HEALING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA MOTIVATIONAL CONTENT AMONG GEN Z

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Abstract

Social media has become a pivotal communication platform in the digital age, where individuals—especially Generation Z (born 1997-2012)—actively engage to meet their social, informational, and emotional needs. With platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok attracting billions of active users, short videos and lifestyle content have become dominant forms of engagement, particularly among Generation Z, who are digital natives with an essential reliance on technology and the internet. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, which attract billions of active users, have popularised short videos and lifestyle content as dominant forms of interaction. The aim of this research is to examine the impact of motivational quotes on Generation Z, focusing on their engagement patterns and preferences for specific types of quotes. This quantitative survey research results reveal that social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, serve as primary channels for motivational content consumption. A notable gender difference was found in engagement, with females showing a higher participation rate in motivational content, suggesting the need for targeted strategies for content creators. The findings indicate that motivational content on social media is a valuable tool for fostering emotional support and resilience. Future research should examine this gap in greater depth, exploring the long-term effects of motivational content on mental health, its potential over-reliance, and its impact across different cultural contexts and demographics within Malaysia.

Keywords: *Generation Z, Motivational Content, Social Media, Well Being, Emotional Resilience*

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Terapi melalui Kandungan Motivasi Media Sosial dalam kalangan Gen Z

Abstrak

Kesan Media sosial telah menjadi platform komunikasi yang sangat penting pada era digital terutamanya kepada Generasi Z. Genrasi ini merupakan golongan yang agak tinggi kepenggunaan media sosial untuk memenuhi keperluan sosial, maklumat, dan emosi mereka. Platform seperti Facebook, Instagram, dan TikTok telah menarik berbilion pengguna aktif, video pendek dan kandungan -kandungan berbentuk gaya hidup dan motivasi. Generasi Z sering mencari keselesaan dalam talian kerana mereka sedang mencari dorongan dan motivasi ketika menghadapi masa-masa yang sukar Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mengkaji impak kandungan motivasi terhadap Generasi Z, dengan memberi tumpuan kepada corak penglibatan mereka dan keutamaan untuk jenis petikan tertentu. Hasil Kajian menunjukkan bahawa media sosial, terutamanya Instagram dan TikTok, berfungsi sebagai saluran utama untuk kandungan motivasi. Penemuan ini menunjukkan bahawa kandungan motivasi di media sosial adalah satu bentuk sokongan kepada generasi ini untuk memupuk sokongan emosi dan ketahanan mental. Penyelidikan masa depan harus meneroka kesan jangka panjang kandungan motivasi terhadap kesihatan mental, potensi ketergantungan berlebihan, serta impaknya dalam konteks budaya dan demografi yang berbeza di Malaysia.

Kata Kunci: *Generasi Z, kandungan motivasi, Media Sosial, Ketahanan Emosi*

Introduction

In the digital age, motivational social media content has emerged as a powerful tool to inspire and uplift audiences worldwide. Creators in this niche blend expressive writing with visual and auditory elements to craft content that resonates deeply with their followers. This fusion creates a therapeutic experience, providing moments of solace and empowerment amidst the chaos of daily life. With the help of social media, which is a fundamental component of communication platforms in a digital society, people can use their smartphones to write, share their thoughts, communicate online, display their lifestyles, and watch videos for entertainment (Mohite, Parchure, 2023 ; Ramadani,2024).

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) highlights the critical role of social media by emphasizing that individuals actively seek specific media

platforms to fulfill various psychological and social needs. Unlike traditional media consumption, which assumes a passive audience, UGT views people as active participants in selecting and using media to achieve personal satisfaction. The uses and gratifications theory (UGT) explains the importance of social media because people are motivated to seek different media to fulfil needs and achieve satisfaction, including socialization, learning, and self- expression (Yuemin et al., 2023). The UGT is a framework that explains how individuals actively use media to satisfy specific needs and desires. When applied to social media, UGT reveals insights into why people engage with platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and LinkedIn. Whiting and Williams conducted a study applying UGT to explore the motivations behind individuals' use of social media platforms (Eissa, & Eissa, 2022). The study highlighted that social media serves a dynamic and interactive role in fulfilling a wide range of cognitive, social, and emotional need. Recent studies have extended the application of UGT to emerging media platforms, shedding light on new user behaviors. Luo and Remus (2020) focused on TikTok usage among young people, revealing that entertainment and escapism were the primary motivations for engaging with short video platforms. This aligns with the idea that users turn to social media for stress relief and enjoyment through easily consumable content.

