

‘Slay’ in the Digital Wild: Tracing Malaysian and Indonesian Youth Expressions on X via PhantomBuster

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Abstract

As digital culture reshapes everyday language, slang expressions like “slay” have become embedded in the communicative practices of youth on social media platforms, reflecting dynamic shifts in meaning across cultural and linguistic boundaries. In the Cambridge English Dictionary, “slay” is defined with three core meanings: to kill violently, to impress greatly, and to disappoint. While the term is widely used online, most existing studies tend to focus on content analysis or linguistic trends without elaborating on the technical process of data collection, particularly the application of web scraping tools. Addressing this gap, the present study utilises PhantomBuster connected to Platform X’s API to extract a dataset of 131,229 entries from Malaysia and 192,991 entries from Indonesia that include the hashtag “slay.” The data were analysed thematically and interpreted through Stewart’s theory of semantic prosody to examine how the term’s meaning is adapted in digital contexts. The findings reveal that Malaysian youth often use “slay” with irony, sarcasm, and humour, frequently indicating frustration or perceived inauthenticity, aligning with the third dictionary meaning. In contrast, Indonesian youth predominantly use the term in an affirmative and empowering manner, expressing admiration and personal excellence, corresponding to the second meaning. The violent literal sense rarely appears, though it occasionally emerges metaphorically through hyperbole or playful exaggeration. This study not only sheds light on the evolving semantics of digital slang but also contributes to broader discussions on youth identity, cultural expression, and methodological approaches to large-scale social media discourse analysis.

Introduction

As digital culture reshapes everyday language, social media has emerged not only as a fast-paced medium for information dissemination and social interaction but also as a dynamic site for linguistic experimentation. Platforms such as TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram serve as spaces where users creatively manipulate language for purposes such as humor, identity construction, provocation, or solidarity. This has given rise to a fluid and multi-layered linguistic ecosystem. In this context, various linguistic phenomena can be observed, including code-mixing between native and global languages (particularly English), the emergence of algospeak as a strategy to circumvent content moderation algorithms, and the use of distinctive linguistic styles to form or maintain online identities. Language on social media has moved beyond its conventional role as a tool for communication and now functions as a symbolic mechanism that reflects the social, cultural, and political dynamics of digital users.

This phenomenon has led to the emergence of diverse forms of digital slang that are not only transient in nature but also capable of influencing how social media users think, speak, and behave. Slang terms such as “slay,” “rizz,” and “delulu” have become part of the everyday vocabulary among youth, serving as expressions of emotion, support, or resistance. Their widespread presence in digital communication renders them an important source of linguistic data. However, the fast-

evolving, viral, and borderless nature of these expressions poses significant challenges for language researchers attempting to trace, document, and analyze their usage. This situation necessitates a methodological approach that can systematically and efficiently collect large-scale linguistic data. In this regard, web scraping emerges as a method that is not only suitable but also essential for contemporary digital linguistic research.

Web scraping has become increasingly important in modern linguistic research due to its potential to access large volumes of authentic data directly from digital platforms. According to Clark (2025), this technique involves the use of automated scripts, typically written in Python, to download, extract, and structure website content including dynamic elements and HTTP protocols into formats suitable for analysis. The key advantage of this approach lies in its ability to gather linguistic data in a raw and unfiltered form, directly from real-time user interactions online. This provides researchers with a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of language usage within digital communities. As information technology continues to evolve, web scraping has revolutionized the ways in which linguistic data are collected and analyzed in contemporary research, although it also demands careful ethical consideration, particularly in relation to user privacy and data consent when dealing with public platforms and personal interactions.

Although this method is gaining wider recognition within the global academic community, a review of linguistic research in Malaysia and Indonesia indicates that its application has received limited attention, especially in terms of detailed methodological explanation. Studies that rely on social media data as their primary source often focus on content analysis or linguistic patterns without elaborating on the process of data acquisition through web scraping (Siti Hamin Stapa and Azianura Hani Shaari, 2012; Sa'adiyah Ma'alip, 2015; Akyuwen et al., 2020; Chuah Kee Man and Niniefadzillea Iswandi, 2021; Nur Nashatul Nasuha Nazman et al., 2023; Nurul et al., 2024; Puji and Nikmatul, 2024; Chuah Kee Man and Niniefadzillea Iswandi, 2021; Nur Nashatul Nasuha Nazman et al., 2023; Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin, 2025). This contrasts with research conducted in Western contexts, where scholars frequently discuss the technical aspects such as script structure and API configurations, along with ethical and legal considerations in the use of digital data (Gallagher and Beveridge, 2021; Văduva et al., 2023; Arboretti et al., 2024; Tarale, 2025). The absence of such methodological documentation presents a barrier to the advancement of robust digital linguistic research in the region and poses challenges for local researchers aiming to harness the full potential of social media data in a lawful and systematic manner.

