

Analysis of New Media Literacy In Message Reception @Aboutcirebon For Generation Z

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Abstract. The rapid development of digital technology has changed the way Generation Z obtains information. This study aims to analyze how Generation Z receives messages from the Instagram account @AboutCirebon and how they assess the credibility of the content shared. The study uses a descriptive qualitative method with seven Generation Z informants, who actively follow the @AboutCirebon account, interviewed in depth to collect data, supplemented by observation and content documentation. The results show that Generation Z cognitively relies on visual aspects without comprehensive supervision. The emotional dimension reveals impulsive reactions triggered by pride in local culture and dissatisfaction with public issues. Aesthetic appreciation of visual content is high, while educational value is neglected. Moral awareness of social media interactions is not yet deep, with informants aged between seventeen and twenty-one years old receiving messages simply as entertainment. Generation Z often assesses the credibility of content with quick decisions such as account reputation and local context relevance. However, additional confirmation from other sources is rarely done. New media literacy needs to be strengthened through collaboration between local media, educational institutions, and the government to encourage critical, ethical, and responsible media consumption among Generation Z.

Keywords: New Media Literacy, Generation Z, Local Digital Media, Message Reception, Content Credibility

1 Introduction

Rapid advances in digital technology have changed the way Generation Z obtains information, which is renowned for its technological skills and creativity [1]. Information is knowledge that for many people can be a source of strength as well as a source of error. Everyone should be able to obtain, evaluate, and utilize information from various sources; this is a basic information literacy skill. When previously obtained information does not meet one's needs, information is sought to improve understanding. People use available sources of information to find information to meet their needs[2]

People born between 1997 and 2012 are considered members of Generation Z. The majority of people who use media platforms are members of Generation Z. Generation Z currently uses the internet as a platform to share their thoughts, reach their full potential, increase their knowledge, and build and expand their networks. This phenomenon shows how Generation Z likes to communicate through digital technologies such as social media because of social situations that encourage excessive use of technology [3]. This situation highlights the importance of new media literacy, especially for Generation Z. Users who understand media are better able to think critically, evaluate messages, and understand the context and purpose of the information they receive. According to [4] defines media literacy as the perspective we actively use to interpret the messages we receive. Potter goes on to say that the data in question has many sides. In addition to facts, which are referred to as cognitive information, emotional, artistic, and moral information can be found in books, newspapers, and magazine articles [5].

The concept of media literacy has expanded to include the ability to interact with new media as a result of advances in communication technology [6]. These skills include the ability to receive, select, and evaluate a variety of content on more interactive and participatory digital platforms, in addition to understanding messages from traditional media [7]. Understanding how social media algorithms operate, how information is shared, and how content can be manipulated to influence public opinion is an important component of new media literacy.

The existence of regional social media accounts, such as @AboutCirebon on Instagram, is an interesting phenomenon that needs to be studied further. With 340k followers, this account is an authentic and well-known local media outlet in Cirebon, demonstrating its wide reach among Cirebon residents. This account actively encourages educational engagement with interesting content about Cirebon's culture, cuisine, and community events. The messages shared emphasize local knowledge while encouraging pride in regional identity. In addition

to being a source of information, this account helps Generation Z develop a sense of identity, pride, and regional image. Although Generation Z's media literacy is still very diverse and often lacks critical thinking skills, the popularity of this account also presents challenges, such as the extent to which its followers can evaluate the truth and authenticity of information. As a result, interactions do not fully reflect an understanding of online communication ethics [8][8].



Figure 1. Instagram account @Aboutcirebon
Source: Account @Aboutcirebon

Previous studies have examined media literacy among the general public, but few studies have explicitly examined Generation Z's new media literacy in relation to local media such as @AboutCirebon. This study attempts to fill the gap in previous research. Previous studies have mostly focused on digital literacy in general, ignoring how local contexts, regional cultures, and community media features can influence Generation Z's information consumption habits.

