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### Critical Analysis of English Language Use in Social Media on Discourse Structure Changes and Linguistic Identity of Generation Z.

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#### ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the impact of English language use on social media platforms, specifically focusing on the discourse structure changes and the linguistic identity of Generation Z. Utilizing a qualitative research design based on library research and systematic literature review, the paper synthesizes findings from various scholarly articles published between 2010 and 2024. It explores how social media has reshaped traditional linguistic practices, giving rise to new forms of communication characterized by abbreviated language, emojis, hashtags, and code-switching. Additionally, the study delves into how Generation Z uses language as a tool for constructing and performing identity in the digital space, reflecting both linguistic fluidity and cultural hybridity. The research reveals that social media platforms are not just spaces for communication, but also sites for identity negotiation, where language is fluid, dynamic, and deeply embedded in social interactions. This paper also discusses the implications of these linguistic innovations for formal communication, education, and professional settings. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for further research on how these language shifts

#### KEYWORDS

*Social Media, Generation Z, Linguistic Identity, Discourse Structures, Code-Switching, Hybrid Languages, Digital Communication.*

evolve and their potential long-term impact on communication norms.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development and widespread use of social media platforms have led to significant changes in language use, particularly among younger generations. Generation Z, typically defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, has grown up in the digital era, where social media is a central feature of daily life. Social media not only provides a platform for communication but also influences linguistic choices, communication styles, and the construction of identity (Nani, 2024). The pervasive use of English on these platforms, often in hybridized, abbreviated, or creative forms, has introduced new dynamics in discourse structure and identity formation.

However, while many studies have examined the evolution of language use on social media, there is still a gap in understanding the specific ways in which these linguistic innovations impact Generation Z's discourse structures and linguistic identity (OLONADE, 2023). The nature of digital communication, characterized by speed, brevity, and multimodality, requires a reconsideration of traditional theories of language structure and identity.

Previous research on social media language has primarily focused on language change in general or on specific linguistic features such as slang or emojis (Stoika & Pitovka, 2025). However, few studies have critically analyzed how the structural changes in discourse and the evolution of linguistic identity are interconnected for Generation Z users of social media. Additionally, the existing literature often overlooks the role of specific platforms and the multilingual environment in which Generation Z operates (Laila & Kanwal, 2025). This gap points to the need for more comprehensive research on how language is used not only as a tool for communication but also as a means for identity negotiation in the digital age.

The urgency of this study lies in the fact that Generation Z represents the future of language use on digital platforms. As digital communication continues to evolve, understanding how linguistic practices on social media shape identity is essential for anticipating future trends in language development (Hamed, 2023). Moreover, with the increasing global reach of social media platforms, the hybridization of languages and the rapid spread of internet slang have implications for both educational practices and societal norms surrounding language use. This research, therefore, addresses both the theoretical and practical need to understand how social media reshapes linguistic structures and identities in a rapidly changing global environment.

Research on language and identity in the context of social media has become an increasingly popular area of study. For instance, Reinhardt discusses how social media facilitates the creation of new linguistic forms that reflect the identities of users (Reinhardt, 2019). Studies by Hasan and Benny have examined the role of code-switching on social media, emphasizing the dynamic nature of language use among bilingual communities (Hasan & Benny, 2025). Fatima et al. explored the function of emojis, arguing that these visual cues are integral to understanding tone and meaning in online communication (Fatima et al., 2025). While these studies contribute valuable insights, they often focus on specific linguistic

features or a particular generation, leaving a gap in understanding how the broader discourse structures and linguistic identity of Generation Z are influenced by social media.

This study's novelty lies in its critical approach to examining both discourse structure and linguistic identity simultaneously, with a specific focus on Generation Z. While previous studies have largely treated these two aspects separately, this research integrates them to understand how social media platforms contribute to a holistic transformation of language. Additionally, by focusing on the impact of multilingualism and the unique features of various social media platforms, this study brings a fresh perspective to the analysis of language change in the digital age.

