

The Evolution of Gen Z Language on Social Media and Its Impact on Social Behavior Change and Social Engagement

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the evolution of Gen Z language on social media and its impact on changes in social behavior and social cohesion within their group. The language used by Gen Z, which includes slang, memes, emojis, and other creative expressions, is rapidly evolving along with the increasing use of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15-20 Gen Z respondents who actively use social media, as well as analysis of their interactions on various digital platforms. The results of the study indicate that Gen Z language plays an important role in shaping their social behavior, strengthening bonds within peer groups, and creating a strong digital identity. The use of unique and creative language creates a sense of togetherness among group members, but also creates exclusivity that can make individuals who do not understand the language feel alienated. In addition, this language also influences Gen Z's social perception of social issues such as gender equality, social justice, and self-identity. Gen Z language functions not only as a means of communication, but also as a means of forming new social norms, which influences how they interact with previous generations. The study also found that the language Gen Z uses on social media has a significant impact on their social engagement, both in the digital world and in everyday life.

Keywords: Gen Z Language, Social Media, Social Behavior, Social Engagement.

Introduction

Language serves as an important tool for communication, especially among Generation Z (Gen Z), who use it to establish social relationships and strengthen group identity. As digital natives, Gen Z have grown up in an environment saturated with technology and social media, which has significantly influenced their language use and social interactions (Musfirah et al., 2024). Their communication patterns reflect a unique mix of language variations shaped by cultural and technological factors, allowing them to adapt their language to fit the digital landscape. Social identity theory highlights how Gen Z derive a sense of belonging from their online communities, where language plays an important role in maintaining these connections

(Nani, 2024). With high levels of digital literacy, they navigate these platforms effectively, using language not only for communication but as a means to express their evolving identities.

Generation Z's engagement with social media exemplifies how language functions as a means of communication and a reflection of their cultural identity. Unique linguistic characteristics such as the use of slang, memes, emojis, and inventive word combinations are not only for expression but also signify their group identity and social dynamics in online communities (Melissa et al., 2024). This is in line with the concept of language as a social act, where language shapes social relationships and structures, highlighting the values and norms prevalent among Gen Z (Nurhayati & Putri, 2024). The multimodal nature of their communication enhances the richness of their interactions, enabling deeper connections and shared experiences in the digital landscape. Thus, Gen Z language on social media is an important instrument for self-expression and social cohesion. The development of Gen Z language on social media has significantly changed social interactions, especially through its role in fostering global connectivity. This instant communication allows Gen Z to connect with peers around the world, enhancing their social behavior and interactions (Kullolli & Trebicka, 2023). In addition, the unique linguistic style that emerges in this generation serves as a powerful tool for social bonding, strengthening the sense of belonging among group members (Amelia & Balqis, 2023). However, this shared language can also lead to exclusivity, creating cliques based on shared linguistic trends and cultural references, which can alienate those who do not understand these nuances (Nani, 2024). While Gen Z language promotes togetherness, it simultaneously risks dividing individuals into those who are “in the know” and those who are not, highlighting the dual nature of social media as a facilitator of connection and separation.

Literature Review

1) Communication and Language Theory

Communication is one of the main elements in social interaction. Interpersonal communication theory emphasizes that language functions as a means to express thoughts, feelings, and self-identity in a social group. In the context of Gen Z, the language they use on social media not only reflects personal expression, but also shapes their mindset and behavior, both individually and in groups. Research by Meyerhoff (2011) shows that language can strengthen social bonds between individuals through the formation of shared norms and identities in groups.

2) Gen Z Language and Social Media

Gen Z language on social media is developing rapidly and has its own characteristics. The use of more expressive slang, memes, and emojis replacing traditional verbal communication is a form of creativity and unique self-identity. Along with the increasing use of platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and the X application, the language used is increasingly informal and focuses on visual and auditory communication. Tagg (2019) in his research on digital language on social media explains that this language is more flexible and can be influenced by the communication context and individual creativity in creating new language styles. This language also has the ability to form social groups that have certain values and norms that are built through social media-based interactions.

