

AN ANALYSIS OF GEN Z'S PERCEPTION REGARDING COMMUNICATION STYLES THAT CULTIVATE RELATABILITY IN PODCAST MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z (Gen Z), the dominant media consumer, actively seeks relatability, yet the specific speaking styles that foster this connection remain unidentified, creating a gap between media production and reception studies. This descriptive qualitative study analyzed semi-structured in-depth interviews with 31 Gen Z informants through a constructivist lens. The findings confirm Gen Z are active "meaning navigators," aligning with Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory. Relatability is not a singular concept but a spectrum fulfilling distinct needs: (1) a "Safe Space" (emotional-reflective), (2) a "Virtual Hangout Friend" (social-communal), and (3) a "Mentor" (aspirational-intellectual). Crucially, each dimension is underpinned by specific speaking styles, from "gentle and empathetic" to "spontaneous and outspoken" or "structured and logical." The most significant finding is the presence of "skill transfer," as Gen Z consciously or unconsciously adopts these admired styles. The study concludes that passive media consumption, when driven by strong relatability, functions as a powerful implicit learning process, with Gen Z actively selecting virtual mentors to shape their real-world communicative identities.

Keywords: generation z; podcast; reception analysis; sense of relatability; speaking style;

Generation Z (Gen Z) is a demographic cohort that did not merely adapt to technology but was born and raised within it. As true "digital natives," this generation, born between 1997 and 2012, has become an inseparable part of the digital landscape and is now emerging as a dominant force shaping social, economic, and cultural trends. In Indonesia alone, Gen Z represents a significant population segment. According to data from the IDN Research Institute, approximately 64% of this demographic are active podcast listeners. The rapid development of Technology 5.0 has transformed how they interact, creating new communication challenges alongside unprecedented opportunities. This shift is marked by the migration of media consumption from traditional platforms, such as television and radio, toward new media that is on-demand, flexible, and personal. Juliyah et al. (2025) note that Gen Z's distinct characteristics, such as their preference for "concise communication, strong visuals, and video," directly influence the communication styles they value. This phenomenon explains why podcasts, especially in audiovisual formats or "vodcasts" on YouTube, have exploded in popularity. Aulia et al. (2025) specifically highlight that Gen Z prefers content integrating visual elements, such as facial expressions, as these elements are proven to "create deeper emotional engagement." In this saturated and noisy media ecosystem, communication skills, particularly speaking skills, have become central.

Speaking skills, fundamentally defined as the ability to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings through articulated sounds, have evolved from being mere tools for information transmission into primary instruments for building personal branding. The public figures, content creators, and influencers who dominate these digital spaces are those who have successfully used specific speaking styles encompassing word choice (diction), intonation, tempo, and body language to connect with their audiences. For Gen Z, media consumption is no longer merely about seeking entertainment or information; it has evolved into a means for "identity formation and social awareness." Herein lies the urgency of this research. In a landscape where Gen Z actively uses media to fulfil psychological needs, a "sense of connection," or *relatability*, has become the most important currency.

Relatability can be defined as a complex subjective perception where in the audience (Gen Z) feels "connected" (*nyambung*) or sees their realities, anxieties, values, and life experiences authentically reflected in the speaker. It is the psychological bridge that transforms passive listeners into loyal followers and, more importantly, into part of a community. The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theoretical framework, posited by scholars such as Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, provides a solid foundation for understanding this phenomenon. This theory posits that audiences are not passive consumers; they actively select and use media to fulfil specific psychological and social needs. Bratadiredja et al. (2025) and Meicella & Aulia (2025) have applied this theory to Gen Z's podcast consumption and found that their primary needs include information, entertainment, personal identity, social integration, and, most crucially, "emotional connection." Relatability is the manifestation of these needs being fulfilled.