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze how the use of English on social media has changed the discourse structures employed by Generation Z.
2. To investigate how these linguistic changes contribute to the formation of linguistic identity within this generation.
3. To explore the role of multilingualism, code-switching, and visual language (e.g., emojis) in shaping communication practices.
4. To assess the implications of these linguistic innovations for the future of language use on social media.

The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the evolving role of social media in shaping language practices and identity, particularly for Generation Z. By exploring how discourse structures and linguistic identities are influenced by digital communication, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of sociolinguistic dynamics in the 21st century. Furthermore, this study can inform educators, linguists, and policymakers about the implications of social media language for language acquisition, communication skills, and cultural exchange.

#### **Language Use on Social Media: Impact on Discourse Structures**

Social media has become a dominant medium for communication, especially for Generation Z, whose engagement with these platforms is primarily digital and instant. This has resulted in significant shifts in the way language is used and structured. Traditional norms of discourse, which emphasize grammatical correctness, full sentence construction, and linearity in communication, are often abandoned in favor of more fluid, fragmented, and abbreviated forms of expression (Matsumoto, 2021). This is evident in the frequent use of acronyms, slang, and informal language on platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. For instance, common abbreviations like "lol" (laugh out loud), "brb" (be right back), and "idk" (I don't know) have become ubiquitous, shaping the brevity and pace of online interactions. Furthermore, the integration of emojis and other visual cues, such as gifs and memes, into written discourse adds layers of meaning, often serving as emotional indicators or emphasizing tone, which traditional text-based communication lacks (Bashir et al., 2025). These changes in discourse structure reflect a shift away from the more formal and rigid conventions of written language towards an increasingly multimodal and interactive style of communication, enabling users to convey more nuanced meanings in a condensed and efficient manner. This phenomenon underscores the need for a new framework in analyzing discourse structures in the digital age, as the traditional boundaries of language and communication are continuously redefined in the online space.

## **Formation of Linguistic Identity through Digital Communication**

The use of language on social media is not just a tool for communication but also a means of identity formation, particularly for Generation Z. Digital platforms allow individuals to craft and perform multiple facets of their identities, often through linguistic choices. The notion of linguistic identity in the digital era is fluid and dynamic, shaped by the audience, platform, and context of the communication. Studies have shown that social media users employ language not only to express their thoughts but also to signal their social affiliations, values, and cultural identities (Zappavigna, 2019). For Generation Z, who often interact with diverse, global audiences, language becomes a tool for negotiating and expressing belonging to various social groups, whether it's through the use of specific slang, memes, or hashtags. These linguistic markers signal group membership and differentiate between in-group and out-group members, reinforcing social identity within online communities. Additionally, code-switching—the practice of alternating between languages or dialects—has become a common feature on platforms like Instagram and Twitter, where users seamlessly shift between English and their native languages (Manuhutu et al., 2024). This practice not only reflects a multicultural identity but also exemplifies how social media fosters linguistic creativity and hybridization. Through these linguistic innovations, Generation Z constructs a digital persona that is multifaceted and adaptable, allowing for self-expression and self-presentation in ways that reflect their dynamic, often transient, social identities.

## **The Role of Social Media Platforms in Shaping Language Use**

The unique characteristics of different social media platforms play a critical role in shaping the language practices of Generation Z. Each platform provides distinct affordances and constraints that influence how language is used and how users interact with one another. For example, platforms like Twitter, which are limited to short character counts, have given rise to highly abbreviated forms of communication and the widespread use of hashtags, which serve both as linguistic tools and social markers (Mahfouz, 2020). Hashtags such as #ThrowbackThursday or #NoFilter do more than categorize content; they connect users to global conversations and trends, marking the intersection between language, culture, and identity. On platforms like Instagram and TikTok, the use of visuals in conjunction with text has further transformed communication practices. Emojis, which are now integral to digital discourse, serve as supplementary linguistic elements that convey tone, mood, and nuance that text alone might fail to express (Tabatabaei Zavareh, 2025). Additionally, the highly interactive nature of social media, where users can engage with content through comments, shares, and likes, fosters an environment where language is constantly evolving. The feedback loop provided by social media users allows certain linguistic trends—whether slang, acronyms, or hashtags—to gain traction rapidly, influencing how others communicate and shaping collective linguistic behaviors. In this sense, social media platforms not only serve as spaces for language use but also actively participate in shaping the very structures of digital discourse.

