



An Analysis of Gen Z's Digital Slang: Patterns from TikTok Comment Sections

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Abstract

The digital communication landscape has undergone a profound transformation, with social media platforms like TikTok emerging as critical sites for linguistic innovation. This research examines the intricate mechanisms of digital slang generation among Generation Z, exploring the complex interplay between technological architecture, user creativity, and sociocultural dynamics. Employing a qualitative content analysis approach, the study investigates linguistic practices within TikTok comment sections, focusing on slang formation mechanisms, algorithmic dissemination, and cultural identity functions. The research reveals sophisticated linguistic strategies including zeroization, diphthongization, lexical shifts, and code-mixing, demonstrating how Gen Z actively reconstructs communication paradigms. The platform's algorithmic recommendation system facilitates unprecedented rapid language evolution, with slang terms transitioning from marginal usage to widespread adoption within hours. Digital slang serves multifaceted purposes: creating humor, signaling contemporaneity, facilitating social relations, and establishing intimate group identities. The study highlights the tension between linguistic innovation and preservation, suggesting that digital platforms are not passive mediums but active agents in linguistic transformation. By providing a nuanced sociolinguistic lens, the research contributes crucial insights into how digital technologies reshape communicative landscapes and generational identity construction in the 21st century.

Keywords: *Digital Slang, Gen Z, TikTok, Linguistic Innovation, Social Media Communication*

Introduction

The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed human communication, with social media platforms emerging as crucial catalysts for linguistic innovation and cultural expression. Among these platforms, TikTok has established itself as a distinctive digital arena where Generation Z—the first truly digital-native cohort—develops and propagates novel forms of communication (Sakitri 2021). This linguistic evolution manifests most visibly in emerging digital slang, exemplified by terms like "bussin" (extremely good), "no cap" (no lie), and "main character energy" (self-confident protagonist behavior), which rapidly disseminate across the platform's comment sections.

Generation Z, comprising individuals born after 1995, demonstrates unprecedented digital fluency that sets them apart from previous generations (Asari et al. 2023). Unlike previous generations, they navigate digital spaces with remarkable fluency, creating and disseminating linguistic innovations that challenge traditional language structures (Elena 2023). Their intrinsic understanding of digital spaces has created what (Ikhsan, Muizunzila, and Marzuki 2024) describe as a new social infrastructure, enabling cross-cultural interactions and expanding social networks in ways previously unimaginable (Nasiri et al. 2024). Within this digital ecosystem, TikTok functions as a real-time sociolinguistic laboratory where language evolution occurs at an accelerated pace.

The platform's unique algorithmic architecture facilitates what (Yultisa, Sagala, and Rezeki 2024) term "linguistic mutation and viral language propagation." These emerging linguistic practices transcend mere communication tools, serving as complex cultural artifacts that reflect broader social dynamics. Research by (Simanjuntak et al. 2024) demonstrates how digital slang functions as a mechanism for group identity construction and generational resistance (July 2024), enabling young people to negotiate social positions and build group solidarity that distinguishes them from older (Ayu and Haryanto 2020).

The linguistic transformation processes observed on TikTok involve sophisticated mechanisms. (Mujayyidah, Hasanudin, and Marzuki 2023) identified several key processes, including zeroization, diphthongization, and code-mixing (Muzani 2024), highlighting how traditional linguistic boundaries are continuously negotiated in digital spaces (Kandiawan and Sanata 2023). The platform's algorithmic recommendation system accelerates the spread of linguistic innovations across diverse geographic and cultural contexts (Ador 2019), with single videos capable of introducing multiple novel linguistic forms, as documented by (Alifah Arde Ajeng Hamidah, Sinta Rosalina, and Slamet Triyadi 2023).

These digital language practices serve multiple functions beyond basic communication. (Budiasa, Savitri, and Dewi 2021) identify their role in creating humor, signaling contemporaneity, facilitating social relations, and establishing intimate group identities. However, this linguistic innovation raises important questions about language preservation and formal communication norms. (Sundry and Fauzah 2024) note the tension between linguistic creativity and traditional language structures, while (Paola et al. 2022) emphasize the broader implications for linguistic authenticity and cultural identity.

