The Emergence of Neologisms and New Linguistic Forms that Impact Communication on *TikTok*

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Abstract*

Nowadays, the development of technology is advancing rapidly, including in the field of communication. Social interaction has shifted to the digital sphere, with *TikTok* being one of the most popular social media platforms that allow users to interact without geographical restrictions. This development has triggered the emergence of neologisms and new linguistic features in social media interactions. Therefore, this study aims to explore the most common forms of neologism and linguistic forms that have emerged on the *TikTok* platforms and illuminate the impact of these phenomena on social discourse. It also highlights the role of social media as both a platform for expression and a driving force behind linguistic change. A qualitative approach with an observation method was applied in this research to deeply explore these issues. The findings reveal that the most common type of neologism is lexicographic, with a percentage of occurrence at 50%, while the use of emojis represents the most dominant new linguistic form on *TikTok*. These phenomena have impacted linguistic changes in social discourse, with the potential for new words to be added to modern dictionaries. Consequently, vocabulary continues to expand in line with the advancement of technology. In addition, this difference in language changes may lead to communication gaps among generations.

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving digital communication landscape, social media platforms have emerged as powerful catalysts for linguistic innovation (Mae et al., 2024). The proliferation of neologism and linguistic forms reflects not only the dynamic nature of language but also the intricate ways in which social and cultural interactions are shaped in virtual spaces (Kukiboyeva & Rakhimova, 2024). As users navigate social media platform, specifically *TikTok*, they engage in a continuous process of linguistic creativity, coining terms and phrases that resonate with their experiences and identities (Page et al., 2022). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among younger generations, who leverage these platforms to forge connections, express individuality, and participate in cultural dialogues (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2018).

The emergence of new linguistic forms—ranging from abbreviations and acronyms to playful neologisms—serves as a testament to the adaptability of language in response to the demands of internet-based communication (Čilić, I. Š., & Plauc, 2021). As stated by Kurniadi, the interplay between language and social media not only presents a new opportunity in the communicative landscape but also raises important questions about the implications of these changes for language preservation, identity formation, and challenges for the future of communication (Kurniadi & Erwin, 2024). Despite the growing body of research on sociolinguistics and the impact of social media on language, there remains a significant gap in understanding the nuanced ways in which neologism and linguistic forms specifically influence communication styles and social interactions across different demographics and platforms.

In this digital era, various social media platforms allow people from all over the world to connect and communicate with each other (Infante & Mardikaningsih, 2022). *TikTok* is one of the rising platforms among several different social media platforms. Specifically, in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic, *TikTok* users increased drastically due to the lockdown (Olvera et al., 2021), which resulted in many people only being able to interact through social media. During the lockdown, *TikTok* surged in popularity and offered entertainment, distraction, and a space for users to share their experiences and interact during the pandemic (Klug et al., 2023).
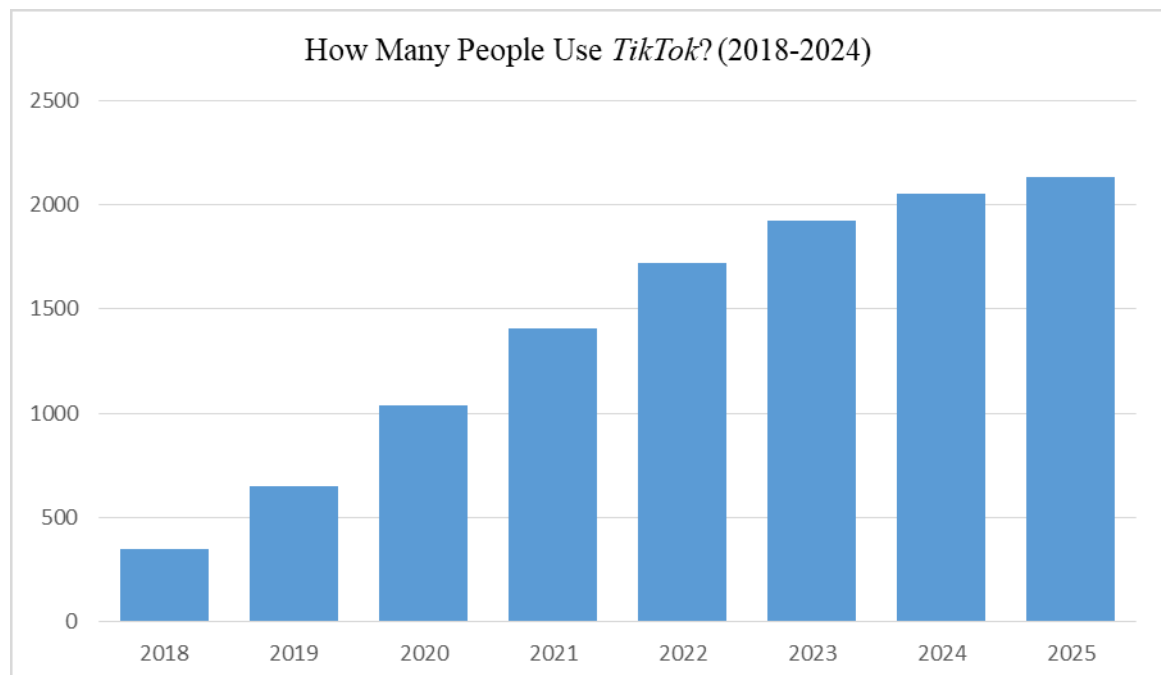

