



Literacy of the Digital Culture: Reading, Producing and Publishing Text of Netizen on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

People who use the internet, or commonly called Netizens, now use public spaces made of digital media in various ways. Netizens are currently vigorously intricate in creating and publishing the information through internet and just being consumers of media texts. However, the increased freedom that netizens now have in their roles as authors, publishers, and creators can result in communication issues, particularly when interpreting texts, which can cause social unrest. The symbolic interaction through language, as internet users chat messages individually or in groups, can occasionally lead to misunderstandings and conflicts because there is not a common understanding. The study aims to evaluate the level of digital literacy of netizens in reading, creating, and publishing messages in social media texts. This study addressed the followings questions: (1) What knowledge and skills in digital citizenship are necessary for effective use of digital media? (2) How do symbolic interactions affect the interaction of online users when using social media as readers, writers, and text creators? (3) What are the problems found in reading, creating, and publishing messages by internet users? A qualitative descriptive method was used to provide a thorough overview of the topic to shed light on these problems. Online surveys, field research, and observations were used to gather the data. It was done using a semiotic strategy with a particular emphasis on symbolic interaction. The results emphasize the significance of netizens possessing four essential components of digital literacy of skills, ethics, culture, and digital safety, to successfully fulfil their roles as text consumers, producers, and publishers on social media platforms. Additionally, the study created a model to depict how netizens symbolically interacted while conversing on social networking sites.

Keywords: Netizen, publishing and producing text, reading, social media, symbolic interaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed the communication model. This media has changed the role of internet users in conveying messages or information. The changing role of internet users in the world of digital media, where they simultaneously read, produce, and publish media texts, especially on social media platforms, presents a communication challenge (Arafah & Hasyim, 2022). Individuals as internet users can create their own news content, share comments, and publish information with a wide audience in various locations, thanks to the interactive nature of online-based media.

The intensive use of online media technology (smartphones, tablets and laptops) is the most common medium for obtaining information today. This pattern is consistent with Indonesia's rising internet usage. In 2020, there will be 175.4 million internet users in Indonesia, or 73% of the population, according to a Service Providers Association study on internet penetration. It suggests that over 50% of Indonesians are frequent Internet users. Smartphones dominate the landscape of internet access devices, used daily by internet users in 93.9 per cent of cases. Social media is now the most widely used platform for interaction and communication (APJII, 2020). According to a joint study by *We Are Social and Hootsuite* conducted in 2020, Indonesians access the internet on average for 7 hours and 50

minutes per day, with 3 hours and 27 minutes spent on social media (Stephanie & Nistanto, 2021). These figures highlight the vital role social media sites play in the day-to-day activities of Indonesian internet users. The main issue with this new media paradigm is the lack of a culture that values reading, publishing (sharing and disseminating information), and producing (creating news). The ability of people (Internet users) to use digital media devices efficiently and safely is referred to as digital media literacy culture (Belshaw, 2011).

The main goal of this study is to investigate the digital media culture of internet users who use social media platforms to read, publish, and create texts. The following research questions are the focus of the study: (1) What knowledge and skills in digital citizenship are necessary for effective use of digital media? (2) How do symbolic interactions affect how online users interact with one another when using social media as readers, writers, and text creators? (3) What are the problems found in reading, creating, and publishing messages by internet users?

A qualitative descriptive approach was used to overview the issues under investigation to accomplish these goals thoroughly. Data were gathered using surveys and online questionnaires in public areas like cafes. The study took a semiotic stance and concentrated on the symbolic interaction theory. The results of this study will help develop a model that shows how symbolic interaction dynamics affect communication on social media platforms.

