

Speaking in Hashtags: Slang, Identity, and Language Change Among Generation Z on Instagram

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Abstract

This study examines the use of slang among Generation Z on Instagram as a reflection of the evolving dynamics of digital language. Informed by sociolinguistic theories of language change, speech community, and digital discourse, the analysis explores how acronyms and abbreviations such as "IDC" (I Don't Care), "ASAP" (As Soon As Possible), "LOL" (Laugh Out Loud), "Fav" (Favorite), and "Cuz" (Because) function beyond mere shorthand. These linguistic forms facilitate efficient, expressive communication and simultaneously signal group membership and identity within online youth communities. While slang enhances connectivity and creative expression, its widespread adoption also raises concerns about potential misunderstandings, generational divides, and the erosion of formal literacy. The findings highlight key pedagogical implications, emphasizing the need for educators to promote code-switching skills and digital literacy. Moreover, the study calls for inclusive policy efforts that recognize youth slang as a legitimate form of language innovation, while addressing its social and educational impacts. Culturally, slang is positioned not as linguistic decline but as a vibrant site of identity performance, social alignment, and resistance. The paper concludes by proposing directions for future research, including longitudinal, cross-platform, and ethnographic studies. These would further illuminate how digital environments shape not only how we communicate, but who we become through language.

Keyword: Generation Z, Instagram, digital slang, sociolinguistics, language change.

A. Introduction

Language functions as a primary means of communication within society, shaped by distinct structures in spelling, meaning, and pronunciation. Over time, language

continuously evolves in response to social and technological changes. One notable development in Indonesia is the increasing use of slang—a non-standard variety of language typically employed by specific communities in casual interaction. According to Sabbagh (2018), slang is characterized by highly informal vocabulary and idioms that are often metaphorical, playful, vivid, and ephemeral. Although typically limited to particular social groups, some slang expressions gain wider recognition.

Allan and Burridge (2006, as cited in Yuniar, 2022) classify slang into five categories: *fresh and creative*, *flippant*, *imitative*, *acronyms*, and *clipping*. The *fresh and creative* category includes newly coined terms that add nuance to informal expressions. *Flippant* slang consists of word combinations with meanings that differ from their literal interpretation. The *imitative* category includes slang adapted from Standard English. *Acronyms* are formed from the initial letters of words or phrases, while *clipping* involves shortening longer expressions without changing their meaning.

The digital era has dramatically transformed communication practices, particularly through social media platforms like Instagram. These platforms not only facilitate interaction but also serve as dynamic spaces for linguistic innovation. Generation Z—individuals born after 1996—have grown up immersed in a digital landscape, leading them to develop a distinct style of communication marked by slang, emojis, and abbreviations. Parker (2020, as cited in Yusuf et al., 2022) describes this group as digital natives who experienced rapid technological advancement and economic growth. Their fluency in social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter supports the widespread dissemination of slang (Rezeki et al., 2019, as cited in Yusuf et al., 2022).

The integration of slang into everyday communication reflects broader linguistic shifts, particularly the trend toward informal and expressive language. This shift is especially evident on Instagram, where language is adapted to suit the platform's fast-paced, visual-centric environment. In this context, slang terms are used not only to convey messages efficiently but also to signal group identity and in-group solidarity.

A local variation of slang, often referred to as *Alay* language, has gained popularity across digital media in Indonesia. While previously associated with SMS or text-based communication, *Alay* has extended into Instagram captions, comment sections, and other online interactions, influencing how youth express themselves online (Yap & Saludez, 2022).

The rapid proliferation of non-standard linguistic forms online raises concerns about their potential impact on the use of formal language. Slang often deviates significantly from conventional grammar and vocabulary, contributing to misunderstandings and posing challenges to effective communication across different user groups. Despite these concerns, social media has enabled the flourishing of linguistic creativity and variation.

This study aims to examine the phenomenon of slang usage on Instagram more closely. Specifically, it investigates the types of slang commonly used by Generation Z and traces their development and spread on the platform. The findings are intended to contribute to our understanding of digital language practices and their implications for communication in the evolving sociolinguistic landscape.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, which is appropriate for exploring linguistic phenomena in depth (Gerring, 2017). The primary aim was to identify and categorize the types of slang terms frequently used by Generation Z on Instagram and to analyze their usage patterns in this digital environment.

The data were collected through non-participant observation of public Instagram accounts, focusing on posts and comments that featured slang terms. The sampling was conducted purposively, targeting Instagram profiles belonging to users aged approximately 17–25 years (Generation Z), who were active in posting and commenting between January and March 2024. A total of 50 Instagram posts and 120 comments were selected as the data corpus, drawn from accounts that were publicly accessible and used English or mixed English-Indonesian slang.

