


Slang Words Used by TikTok Users: Types and Functions

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ABSTRACT

Slang has become a significant feature of informal communication on social media, particularly on TikTok, where language develops rapidly through viral trends. According to Allan and Burridge (2006), slang is inherently innovative and shaped by social context; however, limited studies have systematically examined the types of slang used by TikTok users and their communicative functions. This study aims to identify the dominant types of slang used by TikTok users and analyze their communicative functions in TikTok interactions. A descriptive qualitative method with content analysis was employed, using 20 slang expressions used by TikTok users collected from videos, captions, and comment sections. The data were selected using purposive sampling, in which slang expressions were chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives and their frequency of use in TikTok interactions. The findings reveal that Fresh and Creative is the most dominant slang type (10 items), while expressing admiration or evaluation is the most frequent communicative function (9 items). These results indicate that slang used by TikTok users functions as a strategic communicative resource that supports social interaction and reflects ongoing linguistic innovation in digital communication.

Keywords: *Slang, TikTok, Types, Communicative Function*

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INTRODUCTION

In language studies, there are two main categories, namely formal and informal language. Formal contexts call for the use of formal language, such as in academic and work environments (Chaer, 2010). This suggests that language choice is closely regulated by situational norms and expectations. In contrast, informal contexts call for the use of more casual language, characterized by more flexible and relaxed usage (Holmes, 2001). This indicates that informal settings allow speakers greater linguistic freedom and creativity. One common form of informal language on social media is slang, which is casual expressions or phrases that indicate familiarity within a particular group. Slang, which is non-standard and innovative, has become part of the rapidly growing popular culture in the digital environment (Sumartini, 2025). This highlights that slang develops dynamically alongside trends in digital communication. Slang is defined as a phenomenon of language variation that emerges as a result of language development and social dynamics in society (Aisyah, 2022). This definition reinforces the view that slang is socially driven and continuously evolving. In addition, informally used, non-standard forms of language are known as slang, and seasonal, often used by teenagers as a form of self-expression and a means of communication that reflects creativity and social values within their community (Fitri, 2023). This shows that slang functions not only as informal language but also as a medium of identity expression among young speakers. This indicates that slang is not merely a linguistic variation but also an important means of shaping social and digital cultural identity, which continues to evolve in line with the dynamics of user interaction on social media platforms. Slang as a tool for shaping dynamic social and digital cultural identity. According to (Allan & Burridge, 2006), slang is classified into five main types, namely Fresh and Creative, Flippant, Imitative, Acronym, and Clipping. Each slang word can be categorized into one or more types depending on its form and

Slang Words Used by TikTok Users: Types and Functions

contextual usage, which shows that slang is a flexible and dynamic linguistic phenomenon rather than a fixed or static language form. In addition to its structural classification, slang also performs important communicative functions in both everyday interaction and social media environments, where language is often used creatively and informally. (Zhou & Fan, 2013) define the communicative functions of slang as including the pursuit of self-identity, the expression of emotive feelings, and the achievement of politeness, all of which contribute to maintaining social relationships and creating a sense of familiarity among speakers. These functions highlight that slang is not merely used for casual expression but also plays a strategic role in social interaction. Furthermore, (Adam, 2009) argues that slang is employed to achieve social dynamics, construct social spaces, identify group membership, and express ideas, attitudes, and values shared within a particular community. This perspective emphasizes that slang functions as a marker of social belonging and cultural identity. Therefore, every slang word carries not only semantic meaning but also specific communicative and social functions that support interaction, identity formation, and group cohesion in both offline and digital communication contexts.

