

IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION IN GEN Z'S SLANG ON INSTAGRAM: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This research aims to examine textual features, investigate discursive practices, and analyze social practices that reveal the ideological constructions embedded in Gen Z's slang on Instagram, utilizing Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Data were obtained from 31 purposively selected public Instagram posts that contained frequently used slang expressions, such as "delulu," "roasting," and "rizz." The analysis was conducted through three interrelated stages: textual analysis (examining linguistic patterns, metaphors, and emojis), discursive practice analysis (exploring production, circulation, and audience interpretation), and social practice analysis (interpreting the broader ideological context). Findings reveal that Gen Z's slang reflects ideologies of individualism, irony, authenticity, and digital resistance, functioning not only as a linguistic trend but also as a discursive tool for negotiating power and identity in online communication. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language and ideology intersect within contemporary digital discourse, highlighting the socio-cultural significance of youth language in shaping online interactions.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis; digital communication; gen Z slang; ideology; instagram discourse*

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology in the twenty-first century has transformed the ways people interact and express themselves linguistically and culturally. Among the generations shaped by this transformation, Generation Z (Gen Z) stands out as the first cohort to grow up entirely in the digital environment, where technology is deeply intertwined with identity formation and social participation (Roth-Gordon, 2020). Social media platforms have become spaces where discourse, meaning, and ideology are produced and negotiated rather than merely transmitted. Among them, Instagram occupies a central role due to its multimodal nature—combining images, text, hashtags, and comments—which enables users to continually shape their self-representation and engage in shared meaning-making (Syaputra et al., 2024). Since Instagram remains a leading platform among young people, examining how they use language provides insights into broader patterns of digital communication and cultural change (Telaumbanua et al., 2024). Consequently, Instagram serves not only as a site of communication but also as an arena where linguistic expression becomes a vehicle for ideological construction and cultural resistance (Fairclough, 2013).

Within this digital landscape, Gen Z has developed a rich repertoire of slang expressions—such as “roasting”, “sigma”, “delulu”, “red flag/green flag”, “yapping”, “TBH”, “no cap”, and “skibidi”—that extend beyond playful creativity. These expressions serve as semiotic tools through which users articulate humor, critique, and self-identity, while simultaneously reflecting broader social and ideological orientations (Eviani, 2021). For instance, roasting often functions as humorous criticism, whereas “delulu” turns self-irony into a mode of emotional expression. Such linguistic innovations illustrate how ideology is conveyed through everyday language in online discourse. As Fairclough (2013) asserts, discourse is inherently ideological because it constructs and reproduces social relations and power structures.

Although previous research has examined Gen Z slang on social media, most studies have focused on its linguistic or sociolinguistic features rather than its ideological implications. Wafa and Amalia (2022), for instance, categorized Instagram slang into types of abbreviations and interjections but did not analyze how such terms encode power relations or ideological meanings. Similarly, Syaputra et al. (2024) linked slang use to emotional expression and identity formation, yet their study remained descriptive in nature. Paoletti (2025) further explored the sociopolitical potential of youth slang but did not reveal the linguistic mechanisms through which ideology is constructed. These studies highlight a significant research gap: the need to investigate how Gen Z's digital slang linguistically constructs ideology within social media discourse.

To address this gap, the present study applies Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)—encompassing textual, discursive, and social practices—to examine ideological constructions embedded in Gen Z slang on Instagram. This approach enables an exploration of how linguistic forms, multimodal expressions, and social contexts interact to produce meaning. This study aims to identify textual analysis (linguistic patterns, metaphors, and emojis), to explore discursive practice (production, circulation, and audience interpretation), and to analyze social practice that reflects the ideological construction in Gen Z's slang on Instagram. Ultimately, this research contributes to understanding the intersection of language, ideology, and power in digital communication, offering insights into how online linguistic practices shape contemporary cultural and ideological realities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ideology and Language

The relationship between ideology and language becomes increasingly visible in digital spaces where linguistic expressions circulate rapidly and widely. As Van Dijk (2006) explains, ideology can be understood as a set of socially shared beliefs that shape group identity and power relations. Language serves as the main instrument for the reproduction of such ideologies, especially within mediated communication. In social media environments, users construct and negotiate ideological meanings through textual and visual discourse (Wodak, 2011). Instagram, as a multimodal platform, provides a fertile ground for the production of ideological messages. Through captions, hashtags, and comments, users construct identity while simultaneously engaging in ideological positioning. The use of informal, creative, and humorous language—such as slang—acts as a mechanism for expressing alignment or resistance to dominant cultural narratives (Eviani, 2021). For instance, the term “delulu” humorously represents an over-idealized self-perception but also critiques societal pressures to conform to rational standards of behavior. Likewise, “sigma”

promotes an alternative masculinity that challenges traditional power structures. These linguistic patterns highlight how digital language operates as a vehicle for both identity formation and ideological construction (Among, 2025).

