

## CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY IN DIGITAL DISCOURSE: THE ROLE OF CODE-SWITCHING AND EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE IN INTERACTION ON X

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines how identity is constructed and negotiated in digital discourse through slang, code-switching, and evaluative language on X (formerly Twitter). Grounded in Voloshinov's (1986) concept of evaluative accentuation and in Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural approach to identity, the study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic framework. A purposive sample of 50 posts (5,750 words) and their associated comment threads was collected across diverse thematic contexts, with 35 posts selected for in-depth analysis. The findings reveal that linguistic and paralinguistic resources, including hybrid language use, emojis, humour, and sarcasm, function as strategic semiotic tools for expressing stance, negotiating social relations, and performing identity. Code-switching constructs hybrid identities, while slang and evaluative expressions signal alignment and group belonging. Importantly, comment interactions demonstrate that identity is co-constructed through dialogic engagement. Future research should further explore larger datasets, cross-platform comparisons, and multimodal features to examine identity construction in diverse digital contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Identity construction; Computer-mediated communication; Code-switching; Evaluative language; Slang*

### **1. Introduction**

Language is not merely a neutral tool for communication, nor a static system of abstract rules confined to dictionaries or the individual mind; rather, it is a dynamic social practice through which identities are constructed, negotiated, and represented, while simultaneously reflecting deeply embedded cultural ideologies and values (Haroon et al., 2025; Saleem & Yasmin, 2024; Saleem et al., 2025). In the contemporary era of digitalization, this inherently social and performative nature of language has found one of its most vibrant expressions in social media environments, including platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook. These digital spaces have evolved into highly interactive arenas where users do not simply exchange information but actively perform, negotiate, and display complex social identities. In digital discourse, every post, comment, emoji, and meme functions as a semiotic trace of human interaction, revealing layers of meaning that extend beyond the surface structure of language (Baldauf et al., 2017; Farrukh et al., 2021). Consequently, the task of the linguist is not limited to interpreting explicit textual content. However, it involves "reading between the lines" to uncover how linguistic choices index identity, stance, and social positioning. This perspective aligns with contemporary discourse-analytic approaches that emphasize language as a site of identity work, rather than a mere vehicle of information transfer.

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in the work of Valentin Voloshinov (1986) and Bucholtz and Hall (2005). Within contemporary sociolinguistics, identity is conceptualized as a fluid, emergent, and interactionally achieved construct, continuously shaped through discourse

(Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Voloshinov's (1986) seminal work *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* further reinforces this view by situating language firmly within social interaction and ideology. For Voloshinov, meaning does not reside in isolated linguistic forms; rather, it emerges through dialogic interaction between speaker and audience. Crucially, he argues that language is inherently ideological; each linguistic sign becomes an "arena of struggle" where competing social groups assign different evaluative accents and meanings. This notion is particularly relevant in digital contexts, where diverse users engage in constant interaction, negotiation, and reinterpretation of meaning.

The Pakistani digital context offers a particularly compelling site for such analysis. Characterized by multilingualism, postcolonial linguistic hierarchies, and a rapidly expanding digital population, Pakistan represents a unique sociolinguistic landscape. Reports indicate that over 60% of the population actively engages with social media platforms (Suleman, 2025), making digital discourse a central space for communication and identity formation. In this context, users frequently draw on Urdu, English, and regional languages, as well as slang, emojis, and localized digital expressions. These linguistic practices should not be viewed as signs of linguistic degradation; rather, they function as sophisticated semiotic resources through which users construct hybrid identities that bridge local cultural traditions and global digital culture. Such practices enable the expression of identities linked to gender, youth culture, class, and national belonging (Al Zidjaly, 2019; Bhat, 2026; Diamandaki, 2003).

Despite the growing body of research (Huang et al., 2023; Pérez-Llantada, 2025; Saleem et al., 2022; Vásquez & Liska, 2023; Vohidova, 2025) on digital discourse and identity construction, several important gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature has focused either on macro-level identity categories or on specific platforms and communities, with limited attention to micro-level linguistic mechanisms, such as slang, code-switching, and evaluative language, through which identity is constructed in interaction. Second, while studies have explored digital identity in global contexts, there is comparatively less research that offers a contextually grounded, discourse-analytic account of Pakistani digital communication, particularly one that integrates both linguistic features and interactional dynamics (e.g., comment threads). Third, existing studies often treat posts as isolated units, overlooking the dialogic and co-constructed nature of meaning, which is central to understanding identity formation in social media environments.