2. DIGITAL LITERACY

The skills and knowledge necessary to interact and communicate online are collectively called digital literacy. Digital literacy is the ability to understand and use various informational formats obtained from multiple sources using computer devices, according to Gilster (1997). The idea of digital literacy, which builds on the principles of information literacy and computer literacy, is further explained by Bawden (2001). Computer literacy became prominent as the use of microcomputers in business and society increased in the 1980s. The popularity of information literacy, on the other hand, was raised in the 1990s due to the development of network information technology, which made it simpler to access information. As a result, digital literacy is primarily related to the technical abilities needed to effectively gather, compile, comprehend, and disseminate information, as suggested by Bawden (2001).

Belshaw (2011) listed eight essential components for developing digital literacy, including the following: 1) Culture, which is the ability to comprehend the various contexts in which digital media users interact; 2) Cognition, which is the capacity to analyze information; and 3), Construction, which is the capacity to produce something credible and authentic; Communication is the fourth skill. It is the capacity to comprehend networking and communication in digital media. Confidence with full responsibility is the fifth skill. Creativity is the sixth skill. It is the capacity to make innovations. Critical thinking is the seventh skill. And social responsibility is the eighth skill.

The cultural component is crucial to digital literacy because it offers a framework for comprehending the user's context, assisting the cognitive part in evaluating digital content. According to earlier definitions, having digital literacy means using digital media and communication devices (networks) to evaluate, search for, create, compile, and use information in a wise, intelligent, cautious, and precise manner. It also emphasizes the need to follow the law when using communication and interaction in digital media.

Semiotic Perspective on Symbolic Interaction

Semiotic theory focuses on studying pictures, signs, symbols, and other related objects to comprehend their function and meaning (De Saussure, 1959). Its main objective is to explain the significance of these components in a social context, especially in the context of social media. The field of social semiotics was created by incorporating social interaction into post-structuralist theory, which builds on the principles of structuralist semiotics. Semiotics investigates how people use and interpret various signs and symbols in social media to explain meaning-making as a social practice (Barthes, 1957). It examines culturally and linguistically specific semiotic practices by observing how texts and meanings are produced in various situational and culturally significant contexts. The study of semiotics in social media explores the complexities of interpersonal communication and the use of complex signs in this digital environment.

De Saussure (1959) emphasized the idea of signs as essential to social life, viewing them as socially produced and transmitted systems of verbal and nonverbal language (including images, graphics, and photography). Barthes (1957) developed this idea by extending the concept of signs beyond language to other forms of expression like photography, fashion, magazines, and film. The relationship between various forms of communication is covered by the term "semiotic resources" which was coined by Halliday (1978) and Van Leeuwen (2005). Van Leeuwen's concept of semiotic resources includes overtones, such as language, gestures, images, and music, and more covert ones, such as food, dress, and everyday objects, all of which have cultural value and significance. According to Van Leeuwen's

semiotics framework, the availability and application of sign resources determine how signs, like dominant codes (Hall, 1973) and referent systems (Williamson, 1978), generate specific and general meanings. These tools are crucial for creating and communicating importance in social and cultural contexts.

The semiotic method asks how semioticians interpret signs as symbolic exchanges that promote virtual interaction and communication within communities and social networks, primarily through language. Semiotics investigates how people interpret extended interactions in social practices and how to use signs that result from these interactions well in society (Poulsen, Kvåle, & Van Leeuwen, 2018).

Semiotic analysis of texts from digital media, mainly social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, is the focus of semiotic research in digital media. These texts come in various formats, including written text, photographic images, and videos, all used to spread the news. Digital media's use of textual elements is closely related to the technological aspects of their creation, production, distribution, and consumption. Consider the result of a WhatsApp post as an example, where users not only take and upload photos but also use extra features like emojis and video images, using a visual language to improve communication. Users actively participate in the ongoing construction of meaning during this process by choosing and negotiating with the various features made available by digital media.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Two primary data collection techniques were used in the study: online surveys directed at social media users and direct observation. The observation technique involved closely observing and analyzing internet users' interactions and communication activities on social media and online news platforms. On the other hand, the online questionnaire approach involved sending questionnaires to internet users to gain information about their capacities as readers, publishers, and content creators. Data were gathered for the study from various sources. First and foremost, it examined the different kinds of news text (information) found on social media, such as comments, messages, and shared content. It sought to comprehend the types of text (pointer) consumed by users at the reading level. The research also investigated the data (messages) users disseminated or shared at the publishing level. Finally, it looked at subjects created or produced by internet users in the producing class. The second data source was based on survey responses from the social media-using research participants.

