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Article

# Patterns of Vulgar and Indecent Language in Digital Communication: Evidence from Gen Z Users of Bangladesh

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## Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed patterns of communication, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z), who constitute the most digitally immersed cohort in contemporary society. In Bangladesh, the increasing prevalence of obscene, vulgar, indecent, and offensive language on social media has emerged as a significant social, cultural, and psychological concern. This study investigates the patterns, motivations, and socio-psychological contexts of vulgar and indecent language use in digital communication among Bangladeshi Gen Z users. Employing a quantitative survey-based methodology complemented by contextual qualitative observations, the research examines how anonymity, algorithmic amplification, peer culture, emotional expression, and online disinhibition shape linguistic behaviour in social media environments. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as Online Disinhibition Theory, Media Ecology, and Sociolinguistic Norm Shift theory, the study reveals that vulgar language is not merely a linguistic deviation but a complex form of digital expression shaped by platform architecture, youth identity formation, and socio-political frustration. The findings highlight a growing normalization of offensive speech, a decline in linguistic civility, and the emergence of vulgarity as a symbolic tool for visibility, resistance, and emotional release. The study contributes to scholarly debates on digital incivility, youth culture, and media ethics in the Global South and offers policy-relevant insights for educators, platform regulators, and digital literacy initiatives in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Generation Z; social media; vulgar language; digital communication; online disinhibition; Bangladesh; linguistic incivility; media ethics

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## 1. Introduction

The digital revolution has redefined the nature of human communication, reshaping how language produced, circulated, and interpreted in networked environments. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly twitter) have become dominant public spheres where everyday interactions, political debates, emotional expressions, and identity performances unfold in real time. Among the most active participants in these spaces is Generation Z (Gen Z), generally defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s. In Bangladesh, Gen Z represents a rapidly expanding demographic group whose socialization, worldview, and linguistic practices deeply embedded in digital culture.

One of the most visible and controversial features of Gen Z's online communication in Bangladesh is the increasing use of obscene, vulgar, indecent, and offensive language. Once largely confined to private or informal speech contexts, such language now circulates openly on social media timelines, comment sections, live streams, and messaging platforms. This phenomenon raises critical questions about linguistic norms, moral boundaries, digital ethics, and the broader consequences of online communication practices in a developing democratic society.

Language is not merely a neutral medium of communication; it is a social practice shaped by power, culture, emotion, and technology. Scholars of sociolinguistics argue that language both

reflects and constructs social reality (Bourdieu, 1991). In digital environments, this relationship becomes more complex due to anonymity, immediacy, algorithmic amplification, and the collapse of traditional gatekeeping mechanisms. Social media platforms reward engagement, emotional intensity, and provocative content, often incentivizing extreme or transgressive language use (Klinger & Svensson, 2018). As a result, vulgar and indecent expressions may gain higher visibility, reinforcing their normalization among young users.

In the Bangladeshi context, this issue carries additional socio-cultural significance. Bangladesh is a society deeply rooted in moral, religious, and cultural norms that traditionally emphasize modesty, respect, and linguistic restraint. The apparent contradiction between these values and the growing prevalence of obscene digital language has generated public anxiety, media debates, and policy discussions. Parents, educators, religious leaders, and policymakers frequently express concern that social media is eroding linguistic civility and moral discipline among youth. However, empirical academic research examining this phenomenon from the perspective of Gen Z themselves remains limited.

Existing global studies suggest that the use of vulgar or offensive language online is closely linked to the phenomenon of online disinhibition. According to Suler (2004), individuals tend to behave less restrained in online environments due to factors such as anonymity, invisibility, and a synchronicity. This disinhibition can manifest in toxic behaviours, including verbal aggression, harassment, and obscene speech. For Gen Z users, who often navigate multiple online identities simultaneously, vulgar language may serve not only as an expression of aggression but also as a tool for humor, bonding, identity assertion, and emotional catharsis.

Moreover, Media Ecology theorists such as McLuhan (1964) argue that the medium itself shapes the message. In algorithm-driven platforms, language practices are influenced by the logic of virality, visibility, and monetization. Offensive or shocking language often attracts attention, reactions, and shares, has thereby becoming algorithmically privileged. This creates a feedback loop in which vulgar expressions continuously reproduced and normalized. In Bangladesh, where digital literacy levels vary widely and platform regulation remains inconsistent, this dynamic may intensify the spread of indecent language among young users.

From a psychological perspective, vulgar language can also be understood as a response to social stress, frustration, and perceived marginalization. Bangladesh's Gen Z has grown up amid economic uncertainty, political polarization, unemployment anxiety, and intense academic and social pressure. Social media provides an accessible outlet for emotional release, where offensive language may function as a form of digital catharsis or symbolic resistance against authority, inequality, and social expectations (Papacharissi, 2015).

Despite these theoretical insights, most studies on digital incivility and vulgar language are based on Western contexts. The Global South and Bangladesh in particular, remains underrepresented in empirical research. Cultural norms, religious values, linguistic hybridity (Bangla-English code switching), and socio-political conditions in Bangladesh may shape Gen Z's digital language practices in ways that differ significantly from those observed in Western societies. Therefore, context-specific research is essential for developing a nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

This study addresses this gap by examining the patterns of vulgar and indecent language use among Bangladeshi Gen Z social media users through a survey-based empirical approach. The research seeks to answer the following key questions:

1. What types of vulgar, obscene, and offensive language most commonly used by Gen Z on social media in Bangladesh?
2. What motivations—psychological, social, or cultural—underlie the use of such language?
3. How do platform features such as anonymity, algorithmic visibility, and peer interaction influence linguistic behaviour?
4. What are the broader implications of these practices for digital civility, youth culture, and media ethics in Bangladesh?