The slang terms were categorized deductively, using the classification framework proposed by Allan and Burridge (2006), which includes five categories: *fresh and creative*, *flippant*, *imitative*, *acronyms*, and *clipping*. Each identified slang item was analyzed and placed into one of these categories based on its structure, origin, and contextual usage. This framework allowed for a systematic interpretation of the linguistic variations observed.

To ensure ethical research conduct, only publicly available data were used, and no private messages or restricted content were accessed. Although usernames appeared in the screenshots for illustrative purposes during analysis, they were anonymized or pseudonymized in the final report to protect user privacy. No identifiable personal data beyond what was already public was disclosed.

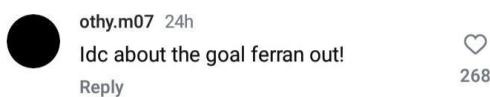
The researcher served as the main instrument of data collection, supported by digital tools such as smartphones and screen capture software. All observations were documented manually and coded for linguistic patterns. This approach enabled the researcher to describe the evolving patterns of slang usage without interfering with user interactions.

C. Findings and Discussion

The findings indicate that the use of various slang terms is common in Instagram comments. The information collected from Instagram will be used as supporting evidence

for the research conclusions. The results of this study will be discussed about the slang terms found in Instagram comments. The research findings are supported by observations. Here are some observations made by slang users on Instagram.

Figure 1. pict-001... @othy.m07



IDC = I Don't Care

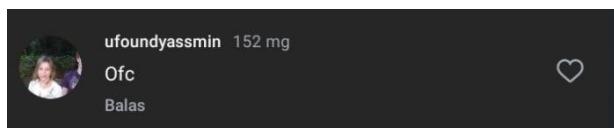
The use of "IDC" (I Don't Care) in Instagram comments reflects more than mere abbreviation; it exemplifies the pragmatic shift toward emotionally detached, minimal-effort communication typical of digital youth discourse. In sociolinguistic terms, "IDC" signals a stance of disengagement, often employed strategically within online interactions to assert boundaries, display irony, or reduce emotional investment. Its brevity enhances communicative efficiency in fast-paced digital environments, aligning with the principle of linguistic economy common in computer-mediated communication (CMC).

However, the same efficiency can lead to semantic opacity—especially for users unfamiliar with such acronyms—revealing a tension between in-group clarity and out-group exclusion. This tension reflects the dynamic nature of speech communities (Gumperz, 1968), where shared norms and insider codes like "IDC" help reinforce group identity (e.g., Gen Z), while also unintentionally erecting communicative barriers with outsiders.

From a language change perspective, the normalization of acronyms like "IDC" illustrates the ongoing grammaticalization and lexical evolution occurring within digital platforms. It demonstrates how slang forms migrate from ephemeral youth talk to more stable elements of online lexicon, contributing to long-term linguistic innovation.

Thus, "IDC" not only performs a semantic function but also indexes sociocultural positioning, identity performance, and technological adaptation in online spaces—a pattern increasingly visible across digital discourse practices.

Figure 2. Pict-002... @ufoundyassmin



OFC = Of Course

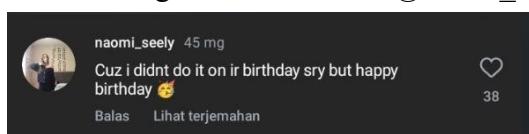
The abbreviation "OFC" (Of Course), frequently encountered in Instagram comment sections, illustrates the trend toward linguistic compression in digital interaction. As a reduced form of a polite affirmation, "OFC" exemplifies the economy of expression valued in online discourse, where speed, brevity, and convenience are prioritized. This aligns with the digital discourse model (Tagg, 2015), where linguistic forms are shaped by the affordances of platforms and the norms of their user communities.

However, while "OFC" functions efficiently within in-group communication, especially among digitally fluent users (e.g., Generation Z), it may present interpretive challenges for those outside the speech community. This duality reflects the indexicality of slang (Silverstein, 2003), in which a linguistic form simultaneously conveys meaning and signals group membership. Thus, "OFC" does not merely replace a phrase—it serves as a marker of digital identity, distinguishing members of an evolving online speech community (Gumperz, 1982).

Moreover, the transformation of fixed phrases into acronyms like "OFC" reflects broader processes of language change in the context of computer-mediated communication. Such transformations are evidence of the ongoing grammaticalization and orthographic innovation occurring in online writing, where visual economy reshapes language practices.

While critics may argue that such abbreviations risk undermining clarity and formality, their growing ubiquity suggests an adaptation to new communicative norms rather than linguistic deterioration. As long as the communicative context sustains mutual intelligibility, the efficiency of terms like "OFC" enhances rather than impedes interaction—especially within linguistically cohesive groups who co-construct and negotiate meaning collaboratively.

