INITIALISMS IN GEN Z TWITTER (X): A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MORPHOLOGICAL PATTERNS AND COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS

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Abstract
This study investigates how Generation Z constructs and uses initialisms in Twitter (X), focusing on their morphological patterns and communicative functions. While previous studies have highlighted the social meanings of abbreviations in digital discourse, limited attention has been given to the systematic morphological structures underlying initialism formation and their functional roles within a single platform-specific context. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the data were collected through purposive sampling of publicly accessible Gen Z tweets posted between October and December 2025. Screenshots of posts containing initialisms were documented and analyzed using content analysis. The findings reveal 85 distinct initialisms, classified into Non-Elliptical (68 forms), Elliptical (12 forms), and Non-Alphabetic (6 forms). Non-elliptical forms dominate, reflecting Gen Z's reliance on fully abbreviated, letter-by-letter constructions that support rapid processing and platform efficiency. Across all categories, initialisms serve key communicative functions, operating as pragmatic tools for stance-taking, emotional signaling, identity construction, boundary marking, and interaction management that strengthen in-group belonging and facilitate high-speed digital interaction. This study contributes to contemporary discussions on digital morphology and Gen Z sociolinguistics by showing how compressed linguistic forms evolve in response to platform constraints and social dynamics. The implications highlight the need to recognize initialisms as a central component of emerging internet-mediated language change.

Keywords: *initialism, gen z, twitter (x), morphology, digital communication*

Introduction

Digital communication has accelerated linguistic change, particularly in the area of word formation, as users adapt language to the constraints and affordances of online platforms. One prominent outcome of this process is the increasing use of initialisms, which are abbreviations formed from the initial letters of multi-word expressions and pronounced letter by letter (e.g., LOL, IDK). On social media platforms such as Twitter (X), where character limits and rapid interaction shape discourse practices, initialisms function not merely as space-saving devices but as socially meaningful linguistic resources that convey stance, emotion, identity, and group affiliation.

This phenomenon is especially salient among Generation Z, the first generation to grow up fully immersed in digital environments. Born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, Gen Z users have developed communication styles characterized by brevity, flexibility, and symbolic density. Rather than serving only informational purposes, language in digital interaction operates as a resource for expressing stance, managing relationships, and indexing social identity. Cognitive-communicative research suggests that adolescents and young adults possess an increased capacity for abstract reasoning and symbolic experimentation, enabling them to manipulate linguistic forms creatively in socially strategic ways (Anil & Bhat, 2020). In online contexts, this capacity is reflected in the productive use of compressed forms such as initialisms to convey complex meanings efficiently.

From a morphological perspective, abbreviations fall under what (Mattiello, 2013) terms alphabetisms, a category that distinguishes between acronyms, which are pronounced as lexicalized words (e.g., NASA), and initialisms, which retain alphabetic pronunciation (e.g., BBC). While both processes reflect linguistic economy, initialisms preserve a transparent relationship between letters and their source expressions, allowing them to function as recognizable meaning units without full lexicalization. This study focuses specifically on initialisms because Gen Z discourse on Twitter (X) overwhelmingly favors letter-by-letter forms that operate as stable, socially coded markers within fast-paced interaction.

Twitter (X) serves as the primary site for this study due to its platform-specific constraints that emphasize brief, fast, and efficient communication. The platform's character limitations and rapid information flow compel users to compress meaning into minimal linguistic forms, creating an environment where speed and brevity are prioritized. As (Viono et al., 2023) note, digital communication increasingly follows a logic of speed, or language dromology, in which linguistic forms are optimized for immediacy. Within this environment, initialisms function as pragmatic tools that facilitate stance-taking, regulate interaction, and maintain conversational flow (Zahidi & Sulaiman, 2017).

Previous studies have documented the widespread use of initialisms and slang among Gen Z across social media platforms. For example, (Obwang'i et al., 2025) show that initialisms on Twitter (X) emerge as morphological responses to character limits and rapid turn-taking. Research on Instagram and TikTok similarly highlights the role of abbreviations in signaling in-group identity and shared cultural knowledge (Tusa'adah & Djauhari, 2025; Wafa & Amalia, 2022). Other research suggests that Gen Z language practices reflect a shift toward independent lexicalization, where abbreviated forms function as autonomous meaning-bearing units in digital discourse (Jabeen & Nawaz, 2025; Tagg, 2015).