2.2 Theoretical Framework (Fairclough's CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a theoretical and methodological approach that examines how language functions as a medium of power and ideology. Fairclough (2013) conceptualizes discourse as both a linguistic and social practice, meaning that language not only reflects reality but also shapes it through ideological processes. In this sense, every linguistic choice—whether a word, phrase, or expression—has potential ideological implications because it contributes to how social relations and power structures are represented and maintained. Wodak (2011) reinforces this notion by emphasizing that CDA seeks to expose the implicit ideologies that perpetuate inequality and hegemony in communication. Fairclough's three-dimensional model—text, discourse practice, and social practice—provides a framework for analyzing how meaning is produced, distributed, and consumed within a specific social context. The textual dimension focuses on linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, metaphor, and cohesion; the discourse practice dimension concerns the processes of production and interpretation; and the social practice dimension relates to broader social structures and power relations (Gee & Handford, 2013). Through these interconnected levels, CDA enables the identification of how language use in digital spaces, including social media, contributes to the reproduction or contestation of ideologies. In the digital era, this approach is particularly relevant because online language is not merely communicative—it also functions as an ideological act (Roth-Gordon, 2020).

2.3 Previous Studies on Gen Z's Slang

Generation Z, born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, represents a cohort that has grown up with constant access to digital communication. Studies have shown that Gen Z's linguistic behavior reflects their need for self-expression, creativity, and community (Paula et al., 2024; Paoletti, 2025). Their frequent use of slang on platforms like Instagram demonstrates a collective attempt to construct a unique generational identity through linguistic innovation. According to Wafa and Amalia (2022), slang on social media serves as both an identity marker and a social bonding mechanism, differentiating Gen Z from older generations. Paula et al. (2024) found that Gen Z tends to use text-based and meme-driven slang, whereas Gen Alpha adopts more visually oriented expressions influenced by platforms such as TikTok. These linguistic patterns reveal how each generation constructs meaning through the technological environments it inhabits. However, as Paoletti (2025) argues, the ideological dimension of slang—particularly its role in shaping or challenging socio-political ideas—remains insufficiently explored. This gap highlights the importance of applying CDA to examine how Gen Z's linguistic creativity intersects with ideological representation in online discourse.

Slang has long been recognized as a form of linguistic innovation that reflects cultural values, resistance, and a sense of belonging. In digital spaces, however, slang extends beyond playful language use; it becomes a medium through which ideological positions are articulated and circulated (Roth-Gordon, 2020). On Instagram, for instance, terms such as “red flag,” “roasting,” or “no cap” convey implicit attitudes about morality, relationships, and authenticity. Through these expressions, Gen Z constructs a worldview that values individual freedom, irony, and social critique (Adhi & Masykuroh, 2025). Fairclough's CDA

offers an effective analytical lens for interpreting slang as a site of ideological struggle. The textual level allows researchers to examine the linguistic features that signal ideological stance, while the discursive and social levels reveal how these meanings are produced and normalized through online interactions (Wodak, 2011). By situating slang within Fairclough's model, researchers can examine how Gen Z's everyday linguistic choices contribute to broader ideological negotiations concerning identity, gender, and power in digital culture.

3. Research Method

This study is categorized as a descriptive qualitative research, utilizing Norman Fairclough's (1992, 2013) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework as the central analytical lens. The qualitative research enables an in-depth interpretation of linguistic phenomena and ideological meanings behind the slang expressions used by Generation Z on Instagram. Rather than quantifying occurrences, this approach focuses on describing how linguistic forms reflect social practices and ideological constructions embedded in digital discourse. The research design emphasizes understanding how language operates as a medium of ideology, identity, and resistance within Gen Z's online communication (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

The research focused on uncovering ideological meanings embedded in the slang expressions used by Generation Z on Instagram. The data consisted of linguistic units such as words, phrases, and short textual segments that represented common slang expressions, including "delulu", "roasting", "yapping", "rizz", "sigma", and "no cap". These terms were selected because they frequently appear in online communication and symbolize social and ideological meanings in Gen Z discourse. The data were taken from 31 publicly accessible Instagram posts uploaded between January and October 2025, originating from influencers, celebrities, meme creators, and ordinary users. Each post was documented along with relevant contextual information such as the account name, posting date, caption, and screenshot evidence. The study only analyzed publicly available posts to maintain ethical integrity and adhere to research ethics in digital ethnography (Snee et al., 2016).

