



The Brain Rot Phenomenon among Generation Z and Its Implications for Da'wah Communication Practices in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed Generation Z's interpersonal communication patterns, particularly through the intensive consumption of short-form digital content. This condition has contributed to the emergence of the brain rot phenomenon, referring to cognitive decline caused by excessive exposure to repetitive and superficial digital content. This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of brain rot among Generation Z and its implications for da'wah communication practices in the digital era, focusing on interpersonal communication dynamics in the Luvu Raya region. This study employed a qualitative method using a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the experiences, meanings, and communication behaviors of Generation Z. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations involving Generation Z individuals aged 17–28 years who actively use social media platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The findings reveal three major dimensions affected by the brain rot phenomenon: focal power dynamics, empathy level analysis, and response analysis. The study indicates that brain rot contributes to declining communication focus, reduced empathy, superficial interactions, and instant communication patterns, posing challenges to interpersonal da'wah communication, which requires reflective, empathetic, and meaningful dialogue. Therefore, adaptive and contextual da'wah communication strategies are needed to maintain the effectiveness of religious messages among Generation Z in the digital era.

Keywords: Brain rot; da'wah communication; digital era; Z generation.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has brought fundamental changes to patterns of social communication, particularly among Generation Z, who were born and raised within the ecosystem of digital media (Laka et al., 2024). The emergence of short-form video-based social media

platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and various other digital platforms has not only transformed the ways in which young people access information but has also influenced patterns of social interaction, message exchange processes, and the construction of meaning in everyday life (Musfirah et al., 2024). The ease of access to rapid, instant, and borderless information undoubtedly offers significant advantages in terms of communication efficiency. However, at the same time, these developments have introduced new challenges, including declining attention quality, an increasing tendency toward superficial communication, and weakening emotional engagement in interpersonal interactions (Montag & Markett, 2023). In this context, changes in the communication behavior of Generation Z can no longer be understood merely as a consequence of technological advancement, but rather as a broader social and cultural issue that has the potential to affect the quality of human relationships in the digital era (Nasution et al., 2025).

Amid these developments, a phenomenon that has increasingly attracted attention in both media and academic discourse is *brain rot*. This term refers to the decline in attention quality, reflective thinking, and cognitive capacity resulting from excessive exposure to repetitive, superficial, fast-paced digital content with minimal depth of meaning. Understanding the implications of brain rot is crucial, particularly as it affects younger generations who are more vulnerable to the impacts of digital consumption (Kareemuddin, 2025). The popularity of the term *brain rot* has grown significantly following its recognition by Oxford University Press as one of the prominent expressions reflecting global concerns over the impact of digital media consumption on the quality of public thinking, particularly among younger productive generations (Oxford University Press, 2024). This phenomenon not only illustrates shifting media preferences among younger age groups but also highlights a broader transformation in patterns of human interaction, increasingly shaped by a culture of rapid and instant communication.

Within the field of digital communication studies, the high intensity of exposure to instant media carries broad implications for individuals' capacity to sustain attention, develop critical reflection, and comprehend messages in a deeper and more meaningful manner (Komara & Widjaya, 2024). Potter argues that a culture of excessive digital media consumption may diminish individuals' ability to process information reflectively, as users increasingly become accustomed to receiving brief, rapid, and

fragmented messages (Potter, 2021). Therefore, communication processes no longer occur in a profound and deliberative manner but instead shift toward interaction patterns that are more pragmatic, reactive, and minimally elaborative in meaning. This condition becomes increasingly relevant to examine among Generation Z, who live in close and continuous engagement with digital technology as an inseparable aspect of their everyday lives.

In social life, interpersonal communication occupies a crucial position as the foundation for building social relationships, strengthening solidarity, and transmitting values among individuals (Rahayu et al., 2023). Interpersonal communication is not merely understood as a process of message exchange but also functions as a medium for fostering empathy, emotional closeness, and the negotiation of meaning in social interactions. However, increasingly intensive patterns of digital media consumption are believed to have influenced the quality of interpersonal communication among Generation Z (Sanmas et al., 2023). Several studies indicate that excessive social media use correlates with declining attention capacity, weaker critical thinking skills, and an increasing tendency toward brief and reactive forms of communication (Arnus et al., 2023; Manggopa et al., 2022). Research conducted by Evita et al. (2023) further demonstrates that Generation Z accesses digital information and entertainment repeatedly throughout the day, thereby shaping patterns of information consumption characterized by speed but lacking sufficient depth and reflective engagement (Evita et al., 2023). Under such circumstances, interpersonal communication is likely to undergo a transformation from reflective communication toward more superficial patterns of interaction.

According to DeVito, the quality of interpersonal communication is influenced by individuals' ability to foster openness, engage in active listening, sustain attention, develop empathy, and provide meaningful responses throughout the process of message exchange (DeVito, 2008). Meanwhile, Knapp argue that interpersonal relationships develop through communication characterized by intensity, reflection, and strong emotional connectedness (Knapp et al., 2022). When individuals' attentional capacity declines as a result of excessive exposure to instant digital media, the quality of interpersonal communication may be adversely affected, as reflected in diminished listening abilities, reduced empathy, the emergence of impulsive responses, and a growing tendency to avoid conversations requiring deeper reflection. Therefore, the phenomenon of *brain rot* should not merely be

understood as a cognitive issue but also as an interpersonal communication concern that influences the quality of social relationships among Generation Z (Angelique et al., 2025).

