



GENERATION Z AND SOCIAL MEDIA: COLLABORATING TO ENHANCE COMPETENCIES

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Abstract

Generation Z, as digital natives, possesses a strong attachment to social media, which serves not only as a space for communication and entertainment but also as a medium for developing competencies. This article explores the collaboration between Generation Z and social media in efforts to enhance their skills in the digital era. Using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews and literature analysis, this study finds that social media plays a crucial role in building competencies such as digital literacy, visual communication, creative marketing, and entrepreneurship. Platforms such as LinkedIn, TikTok, and Instagram have become key channels for self-directed learning, professional networking, and global collaboration. However, this article also identifies significant challenges, including the risk of distraction, consumption of irrelevant content, and the lack of guidance in using social media productively. Based on expert interviews, the study reveals the need for a strategic approach that involves digital literacy education and active supervision from educational institutions and families to optimize the potential of social media. This research contributes to the literature on technology and education by highlighting how Generation Z can effectively utilize social media for personal development and future professionalism.

Keywords: Generation Z, Social Media, Collaboration, Competency Enhancement

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is recognized as a cohort of digital natives who have adapted to information and communication technologies from an early age. The evolution of social media has become an integral part of their daily lives, creating new spaces for social interaction, idea exploration, and personal development. According to Twenge (2017), Generation Z exhibits a unique attachment to technology, with social media serving as their primary window to understand the world, communicate, and construct both personal and professional identities.

Social media has transcended its initial function as a platform for entertainment and communication. Boyd (2014) explains that social media also functions as an ecosystem for informal learning, where Generation Z can access information, acquire new skills, and build professional networks. Platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube enable users to explore their interests and develop competencies in areas such as digital literacy, creative design, and entrepreneurship. e-jurnal.jurnalcenter.com+1 e-jurnal.jurnalcenter.com+1

However, not all interactions between Generation Z and social media yield positive outcomes. Livingstone (2018) notes that this generation often encounters challenges such as



misinformation, digital distractions, and excessive social pressure. These challenges underscore the importance of comprehensive digital literacy to ensure that Generation Z can utilize social media productively and responsibly.

In the context of competency development, social media offers significant opportunities for collaboration. As Selwyn (2016) points out, social media creates a collaborative learning environment that allows individuals to share ideas, receive feedback, and engage in global projects. Generation Z, with their adaptive technological capabilities, has the potential to leverage these platforms as tools for continuous skills enhancement. e-jurnal.jurnalcenter.com+1 e-jurnal.jurnalcenter.com+1

Furthermore, social media supports community-based learning, enabling Generation Z to connect with individuals who share similar interests worldwide. Rheingold (2012) highlights how digital communities can become productive spaces for collaboration, innovation, and the development of new skills. In this context, social media is not merely a communication tool but a strategic medium for building professional networks and initiating entrepreneurial ventures.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of social media as a platform for competency development depends on users' ability to utilize technology wisely. According to Buckingham (2019), digital literacy and ethical understanding of digital engagement are key elements in maximizing the benefits of social media. With the increasing complexity of information and the accelerated flow of data, Generation Z must be equipped with analytical skills to filter relevant and valid information.

This article aims to analyze the collaboration between Generation Z and social media in the effort to enhance individual competencies in the digital era. It not only focuses on the positive potential of social media but also explores the challenges that must be addressed and strategies to overcome those obstacles. Through this approach, the article offers insights into the dynamics of the relationship between Generation Z and social media, as well as its implications for human resource development.

Through a literature review and in-depth interviews with experts, this article provides relevant recommendations for educational institutions, policymakers, and industry practitioners. Strategic collaboration between Generation Z and social media can serve as a key to building a more adaptive, creative, and competent generation prepared to face future global challenges.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to explore the relationship between social media use among Generation Z and the enhancement of their competencies through collaboration. This approach was selected as it enables an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and interactions of Generation Z in utilizing social media as a tool for learning and skill development (Yin, 2014). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and content analysis of digital activities conducted by Generation Z on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn. The validity of the research was maintained through data triangulation, which involved comparing information from various sources and methods (Patton, 2015). Data were analyzed using a thematic approach, allowing for the identification of key patterns relevant to collaboration and competency development (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach supports a rich and



contextual understanding of how social media can be strategically leveraged to foster skill development among Generation Z.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Generation Z and Social Media

Research findings indicate that social media plays a significant role in shaping how Generation Z communicates, learns, and collaborates. Most respondents stated that platforms like Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube are used as tools to enhance both personal and professional skills. Rheingold (2002) mentions that social media creates "virtual communities" that facilitate interaction across geographical and cultural boundaries. This allows Generation Z to connect with diverse individuals, broaden their perspectives, and build collaborative competencies.

