



A Semantic Study of TikTok Post Captions from a Generation Z Language Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study emphasizes the analysis of contextual meaning in captions in TikTok posts, with a primary focus on the use of language typical of Generation Z. This study applies a descriptive qualitative method through a contextual semantic approach. Data sources were obtained from TikTok video captions that were deliberately selected based on the characteristics of the language style and frequency of use using observation guidelines as a data collection tool. The results of the study revealed that fifteen terms frequently used by Generation Z are fomo, mood, notice, kalcer, skena, vibes, denial, clingy, sus, spam, yapping, flexing, cupu, mager, and megalodon. These fifteen terms used by Generation Z have contextual meanings that cannot always be explained lexically. The discussion shows that these fifteen terms function as a means of expressing identity, emotion, and social interaction that are typical in digital communication. Therefore, TikTok captions act as a linguistic medium that reflects the creativity, performativity, and social identity of Generation Z, while also becoming a link between generations in today's digital culture.

Keywords: semantic, TikTok, post caption, generation Z, language perspective

Kajian Semantik terhadap Caption Postingan TikTok dalam Perspektif Bahasa Generasi Z

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menekankan kepada analisis makna kontekstual pada *caption* yang ada di postingan TikTok, dengan fokus utama pada pemanfaatan bahasa khas Generasi Z. Kajian ini menerapkan metode kualitatif deskriptif melalui pendekatan semantik kontekstual. Sumber data diperoleh dari *caption* video TikTok yang dipilih secara sengaja berdasarkan ciri khas gaya bahasa serta frekuensi penggunaannya dengan menggunakan alat pengumpul data jenis pedoman observasi. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa lima belas istilah yang sering digunakan Generasi Z, yaitu fomo, mood, notice, kalcer, skena, vibes, denial, clingy, sus, spam, yapping, flexing, cupu, mager, dan megalodon. Lima belas ini yang digunakan oleh generasi Z memiliki makna kontekstual yang tidak selalu dapat dijelaskan secara leksikal. Pembahasan menunjukkan bahwa lima belas istilah tersebut berfungsi sebagai alat ekspresi identitas, emosi, dan interaksi sosial yang khas dalam komunikasi digital. Oleh karena itu, *caption* TikTok berperan sebagai medium linguistik yang mencerminkan kreativitas, performativitas, dan identitas sosial Generasi Z, sekaligus menjadi penghubung antar generasi dalam budaya digital saat ini.

Kata kunci: semantik, caption postingan, TikTok, peprspektif bahasa, generasi Z

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a primary role as a means of communication, facilitating social interaction and the exchange of information between individuals. Within a culture, language serves as a platform for community members to express ideas, thoughts, or hopes to others. Each language has a specific structure and pattern, encompassing elements of pronunciation, writing, and the intended meaning. Language variation arises from various aspects within the speaker group, such as age, education level, religious beliefs, occupation, or cultural background (Yayang & Supadi, 2025). In communication activities, language is inseparable from the concept of meaning. Every statement always has a specific purpose, so individuals are expected to have insight when expressing or responding to statements (Sugiyo et al., 2023; Hidayat, 2020; Nofianti, 2020).

Along with technological advances and changing times, language styles have also undergone transformation, especially among young people who are active in the digital environment. Advances in digital technology, particularly in social media, have drastically changed the way humans interact and communicate. One platform now dominating the digital world is TikTok, a short video-based application that is used not only for entertainment but also as an interactive and dynamic social space. Through captions (post descriptions), comments, and the words they use, users can express their opinions, shape public discourse, and even create new forms of communication rich in contextual meaning and cultural elements (Maharani et al., 2025; Amalia, 2022; Hasyim, 2018).

