

## Code-Switching as Digital Identity Performance: Gendered Expression on Indonesian TikTok

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**ABSTRAK.** Penelitian ini mengkaji praktik alih kode dalam konten video TikTok Indonesia sebagai strategi linguistik yang berperan dalam pembentukan identitas digital dan representasi gender. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan analisis wacana multimodal, studi ini menganalisis 30 video TikTok yang diproduksi oleh pengguna berusia 15–30 tahun yang secara eksplisit mencampurkan bahasa Indonesia dan Inggris. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa alih kode digunakan secara strategis untuk fungsi emotif, penegasan makna, gaya komunikasi kekinian, serta sebagai penanda identitas sosial dan gender. Selain itu, alih kode juga berfungsi menarik perhatian, memperkuat daya ingat audiens bilingual, serta mencerminkan dinamika ideologis dan simbolik dalam masyarakat digital. Perempuan cenderung menggunakan alih kode dengan gaya yang lebih ekspresif dan afektif, sementara laki-laki lebih sering menggunakan alih kode untuk menyampaikan pesan tegas atau humoris. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa alih kode di media sosial bukan sekadar fenomena linguistik, melainkan praktik performatif yang kompleks, yang sarat makna sosial, kultural, dan politis dalam ruang digital yang algoritmis dan terpolarisasi.

**Kata kunci:** alih kode; identitas digital; TikTok; gender; pragmatik sosial

## Code-Switching as Digital Identity Performance: Gendered Expression on Indonesian TikTok

**ABSTRACT.** This research examines the practice of code-switching in Indonesian TikTok video content as a linguistic strategy that plays a role in the formation of digital identity and gender representation. Through a descriptive qualitative approach with multimodal discourse analysis, this study analyzes 30 TikTok videos produced by users aged 15-30 who explicitly mix Indonesian and English. The findings indicate that code-switching is used strategically for emotive functions, meaning reinforcement, contemporary communication style, and as markers of social and gender identity. Additionally, code-switching also serves to attract attention, strengthen the memory of bilingual audiences, and reflect the ideological and symbolic dynamics in the digital society. Women tend to use code-switching with a more expressive and affective style, while men more often use code-switching to convey assertive or humorous messages. These findings emphasize that code-switching in social media is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but a complex performative practice that is laden with social, cultural, and political meanings in an algorithmic and polarized digital space.

**Keywords:** code switching; digital identity; TikTok; gender; social pragmatics

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the development of digital technology has brought fundamental changes in the way individuals, particularly the youth, communicate, express themselves, and shape their social identities. Amid the increasingly complex and dynamic social media ecosystem, TikTok has emerged as one of the most dominant and influential platforms. With its fast, creative, and easily accessible short video format, TikTok has become not only a medium of entertainment but also a social space that allows users to craft and showcase an ideal version of themselves to the public. This makes the choice of language in TikTok content very important—not merely as a passive medium or communication tool, but as an active space for the formation of social identity,

cultural representation, and linguistic performativity (Wulandari et al (2025).

In this context, language plays a crucial role as both a tool and a symbol. In digital spaces like TikTok, language is no longer used merely to convey information; instead, it is employed to shape personas, strengthen social affiliations, and negotiate symbolic positions within the digital society. Users consciously choose language styles, speech varieties, and even code-switching as communication strategies as well as representations of social identity. This phenomenon aligns with Almoaily's (2023) view that code-switching occurs

rs not only due to lexical limitations but also serves various social functions such as indicating group membership, affirming identity, expressing emotions, or enhancing message attractiveness. In the digital context, code-mixing can also be a strategy to adapt to the audience or to assert cultural identity Wulandari et al (2025) Mona (2024).

One of the most popular forms of linguistic practice on TikTok Indonesia is code-switching between Indonesian and English. This use of code-switching not only reflects bilingual skills or global trends but also serves as an indicator of how the younger generation constructs the meaning of their identity in specific social situations. Recent research shows that hearing code-switching can enhance bilingual attention and memory towards linguistic content around the points of language transition Salig et al (2025). This effect occurs because code-switching acts as a linguistic signal that directs the listener's attention to important information, thereby strengthening the encoding and retention of the message. On the other hand, language selection on open platforms like TikTok tends to favor languages with global reach, such as English, to expand the audience Ramadhani (2024) Khuluq et al (2024).

However, behind the seemingly casual linguistic expressions, this practice contains a deeper ideological dimension related to national identity, disparities in linguistic access, and symbolic exclusion of groups lacking similar competence. In an algorithmic and competitive digital context like TikTok, code-switching can also serve as an exclusive mechanism—not all users have the access or linguistic capacity to engage in this practice effectively. As noted by Seddik et al. (2024), gender also influences the strategies and frequency of code-switching, with women often using it as a form of representation of social or educational status.