In light of this need, the present paper aims to examine the use of digital slang with a focus on the word "slay," a popular expression among youth on the social media platform X. This study adopts a systematic and ethically informed web scraping approach. It focuses on the process of large-scale linguistic data collection and analysis using detailed technical methods while emphasizing the ethical dimensions of digital research. It is hoped that this discussion will contribute to the development of digital linguistic methodologies in Malaysia and Indonesia and provide a solid foundation for further research on language and identity in the digital age.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach supported by web scraping techniques to acquire large-scale data from the social media platform X, in alignment with the current demands of digital linguistic research (Salmons, 2022). The data collection procedure was conducted through the PhantomBuster application, which was integrated with the Application Programming Interface (API) of platform X. This tool enabled the researchers to set automated scraping scripts to download data from five active X pages that frequently discuss social issues and youth lifestyles in Malaysia and Indonesia. These pages were selected based on three main criteria: having more than 50,000 followers, demonstrating high levels of weekly engagement, and consistently publishing content related to social topics. The collected data included comment text, timestamp, number of likes, and anonymised usernames to ensure the confidentiality of personal information.

The data acquisition process began with the registration of a new account on the official PhantomBuster website. After email verification, users were granted full access to the system dashboard. Subsequently, users were required to install the PhantomBuster extension on the Google Chrome browser, which acts as an automatic connector between the application and the

user's X account. Through the "Solutions" menu, users selected a Phantom named "X Hashtag Search Export" to extract data from posts containing specific hashtags. This particular Phantom is designed to gather information such as post captions, number of likes, original post links, number of comments received, and publication dates of posts on platform X.

Project configuration began with logging into the X account via PhantomBuster, where users were prompted to enter their account information and grant access through automatically generated cookies. Once the connection was established, users set the primary search keyword, namely the hashtag #slay, in the provided input field. This ensured that the data collected were directly relevant to the study's theme. In addition, users had the option to specify geographical parameters to narrow the search to particular regions. For the purpose of this study, the data collection focused specifically on two countries, Malaysia and Indonesia, based on the previously identified pages.

Next, users were required to define the number of posts and profiles to be scraped in each session. This study set a target of ten posts and ten profiles per session to manage the data volume and maintain system stability. Under the "Launch Settings" menu, the "Once" and "Manual" options were selected to allow researchers full control over initiating the scraping process manually according to specific needs. Once all configurations were completed, users simply clicked the "Launch" button to begin the data collection process. The collected data could be downloaded in CSV or JSON format for further analysis. This process was carried out weekly over a six-month period from 1 January to 30 June 2025, to ensure comprehensive data coverage and minimise seasonal bias in user interactions.

In total, the data acquisition process successfully collected 131,229 keyword-in-context (KWIC) entries related to the hashtag #slay from X users in Malaysia, and 192,991 KWIC entries from X users in Indonesia. All data underwent a preprocessing phase that included the removal of duplicates, text normalisation, and the anonymisation of user identities. The entire data collection process adhered to digital research ethics guidelines outlined by Woodfield and Iphofen (2018), including obtaining consent from page administrators where necessary, and ensuring all data were used exclusively for academic research purposes.

Following data collection, the next step involved the classification of "slay" usage through thematic analysis. The data were initially grouped into preliminary themes based on the six-phase thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). These phases include: (i) familiarisation with the data through repeated reading and examination to identify initial patterns, (ii) generating initial codes by labelling specific meaning units, (iii) searching for themes by clustering codes into broader categories, (iv) reviewing themes to evaluate their coherence with the data, (v) defining and naming themes for clarity and consistency, and (vi) producing the report by organising findings into a coherent narrative.

Once themes were identified through this process, all instances of the slang term were examined in detail, including variations such as standalone words, idiomatic phrases, metaphors, or combinations with other words in more complex syntactic structures, as well as semantic shifts within cultural contexts. Hutauruk et al. (2024) argue that theme-based analysis operates on the principle that the meaning of a word does not exist in isolation, but is continuously shaped through discourse. Therefore, contextual analysis provides a more holistic understanding of a word's function not only from a semantic perspective, but also pragmatically, including aspects such as tone, communicative intent, and user identity strategies. In digital culture, Pfeifer et al. (2025) note that slang often carries layered nuances, for example, being used literally, sarcastically, ironically, or hyperbolically. As such, thematic analysis forms a crucial foundation for tracing meaning adaptations and the cultural characteristics embedded in slang usage (Hutauruk et al., 2024).

