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BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS OF GENERATION Z WHEN HANGING OUT AT AFFAN COFFEE FROM A SOCIAL COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

Fadly Raihan Nugroho[1], RR. Roosita Cindrakasih[2]
Bina Sarana Informatika University
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Abstract

This study examines the hangout behavior pattern of Generation Z from a social communication perspective, focusing on how young coffee shop visitors in an urban area build meaning, self-identity, and social relationships through everyday interaction. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were gathered through direct observation, semi-structured interviews with three purposively selected informants, and documentation, then analyzed with the Miles and Huberman model and verified through source triangulation with a communication studies lecturer. The findings show that hangout activity is no longer a mere leisure routine but has become a multifunctional lifestyle practice combining productivity, socialization, and relaxation; that social interaction unfolds simultaneously through face-to-face conversation and digitally mediated communication; and that, viewed through George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism and its Mind, Self, and Society concepts, the coffee shop functions as a third place in which Generation Z interprets shared symbols, negotiates self-identity, and internalizes peer-group norms. These results affirm that hangout culture constitutes a dynamic form of social communication rather than a purely recreational activity.

Keywords: *Coffee Shop; Generation Z; Hangout Behavior; Social Communication; Symbolic Interactionism*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji pola perilaku nongkrong Generasi Z dari perspektif komunikasi sosial, dengan berfokus pada bagaimana pengunjung muda sebuah kedai kopi di kawasan perkotaan membangun makna, identitas diri, dan hubungan sosial melalui interaksi sehari-hari. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi langsung, wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap tiga informan yang dipilih secara purposive, serta dokumentasi, yang kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model Miles and Huberman dan diperkuat melalui triangulasi sumber bersama seorang dosen Ilmu Komunikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa aktivitas nongkrong tidak lagi sekedar rutinitas mengisi waktu luang, melainkan telah menjadi praktik gaya hidup multifungsi yang memadukan produktivitas, sosialisasi, dan relaksasi; interaksi sosial berlangsung secara ganda melalui percakapan tatap muka dan komunikasi yang dimediasi teknologi digital; dan, dilihat melalui Teori Interaksionisme Simbolik George Herbert Mead dengan konsep Mind, Self, dan Society, kedai kopi berfungsi sebagai ruang ketiga (third place) tempat Generasi Z menafsirkan simbol bersama, membentuk identitas diri, dan menginternalisasi norma kelompok pertemanan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa budaya nongkrong merupakan bentuk komunikasi social.

Kata Kunci: Generasi Z; Interaksionisme Simbolik; Kedai Kopi; Komunikasi Sosial; Perilaku Nongkrong

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I. INTRODUCTION

Hangout culture in coffee shops has become increasingly embedded in the lives of urban young people. This activity is not merely a means of gathering, but also reflects changes in consumption patterns and the way young generations socialize in public spaces. Coffee shops now come with concepts that target young people's needs, ranging from comfortable seating and internet access to atmospheres that support discussion and work activities, giving young people a space to interact, exchange ideas, and channel their creativity. The function of the café has shifted from merely a space for consumption to a space that supports social interaction, as well as a means of demonstrating existence and self-identity within the social environment. The presence of social media further reinforces this phenomenon, as hangout activities are often shared as part of a digital lifestyle, so that hanging out no longer carries only a practical function but also a symbolic meaning within social life.

Generation Z, generally born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, grew up amid the rapid development of digital technology and is therefore known as digital natives, that is, individuals who have been accustomed to using gadgets, the internet, and social media in their daily lives since childhood. This characteristic makes young people tend to be more imaginative, open to differences, and active in expressing themselves both directly and through digital media, although on the other hand they are prone to anxiety and social pressure due to their dependence on technology. For this generation, the activity of drinking coffee at a coffee shop is no longer merely a consumption activity, but has developed into part of a lifestyle that enables social interaction, the exchange of ideas, and the formation of friendship relations, as well as a means of self-expression and building an image within their environment.

