

# Generation Z's Online Expression Willingness in the New Media Environment

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**Abstract:** Generation Z refers to those born between 1995 and 2009, who can be considered as the primary members of this generation. This study explores how their usage behavior shapes online expression willingness, integrating the Uses and Gratifications and Spiral of Silence theories. An online questionnaire collected 232 valid samples, analysed via reliability/validity tests, correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression. Key findings show entertainment is their primary usage motivation; reading comment sections positively predicts exposure to diverse viewpoints, which is the sole predictor of perceived information echo chambers. Usage motivations and expression concerns have limited explanatory power for their expression willingness. This study concludes that Gen Z's online reticence is a deliberate choice based on risk-reward assessment, influenced by the complex interaction of individual, environmental, platform, and situational factors.

**Keywords:** Generation Z; New Media Usage; Online Expression Willingness; Spiral of Silence; Media Literacy

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background and Problem Statement

In an era where digital media permeates social life and the internet serves as a public discourse space, Generation Z (typically referring to those born between 1995 and 2009, hereafter sometimes abbreviated as Gen Z) as "digital natives" are the most frequent users and invest the most time in online platforms such as social media and short-video platforms. However, during the research process, the author observed that when encountering controversial topics or individuals whose opinions conflict with their own, this group tends toward "reserved

expression" or actively chooses to remain "silent." The contradiction arises from the participation of this generation in online society; the diversity of discourses in online public Spaces; and the formation of a public opinion ecosystem. Exploring its Motivations and Influence Mechanisms Has Practical Value.

Therefore, in this research project, the contradiction of Gen Z's new media use is chosen as an entrance, which aims to reveal the underlying mechanism among new media use, online speech desire, etc. Examine its various attributes of new-media use by Generation Z individuals. What kind of new media use behaviour is most likely to feel under pressure by the online "opinion climate"? Building upon these inquiries, this study moves beyond phenomenological description to establish theoretical connections between behaviors. It introduces the classic communication theory of "uses and gratifications" to explain Generation Z's motivations for new media use. It combines the "spiral of silence" theory to analyze the psychological mechanisms of their online expression, aiming to connect micro-level individual media usage behaviors with the macro-level online public opinion environment. This further clarifies how Generation Z's instrumental and ritualistic new media usage behaviors influence their expression intentions and behavioral choices after perceiving the pressure of the online "opinion climate"—to what extent and through what pathways?

### 1.2 Literature Review

The "uses and gratifications" research posits that media users are active participants who engage with media to fulfill specific social and psychological needs (including cognitive, emotional, communicative, and recreational needs). The "uses and gratifications" approach categorizes "new media use" into "instrumental use" and "ceremonial use (time-killing use)" "Instrumental use" involves actively seeking

information and knowledge, while "ceremonial use" refers to leisurely or habitual browsing and companionship. This research primarily describes the formation and fulfillment of these patterns, rarely examining their impact on social behaviors, including public discourse.

However, the "spiral of silence" theory explores the social-psychological reasons for the generation of public opinion. If they feel like a minority, the fear of social exclusion may make them keep quiet; algorithmic recommendation, top rankings on charts, or featured comments in new media environment may strengthen their sense that there is an "opinion atmosphere", which can lead to more pronounced "spiral of silence".

The existing research on the online will to express one's own views primarily consists of empirical works; they form an integrated framework based on various methods.

Quantitative research methods include questionnaire questionnaires, the widest coverage. The researchers usually collect a sample by convenience or Snowball method, measure the key variable on Likert scale, use SPSS or AMOS to conduct descriptive statistics, correlation test, regression analysis and Structural Equation Model (SEM) etc. Xia et al. surveyed the students of Huazhong University of Science and Technology by distributing self-answered surveys. Using linear regression analysis, it was verified that the three-dimensional structure underlying behaviour intention (BI), Subjective Norms (SN) and Perceived Behaviour Control (PBC) in this study based on the theory of planned behaviour [1]. Scenario Simulation has also served to conduct detailed research under particular conditions. Zhang, et al. established simulated situations of online reverse incidents (for example, a fabricated accusation that the male netizen assaulted his ex-lover through violence) and their automatic correction functions. Collecting participants' comments; coding into the strategy of engagement or avoidance; combining with a scale that measures mediating variables such as shame and trait self-affirmation. The way to present this is to demonstrate how opinion-expression strategy influences social-participation Willingness directly [2].