This research is of high urgency. On the one hand, local social media platforms such as @AboutCirebon have great potential to develop into educational resources that promote new media literacy and regional pride. However, a lack of expertise in handling new media can make the public vulnerable to unreliable, biased, or immoral information. Therefore, it is important to understand how deeply Generation Z in Cirebon can evaluate the reliability of content and identify communication ethics when using social media.

Based on the description, this study aims to describe Generation Z's new media literacy experiences in receiving messages in the content presented by the @AboutCirebon account on Instagram and to analyze how Generation Z assesses the credibility of the information shared by the @AboutCirebon account. The findings of this study are expected to have a significant impact on the creation of more efficient, flexible, and sustainable digital literacy teaching methods, especially for Generation Z social media users. Additionally, in the context of digital globalization, this study seeks to enhance the function of local media as mediators of new media literacy, which can provide information to the public while strengthening regional identity.

This study makes a unique contribution to the field of communication studies. Its novelty lies in three main aspects. First, it examines new media literacy in a local context Cirebon which has not been widely studied before. Second, rather than focusing on national or internasional media platform, this study analyzes a regional digital media account, @AboutCirebon, on instagram. Third, this study examines how Generation Z perceives and evaluates local digital media materials by combining the dynamics of participatory digital culture with Potter's cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, moral framework. This research expands the conversation beyond general studies of digital literacy by situating new media literacy within a regional digital ecosystem.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Digital Literacy, Media Literacy, and New Media Literacy

Digital literacy refers to the ability to access, manage, and evaluate digital information. Media literacy emphasizes the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages.

The development of new media has brought significant changes to the communication patterns of Generation Z. New media is technology-based digital media that is interactive, collaborative, and participatory. Users of new media can create, distribute, and edit information in addition to being consumers of information [12]. This concept was developed by Lister, who formulated this idea in his book "New Media: A Critical Introduction," which explores the dynamics of interaction in the digital age. The ability to understand the dynamics of digital information and manage it appropriately [13]. Local digital media also play an important role in conveying regional issues in a more contextual style that is closer to the audience than the national mainstream media. According to [8], Local media such as @AboutCirebon strategically supports regional identity development by offering educational, interesting, and engaging information for Generation Z.

New media literacy expands these competencies within interactive, participatory, and algorithm driven environments such as social media platforms. Unlike traditional media literacy, new media literacy includes technical and participatory skills in digital spaces.

In this study, new media literacy is operationally defined as the ability to access, interpret, critically evaluate, ethically responds to, and participate in digital content circulations within Instagram environments.

Research by (Khumayah et al., 2023), emphasizes Instagram's function as a platform for Generation Z to develop their identity. This study shows that social media serves as a platform for self-expression, interaction, and self-affirmation, in addition to communication. In line with studies by (Elvionita & Sannusi, 2021), found that Generation Z students often respond to controversial topics on social media without careful consideration due to their low cognitive and moral media literacy. When using digital media, this requires ethical awareness and critical thinking [15].

Recent research focuses on issues of digital media literacy in addition to issues related to identity. According to the article (Faznidatul, 2024), The rapid flow of information in the digital age makes Generation Z vulnerable to misinformation. Continuous training to improve critical thinking is necessary because it is difficult to distinguish between facts and opinions. (Rida Ristiani, 2025), states that this generation often neglects the moral and ethical aspects of communication on social media. Previous research by (Nurfalah et al., 2021) also emphasizes the importance of teaching digital communication ethics to the younger generation. Various studies provide methods for improving new media literacy to address this issue. In the article (Sulistya & Wahidi, 2024) explains that media literacy is important for educational institutions to manage digital materials. This competency is important for understanding and managing content. (Ryanda, 2024), In his article, he emphasizes the importance of cooperation between local media, government, and educational institutions to create a strong new media literacy culture.

Based on a review of the literature, it can be identified that the majority of previous studies have focused on communication ethics in social media, digital literacy in educational environments, or media literacy in general. Only a few studies have specifically examined how Generation Z interprets messages from digital media platforms such as @AboutCirebon, which provides information and expresses regional identity. By examining Generation Z's experience with new media literacy in their interactions with local messages on Instagram, this study attempts to fill the gap in previous research.

