



RESEARCH PAPER**Deciphering the Digital Vernacular: A Study of Generation Z Slang on Social Media Platforms**

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of present study is to investigate the reasons for the popularity of slang words among Generation Z, their types and forms, and their function and meaning in social media platforms. As far as the methodology is concerned, the research uses a qualitative content analysis method. It explores the constantly shifting realm of slang, drawing on the framework developed by Allan and Burrige (2006). The sample consists of 30 participants—20 female and 10 male—all university students. The results revealed that Generation Z uses slang to increase the intimacy of their conversations, and the popularity of slang is linked to the progress of science and technology. The study identifies five types and seven functions of slangs. However, this study is limited to investigating WhatsApp and Instagram chats only. Future researchers should consider other social media platforms as well when conducting similar studies.

KEYWORDS Communication, Generation Z, Slang, Social Interaction, Social-Media, Technology

Introduction

Slang is a language that individuals of specific communities use to describe themselves and communicate with one another in informal settings (Putrawan et al., 2020; Saputra & Marlina, 2019). Trimasturi (2017) states that slang is a phrase that teenagers often employ when interacting. It demands more than just perfect grammar and reliable articulation. The present study delves into the investigation of types and forms of slang as well as their meanings and functions in the everyday conversation of Generation Z.

The previous studies examined the usage of slang in the conversations of Generation Z but the study in hand further explains the reasons behind this usage. Why Generation Z is prone to the use of slang and why its use is becoming common is the research gap of the present study.

In spite of this, pronouncing the vocabulary's acronyms and abbreviations is sufficient because everybody in the group has knowledge of their meaning. One of the factors why slang is becoming more and more common is the progress of science and technology (Muliawati & Murfi, 2017). Moreover, proficiency in languages often exerts stress on language skills to affect vocabulary mastery. As an outcome, vocabulary plays a vital part in language activities that improve the presentation of ideas. Furthermore,

because every kid born in the 2000s knows what the speaker and the other person mean, slang is regarded as the spoken language of the younger generation (Yusuf et al., 2022).

Language is the most crucial form of communication for information transfer. Since language helps simple interaction between people, it is an essential element of human life (Sagala, 2019). It is quite surprising to discover that language meaning is partially based on how words are utilized as well as how they are expressed. When a speaker needs to use a number of languages to get their point across, they must adapt their language (Sagala & Rakhmat, 2019). Generation Z therefore views multilingualism as an essential skill in society (Rezeki, 2018).

The research carried out in 2019 by Budiasa & Savitri discovered that 76% of today's youth use slang during daily conversation including both written and spoken conversations between close friends. When sending direct messages on social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp or leaving comments, they often employ slang. It is not shocking that slang is being used as a social language given how effectively social media has spread the new slang language. (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019)

Some slang expressions like "rude" or "unpleasant," are regarded as appropriate for use in daily life (Supri & Tajudin, 2021). Slang serves seven purposes, according to Allan and Burridge (2006): addressing, degrading, initiating a casual conversation, establishing an intimate environment, conveying an impression, abusing people, and expressing intimacy.

Additionally, he categorized slang into five categories: Clipping, Flippant, Imitative, Acronym, and Fresh and Creative. Whenever speakers use slang words impulsively, they deliberately go against the accepted usage within the group (Kulkarni & Wang, 2018). In accordance with researcher observations, young people use slang mainly in their conversations, therefore, there is a good chance that there will be specific types and uses of slang in the conversations of young people.

Only individuals in this generation speak their language, that goes beyond conventions. The internet boom is seen in this phenomenon (Ardi, 2019). When speaking in person or online via social media platforms, Generation Z interacts in a number of different ways (Muzaffar, et. al., 2020). A variety of personal languages are used for better communication. They use technology and consider the internet to be a need. A great deal of Generation Z currently uses WhatsApp and Instagram for interaction. For this reason, data gathered from these applications is examined in this study.

