

## The Role of Instagram in Shaping Spiritual Resilience and Identity among Undergraduate Generation Z

Farida Hariyati<sup>1</sup>, Rita Pranawati<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>ORCID iD: [0000-0001-5517-8445](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5517-8445), Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA, Jl. Limau II No. 2, Jakarta 12130, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>ORCID iD: [0000-0002-2454-6871](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2454-6871), Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA, Jl. Limau II No. 2, Jakarta 12130, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author, e-mail: [farida@uhamka.ac.id](mailto:farida@uhamka.ac.id)

### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study investigates how undergraduate students Generation Z, who are immersed in digital and urban environments, develop spiritual resilience through their communicative practices on social media, particularly Instagram. It aims to elucidate the dynamic interplay between spirituality, self-control, and the formation of digital identity as central factors in cultivating resilience.

**Methods:** Employing a qualitative case-study approach, this research conducted in-depth interviews with eight Gen-Z students in Jakarta. As members of an urban society and active digital users, these participants represent information-rich cases that provide deep insights into lived experiences rather than generalizable findings.

**Findings:** The findings reveal that social media functions both as a source of spiritual motivation and a trigger of internal conflict. Participants used Instagram for self-expression, information seeking, and spiritual encouragement beyond recreational purposes. Key indicators of spiritual resilience emerged, including self-control, time management, negotiation of multiple identities, and intentional digital detox practices. The students demonstrated critical awareness of social media's dual impact and actively balanced digital engagement with academic, spiritual, and emotional responsibilities.

**Originality:** This study offers a novel integrated approach by synthesizing digital nativity, spiritual purpose, and adaptive resilience, which are often examined separately. It bridges the gap in existing literature by exploring the nexus of Gen-Z's unique digital communication on Instagram and their search for spiritual meaning. By examining these converging dimensions, the research provides a holistic understanding of how communicative processes function as tools for navigating modern adversities.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Resilience, Identity, Generation Z, Social Media, Instagram.

### Introduction

Generation Z, born between the late 1990s and the early 2012, represent a unique cohort shaped by unprecedented technological advancement, socio-political shifts, and economic uncertainties. Their formative years have been marked by digital immersion, constant connectivity, and exposure to a rapidly changing global landscape, influencing their emotional, psychological, and spiritual development (Ranieri et al., 2021). Understanding the interplay between resilience, communication pattern, and spirituality within this demographic is crucial for fostering their well-being and addressing the challenges they face in navigating modern life. This generation's exposure to continuous streams of information and diverse perspectives through digital platforms has molded distinct communication styles, values, and beliefs. The capacity to adapt to stress and trauma is paramount to navigating life's challenges (Harari et al., 2023). This generation faces unique pressures, including academic expectations, career anxieties, and social

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comparisons fueled by social media, that can impact their resilience. Examining the role of spirituality, broadly defined as a search for meaning and purpose in life, offers insights into how Gen Z men cope with adversity and cultivate a sense of hope and connection. Notably, this cohort exhibits higher rates of depression and anxiety and a greater need for emotional support compared to previous generation, a trend observed even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the pandemic has pressured educational institutions at an unprecedented pace to adopt and enhance digital readiness (Ang et al., 2022).

The pervasive integration of digital technology into every aspect of Gen-Z's lives has fundamentally altered their developmental trajectories and mental health outcomes. Gen-Z faces a complex landscape of mental health challenges exacerbated by social comparison and global uncertainties, necessitating adaptive coping mechanisms to foster resilience. Within digital ecosystems such as Instagram, the visual and asynchronous nature of communication serves not only as a potential source of isolation but also as a transformative space for 'digital spirituality,' where individuals engage in a profound search for meaning and transcendent purpose. By integrating spirituality as a core internal resource with digital fluency, Gen-Z can manifest 'spiritual resilience'; a capacity to utilize online connectivity as a conduit for hope and cognitive reframing. This synergy allows them to navigate the deluge of information not merely through technical proficiency, but through a values-based lens that mitigates fear and cultivates lasting psychological strength in the face of modern adversity (Fröh & Robinson, 2024). The unprecedented level of digital engagement has created a paradoxical situation where connectivity coexists with loneliness, and access to information coincides with increased anxiety and uncertainty (J. Twenge, 2018). The algorithmic nature of social media platforms, which prioritizes engagement over well-being, has been linked to increased rates of body dissatisfaction, fear of missing out (FOMO), and comparative distress among young adults (Castellanos Silva & Steins, 2023).

Resilience has gained significant currency in the mental health literature (Masten, 2014). In the context of Gen-Z, resilience encompasses the ability to bounce back from setbacks, adapt to changing circumstances, and maintain psychological well-being in the face of adversity. It involves a complex interplay of personal attributes, social support systems, and environmental factors that either promote or hinder adaptive coping mechanisms. Given the unique challenges they face, such as economic instability, social and political polarization, and the persuasive influence of social media, it is essential to understand the factors that contribute to or detract from their resilience (Soh et al., 2024). Interestingly, Gen-Z is often characterized as being 'bubble-wrapped' due to overprotective parenting styles, potentially hindering the development of resilience through exposure to adversity (Ang et al., 2022).

