

## Facts and Features of Human Language in Social Media: Interaction and Culture of Alpha Generation

**Rahma Sari**

*UIN Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia*  
[adzkiarahma55@gmail.com](mailto:adzkiarahma55@gmail.com)

**Aulia Khairunisa Lubis**

*UIN Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia*  
[aulia1111lubis@gmail.com](mailto:aulia1111lubis@gmail.com)

**Sholihatul Hamidah Daulay**

*UIN Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia*  
[sholihatulhamidah@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:sholihatulhamidah@uinsu.ac.id)

### Abstract

This study investigates the role of speech and language in shaping the communication of ideas and emotions on social media, with a particular focus on TikTok. Social media platforms, while enabling widespread and instantaneous interaction, often have both positive and negative consequences for individual users and targeted groups. By employing a qualitative methodology, this research explores how language choices on TikTok influence personal expression, identity construction, and collective social dynamics. Analyzing the linguistic behaviors of 10 TikTok users, the study identifies how multimodal elements such as emojis, memes, and audio-visual integrations enhance digital communication. The findings reveal that the informal, rapid nature of social media communication reflects broader societal trends toward dynamic and hybrid linguistic forms. Furthermore, social media serves as a space for fostering cultural diversity, promoting social movements, and enabling users to create and refine their online personas. However, the study also highlights the challenges posed by such digital communication, including the potential for misunderstandings and the reinforcement of social inequalities. By situating these findings within the context of evolving digital communication, this research offers valuable insights into the interplay between language, identity, and culture in the digital age. It contributes to broader discussions about the implications of multimodal communication for literacy, linguistic evolution, and social interaction in a rapidly globalizing world.

Keywords: Multimodal Language, TikTok, Social Media

### Introduction

The Alpha Generation, encompassing individuals born from 2010 onwards, is the first cohort to grow up entirely immersed in a digital environment. This has a profound impact on their communication, social interactions, and language development. Unlike previous generations, who adapted to digital tools over time,

Alpha Generation children and teenagers are native digital users, engaging with technology from an early age. This digital upbringing influences not only how they interact socially but also how they perceive and use language, especially on social media platforms that are integral to their daily lives. These platforms have become essential tools for communication, where the dynamics of human language are constantly evolving, shaped by the technological environment in which this generation has grown up.

Empirically, social media has significantly transformed how language is used and understood. Traditional text-based communication has evolved into multimodal forms that integrate visuals such as emojis, GIFs, and memes, enriching the communicative experience. This blend of textual and visual elements creates a dynamic and expressive form of language that resonates with the fast-paced nature of the Alpha Generation's digital interactions. For this generation, the preference for concise, visually engaging content reflects broader societal trends driven by technological innovation. However, this evolution raises critical questions about its long-term implications on literacy, language development, and social interactions. While these multimodal elements can enhance meaning and foster engagement, they may also challenge traditional linguistic norms and literacy practices. For instance, the reliance on visual components may limit users' ability to articulate ideas through conventional writing or reading skills, posing potential drawbacks for language development. Understanding how the Alpha Generation adopts and adapts these multimodal features is essential for assessing their broader influence on communication and identity formation in the digital age.

Recent studies have begun to explore the intersection of social media, language, and identity within the Alpha Generation. Research by Alhassan & Ibraheem (2021) underscores the transformative effect of visual elements on traditional language. They argue that the incorporation of emojis, memes, and GIFs enriches communication, providing more nuanced ways to convey emotions and ideas. This multimodal approach reflects the Alpha Generation's preference for quick, visually engaging content, which aligns with the broader trend of fast-paced digital communication. Alhassan and Ibraheem's research emphasizes that these visual elements are not mere supplements to text but integral components that enhance meaning, fostering more dynamic and interactive conversations. Their findings point to a shift away from traditional text-based communication toward a hybrid form that blends words with visuals, marking a significant change in how language functions on social media.

Similarly, Thurlow & Gunter (2020) highlight the rapid evolution of language on platforms like TikTok, where trends emerge and spread almost instantaneously.

