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Differentiation of Intergenerational Responses to Government Public Communication in Forest and Land Fire Disaster Situations

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ABSTRACT

The urgency of this research lies in the differences in respones across generations regarding the assessment of the quality of public communication delivered by the government in addressing forest and land fires (karhutla). This study aims to analyze how people from different generations receive and interpret government statements regarding forest and land fires, as well as how differences in their interpretations relate to their respones. This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative research design. The subjects consist of 8 informants, comprising 4 individuals from Generations X and Y, born between 1970 and 1985, and 4 individuals from Generation Z, born between 2000 and 2008, selected randomly. Data were collected through interviews in which several government statements concerning forest and land fires were presented as stimuli to elicit the informants' immediate respones. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings show that Generation Z informants were more frequently exposed to forest and land fire (karhutla) information through TikTok, Instagram, and X, whereas Generation X and Y informants experienced a more diverse frequency of exposure through Instagram, WhatsApp, and their social circles. Among Generations X and Y, the interpretation of government statements was split between optimism and criticism, while all Generation Z informants maintained a pessimistic stance. The discussion indicates that the primary difference lies in their standards for evaluating credibility: Generations X and Y assess credibility through empathy and concrete action on the ground, whereas Generation Z evaluates it based on the consistency of the message with facts, data, and logic. In conclusion, high exposure does not guarantee trust, and public risk communication by the government during disasters needs to combine empathy with data transparency. These findings are exploratory and require testing on a broader sample.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Forest and land fires (karhutla) are environmental problems that have a broad impact on community life, especially through ecosystem damage, air pollution, and health disturbances caused

by haze. Uda et al. (2019) explained that peatland fires in Central Kalimantan contribute to increased exposure to particulates that endanger public health. In line with this, Hein et al. (2022) show that peatland fires in Indonesia cause significant health consequences. This condition makes karhutla not only an environmental issue but also a social issue that requires communication and community involvement in its handling.

The government's public communication style amid the 2026 Kalimantan forest and land fires appears to emphasize concrete actions and firmness. The Minister of Forestry stated that 5,000 civil servants from his ministry were deployed as an effort to assist with operational control in six provinces (JPNN, 2026), while the President called for strict punishment for perpetrators and declared zero tolerance for companies that violate (Asia News Network, 2026). The government also conveyed technical efforts, such as the plan to test dry ice stated by the Minister of Forestry as an effort to find alternatives to reduce smoke (Antara, 2026).

However, these messages are not necessarily received uniformly. Greenpeace Indonesia assesses that the government has not appeared serious about addressing the health impacts of haze and ignores calls for a national disaster declaration (Greenpeace Indonesia, 2026), while the community group filed a class action lawsuit at the Pontianak District Court on September 15, 2026, over the handling of forest and land fires (Good News from Indonesia, 2026). The contrast between official statements and residents' experiences shows that the content of the government's message has not yet guarantee the same acceptance. The reception and interpretation of these messages may also differ between generations. Mannheim (1952) views generations as groups whose shared social experiences shape how they interpret the world. In the context of disaster and crisis situations, comparative studies of the 2023 Turkey earthquake found significant differences between generations in habits of using digital media, trust in news sources, and ways of verifying information (Bilişli et al., 2024).

In such situations, government public communication plays an important role in delivering information about the level of smoke hazard, fire causes, disaster management, health appeals, and prevention efforts. Yudarwati et al. (2022) explain that the use of government social media in disaster risk communication in Indonesia faces challenges related to information credibility, public trust, and digital divide. This shows that the success of government communication is not only determined by the delivery of information but also by how the public receives, understands, and trusts the messages conveyed.

Government message reception can vary from one individual to another because it is influenced by experience, knowledge, and sources of information used. Paek and Hove (2024) explain that framing messages and trust play a role in determining the effectiveness of risk communication. Additionally, Park and Avery (2018) found that demographic characteristics, including age, are related to the choice of information channels and the public's intention to follow directions in crisis situations. These findings highlight the importance of examining generational differences in obtaining, understanding, and assessing government statements regarding forest and land fires.