The concept of resilience among Gen-Z requires reconceptualization to account for the unique stressors and resources available to this digitally native generation. Gen-Z exists within a dual reality where digital nativity on platforms like Instagram intersects with a profound need for psychological stability. While Instagram often facilitates social comparison and 'bubble-wrapped' anxieties, it also serves as a vital landscape for 'spiritual resilience'; the capacity to derive meaning and purpose from adversity. This form of resilience is not merely a passive trait but a dynamic motivational process where internal spiritual values act as a buffer against the 'deluge of information' and fear prevalent in the digital age. By leveraging digital connectivity for spiritual expression, Gen-Z can transform fragmented online interactions into a cohesive framework for hope, allowing

them to 'bounce back' from modern setbacks through a values-based cognitive reframing (Mostert et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the digital environment, while offering benefits such as access to information and social connection, also presents challenges such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and exposure to unrealistic portrayals of success. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, Gen-Z experienced a deluge of complicated information that exceeded their processing capacity, leading to biased judgements and increased fear (Harari et al., 2023). Communication patterns among Gen-Z are deeply shaped by their digital nativity, influencing how they interact with others, express emotions, and build relationships. The reliance on digital platforms has fostered a unique style characterized by brevity, visual content, and a preference for asynchronous interactions. While this offers convenience, it also presents challenges such as misinterpretations and the potential for social isolation.

Despite the extensive research on Gen-Z mental health, there remains a significant gap in understanding how their unique digital communication styles and spiritual search for meaning converge to build resilience. Most existing studies treat these elements in isolation. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its integrated approach, exploring the nexus between digital nativity, spiritual purpose, and adaptive resilience. By synthesizing these dimensions, this research aims to explore the lived experiences of Gen-Z in utilizing digital platforms, particularly Instagram and spiritual beliefs to navigate modern adversities, thereby offering a holistic understanding of their communicative processes in building spiritual resilience.

Furthermore, these emphasis on authenticity and transparency in online interactions has influenced how Gen-Z express themselves and connect with others. Given the influence of social media on Gen-Z's perception of mental health, digital literacy and awareness are crucial for protection from potentially negative impacts (Yakobus et al., 2023).

Spirituality, as a search for meaning, purpose, and connection beyond the material world, plays a significant role in the lives of many Gen-Z, influencing their values, beliefs, and coping mechanisms. While traditional religious institutions may hold less sway over this generation compared to previous ones, many Gen-Z identify as spiritual but not religious, seeking meaning and purpose through alternative avenues such as mindfulness practices, nature-based experiences, and social activism. The exploration of spirituality among Gen-Z is often intertwined with questions of identity, purpose, and social justice. This generation's engagement with spirituality is often characterized by a focus on personal experience, authenticity, and social impact. Exploring the diverse expressions of spirituality among Gen Z and understanding how the practices contribute to their resilience, well-being, and sense of belonging is essential for fostering holistic development. Their inclination towards individualistic forms of religion reflects a broader cultural trend of seeking personalized meaning and connection. Furthermore, the emphasis on social and humanitarian dimensions within their spirituality reflects a desire to make a positive impact on the world.

Previous research related to spirituality and social media use in Gen Z has been conducted by Beckham explaining that social media and spirituality influence the formation or development of faith in adults in the younger generation in the United States (Beckham, 2021). Research conducted by (Haroon et al., 2020), found that spirituality cannot mediate social media addiction and user psychology, while research by (Purbiyati & Amelia, 2025) found that social media has a moderate impact on mental health and spiritual intelligence. Previous studies have different results because the

variables are different, namely some place spirituality as an independent variable and provides suggestions for future research to strengthen the understanding of spirituality in the relationship between social media and young people to form spirituality and increase awareness of a belief and identity (Beckham, 2021).

Integrating resilience, communication, and spirituality offers a holistic framework for understanding the well-being of Gen-Z, which reveals the interconnectedness of psychological, social, and existential dimensions in shaping their experiences. Spiritual resilience is the ability to maintain a sense of self and life purpose through spiritual values, principles, and beliefs when facing hardship, stress, and trauma. Resilience is not only about surviving adversity, but also about experiencing growth and transformation. Spiritual resilience comprises five main domains: 1) Relationships rooted in spirituality, where social support and a connection with God are considered vital in overcoming difficulties; 2) A belief system and worldview, where faith in a divine plan or greater meaning helps individuals accept and cope with uncertainty; 3) Spiritual coping, which involves using prayer, faith, and religious practices as ways to deal with stress or suffering; 4) Commitment to spiritual values and practices, which includes intentionally engaging in rituals such as prayer, meditation, reflection, and gratitude as forms of resilience; and 5) Openness to spiritual growth and transformation, where adversity is viewed as an opportunity for spiritual development and positive change (Manning et al., 2019).

