

Analysis of Gen Z's Level of Understanding in Using Social Media Wisely and Safely

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the level of understanding among Generation Z in using social media wisely and safely, particularly in relation to digital ethics, account security, information verification skills, and positive social media engagement. The research employed a descriptive quantitative method using a Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of 20 statements distributed online to 51 respondents. The data were analyzed using frequency percentages to identify response tendencies for each indicator. The findings show that respondents demonstrate a high level of understanding, especially in polite communication, careful information sharing, awareness of digital risks, and the ability to maintain privacy and account security. However, several aspects remain weak, including limiting social media usage time and the habit of reporting negative content. These results indicate that Generation Z possesses good digital literacy, yet the application of healthy digital behavior is not fully optimal. Therefore, more practical and continuous digital literacy education is needed to ensure that the understanding gained can be consistently applied in daily digital activities.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan tingkat pemahaman Generasi Z dalam menggunakan media sosial secara bijak dan aman, khususnya terkait etika digital, keamanan akun, kemampuan memverifikasi informasi, serta pemanfaatan media sosial secara positif. Penelitian menggunakan metode kuantitatif deskriptif dengan instrumen angket skala Likert berisi 20 pernyataan yang disebarakan secara daring kepada 51 responden. Data dianalisis melalui persentase frekuensi untuk melihat kecenderungan jawaban pada setiap indikator. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemahaman responden berada pada kategori tinggi, terutama dalam penggunaan bahasa yang sopan, kehati-hatian membagikan informasi, kesadaran terhadap risiko digital, serta kemampuan menjaga privasi dan keamanan akun. Namun, beberapa aspek masih lemah, yaitu pembatasan waktu penggunaan media sosial dan kebiasaan melaporkan konten negatif. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa Generasi Z telah memiliki literasi digital yang baik, tetapi penerapan perilaku digital sehat belum optimal. Dengan demikian, diperlukan upaya edukasi literasi digital yang lebih aplikatif dan berkelanjutan agar pemahaman yang dimiliki dapat diterapkan secara konsisten dalam aktivitas sehari-hari.

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Introduction

Social media has become an inseparable part of the lives of Generation Z, which is a generation born in an era when digital technology is developing very quickly. Gen Z or Generation Z is often called the "internet generation" with technology, digital platforms, and unlimited access to internet information making Gen Z accustomed to the advancement of the internet (Nurlaila, et al. (2024)) However, the high intensity of this use is not always proportional to the ability to

understand digital risks, ethics, and security. This condition makes the issue of understanding Gen Z's digital literacy an important issue that needs to be studied in depth.

Social media use among Gen Z is not only related to consumptive tendencies towards technology, but also their awareness of digital ethics, data security, and the ability to filter information. Gen Z, who use a lot of gadgets and the internet, is a generation that is easily affected by hoaxes, (Sumantri, A. (2024)). In addition, low awareness of communication ethics puts Gen Z at risk of engaging in negative behaviors such as cyberbullying and hate speech. Then, in terms of digital security, students and students still do not understand how to protect personal data and the security of social media accounts. These findings reinforce the need to assess Gen Z's level of understanding of using social media wisely and safely, making this research relevant and important.

This research was conducted through the distribution of a Likert scale based questionnaire to respondents who are members of Generation Z who actively use social media. The questionnaire instrument consists of 20 statements that reflect four main aspects of digital literacy, namely: (1) digital ethics, (2) account security and privacy, (3) the ability to verify information, and (4) the positive use of social media. The preparation of questionnaire indicators refers to the concept of digital literacy as described by Nasrullah (2023) in the book *Social Media: Communication, Culture, and Sociotechnology Perspectives*, as well as national digital literacy guidelines from Kominfo. The data collected was analyzed using frequency percentages to see the tendency of respondents' approval rate to each indicator, so that it could illustrate the level of understanding of Gen Z in using social media wisely and safely.

The questionnaire instrument was prepared based on digital literacy literature references from the book Nasrullah (2023) *Social Media: Communication, Culture, and Sociotechnology Perspectives* and digital literacy guidelines from Kominfo. Respondents are members of Gen Z who actively use social media, and the data is processed in the form of a percentage of the tendency to answer each indicator.

