



The Motivation of Using English Language in Instagram Captions

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Abstract

Instagram is now a photo and video-sharing social media platform used around the world, and English is increasingly used in captions by non-English speaking Instagram users. This study was aimed to figure out why students at Serambi Mekkah University write English captions on Instagram. This study involved 30 students majoring in English at the University of Serambi Mekkah. The research design used was a descriptive study. To collect data, a close-ended yes-no question questionnaire was distributed online through Google Form. The questionnaire measured the responses in terms of English learning and self-image factors. The results show that the reason students of Serambi Mekkah University used English in their Instagram captions is mainly driven by their need of improving their English proficiency, specifically the spelling and vocabulary. The self-image factor plays a relatively important role too, as half of the participants confessed that they used English in their Instagram post for the sake of being regarded cool and creative. This study suggests that EFL learners use social media not only to improve their English but also to show people their competency in using English.

Keywords: *English language; Writing; Captions; Instagram*

A. Introduction

Social media is extremely popular nowadays. According to the categorisation of social media by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), there are 6 types of social media based on the characteristics. They are; collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. Based on this categorisation, Instagram falls under the social networking sites, along with Facebook, Twitter and many others. The Instagram social networking service was founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010 (Mullen, 2018), and soon became people's favourite networking tool to connect themselves with other people around the world.

In terms of the features, Instagram is different to Facebook, the other most used social media. Unlike Facebook with its scripts or written formats of feeds, the primary Instagram feeds are in the formats of photos and videos. However, although the emphasis is on the photo and video sharing, Instagram also allows its users to escort a post with a limited length of captions, only 2200 characters, or between 310-550 words (Zote, 2021). This space is relatively small when compared to the Facebook posts' word limit which reaches 63.206 characters (Zote, 2021). This limited space to share ideas in writing forms makes Instagram a perfect social media for those who prefer communicating with a picture and a short description or narration.

In Indonesia where Instagram is widely used especially by youth, the language of English is commonly found to be used in captions. This is an interesting phenomenon to study because Indonesia is a non-English speaking country. The results from the study done by Lee et al. (2015) suggest that Instagram users have five primary social and psychological motives: social interaction, archiving, self-expression, escapism, and peeking. It is thought-provoking to research what is behind this trend of using English in social media by non-English speaking internet users, specifically on Instagram. Thus, the general aim of the present study was to figure out the motive behind Indonesian youth in using English-caption in describing their photos/videos on Instagram.

Although studies on the use of English in Indonesian Instagram users have been conducted by some researchers before, for example, those by Anggraeni (2017), Handayani (2017), Ardianti et al. (2018),

Rakanda (2020), and Gonulal (2019), there are still some unanswered questions regarding the motivation.

To illustrate, studies by Anggraeni (2017) and Handayani (2017) similarly reported the positive attitude towards the use of Instagram as English writing learning media. Anggraeni (2017) addressed an open-ended questionnaire to sixty university students from Tidar University, where students responded that they viewed Instagram as a valuable social network platform that motivate them to write better. Handayani (2017) with students in Bukit Tinggi as the participants also reported a similar finding of the benefit of Instagram as a media of learning. Both studies do not explain how the use of English relates to their self-image, or at least how they see themselves when they use the language in that virtual social setting.

A study by Rakanda (2020) reported the self-identity factor behind the Indonesian youth Instagram use. Using the Cawas village community as the participants, the study found that Instagram is a medium to establish existence (2020, p.1). As English has a high status in Indonesia (Lauder, 2008), the use of English in Instagram posts potentially boosts one's self-image thus establish existence as reported in Rakanda (2020). Based on this rationale, therefore, the present study aimed to investigate if this self-image factor was one among the motivations of Indonesian people using English in their Instagram captions.

To be specific, the present study aimed to figure out the motivation of English department students of Serambi Mekkah university in using Instagram English captions.

B. Method

The design of this study was a descriptive study. The researcher collected data about why the University of Serambi Mekkah students use English in their Instagram posts. Sukmadinata (2006) explains that descriptive research is a form of research that aims to describe the phenomenon that exists, both natural phenomenon and man-made phenomenon. Based on the explanation above, in this study, the researcher examined why the students in Serambi Mekkah University use English in their Instagram posts.

The research participants of this study were English students of Serambi Mekkah years 2015, 2016, and 2017. The overall average of students who were included in the study was 30 students. The participants

were all non-native speakers of English, and mostly coming from relatively low socio-economic families. The sampling technique used to determine the participants were purposive sampling, in which they must have had an Instagram account, and frequently used English in the captions.

In this present study, the questionnaire consisted of 10 questions asking for the reasons of using English in their Instagram caption was used and distributed to the participants via Google Form. There were two predictive factors used in the questionnaire items; the self-image and the English learning effort factor.

C. Research Findings

The findings of the present study are presented in Tables 1 and 2 where the response, for every reason proposed in the questionnaire, is illustrated in the percentage form.

The following table portrays the results for the self-image related reasons of why the students at the University of Serambi Mekkah wrote English captions on their Instagram.

