

# NYIMAK

## Journal of Communication

Nyimak Journal of Communication | Vol. 10 | No. 1 | Pages 1 - 274 | March 2026 | ISSN 2580-3808



Published By:  
Department of Communication Science  
Faculty of Social and Political Science  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang

**Journal Address**

Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik

UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH TANGERANG

Jl. Perintis Kemerdekaan I No. 33 Kota Tangerang, Banten 15118

Website : <http://jurnal.umt.ac.id/index.php/nyimak>

Email : [journalnyimak@fisipumt.ac.id](mailto:journalnyimak@fisipumt.ac.id)

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## Journal of Communication

### DAFTAR ISI (TABLE OF CONTENT)

Fulfillment of Local Content in The Era of Democratization and Digitalization In West Java — <b>Ahsani Taqwim Aminuddin, Tryan Nugraha</b> —	1 – 17
Dialogical Framing: A Content Analysis of National Online Media Coverage on the “Indonesia Gelap” Issue in 2025 — <b>Agus Priyanto, Sarah Ayu Putri Novaria, Husnaeni Fauziah Amani</b> —	18 – 40
Thick Description Analysis of Solo Keroncong Music as Indonesia’s Cultural Diplomacy — <b>Danis Sugiyanto, Denik Iswardani Witarti, Komarudin Subekti, Christophe Moure</b> —	41 – 65
Accommodation Strategies IN Cross-cultural Communication of Rohingya Ethnicity in Interacting with The Community of Pekanbaru City — <b>Ringgo Eldapi Yozani, Qori Gita Cahyani, Nova Yohana, Mutia Novela Sari, Tutut Ismi Wahidar, Riyanda Elsera Yozani</b> —	66 – 89
Marketing Communications Mix in Sabang Tourism Promotion: Interaction of Political and Multicultural Communication — <b>Rangga Saptya Mohamad Permana, Sri Seti Indriani, Lilis Puspitasari, Tito Quiling, Jnr.</b> —	90 – 117
Marketing Public Relations for Hospital Brand Awareness through Indonesian Cultural Communication — <b>Renata Anisa, Hanny Hafiar, Retasari Dewi, Yustikasari, Nguyen Tan Khang</b> —	118 – 137

Implementing Communication Networks in Developing the Smart Tourism Village of Dieng Wonosobo — <b>Rialdo Rezeky Manogari Lumban Toruan, Yos Horta Meliala, Eni Kardi Wiyati</b> —	138 – 172
Intercultural Health Communication in Islamic Medicine among Generation Z — <b>Rita Destiwati, Lucy Pujasari Supratman, Junardi Harahap, Wan Maryam Wan Ahmad Kamil</b> —	173 – 194
Framing Power in Japan’s Digital Sphere: A Corpus-Based Functional Approach — <b>Ketut Gede Adi Putra Laksana, Rohali, I Kadek Purnawan, Ni Di Ya</b> —	195 – 216
Strategic Da’wah Communication of Dewan Masjid Indonesia in Strengthening Religious Moderation at the Community Level — <b>Suharto Suharto, Hasriani Hasriani, Ardillah Abu, Halimah Abdul Manaf</b> —	217 – 248
Media Landscape Subculture in the Society 5.0: Case Study on Indonesia Urban Toys Scene — <b>Rani Chandra Oktaviani, Donna Asteria, Niken Febrina Ernungtyas</b> —	249 – 274

## Intercultural Health Communication in Islamic Medicine among Generation Z

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### ABSTRACT

*Islamic medical content circulating on social media plays a significant role in shaping Generation Z's understanding and acceptance of health practices. However, Research on spirituality-based medicine and digital health literacy in shaping Generation Z's intercultural communication when accessing thibbun Nabawi therapists, religious leaders, or health influencers remains limited. This study aims to explore how spirituality and digital literacy influence Generation Z's decisions to engage in Islamic medical practices in Indonesia and Malaysia. Employing a comparative qualitative approach, the study involved six Generation Z informants aged 17 to 24, consisting of three participants from Bandung, Indonesia, and three participants from Malaysia, each with prior experience using Islamic medical practices. The findings indicate that Indonesian Generation Z engages with Islamic medicine mainly through family traditions and religious communities, whereas Malaysian Generation Z is influenced by institutional legitimacy and health campaigns integrating religious values with contemporary lifestyles. These results show that Islamic medical literacy extends beyond health behavior to identity formation, spirituality, and meaning making. Therefore, intercultural responsiveness and contextual sensitivity with digital health communication strategies are crucial for improving the effectiveness.*

