

A Case Study on the Netiquette of Generation Z Phone Users in the Digital Era

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Abstract: Gen Z phone users have been born to a technologically ubiquitous environment and are thus expected to exhibit netiquette rules as they have been greatly influenced by the technological age. This study explored the netiquette rules that generation Z phone users employed while navigating in an online platform. Similarly, it investigated the impact of digital exposure on Gen Z's digital ethics. Lastly, it unearthed how Gen Z individual respond to digital social negativity. In this study, there were twelve (12) participants who were purposely chosen. The data were gathered through a semi-structured interview. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. After the analysis, the results of this study show that the netiquette rules of the Gen Z phone users are deliberating over proper actions, avoiding unfavorable actions, observing proper messaging conventions, and respect and conflict avoidance. Their digital exposure influence is negative effect of exposure towards netiquette. The respondents' response to social negativity are conciliatory response, and both conciliatory and non-conciliatory response. It is recommended that similar study may be conducted to the same generation who are not solely users of cellphones but any other gadgets.

Keywords— Conciliatory Response, Digital Exposure Influence, Response to Social Negativity, Online Rules

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z are those born between 1995 and 2012 who have been dubbed iGen to highlight their connection to the internet (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021). They spent most of their time online. Basically, they have social media accounts and smart phones, especially those who are living in urban and developed areas where satellite internet and electricity are available. Wherever they go, phones and the internet are part of their daily lives. According to Dimock (2019), this group has initially been subjected to an "always on" technological environment, which, in comparison to other age groups, has been exposed to technology and innovation from the beginning, which has improved over time.

With the technological savviness that generation Z possesses, there have been several terminologies being used in referring to them which include, but are not limited to, "postmillennials," "Facebook generation," "netgeneration," and "iGeneration" (Csobanka, 2016). On the other hand, despite their assumed expertise on the subject matter, Stahl and Literat (2023) argued that the youth have sparse awareness of the repercussions of the usage of social media, more specifically information sharing. Hence, there is a need to know their digital ethics, or netiquette. By exploring this concern, it will help them navigate the technological world. Moreover, knowing the netiquette will raise awareness among the current generation about using and engaging with various online platforms.

Netiquette is a term that combines the words "network" and "etiquette," and it refers to the moral compact of the Internet (Sari et al., 2020). They further state that netiquette refers to how people interact, treat others, define themselves, and defend themselves online in relation to ethical problems.

Digital ethics constitute one of the pillars of digital citizenship that users must follow. As a phone user, it is essential to bear in mind ethical standards and considerations to ensure safe browsing on the web and on social media.

With the occurrence of the pandemic, there has been a drastic increase in social media utilization, traffic, and gadget use (Bacolod, 2022; Duta, 2020). During the pandemic where people are restricted from going outside and socializing with their peers, they spend most of their time and connect with their friends and classmates online. Thus, this scenario is a major indicator that netiquette should be taught to people who are substantially the primary audience targeted by social media (Al-Khatib, 2023). Netiquette education should be executed to heighten awareness of online social activities, owing to the fact that the core concept of digital citizenship is believing that all digital citizens contribute positively inclined notions to the digital world (Liverpool-Morrisa, 2023).

In addition, anonymity becomes highly recognized by students and thus allows them to feel that they could act according to impulsive emotions (Cebollero-Salinas et al., 2022). Because of this, some Gen Z are not mindful of how they should behave on an online platform. This action may lead them to cyberbullying and even engaging in pornography.

In a study of Steer et. al. (2020), acceptance of verbal violence is varied according to the youths' internet practices, depth of the agenda, and their sense of humor. They have found that rejection of verbal abuse is more often associated with topics of less relevance, while acceptance of verbal abuse is more often associated with the youth's level of internet and humor usage. Therefore, it is important to delve deeper into the netiquette practices of Gen Z.

