



## THE MEANING OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE FOR GENERATION Z IN BANDUNG CITY

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### ABSTRAK

Perkembangan teknologi mendorong generasi Z untuk menerapkan gaya hidup sehat pasca pandemi, yang maknanya berbeda-beda tergantung kebiasaan sehari-hari. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi makna gaya hidup sehat bagi generasi Z di Kota Bandung. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan dengan 16 informan berusia 18–22 tahun melalui wawancara. Hasil menunjukkan generasi Z memaknai gaya hidup sehat sebagai tubuh tanpa keluhan dan tetap aktif, meski praktiknya sering terganggu oleh kurang istirahat dan penyakit ringan. Teknologi memfasilitasi penerapan gaya hidup sehat melalui olahraga, gizi seimbang, istirahat cukup, dan akses informasi lewat media sosial serta aplikasi kesehatan.

**Kata Kunci:** Gaya hidup sehat, generasi Z, media sosial, olahraga

### ABSTRACT

The advancement of technology encourages Generation Z to adopt a healthy lifestyle post-pandemic, with meanings varying according to individual daily habits. This study aims to identify the meaning of a healthy lifestyle for Generation Z in Bandung. A qualitative approach was employed with 16 informants aged 18–22 years through in-depth interviews. Results show that Generation Z perceives a healthy lifestyle as being free from health complaints and staying active, although practices are often disrupted by insufficient rest and minor illnesses. Technology supports the adoption of healthy habits through regular exercise, balanced nutrition, adequate rest, and access to health information via social media and health applications.

**Keyword:** healthy lifestyle, generation Z, social media, sport

## 1. Introduction

The rapid development of technology and information has significantly influenced health behaviors, particularly among Generation Z, who have grown up in a digital era and heavily rely on social media and health applications. Generation Z tends to be more aware of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including balanced nutrition, regular physical activity, and the use of health applications to monitor their physical condition (Sarah et al., 2023); (Bencsik et al., 2019). However, their healthy lifestyle practices are often inconsistent and affected by several factors, including social media pressure, limited mental health literacy, and the demands of daily activities (Ohorella, 2024); (Ulita et al., 2024).

Previous studies on Generation Z's health behaviors have largely been quantitative, focusing on the frequency of healthy behaviors, food consumption, or levels of physical activity. These studies have not sufficiently addressed the subjective meaning of a healthy lifestyle from the individual's perspective, nor how social interactions and digital technology shape this understanding. This represents a significant research gap: a limited understanding of how Generation Z actively constructs and interprets the meaning of a healthy lifestyle within their digital and social contexts.

To address this gap, this study employs the symbolic interactionism framework, which emphasizes that meanings are constructed through social interactions, the use of symbols, and individual experiences within society (Mead, 2018);(Boss & LaRossa, 2008). This theoretical approach allows for a deeper analysis of how Generation Z perceives, motivates, and practices healthy lifestyles through daily experiences, peer interactions, and exposure to digital information. Additionally, insights from media literacy, health communication, and behavioral theory further support the analysis of how social media and health applications influence healthy lifestyle practices.

Preliminary observations indicate that Generation Z perceives a healthy lifestyle not only as the absence of physical illness but also as the ability to remain active, maintain mental well-being, and manage stress. Despite possessing adequate knowledge about healthy living, daily practices are often hindered by inconsistent routines, social pressures, and limited access to resources.

Based on these considerations, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Generation Z individuals interpret the meaning of a healthy lifestyle in their daily lives?
2. What are their motivations and barriers in adopting healthy lifestyles in the digital era?

The objective of this research is to identify the meaning of a healthy lifestyle among Generation Z in Bandung City and to understand the factors influencing their health practices. The study is expected to contribute to the development of more effective health communication strategies, particularly for young individuals navigating the digital age.

### **1.1. Methods**

This study employs a qualitative research method (Cresswell, 2018). It adopts a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the meaning of a healthy lifestyle among Generation Z in Bandung City (Cresswell, 2018).

