RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Communication through Shifting Lingua Franca: Surveying Followers' Perceptions of Influencers' Code-Switching in Social Media

Bongazana Dondolo[1] and Maria Mushaathoni[2]

Received: 21 February 2024 | **Revised:** 10 June 2025 | **Published:** 19 July 2025

Reviewing Editor: Dr. Grace Temiloluwa Agbede, Durban University of Technology

Abstract

The explosive growth of social media-enabled sharing and engagement has resulted in the emergence of content providers known as social media influencers (SMIs) who use different languages during engagements. This study investigated why SMIs feel the need to switch between languages and how their followers respond to this underreported and interesting phenomenon. The study explored social media followers' perceptions of influencers' code-switching behaviour (n=163). It used SPSS version 28 to conduct descriptive data analysis and to calculate the mean and standard deviation to gain insight into respondents' perceptions. The findings revealed that a significant proportion of the participants reported that the influencers whom they followed frequently employed code-switching during conversations. While English is assumed to be the de facto lingua franca of social media, the findings of this study contribute to the communication field by suggesting that influencers code-switch when conversing in English for many reasons. The results of this study provide insights into how influencers' code-switching is perceived by their followers during social media interactions. Factor analysis was performed, and it *revealed that the underlying followers' perceptions of social media influencers who code switch are related to lexical clarity, lexical deficiencies, and language meaning. This study also revealed that the most dominant perception was lexical clarity. Individuals or organisations interested in engaging influencers may find these results useful, particularly marketers who frequently use influencers for advertising purposes, as they can provide insight into influencer behaviour. Furthermore, social media influencers interested in knowing how followers perceive them when they code-switch may find these results useful.*

Keywords*: social media; influencers; code-switching; followers; lingua franca*

Introduction

The explosive growth of social media makes it possible for people to share and exchange maximum communication (Nwala and Tamunobelema, 2019). It has also resulted in the emergence of content creators who are known as social media influencers (SMIs), hereafter referred to as influencers. De Veirman *et al.* (2017) refer to these individuals as people who established a large network of followers on social media. They are known to create content that is viewed across the globe and frequently interact with their audiences. Influencers are thus viewed as "darlings" of social interactions for those who need to escape from the stressors of life. Clearly, through their personalities, followers find solace and enjoyment in their content. Concerted efforts to identify and characterise influencers have become a key focus in influencer research. One significant characteristic that sets out to define them is that they encompass a wide range of people, including artists, fashion experts, fitness trainers, and students. Analogous to celebrities, influencers are recognised and accorded celebrity status and respected in their respective fields and expected to share similar attributes with celebrities. This is in virtue of the conventional characterisation of celebrities in the marketing field, where they are regarded as famous personalities from various fields of entertainment, sports, the arts, etc. They are also known to be persuasive and may foster engagement between themselves and their audiences. Their down-to-earth approach and personable appeal explain how they could attract a large audience of fans (Gil-Quintana and Vida de León, 2021; Zhou *et al.*, 2023).

[1]Tshwane University of Technology, bongazana.mahlangu@gmail.com | https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5978-1708
[2]Tshwane University of Technology, MushaathoniM1@tut.ac.za | https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7911-4515

In most cases, it is expected that these influencers will make their conversations understandable to a wider audience of followers with diverse backgrounds. Yet, under certain conditions, this appears not to be the case, as the dynamic interaction between language use, cultural identity, and digital communication poses significant challenges. Despite the venerable history of code-switching research, long before YouTubers were seen transitioning from one language to another (Al-Oraibi and Himood, 2022), code-switching in social media has escaped the interest of most researchers. This study investigated how and why social media followers perceive influencers who code switch, an underreported and yet interesting occurrence. In spite of extensive literature on code-switching, most studies have focused on code-switching in schools, only. Other researchers have focused on non-English-speaking countries of the global north (Narayan and Kuar, 2022), and cross-cultural settings (Loscocco and Bose, 1998). These studies show that code-switching is considered a linguistic practice that involves the skill to switch seamlessly between varied languages or even combine them within a single sentence (Trask, 1999). Usually, the phenomenon is observed when the words that are used do not directly translate to English. Code-switching has been viewed as an effective alternative for a bilingual person to effortlessly switch between two languages depending on the context or the people they are communicating with (Saville-Troike, 2008). Thus, it transcends language boundaries.