University students belong to Generation Z, a cohort of individuals born between 1995 and 2010, who exhibit distinct attitudes, expectations, strengths, and weaknesses compared to previous generations (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2016). Gen Z students possess fixed ideation in valuing themselves, influenced by the self-esteem movement (Dweck, 2015). In addition, Generation Z students are associated with higher narcissism, over-confidence, aversion to negative events, and a focus on praises and high grades (J. M. Twenge, 2013). These students are thought to be 'bubble-wrapped' due to helicopter parenting (Talmon, 2019), which may lead to poor academic or career outcome (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014). Given that resilience is proposed to be developed through exposure to adversity (Luecken & Gress, 2009), Generation Z undergraduate students have potentially lesser resilience owing to the lack of exposure to adversity due to helicopter parenting and their general aversion to risk and negative events. Hence, exploring the concept of resilience among these group of students from different university faculties is essential.

The objective of this study is to investigate how undergraduate Generation Z students, as digital natives in an urban environment, develop spiritual resilience through their communicative practices on social media, specifically Instagram. Furthermore, this research aims to explore the nexus between digital nativity, spiritual purpose, and adaptive resilience by examining the lived experiences of these students in utilizing digital platforms and spiritual beliefs to navigate modern adversities, thereby providing a holistic understanding of the communicative processes involved in building spiritual resilience.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the communicative practices and digital spiritual resilience of Generation Z in an urban Indonesian context. The case study method is selected for its strength in providing in-depth, contextualized understanding of lived experiences, particularly suitable for examining the intersection

between youth identity, spirituality, and digital media (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). Qualitative inquiry was chosen because it allows researchers to capture participants' perspectives in their own terms, emphasizing meaning-making, values, and lived realities—an orientation critical for studying spirituality and identity among Gen-Z. This study utilized a qualitative case-study approach to thoroughly examine the communicative practices of Gen-Z. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight undergraduate Gen-Z students in Jakarta, which was selected as the research site due to its status as a diverse, media-rich educational and digital hub in Indonesia. This sample size was chosen based on the principle of information-rich sampling and qualitative saturation logic, which prioritizes deep, contextualized insights and individual narratives rather than generalizable data. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, meeting criteria as active social media users who engage in spiritual reflection concerning their digital lives.

The participants in this study consisted of eight informants (designated as Informant 1 to Informant 8), all of whom belong to the Generation Z cohort residing in Jakarta. The selection of these eight individuals was conducted through a purposive sampling technique to ensure that the data collected remained focused and rich in context. The informants represent a balanced demographic distribution, comprising four males and four females aged between 20 and 23 years old. This specific age range was chosen as it represents the peak of 'digital native' activity, where individuals are most deeply integrated with contemporary digital communication patterns. A key inclusion criterion for this study was the intensity of social media engagement. As detailed in the updated Table 1, all informants are active users who spend a minimum of 4 to 6 hours daily on various social media platforms. To ensure data accuracy, the duration of social media usage was verified through the 'Screen Time' or 'Digital Wellbeing' features on the informants' smartphones, providing an objective measure of their daily digital consumption.

This high level of digital immersion ensures that the informants possess extensive experience and up-to-date perspectives regarding the digital phenomena being investigated. Furthermore, the informants' backgrounds are diverse in terms of their educational institutions, involving students from both private and public universities. This diversity is crucial to capture a broad spectrum of social experiences within the metropolitan environment of Jakarta. The decision to limit the number to eight informants was based on the principle of data saturation in qualitative research, where the depth of individual interviews and field observations takes precedence over numerical quantity. By focusing on this intensive user group, the study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the unique behaviors and viewpoints characteristic of Jakarta's Gen-Z population.

Table 1. The List of Informant

No	Name	Age/Gender	Occupation	Average time for screen time
1	Informant 1	23/M	Private university student	4 hours/day
2	Informant 2	20/F	Private university student	4 hours/day
3	Informant 3	21/M	Private university student	4 hours/day
4	Informant 4	20/F	Private university student	5-6 hour/day
5	Informant 5	23/F	Private university student	4-5 hours/day
6	Informant 6	23/M	Private university student	6 hours/day
7	Informant 7	21/M	Public university student	4 hours/day

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8	Informant 8	21/F	Public university student	5 hours/day
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Note: Informants' daily social media usage duration was objectively verified through the 'screen time' on their respective smartphones. The sample includes a balanced representation of genders (4 males, 4 females) from both private and public universities in Jakarta

## Results

Generation Z is a cohort that has never experienced the era of manual technology; they have been immersed in digital technology throughout their lives. Labeled as 'digital natives,' it is unsurprising that they can easily adapt to activities that rely on digital media. The abundance of information accessible through various digital platforms, including social media and online media, often leads to perceptions of Gen-Z as inconsistent, easily swayed, emotionally unstable, and prone to FOMO (Fear of Missing Out).