By integrating sociolinguistic, psychological, and media studies perspectives, this study conceptualize vulgar language not simply as moral degradation but as a complex communicative practice shaped by digital environments and generational experiences. The findings aim to contribute to academic debates on youth digital culture, online incivility, and communication ethics, while also offering policy-relevant insights for educators, regulators, and platform designers seeking to promote healthier online discourse.

In an era where digital communication increasingly shapes social reality, understanding how and why young people use language online is not merely an academic exercise—it is a societal necessity. This research positions Bangladeshi Gen Z at the center of this inquiry, recognizing them not only as users of social media but also as active agents shaping the future of digital communication norms.

## 2. Literature Review

Research on obscene, vulgar, and offensive language in online spaces spans multiple disciplines — sociolinguistics, media studies, psychology, and computational linguistics. This literature review synthesizes four interrelated strands that inform the current study of Generation Z's use of vulgar language on Bangladeshi social media:

- (1) Definitional and functional accounts of profanity and vulgarity,
- (2) Psychological mechanisms (especially online disinhibition),
- (3) Platform/algorithmic influences on visibility and norms, and (4) empirical and methodological work on detecting and characterizing vulgarity in Bangla and South Asian contexts.

### Definitions and Pragmatic functions

Scholars distinguish between related categories — profanity, vulgarity, obscenity, and offensive or hateful speech — while noting substantial overlap in practice (Jay & Janschewitz, as cited in region-specific studies). Pragmatic and sociolinguistic accounts emphasize that swearwords and vulgar expressions perform a range of social functions beyond mere insult: they can signal group membership, mark intimacy, intensify affect, create humour, or act as rhetorical emphasis (Holgate et al., cited in MDPI review; Thelwall, 2008). Importantly, the meaning and social acceptability of particular lexical items are culturally and contextually determined: a term that is taboo in one community may be mildly expressive or even normalized in another. This polyvalent nature of profanity complicates value-laden assessments that treat all vulgar language as uniformly harmful. Evidence from recent corpora and annotation studies shows that usage categories often include aggression/abuse, emotion/expression, identity/group signalling, and pragmatic auxiliaries that do not necessarily intend harm, (Mahmud, T., Ptaszynski, M., & Masui, F. 2023).

### Online disinhibition and psychological drivers:

A dominant psychological explanation for elevated levels of rude or extreme language online is Suler's (2004) Online Disinhibition Effect: anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, differing norms, and reduced social cues combine to lower inhibitions in mediated interactions, enabling both "benign" and "toxic" disinhibition. Subsequent empirical research refines this view by showing how dispositional factors (personality, impulsivity), situational stressors (political frustration, social marginalization), and affordances of platform interfaces interact to produce aggressive verbal behaviour. For youth — and especially Gen Z, who have matured in always-on digital ecologies — profanity may function simultaneously as emotional release, a marker of authenticity, and a tool for peer bonding; yet the same practices can escalate into harassment and community-level incivility. Suler's conceptualization remains widely used as a micro-level explanatory frame, (Suler, J. 2004).

### Platform logics, algorithms, and the political economy of visibility.

Beyond individual psychology, media and communication scholars emphasize how platform architectures and algorithmic logics shape language norms. Algorithms reward engagement, and provocative or emotionally salient posts (which often contain coarse language) algorithmically

amplified, creating feedback loops that normalize transgressive expressions (Klinger & Svensson, 2018). This meso-level dynamic alters the ecology of acceptable speech: what garners clicks and reactions becomes culturally salient and thus linguistically salient. Theoretical treatments argue that algorithmic mediation is not neutral; platform design choices, moderation policies, and monetization incentives collectively influence which linguistic behaviours proliferate. For research situated in Bangladesh — where digital literacy, policymaking, and moderation infrastructures are uneven— these algorithmic pressures may accelerate the spread and entrenchment of vulgar forms among youth seeking visibility, (Klinger, U., & Svensson, J. 2018).

### **Corpus, detection, and Bangladesh-focused empirical work.**

Methodologically, two complementary streams are important for Bangladesh-focused work: (a) sociolinguistic/qualitative studies documenting usage patterns among youth, and (b) computational/annotation efforts that develop language resources and detectors for Bangla and regional dialects. Recent applied-nlp research has produced Bangla-specific lexica and annotated corpora for vulgarity and abusive content, addressing the “low-resource” challenge (Sazzed, 2021; Sazzed et al., RANLP; Mahmud et al., 2023). Complementing this, Mahmud, Ptaszynski, & Masui (2023) developed methods for automatic vulgar-word extraction and applied them to the Chittagonian dialect, reporting practical pipelines for keyword extraction, annotation practices, and ML baselines. These studies are crucial: they show that (i) vulgar language is measurable in Bangla social media, (ii) linguistic idiosyncrasies (code-mixing, dialectal variants, orthographic variation) require tailored resources, and (iii) context-sensitivity (e.g., sarcasm, reclamation) limits simple keyword-only moderation.