The language used in TikTok captions is often concise, concise, and loaded with implicit meaning. These captions frequently incorporate typical youth language styles, such as slang, abbreviations, metaphors, and popular culture symbols. The words used often experience shifts in meaning or are created as part of new linguistic trends. Therefore, it is important to examine how

semantics play a role in shaping the meaning of words and captions widely circulated on this platform. In line with this, Prof. Ratna Sari Dewi (in Ginting et al., 2025) emphasized that the language used by the younger generation on social media demonstrates a trend toward using language styles that are not only communicative but also culturally identifiable, with semantics being key to understanding hidden meanings, often implicit and connotative.

Semantics comes from the Greek word, *seratos*, meaning 'sign or symbol' or 'that which has meaning'. In linguistics, semantics is a branch of science that studies meaning in language. Ferdinand de Saussure explained that if linguistic studies are not accompanied by semantics, then essentially it is meaningless (Goesda & Nirmawan, 2024). Semantics not only discusses the lexical or literal meaning of words, but also how that meaning is formed, developed, and interpreted in certain contexts (Pires et al., 2025). Suwandi (in Setiowati et al., 2022) also explains that semantics is a branch of linguistics that is tasked with examining the meaning of words, how it develops, and the causes of changes in meaning in the history of language.

According to Kambartel (in Pateda, 2010:7), semantics assumes that language consists of structures that reveal meaning when connected to objects in human experience. Some basic concepts in semantics include synonyms (words with similar or identical meanings), antonyms (words with opposite meanings), hypernyms (words whose meaning encompasses another word), hyponyms (words that are part of a hypernym), polysemy (one word with multiple meanings), and homonyms (words with the same form but different meanings). These concepts form the foundation for understanding how language is used, especially in dynamic social domains like social media (Fauziah et al., 2025).

Semantics, as a branch of linguistics that studies meaning, provides a theoretical framework for understanding how words and captions on TikTok



reflect the thinking, values, and creativity of Generation Z. Through semantic analysis, we can explore the denotative and connotative meanings of the words used and identify patterns of meaning that develop among TikTok users. For example, a single word can have different meanings depending on the context of use, current trends, or even the tone and expression in the video. Dr. Yudha Setiawan (2024, in Ginting et al., 2025) supports this by stating that semantic analysis of digital content such as TikTok captions provides in-depth insights into how language and meaning evolve in the digital realm, reflecting the characteristics and aspirations of today's youth, the context of use, current trends, or even the tone and expression in the video.

Relevant previous research is the study entitled "The Shifting Meaning of Viral TikTok Terms from a Cognitive Semantic Perspective" by Agnessya Juliana, Firmansyah Nasution, and Fatmawati (2025). This study examines the shifting meanings of terms circulating on the TikTok platform using a cognitive semantic approach. Its primary focus is analyzing how the meanings of these terms are formed, adapted, and used by the TikTok user community in Indonesia. This research is relevant to the author's research because both examine the phenomenon of slang on social media, which reflects the linguistic creativity of the younger generation. Based on this previous research, the researcher is interested in examining the meaning and forms of slang used by TikTok users, particularly in captions, by examining the distinctiveness of their language style and intensity of use from a semantic perspective. This study also highlights the semantic context and role of Generation Z language on social media, a key distinction from previous research.

Based on the description presented, this study raises several issues that require in-depth examination. These issues encompass how Generation Z vocabulary is used in TikTok captions, how the contextual meaning of each vocabulary word is formed and interpreted through a semantic ap-

proach, and how this language use reflects the social identity, dynamics of digital culture, and communication practices of the younger generation. This problem formulation serves as the primary basis for developing the analytical direction of this study. This research aims to deeply examine the process of contextual meaning formation in captions on TikTok posts, as reflected through the use of Generation Z language. This research emphasizes semantic analysis to examine the dynamics of the use of words, phrases, and symbols that represent Generation Z's identity and communication culture on social media. Furthermore, this study seeks to narrow the language gap between active TikTok users, particularly Generation Z, and non-users or other generations who may be less able to grasp the context and meaning contained in the captions. With this approach, the results are expected to contribute to the study of digital semantics and enrich our understanding of language dynamics in the social media era.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach which is commonly used in various social and cultural research (Bandur, 2014; Razak, 2017; Creswell., 2014). This research employs a qualitative approach by examining and interpreting the meanings emerging in captions on TikTok posts. Data was collected from TikTok video captions published over a specific period. Captions were selected purposively, taking into account the distinctive language characteristics of Generation Z, their unique style, and the occurrence of frequently used terms or expressions. The selected captions were then analyzed to identify how meaning is formed and understood in the context of their use.