Figure 1. *Number of TikTok Users from 2018 to 2025 (in millions)*

Source: The data is cited from *https://whatsthebigdata.com/tiktok-statistics/*

The graph above shows the growth in the number of *TikTok* users from 2018 to 2025. In 2018, the number of users was under 500 million, but had a significant increase in the following years, reaching over 1 billion users in 2020. The growth continues steadily, with users approaching 2 billion in 2023. Subsequently, *TikTok* is estimated to have around 2 billion active users. This is a 6.7% increase from 2023 when it had 1.92 billion users around the world. The last two years, 2024, and 2025, indicate the number of users surpassed 2 billion, reflecting *TikTok's* growing popularity as an influential social media platform in the digital era. Certainly, from as many *TikTok* users as there are, it is inevitable that the phenomenon of neologism and the formation of new linguistic forms will emerge.

Several scholars have conducted research focusing on linguistic phenomena on social media (e.g. Eisenstein et al., 2014; Hasyim, U. A., Sari, Y. A., & Puspita, 2020; Luhulima et al., 2024; MacWhinney, 2005). Luhulima et al., (2024) have identified the phenomenon of global trends and social developments that contribute to the formation of new language varieties and the emergence of terms through the blending of languages. His research focused on identifying the language change phenomenon on the *YouTube* platform. The research shows that the fluid nature of language is influenced by existing culture, habits, and technological advances. Language is a dynamic thing that will continue to evolve along with the development of an increasingly fast-paced and advanced society.

Meanwhile, Arafah & Hasyim (2019) discuss the linguistic functions of emoji in social media communication. The data in his research were obtained from the questionnaires and screenshots of conversations using emojis on *WhatsApp* platform. His study reveals that emojis are the essential grammatical elements of language in communicating through social media, specifically on the *WhatsApp* platforms. Semiotically, emojis act as sign tools, pointers, and interpretive relationships that form the syntax, semantics, and paradigms of emojis as linguistically functioning sign dimensions in communicating on social media.

While previous studies have explored the emergence of linguistic innovations and their general implications, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis that examines: neologism and new linguistic forms on social media. Previous studies have focused on platforms such as *YouTube* (Luhulima et al., 2024), *WhatsApp* (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019), and *Twitter* (Eisenstein et al., 2014), while the current research focuses on the *TikTok* platform, which has unique characteristics as a short video-based platform has not been widely studied. In addition, there is no specific research that addresses the emergence of neologism and new linguistic forms that develop among the *TikTok* users community.

This research aims to explore the most common form of neologism and linguistic forms that have emerged on social media platforms. By examining how these elements influence interactions, shape cultural narratives, and reflect societal trends, we can gain a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of language in the digital age. Ultimately, this study seeks to illuminate the impact of these phenomena on social discourse, highlighting the role of social media as both a platform for expression and a driving force behind linguistic change.

2. Research Method

A qualitative approach was applied to investigate the criteria of neologisms and new linguistic forms along with their influence on communication on social media. This approach is used to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon on *TikTok*. Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, where the participants are active *TikTok* users who communicate with each other and create various unique trends on *TikTok*. The data sources were collected from the researcher's *For Your Page* (FYP) on *TikTok*. A total of 150 data were randomly collected from post and comments section on *TikTok,* ensuring sufficiency in data collection. Based on gender, the data was classified as follows: 15% male, 45% female, and 40% unidentified users (new, fake, or authorized accounts).