Figure 3. Pict-003... @naomi_seely



CUZ = Because

The abbreviation "CUZ" (a phonetic contraction of "because") exemplifies how spoken language norms increasingly influence digital writing, especially among Generation Z on platforms like Instagram. Its orthographic simplification reflects the

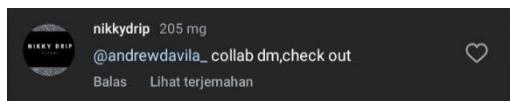
phonological economy common in informal speech and text-based communication, a feature that has become standard in online environments. This aligns with the principle of written speech convergence in digital sociolinguistics (Androutsopoulos, 2006), where writing mirrors casual, real-time speech patterns.

Within the Instagram comment space, "CUZ" allows users to quickly offer explanations or justifications without the formal tone carried by the full word "because." The pragmatic function remains intact, but the shift in form contributes to a more relaxed, relatable, and peer-oriented discourse style. From the perspective of speech community theory (Gumperz, 1982), such usage reinforces in-group norms and shared linguistic behavior, signaling inclusion within a digitally fluent generation.

While "CUZ" promotes efficiency and informality, its usage also highlights a key contradiction: this abbreviation may become opaque or ambiguous to readers outside the immediate digital or generational context. Here, we see the tension between linguistic economy and communicative clarity. For members of the online youth community, "CUZ" is instantly recognizable; for others, it may disrupt comprehension or be interpreted as lazy or careless language. This underscores the indexical function of slang—it does not merely replace standard forms but also indexes user identity, platform familiarity, and cultural alignment.

The growing normalization of "CUZ" in digital writing is also indicative of broader processes of language change, where informal phonetic forms gain legitimacy in new communicative contexts. While prescriptive norms may resist such change, the persistence of "CUZ" in written interaction demonstrates how digital environments serve as incubators for linguistic innovation.

Figure 4. Pict-004... @nikkydrip



DM = Direct Message

The abbreviation "DM" (Direct Message) is emblematic of the evolving communicative practices shaped by platform-specific discourse norms. On Instagram, "DM" is not merely a shorthand for private messaging—it carries layered pragmatic and sociocultural meanings that are tightly bound to digital etiquette, privacy negotiation, and relational signaling.

From a sociolinguistic standpoint, "DM" functions as a discourse marker that indexes interpersonal boundaries and levels of intimacy. It implies a shift from the public sphere of comments to the private domain of one-on-one interaction. This shift is

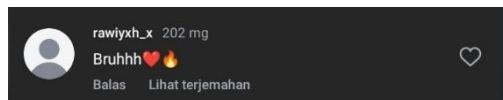
governed by the speech act of requesting discretion or deeper engagement, often with romantic, commercial, or confidential undertones. As such, "DM" has acquired a contextual implicature that extends beyond its literal referent, illustrating Grice's theory of implied meaning (1975) within digital communication.

Its efficiency lies in how it compresses both action ("message me privately") and intention (e.g., flirtation, negotiation, conflict avoidance) into two letters—reflecting the compressed pragmatics typical of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Yet, this same efficiency can generate ambiguity or misreading, especially for users unfamiliar with the nuanced connotations that have emerged through usage in specific digital speech communities (Gumperz, 1982). Thus, the practicality of "DM" is context-bound and relies heavily on shared communicative competence.

In terms of language change, "DM" illustrates how lexical items derived from platform features (in this case, Instagram's "Direct Message" function) can become fully integrated into everyday discourse, including offline settings. This lexicalization process reflects a broader technologically driven linguistic innovation, where new forms are not just coined but embedded with pragmatic functions and social meanings (Tagg, 2015; Androutsopoulos, 2006).

Ultimately, "DM" is not only a marker of linguistic economy but also a social signal—a cue about the speaker's relationship to the listener, the platform, and the norms of digital interaction. It encapsulates the core paradox of digital slang: designed for clarity within a community, but potentially obscure across communities or generations.

Figure 5. Pict-005... @rawiyxh_x



BRUH = Brother

The slang term "BRUH," a phonetic and stylistic variation of "bro" (short for "brother"), functions far beyond a simple nickname for male peers. In digital discourse—particularly on platforms like Instagram—"BRUH" has evolved into a multi-functional discourse marker, signaling surprise, frustration, sarcasm, irony, or camaraderie depending on the context. This shift illustrates a key feature of semantic bleaching, in which a term gradually loses its literal meaning and gains broader pragmatic use (Bybee, 2003).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, "BRUH" operates as a performative device within speech communities—especially youth and digital-native circles—serving as both a solidarity marker and a stance indicator (Eckert, 2012). It indexes informality, familiarity, and cultural belonging, often used in humorous or emotionally charged

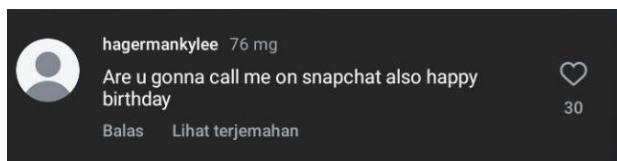
interactions. In this way, "BRUH" contributes to the maintenance of in-group identity and helps delineate generational or subcultural boundaries.