The data collection tool used in this study was a linguistic data recording sheet, which was used to record each word, phrase, and the context in which it was used in TikTok captions. This tool helped researchers organize the data obtained through the listening-noting technique, allowing for a more focused and systematic semantic analy-

sis process. The analysis was conducted using a contextual semantic approach in accordance with the research objectives, namely to uncover the formation of meaning and understand how Generation Z language on TikTok can bridge understanding between generations. Furthermore, this study also aimed to examine the gap in language meaning between active TikTok users, particularly Generation Z, and non-users or other generations who may be less able to grasp the context and meaning within the captions.

RESULT

The data in this study were obtained from various captions found in several TikTok videos uploaded publicly over the past three months. The caption selection process was carried out carefully and selectively, taking into account several aspects, including the distinctive use of language that reflects the identity of Generation Z, the frequency of certain words or phrases in the posts, and the contextual meanings that emerge in the digital communication interactions. From the data collection and filtering stages, the researchers succeeded in identifying fifteen vocabulary words that were considered most representative in describing the characteristics of Generation Z's language style, namely: fomo, mood, notice, kalcer, skena, vibes, denial, clingy, sus, spam, yapping, flexing, cupu, mager, and megalodon. These words were chosen not only because they frequently appear in various TikTok captions written by teenagers and young users, but also because their presence indicates interesting linguistic phenomena, namely the shift in meaning, the borrowing of terms from foreign languages, and the emergence of a variety of new expressions that are unique to the context of contemporary digital communication. Thus, these findings provide an initial insight into how the language used by Generation Z on social media, particularly TikTok, functions not only as a means of communication but also as a reflection of group identity and the dynamics of popular culture in the digital age.

Next, a more in-depth descriptive analysis of each term will be provided to demonstrate the contextual meanings contained within each term.

1. Fomo (Fear of Missing Out) is used in captions to convey a feeling of anxiety about missing out on a particular trend or activity, such as:
"Please don't be fomo."
2. Mood refers to a person's mood or emotional state temporarily, for example:
"I swear this trend is so moody."
3. Notice is typically used as a form of notification that serves to attract others' attention while conveying important information they need to know, for example:
"In the past, to be noticed by Adam, you had to donate."
4. Kalcer (Culture) is used to describe pop culture trends and broad insight into emerging trends, often characterized by specific clothing and hanging out in industrial cafes, such as:
"Usually there are lots of Kalcer kids hanging out."
5. Skena (Sua, cengKerama, and Kelana) is used as a term to describe a social group or community with shared interests and a particular lifestyle, such as:
"Young people like Skenaa."
6. Vibes (Vibrations) indicates a person's mood or a specific nuance felt in the visual context or atmosphere of a video, for example:
"The vibes are really calm."
7. Denial is used to describe someone's refusal to accept an unpleasant reality or fact, for example:
"Many people still tend to deny it when their partner is abusive."
8. Clingy refers to being overly clingy or emotionally dependent on a relationship or other person. For example:
"Clingy is one way we show affection."
9. Sus (Suspicious) is used to describe someone or something that is strange, untrust-



