Original Article

The Role of Effective Strategy and Communication for Generation Z in Rural Communities

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Abstract

One important initial step in developing youth-oriented village development strategies is understanding Generation Z characteristics, including how they communicate, their interests, and aspirations. The purpose of this research is to find the most effective methods and communication approaches to support Generation Z in Karang Rejo Village. This research focuses on Karang Rejo Village in Stabat sub-district, which has 11,621 residents, consisting of 5,827 men and 5,794 women, making it the village with the second largest population in the Stabat. The selection of Karang Rejo as a research location was based on the fact that the village has a very representative demographic, with a balanced population composition between men and women. Using a combination of qualitative methods through in-depth interviews and direct observation, as well as quantitative approaches through surveys, this research aims to identify effective empowerment models. The results obtained are expected to serve as a strategic reference in designing development initiatives that are inclusive, innovative, and sustainable, so that the active involvement of all levels of society is encouraged.

Keywords: Rural Youth Engagement, Intergenerational Communication, Community Development Strategies, Generation Z Participation, Village Governance.

1. Introduction

Generation Z is the successor generation to Generation Y, which representing a transitional generation with continuously evolving technology (Laka et al., 2024). In socio-cognitive or sociological terms, a generation is a group of people born at the same time who share unique events resulting from similar circumstances within the same time period; Generation Z is one such example (Sawitri, 2023).

The communication behavior of millennials and Generation Z has changed in the technological era. The population composition of each generation has also shifted as a result of advancing times. The number of baby boomers is beginning to decrease, while Generation X and Y groups have the largest numbers when compared to productive age and workforce composition. Additionally, a new generation known as Generation Z has emerged and is beginning to enter the workforce (Wijoyo et al., 2020). These changes can be observed in daily life, such as the lack of face-to-face interaction due to the presence of gadgets. This process also occurs among millennials and Gen Z. In Generation Z's relational life processes, communication is crucial because it involves communicators and communicants with the aim of changing attitudes (Apdillah et al., 2022), opinions, and behaviors, as well as conveying messages (Purnama & Farhannaya, 2024).

Generation Z is considered current leaders and determinants of the future. This generation has been the highest target of Google Trends searches since 2018 (Dimock, 2019). All actions and opinions of Gen Z are considered important and influence various aspects of society worldwide. Moreover, in various parts of the world, including Indonesia, Gen Z represents the largest percentage of the total population. According to the 2020 Population Census, Gen Z comprises 27.94% of the population (Rakhmah, 2021) in (Yoanita, 2022). Several important interpersonal communication theories in the context of digital media can help understand Generation Z's communication behavior. One such theory is Joseph Walther's "Social Deindividuation Theory," which states that people tend to be more open to others in online communication even though they have never met face-to-face. Generation Z is willing to share their thoughts and personal moments on social media (Lutfiah et al., 2024).

Generation Z emerged between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, bringing significant changes to the workforce landscape with various characteristics and values. Corporate communication dynamics are an important component in achieving optimal engagement from Generation Z employees (Fikri et al., 2024). This is because Generation Z has the ability to adapt to technology and think more critically. Effective communication strategies for Gen Z in Karang Rejo Village, Langkat Regency, are not only related to message delivery but also to how they understand, process, and interact with symbols in communication. As a generation that grew up in the digital era, they tend to adopt interdisciplinary approaches utilizing psychology, sociology, and anthropology to understand and shape more responsive and meaningful communication dynamics. Thus, communication is not merely a tool but becomes central to building their identity and social engagement (Widiastuti et al., 2013).

Hence, finding appropriate methods is crucial to keep Generation Z relevant, understand them well, and utilize increasingly complex social media (Nugraheni et al., 2024). Generation Z has different features and needs from previous generations. This is because Generation Z grew up in an era where technology and information are easily accessible, making them proficient in technology and accustomed to rapid changes (Arta et al., 2023). This is important in facing ongoing social transformation.

Karang Rejo Village in Langkat Regency becomes an interesting place to observe how Gen Z interacts in rural environments. Due to its diverse population, it is difficult to utilize the potential of young generations for progress in Karang Rejo. Differences in opinions and communication methods between young generations and previous generations often hinder inclusive community empowerment processes. Through technology utilization and innovative approaches, Gen Z plays an important role in designing sustainable solutions and promoting community welfare. Integration of village development strategies with adaptive communication enables broader collaboration, opening opportunities for young generations to actively contribute to social and economic transformation (Marwantho, 2021).

