

LANGUAGE STYLE IN GENERATION Z's INSTAGRAM CAPTIONS

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Abstract. *Social media has transformed the way Generation Z communicates, making Instagram captions an important medium for expressing identity, emotions, and social relationships through language. Previous studies have mainly examined individual linguistic features, such as slang, abbreviations, or code-mixing, while comprehensive analyses of language styles in Instagram captions remain limited. This study aimed to identify the language styles employed by Generation Z in Instagram captions and to analyze the linguistic elements that characterize those styles. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using fifty Instagram captions collected from publicly accessible accounts belonging to Generation Z users. The data were analyzed by classifying captions into language style categories and examining their lexical, grammatical, orthographic, and pragmatic features. The findings revealed three language styles: Casual Style (36%), Formal Style (32%), and Intimate Style (32%), while Consultative Style and Frozen Style were not identified. Casual Style emerged as the dominant style, characterized by slang, abbreviations, emojis, lowercase writing, incomplete sentence structures, and trendy expressions. Formal Style was mainly represented by motivational quotations, reflective statements, and standard grammatical structures, whereas Intimate Style emphasized emotional vocabulary, figurative language, personal pronouns, and expressions of affection or gratitude. These findings indicate that Instagram functions as a platform for informal, expressive, and identity-oriented communication among Generation Z. The study concludes that language style in Instagram captions is shaped by communicative purposes, interpersonal relationships, and digital culture, demonstrating the dynamic adaptation of language in contemporary online communication.*

Keywords: *Casual Style; Generation Z; Instagram Captions; Language Style; Sociolinguistics*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media platforms have become central to how people communicate, express identity, and interact socially. Instagram, in particular, is a prominent stage for Generation Z which are those born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, who are often described as "digital natives" due to their intimate familiarity with technology. Among the many features of Instagram, captions accompanying posts serve not only as descriptive text but as carefully crafted vehicles of style, tone, and voice, through which users present themselves to peers, curate personal identity, and engage in social practices.

Language style in sociolinguistics encompasses the choice of vocabulary, syntax, rhetoric, register (formal vs. informal), and other linguistic features that carry social meaning. In online and digital contexts, these choices gain additional layers: they reflect both personal expression and conformity to group norms. For Gen Z Instagram users, language style may include slang, abbreviations, code-switching (between local dialects, English, or other languages), creative orthography (misspellings, wordplay), emojis, hashtags, and informal greetings or sign-offs. Indonesian Gen Z frequently use slang, colloquial expressions, abbreviations, and informal greetings in their Instagram posts that are influenced by technological affordances, social circles, linguistic trends, and desire for relatability (Telaumbanua et al., 2024).

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Another feature is code-switching: in some contexts, users mix Bahasa Indonesia with English or local regional dialects, sometimes as single words or phrases within a caption, sometimes switching full clauses. In Indonesia, Gen Z frequently uses slang and blends to indicate their regional, educational, and global identities as well as to appeal to particular audiences (Kandiawan, 2022). Furthermore, slang usage in local contexts (such as among young Medanese people) demonstrates semantic inventiveness through the use of acronyms, shortened words, blends, and figurative or metaphorical uses, and it reflects both local culture and worldwide digital influences (Nauli Hosianna Napitu & Damanik, 2025).

The ability of Generation Z to switch between formal and informal registers with ease and to adapt language to various audiences sets them apart. Captions are not simply spontaneous utterances; they are often designed with imagined audiences in mind, aiming for authenticity, relatability, and engagement. Between January 2023 and June 2024, Indonesian Gen Z teenagers mostly used a casual style in Instagram posts, marked by slang, colloquial expressions, abbreviations, and informal greetings. Their language choices were shaped by peer influence, social media trends, platform features, and the need for social recognition (Telaumbanua et al., 2024).

Studying the language styles in Instagram captions by Generation Z is valuable for several reasons. It advances sociolinguistics and digital discourse studies by offering empirical data on how language evolves in mediated communication. It also highlights how young people construct identity, community, and belonging in online spaces. In addition, it has practical implications for education by supporting digital literacy and formal writing skills, for marketing by showing how brands and influencers can engage with Gen Z, and for cross-cultural communication by revealing stylistic preferences across groups. Despite increasing research in related areas, there is still a need to examine not only what linguistic features Gen Z uses in captions but also why they choose specific styles in different contexts, such as casual posts for friends versus broader audiences, and how these choices shape perceptions of authenticity and social meaning.

