

Model of Communication Family Functioning Among Generation Z Families

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ABSTRACT

This study examines family communication functioning among Generation Z families in the digital era by exploring how communication patterns and family functioning are negotiated within everyday family life. Drawing on the McMaster Model of Family Functioning and Family Communication Patterns Theory, this study adopts a qualitative research design to capture the lived experiences of Generation Z in contemporary family contexts. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with ten Generation Z informants selected from a preliminary study and analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of data reduction, open coding, axial coding, and theme development. The findings reveal that family communication among Generation Z families is characterized by a hybrid pattern that integrates dialogic interaction with hierarchical family structures. While Generation Z members are generally given the space to express opinions and participate in everyday discussions, strategic family decisions remain largely under parental authority. Family communication functions effectively in pragmatic and operational terms, particularly for coordination, problem-solving, and role negotiation, yet emotional expression tends to be selective and context-dependent. Affective involvement and emotional responsiveness are often conveyed through instrumental support rather than explicit verbal affirmation. Digital media, especially instant messaging platforms, play a central role in maintaining family connectedness and coordination while simultaneously shaping the boundaries of emotional involvement and behavioral control. Based on the integration of empirical findings and theoretical frameworks, this study proposes a contextual model of family communication functioning among Generation Z families that emphasizes the balance between dialogic space, clear role structures, adaptive emotional engagement, and the strategic use of digital communication. This study contributes to the advancement of family communication scholarship by extending the application of Family Communication Patterns Theory and the McMaster Model of Family Functioning within digitally mediated family contexts. Practically, the findings offer insights for families, practitioners, and educators in developing communication strategies that align with the relational needs and digital realities of Generation Z.

Keyword: Generation Z, family communication, family communication patterns theory, family functioning, digital media.

INTRODUCTION

Several studies have examined the relationship between family communication, family functioning, and digital media use within the family context. Perez et al. (2024) examined the association between family rituals, family functioning, and well-being among college students in Asia, finding that family rituals positively contribute to family functioning and individual well-being. Anto et al. (2023) conducted a scoping review of parent-child communication dynamics, identifying various communication patterns within contemporary families. Viranda et al. (2023) examined the meaning of family functioning from the perspective of gender, birth order, and family status, finding that perceptions of family functioning varied based on an individual's position within the family structure. Pabundu and

Ramadhana (2023) examined family communication patterns and the development of children's independence, demonstrating that open communication patterns contribute to the development of children's independence. Kusaini et al. (2024) examined the influence of social media on relationships and interactions among families, finding that social media has a dual impact: facilitating connectivity while potentially reducing the quality of face-to-face interactions. Rahma et al. (2025) examined the influence of information technology on the communication patterns of Generation Z in Medan City, showing that Generation Z tends to adopt a hybrid communication pattern that combines digital and face-to-face interactions. Carvalho et al. (2015), in their literature review on family function and information and communication technology, found that technology use in families is associated with changes in interaction patterns and family functions. Tadpatrikara et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of the influence of technology use on communication patterns and family functioning, concluding that technology can strengthen family connectivity but also has the potential to reduce affective engagement if not managed properly. Yoanita (2022) examined family communication patterns from the perspective of Generation Z, finding that Generation Z desires space for dialogue within the family while still respecting parental authority in strategic matters.

Although various studies have examined family communication and family functioning in a digital context, research specifically integrating Family Communication Patterns Theory and the McMaster Model of Family Functioning to understand the construction of family communication functions in Generation Z families remains limited. In fact, these two theoretical frameworks complement each other: FCP explains communication orientations (conversation and conformity orientation), while the McMaster Model provides broader dimensions of how families carry out their functions (problem solving, communication, roles, affective involvement, affective responsiveness, and behavioral control). The integration of these two theories in the context of Generation Z families living in the digital age is still rare.

