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WHERE DOES ATTENTION GO WHEN ONE PLATFORM SHUTS DOWN? A STUDY OF CROSS-PLATFORM MIGRATION IN GENERATION Z

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Abstract *This study investigates the redirection of attention among Indonesian Generation Z when access to a social media platform is lost for a day, utilizing a "one day without a platform" experimental design. Guided by Madianou and Miller's Polymedia Theory, which conceptualizes medium selection as a communicative act embedded with social, emotional, and relational significance, the research employed a collaborative multi-autoethnographic method involving eight Indonesian university students who voluntarily abstained from one of their daily platforms. Thematic analysis was conducted using the walking-through, going-along, and scrolling-back procedures outlined by Møller and Robards. Three principal findings emerged: first, attention was not reduced but redirected to platforms with similar formats, maintaining overall content consumption; second, WhatsApp functioned as an indispensable relational channel when visual platforms such as TikTok and Instagram were inaccessible, even facilitating the strengthening of relationships; third, the diversity of responses across social networks indicates that attention shifts also serve as indicators of relationship types. These results extend Polymedia Theory beyond voluntary interpersonal communication to encompass scenarios of platform access termination due to policy or research interventions, with implications for digital competence, platform governance, and the methodological design of digital media research targeting youth.*

Keyword:
Polymedia, attention migration, generation z, response inconsistency, Indonesia

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1. Introduction

In today's digital ecosystem, attention has become one of the most valuable—and most contested—resources. Generation Z, frequently labeled digital natives because they were born between 1997 and 2012 (Ninčević & Vukelić, 2025; Szabó et al., 2021), is right at the center of this struggle. Various studies have noted their distinctive characteristics: multitasking capacities that surpass previous generations, a liking for short, visual content and customized audiovisuals (Afifah & Kuntari, 2025; Utami & Putu, 2025), and a quickness in adapting to algorithmic recommendations. In Indonesia, research during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube became the mainstays of Generation Z for daily

communication, while TikTok plus Instagram emerged as key platforms for individual expression and personal branding (Erwin et al., 2023; Utami & Putu, 2025; Sikumbang et al., 2024).

These characteristics create a significant structural dependence on algorithm-driven visual platforms. As a result, when a platform is restricted or shut down—whether due to government regulations, such as the Indonesian government's restriction of TikTok Shop, or major algorithmic changes—users' attention shifts rapidly. Key research questions include the destination of this redirected attention, the speed of the shift, and the transformation of users' relational structures during the transition. If attention shifts occur purely mechanically between applications, the phenomenon may be considered technical. However, if these shifts are mediated by relational, emotional, and moral factors, a more comprehensive conceptual framework is required for analysis.

Cross-platform migration is not a new phenomenon within digital communication studies. Edwards and Boellstorff documented the 2018 "Tumblrpocalypse" as an example of a digital exodus triggered by platform policy changes. Other research has analyzed patterns of user migration from Twitter to Mastodon and found that migrations occur repeatedly and are influenced by the social networks brought to the new platform (Jeong, Nirmal, et al., 2024; Jeong, Sheth, et al., 2024). In early 2025, TikTok's global restrictions even triggered a massive migration to Xiaohongshu/RedNote, as documented by several researchers (Lin, 2025; Yan et al., 2025; Ying et al., 2025).

Conceptually, the current discussion on platform migration is determined by three main perspectives. First, *platform evacuation* frames migration as a collective event charged with activism and community renegotiation. Second, *eventful migration* stresses the role of political momentum and actor X in driving mass migration. Third, *digital disconnective practice* views migration as a particular form of action that is not used in a socially distributed manner. All three enrich the systematic understanding of platform migration, but none has explicitly used Madianou and Miller's polymedia theory as a relational scalpel.