A high correlation was present within internet access, utilization, and literacy, stipulating that given the teens' length

of usage of the object, their skills on internet usage would vary (Reddy et al., 2021). However, there is a negative consequence of the three (3) facets indicating that online risks accompany one's internet literacy (Bin Naeem & Kamel Boulos, 2021). Moreover, Wachs et al. (2020) argue that longer digital exposure increases the chances of a user engaging in, witnessing, and falling prey to cyberbullying, contrary to the majority's perception that ICT skills and literacy aid in diminishing such risks. They emphasized that a greater prevalence of negative online content is encountered by more skilled users. In the study conducted by Ding et al. (2020), it was shown that higher netiquette scores were determinants of fewer cyberbullying instances. Meanwhile, despite the deemed benefits technology has brought to the community, several issues regarding digital ethics should be taken note of. These challenges include, but are not limited to, (1) hate speech, (2) spreading misleading news, and (3) bullying. (Rejekiingsih & Sayekti, 2021).

With the above pressing concerns, this study is therefore primarily concerned with the netiquette rules of Generation Z in the digital era, the influence of digital exposure on their digital ethics, and how do they respond to digital social negativity. By exploring these aspects, Generation Z may gain insights on how they can navigate the online world safely.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative design. Specifically, the study utilized a single-case study as it will investigate the netiquette of Generation Z. Case studies attempt to come as close as possible to the topic of interest through a combination of firsthand knowledge in natural environments and access to subjective elements (desires, feelings, and ideas) (Yin, 2016). The participants of this study are Generation Z phone users; the majority of the population was born between the 1990s and the 2010s. Thus, the average age range of the respondents was 9 to 25 by the time of the conduct of this study. A total of 12 participants were interviewed within the specified age range with the use of a non-random or non-probability sampling technique (purposive sampling). This study utilized a semi-structured interview guide that underwent a series of validations through consultation with experts and pre-interviews. The data collection was done through a semi-structured interview, as this allowed the participants to render additional relevant comments and/or allow the interviewers to ask additional questions whenever necessary (George, 2022). Meanwhile, interview guides and consent forms to be signed by the respondents were given to each of them.

Before the conduct of the interview, the participants were oriented, especially ethical considerations encompassing the interviewee's anonymity, their voluntary participation, and recognition of any instruments to be used, such as recorders. As the data collection process was done, digital phones (with voice recorders) were used with the consent of the participants. Data was transcribed, translated, if necessary, analyzed, and organized in themes according to the data analysis method in the following section. The data analysis primarily utilized

Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis (as cited by Maguire & Delahunt's, 2017). This data analysis encompasses the following: (1) familiarization of data; (2) generating codes; (3) theme searching; (4) theme review; (5) defining themes; and (6) write-up.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The themes were focused on the netiquette rules being utilized by Gen Z phone users, their reasons for employing such rules, the impact of exposure from the internet on netiquette awareness and implementation, and the responses of the users when met with social negativity.

3.1 NETIQUETTE RULES OF THE GEN Z PHONE USERS

Soler-Costa et al. (2021) have described netiquette as a network communication social code. However, it is said that netiquette is considered an unwritten code of conduct. Regardless, transgressions of these rules are a sign of disrespect towards the other party (Heitmayer & Schimmelpfennig, 2023). Meanwhile, conforming to these rules would aid in diminishing future conflicts in differing environments. Thus, it is at the discretion of the users as to what rules they would emulate to promote virtual peace.

3.1.1. DELIBERATING OVER PROPER ACTIONS

Reasoned, helpful, and kind remarks are linked to more thoughtful remarks in the talks that follow deliberation of action (Freiss et. al., 2021). One of the most frequent netiquette rules that are being employed by the respondents were those actions related to prior deliberation of actions which entailed thinking over actions that could breed conflict, could endanger account safety, and could lead to false information. As the respondents do not wish to further the conflict that may happen or is already happening, rigorous contemplation is done as to what would be the best course of action.

Significant response 1: *Ha social media, uhm, dirik dayon nashare hin mga information nga personal tapos diri gihap ak nashare hin mga diri sure nga information. So, before magshare is kitaon anay kun an source, reliable ba. Tapos pag kuan gihap, pag ito ngani nga mga, mga insensitive nga mga posts. [In social media, I don't immediately share information that is personal and also, I do not share unsure information. So, before I share, I locate the source to check whether it is reliable or not. And also, be aware of insensitive posts.]*

Significant response 2: *"[...] ginsusunod ko gihap an sinisiring nga think before you click, labi na kun an information is mali tapos kun an information is harmful to another person."* [I also follow the so-called think before you click, especially if the information is false and if it is harmful to another person.]