To assess word meaning in context, this study employed Stewart's (2010) theory of semantic prosody, which emphasises the relationship between words and their surrounding linguistic environments. This framework enables researchers to uncover implicit or nuanced meanings through patterns of use. The analysis referred to eight core concepts of semantic prosody as proposed by Stewart (2010): (i) evaluative meaning, which assesses whether the term carries positive, negative, or neutral connotations, (ii) priming, which explains how repeated use shapes certain meaning expectations, (iii) collocational environment, or the words frequently occurring

alongside the target term, (iv) polarity, measuring whether the usage leans more towards positive or negative interpretations, (v) semantic preference, indicating the tendency of the word to appear in specific semantic domains such as emotions, behaviours, or objects, (vi) colligation, referring to the grammatical patterns associated with the term, (vii) transferred meaning, which occurs when the word is used beyond its original domain, and (viii) attached meaning, or additional connotations derived from cultural or group identity contexts. The use of this framework ensures a more detailed and systematic interpretation of meaning grounded in robust linguistic theory (Zhang, 2010; Sarhad and Mahmud, 2023).

The final step involved comparing the meanings obtained through semantic prosody analysis with those recorded in standard dictionary definitions. This comparison aimed to empirically evaluate the semantic shift, thereby determining whether “slay” had undergone a transformation into a digital slang term with newly acquired meanings. According to Polizzi et al. (2024), such comparisons reveal whether a word has experienced expansion, narrowing, or the addition of new connotations not present in its original definition. This process ultimately validates the term’s status as digital slang, as its contemporary meaning can only be fully understood within the context of online cultural usage. Overall, the procedures for data acquisition and analysis conducted in this study not only document the presence of active digital slang, but also affirm that digital language is a dynamic phenomenon, continuously shaped by evolving social and cultural forces (Polizzi et al., 2024).

Results and Discussion

A review of the word *slay* in the Cambridge English Dictionary Online indicates that the term carries three principal meanings, namely:

1. To kill in a violent way – the literal or classical meaning
2. To impress someone very much or to be very good or impressive – the modern slang meaning
3. To make someone feel very upset or disappointed – the emotional or affective meaning

Based on these three documented definitions, it can be concluded that *slay* encompasses three core meanings that reflect a semantic shift from a literal interpretation to modern figurative and social connotations. The first meaning is the original or classical one, referring to “to kill in a violent way,” which denotes the act of killing someone in a brutal or cruel manner and is commonly used in historical, epic, or literary narratives. This form utilises the past tense “slew” and the past participle “slain,” as exemplified in the sentence “The knight slew the dragon.” The second meaning has become increasingly dominant in contemporary everyday usage, especially within popular culture and on social media, namely “to impress someone very much or to be very good or impressive.” This conveys the sense of being outstanding, stylish, or remarkable in action or appearance. A typical example would be the phrase “She slayed at the concert last night,” which expresses admiration for an impressive performance. The third meaning is also figurative but more emotionally driven, defined as “to make someone feel very upset or disappointed,” implying a sense of emotional pain or distress. For instance, in the sentence “It slays me to see her cry,” the term is used to describe a powerful emotional impact. These three meanings illustrate how a single lexical item can evolve and expand according to social, cultural, and emotional contexts in modern English usage.

Interestingly, the tracking of the term *slay* on platform X by Malaysian youth reveals numerous examples of its usage that appear to convey meanings different from those found in the Cambridge English Dictionary Online. The following section presents ten examples of how the word *slay* is used by Malaysian adolescents on platform X, based on the collected data.

1. “Mak suruh pergi kenduri je, dia keluar pakai smoky eye, heels 5 inci — slay gila like dia nak catwalk atas red carpet 🤩🔥👠”
2. “Baru lepas putus, dia post selfie dengan caption ‘New chapter ✨’ — slay tapi macam pedih sikit 🥲”

3. "Dia jawab cikgu pakai British accent masa oral test — slay or delulu? 🇬🇧 GB"
4. "Classmate pakai baju kurung warna neon dengan eyeliner tajam — not everyone can pull that off but she slayed 🎨"
5. "Slay moment bila dia masuk dewan exam lambat tapi chill mcm boss, siap bawa Starbucks lagi ☕👑"
6. "Dia reply hate comment dengan quote tweet + gif Beyoncé — slay level savage 🙄👑"
7. "“Saya tak compete, saya conquer’ — caption dia kat IG post lepas debate final 🇲🇾🔥 #slayqueen"
8. "Time latihan kawad kaki, dia marching macam drill sergeant — slay tapi semua orang penat dah 😓"
9. "Slay bukan main, tapi TikTok dia semua pakai filter butterfly & ai voice over 🎤🦋"
10. "Dia jual baju bundle online siap pakai aesthetic layout & caption 'vibe check passed' — local slaypreneur vibes 😎🛒"

