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Teen Digital Language and Identity Formation: A Corpus-Driven Multimodal Linguistic Landscape Analysis on Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

The intensification of social media has transformed the linguistic landscape of Indonesian teenagers, shaping their identity formation and everyday communicative practices. This study examines how platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp influence teen digital language by analyzing the forms, types, components, and functions of linguistic landscapes in virtual spaces. Focusing specifically on Indonesian teenagers, the research adopts a corpus-driven qualitative approach using naturally occurring multimodal data produced by students aged 17–18 at MAN 1 Gorontalo, an urban public school whose demographic diversity reflects typical youth linguistic practices. The findings reveal the emergence of new linguistic forms, including four categories of slang (acronym-based, borrowed, phonetic-play, and ironic slang), three patterns of code-switching (Indonesian – English, Indonesian - local language, and hybrid mixing), as well as abbreviations, emojis, stickers, and memes. These linguistic variations not only support communication but also serve as central markers of digital identity. They operate as symbolic resources through which teenagers signal in-group membership, cultural alignment, humor styles, and social positioning, illustrating how digital language functions as a cultural performance in online communities. For example, slang such as “gacor” or abbreviations like “FYI” reflect group affiliation, while expressive digital symbols convey emotional stance. The study extends the linguistic landscape (LL) framework into digital contexts and identifies social conflicts stemming from cross-generational misunderstandings. It also highlights implications for education, recommending the integration of digital-literacy discussions, the use of teen language examples in classroom activities, and teacher training to enhance understanding of contemporary youth linguistic practices.

Keywords: Teen Digital Language; Multimodal Linguistic Landscape; Corpus-Driven Study; Digital Identity; Social Media; Indonesian Teenagers

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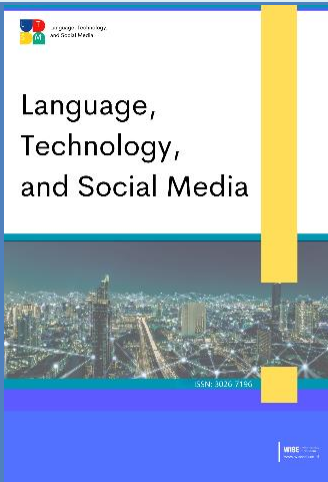
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INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies have reshaped global communication, making social media a primary space for interaction among teenagers. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp enable adolescents to express themselves through slang, abbreviations, emojis, and memes, forming distinctive linguistic patterns that shape identity and peer affiliation [1], [2], [3].

This trend is also evident in Indonesia, where teenagers increasingly rely on digital platforms for everyday communication. As noted by Roux [4], these online environments function as virtual public spaces that expose young users to diverse linguistic resources and multimodal forms of expression. Responding to this shift, the present study examines how Indonesian teenagers use digital language to construct identity on social media. Using a corpus-driven multimodal linguistic landscape approach, the research analyzes the linguistic patterns teenagers produce and the social meanings embedded within them.

Essentially, Linguistic Landscape (LL) theory traditionally examines the presence, functions, and symbolic meanings of written signs displayed in public spaces such as street signs, billboards, shop names, and institutional notices to understand how language reflects power relations, social identities, and cultural practices within a given territory [5], [6], [7]. These signs are typically analyzed in terms of their physical placement, material form, and sociopolitical significance. However, this conventional LL framework, developed for static and location-bound environments, is limited in capturing the fluid, interactive, and multimodal nature of digital communication.

While physical LL focuses on durable and material signs, digital LL involves rapidly circulating, user-generated elements such as emojis, memes, stickers, comment threads, and algorithm-driven visibility that continually shift in form and meaning. These features fall outside the explanatory reach of traditional LL approaches. To address this gap, the present study reconceptualizes LL as a dynamic virtual landscape, positioning teen digital expressions as multimodal signs functioning within participatory online spaces. Through this theoretical adaptation, the study extends LL into digital contexts and demonstrates how Indonesian teenagers employ diverse linguistic resources to negotiate identity, signal social belonging, and articulate expressive styles within contemporary youth culture.

Building on this reconceptualization, identity becomes central to understanding how linguistic signs function in digital environments. Language on social media does not merely convey messages; it performs and negotiates identity [8], [9]. Language is not only a means of communication but identities are enacted via language in social media platforms [10]. Meanwhile, social stratification of language and the generational variation exist in language use. In the context of the web, language is used by adolescents as a social signifier. In addition, there is a rapid evolution of language triggered by social change and the use of language in the digital context [11], [12]. In this case, adolescents being the early adopters of innovations in social/discursive patterns are at the forefront of identity performance via language on social media [11], [13].

The relevance of identity in digital language use is further supported by established theoretical frameworks. Darwin and Norton's theory of investment [14] highlights that individuals invest in language to gain access to cultural capital and social relationships. In virtual public spaces, teenagers invest in language to construct and express their identities, aligning themselves with particular social groups [15]. Similarly, Brown [16] in theory of performativity suggests that identities are not fixed but are continuously performed through language in social interactions. This

is particularly relevant to teen language, as social media provides an ideal platform for identity performance in fluid and dynamic ways, where teenagers constantly negotiate and reshape their identities through linguistic acts [17].

However, despite the significant advancements in understanding language variation and identity performance, the LL framework has not yet been applied to the study of teen language in virtual public spaces. While existing studies have examined language use on social media in Maria et al. [18] and Riadi and Warti [19] mentions few have considered the linguistic landscape on these platforms, where teenagers use language to define themselves and socialize. Altanlar et al. [20] and Buchan et. al [21] argue that public space has expanded to include digital environments, but this digital public space has not been adequately explored in the context of teen language. Moreover, the role of multimodal communication, combining text, images, emojis, and videos, has been largely overlooked in the analysis of teen language in digital spaces [22]. This research aims to fill these gaps by applying the LL theory to analyze teen language on Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, with a focus on how language is used to perform social identity and navigate social relationships in these virtual public spaces.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the types, components, and functions of linguistic landscapes in social media platforms used by teenagers. Additionally, this study explores how teen language contributes to identity formation and social interaction within these virtual spaces. By integrating multimodal analysis which combines text, emoji, images, and videos this study will offer a more nuanced understanding of how teen language is used as a tool for identity performance in digital spaces [22].