Addressing these gaps, the present study aims to provide a systematic qualitative discourse analysis of a carefully selected dataset of social media posts and their associated interactions. Drawing on Voloshinov's concept of the utterance as a socially situated unit of meaning, this study conceptualizes each post and its comments as part of a dynamic dialogic exchange, shaped by audience, context, and ideology. The analysis focuses on four key dimensions: (1) linguistic practices, including slang and code-switching; (2) the use of emojis and paralinguistic features; (3) the construction and performance of social identities; and (4) tone, stance, and evaluative positioning. Ultimately, this study argues that social media should not be understood as a passive medium for communication but as a dynamic, dialogic space where identity and ideology are continuously produced, negotiated, and contested. In doing so, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do users employ slang, code-switching, and evaluative language to construct and perform identities in digital discourse on X?
2. How is identity co-constructed and negotiated through user interactions, particularly in comment threads, on X?

## 2. Literature Review

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed how identity is constructed, negotiated, and performed. Within contemporary sociolinguistics, identity is no longer conceptualised as a fixed or essentialized attribute; rather, it is understood as a fluid, dynamic, and discursively constructed phenomenon that emerges through interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This shift has been further intensified by the rise of computer-mediated communication (CMC), where identities are continuously shaped through linguistic and semiotic practices across diverse digital platforms.

Recent scholarship highlights that digital environment function as complex sociolinguistic spaces where local and global forces intersect. Al Zidjaly (2019) argues that social media platforms facilitate new modes of identity and community construction by enabling users to draw upon a wide range of linguistic and semiotic resources, including text, images, emojis, and multimodal cues. These environments challenge traditional sociolinguistic paradigms by foregrounding multimodality, mobility, and complexity, requiring new analytical frameworks capable of capturing the layered nature of digital interaction (Blommaert, 2016; Pennycook, 2018).

Moreover, the distinction between online and offline identity has become increasingly blurred. Digital discourse does not operate in isolation; rather, it reflects and reshapes offline social realities. As Rafi (2017) notes, identity construction in digital contexts is deeply embedded in sociocultural dynamics, including power relations, gender, and social hierarchy. It aligns with Foucault's (1980) notion of discourse as a site of power, where identities are continuously positioned and repositioned through interaction.

In multilingual contexts, language choice serves as a critical resource for identity performance. Bilingual and multilingual speakers strategically deploy linguistic features such as code-switching, translanguaging, and lexical innovation to index social meanings and negotiate identities (Myers-Scotton, 1998; Rampton, 2010). In digital discourse, these practices are amplified by the flexibility and informality of online communication.

Rafi's (2017) study of Urdu-English bilinguals in Pakistan demonstrates that code-switching operates as a salient marker of identity and social positioning. Participants employ a range of linguistic strategies, including language mixing, reduction, neologism, and paralinguistic features, to construct identities related to solidarity, power, and gender. Importantly, these linguistic choices are not arbitrary; rather, they are shaped by users' positions within social structures and reflect broader sociocultural hierarchies. The concept of translanguaging further expands this understanding by viewing bilingual practices not as the alternation between discrete languages but as the use of a unified linguistic repertoire (Jorgensen et al., 2011). In digital contexts, translanguaging enables users to navigate fluidly between local and global identities, creating hybrid linguistic forms that challenge traditional language boundaries.

Additionally, identity construction through language is closely tied to indexicality, whereby linguistic forms point to social meanings such as class, gender, and group affiliation (Silverstein, 2003). In CMC, even seemingly minor linguistic choices such as abbreviations, orthographic variation, or emoji use carry significant identity-related implications. Thus, bilingual digital discourse serves as a rich site for examining how language functions as a symbolic resource for identity negotiation.

Digital media platforms have reconfigured traditional power dynamics by enabling individuals to participate in content creation and identity representation actively. Unlike traditional mass media, where narratives are controlled by institutional actors, social media and platforms such as YouTube

allow users to construct and disseminate their own identities, often in response to dominant or hegemonic discourses.

