

EXPLORING CONTENT CREATORS' LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND MULTILINGUAL PRACTICES TO ENGAGE AUDIENCE IN THE INSTAGRAM

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Abstract

The rise of digital technology has transformed communication and content creation, particularly on social media platforms like Instagram. This study explores how content creators use English and multimodal elements to engage audiences, the challenges they face, and how their English learning experiences influence their content creation practices. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four Instagram content creators and an analysis of their digital artifacts. Findings reveal that content creators develop their English proficiency through formal education, self-learning via media exposure, and interactive digital communication. English is employed strategically to reach broader audiences, with creators combining it with their native language through code-switching. Multimodal elements, such as text, images, and audio, play a crucial role in enhancing engagement, enabling creators to convey messages effectively. Despite these advantages, challenges persist. Non-native English-speaking creators face difficulties in grammar accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary selection. To overcome these, they rely on tools like online dictionaries, AI-based applications, and audience feedback. The study also highlights that content creation fosters confidence in English use and enhances digital literacy skills. By examining the intersection of language learning, multimodal communication, and audience engagement, this research contributes to the understanding of English as a global language in digital spaces. The findings offer insights for educators, learners, and content creators seeking to navigate the evolving landscape of digital communication.

Keywords: Multimodal, Multilingual, Content Creator, Instagram, Audience Engagement

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital technology has changed the way people communicate, share information, and create content. In particular, social media platforms have emerged as dynamic spaces where users can explore various aspects of language in authentic contexts. One of the most popular social media platforms today is Instagram, which allows its users to share various types of content in multimodal formats, such as text, images, video and audio in order to convey the messages effectively (Grewal et al., 2022). Instagram has evolved into more than just a photo-sharing platform, it has become a digital environment where individuals and communities interact with each other, share information and create new communication trends. This shift has led to the increasing prominence of digital literacy, which involves not only the ability to consume digital content but also to produce and critically evaluate it (Falloon, 2020). Especially in an era where information is consumed at an unprecedented rate, the global connectivity provided by social media platforms has made them essential tools for communication and self-expression (Reza, 2024). In this context,

many content creators utilize Instagram to build audiences, share insights, and even develop their language skills.

Content creators often use more than one language in their posts as a strategy to reach a wider audience and increase engagement. The use of multiple languages in a single piece of content not only serves as a communication tool but also reflects the creator's own linguistic and cultural identity. Phenomena such as code-switching is often seen in digital content, where creators intentionally mix their languages to create a closer connection with their followers. English is one of the languages that many people use on social media and content creators often combine it with their native language since English serves as a global medium for reaching diverse audiences (Khranchenko, 2023). For example, content creators from Indonesia mix their native language to English in their posts to attract both local and global audiences.

One important aspect of creating engaging content on social media is the use of multimodal elements. Multimodality refers to the combination of different modes of communication, such as text, images, audio, and video, to convey messages more effectively and engage the audience. The integration of multiple modes of communication enables creators to amplify their messages, making them more engaging, relatable, and impactful (Isti'anah et al., 2021). On Instagram, content creators utilize various forms of multimodality to increase engagement, for example by combining engaging text in captions, aesthetically pleasing images or illustrations, and short interactive videos. This combination allows the audience to understand the message more easily, increases visual appeal, and strengthens the communication experience.

However, creating multilingual and multimodal content on social media is not without its challenges. Digital content creators must navigate a highly competitive and ever-changing digital landscape. To maintain relevance and engagement, they are often required to produce content that resonates with a diverse and global audience. This task demands not only technical proficiency in using various digital tools but also cultural sensitivity and an understanding of audience preferences. For non-native English speakers, additional challenges arise, such as ensuring linguistic accuracy, fluency, and cultural appropriateness while communicating effectively in a language that may not be their first (Ouanhlee, 2023). They must understand how to choose the most appropriate words, language styles, and communication strategies to make their content more engaging and easily understood by audiences from different language backgrounds.

The first study was conducted by Shamim & Riaz (2023). This study examines how digital multimodal communication impacts Generation Z's literacy in Pakistani higher education. The study finds that students increasingly use slang, colloquial language, and visual elements (GIFs, emojis) in digital interactions, signaling a shift from print to multimodal literacy. It highlights the need for educators to adapt teaching methods to enhance comprehension and engagement.