Studies at the intersection of digital media, Gen Z, and speaking skills have been widely conducted, but with a fragmented focus. A literature review of scholarly journals reveals several main trends. The first theme focuses on production (Speaking Skills as a Learning Output). A significant number of studies focus on the utilization of new media as a pedagogical tool to enhance speaking skills. Research by Qura et al. (2022) quantitatively proved a significant influence of watching YouTube podcasts on improving university students' speaking skills. They concluded that podcasts function as effective role models, where the habit of intensive listening can improve rhetorical abilities. Similarly, Maulana (2020) explored the use of YouTube more

generally to improve high school students' speaking skills, concluding that this medium is relevant and can foster self-confidence, expand vocabulary, and improve intonation through direct practice. Hikmah & Haryadi (2022) also identified TikTok as an effective alternative learning medium for speaking skills, reasoning that the platform is "close and familiar to students and its short-form features are ideal for training students to produce oral content. Research by Wardi et al. (2023), using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), found that students have a positive perception of using video conferencing to practice speaking skills, deeming it "easy to use and useful."

Speaking Skills and Personal Branding explicitly link the mastery of speaking skills with the concept of identity formation. Maspuroh et al. (2023) directly researched "student perceptions of learning speaking skills in personal branding formation through podcast media." This qualitative study found that the majority of students held positive perceptions, realizing that speaking skills are crucial for building self-image. Students reported that this process improved their self-confidence. Fauziah (M.) provides the theoretical basis for this by defining speaking as "self-expression," where a person's personality can be seen from their speech. Additionally, Akmaliah & Santoso (2018) found a significant influence of "critical thinking ability" (a cognitive component of a good speaker) on students' speaking skills. Bratadiredja et al. (Bratadiredja et al., 2025) specifically analyzed "Generation Z's motivation of interest" in listening to podcasts on Spotify using U&G theory. Their core finding was that Gen Z's primary motivations are the needs for "information, entertainment, and emotional connection." They seek content that is "relevant, flexible, and entertaining," as well as a "personal" experience. Research by Meicella & Aulia (Meicella & Aulia, 2025) supports this finding quantitatively. They examined the influence of "interest on audience satisfaction" among Gen Z for the Pod Hub podcast and found a "very high correlation" (0.862). This proves that when interest (based on U&G needs) is met, satisfaction (or relatability) is achieved.

Studies analyzing audience perception of specific communication styles include Azzahra et al. (2025), who examined "student perceptions" of the *Close The Door* podcast in a political context. They found that the "relaxed and in-depth format" and "open discussion style" were highly effective in making complex political information accessible to the younger generation. The study by Setiadji et al. (2023) provides a counter-context by analyzing "Millennials' perceptions of Gen Z stereotypes," such as being "instant-oriented, lazy, and technology-dependent." This is significant as it highlights the existence of intergenerational perceptual tension. However, the most crucial study is by Mindaini & Sudradjat (2025), which directly examined "Generation Z's Reception" of a very specific speaking style: "harsh language." Their findings are vital: Gen Z holds diverse interpretations. The majority held an oppositional position (rejecting it), while others held a dominant position, interestingly accepting the harsh language as part of a "branding strategy" and "authenticity."

From the state of the art discussed above, a clear gap in the literature is visible. The majority of research on speaking skills in social media focuses on production (how Gen Z learns to speak), not on perception (how Gen Z, as the largest audience, assesses and interprets the speaking styles they consume daily). Second, studies focusing on perception (reception) tend to take very specific and often extreme objects, such as "harsh language," or focus on specific contexts like politics. While beneficial, these studies have not yet answered the broader question: beyond harsh language, what kind of speaking style is generally considered "relatable" by Gen Z? Third, research on Gen Z's media preferences (Aulia et al., 2025) has identified that audiovisual content (visuals, facial expressions) helps create "emotional engagement," and

motivation studies (Bratadiredja et al., 2025) have identified what is sought ("emotional connection"), but no research has dissected *how* linguistically and paralinguistically that connection is built. We do not know the communicative "recipe" the combination of intonation, tempo, word choice, code-switching, use of pauses, or spontaneous laughter that constitutes the raw material for this perception of "emotional connection." The study by Mindaini & Sudradjat (Mindaini & Sudradjat, 2025) suggests that relatability is an active construct, where Gen Z can interpret harsh language as "branding," but the linguistic and paralinguistic "recipe" for this relatability has not yet been comprehensively identified.

