ICRRD QUALITY INDEX RESEARCH JOURNAL
INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT
article
ISSN Number: 2773-5958, https://doi.org/10.53272/icrrd, www.icrrd.com

Beyond Likes and Shares: Rethinking Academic Writing Literacy through Facebook as a Digital Learning Space in Bangladeshi Higher Education

Mohammad Sulaiman

Department of English, Asian University of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Corresponding author; Email:* sulaiman.eng.aub@gmail.com

Received: 28 May 2025 **Accepted:** 23 November, 2025
Revision: 21 September 2025 **Published:** 25 November 2025. **Vol**-6, **Issue**-4

Cite as: Sulaiman, M. (2025). Beyond Likes and Shares: Rethinking Academic Writing Literacy through Facebook as a Digital Learning Space in Bangladeshi Higher Education. *ICRRD Journal, 6*(4), 209-229.

Abstract*:* This qualitative study investigates how Facebook operates as a meaningful digital learning space that shapes the academic writing literacy of university students in Bangladeshi higher education. Grounded in New Literacy Studies, Academic Literacies, and translanguaging theory, the research examines how students majoring in English, Economics, and Business utilise social media writing to negotiate voice, audience, identity, and disciplinary understanding. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with eighteen participants from three Dhaka-based private universities and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings reveal five interrelated practices: using Facebook as a space for confidence-building and low-stakes rhetorical experimentation; engaging with authentic audiences and receiving immediate peer feedback; constructing semi-academic posts that blend disciplinary knowledge with everyday language; employing translanguaging to scaffold thinking and expression; and cultivating identity and visibility as emerging academic writers. These practices contrast sharply with the exam-driven, monolingual, and correctness-oriented writing pedagogies dominant in Bangladeshi tertiary institutions. The study argues that Facebook functions as a parallel literacy environment in which students rehearse analytical thinking, practise explanation, and develop academic voice in ways seldom afforded by formal coursework. The findings call for a reconceptualisation of academic writing literacy as a socially situated, technologically mediated, and multilingual process and highlight the need for pedagogical and policy reforms that recognise students' digital literacies as valuable resources for academic development in the Global South.

Keywords: *Digital literacies; academic writing literacy; translanguaging; social media writing; Bangladeshi higher education*.

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, students' literacy practices are increasingly shaped by digital participation, networked communication, and algorithmically mediated social interaction. For university students in Bangladesh, Facebook remains a dominant platform for everyday meaning-making, functioning as a space where personal, social, and intellectual expression converge Scholars of digital literacies argue that such online writing practices are not marginal or

recreational but central to how young people develop voice, rhetorical awareness, and communicative agency in a digital age (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Barton & Lee, 2013; Jones & Hafner, 2021; Milon, 2016; Al Nahar et al., 2024). These perspectives problematise traditional assumptions that literacy is acquired primarily through formal educational structures, instead emphasising the significance of vernacular, multimodal, and socially situated literacies (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012; Alam et al., 2018, 2021, 2025; Milon, 2016). Despite this global shift, academic writing instruction in Bangladesh continues to be dominated by normative models of "correct" English, exam-oriented methods, and structuralist pedagogies that leave little room for creativity, audience negotiation, or identity expression (Mitu, 2022; Jahan, 2025; Imam et al., 2025; Milon & Ali, 2023). This persistent misalignment between students' dynamic digital writing practices and the rigid expectations of institutional academic writing raises fundamental questions about how students develop academic writing literacy in the contemporary Bangladeshi context.

These tensions are exacerbated by long-standing challenges in academic writing instruction across Bangladeshi tertiary institutions. Students frequently struggle with unfamiliar rhetorical genres, limited opportunities for authentic writing, minimal formative feedback, and pedagogical cultures that prioritise memorisation over intellectual engagement (Hasan et al., 2019; Milon et al., 2018a, 2018b). Yet many of the same students write extensively on Facebook—composing reflective commentaries, micro-essays, analytical responses, and creative narratives for diverse audiences. These posts often attract dialogue, critique, and emotional support, creating an interactive literacy ecology rarely present in classroom-based writing. From a New Literacy Studies perspective, such digital practices constitute complex vernacular literacies embedded in everyday life, identity work, and social participation (Street, 2003). From an Academic Literacies standpoint, these practices also reveal the multiplicity of writing identities students inhabit, challenging deficit framings that portray students as lacking proficiency or motivation (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007). Moreover, through a translanguaging lens, students' fluid movement across Bangla, English, and hybrid repertoires on Facebook reflects creative and cognitively meaningful acts of meaning-making that defy monolingual ideologies (García & Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2013). Yet despite these possibilities, higher education in Bangladesh has paid little attention to the pedagogical or epistemic value of these digital literacy resources.

International research has demonstrated the pedagogical potential of social media for developing writing, audience awareness, and rhetorical flexibility (Greenhow & Gleason, 2014; Zhang & Yu, 2021). However, much of this scholarship emerges from Western or technologically privileged contexts where digital access, writing norms, and language ideologies differ significantly from those of the Global South (Asthana, 2017). The applicability of these findings to Bangladesh is therefore limited, especially given the postcolonial status of English, structural inequalities in writing support, and the scarcity of institutional resources for writing development (Mitu, 2022; Hasan et al., 2019). While studies in Bangladesh have examined ICT integration, online learning, and broad patterns of social media use, research has yet to investigate the micro-level literacy work students undertake through their Facebook writing or how these practices intersect with their academic writing trajectories. To date, no empirical study has systematically explored how Bangladeshi university students perceive Facebook as a digital learning space that informs academic writing literacy. This constitutes a clear and pressing knowledge gap. Addressing this gap, the present qualitative study examines how students from English, Economics, and Business programmes in three Dhaka-based

private universities use Facebook as a writing space and how these practices shape their academic writing literacy. Using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, the study explores how students experiment with voice, negotiate identity, mobilise multilingual resources, and engage with audiences through Facebook's multimodal, socially interactive, and relatively low-stakes environment. It also investigates how students navigate tensions between informal digital writing practices and the formal expectations of academic discourse, illuminating Facebook's role as a parallel literacy environment that both complements and complicates institutional writing instruction.

