

Dark Jokes as a Coping Mechanism for Gen-Z Physically Disabled People

Dinda Putri Abadi¹, Mohammad Hilfi Azra Dzikrulloh², Moch. Syihabudin Nuha³,
Linka Latifany Falasifa Reidana⁴, Fitri Wahyuni⁵

{dindabadi@gmail.com¹, mohilfi123@gmail.com²,
moch.syihabudin.2301118@students.um.ac.id³, linka.latifany.2301118@students.um.ac.id⁴,
fitri.wahyuni.fip@um.ac.id⁵}

Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia^{1,2,3,4,5}

Abstract. One type of humor that is currently developing is dark jokes, which is a form of humor that tends to give the impression of controversial satire. The use of dark humor is a coping mechanism for Gen-Z with disabilities. Efforts to cope with stress and recover from difficult pressures require people with disabilities to have high resilience and develop strategies that are appropriate to the situation at hand, or what is commonly known as coping strategies. The purpose of this study is to explore the coping strategies of Gen-Z people with physical disabilities in dealing with physical limitations through dark jokes. The method used in this research is qualitative research with a phenomenological design using in-depth interviews. Data collection through 3 key informants with predetermined criteria. The results of this study show that people with disabilities use coping mechanisms as a problem-solving strategy that includes emotion focused coping and problem focused coping. Through coping strategies owned by people with disabilities, they are able to self-actualize and accept their physical limitations.

Keywords: coping Mechanism, gen-z, disability, dark joke

1 Introduction

The rapid digitization of the social world has led to constant shifts in lifestyle, following trends from around the globe. One such trend is humor preference, referring to the types of humor considered amusing or entertaining. According to research by Thorson et al., as cited in Aji (2024), humor has a positive correlation with warmth, flexibility, assertiveness, pleasure, creativity, positive emotions, and cheerfulness. Additionally, humor negatively correlates with pessimistic behavior, avoidance, low self-esteem, aggression, depression, anxiety, and poor mood. One type of humor that is currently on the rise is dark humor or dark jokes, which tend to carry controversial, satirical, and ironic undertones [2]. These phenomena within society provide an opportunity for expressing criticism, using persuasive language, and shaping public perception.

One example is the talk show "Lapor Pak." On this show, humor is an integral part of its format and often tackles sensitive issues, attracting considerable public interest [2]. Communicating information with humor is believed to reduce tension and stress, helping to avoid feelings of guilt, anxiety, or self-doubt [3]. According to research by Voisey & Heintz (2024), dark humor often involves using someone's illness, disability, or death as a form of bitter entertainment. This research also reveals that dark humor can serve as a coping mechanism [4], [5].

Currently, the majority of the population consists of Generation Z, born between the 1990s and 2010, who have grown up alongside the development of communication technology, including social media. The range of content available to this demographic is extensive, with examples such as "Somasi" or "Stand On Mic Take It Easy," a YouTube content platform by Deddy Corbuzier. In this content, communication style often incorporates elements of reality, paradox, hyperbole, sarcasm, cynicism, and satire [6]. According to Kurniadi et al. (2023), sarcasm and humor have become tools for Gen Z to express dissatisfaction and criticism. Such forms of expression empower them to confront and voice their opinions and concerns.

One of the primary concerns for researchers in dark humor usage is its potential as a coping mechanism for Generation Z with physical disabilities, or limitations in performing certain activities due to physiological, psychological, or structural impairments [7]. Research by Demjén (2016) shows that humor can serve as a coping mechanism for cancer patients, who use humor to express aggression toward their illness, thereby strengthening mutual communication and support among fellow cancer patients. In Semmel (2020) thesis, Gallow Humor is identified as a specific type of coping humor that takes on a darker, more satirical style.

The Gallow Humor that evolved in the United States during slavery bears similarities to the dark humor currently thriving in Indonesia. A study by Martin & Garrick cited in Semmel (2020) indicates that the physiological effects of humor and laughter are similar to those of physical exercise, relaxing the body and acting as a stress reliever. Dark humor as a coping mechanism can also serve as an indicator of a person's mental well-being through a more holistic approach [10]. Humor has helped individuals cope in difficult situations, though specific discussions on the nature and impact of dark humor in coping contexts remain limited [10].