### **Gen Z, identity, and changing norms in South Asian contexts.**

Work specifically on Gen Z discourse (corpus-based and qualitative) points to generational shifts in stylistic norms, register-mixing, and pragmatic reinterpretation of formerly taboo forms. Studies of Gen Z in various contexts note greater tolerance for colloquial and coarse registers online, code switching with English, and the use of emojis and orthographic play to soften or intensify vulgar expressions. Small-scale studies and student theses from Bangladesh (e.g., BRAC University dissertations and regional analyses) report similar trends: younger users employ swearing and slang for humor, peer bonding, identity performance, and to signal disaffection with established social norms. These findings indicate that interventions solely premised on prohibiting certain lexical items may fail to account for the social functions such language serves for youth populations, (Mitul, Rifa Tamanna, 2024).

### **Harm, moderation, and methodological caveats.**

Although many uses of profanity are pragmatic and non-harmful, abusive and targeted vulgar speech causes real harm — psychological distress, reputational damage, and escalation into coordinated harassment. The literature therefore stresses the need for nuance: measures that distinguish between contextualized usages (e.g., in-group humour) and targeted abuse; multi-class annotation schemes that capture severity; and mixed-method approaches combining surveys, discourse analysis, and computational detection. Several studies caution that lexicon-based filters produce false positives/negatives in multilingual, dialect-rich settings; hence, hybrid approaches (lexicon + ML + contextual features) recommended for Bangladesh-bespoke research and moderation systems, (Salim, Sazzed. 2021)

### **Gaps and directions for the present study.**

While computational resources for Bangla vulgarity detection have expanded, gaps remain in theoretically informed, population-representative studies that center Gen Z’s own motivations and interpretations in Bangladesh. Most machine-learning work focuses on detection accuracy; fewer studies integrate qualitative survey data that probe motivations (catharsis, visibility, identity) and normative attitudes toward language use. Moreover, cross-level work linking platform metrics (reach/engagement) with linguistic features and user-reported motivations is scarce in the Bangladeshi literature. Addressing these gaps requires a multi-method design (survey + corpus

analysis + platform metric correlation), culturally sensitive annotation schemes, and an emphasis on policy-relevant outcomes (digital literacy, moderation practice, and youth-focused interventions).

In sum, the literature converges on a complex picture: vulgar language online is multifunctional (social, psychological, political), shaped by platform design and algorithmic incentives, and measurable with growing—but still imperfect—computational tools in Bangla. For Bangladeshi Gen Z, whose digital lives are embedded in both global platform logics and local cultural norms, a context-aware mixed-method investigation will best illuminate the patterns, causes, and consequences of vulgar and indecent language use.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the patterns of vulgar, obscene, and indecent language use among Generation Z (Gen Z) on social media requires a multi-layered theoretical framework that integrates psychological, sociolinguistic, and media-structural perspectives. This study adopts an interdisciplinary framework combining Online Disinhibition Theory, Media Ecology Theory, Sociolinguistic Norm Shift Theory, and Platform Political Economy to explain how individual behavior, cultural transformation, and technological systems collectively shape digital language practices in Bangladesh.

#### 1. Online Disinhibition Theory

The foundational psychological lens for this study is Online Disinhibition Theory, introduced by Suler (2004). The theory explains why individuals behave with reduced restraint in online environments compared to offline settings. According to Suler, six core factors— anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimization of authority—collectively weaken social accountability and encourage uninhibited expression.

For Gen Z users in Bangladesh, online disinhibition plays a central role in facilitating the use of vulgar and offensive language. Social media platforms allow users to comment, react, and share content with limited fear of immediate social consequences. Anonymity and pseudonymity particularly reduce moral self-regulation, making it easier to employ language that would be socially unacceptable in face-to-face interactions. This disinhibition manifests in two forms: benign disinhibition, where users express emotions, humor, or intimacy freely, and toxic disinhibition, where vulgar language becomes abusive, aggressive, or harassing.

In the Bangladeshi context—characterized by strong moral, religious, and hierarchical norms—the contrast between offline restraint and online freedom intensifies disinhibited behavior. This theory helps explain why Gen Z users often justify vulgar language as “normal online behavior,” even when such language violates traditional norms, (Suler, J. 2004).

#### 2. Media Ecology Theory

While Online Disinhibition Theory focuses on individual psychology, Media Ecology Theory provides a macro-level explanation by emphasizing how communication technologies shape human perception, cognition, and behavior. Marshall McLuhan (1964) famously argued, “*The medium is the message,*” asserting that media technologies fundamentally reorganize social relations and symbolic practices.

In algorithm-driven social media environments, language is no longer merely a communicative tool but a performative mechanism for visibility. Platforms privilege emotionally charged, controversial, and provocative content, often amplifying posts that include vulgar or extreme language. From a media ecology perspective, vulgar language among Gen Z is not an aberration but a rational adaptation to the communicative logic of digital platforms.

In Bangladesh, where social media functions as an alternative public sphere due to limitations in traditional media access and youth representation, Gen Z users strategically employ vulgar language to attract attention, express dissent, or assert identity. Media ecology thus explains how platform affordances—likes, shares, comments, and algorithmic ranking—reshape linguistic norms and redefine what considered acceptable speech.

