Language Use in TikTok Activism by Gen Z Communities

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study investigates the linguistic behaviors of Generation Z in TikTok-driven protest movements and explores their implications for management studies. It examines how Gen Z employs creative language practices to construct activist discourse and challenge institutional authority within global digital platforms.

Subjects and Methods: Employing a qualitative approach, the study analyzes linguistic tools such as satire, vernacular codes, emotional appeals, and participatory memes within TikTok content created by Gen Z communities. Data were drawn from online observations and discourse analysis of protest-related materials, focusing on how these practices shape communicative dynamics.

Results: The findings indicate that Gen Z's targeted linguistic actions on TikTok represent a sophisticated form of discursive agency. Rather than being ephemeral, these practices influence the image of social groups, corporate reputation, and stakeholder legitimacy. Within management contexts, Gen Z activism disrupts traditional organizational communication, creating new challenges for stakeholder engagement and crisis management. Activists function as decentralized communication agents, compelling institutional actors to respond to digitally constructed meanings.

Conclusions: The study concludes that organizations must adapt to communication environments characterized by linguistic hybridity, digital remix culture, and affective connectivity. Managers are urged to recognize and engage with these dynamics proactively to maintain ethical authenticity and value alignment.

INTRODUCTION

However, in the last few years the three-fold interconnection between digital technology and youth culture and political involvement has opened a new paradigm in terms of activism modalities as aspect of production, distribution and reception have been altered. The short-form video application TikTok has stood out as a very relevant area within this matrix, where linguistic creativity can incorporate sociopolitical awareness, especially among the users of this application belonging to the Generation Z group.

Since the platform is a typical combination of ephemeral nature, algorithm-based moderation, and participatory culture, TikTok can be used as a cyborg space of activism that is simultaneously performative, affective, and linguistic (Parfaite, 2024). The language in such an environment is not simply an ordinary tool of communication but a highly tactical tool of identity formation, ideology expression and mass mobilization coordination. Generation Z, with a defined age range between the middle of 1990s and the beginning of 2010s, has been raised in a digitized world

where social media perform the key role of the exchange and spreading of information, building of community, and civic engagement (Molyneux, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2021).

In contrast to past generations, people belonging to Generation Z are not only fully technologically literate but are also not as unaware of the performativity of online communication as their predecessors (Abidin, 2020). Internet mediation is colored by sharp awareness of their audience, aesthetic values, and the operation of algorithms (Klein, 2020). To this effect, their involvement in activism, either racially focused, climate-related, gender-based, or political transparency-related, are linguistically constructed in such a manner that challenges the traditional models of protest and discussion (Clark, 2020; Tufekci, 2017).

The extreme form of TikTok activism is therefore an unusual mode of political expression because it is based on the use of multiple modes of discourse such as the spoken code, written captions, music, visual cues, and hashtags that create political meaning in combination with one another (Schrott, 2025). The message put out by the activists on such a platform is often expressed due to irony, jokes, satire or based on a logical rather than ideological appeal: the meme-based message; yet, they also capture meaning due to referential resonance with adolescent peer audiences. The research community refers to such a practice as playful seriousness, in which the existence of attention-grabbing strategies is in one part and the retention of authentic sociopolitical commitments, in the other (Soules, 2021).

In these forms of communicative activity, the linguistic processes that Gen Z enacts are multimedia and work at two levels: they are both expressive and strategic, helping to bypass algorithmic censorship, provoke the production of viral messages, and build soloist notions. This way of speaking is in line with general trends in political discourse on the Internet. In the most modern young people movements, rhetoric or particular rhetoric is often abandoned when the street and vernacular rhetoric is used, and labelled affective and embodied rhetoric (Friberg, 2022). The catchphrases used on TikTok, including No justice, no peace, protect trans kids, and Climate strike now are wedded to fashioned editing, trending music, and the involvement of challenges, which place the elements of language in the sphere of cultural platform logics.

This recontextualization makes the political comments of the Gen Z easy to grasp, share, and relate to emotionally. The new language aspect of TikTok activism demonstrates the way the new generations of people tend to use digital resistance in the environment of visibility, surveillance, and platform control. The linguistic flexibility can be illustrated with the use of euphemistic expressions, to play with the content moderation, or the ability to re-appropriate the trends in the use of memes as an activist strategy. Such opposition does not have to be contradictory in an explicit way but tends to effectuate itself through humor, semantic ambiguity and effective collaboration.

Such hashtags as #GenZForChange and #BlackLivesMatter serve not only as a tool of organization but also as identifiers, as they enable the users to incorporate their linguistic manifestations into the larger discourse communities (Bowman et al., 2021). The linguistic production in the Tik Tok activism should be observed through the prism of identity performance as well. Other users use language to show ideological attainment, assertive ethical stands and development of relationships with audiences. The closeness that tends to be associated with activist videos, with people addressing the camera directly, using first-person pronouns, and inclusive ones like we and us or emulating the styles of popular vernacular, replaces immediacy and authenticity (Ristovska, 2021).

