A Comparative Appraisal Analysis of Technology Representation in Short Stories by Generation Z Authors

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Abstract

The rise of technology has had a significant impact on the lives of Generation Z. As the use of technology is increasingly integrated with institutions, moulding human lives by influencing everyday decisions and regulating information access. This leads to creative writing becoming a space for authors to express dissent by questioning and challenging power that is associated with technology. This study, therefore, aims to appraise how Gen-Z authors express their points of view, feelings, and experiences about these technologies through their creative writings. Despite the recent advancement of AI in society, limited studies have explored how young authors linguistically evaluate technological advancement in their literary works. This paper aims to examine how Gen-Z authors represent technological dissent in their writings by applying Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically appraisal from Martin and White's theory to analyse the author's attitudes towards a subject based on the language they use. Focusing on the Attitude component which examines how authors express their feelings and opinions. The data of this research consist of 3 creative writings by Gen-Z students from Class A and B of Creative Writing classes of Sanata Dharma University's English Letters Department, with technology as the main theme. The findings revealed Gen-Z's non-conformity towards technological advancement, particularly its influence on creativity, culture, and everyday life. Overall, this paper fills a knowledge gap regarding how appraisal theory reflects the differing perspectives of young authors on contemporary technological advancement.

Keywords: appraisal; creative writing; dissent; Generation Z; technology

Introduction

Technology has become a great influence on today's generation of youths. Generation Z (Gen Z), in particular, is the first generation to grow up surrounded in an environment of smartphones, social media, and algorithm-driven platforms. These gadgets then stop being a tool

in Gen Z's life, but a part of their identity, relationships, and overall everyday life. This relationship between people and gadgets becomes increasingly noticeable in the creative writing this generation produces. Gen Z authors frequently foreground technology not as a neutral background, but as a source of anxiety, alienation, connection, or uncertainty. This contrasted with the general assumption that technology is an inherent optimistic progress (Huggins, 1994). Shibulal also mentions that technology is generally considered as a neutral tool that is used to overcome limitations (2025). The short story is a compact genre. Every evaluative decision is interpersonal, so it provides a suitable context for the analysis of how young writers express their attitude towards the digital world they live in. These attitudes are not just important in the appreciation of literature, they provide clues as to how a generation understands, and reacts to, the technologies that construct their formative years.

Despite its relevance, the representation of Gen Z's creative writing remains underexamined in the context of linguistic analysis. Existing literature on technology tends to focus on thematic or narratorial readings, where they focus on what technology represents rather than how the writer uses evaluative language to construct positive, negative, or mixed attitudes towards it. Moreover, according to Hadidi & Mohammadbagheri-Parvin (2015), much of the appraisal-oriented research on evaluative language has concentrated on published, professional, or canonical texts. This leaves emerging writers and students' creative works largely unstudied. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how technology is appraised in short stories produced by Gen Z student writers themselves.

Hadidi and Mohammadbagheri-Parvin (2015) and also Manggala (2023) have demonstrated the usefulness of appraisal-based analysis of literary texts. Nurjanah (2021), on the other hand, analyzes the presented attitude based on the choice of words in an editorial published by The Guardian through the Attitude subsystem. This demonstrates its application to political and policy discourse. Hadidi and Mohammadbagheri-Parvin applied Martin and White's (2007) appraisal framework, with a specific attention to the attitude subsystem of affect, judgement, and appreciation, to analyze Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby.* Manggala (2023) used the Attitude subsystem to characterize humans and giants in Central Sulawesi folktales, showing that non-human entities can be attributed with similar qualities as humans. These studies showcase that appraisal theory is a viable tool to uncover how writers evaluate not only people, but also other phenomena and beings. However, these studies remain limited to a traditional, conventionally published, professional fiction. While objects, such as digital technologies, still remained underexamined.

To examine this gap, this study employs Martin and White's (2007) Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) Appraisal theory. The framework is composed of three interacting systems; Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. The current study examines the creative writings specifically through the attitude aspect because it is developed precisely to capture how evaluative stance is built into text at the level of wording (Banks, 2019). it provides a systematic means of tracing how Gen Z writers evaluate technology; Accordingly, this study is a comparative appraisal analysis of technology representation in short stories written by Gen Z authors, using

creative writing produced by students of the English Letters study program at Sanata Dharma University as its data body.

Specifically, the study seeks to answer: (1) How is technology represented through the Attitude system in selected short stories written by Generation Z authors? and (2) How do the selected stories differ in expressing dissent towards technology? By asking these questions, this study aims to contribute a linguistically grounded account of how a digital native generation evaluates technology, which are central to their lives.

