

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING AND DISSEMINATING GEN Z SLANG: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This study focuses on how digital platforms shape linguistic evolution and interactions within this generation, exploring the important role of social media in influencing and spreading the slang of Gen Z. The study highlights how social media platforms act as important spaces where linguistic creativity can flourish and spread. By analyzing the relationship between Gen Z's use of slang and their engagement with online platforms, this study aims to shed light on how digital culture impacts communication practices in contemporary society. A survey was conducted with 30 participants, comprising both male and female respondents from BZU Multan, to understand their use of slang and the influence of social media on their linguistic choices. The study revealed that major platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter are contributing significantly to the development and spread of slang among Gen Z. These platforms foster a dynamic environment where new slang terms are quickly adopted, normalized, and integrated into everyday vocabulary. The study also revealed that Gen Z slang usage is closely tied to engagement with social media trends and participation in online communities. In conclusion, this study highlights the profound influence of social media on the creation, circulation, and normalization of Gen Z slang, with these platforms reflecting the dynamic interplay between technology and language and acting as incubators of linguistic trends. The study suggests that social media use can provide valuable insight into the broader influence of digital culture on contemporary communication habits.

Key Words: Language Evolution, Gen Z, Slang, Social Media Influence, Digital communication, Slang normalization, Youth identity, Cultural lexicon, Modern communication practices.

Introduction

“Communication means the imparting, conveying or exchange of ideas, knowledge, whether by speech, writing or signs”. – Oxford English Dictionary

Communication is the basic aspect of human interaction and functions as a bridge for people to share ideas, emotions and information. Basically, communication guarantees what we can understand to others, and that the messages we send are transmitted and received in suspicion context and meaning. It is not simply about speaking or transmitting words; it is about creating a shared understanding between the sender and the receiver. This process is critical for fostering connections, resolving conflicts, and collaborating effectively in various settings. The question is how to communicate. Communication can occur in various ways that are widely classified into oral and non-verbal format. Verbal communication involves the use of spoken or written language to convey messages. It includes everything from casual conversations and public speaking to text messages and written reports. The clarity and structure of language in verbal communication play a vital role in ensuring the accuracy and effectiveness of the message conveyed.

Non-verbal communication, on the other hand, refers to all the ways in which we communicate without using words. This includes body language, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, and even silence. Nonverbal cues often provide context

and emotional depth to verbal communication, enhancing or sometimes changing the meaning of what is being said. For example, a warm smile can make a simple greeting more welcoming, while cross-handed can offer protection or discomfort, even if the words pronounced are neutral.

The language, verbal or non-verbal, serves as a powerful tool for communication. It allows people to express their ideas, share experiences, and connect with others. Language is not static: it evolves and adapts in response to cultural influences, technological advances, and societal changes. In today's interconnected world, where digital communication is prevalent, the way we use language has become even more dynamic. Emojis, memes, and abbreviations, for instance, have become integral parts of modern communication, adding layers of meaning to both verbal and non-verbal exchanges. Ultimately, communication is not just an exchange of words; it is a strengthening of mutual understanding. Whether it is a carefully crafted speech, a heartfelt letter, or a simple gesture, the goal is to ensure that the message resonates with the recipient in its intended form. By recognizing the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which people communicate and interact with each other.

According to Syaputra et al. (2024), Language is a communication tool that is useful for interacting with others and sharing information. It is a tool used by members of society to communicate with others. Each language has unique illustrations and arrangements in terms of pronunciation, spelling and meaning.

People use different kinds of languages to communicate with each other. Nowadays, with the advancement in science and technology, the advancement in language has also taken place. People especially the Gen Z [people born between the late 1990s and early 2010] tend to use the shortened form of words in their communication and they name it slang. It has become a common practice to use slang and the most interesting thing about slang is that it makes the communication more interesting, humorous and understandable. Gen Z can create their slang on their own. According to Yusuf et al. (2022), there is a group of words in a language known as slang.

