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**THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MEDIA FRAMING ON THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF GENERATION Z'S PERCEPTION OF THE  
IRAN-USA CONFLICT**

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**Abstract**

*This study aims to understand and explore the influence of digital media framing on Generation Z's perceptions of the international conflict between Iran and the United States. Information circulating in digital media is never entirely neutral but is always shaped by geopolitical and ideological interests through a complex framing process. This research was implemented using a qualitative approach, relying on in-depth interviews with five Generation Z informants, selected using a purposive sampling technique. Thematic analysis of the interview data showed that digital media framing significantly influenced the formation of informants' perceptions. Western media tended to frame Iran as an aggressive entity, while alternative media and independent creators emphasized the United States as a provocative imperialist power. Generation Z's perceptions are formed through three main cognitive stages: sensation, attention, and interpretation. Digital literacy levels were identified as a crucial determinant. Highly literate informants were shown to be able to cross-verify news sources, while those with passive literacy tended to accept framing from a single platform. This study recommends strengthening digital literacy so that Generation Z becomes accustomed to verifying and forming objective opinions amidst the digital information maelstrom.*

**Keywords:** Media Framing, Generation Z, Iran-United States Conflict, Perception, Digital Literacy.

**Abstract**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami dan mengeksplorasi pengaruh framing media digital terhadap konstruksi persepsi Generasi Z mengenai konflik internasional antara Iran dan Amerika Serikat. Informasi yang beredar di media digital tidak pernah sepenuhnya netral, melainkan selalu dibentuk oleh kepentingan geopolitik dan ideologis melalui proses framing yang kompleks. Penelitian ini diimplementasikan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, bersandar pada metode wawancara mendalam (in-depth interview) yang melibatkan lima informan Generasi Z, yang dipilih menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Analisis tematik terhadap data wawancara menunjukkan bahwa framing media digital secara signifikan memengaruhi pembentukan persepsi informan. Media Barat cenderung membingkai Iran sebagai entitas agresif, sementara media alternatif dan kreator independen lebih menonjolkan Amerika Serikat sebagai kekuatan imperialis provokatif. Persepsi Generasi Z tersebut dibentuk melalui tiga tahapan kognitif utama: sensasi, atensi, dan interpretasi. Tingkat literasi digital teridentifikasi sebagai penentu krusial. Informan berliterasi tinggi terbukti mampu memverifikasi silang sumber berita, sedangkan mereka yang pasif cenderung menelan mentah framing dari satu platform saja. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penguatan literasi digital agar Generasi Z terbiasa melakukan verifikasi dan membangun opini yang objektif di tengah pusaran informasi digital.



**Kata Kunci:** Framing Media, Generasi Z, Konflik Iran-Amerika Serikat, Persepsi, Literasi Digital.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The development of information technology has fundamentally changed the way people access and consume news. Digital media is now the primary channel for information dissemination due to its ability to reach a wide and rapid audience. Through digital media, messages can be produced, published, and accessed en masse in mere seconds (Zuniananta, 2020). However, the way messages are conveyed in digital media is never completely neutral, as information can be shaped to suit specific interests. This process of message formation is known as framing (Nurhayati and Laksmi, 2023). In the context of international relations, which are fraught with geopolitical interests, such as the conflict between Iran and the United States, media framing plays a significant role in shaping public understanding of the complex dynamics of conflict.

Framing is a crucial concept for understanding how media influences society in constructing interpretations of reality. This theory was first introduced by Erving Goffman, who stated that individuals understand reality through interpretive frames provided by the media. Goffman proposed that framing can shape social meaning through frames, the way information is organized and presented to the public, creating specific perceptions (Amanda, 2020). Robert N. Entman later developed the concept of framing more operationally by emphasizing four main functions in the news framing process: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and recommending treatment. These four elements work together to form a news frame that not only conveys information but also guides public interpretation and opinion in accordance with the media's interests (Nurhayati and Laksmi, 2023).