Based on the gap outlined, this research proposes a significant novelty by shifting from the traditional focus on the production of speaking skills to a focus on audience perception or reception. Unlike previous studies focusing on (a) media effectiveness for speaking skill production, (b) general U&G motivations, or (c) perception of a single specific style like "harsh language," this study will be the first to comprehensively identify and map the various speaking style elements (verbal, non-verbal, and paralinguistic) that are collectively constructed and interpreted by Generation Z as "relatable" or "fostering connection." This study uniquely bridges three fields: (1) Media Studies, by acknowledging Gen Z's U&G preferences for audiovisual content; (2) Reception Analysis, by using a constructivist paradigm to understand audience interpretation; and (3) Speaking Skills Studies, by dissecting the specific components of speech that contribute to personal branding. Its novelty lies in defining relatability not as an inherent attribute of the speaker, but as a meaning that is actively negotiated and produced by the Gen Z audience. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to comprehensively identify and map the verbal and paralinguistic speaking style elements that Gen Z perceives as constituting relatability in the podcasts they consume.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. This choice is not merely a technical preference but an epistemological stance grounded in the fundamental nature of the research question. The central inquiry is to understand the perception of a phenomenon that is inherently subjective, fluid, and context-bound: how Generation Z interprets "relatability" constructed through speaking styles on social media. To dissect a concept so laden with personal meaning and cultural nuance, a quantitative approach focused on measurement, frequency, or statistical generalization would be blunt and inadequate.

Qualitative research, as defined by methodology experts like Creswell (2018), is an "approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem." Its primary goal is to explore a phenomenon deeply and holistically, allowing meanings to emerge from the data rather than forcing data into a predetermined framework (Sugiyono, 2019)

. In this context, a descriptive qualitative design is specifically chosen. Unlike other qualitative designs that aim to build new theory from the ground up (such as grounded theory) or analyze a unique case (case study), the descriptive qualitative approach has a more straightforward, yet no less important, objective: to present a rich, "thick description," and comprehensive summary of a phenomenon as it occurs in its "natural setting" (Moleong, 2017). The goal is to "capture" and illuminate the landscape of Gen Z's perceptions as they are, in all their complexity and contradictions.

The philosophical foundation underpinning this methodology is the constructivist paradigm (also known as interpretivism). This paradigm stands as an antithesis to positivism, which

believes in a single, objective, and measurable external reality. Conversely, constructivism, as articulated by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), posits that "reality" is something plural, social, and actively constructed by individuals through their interactions with the world. Reality is not discovered; it is created through language and interpretation.

The concept of relatability is a perfect example of such a socially constructed reality. No speaking style is objectively "relatable." A speaking style (e.g., the use of code-switching, a relaxed intonation, or filler words like 'like' or 'y' know') becomes relatable only when a Gen Z audience perceives it as such. This meaning is negotiated between the text (the content) and the audience (Gen Z) within a specific cultural and social context.

Adhering to this philosophy, it becomes clear that the only way to understand relatability is to access the "constructors" of meaning themselves: Generation Z. This methodology requires the researcher to shed the cloak of detached objectivity and instead, adopt what is known in the humanities tradition as *Verstehen* a deep "empathetic understanding" (Hammersley, 2013). This approach is fundamentally humanistic as it places human experience, subjectivity, and the participant's voice at the centre of the knowledge-creation process.