The data collection process employed a documentation method that was supported by manual note-taking and screenshot archiving. The researcher continuously observed Instagram accounts known for using Gen Z slang throughout the research period. To ensure the relevance of the data, Google Trends and online slang dictionaries were used to verify the popularity and meaning of selected expressions. Purposive sampling was employed to select 31 posts that met three main criteria: frequent use of slang, social or cultural significance, and clear ideological representation. All collected data were then organized into a classification table, which contained the slang term, linguistic type, contextual meaning, social function, and source. This corpus construction ensured that the dataset represented a wide range of social contexts—personal, humorous, promotional, and ideological—thus providing a comprehensive basis for discourse analysis (Silverman, 2020).

The analysis of the corpus followed Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, which consists of the stages of description, interpretation, and explanation. In the first stage, description, the researcher examined the textual features of slang expressions, including their lexical, grammatical, and semantic structures, as well as multimodal components such as emojis, hashtags, and visual cues. The second stage, interpretation, analyzed how these linguistic forms were produced, circulated, and understood within Instagram's communicative environment. This stage emphasized how digital users interact with slang through captions, comments, and meme exchanges, illustrating the discursive practices that

sustain the social meanings of language. The final stage, explanation, connected the linguistic and discursive patterns to broader ideological contexts, identifying how slang reflected or resisted dominant values such as modernity, individuality, authenticity, and digital inclusivity. Through these interconnected stages, the study demonstrated how Gen Z's linguistic creativity on Instagram serves as both a reflection of social experience and a mechanism for ideological negotiation in digital culture (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak, 2011).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Findings

The data analyzed in this study consisted of 31 Instagram posts containing slang expressions commonly used by Generation Z in 2025. The posts were collected through purposive sampling, focusing on slang that appeared frequently in captions, hashtags, memes, and comments. The selected terms—such as “roasting,” “yapping,” “oversharing,” “delulu,” “TBH,” “red flag/green flag,” “rizz,” “sigma,” “no cap,” and “skibidi”—represent a variety of digital expressions through which Gen Z communicates identity, emotion, and ideology. Each post was examined through Fairclough's (1995, 2013) three-dimensional framework: textual, discursive, and social practice. This approach allowed for a holistic understanding of how linguistic creativity and social dynamics converge in the construction of digital ideology.

In terms of textual features, there are rewording (“oversharing,” “delulu,” “yapping”), metaphor (“roasting,” “red flag/green flag”), hyperbole (“rizz 100,” “no cap”), and the creative use of emojis (😊, 🗣️, 100, 🙌) that enhance tone, humor, and interpersonal meaning in digital interaction. Here are the findings of the textual features.

1. Rewording: “Oversharing,” “delulu,” “yapping”

These words are formed through lexical modification and semantic shift. “Oversharing” combines the prefix “over-” and the verb “share,” signaling excessive self-disclosure, while “delulu” (clipped from delusional) redefines a psychological term into humorous self-awareness. “Yapping” transfers animal-like imagery (“barking”) into social commentary on excessive talking.

2. Metaphor: “Roasting,” “red flag/green flag,” “rizz”

“Roasting” metaphorically expresses critique disguised as humor; “red flag/green flag” employs color as a moral metaphor to signify warning and approval; “rizz” metaphorically refers to charisma or charm as a quantifiable resource, turning abstract social appeal into a measurable trait.

3. Hyperbole: “Rizz 100,” “nobody can roast me better than my mom,” “no cap”

“Rizz 100” exaggerates the idea of having maximum charisma; “nobody can roast me better than my mom,” amplifying a humorous claim of familial teasing to express emotional closeness; “no cap” intensifies truth claims, functioning as emphatic hyperbole for sincerity. Through these overstatements, Gen Z emphasizes emotional expressiveness and irony, using exaggeration as a means of humor and identity performance.