In participatory digital culture, users are not only consumers but also contributors (Jenkins, 2006). Livingstone (2004) further emphasizes that youth digital literacy requires critical awareness of online risks, credibility, and algorithmic structures. These perspectives expand the understanding of new media literacy beyond technical competence into participatory and critical engagement within algorithm driven environments.

2.2 Generation Z in The Digital Era

Global population growth has led to generational differences based on year of birth. The birth of Generation Z (1997-2012), who are currently important members of society [9]. Technology is part of Generation Z's childhood [10]. Their lives are greatly influenced by the convenience of the digital world, with almost all of their activities carried out online, so they are often referred to as the Internet Generation [11]

Although often labeled as digital natives, technological familiarity does not automatically indicate strong critical literacy competence. Several studies show that Generation Z may engage intensively with social media while still lacking critical and ethical awareness in message interpretation.

2.3 Theoretical Framework of New Media Literacy

The theory of media literacy proposed by James W. Potter in his book "Theory of Media Literacy: A Cognitive Approach". Potter states that there are four interrelated aspects of media literacy: (1) Cognitive, which is the ability to comprehensively understand, analyze, and interpret media content; (2) Emotional, which is the ability to identify and control affective responses to content, such as joy or anger; (3) Aesthetic, which is the

appreciation of the creativity of media presentation, such as graphic design, music, or video editing, which makes the content more interesting; (4) Moral, which is the understanding of moral principles in media messages, such as social responsibility and the social impact of information (Potter, 2019). The main objective of this theory is to enable the public to stop being passive consumers and become conscious, critical, and responsible media consumers.

Potter's theory was used to examine how Generation Z interprets messages from the @AboutCirebon account. This study considers visual styles such as beautiful photos, ethical communication values, and content related to Cirebon culture (Elvionita & Sannusi, 2021). Because it emphasizes critical engagement with digital content, something that Generation Z often overlooks in their daily social media interactions [18].

However, within digital platforms such as Instagram, media literacy also requires additional competencies. Therefore, this study integrates Potter's framework with contemporary new media literacy perspectives by including two additional dimensions: technical (the ability to navigate Instagram features) and participatory (active engagement through commenting and sharing).

By combining cognitive, emotional, aesthetic moral, technical, and participatory dimensions, this framework provides a comprehensive approach to analyzing Generation Z's literacy practices in interacting with @AboutCirebon content.

3 Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive methodology to investigate Generation Z's new media literacy experiences on digital media and their evaluation of content credibility. This method allows researchers to explain in depth how Generation Z interprets information, assesses content credibility, and relates it to their conception of ethics and morals in social media use. The subjects of this study are Generation Z who follow the Instagram account @AboutCirebon and were born between 1997 and 2012. Based on the four main elements of James W. Potter's media literacy theory (2004).

The @AboutCirebon account was selected purposively because it represents one of the most prominent local digital media platforms in Cirebon, with more than 340,000 followers and consistent daily engagement. Since its establishment in 2014, the account has actively disseminated local cultural, tourism, culinary, and public issue content. Its position within the local digital ecosystem makes it relevant for examining Generation Z's new media literacy in a regional context.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly through in-depth interviews with Generation Z who follow the @AboutCirebon account. Secondary data was collected from a literature review related to the research issue and documentation in the form of screenshots of posts. Interview subjects were selected based on certain criteria related to the research objectives. These criteria included seven informants who were Generation Z, resided in the city of Cirebon, actively followed the @AboutCirebon account, and were willing to provide information openly.

Data collection techniques were carried out through three main stages, including: 1) Observation was conducted to observe the activities and interaction patterns of followers related to content uploaded by @AboutCirebon; 2) Semi-structured interviews were conducted so that informants could be more free and in-depth in describing their experiences; 3) Documentation was carried out to supplement the data by collecting relevant written references and visual evidence.