The questionnaires yielded insightful information about their social media usage habits, preferences, and experiences. The data analysis procedure was carried out to unearth and interpret the meaning concealed in media texts that internet users read, produce, and publish. The specific data analysis technique used is described in Table 1 in more detail.

Table 1. Method of data analysis

Roles of Internet Users	Content	Digital skills and knowledge	Digital media cultural literacy
Reader	Types of information consumption	proficiency and comprehension in choosing reading topics	When analyzing and reading texts from digital media, use critical thinking.
Publisher	Types of shared information	Information-sharing and dissemination abilities and knowledge	Having a disposition, exercising critical (selective) thinking, being inventive, and inspiring others when providing information
Producing	Types of produced data	Proficiency in reading, comprehending, and producing texts (including news content creation and commentary on current events).	acting with socially beneficial discretion when it comes to news content production and making comments about news or current events

A digital literacy research design of media culture for internet users in their capacities as readers, producers, and publishers of texts on social media was developed through the research's various stages, which included data collection, data analysis, and the creation of research outputs (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 The research design.

Two hundred seventeen netizens from the Generation Z group were surveyed as part of the data collection process. The respondents were chosen through the distribution of questionnaires and in-person interviews in public settings, with a focus on cafes that this generation is more likely to frequent. Several cafes or restaurants, including 'Kopi Kenangan', 'Kopi Janji Jiwa', 'Café Zero', and 'Warksop Dg. Sija', served as the research's designated public spaces where Generation Z online users were observed and contacted to gather data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Data Characteristics

Table 2. Respondents' characteristics according to sex, age, education, and occupation

Gender	Man			Woman		
	11-15		16-20	21-26		
Age	1		49	50		
Education	Elementary School	Junior High School	Senior High School	Diploma	Bachelor	Masters
Occupation	Student	Employee		Businessman		Etc.
	85	7		3	5	

Table 2 shows that respondent's characteristics consist of two genders, namely male and female. Most respondents are students. Based on age, respondents were mostly aged 21-26 years old with a bachelor's degree. Then, respondents aged 16-20 years old are senior high school students, and the least respondents aged 11-15 who are elementary school students.

4.2. Competence and Knowledge of Internet Users in Using Digital Media

Internet users' behavioral patterns and online platform usage habits are closely related to their skills and knowledge in using digital media (Belshaw, 2011). These behaviors include the media used to access information, the time spent online overall, the specific internet-based media used to access information, the types of social media platforms used to consume information (particularly news), the news topics accessed and read daily through the internet and social media, the general news content found on social media, and the news content that is consumed. These elements influence how adept and knowledgeable internet users are with digital media.

The analysis of the study revealed that Generation Z netizens have turned online media into a public space where people can access information. Surprisingly, 99.1% of Generation Z internet users accessed the internet to find information, underscoring the widespread use of smartphones (see Figure 2). This result highlights that people increasingly use the internet as their primary public space to obtain information about various topics.

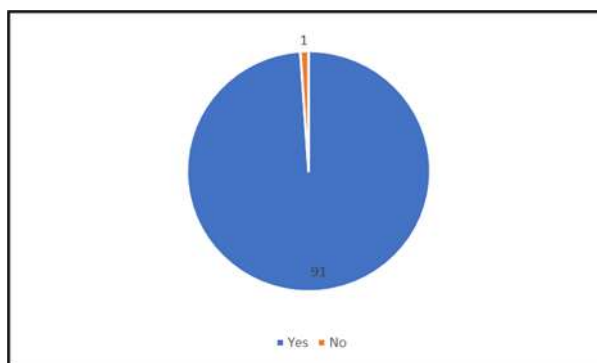


Figure 2 The proportion of people who use the internet to access news and information.