According to (Sugiyono, & Lestari, 2021), qualitative research is a method used to examine phenomena in natural settings, where the researcher serves as the key instrument and explains facts through individuals' actions using inductive analysis that emphasizes meaning. Meanwhile, (Denzlin, N.K, & Lincoln, 2018) as cited in (Mulyana, 2018) describe qualitative research as interpretative in nature because it employs interpretation and involves multiple methods in examining research problems. The use of multiple methods is commonly referred to as triangulation, which aims to enable researchers to obtain a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Littlejohn states that phenomenology makes actual lived experience the basic data of reality. Thus, phenomenology treats genuine lived experiences as the fundamental data of reality. Littlejohn further explains that phenomenology allows phenomena to present themselves as they are, without imposing researchers' predefined categories upon them. While an "objective" scientist formulates hypotheses and then examines whether such structures exist, a phenomenologist does not begin with hypotheses. Instead, phenomenologists carefully investigate direct lived experiences to understand how phenomena appear in reality (Littlejohn, S. & Foss., 2012).

Data were collected using multiple methods to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research objectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary data collection technique. In-depth interviews involved 16 informants aged 18–22 years, consisting of third-semester undergraduate students in the Public Administration Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Al-Ghifari University Bandung, as well as eleventh grade students at Senior High School 12 Bandung. Interviews were used to gather detailed information regarding participant experiences and perspectives on healthy lifestyles among Generation Z. This study employed a purposive sampling technique to select participants who could provide in-depth insights into the meaning of healthy lifestyles among Generation Z. A total of 16 participants aged 18–22 years residing in Bandung City were recruited. The inclusion criteria were: (1) being a member of Generation Z (born between 1997–2012), (2) actively engaging in daily activities such as university attendance or student organization



All informants emphasized that a healthy lifestyle is closely related to the ability to enjoy life without significant physical or psychological barriers. As one participant stated:

**“A healthy lifestyle means I can enjoy my daily activities without feeling tired or stressed, and I feel grateful and happy.”**

Another participant explained:

“Being healthy is not only about not being sick, but also about feeling comfortable, productive, and mentally calm.”

These findings indicate that Generation Z perceives a healthy lifestyle as a holistic concept, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Many factors influence lifestyle, one of which is self-concept. Self-concept is one of the themes within symbolic interaction theory. It consists of two sources: the significant others, such as parents, siblings, and peers, and influences derived from social media.

The informants interviewed expressed a strong desire for a healthy lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle can be defined as living without physical or psychological problems. It is also described as an orientation toward preventing health issues and maximizing personal well-being (Suharjo & Harianto, 2019). A healthy lifestyle is a crucial factor in overall health and is not limited solely to healthy eating but also includes physical activity and adequate rest, as outlined in the FINUT pyramid, which serves as a guideline for healthy living (Gil et al., 2014).

Generation Z is known for valuing diversity and inclusivity. Team sports can bring together individuals from different backgrounds and cultures while fostering teamwork. Through training, cooperation, and competition in sports, a sense of belonging and friendship can be cultivated. Another motivation for Generation Z to engage in sports is the opportunity to develop and showcase their skills. Generation Z is highly competitive and enjoys challenges that allow them to master new skills. Sports serve as a platform for Generation Z to compete and enhance their abilities (Mlsidayu, A., 2023).

A healthy lifestyle is a long-term commitment to maintaining or supporting bodily functions in ways that positively impact health. It is not only about food but also about daily habits in living a healthy life (Prananda et al., 2023).

Mead explained three key concepts in symbolic interaction: mind, self, and society. From the perspective of mind, a healthy lifestyle is interpreted as paying attention to dietary patterns and experiencing no health complaints. From the self perspective, a healthy lifestyle is understood as feeling comfortable in carrying out various activities, being grateful for personal achievements, becoming more productive, and experiencing physical and mental happiness. From the society perspective, the informants demonstrate high awareness of environmental issues that influence healthy lifestyle choices and dietary patterns. Technological advancements further enhance their awareness, enabling them to promote healthy lifestyles through social media platforms.