In collecting the research data, the observation method was employed in this research. The observation method involves systematically examining and recording a phenomenon as it occurs in a natural context. In addition, this method allows the researcher to analyze participants' behavior patterns without direct researcher intervention. According to Creswell (2012), observation is the act of recording phenomena in the field through the five senses of the observer, sometimes involving an instrument, and recording it for research purposes.

The researcher collected data by sorting posts and comments that contained neologism and new linguistic forms. This research used Janssen (2006) who classified neologism into five criteria: psychological, lexicographic, exclusive definition, diachronic definition, and reference corpora definition. In addition, the theory proposed by Crystal (2006) and Danesi

(2020) was used in this research as a grounded theory for linguistic forms used in social media. Based on these theories, new linguistic forms are divided into seven: acronyms and abbreviations, hashtags and tags, emojis/emoticons, sentence fragments, letter repetition, punctuation repetition, and all caps.

At the data analysis stage, systematic and structured steps are essential to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data. Therefore, in this research, various data collections were used to obtain relevant data: This study employs the observation method to collect data on neologisms and linguistic forms on the *TikTok* platform. The collected data were then classified based on the types of neologisms and linguistic characteristics. Furthermore, statistical analysis was conducted to calculate the frequency of occurrence of various linguistic forms, which was presented in a descriptive table. Based on the findings, the researcher concludes linguistic phenomena in communication on *TikTok* social media.

3. Results and Discussion
3.1. The emergence of neologisms on *TikTok*

According to Janssen (2006), a neologism is divided into five criteria:

a) **Psychological**. This neologism refers to words that are considered new by the language community.
b) **Lexicographic**. A word that has been used in a community but does not appear in a dictionary.
c) **Exclusive definition**. Refers to an exclusive list of words that are already widely used by a community. Words in the exclusion lexicon are considered a permanent part of the language, while words outside the list are considered as new.
d) **Diachronic Definition**. Any word form that appears in a general language text but was not previously part of the language.
e) **Reference Corpora Definition**. Any word form that does not appear in the existing reference corpus. This approach is more data-driven, using comparisons between the old and new corpus language.

The data were analyzed using Janssen's (2006) theory successfully classified several criteria of neologisms found on the *TikTok* platform. The following is an analysis of examples of neologism based on each of the criteria.

Table 1. Psychological neologism

Criteria/Type	Sentence	Neologism word	Definition	Function
Psychological	*Lit* it bro!	Lit	The word "lit" is used in a new meaning as something very cool or fun.	Expressing enthusiasm or support

From **Table 1**, the sentence shows how the word *"lit"* is used in a new connotation, which describes something very cool or fun. This definition shows a shift in meaning from literal usage to a more emotional slang term. Its function is to express enthusiasm or support for something. This finding is in line with the previous studies conducted by Song (2016) who identified reflections in the evolution of language that are influenced by culture, specifically in informal interaction environments and social media.

Table 2. Lexicographic neologism

Criteria/Type	Sentence	Neologism word	Definition	Function
Lexicographic	There are so many OTHER ways of ending a relationship/friendship than *ghosting*. Don't do it.	Ghosting	The act of abruptly ending a communication or relationship without any explanation	Describes behaviors that may cause negative emotional effect

Table 2 indicates the lexicographic type of neologism. The word *"ghosting"* is used to describe someone's attitude who ends a communication or relationship abruptly without any explanation. This definition provides a specific term for a social behavior that was previously difficult to explain with a single word. The function of this word is to describe behavior that can cause negative emotional effects, such as confusion and hurt feelings. The phenomenon shows how neologism or new vocabulary often emerges to fulfill the need for expression in modern culture to adapt along with the advancement and development of technology (Blake, 2019).

Table 3. Exclusive definition

Criteria/Type	Sentence	Neologism word	Definition	Function
Exclusive Definition	*Sigma* boy	Sigma	A person called "sigma" is generally seen as independent individual, not bound by conventional norms, and has a unique way of thinking and acting.	Describe an individual who are considered to have more power and different from most people.

