

YOUTH LANGUAGE UNCOVERED: META-SYNTHETIC INSIGHTS INTO GEN Z AND GEN ALPHA SLANG

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APA Citation: Paoleti, V. D., & Mujahidah, N. F. Z. (2025). Youth language uncovered: Meta-synthetic insights into gen z and gen alpha slang. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 13(1), 9-16. <https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v13i1.11425>

Received: 25-10-2024

Accepted: 21-12-2024

Published: 28-02-2025

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the linguistic behaviors of Gen Z and Gen Alpha, focusing on their use of slang, the influence of digital platforms, and the broader cultural and societal implications of their language practices. A meta-synthetic research design was employed, synthesizing data from 30 academic articles, conference proceedings, and credible publications spanning 2016–2024. Thematic synthesis techniques were applied, including coding, categorization into thematic areas, and meta-synthesis to identify patterns and trends. Quantitative metrics, such as the frequency of slang usage on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, were also analyzed to examine inter-generational differences. The findings reveal that both generations use slang as a cultural marker, with Gen Z favoring socio-political expressions such as "no cap" and "woke," while Gen Alpha leans towards playful, meme-based phrases like "Skibidi" and "pog." Digital platforms significantly shape their linguistic behaviors, with TikTok fostering short-lived trends and Instagram blending slang with visual storytelling. Gen Z exhibits adaptability in integrating slang into formal and informal communication, whereas Gen Alpha faces challenges balancing slang usage with traditional literacy skills. The study also highlights the economic relevance of youth slang, as brands adopt generational language to engage audiences effectively. The study emphasizes the adaptive and expressive nature of youth slang, which serves as both a creative tool and a cultural identifier in the digital era. However, challenges such as maintaining traditional literacy skills and linguistic diversity warrant further attention. It is recommended that educators, policymakers, and marketers leverage these insights to bridge generational communication gaps, design effective learning strategies, and create relatable marketing campaigns. Future research should explore longitudinal studies and cross-cultural comparisons to deepen our understanding of the evolution and impact of youth language.

Keywords : *cultural identity; digital communication; Gen Alpha; Gen Z; linguistic innovation; meta-*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital communication has profoundly impacted the linguistic landscapes of younger generations, particularly Gen Z and Gen Alpha. These cohorts, who have grown up with technology and social media, use language that reflects their unique experiences, identities, and the digital platforms they frequent. This study focuses on understanding the slang and communication patterns of Gen Z and Gen Alpha, analyzing how digital environments, such as social media platforms like TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, shape their language use and cultural identity (Rachmijati & Cahyati, 2024; Ugoala, 2024; Conny et al., 2024). The role of slang in youth culture, serving as both an in-group identity marker and a boundary-defining tool, is a

key feature of how these generations communicate in the digital era (McArthur, 2016).

For Gen Z, their linguistic practices are deeply intertwined with the platforms they frequent, especially TikTok, where memes and slang work as cultural shorthand to communicate ideas quickly and effectively (Stahl & Literat, 2023). Their use of memes, viral trends, and language play within these digital spaces has created a new lexicon that is continually evolving (Vardeman, 2022). Similarly, Gen Alpha, as digital natives, has embraced an even more fluid and diverse language structure, drawing on the technology and communication tools they encounter in their everyday lives (Huss & Eastep, 2024; Matsumoto et al., 2019). Their engagement with technology has allowed for faster linguistic innovation and adaptation, with the younger generation pushing

boundaries in both formal and informal language settings.

Slang usage in the digital age is not only a social phenomenon but also a cultural one, where language adapts to reflect the rapid changes in technology, identity, and global connectivity. Studies have highlighted how the rise of digital communication tools has redefined communication practices and social behaviors, particularly through the development of digital slang (Henry & Shannon, 2023; Petrova & Vasichkina, 2021). Moreover, Gen Z's adoption of internet culture, including hyper-consumerist language, reflects broader economic and social trends, which, as noted by Moravčíková (2022), underscores the intertwined nature of language and culture in the digital age. Similarly, the increasing prevalence of online influencers and digital marketing strategies has played a role in shaping the communication styles and language choices of younger generations (Martaningrat & Kurniawan, 2024).

