

# The Use of Emojis and Abbreviations in Generation Z Communication on TikTok Social Media

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## ABSTRACT

The development of social media has given rise to various new linguistic phenomena in Generation Z's digital communication, one of which is the use of emojis and abbreviations on social media TikTok. Emojis and abbreviations are not only used as This research aims to describe the form of emoji, the form of abbreviations, the meaning of emojis, and the meaning of abbreviations in Generation Z communication on TikTok social media. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with pragmatic and semantic studies. The research data was in the form of comments, captions, and posts on TikTok that contained emojis and abbreviations. Data collection techniques were carried out through non-participant observation, structured interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique uses the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model which includes data reduction, data presentation, as well as conclusion drawing and verification. The results of the study showed that emojis are used as a form of expressive speech to express the feelings and attitudes of the speaker, such as happiness, sadness, sarcasm, humor, and apology. Meanwhile, abbreviations show the meaning of denotation and connotation in digital communication. Generation Z's use of emojis and abbreviations on TikTok's social media reflects an expressive, concise, and contextual form of communication. This research is expected to provide an understanding of the dynamics of digital language in pragmatic and semantic studies.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization and digitalization, social media has become an inseparable element of modern society's life. The development of communication technology has changed the way people obtain information, interact, and build social relationships in daily life (Nasrullah, 2021; Hidayat & Prasetyo, 2022). Every generation, especially the younger generation, is experiencing a transformation in the way they communicate and build social identity. One of the most prominent phenomena is the shift of language from formal forms to more creative, rapid, and contextual forms. Generation Z, who were born between the 1990s and the early 2010s, grew up in an environment very

close to technology, thus giving rise to new dynamics in language practices that are more expressive and less rigid (Putri & Rahmawati, 2023; Setiawan et al., 2024).

This phenomenon emerged in response to the need for instant, interactive, and effectiveness-oriented communication. The speed of information exchange on social media has led to the birth of new forms of language that are more concise and emotional, such as emojis and abbreviations (Yuliana & Hendra, 2022). In line with that, it is stated that "the language patterns of the younger generation not only reflect communication preferences, but also become a representation of social dynamics as well as the process of forming their linguistic identity" (Wulandari & Asrianti, 2025). Digital language has developed as a form of adaptation to a fast-paced and multimodal communication environment, so that meaning is not only conveyed through words, but also through symbols, images, and other visual signs (Sari & Nugroho, 2023). This shows that language not only involves words, but also becomes a means of constructing and interpreting meaning in social interactions. One of these linguistic phenomena is seen in the TikTok application.

TikTok is a popular application that is widely used by Generation Z. This platform is not only an entertainment medium, but also a space for the formation of digital culture and new language practices that are growing massively among young users (Pramesti et al., 2024). The application, which was launched in 2016 and was originally named Douyin, has given rise to various linguistic phenomena, one of which is the use of emojis and abbreviations in communication. Based on data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in the 2025 Indonesian Internet Profile Survey, TikTok is one of the most widely used platforms by the younger generation with a percentage of users of 42.27 percent. In interactions on the platform, users often use emojis and abbreviations to convey emotions, opinions, and attitudes quickly and efficiently. Research shows that the use of emojis has evolved from just a complement to a message to an integral part of a digital communication strategy that functions to clarify the intent and emotions of the speaker (Dewi & Kurniawan, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2024).

In the practice of digital communication, the use of emojis and abbreviations also indicates a shift in meaning from their literal meaning. This shift occurs because social media users often construct new meanings based on collective experiences and digital culture that develop in online communities (Amelia & Firmansyah, 2023). For example, emojis 🧢 (blue hats) that visually show a plain blue hat, in their use are no longer meant literally. This emoji began to gain popularity on social media such as TikTok and X around 2020, and was later widely used by Generation Z to express disbelief or flag that a statement is considered untrue. Based on the results of the researcher's initial observations, this blue hat emoji is used to tell that someone is lying. In fact, this emoji is often used in the form of sarcasm or indirect responses, such as in the speech "yes you're right bang 🧢" which actually has the opposite meaning.