The selection of informants in this study was conducted using purposive sampling, a strategic approach designed to recruit participants possessing a wealth of experience regarding the phenomenon under study. The research subjects comprised 31 informants representing the Generation Z demographic, with an age range of 16 to 24 years. The primary inclusion criteria established were the participants' level of activity and routine in consuming podcast content across various social media platforms, ensuring that each informant had sufficiently intensive exposure to form an informed perception. These informants were not positioned as passive objects, but rather as "participant observers" who consciously selected various podcast genres ranging from entertainment and horror to politics as an integral part of their daily ecosystem. Through these criteria, the study ensures that the data elicited are not merely fleeting opinions, but profound reflections of their authentic experiences in interacting with the podcasters' speaking styles.

The justification for using a descriptive qualitative method via in-depth interviews becomes robust when viewed from the research objective. We are not seeking "how many" Gen Z members prefer style A; we are seeking "why" and "how" style A feels "authentic." What linguistic and paralinguistic elements (tone, speed, pause) build the perception of "casualness"? Why is the use of slang by one creator interpreted as "relatable"? Therefore, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection technique. An interview, in the qualitative tradition, is not an interrogation process to extract data, but a "conversation with a purpose" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). It is a site where knowledge is co-produced by the researcher and participant. The researcher can probe, dig deeper, ask for examples, and follow up on unexpected answers to uncover hidden assumptions and the meaning-making frameworks used by participants. This process respects participants as "experts" on their own experiences. Choosing to "listen" to Gen Z's voices through interviews, rather than "measuring" them through surveys, is the essence of the humanistic approach in this study.

The data analysis technique in this study employs an inductive thematic approach adopted from the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, focused on dissecting the construction of meaning behind the informants' narratives. This process begins with data condensation, wherein the researcher immerses deeply into the interview transcripts to identify and code units of meaning representing the spectrum of "relatability" ranging from emotional validation and social familiarity to intellectual aspiration. Simultaneously, the analysis moves to

map specific correlations between these dimensions of connection and preferred "speaking style elements," tracing in detail how linguistic and paralinguistic features such as soothing intonation, dynamic tempo, casual diction, or the use of reflective pauses are perceived by informants as triggers of authenticity. Ultimately, the conclusion drawing involves synthesizing these relational patterns to construct a comprehensive and interpretative explanation regarding how Generation Z navigates and interprets podcasters' communication styles as the basis for forming social and emotional bonds in the digital space.

Overall, this methodology using a descriptive qualitative design, grounded in constructivist philosophy, and executed through in-depth interviews forms a coherent chain of argument. This approach is the only way to generate the "thick" and "rich" data necessary to answer the research question. This study does not aim to make generalizable claims applicable to all of Gen Z in Indonesia; rather, it aims to provide a deep, authentic, and "grounded" contextual understanding of how relatability is constructed and interpreted by a generation now shaping the digital communication landscape. In this nascent research landscape, the first and most crucial task is not to measure or test theories, but to "describe" and "understand" the phenomenon with sensitivity and respect for the human subjectivity that underpins it.

FINDINGS

Generation Z acts not as passive media consumers, but as "meaning navigators." The collected data fundamentally affirms and expands the theoretical framework of Uses and Gratifications (U&G), pioneered by communication scholars such as Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch. This theory posits that audiences are not passive; they actively select and use media to fulfil specific psychological and social needs. They actively choose and "use" podcasts to fulfil diverse psychological functions. These functions range from seeking emotional validation and a "safe space," finding "virtual hangout friends," to searching for "inspiration" and intellectual "credibility." In this meaning-seeking process, the podcaster's speaking style encompassing diction, intonation, tempo, spontaneity, and inter-host chemistry emerges as the central mechanism facilitating this connection. Aulia et al. (Aulia et al., 2025) identified these needs for Gen Z as encompassing information, entertainment, and social identity. The data from this study validates U&G by demonstrating that this "sense of connection" is the manifestation of these needs being fulfilled.