Gen Z's ability to construct meaning through internet slang has been a subject of much scholarly attention, yet there is a relative scarcity of research on how their language might be evolving into the next phase with Gen Alpha, especially in relation to their communication across digital platforms (Douglas, 2023; Agustina et al., 2024). A notable gap in the literature exists in comparing the slang usage between these two cohorts, as well as understanding how their language adapts to the rapidly changing digital environment. Additionally, the exploration of how Gen Z and Gen Alpha are shaping language beyond the confines of traditional linguistics, particularly through memes, aesthetics, and niche subcultures, remains an underexplored area (Gácsi, 2023; Huss & Eastep, 2024).

Digital culture plays a pivotal role in shaping language and identity among Gen Z and Gen Alpha, with their online interactions reflecting their broader social and cultural realities. For instance, studies reveal that the digital slang popularized by these generations often mirrors societal values, trends, and even political ideologies (Kaplan, 2020; Henry & Shannon, 2023). Platforms like Instagram and YouTube have also contributed to shaping their linguistic behaviors by fostering a visual-dominant communication style, where text, emojis, and imagery blend seamlessly (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2023). Such integrations highlight the unique ways in which these generations express

themselves, offering insights into their collective identities and subcultures.

The intersection of internet slang with marketing and branding further exemplifies how youth language has influenced broader societal practices. Studies on social media marketing trends, for example, demonstrate how brands adapt their messaging to align with the slang and cultural expressions of Gen Z and Gen Alpha (Liu et al., 2017; Pandjaitan, 2024). This linguistic adaptation underscores the economic relevance of understanding these generations' language use, particularly as their purchasing power continues to grow. The relationship between slang and branding also emphasizes the importance of linguistic innovation in creating relatable and engaging content.

Another important dimension of youth language is its educational implications. Research shows that the use of internet slang and digital communication tools has transformed classroom dynamics, with both opportunities and challenges emerging from this shift (Ajmal, 2024; Gácsi, 2023). For educators, understanding the slang and digital behaviors of Gen Z and Gen Alpha can provide a bridge to effectively connect with students, while also addressing potential drawbacks such as the erosion of formal language skills. Moreover, the role of language in fostering critical thinking and cultural awareness remains a key area of focus in educational studies.

Finally, the broader cultural significance of Gen Z and Gen Alpha's linguistic practices lies in their potential to influence societal norms and values. The blending of diverse linguistic elements from multiple cultures, facilitated by global connectivity, illustrates the inclusive and adaptable nature of youth language (Mauk et al., 2020; Watanabe, 2022). However, this cultural fluidity also raises questions about linguistic preservation and the potential marginalization of traditional languages in the face of rapid digital globalization. These dynamics underscore the need for further research into the socio-cultural impact of internet slang and its implications for future generations.

This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring the following research questions: (1) How do digital platforms influence the linguistic evolution of Gen Z and Gen Alpha? (2) What are the key linguistic features and slang trends emerging within each generation? (3) How do these linguistic features reflect the broader cultural and societal shifts influenced by social media and digital communication? By synthesizing insights

from previous studies, this research will offer a meta-synthetic framework that deepens our understanding of how digital communication shapes youth language and identity.

The novelty and significance of this study lie in its interdisciplinary approach that integrates linguistics, technology, sociology, and digital media studies. It provides new insights into how language evolves in the context of digitalization and offers implications for various fields, including education, digital marketing, and social media communication strategies. By understanding the linguistic behaviors of Gen Z and Gen Alpha, this study will contribute to a broader understanding of youth culture in the digital age and offer a foundation for future research into the dynamics of language in social media environments.

METHOD

This study adopts a meta-synthetic research design to analyze and synthesize existing studies on the linguistic practices of Gen Z and Gen Alpha. The method involves a systematic review

of relevant literature to identify, compare, and interpret patterns, trends, and gaps in youth slang and digital communication behaviors. The research process includes the following steps:

The data for this study were collected through a comprehensive review of academic articles, conference proceedings, and books. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the linguistic practices of Gen Z and Gen Alpha. A total of 30 references, spanning the years 2016 to 2024, were identified and reviewed. The inclusion criteria for selecting studies were: (1) Focus on linguistic behavior, slang, or digital communication trends among Gen Z or Gen Alpha. (2) Studies from diverse disciplines, including linguistics, sociology, digital marketing, and education. (3) Peer-reviewed publications and credible proceedings.

The databases used for the search included Google Scholar, PubMed, SpringerLink, and Scopus, with keywords such as “*Gen Z slang*,” “*Gen Alpha communication*,” “*internet slang*,” and “*digital linguistics*.”