In this context, TikTok has become the main space for the spread of slang. Explain that TikTok is a revolutionary social media platform with short video formats that encourage creativity and unprecedented content experimentation (Anderson, 2020). Through features such as short videos, captions, hashtags, and comment sections, TikTok enables users to create and disseminate new slang expressions rapidly. The interactive and trend-based nature of the platform facilitates the emergence of informal language that is easily adopted and modified by various groups of users. Therefore, slang on TikTok functions not only as a linguistic innovation but also as a communication tool to express emotions, humor, solidarity, and group identity in digital interactions. TikTok users are defined as individuals or content creators who actively produce, upload, and interact with short videos lasting 15–60 seconds by utilizing various editing features such as music, filters, visual effects, and the For You Page (FYP) algorithm for purposes of self-expression, entertainment, or promotion. As previously explained, TikTok is considered a revolutionary social media platform because its short video format promotes creativity and unprecedented content experimentation. Through short video features, captions, hashtags, and comment sections, TikTok allows users to create and disseminate new slang expressions rapidly. A study entitled *The Impact of TikTok Use on Self-Expression by Generation-Z Users* by (Eryc, 2022) describes TikTok users as Generation Z who utilize the platform to fulfill self-expression needs through various motivations, such as time, friendship, escapism, enjoyment, social interaction, relaxation, information seeking, and personal expression. Based on these characteristics, TikTok users actively employ slang as a strategic linguistic resource in their digital interactions, in which various types of slang emerge and are used to perform specific communicative functions. Thus, the use of slang on TikTok not only reflects the dominant variation of slang types but also demonstrates the most frequently used communicative functions of slang in conveying meaning, building social relationships, and asserting personal identity.

Previous studies have explored slang and language use in digital and social media contexts, emphasizing the role of online platforms in shaping informal communication and linguistic innovation. (Trimastuti, 2017) examined slang usage across various social media platforms and demonstrated that slang functions as a non-standard language variety widely used by young people in online interaction. Platform-specific research has also developed; (Indah & Marhamah, 2024) analyzed the types and communicative functions of slang used on Instagram, revealing that slang serves important roles in social interaction, identity construction, and group solidarity. With the rise of TikTok, several scholars have begun to investigate its linguistic impact. (Maryana & Tetiana, 2024) examined TikTok's influence on the English language and highlighted how slang and language trends rapidly emerge and spread through viral short-video content. Similarly, (Ugoala, 2024) focused on Generation Z's linguistic practices on TikTok, identifying emerging linguistic structures such as neologisms and creative expressions shaped by the platform's affordances. In addition, (Lee, 2023) investigated the language learning affordances of Instagram and TikTok, demonstrating how

multimodal features and interactivity support informal language use, although the study did not specifically address slang classification or its communicative functions. Together, these studies confirm that social media, particularly TikTok, plays a significant role in contemporary language use and slang development.

Although the growing number of studies on language and slang in social media, several research gaps remain. Previous studies have examined slang across social media platforms in general (Trimastuti, 2017) and on specific platforms such as Instagram (Indah & Marhamah, 2024), yet limited attention has been given to TikTok as a unique communicative environment characterized by short video formats, algorithm-driven content distribution, and rapid linguistic diffusion. Although studies by (Maryana & Tetiana, 2024; Ugoala, 2024) have explored language trends and emerging linguistic structures on TikTok, these studies primarily focus on general language development and do not specifically analyze slang as a distinct sociolinguistic phenomenon. Furthermore, existing research tends to examine either the forms of slang or its social functions separately, without providing an integrated analysis that combines both the classification of slang types and their communicative functions within the same study. This indicates a lack of comprehensive research that systematically investigates how slang is formed and how it functions simultaneously in digital interaction. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by focusing specifically on TikTok and analyzing both the types of slang based on (Allan & Burridge, 2006) and the communicative functions of slang based on (Adam, 2009; Zhou & Fan, 2013).