This study uses triangulation techniques to ensure data validity. To produce credible, contextual, and valid results, this method compares and validates findings from various data sources, such as observations, interviews, and documentation. The three stages of Miles & Huberman's interactive analysis model, which include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

4 Results

The Instagram account @AboutCirebon is a local social media platform that highlights the culture, cuisine, tourism, and community events of Cirebon, established in 2014. This account has over 340k followers who use features such as posts, stories, and reels. In posts featuring Cirebon's signature cuisine, tourist destinations, and cultural events, the majority of the content is visual and presented in an entertaining and instructive manner. Hashtags such as #AboutCirebon and #KulinerCirebon are used to expand the audience reach. In addition, this account collaborates with Cirebon MSMEs. The @AboutCirebon account is an authentic source of information that reflects the identity of Cirebon. Based on observations, the content presentation style of @AboutCirebon aligns with Generation Z digital trends, such as using popular music in video reels to capture the attention of social media users.

Based on the results of interviews with Generation Z informants regarding their reception of @AboutCirebon messages in terms of cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, and moral aspects, the aesthetic and emotional aspects tended to be more dominant.

a. Cognitive

Generation Z tends to be quick and visually oriented when receiving messages from the @AboutCirebon account. The following are the results of an interview with informant Siti Erni Damayanti (26 years old) who stated:

“I only look at the pictures or videos, sometimes I also read the captions but not completely.” (Interview with informant on November 18, 2025).

These findings indicate that although textual information is often overlooked, visual components are the most effective way to understand knowledge. However, one informant, Tuti Anisah Sopandi (22 years old), applied new media literacy more deeply, stating that:

“I prefer to read the description/caption if I think the post is important, rather than just looking at the picture.” (Interview with informant on November 18, 2025).

b. Aesthetic

Most informants admitted that they paid more attention to images or videos than reading the entire description. In line with the results of the interview with informant Nikki Eka Putri Yulianti (20 years old), she stated:

“The content is interesting because it is presented with a neat and clear design, but I don't really pay attention to or understand the descriptions or information.” (Interview with informant on November 16, 2025).

c. Emotional

Interactions are influenced by fleeting emotional reactions, but Generation Z's social media connections are also linked to a lack of moral awareness in digital relationships. Based on the results of an interview with informant Muhammad Affan Sayyidi (19 years old), he stated:

“The news content from the @AboutCirebon account makes me more knowledgeable and interested, even though I sometimes comment and repost impulsively.” (Interview with informant on November 17, 2025).

This statement shows how emotional responses, such as curiosity or anger, have a significant impact on digital behaviors such as sharing and commenting.

d. Moral

Generation Z, in interacting with posts on the @AboutCirebon account, does not fully pay attention to or consider the responsibilities and ethics of communication on social media. Consistent with the results of an interview with informant Ilham Adi Nugraha (21 years old), he said:

“I don't really consider the impact in terms of ethical responsibility in communication, but I immediately like or share if I like the posts shared by the @AboutCirebon account.” (Interview with informant on November 17, 2025).

The reputation of the @AboutCirebon Instagram account, the number of followers, and the frequency of posts relevant to the daily lives of the people of Cirebon are the main factors considered by Generation Z when evaluating the credibility of the content presented. The majority of informants believe that the information provided by the @AboutCirebon account is accurate without verifying it with other sources because this belief is based on familiarity and direct experience as followers. This tendency is also reflected in the views of informants Ane and Adli. Ane states that:

“The content from @AboutCirebon is interesting and relevant to what is happening in Cirebon, so I trust the information.” (Interview results, November 18, 2025). This trust does not come from a process of checking sources, but rather from the habit of following the account continuously.

Meanwhile, informant Adli assessed the credibility of the @AboutCirebon account based on the regularity of its posts and its status as a well-known local media outlet. Adli revealed that:

“@AboutCirebon often appears on my homepage and provides information about Cirebon, so I consider it reliable.” (Interview results, November 2025).