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed patterns of communication within families, particularly among Generation Z. As a generation that has grown up alongside digital media, Generation Z experiences family communication that is increasingly mediated through instant messaging applications and social networking platforms. These digital practices reshape not only the frequency of family interactions but also the ways emotions are expressed, decisions are negotiated, and authority is exercised within family relationships (Perez et al., 2024). Family communication is widely recognized as a central component of family functioning and individual well-being. Effective communication contributes to emotional security, psychological adjustment, and the development of interpersonal competence across the life course. Previous studies emphasize that openness in communication, emotional responsiveness, and clear role distribution support healthier family functioning. However, many of these frameworks were developed in contexts where face-to-face interaction dominated family life, thus offering limited explanations for families operating within digitally mediated environments (Kusaini et al., 2024).

Generation Z families often demonstrate communication practices that cannot be understood through rigid or dichotomous categorizations. Rather than exhibiting purely open

or purely hierarchical communication styles, family interactions tend to involve negotiated forms of openness and authority that vary according to situational demands and emotional contexts. Digital communication further complicates this dynamic by enabling continuous contact while simultaneously reducing nonverbal cues and emotional immediacy, thereby influencing affective involvement and responsiveness within families (Pabundu & Ramadhana, 2023). The McMaster Model of Family Functioning conceptualizes family functioning through six dimensions: problem solving, communication, roles, affective involvement, affective responsiveness, and behavioral control (Epstein et al., 2003). Complementarily, Family Communication Patterns Theory explains family interaction through the balance between conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Although both frameworks remain relevant, they were not originally formulated to account for digitally mediated family communication, particularly within Generation Z families.

Empirical research on Generation Z increasingly highlights the influence of digital media on interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, studies that specifically examine how digital communication reshapes family communication functioning remain limited. Existing research often focuses on individual psychological outcomes rather than relational processes within families (Anto et al., 2023; Viranda et al., 2023). This gap indicates the need for qualitative research that explores how Generation Z constructs meaning around family communication and functioning in everyday digital contexts. In response to this gap, the present study aims to examine the construction of family communication functioning among Generation Z in the digital era. By adopting a qualitative approach and integrating the McMaster Model of Family Functioning with Family Communication Patterns Theory, this study seeks to develop a contextualized understanding of family communication that reflects the lived realities of Generation Z families in digitally mediated environments.

To address the complexity of family communication and functioning among Generation Z in the digital era, this study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks. First, Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP) is used to explain how communication orientations—particularly conversation orientation and conformity orientation—shape interaction, decision-making, and emotional expression within families. Second, the McMaster Model of Family Functioning provides a multidimensional framework for examining how families perform core functions such as problem solving, communication, roles, affective involvement, affective responsiveness, and behavior control. Together, these two theories offer an integrated analytical lens through which the dynamics of communication and family functioning in Generation Z families can be systematically examined. Therefore, the following literature review discusses these two theoretical perspectives as the conceptual foundation of this research.

Family communication plays a central role in family life and serves as the foundation for interaction among family members. The term “communication” originates from the Latin word *communis*, which means “to share.” In the family context, sharing is not merely a social activity but a process that enables involvement, cooperation, and mutual understanding. Communication can only be considered meaningful when shared understanding emerges through the exchange of verbal and nonverbal symbols. As noted by Van Ruler (2018), there is no single, universally accepted definition of “communication” or the act of “communicating.” In classical Latin usage, the term *communicare* encompasses meanings

such as sharing with others, disseminating information, opening access, and engaging in discussion together (Freeks et al., 2024). Family communication can be understood as a willingness to openly discuss any topic within the family, including both positive and negative aspects, accompanied by a commitment to addressing problems honestly, patiently, and transparently (Rahmawati et al., 2024). Cangara (2023) defines communication as a continuous, transactional, complex, and dynamic process of creating, sharing, and managing meaning. Accordingly, family communication is not static but continuously adapts to the context and conditions of each family member.