In fact, polymedia theory is highly relevant here. This theory argues that in a plentiful communication environment, users no longer treat each platform as a separate entity, but rather as a unified communicative environment. For Madianou and Miller, choosing a medium is not simply a technical decision, but a relational, emotional, and moral act—someone who sends an email instead of an instant message is communicating intimacy; someone who chooses a short visual platform instead of a lengthy text is expressing spontaneity. This idea has since evolved: Madianou expanded it into the concept of *polymedia life*, Tagg and Lyons formulated the *polymedia repertoire*, and Jansson offered *polymedia distinctions*. In Indonesia, this theory has been used by Putri et al. to examine the communication between working women and their husbands who live far away.

The research gap is becoming increasingly apparent as short-form video platforms form what Graciyal and Ranjini call a cross-platform ecosystem that facilitates binge-watching, and as studies in Indonesia show that fast-scrolling algorithms on platforms such as TikTok reinforce compulsive behavior that leads to emotional distress in users. While research on platform use by Indonesia's Generation Z is quite extensive (Afifah & Kuntari, 2025; Erwin et al., 2023; Utami & Putu, 2025; Sikumbang et al., 2024; Suwana et al., 2020), studies specifically exploring where their attention moves when one platform is temporarily shut down remain limited. Slametno, for example, uncovers the communication paradox of Generation Z—digitally connected yet often emotionally lonely—without addressing the platform restriction scenario. Meanwhile, Rastati, Martha et al., and Simbolon et al. pointed out the importance of digital competence for Generation Z in Indonesia. Still, they did not explicitly define how this literacy operates during migration.

Furthermore, the question remains open: does the shift in attention among Generation Z have an affirmative effect as a repository of attention, or does it actually widen the paradoxical gap in digital connections? This question remains unanswered.

This study intends to address three knowledge gaps. First, there is no empirical mapping of where Indonesian Generation Z's attention moves when a platform is temporarily shut down for a day. Second, the mechanisms of substitution and migration across platforms—and their effects on media consumption behavior—have not been fully identified in the Indonesian literature. Third, the role of social media as a relational infrastructure, considering friendship networks and physical habits in interactions on the platform, still requires empirical testing.

The benefits of this research are expected to extend across theoretical, practical, and methodological dimensions. Theoretically, by situating Indonesian Generation Z's attention migration within Madianou and Miller's polymedia framework and its subsequent elaborations (Madianou, 2021; Tagg & Lyons, 2021; Jansson, 2015), the study is expected to refine the relational interpretation of cross-platform movement in a non-Western, mobile-first digital culture—an analytical view that the existing perspectives of *platform evacuation*, *eventful migration*, and *digital disconnective practice* have not fully elaborated when read alongside the *attention economy* (Kossowska et al., 2023; Michel & Gandon, 2024). Practically, the findings are expected to inform platform designers, digital marketers, communication practitioners, and educators by illustrating how Indonesian Generation Z negotiates attention redirection in algorithm-saturated environments, as well as to provide policy-relevant insights for media-literacy programs, digital-well-being initiatives, and platform-governance frameworks that respond to the paradox of being digitally connected yet emotionally isolated. Methodologically, the study is expected to offer a replicable analytical framework that integrates relational, emotional, and moral dimensions into the empirical study of attention migration. In terms of expected results, this study is anticipated to produce: an empirical map of how Indonesian Generation Z's attention redistributes when a platform is temporarily suspended; a set of substitution and migration mechanisms articulated through polymedia theory that explain variations in media-consumption behavior; and an assessment of how social media continues to function as relational infrastructure in sustaining friendship networks and embodied interaction habits during cross-platform transitions.

