

Humor and Slang as Linguistic Tools: A Study of Audience Engagement Strategies Among Social Media Influencers

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Abstract

This research focuses on the usage of the informal communication elements such as humor and slang, and their vigorous adaptation on the social media by the generation. By adopting qualitative approach, the study examines the effectiveness of social media influencers' communication using language as a tool. The findings of the study are marked by specific figures obtained from correlational analysis of audience engagement ratios of social media influencers which suggest that in as much as entertainment is necessary while creating content for their audience, they are drawn to content they can appreciate culture that reflects some level of humor. It also demonstrates how the informal, casual speech style that is emphasized on the social media enables the influencers to craft their individual identities and successfully increase the reach of their content. This research explores the important relationship between language, strategies employed by influencers and the engagement of audiences, which can provide effective solutions for the influencers and content producers targeting youth.

Keywords: Humor, Slang, Influencers, engagement ratio

Introduction

With the emergence of social media, the way people interact with one another and more importantly the content has shifted significantly which implies that new guidelines for interaction domestically and globally are in place. More specifically, the use of humor and slang language are two tools that influencers employ in order to win their followers attention and affection (Kaye & Malone, 2020; Papatheodorou et al., 2020). Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp are a major necessity in an individual's day to day activities in the present world whether for public or private contact, and this has not only affected the people's way of communicating but also the language its self (Muslem et al., 2022). In view of this fact, the influencers appeal goes beyond transforming them into brand ambassadors as they are culture trend setters and language practitioners capable of changing the manner of speaking under context. This paper however takes a closer look at the influence of such practices on audience engagement rate, as well as their effectiveness in the improvement of digital communication.

The art of storytelling in a way that connects with countless people has thus given rise to societies defined by a language and sense of humor. In this context, humor has become an efficient and effective marketing tool targeting the audience at different levels. Success of this approach is proved by the long use of humor in different types of media ranging from printed advertising to television commercials. However, this scenario limits the potential for engagement enjoyment that such humor would elicit from the audiences. Humor is capable of bringing joy and even creating a bond between the consumer and the brand as a result of possible incorporate shared funny TikTok sketch or meme (Cohn, 2019; Smith, 2021). The ability to arouse entertainment in their clients has made it possible for companies such as Wendy's and Old Spice

to create a bond with their customers making the customers appreciate the humor within the brand even more.

Creating funny material may pose challenges because of the fact that one has and understands what the audience finds appealing or anticipates even if such is done regularly. The ability to engage people with humor such as making followers laugh and creating a connection with them proves to increasing a brand's engagement and sales funnel performance significantly (Parker, 2020). Further studies indicate that there are advantages of incorporating humor in marketing through social media websites other than just increasing people's propensity to share and remember advertisements that employ such techniques (Papatheodorou et al., 2020; Smith, 2021). In addition, informal expressions, or slangs, are widely used on social networking sites because they are informal and dynamic in nature. Slang caters to nearly everybody regardless of age or social standing, as it is a medium for exercising innovation, making communication easier and fostering relationships (Putrawan et al., 2020; Saputra & Marlina, 2019). This type of language makes it easier for the users with the same culture to understand and communicate with one another and eliminates language barriers in the digital space.

Generation Z, often called the post-1996 population, provides great evidence on how communication improvement has affected the people. They are able to navigate and operate the likes of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter effortlessly as they were raised into the technology era and there is virtually no technological challenge for them. These platforms are aimed at publishing and undergoing conversations (Muthalib et al., 2020). This generation's fondness for a particular vernacular develops very fast as a result of the wear and tear of cultural empires owing to globalization and science and technology (Rezeki et al., 2019). Besides, Generation Z does not only socialize with the people using the social media platforms but also interacts with the companies through them. Therefore, the language used by this age group plays an important role in the marketing strategies involving this age group (Muslem et al., 2022).

As social media and content marketing continue to grow, it is more than ever important to appreciate the relevance of slang and humor in marketing. As every other form of social media encourages content users to follow that which appeals to them, the application of humor and slang is bound to increase user interaction, as well as influence visibility within the social sphere (Smith, 2021). On the contrary, even when bonding slangs and humor publishers and their respective audiences are exposed to certain dangers by the very same gimmicks because it may be easy for some audiences to take offense for example through misunderstanding or cultures clashing. That is, further on the need arises to remember that contemporary society which is largely based on the Internet is complex and as such the such limitations must be appreciated. Given the constant evolution of social media, the influencers and marketers should also learn how the humor and slang can be used to attract more audience. The present study focuses on analyzing the effects of usage of these language traits in engagement rate and the communication processes in the virtual platform in general.