In qualitative research, in-depth interviews and content analysis serve as crucial tools for uncovering core factors. Furthermore, some studies employ mixed-methods research to

achieve a logical closed loop of "qualitative refinement - quantitative validation." For instance, Wang et al. conducted in-depth interviews with 8 WeChat users and analyzed semi-structured questionnaire texts from 69 users. Using a layered coding qualitative research method, they ultimately identified six major inhibiting factors for authentic self-expression online: impression management fatigue, functional availability, moral norms, etc. Following the identification of these inhibiting factors, the study constructed a theoretical model based on the Stress-Strain-Outcome (SSO) framework. By collecting 309 valid questionnaire responses, it utilized structural equation modeling to validate the influence pathway through which inhibiting factors affect WeChat users' non-continuous usage intentions via emotional exhaustion and dissatisfaction, fully leveraging the synergistic advantages of both research methods [3].

In summary, existing research categorizes factors influencing online willingness to express opinions online into individual and environmental/platform dimensions. At the individual level, all three dimensions of the Theory of Planned Behavior—behavioral attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control—positively influence willingness to express opinions online. Among these, the perceived expressive popularity effect is strongest, and self-efficacy also plays a crucial role. Concurrently, psychological states such as social anxiety and low self-acceptance inhibit authentic expression, while introverted and neurotic individuals are more likely to express their true selves online [3]. In terms of environmental and platform levels, privacy concerns, moral constraints and impression management fatigue constitute core restrictive factors. Platform Functionality Directly Influences Expression Experiences. WeChat, Weibo and Zhihu have different strengths in expressing lifestyles, news/entertainment/gossip, and professional fields because of different contexts; At the same time, there are still research issues at present: some research has not achieved high consistency rates in evaluating the construct reliability of "willingness to participate in online discussion", which affects comprehensive understanding of its variation conditions and needs further study on factor construction methods. The underlying relationship among them generally requires

theoretical derivation or one-dimensional verification, but lacks targeted analysis of Generation Z's dual characteristics of "high media consumption and weak expressions on hot issues", which research context is too narrow; The interaction effect brought by new environment Factors such as algorithm recommendation in news echo chamber also needs further exploration. Therefore, their expression decision-making logic has not yet been fully disclosed.

### 1.3 Research Value

Based on this, it has helped further deepen people's recognition and comprehension of why Generation Z forms its own online communication characteristics through new media use. Through verification that the "spiral of silence" theory is valid in cyberspace, it advances research on the formation of people's subjective awareness within new-media environments. By combining key results from the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the SSO model, an integrated framework "media use - public opinion atmosphere recognition - individual psychological changes - desire to participate online" is built; thereby adding richness to the existing theoretical system of online willingness-to-express behaviour among new media users. Research on the dialectical interaction between information echo chambers and exposure to different perspectives provides new materials for media-effects research; The conclusion and suggestion help improve the operating level of New Media Platforms, Provide a reference model for Optimizing Platform Content and User Experience; Give some ideas for educating young people's digital literacy, Guide teenagers to form correct views about media use; And also give advice to enhance cyber-governance capabilities by creating an open and free online discussion atmosphere..

### 1.4 Research Methodology and Technical Approach

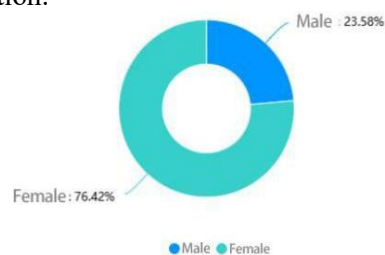
Using the self-collected Online Questionnaire by Wenjuanxi from a mobile device to collect data in three dimensions: new-media use, media attitude and online expression. According to the requirements of this task, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression analyses will be used in SPSSAU software for processing; after obtaining

a set of raw data from these tests, we shall proceed with further data organization activities. Identify the Variables Based on Literature Review First. Following this, empirical data provides associations; finally, these are recommended for application.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1 Survey Method and Sample

A snowball Sampling online self-Administered Questionnaire was designed via wenjuanxing, facilitating the collection of data conveniently. The total number of valid questionnaires was 232; among them, there were 169 females and 63 males. Age distribution concentrated between 2000 and 2005 (72.41%). Most were at universities, accounting for 69.43%. Gender-biased distribution helps target key groups of Internet users; however, this characteristic limits the generalizability of our research findings and will be explored further in Section 4.5. As shown in Figure 1 Gender Proportion of the Survey Sample, the gender proportion.