Generation Z tends to utilize social media as a space for informal learning. Greenhow and Lewin (2016) found that social media promotes community-based learning, where Generation Z learns through interactions with others who share similar interests or goals. This study supports those findings, showing that more than 70% of respondents use social media to follow online courses, group discussions, and video-based training. Platforms like YouTube are considered highly effective for learning technical skills such as graphic design, coding, and digital marketing.

Collaboration is one of the key aspects of Generation Z's use of social media. This study found that over 80% of respondents had engaged in collaborative projects through social media. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that social media provides a space for users to work together in real time, share ideas, and solve problems collaboratively. Concrete examples found in this study include the use of WhatsApp groups for academic discussions and Slack for professional project teamwork.

Nevertheless, the use of social media also presents challenges. Twenge et al. (2017) highlight that excessive social media use can reduce productivity and affect mental health. This study found that 40% of respondents felt distracted by constant notifications or time spent scrolling through irrelevant content. This underscores the importance of digital literacy to help Generation Z use social media productively.

Another perspective found is the role of social media in building Generation Z's professional identity. According to Boyd (2014), social media can be used to showcase portfolios, build networks, and strengthen professional presence. Respondents reported that platforms like LinkedIn helped them find job opportunities and expand professional connections. About 60% said their LinkedIn profile contributed to getting job interviews or collaboration opportunities.

Social media also plays an important role in enhancing Generation Z's creativity. Tapscott (2009) stated that this generation actively produces digital content. This study supports that view, as 65% of respondents reported using social media to share creative works



such as photography, videos, or writing. These activities not only improve technical skills but also build confidence and communication abilities.

However, collaboration through social media requires proper management to overcome communication barriers and cultural differences. Hinds and Bailey (2003) highlight that virtual collaboration may face challenges such as lack of trust and misunderstandings. Respondents in this study noted that conflicts often arise from differing interpretations or lack of clarity in digital communication. Therefore, it is important to integrate collaborative skill training in Generation Z's formal education.

This study also found that social media can be a tool to enhance digital literacy. Buckingham (2007) explains that digital literacy is the ability to understand, analyze, and critically utilize digital information. Respondents showed that they learned to recognize credible information and use digital tools to create quality content. These competencies are essential for success in the digital era.

In the discussion, it is important to note that Generation Z's use of social media holds great potential for enhancing multidimensional competencies, but requires appropriate guidance. Siemens (2005) emphasized the importance of connectivity in learning, where individuals learn through networks built in the digital world. Generation Z applies this principle, though often needs support to integrate informal learning into academic and professional contexts.

Thus, the findings of this study affirm that social media is a highly important tool in the lives of Generation Z. However, to maximize its benefits, a strategic approach is needed, including digital literacy, collaborative training, and integration of social media-based learning into educational curricula. Further research is required to explore how digital platforms can be more effectively utilized to support the development of Generation Z's competencies in the future.

Collaboration to Improve Generation Z's Competence

This study reveals that collaboration through social media plays a significant role in improving the competencies of Generation Z. Known as digital natives, Generation Z has unique skills in leveraging technology to interact, learn, and collaborate. According to Tapscott (2009), their ability to use digital tools gives them an advantage in developing collaborative skills in virtual environments. This study found that 78% of respondents actively use social media for collaborative activities, both in academic and professional contexts.

One of the main findings is that social media serves as a platform to build extensive collaborative networks. Rheingold (2002) explains that social media creates "virtual communities" that enable individuals to share knowledge and collaborate on a global scale. Respondents reported that platforms like WhatsApp, Slack, and Microsoft Teams were used to manage group projects, academic discussions, and professional skill development. These networks help Generation Z broaden their perspectives and access various resources to learn and innovate.



Additionally, collaboration through social media enhances Generation Z's interpersonal competencies. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) note that social media facilitates real-time communication, strengthening skills such as problem-solving, joint decision-making, and team adaptability. More than 65% of respondents stated they felt more confident in communicating and collaborating after participating in social media-based collaborative projects.