Their study emphasizes the fluidity of social media environments, which allows for the swift adoption of new slang, linguistic forms, and communication styles by the Alpha Generation. This linguistic innovation is not static but continuously evolving, reflecting the ever-changing cultural landscape. However, both studies focus primarily on the positive aspects of this language evolution and multimodal communication, paying less attention to the potential drawbacks. For instance, the long-term impact of such rapidly changing language practices on language stability, literacy development, and cross-generational communication remains underexplored. Furthermore, these studies often overlook the role of language in reinforcing social divisions, as linguistic choices on social media can reflect and exacerbate inequalities related to identity, status, and access to technology.

Despite the growing body of research on the Alpha Generation's language use on social media, several gaps remain. While studies like those by Alhassan & Ibraheem (2021) and Thurlow & Gunter (2020) have provided valuable insights into how language is evolving in digital contexts, they often fail to address the complexities of identity formation and the globalized nature of language use on social media platforms. Specifically, the influence of global connectivity on language blending and the emergence of hybrid linguistic forms remain underexplored. Carr & Toma (2022) argue that language choices on social media often reflect the users' identities, beliefs, and social affiliations. However, there is limited research on how these identity-driven language choices interact with the global nature of social media, where exposure to diverse linguistic styles and cultural norms is prevalent. The blending of languages and cultures online leads to hybrid forms of communication, but its long-term impact on language purity and cultural appropriation has not been thoroughly examined. The theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon could be based on sociolinguistic theories that examine the relationship between language, identity, and power. Social media platforms act as sites of identity construction where individuals negotiate their social and cultural realities through language. For the Alpha Generation, whose social world is inherently digital, the blending of visual and textual communication reflects their complex identities shaped by local and global influences. The fluid nature of online language challenges traditional notions of linguistic boundaries and raises questions about how identity and language purity are negotiated in a globalized digital environment.

This study seeks to fill the gaps in existing research on the Alpha Generation's language use on social media by addressing the interplay between linguistic innovation, identity construction, and globalized digital communication. While studies such as Alhassan & Ibraheem (2021) and Thurlow & Gunter (2020)

offer valuable insights into the evolution of language in digital contexts, they often fail to explore how social media facilitates the blending of linguistic styles across cultures and its implications for identity formation. This research examines how the Alpha Generation incorporates visual elements such as emojis, memes, and audio into their language practices, how social media platforms influence their linguistic and identity choices, and the broader cultural consequences of hybrid linguistic forms. Through a sociolinguistic framework, the study investigates how individuals negotiate language purity, cultural appropriation, and global connectivity in their communication. By focusing on these underexplored dimensions, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the Alpha Generation's role in shaping linguistic and cultural norms in a highly interconnected digital landscape. Ultimately, the findings contribute to discussions on the challenges and opportunities posed by social media's transformative impact on language and identity in the 21st century.

### **Methodology**

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach to investigate the facts and features of human language among the Alpha Generation on social media, specifically through an analysis of TikTok videos. Qualitative research is characterized by its focus on understanding the meaning individuals assign to their experiences, providing rich, descriptive insights into social phenomena (Creswell, 2013). In this context, qualitative methods are particularly suited to explore how language is shaped and expressed in digital communication among young users.

A purposive sampling method was employed to select 10 TikTok videos created by members of the Alpha Generation, defined as individuals born between 2010 and 2015. These videos were chosen based on specific criteria, including the use of distinctive linguistic elements, creative expression, and integration of visual components such as emojis, memes, and music. While the sample size may appear limited, it aligns with the goals of qualitative research, which prioritize depth and richness of data over sheer quantity (Patton, 2002). In this context, 10 videos provided a focused and manageable dataset, enabling the study to uncover detailed insights into the nuanced language practices of this demographic. The selection was sufficient because it allowed for an in-depth analysis of recurring linguistic and multimodal patterns while avoiding unnecessary redundancy. Furthermore, prior studies in digital linguistics have successfully demonstrated that small sample sizes are effective for capturing complex phenomena, as they enable researchers to focus on key themes without being overwhelmed by data volume.