The novelty of this study lies in its application of LL theory to virtual public spaces, with a specific focus on teen language in social media platforms. Previous research has addressed language in digital spaces, but the Linguistic Landscape of teen language in virtual public spaces remains underexplored [23], [24]. This study is the first to apply LL theory to teen language on social media, incorporating a multimodal approach to examine how language in these spaces contributes to identity construction and social interaction. The findings of this research are expected to fill the gap in LL research by extending it to virtual public spaces and providing new insights into the ways teenagers use language to perform identity and navigate digital communities [25], [26].

In sum, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature by exploring the LL of teen language on social media, using multimodal analysis to understand how digital spaces shape language use and contribute to identity formation. By applying LL theory in the context of virtual public spaces, this study offers new theoretical contributions to the understanding of teen language and identity performance in the digital era [11], [27], [28].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Linguistic Landscape in Physical Educational and Public Spaces

Studies on LL in physical environments have predominantly examined how language visibility reflects institutional identity and social hierarchy. Rafael et al. [29] demonstrated that differences between public and private schools in Surabaya shape the multilingual compositions of signage and their communicative functions. Similarly, Syamsurijal and Iswary [30] identified top-down and bottom-up LL practices in shopping centers in Makassar, with English dominating as a branding strategy. These studies highlight LL as a tool for understanding language use in institutional and commercial settings; however, they remain limited to physical signage, descriptive methods, and

adult-driven semiotic practices. They do not address youth linguistic behavior or LL dynamics in digital spaces.

Teen Language in Digital Communication

Research on teen language in digital contexts emphasizes the influence of social media on linguistic behavior and identity construction. Xursanovna [31] noted that social media contributes both positive and negative effects on teen language acquisition, although their study does not engage with LL theory or examine social tensions. Pre-digital and early-digital studies by Abbas et.al [32] focused on structural features of slang such as acronyms, abbreviations, and stylistic variation. Furthermore, Bram et al. [33] described slang categories and usage patterns among teenagers. Collectively, these works provide important insights into youth language but rely mainly on textual analysis and overlook the sociolinguistic dimensions of conflict, negotiation, and intergenerational tension surrounding digital teen language use.

Research Gaps and Theoretical Limitations

Within the two primary strands of research physical LL studies and teen digital-language studies three critical gaps emerge. Firstly, existing LL research predominantly focuses on physical environments and seldom extends to virtual spaces, thereby leaving a gap in understanding how digital semiotic practices fit within the broader concept of LL. Secondly, studies examining teen language often neglect its role in fostering social conflict, particularly in school settings where tension between students and educators could arise from generational or linguistic differences. Thirdly, methodological limitations persist in previous works, as they predominantly rely on descriptive qualitative methods, without integrating corpus-driven or mixed-methods approaches that could provide a more comprehensive analysis.

The present study aims to address these gaps by reconceptualizing teen digital expressions as part of a modern linguistic landscape. It explores how these expressions contribute to identity performance and social conflict, particularly within online and school environments. By incorporating multimodal analysis within a corpus-driven framework, this study not only fills the existing void in LL research but also enriches our understanding of how language in digital spaces shapes adolescent identity and mediates social dynamics in both virtual and physical contexts.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative corpus-driven multimodal linguistic ethnography to investigate the linguistic landscape of teen digital language and its related social dynamics. This design combines qualitative inquiry with corpus-driven principles, allowing naturally occurring linguistic data from social media platforms to guide category formation and interpretation without imposing predetermined theoretical assumptions. The ethnographic orientation supports the examination of everyday communication practices, capturing how teenagers use language across online and school-based contexts.

The study incorporates elements of digital ethnography, specifically passive, non-intrusive observation of publicly accessible and participant-consented digital interactions. This includes tracing interactional patterns through screenshots, monitoring recurring linguistic practices in group chats, and observing multimodal features such as emojis, memes, and visual symbols. As a form of

light digital ethnography, the observation is limited by several constraints: the researcher does not intervene in conversations, cannot access private exchanges beyond participant consent, and relies on time-bound digital traces that may change or disappear. These limitations are acknowledged as inherent to ethical and non-obstructive digital fieldwork.

Analytically, the study follows an inductive logic consistent with corpus-driven research. Emerging linguistic patterns were identified through open coding, followed by category building to classify lexical items, multimodal signs, and interactional functions. The analysis then proceeded with thematic mapping to interpret how these linguistic features index identity, reflect social relationships, and contribute to conflict dynamics in school environments. This inductive approach allows sociolinguistic meanings and conflict patterns to emerge directly from the data, ensuring that interpretations remain grounded in teen linguistic behavior within digital contexts.

Population and Sample

The participants of this study consisted of 20 students from State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) 1 Kota Gorontalo aged 17–18 years who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, namely: (1) belonging to the adolescent age group, (2) demonstrating active engagement in digital communication, and (3) participating regularly in group-based interactions on platforms such as WhatsApp and TikTok. Class XI students were selected because this age cohort is linguistically productive, socially active online, and represents typical users of teen digital language in Indonesia, making them suitable for examining linguistic variation and identity performance in virtual spaces.

In addition to student participants, the study included 5 teachers from the same school, selected through criterion-based sampling. The teachers represented different generational groups (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z) to capture diverse perspectives on teenage language and its role in intergenerational communication and conflict. Their varied educational backgrounds and teaching experiences provided contrasting viewpoints on how teen digital language is interpreted, negotiated, and sometimes misunderstood across generations.

Ethical considerations were strictly upheld throughout the research process. All participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Written consent was obtained from students, and because the participants were minors, parental or guardian consent was also secured. Permission to collect digital data such as screenshots of messages, comments, and multimodal content was explicitly requested, ensuring that no private or sensitive information was accessed without authorization. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage protocols. All procedures adhered to ethical standards for research involving minors and digital data.

