

NAVIGATING DIGITAL SPACES: GENERATION Z'S COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR ON INSTAGRAM, FACEBOOK, TIKTOK AND TWITTER

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ABSTRAK- Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perilaku komunikasi Generasi Z dalam menavigasi ruang digital melalui penggunaan media sosial *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *TikTok*, dan *Twitter*. Sebagai generasi yang tumbuh dan berkembang di tengah pesatnya perkembangan teknologi digital, Generasi Z memanfaatkan media sosial tidak hanya sebagai sarana komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai sumber informasi, hiburan, interaksi sosial, serta pembentukan identitas diri. Perbedaan karakteristik dan fitur pada setiap *platform* media sosial memengaruhi cara Generasi Z berkomunikasi dan memenuhi kebutuhan komunikasinya di ruang digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode analisis isi berbasis studi pustaka. Data diperoleh melalui penelaahan berbagai buku, jurnal akademik, dan publikasi ilmiah yang relevan dengan topik media sosial, komunikasi digital, Generasi Z, serta *Uses and Gratifications Theory*. Analisis data dilakukan dengan mengelompokkan temuan berdasarkan kategori kebutuhan informasi, hiburan, interaksi sosial, dan identitas diri sesuai dengan kerangka *Uses and Gratifications Theory*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk pola komunikasi digital Generasi Z. *Instagram* dan *TikTok* dominan digunakan untuk memenuhi kebutuhan hiburan, kreativitas, dan ekspresi diri melalui konten visual dan audiovisual. *Twitter* dimanfaatkan sebagai sumber informasi cepat dan ruang diskusi publik, sedangkan *Facebook* lebih berfungsi sebagai media interaksi sosial berbasis komunitas meskipun tingkat penggunaannya relatif menurun. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa Generasi Z bersifat aktif dan selektif dalam menggunakan media sosial sesuai dengan kebutuhan komunikasinya.

Kata Kunci: Generasi Z, Media Sosial, Komunikasi Digital, *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, Perilaku Komunikasi

ABSTRACT- *Navigating the digital space through the use of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter. As a generation that has grown up amid rapid developments in digital technology, Generation Z utilizes social media not only as a means of communication, but also as a source of information, entertainment, social interaction, and identity formation. The different characteristics and features of each social media platform influence the way Generation Z communicates and fulfills their communication needs in the digital space. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis based on literature review. Data were obtained through a review of various books, academic journals, and scientific publications relevant to the topics of social media, digital communication, Generation Z, and Uses and Gratifications Theory. Data analysis was conducted by grouping findings based on the categories of information needs, entertainment, social interaction, and self-identity in accordance with the Uses and Gratifications Theory*

framework. The results of the study indicate that social media plays an important role in shaping Generation Z's digital communication patterns. Instagram and TikTok are predominantly used to fulfill entertainment, creativity, and self-expression needs through visual and audiovisual content. Twitter is used as a source of quick information and a public discussion forum, while Facebook functions more as a community-based social interaction medium, even though its usage rate has relatively declined. Overall, this study confirms that Generation Z is active and selective in using social media according to their communication needs.

Keywords: Generation Z, Social Media, Digital Communication, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Communication Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Generational differences are often a topic of discussion because each generation has different characteristics, values, and habits in their social lives, including in the way they communicate. These differences often cause communication problems due to differences in perspective, interaction patterns, and habits adopted by each generation. In the Indonesian context, generational differences are a significant social issue, given that Indonesian society has a strong collectivist culture and upholds the habit of grouping together.

In general, a generation can be understood as a group of individuals who experience important events within a relatively similar time frame, thereby forming similar characteristics and social experiences. This study focuses on Generation Z, known as digital natives or the internet generation, a group that grew up and developed alongside the rapid development of digital technology and the internet. Since 2019, Generation Z has become an increasingly dominant group and has received significant attention in various aspects of social life, including in digital communication practices (Nafisah & Jannah, 2024).

The development of digital technology has brought about various changes in human life, one of which is through the presence of social media as a new space for communication. Social media allows individuals to interact, share information, opinions, and news quickly and widely without space and time limitations (William & Helena, 2018). In addition, social media is the result of technological advances and communication flows that facilitate the formation of social networks between individuals or groups who have similar interests, activities, and goals (Akram & Kumar, 2017).