Despite these contributions, existing studies tend to emphasize the social meanings of abbreviations while paying limited attention to the morphological processes underlying initialism formation and their systematic relationship with communicative function. As (Menzel, 2024) notes, compressed forms such as initialisms can create comprehension barriers for outsiders, indicating that their structure and usage are governed by shared community knowledge. Similarly, (McCulloch, 2019) conceptualizes digital abbreviations as a "digital tone of voice" that strengthens in-group bonds while regulating participation. However, few studies have examined how these morphological strategies operate within a single platform-specific discourse environment.

Accordingly, this study addresses this gap by systematically examining how Generation Z constructs and uses initialisms on Twitter (X). The study aims to (1) identify and categorize the morphological patterns underlying Gen Z initialisms and (2) analyze the communicative functions these compressed forms serve within digital interaction. By integrating morphological analysis with functional interpretation, this research contributes to digital morphology and sociolinguistics by clarifying how linguistic economy, platform constraints, and social meaning intersect in Gen Z online communication.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, which is appropriate for analyzing naturally occurring linguistic data and describing patterns of language use without experimental manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The data were collected using purposive sampling, targeting publicly accessible Twitter (X) posts that contained initialisms. Purposive sampling was chosen since it is suitable for linguistic research that requires information-rich cases rather than random selection (Tajik et al., 2024). The source of data included Twitter (X) posts published between October and December 2025, enabling observation during a period of high online activity. Gen Z users were identified by examining publicly available profile information, including age indicators, school/university affiliation, emoji markers commonly associated with Gen Z identity, and generational self-descriptors. Only posts publicly visible under Twitter (X)'s open access settings were included to maintain ethical integrity (Townsend & Wallace, 2016).

Data collection involved systematically documenting posts through screenshots, focusing exclusively on tweets containing initialisms. Screenshots preserve the original visual, linguistic, and contextual features of tweets. Each screenshot was manually coded with metadata such as date, username (anonymized), and interaction context. Because only publicly accessible posts were used and no interaction with users occurred, the study aligns with ethical standards for passive digital observation. The analysis used content analysis, a widely recognized method for identifying patterns in linguistic data (Krippendor, 2013). Each initialism was coded based on morphological structure (Elliptical, Non-Elliptical, Non-Alphabetic) and communicative function (e.g., stance-taking, emotional marking, identity signaling). The analysis proceeded in three steps: (1) identifying initialisms within the corpus, (2) categorizing them morphologically following (Mattiello, 2013) initialism framework, and (3) interpreting meaning and function in relation to the tweet's discourse context. This systematic approach enabled the researcher to describe how Gen Z constructs and uses initialisms as meaningful linguistic tools in digital interaction.

To enhance analytical reliability and trustworthiness, the coding process was conducted iteratively, with repeated reviews to ensure consistency in classification and interpretation. Morphological categories and functional analyses were continuously cross-checked against established theoretical frameworks (Mattiello, 2013; Tagg, 2015). While the identification of Gen Z users relied on publicly observable indicators and thus involved a degree of subjectivity, reflexive awareness was maintained throughout the analysis to minimize bias. These procedures strengthen the credibility and transparency of the findings.

Result and Discussion

The analysis of 85 initialisms extracted from Gen Z Twitter (X) posts revealed the presence of three distinct morphological patterns: (a) Non-elliptical initialisms, (b) Elliptical initialisms, and (c) Non-Alphabetic initialisms. Non-elliptical initialisms constituted the largest proportion, followed by elliptical initialisms, with Non-Alphabetic forms being comparatively rare. This distribution reflects Gen Z's strong preference for alphabetic reduction strategies that support rapid, high-volume, and socially coded interaction typical of Twitter (X) discourse. The dominant presence of non-elliptical forms indicates that Gen Z tends to shorten expressions by taking the initial letters of each constituent word, producing alphabetically pronounced units such as IDK, IMO, TBH, KMS, and WYD. These forms reflect both morphological economy and pragmatic expressiveness. Elliptical forms, such as OST, BGM, ETA, and WYD, represent lexicalized abbreviations that have acquired semi-fixed meanings in digital culture. Non-Alphabetic initialisms, such as /lh, /srs, F2F, W/O, illustrate multimodal creativity that mixes letters with symbols or numerals to index tone, stance, or structural compression. The following discussion integrates an analysis of the morphological patterns and communicative functions of initialisms employed by Generation Z on Twitter (X), which constitutes the main focus of this research.