While the term may appear efficient and relatable within these groups, its broader use can become ambiguous or misunderstood by those outside the digital youth subculture. This demonstrates the tension between the communicative efficiency of slang (in expressing affect with minimal effort) and the potential for exclusion or misinterpretation when interlocutors do not share the same cultural or linguistic frame of reference. Thus, the use of "BRUH" underscores both the connective and fragmentary roles of slang in online interaction.

"BRUH" also reflects broader processes of language change and digital stylization, as new slang terms are shaped by phonological creativity, orthographic variation, and platform-mediated communication norms (Androutsopoulos, 2006). Its widespread adoption and flexible semantics illustrate how social media acts as a laboratory of linguistic innovation, where language forms are rapidly created, shared, and recontextualized.

In summary, "BRUH" encapsulates the dynamics of digital sociolinguistics: it is a form that conveys group identity, emotional tone, and stylistic stance, while also participating in broader shifts in how language is used, perceived, and evolved in online environments.

Figure 6. Pict-006.. @hagermankylee



GONNA = Going To

The use of "GONNA" as a contraction of "going to" reflects a longstanding feature of spoken English, now increasingly entrenched in digital written discourse. On platforms like Instagram, where immediacy, casual tone, and personality are prized, "gonna" serves both a pragmatic and stylistic function. It indexes informality and a relaxed interpersonal stance, aligning with the conversational register of computer-mediated communication (CMC).

From a sociolinguistic standpoint, "gonna" exemplifies how spoken forms are being orthographically codified in digital writing, a phenomenon linked to the written-oral convergence in online spaces (Crystal, 2006). This shift indicates broader language change, as features once confined to spoken vernacular are increasingly acceptable—even

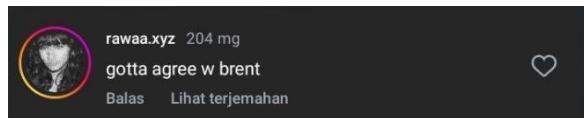
expected—in informal digital text. The use of "gonna" thus signals not only a departure from formal grammar but also an alignment with the speech norms of the Instagram youth speech community (Gumperz, 1982).

While the contraction offers linguistic efficiency, its communicative effectiveness depends on the reader's familiarity with its phonological base. For those within digitally literate communities, "gonna" is easily interpreted. However, for ESL learners, older users, or individuals from different linguistic backgrounds, this spelling may introduce processing difficulty—raising the same efficiency vs. accessibility tension seen in many digital slang forms.

Crucially, "gonna" carries indexical meaning (Silverstein, 2003): it not only conveys future intention but also positions the speaker socially, suggesting casualness, youth identity, or alignment with global pop culture norms. In this way, it contributes to digital identity performance, where users adapt linguistic forms to construct relatable or culturally resonant personas.

Ultimately, the use of "gonna" in Instagram comments reflects how language adapts in response to platform constraints, generational preferences, and the drive for expressive immediacy. It reinforces the notion that social media is not degrading language but reshaping it through new pragmatic needs and community-based norms.

Figure 7. Pict-007... @rawaa.xyz



GOTTA = Got To

The contraction "GOTTA," derived from "got to," is a prominent example of how spoken grammar influences written digital discourse. On platforms like Instagram, "gotta" functions not only as a shorthand for expressing obligation or necessity, but also as a marker of casual tone, urgency, and conversational immediacy. Its widespread usage among Generation Z illustrates the increasing informalization of written language, a defining feature of digital sociolinguistics (Tagg, 2015).

Linguistically, "gotta" represents a process of phonological reduction that has become orthographically encoded, reflecting the convergence of speech and text in online communication (Androultsopoulos, 2006; Crystal, 2006). What was once a feature of informal spoken English is now normalized in digital writing, signifying broader language change driven by technological affordances and user preferences.

In terms of speech community dynamics (Gumperz, 1982), "gotta" indexes membership within a digitally fluent group that values speed, efficiency, and informality. It acts as a linguistic in-group marker, signaling not just what is said, but how it is said—and to whom. The abbreviation compresses meaning into a familiar form that reinforces shared norms and identity among peers.

However, this efficiency is context-dependent. While "gotta" facilitates rapid, casual interaction within native or near-native communities, it may pose comprehension barriers for less proficient users or those outside the cultural-linguistic group. This underscores the tension between slang's practicality and its potential to exclude, a central paradox in digital communication.

