News Consumption Behavior of Generation Z In The Reading Community Via Instagram

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ABSTRACT

This research study examines the impact of the post-truth era—where emotional responses, personal beliefs, and subjective interpretations are more influential than objective facts—on Generation Z's news consumption patterns, particularly in the context of social media. The objective of this study is to examine and assess Generation Z's news consumption patterns in the context of the social media platform Instagram. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, observational studies, and a comprehensive review of relevant literature. The purposive selection of respondents included individuals from Generation Z who actively use Instagram, with a minimum age of 17.The study's findings suggest that Generation Z's news consumption habits are influenced by the prevalence of easily accessible social media platforms, as well as trends and influencers in this space. While respondents demonstrated an understanding of the potential risks associated with fake news, they frequently encountered challenges in verifying the reliability of the content they encountered. This underscores the necessity for strategies aimed at promoting news literacy. The study found that trust in news sources was influenced by the reputation of the media outlet, the visual appeal of the content, and the opinions of their social networks. The study's findings underscore the pervasive influence of prevailing trends, prominent influencers, and the ease of access to information, particularly through social media platforms, on Generation Z's news consumption patterns. While respondents acknowledged the dangers associated with fake news, their inclination to verify information remains a significant challenge.

Keywords: consumption behaviour; news; generation z; social media; post-truth era.

INTRODUCTION

The development of globalization has driven major changes that have made aspects of human life increasingly integrated with digital technology (Triwardhani et al., 2023; Julianti et al., 2024; Andriany, 2022). This transformation also has an impact on the behavior of various generations, including Generation Z. Generation Z is known as individuals born between 1994 and 2010, often referred to as the iGeneration or internet generation. They are characterized by a high level of education, diversity, and intensive use of technology (Dabija et al., 2020). Apart from that, Generation Z has the characteristics of being conservative, responsible, innovative, and very familiar with technology, so they are always connected to the internet. This makes them the social media generation because they tend to like instant things, such as fast and practical online shopping (Zis et al., 2021; Utamanyu & Darmastuti, 2022).

Generation Z was born in an era where technological developments and social media are growing rapidly, giving this generation fast and easy access to information. Generation Z can get the latest news, videos, and various interesting content from all over the world easily (Garini & Monggillo, 2022; Riswandi, 2023). According to a Statista report on the frequency of news source usage among Generation Z in the United States, 50% of them rely on social media to get their daily news, while 23% prefer streaming devices. Only 4% read national print news regularly. Meanwhile, a report from McKinsey & Company shows a similar trend, where more than 50% of Generation Z access social media every day to obtain information. Interestingly, around 15% of the 18-24 year old age group use platforms like TikTok as their main source of breaking news (Sudhakar, 2024).

However, in the midst of this flood of information, a big challenge arises for Generation Z. The abundant availability of news is often accompanied by misleading or inaccurate information (Bermes, 2021; Hanum et al., 2022; Widyatama et al., 2023). This challenge requires Generation Z to be critical and selective in filtering information, as well as developing strong digital literacy skills. The inability to think critically and validate news can have a major impact on how Generation Z constructs a worldview. Fake news and hoaxes can shape opinions and perceptions about social, political, and economic issues (Mufid & Hariandja, 2019). For example, misinformation about government policies or health issues can change how Generation Z makes decisions related to their political or lifestyle choices. This also affects their participation in social and political discussions, where opinions built from misinformation can lead to unproductive debate or even conflict (Meissya et al., 2024).

The AIS Team of the Directorate General of Information Applications of the Ministry of Communication and Information has identified 11,642 hoax contents as of May 2023. This figure covers the period from August 2018 to May 2023. Of this number, the AIS Team of the Ministry of Communication and Information carried out identification, verification, and validation. The most frequently found hoax content was in the health category, with a total of 2,287 items. Apart from that, there were 2,111 hoax contents in the government category, 1,938 in the fraud category, and 1,373 in the politics category (Husna, 2023).