Based on this background, this study intends to: first, describe the patt accordingly, this study aims to: describe the patterns of attention migration across platforms among Indonesian Generation Z when a social media platform is removed or temporarily suspended; identify the mechanisms of substitution and migration, along with their consequences for media consumption behavior; and examine the role of social media as relational infrastructure, particularly the extent to which inconsistent social responses serve as markers of relationship types. The primary conceptual framework is Madianou and Miller's polymedia theory, supported by the concepts of *polymedia life*, *polymedia repertoire*, and *polymedia distinctions*. Complementary perspectives, including *platform evacuation*, *eventful migration*, *digital disconnective practice*, and the *attention economy* (Kossowska et al., 2023; Michel & Gandon, 2024), are employed to interpret migration as a multi-layered phenomenon.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

A qualitative approach using a collaborative multi-autoethnographic design, a variant of participatory autoethnography in which a group of individuals alternately act as both researcher and research subject. This design was chosen based on the nature of the event under study: "one

day without a single platform," which is intimate and a direct response to daily habits. External observation tends to miss the details of lived experience that are fundamental to this phenomenon. Furthermore, this strategy provides intimate data access to the subjects, as demonstrated in a virtual ethnographic study of Generation Z communication (Slametno, 2025).

Generation Z refers to the demographic cohort that follows the Millennials and is generally characterized as the first generation to grow up entirely within a digital and internet-saturated environment. According to Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics, the age range of Generation Z is defined as 14–29 years, a demographic boundary that reflects BPS's national statistical reporting. Although the BPS framework places Gen Z within the 14–29 age span, the present study deliberately narrows its participant age range to 19–24 years for three methodological reasons. First, this study is embedded in Diponegoro University, where the majority of active undergraduate students fall within the 19–24 bracket, allowing the research site and the participant profile to remain theoretically consistent. Second, individuals in this age group are typically situated in late emerging adulthood—a developmental phase marked by intensive social-media experimentation, peer-dependency formation, and relational negotiation through digital platforms—which is precisely the life-stage window the study aims to observe. Third, the 19–24 range produces a more homogeneous cohort with respect to life-stage demands (early career formation, friendship-network reliance, and digital-habit consolidation), thereby reducing intra-group variability that would otherwise emerge from including 14–18-year-olds (still engaged in secondary education) or 25–29-year-olds (transitioning into the labor market). Hence, although narrower than the BPS definition of 14–29, the 19–24 segmentation is operationalized as a purposeful refinement tailored to the university's student population and to the phenomenon of cross-platform attention migration.

The study participants were eight active students in the Social Anthropology Department of Diponegoro University—four women and four men—aged 19–24, thus all falling within the Generation Z category (Ninčević & Vukelić, 2025; Szabó et al., 2021). They had all been active users of at least three social media platforms daily for the past two years, with WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok as their favorite combination. Recruitment was conducted purposively through researchers' friendship networks, while still paying attention to gender variations, study disciplines, and intensity of platform use.

2.2 Data Collection: The “One Day Without a Platform” Experiment

The experiment was conducted individually and in staggered shifts over a two-week period (November 10–23, 2025), a deliberate strategy to ensure accurate record-keeping and prevent the transfer of experiences among participants. Each participant independently selected which platform to abstain from for a full 24 hours. The selections included three participants leaving TikTok, three leaving Instagram, two leaving X, and one abstaining from streaming sites, resulting in data that captured a range of migration trajectories.

Data collection followed three procedures adapted from Møller and Robards (2019). First, in the "walking through" phase, participants documented their feelings and thoughts during moments when they would typically access the app but refrained from doing so. Second, the "going along" phase involved recording bodily habits—such as gestures, sitting positions, and waiting times—that persisted in the absence of the usual platform. Third, in the "scrolling back" phase, participants retrospectively reflected at the end of the day on their usage patterns of alternative platforms that served as replacements. After the 24-hour experiment, each participant composed a reflective note of 1,000–1,500 words.