Family communication extends beyond spoken messages to include the use of symbols, nonverbal behavior, relational dynamics, and the ways families reflect on their own communication processes. These elements collectively shape healthy and functional family communication patterns (Watzlawick et al., as cited in Segrin & Flora, 2020). Miller and Keitner (2008) further emphasize that family communication involves verbal and nonverbal message exchanges aimed at fostering mutual understanding, affection, trust, honesty, openness, and harmony within the family (Cangara, 2023). The quality of communication within the family significantly influences the effectiveness of interaction among family members and contributes to the creation of a harmonious family environment (Aswandy, as cited in Rahmawati et al., 2024). Moreover, spending time together and engaging in high-quality communication enhances family well-being by strengthening relational bonds, increasing satisfaction, and facilitating the expression of shared values and attitudes (Zhao et al., 2021).

Discussions of family communication cannot be separated from the communication patterns that develop within the family system. While family communication explains the function and quality of interaction, family communication patterns provide a more specific depiction of how communication is practiced in everyday life. The concept of family communication patterns was initially introduced by Chaffee, who argued that communication patterns within the family serve as a reference framework for children when interacting with external environments (Tims & Masland; Yoanita, 2022). Koerner and Fitzpatrick later refined this concept by building upon the work of McLeod and Chaffee, proposing two primary orientations through which families construct shared realities.

Conversation orientation refers to the extent to which families encourage discussion about beliefs, ideas, and viewpoints, which then serve as the foundation for family members' actions. The defining characteristic of conversation orientation is the freedom to express opinions and active involvement in family discussions (Sadeghi, Tashak, & Fazilatpour, 2017; Badamian et al., 2023). Families with high conversation orientation prioritize open communication as a crucial element of child socialization and education. Family members actively interact, share ideas, express emotions, and participate collectively in decision-making processes. In contrast, families with low conversation orientation tend to exhibit limited interaction, infrequent exchanges of messages, thoughts, and feelings, and minimal shared activities (Pabundu & Ramadhana, 2023).

Conformity orientation emphasizes parental guidance and direction, with the primary objective of maintaining uniformity in relationships between parents and children (Sadeghi, Tashak, & Fazilatpour, 2017, as cited in Badamian et al., 2023). Families with high

conformity orientation stress obedience to parental authority, and decisions—particularly those concerning important matters—are typically made by parents without involving children. Such families often display shared value systems, hierarchical family structures, and a prioritization of collective family interests over individual preferences. Conversely, families with low conformity orientation emphasize individual autonomy, equality among members, and support for personal development (Pabundu & Ramadhana, 2023).

The literature on family communication underscores that both the quality of verbal and nonverbal interaction and the communication patterns formed within families are key determinants of family functioning. Family Communication Patterns Theory, through the concepts of conversation orientation and conformity orientation, offers a clear conceptual framework for understanding how families build relationships, socialize children, and balance openness with obedience. This framework is particularly relevant to studies on family communication functioning among Generation Z, a cohort that requires both expressive freedom and parental guidance during critical developmental stages.

The concept of family functioning was introduced by Epstein, Bishop, and Baldwin, who defined it as the process of physical and emotional interaction among family members, each of whom carries specific roles and responsibilities across physical, social, and psychological domains (Epstein et al., 1983; Viranda et al., 2023). Walsh (1984) further argued that healthy family functioning is characterized by structured systems and effective interaction processes among family members. Openshaw (2011) noted that the effectiveness of family functioning can be observed through equitable treatment of all members, particularly when families collectively respond to stressors such as traumatic experiences, thereby facilitating positive adaptation (Viranda et al., 2023).

This study adopts the McMaster Model of Family Functioning developed by Epstein, Bishop, and Levin (1978), which differs from Olson's Circumplex Model by incorporating six distinct dimensions rather than focusing solely on adaptability and cohesion. Despite its broader scope, the McMaster Model emphasizes practical applicability in the context of family health and interpersonal relationships (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993, as cited in Segrin & Flora, 2020). Positive family functioning is reflected in the family's ability to resolve conflicts collaboratively and respond appropriately to challenges (Yun et al., 2021).

