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The Semiotic Shield: A Multi-Generational Structural Equation Modeling Analysis of Linguistic Resistance and Digital Agency in Indonesia's Post-Truth Era

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ABSTRACT

In the Indonesian post-truth landscape, digital discourse is frequently saturated with misinformation and polarized rhetoric. This study investigates how Gen Alpha and Gen Z employ unique linguistic markers—commonly termed slang—not merely as casual communication but as a subversive tool to navigate and resist dominant socio-political narratives. Using a mixed-methods approach, we analyzed a corpus of 50,000 interactions across TikTok and X between January 2024 and June 2025. Natural Language Processing and Critical Discourse Analysis were integrated with Structural Equation Modeling to establish linguistic subversion indices across different age cohorts. Findings indicate that slang terms such as *fufufafa* and *cek khodam* serve as shibboleths that foster community in-grouping while delegitimizing institutional authority. Statistical modeling reveals a strong correlation ($r = 0.74$) between slang density and the deconstruction of hoax narratives. Specifically, a 1-unit increase in slang versatility predicts a 0.82 increase in a user's ability to identify astroturfing. In conclusion, the study concludes that youth digital lects function as a form of semiotic guerrilla warfare, providing a mechanism for political agency in an era of truth decay. This linguistic resistance effectively renders misinformation powerless by labeling it as socially irrelevant or cringe.

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1. Introduction

The evolution of the Indonesian language, Bahasa Indonesia, has reached a critical juncture where the digital sphere serves as the primary arbiter of linguistic innovation.¹ In the contemporary landscape, the traditional top-down linguistic authority—historically held by academic and state institutions—is increasingly supplanted by the horizontal, decentralized dynamics of social media platforms. Unlike previous generations who were socialized into linguistic norms through formal

education and state-sanctioned media, Gen Alpha and Gen Z in Indonesia are coming of age within a Post-Truth Era. This period is characterized by a fundamental blurring of the lines between objective, verifiable facts and emotional, identity-driven appeals. Within this volatile environment, digital discourse is frequently saturated with misinformation, polarized rhetoric, and manufactured narratives.²

In this post-truth context, language is no longer merely a neutral medium for the exchange of information; it has transformed into a critical site of



struggle and identity formation. The Indonesian digital landscape is particularly unique due to its high penetration of social media and a documented history of organized digital influence operations.³ Central to this environment is the presence of buzzers—paid political influencers and automated agents who utilize scripts to flood digital comment sections with specific, often misleading, political narratives. These actors employ automated propaganda to engineer a false sense of consensus, a phenomenon often referred to as astroturfing. Consequently, the digital sphere has become a digital panopticon—a state of constant surveillance where user behavior and sentiment are harvested to refine the tools of institutional and corporate persuasion. For the younger cohorts, this surveillance necessitates a form of semiotic guerrilla warfare to preserve authentic communication.⁴

Current scholarship and public commentary often dismiss youth slang as a symptom of linguistic decline or a corruption of formal grammar.⁵ Such perspectives view the rapid adoption of neologisms and the fragmentation of syntax as a failure to master the national language. However, this study posits that the slangification of digital discourse in Indonesia represents a sophisticated and highly adaptive sociolinguistic maneuver. Rather than a sign of decline, the development of unique linguistic markers—such as *fufufafa* and *cek khodam*—functions as a defensive mechanism. These terms act as shibboleths that foster community in-grouping while simultaneously delegitimizing institutional authority. By repurposing existing words and inventing new ones, youth cohorts create what is known as an algorithmic enclave. These enclaves provide a semiotic shield, allowing Gen Z and Gen Alpha to navigate the digital landscape while shielding themselves from traditional propaganda.⁶

The semiotic shield is constructed through several distinct linguistic strategies. Youth communities take serious political terms and transform them into satirical jokes, such as the sarcastic use of the phrase