Research Instrument

The instruments employed in this study were constructed to document adolescents' multimodal linguistic practices across social media platforms. Developed within a qualitative corpus-driven multimodal linguistic ethnography, the instruments emerged through an iterative, field-responsive process. During preliminary observations, the researcher informally tested the instruments by examining their capacity to capture naturally occurring digital features such as emojis, stickers, memes, and hybrid orthography which prompted successive refinements to the corpus protocol,

observation descriptors, and interview prompts. This naturalistic form of instrument testing ensured contextual adequacy without necessitating formal pilot studies or expert validation.

The refinement process was complemented by systematic theoretical alignment. LL theory guided the categorization of digital signs and semiotic components, digital identity and performativity theories shaped the formulation of interview items related to self-presentation and social positioning, and corpus-driven principles informed the procedures for assembling and analyzing digital linguistic data. To illustrate the structure of these instruments, sample items included observation cues such as *“Record instances of emoji-verbalization or meme references in peer interaction,”* interview questions such as *“How do students’ digital expressions affect communication in the classroom?”* and questionnaire items such as *“I frequently use slang or emojis when communicating online”* and *“Describe a misunderstanding that arose from online language.”*

Through the integration of iterative field-based refinement, naturalistic testing, and theoretical alignment, the instruments achieved conceptual coherence and methodological suitability for capturing the complexity of teen linguistic behavior in digital environments. Furthermore, to provide a clear and systematic overview of the tools used in this study, the research instruments are presented in a structured format data collection process was carried out in several stages;

Table 1. Research Instrument

Instrument	Data Source	Purpose	Procedures	Output
Corpus-Driven Data Collection	WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram posts/comments of students	To capture authentic teen language in digital environments	Collecting screenshots of posts, comments, memes, emojis from Apr–Jun 2025	Digital corpus of teen linguistic forms
Structured Observations	MAN 1 Kota Gorontalo school environment	To examine real-life language practices and conflict situations	Using an observation checklist to record slang, abbreviations, emojis, conflict events	Field note dataset
In-Depth Interviews	5 teachers at MAN 1 Kota Gorontalo	To explore teachers’ perspectives on teen language and intergenerational conflict	Semi-structured interviews based on protocol aligned with research questions	Transcribed interview data
Questionnaire	20 student participants	To identify perceptions of teen language and social conflict	Google Form with mixed closed- & open-ended items	Quantitative + qualitative responses

AI Chatbot Integration and Activities

Data were collected through a clearly defined, step-by-step corpus-driven procedure aligned with the study’s qualitative multimodal design. First, student participants were purposively selected from the eleventh grade because they represent an age group highly active in multimodal digital communication. Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp were chosen as data sources because they are the platforms most frequently used by Indonesian teenagers for posting texts, images, videos, and symbolic features such as emojis and stickers, making them suitable for multimodal LL analysis.

Prior to data collection, institutional approval, parental consent, and individual participant consent were secured. The data collection process involved three main steps: (1) obtaining explicit access to participants selected social media accounts and group chats; (2) systematically identifying posts, comments, and interactions that contained multimodal linguistic features; and (3) capturing these data as screenshots following uniform criteria—content had to be participant-generated, naturally occurring, and include at least one relevant multimodal element. Over a three-month period (April–June 2025), this procedure produced 312 screenshots, all derived from participant-authorized digital interactions, with no private content accessed without documented permission. The data collection procedure is outlined in the flowchart below:

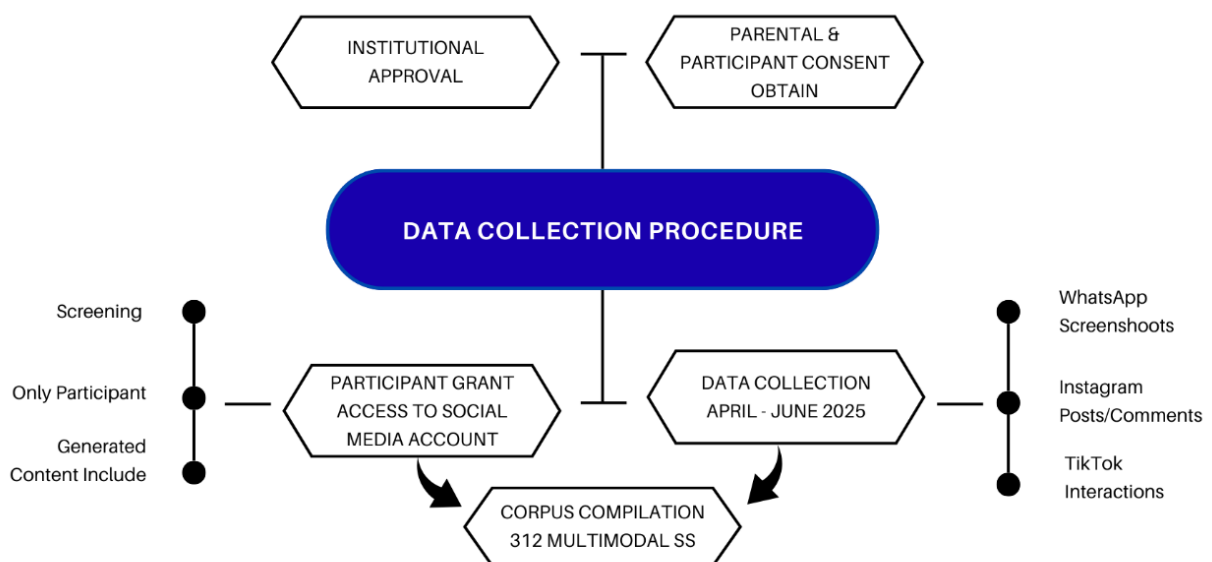


Figure 1. Data Collection Procedure

All screenshots were stored in PNG format to preserve multimodal detail and were accompanied by minimal metadata (platform, date, time, pseudonym). Identifiable information including usernames, profile images, and contact details was anonymized through blurring and coded pseudonyms. The corpus was subsequently classified into analytic categories based on linguistic form, multimodal features, interactional function, and platform type. This procedure ensured technical rigor, ethical compliance, and systematic organization of the digital linguistic data.