As such, Generation Z tends to make quick, hasty decisions and relies more on superficial characteristics such as presentation style, visual quality, and account reputation without double-checking with other sources.

5 Discussion

5.1 Analysis of Generation Z's New Media Literacy in Message Reception @AboutCirebon

Based on the results of the study, when evaluating and obtaining information, Generation Z often relies on visual appearance, account reputation, and personal experience. To understand this pattern, this study uses James W. Potter's new media literacy theory, which emphasizes four important dimensions: cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and moral.

In cognitive terms, message reception often begins with visually appealing and interesting images without further explanation, such as culinary images or videos about cultural events. Because they consider information from local accounts to be reliable, some informants admitted that they only looked at thumbnails or main images. These accounts aim to communicate information and advertisements, but do not always consider whether the message balances entertainment and education. This shows how content on social media is often not well

understood cognitively. Informants often ignore additional information such as descriptions, references, or more critical cultural contexts in favor of visual components that immediately grab their attention [19]. This trend shows that verification, critical thinking, or a deep understanding of the meaning that a post is trying to convey are not always included in the process of interpreting messages [20].

Emotionally, Generation Z often reacts impulsively and quickly to posts from @AboutCirebon. One comment on a post about parking fees in Cirebon illustrates this point. One account, @arul_pringgondani, commented, “How can you expect to achieve your goals when no one from the bottom up is honest?” This comment refers to how users' direct and impulsive criticism is triggered by emotional responses such as disappointment and distrust of public services. The ensuing conversation often serves as a means of expressing negative emotions, such as irritation, distrust, or anger, which arise more quickly than logical judgment.

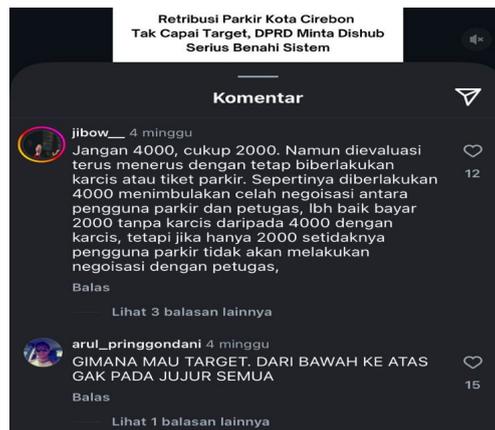


Figure 2. Followers' comments on posts from the @AboutCirebon account
Source: Account @Aboutcirebon

Figure 2 shows that digital behaviors such as commenting and sharing are strongly influenced by emotional reactions, whether curiosity or anger. Although this type of communication demonstrates emotional involvement and deep interest in regional issues, strong emotional responses can lead to hasty and uncritical assessments of facts [21]. Local information, such as @AboutCirebon, can add to public knowledge and a sense of community, but interactions influenced by temporary emotions show that media literacy, especially the capacity for emotional judgment, still needs to be deepened [22].

The aesthetic aspect is more prominent because informants appreciate sharp visuals, good editing, and attractive graphic design, making content easier to understand even when inundated with digital information. However, this appreciation is often superficial and ignores the instructional meaning in favor of focusing only on visual components. Users are encouraged to skim through the text without attempting to fully understand the message when they are more interested in visual elements such as attractive designs, color combinations, and clear layouts [23]. Visual appeal strategically adds to Generation Z's first impression, it can also distract them from more complex information [24].

Moral considerations show that public perception of @AboutCirebon is generally positive, with content that complies with digital ethics and does not undermine local values. However, moral considerations in interactions are not yet thorough, as sharing or liking is done without considering social considerations [25]. Informants aged between seventeen and twenty-one years old have limited new media literacy skills due to Instagram's algorithm prioritizing fast-paced content. Tourism promotional content is better received than educational content, with high engagement on visually appealing content such as culinary Reels videos. This indicates that message reception is not only passive but also influenced by algorithms that promote sensory content.