Non-elliptical Initialisms

The non-elliptical initialisms identified in this data make up the largest group of forms by Gen Z on Twitter (X) with 68 data, and their structure is close to what Mattiello (2013) classifies as alphabetisms, i.e., abbreviations which are pronounced letter by letter rather than as a unified lexical item. Morphologically, these forms are created by the strict initial-letter selection from multi-word expressions (such as IMO - In My Opinion; IDK - I Don't Know; ASAP - As Soon As Possible), and are a process of segmental reduction with the orthographic identity of each letter. Unlike acronyms, however, non-elliptical initialisms do not become lexically phonetic, that is, they do not become pronounceable "words", but retain the sequential alphabetical structure (e.g./aɪ.diː.keɪ/ IDK, /tiː.biː.eɪtʃ/ TBH). This pattern mirrors Mattiello's assertion that alphabetisms adopt maximal brevity while preserving transparent correspondence between the letter and the word, rendering them efficient tools in high-speed textual communication. In Gen Z discourse, this morphological minimalism is especially functional, for it allows for compression without loss of semantic recognisability, allowing young users to use only three to four characters to encode complex pragmatic intentions. The table below illustrates the non-elliptical forms identified in the data.

Table 1. Non-elliptical Initialisms in Gen Z Twitter (X) Discourse

No	Non-elliptical Initialism	IPA	Meaning & Communicative Function
1	IMO	/aɪ.ɛm.oʊ/	**I**n **M**y **O**pinion: Epistemic stance marker softening an assertion.
2	IMHO	/aɪ.ɛm.eɪtʃ.oʊ/	**I**n **M**y **H**umble Opinion: Politeness strategy, often used ironically to emphasize a point.
3	IRL	/aɪ.ɑːr.ɛl/	**I**n **R**eal **L**ife: Contrasts offline reality with online existence; validates authenticity.

No	Non-elliptical Initialism	IPA	Meaning & Communicative Function
4	KMS	/keɪ.ɛm.ɛs/	**K**ill **M**y**s**elf: Dark humor/hyperbole expressing embarrassment or minor inconvenience.
5	KYS	/keɪ.waɪ.ɛs/	**K**ill **Y**our**s**elf: Hostile imperative or, in deep in-groups, ironic banter.
6	LMS	/ɛl.ɛm.ɛs/	**L**ast **M**an **S**tanding: Gaming term used metaphorically for resilience.
7	NGL	/ɛn.dʒiː.ɛl/	**N**ot **G**onna **L**ie: Functions as a stance marker to preface honesty or unpopular opinions, softening potential disagreement.
8	OML	/oʊ.ɛm.ɛl/	**O**h **M**y **L**ord: Exclamation of shock or intensity.
9	OMW	/oʊ.ɛm.dʌbəl.ju/	**O**n **M**y **W**ay: Omits "I am." Signals immediacy and movement; often used figuratively to express excitement.
10	OTP	/oʊ.tiː.piː/	**O**n **T**he **P**hone: Contextual marker indicating current status or unavailability due to a call. **O**ne **T**rue **P**airing: Romantic pairing/shipping for fandom
11	WTT	/dʌbəl.ju.tiː.tiː/	**W**ant **T**o **T**rade: Transactional marker common in fandom economies (photocards/merch).
12	WTS	/dʌbəl.ju.tiː.ɛs/	**W**ant **T**o **S**ell: Transactional header used to categorize sales posts efficiently.
13	WTB	/dʌbəl.ju.tiː.biː/	**W**ant **T**o **B**uy: Signals demand in the digital marketplace.
14	DM	/diː.ɛm/	**D**irect **M**essage: Directive to shift communication channel to private.
15	PMO	/piː.ɛm.oʊ/	**P**iss **M**e **O**ff: Expression of anger/annoyance, censoring the vulgarity.
16	RN	/ɑːr.ɛn/	**R**ight **N**ow: Temporal deictic marker emphasizing the immediacy of a feeling or state.
17	ROTFLMAO	/ˌrɒtfəlˈmeɪ.oʊ/	**R**olling **O**n **T**he **F**loor **L**aughing...: Hyperbolic affect marker indicating extreme amusement.
18	TBH	/tiː.biː.eɪtʃ/	**T**o **B**e **H**onest: A hedging device used to introduce frankness or distinct personal opinion.
19	TS	/tiː.ɛs/	**T**his **S**h*t: Anaphoric reference marker often carrying a negative or frustrated affective load.
20	IDK	/aɪ.diː.keɪ/	**I** **D**on't **K**now: Expresses uncertainty or disinterest.
21	TYSM	/tiː.waɪ.ɛs.ɛm/	**T**hank **Y**ou **S**o **M**uch: Intensified expression of gratitude/politeness.
22	IYKYK	/aɪ.kɛk/	**I**f **Y**ou **K**now **Y**ou **K**now: Gatekeeping marker; signals in-group knowledge and exclusive context.

