

## The Perception of Generation Z on Communication Ethics in Information Dissemination Through Social Media

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe Generation Z's perceptions on communication ethics in delivering messages on social media. Using a quantitative approach, the research was conducted with active students at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY). The study employed multistage sampling, selecting 394 students from eight faculties: FIPP, FISHIPOL, FIKK, FT, FMIPA, FBSB, FEB, and FV. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed via Google Forms. The validity test indicated that six out of 32 items were invalid, leaving 26 valid items for further analysis. The reliability test yielded a coefficient of 0.858, signifying high reliability. Descriptive percentage statistical techniques were used for data analysis. Results showed that 51% of students had a high perception of communication ethics, while 49% had a low perception. Key aspects of communication ethics assessed included avoiding emotional triggers, caution in posting information, refraining from offensive content related to ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations, and discretion in sharing personal photos. The study concludes that although most students display ethical awareness in their social media communication, nearly half still need improvement. It recommends enhancing educational programs and awareness initiatives to promote digital literacy and stronger ethical practices among Generation Z.

**Keywords:** *The Perception of Generation Z, Communication Ethics, Social Media, University Students*

### INTRODUCTION

In daily life, humans are constantly engaged in interactions and communication to meet their needs. Communication is a process of conveying messages from the communicator to the communicant through various media, which can elicit specific effects. With the rapid development of internet technology, social media has become a dominant platform for information exchange, especially among Generation Z. Generation Z, typically defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is characterized by their upbringing in the digital age, where technology and the internet play central roles in shaping their values, perspectives, and behaviors (Putra, 2017).

As of January 2022, the We Are Social report indicates that the number of active social media users in Indonesia reached 191 million, representing a 12.35% increase from 2021. Among these users, Generation Z actively engages with platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, and

Snapchat to share information (Sitompul, 2023). For Generation Z, social media serves various purposes, including maintaining relationships, building self-image, and seeking entertainment (Nuzulita & Subriadi, 2019). Additionally, it has become their primary tool for communication, interaction, and engagement in public discourse (Evita et al., 2023).

Given the prominence of social media in their daily lives, Generation Z must understand the implications of their online activities, especially in terms of how the information they share can impact themselves and others (Pambudi, 2023). The digital age facilitates the rapid spread of information, which has the power to shape public opinion and individual reputations. Consequently, Generation Z must recognize that the content they share online can have significant consequences. The dissemination of false or unverified information can lead to negative outcomes, such as the spread of misinformation or social conflicts. Hence, an awareness of these potential impacts is crucial for responsible online engagement. In this context, communication ethics play a vital role, as Generation Z must be capable of distinguishing between credible and false information and avoid spreading harmful content (Pambudi, 2023).

Communication ethics serve as guiding principles for individuals in using social media platforms responsibly and ethically. These principles include honesty, transparency, respect, fairness, and responsibility, all of which should be upheld in every communication exchange (Balconi & Fronda, 2020). Honesty and transparency are particularly crucial for ensuring the accuracy and accountability of information shared on social media. By being truthful, individuals can build trust with their audiences, while transparency provides context and clarity about the information being shared. Furthermore, respect and fairness are essential when engaging with diverse perspectives, helping to foster broader understanding and avoid unnecessary conflicts.

Ethical communication is essential for fostering positive relationships both online and offline. It involves the responsibility to consider how the information shared might affect others, ensuring that communication remains not only truthful but also respectful and empathetic. As McGreavy et al. (2022) highlight, ethical communication fosters trust by promoting openness and respect in exchanges. Engaging in responsible communication helps prevent misunderstandings or harm caused by misinformation or offensive content, especially in the realm of social media, where messages can be easily misinterpreted or taken out of context.

Communication ethics hold particular importance for individuals in leadership roles, who are expected to model ethical communication by valuing feedback and open dialogue. Ethical leadership emphasizes the need for accurate and reliable information, which serves as the foundation for sound decision-making (Yagmur, 2021). Therefore, communication ethics are critical not only in everyday social media interactions but also in broader contexts, including leadership and decision-making.