The social communication perspective views the activities that take place in a coffee shop as a process of interaction between individuals within a social space, where every visitor engages in social contact through certain symbols, both verbal and nonverbal. Through this process, individuals not only convey information but also influence one another and construct shared meaning, so that the coffee shop is not merely a gathering place but a space in which a dynamic process of social communication unfolds. Nevertheless, behind the increase in hangout activity, a phenomenon has also emerged in which visitors' physical presence is not always accompanied by full engagement in direct conversation, as some visitors become more

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absorbed in using their gadgets, so that face-to-face interaction proceeds alongside technologically mediated communication

Previous studies on the phenomenon of hanging out at coffee shops have generally discussed it as part of social trends, students' social needs, the regenerative practice of coffee-drinking culture, or a means of constructing self-image on social media These studies enrich our understanding that coffee shops function as public spaces and as means of self-identity formation for young people, yet most remain at the level of describing lifestyle trends and have not specifically linked this phenomenon to the framework of symbolic interaction theory, which explains the gradual process of meaning-making. Existing research on symbolic interactionism has also been applied mostly to other contexts, such as group interaction in online games or educational settings, so that its contextual application to the coffee shop as a hangout space for Generation Z has rarely been undertaken. This condition reveals a gap between the expectation that coffee shops function optimally as spaces for social communication and the reality that an understanding of how meaning, identity, and social interaction are contextually formed at a particular location and remain underexplored. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated use of the Mind, Self, and Society concepts to address three research questions at once, how Generation Z's hangout behavior pattern unfolds, how social interaction occurs when they are present at the coffee shop, and how they make meaning of that activity as a space of social communication. This study therefore aims to identify Generation Z's hangout behavior pattern at the coffee shop, to understand the process of social interaction that occurs during that activity, and to determine the meaning of the hangout activity as a form of social communication for Generation Z, so as to provide a more complete picture of the dynamics of young people's social communication in urban public spaces.

II. THEORICAL REVIEW

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Symbolic Interactionism Theory, put forward by George Herbert Mead, explains that human behavior is formed through a process of social interaction that uses symbols, such as gestures, language, and other signs. Symbols play an important role because they help individuals understand meaning and determine action in social life, while meaning itself is not inherently attached to a symbol but is produced through an ongoing process of social interaction and cultural construction. Social interaction, in this view, unfolds through three stages: the preparatory stage, in which the individual imagines others' responses before acting; the

experiential stage, in which the interaction takes place directly; and the reflective stage, in which the individual evaluates the interaction that has occurred in order to adjust their behavior.

This theory cannot be separated from the concept of Mind, Self, and Society, which explains how mind, self, and society are formed simultaneously through social interaction and are interrelated in understanding individual behavior. Mind refers to an individual's capacity to think and understand meaning through symbols, particularly language, which develops through the process of interacting with others. Self is a concept of identity formed through social interaction, in which an individual learns to understand themselves from the perspective of others (role taking), divided into the spontaneous "I" aspect and the "Me" aspect, which is the result of internalizing social norms and values. Society is the social environment in which individuals interact and construct shared meaning through ongoing communication and social action, which in turn shapes an individual's way of thinking, identity, and behavior through prevailing values and norms. In the context of this study, the theory is relevant for understanding how coffee shop visitors exchange symbols, construct shared meaning about the hangout experience, and form self-identity and interpersonal relationships within that space.

Social Communication

Social communication is understood as a process of interaction between individuals or groups in community life that involves the delivery of messages and the exchange of meaning, and does not merely convey information but also creates shared understanding among the parties involved. Social communication is dynamic in nature, encompassing individual-to-individual as well as individual-to-group relationships, thereby helping individuals build social relations and adapt to their environment. In practice, social communication can be distinguished into interpersonal communication, which takes place directly between two or more individuals and allows for immediate feedback, making it dialogical in nature, and group communication, which takes place among group members with a shared goal even though each member has a different role.