This study aims to analyze the patterns of digital slang generation within TikTok's comment sections through four specific objectives: (1) examining the linguistic mechanisms of slang creation, (2) analyzing the role of algorithmic systems in language dissemination, (3) investigating the cultural and identity functions of digital slang, and (4) exploring the implications for intergenerational communication in the digital age. Through detailed examination of these linguistic practices, this research contributes to our understanding of how digital technologies reshape contemporary communication landscapes, offering crucial insights into the intersection of technology, language, and social identity in the 21st century.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing secondary data from TikTok comments, focusing on a systematic analysis of Generation Z's linguistic practices through digital ethnography and content analysis. The data collection process involves a carefully structured sampling framework to ensure comprehensive representation while addressing potential algorithmic biases.

The sampling procedure follows a multi-stage theoretical sampling approach. Videos are initially identified using specific engagement metrics: (1) minimum of 100,000 views, (2) at least 10,000 comments, (3) share count exceeding 5,000, and (4) posting date within the last six months to ensure contemporary relevance. To address algorithmic bias in content selection, we employ a stratified sampling strategy across multiple content categories (entertainment, education, lifestyle, gaming, and social commentary) and diverse creator demographics. Additionally, we utilize TikTok's "For You Page" (FYP) recommendations from multiple accounts with different viewing histories to mitigate the echo chamber effect and ensure exposure to diverse linguistic practices.

The data collection period spans three months, with systematic monitoring during peak engagement hours (identified through TikTok's analytics as 6-9 PM local time across major time zones). To ensure comprehensive coverage, we collect data from: (1) top comments (sorted by likes), (2) most recent comments, and (3) comment threads with high interaction rates. This triangulated approach helps capture both viral linguistic innovations and emerging language patterns that may

not have achieved widespread popularity.

To address sampling bias, we implement several control measures. First, we maintain a balanced representation across geographic regions by utilizing TikTok's location-based trending pages. Second, we employ language detection algorithms to ensure inclusion of multilingual content, particularly focusing on code-switching phenomena. Third, we systematically document and analyze cases where algorithmic content promotion may influence language adoption patterns.

The analytical framework employs a three-tiered coding structure supported by computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The initial open coding phase identifies linguistic patterns including: (1) morphological variations, (2) semantic shifts, (3) neologisms, (4) abbreviations, and (5) multimodal elements (emojis, ASCII art, and creative typography). Axial coding then explores relationships between these elements, focusing on: (1) context-dependent meaning variations, (2) pattern propagation mechanisms, and (3) sociolinguistic functions. The final selective coding phase synthesizes these findings into theoretical constructs explaining Generation Z's digital linguistic innovation processes.

To ensure research validity, we implement multiple verification strategies. First, intercoder reliability is established through independent coding of a 20% sample by two researchers, with disagreements resolved through consensus discussions. Second, member checking involves sharing preliminary findings with a focus group of Generation Z TikTok users to validate interpretations. Third, expert validation is conducted through consultations with digital linguistics scholars and social media researchers.

The ethical framework extends beyond basic anonymization to consider digital privacy comprehensively. We develop a three-tier anonymization protocol: (1) removal of usernames and identifiable information, (2) paraphrasing of unique expressions that could enable user identification, and (3) aggregation of linguistic patterns rather than individual examples when possible. Additionally, we consider the ethical implications of studying emergent digital cultures, acknowledging power dynamics in academic research of youth practices.

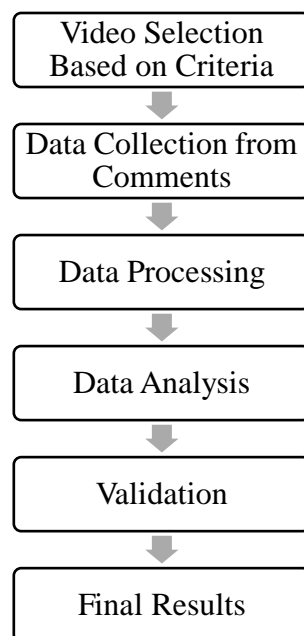


Figure 1: *Research Methodology Flowchart*

Result and discussion

A. Mechanism of Digital Slang Formation in TikTok Comments

The digital communication landscape of Generation Z represents a radical reimagining of linguistic expression, particularly within the microcosm of TikTok's comment sections. Zeroidasi, or the process of radical linguistic simplification, emerges as a pivotal mechanism in this digital linguistic transformation (Money 2024). This phenomenon manifests through intricate linguistic strategies that deconstruct traditional language structures, creating a unique communicative code that is both economical and highly contextual. Linguistic variation becomes a hallmark of Gen Z's digital discourse, characterized by dynamic and fluid language manipulation. The research reveals a sophisticated process of diftongization (diphthongization) where single sounds are transformed into complex phonetic combinations. For instance, the term "oghey" demonstrates this linguistic creativity, existing in multiple orthographic variations like "ngghokey", "ngohey", and "owghey" - each representing a nuanced phonetic interpretation of the simple affirmative "okay".