The novelty of this study lies in the exploration of code-switching as a performative action of digital identity closely related to gender and the symbolic capital of language. Many previous studies have focused on code-switching in oral communication or in educational contexts, but there is still little research examining how code-switching on platforms like TikTok plays a role in shaping public personas based on gender dynamics Seddik et al (2024) Farida et al (2018). Research by Almoaily (2023) and Wulandari et al. (2025) shows that code-switching strategies are heavily influenced by rhetorical goals, the platform used, and the intended audience—factors that can interact with gender variables on TikTok to form online representations.

On the other hand, the dominance of the use of English overly mixed with Indonesian raises critical questions about the sustainability of national linguistic identity and the potential symbolic marginalization of regional languages and users from non-privileged backgrounds. This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Garg (2024) and Schächinger Tenés et al. (2023) that language choices in the digital realm not only reflect linguistic competence but also reveal social hierarchies and power dynamics. This opens up space to explore how language is used not only to convey messages but also as a tool for negotiating power, social affiliation, and resistance to dominant norms.

For this reason, this research becomes important because it not only discusses code-switching from a purely linguistic perspective, but also from the dimensions of performative-identity, gender representation, and language politics in the digital space. This approach combines three important discourses: (1) the performative function of code-switching in shaping digital identity, (2) the relationship between attention, memory, and bilingual experience in receiving linguistic messages Salig et al (2025), and (3) the social and ethical dimensions of code-switching in an increasingly complex and polarized digital public space (Wulandari et al., 2025).

By understanding how language is used on TikTok to shape and negotiate social identities, this study is expected to make a concrete contribution to the efforts of preserving linguistic diversity, cross-cultural understanding, and creating inclusive digital literacy policies. To address this objective, it is important to understand the theoretical foundations regarding code-switching, its role in the formation of digital identities, the influence of gender factors, cognitive impacts on attention and memory, as well as the ideological and political implications of language in digital spaces. This understanding will be elaborated on more deeply in the following literature review.

## LITERATURE STUDY

In the context of modern digital environments, social media has become a space for interaction that not only facilitates communication but also serves as an arena for users to negotiate identity, social affiliation, and cultural values through language practices. One of the most prominent forms of language practice in the digital space is code-switching, which is the alternation of languages within a single utterance or communication interaction. Poplack (1980) classifies code-switching into three main types: insertion (insertion of elements from a second language), alternation (switching between

languages in different syntactic units), and congruent lexicalization (lexical mixing in the same grammatical structure). In social media, these forms often appear in comments, captions, or video narratives, and functionally develop further than just meeting lexical needs. In line with Almoaily's view (2023), code-switching occurs not only due to language limitations but also serves to mark identity, indicate group membership, express emotions, and enhance the appeal of messages.

In the context of digital media, Androutsopoulos (2006) emphasizes that code-switching has performative and symbolic functions, where the choice of language used reflects aspects of identity that one wishes to display, such as proximity to global culture, social class affiliation, or connection to a particular community. Research by Zhou and Fu (2025) even highlights the stylometric function of code-switching, that is, its use as a stylistic strategy to shape discursive identity or to obscure meaning in sensitive contexts, including hate speech and content that could potentially violate platform policies. Lee's (2017) study on Instagram and YouTube also shows that the use of two languages is often utilized to manage relationships with the audience, build emotional closeness, and strengthen a sense of informality. In the framework of translanguaging, García and Wei (2014) add that social media users often flexibly utilize their entire linguistic repertoire without separating languages based on formal systems, thus blurring the boundaries between languages and making them more fluid.

Language in the digital space functions not only as a communication tool but also as an instrument for the formation of digital identity. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identity is a dynamic construct shaped through linguistic practices in social interactions, while Page (2012) indicates that linguistic practices on social media can shape and negotiate gender identity. TikTok, as a video and audio-based platform, reinforces this performative dimension by allowing language to be used strategically to construct socially and culturally relevant public personas. In line with Deumert's (2014) perspective, digital identity can be seen as a multimodal stylistic practice that integrates text, voice, images, and body movement, where language serves as a style symbol reflecting social dynamics such as class, ethnicity, and generation.

Gender factors are an important element in linguistic strategies on social media. Herring and Paolillo (2006) found that men and women show significant differences in lexical choices, sentence structure, and online interaction patterns. Women tend

to use expressive and inclusive language styles, while men more often adopt competitive and direct styles. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) emphasize that these stylistic differences are not solely due to biological sex, but result from social practices and prevailing performative norms. Holmes and Meyerhoff (2003) add that gender-based discourse on social media often reflects how users understand and display their gender roles in society, including through code-switching to signify humor, sophistication, or resistance to gender norms.

