Motives for Using Anonymous Chatbot Features on Telegram among Generation Z

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the motives for using anonymous chatbot features on Telegram among Generation Z. This research employs a qualitative phenomenological approach within a constructivist paradigm. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observation of Generation Z users who actively use anonymous chatbot features on Telegram. The theoretical framework is based on Alfred Schutz's phenomenological theory, particularly the concepts of because motives and in-order-to motives. The findings indicate that the dominant motives for using anonymous chatbot features include social interaction needs, privacy and security concerns, emotional expression, and self-identity exploration. This study contributes to digital communication research by providing a deeper understanding of subjective motives underlying anonymous digital interactions among Generation Z.

Keywords: Anonymous Chatbot; Telegram, Generation Z; Usage Motives; Digital Communication

Introduction

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has transformed the way individuals interact, socialize, and construct meaning in online environments (Nugroho, 2020; Mulyana, 2015). Instant messaging applications, in particular, have become central spaces for everyday communication, especially among younger generations who are highly integrated with digital platforms (Mulyana, 2015). Alongside this development, anonymity has emerged as a significant feature in digital interaction, enabling users to communicate freely without disclosing their personal identities. This phenomenon has reshaped interpersonal communication patterns by altering norms of self-disclosure, privacy, and social engagement in online spaces (Widuri, 2023).

One platform that exemplifies this transformation is Telegram. Known for its emphasis on privacy, encryption, and flexibility, Telegram provides various features that support anonymous interaction, including anonymous chatbot services (Telegram, 2024). These chatbots function as intermediaries that randomly connect users without requiring personal profiles or identifiable information. By removing identity markers, anonymous chatbots create a unique communicative environment where users can express thoughts, emotions, and intentions with reduced social risk (Widuri, 2023). This condition makes anonymous chatbot features particularly attractive in the context of contemporary digital

culture, where concerns about data security and online surveillance are increasingly prominent (Nugroho, 2020).

The growing popularity of anonymous chatbot features is closely associated with Generation Z, a cohort characterized by high digital literacy, multitasking abilities, and intensive use of online communication technologies (Kinanti & Erza, 2020). As digital natives, Generation Z individuals integrate digital platforms into almost all aspects of daily life, including social interaction, entertainment, emotional expression, and identity exploration (LivinginTelkom, 2023). At the same time, this generation demonstrates heightened awareness of privacy risks and tends to be cautious in sharing personal information online. These characteristics position Generation Z as a relevant group for examining the motives behind the use of anonymous digital communication features (Kinanti & Erza, 2020).

Previous studies on anonymous communication have largely focused on behavioral outcomes, technological affordances, or potential risks such as misuse, cybersex, and deviant behavior (Widyastuti, 2020; Widuri, 2023). While these studies provide important insights, they often emphasize external effects rather than the subjective meanings experienced by users. Limited attention has been given to how individuals themselves interpret and construct motives for engaging in anonymous digital interactions, particularly within the context of chatbot-mediated communication. As a result, there remains a gap in understanding the subjective motivations and lived experiences that underlie the use of anonymous chatbot features among Generation Z (Widyastuti, 2020).

To address this gap, this study adopts a phenomenological perspective grounded in Alfred Schutz's theory, which emphasizes the importance of understanding human action through subjective meaning (Schutz, 1967). Schutz distinguishes between because motives, which are rooted in past experiences, and in-order-to motives, which are oriented toward future goals. This theoretical framework allows for an in-depth exploration of how Generation Z users interpret their actions and intentions when engaging with anonymous chatbot features on Telegram (Schutz, 1967).
Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the motives for using anonymous chatbot features on Telegram among Generation Z by examining both the underlying reasons and the intended purposes of such usage. By focusing on users' lived experiences and subjective interpretations, this research seeks to contribute to digital communication studies by offering a deeper understanding of anonymous interaction as a meaningful social practice rather than merely a technological function (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Schutz, 1967).