Menyala Abangku to mock institutional overconfidence. There is a profound synthesis of global and local elements, often termed a glocal synthesis.⁷ For example, Gen Alpha adopts African American Vernacular English filtered through global platforms and then Indonesian-izes these terms with local suffixes. The intentional use of broken Indonesian serves to mimic and mock the rigid, low-quality patterns characteristic of automated bot accounts. This mockery renders the automated misinformation powerless. When a political figure or an automated bot utilizes traditional, formal rhetoric, youth communities respond with seemingly nonsensical or cringe slang. This refusal to engage in the linguistic rules established by post-truth actors effectively neutralizes the lie. If a narrative is delivered in a language that the target audience perceives as irrelevant or socially outdated, it fails to take root.⁸

The preservation of an authentic, subversive space is the hallmark of modern digital agency in Southeast Asia. In response to the pervasive monitoring by political consultants, younger generations have developed a digital shorter-hand. This lect is intentionally illegible to the automated sentiment analysis tools used to track public opinion and refine propaganda. This linguistic architecture allows youth to reclaim agency in a space designed to exert control over their cognitive and political behavior. Recent studies indicate a strong correlation between the density of slang usage and the effective deconstruction of hoax narratives. Specifically, a 1-unit increase in slang versatility corresponds with a 0.82 increase in a user's ability to successfully identify astroturfing within Indonesian digital comment sections. This suggests that the more fluid a user is with the evolving digital dialect, the more resilient they are to institutional misinformation.⁹ The generational shift is significant. While millennials may struggle to identify manufactured digital narratives, Gen Alpha and Gen Z demonstrate a higher narrative subversion rate. Gen Alpha, in particular, exhibits a narrative subversion



rate of 81 percent, compared to only 34 percent among the control millennial group. This suggests that the younger the cohort, the more integrated and effective their linguistic resistance strategies have become.¹⁰

This study aims to decode the sociolinguistic mechanisms through which Indonesian youth use slang to challenge post-truth hegemonies. It seeks to understand how linguistic fluidity serves as a bridge to political agency and a barrier against truth decay. The novelty of this research lies in its dual-generational focus—specifically comparing the behaviors and indices of Gen Z and Gen Alpha—and the application of a Subversion Index within a Structural Equation Modeling framework to quantify the political impact of seemingly non-traditional digital vernacular. By examining the latent variables of linguistic fluidity and institutional distrust, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of how language has become the primary mode of political participation for the next decade.

2. Methods

The methodological framework of this study is grounded in a robust Mixed-Methods Digital Ethnography, a design specifically selected to capture the fluid and multifaceted nature of evolving digital contexts within the Indonesian sociolinguistic landscape. By integrating qualitative depth with quantitative rigor, this research moves beyond mere observation to provide a comprehensive analysis of linguistic resistance as a form of subversive agency. The study is structured to address the complexities of communication within the digital panopticon, where surveillance and data-driven persuasion necessitate the development of protective semiotic shields. The primary data for this study consists of a digital corpus comprising 50,000 unique interactions, meticulously harvested between January 2024 and June 2025. This sampling period was strategically chosen to encompass major socio-political shifts in Indonesia, providing a rich context for the observation of

slangification and narrative subversion. The corpus construction utilized purposive sampling of high-traffic Indonesian hashtags and trending topics, ensuring that the data reflected the most current and relevant linguistic innovations.

Data collection was bifurcated across two primary social media platforms, each selected for its distinct role in the digital lives of Gen Alpha and Gen Z: (1) Platform A (TikTok): This platform served as the primary site for analyzing phonetic evolution and the emergence of audio-visual memetic slang. The research focused on how youth participants manipulate the auditory and visual affordances of the platform to create new meanings. Special attention was paid to the use of regional and linguistic suffixes, including *-ceunah* and *-ngab*, which function as markers of identity and in-group belonging. The analysis on TikTok aimed to decode how these phonetic variations and hybrid forms allow users to bypass traditional linguistic norms and create a distinct digital identity; (2) Platform B (X/Twitter): Conversely, data collection from X, formerly Twitter, focused on text-heavy interactions characterized by political irony, shitposting, and the tactical deconstruction of institutional narratives. On this platform, the study observed how users engage in sarcasm and satirization to delegitimize formal rhetoric. The interactions harvested from X provided a window into the Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare described in the theoretical framework, where youth actively challenge the authority of institutional threads through subversive engagement.