Moreover, "gotta" carries indexical value (Silverstein, 2003): it communicates more than grammatical obligation—it also conveys speaker attitude, social stance, and alignment with informal, often youth-driven linguistic norms. The use of "gotta" in Instagram comments often contributes to a laid-back, relatable persona, aligning with platform aesthetics and the social expectations of digital peer groups.

Thus, "gotta" exemplifies how digital communication reconfigures traditional language norms, emphasizing speed, social signaling, and stylistic coherence over grammatical formality. Far from being a linguistic shortcut alone, it is a marker of identity, intention, and the ongoing transformation of language in digital public spheres.

Figure 8. Pict-008... @g3llontop



GIMME = Give Me

The term "GIMME," a phonetic contraction of "give me," reflects the increasing tendency of digital users—especially from Generation Z—to write as they speak. While it offers phonological economy and a tone of informality, "gimme" also carries rich sociolinguistic implications that extend beyond its surface-level abbreviation.

In digital contexts like Instagram, "gimme" signals a deliberately casual and assertive stance, often employed in humorous, ironic, or exaggerated requests. Its usage illustrates how online users actively construct identities through linguistic choices that mimic speech patterns and reflect informal intimacy. From a pragmatic perspective, "gimme" also compresses a request while softening it with a tone of playfulness—sometimes even entitlement—marking it as a form of stance-taking in conversation.

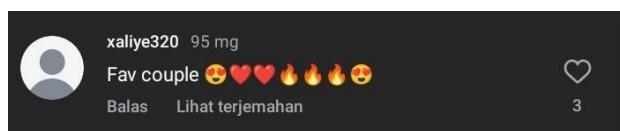
Viewed through the lens of speech community theory (Gumperz, 1982), “gimme” indexes a shared communicative code among users who recognize and accept the relaxed norms of digital discourse. Its prevalence among Gen Z is not merely linguistic laziness but a reflection of shifting norms around politeness, authority, and peer-to-peer interaction. In this sense, it fosters solidarity within digitally literate communities while potentially alienating those unfamiliar with the register or its connotative range.

This duality—between efficiency and potential exclusion—is central to understanding digital slang. While “gimme” offers rapid, expressive communication, its non-standard form may cause misunderstandings or be viewed as inappropriate in more formal or intercultural interactions. This highlights a key tension: digital slang enhances expressiveness for some, but reduces clarity for others.

From a broader perspective of language change, “gimme” represents the normalization of spoken contractions in digital text, part of a larger trend in which written language is increasingly shaped by oral discourse conventions (Crystal, 2006; Tagg, 2015). Its widespread and seemingly unmarked usage on social media platforms reflects the fluid boundaries between speech and writing in computer-mediated communication.

In short, “gimme” is not simply a fast way of saying “give me”—it is a linguistic tool shaped by community norms, identity construction, and platform-specific interaction styles. It exemplifies how digital slang operates both economically and socially, facilitating engagement while continuously reshaping what counts as acceptable language in the public digital sphere.

Figure 9. Pict-009... @xaliye320



FAV = Favorite

The slang term "FAV," a clipped form of "favorite," exemplifies how linguistic economy and affective expression converge in digital communication. On platforms like Instagram, where brevity and emotional intensity often define engagement, "FAV" operates as a compact marker of preference, endorsement, or personal attachment. It is not only a lexical abbreviation but a tool of identity signaling and social affiliation within digitally native speech communities.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the use of “FAV” reflects how clipping—the reduction of longer words into shorter forms—is both a linguistic and social practice. It aligns with the speech norms of Generation Z, who often value speed, informality, and stylistic minimalism in online interactions. This abbreviation is more than practical; it

functions as a symbolic expression of belonging to a community that shares values around efficiency and cultural shorthand.

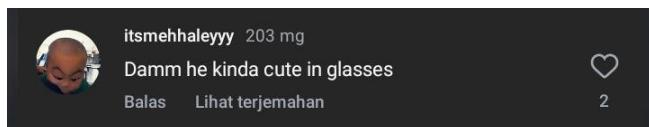
However, the use of clipped forms like “FAV” introduces a subtle tension between clarity and expressiveness. While such terms facilitate fast-paced, emotionally loaded communication, they can lose semantic precision or be misunderstood by individuals outside the in-group or those unfamiliar with platform-specific language norms. This paradox highlights the context-dependence of slang efficiency: what feels “practical” within one speech community may feel alienating or opaque to another.

In digital sociolinguistics (e.g., Tagg, 2015; Androutsopoulos, 2006), this phenomenon is understood as part of the mediatization of language, where new communicative environments give rise to innovative forms. “FAV” is a product of this evolution, shaped by Instagram’s constraints (e.g., caption limits, comment visibility) and the platform’s emphasis on curated taste and rapid interaction. It also reflects the broader trend of language change, in which standard words are truncated, stylized, and recontextualized to suit new functions in new media.