Farrukh, Haidar, and Shehzad (2021) explore this phenomenon among Pakistani vloggers, demonstrating how digital media facilitates the construction of hybrid identities that simultaneously draw on local cultural norms and global influences. Their findings reveal that vloggers strategically present themselves as both culturally rooted and globally modern, thereby challenging stereotypical representations of Pakistani and Muslim identities. This hybridisation reflects the broader impact of globalisation, in which the interaction between local traditions and global discourses shapes identities. Theoretical frameworks such as micro-hegemonies (Blommaert & Varis, 2013) and investment theory (Darvin & Norton, 2015) provide valuable insights into these processes. Micro-hegemonies refer to the multiple, overlapping norms and expectations that individuals navigate in different social contexts. At the same time, investment theory highlights how language users strategically engage in linguistic practices to gain symbolic and material capital. In digital spaces, users continuously negotiate these forces through discursive practices, constructing identities that are both contextually appropriate and strategically advantageous.

Furthermore, digital media plays a crucial role in countering dominant narratives and reclaiming representation. Farrukh et al. (2021) note that Pakistani vloggers actively resist negative portrayals of Muslims in global media by presenting alternative, self-defined identities. This aligns with Hall's (1997) theory of representation, which emphasizes the role of media in shaping and contesting social meanings. Pakistan provides a particularly compelling context for examining the construction of digital identity due to its complex linguistic ecology and postcolonial history. The coexistence of Urdu, English, and regional languages create a dynamic sociolinguistic environment where language choice is closely linked to issues of identity, power, and prestige.

Rafi (2017) highlights those English functions as a language of prestige and global connectivity, while Urdu serves as a marker of national identity and cultural belonging. In digital discourse, these languages are often combined, reflecting the interplay between local and global identities. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of glocalization, in which global influences are adapted to local contexts (Robertson, 1995). The increasing accessibility of digital media in Pakistan has further amplified these dynamics. As noted by Farrukh et al. (2021), the rise of platforms such as YouTube has enabled individuals to engage in bottom-up identity construction, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. This democratisation of discourse enables more diverse and nuanced representations of Pakistani identity, highlighting digital media as a space for cultural negotiation and self-expression.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative discourse analytic framework to examine how linguistic resources, particularly slang, code-switching, and evaluative language, operate within contemporary digital communication. A qualitative orientation is adopted to enable a fine-grained, interpretive analysis of how meaning is produced, negotiated, and contested in computer-mediated discourse (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2018). Specifically, the approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how users construct identities, express stances, and position themselves within socially embedded interactional contexts.

### **3.2.Data Collection**

The dataset was drawn from the social media platform X, a digital environment characterized by high interactivity, linguistic hybridity, and informal communicative practices. An initial corpus of 50 posts (approximately 5,750 words) was compiled through purposive sampling. To ensure representational diversity, posts were selected across eight thematic domains reflecting varied sociocultural and communicative contexts: women's empowerment, rising inflation, marketing campaigns, Eid-ul-Fitr, everyday informal discourse, motivational content, rainy-day expressions, and war-related discussions (Saleem & Yasmin, 2024). These categories were chosen to capture a broad spectrum of affective, ideological, and situational expressions within digital discourse. The selection was guided by the presence of salient discourse features, including slang, humour, sarcasm, and code-switching, which are central to expressive and identity-oriented communication in online environments.

### **3.3.Sampling Strategy and Contextualization**

Following the initial compilation, a subset of 35 posts was selected for detailed analysis. This reduction was methodologically motivated to allow for depth-oriented, micro-level examination of linguistic patterns and interactional dynamics, consistent with qualitative research principles (Rafi, 2017). The sampling process prioritised posts demonstrating active user engagement, operationalised by a visible number of comments. This criterion reflects the inherently dialogic nature of digital discourse, where meaning is not produced in isolation but emerges through interaction among multiple participants.

Consequently, each selected post was analyzed alongside its associated comment threads, enabling the study to capture processes of meaning co-construction, stance negotiation, and identity performance across users. This inclusion of interactional data extends the analysis beyond monologic text to a more comprehensive understanding of discourse as a socially distributed phenomenon (Farrukh et al, 2021; Saleem et al., 2025). Furthermore, each post was interpreted within its situational and sociocultural context, including the event or theme to which it responds. Recognising that discourse is inseparable from context, this approach ensures that linguistic choices are analysed in relation to the broader social meanings and ideological frameworks that shape them.