Next, Participant observation was conducted to document how adolescents reproduce digital linguistic practices in offline settings. The researcher was embedded in the school environment for six weeks (May–June 2025) during regular instructional and non-instructional periods, enabling unobtrusive observation of naturally occurring peer interactions. Field notes were recorded using a

structured protocol that captured instances of slang, emoji-verbalization, meme references, code-switching, and interactional cues related to alignment, negotiation, and misunderstandings. Observation data were processed through inductive qualitative coding, beginning with open coding to identify recurrent behaviors, followed by axial coding to consolidate patterns into thematic categories such as *identity enactment*, *interactional management*, and *conflict emergence*. This procedure ensured analytical consistency between observational data and the digital corpus.

Following the observation phase, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to explore their interpretations of teenage digital language and its perceived effects on classroom interaction, social relationships, and conflict emergence. The interview guide consisted primarily of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives, reflective accounts, and experiential insights, allowing participants to elaborate on specific communication challenges or generational differences they observed.

Subsequently, a qualitative questionnaire was administered to student participants to obtain their perspectives on digital language use across social media platforms and its influence on peer and teacher relationships. The questionnaire included open-ended items and short-answer prompts, enabling students to describe the expressions they commonly use, the contexts in which these expressions occur, and any misunderstandings or tensions arising from them. No *likert-type* or semantic-differential items were used, as the instrument was designed to gather descriptive and interpretive rather than numerical data.

Data Analytics

Data analysis followed a multi-step workflow integrating corpus-driven and qualitative analytical procedures. First, all digital data were extracted from screenshots and transferred into a corpus folder system organized by platform and participant pseudonym. The corpus was then pre-edited, which involved removing identifying information, standardizing file names, and segmenting multimodal elements (e.g., emojis, stickers, memes) into analyzable units. Following pre-editing, the corpus was tagged manually, with each item coded for linguistic form (slang, abbreviation, hybrid orthography), multimodal feature (emoji, sticker, meme), interactional function, and contextual metadata. It can see in the following flowchart:

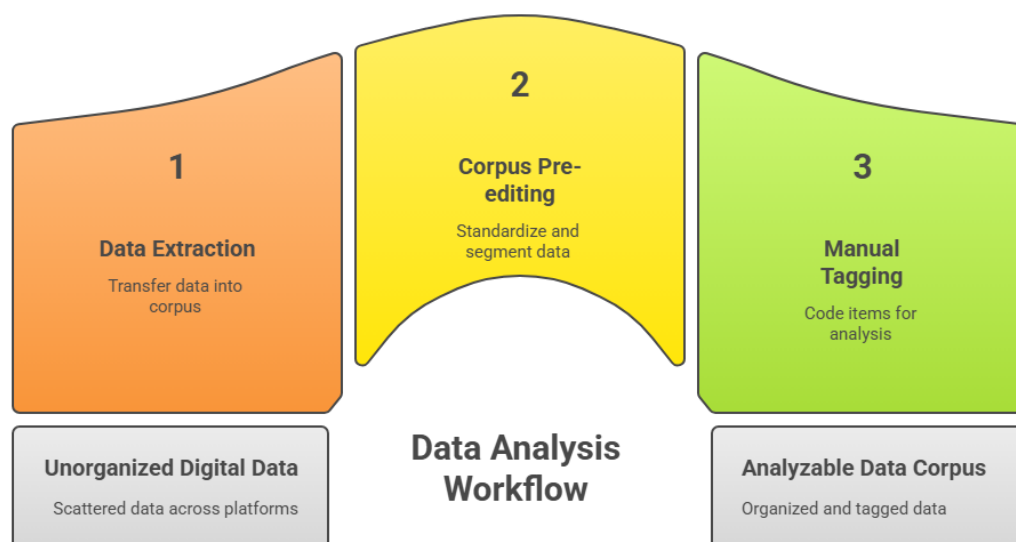


Figure 2. Data Analytics

The tagged corpus was subsequently processed using *AntConc* to conduct frequency analysis, enabling the identification of recurrent linguistic forms and multimodal patterns. These quantitative outputs informed the inductive categorization of digital signs. Observation notes and interview transcripts were analyzed through categorization, beginning with open coding to identify salient meanings, followed by axial coding to connect linguistic patterns with broader interactional dynamics such as peer alignment, identity performance, and conflict emergence. This integrated workflow allowed for a systematic interpretation of how multimodal language practices shape social relationships among adolescents in both digital and offline contexts.

The observation notes and interview transcripts were examined using inductive categorization, allowing analytical categories to emerge directly from the data without imposing a thematic framework. The analysis began with familiarization, followed by initial coding of salient segments related to slang use, multimodal expression, peer alignment, and conflict cues. These codes were then clustered into broader data-driven categories representing recurring sociolinguistic patterns, which were refined through constant comparison to ensure conceptual clarity and analytic coherence. As the study employed a single-researcher analysis, intercoder reliability was not applied; instead, consistency was ensured through iterative verification and memo-based reflexive checks. This categorization process enabled a systematic interpretation of how teen language shapes identity performance and social conflict in both digital and school contexts.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study employed triangulation through member checking and audit trail techniques. Member checking involved asking participants, particularly teachers, to confirm the accuracy of interpretations, while the audit trail documented the entire research process to maintain transparency and accountability. These techniques allowed cross-verification of data and interpretations, reducing potential biases and ensuring that the study accurately represented participants' experiences. By systematically validating findings through multiple techniques, the study strengthened its construct validity and captured a comprehensive view of teenage language use and the resulting social conflicts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This segment outlines the findings of the study regarding the diverse language variations used by teenager across digital platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok. The data was collected using a corpus-driven methodology, which focused on linguistic elements such as slang, abbreviations, emojis, code-switching and pictures/digital content. These language features were systematically categorized and examined to understand how they contribute to the creation of online identities and social interactions among teenager. The findings reveal that these linguistic elements play a significant role in shaping digital personas and facilitating communication, leading to new forms of socialization.