According to Arsyad et al. (2025), media framing of international conflicts is heavily influenced by the ideological background and geopolitical interests of the country in which the media operates. This is evident in how Al Jazeera frames its news with a construction of reality that corners Israel, while CNN World tends to frame its news with a more neutral construction of reality, even biased toward Israel. These differences in framing demonstrate that the media never exist as value-free entities but always carry specific interests in their reporting.

According to Utami et al. (2024), even within a single media group, news framing can differ significantly depending on the editorial policies and target audience of each media outlet.

cnindonesia.com took a firm pro-Palestine stance, while detik.com attempted to take a more neutral stance by presenting balanced coverage from both sides. This demonstrates that framing is not merely a technical journalistic issue but also involves complex strategic considerations.

According to Devit and Ridwan (2023), media framing can significantly shape public opinion and perception. The public is presented with various narratives that lead to the formation of certain preferences regarding an issue. However, audiences still have the ability to negotiate the meaning of the messages they receive, so the perceptions they form do not always align with the direction of the media's framing.

In the digital era, framing has become increasingly complex due to the speed of information and more active audience participation. According to Amanda (2020), new media not only presents information but also invites active audience participation in shaping narratives through comments, sharing content, and creating their own content. Every individual has the potential to influence collective perceptions through the content they create and share. In this context, Generation Z, as a demographic group that grew up with digital technology, is particularly interesting to study. They are not merely passive consumers but also actively produce and distribute content related to global issues, including the conflict between Iran and the United States.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with the aim of in-depth understanding of how digital media framing shapes Generation Z's perceptions of the Iran-United States conflict. According to Rasyid (2022), qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups attach to specific social issues. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research needs, which seeks to explore the subjective experiences, personal meanings, and interpretation processes undertaken by Generation Z in responding to international conflict coverage in digital media.

The data collection method used in this study was in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews allow researchers to obtain rich and detailed information regarding the informants' perspectives, experiences, and understanding of the phenomenon under study (Sina, 2024). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner using a flexible interview guide. The guide included key questions related to the informants' habits in accessing news about the Iran-United States conflict, the digital media platforms they use, their perceptions of news framing, and how media narratives influence their views of the two countries involved in the conflict.

Informants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique. According to Rasyid (2022), purposive sampling is a technique for selecting informants based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives. The informants in this study were individuals belonging to the Generation Z category, aged 17 to 27, actively consuming news through digital media at least three times a week, and interested in international political issues, particularly the conflict between Iran and the United States. The number of informants was not strictly determined but rather based on the principle of data saturation, which occurs when information obtained from interviews no longer yields new findings.

Data analysis in this study was conducted thematically, following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Rasyid, 2022). The analysis process began with transcribing the interviews verbatim, then coding informant statements relevant to the research focus. These codes were then grouped into larger categories to identify key themes that reflect Generation Z's perceptions of the conflict between Iran and the United States. To ensure the validity of the data, this study employed source triangulation, comparing interview results across informants to ensure the consistency and credibility of the findings.

### **III. RESEARCH RESULTS**

This study aims to understand how digital media framing shapes Generation Z's perceptions of the Iran-United States conflict. Based on in-depth interviews with five informants, several key themes were identified that reflect media consumption patterns, perceptions of news framing, and opinion formation among Generation Z.

#### **Perceptions of Media Framing in the Iran-United States Conflict**

The first informant provided an overview of how digital media frames the two countries involved in the conflict. The informant stated,

*"Western media like CNN or the BBC seem to frame Iran as an aggressive party, one that likes to stir up trouble in the Middle East. But when I look at X from independent accounts or freelance journalists, the other side often appears, that America is actually also provocative. So it's like they're the same, just from different perspectives."*

This statement demonstrates the informant's critical awareness of the differences in framing employed by mainstream and alternative media. The informant recognizes that mainstream media outlets tend to frame news according to their country's geopolitical interests. Western-based CNN and BBC tend to portray Iran as aggressive, while independent accounts on platform X provide alternative perspectives that highlight provocations from the United States. This skepticism is further reinforced by the informant's admission that

*"Honestly, now I rely more on independent accounts on X and TikTok. Because the big media outlets clearly have vested interests."*

This statement indicates a shift in trust among Generation Z members from mainstream media to alternative media, perceived as more independent. A similar finding emerged from a second informant who consumes news content via TikTok. The informant stated,

