



## The Phenomenon of Cyberbullying and Its Impact on the Formation of Civic Character in Generation Z

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**Abstract:** The development of digital technology has shaped the interaction patterns of Generation Z, yet it has also increased the risk of cyberbullying, which poses serious impacts on their psychological, social, and civic character development. This study aims to identify the forms of cyberbullying experienced by Generation Z, analyze its effects on emotional development, social relationships, academic performance, and examine its implications for the formation of digital citizenship character. This research employs a literature review (library research) method by examining national and international journals, institutional reports, and relevant scientific publications selected through a systematic screening process. Illustrative cases involving public figures such as the cyberbullying experienced by TikTok influencer Fujianti Utami are used as contextual examples without serving as the main data source. The findings show that common forms of cyberbullying include flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, and trickery, all of which contribute to anxiety, insecurity, lower self-esteem, social isolation, difficulty concentrating, and decreased learning motivation. Long-term impacts are also evident in the formation of civic character, including weakened empathy, reduced self-control, diminished critical thinking skills, and declining social responsibility in digital spaces. These findings affirm that cyberbullying is not merely an interpersonal issue but also a threat to the development of smart, ethical, and responsible digital citizens. This study recommends strengthening value-based digital literacy, promoting social media ethics education, and enhancing collaboration among families, schools, government, and digital platforms to create a safe and civil digital environment.

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying; Digital Citizenship; Digital Ethics; Digital Literacy; Generation Z; Social Media.

### 1. Introduction

Technological developments in the modern era have advanced rapidly and brought significant changes to various aspects of human life. The internet has become one of the most influential innovations, not only in terms of communication but also in education, economics, social interaction, and culture. According to the 2022 survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 210 million people, an increase of 3.5% from the previous year. These users are predominantly from younger age groups, especially those aged 15-24 years, with 99.26% coming from students and university students. This data shows that the younger generation has integrated the internet into their daily lives.

Indonesia represents a relevant context for studying Generation Z because it has one of the largest youth populations globally and a culturally diverse digital environment that shapes young people's social interactions and civic development. However, empirical studies examining cyberbullying and citizenship character among Indonesian youth remain limited, making this population important for further investigation.

This exposure has shaped them into active and creative users who leverage the internet for learning, sharing information, and communicating. However, behind its positive impacts, the internet also carries negative consequences that cannot be ignored,

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such as online fraud, exposure to inappropriate content, and the increasing phenomenon of cyberbullying among teenagers and students. Empirical evidence in Indonesia indicates that cyberbullying is a serious and growing problem among adolescents. Reports from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) and recent school-based studies show that a substantial proportion of students experience online harassment, which is associated with anxiety, social withdrawal, and declining academic engagement (Siswati & Saputra, 2023).

Cyberbullying refers to repeated harmful actions carried out through digital media that can cause psychological distress, such as anxiety, stress, and decreased self-confidence among adolescents (Yunita, 2023). who describe cyberbullying as aggressive behavior conducted through digital technologies with the intention of intimidating or harming others, either verbally or nonverbally.

Citizenship values such as responsibility, social awareness, freedom of expression, and active participation have now expanded into the digital realm (Marlef et al., 2024). The concept of digital citizenship no longer refers merely to the ability to use the internet, but also to the ability to exercise rights and obligations ethically and responsibly in cyberspace.

This social transformation presents both opportunities and challenges for the younger generation. On one hand, the internet provides wide access to information, encourages creativity, and enables public participation in various social and civic activities. Digital platforms allow young people to express opinions, build networks, and engage in discussions related to social and national issues. On the other hand, the rapid expansion of digital spaces also creates serious risks, particularly the emergence of cyberbullying, which can negatively affect social interaction and character development among adolescents. Cyberbullying reflects unethical behavior in digital environments and indicates weak internalization of moral and civic values among young people (Maria, 2024). Studies show that the lack of ethical awareness and self-control in online interactions often leads to aggressive behavior, harassment, and disregard for others' rights in cyberspace. From a civic education perspective, this condition highlights the importance of strengthening digital ethics and citizenship education. Research emphasizes that civic education plays a strategic role in fostering responsible digital behavior, promoting empathy, respect, and social responsibility, and minimizing cyberbullying practices among Generation Z. Strengthening ethical values and civic awareness in digital spaces is therefore essential to ensure that technological advancement contributes positively to character formation and social harmony (Nur et al., 2022).