No	Non-elliptical Initialism	IPA	Meaning & Communicative Function
23	TMI	/tiː.ɛm.aɪ/	**T**oo **M**uch **I**nformation: Acknowledgment of oversharing; meta-discourse marker.
24	HMU	/eɪtʃ.ɛm.juː/	**H**it **M**e **U**p: Invitation for social contact; signals approachability.
25	ATP	/eɪ.tiː.piː/	**A**t **T**his **P**oint: Discourse marker summarizing a situation, often with a tone of resignation.
26	SMH	/ɛs.ɛm.eɪtʃ/	**S**haking **M**y **H**ead: Evaluative marker of disappointment or disapproval.
27	LMK	/ɛl.ɛm.keɪ/	**L**et **M**e **K**now: Polite directive requesting feedback or confirmation.
28	ASAP	/eɪ.sæp/	**A**s **S**oon **A**s **P**ossible: Intensifier indicating urgency.
29	GM	/dʒiː.ɛm/	**G**ood **M**orning: Phatic opening greeting.
30	ISTG	/aɪ.ɛs.tiː.dʒiː/	**I** **S**wear **T**o **G**od: Intensifier used to assert truthfulness or express frustration.
31	BRB	/biː.ɑːr.biː/	**B**e **R**ight **B**ack: Interactional management signal for temporary absence.
32	JIC	/dʒeɪ.aɪ.siː/	**J**ust **I**n **C**ase: Pragmatic softener or precautionary marker.
33	OMG	/oʊ.ɛm.dʒiː/	**O**h **M**y **G**od: Universal interjection for surprise or emphasis.
34	BFFR	/biː.ɛf.ɛf.ɑːr/	**B**e **F***cking **F**or **R**eal: Challenge to validity; expresses exasperation.
35	CTFU	/siː.tiː.ɛf.juː/	**C**racking **T**he **F***ck **U**p: Indicates intense laughter; stronger than LOL.
36	GN/GNG	/dʒiː.ɛn/	**G**ood **N**ight / **G**ood **N**ight **G**uys: Phatic closing signal maintaining group cohesion upon departure.
37	ICL	/aɪ.siː.ɛl/	**I** **C**an't **L**ie: Epistemic marker similar to NGL, emphasizing the authenticity of the following claim.
38	AFAIK	/ˌeɪ.ɛf.eɪ.aɪ.keɪ/	**A**s **F**ar **A**s **I** **K**now: Epistemic hedge limiting the speaker's liability for truth.
39	FTW	/ɛf.tiː.dʌbəl.juː/	**F**or **T**he **W**in: Expression of enthusiasm or endorsement.
40	LOL	/lɒl/	**L**aughing **O**ut **L**oud: Pragmatic particle signaling friendliness rather than literal laughter.
41	WDYM	/dʌbəl.ju.diː.waɪ.ɛm/	**W**hat **D**o **Y**ou **M**ean: Request for clarification or expression of disbelief.
42	HBU	/eɪtʃ.biː.juː/	**H**ow a**B**out **Y**ou: Relational device similar to WBU, fostering reciprocal conversation.
43	NBD	/ɛn.biː.diː/	**N**o **B**ig **D**eal: Stance marker often used ironically to downplay significant events (humblebragging).
44	LOML	/loʊ.məl/	**L**ove **O**f **M**y **L**ife: Hyperbolic affection marker for idols or fictional characters.