Another study by Potter (2023) found that dark humor can be a coping mechanism and contribute to group dynamics among colleagues. Sigmund Freud, a prominent figure in psychology known for his works on humor theory, labeled humor as an exceptional defense mechanism, stating that humor indicates a triumph not only of the ego but also of the pleasure principle, asserting itself in the face of challenging realities. This implies that humor can be used as a way to display superiority when one succeeds in making others laugh, feel acknowledged, and maintain optimism in the face of adversity [11]. This research is expected to offer an alternative solution for coping strategies among individuals with physical disabilities in relation to the still-taboo or ambiguous phenomenon of dark humor, as an effort toward achieving resilience.

2 Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method aimed at deeply uncovering individuals' experiences related to specific events as a form of interaction with their environment. The study generates qualitative data on coping strategies among individuals with physical disabilities in dealing with dark jokes to achieve life success. The results of data analysis will provide recommendations for a coping strategy model for Gen-Z individuals with physical disabilities in facing dark humor or similar situations.

The research follows several stages of phenomenology, including (1) determining research subjects; (2) data collection; (3) data analysis; and (4) checking and verifying the validity of findings. The focus of the research is on the resilience dynamics and coping strategies of Gen-Z individuals with physical disabilities regarding the phenomenon of dark humor.

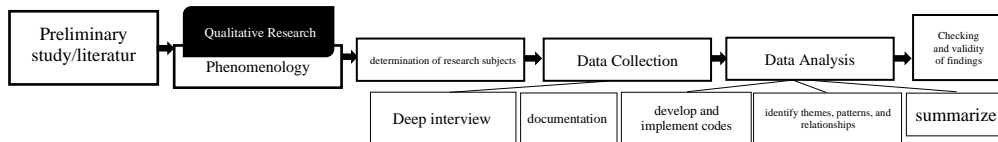


Fig 1. Research Process Flow (Author's Work, 2024)

The research subjects were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria. The subjects consist of key informants and supporting informants. Key informants must meet the following criteria: (1) born between 1977–2012, (2) individuals with physical disabilities, and (3) have been exposed to dark humor. Supporting informants include close friends or family members of the key informants. The data sources for this research consist of:

1. Primary Data: Obtained from in-depth interviews with key informants.
2. Secondary Data: Obtained from a literature review on dark humor sourced from Sinta- and Scopus-indexed journals.

Data collection for phenomenological research involves in-depth interviews and documentation with key and supporting informants, using a semi-structured technique to maintain flexibility. Additionally, a literature review is conducted via platforms like Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Portal Garuda to obtain credible theoretical references as data support.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using MAXQDA software, following the [12] model, which includes: 1) code development and application, 2) identification of themes, patterns, and relationships, and 3) data summarization. The validity of the findings is tested through source triangulation between key and supporting informants, along with discussions with experts or academic advisors.

3 Results and Discussion

Exploring Coping Strategies of Gen-Z Individuals with Physical Disabilities in Facing Physical Limitations through Dark Humor. In-depth interviews with Gen-Z individuals with physical disabilities revealed that they face numerous issues and challenges, primarily related to physical abilities. They experience limitations in mobility, performing daily activities, and adapting to changes in their physical condition. Beyond physical challenges, they must also manage feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and social stigma or jokes from those around them. Nonetheless, many expressed that support from friends and family plays a crucial role in their adaptation process. They employ various coping strategies, such as accepting reality and focusing on positive aspects of life. Through worship and gratitude, they work to manage the negative emotions arising from their physical changes. Some also emphasize the importance of practicing to improve their abilities and independence in daily activities. With perseverance and strong motivation, many are able to rise above and lead better lives despite the obstacles they face.

The first informant, Zaki, a 24-year-old graduate who studied in Malang, has been physically disabled since birth. His college friendships, primarily with other individuals with disabilities, grew closer as they accepted each other's limitations. This acceptance is evident in their group of friends, where they can make dark jokes with one another. Zaki frequently interacts with the disability community and receives support from his friends, both within the community and beyond the campus. He feels aided by an inclusive school environment that does not discriminate against individuals with disabilities and has close relationships with those around him who support his perseverance and provide significant encouragement throughout his college years.

