



How Gen Z Uses Media: An Exploratory Sequential Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract. The influence of generation and gender on media consumption habits is a particularly important topic in contemporary media studies. Using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, this study analyzed media consumption patterns among Generation Z (Gen Z) in Indonesia. At the first stage, the survey was given to 396 high school students to measure their information consumption habits on both conventional and digital media among Gen Z. Additionally, this study aims to reveal the differences in information consumption based on gender. In addition to quantitative data, this research also analyzed qualitative data from the focus groups of selected respondents to understand their reasons for consuming information through the media. The finding shows that Gen Z demonstrates a strong preference for digital media, which offers quick, interactive, and captivating content. The findings of this research also support the hypothesis that males and females have different information consumption patterns. Furthermore, Generation Z exhibits a marked transition from conventional media to digital platforms, indicative of their adaptation to technological advancements and information formats that align more closely with their preferences and consumption habits. Overall, these findings are consistent with the Uses and Gratification theory.

Keywords: Media Use; Information Access; Exploratory Sequential; Mixed-Methods

1 Introduction

Media plays an important role in our lives. Littlejohn et al. [1] stated that the culture of writing and especially the invention of the printing press have brought about major changes in society. The printing press's widespread use made it possible to copy books, essays, and announcements in large quantities. The printing press made information accessible to those beyond the elite [2, p. 373]. This encouraged the growth of literacy culture and the birth of modern civilization [3]. Another change occurred when electronic media emerged in society. The presence of electronic media such as telegraphs, telephones, typewriters, radio, and television created an explosion of information. As a result, media organizations competed fiercely to attract

the audience's attention [1]. Meanwhile, the emergence of new media such as the Internet, social media, and forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has allowed diverse communities from various parts of the world to stay connected to each

other [1], [2]. Despite the major changes brought about with its emergence, the primary role of media remains the same, namely to communicate and connect with others and to convey information to the general public [4].

Media use is one of the elements that shape the characteristics of a generation. Several studies have shown differences in dominant media use across generations. Unlike middle-aged adults (defined as 45-64 years old) and young adults (defined as 18-44 years old), older adults (defined as 65 years old and older) find mobile phones and websites less user-friendly [5]. Millennials (defined as those born between 1980 and 2000) in Spain mostly use technology for entertainment and enjoyment purposes, while Generation X (defined as those born between 1965 and 1980) are mostly driven by utility and information-seeking purposes [6]. Different findings show that Generation X (defined as those born between 1974 and 1984) in China tend to pay more attention to entertainment-based media programs such as television drama series and radio pop music and avoid information-based topics such as news or business reports [7]. Meanwhile, Laor & Galily [8] found that Generation Z (defined as those born between 2000 and 2020) consumes more on-demand content than their peers from Generation Y (defined as those born between 1980 and 2000).

Differences in access to information media between the previous generation and Generation Z indicate a shift in information consumption patterns. Generation Z predominantly uses digital or internet-based media, as opposed to conventional media, for information search. The Indonesian Internet Providers Association (APJII) nationwide survey [9] shows that Generation Z (34.4 percent) contributes more than Millennials (30.62 percent) in using the internet to access information. Meanwhile, the Reuters Institute Digital News Report [10] states that social media, search, or aggregators are increasingly becoming the main gateway to online news. According to the report [10], there are three reasons why audiences, including younger generations, are attracted to video and other content on social and video platforms. First, respondents say that video and other content on social and video platforms are more authentic and trustworthy compared to traditional media. The second reason is the convenience of getting news delivered through platforms we already use; social and video platforms know our interests, and algorithms work to provide suggestions based on previous considerations. Third, social video platforms offer diverse perspectives.

Several studies have been conducted to reveal information consumption patterns through digital and conventional media among Generation Z, especially in developed countries in Europe and the United States. Statista [11] shows that 50 percent of Generation Z (14-24 years old) in the United States use social media as their main source of news every day. In 2024, Facebook is still the most popular social media network for news worldwide. However, its usage has decreased from previous years. Besides Facebook, TikTok is becoming an increasingly popular social media platform as a news source. In 2024, news consumption on TikTok increased and was eight times higher than in 2020 [12]. While Gen Z shows a preference for digital media platforms, Media Nations UK 2024 [13] shows that 48% of respondents aged 16-24 admitted to watching TV broadcasts in an average week. In addition, compared to 2023, there was an increase in radio listening time in 2024, where the average was 20.5 hours per week. The first quarter of 2024 showed the highest number of weekly radio listeners across all devices in the last 20 years (just under 50 million). In Indonesia, a study conducted by

Permatasari [14] investigated Gen Z's news consumption in mainstream media and the factors influencing it, as well as Gen Z's perception of the role of mainstream media in exercising social control and as a reliable source of information. The study found that interests, location, proximity, self-satisfaction, and trivialities influence Gen Z's information search. Gen Z considers mainstream media as a reference to confirm the truth, but they do not tend to be loyal to a specific media outlet. They consciously visit mainstream media websites directly.