In addition, the use of emojis 😞 also shows the diversity of meanings in digital communication. Although it generally represents a crying expression, in practice this emoji is used to express various attitudes and feelings of the speaker. Recent research findings show that the meaning of emojis is highly dependent on the context of user use and interpretation so that one emoji can have diverse pragmatic functions (Rahman & Sulastri, 2024; Lestari et al., 2025). Based on the researchers' initial observations, emojis 😞 are not only used to show sadness, but can also mean tiredness, as in the speech "I don't really understand myself 😞😞😞😞"; then expressing shock, such as "in my place the early childhood teacher just graduated from junior high school 😞"; then show excessive laughter or laughter responses, such as "I don't read comments 😞 very well"; and expressing frustration with humorous nuances, such as "trying not to repost 😞". In addition, this emoji is also used to convey sadness or sympathy, such as in the speech "leave the way for other drivers, mother 😞".

Meanwhile, abbreviations such as YGY (Ya Guys Ya) are used to reinforce statements or as affirmations as well as create a relaxed and familiar impression in interactions, such as in the speech "He is indeed the most diligent in class, YGY". The phenomenon of the emergence of various abbreviations in social media shows that there is a tendency for users to create a more economical but still communicative form of language (Fauziah & Hamzah, 2023). This phenomenon shows that both emojis and abbreviations have developed functions in digital communication which are greatly influenced by the context of use, and play an important role in conveying attitudes, emotions, and meanings in interactions on social media.

This phenomenon of shifting meaning requires a more specific analysis based on the characteristics of each linguistic element. In this case, emojis and abbreviations have different properties so that they require a different approach to study, namely through a pragmatic and semantic point of view. Pragmatic studies are considered relevant because the meaning that emerges in digital communication often depends on the context of the situation, the relationship between participants, and the communication goals to be achieved (Yusuf & Anwar, 2022).

Emojis in form are visual representations that fall into the semiotic category because they function as signs or symbols. However, in the practice of digital communication, emojis do not only serve as symbols, but also as a substitute for nonverbal expressions such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body movements that cannot be transmitted through writing. This causes the meaning of emojis to be not fixed, but rather highly dependent on the context of speech and communication situations. Therefore, in this study, emojis are studied through a pragmatic approach, especially expressive speech acts. This approach was chosen because the use of emojis is related to the speaker's actions in expressing feelings or psychological attitudes towards a situation (Kusuma & Laili, 2024). Thus, the analysis of emojis does not only focus on their symbolic form, but also on their communicative function as a means of expressing emotions, such as happiness, disappointment, sarcasm, and longing in digital interactions.

Meanwhile, abbreviations indicate a form of communication that is concise but still contains complex meanings. Unlike emojis that function as markers of expression in the context of speech, abbreviations are lexical forms that have meanings that can be identified directly or through certain associations. Therefore, in this study, abbreviations are studied through a semantic approach, especially the meaning of denotation and connotation. Denotation meanings refer to the actual meaning or basic meaning of a form of language, while connotation meanings refer to additional meanings that are emotional, associative, and contextual, which are often called implicit or figurative meanings. The semantic study of digital languages is important because many new forms of language have expanded or narrowed their meaning in their use on social media (Handayani et al., 2023). Thus, the analysis of abbreviations is focused on how the abbreviated form represents a literal meaning as well as an additional meaning that develops in use on social media.

However, in practice, the use of emojis and abbreviations often causes problems in the interpretation of meaning. The meaning conveyed by the speaker is not always understood equally by the speaking partner, because the meaning is highly dependent on the context, experience, and shared knowledge between the users. Differences in social background and level of understanding of digital culture can lead to ambiguity, misunderstandings, or even shifts in meaning in communication (Maulana & Safitri, 2025). This shows that both emojis and abbreviations have dynamic and contextual meanings in their use on social media. Therefore, this research is important to understand how emojis and abbreviations are used in digital communication, especially in conveying feelings, attitudes, and meanings. In addition, this research is also expected to help readers to better understand the use of language on social media so that it can reduce misunderstandings in communication.