3) Social Behavior and Social Media

Social behavior refers to individual actions that are influenced by social norms and rules that exist in a group. Bandura (2001) in his theory of Social Learning states that social behavior is influenced by observation and imitation of models that exist in the social environment. In the context of social media, Gen Z often adopts and imitates behavior seen in influencers or their friends on digital platforms. The language used in these digital social interactions influences how they respond to social situations and interact with others. Research by Valkenburg and

Peter (2006) shows that interactions on social media have a major influence on adolescent social behavior, including communication behavior and interpersonal relationships.

4) Social Bonding in the Context of Social Media

Social bonding refers to the relationships that exist between individuals in a group. Berscheid and Reis (1998) in their social bonding theory explain that relationships between individuals can strengthen a sense of togetherness and solidarity. Social media functions as a platform to strengthen or even change social bonds in society. The language used by Gen Z on social media strengthens social bonds between individuals by creating a sense of shared identity, such as the use of slang or memes that are only understood by certain groups. On the other hand, this phenomenon can also exacerbate exclusivity, where those who are not familiar with the language feel isolated or alienated.

Methods

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method, with a descriptive and exploratory approach. The approach used in this study is to obtain more comprehensive data. Qualitative methods are used to explore a deeper understanding of the social and psychological context behind Gen Z's use of language on social media. This study uses an exploratory-descriptive research design, which aims to explore the phenomenon of Gen Z's use of language on social media and its relationship to changes in social behavior and social attachment within their group. Population This study focuses on Generation Z, namely individuals born between 1997 and 2012. This population was chosen because they are active users of social media and are familiar with the rapidly developing digital language. The research sample will be selected using a purposive sampling technique, namely the selection of samples based on certain criteria that are relevant to the research objectives.

Results and Discussion

1) Results

Table 1. The Influence of Gen Z Language on Social Media on Changes in Social Behavior and Social Engagement

Findings Theme	Description of Findings	Example Quotes
Gen Z Language Use in Social Media	Gen Z language on social media includes the use of slang, memes, emojis, and other creative terms that are often not understood by previous generations. This language creates a unique identity among Gen Z.	"In our chat group, if we don't use memes or emojis, it doesn't feel fun. That has become the way we chat every day."
	Changes in Social Behavior in Interaction	Gen Z's language influences how they interact with their peers, creating closeness through the use of a common language and in line with digital culture. It also changes their communication patterns in everyday life.
Formed Social Norms	Gen Z's use of language on social media creates new norms, both in communication and in how to interact socially, especially within peer groups who share a common language.	"We have our own kind of code of speech, which makes us feel closer."

Social Attachment and Group Identity	Gen Z language strengthens social cohesion within their group, creating a solid sense of community, but it can also lead to exclusivity, where those who do not follow this language feel alienated.	"If someone doesn't understand the trending memes or slang, they feel left behind."
	Gen Z language creates a sense of inclusion for those who understand the language, but also exacerbates exclusivity between groups who use the language and those who do not.	"Sometimes we feel separated from people who don't understand our language, because there are many jokes that only we understand."
The Influence of Social Media on Social Perception	The language used in memes and conversations on social media influences Gen Z's perceptions of social issues, such as gender roles, politics, and relationships between individuals in society.	"There are a lot of memes about gender equality that make me more aware of this issue."
Digital Identity Creation	Gen Z's language enables the creation of a strong digital identity on social media. This influences how they express themselves and show who they are online.	"Instagram and TikTok are places where we can be ourselves, in a language that only our friends understand."

Changes in Social Norms	The increasingly free and informal use of language leads to a change in more relaxed social norms, which affects the way they interact with their parents and older generations.	"Sometimes the language we use in a group of friends can't be used when talking to adults, because it feels impolite."
	Memes and slang have become more efficient and meaningful communication tools among Gen Z, often replacing verbal conversation in conveying emotions or opinions.	"Sometimes a meme can express our feelings better than a long speech."

Source: Data Processed (2025)

Based on the findings above, this study found that the language used by Gen Z on social media not only reflects the way they communicate, but also shapes social behavior and social ties within their group. This language strengthens relationships between individuals who share the same language, but also creates exclusivity for those who do not understand the language. In addition, Gen Z's language also influences their social perceptions of various issues, such as gender equality and self-identity, and changes social norms in interactions with older generations.

This study also shows that Gen Z's language plays an important role in creating a strong digital identity in cyberspace, where social media functions as a space to express themselves and strengthen a sense of togetherness within their group.

