

## TEEN SLANG PHENOMENA ON SOCIAL MEDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF FORMS AND FUNCTIONS IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

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### ABSTRACT

*Teen slang on social media demonstrates that digital communication is shaped by expressive needs, platform logics, participatory culture, and group identity. This article aims to describe the forms of slang commonly used by teenagers on social media and to explain their social-pragmatic functions in digital communication. The study applies a qualitative descriptive approach combining literature review and illustrative digital discourse analysis. The data consist of slang expressions commonly found in comments, captions, replies, and short exchanges on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X. Data analysis was carried out through three stages: identifying slang forms, classifying their linguistic processes, and interpreting their social-pragmatic functions in youth digital communication. The findings show that teen slang appears in the form of abbreviations and acronyms, clipping, playful reversals, code-mixing, lexical borrowing, semantic shift, and graphic-phonological modification. Functionally, slang serves to mark group identity, build solidarity, increase communicative efficiency, express evaluative stance, create humor, and manage closeness and politeness in online interaction. These findings suggest that teen slang should be understood as a creative and contextual linguistic practice closely tied to youth digital culture.*

**Keywords:** Teen Slang, Social Media, Digital Communication, Linguistic Variation, Youth Culture.

### INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an everyday communication space for teenagers. Through Instagram, TikTok, X, YouTube, and various other online conversational spaces, teenagers not only share information but also construct identities, display group affiliation, and negotiate social closeness. In these fast-moving, concise, and highly interactive spaces, language choice becomes an important marker of who is speaking, to whom they are speaking, and what kind of self-image they wish to project (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; boyd, 2014; Buckingham, 2007).

Slang emerges as one of the most salient forms of language variation in digital communication. From a sociolinguistic perspective, such variation should not be viewed merely as a deviation from the standard language, but rather as a linguistic practice with specific social functions. Slang often functions as a group language, a marker of solidarity, and a means of distinguishing one group from another. In the context of adolescence, slang is also closely related to linguistic creativity, emotional expression, and the need to appear familiar, relaxed, and relevant (Eble, 1996; Chaer & Agustina, 2010; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

The character of social media accelerates these changes. Digital communication tends to be brief, multimodal, and responsive. Text coexists with emojis, memes, images, sounds, and videos; comments circulate rapidly; and certain terms can become trends within hours. Studies of internet language confirm that linguistic forms in digital spaces develop in response to media design, user habits, and constantly shifting interactional contexts (Crystal, 2006, 2011; Baron, 2008; Barton & Lee, 2013; Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2015; Jones &

Hafner, 2021; Tagg, 2015). Therefore, teen slang on social media needs to be understood as part of a broader digital communication ecology.

A number of studies in Indonesia indicate that slang on social media is characterized by the dominance of abbreviations, acronyms, code-mixing, playful distortions, and phonological and graphic changes. Studies by Swandy (2017) on Facebook, Rosalina, Auzar, and Hermandra (2020) on Twitter, Deneta (2021) on code-mixing among South Jakarta youth on Twitter, Iswatiningsih, Fauzan, and Pangesti (2021) across various social media platforms, Rohmah (2022) on popular-culture fan communities, Pratama, Faoziyah, Siswanto, and Hikmawaty (2022) on Instagram, Azzahra, Yuliadi, and Karunia (2024) on the phonology of South Jakarta slang, as well as Saputra and Junadi (2025) and Kartika, Mualafina, and Prayogi (2025) on TikTok, show that the selection of slang forms is related to efficiency, intimacy, humor, and the construction of youth identity.

Nevertheless, many studies still focus on vocabulary listing or on a single platform. In actual digital communication practices, however, slang forms often operate alongside their social-pragmatic functions: marking closeness, signaling stance, eliciting responses, or adapting to algorithmic cultures that encourage participation and imitation. Therefore, this article not only maps the forms of slang but also explains their functions in teen digital communication.

Based on this background, this article aims to: (1) describe the forms of slang commonly used by teenagers on social media; (2) explain the social, pragmatic, and communicative functions of slang in digital interaction; and (3) demonstrate the relationship between slang, youth culture, and the characteristics of social media platforms. This focus is expected to contribute to digital sociolinguistic studies while also providing material for reflection in language learning and digital literacy.

The novelty of this article lies in its effort to combine a mapping of slang forms with a reading of their social-pragmatic functions across platforms, so that slang is understood not merely as a lexical inventory but as a discursive practice related to platform culture, group affiliation, and the dynamics of teen digital interaction.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was selected because the objective of the study is to map the forms of teen slang while interpreting their social-pragmatic functions in digital communication, rather than measuring the frequency of their use statistically. The analytical framework draws on sociolinguistics, studies of social media language, and digital discourse analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Forms of Slang in Digital Communication**

Based on the literature review and illustrative observations of social media discourse, teen slang in digital spaces can be grouped into several main forms. These categories are not rigid because, in practice, a single expression may involve more than one linguistic process. Nevertheless, this classification helps reveal general patterns that recur in teen digital communication.