As far as the rationale of the study is concerned because the researcher usually employs slang while speaking with friends in a social setting, those facts stimulated her interest in carrying out this study. Young people also frequently utilize slang. Therefore, Wahib (2020) discovered an array of slang phrases from the most prevalent videos; however, the study does not target a particular generation. The manner in which Generation Z (Gen Z) specifically uses slang makes the current research novel. The researcher discovers it's easier to collect the data because the sample and the researcher are both from Generation Z. The study in hand used 30 participants for conducting the research. The participants are students at a private university in Sialkot, Pakistan. All participants are between the ages of 22 to 25. The researcher's closeness to social data sources and to the slang consumers in the study are factors to take into account when evaluating the study's findings with regard to the usage of slang.

Moreover, this study can provide significant insights into how society operates and highlight the formation of identities within Generation Z by utilizing the framework established by Allan and Burridge. Their digital slang is more than just a list of hidden words; it's a sign of their social skills and an expression of a generation that's continually coming up with new ideas and ways to improve interaction in the digital era.

Literature Review

Slang, based on Hutabarat et al. (2020), is an uncommon language used in informal settings. Some of the contributing variables are the swift development of technology and information. Furthermore, slang usually differs from acknowledged pronunciation and grammar rules and regulations. According to Olaniyan and Oluremi (2024), Generation Z uses slang for sarcasm and irony in order to construct their identity. They use slang to overcome social vices, create a subtle message, and indirectly point out the socio-political events in the nation. It helps in the construction of derivations and lexical innovations in a humorous manner. As a consequence, it is easy to find out good or negative information.

Multiple variables, such as social interaction, technology, and lifestyle, affect language change. For instance, new words may develop as an outcome of advances in technology and innovations. Language shifts or borrowing can result from constant communication inside as well as across national borders. Changes in language are additionally caused by people's lifestyle choices. The lives of individuals during pandemics are a particular example. The Oxford Dictionary adds many new words every year and recent additions include words like lockdown, WFH, and Covid-19 to highlight the pandemic (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022).

Approximately 5,400 new words are developed every year, according to the Global Language Monitor; only 1000 that are assessed to have insufficiently widespread use get released in print (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022). Furthermore, English slang has been affected by social media in ways that go beyond the development of languages and take into consideration broader sociological trends. People who obtain formal education and the internet community as a whole contribute significantly to a thorough grasp of language evolution as the use of English brings change in the digital age (Mahardika, 2023). For illustration, based on Sladek & Garbinger (2014), the youngest people in the entire nation are people who belong to Generation Z.

Furthermore, Sladek & Grabinger (2014) define Gen Z as individuals who were born between 1996 and 2009. They are additionally believed to be the most diverse group of individuals in the world's history with respect to ethnicity and racial background, and they ought to have the highest degrees of education. The main feature that sets Gen Z apart is how important technology has been to their upbringing. It is the generation that was first to grow up with advances in technology like mobile phones, that simply accept it as an everyday aspect of life instead of as something novel to be adopted (LeDuc, 2019). Similarly, Maghirang (2019) defines Filipino Gen Z as being conscious of the advantages of technology, ready to share their knowledge, and eager for more human interaction. Young Filipino adults devote nearly all of their time on their smartphones. They have expertise in using their gadgets to achieve different goals. Several social media applications, including Instagram and WhatsApp, can easily be downloaded and used on their mobile phones.

There are five types and seven functions of slang proposed by Allan & Burridge (2006) that this study used to analyze the collected data. The types are acronyms, flippant, imitation, creative and fresh, and clipping. As far as functions are concerned, they are to

address, humiliate, initiate a casual conversation, create an intimate atmosphere, express impressions, abuse people, and express intimacy. Through the analysis of data gathered, each type and function are discussed with examples.

Based on Puspita & Ardianto (2024) the motivating factors behind the use of slang can be the necessity of demonstrating one's cultural and linguistic identity, establishing group identification, or developing a connection with others. The use of slang words is becoming common among the younger generations of the present era. Slang can be a communication tactic employed to adapt to certain situations.