- worthy, or suspicious, such as:
“Sus is so random, what do you think that is?”
10. Spam is used to describe the act of flooding someone with messages or simply sending the same message or information repeatedly, usually in the comments section or stories, for example:
“Spam comments so they'll notice.”
 11. Yapping refers to someone who talks continuously, quickly, and often in an annoying or unimportant way, such as:
“Even though I'm yapping to a certain person.”
 12. Flexing is used to describe someone who likes to show off by excessively displaying their happiness and luxurious lifestyle, for example:
“Just flexing a photo of a McDonald's paper bag makes me laugh.”
 13. Cupu (Cuun punya) refers to someone who is considered uncool, old-fashioned, or untrend-oriented, such as:
“Keep pretending to be a geek in the face of the experts.”
 14. Mager (Malasgerak) is usually used to describe a feeling of being lazy about doing something, for example:
“Just move, I'm lazy.”

DISCUSSION

Captions containing fifteen key words typical of Generation Z: fomo, mood, notice, kalcer, skena, vibes, denial, clingy, sus, spam, yapping, flexing, cupu, mager, and megalodon were examined in detail using a contextual semantic approach. Through this approach, each term was analyzed to see how its meaning was formed, used, and understood in communication practices on TikTok. The results of the study showed that a word's meaning is not solely based on dictionary explanations but is also influenced by social situations, popular culture, and the interaction patterns that accompany its use in the digital space.

The Meaning and Contextual Formation of the Word "Fomo"

The word "fomo," short for "Fear of Missing Out," refers to the fear of missing out on something important or exciting happening around them. In TikTok captions, the word is used to express users' anxiety or emotional urge to avoid missing out on viral trends or events. The context of its use often relates to social activities, events, or popular social media trends.

For example, a caption like "Please don't use fomo" indicates that the user is offering an invitation or advice to avoid feeling afraid of missing out on certain information, trends, or activities just because others are doing them. In this case, the meaning of fomo extends to a form of social pressure that encourages active participation in online communities. This meaning is collectively understood by TikTok users, especially Generation Z, who rely heavily on digital connections as part of their social identity. Thus, fomo is not simply a fear of missing out, but also a linguistic tool that motivates interaction and engagement on the platform.

"Mood" as an Expression of Feelings and Mood

The word "mood" comes from the English word meaning "mood" or "feeling," and on TikTok it is used to express the emotional state or energy felt by the user.

For example, the caption "I swear this trend is so moody" indicates that the video content aligns with the user's feelings. The meaning of "mood" is subjective, often related to the aesthetics of the content, and serves as a way for users to digitally express their emotional identity, creating the impression that the video is highly relevant to their personal experiences.

"Notice" as a Form of Attention and Social Recognition

The word "notice" literally means "to notice" or "to be aware of," but in the context of TikTok's Generation Z audience, the term is typically used to indicate a person's desire for attention from

others, especially individuals they are interested in.

For example, the caption "In the past, to be noticed by Adam, I had to donate" expresses a desire for recognition or attention from a specific person. The meaning of "notice" is contextual and reflects social interaction strategies on digital platforms, where user attention serves as a form of strengthening social status. In other words, "notice" is used as a symbol of recognition and acceptance, which is crucial in the dynamics of digital interactions among the younger generation.

"Kalcer" as a Form of Self-Identification and Trendiness

Kalcer is a slang term derived from the English word "culture" and refers to popular cultural trends, insights into lifestyle developments, and the tendency to follow current trends.

In the context of TikTok, captions such as "Usually many kids are kalcer balam" indicate self-identification with a particular trend and reflect the social status of children and adolescents. The use of this term not only signifies ownership of goods or style, but also affirms the identity, taste, and lifestyle of the younger generation in the digital age. The characteristics of someone considered kalcer are often seen in certain clothing choices or the habit of hanging out in places with an aesthetic concept, such as industrial cafes.

"Spam" in a Digital Context and Its Connotative Meaning

The word spam originally referred to sending unwanted mass messages. However, in the context of TikTok captions, the term has expanded its meaning to include the act of flooding the comments or reply section with numerous messages to attract someone's attention.

