

The Digital Culture Literacy of Generation Z Netizens as Readers, Producers and Publishers of Text on Social Media

Burhanuddin Arafah*¹, Muhammad Hasyim², A. St. Aldilah Khaerana³, Andi Inayah Soraya⁴, Rezky Ramadhani⁵, Ahmad Ismail⁶, Takwa⁷

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Abstract: The Internet has revolutionized how people interact and communicate, leading to significant changes in the social order. Internet users, the netizens, now play multiple roles in using digital media in public spaces. In addition to being consumers of media texts, netizens have also become creators and publishers, actively involved in producing and disseminating news through digital media. However, the newfound freedom of netizens as readers, publishers, and producers can give rise to communication problems, particularly in interpreting texts, leading to social conflicts. As netizens exchange messages and information individually or within groups, symbolic interaction through language can sometimes result in misunderstandings and disputes due to the lack of shared understanding. This research aims to assess the digital literacy of netizens in their roles as readers, publishers, and producers on social media platforms. The research was performed to answer the following questions: (1) What are the digital citizenship skills and knowledge required to utilize digital media effectively? (2) How does the symbolic interaction among netizens as readers, producers, and publishers influence their communication on social media? (3) What challenges do netizens face in fulfilling their roles as readers, publishers, and producers? A qualitative descriptive method was employed to gain insights into these issues, providing a comprehensive overview. Data were collected through observation, field studies, and online questionnaires. A semiotic approach that specifically focused on symbolic interaction was used. The findings highlight the importance of netizens possessing four critical digital literacy skills: Digital Skills, Digital Ethics, Digital Culture, and Digital Safety, to effectively carry out their roles as readers, producers, and publishers of text on social media platforms. Moreover, the research developed a model that illustrated the symbolic interaction of netizens as they engaged in communication on social media platforms.

Keywords: Netizen; Symbolic Interaction, Reading, Publishing and Producing Digital Text Media; Social Media

1. Introduction

The issue of communication on social media continues to be a fascinating topic of discussion. Communication challenges arise from internet users' evolving roles in digital media, where they simultaneously act as readers, producers, and publishers of media texts, especially on social media platforms. The interactive nature of online-based media enables individuals to consume information and generate news content, provide comments, and share/publish information with a broad audience across various locations. Internet users can access information, comment, share information, criticize, and even generate other information (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023).

The proliferation of online media technologies, such as smartphones, tablets, and notebooks, has become the primary gateway to accessing information (Arafah & Hasyim, 2022). This advancement has changed the way people think in this modern life (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). The changing learning method to an online method made it possible for students to access the Internet more often

(Anggrawan et al., 2019). Digital media also allows people constant communication, instant access to information, and more interaction with other people in real-time (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). This trend aligns with the increasing number of internet users in Indonesia. According to a survey on internet penetration conducted by the Service Providers Association, the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 175.4 million people (73 per cent of the population) in 2020. It indicates that over 50% of Indonesia's population are internet users (Arafah & Hasyim, 2022). Among the various devices used for internet access, smartphones dominate the landscape, accounting for 93.9 per cent of daily usage by internet users (Arafah & Hasyim, 2022).

Additionally, social media has emerged as the most popular application for communication and interaction (APJII, 2020). The ease of internet use is as simple as just one click away to access everything, so it needs to give more attention, especially for teenagers (Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022; Purwaningsih et al., 2020). It can lead them to shape their characters into good or bad, like a sword with two edges. It is beneficial but also destructive (Suhadi et al., 2022). Collaborative research conducted by We Are Social, and Hootsuite in 2020 reveals that Indonesians spend an

1,2,3,4,5,6 Hasanuddin University – 90245, Indonesia

7 Universitas Sembilanbelas November Kolaka – Indonesia

* Corresponding Author Email: Burhan-arafah@unhas.ac.id

average of 8 hours and 52 minutes per day accessing the Internet, with three hours and 26 minutes explicitly dedicated to social media activities (Stephanie, 2021). These statistics emphasize the significant role that social media platforms play in the daily lives of Indonesian internet users. Giving more time to surf social media could be a negative impact where modernity erodes the locality (Arifin et al., 2022). People will do more communication via online than talking to people nearby. The shifting pattern of the locality to modernity can be shown in many aspects of life, for example, the shift of lexicon that causes the changing of meaning in a specific society (Takwa et al., 2022).

The primary concern associated with this new media paradigm is the need for digital media literacy culture concerning reading, publishing (dissemination and sharing of information), and producing (creating information). One thing that needs to be remembered before publishing and producing information is that it needs to be written in the best way, academically and essentially, as it needs to create arguments with possible solutions (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023). In contrast, social media nowadays is fulfilled by people who are likely to criticize, complain, or express their dissatisfaction using direct words or using metaphors to point out the exact person or object by referring to something similar (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019; Baa et al., 2023). Furthermore, introducing digital media wisely and giving more cultural knowledge to internet users will slowly positively impact digital literacy (Arafah et al., 2023). Digital media literacy culture refers to the cognitive capabilities of individuals (internet users) in effectively and safely utilizing digital media devices (Belshaw, 2011).