The U&G theory classifies these needs into several main categories, which are clearly manifested in the research data. The first category is Cognitive Needs, which is the drive to acquire information, knowledge, and understanding. This is the basic need to understand the world around us. In the Gen Z context, listening to podcasts is a means to gain "information" and "new insights." Research by Azzahra et al. (Azzahra et al., 2025) found that political podcasts like *Close The Door* were deemed effective because their "relaxed and in-depth format" made complex issues "accessible" to students. This cognitive need also aligns with Ramadhan's (2024) findings, which identified podcasts as an "academic support system," and Maulana's (Maulana, 2020) findings, which saw YouTube as a medium for developing Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) such as "critical thinking." Even quantitatively, Qura et al. (Qura et al., 2022) proved "an influence between watching YouTube Podcast shows and student speaking skills," demonstrating that audiences actively use podcasts as role models for learning.

A podcast will "win" in this competition if its speaking style is deemed "relatable" by Gen Z, as that style is the most effective vehicle for delivering the sought-after satisfaction. Be it cognitive satisfaction (a "smart" and "logical" speaking style), affective satisfaction (a "poetic"

and "engaging" style), personal identity satisfaction (an authentic style for personal branding), or social satisfaction (inter-host chemistry that creates "community"). Quantitative research by Meicella & Aulia (Meicella & Aulia, 2025) proves this close relationship, where "interest" (a U&G need) was shown to have a "very high" correlation and a significant influence (74.4%) on "audience satisfaction." Therefore, U&G is the most essential theoretical framework for unpacking *why* Gen Z seeks relatability and *how* certain speaking styles succeed in fulfilling it.

Tables 1. Mapping of Generation Z's Perceptions of Relatability toward Communication Styles on Social Media

No	Subject	Prime Reference Podcast	A sense of connection between the audience and the podcaster	Preferred Speaking Style Elements
1.	Naf (19)	<i>Sesuai Minat (Hiburan, Politik)</i>	Topic relevance, simple language, and natural interaction	Communicative, easy to understand, friendly
2.	El (18)	<i>Bagus Muljadi, Gita Wirjawan</i>	Relevance of the message, self-reflection, "close" to reality	Calm, structured, clear, slow rhythm
3.	Je (19)	<i>Close The Door (Deddy C.)</i>	Aspirational: Admiration for intellectuality, feeling mentally challenged	Firm, logical, intellectual, critical, sharp questions
4.	Tan (20)	<i>Makna Talks, Do You See What I See</i>	Validation: Feeling understood, "as if you are listening to someone who understands you."	Outspoken, intelligent, honest, dynamic, on the same frequency
5.	Re (22)	<i>BKR Brothers, Podcast Ancur</i>	Social/Communal: "Virtual hangout friends," feeling "not alone"	Relaxed, spontaneous, natural, not patronizing, humorous
6.	Ay (19)	<i>Rintik Sedu, Suarane</i>	Emotional: "Accompanied in loneliness," evocative of feelings, inner peace	Gentle, calm, not patronizing, poetic, full of meaning