Social media platforms, with their interactive nature, allow users to connect with others, gain information, express themselves, and escape from daily routines. Hence, inspirational quotes are one of the most popular content today. Creators often use expressive writing to transform profound thoughts into concise and relatable messages. These quotes act as inspiration, addressing themes like resilience, self-love, and personal growth (Sahakian, 2024). They connect emotionally, evoking introspection and encouraging positive change.

Generation Z (Gen Z), defined by the generation theory as a demographic born between 1997 and 2012, is between 12 and 27 years old (Mishra, Sharma and Garg, 2024). These generations are also known as “true digital natives,” adept at searching the internet for information and meeting their needs (McKinsey, 2023). They are divided between individuals who are still in their education and those who have already entered the workforce for several years. Their views and behaviours are more influenced by digital technology than other generations because of their extensive exposure to mobile systems, technology, and the internet from a young age (Chang and Chang, 2023). Hence, Gen Z relies on social media to fulfil their needs, making

these platforms vital daily (Yuemin et al., 2023). Motivational social media content involves creators crafting inspirational quotes using expressive writing, often paired with relaxing background music or images to bring a therapeutic experience that inspires and uplifts individuals (Al-Jarf, 2013; Tumasang, 2022). These contents can enhance cognitive engagement, helping users process and internalize positive messages more effectively (Blumenfeld, Kempler and Krajcik, 2006), fostering a positive mindset and self-assurance (Bedrov and Bulaj, 2018). It aims to boost confidence and create a sense of connection during difficult periods.

Generation Z (Gen Z), become less forthcoming in their interactions with those around them, many parents may find it challenging to comprehend their children's current situations and perspectives. Hence, this phenomenon underscores the first problem of the study is the emergence of a communication gap between Gen Z and their parents due to reliance on technology and social media. This gap could lead to Gen Z's reluctance to communicate openly with their parents, often causing perceived misunderstandings (Nursanti et al., 2022). Implementing weekly phone-free gatherings can be a way to develop open communication and connection between parents and Generation Z; however, some families may be hesitant to participate in such practices (Davis, Dinhopl and Hiniker, 2019). If families can solve this problem, it could strengthen family bonds, making Gen Z feel more understood and supported by their parents, enhance their emotional well-being and improve family dynamics.

Understanding that Generation Z, who live in this fast- paced and competitive society, faces many challenges—from academic pressures to workplace stressors, often leading them to psychological distress. Statistics provided by Lindner (2023a) highlighted that Generation Z faces a higher level of stress in comparison to other generations, showing that 70% of them expressed they had suffered from anxiety and depression issues within the age group. When Gen Z are facing psychological distress, they prefer to seek knowledge and assistance online and on social media first instead of searching in their immediate social circle (Pratama and Hermanu, 2023; Ji et al., 2021).

Motivational posts are highly shareable on social media platforms, which is another problem for this research. By making motivational and inspiring content, these creators hope to uplift and comfort people who are going through hard times (Tumasang, 2022). At the same time, Gen Z audiences often seek comfort online because they are looking for

encouragement and motivation during difficult periods (Chang and Chang, 2023). Although researchers have explained that motivational books can really inspire and positively impact people's mental health (Zanal Abidin, Shaifuddin, and Wan Mohd Saman, 2021), not much research has been done to explain the effectiveness of motivational quotes on social media in helping with psychological distress for Gen Z.

Through an examination of these issues, this study could provide an important opportunity to determine how Generation Z perceives motivational posts on social media. It can also determine how motivational posts on social media platforms can influence Gen Z's emotions through using words in communication. Existing researchers have explored the impact of motivational words on other demographics, but there is limited knowledge about how motivational content specifically affects Generation Z. Moreover, this study will explore the differences in how male and female members of Gen Z respond to motivational posts, providing insights into the most effective motivational content. This aspect has yet to be extensively examined in previous research, making this study a valuable addition to the field.

The aim of this study is to investigate the perception of motivational quotes among generation Z, focusing on how they interpret and react to such messages. Additionally, the study aims to examine the impact and preferences of motivational social media posts within this demographic, analyzing how these posts influence their attitudes, behaviors, and engagement with content across social platforms.

Literature Review

Generation Z and Social Media Usage

With the exponential growth of Web 2.0, social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have brought in online social networking and provided avenues for community engagement, self-expression, and entertainment (Kanchan and Gaidhane, 2023). As the technical and digital ages go on, Generation Z, born in this era, will rely more on their electronic gadgets and social networking platforms. Lindner (2023b) noted that 56% of Gen Z humanize their communication by using social media platforms to connect with others and seek information and knowledge, allocating an average of 3 hours per day across multiple platforms. Hence, these platforms have become integral elements of their daily lives.