The primary objective of this research is to explore the digital media culture among netizens who engage as readers, publishers, and text producers on social media platforms. The research addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the digital citizenship skills and knowledge required to utilize digital media effectively? (2) How does symbolic interaction shape the communication patterns of netizens as readers, producers, and text producers when engaging with other netizens on social media? (3) What challenges arise in fulfilling their roles as readers, publishers, and producers?

In order to achieve these objectives, a qualitative descriptive method was employed to provide a comprehensive overview of the issues under investigation. Data were collected through surveys and online questionnaires distributed in public spaces like cafes. The research adopted a semiotic perspective, specifically focusing on the symbolic interaction approach. The findings of this research will contribute to developing a model illustrating the dynamics of symbolic interaction in communication on social media platforms.

2. Digital Literacy

Digital literacy encompasses the skills and competencies required to utilize digital media for interaction and communication effectively. Gilster (1997) defines digital literacy as the aptitude to comprehend and employ diverse information from various sources through computer devices. Bawden (2001) further expounds on digital literacy, which builds upon the foundations of computer and information literacy. Computer literacy gained prominence in the 1980s as microcomputer usage expanded across business and society. On the other hand, information literacy gained traction in the 1990s with the advent of network information technology, facilitating more accessible access to information. Therefore, as Bawden (2001) suggests, digital literacy primarily concerns the technical skills required to acquire, compile, comprehend, and disseminate information effectively.

Belshaw (2011) mentioned eight core elements of digital literacy development: 1) culture - how to understand the various contexts of digital media users; 2) Cognition - the ability to think to assess content; 3) Construction - the ability to create something professional and actual; 4) Communication - the ability to understand networking and communication in digital media; 5) Confidence with full responsibility; 6) Creativity - the ability to make innovations; 7) Critical ability to respond to specific content; and 8) Social responsibility.

The cultural aspect holds significant importance within digital literacy, as it provides a framework for understanding the user's context, thus aiding the cognitive aspect in assessing digital content. In digital literacy, language holds an essential role as language relates to culture and affects people's awareness (Arafah et al., 2023). As per previous definitions, digital literacy entails possessing cognitive abilities and skills to effectively utilize digital media and communication devices (networks) for evaluating, searching, creating, compiling, and utilizing information wisely, intelligently, carefully, and precisely. Furthermore, it emphasizes adherence to legal regulations while engaging in digital communication and interaction.

3. Symbolic Interaction in Semiotic Perspective

Semiotics is a scientific discipline that researches images, symbols, signs, and related objects to understand their use and meaning. It focuses on sociocultural life, where humans communicate and obtain the meaning of those signs and symbols from their environment (Hasyim et al., 2020). Its primary aim is to unravel the significance of these elements within a social context, particularly within social media. The post-structuralist theory builds upon the foundations of structuralist semiotics by incorporating social interaction, giving rise to the field of social semiotics. In the context of social media, semiotics examines how individuals use and

interpret various signs and symbols, aiming to explain the process of meaning-making as a social practice. It explores semiotic practices specific to cultures and communities, observing how texts and meanings are created within diverse situational and culturally significant contexts. The research of semiotics in social media delves into the complexities of human interaction and the utilization of intricate signs within this digital domain.

Saussure (1959) emphasized the concept of signs as integral to social life, considering them as systems of verbal and nonverbal language (including pictures, graphics, and photography) produced and communicated within society. Other than that, the system of symbols can also be found in another branch of linguistics, such as computational linguistics, where symbols can be communicated, yet it uses a computer as the medium (Iksora et al., 2022). Barthes (1957) expanded on this notion, encompassing signs beyond language to include various forms of expression such as photography, fashion, magazines, and films. Halliday (1978) and Theo van Leeuwen (2005) introduced the term "semiotic resources," which encompasses the relationship between different modes of communication. Van Leeuwen's concept of semiotic resources includes explicit modes like language, gestures, images, and music and more subtle ones like food, dress, and everyday objects, all of which carry cultural value and significance (2005). These semiotic resources serve as means of producing meaning. In Van Leeuwen's semiotics framework, signs that generate individual and universal meanings, such as dominant codes (1980) and referent systems (Williamson, 1978), are primarily shaped by the availability and utilization of sign resources. These resources play a significant role in producing and conveying meaning within social and cultural contexts.