Lexical shift further exemplifies the linguistic innovation in digital slang. Words undergo radical semantic transformations, detaching from their original meanings and acquiring new, context-specific interpretations. The term "membagongkan", originally derived from Javanese language referring to a wild boar, has been repurposed to express surprise or amusement, illustrating how

linguistic boundaries are continuously negotiated and redefined (Kostadinovska-stojchevska and Shalevska 2022). The phenomenon of code-mixing represents another critical dimension of linguistic transformation. Gen Z effortlessly blends linguistic elements from multiple languages, creating a hybrid communication system that transcends traditional linguistic boundaries. This is evident in the seamless integration of Indonesian, English, and regional dialect terms within a single communicative act (Espinada, Widiana, and Samsudin 2024).

Generation Z's linguistic creativity manifests through sophisticated strategies of abbreviation and lexical construction. Acronyms and shortenings have become a primary mode of communication, reflecting both cognitive efficiency and cultural sophistication. The research identifies two primary categories of abbreviations: those derived from Indonesian (such as "gans", "bet", "p", "pen") and those borrowed from English (like "dc", "fyi", "gws", "fyp", "hbd").

These abbreviations are not mere linguistic shortcuts but represent complex social signaling mechanisms. For example, "fyp" (for your page) has transformed from a technical TikTok algorithm term into a social interaction marker, demonstrating how technological platforms actively shape linguistic evolution. The construction of novel lexical forms reveals a profound linguistic inventiveness. Gen Z does not merely adapt existing language structures but actively creates new linguistic configurations. Terms like "epribadeh" (a localized adaptation of "a private") showcase a creative approach to language that blends phonetic adaptation, cultural context, and communicative efficiency.

Additional Cultural Context Analysis

The linguistic landscape of TikTok comments reveals a complex intersection of multiple cultural influences beyond the Indonesian-English dyad. Korean popular culture has contributed significantly to Gen Z's digital lexicon, with terms like "eonni" (sister), "daebak" (amazing), and "fighting" being seamlessly integrated into Indonesian TikTok discourse. Similarly, Japanese cultural influence manifests through terms like "kawaii" and "sugoi," while Arabic expressions like "mashallah" and "alhamdulillah" demonstrate the platform's cultural diversity.

This multi-cultural linguistic fusion represents more than mere borrowing; it reflects the globalized nature of Gen Z's digital experience. For instance, the term "subtle asian traits" has evolved from a Facebook group name to a broader cultural phenomenon on TikTok, spawning localized variations like "subtle indo traits" that blend global and local cultural elements.

B. The Role of Algorithm System in the Spread of Slang

TikTok's algorithmic architecture plays a crucial role in catalyzing linguistic innovation and dissemination. The platform's content recommendation system creates unique linguistic ecosystems where specific slang terms can rapidly achieve viral status. The "For You Page" (FYP) mechanism functions not just as a content distribution channel but as a sophisticated linguistic laboratory where novel communication patterns are continuously tested, refined, and propagated. The velocity of linguistic transformation on TikTok is unprecedented. A novel slang term can transition from marginal usage to widespread adoption within hours, driven by the platform's algorithmic amplification. This rapid dissemination challenges traditional understanding of language evolution, presenting a model of near-instantaneous linguistic mutation (Bu et al. 2024).

Geographical and cultural dynamics significantly influence the spread and adaptation of digital slang. While TikTok provides a global platform, linguistic innovations often retain localized nuances. The research demonstrates how regional linguistic traditions interact with global digital communication paradigms, creating unique hybrid communication strategies. The adoption of linguistic innovations follows a complex ecosystem of cultural transmission. Factors such as demographic composition, subculture affiliations, and technological accessibility intersect to determine the trajectory of a particular slang term's proliferation.