Crucially, the word “FAV” also carries indexical meaning (Silverstein, 2003). It not only names something preferred but also reflects the speaker’s stance, aesthetic values, and level of social media literacy. In this way, "FAV" becomes part of a larger repertoire of digital expressions that simultaneously communicate content and identity.

In sum, “FAV” is more than a shorthand—it is a linguistic artifact of contemporary digital culture, revealing how speakers adapt and shape language in response to evolving social technologies, generational dynamics, and community norms.

Figure 10. Pict-010... @itsmehhaleyyy



KINDA = Kind Of

“KINDA,” a contracted form of “kind of,” exemplifies how spoken discourse patterns are increasingly embedded in digital writing, especially among younger users on platforms like Instagram. While it may appear as a simple phonological reduction, its use carries significant sociolinguistic weight, functioning not just as a linguistic shortcut but as a stylistic marker of stance, hedging, and informality.

In digital contexts, “kinda” often signals tentativeness or understatement, allowing users to express uncertainty, soft agreement, or emotional nuance—e.g., “kinda like this” or “kinda tired.” This pragmatic flexibility aligns with the interpersonal function of

language (Halliday, 1985), where speakers adjust meaning based on relational dynamics. As such, “kinda” performs a hedging function that can temper strong opinions, avoid direct confrontation, or invite collaborative interpretation.

From the perspective of speech community dynamics (Gumperz, 1982), “kinda” also serves as a solidarity marker within online youth communities, contributing to an informal, laid-back tone that reinforces in-group belonging. Its usage reflects a shared communicative repertoire in which phonetic spellings and casual expressions are not only accepted but expected. Within this space, “kinda” functions efficiently—not merely by shortening “kind of,” but by conveying subtle social cues with minimal effort.

However, its apparent efficiency is not universal. For individuals outside this community—such as older users, non-native speakers, or formal audiences—“kinda” can appear ambiguous or imprecise. This reflects a recurring tension in digital slang between pragmatic economy and semantic clarity, highlighting that such terms are efficient only within contexts of shared linguistic and cultural understanding.

From a language change perspective, “kinda” exemplifies the natural grammaticalization of informal speech patterns, now normalized in digital text. Its ubiquity in online communication indicates a shift in what counts as “acceptable” language, challenging traditional distinctions between spoken and written registers (Crystal, 2006; Tagg, 2015).

In essence, “kinda” is more than a casual contraction—it is a multifunctional tool for expressing subtlety, managing face, and reinforcing social alignment within a digitally mediated speech community. Its rise in social media discourse underscores how digital platforms not only reflect language change but actively accelerate it, reshaping how users express themselves in real time.

Figure 11. Pict-011... @gyukloz



OMG = Oh My God

The acronym “OMG” (Oh My God) is a hallmark of digital exclamatory language, widely used on platforms like Instagram to express strong emotional reactions—ranging from surprise and excitement to disbelief or amusement. While it may appear to serve a purely emotive function, its usage reveals deeper sociolinguistic processes tied to identity construction, language change, and community norms in online communication.

Functionally, “OMG” exemplifies what Jakobson (1960) terms the expressive function of language, where the speaker’s emotional state is foregrounded. Yet in digital spaces, its role extends beyond expression: “OMG” also works as a discursive signal that marks participation in a shared communicative style, especially among younger users. Its brevity and recognizability reflect the values of linguistic economy in computer-mediated communication (CMC), where conveying affect quickly and memorably is crucial.

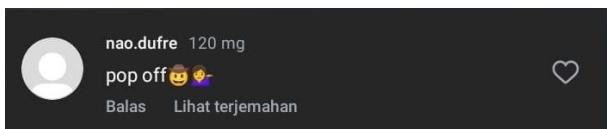
From the perspective of speech community dynamics (Gumperz, 1982), “OMG” operates as a cultural shorthand, indicating familiarity with platform-specific norms and generational in-group discourse. Its frequent appearance in Instagram captions, comments, and reactions suggests that it functions as more than an interjection—it serves as a social marker, signaling belonging within digitally literate communities that prioritize emotional immediacy and informal tone.

Yet, the same efficiency that makes “OMG” practical in digital environments can generate interpretive ambiguity in cross-generational or intercultural contexts. For some users, “OMG” may be perceived as irreverent or overly dramatic, especially when detached from its original religious connotation. This highlights a key tension in digital slang: while it enhances speed and relatability among insiders, it can simultaneously lead to misunderstanding or alienation for those outside the intended audience.

From a language change perspective, “OMG” is part of a broader trend of orthographic innovation and pragmatic compression in online language. As digital discourse becomes more performative and emotionally charged, acronyms like “OMG” are no longer niche expressions—they are part of a mainstream linguistic repertoire shaped by social media platforms and their communicative constraints.

