CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL IDENTITY: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF GENERATIONAL LANGUAGE USE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how language is used by different generations on social media, particularly TikTok, to construct and express social identity. By analyzing linguistic elements such as slang, emojis, and code-switching (mixing Indonesian and English), this research highlights generational differences in digital communication. Younger generations often use modern slang and emojis to appear trendy and relatable, while older users prefer more formal and traditional language styles. A quantitative approach, including surveys of 43 respondents, found that language use on social media reflects social identity, cultural trends, and global influences. The results show that code-switching and emojis promote emotional connection and involvement, while generational linguistic differences highlight the adaptability of language in digital spaces. This research contributes to the understanding of linguistic adaptation in a digitally mediated society.

Keywords : *Language Use, Social Media, Generational Differences, Sociolinguistics, Social Identity, Tiktok, Slang, Emoji, Code-Switching, Digital Communication*

INTRODUCTION

Sociolinguistics is the study that connects language and social factors in society. In the context of language use on social media, sociolinguistics views language as a social phenomenon that reflects various aspects of individual and group life, including social identity, social status, and dynamics of relationships between groups. Language on social media is not just a means of communication, but also a means to build, maintain, or change social identity.

The language used by individuals on social media is influenced by various social factors, such as age, gender, cultural background, and education. On social media, we can observe variations in language used by different age groups or generations, both in the form of slang words, code-mixing, and the use of symbols such as emojis. This indicates that each generation has a unique way of communicating that also reflects the mindset, values, and social norms they adhere to.

In addition, social media allows interaction between individuals from different social backgrounds, and this opens up space for language mixing or new evolutionary events in language use. These language changes, which often occur rapidly on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok, reflect the strong influence of technology and digital media on language practices. According to Sudrajat & Kasupardi (2018), language is able to produce or acquire intelligence in linguistics so that it experiences changes in behavior caused by experience based on research and discoveries supported by data facts. Language skills are mandatory for every social being, because these skills are a tool for everyday communication. Language skills consist of four aspects, namely: (1) listening skills; (2) speaking skills; (3) reading skills; and (4) writing skills (Tarigan, 2013). These four aspects are very closely related. Because language can be said to be an overflow of the mind of the person who speaks it. The science that studies language has a series of theories for studying a language related to social life, namely the field of sociolinguistics. According to Jannah, Widayati, & Kusmiyati (2017), sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics or linguistics where the use of language is placed in terms of the position of language speakers in social relations. According to Sumarsono & Partana (2007), sociolinguistics is a combination of two words, namely sociology or socio-, which means society, and linguistics, which means the study of language. So, sociolinguistics is a science whose study of language is closely related to the situation and conditions of society, where this relationship is supported by social sciences and theories, especially sociology. Sociolinguistics studies the linguistic levels found in human life, especially Indonesian language students in various ways such as dialects and code mixing in communication.

The formulation of the problem that the researcher describes in this study is: (1) What do you think about the use of mixed codes (Indonesian and English) on TikTok? (2) How do people from different generations use language on social media to build their social identity? The general objective that the researcher wants to achieve in the study is to analyze how different generations use language on social media to build their social identity, with a focus on the use of slang, code switching, and emojis. This study uses a qualitative approach, utilizing content analysis of popular social media accounts and surveys on language use on various social media platforms. Specifically, this study aims to describe: (1) the use of slang that is characteristic of each age group; (2) the use of mixed code (code-switching), which shows the flexibility of language. The researcher hopes that this research can provide benefits both practically and theoretically. Theoretically, this study provides and adds knowledge for developers of sociolinguistics, especially regarding dialects and code mixing of spoken languages, as well as analyzing how the younger generation uses language on social media to build their social identity, including the use of slang, mixed codes, or emojis. In this study, we will analyze

how language is used by different generations on social media as a means to construct and display their social identities. By focusing on linguistic elements such as slang, code mixing, and emojis, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how language plays a role in the formation of social identities in the digital age. The findings of this study are expected to shed light on the interplay between language, identity, and digital interactions. By analyzing language use by generation on social media, this study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of linguistic adaptation in a digitally mediated society.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative research method with content analysis and comments from popular accounts and from other social media posts in the form of Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and a survey of language use on social media from various groups in society. According to V. Wiratna Sujarweni (2014:39) quantitative research is a type of research that produces findings that can be achieved (obtained) using statistical procedures or other means of quantification (measurement).