In addition to social and cultural dimensions, code-switching on social media also has cognitive effects. A study by Salig et al. (2025) shows that code-switching can enhance attention and memory retention in bilinguals, particularly around the points of language change. These findings are consistent with research by Timmer et al. (2021) which demonstrates the flexibility of bilingual attention control in response to changes in linguistic context. In Green's (2019) executive control model, language switching triggers selective attention to input deemed relevant, which can be strategically used to highlight important information on platforms like TikTok.

Finally, it is important to understand code-switching within the framework of language ideology and politics. Blommaert (2010) highlights that globalization creates inequalities in access to linguistic resources, where high-value languages like English become symbols of social and cultural capital. Pennycook (2007) views language as a political practice and cultural action that can function as a form of resistance or reinforcement of social hierarchies. Canagarajah (2013) adds that translanguaging practices allow individuals to use languages strategically to negotiate meaning, social position, and even ideology. In the context of TikTok, code-switching can serve as a means of multilingual creative expression, but it also has the potential to reinforce inequalities in linguistic representation and exclude groups that do not have access to the dominant language.

Thus, this literature review emphasizes that code-switching on social media such as TikTok should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon—combining linguistic, performative, cognitive, gender, and ideological functions. This comprehensive approach aligns with the research's aim to analyze code-switching not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a discursive strategy that plays a role in the formation of digital identity, power negotiation, and social representation in the era of digital globalization.

## METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach focusing on the analysis of code-switching practices in TikTok video content produced by Indonesia's youth generation. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the social meanings, identities, and communication strategies implied in language use in the digital space. The primary data in this study consists of TikTok videos that explicitly showcase code-switching practices between Indonesian and English. Video samples were selected using purposive sampling techniques, with criteria that the videos are produced by users aged 15 to 30, feature a mix of Indonesian and English, and exhibit high levels of interaction (as seen from likes, comments, and shares).

Data collection was carried out by accessing and documenting relevant TikTok videos, followed by multimodal transcription, which includes verbal text (speech, captions), visual elements (gestures, facial expressions), and audio (intonation, background music). The analysis technique used is Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), which aims to identify how code-switching is employed in various forms of multimodal communication on the platform, as well as Thematic Analysis to group the functions of code-switching based on categories such as identity expression, language style, attention-grabbing strategies, and specific social representations (e.g., gender or cultural affiliation). The analysis was conducted interpretively and contextually, referring to theories of performative sociolinguistics, digital identity, and language politics in online media.

By emphasizing the publicly available visual and linguistic data on TikTok, this research does not involve direct interaction with the research subjects, thus maintaining research ethics by obscuring the identities of user accounts in the presentation of data, and only using content that has been publicly published. Through this approach, the research is expected to provide a sharper understanding of how language is strategically used by the younger generation in shaping identities and establishing communication in an increasingly global and multilingual digital landscape.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines the results of the analysis of code-switching usage in TikTok video content produced by creators with diverse gender backgrounds. The analysis is based on the communicative functions that emerge, which include emotive functions, emphasis, social and cultural identity, religious and educational, language style and

aesthetics, humor and social critique, as well as academic and intellectual functions. This grouping is done to provide a more structured understanding of the strategy of code-switching in digital communication.

### 1) Emotional Expression

The emotive function is the most dominant category. This function is used to convey feelings in a deeper, more dramatic, and personal way, utilizing English to enhance expression. For example, in (V01), the phrase 'I will treat you like you treat me' conveys firmness as well as disappointment, while (V02) features the phrase 'full effort' that highlights maximum struggle as a form of motivation. In (V03), the use of 'in another life' and 'deep down' creates an emotional narrative framework that starts from imagination to the acknowledgment of hidden fears. (V04) expresses gratitude and happiness through phrases like 'of course!' and 'I'm so lucky to have you,' while (V05) utilizes the expression 'is another level of happiness' to reinforce joy. The emotional intensity is also reflected in (V07) through the phrase 'This part, was kill me' which enhances the dramatic impression, (V08) with the expression 'enjoy with my life' that reflects optimism, and (V09) with 'treat like a queen' which signifies hope for special treatment. In (V10), the prayer 'I hope you turn back the table' shows a hope for a reversal of circumstances, while (V14) uses 'but I trust You God' as a testament of faith. Personal motivational messages are also present in (V15) ('Just be you. Be your best self') and (V16) ('as long as I'm happy, I'll do it'). Emotional expressions that are more critical socially are seen in (V18) ('please stop being narcissistic') and (V19) ('is another level of pain'), while (V20) emphasizes empathy through 'Everyone's pace is different.' Religious values mixed with emotion appear in (V21) with 'but Allah always with me.' Romantic humor accompanied by a statement of sacrifice is evident in (V22) ('lunch vs buffet'), followed by a declaration of love in (V23) ('I'm lucky to have you'), and self-affirmation in (V25) (you only need yourself).