*Keywords:* Intercultural, health communication, generation Z, Islam medical

### ABSTRAK

Konten pengobatan Islam yang beredar di media sosial memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk pemahaman dan penerimaan Generasi Z terhadap praktik kesehatan. Namun, penelitian mengenai pengobatan berbasis spiritual dan literasi kesehatan digital dalam membentuk komunikasi antarbudaya Generasi Z ketika mengakses terapis thibbun Nabawi, tokoh agama, dan influencer kesehatan masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana spiritualitas dan literasi digital memengaruhi keputusan Generasi Z dalam menggunakan praktik pengobatan Islam di Indonesia dan Malaysia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif komparatif, penelitian ini melibatkan enam informan Generasi Z berusia 17–24 tahun, yang terdiri atas tiga partisipan dari Bandung, Indonesia, dan tiga partisipan dari Malaysia, yang masing-masing memiliki pengalaman menggunakan pengobatan Islam. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Generasi Z di Indonesia lebih banyak terlibat dalam pengobatan Islam melalui tradisi keluarga dan komunitas keagamaan, sedangkan Generasi Z di Malaysia dipengaruhi oleh legitimasi institusional dan kampanye kesehatan yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai religius dengan gaya hidup kontemporer. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa literasi pengobatan Islam tidak hanya berkaitan dengan perilaku kesehatan, tetapi juga mencakup pembentukan identitas, spiritualitas,

**Submitted:** 2025-11-11

**Revised:** 2026-02-21

**Accepted:** 2026-03-05

**Available Online:** March 2026

**CITATION:** Destiwati, R., Supratman, L. P., Harahap, J., & Kamil, W. M. W. A. (2026). Intercultural Health Communication in Islamic Medicine among Generation Z. *Nyimak Journal of Communication*, 10(1), 173–194.



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dan pencarian makna. Oleh karena itu, responsivitas antarbudaya dan sensitivitas kontekstual dalam strategi komunikasi kesehatan digital menjadi krusial untuk meningkatkan efektivitas.

Kata Kunci: Antarbudaya, komunikasi kesehatan, generasi Z, pengobatan Islam

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## INTRODUCTION

Traditional medicine is a body of knowledge or practice in the health sector that has long been used from generation to generation. Broadly, this type of medicine is regarded as an alternative to Western medical treatment among Southeast Asian communities in general (Ahmad, 2002). As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has highly diverse religious cultures and practices. Religious beliefs, education, and access to information are other factors that influence the use of Islamic alternative medicine in Indonesia (Elshara, 2024). Local complementary and alternative medicine in Indonesia, from both health and economic perspectives, demonstrates that these practices remain relevant and play an important role in the public health system (Laksono et al., 2024). Within society, Islamic medicine commonly practiced includes ruqyah, cupping (*bekam*), the consumption of honey, and habbatussauda (Isdianto et al., 2025). However, Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, displays distinct pattern in understanding and adopting these practices in today's digital era. Some embrace and apply Islamic alternative medicine, while others prefer contemporary medical approaches (Wirautumi et al., 2025).

Speaking of the role of Generation Z, who are people who use modern technology, it turns out that among Generation Z, religious values are integrated into their lives and, of course, into their use of modern technology (Warisno et al., 2026). It turns out that Generation Z finds sources of peace and guidance for their health, especially the health of Generation Z, in religious values as a strategy for achieving mental health among Generation Z (Rahmawati & Fauji, 2025).

It is very interesting to see how Generation Z views traditional medicine and beliefs. It turns out that Generation Z still believes in traditional medicine despite being in the midst of modernization and globalization, which shows that the cultural adaptation process of the younger generation, who still have a strong sense of identity, is still ongoing (Isamudin et al., 2025).

Self-medication practices have been carried out in two countries with Muslim-majority populations, namely Indonesia and Malaysia, which utilize religious practices in faith-based medicine and the use of media. Generation Z particularly likes religious preaching in medicine

using media, and this is favored by Generation Z (Reyza et al., 2025). And when we consider that Generation Z are people who have very easy access to technology and can easily obtain information on various topics, including health issues, it is clear that Generation Z can easily obtain information on these matters (Hudha et al., 2024).

And it turns out that the Islamic spiritual approach to Generation Z can maintain the health, especially the mental health, of Generation Z in their lives and the challenges of modern life with the massive use of social media (Sari & Nasrulloh, 2026). Generation Z's use of digital social media shapes their perceptions of the sources they encounter, which are influenced by their digital literacy. This literacy plays a role in the dynamics of intercultural communication in the field of health communication in shaping the behavior of Generation Z. Of course, they also verify the information they obtain from the digital media they use. This is an interesting phenomenon for people in both Indonesia and Malaysia to observe.