With code-switching gaining traction and broad acceptance, mostly in the classroom, much less scrutiny has been given to code-switching in the space of social media influencers. While researchers in the field of social media have probably taken notice of the phenomenon of code-switching, there is still little illumination into its implications for effective communication. Although social media influencers certainly switch codes in their conversations, there is no theoretical understanding as to how their followers perceive this. Therefore, a gap exists. Where the present study points out the scarcity of studies on social media code-switching, Ting and Yeo (2019) proceed to note how not so much is known about code-switching in social media communication such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram (Gil-Quintana and Vida de León, 2021). There is a need to bridge this knowledge gap. Despite the newness of this phenomenon in social media, as pronounced by Gil-Quintana and Vida de León, admittedly, nothing much has been done in developing countries. This is especially evident in countries where multicultural and multilingual communities and linguistic variation are a part of everyday conversation (Woldemariam, 2016; Alshehri and AlShabeb, 2023). For example, in South Africa, a country with 11 official languages, this diversity gives rise to numerous language variants, influencing communication practices like code-switching. Despite social media being a dynamic tool for interaction, the literature on code-switching remains biased towards the global north. Therefore, this paper investigates social media followers' perceptions of influencers' code-switching.

Literature Review

Beginning from motives as to why people engage in code-switching behaviour (Kim, 2006; Inuwa *et al*., 2014; Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2021) to attitudes (Rukh *et al*., 2014; Kkese, 2020; Pluszczyk, 2023), code-switching research has come a long way. Code-switching, as it is understood in the sociolinguistic theory, serves as a tool for negotiating social identity and solidarity within groups (Rampton, 2018) and a vital communicative tool among bilingual speakers aiming to facilitate social interaction and identity expression (Albahoth *et al*., 2024). The Sociolinguistic Theory originates from the work of Labov (1972), which posits that social factors, including social identity, influence language use. This study is therefore guided by this perspective.

Syafutri and Saputra (2021) state that sociolinguistics is the use of a mother tongue language and how that influences the use of a second language. Simply stated, sociolinguistics refers to how people communicate with each other using the language. It argues that language is not a fixed system but an inherently flexible tool that speakers use to construct identity and linguistic meaning. The literature has pointed out that alternating between the variations of languages helps navigate diverse audiences. Sociolinguistic theory emphasises the relationship between language and social factors, such as identity (Tanimu and Nwaobasi, 2024), community (Bodó *et al*., 2022), and power dynamics (Vogel, 2022). This theory posits that language use, including code-switching, is influenced by social contexts and relationships among speakers (Agustine *et al*., 2021). It puts forward the role of social influences (Squires, 2013) in motivating individuals to engage in certain actions and how these can help in making behavioural adjustments. As a result, one of the key concepts in this theory is interactions (Amin, 2020; Bhatt and Bolonyai, 2022; Shodieva, 2023). Such interactions become more pronounced when there is linguistic diversity and may play an integral role in shaping human interactions. Inuwa *et al.* (2014) voiced out that such interactions signal group membership and convey nuanced Language meanings that are culturally specific. Residing on the importance of one's belonging to a group, interactions are used to broaden the audience base and

encourage a connection linked to cultural ties (Collins, 2005), an ideal for fostering social identification. During these interactions, speakers discuss topics pertaining to many issues and can be seen switching from one topic to another (Hynninen *et al.*, 2017). This is referred to as topical switching. According to Ayati and Widyastuti (2021), topical switching constitutes a motivational mechanism for reinforcing a discussion. Once a topic of discussion is initiated, switching between different codes may signal that linguistic meaning is to be assigned to a topic (Holmes, 2013). The decision to move between languages also requires that the linguistic meaning cannot be conveyed in another language except that of the speaker (Ayati and Widyastuti, 2021). The inclination towards a certain language for a topic may be due to the disparate competencies in the two codes (Nwoye, 1993). In situations like these, when people who are interested in the topic struggle to understand the linguistic meaning of terms that are not provided in their language, they undoubtedly may feel left out (Kroll *et al.*, 2018) and lost. Conceptually, topical switching determines code-switching behaviour.