## ***2. Self-Concept and Influencing Factors***

The findings reveal that lifestyle is strongly influenced by self-concept, which is shaped by both significant others (such as parents, siblings, and peers) and social media exposure. Informants expressed a strong desire to maintain a healthy lifestyle, which they associate with being free from physical and psychological problems.

Several factors influencing healthy lifestyle practices were identified, including:

1. Individual factors (knowledge, motivation, body image)
2. Social factors (peer influence, social environment)
3. Cultural and religious values
4. Economic factors (financial ability, food affordability)
5. Environmental factors (availability of healthy options)

One participant noted:

**“Sometimes I want to eat healthy, but it depends on money and what food is available around me.”**

Another added:

**“My friends influence me a lot, especially when we decide where to eat or whether to exercise.”**

Healthy lifestyle behaviors among Generation Z are strongly influenced by factors such as body image perception and knowledge related to healthy living, which can encourage healthy behaviors. Conversely, financial resources, food taste preferences, and stress may hinder Generation Z from maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Talitha & Karjoso, 2022). Referring to symbolic interaction theory, an ideal healthy lifestyle is formed through habitual behaviors practiced by Generation Z, such as regular physical activity, balanced eating habits, adequate rest, and reducing unproductive activities.

Research conducted by (Nasution et al., 2024) shows that Generation Z tends to display consumptive behavior when choosing snacks due to ease of access and convenience. The influence of advanced social media further encourages consumptive behavior, such as visiting restaurants or cafés up to twice a day after being exposed to social media content. Eating and drinking activities for Generation Z are no longer merely biological needs but have become complex social activities involving menu selection, restaurant aesthetics, service processes, and promotional pricing (Irwanto & Hariatiningsih, 2019).

Food consumption is not only a source of energy but also reflects cultural development and trends. Generation Z brings a new perspective to dining experiences by integrating technology, diversity, and curiosity about food. They are also increasingly concerned about health and sustainability, paying attention to nutritional content, balanced diets, and sustainable food sources (Kumparan, 2023). However, Generation Z is also known for hedonic lifestyles and consumptive behavior influenced by their environment and rapid technological development (Wakhida & Sumardjoko, 2024). The negative impacts of hedonism include a lack of future financial orientation, increased debt, poor financial management, depression, and unnecessary consumption. Consumptive behavior may also lead to anxiety and insecurity due to financial pressure (Kompasiana, 2021).

### ***3. Role of Digital Media in Shaping Healthy Lifestyles***

Digital media, particularly social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, play a significant role in shaping participants' understanding and practices of healthy lifestyles. Informants reported that they frequently obtain health-related information from these platforms, including diet trends, exercise routines, and lifestyle tips.

However, the findings also show mixed experiences:

**“I often see healthy lifestyle content on TikTok, but sometimes it’s confusing because different people say different things.”**

**“Social media motivates me to exercise, but sometimes it also makes me feel pressured to look a certain way.”**

These results indicate that digital media serves as both a source of motivation and a source of confusion for Generation Z.

Social media use has a significant impact on mental health by enhancing connectivity, self-confidence, and a sense of belonging. However, it can also lead to increased stress and pressure from social comparison (Zsila & Eyes, 2023).

The fast-food phenomenon among Generation Z is heavily influenced by social media habits. Fast food is seen as a symbol of consumer culture, encouraging continuous consumption through viral marketing of specific food items (Zakiyah et al., 2024). Excessive fast-food consumption increases energy, fat, sugar, and sodium intake, while providing low fiber, which may lead to obesity and other health risks. Fast food is often chosen

as a substitute for home-cooked meals due to its convenience and practicality, despite its potential health hazards, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and other serious conditions (Permatasari et al., 2024).

Fast-food restaurants also attract Generation Z through discounts, promotions, efficiency, drive-through services, and comfortable environments, creating positive customer experiences (Nadhifah, 2023). Field findings indicate varied responses among Generation Z regarding healthy lifestyles, particularly related to bringing meals from home. Students who bring packed meals perceive them as safer and healthier. However, technological advancement has increased preference for fast food, influenced largely by TikTok and Instagram content, visual appeal, influencer recommendations, pricing, and convenience.