Generation Z tends to prefer visual elements over heavy text content. They enjoy using social media to view short videos, photos, and 24-hour stories (Taber, Dominguez, and Whittaker, 2023). According to Popova (2017) and Raslie (2021), Gen Z's communication pattern includes concise and easy-to-understand language, with a preference for visual content such as short- form messaging and emoticons or emojis on social media. Social media has given them opportunities to explore and express themselves (Atay and Ashlock, 2022), and they often carefully customize their online personas before posting on social media to showcase their lives aligned with their values and interests (Hassoun et al., 2023). Besides, this generation is particularly drawn to influencers and creators who share authentic experiences and viewpoints, favouring content that tells a story or evokes emotion (Pandit, 2015). Pandit (2015) also mentioned that social media platforms can capture significant attention from this demographic because they allow users to share personal stories or engage with relatable trends and challenges.

However, researchers such as Imjai et al. (2024) and Lin et al. (2016) noted that social media can also contribute to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression among Generation Z. This is because they often feel pressured to compare themselves to others to present a perfect image online, which can negatively implicate their mental health (Imjai et al., 2024). Swart (2021) explained that social media not only enhances traditional ways for people to understand and learn about human nature, but it also encourages them to read others' words to gain psychological support or shape perceptions from the Internet (Wellman, Holton, and Kaphingst, 2022; Pandit, 2015).

Social media has indirectly contributed to a change in the communication culture between Generation Z and other generations. The generational cohort theory, explained by Moss (2016), posits that an individual's character, perception of reality, and reactions to events are shaped by the unique combination of factors present during their formative years. Faika and Zabeen (2023) applied this theory to highlight the distinct environment in which different generations grew up to shape their communication preferences. They noted that the digital revolution of the 1990s made Generation Z the first cohort to grow up with constant exposure to internet technology. Purnawati and Kurniawati (2023) argued that as people's reliance on technology and social media for communication increases, it inadvertently fosters a culture of emotional reservation and hinders open dialogue, even within families. Marciano et al. (2022) observed that Generation Z's decline in face-to-face interactions exacerbates these generational differences in

communication preferences. While Gen Z favours digital mediums, their parents often prefer face-to-face interaction, leading to a cultural shift between generations (Nursanti et al., 2022).

Motivational Posts and Generation Z:

Motivations came from our experience, environment, and past. Ignat et al. (2021) mentioned that motivational posts are content creators who utilize written words as a form of communication to create quotes that are often healing or motivating, aiming to make psychological constructions that inspire and impart positive energy towards other people. Although not many researchers have extensively explored how motivational communications on social media can heal people on psychological constructions, Gero, Liu, and Chilton (2022) still noted that these inspirational words, containing positivity and affirmation, can create empathy and understanding, providing comfort and a sense of connection, especially during difficult times.

Before the advent of social media, many authors had written books on healing the soul and inspirational stories (Butler-Bowden, 2010). However, in this fast-paced era, people, especially Generation Z, refuse to spend their time and money reading extensive and expensive book (Linnes and Metcalf, 2017). Linnes and Metcalf (2017) noted that new generations prefer e- books; Twenge (2014) observed that Generation Z favours online quotes for their relatability and authenticity, as natural and young individuals often create them. Hence, the rise of social media allows authors to share quotes from their books on these platforms, enabling them to reach a wider audience more effectively.

These quotes, often derived from personal experiences, resonate with those who have undergone similar situations, providing a sense of understanding and healing (Tumasang, 2022; Dimofte, Haugtvedt, and Yalch, 2015). This brings the content to social media and fosters a connection as more users engage and share their thoughts in their comments section (Su, 2024a). Existing research indicates that motivational social media posts become viral, attracting many followers from around the world. This raises the question of how this content reaches generation Z. According to studies, social media algorithms play a crucial role in delivering this content to Generation Z (Hernandez-de-Menendez, Escobar Díaz and Morales-Menendez, 2020; Tulen, 2023). Paul and Ahmed (2023) explained that these algorithms are computed by Artificial Intelligence (AI) to personalize recommendations based on users' past behaviours, likes, shares, conversations, and

interactions. By analyzing this data, algorithms create a feed that includes motivational content, ensuring it reaches users most likely to engage with it (Brady, Crockett and Van Bavel, 2020).

