The Negative Impact of Instagram on Generation Z from the Perspective of Islamic Psychology

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Abstract. Social media has become an inseparable part of the identity of Generation Z. One of the predominant social media platforms favored by this generation is Instagram. Instagram is utilized as a means of communication, interaction, development, and obtaining various informational materials. In this modern age, technology is increasingly sophisticated, and the speed and ease of obtaining data or information are very fast and instant. However, the ease of access to information that is super fast and easy has negative impacts on Generation Z, in addition to the positive ones that come with it. This study aims to describe the negative impacts of Instagram on Generation Z from the perspective of Islamic Psychology and how Islam offers solutions to these problems. The research method employed in this study is a qualitative approach, applying library research methods. The data analysis technique utilized is descriptive analysis. The results of this study reveal three negative impacts of Instagram on Generation Z, namely: (1) weak mentality or "strawberry generation," (2) low self-confidence (resulting from comparing oneself to others), and (3) life assessment that is only limited to worldly matters.

Keywords: Generation Z · Instagram · Psychology · Islam

1 Introduction

Instagram is one of the social media platforms that enable long-distance communication and interaction without limitations of space and time. Instagram is a photo-sharing application where users take photos, apply digital filters, and share them on various social networks, including Instagram's own platform [1]. Currently, Instagram has many features such as instastory, direct messages, IGTV, live streaming, reels, and others. Instagram was founded by Burbn.Inc in 2010 [2]. He company is engaged in startup technology that focuses on developing applications on gadgets. Statistically, within the first ten months of the launch of the Instagram app, it managed to attract attention. This is demonstrated by the high number of downloads, which was 7 million new users. In addition, there were 150 million photos on Instagram. This is supported by Paul Webster's statement that since its launch in 2010, Instagram has had more than 400 million active users worldwide [3].

The general purpose of Instagram is to serve as a means for individuals to share their activities, possessions, places, or even themselves in the form of images or videos. Instagram is a platform for self-expression and seeking attention from others. As noted by Nainggolan et al. [4], Instagram is utilized for attracting attention, seeking opinions, enhancing one's image, and as a leisure activity. Additionally, Instagram is also utilized for finding and establishing new friendships, conducting business, engaging in politics, and even finding romantic partners.

Indonesia is one of the countries with the highest number of Instagram users, with 89% of Instagrammers aged between 18 and 34 years old. This indicates that a significant number of Instagram users in Indonesia belong to the Generation Z [3]. The majority of Indonesian Instagrammers are young, educated, and financially stable. Instagram is a popular entertainment medium among Indonesian society, accessed during leisure time amidst studying, attending classes, or working. Apart from entertainment, Instagram also facilitates the Generation Z in gaining knowledge about academic subjects through educational Instagram accounts. Many users believe that Instagram can aid in business ventures, especially in marketing products. The motives behind individual Instagram use are influenced by the perceived satisfaction, usefulness, and enjoyment of the social media platform, particularly Instagram [5]. Indonesian society, particularly the Generation Z, holds Instagram in high regard due to its multiple features that facilitate communication and the exchange of information with others, whether they be fellow citizens or the wider public.

Currently, Indonesia is experiencing a demographic bonus, which means that the number of productive age population is greater than the non-productive age population. However, the continuous growth of the population has led to negative impacts that threaten the younger generation. For instance, there is a scarcity of places for Generation Z to express themselves creatively outside of school. To give an example, Generation Z faces a shortage of venues to express their creativity beyond the school setting. As a result, social media has become their quickest means of finding a refuge to unleash their ideas, emotions, and creative output. Specifically, Instagram has emerged as the most accessible platform for this generation to connect and showcase themselves, both for personal or business purposes. As stated by [6], social media is not only used for personal needs but also has a wide range of usefulness in other aspects, such as the business feature, which functions as a promotional medium to market products or services.

Generation Z is strongly associated with social media, particularly Instagram, which is the most popular social media platform with increasing user numbers [7]. Generation Z spends more time accessing Instagram than gathering with their families or studying. They continuously scroll through Instagram even when walking, eating, or in class. This generation is defined as the cohort of humans categorized by their birth years. According to American sociologists, Generation Z refers to those born between 1998 and 2010 [8]. They have grown up in a world where technology has been an integral part of their lives since birth. Based on their birth years, Generation Z is currently aged between 12 and 24 years old. Hence, it can be concluded that they are in the teenage to early adulthood phase.