The concept of social semiotics is coming as a part of anthropological linguistics that analyzes text based on the language form, its function or use, and its cultural environment (Arafah et al., 2020). The semiotic approach raises the question of how semioticians analyze signs as symbolic interactions that facilitate virtual communication and interaction within communities and social networks, primarily through language. Semiotics explores how individuals derive meaning from symbolic interactions within social practices and how to effectively employ signs that emerge from these interactions in society (Poulsen et al., 2018). To understand a language, it needs to interpret by its structure, function, and context to result in literal meaning and a rich interpretation linked to the contextual meaning (Yulianti et al., 2022).

Semiotics in social life can be found in the form of literary work. As it is closely related to language and culture, literary work is the closest way to learn about semiotics. Literature is a resource and contains different degrees of language

ability and cultural knowledge (Sunardi et al., 2018). The language used has a specific function in the underlying sociocultural context (Takwa et al., 2022). It functions as a medium of communication and interaction between authors and readers by adding language style to make the readers more interested (Afiah et al., 2022; Asriyanti et al., 2022). Literary work as a product of art and a record of cultural events displays how an author thinks, behaves, and author's manners (Yudith et al., 2023; Fadillah et al., 2022). It also reflects a society in a certain period that presents its good or ills (Arafah et al., 2021; Mutmainnah et al., 2022). Through literature, an author puts personal opinions to convey human disappointment, such as the excessive exploitation of natural resources, criticize the government, and so on, using their language style in order to indirectly criticize a particular person or situation (Manugeran et al., 2023; Siwi et al., 2022). In the form of literary work, symbols and signs symbolize any particular person, object, or context that the author could not state directly. Furthermore, it is also essential to remember that literary work is a product of the author's imagination; some may be based on phenomena around the author, and some are just fiction (Sunyoto et al., 2022). In this digital media, literary work is also adapted to be provided online for academic purposes as the subject material in online learning or for personal purposes as reading material to spare time (Arafah et al., 2023).

In digital media, semiotic research focuses on analyzing digital media texts, particularly those found on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. These texts encompass various formats, including written text, photo images, and videos, which serve as vehicles for disseminating news. As for Instagram, the text also usually includes abbreviations due to some essential factors (Hasjim et al., 2020). The use of textual elements within digital media is intricately tied to the technological features involved in their design, production, distribution, and consumption. Take, for instance, creating a WhatsApp post, where users capture and upload images and utilize additional features such as emojis and video images, employing a visual language to enhance their communication. Throughout this process, users actively participate in the continuous construction of meaning by selecting and negotiating with the various features made available by digital media.

4. Method

The research employed two primary data collection methods: (1) observation and (2) online questionnaires targeting social media users. The observation method involved examining and analyzing internet users' interaction and communication activities on online news and social media platforms. On the other hand, the online questionnaire consisted of distributing questionnaires to

internet users to gather insights into their roles as readers, publishers, and content producers. The research drew data from multiple sources. Firstly, it analyzed the type of news text (information) found on social media, including comments, messages, and shared information (forwarded content). It aimed to understand the types of text (information) users consume at the reading level.

Additionally, the research investigated the information (messages) that users shared or spread at the publishing level. Lastly, it explored the topics produced or created by internet users at the producing level. The second data source

relied on questionnaire responses from the research participants, who were social media users. The questionnaires provided valuable data regarding their behaviours, preferences, and experiences related to social media usage.

The data analysis process was administered to reveal and interpret the meaning embedded in media texts consumed (reading), produced (producing), and disseminated (publishing) by internet users. The specific data analysis method employed is outlined in Table 1.

Roles of Internet Users	Content	Digital skills and knowledge	Digital medical, cultural literacy
Reader	Types of information being consumed	Proficiency and understanding in selecting topics for reading	Think critically in reading/understanding digital media texts
<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Types of information being shared</u>	Skills and understanding in sharing and disseminating information	Having an attitude, thinking critically (selectively), creatively and inspiringly in disseminating information
Producing	Types of information being produced	Proficiency and understanding and proficiency in producing texts (creating news content (information) and commenting on current issues	Acting selectively (which provides social benefits) on news content (information) produced and commenting on information or current issues

Table 1. Data Analysis Method

The research encompassed several stages, including data collection, data analysis, and the generation of research outputs, which collectively contributed to developing a digital media culture literacy design for netizens in their capacities as readers, producers, and publishers of texts on social media.



Fig 1: Design of the Research

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Data Characteristics

The data collection process involved gathering information from a total of 217 netizens belonging to the Generation Z group. The respondents were selected through the

distribution of questionnaires and direct observation conducted in public spaces, with a particular focus on cafes frequented by individuals from this generation. Several cafes, namely Kopi Kenangan, Kopi Janji Jiwa, Café Zero, and Warksop Dg Sija, served as the designated public spaces for the research, where Generation Z netizens were observed and approached for data collection.