We can call it an informal language that is delivered in a fun or relaxed form. Generation Z, known for their proficiency with technology, swiftly generates and shares slang through platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

Their slang often reflects their values, such as humour and originality, with terms like 'lit,' 'sus,' and 'no cap' gaining popularity. Social media hastens the spread of these phrases, influencing how Gen Z communicates and shaping their unique identity. Social media platforms like TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat serve the means for spreading of slang. They allow young people to quickly disseminate and popularize new terms and phrases. These sites encourage concise and creative communication, facilitating the swift spread and trendiness of slang. Additionally, social media helps Gen Z forge connections and express their identities through vocabulary, making slang a vital component of their cultural identity. The constant influx of material and interactions on social media ensures that slang evolves rapidly, influencing how Gen Z communicates both online and face-to-face.

According to Endang et al. (2024), Social media can be considered as an online facilitator that helps users establish relationship and build social relationship on the internet. From year to year, social media continues to evolve either in one platform update its features and functions or even new platforms emerging to meet people's new needs. Many new platforms that have emerged in recent years show that the popularity and interest in social media has increased significantly.

In conclusion, communication is a multifaceted process that covers verbal and non-verbal elements, which serves as a vital tool for the exchange of ideas, emotions and information. The language, as a means of communication, continues to develop, especially in the era of digital technologies, where social networks play a central role in the formation of language trends. Among Gen Z, slang has become a unique and dynamic form of expression that reflects their creativity, humour, and cultural values. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat facilitate the creation, adoption, and rapid dissemination of slang, allowing Gen Z to connect and assert their identity through language. Social media not only accelerates the spread of these informal terms, but also fosters a sense of belonging and cultural identity among this generation. By examining the relationship between social media and the evolution of Generation Z slang, this research highlights the profound influence of digital platforms on modern communication and linguistic practices.

Literature Review

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics plays a vital role in understanding Gen Z slang by examining how social, cultural, and technological factors influence the creation, use, and evolution of Gen Z slang. Slang can serve as an identity marker, allowing Gen Z to express a sense of group belonging, distinguish themselves from previous generations, and reflect values such as inclusive and mobility. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter are pivotal in shaping and disseminating slang, enabling global diffusion and rapid linguistic innovation. Many terms, like "slay" and "no cap," originate from marginalized communities, highlighting issues of cultural appropriation and power dynamics. Regional, cultural, and multilingual variations add to the diversity of slang, while the rapid life cycle of terms, which emerge from memes or trends and often disappear due to overuse, reflects the fast pace of Gen Z's digital communication. Combining creativity, humor, and cross-cultural influences, Gen Z slang not only reflects their identity, but is also a dynamic response to broader social and linguistic changes. Sociolinguistics being an interdisciplinary field [including both sociology and linguistics] helps to understand the spread of slang among different societies and cultures.

Language is evolving rapidly, and social media platforms have become powerful agents in accelerating language change, especially among Generation Z (Generation Z). As a demographic group born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, Generation Z is deeply connected to digital communication channels, where unique language practices, including slang, emerge and spread. This literature review examines existing research on how social media platforms influence the creation, adoption, and dissemination of Generation Z slang.

The Nature of Slang in Digital Communication

Slang is defined as informal, non-standard language that reflects cultural trends and group identities. Slang in digital communication reflects the dynamic and adaptive nature of language in an interconnected, rapidly changing environment. It thrives on creativity, informality, and brevity, evolving as a result of cultural trends, technological innovations, and social interactions. In the digital world, slang serves as a powerful linguistic tool to enhance expression, foster community, and create a sense of identity, especially among younger generations like Gen Z.

One of the defining features of slang in digital communication is its informal and playful nature. It often deviates from conventional grammar and structure, favouring colloquialism and originality over formality. For example, expressions such as "yeet," "sksksk," or abbreviations such as "BRB" (I'll be right back) and "OMG" (oh my god) illustrate how

digital slang places a premium on relationship and humour. This informality makes communication more engaging and accessible, especially in the context of social media, where interactions are often informal and spontaneous.

Another important aspect of digital slang is its brevity. In a world where character restrictions, instant messages, and short education are prioritized, effective communication requires concise. Slang terms such as \ "SUS \ " (suspicious), \ "lol \ " (loud laughing), and \ "IDK \ " are designed to convey complex ideas and emotions with minimal efforts that match quickly. Digital communication slang is also very focused on context. The value of slang terms often depends on the platform, community, or cultural moment used. For example, a term that gains popularity on TikTok may have one connotation in that space, but may be interpreted differently on Twitter or Instagram. This contextual flexibility allows slang to adapt and remain relevant in different digital communities. In addition, the digital slang is constantly developing. New words and sentences appear quickly, often mobile memes, viral trends or the influence of online teams. Social media platforms act as incubators for such linguistic innovations, and their online and interactive nature accelerates the adoption and spread of slang: terms originating from highly specialised subcultures can become globally recognised within days, demonstrating the speed and reach of digital communication. The collaborative and participatory nature of digital communication also shapes slang: users collectively create, modify and popularize slang terms, making them a shared cultural product. This participatory approach fosters a sense of belonging and community among users, especially within specific online subcultures and fan groups.