This corresponds to that of performativity developed in which an individual positions himself or herself in a strategic manner so as to affect social perceptions. Such performative acts of activism may no longer be merely the collection of individual acts; instead, they now are shared and sewed together between videos and across users to create distributed campaigns in TikTok activism. Activism on TikTok has grown even further; yet the linguistic dynamics of movements that maintain them is little researched in academia.

The focus of scholarly studies tends to use TikTok content in terms of visual or behavioral aspects and overlook the importance of mobilizing language in the caption, narrated voiceover, audio overlay and comments section key to creating political meaning (MacKinnon et al., 2021). The

analysis to be presented in this research work attempts to address this disparity and thus produces a detailed discussion of Gen Z populations on TikTok, with the emphasis on language being one of the triggers of digital resistance, identity formation, and activist narratives. A critical form of discourse analysis and digital ethnography helps the study to place the language as a medium, but performative, ideological, and relational practice in the context of Gen Z activism.

With the language at the center of its interest, the current study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on digital sociolinguistics, youth media and platforms. It argues that those linguistic practices used by Gen Z on TikTok are not accidental; instead, they happen to be the means crucial to fashion, circulate, and maintain activist narratives in the modern digital culture. The importance of language in these processes is becoming necessary as the social and political movements get more global and online. The role of language in the processes should not only be evaluated through the academic exploration, but also as far as practitioners, educators, and activists involved in the emergent process of youth-based form of digital resistance.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The current research is conducted in the pursuit of qualitative research that operates on the interpretivist epistemology. It challenges the subtle linguistic work of Gen Z groups as well as problematizing the use of TikTok as a space of activism where language is positioned as a literal articulated social action within the digital media, cultural self-identity, and activism. Instead of measuring repetitive trends or examining a set of hypotheses already formulated, the interpretation of significance, rhetorical strategy, and subject performance discursive acts as possible through the multimodal and linguistic aspects of TikTok videos is the goal of the analysis. Placing the center of its studies in terms of context, interaction and interpretation the study aims at shedding light not only on the lived-realities and communicative creativities of Gen Z activists.

Research Design

This paper uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its dominant interpretation scheme and supplements it with ethnography, optimized to apply to online research, in digital ethnography research. Based on, the CDA will be adopted as an instrument that will guide the research in examining how language and ideologies are constituted in TikTok in order to discard the dominant narratives and construct activist identities. Ethnography, in its turn, allows to observe interactions, narrative formation, and engagement without interventions, creating a methodological design in combination and combination, targeting both the content, and the context of digital activism.

Data Collection

The corpus is constituted of 30 Tik Tok videos created by the participants that are members of Generation Z and are approximately between the ages of 16 and 25 years. Thematic of significance, recency, breadth of topics covered, and popularity (number of likes and shares) were selected through purposeful selection of videos. Lastly, the choices include activism issues in the realm of racial justice, environmental activism, gender and LGBTQ + rights and political mobilization. The design of the study has excluded personal material and blocked out accounts and has used only publicly accessible material. The data was enhanced by extraction of the corresponding metadata, such as video captions, hashtags, comment threads, and usernames (and anonymized in order to do ethical analysis). Also, there were audio records of transcripts and video descriptions of the videos in support of multimodal analysis. An eight-week period was used during which the non- participant observation was systematically conducted to monitor the process of the development of activist content on the platform, its dissemination, and transformation.

Data Analysis

A two-stage analysis was sought and both stages combined. Thematic coding on the data was done using the NVivo software in the first step. Video coding was related to patterns of repetition in language, discourse style, ideological framing and identity signifiers. Themes that were coded, were protest slogans, satire or irony, hashtags-as-discourse, inclusive pronouns, and cultural

references. The second step involved the use of a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that was used to unravel underlying ideological framework and power networks enshrined in the language use. The paper analyzed the three-dimensional model given, which entailed the following: (1) textual level, in which the lexical choices, syntax, as well as narrative devices were discussed; (2) discursive practice level, where production and consumption of activist content were analyzed; and (3) level of the sociocultural practice, at which the discursive practices were examined in relation to social conditions and platform politics they respond to and shape. Multimodal features were also featured into consideration; the interaction of visual and audio elements with text language to give meaning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social media has become not only one of the main political conversation spaces but also a space of mass mobilization, and the emergence of TikTok with its specific algorithmic design, communicative performance, and long-term creative verbal expression has created a communication environment that breaks the traditional patterns of influence and message control. In such a setting, those belonging to generation Z are not only digital natives, but also cultural producers who create narratives, symbolic resistance, and awaken affections in publics in language. Their activism does not only play out in terms of intelligible ideological stands, but also those situated by the micro-politics of tone, meme, rhythm and vernacular authenticity. Such language choices have an important organizational implication, especially among those institutions that attract balancing reps and reputational risk because of viral criticism. In this regard, effective understanding of the use of language as an activism tool is essential to both management scholars and practitioners. The above considerations can be used to explain not only the linguistic approach that the members of Generation Z on TikTok have adopted but also how these discourses blur the boundaries of top-down hierarchies in communications and what modern organizations mean by accountability and stakeholders within the digital world.