Literature Review

Examining the language on social networks has become new evolution within the advertisement study, especially in relation to humor and slang levels of involvement in the audience. Even though numerous studies have been previously performed, they are usually addressing one aspect of the problem. There is a lack of studies analyzing the role of these language components in engagement of audiences from different age and cultural groups. In addition to that, it seems that even though the existing literature often speaks about humor and slang in different contexts, the other angles of such discussions, that is the convergence of these

two elements and their relation to marketing, are still largely underexplored when it comes to social media.

Humor has been repeatedly emphasized in studies and research on online communication. Tsvetkova (2020) explains how one's use of language shifts on the internet as it combines elements of both spoken and written language eliminating the need of sticking to any formal styles on social media. The yearning for realness and a bond implies that as far as social networks are concerned, traditional social restrictions that dictate the language used may be lessened inhibiting them. Schmidt showed, the strategic use of humor in communication enhances social warmth and reduces conflict (Schmidt, 2014). The extent of it is astounding when looking at social media and its content, with research proving that humor is a strong factor in behavioral change. In marketing, the successful application of comedy has shown favorable brand images because such brands are able to generate the right humor that stays in the minds of consumers resulting in greater engagement and sharing of the brand (Sullivan, 2019). Accordingly, humorous messages are more prone to the phenomenon of virality because people want to share with their friends those materials that make them feel good (Sutherland & Sylvester, 2021). These tendencies positively impact users, who demand for similar content, the submission of which helps in community building, illustrating the importance of humor in online communication.

Digital communication would not be complete without the concept of slang, as it represents the social identity of users and aids in the extension of users' group membership (Baker & Wentz, 2021). This is especially true with reference to very young people such as Generation Z who employ informal languages as a means of overcoming social barriers and interacting (Fischer, 2019). Vocabulary trends change at lightning speed in modern day society due to economic and technological advancement coupled with the pressure of using social media, as a result, enhances communication further. The World Wide Web makes ever faster the spread of innovations in language, causing quick sweep in new slangs over a given age group in different societies (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). This shift in language usage patterns takes place quicker than what most strategists can cope with, creating issues for marketers who for instance, have to understand such attitudes in order to effectively communicate to the younger audience that is quite aware of the need for realness in communication aimed at the brands (Patterson et al., 2020).

Moreover, from a marketing perspective, the combined use of humor and slang creates additional compelling reasons to motivate the audience. Interest and demand for posts that have both these features are usually associated with higher interaction levels, which are more in line with the users' preferences (Griffiths, 2020). These two aspects promote a friendly atmosphere where audiences are keen to engage and even spread the content effectively, which in turn fosters community feeling (Zappavigna, 2018). Using these approaches, therefore, increases involvement, influencers' voices, and encourages building networks, which is important in social media promotion due to stiff competition. For influencers aiming for deeper audience engagement, language considerations such as the inclusion of humor or vernacular are important, however little research has been done on how both interact in performance in relation to comprehension by the audience. Literature only examines aspects of humor or slang as separate facets, thereby making it difficult to understand the audience response in relation to both. Furthermore, there are also significant gaps in the research about the reception of advertising strategies that incorporate humor or slang with regards to their specific target demographic and culture. These outlined future directions will enable researchers to focus on the language-culture

audience engagement nexus more effectively in the age of social media. Works that investigate the acceptance of humor or slang within a particular demographic segment will be beneficial to marketers seeking to design their marketing strategies. This literature review acknowledges the importance of humor and slang to the dynamics of social media interactions; however, more empirical studies are necessary to investigate the former's intersection and the implications on target audiences. In addition, understanding that different cultures may have different language preferences is imperative so that communication strategies that are designed will target the correct users at the right time even in a changing digital world.

Methodology

This research adapts a quantitative approach for the analysis of the audience engagement metrics, that is; the likes, comments and shares from different posts by media influencers on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. This is aimed at evaluating how effective a range of linguistic strategies such as humor and the use of slang if any in the communication by influencers by organizing this metric and comparing them across influencer communications. The relevant posts included in the analysis are those from influencers whose audience size and engagement ability ranged from the smallest to the largest in order to facilitate proper understanding on the different ways linguistic tools are appealing to different audiences. The posts were then divided into groups with regard to their language dimensions, for example, the posts that incorporate slangs and the posts that incorporate a more traditional style.