Based on interviews with informants, it can be described that social media and spiritual resilience represent a dynamic process within Gen-Z individuals as they strive to adapt and persist in upholding religious values and moral principles instilled from an early age--whether through parental guidance, environmental influences, or media exposure. The data analysis reveals that spirituality holds significant importance in the social lives of Gen-Z individuals amidst the overwhelming flow of digital technology and social media content. Their understanding of spirituality may differ from previous generations, with an emphasis on individual exploration and personal meaning-making. Many Gen-Z individuals identify themselves as spiritual but not necessarily religious, prioritizing ethical living, mindfulness, and a sense of connection to something greater than themselves. These spiritual experiences are often facilitated by digital platforms that allow them to access diverse sources of moral values, engage with communities, and explore a variety of spiritual expressions. Consequently, their participation contributes to the shaping of individual perceptions and the expansion of collective understanding (Turner, 2018). The visually-oriented nature of the digital era has amplified Gen-Z's ability to express and engage with spirituality. Based on in-depth interviews and thematic categorization of the transcripts, the findings on spiritual resilience communication in relation to social media use among Gen-Z university students can be classified as follows:

Five informants stated that they follow Islamic preaching accounts such as *Adi Hidayat*, *Huzaiifah Azlam*, and *Bazam Sidik*, which motivate them to maintain consistency in both obligatory and voluntary religious practices. These accounts serve as short-term reminders or motivational tools, especially during times when religious observance begins to decline. However, maintaining long-term consistency remains a challenge. Social media may also cause internal conflicts or guilt, as illustrated by Informant 2, who expressed regret for rushing to use her phone after prayer and skipping post-prayer rituals. Similarly, Participant 4 admitted that her addiction to social media 'sometimes leads her to neglect Qur'anic memorization, though she still performs obligatory religious duties. These accounts illustrate a tension between religious consciousness and an inability to fully control media consumption, resulting in what can be termed a 'guilty pleasure' or inner conflict.

The *second* findings of the research results is about self-management and social media control. This point relates to Participant 1 and 3's statement that cleaning or deleting algorithms can filter out passing content on social media, especially Instagram; "by routinely cleaning the algorithms provided in the Instagram menu can filter out strange content that is sometimes disturbing when they are 'down'." Based on this

expression, Gen-Z has the awareness to 'curate' content in order to maintain mental health and avoid bad influences from social media. In addition, in building this spiritual resilience, participants also revealed that although they need social media, they have the ability for time management and self-discipline, such as Informant 3 expression that he always remembers his parents' messages to manage time in every activity, although he has not been able to fully regulate the use of social media, for example when 'stuck' facing college assignments, diverting to playing social media, so it is late in completing it, and resulting in lack of rest and fatigue. Participant 4's expression is different, where according to her indeed, social media can make you lazy to study, can encourage jealousy because of someone's post, and even FOMO. *"I once regretted playing my cellphone too late at night, I got sleepy and tired. So I think we really need people or friends to remind us."* Similarly, Participant 6 said that sometimes she is still complacent in using social media, and is now learning to choose to open social media for the purposes of her final assignment/thesis.

From the participants' statements, it can be identified that Gen-Z tries to balance the need for social media with their academic responsibilities and physical health. Participant 5 revealed that he had experienced the phenomenon of 'doom scrolling', which is the habit of constantly scrolling social media content without a clear purpose that makes time wasted. This experience made him start to be more aware and wiser in using social media. He started following accounts related to health and healthy lifestyle, such as healthy eating and exercise, because he now feels more concerned about his own quality of life. To control the use of social media, Participant 5 has his own way of limiting scrolling time to a maximum of ten minutes, then reminding himself to return to other important activities, such as doing assignments. There is interesting information from Participant 4 and 5 who attend Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*), where the use of devices and internet access is limited during learning. They can both use social media on their days off at home. Both participants said that now that they are students, they do not feel like overindulging in social media, even though they have been in the access restriction phase and they feel fine with this condition. The implication of the two informants' statements is that the experience of social media 'detox' shows that Gen-Z is able to adapt without social media, without feeling left behind by new things but still utilizing what they want and need.

Findings indicate that Gen-Z is consciously engaged in self-management and control strategies to maintain their mental and spiritual well-being. This is evidenced by the practice of digital content 'curation,' as expressed by Informants 1 and 3, who clean or reset their Instagram algorithms to filter out disturbing content, particularly when they feel overwhelmed or 'down'. Awareness of these negative impacts also fosters time management skills and self-discipline. For instance, Informant 5, recognizing their tendency toward 'doom scrolling' (the habit of aimlessly scrolling through content), has begun limiting their scrolling time to a maximum of ten minutes. Furthermore, the 'digital detox' experiences (as undergone by two informants from Islamic boarding schools/*pesantren*) demonstrate the adaptive capacity of Gen-Z. They are able to adapt without excessive social media use without feeling 'left behind' (FOMO), emphasizing that they utilize social media solely based on necessity.