### 3. Sociolinguistic Norm Shift Theory

Language norms are socially constructed and historically contingent. Sociolinguistic Norm Shift Theory, rooted in the works of Bourdieu (1991) and later digital sociolinguists, explains how linguistic legitimacy changes across contexts and generations. Bourdieu conceptualized language as symbolic capital, regulated by power relations and institutional authority.

In digital spaces, traditional linguistic gatekeepers—schools, religious institutions, family structures— are weakened. Gen Z users increasingly define their own norms through peer networks rather than institutional authority. Vulgar language, once stigmatized, becomes normalized through repeated exposure, peer validation, and algorithmic amplification.

In Bangladesh, this norm shift is intensified by linguistic hybridity: Bangla-English code switching, transliteration, and dialectal slang dilute the perceived severity of vulgar expressions. What was once obscene becomes humorous, ironic, or expressive. This framework allows the study to conceptualize vulgar language not solely as moral decline, but as part of a generational renegotiation of linguistic boundaries.

### 4. Platform Political Economy

To understand why vulgar language circulates so widely, the framework incorporates Platform Political Economy, which examines how corporate interests, monetization models, and algorithmic governance shape user behavior. Scholars argue that social media platforms commodify attention and emotional engagement, incentivizing content that provokes strong reactions (Fuchs, 2017; Klinger & Svensson, 2018).

Vulgar and offensive language often generates higher engagement, making it economically valuable within platform ecosystems. For Gen Z users seeking visibility, popularity, or monetization, vulgar language becomes a strategic resource. This dynamic is particularly relevant in Bangladesh, where social media offers economic opportunities through content creation and influencer culture.

This framework highlights the structural responsibility of platforms in normalizing vulgar language, shifting the focus from individual morality to systemic incentives.

### 5. Integrative Conceptual Model

This study integrates the four theoretical perspectives into a unified conceptual framework:

- Micro-level (Psychological): Online disinhibition reduces self-censorship.
- Meso-level (Cultural): Sociolinguistic norm shifts legitimize vulgar language.
- Macro-level (Technological): Media ecology and algorithms amplify provocative speech.
- Structural-level (Economic): Platform capitalism rewards engagement-driven vulgarity.

Together, these dimensions explain how vulgar language among Bangladeshi Gen Z emerges as a socially learned, technologically reinforced, and economically incentivized practice rather than an isolated behavioral problem.

### 6. Relevance to the Present Study

By applying this integrated theoretical framework, the study moves beyond simplistic moral judgments and situates vulgar language within broader processes of digital transformation, youth identity formation, and platform governance. This approach enables empirically grounded analysis and policy-relevant recommendations for digital literacy, ethical platform design, and youth engagement strategies in Bangladesh.

## 4. Research Methodology

### 1. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative-dominant mixed research design, combining a structured survey with limited qualitative inputs to examine patterns, motivations, and contextual factors behind the use of vulgar, obscene, and indecent language on social media among Generation Z (Gen Z) users in Bangladesh. A survey-based approach is particularly suitable for this research because it

allows systematic measurement of attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions across a relatively large youth population while ensuring statistical generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research is cross-sectional, capturing participants' self-reported behaviors and perceptions at a single point in time. This design is appropriate given the rapidly evolving nature of digital communication practices and the study's focus on identifying prevailing patterns rather than longitudinal change.

## 2. Population and Sampling

### 2.1 Target Population

The target population comprises Bangladeshi Gen Z social media users, defined operationally as individuals aged 18–27 years, consistent with contemporary generational classifications (Dimock, 2019). Participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria:

- Bangladeshi nationality or long-term residency
- Active use of at least one social media platform (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, X)
- Minimum social media usage of one hour per day

This age group is particularly relevant because Gen Z represents the most digitally native cohort in Bangladesh, with extensive exposure to online communicative norms and algorithm-driven content environments.

### 2.2 Sampling Technique

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed, supplemented by snowball sampling. Initial respondents were recruited through university networks, online youth forums, and social media groups. They were encouraged to share the survey link within their peer networks, facilitating broader reach among Gen Z users.

While probabilistic sampling was constrained by resource and access limitations, purposive and snowball sampling are widely used in digital youth studies and have proven effective in capturing diverse online populations (Bryman, 2016). To mitigate sampling bias, efforts were made to include respondents from different regions (urban and semi-urban), educational backgrounds, and gender identities.

The final sample consisted of  $N = 400$  respondents, which exceeds the minimum recommended size for multivariate statistical analysis in social science, research (Hair et al., 2019).

## 3. Data Collection Instrument

### 3.1 Survey Questionnaire Design

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire, developed in both Bangla and English to ensure linguistic accessibility. The questionnaire comprised five sections:

1. Demographic Information (age, gender, education, residence)
2. Social Media Usage Patterns (platforms used, time spent, purposes)
3. Frequency and Types of Vulgar Language Use
4. Motivations and Psychological Factors
5. Attitudes toward Digital Ethics and Language Norms

Most items employed five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), enabling quantitative measurement of attitudes and perceptions.

