



GEN-Z TERTIARY STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE IN SHAPING THEIR READING COMPETENCE

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Abstract

Gen-Z tertiary students benefit from social media in shaping their reading competence, a crucial skill for academic success. This qualitative study examined their perspectives on social media's influence on reading abilities in English texts. Using an interpretative phenomenological design, data were collected from eight purposively selected participants through a validated interview guide and analyzed using Smith's method. Findings revealed a dual impact, captured in the theme "Balancing Perspectives: Two-Fold Impact of Social Media on Reading Competence." While social media enhances engagement and language learning, it also causes distractions and reduced attention spans. Future research should integrate triangulation for deeper insights.

Keywords: Gen-Z, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Lived Experiences, Reading Competency, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The world continues to evolve, and so do students and their learning methodologies. The rapid advancement of technology and the widespread use of social media allow students to connect with others, engage in recreational activities, and acquire new information. Reading has long served as a vital source of knowledge across generations and eras. Reading and writing skills are foundational for academic success and continue to be essential throughout students' educational journeys, including tertiary education. Social media platforms have transformed students' reading practices and their means of acquiring information. Thus, it is imperative to examine students' perspectives regarding how social media influences their reading attitudes and competencies.

While social media serve as platforms for both education and entertainment, they also



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raise concerns about their impact on literacy skills, particularly reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Zainal and Rahmat (2020) found that frequent social media use among Malaysian students affects vocabulary development, often exposing users to incorrect language structures that deviate from formal academic English. In contrast, Purwanto et al. (2020) observed that the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased social media use for learning purposes; however, many students lacked the digital tools needed for effective engagement. According to Statista (2020), social media remain underutilized in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, with few studies exploring platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp for grammar and spelling improvement.

Shreim (2023) found a correlation between frequent social media use and lower literacy levels, whereas Suhe Ji et al. (2022) argued that such platforms foster professional learning and academic engagement. Although digital tools grant immediate access to educational content, students often face challenges with technical skills and access to online reading materials (Mirza, 2021). Zhou (2021) emphasized the importance of using technology judiciously, noting that while engaging content can serve as a learning aid, it also presents potential distractions.

Namaziandost and Nasri (2019) reported that social media use improved Malaysian students' language skills, particularly by exposing them to diverse vocabulary, which positively impacts reading comprehension. Similarly, Rahmat and Zainal (2020), Dong et al. (2020), and Ha (2021) supported the idea that social media can enhance students' reading competence. Nevertheless, Pramerta (2024) argued that despite their digital fluency, Gen Z students often fail to recognize the academic and professional significance of digital literacy. Educators thus face the challenge of integrating digital literacy with reading comprehension to better prepare students for future academic and career demands (Rinekso et al., 2021; Su, 2023). Lampi et al. (2023) stressed that strong literacy skills are predictive of academic achievement, emphasizing the need for effective strategies in the EFL classroom. Additionally, research by Saxena and Mishra (2021) suggests that gamification techniques enhance Gen Z learners' motivation, while Bilonozhko and Syzenko (2020) highlight the effectiveness of incorporating real-world texts in EFL instruction.

Although various studies have explored the effects of social media on reading habits and comprehension, a significant gap remains in understanding Gen Z students' specific

perspectives on this influence. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing educational strategies that incorporate social media while mitigating its challenges—particularly for tertiary students, such as those enrolled at Lorma Colleges in La Union. General education instructors often struggle to cultivate a reading culture among students, many of whom rely on alternative sources like YouTube videos or social media summaries instead of engaging with full texts. This shift affects reading comprehension and classroom participation, ultimately hindering overall reading competence.

This issue is especially pressing in the Philippines, which ranked among the bottom 10 out of 81 countries in reading comprehension according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2022). This low ranking underscores the urgent need to enhance reading abilities, especially for tertiary students who require strong literacy skills for both academic and professional success. As a Gen Z educator, the researcher compared the perspectives of students from 2014 to 2018 with those from 2024 onward, aiming to better understand the influence of social media on reading competence.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to explore how Gen-Z tertiary students perceive the influence of social media on their reading attitudes and competence. IPA, as described by Smith et al. (2006, 2019), centers on examining participants' lived experiences and interpreting the personal meanings they attach to these experiences, making it appropriate for exploring subjective perspectives related to reading behaviors affected by social media.