While the definition of Quantitative Research Method, according to Sugiyono (2017:8), is a research method based on the philosophy of positivism, used to research a certain population or sample, data collection using research instruments, data analysis is quantitative or statistical, to test the established hypothesis

And other viewpoints according to (2009:28), the quantitative approach is an approach that primarily uses the postpositivist paradigm in developing science (such as thinking about cause and effect, reduction to variables, hypotheses and specific questions using measurement and observation and theory testing), using research strategies such as experiments and surveys that require statistical data. So that in quantitative research, as the name implies, many are required to use numbers, starting from data collection, interpretation of the data, and the presentation of the results (Arikunto, 2006)

This research was conducted through several stages of data collection, namely taking samples from social media that are widely used in society, such as TikTok, as well as the use of dialects and code mixing in the language used by various groups there and analyzing them, after that data collection will also be carried out through online surveys with Google Forms and then shared with friends, family, relatives or others.

In this study, the Observational Research Method is utilized through a quantitative survey to gather data on language use on TikTok and how individuals from different generations interact with social media to express their social identity. The focus of the observational method is to capture patterns of behavior related to language usage, especially mixed codes (code-switching), and the perception of this phenomenon among different age groups.

This study employs a quantitative approach to investigate generational language use and social identity construction on social media, with a particular focus on TikTok. Information was collected through a survey conducted to 43 respondents aged between 18 and over 45 a long time ancient. The respondents were asked about their dialect utilization, inclinations, and perceptions of code-mixing and slang utilization on TikTok. The survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to assemble comprehensive information.

Respondent Demographics

The respondents were diverse in terms of age, gender, education level, and TikTok usage patterns.

Table 1. The Respondents Were Diverse In Terms Of Age, Gender, Education Level, And Tiktok Usage Patterns

Category	Details
Age groups	18-25 years (majority), 26-35 years, >45 years
Gender	Predominantly female
Education level	Ranging from high school to postgraduate
Tiktok usage	Varies from <1 hour to >5 hours daily
Languages Used	Combination of Indonesian and English (code-mixing) and Indonesian

Table 2. Data Collection

Question	Most common response	Percentage of Responses
Do younger and older generations use different languages on TikTok?	Yes	65%
Do you feel the need to adjust your language style when interacting with users from other generations on TikTok?	Sometimes	50%
What do you think about the use of mixed codes (Indonesian and English) on TikTok?	Very interesting and relevant	70%

The data suggests that most respondents perceive generational differences in language use. Additionally, many participants acknowledge adapting their language style based on their audience, with a significant majority finding the use of mixed codes both appealing and relevant.

Objective

The primary objective of this method is to observe how language is used by TikTok users from various generations. By conducting a quantitative survey, the study aims to systematically analyze patterns in language use, with particular attention to:

1. The use of mixed codes (Indonesian and English) on TikTok.
2. The way language varies between younger and older generations.
3. The participants' perceptions of the relevance of code-switching in social media discourse.

Survey Design

The quantitative survey was designed with a set of structured questions to gather objective, measurable data. These questions focused on the respondents' experiences, opinions, and behaviors in relation to the use of language on TikTok. The survey questions were closed-ended to facilitate statistical analysis and to enable comparisons between different demographic groups.

Data Collection Process

The data collection took place via an online survey distributed to a sample of 43 respondents, representing a range of age groups. Respondents were asked to provide their opinions and behaviors

regarding language use on TikTok, specifically focusing on how they perceive the use of mixed codes (Indonesian and English) and whether they adjust their language style based on the generational identity of the users they interact with.