## **2. METHODS**

This study adopts a qualitative research design through the lens of literature-based analysis, commonly referred to as a systematic literature study. This method is appropriate for exploring the theoretical intersections of language use, discourse structures, and linguistic identity as shaped by social media, especially among Generation Z. Literature-based

qualitative research emphasizes the critical synthesis of scholarly works to generate conceptual insights, rather than collecting primary empirical data (Snyder, 2019). As such, this study focuses on interpreting and integrating findings from prior studies, with the aim of developing a cohesive understanding of how English is used on social media and its implications for discourse and identity formation.

The data sources for this study consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reputable conference papers published between 2010 and 2024, with a particular focus on works in the fields of sociolinguistics, discourse studies, digital communication, and identity studies. The selection criteria for inclusion included relevance to the themes of English usage in digital contexts, Generation Z's language behavior, discourse analysis, and identity negotiation online. Databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect were utilized to ensure access to high-quality, academically rigorous sources.

For data collection techniques, a systematic search strategy was employed using keyword combinations such as "Generation Z and language use," "English in social media," "discourse change online," "linguistic identity digital communication," and "code-switching in digital platforms." Boolean operators were applied to refine the search results, and duplicate or low-quality sources were excluded. The resulting body of literature was then organized and categorized thematically to identify patterns, theoretical frameworks, and recurring findings across studies (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015).

The data analysis method employed in this study is qualitative content analysis, which involves interpreting textual material from scholarly sources to identify key concepts, relationships, and thematic trends. This approach enables a deep examination of how discourse structures and identity formation processes are discussed and conceptualized in academic literature. Following the steps proposed by Mayring (2014), the analysis was conducted by coding the texts into thematic categories such as "discourse innovation," "digital linguistic identity," "multimodal communication," and "platform-specific language norms" (Stone, 2020). This systematic approach ensures transparency, replicability, and theoretical rigor in qualitative synthesis.

Through this methodological framework, the study offers a critical and integrative perspective on the linguistic phenomena observed in social media environments, grounded in established academic discourse while contributing new insights relevant to the field of language and identity in digital communication.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1.** Literature Data Results of Literature Studies

Author & Year	Article Title	Key findings
Zappavigna, M. (2021)	Discourse and Social Media. The Bloomsbury Handbook of Discourse Analysis, 295–309.	Social media reshapes discourse structures by promoting informal, abbreviated, and multimodal communication styles that

		differ from traditional linguistic norms.
Amina KEMRI, R. R. (2025)	The Influence of Social Media Influencers on Language Trends: How Influencers Shape Linguistic Norms Among Youth.	Social media influencers play a crucial role in shaping linguistic trends among young people by popularizing specific words, abbreviations, and communication styles.
Salfin, S., Kurniadi, P., & Erwin, E. (2024)	Language Development in the Digital Age: A Literature Review on the Influence of Technology on Human Communication.	The digital age emphasizes speed and efficiency in communication, leading to the evolution of new linguistic norms that prioritize brevity and adaptability.
Biró, E. (2019)	Linguistic Identities in the Digital Space. <i>Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica</i> , 11(2), 37–53.	Language use in digital spaces plays a central role in constructing and expressing both individual and collective identities, particularly among online communities.
Amjad, M., & Tayyab, M. (2025)	Language and Identity: How Bilingualism Shapes Social Perception. <i>Scholar Insight Journal</i> , 3(1), 55–67.	Bilingual individuals use code-switching and hybrid linguistic practices to express identity and social belonging, reflecting complex linguistic adaptation in digital contexts.
Karabayeva, M. (2025)	The Impact of Social Media on Language Variation and Identity in Digital Communities. <i>International Journal of Artificial Intelligence</i> , 1(2), 776–778.	Social media promotes linguistic diversity and identity fluidity, allowing users to adapt language based on community norms and digital context.
Boell, S. K., & Cecez-Kecmanovic, D. (2015)	On Being ‘Systematic’ in Literature Reviews in IS. <i>Journal of Information Technology</i> , 30(2), 161–173.	Provides methodological insight into conducting systematic literature reviews, emphasizing transparency, rigor, and replicability in academic research.
Forceville, C. (2020)	Visual and Multimodal Communication: Applying	Highlights how multimodal communication—integrating text, visuals, and symbols—

the Relevance Principle. extends meaning-making  
Oxford University Press. beyond linguistic boundaries  
in digital interaction.