Therefore, research on cyberbullying and its impact on the formation of citizenship character among Generation Z is highly significant. Based on this background, this study focuses on three main areas: (1) identifying the forms and characteristics of cyberbullying among Generation Z; (2) examining the impact of cyberbullying on the development of citizenship character; and (3) determining the efforts that can be taken to mitigate cyberbullying in order to foster better citizenship character. This research aims to identify cyberbullying patterns among young people, analyze its effects on moral values, empathy, social responsibility, and digital behavior, and formulate effective preventive strategies (Syifa & Ula, 2024).

The urgency of this study is further supported by findings showing that adolescents involved in cyberbullying tend to display lower empathy, weaker prosocial behavior, and reduced civic engagement, indicating that cyberbullying poses not only psychological risks but also challenges to citizenship character development.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a literature study (library research) method conducted systematically and comprehensively to understand the phenomenon of cyberbullying and its relation to the formation of citizenship character among Generation Z. The literature study method is chosen because it provides a broad

analytical scope for examining theories, concepts, and empirical findings from various scholarly publications that have undergone academic review processes. Following the perspectives of Septianawati et al., 2023, literature studies are highly relevant when researchers aim to map dynamically evolving social phenomena within digital spaces while integrating multiple research findings into a unified theoretical concept. Through this method, the researcher collects, selects, and synthesizes data from credible sources to ensure that the research outcomes are academically accountable.

The data used in this study consist of secondary data derived from academic publications, including national and international journal articles, research reports, and review studies that focus on cyberbullying, adolescent digital behavior, psychological and social impacts, and the role of education in shaping character and civic values. Previous studies have demonstrated that cyberbullying is closely associated with emotional distress, social problems, and weakened moral values among adolescents, highlighting the importance of examining this phenomenon from both psychological and civic perspectives (Yunita, 2023).

Data collection was conducted through a systematic literature search using academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, SINTA, and international journal platforms. Keywords used in the search process included *cyberbullying*, *Generation Z*, *digital behavior*, *citizenship character*, and *civic education*. The selection of literature followed specific inclusion criteria, namely relevance to the research focus, publication within the last ten years, and availability in reputable academic journals. Studies discussing the role of civic and character education in minimizing cyberbullying behavior were prioritized, as previous research emphasizes the importance of value-based education in reducing unethical behavior in digital spaces (Kumala & Sukmawati, 2020).

Data analysis was carried out using qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach. The researcher identified key themes across the selected literature, including forms of cyberbullying, patterns of digital interaction among adolescents, psychological and social consequences, and their implications for the development of citizenship character. Several studies indicate that cyberbullying negatively affects empathy, self-control, and social responsibility, which are essential components of citizenship character (S. Aini & Rahardjo, 2024). The findings from different sources were compared and synthesized to build a coherent analytical framework regarding the relationship between cyberbullying and character formation among Generation Z.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the researcher conducted source triangulation by comparing results from multiple studies and examining the consistency of conclusions across different research contexts. Attention was given to the credibility of publishers, the relevance of research settings, and the methodological rigor of each study. Since this research relied solely on secondary data from published literature and did not involve direct interaction with human participants, ethical approval and informed consent were not required. Through this methodological design, the study aims to provide a systematic and academically accountable analysis of cyberbullying phenomena and their implications for the development of citizenship character among Generation Z.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Forms and Characteristics of Cyberbullying Among Generation Z

The findings of this study indicate that the phenomenon of cyberbullying among Generation Z is complex and continues to develop alongside the rapid growth of social media use. Various studies show that digital platforms have become spaces where aggressive behavior can easily emerge due to anonymity, wide audience reach, and limited direct social control (Bularca et al., 2024). As the generation with the highest level of internet engagement, Generation Z is particularly vulnerable, both as victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying.

Based on the reviewed literature, cyberbullying manifests in several dominant forms, including flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, and trickery. Flaming refers to the use of harsh, offensive, or provocative language aimed at attacking others in online comment sections or private messages. Harassment involves repeated insults or intimidating messages delivered continuously. Denigration occurs when individuals spread false or damaging information to harm someone's reputation, while impersonation is carried out through fake or anonymous accounts to deceive or discredit victims. Trickery involves manipulating victims into sharing personal information that is later used to embarrass or humiliate them publicly (Waji, 2021). These forms are commonly found on social media platforms frequently used by Generation Z, such as TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter).