*"From what I've seen, America is like the main antagonist. Seriously, there's so much content that shows America interfering in other countries' affairs, and Iran is like the underdog who dares to fight back."*

The framing perceived by this informant is heavily influenced by the characteristics of TikTok content, which tends to present narratives emotionally and biasedly. The informant further admitted,

*"But I also realize this is only one side of the story, but I guess I find pro-Iran content more engaging."*

This admission is interesting because it shows that even though the informant was aware of the bias in the information he consumed, the emotional involvement factor still pushed him to accept certain narratives.

### **The Influence of Algorithms and Emotional Engagement**

A fourth informant, a psychology student, provided a more personal perspective regarding her emotional involvement in this conflict. She revealed that

*"Honestly, at first I didn't really care. I'm more of an entertainment or motivational content person. But because TikTok often shows short videos about Iranian children struggling due to sanctions, I'm a bit touched. Especially when there's a humanitarian narrative, I become more empathetic."*

This statement demonstrates how social media algorithms can foster interest in even issues that previously hadn't been of interest to the informant. Content that touches on the human side has proven effective in building emotional connections between audiences and news subjects. The informant also added,

*"America is cold, cruel, and heartless. Iran is a country fighting alone. That's the impression I got."*

This dichotomous framing reflects how digital media, especially TikTok, tends to simplify complex conflicts into easily digestible, black-and-white narratives. Interestingly, the informant acknowledged the limitations of his understanding, stating,

*"I realize this is biased, but I'm not an international relations student either, so I just accept the information that comes my way."*

This admission indicates a kind of passive acceptance of the information presented by the algorithm without a strong urge to verify it further.

### **Critical Attitude and Digital Literacy**

Unlike the other informants, the third and fifth informants demonstrated a higher level of digital literacy. The third informant, a content creator, stated,

*"I always check the original source first. For example, if there's news about an Iranian attack on Israel or something, I look for press releases from Reuters or AP. Then I compare it to the narrative circulating on X."*

This verification strategy reflects a critical habit of consuming information that not all informants possess. The informant also concluded,

*"Both have their own interests. America wants to maintain its hegemony in the Middle East, Iran wants to exist as a regional power. It's the people who are the ones who suffer. But I don't want to get caught up in black-and-white narratives. The political world is all gray."*

Similarly, the fifth informant, who is active on Reddit, expressed a more analytical view. The informant revealed,

*"I'm skeptical of all narratives. I always try to understand the interests behind a framing. For example, why does the American media frame Iran as a threat? Obviously, because they are geopolitical rivals. Why does the Middle Eastern media frame America as the devil? Because there's a long history of intervention in their region."*

This ability to view conflict as a game of geopolitical interests demonstrates that the level of digital literacy and depth of information exploration significantly influence Generation Z's perceptions of international conflict.

The results of this study indicate that Generation Z's perceptions of the Iran-United States conflict are formed simultaneously by two interrelated mechanisms: digital media framing and individual perception processes. This finding can be comprehensively explained by integrating Robert N. Entman's framing theory and perception theories from various sources reviewed.

According to Nurhayati and Laksmi (2023), framing is the media's way of selecting, highlighting, and emphasizing certain aspects of an event, thus influencing the public's perspective. In this research, informants acknowledged that digital media frames the Iran-

United States conflict differently depending on the interests and ideologies behind the media. Informants noted that Western media outlets like CNN tend to frame Iran as an aggressive party, while independent accounts on platform X and TikTok frame the United States as a provocative imperialist power. This finding aligns with research by Arsyad et al. (2025), which shows that media framing of international conflicts is heavily influenced by the ideological background and geopolitical interests of the country in which the media operates.