The study was conducted at Lorma Colleges in La Union, chosen for its diverse student population and innovative academic environment. Participants were eight (8) purposively selected Gen-Z tertiary students (ages 18–27), enrolled during the school year 2024–2025. Inclusion criteria required participants to demonstrate observable reading difficulties (e.g., low text comprehension, weak vocabulary, poor performance in reading-intensive subjects) and be daily users of social media for reading texts. Participants were also non-native English speakers. Students with significant reading disabilities or who did not use social media daily were excluded. Teachers identified and recommended participants based on their reading challenges and relevance to the research topic.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide, developed based on layered human experiences to generate a priori codes. The guide was reviewed by a reading committee and approved by an ethics board to ensure its appropriateness and adherence to ethical standards. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, lasted approximately 10 minutes, and were audio-recorded with participant consent. Participants received the guide in advance to ensure comfort and preparedness. Interviews were conducted at the participants' preferred times and locations. The researcher acted as a facilitator to encourage open and reflective responses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 illustrates the answers of the research question, “How do Gen-Z tertiary students view the influence of social media in shaping their reading competence in English texts?”

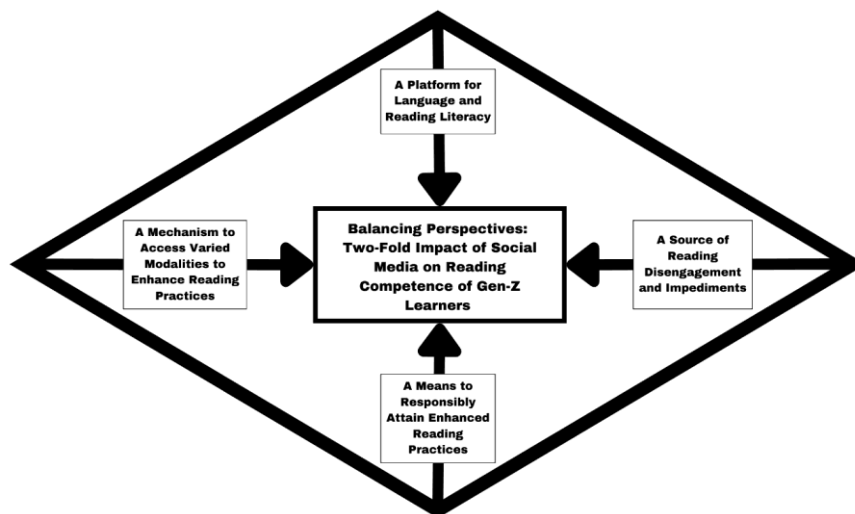


Figure 1. Model on Balancing Perspectives: Two-Fold Impact of Social Media on Reading Competence of Gen-Z Learners

The model is named after the final theme of the study which is Balancing Perspectives: Two-Fold Impact of Social Media on Reading Competence of Gen-Z Learners, directly answers the main question, “How do Gen-Z tertiary students view the influence of social media in shaping their reading competence in English texts?”. After interpreting the participant's meaningful experiences regarding the influence of social media

on their reading competence, a combination of both favorable and unfavorable impacts is revealed, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a balanced perspective.

The focal point of the model resides in a box at the middle center of the model, where the main theme is presented. There are four generated themes surrounding the main theme that are located in the four corners of the model that serve as the four areas where the influence of social media on reading competence resides. The shape of the model, which appears to be like a diamond, represents the views of Gen-Z tertiary students on the influence of social media on their reading competence. The generated final theme is extracted from the four themes, namely: A Platform for Language and Reading Literacy, A Source of Reading Disengagement and Impediments, A Means to Responsibly Attain Enhanced Reading Practices, and A Mechanism to Access Varied Modalities to Enhance Reading Practices.