The literature also highlights that cyberbullying behavior is influenced by psychological and social factors. Studies show that low self-control, weak emotional regulation, peer pressure, reduced empathetic sensitivity toward others' emotions contribute significantly to the emergence of aggressive digital behavior among adolescents and young adults (Kurniawan et al., 2024). The digital environment often provides a sense of distance and anonymity, which reduces feelings of guilt and responsibility, allowing individuals to express hostility more freely than in face-to-face interactions.

Cases of cyberbullying involving public figures serve as concrete examples of how this phenomenon operates in digital environments. Public figures often become targets due to their constant visibility and the ease with which they can be subjected to criticism. One relevant case highlighted in this study is the cyberbullying experienced by Indonesian TikTok and Instagram influencer Fujianti Utami Putri. As a young public figure who is highly active on social media, Fuji frequently receives demeaning comments, especially those targeting her appearance and skin tone.



Figure 1 Source: TikTok

Figure 1 illustrates how Fujianti Utami receives verbal attacks in the form of insults such as "maghrib" a racially charged term used by some netizens to demean individuals with darker skin tones. Other belittling comments, such as "trying too hard to be pretty" or "tacky," also frequently appear in the comment sections of her TikTok and Instagram accounts. These attacks fall under the categories of flaming and harassment, as perpetrators use harsh words and direct insults toward the victim. In many cases, the comments come from anonymous accounts, which also categorizes the behavior as denigration, since the concealed identity of the perpetrators complicates any accountability.

The case of Fujianti Utami reflects a common pattern of cyberbullying against public figures, where negative comments do not merely focus on criticizing behavior but extend to personal attacks involving physical appearance, skin tone, and identity. Fuji herself has stated that she has repeatedly received similar comments, especially from

accounts with unclear identities, indicating that such aggressive digital behavior is carried out continuously and systematically.

Importantly, these patterns indicate a reduction in empathic engagement on the part of perpetrators, as reflected in their disregard for the emotional consequences of their actions. However, this reduced empathy should not be interpreted as a direct moral failure but rather as a situational response shaped by anonymity, online disinhibition, and peer reinforcement in digital environments.

This phenomenon can be understood through Alfred Schutz's phenomenological theory, which emphasizes that a social phenomenon is the result of meaning construction within interpersonal interactions. Phenomenology views human actions in digital spaces as shaped by reciprocal relationships between individuals who produce content and those who respond to it (Tobing & Septiningtyas, 2024). In this context, cyberbullying is understood not only as an aggressive act but also as an interpretive process—how netizens interpret Fuji's actions or appearance through their subjective perceptions.

A concrete illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in cases involving public figures who are highly active on social media. One relevant example is the cyberbullying experienced by Indonesian influencer Fujianti Utami Putri. As a young public figure with high online visibility, Fuji frequently receives demeaning comments targeting her physical appearance and skin tone. Insults such as racially charged remarks, along with belittling expressions questioning her appearance, frequently appear in the comment sections of her social media accounts. These actions fall under flaming, harassment, and denigration, particularly as many of the comments originate from anonymous accounts, making accountability difficult. This case reflects a broader pattern of cyberbullying in digital spaces, where criticism often shifts from behavior to personal identity, highlighting weak digital ethics within online communities (Anjani, 2024).

Cyberbullying can be analyzed through two types of motives: in-order-to motives and because motives (a) The in-order-to motive is evident when netizens intentionally attempt to humiliate or degrade Fuji through insulting comments. (b) The because motive emerges when perpetrators act based on past experiences or certain perceptions, such as stereotypes about darker skin, societal beauty standards, or conflicts among fandom groups on social media.

Thus, the cyberbullying experienced by Fuji is not a spontaneous act but the result of a series of social constructions that shape how netizens view and respond to public figures. These online attacks not only affect the psychological well-being of the victim but also reflect the fragility of digital ethics within society. This aligns with the discussion in the introduction stating that Generation Z is highly active in the digital sphere yet still lacks adequate digital ethical literacy, leading many to regard aggressive online behavior as normal or entertainment. This section is not mandatory but can be added to the manuscript if the discussion is unusually long or complex.

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that cyberbullying is a structured social phenomenon involving psychological, social, and technological factors. The case of Fujianti Utami provides a concrete example of how this phenomenon operates while highlighting the need for stronger digital ethics education so that young generations can behave more wisely, responsibly, and ethically in their digital interactions.