Previous research by (Asmarantika et al., 2022) found that the majority of Generation Z in Indonesia access the media for more than 8 hours per day, with social media being the main gateway for getting news and information. In choosing news, Generation Z considers media credibility and content quality as the main factors. They also tend to prefer news content that presents comprehensive information, compared to articles that are fast but less complete in their delivery.

In another study (Deti & Matondang, 2024), data was collected and distributed randomly to 85 communication science students in semesters 2, 4, 6, and 8. The findings of this research show that communication science students' preferences in consuming news are not much different from Generation Z in general. However,

because they study communication science, they tend to be more critical and careful in filtering news, especially from contemporary sources, which often contain false or inaccurate information.

Although there has been a lot of research discussing news consumption behavior in general, there is still a research gap regarding how Generation Z in the reading community interacts with news in this post-truth era. The reading community consists of a group of individuals who have the same interest and love for reading and literacy activities. A high level of literacy allows a person to be more skilled in understanding information and applying it in everyday life (Ucik, 2023). In Indonesia itself, there are many reading communities, including the Narrative Book Club, Baca Together, Kebab Reading Club, Kumpul Baca, Literasa Book Club, and Bookish Indonesia (Albab, 2024). The focus of this research is the reading community because the large number of members makes it easier for researchers to obtain information.

This research has practical implications for policymakers, media companies, and educators. First, policymakers can use these results to design more effective digital literacy programs, with a focus on news verification and raising awareness of fake news. Second, media companies can consider more adaptive content distribution strategies for Generation Z, for example, by paying attention to social media trends and using attractive visual formats. Third, educators can use these findings as learning materials about the importance of critical thinking and assessing the validity of information in dealing with news in the post-truth era.

Based on the background that has been explained, this research aims to 1) understand how Generation Z behaves in consuming news, especially in reading communities that use the Instagram application, and 2) evaluate strategies to reduce the negative impacts that may arise due to the consumption of fake news.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study methodology to explore Generation Z's news consumption behavior through social media, specifically Instagram. Data testing was conducted through qualitative research methods, which relied on semi-structured interviews, observations, and literature reviews to collect data, allowing for an in-depth exploration of Generation Z's news consumption behavior. The conceptual framework underpinning this research is anchored on three key pillars: an examination of the influence of social media platforms (e.g., Instagram) on news consumption; an exploration of the role of trends, influencers, and emotional triggers in shaping news sharing behavior; and an analysis of the impact of the post-truth era on Generation Z's interaction with news content.This study employed a purposive sampling technique, targeting Generation Z individuals who are active in reading communities. The precise number of respondents was not specified in the text; however, it was emphasized that the participants were selected based on two criteria: active engagement on Instagram and membership in reading communities, with a minimum age of 17.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Generation Z is known as individuals born between the mid-1990s and the early 2012s, namely the generation that grew up in a digitally connected environment (Daffa et al., 2024). According to Roberts et al. (2014) in the book Lifespan Development (17th edition), this generation is starting to enter the development phase of adolescence and adulthood amidst the rapid progress of the internet. As a result, Generation Z has made smartphone devices an integral part of their daily lives. In Indonesia, Generation Z is the most dominant group, covering around 27.94% of the total population, and this is also seen in many parts of the world (Siregar et al., 2023). Also known as the digital native generation or a generation that has interacted with technology and gadgets from an early age. This gives you the unique ability to express your identity, both in real life and through social media. Generation Z relies on technology for communication and entertainment, building communities and developing world views, making this generation the pioneers in the ever-evolving digital era (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2020).

Generation Z has an incredible affinity for technology, especially when it comes to their use of social media, which has shaped their unique way of consuming news. According to Putri et al. (2024), this generation is more likely to use digital platforms, especially social media, as the main source of information. As a generation that is more intensive in accessing information through digital media or internet-based mass media, Generation Z finds that social media is the most common channel for searching for and accessing news. Everyone can easily get information quickly through several social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, or short messages via mobile phones, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, etc. (Fardiah et al., 2020). According to research by Asmarantika et al. (2022), around 71% of respondents admitted to getting information from social media.