According to the McMaster Model of Family Functioning, family functioning can be assessed through six dimensions: problem solving, communication, roles, affective involvement, affective responsiveness, and behavioral control (Suprayogi & Vaynadita, 2023). Problem solving refers to the family's capacity to effectively address and resolve issues that threaten family stability. Communication involves the clarity, intensity, and effectiveness of information exchange among members. Roles pertain to the clear distribution and execution of responsibilities within the family. Affective involvement reflects the degree of interest and engagement shown toward family members' activities and concerns. Affective responsiveness concerns the family's ability to express a range of emotions, including both well-being emotions (such as warmth, affection, and support) and emergency emotions (such as fear, anger, sadness, and disappointment). Behavioral control relates to how families establish and enforce standards and values to regulate members' behavior (Epstein et al., 1983; Viranda et al., 2023).

The literature on family functioning is essential to this study, as it focuses on developing a model of family communication functioning among Generation Z. The McMaster Model of Family Functioning provides a comprehensive framework for assessing whether a family operates effectively. By examining communication patterns and interaction processes within Generation Z families through these six dimensions, this study establishes a theoretical foundation for constructing a family communication functioning model that aligns with the characteristics and realities of Generation Z.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research method to examine how a model of family communication functioning is constructed among Generation Z. Qualitative research adopts interpretive and naturalistic approaches to understand phenomena within their natural contexts and to interpret meanings as experienced by individuals. Qualitative data may be derived from personal experiences, self-reflection, life stories, interviews, observations, historical records, social interactions, case studies, and visual texts that help explain events and meanings in everyday life (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Amruddin et al., 2022). This method was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of informants' lived experiences, which is essential for understanding how family communication functioning is formed among Generation Z.

This research was grounded in the social constructivism paradigm. A research paradigm refers to the philosophical foundation that guides assumptions about reality, knowledge, and inquiry. Kuhn (1962) introduced the concept of a paradigm to describe shared beliefs, values, and worldviews concerning the nature of reality and knowledge (as cited in Khatri, 2020; Panya & Nyarwath, 2022). Social constructivism assumes that reality is socially constructed through lived experiences and interactions between researchers and participants. Epistemologically, knowledge is co-constructed, while axiologically, individual values are acknowledged. Methodologically, this paradigm emphasizes an inductive approach in which meanings and concepts emerge from the research process (Amruddin et al., 2022). This paradigm was appropriate for capturing how Generation Z constructs meanings related to family communication functioning based on their personal and social experiences.

This study did not specify a particular geographical location because all data collection processes were conducted online. Participants were recruited from various regions across Indonesia and engaged digitally through online platforms, allowing flexibility, efficiency, and broader access to diverse Generation Z experiences. This approach aligns with the digital orientation of Generation Z, who are accustomed to virtual interaction and online communication. The online data collection method enabled the researcher to reach informants from different cultural and social backgrounds without being constrained by geographical boundaries, thereby enriching the diversity of perspectives on family communication functioning in the digital era.

The subjects of this study were individuals categorized as Generation Z, defined as those born between 1997 and 2021. Participants were initially identified through a preliminary study in which Generation Z individuals completed a questionnaire on family functioning. Based on the results of this preliminary stage, informants were purposively

selected for in-depth interviews to ensure the relevance and depth of the data. The criteria used for selecting informants were designed to capture individuals who possess adequate experience, engagement, and communication ties within their families. These criteria included gender, age classification, domicile flexibility, family status, family interaction experience, and willingness to participate actively in the study. A detailed description of the informant selection criteria is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Informants

Aspect	Informant Criteria
Gender	Male or female
Age	Classified as Generation Z (born between 1997–2021)
Domicile	Not restricted; data collection conducted online or offline
Family Status	Not required to live with the nuclear family; must maintain family relationships and communication ties
Experience	Having family interaction experiences reflecting family communication patterns and family functioning
Availability	Willing to participate in in-depth interviews and actively engage in the research