“A Platform for Language and Reading Literacy” as a theme is generated from five superordinate themes, namely: Enhances Language and Vocabulary Development for Improved Reading Ability, Catalyst for the Development of English Language Learning and Reading, Motivates Learning and Reading Engagement through Accessible Information Channels, Provides Opportunity to Access Online Platforms for Learning, and Boosts Confidence through Enhanced Reading Fluency. This also applies to the second main theme, which is “A Source of Reading Disengagement and Impediments.” It is derived from the four superordinate themes, including the following: Impacts Attention Span and Reading Ability, Detrimental Effects of Social Media on English Language Learning, Challenges Information Processing Due to Social Media Distractions, Shortened Attention Spans, and Alters In-Depth Analysis of Reading Materials. This is similarly true for the third main theme, “A Means to Responsibly Attain Enhanced Reading Practices.” For the third main theme, it is generated from the three superordinate themes: Responsibility to Balance Social Media for Entertainment and for Learning, Cultivates Critical Thinking in Searching for Reliable Information, and Challenges the Manner on How Learners Read. And lastly, followed by the fourth main theme, which is “A Mechanism to Access Varied Modalities to Enhance Reading Practices,” which is from the three formed themes from the following: Fosters Continuous Learning and Comprehension Through Multimodal Literacy, Ushers Readers to New-Termed Words, and Opens Opportunity to Learn New Terms. This model transparently represents the process of how the final theme was generated: from the

initial themes generated from the significant statements of the participants, superordinate themes were extracted. From these, patterns observed in the various cases were considered. Deepening the interpretation: the researcher examined the themes throughout the data set by employing metaphors and temporal referents to extract a more substantial understanding of the experience. In the final phase of analysis, the researcher referenced existing experiences or concepts to further explore the data.

Main Theme 1: Platform for Language and Reading Literacy

This theme represents how Gen-Z tertiary students view social media as a valuable platform for enhancing language and reading literacy. In today's digital age, online platforms serve as essential tools in their education. The ease of accessing a wide range of information by simply swiping or searching keywords allows students to gather information quickly. Social media content can effectively supplement their learning, supporting both class discussions and academic assessments.

Enhances Language and Vocabulary Development for Improved Reading Ability

This subtheme presents how social media acts as an informal learning platform for Gen-Z tertiary students by exposing them to diverse language use in real-world contexts. Through content like blogs, memes, captions, and comments, students expand their vocabulary and understanding of sentence structures, which enhances their reading comprehension and overall literacy skills.

When the researcher asked about the participants' behavior affected by social media, Participant 1 shared, *"I am being inspired to read more on that topic."*, *"Mas nagbibigay ng interest sa aming mga Gen-Z and madaming mga deep words na natututunan namin"* (it gives us interest as Gen-Zs to learn more and read more especially there are also deep words that we are able to learn,) and *"Pag nagbabasa po ako ng reading material, minsan po nag-stop po ako sa kalagitnaan tapos isearch ko nalang po yung summary sa YouTube"* (I read a reading material and usually ends at the middle of it and just search for the summary on YouTube.)

This section illustrates the mixed effects of social media on Gen-Z students' reading and language development. While some students find that it sparks curiosity and enriches vocabulary, others note that it introduces complex terms they adopt in their language use.

However, there's also concern that the convenience of summaries on social media may encourage skipping full texts, leading to a shortcut-oriented reading habit.

Catalyst for the Development of English Language Learning and Reading

This subtheme implicates how social media serves as an interactive platform where students can observe and imitate proper English usage, pronunciation, and grammar from influencers or educators. Through continuous exposure to English-based content such as tutorials, vlogs, or captions, students develop a stronger foundation in the language, which positively impacts their reading proficiency and overall communication skills.

The researcher asked about the participants' motivation in reading when using social media, and Participant 2 shared, *"I see or I view social media as a learning platform and also it influenced many students to read more about English texts because there are lots of issues right now in our society."*; *"also improves my reading skills because when I am using social media, there's also a platform wherein people tend to teach you about English stuff."*; and *"One of the words that I have discovered on social media was the word "nostalgia."*

These answers from Participant 2 reflect that social media platforms supplement learning of English texts because as students read for different issues and contents that they are encountering online, they are already unconsciously familiarizing themselves with different English texts as they read to the point of language acquisition. When the researcher asked if they are learning things on social media, Participant 2 also said, *"I want it to be a platform where I can learn a lot, especially in English and other things about my degree."* Since they are college students, whatever they are learning online, especially with the ability to read, talk, and understand the English language, can be beneficial to the career that they are preparing right now as future professionals.