The popularity of the internet as the primary method of obtaining information is consistent with the amount of time spent on such pursuits. According to the study, Generation Z internet users spend 5 to 7 hours daily looking up information online (see Figure 3). It highlights the central role that the internet plays in their lives by showing that a sizeable portion of their daily activities revolve around using the internet.

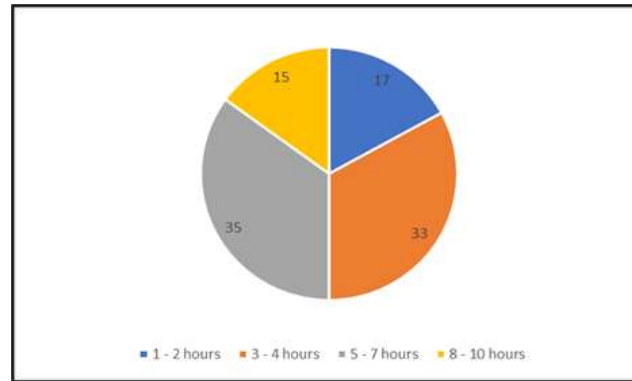


Figure 3 The percentage of time devoted to online news and information access.

The internet media netizens used during that time impacted the average time spent accessing information for 5-7 hours. Social media stands out among the options as the main entry point for internet users in Generation Z. The study's conclusions show that most Generation Z internet users, or about 88% of them, use social media platforms to find information, including news. Notably, this proportion matches the netizens' nearly 100% usage of internet-based media, highlighting the close connection between social media and Generation Z's information consumption habits.

Generation Z internet users now access information primarily through social media (see Figure 4). Its function goes beyond serving as a platform for communication between people and groups to include serving as a significant information source for news and other kinds of actual information. Social media is a portal for current affairs, product offers, entertainment, knowledge, and bad news like hoaxes. Several social media sites have significantly increased in popularity among internet users in Indonesia. The social media networks WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Telegram, Twitter, YouTube, and FB Messenger are the most popular nationwide, according to data from DataIndonesia. WhatsApp is still widely regarded as Indonesia's most popular social media site.

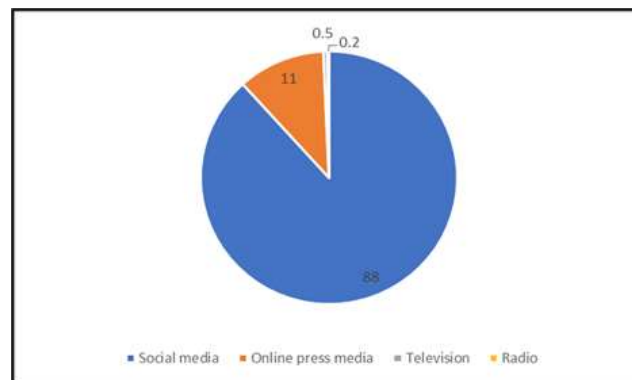


Figure 4 The various media available for information access.

For Indonesians, WhatsApp continues to be the most popular social media platform (see Figure 5). According to *We Are Social* report, 92.1% of people in the nation were using the instant messaging app as of January 2023. Because 86.5% of internet users in Indonesia use Instagram, it is ranked second. In that case, Facebook users comprise 83.8% of all internet users. With 70.8% of users in Indonesia, Instagram is in second place.

Furthermore, 64.3% and 60% of Indonesians use Twitter and Telegram. Furthermore, 51.9% of Indonesian internet users use Facebook Messenger. SnackVideo (Kuaishou), used by 37.8% of respondents, is in eighth place according to the data Indonesia.id article *WhatsApp is Still the Most Favorite social media in Indonesia*.