The results of the questionnaire analysis showed that: The majority of respondents showed a good understanding of communication ethics on social media. Respondents understand the importance of verifying information, maintaining digital privacy, and being aware of risks such as hoaxes, online fraud, and cyberbullying. Most indicators gained dominance of Agree and Strongly Agree answers. However, some aspects are still weak, such as controlling social media usage time and reporting negative content initiatives, which suggest that healthy digital behaviors are not yet fully established. These results are in line with the findings of Lestari (2024) in the *Journal of Abdimas Lestari*, which states that young users have basic knowledge about digital security but often neglect to apply it in their daily habits.

The findings of the study show that Gen Z has a relatively good level of understanding of digital literacy, especially in the aspects of ethics, account security, and awareness of false information, ethics and the ability to manage information are the main competencies in 21st century digital literacy. However, the weaknesses found in aspects of self-control and active participation in maintaining the digital ecosystem indicate that understanding alone is not enough. Darmawan (2024) in the *Journal of Digital Media Education* explained that the biggest challenge for the younger generation lies in digital wellbeing, namely the ability to manage time and maintain mental health from excessive exposure to social media. Thus, more applicative and sustainable digital literacy education efforts are needed, so that Gen Z not only understands the concept of using social media wisely and safely, but also really applies it in their daily lives.

Method

This study uses a descriptive quantitative approach that aims to describe the level of understanding of Generation Z in using social media wisely and safely based on numerical data obtained from the questionnaire. This approach is in accordance with the opinion of Sugiyono (2022) who states that descriptive quantitative research is used to describe phenomena as they are through objective measurements. The subject of the study is Generation Z who actively use

social media, chosen purposively because this group is the most dominant digital user. Data collection is carried out online through the distribution of digital questionnaires, adjusting to the characteristics of Generation Z who are used to activities in the digital space. The research instrument is in the form of a Likert scale questionnaire with 20 statements that cover four aspects of digital literacy, namely digital ethics, security and privacy, the ability to verify information, and the positive use of social media. The preparation of the questionnaire indicators refers to the concept of digital literacy from Nasrullah (2023) in the book *Social Media: Communication, Culture, and Sociotechnology Perspectives*, as well as national digital literacy guidelines from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics. Each item is presented on a scale of 1 to 5, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics by calculating the frequency and percentage of each answer category (STS, TS, N, S, SS). This analysis technique refers to Sudijono (2021) who explains that percentages are used to find out the trends of data more clearly. The results of the analysis were then interpreted to see the pattern of respondents' understanding of each indicator. The validity of the data is maintained through the preparation of instruments based on national literature, especially the work of Nasrullah (2023), as well as the Kominfo's digital literacy module, so that the indicators have strong content validity. Thus, this research method is designed to provide an accurate and comprehensive picture of how Generation Z understands the use of social media wisely and safely.

Result and Discussion

Based on the results of the questionnaire that we have distributed to 51 respondents and 20 questions, the results show:

Table 1. Results of the Dissemination of Research Questionnaires

NO	STATEMENT	STS	TS	N	S	SS	CONCLUSION
1	I understand The importance of using polite language on social media	4 (7,8%)	0	2 (3,9%)	14 (27,5%)	31 (60,8%)	88.3% understand the importance of polite language
2	I check the correctness of the information before sharing it	4 (7,8%)	0	4 (7,8%)	8 (15,7%)	35 (68,6%)	84.3% check information before sharing
3	I avoid abusive/provocative comments.	3 (5,9%)	0	4 (7,8%)	16 (31,4%)	28 (54,9%)	86.3% avoid negative comments
4	I am aware that uploads/comments have an impact on others	3 (5,9%)	0	6 (11,8%)	16 (31,4%)	26 (51%)	82.4% are aware of the impact of uploads
5	I use social media for positive things	3 (5,9%)	1 (2%)	3 (5,9%)	16 (31,4%)	28 (54,9%)	87.3% use social media positively
6	I know the importance of strong & unique passwords	4 (7,8%)	0	3 (5,9%)	13 (25,5%)	31 (60,8%)	86.3% understand the importance of words Strong Password
7	I don't share Personal Information	4 (7,8%)	0	6 (11,8%)	15 (29,4%)	26 (51%)	80.4% maintain privacy
8	I understand the risks of fraud (scam)	4 (7,8%)	0	3 (5,9%)	15 (29,4%)	29 (56,9%)	86.3% understand the risks of scams