Ultimately, “OMG” exemplifies how language adapts in digital contexts—not just to express emotion, but to construct social meaning, reinforce community boundaries, and reflect evolving norms of digital interactional style. It is a linguistic form that encapsulates both the spontaneity and stylization of social media communication.

Figure 12. Pict-012... @nao.dufre



Pop off

The slang phrase “pop off,” as used in Instagram discourse, reflects a highly context-dependent expression that has evolved from general English into a term loaded with social and stylistic meaning. While it is commonly used to praise someone’s appearance, achievement, or assertive behavior—e.g., “She really popped off in that

outfit"—its flexibility also allows it to signal surprise, encouragement, or even aggression, depending on tone and audience. This polysemy makes "pop off" a compelling case of pragmatic elasticity in digital slang.

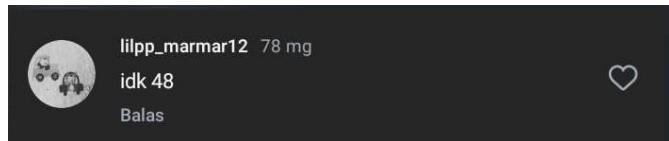
From a sociolinguistic standpoint, "pop off" exemplifies how users deploy slang not only to express emotion but also to perform social alignment and index stance. The phrase often functions as a positive evaluation marker within peer-to-peer interaction, reinforcing solidarity and admiration, especially in online youth communities. Its use can reflect what Goffman calls "footing"—the speaker's social position and relational intention in a given interaction.

The expression also illustrates a central process in language change: semantic shift. Originally associated with sudden outbursts (often negative), "pop off" has been reappropriated by digital communities, particularly on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, to convey praise and enthusiasm. This demonstrates how meaning is renegotiated within specific speech communities (Gumperz, 1982) based on shared values, evolving norms, and technological affordances.

Despite its popularity, the term's interpretive range can also introduce ambiguity for outsiders. For example, without familiarity with the current digital connotation, "pop off" might be misconstrued as hostile rather than celebratory. This highlights the tension between expressive creativity and semantic clarity—a recurring theme in the use of digital slang. Within in-groups, the term increases communicative efficiency and affective richness; outside those groups, it can obscure meaning and hinder interpretation.

From the perspective of digital sociolinguistics, "pop off" illustrates how users creatively rework conventional language into forms that are more expressive, socially meaningful, and platform-specific. It reflects how identity, emotion, and community are performed through everyday language choices in online spaces. Ultimately, "pop off" is not just praise—it is a social gesture, embedded in the evolving stylistic repertoire of digital youth culture.

Pict-013... @lilpp_marmar12



IDK = I Don't Know

The acronym "IDK" (I Don't Know) is a staple of digital communication, widely used across platforms like Instagram to express uncertainty, detachment, or lack of information. While its surface function appears to offer a simple, efficient response, its

use within digital discourse reflects broader sociolinguistic dynamics—especially those related to stance-taking, politeness strategies, and generational identity.

From a pragmatic perspective, “IDK” operates as a hedging device, allowing users to acknowledge gaps in knowledge while also managing face in a socially acceptable way. It softens direct negation or ignorance, functioning similarly to discourse markers like “maybe” or “I guess.” Its popularity among Generation Z users suggests a preference for expressions that are low-effort yet socially nuanced, helping to maintain conversational flow without overcommitting to a response.

Viewed through the lens of speech community theory (Gumperz, 1982), “IDK” serves as a shared linguistic norm among digitally fluent users, signaling inclusion within a peer group that values brevity, informality, and affective neutrality. Its widespread usage in casual online settings reveals how digital natives repurpose conventional expressions into textual markers of social identity, crafting a communication style that reflects both their technological environment and interpersonal dynamics.

Despite its efficiency, “IDK” also embodies the tension between clarity and social signaling. While it is instantly recognizable within youth and internet-savvy communities, it can seem evasive, dismissive, or insufficiently informative in more formal or intergenerational contexts. This tension illustrates the contextual dependence of digital slang—its utility relies on shared cultural understanding and platform-specific norms.

From the perspective of language change, “IDK” exemplifies how acronyms transition from marginal internet slang to normalized linguistic units in everyday conversation. What began as a text-based convenience is now commonly spoken aloud, further blurring the boundary between written and oral language—a hallmark of contemporary digital sociolinguistics (Crystal, 2006; Tagg, 2015).

Ultimately, “IDK” is not just a declaration of ignorance; it is a stylistic resource, shaped by social context and platform culture. Its rise in popularity reflects a broader trend in online communication: the move toward linguistic minimalism that conveys both information and identity with remarkable economy.