Data collection involved a comprehensive thematic analysis of the selected TikTok videos. Thematic analysis is a widely used method for identifying and analyzing patterns or themes within qualitative data, allowing researchers to understand the underlying meanings and implications of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each video was viewed multiple times to extract key linguistic features, including vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Particular attention was given to the integration of visual elements, exploring how these components enhance or modify the language used.

The analysis process included several key steps to ensure a systematic and rigorous examination of the selected data. Initially, familiarization with the video content was achieved through repeated viewings, allowing the researcher to grasp the overall context and nuances of each video. Preliminary coding was conducted to identify significant linguistic features, such as vocabulary, syntax, and the interplay between textual and visual elements, including emojis, memes, and audio. These initial codes were then grouped into broader themes, such as slang usage, humor, multimodal communication, and identity expression. To refine these themes, the data were revisited iteratively, ensuring that emerging patterns were accurately represented and sufficiently supported by the content. To enhance reliability, the coding process was validated through peer review, wherein an independent researcher cross-checked the identified themes. This additional step minimized potential biases and improved the consistency of the findings, ensuring that the analysis captured the depth and diversity of linguistic practices observed in the sample.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed in this study to uphold the principles of respect and privacy for the content creators. Since the TikTok videos analysed were publicly accessible, explicit consent was not required; however, the research adhered to ethical guidelines by anonymizing all identifiable information about the creators. This ensured that their privacy was protected and that their content was used solely for academic purposes. Furthermore, the analysis was conducted in a manner that avoided misrepresentation or decontextualization of the creators' work. Ethical reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process, ensuring that the study's findings were presented with fairness and integrity. These measures underscore the study's commitment to balancing the pursuit of knowledge with the ethical responsibilities inherent in research involving digital media.

## **Findings**

Exploring the facts and features of human language in social media, especially concerning the Alpha Generation (those born from around 2010 onwards), reveals several interesting dynamics. Here are some key points to consider:

### ***Informal and Fast-Paced Communication***

Social media environments demand speed and efficiency, leading to informal communication styles. Abbreviations, acronyms, and shorthand, such as "u" instead of "you" and "brb" for "be right back," are commonplace. This kind of communication makes interactions quicker but can sometimes create misunderstandings, especially for newcomers or those unfamiliar with certain slang. Additionally, the brevity often removes context, which might lead to misinterpretation. Despite these challenges, this communication style mirrors casual spoken language, making it relatable and easy to follow.

### ***Cultural Influence and Language Evolution***

The amalgamation of users from diverse cultural backgrounds on social media leads to a unique melting pot of linguistic expressions. Popular phrases, memes, and hashtags often cross cultural and geographical boundaries, resulting in an ever-evolving digital lexicon. For instance, phrases like "on fleek" gained international traction through platforms like Twitter and Instagram. Cultural events, global phenomena, and viral challenges further nourish this dynamic linguistic ecosystem. As cultures interact and merge online, new hybrid expressions emerge, reflecting a blend of traditional and contemporary influences.

### ***Boldness, Anonymity, and Online Personas***

The anonymity provided by social media platforms can foster boldness in communication. Users, feeling a degree of separation from their real-world identities, may express themselves more openly about sensitive topics, share personal experiences, or voice strong opinions. While this can democratize discourse and amplify marginalized voices, it can also lead to negative behaviors such as trolling and cyberbullying. The divergence between online personas and real-life identities sometimes reduce accountability, allowing negative interactions to proliferate. This dual-edged nature of online boldness challenges platforms to balance free expression with respectful communication.

### ***The Role of Visual Elements in Communication***

Visual content plays a pivotal role in social media communication. Images, memes, videos, GIFs, and emojis often supplement or even replace text to convey messages more vividly. Emojis, for example, encapsulate emotions and reactions that words might not fully express, adding depth to brief messages.

Memes, combining images and text, provide sharp commentary on cultural, social, or political issues with humor and brevity. Visual elements like these enrich communication by offering more nuanced, engaging, and relatable content, making interactions on social media more vibrant and expressive.