These changes in the interpersonal communication patterns of Generation Z have also introduced new challenges for the practice of *da'wah* communication in the digital era. Fundamentally, *da'wah* is not merely understood as a formal activity of conveying religious messages, but rather as a process of value-based communication aimed at fostering awareness, behavioral change, and social transformation through persuasive, empathetic, and meaningful interactions (Wijaya & Al Afnan, 2025). Within the context of a digital society, the effectiveness of *da'wah* communication is determined not only by the substance of the message being conveyed but also by the communicator's ability to understand audience characteristics, patterns of attention, and the evolving culture of communication within society (Azzahro & Fasha, 2025).

From the perspective of Islamic communication, the quality of *da'wah* communication is strongly influenced by the ability to convey messages effectively, gently, truthfully, and meaningfully. The principle of *qaulan baligha* emphasizes the importance of communication that is effective and capable of reaching the audience's consciousness, while *qaulan layyina* underscores the significance of a gentle and empathetic communicative approach (Faizin, 2022). Meanwhile, *qaulan sadida* and *qaulan ma'rufa* stress the importance of delivering messages that are truthful, appropriate, and socially relevant to the needs of society (Handayani & Jaya, 2024). Within the context of Generation Z, whose communication patterns have been shaped by digital culture, these principles of Islamic communication face new challenges, particularly when audiences exhibit shorter attention spans, reduced emotional engagement, and a tendency toward faster yet less reflective responses.

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between digital media, communication behavior, and Generation Z. Research conducted by Arnus demonstrates that digital media literacy influences Generation Z's ability to filter information within digital spaces (Arnus et al., 2023). Likewise, Husain explain that the use of TikTok contributes to the transformation of communication behavior, shaping new forms of virtual interaction within society (Husain et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Qin found that high levels of social media usage may trigger *social media fatigue*, which subsequently affects individuals' concentration and emotional

regulation abilities (Qin et al., 2024). Nevertheless, these studies predominantly frame digital communication issues in terms of psychological dimensions, social media use, or general communication behavior, while failing to specifically address the phenomenon of *brain rot* in relation to its implications for interpersonal *da'wah* communication practices among Generation Z.

The limitations of previous studies indicate an important academic space that warrants further exploration. To date, the phenomenon of *brain rot* has largely been understood as an issue of digital psychology or as a technological consequence affecting individuals' attentional capacity, while its implications for *da'wah* communication practices remain relatively underexplored (Donaldo, 2025). In fact, within digital societies, the success of *da'wah* cannot be separated from individuals' ability to establish reflective and empathetic interpersonal communication and effectively transmit socio-religious values (Saleh et al., 2022). Therefore, research on *brain rot* should be expanded beyond its cognitive dimensions to include interpersonal communication aspects and the challenges it poses to *da'wah* communication practices in the digital era (Aziz, 2025).

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to connect the phenomenon of *brain rot* with interpersonal *da'wah* communication practices among Generation Z through an analysis of changes in communication focus, empathy levels, and interpersonal response patterns in the Luwu Raya region. This study not only captures shifts in communication behavior resulting from digital media consumption but also examines the socio-religious implications of these transformations for the quality of *da'wah* communication amid the ongoing transformation of digital culture. Academically, this study is expected to enrich contemporary *da'wah* scholarship, particularly in understanding the challenges of religious communication among digital generations experiencing changing patterns of social interaction.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to analyze the phenomenon of *brain rot* among Generation Z and its implications for *da'wah* communication practices in the digital era, with a particular focus on the dynamics of interpersonal communication among Generation Z communities in the Luwu Raya region.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive

phenomenological design to understand the lived experiences, meanings, and transformations in the interpersonal communication patterns of Generation Z individuals experiencing the phenomenon of *brain rot* in the digital era (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological approach was selected because the study sought to explore individuals' subjective experiences regarding changes in communication behavior resulting from the intensity of consuming short-form digital media content.

The study was conducted in the Luwu Raya region, South Sulawesi, encompassing the City of Palopo, Luwu Regency, East Luwu Regency, and North Luwu Regency, during the period from January to April 2025. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the following criteria: (1) belonging to the Generation Z category aged between 17 and 28 years; (2) actively using social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp; (3) demonstrating a high intensity of accessing short-form video-based digital content for at least 4–6 hours per day; and (4) possessing interpersonal communication experiences relevant to the *brain rot* phenomenon. Based on these criteria, the study involved 12 male and female informants aged between 18 and 27 years who actively engaged with digital media in their daily lives (Hamzah, 2020).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and field documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore informants' experiences, perceptions, and changes in interpersonal communication patterns in the digital era. Each informant participated in two to three interview sessions, with an average duration of 45–90 minutes per session. Observations were undertaken to examine informants' communication behavior, particularly concerning attention patterns, listening habits, communicative responses, smartphone use during interactions, and emotional engagement in interpersonal conversations.

To ensure the rigor of the phenomenological inquiry, the researcher applied the processes of *epoche* and *bracketing* to minimize personal assumptions in understanding the subjective experiences of informants. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, namely when additional interviews no longer generated significant new themes.

Data analysis employed the thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which consisted of six stages: familiarization, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and thematic interpretation. The analytical process generated three

principal dimensions: *focal power dynamics*, *empathy level analysis*, and *response analysis* as analytical constructs for explaining changes in the interpersonal communication patterns of Generation Z resulting from the *brain rot* phenomenon and its implications for *da'wah* communication practices in the digital era.

