

The Digital Interaction of Generation Z: Communication Patterns with Idols Through TikTok Live Streaming

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Abstract

This research examines the digital interaction patterns of Generation Z with their idols through live streaming on TikTok. As a generation deeply connected to digital technology, Generation Z spends a significant amount of time on social media platforms, with TikTok being one of the most popular choices due to its interactive live streaming feature. This study aims to explore how real-time communication during live streaming influences the parasocial relationship between fans and idols. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data was collected through online participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. A total of 12 participants aged 18 to 23 who actively followed live streaming sessions on TikTok were involved in this research. The study results revealed that 75% of participants felt emotionally closer to their idols during live streaming compared to pre-recorded content. The main interaction patterns observed included personal comments and questions, as well as the use of interactive features such as sending virtual gifts, which allowed fans to receive direct recognition from their idols. These interactions strengthened the emotional bond between fans and idols. The study also found that the idol's personality and responsiveness significantly influenced fan engagement. More interactive and responsive live sessions tended to sustain fan interest, while longer and less interactive sessions led to a decline in engagement. This research highlights how live streaming technology plays a crucial role in shaping digital communication patterns, particularly in strengthening parasocial relationships between Generation Z and their idols on TikTok. The study provides insights into the dynamics of real-time digital communication and its impact on fan-idol relationships, contributing to a broader understanding of the role of social media in contemporary fan culture.

Keywords: *Gen Z, Tiktok Live Streaming, Idols, Communication Patterns*

Introduction

Generation Z, born between 1995-2010, is a generation that has been familiar with digital technology from an early age (Sakitri, 2021). They live amidst rapid technological advancements and are one of the most active groups on social media (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021). As a generation globally connected through mobile devices and the internet, Gen Z spends a significant amount of time in digital interactions. Research shows that 33% of Generation Z use their phones for more than 6 hours each day, with Indonesia being one of the top countries in digital media usage. In Indonesia, the average phone usage time by Gen Z reaches 8.5 hours per day, far exceeding that of previous generations (Kim et al., 2020). This data emphasizes the dominant role of technology in the daily lives of Generation Z, especially in social media.

One of the trends highly favored by Generation Z is live streaming, which enables real-time interaction between users and content creators (Agustina, 2018). Among various social media platforms, TikTok stands out as the most popular among Generation Z, primarily due to its interactive and instant live streaming feature (Agistiani et al., 2023). TikTok allows users to interact directly with their idols, whether they are celebrities, influencers, or content creators. Unlike other platforms that primarily rely on one-way communication, TikTok provides a space for users to engage directly through real-time comments and interactive features such as gift-giving (Ibrahim, 2023).

Generation Z places a strong emphasis on authentic and interactive communication, and TikTok live streaming offers them the opportunity to experience a more personal connection with their idols. During live broadcasts, idols not only present entertaining content but also engage directly with fans by responding to their questions, comments, and support. This creates a two-way interaction that fosters active fan participation, making them feel part of a more intimate community (Kompas.com, 2015). This interactive experience is crucial for Generation Z, who tend to seek direct engagement and feel more connected to their idols through such interactions.

The parasocial communication patterns between fans and idols through social media have become a subject of academic study in recent years. Research by (Sagita & Kadewandana, 2017) revealed how fans establish parasocial relationships with their idols on platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, despite the one-sided nature of these interactions. However, social media platforms like TikTok, with its live streaming feature, introduce a new dimension to these interaction patterns. Live streaming enables a more intimate, two-way interaction where idols can directly communicate with fans, respond to comments, and even personally acknowledge individual fans. This creates a more intense and personal communication experience compared to traditional social media platforms like Instagram or Twitter (Nuruzzahra et al., 2023).

Furthermore, (Paulus, 2024) highlights how live streaming on TikTok creates a distinct experience compared to pre-recorded videos. TikTok Live encourages active engagement through real-time features that allow users to respond directly to content creators, either through comments or by sending gifts as a form of support. This strengthens the emotional bond between fans and idols. Generation Z uses TikTok as a primary platform to shape their digital identity and interact with content in an active manner, making them not just passive consumers but also active participants who can influence the direction of discussions during live streaming sessions (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021).

However, despite the extensive research on parasocial relationships on social media, there is a gap in studies that specifically examine real-time communication patterns through live streaming on TikTok, particularly in the context of Indonesian culture. Most previous research has focused on other platforms such as Instagram or YouTube, which do not offer the same real-time interaction as TikTok. Additionally, studies exploring how Generation Z communicates with their idols through live streaming remain limited, especially in understanding how this experience shapes emotional connections and fan loyalty towards idols.