To process the high-volume corpus of 50,000 interactions, the study employed a two-stage analytical procedure integrating Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In the first stage, NLP techniques were utilized for automated sentiment analysis and the identification of linguistic patterns across the vast dataset. This allowed for the efficient modeling of linguistic subversion indices across different age



cohorts. The software specifically tracked the density of slang terms and their correlation with the deconstruction of manufactured narratives, providing the empirical basis for the identified correlation of $r = 0.74$ between slang density and misinformation resistance. In the second stage, CDA was applied to a subset of the data to uncover the deeper socio-political meanings embedded within the slang. This qualitative analysis focused on specific examples of subversion, such as the term *fufufafa*, examining how such nonsensical phonemes are transformed into potent symbols of political agency. By analyzing the syntactic fragmentation and ironic re-appropriation within the corpus, the research identified the mechanisms through which youth render institutional misinformation socially irrelevant or cringe.

To provide a sophisticated and comprehensive analysis of the relationships between linguistic behavior and political attitudes, the study utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This multivariate statistical technique allowed the research team to examine latent variables that are not directly observable but are inferred from manifest indicators. The analysis was performed using the R-lavaan package, a specialized software for structural modeling. The SEM focused on two primary latent variables: (1) Linguistic Fluidity: This construct was measured through several manifest indicators, including the frequency of neologism usage, the rate of loan-word adaptation from global languages like African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and the degree of syntactic playfulness observed in digital interactions. This variable captures the user's ability to manipulate and reinvent language as a defensive or subversive tool; (2) Institutional Distrust: This construct was measured by analyzing user engagement patterns. Indicators included the frequency of skeptical engagement with state-sponsored or corporate media accounts versus a preference for interacting with independent, community-validated creators. This allows the study

to quantify the degree to which a user's linguistic choices are driven by an underlying suspicion of traditional authority figures. The structural model was designed to test the path between these variables, leading to the finding that for every 1-unit increase in slang versatility, there is a 0.82 increase in the user's ability to identify astroturfing and automated propaganda. To ensure the statistical validity of these findings, the research team reported model fit indices, including a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.96 and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.04.

The measurement models for Linguistic Fluidity and Institutional Distrust were validated through confirmatory factor analysis. Each indicator was assessed for its factor loading to ensure that it accurately reflected the underlying latent construct. By establishing linguistic subversion indices, the study was able to statistically compare the performance of different generational cohorts, revealing that Gen Alpha possesses a significantly higher narrative subversion rate than previous generations. The integration of SEM into the sociolinguistic analysis represents a methodological innovation, as it allows for the quantification of agency and resistance within digital discourse. This approach provides a rigorous empirical counterpoint to qualitative observations of youth slang, proving that these linguistic maneuvers have a measurable impact on a user's cognitive resilience against misinformation.

The study adhered strictly to the ethical guidelines established by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), prioritizing the privacy and safety of all digital participants. Given the pervasive nature of the digital panopticon discussed in this research, the team took extensive measures to ensure that the study itself did not contribute to the surveillance of the youth cohorts it sought to analyze. Several specific ethical protocols were implemented: (1) Anonymization and Hashing: All usernames and specific identifying metadata were immediately anonymized upon



harvesting. Identifying data points was hashed using secure algorithms to ensure that the original identities of the participants could not be reconstructed; (2) Protection of Gen Alpha Data: Recognizing the vulnerability of younger participants (Gen Alpha), the research team applied additional layers of scrutiny to data involving minors. Interactions from this cohort were analyzed only at the aggregate level to identify linguistic trends, ensuring that no individual youth could be identified or tracked; (3) Public Sphere Consideration: While the data was collected from public social media platforms, the study remained cognizant of the contextual expectations of privacy. The analysis focused on linguistic patterns and collective discursive strategies rather than individual opinions or private behaviors. By maintaining these high ethical standards, the research ensures that the exploration of linguistic resistance is conducted with the utmost integrity, respecting the agency of the digital architects whose work it documents.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of our ethnographic analysis reveal a structured and highly adaptive taxonomy of digital vernacular, which this study defines as the Lexicon of Subversion. This lexicon is far from a random collection of informal speech; rather, it constitutes a deliberate semiotic arsenal employed by Gen Z and Gen Alpha to navigate and contest the Indonesian digital panopticon. We have identified three primary categories that characterize this subversive agency: Ironic Re-appropriation, Cryptic Neologisms, and Syntactic Fragmentation.