The *third* finding is about self-identity and representation on social media. For Gen-Z, social media can be used to build 'branding' and self-image. Five informants said that they have more than one Instagram account. The *first* account is used for branding, showing the good and positive side, with posts that have 'value' such as college

assignments, achievements, organizational activities, important information, and positive messages or writings; while the second account is for sharing casual posts with friends, childhood photos, pouring out one's heart, and storing archives. This *second* account is more private and is followed only by close friends of these informants. From these findings, it was identified that there is a tendency for Gen-Z to have multiple identities or 'finsta' (fake Instagram) among them to separate public image and private space. In addition, in relation to this identity and representation, Gen-Z wants to get validation and there is a fear of being judged by others, for example, expressed by Informant 7 who actually does not post achievements or accomplishments because she is easily influenced by other people's judgments: *"afraid of being commented on as being over (lebay), what I am doing, even once my post was screen-shot, then sent to a group, since then I don't want to post my achievements anymore."*

Informant 1's statement is different, in fact he does not feel worried if he gets rejected, such as not joining the trend of smoking or drinking, for Informant 1, it's a principle; *"I'm not afraid to say I don't have friends, but in fact I have friends, I'm not worried, I don't hang out, I don't follow social media trends."* According to Informant 1 and 4, they feel that there should be limits in sharing on social media, not too 'oversharing', because it will actually be a boomerang, building various perceptions, people's judgment can change, and even shunned by close friends. This is emphasized by Informant 4 that she does not like oversharing or venting on social media, just posting the good stuff'. This includes Informant 6 statement that she is in the process of forming her identity amidst the onslaught of technology. She wants to be a 'slang' and independent Gen-Z, but also struggles to maintain her spiritual values, so this shows that there is a complexity of teenage identity in the digital era. In line with other informants, informant Halwa stated that in terms of balance between the virtual and real worlds, she does not feel the need to pretend or form different personas on social media. She remains herself in both realms. However, she realizes the importance of being careful in sharing content, especially after a personal experience where she posted something about her family and felt uncomfortable because of negative responses that may be related to the *ain* (envious view) phenomenon. Since then, she has been more selective and tends to maintain a stricter sense of privacy.

Next finding is about family role and values in social media use. According to the informants, their parents play a very strong role in their social lives. All informants said that they have known and recognized social media since they were in elementary school, and even have their own accounts (created with their friends), but they still pay attention and obey their parents' teachings that whatever they do outside the home will carry the family name, so they must take good care of themselves and their family. In addition, informant Kanaya also added that her parents spoil her, giving her the freedom to use social media, but after all, parents are the source of happiness, so she does not want to disappoint them. If the teachings of parents are not obeyed, then the influence of the social environment, especially these informants are in the midst of an urban society that is permissible, free, and full of competition and even informant 6, who comes from Banyumas, Central Java, said that she sometimes feels social pressure because she is in the environment of her friends, and in big cities like Jakarta, she feels more insecure, overthinking, afraid of being left behind.

Regarding challenges and risks; according to Informant 8, who first used social media in 2016 when he was in grade 2 of junior high school, starting with Facebook. Now, he uses Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, but he only has one account for each

platform because he feels there is no need to compartmentalize his identity online. He uses Instagram to share productive activities, such as his involvement in organizations, theatre, and internships. She chooses to use Instagram to share productive activities, such as her involvement in organizations, theater, and internships, because she believes it is not important to have multiple accounts, as social media can also act as a tool for self-reflection, depending on the content one chooses to consume. He prefers comedic content as a form of light therapy when facing stress or pressure. However, he also realizes that spiritual and religious content can provide calmness and a new perspective, although he does not explicitly make it his main consumption, such as spiritual (church) songs. He emphasized that as an individual who is at the end of his study period, he wants to form a solid self-identity, not easily swayed by digital trends, and still have a useful value in using social media. He wants to be a person who thinks critically, is emotionally resilient, and is wise in responding to the swift flow of information in today's digital era.

This study identified that the informants developed a spiritual resilience communication process that was supported by individual and social aspects. Hence, these factors are integrated in the analysis as the needs of students undergoing this spiritual resilience process are dynamic. Promoting spiritual communication among Gen-Z students requires a multi-directional approach that supports their unique needs and preferences. As a generation that has received various negative labels, informants actually show that as generation Z they are able to build themselves as individuals who have values, are able to manage time and priorities in life, manage and balance the use of social media reasonably and as needed, try not to overdo social media, and even dare to do 'digital detox' by not activating social media under certain conditions and times. Therefore, this study found that the resilience process of Gen-Z students is a dynamic process that is learned from their own social life. Their experiences after the pandemic in social media activities have taught them that social media has many benefits in various ways, for example: a source of information, looking for tips and tricks in relation to their lives and academic activities, looking for references to good values, and as entertainment. However, they realize that by using social media excessively, such as: spending time scrolling or watching social media content, resulting in neglecting more important tasks, forgetting worship, which makes them then feel regretful, encouraging them to be able to build a principle of balance in social media, including having more than one social media account, such as Instagram

Based on an analysis of the combined interview transcripts, the main findings in the form of categories related to spiritual resilience, social media use, and communication practices among Gen-Z students in urban society in Indonesia may display several aspects identified from the results of this study, as shown in [Figure 1](#).