This generation is also known as the internet generation as they grew up in the digital era where access to information is rapid since a young age [9]. Putra (2016) stated that

technology and information have become a part of the lives of Generation Z as they were born in an era where access to information, particularly the internet, has become a global culture. This has influenced their values, beliefs, and life goals [10]. Therefore, it is apparent that Generation Z is closely associated with technological advancement, including social media platforms such as Instagram.

For Generation Z, the use of Instagram has become an integral part of their lives. The Instagram application is installed on their smartphones, which means that they are constantly connected to it. According to Ozkan and Solmaz, the active use of smartphones by Generation Z is not addictive, but rather a necessary part of their daily lives [11]. However, the use of Instagram can have both positive and negative effects on their attitudes and behaviors. On the positive side, Generation Z becomes more creative and attractive, while on the negative side, they become obsessed with displaying their possessions on Instagram, as if it is a competition [12].

Instagram has an impact on Generation Z, both positive and negative. However, if not used wisely, Instagram can have negative consequences. One characteristic of Generation Z is their penchant for revealing their privacy [13]. This habit may have a negative impact on them in the future. Additionally, social media characteristics that are accessible at any time without time limits, such as listening, measuring, and performing, can be detrimental to their psyche and mental health [14]. Therefore, it is highly likely that Instagram has an impact on the psychological and mental well-being of Generation Z. Frequent use of smartphones to access Instagram, view and upload stories, can cause them to become unsteady and lose their sense of identity. Furthermore, this article will discuss the negative impact of Instagram on Generation Z from the perspectives of psychology and Islam.

There are three main topics discussed in this article as negative impacts of Instagram based on the results of a discussion at the "Back to Muslim Identity" event, namely making Generation Z mentally weak (strawberry generation), low self-confidence (comparing oneself), and having a limited view of life standards. The aim of this study is to describe the negative impact of Instagram on Generation Z from the perspectives of psychology and Islam, as well as how Islam provides solutions to these problems.

2 Method

This study utilizes a qualitative approach by employing library research as its methodology. Library research is a research activity conducted by collecting information and data using various library resources such as reference books, previous research studies, articles, notes, and various journals related to the problem that needs to be solved [15]. Literature-based research is a form of research that uses literature as its object of study. The object of study in this article focuses on the negative impact of Instagram from the perspectives of psychology and Islam.

This study is a qualitative type of research through a literature review. The research process involves collecting primary and secondary sources [16]. The primary sources used in this article are books, research journals, and previous articles relevant to the discussion. After obtaining appropriate data and information for the research, the method used is descriptive analysis. Qualitative descriptive analysis involves analyzing, describing, and summarizing various conditions and situations from various collected data [17].

The data collected in this study are in the form of literature findings related to the research problem. Descriptive analysis means analyzing the obtained information by gathering sources from books or journals and then explaining them descriptively as the result of the conclusion. In this article, this means describing the research question formulation that has become the research objective.

3   Results and Discussion

Instagram is popular among the Generation Z as evidenced by Paul Webster's (2016) statement that 89% of Instagram users are aged 18–34 [18]. This confirms that many of Instagram's users belong to the Generation Z, born between 1998–2010 [8]. Instagram serves as a medium for long-distance communication and self-expression. However, despite its many positive effects, there are also negative impacts that need to be known as a result of imprudent use of social media.

3.1   Weak-Minded or Strawberry Generation

The term "strawberry generation" was popularized by Prof. Rhenald Kasali in his book titled "Strawberry Generation: Turning Fragile Generations into Tough Generations". Generation Z, known as the most creative and intelligent generation, is likened to strawberries. According to Kasali, the strawberry generation is appropriate for today's young generation, as Generation Z tends to want quick results and easily give up. Research shows that gadgets and easy access to information can be one of the factors [19]. In contrast to the earlier generation, who became diligent in reading and searching from various sources, even if it took a long time due to difficulty in accessing information, today's technological age provides easy and quick access to information. As a result, the determination and perseverance of Generation Z have diminished. They no longer need to read books to search for information, as a simple Google search and pressing enter will suffice.

The excessive use of social media by Generation Z has led to negative impacts such as the availability of gadgets and easy access to information. The ease of access to information, including personal information of others, constantly seen on social media has resulted in negative effects on mental health, such as depression, insomnia, loneliness, and extreme mood swings [20]. Accessing Instagram regularly and seeing others' success posts does not necessarily inspire them to achieve the same; instead, it leads to depression and easily feeling down. Generation Z also tends to spend more time on their gadgets, feeling lonely, and seeking a world on Instagram. However, instead of getting positive outcomes, they experience negative effects, which impact their mental health. They see negative comments, participate in commenting, and when they receive comments, they become depressed instead of fixing the issue.