No	Non-elliptical Initialism	IPA	Meaning & Communicative Function
45	OOMF	/uːm(f)/	**O**ne **O**f **M**y **F**ollowers: Pseudo-word used for indirect referencing ("subtweeting").
46	GO	/dʒiː.oʊ/	**G**roup **O**rder: Logistical term for collective purchasing in fandoms.
47	LSF	/ɛl.ɛs.ɛf/	**L**ocal **S**hipping **F**ee: Commerce term specifying cost components.
48	DOP	/diː.oʊ.piː/	**D**eadline **O**f **P**ayment: Temporal boundary setter in commerce.
49	DM	/diː.ɛm/	**P**oint **O**f **V**iew: Narrative framing device used to set a scenario or perspective.
50	POV	/piː.oʊ.viː/	**S**ong **O**f **T**he **Y**ear: Acronymized initialism used in K-pop award discussions.
51	SOTY	/soʊ.tiː.waɪ/	**T**hat **F**eeling **W**hen: Introduces a relatable experience to build empathy.
52	TFW	/tiː.ɛf.dʌbəl.ju/	**T**emporary **F**oreign **W**orker: Civic term recontextualized for political/social discussion.
53	LFB	/ɛl.ɛf.biː/	**L**ooking **F**or **B**uyer: Commercial shorthand similar to WTS, specifically seeking a transactional partner.
54	WBK	/dʌbəl.ju.biː.keɪ/	**W**e **B**een **K**new: (AAVE origin) Stance marker indicating that information is old news or obvious.
55	WFH	/dʌbəl.ju.ɛf.eɪtʃ/	**W**ork **F**rom **H**ome: Lifestyle marker used to contextualize availability or behavior.
56	MMCS	/ɛm.ɛm.siː.ɛs/	**M**ain **M**ale **C**haracter **S**yndrome: Critical term mocking certain behavioral tropes.
57	TBR	/tiː.biː.ɑːr/	**T**o **B**e **R**ead: (Elliptical use) Categorization label for future reading, common in #BookTwt.
58	OOTD	/uː.tiː.diː/	**O**utfit **O**f **T**he **D**ay: Genre tag for self-presentation and aesthetic evaluation.
59	DNI	/diː.ɛn.aɪ/	**D**o **N**ot **I**nteract: Boundary marker asserting control over who engages with the post.
60	OOT	/uː.tiː/	**O**ut **O**f **T**opic: Discourse management tool to signal a digression from the main thread.
61	PWP	/piː.dʌbəl.ju.piː/	**P**orn **W**ithout **P**lot: Genre tag for explicit fanfiction content.
62	NW	/ɛn.dʌbəl.juː/	**N**ow **W**atching: Activity tag used to share media consumption in real-time.
63	FMC	/ɛf.ɛm.siː/	**F**emale **M**ain **C**haracter: Literary/fandom analysis term.
64	MMC	/ɛm.ɛm.siː/	**M**ale **M**ain **C**haracter: Literary/fandom analysis term.
65	DIY	/diː.aɪ.waɪ/	**D**o **I**t **Y**ourself: Activity category implying self-sufficiency.

No	Non-elliptical Initialism	IPA	Meaning & Communicative Function
66	MV	/ɛm.viː/	**M**usic **V**ideo: Specific media format label, essential in pop-culture discourse.
67	EP	/iː.piː/	**E**xtended **P**lay: Music industry format classification.
68	DP	/diː.piː/	**D**own **P**ayment: Financial term ensuring commitment in transactions.

Functionally, these non-elliptical initialisms perform a wide range of interactional, affective, and epistemic tasks in Gen Z communication. Many of them are used as markers of stance, like IMO and IMHO, which mitigate disagreement or signal personal opinion, which is also in tune with the Gen Z tendency towards polite hedging and relational sensitivity. Others are used as affective intensifiers, such as OML, OMG, ROTFLMAO, and CTFU, which are indices of emotional extremes that otherwise would require longer descriptions. A significant subset operates as relational or phatic devices - for example, GM (greeting), GN (closing), and HMU (invitation to contact) - signalling Gen Z's emphasis on being interpersonally connected even in minimal textual space. Several forms serve as organizational or transactional markers in digital subcultures, such as WTS, WTT, WTB, LSF, and GO, which are crucial for the K-pop and fandom marketplace landscape on Twitter. Meanwhile, epistemic markers like TBH, NGL, AFAIK, and ICL indicate a degree of certainty or honesty, which underscores Gen Z's metadiscourse orientation. Importantly, gatekeeping expressions such as IYKYK can be used in the creation of in-group identity, which strengthens community boundaries by reinforcing knowledge in a shared context. Finally, some time-management and availability signs like BRB, RN, and OMW are useful for coordinating synchronous interaction in high-speed digital environments.