The characteristics of the research data, including age, gender and occupation (education), are explained in Table 2.

Gender	Man			Woman		
	73.7			26.3		
Age	11-15		16-20		21-26	
	0.9		49.3		49.8	
Education	Elementary School	Junior High School	Senior High School	Diplome	Bachelor	Masters
	0.9	1.4	71	0	26.3	0.5
Occupation	Student	Employee		Businessman		Etc.
	84.3	7.4		3.2		5.1

Table 2. The characteristics of research data based on sex, age, educational background and occupation

5.2 Netizens' competence and knowledge in using digital media

Netizens' skills and knowledge in utilizing digital media are closely connected to their behavioural patterns and habits when engaging with online platforms. These behaviours encompass the choice of media utilized to access information, the amount of time dedicated to internet usage as a whole, the specific internet-based media employed to access information, the types of social media platforms used for information consumption (particularly news), the specific news topics accessed and read daily through the Internet and social media, the overall content of news encountered on social media, and the news content that precisely captures the interest of netizens. These factors collectively shape netizens' proficiency and understanding of digital media.

The research revealed that netizens from the Generation Z group had transformed internet-based media into a public space for information access. Remarkably, 99.1 per cent of Generation Z netizens accessed information online, highlighting the prevalence of smartphone usage. This finding underscores that the Internet has emerged as the primary medium and public space through which individuals seek and obtain diverse forms of information.

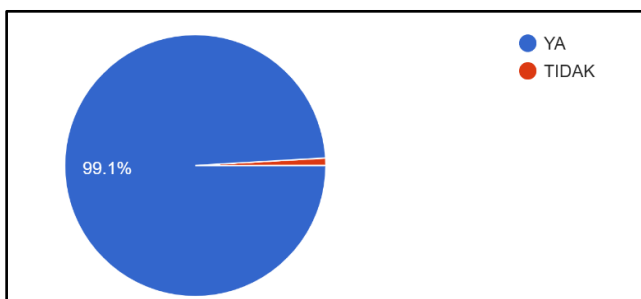


Fig 4. The percentage of the Internet as media to access information (news).

The prominence of the Internet as the primary medium for accessing information aligns with the amount of time

dedicated to such activities. The research findings suggest that Generation Z netizens typically spend an average of 5 to 7 hours per day accessing information on the Internet. It indicates that a significant portion of their daily activities revolves around internet usage, further emphasizing the integral role of the Internet in their lives.

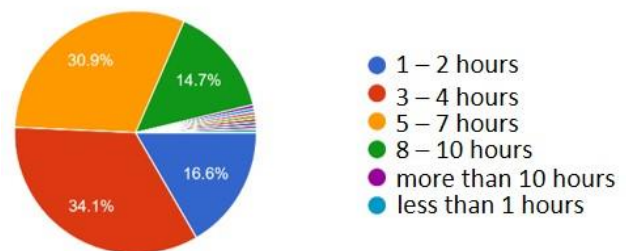


Fig 5. The percentage of time allocated for accessing information (news) on the Internet.

The average time spent accessing information for 5-7 hours is indeed influenced by the types of internet media utilized by netizens during that period. Among the various options available, social media emerges as the primary gateway for information access among Generation Z netizens. The research findings indicate that a significant majority, approximately 88% of Generation Z netizens, employ social media platforms to obtain information, including news. Notably, this percentage aligns with netizens' nearly 100% usage of internet-based media, highlighting the strong correlation between social media and information consumption habits among Generation Z.

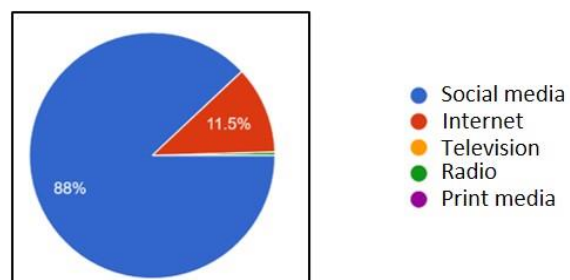


Fig 6. The types of media for accessing information

Social media has emerged as the primary medium for Generation Z netizens to access information. Its role extends beyond being a communication platform connecting individuals and groups to becoming a significant source of information, including news and various types of factual information. Social media is a gateway for accessing ongoing events, product offers, entertainment, knowledge, and negative news such as hoaxes. In Indonesia, several social media platforms have gained significant popularity among netizens. The country's most widely used social media platforms include WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Telegram, Twitter, YouTube, and FB Messenger. WhatsApp remains prominent as the most favoured social media platform in Indonesia, according to data from data Indonesia.id.