9	I know how to turn on two-verification. Steps	4 (7,8%)	0	7 (13,7%)	18 (35,3%)	22 (43,1%)	78.4% understand security features
10	I cautiously accept friend requests from strangers	3 (5,9%)	1 (2%)	5 (9,8%)	18 (35,3%)	24 (47,1%)	82.4% are cautious on foreign accounts
11	I am aware that excessive use of social media has a bad impact	4 (7,8%)	0	5 (9,8%)	13 (25,5%)	29 (56,9%)	82.4% are aware of the impact of overuse
12	I understand the content I upload affects Reputation	2 (3,9%)	2 (3,9%)	15 (29,4%)	10 (19,6%)	22 (43,1%)	62.7% understand the impact of reputation
13	I can distinguish between genuine information and hoaxes	3 (5,9%)	0	11 (21,6%)	15 (29,4%)	22 (43,1%)	72.5% are able to distinguish hoaxes
14	I understand the dangers of cyberbullying	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	4 (7,8%)	16 (31,4%)	31 (66,8%)	93.2% understand the dangers of cyberbullying
15	Unauthorized sharing of photos/videos is Privacy Violations	2 (3,9%)	0	1 (2%)	15 (29,4%)	33 (64,7%)	94.1% understand a privacy breach
16	I limit my time using social media	2 (3,9%)	0	17 (33,3%)	17 (33,3%)	15 (29,4%)	62.7% limit usage
17	I filter and unfollow unhelpful content	0	3 (5,9%)	9 (17,6%)	18 (35,3%)	21 (41,2%)	76.5% filter content
18	I use social media to search for information & positive content	1 (2%)	0	6 (11,8%)	18 (35,3%)	21 (41,2%)	76.5% for positive content
19	I am careful when uploading Personal Information	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	5 (9,8%)	14 (27,5%)	30 (58,8%)	86.3% are cautious
20	I report Negative content	1 (2%)	2 (3,9%)	12 (23,5%)	16 (31,4%)	20 (39,2%)	70.6% reported negative content

The results of the research based on the 20-question questionnaire show that the level of understanding of Gen Z in using social media wisely and safely is in the high category, although there are still some aspects that need strengthening.

1. Language Ethics and Responsible Behavior on Social Media

Digital ethics is one of the important competencies in 21st century digital literacy. They stated that the younger generation who have an ethical understanding will be able to sort out speech and refrain from actions that have the potential to harm others digitally.

According to Mutiah, et al (2019) explain several ethics that need to be considered in using social media, namely: First, do not use the word rude, provocative, pornographic or SARA. Second, don't post articles or statuses that are false. Third, do not copy and paste copyrighted

articles or images, and provide relevant comments.

According to (Wahyudin and Karimah, 2016) the ethics of communicating on social media. First, it's a good idea to post content that is helpful or beneficial for the common good. Second, before posting, you should check and reconsider the things to be posted and the thing that needs to be considered is to avoid content that will cause conflicts such as violence, hoaxes, pornography, and SARA issues. Third, it can distinguish things that are part of the realm of personal space, so before posting it is necessary to consider what should not be published. Fourth, communicate politely. Fifth, give comments wisely and politely. Sixth, images that have copyright should not be imitated and comment in polite language. The survey also showed that the majority of respondents understood the importance of using polite language, avoiding abusive comments, and realizing that every post has a social impact.

Ethics play an important role in preventing digital conflicts and cyberbullying actions. The high awareness of respondents shows that they have become accustomed to more ethical communication norms in the digital space. Thus, the digital ethics aspect of the respondents can be said to be in the good category.

2. Information Literacy and the Ability to Identify Hoaxes

Respondents showed positive behavior in checking information before sharing it as well as the ability to distinguish between real and hoax information. As many as **84.3%** of respondents stated that they verified information before sharing it, and **72.5%** were able to distinguish hoax information.

Hoaxes are information that is engineered to cover up the real facts (Mutiarani et al., 2024). In other words, hoaxes are attempts to distort facts through information that seems convincing but cannot be verified for its truth. One common form of hoaxes is a false claim about an item or event with a different label than the actual condition. Another definition states that hoaxes are hoaxes that make a person believe false and often unreasonable information, especially through online media.

Information literacy is a person's ability to recognize the need for information, search, evaluate, and utilize it effectively and ethically. Effective means that the information is used appropriately, while ethical means that it does not violate generally agreed norms. This skill is very important for people to have, especially in the face of technological developments and increasingly rapid information flows (Mahardhini, Rahmi, & Rahmawati, 2021).