Methodology

The objects of the study are three flash fictions, titled *Behind the Screen*, *Unblinking*, and *Digital Echoes*, written by students from classes A and B from Sanata Dharma's English Letter study program for the flash fiction assignment of the creative writing class. These stories are treated as linguistic data and analyzed based on the attitude of appraisal found within the stories. The study focuses on how technology is involved in the stories, particularly where characters, narrators, or other textual elements express emotional reactions, behaviors, and evaluations toward or in relation to technology. A total of three flash fictions have been analyzed in this study, and 50 appraising items have been found in the three flash fictions selected. The students' short stories are analyzed as instances of written discourse through which particular attitudes toward technology may be constructed. Therefore, the analysis focuses on the language used in the texts rather than attempting to determine the students' actual personal opinions about technology outside the stories.

This research is comparative qualitative research. According to Kothari (2004), qualitative research is interested in qualitative phenomena that relate to quality and is particularly relevant to the behavioral and social sciences where the focus is to uncover underlying motivations and to consider the factors that influence human behavior and meaning. Creswell (2003) continues that the qualitative method is a research approach that makes knowledge claims from a constructivist point of view and is primarily used to discover themes and patterns in meanings from data that is emerging and open-ended. These characterizations are sufficient to support the present study, which does not aim at measuring or quantifying linguistic features statistically, but rather at understanding how attitudes on technology are constructed from the students' stories.

In addition, the approach of stylistics is adopted in this study, specifically taking on Systemic Functional Linguistics or SFL. Stylistics as a discipline applies linguistic theories and methods to dissect and analyze literary texts, focusing on how language choices create meaning, develop characters, and produce other effects. Verdonk (2003) defines stylistics as the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect. This highlights that the discipline is, at the base level, concerned with the relationship between linguistic form and literary meaning.

This study employs purposive sampling; purposive sampling is appropriate when the researcher needs data that is information-rich and directly tied to the phenomenon being studied

(Creswell, 2003). The population of this study is the flash fiction created by the students from the creative writing classes of classes A and B. This technique is applied because not every flash fiction created is about technology. Thus, the researchers selected only written works that have a clear narrative structure. Then the data is further filtered for those that revolve around the theme of technology. These are the criteria that need to be met for the stories to be considered as the research data.

There are several steps taken to collect the data. First, the researchers read each story to determine whether the theme of the flash fiction is about technology or not, since the flash fiction can be created on any theme. After that, the researchers read the selected flash fictions and then sorted them based on their theme, which focuses only on those that have technology as the stories' focal points. Only after meeting these two criteria could the stories be considered as research data. Lastly, these data are then sorted into a data table containing the textual expression. The researchers collected three data points for this research because those data met the two criteria that have been stated above.

To analyze the data, first, the researchers identified the evaluative expressions related to technology and its representation in each story. Second, the data are classified based on the attitude subsystems according to Martin and White's (2007) Appraisal framework, which consists of affect, judgement, and appreciation. Affect focuses on the representation of emotional responses and state of being, such as un/happiness, dis/satisfaction, and in/security. Judgement focuses on the behavior related to social norms, such as normality, capacity, tenacity, veracity, and propriety. Appreciation focuses on evaluation of things, phenomena, and processes, such as reaction, composition, and valuation. Third, the researchers then determined polarity by identifying whether each coded instance expresses a positive or negative evaluation, considering its context. Later, the researchers counted and organized the data into attitude category, polarity, and story.

Next, each story is interpreted to explain how evaluative language constructs the representation of technology. Finally, the researchers compared the stories to identify similarities and differences, then interpret how it expresses dissent toward technology. These interpretations are made based on the context of each text rather than predetermined assumptions.

Results and Discussion

1. Attitude Result and Discussion of *Behind the Screen*

Table 1. Findings of Attitude Analysis of *Behind the Screen*

No.	Appraising Items	Attitude		
		Affect	Judgement	Appreciation
	1	2	3	4
1	The screen opened and closed on its own. **Amore was confused** and just realized that she was no longer in her room.	- Insecurity		
2	"Detected," a voice came from nowhere, and **fear crept out on Amore**, like a cold shiver.	- Insecurity		
3	**Curiosity took over**, and without hesitation, she touched the screen.	+ Inclination		
4	The history of her searches, unfinished drafts, and personal thoughts she had typed and deleted before hitting enter also appeared. **She felt exposed.**	- Insecurity		
5	"I'm not a user," **she snapped**	- dissatisfaction		
6	Her answer **sounded calm**, without a hint of doubt.	+ security		
7	**She was stunned**, "Why does that sound like my voice?"	- Insecurity		
8	However, this place felt… **orderly. Too perfectly organized.**			+ Composition
9	It felt **helpful**, but also **bothered** her.	- Insecurity		+ Valuation
10	She stared at each screen showing a **calmer, smarter**, and more **confident**		+ Capacity	

	version of herself.			
11	She never **hesitates** in the AI form.		+ Tenacity	
12	Speed is **not a skill.**			- Valuation
13	**“You haven’t made me better,”** she remarked.			- Valuation
14	"I want to think **severely** and **learn**," she said.	+ inclination		
15	Amore had a **failure** this time		- Capacity	