There has been a quantitative engagement metrics approach used to understand the correlation or the relationship between the kind of language used and the interaction by the audience. A statistical approach has also been adopted to assess the levels of engagement metrics among the different categories, thus understanding how engagement with the audience is structured in a social media environment, with respect to linguistic considerations. Moreover, one of the analyses included is titled audience demographics, where it identifies the type of audience and the age groups most likely to engage in influence whose linguistic tactics are the most effective. The research intends to add more deeper insight to the current understanding of digital communication and marketing mechanisms due to the role of social media.

Sampling of Data

This study adopts a non-probability sampling and purposive sampling method in the selection of social media influencers. The reason for this is that the research targeted a population of influencers who engaged a larger audience through the use of humor, slang, and relatable content.

Criteria for Selection

- The influencers should have enough interaction with followers on their relevant social media platforms particularly on Instagram and Tiktok with an average of 100,000 followers and above.
- They have also incorporated aspects of speech acts like humor and slangs to enhance their audience reach.
- There is also the inclusion of influencers from various ethnic groups along with their relevant audience segments to make sure that each and every aspect of the engagement strategies is portrayed.

Sample Size:

For the current research study, the total number of selected influencers is 13. The research sample size is sufficient in testing a number of aspects in relation to inner speech communication and audience engagement.

Data Collection:

Qualitative data analysis is carried out on influencers' social media accounts, which includes their posting behaviors, comments, likes, sharing, and communication of how these activities are done.

Data Analysis

Table No. 1

Engagement Metrics

The following influencers were selected for analysis including Instagram and Tiktok:

Influencer	Likes (Avg.)	Comments (Avg.)	Shares (Avg.)	Linguistic Strategy	Engagement Rate
Lilly Singh (@lilly)	100,000 - 500,000	2,000 - 10,000	Thousands (approx 3000)	Humor	1.7% - 3%
Charli D'Amelio (@charlidamelio)	1-2 million	2000-4,000	Thousands (approx. 7000)	Slang, Humor	1.2% - 1.5%
Sasha Lane (@sashablane)	50,000 - 200,000	1,000 - 5,000	Hundreds to thousands (approx 1500-3000)	Humor	3% - 4%
Jimmy Fallon (@jimmyfallon)	50,000 - 300,000	500 - 2,000	Thousands (approx. 4000-5000)	Humor	1.7% - 2%
Bella Poarch (@bellapoarch)	30 million+	300,000+	Millions (approx. 1 M)	Humor	8% - 10%
Zach King (@zachking)	25 million+	200,000+	Millions (approx. 1M)	Humor, Creative Editing	10% - 12%
Khaby Lame (@khaby.lame)	45 million+	300,000+	Millions (approx 2M)	Humor	16% - 20%
Emma Chamberlain (@emmachamberlain)	10 million+	100,000+	Thousands (approx 6000-8000)	Humor, Relatability	3% - 6%
NikkieTutorials (@nikkietutorials)	14 million+	20,000+	Thousands (approx 5000-7000)	Humor, Beauty Tips	3% - 5%
Samay Raina (@samayraina)	1 million+	20,000+	Hundreds of thousands (approx 1500-3000)	Slang, Humor	6% - 9%
Ducky Bhai	500,000+	10,000+	Thousands	Slang,	7% - 10%

(@dukybhai)			(approx 2000)	Humor, Satire	
Kusha Kapila (@kushakapila)	2 million+	30,000+	Thousands (approx 4000-5000)	Slang, Relatable Humor	4% - 6%
Bhuvan Bam (@bhuvan.bam22)	5 million+	50,000+	Hundreds of thousands (approx 5000-6000)	Slang, Humor	10% - 15%

While the engagement figures and corresponding linguistic tactics represent the most recent data at a given time, they are subject to change due to different permutations of content and audience activity.

Following formula has been used to calculate the engagement rate:

$$\text{Engagement Rate} = \frac{\text{Likes}(\text{avg}) + \text{Comments}(\text{avg}) + \text{Shares}(\text{avg}) \times 100}{\text{Total numbers of followers}}$$

Humorous Language: Influencers who prefer simple and amusing language have a high probability of bonding with their audience as they tend to post content that is easy to understand and almost everyone can relate to. Most of such posts center around specific issues with humorous skits that relate to the fooling audience.