Several studies emphasize the importance of communication ethics in the digital age. First, communication ethics influence the relationship between social media use, user motivations, and internet ethics in relation to work ethics (Rahman & Wok, 2018). By adhering to ethical principles, individuals can cultivate a sense of responsibility and integrity in their online interactions. Second, ethical considerations are particularly important when engaging with followers on social media, especially in self-presentation efforts (Mustaqim, 2023). Upholding communication ethics ensures that individuals maintain transparency and respect, thereby building trust and credibility with their audience. Ethical guidelines also help individuals navigate the complexities of online interactions, ensuring communication remains respectful and mindful of its potential consequences (Anggraeni, 2024).

Applying communication ethics in online interactions is essential for creating a positive digital space where individuals are more likely to engage respectfully and responsibly. When communication is grounded in ethical principles such as honesty, transparency, and respect, it reduces the chances of misunderstandings or conflicts that could arise from misinformation or harmful content. Furthermore, practicing these ethical standards helps build trust among online communities, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment. In turn, this can lead to healthier online relationships, promote constructive dialogues, and encourage responsible sharing of information.

Generation Z, having grown up in a technology-driven world, develops a unique way of perceiving and interpreting information shared through social media. Perception, a cognitive process, refers to how individuals process and make sense of the information they encounter, shaping their views of people, situations, and ideas. In communication, perception is crucial as it influences how messages are received, understood, and responded to. For Generation Z, this process is shaped not only by the content of the information but also by their social background, culture, and personal experiences, which can significantly affect how they interpret messages in the digital space (Junawan & Laugu, 2020). Thus, Generation Z's approach to online interactions is highly nuanced, involving critical evaluation of content based on various factors, including their cultural and social contexts.

Perception also plays a significant role in shaping social interactions and decision-making, especially in the digital era, where information is readily available through social media. Generation Z, deeply immersed in the digital world, tends to be more critical of the content they encounter, evaluating the credibility of sources and the relevance of the information before sharing it (Sitompul et al., 2021). This skepticism reflects their awareness of misinformation and the potential impact of sharing unreliable or misleading content. For Generation Z, information-sharing is driven not only by the desire for accuracy but also by a sense of responsibility, as they recognize the far-reaching consequences that false or biased information can have on social dynamics and public opinion.

Previous research on Generation Z's communication ethics on social media has primarily focused on the negative effects, such as the spread of hoaxes and cyberbullying (Parhan et al., 2021; Pambudi, 2023). While studies like those by Ismiati (2024) and Indrajaya & Lukitawati (2019) explore the ethical dimensions of social media use, few specifically investigate how Generation Z perceives the ethical implications of information sharing. Existing research suggests that Generation Z is highly aware of ethical concerns such as privacy, data security, and the responsibility of sharing information (Huda, 2023; Pambudi, 2023). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning a deeper understanding of the diverse perceptions within Generation Z regarding these issues. Therefore, this study aims to explore Generation Z's perceptions of communication ethics in the dissemination of information through social media.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception is a complex cognitive process that involves not only the sensory input received from the environment but also the interpretation and organization of this information by the brain. Sensory inputs, such as sights, sounds, and tactile sensations, provide the raw data necessary for forming our perceptions (Chiguichón, 2022; Persson et al., 2022). However, the way these inputs are understood and processed is influenced by cognitive factors like personal values, emotional states, and individual needs. These internal influences ensure that each person's perception is unique and subjective, as the brain selectively processes and organizes sensory information based on one's life experiences and perspectives (Sharma, 2020). This makes perception a highly individualized process, shaped not only by the external world but also by our internal mental frameworks.

In the context of Generation Z, a group born after 1995, perception plays a crucial role in understanding how they engage with digital communication platforms. Generation Z, often referred to as "digital natives," has grown up with constant exposure to technology. This cohort is proficient in using digital devices such as smartphones and computers, which has significantly influenced their communication preferences and behaviors (Jayatissa, 2023). Their early and continuous exposure to technology has not only fostered a strong preference for digital communication but has also led to their adeptness at multitasking, engaging with multiple devices and platforms simultaneously (Nurlaila et al., 2024). As a result, Generation Z's communication style is primarily digital, shaping their interactions in profound ways.