In the flash fiction entitled *Behind the Screen*, a total of 16 appraising items is identified with 9 affects, 3 judgements, and 4 appreciations. In this story, technology is depicted through the character Amore, who enters the inside world of the screen and encounters an AI generated version of herself. Based on the table in the findings, the most dominant affect is negative insecurity. For instance, Amore feels afraid or startled when she hears a voice that sounds like her own, and feels exposed when her search history and personal writings appear. This suggests that technology is something that monitors and threatens privacy. However, the story also shows positive evaluations. For example, the story shows that the inside world of the AI feels orderly, the AI feels helpful, and the AI version of Amore is seen as calmer, smarter, and more confident. Thus, the story’s first attitude is not one of rejection of technology. A clear attitude of rejection is shown only at the end, when Amore states that speed is not skill and that the AI has not made her a better person. She then says that she wants to think and learn on her own. The technology in this story is viewed as interesting and useful, but a threat to privacy and the human thought process. Furthermore, the disagreement here emerges consciously and firmly. The character in the story rejects AI as a substitute for her own learning process and creativity.

2. Attitude Result and Discussion of *Unblinking*

Table 2. Findings of Attitude Analysis of *Unblinking*

No.	Appraising Items	Attitude		
		Affect	Judgement	Appreciation
	1	2	3	4
1	I have **extremely beautiful** big eyes.			+ Reaction

2	Well, even though there's a small eye in me, still, everything could be **extremely beautiful** in it.			+ Reaction
3	Sometimes I'm **proud of myself,**	+ satisfaction		
4	Sometimes, I must see and be forced to capture the **worst things, cruel things, even disgusting things.**			- Reaction
5	This is why sometimes **I really hate myself.**	- Unhappiness		
6	because all **I want** is just to take all of the drop-dead beautifully peaceful moments.	+ Inclination		
7	My **body is shaking** in someone's hand.	- Insecurity		
8	**I want** to blur. **I want** to lose my focus.	- Inclination		
9	**I wish** I just could close my eyes by myself.	- Inclination		
10	There is **no beauty** anymore in me.			- Reaction
11	Yeah, I know right now **I am the "devil."**		- Propriety	
12	It makes me feel like **I wish** I were just the "eyes" of a breathing creature	- Inclination		
13	**I feel weird** when I hear the silence in the room while they watch.	- Insecurity		
14	There is a **heavy hurt in my heart.**	- Unhappiness		
15	I feel **deeply ashamed**.	- Unhappiness		
16	Yet I have no idea why **I feel extremely out of my breath** in a way machines should not understand.	- Insecurity		

17	I was **never the devil**.		+ propriety	
18	**I do not wish** to be the "eyes" of any breathing creature.	- Inclination		

A number of 18 appraising items have been identified in the flash fiction *Unblinking*, such as 12 affects, two judgements, and four appreciations. This is the story with the highest number of affect and the most dominant negative polarity with a total of 13 negative affects out of 18 affects. This story used the point of view of a camera as its narrator. At first, the camera views itself positively, such as saying that it has very beautiful eyes and feels proud of itself. However, the camera was later forced to record cruel and repulsive things, leading to unhappiness, a sense of insecurity, and a sense of reluctance. The camera even labels itself a devil, but in the end rejects it. Technology in this story is not portrayed as evil, but it is the victim of the ways humans use it. The story does not criticize technology, but rather the behavior of humans who use technology to record something terrible or bad. Therefore, the criticism is directed at the ethics of technology use in culture and daily life.