Social Interaction

Social interaction is defined as a form of reciprocal contact between individuals or between groups, which arises when a person's action holds meaning for another person and is directed toward influencing or responding to that action. Social interaction is dynamic in nature and encompasses various patterns of relationship such as cooperation, dominance, and competition, and takes place because of two main requirements: social contact and communication. As it has developed, social interaction can be distinguished into face-to-face

interaction, which allows for direct response, nonverbal expression, and strong emotional involvement, and digital interaction, which takes place through technological media without requiring individuals to be in the same physical space. In addition, social interaction can also be distinguished into associative forms, which lead toward cooperation and harmony such as accommodation and assimilation, and dissociative forms, which lead toward competition or conflict due to differences of interest.

These two forms of interaction, face-to-face and digital, no longer stand apart in the daily lives of young people but instead run side by side and complement one another. Digital interaction allows individuals to remain connected to their network of friends even while being in the same physical space, while face-to-face interaction continues to provide a quality of emotional closeness that cannot be entirely replaced by mediated communication. This phenomenon confirms that social interaction in the digital era is complex and continually evolving, so that understanding it needs to take both dimensions into account simultaneously, rather than only one of them.

Generation Z

Generation Z is a generational cohort born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, having grown up amid the rapid advancement of digital technology and the internet, and is thus often referred to as the internet generation or digital natives. This generation's closeness to digital devices shapes the way they communicate, interact, and express themselves within their social environment, and makes them tend to prefer visual content and interactive media as sources of information and means of communication. This characteristic is reflected in hangout behavior at coffee shops, which for Generation Z is no longer merely a gathering activity but also part of a lifestyle and a means of self-actualization that is often accompanied by the simultaneous use of digital devices.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, as it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of hangout behavior patterns, forms of social interaction, and the meaning of hangout activity as a form of social communication among Generation Z, without using statistical analysis, in line with the use of qualitative research to examine natural object conditions and to focus on understanding the meaning of a social phenomenon. The research was conducted at a coffee shop popular among Generation Z in the North Jakarta area over a period of three months, with the social activity of the coffee shop's visitors serving as the unit of analysis. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling

technique from among three visitors belonging to the Generation Z category who had hung out at the location at least three times in the past month, with differing backgrounds university student, a civil servant, and a private-sector employee along with one expert triangulator from among Communication Studies academics to strengthen the validity of the data. Data collection techniques consisted of direct observation of the ongoing social activities and interactions, semi-structured interviews to explore informants' experiences and views in depth, and documentation as supporting data; meanwhile, data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of data reduction to select and focus relevant information, data display in the form of a systematic descriptive account, and conclusion drawing based on the processed findings.

IV. RESEARCH FINDING

Generation Z's Hangout Behavior Pattern at Affan Coffee

The interview results show that Generation Z's choice of a coffee shop as a hangout spot is influenced by a combination of atmosphere, comfort, functionality, and facilities. One informant perceived the place as quieter compared to other coffee shops because of the minimal loud music and crowding, making it suitable for simply relaxing.

> *"Well, first of all, compared to other places, this one is much quieter. I don't really know why, maybe because other places usually have music playing, but here there isn't any. This place is really nice for just zoning out, the atmosphere is relaxed."*

This statement shows that for Generation Z, the atmosphere of a place is an important factor in determining the comfort of a hangout space, where the coffee shop functions not only as a place of consumption but also as a space for psychological relaxation from daily activities. Another informant emphasized more functional considerations, such as location, price, and rooftop facilities that support networking activities as well as relaxing after work.

> *"In my opinion, this place is comfortable for networking or just chilling after work, the prices are affordable, the location is strategic and close to my house, and most importantly the ambience, because there's also a rooftop here, so at night it's really nice to relax."*

A third informant added considerations of proximity to home, the quality of the internet connection for playing games together with friends, and the availability of a prayer room and a rooftop area as an added comfort value.

> *"First, it's close to home; second, in my opinion it's worth it for a coffee shop, it's nice for hanging out, the Wi-Fi is fast for gaming together with friends, and there's a prayer room here as well as a rooftop."*

These three findings show that Generation Z's decision in choosing a hangout place is not impulsive, but rather involves considerations that combine social needs, functional value, and the spatial experience offered by the place.

The Process of Generation Z's Social Interaction during Hangout Activities

The hangout activities carried out by Generation Z at coffee shops are not only recreational but also productive in nature. One informant explained that hanging out with friends is often combined with doing group coursework.