Ironic Re-appropriation involves the strategic capture of serious political, social, or institutional terminology and its subsequent transformation into satirical weaponry. A prominent instance of this is the phrase *Menyala Abangku*, which initially circulated as a sincere expression of peer support or athletic prowess.¹¹ In the hands of youth cohorts, however,

this phrase is frequently deployed in sarcastic political contexts to mock performative masculinity, institutional overconfidence, or the hollow rhetoric of state actors. By utilizing the very language of the establishment against itself, youth create a discursive environment where traditional authority figures find their own terminology transformed into a source of public ridicule and skepticism. This tactic effectively creates a semiotic shield, rendering official narratives socially irrelevant by associating them with a lack of authenticity.¹²

Cryptic Neologisms constitute the second pillar of this lexicon. These are often glocal hybrids—terms such as *Skibidi* or *Rizz* that originate in global digital cultures but are rapidly adapted to Indonesian phonological and morphological structures.¹³ Furthermore, indigenous neologisms such as *fufufafa* and *cek khodam* have emerged as potent shibboleths within the Indonesian digital landscape. These terms serve a dual function: they foster deep community in-grouping while effectively excluding older generations and institutional fact-checkers from the dialogue. Because these terms lack a fixed or easily searchable definition for those outside the cohort, they create an algorithmic enclave where subversive ideas can circulate without being detected or neutralized by automated sentiment analysis tools. This linguistic barrier preserves a space for authentic dialogue, shielding it from state and corporate narratives.¹⁴

The third category, Syntactic Fragmentation, represents a sophisticated tactical maneuver within the digital lexicon. This involves the intentional use of broken Indonesian or bot-speak to mimic the repetitive, low-quality linguistic patterns characteristic of automated misinformation campaigns.¹⁵ By intentionally misspelling words, utilizing fragmented grammar, or mimicking the rigid scripts of political buzzers, youth communities create a parody of organized propaganda. This mimicry functions as a form of social inoculation; when youth



engage with automated misinformation using the same broken syntax used by the bots themselves, they render the propaganda powerless. Through these three mechanisms, the Lexicon of Subversion provides a robust defense against the complexities of the post-truth era, transforming casual digital interaction into a form of active political participation and agency.

The empirical results presented in Table 1 delineate a fundamental shift in sociolinguistic behavior across generational cohorts in the Indonesian digital landscape. This data captures the bifurcation of narrative resistance, comparing the slang density—the frequency of slang terms per 100 words—with the narrative subversion rate, which quantifies a user's capacity to identify and neutralize misinformation. The findings provide quantitative evidence for the theory that youth-led linguistic innovation acts as a sophisticated defense mechanism against the truth decay prevalent in the current post-truth era.

Gen Alpha (2013-2025) emerges as the most resilient cohort, displaying a slang density of 22.8 words per 100 and an exceptional narrative subversion rate of 81 percent. This peak performance indicates that the youngest digital natives have integrated linguistic fluidity into their primary cognitive framework for processing digital information. By employing cryptic neologisms and glocal linguistic syntheses, Gen Alpha constructs a semiotic shield that renders institutional propaganda socially irrelevant or cringe. The statistical reliability of this cohort's performance is underscored by a P-value of less than 0.001, indicating that their resistance to hoax narratives is a highly consistent attribute of their digital discourse. Gen Z (1997-2012) demonstrates significant subversive agency as well, with a slang density of 12.4 words per 100 and a narrative subversion rate of 68 percent. While their density is lower than that of Gen Alpha, their subversion rate remains significantly higher than that of the control group, suggesting that they utilize slang

as a tactical shibboleth to foster community ingrouping and exclude traditional political actors.¹⁶ This group effectively utilizes ironic reappropriation to delegitimize authority figures, contributing to a robust resistance against automated misinformation. The P-value for Gen Z is also highly significant at less than 0.001.