**Figure 1. Gender Proportion of the Survey Sample**

### 2.2 Measurement Tools and Variables

All the indicators used in this research were on a five-point likert-scale basis. In total, the overall research scale included nine assessment elements arranged in three primary directions according to construct research builds: media-use behaviour, media cognition and perception impact; And the tendency for silent behaviour. Gender and average daily use Time served as controls in this study to improve the scientific nature and accuracy of these results. Silent behaviour tendency, defined as "behavioural choices during silence", was measured through a single-answer question or an open-ended fill-in. This variable was classified into four categories according to the following rules: "1" means to quietly go out without taking any actions; "2" refers to seeking and liking comments with similar opinions; "3", which is

an unspecified number of times expressing one's own ideas or beliefs on other private platforms such as WeChat Group Chats, etc.; If this reason could not be fulfilled within three days after submission.

Online willingness to express opinion: One-item self-reported Likert-scale survey method; Using a five-level scale (0 = Very unlikely; 4 = Very likely) — the "likelihood of posting divergent views" item was established as the main outcome indicator for this investigation.

### 2.3 Data Analysis Methods

Using SPSS for organising and analysing questionnaires, which were distributed through the Wenjuanxing platform. Reliability and Validity were verified by Cronbach's alpha coefficient and exploratory factor analysis. Then conducted descriptive statistics; Pearson's product-moment correlation to investigate the relationship of each factor; and finally perform a multiple linear regression analysis on them. Established three independent regression models: One based on the dependent variable being "exposure to diverse viewpoints", another based on it at "likelihood of expressing different views", and the third was that the dependent variable was "perception of information echo chamber level". Independent variable New media usage motives (Purposeful use, Ceremonial Use); Reading behaviour in comments; Passive consumption of content; Average daily time spent on the Internet; Gender. Examining the predictive power of all factors on their respective dependent variables.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Reliability and Validity Testing

Internal consistency reliability is assessed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Questionnaire: Nine items, covering a total of 231 individuals. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : The value is 0.781. Under generally accepted reliability standards, if the alpha coefficient exceeds 0.7 for most indicators, it can be considered reliable; otherwise, more work is needed to reduce this deviation from the norm.

The current article used exploratory factor analysis to investigate the construct validity of this question bank; First, KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericities were applied for assessment. The KMO value was  $0.774 > 0.7$ , so it is suitable to

conduct factor analysis; Bartlett's test of sphericity obtained an approximate chi-square value of 414.680 with  $df = 45$  and  $p < 0.001$ . The data has rejected the null hypothesis on the unit matrix; therefore, it is suitable for factor analysis.

Based on the principle of eigenvectors greater than one during common factor extraction using principal component analysis. The final three were obtained. The eigenvalues of the three factors before rotation were 3.35, 1.41, 1.02, explaining 57.76% of the variance. After simplification to reduce multiple factors, Varimax rotation was used to obtain eigenvalues of 2.49, 2.25 and 1.04 that explained 24.85%, 22.48% and 10.43% of the variance, respectively.

Rotated factor loadings showed that most factors' group patterns of every question were consistent with those expected by theory.

Factor 1 (Media-use behaviour) comprises four items: the purposeful use, reading comments sections, ceremonial uses, and passive content reception behaviours, with a load range of 0.71~0.78;

Factor 2 (Media perception and influence perception) consists of four items: "Degree of concern expression", "Exposure to diverse viewpoints", "Perceived information echo chamber" and "Influence on opinion formation"; the loadings range from 0.64 to 0.75;

Factor 3 (Tendency of silent behavior) includes one item: Tendency to be quiet; the load coefficient is 0.87.

The core dependent variable "Likelihood of Voicing Dissenting Opinions" uses one question, which was not included in the factor analysis. The limitations of the measurability will be introduced in section four two.

Therefore, in general, all of the retained items have communalities greater than 0.4; these common factors can adequately explain variations in the original variables. The questionnaires have good Construct Validity and can be used in further empirical research.

### 3.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics showed that the means of these research variables were distributed within an interval of about 2.71 to approximately 3.60, and their standard deviations fell between around 0.88 and roughly 1.12; See Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables.