Survey Questions:

The survey consisted of three key questions designed to gather data related to the research questions:

1. Do you think younger and older generations use different language on TikTok?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I don't know
2. Do you feel the need to adjust your language style when interacting with users from other generations on TikTok?
   a. Yes
   b. Sometimes
   c. No
3. What do you think about the use of mixed codes (Indonesian and English) on TikTok?
   a. Very interesting and relevant
   b. Ordinary
   c. Not important

Data Analysis

The data collected through the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify the frequency and percentage of responses for each question. By observing these responses, the study aimed to uncover patterns in language use and the respondents' attitudes toward code-switching and language adjustment across different generations.

Rationale for Quantitative Approach

The use of a quantitative survey in this study allows for a clear, objective examination of language patterns across a diverse group of participants. Quantitative data enables the researcher to:

1. Measure the prevalence of mixed code usage and language style adjustment across generations.
2. Draw comparisons between the perceptions and behaviors of different age groups.
3. Present findings in a format that is easily interpretable and statistically significant, ensuring the reliability and validity of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study confirms that generational differences significantly influence language practices on TikTok and other social media platforms. Younger users frequently utilize slang, code-switching, and emojis to maintain casual, relatable interactions and align with current trends. This reflects their adaptability and creativity in language use as part of their digital social identity. Data collection was conducted through an online survey distributed to a sample of 43 respondents, representing various age groups. The following is the data.

Table 3. Data Collection Was Conducted Through An Online Survey Distributed To A Sample

No	Respondent Name	Age	Content Viewed
1.	A.B.R.S.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment

2.	A.B.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
3.	A.D.G.	18 - 25 Tahun	Gaming
4.	A.	18 - 25 Tahun	Others
5.	A.A.A.	18 - 25 Tahun	Lifestyle
6.	A.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
7.	A.	18 - 25 Tahun	Lifestyle
8.	A.Q.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
9.	A.Z.	18 - 25 Tahun	Gaming
10.	D.A.S.	18 - 25 Tahun	Lifestyle
11.	D.	18 - 25 Tahun	Education
12.	D.C.	18 - 25 Tahun	Lifestyle
13.	F.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
14.	G.P.R.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
15.	H.Z.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
16.	H.T.I.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
17.	J.D.	26 - 35 Tahun	Entertainment
18.	L.D.	26 - 35 Tahun	Education
19.	L.M.K.	18 - 25 Tahun	Lifestyle
20.	M.F.E.	18 - 25 Tahun	Lifestyle
21.	M.A.H.	18 - 25 Tahun	Others
22.	M.A.K.	18 - 25 Tahun	Others
23.	M.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
24.	M.Y.	> 45 Tahun	Education
25.	M.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
26.	M.W.	18 - 25 Tahun	Gaming
27.	M.K	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
28.	N	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
29.	R.K.S	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
30.	R.D.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
31.	R.R.	18 - 25 Tahun	Others
32.	R.P	18 - 25 Tahun	Lifestyle
33.	R.Y	26 - 35 Tahun	Entertainment
34.	R.	18 - 25 Tahun	Others
35.	R.M	18 - 25 Tahun	Sport
36.	R.D	26 - 35 Tahun	Lifestyle
37.	S.D.I.R.	18 - 25 Tahun	Lifestyle
38.	T.R.Y.	18 - 25 Tahun	Gaming
39.	V.A.L.	18 - 25 Tahun	Gaming
40.	S.W.T	18 - 25 Tahun	Sport
41.	Y.D.	18 - 25 Tahun	Entertainment
42.	Y.F.	18 - 25 Tahun	Education
43.	Z.M.	18 - 25 Tahun	Others

The data has been analyzed against the use of mixed codes, slang, emojis and the use of language on social media by various generations with different ages. The following data are the results of the general results obtained based on the different diversity of various respondents on the use of slang/emojis, the use of language, and code mixing against the social identities of users on social media.

Code-Switching and Mixed Code as Identity Tools

Social media users frequently engage in code-switching or mixed-code language, combining elements from multiple languages to reflect their multifaceted identities. For example, bilingual users might mix English with their native language to connect with both local and global audiences. This practice not only demonstrates linguistic flexibility but also reflects the hybrid nature of modern identities shaped by globalization and technology.