### 3.2 Measurement of Key Variables

- **Vulgar Language Use (Dependent Variable):**  
Measured through self-reported frequency of using obscene, indecent, or offensive words in posts, comments, and private messages.
- **Online Disinhibition:**  
Measured using adapted items from prior studies on online disinhibition, focusing on anonymity, lack of accountability, and emotional release (Suler, 2004).

- **Platform Influence:**  
Assessed through items related to likes, shares, algorithmic visibility, and peer reactions.
- **Normative Attitudes:**  
Measured by respondents' perceptions of acceptability and normalization of vulgar language on social media.

#### 4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire items were derived from established literature on online disinhibition, digital incivility, and youth communication. A pilot study was conducted with 30 respondents to assess clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness of items.

Reliability analysis was performed using Cronbach's alpha. All multi-item scales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha \geq .70$ ), consistent with social science research standards (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

#### 5. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected over a six-week period using an online survey platform. Participation was voluntary, and no financial incentives were provided. Respondents accessed the questionnaire through a secure link and were required to provide informed consent before proceeding.

Given the sensitive nature of vulgar language use, anonymity was emphasized to encourage honest responses. No personally identifiable information was collected.

#### 6. Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to established ethical guidelines for social science research. Key ethical measures included:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were clearly informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time.
- **Confidentiality:** Responses were anonymized and stored securely.
- **Minimization of Harm:** Survey items were framed to avoid explicit reproduction of obscene terms, focusing instead on categories and self-assessment.

Ethical considerations were particularly important given the cultural sensitivity surrounding language and morality in Bangladesh.

#### 7. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 26) following a multi-stage analytical strategy:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize demographic variables and language-use patterns.
2. **Inferential Statistics:**
  - Pearson correlation analysis examined relationships between online disinhibition, platform influence, and vulgar language use.
  - Multiple regression analysis assessed the predictive power of psychological and platform-related factors.
3. **Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA):** Used to identify underlying dimensions of attitudes toward vulgar language and digital ethics.

Statistical significance was evaluated at the  $p < .05$  level.

#### 8. Methodological Limitations

Despite its strengths, the study acknowledges several limitations:

- Reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias.
- Non-probability sampling limits full generalizability.
- Cross-sectional design restricts causal inference.

These limitations are addressed through careful interpretation and recommendations for future longitudinal and mixed-method research.

## 9. Methodological Contribution

Methodologically, this study contributes to Bangladeshi digital communication research by operationalizing vulgar language use in a culturally sensitive manner and integrating psychological, sociolinguistic, and platform-level variables into a single empirical model.

## 5. Data Analysis and Findings

### 1. Overview of Data Analysis Strategy

The data analysis aimed to examine the prevalence, patterns, and determinants of vulgar, obscene, and indecent language use on social media among Generation Z (Gen Z) users in Bangladesh. A total of 400 valid survey responses were analyzed using SPSS (Version 26). The analysis followed a structured, multi-stage approach: (a) descriptive statistics to outline demographic and usage patterns; (b) inferential statistics to examine relationships between key variables; and (c) multivariate analysis to identify predictors of vulgar language use.

This analytical strategy aligns with established quantitative research practices in digital communication studies (Hair et al., 2019) and allows for both pattern identification and theory-driven explanation.

### 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample comprised Gen Z respondents aged 18–27 years. Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 54% male, 45% female, and 1% identifying as non-binary or preferring not to disclose. In terms of education, 68% were university students, 21% had completed undergraduate education, and 11% were engaged in higher secondary or vocational education.

Geographically, 62% of respondents resided in urban areas, 26% in semi-urban areas, and 12% in rural settings. This distribution reflects Bangladesh's digital divide, where urban youth have greater internet access and social media penetration. The demographic profile suggests that the findings largely represent digitally active, educated Gen Z users—an important consideration for interpretation.

### 3. Social Media Usage Patterns

Descriptive analysis revealed high levels of social media engagement among respondents. Approximately 71% reported using social media for more than three hours per day, while only 9% used it for less than one hour daily. Facebook remained the most frequently used platform (84%), followed by YouTube (76%), Instagram (63%), TikTok (58%), and X/Twitter (22%).

Regarding purpose of use, respondents reported multiple motivations: entertainment (82%), social interaction (74%), news and information (49%), and self-expression (41%). Notably, platforms emphasizing short-form video and comment-driven engagement (TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram) were more strongly associated with exposure to vulgar and offensive language, indicating the role of platform affordances in shaping communicative norms.

### 4. Prevalence and Forms of Vulgar Language Use

One of the central findings of the study is the widespread normalization of vulgar language on social media among Bangladeshi Gen Z users. Approximately 67% of respondents acknowledged using vulgar or indecent language at least occasionally, while 29% reported frequent use, particularly in comment sections and private messages.

The most commonly reported forms included:

- Slang-based vulgarity (Bangla-English hybrid terms)
- Sexually suggestive language
- Derogatory insults targeting peers or public figures
- Emotion-driven profanity (anger, frustration, humor)

Importantly, respondents distinguished between *intentional abuse* and *casual or humorous vulgarity*. This distinction supports sociolinguistic findings that vulgar language is often multifunctional rather than inherently aggressive (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008).