Sociolinguistic theorists further explain lexical deficiencies as one of the reasons why people are seen as eager to switch between languages (Douaoudi and Guitoune, 2021; Al-Oraibi and Himood, 2022). The assumption that code-switching bridges the gap, especially when someone cannot access words or concepts in the immediate spoken language, is what leads to using a second language in the same conversation. Accordingly, Masna (2020) emphasised the necessity of mitigating a lack of vocabulary that characterises code-switchers within sociolinguistic theory. There is a strong belief that in such situations, the flexibility with which concepts may be accessed and carried over from one language to another becomes even more important for those who code-switch (Altarriba and Basnight-Brown, 2022). This becomes a challenge when language attrition occurs (Saville-Troike, 2008) as speakers may not find words and phrases to directly express the intended linguistic meaning (Pluszczyk, 2023). When this happens, the speaker usually knows the desired expression only in one language (Saville-Troike, 2008). Sociolinguistic theorists argue that such transitions are a precursor to expressing one's authentic persona (Napitupulu and Situmorang, 2022) and indicate a person's commitment to sincere interaction with their audience. These interactions sometimes contain the speaker's emotions and thoughts (Chen, Li and Yao, 2022). It emerges quite clearly from the literature that the concept of emotions is critical in understanding why people code-switch. Hamed *et al*. (2022) argue that a person may code-switch to convey feelings and attitudes or to distance one's self from emotional events. In highly intense emotional situations, Heredia and Altarriba (2001) state that people opt for a second language when they attempt to distance themselves from emotions.

Linked to this theoretical argument is another critical issue of ambiguity. It is said that repeating something in different languages may serve either to intensify or eliminate ambiguity (Saville-Troike, 2008). Saville-Troike (2008) noted that when ambiguity is assumed to be present, it occurs possibly due to the interaction with various cultural groups. Both ambiguity and emotions apply primarily to the situation where a person finds themselves in different social contexts, either at home, at work, or in formal settings (Van Kleef and Côté, 2022). This is supported by Doğruöz *et al.* (2021). when they argue that language code-switching assumes a direct relationship between language and the social situation. It is said that when people find themselves in a particular situation or context, they quickly adapt the languages they use to suit their circumstances (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2021).

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative research methodology, wherein a survey questionnaire was sent to social media users within and outside South Africa's borders. The reason for using a survey approach was its capacity to gather data from large populations efficiently, simplify the development and administration of the research questionnaire, and enable the generalisation of research findings (Malhotra, 2010). Furthermore, the survey approach allowed for the collection of a wide range of data, including demographic information, which could be used to analyse patterns and trends in social media usage across different groups. It included questions about the demographics of the participants and those related to perceptions about code-switching on social media. The study aimed to capture diverse perspectives and opinions by targeting social media users.

The survey was conducted online using Google Forms distributed via social media platforms. The researchers relied on social media to find participants through snowball sampling. This study adopts Sadler *et al.*'s (2010) definition of the snowball sampling technique, which usually involves starting with one person with the desired characteristics and using that person to recruit others with the same characteristics from the same population group. The sampling method was chosen because the people who follow influencers on social media are not easy to identify on social media platforms, and it can take some time to identify them. Each researcher posted on their personal social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp) and asked their social media friends to

share the survey link with others in their networks who met the participation criteria to reach more potential participants and increase the sample size. Participants in the snowball method were selected using a convenience sampling method. The researchers opted for this method because, according to Baltar and Brunet (2012), the snowball system is random in theory and difficult to implement in practice. After two weeks of slow responses to the survey, a survey reminder link was sent via email, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. With this technique, the researchers followed the arguments of Cook *et al.* (2000) that the response rate of online studies depends on personalised contact strategies. An important point to highlight is that due to budget constraints, it was a challenge to create multiple language versions of the questionnaire. Therefore, only an English version was used for the survey, with the choice based on the assumption that social media followers can read, write and understand English. The resulting sample size was 163 social media users in various South African provinces and neighbouring countries such as Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Swaziland.

The study utilised a cross-sectional research design. The participants' perceptions of code-switching by social media influencers were collected by self-report questionnaires, which consisted of a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and contained an operational definition of code-switching. The questionnaire was developed in English and consisted of a section on demographic information and a section investigating participants' perceptions of the influencer's code-switching behaviour. All the items in the questionnaire were measured on a five-point Likert scale anchored from 1= 'strongly disagree' to 5= 'strongly agree'.

Results

The first question asked the respondents whether the influencers they followed code-switched when chatting on social media. In this part of the questionnaire, the researcher used a yes/no question type to obtain the data.

Table 1: Do influencers use code-switching when chatting on social media?

	Frequency	Percentage
No	10	6.1
Yes	153	93.9
Total	**163**	**100.0**

The data presented in Table 1 reveals that a substantial majority of respondents, specifically 153 out of 163 (93.9%), reported that the influencers they followed engaged in code-switching during their social media interactions. In contrast, only 10 respondents (6.1%) indicated that their influencers did not employ code-switching. This significant disparity underscores the prevalent use of code-switching among the sampled participants. The high percentage of affirmative responses suggests that code-switching is a common practice, potentially serving as a strategic tool to enhance relatability and engagement with a diverse audience. The relatively small proportion of respondents who observed no code-switching may reflect either a niche audience preference or the specific linguistic practices of certain influencers. Overall, the data highlights the widespread occurrence of code-switching in social media communications among the influencers followed by the participants.