The aim of the study is to critically analyse the relationship between Facebook writing and academic writing literacy within Bangladeshi higher education, paying particular attention to how students understand the value of their digital writing and how they perceive the transferability of these practices into academic contexts (Mohd Pauzi & Shahadat Hossen, 2025). By drawing on New Literacy Studies, Academic Literacies, and translanguaging theory, the research foregrounds students' lived experiences to challenge deficit narratives surrounding their writing and to reimagine academic writing literacy as socially situated, technologically mediated, and multilingual. In doing so, this study contributes to broader scholarly conversations on digital literacies, writing pedagogy, and Global South higher education by demonstrating how informal digital writing spaces such as Facebook can offer valuable rhetorical, linguistic, and affective resources for rethinking academic writing instruction in the twenty-first century.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Literacies and the Social Turn in Writing

The rise of digital communication has prompted a fundamental rethinking of literacy, shifting the field away from narrow, print-centric conceptions toward socially situated, multimodal, and participatory forms of meaning-making. Scholars such as Lankshear and Knobel (2011) and Barton and Lee (2013) argue that digital platforms have created new spaces where writing is embedded in everyday social interaction, identity performance, and collaborative engagement rather than confined to institutionally sanctioned genres. Within this "social turn," writing is understood as a dynamic practice shaped by the affordances of digital environments, including multimodality, interactivity, and immediacy. These features enable writers to experiment with voice, adopt new rhetorical strategies, and participate in distributed forms of learning that differ substantially from traditional classroom-based instruction (Gee, 2015; Milon et al., 2023). Facebook, in particular, exemplifies this shift by offering users a versatile canvas for narrative expression, social commentary, reflective thinking, and public interaction. The platform's combination of likes, comments, sharing functions, photos, hyperlinks, and emojis allows individuals to compose texts that are simultaneously personal, public, and multimodally rich. Although such practices have been shown to foster confidence, creativity, and rhetorical awareness—skills essential to academic writing—these affordances remain insufficiently recognised within mainstream academic writing pedagogies, especially in Global South contexts where writing continues to be assessed through correctness-oriented frameworks.

2.2 New Literacy Studies: Literacy as Social Practice

New Literacy Studies (NLS) provides a powerful conceptual foundation for understanding why students' Facebook writing constitutes meaningful literacy work. Street's (2003) ideological model of

literacy challenges autonomous, skills-based notions of writing by emphasising that literacy practices are inseparable from cultural norms, identity formation, and power relations. From an NLS perspective, Facebook writing represents a form of vernacular literacy: locally meaningful, agentive, and deeply embedded in the social lives of students. This contrasts sharply with the dominant literacy ideology in South Asian universities, where writing is treated as a decontextualised skill focused on grammar, structure, and correctness (Canagarajah, 2013). NLS research emphasises that individuals draw on diverse semiotic resources—including multilingual repertoires, emotional expression, and visual modes—to make meaning in authentic contexts (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012). For Bangladeshi students, Facebook serves as a central communicative environment where they articulate personal reflections, engage with social issues, express emotions, and negotiate identities. These practices extend far beyond conventional academic writing expectations and reveal a repertoire of expressive competencies that academic institutions rarely recognise. Thus, NLS highlights the need to understand students' Facebook writing as culturally and socially embedded literacy work that can meaningfully contribute to academic literacy development.

2.3 Social media, Informal Writing, and Pedagogical Potentials

A growing body of international literature has examined the pedagogical potential of social media for writing development. Many studies focus on teacher-managed integration of Facebook into writing classrooms—for example, peer feedback activities, online discussion groups, and collaborative assignments (Aydin, 2012; Yunus & Salehi, 2012; Sharma, 2019). These studies generally show that Facebook can enhance student motivation, encourage dialogue, and foster communities of practice. However, such research often conceptualises Facebook instrumentally, as a supplementary tool for formal instruction, rather than acknowledging the everyday, organic writing that students already undertake on the platform (Rashed et al., 2025). Other scholars highlight Facebook's role in nurturing "audience-aware writing," as students write for real readers and receive instantaneous feedback through comments and reactions (Blattner & Fiori, 2011). Informal digital writing has been shown to support fluency, narrative skill, critical engagement, and confidence (Lee, 2017; Zhang & Yu, 2021). Yet some researchers caution against idealising social media writing, noting that these environments may also foster superficial engagement or reinforce attention to speed over depth (Boyd, 2014). These tensions underscore the need for research that examines Facebook writing within its broader social, cultural, and institutional context rather than simply as a pedagogical tool.

2.4 Academic Writing Challenges in Bangladeshi Higher Education

Academic writing remains a significant challenge for students in Bangladeshi universities, shaped by structural constraints and long-standing pedagogical traditions. Studies report difficulties with argumentation, coherence, critical engagement, and understanding disciplinary conventions (Jahan, 2025; Imam et al., 2025). These struggles are exacerbated by exam-oriented curricula, large class sizes, limited exposure to extended writing tasks, and minimal formative feedback. Writing instruction remains predominantly grammar-focused and memorisation-driven, with little attention to process-based writing, critical thinking, or audience awareness (Sharmin, 2023). The dominance of English as the medium of academic legitimacy adds further pressure, particularly for students from Bangla-medium backgrounds who have had limited opportunities to practice extended English writing. This English-only orientation reinforces deficit discourses surrounding students' writing abilities and obscures the rich multilingual and digital practices they engage in outside the classroom

(Sharmin, 2025). Importantly, these institutional constraints coexist with students' active writing on Facebook, where they frequently produce reflective narratives, analytical commentaries, and social critiques that demonstrate rhetorical sophistication (Hossen & Pauzi, 2025). The disconnect between institutional expectations and students' lived literacies highlights a need to re-evaluate how academic writing is conceptualised and taught in Bangladesh.