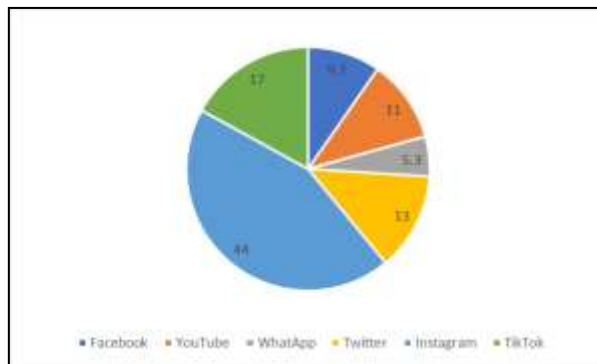


Figure 5 Platforms for accessing information on social media.

According to *We Are Social* report, WhatsApp continues to be the most popular social media platform in Indonesia. As of January 2023, 92.1% of Indonesian internet users used instant messaging. Second place goes to Instagram, which is used by 86.5% of Indonesian internet users. The third place goes to Facebook, which is used by 83.8% of Indonesian internet users. Instagram takes fourth place in Indonesia with 70.8% of users. Internet users in Indonesia use Twitter and Telegram at 64.3% and 60.2%, respectively. In Indonesia, 51.9% of internet users use Facebook Messenger. With 37.8% of respondents using the platform, SnackVideo (Kuaishou) is in eighth place. According to data Indonesia.id, this information confirms WhatsApp's dominance as the preferred social media platform among Indonesian internet users.

Instagram is the social media site that Generation Z users use the most, with a usage rate of 43.8%. Following Instagram, Generation Z internet users use Facebook 16.6%, Twitter 13.4%, YouTube 9.7%, and WhatsApp 5.1%. Internet users in Generation Z most frequently use these five social media sites to access news and other information. Instagram stands out among them as the preferred communication platform in digital media.

The five social media platforms provide a variety of news topics that Generation Z internet users enjoy accessing. Knowledge or actual news is the news topic that Generation Z internet users access social media about the most (28.6%), followed by entertainment (21.2%), lifestyle (18.4%), technology (10.1%), and sports (specifically football, at 2.8%). As Generation Z internet users seek information and use social media platforms to consume news, these topics hold their interest and attention.

The study found that Generation Z users access information online for an average of 5-7 hours per day, mostly through social media and web-based platforms. According to the study, the most relevant news topic categories were knowledge, entertainment, technological information, lifestyle, and football (see Figure 6). Internet users in Generation Z read 1-3 articles on average (54.8%), 4-6 articles on average (31.8%), 7-9 essays on average (8.3%), and 10-12 articles on average (5.1%) each day.

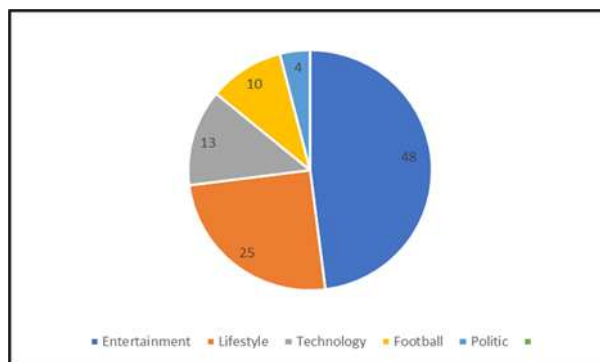


Figure 6 Information accessed daily on social media platforms.

These findings demonstrate that internet users in Generation Z regularly read news articles on digital platforms. Nevertheless, the study discovered that only 47.9% of internet users read the selected news article in its entirety, 28.6% only skimmed the text, and 23.5% have a variety of reading habits. It suggests that many internet users skim the news articles, which could lead to their knowledge and comprehension of the news they consume being incomplete. This behavior may also limit their ability to provide insightful commentary and inform other social media

users. Users on social media may misunderstand and disagree on how to interpret the news because of reading news articles in part. To ensure accurate comprehension, meaningful interactions, and a reduction in the likelihood of social conflicts brought on by misunderstandings, it is imperative to address this issue.