Table 2: Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	91	55.8
Male	72	44.2
Total	163	100

Amongst the respondents, 55.8% were female and 44,2% were male.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by home language

Home Language	Frequency	Percentage
Afrikaans	14	8.6
English	12	7.4
IsiNdebele	12	7.4
IsiXhosa	10	6.1

IsiZulu	7	4.3
Sepedi	9	5.5
Shona	3	1.8
siSwati	15	9.2
Sotho	18	11.0
Tshivenda	27	16.6
Tswana	21	12.9
Xitsonga	15	9.2
Total	163	100

In the group of respondents, 16.6% (*n* = 27) spoke Tshivenda, 12.9% (*n* = 21) spoke Tswana, 11% (*n* = 18) were Sotho speakers, 9.2% (*n* =15) were siSwati speakers, 9.2% (*n* = 15) spoke Xitsonga, 8.6% (*n* = 14) spoke Afrikaans, 7.4% of the respondents' mother tongue was IsiNdebele, 7.4% (*n* = 12) spoke English, 6.1% (*n* = 10) indicated they were IsiXhosa speakers, 5.5% (*n* = 9) indicated they spoke Sepedi, 4.3% (*n* = 7) spoke IsiZulu and 1.8% (*n* = 3) were Shona speakers; this is the multilingual representation of the language composition within the respondents of this study.

Extraction of code-switching perception factors

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify the factors associated with perceptions of code-switching, using principal component analysis and the varimax rotation method. Low factor loadings, cross-loadings, and low commonalities were removed to improve the factor composition (Malhotra, 2010). A margin of 0.50 was set for the loadings of the constructs. This is consistent with the results of Hair *et al.* (2010), which indicate that the loadings of factor more than 0.30 satisfy the minimum threshold; factors with values of 0.40 are considered significant, while factors with values of 0.50 and higher are viewed as highly significant. The Bartlett's test yielded a p-value of less than 0.000, a chi-square value of 856.717 and a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of 0.699. This confirmed the suitability of the dataset for factor analysis. The extracted factors account for a total variance of 64.8%, which means that the remaining 35.2% is due to extraneous variables that fall outside the scope of this study. Ultimately, a three-factor solution was determined based on the credible correlation of the items with the underlying factors.

Table 4: Rotated factor patterns and factor loadings of code-switching perceptions of followers of social media influencers

Influencers who switch codes from English to their home languages or from home languages to English can express themselves clearly in both languages.	**,722**	-,144	,218
Influencers who switch codes from English to their home languages or from their home languages to English may have difficulty understanding	,193	-,053	**,877**
Influencers who switch codes from English to their home languages or from home languages to English pollute languages	-,188	,397	**,690**
Influencers who switch codes from English to their home languages or from home languages to English are deficient in English	-,203	,479	**,599**
Influencers who switch codes from English to their home languages do so to give feedback to followers	,238	**,715**	,212
Influencers switch codes from English to their home languages or from their home languages to provide instructions	,099	**,816**	,101
Influencers switch codes from English to their home languages or from their home languages to English to explain issues	,410	**,656**	-,032
Code-switching via social media enhances the influencer's communication skills	**,642**	,379	-,142
Code-switching helps influencers convey new words easily	**,649**	,278	,052
Code-switching makes influencers feel more comfortable and confident	**,676**	,222	-,259
Code-switching allows influencers to express the ideas that I can't express	,492	,140	,014
I have the intention to interact with the social media influencer	,163	,064	,133
I predict that I will interact with the social media influencer	,071	,090	,031
I respect the influencer more when conversing in their home language and English	,213	-,057	-,262
I respect the influencer more when conversing in their home language	,073	-,026	,090
I respect the influencer more when conversing in English	,002	,171	,275

Note. Values in bold are the factor loadings greater than 0.50

Factor one, labelled Lexical Clarity, has four items and accounted for 12.29% of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 1.968. The items loading on this factor relate to positive perceptions of code-switching, including improved communication skills (.642), ease in communicating new words (.649), increased comfort and confidence (.676), and the ability to express otherwise inexpressible ideas (.492). For this factor, Cronbach's alpha was 0.738.

Factor two, labelled Lexical Deficiencies, comprised three items and accounted for 15.53% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 2.486 after rotation. The items loaded on this factor primarily relate to negative perceptions of code-switching by influencers, including difficulty understanding (.877), language pollution (.690), and English deficiencies (.599). The Lexical Deficiencies dimension showed good internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha of 0.743.

