# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN GENERATION Z COMMUNICATION

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**Abstract:**

Social media has a significant role in human life, especially among young people such as Generation Z, who were born between 1996 and 2010. The use of social media greatly influences generation Z's daily activities. This journal explores the role of social media in generation Z communication dynamics through a qualitative research apprsoach. In an effort to understand how generation Z uses and interacts with social media, this research explores the complexity of experiences, views and identity construction formed through digital platforms. With a focus on interaction and interpretation, qualitative methodology was used to analyze data obtained from in-depth interviews, observations, and social media content analysis. The research results illustrate that social media is not only a communication tool but also an arena where generation Z builds and expresses their identity, values and communication patterns. These findings provide deep insight into how generation Z understands, responds to, and shapes their communication environment through social media use, highlighting the importance of social constructs in shaping their communication experiences.

**Keywords:** Gen Z, Social Media, Communication

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## INTRODUCTION

The Gen Z generation, which generally consists of individuals born between the mid-1990s to the mid-2010s, is the first generation to grow up in a hyper-connected digital era. They grew up in a world flooded with technology, especially social media, which has changed the way they communicate, interact, and form relationships with others. Social media has become an integral element in Gen Z Generation's daily lives, shaping their communication patterns in unique and significant ways.

There are four generational groups that can be distinguished based on the range of years of birth and significant events that occurred during that time: (1) the veteran generation born between 1920 and 1945; (2) Baby Boomers generation born between 1946 and 1964; (3) Generation X born between 1965 and 1980; (3) Generation Y or often referred to as the millennial generation who were born between 1981 and 2000; (4) generation Z born between 1995 and 2012. Each generation has its own characteristics, which are influenced by different economic, social and political events during their lives (Yolanda et al., 2020; Zalfa, 2020).

Intergenerational differences in the work environment are a growing focus in human resource management. The concept of generational differences continues to evolve over time. According to Manheim (1952), generations are social constructs that include individuals with similar age ranges and historical experiences. Furthermore, Manheim (1952) explained that individuals who belong to one generation were born in the same 20-year period and share a similar social and historical context (Kertati, 2018).

Social media has a significant role in human life, especially among young people such as Generation Z, who were born between 1996 and 2010. The use of social media greatly influences generation Z's daily activities. For them, having and using social media is not only necessary but also an integral part of their daily routine. Social media is not only a means of learning and communication, but also a place to express oneself. Especially during the pandemic, where Generation Z's activities are limited to home with minimal social interaction, the presence of social media is one way to overcome boredom by providing abundant entertainment and distraction (Ariandi et al., 2023).

Currently, the Gen Z generation is one of the main groups of social media users throughout the world. They spend much of their time on platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Twitter, which have become key places to communicate, share experiences, and build digital identities. Social media has created a space where they can connect with peers, interact with brands and celebrities, and express their political and social views.

It is important to understand that these changes are not just communication changes but also deep social and cultural changes. Therefore, the background to this problem arises from the need to investigate and understand the impact of social media on the communication patterns of the Gen Z Generation and its implications in various aspects of their lives.

Questions that arise are, for example, how has the role of social media changed the way the Gen Z generation communicates? The Gen Z generation actively creates and contributes to social media content. They share their personal experiences, opinions and creativity through videos, images and their own writing. This change reflects the Gen Z Generation's adaptation to new communication tools and continuously developing technology. They tend to be more open to various forms of communication and often integrate social media into their daily lives more smoothly than previous generations. However, this change also comes with challenges, including managing screen time and avoiding negative impacts such as social media pressure. With a deeper understanding of the role of social media in the communication patterns of the Gen Z Generation, we can identify the challenges and opportunities that arise and look for wiser solutions to managing the impact of social media in their lives.