“Wah kalau aku kebetulan sirkelku itu kebanyakan yang difabel. Dulu kami tuh saling melontarkan ya istilahnya dark joke gitu ya. Kayak misalkan temanku buta, eh buta, picek gitu, sering kita apa sebut-sebut gitu. Begitu juga teman-temanku, eh kursi roda, pinjam dong kursi rodanya” --(Zaki, 24 tahun)

“Wah, in my circle, most of us are disabled. We used to throw around what you could call dark jokes. Like, for example, if my friend is blind, we would joke about it, like calling each other blind or cross-eyed. And my friends with wheelchairs would also joke, ‘Hey, can I borrow your wheelchair?’” --(Zaki, 24 years old)

The first informant's strategy for dealing with problems involves, initially, using emotion-focused coping by redirecting issues through activities that focus on emotions, such as sleeping or overthinking. However, after completing the emotion-focused coping stage, the informant then tries to resolve the issue with a second strategy, problem-focused coping, by discussing or brainstorming with people involved in the problem. The informant also mentioned occasionally having thoughts of engaging in risky behavior, such as self-harm, when facing problems, though this did not become a coping method. Besides emotion-focused and problem-focused coping, the informant

also uses dark humor as a coping strategy, sharing jokes with friends who have disabilities and have accepted their own limitations.

The second informant, Vina, a 24-year-old administrative staff member at a middle school in Banyuwangi, had an accident in 2016 while in high school. As a result, she had to undergo an amputation of her left leg and now uses a prosthetic leg for daily activities. Although she initially faced difficulties and trauma, the support from her family and friends, along with her own efforts, helped her regain independence. Vina is not only employed but is also actively involved in the school's multimedia activities, including documentation, video creation, and social media management.

The second informant's strategy for dealing with problems begins with using emotion-focused coping through her strong religious beliefs, involving worship and gratitude, which helps her accept her condition as fate. Vina's emotion-focused coping includes expressing gratitude, praying, seeking emotional support from family and friends, facing negative feelings by crying, and maintaining self-control to stay positive amidst her challenges.

"Dari keluarga saya diberikan nasehat, harus bersyukur, kayak kita itu ingin kamu balik kayak dulu lagi."—(Vina, 24 tahun).

"My family advised me to be grateful, saying they want me to return to the way I was before" —(Vina, 24 years old)

Vina's problem-focused coping strategy for dealing with her limitations includes working toward recovery and returning to normal, undergoing therapy and physical exercises for her rehabilitation, and planning various approaches to resolve her challenges.

"Akhirnya terapi. Berusaha kembali seperti dulu lagi."

"Mulai lepas tongkat, pakai palsu, mulai belajar kayak dulu lagi."

"Finally, therapy. Trying to get back to the way I was before."

"Starting to let go of the cane, using a prosthetic, and learning how to do things like I used to."

For the second informant, dark humor does not serve as a coping strategy. The deep trauma from the accident she experienced has made her aware that returning to normal requires significant effort, so she avoids making light of her physical limitations.

"Saya selalu berusaha buat nggak kayak begitu. Kalau keceplosan atau apa saya gak tahu, tapi saya berusaha agar tidak sampai melontarkan itu (dark joke). Biasanya kan lihat di sosmed itu. Nah kalau orang-orang bikin dark joke begitu saya cuma batin 'oh iya seh kamu gak merasakan'".

"I always try not to be like that. If I slip up or something, I don't know, but I make an effort not to throw those (dark jokes) out there. Usually, I see it on social media. When people make dark jokes like that, I just think to myself, 'Oh, you haven't experienced it.'"