Based on a study by Sudiyanti et al. (2017), that investigated the slang function in the film "Step Up: All In," there are four distinct types of slang that are used in the film: flippant, clipping, imitation, and fresh and creative. The use of slang in that movie achieves a variety of goals, like addressing, establishing a casual conversation, fostering intimacy, and humiliating. As a consequence, greeting others and striking up a conversation are prevalent tasks because people usually address their close friends in particular manners and sometimes use slang terms to establish a casual atmosphere (Ratna et al., 2021).

The subjects and results of this study differ from those of previous ones. Lestari (2020), for example, looked at slang used on the X network. Several slang terms were found in the forum, yet the study failed to give an organized list of the data sources. Meanwhile, the researcher discovered the data sources for this study, involving the social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram used by Generation Z.

Similarly, Mailisa et al. (2022) investigated how American slang was utilized in the "Despicable Me 3" movies. Slang is frequently used in the movie to express intimacy, initiate, and degrade. Slang words are often employed in communication to make fun of and acknowledge the other person. Slang terms are additionally employed, depending on the individual who is speaking with you (Harared, 2018). In addition, slang leads to grammatical errors. Trimasturi (2017) demonstrates in his study that slang on social media has multiple grammatical errors, such as inconsistent use of capital letters, abbreviations, and alphabet switching.

It has evolved into commonplace because of slang in everyday conversation, especially on social media (Matsumoto et al., 2019; Fata & Apriliya, 2021). Slang spreads rapidly, as demonstrated by Fata et al. (2019), particularly among consumers of common applications like WhatsApp Instagram, etc. Slang, which may have developed in a single group, may propagate effortlessly thanks to the popularity of social media.

Slang on social media platforms permits individuals to establish the mood of their discussions when they utilize it for regular communication. Generation Z's daily use of slang is strengthened by the ease of communication made feasible by technological devices like WhatsApp and Instagram. Additionally, they can control the mood of the conversation by utilizing slang in their regular discussions. Since technology makes communication easier, Generation Z is more inclined to use slang frequently. Additionally, since slang can create a comfortable atmosphere, Generation Z is permitted to express how they feel through it (Utami et al., 2020; Matsumo et al., 2019).

Material and Methods

The study in hand used content analysis (Ary et al., 2006) for the analysis of data collected from different social media platforms including WhatsApp and Instagram. The study is qualitative by documentation. Convenience sampling technique is used to

approach the participants of the research. A total number of 30 participants (20 females and 10 males) were selected randomly from Generation Z. All are students at a private university in Sialkot, Pakistan. A total number of 30 chats were collected from the participants. The data is collected from their social media chats, 20 chats from WhatsApp, and 10 chats from Instagram. As all the participants were acquainted with the researcher, so it was easy to collect the data. The WhatsApp chats were shared through the WhatsApp 'export chat' option and then transferred to the laptop for analysis. However, the Instagram chats were exported by taking screenshots of each chat and then converting them into PDF files. As far as ethical considerations are concerned, the researcher explained the research goal, method, and purpose before collecting the data. The participants were not forced or pressured to share their social media chats. As all the participants are from the researcher's friend circle, they voluntarily participated. Keeping in mind the point of anonymity and confidentiality, participants' chats are neither shared with anyone else nor their identities are revealed. Moreover, the chats are deleted after the research purpose is fulfilled.

Data collection steps are given below:

1. Data were collected by determining the data sources;
2. The data were collected after requesting access to the data from the account holders;
3. The data were transferred from the mobile phones into the laptop.
4. After data collection, the researcher converted the whole data, with respect to types and functions of slang along with their occurrences, into tables just for the sake of making data analysis easy.

For this Allan and Burrige's (2006) theory is utilized. The data was categorized and analyzed for the sake of description and conclusion by identifying the types and functions of slang provided by these theorist (as presented in section 3.1).

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Allan & Burrige (2006) was used with the goal to identify different types of slang words and their functions found in the data.

The theoretical framework is described in the form of table below which the researcher created based on the types and functions of slangs along with their description and examples.