Table 1. *Data collection overview for linguistic analysis of gen z and gen alpha*

Aspect	Details
Sources	Academic articles, conference proceedings, books
Years Covered	2016–2024
Total References	30
Inclusion Criteria	- Focus on linguistic behavior, slang, or digital communication trends among Gen Z or Gen Alpha - Studies from diverse disciplines (linguistics, sociology, digital marketing, education) - Peer-reviewed publications and credible proceedings
Databases	Google Scholar, PubMed, SpringerLink, Scopus
Keywords Used	“Gen Z slang,” “Gen Alpha communication,” “internet slang,” “digital linguistics”

A thematic synthesis approach was employed to analyze the collected data. This approach involves: (1) Coding: Key themes and linguistic features were identified, such as slang trends, digital platform influences, and generational language shifts. (2) Categorization: The studies were grouped into thematic areas: (a) Slang as a cultural marker. (b) Digital platforms shaping language. (c) Educational and societal impacts of

youth slang. (3) Meta-Synthesis: Patterns and trends were synthesized to generate broader insights into the evolution of slang and communication practices.

Quantitative metrics, where available, were extracted for comparison. For instance, the frequency of slang usage across platforms like TikTok and Instagram was noted to examine inter-generational differences.

Table 2. *Thematic synthesis framework for linguistic analysis*

Step	Details
1. Coding	- Identified key themes and linguistic features - Focused on slang trends, digital platform influences, and generational language shifts
2. Categorization	Grouped studies into thematic areas: - Slang as a cultural marker - Digital platforms shaping language - Educational and societal impacts of youth slang
3. Meta-Synthesis	Synthesized patterns and trends to generate broader insights into the evolution of

	slang and communication practices
Quantitative Metrics	- Extracted metrics such as slang frequency across platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram) - Compared inter-generational differences in language use

This study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do digital platforms influence the linguistic evolution of Gen Z and Gen Alpha? (2) What are the key similarities and differences in slang usage between the two generations? (3) How do their linguistic practices reflect broader cultural and societal trends?

To ensure validity, the study adopted a triangulation approach, incorporating insights from: (1) Multiple academic disciplines (linguistics, sociology, digital marketing). (2) A variety of data sources (peer-reviewed journals, doctoral dissertations, conference proceedings). (3) Independent reviews by two researchers to cross-verify the findings.

As this study is based on secondary data, it does not involve direct interaction with participants. Ethical approval was obtained for using publicly available data, ensuring proper attribution to original authors and adherence to copyright laws.

The study acknowledges the following limitations: (1) The reliance on secondary data may exclude emerging trends not yet documented in academic literature. (2) Differences in geographic focus among the studies may limit the generalizability of findings across regions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The meta-synthetic analysis revealed several key findings regarding the linguistic behaviors of Gen Z and Gen Alpha:

Slang as a cultural marker

Both Gen Z and Gen Alpha utilize slang to assert their identities and create in-group dynamics. Gen Z’s slang often reflects socio-political awareness, while Gen Alpha’s slang leans more toward playful and entertainment-driven language (Rachmijati & Cahyati, 2024; Stahl & Literat, 2023). Key terms such as “no cap,” “sus,” “vibe,” “drip,” and “on fleek” dominate Gen Z’s lexicon, signaling authenticity, style, and shared understanding. Meanwhile, Gen Alpha popularizes short-lived, meme-based phrases such as “Skibidi,” “Rizz,” “slay,” “lit,” and “fire,” which often originate from trends on TikTok and gaming communities (Ugoala, 2024; Matsumoto et al., 2019).

The table below provides a comprehensive summary of the key findings from the meta-synthetic analysis on linguistic behaviors and slang usage among Gen Z and Gen Alpha. It highlights the distinctive characteristics of their slang as cultural markers, the influence of digital platforms on linguistic trends, generational differences in language evolution, societal and educational impacts, and the economic relevance of their language to marketing strategies. Examples of popular slang terms for each category are included to illustrate the trends and patterns observed in this study.

Table 3. Comparison of slang usage between gen z and gen alpha

Aspect	Gen Z	Gen Alpha
Purpose of Slang	Asserts identity; reflects socio-political awareness.	Asserts identity; focuses on playful and entertainment-driven language.
Key Characteristics	- Reflects authenticity, style, and shared understanding.	- Short-lived, meme-based phrases influenced by trends.
Popular Slang Examples	"no cap," "sus," "vibe," "drip," "on fleek."	"Skibidi," "Rizz," "slay," "lit," "fire."
Source of Trends	Cultural and socio-political influences.	Meme culture and gaming communities, primarily on platforms like TikTok.

