

A 'delulu' marketer's guide to using Gen Z slang without being cringe

Article

If it feels impossible to keep up with Gen Z slang, that's because it is. TikTok has turbocharged an already fast-moving content cycle, so you've probably heard about trends that sound like

gibberish. It's tempting to give up on the spiraling influx of new language, but marketers need to understand at least some of the lexicon to avoid creating "cringe" content. Here are some terms marketers should know.

Cringe: Used as an adjective, cringe is a shortening of "cringeworthy." It refers to something so awkward and embarrassing that someone might have a physical reaction. If someone calls content cringe, that content might be dated, overwhelmingly earnest, or overproduced.

Delulu: Delulu is slang for delusional. The slang often has a positive connotation, associated with being so ignorant of reality that you actually manifest something to happen. "**Delulu is the solulu**" is essentially a timely way of articulating the power of positive thinking. If a commenter calls someone or something delulu, it might be less of an insult and more of a silly acknowledgement of a positive behavior.

-Coded, Core: To be "something-coded" or "somethingcore" (e.g., girl-coded, Barbiecore, etc.) is to take on traits of the thing that precedes the word "coded" or "core." Content that is "millennial-coded" is probably a bit dated. Content that is "cottagecore" probably has a soft, simple aesthetic. And **content that is "corecore"** uses the suffix ironically to refer to a genre of online content that mashes seemingly unrelated videos together to portray nostalgia or nihilism.

Giving/Serving: To give something or serve something is to represent that characteristic. This slang isn't all that different from -coded or core. Someone who is "giving fall" might be dressed in a cozy sweater and drinking a pumpkin spice latte. Serving is similar, but while giving has a neutral or somewhat positive connotation, serving has a very positive connotation. If someone is "serving looks," it means they are very well-dressed. And if someone is giving or serving without any word following, it means they are doing something successfully.

Understood the assignment: To understand the assignment is to excel. Just like if a student understood their assignment, a creator or celebrity that "understood the assignment" nailed a performance, a joke, a look, or whatever the content features.

Cooked/Ate: Both "cooked" and "ate" aren't all that different from understanding the assignment. The terms also mean to excel. Someone may comment on a Beyoncé concert clip and say "she cooked" or "she ate." The terms mean the same thing (in this case, that Beyoncé did a good job).

Rizz: Short for charisma, rizz refers to what you might have called “game” 10 years ago. It’s the confidence or swagger one has (or doesn’t have) when flirting. Rizz can be used as a noun (he has no rizz) or a verb (he rizzed her up).

Is my Roman Empire/Lives rent-free: Both of these phrases mean something that is perpetually on someone’s mind. For example, **Oreo’s iconic 2013 Super Bowl tweet** might be your Roman Empire or lives rent-free in your mind. The rent-free phrase is fairly simple to understand: It’s a concept that will never be evicted from one’s mind. The Roman Empire phrase refers to a trend from 2023 where TikTokers discussed how much **men think about the Roman Empire** (all the time, apparently).

Main character energy: Main character energy means someone that is so interesting or attractive that in a movie or story they would be the main character. This term can also be used to refer to someone who is narcissistic or thinks of themselves as a main character. But for the most part, if someone says you’re giving or serving main character energy, or says you are the main character, it’s a good thing.

NPC: The opposite of main character energy, an NPC refers to someone who is so uninteresting that it seems like they don’t matter. The term comes from non-player characters in video games, who are featured in the background or along quests but don’t serve a major role. If someone calls you an NPC, it’s meant to be an insult.

Girl math/Girl dinner/Girl anything: TikTokers have been putting “girl” in front of words for a while to **feminize certain concepts**. The addition of “girl” doesn’t necessarily mean the same thing every time. Girl dinner is an assortment of snacks that combine to make a discombobulated meal. Girl math is math that doesn’t technically add up but still makes sense in some way. There are hot girl walks (walks) and girlpops (girls) and babygirls (**cute, confused men on TV**, surprisingly). This slang’s definition depends on context, and you may have to check in with more plugged-in colleagues to grasp specific meanings.