Hybrid Language: The Blending of Advocacy and Internet Vernacular

The strategic combination of the language of formal advocacy and the informal language of internet culture, memes, and popular lingo, which also represents an informal language of youth, is one of the features of Gen Z activism leveraging TikTok. Danuel Norris is aiming to provide a very intentional engineering of this hybrid discourse to establish congruency between the political messaging as well as the communicative norms of the platform and youth identity. The examples of such sentences like gaslight the system, no cap activism, we ate the patriarchy, serve justice, not just looks can demonstrate the ingenuity of the combination of the political analysis with the conventions of aesthetic and semiosis of TikTok culture. This linguistics mixes serve various communicative functions. To begin with, it increases peer relatability and affective proximity. Idioms and lexical items widely used in the communicative arsenal of Gen Z help the users shorten the discursive gap between the speaker and the audience. Political messages thus are recreated as dialogic and conversational, with the emphasis laid on horizontal peer relations and the displacement of top-down persuasion. Second, a very light, ironic note inherent in such words does soften the solemnity of the matters being discussed, which is much closer to the entertainment-based reality of TikTok. By contrast to dialogue that downplays activism and undermines its gravity, this playfulness provokes a state of cognitive engagement hinging on humor, wit and cultural familiarity, which are the functions that constitute the backbones to digital literacy of the generating Z community (Haque, 2025).

A larger discussion of Gen Z activism on TikTok into a cultural resistance indicates that it is a new iteration of cultural resistance. Indeed, these users focus on reframing political communication using the semiotic repertoires of their generation instead of building on well-established institutional talk. They put the political criticism in the rhetorical scene where the jokes on popular culture that people share are mixed up with viral phrases, which also complicate the standard divisions between the state and the intimate world and perform what can be considered an action called the discursive reterritorialization (Dynel, 2021). The savvy combination of registers is also a manifestation of the keen appreciation of the algorithmic and participatory nature of the platform. Algorithmic visibility on TikTok does not depend only on the quality of content it includes but also on format, sonic trends, jokes delivery, and synchronization with

users' attention trajectories. Under this scenario, the conventional mode of activist discourse which usually tends towards linear arguments or formal pleas is exposed to the risk of becoming outdated. Hybridized language is therefore an adaptation strategy, enabling its agents to manage both communicative clarity and the production of ideological clarity with reference to the rules and those on the viral media (Farida et al., 2024). As an example, adding a popular audio clip to the post about climate anxiety can help activists optimize the algorithmic visibility and integrate most of their messages with the existing popular narratives. In this instance, language is not an accident of activism but is instead the means by which the claims of activists might make present.

The factor of linguistic hybrid as a significant aspect of identity development is presented today. In networked publics, the issue of linguistic performance allows Gen Z activists to express not only ideological positioning but, at the same time, definition of the self. Their talk is plumped up with cultural references, emotional investment and identification. Think of the phrase I am screaming, and I am organizing, which, at once, signifies both emotional burnout and long-term political activity, a unique Gen Z combination of emotional and political agency. This layered language serves as an emphasis on values of genuine, humor, and unity that is the focus of the group digital culture. Notably enough, such pieces are often self-referential or intertextual, assumed to be very well-known to meme cycles, current trends in Tik Tok, and the in-platform irony. This therefore means that language is not only a tool of ideological expression but one of an in-group identification as well. Specifically, the discourse of TikTok particularly tends to have a metalinguistic approach, thus introducing the discourse as a performance. Many of the Gen Z creators are reflexive with the activist language they use and are ironically or hyperbolically using tropes like: As a queer, neurodivergent, ecofeminist intersectional baddi. The practices serve to assert and challenge the imperative of self-representation in online environments at the same time. This kind of dual-voiced discourse makes the dynamics operating inside youth-driven digital activism more complicated, and proves that the power of interpretation relies not only on the semantics of reading, but also on the performative tactics with the help of which meaning could have been created and challenged.

