

## Social Media Use and the Reconfiguration of Social Competence among Generation Z in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

The existence of social media has shifted face-to-face communication to mediated communication, leading to the assumption that social media has successfully replaced face-to-face communication. As a result, Gen Z's social competence is low, they tend to be individualistic, socially isolated, and the quality of communication within the family decreases. This has the potential to conflict with kinship values in Indonesian culture. This condition emphasizes the importance of research that specifically examines the social competence of Generation Z in the context of social media use. This study uses a mixed method, namely combining descriptive qualitative and descriptive quantitative research methods. The qualitative method is used to discover and understand the meaning of Gen Z's social competence. The quantitative method is used to strengthen supporting data for qualitative data through data mining on social media. The data collection method is carried out using in-depth interviews with Gen Z in cyberspace, supported by data mining on social media. Gen Z actually excels in communication and socialization skills, friendship networks, and adaptation in virtual interactions. These findings indicate a shift in social competence patterns influenced by the use of social media and digital interactions. These differences indicate that Gen Z's social competence is multidimensional, with advantages in online interactions and social networks, but still needs to be strengthened in traditional interpersonal aspects that support empathy, self-control, and face-to-face social relationships.

**Keywords:** *Social media, Gen Z, digital, communication technology, social competence.*

### INTRODUCTION

Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is known as the digital native generation. Gen Z grew and developed alongside the advancement of digital technology. Gen Z's ability to adapt to the continued development of digital technology is very good (Utami et al., 2025). Gen Z has good intelligence and intuition, so they can follow the development of digital technology. The Gen Z group is known as users of digital technology, and its numbers continue to increase. The number of internet users in Indonesia currently accounts for 78.19% of the total population (APJII, 2023). As many as 80% of these internet users use social media. Based on APJII data (2023), the largest number of social media users is in the Gen Z age group, namely 42%. The female gender is the largest social media user (51%), and the male 49%. A study on "How Teenagers Communicate Every Day" shows that 51% of teenagers aged 12-17 years communicate via the Internet by accessing social networking sites (Giarla, 2019). Only 29% of teenagers communicate with their friends face-to-face (face-to-face communication). This shows how the virtual world (through social networking sites) has been able to replace forms of communication in the social lives of teenagers (Sakharova et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2022).

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Gen Z uses social media daily for 7-8 hours (Candrasari et al., 2020). In its development, early adolescents (13-20 years) use the internet to play online games and social media, spending 5-7 hours per day (Ain et al., 2023). Furthermore, research conducted on teenagers aged 17-24 years showed that in one day, they visit social networking sites 4 times or sometimes more (Jarrar et al., 2022; Lin, 2018). This shows that Gen Z feels comfortable and satisfied in using social media. Previous studies have shown that using social networking sites has led to happiness and life satisfaction (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020; Wheatley & Buglass, 2019). Social networking sites have also succeeded in increasing the comfort and well-being of their users (Verduyn et al., 2022). Research others verify that active use of social networking sites is positively related to well-being (Marciano et al., 2024).

As digital natives, Gen Z uses social media to fulfill almost all of their daily activities, ranging from socializing, entertainment, learning, and working (Arifah & Candrasari, 2022). This situation has resulted in Gen Z's reduced ability to communicate and interact directly. For Gen Z, interactions with extended family and peers are often considered sufficient through social media platforms like WhatsApp. Consequently, their understanding of the importance of family and social relationships tends to decline. Furthermore, Gen Z also exhibits a tendency toward low self-control. This phenomenon is reflected in various social media posts that often display exaggerated emotional expressions. Social media then serves as a means of venting emotions, whether in the form of anger, sadness, or excessive joy. Thus, it can be said that social media has influenced the quality of Gen Z's social competence, which has distinct characteristics compared to previous generations. High-intensity social media use is thought to have caused a shift in social competence, even though social competence is a crucial factor in shaping an individual's character and ability to interact effectively in society.