Impact of motivational post in social media

Some psychologists and communication researchers believe that motivational posts can serve as a means of communication to comfort people, as their suppressed emotions might only be temporary (Tumasang, 2022; Muntinga, Moorman and Smit, 2015; Lazarus, 1991). They think these "words" could positively influence individuals' behaviour, helping them regain confidence and stand up again. For many, motivational posts provide emotional relief and help individuals believe in their abilities and values, thus restoring their confidence (Forest and Wood, 2012). Muntinga, Moorman and Smit (2015) mentioned that these contents can provide direction in life or help people realize that others have faced similar challenges, fostered empathy and encourage them to overcome difficulties. Consequently, when more people share motivational content, it spreads positivity and encouragement throughout a broader community, creating a supportive environment.

Quotes on social media serve as a powerful tool for connection, reflection, and motivation for Gen Z (Rushing, 2024). They not only provide comfort and encouragement but also create a sense of community, allowing young people to share their journeys and support one another.

On the other hand, some researchers have identified potential drawbacks of over-relying on motivational posts. Gu (2016) and Luyi (2024) argued that these self-help contents can act as a form of brainwashing, subtly shaping people's values. Unlike other age groups, Generation Z tends to seek, interpret, and remember information with their methods and form their preconceptions. For instance, when Gen Z keeps searching for motivational posts, social media algorithms reinforce existing beliefs by showing content aligned with the users' views. It creates a "filter bubble", making the users challenging to encounter contradictory information and causing individuals to become overly dependent on these external sources of inspiration (Shcherbakova and Nikiforchuk, 2022; Dale et al., 2019), neglecting whether their actions align with the encouragements to make changes (Western et al., 2021). As a result, individuals may experience severe depression and anxiety, feeling pressured to achieve the success depicted in these quotes but

finding themselves unable to do so (Tumasang, 2022; Bedrov and Bulaj, 2018). Bedrov and Bulaj (2018) stated that people might also feel compelled always to remain positive, causing them to be unable to express their negative thoughts healthily. Furthermore, the surface-level nature of many inspiring quotes may lead to superficial engagement with the content rather than deeper reflection and personal growth. When individuals feel momentarily motivated but fail to take actual action, these fleeting inspirations will not transform into sustained effort or long-term change (Tan et al., 2023).

Social media and inspirational messages have become crucial communication tools for current age groups, mainly Generation Z. These platforms provide a way for young people to express themselves when they struggle to find the right words. The eloquence and relevance of inspirational quotes often lead people to share, like, or comment, reflecting their inner feelings. This method of communication significantly influences this generation, bringing both positive and negative effects that deserve attention (Dale et al., 2019).

The study utilized a quantitative research design, focusing on survey-based data collection. This study employed a non-random sampling method, targeting individuals aged 18 to 27 who had seen and engaged with motivational posts on social media.

The data collection involved an online questionnaire designed using Microsoft Forms, ensuring easy access and broad participation. The questionnaire focused on understanding the engagement of Generation Z with motivational social media content. It explored variables such as gender to determine if there were differences in engagement between males and females. The questions were crafted to capture the perceptions and experiences of Generation Z with motivational social media posts. Data collection commenced from the last week of May 2024 until the first weekend of June 2024.

Findings and Discussions

Gen Z- perception towards motivational quote.

To better understand Generation Z's perceptions of motivational posts, the questionnaires were designed using a Likert scale to collect their ratings to examine whether respondents seek motivational posts on social media during difficult times, whether these posts help them feel better when stressed, and whether motivational social media posts have

influenced them to achieve their personal goals. The average rating is 3.883, showing that it is normal for respondents to seek motivational posts during emotional difficulties frequently. The median and mode are '4', highlighting a slightly high tendency for them to use motivational content for support. The standard deviation of 1.032 indicates consistent behaviour across respondents, and the skewness of -0.6905 is negatively skewed. With the median range at '4', indicating that most respondents feel better after viewing motivational posts. With a mean of 3.932, it is clear that motivational posts are perceived to affect emotional well-being positively. The standard deviation is 0.8994, and the skewness is -0.9361. whereby, the mean of 3.835 indicates that motivational posts notably influence achieving personal goals. The median and mode are 4, showing the respondents' moderate agreement on the impact of motivational posts on goal achievement. The standard deviation is 1.0203, and the skewness is -0.5642.

Respondent preference with motivational post.

From the data collected, it is shown that most respondents will engage with motivational posts by liking them when they see inspirational quotes on social media most respondents will share it, and about 50% will choose to comment on those posts. Only 8 respondents decided never to engage in anything, even if they noticed it on social media, and 10 totally ignored those posts. The mode is 'like', showing it as the most common form of engagement.