## 2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method that is descriptive. According to (Moleong, 2010) Qualitative research is a type of research that aims to explore phenomena related to the experience of the research subject such as perception, motivation, action, and so on, comprehensively and by describing these phenomena using words and language. In line with that (Waruwu, 2023) reveals that qualitative research is a research method that utilizes narratives or terms in describing and describing the meaning of each particular social phenomenon, symptoms, and circumstances. In other words, in this study, the discovery of data does not use calculations or statistics at all (Safarudin et al., 2023).

Based on the views of these experts, it can be concluded that descriptive qualitative research is a method that emphasizes a deep understanding of a social phenomenon by describing it in detail through the use of natural language and words. This approach provides researchers with the opportunity to understand the meaning behind the behaviors, experiences, and actions of the research subjects in a contextual and in-depth way, so that the results not only explain what happened, but also reveal the reasons and meanings behind each event studied.

This research focuses on the phenomenon of Generation Z language on TikTok social media, especially the use of emojis and abbreviations in digital communication. In this study, emojis were studied using a pragmatic approach, namely expressive speech acts, to identify the forms of expression of the speaker's feelings or attitudes contained in their use. Meanwhile, abbreviations are studied using a semantic approach, namely through the analysis of the meaning of denotations and connotations to understand the meaning contained based on the context of their use. Thus, this study aims to analyze and describe the use of emojis and abbreviations as a form of communication that contains meaning in the digital interaction of Generation Z.

The subjects in this study are Generation Z of TikTok social media users who use emojis and abbreviations in comments, speech, and *captions*. The subjects of this study consisted of 20 digital communication data taken from the speech, comments and captions of TikTok users Generation Z. Of these, there were 10 data that focused on emojis and 10 other data focused on abbreviations. The determination of the research subject was carried out based on several criteria, namely (1) data taken from user accounts who are Generation Z; (2) the speech, comment, or caption analyzed contains emojis or abbreviations; (3) the context of speech can be clearly observed to analyze its form and meaning.

The benchmark for researchers in determining the research subject really comes from generation Z, namely through interviews online with the identified study subjects using emojis and abbreviations in the comments, caption, and his post to find out whether the subject is generation Z. In this study, the research subject who is the source of the data of the comment post, and Caption also acted as an interview informant. Thus, the individual who is analyzed as a speaker in the speech event is the same individual as the interviewed informant to obtain clarification on the meaning of the use of emojis and abbreviations. In this study, it is clear that the analysis method applied is a qualitative data analysis method. The data analysis in this study was carried out qualitatively using an interactive analysis model by Miles and Huberman (in Abdussamad, 2021) which includes the stage of data reduction, data collection as well as drawing conclusions and verification.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, it was found that the form of use of emojis and abbreviations in Generation Z communication on TikTok social media was found. The amount of data analyzed was 25 data, consisting of 14 data on the use of emojis and 11 data on the use of abbreviations. Emoji data was analyzed based on expressive speech actions, while abbreviated data was analyzed based on the meaning of denotation and connotation.

## The Form of Emoji in Generation Z Communication on TikTok Social Media

In digital communication, emojis have an important role in supporting the delivery of messages in speech. Therefore, the classification of emoji forms in this study is based on their function in the use of language by speakers. In digital communication, emojis have an important role in supporting the delivery of messages in speech. Therefore, the classification of emoji shapes in this study is based on the category of emoji shapes proposed by (Hidayatul, 2021) which includes Smileys and People emojis, Animals and Nature emojis, Food and Drink emojis, Activity emojis, Travel and Places emojis, Objects emojis, Symbols emojis, and Flags emojis. However, based on the data found in this study, the form of emoji used only consists of emoji smiley dan orang (smileys and people) **and** Emoji object (objects). The two forms of emoji were then used as the basis for grouping research data.