2.5 Facebook as an Everyday Literacy Space in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's digital landscape is unique in that Facebook functions as the dominant platform for social interaction, political discussion, and personal expression. High mobile internet penetration and widespread smartphone use have made Facebook an integral part of daily communication for university students, shaping how they read, write, and participate online. Unlike Western contexts where digital participation is distributed across multiple platforms, Bangladeshi students rely heavily on Facebook, which amplifies its impact on literacy development. Studies from the Global South illustrate how young people use social media to enact identities, articulate emotions, and engage in civic deliberation (Asthana, 2017; Ngwainmbi, 2024; Uzuegbunam, 2025; Zhang & Lallana, 2013). Bangladeshi students engage in similar practices, producing micro-essays, reflective posts, social critiques, and multimodal narratives that attract substantial peer engagement. These practices foster argumentation skills, audience negotiation, and self-reflective writing—central components of academic literacy. Yet existing research in Bangladesh has rarely examined how Facebook writing shapes students' academic writing trajectories. Most studies focus on ICT adoption or general social media behaviour (Mitu, 2022), leaving a significant gap in understanding how students' digital literacies intersect with formal academic writing.

2.6 Conceptual Gaps and the Need for an Integrative Approach

Despite substantial research on digital literacies, social media writing, and academic writing pedagogy, these strands have not been meaningfully integrated within the Bangladeshi context. Digital literacy research highlights the educational potential of informal digital writing but seldom addresses the structural and ideological challenges facing academic writing in Bangladesh. Academic writing studies diagnose systemic problems in pedagogy but rarely recognise digital writing as a resource. Research on Facebook in education predominantly emphasises teacher-led interventions, neglecting the organic, self-initiated writing practices students engage in daily (Hossen & Pauzi, 2025). This fragmentation reveals a clear conceptual and empirical gap: the absence of research that examines how Bangladeshi university students themselves perceive the connections between their Facebook writing and their academic writing literacy. Addressing this requires an approach that integrates digital literacies, NLS, academic literacies, and contextual scholarship on writing in the Global South.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

To address this gap, the study draws on an integrated theoretical framework combining New Literacy Studies (NLS), the Academic Literacies perspective, translanguaging theory, and digital writing scholarship. NLS conceptualises literacy as a socially situated and ideologically shaped practice (Street, 2003; Barton & Hamilton, 2012), providing a lens through which Facebook writing can be understood as vernacular literacy rather than peripheral digital activity. The Academic Literacies framework emphasises writing as a site of identity negotiation, epistemological struggle, and institutional power (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2023), illuminating the challenges students

face within monolingual, correctness-driven writing regimes in Bangladesh. Translanguaging theory foregrounds the creative, fluid movement across languages and semiotic resources that characterises students' writing on Facebook, challenging deficit-oriented interpretations of multilingual practice (García & Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2013). Finally, digital writing and multimodality scholarship informs the conceptualisation of Facebook as a technologically mediated rhetorical environment shaped by interactivity, algorithmic visibility, and multimodal expression (Kress, 2010; Jones & Hafner, 2021; Zhang & Yu, 2021). Together, these frameworks enable a holistic understanding of Facebook as a parallel literacy environment, one that intersects with and influences students' academic writing trajectories within the particular cultural and institutional context of Bangladeshi higher education.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative, interpretivist research design to examine how Bangladeshi university students make sense of the relationship between their Facebook writing and their academic writing development. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suited to exploring socially situated literacy practices because it enables researchers to understand the meanings individuals attach to their experiences, the contexts that shape these meanings and the identities they negotiate through writing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Milon et al., 2023). Writing—especially digital writing—is not a neutral or purely technical activity; it is embedded in social interactions, linguistic ideologies and institutional expectations (Barton & Lee, 2013). An interpretivist stance therefore aligns with the study's aim of uncovering the complexity of students' experiences and perspectives. A quantitative approach would have reduced these rich, context-specific practices to measurable indicators, masking the nuanced ways students navigate informal and formal writing spaces. By foregrounding depth, reflexivity and contextual interpretation, the qualitative design ensured methodological coherence with the research questions and the theoretical commitments of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Alam et al., 2024; Milon, 2020; Milon et al., 2017).

3.2 Research Sites and Participant Selection

Data were collected from three private universities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Dhaka was chosen because it is the country's principal academic and technological hub where university students have high levels of digital connectivity and sustained engagement with Facebook as a writing and communication platform. The urban, multilingual and academically diverse environment provided fertile ground for investigating how informal digital practices intersect with institutional academic expectations. Within these universities, Facebook occupies a central role in students' everyday literacy lives, making Dhaka an analytically compelling site for exploring digital–academic literacy relationships.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they possessed meaningful experience with both Facebook writing and academic writing. Eighteen students participated—six from English, six from Economics and six from Business Studies. These three disciplines were deliberately chosen because they represent distinct writing cultures. English majors engage heavily in analytical, interpretive and reflective writing; Economics students write reasoning-driven assignments and applied commentaries; and Business Studies students produce structured, professional genres such as reports and proposals. Including these three disciplinary contexts

allowed the study to explore how students with different writing expectations negotiate the affordances and constraints of Facebook as a literacy space. To participate, students were required to have at least two years of sustained Facebook writing experience and to be active writers of posts, reflections or commentary in English, Bangla or mixed linguistic forms. The sample included both undergraduate and postgraduate students to capture variation in academic maturity and writing experience. This purposive, criteria-based sampling ensured depth and relevance, consistent with qualitative research standards (Patton, 2015).