Research on information consumption patterns through mass media by Generation Z has also been conducted in Indonesia, although it is still limited. Suciska and Gunawibawa's study [15], for example, compared news consumption patterns between Generation Z and the millennial generation and Baby Boomers in Bandar Lampung. Their study found that the level of interest and use of internet-based digital information technology was much higher than in the Millennial Generation and Baby Boomers. Evita et al. [16] explore the media consumption of Indonesia's Generation Z aged 15-25 years during the pandemic. Their study found that instant messaging applications and social media are the main gateways for Generation Z to obtain information. Generation Z accesses media for various purposes, but the main one is to seek entertainment. In addition, through instant messaging applications and social media, Gen Z seeks non-entertainment or serious information, including information related to education and work. **(H1)** Based on the literature review, we assume that compared to conventional media, Generation Z accesses digital media more to find information.

Another important factor related to information consumption through media is gender. According to Uses and Gratifications theory, variations in media use and preferences for information or content accessed may reflect a number of audience characteristics, including gender [17, p. 3579]. Several studies have shown differences in media usage patterns between men and women. Survey conducted by Liu & Huang [18] revealed that female readers preferred paper reading to male readers, while male readers showed a higher level of satisfaction with online reading than female readers. Twenge & Martin [19] found that teenage girls spend more time on smartphones, social media, texting, general computer use, and online activities, while boys spend more time playing games and using electronic devices in general. Differences in media usage patterns between men and women also occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lemenager et al. [20] found that men tended to consume games and erotic platforms more than women, while women accessed social networks, information research, and video streaming more than men. The findings of a study by Alsulaiman [21] also showed the role of gender differences in news consumption by students in Saudi Arabia. He found that compared to men, female respondents tended to use more diverse media when searching for news. Men and women also showed differences in their search for health information. Hassan & Masoud [22] found that female respondents in Egypt had a higher percentage of health data searches on YouTube and looked for nutritional information than men. On the other hand, men used online health applications more often and were more interested in physical fitness and smoking. **(H2)** Given these findings, we assume that there are differences in information consumption patterns through media between males and females of Generation Z.

The Uses and Gratifications theory explains Generation Z's pattern of media consumption. Uses and gratifications theory states that we seek media exposure for a

variety of reasons, which may be informational, social, affective, or dissemination-seeking [17, p. 124]. The Uses and Gratifications' research began with the examination of newspapers, focusing on their monitoring, correlational, and escapist functions [17, p. 3297]. In addition, Uses and Gratifications studies have also addressed the content preferred by magazine readers and the role of magazines according to them [17, p. 2745]. There are two types of magazines: general interest magazines and special interest magazines. General interest magazines appeal to a broad readership, and special interest magazines target specific audiences. Trade magazines, also known as specialty business magazines or business-to-business magazines, serve specific industries and professions. The results showed that readers of trade magazines and newsweeklies preferred insight and information, while readers of consumer magazines sought diversion. For many readers, magazines play a social role, building communities or affinity groups to which they identify.

Researchers have conducted Uses and Gratifications studies on electronic media, in addition to printed media. Unlike print media users, television viewers tend to be active media users [17, p. 644]. However, the use of electronic media (radio, television) often occurs only incidentally, in a habitual manner, and without much attention. The Uses-and-Gratifications approach, on the other hand, includes participation as a clear part of the idea of audience activity [17, pp. 2532–2533]. Levy and Windahl's three-phase model expresses involvement as the intention to use the media prior to exposure. During media exposure, involvement is understood as the level of psychological interaction of the individual with the media or its message. After the person is exposed to the media, involvement can be conceptualized as a long-term identification or parasocial relationship [17].

McQuail [23] emphasized that mass media is created to meet the specific needs of its users and that audiences have a complex set of desires to seek satisfaction in using mass media [24]. If the media fails to meet these needs, people will abandon it [23]. An individual, consciously or not, will seek media that gives them satisfaction [2]. Therefore, in order to remain relevant, media must meet the expectations of the audience. The difference between the satisfaction sought or expected (gratification sought) and the gratification obtained can reveal the deepest preferences of society towards certain media. Referring to this theory, this study also aims to analyze the underlying reasons for Generation Z consuming information through the media they access.