Table 1
Types of Slang

No	Types of Slang	Description	Examples
1	Acronym	Reduced versions of long words or phrases, often used as single words.	FYI (for your information), NGL (not going to lie)
2	Flippant	Reiteration of words or phrases in a playful or demeaning way to convey a new meaning	Butterfinger (a clumsy person), Chill out (relax)
3	Imitation	Words that imitate sounds or actions.	Ditto (same), Wanna (want to)
4	Clipping	Short forms of already existing words	Collab (collaboration), Pics (pictures)
5	Creative and fresh	Words invented to convey humor or to emphasis something	Nope (no), Derp (silly or clueless person)

Table 3.2
Functions of Slang

No	Functions of Slang	Description	Examples
1	Abusing people	A way of expressing anger in a slang term	Call her, bitch.
2	To express impression	To express a feeling or opinion	Yeah, I am low-key obsessed with it.
3	To create an intimate atmosphere	To create a friendly and informal atmosphere	Gotchuu, all right.
4	To express intimacy	Using slang terms for the expression of closeness	You know what, we share the same vibe.
5	To humiliate	Used to insult others using slang terms	Huh, she gives me sus person vibes.
6	To start a casual conversation	Used to create a casual tone	Sup?
7	To address	An informal way of addressing someone	Thnx sis, it's a great favor.

Based on Allan and Burrige (2006), language is an evolving system that is shaped by identity and social power. The use of slang by Generation Z symbolizes their altering social identities and places them in the digital age. Social media platforms serve as dynamic environments where those in Generation Z develop and access their digital identities. Their slang, which can be distinguished by acronyms, emoticons, and abbreviations, acts as a distinctive indicator of group membership. They forge connections within their group and set themselves apart from past generations. Another variable shaping this slang is efficiency and speed, both of which are common in their digital environment.

Allan and Burrige further emphasize how language serves an integral role in humor and criticism. Irony and sarcasm are plentiful in the utilization of slang by Generation Z. This gives them a chance to subtly convey their discontent and playfully challenge authority. Their continuing slang lexicon evolution is a further instance of how they oppose accepted norms and strive to forge their own linguistic identity in the digital world.

Results and Discussion

The present study provides the analysis of types and functions of slang used by Generation Z on social media platforms. The given table 1 highlights the 100 slangs used by participants.

Table 3
Types and Occurrences of Slangs used by Participants

No	Types	Occurrences
1	Flippant	14
2	Clipping	10
3	Acronym	32
4	Imitative	28
5	Fresh and creative	16
	Total	100

According to the information given in the form of table the most common type of slang is acronym and the least common slang is clipping.

Slang Types

Flippant

Flippant slang is described by Allan and Burrige (2006) as slang that consists of two or more words that do not share the same denotative meaning. It is one of the least

occurred slang words. This kind of slang, which incorporates two unconnected but related-meaning words, is likely the reason for the low number. Some examples are given below:

1: You're such a **butterfinger**, Aniya.

2: **Chill out**, you can do it latter.

In example 1 the word 'butterfinger' doesn't mean a finger made of butter but it simply means a person who is clumsy and drops things easily. The typist is referring towards the scenario when her friend dropped the whole bucket of fruits at a family gathering. This slang is difficult to understand by the non-native English speakers, especially ordinary people can't understand it without a proper understanding of the context.

The message typist in example 2 uses the expression "chill out," which means to "relax" or "take it easy" as his friend was refusing to go out due to some pending assignments. The other party can understand slang utilized in chats, but there is no linguistic link between both words and their meanings. This slang provides its users an amazing, creative, and amiable impression while they are chatting on different social media platforms.

Clipping

It is the least occurred slang word in social media chats. A common method to create new words in English is to clip words. It includes reducing a longer word, often to just one syllable goal of Generation Z, to make slang words. An exceptionally common form of clipping slang while using social media platforms is a result of Generation Z's tendency to promote communication and lead a fast-paced lifestyle. Below is a description of a few above-mentioned problems.

3: Did you see the post related to BTS **collab** with Pakistani choreographers?

4: Saira isn't looking good in her wedding **pics**.

In the example 3 the word 'collab' is a shorter form of 'collaboration' which the typist used while discussing some Instagram reels with her friend. This type of slang is developed to convey the original meaning of the word in a simpler, shorter form. Utilizing a brief expression like this one usually makes the other person understand the meaning of the word immediately, without the typist having to add any extra information about the congratulations.