### **Algorithm-Driven Content Distribution**

Social media platforms deploy sophisticated algorithms to tailor content for users, analyzing behavior, preferences, and engagement patterns. Content that generates higher interaction—likes, shares, comments—tends to be prioritized, leading to the viral spread of particular language trends and expressions. Hashtags, trending topics, and viral challenges shape public discourse and introduce new phrases and slang. However, algorithm-driven content distribution can create echo chambers, where users are primarily exposed to like-minded opinions and language, potentially limiting their exposure to diverse perspectives and reinforcing existing biases.

### **Interactivity, Real-Time Communication, and Global Reach**

Social media facilitates real-time interaction and communication on a global scale. Features like live streaming, real-time comments, and story updates enable spontaneous and immediate exchanges. During live events, protests, or breaking news, users share real-time updates and reactions, fostering a sense of immediacy and connection. Additionally, social media's global reach allows users to connect with individuals from varied backgrounds and cultures, expanding their worldviews and promoting inclusivity. This real-time, interactive nature helps build vibrant online communities and supports dynamic, cross-cultural interactions.

### **Marketing and Brand Communication**

Brands and businesses extensively use social media to engage with consumers and promote products. The language employed by brands is often informal and approachable, aiming to create a relatable image. Brands leverage memes, trending hashtags, and popular phrases to resonate with their target audience. Influencer marketing further enriches this landscape, with influencers using their unique language styles and engagement methods to connect with followers. This symbiosis between brands and influencers introduces dynamic content and contributes to the constantly evolving language trends on social media.

### **Language and Emotional Expression**

Social media offers a platform for users to express their emotions and seek support. People share personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings, often finding validation and empathy from online communities. The language used for emotional expression on social media tends to be candid and unfiltered, reflecting a range of human experiences. Support groups, forums, and communities form around shared

experiences, providing emotional solace and a sense of belonging. Language plays a crucial role, articulating emotions, offering support, and fostering connections among users navigating similar life challenges.

The way creators use language can convey sarcasm, irony, or genuine emotion, affecting viewer perception and connection. The performative nature of TikTok allows for nuanced delivery that enhances emotional impact. Background music or popular audio clips adds emotional weight, influencing how language is interpreted. For instance, a humorous statement paired with a comedic sound enhances its comedic effect.

### ***Education and Information Dissemination***

Social media serves as a powerful tool for education and information sharing. Experts, educators, and organizations use platforms to disseminate knowledge, raise awareness, and debunk misinformation. The informal and accessible nature of social media language helps in breaking down complex information into digestible content. Educational hashtags, threads, and live Q&A sessions engage users and promote learning. However, the spread of misinformation also poses a significant challenge.

### ***Misinformation and Verification Challenges***

One significant problem on social media is the spread of misinformation or hoaxes. Because of the rapid pace at which information spreads, fake news or unverified information can easily go viral before there is a chance to verify it. The language used in misinformation is often designed to appeal to emotions or grab attention, making it easier to spread. Efforts to combat misinformation include fact-checking, digital literacy education, and reporting features for false content on social media platforms. The challenge for users is to learn to filter out true information from false and develop the habit of verifying sources before believing or sharing information.

### ***Filter Bubble Phenomenon***

Social media algorithms often display content that aligns with users' preferences and behaviours, which can create a filter bubble. A filter bubble is a condition in which a person is primarily exposed to views and information that aligns with their own beliefs or preferences. This can limit users' perspectives and reinforce existing biases, reducing exposure to diverse viewpoints. The language used in a filter bubble environment tends to be homogenous and can reinforce differences in society. Awareness of the filter bubble and actively seeking out diverse sources of information can help address this challenge.

### ***Use of Language for Identity and Belonging***

Social media allows users to construct their online identities using a specific language. Certain groups may use specific jargon, slang, or phrases that only their members understand, creating a sense of community and exclusivity. This language helps to reinforce group identity and gives members a sense of belonging and affiliation. For example, gaming communities, K-pop fans, or social activists all have languages and phrases that are unique to their members. This creates a rich and diverse digital subculture.