2 Methodology

This study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, utilizing a sequential explanatory strategy. In the first stage, quantitative data collection was carried out and descriptively collected to obtain an overview of information consumption patterns through media by Generation Z. The study then proceeded with data collection and qualitative data analysis, based on the quantitative analysis results.

The sample included 396 adolescents aged 15 to 22 years (51% female) who were surveyed between July-August 2024. All respondents are high school students in Semarang City. Meanwhile, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted once in each school. Five students, purposefully selected, served as informants.

Measures

The adolescents completed a self-report survey. In addition to sociodemographic variables (five items), the survey included 12 questions asking participants about the time spent getting information from conventional media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, cinemas, and CDs) and digital media (domestic and/or foreign online news media, streaming services, e-commerce, and social media). Answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale (0: never, 1: <2 hours, 2: 2-3 hours, 3: 4-5 hours, 4: >5 hours).

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS statistical package, version 23.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA). The Compare Means procedure was performed to summarize and compare the time of accessing information through conventional media and digital media based on gender. Furthermore, nonparametric tests were conducted to prove the research hypothesis. The Chi-Square Test was conducted to determine whether there is a relationship between these variables.

Focus Group Discussion

Informants were asked to answer questions about their reasons for choosing media. The FGD lasted approximately 45 minutes and included six questions. The questions asked include:

1. What are your reasons for choosing to access conventional media types to obtain information?
2. What are your reasons for choosing to access digital media types to obtain information?
3. If you access digital media types more often than conventional media types, what are your reasons?
4. If you access conventional media types more often than digital media types, what are your reasons?
5. Do you tend to use the same media platform to access information?
 - a. If yes, please mention it and explain why you stick with it.
 - b. If no, please mention the platforms you use and explain why you switch between them.
6. Is the format or packaging of information (e.g., video, audio) important to you?

3 Results and Discussion

Our H1 is supported by findings related to information consumption through conventional media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, cinema, and CDs) and digital media (domestic and/or foreign online news media, streaming services, e-commerce, and social media) by Generation Z (see Table 1-3). Table 1 shows that Generation Z spends more time using digital media to access information.

Table 1. Information consumption through media by Generation Z

Group	Conventional media	Digital media
N	396	396
Mean	0.78	1.89
Standard Deviation	0.410	0.692

Source: Analyzed data

Compared to other digital media, this study found that social media is the most widely accessed platform. The majority of Generation Z access social media on a daily basis for more than 5 hours per day. In the FGD session, it was revealed that all participants stated that they most often access social media to obtain information compared to other digital media. The main reason Generation Z accesses social media is that accessing information on social media is easier, and the information presentation format is more interesting.

Table 2. Digital media consumption by Generation Z

Group	Online news	Streaming services	E-Commerce	Social Media
N	396	396	396	396
Mean	1.34	1.88	1.49	2.84
Standard Deviation	0.919	1.200	0.935	1.061

Source: Analyzed data

As shown in Table 2, the majority of Generation Z also spends much time on the streaming services. They are classified as frequent users based on their frequency. Generation Z spends 2-3 hours on average per day on streaming services. They access streaming services for entertainment, such as watching movies or series on Netflix or Disney+ Hotstar or watching sports on Vidio.com. In addition to watching movies or series, for them, watching documentary content is also enjoyable. According to Wibowo et al. [25] this creates the concept of “roamer behavior,” which means the behavior of Generation Z, which is identical to their preference for various online streaming platforms compared to television.

Most members of Generation Z also use e-commerce as a digital platform. Based on FGD, Generation Z admits that they can get honest product reviews from the previous buyers. In addition, e-commerce has an intriguing and entertaining LIVE feature, such as TikTok LIVE and Shopee LIVE. This feature allows Generation Z to receive a wealth of information directly from the seller. Prospective buyers can ask questions of the seller through the available live chat. Both online product reviews and LIVE features help Generation Z in the purchase decision.

Social media, streaming services, and e-commerce have surpassed online news media in popularity among Generation Z. This demographic rarely engages with online news due to the unappealing format, which primarily consists of lengthy or brief text with limited visual content, leading to disengagement. Nevertheless, some members of Generation Z continue to access online news media, primarily to gather information for academic purposes. Additionally, given their tendency to question the credibility of information, Generation Z frequently uses online news platforms to verify details encountered on other digital media. [14].