Motivates Learning and Reading Engagement Through Accessible Information Channels

This subtheme presents that social media motivates learning and reading engagement through accessible information channels with the availability and accessibility of information and learning materials in various platforms where students can just access anytime and anywhere as long as they are connected to the internet and logged in to their accounts.

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Participant 3 shared, *“Social media motivates me to read especially when I am interested with the material that I discovered online.”* And *“the stories that I encountered on TikTok, I search for them and read them especially if they caught my attention and interest.”*

This provides the idea that social media motivates Gen-Z to read. The contents that they encounter online inspire them to go over them to be enlightened or to be updated and not to be left behind what is trendy and popular.

Provides Opportunity to Access Online Platforms for Learning

This subtheme showcases that due to their dependence on social media, this imparts the idea of Gen-Z tertiary students' reliance on learning on social media because of its convenience; students barely think anymore or it makes them lazy to think because information is already available by clicking their button and scrolling to their screen. It also acknowledges that social media offers quick and accessible ways to gather information, making it convenient for students to learn without needing to read lengthy materials.

When the researcher asked about their behavior when using social media that affected their reading competence. Participant 4 stated, *“yung mga studyanteng gaya ko eh nagrerely sa social media and hindi na nagbabasa masyado ng mga mahahabang material kasi mas madali nalang matuto sa social media”* (Students like me rely only on social media and do not read anymore the whole material because of its accessibility,) which shows how they mostly rely on their learnings on social media because of how fast they can collect information on various platforms. The participant also added, *“parang in a way Ma'am nag-decline yung performance ko because of my reliance sa social media”* (it also declined my reading performance because of my reliance on social media.)

This highlights the efficiency and practicality of social media as a learning tool. However, the participant also reflects on the negative consequence of over-reliance on such platforms, admitting that it has led to a decline in their reading performance. This suggests that while social media provides opportunities for learning, excessive dependence on it may hinder deeper reading engagement and comprehension skills.

Boosts Confidence Through Enhanced Reading Fluency

This subtheme represents how social media boosts confidence through improved reading fluency. Enhanced vocabulary and frequent exposure to various texts on social

media help students practice reading, improving speed, comprehension, and fluency. As a result, they feel more confident in discussions and expressing their thoughts.

Participant 4 shared, *“nag-improved din yung confidence ko sa pagbabasa Ma’am because of how I discovered new words and yung meaning nila sa social media”* (improved my confidence in reading because of how I discovered new words and their meaning in different platforms.)

Due to the wide array of information that students access and acquire on social media, it gives them the idea that social media builds confidence due to fluency in reading. With social media’s influence on their vocabulary bank and context clues based on the content that they see online, it helps them build their confidence because of their fluency in reading.

Main Theme 2: Source of Reading Disengagements and Impediments

This section emphasizes concerns about social media causing reading disengagement among Gen-Z students. Constant exposure to brief online content reduces their focus and ability to engage with traditional, in-depth reading. The instant gratification from social media conflicts with the concentration needed for academic reading, leading students to skim for quick information and struggle with longer texts. This shift is changing how they read and learn in a fast-paced, content-saturated digital environment.

Impacts Attention Span and Reading Ability

This subtheme gives the idea that social media impacts attention span and reading ability as it fuels the curiosity of students to look for the content of a headline, which allows them to read and, at the same time, impacts their attention span as they will only rely on their interest in reading a text, and if they lose their interest, they will no longer continue reading it. Aside from that, with the fast relaying of information on social media, they tend to just search for a summary of the content for easier learning.

Participant 1 relayed that when reading, *“Mas matagal po akong magbasa kasi sometimes it’s hard for me to analyze Ma’am kasi para sa akin I learn more on listening and visuals and nagagawa ko po yun when I’m browsing social media”* (it takes reading a longer time to consume because sometimes it is hard to analyze because, for me, my learning is more on listening and visuals and I can do that when browsing social media.)

The participant’s response shows that social media challenges their attention span and reading ability. They struggle with text analysis, take longer to read, and prefer visual or

auditory learning supported by social media. This reliance on fast, engaging content may weaken their focus, reading stamina, and analytical skills.

Detrimental Effects of Social Media on English Language Learning

This subtheme highlights how the ease of using social media has led to the creation of made-up words and irrelevant meanings, confusing students when they encounter these terms while reading. Social media can also be a distraction, as notifications interrupt focus, negatively impacting reading comprehension.