The second study was conducted by Puspawati & Siswadi (2022). This research investigates Instagram's role in shaping teenage self-image at Santy Sastra Public Speaking. Findings show that Instagram boosts confidence, self-expression, and identity formation but also promotes selective content sharing and occasional digital detox. While it enhances self-perception, the study warns of the risk of over-reliance on online validation.

The third study was conducted by Limatius (2023). This study analyzes Finnish social media influencers' use of multilingual and multimodal strategies in fashion and beauty. The study finds that influencers blend Finnish and English to engage diverse audiences while using visually appealing content and interactive elements for authenticity and branding. However, smaller influencers struggle with monetization despite innovative engagement strategies.

The fourth study was conducted by Batolu & Bustam (2022). Studies WHO's Instagram posts using a multimodal approach. Findings reveal that WHO strategically combines text and visuals to create engaging and informative health messages. While consistent visual presentation ensures clarity, diverse textual processing enhances emotional impact, demonstrating Instagram's effectiveness in public health communication.

The fifth study was conducted by Isti'anah, Rahmasari, & Lauren (2021). This research explores Indonesia's post-pandemic tourism promotion on Instagram. The study finds that images, captions, and hashtags work together to create an emotional connection, reinforce scenic representations, and subtly influence tourists' perceptions, making Instagram a powerful tool for tourism recovery.

The last study was conducted by Kamariah & Ambalegin (2019) which investigates code-switching on Instagram, identifying three types: intrasentential (within sentences), intersentential (between sentences), and tag-switching (single words/phrases). The study finds that users switch languages due to topic changes, vocabulary gaps, multilingual backgrounds, and social trends, reflecting the dynamic nature of digital communication.

While these studies provide valuable insights into the role of Instagram in literacy, identity, marketing, and multilingualism, they tend to focus either on general user behavior or specific institutional settings. There is a lack of research that specifically investigates how non-native English-speaking digital content creators integrate both multilingual and multimodal strategies to engage audiences on Instagram. This study fills that gap by focusing on Indonesian content creators, exploring how their English learning experiences influence their communication practices and the challenges they face when producing multimodal content in English. The novelty of this research lies in its combined analysis of linguistic strategy, multimodality, and language learning backgrounds within the real-world context of Instagram content creation—an area that remains underexplored in previous literature. Given the central role of digital content creators in shaping online discourse, understanding their practices and challenges is critical. In order to seek valuable insights into the intersection of language, technology, and creativity in the digital age, this study aimed to explore several key research questions. First, it examines how digital content creators use multimodal elements to enhance communication and engagement in English on Instagram. Second, it investigates the challenges and strategies of using English as the language for creating content on Instagram. Lastly, it explores how English learning experiences relate to communication practices in real-world contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2012; 2018) to explore how Instagram content creators learn and use English to engage their audiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and digital artifact analysis, allowing for an in-depth understanding of participants' language practices in social media contexts.

The participants consist of four content creators from Palembang selected through purposive and snowball sampling. The decision to involve four participants was based on the principle of data saturation, where recurring themes begin to emerge and no new insights are likely to surface. Saturation in qualitative research marks the point where data collection can cease, ensuring that the findings are both rich and robust through systematic thematic analysis (Naeem et al., 2024). These participants were selected because they met specific criteria set by the researcher, including: (1) frequent and active use of English in their Instagram content, (2) integration of multimodal elements (such as text, visuals, and audio), (3) consistent engagement with their followers, and (4) willingness to participate in interviews and provide access to their content. Therefore, this study involved four content creators with diverse areas of focus: two primarily producing English-language content, one specializing in beauty and fashion, and another concentrating on education and entertainment.

For data collection, interviews were conducted via Zoom using open-ended questions, focusing on participants' language learning experiences, challenges, and strategies in using English. In addition, digital content—including reels, photo posts, and Instagram stories was analyzed to examine the use of English and multimodal features. Two samples per participant were selected based on their use of English and multimodal elements. The accounts involved included @anggunms._ (>11,800 followers), @naomi_kurta (>4,327), @ziza.r22 (>823), and @m.fajar_ramadan0312 (>571).