Generational differences are also related to the development of information technology that shapes people's habits in accessing and trusting information. Fletcher et al. (2025) show a relationship between age, media use, and trust in news. In the context of forest and land fires, these differences are interesting to study because communities may have different ways of finding information, assessing government credibility, and understanding fire threats. However, generational differences cannot be directly assumed to determine a person's level of trust or compliance; rather, they need to be proven through experience and community responses.

Although previous research has discussed disaster risk communication, health impacts of forest and land fires, and media use in crisis situations, studies on the relationship between the reception of government statements and cross-generational community responses in the context of forest and land fires still need to be further developed. This study places the community as active message recipients in giving meaning to government information. This interpretation can produce cognitive responses such as trust or doubt, affective responses such as worry or anger, as well as behavioral responses such

as reducing outdoor activities, protecting health, disseminating information, and following government appeals.

Based on these issues, this study aims to analyze how communities from different generations accept and interpret government statements regarding forest and land fires and how these differences in acceptance relate to their responses. This study focuses on exposure, attention, understanding, trust, and assessment of the relevance of forest and land fire threats, as well as cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses of the community. The results of the study are expected to contribute to the development of public communication studies and the sociology of communication, particularly in understanding the reception of disaster information and community responses across generations.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with an interpretative paradigm to understand social phenomena based on experiences, views, and individuals' interpretations of social realities occurring in the community. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on exploring the meaning and perspectives of individuals or groups in understanding a social phenomenon that cannot be explained solely through statistical measurement (Banghu et al., 2023). The interpretative paradigm is used to understand how individuals give meaning to the phenomena they experience based on their respective social backgrounds and experiences. Thus, this study seeks to explore similarities and differences in perspectives between generations regarding the phenomenon that is the focus of the study.

The research design used is qualitative descriptive. This design aims to describe and elaborate on social phenomena based on information obtained directly from informants. Through this design, the researcher seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of perspectives, experiences, and intergenerational views on the issues studied. This research is not oriented towards measuring the relationship between variables statistically, but rather on understanding social reality based on the informants' perspectives.

The subjects in this study consist of three generational groups: Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. The research informants are individuals who have knowledge, experience, and understanding relevant to the phenomenon being studied, enabling them to provide information tailored to the research needs (Sugiyono, 2017). This study involved 8 informants consisting of 4 Generation X and Y with birth years between 1970–1985 and 4 Generation Z individuals with birth years between 2000–2008. Informants were selected using purposive sampling technique, which is selecting informants based on certain considerations and criteria tailored to the research objectives. The criteria for informants included conformity of birth years with the generation group studied, having experience or knowledge relevant to the research phenomenon, and willingness to provide information through interviews. The division of informants into these two generational groups aims to obtain an overview of the similarities and differences in perspectives between the two generations regarding the social phenomena studied.

The data collection technique in this study was conducted through interviews. Interviews are data collection techniques conducted through direct interaction between the researcher and informants to obtain in-depth information about their experiences, views, and interpretations of the phenomena studied (Wong et al., 2023). Interviews were conducted with all informants by asking a series of questions related to the research focus. Through this technique, the researcher sought to obtain information directly from each generational group so that they could identify similarities, differences, and social factors influencing their perspectives.

In the interview process, the researcher presented several government statements to be tested as stimuli to generate direct responses from informants. The statements used were those issued by public officials related to the forest and land fire issue, ranging from regional officials to the President of the Republic of Indonesia. Statement selection was done randomly based on the statements most frequently appearing on social media feeds during the forest and land fire disaster. All informants were given the same statement messages so that differences in responses were not caused by differences in message

content. The statement message was delivered before the informant answered questions about message interpretation, reactions, and hopes to follow the government's public communication quality assessment amid the ongoing forest and land fire issue.

The data analysis technique in this study uses thematic analysis, which is a qualitative data analysis technique used to identify, organize, and interpret patterns or themes arising from the research data (Virginia & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, to maintain data validity, this study uses source triangulation techniques by comparing information obtained from informants Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. This comparison is conducted to assess information consistency, find similarities and differences in perspectives, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the social phenomena being studied.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 16 informants consisting of 8 people from generation X and Y with birth years from 1970–1985 and 8 people from Generation Z with birth years from 2000 to 2008, who were randomly selected. All subjects were grouped into two main categories based on how technology plays a role in their daily lives. The fundamental differences in technology adoption then triggered significant suggestion differences, especially in terms of communication patterns, information consumption preferences, and how each generation understands and assesses conditions based on life experiences and the urgency of an issue. All research subjects had the same opportunity to assess the quality of government public communication with the same statement message. Based on thematic analysis of the collected data, this study identifies gaps between the quality of government public communication and the differentiation of responses between generations.