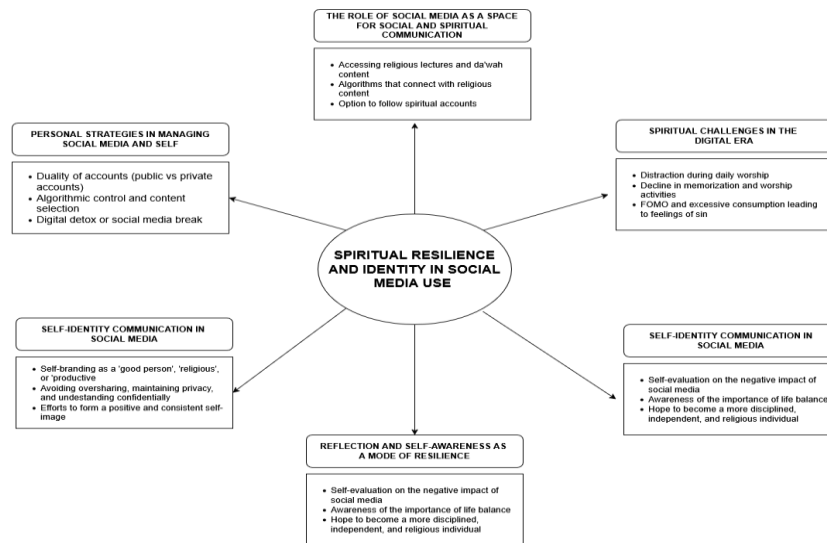


Figure 1. Identification of spiritual resilience, communication practices, and identity construction in social media use among Gen-Z (source: Identification of Research Findings)

## Discussion

In the era marked by rapid societal transformations, the study of generational dynamics becomes increasingly crucial for understanding how different age cohorts navigate the complexities of life (Mishra et al., 2024). Social media and technology significantly influence how Gen Z communicates and expresses themselves, providing tools for instant connection and global interaction (Jaiswal & Vidani, 2024). This hyper-connectivity has fostered a culture of inclusivity and awareness, where social justice issues and activism efforts are readily accessible and widely discussed (Powell et al., 2021).

Resilient Gen-Z students are those who are characterized by being able to utilize various resources capable of mitigating challenges in achieving their academic goals (Ainscough et al., 2019; Ang et al., 2022). Intrinsic values such as strength, decision-making, future orientation, along with a growing sense of belonging and social support, are some of the values of resilient student qualities (Ang et al., 2022; Azmitia et al., 2018a; Bailey et al., 2020). When social media is done based on needs, Gen-Z students are able to control when they need social media and when they can stop or reduce its use because they have to complete other work that is prioritized in their 'to-do-list'. This shows that the use of social media among Gen-Z students especially is not necessarily blind and does not reduce their real social relations. By utilizing technology for positive things, Gen-Z can harness the power of social media for positive change and contribute to a more just and humane world (Alruthaya et al., 2021; Turner, 2018). Social media platforms have revolutionized communication, offering unprecedented opportunities for individuals to connect, share information, and engage in discussions about diverse topics, including spirituality. Gen Z, in particular, leverages social media to explore and express their spiritual beliefs, often finding community and support within online groups and forums (Turner, 2018).

This study highlights the intricate and dynamic relationship between spiritual resilience, communication, and social media use among Generation Z university students. As digital natives, Gen-Z individuals engage in complex meaning-making processes while navigating the pressures and potentials of digital environments (Jaiswal & Vidani,

2024). The findings suggest that spiritual resilience in this context is not static but continually shaped through communicative interactions with peers, family, media, and self-reflection.

Spiritual resilience implies a growing hardiness through progressive self-awareness that facilitates inner transformation (Nelson-Becker & Thomas, 2020). Another definition about spiritual resilience, is as the capacity to maintain and develop spiritual well-being despite challenges (Buzzanell, 2010; Turner, 2018); is evident in the ways Gen-Z students use social media as both a source of spiritual inspiration and a site of internal conflict. Informants reported turning to Islamic preaching accounts and religious content as motivational tools to sustain religious practices. However, they also acknowledged the paradoxes of this engagement--such as guilt after abandoning spiritual rituals in favor of digital distractions. This aligns with (Turner, 2018) that digital platforms play a role in shaping contemporary spirituality, providing access to multiple sources of moral discourse and enabling individualized spiritual exploration. The data further illustrates that Gen-Z's spiritual resilience is not purely individual but emerges from socio-technological interactions. Informants expressed tension between their digital behaviors and spiritual commitments, showing how resilience involves not only belief but also self-regulation, time management, and emotional coping--traits that are communicatively enacted in their daily lives.

The findings support the view of communication as a constitutive process, in which Gen-Z students actively construct meaning, negotiate values, and manage their identities. For example, through curating algorithmic feeds and limiting social media use, informants demonstrate resilience communication (Buzzanell, 2010)--the ability to adapt, make meaning, and maintain core values in the face of external pressures. This is particularly relevant in maintaining a balance between their academic responsibilities and digital consumption.

The findings regarding the use of multiple Instagram accounts (finsta) by informants indicate that Gen-Z's spiritual and social identities are consciously and intentionally managed across digital platforms. This strategy reflects communication boundary management and identity representation, which aligns with the view that identity in digital spaces is performed and curated (Marwick & Boyd, 2014; Turkle, 2011). Within Buzzanell's framework of resilience communication (Buzzanell, 2010), the use of a finsta can be interpreted as a process of 'affirming identity anchors'; it is a communicative process that individuals or groups use to build resilience during times of crisis or disruption. An 'identity anchor' is a relatively stable set of values, roles, or beliefs that define who we are. When a crisis hits (like a job loss, a global pandemic, or a personal tragedy), our sense of self can feel shattered. An anchor is the 'steady point' we hold onto to remind ourselves of our core identity while everything else is changing. By separating the public persona (for branding and achievements) from the private space (for sharing emotions and close relationships), Gen-Z strengthens their core values and personal goals, ensuring that their identity remains a grounding force amidst massive digital trends. This suggests that spiritual resilience is not merely internal but is an adaptive communicative process.