To enhance trustworthiness, three triangulation procedures were employed. Participants engaged in peer debriefing by reviewing and commenting on each other's reflective notes. A 60-minute focus group discussion was conducted following the experiment to validate observed patterns. Additionally, analysis results were returned to all participants for member checking, ensuring alignment between researchers' interpretations and participants' experiences.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis combined thematic analysis and platform mapping with the walking-through, going-along, and scrolling-back methods adopted by Møller and Robards (2019). The process was gradual: beginning with familiarization with the multi-subject narrative data, followed by open coding of units of attention migration experiences, then selective coding for similar themes such as format-convertibility, relational-relocation, and embodied-moderated withdrawal, and concluding with cross-checking with relevant secondary sources, as conducted by Purboningsih et al. (2023) and Waseso and Wibowo (2026).

The coding process itself was developed iteratively. The two principal researchers first conducted open coding separately on all data and reflective narratives, then compared and discussed the results to establish consistency and bridge differences in interpretation. Each main theme was decided through discussion until consensus was reached, with periodic reviews with other group members as initial validation of the emerging categories. Intercoder reliability was examined by comparing coding conformity across randomly selected data portions, while an audit trail was documented to guarantee transparency of every analytical decision.

The platform mapping followed the recommendations of Cusnir (2025), who views interface design as a constituent of diverse perceptual experiences, and Braun and Mateus (2024), who emphasize the need for critical reflection regarding TikTok's algorithm. Costa do Nascimento et al. (2022) and Forberg and Schilt (2023) provide additional methodological guidance about selecting a digital ethnographic framework appropriate to the research object—guidance that informs the selection of collaborative multi-autoethnography as the most appropriate method for the phenomenon of attention migration inherent in the subject's body and social network.

2.4 Ethical Issues

Before the experiment began, all participants signed informed consent forms. Participants' identities were anonymized using the code names Subject A through Subject H, and all reflective notes were stored on an encrypted device and not shared outside the research team. Furthermore, the experiment was designed to be completely voluntary; participants could withdraw from the experiment at any time without external pressure.

3. Result and Discussion

A thematic analysis of eight participants' reflective accounts yielded three main themes that summarize the essence of Indonesian Generation Z's attention migration experiences during the "one day without a platform" experiment. These three themes are discussed separately using Madianou and Miller's (2013) polymedia theory as the main framework, along with several relevant complementary perspectives.

The use of Polymedia Theory as the principal analytical lens rests on the assumption articulated by Madianou and Miller (2013) that, in a saturated communicative environment, individual platforms are no longer treated as isolated entities but as an integrated continuum in which each medium carries relational, emotional, and moral weight. Accordingly, the three

themes generated from the thematic analysis are not presented as descriptive summaries but interpreted through distinct strands of the polymedia framework so that each theme acquires theoretical depth rather than empirical breadth alone.

3.1 Cross-Platform Substitution Mediated by Format Similarity

The first finding shows that the closure of one platform did not decrease participants' total digital content consumption. Instead, attention moved to other platforms with similar formats. When TikTok shut down, focus moved to TikTok Reels and YouTube Shorts; when Instagram shut down, focus moved to Snapchat Discover and X. In the first hours after the shutdown, total consumption even tended to increase, motivated by curiosity and compulsive behavior to fill the void left by the platform's inaccessibility.

Subject F (21 years old, Yogyakarta) described his experience candidly: "*Strangely, when TikTok shut down, I actually opened YouTube Shorts more often. Not because I liked it, but because my brain was looking for similar things.*" Similarly, Subject H (22 years old, Jakarta) admitted that he "*didn't feel like he was missing anything*" because Reels provided a nearly identical sensation to TikTok—what was missing was the variety of creators, not the consumption structure (Annabell & Abidin, 2026; Ying et al., 2025).

This finding directly confirms the core proposition of Polymedia theory: in a media-abundant environment, platforms do not exist in isolation, but rather form a convergent ecosystem (Madianou & Miller, 2013). As Madianou and Miller (2013) assert, "*what cannot be achieved by email can be accomplished by webcam, instant messaging, or a phone call*"—when one medium is unavailable, users automatically re-navigate their polymedia repertoire to continue fulfilling their communicative goals. Tagg and Lyons' (2021) concept of the polymedia repertoire helps explain this mechanism. Once one repertoire element (e.g., TikTok) disappears, users quickly modify their repertoire by activating other elements that have been dormant or rarely used.