The main findings show that Instagram's visual features dominate passive consumption of @AboutCirebon messages, and Generation Z's new media literacy is not yet profound. According to [8] In a study on digital literacy in Indonesia, the cognitive aspect of trust evaluation shows a gap in verification skills that can trigger misinformation. The emotional and aesthetic aspects show that visual content helps establish initial connections but does not encourage ethical criticism, while the moral aspect emphasizes the relevance of accounts in preserving culture. Social media can be used as a medium for digital literacy, where educational content is not only used for education but also useful for supporting future careers[26].

5.2 Credibility Evaluation of @AboutCirebon Content by Generation Z

The way Generation Z assesses the credibility of @AboutCirebon content shows a tendency to make quick decisions. Generation Z often uses hasty decision-making as a sign of trust [27]. Account proximity to user communities increases perceived trust; content relevant to their daily lives and sense of diversity is considered

more legitimate [28]. Although popularity does not always correlate with the accuracy of information, the popularity of an account is measured by the number of followers, likes, or comments, and also influences the evaluation of credibility [29]. This pattern illustrates that local content such as @AboutCirebon does have the potential to increase cultural awareness, but its educational impact may be limited and not yet profound (Faja riah, 2025).

The findings of this study indicate that although Generation Z's new media literacy in interacting with @AboutCirebon posts has the potential to preserve local culture in a positive way, literacy skills must be critically applied to achieve healthy digital engagement, which describes the critical and responsible use of social media [31]. Healthy use occurs when users are able to evaluate the reliability of information and consider the social consequences of actions such as liking, commenting, or sharing [32]. In addition to focusing on visual entertainment, media consumption also demonstrates understanding, morality, and a selective approach when interacting with digital content. This closes the gap in media literacy research in Indonesia and has an impact on the creation and education of social media content. This analysis reveals that older informants with longer digital experience have deeper new media literacy skills, highlighting the need for early childhood education [33].

Researchers believe that the study's findings show that Generation Z's new media literacy still needs to be deepened, especially in terms of their ability to critically analyze and evaluate messages on social media. When evaluating news, especially those related to public issues and local culture, reliance on aesthetic appeal and the credibility of unreliable sources can hinder critical thinking. In addition, local digital media such as @AboutCirebon play an important role as sources of information for the community, so as local media they should not upload or disseminate anything carelessly. To prevent misunderstandings or excessive emotional responses, local media must pay attention to accuracy, clarity of context, and ethical issues in every publication. On the other hand, it is essential to support collaboration between local media, government agencies, and local authorities to promote a responsible and sustainable media culture among Generation Z.

The findings also indicate that message reception is influenced by Instagram's algorithmic visibility system. Content featuring visually appealing element such as culinary reels and tourism videos tends to receive higher engagement compared to educational or informational posts. This suggests that algorithm driven prioritization of sensory and high interaction content shapes Generation Z's exposure and engagement patterns. Consequently, new media literacy must also include awareness of how algorithms influence information visibility and public perception.

6 Conclusion

According to the study's findings, Generation Z's new media literacy in receiving messages from the Instagram account @AboutCirebon is uneven and needs to be developed, especially in terms of evaluation and critical thinking. This shows that Generation Z cognitively prefers to rely on visual elements without considering the accuracy of information in depth. The emotional dimension emphasizes responses that are often hasty and lack consideration, which can be triggered by public issues, even though local content can foster cultural pride. Moral awareness of the social impact of social media interactions is not yet deep, and appreciation of the aesthetic quality of visual information is quite strong but often ignores its learning potential.

These results show that although local digital media, such as @AboutCirebon, have great potential to protect cultural identity, their effectiveness depends on the new media literacy of their users. Generation Z often assesses the credibility of content through quick decisions such as account reputation and local context relevance. However, additional confirmation from other sources is rarely sought. Further research is recommended to examine how well digital literacy initiatives work and how social media algorithms influence Generation Z's information consumption habits across various platforms and in other local media contexts.

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