Viewed through the theoretical lens of Mattiello, these non-elliptical initialisms indicate that morphological reduction and communicative efficiency tend to be mutually reinforcing strategies in Gen Z discourse. Their alphabetic form guarantees maximum brevity, while their pragmatic versatility allows for a complex register of feeling, stances, social bonding, and community participation. Thus, the non-elliptical use of initialisms by Gen Z on Twitter (X) illustrates the ways in which morphological economy, platform limitations, and youth practices of identity overlap to form a highly codified, yet fluid digital register. These findings show how non-elliptical initialisms function as multifunctional communicative units that efficiently encode tone, stance, identity, and social alignment.

Elliptical Initialisms

Elliptical initialisms are abbreviations formed by contracting phrases to their initial letters, yet each retains its alphabetic meaning. Although elliptical forms omit parts of the original phrase, shared contextual knowledge allows users to restore the intended meaning. The elliptical initialisms that appear in this study, including DP, QRT, TL, PFP, BF, BG, GF, OST, BGM, ETA, WYA, WYD, and PC, reflect the tendency of Gen Z to use the morphological structures as compressed as possible, which remain recognizable despite the highest level of reduction. On platforms like Twitter (X), users swiftly interpret these alphabetized clusters, aided by the shared digital context. These forms function not only as abbreviations but also as socialized morphological choices, shaped by platform conventions and frequent use. The data is depicted as follow.

Table 2. Elliptical Initialisms in Gen Z Twitter (X) Discourse

No	Elliptical Initialism	IPA	Meaning & Communicative Function
1	QRT	/kjuː.ɑːr.tiː/	**Q**uote **R**e**T**weet: Procedural term referring to the platform mechanism of sharing a tweet with comment.
2	TL	/tiː.ɛl/	**T**ime**L**ine: Refers to the user's feed; spatially locates content within the digital environment.
3	PFP	/piː.ɛf.piː/	**P**ro**F**ile **P**icture: Refers to the user's digital avatar/visual identity.
4	BF	/biː.ɛf/	**B**oy**F**riend: Relationship marker; defines social actors within a narrative.
5	BG	/biː.dʒiː/	**B**ack**G**round: Contextual shorthand referencing the setting of an image or event.
6	GF	/dʒiː.ɛf/	**G**irl**F**riend: Relationship marker corresponding to BF.
7	OST	/oʊ.ɛs.tiː/	**O**riginal **S**ound**T**rack: Media term referring to music from film/shows.
8	BGM	/biː.dʒiː.ɛm/	**B**ack**G**round **M**usic: Atmospheric description for media clips.
9	ETA	/iː.tiː.eɪ/	**E**stimated **T**ime of **A**rrival: Borrowed from logistics; used to manage temporal expectations in social or shipping contexts.
10	WYA	/dʌbəl.ju.waɪ.eɪ/	**W**here are **Y**ou **A**t: Phatic query requesting location or social attention.
11	WYD	/dʌbəl.ju.waɪ.diː/	**W**hat are **Y**ou **D**oing: Conversational opener; prompts interaction and disclosure.
12	PC	/pi : si :/	**P**hoto**C**ard: Noun referring to a specific collectible item in K-pop culture.

Elliptical initialisms make up a significant portion of the data, with 12 items identified in this category. Morphologically, elliptical initialisms often omit entire words, sometimes keeping only the original nouns while deleting functional words-as seen in PFP (Profile Picture), and TL (Timeline), which Mattiello describes as lexical left-truncation. Some, like WYA (Where are you at) and WYD (What are you doing), remove verbs and grammatical operators, demonstrating clausal reduction. Others, such as QRT (Quote Retweet), simplify multi-word platform processes into their initials. These patterns show how Gen Z relies on structural clues and platform familiarity to interpret meaning, prioritizing brevity and efficiency in fast-paced digital communication.

In terms of communicative purpose, elliptical initialisms allow Gen Z users to interact efficiently online. Terms like WYA, WYD, and BF/GF act as markers for interpersonal exchange, expressing relational questions or identity quickly. DP, ETA, and PC are commerce-related, helping clarify transactions in fandom or marketplace contexts. OST and BGM categorize digital media, while QRT and TL serve navigational or procedural functions on the platform. Overall, these forms balance morphological reduction with communicative precision, enabling Gen Z to adapt language for speed, efficiency, and shared digital environments.