4. Acronym: “TBH” (“to be honest”), “W/L” (“win/lose”), “No Cap”

These acronyms index authenticity and evaluation. “TBH” expresses honesty or sincerity, “W/L” frames judgment in binary terms, and “no cap” signals truthfulness, reinforcing Gen Z's ideology of performed authenticity.

5. Emoji: “😏”, “😬”, “👉”, “100”, “👌”, “🤪”

Emojis operate as paralinguistic cues that soften sarcasm, signal irony, and add emotional texture. For instance, “😏” or “😬” amplify humor or exaggeration; “👌” adds friendliness to irony; “👉” and “100” index confidence and approval, aligning with Gen Z's expressive and playful communication style.

4.2 Textual Analysis

4.2.1 Rewording

Rewording in Gen Z's slang represents lexical creativity where existing words are modified or recontextualized to express new social meanings. Examples include “oversharing”, “delulu”, and “yapping”. The word oversharing combines the prefix “over-” and the verb “share,” forming a new lexical item that humorously critiques excessive self-disclosure on social media. This modification reflects Gen Z's awareness of digital boundaries and the ideology of self-control in online spaces. Similarly, “delulu”—a clipped form of delusional—transforms a term with clinical connotations into a humorous expression of self-irony and emotional optimism. It reflects how Gen Z normalizes imperfection and embraces imagination as a coping mechanism in a high-pressure digital environment.

The term “yapping”, originally used to describe the sound of small dogs barking, has been reappropriated to describe people who talk excessively or unnecessarily. This rewording illustrates how Gen Z employs linguistic humor to critique social behavior in a lighthearted, non-aggressive manner. Overall, these examples show that rewording allows users to challenge conventional meanings and create new vocabularies that align with their cultural values of openness, humor, and creativity.

4.2.2 Metaphor

Metaphor serves as one of the most powerful textual devices in Gen Z's slang, enabling abstract concepts and social attitudes to be expressed in vivid and relatable terms. Expressions such as “roasting”, “red flag/green flag”, and “rizz” reveal how metaphorical language operates as a discursive tool for encoding ideology. The term roasting metaphorically refers to the act of “burning” someone with words, transforming criticism into playful humor. This metaphor enables users to engage in social critique without confrontation, reflecting an ideology of indirectness and irony prevalent in Gen Z communication.

The color-based metaphors “red flag/green flag” symbolize moral evaluation—warning and approval, respectively. These metaphors simplify complex interpersonal judgments into accessible visual codes that circulate widely in memes and hashtags. Their popularity demonstrates how metaphor facilitates shared cultural understanding and collective participation in moral discourse online. Meanwhile, “rizz”, a slang term for charisma, metaphorically conceptualizes charm as a measurable quantity—something one can “gain,” “lose,” or “have 100% of.” This metaphor reflects a neoliberal ideology of self-performance and social competitiveness, where personal appeal is treated as a quantifiable asset. Through such metaphors, Gen Z conveys its identity, social stance, and emotional tone in concise and symbolic ways. They use metaphor not only to entertain but also to position themselves ideologically within a digital culture that values humor, relatability, and self-awareness.

4.2.3 Hyperbole

Hyperbole, or deliberate exaggeration, is another salient feature of Gen Z's slang on Instagram. It serves to dramatize meaning, intensify emotion, and add humor or irony to digital communication. Common examples include "Rizz 100," "Nobody can roast me better than my mom," and "No cap." These expressions rely on overstatement to amplify affective force and convey playful self-expression. The phrase "rizz 100" exaggerates the level of one's charisma, implying maximum charm or confidence. It mirrors a gamified worldview where social traits are quantified, reinforcing Gen Z's engagement with performance-based identity in online spaces. Similarly, "nobody can roast me better than my mom" employs hyperbole to humorously elevate familial teasing into an exaggerated yet affectionate competition, softening criticism through humor. The expression "no cap" originated as an assertion of truth and now functions as emphatic hyperbole to reinforce sincerity and reliability. Through hyperbolic language, Gen Z constructs a discursive style that celebrates emotional expressiveness and irony. The exaggeration embedded in these phrases underscores an ideological stance that values humor and authenticity over formality and restraint. In digital interaction, hyperbole becomes a linguistic strategy for dramatizing identity, signaling confidence, and maintaining social connections.