The findings are presented in the following sections, beginning with an analysis of slang usage, followed by an investigation into abbreviations, and finishing with a discussion on the role of emojis and other forms of creative language. Each section examines how these language features are utilized in different social media settings, how they help shape the teens identities, and their influence on both their online and offline social interactions. The discussion also delves into the broader social and functional impacts of these language variations in the everyday of teens communication.

Slang in Youth Digital Communication

Teens slang serves multiple purposes such as emotional expression, identity formation, and social bonding. Below is a table that illustrates the linguistic variations:

Table 2. Teens Language Variation: Slang

Word/Phrase	Platform	Origin/Etymology	Linguistic Process	Social Meaning & Identity
Anjay	Instagram/TikTok/WhatsApp	Euphemistic form of "anjing"	Phonetic euphemism	Expressive, humorous, showing a playful, non-offensive style
Anjir/'Njir/Bjir	Instagram/TikTok/WhatsApp	Same as "anjing" (slang)	Clipping + phonetic variation	Expressive, conveys camaraderie among youth
Bacot	Instagram/TikTok/WhatsApp	From Betawi (chatter)	Regional slang → national slang	Criticism with a casual tone; urban street identity
Drip	Instagram/TikTok	English (fashion-related)	Borrowing (lexical loan)	Fashionable identity, reflecting global teen trends
Bet	Instagram/TikTok/WhatsApp	English slang ("deal")	Borrowing + pragmatic use	Confident, affirmative identity among youth peers
Flex	Instagram/TikTok	English slang ("show off")	Borrowing + semantic extension	Show-off digital identity, flaunting lifestyle
Comel	Instagram/TikTok	Malay language (cute)	Regional borrowing	Cute identity, influenced by Malaysia/K-pop fandom
Slay	Instagram/TikTok	English slang ("to dominate")	Borrowing + semantic broadening	Powerful, stylish identity, exuding confidence
Bae / Bestie	Instagram/TikTok/WhatsApp	English informal ("before anyone else")	Borrowing	Friendship solidarity, close digital bond
Kiyowo	Instagram/TikTok	Korean (귀여워 – "cute")	Phonetic borrowing (Korean wave)	Identity linked to K-pop culture, soft-aesthetic for teens
Vibe	Instagram/TikTok	English ("mood, aura")	Semantic extension	Aesthetic identity, denoting digital mood and trends
Ghosting	Instagram/TikTok/WhatsApp	English slang ("suddenly disappear from communication")	Semantic borrowing	Relationship culture, signifying disappearing acts in communication

Word/Phrase	Platform	Origin/Etymology	Linguistic Process	Social Meaning & Identity
Glow-up	Instagram/TikTok	English slang ("appearance transformation")	Compounding + borrowing	Identity of self-improvement and beauty transformation
Sniper	Instagram/TikTok	English ("sharp shooter")	Metaphor lexicalization	Cool, performance-oriented identity, linked to gaming
Cringe	Instagram/TikTok/WhatsApp	English ("embarrassing")	Semantic borrowing	Evaluative identity, highlighting social boundaries among groups
No Cap	TikTok	English slang ("no lie")	Idiomatic borrowing	Authentic, trustworthy identity in street culture
On Fire / Menyala	TikTok/WhatsApp	English → literal ("on fire")	Creative translation	Energetic, motivational identity, expressing enthusiasm
Cepu	Instagram/TikTok/WhatsApp	Betawi/Javanese (informant)	Regional transfer → national	Anti-betrayal identity, emphasizing loyalty in group dynamics
Savage AF	Instagram/TikTok	English slang ("as f***")	Vulgar euphemistic borrowing	Bold, fearless identity, asserting dominance digitally
Gille sie	Instagram/TikTok	Phonetic variation of "gila sih"	Phonological humor + hyperbole	Dramatic, expressive identity within online solidarity

Slang terms in digital natives communication reflect cultural, social, and linguistic influences. These words showcase layers of identity, from global trends to regional expressions, marking social belonging and group identity: 1) Globalization and Identity: Words like "Drip," "Bet," and "Flex" are borrowed from English, signaling digital cosmopolitanism and global awareness, where fluency in English and slang signifies trendiness and sophistication. 2) Regional Identity: Slang like "Cepu" and "Gaskeun" reflects regional identity. "Cepu" evolved from "informer" to "traitor," highlighting how local slang adapts to digital contexts, reinforcing solidarity or rebellion. 3) Fandom Culture: Words like "Kiyowo" and "Ommoo" show K-pop fandom culture, where teens express identity linked to global trends and cultural phenomena. 4) Rebellion and Humor: Terms like "Anjay" (a softened curse) and "Bacot" (chatter) reflect rebellion against formal norms, where youth creatively use language to assert their digital identity.

Abbreviations in Teens Language

Teens language also incorporates various abbreviations that simplify communication and reflect the fast-paced nature of social media interactions. These abbreviations serve not only as linguistic tools but also as symbols of digital fluency and peer circle membership. The data reveals that abbreviations like *LOL*, *OMG*, and *BRB* are central to teens identity, serving as shorthand for expressing emotions, casual interactions, and digital group identity.