### ***3.2 The Psychological and Social Impacts of Cyberbullying on Generation Z***

Cyberbullying has significant psychological and social consequences for Generation Z, who spend a substantial portion of their daily lives in digital environments. Research consistently shows that victims of cyberbullying experience multidimensional impacts that affect emotional well-being, social relationships, academic functioning, and long-term personal development (Adam et al., 2025).

Emotionally, victims commonly experience anxiety, stress, insecurity, and decreased self-esteem. Continuous exposure to negative comments, insults, or humiliating content creates emotional pressure that can disrupt psychological stability.

Studies indicate that cyberbullying victims are more vulnerable to depressive symptoms, emotional exhaustion, and persistent feelings of worthlessness, especially when attacks occur repeatedly and are visible to a wide audience (Aini & Apriana, 2018). The permanence of digital content further intensifies this burden, as victims often feel unable to escape negative narratives circulating online.

From a social perspective, cyberbullying frequently leads to withdrawal and digital isolation. Victims may limit online interactions, deactivate social media accounts, or distance themselves from peer groups to avoid further attacks. Such behavior reduces opportunities for healthy social engagement and weakens support networks that are essential during adolescence and early adulthood (Ardyah & Harahap, 2023). In the long term, social withdrawal can hinder the development of interpersonal skills and negatively affect social identity formation.

Cyberbullying also has implications for academic performance. Emotional distress caused by online harassment often interferes with concentration, motivation, and learning engagement. Victims may experience declining academic achievement, increased absenteeism, and reduced participation in academic activities, particularly when cyberbullying involves peers from the same educational environment (Agustin et al., 2024). These findings suggest that cyberbullying is not merely a personal issue but an educational concern that requires institutional attention.

In the long term, prolonged exposure to cyberbullying may result in severe psychological consequences, including chronic stress, trauma-related symptoms, and an increased risk of self-harm or suicidal ideation. A narrative review by (Kurniawan et al., 2024) highlights that adolescents who experience sustained cyberbullying face a higher risk of serious mental health problems if adequate support systems are absent.

Notably, many victims also develop coping strategies to manage cyberbullying, such as disengaging from online platforms, blocking perpetrators, seeking social support, or cognitively reframing negative comments. These behaviors should be understood as adaptive responses rather than indicators of psychological weakness or moral decline. Distinguishing these coping mechanisms from emotional vulnerability helps avoid overgeneralizing the long-term psychological impact of cyberbullying.

### ***3.3 Cyberbullying and Its Implications for the Formation of Citizenship Character Among Generation Z***

The growing prevalence of cyberbullying within the digital activities of Generation Z carries profound implications for the formation of their citizenship character. Generation Z, who have been connected to the internet and social media since childhood, undergo their social, emotional, and moral development in an environment heavily shaped by digital interaction. This high intensity of technological use makes the digital space not only a platform for entertainment but also a domain for learning values, expressing identity, and developing character. Therefore, cyberbullying occurring in online spaces cannot be separated from the context of citizenship character formation, as such behavior is closely related to moral values, social responsibility, empathy, and integrity core foundations of modern citizenship (UNICEF, 2020).

The prevalence of cyberbullying within the digital lives of Generation Z has profound implications for the formation of citizenship character. Digital spaces have become arenas where values, norms, and social responsibilities are learned and practiced. Consequently, behavior in online environments directly influences the development of empathy, integrity, responsibility, and respect core elements of citizenship character (Pambudi et al., 2023).

Generation Z is often recognized for their adaptability and competence in navigating digital technologies. They can quickly access information, build cross-cultural relationships, and express opinions openly through various social media platforms. However, digital skills are not always accompanied by emotional maturity or a strong sense of digital ethics. Recent data show that the majority of Indonesian adolescents have been exposed to cyberbullying either as victims, perpetrators, or bystanders

particularly through platforms most frequently used by Generation Z such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp. This highlights that the digital environment plays a central role in shaping the socio-political character of young generations (Dewi & Ginting, 2025).

Cyberbullying undermines these values by normalizing aggressive communication and diminishing sensitivity toward others. Victims often experience reduced self-confidence and reluctance to express opinions in digital public spaces, which weakens civic participation and democratic engagement. This condition contradicts the goals of citizenship education, which aim to empower individuals to participate responsibly and ethically in social and political life (Nur et al., 2022).