In response to these research gaps, this study investigates the language styles employed by Generation Z in Instagram captions and examines the linguistic elements that characterize each style. Using a sociolinguistic approach, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how language style is constructed in digital communication and how it reflects identity, interpersonal relationships, and communicative purposes. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on digital discourse while offering practical insights into the language practices of Generation Z in contemporary social media environments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Language Style and Sociolinguistics

Language style refers to the variation of language use according to context, purpose, and audience. Joos' (1962) classical framework outlined five functional styles which are frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate continue to serve as a reference point in stylistic studies.

In recent years, digital communication platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have transformed how language style is used and perceived. social media discourse displays flexible norms, where formal and informal elements often blend depending on the platform and audience expectations (Isnarini et al., 2025). This demonstrates how, in online environments, style is now contextually negotiated rather than fixed.

Studies focusing on Generation Z further reveal that casual style is the most dominant form of language used on social media. Gen Z's Instagram captions commonly use slang, colloquial expressions, abbreviations, and informal greetings, shaped by social trends, peer influence, and digital media, while also serving as a marker of identity and group belonging (Syaputra et al., 2024; Telaumbanua et al., 2024). On Instagram, teenagers tend to use casual style as the default, with formal, consultative, and intimate styles appearing less frequently, while gender differences

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emerge in the use of creative and colloquial features, along with variation in lexical and grammatical choices (Al-Munawarah & Nirwana, 2023; Murwantono et al., 2024). Digital spaces encourage linguistic innovation in Instagram captions, reflected in the growing use of English borrowings, abbreviations, and contractions in Indonesian social media, driven by both internal linguistic processes and external factors like globalization and digital culture (Fibriasari et al., 2022).

Language style in digital youth discourse, especially among Gen Z, is highly flexible, with casual forms dominating online interactions. Social media serves not only as a space for informal expression but also as a site for identity construction, creativity, and ongoing linguistic change, making language style an essential lens for understanding communication in contemporary society.

2.2 Digital Communication and Social Media Language

Digital communication has transformed the way people use and perceive language. Unlike traditional face-to-face interaction, communication on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok relies heavily on brevity, creativity, and multimodality. Social media language is characterized by hybrid forms, mixing written, spoken, and visual elements into a single mode of expression. This has given rise to unique features such as abbreviations, emojis, hashtags, and memes, which serve not only as linguistic shortcuts but also as tools for identity construction and social bonding (Tagg & Seargeant, 2021).

The flexibility of language on social media enables rapid shifts between formal and informal registers, producing hybrid “digital registers” that blur the line between spoken and written discourse (Calude, 2025). Digital platforms also accelerate language change through shortened spellings, phonetic forms, and other non-standard usages, reflecting both efficiency and creativity in online interaction (Kawano et al., 2023; Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). At the same time, linguistic style functions as a marker of belonging, as communities can often be distinguished by their shared stylistic choices (Khalid & Srinivasan, 2020). On Instagram, this interplay of style and identity is especially evident in captions, where informal language, creative spelling, and emojis dominate, particularly among Gen Z users who use casual and innovative forms to align with the platform’s interactive nature (Telaumbanua et al., 2024).

In sum, the language of digital communication is marked by hybridity, innovation, and fluidity. Social media platforms not only shape how people write but also how they construct identity, negotiate relationships, and form communities. These findings indicate that social media language is not just a tool of communication, but also a powerful cultural and sociolinguistic phenomenon.

2.3 Generation Z and Linguistic Innovation

Generation Z, often defined as those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is the first generation to grow up fully immersed in the digital era. Constant access to the internet, smartphones, and social media has shaped their communication practices, resulting in linguistic behaviors marked by creativity, informality, and hybridity (Prensky, 2020).

A key feature of Gen Z’s digital language is the extensive use of slang, abbreviations, and non-standard spellings in Instagram captions, which serve both as playful communication and as markers of identity and solidarity with peers (Syaputra et al., 2024; Telaumbanua et al., 2024). Beyond slang, they also innovate multimodally by combining text with emojis, GIFs, and memes, creating expressive and efficient forms of communication that reflect the highly visual and fast-paced nature of social media (Al-Munawarah & Nirwana, 2023).