Figure 14. Pict-014... @simply_shahanie



CRUSH

The above comment includes slang terms commonly seen on Instagram. CRUSH in slang usually refers to someone we admire or like.

Table 1. Table of research results of types of slang words, the data, and the meaning

Types of Slang	The data	The meaning
Fresh and Creative	BRUH	Refers to Men or Older People
	CRUSH	Refers to Favorite Person
Flippant	POP OFF	Positive Context to Praise
Imitative	Luvv Y'all Kinda Gimme Gotta Gonna	Love You All Kind Of Give Me Got To Going To
Acronym	LDC ASAP LOL IDK OMG DM OFC	I DON'T CARE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE LAUGH OUT LOUD I DON'T KNOW OH MY GOD DIRECT MESSAGE OF COURSE
Clipping	Fav Cuz	Favorite Because

Discussion

Based on observations conducted on Instagram, it was found that Generation Z frequently uses slang in almost every comment when communicating. The use of these terms continues to increase without clear control. Data analysis reveals that slang can create communication barriers. Many Generation Z users do not fully understand the meaning of certain slang terms or struggle to interpret slang-based writing. This lack of understanding can result in messages not being received as intended by the sender. Additionally, the process of creating or interpreting slang can be time-consuming and

inefficient, which contradicts the purpose of social media communication which aims to be fast and practical.

Generation Z's habitual use of slang in daily communication may also cause them to become less accustomed to using proper formal language. This phenomenon is not limited to teenagers but extends to adults and children. The unique, humorous, and creative appeal of slang contributes to its widespread usage.

However, the widespread use of slang can disrupt communication, especially for individuals unfamiliar with such terms. This is particularly true for those less active on social media or from different linguistic backgrounds. As a result, misunderstandings may arise, with the meaning of words or sentences becoming unclear or open to multiple interpretations. In some cases, the message may fail to be understood entirely.

On Instagram, Gen Z users frequently employ slang in nearly every comment, creating communication barriers for those unfamiliar with these terms. This often arises from numerous errors in abbreviated language and the inclusion of foreign jargon. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Line were chosen for this study because they are highly popular among Gen Z. This generation frequently updates their slang usage to maintain their presence and connection with peers on these platforms. The unrestricted nature of language use allows creativity and the development of various linguistic varieties.

D. Conclusion

The use of slang among Generation Z on social media platforms like Instagram reflects an ongoing evolution in language, driven by the demands of rapid, informal, and expressive digital communication. Slang expressions such as "IDC" (I Don't Care), "ASAP" (As Soon As Possible), "LOL" (Laugh Out Loud), "Fav" (Favorite), and "Cuz" (Because) demonstrate how linguistic forms are increasingly shaped by the norms of online interaction. These terms enable users to communicate more efficiently and to signal group identity, aligning with the informal and dynamic culture of social media.

However, this linguistic innovation is not without complications. The growing reliance on slang can contribute to communication breakdowns, particularly among users from different age groups, cultural backgrounds, or linguistic competencies. Moreover, excessive use of informal language may hinder the development or maintenance of formal literacy skills—skills that remain essential for success in academic, professional, and civic contexts.

These observations carry important pedagogical implications. Educators should be encouraged to engage with digital slang not as a threat to language norms but as a teachable moment—an opportunity to help students become code-switching competent, learning when and how to adjust language use across formal and informal registers.

Curriculum development in language education could incorporate discussions of digital literacy, including the function and social meaning of slang, to enhance students' metalinguistic awareness and communicative versatility.

On a policy level, digital communication practices—including slang usage—should be recognized in broader conversations about media literacy, linguistic inclusivity, and youth empowerment. Educational and governmental institutions can promote programs that bridge generational and linguistic gaps by supporting intergenerational dialogue about language change and fostering a more nuanced understanding of online communication norms.

Culturally, slang should not be dismissed as linguistic degradation, but rather appreciated as a site of creativity, resistance, and identity formation. Social media offers a stage where young people actively participate in shaping linguistic trends, asserting voice, and negotiating meaning within their communities. Recognizing this role affirms the legitimacy of youth linguistic practices while also highlighting the need for critical awareness of their limitations.

Future research should go beyond descriptive studies and investigate the longitudinal effects of slang use on language acquisition, reading comprehension, and formal writing proficiency. Comparative studies across platforms, languages, and regions could reveal how different digital environments shape linguistic innovation. Additionally, ethnographic approaches could provide deeper insight into how slang functions within specific online communities as a marker of identity, belonging, or exclusion.

In conclusion, the rise of slang among Generation Z reflects the adaptive, creative, and socially meaningful nature of language in the digital era. As it reshapes communication norms, it invites us not only to observe but also to respond—through thoughtful pedagogy, inclusive policy, and sustained critical inquiry.

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