4.2.4 Acronym

Acronyms are a pervasive textual feature in Gen Z communication, representing linguistic economy and shared cultural codes. Expressions such as "TBH" ("to be honest"), "W/L" ("win/lose"), and "no cap" exemplify abbreviation as a means of establishing in-group identity and signaling communicative efficiency. The acronym "TBH" is used to preface statements of sincerity, functioning as both a politeness marker and a performative cue of honesty. "W/L" reduces evaluative judgment into binary categories of success and failure, reflecting the digital generation's tendency toward instant categorization and moral shorthand. Meanwhile, "no cap"—though originally slang rather than a strict acronym—operates semantically as a compressed expression of authenticity, emphasizing the speaker's truthfulness. These linguistic shortcuts embody Gen Z's ideology of speed, simplicity, and emotional transparency in communication. By condensing meaning into recognizable codes, acronyms enhance group belonging and efficiency in online discourse. They also reflect a broader cultural tendency toward multimodal brevity, where words, symbols, and emojis collectively construct meaning in digital spaces.

4.2.5 Emoji

Emojis function as crucial multimodal elements that complement linguistic meaning and construct emotional tone. Far from being mere decoration, emojis such as 😊, 😬, 🙌, 🙄, 🙏, 🙌, and 🙄 serve pragmatic functions that clarify intent, reinforce humor, and express stance in online discourse. For instance, 😊 and 😬 are frequently paired with sarcastic captions to indicate laughter or mock despair, transforming potentially harsh statements into lighthearted humor. 🙌 adds friendliness or ironic detachment, while 🙄 and 🙏 signal confidence, empowerment, and approval. These visual symbols function as paralinguistic markers, conveying nuances of tone—softening sarcasm, signaling playfulness, or amplifying emphasis. In the context of Fairclough's (2013) textual analysis, emojis act as semiotic resources that bridge linguistic and visual communication. They function ideologically by embodying Gen Z's preference for emotional transparency and

expressive individuality. The integration of emojis into everyday writing illustrates a shift toward multimodal literacy, where visual symbols enhance relational meaning and reinforce digital intimacy.

The analysis of thirty-one Instagram posts containing Gen Z slang expressions revealed that language use among digital youth extends beyond casual communication and serves as a discursive site of ideological construction. Based on Fairclough's (1992, 2013) three-dimensional CDA framework, the data were analyzed through three stages: description, interpretation, and explanation. The descriptive stage identified linguistic patterns such as metaphor, acronymization, and rewording; the interpretative stage examined how users produced and circulated slang across social interactions; and the explanatory stage connected these discursive forms to broader ideological meanings within digital culture. The findings indicate that Gen Z's linguistic creativity reflects multiple ideological orientations, particularly those related to modernity, inclusivity, and identity, as well as resistance and self-expression. These ideologies appear not as abstract concepts but as lived discursive practices that shape how young users perceive power, authenticity, and belonging in online spaces.

The data demonstrate that certain slang expressions—such as “delulu”, “rizz”, “sigma”, “roasting”, “TBH”, and “red flag/green” flag—function as symbolic representations of generational values. While the frequency of usage varied, terms like “delulu” and “roasting” appeared most often in captions and memes, highlighting humor and self-irony as the dominant communicative strategies. In contrast, words such as “rizz” and “sigma” occurred in motivational or lifestyle contexts, indicating aspirational discourse linked to identity and self-image. These linguistic variations illustrate how ideology is encoded through language choice and multimodal expression, aligning with Fairclough's notion that discourse both reflects and reconstructs social reality.

4.3 Discursive Practice

Discursive practice refers to the processes through which language is produced, circulated, and interpreted within a specific social context. In the case of Gen Z's slang on Instagram, discursive practice highlights how linguistic creativity is not an isolated act of expression but a socially embedded process shaped by digital participation, community norms, and technological affordances. Following Fairclough's (1992, 2013) framework, the analysis of production, consumption, and distribution reveals how Gen Z collectively constructs meaning, reproduces ideology, and negotiates identity through everyday online discourse.

4.3.1 Production

The production of Gen Z's slang on Instagram is characterized by participatory authorship, where users—ranging from influencers and content creators to ordinary followers—actively coin, modify, and remix linguistic expressions. The creation of terms such as “delulu”, “rizz”, or “yapping” often originates from online micro-communities (e.g., fandoms, meme pages, and subcultures) and is later recontextualized into mainstream digital discourse.