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The table above summarizes key findings from ten selected articles related to the research topic. These articles were carefully chosen from a larger pool of literature to ensure relevance and high academic quality. The findings reflect the various ways in which social media impacts discourse structures and linguistic identity, especially for Generation Z. This selection provides insights into how language use on social media is evolving, contributing to the transformation of discourse and identity in the digital age.

### **Data Interpretation - Key Findings from the Literature Review**

The literature review conducted for this study uncovers several critical insights into how social media influences discourse structures and linguistic identity, particularly among Generation Z. A thorough examination of the selected articles reveals a number of key themes that highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of language use in digital spaces. One of the most prominent findings is the shift in discourse structures as a result of social media platforms, as shown in the works of (Zappavigna, 2021). These studies highlight that social media encourages the abandonment of traditional formal language conventions in favor of more abbreviated, fragmented, and multimodal communication styles. For instance, common abbreviations like "lol" and "brb" as well as the incorporation of emojis and hashtags, which serve both as linguistic and social tools, have reshaped how individuals communicate online (Amina KEMRI, 2025). These changes in discourse structure align with Salfin et al. argument that the nature of digital communication prioritizes speed and brevity, leading to the development of new, more efficient linguistic norms (Salfin et al., 2024).

Alongside structural changes, the literature emphasizes how linguistic identity is deeply intertwined with social media language use. As Biró notes, language is an essential component in the construction of personal and social identities, and this is particularly evident in digital spaces (Biró, 2019). Generation Z, using platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, actively constructs and negotiates their identities through language. This is particularly visible in the frequent use of code-switching and hybrid languages. Amjad and Tayyab reveal that bilingual individuals often switch between languages, leveraging both linguistic codes to express various aspects of their identity (Amjad & Tayyab, 2025). The flexibility of language on social media allows users to express their belonging to particular online communities and cultural groups, while also adjusting their language use based on context (Karabayeva, 2025).

Another crucial finding from the literature pertains to the platform-specific influence on language. Each social media platform introduces its own communicative norms and constraints, which, in turn, affect how language is used. For example, Twitter's character limit compels users to condense their messages into short, often cryptic statements, while platforms like Instagram and TikTok highlight the integration of visuals alongside text, further shaping discourse (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). Forceville explain that multimodal communication—combining text, visuals, and interactive elements—is reshaping language

structures and how meaning is conveyed, going beyond traditional linguistic boundaries (Forceville, 2020).

Taken together, the findings from the literature highlight the transformative role of social media in shaping both language structure and identity. These changes reflect the ongoing evolution of communication practices in the digital age. Generation Z's active role in reshaping discourse structures through their creative and flexible language use on social media represents a significant shift in how language is conceptualized and utilized in the 21st century.

## **Discussion**

The findings from this literature review reveal profound shifts in language use and identity construction driven by social media platforms, particularly among Generation Z. These shifts align with contemporary trends in digital communication, where the use of abbreviated language, code-switching, and multimodal forms of expression have become commonplace. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, are not merely sites for communication but serve as venues for the active negotiation and performance of linguistic identity (Arshad et al., 2025). Generation Z's linguistic practices are shaped by the unique features of these platforms, which favor brevity, visual cues, and interactive elements (Sunday, 2025). This aligns with the ongoing trend of informalization in language use, where social media communication increasingly diverges from traditional, formal writing norms, reflecting a cultural shift towards faster, more efficient communication (Sikandar, 2025).