One aspect is worth highlighting: the substitution is format-based, not feature-based. Participants do not seek platforms with identical features, but rather platforms with similar "sensory forms"—short vertical formats, infinite scrolling, and recommendation algorithms based on ephemeral popularity. This pattern is consistent with the attention economy perspectives of Michel and Gandon (2024) and Kossowska et al. (2023), which suggest that algorithms are intended to capture the attention of "homeless" users. For decision-makers, this finding carries an important message: regulations that restrict only one platform without understanding the comparable algorithmic ecosystem tend to shift attention, rather than reduce consumption overall (Tkacz et al., 2025).

This finding also reveals another interesting aspect: shifting attention is not an autonomous individual act, but rather a process of polymediation mediated by networks of friends. Subject B (20 years old, Bandung) recounted that for the first three hours after TikTok was shut down, he "*did nothing*"—not because he was calm, but because he didn't know where to turn. Only after consulting a class discussion in a WhatsApp group was he "directed" to YouTube Shorts. Subject B's narrative emphasized that in the Generation Z polymedia ecosystem, the speed of finding a replacement platform is highly dependent on one's network of friends (Madianou, 2021; Tagg & Lyons, 2021)—a stratification pattern consistent with Jansson's (2015) concept of polymedia distinctions: medium choice is never free from social stratification.

The implication for Generation Z digital literacy remains the significance of grasping that cross-platform substitution is not always safe, as similar algorithms do not necessarily have the same moderation governance (Martha et al., 2024; Rastati, 2018; Simbolon et al., 2025). Rastati

(2018) suggests that media literacy for Generation Z is most effectively delivered through short videos and positive influencers, while Simbolon et al. (2025) point out the importance of digital correspondence training that includes an understanding of algorithms. This study recommends that digital competence modules be expanded to include "platform navigation skills," namely the ability to read, understand, and make critical decisions when moving between platforms.

3.2 WhatsApp as a Non-Negotiable Relational Channel

The second finding emphasizes something unexpected: WhatsApp's dominant role as a relational infrastructure when other platforms are shut down. Instead of immediately switching to other visual platforms, many participants actually increased their WhatsApp usage once access to TikTok, Instagram, or X was cut off—whether via private chats, group chats, or voice messages. Subject C (23, Bandung) put it this way: "*When I can't watch Reels, I chat with my friends. Chatting on WhatsApp helps a lot because I feel like they understand me, unlike my social media feeds, which are filled with strangers*." Subject D (24, Jakarta), meanwhile, shared that "*suddenly WhatsApp became busy*"—two of his friends sent voice messages simply "checking in," something they rarely did before.

This finding greatly enhances Polymedia Theory. Madianou and Miller (2013) argue that choosing a medium is not a technical decision, but rather a relational, emotional, and moral one. In the context of this research, WhatsApp—as a medium based on text and voice messaging—appeared as a "non-negotiable" choice when visual platforms were shut down. The term "non-negotiable" needs to be understood carefully: it doesn't mean that participants had no other options—they could have communicated via Instagram DM, Telegram, or LINE—but rather that choosing WhatsApp was a no-brainer, as this medium has become the relational baseline for Indonesian Generation Z (Putri et al., 2023). Tagg and Lyons' (2021) concept of the polymedia repertoire helps explain this: WhatsApp was the most stable, most frequently used, and most understood element of the repertoire by participants. So it's natural that it became the safest choice when other elements of the repertoire were disrupted.