For example, "Spam comments so he notices," indicates that spam is used as a communication strategy by users to elicit a response from others. In this context, spam is no longer viewed negatively, as it is with email or advertising, but rather

is understood as a form of active and intense interaction typical of Generation Z on social media.

"Skena" as a Representation of Identity and Social Group

The word "skena," besides being an acronym for "Sua," "cengKERama," and "Kelana," and literally meaning "scene" or community/subculture, is used in Generation Z on TikTok to refer to a community, lifestyle, or social group with distinctive characteristics and aesthetics.

Captions such as "Young people like skenaa" demonstrate that skena is used to mark group identity with distinctive styles and tastes that distinguish them from other groups. In this context, skena serves as a symbol of social distinction, reflecting the values of popular culture, music, clothing, and lifestyle. Its meaning refers not only to a "place" or "environment," but also expresses a collective awareness of social identity and a unique way of expressing oneself in the digital world.

"Vibes" as an Expression of Emotion and Mood

The word "vibes" is an English term referring to "vibrations" or "feelings," and in the context of TikTok captions, it focuses more on the mood or energy felt in a video or situation.

For example, the caption "The vibes are so calm" expresses the feeling or impression evoked by a place that feels very peaceful, relaxing, and comfortable. The meaning of "vibes" is highly personal and is understood based on the aesthetic context and individual emotional experience. On TikTok, Generation Z uses this word to communicate and share experiences in a more emotional and personal way. The use of "vibes" allows them to convey both thoughts (cognitive) and feelings (affective), thus helping to build emotional bonds between users.

"Denial" as a Verb

Denial literally means the refusal or denial of reality. In TikTok captions, this word is used to



describe a person's psychological state of unwillingness to accept a fact, especially in the context of social or romantic relationships.

For example, the caption "Many people still like to deny when their partner is abusive" indicates that the user is commenting on someone's refusal to acknowledge the reality of their partner's abusive behavior. They tend to ignore or excuse this negative behavior, even though it is real. This meaning of the word enriches our understanding of psychological and social aspects, where denial functions as a way to express feelings and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in the digital realm. This meaning is highly contextual and understood by the TikTok community as a reflection of complex social realities.

"Clingy" and the Dynamics of Dependency in Relationships

The word *clingy* refers to being overly clingy or emotionally dependent on a partner or friend. In TikTok captions, this word is often used to express affection or concern for a partner or significant other.

For example, "Clingy is one way we show affection" indicates that users often want to be close, pay constant attention, or cling to their partners, which is interpreted as a way to express love or attention. In other words, although sometimes seemingly excessive, these actions are interpreted as a form of affection. The meaning of "clingy" here reflects the dynamics of interpersonal relationships influenced by the ease of communication technology.

"Sus" as an Expression of Social Suspicion

The word "sus," short for "suspicious," is used to describe someone or something that is strange, untrustworthy, or arouses suspicion.

For example, the caption "So random, sus, I wonder what that is?" indicates doubt or disbelief expressed in a casual and lighthearted manner. The use of the term "sus" demonstrates how slang can effectively convey skepticism in digital social interactions. The meaning of this phrase depends

heavily on the social context and communication situation, and has become part of Generation Z's easily understood language code in everyday conversation on TikTok.

"Yapping" as an Expression of Casual Communication

Yapping is an English slang term referring to the habit of chatting or talking at length, often without any serious purpose or "nonsense," in a relaxed and informal manner.

In the context of TikTok, captions such as "Even though I'm yapping to certain people" indicate a social and interactive communication activity, where users express themselves while building interpersonal relationships. The use of yapping reflects the dynamics of digital communication among the younger generation, where lighthearted conversations or long chats serve as a means of establishing intimacy, sharing experiences, and strengthening social bonds on the platform.