Literature Review

Digital communication research has increasingly emphasized the importance of understanding not only observable online behavior but also the subjective meanings that guide individuals in mediated interactions (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Nugroho, 2020). In digital environments, communication is shaped by technological affordances that alter social presence, identity disclosure, and interpersonal dynamics (Papacharissi, 2010). These affordances influence why individuals choose particular platforms and features, as well as how they interpret their communicative actions. Consequently, examining user motives becomes essential for understanding communication practices in contemporary digital spaces (Mulyana, 2015).

Motives in communication are commonly understood as internal orientations that drive individuals toward specific actions. Rather than being isolated psychological impulses, motives are socially and experientially constructed, emerging from past interactions and anticipated outcomes (Maslow, 1954; Schutz, 1967). In digital contexts, motives are closely linked to platform characteristics such as accessibility, privacy, interactivity, and anonymity. Studies on digital media use have identified recurring motivational patterns, including the need for social connection, emotional expression,

entertainment, information seeking, and identity exploration (Papacharissi, 2010). However, these motivations often manifest differently depending on the communicative environment and the degree of identity visibility involved.

Anonymity represents one of the most influential features shaping digital communication behavior. Anonymous communication reduces the visibility of personal identity, allowing users to interact without the social constraints commonly present in face-to-face or identifiable online interactions (Suler, 2004). Research suggests that anonymity can encourage openness, honesty, and self-disclosure, particularly in discussions involving personal emotions or sensitive topics (Widuri, 2023). At the same time, anonymity may weaken social accountability, potentially enabling inappropriate or harmful behavior. This dual nature positions anonymous communication as a complex social phenomenon rather than a purely technical feature (Livingstone, 2008).

The emergence of chatbots further complicates the landscape of digital interaction. Chatbots function as automated systems that mediate or participate in communication, blurring the boundaries between human and non-human actors (Gillespie, 2014). In messaging platforms such as Telegram, anonymous chatbot features randomly connect users and regulate the flow of interaction without requiring identifiable profiles (Telegram, 2024). This combination of anonymity and automation produces a distinctive communicative setting in which interaction is structured by algorithmic processes rather than direct interpersonal selection. As a result, user motives in chatbot-mediated communication cannot be fully explained through traditional interpersonal communication theories alone, as they involve interactions shaped simultaneously by human intentions and technological mediation (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

Generation Z occupies a central position within this evolving digital communication environment. As digital natives, members of Generation Z demonstrate extensive familiarity with online platforms and rely heavily on digital communication in their everyday lives (Kinanti & Erza, 2020). Digital spaces serve not only as tools for information exchange but also as environments for socialization, emotional expression, and identity negotiation (LivinginTelkom, 2023). At the same time, Generation Z users exhibit heightened awareness of privacy risks and data security issues, influencing their preferences for communication features that offer greater control over personal information. Anonymous chatbot features may therefore function as alternative spaces where social interaction and self-expression can occur with reduced perceived risk (Kinanti & Erza, 2020).

Despite growing scholarly attention to anonymous communication and chatbot technologies, existing studies tend to focus on technological functions, behavioral patterns, or negative consequences such as misuse and deviant behavior (Widyastuti, 2020; Widuri, 2023). Less attention has been given to how users themselves interpret their engagement with anonymous chatbot features and how they construct meaning around such interactions. In particular, there is limited research that explores user motives from a phenomenological perspective that prioritizes lived experience and subjective interpretation. This gap is especially evident in studies involving Generation Z, whose digital practices are often examined quantitatively rather than through in-depth qualitative inquiry (Schutz, 1967).

To address this limitation, a phenomenological approach grounded in Alfred Schutz's theory provides a suitable analytical framework. Schutz conceptualizes social action as inherently meaningful and emphasizes the importance of understanding actions from the actor's point of view (Schutz, 1967). His distinction between because motives, which are rooted in past experiences, and in-order-to motives, which are oriented toward future goals, offers a systematic way to examine why individuals engage in particular forms of communication. Applying this framework to anonymous chatbot usage allows for an exploration of how Generation Z users interpret both the reasons behind their engagement and the purposes they seek to achieve through anonymous digital interaction.