Another interesting point: what increased wasn't only the quantity of relationships, but their quality. Subject G (19 years old, Yogyakarta) wrote, "*Usually I only reply to WhatsApp chats when it's urgent, but because I can't scroll TikTok, I end up actually chatting with friends, discussing random things I don't usually talk about*." This means that attention migration isn't automatically productive in terms of content consumption. Still, it can be relationally productive—it opens up space for types of communication that have previously been unable to compete with the infinite scroll algorithm on visual platforms. Annabell and Abidin's (2026) perspective on platform evacuation is relevant here: platform closures don't just create a void but additionally create new relational spaces that cannot be replaced algorithmically. As Tkacz et al. (2025) emphasize, migrations triggered by external events often result in behavioral transformations that are beyond expectations.

These data also give empirical support for studies of private communication in Indonesia. Putri et al. (2023) demonstrated how polymedia enabled working women to manage long-distance relationships with their husbands through the choice of media rich with relational meaning. This study expands on these conclusions: in the context of attention migration, private messaging spaces like WhatsApp become even more important because they are not subject to the infinite scroll algorithm. Subject A (22 years old, Jakarta) beautifully summarized this thought: "*That day I understood that WhatsApp wasn't just an app, it was a place where I felt safe. I could open and close other platforms, but WhatsApp was always there*."

Ultimately, this second theme demonstrates that Generation Z's polymedia repertoire possesses a hierarchy of mediums—not simply a collection of equal options (Jansson, 2015). Thanks to its baseline characteristics, WhatsApp functions as a non-negotiable relational pathway, a kind of "social safety net" when other visual platforms are unavailable (Madianou & Miller, 2013). The pragmatic implications are clear: policymakers restricting platforms need to be aware that such decisions not only reduce content consumption, but also have the potential to shift interpersonal communication behaviors to more private and intimate mediums—with all the consequences, both positive (depth of relationships) and negative (limited public visibility).

3.3 Inconsistency of Social Responses as a Marker of Relationship Type

The third finding was simultaneously the most poignant and the most nuanced: it turns out that not everyone in the participants' social networks reacted to their absence from the closed platform. The response was far from uniform—only a handful commented, sent messages, or asked questions, while the majority remained silent. Subject E (21, Yogyakarta) wrote bitterly: "*I opened my Instagram account 24 hours later, and only three people liked it, and one DM asked why I wasn't active, even though I have around 800 followers*."

Similar accounts came from other participants. Subject C reflected, "*The lack of questions or responses regarding my absence suggests that one's presence on Instagram is often symbolic and doesn't always have strong social meaning*." Subject A noted that only "*my close friends*" expressed concern by sending direct messages to inquire about her whereabouts. Meanwhile, for Subject F, the "passive" response from most followers actually confirmed that their relationship had been "*limited to enjoying content, not truly getting to know each other*." In other words, the shift in attention from visual platforms to WhatsApp resulted in an organic "filtering" of the social network: those who truly cared would proactively seek out content via WhatsApp, while those who didn't would remain on the same visual platform.

This is perhaps the purest implementation of Polymedia Theory in this study's overall analysis. The inconsistency of social responses directly demonstrates that platforms are not simply "places where we present ourselves," but rather mediums where types of relationships are implicitly communicated and negotiated (Madianou & Miller, 2013). Madianou and Miller (2013) emphasized from the outset that medium choice in polymedia carries social, emotional, and moral consequences—and in this context, those consequences are revealed precisely at the moment when one medium is unavailable: when the structures of expression typically supported by engagement algorithms suddenly collapse (Jansson, 2015; Tagg & Lyons, 2021).