WhatsApp is still the most widely used social media by Indonesian people. Based on the We Are Social report, the percentage of users of the instant chat application in the country reached 92.1% as of January 2023. Instagram is in second place because it is widely used by 86.5% of Indonesian internet users. Then, internet users who use Facebook are as many as 83.8% of internet users. Instagram follows its position with 70.8% of users in Indonesia. Then, the percentage of Telegram and Twitter users in Indonesia is 64.3% and 60.2%, respectively. Furthermore, FB Messenger is used by 51.9% of internet users in Indonesia. The eighth position is occupied by SnackVideo (Kuaishou), which is used by 37.8% of respondents (WhatsApp is Still the Most Favorite Social Media in Indonesia (data Indonesia.id).

We Are Social report showed that WhatsApp remained Indonesia's most widely used social media platform, with a staggering 92.1% of Indonesian internet users utilizing the instant chat application as of January 2023. Instagram follows closely in second place, with 86.5% of Indonesian internet users using the platform. Facebook ranks third, with 83.8% of internet users in Indonesia utilizing the platform. Instagram secures the fourth position with 70.8% of users in Indonesia. Telegram and Twitter have 64.3% and 60.2% usage percentages among Indonesian internet users. FB Messenger is used by 51.9% of internet users in Indonesia. SnackVideo (Kuaishou) holds the eighth position, with 37.8% of respondents using the platform. This data further supports the dominance of WhatsApp as the favourite social media platform among Indonesian netizens, as reported by Data Indonesia.id.

Among Generation Z netizens, the most commonly used social media platform is Instagram, with a usage rate of 43.8%. Following Instagram, Facebook is utilized by 16.6% of Generation Z netizens, Twitter by 13.4%, YouTube by 9.7%, and WhatsApp by 5.1%. These five social media platforms are the most frequently employed by Generation Z netizens for accessing information, including news.

Among them, Instagram stands out as the preferred platform for communication within the digital media landscape.

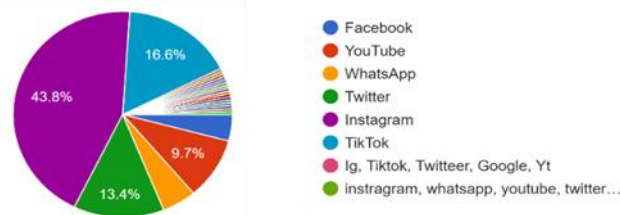


Fig 7. Social media platforms used for accessing information

Generation Z netizens enjoy accessing various news topics through the five social media platforms. The most frequently accessed news topics through social media among Generation Z netizens include knowledge or actual news (28.6%), entertainment (21.2%), lifestyle (18.4%), technology (10.1%), and sports (specifically football, at 2.8%). These topics capture the interest and attention of Generation Z netizens as they seek information and engage with social media platforms for news consumption.



Fig 8. The topics of information accessed on social media daily

The research indicates that Generation Z netizens spend an average of 5-7 hours per day accessing the Internet, primarily through the Internet and social media platforms, to access information. Regarding the types of news topics chosen, the research found that knowledge, entertainment, technology-related information, lifestyle, and football were the most relevant topics. In terms of the number of articles accessed and read daily, the majority of Generation Z netizens (54.8%) read 1-3 articles, followed by 31.8% reading 4-6 articles, 8.3% reading 7-9 articles, and 5.1% reading 10-12 articles. These findings indicate that Generation Z netizens actively read digital media news texts. However, when it comes to reading the entire selected news text, the research revealed that only 47.9% of netizens read the entire content, while 28.6% do not read the whole text, and 23.5% have mixed reading habits. It suggests that most netizens only read part of the news content, which may lead to incomplete knowledge and understanding of the news they consume. This behaviour can also affect their ability to provide informed comments and share the news with other social media users. The incomplete reading of news texts can generate misunderstandings and conflicts in the interpretation of news among social media users. It is essential to address this issue to ensure accurate comprehension and meaningful interactions in the online

space, reducing the risk of social conflicts arising from misinterpretations.

5.3 The Symbolic Interaction of Netizens as Readers, Publishers and Producers of digital media texts

Symbolic interaction is a process of social interaction among individuals in exchanging messages through language. Symbolic interaction develops one's self-concept and perceptions through interactions with other individuals or social groups. Blumer [20] proposed a theoretical view of symbolic interactions, namely (1) behaviour developed based on the meaning given to them by other people or groups; (2). Meaning is created through social interactions (3). The meaning of an object is interpreted.