To date, research on social media has focused more on the dependency, addiction, and psychological impacts of social media use on Gen Z. Existing research is limited in examining how social media not only diminishes but also shapes new patterns of Gen Z's social competence in the digital age. Studies specifically addressing changes in Gen Z's social competence as a result of social media use are still relatively limited. However, changes in communication and social interaction patterns in the digital era have the potential to shape social competence distinct from the concept of social competence in face-to-face interactions. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine how Gen Z's social competence in the digital era is shaped by the high intensity of social media use in communication and social interaction.

#### LITERATUR REVIEW

Gen Z is a generation that wants to feel connected to their friends. Gen Z is a generation that tends to have a high level of emotionality, and those under the age of 24 have a higher ability to use digital technology and are more active (Bishop, 2023). Social media, one of the characteristics of which is a connecting medium, is able to fulfill Gen Z's needs to be connected at all times. Social media for Gen Z can be a medium of expression and communication. Social media with features designed to make it easier for users to continue scrolling the screen and interacting has had an impact on Gen Z. The amount of time Gen Z spends using social media (> 3 hours/day) has an impact on their lives. Gen Z, whose lives depend mostly on digital technology, Gen Z's experiences, values, and behaviors are shaped by the unique context of digital technology. As a result, Gen Z lacks good social skills. Gen Z lacks experience in face-to-face interaction and communication because most of Gen Z's time is spent on social media. Face-to-face interpersonal communication is greatly reduced in Gen Z compared to the previous generation who did more face-to-face communication directly. Therefore, this study

will examine the social competence and mediated communication patterns of Gen Z in this digital era. The purpose of this study is to overcome communication problems between parents and Gen Z due to the increasingly large differences in perspective and competence. Given the widening gap in technological and social competence

Especially associated with the culture of Indonesian society which is very thick with a high kinship culture. The reality is that currently teenagers actually feel comfortable in establishing social relationships and communicating in cyberspace mediated by the media (internet). As a result, Gen Z in communicating directly with family, both nuclear and extended families, tends to be low in intensity. This has an impact on the values and culture of Indonesian families, which are full of families that have been greatly reduced and ingrained in Gen Z. This condition makes Gen Z's social competence inadequate.

The amount of time Gen Z spends using social media has an impact on Gen Z's life. One of them is the low social competence of Gen Z. Social competence is an individual's ability in communication and socialization, empathy, initiative, self-control, and adaptation (Shen et al., 2010; Sharov et al., 2021). Social competence can also be seen in two aspects, namely initiative and self-control. Initiative refers to the behavioral tendency to actively initiate and maintain social interactions, and self-control refers to the ability to regulate one's behavior and emotional response (Alblwi et al., 2021; Chen, 2023) studies have shown that social skills play an important role in children's overall well-being (Merrel & Gimpel, 2014).

Social competence includes the ability to communicate appropriately, adapt to social situations, possess emotional awareness and regulation, consider others' perspectives, and learn from previous experiences (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). These characteristics tend to be interrelated and contribute to fostering positive interactions with peers. Several studies have shown that social competence can be used to predict success in social relationships. Elements of social competence include decision-making ability, empathy, social skills, emotional control, and the absence of behaviors that can harm others in social interactions, such as aggressiveness, shyness, and social anxiety (Adjei et al., 2020; Yang & Brown, 2015).

Many studies have shown that social competence plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's character (Yue et al., 2024). Social competence is defined as a set of skills and behaviors necessary to get along with others and be accepted and liked in social settings. In line with previous research, social competence refers to a person's ability to interact and establish good relationships with others, and is an important indicator of an individual's well-being and psychological development (Yang & Brown, 2015; Reich, 2017).