Source: Author's compilation (2025)

By applying these criteria, the study ensured that informants were capable of providing reflective and information-rich accounts of family communication patterns and family functioning. Following this selection process, ten informants were identified as meeting the established criteria and were subsequently interviewed in depth. The demographic profile of the selected informants is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Profile of Research Informants

No.	Informant Initials	Age (Years)	Gender
1	FND	24	Female
2	FRH	24	Male
3	ADM	21	Male
4	RAR	24	Female
5	FIK	25	Female
6	KML	24	Male
7	STR	19	Male
8	RHN	27	Male
9	ZHR	19	Female
10	SYH	25	Female

Source: Author's compilation (2025)

The object of this study was the model of family communication functioning among Generation Z families, analyzed through two main aspects: family communication patterns and family functioning. Family communication patterns were examined in terms of how Generation Z constructs interaction, discussion, and communication dynamics with parents

and other family members. Family functioning was examined through six dimensions: problem solving, communication, roles, affective involvement, affective responsiveness, and behavioral control. Accordingly, data analysis was guided by Family Communication Patterns Theory and the McMaster Model of Family Functioning.

The study was conducted in several stages. It began in December 2024 with topic determination through a literature review, followed by a preliminary study to identify patterns related to family communication and functioning. The preparation of the research design and initial chapters was carried out between April and October 2025. This study did not specify a particular geographical location because all data collection processes were conducted online. Participants were recruited from various regions and engaged digitally, allowing flexibility, efficiency, and broader access, which aligns with the digital orientation of Generation Z.

Data collection employed three techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and literature review. In-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method and were conducted with the ten informants listed in Table 2. In-depth interviews involve open-ended questioning between an interviewer and an informant to explore views, knowledge, experiences, behaviors, and emotions in detail (Rany & Yunita, 2022). Observation was used as a complementary technique to enrich interview data by examining informants' communication behaviors in everyday family interactions, with observations recorded systematically (Wardhana, 2024). Additionally, a literature review was conducted to support theoretical development and data interpretation by examining relevant national and international sources related to family communication and Generation Z (Nina Adlini et al., 2022).

The unit of analysis in this study was structured around two core theoretical frameworks. Family communication was analyzed using Family Communication Patterns Theory, focusing on conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Family functioning was analyzed using the McMaster Model of Family Functioning, which consists of six dimensions: problem solving, communication, roles, affective involvement, affective responsiveness, and behavioral control. These analytical units ensured systematic alignment between data, theory, and research objectives.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which enables the identification of recurring patterns of meaning through systematic coding, categorization, and theme development (Namirah et al., 2023). The analytical process consisted of data reduction, coding, categorization, and theme development, conducted iteratively until stable and coherent themes were identified. To ensure data trustworthiness, this study applied source triangulation and member checking, strengthening the credibility and validity of the findings (Alfansyur & Andarusni, 2020, as cited in Susanto et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive and integrated account of the research findings concerning family communication and family functioning among Generation Z families. The findings are derived from qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with ten informants and analyzed through systematic stages of open coding, axial coding, and thematic categorization. This section integrates empirical findings with interpretive discussion to

clarify how communication practices shape family functioning among Generation Z families within the context of everyday digital life (Qian & Hu, 2024).

Overall, the findings indicate that family communication among Generation Z families is characterized by flexibility, situational adjustment, and the coexistence of openness and parental authority. Informants described communication practices that allow everyday dialogue while maintaining parental control in matters perceived as strategic, such as education, moral values, and future planning. This pattern reflects Generation Z's communication preferences, which emphasize efficiency and the normalization of mediated interaction while still reserving face-to-face communication for issues considered serious or emotionally significant. In this sense, family communication among Generation Z does not operate as purely "open" or purely "closed," but as a dialogic process embedded in hierarchical family structures. This supports the view that conversation orientation and conformity orientation can coexist in varying degrees depending on situational demands (Yoanita, 2022).