Participant 2 shared some negative perspectives when the researcher asked about the challenges, they have encountered using the social media platforms that affected their reading competence: *“hindered my reading skills on the other hand is when people tend to create more languages that doesn’t make sense. The reason why sometimes we misunderstand because there are words that we do not know anymore the meaning because some people change their meaning on social media.”*

This tells the idea of social media's tendency to spread wrong information and incorrect usage of spelling due to the accessibility of people in using social media and posting their contents; there is no act of screening what is reliable information and filtering what is not since everyone is entitled to post whatever they want and share their opinions, which confuses some students and tends to make them believe in whatever they are reading at first glance.

Aside from that, Participant 2 relayed, *“it serves also as an interruption when I am reading especially when someone or a friend is calling.”*

This provides the idea that social media decreases reading patience due to the reach of people to anyone whom they just want to communicate with; it disrupts the concentration of someone, especially when reading if their gadget is just beyond their reach or if they are using their gadget to read.

Challenges Information Processing Due to Social Media Distractions and Shortened Attention Spans

This subtheme reveals that Gen-Z tertiary students, accustomed to the fast-paced nature of social media, often get bored with traditional reading. They seek quicker alternatives, like searching on social media, to process information faster, which challenges their attention span and information processing due to frequent distractions.

Social media also serves as a form of distraction when reading. When the researcher asked about what hinders them to improve their reading competence, according to Participant 3, *“It hindered me on the other hand is when I am reviewing and when my cellphone is on the side, I was being tempted to browse and watch on social media instead of reading my notes.”*

As it provokes students to use their cellphones whenever they are reading or doing something important in their studies or when reviewing their notes, which results in wasting their time by dividing their attention to whatever they are reading and browsing online.

Participant 3 also added that social media *shortens attention span*; *“yung patience ko sa pagbabasa napunta sa social media”* (my patience in reading goes to social media,) and *“Hindi ko na natatapos basahin yung mga English reading materials ng isang basahan because of social media”* (I cannot finish an English reading material in one sitting because of social media.)

These responses emphasize how social media distractions and shortened attention spans hinder students' ability to process information effectively. Participant 3 points out how constant phone temptations divert attention from studying, leading to wasted time and difficulty focusing on reading materials. Social media's influence has also reduced their patience for in-depth reading, making it harder to engage with English texts.

Alters In-Depth Analysis of Reading Materials

This subtheme shows how Gen-Z students' preference for quick information from social media limits in-depth reading and alters their information processing. Social media's fast-paced content encourages skimming, reducing their ability to analyze complex texts and weakening critical thinking skills. Over time, this shift impacts their capacity to engage with and reflect on nuanced ideas in longer materials.

Participant 8 relayed, *“nagsesearch po ako ng summary ng mga stories na part ng lessons sa YouTube and mas naiintndihan ko po yung story dun.”* (search and watch for the summary of the stories that were part of our lessons before on YouTube. I understand it more if I watch the plot there.)

The thought of having social media makes them lazy and not engage in deep reading anymore as contents uploaded there are fed to the users already and that they also lost their motivation to reflect whatever they are reading, and this is true when Participant 8 said, *“if the teacher gave us reading material, I just search for the summary on YouTube.”*

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In fact, Participant 8 also added, *“parang naging tamad ako. Mas prefer ko nang manood kesa magbasa ng mahabang English reading materials.”* (makes me lazy; I prefer watching than reading long English reading materials because of it.) And *“but right now, because of the accessibility of social media, I prefer relying on my learning there already.”* These responses highlight how social media alters Gen-Z students' approach to in-depth reading. Participant 8 prefers watching story summaries on YouTube, finding them easier than reading the original material. This reliance on simplified content reduces their motivation for deep reading and critical thinking, as they become accustomed to passive consumption rather than engaging with more complex texts. This shift diminishes their ability for independent analysis and reflection.

Main Theme 3: A Means to Responsibly Attain Enhanced Reading Practices

Social media plays a significant role in supporting the reading habits of Gen-Z students, providing easy access to various materials. However, students must be cautious of the risks it poses, such as distractions, misinformation, and shortcut learning. By using social media strategically and responsibly, students can enhance their reading practices while maintaining critical engagement and comprehension.