Based on the research gap identified above, this study aims to analyze the use of slang words by TikTok users with a particular focus on their types and communicative functions in digital interaction. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the types of slang most commonly used by TikTok users by referring to established classifications of slang and to examine the communicative functions of these slang expressions in online communication. This includes analyzing how slang is employed to convey meaning, express emotions, create humor, build social relationships, and assert personal or group identity within the TikTok community. By addressing these objectives, this research is expected to contribute to the field of digital sociolinguistics by providing a more comprehensive understanding of slang usage on TikTok and by highlighting the role of slang as a strategic linguistic resource in contemporary social media communication.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a content analysis approach. In line with (Creswell, 2017), qualitative research is a method used to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems. In this context, data were collected inductively, moving from specific findings in the field toward broader themes to provide an in-depth description of the phenomenon of slang usage on social media. The researcher acts as the key instrument in capturing the complexity of meanings, functions, and types of slang words as they naturally occur within the environment of TikTok users. The purpose of this study is to identify the types of slang used by TikTok users and to analyze the communicative functions of these slang expressions in digital interactions. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to explore language as it is naturally used in real-life digital contexts, rather than to measure it statistically. Slang is a dynamic linguistic phenomenon that is highly context-dependent; therefore, understanding its meaning and function requires in-depth interpretation rather than numerical analysis. Specifically, this study applies a content analysis method, which enables the researcher to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret textual data derived from TikTok content such as captions, comments, and video transcripts. Through qualitative content analysis, this study examines how slang words appear in TikTok content, their forms, and their communicative functions. In this research, language is viewed not merely as a system of words, but also as a social practice that reflects identity, emotions, humor, solidarity, and a sense of belonging within a group. Because TikTok is a rapidly evolving digital environment, the qualitative method

enables the researcher to capture dynamic patterns of slang usage and interpret their communicative significance within specific contexts.

Respondents

TikTok users refer to individuals or content creators who actively create, upload, and interact with short videos on the TikTok platform. They utilize features such as captions, hashtags, comment sections, music, filters, visual effects, and the For You Page (FYP) algorithm to communicate, express ideas, and engage with other users. Due to the interactive and trend-driven nature of TikTok, users frequently employ informal language, including slang, as part of their digital communication practices. The dynamic environment of TikTok makes its users an appropriate subject for examining how slang is created, modified, and circulated in online interactions.

In this study, the sources of data were publicly accessible TikTok content rather than direct interviews with participants. The data were obtained from videos, captions, and comment sections containing slang expressions produced by TikTok users. Therefore, the unit of analysis in this research was the slang words used within TikTok content, which were analyzed to identify their types and communicative functions.

Instruments

The main instrument of this study was documentation supported by a structured slang classification sheet. This classification sheet was designed to systematically record and organize all collected slang expressions found in TikTok videos, captions, hashtags, and comment sections. Each slang word was categorized based on its type according to (Allan & Burrige, 2006), namely Fresh and Creative, Flippant, Imitative, Acronym, and Clipping. In addition, each expression was analyzed based on its literal meaning, contextual meaning, communicative function, and frequency of occurrence.

The communicative functions were classified based on the theories of (Adam, 2009; Zhou & Fan, 2013), including functions such as self-identity expression, emotive expression, politeness, group identity or solidarity, and expressing ideas, attitudes, and values. The researcher also made contextual notes to explain how each slang expression functioned in interaction, such as whether it was used to express emotion, build solidarity, show humor, emphasize an idea, or construct identity.

This instrument enabled the researcher to analyze the data in a structured and consistent manner, ensuring that both the types and communicative functions of slang were systematically identified and interpreted based on established theoretical frameworks.

Procedures

This study's data was collected by collecting and recording public content from three platforms. By using purposive sampling, we were able to select data that was consistent with the study objectives and subject to specific rules of selection. The data we collected included about 20 posts, comments, and captions that clearly showed the use of slang. The selection criteria were: (1) publicly accessible TikTok content created by users, (2) content that could be accessed without violating privacy regulations, and (3) content that contained identifiable slang expressions used in natural digital interactions. These criteria ensured that the data represented authentic language use as it naturally occurs within the TikTok platform. This method allowed the researcher to analyze real instances of slang usage in context, reflecting how TikTok users communicate, express identity, and perform social interaction in an online environment.