The low ability to verify information in some communities makes it easier for hoaxes to spread, which can ultimately negatively affect public opinion (Cahyani et al., 2024). Therefore, in order to avoid hoax information, careful and sustainable information verification skills are needed (Hikmat & Masruri, 2020).

3. Digital Security: Passwords, Privacy, and Account Protection Features

In the aspect of digital security, respondents showed a high understanding of the use of strong passwords, not sharing personal information, and being wary of unknown accounts. Most respondents also understand the risks of scams, although there are still around 13–20% of respondents who are not fully aware of the importance of privacy protection.

Digital privacy refers to the right of individuals to keep personal information from unauthorized access, collection, and use in digital spaces (Sihite et al., 2024). This concept has become increasingly complex as information technology advances. Personal information—from identification data to online activity—is becoming increasingly vulnerable to exploitation by irresponsible parties. Privacy is a fundamental right that gives individuals control over the information they share, and this is especially relevant in the digital context, where user data is often collected without explicit consent through platforms such as social media, e-commerce, and location-based apps.

Supervision of the security of personal data depends not only on the user, but also on government regulations and policies implemented by digital platforms. Algorithms that govern content and potential misuse of data by third parties must be closely monitored to maintain

transparency and security (Abubakar & Handayani, 2022).

While user engagement is critical to maintaining online safety, their awareness of preventive measures is often low. Therefore, efforts are needed to improve digital security literacy through practical and applicable training, so that people can be better able to protect their personal data in cyberspace (Ellen & Nenden, 2019).

Protecting personal data has become an urgency that cannot be ignored in the digital age, given the value of information as a highly valuable commodity. Any personal data that is exposed or misused can have a direct impact on individuals, ranging from identity theft, financial fraud, to reputational damage. These threats not only cause material losses, but also erode public trust in the digital system that supports modern life. In this context, the protection of personal data is not just an option, but a necessity to maintain the privacy and security rights of individuals in the midst of rapid technological developments.

4. Digital Risk Awareness: Scams, Cyberbullying, and Psychological Impact

The results of the questionnaire show that the majority of respondents understand the risks of cyberbullying, online fraud, and the impact of excessive use of social media on mental health. All digital risk indicators obtained an awareness level above 80%, indicating that respondents had a good understanding of potential threats in the digital environment.

Cyberbullying can have a serious impact on a person's life, including depression, anxiety, stress, and feelings of isolation. In some cases, cyberbullying can even increase suicidal tendencies. Psychological factors that are important in explaining this phenomenon include personality, stress, anxiety, depression, emotional intelligence, revenge, loneliness, frustration, self-esteem, aggression, empathy, antisocial behavior, insecurity, internalizing behavior, as well as jealousy. These various factors show positive and negative relationships as causes and consequences of cyberbullying behavior (Paunovic Sikola, 2018).

Scam is a fraudulent act committed by individuals or groups with the aim of taking advantage of and harming victims through ways that are unknown or unaware of by the victim. Scammers can come from any circle, both local and foreign, especially through social media which has a wide reach (Rahayu & Fauzi, 2024).

Understanding digital risks is essential to form safe behavior in the use of social media. Awareness of the psychological impact of social media is also part of digital health literacy, which is the ability of individuals to understand the emotional and mental consequences of exposure to digital media. Thus, the level of respondents' awareness of digital risks can be categorized **as very good**.

5. Utilizing Social Media for Positive Activities

Respondents stated that they use social media to search for positive content, follow useful accounts, and filter out negative content. This is closely related to the ability of digital literacy to utilize technology productively. Social media itself is an internet platform that allows its users to express themselves, interact, collaborate, share, and communicate virtually (Poernomo, Natarya, Badry, & Faizi, 2025).

Technology literacy includes the ability to understand various aspects of technology, including hardware, software, internet utilization, and compliance with technology use ethics (Sudirman & Mahfuzi, 2023).

The use of social media provides various benefits, such as helping users get inspiration, increasing creativity, expanding the network of friends, eliminating communication barriers, opening up business opportunities, and facilitating access to information about world events (Widada, 2018).

In the context of this study, the use of social media as a means of learning, positive entertainment, and the dissemination of education shows a healthy level of digital literacy. Users who understand netiquette tend to curate the accounts they follow to maintain the quality of the information consumed. Thus, respondents showed the ability to use social media productively and selectively.