Non-Alphabetic Initialisms

Non-Alphabetic initialisms constitute the smallest category in the data, with 6 forms identified in Gen Z's Twitter (X) discourse: "/lh," "/srs," "F2F," "W/O," and "/j." These

forms blend letters with non-alphabetic symbols (slashes, numerals, punctuation), reflecting what Mattiello (2013) describes as complex abbreviation processes that combine multiple compression strategies. Their presence, although limited in number, is significant because non-alphabetic initialisms emerge specifically to address communication constraints unique to digital interaction, namely the absence of vocal tone, the need for speed, and the blending of online and offline realities. Gen Z users rely on these non-alphabetic forms to reduce ambiguity and increase the pragmatic precision of their messages, showing that this category serves a distinctly interpersonal and metacommunicative function. The data is displayed below.

Table 3. Non-Alphabetic Initialisms in Gen Z Twitter (X) Discourse

No	Non-Alphabetic Initialism	IPA	Meaning & Communicative Function
1	/lh	/ɛl.eɪtʃ/	**L**ight **H**earted: Tone indicator clarifying that the preceding statement is non-aggressive.
2	/srs	/sɜːrz/	**S**e**R**iou**S**: Tone indicator. Prevents misinterpretation of sarcasm, critical for text-based clarity.
3	F2F	/ɛf.tuː.ɛf/	**F**ace to **F**ace: Distinguishes physical reality from digital interaction; logistical planning term.
4	W/O	/wɪˈðaʊt/	**W**ith**O**ut: Symbolic reduction used for speed and economy.
5	/j	/dʒeɪ/	**J**oke: Tone indicator. Explicitly marks content as humorous to avoid conflict.
6	/lh	/ɛl.eɪtʃ/	**L**ight **H**earted: Tone indicator clarifying that the preceding statement is non-aggressive.

From a morphological standpoint, non-alphabetic initialisms in the data demonstrate two primary patterns identified by Mattiello. The first is symbolic substitution, where non-alphabetic characters replace lexical items for brevity (e.g., “W/O” replacing without). This type represents what Mattiello terms graphic abbreviation, in which symbols operate analogously to full lexical segments, enabling extreme economy without sacrificing meaning. The second pattern is functional augmentation, seen in slashed tone indicators such as “/lh,” “/srs,” and “/j.” These forms illustrate a non-alphabetic process where the slash works not as a phonological element but as a metapragmatic marker, signaling that the abbreviation modifies the intended tone of the entire utterance. The non-alphabetic form “F2F” incorporates a numeral to replace the preposition to, exemplifying Mattiello’s category of alphanumeric reduction, a strategy common in texting and gaming environments due to its efficiency and memorability. Across the data, these non-alphabetic forms demonstrate a high degree of morphological innovation driven by platform-specific constraints and Gen Z’s preference for rapid symbolic communication.

Communicatively, non-alphabetic initialisms play a crucial role in preventing misinterpretation and regulating social interaction. Tone indicators like “/lh,” “/srs,” and “/j” explicitly convey emotional intent, compensating for the lack of prosodic cues in online text. Meanwhile, “F2F” and “W/O” function as situational or logistical markers, enabling users to distinguish between online and offline contexts or to express procedural information efficiently. Collectively, these forms highlight Gen Z’s heightened sensitivity to misunderstanding in text-based environments and their reliance on non-

alphabetic abbreviation strategies to achieve pragmatic clarity. In conclusion, non-alphabetic initialisms, though fewer in number, represent one of the most functionally sophisticated morphological categories, illustrating how Gen Z expands traditional abbreviation processes to manage tone, identity, and interactional precision in the digital sphere.

The use of initialism in Gen Z Twitter (X) discourse indicates a consistent preference for highly economical linguistic strategies. This pattern reflects the communicative pressures of digital space, where speed, immediacy, and participation norms shape language choices. Such prioritization of brevity aligns with (Putri et al., 2025) who found that Indonesian Gen Z users employ abbreviated forms to articulate identity and belonging while maintaining conversational flow. The dominant usage of non-elliptical initialisms in this study (e.g., IMO, TBH, LMK, ASAP, BRB) demonstrates how young users compress full syntactic clauses into compact signals that efficiently express stance, emotion, and social positioning. This supports (Rahmawati et al., 2025) who observed that Gen Z slang on X frequently functions as both a stylistic marker and a pragmatic shortcut in high-velocity online interaction. Elliptical initialisms (e.g., TL, PFP, OST) serve more referential and categorical functions, such as artifacts, media forms, or relational roles, mirroring findings from the(Wedananta et al., 2023), which reported that abbreviation types used by youth frequently map onto lifestyle and cultural domains. non-alphabetic forms, such as F2F, /j, /srs, and W/O, show strategic blending of symbols and letters to convey nuance, especially tone marking and interpersonal clarity. This resonates with (Sitohang et al., 2025) which highlights that Gen Z often prioritizes emotional precision to prevent misinterpretation in text-based media.