The purpose of this research is to find the most effective methods and communication approaches to support Generation Z in Karang Rejo Village. One important initial step in developing youth-oriented village development strategies is understanding Generation Z characteristics, including how they communicate, their interests, and aspirations. According to (Nasution & Rizky, 2024), the Latin word "*Communis*" derives from a word meaning "to create togetherness or build togetherness between two or more people." Through their creative ideas, Generation Z has the ability to change the world in positive ways. They have opportunities to actively engage in various programs focused on village development.

2. Literature Review

In an era of increasingly complex competition, an organization's sustainability heavily depends on the quality and effectiveness of human resource management (Gunawan & Risky, 2024). Generation Z, as part of the current and future workforce, has unique characteristics in receiving and responding to organizational strategies and communication. Therefore, companies and institutions in Karang Rejo Village, Langkat Regency, need to implement innovative and digitally-based approaches to build stronger employee retention while increasing their engagement and motivation in the work environment.

The success of a population heavily depends on its ability to manage human resources with appropriate strategies and effective communication (Imamam & Rizky, 2024). Generation Z, which has unique characteristics in how they interact and receive information, requires adaptive and technology-based communication approaches. In the context of Karang Rejo Village, Langkat Regency, implementing communication strategies that align with Gen Z's mindset and preferences can increase their involvement in various social and economic initiatives, thereby contributing to sustainable village development (Rizky M C et al., 2024).

According to Grail Research (as cited in (Turner, 2015)), Generation Z refers to individuals born between 1995 and 2010, and is considered the first generation to grow up with the internet, having been born into an era where internet technology was already widespread. Additionally, it is said that Gen Z is interesting to discuss due to various phenomena experienced by this generation; they are considered intelligent, internet-loving, and have high tolerance for cultural differences. This generation is also called the internet generation, net generation, or internet generation. Because Gen Z interacts more with the internet, they face various problems (Zis et al., 2021).

Miscommunication can be a major challenge in efforts to increase the number of independent villages. The Indonesian government pays great attention to this issue due to its wide impact on community welfare. Gen Z in Karang Rejo Village, Langkat Regency, can play a role as agents of change by utilizing strategic communication and technology to create innovative solutions that promote sustainable village development (Sari et al., 2024). Gen Z plays an important role and influences Indonesia's current and future development. However, many Gen Z individuals do not yet understand the challenges and opportunities they will face in the future. Nevertheless, with their important role, it is crucial for Gen Z to understand all situations in the future (Arta et al., 2023).

3. Methods

In Karang Rejo Village, Langkat Regency, the role of Generation Z strategies and communication was evaluated through mixed methods with sequential explanatory design. A qualitative approach was used to gain deep understanding of village leadership perspectives and factors influencing youth engagement in community social activities. Meanwhile, a quantitative approach was used to measure participation levels and youth perceptions.

3.1. Data Collection

Data collection was carried out using two primary methods. First, questionnaires were distributed to members of Generation Z to assess their level of participation, perceptions of communication, and preferences for engagement in village activities. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with the Village Head to gain insights into the village government's perspective on communication strategies and the challenges faced in engaging youth.

3.2. Data Analysis

The data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the help of SPSS software to identify patterns and trends. Qualitative data were examined through journal analysis and thematic categorization to extract key themes and insights. To ensure the validity and depth of the findings, triangulation was employed by integrating the results of both analyses, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. Gen Z Participation in Village Activities

Interview results show that village government is still concerned about Gen Z involvement in community activities. Nevertheless, young generations are still involved in various activities, such as:

a) Youth Organization Activities: Young people are still actively involved in Youth Organization (*Karang Taruna*), especially in organizing Independence Day commemoration activities (August 17th) annually. Youth Organization members are consistently responsible for these activities.

b) Religious Activities: Quranic Recitation Selection (STQ), which began in 2024, is organized by teenagers at the village mosque. The purpose of this activity is to bring the Quran and religious values closer to young generations.

c) Involvement in Village Consultations: Young people are invited and involved in village development consultations and various institutional meetings, both in development contexts and religious activities such as Ramadan activities.

4.1.2. Applied Communication Strategies

Village government has implemented several communication strategies to engage Gen Z:

a) Participatory Communication: Involving teenagers in village consultations and development by directly asking them about programs and activities they like, both through Youth Organizations and mosque youth groups.

b) Positive Activity Facilitation: Village government's commitment is to facilitate beneficial activities and support youth advancement by providing facilities and infrastructure.

c) Education and Motivation: Village government consistently educates and encourages young people to avoid negative influences such as motorcycle gangs and drugs in every activity.