Then one of the popular platforms for getting news among Generation Z is Instagram, which is also widely used in the reading community. It was recorded that in January 2023, the Instagram platform was in second place as the most frequently used social media in Indonesia (Zain & Dwivayani, 2024). There are several reasons why social media, such as Instagram, is so influential on Generation Z. First, the accessibility of social media helps users to access information anytime and anywhere via mobile devices. Digital devices connected to the internet make it easier to consume news, while various news sources provide people with many choices of content that can be accessed easily (Asmarantika et al., 2022).

Second, personalization is an important factor. Social media algorithms present content that is relevant to the user's interests so that users feel more connected to the information they receive. The concept of a "filter bubble" explains how this algorithm functions, giving users the potential to rediscover content that matches individual behavior and interests (Wulandari et al., 2021).

Interactivity is also an aspect that cannot be ignored. Social media facilitates users to interact directly with content creators, influencers, and other users, creating a strong sense of community. This means that the development of digital platforms helps young adults interact closely with favorite celebrities, brands, and users in the virtual world through two-way communication, such as live chat and comments (Kim & Kim, 2020). Finally, Generation Z has a higher interest in visual and short content. Content such as short videos and images are more engaging, especially because attention spans are relatively short (Suciati & Fauziah, 2020; Yendra et al., 2024). As a result of these factors, it is clear that social media plays an important role in how Generation Z accesses and absorbs information.

The difference in the way the previous generation and Generation Z access information media reflects a significant shift in news consumption patterns from conventional media to digital media. This phenomenon occurs amid the emergence of the term "Post-Truth Era," which describes a situation where the objectivity of facts has become less relevant and where emotions or personal beliefs often have more influence on public opinion. Ashari's opinion (2021) states that post-truth is an era where lies can appear as if they are the truth. This is done by exploiting the emotions and feelings of internet users or netizens so that the truth becomes unclear and is often ignored. According to the Oxford Dictionary, post-truth is defined as a condition where facts do not have a strong impact in shaping public opinion when compared to individual emotions and beliefs (Amilin, 2019).

The main problem facing society is not how to get news but rather their ability to digest information correctly. In the digital era, where news is available easily and quickly, society must face the challenge of sorting correct information from what is not (Alamsyah et al., 2024). Even though social media offers convenience and speed in delivering news, these two characteristics can also be a weakness of online media, considering the shorter information processing process, which can reduce the level of news accuracy, thereby affecting the credibility of the news (Rahmawati & Darmawan, 2021). Social media, although Generation Z is the main source of news, does not always provide accurate information. This phenomenon makes the spread of false information (hoaxes) and disinformation increasingly rapid and widespread on these platforms (Siswoko, 2017).

Based on in-depth interviews, it was revealed that Generation Z's news consumption behavior on social media shows that although this generation is aware of the risks of fake news, they tend not to always verify the accuracy of the information they receive. This finding is consistent with previous research comparing Generation X and Generation Z. According to Alamsyah et al. (2023), Generation X tends to be more conservative and careful in making decisions based on accurate and verified information. In contrast, Generation Z is more spontaneous, follows trends, and tends to be influenced by social media and influencers.

Generation Z relies more on social media and online influencers as the main source of information. This generation tends to receive new news quickly but often lacks in-depth verification (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). This could be caused by a lack of understanding of the importance of verifying information or because of the pleasure of spreading sensational news without thinking about the consequences (Salsabila et al., 2024). This is made worse by the flood of information on social media, where it is difficult for audiences to distinguish true information from false. This false information often triggers conflict, where different groups claim the truth of their respective information and accuse their opponents of spreading hoaxes. The consequences of deficiencies in news accuracy can have an impact on lifestyles that are more influenced by trends and peer pressure, such as fashion trends, lifestyle, and consumption decisions that may be made impulsively without careful consideration.