6. Weak Aspects: Time Control and Negative Content Reporting

The duration of social media use in Indonesia is relatively high every day. Internet users access through tablets or PCs for an average of 5 hours and 6 minutes, while through mobile phones it reaches 3 hours and 52 minutes per day (Adiatussalik, Sari, & Septimar, 2024). Social media provides a number of advantages for teenagers, such as being a means of finding useful information, an easy communication medium, expanding friendship networks, sharing photos and information, and being an effective promotional medium. However, in addition to these positive impacts, social media also has negative impacts, namely addiction, disruption of learning activities, insomnia, decreased social interaction skills, the emergence of hedonistic and consumptive behavior, and the risk of exposure to pornographic content. Excessive use of social media causes adolescents to experience dependency and decreased sleep quality; many teenagers admit to sleeping less than 7 hours per night (Fauzan, 2023).

Adolescents who implement *digital well-being* tend to be able to control the excessive use of digital devices which can cause stress, reduce sleep quality, and have an impact on mental health. Therefore, the implementation of digital well-being helps adolescents minimize the negative impact of technology use and avoid unhealthy conditions due to excessive digital exposure (Binus University, 2020). However, digital well-being is still a big challenge for the younger generation because of the tendency of social media addiction that makes it difficult for them to control the duration of use of digital devices.

Digital *well-being* is a condition of balance between the use of digital technology and a person's mental, physical, and emotional health. This concept includes the ability to manage digital devices and the internet wisely to support overall well-being. Digital well-being is also related to the ability to regulate emotions, maintain social relationships, and balance environmental influences on the use of technology (Kitkowska et al., 2024).

In addition, digital well-being is understood as an effort to maintain a balance between *digital connectivity* (connection to the digital world) and *disconnectivity* (the ability to escape from the digital world). Thus, one needs to be able to determine when to connect and when to distance themselves from technology to achieve a healthy balance (Dekker et al., 2024).

The low habit of reporting negative content is caused by the lack of user knowledge about reporting mechanisms on various digital platforms, such as *the report*, *block*, or *mute* feature. In addition, the passive attitude of users who tend to ignore or just scroll the screen when encountering problematic content also exacerbates the low reporting rate. This passive attitude is generally influenced by the assumption that reporting does not have a direct impact or the fear of conflicts with other parties.

This condition shows that users' digital literacy skills still need to be strengthened, especially in the aspects of digital safety and digital *citizenship*. Understanding the importance of reporting negative content is a form of active participation in maintaining a safe, healthy, and abuse-free digital ecosystem. Therefore, the two main aspects of technical knowledge about reporting mechanisms and the formation of proactive attitudes are areas for improvement that need to be improved through advanced digital literacy programs.

Digital literacy programs can be directed at education about the types of content that need to be reported, such as hate speech, cyberbullying, fraud, the spread of hoaxes, and various forms of content that violate ethics and laws. In the context of Indonesian regulations, negative content includes pornographic material, gambling, fraud, harassment, defamation, and fake news. By increasing knowledge about these problematic content categories, users, especially the younger generation, will be more courageous to take action when they find potentially harmful content.

In addition to the reporting feature in the application, the public can file complaints of negative content through <http://trustpositif.kominfo.go.id/> site. In light of these neuroscientific findings and recognizing the lack of studies on vocabulary competence in secondary EFL context, this study investigates whether vocal training with authentic English pop songs enhances multi-word unit learning.

Conclusion

Based on the results of research on the level of understanding of Generation Z in using social media wisely and safely, it can be concluded that The level of understanding of Gen Z is in the high category. The majority of respondents showed positive behaviors related to digital ethics, such as the use of polite language, avoiding provocative comments, and awareness that uploads on social media have a social impact. Respondents' information literacy is quite good. Gen Z shows a habit of checking the truth of information before sharing it and has the ability to distinguish between genuine and hoax information, although a small percentage are still in the category of skepticism. Digital security awareness is relatively high. Respondents understand the importance of strong passwords, not sharing personal data, and being aware of foreign accounts and the risk of digital fraud. Awareness of digital risks is very good. Respondents understand the dangers of cyberbullying, the impact of excessive social media use, and the importance of maintaining a digital footprint to protect one's reputation. The use of social media tends to be positive. Gen Z uses social media to find useful information, educational entertainment, and tend to filter out irrelevant content. Aspects that are still weak are controlling the time of using social media and the habit of reporting negative content. These two aspects are still in the medium category and need to be improved so that digital welfare can be better maintained. Overall, Gen Z has a good understanding of digital literacy, but its application is not fully optimal in daily life.

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