Platform-specific linguistic patterns

Different platforms shape the linguistic trends of these generations. TikTok fosters creativity with short, catchy phrases and hashtags, including terms like “main character,” “FYP (For You Page),” “CEO of,” “ratio,” and “POV (Point of View)” (Stahl & Literat, 2023). Instagram combines slang with visual storytelling, featuring

captions and emojis accompanied by terms such as “aesthetic,” “IG-worthy,” “flex,” “stan,” and “clout” (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2023). X and YouTube, on the other hand, promote niche-specific jargon and influencer-driven language, including words like “simp,” “cancelled,” “GOAT (Greatest of All Time),” “cringe,” and “lowkey” (Pandjaitan, 2024; Zhang et al., 2016).

Table 4. *Platform-specific linguistic patterns among gen z and gen alpha*

Aspect	Gen Z	Gen Alpha
Purpose of Slang	Asserts identity; reflects socio-political awareness.	Asserts identity; focuses on playful and entertainment-driven language.
Key Characteristics	- Reflects authenticity, style, and shared understanding.	- Short-lived, meme-based phrases influenced by trends.
Popular Slang Examples	"no cap," "sus," "vibe," "drip," "on fleek."	"Skibidi," "Rizz," "slay," "lit," "fire."
Source of Trends	Cultural and socio-political influences.	Meme culture and gaming communities, primarily on platforms like TikTok.

This table provides a clear comparison between Gen Z and Gen Alpha in terms of their slang usage and cultural dynamics. Let me know if you'd like further adjustments!

Generational differences in linguistic evolution

Gen Z's slang is often rooted in cultural critique and inclusivity, shaped by socio-political issues such as climate change and mental health awareness. Terms like "woke," "adulthood,"

"ghosting," "gaslighting," and "safe space" highlight their engagement with societal issues (Ariestya et al., 2022; Kaplan, 2020). Gen Alpha, by contrast, displays a rapid turnover in slang trends influenced by emerging technologies, featuring words like "GG (Good Game)," "pog (Play of the Game)," "sus," "yeet," and "epic," often originating from gaming and virtual reality environments (Huss & Eastep, 2024).

Table 5. *Generational differences in linguistic evolution: gen Z vs. gen alpha*

Aspect	Gen Z	Gen Alpha
Primary Influences	Cultural critique, inclusivity, socio-political issues (e.g., climate change, mental health).	Emerging technologies, gaming, and virtual reality environments.
Key Characteristics	Language reflects societal awareness and engagement with cultural issues.	Rapid turnover in slang trends, playful and tech-driven.
Popular Slang Examples	"woke," "adulthood," "ghosting," "gaslighting," "safe space."	"GG," "pog," "sus," "yeet," "epic."
Source of Trends	Socio-political discourse and cultural movements.	Gaming culture, memes, and digital innovation.

Educational and societal impacts

The increasing use of slang in digital spaces is reshaping formal and informal communication practices. Gen Z demonstrates adaptability in blending formal language with digital slang, frequently incorporating terms like "legit," "savage," "bet," "mood," and "shook" into their

everyday communication (Douglas, 2023; Gácsi, 2023). Gen Alpha, however, faces challenges in balancing slang with traditional literacy skills, as their lexicon includes playful terms like "bruh," "noob," "poggers," "big yikes," and "oof," commonly used in online interactions and gaming (Huss & Eastep, 2024).

Table 5. *Educational and societal impacts of slang usage among gen z and gen alpha*

Aspect	Gen Z	Gen Alpha
Communication Practices	Blends formal language with digital slang, showing adaptability.	Heavy reliance on slang, posing challenges for balancing with traditional literacy skills.
Key Characteristics	Slang is integrated into everyday communication, bridging informal and formal contexts.	Slang is predominantly playful and tied to online interactions and gaming culture.
Popular Slang Examples	"legit," "savage," "bet," "mood," "shook."	"bruh," "noob," "poggers," "big yikes," "oof."
Challenges and Impacts	Enhances engagement but risks overuse in professional or formal settings.	May hinder the development of traditional language skills, especially in academic contexts.