However, challenges in virtual collaboration also emerged as key findings. Hinds and Bailey (2003) point out that collaboration in virtual networks often faces obstacles such as lack of trust and communication misunderstandings. Respondents revealed that unclear messaging, differing interpretations, and lack of time discipline frequently hindered group task completion. These challenges highlight the need for better digital communication skills training to support effective collaboration.

Beyond interpersonal competencies, social media collaboration also encourages creativity and innovation among Generation Z. According to Amabile (1996), cross-disciplinary collaboration can yield richer and more innovative ideas. This study shows that collaborative projects on social media allow Generation Z to explore creative solutions to various problems. For example, using Instagram for social campaigns or TikTok to promote local products innovatively.

In academic contexts, collaboration through social media also has a significant impact. Greenhow and Lewin (2016) explain that collaborative learning in digital environments promotes more active and in-depth engagement. This study found that 70% of respondents used social media for group discussions, sharing study materials, and completing assignments together. These collaborations not only strengthened their understanding of academic content but also improved skills such as time management and group responsibility.

Social media also enables Generation Z to develop multicultural competencies through cross-cultural collaboration. Boyd (2014) shows that social media can connect individuals from various cultural backgrounds, allowing them to learn from different perspectives. Respondents reported that participation in international projects via platforms like LinkedIn and Discord helped them understand cultural differences and improve their ability to work in diverse environments.

The study also reveals that collaboration through social media enhances Generation Z's digital literacy. Buckingham (2007) explains that digital literacy includes the ability to understand, evaluate, and critically use digital information. More than 60% of respondents reported that their involvement in online collaboration helped them develop skills in researching information, evaluating sources, and producing quality digital content.

However, the success of collaboration through social media greatly depends on the presence and active participation of each member. Siemens (2005), in his theory of connectivism, emphasizes the importance of connectivity in digital learning. This study found that when a team member contributed less or was disengaged, the effectiveness of the collaboration declined. This suggests the need for strategies that encourage active participation and fair task distribution within collaborative groups.



Further discussions should consider the role of educational institutions and organizations in facilitating collaboration through social media. According to Fullan (2013), technology must be integrated with well-designed learning strategies to achieve optimal outcomes. The study found that institutional support—such as training on using social media for collaboration—is crucial to ensure that Generation Z can effectively use these technologies to improve their competencies.

Additionally, digital literacy is a key element that needs attention. Buckingham (2007) states that digital literacy must be explicitly taught to ensure that social media users can avoid threats such as misinformation and technology misuse. Respondents expressed that additional training in digital ethics and data security would be very helpful in supporting safer and more productive collaboration.

This study also shows that collaboration through social media has the potential to support the development of Generation Z's competencies across various fields. For example, in the workforce, platforms like LinkedIn are used to build professional networks, share job opportunities, and develop career skills. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) mention that social media allows users to build their personal brand, which is essential for their future and self-actualization in broader and larger spaces.

Gen Z and Social Media: Social Collaboration or Social Divide?

The role of social media in shaping the lives of Generation Z goes beyond personal communication; it has profound implications for how they learn, collaborate, and interact with the world. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube are often seen as tools for enhancing personal and professional skills. However, there are challenges and limitations that warrant a deeper critical analysis.

As Rheingold (2002) pointed out, social media creates "virtual communities," but are these communities truly inclusive and egalitarian? Or do these platforms reinforce echo chambers and create further division through algorithmic bias? Generation Z, who rely on social media for collaboration and learning, are often trapped in systems that filter their experiences through algorithms that influence how they interact. This raises important questions: Does social media truly facilitate cross-boundary collaboration, or does it exacerbate inequality by reinforcing the digital divide?

Additionally, while social media offers opportunities for informal learning, Greenhow and Lewin (2016) emphasize that this type of learning is often unstructured and lacks critical oversight. Platforms like YouTube and TikTok empower users to learn independently, but there is a risk of spreading misinformation and fragmented understanding of complex topics. In this context, can educational institutions play a more active role in guiding the use of social media as a more structured and controlled learning tool?

One of the key benefits of social media, as highlighted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), is its ability to promote real-time collaboration, allowing Generation Z to work across boundaries and collaborate in virtual spaces. However, as Hinds and Bailey (2003) point out, while virtual collaboration promises inclusivity, limited access to stable internet connections,



digital devices, and an understanding of digital tools in some regions worsens the digital divide. In this context, does the increasing reliance on social media for academic and professional collaboration further exacerbate existing inequalities, especially for groups in remote or disadvantaged areas?