## 5. Online Disinhibition and Vulgar Language Use

To test the role of psychological factors, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted between online disinhibition and vulgar language use. The results revealed a moderate to strong positive correlation ( $r = .46, p < .01$ ), indicating that higher levels of perceived anonymity, invisibility, and reduced accountability were associated with increased use of vulgar language.

Regression analysis further confirmed online disinhibition as a significant predictor ( $\beta = .38, p < .001$ ). These findings empirically support Suler's (2004) Online Disinhibition Theory and suggest that digital environments lower normative constraints on language use among Bangladeshi Gen Z users.

## 6. Platform Visibility and Algorithmic Influence

The influence of platform dynamics was assessed through items measuring engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares) and perceived algorithmic amplification. A significant positive relationship was found between engagement-seeking behavior and vulgar language use ( $r = .41, p < .01$ ).

Respondents reported that posts or comments containing provocative or vulgar language often received higher visibility and peer attention. Multiple regression analysis indicated that perceived algorithmic reward was the second strongest predictor of vulgar language use after online disinhibition ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ).

These findings align with media ecology and platform political economy perspectives, which argue that social media algorithms incentivize emotionally charged and transgressive communication (Klinger & Svensson, 2018).

## 7. Normative Attitudes and Cultural Shifts

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine attitudes toward language norms and digital ethics. Three distinct factors emerged:

1. Normalization of Vulgarity – viewing vulgar language as “normal” or “unavoidable” online
2. Moral Discomfort – feelings of guilt or concern regarding language degradation
3. Contextual Justification – acceptance of vulgar language in humor, satire, or political critique

Approximately 61% of respondents agreed that vulgar language has become normalized on social media, while 47% simultaneously expressed concern about its long-term cultural impact. This ambivalence reflects a broader sociolinguistic norm shift, where traditional moral frameworks coexist uneasily with emerging digital norms.

## 8. Gender and Regional Differences

Independent sample t-tests revealed statistically significant gender differences. Male respondents reported higher frequency of vulgar language use ( $M = 3.42$ ) compared to female respondents ( $M = 2.88$ ),  $t(398) = 3.76, p < .01$ . However, female respondents reported higher exposure to offensive language and greater discomfort with such content.

Urban respondents exhibited significantly higher normalization scores than rural respondents, suggesting that urban digital cultures may accelerate linguistic norm shifts due to greater platform immersion.

## 9. Integrated Model Findings

When combined into a multivariate regression model, online disinhibition, algorithmic visibility, peer validation, and normalization attitudes jointly explained 52% of the variance in vulgar language use ( $R^2 = .52$ ). This substantial explanatory power indicates that vulgar language use among Bangladeshi Gen Z is not random or purely individualistic but structurally patterned.

The data analysis yields several key findings:

1. Vulgar and indecent language use is widespread and increasingly normalized among Bangladeshi Gen Z social media users.
2. Online disinhibition significantly predicts vulgar language use.
3. Algorithmic visibility and engagement incentives reinforce transgressive language.
4. Gen Z users' exhibit ambivalent attitudes, balancing normalization with moral concern.
5. Gender and urban-rural differences shape linguistic practices and perceptions.

Together, these findings validate the study's theoretical framework and underscore the need to address vulgar language use as a systemic digital communication issue rather than a simple moral failing of youth.

## 6. Discussion

The present study set out to examine the patterns, motivations, and structural determinants of vulgar, obscene, and indecent language use on social media among Generation Z (Gen Z) users in Bangladesh. The findings offer compelling empirical support for the integrated theoretical framework proposed earlier and contribute to broader scholarly debates on digital incivility, youth culture, and platform governance in the Global South. This discussion interprets the results through psychological, sociolinguistic, and political-economic lenses, highlighting both theoretical contributions and contextual implications.

### Online Disinhibition and Psychological Normalization

One of the most significant findings of this study is the strong predictive relationship between online disinhibition and vulgar language use. Consistent with Suler's (2004) Online Disinhibition Theory, respondents who perceived higher anonymity, reduced accountability, and emotional distance from audiences were significantly more likely to engage in vulgar and offensive speech. This finding aligns with previous studies conducted in Western contexts, confirming the cross-cultural applicability of online disinhibition mechanisms (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012).

In Bangladesh, where offline communication is regulated by strong moral, religious, and hierarchical norms, online disinhibition appears to be particularly pronounced. Social media functions as a psychological "escape space" where Gen Z users can temporarily suspend normative constraints. Vulgar language, therefore, should not be interpreted solely as deviant behavior but as a symptom of broader tensions between traditional social control and digital autonomy. This supports the argument that digital spaces enable the expression of suppressed emotions and identities that are constrained in offline settings.

### Vulgar Language as Sociolinguistic Practice Rather Than Moral Failure

The findings demonstrate that vulgar language among Bangladeshi Gen Z users is often contextual, performative, and multifunctional. Many respondents distinguished between targeted abuse and casual or humorous vulgarity, indicating an emerging generational reinterpretation of linguistic boundaries. This observation resonates with sociolinguistic research suggesting that profanity often serves pragmatic functions such as humor, emphasis, and in-group bonding (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008).