Across all categories, the communicative functions uncovered, stance-taking, boundary setting, affiliation, humor, commercial coordination, and affective intensification, demonstrate how initialisms act as semiotic resources for constructing digital personae and managing social relationships. These observations parallel (Alshaboul, 2025) and the additional Consensus-indexed study on social media language, both of which underline that social media accelerates linguistic innovation and promotes shared conventions that strengthen group cohesion. The present findings also reinforce (Razak et al., 2025) who showed that influencers use slang and initialisms to cultivate relatability, perform authenticity, and engage followers, functions mirrored in Gen Z users' use of NGL, WYA, OOMF, or IYKYK to signal proximity and insider knowledge. The patterns further reflect (Crystal, 2011) proposition that Internet-mediated communication promotes linguistic compression, multimodality, and playful innovation, which collectively reshape norms of written interaction. In the present study, non-elliptical initialisms function almost like pragmatic particles, softening assertions (IMO, IMHO), marking emotion (OML, SMH), managing discourse (RN, BRB), or constructing relational rapport (HBU, HMU). Elliptical and non-alphabetic forms complement this by indexing shared cultural knowledge, media consumption habits, and tone clarification. Overall, these findings confirm that Gen Z initialism usage is not random linguistic reduction but a systematic and socially meaningful practice shaped by platform affordances, peer-group conventions, and evolving digital identities. This supports broader scholarly consensus that youth language online functions as a marker of group belonging, symbolic capital, and communicative efficiency across diverse social media contexts.

Conclusion

Gen Z's use of initialisms reflects a dynamic intersection of linguistic innovation, social identity, and digital pragmatics. Their highly condensed forms reveal how language evolves within technologically mediated communication environments, and they exemplify the broader shift toward compressed, expressive, and socially coded discourse in the digital age. This study set out to examine how Generation Z constructs and uses initialisms in Twitter (X) communication, focusing on both their morphological patterns and the communicative functions within real-time digital interaction. Overall, the findings demonstrate that Gen Z's initialisms are shaped not merely by the platform's pressure for brevity, but by broader sociolinguistic processes in which identity performance, stance-taking, and in-group indexing play central roles. The predominance of non-elliptical initialisms shows that Gen Z prefers highly stable, letter-based reductions that maintain full semantic transparency even when compressed. Meanwhile, the presence of elliptical and non-alphabetic forms illustrates their capacity to creatively omit predictable lexical material or mix letters with symbols to maximize efficiency while preserving intelligibility. These tendencies collectively reveal that Gen Z's morphological innovations are systematic rather than random, and are aligned with their broader communicative norms of speed, playfulness, and social alignment.

The communicative functions observed across all three categories also reflect Gen Z's highly pragmatic and interaction-oriented linguistic style. Initialisms in this study consistently operate as stance markers, affect signals, politeness strategies, boundary-setting tools, and digital identity cues. Such uses align with larger trends in contemporary social media language where users employ reduced forms not only to save space, but to encode emotional tone, maintain relational closeness, and regulate participation in online communities. In broader terms, these findings suggest that initialisms are becoming an essential part of Gen Z's socio-digital repertoire, functioning as compact meaning units capable of carrying both linguistic and social information. As these forms continue to circulate widely across platforms, they contribute to ongoing shifts in English morphology and pragmatics, and pose important implications for cross-generational communication, digital literacy education, and future studies of internet-mediated language change.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the data were limited to Twitter (X), which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other social media platforms with different affordances and interactional norms. Second, the qualitative design and purposive sampling approach prioritize depth over representativeness, meaning the frequency and distribution of initialisms cannot be statistically generalized across the broader Gen Z population. Future research could address these limitations by conducting cross-platform comparisons involving Instagram, TikTok, or WhatsApp, or by integrating quantitative corpus-based methods to validate the prevalence and functional patterns of initialisms. Longitudinal studies may also provide insight into how Gen Z initialisms evolve over time and influence broader language change.

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