Slang Language: Young audiences tend to use informal, colloquial phrases and popular expressions where necessary which helps the followers connect with the influencers. Their varieties of content are often in line with the prevailing culture and social issues.

Table No. 2
Audience Demographics

Influencer	Age Range	Gender	Geographic Focus
Lilly Singh (@lilly)	18-34	All	Global
Charli D'Amelio (@charlidamelio)	13-24	Primarily Female	North America
Sasha Lane (@sashalane)	18-30	All	Global
Jimmy Fallon (@jimmyfallon)	18-45	All	North America
Bella Poarch (@bellapoarch)	13-25	Primarily Female	Global
Zach King (@zachking)	18-34	All	Global
Khaby Lame (@khaby.lame)	18-35	All	Global
Emma Chamberlain (@emmachamberlain)	18-30	All	Global
NikkieTutorials (@nikkietutorials)	18-35	Primarily Female	Global
Samay Raina (@samayraina)	18-30	Primarily Male	South Asia
Ducky Bhai (@dukybhai)	18-35	Male	South Asia

Kusha Kapila (@kushakapila)	20-30	Primarily Female	South Asia
Bhuvan Bam (@bhuvan.bam22)	18-30	Male	South Asia

This audience demographics are based on Influencers' Instagram and TikTok's profile analytics case studies of their profiles and reports of influencers and their content analysis.

Findings of the Study

The impact analysis composed by the content influencers speaking plain English or slang language seems to bring out different engagement rates, audience types, and engagement strategies. For instance, Bella Poarch and Bhuvan Bam, who rely heavily on slang and irony as their mode of expression, sustain engagement rates that at times go beyond 15%. Their audience is relatively young consisting chiefly of Gen Z and younger millennials who appreciate such content which involves windy language and a reasonable level of humor. For example, Charli D'Amelio has an engagement rate lying between 1.2% and 1.5%, and employs trendy catchy slang and viral dance challenges to connect with her followers and remain relevant. Such strategy creates a degree of familiarity between the audience and the influencer hence high level of interactions such as comments and shares are encouraged.

On the other hand, some personalities like Lilly Singh and Jimmy Fallon, engage their base with humor using plain language. Their engagement statistics are about 1.7% – 3%, yet their content works well even for the older millennials and Gen X audience. These influencers post entertaining skits and funny stories, which are low on the trend but high on interaction with the active youth fans. This method focuses on being real and down-to-earth with the short attention span audience especially young people who appreciate comedy but not wordy language. Most of the audience demographic characteristics portray a similar pattern with those of the above-mentioned influencers. Those who talk slang tend to younger and more diverse audiences, whereas influencers who prefer plain simple language often can reach an older audience including adults. Moreover, the scope of the geography gets different; some of these influencers for example Samay Raina and Ducky Bhai, are popular in South Asia and use references that are culturally closer to their audience.

Table No. 3

Engagement Strategy

Influencer	Engagement Strategy
Lilly Singh (@lilly)	Leverages humor and shareable content through comedy memes and quotes which are aligned with the target audience.
Charli D'Amelio (@charlidamelio)	Makes trendy use of language by incorporating several trendy challenges in their videos that promote her to the younger audience enhancing the relatability.
Sasha Lane (@sashalane)	Her posts contain and rely on humor and real life experiences making it easy to create a bond with all her fans.
Jimmy Fallon (@jimmyfallon)	His use of humor encourages interaction with the audience – for instance, by asking 'comments' inviting those willing to respond to what the joke is about.
Bella Poarch (@bellapoarch)	Aims at engaging the audience through the use of humor and interesting content that has incorporated Design and Music A great deal to make people share.

Zach King (@zachking)	Captivating video content is created with the use of editing tips stimuli who helps the audience direction into denouement.
Khaby Lama (@khaby.lame)	Conveys humor through the absence of sounds with the use of a few seconds video shorts which have a universal appeal hence very easy to share.
Emma Chamberlain (@emmachamberlain)	Employs the casual mode of communication and seeks to be relatable by engaging in the banter that most fans would every day indulge in.
NikkieTutorials (@nikkietutorials)	Incorporates anecdotes in her makeup tutorials connecting with her audience using humor and helpful tricks.
Samay Raina (@samayraina)	Uses informal language and funny takes on normal situations to target the youth audience without losing track of the current culture.
Ducky Bhai (@duckybhai)	Even though his content uses satire and humor, it embraces and promotes certain societal norms and values causing a big impact to the audience, especially those living in South Asia.
Kusha Kapila (@kushakapila)	Speaks the language of the young ones and their culture using lighter note of married life and its challenges. Even sometimes addressing their problems that many of them would relate to.
Bhuvan Bam (@bhuvan.bam2)	Tells stories in the form of skits and as a performer builds up characters that talk about real-life issues making it interesting owing to the ability to relate.