Hashtags as Tools of Organization and Identity Formation

Hashtags in TikTok digital architectures also serve multiple purposes in addition to their ostensible technical purview of metadata markers. They have been transformed into complex discursive tools that regulate the process of collective identity, the politicization of the speech, and the definition of ideological display grounds. Within Gen Z groups activated through Tik Tok, hashtags do not simply index the content within algorithmic systems, but also express belonging, solidarity and opposition. That is why their deployment is a sign of a change in the form and expression of political organization in platformed landscapes where words have to circumnavigate attention economics, speedy diffusion, and ephemeral cultural fashions. Among the general hashtags that are repeated throughout the data, the #GenZForChange, #NoJusticeNoPeace, #BlackLivesMatter, #ProtectTransYouth, and #ClimateStrikeNow have been occurring with vivid discursive regularity. These tags operate on two levels which are mutually dependent. Structurally they are searchable and aggregate able units, which allow the algorithm of TikTok and by extension its users to sort chat and share activist materials. This system makes it possible to assume decentralized self-organization without dependence on the formal institutions and central authorities (Sokhova & Red'ko, 2021). Semiotic identity emblems and intent are, symbolically, represented by hashtags. Using a specific tag in their caption, producers associate themselves, implicitly, with more comprehensive sociopolitical agenda, spread the ideology on their position, and make their activist stance visible to their followers and strangers.

The patterned and repetitive use of the hashtags in many Tik Tok videos maintains the creation of a collective activist language. The expansion of this lexicon goes beyond single clips to allow the formation of a networked discourse community that is connected not only by various areas of interest but through the language of involvement. As in the case of #GenZForChange, which is representative of a hashtag more than a demographic label, it is also shorthand of a generational agency, rhetorical property, and tactical activist orientation. Using this tag, creators place themselves in the group that positions itself as a cultural and political agent, redefining youth as

active producers of change rather than an inert consumer (Soriano & Gaw, 2022). At the same time, hashtags on TikTok often perform a role, where they are like political speech acts (Austin, 1962). When the user places a video with #NoJusticeNoPeace or #AbolishICE in them, it is not simply a descriptive action, but one of protest, declaration and call to action. This performative aspect summarizes what has been called the logic of hashtag activism when the language artifact becomes a site of struggle and action in its own right. Notably, diffusion of such tags creates affective publics - networked groups, tied together in structural relation of emotional investment, discourse rituals, as well as the symbolic power of the common hashtag. In addition, there is a striking set of behaviors that entails a reappropriation of trending or otherwise generic hashtags to sabotage algorithmic circulations in the name of redirecting attentional resources toward the collective agendas of activists. The most noteworthy instance of this has been the intentional takeover of #FYP (For You Page) which though not technically political in nature nevertheless allows an increased level of content discovery.

The Gen Z activists do this by regularly adding their videos with activist-related hashtags (e.g., #EndSARS, #ReproductiveJustice) along with tags that to gain visibility (e.g. #FYP, #Viral or #TikTokPolitics), thus merging the elements of algorithmic pragmatism with the ideological goals. The practice shows that it is a media-savvy generation that knows how to articulate the political content as well as manipulate platform mechanisms, showing an amazing understanding of how visibility works and how linguistic strategies can be crafted to reach the largest numbers. Hashtags also serve as elements of digital identity construction in addition to being too useful as part of strategic action. Addition of activist hashtag to the video discourse becomes a program of identity, which can be compared to ideological and cultural jewelry. Similarly to the way fashion or music taste can represent affiliations and beliefs, the hash tags used in the open network will proclaim the political allegiance, moral commitments, and social group they belong to. The hashtags are therefore micro performances of the self that indicate activist identity and shared moral codes. The constant presence of #TransRightsAreHumanRights or #DefundThePolice in bios or on every single published video is an expression of this trend and how hashtags are being made part of a unified activist identity regardless of what is being said at the moment. Hashtags also work as relationships.

When videos are conversing through duets, stitch or comments, the original hashtags commonly get replicated or used further in the creation of a dialogue chain with same patterns of conversation. These are some of the hashtags that serve as landmarks of shared discussions, bringing diverse voices into one coherent story of a community. Digital coalitions are formed when makers that are geographically dispersed, divided by identity categories and contexts of experience are united around the adoption of the same hashtags. The ideological strength of the hashtag makes this medium of communication confusing as well as powerful. Another common counter-movement is an attempt to oversaturate or to infest activist hashtags with neutral or counter-messaging material; the spamming of #BlackLivesMatter with non-political or antagonistic material affords an illustrative example. Gen Z creators, as such, resort to counter-strategies. There is reclamation of hashtags, creation of others and others that give community warnings regarding tag flooding. The given process shows how dynamic and susceptible the hashtag discourse is, since its meaning cannot be altered but are constantly renegotiated in the form of usage, contexts, and digital conflict.