The third informant is Nizar (19 years old). Nizar is a 19-year-old young man who has just graduated from vocational school with a major in Automotive Engineering. In 2020, while in the second year of junior high school, he experienced an accident that resulted in disabilities in his left leg and arm. This physical change was quite drastic, but Nizar has managed to live his life with full acceptance and the belief that this is a fate he must face. Although he initially felt embarrassed and emotionally affected by his limitations, Nizar did not let this stop him from engaging in activities. He learned to adapt and resumed independent activities, such as walking and writing. His family, friends, and neighbors provided the moral and physical support that helped him through his recovery period.

Nizar's coping strategies include emotion-focused coping, which involves self-acceptance of his condition, expressing gratitude for still having the opportunity to worship despite the accident, and managing his emotions by not dwelling on jokes about his physical condition. Additionally, his problem-focused coping involves physically adapting by engaging in activities such as learning to walk without assistive devices and facing challenges by thinking before acting and not avoiding the problems he encounters.

"Sering kak, tapi saya anggap becanda saja, nggak saya seriusin."—Nizar 19 tahun

"I often do, but I just consider it a joke; I don't take it seriously." —
Nizar, 19 years old

Based on the presentations from the three informants, it is evident that the coping mechanisms used by individuals with physical disabilities include (1) emotion-focused coping, which involves efforts to manage the emotions arising from their condition; and (2) problem-focused coping, which refers to the ability to address problems directly to resolve them promptly. The informants preferred to solve problems rather than let them linger. Additionally, their faith in God, who is always with them and provides the best destiny, is a significant aspect of their emotion-focused coping. According to Lazarus and Folkman (as cited in [13]), problem-focused coping can be carried out by confronting the stressors directly, while emotion-focused coping is more about efforts to maintain inner balance by regulating emotional responses to stressors to feel better.

From the results and discussions, it can be concluded that the various efforts made by the informants, as individuals with physical disabilities, reflect coping strategies. Through the exploration of effective coping strategies, individuals with physical disabilities can face the difficulties they encounter without engaging in risky behavior, thus achieving a good self-actualization to continue living and interacting while being connected with those around them. This research serves as an effort to help understand the needs and desires of individuals with physical disabilities, showing that despite their limitations, they can continue to interact, grow, and connect emotionally with their environment. This understanding is essential for reducing internal psychological conflicts in accepting their limitations. However, further in-depth studies will be needed in the future.

In the context of coping, Gen-Z individuals with physical disabilities often utilize a combination of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. One common coping strategy is emotion-focused coping, where individuals learn to alleviate negative emotions arising from their physical limitations. For instance, they develop mechanisms to cope with feelings of shame or social stigma, such as avoiding situations that trigger discomfort. In this way, they strive to maintain a positive self-image and reduce the negative impact of others' perceptions. Additionally, through reflection and acceptance, they can shift their views about their condition, seeing it as part of a fate to be embraced and faced with optimism.

Moreover, problem-focused coping also plays a role in their strategies. Gen-Z individuals with physical disabilities often focus on developing skills and knowledge that can help them adapt to their circumstances. For example, they take the initiative to learn new ways to engage in activities or seek support from physical therapy that aids their rehabilitation. By involving themselves in productive and goal-oriented activities, they not only enhance their physical abilities but also strengthen their identity as independent and competitive individuals.

It is also important to note that they cultivate a positive attitude towards humor, which often serves as a tool for relieving tension. Responding to teasing or jokes about their physical condition with a relaxed attitude helps mitigate the emotional impact that may arise. This creates a healthier and more enjoyable social interaction space, while also reducing potential stigma. The role of humor is equally crucial in their coping strategies. By utilizing humor, individuals with physical disabilities can relieve the tension arising from social interactions and transform negative perceptions into more positive experiences. This attitude not only assists them in facing jokes or teasing directed at them but also creates opportunities for building better social relationships with others.

4 Conclusions

The rapid digitalization of the social world has influenced lifestyles, including humor preferences. Humor, particularly dark jokes, is often used as a tool to convey criticism and reduce stress. Research shows that humor, including dark humor, can serve as a coping mechanism for individuals with physical disabilities. Gen-Z, who have grown up with technological advancements, utilizes humor to confront their

physical and social challenges. Based on in-depth interviews, the coping strategies employed by individuals with physical disabilities include problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, which help them address stigma and physical difficulties, as well as enhance their resilience in navigating life. This research reveals that dark humor can function as a coping tool and strengthen mental well-being, although further studies are still needed.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the informants who took the time to share their valuable insights, enabling this research to proceed successfully. Special thanks also go to the Research and Community Service Institution (LP2M) of Universitas Negeri Malang for their financial support and facilities that made this research possible. The support from various parties has been crucial to the success of this study.