Table 3. Teens Language Variation: Abbreviations











Word/Phrase	Platform	Origin/Etymology	Linguistic Process	Social Meaning & Identity
LOL	WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok	English – Laughing Out Loud	Initialism	Expressive-humorous identity, spontaneous laughter
LMAO	TikTok, Discord	English – Laughing My Ass Off	Acronym + Intensity	Extreme laughter, casual humor
BRB	WhatsApp, Telegram	English – Be Right Back	Initialism	Digital communication etiquette, politeness
OMG	Instagram, Twitter (X)	English – Oh My God	Phonetic abbreviation	Expressive, surprise, or admiration
FYI	Twitter (X), Email, Threads	English – For Your Information	Informal Acronym	Symbolizing efficiency and informational clarity
IDK	TikTok, WhatsApp	English – I Don’t Know	Clipping + Phonetic Elision	Casual, honest, and relaxed communication
STFU	Discord, Twitter (X)	English – Shut The F* Up	Vulgar Acronym	Sarcasm, rebellion, extreme humor
RIP	TikTok, Instagram	Latin–English – Rest In Peace	Conventional Acronym	Ironic use for failure or disaster
BFF	Instagram, WhatsApp	English – Best Friends Forever	Abbreviation	Strong, loyal friendship, solidarity among peers
KYS	Discord, Reddit	English – Kill Yourself	Extreme Acronym	Dark humor, hyperbolic emotional expression
YOLO	Instagram, TikTok	English – You Only Live Once	Idiomatic Abbreviation	Embracing freedom, living without regrets
TTYL	WhatsApp, Telegram	English – Talk To You Later	Abbreviation	Polite digital conversation closure
SMH	Twitter (X), TikTok	English – Shaking My Head	Descriptive Initialism	Sarcastic disapproval, disappointment
TBH	Instagram, TikTok	English – To Be Honest	Idiomatic Abbreviation	Symbolizing authenticity and honesty
FYP	TikTok	English – For You Page	Platform Abbreviation	Signifier of popularity and digital presence

Abbreviations, often in the form of acronyms, are a key part of digital teens language. They allow for quick communication of emotions and information, reflecting the need for speed and group identity in online interactions: 1) Efficiency and Social Group Identity: Acronyms like "LOL" (Laughing Out Loud) and "OMG" (Oh My God) streamline communication while reinforcing group solidarity, with terms like "BFF" symbolizing friendship and loyalty. 2) Cultural Resilience and Rebellion: Terms like "LMAO" (Laughing My Ass Off) and "STFU" (Shut The F* Up) reflect youth resistance to formal communication norms, often used humorously or sarcastically to express freedom from social expectations. 3) Adaptation to Global Digital Culture: Acronyms like "YOLO" (You Only Live Once) and "KYS" (Kill Yourself) showcase global slang adopted by Indonesian youth, with "YOLO" representing adventure and risk-taking, and "KYS" reflecting dark humor, though its misuse reveals tension in sensitive digital spaces.

Emoji Usage in Youth Communication

Emojis are widely used by teenager as part of their multimodal communication strategy. These symbols enhance the emotional and contextual depth of digital interactions. Below is a summary of how emojis are used by youth:

Table 4. Teens Language Variation: Emoji

Emoji	Platform	Origin/Etymology	Linguistic Process	Social Meaning & Identity
	TikTok, Instagram	Unicode, Skull symbol	Romanticization & Irony	Extreme laughter, irony in digital culture
	TikTok, IG, WhatsApp	Unicode, Fire symbol	Semantic Metaphor	Popular, trendy, hot, signifying digital presence
	TikTok, IG	100% symbol	Semantic Extension	Affirmation, approval, validation of performance
	TikTok, IG	Unicode, Crown symbol	Symbolization	Confidence, superiority, digital leadership
	TikTok, IG	Star-struck face	Emotional Iconography	Enthusiastic appreciation, awe
	WhatsApp, IG	Orange Heart (color variation)	Polychromatic Meaning	Empathy, affection in non-romantic friendships
	WhatsApp, IG	Smiling face with open hands	Kinesthetic Virtual Expression	Warmth, support, empathy in digital relationships
	TikTok, IG	Raised Hands emoji	Praise & Celebration	Collective identity, community support
	TikTok, IG, WhatsApp	Party Face emoji	Celebration Iconography	Fun, positive, celebratory teen culture
	TikTok, IG	Speech Balloon Icon	Metonymic Communication	Digital participation, conversation marker

Emojis play a key role in youth digital communication, enhancing emotional expression and helping to construct various aspects of identity. They serve as universal symbols, transcending language barriers to communicate moods, reactions, and identities.

Affirmation and Confidence: Emojis like 👑 (Crown) and 💯 (Hundred) symbolize confidence, success, and assertiveness, representing self-empowerment and dominance within peer circle.

Humor and Social Bonding: Emojis such as 💀 (Skull) and 🔥 (Fire) express humor, excitement, and trendiness, reinforcing solidarity and shared emotional experiences in digital spaces.

Multimodal and Emotional Identity: Emojis like ❤️ (Orange Heart) and 🤗 (Hugging Face) signify empathy and social connection, creating a supportive and caring online environment.

Playfulness and Subculture Identity: Emojis like 🥳 (Party Face) and 🙌 (Raising Hands) reflect celebration and collective joy, strengthening subcultural group identity and youthful exuberance in digital communication.

Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

In teens communication on platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok, code-switching and code-mixing are common. Teenagers blend Indonesian and English, often with slang, to express identity, social ties, and cultural connections. These practices reflect how digital interactions shape their communication and social relationships. Below is a table showing the findings on code-switching and code-mixing patterns observed in the study.

Tabel 5. Teens Language Variations: Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

Word/Phrase	Platform	Origin/Etymology	Linguistic Process (Code-Switching/Mixing)	Social Meaning & Identity in LL
Squad Up, Ayo!	TikTok, Instagram	English ("squad up") + Indonesia ("ayo")	Inter-sentential code-switching (switching between languages in one utterance)	Shows group solidarity and collaborative spirit among youth; creates an energetic and inclusive collective identity.
Emng bisa sekiyowo ini?	TikTok	Indonesia slang + Korea ("kiyowo" = cute)	Intra-lexical code-switching (inserting foreign elements into local words)	Reveals Korean fandom identity and global expression adoption (K-pop culture); signifies cultural affiliation.
Keren bet dah!	WhatsApp, TikTok	Indonesia slang ("bet" = banget)	Phonological and morphological reduction; shortening of slang expressions	Expressive Gen Z communication style; emphasizes familiarity and spontaneity in digital interactions.
Healing yuks!	Instagram Story, TikTok	English ("healing") + Indonesia ("yuks")	Conceptual code-switching; adapting	Represents digital youth lifestyle trends (self-care,