Moreover, the communication ethics of Generation Z are heavily influenced by their use of social media. Social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have exposed them to various communication styles, including humor, self-expression, and critique, which can sometimes present ethical dilemmas around self-representation and the portrayal of others (Pandjaitan & Theresia,

2023). These platforms provide them with opportunities to create and share content, but they also bring about concerns related to misinformation, privacy, and the ethical responsibilities of users. Consequently, the need for ethical literacy in digital spaces is crucial for Generation Z, particularly in terms of navigating the ethical challenges posed by these platforms (Nedelko et al., 2022). This underscores the importance of understanding communication ethics in the digital age.

Communication ethics itself encompasses a set of principles and guidelines that govern behavior in communication, ensuring interactions are carried out with integrity, responsibility, and transparency (Suhairi et al., 2023; Apdillah et al., 2022). In today's digital era, communication ethics serves as a framework to regulate online behavior, promoting responsible conduct and ensuring that virtual interactions align with accepted social norms. The significance of these ethics is especially evident in digital communication, where the rapid dissemination of information can have profound social consequences. Ethical standards in communication help prevent the spread of misinformation, protect individual privacy, and maintain social stability (Apdillah et al., 2022). As such, communication ethics plays a critical role in the responsible use of social media. Communication ethics in social media encompass a range of practices aimed at fostering respectful and constructive interactions. These include avoiding emotional triggers (M, 2024), exercising caution in posting information (Sampurna et al., 2024), refraining from offensive content related to ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations (Sampurna et al., 2024), and discretion in sharing personal photos (Marjianto, 2024).

Social media, as a broad category of online platforms, has revolutionized the way individuals create, share, and exchange content within virtual communities. These platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and various blogging sites, are powered by Web 2.0 technologies. These technologies enable users to generate content, interact with others, and engage in two-way communication, which marks a shift from the traditional, one-way information flow seen in earlier versions of the internet (Shukla & Agarwal, 2024). This level of interactivity makes social media more engaging, as users can contribute their personal thoughts, images, and videos, which creates a dynamic environment for communication. The ability to share content in real time and engage with a global audience reshapes traditional forms of communication, allowing individuals to express themselves freely and connect with others across vast distances.

The diversity of content shared on these platforms enhances user interaction and engagement, as it accommodates various forms of expression, from casual status updates to multimedia content like photos and videos (Ajegbomogun, 2021). This allows users to participate in vibrant online communities where their voices, opinions, and creative works are often highlighted. In this sense, social media has democratized the creation and dissemination of content, giving individuals unprecedented power over their digital presence and the information they share.

However, alongside these benefits, social media also presents significant ethical and social challenges. The ease with which information can be shared has led to privacy concerns, as users may inadvertently expose personal data or become victims of data breaches. Moreover, the rapid spread of misinformation is a growing concern, as false or misleading content can easily go viral, causing harm to individuals or groups. The prevalence of cyberbullying and online harassment on social media platforms has also raised alarms about the negative social consequences of these technologies (Mukhammad et al., 2024; Sama et al., 2023). These issues emphasize the need for responsible use of social media, which includes adherence to ethical principles such as privacy protection, truthfulness in sharing information, and promoting respectful online interactions. Ultimately, while social media offers significant opportunities for communication, it also calls for users to be mindful of the ethical implications of their actions in the digital space.

The rapid spread of information on social media platforms can lead to the circulation of misleading or harmful content, emphasizing the need for frameworks that promote responsible communication and minimize the risks associated with digital information exchange (Sama et al., 2023). This calls for the implementation of communication ethics that regulate the content shared online and ensure it aligns with societal norms. Ultimately, the communication ethics of Generation Z

reflect broader societal values and challenges. Their unique experiences with technology and social media underscore a collective consciousness that prioritizes ethical considerations in all forms of interaction. As Generation Z matures, their ability to navigate these ethical challenges will significantly impact their personal relationships, behaviors, and the larger movement toward a more responsible and ethical digital society.

## METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach, beginning with an examination of the concept of perceptions regarding communication ethics. The research subjects were Generation Z, active students of Yogyakarta State University (UNY). The sampling technique used was multistage sampling, with a sample consisting of 394 students drawn from eight faculties: FIPP, FISHIPOL, FIKK, FT, FMIPA, FBSB, FEB, and FV. Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire employed a Likert scale with four categories: strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD), to measure the responses of the participants. The questionnaire was designed to assess students' perceptions of several key aspects of communication ethics on social media, including emotional triggers, caution in sharing information, sensitivity to issues of ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA), and the responsible sharing of photos. These aspects were selected based on their relevance to the ethical challenges commonly encountered by social media users in Generation Z. The validity test of the questionnaire revealed that 6 out of 32 items were invalid, leaving 26 valid items for use. The reliability test yielded a score of 0.858, indicating a reliable instrument. Data analysis in this quantitative study was conducted using descriptive statistical techniques, including percentage analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research data on students' perceptions of communication ethics can be presented in Tables 1 as follows:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low	193	49.0	49.0	49.0
	High	201	51.0	51.0	100.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	

Based on the calculation of students' perceptions regarding communication ethics, a total of 201 students (51%) were found to have a high perception, while 193 students (49%) exhibited a low perception. Therefore, most students at Yogyakarta State University (UNY) hold a high perception of communication ethics.

The study also found that students' perceptions regarding communication ethics on social media can be viewed from several aspects, including avoiding emotional triggers, caution in sharing information, refraining from offending issues related to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup (SARA), and not carelessly sharing photos on social media. The detailed percentage of respondents' answers related to these aspects is presented in Table 8 below.

<i>Items</i>	Percentage of informant responses (%)			
	SA	A	D	SD
I carefully review all the statuses uploaded on social media, paying attention to media etiquette.	53,9	42,9	2,5	0,6
I observe each post closely, striving to avoid triggering negative emotions.	49,6	47,9	2,1	0,4

I am cautious when posting information on social media.	60,2	38,6	0,6	0,6
The sentences I compose for social media are scrutinized beforehand to ensure they do not offend issues related to ethnicity, religion, race, or intergroup relations.	69,5	28,8	5	0,6
In my opinion, individuals who do not carelessly share photos on social media are considered wise.	51,5	41,9	4,6	2,1

The research results also revealed several reasons why respondents upload information on social media, namely due to necessity and the desire to share information.

Tabel 3. Distribution of Informants' Responses Regarding Reasons for Posting Information on Social Media

<i>Item</i>	Percentage of informant responses (%)			
	SA	A	D	SD
I post information on social media out of necessity and only share important information.	56,6	32,4	10,2	0,8
I post information on social media with a specific purpose, such as sharing information with others	34,6	59,1	4,8	1,5

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the perceptions of communication ethics among students at Yogyakarta State University (UNY), particularly with regard to their social media practices. The survey results show that a majority of students (51%) have a high perception of communication ethics, with only a slight difference from the 49% who exhibit a low perception. This suggests that, overall, students at UNY are mindful of their communication ethics, though there remains a notable proportion who may not consistently apply ethical standards in their social media interactions.

While the findings show that the majority of students at Yogyakarta State University (UNY) possess a strong understanding of communication ethics, there remains a notable gap that requires attention. Approximately 49% of students reported a lower perception of communication ethics, indicating that a significant portion may not fully appreciate or prioritize the ethical implications of their actions online. This points to a critical area for further development and underscores the importance of enhancing students' awareness of ethical standards in digital communication. To address this gap, it is essential to prioritize education on digital literacy and responsible social media use. As social media becomes an increasingly integral part of students' personal and professional lives, fostering a deeper understanding of the ethical issues it presents is vital. In line with this, Alfazri & Syahputra (2024) emphasize the importance of digital literacy in helping individuals navigate the ethical challenges associated with social media. By equipping students with the skills to manage these challenges, digital literacy can play a crucial role in promoting responsible online behavior. This not only helps students engage more ethically but also enables them to handle the complexities of digital environments with greater awareness and responsibility.

Several aspects of communication ethics were explored in the study, including emotional triggers, caution in sharing information, sensitivity to ethnic and religious issues (SARA), and the care taken in sharing photos. The responses show that a large majority of students are conscientious about these factors when interacting on social media. For instance, over 50% of the respondents indicated that they carefully review the statuses they upload, with 53.9% strongly agreeing with this statement, and 42.9% agreeing. This suggests a strong awareness of media etiquette and a preference for maintaining civility online. While the data suggests a strong awareness of media etiquette among respondents, it is important to consider the varying levels of netiquette application across different demographics and contexts. Factors such as cultural differences, platform design, and the nature of discussions can significantly influence the level of civility observed online. Therefore, promoting a more civil online environment requires a multifaceted approach that addresses these diverse influences and encourages consistent application of netiquette principles.