According to (Research, 2011), the characteristics of generation Z are that it is the first generation that is truly the internet generation. If the previous generation, namely Generation Y, was still experiencing a technological shift towards the internet, Generation Z was born in an era where this technology was already very developed. This condition causes this generation to have certain characteristics, including a high interest in technology, flexibility, more adaptive intelligence, and greater tolerance for cultural differences. They have global connectivity and actively interact in cyberspace. However, this generation also tends to like instant things. It is less sensitive to privacy because of their habit of constantly sharing aspects of their lives on social media (Rastati, 2018; Zis et al., 2021).

Generation Z faces several challenges related to social media use. One challenge is the pressure to create the perfect image on the platform, which often has a negative impact on self-confidence and mental health. Additionally, there is a risk of disclosing too much personal information, raising concerns about privacy and data security. However, there are great opportunities that can be exploited in terms of communication and social interaction. Generation Z can use social media as a tool to voice opinions, build professional networks, and access information more widely and quickly. Social media also allows them to participate in global discussions, broaden their horizons, and bridge cultural differences and diverse viewpoints. By using social media wisely, Generation Z can take advantage of this opportunity to increase creativity, develop inclusive communication skills, and expand positive influence in their digital environment.

Technological advances aim to make communication easier via mobile devices. The use of communication media on mobile devices has become an important need in this digital era, especially to establish long-distance communication connections that are more efficient when compared to postal or telegram services that take longer to process messages (Nasrullah, 2022). Nowadays, getting the latest information has become easier thanks to the rapid development of information technology (Fauzi et al., 2023).

The increased access and use of social media by Generation Z has triggered a significant shift in the communication paradigm. This phenomenon implies several important implications. First, Generation Z has the ability to access information that was unmatched before; however, this also raises challenges regarding the validity and truth of the information they receive. In addition, these changing communication patterns also affect the depth of personal interactions, leading them into more often digital relationships and relying less on face-to-face communication.

From this phenomenon, the internet has a positive impact but also a negative one. The great influence of internet technology in human life today shows a strong dependence on the internet and social media. The use of social media can have a negative impact if a person's real life is closely related to the platform. The border between real life and life in cyberspace is increasingly blurring. The role of social media has also changed to become more negative; some examples include openly disclosing personal problems, excessive exhibitionism, and anxiety when they do not get a positive response, such as lots of likes on their posts (Putra & Fitriani, 2019).

Although social media offers a powerful platform for self-expression, social connection, and empowerment, there are also concerns regarding its impact on the mental and emotional health of Generation Z. The phenomenon of social comparison and self-image influenced by content uploaded on social media also plays a role in exacerbating this condition. Therefore, a deeper understanding of how social media influences Generation Z's communication patterns is essential. This requires in-depth research to analyze the implications of these changes regarding social interactions, mental health, and the evolution of communication paradigms in the current digital era.

The social media phenomenon has become the main platform for social interaction and self-expression of Generation Z. In this context, dramatic changes are seen in the way they interact with each other. Social media facilitates relationships that occur more frequently online, allowing them to stay connected without being limited by geographic distance. Apart from that, self-expression has also undergone a significant transformation. Social media platforms provide ample space for Generation Z to voice opinions, share activities and build their identity. However, the impact of constant exposure to public opinion and expectations from peers can put additional pressure on them to maintain a positive image.

Analysis of how social media has changed the way Generation Z (Gen Z) communicates, including the use of text messages, images, videos, and emojis, is an important part of understanding the impact of social media on this generation. Gen Z tends to communicate more via text messages than through direct verbal communication. This can change the dynamic in their relationship, as text messages give them time to think about a response. They also use slang more often when communicating on social media. Slang used by millennial teenagers comes from regional languages, Indonesian, foreign languages, and a combination of Indonesian and foreign languages. Patterns of slang formation from abbreviations, word shortening, acronyms, word reversals, puns and shifts in meaning. The purpose of using slang by millennial teenagers is to greet, joke, tease or ridicule, and build intimacy in friendships (Iswatiningsih & Pangesti, 2021).