The development of communication technology is also marked by the transformation of the function of mobile phones. Initially, mobile phones were only used to make voice calls

and send short messages (Short Messaging Service). However, today mobile phones have evolved into multifunctional devices that allow users to communicate face-to-face via video calls, send documents or attachments, and access various multimedia and online mass media services (Madjid & Subuh, 2019). This technology has made mobile phones the primary means of daily digital communication.

The development of mobile phone technology has led to the emergence of various popular social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter, each with different characteristics and functions. Generation Z, as active social media users, not only utilize these platforms for entertainment but also as a space for communication, self-expression, building social relationships, and obtaining information. According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2025, the number of internet users in Indonesia reached around 229 million people, indicating that digital space has become an important part of people's lives, especially for Generation Z.

Based on these conditions, it is important to understand how Generation Z navigates various digital spaces through the use of Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter in their digital communication practices. Each platform has different communication characteristics that influence Generation Z's behavior, interaction patterns, and communication methods in the digital space. Therefore, this study aims to examine Generation Z's digital communication behavior on various social media platforms to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Generation Z's communication in the digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Generasi Z

Generation Z is a demographic group born between 1995 and 2010 and raised in an environment heavily influenced by the development of digital technology. This generation grew up connected to the internet, gadgets, and social media, making technology an integral part of their daily lives (Lubis & Handayani, 2021). Unlike previous generations who experienced a process of adaptation to technology, Generation Z has lived alongside the digital world from the beginning.

Generation Z's closeness to digital technology has shaped distinctive characteristics, such as multitasking abilities, openness to change, and speed in accessing and processing information.

Lubis and Handayani (2021) explain that Generation Z is accustomed to doing various activities simultaneously, such as studying, communicating, and accessing social media at the same time. Exposure to technology from an early age has given Generation Z a high level of adaptability to social changes and technological developments.

Generation Z is known as a generation that does not know a world without the internet. Social media has become the main means of social communication, building relationships, and self-expression. Csobanca states that social media plays an important role in shaping the communication and social interaction patterns of Generation Z (Csobanca in Lubis & Handayani, 2021). Social media not only functions as a medium of entertainment, but also as a social space that allows Generation Z to build their identity and social participation.

Stillman and Stillman (2018) refer to Generation Z as the figital (physical–digital) generation, which is a generation that combines the physical and digital worlds as a single reality of everyday life. The figital concept shows that the boundaries between direct and digital interactions in Generation Z are becoming increasingly blurred. Educational, social, economic, and entertainment activities take place simultaneously in physical and digital spaces (Stillman & Stillman, 2018). In this context, social media serves as a new space for Generation Z to interact, express themselves, and form views of the social world.

The high intensity of social media use makes Generation Z very dependent on gadgets. Mahmudah explains that Generation Z spends a considerable amount of time each day using social media, whether for communication, entertainment, or information seeking (Mahmudah in Lubis & Handayani, 2021). In fact, Sakitri mentions that some Generation Z spend more than six hours a day accessing their cell phones and social media (Sakitri in Lubis & Handayani, 2021). This condition shows the enormous influence of social media on the behavior patterns and lifestyles of Generation Z.

The use of social media by Generation Z has both positive and negative impacts. The positive impacts include ease of obtaining information, expanding social networks, and increasing digital creativity and innovation. Lubis and Handayani (2021) emphasize that social media can be a productive tool for Generation Z if used wisely and responsibly. Social media also opens up opportunities for Generation Z to participate in social issues and convey their aspirations more widely (Pitoewas et al., 2020).

However, excessive use of social media can also have negative effects. Ulfa and Perdana (2022) explain that high intensity of information technology use can lead to a decrease

in physical activity and the quality of direct social interaction. Dependence on gadgets has the potential to affect the social life balance of Generation Z if it is not balanced with adequate digital literacy (Lubis & Handayani, 2021).

Digital Communication

Digital communication is a form of human interaction transformation that utilizes digital technology as the primary medium for conveying messages, information, and social values. According to Nasution and Siregar (2026), digital communication is not merely a process of exchanging information through online media, but also forms a new ecosystem that requires adaptive abilities to various languages and nonverbal symbols in virtual spaces. In line with this, Hasan (2026) mentions that digital communication plays a role in building social relationships and strengthening the participation of the younger generation in social life, especially through social media and interactive platforms.