Data were analyzed using two methods. Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify themes from interview data, highlighting participants' language learning journeys and content creation strategies. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012) was applied to digital content to examine how language, visuals, and design elements construct meaning and engage audiences in online spaces.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the findings related to the exploration of content creators' language learning experiences and their multilingual practices in engaging audiences on Instagram. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and content analysis of Instagram posts, stories, and videos shared by selected participants. The analysis focuses on how their language backgrounds, learning journeys, and use of multiple languages and modes of communication contribute to content creation and audience interaction on the platform.

Utilization of Multilingual and Multimodal Elements by Digital Content Creators to Enhance Communication and Engagement in English on Instagram

This subsection presents how Instagram content creators utilize multilingual and multimodal elements to communicate and engage with their audiences, particularly through the use of English. The data were analyzed employing framework of multimodal critical discourse analysis from Machin & Mayr (2012), focusing on visual, textual, and auditory elements combined with multilingual language use. Each participant used unique strategies that reflect both personal style and target audience engagement.

Participant 2: @anggunms._

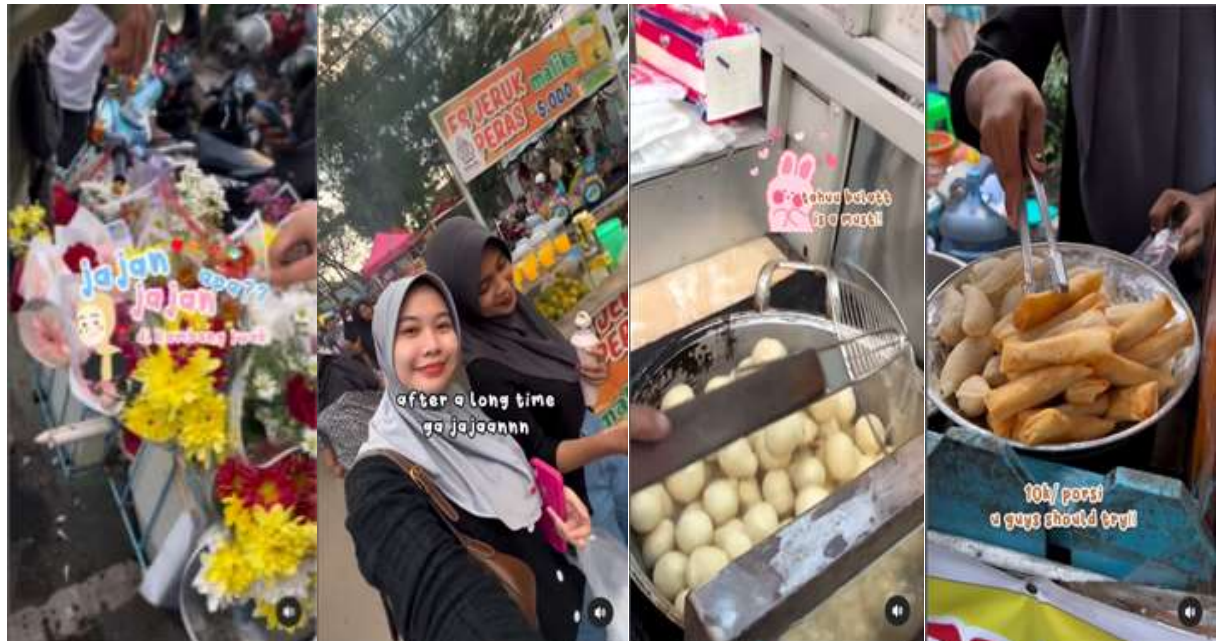


Figure 2 Capture of @anggunms._ video content

The audience engaged with this content through comments, likes, and views as in the video there are 4,326 views, 176 likes, and 2 comments (as of May 1st, 2025). The video was about food recommendations in Palembang especially in KI (Kambang Iwak). In this video the multimodal element that she used; text overlay that reads, “after a long time ga jajaannn” and others as in the video. This example of code-switching between English and Bahasa Indonesia demonstrates a relaxed and relatable communication style and also, she uses local language in spoken, stickers, hashtag (#palembangfood) since the content was about food recommendations, and she utilized back sound to help her content looks interesting and engaging for the audience. The video focuses on authenticity, with minimal editing, and incorporates gesture and facial expression to enhance interpersonal connection. While the language use is simple, it reflects spontaneous engagement in English, reinforcing her confidence and presence as a content creator.