### **3.4.Analytical Framework**

The analysis is anchored in a sociocultural discourse framework, integrating key theoretical perspectives to account for the relationships among language, ideology, and identity: Voloshinov's (1986) concept of evaluative accentuation, which posits that all linguistic signs are ideologically charged and that meaning is shaped by social evaluation and context. Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic theory of identity, which conceptualizes identity as an emergent, relational, and interactionally achieved construct. Guided by these frameworks, the data were analyzed across multiple interconnected linguistic and semiotic dimensions, including: a. Tone and stance-taking practices, b. lexical choice, including slang and informal registers, c. Code-switching and bilingual language use d. Emojis and other paralinguistic features. These features were examined not in isolation but as part of a broader semiotic repertoire, through which users construct meaning, signal social alignment, express evaluation, and negotiate interpersonal relationships.

### **3.5.Analytical Focus**

The analysis specifically investigates how these linguistic resources function to: a. Construct and perform individual and group identities; b. express attitudes, emotions, and evaluative positions; c. Negotiate social relations such as solidarity, authority, and alignment d. Reflect broader

sociocultural and ideological dynamics within digital interaction. By adopting this multi-layered analytical lens, the study captures the complex interplay between language, identity, and context in digitally mediated environments. Table 1 presents a curated sample of selected social media posts, along with their corresponding engagement metrics, example user comments, and thematic contexts. The table illustrates how diverse digital events and topics generate varied interactional responses, providing a foundation for analyzing identity construction through linguistic and paralinguistic features in online discourse.

**Table 1**

*Selected Social Media Posts, Engagement Metrics, Example Comments, and Thematic Contexts*

No.	Selected Post	Engagement	Example Comments	Events
1	<i>"Jab aurat naam main hi aura hai tu mardoon ko kis baat ka garoor"</i>	370 views	👍🔥; "There is something incredibly magnetic about a bold, assertive woman..."; "This kind of motivation makes my day."	Women Empowerment
2	<i>"Pakistaniyon, tum 500 rs litre bhi dalwa loge... Afsos!"</i> (F)	405 views	"Mulk se ghurbaat khatam karni hai ya gareeb?"; "Tum log road par aao 😞"; "Pakistani celeb struggling 😂😂😂"; 😞	Rising Inflation
3	<i>"Wow bhari bite. No breaking, only growing"</i> (O)	4M views	"Wao yummy 😋"; "Best solution for 🤢"; 👍; "Great offer"	Marketing Campaign
4	<i>"Aapnon ka sath Eid ho tu aur bhi pyari lagti hai"</i>	2M views	"We miss our family 😞😞"; "Eid apne mulk mein hoti hai 😞❤️"; "Everything has a cost 😞"; 🙏	Eid-ul-Fitr
5	<i>"Agar ap request nahi kar sakta tu expect bhi na karein."</i>	3M views	"Exactly 🙏"; "Clear boundaries 💪"; 🙏🙏; "No compromise on self-respect 🛑"	Everyday Discourse
6	<i>"Chill karo, guys, char din ki zindagi hai..."</i>	4M views	"Main roz chill karna sochti hoon but 😊"; "Problems aati jati rehti hain, face them 🔥🔥"; 🙏	Motivational
7	<i>"Rainy day vibes, some days bloom best under grey."</i>	1M views	"Cozy ☕"; "So beautiful ☁️"; "Awesome vibe ❤️"; "Surreal 🌧️😍"	Rainy Day
8	<i>"Iran must open the Strait of Trump... I mean Hormuz"</i> (C)	5M views	"Best comedian ever 😂"; "I appreciate the brand he smokes 😂"; "Make America great again 🇺🇸 → give him brain again ✅😂"	War/Politics



No.	Selected Post	Engagement	Example Comments	Events
9	“Feminism has got such a bad name...” (D)	102K views	“Feminism is not anti-men, it’s anti-oppression”; “This really spoke to me ❤️”; “She is right 🏆”	Feminism
10	“A long rant... I am just so angry!” (A)	3K views	“Madam ko paid campaign chahiya 🤨”; “Agree”; “Good shot 😂”	Expressive/Opinion

#### 4. Analysis and Interpretation

##### 4.1. Code-Switching and Identity Construction in Digital Discourse

Code-switching, defined as the alternation between two or more languages within a single discourse, emerges in this dataset as a strategic and meaning-bearing practice rather than a random linguistic phenomenon. Consistent with sociolinguistic scholarship, code-switching functions as a resource for identity construction, enabling users to index cultural affiliation, social positioning, and group belonging. From a Voloshinovian perspective, language acquires meaning only in interaction; thus, code-switching reflects the speaker's attempt to negotiate meaning within a dialogic, socially situated environment.