4.1.3. Challenges Faced

Several main challenges in communicating with Gen Z were identified:

a) Technology Influence: Two main issues are device usage and uncontrolled access to digital information. Technology has dual effects: reducing interpersonal communication and increasing information access.

b) Direct Communication Degradation: Gadgets disrupt family and peer communication, reducing the quality of direct social interaction.

c) Information Filtering: Young people often obtain information from the internet without proper filtering or communication, which can have negative impacts.

d) Age Classification: Considering differences in thinking patterns between different education levels (elementary, junior high, senior high school, and university students).

Research results show complex dynamics in Generation Z participation in Karang Rejo Village. Involvement in traditional activities like Youth Organizations and mosque youth groups still exists, but there are concerns about participation quality. This aligns with Gen Z's nature of being more selective in social engagement and focusing on activities that have personal meaning.
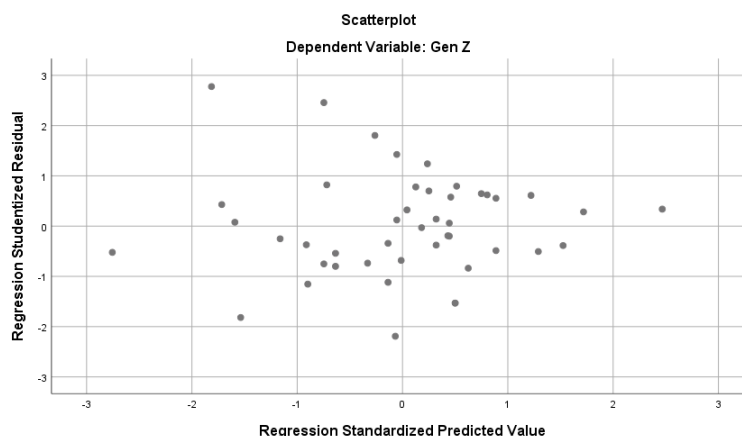
Figure 1. Scatterplot Results

Based on the scatterplot, it can be seen that residual points are randomly and evenly distributed around the zero line without forming specific patterns. This indicates that homoscedasticity and linearity assumptions are met, so the regression model used is appropriate and suitable for analysis.

Table 1. Item-Total Statistics Results

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Strategy	68.93	49.064	.398	.169	.619
Communication	69.80	56.800	.435	.220	.573
Gen Z	73.40	41.555	.537	.296	.412

Item-Total Statistics results show that all questions in the questionnaire have good quality with correlations >0.3, so all items are suitable to be retained for further analysis.

4.2. Discussion

Gen Z is the generation born between 1996 and 2010, after the millennial generation or gen Y. Many terms are used to refer to Generation Z, including GenZ, iGen (iGeneration), gen Net (internet generation), gen Tech, digital natives, and plurals. Gen Z grew up with technology, internet, and social media, which sometimes makes them stereotyped as addicts (Saebah & Asikin, 2022). Committee strategies entrusted to young generations, as shown by the implementation of Independence Day and STQ activities, demonstrate appropriate methods for providing responsibility and trust. These methods can build young people's leadership abilities and increase their sense of ownership.

Village government uses participatory communication approaches, showing good understanding of Generation Z's nature of valuing participation in decision-making. Communication strategies that align with Gen Z preferences, who tend to want to be heard and have their opinions valued, involve young people in village development consultations and

directly asking about programs they want to implement. However, these strategies must be enhanced by considering Gen Z's digital communication preferences. Incorporating digital platforms in consultation and communication processes can increase reach and youth participation.

Effective Gen Z involvement in village development has strategic impact on village progress. With their mastery of information technology and high energy, this generation can become drivers of innovation in village development. However, this potential can only be achieved if appropriate approaches and tactics are used. Success in optimizing Gen Z contributions to village progress can be achieved using holistic approaches that combine strengthening religious principles, developing technological skills, and enhancing leadership abilities.

5. Conclusion

Communication and strategies implemented significantly influence Gen Z participation in Karang Rejo village development. Research results show that communication has greater influence on encouraging their involvement than strategy (β = 0.381 vs. β = 0.301). Several additional factors may play a role, but this model explains 29.6% of the variation in Gen Z involvement.

Interviews with participants show that their involvement increases through effective communication, direct engagement, and clear strategies. Quality, sustainability, quantity, and impact are very important indicators for understanding their engagement dynamics. Policies and programs can be designed more appropriately to increase Gen Z participation and provide optimal social impact for the village by improving communication and more adaptive strategies.

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