Social media, while often perceived as a source of distraction or spiritual decay, is shown in this study to have dual functions. On one hand, it facilitates exposure to religious content, emotional support communities, and motivational messages that reinforce ethical living and mindfulness. On the other hand, it can provoke anxiety, FOMO, and inner conflict, particularly when spiritual intentions clash with digital habits. Moreover, social

media carries the potential to facilitate emotional contagion, where emotions propagate between individuals much as they do in offline environments (Steinert, 2021). This tension is consistent with (Powell et al., 2021), who argue that social media can simultaneously foster awareness and emotional instability among Gen-Z users. The phenomenon of 'doomscrolling' and informants' deliberate efforts to limit it reflect growing media literacy and self-awareness, which are crucial aspects of spiritual resilience. These practices are forms of communicative adaptation, enabling users to assert control and realign their behaviors with deeper values and life goals.

The findings show that spiritual resilience among Gen Z does not emerge spontaneously, but is shaped by a reflective and adaptive communication process. Practices such as digital detox, algorithm management, and the use of multiple accounts (finsta) show that Gen Z students are not passive towards the media, but active in managing their existence in the digital space. Social media is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, platforms like Instagram and YouTube provide access to religious content and spiritual communities. But on the other hand, the presence of content that triggers FOMO, social anxiety and 'doomscrolling' presents real emotional challenges. Gen Z seeks to reconfigure their relationship with media through mechanisms of self-control and boundary awareness.

Family communication plays a foundational role in shaping Gen-Z's spiritual and digital behavior. Parental guidance, especially messages that emphasize maintaining the family's good name and moral integrity, serve as anchors in the fluid landscape of online life. Informants internalized these messages and used them as a basis for ethical decision-making. This resonates with studies on intergenerational communication and cultural values in Indonesian society, where familial norms continue to shape youth identities even amid urban, individualistic, and digital pressures. The centrality of family values in shaping Gen-Z's digital behavior resonates with (Azmitia et al., 2018b) findings on first-generation college students, where parental messages served as 'identity anchors' that grounded students amid academic and social pressures. Similarly, informants in this study internalized family teachings about maintaining the family name, which functioned as moral compasses in navigating online risks. This cross-generational consistency underscores the enduring role of family communication in fostering resilience, even in hyper-digital contexts.

The study also uncovers a range of challenges, from identity fragmentation to the fear of judgment online. However, rather than viewing these as deficiencies, they can be understood as part of a broader developmental process in which Gen-Z students test boundaries, experiment with digital expression, and gradually form resilient identities. Informants' narratives of digital detox, conscious content curation, and intentional social media use underscore their agency and adaptive capacities. Importantly, even informants who initially struggled with social media overuse developed critical self-reflection and coping mechanisms over time. This suggests that spiritual resilience communication is not about strict abstinence or perfection, but about finding balance, making intentional choices, and engaging in ongoing negotiation between values, environments, and media practices.

(Qi & Yang, 2024) stated that there are four-dimensional framework of digital resilience: knowing the risks, seeking help, proactive learning, and self-recovery that provides a useful lens for interpreting Gen-Z's practices. Informants' behaviors such as cleaning algorithms (knowing the risks), confiding in friends over venting online (seeking help), and deliberate content curation (proactive learning) align with these

dimensions. Moreover, their finding that moderate online time (1-2 hours/day) optimizes digital resilience supports this study's emphasis on balance rather than abstinence. (Sage et al., 2021) emphasizes that resilience is 'not about strict abstinence or perfection, but about finding balance and making intentional choices'. This perspective challenges deficit-oriented narratives about Gen-Z and reframes their digital struggles as developmental processes of identity experimentation and adaptive coping. The tension between spiritual intentions and digital habits documented in this study reflects not weakness but ongoing negotiation, a hallmark of communicative processes of resilience (Buzzanell, 2010).

The findings on self-control and time management among Gen-Z students align with (Wu et al., 2023) S-O-R model, which demonstrates that cognitive assimilation mediates the relationship between digital stimuli and adaptive behavior. Similar to how Taiwanese youth internalized pandemic information to guide preventive actions, Gen-Z students in this study consciously curate Instagram algorithms and practice digital detox to maintain spiritual well-being. This suggests that spiritual resilience is not merely reactive but involves active cognitive processing of digital content to align behaviors with core values.