The trustworthiness of the data was maintained through source and methodological triangulation by comparing findings obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, *member checking* was conducted with six primary informants to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected their intended experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of Generation Z's Interpersonal Communication Patterns

The findings of this study reveal that the phenomenon of *brain rot* among Generation Z in the Luwu Raya region has contributed to fundamental changes in interpersonal communication patterns in the digital era. These transformations are reflected in the weakening of individuals' ability to maintain communicative focus, declining engagement in conversations, and increasing levels of distraction during interpersonal interactions. In this study, such transformations are understood through the analytical construct of *focal power dynamics*, referring to changes in individuals' capacity to sustain attention, focus, and interpersonal engagement as a consequence of intensive exposure to short-form, fast-paced, and repetitive digital media content (Hidayat & Rahmijati, 2024). This transformation indicates that Generation Z's interpersonal communication has shifted from reflective forms of communication toward interactions that are increasingly instant, brief, and minimally elaborative in meaning.

This phenomenon cannot be separated from the transformation of digital media consumption culture, which has become increasingly dominant in the lives of Generation Z. The emergence of short-form video-based platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts has shaped patterns of information consumption characterized by speed, visual orientation, and immediacy (Baumgartner et al., 2025). Repeated exposure to digital content has encouraged the formation of *short attention spans*, whereby individuals tend to feel more comfortable receiving information in concise formats rather than engaging in communicative processes that require prolonged concentration and deeper reflection

(Montag & Markett, 2023). In this context, the phenomenon of *brain rot* not only reflects changing media consumption patterns but also influences how individuals establish interpersonal communication in everyday life.

One of the most dominant changes identified in this study is Generation Z's tendency to avoid conversational topics perceived as cognitively demanding or requiring high levels of concentration. Most informants admitted that they felt more comfortable engaging in casual, relaxed conversations that directly addressed the main point rather than prolonged discussions demanding deeper cognitive engagement. One informant explained:

“If the discussion is too serious or too long, I usually get bored quickly, so I prefer casual conversations or discussions that go straight to the point.” (AB, interview, 2025)

These findings indicate a tendency toward *avoiding heavy topics*, reflecting a shift in communication preferences from reflective conversations to more pragmatic forms of interaction. Another informant also reported that lengthy conversations were often perceived as exhausting because they demanded greater concentration compared to accessing social media, which was considered lighter and more immediate:

“Sometimes when conversations become too serious, it feels exhausting, so I prefer light conversations or simply joking around.” (GS, interview, 2025)

From an interpersonal communication perspective, the tendency to avoid in-depth conversations indicates a transformation in the quality of social interaction. DeVito argues that effective interpersonal communication requires mindfulness, openness, and active engagement in understanding the interlocutor's message. When individuals begin to avoid discussions requiring cognitive elaboration, interpersonal communication risks experiencing a reduction in meaning, as conversations function merely as exchanges of brief information rather than spaces for developing mutual understanding (DeVito, 2008). This cognitive saturation directly leads to a progressive loss of conversational depth during structured social interactions (Khairani et al., 2025). Potter further explains that a fast-paced and repetitive digital media culture tends to reduce individuals' capacity to sustain deep reflection on particular issues, as attention becomes increasingly fragmented (Potter, 2021).

In addition to the tendency to avoid cognitively demanding topics, this study also found a decline in active listening abilities (*lack of listening*)

among Generation Z. Several informants admitted that they frequently lost focus when others spoke for extended periods, particularly when the conversation was perceived as uninteresting or unrelated to their personal interests (Rahmani et al., 2024). This phenomenon highlights the challenges posed by modern communication habits, where distractions from devices significantly impair interpersonal skills and engagement (Chen, 2024). This decline in active listening is further exacerbated by the prevalence of phubbing, which diverts attention away from meaningful interactions and diminishes empathy in conversations. Promoting awareness of phubbing's impact may encourage Generation Z to cultivate better listening habits and foster more meaningful connections in their social interactions (Roberts & David, 2016). Addressing these issues requires a collective effort to educate young individuals on the importance of presence and attentiveness in conversations, ultimately enhancing their relational dynamics (Rois & Purwani, 2021). This condition was exacerbated by the continuous presence of smartphones, which constantly introduced notifications and digital distractions.

“Sometimes when people talk for too long, I lose focus, especially when I have my phone with me I usually check notifications first.”
(NR, interview, 2025)

This phenomenon demonstrates a transformation in attentional patterns during interpersonal communication. In certain situations, informants' attention was no longer fully directed toward their conversation partners but was divided among various digital stimuli appearing simultaneously. Consequently, active listening abilities became increasingly limited. Yet, according to DeVito, *active listening* constitutes an essential component of healthy interpersonal communication because it enables individuals to understand messages more deeply, develop empathy, and foster emotional closeness (DeVito, 2008).

Knapp explain that interpersonal relationships develop through communicative processes characterized by intensity, reflection, and emotional connectedness. When individuals' attention is easily distracted by digital media, the quality of interpersonal communication becomes not only more superficial but also potentially diminishes the quality of social relationships themselves (Knapp et al., 2022). This condition illustrates how a fast-paced digital communication culture has cultivated shorter attentional habits, making it increasingly difficult to sustain focus during face-to-face interactions.