Similarly, almost half of the students (49.6%) agreed, and 47.9% strongly agreed, with the importance of being mindful of the emotional impact their posts may have on others. This indicates a growing awareness among students of the potential emotional consequences of their online communication. Social media platforms, by their very nature, tend to amplify emotional contagion, where users often adopt the prevailing emotions within their network. This correlates with the research performed by Ferrara et al. (2015) that individuals who are exposed to negative content on platforms like Twitter are more likely to share negative content themselves. The same effect occurs with positive content, as exposure to uplifting or cheerful posts can prompt users to contribute similarly positive material. This highlights the significant role social media plays in shaping emotional experiences, both for individuals and within their broader social networks, and underscores the importance of being mindful of the emotional tone conveyed in online interactions. It also emphasizes the responsibility of users to prevent the spread of negativity, which can create a harmful and emotionally charged online environment.

A substantial number of students (60.2%) reported being cautious when posting information on social media, highlighting their awareness of the potential impact their posts may have. This reflects their understanding of how what they share online can influence both the information itself and the perceptions they create. This finding is consistent with previous research, which shows that awareness of social media etiquette is closely linked to responsible online behavior among college students. Such awareness encourages students to engage in more respectful and thoughtful interactions on social media platforms (Abadilla et al., 2024). Additionally, the students demonstrated an awareness of sensitive issues related to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations. A significant 69.5% of students emphasized the importance of carefully reviewing their posts to avoid offending others on these delicate topics. This result is promising, as it reflects a high degree of cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity. The importance of this is underscored by Andu's (2018) research, which indicates that social media posts can affect friendship dynamics, with people often choosing to limit interactions with individuals who share insensitive content related to these sensitive topics. This further highlights the significance of cultural sensitivity in fostering positive and harmonious online relationships.

The study also revealed that students are becoming more cautious when it comes to sharing photos on social media. A significant portion of respondents (51.5%) believed that individuals who carefully consider the photos they post are seen as wise. This suggests a growing awareness of privacy concerns and the risks that come with oversharing personal content online. One of these risks is cyberattacks, which can compromise users' security and personal information. This finding aligns with the work of Selvakumar (2024), who notes that social media platforms are common targets for cyberattacks, potentially exposing users to data theft and identity fraud. The practice of aggregating and selling data on these platforms exacerbates these privacy risks, leading to potential misuse of personal information. Therefore, students' awareness of these threats reflects a broader understanding of the importance of maintaining online privacy and being more selective with the content they share.

Another key finding relates to the reasons why students post information on social media. The majority of students (56.6%) stated that they post information out of necessity, only sharing important content. This reflects a more intentional approach to social media use, with students being selective about what they share. Furthermore, 34.6% of students reported posting information with a specific purpose, such as sharing useful information with others. These findings suggest that, despite the abundance of casual social media interactions, students are increasingly aware of the purpose behind their posts and strive to make their online presence meaningful and constructive. The tendency to post only necessary or important content is supported by previous research indicating that students are selective about their social media interactions, often consuming content passively rather than actively producing it (Dennen & He, 2024).



## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that Generation Z's perception of communication ethics on social media tends to be evenly divided. Approximately 51% of participants exhibit a high perception of communication ethics, while the remaining 49% demonstrate a low perception. Good communication ethics, such as caution when posting information, and avoiding offensive content related to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA), are crucial in maintaining positive interactions on social media. Generation Z appears to be more aware of their responsibility in sharing information, especially regarding the social impact of the content they post. This study also highlights the importance of caution when using social media, considering the risks of spreading false information that could negatively affect society at large. The study recommends that social media users, particularly Generation Z, place greater emphasis on verifying information sources before sharing them. Moreover, training or education on the importance of communication ethics on social media is essential to minimize negative impacts, such as the spread of misinformation or social conflict. Strengthening ethical values in digital communication can help create a safer, more inclusive, and responsible online environment.

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