



SOCIAL MEDIA AND GEN Z IN SEARCH OF SELF-EXISTENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

Social media has now become an inseparable part of the lives of generation z. Young people for the most part need to show the best version of themselves on social media in order to be accepted and recognized. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the relationship between social media users and the search for self-existence and mental health in generation z. Social media has become an inseparable part of generation z's life. The findings of this paper are that this platform provides a space for them to express themselves, build their identity, and connect with others

Keywords: social media, generation z, self-existence, mental health

Abstrak

Media sosial kini telah menjadi bagian tak terpisahkan dari kehidupan generasi Z. Sebagian besar anak muda perlu menunjukkan versi terbaik diri mereka di media sosial agar dapat diterima dan diakui. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif untuk mengeksplorasi hubungan antara pengguna media sosial dengan pencarian jati diri dan kesehatan mental pada generasi Z. Media sosial telah menjadi bagian tak terpisahkan dari kehidupan generasi Z. Temuan penelitian ini adalah bahwa platform ini menyediakan ruang bagi mereka untuk mengekspresikan diri, membangun identitas, dan terhubung dengan orang lain.

Kata kunci: media sosial, generasi Z, jati diri, kesehatan mental

Introduction

Social media has now become an inseparable part of the lives of generation z. Almost every aspect of their lives is inseparable from digital media, from socializing, searching for information to expressing themselves. On the other hand, social media provides space for Gen Z to show who they are, share stories, and build relationships with the general public. But on the other hand, social media can also be a place full of pressure, especially as standards of beauty, success and ideal lifestyle are constantly being observed non-stop.

Young people for the most part need to show the best version of themselves on social media in order to be accepted and recognized. Photos that look perfect, a high number of likes, and positive comments are often used as a measure of a person's self-worth. Without realizing it, this makes many of Generation Z trapped in unhealthy social comparisons. When other people appear happier, more successful or more attractive, feelings of not being good enough, less worthy or even failure arise.

This kind of pressure has a big impact on mental health. Anxiety, stress, and depression are increasingly experienced by Gen Z due to expectations where the benchmark is created by social media. In addition, phenomena such as cyberbullying and negative comments can also make the situation worse. whereas social media should be a place or means of fun and supportive entertainment, not a source of anxiety and stress.

Seeing this phenomenon is very important for us to understand how social media influences the way Gen Z builds their identity and its impact on mental health. With such great awareness, we can find ways to keep social media a useful tool without making its users feel burdened or even lose their identity.

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According to the We Are Social and Hootsuite report (2023), around 99% of Generation Z in Indonesia use the internet and 98% of them are active on social media. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok and Twitter have become the main places for them to express themselves and interact. but this intense use also increases the risk of anxiety and social stress. A study from the Royal Society for Public Health (2017) found that excessive use of social media can increase anxiety and depression, especially among teenagers and young people.

Apart from that, research from the American Psychological Association (2019) shows that social comparisons that occur on social media make more than 60% of teenagers feel dissatisfied with themselves. Social media algorithms designed to surface relevant content can also exacerbate these feelings as users are constantly exposed to other people's seemingly more perfect lives. As a result, many young people feel pressured to meet unrealistic standards which can impact their mental health in the long term.

On the other hand, social media also contributes to the increase in cases of cyberbullying. UNICEF (2021) reported that one in three teenagers in more than 30 countries experienced online bullying which had an impact on their emotional health and self-confidence. Cyber bullying does not only occur in the form of negative comments but also the spread of online harassment hoaxes and social pressure to follow certain trends. This confirms that although social media provides many benefits, its impact on the psychological well-being of generation z cannot be ignored and needs more serious handling.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the relationship between social media users and the search for self-existence and mental health in generation z. This approach was chosen to understand the subjective experiences and social meanings that individuals construct in their interactions on social media.

1. Research design

This research design is exploratory in nature with a focus on understanding the phenomenon through the narratives and perceptions of social media users from Gen Z. The main focus is to explore the meaning of self-existence and its implications for their psychological condition.

2. Subjects and informant selection techniques

The research subjects were individuals from generation Z (aged 15 to 25 years) who actively used social media for at least 3 hours per day. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on certain criteria, such as high involvement in activities from using platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and x (Twitter) as well as a willingness to share personal experiences. The number of informants ranges from 6 to 10 people, adjusted to reach the data saturation point.

3. Data collection technique

data obtained through:

- Online in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide
- Non-participatory observation of activities and interaction patterns on social media
- Literature review and scientific journals, books and previous research reports as supporting data.

4. Data analysis techniques

The data was analyzed using the thematic analysis method with the steps of transcribing the results of the open coding interview process to find key themes for categorizing and interpreting data based on the theoretical framework of existentialism and media psychology.

5. Data validity

Data validity is maintained through source triangulation techniques (observation interviews and literature), member checking to validate the interpretation results with informants and peer debriefing to increase the objectivity of the analysis.

6. Research ethics



This research is based on ethical principles including informed consent, success, informant identity and protection of personal data. All informants are given the right to withdraw at any time from the research process without any consequences.

Discussion

Social media has become an important part of generation z's life. they use it as a place to express themselves, build their identity, and connect with other people all over the world that have internet access. on the one hand, social media plays a role and gives them space so they feel heard and accepted. but on the other hand many of them feel burdened by the expectations that appear in cyberspace. they feel they must always appear perfect, follow trends, and get recognition from others. Often this is what makes them lose their true identity.