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection combined semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant-selected Facebook texts to capture a holistic picture of students' writing practices. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source because they allow for systematic yet flexible exploration of participants' literacy histories, audience awareness, rhetorical strategies and perceived connections between digital and academic writing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Interviews, lasting 45–70 minutes, were conducted in quiet campus settings and were audio-recorded with consent. Participants were encouraged to use Bangla, English or mixed codes, reflecting the study's translanguaging-informed orientation, which values multilingual expression as a resource for meaning-making (García & Wei, 2014).

To explore socially negotiated perspectives, two focus group discussions were conducted with five to six participants each. Focus groups allowed participants to respond to and extend one another's accounts, revealing collective norms, peer expectations and shared interpretations that might not surface through individual interviews alone (Morgan, 2019; Yasmin et al., 2024). These discussions probed how students evaluate peer feedback, interpret audience reactions and situate Facebook writing within their broader literacy identities.

To complement self-reported accounts, participants voluntarily submitted anonymised examples of Facebook posts. These included reflective narratives, opinion pieces, micro-essays and everyday commentary that participants selected as representative of their writing identity. The researcher did not access participants' accounts; instead, students shared screenshots or copied text. All identifying details were removed. This participant-controlled approach protected privacy, ensured ethical integrity and provided authentic writing samples without compromising participants' digital boundaries. Triangulating interviews, focus groups and textual artefacts enhanced the depth and robustness of the data (Denzin, 2012).

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analysed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) following Braun and Clarke (2019, 2021). RTA was selected because it aligns with an interpretivist paradigm and recognises that themes are not "discovered" but actively generated through the researcher's reflexive engagement with the data. The analysis began with immersion, involving iterative readings of interview transcripts, focus group transcripts and Facebook posts while recording analytic notes about recurrent patterns, tensions and rhetorical practices. The second phase involved inductive coding, with attention to issues such as confidence, identity work, audience engagement, linguistic experimentation and academic negotiation. Coding was supported by qualitative data analysis software, while analytic memos documented evolving interpretations (Milon et al., 2024; Saldaña,

2016; Alam et el., 2024). Subsequently, codes were clustered into candidate themes that reflected broader conceptual patterns. These themes were iteratively refined to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness, with particular attention to how participants described navigating the boundaries between informal Facebook writing and formal academic expectations. Throughout the analytic process, reflexivity was central; the researcher documented positionalities, assumptions and interpretive decisions in a reflexive journal, consistent with expectations for transparency and analytical rigor in contemporary qualitative research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2019).

3.5 Trustworthiness, Credibility and Dependability

Trustworthiness was ensured through a combination of established qualitative strategies (Alam et al., 2022a, 2022b; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of interviews, focus groups and textual artefacts, allowing thematic interpretations to be cross-validated across multiple sources. Informal member reflections enabled participants to comment on preliminary interpretations, helping to refine and confirm the accuracy of the emerging themes. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics and disciplinary writing cultures. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail documenting sampling decisions, coding processes, analytic memos and methodological reflections. Confirmability was ensured through reflexive journaling and by grounding all interpretations in evidence from participants' own words and posts. Together, these strategies enhanced the transparency, consistency and analytical rigor of the study.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical sensitivity guided the research design due to the personal and sometimes emotionally charged nature of academic struggles and digital writing. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of their right to decline questions, refrain from sharing posts or withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were used throughout, and all identifiable information was removed from transcripts and textual artefacts. For Facebook data, participants exercised full control over what they wished to share, and no direct account access was requested (Alam et al., 2025). All digital files were stored in encrypted, password-protected folders, and care was taken not to reproduce distinctive phrases that might be searchable online. These ethical practices aligned with contemporary guidelines for research involving digital artefacts and networked publics, ensuring respect for participants' autonomy, dignity and privacy.

4. Findings

The reflexive thematic analysis of interview, focus group, and Facebook text data generated five interrelated themes that illuminate how students from English, Economics, and Business departments in three Dhaka-based private universities understand the relationship between their Facebook writing and their academic writing development. These themes show that Facebook operates as a parallel literacy environment where students construct writer identities, negotiate audiences, mobilise multilingual repertoires, navigate conflicted literacy expectations, and experiment with semi-academic discourse. Across the data, Facebook emerges not as a trivial social distraction but as a consequential digital learning space that both supports and complicates academic writing literacy in Bangladeshi higher education.

4.1 Constructing Writer Identity through Low-Stakes Digital Expression

Across all three disciplines, students framed Facebook as a low-stakes writing space that allowed them to build confidence and explore who they could be as writers, in stark contrast to the exam-centred culture of their universities. Hassan, an English major, drew a sharp distinction between the emotional climate of academic writing and the relative freedom of social media: *"On Facebook, I don't feel that constant fear of being wrong… no teacher is taking marks, so I can write what I really think."* His reference to "constant fear" and "marks" signals how deeply assessment saturates his experience of academic writing, positioning it as a site of potential failure rather than exploration. Facebook, by contrast, suspends the immediate threat of institutional judgment and makes space for personal stance, opinion, and experimentation. Read through a New Literacy Studies lens, Hassan's account suggests that Facebook functions as an alternative literacy domain where the meanings and values attached to writing are reconfigured—from correctness and conformity toward self-expression and voice.

This pattern was especially pronounced among students outside traditionally writing-intensive disciplines, who found in Facebook a textual space largely absent from their curricula. Oishi, a Business student, explained: *"In my business courses we mostly write reports or bullet points, very formal… but on Facebook I started writing small stories about my daily life, and people responded. That made me feel I actually have a voice."* Her description of reports and bullet points as "very formal" and impersonal contrasts with the "small stories" she crafts online, which are rooted in everyday experience and oriented toward peer engagement. The phrase "I actually have a voice" is analytically significant: it indicates that Facebook writing is doing identity work, enabling her to recognise herself as someone whose ideas and experiences are worth articulating. From an Academic Literacies perspective, this writer identity is foundational for engaging in more demanding forms of academic writing, yet the conditions that nurture it are primarily located in the digital, not the institutional, sphere.