Significant response 3: *"If you are using or you have social media accounts, make sure that all information that is related to you or something very relevant, it must keep private to avoid scam or hack."*

Significant response 4: “[...] *dapat, diri dapat mahatag hit imo opinion dayon kay bangin [...] utro ka gihapon nga sayop, sugad hiton.*” [You should not give your immediate opinion on something because maybe, you may be incorrect as well.]

The findings state that Gen Z often employ deliberation or systematic cogitation which must be done before an action. With it, possible damage could be mitigated, if not completely avoided as specific actions could elicit a myriad of emotions and reactions from different people on the internet.

3.1.2. AVOIDING UNFAVORABLE ACTIONS

With the exposure and usage of various online platforms it is important to choose civility to promote a positive online and learning environment (Mistretta, 2021). In accordance with the first theme, avoiding unfavorable actions is being executed as well. Avoiding unfavorable actions follows general rules that are being followed regardless of the environment, which no longer require great contemplation. These netiquette rules, however, are employed with the same intentions as the first.

Significant Response 1: “*Actually, usa gihap ito hiya nga netiquette, it diri pakig-away ha social media kun waray-waray man kay pwede man manabo hiya, pwede istoryahan privately kay kaya man.*” [Actually, that is also one of the netiquette [rules], not having disputes in social media if the topic is not quite worth the discussion since it can be discussed privately.]

Significant Response 2: “*An netiquette rules nga pirme ko ginagamit kada adlaw ha social media an kadiri pagi-spread han toxicity ha social media mismo. Labi na it na nga nagkakagawas yana nga mga porn meme, diri ak nalilipay hito.*” [The netiquette rules that I always use every day in social media is to not spread toxicity in it. Especially those porn memes, I do not find them entertaining.]

Significant Response 3: “*naiwas gihap ak hiton hit mga sensitive nga topics such as kun makaka iton nga mga post ngani nga nakaka offend ha mga tawo [...].*” [I also avoid those sensitive topics such as those posts that could offend other people.]

In the event where one can avoid an incorrect action, a person's natural reaction would be to do so as to avoid conflict and its repercussions with others. This behavior has become a response to any online context and thus has become a netiquette rule for Gen Z phone users. These results conform to Boynton's (2018) implications, stating that conflict may be elicited regardless of intention and with that notion, people should act according to rules.

3.1.3. OBSERVING PROPER MESSAGING CONVENTIONS

Proper messaging conventions are rules of formality which are done by users to convey respect to the receivers of the message which would include basic conventions of writing as opposed to the medium of communication. These include

the checking for spellings, capitalization of letters, grammar, and sentence structuring which, if neglected, could cause misunderstandings and conflict.

Significant Response 1: “*pagka-capitalize and lowercase of words I always stay cautious cause sometimes it gives the other person wrong intonation kun pano mo hiya gusto ig relay ha receiver or reader*”

Significant Response 2: “*kailangan han- imo kitaon it mga spelling and paano nimo igdedeliver it imo usa nga message to avoid misinterpretation or magka-misunderstanding.*” [You need to observe the spellings and how you deliver the message to avoid misinterpretations.]

Significant Response 3: “*dire ako nagca-capslock kun kay it means kasi na na shout ka hito kun nag cacaps lock ka*” [I do not use caps lock because it means that you are shouting.]

The different conventions aid in properly relaying the message and its intended meaning to the receiver. Having errors in these circumstances could rouse misconceptions regarding a certain topic, which could then elicit different reactions that may lead to greater disputes. As such, proper messaging conventions are aptly being applied by Gen Z phone users.

3.1.4. RESPECT AND CONFLICT AVOIDANCE

The most prevalent justification as to why they are following such rules is to respect other people who are using the internet and to avoid the conflict that may arise from having breached these rules. In order to avoid conflict, the respondents would often mention respecting others' abilities, rights, and boundaries while considering whether each action they would execute would create misunderstandings and unnecessary disagreements.

Significant response 1: “*Kailangan ko hiya sundon kay mayda mga words or phrases nga pwede makaul-ol ha usa nga tawo or pwede gihap an iba nga tawo, iba an pagkahuna-huna.*” [I need to follow these because there are phrases that could hurt other people or for others, they might misunderstand my intentions.]