On the other hand, conventional media such as books, television, and cinema still have a place, albeit on a smaller scale. Generation Z still frequently accesses books as the only conventional media, particularly for academic purposes. Television and cinema, although less frequently accessed, are still considered to provide complete and in-depth information and quality entertainment. Most members of Generation Z have abandoned radio, newspapers, and magazines due to their limitations in presenting dynamic and instant information. This also confirms the findings of Kullolli & Trebicka [26] who state that Generation Z has more preference in media displays that are rich in visuals and interactive compared to traditional media that is text-heavy. Of course, this shows a shift in media preferences between Generation Z and previous generations [26].

Table 3. Traditional media consumption by Generation Z

Group	Television	Radio	Newspaper	Magazine	Book	Cinema	CD
N	396	396	396	396	396	396	396
Mean	1.30	0.30	0.33	0.45	1.47	1.26	0.32
Standard Deviation	0.932	0.597	0.532	0.656	0.961	0.866	0.682

Source: Analyzed data

The findings regarding gender differences in media consumption patterns (see Table 4) support our hypothesis (H2). Table 4 illustrates that, compared to males, females in Generation Z engage more frequently with media for information. The Chi-square test of independence reveals a statistically significant relationship between the time spent consuming information through media among males and females of Generation Z, $\chi^2(2, n = 396) = 11.14, p = .004$.

Table 4. Information consumption through media by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	1.24	1.12
Standard Deviation	0.396	0.421

Source: Analyzed data

Table 5. Television consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	1.31	1.29
Standard Deviation	0.990	0.869

Source: Analyzed data

Table 5 demonstrates that females watch television more frequently than males. Perić et al. [27] suggest that television consumption is influenced by the audience's level of trust. Their study found that Generation Z in the Balkan region exhibits high levels of trust in television, largely due to the perception that information broadcast on television undergoes rigorous verification processes before being broadcasted to the public. Additionally, females tend to have greater preferences and motivations for watching television than males. Younus & Shaikh [28] observed that women in Pakistan allocate time to watch a diverse range of television programs, including those focused on health

information, cosmetics, and clothing. Furthermore, they regularly engage with dramas, religious programs, morning shows, news, and cooking segments, indicating a strong interest in a wide variety of television programs.

Table 6. Radio consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	0.29	0.30
Standard Deviation	0.598	0.598

Source: Analyzed data

In contrast, the frequency of accessing information via radio is slightly higher in males than females of Generation Z (see Table 6). In this regard, Nicolaou et al. [29] found that Generation Z still consumes radio frequently. They listen to the radio channels to enjoy music without having a particular interest or just listen to the radio as a background company. This trend of radio consumption among Generation Z, both male and female, also refutes the assumption that radio is no longer used by the younger generation.

Table 7. Newspaper consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	0.28	0.39
Standard Deviation	0.491	0.568

Source: Analyzed data

Table 7 demonstrates that the level of consumption of conventional newspapers is also higher among males compared to females of Generation Z. In a similar vein, Geers [30] found that among Dutch teenagers aged 16–21, males more often access traditional media, such as newspapers, to get news, while females more often visit online news platforms. In addition, those who use traditional media have a preference for domestic political news, while those who access online news platforms have a preference for entertaining news content [30].

Table 8. Magazine consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	0.42	0.49
Standard Deviation	0.628	0.685

Source: Analyzed data

Table 8 shows higher levels of magazine consumption among males compared to females in Generation Z. Generation Z still consumes printed magazines for various reasons, which, of course, is in accordance with the Uses and Gratification Theory. Mbombo & Muthambi [31] found that some of these digital natives buy printed magazines, such as printed fashion magazines, because of the value of authenticity and satisfaction when they turn each page of the magazine. The idea that the magazine can serve as a collection also supports this, encouraging readers to delve deeper into each presented article.

Table 9. Book consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	1.53	1.41
Standard Deviation	0.957	0.963

Source: Analyzed data

Meanwhile, this study found that females spend more time accessing information through books than males (see Table 10). This may be due to differences in preferences and characteristics between male and female. Nashath & Ahamed Akram [32] found that compared to males, female students in Sri Lanka have more preferences in reading, especially novels and books. This difference in reading frequency may be due to differences in the way the two genders encourage personal satisfaction, relaxation, entertainment, gaining knowledge, and using free time.

Table 10. Cinema consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	1.40	1.12
Standard Deviation	0.853	0.859

Source: Analyzed data

Table 10 also reveals a slight difference in media consumption between males and females of Generation Z, indicating that females spend more time in cinemas than males. Generation Z often watches movies in theaters as a way to have fun. Soto-Sanfiel et al. [33] found that their motivation for going to the cinema was primarily to be entertained, with few of them having specific cognitive motivations.

Table 11. CD consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	0.31	0.33
Standard Deviation	0.665	0.701

Source: Analyzed data

Meanwhile, Table 11 shows that compared to female, male accesses information through CDs more frequent.