The use of social media can cause delays in work or assignments, potentially causing accumulated task stress (Alblwi et al., 2021). Gen Z's ability to navigate online communities is better than their parents, but Gen Z lacks social skills (Candrasari et al., 2022). As a result, Gen Z is more prone to social anxiety and communication problems and feels as if they are more isolated from their peers (Harvey, 2022; Shao & Kwon, 2019).

Some even claim that excessive dependence on technology has led to the impoverishment of social skills (Grasso & Smith, 2022; Erdogan, 2023). The phenomenon is that Gen Z has good skills in using technology, including social media, but lacks social sensitivity (Indrawan & Candrasari, 2023). It is said in the study that Gen Z does not have communication skills is less sociable, less creative, and tends to be socially isolated (Giarla, 2019; Jarrar et al., 2022). In reality, currently, teenagers actually feel comfortable establishing social relationships and communicating even though it is mediated by the media (internet). Even Gen Z tends to be low in communicating within the family; as a result, the values and

culture of Indonesian families that are full of family have been greatly reduced and embedded in Gen Z. As a result, Gen Z's social competence is low. "Although face-to-face social connectedness is very related to well-being, it is unclear what happens when those interactions occur virtually" (Smith et al., 2021). The connecting factor could be that they are a generation that uses social media platforms to express their emotions and build connections, but at the same time misses the in-person connections they need to function well in society (Giarla, 2019). The use of online social platforms has the potential to produce a number of benefits, including gaining comfort and well-being from increased social relationships and gaining social capital. However, the use of social media has a negative impact on Gen Z. This condition illustrates that social networking applications basically make it easy for their users to connect with other users. The concept of social networking built through the internet facilitates individuals to connect with family, friends, and other people. This has a positive impact on the lives of individuals, especially those who feel lonely or have difficulty socializing. For individuals, their connection with other individuals can be fun because they can easily and quickly find friends to communicate and share with. For social media users, their connection with many people in cyberspace becomes social capital. Namely, it can increase social trust and increase positive perceptions of user engagement in social networks (Wheatley & Buglass, 2019; Opiyo & Kuruç, 2021; Dolan et al., 2025).

#### METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed method that combines quantitative and qualitative research. First, data related to Gen Z's social competence on social media is collected using qualitative methods. Including data related to the use of social media, involving the purpose of using social media, time spent using social media, positive and negative experiences, active or passive use of social media, and Gen Z communication on social media. The data was obtained through in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 informants aged 15-23 years. This study took informants in that age range because, based on previous research, it was stated that Gen Z, who were born after 2000 and in the age range of 15-23, have better abilities in using technology (Collie et al., 2024). The status of informants varies, namely, students, college students, and private employees. Informants are active users of social media. Namely, informants have at least one account on each social media platform. Research data shows that informants, on average, have accounts on Instagram, X, TikTok, and WhatsApp. The quantitative research method was conducted through data mining. This data mining aims to see and map what Gen Z talks about a lot on social media. Data was collected using the pytweettoolkit library, accessed using the Python programming language. Researchers conducted data mining on the Menfess account, which is quite popular among Gen Z in Indonesia. Furthermore, the tweets collected were tweets from the last 3 months when the research was conducted. Researchers looked for Menfess accounts with followers and actively discussed general topics around Gen Z's life, not specific topics that are often discussed on other Menfess accounts. Researchers found 4 (four) Menfess accounts with followers of 665,629, 2,870,490, 1,613,545, and 58,032.

The four menfess accounts are very active with daily tweets with Gen Z followers. This can be seen from the topics of conversation in the tweets that exist every day according to the character of Gen Z. Among them are topics about school problems, romance, and outpourings of the heart about life problems typical of Gen Z. The consideration for choosing the Menfess account is because the Menfess account is widely used by Gen Z to share feelings, experiences, or opinions. The mapping data of the topics of conversation in these Menfess

accounts can complement and strengthen research data related to social competence and Gen Z Communication patterns in Indonesia. Furthermore, the researcher combined research data from the two methods and conducted data analysis.

#### FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This study was conducted on Gen Z aged 15-23 years. The study was conducted on Gen Z who are the owners of social media accounts on at least 2 platforms and are active. Research data related to social media usage shows that, on average, informants have 4 active social media accounts, namely Instagram, X, TikTok, and WhatsApp. The following is the data from the informants involved in this research.

Table 1: Informant characteristics

No	Name	Age	Status
1	Galih Ayu Palupi	23 years	Employee
2	Hanifah	17 years	Student
3	Agung	23 years	Self-employed
4	Lintang Prameswari	19 years	College student
5	Anggoro	22 years	College student
6	Beauty	20 years	College student
7	M. Nurullah	21 years	College student
8	Mahendra	17 years	Student
9	Maulidya Dwi	16 years	Student
10	Nur Alifah	15 years	Student
11	Rahmad Dorijatun	22 years	employee
12	Rayhan Maulana Akbar	18 years	College student
13	Reza Fiolentina	22 years	Employee
14	Yusufil	23 years	Employee
15	Alfaraby	16 years	Student

The data illustrate that informants use social media more to increase friendships and expand their social networks. Informants aged 15-19 years are very active in adding friends. Although informants have not known them before, informants are active in approving friend requests. Informants spend 6-10 hours on social media. This study also found that informants, especially those under 20 years old, scroll TikTok for 6 hours per day. This means that informants are more passive in using social media. Informants' activities on social media increase wider social networks, posting and uploading photos. Informants who are all in the Gen Z category use TikTok more than Instagram or X in their daily lives. Previous studies have also found that teenage users, especially females, spend more time online uploading photos than male teenagers, increasing their friendship networks and engaging in social comparison (Ozimek & Bierhoff, 2016).

The informant's experience in using social media is described as a pleasant experience. This is reinforced by the duration of Gen Z's social media use which exceeds the standard limit (1-3 hours). Several female informants have had negative experiences, namely being victims of cyberbullying. However, informants do not feel traumatized by using social media. For informants, social media is used more to interact with friends in addition to seeking information than as a medium of entertainment. As stated by the first informant:

Every time I open my cellphone, the first thing I open is WA. After that, TikTok or Instagram. (Informant 1)

Likewise with the second and fifth informants:

Yes, I open Wa ... because on WA it's for communicating with friends. (Informant 2)

Social media is one way to communicate with friends and a way to add friends. (Informant 5)

Social media, which was born in the Web 2.0 era, was basically developed to make it easier for users to interact and communicate with others. Social media is a platform that gives users the opportunity to build a personal profile and then participate in all activities, such as posting text, images, and videos and sharing content with others. Through social media, Gen Z gets the opportunity to improve their communication skills. For Gen Z, communication carried out through media is easier and more convenient. Gen Z can develop their creativity to compose text, images, or videos.

Furthermore, research data illustrates that Gen Z, who spend a lot of time on social media, have unique social competencies. This results in the formation of social skills or social competencies in Gen Z. Based on field data, Gen Z's social competencies are slightly different from the social competencies of the previous generation. The results of the study showed that the social competencies of Generation X were higher, especially in terms of job responsibility and innovation, compared to the millennial generation (Nurhayati et al., 2023).

Most people use social media to socialize with peers, follow trends, get educational information, and express their feelings and aspirations. Social media also serves as a means to build networks, share opinions, and stay up-to-date on trends and entertainment. Research data suggests that Gen Z uses social media as a space for communication, entertainment, learning, social validation, and self-exploration and opinions, including topics they might find difficult to discuss directly with those closest to them, such as family.

This is evident from data mining results. This research drew data from social media, specifically from Menfess accounts, which are widely used by Gen Z in Indonesia. Menfess accounts are anonymous Twitter accounts managed by one or more admins to facilitate interaction and confidential messaging between users. Menfess accounts provide a comfortable space for users to express themselves. Menfess accounts on Twitter are a manifestation of Indonesian Gen Z's digital culture, combining the need for anonymous expression, community togetherness, and technological adaptability. Menfess accounts provide a space for Gen Z to build alternative social spaces online. Their presence continues to evolve in line with the dynamics of online interaction in Indonesia.