From **Table 3**, the word *"sigma"* has been widely used on social media, especially by the Alpha Generation (the generation of people born between 2010 and 2024). This word refers to someone who has a unique way of thinking and acting. This neologism often appears in popular culture to emphasize unusual identities or concepts. The neologism *"sigma"* has developed since then and was recorded in October 2024, it was mentioned more than 3.410 times in Indonesian social media (Salwa et al., 2024). The data also shows that the spread of neologisms occurs rapidly.

Table 4. Diachronic definition

Criteria/Type	Sentence	Neologism word	Definition	Function
Diachronic Definition	Neeko *trolled* the other team	Troll	This word refers to the act of teasing, annoying, or mocking	Expressing annoyance with how others treat you

Table 4 shows the neologism word *"troll"* which is categorized as a diachronic definition. The word *"troll"* was originally used to describe an ugly creature in folklore, usually depicted as giants or dwarves (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). However, as time goes by, the meaning of this word changed to a term for someone's annoying behavior. This criterion of neologism is very popular among gamers because it emphasizes an action of the players who intentionally perform actions to make upset other players. As time goes by, this word is widely used in social media to define the act of teasing, annoying, or mocking someone.

Table 5. Reference corpora definition

Criteria/Type	Sentence	Neologism word	Definition	Function
Reference Corpora Definition	20 Products Will Go *Viral* in 2025 #dropshippingtips	Viral	This word is used to describe the rapid spread of information or online content	Describes the popularity or wide reach of content in a short period of time

The last neologism criterion is the reference corpora definition. The sentence in **Table 5** contains the word *"viral"* which means the rapid spread of information or online content. This word often appears on the *TikTok* platform indicating that someone is famous very quickly because of the content they upload. The development of this neologism has also increased with other social media such as *X* and *Instagram*. Bernatta and Kartika (2020) identified that users often seek viral content on social media as a primary source of information. In addition, this term is not only in the context of entertainment but also in marketing and digital campaigns to reach bigger and wider audiences.

3.2. The development of New Linguistic Forms on *TikTok*

According to Crystal (2006) and Danesi (2020), there are various linguistic forms that are often found on social media. In this research, linguistic forms found on social media are categorized into several types: acronyms and abbreviations, hashtags and tags, emojis, sentence fragments, letter repetition, punctuation repetition, and all caps. The following data presents examples of the emergence of each linguistic form along with their explanations on the *TikTok* platform.
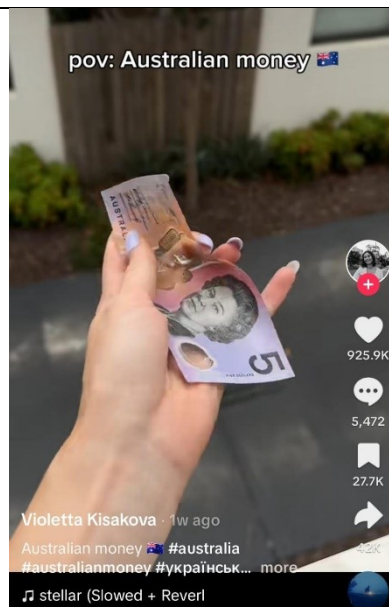
Acronyms and abbreviations

Figure 2. Abbreviation on the TikTok platform

*"**pov**: Australian money #australia #australianmoney"*

Figure 2 shows one of the captions in a post on the *TikTok* platform. The sentence contains the abbreviation 'POV' which stands for 'Point of View'. The abbreviation 'POV' is usually used by the *TikTok* community to indicate the point of view of the content creator or character in the content. A study conducted by Lisdawati (2021) shows that *TikTok* content creators often introduce new vocabulary and language styles. This phenomenon influences other *TikTok* users to use them.
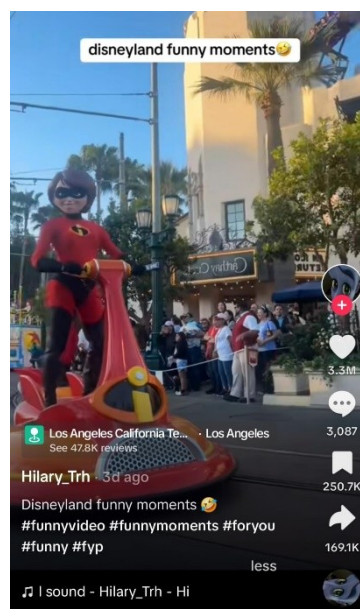
Hashtags and tags