According to the specific data:

In terms of motivation to use online platforms, the mean scores were 3.51 and 3.34 respectively for "Time-killing usage" and "Purposeful usage". Generally speaking, the reasons for users spending more time on the platform are relatively weakly influenced by these responses.

Among the new media cognition and perception dimensions, there were significant differences in the average scores of exposure to diverse opinions [Mean (M)=3.60]; perceived information echo chambers [M]=3.39] versus the least influence on opinion formation [M]=3.31).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables**

Variable	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Explicit Purpose of Use	I typically access online platforms with a clear purpose (e.g., to look up information, learn knowledge)	3.34	1.12
Reading comment sections	I carefully read comment sections to understand different perspectives.	3.50	1.01
Using it to kill time	I mainly scroll through casually to kill time	3.51	1.07
Passively receiving content	I usually just passively receive content recommended by the platform	3.29	1.05
Level of Concern About Negative Feedback	When deciding whether to speak up, how concerned are you about potential rebuttals or negative feedback from other netizens?	3.31	1.06
Exposure to Diverse Viewpoints	To what extent do you believe new media exposes you to diverse perspectives in areas such as daily life, learning, and entertainment?	3.60	0.93
Perceived Information Echo Chamber Effect	To what extent do you believe new media makes it easier for you to become trapped in an Information Echo Chamber?	3.39	0.88
Influence on Opinion Formation	To what extent do you believe new media influences the formation of your personal views?	3.31	0.88
Behavioral Choices When Silent	If you ultimately choose not to comment directly, what are you most likely to do?	2.47	0.91
Likelihood of voicing a different opinion	In this scenario, the likelihood that you would comment to express your differing opinion is	2.71	1.08

### 3.3 Correlation Analysis Results

Correlation coefficients among many of the factors are relatively large within this group:

3.3.1 Internal Correlations Within " " Usage MOTIVATION", "PURPOSEFUL USE", and "CEREMONIAL USE" were significantly positively correlated at the significance level ( $\rho = 0.21$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ): Motivation for using online platforms does not entirely exclude ceremonial motivation, although there may be some overlap between these two types of motivations; Furthermore, "purposeful use" was closely associated with "reading behaviour in comment sections" ( $\rho=0.49$ ,  $P<0.01$ ) as well as "cultural tourism" activities. "Ceremonial Use" and "Comment Section Reading Behavior" were also highly positively correlated ( $\rho=0.45$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). This suggests that regardless of their primary motivation, users tend to seek information through reading comment sections.

3.3.2 Association between usage motivation and expressive behavior

Analysis of the relationship between usage

motivation and expressive behavior revealed that "purposeful use" showed a significant weak positive correlation with "likelihood of expressing differing opinions" ( $r=0.14$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), but did not reach statistical significance with "level of concern expressed" ( $r=0.11$ ). In contrast, "time-killing usage" showed a significant weak positive correlation with "level of concern expressed" ( $r=0.17$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), while its correlation with "possibility of expressing differing opinions" was non-significant ( $r=0.09$ ); Additionally, "reading comment sections" showed a significant moderate positive correlation with "level of concern expressed" ( $r=0.27$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), but similarly failed to reach significance with "likelihood of expressing differing opinions" ( $r=0.09$ ). Finally, the variable "likelihood of expressing differing opinions" exhibited only a non-significant weak positive correlation with "level of concern expressed" ( $r=0.10$ ).

3.3.3 Association between usage motivation and new media perception

Analysis of the relationship between usage

motivation and new media perceptions revealed that "purposeful usage" showed a significant positive correlation with "exposure to diverse viewpoints" ( $r=0.18$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and also with "perceived information echo chamber" ( $r=0.16$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In contrast, "time-killing usage" showed significant positive correlations with "exposure to diverse viewpoints" ( $r=0.23$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), "perceived Information Echo Chamber" ( $r=0.18$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and "perceived influence on opinion formation" ( $r=0.15$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), with overall stronger associations than those observed for "purposeful usage."

### 3.3.4 Internal correlations within new media perceptions

Correlations among various perceptions of new media were even stronger. Analysis revealed that "exposure to diverse viewpoints" showed a significant positive correlation with "perceived influence on opinion formation" ( $r=0.39$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), indicating that individuals who perceived greater exposure to diverse viewpoints through new media were more likely to believe new media influenced their personal opinion formation. Similarly, "perceived Information Echo Chamber" showed a significant positive correlation with "perceived influence on opinion formation" ( $r=0.42$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), indicating that individuals who perceive themselves as more trapped in an Information Echo Chamber are also more likely to believe new media influences their personal opinion formation; Furthermore, "exposure to diverse viewpoints" and "perceived Information Echo Chamber" showed a significant positive correlation ( $r=0.35$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), suggesting that individuals may simultaneously experience exposure to diverse viewpoints and perceive being trapped in an Information Echo Chamber when using new media.