Symbolic interaction is a theory that offers insight into social phenomena by emphasizing the role of humans as social beings who engage in relationships and interactions with others, shaping their sense of self. This theory highlights the importance of symbols in creating meaning and guiding behaviour. According to symbolic interaction theory, individuals are motivated to act based on the meanings they attribute to people, objects, events, and situations. These meanings are not fixed or inherent but are constructed through social interactions and communication. Language plays a crucial role in this process as it serves as a medium for communication, both in interpersonal and intrapersonal contexts. Through language, individuals develop a sense of self and engage in meaningful interactions with others within a society. Language is considered a natural and innate symbol that enables humans to express their thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Through language, individuals can effectively communicate and understand the meaning behind social activities. Therefore, researching individuals' language is a practical approach to uncovering the meaning and significance of their social interactions.

From a semiotic perspective, symbolic interaction occurs in communication among individuals and groups through a semiotic process: sign (language) – object – interpretant (interpretation). Language is a communication tool enabling social interaction between individuals and groups. Within language, specific symbols are assigned meaning by individuals and shared with others. These symbols refer to various objects, including physical entities, individuals, behaviours, actions, and events. Interpretation involves assigning meaning to actions, leading to behaviours, within the framework of symbol-object relationships.

Symbolic interaction within digital media, particularly social media, revolves around internet users' engagement, often called netizens, who interact with fellow netizens and community groups through social networking platforms. These platforms serve as intermediary tools connecting individuals and groups for communication. These social

media networks facilitate symbolic interactions between netizens and groups, where users are guided and influenced by the functionalities and features provided by the platforms. For instance, using emoji symbols readily available through social media applications shapes and regulates the communication activities of netizens.

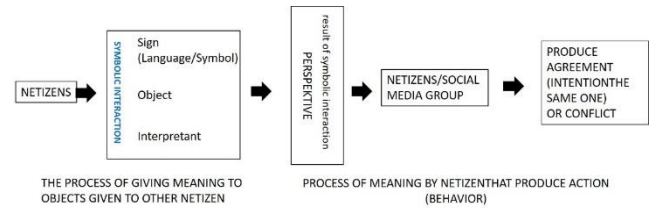


Fig 9. Interaction symbolic in social media

Symbolic interaction on social media commences with netizens consuming various information, such as news, obtained from society or online media sources. Through language, netizens partake in symbolic interactions by attributing meaning to objects, encompassing various events. They engage in social interactions on social media platforms with individuals or groups by commenting or sharing the received information with others. In this process, netizens ascribe meaning through symbols, which are then communicated to other netizens or groups. Other netizens, employing symbolic processes, interpret the shared news based on the symbols employed. In social interactions between netizens, the second individual offers their perspective or views on the meaning of the information the first netizen provides. The outcomes of symbolic interaction yield the meaning of action or behaviour, resulting in either consensus (shared meaning) or conflict.

Symbolic interaction among netizens on social media involves using language (symbols) to construct meanings derived from individual thoughts and self-perception within online interactions. These interactions occur within the virtual realm of social media, aiming to mediate and interpret meanings within the online community. The resulting meaning is generated through social interactions, and meaning formation entails establishing connections and relationships with other netizens through interactive engagements.

As readers (reading digital media/news texts), producers (making comments) and publishers (forwarding and sharing news), netizens form self-meaning individually within the internet community. Three basic ideas of symbolic interaction in forming meaning among individuals and society are explained as follows.

1. Mind

Mind refers to the capacity of netizens to employ language (symbols) that hold similar social significance as other users or within society, particularly in social media. Netizens enhance their cognitive abilities through interactions with

fellow individuals, thereby constructing personal interpretations. As readers, netizens engage with captivating news content and contribute positive comments to provide valuable information to their social media peers. As producers and publishers, netizens aim to offer more comprehensive public insights, knowledge, and entertainment on social media platforms.

This research indicates that as many as 82% of netizens share news they find fascinating on social media groups.

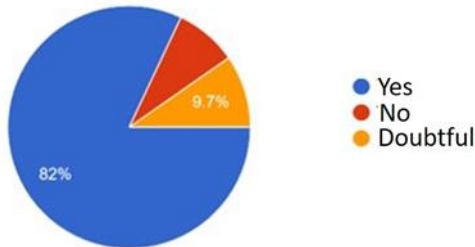


Fig 10. The percentage of netizens sharing appealing information (news) to other netizens or on social media groups.

Their motivations and goals drive netizens' inclination to share intriguing information. When it comes to sharing news deemed attractive, netizens have various purposes in mind. The primary aim, accounting for 48.4% of cases, is to contribute insights and knowledge, providing valuable information to others. Additionally, netizens share news content intending to entertain their peers, encompassing humour-infused text, photographs, and videos, which accounts for 29% of instances. Another purpose is to educate, accounting for 10.1% of cases where netizens share news about corruption and harassment incidents. Furthermore, netizens share activities for promotional purposes, such as endorsing products or promoting specific regions, comprising 4.6% of cases.



Fig 11. Types of information (news) shared with other netizens.