Figure 3. The use of Hashtag on the TikTok platform

"Disneyland funny moments *emoji #funnyvideo #funnymoments #foryou #funny #fyp"

TikTok is a famous platform that uses hashtags and tags to globalize videos. The function of hashtag on *TikTok* is to categorize content and make it easier for users to find. In addition, hashtags help *TikTok's* algorithm understand who should see the video. Users just need to type something they want to explore by using the '#' sign at the beginning of the

word. In the **Figure 3** above, the hashtags found are '#funnyvideo', '#funnymoments', '#foryou', '#funny', and '#fyp'. This feature develops assumptions among users about how the *TikTok* algorithm works. They believe that the use of hashtags in a *TikTok* post influence content visibility (Klug et al., 2021).
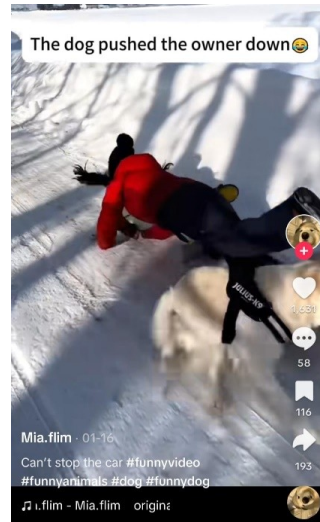
Emojis

Figure 4. The use of emojis to differentiate the meaning of a sentence/caption

*"The dog pushed the owner down *emoji"*

Figure 4 indicates the use of an emoji in a caption on a *TikTok* platform post. The emoji used shows a laughing face with tears streaming down, which depicts someone laughing out loud. The use of emoji is an important indicator for users who want to convey their emotions to others. If the caption does not contain the emoji, then the sentence seems only a simple statement without additional context. In this case, it means that the dog pushed the owner to the ground without any indication of how the incident was perceived – whether serious, funny, or otherwise. On the other hand, after adding the emoji, the speaker implies that the event is considered funny or entertaining.
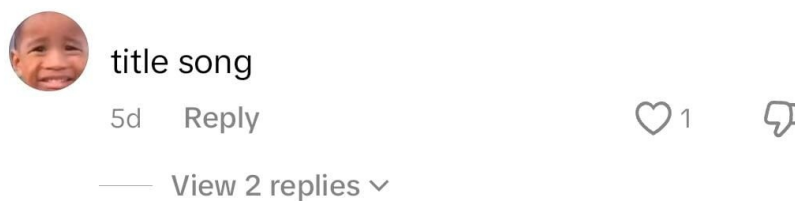
Sentence fragments

Figure 5. Sentence fragment on the TikTok comment section

Figure 5 shows a *TikTok* platform user who left a comment on a post. The comment is *"title song,"* which is a sentence fragment. The sentence can be interpreted as *"What is the title of the song?"* or *"Can you tell me the title of the song?"* However, the person above only wrote two words instead of the full sentence. Thelwall (2009) noted that comments on social media tend to be brief and often in incomplete form in online interactions. This is due to the need to communicate efficiently in a digital environment.

Letter repetition

Figure 6. *Letter repetition on the TikTok comment section*

Figure 6 indicates the phenomenon of letter repetition linguistic form. This phenomenon often appears on social media interaction, especially in the more casual and expressive context. Users tend to lengthen or repeat certain letters in words to emphasize certain feelings, such as excitement, admiration, or surprise. The comment above contains letter repetition in the phrase *"Ooh myyy goshhh"*, it seems like the user wants to express a feeling or surprise at something. Pak et al., (2018) mentioned that letter repetition is used to intensify and express their feeling (e.g. excitement, shock, happiness, sadness, etc) in the comments section on social media.

Punctuation repetition

Figure 7*. Punctuation repetition on the TikTok comment section*

Figure 7 shows an example of punctuation repetition among *TikTok* users. This phenomenon is often found on the *TikTok* platform, especially in the comment section. Similar to letter repetition, the use of punctuation repetition aims to emphasize the meaning and expression of the user in a sentence. For instance, a sentence above ends with multiple exclamation marks, meaning that the user wants to express admiration and a strong emotional tone towards what she saw on the post.