### 2) Emphasis

Code-switching serves to reinforce the core message and highlight important parts that the audience should remember. In (V01), I will treat you like you treat me serves as the main marker of the message of justice, while (V02) emphasizes the spirit through full effort. (V03) places 'in another life' and 'deep down' as indicators of emotional points. A more reflective assertion appears in (V11) through 'Not

everything needs our attention' and 'not everything deserves our energy', and in (V12) with 'we live for ourselves, not for others'. (V13) positions 'Enjoy every process' as the title and main theme, while (V15) places 'Just be you' at the climax of the motivational message. (V17) underscores a worldview with 'People come and go', while (V20) reaffirms life philosophy through 'Life's not a race to the finish line'. (V25) repeats the core statement 'you only need yourself' as the main advice.

### 3) Social and Cultural Identity Functions

This function affirms bilingual identity, proximity to global trends, or affiliation with certain groups, including gender identity. In (V06), the combination of 'Fii amanillah' in Arabic and the translation 'I leave you in the care of Allah' marks a Muslim identity as well as openness to an international audience. V08 emphasizes the identity of the younger generation through 'enjoy with my life', (V09) showcases a modern relational style with 'treat like a queen', and (V17) displays the global idiom 'People come and go'. The religious-bilingual identity is also present in (V21) ('but Allah always with me'). Gender solidarity is shown in (V28) through the greeting 'Girl to Girl', while academic identity appears in (V29) with the use of the terms 'intellectual inheritance' and 'knowledge bank'.

### 4) Religious and educational functions

Are found in several videos that combine religious messages with translations for inclusive purposes. (V06) merges Arabic and English to convey prayers, (V14) affirms spiritual beliefs through 'but I trust You God', and (V21) expresses the presence of God with 'but Allah always with me'. This function demonstrates the role of code-switching in expanding the reach of religious meaning to a global audience.

### 5) The function of language style and aesthetics

is utilized to beautify the message and make it more visually and linguistically appealing. In (V04), 'I'm so lucky to have you' creates a romantic impression, (V05) features 'is another level of happiness' that is contemporary, and (V13) leverages 'Enjoy every process' as a stylish opener. (V15 and V16) use English to reinforce motivational messages, while (V24) combines 'you can bet' and 'goals & dreams' to give an aspirational impression. (V30) merges the phrase 'The Real Suami Siaga' with popular terms in Indonesian culture to emphasize an authentic image.

### 6) The functions of humor and social critique

appear when code-switching is used to convey sarcasm or jokes in a light manner. V18 conveys sarcasm through "please stop being narcissistic," V22 compares lunch and buffet to create contrasting humor, V26 starts with "Are you single?" followed by a sarcastic answer, and V27 utilizes the popular slang "Login Islam" to raise the issue of religious differences in a joking tone.

### 7) Academic and Intellectual Functions

Although rare, there is the use of code-switching to convey an academic or intellectual impression. In V29, the terms 'intellectual inheritance' and 'knowledge bank' are used to describe education as a form of non-material heritage. This function adds an extra dimension to the content, especially regarding the prestige of education and personal development.

### 8) Expanded Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

These expanded interpretations strengthen the argument that code-switching on TikTok is not only a linguistic habit but a deliberate performative strategy embedded in identity negotiation, audience design, and gendered representation. Therefore, the analytical findings directly support the conclusion that code-switching operates simultaneously across emotional, social, symbolic, and political layers in Indonesia's digital space.

These findings not only confirm previous research (Almoaily, 2023; Herring & Paolillo, 2006; Salig et al., 2025), but also extend them by showing that gender plays a determining role in shaping the performative function of code-switching within an algorithm-driven platform like TikTok.

### CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the use of code-switching in the 30 TikTok video contents analyzed is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but also a complex multimodal communication strategy, influenced by emotional, social, cultural, religious, and aesthetic factors. The data indicates that code-switching serves a variety of functions, which can be grouped into seven main categories: emotive function, emphasis, social and cultural identity, religious and educational, language style and aesthetics, humor and social criticism, as well as academic and intellectual functions.

