

## Improving Media Literacy skills in Generation Z in the Digital Era

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Keywords:**

Media Literacy, Gen Z,  
Digital Era, Social Media.

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate efforts to improve media literacy skills in generation Z. Generation Z, who grew up in the digital era, is exposed to a variety of information and social media that can influence their understanding of news, opinions and other information. This research uses qualitative research methods to analyze the challenges and opportunities faced by generation Z in increasing their media literacy in the digital era. The research results show that Generation Z, who grew up in a tumultuous digital era, has unique characteristics that reflect the impact of technology on their lives. They are very familiar with technology, have the ability to make independent decisions, and show strong ambition in achieving success. However, to increase their media literacy, there needs to be a holistic approach that includes formal education, support from family, and a deep understanding of digital media. Steps such as media education in schools, critical learning, developing research skills, awareness of media bias, positive use of social media, critique of digital content, and supporting creativity are important elements in helping Generation Z become wise media consumers, critical, and contribute positively in a digital society that continues to develop. This discovery makes an important contribution in supporting the development of generation Z media literacy, which is a key aspect in facing the challenges and opportunities in today's digital era.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

After Generation Z received a lot of attention as the group referred to as the younger generation, the spotlight then shifted to the group called Generation Z (Haryadi & Rakhman, 2020). Throughout the world, including Indonesia, they are the next population that has been in the spotlight in recent years (Zis et al, 2021). This population has strengths apart from being a large population, but the specialty of this group is because they are the first Digital Native generation who are considered to be very fluent in various digital "languages" compared to previous generations (Tessalonika & Junaidi, 2014; Achmad et al., 2023).

Generation Z is a term that can still be "discussed", for example, one of which is that experts still often discuss the definition of the age range for Generation Z, variously. In 2012, American journalist Bruce Horovitz (2012) introduced the age range of this group, which is often used to introduce Generation Z to the public, there is still debate in this section. Generation Z, which is a group of individuals born around the mid-1990s to the early 2010s, grew up in a very dynamic digital information era. They have wide access to various media, including the internet, social media and various other digital platforms (Nisa et al, 2020).

Through widespread access to the internet in today's digital era, it is very easy for the world to be influenced by whatever happens in the western world. The interactions with social media in cyberspace carried out by gen-Z are very diverse, ranging from socializing, existence, narcissism, viral, political choices, to business (Hastini et al, 2020). But unfortunately, Gen Z is generally less able to sort information and tends to put aside moral

and ethical values in existing and disseminating information on social media (Supratman, 2018). Therefore, the number of interactions that generation Z can carry out requires limits, so that the truth of the information shared can be accounted for. If not, interactions on social media can be categorized as spreading information or provocative news to fake news or what is familiarly called a hoax (Nur, 2020).

So far, what has happened on social media is that the flow of information circulating seems to be without control, as long as there is internet access it can be spread directly, without confirmation or at least checking again whether the information is true or contains elements of a hoax (Nasution, 2020). In fact, the flow of information from social media in this digital era can be controlled through good media literacy in the digital community, especially generation Z. Information on social media makes us seem to forget to check again, so that information that is not necessarily true in the name of existence can circulate without warning. limits (Lestari & Saidah, 2023).

Seeing conditions like this, Gen Z must understand what media literacy is. Media literacy includes the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate information in various forms of media (Pratikno & Kristanty, 2018). Media literacy is a set of perspectives that are actively used when accessing mass media to interpret the messages encountered (Yodiansyah, 2017). Media literacy skills are very useful for dealing with various information contained in conventional media and new media such as social media. The characteristics of social media can connect and disseminate information in various regions of the world without knowing space and time, as has been reviewed by Sya'diyah & Anggraini (2021) and Sidiq et al (2021) with world without secrets that the presence of new media (new media/cybermedia) such as social media makes information a something that is easy to search and open.

Obstacles in Generation Z's media literacy skills not only impact their understanding of news and information, but also have the potential to harm them as consumers of information. The rampant spread of fake news, disinformation and propaganda on social media is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. Therefore, the main problem that is the focus of this research is: "How to improve the media literacy skills of Generation Z in the digital era?" The main objective of this research is to identify effective strategies and methods in improving media literacy skills in Generation Z. Thus, this research aims to provide a significant contribution in overcoming the challenges faced by Generation Z in facing the complex and diverse media environment of today. This.

## 2. METHOD

The methodology employed in this study is a qualitative technique. The research methodology employed in this study involves the utilization of library research or bibliographic research. As stated by Nazir (1988) and Yulianah (2022), library research entails the systematic collection of data through the examination of books, literature, notes, and relevant material pertaining to the research subject at hand. Data gathering strategies are implemented using the method of documentation. Documentation refers to the systematic process of gathering data through scrutinizing and analyzing diverse records generated by both the researcher and other individuals pertaining to the subject of study. In this study, we employ a collection of textual resources comprising various books and academic journals that pertain to research papers. Following the data collection process, the subsequent stage involves the analysis of the acquired data. During this phase, relevant details will be collected, including the author's name, publication year, subject matter, research methodology, and outcomes. The concluding phase entails composing a comprehensive

elucidation of the research subject matter by means of a review, as suggested by Sugiyono (2011).