### Smiley and people emoji

The *smileys and people emoji* is an emoji that depicts the shape or expression of human faces, emotions, and movements in digital communication. Emojis in this category are often used to show the speaker's feelings, responses, and attitudes toward speech. In addition, the use of *smileys and people emojis* can also clarify the meaning of the message so that communication becomes more expressive and easy to understand by the recipient of the message. The data included in this category is presented as follows. The data is presented as follows.

Data 1 : cmn 30K don't let your hair fall out again 😏

Emojis 😏 fall into the category of *smileys and people* because they represent a human face with misaligned eyes and outstretched tongues.

Episode 2: Miss Aqeela Version Like This 😭

Emojis 😭 are included in the category of *smileys and people* because they represent the shape of the human face accompanied by flowing tears

Data 3 : The city and its 😞 larvae

Emojis 😞 fall into the category of *smileys and people* because they represent the shape of a human face with a mouth that curves downwards.

Data 4 : Just bring colorful chickens at home 😊

Emojis 😊 are included in the category of *smileys and people* because they represent the shape of a human face with one eye closed

Data 5 : The content is very educational 😜

Emojis 😜 fall into the category of *smileys and people* because they represent the shape of **a human face that is smiling but displayed in an upside-down position**

Data 6 : This doctor again 😡

Emojis 😡 are included in the category of *smileys and people* because they represent the shape of the human face with the direction of the eyes looking upwards

Data 7 :let's insult again bro it's my motivation to change for the better bro 😏

Emojis 😏 fall into the category of *smileys and people* because they represent the shape of a human face with misaligned eyes and an asymmetrical mouth shape.

Data 8: Finally able to eat together again

Emojis 🥰 are included in the *category of smileys and people* because they represent the shape of a human face accompanied by a heart symbol.

Data 9 : Sorry to be suspicious first 🙏

Emojis 🙏 fall into the category of *smileys and people* because they represent the movement of two hands put together as part of a human gesture.

### Object Emoji

Objects emoji are emojis used to describe a specific object or object. The use of emojis in this category not only serves as a complement to the message, but can also reinforce the meaning that the speaker wants to convey. In their use on social media, emoji *objects* are often used to give a certain

impression according to the context of the speech used. The data included in this category is presented as follows. The data is presented as follows.

Data 10: Yes for sure 🗿

Emojis 🗿 fall into the category of *objects* because they represent objects in the form of stone sculptures.

Episode 11: you 🗡️.

Emojis 🗡️ are included in the *category of objects* because they represent objects in the form of knives.

Data 12: Your crown is missing the king 👑

Emojis 👑 are included in the *category of objects* because they represent objects in the form of crowns.

Episode 13: I Don't Want To Kill Him 🧢

Emojis 🧢 are included in the *category of objects* because they represent objects in the form of hats.

Data 14: Laugh it 💵💵💵 off

Emojis 💵 are included in the *category of objects* because they represent objects in the form of banknotes.

### Abbreviated Forms in Generation Z communication on TikTok Social Media

In digital communication, abbreviations have an important role in supporting the delivery of messages in speech. Therefore, the classification of abbreviated forms in this study is based on their function in the use of language by speakers. According to Kridaksalana, the classification of abbreviations includes: (1) The first letter fragment of each component, which is taken from the first letter of each word, (2) Retention of the first letter by releasing conjunctions, prepositions, reduplications, and word articulation. (3) The repetition of the first letter with the number of repeated numbers (4) The retention of the first two letters of this force type word is taken from the first two letters (5) The retention of the first three letters of a word (6) The retention of the first four letters of a word (7) The retention of the first and last letters.

laugh (8) Retention of the first and third letters (9) Retention of the first and last letter of the first syllable and the first letter of the second syllable (Karina & Amri, 2017). However, in the research conducted by the researcher, the researcher found two forms of abbreviation, namely the first letter of each component i.e. this is taken from the first letter of each word and Retention of the first three letters of a word. The data is presented as follows:

#### First Letter Fragment of Each Component

The first letter fragment of each component is a form of abbreviation formation that is carried out by taking the initial letter of each word in a phrase or combination of words, then assembling it into a new, more concise form. This form of abbreviation is widely used in digital communication because it is more practical, efficient, and easy to remember by language users, especially in conversations on social media that demand speed in message delivery. The data is presented as follows:

Data 15: MK: I was hungry but my friend asked a lot during the presentation.