The transformation of interpersonal communication patterns is also reflected in the emergence of a preference for *short conversations*. Most informants acknowledged that they preferred communication that directly addressed the core issue rather than prolonged conversations, which were often perceived as time-consuming and mentally exhausting. One informant stated:

“Nowadays, when having conversations, I prefer getting straight to the point. If it goes on for too long, I usually get tired of listening.” (RJ, interview, 2025)

This tendency reflects a transformation in interpersonal communication patterns from reflective forms of communication toward interactions that are increasingly rapid and practical. Social interaction no longer functions optimally as a space for exchanging ideas and emotional experiences but increasingly resembles a process of instant information exchange. Manggopa explain that the high intensity of digital media use contributes to the formation of communication patterns that are more reactive and concise, particularly among younger generations accustomed to rapid information flows (Manggopa et al., 2022).

In addition, this study found that *cellphone distractions* constituted one of the dominant factors influencing the quality of interpersonal communication among Generation Z (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). Nearly all informants acknowledged that smartphone use continued even during face-to-face conversations. In some situations, attention to social media became more dominant than attention directed toward conversation partners.

“Sometimes when I’m talking with someone, I still check my phone, especially if notifications appear.” (SY, interview, 2025)

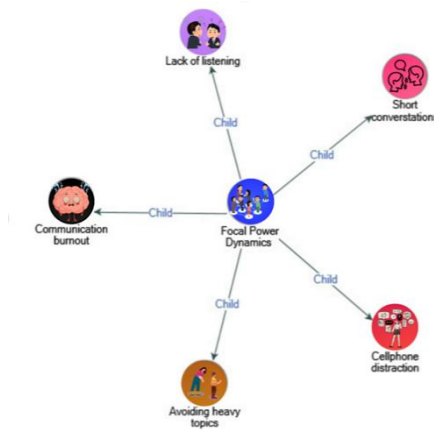
This phenomenon indicates the existence of attentional competition between face-to-face communication and digital media. Under such conditions, emotional involvement in conversations becomes increasingly limited as individuals’ focus is fragmented by the continuous emergence of digital stimuli. This condition reflects a broader transformation in the culture of interpersonal communication, in which sustained attention and emotional presence are gradually displaced by habits of multitasking and constant digital connectivity. As individuals become increasingly accustomed to rapidly shifting between various digital stimuli, they experience greater difficulty maintaining concentration and emotional engagement in face-to-face interactions. Consequently, interpersonal

communication tends to become more superficial and transactional, reducing opportunities for deep listening, empathy, and meaningful social bonding. In the long term, this transformation may weaken the quality of interpersonal relationships because communication is no longer primarily oriented toward mutual understanding and emotional connectedness but rather toward the rapid exchange of information and immediate stimulation (Parmar et al., 2025). Qin explain that high levels of social media use may trigger *social media fatigue*, which subsequently affects individuals' concentration and attentional regulation capacities (Qin et al., 2024). In other words, excessive digital media use not only affects cognitive capacity but also undermines the quality of interpersonal relationships.

From the perspective of da'wah communication, the transformation of interpersonal communication patterns presents new challenges to the effectiveness of religious message delivery among Generation Z. Da'wah practices that rely on lengthy, one-way, and minimally interactive communication may encounter significant obstacles when addressing audiences with increasingly shorter attentional capacities. In the digital era, da'wah communication requires more adaptive, contextual, and engaging communication strategies capable of sustaining the involvement of younger audiences. This finding suggests that the challenge of contemporary da'wah is no longer limited to the substance of religious messages but also concerns the transformation of how audiences receive, process, and maintain attention toward those messages (Suriati et al., 2026).

The culture of rapid and fragmented digital communication has reshaped young people's expectations of communication, making them more responsive to concise, interactive, and experience-based forms of engagement. Consequently, conventional preaching models that emphasize lengthy monologues and passive audiences risk becoming less effective in fostering reflection and internalizing religious values. Therefore, da'wah communication needs to move toward dialogical and participatory approaches that integrate storytelling, visual communication, and interactive digital media in order to maintain both audience engagement and the depth of religious meaning (Efendi et al., 2023).

Figure 1 illustrates the dynamics of changes in Generation Z's communication focus (*focal power dynamics*), characterized by tendencies to avoid cognitively demanding topics, communication fatigue, limited active listening abilities, shortened conversations, and cellphone distractions in interpersonal communication practices.



Source: Author's Observation, 2026

Figure 1.

Generation Z's Interpersonal Communication Patterns

Figure 1 demonstrates that changes in Generation Z's interpersonal communication patterns resulting from the phenomenon of *brain rot* have produced five dominant tendencies: *lack of listening*, *short conversations*, *cellphone distraction*, *avoiding heavy topics*, and *communication burnout*. These five dimensions indicate that the intensity of consuming short-form digital media content has influenced individuals' capacity to sustain focus in interpersonal communication. On the one hand, these changes reflect Generation Z's adaptive capacity toward the rapid rhythm of digital communication; on the other hand, they imply a decline in attentional quality, emotional engagement, and the depth of interpersonal interactions.

From the perspective of *da'wah* communication, the transformation of interpersonal communication patterns presents new challenges to the effectiveness of religious message delivery among Generation Z. *Da'wah* practices that tend to rely on lengthy, one-way, and minimally interactive forms of communication may encounter obstacles when addressing audiences with increasingly limited attentional capacities. This condition suggests that the challenges of contemporary *da'wah* are no longer solely related to the substance of religious messages but also concern transformations in how audiences receive, process, and sustain attention toward communicated messages (Aini, 2023). In other words, the phenomenon of *brain rot* has shifted Generation Z's communication

reception patterns from reflective forms of engagement toward communication that is increasingly rapid, visual, and based on instant stimulation.