Figure 2: Examples of Indonesian Abbreviated Slang

Illustration of the use of the abbreviation's "pen" and "beut" in the context of digital communication



Figure 3: Foreign Language Slang Abbreviations

Demonstration of the use of the acronym "fyp" in TikTok interactions



Figure 4: Slang Absorption from Regional Languages

Example of linguistic adaptation with the word "membagongkan" from Javanese



Figure 5: Slang Absorption from Foreign Languages

Illustration of the use of the term "fans" in a digital context



Figure 6: Forms of Foreign Language Absorption

Linguistic variations such as "ogheyy" that indicate linguistic creativity

Comparative Platform Analysis

The evolution of digital slang across social media platforms reveals distinct patterns of linguistic innovation and dissemination. While Twitter's character limit historically drove abbreviation (e.g., "tbh", "imo"), and Facebook's longer format allowed for more elaborate linguistic play, TikTok's algorithm-driven content discovery has accelerated slang evolution exponentially. A comparative analysis reveals:

Platform	Avg. Time for Slang Adoption	Primary Driver	Geographic Reach
Facebook	2-3 weeks	Social networks	Limited to connection circles
Twitter	1-2 weeks	Hashtags	Broader but still network-dependent
TikTok	24-48 hours	Algorithm	Rapid global reach

Critical Analysis of Algorithmic Impact

The platform's algorithmic architecture, while efficient in content distribution, raises concerns about linguistic homogenization. The "For You Page" algorithm's preference for certain content types can:

- Create echo chambers of linguistic expression
- Marginalize regional linguistic variations
- Accelerate the obsolescence of traditional language forms
- Promote dominant cultural expressions over minority voices

C. Cultural Function and Identity of Digital Slang

The emergence of digital slang represents a profound mechanism of generational identity formation among Gen Z, characterized by a complex interplay of linguistic creativity and social resistance. According to (Simanjuntak et al. 2024), slang is not merely a communication tool but a sophisticated "symbol of group identity" that fundamentally distinguishes younger generations from older social structures. This linguistic phenomenon enables Gen Z to establish a unique communicative space that transcends traditional linguistic boundaries (Rininggayuh et al. 2024). The core of this identity construction lies in the creation of solidarity networks. As Simanjuntak's research reveals, slang functions as a "solidarity-building mechanism" that helps youth negotiate their social positioning.

By developing exclusive linguistic codes, Gen Z creates an intricate "in-group" communication system that simultaneously excludes and defines their generational experience (Peredy 2024). The linguistic creativity embedded in slang becomes a form of "creative resistance" against conventional communication paradigms. Research by (Budiasa, Savitri, and Dewi 2021) further illuminates the multifaceted purposes of slang, highlighting its role in self-presentation and social intimacy. The linguistic choices are deliberate strategies of "contemporary self-expression," allowing individuals to appear innovative, humorous, and culturally attuned. This linguistic performativity becomes a critical aspect of generational identity negotiation.

The social dimensions of digital slang extend far beyond mere communication, representing a complex sociocultural phenomenon. Humor emerges as a pivotal function, transforming linguistic interactions into spaces of collective enjoyment and shared experience. Budiasa's research demonstrates that slang is frequently employed as a "funny ingredient" in conversations, reducing communicative seriousness and fostering interpersonal connections. Intimacy in communication represents another critical dimension. The linguistic codes developed within digital platforms like TikTok create exclusive communicative spaces that generate deep social bonds. (Alifah Arde Ajeng Hamidah, Sinta Rosalina, and Slamet Triyadi 2023) discovered that these linguistic variations serve not just as communication tools but as intricate "cultural dictionaries" that reflect generational experiences. The contemporary significance of digital slang is further underscored by its rapid evolution and viral potential. Platforms like TikTok have emerged as dynamic "sociolinguistic laboratories" where language mutates and transforms at unprecedented speeds. The algorithmic mechanisms of these platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination and adoption of new linguistic forms, creating a constantly shifting communicative landscape.

D. Broader Implications for Digital Communication

The digital communication paradigm represents a radical departure from traditional linguistic models. Gen Z's communication style, characterized by brevity, creativity, and multi-modal expression, challenges established linguistic norms. (Sakitri 2021) emphasizes that this generation, being the first truly "digital native" cohort, fundamentally reimagines communication mechanisms. The challenge to formal language structures is particularly noteworthy. (Sundry and Fauzah 2024) highlight the tension between linguistic innovation and preservation, noting that digital platforms introduce numerous neologisms that often deviate from standard language dictionaries. This linguistic mutation raises critical questions about language evolution and preservation. Predicting future linguistic trends involves

recognizing the increasingly global and interconnected nature of digital communication. The blend of local and global linguistic elements, as observed in code-mixing studies by (Ana Dahniar and Rr. Sulistyawati 2023), suggests a future where linguistic boundaries become increasingly fluid and permeable.