The abbreviation MK is a form of fragmentation of the first letter of each component because it is formed from the initial letter of the phrase Moment When.

Data 16: But apart from that fact, there is one more fact that men tend to smell worse than girls because of the higher apocrine glands of CMIIW.

The abbreviation CMIIW includes the form of a fragment of the first letter of each component because it is formed from the initial letter of the English phrase Correct Me If I'm Wrong.

Data 17 : OTW coming soon

The OTW abbreviation includes the form of a fragment of the first letter of each component because it is formed from the initial letter of the English phrase On the Way.

Data 18: Don't be afraid of being suspected of fomo

The abbreviation FOMO includes the form of a fragment of the first letter of each component because it is formed from the initial letter of the English phrase Fear of Missing Out.

Data 19 : POV: First time look at the giant clock

The abbreviation POV includes the form of a fragment of the first letter of each component because it is formed from the initial letter of the English phrase Point of View.

Date 20 : FYI, this is a hoax

The abbreviation FYI includes the form of the first letter of each component because it is formed from the initial letter of the English phrase For Your Information.

Episode 21: GWS

The abbreviation GWS includes the form of a fragment of the first letter of each component because it is formed from the initial letter of the English phrase Get Well Soon.

Data 22 : YTTA hahaha

The abbreviation YTTA includes the form of a fragment of the first letter of each component because it is formed from the initial letter of the phrase Yang Tahu Tahu Aja.

Data 23 : TBL TBL

The abbreviation TBL includes the form of a fragment of the first letter of each component because it is formed from the initial letter of the phrase Really Afraid

### Retention of the First Three Letters of a Word

The retention of the first three letters of a word is a form of abbreviation formation process in digital communication which is carried out by retaining the first three letters of the root word, then used as a form of shortening to make it easier and faster to convey the message. The data is presented as follows.

Data 24 : Friendship that is a little sus wkww

The abbreviation sus includes the form of retention of the first three letters of a word because it is formed by retaining the first three letters of the English word suspicious *which means suspicious which means suspicious*.

Data 25 : Bro, we do the dishes

The abbreviation bro is a form of retention of the first three letters of a word because it is formed by retaining the first three letters of the English word *brother*.

### Discussion

The results of the study show that the use of emojis and abbreviations in Generation Z communication on TikTok social media reflects the development of digital language that is increasingly dynamic, expressive, and contextual. These findings are in line with the opinion of Alruthaya et al. (2021) who stated that Generation Z grew up in a digital environment that forms the characteristics of fast, flexible, and technology-based communication. In the context of TikTok, users not only utilize verbal language, but also various visual symbols and abbreviated forms to convey messages more effectively. This condition shows that social media has become a space for the formation of new linguistic practices that are different from conventional communication.

Based on the results of the research, the form of emoji found consisted of the categories of smileys and people and objects. The dominance of emoji in the smileys and people category shows that emojis function as a means of expressing emotions in digital communication. These findings support the research of Bai et al. (2022) who explain that emojis are an important element in digital communication because they are able to help users convey emotions, attitudes, and intentions that are difficult to represent through plain text. The use of emojis such as 🙄, 😊, 😏, 😬, and 🤔 suggests that Generation Z is utilizing visual symbols to replace the facial expression functions commonly present in face-to-face communication.