Kamala and Aimah (2026) emphasize that digitization in communication brings structural changes to organizational and educational systems, where internal communication now largely depends on online-based applications that enable real-time interaction. Meanwhile, Lie, Anwar, and Afsa (2026) view digital communication as a means of disseminating meaningful motivational messages and plays a role in shaping a positive communication culture in the virtual world.

Furthermore, Maharani and Ramadana (2026) explain that digital communication also covers aspects of information security and ethics due to humans' increasing dependence on data-based communication systems. Thus, digital communication is not merely a technical medium, but also a social phenomenon that changes patterns of thinking, interacting, and participating in public spaces (Apriani, Azizah, & Lubis, 2026).

Communication Patterns of Generation Z on Social Media

Communication patterns are essentially the forms or methods individuals and groups use to convey messages, interpret meaning, and create social relationships within a particular communication system. According to Effendy (2017), communication patterns reflect the structure of interaction between communicators and communicants, which can be one-way, two-way, or circular depending on the context and media used. In the context of digital media, communication patterns are no longer linear, but interactive and multidimensional because messages are conveyed through various channels such as text, images, videos, and symbols

(Suryani, 2021). Social media has become a modern communication platform that enables simultaneous and participatory dialogue, where users can be both senders and receivers of messages (Nasrullah, 2018).

Generation Z, according to Putri & Anggreni (2025), is a group born in the digital era who have interacted with technology from an early age. They are referred to as digital natives because they have high skills in accessing, managing, and sharing information through internet-based media. Communication for Generation Z is instant, visual, and expressive, with a preference for forms of communication that are fast and easy to understand (Rohman, Salamah, & Husnusyifa, 2025). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z tends to avoid formal communication and prefers visual symbols such as emojis, memes, or short videos as a means of conveying emotions and messages. This shows that for Gen Z, communication is not only about the exchange of information, but also the representation of identity and social existence in the digital space (Sabrina & Razi, 2025).

Social media has become the main space for shaping Generation Z's communication patterns. Each platform has characteristics that influence the way they interact. Instagram is used to visually display self-image and lifestyle; Facebook is a platform for maintaining social relationships and communities; TikTok serves as a space for creative expression and entertainment; while Twitter is used as a medium for public opinion and social issue discussions (Uyun, 2025). According to Nasrullah (2020), communication patterns on social media are networked communication, where messages flow horizontally between individuals without space and time limitations. The algorithmic characteristics of social media also influence how messages are received and disseminated, making Gen Z communication highly dependent on trends, engagement, and response speed.

Thus, the communication patterns of Generation Z on social media are a manifestation of digital culture that emphasizes self-expression, connectivity, and speed of information. This pattern indicates a shift from traditional communication to participatory and visual digital communication. Generation Z is no longer passive consumers, but active producers of meaning and identity in the online space. Therefore, understanding Gen Z communication patterns means understanding how this generation constructs social reality through digital media that is integrated into everyday life (Nasrullah, 2020; Putri & Anggreni, 2025).

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory is a communication theory that emphasizes that audiences are active in choosing and using media to fulfill certain needs and gratifications. Unlike media theories that view audiences as passive, this theory views individuals as conscious, selective, and purposeful subjects in their consumption of media.

According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, the Uses and Gratifications theory focuses on the question: "What do people do with the media?" rather than "What does the media do to people?" This means that media use is driven by the psychological and social needs of the users themselves (Katz et al., 1974). Meanwhile, McQuail explains that the Uses and Gratifications theory examines how individuals use certain media to fulfill their needs for information, entertainment, personal identity, and social interaction (McQuail, 2011).

Putra and Lestari (2019) adapted Uses and Gratifications Theory in the context of Indonesian social media and stated that this theory explains individuals' motivations in choosing social media to fulfill their psychological and social needs. This theory emphasizes that users actively choose media according to their needs, such as for entertainment, information, or social interaction.

According to Kurniawan (2022), Generation Z's use of social media is primarily driven by the need to build self-identity, find information quickly, and expand their social networks. This theory is relevant for studying the reasons Gen Z chooses Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter as their main channels of digital communication. In the context of digital media such as social media, YouTube, or online platforms, this theory is highly relevant because users have complete freedom in choosing content, time, and purpose of media use.

McQuail (2011) and Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch (1974), information needs are one of the main indicators in the Uses and Gratifications theory. This need is related to the individual's drive to use media as a means of acquiring knowledge and understanding about their surroundings.