In this context, the principle of *qaulan baligha* becomes particularly relevant as an approach to *da'wah* communication that is effective, communicative, and capable of reaching the audience's consciousness (Lutfiyah & Khuluq, 2024). This principle emphasizes not only the accuracy of the message but also the appropriateness of communication methods in relation to audience characteristics (Elhany & Pujianto, 2022). The findings of this study indicate that declining attentional focus in interpersonal communication has made it increasingly difficult for Generation Z to sustain engagement with lengthy and formalistic forms of *da'wah* communication. This finding suggests that conventional *da'wah* models, predominantly characterized by one-way preaching or sermons, may face limitations in effectiveness when engaging digital audiences with increasingly shorter attention spans.

Analytically, this condition calls for a transformation in *da'wah* communication approaches toward models that are more dialogical, contextual, and adaptive to digital communication culture. *Da'wah* messages need to be packaged in ways that are more concise, interactive, and relevant to the everyday experiences of Generation Z without compromising the depth of religious substance. The use of visual illustrations, storytelling, experience-based communication, and digital media utilization may constitute important strategies for sustaining young audiences' engagement in the process of *da'wah* communication. However, this transformation should not be interpreted merely as a technical adjustment in communication methods. Rather, it reflects a broader shift in the communicative ecology of religion, in which the effectiveness of *da'wah* increasingly depends on its ability to compete within an environment characterized by information abundance, fragmented attention, and rapid stimulation. Under these circumstances, religious communication is challenged not only to transmit normative teachings but also to create meaningful experiences capable of fostering reflection, emotional engagement, and value internalization.

Therefore, the phenomenon of brain rot should not merely be understood as a matter of changing interpersonal communication behavior but also as a serious challenge to the effectiveness of Islamic *da'wah* in fostering awareness, reflection, and the internalization of religious values

within contemporary digital society. More fundamentally, these findings suggest that brain rot has transformed the ways in which religious messages are received, interpreted, and internalized by younger generations, requiring da'wah institutions to rethink both their communication strategies and their approaches to maintaining religious relevance in the digital age.

Empathy Crisis in Generation Z's Interpersonal Communication

The findings of this study indicate that the phenomenon of *brain rot* among Generation Z in the Luwu Raya region has not only affected changes in interpersonal communication focus but has also influenced the quality of empathy in everyday social relationships. In this study, this condition is understood through the analytical construct of *empathy level analysis*, referring to changes in individuals' ability to understand others' perspectives, develop emotional engagement, and sustain interpersonal sensitivity throughout communication processes. The findings demonstrate that the high intensity of consuming short-form digital media content has fostered communication patterns that are increasingly rapid, reactive, and minimally reflective in emotional terms (Decety & Cowell, 2014). As a consequence, Generation Z tends to experience difficulties in deeply understanding others' emotional experiences and demonstrates limitations in establishing emotional connectedness during interpersonal interactions.

Within the context of interpersonal communication, empathy constitutes one of the fundamental elements determining the quality of social relationships. Empathy is not merely understood as the ability to comprehend another person's emotional condition but also involves the willingness to view situations from another person's perspective and establish emotional connectedness throughout communication processes (Aini, 2023). DeVito argues that effective interpersonal communication requires openness, active listening, and empathy as essential foundations for building healthy relationships (DeVito, 2008). When empathy declines, interpersonal communication risks becoming increasingly transactional, superficial, and emotionally disengaged. Under such circumstances, communication no longer functions as a medium for exchanging experiences and constructing shared meaning but instead serves primarily as a pragmatic and rapid mechanism for information exchange.

One of the forms of empathy crisis identified in this study is the declining ability to understand others' perspectives (*lack of cognitive*

perspective). Most informants acknowledged difficulties in becoming deeply involved in other people's problems due to their habituation to the rapid communication patterns fostered by digital media. The repetitive and rapid flow of information has shortened individuals' attentional capacities, resulting in more limited processes of understanding others' experiences.

One informant explained:

"Sometimes when friends tell long stories, I get confused about how to respond, so I usually just give minimal responses." (RH, interview, 2025)

Another informant similarly explained that habitual social media use had accustomed individuals to rapidly shifting from one topic to another, thereby limiting opportunities for deeper engagement with others' concerns:

"Nowadays, when people talk, I still listen, but I don't think too deeply about it because I'm already used to quickly moving from one topic to another." (NA, interview, 2025)

These findings reveal a transformation in interpersonal communication patterns from reflection-based communication toward more pragmatic and response-oriented interaction. On the one hand, this shift reflects Generation Z's adaptive capacity within a fast-paced digital environment. On the other hand, however, it also indicates a decline in *perspective taking*, namely the ability to understand situations from another person's point of view, which constitutes an essential foundation for the development of interpersonal empathy.

From an interpersonal communication perspective, the reduced capacity to understand others' viewpoints may contribute to increasingly superficial social relationships, as individuals no longer possess sufficient reflective capacity to deeply comprehend the emotional experiences of others. Knapp, Vangelisti, and Caughlin (2022) explain that interpersonal relationships evolve through communicative processes characterized by intensity, reflection, and meaningful emotional exchange (Knapp et al., 2022). When individuals experience a diminished ability to understand others' perspectives, the quality of interpersonal relationships becomes vulnerable to fragmentation. Social relationships are no longer grounded in strong emotional understanding but instead tend to become increasingly superficial and instrumental (Haslam, 2022).