Irony, Satire, and Meme Logic as Subversive Language Strategies

These features of the political performance of Gen Z on Tik Tok include the strategy of controlled irony, satire and logic of memes as products of the specific system of political criticism conveyed in the form of coded jokes, masked acting, and culturally speaking jokes. Most Gen Z creators do not express outrage or opposition as explicitly or aggressively; instead, they use subtle, sarcastic, or parodic pitch and insert the serious political statements into the humorous form. The strategy serves several rhetoric and risk-averse purposes: maintenance of a platform suitability, avoidance of content restraint, diminished emotional weight of political discourse, and promotion of engagement by peers and in recognizably humorous terms. In turn, irony can be compared to a protective linguistic device and a strategic means of magnification. Researchers have described this ability to subvert through play as playful subversion (Blais & Dupuis, 2022) and revealed that

in the context of the digital world, the role of humor is not a negation of activism but is one of the most powerful tools used by them. Participatory affordances and algorithmic patterns of TikTok give preference to humor, shortness, and entertainment, the feature that does not classically define protest communicating. As reaction, Gen Z activists have responded to this ecology by integrating resistance into frames in the shape of formats that reflect the platform preference. Satirical restaging of political characters, clips edited with the ironic sounding cover, the usage of compositions that are trending and thus used ironically are just some examples of how the creators use contradictions between lightheartedness and criticism. The use of a case study means activists pretending to mime a popular phrase like It is giving with statistics on racial disparities in the police field being shown and hence, creates a clash between comedy and serious material.

Rhetoric use of irony is based on generation. The scholars of digital youth culture assert that Generation Z, socialized in endless selfie, economic insecurity, climate change, and political crisis, has incorporated irony as the primary coping style and communication mode. This is not irony of cynical distance; instead, this is a multi-level criticism based on the realization of the absurdity of systems put under question. Linguistically, irony is used in the functions of distancing and alignment: writers avoid literal presentation and position themselves with readers who are able to read between the lines. This can be a feature of a shared cultural literacy whose meaning is less obtrusive than on the main surfaces, but is discovered through fluency of platform, meme knowledge, and generation context. There is still another layer of linguistic complexity with memetic activism. Memes are by definition visual-linguistic constructs situated on principles of repetition, intertextuality and remix. When TikTok content creators are recontextualizing meme templates they are subverting the language of comedy to sneak in political commentary, e.g. the split-screen template of me vs. the government or the how it started how it is going transition. This dual-encoding seeks to expand the audience as well as holds on the deniability.

Due to its use of remix, memes presuppose participation of the audience and consequent remaking; thus, when used as a part of the activism approach, memes encourage the audience not only to consume but to elaborate the message by remixing, stitching, performing a duet, or leave a comment. Academic treatments of humorous activism have insisted that the humorized forms of protest do not lessen ideological seriousness; instead, they improve interpretive richness, and cause viewers listeners to interpret with their minds and their cultures to find out the intended meaning. A sarcastic TikTok using the sound signal of the phrase, everything is fine, and projected information about the problem of global warming, as an example, will be used due to the ability of viewers to identify the linguistic dissonance and ironic purpose. In this context, humor can be interpreted as a vehicle of counterculture, as a harmless subversion that can be used to bypass algorithms, at the same time finding a response in emotionally charged and entertainment-related users that is typical of the Gen Z online audience. Moreover, this strategy provides some sort of security to those who practice it. Political messaging on social websites is often either trolled, criticized or punishable by the administration. The ironic deployment and meme logic offer protection so that messengers can state critical positions without going into direct combat with them.

Faced with this challenge, creators may escape the accusation of literal meaning or even avoid such an accusation through a claim of ambiguity in the language of irony an example is the reliance on the discursive ambiguity identified. This grey area of the lexicon allows specific messages to stay within the view of audiences that have access to meme literacy but less able to interpret messages by antagonistic actors or a moderation system. Comical expressions can also be seen as support to the more general anti-institutional mood in the Gen Z political culture. Instead of the reproduction of common activist media formats, i.e., press releases, manifestos, or serious debates, these artists utilize ironic irreverence in an attempt to display contradictions, hypocrisies, and absurdities inherent in dominant political rhetoric. As an example, a creator may state: So appreciative of the minimum wage, accompanied by the images of the student debt, the inability to afford housing and inflation. These performative decisions avoid moral posturing and, instead, replace juxtaposition, one of the foundations of meme reasoning.

Captioning as a Site for Encoded Meaning and Emotional Framing

In the framework of TikTok, it is not the secondary textual supplement that is called a caption but an autonomous layer of the semiotic hierarchy, interacting with sound, visual, and movement information. Within the Gen Z digital activism, one can see captions as a hidden linguistic tool aiding the formulation of a political position, the readjustment of a tone, and the regulating of how the viewers interpret the content, especially when the cinematic performance aspect of a video is premised on humor, parody, or the deliberate ambiguity. Here, captions are both grounding and expansive: they both stabilize the overall impression that the viewer has about what the video is up to and broaden her scope of interpretation. A certain pervasive trend in the gathered data presents itself as well: the intentional use of emotionally charged or ideologically telling captions accompanies the use of visual pieces which, when taken by themselves, would seem humorous or playful. To give one example, the caption on a TikTok that uses a trending soundtrack and dance could be something like This is how we cope, when our generation can't afford housing or don't say that I am satirizing, this is survival. The caption, in these cases, can be considered as textual decoding agent since it is guiding the viewer to interpret the video as a political statement as opposed to a trifling entertainment. This interplay agrees with the formulation advanced by Chen (2024) of the anchoring influence of paratextual signals in multimodal narratives: the caption allows one to see a meaning that is unarticulated in choices of tone or gesture.

