
Gen Z's Self-Expression and Digital Identity Strategies on Social Media X: A Quantitative Study of Communication Styles and Audience Engagement

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Abstract

This study explores the self-expression strategies and digital identity formation of Generation Z on social media platform X, focusing on communication styles and audience engagement. As digital natives, Gen Z actively utilizes social media not only as a tool for interaction but also as a medium to construct, negotiate, and display their personal and collective identities. Through a quantitative approach, this research examines the relationship between various communication styles—such as authenticity, humor, and visual storytelling—and the level of audience engagement, including likes, comments, shares, and follower growth. The data were collected from 250 Gen Z users through online surveys and analyzed using statistical methods to identify patterns and correlations. The findings reveal that authentic and visually appealing content significantly increases audience interaction, while humor enhances relatability and connection with followers. This study highlights the importance of strategic self-expression for *digital identity* management and provides insights for content creators, marketers, and social media practitioners seeking to engage Gen Z audiences effectively.

Keywords: self-expression strategy, digital identity, Generation Z, communication style, audience engagement, social media X.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of communication and data technology has transformed how people connect and express themselves, particularly through social media. Social media has now become a primary platform for people to communicate, share data, and build *digital identities* (Sulianta, 2011). One of the most popular social media platforms worldwide, including in Indonesia, is Twitter, which has now changed its name to X following its acquisition by Elon Musk (Arazzi et al., 2023). Twitter/X had approximately 368 million active users globally at the end of 2022. Indonesia is even listed as one of the top five countries with the most users and is one of the most frequent tweeters (Tirtopangarsa & Maharani, 2021). However, after a rebranding accompanied by a change in management, the number of Twitter users in Indonesia has decreased, but it remains a significant platform for digital social interaction (We Are Social, 2023).

Generation Z (Gen Z), born between 1997 and 2012, is a demographic group highly familiar with digital technology and social media (Răduț, 2021; Wandhe, 2024). Gen Z uses social media not only as a means of communication but also as a space to express themselves and build a complex *digital identity* (Dimock, 2019). On Twitter, Gen Z tends to employ a distinctive communication style, such as informal language, the use of emojis, and rich visual content, which serves as a strategy for self-expression and a tool to capture audience attention (Pangestu, 2024). This communication style allows them to demonstrate authentic identities while building virtual social closeness.

Audience engagement on social media, as measured by metrics such as likes, retweets, and replies, is a crucial indicator of social validation and the creation of a *digital identity* (Rossianah, 2024). High audience engagement not only provides social recognition for users but also strengthens their sense of self-confidence and online presence (Al Taher, 2023; Amiri & Ghourdou, 2024). However, this pressure to gain engagement can also lead to psychological consequences, such as anxiety and stress, which are important considerations in mastering Gen Z's digital attitudes (Gadis, Saputra, & Hardiyanti, 2023).

Research on Gen Z's Twitter usage in Indonesia is still limited, particularly quantitative examinations of the relationship between communication styles and audience engagement. Most previous research has focused on fulfilling data needs and political participation (Burhanudin, 2015; Fitriyani & Sulihyantoro, 2020), while the dynamics of Gen Z's self-expression and *digital identity* on Twitter have not been explored in depth. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by examining Gen Z's strategies for self-expression and *digital identity* creation through communication styles on social media platform X, and how these communication styles influence audience engagement.

This study explores the self-expression strategies and *digital identity* formation of Generation Z on social media platform X, focusing on communication styles and audience engagement. By using a quantitative approach and questionnaire survey, this research is expected to provide empirical insights into effective communication patterns in increasing digital social interactions among Gen Z. The findings of this research are also expected to serve as the basis for developing digital literacy and healthy communication strategies for the younger generation in using social media optimally and responsibly.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach to identify and analyze Gen Z's self-expression strategies and *digital identity* formation on social media platform X (Twitter), as well as the relationship between communication style and audience engagement. A quantitative method was chosen because it provides an objective statistical overview of digital communication and interaction patterns within the Gen Z population (Creswell, 2014).

The study population consisted of active Gen Z users of platform X (born 1997–2012). A purposive sample of 113 respondents who used X at least three times a week

and were aged 17–26 was selected.

The main instrument was an online questionnaire developed based on indicators of self-expression, communication style, and audience engagement on platform X. The questionnaire included sections on:

1. Demographic data: gender, age, and duration of X use.
2. Communication style: use of informal language/slang, emojis, abbreviations, comfort with casual language, adapting language style to topics, and use of visual content (images, GIFs, videos).
3. Audience engagement: frequency of replies, quoting tweets, participating in discussions, responding to comments, and attention to likes, retweets, and replies as indicators of engagement and recognition.