This linguistic production process is closely tied to creativity and the performance of identity. Influencers and meme creators, for instance, use slang strategically to craft relatable personas and engage followers through humor and authenticity. Posts containing phrases like “stay delulu babes 🙌” or “rizz 100” are not merely linguistic play, but

intentional acts of self-branding that align with Gen Z's ideology of performative confidence. The production stage also reflects intertextuality, as users draw inspiration from popular culture, music lyrics, and internet trends. Through this intertextual recycling, slang becomes a living discourse—constantly evolving to accommodate new social meanings and ideological undertones. Thus, the production of slang on Instagram represents not only linguistic innovation but also ideological authorship, where users collectively shape the values of openness, humor, and individuality that define Gen Z communication.

4.3.2 Consumption

The consumption of Gen Z's slang involves the interpretation, engagement, and internalization of linguistic meaning by digital audiences. Users who encounter expressions such as “no cap”, “red flag”, or oversharing often understand their meanings through contextual cues—such as memes, emojis, and comment interactions—that guide their interpretation. Meaning, therefore, is not fixed by the producer but co-constructed through participatory responses such as likes, shares, comments, and duets.

This process of active interpretation illustrates Fairclough's (1992) notion of discourse as social practice: language meaning is shaped by both production and reception. Audiences engage with slang not only to decode information, but also to perform identity and establish a sense of belonging. For example, when followers reply to a post saying the same “delulu energy ✨”, they signal mutual understanding and alignment with the humor and ideology behind the term. Such interactions create a feedback loop in which meaning is continuously negotiated and reinforced through collective participation.

Furthermore, the consumption of slang reflects ideological alignment. When users adopt terms like “sigma” or “roasting,” they implicitly endorse the underlying values of independence, irony, and critique. In this way, consumption becomes an ideological act—a means of affiliating with shared generational values while participating in a broader digital discourse of self-expression.

4.3.3 Distribution

The distribution of Gen Z slang illustrates how language forms can spread rapidly through repost features and algorithmic visibility. Based on research data, terms such as “delulu” are not only popular due to their linguistic creativity but also because the communication environment on Instagram enables them to spread quickly and widely, especially within the K-pop fan community.

At the user level, slang spreads through interactive features such as captions, comments, memes, reels, and reposts on Insta Story. When influencers use terms such as “Sunday roasting 🌸” in their post captions, their followers tend to reuse them in their comments or personal posts. This repeated participation forms a distribution chain that makes slang a shared linguistic resource, which is continuously recontextualized in various communication situations. In addition, the use of hashtags such as “#sigma,” “#redlag,” and “#greenflag” also expands the reach of dissemination by connecting slang to a broader discursive network.

At the platform level, Instagram's algorithm also plays a significant role in the dissemination of slang. Posts involving slang, especially on reels and memes, often gain high engagement, which is then promoted through the explore and recommendation features, allowing them to be redistributed by the audience. The mechanism of this algorithm enables terms that were originally used only in a small circle to spread and become widely accepted.

For example, content such as “rizz 100” and “nobody can roast me better than my mom” is often reposted by Instagram's algorithm due to its high entertainment value, thereby reinforcing the normalization of these terms.

4.4 Social Practice

4.4.1 Ideology of Modernity

At the descriptive level, several slang terms embody modernity through linguistic innovation and digital adaptability. Expressions such as “rizz,” “TBH,” and “no cap” represent the modernization of interpersonal communication by emphasizing confidence, honesty, and authenticity in online interactions. The abbreviations “TBH” (“to be honest”) and “no cap” (“no lie”) serve as discursive markers of sincerity, reflecting a generational shift toward transparency and self-expression in digital communication.

Interpreted within discursive practice, these words circulate widely across memes and comments, normalizing an ideology of modern authenticity that values openness yet remains performative. Users employ “TBH” to appear genuine, while simultaneously crafting a self-image that aligns with the aesthetic and emotional codes of social media culture. This duality reflects what Marwick and Boyd (2014) describe as “performed authenticity,” where honesty itself becomes a mediated performance.