Significant response 2: “*I always make sure that I am not offending or stepping on the disability of anyone on the net, for I believe that the internet should be a safe place for everyone.*”

Significant response 3: “*Importante it pagfollow hini nga mga rules kay ini nga mga rules, nagrereflect hini hit usa nga tawo kun ano ka ngada hit gawas hit social media ngahin ngada't sakob hit social media, tapos in hiya nga mga rules, usa- aw, ultimate form hiya- ini hin respect ha iba nga tawo.*” [It is important to follow these rules because these rules serve as a reflection of a person as to his actions inside and outside the social media. These rules and these rules are the ultimate form of respect for other people on the internet.]

Significant response 4: *“Number one, kay para diri ka makahurt. Asya gud iton it importante. Kay kun ikaw it sugaron, bagan hi ikaw, labi na kun nakacapslock an ginsend ha imon usa nga tawo, like magooverthink ka kun nag-iisog ba hiya or diri, sugad hiton,”* [Number one, so that you won't hurt other people. That is very important. Because if you were in their shoes, especially if you were sent a message in uppercase letters, you would overthink as to whether the other party is angry or not.]

To promote the peace that should inhabit the different communities made by the people, disputes should be avoided while respect should be induced. The aforementioned methodologies of respect and avoidance of conflict are in accordance with the results of Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) study.

3.2. INFLUENCES OF DIGITAL EXPOSURE ON GEN Z'S DIGITAL ETHICS

Digital exposure has a great impact on the attitudes of the user because it commonly influences the development of people's behavior which could lead to societal defiance. This condition affects people's readiness to use digital tools responsibly. Teenagers who use digital tools for socializing are affected by this lack of comprehension and knowledge of using social media and frequent use of social media results in inefficiency and misuse, breeding a range of social issues in the community.

3.2.1. NEGATIVE EFFECT OF EXPOSURE TOWARDS NETIQUETTE

Due to the rising negativity in social media, some participants have found their netiquette application to have become worse due to varying reasons, mainly influenced by other people's behaviors on the said platform.

Significant Response 1: *“Para ha akon gihap, diri, kay kadugayan urog ha at ginbabalewala nala an rules han social media tungod hin kahubya ngan danay nagdadara ha at ha karat-an hit paggamit hin social media.”* [For me, I think it is not good because almost all of us neglect the rules on social media because of our laziness, which sometimes leads us to bad use of social media.]

Significant Response 2: *“For me, diri [maupay] kay mas nagtitikatoxic it social media in a way nga damo na it nagkakat na mga viral videos and dadamo it nag-aaragway using socmed.”* [For me, it is not a good thing, since social media is becoming toxic in a way where viral videos are becoming rampant and many people using social media are having disputes.]

Significant Response 3: *“Para ha akon, diri natikaupay it akon netiquette kay [For me, my netiquette is not becoming better because] social media is full of toxicity and false information. Even though you are not toxic yourself, you are still affected by other people.”*

The study of Bhagat et al. al. (2020), demonstrated that full internet use enhances a person's ICT skills, which in turn makes them more susceptible to social negativity or aggressive behaviors. The results of this study revealed that greater exposure to social media platforms may lead to greater possibilities of receiving adverse effects such as toxicity and false information about netiquette as a consequence of receiving negativity.

3.3. RESPONSE TO SOCIAL NEGATIVITY

Different social negativities have emerged as social media has become rampant. These social negativities include, but are not limited to, fake news spreaders, flammers, posers, trolls, and baiters. The researchers have found out that there are several methodologies that are being employed by Gen Z phone users which are then dependent on individual reasoning. Both conciliatory and non-conciliatory responses were observed based on the framework of Lim et al. (2019).

3.3.1. CONCILIATORY RESPONSE

Conciliatory responses, or responses where conflict is avoided, self-interest is prioritized, and victims render benefit of the doubt, were deemed the most prevalently perceived to be appropriate feedback by Gen Z phone users. The reasons for which they responded to such stimuli were primarily for conflict and time-wastage avoidance.

Significant Response 1: *“Para ha akon, ginpapabay-an la kay nadiri ako hin samok ngan nadiri ako nga may kaaway.”* [For me, I ignore them because I do not want any conflicts nor make any enemies.]