## 3.4 Regression Analysis Results

This study constructed three multiple linear regression models, with "Exposure to Diverse Viewpoints," "likelihood of expressing differing opinions," and "perceived Information Echo Chamber" as dependent variables, respectively, to examine the influence of each factor.

### 3.4.1 Predicting exposure to diverse viewpoints

With "Exposure to Diverse Viewpoints" as the dependent variable, the model included two usage motivations, "reading comment sections," "passive reception" behaviors, and gender as independent variables. The overall model was significant ( $F(5,223)=5.274$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) but had

limited explanatory power (adjusted  $R^2=0.086$ ). Key findings indicate that, after controlling for other variables, only the behavior of "carefully reading comment sections" significantly and positively predicted the degree of exposure to diverse viewpoints ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Neither "purposeful use" nor "Ceremonial use" had significant direct effects.

### 3.4.2 Predicting the likelihood of expressing dissenting opinions

With expression of intent as the dependent variable, the model included levels of concern, two types of usage motivation, exposure to diverse viewpoints, and gender. The regression model as a whole failed to reach statistical significance ( $F(5,223)=1.596$ ,  $p=0.162$ ), with an extremely low adjusted  $R^2$  (0.013). None of the independent variables' regression coefficients were significant. This indicates that the variables measured in this study cannot effectively explain differences in Gen Z's willingness to express opinions.

### 3.4.3 Predicting perceived information echo chamber

With "perceived Information Echo Chamber" as the dependent variable, the model included two usage motivations, comment section reading behavior, passive content consumption, exposure to diverse viewpoints, average daily usage time, and gender as independent variables. The overall model was significant ( $F(5,223)=7.480$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), with an adjusted  $R^2=0.124$ . Key findings indicate that "exposure to diverse viewpoints" is the only significant positive predictor of Information Echo Chamber perception ( $\beta = 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Variables such as "time-killing usage," "purposeful usage," "passive content consumption," and "usage duration" showed no significant influence.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Core Characteristics of Gen Z's New Media Usage

This study demonstrates that Generation Z's new media usage exhibits both "time-killing as primary" and "purpose-driven as secondary" dual motivations, which are significantly positively correlated—consistent with prior research [4]. It shows that the basis of Gen Z's new media use is not single, but includes two types of behaviours at the same time - killing off time and pursuing entertainment; Although there are differences in the proportions between them

(slightly more killing time), on balance, it can be concluded that most of their reasons for using new media are to kill some time or seek amusement. There are two reasons here: one is killing time and another is pursuit of purpose.

Additionally, regardless of the use case, many Gen Z Users participate in comment sections; they show moderate-strong relationship coefficients to them. The reader gets diverse opinions through this interaction; Therefore, A connection Network has been constructed via such communication activities. Enhance the Development of platform's comments to boost interactions.

The generation of Gen Z holds an overall positive view on new media's role in promoting information diversity and gaining a broad perspective; However, it is still under pressure from an Information Echo Chamber, resulting in low scores for "Information Echo Chamber". This suggests that, as young users immersed in digital technology, they have more basic media-savvy skills. Neither glorify the positive effects of new media to an extreme extent nor denounce them entirely. Rather than maintaining rationality and objectivity in front of the New Media's positive and negative effects simultaneously.

In addition, there was a significant positive relationship between "exposure to diverse opinions" and "perception of the impact on opinion formation", and both were positively correlated with "perceived information echo chambers"; this shows that Generation Z is influenced by new media regardless of whether they present various views or create Information Echo Chambers [5]. Thus, in order to enhance the influence of new media on generation Zs' ideas through high-quality content promotion and other means.

#### **4.2 Analysis of the Influence Mechanism on Online Expression Intent**

The regression model results of this study show that Generation Z's willingness to express themselves online exhibits no significant regression relationship with operationalized variables such as motivation for use and level of concern, and has minimal explanatory power (Adjusted  $R^2=0.013$ ). This indicates that the causal chain influencing Generation Z's willingness to express themselves online is complex, implicit, and unclear, and the explanatory power of existing operationalized

variables is still weak. Drawing on multiple literature sources and core theories, specific inferences can be made in the following areas.