In all ten sentences analysed (Sentences 1 to 10), the word *slay* is used in its slang form to express admiration, confidence, exceptional style, or an individual's social success in a given context. It does not carry the literal meaning of "to kill," but has instead been culturally and contextually adapted to signify a person's ability to attract attention or dominate a situation with flair. Its usage is often accompanied by elements of humour, satire, and dramatization, as seen in expressions like "*slay or delulu?*" which blend praise with playful doubt. There are also instances where *slay* is used sarcastically or ironically, such as in "*slay bukan main, tapi TikTok dia semua pakai filter butterfly*", which critiques exaggerated style in a humorous tone. Furthermore, the linguistic style employed reflects code-mixing between Malay and English, along with the use of emojis and hashtags, positioning *slay* not only as a verb but also as a marker of youth digital culture.

From the ways in which *slay* is used in these examples, it can be inferred that the emerging meaning is "to stand out impressively," whether through appearance, behaviour, self-confidence, or lifestyle. *Slay* functions as an informal form of recognition for individuals who succeed in capturing attention through uniqueness, boldness, or non-conformity. However, in certain contexts, this meaning is layered with elements of irony, humour, or hyperbole, suggesting that *slay* may also convey notions of exaggeration, trying too hard, or a mixed perception of social norms. Therefore, among Malaysian youth, *slay* does not solely denote absolute excellence, but rather serves as a form of social evaluation rich in cultural context, emotional undertones, and digital expression.

The following section presents ten examples of how the word *slay* is used by Indonesian adolescents on platform X.

11. "Bestie gue datang ke kelas jam 7 pagi tapi makeup udah full glam — slay ga ada capeknya 🇮🇩💄🌟"
12. "Dia jawab dosen pake teori yang bahkan dosennya lupa — intellectual slay 🔥📖"
13. "Slay alert: dia presentasi sambil pake slide aesthetic warna lilac + lo-fi music 🎨🎧"
14. "Abis diselengkuhin malah glow up & buka bisnis kopi — slay revenge-nya manis banget ☕😌"
15. "Slay banget! Outfit dia di konser Kpop bener-bener kayak main character 🎤🔥"
16. "Dia quote tweet omongan misogynis pake argumen akademik + meme kucing marah — slay for feminism 🐱👊"
17. "Caption IG dia: 'idgaf, I slay in silence' padahal tadi nangis di toilet kampus 🇮🇩"
18. "Slay vibes waktu dia nge-post reels main gitar sambil nyanyi lagu indie obscure banget 🎸❤️"
19. "Gue kira dia introvert... sekali dia ngehost acara sekolah kayak MC kondangan — SLAYED 🔥🎤"

20. “Dandan ke minimarket pake crop top, shades, & totebag eco friendly — minimalis slay 🤩🛒”

Based on examples 11 to 20 above, it can be observed that Indonesian adolescents use the word *slay* as a form of slang to express admiration for actions, appearances, or achievements that are striking, bold, or captivating. The term *slay* is embedded in a variety of contexts, ranging from academic achievement (“intellectual slay”) and feminism (“slay for feminism”) to everyday lifestyle expressions such as dressing up aesthetically for a visit to the minimarket (“minimalis slay”). The language used reflects a blend of Indonesian and English, accompanied by emojis and digital cultural references such as “main character,” “idgaf,” and “reels.” The style of expression among these adolescents tends to be positive, affirming, and self-assured, positioning *slay* as a symbol of empowerment and an aesthetic and authentic lifestyle.

From its usage, the meaning of *slay* among Indonesian youth can be understood as an expression of praise for someone's excellence, style, or inner strength, especially in the face of adversity or in standing out from societal norms. Unlike Malaysian adolescents who may use *slay* in sarcastic or humorous ways, Indonesian youth tend to employ it more seriously and affirmatively, as seen in contexts such as overcoming disappointment (“slay revenge-nya manis banget”) or advocating for values like feminism. This indicates that *slay* is not only used to refer to beauty or performance, but also functions as a tool for expressing identity, strength, and social resistance. In this context, its meaning aligns closely with the second dictionary definition (to impress or be impressive), and in some cases touches on the third (emotional impact), reframed positively as a symbol of resilience and perseverance.