Code-mixing and code-switching are also common, particularly in multilingual settings. Indonesian Gen Z frequently incorporates English borrowings into captions, signaling modernity, global connectedness, and linguistic prestige (Fibriasari et al., 2022). At the same time, casual

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and creative styles dominate captions across contexts, illustrating how linguistic choices are closely tied to identity construction and peer expectations (Murwantono et al., 2024).

Overall, Generation Z is not just passively using language but actively shaping it. Through slang, code-mixing, multimodal communication, and creative expression, they are contributing to rapid linguistic innovation in digital spaces. Their practices highlight the dynamic relationship between language, technology, and identity, reinforcing the idea that Gen Z is at the forefront of linguistic change in the 21st century.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the language styles used by Generation Z in Instagram captions. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting language use and identifying the linguistic characteristics of each language style rather than measuring variables statistically.

The data consisted of fifty Instagram captions collected from publicly accessible Instagram accounts belonging to Generation Z users. The captions were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) the account owner belonged to Generation Z, (2) the account was publicly accessible, (3) the caption was written primarily in English, and (4) the caption contained sufficient linguistic features for language style analysis. Each caption served as a unit of analysis.

Data were collected through documentation by identifying eligible Instagram posts, recording the captions, and organizing them into a coding sheet. The analysis was based on language style categories consisting of Formal Style, Consultative Style, Casual Style, Intimate Style, and Frozen Style. In addition to identifying language styles, the study also examined linguistic elements appearing in the captions, including slang, abbreviations, emojis, quotations, lowercase writing, figurative language, code-mixing, punctuation, and lexical choices.

The data analysis followed three stages. First, each caption was classified according to its dominant language style based on its communicative purpose and linguistic characteristics. Second, the linguistic elements contained in each caption were identified and interpreted. Finally, the findings were summarized and discussed to explain the patterns of language use among Generation Z in Instagram communication.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Distribution of Language Styles in Generation Z's Instagram Captions

The analysis of fifty Instagram captions written by Generation Z revealed the occurrence of three language styles: Casual Style, Formal Style, and Intimate Style. In contrast, Consultative Style and Frozen Style were not identified in the collected data. The distribution of language styles is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Language Styles in Generation Z's Instagram Captions

Language Style	Frequency	Percentage
Casual Style	18	36%
Formal Style	16	32%
Intimate Style	16	32%
Consultative Style	0	0%
Frozen Style	0	0%
Total	50	100%

As shown in Table 1, Casual Style was the most frequently identified language style, accounting for 18 of the 50 captions (36%). This finding indicates that Generation Z predominantly prefers informal and expressive communication when composing Instagram captions. The frequent use of casual language reflects the nature of Instagram as a social media platform where users prioritize spontaneity, creativity, and interpersonal closeness over strict

adherence to formal linguistic conventions. The dominance of Casual Style also suggests that Instagram captions function primarily as a medium for self-expression rather than formal communication.

Formal Style and Intimate Style were each identified in 16 captions (32%), indicating that both language styles were employed with the same frequency. Although less dominant than Casual Style, Formal Style demonstrates that Generation Z continues to use standard language structures when expressing inspirational messages, gratitude, or reflections on personal experiences. Captions categorized as Formal Style generally contained complete grammatical constructions, carefully selected vocabulary, and motivational or reflective expressions. These findings suggest that formal language remains relevant in digital communication when users intend to convey serious or thoughtful messages.

Similarly, Intimate Style represented 32% of the analyzed captions, highlighting the importance of emotional expression in Generation Z's online communication. Captions classified under this style commonly expressed affection, gratitude, hope, longing, and personal reflection. Emotional vocabulary, figurative expressions, and personal pronouns were frequently used to establish a sense of closeness between the writer and the intended audience. This finding indicates that Instagram serves not only as a platform for sharing visual content but also as a space where users communicate personal feelings and strengthen interpersonal relationships through language.

Interestingly, no captions were categorized as Consultative Style or Frozen Style. The absence of these language styles can be explained by the communicative functions of Instagram captions, which are primarily intended for self-expression, entertainment, and social interaction rather than professional discussions, academic exchanges, legal discourse, or ceremonial communication. Consequently, the defining characteristics of Consultative and Frozen Styles were not represented in the data.

The distribution of language styles demonstrates that Generation Z adapts language according to the communicative purpose of Instagram. While Casual Style dominates because of its flexibility and expressive nature, the substantial presence of Formal Style and Intimate Style indicates that users are capable of adjusting their linguistic choices to express reflection, motivation, or emotional attachment. These findings provide an overview of the language style patterns employed by Generation Z and serve as the basis for a more detailed discussion of each language style in the following sections.