7.	Di (21)	<i>Podcast Subjective, Menjadi Manusia</i>	Reflective: "Reflection of the contents of the mind," "dialogue with a wiser version of oneself"	Authentic, calm, realistic, honest, simple, meaningful
8.	Sa (21)	Thirty Days of Lunch	Empathy: Feeling understood, "finding someone who shares your mindset and emotions"	Light but deep, intimate, calm, empathetic, coherent.
9.	La (17)	<i>Curhat Bang (Denny Sumargo)</i>	Authenticity: "Self-reflection," feeling understood, being true to oneself	Authentic, honest, firm but polite, proportional empathy
10.	Kev (18)	<i>Podkesmas</i>	Social/Communal: "Hanging out with friends," feeling accompanied, part of the conversation	Natural, funny (nothing artificial), flowing, relaxed, strong chemistry
11.	Bi (17)	<i>Mario Kaisar</i>	Emotional: "A friend who understands without judging," feels heard and understood.	Honest, calming, gentle yet firm, empathetic.
12.	Va (19)	Mindful Talks ID	Therapeutic: "A verbal hug," feels calm and understood	Gentle, sincere, slow, structured, calming
13.	Wa (22)	<i>Retropus</i>	Social/Communal: "Like a friend hanging out with you", close to casual fans.	Cheerful, spontaneous, relaxed, funny.
14.	OI (18)	<i>Raditya Dika</i>	Intellectual-Humour: "Invited to think together ", logical yet funny	Relaxed, coherent, easy to understand, logical, light hearted humour.
15.	Al (23)	<i>Suara Berkelas</i>	Aspirational : Self-development, "classy impression"	Calm, clear, net diction, confident, sincere
16.	Zi (21)	<i>Lentera Malam</i>	Immersive: "Feel the atmosphere "be there"	Calm, coherent, able to build atmosphere, vocal expressiveness.
17.	Na (20)	<i>Curhat Bang (Denny Sumargo)</i>	Authenticity: "Seeing yourself," "talking directly to you," feeling close and understood	Firm yet warm, direct yet polite

18. Sam(19)	<i>Jejak Backpacker</i>	Immersive: "Taken along on the journey," "feels real"	Relaxed, insightful, calm, narrative, expressive
19. Pu (24)	<i>Podcast Sebelum Tidur (Adriano Q.)</i>	Emotional: "Represents his feelings," "chatting with a friend"	Natural, honest, non patronizing, warm gentle
20. Ma (20)	<i>Rapot</i>	Social/Communal: "Strong Chemistry, nostalgia, "jargon... iconic"	Humorous, strong chemistry, use of iconic jargon
21. Fi (19)	<i>Podkesmas</i>	Social/Communal: "Gossip ala dads," spontaneous comedy, "frank"	Outspoken, spontaneous, fast, full of energy, distinctive laugh
22. Tin (18)	<i>Rintik Sedu</i>	Emotional: "Safe space," validation of feelings ("I'm not the only one experiencing this")	Soft, rich in expression, poetic touch.
23. No (21)	<i>Agak Laen</i>	Social/Communal: "Jokes," "personal stories," "a bit different"	Plain, honest, humorous
24. Tha (17)	<i>Makna Talks (Iyas Lawrence)</i>	Aspirational: Career path, "smart"	Relaxed but meaningful, intelligent, humorous, friendly
25. LS (19)	<i>Rintik Sedu</i>	Emotional: "Feeling of calm," "eliminating feelings of loneliness," self-acceptance	Slow, clear, gentle
26. NZ (19)	<i>Suara Berkelas</i>	Aspirational: "Inspiration," "insight," feeling less alone in the struggle	Empathetic, good communicator, good listener
27. MG (18)	<i>Suara Berkelas</i>	Aspirational: "Inspirational credibility," "success narrative"	Structured, convincing, logical, solution-oriented.
28. CH (20)	<i>ABG Siniar</i>	Social/Communal: "Hangout chat," "reactive and honest," "excitement"	Spontaneous, expressive, minimal script, high chemistry
29. SR (16)	<i>Podcast Sekolah</i>	Format innovation: "New and unique media," "vodcast (visual)"	Interactive, fresh, visual (vodcast)
30. AJ (22)	<i>Cerita Dibalik Layar (PFN)</i>	Corporate Authenticity: "Transparency," "the human side of the company"	Not stiff, easy to digest, real, close

31. IA (19)	<i>Rintik Sedu</i>	Emotional: "Expressing subjective feelings," "inner conflict"	Honest, flowing, dramatic, poetic
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(Source: Source: Results of interviews with Generation Z participants (aged 16–23 years))

The research findings indicate that Gen Z consciously "uses" podcasts to fulfil diverse psychological functions. These functions range from fulfilling affective needs (seeking emotional validation and a "safe space"), social integration needs (finding "virtual hangout friends"), to cognitive and personal identity needs (seeking "inspiration" and intellectual "credibility"). In this meaning-seeking process, the podcaster's speaking style encompassing diction, intonation, tempo, spontaneity, and chemistry emerges as the central mechanism facilitating this connection. In line with Aulia et al. (Aulia et al., 2025), who identified Gen Z's needs for information, entertainment, and social identity, the "sense of connection", or relatability, in this study is the tangible manifestation of these U&G needs being fulfilled.