The framing process in digital media does not stop at the message production stage but continues through the audience's reception and interpretation. This is where perception theory plays a crucial role in explaining how Generation Z processes the framing they receive. According to Nisa, Hasna, and Yarni (2023), perception is a complex process involving the recognition, organization, and interpretation of information through the five senses. Informants go through these three stages when consuming news content on digital platforms. The selection process occurs when social media algorithms repeatedly present content about the Iran-United States conflict, which then attracts informants' attention due to the novelty and intensity of visual and auditory stimuli. According to Nurcahyani (2024), citing Bernard Barelson's theory of perception, the sensation process occurs through stimuli received by the senses of sight and hearing before finally being interpreted by the brain. This aligns with informants' statements that they are attracted to conflict content because of its engaging visuals and the creator's delivery style, which uses distinctive vocal intonation and trendy background music.

Al-Azan, Rahuda, and Hasanah (2025) explain that perception is selective, evaluative, and influenced by past experiences and values. These perceptual characteristics are highly relevant in explaining the variation in informants' responses to the same media framing. Informants with an educational background in international relations and a habit of consuming news from various sources such as Reddit and YouTube demonstrated the ability to deconstruct media framing. The informants were able to discern that both American and Middle Eastern media outlets had a vested interest in framing the conflict and were not trapped in a black-and-white narrative. Conversely, informants who relied on TikTok content as their primary source tended to accept media framing more raw and adopted the perception that the United States was the antagonist while Iran was fighting alone.

Rindika et al. (2023) emphasized that individual perceptions are influenced by their knowledge and experience. This explains why digital literacy levels significantly determine how Generation Z responds to media framing. Informants who actively verify and cross-check information from various sources are able to construct more objective and balanced

perceptions. Meanwhile, informants who passively accept algorithmic presentations tend to adopt media framing without adequate evaluation. Interestingly, the informants remained aware that their perceptions may be biased due to limited access to balanced perspectives. This demonstrates that Generation Z possesses a critical awareness of framing, although this is not always followed by adequate verification.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Generation Z's perceptions of the Iran-United States conflict are constructed through the interaction between the framing of the digital media they consume and individual perceptual processes influenced by their knowledge, experience, and media consumption patterns. Media framing provides a narrative frame that is then processed through the mechanisms of sensation, attention, and interpretation to produce varying perceptions among Generation Z. This finding emphasizes the importance of digital literacy as a critical instrument in responding to media framing in the era of information overload.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Based on the research results and discussion outlined above, it can be concluded that digital media framing has a significant influence on Generation Z's perceptions of the Iran-United States conflict. Digital media frames coverage of this conflict differently according to the ideological and geopolitical interests behind it. Western media tends to frame Iran as an aggressive force threatening regional stability, while alternative media and independent content creators on platforms like TikTok and X frame the United States as a provocative imperialist power. While some informants critically perceive these differences in framing, others tend to accept them at face value due to limited access to balanced information.

The process of forming Generation Z's perceptions of this conflict occurs through three main stages: sensation, attention, and interpretation. In the sensation stage, informants receive visual and auditory stimuli from content presented by social media algorithms. The attention stage is influenced by external factors such as content novelty, repetition, and intensity, as well as internal factors such as personal interests and information needs. The interpretation stage ultimately determines how informants interpret the Iran-United States conflict. This interpretation is heavily influenced by each individual's background knowledge, experience, values, and digital literacy level.

This study also found that not all Generation Zers passively accept media framing. Informants with relevant educational backgrounds and a habit of verifying information from multiple sources demonstrated the ability to deconstruct framing and develop more balanced perceptions. They were able to view the Iran-United States conflict as a complex geopolitical

game of interests and avoided being trapped by black-and-white narratives. Conversely, informants who relied on a single platform as their primary source tended to adopt media framing more crudely. This finding confirms that digital literacy is a key factor distinguishing Generation Z's ability to respond to media framing.

Based on these conclusions, this study makes several recommendations. First, Generation Zers are advised to improve their digital literacy by getting into the habit of verifying and cross-checking information from multiple sources before forming opinions on complex international issues. Second, content creators and digital media outlets are expected to present more balanced news and avoid being trapped by provocative framing for the sole purpose of engagement. Third, future researchers are advised to examine more deeply the role of social media algorithms in strengthening echo chambers and filter bubbles, which can narrow Generation Z's perspective on global issues. Further research could also use a quantitative approach to measure how much influence media framing has on Generation Z's political attitudes more broadly.

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