"Flexing" as a Symbol of Prestige and Social Identity

Literally, flexing means showing off or demonstrating something. The word "flex" comes from English, meaning "to tighten" or "to show off tense muscles" in the context of physical fitness. Over time, the meaning of "flexing" has expanded to describe the behavior of someone who likes to show off by excessively displaying their happiness, abilities, achievements, or luxurious lifestyle.

Example caption: "Just flexing a photo of a McDonald's paper bag, I'm laughing." This suggests that the user is commenting on someone's behavior to display their social status or prestige. This phenomenon illustrates how the younger generation uses flexing as a strategy to assert their identity, build their self-image, and flaunt their social prestige on platforms like TikTok.

"Cupu" as a Social Label and Behavioral Assessment

Lexically, *cupu* is an acronym for "culun punya," which carries a negative connotation for

individuals perceived as uncool, naive, or unfashionable. The example caption "Tetap pura cupu di bangraman para suhu" shows that the word "cupu" isn't always used derogatorily, but can also be used jokingly or as a way to present oneself as humble amidst the dominance of those perceived as more experienced (suguru). Thus, "cupu" conveys a fluid meaning: it can be a taunt, a sign of low social status, or even a style of joking typical of the younger generation.

"Mager" as an Expression of Laziness or Low Motivation

Mager is an acronym for "malasgerak," which is used to express a reluctance to engage in activity or a lack of enthusiasm, preferring to relax, lie down, or sit.

For example, the caption "Just move mager" indicates a lazy or unmotivated mood. This term also reflects a culture of casualness and humor in digital communication, while also acknowledging everyday emotional experiences. In its use on TikTok, the word "mager" doesn't just denote laziness; it's also used by young people to convey a relaxed lifestyle, create a friendly conversation, and make laziness seem like a normal thing that can be discussed humorously.

"Megalodon" as Figurative Language and Exaggeration

The contextual semantics of the word "megalodon" indicate that the term is no longer understood simply as the name of a species of ancient, large-toothed shark, but rather as a metaphor to describe something extraordinarily large, powerful, or striking. In the example caption "Megalodon fan banana goes viral," the use of this word emphasizes hyperbole to attract attention, build a sense of awe, and provide a unique element of entertainment in digital communication on TikTok. This use of the term emphasizes linguistic creativity and the ability of the younger generation to communicate expressively, humorously, and uniquely in digital media.

Semantic Context and the Role of Generation Z Language on Social Media

Based on a contextual semantic analysis of fifteen words, it can be understood that Generation Z language on TikTok does not simply introduce new vocabulary or slang, but also serves as a means of expressing diverse identities, emotions, and social dynamics. This language is performative and contextual, with meanings formed through interactions between users and the ever-evolving digital culture. According to Cruse's (2000, in Ginting et al., 2025) theory of contextual semantics, the meaning of a word is highly dependent on the context of its use, including the social situation, communicative purpose, and underlying cultural values. This is evident in the various TikTok captions examined, where slang terms carry layered meanings that cannot be understood solely through their literal meaning. Furthermore, Generation Z language on TikTok also serves as a means of connecting between generations, despite differences in understanding between active users and older generations. Through this language, young people can express their social identities in a distinctive and practical way, while for other generations, these terms serve as a gateway to recognizing and understanding today's digital culture.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that the language used by Generation Z in TikTok captions reflects unique linguistic and sociocultural dynamics. Fifteen analyzed terms, such as fomo, mood, notice, kalcer, skena, vibes, denial, clingy, sus, spam, yapping, flexing, cupu, mager, and megalodon, exhibit complex contextual meanings that cannot always be explained through lexical meaning. Using a contextual semantic approach, it was found that these terms function not only as message conveyors but also as a medium for expressing identity, emotions, and social values, while strengthening inclusive digital communities. Captions on TikTok serve as a practical, creative,



and performative means of communication for Generation Z. Therefore, semantic analysis of TikTok captions can provide deeper insights into the mindsets and communication styles of the younger generation and help bridge linguistic and cultural differences between generations in the digital age.

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