Gen Z is more likely to use images and videos to tell their stories, whether through posts on Instagram, Snapchat Stories, or other platforms. Gen Z often creates creative visual content such as

memes, vlogs and TikTok, which have become an important part of their communication culture. Changes in the way Gen Z communicate as a result of social media are creating a unique communication environment (Supratman, 2018).

In this ever-growing digital era, communication has undergone significant changes. As one of the main platforms, Instagram plays a central role in Generation Z's interaction with the outside world, especially with their idol figures. Generation Z, who grew up in an era of advanced technology, uses Instagram as the main tool to interact and build personal relationships with celebrities or their idols via direct messages (DM). This phenomenon reflects how Generation Z uses DM as a typical communication tool that has a significant impact on establishing personal interactions with public figures they admire (Nuruzzahra et al., 2023).

The psychological characteristics of the Gen Z Generation influence their interactions on social media in various ways. Gen Z uses social media to express and explore their identity. They create profiles that reflect their values, interests, and aspirations, looking for groups that align with their identities.

Generation Z shows striking differences in their communication patterns when compared to previous generations. They are individuals who grow along with advances in communication technology. Therefore, Generation Z tends to depend on the internet and considers it the main source of information when searching for information (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021).

Gen Z has grown up with technology, so they tend to be more skilled at using social media and more aware of how technology impacts their lives. These characteristics create a unique dynamic in Gen Z interactions on social media. They seek a balance between self-expression, social interaction, and awareness of social issues in an ever-evolving digital environment.

A deeper understanding of how social media influences Generation Z's interpersonal interactions, and self-expression processes is essential to confronting these changes. An in-depth study of the psychological implications, social effects, and differences between online and face-to-face interactions is important to highlight the complex dynamics of the role of social media in their daily lives.

Generation Z's exposure to social media has had a significant impact on their mental health. This phenomenon results in increased levels of anxiety, mainly due to the stress that arises from the expectations projected by social media content as well as the incessant comparison of other people's lives. Apart from that, consuming content on social media also affects their self-image. Along with selective curation of the lives they show, Generation Z tends to compare their own lives to the images presented by others on these platforms. This often results in feelings of inadequacy or lack of satisfaction with oneself.

Thus, a deeper understanding of how social media contributes to increased anxiety, social comparison, and its impact on self-image is important.

**Generation Z**

Generation Z is a term used to refer to the generational demographic group born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s. They are a generation that has grown up in an era of rapidly developing digital technology, especially in the age of the internet, social media, smart devices and wide access to information. Generation Z is also known for several characteristics, including high technological proficiency from an early age, multitasking skills, an orientation towards creativity, and an emphasis on the values of equality, inclusivity and diversity. They are often considered a highly socially connected generation through social media platforms and communication technologies that enable easy digital interaction (Bhalla et al., 2021).

In a social and cultural context, Generation Z is also often associated with a more progressive attitude towards environmental, social and political issues. Due to their significant growth in the era of digital technology, their adaptation to social and technological changes is also a major highlight in studies of the development of this generation.

**Social media**

Social media is a platform or website that allows users to interact, share content and connect with others online. Social media platforms allow users to create personal profiles or pages and then participate in various activities such as posting text, images, and videos and interacting with content shared by others. Examples of social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube, and many more. Each platform has its own functionality and attracts users in different ways, for example, to share moments in images (Instagram), communicate with short messages (Twitter), interact professionally (LinkedIn), or share short videos (TikTok) (Duong, 2020; Wojdan et al., 2021).

Social media also enables the formation of online communities based on shared interests, activities or goals, and provides opportunities for individuals to share their opinions, information and experiences. Additionally, businesses, celebrities, and organizations often use social media platforms as marketing and communication tools to interact with their audiences.