All caps

Figure 8*. All caps on the TikTok comment section*

Figure 8 reveals the all caps type of new linguistic forms found on *TikTok* platform. In online communication, it may also reflect the emotional intensity of the writer, as capital letters are often associated with shouting or speaking loudly. Even though they are often used to accentuate certain sentences, the overuse of all caps also leads rude or excessive messages, so they should be used wisely to avoid misunderstanding. However, Heath (2021) found that not only does the use of all caps express shouting and anger, but it also suggests that the average pitch and syllable duration tend to increase.

3.3. *TikTok* as a platform for Neologisms and New Linguistic Forms

The results of this research show that social media, specifically *TikTok*, has become a medium for the emergence of various forms of neologism and new linguistic forms. The most common form of neologism found is lexicographic neologism with a percentage of 51.35%, while the use of emojis has become the most common of linguistic forms with a percentage of 40.31%. These findings indicate that social media users continue to create and adapt language elements according to evolving communication trends. The findings are in line with the previous study conducted by Uyuni et al., (2018) who identified social media and language trends. Uyuni emphasizes that language trends on social media can influence changes in the meaning of words and the way a community communicates within them.

The emergence of neologism and linguistic forms, ranging from acronyms and abbreviations to all caps, proves that language is dynamic. Each generation can create new words or communication styles that reflect the way they interact in the digital space. In fact, language variations may differ from one community to another due to the influence of social and cultural factors. According to Holmes (2022), language variation that prevails in each community is called speech community. In the digital era, the word 'community' may refer to different social media platforms, such as *TikTok, Facebook, Instagram,* and many more. Mandalika (2024) emphasized that the speech community in social media is influenced by factors such as gender, age, cultural background, and individual characteristics. These studies demonstrate that digital platforms have become new speech communities, in which users use language according to the norms and practices of each online space, highlighting both the traditional sociolinguistic patterns as well as new means of how language is used.

Therefore, on the *TikTok* platform, language trends develop rapidly due to the short video-based nature of the platform and the virality of its content. *TikTok* users often adapt language in the form of captions, comments, and hashtags to convey their expressions more effectively. In addition, *TikTok* users mostly used emojis to emphasize their feelings. Moreover, the use of letters and punctuation repetitive, such as *"sureeee"* and *"!!!!!"*, reinforce the emotional tone of digital communication. Arafah and Hasyim (2019) have investigated the pragmatic and semiotic function of emojis. In pragmatics, emojis function to strengthen the meaning and social relations between users. On the other hand, in semiotics, emojis act as a vehicle sign to convey the meaning of a sign in the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions.

Neologisms that appear on the *TikTok* platform are not only limited to new words but also to the reuse of existing words with recycled meanings. For instance, some words that initially have neutral meanings can acquire new meanings that are more specific and contextualized in certain communities. The result of this research shows several words that have been reused with different meanings, such as the word *"ghosting"* or /ˈgəʊ.stɪŋ/. This word originally has a neutral meaning that has been written in the dictionary which means *"the activity of writing books, articles, etc. for another person to publish under their own name"* (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). However, *TikTok* communities have changed the meaning of the word for describing someone's behavior that can cause negative emotional effects, such as confusion and hurt feelings.

In addition, social media such as *TikTok* allows the formation of micro-communities with their own distinctive language styles. Each community can develop a unique vocabulary that is only understood by the members within it. However, as time goes by, the unique vocabulary created by the *TikTok* community can be recognized by other communities, such as *Instagram, Facebook, X,* and even in their daily interactions. This phenomenon shows that even though a language is only known in a small group, the communication patterns in a particular community may affect other communities if the language is often used across the community itself. Fauziah et al., (2014) revealed that language that the community uses on social media, is often applied in everyday life.

4.4. The Impact of Neologism and New Linguistic Forms

The fact that some words or phrases that are initially popular on *TikTok* to other social media and even in daily interaction indicates that social media acts as a bridge that accelerates the spread of language innovation on a wider scale. This is in line with previous research conducted by Jebaselvi et al., (2023) who identified that social media accelerates the spread of language innovation and changes communication styles. Jebaselvi added that social media acts as a forum for individuals who are not concerned with syntax and grammatical rules. It also allows them to be more relaxed, creative, and forward-thinking while challenging the ever-changing conventions of language.