Word/Phrase	Platform	Origin/Etymology	Linguistic Process (Code-Switching/Mixing)	Social Meaning & Identity in LL
			global terms to local contexts	refreshing); identifies with hedonistic and mental health awareness identity.
Oh Prewed eey!	Instagram	English ("prewed" = pre-wedding) + local expression ("eey")	Lexical code-switching (using borrowed English in informal style)	Creative social identity; shows familiarity with visual terms and social media lifestyles.
Kece BGT	WhatsApp, TikTok	Indonesia slang + abbreviation ("BGT" = banget)	Morphological reduction + abbreviation	Symbolizes quick and efficient communication; forms a dynamic and trendy persona.
Bet, Gue Setuju!	TikTok, X	English slang ("bet") + Indonesia ("gue setuju")	Pragmatic code-switching; using English expressions for affirmation	Reflects global digital language influence (AAVE slang); portrays confident and cool identity.
Saluut Partner MC nih	Instagram	Indonesia + English ("partner", "MC")	Terminological code-switching	Represents young professional identity; displays bilingual linguistic competence (event culture).
FOMO dulu, baru YOLO	TikTok, IG Reels	Global acronyms (FOMO, YOLO)	Idiomatic code-switching; adopting global idioms in local sentences	Represents impulsive and expressive digital identity; reflects Gen Z's spontaneous and momentary living philosophy.
Lv u uti, tapi stop Julid ya	WhatsApp, TikTok	English ("love u") + Indonesia slang ("julid")	Interpersonal code-switching + phonetic digital (Lv u = love you)	Indicates emotional closeness but still controls digital social norms; empathetic yet firm youth identity.
No Cap, Gue Serius!	TikTok	English slang ("no cap") + Indonesia ("gue serius")	Idiomatic code-switching; expression of honesty in global slang	Authentic and self-confident identity; awareness of global digital language trends (AAVE influence).

Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

The analysis reveals that code-switching and code-mixing are key features of teens communication on platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok. Teenager blend Indonesian with English or global slang to express themselves effectively in digital spaces.

Inter-sentential Code-Switching

Example: "Squad Up, Ayo!". This shows youth switching between languages within a sentence, reflecting their ability to adapt based on context and group identity.

Intra-lexical Code-Mixing

Example: "Emng bisa sekiyowo ini?". Mixing local Indonesian with foreign terms (kiyowo) shows how teens create language that reflects their lifestyle and cultural affiliations, such as K-pop.

Pragmatic and Idiomatic Code-Mixing

Example: "No Cap, Gue Serious!". Integrating global expressions like "No Cap" with local language highlights Gen Z's confidence and authenticity in blending universal and local values.

Phonological and Morphological Reduction

Example: "Kece BGT". The use of abbreviations and shortened words shows communication efficiency and the fast-paced nature of social media interactions.

Discussion

Linguistic Landscape of Teens Communication

The study critically engages with the role of digital language in shaping the social dynamics of youth. Slang and abbreviations are not just tools for efficiency but are deeply intertwined with the social fabric of peer relationships. These elements are employed to foster intimacy and emotional bonds within groups, acting as markers of both individual and group identity. Labov [34] suggest that language reflects social proximity, and the digital space amplifies this by offering adolescents a medium through which they negotiate their place within a larger social order. The language used on platforms like WhatsApp transcends basic communication, serving as a vehicle for youth to assert and perform their social identity, with its dynamic and ever-shifting character reflecting the rapid pace of social and cultural change in digital environments [35].

Teens Identity in Digital Linguistic Landscapes

The research identifies three primary forms of linguistic landscape in youth language: verbal text, non-verbal symbolic forms (emojis), and visual forms (photos and designs). Each form plays a distinct role in shaping the linguistic landscape, with emojis and images extending the boundaries of traditional language to form a multimodal communication system. This is consistent with Danesi [36], who argues that emojis are integral to the evolving nature of digital communication, functioning as both emotional cues and symbols of social belonging. However, while these forms facilitate richer and more flexible communication, they also introduce challenges. The blending of formal and informal registers, particularly in interactions with adults (e.g., teachers in WhatsApp groups), creates a linguistic duality [37], [38]. This duality represents a clash between the norms of traditional educational settings and the informality of digital communication, where language becomes more fluid and experimental. This phenomenon supports assertion Malinowski et al. [39] that digital spaces foster a hybrid linguistic landscape, marked by constant innovation and adaptation.

The study also logically examines the components that constitute the youth linguistic landscape. Top-down vs. bottom-up dynamics illustrate the tension between formal, institutional language (e.g., official announcements) and the spontaneous, informal language generated by users in digital spaces. The dominance of bottom-up dynamics reflects the increasing personalization and democratization of language on social media platforms, where youth have the freedom to express themselves without institutional constraints [40]. The multimodal nature of communication further emphasizes the complexity of the digital linguistic landscape. Kusal et al. [41] noted that, multimodal communication combining text, images, and emojis enriches the meaning-making process and enhances self-expression. This multimodal interaction not only allows for more nuanced identity construction but also contributes to the ongoing transformation of language as youth engage in creative, dynamic, and ever-evolving digital interactions.

Regarding types of linguistic landscape in youth language, platforms like TikTok, which are video-based, provide a virtual public space for broader interaction. These platforms allow youth to express self-identity, shape linguistic identity, and spread cultural trends. For instance, the use of emojis like 🔥 (fire) and expressions such as "No Cap" to indicate seriousness show how language on these platforms evolves rapidly, responding to digital culture trends [13]. Meanwhile, Aitchison [12] in the theory of language change, suggests that language evolves in response to social and cultural shifts, is particularly relevant to the language dynamics observed on TikTok. Here, the language constantly evolves, creating new linguistic phenomena that spread quickly among youth.