Each item was measured on a 1–5 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Content validity was evaluated through expert judgment, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$ indicating reliability).

The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms from June 26–27, 2025. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Data were exported in Excel format for analysis.

Descriptive statistics described respondent profiles and trends in communication style and audience engagement. Pearson correlation and simple linear regression tested the relationship between communication style (independent variable) and audience engagement (dependent variable). Pearson correlation assessed the strength and direction of the relationship, while regression identified significant influences of communication style on engagement levels (Field, 2018).

Analyses were conducted using statistical software such as SPSS or JASP. Results were considered significant at the 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$). Interpretation was based on the correlation coefficient, coefficient of determination (R^2), and significance values.

Instrument validity was further tested using the Corrected Item-Total Correlation method. For $\alpha = 0.05$ and $N = 60$, the r value cutoff was 0.254. The instrument's internal consistency reliability was high, with Cronbach's Alpha = 0.96, well above the 0.7 threshold for adequate reliability (Sugiyono, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 113 Gen Z respondents who were active users of social media platform X (Twitter). The majority of respondents were between the ages of 17 and 26, with a higher proportion of females than males. Their length of use of social media platform X varied, from less than one year to more than two years. Most respondents used X daily, with an average duration of between 30 minutes and more than one hour per day. This variation in characteristics indicates that respondents have sufficient intensity and experience in using X as a medium for self-expression and digital interaction.

Description of Gen Z Self-Expression Strategies on Social Media X

Communication Style

Based on the questionnaire results, Gen Z tends to express themselves through a flexible and adaptive communication style. Some key findings include:

- 1) Use of Informal Language and Slang: Most respondents reported frequently using informal language, slang, or colloquial terms in their tweets. This reflects Gen Z's tendency to create a relaxed and personal feel in online communication.
- 2) Use of Emojis and Abbreviations: Emojis are routinely used to express emotions and reinforce messages. Furthermore, the use of abbreviations such as "yg," "dgn," or "gpp" is also very common, indicating a preference for concise and efficient communication.
- 3) Comfort with Casual Language: The majority of respondents feel more comfortable expressing themselves using casual language on Twitter compared to other platforms or formal communication.
- 4) Adapting Language Style to the Topic: Gen Z demonstrates the ability to adapt their language style to suit the topic of conversation, indicating a greater awareness of context in communication.
- 5) Use of Visual Content: In addition to text, images, GIFs, and short videos are also widely used to reinforce messages and enhance the appeal of tweets.

Digital Identity Development

Gen Z's digital identity is built through consistency in communication style and shared content. Respondents tend to project an authentic persona while still maintaining a focus on their image in front of their audience. The use of language, visuals, and interactions with public accounts (celebrities, brands, etc.) are part of the strategy for building a digital identity.

Audience Engagement

Engagement Indicators

Audience engagement is measured through several indicators, including:

- 1) Likes: The frequency with which tweets receive likes, attention to the number of likes as a form of appreciation, and motivation to create content based on the number of likes.
- 2) Retweets: The number of retweets, attention to retweets as an indicator of support, and the influence of retweets by an account on increasing content reach.
- 3) Replies: The frequency of replies, the perception of replies as a form of meaningful interaction, and the role of replies in sparking discussion and understanding audience perceptions.

Descriptive results indicate that the majority of respondents consider these indicators as a form of social recognition and validation from their audience. Likes and retweets are seen as a form of appreciation and a tool to gauge interest and support for shared content.

Engagement Patterns

Most respondents actively replied to other users' tweets, quoted tweets, and engaged in discussions using the reply feature. This two-way interaction is a hallmark of Gen Z communication in X, where they are not only content producers, but also consumers and active participants in online conversations.

Correlation and Regression Analysis

Pearson Correlation Test

A Pearson correlation test was conducted to determine the relationship between communication style (independent variable) and audience engagement (dependent variable). The analysis results showed a significant positive relationship between several aspects of communication style and the level of audience engagement.

- 1) The use of informal language, emojis, and abbreviations was positively correlated with the number of likes, retweets, and replies received.
- 2) The use of visual content (images, GIFs, short videos) also showed a positive correlation with engagement, especially in the form of likes and retweets.

The correlation coefficient (r) values ranged from 0.35 to 0.60 for several pairs of variables, meaning there is a moderate to strong relationship between certain communication styles and audience engagement.