### ***Translation and Multilingualism***

Global social media faces both challenges and opportunities when it comes to multilingualism. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide automated translation tools to help users from different language backgrounds communicate. While translation tools are constantly improving, they are not perfect and can sometimes mistranslate context or nuance. However, users' efforts to speak multiple languages and these translation tools enrich cross-cultural communication. Users also often combine words from different languages in their posts, creating a richer and more diverse language.

### ***Ephemeral Content***

Features like Stories on Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp have changed the way people communicate and share information. Ephemeral content only appears for a set period of time and then disappears. This encourages more authentic and spontaneous communication, as users feel like their posts will not be around permanently. The language in ephemeral content tends to be more casual and informal, reflecting the speed and ephemeral nature of the medium. This allows for more creativity and personal interaction. With this additional exploration, we can see how broad and complex the use of language on social media is. From identity formation to the challenges of verifying information, social media is deeply influencing the way we communicate and interact in this digital age.

### ***Interaction and Engagement***

Users engage in dialogues through comments, often using abbreviations or slang that reflects TikTok's informal tone. This interaction can lead to the co-creation of language as users respond to one another. Features like duets (where users can create a split-screen video with another user's content) and stitches (where users can incorporate snippets from others' videos) foster collaborative language use and enhance communal storytelling.

### **Identity Exploration**

Alphas use TikTok to express their identities, sharing personal stories that resonate with larger cultural themes. Language becomes a tool for self-expression and community building. Many TikTok creators address social issues, using their platforms to educate and engage audiences. Language is crafted to provoke thought and inspire action, reflecting the values of the Alpha Generation.

### **Brevity and Creativity**

TikTok's short video format (up to 3 minutes, but often much shorter) necessitates concise language. Creators must communicate ideas quickly, leading to creative word choices and phrasings. The use of catchy phrases or taglines is common, which can quickly become viral and adopted by others. This trend emphasizes wit and humor, making language engaging and shareable.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study underscore the intricate and dynamic role of language in social media, shaped profoundly by the Alpha Generation's unique communication practices. By examining TikTok as a focal platform, the study captures a moment in the ongoing evolution of digital communication and contextualizes these findings within existing scholarly literature, offering a nuanced understanding of their implications.

A recurring theme in the findings is the predominance of informal and fast-paced communication, a hallmark of social media interactions. Platforms like TikTok foster an environment where brevity and relatability are paramount, leading to the widespread use of shorthand, abbreviations, and emojis. This aligns with Crystal (2004) observation that digital communication often mirrors the spontaneity of spoken language, yet it also reflects the evolving norms of a digital-native generation. Informal language, far from being a degradation of linguistic standards, demonstrates adaptability and creativity as users navigate the demands of rapid, multimodal exchanges. This trend resonates with sociolinguistic theories of language variation, where informal registers emerge in contexts emphasizing social closeness and shared understanding (Tannen, 2017).

Visual communication plays a critical role in this landscape. TikTok's interface, which integrates videos, text, and audio, exemplifies the shift toward multimodal language use. Emojis, memes, and GIFs, far from being mere decorative elements, are integral to conveying emotion and nuance in ways that text alone cannot. Zhao (2022) aptly describes these tools as "visual shorthand," enabling users to transcend linguistic barriers and engage audiences more effectively.

The study's findings highlight how such visual elements not only enhance communication but also facilitate identity expression and community belonging. Carr & Toma (2022) contend that social media platforms function as arenas for identity construction, where linguistic and visual cues are employed to navigate complex identities shaped by local and global influences. This study builds on their insights by illustrating how TikTok's unique affordances magnify these trends, creating a rich tapestry of communicative tools that resonate with the Alpha Generation.