**Comment 1:** “*Jab aurat naam main hi aura hai tu mardoon ko kis baat ka garoor 🏆*”

This post provides a compelling illustration of how linguistic creativity enables ideological reconfiguration. The lexical manipulation of “*aurat*” (woman) to foreground the embedded English-derived “*aura*” represents a clear case of evaluative re-accentuation, in Voloshinov’s sense. Traditionally, the term *aurat* may carry culturally embedded associations of domesticity or limitation; however, the speaker reassigns it a new evaluative meaning associated with power, radiance, and agency. This shift demonstrates that linguistic signs are not fixed but are sites of ideological struggle, where dominant meanings can be contested and redefined. The rhetorical question “*mardoon ko kis baat ka garoor?*” (What are men proud of?) further intensifies this confrontation, positioning the utterance as a challenge to patriarchal norms. In this sense, identity is not merely expressed but actively constructed through resistance and reinterpretation, aligning with Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) view of identity as emergent and relational.

The presence of code-switching, Roman Urdu combined with the English-derived “*aura*,” plays a critical role in shaping this identity. The use of English here indexes modernity, global awareness, and symbolic capital, while Urdu anchors the discourse in the local cultural context. This blending produces a hybrid identity, simultaneously local and global, which is characteristic of digital youth discourse. Paralinguistic elements, particularly the emoji 🏆, further reinforce this identity performance. The emoji functions as a semiotic marker of confidence, femininity, and assertiveness, amplifying the evaluative stance of the utterance. This supports the view that meaning in digital discourse is multimodal, extending beyond lexical choices to include visual-symbolic resources.

The comment threads associated with this post illustrate how identity is co-constructed through interaction, rather than solely produced by the original speaker. Responses such as “Power,” 🔥, and 👍 function as evaluative alignments, signalling agreement with the re-accentuated meaning.

In Voloshinovian terms, these minimal responses still carry ideological weight, reinforcing and legitimizing the newly constructed identity of the "empowered woman."

More elaborate comments, such as references to boldness and strength, demonstrate how users actively extend the meaning of the original utterance, contributing to a shared discourse of empowerment. This process reflects the dialogic nature of digital communication, where meaning is continuously negotiated among participants. Importantly, these interactions illustrate that identity is not fixed within a single post but is collectively produced across multiple voices, aligning with the study's second research question.

**Comment 2:** "*Pakistaniyon tum 500 Rs litre bhi dalwa loge. Afsos! The nations that do not stand up for themselves deserve this and worse!*"

This post exemplifies how code-switching can be used to construct authority, distance, and ideological stance. The initial use of Roman Urdu ("*Pakistaniyon...*") establishes an affective and inclusive tone, positioning the speaker within the national collective. However, the subsequent shift to English "*The nations that do not stand up...*" marks a significant discursive transition. From a Voloshinovian perspective, this shift represents a change in evaluative accentuation. English, in this context, functions as a language of moral judgment and global discourse, lending the statement authority and universality. The speaker thus moves from being a participant within the community to a critic positioned above it, highlighting a tension between identification and evaluation. The lexical choice "*afsos*" (regret/shame) further intensifies the evaluative dimension of the utterance, embedding emotional and ideological judgment within the discourse. It reflects Voloshinov's argument that language is inherently ideological and evaluative, rather than neutral. The comment section reveals a more complex process of ideological negotiation and contestation. For instance, the response: "*Mulk se ghurbaat khatam karni hai ya gareeb?*"

reinterprets the original post by shifting the focus from public passivity to structural inequality and elite responsibility. It constitutes a clear case of re-accentuation, where the meaning of the discourse is reoriented toward a different ideological framework. Similarly, responses such as "*Tum log road pa ao 🙄*" highlight issues of agency and class division, suggesting that the burden of protest is unevenly distributed. The use of emojis such as 🙄 and 😞 reflects a passive, evaluative stance, signalling agreement with the critique while simultaneously expressing emotional exhaustion and limited agency. Conversely, mocking responses (e.g., "*Pakistani celeb struggling 😂😂😂*") demonstrate discursive resistance, challenging the speaker's authority and exposing underlying tensions between celebrities and the general public. The use of humour and sarcasm here serves as a counter-discursive strategy, enabling users to renegotiate power relations within the interaction.