The indicators of information needs include:

1. Seeking information: Media users utilize media to obtain the latest information needed in their daily lives.
2. Increasing knowledge: Media is used as a means to broaden horizons and improve understanding of various topics.

3. Understanding specific events or issues: Media serves to help individuals understand current social, economic, political, and cultural events.
4. Seeking references or learning: Media is used as a source of learning, both formal and informal, such as tutorials, concept explanations, or educational materials.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of social media use in Generation Z's digital communication through the interpretation of relevant concepts, theories, and scientific findings, rather than through statistical measurements or field data collection.

The method used in this study is content analysis based on literature review. Content analysis was conducted by examining various written sources such as textbooks, scientific journals, research articles, and academic publications discussing the use of Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter in the context of digital communication and Uses and Gratifications Theory.

The research subjects in this study are Generation Z, specifically in the context of social media users, as described and analyzed in various relevant studies and scientific literature. Meanwhile, the research object focuses on the concepts, patterns of digital communication, and motives for Generation Z's use of social media as reflected in previous literature reviews.

Data collection techniques were carried out through a literature study, namely by identifying, classifying, and examining relevant scientific sources. The collected data was then analyzed and categorized based on information needs, entertainment, social interaction, and self-identity in accordance with Uses and Gratifications Theory, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of Generation Z's use of social media in digital communication.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses research findings that focus on Generation Z's communication patterns on social media, particularly on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter. The analysis is based on observations and relevant literature studies, using the Uses and Gratifications Theory framework to understand users' communication motives and needs.

Through this approach, the research seeks to describe how Generation Z utilizes social media as a means of interaction, self-expression, and digital identity formation in a dynamic communication environment.

Motives for Using Social Media in Generation Z's Digital Communication

Based on a literature review of various previous studies, social media has become the primary means of digital communication for Generation Z. As a generation that grew up in a digital technology environment, Generation Z uses social media not only for communication, but also to obtain information, entertainment, and build social relationships online. This condition is in line with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which states that media users are active and have specific purposes in using the media (Jayanti et al., 2025).

Research by Adiarsi et al. (2024) shows that Generation Z uses social media as their main medium of communication because of its ease of access, time flexibility, and the diversity of features that support two-way communication. Social media such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook enable real-time, interactive, and multimodal communication, shifting conventional communication patterns towards digital communication. The analysis results show that the need for information is one of the main motives for Generation Z in using social media. Platforms such as Twitter and Instagram are used as sources of quick information related to social issues, trends, entertainment, and current events. This supports the Uses and Gratifications Theory concept, which places media as a means of fulfilling users' cognitive needs (Chumpradit et al., 2022). Generation Z chooses social media as a source of information because it is instant and easily accessible compared to conventional media. However, the information obtained tends to be concise and quick, so it is less in-depth when compared to formal journalistic media (Jayanti et al. 2025).

Apart from the need for information, the need for entertainment is a dominant motive in the use of social media by Generation Z. TikTok and Instagram are the most widely used platforms because they provide visual and audiovisual content that is interesting, short, and easy to consume. Arifin (2022) states that visual content on social media can increase user engagement because it suits the characteristics of Generation Z, who prefer fast and visual communication. Research by Jayanti et al. (2025) shows that the use of TikTok significantly fulfills the entertainment needs of Generation Z through creative short videos and personalized algorithms. However, the dominance of entertainment also limits social media's ability to provide in-depth educational content.

Social media also plays an important role in shaping Generation Z's identity and self-existence. Instagram, in particular, is used as a space for self-representation through photo, video, and story uploads. From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, social media is used to fulfill personal identity needs, namely the need to build and display one's image in the digital public sphere (Arifin, 2022). Through social media, Generation Z can express their interests, lifestyles, and personal views, which then shape their digital identities. This process shows that social media not only functions as a communication tool but also as a symbolic medium in the formation of users' identities.

In the context of social interaction, social media allows Generation Z to build and maintain social relationships without the constraints of space and time. Features such as comments, direct messages, and discussion groups facilitate interactive two-way communication. (Chumpradit et al. 2022) states that social media fulfills the integrative social needs in Uses and Gratifications Theory, namely the need to establish social relationships and a sense of togetherness. Facebook, despite experiencing a decline in popularity among Generation Z, is still used as a means of community-based interaction, especially in certain groups (Adiarsi et al., 2024). However, in general, Generation Z prefers platforms that are visual and dynamic rather than those that are text-heavy.