2. Self

Self-awareness is a characteristic displayed by netizens, enabling them to introspect and evaluate their perspectives and opinions in light of feedback from other netizens or groups. By assuming the roles of producers and publishers, netizens share captivating information, including news, to garner recognition from their peers. It is evident through the responses and replies expressed by netizens, often conveyed through symbolic language such as emojis. These symbols serve as a means of communication, further exemplifying

netizens' desire for acknowledgment and validation within online communities.

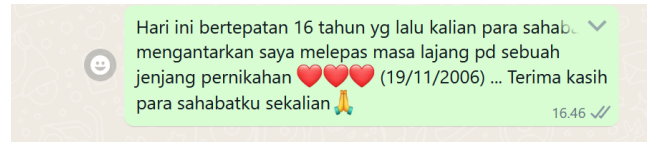


Fig 12. Gratitude expression from netizens towards the happy birthday greetings from members of a WhatsApp group. (Translation: Today coincides 16 years ago, you friends escorted me to let go of my single life at a marriage level. Thank you my friends).

3. Masyarakat Maya (cyber society)

Cyber society is a dynamic network of social interactions created and shaped by individual netizens. Each netizen can actively and voluntarily participate in this cyber society. Their involvement is primarily manifested through the dissemination of intriguing information, both in the form of comments and by sharing valuable content for the benefit of the cyber community members. The significant role played by netizens within the cyber society becomes evident when examining the reasons and purposes behind sharing essential information. According to recent research, 42% of netizens share information to provide usefulness to others, 38.2% aim to entertain, and 15.2% distribute urgent information. These statistics underscore the active engagement of netizens in shaping virtual society by actively contributing and disseminating content based on their motivations and expected outcomes.

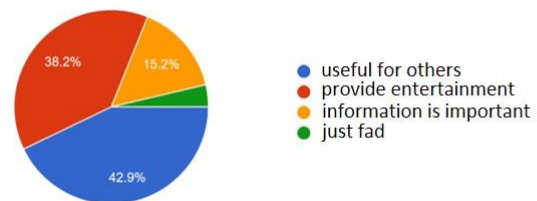


Fig 13. Netizens' motives in sharing certain information with other netizens (digital community).

The symbolic interaction among netizens on social media emphasizes the significance of constructing meaning for individuals within the virtual society. According to symbolic interaction theory, members of virtual communities on platforms such as social media cannot be detached from the communication process that facilitates the creation of mutually agreed-upon meanings.

Analyzing the symbolic interaction among netizens on social media resulted in these assumptions.

1. Social media netizens treat other netizens as the member of the digital community (based on the messages shared through interactions on social media)
2. The meaning of using symbols (language) within the interaction and relationship among social media users.

3. The modified meaning or the creation of a new meaning by an individual (netizen) through the interpreting process

5.4 Problems in interpreting the Symbolic Interaction among Netizens as the reader, publisher, and producer of digital media texts

Symbolic interaction in netizens' realm involves using symbols, such as language, which may only sometimes yield uniform interpretations. Discrepancies in meaning can lead to conflicts among netizens or community members when a particular symbol used by one netizen in response to an event is perceived differently by others within the virtual community.

A specific case research that exemplifies symbolic interaction theory involves a contentious comment made by a researcher from BRIN (National Research and Innovation Agency) that was perceived as an insult towards Muhammadiyah, an Islamic organization, regarding the discrepancy in the timing of 1 Shawwal 1444 (2023). The incident unfolded on social media, specifically Facebook, beginning with a threatening comment posted by Andi Pangerang Hasanuddin, an astronomy researcher at BRIN, in response to a link shared by another BRIN researcher, Thomas Jamaluddin. The link discussed different methods of determining the date for Eid in 2023. Initially, Thomas commented that Muhammadiyah had disregarded the government's decision regarding the timing. This discrepancy led to AP Hasanuddin responding to Thomas's comment sarcastically and threateningly.

The following shows the comment made by Hasanuddin on social media "Should I make the blood of all Muhammadiyah members lawful or not? Hizb ut-Tahrir even infiltrates Muhammadiyah through the global Islamic calendar agenda from Gema Liberation. Too much talk! I am here to kill you one by one. Dare to report my comments with threats to the article on murder! I am ready to be jailed. I'm tired of seeing your fights," (<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/04/25/15030881/perMintaan-maaf-peneliti-brin-terkait-threat-kill-warga-muhammadiyah>).