Table 12. Online news consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	1.29	1.40
Standard Deviation	0.879	0.957

Source: Analyzed data

This study also found that compared to females, males of Generation Z access information much more through online newspapers (see Table 12). It is noteworthy that there has been a shift between generations regarding news consumption patterns, from previously relying on conventional media to digital media. According to Tandon et al. [34] Generation Z has more preference in accessing digital news media. They hold ideas and attitudes related to the value of sustainability in digital media and consider it much

easier and more convenient to access news through digital media.

Table 13. Streaming service consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	2.14	1.62
Standard Deviation	1.193	1.151

Source: Analyzed data

Meanwhile, the study also found differences in streaming service consumption patterns between males and females of Generation Z, where Table 13 shows that females access streaming services more often than males. Both males and females of Generation Z have high involvement in streaming service consumption, for example, through binge-watching, which is popular among them. However, there are differences in motivation between males and females in their involvement in streaming service consumption. Qayyoom & Malik [35] found that entertainment, escape, and excitement were the main drivers for teenagers to obtain satisfaction. They also stated that females were more driven by fear of missing out (FOMO) and social interaction aspects, while males were more driven by excitement when binge-watching.

Table 14. E-Commerce consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	1.66	1.31
Standard Deviation	0.928	0.910

Source: Analyzed data

The result also shows a similar pattern in the level of e-commerce consumption based on gender division. Table 14 shows that among Generation Z, females access e-commerce more often than males. However, Pradhana & Sastiono [36] discovered a slight difference in the spending habits of males and females. In fact, men are considered to buy goods that have higher value and price than women. There are various factors that influence ecommerce purchase habits, such as age, education level, product knowledge, and the use of social media [37]. In addition, men tend to be influenced by their level of trust in e-commerce, while women tend to be influenced by the emotional level and practicality of purchasing goods [36].

Table 15. Social media consumption by Gender

Group	Female	Male
N	202	194
Mean	3.03	2.64
Standard Deviation	0.977	1.112

Source: Analyzed data

In addition, Table 15 also shows that compared to males, females of Generation Z spend more time on social media. Li & Zhuo [38] found that females tend to express themselves through social media, which may be difficult to express in the real world. This motivation for emotional expression is the main motivation for females to keep using their social media, which can then explain their higher level of social media consumption than males.

These results are consistent with the Uses and Gratifications theory, which emphasizes that individuals choose media based on their needs and the gratifications they seek. Generation Z uses social media for social interaction and entertainment, e-commerce for relevant and interactive product information, and streaming services for engaging entertainment. Generation Z also uses social media as a way to communicate with others and access entertainment; even some of Generation Z use social media as a means for learning activities [39].

Conventional media such as books and television, although less used, still meet the need for in-depth and reliable information and entertainment. When compared to previous studies, these findings show consistency in Generation Z's tendency to abandon conventional media and switch to digital media. Research by the IDN Research Institute and Populix [40] reported that the majority (82%) of Generation Z still watch TV. The findings are in line with the data from this study, which shows that TV is still accessed by some Generation Z, although the frequency of access is low. Likewise, the Indonesia Gen Z Report 2024 reveals a significant decline in the use of conventional media, such as magazines and newspapers, in line with research findings that Generation Z tends to abandon this type of media as a source of information. Overall, the results of this study show that Generation Z has a strong tendency to use digital media that offers fast, interactive, and intriguing information. This conclusion is in line with the Uses and Gratifications theory and their evolving information consumption patterns.

4 Conclusion

Our H1 is fully supported by the findings because recent research shows that members of Generation Z consume more information through digital media than through conventional media. Meanwhile, our H2 is fully supported by the findings of the study, which show a difference in the length of time spent consuming information through media for male and female Generation Z.

Generation Z tends to access information through digital media compared to conventional media. Social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are the main platforms used by Generation Z to get information, entertainment, and social interaction, thanks to their interactive and engaging formats. Instagram is widely used for image- and video-based content, TikTok is popular for trending content, and YouTube provides a variety of informative and entertaining videos. E-commerce platforms such as Shopee, TikTok Shop, and Tokopedia also play a significant role, especially in terms of product information presented directly through the live feature.

On the other hand, conventional media such as books and television are still used, but with a lower frequency because they are considered less fulfilling the needs for fast access and engaging formats sought by Generation Z. Books are still often used for academic purposes, while television is accessed less often compared to social media. These results back up earlier research that showed a big shift from traditional to digital media among Generation Z. This shows how well they have adapted to technology and how much they like information that is quick, interactive, and in line with their consumption habits.

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