Even though the language change is natural, there are some challenges to overcome, especially in terms of intergenerational understanding. It means that the older generations may have difficulties understanding neologisms coined by younger generations, specifically on the *TikTok* platform. This difference in understanding may lead to communication gaps, especially in interactions across generations and cultures. These findings confirm a previous study conducted by Venter (2017), his findings stress that different ways of communication may cause conflict and misunderstanding between generations. This difference may lead to interference with the meaning of the message due to the lack of nonverbal cues.

Moreover, as neologisms continue to emerge over time, modern dictionaries will continue to be updated and expanded regularly to include neologisms emerging from social media platforms and other sources (Kilmer, 2020). The creation of new words is driven by the need to capture changes in social and communicative systems. These changes reflect developments in various aspects of life (Zamyatkina & Belova, 2022). In addition, the updated vocabulary in modern dictionaries also provides documentation of linguistic changes that occur over a period. The process of updating modern dictionaries is carried out gradually following the development of language trends and changes in a community.

However, the challenge that arises from this phenomenon is how to determine which words are worthy of inclusion in the dictionary. In particular, not all neologisms are of long-term use, as some are just following short-term trends. Therefore, this phenomenon should consider factors such as frequency of use, dissemination in various social media platforms, as well as relevance in cross-community interaction before including new terms in the official dictionary. These findings are in line with a previous study done by Anisimova and Tikhonova (2022), who identified that only some neologisms were included in the dictionary, while the rest of them became terms. Therefore, some neologisms disappear and are no longer used by a particular community. This phenomenon occurs because the majority of these words only appear and gain popularity during a certain trend.

Overall, the findings of this research confirm that *TikTok* platform is not just an entertainment social media platform, but also plays a crucial role in language changes. The linguistic changes that occur on *TikTok* reflects the dynamics of digital communication and the need of users in adjusting to new trends of communication. In addition, the emergence of neologism—ranging from abbreviations to emojis and new linguistic forms has changed the style of communication, allowing for faster and more efficient global interaction (Natsir et al., 2023). With the advancement of technology, language change on social media will constantly evolve to enrich modern vocabulary and shape the way humans communicate in the future.

5. Novelty

The novelties in this research lie in the emergence of neologisms and new linguistic forms on the *TikTok* platform. This research reveals that there are several types of neologisms and new linguistic forms that appear on this platform. In addition, it shows that social media is a vehicle for the emergence of new language varieties. Furthermore, this research was also able to confirm the previous study conducted by Shahlo and Ravshanova (2022) who investigated that neologisms are innovations in every language and are created every day. As

the internet has launched new things, new words with new meanings have emerged in language.

4. Conclusion and suggestion

This research attempts to explore the most common forms of neologism and linguistic forms that have emerged on *TikTok* platforms and illuminate the impact of these phenomena on social discourse. It also highlights the role of social media as both a platform for expression and a driving force behind linguistic change. The findings show that the most commonly encountered language phenomenon on *TikTok* is new linguistic forms with a contribution of 77.72%, while neologisms are only at 22.28%. Among the new linguistic forms, emoji is the most frequently used, with a total of 40.31%. Meanwhile, in the neologism category, the lexicographic type dominates for 51.35%.

The emergence of these linguistic phenomena impacts social discourse and the role of social media as a platform for expression and a driving force behind linguistic changes. The communication gap between the older and younger generations is one of the impacts. The vocabulary often used by the younger generation on *TikTok* is not always understood by the older generation. This is due to the emergence of neologism or new words among the younger generation. In addition, the habit of using popular terms on *TikTok* may also spread to other social media communities and even be adopted in daily interaction. Lastly, as time goes by, modern dictionaries will continue to be updated to accommodate new vocabulary.

More investigation is essential to discover the emergence of neologisms and new linguistic forms in other social media platforms. For further research, it is essential to examine the long-term sustainability of these linguistic innovations. In addition, it is also important to investigate the role of social media algorithms in spreading new terms along with their effect on different communities. This study contributes to the understanding of language dynamics in the digital era, particularly on how social media becomes a platform for linguistic innovation. The novelty of this research lies in the in-depth analysis of neologisms and new linguistic forms that emerge on the *TikTok* platform. Furthermore, this study also highlights how this linguistic phenomenon reflects the changing patterns of communication within the digital community.

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