4.3. The Symbolic Interaction of Internet Users as Publishers, Readers, and Authors of Digital Media Texts

The process of social interaction in which people exchange messages through language is known as symbolic interaction. Through interactions with other people or social groups, symbolic interaction helps people develop their self-concept and perceptions. Blumer (1986) put forth three theoretical perspectives on extended interactions, namely: (1) behavior set based on the meaning of others or groups assigned to it; and (2) Social interactions are what produce sense (3). An object’s purpose is deciphered.

By focusing on the role of people as social beings who interact and interact with others, which in turn shapes their sense of self, symbolic interaction is a theory that sheds light on social phenomena. This theory emphasizes how symbols are crucial in meaning formation and behavior regulation. A person's motivation to act is based on the meanings they assign to others, things, events, and situations, claims symbolic interaction theory. These meanings are created through social interactions and communication and are not inherent or fixed. As a means of communication in both interpersonal and intrapersonal contexts, language plays a crucial part in this process. Through language, people create a sense of who they are and interact with others in society meaningfully. People use language to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas because it is thought to be a natural and innate symbol. People can communicate effectively and comprehend the meaning behind social activities through language. Therefore, studying people’s speech helps them learn about the significance and importance of their social interactions.

From a semiotic point of view, communication between individuals and groups involves symbolic interaction through a semiotic process: sign (language) - object - interpretant (interpretation). Language facilitates social interaction between individuals and groups by acting as a tool for communication. Individuals give symbols in language meaning, which they then communicate with others. These symbols represent a variety of things, such as actual physical things, people, behaviors, actions, and events. In the context of symbol-object relationships, interpretation is the process of giving meaning to behaviors that result from actions.

The idea of symbolic interaction in digital media, especially social media, centers on the involvement of internet users, also known as netizens, who communicate with one another and with community organizations via social networking sites. These platforms function as connecting mechanisms for people and groups to display. These social media networks enable symbolic interactions between users and groups, where users are led and influenced by the functionalities and features offered by the platforms. Emoji symbols, which are easily accessible through social media applications, for instance, are used to shape and control the communication activities of online users.

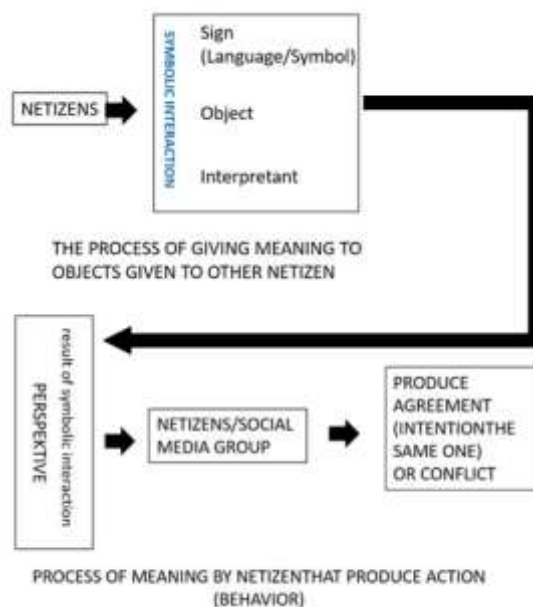


Figure 7 The social media symbolic interaction model.

In Figure 7, netizens’ consumption of various information, such as news, from the public or online media sources sets the stage for symbolic interaction on social media. By giving meaning to objects, which include a variety of events, netizens engage in extended interactions using language. They interact with people or groups on social media by leaving comments or disseminating their learned information. Through symbols, internet users assign meaning to them, which is then transmitted to other users or groups. Other online users will interpret the shared news using symbolic processes based on the symbols used.