In addition, the results of the study show that the meaning of emojis does not always match their visual form. Emojis 🙄, for example, are not only used to show sadness, but are also used to express shock, tiredness, sympathy, humor, and excessive laughter. These findings reinforce the research of Robertson et al. (2021) who stated that the meaning of emojis has changed and evolved along with its

use in the digital community. The meaning of emojis is formed through the collective experience of the user so that it can undergo a shift from literal meaning to contextual meaning. The same thing is also stated by Zhang and Yang (2025) that the interpretation of emojis is greatly influenced by the context of communication, relationships between participants, and the digital culture that develops in a community of social media users.

The use of emoji category *objects* such as 🧢, 🍷, 🙄, 🤔, and 🗣️ indicates that visual objects can acquire new meanings that are different from their original meaning. Emojis 🙄, for example, are no longer interpreted as hats, but are used to show a lie or disbelief in a statement. These findings show a process of shifting meaning influenced by Generation Z's digital culture. Thus, emojis are no longer just visual symbols, but have evolved to become part of Generation Z's digital communication identity.

Viewed from a pragmatic perspective, the use of emojis in this study shows the function of expressive speech acts. Emojis are used to convey happiness, sadness, sarcasm, humor, admiration, and apologies. These findings support the opinion of Riordan (2022) who states that emojis act as a tool to express the emotions and psychological attitudes of the speaker in text-based communication. The presence of emojis helps users convey emotional nuances that cannot be conveyed directly through writing so that communication becomes more lively and easy to understand by speech partners.

In the abbreviation aspect, the results show that the most dominant form of abbreviation is the first letter fragment of each component, such as MK, CMIIW, OTW, FOMO, POV, FYI, GWS, YTTA, and TBL. These findings suggest that Generation Z tends to use concise forms of language to improve communication efficiency. The results of this study are in line with Nashrudina et al. (2025) who found that social media, especially TikTok, plays a major role in accelerating the emergence of various new forms of language, including abbreviations used as part of the identity of young user groups.

In addition, abbreviated forms were also found that came from the retention of the first three letters of a word, such as *sus* and *bro*. The use of this form shows that there is a strong influence of English in the digital communication of Generation Z. This phenomenon shows that social media is a means of language contact that allows the entry of various foreign terms into daily communication practices. These findings support the view of Herring and Dainas (2022) that digital communication encourages the creation of new forms of language that are creative, multimodal, and cross-cultural.

Based on semantic studies, the abbreviations found in this study contain the meaning of denotation and connotation. The meaning of denotation is seen in abbreviations that still retain their basic meaning, such as FYI (*For Your Information*) and OTW (*On the Way*). Meanwhile, connotations are found in abbreviations such as TBL and YTTA which are not only understood based on their literal meaning, but also contain certain social meanings according to the context of their use. These findings suggest that meaning in digital communication is not only shaped by the structure of language, but also by the social and cultural experiences of users. The results of this study are in line with Bai et al. (2023) who stated that the interpretation of meaning in digital communication is greatly influenced by the context of use and user experience in the digital community.

Overall, the results show that Generation Z's use of emojis and abbreviations on TikTok reflects the characteristics of expressive, concise, creative, and contextual digital communication. TikTok not only functions as an entertainment medium, but also as a space for the formation of language innovations that allow the emergence of various new meanings in communication. These findings support the research of Flecha-Ortiz et al. (2024) who state that social media has become an important part of the shaping of Generation Z's digital culture, including in the way they communicate and build social identity through language.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the use of emojis and abbreviations in Generation Z communication on TikTok social media reflects an expressive, concise, and contextual form of digital communication. The forms of emojis found consisted of the categories of *smileys and people* as well as *objects*, which were used to express various expressive speech acts, such as happiness, sadness, humor, sarcasm, admiration, and apology. Meanwhile, the form of abbreviations found includes the fragmentation of the first letter of each component and the retention of the first three letters of a word, which contain the meaning of denotation and connotation according to the context of its use. The results show that the meaning of emojis and abbreviations is not always literal, but rather evolves according to digital culture, user experience, and the communication situation behind it. Thus, emojis and abbreviations not only serve as a complement to communication, but also become an important means of conveying emotions, attitudes, and meanings in Generation Z's digital interactions on TikTok's social media.

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