**METHOD**

The research method used, namely Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, in understanding the role of social media in shaping Generation Z's communication patterns will involve several steps of in-depth analysis of the symbols, signs and messages contained therein. This research was carried out using 2 data collection techniques: primary and secondary data. Primary data is processed from interviews or from filling out distributed questionnaires. This approach will allow in-depth observation of the role of social media in communication patterns. Then take secondary data which can be obtained from previous research, for example from journals, books or articles. First, this research will use semiotic analysis to identify visual and verbal signs, such as emojis, hashtags, captions, images, and short videos, used in social media content that is popular among Generation Z. This step will lead to an understanding of how these signs are used to communicate messages, values, or identities. Next, an analysis of the denotation and connotation of these signs will be carried out. This step includes deciphering the literal meaning (denotation) of the signs, as well as a deeper interpretation of the conceptual or symbolic meaning (connotation) that Generation Z might interpret. Then, this research will pay attention to the social, cultural and psychological context of the use of these signs in social media by Generation Z. These factors will be analyzed to understand how social media use influences identity, social interaction patterns and thinking of this generation. Finally, a synthesis of semiotic findings will be used to develop a broader understanding of how social media plays a role in shaping Generation Z's communication patterns. This will yield deeper insight into how signs on social media are becoming a primary tool in building relationships, communicate values, and shape identity in this digitally connected generation. Researchers using a constructivist paradigm, research on the role of social media in generation Z communication will emphasize how individuals from generation Z actively build understanding, perceptions and meaning related to the use of social media in their communication. This approach would recognize that reality is not only discovered but also constructed by individuals through their interactions with social media. Researchers will explore how generation Z subjectively creates their self-representation, identity, and worldview through online interactions, including how the use of social media shapes their perceptions of social relationships, values, and communication patterns. The constructivist paradigm allows for a deep understanding of how individuals from generation Z construct

their thoughts, meanings, and ways of communicating through interactions with social media, and how important social constructions are in shaping their communication experiences. In this journal, research was conducted using a qualitative approach which allows for an in-depth understanding of the role of social media in generation Z communication. This approach allows researchers to explore the complex experiences, views and interactions that occur in the context of social media use by generation Z. Through interviews in-depth, observational, or analysis of social media content, this qualitative research obtains a detailed understanding of how generation Z utilizes these platforms to shape their identity, values, and the way they communicate. By focusing on context and interpretation, a qualitative approach allows researchers to capture the diversity of individual experiences and explore the social dynamics that influence how Generation Z interacts and communicates via social media.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication pattern analysis that reveals findings regarding Generation Z's dominant communication patterns in using social media highlights several distinctive characteristics. Generation Z shows a strong preference for visual content, utilizing images, short videos and visual elements such as emojis or filters to convey messages or express themselves. Concise, quick, and direct communication is characteristic of their interactions, indicating a tendency to respond concisely and efficiently. In addition, Generation Z is also actively involved in social or political issues through social media, expressing their support for social justice, diversity, and environmental issues. Their ability to tailor communication styles and content to each platform specifically reflects their strong adaptability to various social media platforms. They are also actively involved in forming online communities based on certain interests or identities. In addition, Generation Z shows diverse content consumption, including content that educates, entertains and provides inspiration. Their awareness of privacy and security on social media is also highlighted, showing greater attention to their privacy settings and protection of personal information. This analysis shows how Generation Z utilizes social media as a primary tool to communicate, share, and engage in various aspects of their lives online.

The evolution of social media from time to time continues to attract attention both at home and abroad, in line with the progress of the times which continues to develop with the emergence of innovations, including in the realm of social media. The progress of social media remains an important aspect of human social life, showing significant changes from previous times, and becoming part of the public's view as a whole.

Digital natives in Indonesia, who are the largest group in the population today, are those who were born and raised in the digital era. Generation Z and the millennial generation have adequate knowledge in operating social media because they grew up in the digital era. They are not only social media users, but are also active as content creators, using these platforms as a means of interaction in cyberspace. They realize that social media has a convergent nature, which allows various media platforms to be connected to one another. Therefore, they have widespread accessibility to multiple social media platforms rather than just being limited to one account.