Economics students echoed this sense of transformation from invisible exam-writer to visible social writer. Farhan reflected: *"Before, I only wrote answers in exams. When I wrote a long post on Facebook and many people reacted, I felt for the first time that my writing matters."* Here, "answers in exams" invokes a narrowly instrumental view of writing as reproducing expected content for a single evaluator, whereas the Facebook post and its reactions introduce a different economy of value—one grounded in recognition, resonance, and interaction. His statement that his writing "matters" for the first time illustrates how Facebook recalibrates the stakes of writing from compliance to contribution. Taken together, these accounts show that Facebook's low-stakes, participatory environment enables students to move beyond deficit-oriented academic identities and to construct themselves as writers with opinions, stories, and insights that matter to real audiences.

4.2 Facebook as a Rhetorical Training Ground for Audience Negotiation

In addition to fostering confidence, Facebook sharpened students' awareness of audience and pushed them to make more deliberate rhetorical choices. Unlike university assignments written for an often invisible examiner, Facebook posts were addressed to heterogeneous networks that could include peers, extended family, teachers, and, in some cases, employers. This multiplicity of potential readers demanded strategic adjustment of tone, clarity, and content. Tanvir, an Economics

major, described this careful calibration: *"When I write a post, I know my friends, some teachers, even my boss may see it, so I try to make it understandable and not too harsh. I think carefully about every sentence."* His comment reveals an emergent rhetorical metacognition: he anticipates how different readers might interpret his words, moderates his stance accordingly, and monitors his writing at sentence level. In effect, Facebook places him in a complex rhetorical situation that is arguably more authentic and demanding than many decontextualised academic tasks.

English majors described using Facebook explicitly to rehearse forms of argumentation and structure. Sadia explained: *"Sometimes I write a reflection on a social issue, and I structure it like a mini-essay with an opening idea and some supporting points, because I know people will criticise if it is not logical."* Her decision to structure posts as "mini-essays" suggests that she is transposing academic structuring strategies—introduction, development, logical flow—into a digital genre. The expectation of peer critique ("people will criticise") provides a real audience pressure that compels her to ensure coherence and reasoning, aligning closely with the goals of academic writing pedagogy. Here, Facebook becomes a rhetorical training ground where the stakes are social rather than graded, but the intellectual work of constructing and defending a position is very real.

Students in Business also positioned comments and reactions as informal feedback mechanisms that fostered revision and clarity. Mahira recounted: *"When people comment and ask, 'what do you mean by this?', I realise that my writing was not clear. Next time I try to explain better from the beginning."* This sequence—public posting, questioning, self-recognition of ambiguity, and prospective adjustment—mirrors key stages in process-oriented writing models, yet emerges organically from interaction rather than being imposed by a teacher or rubric. Mahira's reflection shows how Facebook participation cultivates metacognitive awareness of clarity and audience needs, both central to academic literacy. Overall, students' accounts indicate that, even in the absence of explicit pedagogical design, Facebook operates as a powerful rhetorical environment that sensitises them to audience diversity, stance, coherence, and the need to anticipate possible misreadings.

4.3 Translanguaging as a Resource for Meaning-Making and Identity Performance

A third theme concerns the centrality of translanguaging to students' Facebook writing, and how this linguistic flexibility supports both meaning-making and identity performance. Participants across departments described routinely mixing Bangla, English, and sometimes Arabic religious expressions, often alongside emojis and other visual signs. This fluid movement across languages and modes was experienced not as a deficiency but as an essential resource. Sadia, the English major, elaborated: *"If I write only in English, sometimes it sounds artificial to my friends; if I use only Bangla, I cannot express some academic or global ideas. So I mix them… it feels more honest."* Her account highlights two key dynamics: English alone can sound socially inauthentic, while Bangla alone can feel conceptually limiting for certain topics. Translanguaging thus enables her to align relationally with her audience and intellectually with wider discourses. Her reference to feeling "more honest" suggests that linguistic mixing is tied to an ethical dimension of self-presentation, allowing her to write in a way that is truer to her complex linguistic and social identity.

Economics and Business students illustrate how translanguaging also functions as a pedagogical strategy for making disciplinary knowledge accessible. Farhan explained: *"When I write about*

economic issues, I use English terms like 'inflation' or 'recession' but explain them in Bangla so that my friends can relate." In this practice, English indexes technical, disciplinary authority, while Bangla offers relational proximity and clarity. Far from being random mixing, this is a carefully orchestrated division of labour between languages, oriented toward both epistemic precision and audience engagement. It reveals sophisticated communicative competence that is rarely captured by monolingual assessments of academic writing.

At the same time, students were acutely aware that such practices are not allowed in formal university writing. Oishi noted: *"In assignments, we are told 'don't write Bangla words, only proper English'; if I wrote like my Facebook posts, I would lose marks."* The phrase "proper English" encapsulates the ideological hierarchy that privileges standard English as the sole legitimate academic code and positions other resources as contaminating. This creates a fractured literacy landscape in which students must suppress the very practices that make their digital communication effective. The disjuncture points to a broader tension between students' lived multilingual literacies and institutional monolingual expectations. From a translanguaging perspective, what is construed as "improper" in academic settings is, in fact, a sophisticated mobilisation of a full semiotic repertoire in digital contexts—a resource that remains structurally undervalued in Bangladeshi higher education.

4.4 Navigating Conflicted Literacy Worlds: Tensions between Informal and Academic Writing Norms

While students attributed significant benefits to their Facebook writing in terms of confidence, fluency, and rhetorical awareness, they also described pervasive tensions when attempting to align these informal practices with formal academic conventions. Many portrayed the shift from Facebook to academic assignments as a kind of identity split. Mim, an English major, explained: *"On Facebook I can write freely and directly, but when I start an academic essay, suddenly I have to control my language, avoid personal opinion, follow strict structure… it feels like a different person is writing."* Her sense of becoming a "different person" speaks to the powerful identity demands of academic discourse, which often requires impersonality, hedging, and deference to authoritative sources. Informal digital writing and formal academic writing thus appear to call forth different selves, with distinct linguistic and epistemic repertoires.