Consuming fast food and adopting a hedonic lifestyle have serious health implications, including diabetes, heart disease, and digestive disorders (Maulana et al., 2023). Awareness of healthy snacking is higher among this group compared to younger age groups, and employment status and skipped meals significantly influence snacking patterns (Haryana et al., 2023).

#### **4. Healthy Lifestyle Practices**

In practice, informants reported several common healthy lifestyle behaviors, including:

- Engaging in regular physical activity
- Consuming balanced and nutritious food
- Getting adequate rest
- Managing stress
- Using health applications to monitor activities

Some participants also emphasized planning and consistency:

**“I try to schedule my exercise and meals so I don’t skip them.”**

However, these practices were not always consistent due to daily constraints.

A healthy lifestyle is essential in addressing hedonic behavior and fast-food consumption. One effective strategy is consuming nutritious foods containing essential nutrients such as protein, carbohydrates, and minerals (Hendrias et al., 2023). Generation Z should also engage in regular physical activity, maintain physical and mental health, practice meditation, and adopt balanced dietary habits. Parents play an important role in encouraging healthy eating habits, including bringing healthy meals, vegetarian options, and fruits.

In today’s modern era, fast food is widely promoted among adolescents through attractive advertising, making media a significant factor influencing fast-food consumption (Nadimin & Fanny, 2023). Generation Z has the potential to drive positive dietary change due to their health awareness and technological literacy. Innovative educational and technological programs can promote healthier eating habits (Azmi, 2024).

Factors influencing unhealthy eating behaviors among Generation Z include price, taste, aroma, and food availability. Stakeholders must continue educating Generation Z by providing healthier food options in school and university cafeterias (Ariestiningsih & Has, 2024).

#### **5. Food Consumption Patterns and Lifestyle Trends**

The findings show that food choices among Generation Z are influenced by social trends, convenience, and digital exposure. Eating is no longer seen solely as a biological need but also as a social and lifestyle activity.

Interview findings also reveal that many young people perceive healthy lifestyles merely as consuming instant foods such as instant noodles or gluten-based products as substitutes for rice. They tend to choose aesthetic, viral dining locations such as cafés, rooftops, coffee shops, and culinary night markets for socializing and taking photos, often overlooking food safety and health risks. Regarding meal preparation, some bring packed meals while others prefer receiving money to buy snacks. Those who bring meals perceive them as

safer and cleaner, while others prioritize preference and convenience without considering nutritional content or health impacts.

Perceptions regarding food choices are presented in the following table.

Selection of Eating Venues	<i>Coffeshop, foodcourt</i>
Time Duration	Twice a week
Sources of Food Information	Tiktok, instagram, word of mouth
Favorite food	Dimsum, sushi, korean food, creamy latte, chocolate, coffee

Table 1. References for Food Venue Selection among Generation Z

Source : Data Collection, 2025

However, a healthy lifestyle is often neglected by the informants. This neglect is reflected in insufficient rest and the emergence of various health problems, such as gastritis, low blood pressure, appendicitis, typhoid fever, acid reflux, hypertension, and other related conditions. Maintaining health is a crucial long-term investment for Generation Z. By adopting a healthy lifestyle including reducing screen time, implementing a balanced diet, maintaining mental health, and engaging in regular physical activity Generation Z can establish a strong foundation for a healthy and productive future (Mulyansyah, 2024).

## 6. *Healthy Lifestyle Campaigns and Awareness*

The findings also show that informants are aware of health promotion campaigns, including digital campaigns promoting balanced nutrition and physical activity. However, mass media is not the primary source of health information for most participants. Instead, they rely more on interactive digital platforms.