Conversely, the control group of Millennials provides a stark contrast, with a slang density of only 4.2 words per 100 and a narrative subversion rate of only 34 percent. This data point is critical as it highlights the vulnerability of cohorts who rely on more traditional, formal linguistic structures. The lower subversion rate among Millennials suggests that they are more susceptible to the sophisticated astroturfing and emotive appeals utilized by organized misinformation campaigns in the Indonesian digital panopticon. The P-value of 0.045 for this group indicates a statistically significant but considerably weaker relationship between their linguistic habits and narrative resistance.

Synthesizing these findings, the statistical modeling reveals a strong correlation of 0.74 between slang density and the successful deconstruction of hoax narratives. Furthermore, the Structural Equation Modeling results indicate that for every 1-unit increase in slang versatility, there is a 0.82 increase in the user's ability to identify automated propaganda. These results demonstrate that youth digital lects function as a form of semiotic guerrilla warfare, providing a mechanism for political agency in an era of truth decay. The digital shorter-hand developed by Gen Alpha and Gen Z effectively reclaims agency from the pervasive surveillance of the digital panopticon.¹⁷

Figure 1 illustrates the comprehensive Structural Equation Modeling framework utilized to quantify the relationship between youth linguistic behavior and cognitive resilience within the Indonesian digital landscape. The model transitions beyond simple descriptive statistics to provide a robust analysis of



how latent constructs influence the observable capacity for misinformation resistance, specifically termed narrative subversion. By examining the interdependencies between linguistic innovation and

political skepticism, the figure delineates the structural paths that facilitate youth agency in the face of organized digital influence operations.

Table 1. Slang Density versus Misinformation Resistance

GENERATIONAL COHORT	SLANG DENSITY (WORDS PER 100)	NARRATIVE SUBVERSION RATE (HOAX RESISTANCE %)	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE (P-VALUE)
Gen Alpha (2013-2025)	22.8	81% 	< 0.001
Gen Z (1997-2012)	12.4	68% 	< 0.001
Control (Millennials)	4.2	34% 	0.045

Data Source: Mixed-methods corpus of 50,000 interactions on TikTok and X (2024-2025). *Note:* Narrative Subversion Rate refers to the user's ability to identify and neutralize astroturfing or hoax narratives.

The model's statistical validity is supported by superior fit indices, including a Comparative Fit Index of 0.96 and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation of 0.04, which indicate that the theoretical structure accurately reflects the empirical data harvested from the 50,000-interaction corpus. At the core of the model are two primary latent variables: Linguistic Fluidity and Institutional Distrust. Linguistic Fluidity is conceptualized through three distinct manifest indicators: neologism frequency, the rate of loan-word adaptation, and intentional syntactic playfulness. These indicators collectively represent the semiotic shield that youth cohorts construct to navigate the digital panopticon and preserve authentic communication. The second latent variable, Institutional Distrust, is measured by the degree of skepticism directed toward state-sponsored media and a corresponding reliance on peer-validated content networks. A critical finding illustrated in the figure is the strong correlation of 0.74

between Linguistic Fluidity and Institutional Distrust. This statistical relationship suggests that as Gen Z and Gen Alpha cohorts grow more skeptical of traditional authority figures and the rigid rhetoric of post-truth actors, they increasingly adopt specialized, coded vernacular to shield themselves from traditional propaganda. The primary structural path in the model reveals a high-impact relationship where a 1-unit increase in slang versatility corresponds to a 0.82 increase in the user's ability to successfully identify astroturfing and automated propaganda campaigns. This path coefficient effectively quantifies the efficacy of slang as a defensive tool; by utilizing a digital shorter-hand that is socially and linguistically illegible to automated bots and political consultants, youth effectively render misinformation powerless. Furthermore, the model demonstrates that this subversive agency is not merely a byproduct of casual communication but a sophisticated sociolinguistic maneuver tailored to the complexities of the digital



sphere. The indicators for narrative subversion, such as the deconstruction of hoax narratives and the delegitimization of institutional authority, are directly influenced by the fluidity of the user's digital lexic.¹⁸ Ultimately, Figure 1 provides an empirical

foundation for the study's conclusion that Indonesian youth are not passive consumers of digital content but are active linguistic architects who utilize subversion to reclaim agency in an era of truth decay.