Research data shows that from four active Menfess accounts with large followings, Gen Z feels they have a space to speak and express themselves freely, comfortably and safely. This can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Percentage of Gen Z topics of discussion on menfess account

No	Topic of Discussion	Indicator	Percentage
1	Daily stories about love	friendship, personal experiences, and challenges at school or work.	31%
2	Fandom K-Pop	Discussion about K-pop idols, Korean dramas, and K-pop-related events	20%
3	Social and Political Issues Discussion	Social issues such as humanitarian issues, women's rights, social justice, and environmental issues. Political issues include political parties, political elites, elections, government, and regional elections.	16%
4	Gossip and rumors	about the lives of celebrities, influencers, or even events on campus or in their environment.	14%
5	Fashion and Beauty Trends	Fashion trends created by influencers, fashion tips, beauty, make-up tutorials, and beauty product reviews	8%
6	Technology and Gadgets	Discussion about new technology, latest devices, applications, and social media features	6%
7	Local Memes and Humor	memes and humor content that are trending among Gen Z. These memes are often related to pop culture, student life, and currently viral things.	5%

The data shows that social media has become a relevant space for Gen Z to discuss various topics, especially personal matters. Data mining results obtained from four menfess accounts indicate that the most frequently discussed topic among Gen Z is sharing their feelings (as seen in Table 2). Researchers then sorted the conversation topics based on replies, views, and likes and selected the five highest replies. The results further confirmed that the top five replies included four topics about sharing their feelings daily, with subtopics of personal experiences and romantic relationships, and only one topic related to social issues, with a subtopic of humanitarian issues.

The menfess account, which provides a space for anyone due to its anonymity, allows Gen Z to feel free to speak and share their hearts and minds. Menfess has become a new, comfortable space for Gen Z to express their feelings, desires, and thoughts. The presence of this space seems to indicate that Gen Z is no longer entirely dependent on others, including family, to discuss everything from personal matters to general issues. Menfess also serves as a space where language and experiences are instantly understood by its members, creating a strong sense of community and belonging that may not always be found within a family environment.

Based on this data, it appears that the Menfess account has been able to encourage Gen Z to more freely discuss sensitive topics such as mental health, romantic relationships, self-identity, and academic pressure—topics that are often difficult to discuss with parents due to differences in values and experiences. Through Menfess, Gen Z can experiment with their opinions, identities, and feelings, which contributes to the process of developing their sense of self. Furthermore, they also receive validation from peers when their posts receive likes, retweets, or supportive replies from dozens to hundreds of other anonymous accounts.

## DISCUSSION

### *Gen Z Social Competence*

Social competence is a social skill that is seen in individual involvement, initiative, cooperation (sharing something), empathy, making friends, self-control, and adaptation. Research data has successfully mapped the social competence of Gen Z in Indonesia in the aspects of making friends, initiative, empathy and self-control.

Social competence in the aspect of making friends for Gen Z is somewhat different from the previous generation. For informants (Gen Z) social media is used to make friends. This means that Gen Z views the concept of friendship as not having to know each other first but adding this friendship to get support from others. In line with these findings, previous studies have also shown the same results. Gen Z prefers to be approached online rather than in person, and Gen Z feels appreciated for their choices (Verduyn et al., 2022). Especially Gen Z, who have an open personality, find it easier to get to know other people in cyberspace. As expressed by the seventh, ninth, and eleventh informants below:

You could say I'm an extrovert too, so like anyone I meet, even if I don't know them at first or suddenly on social media, I will approach them. As long as the person has a positive impact, I'm actually not picky. (Informant 7)