4.2 Characteristics of Formal Style

Formal Style was identified in 16 out of the 50 Instagram captions analyzed, accounting for 32% of the total data. Although Instagram is generally associated with informal communication, the findings indicate that Generation Z continues to employ formal language when conveying inspirational messages, expressing gratitude, or sharing personal reflections. Captions classified as Formal Style generally exhibited standard English grammar, complete sentence structures, carefully selected vocabulary, and a relatively objective tone. Unlike Casual Style, these captions contained few or no slang expressions, abbreviations, or colloquial language, emphasizing clarity and linguistic accuracy. One representative example is caption GZ03: *"A thousand thanks for the people, the lessons, and the memories. Onto what's next with full hearts and steady steps!"*

This caption demonstrates the characteristics of Formal Style through its well-structured sentences and carefully chosen vocabulary. Expressions such as *a thousand thanks*, *lessons*, and *steady steps* convey gratitude and reflection in a polite and meaningful manner. Although an emoji appears at the end of the caption, it functions only as a visual complement and does not alter the dominant communicative purpose of the text. The overall linguistic construction remains formal because the message emphasizes appreciation and reflection rather than casual interaction. Another example is caption GZ04: *"Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery."*

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The findings suggest that Formal Style remains an important mode of communication for Generation Z, particularly when users intend to communicate inspirational thoughts, appreciation, or self-reflection. Although Instagram provides an environment that encourages informal interaction, users continue to adopt formal linguistic structures when they wish to present thoughtful or meaningful messages. This indicates that Generation Z is capable of adjusting language choices according to communicative intentions, demonstrating flexibility in navigating different styles of digital communication.

This caption illustrates the omission of the subject and auxiliary verb that would normally appear in standard English. A grammatically complete sentence would be “*I have been in the*

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gallery for a while." However, the shortened construction reflects the conversational nature of social media communication, where efficiency and simplicity are often prioritized. The accompanying emoji further strengthens the relaxed tone by expressing a casual attitude toward the statement. Casual Style is also reflected in humorous and playful expressions, as shown in caption GZ20: "*Relationship status: In love with Mango Sticky Rice.*"

Although the caption adopts the familiar expression *relationship status*, it humorously redirects the phrase toward a favorite food rather than a romantic partner. This playful use of language creates a light-hearted impression and demonstrates how Generation Z frequently employs humor to engage audiences. The caption relies on creativity and cultural familiarity rather than formal linguistic conventions. Another example is caption GZ23: "*moodboard material 📌*"

The caption consists of only two words and does not form a complete sentence. Nevertheless, the phrase effectively communicates the writer's intention by using the trendy expression *moodboard*, which is widely recognized in contemporary digital culture. The brevity of the caption illustrates how Instagram users often prefer concise expressions that complement visual content rather than elaborate textual descriptions. The use of abbreviated forms is further illustrated in caption GZ39: "*Do whatever u wanna do. But remember to set ur limits ;)*"

Several informal lexical items appear in this caption, including *u* for *you*, *ur* for *your*, and *wanna* for *want to*. These abbreviated forms are commonly found in online communication because they create a conversational atmosphere and reduce linguistic formality. The closing emoticon also contributes to the friendly tone by softening the advisory message delivered in the caption. Similarly, caption GZ43 states: "*chef's kiss for monochrome fit 🍷*"

The expression *chef's kiss* is widely recognized as internet slang used to indicate admiration or perfection. Combined with the fashion-related term *fit* and the kiss emoji, the caption demonstrates how Generation Z integrates contemporary internet expressions with visual symbols to communicate appreciation in a concise yet expressive manner. The caption illustrates the influence of digital culture on vocabulary choice and language style.

Across the analyzed captions, several linguistic characteristics repeatedly appeared within Casual Style. Abbreviations such as *smth*, *u*, *ur*, and *wanna* reflected the tendency to simplify written communication while maintaining comprehensibility. Slang expressions including *chef's kiss*, *moodboard*, *late post*, and *relationship status* represented contemporary internet culture commonly shared among young social media users. Emojis were also consistently employed to express emotions, replace words, emphasize ideas, and increase the visual attractiveness of captions.