Generation Z has brought about changes to the spirituality of Generation Z in relation to content in the digital age, which has brought Generation Z's spirituality closer to the use of digital media (Aspar & Said, 2025). It is also evident in how alternative medicine has attracted the attention of Generation Z, which has then influenced their perceptions (Kusuma & Prabayanti, 2022). One characteristic of Generation Z is that they are very familiar with digital media, which leads to extensive use of health information that they can easily access and which becomes their main source of information. Generation Z is a generation that is quick to learn about health literacy, which certainly allows them to obtain information quickly (Rosya et al., 2025). It turns out that globalization has played a role in shaping Generation Z's health practices. It is certainly interesting to see how Generation Z has been shaped by technology in health practices (Maharani et al., 2025).

Islamic-based treatments such as ruqyah bring spiritual comfort and health benefits and also have an impact on physical health (Isdianto et al., 2025). Religious-based treatments such as ruqyah, religious-based herbal medicine, and cupping have also gained popularity among Generation Z, which is conveyed through digital platforms (Nurhasanah, 2025). This shows that religion-based medicine has been accepted and provides aspects of medicine related to cross-cultural communication in health communication. This includes medicine that uses religious values that provide existing religious norms based on Islamic values. Of course, Indonesia, which has a Muslim majority population, and Malaysia also play a role in the religious practice of Islamic medicine, even though they are framed by societies with cultural differences within their communities.

It also turns out that there has been a shift in Islamic-based medicine, where people are using Islamic-based medicine because they realize its importance, so those who previously used conventional medicine have switched to Islamic-based medicine (Harahap & Destiwati, 2023). Furthermore, the digital literacy possessed by Generation Z through social media has played a role in their involvement in Islamic medicine, due to the role of social media in this context (Prabayanti et al., 2020). And of course, on social media, there is a variety of information related to medical practices that needs to be obtained, both from reliable and valid sources and from sources that need to be cross-checked or are no longer valid. This is the importance of literacy on social media (Zainurrofiq et al., 2024).

It is important to understand the beliefs and knowledge related to treatment and the benefits obtained on social media when receiving inadequate information about traditional or herbal medicine and other important matters, so that one has sufficient knowledge about the treatment (Andelina, 2025). Existing studies show that there is still a gap in research on Islamic-based medicine among Generation Z, with a focus on Indonesia and Malaysia. This research will focus on an in-depth exploration of patterns of knowledge and behavioral attitudes in practice. This study provides an understanding of how Generation Z accepts and rejects Islam-based medicine, as well as examining the factors and attitudes that influence them, which are certainly affected by modernization and the digitalization of media in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Although nearly 80% of Indonesians identify as Muslim, not all practice or accept Islamic medicine (Syukri, 2022). In Malaysia, Islamic medicine has also been an integral part of Malay-Muslim culture and tradition for generations (Johari et al., 2024). Nevertheless, its acceptance among Generation Z reveals distinctive patterns shaped by educational background, social dynamics, and the influence of modernization (Nisa et al., 2018).

This study demonstrates that, from an intercultural communication perspective, health culture framing is shaped by religious values and local practices. Trust mediated through religious leaders, community networks, and digital influencers is often transferred to institutional authorities. Effective interventions can therefore integrate religious message framing that is formal yet relatable for Generation Z, while activating trusted cultural actors within local communities. Such approaches should be aligned with the cross-cultural competencies of health professionals and communicators. Moreover, limited research has addressed the integration of intercultural communication, spirituality, and digital literacy. This study offers Generation Z a new perspective for understanding cultural differences in responding to religion-based health messages in digital media.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilises a qualitative method with a post-positivist approach. This approach is highly correlated in exploring intercultural communication in the context of religion-based medicine. This phenomenon involves the construction of meaning and religious values, while also providing Gen Z with subjective experiences in the digital space, originating from different cultures (Indonesia-Malaysia) built from interactions between researchers and informants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The selection of informants for this study was conducted by determining criteria (Purposive sampling), including: 1) Muslim, 2) Gen Z aged 17-24 years, 3) Active social media users, 4) Experienced in using Islamic-based treatments such as cupping and ruqyah, as well as the consumption of habbatussauda, olive oil, and honey to maintain immunity.

**Table 1. Dimensions of Interculture Communication**

<b>Infor- mants</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Cultural Identity</b>	<b>Perceptions of Islamic Medicine</b>	<b>Language Barriers</b>
<b>1</b>	Malaysia	Religious Malay	Accepted because it is based on arguments (Hadith and Al-Qur'an)	No issues with terminology and language
		Using Ruqyah practices and consuming herbs	Cross-check with medical evidence	No issues with terminology and language
<b>2</b>	Malaysia	Traditional Malay	Strongly believe in because of the remedies used in the family tradition	Difficulty in understanding modern medical terminology
		Treatment passed down from family	Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, prioritising therapy derived from Islam	No issues with terminology and language
<b>3</b>	Malaysia	Religious Urban Malay	Combining Islamic medicine and modern (scientific) medicine	Sometimes it is rather difficult to understand modern medical terminology.
		Moderate family education	Critical and prioritising references	No issues with terminology and language
<b>4</b>	Indonesia	Sundanese with a background in Islamic boarding schools	Seeking valid, critical and positive references	No issues with terminology and language
		Active family studies (Pengajian)	Positive because it has been implemented in the family	No issues with terminology and language