Table 1. Information Reception of Generations X and Y (Born 1970 – 1985)

Generation Group	News Frequency	Sources of Information	Impact of Forest and Land Fires
Generations X and Y (Births 1975-1980)	Very often	Instagram Home	o Anxious on health risks. o Distance diminished view
	Often	Instagram Home, Google News	o Obstruction of outdoor activities o Impact Smoke on Health
	Often	Instagram Reels, WhatsApp group	o Pollution deteriorating air
	No too often	People around, WhatsApp group	o Limiting activities o The Difficulty clean air

Table 2. Information Reception of Generation Z (2000 – 2008)

Generation Group	News Frequency	Sources of Information	Impact of Forest and Land Fires
Generation Z (Born 2000 – 2008)	Often	TikTok Home	o Decreased air quality o Applications Distance Learning (PJJ) within the campus environment
	Very often	X, Tiktok, Instagram	o Not feeling the impact directly o Empathy for forest and land fire victims
	Very often	Instagram Reels, WhatsApp group	o Online lectures
	Very often	Tiktok, Instagram, Google News	o Polluted air quality

Table for Assessing the Quality of Government Public Communication Amid the Forest and Land FireSituation

Table 3. Assessment of Government Public Communication Quality Amid Forest and Land Fire Situations for Generations X and Y (Born 1970 – 1980)

Generation Group	Interpretation of the Statement	Ideal Statement Alternatives	Public Perspective
	The government was less responsive to disasters. The government also failed to provide positive aspirations and appreciation to the people who helped.	Government officials should be able to express sympathy and empathy, but not Considering disasters as trivial, no matter how small.	Listening every government statement only cause new criticism every day.

Generation X and Y (Born 1970 - 1985	Government have done their best efforts, maintaining focus, the country, and this is not a problem quickly. The public must also be patient while continuing to monitor	Maybe The government should show Focus. If If the karhutla problem is not resolved, there must be a focus being developed.	Optimistic and trusting. The public still needs to patient, waiting, and aware of Performance the community.
	President They did not show seriousness or greater concern for the conditions on the ground and the victims.	The government must be alert and accept as well as showing concern With Field Action.	Pessimistic. The government's statement is strange, seems joking, taking this big issue lightly.
	The government seems to care and has done its best. If there is a sentence with a joking impression, maybe it is only for lightening the atmosphere.	It was appropriate. The government already understood the risks and the president gave quite good direction. Maybe in the future Regarding program efficiency.	The government has taken it seriously and encouraged it. Then the government wants the public is confident with This slow effort.

Table 4. Assessment of Government Public Communication Quality Amid Forest and Land Fire Situations Generation Z (Born 2000 – 2008)

Generation Group	**Interpretation of the Statement**	**Ideal Statement Alternatives**	**Public Perspective**
	Government The region responds only from a personal perspective without making a real contribution.	Government officials must to make statements based on facts and motivate all sectors of society.	report pessimistic with statement that in Withdraw, trust in the government decreases.
Generation Z (Born 2000 - 2008)	The government's statement is considered inconsistent with the logic and facts that actually occurred.	Orders should be more logical, uncover facts, and provide solutions.	report very pessimistic with government performance.
	President no reflects concern for the affected community. The government is considered unable to assess the field conditions and unable to provide	The government must be wiser and provide greater empathy and then issue a message based on facts and data.	Government statement only cause new criticism without solution the right one.

	solutions besides sacrificing the community.		
	Government They appear indifferent and indifferent to the impact of forest and land fires.	In addition give solution, government necessary pay attention more on social risk.	The government is considered not ready to tackle forest and land fire disasters and only causing disappointment.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that differences between generations in receiving government public communication during forest and land fire situations do not stop at the channels and how often information is received, but extend to how informants assess what is called good communication. The following discussion interprets the findings in Table 1.1 through Table

Thematically, relate it to the literature, then formulate theoretical contributions and practical implications.