I really want to reach out to him directly, like, "Hello, I'm Doro," on social media. So, I think, now I'm not shy, to send a message or get to know him first. Okay, because it's the virtual world, so it's more relaxed. (Informant 9)

Social media is currently also one of the ways for us to increase networking. Almost everyone can use social media, so we can expand our relationships, both with old friends and new people we meet. (Informant 11)

Research facts show that Gen Z considers that the virtual world has become the same social environment as the real world. Gen Z finds it easier to make more friends in the virtual world, and they use this condition to increase networking. Gen Z realizes that building a network is an important factor in helping them build social capital. Furthermore, this study revealed that friendships built in the virtual world are not just about adding followers. It is proven that the friendships built on social media are not one-sided but are between them, following each other. As emphasized by informants number nine and ten:

Eh, if we are on social media, we are generally mutual, yes. You could say it's like online friends. I have met several times in person with friends I know on social media, like in Surabaya. We even hang out together if we happen to be in the same city. (Informant 9)

We definitely follow each other on Instagram. So, social media is not only to improve portfolios, although that is also important, but also to expand networks. (Informant 10)

This condition shows that informants (Gen Z) are more focused on expanding networks through social media than direct contact. Especially for Gen Z, who are still students. Gen Z believes that building connections does not have to be based on emotional ties or having to

know each other first. But just following each other between them has become the standard for Gen Z in understanding the value of friendship. This phenomenon indicates a fundamental shift in the concept of friendship. For Gen Z, having many online friends is a source of pride, even if they don't know each other. Therefore, in this digital age, having many online friends doesn't necessarily mean being more socially competent, while having fewer friends (followers) doesn't necessarily mean being less socially competent. Previous studies have also suggested that in the digital age, measuring social competence solely through the number of friends (followers) on platforms like Facebook is considered less relevant (Adjei et al., 2020).

This is different from the previous generation. Gen X considers that, as social beings, humans should interact with others directly to build connections (Calvo-Porrall & Pesqueira-Sanchez, 2020). Building social relationships face-to-face can create emotional closeness. So that individuals as social beings do not feel lonely and have friends to share with. Considering that each individual will have personal problems that cannot be expressed and can only be expressed to those closest to them. Generation Z seems to oppose this basic human characteristic by limiting their interactions to the real world. This makes them unable to build and maintain face-to-face relationships like previous generations (Giarla, 2019). This pattern shows that Gen Z is more comfortable communicating virtually than face-to-face interactions. The speed and ease of access to information through social media also allow them to stay connected with friends, family, and communities more efficiently. However, researchers found that the social interactions carried out by Gen Z have reduced the intensity of Gen Z meetings with family and relatives. Family relationships are less established, so Gen Z is less familiar with relatives or their closest social environment.

#### *Kinship and Gen Z*

Social competence involves not only the ability to interact with peers or the wider community, but also the ability to maintain relationships with family members, including parents, siblings, and close relatives. One aspect that can be used to assess social competence is active participation in family activities (Bakker, 2021). Research data shows that several informants consider social media to be quite effective as a means of interacting with family members. For Generation Z, their presence in extended family groups on social media is considered sufficient to represent their participation and involvement as part of the extended family. As stated by the following informant:

I rarely attend family gatherings... I often talk on WhatsApp. I already know about my cousins... (Informant 9)

Usually, I don't really attend family gatherings. I'm already updated on all the news in the WhatsApp group... so I don't really feel like attending in person. When I meet with family, it's sometimes just a formality. I can find out all the news and gossip from the chat. (Informant 11)

These facts indicate a significant shift in Gen Z's social competence, particularly regarding the socialization process within the family. Traditional social competence, which emphasized an individual's ability to interact directly, understand nonverbal cues, and build emotional closeness through face-to-face interaction, is now shifting. For Gen Z, participation in family activities can be represented through conversations and interactions on social media.