By situating anonymous chatbot usage within a phenomenological perspective, this study positions digital communication as a socially constructed practice shaped by subjective meaning rather than merely a response to technological availability (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This approach contributes to digital communication scholarship by deepening understanding of anonymity, motivation, and human–technology interaction in contemporary messaging platforms.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Haryono, 2020). The primary objective of this design is to explore and interpret the subjective meanings that underlie social action, particularly in digitally mediated communication. Rather than seeking causal generalization, this study emphasizes understanding how individuals experience and interpret their engagement with anonymous chatbot features on Telegram (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The research is positioned within a constructivist paradigm, which assumes that social reality is constructed through interaction and interpretation, and that meaning emerges from individuals' lived experiences within specific social contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

A phenomenological approach is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of user motives as experienced and articulated by the participants themselves (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Drawing on Alfred Schutz's phenomenological theory, this study conceptualizes communication behavior as meaningful social action shaped by both past experiences and future-oriented intentions (Schutz, 1967). Schutz's distinction between because motives and in-order-to motives provides the analytical lens through which participants' narratives are interpreted (Schutz, 1967).

Research Participants

The research participants consisted of members of Generation Z who actively use anonymous chatbot features on the Telegram application. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all informants had direct and relevant experience with the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The criteria for participant selection included active engagement with anonymous chatbot features and willingness to share personal experiences related to their usage. This sampling strategy aligns with phenomenological research principles, which prioritize depth of experience over sample size and emphasize participants' lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were employed to allow participants to freely express their experiences, motivations, and interpretations while maintaining focus on key research themes. This method enables the researcher to capture rich, nuanced accounts of participants' lived experiences in using anonymous chatbot features (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Observation was conducted to complement interview data by providing contextual insight into how anonymous chatbot interactions occur within the Telegram platform (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

All interviews were conducted in an ethical manner, with participants informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Given the sensitivity associated with anonymous communication, particular attention was paid to protecting participants' identities and ensuring voluntary participation (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an interpretive phenomenological process informed by Alfred Schutz's theoretical framework (Schutz, 1967). Interview transcripts were analyzed through iterative reading and thematic interpretation to identify recurring patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Participants' narratives were examined to distinguish between because motives, reflecting past experiences that influenced their decision to use anonymous chatbot features, and in-order-to motives, reflecting the goals and intentions that participants sought to achieve through such usage (Schutz, 1967).

The analysis emphasized intersubjectivity, recognizing that participants' meanings are shaped through social interaction and shared cultural understanding (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Rather than quantifying responses, the study focused on interpreting how participants construct meaning around anonymous digital communication and how these meanings inform their communicative actions.

Trustworthiness and Research Rigor

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed methodological rigor consistent with qualitative research standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data triangulation was achieved by combining interview and observational data, allowing for cross-validation of findings (Denzin, 2012). Prolonged engagement with the research context and reflective analysis further enhanced the depth and consistency of interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These strategies support the validity of the findings by ensuring that interpretations accurately reflect participants' lived experiences.

By adhering to a phenomenological methodology grounded in a constructivist paradigm, this study provides a robust framework for examining motives in anonymous digital communication. This methodological approach aligns with IJMMU's emphasis on interpretive social research and supports a nuanced understanding of how Generation Z users engage with anonymous chatbot features on Telegram (Schutz, 1967; Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the use of anonymous chatbot features on Telegram among Generation Z is driven by complex and interrelated motives. Consistent with Alfred Schutz's phenomenological framework, these motives can be analytically categorized into because motives and in-order-to motives (Schutz, 1967). This distinction allows for a deeper understanding of anonymous chatbot usage as meaningful social action shaped by both past experiences and future-oriented intentions.

Because Motives: Background Experiences and Preconditions of Action

Because motives refer to past experiences and contextual conditions that encourage individuals to engage in particular actions (Schutz, 1967). In this study, participants' narratives indicate that their initial engagement with anonymous chatbot features was influenced by prior exposure to information, social environments, and digital experiences. Awareness of anonymous chatbot features through peer networks, social media platforms, and online communities reflects the socially constructed nature of digital meaning formation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Another prominent because motive relates to participants' past experiences with identity exposure and privacy concerns in digital communication. Discomfort with identifiable platforms, fear of judgment, and concerns over data misuse contributed to a preference for anonymous interaction. These findings

align with studies indicating that anonymity serves as a protective mechanism against social evaluation in online environments (Suler, 2004; Papacharissi, 2010).