This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the communication patterns of Generation Z with their idols through live streaming on TikTok. It will analyze how real-time interactions influence the formation of parasocial relationships, and how cultural aspects affect these communication patterns in Indonesia. Additionally, this research

will examine the impact of fans' active participation during live streaming sessions on their sense of attachment and loyalty towards their idols.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Descriptive qualitative research is a method aimed at providing an in-depth and systematic understanding of phenomena without manipulation or intervention (Rahardjo, 2017). The primary focus is to comprehensively understand and explain the communication patterns of Generation Z with their idols through TikTok's live streaming feature. The study seeks to explore real-time interactions that occur during live streaming sessions and how these interactions shape emotional attachments between fans and idols. This research aims to uncover the specific and unique phenomena experienced by TikTok users, particularly Generation Z in Indonesia.

Data collection is conducted through three main methods: online participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation involves directly monitoring idol live streaming sessions on TikTok to record interaction patterns and fan responses. In addition, semi-structured interviews are conducted with 10-12 Generation Z participants who actively follow live streaming sessions on TikTok. These interviews aim to explore the motivations, experiences, and feelings of participants in communicating with their idols. Additional data, such as recordings of live streaming sessions, are also collected to analyze interactions in greater detail.

The data obtained is analyzed using thematic analysis, where data from interviews and observations are coded to identify key themes related to communication patterns, engagement, and their impact on fan-idol relationships. Data validity is maintained through triangulation, by comparing findings from various data sources (observations, interviews, and documentation), as well as member checks to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation. Therefore, this research aims to provide a clear understanding of how live streaming on TikTok influences the dynamics of parasocial relationships between Generation Z and their idols.

Result

This study involved 12 participants from Generation Z who actively follow live streaming sessions on TikTok. Most participants were between the ages of 18 and 23, with the majority residing in major cities across Indonesia. On average, participants spend around 3 to 4 hours per day on TikTok, attending approximately 1 to 2 live streaming sessions each week. The participants typically follow celebrities, influencers, or content creators in the fields of entertainment, beauty, and lifestyle.

Motivation for Following Live Streaming on TikTok

The interview results show that the main motivation for participants to follow live streaming sessions is the desire to feel closer and engage directly with their idols. A total of 75% of participants stated that they feel more connected to their idols during live sessions compared to just watching pre-recorded content. This is supported by one participant's statement, who said:

In Indonesian : "Ketika menonton live streaming, saya merasa seperti benar-benar berbicara dengan idola saya. Mereka bisa langsung merespons komentar saya, dan itu membuat saya merasa lebih dekat dengan mereka."

In English : *"When I watch live streaming, it feels like I'm really talking to my idol. They can respond to my comments right away, and it makes me feel closer to them."*

Additionally, some participants mentioned that live streaming offers the opportunity to access exclusive information not available in other content. Many idols often use live sessions to discuss things that have not yet been shared in their regular content. This adds extra value for fans who want to learn more about their idols.

Communication Patterns During Live Streaming Sessions

Based on the observations conducted, several prominent communication patterns emerged during TikTok live streaming sessions. First, fan comments generally fall into two main categories: personal comments and general questions. Personal comments often contain expressions of support or affection towards the idol, while general questions are more focused on the topic being discussed by the idol during the live session.

The idol's response also plays a significant role in shaping the interaction. Most idols observed during live streaming sessions directly responded to specific questions or comments, although not all could be addressed due to the high volume of comments. However, idols tend to give more attention to fans who send "gifts," a TikTok feature that allows users to give virtual gifts to content creators. This aligns with interview findings, where participants mentioned feeling more noticed when they sent gifts to the idol, as expressed by one participant:

In Indonesian : *"Ketika saya mengirim gift, idola saya langsung menyebut nama saya dan mengucapkan terima kasih. Rasanya seperti saya benar-benar diakui, dan itu pengalaman yang sangat menyenangkan."*

In English : *"When I sent a gift, my idol immediately mentioned my name and thanked me. It felt like I was truly recognized, and it was a very enjoyable experience."*

The Impact of Real-Time Interaction on Parasocial Relationships

The parasocial relationship between fans and idols appears to be strengthened through real-time interaction on TikTok Live. A total of 83% of participants felt that live streaming sessions made them feel emotionally closer to their idols. This parasocial relationship is characterized by the feeling of having a personal connection with the idol, even though the communication is actually one-sided. One participant described it as:

In Indonesian : *"Saat menonton konten biasa, saya hanya merasa seperti penonton. Tapi ketika di live streaming, saya merasa seperti bagian dari komunitas mereka. Saya merasa lebih terlibat dan penting, karena saya bisa berbicara langsung dengan mereka."*

In English : *"When watching regular content, I only feel like a viewer. But during live streaming, I feel like part of their community. I feel more engaged and important because I can interact with them directly."*

This phenomenon is also strengthened by the idol's ability to cultivate intimacy during live sessions by directly responding to fan comments or speaking in a more personal tone. Idols who use a friendly and informal communication style tend to foster closer relationships with their fans.