Empirical analysis indicates that captioning serves as the linguistic bridge upon which the Affect manifests itself. Whereas the visual materials offered by the citizens of Generation Z are often characterized by the performative inhibition or ironical detachment, the caption discourse provides an avenue in which vexation, sorrow, or desperation can nonetheless be expressed as such. In this space, habitual expressions of affective framing are applied by captioners, who refer to theoretical contributions to highlight the importance of the message, regardless of whether the issue is climate anxiety, racial injustice, economic precarity, or gender-based violence. As an example, anyone producing a piece of content may incorporate an aesthetically light approach with a tag like, we laugh because we have cried enough, or this is not content; it is our experience in life. These above-mentioned statements serve as the discursive hinges reshaping the channel of the viewer movement toward emotional identification or social criticism as opposed to the aestheticized involvement. Such framing activity is particularly highlighted in platform ecosystem characterized and controlled by algorithmic curation based on engagement, novelty, and entertainment without the seriousness of didactics (Stepnik, 2023). Leveraging the power of the persuasive caption strategies, the activists offset the discursive power of the algorithm and repossess the interpretive power of making meaning in the context that is prone to simplifying even political discourse. Coming to this meaning, captioning is a platform-literate rhetorical move, which allows an activist to move around the aesthetic economy of TikTok and promote ideological lucidity and political self-determination.

The text in the embedded captions in social-media messages is considered to play multiple communicative functions, including what has come to be called coded resistance (Nurjamin et al., 2023). In inflammatory political contexts, in places where law-enforcement practices, state policy, or the prevailing ideology is on the receiving end of a row; or where people are being persecuted by the government that they always mention, digital artists will always employ euphemism, misspelling, symbolic coding (such as, g0vt, an abbreviation of government), and indirect language. Though the latter stylistic devices are fairly subtle, they play a role within the Gen Z online conversation, providing a kind of linguistic steganography in which the message will only be dormant rather than impossible to interpret to only people that have the same set of cultural and political frames informing the way one thinks about this situation. would be the caption of another day of late-stage capitalism, which is both funny and ideologically critical; in the context of youth digital resistance culture, however, it is a clear indicator of political activity, and not an ironical comment. The practical role that captions serve as a source of storytelling bridging between personal and mass identity is also due to the captions. One may comment on a video on the struggle with student debt by declaring that millions of us are living this story, which turns the personal topic into a generational issue as compared to a single grievance. Such transformation of personal story to communal narration corresponds to the paradigm of affective

publics in which narrative connects the category of emotional expression and the process of political mobilization.

These strategies are also intensified by the semantics manipulation that is posed by hash tagged captions. When using ironical/deceptive labels (e.g., #funny, #trending), activists tend to combine them with genuine movement-related tags (e.g., #ClimateJustice, #BLM) so as to maximize the exposure rate and, at the same time, reduce the possibility of moderation or better algorithmic exposure. Hashtags perform the role of semantic switches in this dual purpose and allow the creators to switch between the viral spread and ideological perpetuation. Such a coordination of authenticity and algorithmic optimization characterizes the calculated literacy that Gen Z pays attention to in an attention economy. Captions are a very important place of reflexivity and meta-commenting. Some artists use this aspect to highlight the limitations of Tik Tok as an activist platform and make such statements as, yes, this is a TikTok, yes, we still care or Activism looks different here, and that is okay. These self-conscious statements serve simultaneously as defenses against possible criticisms of affective, aesthetic, and comic forms of opposition as well as a defense of the legitimacy of such forms of opposition and thus refute the implication that these modes of opposition are considered as inferior to more standard forms of activist speech.

Collaborative Discourse through Duets, Stitches, and Comment Dialogues

A participatory architecture of TikTok is a unique system to create collaborative discourse in digital activism. At the center of this model are the characteristics of duets, stitches, and comment replies, which allow users to react, comment, or add more to other videos on-site. Such affordances facilitate an emergence of what can be termed polyvocal form of activism where language is dialogically constructed and dynamically stratified through the contributions of users (Rodima, 2024). Rather than a single voice of the activist, a cluster of interconnected stories emerges, where authorship is distributed, and people act in unison. In a special way, duets and stitches favor visual and linguistic juxtaposition. Stitches allow users to remove it a part of an original video (usually it is a daring statement, a statement of experience, or a call to action) and instantly add their own comments to it. This structure provides such a powerful means of rhetorical intervention, by means of which the users shift discourse along the way. An example is a video alleging that the issue of climate change is overhyped, stitched together by a Gen Z user who provides scientific refuting statements or his or her personal experience of environmental degradation. It is a multimodal approach that combines performative utterance and counter-discourse account about the issue, which allows the participants to counter the misinformation or add context to the black-and- white claims on the fly (Vaara & Whittle, 2022).