The digital campaign “Si Paling Megang (Menyala dengan Gerak dan Gizi Seimbang)” is one of the initiatives conducted by the Directorate of Health Promotion of the Indonesian Ministry of Health. This campaign aims to encourage Generation Z to adopt healthy lifestyle habits through the promotion of fruit and vegetable consumption combined with regular physical activity. This initiative can be seen in the following figure:



Figure 2. Healthy Lifestyle Campaign for Generation Z

Sources : Instagram of Ministry of Health Indonesia

Although Generation Z is often perceived as an “instant” generation that has grown up amid rapid advances in technology and information, this condition actually calls for stronger promotion of healthy lifestyles by integrating technology to support physical activity and mental health. Mass media, which has long been assumed to be a primary source of health information, has in fact not become the main reference for students. Their limited access to health information through mass media is due to the fact that they can only access media such as social media, radio, newspapers, or television when required for school or university assignments. Consequently, the health information available in mass media has not been optimally utilized by students to obtain health-related knowledge (Wahyudin & Karimah, 2021).

Currently, mass media is not only diverse in quantity but also in form, including print, audio, visual, audiovisual, and online media. The process of message delivery through media has also undergone significant changes. Previously, media functioned as a one-way source of information, whereas today it has become more interactive. Audiences are no longer merely passive recipients of information but active participants, as technological developments enable interaction within media platforms. In health communication, media possess persuasive power and influence in delivering messages, which largely depends on the type of media chosen by communicators to transfer health-related information. Media can take the form of sensory media or human-created media, and in health communication, media play an essential role as instruments of health promotion and education (Marini,2023).

For the informants, a healthy lifestyle is perceived as engaging in regular physical exercise, consuming nutritious food, seeking validation in practicing a healthy lifestyle, feeling productive, and being up to date with health-related information, including discussing viral and current health issues. Generation Z shows strong concern for health, nutrition, and lifestyle. They are also sensitive to social determinants of health, reflected in their awareness of access to healthcare, adequate and affordable housing, poverty, and unemployment. Furthermore, they are attentive to food choices, environmental impacts, and food production processes, demonstrating a high level of awareness regarding the importance of nutrition for overall health (Bogueva & Marinova, 2024).

Moreover, the healthy lifestyle adopted by Generation Z reflects a holistic and creative approach to health. A healthy lifestyle is expected not to remain merely a slogan but to be accompanied by concrete steps, actions, and strategies that translate decisions into practices for maintaining both physical and mental well-being.

Nevertheless, building a healthy lifestyle poses significant challenges for Generation Z, particularly in abandoning habits such as consuming junk food and fast food, as well as engaging in hedonistic activities outside the home. One effort to promote a healthier lifestyle involves limiting the consumption of foods and beverages containing excessive sugar, monosodium glutamate (MSG), and similar additives. In addition, there is a strong need for massive socialization and education targeting Generation Z regarding healthy lifestyles, the selection of nutritious food and beverages, and the health risks associated with the excessive consumption of junk food and fast food.

This study reveals that Generation Z interprets a healthy lifestyle as a multidimensional and holistic concept, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional well-being. A healthy lifestyle is not only defined by the absence of illness but also by the ability to remain active, productive, and emotionally balanced while maintaining a sense of happiness and gratitude.

The findings indicate that healthy lifestyle practices are shaped by multiple factors, including individual motivation, self-concept, social environment, economic conditions, and cultural influences. In addition, digital media plays a central role in influencing health-related behaviors, serving both as a source of information and motivation, as well as a source of confusion due to inconsistent or misleading content.

Although Generation Z demonstrates a relatively high level of awareness regarding healthy lifestyles, their actual practices are often inconsistent due to barriers such as time constraints, financial limitations, social pressures, and the convenience of fast food consumption. Social media exposure further contributes to hedonic consumption patterns and lifestyle trends, particularly in food choices and dining behavior.

Overall, the findings highlight that the meaning and practice of a healthy lifestyle among Generation Z are socially constructed through daily experiences, interactions, and digital engagement, reflecting the dynamic relationship between individuals and their social and technological environments.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, this research employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method; therefore, the findings are contextual and in-depth but cannot be generalized to the entire Generation Z population in Indonesia. The participants were limited to Generation Z individuals residing in Bandung City, meaning that the meanings of a healthy lifestyle identified in this study are strongly influenced by urban social, cultural, and environmental contexts.