Responsibility to Balance Social Media for Entertainment and for Learning

Given both the positive and negative impact of social media on students' reading competence, the researcher asked about the things they do when they encounter such reading challenges, Participant 2 shared, *“depends on how people use social media. Because before, I was using social media as a form of entertainment where you get dopamine in your mind, the reason why you get to scroll more and waste your time. And when I realized that, I was able to change.”* And followed it with, *“I rewired my brain, at first, I tried to unfollow the influencers that gave me dopamine in mind and now only follows the influencers where they teach more about life, about learning, especially reading.”*

Participant 2's answers lead to the idea that a student should draw a line between social media as a form of entertainment and as a form of learning, that as students, especially for tertiary students, it is still their responsibility to balance social media for entertainment and for learning.

Participant 2 also added, *“Now, I try to manage my social media.”* And ended it with saying that, *“social media is good and it also depends on the person on how they use social media.”*

Participant 2 emphasizes the importance of balancing social media for entertainment and learning. They began unfollowing distractions and following educational content, emphasizing the need for self-regulation and curating a feed that enhances academic enrichment.

Cultivates Critical Thinking in Searching for Reliable Information

This subtheme represents the need for students to develop a discerning mindset when using social media, as the vast amount of unfiltered content can be misleading. Students must learn to critically evaluate information by questioning its source, intent, and accuracy. This fosters skepticism, encouraging them to cross-check facts and rely on credible resources. By cultivating critical thinking, students can better navigate the digital landscape, ensuring they consume reliable information for both academic and personal growth.

When the researcher asked about the hindrances of the participants when using social media that affected their reading competence, Participant 5 mentioned, *“What hindered my reading skills in English texts was when there are lots of false information on social media. Sometimes, the meaning of a word on social media was different from its real dictionary meaning because how people define it differently in there. That is why it sometimes gives me doubt of the meaning of these words when I am already reading an English reading material.”*

Participant 5’s response introduces the point that social media gives confusion due to unverified social media content. The prevalence of false information and the differing definitions of words on social media can lead to confusion, especially when these interpretations conflict with their traditional, dictionary meanings.

However, on the brighter side, Participant 5 followed, saying, *“I need to always verify first the words or things that I am seeing on social media platforms.”* And *“it pushed me more to read because of my curiosity to verify it search for its true meaning that is why sometimes it surprises me that I am already consuming a lot of my time in reading.”*

That instills the idea that social media promotes critical thinking through verifying social media contents; that only means that they are aware of some errors in terms of

language, which encourages them to be more vigilant when encountering new words and content online.

Changes the Manner on How Learners Read

This subtheme reflects how Gen-Z tertiary students' learning habits have shifted due to exposure to digital platforms. With multimodal literacy, students prefer faster, more efficient ways to absorb information, such as videos and summaries, over traditional reading. They value productivity and time-saving, prioritizing speed and convenience while still seeking knowledge. As a result, their reading practices have evolved to focus on quicker, multimodal content, reflecting a preference for immediate access to information rather than lengthy, immersive reading sessions.

When the researcher asked about the negative effects of social media to the participants' reading competence, Participant 7 mentioned, *“pero mostly po yung contents eh videos kaya nawawalan na akong ng gana magbasa ng mga reading materials”* (but most of the contents are in the form of videos which make me not interested in reading other reading materials anymore.) This means that social media decreases interest in traditional reading.

Participant 7 also added, *“yung opportunity po na makapagsearch ng summary sa social media ang gusto ko na nase-save po yung time ko instead na magbasa”* (an opportunity to search for the summary on social media, I preferably do that to save time reading.) And *“pero yung mga contents po sa social media na madami eh mga videos na nawawalan narin ako ng ganang magbasa ng reading materials”* (but most of the contents are in the form of videos which make me not interested in reading other reading materials anymore.)

Participant 7 reveals that social media has reduced interest in traditional reading. The constant availability of content, especially in video form, leads students to stop reading if they lose interest and opt for online summaries, reflecting a decline in reading habits due to the convenience of digital media.

Main Theme 4: A Mechanism to Access Varied Modalities to Enhance Reading Practices

This theme represents how social media has introduced Gen-Z students to multimodal literacy, blending text, images, videos, and interactive content to create a dynamic learning environment. Multimodal literacy has become essential for interpreting information in

various formats, influencing students' reading attitudes and enhancing their ability to engage with complex content.