Factor three labelled Linguistic Meaning comprised three items and accounted for 14.70% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 2.353 after rotation. The items that are loaded on this factor relate to the motivational aspects of code-switching, including giving feedback to followers (.715), giving instructions (.816), and explaining problems (.656). The Cronbach alpha for social Language meaning was 0.746.

Perception towards factors in code-switching

The study investigated the social media's perceptions and motivation regarding influencers who code-switch. A one-sample T-test was performed to achieve the significance of the differences between the mean scores of the sample. Normality tests were also performed to conform to the assumptions in one sample T-test. The mean value of the Likert scale, 1-5, was used as the test value to compare the mean of the study's sample. The sample mean was compared with a neutral point of 3 using a one-sample T-test where ratings above this threshold (4 and 5) indicate a stronger agreement with the construct. Based upon the five-point Likert scale, a factor was deemed meaningful if it had a mean value of 3 or above. This signified that there was a noticeable difference between the sample mean and the test value. The population mean was fixed at an appropriate level of 3. The significance level was also set at 95 percent. P-values of less than 0.05 indicated significant differences in respondent's perceptions of code-switching. Table 5 shows the p-values were less than 0.05. This indicates that there were noticeable differences between the assumed mean (3) and the population means. Thus, the followers' perceptions of social media influencers who code-switch were significantly different. Furthermore, normality was not violated because Field (2009) indicated that normality values based on both skewness and kurtosis (positive or negative) should not be greater than 1.96 for small samples and not be greater than 2.58 for large samples (i.e. 200 or more). All normality indicators, as presented in Table 5, adhered to this rule of thumb. That is why the one sample T-test was performed.

The following results of a one-sample T-test are useful in ascertaining followers' perceptions of social media influencers who code-switch.

Table 5: *One sample T-test for social media influencers who code-switch*

	T	Degrees of freedom	Significant (2-tailed)	Mean	Standard deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness
Clarity of content	78,700	162	<0,001	3,8328	,62179	0.376	-0.543
Lexical deficiencies	46,537	162	<0,001	3,2924	,90326	-0.028	-0.679
Linguistic	58,754	162	<0,001	3,6442	,79187	1.084	-1.074

Every single factor shown in Table 5 contains T-test values that were greater than the hypothesised mean (test value) of 3. In addition, the p-values were all below 0.05 which intimates that every one of them is accepted. The results of the One-sample T-test analysis at a 95% confidence level showed that the mean value of the construct clarity of content (M=3,8328) significantly differs from its test value of 3, as the p-value (p <0,001) is less than 0.05, demonstrating that respondents perceive that influencers who code-switch do so because they want to clarify issues. Previous research suggests that clarity of content has the strongest impact on effective communication. These results provide valuable insights for improving communication strategies, particularly in contexts requiring precision and social relevance.

The one-sample T-test show that the mean value of Lexical Deficiencies significantly varies from its test value of 3, with a p-value less than 0.05. The mean value for Lexical Deficiencies is 3.2924, indicating that respondents

moderately agree with lexical deficiencies. This finding is consistent with studies highlighting that lexical challenges may hinder the effective conveyance of linguistic meaning and comprehension, necessitating careful word choices in communication. The results of the one sample T-test further revealed that the mean value of the construct Linguistic meaning (M=3.6442) significantly varies from its test value of 3, with a p-value less than 0.05. This value demonstrates that by reducing the ambiguity in communication, the linguistic meaning of what is communicated becomes clearer. The results further show Cohen's d effect size. The lexical clarity factor had an effect size of 1.339, suggesting a strong effect. Lexical Deficiencies has an effect size of 0.324, demonstrating a small but meaningful effect. Cohen's d-effect value for social and linguistic meaning was 0.813, indicating a strong effect. Overall, this suggests a generally positive perception of code-switching among respondents despite some concerns about language deficiencies.