Table 1. Classification of Teen Slang Forms on Social Media

Form	Main Characteristic	Illustrative Example	General Function
Abbreviations and acronyms	The formation of concise forms from words or phrases that are frequently used repeatedly.	mager, bucin, gercep, POV, GWS	Efficiency and a marker of familiarity
Clipping	The omission of part of the sounds or syllables without removing the core meaning.	besti, bund, makasii, notif	Makes utterances feel casual
Playful distortion or reversal	The alteration of form to create a humorous effect, familiarity, or community-specific character.	kuy, skuy, ngab, anjir	Humor and group identity
Code-mixing and borrowing	The inclusion of foreign-language elements or mixing with Indonesian.	spill, relate, insecure, flexing, healing	Style, prestige, and closeness to popular culture
Semantic shift	Existing words are used with new meanings according to digital and youth cultural contexts.	gacor, receh, valid, gas	Rapid and expressive evaluation
Graphic-phonological modification	Lengthening of letters, repetition, or spelling play to mark emotion.	lucuuu, gemesss, wkwkwk, parahhh	Emotional emphasis and affective effect

Note. The examples in the table are illustrative and represent patterns commonly circulating in teen digital communication.

Abbreviations and acronyms constitute the most prominent pattern because they align with the character of social media, which demands speed, density of meaning, and economy of space. Forms such as *mager*, *bucin*, *gercep*, or *POV* allow users to convey attitudes and experiences briefly while remaining understandable to members of the same community. In this case, efficiency cannot be separated from identity: those who understand certain terms are usually regarded as belonging to the same digital cultural circle. This pattern is also evident in the findings of Pratama et al. (2022), Saputra and Junadi (2025), and Kartika et al. (2025), which show the strong presence of abbreviation, acronym formation, and form compression in teen communication on social media.

Clipping, reversal, and playful distortion show that slang also operates as language play. Forms such as *besti*, *bund*, *kuy*, or *ngab* are not merely formal variants, but also carry particular relational nuances. These expressions create an impression of familiarity, informality, and sometimes irony, and are often used to soften utterances. Such creativity is consistent with the findings of Zein and Wagiaty (2018), which show that slang on social media exhibits reduction, shortening, and acronym formation as major features of youth linguistic creativity; it also intersects with Tagliamonte and Denis's (2008) discussion of concise and expressive forms in teen digital communication.

Code-mixing and borrowing also serve as important markers in youth discourse. Words such as *relate*, *spill*, *healing*, *insecure*, and *flexing* are not always used in their original lexical meanings, but are adjusted to expressive needs and the style of digital conversation. This shows that slang not only absorbs foreign elements but also renegotiates meaning to fit local culture and platform contexts. A similar situation is recorded in the

studies of Deneta (2021), Rohmah (2022), Barton and Lee (2013), and Zappavigna (2012), which position social media as a space where diverse linguistic resources and affiliation strategies meet.

As an illustration, expressions such as “bestie, spill dong skincare-nya” show the convergence of an intimate form of address and English borrowing that functions to build closeness while also following platform culture. Meanwhile, expressions such as “anjir lucu bgt, auto FYP” indicate that evaluative stance, humor, and participation in digital trends often appear simultaneously within a single utterance.

## 2. Functions of Slang in Digital Communication

Slang is of interest not only because of its forms, but also because of the functions it performs in digital interaction. In social media communication, word choice is rarely neutral; particular forms carry implications of familiarity, evaluation, emotion, and even the speaker's social position. These functions may be summarized as follows.

Table 2. Functions of Slang in Social Media Interaction

Function	Explanation	Example of Use
Identity and solidarity	Marks closeness, group membership, and a sense of shared experience among users.	"bestie, kamu relate banget"
Communication efficiency	Condenses messages so that they can be read, typed, and responded to quickly in fast-paced digital spaces.	"otw ya", "GWS semoga cepet pulih"
Humor and language play	Creates a humorous, casual, or ironic effect so that interaction feels fluid.	"anjir lucu bgt wkwkwk"
Evaluative stance	Shows evaluation, agreement, rejection, or intensity of feeling concisely.	"kontennya gacor", "ini valid sih"
Management of closeness and politeness	Softens utterances, preserves face, or makes criticism feel lighter.	"spill dong pelan-pelan"
Participation in digital trends	Follows popular terms in order to appear up to date and aligned with platform culture.	"fix masuk FYP", "auto rame"

Identity and solidarity functions are evident when slang is used to emphasize social closeness. Forms of address such as bestie, bro, bund, or ngab make interactional distance more fluid and informal. Within Eble's (1996) framework, slang functions as an in-group language, that is, a language that affirms that speaker and addressee occupy the same social space. On social media, this function becomes stronger because relationships among users are often built through brief yet intense interactions, such as comments, replies, and mentions. This perspective on identity is also consistent with Bucholtz and Hall (2005) and boyd (2014), who see linguistic practice as part of self-construction and social positioning in digital spaces.