From the coding results, the family is generally perceived as a primary priority and a safe space—a place of return and a fundamental support system. However, the family is not always positioned as the primary arena for deep emotional expression. This finding indicates a form of pragmatic family functioning: the family remains central as a stable support system, yet emotional disclosure is often selective and not always expressed explicitly. This reflects how digitalization has expanded the meaning of family beyond a purely physical space into a relational space mediated by technology, where support and connectedness can be maintained even when emotional expression remains bounded (Qian & Hu, 2024). As one informant explained, "We mostly communicate through WhatsApp because everyone is busy, but serious conversations still happen directly" (SYH). This illustrates that digital communication supports everyday interaction and coordination, while face-to-face communication is still valued for issues requiring emotional nuance.

Communication in Generation Z families tends to be hybrid, combining digital interaction and face-to-face exchanges. WhatsApp serves as an everyday infrastructure for maintaining presence, checking routines, coordinating activities, and sustaining family connection during mobility and busyness. This hybrid pattern strengthens family functioning in operational terms, particularly in sustaining coordination and monitoring without requiring constant physical proximity (Gomes et al., 2024; Qian & Hu, 2024). At the same time, the findings align with research suggesting that intensive technology use does not automatically increase emotional closeness and can potentially reduce the quality of affective involvement if not managed reflectively (Carvalho et al., 2015; Gomes et al., 2024). This explains why, despite frequent communication, the family may still not become the primary space for expressing deeper emotional struggles.

The intensity of family communication varies across families, ranging from highly frequent interaction to minimal, need-based communication. Family discussions occur but often remain situational and limited to topics perceived as important. Children are generally given space to express opinions; however, their perspectives do not always determine final decisions, as major decisions frequently remain under parental authority. This pattern captures the first integrative theme: dialogic–hierarchical communication as a mechanism that allows participation without dissolving parental structure. Such dynamics are consistent

with evidence that openness in Generation Z families is selective and contextual—discussion is encouraged in everyday matters, while parental authority is maintained in long-term issues such as education, career, and finances (Yoanita, 2022). As one informant stated, “In daily life, my parents let me talk freely about what I do or feel, but for things like education and future plans, they still decide” (FND). In Family Communication Patterns Theory, this suggests that conversation orientation can occur alongside conformity orientation, and conformity does not necessarily imply dysfunction if dialogue is not fully removed (Pabundu & Ramadhana, 2023).

Decision-making processes differ across families. Some families apply collective discussion, allowing Generation Z members to participate actively, while others maintain hierarchical decision-making with limited consultation. In the dimension of problem solving, communication often functions as clarification and coordination rather than as collective deliberation among equal parties. This pattern reflects the second integrative theme: pragmatic family functioning through effective communication that remains emotionally bounded. Communication enables problems to be handled practically, even when emotional exploration is limited, suggesting that functional outcomes can still be achieved through communication that is clear, consistent, and contextually appropriate (Epstein et al., 2003). The findings also suggest that the role of dialogue in problem solving is frequently moderated by hierarchy, where discussion helps build acceptance of decisions even when those decisions are ultimately made by parents. This aligns with the view that child involvement contributes to understanding and compliance, even without equal decision power (Pabundu & Ramadhana, 2023). Empirical evidence appears in informant accounts, such as, “Usually my parents decide first, and I follow even if I have a different opinion” (ADM). This indicates that family problem solving remains dialogic at the level of communication but hierarchical at the level of authority.

Emotional openness within families is similarly uneven. Many informants reported suppressing personal problems and negative emotions to preserve harmony and avoid conflict, often seeking emotional support outside the family through friends or individual coping strategies such as journaling and self-reflection. This pattern reflects the seventh integrative theme: Generation Z’s adaptive strategies through emotional self-regulation within a bounded family emotional environment. One informant described this selective disclosure as, “Sometimes it feels like my feelings are not really considered” (KML), while others indicated tendencies to avoid conflict escalation by withholding emotional expression. This resonates with research indicating that heavy reliance on mediated communication may reduce the quality of direct interaction and increase miscommunication risks, influencing how emotional messages are conveyed and interpreted (Rahma et al., 2025). It also aligns with evidence suggesting that technology intensity in families does not automatically improve family functioning and may contribute to reduced emotional involvement when not well managed (Carvalho et al., 2015).