Figure 1. The Diagram Above, Which Is The Result Of A Questionnaire Conducted Among

From the diagram above, which is the result of a questionnaire conducted among 43 respondents, we can see that 52.4% think that the use of code-mixing on social networks is very interesting and important, then 42.9% think that the use of code-mixing is simply common and 4.8% think that the use of code-mixing on social networks is not important.

Code-mixing, the mixing of two or more languages or language varieties in communication, is a common phenomenon on social media platforms. It reflects linguistic creativity and serves as a tool for users to express their identity, connect with specific communities, and convey messages more effectively. For younger users, it often demonstrates multilingual skills and aligns with modern communication trends.

On the other hand, some users see code-mixing as a way to simplify or clarify communication, especially when certain terms or expressions are more commonly heard in a language. However, this can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or create a sense of exclusion among people who do not know the mixed languages.

Overall, the use of code-mixing on social media continues to grow as a dynamic feature of online interaction, influenced by cultural diversity and the evolving nature of digital communication.

Mixed code usage demonstrates flexibility in expressing thoughts and connecting with diverse audiences. Respondents noted that combining Indonesian and English makes their language feel modern and relatable, particularly in a globalized digital environment.

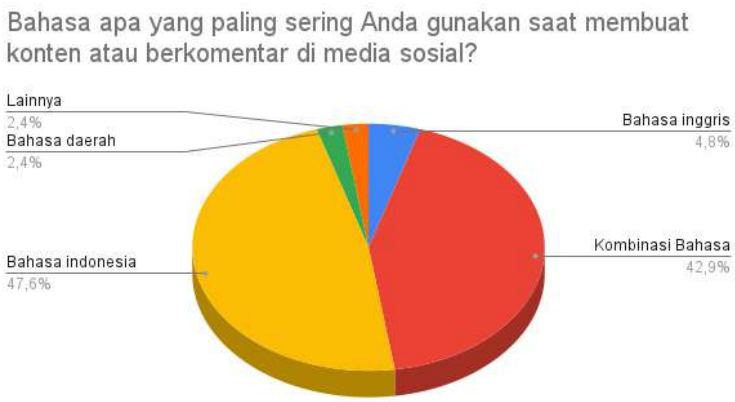


Figure 2. The Result Of A Questionnaire

Based on the diagram above, which is the result of a questionnaire by 43 respondents, it can be seen that as many as 42,9% use Indonesian in creating content or commenting on social media, then 21,4% use a combination of Indonesian and English (mixed code), 4,8% use English, 2,4% use regional languages and 2,4% use others. **The provided pie chart** illustrates the distribution of language use, including mixed code (a combination of Bahasa Indonesia and English), on social media among different age groups. Below is a detailed explanation:

a. Bahasa Indonesia (47.6%)

This is the most widely used language on social media across generations, indicating a preference for the native language in digital communication.

b. Mixed Code (Bahasa Indonesia and English) (42.9%)

A significant portion of users employs a combination of Bahasa Indonesia and English. This mixed-code usage reflects the influence of globalization and the frequent incorporation of English terms into Bahasa Indonesia, especially among younger or professional users.

c. English (4.8%)

Only a small percentage of users primarily use English, which may suggest its popularity in specific contexts, such as professional communication, education, or among users who are fluent in English.

d. Regional Languages (Green Segment)

The use of regional languages, although present, is minimal. This reflects either a limited digital presence among speakers of regional languages or a preference for Bahasa Indonesia and English on social media.

e. Other Languages (Purple Segment)

A very small portion represents other languages, possibly foreign or niche languages, indicating their limited use in online interactions.

The data suggests that mixed code (Bahasa Indonesia and English) plays a crucial role in online communication, demonstrating linguistic flexibility and adaptation among users. It could indicate how different generations interact online, with younger users more likely to adopt mixed-code practices due to exposure to bilingual environments and international influences. Meanwhile, older generations might prefer using Bahasa Indonesia exclusively.

