



DIGITAL IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AND L2 MOTIVATIONAL SELF SYSTEM: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA USE RESHAPES ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION AMONG UZBEK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: In the age of pervasive digital connectivity, social media platforms have emerged not merely as communication tools but as identity-forming spaces where language learners actively construct, perform, and negotiate their sense of self in relation to English. Drawing on Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) and Norton's concept of investment and identity, this study investigates how Uzbek university students' engagement with English-language content across Instagram, YouTube, and Telegram shapes their Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience. Despite the rapid digitalisation of Uzbek higher education following national language policy reforms, the intersection of digital identity practices and English learning motivation remains theoretically underexplored in the Central Asian context. Employing a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, the study collects quantitative data via a validated motivational self-system questionnaire administered to 320 undergraduate students across four Uzbek universities, followed by in-depth semi-structured interviews with 24 purposively selected participants. Social media usage logs and digital artefact analysis complement the interview data to triangulate findings. The quantitative phase examines the predictive relationships between specific social media practices – content creation, passive consumption, parasocial interaction with native speakers, and translingual code-switching – and the three dimensions of L2MSS. The qualitative phase explores how students narrativise their online English-using identities and how digital role models mediate their imagined futures as English speakers. Preliminary findings suggest that content-creation practices, particularly short-form video production and English captioning, correlate significantly with a stronger Ideal L2 Self and greater self-regulatory learning investment, while passive consumption alone shows a weaker and occasionally demotivating effect when accompanied by negative social comparison. The study contributes an empirically grounded, culturally situated model of digitally mediated L2 motivation and proposes pedagogical implications for ELT practitioners in Uzbekistan and comparable post-Soviet



EFL contexts, including the strategic integration of identity-affirming digital tasks into university English curricula.

Keywords: L2 motivational self system, digital identity, social media in ELT, English language motivation, Uzbek EFL learners, ideal L2 self.

Relevance And Scientific Novelty

The study responds to a confluence of three timely developments in applied linguistics and ELT. First, Dörnyei's L2MSS, introduced in 2005 and extensively validated in European and East Asian contexts, has received limited empirical attention within post-Soviet, multilingual Central Asian settings where English occupies a complex sociolinguistic position alongside Uzbek, Russian, and other regional languages. Second, while social media's role in informal language learning has attracted growing scholarly interest globally, research in the Uzbekistan context is nascent, with most existing work focused on classroom technology integration rather than on how digitally mediated identity construction drives motivation. Third, the dramatic expansion of Uzbek university enrolments in English-medium instruction since 2017 has created an urgent need for evidence-based motivational frameworks that account for learners' digital lives outside the classroom.

The study's scientific novelty lies in three interconnected contributions: (1) it extends L2MSS theory by proposing a Digital Ideal L2 Self sub-construct that captures the motivational force of online English-using identities; (2) it provides the first large-scale, mixed-methods investigation of the social media–motivation nexus among Uzbek university learners; and (3) it offers a replicable methodological framework for studying digital identity in EFL contexts characterised by rapid technological adoption and evolving national language policies.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between specific social media engagement practices and the three components of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System among Uzbek university students.
2. To explore how Uzbek EFL learners negotiate English-language identities in digital spaces and how these identities interact with their L2 motivation.
3. To identify the social media practices most strongly predictive of motivated self-regulatory investment in English language learning.
4. To propose and empirically test a contextualised Digital Ideal L2 Self construct that extends existing motivational theory for digitally connected EFL learners.
5. To derive actionable pedagogical recommendations for integrating



identity-affirming digital practices into university ELT in Uzbekistan.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in three theoretical pillars. The primary framework is Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, which reconceptualises motivation as a future-oriented, identity-based phenomenon comprising the Ideal L2 Self (the vision of oneself as a proficient L2 user), the Ought-to L2 Self (the attributes one feels obliged to develop), and the L2 Learning Experience (situation-specific motives relating to the immediate classroom and learning environment). The L2MSS has demonstrated robust predictive validity in diverse contexts but requires adaptation for the digital age, in which the Ideal L2 Self is increasingly constructed through parasocial interactions with online figures and self-representation in social media spaces.

The second pillar is Norton's (2000, 2013) theory of investment and identity, which positions language learning as an exercise in identity negotiation across unequal social relations. Norton's framework is particularly generative for understanding how Uzbek learners navigate the prestige and power dynamics embedded in English-language digital spaces, where global content creators, influencers, and academic communities constitute imagined communities toward which learners orient their investment. The third pillar draws on Warschauer and Matuchniak's (2010) digital inclusion framework and more recent work on translanguaging in digital spaces (García & Li Wei, 2014), which illuminates the multilingual, code-switching realities of learners who inhabit simultaneously Uzbek, Russian, and English digital environments.

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