Another recurring feature was the intentional use of lowercase writing. Many captions omitted capitalization even at the beginning of sentences, creating a relaxed and aesthetically pleasing writing style that has become increasingly popular among Generation Z. In addition, incomplete sentence structures frequently appeared because users tended to remove subjects, auxiliary verbs, or other grammatical elements without affecting the intended meaning. This pattern demonstrates that communicative efficiency and stylistic preference often take precedence over grammatical completeness in Instagram communication.

The findings indicate that Casual Style serves as the primary language style employed by Generation Z on Instagram because it enables users to communicate naturally, creatively, and efficiently. The integration of slang, abbreviations, emojis, lowercase writing, and concise sentence structures allows users to construct captions that are engaging, relatable, and consistent with the informal environment of social media. These characteristics explain why Casual Style emerged as the most dominant language style among the captions analyzed in this study and highlight its significant role in contemporary digital communication.

4.4 Characteristics of Intimate Style

Intimate Style was identified in 16 of the 50 Instagram captions analyzed, representing 32% of the total data. This finding indicates that emotional expression plays a significant role in Generation Z's communication on Instagram. Unlike Casual Style, which primarily emphasizes informality and entertainment, Intimate Style is characterized by personal feelings, emotional attachment, expressions of affection, gratitude, hope, and self-reflection. The captions categorized under this style frequently employed emotional vocabulary, figurative language, personal pronouns, and reflective expressions that established a sense of closeness between the writer and the intended audience. One representative example is caption GZ01: *"Isn't it blessing to have another day to cherish? 🌸"*

This caption reflects Intimate Style because it expresses gratitude and appreciation for life through a personal reflection. Although the sentence is relatively simple, the writer conveys sincere emotions rather than merely describing the accompanying photograph. The word *cherish* emphasizes appreciation and emotional value, while the emoji reinforces the positive feeling expressed in the caption. Another example is caption GZ07: *"I live inside a beautiful moment, hoping time will be kind."*

This caption demonstrates several characteristics of Intimate Style through its reflective and emotional language. The expression *beautiful moment* conveys appreciation for personal experiences, whereas the phrase *hoping time will be kind* reflects optimism and hope for the future. Instead of providing factual information, the caption reveals the writer's inner thoughts and emotional state, creating a personal connection with readers. A similar characteristic appears in caption GZ14: *"It's just a quiet night, and it feels perfect just the way you are. 🐾 🌸"*

The caption directly addresses another person using the pronoun *you*, indicating interpersonal closeness. The phrase *just the way you are* expresses acceptance and appreciation, while the overall message conveys affection in a gentle and emotional manner. These linguistic features strengthen the intimate relationship implied between the writer and the intended audience. Another representative example is caption GZ16: *"You're loved as the sun loves the sky."*

This caption employs figurative language to express affection. The metaphor comparing love to the relationship between the sun and the sky creates a poetic and emotionally meaningful message. Rather than communicating information, the writer focuses on conveying sincere feelings, which is one of the defining characteristics of Intimate Style. The strongest example of Intimate Style is found in caption GZ22: *"In a world full of chaos and noise, God finally gave me you, the one who calms my storms and gives me the kind of peace that feels like home."*

This caption contains multiple emotional expressions that reflect deep interpersonal attachment. Phrases such as *gave me you*, *calms my storms*, and *feels like home* illustrate gratitude, affection, and emotional dependence. The extensive use of figurative language and emotionally charged vocabulary demonstrates the writer's intention to communicate personal feelings rather than simply describe an event or situation. Another interesting example is caption GZ38: *"Wish I hated u."*

Although the caption contains the abbreviation *u*, which is commonly associated with Casual Style, its dominant communicative purpose is emotional expression. The statement conveys disappointment, sadness, or unresolved feelings toward another person. The emotional meaning is more prominent than the informal abbreviation, leading to its classification as Intimate Style. This finding illustrates that language style classification should consider the overall communicative intention of the caption rather than relying solely on isolated linguistic features.

Several linguistic characteristics consistently appeared in captions categorized as Intimate Style. Emotional vocabulary such as *love*, *peace*, *beautiful*, *cherish*, *home*, and *memories* frequently expressed affection, gratitude, and personal reflection. Personal pronouns including *I*, *me*, *you*, and *we* reinforced the interpersonal nature of the communication by emphasizing the relationship between the writer and the intended audience.

Figurative language also emerged as one of the most distinctive features of Intimate Style. Metaphorical expressions such as *the sun loves the sky, calms my storms, feels like home*, and *beautiful moment* enriched the captions by conveying emotions in a poetic and symbolic manner. Rather than communicating ideas literally, these expressions allowed writers to represent personal experiences through imaginative language that resonated emotionally with readers.