Digital platforms like TikTok are not passive mediums but active agents in linguistic transformation. (Mujayyidah, Hasanudin, and Marzuki 2023) demonstrated how these platforms facilitate complex linguistic phenomena such as zeroization, diphthongization, and lexical changes, creating dynamic linguistic ecosystems. The negotiation of linguistic structures occurs continuously through user interactions, algorithmic recommendations, and content creation. Each digital interaction becomes a potential site of linguistic innovation, where traditional grammatical rules are constantly challenged and reconstructed.

Algorithmic Implications and Cultural Dominance

The algorithmic mediation of linguistic evolution on TikTok presents several concerning implications:

1. **Linguistic Homogenization:** The platform's content recommendation system tends to amplify certain linguistic forms while potentially suppressing others, leading to a standardization of digital expression that may erode linguistic diversity.
2. **Cultural Dominance:** Popular content creators from dominant cultural backgrounds often set linguistic trends, potentially marginalizing expressions from minority communities. This creates a hierarchy of linguistic influence that may not reflect the platform's actual user diversity.
3. **Preservation Challenges:** The rapid evolution of digital slang, driven by algorithmic promotion, poses challenges for language preservation efforts. Traditional documentation methods struggle to keep pace with the platform's linguistic innovations.

The research indicates a need for balanced platform governance that promotes linguistic innovation while protecting cultural and linguistic diversity.

Conclusion

This research has illuminated the complex dynamics of Gen Z's digital linguistic practices on TikTok, revealing sophisticated mechanisms of cultural expression and identity formation that extend beyond mere communication tools. Through detailed analysis of comment sections and linguistic patterns, the study demonstrates how digital platforms facilitate unprecedented rates of language evolution and transformation. The findings establish that Gen Z's linguistic innovations, characterized by creative abbreviations, code-mixing, and algorithm-driven evolution, represent a significant shift in contemporary communication paradigms that aligns with Castell's network society theory and Blommaert's sociolinguistic globalization framework.

Several critical research gaps emerge from this investigation that warrant further exploration. First, longitudinal studies tracking the lifecycle of digital slang terms from emergence to obsolescence are notably absent from current literature. Such studies would provide valuable insights into the sustainability and lasting impact of digital linguistic innovations. Second, cross-cultural comparative analyses examining how different cultural contexts influence digital slang formation and adoption remain underexplored. Additionally, the interaction between traditional linguistic preservation efforts and digital innovation requires more thorough investigation, particularly in contexts where multiple languages and dialects coexist within digital spaces.

The research findings suggest three primary actionable recommendations for stakeholders in the digital communication ecosystem. First, educational institutions must develop integrated language curricula that acknowledge digital linguistic innovations while maintaining traditional language competencies. This could be achieved through the implementation of dual-track language programs that simultaneously teach standard language forms and digital communication skills. Second, platform developers should incorporate sociolinguistic impact assessments into their algorithmic design processes, considering how content recommendation systems influence linguistic diversity and evolution. Third, language policy makers should establish collaborative frameworks with digital platforms to document and analyze emerging linguistic patterns, ensuring that language preservation efforts remain relevant in the digital age.

The theoretical implications of this research extend beyond immediate linguistic concerns, intersecting with broader paradigms in digital communication studies. The findings support Chandler's digital discourse theory, particularly regarding the role of technological affordances in shaping linguistic practices. Furthermore, the observed patterns of linguistic innovation and dissemination align with Van Dijck's platform society concept, demonstrating how algorithmic systems fundamentally alter traditional mechanisms of language evolution. This theoretical alignment suggests that digital slang represents not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a fundamental transformation in how human communication adapts to technological environments.

Looking forward, the field requires a more nuanced understanding of how algorithmic systems influence linguistic diversity and cultural expression. Future research should prioritize mixed-method approaches combining computational linguistics with ethnographic investigation to capture both the quantitative patterns and qualitative richness of digital communication. Additionally, investigating the potential long-term implications of accelerated linguistic

evolution on cognitive development and social cohesion could provide valuable insights for both theoretical understanding and practical application. Such research would benefit from interdisciplinary collaboration between linguists, computer scientists, and social psychologists to comprehensively address the complex interplay between technology, language, and society.

The emergence of TikTok-driven linguistic innovation represents a pivotal moment in the evolution of human communication, challenging traditional understanding of language change and adaptation. As digital platforms continue to reshape communicative practices, maintaining a balance between innovation and preservation becomes increasingly critical. This research contributes to our understanding of these dynamics while highlighting the need for continued investigation into how technology mediates and transforms human linguistic expression in the digital age.

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