Fosters Continuous Learning and Comprehension Through Multimodal Literacy

This subtheme shows how social media enhances Gen-Z students' comprehension through multimodal content like videos, infographics, and interactive posts. Exposure to diverse formats improves vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking, with platforms like YouTube and Facebook serving as educational spaces that support ongoing learning and literacy development.

Social media aids multimodal literacy in reading, as Participant 6 answered, “*pag nanonood po ng K-dramasa sa social media, di ba po may subtitle in English. Natututo po ako while I'm listening and reading to words. I think nag-improve po yung knowledge ko sa words, pagbabasa, pakikinig, and sa speaking narin po.*” (watch K-dramas on social media, isn't it that there is a subtitle and it is written in English? Through it, I am reading and listening to words. I think I was able to improve my knowledge of words, reading skills, and speaking.)

K-dramas or movies are examples of complex multimodal texts, combining images, audio, spoken language, written language, space, and gesture to convey meaning. Watching these on social media helps students learn English through subtitles, bridging language and cultural contexts. The dialogue and on-screen text enhance understanding and language acquisition, especially for international viewers.

Ushers Readers to New-Termed Words

Gen-Z tertiary students are creative and expressive, often inventing new words based on their experiences and emotions. Social media enables them to share these coined terms widely, making them easily accessible to peers and others. This shows how social media introduces readers to new and evolving vocabulary.

These varying modes of communication allow Gen-Z tertiary students to develop a habit to learn something new. In the words of Participant 6, when the researcher asked about how they view social media and its influence on their reading competence, social media is said “*an easy access po to find and learn new words*” (as an easy access to find and learn new words.)

Participant 6 also added, “*mahilig din ako magsearch ng mga synonyms ng mga words na naeencounter ko online like “tourism”, na yung synonyms niya pala are words*

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like “voyage”, “trip” and etc.” (also fond of searching the synonyms of the words I encountered online. For example, the word “tourism”, the synonyms are “voyage”, “trip” and etc.)

Social media’s ease of access made them the habit of not learning enough, which enables them to be a lifelong learner for continuously updating whatever information they acquired.

Based on Participant 6’s answer, “*unity among people in a community online, learning their culture, learning new words, and applying this learning when I am reading,*” the idea of having people online, sharing their pieces of information of different contents, and being able to interact and have dialogues with them for discussions makes more learning fun and continuous.

Meanwhile, people being constantly immersed in social media tend to forget the correct spelling of words due to social media slang. When the researcher asked about the challenges of the participants when using social media that affected their reading competence.

Participant 6 said, “*they tend to invent new words na wala naman po sa dictionary parang yung mga words na “dancerist”, “singerist”, “sarcasm” and madami pa po. Minsan nalilito po yung mga tao sa mga iba if nag-eexist ba yung mga words nay un or hindi*” (they tend to invent new words which are not really in our dictionary like the word “dancerist”, “singerist”, “sarcasm” and etc. Sometimes these words make confusions to people or students like us if these words are really existing or not.)

Social media slang, often informal and trend-driven, leads students to forget correct spellings and meanings of words. Gen-Zs, influenced by playful and dynamic slang, frequently use shortened terms online, which can affect their spelling and reading when transitioning to formal writing.

Opens Opportunity to Learn New Terms

This subtheme shows how social media exposes Gen-Z students to new vocabulary through various platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and educational blogs. Exposure to diverse language contexts, from academic to informal, enhances their vocabulary and reading competence, encouraging self-directed learning and improving their ability to understand and apply terms in different contexts.

Adding up to that idea is the students' motivation to investigate meanings, when the researcher asked about the participants' outlook on their social media usage and its impact on their reading competence. According to Participant 8, "*social media expands my vocabulary whenever I see unfamiliar and new words that I can learn from the different platforms.*" Wherein the participant also mentioned "*nadicover ko po yung mga words like "scheming", "nonchalant", and "demure"*" (I discovered words like "scheming," "nonchalant," and "demure." And "*nae-encourage po akong magbasa and i-search yung mga meaning nila*" (it encourages me to read and search for their meanings too.)