Slang and Emojis as Social Identity Tools

Slang and emojis have become powerful tools for expressing social identity in the digital era. Slang reflects group affiliation, cultural trends, and individuality, enabling people to connect through shared language and insider expressions. Similarly, emojis add emotional depth and nuance to text-based communication, often bridging cultural and linguistic gaps. By using specific slang and emojis, individuals signal belonging to particular communities, age groups, or cultural movements. These tools shape modern communication, reflecting identity and fostering social bonds in an increasingly interconnected world.



Figure 3. According To The Results Of The Questionnaire

According to the results of the questionnaire, it was found that the use of emojis or slang helps to feel more connected to the community on social networks, with the percentages being quite useful 51.2%, very useful 22.0% and ineffective 26.8%. The following data is the result of general results obtained based on the different diversity of respondents of different ages regarding the use of slang and emojis as a means of social identity on social media.

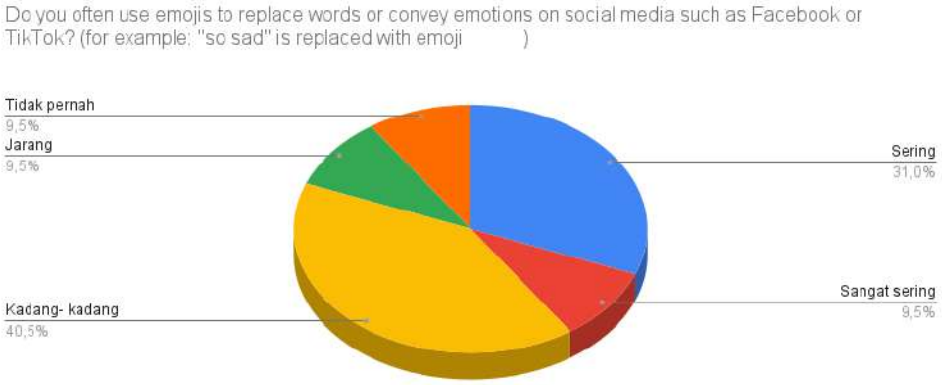


Figure 4. Based On The Survey Results

Based on the survey results, 9.5% of respondents use emoji very often, 31.0% use it often, 40.5% use it occasionally, 9.5% rarely and 9.5% never use it. This data highlights the prevalence of emoji as a communication tool in social media interactions. Emojis play a significant role in replacing words and conveying emotions quickly and visually. For example, a simple ☺ can express happiness,

while a 😳 can represent sadness, eliminating the need for lengthy explanations. Emojis also help clarify the tone of a message, reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation in text-based communication.

Their universality transcends language barriers, allowing users from different linguistic backgrounds to understand emotions and intentions. However, over-reliance on emojis might limit nuanced communication, especially in contexts requiring clarity and formality. Balancing emoji use with textual content ensures effective and meaningful interactions across social media platforms.

Slang words like “anjir,” “slebew,” and “rizz” frequently appear among younger respondents, emphasizing their connection to contemporary culture. Emojis also serve as emotional expressions and substitutes for words, fostering engagement and relatability. This aligns with the notion that social media language mirrors one’s personal and group identity.

Generational Differences

The rapid evolution of social media has created a space where multiple generations communicate, often requiring language adaptation to bridge generational gaps. Younger generations tend to use slang, abbreviations, and emojis to express themselves concisely, while older generations often prefer more formal and structured communication. This difference can lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations in online interactions. For example, terms like "slay" or abbreviations like "FOMO" might confuse older users, while younger users might perceive formal language as overly serious or outdated. To foster better understanding, individuals need to be aware of these linguistic variations. Adapting language styles and being open to learning from one another can enhance communication, making social media a more inclusive platform for all generations.

The following data is the result of general results obtained based on the opinions of various respondents from different generations and ages regarding adjustments to the use of language style when interacting with users from other generations on social media.