The role of social media in the way Generation Z communicates has been a significant change in their communication patterns. Social media platforms provide a platform for faster, more visual and concise interactions. Generation Z tends to lean more towards visual content, such as images and short videos, in conveying messages and self-expression, showing their adaptability to a preference for shorter and more direct communications. The presence of emojis, GIFs, and visual filters has become an integral part of how they communicate, allowing for richer and more intuitive expressions of emotions in online interactions. Additionally, their involvement in social or political issues via social media reflects their efforts to use the platform as a tool to voice opinions and values that are important

to them. This influences how they utilize social media as a platform to share, engage, and form social relationships in their daily lives online.

Interaction via social media has triggered several significant cultural changes among Generation Z. One crucial change is in how they consume and produce content. Generation Z tends to be more active and diverse content consumers, with a tendency to seek entertaining, informative or inspiring content. The ability to instantly share everyday moments also changes the paradigm of sharing information and experiences. Apart from that, social media has also become the main means for them to express their identity, opinions and uniqueness. They form and engage in online communities based on specific interests or identities, allowing them to feel connected to people while maintaining diversity and inclusivity. This reflects cultural changes towards acceptance of diversity and recognition of the expression of individuality within the wider community.

The following are the results of interviews that researchers obtained based on 4 sources.

1. **How often do you use social media in a day?**
   **Lisa (Informant 1):** 5 hours a day
   **Titin (Informant 2):** 5 hours a day
   **Jesika (Informant 3**): 7 or 8 hours a day
   **women (Informant 4**): quite often, ± 8 hours

2. **What social media platforms do you use most often to communicate?**
   **Lisa (Informant 1):** whatsapp
   **Titin (Informant 2):** whatsapp
   **Jesika (Informant 3):** whatsapp
   **Annisa (Informant 4):** whatsapp

3. **Are you more likely to use visual content (images, videos) or text in your communications on social media?**
   **Lisa (Informant 1):** prefers text only
   **Titin (Informant 2):** more often, text and stickers.
   **Jesika (Interviewee 3):** I rarely use images. I prefer text
   **Annisa (Informant 4):** text

4. **How do you consider the use of emojis and visual filters in your online communications?**
   **Lisa (Informant 1):** To express emotions when you run out of words.
   **Titin (Informant 2):** I often use emojis and stickers as a form of expression when communicating via social media.
   **Jesika (Informant 3):** normal.
   **Annisa (Informant 4):** Use emojis and stickers to express yourself.

The results of the research show that the interviewees, who are part of generation Z, actively use social media as a means of online communication, spending more than 4 hours every day. Most of them tend to use WhatsApp as the main platform for communicating online. The use of social media, especially in instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp, has created communication patterns that tend to be more written, with the use of stickers as a tool to express emotions visually. However, of the four sources interviewed, three of them preferred to use text rather than image, sticker or video formats when interacting. Even so, they revealed that using stickers was the main way to express their emotions and themselves when communicating via social media. This illustrates how social media has influenced how they communicate, adding a visual and expressive dimension to online language use, a significant change in generation Z's communication patterns.

From the results of this research, several things can be identified related to changes in communication that are influenced by social media. First, the increase in the amount of time spent on online communication indicates a major shift from traditional to more digital communication. The fact that they spend more than 4 hours every day shows the intensity of using social media as one of the main means of communication. Second, the preference for using text compared to visual media such as images, stickers, or videos may signal a change in how generation Z conveys messages. Even though they still use text as the main method, stickers have become an important choice for expressing emotions in their online communication. This shows an adaptation in self-expression and text-based communication which is increasingly enriched with visual elements in the form of stickers. Therefore, the results of the study illustrate that social media has brought about significant changes in the way generation Z communicates with increased time spent online as well as a shift in preferences for emotional expression and communication through the use of stickers.