Generation Z is often likened to strawberries, as they share some similarities. Just like the fruit, this generation has a bright and attractive appearance and possesses remarkable qualities such as intelligence, creativity, and capability. However, strawberries are notorious for their fragility; a slight touch can cause them to bruise or get damaged. In

the same way, this generation is often seen as sensitive and prone to giving up easily, resulting in them being labeled as the "Strawberry Generation".

Generation Z's fragility is not solely attributed to their preference for instant gratification and access to quick information. It is also due to their immersion in the digital world, where seeking validation through feedback and praises is common. Consequently, they are highly sensitive to criticisms or negative feedback. This generation is seen as weak because they are often confined to their comfort zones, leading them to give up easily when faced with challenging situations [21]. Hence, the term "Strawberry Generation" has become a popular label for them. Nowadays, the younger generation frequently relies on "self-healing," "self-reward," "work-life balance," and other popular terms on social media [19].

There are three stages of adolescent development classification, namely, early adolescence between the ages of 11 to 14 years, middle adolescence between the ages of 15 to 17 years, and late adolescence between the ages of 18–21 years [22]. Currently, Generation Z is between the ages of 12–24 years, which means that the majority of Generation Z is in the adolescent stage. From a psychological perspective, adolescence is a period of emotional tension, mainly due to social pressure and facing new situations, so most teenagers experience emotional instability from time to time as a result of adapting to new behaviors and social expectations [23]. Adolescence can be a challenging time as young people navigate a world where their wishes are not always granted, unlike in childhood. This can create pressure and lead to heightened sensitivity, making adolescents more emotionally responsive.

Generation Z may be vulnerable if they don't exercise caution while using social media, particularly Instagram. Given their heightened emotional sensitivity, it's crucial to control their feelings when expressing themselves through posts or comments. However, the label of "strawberry generation" or fragile generation can transform into a robust one if they use social media judiciously. It's important for Gen Z to understand that technology and social media are not just tools to explore and follow but also to be in charge of oneself.

Islam emphasizes the importance of the younger generation being more connected to the Quran than to gadgets. It is essential for them to possess emotional intelligence and self-control. The Quran provides numerous examples of the Prophets and Messengers that can serve as role models. The story of Prophet Nuh, as described in verses 1–28 of Surah Nuh, is a remarkable illustration of his endurance in preaching to his people for almost a millennium, despite having few supporters. Despite being subjected to ridicule and verbal abuse, Prophet Nuh remained patient and steadfast in his mission.

وَلَقَدْ اَرْسَلْنَا نُوْحًا اِلٰى قَوْمِهٖ فَلَبِثَ فِيْهِمْ اَلْفَ سَنَةٍ اِلَّا خَمْسِيْنَ عَامًاۗ فَاَخَذَهُمُ الطُّوْفَانُ وَهُمْ ظٰلِمُوْنَ

"And verily, We sent Noah to his people, and he stayed with them a thousand years less fifty years, and the flood overtook them while they were wrongdoers" (Q.S. Al-Ankabut: 14).

The tales of the Prophets and Messengers narrate their unwavering devotion to faith, the trust in Allah exhibited by Prophet Yunus during his trial of being cast into the sea and swallowed by a whale, and the bravery of Prophet Musa in his fight against the cruelty and polytheism of Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. These accounts should inspire the Z generation by showcasing the strength and resilience of young Muslims in the past, in contrast to the fragility and tendency to give up easily, as suggested by [21] n his book on the "strawberry generation." Numerous individuals possess traits such as perseverance, intelligence, and honesty, making them ideal role models. Among them is Mohammad Djazman Al-Kindi, who demonstrated his commitment to the development of Muhammadiyah's cadres by founding the IMM (Muhammadiyah Student Association) [24]. The inspiring and influential figures like him provide a wealth of valuable lessons for the younger generation to learn from.

The Generation Z cohort is often characterized as being prone to complaining and giving up easily in the face of challenges, likened to strawberries that easily bruise even with gentle friction [21], To overcome this tendency, they must learn to regulate their emotions and draw inspiration from the stories of Islamic figures. Rather than retreating in the face of adversity, Muslim youths should emulate the bravery of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, who confronted overwhelming odds in battles such as Badr, the Trench, and Mu'tah. Despite being vastly outnumbered, they remained optimistic, strategic, and resolute, advancing against their foes. Muslim youths must have faith in Allah's help, cultivate mindfulness, and maintain positivity. It is important to promote Instagram trends that highlight strength, courage, and progress, as the rapid exchange of information and technological advancements demand that Generation Z take control of their lives and destinies.