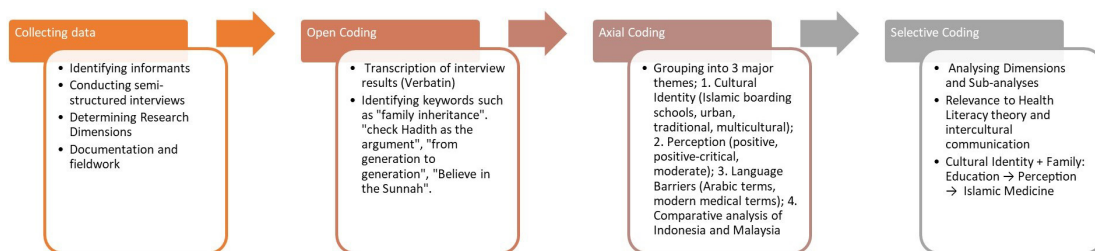
5	Indonesia	<i>Minang Kabau</i>	Believe because it has value "Adat Basandi Syarah, Syarah Basandi Kitabullah"	Hindered by Arabic terms such as Ruqyah syar'iyah
		Religious family traditions	Treatment is carried out using a combination of medical and Islamic medicine.	The terms used in Western medicine and Islamic medicine are very different.
6.	Indonesia	Javanese Urban Culture	Tends to be neutral and moderate	Understanding the terms used by the ustad as opinion leader is a little difficult because the terminology is unfamiliar.
		Social media users	Selective and digitally connected	The selection of Islamic health messages because they are still found on social media, which in terms of terminology are still mixed with other alternative treatments.

The research design used in this study is a cross-cultural comparative case study (Yin, 2018). In-depth interviews and digital observation were the techniques used to collect data in this study, exploring cultural perceptions in both Indonesia and Malaysia, digital health communication literacy, and language barriers (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Pink et al., 2016). Data collection consisted of three primary techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with family members that included Generation Z participants.

Table 1 shows the dimensions of intercultural communication that describe the cross-cultural approach related to cultural identity, perceptions of Islamic medicine, and language. It shows how cultural identity is influenced by many things, such as ethnicity and understanding of Islamic medicine, as well as perceptions of Islamic-based medicine from both religious and medical perspectives, and language factors that have issues related to understanding language terminology and the understanding of opinion leaders.

One Generation Z informant from Bandung is a university student from a family deeply rooted in Islamic values and pesantren traditions. In this family, cupping and ruqyah are long-established practices, even as the informant pursues a science-based academic discipline. The second informant, originally from Malaysia and currently studying in Bandung, comes from a Malay family with strong Islamic traditions

The research data was collected from March 2024 to August 2024. Meetings were held periodically with a duration of 60-90 minutes. The interview results were recorded and analysed by the researcher. Observations were continuously made by looking at the informants' habits in seeking information related to Islamic-based medicine and their habits in using Islamic medicine. Triangulation was used to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings, which were analysed using thematic analysis following the framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



**Figure 1: Flowchart of Hybrid Communication Ecosystem of Gen Z**

Figure 1 shows the coding categories and thematic analysis in the data collection and coding of selective data, which provided an analysis of dimensions related to culture, family, and perceptions of Islamic-based medicine. Through data analysis reviewed from the field of communication, it was found that there was an exchange of messages, that health communication not only provides information but also involves a transactional process in producing messages. In addition, this analysis also focused on Islamic medicine, which was demonstrated by religious symbols through scientific narratives. There was cultural noise, such as differences in language, medical terms and religious symbols.

## RESULTS

Islamic-based health information is very dynamic in the literacy process among Gen Z. Exposure to health content on social media such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube begins with religious Ustadz and influencers who are focused on literacy. Islamic medicine. Usually, searching for health information on social media begins with a health need. This process does not happen only once, but informants search for information on specific accounts that discuss Islamic medicine. This search for information is needed to find user testimonials. During the evaluation process, the credibility of the source and its compatibility with Islamic teachings, medical evidence, and ease of understanding the meaning of the message in different languages are assessed. The meaning process is greatly influenced by the level of

spirituality, cultural identity, and digital literacy skills. Experiences with Islamic-based medicine are shared on social media so that this information appears repeatedly on social media across cultures, namely Indonesia and Malaysia digital content;