Furthermore, these findings deepen our understanding of how digital social networks operate: they are not homogeneous structures but collections of micro-networks with varying depths of relationships. Shifting attention becomes a moment when these differences in relationship depth are clearly revealed. Subject B's reflection summarizes this: "*That day I learned who are real friends and who are just followers. Most of my followers are not friends. They like my content, not me.*"

There's also another unexpected dimension: bodily habits and spatial variables. Subject H shared that when he couldn't watch TikTok, he found himself sitting at the family dinner table more often and focusing more on face-to-face conversations at home. Subject D added that his increased use of WhatsApp led him to listen to voice messages more frequently in public spaces—on the bus, in the cafeteria, in waiting rooms—until a new spatial awareness emerged that "*the platform isn't separate from my body; it's inside my body*." Ittefaq's (2025) perspective on digital disconnective practices resonates here: not using a particular platform is not merely a rational decision, but also an embodied practice that reshapes the user's presence in the domestic space.

These findings also resonate with other studies. Syahfran et al.'s (2026) study of the adaptation of Minangkabau migrants in Bekasi demonstrated that intercultural communication via text messaging plays a significant role in maintaining identity and kinship networks in the diaspora—a structure similar to the findings of this study: WhatsApp serves as a medium for maintaining important relationships as the medial environment changes (Putri et al., 2023). Furthermore, these findings touch on the concept of public space in the Habermas tradition of thought (Haikal et al., 2026). Haikal et al. (2026) argue that the colonization of the lifeworld in the digital age demands a rereading through Habermas's lens (Haikal et al., 2026), while Kruse et al. (2018) show that social media often serves as a space that does not fully support political deliberation—but rather is rife with performative and affective interactions. The findings of this study actually strengthen this argument: the inconsistent response to absence on visual platforms demonstrates that the digital public sphere is not a stable deliberative space, but rather a performative space where "presence" functions more as a symbol. Within this framework, participants' shift of attention to WhatsApp can be read as a "shift to a more intimate public space"—not a deliberative public space (Haikal et al., 2026; Kruse et al., 2018), but rather a relational public space that operates on the logic of "who proactively seeks us out," not "who scrolls through our content" (Putri et al., 2023).

Finally, these findings offer practical contributions for platform designers and digital literacy educators in Indonesia. First, notification systems and engagement algorithms on visual platforms never reflect the true depth of relationships—they only reflect the intensity of content consumption. Second, national digital literacy educators can instill in adolescents the understanding that "a large following" does not automatically mean a "strong community"—and that the true relational infrastructure lies in private messaging platforms like WhatsApp, not in algorithm-driven visual platforms (Badri, 2022; Juhaidi et al., 2023; Martha et al., 2024; Rastati, 2018; Simbolon et al., 2025). Badri (2022) notes that Indonesia's Generation Z already has a moderate digital communication skills profile; this study suggests expanding this profile with one more skill: the ability to distinguish performative from substantive relationships.

4. Conclusion

This study addressed three research objectives: to describe the patterns of attention migration across platforms among Indonesian Generation Z when a social media platform is removed or temporarily suspended; to identify the mechanisms of substitution and migration, along with their consequences for media consumption behavior; and to examine the role of social media as relational infrastructure, particularly the extent to which inconsistent social responses serve as markers of relationship types. Guided by polymedia theory (Madianou & Miller, 2013) as the primary framework, strengthened by polymedia life (Madianou, 2021), polymedia repertoire (Tagg & Lyons, 2021), and polymedia distinctions (Jansson, 2015), and complemented by perspectives on platform evacuation (Annabell & Abidin, 2026), eventful migration (Tkacz et al., 2025), digital disconnective practice (Ittefaq, 2025), and the attention economy (Kossowska et al., 2023; Michel & Gandon, 2024), the study's three principal findings answer each objective in turn.

The first objective is answered by an empirical mapping of where attention moves when a platform becomes inaccessible. Attention migration does not follow a singular pattern: rather than being reduced or mechanically reallocated, attention is redirected to platforms with similar sensory formats — when TikTok was closed, participants moved to Reels and YouTube Shorts; when Instagram was closed, they moved to Snapchat Discover and X. This confirms the central proposition of polymedia theory that platforms are not separate entities but a single,

interconnected communicative ecosystem (Madianou & Miller, 2013), while filling the empirical gap identified at the outset: no previous study had mapped where Indonesian Generation Z's attention moves during a one-day platform shutdown.