Discussion

This study examined the perceptions of social media followers on influencers' code-switching behaviour. Research findings are based on factor analysis and One-Sample T-test. Factor analysis returned a three-component structure: lexical clarity, lexical deficiencies, and linguistic meaning. Lexical clarity consisted of four items. The items loading on this factor relate to positive perceptions of code-switching, including improved communication skills (.642), ease in communicating new words (.649), increased comfort and confidence (.676), and the ability to express otherwise inexpressible ideas (.492). The one sample T-test results strongly support this factor, displaying the highest mean score among all factors ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.62$, $t(162) = 78.700$, $p < 0.001$). This statistically significant result indicates that participants overwhelmingly perceive code-switching as helping in clarifying issues. Lexical clarity is the key factor for these respondents, as reported in the results of this study. Many studies argue that people employ code switching to repeat what they say to clarify matters. Similar conclusions were drawn by Istifci (2019) and Kkese (2020). This may explain why people frequently switch between languages to clarify the meaning of certain words (Caparas and Gustilo, 2022). Another important factor, as reported in the results of this study, is lexical deficiencies. The factor comprised of three items and accounted for 15.53% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 2.486 after rotation. The items loaded on this factor primarily relate to negative perceptions of code-switching by influencers, including difficulty understanding (.877), language pollution (.690), and English deficiencies (.599). The factor emerged as a reliable factor, showing a good internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha of 0.743. The one-sample T-test results for lexical deficiencies ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.90$, $t(162) = 46.537$, $p < 0.001$) confirm the statistical significance of this factor. These results suggest a tendency to struggle to find words and phrases for the direct expression of the intended language meanings (Pluszczyk, 2023), as a result of which they may unconsciously turn to code-switch. In many instances, a lack of vocabulary characterises code-switchers (Masna, 2020). Thus, when someone is unable to access words or concepts in the immediate spoken language, they immediately use a second language in the same conversation.

Providing language meaning is highly noticeable to those who code-switch. This factor consisted of three items and accounted for 14.70% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 2.353 after rotation. The items that are loaded on this factor relate to the motivational aspects of code-switching, including giving feedback to followers (.715), giving instructions (.816), and explaining problems (.656). The Cronbach alpha for Linguistic meaning was 0.746. One-sample T-test results confirm the significance of this factor ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.79$, $t(162) = 58.754$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that the efforts a speaker goes through in switching between different codes may be a signal that linguistic meaning is to be assigned to a topic under discussion (Holmes, 2013). Consequently, a speaker who lacks competencies in one language (Nwoye, 1993) may probably use a different language in those areas where providing ideas expressed in the conversation is required. In most cases, there are those who may feel left out even though they want to be part of the conversation (Kroll *et al*., 2018). As a result, the linguistic meanings of the words used are not being provided in the language they understand. To this end, the combined factor analysis and T-test results present a nuanced picture of followers' perceptions of influencer code-switching in social media. The findings of the study revealed that the participants believed that the influencers whom they followed frequently employed code-switching during conversations. It should also be noted that the findings reported in this paper do not represent an exhaustive list of opinions about code-switching, as many factors are responsible. However, it seems that code-switching continues to be a significant factor in everyday conversations. To some, code-switching may appear to trigger not only a state of confusion but also a state of being left out (Kroll *et al*., 2018) and lost. In general, the respondents in this study have favourable perceptions of code-switching. This is supported by Rukh *et al*. (2014), who found that students perceived teachers' code-switching as beneficial for the students.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate social media followers' perceptions of influencers' code-switching. Three factors, lexical clarity, lexical deficiencies, and linguistic meaning were extracted using exploratory factor analysis. The application of one sample T-test revealed that with values above a set point of 3, all mean values of factors were above the benchmark value. Lexical clarity emerged as the one with the highest mean values, followed by Linguistic meaning and lexical deficiencies in that order. All these factors were statistically significant. Although the results of this study could be used to gain insights into how influencers' code-switching in social media interactions, it still has some limitations and implications for future scholarly pursuits. First, certain methodological drawbacks call for further investigation. Although the factor extraction came up with a three-factor model and the KMO value of this study was adequate for conducting statistical analyses, future research with additional factors will be useful to see what other factors future studies might identify. Moreover, this study employed exploratory factor analysis and one sample T-test. There is a need for rigorous statistical analysis to assess the causal relationships between the factors. Another limitation is the fact that the data for this study was mainly collected from participants in the Southern region of Africa. Although there might be drawbacks to generalising the findings of this study, it could still open the door for comparative studies. The practical implication is that the findings of this study may be useful to influencers who code-switch as well as communicators who are interested in employing social media influencers in their communication strategy. With factors identified in this study, communication managers may be able to use influencers in targeting communication messages in the social media multicultural environments. These findings could also help social media influencers tailor their communication strategies for better engagement.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: The paper demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach through the integration of insights from communication studies, sociolinguistics and media studies. The convergence of these disciplines enables an in-depth examination of communication through shifting lingua franca by surveying followers' perceptions of influencers' code-switching in social media.

Author Contributions: Conceptualising (Dondolo); literature review (Dondolo and Mushaathoni); methodology (Dondolo); analysis (Dondolo); drafting and preparation (Dondolo); review and editing (Dondolo and Mushaathoni). All authors have read and approved the published version of the paper.