Economics students described a similar marginalisation of their personal voice within disciplinary writing. Jubair commented: *"In Facebook posts, I can say 'I think' or 'I feel', but in university answers I have to write what the book or the theory says… my own voice is not important."* His account suggests that academic writing, as currently framed, privileges reproduction of authorised knowledge over the articulation of personal stance. Yet, it is precisely on Facebook that he practices taking positions, evaluating ideas, and framing arguments. The institutional insistence on depersonalised writing risks disconnecting academic literacy from the critical, reflective voices students cultivate in digital spaces, thereby limiting the development of genuinely critical academic writers.

Despite these tensions, some participants reported attempts to selectively transfer digital writing competencies into academic tasks. Mahira reflected: *"After writing many posts, I became better at organising my thoughts; now when I write reports, I try to make the points flow like in my longer*

Facebook posts, but I remove the informal words." Here, she intentionally draws on discourse-level skills—such as sequencing and coherence—developed through extended Facebook posts, while consciously editing out lexical and stylistic markers deemed inappropriate in academic genres. This selective adaptation reveals that students are not simply trapped between two separate literacies; rather, they actively navigate and negotiate the boundaries, carrying over what is institutionally acceptable and suppressing what is not. Nevertheless, the burden of this negotiation rests entirely on students, as institutional pedagogies seldom acknowledge Facebook as a potential resource. The result is a conflicted literacy world in which students juggle divergent norms without explicit guidance on how to productively bridge them.

4.5 Facebook as a Hybrid Semi-Academic Space for Emerging Scholarly Practice

The final theme reveals that, for many students, Facebook is not only a social or expressive platform but also an emerging semi-academic space where they experiment with forms of scholarly practice. English majors, in particular, described using Facebook to extend classroom discussions and test interpretive ideas. Hassan noted: *"Sometimes after reading a novel or an article, I write a short reflection on Facebook… not in fully academic style, but I try to connect ideas, and friends from my department respond."* His description of "connecting ideas" indicates early forms of analysis and synthesis, hallmarks of academic literacy. The fact that these reflections elicit responses from peers further suggests that Facebook hosts informal scholarly dialogues which supplement formal coursework.

Economics and Business students similarly engaged in what might be termed public-facing academic writing. Farhan explained: *"When there is news about budget or price hike, I sometimes write a post explaining it in simple language; my friends ask questions, and I feel like I am teaching."* In translating complex economic developments into accessible language, he performs a pedagogical role, consolidating his own understanding while enabling peers to engage with disciplinary knowledge. Oishi described using Facebook groups for practical literacy learning: *"We discuss how to write emails, CVs, even cover letters… it's not graded, but we learn from each other's drafts."* These practices indicate that students are using Facebook to co-construct knowledge about genres that are crucial for both academic and professional success.

Taken together, these accounts challenge simplistic binaries between "social" and "academic" writing. For many participants, Facebook is already a hybrid literacy space where social interaction, personal expression, disciplinary knowledge, and practical writing advice converge. It is neither fully academic nor purely recreational; instead, it functions as a flexible semi-academic environment in which students rehearse forms of critical reflection, explanation, and genre awareness that are central to academic writing literacy. However, because these activities unfold outside formal curricula, they remain invisible to institutional pedagogies and policies. This invisibility represents both a missed opportunity and a potential site for rethinking academic writing support in Bangladeshi higher education.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study show that Facebook operates as a significant literacy environment where Bangladeshi university students engage in identity work, rhetorical negotiation, multilingual meaning-making, and hybrid genre experimentation. Interpreted through the combined lenses of

Digital Literacies, New Literacy Studies (NLS), Academic Literacies, and Translanguaging Theory, these practices illuminate the complexity of students' writing trajectories and reveal the limitations of conventional academic writing pedagogies in Bangladeshi higher education. Rather than reiterating the empirical themes, this discussion critically interprets how the findings extend, challenge, and reframe existing theories of literacy, particularly within a Global South context where digital infrastructures, linguistic ideologies, and pedagogical cultures shape literacy practices in distinctive ways.

The findings strongly echo core arguments in Digital Literacies scholarship, which conceptualises writing as a socially situated, participatory practice embedded in everyday communication (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Barton & Lee, 2013). Students described Facebook as a space where they could experiment with ideas, build confidence, negotiate critique, and write with an authentic sense of purpose—experiences that stand in stark contrast to the exam-oriented, teacher-centred literacy practices prevalent in Bangladeshi universities. This contrast underscores the argument that digital spaces provide alternative pathways for literacy development that are rarely acknowledged in formal institutions. Moreover, the centrality of Facebook in the Bangladeshi digital ecology, unlike Western contexts where multiple platforms distribute users' writing practices, highlights how a single platform can become a dominant literacy site. This observation extends current Digital Literacies research by showing that platform dominance shapes how students acquire rhetorical and discursive strategies, particularly when institutional pedagogies provide limited opportunities for extended writing.

From an NLS perspective (Street, 2003), students' Facebook writing constitutes vernacular literacy work that is deeply intertwined with identity, emotion, agency, and community belonging. The study demonstrates that students' everyday digital writing is not peripheral to literacy development but is central to how they articulate voice and position themselves as writers. Students' reflections on gaining confidence and discovering their "voice" online reveal that Facebook provides a space where writing is connected to lived experiences, personal expression, and peer interaction—dimensions largely absent from academic writing tasks shaped by correctness, structure and replication. This aligns with Pahl and Rowsell's (2012) argument that vernacular literacies hold significant personal and cultural value even when unrecognised by institutions. In the Bangladeshi context, where English-dominant writing norms often produce deficit narratives around students' abilities, the identity-affirming practices observed on Facebook challenge institutional ideologies that equate academic writing solely with mastery of standard English forms.