Moreover, in example 4 the word 'pic' is derived from 'picture' as the typist and her friend are discussing the wedding pictures of one of their mutual friends. Instead of using the full word, typist used the shorter version 'pic'. This slang is not only used in social media platforms but also in everyday conversations.

Acronym

Acronym is the most commonly used slang by Generation Z in their chats. This notable result is likely due to the reality that Generation Z develops their language by means of everyday interactions, especially while messaging or chatting on social media platforms. An acronym is a phrase that is created through the combination of the first letters of each individual word in a sentence and pronouncing it as one word. Generation

Z individuals are becoming more adept with this kind of slang in conversation. These are a few instances of this kind of slang.

5: **FYI**, this is not a right way to do it.

6: **NGL**, Lee Minho is a real king of k-dramas.

In the example 5 the acronym 'FYI' stands for 'for your information' and 'NGL' stands for 'not going to lie'. In the first example the typist is guiding her friend about the right way to add references in a research article. Moreover, the second example is taken from Instagram chat where two friends are discussing the reels of Korean actors. Generation Z considers the use of acronym a straightforward way of conveying the message without much effort. In such cases, the words can be understood through acronyms that their peers often comprehend because the goal is to speed up message delivery and facilitate communication. It is a common practice among the younger generation and it is spreading rapidly day by day.

Imitative

Allan and Burrige (2006) describe slang as words that imitate or derive from Standard English (SE) words or combine two different words. In the course of the analysis, this type appeared as the second most prevalent type. The likely cause of this important outcome is Generation Z, whose language is developed in everyday interactions, especially while messaging. Here are a few examples of this particular slang.

7: **Ditto**.

8: **Wanna** come?

Today's Generation Z is also accustomed to using slang terms. In instance 7, the typist is conveying the sense of sameness when her friend told her that today's lecture was boring for her, the typist replied in the same manner. Similarly in the example 8 another slang 'wanna' is used. It is a short form of 'want to come'. The typist used this slang while chatting with her elder sister whether she want to come for Eid or not. The analysis explains that Generation Z uses the slangs only to facilitate the conversation and to convey the message in a more straightforward manner.

Fresh and creative

The fresh and creative type of slang is also less prevalent among the Generation Z just like the Flippant and Clipping. Here are the examples

9: **Nope**.

10: You are a **derp**, sista.

As shown by example 9, 'nope' means 'not' or 'no' and shows 'unwillingness'. When the typist asked her friend whether she has prepared her assignment or not, the addressee replied with the text 'nope' It is a trendy word among Generation Z. This is a new and innovative word. It is used in informal discussions or while chatting with friends. Example 10, 'derp' is used for a person who is 'silly or clueless.' When the typist texted her friend for the final syllabus, she texted her the syllabus and called her a derp for not attending the lectures attentively. It is mostly used in informal settings, particularly among sisters or close friends.

Functions of Slang used by Generation Z

Table 4
Functions of slangs used by Participants

No	Functions	Occurrences
1	Abusing people	8
2	To humiliate	10
3	To address	12
4	To express impression	14
5	To create an intimate atmosphere	20
6	To start a casual conversation	34
7	To express intimacy	2
Total		100

The table 4.2 shows that “to start a casual conversation” is the most commonly used slang function. The least frequently occurring slang function, on the other hand, is “to express intimacy.” The following subsections present instances from the conversations and explanations for each type and function of slang discovered in the messages from the analysis.

Abusing People

A total number of 8 slang terms were found by the researcher while analyzing the data. This function is the second-shortest of all the parts examined, with just 8 occurrences. This sort of informal language is rare because it is considered a harsh language. For this reason, as in the next example, the terms must match the context.

1: Call her, **bitch**.

In this example the typist uses the word ‘bitch’ to express emotion during the conversation. The typist is chatting with her friend and asking her to call their third friend who is not attending her calls. She might be extremely frustrated in this situation, but it might also be a joke between close friends.