#### 4.2. Slang and Informal Digital English

Slang and informal digital English emerge in this dataset as central semiotic resources through which users construct identity, express stance, and negotiate social relationships in computer-mediated communication. Consistent with prior research, slang is not merely a deviation from standard language but a socially meaningful linguistic practice associated with youth culture, in-group affiliation, and expressive communication (Trimastuti, 2017; Budiasa & Savitri, 2019). In the present study, slang operates alongside code-switching and paralinguistic features to form a multimodal repertoire for identity construction. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with Voloshinov's (1986) assertion that linguistic signs are inherently ideological and evaluative, and with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) framework, which views identity as emergent and interactionally

achieved. Slang, therefore, is not neutral; it carries evaluative accents that signal social positioning, emotional stance, and group belonging.

**Comment 1:** “chill kro guys, char din ki zindagi hai kitna stress lo g”

This post exemplifies how slang functions as a discursive strategy for identity performance. The lexical items “chill” and “guys” are key markers of globalized youth discourse, indexing informality, modernity, and cultural hybridity. Their use signals alignment with a digitally connected, English-influenced youth identity, while the accompanying Urdu phrases anchor the discourse within a local sociocultural context. The utterance reflects a clear case of code-switching as identity work, where the alternation between Urdu and English constructs a hybrid identity that is both locally grounded and globally oriented. It supports the view that bilingual practices in digital spaces are systematic and meaning-driven, rather than random. From a Voloshinovian perspective, the term “stress” carries a negative evaluative accent associated with burden and anxiety, while “chill” functions as a counter-evaluative term, promoting relaxation and emotional resilience. The repetition of “chill” across the post and comments further reinforces this evaluative stance, transforming it into a collective ideological position shared among participants.

The comment thread demonstrates how identity and meaning are co-constructed through interaction. Responses such as: “main roz chill krna sochti hn but 😊”, “indeed ❤️”, “face them and chill kro 🍌🍌” illustrate varying degrees of alignment, negotiation, and reinterpretation. The use of emojis (❤️, 😊, 🍌) plays a crucial role in this process, functioning as paralinguistic markers of stance and affect. These minimal responses, though brief, carry strong evaluative force, confirming Voloshinov’s claim that even the smallest utterances are ideologically charged. Importantly, these interactions construct a shared identity of emotionally aware, resilient, and socially connected youth, while also revealing subtle tensions between aspiration (“chill”) and lived experience (“but 😊”). It demonstrates that identity is not simply expressed but negotiated across multiple voices, aligning with the dialogic nature of digital discourse.

**Comment 2:** “Rainy day vibes, some days bloom best under grey.”

This post illustrates how slang and metaphorical language contribute to the construction of an aesthetic and affective identity in digital discourse. The term “vibes” functions as a culturally loaded lexical item that goes beyond its literal meaning, indexing a shared emotional and experiential framework common in contemporary youth culture. The phrase “bloom best under grey” represents a clear instance of evaluative re-accentuation, where a typically negative concept (“grey”) is reinterpreted positively. In Voloshinovian terms, this demonstrates how meanings are not fixed but are socially negotiated and context-dependent. The post constructs an identity that values introspection, emotional depth, and aesthetic appreciation, reflecting a shift from purely informational communication to experience-centred discourse.

The associated comments: “cosy 🛋️,” “surreal 🍌,” “😊,” “so beautiful ☁️” highlight the role of minimal evaluative utterances in digital communication. These responses rely on shared cultural knowledge and interpretive frameworks, allowing users to communicate complex meanings through concise expressions. Emojis play a central role in this meaning-making process: 🛋️ - warmth, comfort, intimacy; ☁️ - aesthetic alignment with the post’s theme; 🍌 - intensity and admiration; ❤️ /- emotional engagement. These symbols function as visual extensions of evaluative language, reinforcing the multimodal nature of digital discourse. They contribute to what can be termed a collective aesthetic identity, in which users align with a shared perception of beauty, mood, and experience.

The use of slang terms such as “*vibes*” and “*awesome*” also serves a boundary-marking function. While these expressions foster in-group solidarity among digitally literate users, they may simultaneously exclude those unfamiliar with such linguistic conventions. This dual function of slang as both inclusive and exclusive highlights its role in structuring social relations within digital communities.