Participant 3: @m.fajar_ramadan0312

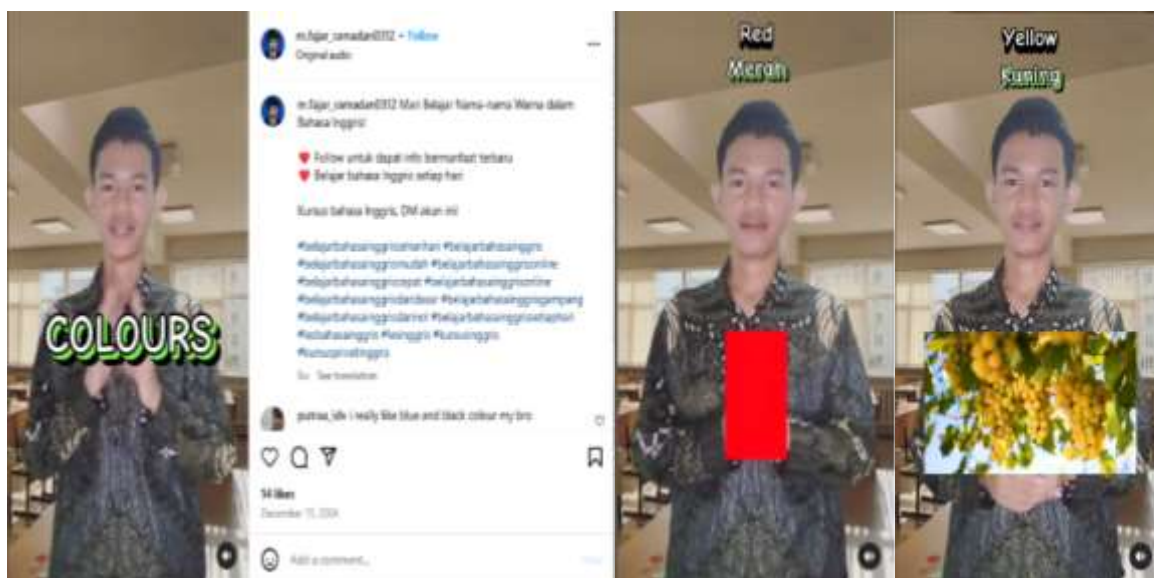


Figure 3 Capture of @m.fajar_ramadan0312 video content

This participant produces educational video content titled "Mari Belajar Nama-nama Warna dalam Bahasa Inggris." In this content, he uses clear multimodal strategies by combining visual aids, such as colorful objects, and multilingual to teach colors in the content. The word "Colours" appears in bold at the beginning to establish the topic. Each color (red, yellow, green) is accompanied by a matching object and labeled in both languages, effectively supporting the learning process and demonstrating a structured approach to using English for instructional purposes. Audience engagement can be seen through the total number of views, likes, and comments as in the video, there are 473 views, 15 likes, and 1 comment.

Participant 4: @ziza.r22

Instagram has many features in terms of sharing, including stories, reels, live, IGTV, etc. This creator is different from other creators. Those three creators utilize reels and IGTV to share their content, this creator uses Instagram stories in the form of pictures within only 24 hours to share her content. She makes content about English material, discusses it with her audience employing multimodal elements in the pictures of her content such as animation, stickers, GIF, and text related to the material that she discussed and it makes her content looks aesthetic as she mentioned in the interview. Because of the time only 24 hours, the viewers only can be seen at that time. The average of viewers ranging from 250 – 300s and for the quiz, the audience participation ranging from 50 – 70s. the viewers and audience participation only can be seen once.