The integration of slang and code-mixing (e.g., "spill dong," "Good job baby. Congrats anyway," "cantik banget omg") showcases the desire of youth to present themselves as sociable, modern, and global. English mixed into Indonesian functions as an investment [14], a strategy for positioning oneself within the global community. Slang like "spill," "gacor," and "awakss" reflects indexicality [42], marking membership in a digital community that only other youth users can fully understand. This analysis identifies at least four linguistic identities formed through digital LL: 1) *Global-Cool Identity*: Marked by the use of Indonesian-English blends, digital slang, and popular expressions (e.g., spill, OMG, congrats). This linguistic strategy is an investment [14]. 2) *Relational-Hierarchical Identity*: Indicated by terms of address such as adik, kakak, bestie, njir, reflecting social structures in youth communities. These elements carry indexicality [42], understood only within the digital slang community. 3) *Supportive-Solidarity Identity*: Characterized by motivational comments, compliments, and the use of supportive emojis (e.g., 🍀, 🍀, 😊). This identity is built through relationality and face-work [17], where youth aim to maintain a positive face with peers by offering emotional support, praise, and motivation. 4) *Expressive-Creative Identity*: Expressed through stylistic practices [43], marked by exaggerated writing styles (e.g., KERENNN, GACORRRR), capitalization (e.g., OMG), and combinations of text and emojis (e.g., 😊🍀🍀). This identity shows how youth use language as an aesthetic medium. Hyperbole in writing has become a hallmark of the digital generation, accustomed to visually and dramatically expressing themselves.

Components of Youth Linguistic Landscape are evident in platforms like Instagram, where language is often combined with visual elements to convey deeper meanings [37], [44]. On Instagram, youth language serves not only for communication but also for constructing self-image through images and videos. Terms like "Glow-Up," "Flex," and emojis like 💯 (100) are used to

signal self-improvement, lifestyle, and personal achievements. This creates a social identity deeply tied to self-visualization [45], [46]. Additionally, Baker and Collins [47], Cheema et al. [48] multimodal theory explains that language on Instagram is highly visual, with descriptions in photo or video captions often reinforcing or confirming meanings conveyed through images or videos.

Studies like Turvy [49] show that social media platforms like Instagram allow quick reactions to wider cultural trends, enabling youth to adapt to new language and trends. This creates an interactive space where youth define their social groups, with terms like "Gacor," "Squad," and "Stecu" indicating group identity through digital interactions. Digital platforms, therefore, serve as linguistic spaces that allow youth to express their emotions, opinions, and identities freely and creatively [37].

This study highlights the key features of the linguistic landscape in the digital era, which can be seen in: 1) Top-down vs. Bottom-up: Top-down elements such as formal designs like "DUTA GENRE 2025" banners in Instagram posts, versus Bottom-up elements like spontaneous, informal, and expressive comments in comment sections. In the context of social media, the bottom-up linguistic landscape emerges as users have the freedom to create meaning without formal institutional intervention [40]. 2) Multimodality: The multimodal component of this study is evident in the use of combinations of text, emojis, photos, videos, and visual symbols. LL in the context of youth on social media is not just writing but also visual identity (profile photos, event designs). This combination of modes shows that digital youth identities are formed through multimodal communication, aligning Thurlow [50] views on multimodal discourse.

Essentially, on social media, multimodality becomes a crucial part of the linguistic landscape, as the combination of text, images, and videos interacts to create more complex and dynamic meanings [51]. Furthermore, research by Fazeli [52], supports this finding, revealing that graffiti or texts in digital public spaces like Instagram and TikTok are not merely verbal communication but also social actions that convey cultural meaning. In social media applications, this is manifested in viral trends and challenges that combine youth language with visual creativity.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the linguistic landscape of youth communication on digital platforms, specifically Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, focusing on how variations in language, such as slang, abbreviations, emojis, and code-switching, contribute to the development of teens identity in the digital realm. The research intended to explore the effects of these linguistic practices on self-expression, social interaction, and cultural identity among teenager in online spaces. The findings indicated that teens language on social media is incredibly fluid, marked by a fusion of global digital trends and local linguistic elements. Slang, abbreviations, and emojis were identified as primary tools used by teenager to convey emotions, strengthen social ties, and foster a sense of community within peer circle. The study showed that language on these platforms goes beyond mere communication and plays a key role in forming both personal and collective identities. Practices like using terms such as "Drip" and "Squad" not only reflect individual self-presentation but also signify participation in a global digital culture while maintaining connections to local, often regional, expressions. These results emphasize that language in the digital age is a means of identity construction, with profound implications for how teenager communicate and engage both online and offline. The research introduces new perspectives by demonstrating how digital platforms allow teenager to explore language, helping them articulate multiple facets of their identity.

LIMITATIONS

These finding challenges conventional views of language as simply a medium for communication, positioning it instead as an active and performative aspect of social identity. Although the research provides valuable contributions to the understanding of teens language in digital spaces, it has some limitations. The study attentive on only three social media platforms and analyzed language practices within a specific context, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future studies are encouraged to investigate the linguistic landscape of teenager across a wider range of digital platforms and cultural settings. Furthermore, longitudinal research tracking the evolution of digital language use could provide more comprehensive insights into how digital communication shapes teens identity as technology advances. In completion, this study asserts that the linguistic landscape of teenager in the digital age is a complex, evolving, and multifaceted phenomenon. Language use on social media platforms is a vital tool in the formation of teens identities, with significant implications for social interaction and self-expression. Understanding how these linguistic practices develop and influence teens behavior will help inform educational approaches, media literacy initiatives, and future studies on teens communication in the digital era.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

In this study, I. M, as the first author, led the conceptualization, study design, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, and wrote the original manuscript. N. B., as the first supervisor, contributed to refining the concept, validating the methodology, framing the theory, supervising the research process, and reviewing and editing the manuscript. S. T. M., the co-supervisor, assisted with data interpretation, analytical validation, critically reviewing the manuscript, and enhancing its academic rigor. M., the second co-supervisor, provided additional oversight, ensured

methodological consistency, and participated in the final review and approval of the manuscript before submission.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

The authors declares that no generative AI tools were used in the writing, editing, data analysis, or graphic design processes of this manuscript. All content was independently developed by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work.

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