The comparative analysis of *slay* usage by Malaysian and Indonesian youth also enables a reflection on its standard dictionary meanings, as recorded in the Cambridge English Dictionary. This dictionary outlines three primary meanings for *slay*. The first is “to kill in a violent way,” representing the literal or classical meaning, typically used in literary, historical, or epic narrative contexts. The second, which is increasingly widespread in modern culture, is “to impress someone very much or to be very good or impressive,” denoting actions or presences that are captivating and admirable. The third is “to make someone feel very upset or disappointed,” which reflects a figurative usage tied to deep emotional states. These meanings demonstrate the semantic expansion of the term from a literal interpretation to social and emotional forms, depending on the context of use.

Among Malaysian adolescents, the slang *slay* is used to denote someone's excellence or style in a given situation, often accompanied by elements of sarcasm, dramatization, or irony. For example, in the sentence “*Dia reply hate comment dengan quote tweet + gif Beyoncé — slay level savage*”, *slay* is used to indicate boldness and flair in a social response, which aligns with the second dictionary meaning. However, in the example “*Slay bukan main, tapi TikTok dia semua pakai filter butterfly & ai voice over*”, the usage of *slay* is ironic and critiques the exaggerated nature of digital aesthetics. This could be indirectly linked to the third meaning, reflecting perceptions of cringeworthy or emotionally exaggerated behaviour. Thus, for Malaysian youth, *slay* is not merely a compliment but also a socially layered expression rich in humour and subtle critique.

Conversely, among Indonesian adolescents, *slay* is more frequently used in a positive and affirming tone, highlighting aspects of empowerment, aesthetics, and personal strength. Examples such as “*Abis diselengkuhin malah glow up & buka bisnis kopi — slay revenge-nya manis banget*” illustrate how *slay* is used to symbolise resilience after disappointment, aligning with the second dictionary meaning and touching on the third in the context of emotional recovery rather than decline. Similarly, the sentence “*Dia quote tweet omongan misogynis pake argumen akademik + meme kucing marah — slay for feminism*” shows *slay* being used to convey intellectual power and meaningful impact, again consistent with the second definition. Overall, the use of *slay* among Indonesian youth tends to signal recognition of strength, success, and identity expression.

In comparison, both Malaysian and Indonesian adolescents predominantly use *slay* according to the second dictionary meaning, as a marker of admiration or prominence. However, the difference lies in the expressive style: Malaysian youth employ *slay* with more irony, humour, and social playfulness, while Indonesian youth use it in affirmative, aesthetic, and empowering

contexts. In a sentence like “*Classmate pakai baju kurung warna neon dengan eyeliner tajam — not everyone can pull that off but she slayed*”, the subtle sarcasm is evident in Malaysian usage. In contrast, “*Bestie gue datang ke kelas jam 7 pagi tapi makeup udah full glam — slay ga ada capeknya*” reflects sincere admiration and confidence in Indonesian expression. In both cases, the first dictionary meaning (to kill in a violent way) is entirely absent, indicating a clear shift in meaning among younger users.

In conclusion, the use of the slang term *slay* by Malaysian and Indonesian adolescents illustrates a divergence between dictionary meanings and culturally situated interpretations. While both groups of youth adopt the second dictionary meaning to express admiration, the emotions and communicative intentions embedded in their usage differ. Malaysian youth tend to use *slay* as a tool for socially ironic and critical expression, whereas Indonesian youth apply it as a symbol of strength, beauty, and expressive freedom. This suggests that global slang terms like *slay* are not merely adopted, but are also reinterpreted through the lens of local cultural and emotional contexts.

Conclusions

The findings of this study clearly illustrate how specific linguistic and symbolic norms, such as the use of the slang term *slay*, actively evolve within online social interactions, particularly among Malaysian and Indonesian adolescents. The usage of *slay* not only reflects semantic shifts within the framework of global English, but also demonstrates the processes of cultural adaptation and linguistic creativity through which young people respond to their everyday social realities. Whether used affirmatively or with sarcasm, this slang term functions as a form of expression that carries meanings far beyond simple praise. It encapsulates aspects of lifestyle, identity, social resistance, and the affirmation of values within digital communities.

Overall, this study not only reveals the dynamics of language use on social media platforms but also contributes meaningfully to the discourse on the construction of social identity and the negotiation of belonging in contemporary digital environments. Words such as *slay* form part of a living and evolving linguistic ecosystem, shaped by context and interaction. They reflect how younger generations express themselves, communicate, and build solidarity through digital mediums. This research opens avenues for further investigation in the field of digital sociolinguistics, particularly in understanding how language evolves as a reflection of social relations, power structures, and cultural values in the age of new media.

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