In social interactions between online users, the second person shares their opinion on the significance of the data that the first user has provided. The results of symbolic interaction produce the meaning of an action or behavior, leading to either agreement (shared purpose) or disagreement.

Symbolic interaction among netizens on social media is the use of language (symbols) to create meanings derived from unique thoughts and the perception of self within online interactions. These interactions occur online through social media, and their main objective is to interpret and mediate meanings within the online community. The formation of substance involves connecting with other netizens and developing relationships with them through interactive engagements. The resulting essence is created through social interactions.

Netizens develop their sense of self within the online community as readers (reading digital media/news texts), producers (making comments), and publishers (forwarding and sharing news). The following three fundamental concepts of symbolic interaction are explained in forming meaning among people and in society.

4.3.1. Mind

The ability of internet users, particularly in social media, to use language (symbols) that have the same social significance as other users or within society is called mind. Netizens develop their cognitive skills and create interpretations through interactions with other users. To provide helpful information to their social media peers, netizens engage with compelling news content as readers and then leave encouraging comments. On social media platforms, netizens assume the roles of producers and publishers to provide information, entertainment, and insights to a larger audience.

According to the study, up to 82% of online users post interesting news to social media groups (see Figure 8).

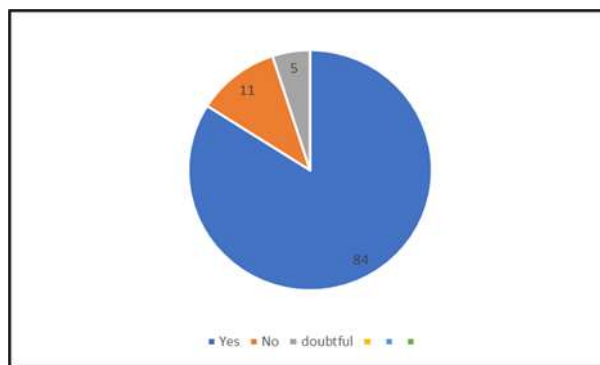


Figure 8 The proportion of online community members who share interesting news with other online community members or on social media groups.

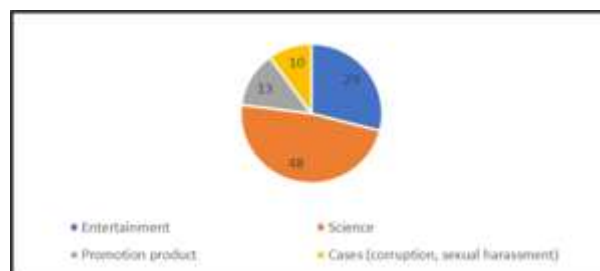


Figure 9 Information (news) sharing styles other internet users.

Individual motivations and goals influence how likely netizens are to share interesting information. Figure 9 shows the proportion of netizens share the news that they find interesting for a variety of reasons. In 48.4% of cases, the

main goal is to share knowledge and insights and help others by providing helpful information. In addition, 29% of the time, internet users share news content to amuse their friends. It includes humorous text, images, and videos. In 10.1% of cases, when netizens share news about incidents of harassment and corruption, among other things, it is also for educational purposes. Additionally, 4.6% of cases involve users sharing content for commercial gain, such as endorsing goods or promoting particular locales.

4.3.2. Self

Netizens exhibit self-awareness, enabling them to reflect and assess their unique perspectives and opinions considering feedback from other netizens or groups. Netizens share fascinating information, including news, by assuming the roles of producers and publishers to win recognition from their peers. In Figure 10 and Figure 11, it is clear from the comments and replies made by internet users, many of whom used emojis and other forms of symbolic language to communicate. These signs are used for communication, demonstrating how important it is for online communities to recognize and validate netizens.