Several studies have suggested that pressure on social media can have a direct impact on young people's mental health. A study from the Royal Society for Public Health (2017) found that platforms like Instagram and Snapchat can leave teenagers with anxiety and depression. One of the main causes is the culture of social comparison that continues to occur. even though what they saw at that time did not necessarily reflect the reality that was actually happening.

Apart from social comparison, cyberbullying is also a serious threat to the mental health of Gen Z. According to a UNICEF report (2021), around 37% of teenagers in the world have experienced online bullying. Negative comments, taunts, and hate speech received on social media can have a negative impact on their self-confidence and emotional well-being.

Not only that, social media also makes some young people trapped in the pressure to always look productive. the term "hustle culture" a culture that often appears on social media so that they feel they have to continue to work hard and achieve many things in a short time. Otherwise they will feel left behind compared to their peers. whereas everyone has a different rhythm of life and not all achievements should always be shown off on social media.

But even though social media has negative impacts, it does not mean that all social media is completely bad. if used wisely, social media can be a space to share experiences. find a supportive community and get access to useful information. For example, many Instagram and TikTok accounts discuss mental health and can provide support for those who are experiencing psychological problems. In addition, online communities on various platforms can also be a safe place for young people to tell their stories and feel accepted without having to be afraid of being judged.

Therefore it is important for generation z to be more aware in using social media platforms. they need to understand that what is displayed by social media does not always reflect the reality that actually occurs. in addition, it is necessary to set and create limits in its use such as regulating screen time and choosing content that is healthy for their mental health. if you feel stressed or uncomfortable, there's nothing wrong with taking a break from social media and focusing on the real world that is more meaningful. but it's different if the child is under age, then they must be under strict supervision by their parents so as not to influence and damage bad mindsets and knowledge at an early age.

Awareness of the impact of social media on identity and mental health is very important. social media can be a useful tool if used in a good, correct, and appropriate way. however, if not managed properly, social media can actually be a source of detrimental pressure. therefore, it is important for generation z to be able to find a balance so that they can still enjoy the benefits of social media without having to lose their identity or even damage their mental health.

Social media also greatly influences the way gen z views themselves, especially in terms of beauty and success standards. every day they are presented with images of the perfect lives of influencers or celebrities who look flawless. as a result, many of them feel they have to meet these standards in order to be considered attractive or successful. they start to feel inadequate if they don't have the ideal body shape, perfect skin, or luxurious lifestyle that they often see on social media. This pressure can make them feel insecure, even triggering disorders such as social anxiety or body dysmorphia where someone feels there is something wrong with their appearance even though there isn't.



In addition, the way social media works also plays a role in shaping the mindset and feelings of its users, the content that usually appears on the homepage is adjusted to what they often see or like, so they tend to only be exposed to the same perspective over and over again. This phenomenon is called the Echo Chamber where someone only sees a certain point of view without realizing that there is another reality outside of it. This is dangerous because it can make it difficult for them to see a broader picture and can even make them more trapped in negative feelings if what they consume is content that is full of pressure or social comparison.

Therefore the role of family and friends is very important in helping gen z deal with the impact of social media. they need friends to talk about their feelings without fear of being judged, as well as guidance to be wiser in using social media. education, about mental health and how to sort information in the digital world also needs to be taught early on, so that they are not easily influenced by the pressures in cyberspace. with the right support, social media can still be a fun and useful place for gen z, without having to sacrifice their identity and mental health.

Conclusion

Social media has become an inseparable part of generation z's life. this platform provides a space for them to express themselves, build their identity, and connect with others. however, behind these benefits, social media also brings major challenges, especially in terms of social pressure and mental health. many young people now feel they must always appear perfect in cyberspace, which can ultimately make them lose their identity and feel burdened by unrealistic expectations.

Social media also has an increasingly real impact on gen z's mental health, with increasing cases of anxiety, stress, and depression due to social comparison and cyberbullying. in addition, social media algorithms that tend to display certain content continuously can shape users' thought patterns and emotions, even without them realizing it. if not realized and managed properly, this can worsen mental conditions and make it even more difficult for them to find balance in life.

But it does not mean that social media has a completely negative impact. if used wisely, this platform can be a source of information, a place to share experiences, develop skills, and a means to find a supportive community. therefore, it is important for gen z to be more aware of using social media, set boundaries in its use, and be able to find a supportive environment in the real world. With a better understanding, they can still enjoy the benefits of social media without having to sacrifice their mental health and identity.

In addition it is important for generators to understand that life on social media often only shows the best side of a person, not the whole reality. many people only share happy moments while the challenges and difficulties of life are rarely discussed. if not realized, this can make people feel inferior and continue to compare their lives with others. therefore, having a critical and realistic mindset in responding to content on social media is an important step to maintaining health.

Government, schools, and families also have a big role in helping generation z deal with the impact of social media. education about digital literacy and mental unity needs to be strengthened so that young people can understand how to use social media well and wisely. in addition, support from the surrounding environment, so that they do not feel alone when experiencing social pressure in cyberspace. With good understanding and proper support, social media can still be a useful tool without having to harm its users. Gen Z needs to learn to be more selective in consuming content, set time limits on its use, and interact more directly in the real world. that way they can find balance in life in the digital world and the real world, so that self-identity and mental health are maintained.

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