The first dimension identified is the fulfilment of affective needs (emotional needs) within the U&G framework. For this informant group, relatability is a profound affective experience, where the podcast functions as a "mirror and companion" for their feelings. Informant Ay (19) defined "relatable" as a moment that brings "inner peace," describing it as "being accompanied in loneliness." This need for emotional validation is also seen in Informant Bi (17), who felt connected because the podcast felt like "a friend who can understand without judging," and Informant Tin (18), who felt relieved because their feelings were validated as "normal." This experience was poetically expressed by Informant Va (19) as a "verbal hug." The speaking style that successfully fulfils this affective need is highly specific: "gentle," "calm," "full of empathy," and "not patronizing". Informant LS (19) even highlighted "pauses in speech" as a crucial element that gave her "an opportunity to self-reflect." This finding reinforces the study by Aulia et al. (Aulia et al., 2025) that Gen Z's preference for vodcasts (which have visual elements like facial expressions) is based on seeking "deeper emotional engagement." In this context, a gentle speaking style and slow tempo function as an "auditory facial expression" that builds emotional resonance and creates a "safe space" for the listener.

The second dimension is the fulfilment of social integration and interaction needs. If the first dimension was introspective, this one is extroverted, where listeners actively seek a sense of belonging and communal entertainment. The U&G need for "social identity," as proposed by Aulia et al. (Aulia et al., 2025), is fulfilled here. Informant Re (22) listens to BKR Brothers and describes it as a "virtual hangout friend," while Kev (18) felt an atmosphere "like hanging out with your own friends" in Podkesmas. The key to relatability here is the 'chemistry' between the hosts, described by CH (20) as being "minimally scripted." The speaking style fulfilling this social need starkly contrasts with the previous dimension: "spontaneous," "natural" (Re), "humorous" (Kev), "outspoken" (Fi), "cheerful" (Wa), and using "iconic... jargon" (Ma). This finding proves the podcast's role in "building community," where a spontaneous speaking style becomes an identity marker. This also reinforces the findings of Mindaini & Sudradjat (Mindaini & Sudradjat, 2025) that unconventional language styles (including "harsh" or "outspoken") can function as an authentic "branding strategy" that binds the community.

The third dimension fulfils cognitive needs (information) and personal identity needs (aspiration). This is a form of relatability based not on similarity, but on admiration: "I want to be like them." Informant Je (19), for instance, explicitly connected with Deddy Corbuzier due to "admiration for his communication competence and intellectuality." Similarly, informants

listening to *Suara Berkelas* (AI, NZ, MG) actively seek "inspirational credibility" and a "classy impression." The speaking style that successfully fulfils this aspirational need is "firm, logical, intellectual" (Je), "neat diction" (AI), and "structured" (MG, OI). This finding aligns with previous research identifying the podcast's function as an "academic support system" (Ramadhan, 2024) and a medium that can develop Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) like "critical thinking" (Maulana, 2020). Informant Je (19) admiring a "critical" style is tangible proof that Gen Z actively uses media to stimulate their intellectuality, consistent with U&G assumptions.

The fourth dimension is the fulfilment of entertainment or escapism needs. In this dimension, listeners connect not with the podcaster's personality, but with the atmosphere or world created by the narrative. Informant Zi (21), who listens to *Lentera Malam*, felt connected because they "could feel the atmosphere," as if "at the scene." Sam (19), listening to *Jejak Backpacker*, felt "taken along on the journey." This fulfilment of the U&G entertainment need is achieved through the technical mastery of narrative speaking skills. The required speaking style is "calm, sequential, and able to build atmosphere" (Zi), as well as "narrative" and "expressive" (Sam), which allows the listener to be immersed in the story.