> *"Yeah, I usually hang out with friends, and like I said before, it's often for doing assignments, maybe group work, or something like that. And the food here is good too, so it's a nice place to just relax."*

Meanwhile, the informant who was already working showed that activity at the coffee shop combines social interaction, entertainment, and productivity through activities such as working remotely (work from café), checking email, and discussing matters with friends.

> *"Usually I just chat with my friends, play games together, or simply finish up my work WFC (work from café), checking email, brainstorming. It's pretty relaxed here."*

For another informant, the most dominant activity was social interaction with their friend group through conversation as well as playing digital games together, which shows that the coffee shop also functions as a medium for strengthening closeness and maintaining social relationships with peers.

In terms of interaction, the conversations that take place while hanging out tend to be informal, spontaneous, and not bound to any single topic, ranging from studies, work, and health to current issues that are trending. When the intensity of conversation decreases, some visitors shift their interaction to playing games together as a form of entertainment and togetherness. This condition confirms that social interaction within the coffee shop space is dual in nature taking place face-to-face while simultaneously being mediated by digital devices thereby forming a communication pattern characteristic of a generation raised in the technological era. The forms of social communication that emerge include the exchange of information, sharing of experiences and grievances, the expression of opinions, and joint activities that strengthen social bonds within the friend group, so that hangout activity functions not only as a recreational activity but also as an active space of social communication for Generation Z.

This pattern also shows that the social communication that takes place while hanging out is not always structured or single-purpose. Some conversations flow without a fixed topic direction, yet still function to maintain familiarity and a sense of togetherness among members of the friend group. The involvement of digital devices in interaction, whether for playing games together or simply checking social media, does not diminish the quality of the closeness built, but instead becomes an integral part of how Generation Z expresses togetherness. In other words, the coffee shop space becomes an arena in which verbal and nonverbal communication,

both direct and digital, complement one another in shaping a complete social experience for its visitors.

The Meaning of Hanging Out as a Form of Social Communication

The hangout activity was interpreted differently by each informant, yet shared a common thread as a space of transition and psychological recovery. One informant interpreted the coffee shop as a transitional space that helps relieve fatigue and mental pressure before returning home, as well as a venue for building and maintaining relationships with friends.

> *"For me, the coffee shop is the right transitional place to relieve stress before going home, a way to stay connected with friends, and at the same time a conducive place whenever I want to get out of the house."*

Another informant interpreted the coffee shop as part of a social routine related to the need for relaxation, interaction, and a change of atmosphere from the home environment to public space, while a third informant interpreted hanging out as a means of attaining calm and reducing mental burden through conversation with friends.

> *"Hanging out at a coffee shop can make my heart feel calm, relaxed, at ease. It doesn't cause stress, just talking. Talking with friends makes all my problems disappear."*

These three interpretations show that for Generation Z, hanging out is not merely an activity to fill spare time, but functions as a means of emotional relaxation, the maintenance of friendship ties, and an alternative space for attaining psychological comfort outside the home and work environment.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examines Generation Z's hangout behavior patterns from a social communication perspective using a descriptive qualitative approach, and yields three main conclusions. First, Generation Z's hanging-out activities at coffee shops are not merely a routine way to fill free time, but have transformed into a multifunctional lifestyle that flexibly combines completing academic and work tasks, recreational activities with friends, and efforts to relax the mind, with venue selection influenced by the comfort of the atmosphere, affordability, location accessibility, internet connection quality, and the appeal of supporting facilities. Second, social interactions at coffee shops are dual-natured occurring both face-to-face and mediated by digital devices simultaneously with informal, spontaneous conversations covering various everyday topics, so that these two forms of interaction complement each other and form a communication pattern characteristic of a generation raised in the digital age, where friendships are nurtured and social groups form organically. Third, for Generation Z, coffee shops function as a "third place" after home and the workplace or campus that offers a balance between productivity and relaxation. Hanging out is seen as a way to relieve the pressures of

daily routines, strengthen social networks, express oneself, and build social identity; within the framework of Social Interactionism Theory.

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