At the explanatory level, these linguistic trends reveal that Gen Z constructs modernity not solely through technological progress but through the redefinition of moral and emotional values in digital spaces. The use of concise, coded slang demonstrates the modern ideal of efficiency and immediacy, while simultaneously reinforcing the neoliberal value of self-branding. Similar to findings by Wafa and Amalia (2022), the prevalence of “TBH” and “no cap” underscores that Gen Z's communication style is shaped by an ideology of modernization that privileges individual authenticity over collective conformity.

4.4.2 Ideology of Inclusivity and Identity

The second major ideological pattern relates to inclusivity and identity construction. At the descriptive level, words such as “delulu”, “red flag/green flag”, and “yapping” exhibit linguistic creativity that blends humor with social awareness. The clipped form “delulu” (from “delusional”) is a notable example of how psychological terminology is recontextualized into self-referential humor. Similarly, the metaphorical pairing of “red flag/green flag” simplifies complex interpersonal behaviors into accessible moral categories.

Interpretatively, these slangs are used as community markers that foster belonging and shared understanding within online groups. The frequent appearance of “delulu” in fandom posts, for example, builds collective solidarity through self-irony. When users say “stay delulu babes 🙌” They affirm both individuality and group membership, embodying what Paula et al. (2024) term as “linguistic bonding in digital tribes.” Likewise, “red flag” memes invite participatory evaluation, creating a sense of moral community where users collectively define what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

At the explanatory level, these practices reveal an ideology of inclusivity rooted in the desire for connection and emotional visibility. Gen Z utilizes language to democratize identity expression, transforming private emotions into public discourse and thereby challenging hierarchical norms of communication. This aligns with Van Dijk's (2006) argument that ideology operates as a shared cognitive structure shaping group identity. By reappropriating stigmatized or clinical terms like “delulu”, Gen Z transforms marginal

linguistic forms into expressions of empowerment and acceptance, reinforcing inclusivity as a defining feature of their digital identity.

4.4.3 Ideology of Resistance and Self-Expression

The third ideological pattern emerging from the corpus involves resistance and self-expression, most evident in slang such as “roasting”, “sigma”, and “skibidi”. At the descriptive level, “roasting” uses metaphor and irony to mask criticism within humor, while “sigma” and “skibidi” reflect linguistic play that challenges social conventions. The term “sigma,” originally denoting an independent archetype, has evolved into a symbolic expression of self-determination and defiance against mainstream notions of masculinity. Meanwhile, “skibidi”, a nonsensical word from meme culture, embodies post-ironic creativity that rejects rational or traditional forms of communication.

At the interpretative level, these slangs circulate through comment threads, reels, and meme communities as acts of discursive play. Their viral repetition transforms them into tools of collective resistance against seriousness and authority. Users adopt “roasting” as a socially acceptable form of critique and “skibidi” as a humorous rejection of coherence itself, illustrating what Shifman (2021) terms “networked play,” where absurdity becomes a shared cultural code. This usage positions humor not as trivial entertainment but as a subtle act of ideological opposition.

At the explanatory level, these discursive patterns demonstrate how Gen Z employs language to resist normative expectations while constructing alternative value systems. The ideology of resistance is visible in how irony and humor are used to destabilize social hierarchies, critique societal norms, and celebrate self-expression. In line with Fairclough’s (2013) concept of discourse as a site of struggle, slang such as “roasting” and “sigma” reveal how everyday digital communication becomes a means of negotiating autonomy and power. This supports the findings of Among (2025), who emphasizes that youth discourse online functions as both a form of cultural resistance and a mechanism for ideological renewal.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of Gen Z slang on Instagram reveals that language in digital spaces serves not only as a means of communication but also as an ideological practice that shapes identity, values, and social interactions. Using Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework, this study found that textual features such as rewording, metaphor, hyperbole, acronyms, and emojis encode ideologies of humor, authenticity, and emotional openness; discursive practices involving influencers, memes, and fandoms transform these expressions into shared cultural norms; and social practices reflect broader ideologies of modernity, inclusivity, and resistance. The novelty of this study lies in its critical discourse approach that links linguistic creativity to ideological construction, revealing how Gen Z uses slang to challenge norms and redefine identity in digital culture. Although limited to English-based Instagram data, the findings provide valuable insights for future research to explore multilingual or cross-platform variations. Theoretically, this study strengthens the role of Critical Discourse Analysis in understanding how online discourse reproduces and negotiates ideology. Practically, it underscores the significance of youth language as a reflection of cultural values and social transformation in the digital age.

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