Emojis frequently accompanied Intimate Style captions, although their communicative function differed from those found in Casual Style. Instead of emphasizing humor or playfulness, emojis in Intimate Style strengthened expressions of warmth, gratitude, affection, and emotional sincerity. In addition, many captions contained reflective statements that encouraged readers to contemplate personal experiences, relationships, or life events. Such reflective language further highlighted the emotional orientation that distinguishes Intimate Style from other language styles identified in this study.

The findings demonstrate that Intimate Style constitutes an important pattern of communication among Generation Z on Instagram. Through emotional vocabulary, figurative expressions, personal pronouns, and reflective language, users employ Instagram captions not only to accompany photographs but also to communicate personal experiences, express interpersonal relationships, and construct meaningful emotional connections within digital environments.

4.5 Linguistic Elements Found in Generation Z's Instagram Captions

In addition to identifying the language styles employed by Generation Z, this study also examined the linguistic elements that characterized the analyzed Instagram captions. The findings revealed that Generation Z frequently combines various linguistic features to make captions more expressive, engaging, and visually appealing. These elements include slang expressions, abbreviations, emojis, quotations, lowercase writing, figurative language, and code-mixing. Rather than functioning independently, these elements often appeared simultaneously within a single caption, reflecting the multimodal nature of communication on social media.

4.5.1 Slang Expressions

Slang expressions were among the most frequently identified linguistic elements, particularly in captions categorized as Casual Style. The use of slang enabled users to communicate in a relaxed and conversational manner while reflecting current digital culture. Expressions such as *chef's kiss*, *moodboard material*, *late post*, *holiday mood*, and *relationship status* illustrated how Generation Z adopted popular internet vocabulary to make their captions more relatable and engaging.

Unlike standard vocabulary, these expressions conveyed meanings that were strongly influenced by online communities and contemporary social media trends. Their frequent occurrence demonstrates that Instagram captions are not merely descriptive texts but also a medium through which users construct identities and participate in shared digital culture. The findings suggest that slang functions as a linguistic marker of group membership, allowing Generation Z to communicate using expressions that are widely recognized within their social networks.

4.5.2 Abbreviations

Abbreviations appeared repeatedly throughout the collected data and constituted one of the defining characteristics of Casual Style. Common abbreviated forms included *smth* (something), *u* (you), *ur* (your), and *wanna* (want to). These shortened forms simplified written communication without reducing the intended meaning of the message.

The widespread use of abbreviations reflects the tendency of Generation Z to prioritize efficiency and speed when communicating through social media. Instead of following

conventional grammatical conventions, users preferred concise lexical forms that were easier to type and more consistent with the informal nature of Instagram communication. Although abbreviations predominantly appeared in Casual Style, one example classified as Intimate Style also contained the abbreviation *u*. This finding indicates that abbreviations alone are insufficient to determine language style because the overall communicative purpose remains the primary basis for classification.

4.5.3 Emojis

Emojis represented one of the most prominent linguistic elements found in the analyzed captions. Nearly every language style identified in this study incorporated emojis, although their communicative functions varied according to context. In Casual Style, emojis primarily emphasized humor, spontaneity, and playfulness while enhancing the visual attractiveness of captions. In Intimate Style, emojis strengthened expressions of affection, gratitude, warmth, and emotional sincerity. Meanwhile, emojis appearing in Formal Style functioned merely as complementary visual elements and did not alter the formal characteristics of the written message.

The findings indicate that emojis have become an integral component of digital communication. Rather than serving only decorative purposes, they contribute additional emotional meaning, replace verbal expressions, and reinforce the writer's intended message. Their consistent presence across different language styles demonstrates that visual symbols have become an essential aspect of Generation Z's communication practices on Instagram.

4.5.4 Quotations

Several captions consisted of quotations or motivational statements expressed through complete and grammatically accurate sentences. Examples included *Do what you love, love what you do*, *Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery*, and *She believed she could, so she would*. These quotations generally appeared in captions categorized as Formal Style because they conveyed inspirational messages using standard English vocabulary and sentence structures.

The presence of quotations indicates that Instagram captions are frequently used not only for describing photographs but also for communicating personal values, life philosophies, and motivational messages. Through quotations, users present themselves as reflective individuals while encouraging interaction with their audiences.