The emotive function becomes the dominant form, used by creators to express feelings more

intensely and personally, while also building emotional closeness with the audience. This function often intersects with the function of emphasis, where English acts as a marker for the focus of messages considered important. The function of social and cultural identity shows how code-switching becomes a symbol of membership in bilingual communities, digital generations, or specific groups, including gender solidarity and religious affiliation.

Religious and educational functions show that code-switching can serve as a bridge across languages and cultures, enabling spiritual messages and knowledge to reach a broader audience. Meanwhile, stylistic and aesthetic functions emphasize that code-switching is also chosen to enhance the appeal of the message, creating a modern, elegant, and memorable impression—an effective strategy in the context of highly visual and fast social media communication.

The functions of humor and social critique illustrate the creative dimension of code-switching, where mixed language is utilized to convey sarcasm or social commentary in a light tone, allowing the critical message to be well received by the audience. The academic and intellectual functions, although rarely appearing, provide an indication that code-switching can also be used to construct an intellectual image and add weight to the meaning of the message.

Overall, these findings reinforce the view that code-switching on social media, particularly TikTok, not only reflects the bilingual competence of creators but also becomes part of a discursive strategy to shape identity, build emotional closeness, and negotiate meaning in online interactions. This phenomenon aligns with Communication Accommodation theory, which emphasizes language adaptation according to the audience, and is also relevant to the study of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), which highlights the role of multimodality in shaping the dynamics of digital communication.

From a practical standpoint, understanding the function of code switching on TikTok can be utilized in the fields of digital marketing, language education, and popular culture studies. Content creators, educators, and researchers can adapt this strategy to enhance audience engagement, broaden the reach of their messages, and create more effective communication in a digital space that crosses languages and cultures.

This study contributes theoretically by demonstrating that code-switching is not merely a communicative resource but a multimodal mechanism of identity performance embedded in gendered digital practices. Practically, the findings can inform digital literacy initiatives, gender-sensitive communication studies, and content-creation strategies that consider bilingual audience engagement on algorithmic platforms. Future research may expand the dataset to

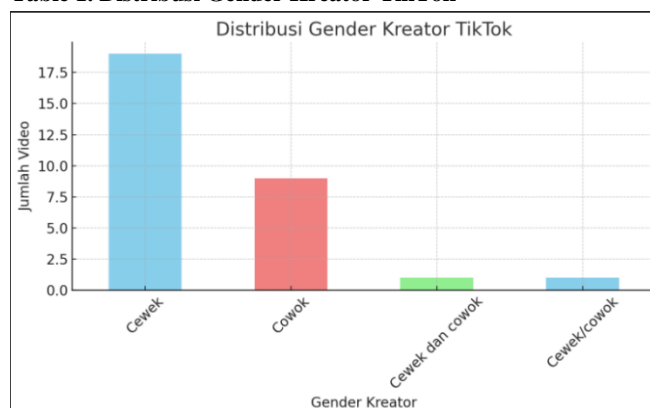
include regional languages, queer identity representation, or longitudinal observation to examine whether linguistic performance on TikTok shifts based on evolving algorithmic trends and audience behavior.

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### CITATIONS AND DOCUMENTATIONS

**Table 1. Distribusi Gender Kreator TikTok**

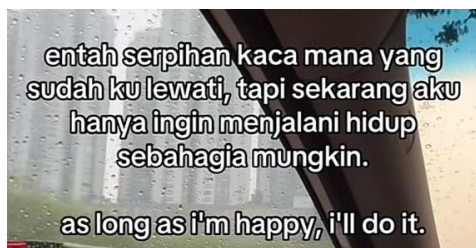


**Table 2 : Summary of Code Switching in 30 Indonesia Tiktok Video**

No	Types of Code Switching	Dominant Function	Dominant Gender	Example Phrases
1	Intra-sentential	Emotive, assertive, stylish	Woman	“deep down”, “so lucky to have you”
2	Inter-sentential	Affirmation, climax opening	Woman	“People come and go”
3	Combination (intra+inter)	Identity, gender solidarity	Woman	“Girl to Girl”
4	Religious	Spirituality, Islamic identity	Mixture	“Fii amanillah”, “Allah with me”
5	Sarcastic/humorous	Social criticism, trendy style	Man	“Login Islam”, “narcissistic”
6	Motivation	Inspirational, modern style	Woman	“You only need yourself”
7	Romantic	Emotional, affirmation of love	Man	“I’m lucky to have you”



*Gambar 1. Code switching as Digital Identity*  
(Sumber : platform TikTok)



*Gambar 2. Code switching as Digital Identity*  
(Sumber : platform TikTok)

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