The Factors of Influence on Fan Engagement

Several factors were found to significantly influence the level of fan engagement during live streaming sessions. One key factor is the idol's personality and charisma. Idols who actively respond to fans and display a friendly demeanor tend to attract

greater fan engagement throughout the session. Conversely, when idols are less responsive or when the session feels too one-sided, fans tend to lose interest.

The duration of the live session also affects engagement. Longer live sessions often reduce fan participation as fans may become bored or fatigued. On the other hand, shorter and more interactive live sessions are better at maintaining fan interest and engagement throughout the broadcast.

Additionally, interactive features on TikTok, such as real-time gifts and emojis, play a crucial role in boosting fan involvement. Most participants mentioned that they felt more connected and active when using these features, as they received direct attention from their idols.

Implications for Fan Loyalty

Live streaming sessions have been shown to enhance fan loyalty toward idols. 91% of participants admitted that they would continue to follow live streaming sessions in the future, even when they are not always able to interact directly with the idol. Live sessions are perceived as an effective way to strengthen the connection with idols, create a solid fan community, and foster a sense of belonging. As one participant stated:

In Indonesian: *"Setelah beberapa kali ikut live streaming, saya merasa semakin loyal terhadap idola saya. Rasanya seperti saya sudah menjadi bagian dari perjalanan mereka, dan saya ingin terus mendukung mereka."*

In English: *"After attending several live streaming sessions, I feel increasingly loyal to my idol. It feels like I've become part of their journey, and I want to continue supporting them."*

The relationships formed through live streaming not only impact fan loyalty on an emotional level but also increase engagement within the fan community and active participation in other activities involving the idol, such as purchasing merchandise or supporting the idol on other social media platforms.

Discussion

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that live streaming on TikTok has a significant impact on shaping communication patterns and strengthening parasocial relationships between Generation Z and their idols. Real-time interaction offers fans a more personal experience, deepening emotional attachment and encouraging more active engagement. This aligns with the findings of (Paulus, 2024), which suggest that interaction through live streaming creates a more intense and intimate experience compared to pre-recorded content.

However, this study also reveals several challenges, such as the imbalance between the number of comments idols receive and their ability to respond personally. This creates a sense of exclusivity among fans who receive direct attention, but also carries the potential for feelings of exclusion among those who do not get a response. Therefore, it is crucial for idols to manage their interactions with fans fairly and equitably.

In the context of Indonesian culture, live streaming on TikTok is not only a medium for entertainment but also a means to strengthen social bonds among fans. TikTok has become a primary platform for Generation Z to build their digital identity and establish connections with public figures they admire, reflecting new communication dynamics in the digital era.

Conclusion

This study has examined the digital interaction patterns of Generation Z with their idols through live streaming on TikTok, providing insights into how real-time communication can strengthen parasocial relationships. The findings show that TikTok's live streaming feature plays a significant role in transforming passive content consumption into active engagement, allowing fans to feel closer and emotionally connected to their idols. Interactions through comments and gift-giving create a sense of intimacy and recognition, which strengthens the emotional bond between fans and idols. This research contributes to the development of scientific knowledge by highlighting the impact of real-time digital communication in shaping relationships between public figures and their followers, especially among the highly interactive Generation Z.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. While the sample size is sufficient for a qualitative approach, it may not fully represent the broader population of Generation Z TikTok users. Additionally, the focus on users in Indonesia means that the findings may not entirely apply to other cultural contexts, where different social norms and values could influence online communication patterns. Therefore, generalizations from this study should be made with caution. Despite these limitations, the study has expanded our understanding of how real-time digital interaction through live streaming contributes to strengthening parasocial relationships, providing a foundation for further exploration of how these dynamics evolve across different platforms and cultures.

Based on the findings, several recommendations for future research can be made. First, future studies should consider exploring the comparative effects of live streaming across various platforms, such as YouTube Live or Instagram Live, to see how specific platform features shape fan-idol interactions. Expanding the research to various cultural and demographic groups would also be valuable in understanding how diverse cultural backgrounds influence communication behaviors and relationship formation in online environments.

Additionally, further research could explore the long-term implications of parasocial relationships formed through live streaming, particularly how these relationships affect fan loyalty, mental health, and consumer behavior over time. There is also room to investigate how public figures and influencers strategically manage these interactions to build sustainable fan communities. Ultimately, these recommendations could deepen our understanding of digital communication dynamics in real-time interactions and help develop better engagement strategies for content creators and brands.

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