Furthermore, this phenomenon may also be understood as a consequence of a digital communication culture that prioritizes speed over

interactional depth. Continuous exposure to short-form social media content encourages individuals to process information rapidly without sufficient reflective engagement. Potter (2021) explains that digital media culture may diminish individuals' capacity for deep meaning-making because attention is continuously directed toward rapidly shifting streams of information. As a result, interpersonal communication loses the reflective space that previously enabled individuals to cultivate empathy and social understanding more comprehensively.

In addition to the declining ability to understand others' perspectives, this study also identified a decrease in emotional presence during interpersonal communication (*lack of emotional presence*). Most informants admitted that while interacting with others, their attention was frequently divided by smartphones, social media, or other digital activities, thereby limiting emotional involvement in conversations.

One informant explained:

"Sometimes during conversations I still listen, but I also check my phone, so I don't really connect with the other person's feelings." (DL, interview, 2025)

Another informant similarly reported that contemporary social interactions often involve physical presence without full emotional engagement:

"Sometimes we gather with friends, but everyone is busy with their own phones, so the conversations are very minimal." (SY, interview, 2025)

These findings reveal a fundamental transformation in the quality of Generation Z's interpersonal connectedness. Physical presence in communication no longer automatically generates emotional closeness, as individuals' attention has become fragmented by multiple digital stimuli. From the perspective of interpersonal communication, this condition reflects a decline in *emotional engagement*, which constitutes a crucial foundation for healthy and meaningful interpersonal relationships (Campbell, 2013).

This phenomenon is further reinforced by the findings of Qin, who explain that high levels of social media use may affect emotional regulation and reduce individuals' capacity to establish deep emotional connectedness. Continuous exposure to rapidly changing digital content conditions individuals to receive emotional stimulation only within short durations, thereby limiting their ability to sustain emotional attention during real-life

interactions. In other words, Generation Z appears increasingly inclined to provide immediate responses rather than develop more reflective and emotionally engaged forms of interaction (Sampurna et al., 2023).

In a broader social context, this empathy crisis may produce serious implications for the quality of social relationships within society. The declining ability to understand others' perspectives and the weakening of emotional engagement may undermine social solidarity, interpersonal sensitivity, and individuals' capacity to resolve conflicts through constructive dialogue. If such conditions persist, society may increasingly experience deteriorating social relationships characterized by individualism and weakened emotional closeness (Husain, 2021).

From the perspective of *da'wah* communication, this condition presents serious challenges to the effectiveness of transmitting religious values among Generation Z. Fundamentally, *da'wah* is not merely intended to convey religious information but also to cultivate awareness, empathy, and behavioral transformation through humane interpersonal relationships. When audiences experience declining empathic capacity, the internalization of religious messages may encounter obstacles, since *da'wah* messages must not only be cognitively understood but also emotionally experienced.

In this context, the principle of *qaulan layyina* becomes particularly relevant as a *da'wah* communication approach emphasizing gentleness, emotional sensitivity, and empathy in the delivery of messages. This principle demonstrates that *da'wah* communication should not focus solely on transmitting normative truths but must also consider audiences' psychological, emotional, and social conditions. The findings of this study suggest that Generation Z, whose empathic patterns have been transformed by the phenomenon of *brain rot*, requires *da'wah* communication models that are more dialogical, humane, and grounded in everyday experiences to foster emotional resonance during message reception (Bakhrudin, 2025).

Analytically, this condition necessitates a transformation in *da'wah* communication strategies in the digital era. *Da'wah* can no longer rely exclusively on formalistic, one-way communication models but must increasingly adopt approaches that are closer to young audiences' lived experiences. The use of storytelling, experience-based communication, interactive dialogue, and emotionally oriented approaches may become essential strategies for rebuilding interpersonal closeness increasingly

fragmented by the rapid culture of digital communication. Therefore, the phenomenon of *brain rot* should not merely be understood as an issue of changing interpersonal empathy among Generation Z but also as a new challenge to the effectiveness of *da'wah* communication in fostering more meaningful socio-religious relationships in contemporary digital society.

Transformation of Generation Z's Communication Response Culture

The findings of this study indicate that the phenomenon of *brain rot* among Generation Z in the Luwu Raya region has not only affected interpersonal communication focus and empathy quality but has also transformed the culture of communication responses in everyday life. In this study, these transformations are understood through the analytical construct of *response analysis*, referring to changes in individuals' patterns of responding to messages, sustaining interaction quality, and maintaining depth in interpersonal communication amid the high intensity of digital media consumption. The findings demonstrate that Generation Z's communication culture has become increasingly shaped by the rapid, instant, and stimulation-based rhythm of digital media. Consequently, communication responses tend to occur more rapidly, briefly, and sometimes with delays, often at the expense of the depth of conveyed meaning (Aldy & Kholil, 2025).

From the perspective of interpersonal communication, responses constitute an essential element in determining the quality of message exchange and social relationships. Responses do not merely indicate that a message has been received but also serve as indicators of emotional involvement, attentiveness, and individuals' understanding of their communication partners. DeVito argues that effective interpersonal communication requires responses that are reflective, open, and capable of demonstrating understanding of received messages. However, the findings of this study suggest that transformations in digital media culture have fostered communication response patterns that are increasingly rapid but less reflective (DeVito, 2008).

One of the most significant transformations identified in this study is the tendency to provide *quick responses*. Most informants acknowledged that they had become accustomed to responding spontaneously and immediately, particularly in digital communication contexts. The continuous exposure to brief messages and notifications has created an

expectation that communication should occur rapidly and without prolonged periods of reflection.