Technology Usage Bias Affects the Intensity of Information Reception

Among Generation Z, three out of four informants stated they encountered news about forest and land fires very often, and one informant said often, especially through TikTok, Instagram, and X (Table 1.2). Among Generations X and Y, the frequency was more varied, from very frequent to not very frequent, with channels centered on Instagram, Google News, WhatsApp groups, and information from people around them (Table 1.1). Instagram became the meeting point for both groups, while TikTok and X only appeared among Generation Z, and interpersonal relationships only appeared among Generations X and Y.

Differentiation of Statement Meanings

Among Generations X and Y, the reading of government statements is divided: two out of four informants are optimistic and trusting, while the other two are critical or pessimistic (Table 2.1). Optimistic informants believe the government has done its best and the public needs to be patient while monitoring. Critical informants assess that the government is less responsive and shows less concern for victims. Among Generation Z, all four informants read the statement critically: not in line with logic and facts, without real contribution, lack empathy, and lack readiness (Table 2.2).

Optimistic reading approaches dominant reading, which is accepting the intended meaning of the sender. Critical reading but still holding hope for improvement approaches negotiation reading, while rejection of statement credibility approaches opposition reading. This research pattern shows that Generations X and Y occupy these three positions, while Generation Z accumulates in opposition positions.

Relevance of Intergenerational Threats

Generation X and Y informants described physical and daily impacts: anxiety about health risks, reduced visibility, outdoor activities obstructed, and air is difficult to clean (Table 1.1). Conversely, the impacts mentioned by Generation Z mostly include declining air quality and changes in academic activities such as distance learning, and one informant stated they did not feel the direct impact but felt empathy for the victims (Table 1.2).

This difference supports Mannheim's (1952) idea that social experiences shaped by generational positions influence how people interpret the world. However, he also showed that threat relevance is influenced by social position, for example, students whose activities are regulated by campuses, and

not solely by age. In this study, "generation" is mixed with social roles, so the differences found need to be read as differences in both generational position and social position.

Government Public Communication Quality Standards

The ideal statement column shows the most informative differences. Generation X and Y informants emphasize sympathy and empathy, real care through field actions, appreciation for the people who help, and not underestimating disasters, no matter how small (Table 2.1). Generation Z informants emphasize the alignment of messages with facts, data, and logic, accompanied by solutions as well as empathy and attention to social risks (Table 2.2). Three out of four Generation Z informants explicitly mention facts, data, or logic as measures, while Generations X and Y prioritize attitudes and concern for officials.

This shows differences in credibility assessment criteria, namely relational and affective among Generations X and Y, as well as evidence-based belief levels among Generation Z, and not just differences in trust levels. This direction is consistent with a survey in Europe that did not find differences in media trust levels between generations, but found that trust-related factors work differently across generations. Similarities also emerged: one Generation X and Y informant and one Generation Z informant both stated that government statements only provoked new criticism. Here, fatigue with messages without resolution is evident, crossing generational boundaries. These findings align with the idea that framing messages and trust determine the effectiveness of risk communication (Paek & Hove, 2024)

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze how people from different generations accept and interpret government statements about forest and land fires and how these differences in reception relate to their responses. This study concludes that people from different generations accept and interpret government statements about forest and land fires differently, especially in assessing communication quality. Generation X and Y informants are exposed to information with varying frequencies through Instagram, WhatsApp, and surrounding networks, assess messages through the concern and concrete actions of officials, and are divided between optimism and critical. Generation Z informants are very frequently exposed through TikTok, Instagram, and X, assessing messages based on their alignment with facts, data, and logic, and are overall pessimistic or disappointed. These differences in acceptance are evident in cognitive responses (trust, doubt, or rejection) and affective responses (optimism, disappointment), while behavioral responses are still limited to reduced activity and changes in academic activities. Because the sample is small and generations are mixed with social roles, these findings are exploratory.

For the government, it is recommended to develop forest and land fire communication that combines empathy and evidence: showing concern and presence in the field, while also opening data and aligning statements with the conditions experienced by residents, through channels that suit the habits of each group. Officials also need to be careful with the tone of messages so that they do not is read as lack of seriousness. For future research, it is recommended to enlarge and balance the sample, clearly state locations and periods, test differences in credibility assessment criteria with mixed designs or surveys, control for social roles and direct experience, and explore real behavioral responses after citizens receive government statements.

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