The study employed documentation techniques, which included selecting or monitoring, documenting, and preserving visual and written evidence of how individuals communicate on social media. The researcher took screenshots of posts, comments, and captions that included slang words. All the data was saved in a digital storage system and organized by the type of social media platform, the form of the slang, and how it was used.

This method was chosen because it lets the researcher see real communication without changing or influencing what people say.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques. The analysis process began by identifying and selecting slang expressions found in the collected TikTok videos, captions, and comment sections. Slang expressions that were not relevant to the research objectives were eliminated during the data reduction stage. Next, each slang word was classified according to its type based on the slang classification described in the theoretical framework. After the classification process, each expression was analyzed based on its contextual meaning to identify its communicative function in digital interactions.

To determine dominant usage patterns, the frequency of occurrence of each type and function of slang was calculated. The results of the analysis were then interpreted to explain how slang functions as a linguistic resource in the communication of TikTok users. To ensure data validity, the researcher rechecked the categorization process to maintain consistency between the identified types and functions of slang.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Dominant Types of Slang Used by Gen Alpha

No	Slang Word	Meaning	Type
1	Cap	lie / not true	Flippant
2	Rizz	charisma/flirting ability	Fresh and Creative
3	Brainrot	obsession with something trivial	Fresh and Creative
4	Tuff	cool/impressive	Imitative
5	Mewing	Jawline exercise trend	Fresh and Creative
6	fanum tax	stealing food from friends (jokingly)	Fresh and Creative
7	Ate	did very well	Imitative
8	Eats	performs excellently	Imitative
9	killed it	did something extremely well	Flippant
10	Cook	perform impressively	Imitative
11	Ohio	strange/weird situation	Fresh and Creative
12	Skibidi	absurd meme expression	Fresh and Creative
13	Sigma	Cool/independent male persona	Fresh and Creative
14	FR	for real	Acronym
15	Sus	Suspicious	Clipping
16	1000 aura	extremely charismatic	Fresh and Creative
17	Drip	stylish appearance	Imitative
18	Delulu	Delusional	Clipping
19	67	standard or average rating	Fresh and Creative
20	Gyatt	expression of surprise (often at appearance)	Fresh and Creative

The table analysis shows that Fresh and Creative slang is the most dominant type used by TikTok users, and there are 10 words of slang. This category includes newly created expressions such as rizz, brainrot, mewing, and Skibidi, which reflect linguistic innovation in digital spaces. The high frequency indicates that TikTok encourages the creation and rapid spread of new vocabulary. The second most common type is Imitative slang, followed by Flippant, Clipping, and Acronym. This distribution suggests that users prefer creative and innovative expressions rather than simple abbreviations, highlighting TikTok's role in shaping contemporary informal language.

Table 2. Dominant Communicative Functions

No	Communicative Function	Slang Words	Total
1	Expressing Admiration / Evaluation	ate, killed it, cook, bussin, drip, rizz, sigma, 1000 aura, tuff	9
2	Emphasizing Meaning	FR, cap, sus	3
3	Creating Humor	delulu, fanum tax, mewing	3
4	Social Commentary / Mockery	Ohio, Skibidi, 67	3
5	Expressing Emotion	brainrot, gyatt	2
	TOTAL	20	20

The findings indicate that the dominant communicative function of slang is expressing admiration or evaluation. Words such as *ate*, *drip*, and *rizz* are frequently used to praise or positively evaluate others, showing that slang supports social recognition in digital interaction. Other functions include emphasizing meaning, creating humor, and expressing emotional reactions. Overall, slang on TikTok serves not only as informal language but also as a strategic tool for interaction, solidarity, and identity construction.