One informant explained:

“When I receive a chat, I usually reply immediately because if I take too long, I worry people will think I’m ignoring them.” (NA, interview, 2025)

Another informant similarly reported that rapid responsiveness had become part of everyday communication habits, even during face-to-face interactions:

“Nowadays, I’m used to responding quickly. Sometimes, before people finish speaking, I already answer.” (AF, interview, 2025)

These findings indicate a transformation in interpersonal communication patterns that increasingly prioritize speed over depth of message comprehension. On the one hand, a culture of rapid responses reflects Generation Z’s adaptive capacity within the dynamic rhythm of digital communication. On the other hand, however, this condition may also reduce the quality of reflection in interpersonal communication, as individuals tend to respond before fully understanding the context of the message.

From an interpersonal communication perspective, excessively rapid responses may increase the likelihood of misunderstandings because individuals become more oriented toward spontaneous reactions than reflective comprehension. Knapp, Vangelisti, and Caughlin explain that healthy interpersonal communication requires an exchange process that enables individuals to listen, understand, and process information before responding (Knapp et al., 2022). When communication becomes excessively dominated by an instant communication culture, the quality of interpersonal meaning-making may be substantially reduced.

In addition to rapid responses, this study also identified the emergence of a *short response culture*. Most informants acknowledged that they had become accustomed to providing brief answers that directly addressed the main point of communication rather than lengthy responses requiring deeper elaboration. Communication frequently occurred in the form of short responses such as “yes,” “okay,” “ready,” or through symbols and emoticons perceived as sufficient to convey particular meanings.

One informant explained:

“Nowadays, conversations are usually short. As long as the meaning is understood, that’s enough.” (RJ, interview, 2025)

Another informant similarly explained that lengthy communication was often perceived as boring and exhausting:

“If messages are too long, I get lazy reading them, so I prefer things that go straight to the point.” (GS, interview, 2025)

These findings reveal a transformation in interpersonal communication culture toward forms of communication that are increasingly practical and efficient. In certain contexts, short responses may indeed enhance communication efficiency. However, when such habits extend into interpersonal interactions requiring emotional engagement, the quality of social relationships may decline. Excessively brief communication may reduce opportunities for clarification, reflection, and deeper meaning-making, all of which constitute essential foundations of interpersonal relationships (Rosa et al., 2015).

Potter explains that the rapid and fragmented nature of digital media culture encourages individuals to receive and process information in concise formats. As a result, attentiveness to message details becomes increasingly limited (Potter, 2021). Over time, this condition may lead interpersonal communication to become increasingly pragmatic and deprived of depth, as individuals become habituated to responding in minimalist ways.

On the other hand, this study also identified a tendency toward *slow responses* in particular contexts, especially in communication perceived as requiring greater emotional involvement or prolonged attention. Several informants admitted delaying replies or avoiding conversations considered emotionally demanding.

One informant stated:

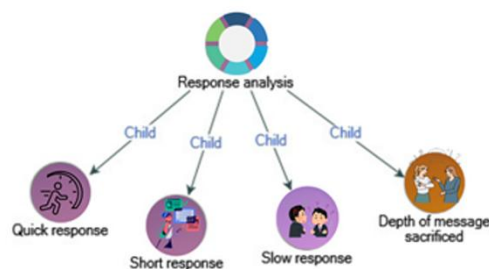
“If the message is long or about serious issues, sometimes I delay replying.” (DL, interview, 2025)

This condition reflects a paradox in Generation Z’s communication culture. On the one hand, they are accustomed to rapid response norms; on the other hand, they tend to avoid communication requiring deeper emotional involvement. This phenomenon suggests that response speed does not necessarily correspond to the quality of interpersonal engagement. In certain situations, delayed responses may instead reflect individuals’ limitations in coping with emotionally complex conversations. Analytically, this paradox demonstrates that digital communication culture has reshaped not only the tempo of interaction but also individuals’ emotional capacities to engage in meaningful conversations. The expectation of immediacy in

digital environments encourages individuals to prioritize efficiency and responsiveness, while simultaneously reducing their tolerance for emotionally demanding interactions that require reflection, patience, and empathic involvement. Consequently, interpersonal communication becomes increasingly selective and instrumental, with individuals preferring interactions that are cognitively and emotionally less demanding. Over time, this tendency may weaken emotional intimacy and diminish opportunities for the development of deeper social bonds, as communication is increasingly oriented toward convenience and instant gratification rather than mutual understanding and emotional connectedness (Singh, 2022).

Qin explain that high levels of social media use may trigger *social media fatigue*, namely a condition of mental exhaustion caused by continuous exposure to digital communication. Such fatigue encourages individuals to avoid communication perceived as emotionally demanding. Therefore, delayed responses among Generation Z should not always be interpreted as a lack of concern but may also represent a form of adaptation to digital communication fatigue (Qin et al., 2024).

The findings of this study further indicate that changes in communication response culture have contributed to a reduction in the *depth of message meaning sacrificed*. Interpersonal communication is no longer predominantly utilized as a space for exchanging emotional experiences and engaging in deep reflection but increasingly functions as a medium for rapid information exchange. Consequently, the meaning of communicated messages becomes more superficial, as individuals tend to prioritize communication efficiency over processes of deeper interpersonal understanding.



Source: Author's Observation, 2026

Figure 2.

