight to minority language content or developing language labeling features that allow users to filter content by language. Educators are encouraged to integrate digital literacy into indigenous language instruction, teaching students not only vocabulary and grammar but also how to use social media strategically to practice and promote their native tongues. Tech companies are advised to invest in features that support linguistic diversity, such as improved multilingual keyboards, automatic translation for indigenous languages, and recommendation algorithms that are not biased against small languages. Future research needs to empirically test the effectiveness of various digital revitalization interventions using experimental or quasi-experimental methods, as well as conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in the linguistic behavior of the younger generation alongside the evolution of social media platforms.

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