“ I first saw content about cupping on TikTok. At that time, it was explained by a well-known religious Ustad in Indonesia. The Ustad explained it using hadith, and all the comments were positive “. (Indonesian informant)

“ I saw this content on Instagram, a religious Ustaz was explaining Islamic medicine practices for people affected by witchcraft. (Malaysian informant)

The search for information on Islamic-based medicine continues due to interest in the subject.;

“When searching for information, I didn’t just look at YouTube, but also other sources because at that time I had the flu, a cold and a headache “ (Indonesian informant)

“After searching for information on social media, I didn’t believe it just like that. I like to check and double-check with my family in Malaysia” (Malaysian informant)

The process of evaluating information conveyed on social media is not simply accepted at face value. Gen Z evaluates information.

“At first, I was sceptical about the information on Islamic medicine on social media, but because the ustad used hadith and the Qur’an, I became quite convinced” (Indonesian informant).

“ I find it hard to believe people who like to bring religion into the picture, especially when it comes to health, but because the ustad spoke using hadith and the Qur’an to strengthen my heart, I wanted to try it “ (Malaysian informant)

The meaning of spirituality, identity and literacy in processing the negotiation of meaning with medical evidence using religious arguments to strengthen trust;

“I am still not entirely convinced about using Islamic medicine, but as a Muslim I must believe in it. However, I will still go to the doctor if my condition is not good.” (Indonesian informant).

“Ruqyah is a bit easy for me, but I still go to the doctor” (Malaysian informant).

The context of sharing experiences and making decisions among Gen Z regarding Islamic

medicine is an activity that is always carried out;

“When I was ill, I went to the Bekam Ruqyah Centre in Bandung. Thank God, my condition improved, so I shared my testimonial on my Instagram account, and it turned out that someone asked for the address of the clinic” (Indonesian informant).

“The time for the ruqyah was up, but I hadn’t felt any change. It turned out that the next day I was healthy. I shared this experience on my social media account.” (Malaysian informant)

From an intercultural perspective, digital media is a digital space where messages from various cultures meet and compete for the audience’s attention. Digital media functions as a primary gatekeeper, especially for Gen Z (Jiao et al., 2023). Ustad and influencers are religious figures who become sources of information that counter the messages entering social media in shaping health messages. The audience’s assessment of the credibility of sources as scientific evidence also includes religious authority. In the context of intercultural communication, the religious frame serves as a “culture clue” in receiving messages in Muslim communities (Agnihotri et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, the scientific frame serves as medical evidence in considering decisions on the use of religion-based treatments. Cross-cultural engagement is very important in supporting message framing and audience culture. Research on intercultural issues requires adaptation of language and symbols in promoting health and health campaigns. Although Indonesia and Malaysia come from the same ethnic group with the largest Muslim population, it cannot be denied that in linguistics and symbolism there are problems with message reception (Djatkika et al., 2024). The strong influence of local linguistics and local symbols affects the interpretation of Islamic-based health messages. In decision-making, religious and medical practices illustrate the process of meaning negotiation. The audience combines religious culture with the dominant health framework in the scientific realm. This shows that theoretical concepts are processed through transactional means and contextualised into a person’s cultural identity.

In their study, Agnihotri et al., (2022) mention that cultural values integrated into health messages are highly relevant when implemented in local communities. Repeated distribution strengthens the narrative and can accelerate information on Islamic medical practices. Sharing experiences in digital spaces is part of the mechanism of social diffusion (Ishikawa et al., 2025). This method can reflect medical practices that play an important role in shaping cross-cultural health norms. The dynamics of engagement, if culturally appropriate, can influence how individuals adopt messages. In the intercultural communication model in this study,

there are two types of credibility: religious and scientific authority, cultural noise (linguistic and symbolic), transactional and negotiation. In designing messages, religious figures such as Ustadz and scientific evidence strengthen the adoption of messages and reduce disinformation.