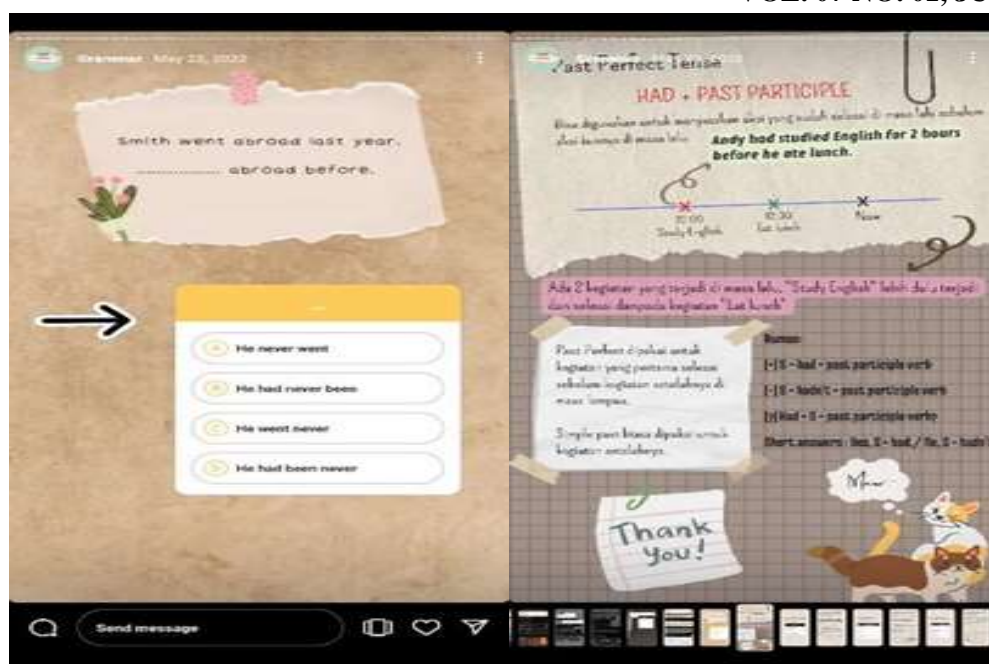


Figure 4 Capture of @ziza.r22 stories content

In these stories, she made content about the use of “had” and past participles. First, she made a quiz (picture 1) for the audience to answer the question in it. After that she made the explanation about that question. Even though the visual elements that she used not that much but she designed it very well, related to the context of the content itself. The content analysed of Instagram Stories feature still images accompanied by English text overlays. The text serves as brief narrative reflections or captions that convey mood and message. Though the content format is simple, her use of English within personal storytelling adds expressive value and promotes informal language practice. The stories are characterized by visual authenticity and emotional resonance, showing that everyday moments can serve as platforms for multilingual and multimodal engagement.

Challenges in Using English for Instagram Content Creation and the Strategies Employed by Creators

All participants employ code-switching in their content creation. This practice not only helps them to easily convey the messages but also helps them in gaining many audiences. Based on the result above, all creators face some challenges when making content in English such as they are afraid of grammar mistakes, the choice of vocabulary, and pronunciation. Despite those challenges, all creators shared the same strategies that they use to overcome it. They will check it first before they share the content on Instagram, the strategies include; look up on online dictionaries, using AIs and Google Translate.

When creators create content in English, they face some challenges since English is not their first language so they need to be careful before they share their content on social media especially on Instagram because it can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The first challenge that the creators faced is grammar mistakes. They are afraid if they make mistakes in grammar because on social media, there are some people that frequently correct other people's mistakes in grammar especially so that it creates a challenge for creators when

they use English in content creation. To avoid that, the creators use tools on the internet like Google Translate, online dictionary, and AIs.

The second challenge is the choice of vocabulary. Since not all of the people on social media understand and can use English, the creators must carefully choose the right vocabulary to explain what they want to share to the audience. Some participants mentioned that they will search for alternative words that are easy to understand for their audience and also change it into Bahasa Indonesia is one of the strategies that the participants employ in order to overcome this challenge. The third challenge is about pronunciation, the creators afraid that if they miss pronounce words it can cause misunderstanding to the audience. To avoid that, some creators use online dictionaries and google translate to help them in finding the best pronunciation before the content is shared.