2) Discussion

- a. Gen Z's language on social media includes the use of slang, memes, emojis, and other creative terms that previous generations may not understand. This language creates a unique

identity for users, giving color to everyday conversations that are more expressive and relaxed. As reflected in the quote, "In our chat group, if we don't use memes or emojis, it doesn't feel fun. That's already our way of chatting every day." The use of this language shows a major shift in communication style, where language becomes more visual and creative.

- b. Gen Z's language not only functions as a means of communication, but also influences the way they interact with friends. By using the same language, they feel more connected and sociable. This is reflected in the quote, "When we use the same language, we can relate more and connect with friends more quickly." The same language creates closeness and makes interactions more fluid among fellow group members.
- c. Gen Z's use of language also forms new norms in communicating and interacting socially, especially among peers. They have certain ways of speaking and codes that strengthen a sense of togetherness. As expressed in the quote, "We have our own code in speaking, that's what makes us feel closer." Language becomes a way to show group identity and strengthen relationships between members.
- d. Gen Z's language has the power to strengthen social ties within a group, providing a solid sense of community. However, this can also create exclusivity, where those who do not understand this language feel alienated. "If someone doesn't understand the latest memes or slang, they feel left behind," describing how language can separate those who have knowledge of a particular language from those who don't.
- e. Gen Z's language creates a sense of inclusivity among those who speak the language, but also exacerbates exclusivity for those who do not. "Sometimes we feel separated from people who don't speak our language, because there are a lot of jokes that only we understand," shows how the use of certain languages can create a dividing wall between social groups.

- f. The language used in memes and conversations on social media also influences Gen Z's perception of social issues. Issues such as gender equality or politics are often discussed through memes, which broadens their horizons. "There are a lot of memes about gender equality that make me more aware of this issue," reflects how social media and the language used in it play a role in shaping the social views of this generation.
- g. Gen Z's language also facilitates the creation of a strong digital identity. On social media such as Instagram and TikTok, they express themselves through language that not only represents them, but also creates community. "Instagram and TikTok are places where we can be ourselves, using a language that only our friends understand." This shows how Gen Z's language helps shape identity in the digital world.
- h. Changes in social norms are also seen through Gen Z's increasingly free and informal use of language. This affects how they interact with their parents or older generations. As reflected in the quote, "Sometimes the language we use in a group of friends can't be used when chatting with adults, because it feels impolite." The use of more casual language among peers is not always accepted among adults. 9. Memes and slang have incredible power in Gen Z's communication, often replacing verbal conversation. Memes can better describe feelings or convey messages more effectively than words. "Sometimes one meme can describe our feelings better than a long talk." This reflects how effective memes are in conveying emotions and opinions in a more visual and direct way.

Conclusion

Based on the results obtained from in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis of the collected data, there are several key findings that provide a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. The following are comprehensive conclusions from this study:

- a. The language used by Gen Z on social media, such as slang, memes, emojis, and other creative expressions, is a form of communication that reflects their cultural and social

dynamics. This language has evolved along with changes in the social media platforms used by this generation, such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter.

- b. Gen Z's language has a significant influence on their social behavior, especially in interactions between peers. The use of the same language creates a sense of togetherness and strengthens social bonds within their group. By using exclusive or "unique" language, Gen Z can form a strong group identity, which not only reflects differences from previous generations but also strengthens a sense of belonging to their community.
- c. Gen Z's language also influences changes in social norms in the way they communicate and interact with others. The use of more relaxed and informal language, as well as the dominance of visual language, indicate a shift in the way the younger generation views communication norms, both in social and professional settings.
- d. Social ties that are formed in the digital world, especially on social media, are greatly influenced by Gen Z's language. This language strengthens ties within peer groups, because the use of the same language creates a shared identity. This can create a strong sense of solidarity among them. However, on the other hand, the language that develops among Gen Z also creates a gap between those who "understand" and those who do not follow the development of the language.
- e. The language used by Gen Z on social media also influences their perception of social issues. Memes, slang, and expressions that develop on social media often reflect Gen Z's views on various social topics such as gender equality, self-identity, and social justice. Thus, Gen Z's language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a means of forming their views and values in society.
- f. One of the main findings in this study is the important role of language in the creation of digital identity among Gen Z. Through the language used on social media, Gen Z can express themselves in a more creative and free way.

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