Duets, in their turn, suggest lateral vertical chats. Duets are used by the activists to collaborate and make use of mutual critique, solidarity, or story-telling. In one case, a user describes how they were misgendered at school and receives affirmations by the others who shared their stories or have experienced the same things and who described institutional discrimination. This involvement creates the symmetry of aesthetics and debate; body language, verbal reinforcement, and linguistic register re-create the original video and incorporate a novel layer of emotional or ideological meaning (Xiao, 2024). In this case, language is not fixed, but merely recontextualized time and again by users who choose to reach and reclaim or reinforce through their vernacular. In the modern digital environment, social-media applications like Tik Tok have continued to become the core elements of networked publicly referred to by scholars as networked publics. The networked nature of these publics is normalized by visibility, virality and peer-to-peer responsiveness and thus remakes the political discourse. With activist expression now located in wider common linguistic reservoirs and community situated registers, an expression no longer belongs to the initial intentions of the creating person. As a result, meaning is created in an interdependent and repeated process and closely resembles the logic of open-source activism instead of prioritizing top-down messaging. In this regard, Tik Tok does not only act as a broadcasting platform, but it acts as a discursive platform where meaning will always be contested and re-produced.

The conversational aspect is enhanced in the comment box. Traditionally excluded in traditional media studies as the mere bane or harmless trash, TikTok comments turn out to be the hubs of

micro-argument, cultural translation, and reinforcement of the community. Its users often use informal but politically effective language to argue or explain something in implicit points. Phrases like Not everyone is as privileged as you are, as a person of that background, just allow me to explain, are signs that power has passed into a deliberative part, where knowledge is not only negotiated individually, but also in a social way. These types of interactions reflect the ease with which Gen Z has placed fluid identity positions and the disposition toward what they have to say the lines toward dialogic practices of self-correction, favoring subtlety over dogma (Wajdi et al., 2024). In addition, it is common for comment dialogues to take the call-and-response forms of oral practices of resistance and communal story-curating (hooks, 1994). A user can post a weaker story about mental health, and each new message can include empathies ("Sending love") or support ("Same here, hang in there") or advice ("Here is a resource that worked on my case"). Although they can be viewed through the lens of affect, such gestures should also be seen as a vernacular politics of care where empathy and emotional literacy become the foundational elements of the activist identity. Language is used in this case not as a tool of persuasion or argumentation but to confirm presence, communicate awareness, and perform mutual support.

TikTok was able to stand out among the previous networking platforms like Twitter or Facebook because of the involvement of kinesthetic interactivity. The participants in the same site can not only write comments on the text but also use the embodied discourse, i.e. gestures, facial imitations, voice dynamics, and mimicry. Through duets and stitches, people can frame the words of other people, in this way creating a multimodal chain of resistance. In this regard, language is perceived as both spoken interaction and performance that accommodates both the visual and the textual representation; an interaction by which meaning is created. These forms of participatory layering can also be connected to the ideas expressed, who coins what he calls the remix culture whereby the creation of culture is enhanced by appropriation, iteration and re-signifying. The opposite is true: TikTok activism thrives because it encourages remix in a broader sense: not just of the sounds and the images but also of the ideological perspective, the discursive stance, the generational understanding, and so on. Every sewn reply or comment is an example of civic annotation and therefore introduces other meanings into the logic of the circulation of the platform.

Discussion

The paper draws a conceptual reorganization of activism, discourse, and influence in the digital landscape, focusing on the role of linguistic agency that the Gen Z plays on TikTok. Organizational perspective This shift is even beyond media platform or age group preference questions: this is a revolutionizing renegotiation of stakeholder communication, public legitimacy and value alignment in new decentralized settings. In the modern context, institutions, whether corporate, governmental, non-profit ones cannot rely on a one-way, top-down kind of communication strategy in order to achieve some sense of relevance or legitimacy. They are, rather, faced with a discursive ecology where grassroots stories challenge and is transformed into institutional legitimacy (Apostolopoulou et al., 2022). In the findings, it is identified that the linguistic activism used by Gen Z is a form of digital labor, which is disciplined, incorporating both affective and strategic messaging. These habits disapprove old-fashioned assumptions that young digital consumers are all the members of passive, distracted, and incoherent individuals. Instead, the data show that this is a generation that speaks symbolic management, reputation engineering and that we often see them display the ability to move nimbly to resolve a crisis or a cultural flash point. Their ability to remix, refute, and retell hegemonic discourse is a bright example of participatory culture that functions under the model of civic and activist engagement. The implication to brand managers and communication strategists is obvious; the sovereignty of narratives has been permanently decentered.