In summary, we can say that slang in digital communication is informal, terse, contextual, and constantly evolving. It reflects the creativity and adaptability of language in response to technological progress and societal changes. As a cultural phenomenon, the digital slang improves not only the way people communicate online, but also serves as a marker of identity and the community in the modern digital age.

Studies by Eble (1996) and Coleman (2014) highlight slang as a linguistic tool for self-expression and community building, particularly among younger demographics. With the advent of social media, slang has moved from niche in-groups to global audiences. Research by Crystal (2004) suggests that the digital landscape enhances the visibility and life cycle of slang, creating a shared linguistic repertoire among users.

Social Media as a Catalyst for Linguistic Change

Social media platforms like TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat create a virtual space where users co-create and popularize slang. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat serve as dynamic virtual spaces where users actively co-create, disseminate, and popularize slang expressions. These platforms facilitate a collaborative environment in which linguistic innovation thrives, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to contribute to the evolution of language. These digital spaces act as catalysts for the rapid adoption and standardization of new slang terms through viral trends, memes, and influencer content. TikTok, with its short-form video content, allows users to combine slang with visual and audio elements to amplify its impact and embed it in popular culture. Known for its succinct style of communication, Twitter encourages the creation of witty and clear phrases that resonate with online users, often transforming niche expressions into mainstream vernacular. Instagram, with its emphasis on visual storytelling, provides a platform for incorporating slang into captions, stories, and comments, amplifying the use of slang in creative and socially engaging ways. On the other hand, Snapchat's ephemeral nature encourages spontaneous, informal communication, creating the perfect environment for

experimenting and refining slang. Boyd (2014) emphasizes the participatory nature of these platforms, allowing individuals to adapt and remix language in real time.

Viral Trends and Memes: Studies by Shifman (2013) explore how viral memes contribute to the rapid dissemination of slang. Platforms like TikTok often serve as breeding grounds for new terms, where short-form videos make slang visually and audibly accessible to millions of users.

Hashtags and Algorithms: According to Tagliamonte (2016), hashtags and algorithms amplify certain terms, enabling slang to transcend regional boundaries. For instance, hashtags like #NoCap or #Slay aggregate content, fostering wider adoption of these terms. Furthermore, Social media platforms transform slang into a dynamic and creative form of communication by cultivating different types of slang, such as abbreviations (such as "LOL", "FOMO"). Borrowing slang from marginalized groups ("kill", "te") emphasize cultural exchange, while gaming slang ("GG", "noob") and platform-specific terms ("FYP", "subtweet") reflect niche character culture. Hashtags (#TBT), hyperbolic expressions ("dead\"), and abbreviated words ("whosh") emphasize brevity and relativity. Together, these slangs capture the changing cultural trends and the rapid pace of online interactions. The study of Yusuf et al.(2022) shows that there are five types of slang including acronym, flippant, imitative, clipping and fresh and creative depending upon their functions.

According to Tufail et al.[2024], multiple variables, such as social interaction, technology, and lifestyle, affect language change. For instance, new words may develop as an outcome of advances in technology and innovations. Language shifts or borrowing can result from constant communication inside as well as across national borders. Changes in language are additionally caused by people's lifestyle choices. The lives of individuals during pandemics are a particular example.