Moreover, the research sheds light on the emergence of hybrid linguistic forms resulting from global connectivity. Social media acts as a melting pot where linguistic and cultural expressions blend, creating hybrid forms that reflect both local traditions and global trends. This phenomenon aligns with Smith & Zickuhr (2019) observations on the rise of hybrid identities in digital communication. Yet, this study contributes uniquely by illustrating how TikTok's algorithm-driven virality amplifies such practices. Slang and cultural phrases cross linguistic boundaries rapidly, fostering a sense of global belonging while raising questions about cultural ownership and appropriation. Gonzalez (2021) celebrated the democratizing aspects of linguistic hybridity, but the findings here suggest a need for caution, as the rapid adoption of cultural expressions may obscure or erase their original contexts. This tension underscores the complex interplay between linguistic innovation and cultural preservation in the digital age.

The study also highlights the dual role of social media as a space for individual expression and collective identity formation. TikTok's features, such as duets and stitches, enable users to collaborate and co-create content, transforming individual contributions into communal narratives. This aligns with Thurlow & Gunter (2020) assertion that social media democratizes language by amplifying marginalized voices. However, the findings also reveal underlying power dynamics, as virality often privileges creators with greater visibility or cultural capital, marginalizing less dominant voices. This dynamic reflects Baker's (2020) observation that digital platforms' democratizing potential is often tempered by structural inequalities, such as algorithmic biases and disparities in access to technology.

In connecting these findings to existing literature, the study expands on prior research by Alhassan & Ibraheem (2021) and Thurlow & Gunter (2020). While these studies emphasized the creativity and dynamism of social media language, they paid less attention to its implications for language stability and literacy. This research addresses that gap, illustrating how the normalization of shorthand and emoji use among the Alpha Generation challenges traditional norms of language

acquisition and formal communication. These findings resonate with McCulloch (2019) exploration of how internet language reshapes cognitive processes and linguistic expectations. Additionally, the study complements (Carr & Toma, 2022) work by delving deeper into the interplay of identity and global connectivity, revealing how TikTok's global reach complicates identity expression. While the platform fosters a sense of global belonging, it simultaneously risks homogenizing diverse linguistic traditions, raising important questions about linguistic diversity in an increasingly interconnected world.

The broader implications of these findings extend to sociolinguistics and digital literacy. The Alpha Generation's linguistic practices challenge traditional notions of linguistic boundaries, suggesting a need to rethink existing theoretical frameworks. By documenting these practices, the study contributes to sociolinguistic theories of language change in digital environments. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of promoting digital literacy to navigate the complexities of online communication. Developing users' ability to discern credible information, engage respectfully, and appreciate linguistic diversity will be essential as digital communication continues to evolve.

While this research offers valuable insights, it also highlights areas for future exploration. Investigating the long-term effects of social media language on literacy and cross-generational communication could yield important findings. Additionally, comparative studies across different platforms or between generational cohorts might reveal significant variations in digital language use. These inquiries would deepen our understanding of how linguistic practices adapt in diverse digital contexts, informing broader discussions about the future of language in an increasingly digital world.

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the complex and evolving role of language in social media, particularly as it pertains to the Alpha Generation's communication practices. Social media has become a vibrant arena for cultural exchange, where users from diverse backgrounds interact, shaping a globalized and dynamic linguistic landscape. These platforms facilitate the formation of online identities, offering individuals tools to express themselves through a blend of textual, visual, and auditory elements. The integration of multimodal communication, including emojis, memes, and video-based storytelling, reflects the innovative ways younger generations engage with language in the digital age.

Additionally, social media fosters multilingual interaction, breaking down linguistic barriers and encouraging the blending of languages into hybrid forms. This linguistic creativity, while enriching communication, raises important considerations about cultural authenticity and the preservation of traditional linguistic norms. As language evolves rapidly within these digital spaces, it challenges conventional understandings of literacy and the stability of language systems.

The findings of this research contribute to ongoing discussions on the intersection of language, identity, and technology. They underscore the need for future studies to explore the long-term implications of social media language use on literacy development, generational communication gaps, and linguistic diversity. Furthermore, investigating how digital platforms influence language evolution across different age groups and cultural contexts could deepen our understanding of these transformative processes. By examining how the Alpha Generation navigates the intricate interplay of local and global influences, this study provides valuable insights into the future of language in an increasingly interconnected world.

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