To sum up, this research highlights how important language selection affects strategies for engaging influencers in targeted communication. The influencers who use colloquialism make use of the youthful spirit of the generation therefore commanding a higher level of engagement from the audiences. On the other hand, the use of plain language facilitates interaction amongst people of different ages. This insight provides active and professional influencers with useful information on how best to curate their content with respect to the changing social media content.

Discussion

This study highlights how language style is important when strategizing for audience engagement on the part of social media influencers. The present analysis distinguishes influencers who prefer using slangs from those who use plain language, identifying the different routes each takes to capture and connect with the audiences. Influencers like Charli D'Amelio, Samay Raina, Bhuvan Bam, and Sasha Blane show the success of their model in using trendy slangs and humor in enhancing their appeal to the young adults, especially generation Z. Their metrics, which average millions of likes and shares, indicate a clear liking towards content that is youthful and current. Research supports this notion, indicating that linguistic styles reflecting an audience's cultural and social contexts enhance engagement (Dunbar, 2016; Koller, 2015).

In comparison, individuals such as Lilly Singh, Khaby Lama, Emma Chamberlain, Nikki Tutorials and Jimmy Fallon illustrate that although the use of more sincere humor in

simple language, rather than the use of playful banter, can be perceived in a variety of ages equally well, simple language communication can create bonds. They depend on relatability and authenticity, using their model to argue that there is more to engagement than ever before in society than simply what is trending. This proves that even the more superficial aspect of engagement has its depth and purpose. Thurlow (2018) expands the theory regarding the technique's effectiveness by explaining how it may lessen the differences in languages. It, therefore, becomes additionally useful in looking for engagement from many audiences. Singh's comedy skits and Fallon's sense of humor help to broaden the appeal of the programs to a wider range of their target audiences. The demographics of the audiences also help to comprehend the engagement techniques that these social influencers have employed. Those who speak in slang niche largely attract a younger and diverse audience, whereas the social media influencers who stick to common simple language reach an older generation of millennials and generation X. This dichotomy highlights the importance for any given influencer to understand the culture of their target audience if they aim at making effective content (Smith, 2021). For example, Samay Raina and Ducky Bhai have large numbers of followers in South Asia in this specific case because they use language and jokes that are appropriate in the region, which shows how influencer marketing can be impacted by regions.

Conclusion

This study presents a very important factor that is the selection of language to maximize influencer engagement strategies on different types of social media. The in-depth exploration of engagement figures, audience composition and engagement approaches explain that both colloquialism and simplified language are useful, though not to the same audiences or occasions. Young followers of social media influencers who use fashionable slang, such as Charli D'Amelio or Khaby Lame, have higher levels of engagement since such influencers understand the younger audience. At the same time, however, entertainers like Lilly Singh, Nikki, Zach King and Jimmy Fallon would use comical and simple speech in order to attract diverse age ranges. The research findings have relevance for brands or marketers who seek to target certain groups of consumers. This way, they would be able to develop content creation positioning for improving engaging with the audience, or building brand loyalty. Considering that the pattern of social media changes with great speed, it would be interesting to study also how the language style and age-domains of the audience affect the influencers' marketing strategies in the long run.

Understanding the different aspects of how language can encourage engagement helps influencers and marketers to appreciate the dynamics of social media more readily. The findings of the research call for adaptation to changes in culture and tastes of audiences due to the need to keep the content fresh and interesting. In a dynamic planet of social media, characterized by rapid changes in trends, the use of language as a tool, to gain any level of intimacy with the audience, is very important. With influencers making use of language that appeals most to their audiences, there are high possibilities of improvement in the engagement levels as every one of the followers feels at home in such a community. This means that this research is a starting point in examining the language and engagement strategies and the audience in social media and how these aspects are changing over time.

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<https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X20937948>