Discussion

Types of Slang Used by TikTok Users

The findings reveal that Fresh and Creative slang is the most dominant type used by TikTok users. This dominance indicates that users are not merely adopting existing informal vocabulary but are actively participating in the creation of new linguistic forms. The frequent appearance of terms such as *rizz*, *brainrot*, *Skibidi*, *sigma*, and *1000 aura* reflects how TikTok functions as a productive space for lexical innovation. These expressions are strongly influenced by viral memes, short-video trends, gaming culture, and influencer discourse, all of which circulate rapidly through the algorithm-driven For You Page (FYP). This dominance can be explained by the platform's trend-oriented ecosystem, where originality and novelty are highly valued as strategies to attract attention and engagement, encouraging users to continuously invent and popularize new slang expressions.

The prominence of Fresh and Creative slang suggests that TikTok users, particularly Generation Alpha, engage in language play as a form of digital creativity. Unlike traditional slang that typically develops gradually within localized communities, TikTok slang emerges and spreads within a very short period due to the platform's multimodal and highly networked environment. The combination of short videos, captions, hashtags, background audio, and interactive comment sections creates a dense communicative ecosystem in which new lexical items can quickly gain traction and be recontextualized across diverse content categories. This finding supports (Allan & Burridge, 2006) argument that slang is inherently innovative and highly responsive to social context. In the TikTok environment, the relevant social context is characterized by speed, virality, and performativity. Language on this platform is not only written or spoken but also embedded in visual cues, gestures, sound effects, and remix practices. As a result, slang becomes part of a broader semiotic system in which meaning is constructed multimodally rather than purely linguistically. Furthermore, TikTok culture actively encourages linguistic creativity by rewarding content that is engaging, relatable, and trend-sensitive, allowing newly created slang to spread quickly and be adopted by a wide range of users across different communities.

The second most frequent category, Imitative slang, further demonstrates how TikTok users reinterpret existing vocabulary by assigning new contextual meanings. Expressions such as *ate*, *cook*, *drip*, and *tuff* no longer function according to their literal dictionary definitions but instead operate as evaluative markers of approval and admiration. This semantic shift illustrates the fluidity of meaning in digital discourse and highlights how users creatively repurpose familiar lexical items to align with current cultural trends. Meanwhile, the relatively lower frequency of Flippant, Clipping, and Acronym forms suggests that abbreviation and figurative compression are less central to TikTok communication compared to lexical innovation. Although expressions such as *cap*, *killed it*, *sus*, *delulu*, and *FR* remain present, they do not dominate the dataset. This pattern implies that TikTok users tend to prioritize expressive novelty and cultural relevance over linguistic economy. In other words, producing trend-aligned and creatively resonant language appears to carry greater social value within the platform's interactional norms. In addition, the use of both creative and imitative slang contributes to the construction of online identity, as users employ these expressions to signal their familiarity with current trends and to position themselves within specific digital communities.

Overall, the distribution of slang types demonstrates that TikTok operates not only as a social media platform but also as a dynamic linguistic laboratory in which users continuously experiment with and reshape informal English. The dominance of Fresh and Creative slang

Slang Words Used by TikTok Users: Types and Functions

highlights the accelerating pace of lexical innovation in digitally mediated communication and underscores the platform's role in shaping contemporary youth language. Through this process, slang functions not only as a linguistic form but also as a symbolic resource that allows users to express individuality, gain social recognition, and establish a sense of belonging in the digital environment.

Communicative Functions of Slang Used by TikTok Users

In terms of communicative functions, the findings indicate that expressing admiration or evaluation is the most dominant function of slang usage. Many of the identified expressions are used to compliment, praise, or positively evaluate someone's performance, appearance, or personality. This pattern reflects the participatory culture of TikTok, where interaction is often centered around reacting to and assessing content. Slang provides a concise and culturally recognizable way to express approval while simultaneously demonstrating familiarity with current trends. The dominance of evaluative slang suggests that TikTok interaction is strongly oriented toward recognition and social validation. Users actively engage in comment exchanges that reinforce visibility and support within the platform's community. Through the use of trendy evaluative expressions, individuals position themselves as culturally aware participants in digital discourse. In this sense, slang functions as both a communicative tool and a marker of belonging. This dominance can be explained by the platform's engagement-driven environment, where users are encouraged to respond quickly and positively to content, making evaluative slang an efficient and socially rewarding form of interaction. Furthermore, by using popular evaluative expressions, users strengthen their online identity and signal alignment with current digital culture and community norms.