The most practically significant finding of this research is that this gratification fulfilment process is not a passive experience. The data consistently shows the presence of "skill transfer" from the podcaster to the listener. Gen Z, whether consciously or unconsciously, adopts and adapts the speaking styles they admire. Informant Je (19) "imitates a way of speaking that is straightforward, critical, and focused." Informants Ay (19) and Va (19) try to speak with a "softer tone" and be more "mindful." Informants Kev (18) and Fi (19) became "more spontaneous" and "braver and more honest in expressing opinions." This is very strong empirical evidence supporting previous studies (e.g., Maulana, 2020; Hikmah & Haryadi, 2022) that identified audiovisual media as able to "improve speaking skills." However, this study adds a crucial new nuance: whereas previous research focused on using media for active practice, this finding shows that the relatability created from passive consumption alone is sufficient to trigger a learning process. This is the ultimate proof of the active U&G audience: Gen Z does not just listen; they internalize, adapt, and ultimately reshape their own communicative identities, guided by the "mentors" and "virtual friends" they choose in the social media landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Generation Z are not passive media consumers, but rather intelligent and active "meaning navigators." This finding fundamentally affirms and expands the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theoretical framework, demonstrating that audiences actively select media to fulfil specific psychological and social needs. (a sense of connection), or relatability, is shown to be not a singular concept, but rather a spectrum of psychological experiences dynamically negotiated by listeners to fulfil four main functions: (1) as a "Safe Space" for emotional validation and self-reflection; (2) as a "Virtual Hangout Friend" to fulfil the need for entertainment and communal identity; (3) as a "Mentor" for the fulfilment of intellectual aspiration and admiration; and (4) as an immersive narrative "Experience." Crucially, this study demonstrates how each dimension of connection is directly underpinned by specific speaking style elements, ranging from "gentle" and "empathetic" to "spontaneous" and "outspoken", or "structured" and "logical."

This finding has academic implications, bridging the gap between media reception studies and the pedagogy of speaking skills by shifting the focus from content production (Maulana,

2020; Hikmah & Haryadi, 2022) to audience perception. The most theoretically significant finding is the presence of "skill transfer," which proves that passive media consumption, when driven by a strong bond of relatability, functions as a highly effective implicit learning process. Gen Z does not merely listen; they consciously or unconsciously internalize, adapt, and ultimately reshape their own communicative identities.

For communication education and public speaking training, this study suggests that curricula should not focus solely on rigid, formal delivery. Educators should introduce the concept of "stylistic flexibility," training students to adopt various speaking styles according to their objectives whether to build empathy ("Safe Space"), create familiarity ("Virtual Hangout Friend"), or establish authority ("Mentor"). The use of podcasts as a passive learning model (Qura et al., 2022) is thus validated, as relatability is the very mechanism that triggers this learning. For content creators, podcasters, and influencers, this study offers a roadmap for building authenticity. Creators must understand which U&G function they aim to fulfil; a creator wishing to be a "Mentor" cannot use a "Virtual Hangout Friend" style and expect to succeed. Success lies not in a single "magic" style, but in the alignment between the chosen speaking style and the target audience's psychological needs.

Furthermore, this study opens important avenues for future research. While this qualitative study has successfully mapped the dimensions of relatability, future quantitative research could measure the extent to which specific paralinguistic elements (such as tempo, pitch, or the frequency of "pauses") statistically influence perceived connection. Moreover, longitudinal studies could track this skill transfer phenomenon over time to observe the permanence of these speaking style adaptations within Gen Z. Cross-platform research (e.g., comparing YouTube podcasts with Tik Tok clips) is also necessary to understand how different media formats affect the construction of relatability.

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