### 4.3 Tone and function

The analysis of tone and function in digital discourse reveals that language operates not only as a medium of communication but as a strategic resource for evaluation, positioning, and identity performance. In line with the study's qualitative discourse-analytic approach, tone is examined as an interactionally achieved feature that emerges through lexical choices, rhetorical structures, and multimodal elements. Drawing on Voloshinov's (1986) concept of evaluative accentuation, the findings demonstrate that humour and sarcasm in digital communication are not merely stylistic devices but ideologically loaded practices through which users negotiate meaning and construct social identities.

**Comment 1:** “Iran must open the Strait of Trump, I mean Hormuz”.

This post exemplifies how tone is constructed through deliberate linguistic manipulation and evaluative positioning. The phrase “Strait of Trump, I mean Hormuz” represents a purposeful “slip” or mock correction, which functions as a discursive strategy of sarcasm. Rather than indicating an actual mistake, the substitution of “Trump” for “Hormuz” introduces a layer of irony that connects a serious geopolitical issue with a politically charged figure. From a Voloshin perspective, this substitution illustrates how linguistic signs are inherently multi-accentual. The word “Trump” carries a dense ideological load, invoking political associations, public perceptions, and evaluative judgments. By inserting this term into a geopolitical context, the speaker re-accentuates the discourse, transforming it from a neutral statement into a critical and humorous commentary. The tone, therefore, is not informative but mocking and evaluative, reflecting an implicitly critical stance toward political authority or decision-making.

It aligns with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) framework, which posits that identity is constructed through stance-taking and relational positioning. The speaker positions themselves as a critical, socially aware participant who engages with global political discourse through humour. The comment threads extend and intensify the tone established in the original post, illustrating how meaning is co-constructed through interaction. For example: “I truly appreciate the brand he smokes 😊”, “best comedian ever 😊”. These comments rely on ironic praise, where positive expressions are used to convey negative evaluation. This form of sarcasm depends on shared cultural knowledge and contextual interpretation, reinforcing the idea that meaning is not inherent in words but emerges through social interaction. The repeated use of the emoji 😊 plays a crucial role in signalling the intended tone. In digital discourse, emojis function as paralinguistic cues, clarifying the speaker's stance and guiding interpretation. From a Voloshin perspective, these elements contribute to the utterance's evaluative accent, ensuring that the audience recognizes the ironic intent.

**Comment 2:** “They have to open up Trump, I mean Epstein file, not sorry”.

demonstrates a process of discursive mirroring and transformation. By replicating the structure of the original post (“X, I mean Y”), the commenter participates in a chain of dialogic interaction, extending the humorous framework while introducing new ideological references. This reflects the inherently intertextual nature of digital discourse, in which users build on existing utterances to create layered meanings.

**Comment 3:** “make America great again ✘ time to give him brain again ✔🤔.”

This comment illustrates the role of multimodal semiotic resources in constructing tone. The use of symbols (✘, ✔) visually encodes rejection and approval, while the altered slogan introduces a sarcastic critique. This combination of textual and visual elements highlights the multimodal nature of evaluation, where meaning is distributed across linguistic and symbolic forms. Across the dataset, humour and sarcasm function as mechanisms for social alignment and identity construction. Users who engage with the post through similar ironic and humorous responses demonstrate interactional alignment, positioning themselves within a shared interpretive community. This aligns with the concept of intersubjectivity, where participants collaboratively construct a shared understanding of meaning.

At the same time, such discourse practices also create boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. The effectiveness of sarcasm relies on shared knowledge of political figures, cultural references, and communicative norms. Users who lack this background may find the discourse inaccessible, highlighting how language functions as both a unifying and differentiating social tool. From a Bucholtz and Hall (2005) perspective, this process reflects identity as relational and indexical. Through their participation, users index identities associated with digital literacy, political awareness, and humour competence, reinforcing their membership within a specific online community.

#### 4.4. Evaluative Language and Identity Negotiation

The post “Feminism has got such a bad name...” and its associated comments provide a rich site for examining how evaluative language, stance-taking, and interactional alignment function in the construction and negotiation of identity in digital discourse. This example demonstrates that meaning is not fixed in the original post but emerges through dialogic interaction among users, shaped by sociocultural context and ideological positioning. From a Voloshin perspective, the term “*feminism*” itself is a multi-accentual sign that carries competing evaluative meanings within Pakistani society. On one hand, feminism is often associated with negative ideological accents, such as opposition to men or deviation from traditional cultural norms. On the other hand, it is reinterpreted by certain groups as a discourse of equality, empowerment, and resistance to oppression (Saleem et al., 2021). This tension reflects Voloshinov’s notion that linguistic signs function as “arenas of struggle”, where different social groups attempt to impose their own meanings.