Therefore, this shift indicates that Gen Z's social competence is not lost, but rather changing form, adapting to the digital context that dominates their social lives.

Kinship culture is also an important part of Indonesian society. In a social context, kinship is not only limited to blood relations, but also includes emotional, social, and cultural ties. In Indonesia, which consists of various ethnicities, religions, and customs, the kinship system plays an important role in shaping identity and social interaction. In Indonesia, the family is a very important social unit in society. Many cultures in Indonesia consider close family relationships to be the foundation of social life. Responsibility for the family is not only limited to core members but also involves distant relatives. This is reflected in practices such as "silaturahmi," where visits between family members, both near and far, are an important part of everyday life.

Silaturahmi is a form of social relationship to maintain relationships of affection and brotherhood with fellow human beings, especially with family and relatives. Silaturahmi is the value of kinship, which is one of the cultural characteristics of Indonesian society. Silaturahmi is a tradition that upholds the values of family, brotherhood, and social relationships. In Indonesia, this value is very important in strengthening social ties, both at the family and community levels. Silaturahmi can be built through physical contact and direct meetings. The existence of social media has had an impact on reducing direct meetings. Gen Z prefers to communicate and interact socially through media. Although social media provides convenience, for Indonesian people, face-to-face interaction and communication still have an important place in the culture of silaturahmi.

These kinship values are built not only by building connections but also through direct communication, so that emotional bonds are built. In reality, Gen Z considers that direct communication is no longer the main factor in friendship. So that friendships between Gen Z have no emotional ties but are based on interests. This condition is in accordance with the character of Web 2.0 technology, that each individual will be connected because of common interests or shared interests.

The bonds of friendship between Gen Z, apart from having common interests or interests, are also based on standard factors required by social media. This means that the form of communication or dialogue that is built is to increase engagement with followers. As stated by the fourteenth informant below:

For Instagram, I feel it is important to reply to comments in order to increase engagement with followers. By replying to comments, my followers will see that this account is active. And I think replying to comments is also our appreciation as account owners to our friends in cyberspace. It cannot be denied that I actually need followers, too... he..he..he.. By actively posting or giving responses to followers, I think it is to increase the trust of followers in our account, right? (Informant 14).

In addition to building friendships to improve networking, Gen Z also builds friendships on social media to increase followers. This means that many friendships are not built on social interactions with others. But to add followers who can increase Gen Z's self-confidence. Also, to increase their existence in cyberspace.

My goal in using social media is to increase relationships. I also look for followers to increase trust. For me, the importance of followers is to help me assess the posts I make. (Informant 6)

From these data, it can be analyzed that friendships built through social media are because on interests, so emotional bonds are less built. As a result, communication between them is also limited. This can be seen from how Gen Z will respond to comments from their close friends. For friends who are not so close or have not been known in the real world, communication is not well-established. It is proven that most informants stated that they only provide comments to friends on social media who are already known. They have never met, even though they have followed each other and even interacted on social media.

The friendship ties built by Gen Z are based on interests, namely, to get followers, making friendship ties weak. This means that even though Gen Z has many followers on their social media, they cannot build quality friendships. The low quality of friendships makes Gen Z feel lonely because followers actually only reflect social status, popularity, and identity. Followers for Gen Z are considered an indicator of social status. Increasing the number of followers can provide a sense of validation and recognition in cyberspace (Ong et al., 2024). Gen Z often associates popularity with success, so many try to expand their reach of followers as part of their search for identity. Gen Z realizes that the number of followers does not always reflect real or meaningful relationships. This condition causes Gen Z to feel like they don't have close friends to share with. This factor allows Gen Z to express their feelings and desires through social media. This can be seen from how Gen Z often shares personal problems on social media.