The tension between students' digital writing identities and university writing expectations becomes particularly evident when the findings are interpreted through an Academic Literacies lens (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007). Participants repeatedly described academic writing as a restrictive genre requiring them to suppress personal voice, adhere to rigid structural templates, and reproduce authorised knowledge rather than engage in critical or creative expression. The disconnect between the expressive, dialogic, audience-responsive writing students practise on Facebook and the highly formal, impersonal writing demanded by universities illustrates the epistemological and ideological dimensions of academic literacy. These findings reaffirm that academic writing is not a neutral skill but a socially regulated practice shaped by institutional power relations. In Bangladesh, where writing instruction remains heavily influenced by exam culture,

academic literacies are framed as static skills rather than negotiated practices. The study contributes to Academic Literacies theory by highlighting how digital literacy environments expose the limitations of institutionally sanctioned writing norms and reveal students' capacity for rhetorical sophistication outside formal assessment contexts.

Translanguaging emerged as a pervasive dimension of students' Facebook writing, demonstrating that multilingual meaning-making is central to their communicative repertoires. Drawing on García and Wei's (2014) conceptualisation of translanguaging as the fluid deployment of a unified linguistic repertoire, the findings show that students strategically blend Bangla, English, Arabic phrases, and emojis to achieve clarity, authenticity, and relational alignment with their audiences. This flexibility reflects both linguistic creativity and socio-cultural awareness, challenging monolingual ideologies that dominate academic writing in Bangladesh. The fact that students must suppress their multilingual resources in academic assignments reveals a structural contradiction: universities value English as the sole medium of academic legitimacy, while students' lived literacies are inherently multilingual. This study extends translanguaging scholarship by demonstrating how digital platforms become key sites where students' multilingual practices flourish, even as academic institutions attempt to impose monolingual norms. The resulting tension exposes broader issues of linguistic inequity and epistemic injustice in Bangladeshi higher education.

Finally, the study shows that Facebook serves as a hybrid semi-academic space in which students experiment with explanatory, reflective, and analytical discourse. This hybridity challenges the rigid separation between "social" and "academic" writing often assumed by educators. When students write reflections on literature, explain economic concepts for peers, or share academic advice, they engage in early forms of public academic discourse that are dialogic, audience-oriented, and intellectually generative. These practices resonate with emergent scholarship emphasising the educational potential of informal online writing (Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Lee, 2017), but the present study extends this work by demonstrating that students in the Global South develop semi-academic genres independently, without institutional scaffolding. This finding challenges Western-centric assumptions that academic digital writing must be teacher-designed, revealing that students themselves create meaningful academic writing ecologies outside formal curricula.

Overall, the discussion shows that Facebook writing is not merely an informal, recreational activity but a complex digital literacy practice that intersects with identity, multilingualism, rhetorical development and disciplinary learning. These insights illuminate larger structural issues in Bangladeshi higher education, where academic writing remains dominated by monolingual, exam-driven conventions that fail to recognise the rich literacy practices students enact daily in digital spaces. By interpreting the findings through Digital Literacies, New Literacy Studies, Academic Literacies and Translanguaging Theory, this study challenges deficit-oriented narratives and contributes a contextually grounded understanding of how informal digital writing can inform, complicate and enrich students' academic writing trajectories.

6. Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study point to important pedagogical, curricular and ideological implications for writing instruction in Bangladeshi higher education. When interpreted through Digital Literacies, New Literacy Studies, Academic Literacies, and Translanguaging Theory, these insights underscore

the need for systemic shifts in how academic writing is conceptualised, taught and evaluated. Rather than treating students' digital writing as peripheral or irrelevant, universities must recognise that the rhetorical, multilingual and identity-based practices students enact on Facebook constitute meaningful literacy resources that can support academic writing development. These implications extend beyond classroom technique; they speak to the broader epistemological and ideological foundations of writing pedagogy in Bangladesh, which are currently shaped by monolingual norms, exam-oriented structures and narrow views of academic discourse.

A central implication concerns the need for academic writing pedagogy to draw more explicitly on students' existing digital literacy practices. The confidence-building, audience-responsive, and exploratory writing behaviours observed in this study align closely with international research showing that low-stakes, socially situated writing environments enhance student engagement and writer identity (Barton & Lee, 2013; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Incorporating pedagogical approaches that mirror the dialogic and iterative qualities of Facebook—such as reflective journals, exploratory posts, peer-response activities or multimodal compositions—could help reduce anxiety around writing and encourage students to see themselves as writers before they are asked to produce high-stakes, graded academic texts. Scholars such as Elbow (1998) and Hyland (2019) have long argued that writing develops through practice and meaningful communication rather than correction-oriented teaching, suggesting that Bangladeshi universities could benefit from embedding low-stakes, process-oriented writing tasks into the curriculum as a bridge between informal and formal genres.

The findings also hold significant implications for linguistic ideology and policy in Bangladeshi higher education. Students' extensive use of translanguaging on Facebook points to the communicative and cognitive advantages of mobilising their entire linguistic repertoires (García & Wei, 2014). Yet academic writing policies continue to privilege monolingual English norms, reflecting what Canagarajah (2013) describes as the "monolingual bias" of postcolonial education systems. This ideological misalignment restricts students' meaning-making potential and reinforces deficit discourses that pathologise multilingualism. Writing teachers and policymakers must reconsider the rigid separation between languages in academic contexts and adopt more inclusive stances that recognise multilingual resources as assets rather than liabilities. Although full translanguaging in formal academic documents may not always be feasible, pedagogical spaces such as brainstorming, drafting, collaborative writing and class discussions can meaningfully incorporate students' multilingual repertoires without compromising academic standards. Research in multilingual education consistently shows that allowing students to draw on their dominant languages enhances cognitive engagement, critical thinking and disciplinary understanding (Cummins, 2017; Hornberger & Link, 2012).