**Comment 1:** “Feminism is not anti-men, it is anti-oppression.”

It represents a clear instance of discursive re-accentuation, where the commenter actively redefines the meaning of feminism. Rather than accepting the dominant negative framing, the speaker reframes feminism as a universal principle of justice and equality. This shift in evaluative accent highlights how users engage in ideological negotiation, using language to challenge prevailing social narratives (Saleem et al., 2022). In doing so, the commenter constructs an identity aligned with progressive, equality-oriented discourse, positioning themselves against traditional or conservative interpretations.

**Comment 2:** “This really spoke to me ❤️.”

Similarly, this comment demonstrates affective alignment and personal identification. The phrase “spoke to me” signals that the discourse resonates at an individual level, while the white heart emoji (❤️) functions as a paralinguistic marker of sincerity, empathy, and emotional engagement. Within Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) framework, this can be interpreted as a process of

intersubjective identity construction, in which the commenter aligns with the values expressed in the post, thereby reinforcing a shared ideological stance.

**Comment 3:** “She is right 🏆.”

It represents a form of minimal evaluative endorsement, in which agreement is expressed concisely yet powerfully. The emoji 🏆 intensifies the evaluative stance, signalling certainty and strong approval. Such responses illustrate how digital discourse often relies on compressed yet highly meaningful expressions, where even brief utterances carry significant ideological weight. From a Voloshinovician standpoint, these minimal forms still embody evaluative accentuation, contributing to the overall meaning-making process.

From a Bucholtz and Hall (2005) perspective, the interaction illustrates how identity is constructed through: a. Stance-taking (e.g., agreement, support, reinterpretation) b. Relational positioning (aligning with or resisting dominant ideologies) c. Indexicality (linking linguistic choices to broader social meanings). Users who support the post construct identities associated with awareness, progressiveness, and social consciousness, while implicitly positioning themselves in opposition to traditional or patriarchal interpretations. This demonstrates that digital discourse functions as a space where individuals can reclaim and renegotiate contested identities.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digital discourse on platforms such as X, Instagram, and Facebook constitutes a dynamic, dialogic space of meaning-making, in which language serves as a central resource for identity construction and ideological expression. Through a qualitative discourse analysis of selected posts and their associated comment threads, the findings reveal that linguistic and paralinguistic features, particularly slang, code-switching, evaluative language, and emojis, operate as strategic semiotic tools rather than merely stylistic choices. These resources enable users to express a stance, negotiate social relationships, and position themselves within digitally mediated interaction. Consistent with the study's theoretical framework, the analysis supports Voloshinov's (1986) claim that language is inherently ideological and evaluative, with meaning emerging through interaction rather than residing in isolated linguistic forms. Across the dataset, utterances were shown to carry distinct evaluative accents, shaped by context, speaker intention, and shared cultural knowledge. Whether expressed through humour, sarcasm, or minimal responses such as emojis, users engage in continuous dialogic negotiation, reinforcing the view that meaning in digital discourse is fluid, relational, and co-constructed.

At the same time, the findings align with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural perspective, demonstrating that identity in digital environments is not pre-given but emergent and interactionally achieved. Users draw on hybrid linguistic repertoires combining local languages with global digital forms to construct identities that are simultaneously context-specific and globally oriented. Importantly, the inclusion of comment threads underscores that identity is not produced solely by individual speakers but is collectively shaped through interaction, emphasizing the centrality of co-construction in digital communication (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Saleem et al., 2021). While the study is based on a relatively small, purposively selected dataset, its aim is interpretive rather than generalizable. The findings nevertheless offer valuable insights into how contemporary digital users, particularly younger generations, employ language creatively to reflect their social realities, negotiate ideological positions, and build connections within online communities. In sum, this study conceptualizes digital discourse as a living linguistic ecosystem in which language, identity, and ideology are deeply intertwined. It underscores the need for future

research to explore further the micro-level linguistic practices and interactional dynamics that shape identity in increasingly complex, multimodal digital environments.

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