The Influence of English Learning Experiences on the Creation of Multilingual Content on Instagram

The findings reveal the connection between participants' English learning experiences and their multilingual practices on Instagram. Most participants related their English skills to formal education, course, exposure to media, and social interactions.

All participants first learned English in school, where they were introduced to basic skills in English material. However, many felt that formal education alone was not enough to develop strong communication skills. Some participants also emphasized the importance of attending English courses, where they received structured lessons and practical opportunities to practice the skills. These courses provided greater exposure to English interactions, helping them gain confidence and apply their knowledge outside the classroom.

For many creators, Instagram became a real-world space for language application. By producing content in English, they were able to practice and refine their communication skills, which, in turn, increased their confidence. Some reported that creating English-language content not only improved their proficiency but also enhanced their public speaking skills, particularly when recording videos or engaging with audiences.

Furthermore, these language learning experiences influenced how they perceived themselves in digital spaces. Some mentioned that their audience viewed them as fluent English speakers, reinforcing their self-identity as content creators, educators, or influencers. Others stated that the experience of making content in English helped them develop a professional image, particularly those who used Instagram to promote their teaching or business ventures.

The findings suggest that English learning is not limited to traditional classroom settings; instead, digital content creation serves as both a product of and a tool for language learning. By continuously using English in their online content, participants are not only applying their language skills in real-world contexts but also improving their fluency over time.

In short, participants' language learning experiences includes both formal and informal, significantly influenced how they create and provide content on Instagram. These experiences shaped their language choice, confidence and self-identities in digital area. While English was the main language used, their multilingual practices on Instagram were influenced by their learning background and audience needs, making the content creation both as product and media to developed their language learning.

Discussion

Based on the findings of the study showed that all participants employed the combination of multilingual and multimodal elements as strategies to enhance engagement with their audiences. English was used as the primary language for global reach, but Indonesian and other local expressions including local language were strategically integrated to build intimacy and relatability with Indonesian audiences. In terms of multimodality, some elements such as picture, text, sticker, GIF, animation, and sound are helpful for creators in conveying messages effectively, it makes them feel easier in expressing their ideas to the audience and also makes the content interesting to be seen so that it can engage a large audience.

All creators utilize multimodal elements in order to engage their audience and convey the meanings effectively. This is in line with Isti'anah et al. (2021) who stated that the integration of multiple modes of communication enables creators to amplify their messages, making them more engaging, relatable, and impactful. Visual and sound are the main elements that creators employ in their content. The combination of visual elements such as picture, text, sticker, GIF, animation and sound elements such as creator's voice over and back sound increase audience engagement makes the audience feel comfortable and interested in viewing the content and also increasingly expressing their feelings and meaning in digital interactions (Shamim & Riaz, 2023). Besides the multimodal elements, creators create an interactive environment where audiences feel engaged rather than like passive customers by presenting themselves as entertainers or knowledge givers. Direct engagement strategies include calls to action, interactive components such as hashtag, polls, quizzes, and comments, and questions in the caption encourage active participation by fostering a sense of collaboration between creators and audience (Bellavista et al., 2019). Similar to a study by (Limatius, 2023) who emphasized the use of visually appealing layouts, interactive elements, underscores the importance of authenticity and personal branding in their content creation.

To further explain their message, creators frequently combine textual and spoken dialogue using mix languages, Bahasa Indonesia, English and local language in order to balance accessibility and participation. Similar to the research conducted by Limatius (2023) who analyzed Finland content creators in their language use which resulted in them employing Finnish and English in their communications, reflecting their adaptability to diverse audience demographics. The use of multilingual captions and subtitles provides understanding across a range of audiences. In other words, using mixed languages is beneficial for both creators and audience. It helps creator to reach bigger audience which is in line with Caingcoy (2020), who stated that non-native speakers often employ English to reach larger audiences, leading to a hybridization of language practices, it also helps audience who does not understand English become understand within the use of mix languages in the text overlay and spoken language employ by creators. Some creators switch their language due to the vocabulary choice that they never heard before and choose the vocabulary that is easy to understand to their audiences. This is in line with Kamariah & Ambalegin, (2019) who identified the main causes of code-switching; one of them is lack of vocabulary.