METHOD AND THEORY

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of social media in the creation and dissemination of slang among Generation Z. Social media platforms are dynamic media for the rapid development and spread of languages, especially among the younger generation. To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, questionnaires were chosen as the primary data collection method. This approach is effective in gathering targeted responses while capturing participants' perspectives and experiences. The study involved 30 participants, including both male and female students from Bahauddin Zakariya University, who represent a key demographic of Gen Z. By focusing on this group, the research aims to analyze how frequently social media platforms are used to engage with and adopt new slang, as well as to understand the influence of these platforms on their everyday language. This study used a quantitative and descriptive design, supplemented by minor qualitative elements, to understand the role of social media in shaping and spreading Gen Z slang. A descriptive approach is appropriate as it allows the analysis and summary of characteristics, usage patterns and opinions related to the adoption and spread of slang on social media platforms. The study uses a structured questionnaire, consisting primarily of closed-ended questions, to collect quantitative data on participants' social media usage, slang exposure, and slang term usage. This quantitative component helps identify trends and patterns within the target audience. In addition, an open-ended question was included to gather qualitative opinions on the perceived role of social media in influencing language evolution. The exploratory aspect of the open-ended question allows participants to share unique insights and perspectives, helping to uncover new ideas or themes about the impact of social media. The combination of descriptive and exploratory elements provides a comprehensive understanding of the

phenomenon, balancing measurable trends with personal perspectives. Using this design, the study aimed to analyse how often social media promotes the use of slang, which platforms are most influential, and how students perceive the role of social media in shaping their linguistic expression. The questionnaire was designed to collect relevant data on the role of social media in shaping and disseminating Gen Z slang. It consisted mainly of multiple-choice questions for ease of analysis and to ensure suitability for achieving the research goals, with one open-ended question to capture qualitative insights. The questionnaire covered four main areas: demographic information (age and gender), social media usage (platforms used and time spent per day), slang usage (understanding of specific slang terms and frequency of use), and finally an open-ended question: participants' opinions on the role of social media in influencing the spread of slang. We conducted a pilot study with 10 participants to ensure the clarity and reliability of the questions. Feedback from the pilot helped refine the wording and structure, ensuring that the questionnaire effectively captured the required data for the study. The target group for this study is Generation Z people who are active users of social media and use Generation Z slang. Participants were selected from Bahauddin Zakariya University and represent a relevant and accessible population for this study. A convenience sampling method was used because it provides easy access to respondents in a university setting who meet the criteria of social media users familiar with Generation Z slang. This random sampling method was chosen due to time and resource constraints while ensuring that participants met the study objectives. The sample of this study is 30 participants, which were determined based on the possibility of research and data collection. Although the sample is relatively small, it provides a sufficient foundation for the identification of trends and models, as the social media affects the distribution and implementation of Gen Z slang. The volume of the sample is in accordance with similar concentrated population statistics studies. Data for this study were collected using offline paper questionnaires that were distributed directly to participants. This method ensured a higher response rate and allowed for immediate clarification of all participants' questions. The data collection process took place over a week, allowing enough time for 30 participants to complete the questionnaire. The responses collected from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify trends and patterns in the data. For the quantitative data from the multiple choice questions, means and frequencies were calculated to determine the most commonly used social media platforms, the amount of time participants spent on these platforms, and Gen Z's familiarity with certain slang terms. This approach allowed for a clearer understanding of the use and spread of slang through social media. A basic thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions to identify recurring themes and opinions regarding the role of social media in shaping slang. This combination of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the data and effectively addressed the research objectives. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent was obtained before completing the survey. Responses were kept anonymous and used for research purposes only.

RESULTS

The study contained 30 participants at BAHAUDDIN ZAKARIYA University, consists of 15 men and 15 women. All participants belonged to generation Z and were 18 to 25 years old. The results showed that Instagram and TikTok were the most frequently used social media platforms among participants, followed by twitter. On average, participants reported spending 1-3 hours daily on social media, highlighting its strong influence on their daily activities. When the popular slang term Gen Z list (for example, "savage", "no cap", "tea",

and" FR " "ghost") are presented, 90 % of the participants recognized these terms. In many cases, "Ghost","tea" and "savage" were the most recognized conditions. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that social media platforms play a significant role in introducing and popularizing new slang. Respondents noted that "memes and influencer content make slang spread the most." In summary, the results reveal that social media, especially platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, play a key role in the formation and dissemination of Gen Z slang, with participants demonstrating a high level of familiarity with popular slang terms and perceiving social media as the main source of information on how new slang terms are emerging and influencing communication.