**Table 2. Analysis Matrix**

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Thematic</b>	<b>Relevance of the Concept</b>
"I first saw content about cupping on TikTok. At that time, it was explained by a well-known religious Ustad in Indonesia. The Ustad explained it using hadith, and all the comments were positive"	Media Coverage	Gatekeeping & Exposure
"I saw this content on Instagram, a religious Ustaz was explaining Islamic medicine practices for people affected by witchcraft"		
"When searching for information, I didn't just look at YouTube, but also other sources because at that time I had the flu, a cold and a headache"	<b>Advanced search</b>	<b>Digital Health Literacy</b>
"After searching for information on social media, I didn't believe it just like that. I like to check and double-check with my family in Malaysia"		
"At first, I was sceptical about the information on Islamic medicine on social media, but because the ustad used hadith and the Qur'an, I became quite convinced"	<b>Framing Religiosity and Source Credibility</b>	<b>Cultural Framing</b>
" I find it hard to believe people who like to bring religion into the picture, especially when it comes to health, but because the ustad spoke using hadith and the Qur'an to strengthen my heart, I wanted to try it "		
"I am still not entirely convinced about using Islamic medicine, but as a Muslim I must believe in it. However, I will still go to the doctor if my condition is not good."	<b>Negotiating Meaning</b>	<b>Cultural Noise</b>
"Ruqyah is a bit easy for me, but I still go to the doctor"		
"When I was ill, I went to the Bekam Ruqyah Centre in Bandung. Thank God, my condition improved, so I shared my testimonial on my Instagram account, and it turned out that someone asked for the address of the clinic"	Sharing experiences in interpreting social messages	Social diffusion & transmission
"The time for the ruqyah was up, but I hadn't felt any change. It turned out that the next day I was healthy. I shared this experience on my social media account."		

## DISCUSSION

The results of the study illustrate the integration of intercultural communication in Islamic-based health practices. Gen Z, as a digitally native generation, finds health literacy to be contextual and transactional. Through interviews, it was found that Gen Z in Indonesia and Malaysia actively receive Islamic-based health information on social media. The process of verifying sources uses arguments such as hadith and the Qur'an as well as scientific evidence, thereby negotiating meaning in the process of making health decisions. This condition demonstrates the integration of spirituality and rationality in a scientific manner. It illustrates the function of digital health literacy (DHL) in shaping health behaviour among Gen Z (Jiao et al., 2023). Cultural and linguistic differences influence the way messages are encoded and decoded, reinforcing the argument that health communication is understood within the context of intercultural communication.

### Cultural Identity

Islamic medicine is perceived by informants as part of their religious identity and not merely as a form of treatment. Urban informants mentioned that Islamic medical practices such as cupping, ruqyah and natural herbs maintain that these practices are markers of identity but are more focused on empirical findings. In Islamic medicine practice as a cultural identity, cultural affordance is an effort to reflect and preserve Islamic medicine even though it is still very varied in biomedical terms. This issue is in line with the role and value of religiosity in the conservation of complementary medicine practices in Southeast Asia (Wahyuni & Salim, 2023).

The socio-cultural structure between Indonesia and Malaysia differs. Malaysia is characterised by a homogeneous Malay Islamic culture, while Indonesia is culturally pluralistic. This character influences literacy strategies, which must be adapted to local cultures and cannot be treated as a "one size fits all" approach. Therefore, from a religious legitimacy perspective, arguments such as hadith and the Qur'an are highly relevant and must be supplemented with scientific findings that are acceptable to religious communities. Regional surveys confirm that the use of TCM patterns differs from country to country (Kong et al, 2022). In addition, according to informants, Islamic medicine in Malaysia more closely reflects Malay Islamic patterns, making it easier to convey information and pass on medical practices between generations, who are quicker and more receptive to these practices. Meanwhile, according to informants, Indonesia has a diverse range of ethnicities. Plurality of practices and variations in legitimacy still predominantly refer to local culture. The

implication regarding health literacy must have a specific culture in accordance with the beliefs of the group and not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Cultural identity here serves as the main framework that legitimises Islamic medical practices. Given their family traditions, which are rooted in Islamic boarding schools, Gen Z accepts Islamic medical practices as part of their identity. The educational background of parents acts as a connecting factor in managing beliefs, as higher education encourages a reflective critical attitude, while lower education leads to Islamic medicine being practised in a perfunctory manner as a tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation (Aizuddin et al., 2022). This means that cultural identity here acts as a cultural affordance, and this practice will persist even though scientific evidence varies. Islamic medicine is not just about healing but also enters the symbolic level that reinforces Islam and the continuity of tradition. This is related to research related to (TAIM) studies and traditional Islamic practices that apply the tradition of cultural spiritual relations (Al-Rawi & Fetters, 2012).