3.2 Low Self-esteem (Self Comparing)

Generation Z is a group that is currently in the process of transitioning from childhood to adulthood. During their teenage years, they tend to develop a strong sense of self-worth, display joy, and demonstrate excessive courage [25]. Seeking attention and validation is common among this age group, which is evident from the attention-seeking behaviors frequently observed on Instagram. Instagram posts typically showcase self-portraits, possessions, achievements, and successes, leading to a desire for similar things among frequent users of the platform. Additionally, the competitive atmosphere that is common during the teenage years [25] contributes to social comparison.

Social comparison has both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, individuals who engage in social comparison feel motivated to strive for better outcomes. On the negative side, social comparison can lead to feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. This is consistent with Alfred Adler's theory of personality psychology, which suggests that the desire for superiority and perfection is innate [26]. The frequent exposure to other people's seemingly perfect lives on Instagram contributes to the tendency of Generation Z to strive for excellence. Furthermore, their vulnerability during adolescence, combined with the search for identity and enjoyment of competition, can exacerbate this tendency.

Adler (1927) postulated that the drive for superiority is an intrinsic part of life, with humans progressing from one level of development to the next higher level [26]. The desire for superiority is demonstrated in a multitude of lifestyles, each with its own way of achieving or striving for perfection. Seeking perfection, however, is impossible for humans as each individual is unique. Therefore, comparing oneself to the lifestyles of others on Instagram is misguided. Members of Generation Z who share their lives on Instagram only highlight the happy moments and are unlikely to post during difficult, low, and degrading times. Hence, comparing human lives is a major mistake since each person has their own timeline.

The tendency of Generation Z to engage in social comparison is often observed in terms of physical appearance, possessions, and social status. Those who do not possess at least one of these aspects may feel worthless, experience low self-esteem, or develop an inferiority complex, which is a psychological barrier that typically emerges during adolescence [27]. This negative mindset arises from constantly looking up and being unsatisfied with one's life, as individuals continue to compare themselves to others. However, in Islam, we are instructed to look up for inspiration and to look down to express gratitude.

The attitudes and feelings resulting from frequent unfiltered exposure to other people's lives on Instagram suggest that the unwise use of this platform can have numerous negative effects. Seeking recognition from other people is a never-ending and exhausting pursuit, and as Muslims, we should be content with the recognition from Allah SWT, the Creator of humans and the universe. Allah's love for humans is far greater than any human love, and in terms of physical appearance, wealth, and social status, Allah only looks at a person's level of piety, as stated in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13,

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّـهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

"Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you." (Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13)

This is further reinforced by the following hadith,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لاَ يَنْظُرُ إِلَى صُوَرِكُمْ وَأَمْوَالِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يَنْظُرُ إِلَى قُلُوبِكُمْ وَأَعْمَالِكُمْ

"Verily Allah does not look to your faces and your wealth but He looks to your heart and to your deeds." (Sahih Muslim).

The normative basis in education is that human beings are created by God with unique differences, both visible and invisible. The level that makes a difference in the eyes of God is a person's piety [28].

Generation Z should be aware that seeking the approval of others and striving for perfection by comparing oneself to others is unnecessary. In the eyes of Allah SWT, everyone is equal, and what sets individuals apart is their level of taqwa. Instagram and other social media platforms should not lead individuals to disbelief, but rather, they should increase their piety. Generation Z must control the flow of information and

use Instagram as a means of spreading goodness instead of promoting sinful behavior. Having high self-regulation can help Generation Z control their social media use and avoid negative effects such as addiction and compulsive behavior, as stated by Wanjohi et al. [29]. Those with good self-regulation can filter and control the information or stimuli they receive, thereby avoiding the habit of constantly comparing themselves to others.

3.3   Only Limited to Worldly Standards

Instagram has negative effects, one of which is the limited focus on worldly standards of living, disregarding the afterlife. This is reinforced by the abundance of content on the platform that glorifies materialistic pleasures. It has become an integral part of Generation Z's lifestyle, and frequent usage of the app can lead to an uncontrollable immersion in this trend. Instagram's algorithm prioritizes frequently viewed and interacted-with content, leading to a dangerous cycle for those who struggle to manage their social media usage.

Moreover, social media influencers or celebrities with verified accounts have influenced Generation Z's perception of life. While it is not an issue if these influencers promote positive values, it becomes problematic when they promote negative values. Many influencers focus solely on displaying their fame, wealth, and possessions, shaping the younger generation's perspective of life based on their content [20]. This is concerning, as there are numerous Islamic figures who possess greater qualifications and are better suited to be idols or role models for Generation Z.