Existing theoretical and empirical research has identified multiple levels of factors influencing online willingness to express opinions online, including individual, environmental, and platform dimensions. This study selected only a few factors such as new media usage motivation and expression concerns, overlooking some important factors. At the individual level, factors such as subjective norms (perceived expressive legitimacy) and self-efficacy (expressive confidence) from the Theory of Planned Behavior, as well as impression management (impression management fatigue), privacy risks, and self-acceptance identified in Wang Yalan's research, also exert negative influences on online expression [3]. This study did not fully measure these factors. Additionally, Xia et al. found that perceived expressive legitimacy exerted the strongest positive influence on college students' online willingness to express opinions online ( $\beta=0.244$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) [1], which was not addressed in this study and may also affect the model's explanatory power. Regarding platforms and environments, factors such as online violence on platforms, platform disciplinary mechanisms (e.g., post deletion, filtering), and the context of online topics may also influence Gen Z's willingness to express themselves. Zhang et al. previously proposed that expressive behavior selection is influenced by specific contexts (e.g., reversal events), involving processes such as face threat and shame [2]. This question has ignored the specific situation of different cases, so it is not easy to reveal expression models under actual circumstances clearly.

Gen Z's willingness to express varies contextually across platforms. They demonstrate various kinds of expressions in different platforms, topics and Groups. Lu Shuman et al. found that WeChat users have a greater desire for expressing life-related issues; their favorite entertainments and informal chats on Weibo; Users tend towards serious discourse at Zhihu. The present research failed to examine the Willingness to express opinions Online under various contexts; Allowing for only one-item measurement of this phenomenon over broad scales might conceal variations in that behaviour at diverse times [6]. Moreover, the single-item assessment lacks robustness against reliability and validity checks. Although the items are not

included in exploratory factor analysis at present, their measurement validity as primary dependent variables should continue to improve. In the future, researchers can use multiple-item scales to capture the multi-dimensional characteristics of Generation Z's desire for expression on social media more accurately.

Using theories from "use and gratification" and the "spiral of silence", it partially confirms or further proves that: when generation Z performs ritualistic consumption (such as time-wasting), high-frequency exposure to conflicting information accompanied by an increased sense of risk in opinion dissemination ("sensitization"), such as being rebutted, will tend to intensify fear-based self-regulation; The highly significant positive relationship found at the correlation level is partially consistent with this conclusion. Unstructured exploration leads young people into areas where they are exposed to a large amount of contentious and verbal abuse on the Internet; They are alarmed by it, considering "expressing one's own thoughts may result in being isolated", leading them to avoid this kind of space [7]. However, their active application (with specific goals, like watching others comment), although exposure to diverse viewpoints increases, does not follow predictions because these actions do not strengthen willingness to voice objections. The significant positive correlation between "purposeful use" and "exposure to diverse viewpoints" ( $r = 0.18, p < 0.01$ ) in this study, along with the significant positive predictive effect of "reading comment sections" on exposure to diverse viewpoints ( $\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$ ) similarly indicate that while such instrumental use broadens information acquisition, it does not enhance users' willingness to express themselves. This suggests that within the intensified public opinion landscape of new media, the perceived pressure from the "opinion climate" may become a more potent factor inhibiting expression than the motivation for use. Even after perceiving diverse viewpoints through instrumental use, Generation Z may choose silence out of fear of contradicting mainstream opinions or criticism, they may choose silence. This explains the absence of a direct relationship between usage motivation and willingness to express opinions online in this model [8].

It should be noted that Generation Z's dialectical awareness (simultaneous exposure to differing

viewpoints and awareness of Information Echo Chamber) and relatively high media literacy imply they are not as uncritically exposed as theoretical assumptions suggest. Both "Degree of Exposure to Diverse Viewpoints" ( $M=3.60$ ) and "Perceived information echo chamber" scores above average in terms of descriptive statistics for this part and are positively correlated ( $r=0.35, p<0.01$ ). It shows that they have been influenced by new media to some extent and know how others see them; however, due to the restrictions of algorithms or other factors, there are still shortcomings in this process. This helps form an autonomous mechanism for resisting information overload - "the spiral of silence". Although they are aware that their opinions will not have a decisive effect, there is often an underlying reason: fear of being excluded in discussions, such as "debates are futile" or "no one dares to harm their own reputation", which requires further improvement in the future research to adjust this model."