### **Perceptions from Imitation (Taklid) to Critical Reflection**

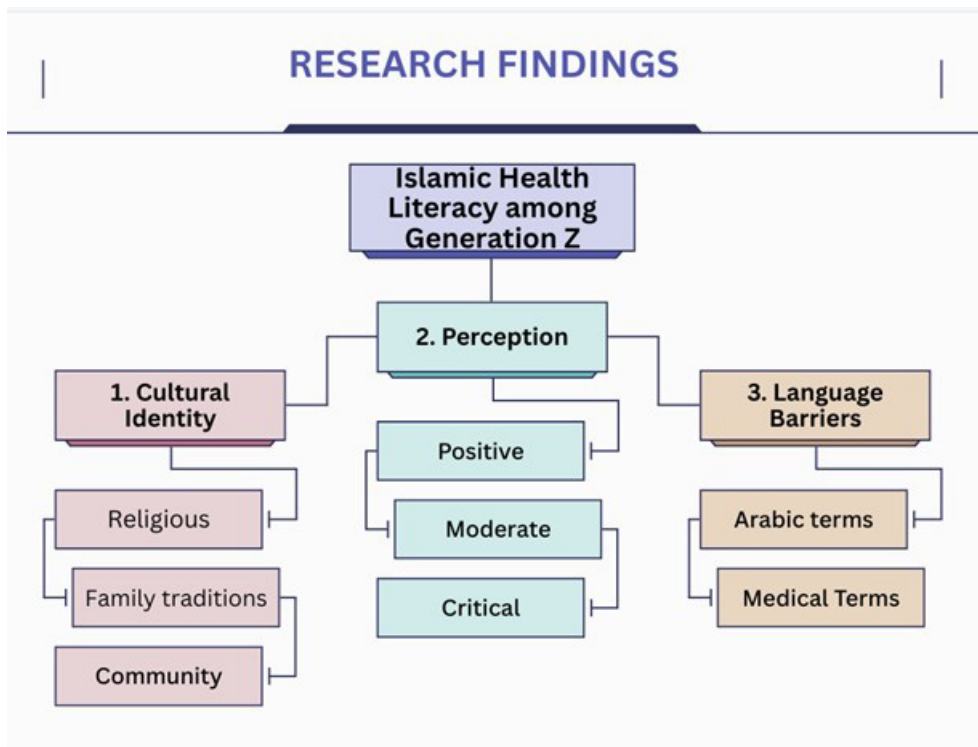
From the findings obtained from informants in both Indonesia and Malaysia, Islamic medicine is viewed positively. Differences were found at the validation level, with some informants accepting this tradition wholesale or rigidly, obediently and accepting it, especially among Gen Z whose families are highly educated. This is because those who are more highly educated try to combine religion with empirical verification. This condition reflects the difference between functional and critical health literacy, where in assessing, comparing and citing from external sources, there is a difference between passive and active practice with rational acceptance. Previous research findings indicate that health literacy in Malaysia and Indonesia is quite diverse. This can be seen from educational background, age, and access to digital media. Gen Z is a generation that is very active in searching for anything on social media, so digital literacy is an important sub-analysis that needs to be discussed (Jaafar et al., 2021).

Some informants are willing to use treatment practices such as cupping if there are positive reviews. However, they are sometimes concerned about safety aspects such as sterilisation and therapists who are not yet trained or skilled. Other findings indicate that cupping is widely used by the public in certain conditions. This method also varies greatly in terms of recommendations, so trying this practice requires a recommendation from a trusted source (Wu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; Uzun, 2024).

### **Language Barriers**

The similarities between Malay and Indonesian languages make it easier to understand Islamic medicine. However, obstacles arise with classical Arabic terms such as ruqyah syar'iyah, dalil and fiqh. Meanwhile, modern medical terms include sterilisation and risk of infection. Arabic terms can have multiple meanings. If they are religious terms, they are guidelines that influence compliance. These Arabic terms become epistemic barriers for those who do not have extensive religious literacy. The Gen Z participants in this study are young people who, on average, live with parents who have low literacy levels. The integration of complementary alternative medicine in authoritative language strengthens beliefs, but patients are hindered in their critical evaluation. Therefore, this study recommends that digital health literacy in Indonesia should have a small dictionary to accommodate technical terms in formats such as visual glossaries, short videos, and infographics to bridge the generation gap and increase the effectiveness of the message.

For many Muslim Gen Z, practices such as cupping, ruqyah, honey, and habbatussauda are more than mere treatments; they function as cultural markers and symbols of spiritual legitimacy (Hamdan et al., 2025). Social media provides a vast repository of knowledge, from peer-reviewed research to unverified emotional testimonials (Akram, 2023). Although Gen Z is adept at navigating online spaces, their critical evaluation skills do not always match their technical proficiency. Viral or emotionally charged content often appears more credible than scientifically validated information, creating a susceptibility to health misinformation (Mulcahy et al., 2025).



**Figure 2. Visualisation of Research Results**

Figure 2 shows the visualization of research results on cultural identity, which includes issues of religion, family traditions, society, and, of course, the perceptions of Generation Z regarding Islamic medicine. It also shows the obstacles caused by language barriers, both in Arabic and medical terms. This is a visualization of the research results. As Generation Z has grown up in an era of massive media information, and doing so has become a way of life for them. This knowledge is reinforced by information obtained from their parents regarding Islamic medicine, so that the information they obtain from the media reinforces their understanding of Islamic medicine. This means that the family plays a role in providing knowledge related to Islamic medicine, and of course there is a culture that provides an understanding of the use of Islamic-based medicine (Nasihin et al., 2024).