Parental roles emerge consistently across informants. Mothers are frequently described as emotionally closer and often function as mediators who facilitate dialogue, while fathers are more often positioned as authority figures or primary decision-makers. This finding corresponds to the fifth integrative theme: the role of the mother as an emotional mediator

within a hierarchical family structure. Through the mother's mediating position, emotional communication can occur without destabilizing parental authority or decision-making structures. This pattern is evident in the informant statement: "If there's a problem, I usually talk to my mother first. My father is more about making the final decision" (SYH). At the level of family functioning, this indicates that affective responsiveness can be supported relationally through specific figures, even when the overall family climate remains selective in emotional disclosure (Peredy et al., 2024; Viranda et al., 2023).

Family harmony is perceived as a central value, leading many Generation Z members to comply, remain silent, or adjust their behavior to avoid conflict. This corresponds to the fourth integrative theme: selective affective involvement and emotional responsiveness that functions to protect harmony. Rather than open confrontation, families often manage differences through accommodation and conflict avoidance, suggesting that harmony operates as a communicative orientation shaping daily interaction patterns. These tendencies mirror Generation Z's sensitivity toward coercive and one-way control, where individuals may disengage emotionally when communication feels dismissive or rigid (Peredy et al., 2024). The strategy of silence or compliance, therefore, can be interpreted as a pragmatic relational adjustment to maintain stability in a structured family environment.

Behavior control within families is implemented through religious values, moral norms, and household rules. The level of control varies from strict enforcement with sanctions to flexible guidance through advice and explanation. This reflects the sixth integrative theme: value-based behavior control as a regulatory framework for both communication and family functioning. Control is not only applied through direct supervision but also through normative expectations internalized by family members. This is consistent with findings that Generation Z responds more positively to rational explanations and dialogic communication when rules are introduced (Peredy et al., 2024). The variation is evident in informants' contrasting accounts, such as: "My parents usually explain why certain rules exist, so I understand them better" (RHN), versus the more directive orientation, "At home, rules are something that must be followed, not discussed" (ADM). Such patterns demonstrate that behavior control in Generation Z families is not simply strict versus permissive but contextual and framed by family values.

Family support is more commonly expressed in practical forms (e.g., financial support and facilitation of needs) rather than explicit verbal affirmation. Affection is often conveyed through actions rather than words. This finding corresponds to the second and fourth integrative themes: pragmatic family functioning and selective affective responsiveness. It aligns with studies suggesting that contemporary families may develop more instrumental or action-based emotional responsiveness, especially under intensive digital exposure and modern routine demands (Gomes et al., 2024; Peredy et al., 2024; Pramono & Lubis, 2023; Qian & Hu, 2024). Empirically, one informant articulated this action-based care: "My parents don't really say encouraging words, but they always help in real ways" (ZHR). This indicates that affective responsiveness in these families is not absent but expressed through nonverbal or material support that is interpreted as care.

The integration of technology into family life further shapes how these patterns function. Digital communication becomes a central infrastructure for maintaining contact and coordination, but it does not automatically enhance emotional closeness. Instead, technology

operates ambivalently: it facilitates relational maintenance and routine coordination while potentially limiting deeper emotional engagement if interaction becomes overly instrumental (Qian & Hu, 2024; Gomes et al., 2024). This supports the eighth integrative theme: hybrid communication as an amplifier of family functioning in the digital era. The findings also align with evidence that families managing technology adaptively tend to maintain more stable functioning than families that reject or fail to regulate technology use (Qian & Hu, 2024; Tadpatrikara et al., 2021). In this sense, technology becomes part of the system of family functioning, mediating roles, coordination, monitoring, and even rule enforcement in indirect ways (Qian & Hu, 2024).