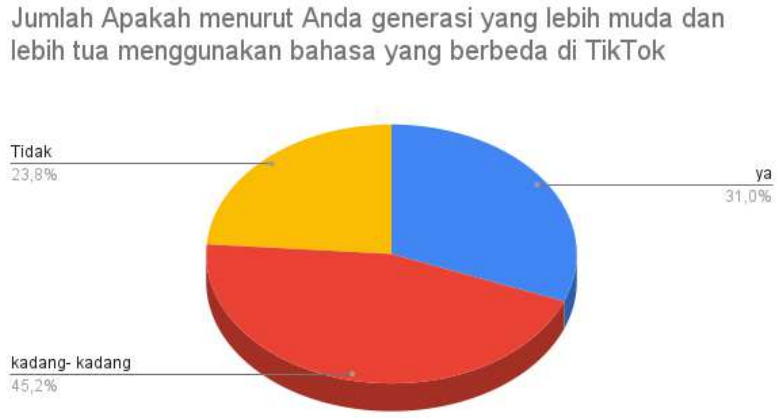


Figure 5. Divided Into Three Categories

The data is divided into three categories: "Yes," "Sometimes," and "No." Below is an explanation of each segment:

"Sometimes" (45.2%)

This is the largest segment, suggesting that nearly half of the respondents believe there is occasional variation in language use between generations on TikTok. This reflects the dynamic nature of language on social media, where context, trends, and audience influence language choices.

"Yes" (31.0%)

About one-third of respondents agree that there is a clear generational difference in language use. This could indicate that younger users prefer modern, globalized language styles (e.g., English or mixed code), while older generations might stick to more traditional or formal language.

"No" (23.8%)

A smaller percentage disagrees with the idea of generational language differences. This suggests that some users perceive language use on TikTok as uniform or that both younger and older generations adapt to platform trends, minimizing differences.

The data imply that generational differences in language use on TikTok are evident but situational. Younger users are likely to adopt trendy expressions, slang, or mixed code (e.g., Bahasa Indonesia combined with English), while older generations may lean toward formal or regional languages. However, the "sometimes" category emphasizes that these differences are not rigid, as users may adapt their language based on context or the content they consume or create.

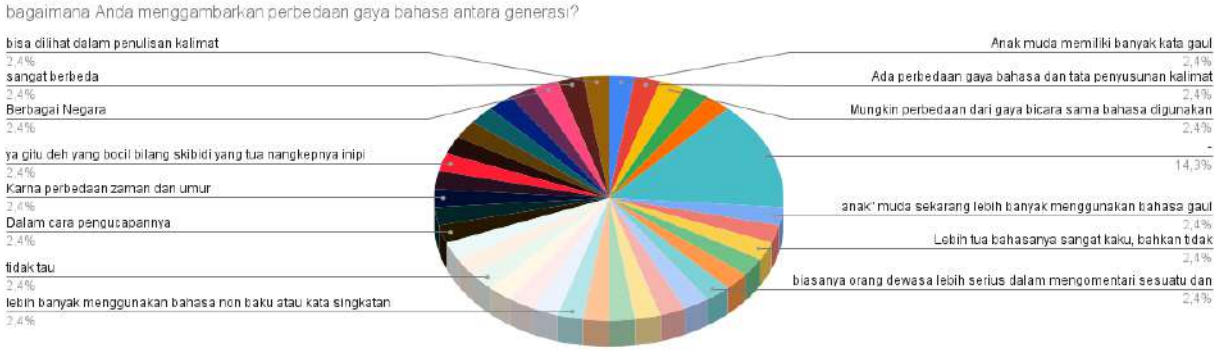


Figure 6. The Pie Chart Summarizes The Responses To A Questionnaire On How Generational Changes Affect Language Styles On Social Media

The pie chart summarizes the responses to a questionnaire on how generational changes affect language styles on social media. The main observations are as follows:

1. **Youth-Oriented Language**

Many respondents highlight that younger generations frequently use slang, abbreviations, and informal language. This reflects a dynamic and evolving communication style influenced by trends and digital culture.

2. **Formality Among Older Generations**

Older users are described as using more formal, structured, and serious language, with less adaptation to modern slang or trends.