(Buzzanell, 2010; Buzzanell, 2018) argues that resilience is not merely an individual capacity to withstand adversity, but rather a communicative process constructed through social interaction, narrative, and the co-creation of meaning. According to her, there are five key processes in communicative resilience. Based on these processes and the interview transcripts from the informants, the following is a sharpened analysis using Buzzanell's five resilience processes: 1) crafting normalcy; reconstructing a sense of "normal" amid abnormal situations, e.g., the pandemic, spiritual strain, or digital fatigue. Examples from the data: Informant 2 and 3 practiced digital detox by stepping away from social media to restore inner calm and personal rhythm, then, Informant 5 recognized her spiritual fatigue from excessive social media use and attempted to reset her habits, although inconsistently. The analysis from this sub-process is: they are trying to create their own sense of "normalcy" amidst the fast-paced digital world as part of a spiritual and psychological coping strategy; 2) affirming identity anchors; reinforcing one's core identity and values (such as faith, family teachings, or personal goals). Examples from the data: Informant 6 relies on his parents' religious teachings and consistent worship to anchor his digital behavior. She aspires to be an independent woman while maintaining her religious values. Informant 7 maintains two Instagram accounts to separate her public and private persona while staying authentic to herself in both.

Gen-Z participants in this study show that despite the overwhelming digital current, they strive to affirm their spiritual identities as a grounding force in their online lives; 3) maintaining and using communication networks; relying on communication networks for emotional and spiritual support. Examples from the data: Informant 8 consciously avoids echo chambers and leans more on offline networks and inner reflection. Informant 4 prefers confiding in friends rather than venting on social media, as she seeks genuine responses. So, Social media is not seen as the ultimate solution. These youths often prefer interpersonal communication for more meaningful emotional and spiritual support; 4) putting alternative logics to work, using alternative frames of thinking to interpret situations in more constructive or positive ways. Examples from the data: Informant 5 reframed a negative experience (being affected by others' envy through a personal post) as a lesson to be more mindful online. Seta uses humorous content as a form of emotional

and spiritual therapy amidst life pressures. Instead of falling into negative effects of social media, they apply alternative logics to reframe their experiences into meaningful insights or emotional relief; and 5) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action; Acknowledging emotional struggles while committing to constructive actions. Examples from the data: Informant 6 admits to laziness and a decline in holy book (*Al Qur'an*) memorization but expresses the intention to restore her spiritual discipline. Informant 7 acknowledges his digital burnout during the pandemic and now deliberately consumes content that promotes health and faith. Their awareness of negative digital impacts does not result in passivity, but rather fosters self-reflection and corrective actions that build spiritual resilience. Spiritual resilience among Gen-Z in Indonesia is communicative, reflective, and adaptive, and must be understood within the context of digital life, and 'resilience as a process, not a trait', spiritual resilience is not innate, but built through continuous communicative practices.

In sum, this study demonstrates that spiritual resilience among Gen-Z students is a communicative and adaptive process--one that is negotiated across digital and offline spheres, shaped by individual reflection, family influence, and broader socio-cultural contexts. Social media, while posing risks, also offers tools for spiritual growth, ethical living, and community engagement. Understanding the nuanced ways in which Gen-Z communicates and sustains their spiritual values provides valuable insights for educators, parents, and community leaders seeking to support their holistic development in an increasingly digital world.

This study acknowledges several limitations, primarily its qualitative case-study design which involves a small sample size of eight informants. While this approach allowed for deep, contextualized insights and rich individual narratives, the findings are prioritized for depth rather than broad generalizability to the entire Generation Z population. Additionally, the geographic focus is limited to undergraduate students in the metropolitan environment of Jakarta, which may not represent the experiences of Gen-Z in rural or different socio-cultural settings. Future research could benefit from a larger, more diverse sample or mixed-methods approach to further validate these findings across different demographic.

## Conclusion

This study highlights how Generation Z undergraduate students in urban settings engage in spiritual resilience through communicative practices facilitated by social media. The findings demonstrate that while social media presents risks such as distraction and emotional fatigue, it also offers avenues for spiritual reflection, identity exploration, and peer support. Gen-Z students exhibit an evolving capacity to manage their digital presence through practices like content curation, digital detox, and selective self-disclosure. They strive to maintain a balance between academic, spiritual, and social demands, often drawing on personal values and family teachings as anchors. The dynamic nature of their resilience is shaped not only by individual strategies but also by the socio-cultural and technological context in which they are embedded. These insights call for a more holistic understanding of spiritual well-being that integrates the digital behaviors and values of contemporary youth. Future research should further explore the intersection of digital identity, resilience, and spirituality across diverse cultural backgrounds. By investigating how spiritual resilience is negotiated in offline and hybrid contexts, as well as how these practices differ across various socioeconomic, religious, and cultural contexts, future study could expand on these findings. Theoretically, this study contributes to emerging

frameworks that link communicative resilience with digital identity construction and spiritual well-being. It encourages a broader application of communication theories--such as the theory of communicative resilience, affordance theory, and mediated identity frameworks--to understand how resilience is co-constructed in digital ecosystems. Methodologically, the findings open pathways for more integrative and interdisciplinary approaches, combining digital ethnography, narrative inquiry, and media discourse analysis. Future studies may benefit from incorporating mixed-method or participatory research designs that reflect the plural and experiential nature of Gen-Z's spiritual life.

### Conflict of Interest

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organization related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

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