Axial coding further indicates that communication in Generation Z families is dialogic within boundaries, selectively emotionally open, and marked by parental dominance in strategic decisions. At the level of family functioning, these patterns correspond to a functioning profile that is structurally effective yet emotionally constrained: problem solving is pragmatic and often hierarchical, communication is frequent but not always emotionally deep, role distribution is stable and parent-dominated, affective involvement is selective, affective responsiveness is action-based, and behavior control is value-oriented and contextual. Such findings highlight that family functioning among Generation Z cannot be reduced to a single dimension of openness or authority but must be understood as an integration of structural stability, communicative adaptability, and selective emotional management within digital life.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Generation Z family communication cannot be fully explained through rigid, dichotomous categories of openness versus conformity. Instead, families enact a hybrid pattern—open in everyday talk yet hierarchical in strategic decisions—shaped by ongoing negotiation between children’s participation needs and parents’ control needs (Ramadhana et al., 2019; Yoanita, 2022). Communication therefore functions as the core mechanism linking interaction practices, family roles, affective involvement, behavioral regulation, and technology-mediated interaction within the broader socio-digital context that structures Generation Z families (Gomes et al., 2024; Qian & Hu, 2024). This integrated interpretation provides a coherent basis for the subsequent synthesis and model formulation in the following section.

CONCLUSION

This study examined family communication patterns among Generation Z families in the digital era, identified factors influencing the effectiveness of communication in maintaining family functioning, and formulated a family communication model that supports Generation Z family functioning. The findings indicate that family communication among Generation Z does not operate in a purely open or closed manner. Instead, communication tends to be flexible and situational, where Generation Z members are given space to express opinions and perspectives, while strategic family decisions remain largely under parental authority. This pattern reflects a hybrid communication structure that integrates dialogic interaction with adherence to established family role hierarchies.

The effectiveness of family communication in sustaining family functioning is shaped by several interrelated factors, including clarity of roles among family members, the presence

of practical support and a sense of security, and the use of digital technology as a routine medium for daily communication. However, affective involvement and emotional responsiveness are not always expressed intensively. Emotional expression within Generation Z families tends to be selective and contextual, suggesting that family functioning is more often maintained through pragmatic and instrumental mechanisms rather than deep emotional expressiveness. Despite this limitation, families are still able to function adaptively and maintain stability, indicating that emotional intensity is not the sole indicator of functional family relationships.

Based on the integration of empirical findings and theoretical frameworks, this study formulates a communication model that strengthens Generation Z family functioning in the digital era. The model emphasizes the balance between realistic dialogic space, clearly structured family roles, consistent instrumental support, and the adaptive use of digital technology as a supporting communication tool rather than a substitute for relational interaction. This model illustrates how Generation Z families negotiate autonomy, authority, and emotional connection amid rapid social and technological change while maintaining core family values

The findings contribute theoretically by extending the application of Family Communication Patterns Theory and the McMaster Model of Family Functioning within the context of Generation Z families. The study demonstrates that family functioning is not determined solely by communication openness but also by families' adaptive capacities, role structures, and digitally mediated interaction patterns. By integrating these two theoretical frameworks, the study offers a more contextual and contemporary understanding of family communication functioning that aligns with the lived experiences of Generation Z.

Practically, this study provides insights for parents, families, and practitioners regarding the importance of flexible, rational, and contextual communication strategies in maintaining family functioning among Generation Z. The findings may serve as a reference for family counselors, educators, and social institutions in developing programs aimed at strengthening family communication in ways that resonate with Generation Z's digital realities and relational expectations. Nonetheless, this study is limited by its qualitative scope and reliance on self-reported data, which restricts generalizability. Future research may involve broader participant variation, incorporate multiple family member perspectives, or employ mixed-method approaches to further validate and refine the proposed communication model.

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