Furthermore, Generation Z's news consumption patterns show that this generation's trust in news is greatly influenced by media reputation, visual appeal, and opinions from social networks. Content that is presented visually and interactively tends to attract their attention more because Generation Z prefers forms of information that are easily accessible visually (Alamsyah et al., 2023; Rafni et al., 2024). Apart from that, this generation is more influenced by marketing carried out by influencers and trends found on social media, making influencers a significant source of information for this generation.

Apart from that, generation Z also has a tendency to share the news that triggers emotions or that is considered relevant to their social identity. Often, the desire to share this information is not based on the accuracy of the news but rather on its relevance to personal beliefs or experiences. If fake news matches existing beliefs or matches previous information, they more easily accept it as fact, even though the validity of the news is still questionable (Lan & Tung, 2024).

Furthermore, social media algorithms play an important role in shaping Generation Z's news consumption behavior. These algorithms can create "filter bubbles," where users are only exposed to information that matches their views (Bahram, 2023). These algorithms are primarily designed to help users find content that matches individual interests, but they run the risk of isolating users from different viewpoints or information. As a result, users may not gain a broader understanding of issues outside the information bubble. By relying solely on this algorithm, the information blocked by the system may be important information that should be known (Wulandari et al., 2021).

There are consequences of consuming fake news that can occur in generation Z. One striking impact is Generation Z's vulnerability to manipulation, especially through information of an emotional nature. When they are faced with news that triggers certain feelings, such as anger, sympathy, or fear, they are more easily influenced without questioning the validity of the news. This can lead to greater polarization in society, where people are divided into camps of conflicting information (Dewi et al., 2024).

Efforts to overcome the negative impacts of fake news consumption, especially among Generation Z in the post-truth era, require strategies that focus on forming more critical news consumers. Many people do not yet have digital literacy skills, even though digital literacy skills are very important to anticipate the impact of media (Fardiah et al., 2021). For this reason, one of the main strategies is through media education, which needs to be included in school and university curricula. This education aims to teach students how to evaluate information critically and understand the news they consume. Digital literacy is an important component in media education because it provides the skills needed to navigate the vast and fast information in today's digital world (Cynthia & Sihotang, 2023). According to Sabrina (2018), increasing digital literacy is very important in dealing with the circulation of false information (hoaxes), especially in the post-truth era. Digital literacy gives people more control in understanding messages circulating on digital media, thereby helping them identify signs of fake news, verify information, and prevent the spread of hoaxes.

Apart from digital literacy, it is also important to encourage quality journalism (Putra, 2024). Mainstream media has an important role in providing accurate, trustworthy, and fact-based content so that people can rely on the information they consume. High-quality content can provide a counterbalance to fake news circulating on social media, where unverified information tends to attract more attention.

Lastly, collaboration between the government and non-governmental organizations is also an important step in combating the spread of fake news (Maharani et al., 2023). This collaboration, through policies for social media, which is the main source of information for Generation Z, needs to take proactive steps in filtering invalid content and providing education to users about the importance of verifying information. This joint effort can help create a healthier digital ecosystem and reduce the negative impact of the spread of fake news in the post-truth era. Through these steps, Generation Z can be formed into more critical news consumers so that the negative impact of the flow of unverified information in the post-truth era can be minimized.

CONCLUSION

Generation Z's news consumption behavior via social media is greatly influenced by trends, influencers, and ease of access to platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. Although Generation Z is aware of the risks of fake news, they do not always verify the information they receive. Generation Z's trust in news is greatly influenced by media reputation, visual appearance, and opinions from their social networks. In addition, Generation Z tends to share news that triggers emotions or is relevant to their social identity, although the validity of the news is not necessarily guaranteed. This reflects news consumption behavior in the post-truth era, where emotions and social identity play a greater role than factual accuracy.

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