Second, data collection relied on semi-structured interviews, which depend heavily on the participants' subjective interpretations and personal experiences. Differences in family background, economic conditions, daily habits, and exposure to social media may have contributed to variations in the meanings of a healthy lifestyle that were not fully explored in this study.

Third, this study did not comprehensively examine structural and policy-related factors, such as government regulations, the availability of public facilities supporting healthy lifestyles, or the institutional role of schools and universities in promoting health. In addition, the research did not integrate quantitative data that could strengthen the analysis of behavioral patterns related to healthy lifestyles among Generation Z.

These limitations indicate that the meanings of a healthy lifestyle identified in this study are socially constructed through symbolic interactions between individuals and their social environments. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, meaning is not fixed but is continuously formed and negotiated through social interaction. Therefore, the findings reflect the subjective experiences of Generation Z in Bandung, shaped by social media exposure, consumer culture, and the dynamics of urban life.

The limited geographical scope also affects the diversity of meanings identified. Generation Z individuals living in rural areas or smaller cities may construct different meanings of a healthy lifestyle based on their distinct social, cultural, and environmental conditions. Consequently, the results of this study should be understood as contextual insights rather than universal representations.

Furthermore, the absence of an in-depth analysis of structural and policy factors means that this study primarily emphasizes individual and social meanings rather than systemic influences. In practice, the development and sustainability of healthy lifestyles among Generation Z are also strongly influenced by supportive policies, access to facilities, and conducive social environments.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes valuable insights into understanding the meaning of a healthy lifestyle from the perspective of Generation Z using a phenomenological approach and symbolic interaction theory. The findings provide a foundation for future research to adopt broader methodological approaches, expand the study area, and incorporate policy and quantitative analyses to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of healthy lifestyle practices among Generation Z.

### **1.3. Conclusion**

This study concludes that the meaning of a healthy lifestyle among Generation Z is multifaceted and socially constructed, encompassing the absence of health complaints, physical activeness, emotional well-being, and a sense of happiness. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, these meanings are shaped through the dimensions of mind, self, and society. At the level of mind, a healthy lifestyle is understood as maintaining proper dietary patterns and preventing health problems. At the level of self, it is reflected in feelings of gratitude, productivity, and both physical and psychological well-being. At the societal level, it is associated with increasing awareness of health issues and active engagement with information, particularly through social media.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to communication studies by demonstrating that digital media serves as a symbolic environment in which Generation Z constructs and negotiates the meaning of a healthy lifestyle. The findings extend the application of symbolic interactionism by integrating it with media

literacy and digital media responsibility perspectives, highlighting the role of social media not only as a source of information but also as a space that shapes health-related perceptions and behaviors.

In terms of communication implications, this study emphasizes the importance of effective digital health communication strategies that are tailored to Generation Z. The findings show that social media plays a dominant role in influencing health behaviors, making it essential for communicators, institutions, and policymakers to utilize digital platforms responsibly and strategically.

Furthermore, this study highlights important implications for media literacy education. Given the high reliance of Generation Z on social media platforms, there is a critical need to strengthen digital health literacy, enabling individuals to critically evaluate health information, identify misinformation, and make informed lifestyle decisions. In this context, digital media responsibility and basic principles of journalism ethics become essential to ensure that health-related content is accurate, reliable, and does not cause harm.

Practically, these findings suggest that the government, educational institutions particularly schools and universities and digital content creators should collaborate in promoting healthy lifestyles. This can be achieved through integrated digital campaigns, educational programs, and the dissemination of credible health information across social media platforms, as well as through structured health education at the school and university levels.

However, this study has several limitations, particularly in terms of its qualitative scope and the limited number of participants within a specific urban context. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the geographical scope, incorporate mixed-method approaches, and further examine the role of digital media, misinformation, and policy frameworks in shaping healthy lifestyle behaviors among Generation Z.

In conclusion, promoting a healthy lifestyle among Generation Z requires not only individual awareness but also collective efforts in strengthening media literacy, ensuring digital media responsibility, and developing effective communication strategies in the digital era.

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