The majority of Generation Z consists of teenagers, who, as young Muslims, need to realize that the world should not be the basis of their lives. The world is merely an illusion and should not be taken too seriously. As stated in the Quran,

وَمَا الْحَيٰوةُ الدُّنْيَآ اِلَّا لَعِبٌ وَّلَهْوٌ ۗ وَلَلدَّارُ الْاٰخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِيْنَ يَتَّقُوْنَّ
اَفَلَا تَعْقِلُوْنَ.

"This worldly life is no more than play and amusement, but far better is the ⌈eternal⌉ Home of the Hereafter for those mindful ⌈of Allah⌉. Will you not then understand?" (QS Al-An'am: 32)

Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyah compared the world to a shadow, saying, "The world is like a shadow; if you run after it, you will never catch it." [30]. Those who focus solely on worldly standards of living are like those who chase after the world, which is endless and never enough. Generation Z who thinks this way will likely experience depression and feel overwhelmed, as the happiness they see on Instagram is only temporary and worldly.

Therefore, the standard of living should not be based solely on worldly pursuits, but should also include the afterlife. This is because the world is only temporary and fleeting, and the afterlife is much better for Muslims. Therefore, the use of Instagram by Generation Z should be more prudent, so that young people do not have a narrow-minded view that is limited to worldly pursuits. Pursuing worldly pleasures will never be enough, as feeling content and satisfied is a cliche that is not supported by the world.

However, a Muslim's life is not just about the world, and we are taught to be grateful for everything that happens.

Allah Himself promised that,

$$\text{وَاِذْ تَاَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَاَزِيْدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ اِنَّ عَذَابِيْ لَشَدِيْدٌ}$$

"And ⸢remember⸣ when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more. But if you are ungrateful, surely my punishment is severe." (Q.S. Ibrahim: 7)

Therefore, if we are grateful, Allah will increase His blessings upon us. Islam should be sufficient for Generation Z to navigate their lives on this earth. The standard of living for young people should not be based on social media trends, but on Islam, which is comprehensive and covers all aspects of life.

In reality, the world deliberately steers humans to separate worldly life from religion. Religion is not involved comprehensively in worldly aspects, and thus knowledge development is based mainly on rationalism in explaining the purpose of human life, even more dominant than religion itself [31]. The Western idea that separates religion from all aspects of worldly life is contradictory to Muslim thought. This is because religion governs all aspects of worldly life. Islam serves as a guide for living, not separated from but directing humans.

The progressive view of religion suggests that religion should bring joy to its followers and inspire them to act and engage in solving life's problems, thereby promoting social progress [32]. Islam, as a way of life, also plays a role in solving problems faced by humans. According to Azani (2022:280), all human beings are allowed to celebrate their differences, but at the same time, they need to be nurtured with knowledge and strong morals based on Islamic values [33]. This shows that whatever is pursued, achieved, or celebrated in this world is not a problem as long as one firmly adheres to the rules or teachings of Islam. Knowledge coupled with akhlakul karimah (noble character) that aligns with Islamic values is already sufficient preparation for Generation Z to navigate life in this world.

4   Conclusion

Instagram is a popular social media platform, particularly among the Z generation. However, this technological advancement has also led to negative consequences, especially for Z generation individuals in their teenage and early adult years. These negative effects include mental fragility, low self-confidence, and a limited worldview that prioritizes materialistic values over spiritual ones.

The term "strawberry generation" has been used to describe this generation, characterized by having many ideas but being fragile and easily giving up. The easy access to information on Instagram has made them vulnerable to even minor criticism, as well as stress due to constant exposure to the opinions of others. They tend to compare themselves to others, often making judgments based on external validation rather than personal standards. Instagram influencers and celebrities are seen as role models, shaping their aspirations and limiting their perspectives to worldly matters.

On the other hand, Islam provides a deeper understanding and guidance for the Z generation. The stories of the prophets and the history of the Prophet Muhammad offer motivation and inspiration for leading a meaningful life. Islam emphasizes the importance of a strong mentality, a compassionate heart, a sharp mind, and a strong foundation of faith. The Quran reminds us that this world is temporary and that the hereafter is the ultimate goal for those who seek righteousness. Allah judges people based on their piety rather than materialistic possessions or societal status. Therefore, the Z generations have to prioritize their relationship with Allah over worldly pursuits.

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