The efficiency function is also highly dominant. Social media encourages speakers to compose messages that are brief, rapid, and easy to process. Acronyms and shortened forms reduce typing effort while accelerating responses. Yet efficiency here is not purely technical. Concise forms also often carry a particular stylistic nuance. Thus, expressions such as POV, FYP, otw, or gws are not only economical, but also immediately position the speaker within a particular platform culture. This explanation resonates with the views of Baron (2008), Tagg (2015), and Jones and Hafner (2021) regarding language economy, platform rhythm, and everyday digital literacies.

Slang also functions to build humor, express emotion, and take evaluative stances.

Words such as *receh*, *gacor*, *valid*, *auto*, or *anjir* help speakers convey evaluation quickly and intensely. Choices of this kind make digital language highly performative: a single word can contain support, ridicule, admiration, or sarcasm. The findings of Rosalina et al. (2020) and Iswatiningsih et al. (2021) show that joking, attention-seeking, intimacy, and emotional expression are important aspects of slang use on social media; in a broader framework, Zappavigna (2012, 2018) also shows that affiliation, evaluation, and metacommentary strongly shape meaning-making dynamics in social media discourse.

In addition, slang functions as a strategy for face management and politeness. Modified or softened forms, for example *anjir* compared with stronger expletive forms, allow users to convey emotion without entirely losing a sense of familiarity. In digital communication, which is vulnerable to misunderstanding, such strategies help maintain relationships, especially when interaction takes place in public spaces that are open and visible to many other users.

The examples above show that slang functions not only as a lexical choice but also as an interactional strategy. In comment sections or brief replies, concise and expressive forms help users attract attention, assert stance, and manage social distance quickly without losing nuances of familiarity.

### **3. Slang and the Ecology of Social Media**

The spread of slang cannot be separated from the character of social media as a communication environment. Threaded comment features, share buttons, short video clips, and remix culture make a linguistic form easy to move from one community to another. Terms that initially circulate within small circles can quickly become mainstream when taken up by popular creators, used in memes, or repeated across posts with similar contexts. In this sense, slang on social media is highly circulatory: it survives because it is imitated, adapted, and continuously renegotiated (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014; Page et al., 2022).

This phenomenon aligns with the view that digital discourse results from the interaction between speakers' linguistic choices and platform design (Crystal, 2006; Barton & Lee, 2013; Herring & Androutopoulos, 2015; Zappavigna, 2012). Word choices in comments, captions, and replies never stand alone. Certain terms become popular because they fit the rhythm of the platform: short, easily recognized, readily turned into punch lines, and affectively strong. This is why teen slang often foregrounds forms that are dense, rhythmic, and expressive.

These findings also help avoid an overly normative view of youth language. Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) show that digital language is not language decay, but rather a new register that creatively combines formal, informal, and vernacular elements. In the context of youth culture, Buckingham (2007) likewise reminds us that digital practice is an important space for the formation of identity, style, and participation. Therefore, slang is not the opposite of standard language, but a variety that lives within specific social contexts.

### **4. Implications for Digital Literacy and Language Learning**

An understanding of slang is important for digital literacy. Teenagers need to realize that language choice is always related to context, purpose, and audience. Slang can be effective for building closeness in peer interaction, but it is not always appropriate for academic, administrative, or professional communication. Therefore, language education should not merely emphasize the dichotomy between standard and nonstandard language. More importantly, it should foster register awareness: when a particular form is appropriate, when it should be replaced, and how language style can be adjusted to the communicative situation (Jones & Hafner, 2021; Page et al., 2022).

From a learning perspective, the phenomenon of slang can be used as an entry point

for discussing language variation, semantic change, word formation, code-mixing, and ethics of communication in digital spaces. Such an approach enables students to see that Indonesian is a living and evolving language, while also understanding that linguistic creativity still requires social responsibility. Thus, the study of slang does not stop at the inventory of terms, but also helps build adaptive and reflective language competence. Empirical findings from Pratama et al. (2022), Saputra and Junadi (2025), and Kartika et al. (2025) support the importance of using digital linguistic data as contextual learning material.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that teen slang on social media appears in various forms, such as abbreviations and acronyms, clipping, playful distortion or reversal, code-mixing, borrowing, semantic shift, and graphic-phonological modification. These forms develop in line with teenagers' expressive needs, demands for efficiency, language play, and adaptation to the fast and interactive culture of platforms.

Functionally, slang serves as a marker of group identity, a means of solidarity, a strategy of communicative efficiency, a marker of evaluative stance, a vehicle of humor, and a tool for managing closeness and politeness in digital interaction. These findings confirm that slang is not merely a symptom of deviation from standard language, but a creative and contextual linguistic practice relevant to the study of digital sociolinguistics, media literacy, and language learning. Further corpus-based research is still needed so that variations in form, function, and semantic change can be mapped more comprehensively.

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