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Generation Z in the Digital Era**

The presence of the Z generation, which was born in the mid-1990s to early 2010, witnessed the most synonymous changes related to advances in technology. Of course, Generation Z is growing and developing in a very rapid digital era, and the impact of technology on everyday life in society is very significant (Gasa & Mona, 2020). The digital era is the identity of generation z because this generation grew up in an environment that was almost completely digitally connected. Generation z uses technology as their life partner, they use smartphones which are always in their hands so they can access information and entertainment via the internet (Jati, 2021). The existence of social media as an impact of technological developments certainly influences the way to communicate, socialize and express oneself (Pratiwi & Pritanova, 2017; Poluakan et al., 2019).

Gen Z has several characteristics that show that they are children of that era (Nabila et al, 2023). The most visible characteristics of Gen Z include:

#### a) Familiar with technology

Generation Z, also known as Gen Z, is known as a generation that is very familiar with technology. One of the main characteristics of Gen Z is their ability to interact with technological devices and platforms from an early age. They grow up in an era where digital technology has become an integral part of everyday life. From smartphones to tablets, the internet and social media, they have grown up in an environment always connected to technology.

As a result, Gen Z has the ability to master new technology quickly. They are used to rapid technological change and tend to feel comfortable adapting to the latest devices and applications. This is because they have been used to dealing with technology since birth. It could be said that they were born and grew together with rapid technological advances. Apart from that, Gen Z also tends to be innovators in terms of technology. They are often a source of technology information and guidance for previous generations, such as their parents or generation X (Achmad, 2021). They have a deep understanding of how to use devices, apps and social media platforms. This makes them agents of change in adopting new technologies in their families and communities.

With exceptional technology skills and the ability to adapt quickly, Gen Z has great potential to influence technological developments and the way we interact with the digital world. Their ability to share knowledge and be pioneers in the use of technology is one of the characteristics that differentiates this generation from others.

#### b) Independent

Generation Z is known as an independent generation, and one of the main factors that contributes to their independence is easy access to information provided by digital technology. The digital era they are experiencing has given them unlimited access to information from various sources, including the internet, social media and other online platforms. In an environment that is so rich in references and information, Generation Z feels more confident in making their own decisions.

Generation Z's ability to make decisions independently is supported by their confidence in filtering and evaluating the information they encounter in cyberspace. They are trained to differentiate between relevant and irrelevant information and identify reliable sources. This has honed their critical skills in processing information and making the right decisions.

Apart from that, Generation Z also feels comfortable using technology as a learning and self-development tool. They tend to use the internet to look for learning resources, tutorials and online courses that can improve their skills. The presence of various online learning platforms and educational resources allows them to learn and develop independently, without too much dependence on teachers or parents.

This independent ability also encourages Generation Z to be innovative. They feel they have the freedom to create and contribute to the digital world. With creativity and the courage to experiment, they often create new content, applications, or fresh ideas that can have a positive impact in various aspects of life. In other words, Generation Z feels that freedom in making decisions and accessing digital resources is the key to developing independently and contributing to an increasingly advanced digital society.

#### c) Ambitious

Generation Z tends to have a strong ambitious nature. They grew up in an environment driven by technological advances and easy access to information. As technology advances rapidly, they feel that learning and personal growth have no boundaries. This encourages them to always seek new challenges and never be satisfied with their previous achievements.

In the world of work, Generation Z's ambitions are very clear. They not only see work as a livelihood, but also as a means for developing their own careers. They often seek opportunities to advance or achieve higher positions, with a determination to continually improve their abilities and achievements. They feel that through experience and skill development, they can achieve higher levels of success.

This ambitious characteristic also reflects their drive to make greater contributions to society and the world. Generation Z often has high aspirations in terms of creating positive change in various aspects of life, be it in the social, environmental or business fields. They feel that with strong ambition and determination, they can play an active role in shaping a better future.

Although ambitious, Generation Z also faces unique pressures and challenges in achieving their goals. They grew up in an era of high competition, where competition for success can be fierce. However, their strong ambition and quick adaptability are often the main strengths in overcoming obstacles and achieving what they dream of.

Generation Z will of course continue to be shaped and influenced by technological developments in the future. They will certainly be agents of change in developing innovation and new technology. On the other hand, they are of course also faced with their responsibility to ensure that they can use technology so that technology can influence the future of generation z. By understanding the impact of technology on the lives of Generation Z, hopefully Generation Z can lead the world towards a brighter and more inclusive future. Generation Z certainly has to monitor themselves and control themselves so that they can bring about change in the future.

#### **Increasing media literacy for Gen Z**

The popularity of social media among the millennial generation has increased its impact in real life. The millennial generation uses social media as a means to express themselves. For them, a day without access to social media is like losing ties with the modern world (Fahrimal, 2018). The way they express themselves can be seen through uploading images, videos, comments, sayings, inspirational quotes, and images they take from various sources such as the Photobucket website which they share on their social media profiles.