4.5.5 Lowercase Writing

Another frequently observed feature was the intentional use of lowercase letters throughout entire captions. Many writers deliberately omitted capitalization even at the beginning of sentences or when writing the personal pronoun *I*. Examples such as *been in gallery for a while*, *wish i hated u*, and *finding beauty in every little things* illustrate this stylistic preference.

The consistent use of lowercase writing demonstrates that it has become an aesthetic convention among Generation Z rather than an indication of inadequate language proficiency. This writing style creates a relaxed visual appearance and reflects contemporary digital communication practices in which typography contributes to the overall aesthetic presentation of social media content.

4.5.6 Figurative Language

Figurative language appeared primarily in captions categorized as Formal Style and Intimate Style. Metaphorical expressions such as *the sun loves the sky*, *calms my storms*, *feels like home*, and *beautiful moment* enabled writers to communicate emotions indirectly while enhancing the aesthetic quality of their captions.

Rather than providing literal descriptions, figurative language enriched emotional meaning by encouraging readers to interpret symbolic expressions. This linguistic feature demonstrates that Instagram captions often function as creative texts in which language is carefully selected not only to convey information but also to evoke emotional responses.

4.5.7 Code-Mixing

Code-mixing was another linguistic element identified in several captions. Although English served as the primary language of the analyzed captions, some users incorporated culturally specific words or expressions such as *Jogja*, *Mango Sticky Rice*, and *camroll*. These expressions illustrate the multilingual practices commonly found among Indonesian Generation Z, who frequently combine English with local or internationally recognized cultural references.

The occurrence of code-mixing suggests that Instagram communication is influenced by both local identity and global digital culture. Users integrate linguistic resources from different languages to create captions that are meaningful, authentic, and culturally relevant to their intended audiences.

The findings presented in this section demonstrate that Generation Z's Instagram captions are characterized by a wide range of linguistic elements that extend beyond conventional grammatical structures. Slang, abbreviations, emojis, quotations, lowercase writing, figurative language, and code-mixing collectively contribute to the expressive and multimodal nature of digital communication. These elements not only support different language styles but also illustrate how Generation Z adapts linguistic and visual resources to construct identity, convey emotions, and establish interpersonal relationships within online environments.

4.6 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Generation Z strategically employs different language styles in Instagram captions according to their communicative purposes. Although Casual Style emerged as the most frequently used language style, the considerable presence of Formal Style and Intimate Style indicates that Instagram captions are not limited to informal interaction. Instead, they function as a flexible medium through which users communicate information, express emotions, construct identities, and maintain interpersonal relationships. These findings suggest that language style selection in digital communication is influenced not only by the technological characteristics of social media but also by users' intentions and their relationships with the intended audience.

The predominance of Casual Style reflects the communicative environment of Instagram, where interaction tends to be spontaneous, expressive, and socially oriented. The frequent use of slang expressions, abbreviations, emojis, lowercase writing, and incomplete sentence structures demonstrates that Generation Z prioritizes efficiency and relatability over grammatical accuracy. Rather than following conventional writing norms, users adapt their language to create captions that are concise, visually attractive, and easily understood by their peers. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Telaumbanua et al. (2024), who reported that Generation Z predominantly uses informal expressions, abbreviations, and colloquial language in Instagram communication because these linguistic forms create a sense of familiarity and strengthen peer relationships. Similarly, Syaputra et al. (2024) argued that slang functions not only as a communication tool but also as a marker of youth identity within digital communities. The present findings reinforce these conclusions by demonstrating that Casual Style represents the dominant communicative pattern among Generation Z on Instagram.

Although Casual Style was the most dominant, the equal proportions of Formal Style and Intimate Style reveal that Generation Z demonstrates considerable flexibility in adapting language according to communicative intentions. Formal Style was primarily employed when users shared motivational quotations, life reflections, or expressions of gratitude. These captions generally maintained complete grammatical structures, standard vocabulary, and

carefully organized sentence patterns despite occasionally incorporating emojis. This finding indicates that the inclusion of visual elements does not necessarily reduce the level of formality, provided that the dominant communicative purpose remains reflective or inspirational. In contrast, Intimate Style was predominantly used to express affection, hope, gratitude, and personal emotions through emotional vocabulary, figurative language, and personal pronouns. These characteristics illustrate that Instagram functions not only as a platform for presenting visual content but also as a space where users communicate meaningful personal experiences and strengthen emotional connections with others.