Participant 8's responses emphasize that social media introduces students to unfamiliar vocabulary, encouraging self-expression and learning. This exposure promotes self-directed language development, enhancing vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency.

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool that shapes how learners interact with texts, offering both opportunities and challenges in their pursuit of reading development. Through the participants' responses, it became evident that while social media fosters accessibility to diverse content, enhances vocabulary acquisition, and promotes multimodal literacy, it also presents pitfalls such as distractions, reliance on summaries, and limited engagement in in-depth reading. This contrast shows how social media plays a complicated role in today's education, offering both opportunities and challenges that need careful consideration. The final theme, *Balancing Perspectives: Two-Fold Impact of Social Media on Reading Competence of Gen-Z Learners*, encapsulates this complex relationship, emphasizing the need for learners to navigate social media responsibly to optimize its potential as a learning tool while mitigating its negative effects. These findings support the observations of Eze et al. (2022) and Sadha et al. (2023), who pointed out the dual nature of social media as both a facilitator and a distractor in literacy development.

Social media has become an agent for enhancing language skills and reading competence among Gen-Z learners. Platforms like blogs, online articles, and educational apps help students improve vocabulary and language proficiency, offering practical, real-world applications. These platforms foster reading engagement through interactive and multimodal content, boosting students' reading fluency and confidence. Kabir and Jeromes (2022) highlight how social media facilitates peer learning and collaboration, aiding students' reading development, while Sadha et al. (2023) and Nworie et al. (2023)

emphasize the role of social media in creating engaging literacy environments that support vocabulary acquisition and comprehension.

However, while social media can aid in literacy, it also presents challenges that hinder reading competence. The constant flow of notifications and fragmented content can disrupt attention spans, leading to superficial reading habits and difficulty engaging with complex texts. Informal language used on social media may affect students' English learning, and the overload of content makes it harder to process information deeply. Research by Obiajulu et al. (2022) and Galadima and Bright (2020) shows the negative impact of excessive social media use on academic performance, while Nworie and Odah (2024) emphasize the importance of managing social media time to avoid distractions.

Despite these challenges, social media can be used responsibly to enhance reading practices. By balancing entertainment and educational use, students can improve critical thinking and evaluate the reliability of the content they consume. Eze et al. (2022) and Ojo (2022) stress the need for mindful social media use to prevent its negative effects on academic performance. Additionally, social media's multimodal content—combining text, visuals, and multimedia—supports continuous learning and enhances comprehension. Syofian (2021) and Ibda (2020) highlight how such multimodal platforms, like TikTok, improve literacy skills, demonstrating that social media can be a transformative tool for reading competence when used intentionally.

The integration of the four main themes in the study forms the foundation of the final theme, *Balancing Perspectives: Two-Fold Impact of Social Media on Reading Competence of Gen-Z Learners*. Themes 1 and 4 illustrate how social media fosters growth in language skills and literacy through accessible, engaging, and multimodal content. In contrast, Theme 2 highlights its potential to hinder reading competence by contributing to distractions, superficial reading, and language inconsistencies. Theme 3 bridges these perspectives by promoting mindful and responsible use of social media, demonstrating how learners can mitigate its drawbacks and maximize its benefits. Together, these themes present a balanced view of social media's dual influence, offering a nuanced understanding of its role in shaping the reading competence of Gen-Z tertiary students. The final theme reflects this interconnection, emphasizing the importance of balance, intentionality, and innovation in navigating the complex effects of social media on literacy development.

CONCLUSION

This study elucidates the views of Gen-Z tertiary students on the influence of social media in shaping their reading competence. Their perspectives are represented in the final theme, which is “*Balancing Perspectives: Two-Fold Impact of Social Media on Reading Competence of Gen-Z Learners.*” The subordinate themes in this study reveal both opportunities and challenges that social media employs for language learning in Gen-Z tertiary students’ reading competence and the need to balance their engagement to maximize its advantages and benefits for reading competence while reducing its potential hindrances. By understanding these dynamics, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how social media is reshaping reading habits, language acquisition, and academic performance among Gen-Z learners. Ultimately, it suggests that when used mindfully, social media can serve as a powerful tool in strengthening reading competence, enabling students to develop more efficient, adaptable, and interactive approaches to reading.

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