Category	Details
Participants	30 (15 men, 15 women)
Age Range	18 to 25 years old (Generation Z)
Most Used Social Media Platforms	1. Instagram 2. TikTok 3. Twitter
Average Time Spent on Social Media	1-3 hours daily
Recognition of Gen Z Slang Terms	90% of participants recognized terms such as "savage", "no cap", "tea", "FR", "ghost"
Most Recognized Slang Terms	"Ghost", "Tea", "Savage"
Perception on Social Media's Role	Social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, are seen as the main platforms for introducing and spreading new slang.
Influencing Factors	"Memes and influencer content" are identified as the primary drivers of slang spread.
Overall Conclusion	Social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok, play a significant role in the formation, dissemination, and popularization of Gen Z slang.

This table summarizes the key findings from the study in an organized manner.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that social media plays a significant role in shaping, disseminating, and popularizing Gen Z slang. The responses of the 30 participants indicate that Instagram and TikTok are the most frequently used platforms, followed by Twitter, while participants generally reported spending one to three hours daily on social media. This level of engagement provides Gen Z with frequent exposure to emerging expressions and creates opportunities for new slang to be encountered, adopted, and incorporated into everyday communication. The high recognition rate of commonly used expressions such as "ghost," "tea," "savage," "no cap," and "FR" further indicates the considerable visibility of contemporary slang within the participants' digital environment.

The results support the view presented in the literature that social media has become an important environment for contemporary linguistic change. Previous discussions in the study describe digital platforms as spaces in which users collectively create, modify, and popularize

linguistic expressions. The present findings are consistent with this perspective because participants identified social media as an important source through which new slang is introduced and spread. In particular, the prominence of Instagram and TikTok suggests that platforms based on highly interactive and rapidly circulating content can provide favourable conditions for linguistic innovation. This corresponds with the discussion of Boyd (2014), who emphasizes the participatory nature of networked communication, and with the study's discussion of viral trends, memes, hashtags, and influencer content as mechanisms through which linguistic forms gain wider visibility.

The findings also reinforce the sociolinguistic understanding of slang as more than simply a collection of informal words. As discussed in the literature review, slang can function as a marker of group identity, social belonging, creativity, and cultural affiliation. The rapid circulation of expressions through online communities allows users to participate in shared linguistic practices and to recognize themselves as members of particular digital and generational groups. The widespread recognition of the selected slang terms among the participants therefore suggests that social media contributes not only to the circulation of vocabulary but also to the establishment of a shared linguistic repertoire among young users. This finding is compatible with the work of Eble (1996) and Coleman (2014), which presents slang as a resource for self-expression and community formation.

An important finding is the reported influence of memes and influencer content on the spread of slang. Participants specifically identified these forms of digital content as major factors behind the dissemination of new expressions. This finding illustrates how the participatory structure of social media can accelerate linguistic diffusion. A slang term does not necessarily remain restricted to the community in which it originates; repeated exposure through viral content can move it across online communities and into broader everyday usage. The literature reviewed in this study similarly identifies memes, trends, hashtags, and platform-based interactions as important mechanisms through which slang can move rapidly from relatively limited online communities to wider audiences.

The findings further support the argument that digital communication contributes to the dynamic nature of contemporary language. Slang on social media is characterized in the literature as informal, concise, creative, contextual, and constantly changing. The strong familiarity of participants with contemporary expressions demonstrates how quickly linguistic forms can become recognizable within a digitally connected generation. At the same time, the rapid emergence and disappearance of slang suggests that its use remains closely connected to changing online trends and communities. Thus, social media should not be viewed merely as a channel through which pre-existing slang is transmitted; it also provides an interactive environment in which linguistic forms can gain new meanings, wider circulation, and greater social visibility.

Overall, the study concludes that social media has a substantial role in the contemporary development and dissemination of Gen Z slang among the surveyed university students. Instagram and TikTok emerged as particularly prominent platforms, while memes and influencer-generated content were identified as important drivers of slang diffusion. The findings indicate that frequent engagement with digital platforms exposes young users to emerging linguistic forms and facilitates their recognition and adoption. Consequently, social media functions as an important environment for linguistic creativity, interaction, and generational identity. However, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the study because the research was based on a relatively small convenience sample of 30 students from Bahauddin Zakariya University. The results therefore indicate patterns within the



surveyed group rather than representing all members of Generation Z. Future research with larger and more diverse samples could provide a broader understanding of how different social media platforms, communities, and demographic groups contribute to the continuing evolution of Gen Z slang.

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