From a sociolinguistic norm-shift perspective, the normalization of vulgar language reflects a redistribution of symbolic power in digital spaces. Traditional linguistic authorities—educational institutions, family structures, and religious norms—are increasingly displaced by peer-driven norms reinforced through platform engagement. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital is particularly relevant here: what counts as "legitimate" language is no longer dictated by institutional power but by visibility, virality, and peer validation. In Bangladesh, this shift is intensified by code mixing and transliteration, which soften the perceived offensiveness of vulgar expressions.

### Algorithmic Amplification and Platform Responsibility

The strong association between algorithmic visibility and vulgar language use underscores the role of platform architecture in shaping communicative behavior. Respondents' perception that provocative language garners more engagement supports the media ecology argument that digital platforms restructure linguistic incentives (McLuhan, 1964). This finding aligns with research showing that emotionally charged and extreme content is more likely to be amplified by algorithms optimized for engagement (Klinger & Svensson, 2018).

From a political economy perspective, vulgar language becomes a form of attention capital within platform capitalism. Gen Z users—particularly aspiring influencers or content creators—may strategically deploy vulgar language to increase reach and relevance. This raises critical ethical

questions about platform responsibility in normalizing harmful speech. Rather than framing vulgar language use solely as a youth problem, the findings suggest that platform governance, monetization models, and moderation practices play a central role in sustaining digital incivility.

### **Ambivalence and Moral Anxiety among Gen Z**

An important and nuanced finding of this study is the coexistence of normalization and moral discomfort among respondents. While a majority acknowledged the widespread acceptance of vulgar language online, nearly half-expressed concern about its cultural and psychological consequences. This ambivalence reflects what Habermas (1984) describes as a tension between lifeworld norms and system imperatives. Social media platforms, as system-driven structures, prioritize engagement and visibility, often at the expense of communicative rationality and ethical discourse.

In the Bangladeshi context, this tension manifests as moral anxiety about cultural erosion, linguistic degradation, and intergenerational conflict. Gen Z users are simultaneously agents and critics of the digital culture they inhabit. This duality challenges simplistic narratives that portray youth as either victims or perpetrators of digital vulgarity and instead positions them as reflective actors navigating complex communicative ecosystems.

### **Gendered and Spatial Dimensions of Vulgar Language Use**

The observed gender differences—higher self-reported usage among male respondents and greater discomfort among female respondents—mirror findings from prior studies on online aggression and gendered communication norms (Fox et al., 2015). These patterns suggest that digital vulgarity is embedded within broader gender power dynamics. For female users, exposure to vulgar language may be more threatening due to its association with harassment and objectification.

Similarly, urban–rural differences in normalization scores highlight the uneven diffusion of digital norms in Bangladesh. Urban Gen Z users, with greater platform immersion and exposure to global digital cultures, may internalize transgressive norms more rapidly. These spatial differences underscore the importance of contextual sensitivity in policy and intervention design.

### **Implications for Theory**

The findings extend Online Disinhibition Theory by demonstrating its interaction with sociocultural context and platform political economy. Disinhibition alone does not explain the normalization of vulgar language; rather, it operates within a system of algorithmic incentives and shifting sociolinguistic norms. By integrating micro-level psychology with macro-level media structures, this study contributes to a more holistic understanding of digital incivility in non-Western contexts.

Furthermore, the study challenges deficit-based models of youth digital behavior by highlighting the strategic, expressive, and reflective dimensions of Gen Z language use. Vulgar language emerges not merely as a breakdown of civility but as a contested symbolic resource within digital public spheres.

### **Policy and Practical Implications**

The discussion points toward several practical implications. First, digital literacy initiatives in Bangladesh should move beyond moralistic prohibitions and focus on critical awareness of platform incentives and algorithmic amplification. Second, platform moderation strategies should adopt context-sensitive approaches that distinguish between casual vulgarity and targeted abuse. Third, educational institutions and families must engage Gen Z in dialogue rather than discipline, recognizing their agency in shaping digital culture.

In sum, this study demonstrates that vulgar and indecent language use among Bangladeshi Gen Z social media users is a complex, multi-determined phenomenon shaped by psychological disinhibition, sociolinguistic norm shifts, and platform political economy. The findings challenge reductionist interpretations and call for theoretically informed, culturally sensitive, and structurally oriented responses to digital incivility.

## 7. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

### Conclusion

This study set out critically examine the patterns, drivers, and implications of vulgar, obscene, indecent, and offensive language use on social media among Generation Z (Gen Z) users in Bangladesh. Drawing on survey data, sociolinguistic theory, online disinhibition theory, media ecology, and platform political economy, the research offers a nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of digital language practices in a rapidly transforming communication environment.

The findings clearly demonstrate that vulgar language use among Bangladeshi Gen Z is neither an isolated behavioral anomaly nor merely a reflection of moral decline. Rather, it is a systemic and multidimensional phenomenon shaped by psychological disinhibition, shifting sociolinguistic norms, peer culture, and algorithm-driven platform incentives. A significant proportion of respondents reported regular exposure to—and participation in—vulgar or indecent speech on social media, often framing such language as normalized, humorous, or expressive rather than inherently abusive.