The literacy and understanding gained from the media then provides understanding to the younger generation, as well as the things they learn at school that give them an understanding of Islamic medicine and how it should be practiced. Parents also play a role in how Generation Z utilizes Islamic-based medicine. Media channels play an important role for Generation Z in obtaining information, and one of their abilities is certainly to use the media available on social media and how they make the best use of it, so that this role

becomes a very important role in providing understanding to Generation Z (Liventstova et al., 2024), who are indeed very close to the media, reinforced with information from parents, schools, and others that strengthen their understanding of Islamic-based medicine.

To strengthen awareness of Islamic alternative medicine among Gen Z, several strategies can be implemented, such as information campaigns highlighting the benefits of Islamic healing, educational initiatives promoting proper practices, collaborations with religious leaders and Islamic medicine practitioners to disseminate accurate knowledge, and further research exploring the factors that influence acceptance of these practices and how they can be adapted to meet the needs of future generations. This study integrates spiritual framing, cultural identity, and cross-cultural digital health literacy based on Islam across Indonesia and Malaysia.

This shows that Generation Z is greatly assisted by social media, including the use of AI in health-related learning (Kazemy et al., 2026). Meanwhile, other studies state that Generation Z has unique, complex, and even contradictory perceptions regarding health, whereby they have an innovative approach to understanding health issues and their promotion (Kanste et al., 2025). This shows the dialectic nature of this research regarding Generation Z's views on the latest literature. It is also interesting to note that Generation Z, who are active in using social media to access information about their health, even avoid various online health information when they encounter problems or experience uncertainty (Jia & Li, 2024).

Generation Z seeks health-related information using the internet, whereas older generations tend to use traditional media, indicating different references in seeking health information (Jiao et al, 2023). Generation Z's use of media involves strategies that challenge the framing based on digital youth culture (Gotzfried & Heitmayer, 2026).

Given the unique characteristics of Generation Z, it is necessary to build collaborative relationships in order to guide and advance this generation (Patten, 2025). From the literature above from around the world, it can be seen that Generation Z uses digital media for health and even takes an innovative approach to it, despite the dialectics in Generation Z's views, including when Generation Z experiences uncertainty, so they need strategies to use the media and also collaborate. The research results show that there are differences in which cultural identity factors, such as religion, tradition, and education within the family, give importance to cultural identity in providing an understanding of perceptions of Islamic medicine. Therefore, it is these perceptions that shape their strong belief in Islamic-based medicine, making them more selective in their choice of digital media. This is what makes this article novel, in addition to the language factor, which plays a role in the different

understandings in conveying messages in digital and social media for Islamic-based medicine.

Digital Health Literacy (DHL) attempts to map health information behaviour among Gen Z. Gen Z's active search for information can be verified by the variability of DHL in national and cultural contexts (Nutbeam, 2000; Yuen et al., 2024). This analysis shows that, in accordance with the concept of health literacy presented by Nutbeam (2000), there are determining factors in intercultural health communication literacy in Indonesia and Malaysia that reveal individual factors in increasing knowledge, motivation, and resilience (Nutbeam, 2000; Yuen et al., 2024). This is in line with the theory of digital-based health literacy and not only that aspect but also the level of literacy and its benefits to the community, which are influenced by social norms and determining factors in the community, including religious factors and community leaders, which provide support and obstacles to health literacy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study found that intercultural communication in the context of religion-based medicine among Gen Z in Indonesia and Malaysia occurs through active health literacy processes in digital, contextual and transactional spaces. Gen Z not only passively receive messages, but also verify and evaluate messages that use hadith and Qur'anic arguments scientifically. The context of spirituality is taken as the main reference. Digital literacy serves as a counter to assess the credibility of information. Language differences in a cultural context influence the decoding of messages. Scientific-based cultural sensitivity that integrates Gen Z characteristics becomes an effective concept for health communication. Aligning digital health communication with spiritual values is essential for strengthening intercultural communication in Islamic-based medicine. Moreover, spirituality and digital health communication literacy play a crucial role in shaping intercultural health communication among Generation Z in Indonesia and Malaysia. This study reveals that Islamic alternative medicine for Generation Z is not only understood as a way to maintain health but also as a means of affirming identity, deepening spirituality, and seeking meaning in life. However, the overwhelming flow of information on social media makes Gen Z vulnerable to unverified health claims. Literacy related to Islamic-based medicine has raised awareness of the importance of culture in understanding the digital era, which requires collaboration from various parties in bringing information related to Islamic-based medicine to the younger generation through integration and recognition of religious and cultural values is necessary to facilitate good communication in literacy and the experiences of Generation Z, who are constantly exposed to social media, which is always a learning point for Generation Z.

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