The findings also support the relevance of Martin Joos' Language Style Theory in explaining language variation within digital communication. Although the theory was originally developed to describe spoken language in face-to-face interactions, the present study demonstrates that several of its language style categories remain applicable to social media communication. Formal Style, Casual Style, and Intimate Style were clearly represented in the analyzed captions, each displaying distinctive linguistic characteristics and communicative functions. However, the study also indicates that these styles have evolved in response to technological developments. Contemporary Instagram captions frequently integrate verbal language with emojis, internet slang, abbreviations, aesthetic typography, and other multimodal resources that were not addressed in the original framework. Consequently, digital communication expands the realization of language styles without fundamentally changing their communicative purposes.

An interesting finding concerns the absence of Consultative Style and Frozen Style in the collected data. According to Martin Joos' classification, Consultative Style generally appears in professional interactions, interviews, educational settings, or discussions involving information exchange, whereas Frozen Style is commonly associated with ceremonial speeches, legal discourse, religious texts, and other highly formal contexts. None of these communicative situations were represented in the analyzed Instagram captions because the platform primarily facilitates self-expression, personal storytelling, entertainment, and social interaction. The absence of these two language styles therefore reflects the communicative characteristics of Instagram rather than a limitation of the analytical framework. This finding also addresses the observation raised during the instrument validation process regarding the absence of Consultative and Frozen Styles in the research data.

Beyond identifying language styles, this study demonstrates that linguistic elements such as slang, abbreviations, emojis, quotations, lowercase writing, figurative language, and code-mixing play an important role in shaping communication on Instagram. These elements function not merely as stylistic ornaments but as communicative resources that allow users to convey emotions, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and construct digital identities. For example, emojis frequently complemented verbal messages by reinforcing emotional meanings, while abbreviations and slang reflected communicative efficiency and familiarity within Generation Z communities. Likewise, figurative language enriched emotional expression, whereas code-mixing illustrated the multilingual practices that characterize Indonesian digital communication. These findings are consistent with Fibriasari et al. (2022), who argued that social media has accelerated language change by encouraging creative linguistic innovation and multilingual language practices among young users.

Another important contribution of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of language styles alongside their linguistic characteristics. Previous studies have generally focused on individual linguistic phenomena, such as slang, code-mixing, or abbreviations, without systematically examining how these features interact to form broader language styles. By integrating language style classification with the analysis of linguistic elements, the present study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how Generation Z adapts language to different communicative purposes within digital environments. The findings demonstrate that language style cannot be determined solely by isolated linguistic markers but should instead be interpreted through the dominant communicative intention conveyed by the entire caption.

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This is evident in captions such as GZ38, where the abbreviation *u* appears alongside highly emotional expressions. Although the abbreviation is commonly associated with Casual Style, the caption was classified as Intimate Style because its dominant function was the expression of personal emotion rather than casual interaction.

These findings indicate that Instagram captions represent a dynamic form of sociolinguistic practice in which linguistic choices are shaped by communicative goals, audience awareness, interpersonal relationships, and digital culture. Rather than simply reflecting informal communication, Generation Z strategically combines conventional language structures with multimodal resources to construct identity, express emotions, and maintain social connections in online environments. The study therefore contributes to a broader understanding of how language styles continue to evolve alongside the rapid development of digital communication while demonstrating the continuing relevance of sociolinguistic perspectives in analyzing contemporary social media discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the language styles employed by Generation Z in Instagram captions and the linguistic elements that characterize those styles. The findings revealed that Casual Style was the most dominant language style, followed by Formal Style and Intimate Style, while Consultative Style and Frozen Style were not identified in the analyzed data. The predominance of Casual Style indicates that Generation Z prefers informal, expressive, and interactive communication on Instagram, whereas Formal Style and Intimate Style demonstrate their ability to adapt language according to different communicative purposes, such as conveying motivational messages, expressing gratitude, or communicating personal emotions. Furthermore, the frequent use of slang, abbreviations, emojis, quotations, lowercase writing, figurative language, and code-mixing illustrates how Generation Z combines linguistic and multimodal resources to construct identity, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and enhance emotional expression in digital communication. These findings demonstrate that language style in Instagram captions is shaped by communicative purpose, audience, and digital culture, while also extending the application of language style analysis to contemporary social media discourse and contributing to a broader understanding of Generation Z's language practices in online environments.

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