At the psychological level, the strong association between online disinhibition and vulgar language use confirms that anonymity, reduced accountability, and emotional distance fundamentally alter communicative behavior. In a society like Bangladesh—where offline communication is governed by strong moral, religious, and hierarchical norms—digital spaces function as alternative arenas of expression, allowing Gen Z users to articulate frustration, humor, dissent, and identity in ways that are often constrained offline. Vulgar language, in this sense, operates as a form of emotional release and symbolic freedom.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the study reveals an ongoing normative shift in language practices. Traditional boundaries between “acceptable” and “unacceptable” speech are being renegotiated within digital peer cultures. Code switching, transliteration, slang, and ironic usage dilute the perceived severity of vulgar expressions, enabling their normalization. Importantly, respondents’ ambivalence—simultaneous acceptance of vulgar language and concern about its cultural consequences—suggests that Gen Z is not indifferent to ethical questions but is navigating competing normative frameworks.

At the structural level, the findings underscore the decisive role of platform architecture and political economy. Algorithmic amplification of provocative content, engagement-based visibility, and influencer culture collectively reward emotionally charged and transgressive language. Vulgarity thus becomes not only expressive but also instrumental—an attention-generating resource within platform capitalism. This shifts responsibility away from individual users alone and toward the design, governance, and economic logic of social media platforms.

Taken together, the study contributes to scholarship in three important ways. First, it extends theories of online disinhibition and digital incivility into the Global South, demonstrating their relevance while highlighting context-specific dynamics. Second, it challenges moral panic narratives by situating Gen Z language practices within broader structural and cultural transformations. Third, it provides empirically grounded insights that can inform policy, education, and platform governance in Bangladesh.

However, the study also acknowledges its limitations. The reliance on self-reported survey data and non-probability sampling constrains full generalizability. Future research could employ longitudinal designs, qualitative digital ethnography, and computational analysis of Bangla-language corpora to deepen understanding. Despite these limitations, the findings offer a robust foundation for informed policy interventions.

### Policy Recommendations

Addressing vulgar and indecent language use on social media requires multi-level, non-punitive, and context-sensitive policy responses. Moralistic censorship or blanket bans are unlikely to be effective and may even exacerbate resistance among youth. Based on the study’s findings, the following policy recommendations can be proposed-

## 1. Rethinking Digital Literacy Education

Digital literacy initiatives in Bangladesh should move beyond technical skills and incorporate critical communicative literacy. Educational programs—at secondary, tertiary, and community levels—should address:

- The psychological effects of online disinhibition
- The role of algorithms in amplifying provocative content
- The difference between expressive language and harmful abuse
- Ethical responsibility in digital communication

Rather than framing vulgar language purely as “bad behavior,” curricula should encourage reflective discussion about context, impact, and power relations in online speech. Engaging Gen Z in dialogue rather than discipline is essential for fostering sustainable digital civility.

## 2. Youth-Centered Ethical Engagement

Policy interventions should recognize Gen Z not merely as subjects of regulation but as co-creators of digital culture. Universities, youth organizations, and civil society groups can facilitate forums, workshops, and peer-led campaigns that allow young users to reflect on their own language practices and their consequences.

Such participatory approaches can transform moral anxiety into ethical agency, empowering Gen Z to shape healthier online norms from within their communities.

## 3. Platform Accountability and Context-Sensitive Moderation

Social media platforms operating in Bangladesh must assume greater responsibility for the linguistic environments they create. Policy dialogue with platform companies should emphasize:

- Context-aware moderation in Bangla and regional dialects
- Distinguishing between casual vulgarity and targeted harassment
- Reducing algorithmic amplification of abusive content
- Transparency in content ranking and moderation practices

Automated moderation systems can be supplemented with culturally informed human oversight to avoid over-policing non-harmful expression while effectively addressing abuse.

## 4. Regulatory Frameworks without Over-Criminalization

Government regulation should avoid criminalizing youth expression or conflating vulgar language with extremism or sedition. Overly punitive laws risk chilling free expression and disproportionately targeting young users.

Instead, regulatory frameworks should focus on:

- Platform compliance with transparency and accountability standards
- Protection against targeted harassment and gender-based abuse
- Collaboration with educators and civil society rather than solely law enforcement

Such an approach aligns with democratic principles while addressing genuine harms.

## 5. Gender-Sensitive and Safety-Oriented Policies

Given the gendered impact of vulgar and offensive language, particularly on female users, policies should prioritize online safety. This includes:

- Strengthening reporting mechanisms for harassment
- Ensuring swift and fair responses to gender-based abuse
- Supporting digital mental health resources for affected users

Addressing vulgar language must therefore be linked to broader agendas of digital safety and gender justice.

## 6. Continued Research and Evidence-Based Policymaking

Finally, policymakers should invest in ongoing research on digital communication in Bangladesh. National surveys, academic–policy collaborations, and publicly accessible data can ensure that interventions remain evidence-based rather than reactive. Research focusing on Bangla-language content, youth culture, and platform dynamics is particularly crucial.

In conclusion, vulgar and indecent language use on social media among Bangladeshi Gen Z should be understood not as a moral crisis but as a mirror of deeper transformations in communication, culture, and power. Gen Z operates at the intersection of traditional social norms and global digital capitalism, negotiating identity, emotion, and visibility in complex ways. Effective responses must therefore be equally nuanced grounded in theory, informed by data, and guided by empathy.

By shifting the focus from blame to understanding, from censorship to education, and from individual fault to structural responsibility, Bangladesh can work toward a digital public sphere that is expressive yet respectful, diverse yet ethical, and open yet accountable.

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