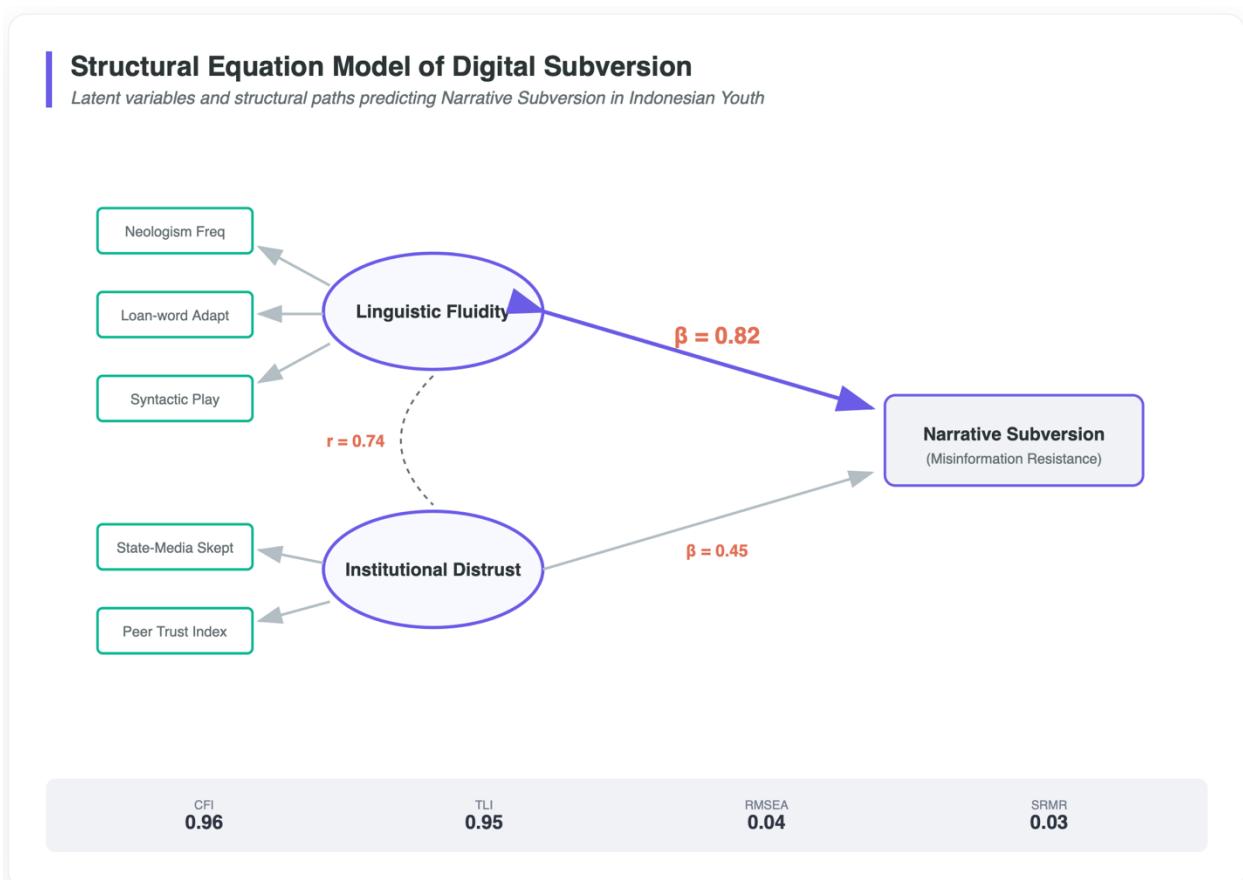


Figure 1. Structural equation model.