However, it is important to distinguish between decreased empathy among perpetrators and coping strategies among victims. Reduced empathy among perpetrators is indicated by behaviors such as emotional detachment, normalization of harm, and lack of concern for others' psychological well-being. In contrast, victims' responses such as withdrawal from digital platforms or selective disengagement represent adaptive coping strategies aimed at self-protection rather than moral disengagement or civic apathy. Recognizing this distinction helps avoid overclaiming the moral impact of cyberbullying on young citizens.

Furthermore, cyberbullying is closely linked to declining self-control and emotional regulation. Adolescents who experience or witness online aggression may respond impulsively or adopt similar behaviors, reinforcing cycles of hostility in digital interactions. Research indicates that weak self-control and strong peer influence significantly increase the likelihood of cyberbullying behavior, thereby hindering the development of responsible citizenship (Kumala & Sukmawati, 2020).

Despite its negative impacts, several studies suggest that cyberbullying experiences can foster resilience when victims receive adequate support from families, schools, and social institutions. Supportive environments help adolescents develop empathy, digital ethics awareness, and a stronger commitment to creating safe online spaces (Purwanto et al., 2024).

Therefore, strengthening citizenship character in the digital era requires integrated efforts involving families, educational institutions, policymakers, and digital communities. Citizenship education must incorporate digital literacy that emphasizes ethical communication, emotional management, respect for diversity, and responsible participation in online spaces. By doing so, Generation Z can be guided to become citizens who are not only digitally skilled but also morally grounded and socially responsible in navigating the complexities of digital society (Anggana et al., 2025).

Families, educational institutions, the government, and digital communities to strengthen digital literacy education oriented toward citizenship values. Digital literacy in this context goes beyond technical skills; it includes emotional management, understanding communication ethics, respecting others' opinions, and being responsible technology users. Citizenship education in schools must emphasize *digital citizenship* the ability to interact, participate, and contribute ethically within digital society so that Generation Z can become intelligent, critical, and morally grounded citizens in both physical and virtual environments (Rahayu et al., 2025).

Overall, cyberbullying is a multidimensional challenge that affects the development of citizenship character among Generation Z. Its impacts span psychological, social, moral, and participatory aspects. Therefore, the strengthening of citizenship character education must adapt to the challenges of the digital era, enabling Generation Z to grow as citizens who embody integrity, high empathy, digital competence, and a sense of responsibility in navigating the complexities of online spaces (Saputra et al., 2025).

#### 4. Conclusions

This study concludes that cyberbullying is a significant social problem affecting Generation Z within today's digital environment. High levels of internet and social media use have increased the vulnerability of young people to online harassment, both

as victims and perpetrators. Cyberbullying manifests in various forms such as verbal abuse, humiliation, and digital harassment, which are often amplified by anonymity and the rapid spread of online content.

The findings indicate that cyberbullying has multidimensional impacts on Generation Z, including psychological distress, social withdrawal, decreased academic engagement, and long-term emotional vulnerability. Beyond these individual effects, cyberbullying also undermines the formation of citizenship character by weakening empathy, self-control, critical thinking, and social responsibility in digital spaces.

Therefore, cyberbullying should be understood not only as a personal or psychological issue but also as a civic and ethical challenge in the digital era. Strengthening value-based digital literacy, digital ethics education, and collaborative efforts among families, educational institutions, governments, and digital platforms is essential to foster responsible, ethical, and empathetic digital citizens among Generation Z.

Future research should prioritize more rigorous empirical approaches to test the cyberbullying–citizenship character relationship. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how repeated exposure to cyberbullying shapes changes in empathy, responsibility, and civic engagement over time. Mixed-method research designs combining surveys, interviews, and digital ethnography are recommended to capture both measurable trends and lived experiences. In addition, the development and validation of standardized digital citizenship and civic character scales would enable more reliable and comparable measurement across contexts. These research agendas are essential for building stronger evidence-based interventions and policy frameworks addressing cyberbullying in the digital era.

## 5. Patents

No patents resulted from the work reported in this manuscript. The research focuses on social phenomena, specifically the analysis of cyberbullying and its implications for the psychological, social, and civic character development of Generation Z, and therefore does not involve the creation of proprietary tools, digital systems, or patentable innovations. All concepts, interpretations, and analyses presented are academic in nature and are intended exclusively for scholarly purposes without generating any intellectual property claims.

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