Thematic Model of the Transformation of Generation Z's Communication Response Culture in the Brain Rot Phenomenon Brain Rot

Figure 2 demonstrates that the transformation of Generation Z's communication response culture within the *brain rot* phenomenon is shaped by four dominant patterns: *quick response*, *short response*, *slow response*, and *depth of message sacrificed*. These four dimensions indicate that Generation Z's communication culture has become increasingly influenced by the logic of digital media characterized by speed, immediacy, and minimal elaboration. On the one hand, these transformations reflect Generation Z's adaptive capacity toward the dynamic rhythm of digital communication. On the other hand, however, they imply a decline in reflective capacity, emotional engagement, and the depth of meaning exchange within interpersonal communication.

From the perspective of interpersonal communication, this condition reflects a transformation of social relationships from reflective interactions toward more pragmatic forms of engagement. DeVito emphasizes that the quality of interpersonal relationships is strongly influenced by individuals' ability to sustain meaningful dialogue. When message depth begins to be sacrificed for the sake of communication efficiency, social relationships risk losing the emotional closeness that has long served as a fundamental basis of interpersonal connection.

From the perspective of *da'wah* communication, the transformation of communication response culture presents serious challenges to the effectiveness of religious message delivery among Generation Z. *Da'wah* practices that are excessively lengthy, formalistic, and minimally interactive may encounter obstacles because digital audiences have become increasingly accustomed to rapid and concise communication patterns. Nevertheless, adapting to digital communication culture does not imply that *da'wah* should sacrifice the depth of its religious messages (Jalaluddin et al., 2024).

In this context, the principle of *qaulan sadida* becomes particularly important because it emphasizes the delivery of truthful, clear, and precise messages, while *qaulan ma'rifa* highlights the importance of communication that is appropriate, relevant, and easily accepted by audiences. The findings of this study indicate that Generation Z requires *da'wah* communication that is not only concise and easily comprehensible but also capable of

preserving the substantive meaning of religious messages. Therefore, *da'wah* communication practices need to evolve toward more adaptive models through the use of simple language, visual media, storytelling, and dialogical communication approaches capable of sustaining young audiences' engagement.

Analytically, the phenomenon of brain rot demonstrates that the challenges of *da'wah* communication in the digital era are no longer solely related to the delivery of message substance but also concern transformations in Generation Z's communication reception patterns. As audiences become increasingly accustomed to rapid, concise, and minimally elaborative responses, *da'wah* communicators are required to package messages effectively without sacrificing the depth of Islamic values. This condition indicates a broader shift in the way religious messages are processed and internalized by younger generations. The culture of instant communication has fostered preferences for brief, emotionally stimulating, and easily digestible content, thereby reducing opportunities for prolonged reflection and deep engagement with religious teachings. Consequently, the effectiveness of *da'wah* can no longer be measured merely by the extent of message dissemination but must also consider the quality of audience engagement and the degree to which religious values are meaningfully understood and internalized.

Therefore, the phenomenon of brain rot not only transforms Generation Z's interpersonal communication response culture but also necessitates a transformation in *da'wah* communication strategies to ensure their continued relevance and meaningfulness within contemporary digital communication culture (Choirin et al., 2024). More fundamentally, these findings suggest that the digital era has reshaped the communicative ecology of religion, requiring *da'wah* institutions to reconsider how religious authority, meaning, and value transmission are constructed in an environment characterized by fragmented attention and continuous digital stimulation.

Overall, these findings indicate that the phenomenon of brain rot has fostered a communication response culture among Generation Z that is increasingly rapid yet less reflective. This transformation presents new challenges for *da'wah* communication in the digital era, particularly in maintaining a balance between communication speed, message depth, and the quality of religious value internalization among younger audiences. More importantly, the findings suggest that the digital transformation of

communication has altered not only how religious messages are delivered but also how they are received, interpreted, and integrated into everyday life. Consequently, the effectiveness of contemporary da'wah increasingly depends on its ability to create meaningful, emotionally engaging, and reflective communication experiences that can compete with the culture of instant digital stimulation. In this regard, the phenomenon of *brain rot* should be understood not merely as a communication issue but also as a socio-religious challenge that requires the reconstruction of da'wah strategies in order to preserve the relevance and transformative function of Islamic teachings in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the phenomenon of *brain rot* among Generation Z in the Luwu Raya region has affected the quality of interpersonal communication while simultaneously presenting challenges to *da'wah* communication practices in the digital era. The high intensity of consuming rapid and repetitive digital content has contributed to transformations in communication patterns characterized by tendencies to avoid cognitively demanding topics, *communication burnout*, diminished listening abilities, shortened conversations, and cellphone distractions during social interactions. These conditions have also contributed to declining interpersonal empathy, both in terms of understanding others' perspectives (*lack of cognitive perspective*) and emotional engagement (*lack of emotional presence*), while fostering a communication response culture that is increasingly rapid yet comparatively superficial.

These findings suggest that *brain rot* is not merely associated with cognitive changes resulting from digital media exposure but also carries significant implications for the effectiveness of interpersonal *da'wah* communication among Generation Z. *Da'wah*, which fundamentally requires reflective, empathetic, and dialogical forms of communication, faces new challenges as audiences become increasingly accustomed to instant communication patterns with minimal elaboration of meaning. Therefore, strengthening digital media literacy and developing *da'wah* communication models that are more adaptive and contextual, while remaining capable of preserving the depth of religious messages, are necessary in responding to the continuing transformation of digital communication culture.

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