A further implication relates to the need for a more critical approach to academic writing instruction. The tensions students described—switching identities, suppressing personal voice and conforming to rigid templates—reflect deeper structural issues in how writing is conceptualised within Bangladeshi universities. According to Academic Literacies scholarship, academic writing is never merely a technical skill but a socially regulated practice shaped by power relations and epistemological assumptions (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007). The current study reinforces this view by demonstrating that students' rhetorical sophistication and critical engagement flourish in digital

spaces, even when academic environments restrict these forms of expression. Thus, writing pedagogy must shift from a corrective, product-oriented model to one that foregrounds negotiation of meaning, disciplinary values and the development of authorial voice. Teachers could draw on Lea and Street's (1998) academic literacies model by explicitly discussing how disciplines construct knowledge, how arguments are built, and how writers position themselves within academic conversations rather than focusing solely on grammar or structure.

Another implication concerns the potential role of social media as a semi-academic environment that could complement formal writing development. The study shows that some students already use Facebook to reflect on literature, explain economic concepts or share professional writing advice—activities that mirror early forms of academic discourse. This aligns with research suggesting that digital platforms can support public academic writing and promote authentic engagement with ideas (Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Lee, 2017). Universities could build on this emergent practice by designing optional online spaces—closed Facebook groups, discussion forums, or multimodal writing communities—where students can share drafts, receive peer feedback, or rehearse academic arguments in a less formal environment. Such initiatives would not replace academic writing instruction but could operate as hybrid literacy spaces that ease the transition from informal expression to disciplinary writing.

Finally, the study highlights a broader need for curriculum reform and teacher development. Writing instructors require professional support to integrate digital literacies, recognise multilingual resources, and adopt more student-centred pedagogical approaches. As global scholarship increasingly emphasises the importance of digital, multimodal and culturally responsive writing pedagogy (Rowsell & Walsh, 2011; Mills, 2016), Bangladeshi universities must ensure that their writing curricula are aligned with contemporary understandings of literacy. This may involve revising course outcomes, diversifying writing assignments, incorporating digital genres and training teachers to move beyond grammar-focused instruction. Without such systemic changes, the gap between students' lived literacies and institutional expectations will continue to widen.

7. Conclusion

This study examined how university students in Bangladesh engage with Facebook as a meaningful writing space and how these practices intersect with their academic writing development. Drawing on Digital Literacies, New Literacy Studies, Academic Literacies and Translanguaging Theory, the findings reveal that Facebook operates as an affective, rhetorical and multilingual literacy environment that supports confidence, authorial identity, audience awareness, and flexible meaning-making. These digital practices contrast sharply with the monolingual, correctness-driven and exam-oriented writing norms that dominate Bangladeshi higher education. By foregrounding students' narratives, the study challenges deficit perspectives that portray students as weak writers and instead demonstrates that they possess rich, diverse literacies cultivated through everyday digital participation. The findings thus contribute to global discussions on literacy by offering a contextually grounded understanding of how informal digital spaces shape academic trajectories within Global South settings.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. Data were drawn from three private universities in Dhaka, and while these institutions represent influential academic spaces, they cannot

capture the full diversity of literacy practices across Bangladesh's public universities, regional campuses or rural student populations. Similarly, although interviews, focus groups and participant-selected Facebook posts offered rich insights, they could not fully document the real-time processes through which digital texts are drafted, revised and socially circulated. The study also relied on retrospective accounts that may have been shaped by participants' selective memories or awareness of institutional expectations. Furthermore, the exclusive focus on Facebook—though appropriate in the Bangladeshi context where it dominates students' digital engagement—limits the transferability of findings to other platforms that may structure literacy differently. These limitations signal the importance of approaching the findings as contextually rooted rather than universally generalisable.

Future research can further deepen understandings of digital–academic literacy intersections in several ways. Longitudinal studies would illuminate how students' digital writing practices evolve across their university trajectories, particularly as they transition into higher-level disciplinary writing. Comparative work incorporating public universities, rural institutions or madrasa-educated students could reveal how socio-economic and educational backgrounds shape digital literacies and academic writing identities. Additionally, digital ethnographic methods—capturing live interactions, comment threads and composing practices—would offer more granular perspectives on the social and cognitive dynamics of online writing. Intervention-based studies could also examine how writing instructors might meaningfully integrate digital literacies, reflective writing and translanguaging practices into curriculum design, and evaluate how such pedagogical innovations influence students' academic performance, confidence and writer identity. These avenues would not only build on the present study but also contribute to theorising literacy practices in digitally mediated Global South contexts.

This study argues that Facebook is far more than a social networking platform; it is a complex literacy environment where students rehearse rhetorical strategies, negotiate multilingual identities and engage in hybrid forms of academic sense-making. Recognising these practices compels educators and policymakers to question entrenched monolingual, exam-driven approaches to writing instruction and to envision pedagogies that are more inclusive, reflexive and attuned to students' lived communicative realities. By foregrounding the literacy resources students already possess, higher education institutions in Bangladesh have the opportunity to cultivate writing pedagogies that are not only more equitable but also more aligned with contemporary understandings of literacy in a digitally mediated world. Through such reorientation, academic writing instruction can move toward practices that honour linguistic diversity, nurture writer identity and bridge the persistent divide between students' everyday digital literacies and institutional expectations.

Acknowledgment: The author extends sincere appreciation to the editor and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback, which greatly enhanced the clarity and quality of this paper.

Funding: This research was conducted without any financial support from funding agencies, institutions, or organizations.

Author's Contribution: The author solely conceptualized, designed, conducted, and wrote the manuscript and takes full responsibility for its content and accuracy.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest related to this study.

Declaration of Originality: This manuscript has not been submitted to, nor is it under consideration by, any other journal or conference.

Data Availability: All data generated or analysed during this study are retained by the author and are available upon reasonable request.

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