To humiliate

It is the third least occurred expression by Generation Z in their conversations. A total number of 10 humiliating slangs were found by the researcher. Here is an example

2: Huh, she gives me **sus** person vibes.

‘sus’ is a short form for “suspicious”. It is used to indicate an ‘untrustworthy person’. The typist is chatting about her cousin with her friend whom she considers an untrustworthy person. Apart from ‘sus’, Generation Z also use a number of slangs which convey humiliating impressions like ‘cringe’ or ‘roast’. However, the meaning depends on the setting as well.

To Address

Only 12 slang words had this function, in relation to the researcher’s data analysis. It could be that there aren’t numerous chances to use it because most users are acquainted with most of those whom they interact with via the chat feature.

3: Thnx **sis**, it’s a great favor.

In example 3 the typist uses the term 'sis' which means 'sister' to refer to a woman she might have known for a long time. The typist is thanking a senior student for helping him in his assignments. This phrase is frequently used by writers in monologue talks and in ads for women's products. Nonetheless, it is rare to come across it in a long-term acquaintance conversation.

To express impression

With 14 occurrences, this function is the third most often encountered slang term. When contrasted to the total amount of data, the amount is fairly important. The main reason for this could be the fact that numerous young people use social media with their peers and come across as overly informal way of communication, especially when replying to remarks made by close companions. This is one instance.

4: Yeah, I am **low-key** obsessed with it.

The typist uses 'low-key' which is slang for 'liking something but feeling embarrassed to accept it. The typist is talking about his obsession with the pink color. He prefer to respond informally to the other person in this case, a close friend who has made the statement. The use of such words is quite frequent among Generation Z as words like this are contextually appropriate.

To create an intimate atmosphere

This the second most frequently encountered slang in the chats of Generation Z in social media platforms. Over the course of the analysis, 20 instances of this function were found. This is one instance.

5: **Gotchuu**, all right.

The typist is informing his professor about being absent from the classes due to the death of his mother. The professor replied with the term 'gotchuu'. This informal phrase translates to 'I have got you', which can be taken to mean mutual trust in an amicable relationship. It may also be determined as showing empathy and sympathy for a person who has experienced hardship. Lastly, a different approach to interpret this slang term is as 'I understand you.'

To start a casual conversation

This is the most frequently used function in the whole data. Researcher got 34 instances of this particular function. It may occur because the vast majority of social media users, particularly those in Generation Z, use the apps for casual peer discussions. Here is an example.

6: **Sup?**

This term is a slang for 'what's up' which is only used in casual situations, usually among peers, by Generation Z. The typist is a newly joined university student and is trying to create a casual relation with her new friend through this form of address. Instead of using the whole phrases or sentences the younger generation prefer to cut the words short and utilize them in their conversations.

To express intimacy

This is the least occurring slang in the chats the slangs in this category are 2 in function. Here is an example.

7: You know what, we share the same **vibe**.

In this text, the word 'vibe' is used as a slang which refers to 'feeling a good connection or energy' with someone. The typist and her friend are chatting about how they become friends and they concluded that it's the vibe which they both did not see in other class fellows.

Conclusion

The study delved into the types and functions of slang used by Generation Z on social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram. Utilizing Allan and Burridge's (2006) theory, the researcher identified all five types of slang, each serving seven distinct functions. These slangs conveyed different meanings based on the context and the relationship with the recipient. Additionally, the proliferation of technology, scientific advancements, and the widespread use of social media platforms have significantly contributed to the increased usage of slang. Generation Z employed slang to foster a friendly, informal, and casual communication environment. Proficiency in languages often imposes pressure on language skills, affecting vocabulary mastery. As a result, vocabulary played a crucial role in language activities, enhancing the expression of ideas. Generation Z was highly exposed to social media platforms. The use of slang by students reflected their digital culture, which necessitated rapid typing or clear communication, created unique symbol codes with connotations that signified group affiliation, introduced new trends, and demonstrated creativity, adaptability, and inclusivity. Consequently, members of Generation Z were more inclined to incorporate slang into their daily conversations compared to other generations.

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