Based on the research results above, changes in communication patterns influenced by social media have a significant impact on social relationships, personal development, and society as a whole. Socially, these changes have changed the dynamics of interpersonal interactions. Although social media allows for faster and broader connections between individuals, it can sometimes reduce the depth of relationships. Intensive involvement in digital platforms can shift face-to-face communication, reduce direct interaction time, and affect an individual's ability to read non-verbal expressions because by communicating via social media, we can express our feelings or moods using emojis or stickers. This can lead to declining social skills in situations outside the digital realm.

In the context of personal development, the use of social media has influenced the way Generation Z constructs identity and self-perception. These platforms provide a platform for self-expression. However, they often come with pressure to create the perfect image. Social comparison with content uploaded by others on social media often brings feelings of dissatisfaction or lack of self-confidence. This can impact their mental and emotional health, as well as change their perception of beauty, success and other values in life.

The rapid development of technology, especially through social media, has become an important need for Generation Z now and in the future. Content and information spread on social media are associated with a decline in morality. Generation Z's reliance on social media, along with a lack of filtering of content on these platforms, has the potential to result in reduced shyness and a loss of politeness in some of this generation. Generation Z's multitasking ability is also visible when they can carry out several activities at once, such as using social media when using devices such as cellphones or Personal Computers (PCs), as well as enjoying musical entertainment via handheld devices. All their activities are often connected to the internet or cyberspace (Liah et al., 2023).

The research results identified that the millennial generation carries out the social communication process through three steps. First, they build social relationships by using social media and also having direct face-to-face interactions. Second, they use a language style that can be adapted to the communication context and utilize symbols in communication, both in the form of text and emoji, to communicate messages verbally and non-verbally. Third, to shape their image, the millennial generation manages speech, writing, comments and emojis based on the values of honesty and openness (Nurdin & Labib, 2021).

The impact of changes in Generation Z's communication patterns also extends to society more broadly. Social media influences thought patterns, opinions and the flow of information spread in society. The rapid dissemination of information via these platforms also has the potential to produce significant domino effects in terms of public opinion, misinformation, or the rapid and widespread spread of trends.

Changes in communication patterns, especially those triggered by advances in technology and social media, have far-reaching impacts on various aspects of life. Socially, these changes have changed the way humans interact and form interpersonal relationships. Although social media facilitates faster and broader connections, it can sometimes reduce the depth of relationships, reduce face-to-face interaction time, and affect an individual's ability to read non-verbal expressions. This could degrade social skills in situations outside the digital realm.

On the personal development side, social media use plays an important role in shaping identity and influencing how individuals see themselves and the world around them. These platforms are a reflection of self-expression, but they also bring pressure to create the perfect image. Social comparison with content uploaded by others often leads to feelings of dissatisfaction or lack of self-confidence.

The impact of changes in communication patterns is not only limited to individuals, but also extends to society at large. Social media has changed perspectives, opinions and the flow of information circulating in society. The rapid dissemination of information through these platforms also has the potential to create a domino effect in terms of public opinion, misinformation, or the rapid and widespread spread of trends. This encourages people to be more critical of how the use of social media can influence the social, cultural and political structure of a community as a whole.

## CONCLUSION

From research conducted regarding the role of social media in generation Z communication, it can be concluded that social media plays a central role in shaping their identity, communication patterns and social interactions. Generation Z uses social media not only as a communication tool but also as a space where they build and express themselves individually and collectively. This research highlights the importance of qualitative approaches in understanding the complex dynamics of social media use by generation Z. It shows that social constructs play a crucial role in shaping their communication experiences. These findings provide relevant and important insights for our understanding of how Generation Z interacts, forms identities, and understands the world through social media in today's digital era. However, the use of social media also has negative impacts, including increased social pressure, decreased direct communication skills, and raises concerns regarding privacy and mental health. It is important to understand that the role of social media in Generation Z's communication patterns has broad implications, both at the individual level and at the level of society as a whole.

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