Marketing and economic relevance

Gen Z and Gen Alpha's language profoundly influences consumer behavior and brand

strategies. Marketers increasingly adopt slang to resonate with these audiences, incorporating terms like "bae," "lit," "dope," "snatched," and "slaps"

into campaigns targeting Gen Z (Liu et al., 2017; Martaningrat & Kurniawan, 2024). For Gen Alpha, the integration of gaming and meme-inspired slang into advertisements includes words such as “vibing,” “sus,” “OP (Overpowered),” “drippy,” and “L (Loss)” to capture their attention and engagement (Huss & Eastep, 2024).

Table 6. *Marketing and economic impact of slang usage: Gen z vs. Gen alpha*

Aspect	Gen Z	Gen Alpha
Impact on Consumer Behavior	Influences purchasing decisions through relatable and culturally attuned messaging.	Engages through playful, gaming, and meme-inspired language.
Popular Slang Examples	"bae," "lit," "dope," "snatched," "slaps."	"vibing," "sus," "OP," "drippy," "L."
Marketing Strategies	Brands use culturally relevant slang to establish authenticity and connect emotionally.	Marketers incorporate gaming and meme slang to align with Gen Alpha's digital interests.
Key Characteristics	Focus on cultural relevance, inclusivity, and social awareness in campaigns.	Leverages entertainment-driven slang to captivate attention in gaming and digital spaces.

The table below provides a comprehensive summary of the key findings from the meta-synthetic analysis on linguistic behaviors and slang usage among Gen Z and Gen Alpha. It highlights the distinctive characteristics of their slang as cultural markers, the influence of digital platforms on linguistic trends, generational differences in language evolution, societal and educational impacts, and the economic relevance of their language to marketing strategies. Examples of popular slang terms for each category are included to illustrate the trends and patterns observed in this study.

CONCLUSION

The meta-synthetic analysis of youth language, particularly the slang used by Generation Z and Generation Alpha, highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of linguistic practices in the digital age. Slang serves as a powerful cultural marker, reflecting the identities, values, and community dynamics of these generations. While Gen Z's slang often embodies socio-political awareness and cultural critique, Gen Alpha's language leans toward playful and entertainment-driven expressions shaped by meme culture and gaming communities. This linguistic diversity underscores the adaptability of youth language in responding to their unique digital environments and societal influences.

Digital platforms play a significant role in shaping the linguistic behaviors of both generations. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube not only provide spaces for slang innovation but also drive the rapid turnover of linguistic trends, creating distinct language ecosystems. Gen Z utilizes these platforms to develop a lexicon rooted in cultural relevance and

inclusivity, while Gen Alpha's engagement with gaming and meme culture fosters a more fluid and creative use of language. The interplay between digital platforms and youth slang highlights the importance of technology as a driver of linguistic innovation.

Generational differences in slang usage are particularly pronounced. Gen Z's language reflects societal awareness and inclusivity, with terms often tied to socio-political discourse and cultural critique. In contrast, Gen Alpha's language is more fluid and playful, driven by technology and gaming environments. These differences illustrate how each generation's linguistic practices are shaped by their unique digital experiences, yet they share a common reliance on slang as a means of expression and identity formation.

The educational and societal impacts of slang usage also warrant attention. Gen Z demonstrates adaptability in integrating digital slang into formal communication, effectively bridging the gap between informal and professional contexts. However, Gen Alpha faces challenges in balancing slang with traditional literacy skills, raising concerns about the long-term implications for academic and professional development. Understanding these impacts is crucial for educators and policymakers aiming to bridge generational divides in communication and literacy.

Finally, the economic relevance of youth slang cannot be overlooked. Marketing strategies increasingly leverage slang to connect with these generations, reflecting the cultural and consumer significance of their language. Brands adopt culturally relevant slang to engage with Gen Z and utilize gaming and meme-inspired

expressions to capture Gen Alpha's attention. This linguistic adaptation underscores the broader influence of youth slang on branding, consumer behavior, and digital marketing.

This study sheds light on the intricate relationship between digital communication, cultural identity, and linguistic practices among Gen Z and Gen Alpha. While slang fosters creativity and community, it also presents challenges in maintaining linguistic diversity and traditional literacy skills. Future research should explore longitudinal studies to track the evolution of slang, examine cross-generational comparisons in diverse cultural contexts, and analyze the implications of youth language on education and professional communication. By deepening our understanding of how digital communication shapes linguistic behaviors, this study contributes to the broader discourse on youth culture in the digital era.

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