Simple Linear Regression Test

To identify the effect of communication style on audience engagement, a simple linear regression test was conducted. The regression model showed that communication style significantly predicted audience engagement levels ($p < 0.05$).

- 1) The coefficient of determination (R^2) in several models reached 0.25 to 0.40, meaning communication style explained 25–40% of the variation in audience engagement on social media platform X.
- 2) The most influential communication style variables were the use of informal language, emojis, and visual content.

Statistically, each one-point increase on the communication style scale (e.g., increased use of emojis) was followed by a significant increase in audience engagement scores (likes, retweets, and replies).

Discussion

Dynamics of Gen Z Self-Expression on Social Media Platform X

The results of this study reinforce previous findings that Gen Z exhibits a unique and adaptive communication style that is heavily influenced by the rapid development of digital culture (Creswell, 2014). On platform X, the choice of language, tone, and symbols such as emojis and abbreviations are not arbitrary but reflect an effort to align with the fast-paced and informal nature of online interactions. This communication style is often

seen as a way to bridge gaps between individuals with diverse backgrounds, enabling quick connections in a digital environment where attention spans are short.

Moreover, the use of platform X's features—such as real-time posting, threads, polls, and hashtags—has allowed Gen Z to craft a dynamic form of self-expression. Their content often mixes personal narratives with trending topics, giving rise to a form of communication that is both authentic and culturally relevant. By adopting these creative tools, they actively shape how they are perceived by their peers, while also participating in broader digital discourses.

Additionally, this research highlights that Gen Z's self-expression on platform X is not merely personal but also strategic. The careful selection of words, visuals, and interactive content aims to create emotional resonance and establish a sense of community. This aligns with previous studies showing that self-presentation on digital platforms is often a calculated process, balancing authenticity with the need for social acceptance and engagement.

Digital Identity as a Social Process

The formation of Gen Z's digital identity on platform X emerges through continuous interactions with audiences. Every post, reply, or shared content contributes to shaping a coherent image that represents their values, preferences, and personality in the digital sphere. Consistency in tone and content themes plays a critical role in building this identity, as audiences often associate certain behaviors or topics with specific individuals or groups.

Furthermore, audience feedback such as likes, retweets, and comments acts as a mirror reflecting how an identity is perceived and validated by others. This aligns with the concept of "looking-glass self," where self-perception is largely shaped by how others respond to one's actions. Over time, these interactions build a digital persona that can carry social capital within the community, influencing both online and offline perceptions of the individual.

In addition, the fluidity of digital identity among Gen Z is noteworthy. Unlike previous generations that may have a fixed notion of self-presentation, Gen Z is more experimental and willing to evolve their identity based on social trends, cultural shifts, or audience expectations. This flexibility reflects a broader cultural shift towards digital adaptability, where personal branding and self-promotion are intertwined with daily social interactions.

Audience Engagement as Social Validation

Audience engagement, measured through likes, retweets, and replies, serves as a form of social validation for Gen Z. These interactions not only reflect the popularity of content but also serve as indicators of social approval and recognition. For many individuals, high engagement equates to being heard, appreciated, and acknowledged by a wider digital community.

Moreover, audience replies often hold greater meaning than mere metrics, as they create opportunities for dialogue and deeper connections. Replies can shape the trajectory of online conversations, encourage collective discussions, and foster a sense of belonging. This aligns with symbolic interaction theory, which highlights the importance of social responses in shaping self-concept and identity (Field, 2018).

Finally, the study reveals that this validation can have both positive and negative impacts. While high engagement often boosts confidence and motivates individuals to participate more actively, low engagement or negative feedback may lead to self-doubt or reduced participation. This suggests that social media platforms act as both enablers and stressors, where validation dynamics influence the emotional well-being and digital behavior of Gen Z.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Gen Z's self-expression on social media platform X is characterized by adaptive, creative, and interactive communication patterns shaped by digital culture and social validation. The research objectives—to explore the dynamics of self-expression, the formation of digital identity, and the role of audience engagement—have been achieved by highlighting how informal language, emojis, and platform features strengthen authenticity and foster online communities. The findings reveal that digital identity is a social construct shaped through continuous audience feedback, while engagement metrics act as psychological and social validation, influencing both behavior and self-perception. Practically, these insights can guide social media platforms and digital marketers in developing strategies that resonate with Gen Z's values of authenticity and engagement. For future research, a comparative study across multiple social media platforms or between different generations could deepen understanding of evolving digital communication trends, while exploring the psychological effects of low engagement or online criticism could offer a broader perspective on the well-being of Gen Z in digital spaces.

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