Comparison of Social Media Platform Usage

Based on the results of a literature review, Generation Z's use of social media shows differences in characteristics, advantages, and limitations on each platform. These differences reflect the main principle of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which places the audience as an active party in choosing media according to the needs they want to fulfill (Jayanti et al., 2025).

Tabel 1. Comparison of Social Media Platform Usage

No	Social Media	Function
1	Instagram	Self-expression, digital identity formation, and visual-based social interaction through photos, videos, stories, and reels.
2	Tiktok	Entertainment, creativity, and information seeking
3	Twitter	Information needs and public opinion
4	Facebook	community-based social interaction, particularly through group features and discussion forums

Instagram is the most effective platform for fulfilling the needs of self-expression, digital identity formation, and visual-based social interaction. Features such as photo and video uploads, stories, and reels allow users to display their self-image and build personal branding in the digital space. This is in line with Arifin's (2022) findings, which state that Instagram is actively used by Generation Z to fulfill their needs for self-identity and social interaction in accordance with the Uses and Gratifications Theory perspective. However, Instagram's limitation lies in its function of conveying in-depth information, as its content focuses more on visuals and entertainment than complex informative discussions.

TikTok excels in meeting Generation Z's needs for entertainment and digital creativity. This platform offers short video content with a personalization algorithm that can quickly adapt to user preferences. Research by Jayanti et al. (2025) shows that TikTok is used by Generation Z to fulfill their needs for entertainment and light information search instantly. However, TikTok has limitations in delivering in-depth and analytical information, making it less than optimal as a medium for complex informative communication.

Twitter is more dominant in fulfilling the needs for information and public opinion. Twitter enables real-time information dissemination and serves as an open public discussion space. A study by Chumpradit et al. (2022) shows that Twitter is used to fulfill the need for quick information and participation in public discourse. However, Twitter's limitations lie in its character restrictions and the high intensity of debates, which often result in communication that is brief and lacks emotional depth.

Facebook excels in meeting community-based social interaction needs, particularly through its group and discussion forum features. However, some literature indicates that Generation Z's interest in Facebook tends to decline because the platform is considered less visually relevant and is used more by older generations (Adiarsi et al., 2024). This makes Facebook less optimal in meeting Generation Z's entertainment and self-expression needs compared to Instagram and TikTok.

Overall, the comparison of these four social media platforms shows that Generation Z does not rely on just one social media platform, but rather uses various platforms selectively according to their needs. Instagram and TikTok are more dominant in meeting entertainment and self-identity needs, Twitter excels in information and public opinion needs, while Facebook functions as a community-based social interaction medium. These findings reinforce

the Uses and Gratifications Theory assumption that media users are active and rational in choosing the media that best suits their digital communication goals (Jayanti et al., 2025; Arifin, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of analysis and discussion conducted through a qualitative approach using literature review and content analysis methods, it can be concluded that social media is the primary means of digital communication for Generation Z. Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook are actively used to meet various communication needs, in line with the Uses and Gratifications Theory assumption that places users as active parties in choosing media according to their goals and needs.

The results of the study show that Generation Z's use of social media is driven by several main needs, namely the need for information, entertainment, social interaction, and identity formation. The need for information is mainly fulfilled through Twitter and Instagram, which allow for quick and real-time access to information. Meanwhile, the need for entertainment and digital creativity is more predominantly fulfilled through TikTok and Instagram, which provide interesting and easily consumable visual and audiovisual content.

In addition, social media plays an important role in shaping Generation Z's identity and self-existence. Instagram is the main platform for displaying self-image and personal branding, while TikTok is used as a space for creative expression. In terms of social interaction, Facebook still functions as a community-based communication medium, although Generation Z's interest in this platform tends to decline compared to other platforms that are more visual and dynamic.

Overall, this study confirms that Generation Z does not rely on just one social media platform, but selectively uses various social media according to their needs. These findings reinforce the relevance of Uses and Gratifications Theory in explaining Generation Z's social media usage behavior and digital communication patterns in Indonesia. Thus, social media not only functions as a communication tool, but also as a strategic medium in shaping Generation Z's communication patterns and digital identity.

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