Conflict of Interest: The authors report no conflict of interest related to the work reported in this paper.

Funding: The authors received financial support for the publication of this paper from the Faculty of Humanities at Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa.

Availability of Data: The paper includes all relevant data. More information, however, can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

References

Agustine, S., Asi, N. and Luardini, M. A. 2021. Language Use in EFL Classroom Interaction: A Sociolinguistic Study. *International Journal of Language Education*, 5(4): 372-381.

Albahoth, Z. M., Jabar, M. B. A. and Jalis, F. M. B. M. 2024. A Systematic Review of the Literature on Code-Switching and a Discussion on Future Directions. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(2): 61-80.

Al-Oraibi, Z. Q. and Himood, Z. F. 2022. Codeswitching in Social Media Influencers' Speech: 'Iraqi Youtubers' – A Case Study. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 3: 8575-8586.

Alshehri, A. and AlShabeb, A. 2023. Exploring Attitudes, Identity, and Linguistic Variation among Arabic Speakers: Insights from Acoustic Landscapes. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 24(2): 1-16.

Altarriba, J. and Basnight-Brown, D. 2022. The Psychology of Communication: The Interplay between Language and Culture through Time. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 53(7-8): 860-874.

Amin, A. 2020. Attitude towards Language in Sociolinguistics Settings: A Brief Overview. *REiLA: Journal of Research and Innovation in Language*, 2(1): 27-30.

Ayati, I. and Widyastuti, T. 2021. Code-Switching in ESP Classroom Conversation: A Focus on Lecturer-Students Interaction at the University Level. *Akrab Juara: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Sosial*, 6(2): 56-66.

Baltar, F. and Brunet, I. 2012. Social Research 2.0: Virtual Snowball Sampling Method Using Facebook. *Internet Research*, 22(1): 57-74.

Bhatt, R. and Bolonyai, A. 2022. Multilingualism as an Object of Sociolinguistic Description. *Languages*, 7(4): 277.

Bodó, C., Barabás, B., Fazakas, N., Gáspár, J., Jani-Demetriou, B., Laihonen, P. and Szabó, G. 2022. Participation in Sociolinguistic Research. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 16(4): e12451.

Caparas, P. and Gustilo, L. 2017. Communicative Aspects of Multilingual Code Switching in Computer-Mediated Communication. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(2): 349-359.

Chen, F., Li, Q. and Yao, H. 2022. Understanding and Studying Internet Culture by the Tool of Internet Language. In: *2021 International Conference on Education, Language and A*rt. Dordrecht: Atlantis Press, 1045-1049.

Collins, W. M. 2005. Codeswitching Avoidance as a Strategy for Mam (Maya) Linguistic Revitalization. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 71(3): 239-276.

Cook, C., Heath, F. and Thompson, R. L. 2000. A Meta-Analysis of Response Rates in Web-or Internet-Based Surveys. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 60(6): 821-836.

De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V. and Hudders, L. 2017. Marketing through Instagram Influencers: The Impact of Number of Followers and Product Divergence on Brand Attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5): 798-828.

Doğruöz, A. S., Sitaram, S., Bullock, B. E. and Toribio, A. J. 2021. A Survey of Code-Switching: Linguistic and Social Perspectives for Language Technologies. Available: https://aclanthology.org/2021.acl-long.131.pdf (Accessed 17 June 2025).

Douaoudi, M. and Guitoune, W. M. 2021. Investigating the Use of Code Switching by Social Media Influencers on Instagram. Université Ibn Khaldoun-Tiaret, Doctoral Dissertation.

Field, A. 2009. *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Gil-Quintana, J. and Vida de León, E. 2021. Educational Influencers on Instagram: Analysis of Educational Channels, Audiences, and Economic Performance. *Publications*, 9(4): 43.

Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J. and Anderson, R. E. 2010. *Multivariate Data Analysis: A Global Perspective.* 7th edition. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson.

Hamed, I., El Bolock, A., Herbert, C., Abdennadher, S. and Vu, N. T. 2022. The Who in Code-Switching: A Case Study for Predicting Egyptian Arabic–English Code-Switching Levels Based on Character Profiles. *International Journal of Asian Language Processing*, 32(1): 2250010.

Holmes, J. 2013. *Women, Men, and Politeness.* London: Routledge.

Hynninen, N., Pietikäinen, K. S. and Vetchinnikova, S. 2017. Multilingualism in English as a Lingua Franca: Flagging as an Indicator of Perceived Acceptability and Intelligibility. In: Nurmi, A., Rütten, T. and Pahta, P. eds. *Challenging the Myth of Monolingual Corpora.* Leiden & Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 95-126.