Beyond evaluation, slang is also frequently used to emphasize meaning. Expressions such as FR, cap, and sus serve pragmatic purposes by strengthening statements, indicating truthfulness, or signaling doubt and suspicion. These forms help users negotiate stance and clarify intention in fast-paced digital interactions. In short comment exchanges, such concise markers are effective in conveying strong positions without requiring lengthy explanations. This reflects the need for efficiency in TikTok communication, where brevity and clarity are essential due to the rapid flow of content and interaction.

Slang further functions to create humor and playful interaction. Words such as delulu, fanum tax, and mewing contribute to exaggerated or ironic expressions that align with TikTok's meme-based culture. Humor in this context is often built on shared knowledge of trends and references, meaning that understanding such slang requires cultural familiarity. As a result, humor-oriented slang fosters group cohesion by reinforcing shared interpretive frameworks among users. This demonstrates how TikTok culture encourages creative and entertaining language use, where humor becomes a key strategy for gaining attention and maintaining audience engagement.

In addition, certain slang terms operate as tools of social commentary or mockery. Expressions like Ohio, Skibidi, and 67 symbolize absurdity, randomness, or mediocrity and are often used with ironic undertones. These terms function as shorthand cultural references that encapsulate complex evaluative meanings. Their usage demonstrates how slang can condense social attitudes and collective judgments into brief linguistic forms. Such usage highlights the role of slang in reflecting shared cultural perspectives and enabling users to participate in collective meaning-making within digital communities.

Finally, slang also serves to express emotional reactions. Words such as brainrot and gyatt convey excitement, exaggeration, obsession, or surprise. In the absence of face-to-face interaction, such expressions help compensate for missing non-verbal cues by intensifying emotional tone in written comments. This aligns with (Zhou & Fan, 2013) view that slang performs emotive and relational functions, enabling speakers to build familiarity and intimacy in interaction. Through these expressions, users are able to convey personal feelings more vividly, which further contributes to the development of a recognizable and expressive online identity.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that slang on TikTok functions as a strategic communicative resource rather than merely informal vocabulary. It enables users to construct identity, express attitudes, signal cultural awareness, and maintain social relationships within a rapidly evolving digital environment. The dominance of creative and evaluative expressions further indicates that language on TikTok is closely tied to visibility, trend participation, and social alignment. Consequently, slang usage on the platform reflects broader patterns of contemporary digital communication in which linguistic innovation, performance, and community belonging are deeply interconnected. Overall, the use of slang reinforces not only communication efficiency but also identity formation, as users continuously negotiate their presence and belonging within the fast-changing landscape of TikTok interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that slang on TikTok functions as a dynamic communicative resource that extends beyond informal language use. The findings reveal that evaluative expressions are the most dominant function, enabling users to express admiration, approval, and opinions while enhancing interaction and engagement within the platform. Slang also serves to emphasize meaning, express emotions, create humor, and deliver social commentary through concise and culturally meaningful expressions. These functions allow users to communicate efficiently, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and participate actively in shared digital culture. Furthermore, the widespread use of creative slang reflects how language supports identity construction, cultural awareness, and a sense of belonging in online communities. The findings highlight the close relationship between linguistic innovation and social interaction in contemporary digital communication, where users continuously adapt language to suit evolving online trends and communicative needs. Overall, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the communicative role of slang in shaping interaction, identity, and participation on social media platforms.

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