The use of emojis, hashtags, and other visual elements on platforms like Instagram or TikTok reinforces this transformation. Emojis, which were once viewed as simple emotional indicators, now serve as integral parts of discourse, carrying nuanced meanings that go beyond textual language (Fatima et al., 2025). The multimodal nature of social media communication, which blends text, visuals, and symbols, is reshaping the very concept of language and meaning. This phenomenon echoes theories of multiliteracies, which argue that communication in the digital age requires a broader set of literacy skills, encompassing not just reading and writing but also interpreting and producing multimodal texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016). Generation Z's familiarity with this dynamic form of communication reflects their ability to navigate both linguistic and visual literacies, an essential skill in today's digital landscape.

Moreover, the phenomenon of code-switching and hybrid languages discussed in the findings is particularly salient in the context of globalized digital interactions. Generation Z, often raised in multilingual environments or exposed to diverse cultures through social media, frequently alternates between languages or combines elements of multiple languages in a single message (Yousif, 2025). This reflects the broader trend of linguistic fluidity, where traditional boundaries between languages are increasingly porous. As Udenze suggests, language is intrinsically tied to identity, and social media platforms provide the perfect environment for users to express and construct multiple layers of their identities, often influenced by cultural, regional, or social contexts (Udenze, 2022). This constant switching between languages not only reflects cultural hybridity but also signals a shift in the way linguistic identity is perceived and expressed.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings support the concept of language as social practice (Dolan et al., 2019), where language is not simply a tool for communication but a

means of performing identity in a social context. The digital environment, with its affordances for rapid communication and feedback, accelerates the process of identity performance. Generation Z, therefore, uses language not just to express ideas but to construct and project self-representations in real-time, allowing them to negotiate and adjust their identities based on interactions with peers and online communities.

While these findings reflect a dynamic and creative use of language, they also raise important concerns about the impact of these shifts on traditional forms of literacy and communication. As language becomes more abbreviated and informal, there is a risk that academic literacy and formal communication might suffer. This phenomenon calls for an examination of how educational systems and linguistic policies will adapt to these changes in language use, particularly as Generation Z enters professional and academic fields. While the shift towards informal and multimodal communication can enhance creativity and self-expression, it also challenges conventional expectations of communication in professional settings, where clarity, formality, and standardization are typically valued.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the transformative role of social media in shaping language practices and identity formation, particularly for Generation Z. These changes reflect broader shifts in communication culture, where linguistic fluidity, multimodal expression, and identity negotiation are increasingly central. However, while these shifts offer exciting new possibilities for self-expression and cultural interaction, they also present challenges for maintaining traditional forms of literacy and communication standards in academic and professional contexts.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study highlights the significant transformations in language use and identity construction driven by social media, particularly among Generation Z. The findings reveal how social media platforms are reshaping discourse structures through the adoption of abbreviated language, emojis, hashtags, and multimodal communication forms. These shifts reflect broader trends towards more informal, rapid, and interactive modes of communication. Additionally, social media serves as a space for the active performance and negotiation of linguistic identity, where Generation Z constantly constructs and redefines their identities through language, often employing code-switching and hybrid languages to navigate multicultural and multilingual digital spaces. These linguistic practices demonstrate a break from traditional language norms, reflecting the fluidity of identity and communication in the digital era.

However, while these linguistic innovations foster creativity and inclusivity, they also present challenges, particularly in maintaining the standards of formal communication in academic and professional settings. As Generation Z continues to dominate digital spaces, the growing divergence between formal and informal language use necessitates further examination of its implications for literacy, education, and communication norms.

#### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Given the rapid evolution of language on social media, further research should focus on longitudinal studies to track how these linguistic shifts evolve over time, particularly as new social media platforms emerge. It would also be beneficial to explore how these language practices affect cross-generational communication and the interaction between digital natives and older generations, especially in professional and academic contexts. Future

research could also delve deeper into the psychological and sociocultural impacts of these linguistic shifts, examining how the fluidity of identity and language on social media influences self-perception and social relationships. Lastly, comparative studies across different cultural contexts could provide insights into how multilingualism and cultural hybridity are shaped by digital communication practices on a global scale.

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## 6. AUTHORS' NOTE

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