The linguistics of Gen Z, including such features of their language as satire, vernacular unity, and emotional sincerity, do not mesh well with the current models of corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication. Such traditional formats (with the standardized annual report and sanitized news release as the most obvious examples) are more likely to avoid the elements of reality that would strike a chord with the TikTok discursive environment (Tóth et al., 2022). The current research shows that CSR hypocrisy revealed by Gen Z activists hidden in popular sound-

bite or meme formats subsequently makes brand gaffes go viral within an hour. As a management issue, this becomes a case of transformation of reputation management to reputation susceptibility where the misalignment of communicator is increased by the participatory backlash. The implication of the organizational communication strategies is dire. To communicate with Gen Z is not enough to live in the same platforms, it requires to accept the same dialogic, reflective and open to criticism discursive logic. The status quo measures, such as reach, impression or sentiment score, need to be complemented with the measures of narrative uptake, linguistic truth and remix potential. This reframing fits with the strategic communicative realism advocated by Marenco & Seidl (2021) in which organizations do not follow discursive trends within digital publics but prepare and act ahead of the times.

In this work, micro-political processes of domination are placed in first place. Phones Partners in TikTok are not the passive recipients of online content but the micro-managers of mass attention. They enlist a following behind various causes using skillful use of language and algorithmic literacy including environmental justice, racial equity and mental health. They, thus, face managerial hierarchies of message design and present connective action, used to refer to individualized but organized expression that goes around organizations. The activism specific to Gen Z thus represents not only a decentralizing of power in terms of political leadership but also authority over linguistics, a notion of special interest to the communication of leaders, effective storytelling in organizations, and the whole construct of dealing with crisis. The orthodox assumptions concerning the processes through which the shaping of public engagement occurs are also destabilized by the findings as far as governance is concerned. The classical stakeholder-engagement models are based on consultation, consensus-building, and a systematic discussion. In contrast, TikTok activism works by means of the provocation, iteration, and participatory correction, establishing the bottom-up accountability circuits that occasionally work more swiftly than the official bureaucratic chains.

The patterns described require a rethinking of the nature of (public-affairs) management, under which dialogic responsiveness should have to be made capable of responding to ethereal, emotional, and semi-ironic interjections and infusions by activist voices. In addition, the epistemological unease that this dynamic produce needs to be considered in the fields of discipline that is related to management and policies. Though not governed by rational-argumentative logic, Tik Tok discussion still has some quantitative organizational impact, both in terms of boycotts and stock changes; and forced resignations. This fact is linked with recent thought on emotional labor in the social discourse, including the idea that affect-mediated activism exists as separate epistemic system that is expressed and reinforced as truth by being expressed and re-individuated in the community. On the part of the managers and policy actors, the ability to understand this terrain not only requires knowing how to use data to make effective decisions but also knowing how to create narrative sensemaking and the attendant affective processes that are its backdrop.

The current research holds strategic implications to organizational culture and talent development. Since the generation Z will become more visible in the workplace, activist-discursive orientation will shape the internal communication activities, inclusion efforts, and employee branding. Companies that reject such linguistic abilities as marginal could lose an entire generation that values the ability to act and speak linguistically; to have a voice; to be morally accountable (Holborow, 2021). In turn, it is necessary to consider how important it is in organizations to transform linguistic activism into an internal matter of culture, no longer viewed as a subject of reputational risk but as an indicator of both value integration and social responsiveness. The underestimation of discursive aspects of Gen Z activism is tantamount to a flawed analysis of the contemporary environment of stakeholders, the capacity of leaders, and the legitimacy of organizations. The current research does not support the idea that all the institutions should integrate TikTok or use the activist jargon. Instead, it holds that an ethnographic sensibility, discursive humility and willingness to listen, learn and co-create meaning with publics that resist communicative asymmetry more and more are what effective management in the digital age requires.

CONCLUSION

The given research study analyzes the Gen Z linguistic practices in TikTok activism and explains this linguistic performance does not simply act as a stylistic play; it is an act of discursive power which can construct the public discourse, challenge institutional legitimacy, and create the demands of authentic organizational accountability. Advanced in the field of management, this linguistic activism marks the paradigm shift in the use of influence and engagement and stakeholder dialogue in the digital environment. As evidenced in the astute use of satire, vernacular expression, and emotional appeal as well as the remix culture, it is not insignificant to note that Gen Z are not merely media followers but rather active producers of meaning, curators, and co-creators, and challengers in the algorithmic ecosystems. To organizational actors, the consequences are far reaching. Adequate management in the modern world needs more than transmitting messages under control; it has to respond to decentralized, passion-filled and linguistically dynamic civic societies. The activism of Gen Z reconceptualizes corporate communication and stakeholder models along with organizational internal culture. Questions of morality, morality transparency, culturally fluent and dialogic relations are becoming an essential measure of the legitimacy of institutions, both public and private. The study ends up fighting the thought of recalculating communicative strategy and the leadership of the organizations in terms of verbal uplift. It is clear that in the constant formation of Gen Z as fosters digital activism, management educators and practitioners have to wrestle with the truth of the participatory culture order of communication where the very language becomes the strategic and political tool.

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