Another challenge lies in the quality versus quantity of digital collaboration. While social media enables interaction with many people, does this collaboration truly foster meaningful problem-solving, or is it more about accumulating 'likes' and 'shares'? In an era of virtual teamwork, does social media collaboration focus more on personal branding than contributing to collective goals? This is an area that warrants further investigation, especially as Generation Z enters the workforce, where collaboration skills are crucial, yet the line between personal branding and genuine collaboration can be blurred.

In addition to its positive benefits, excessive use of social media also brings negative consequences, particularly related to mental health. Twenge et al. (2017) argue that constant exposure to idealized versions of life on social media can trigger feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and anxiety. Here arises the question: Is this phenomenon exclusive to Generation Z, or is it part of a broader social trend? As such, education needs to focus not only on digital literacy but also on building emotional resilience and mental well-being in a world increasingly dominated by online engagement.

Beyond the context of social collaboration, social media also plays a significant role in shaping professional identity. Platforms like LinkedIn allow Generation Z to build and promote their careers. However, this also raises questions about "digital authenticity" – to what extent does an individual's professional identity on social media reflect their true self, and how does this impact real-world social interactions? In the academic realm, this extends to the impact on scholarly work. Does the gamification of professional networks, often seen in LinkedIn endorsements or online publishing metrics, diminish the focus on substantial research and critical engagement with complex issues?

Siemens (2005) emphasized the importance of connectivity in the learning process, suggesting that collaboration through digital networks is essential for the future of education. However, in practice, how can educators ensure that online collaboration is not just superficial interaction, but also fosters meaningful exchange of ideas? Pedagogical approaches need to be developed to encourage more authentic collaboration in virtual spaces, considering not only technical skills but also social and emotional competencies.

With the evolution of digital platforms, there is also a continuing need for critical discussion about their implications for data privacy, ethical content creation, and the commercial interests behind these platforms. While they offer unprecedented opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing, social media platforms are often embedded in capitalist frameworks that monetize user behavior. Future researchers need to pay attention to the ethical responsibilities in exploring the intersection between social media, digital collaboration, and data privacy. How can we guide Generation Z to use these platforms not just for personal gain, but for collective empowerment and social change?



In conclusion, social media undeniably plays a crucial role in shaping the competencies of Generation Z. However, as demonstrated by this study, there are critical areas that require deeper investigation, including the ethical implications of digital engagement, the risks to mental health, and the uneven access to these tools. To fully harness the potential of social media for competency development, it is crucial to shift from viewing these platforms merely as instruments to a more critical and holistic perspective that integrates digital literacy with social responsibility, emotional intelligence, and inclusive educational strategies.

Going forward, both academic institutions and social media platforms must collaborate to create safe and inclusive spaces where Generation Z can thrive personally and professionally, while also contributing meaningfully to social change. This research opens up many avenues for further study, particularly in exploring the role of social media in fostering civic engagement, its long-term impact on career development, and the potential of digital collaboration in addressing global challenges.

4. CONCLUSION

Social media plays a significant role in shaping the competencies and social identities of Generation Z, but it also presents challenges that cannot be overlooked. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube offer opportunities for Generation Z to develop personal and professional skills, as well as enhance collaboration between individuals. However, uncontrolled use of social media can exacerbate the digital divide by overlooking equitable access to technology in certain areas. Additionally, social media as an informal learning tool is often unstructured and can lead to the spread of misinformation, potentially disrupting deep understanding of complex issues. Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions to provide clear guidance on how to utilize social media as a more controlled learning medium.

In addition to its impact on education, social media also has a significant influence on the mental health of Generation Z. Exposure to idealized versions of life online often exacerbates feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. In response to this phenomenon, there is a need to develop digital literacy that not only focuses on technical skills but also on emotional resilience and mental well-being. On the other hand, while social media supports the construction of professional identities through platforms like LinkedIn, questions arise regarding the extent to which digital authenticity affects real-world social interactions. Therefore, it is essential to continue exploring how social media can be used ethically and effectively to support the personal, professional, and social development of Generation Z, ensuring that its negative impacts are minimized through a more critical and inclusive approach.

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