Inuwa, Y. N., Christopher, A. A. and Bakrin, H. B. 2014. Factors Motivating Code-Switching within the Social Contact of Hausa Bilinguals. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(3): 43-49.

Istifci, I. 2019. Code-Switching in Tertiary-Level EFL Classrooms: Perceptions of Teachers. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 15(4): 1287-2019.

Kim, E. 2006. Reasons and Motivations for Code-Mixing and Code-Switching. *Issues in EFL*, 4(1): 43-61.

Kkese, E. 2020. The Role of Teacher Code-Switching and its Functions in the L2 English Classroom: Insights into CG Students' Attitudes at Tertiary Level Education. *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 29(1): 95-120.

Kroll, J. F., Dussias, P. E. and Bajo, M. T. 2018. Language Use Across International Contexts: Shaping the Minds of L2 Speakers. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 38: 60-79.

Labov, W. 1972. Some Principles of Linguistic Methodology. *Language in Society*, 1(1): 97-120.

Loscocco, K. A. and Bose, C. E. 1998. Gender and Job Satisfaction in Urban China: The Early Post-Mao Period. *Social Science Quarterly*, 79(1): 91-109.

Malhotra, D. 2010. The Desire to Win: The Effects of Competitive Arousal on Motivation and Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 111(2): 139-146.

Masna, Y. 2020. EFL Learners' Code-Switching: Why Do They Switch the Language? *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 8(1): 93-101.

Napitupulu, M. H. and Situmorang, S. 2022. The Influence of Digital Influencers on Linguistic Evolution in the Javanese Language. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan dan Humaniora*, 11(1): 18-34.

Narayan, R. and Kuar, M. 2022. Code-Switching as a Conversational Lubricant in the Literature Classrooms: An Explanatory Study Based on the Opine of Fijian High School ESL Teachers. *International Journal of Linguistic Literature and Translation*, 5: 157-172.

Nwala, M. A. and Tamunobelema, I. 2019. The Social Media and Language Use: The Case of Facebook. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 10(4): 9-13.

Nwoye, O. G. 1993. Code-Switching as a Conscious Discourse Strategy: Evidence from Igbo. *Multilingual,* 12(4): 365-386.

Pluszczyk, A. 2023. Students' Motivations, Reasons and Attitudes to Code-Switching: A Questionnaire Study. *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny*, 36-457.

Rukh, S., Saleem, N., Javeed, H. G. M. and Mehmood, N. 2014. Students' Attitudes towards Teachers' Code-Mixing/Code-Switching to L1 and Its Influence on their L2 Learning: A Case of Business Students in Sargodha. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 3(5): 1111-1116.

Sadler, G. R., Lee, H. C., Lim, R. S. H. and Fullerton, J. 2010. Recruitment of Hard-to-Reach Population Subgroups via Adaptations of the Snowball Sampling Strategy. *Nursing and Health Sciences*, 12(3): 369-374.

Saville-Troike, M. 2008. *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Shodieva, M. 2023. Understanding Sociolinguistic Approach in the English Classroom. *Modern Science and Research*, 2(10): 64-68.

Squires, L. 2013. It don't go Both Ways: Limited Bidirectionality in Sociolinguistic Perception. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 17(2): 200-237.

Syafutri, T. and Saputra, A. 2021. The First Language Interference toward Students' English Speaking as Foreign Language. *Linguists: Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 7(1): 39-51.

Tanimu, Y. and Nwaobasi, C. E. 2024. Sociolinguistic Study of Language, Social Identity and Behavioural Patterns of Keke Operators in Lafia Metropolis. *African Journal of Humanities and Contemporary Education Research*, 14(1): 164-172.

Ting, S. H. and Yeo, D. K. L. 2019. Code-Switching Functions in Facebook Wallposts. *Human Behavior, Development and Society*, 20(3): 7-18.

Trask, R. L. 1999. *Key Concepts on Language and Linguistics*. London: Routledge.

Van Kleef, G. A. and Côté, S. 2022. The Social Effects of Emotions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 73(1): 629-658.

Vogel, S. 2022. Attending to and Transforming Power Dynamics in Translanguaged Research Relationships and Methodology. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*, 1(3): 100021.

Wardhaugh, R. and Fuller, J. M. 2021. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Zhou, L., Jin, F., Wu, B., Chen, Z. and Wang, C. L. 2023. Do Fake Followers Mitigate Influencers' Perceived Influencing Power on Social Media Platforms? The Mere Number Effect and Boundary Conditions. *Journal of Business Research*, 158: 113589.