3. **Mixed Perceptions**

Some respondents note slight differences in sentence construction and expression, while others emphasize significant variation based on generational contexts, such as differences in pronunciation or tone.

4. **Contextual Usage**

Certain responses suggest that differences in language styles are situational, depending on the audience and purpose of communication.

Key Trends Identified:

1. **Slang and Informality Among Younger Generations**

Younger respondents are noted for using slang, abbreviations, and non-standard grammar. Examples include phrases like “skibidi” or other trend-driven expressions. This demonstrates how digital environments like TikTok, Instagram, or memes significantly influence youth communication styles. Younger users value speed, creativity, and trend alignment over formal language.

2. **Formality and Rigidness Among Older Generations**

Older generations tend to prioritize correct grammar, clear structure, and serious tone in communication. This could stem from educational norms or less exposure to rapidly changing digital slang. They may be less inclined to adopt new trends, making their language appear "stiff" or formal compared to younger users.

3. **Contextual Adaptation**

While the differences are pronounced, some respondents mention that generational language variations depend on the situation. For example, professional or formal contexts might narrow the linguistic gap, as all generations adhere to similar standards.

4. **Generational Perception of Language Differences**

Younger respondents often highlight their creative and expressive language styles, while older respondents might view these trends as improper or casual. This perception gap might lead to misunderstandings in intergenerational communication.

5. **Influence of Digital Media**

Social media platforms play a major role in shaping language use. Younger generations are more engaged with online trends, while older users may use platforms more conservatively, for example, focusing on direct communication or sharing formal content.

Implications:

1. **For Communication in Mixed-Generation Platforms**:

a. Brands or educators should adopt a balanced tone-informal enough to engage younger audiences yet structured enough for older ones.
b. Digital content creators can consider mixed-code language to bridge the generational gap.

2. **Cultural Evolution of Language**: The data shows how language evolves alongside societal and technological changes, highlighting the generational struggle between tradition and modernization.
3. **Research Opportunities**: Further studies can explore how these differences impact workplace communication, family dynamics, or cultural preservation in multilingual contexts.

In short, older users tend to use formal expressions, which follow conventional norms, while younger users. The contrast between concise and fashionable communication and the formal and structured language of the older generation highlights the dynamics of linguistic identity that are constantly developing in the digital space.

Language As Social Identity In Social Media

Language plays a significant role in shaping and reflecting social identity, particularly in the context of social media. On these platforms, individuals use language not only as a tool for communication but also as a means of expressing who they are, their affiliations, and their cultural or social backgrounds. The diversity of language use on social media highlights its power in constructing and maintaining social identity.

On social media, users often align their language use with specific groups or communities to establish a sense of belonging. For instance, younger generations may use internet slang, abbreviations, and emojis to signal their participation in digital youth culture, while professional communities might adopt formal language and industry-specific jargon. This linguistic alignment helps individuals signal their membership in particular social or cultural groups.



Figure 7. Result Of The Previous Questionnaire

Based on the diagram above which is the result of the previous questionnaire, it is known that according to respondents, language style reflects the social identity of social media users as much as 58.5%, then there are those who think that language style does not reflect social identity in the media, namely 29.3%, then there are those who think that language style has a big influence on social identity in social media as much as 12,2%.

The choice of language on social media can also reflect social status, education level, or professional identity. Using formal grammar, sophisticated vocabulary, or specific language styles may indicate a professional persona, while casual or playful language may suggest a relaxed and approachable personality. The deliberate use of certain linguistic styles can therefore project desired aspects of one's identity.

Generational differences in language use are especially pronounced on social media. Younger generations often adopt rapidly evolving slang and trending phrases to express their dynamism and modernity, while older generations may stick to traditional or formal language styles. These differences not only reflect generational identities but also influence the way individuals interact across age groups.

In short, language on social media is much more than a means of communication; it is a dynamic representation of social identity. By adopting specific linguistic styles, individuals navigate their roles in different social groups, signal their cultural affiliations, and project the personas they wish to embody. As social media continues to evolve, so too does the way language reflects and constructs identity in the digital age.

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