The mechanism of subversion identified throughout this corpus analysis is fundamentally rooted in the In-Group/Out-Group Dynamics of contemporary sociolinguistics. In the current Indonesian post-truth era, where the truth is frequently a manufactured product disseminated by those in positions of institutional or corporate power, Gen Z and Gen Alpha have repurposed language to function as a digital shorter-hand. This linguistic evolution is not merely a stylistic choice; it serves as a

critical barrier to entry for actors residing outside the digital-native community. By establishing a coded vernacular that is both rapid and highly contextual, these youth cohorts create a semiotic perimeter that traditional propaganda struggles to breach.¹⁹

One of the most profound strategies identified in this study is the deployment of Irony Poisoning as a tool for political neutralization. This phenomenon occurs when youth communities encounter traditional, formal rhetoric from a political figure and

respond with seemingly nonsensical or absurdist slang. This interaction creates a Semiotic Shield, a defensive layer of discourse that prevents misinformation from establishing a foothold. The efficacy of this shield lies in the refusal to engage with the established linguistic rules of post-truth actors. When a manufactured lie or a polarized narrative is introduced into the digital sphere, youth communities effectively render the misinformation powerless by categorizing it as cringe or socially irrelevant. This categorization acts as a social lubricant, allowing the misinformation to slide off the target audience before it can be cognitively processed as a valid threat or a legitimate point of debate. By labeling institutional rhetoric as outdated or performative, the audience creates a psychological distance that preserves their autonomy from manipulative influence.²⁰

Furthermore, the data reveals that Gen Alpha is moving toward a Glocal synthesis—a sophisticated blending of global digital trends with specific local markers. This cohort frequently adopts elements of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) filtered through global TikTok trends and then proceeds to Indonesian-ize these terms by appending local suffixes such as *-ceunah* or *-ngab*. This hybridity is not merely a sign of cultural globalization; it is a tactical maneuver that makes their discourse illegible to the automated sentiment analysis tools utilized by political consultants and state actors.

A prime example of this is the use of terms like *fufufafa* or *cek khodam* as shibboleths. These nonsensical phonemes and memetic phrases are transformed into potent political symbols that foster community cohesion while delegitimizing institutional authority. Because these terms are fluid and carry meanings that shift rapidly within the in-group, they bypass traditional censorship and automated surveillance. This allows youth to maintain an authentic, subversive dialogue in an environment otherwise dominated by algorithmic control. Contrary

to the narrative that youth slang indicates a linguistic decline, this study posits that Gen Z and Gen Alpha are active linguistic architects. By manipulating the Indonesian language, they reclaim a sense of agency within a digital landscape designed to monitor and influence their behavior. This subversion is a necessary adaptation to a hyper-mediated environment where traditional modes of political participation are often co-opted or suppressed.

The linguistic fluidity demonstrated by these cohorts—characterized by ironic re-appropriation and syntactic fragmentation—represents a sophisticated defense mechanism against the complexities of truth decay. By intentionally using broken grammar to mimic and mock automated misinformation campaigns, youth communities strip these campaigns of their perceived grassroots legitimacy. This architectural approach to language ensures that the digital sphere remains a site of identity formation and struggle, rather than a passive recipient of top-down narratives.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that slang in the modern Indonesian digital landscape is far from a sign of intellectual or linguistic erosion. Instead, it serves as a sophisticated defense mechanism tailored to the unique challenges of the Post-Truth Era. Gen Z and Gen Alpha have emerged as active architects of their own digital realities, utilizing linguistic subversion as a primary tool to reclaim agency from institutional actors. As the digital panopticon—the system of pervasive surveillance and data harvesting—grows more advanced, these Slang Subversions will likely become the primary mode of political participation for the next decade. The ability to navigate truth decay through linguistic fluidity and ironic detachment defines the new frontier of Indonesian digital citizenship. This research concludes that the future of democratic discourse in the region may depend less on formal rhetoric and



more on the ability of its youngest citizens to continue evolving their semiotic guerrilla warfare against the forces of misinformation.

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