To gain insight into respondents' preferences for motivational content, among the 103 individuals, revealed that life quotes and personal stories were equally popular (39 respondents). In contrast, fewer respondents found affirmations (15) and advice (10) content engaging.

In the results also indicate that videos are the most preferred element in motivational content (73 respondents). Images follow closely behind, with 67 respondents. Music and textual content are also significant, with 53 and 52 respondents, respectively. Only 11 respondents favoured emojis or icons, highlighting these as the least favoured elements in motivational content. The mode is videos, emphasizing that they are the most interactive media element in motivational posts.

The impact of motivational quote towards Gen-Z

In gathering ordinal data on the impact of motivational quotes on social media to understand whether inspirational quotes could help

respondents overcome challenges or handle stress. A mean rating of 3.893, showing an average agreement that motivational quotes inspire overcoming challenges. The median and mode are “Agree”. This consistency indicates that most respondents perceive motivational quotes as helpful. From the average data, the standard deviation and the skewness can be calculated as 0.9692 and - 0.6387. With an average rating is 3.816, indicating that most respondents agree that exposure to motivational quotes enhances the ability to handle stress and adversity. The median and mode are also under “Agree”, reflecting a positive perception among respondents .

The survey results show insights into Generation Z’s engagement patterns and preferences regarding motivational content on social media, corroborating the analysis of Tumasang (2022) and Ignat et al. (2021). The dominance of Instagram as the most frequently used platform and videos as the most crucial element in motivational posts suggested that visual and interactive content is particularly appealing to this group. Taber, Dominguez, and Whittaker (2023) and Popova (2017) supported this finding in the literature review, highlighting that Gen Z prefers platforms that offer rich media experiences.

Regarding their current status and stress levels, most respondents are college or university students. The standard deviation for their stress level is close to the mean, reflecting a common experience of high stress among the younger segments of Generation Z, who often suffer under high academic pressure.

By comparing the genders, the results indicated that females have a higher participation rate and greater interest in engaging with motivational content on social media. This gender distribution is vital for the survey, as it can help create more targeted and effective motivational content that resonates with the primary audience. The high preference for life quotes and personal stories proves Pandit’s (2015) assertion that Gen Z preferred stories and personal experiences that could evoke emotions. Gender differences in content preference indicate that different content inspired different demographic groups in motivational posts. Females resonate more with personal stories, while males are more drawn to life quotes, providing insights for content creators to tailor their information accordingly.

Besides, the findings reveal a high frequency of engagement actions, indicating strong interaction with motivational content among Gen Z. Respondents are more likely to engage through likes, followed by shares

and comments when they encounter motivational posts. These interactions drove social media algorithms to prioritize similar content in their feed, proving Paul and Ahmed's (2023) explanations.

The high ratings indicate a positive influence of motivational posts on respondents' emotional well-being and goal achievement. The responses consistently indicated high median and mode values and negative skews, reflecting a general agreement that motivational posts and inspirational words are beneficial to Generation Z. The findings support existing literature on the role of motivational content in providing emotional support and inspiration, particularly during challenging times that helps to overcome their challenges and stresses.

Conclusions and Recommendation

Generation Z generally perceives motivational posts as beneficial, with a tendency to seek them out during emotional difficulties. Respondents perceive these posts as helpful in improving their emotional state, with a significant portion agreeing that motivational quotes contribute to achieving their personal goals. This indicates that motivational content is seen as a valuable resource for coping and self-improvement.

Generation Z's preference for motivational content leans towards visual and interactive formats. Videos and images are the most favored elements, highlighting the importance of dynamic, rich media content. Furthermore, life quotes and personal stories were the most popular types of motivational posts, particularly among females, while males favored life quotes more.

In conclusion, motivational posts have a significant, positive impact on Generation Z's mental well-being, are perceived as helpful in managing stress, and are most appreciated in video and image formats, with a strong preference for life quotes and personal stories.

Future research should investigate the effectiveness of various content formats, particularly videos and images, in engaging Gen Z audiences with motivational posts given that these formats are the most popular among this demographic. Researchers should also examine the impact of Instagram's features, such as reels and stories, on user interaction, as these formats allow for more dynamic and immersive experiences.

Moreover, there is a need for studies that explore potential communication gaps between Generation Z and older generations in their consumption of motivational content. Comparing the motivational content needs of different age groups could shed light on why certain types of content appeal to Gen Z more than to older generations.

Lastly, cultural variations within Malaysia should be thoroughly investigated to determine how motivational posts are received by different ethnic groups. Researchers should assess whether the content's themes, formats, or presentation styles are equally effective across these diverse groups or if modifications are necessary to resonate with their distinct cultural values and preferences.

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