The second objective — identifying the mechanisms of substitution and migration and their consequences for media consumption — is answered through two mechanisms. The first is substitution based on format similarity rather than feature similarity, whereby participants activate dormant elements of their polymedia repertoire, so that total content consumption does not decline but merely shifts (Madianou, 2021; Tagg & Lyons, 2021). The second is the consolidation of attention in WhatsApp as a non-negotiable relational pathway and social safety net when visual platforms are disrupted, showing that Generation Z's polymedia repertoire contains a hierarchy of mediums — with private messaging as its baseline — rather than a collection of equal options (Madianou, 2021; Putri et al., 2023; Tagg & Lyons, 2021). The consequence for media consumption behavior is thus twofold: consumption is sustained across formats, while relational communication that previously could not compete with infinite scroll gains new space within private messaging.

The third objective is answered by the finding that inconsistent social responses function as markers of relationship types. The uneven reactions to participants' absences — only a handful of followers inquired while the majority remained silent — indicate that platforms operate as systems of relational stratification, and that attention shifts constitute the most honest moments for observing who truly cares and who is merely consuming content (Jansson, 2015; Madianou & Miller, 2013; Syahfran et al., 2026). Social media therefore continues to operate as relational infrastructure, but unevenly: it sustains close relationships through private channels while reducing more distant ties to symbolic presence.

Taken together, the study's overall contribution is threefold. Theoretically, it extends polymedia theory beyond voluntary interpersonal communication to attention migration triggered by research decisions, regulations, or systemic events; in such scenarios, the proposition that medium choice is a relational, emotional, and moral act not only remains valid but becomes more precise, and "social response inconsistency" is offered as an operational indicator of relationship type that complements polymedia distinctions. Practically, the findings speak to three parties: for policymakers, restricting one platform without addressing the corresponding algorithmic ecosystem will only shift attention rather than reduce consumption (Michel & Gandon, 2024; Tkacz et al., 2025); for digital literacy educators, teaching modules should incorporate "platform navigation skills" as an extension of the four pillars of digital literacy proposed by Simbolon et al. and reinforced by Rastati and Martha et al. — including the ability to read algorithms, the awareness that a large following does not automatically mean a strong community, and the ability to distinguish deliberative from relational public spaces (Badri, 2022; Haikal et al., 2026; Juhaidi et al., 2023; Kruse et al., 2018); and for platform designers and creative industries, losing an audience means losing a relational ecosystem, so retention strategies must rebuild those relationships through the right medium, because in Generation Z's polymedia ecosystem, relationship depth is determined not by algorithms but by who seeks us out after we disappear (Madianou & Miller, 2013; Syahfran et al., 2026). Methodologically, the study offers a replicable analytical framework that integrates relational, emotional, and moral dimensions into the empirical study of attention migration.

The study nonetheless has limitations. The small number of participants — eight university students — limits generalizability, although the design prioritized depth over breadth. The experiment was also a voluntary simulation, so participants' experiences may differ from those who face a state-imposed lockdown without an opt-out option. Furthermore, participants

were university students with relatively high digital literacy (Badri, 2022; Juhaidi et al., 2023; Rastati, 2018), so the findings may not reflect Indonesia's more socioculturally diverse Generation Z. Future research could involve more diverse educational and occupational backgrounds and adopt a longitudinal design to monitor attention migration during a real platform shutdown.

In conclusion, for Indonesia's Generation Z, attention shifts following a platform shutdown do not follow a singular pattern: attention migrates through shared algorithmic formats, consolidates within private messaging spaces as essential relational infrastructure, and functions as an indicator of relationship types within social networks. Polymedia theory has demonstrated its effectiveness as a framework for analyzing this phenomenon as a complex and dynamic communicative practice within Indonesia's digital media landscape.

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