Table 1. The Reasons Related to Self-Image

No	Statements Related to Self-Image	Frequency	
		Yes	No
1	I feel if I post the text in English, I will look cool	20 66.7%	10 33.3%
2	I posted a photo on Instagram with an English caption to make it look more creative.	23 76.7%	7 23.3%
3	I posted the caption in English to make it look slang.	14 46.7%	16 53.3%
4	I post captions in English, so people think I can speak English.	11 36.7%	19 63.3%
5	I feel that by posting captions in English, people will think that I can speak English.	7 23.3%	23 76.7%
Total		50%	50%

From Table 1 above, it can be seen that, in general, approximately, half of the students of Serambi Mekkah University use English in their Instagram caption for a prestige reason. To be more specific, they feel that posting in English will make them look cool (66, 7%) and creative (76,7 %).

Moreover, although they believe that using English captions on their Instagram can boost their self image in terms of creativity and coolness, they reject to say that they do so to make people believe that they can speak English (76,7 %).

The next table below demonstrates the result of the questionnaire measuring the other factor, one related to the English learning effort.

Table 2. Reasons Related to English Learning Effort

No	Statements Related to English Learning	Frequency	
		Yes	No
6	I post captions in English to practice using my English vocabulary.	28 93.3%	2 6.7%
7	I feel that by posting English captions I can increase my vocabulary.	29 96.7%	1 3.3%
8	I'm posting a caption in English because I'm following my friend who can speak English.	3 10%	27 90%
9	I write captions in English so I can motivate myself to improve my English.	29 96.7%	1 3.3%
10	I write captions in English to improve my English spelling knowledge.	23 76.7%	7 23.3%
Total		89.1%	10.8%

Meanwhile, regarding the English learning effort factor, the respondents expressed their opinion relatively more homogeneously. Overall, 89.1% express that their motivation for using English in their Instagram caption was for the reason of English learning practice. Out of 30 respondents, 28 people said that they posted in English to practise their vocabulary, and 29 people said that they did so to increase their vocabulary and to motivate themselves to improve their English. More than 70% or 23 out of 30 people also yielded the spelling improvement goal as their reason in writing an English Instagram caption. However, they refused to say that their reason for posting an English Instagram caption was because they wanted to be like their friends who are excelling in English (90%).

In brief, the data show that English department students of Serambi Mekkah University generally used English for their Instagram caption as a strategy to improve their English proficiency, although half of the respondents also indicate that the language can boost their self-image in the social media.

D. Discussion

The present study found that students at University of Serambi Mekkah used English in Instagram to practice their skill in the language, and although not always, to establish a social image of someone creative and cool. In the first finding, the study found the reason of the university students wrote English Instagram captions was to practice their vocabulary. The view of Instagram as a writing practice media is also parallel to those reported by Anggraeni (2017), Handayani (2017), and Gonulal (2019). In the latter one, specifically, the finding on vocabulary improvement is also conveyed, which is consistent with what yielded by this present study. Gonulal (2019) even reported that the advantage of Instagram was not only in vocabulary building but also in social competence (p. 309). Although the present study did cover the social competence reason, the finding on the vocabulary practice still indicates the indirect motivation of employing their linguistic knowledge in communication, which in this case is through virtual social interaction.

Moreover, the present study also found the factor of the self-image behind the use of English captions in Instagram, although the percentage was not relatively high, or only half of the total participants. In this study, the respondents feel more creative and cool to be able to express themselves in English, especially in the Instagram context. The finding is consistent with what was reported in Rakanda (2020); and Lee et al. (2015). The result of the present study on the self-image factor is understandable for an EFL context like Indonesia, where English is regarded as a high-status and a difficult-to-learn foreign language (Irnanda, 2021). Posting in English will show that to some extent one has the ability to communicate in the language.

Furthermore, as the present study also found the factor of spelling practice as one of the reasons in writing English Instagram caption, the study is consistent with that of Zheng et al. (2018) on the use of social media to support English writing. In Zheng et al. (2018), the respondents elaborated how social media like blogs can be a tool for immigrants Somali school girls in expressing themselves freely in English. In the Indonesian EFL context, where English spoken is limited, a simpler writing activity, such as composing an Instagram caption can also be a similar tool that boosts the learner's confidence about their English.

Overall, The findings of the present study show that the main important reason why English department students of Universitas Serambi Mekkah use English in their Instagram caption is that they want to improve their English proficiency in general, and to increase and practice their vocabulary, and spelling in particular.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the research above, it can be concluded that in general, English students of Serambi Mekkah University write their Instagram captions using the English language so that they can practice using their vocabulary, and practice their spelling knowledge by typing down the vocabulary. In addition, in this study, it is also found that the image of being creative and cool is the secondary reason of why the English language caption is used in their Instagram posts. The study is limited as the subject of the research is only one type of social media users. It is hoped that further research can use more kinds of social media so that a more comprehensive picture of why English is highly used by the Indonesian EFL learners in their social media posts and interactions can be gained.

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