References

- [1] W. Aji, "Humor untuk Mengatasi Ketegangan Teologis dan Potensi Konflik di Media Sosial," *JSIM J. Ilmu Sos. dan Pendidik.*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2024, doi: 10.36418/syntax-imperatif.v5i4.459.
- [2] K. Nisa, "Analisis Wacana Kritis Model Break pada Tuturan Dark Jokes di Acara Televisi 'Lapor Pak' dan Implikasinya pada Mata Kuliah Analisis Wacana Perguruan Tinggi," *J. Kaji. Bahasa, Sastra dan Pengajaran*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 267–282, 2023, doi: 10.31539/kibasp.v7i1.7871.
- [3] A. Z. Nizar and N. M. Aesthetika, "Analisis Semiotika Meme Satir di Akun Twitter @memefess," *Interact. Commun. Stud. J.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 161–171, 2024, doi: 10.47134/interaction.v1i1.2544.
- [4] S. Voisey and S. Heintz, "Do Dark Humour Users Have Dark Tendencies? Relationships between Dark Humour, the Dark Tetrad, and Online Trolling," *Behav. Sci. (Basel)*, vol. 14, no. 6, p. 493, Jun. 2024, doi: 10.3390/bs14060493.
- [5] M. Naufal, H. Cholsy, and U. G. Mada, "Kesepadanan Pragmatik Dark Humor Pada Serial TV 'Family Guy,'" *Ilmu Budaya J. Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Budaya*, vol. 8, no. April, pp. 145–154, Apr. 2024, doi: 10.30872/jbssb.v8i2.14798.
- [6] Y. Kurniadi, M. Mujiono, and S. Alvin, "Humor and Gen- Z: A Reception Study of Bintang Emon's Stand- Up Comedy in Somasi Content," *DIJEMSS Dinasti Int. J. Educ. Manag. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 4, no. 6, pp. 860–868, Aug. 2023, doi: 10.31933/DIJEMSS.V4I6.1995.
- [7] N. Hasanah and D. Rusmawati, "Hubungan Antara Resiliensi Dengan Kematangan Karir Pada Remaja Penyandang Disabilitas Daksa Prof. Dr. Soeharso Surakarta," *J. EMPATI*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 286–290, 2018, doi: 10.14710/empati.2018.21868.
- [8] Z. Demjén, "Laughing at cancer: Humour, empowerment, solidarity and coping online," *J. Pragmat.*, vol. 101, pp. 18–30, Aug. 2016, doi: 10.1016/j.pragma.2016.05.010.
- [9] S. Semmel, "'Things are Going to Get a Lot Worse Before They Get Worse': Humor in the Face of Disaster, Politics, and Pain," University of Maine, 2020. Accessed: Oct. 01, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/honors>
- [10] R. Lotto, J. Mercer, and D. Morgan, "A qualitative exploration of the views of paramedics regarding the use of dark humour," *Br. Paramed. J.*
- [11] Z. R. Potter, "Laughing Through the Pain: An Analysis of Dark Humor in Trauma-and-Crisis-Centered Occupations," *Univ. Honor. Theses*, pp. 1–47, Jun. 2023, doi: 10.15760/honors.1335.
- [12] D. Priharsari and R. Indah, "Coding untuk menganalisis data pada penelitian kualitatif di bidang kesehatan," *J. Kedokt. Syiah Kuala*, vol. 21, no. 2, Aug. 2021, doi: 10.24815/jks.v21i2.20368.
- [13] A. N. Nursadrina and D. Andriani, "Gambaran Coping Strategies pada Mahasiswa Universitas Padjadjaran," *J. Psychol. Perspect.*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 01–11, 2020, doi: 10.47679/jopp.021.06200001.