Some findings of this study align closely with conclusions drawn by scholars such as Xia and Wang [1,3], including the positive correlation between reading comment sections and expressing concerns, and the reinforcement of silence tendencies through ritualistic use. The risk perception stemming from comment sections resonates with Xia et al.'s findings on environmental opinion climate influencing willingness to express opinions online, grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior [1]. The influence logic of ritualistic use also aligns with Wang et al.'s findings [3] that purposeless media use suppresses expression through negative experiences via the SSO framework. These findings collectively validate the core mechanism of media use indirectly influencing expression through psychological perception. However, unlike existing research that generally confirms positive effects of usage motivation on willingness to express opinions online [1,3,6], this study did not find a significant direct correlation between the two [1], this study found no significant direct correlation between the two. The core reason is that this research focused on controversial topics, where the spiral of silence effect is stronger. In this context, the constraining effect of perceived opinion climate outweighs the driving force of usage motivation. In addition, Gen Z's media consumption and creation behaviour are increasingly complicated. Dialectically thinking can make expression

choices more reasonable, considering both the risk and benefit of actions in deciding whether to use something. Therefore, the explanatory ability of one type of motivation has been reduced.

#### 4.3 Practical Implications of Key Influencing Factors

The only factor that affects exposure to different perspectives in the public comment section. This result has some reference value; it shows that the comment areas are not just places of interaction among people but also venues for exposing different perspectives by young people, so new media platform operators need to strengthen development management work here: first, use algorithms and human intervention combined to remove abusive comments and extreme thoughts, create a broad-ranging exchange atmosphere. Secondly, introduce functions such as "Viewpoint Plaza" or "Diverse Perspectives recommendations", which actively present different views to users and expand the commentary space for presenting multiple opinions [9].

In addition to this, Exposure to a variety of points of view can enhance perception; Information echo chambers have weaker effects when people encounter fewer types. As two opposite phenomena, this suggests that Gen Z has good media literacy; they are more exposed to information than others and can use their minds more reasonably after acquiring knowledge [10]. This finding also indicates that breaking out of Information Echo Chamber hinges not on the provision of diverse perspectives, but on enhanced media literacy and users' intentional efforts to escape their Information Echo Chambers [2].

#### 5. Summary

Based on this research, the questionnaire was found to have good stability and validity; Generation Z's basic attitude towards using new media is that it primarily serves relaxation purposes with an aim at exploration as well. However, they are aware that a variety of viewpoints may be presented through new media use; therefore, there exists some degree of self-censorship during online expression due to concerns about information verification or echo chambers driven by algorithmic bias.

Therefore, we recommend: New Media Platforms should create an inclusive and Rational Comment Environment, improve the

Recommendation Algorithm, expand Choices, And design Features such as Anonymous mode, Rational Discussion Tools to alleviate Barrier for Expression For Generation Z Audiences themselves, improving Self-Media Literacy is vital. Cultivate good, reasonable habits of using the internet in conjunction with studying how to be responsible online; Educational institutes and the cyber-Governance Department should enhance digital Literacy among young people, clarify cyberspace Governance regulations, and promote deep research into issues of Cyberspace governance.

There are also some limitations in our study; The subjects' ages and genders were not balanced enough in this investigation, nor was there a detailed measurement of essential elements like "willingness to make comments", which need improvement. However, based on current research methods, future work can expand its scope and depth by collecting more individuals at different stages across various age groups and using more specific evaluation instruments. Such efforts may provide more information for theoretical research and application problems.

In summary, this study concludes that: Generation Z mainly use new media for recreation with a task-based purpose being relatively less frequent; recreational and work-related situations often occur together, and reading comment sections play an important role in obtaining diverse information sources; they have high media literacy abilities, which help them evaluate new media's double-sided nature objectively; moreover, they pay attention to different types of content on new media and may experience changes in Information Echo Chamber; However, whether individuals will use online platforms to express themselves requires consideration from personal circumstances such as family relationships or life scenarios. Variability attributed to these variables has been minimal. The reason why the generation of 1995-2009 "doesn't want to say anything" is very complicated; it's not that afraid of talking. It tends to choose according to risk-return decisions combined with individuals' risks, situations, etc.

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