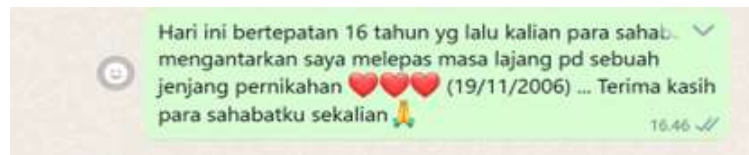


Figure 10 Internet users' expressions of gratitude for the birthday wishes sent by a WhatsApp group.

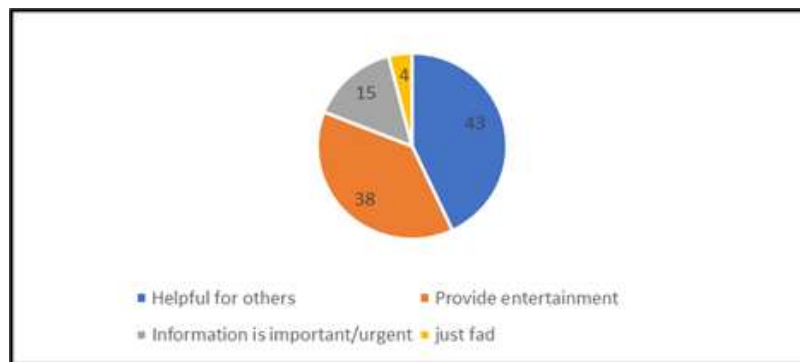


Figure 11 Why certain information is shared with other members of the online community by netizens.

4.3.3. Cyber Society

Cyber society is a living, evolving web of social interactions shaped by and created by individual online users. Every internet user can actively and voluntarily engage in this digital society. Their involvement is primarily demonstrated by sharing exciting information for the benefit of other online community members, both in the form of comments and by sharing helpful content. Examining the motivations and ends driving the sharing of crucial information reveals netizens' significant role within the cyber society. This current study found that 42% of internet users share information to make it worthwhile for others, 38.2% do so to amuse, and 15.2% do so because they believe it to be urgent. These figures demonstrate how actively contributing and disseminating content based on their goals and desired results and netizens influence virtual society.

The symbolic exchanges among internet users on social media highlight how important it is for people to create meaning for themselves in the virtual world. Members of virtual communities on sites like social media cannot be cut off from the communication process that enables the creation of mutually agreed-upon meanings, contends symbolic interaction theory.

These presumptions were developed due to an analysis of the symbolic communication between social media users. Social media users view other users as fellow online community members based on messages they exchange there. The significance of the language and symbols used in interactions and relationships between social media users. An individual's (netizen) alteration of the meaning or creation of a new meaning during the interpreting process.

5. CONCLUSION

Users on social media play various roles as consumers, producers, and distributors while participating in symbolic exchanges that build deep relationships within online communities. Through these interactions, the significance attached to the use of symbols in communication between netizens or groups is revealed and is consistent with the more significant meaning embraced by online communities.

Netizens, as members of the virtual society, must possess the following four pillars of digital media literacy to produce the same meaning through symbolic interaction. Digital skills are the capacity to use various digital technologies to create and evaluate information effectively. Knowledge of flexibility with, and application of digital ethics. Human creation and labor based on internet technology are known as "digital culture." How netizens interact, act, think, and communicate within the online community reflects digital culture. Digital safety is the knowledge of personal data security and protection. Digital security measures are intended to secure digital transactions using an OTP or password for authentication.

Netizens participate in symbolic interactions within digital media as readers, producers, and publishers. They must be knowledgeable about and behave in ways that support the four pillars of digital media literacy. Digitally literate members of Generation Z's online community are better equipped to use digital technology and interact with it in a skillful and culturally sensitive way, promoting moral and culturally rich symbolic interactions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the members of the research team and Research and Community Service Institute, and the Funding Institution of Hasanuddin University which have contributed to the publication of this research paper.

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