Developing followers can be a strength in enriching their social experience. Anonymity also strengthens Gen Z in constructing an identity that Gen Z uses to expand their social network. However, the social experience gained by Gen Z through interaction and communication on social media impacts low social competence. Good social competence can improve the quality of friendship (Masalimova et al., 2023). On the other hand, low social competence can hinder individuals in socializing and social adaptation, which can cause individuals to withdraw socially (Yue et al., 2024; Verduyn et al., 2020).

If we look at Table 2 we see that Gen Z's discussion topics on social media are not only about heartfelt outpourings, but Gen Z also discusses a lot about social and political issues. This shows that Gen Z still cares and togetherness, especially on issues concerning humanity, injustice, and politics. The values of mutual cooperation, which are one of the values in kinship culture in Indonesia, are still attached to Gen Z. The topic of technology and gadgets is also one of the topics that Gen Z talks about when communicating and interacting on social media. Social media helps connect Gen Z with other individuals with the same interests. Through followers and friendships in cyberspace, Gen Z can share experiences, opinions, and knowledge (Marciano et al., 2024). Therefore, Gen Z's ability to adapt, especially to technological developments, is very good. On the other hand, the number of followers can not only provide self-confidence but can also cause pressure. Gen Z often unconsciously makes social comparisons and anxiety related to the number of likes and comments (Situmorang & Salim, 2020). This is what results in the emergence of negative impacts on mental health. This condition ultimately makes Gen Z realize that online friendships do not reflect real relationships. This opens up awareness for some informants to not only build social relationships and communication in the virtual world.

Therefore, Gen Z also recognizes the importance of maintaining a balance between online and offline communication, especially among informants over the age of 20. They still value face-to-face interactions, especially in more personal or in-depth relationships. Technology remains an important bridge connecting offline and online communication. As expressed by the seventh and eighth informants below:

In my opinion, there must be a balance in the real world and in the virtual world. (Informant 7)

The virtual world is not always good, so meeting friends in person is also necessary. Playing together, hanging out together is still necessary. (Informant 8)

Both informant statements indicate that informants (Gen Z) tend to be more aware of the importance of social welfare, namely building quality social relationships. They may prefer meaningful and in-depth interactions, rather than simply fulfilling social obligations. This is reinforced by other informants who said that maintaining friendships is easier to do face-to-face. This means that Gen Z still considers direct communication (face-to-face) to be important, especially for personal conversations. As a form of Gen Z's responsibility towards the Silaturahmi tradition, Gen Z prefers small meetings with close friends rather than large groups. Gen Z realizes that although social media makes it easier to establish communication and social interaction, face-to-face interaction still has an important place in the culture of Silaturahmi. The values in silaturahmi are very important in strengthening social ties, both at the family and community levels.

## CONCLUSION

The increasing popularity of smartphones and a number of social media applications has increased Gen Z's accessibility to social media. In addition, the existence of smartphones provides greater accessibility for Gen Z for social interaction and getting social support through their social networks. Overall, this study has revealed that the use of social media has shaped the social competence of Gen Z in Indonesia. Compared to the previous generation, Gen Z, known as digital natives, has different social competence. This difference is because Gen Z has obtained social media that is considered capable of developing communication and social relationships with the support of sophisticated social media features. Social media based on social networks is considered by Gen Z to be able to help Gen Z in developing friendships. For Gen Z, friendship no longer has to be based on proximity values as the previous generation did in building friendships. Gen Z prefers to do mediated communication (social media). Gen Z focuses more on increasing the number of friendships (quantity) than building quality friendships. Therefore, Gen Z's social competence related to self-control is lower than the previous generation. Gen Z tends to be unable to control themselves (emotions) so they pour out their hearts on social media. Likewise, the initiative aspect of social competence. Gen Z's habit of only scrolling on social media makes Gen Z's initiative lower in the process of building communication and social interaction in the real world. Gen Z prefers visual communication and fast interaction and often relies on social media to shape their identity. It is important for parents to understand Gen Z's social competence which is currently being shaped and influenced by social media.

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