Many of the millennial generation are even active in monitoring accounts that interest them on social media. Some users even engage in “stalking” to find out information about their friends, even though they may not have spoken to each other for a long time (Gershon,

2010). This reflects how social media has become the main platform for interacting, sharing experiences and building an online identity for the millennial generation. With the ability to connect with friends, family, and even strangers online, social media has become an important part of their daily lives, and they use it to strengthen their presence both online and in the real world.

Increasing media literacy in Generation Z is an important challenge in the current digital era. Media literacy is the ability to understand, evaluate and use media wisely. The following are several steps that can be taken to increase media literacy in Generation Z:

1. Media Education in Schools.

Including media education in the school curriculum is one of the most effective steps in increasing the media literacy of Generation Z. Through these media lessons, Generation Z can be taught very important skills, such as the ability to identify accurate information amidst a flood of information, recognizing biases that may exist in news and media content, as well as becoming critical consumers of information. With this approach, they will be better prepared to face information challenges in the digital era and become smarter and more knowledgeable citizens in consuming media.

2. Critical Learning.

It is important to teach Generation Z to always ask questions about the information they encounter. They must be taught to dig deeper, look for verified sources of information, and recognize the signs of fake news or disinformation.

3. Research Skills Development

Generation Z really needs in-depth training on how to search effectively for information on the internet. This includes the ability to recognize trusted sources of information, use appropriate keywords in searches, and develop skills in assessing the quality of the information sources they encounter. With these skills, they can become more independent in seeking knowledge, avoiding false information, and ensuring that they obtain accurate and relevant data. This is an important step in equipping Generation Z with media literacy skills that will help them become wise and skilled consumers of information in this digital era.

4. Awareness of Media Bias

It is important for Generation Z to have a deep understanding of the different types of media bias that can influence the way news and information is presented. In an information age filled with multiple sources and viewpoints, understanding political, social, or commercial bias in the media is critical. They need to be taught to recognize how these biases can influence the way news is shaped, delivered, and even how they can influence public perception. With this understanding, Generation Z can become more critical media consumers, able to identify and evaluate the information they encounter, and see beyond bias to get a more accurate and balanced picture of an issue. This is an important skill in dealing with multiple perspectives in digital media that is often full of diverse points of view .

5. Using Positive Media

In an effort to increase Generation Z's media literacy, it is very important to provide an understanding of positive media use. Apart from being critical media consumers, they also need to learn about the impact of social media on mental well-being and balance in media use. This includes understanding how social media can impact their mood, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. With this understanding, Generation Z can develop the skills to use social media positively, limit exposure to harmful content, and maintain a balance between online and offline life. This will help them avoid the negative impacts that may arise

from excessive use of social media and ensure their experience in the digital world is healthier and more meaningful.

#### 6. Digital Content Criticism

Generation Z needs to be empowered with the ability to be critical of all types of digital content they encounter, especially on social media. They must understand that the images, videos and information they see in the digital world do not always reflect actual reality. The ability to recognize visual manipulation and content editing is critical in improving their media literacy. With this understanding, they can become more alert to the potential spread of false or disinformation, and look beyond edited visuals to gain a deeper understanding of the real situation. This ability not only helps them avoid the trap of misleading content, but also increases their ability to make decisions based on more accurate and objective information. Thus, being critical of digital content is a key step in equipping Generation Z with solid media literacy in a world full of visual information.

#### 7. Supports Creativity

Generation Z needs to be empowered with the ability to be critical of all types of digital content they encounter, especially on social media. They must understand that the images, videos and information they see in the digital world do not always reflect actual reality. The ability to recognize visual manipulation and content editing is critical in improving their media literacy. With this understanding, they can become more alert to the potential spread of false or disinformation, and look beyond edited visuals to gain a deeper understanding of the real situation. This ability not only helps them avoid the trap of misleading content, but also increases their ability to make decisions based on more accurate and objective information. Thus, being critical of digital content is a key step in equipping Generation Z with solid media literacy in a world full of visual information.

Improving media literacy in Generation Z requires a holistic approach that includes formal education, support from family, and a deep understanding of digital media. By taking these steps, we can help Generation Z become wise media consumers and contribute positively to an ever-evolving digital society.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Generation Z, growing up in a tumultuous digital era, has unique characteristics that reflect the influence of technology in their lives. They are familiar with technology, independent in making decisions, and have a strong ambition to achieve success. Increasing media literacy in Generation Z is an important challenge in this digital era. Some steps that can be taken to increase their media literacy include media education in schools, critical learning, developing research skills, awareness of media bias, positive use of social media, critique of digital content, and supporting creativity. With a holistic approach that includes support from formal education, family, and a deep understanding of digital media, Generation Z can become wise, critical media consumers and contribute positively to an ever-evolving digital society. They can use technology smartly, avoid disinformation, and maintain a balance between online and offline life to ensure their experiences in the digital world are healthier and more meaningful.

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