3. Attitude Result and Discussion of *Digital Echoes*

Table 3. Findings of Attitude Analysis of *Digital Echoes*

No.	Appraising Items	Attitude		
		Affect	**Judgement**	**Appreciation**
	1	2	3	4
1	Kai's chest **tightened**.	- Insecurity		
2	Kai **swallowed**.	- Insecurity		
3	It felt **invasive.**			- Reaction
4	Yet, beneath the unease, there was something else. **Relief**.	+ Security		
5	But ECHO was **different**.			+ Valuation
6	It **listened**. It **responded**. It **stayed**.		+	

			Capacity	
7	Kai felt something **shift inside him. A warmth** he couldn't quite explain.	+ Happiness		
8	But with ECHO, there was **always a response. Predictable. Immediate. Understanding.**			+ Valuation
9	Kai **frowned**.	- Dissatisfaction		
10	He opened ECHO. **No response**. The silence was **immediate** and **overwhelming**.		- Capacity	- Reaction
11	At first, the silence felt **unbearable**. It pressed against him, heavy and **suffocating**, like something he needed to escape from. His fingers twitched, instinctively reaching his phone, but there was no response at all.			- Reaction
12	Kai let out a **small laugh**.	+ Happiness		
13	Kai sat up immediately, his **heart pounding**. "No internet," his phone displayed. "No signal."	- Insecurity		
14	**"**The program could **analyze patterns," "predict emotions, even imitate empathy…"** Kai whispered to himself,		+ Capacity	
15	"…but like an echo, it can **only repeat** what it has learned."		- Capacity	

In the story *Digital Echoes*, there were identified 16 appraising items, namely seven affects, four judgements, and five appreciations. This story has the most balanced ratio of judgement and appreciation to affect from the other two stories. This story also shows a clear change in attitude. At the beginning of the story, the character named Kai feels insecure and uncomfortable socializing with others at school, but this is immediately followed by a sense of relief and warmth because of the application called ECHO. ECHO was always there to respond to Kai's messages, but when ECHO did not respond due to a sudden blackout, Kai felt stress and panic. In the end, when the lights turn on, Kai learns that the application can only repeat what it has learned, like

an echo. The story's dissent emerges through a gradual realization. Even though technology can give warmth to people, it could lead to dependency towards technology and can impact human relationships and daily life.

4. Attitude Result and Comparison Between the Three Stories

Table 4. Total of Findings

Stories/Attitude	Affect	Judgement	Appreciation	Total
Behind The Screen	9	3	4	16
Unblinking	12	2	4	18
Digital Echoes	7	4	5	16
Total	28	9	13	50

From the analysis of the three flash fictions, a total of 50 appraising items have been identified with affect being the most frequently appeared appraising item with 28, followed by appreciation with 13 and judgement with 9. This means that Gen-Z authors more often depict technology through their characters' feelings rather than through evaluations of behavior or objects. The following sections discuss each story to analyze how each author expresses dissent towards technology.

All three stories are dominant with negative polarity. *Behind The Screen* and *Digital Echoes* have a nearly balanced positive and negative polarity with both stories having 9 negative and 7 positive polarities, while *Unblinking* is far more negative with 13 negatives and 5 positives. The difference lies in how the dissent is constructed. *Behind The Screen* illustrates it through the characters' firm rejection of AI in terms of creativity and ability to think. *Unblinking* illustrates it through the suffering of technology caused by a human to critique human behavior of using technology. *Digital Echoes* illustrates it through a shift in sentiment from relief to an awareness of AI's limitations. Overall, these findings indicate that Gen-Z authors do not simply reject technology outright. They acknowledge its benefits, but express concerns about its impact on creativity, privacy, relationships, and human values in everyday life.

Conclusion

The findings concluded that technology is represented primarily through the Affect aspect, accounting for 56% of the evaluations, with 71,4% of these expressions conveying negative emotions. This suggests that the stories predominantly explore the emotional consequences of technology rather than just simply describing its functions or implications to human lives. Overall, the evaluation of technology is largely negative, with such expressions accounting for 62% of the findings. However, Judgement and Appreciation aspects are relatively balanced throughout the

stories. This indicates that the authors do not entirely reject technology, but instead present a more contrasting perspective towards it. Each story contributes a different level to this representation. *Behind the Screen* portrays technology as something helpful and convenient while simultaneously creating feelings of uneasiness. *Unblinking* presents technology through an emotional perspective, giving it an almost human-like voice and highlighting its capacity to evoke emotional responses. Meanwhile, *Digital Echoes* explores the limitations of technology and its potentially invasive nature, particularly in relation to human experiences and personal boundaries. Considering all these stories, the findings demonstrate that they express dissenting perspectives toward the dominant assumption that technological advancement is inherently beneficial. The authors acknowledge its usefulness while also questioning its limitations, consequences, and influence on everyday life. Therefore, dissent in these stories does not necessarily mean the complete rejection of technology, rather it challenges the overly optimistic views of technological development.

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