"Perlu saya halalkan gak nih darahnya semua Muhammadiyah? Apalagi Muhammadiyah yang disusupi Hizbut Tahrir melalui agenda kalender Islam global dari Gema Pembebasan? Banyak bacot emang!!! Sini saya bunuh kalian satu-satu. Silakan laporkan komen saya dengan ancaman pasal pembunuhan! Saya siap dipenjara. Saya capek lihat pergaduhan kalian." (Do I need to make it legal or not, the blood of all Muhammadiyah? What's more, Muhammadiyah was infiltrated by Hizb ut-Tahrir through the global Islamic calendar agenda from Gema Liberation? Lots of bastards!!! Here I kill you one by one.

Please report my comments with death threats! I'm ready to go to jail. I'm tired of seeing you fight."

Source:

<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/04/25/15030881/perMintaan-maaf-peneliti-brin-terkait-ancaman-bunuh-warga-muhammadiyah>.

Internet media is an interactive platform that facilitates rapid and widespread information dissemination through social media channels and online press outlets such as nasional.kompas.com and [detik.com](https://www.detik.com). In the case of the Hasanuddin reporting incident, the symbolic interactions among netizens resulted in the production of comments, where netizens assumed the role of producers and the distribution of awful news and comments, with netizens taking on the role of publishers. These interactions extended beyond the initial platform, spreading to other social media platforms and online press outlets.

Several netizens expressed their attitudes and opinions regarding Hasanuddin's affiliation with the Muhammadiyah organization, conveying their statements online. These sentiments were captured in the Muhammadiyah Press release, which can be accessed at this link: [link]. The press release highlights the following key points: Firstly, the actions carried out by APH are considered to constitute ITE (Information and Electronic Transactions) crimes, specifically the dissemination of hate speech, as stipulated in Article 28, Paragraph (2) in conjunction with Article 45, Paragraph (2) of the ITE Law. Secondly, there is an urgent call for the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (MenPAN RB) and the Head of the National Agency for Research and Innovation to take decisive action against civil servants who engage in uninformed and provocative behaviour, which includes the violation of rules as an ASN (civil servant) and making death threats. Lastly, the Muhammadiyah Press urges the Indonesian National Police (POLRI) to promptly investigate the alleged crimes committed by Andi Pangerang Hasanuddin (APH) concerning violations of the ITE Law and the Criminal Code.

Symbolic interaction through language among netizens, as exemplified by Hasanuddin's role as both a producer and publisher of comments, is rooted in the notion that individuals (netizens) act towards others (netizens) based on the meanings ascribed to them by their peers. Hasanuddin's comments were prompted by a conversation via chat on social media with Thomas Djamaluddin, a senior researcher at the Space Research Center for the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN). In response to the conversation, Hasanuddin stated, "Yes. They disobeyed the government's decision but still asked for facilities for the Eid prayer. The government also provides facilities." The meaning of Thomas Djamaluddin's statement was constructed within

the realm of human interaction between Hasanuddin and Thomas Djameluddin. However, Hasanuddin interpreted and modified the meaning of Thomas Djameluddin's statement through an interpretive process. It led to a comment whose meaning underwent further interpretation, resulting in an action that conveyed protest against Hasanuddin's comment. The modified meaning, generated through the interpretive process of Hasanuddin's comment as a netizen, yielded a different interpretation among virtual community members. As a result, protests arose against the netizen who commented.

The symbolic interaction between netizen comments as creators and distributors of digital media content are intertwined with the dynamic between individual autonomy (netizens) and the virtual community. This perspective acknowledges that while virtual society enforces certain social norms (digital media ethics), these norms still impose constraints on the behaviour of individual netizens. Each netizen exercises agency in shaping the available choices within social media platforms. The significance of symbolic interactions between individuals and society is profoundly shaped by cultural and social dynamics within digital media communities, ultimately giving rise to distinct social structures through ongoing social interactions.

6. Conclusion

Netizens play multifaceted roles as consumers, creators, and distributors on social media, engaging in symbolic interactions that establish meaningful connections within virtual community groups. Through these interactions, the use of specific symbols in communication between netizens or groups carries significance that aligns with the broader meaning embraced by virtual community groups.

In order to produce the same meaning through symbolic interaction, four pillars of digital media literacy need to be possessed by netizens as members of virtual society as follows.

1. Digital Skills - effectively evaluating and creating information using various digital technologies.
2. Digital Ethics - the ability to realize, adapt, and apply digital ethics.
3. Digital Culture - creation and work of humans based on internet technology. Digital culture is reflected in how netizens interact, behave, think, and communicate within the digital community.
4. Digital Safety - the awareness of personal data protection and security. Digital security activities aim to secure digital activities using passwords or OTP for verification.

Netizens engage in symbolic interactions within digital media as readers, producers, and publishers. They must

possess knowledge and exhibit behaviour aligned with the four pillars of digital media literacy. Generation Z netizens with a firm grasp of digital literacy are empowered to navigate and interact with digital technology proficiently and culturally sensitively, fostering ethical and culturally enriched symbolic interactions.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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