All creators present high modality since it determines the degree of realism and credibility in digital communication. Clear and high-resolution images, well-articulated speech, and detailed captions, enhance the authenticity and comprehensibility of content. Creators balance these elements by ensuring that their visual, textual, and auditory

components align with their intended message, maximizing clarity and engagement. The use of bright and contrasting colors frequently highlight the key information, making educational content more visually appealing. Also, softer colors are chosen for aesthetic appeal, particularly in beauty and lifestyle content. Typography is also a crucial element creators ensure that text is positioned clearly and does not obstruct other visual components. Well-structured layouts contribute to the overall readability and effectiveness of their posts and videos, ensuring that different multimodal elements work together cohesively.

By employing multimodal elements and using multilingual in content creation in order to engage audience in the Instagram, the audience engagement can be seen through Instagram features such as views, likes, and comments. All participants' multilingual and multimodal content had a higher average audience than their local language-only content especially if the content contained English and interactive elements.

Therefore, the findings of this study show that all participants employed code-switching in their Instagram content creation. This practice was used not only as a communication strategy to deliver messages more effectively, but also as a tool to reach a broader audience. This supports the statement by Darginavičienė & Ignotaitė (2020) who stated that users employ various means to enhance the visibility of their code-switched elements, which match with the trends of internet culture.

Despite the benefits, using English as a second language in content creation also presented challenges for the participants. These challenges include fear of grammar mistakes, difficulty in selecting appropriate vocabulary, and concerns about pronunciation. This aligns with Ouanhlee (2023), who pointed out that content creators often struggle with maintaining linguistic accuracy, fluency, and cultural appropriateness when communicating in a non-native language.

To address these challenges, participants indicated that they employed various strategies before disseminating their content. They utilize digital resources like online dictionaries, Google Translate, and AI-driven applications to verify grammar, identify appropriate vocabulary, and confirm precise pronunciation. These strategies assisted in minimizing the likelihood of misinterpretation or adverse feedback from the audience. Moreover, some participants opted to streamline their language or transition to Bahasa Indonesia when needed, to guarantee that their audience comprehensively grasped their message. In summary, using English in creating Instagram content enhances audience reach, yet it necessitates that creators remain attentive to the accuracy of the language used. The results confirm that content creators, particularly those working in a non-native language, must strike a balance between creativity and accuracy by leveraging available resources to enhance their linguistic confidence and engagement effectiveness.

The findings above showed that participants' English learning experiences through formal education, courses, media, and social interaction directly influence their multilingual content creation on Instagram. This supports Bin-Hady & Al-Tamimi (2021), who stated that media use enhances English skills. Content creation also boosts participants' confidence and fluency, turning Instagram into a practical language-learning space.

Their experiences shaped how they view themselves digitally, as also noted by Puspawati & Siswadi (2022), where language strategies affect self-perception. For some, producing English content helped build a professional image, aligning with Katsimene &

Eldås (2020) who identified content creation as a career path. Thus, participants' language learning informs both their content and identity in digital spaces.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that content creators acquire English proficiency through formal education, self-directed learning, and media exposure, with motivation stemming from personal interest, external influences, and practical benefits. Their frequent use of English in daily life, teaching, and online interactions further enhances their fluency. In content creation, English serves as both a tool for practice and a means of reaching a broader audience. Challenges such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary selection are common among creators, yet they employ strategies like double-checking their content, using AI tools, and leveraging multilingual approaches to overcome these difficulties. The study also highlights how content creation in English impacts their self-perception, branding, and confidence, reinforcing their identity as proficient English speakers and educators. In the end, this study highlights the dynamic interaction between learning English and creating digital content, showing how social media platforms function as informal yet efficient spaces for audience engagement and language practice. Making content more relatable and engaging requires the integration of multimodal elements like text overlays, pictures, audio, and interactive aspects.

Based on the findings and discussion of the research, the researcher makes several suggestions for digital content creators, for educators and learners, and for future research. For digital content creators, keep using social media as a platform for language practice and audience engagement, based on the findings above employing multimodal elements in the content are really helpful. For educators and learners, this study can suggest them to utilize social media especially Instagram as a media to teach and learn. Lastly, for future researcher this research serves as a reference for further research encouraging exploration of a wider range of content creation in English.

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