Additionally, boredom and routine saturation in everyday digital interaction emerged as important background conditions. Repetitive communication patterns on mainstream platforms reduced novelty and engagement, making anonymous chatbot features appear more attractive due to their unpredictability and spontaneity. This condition reflects how prior digital experiences shape readiness for alternative forms of mediated interaction (Livingstone, 2008).

In-Order-To Motives: Goals and Intentions of Anonymous Interaction

While because motives explain why participants were inclined to use anonymous chatbot features, in-order-to motives illuminate what participants sought to achieve through their engagement (Schutz, 1967). One dominant in-order-to motive is the desire to establish new social connections without social pressure. Anonymity enabled users to initiate interaction without concerns about self-presentation or social expectations, facilitating openness and relational exploration (Papacharissi, 2010).

Emotional expression also emerged as a central in-order-to motive. Participants perceived anonymous chatbot spaces as environments that allowed honest expression of thoughts and feelings without fear of negative evaluation. This finding supports the notion that anonymity can function as an emotional buffer that encourages self-disclosure in digital communication (Suler, 2004).

Another significant in-order-to motive involves entertainment and escapism. Random matching and unpredictable conversations provided excitement, novelty, and playful engagement. These motivations are consistent with research highlighting entertainment and affective gratification as key drivers of digital media use (Maslow, 1954; Livingstone, 2008).

Ambivalent Experiences and Reflexive Interpretation

The findings also reveal ambivalence in participants' experiences. While anonymity enabled openness and exploration, it simultaneously exposed participants to risks such as inappropriate or sexually explicit content. These experiences prompted reflexive strategies, including terminating conversations or actively managing interaction boundaries. Such reflexivity demonstrates that users are not passive recipients of anonymous digital environments but active agents who negotiate meaning and interaction norms (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

From a phenomenological perspective, this ambivalence reinforces Schutz's assertion that social action is interpretive and situated. Participants continuously reinterpret their actions and adjust behavior based on ongoing experiences, illustrating the dynamic nature of motive construction in mediated interaction (Schutz, 1967).

Discussion: Anonymous Chatbot Usage as Meaningful Social Action

The distinction between because motives and in-order-to motives highlights anonymous chatbot usage as a form of meaningful social action rather than a purely technological practice. These findings demonstrate how accumulated experiences, social context, and future-oriented intentions converge in shaping digital communication behavior (Schutz, 1967).

By applying Schutz's phenomenological framework, this study foregrounds subjective meaning and intentionality in anonymous chatbot usage. Anonymous digital interaction should therefore be

understood not merely as an outcome of technological affordances but as a socially constructed practice embedded in users' lived experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

Conclusion

This study examined the motives underlying the use of anonymous chatbot features on Telegram among Generation Z by adopting a phenomenological approach grounded in Alfred Schutz's theory of social action (Schutz, 1967). The findings demonstrate that anonymous chatbot usage constitutes a meaningful communicative practice shaped by lived experiences and intentional orientations rather than a simple response to technological availability.

The analysis reveals that because motives are rooted in prior digital experiences, privacy awareness, and identity concerns, while in-order-to motives reflect goals related to social connection, emotional expression, and entertainment. The coexistence of opportunity and risk within anonymous chatbot interaction underscores the reflexive and interpretive nature of digital communication practices (Livingstone, 2008).

Theoretical Contribution

The primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in its application of Alfred Schutz's phenomenological framework to anonymous chatbot-mediated communication. By operationalizing the distinction between because motives and in-order-to motives, this research extends phenomenological theory into contemporary digital contexts involving non-human and algorithmic mediators (Schutz, 1967; Gillespie, 2014).

Furthermore, this study reframes anonymous chatbot usage as meaningful social action rather than technologically deterministic behavior. Anonymity is shown to function as a socially constructed condition that enables particular forms of interaction, emotional expression, and identity exploration among Generation Z (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Papacharissi, 2010). This contribution provides a conceptual foundation for future research on mediated anonymity, chatbot communication, and beyond-human communication dynamics (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

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