Significant Response 2: *“Whenever I see some trolls or negativity on social media, I don't mind it. Just like those trolls who didn't do anything good but bring people down. They don't even deserve the tiniest attention.”*

Significant Response 3: *“Mas better nala ig-ignore mo nala it mga sugad hito kaysa makisawsaw ka pa para diri na gihap ito hiya magviral, magkaada hin damo nga likes, damo na mga feedbacks”* [It is better to ignore them than to involve yourself so that it would not become viral, have more likes or feedback.]

In addition, Drain (2019) found justifications that ignoring critical tweets affirmed student-athletes' premise for self-development; this finding may be deemed to support the notion that ignoring social negativities is rooted in self-validation and the perceived importance of priorities compared to interacting with the aforementioned negativities. Moreover, this is similar to Pamarathna's (2019) studies, which state that breaking the negative cycle is the recommended course of action.

3.3.2. BOTH CONCILIATORY AND NON-CONCILIATORY RESPONSE

Some Gen Z phone users, however, resorted to non-conciliatory responses which encompassed direct retaliation and revenge. The primary consideration of the respondents

upon opting for non-conciliatory responses was whether their actions were grave enough to require reprimanding and needed to be changed for the development of both the haters and the internet's social environment. Otherwise, conciliatory responses would still be employed.

Significant Response 1: "*Diri maiiwasan nga magpatol danay but I make sure liwat nga nagiging responsible liwat ako hit akon pag- бага hit pagreply hiton ngan ginba-based ko hiya liwat ha facts. Kumbaga gin-ginba-backan ko liwat hiya hin facts. Tapos, asya adto, ginrereport, sugad, but waray pak hiton nga nakig-away talaga ako ha social media. Kun mayda man sugad, like waray pak makig-away but sometimes ginpi-pm ko through messenger.*" [Retaliation is sometimes unavoidable but I make sure to be responsible with my reply whereas I base it upon facts. Reporting also but I have not had an overt conflict on social media. If there are cases like that, I message them through messenger.]

Significant Response 2: "*Iton nga mga tawo, danay ginblo-block. Danay liwat diri nala talaga nagyayakan, kan [sibling] talaga 'k nago-open kay diri gud kasi ako mahilig iton nga magcomment-comment hiton, so danay ginblock ko nala iton. Kay nadiri gihap nala ak pagresponse. Siguro depende ha situation kay waray pa man liwat ak maka-agi hin sugad hiton.*" [For those types of people, I sometimes block them. Sometimes, I simply do not react since I am not really fond of commenting, so seldom, I block them because I do not want to respond. Perhaps, it is dependent on the situation since I have not directly encountered a situation like that.]

Significant Response 3: "*kun uhm dire ako nakaka naapektuhan gud hito na ano na trolls, so okay la ito papasagdan ko lat hira kay syempre hin-o ba man liwat ako na makuan iton na mga trolls so kun talaga it hiya ha akon bagat kilala ko tapos nakaka apekto ito hiya ha akon na tawo an iya gin papanyakan probably ma kuan gihap ako na igblo-block ko hiya.*" [If I am not greatly affected by the trolls, it is okay to ignore them, because in the first place, who am I to interfere. If I am affected directly by the words a certain person, I block them.]

Their responses were greatly affected by whether they perceived that they would be able to make a change or do something of a higher degree, which is accordant with the findings of Gahagan et al. (2016), who state that users who are victims of and witness cyber victimization base their actions upon "circumstantial responsibility," where they deliberate on whether they have the capability to do an action of a higher degree or not.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results, generation Z follows positive netiquette rules as they navigate the digital world, which allows them to have a controlled and mitigated conflict online. However, in spite of following positive online rules, generation Z experiences negative effects due to digital exposure. At times, they tend to retaliate against online

toxicity. On the other hand, to break the cycle of negativity online, generation Z engages in a conciliatory response where they ignore fake news, flaming, posers, trolls, baiters, and others.

Based on the outcome of the study, it is important to note that generation Z will raise awareness and share their positive netiquette rules with their peers. Similarly, they have to dedicate themselves to minimizing their exposure to negative content on social media to mitigate its detrimental effect on their personal, academic, social, and psychological lives. It is also recommended that similar study may be conducted to generation z who uses all forms of gadgets.

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