

CYBER NATIVES UNDER PRESSURE: SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AFFECTS EMOTIONAL STABILITY IN GENERATION Z

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ABSTRACT

Numerous young people report spending their time online instead of engaging in real-life activities, indicating that their emotions, such as happiness, anxiety, and concern, are becoming increasingly tied to their digital experiences. This research investigates the emotional and behavioural impacts of social media on individuals aged 18 to 25, with a particular focus on Generation Z. The results show a notable increase in YouTube usage within this age group, indicating a change in digital consumption habits toward more engaging and visually attractive platforms. The study examines how prolonged social media usage affects users' emotions, frequently leading to compulsive behaviors.

The relentless pursuit of validation through likes, comments, and shares establishes a feedback loop that affects self-esteem and emotional well-being. This continuous cycle of online interaction often interferes with daily routines and reduces engagement in in-person relationships and activities. The research underscores that social media not only connects individuals but also has a notable effect on social behaviors and emotional experiences. Recognizing the psychological impacts of these platforms on young people is essential as digital environments become increasingly immersive. The study calls attention to the necessity for targeted strategies and greater awareness to encourage healthier digital behaviors among youth.

Keywords: Social Media; Emotional Well-being; Generation Z; Digital Addiction.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of social media platforms has changed the way Generation Z interacts. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and YouTube have emerged as essential components of the everyday lives of Generation Z people born between 1997 and 2012. For Generation Z, these platforms fulfil social, emotional, and recreational needs, thus becoming an essential part of their online identity. While these tools encourage connection and self-expression, they also raise significant questions about their psychological impacts, particularly regarding emotional well-being and attitude. In today's digital landscape, as noted by Bassiouni and Hackley (2014), Generation Z is highly involved in social media. This group has always experienced a world with internet access and advancements in smartphones. Social networks provide instant communication, entertainment, and

validation—but not without consequences. Numerous studies have associated high levels of social media usage with increased rates of anxiety, depression, social comparison, and emotional dependence (Kuss, & Griffiths, 2017). This research aims to investigate the complex connection between social media reliance and mental health in Generation Z, emphasizing the impact of personal traits on online activities and emotional reactions. Social media, a result of digital advancement, has changed how we connect and engage globally. The concept of digital networking has greatly evolved, impacting how Generation Z uses social media today (Cho, et al., 2024). Sites such as Orkut, MySpace, Friendster, and ultimately Facebook have dramatically altered the way people interact, express their opinions, and build communities

Social media, a result of digital advancement, has changed how we connect and engage globally. Beginning with early platforms such as Classmates.com and SixDegrees.com in the late 1990s, the concept of digital networking has greatly evolved (Cho, et al. 2024). Sites such as Orkut, MySpace, Friendster, and ultimately Facebook have dramatically altered the way people interact, express their opinions, and build communities. Mobile internet and smartphones have made social networking platforms easy to use and accessible, allowing for the immediate sharing of personal experiences and information (Hudders, et al. 2021). For Generation Z, social media serves as an essential platform for socialization, self-expression, and identity formation, rather than just a tool. However, this hyperconnectivity poses challenges. Regular online engagement is attractive and easy, but it can lead to excessive involvement, emotional fatigue, and dependency. Consequently, it is crucial to analyze the influence of these platforms on the emotional well-being, behavioural tendencies, and cognitive anticipations of the younger generation (Ribeiro, et al. 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Moreover, research conducted by Lin et al. in 2020 indicated that young adults addicted to social media exhibited increased neuroticism and decreased conscientiousness. h indicated that social media addiction often leads to increased mental instability and fluctuations in mood.

The subsequent most common motives for using the internet included education, viewing movies or streaming music, relaxing, using email for professional purposes, and reading news on socio-political issues, after social networking and information seeking (Hashemi, et al. 2022) which can also contribute to patterns of social media use. Multiple studies suggest that social media addiction can result in adverse effects, such as diminished academic achievement, reduced engagement in offline communities, and challenges in relationships (De Doncker & McLean, 2022); Kuss and Griffiths (2017) propose that there exists a generational divide regarding the perception of SNS addiction, with younger generations potentially being more prone to exhibiting addictive symptoms linked to their SNS activities. Despite the negative impacts of social media addiction, platforms also serve as valuable educational tools for online learning. Currently, digital communication tools such as game consoles, smartphones, and personal computers are accessible to many young children globally, aged 5 to 16 (Bassiouni & Hackley 2014). versely impacts the emotional well-being and actions of Generation Z; thus, these findings highlight the importance of implementing strategies to address this demographic's dependence on social medias to address this demographic's It is essential to develop strategies that promote healthy social media engagement and reduce the harmful impacts of addiction. Develop strategies that promote healthy engagement and mitigate these harmful impacts.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the extent of social media engagement within Generation Z.
2. To assess the relationship between social media addiction and the emotional well-being of youth.
3. To suggest strategies for mindful social media interaction that support emotional health and mental well-being.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Sampling

The demographic includes individuals aged 18–25, signifying Generation Z. To ensure representation from students, working professionals, and the unemployed, a stratified random sampling method was used. From the previously mentioned group of UG colleges, a sample of 200 young individuals was selected from the total youth population, including both males and females in the NCR region.

Instruments for Data Gathering: A systematic survey was created, comprising three sections:

- Population characteristics
- Social Media Dependence Measure (modified from the Bergen Social Media Dependence Measure)
- Scale for Emotional Well-being (derived from the WHO-5 Index).

Demographic Form

Incorporates age, gender, educational degree, and average daily time dedicated to social media.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Unsuitable social science software was used to evaluate the data, and all percentages, frequencies, and mean scores were statistically determined before being displayed in tables and graphs Tables 1-4.

Descriptive Statistics

Employed for demographic examination:

- Average (M)
- Standard Deviation (SD)
- Occurrence (f) and Proportion (%)

Inferential Statistics

a. Pearson Correlation (r):

Employed to determine the connection between: Social Media Addiction and Emotional Well-being, Temperament and Social Media Addiction

Formula

$$r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

b. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance):

Used to test if emotional well-being varies significantly among different temperament groups.

F-ratio formula:

$$F = \frac{MS_{\text{between}}}{MS_{\text{within}}}$$

c. Linear Regression Analysis:

Used to predict emotional well-being from levels of social media addiction.

Equation:

$$Y = a + bX$$

Where:

- YY = Emotional Well-being
- XX = Social Media Addiction Score
- aa = Constant
- bb = Regression Coefficient

Table 1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS TABLE					
Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Social Media Addiction	200	19.45	4.32	10	30
Emotional Well-being	200	12.88	5.76	2	25
Social engagement	200	14.3	3.15	6	20
Anxiety	200	16.78	4.09	7	24

Interpretation: Based on the descriptive statistics, the average level of social media addiction among participants was moderate (M = 19.45, SD = 4.32). The scores for emotional well-being (M = 12.88, SD = 5.76) indicated that the emotional states of the group were variable. Neuroticism levels were substantially elevated (M = 16.78, SD = 4.09), suggesting that numerous participants experienced anxiety-related traits or emotional volatility, whereas extraversion scores were moderately high and stable (M = 14.30, SD = 3.15).

Table 2 PEARSON CORRELATION TABLE			
Variables	1	2	3
1. Social Media Addiction	1		
2. Emotional Well-being	-0.53 (p < 0.01)	1	
3. Anxiety	+0.41 (p < 0.01)	-0.33 (p < 0.05)	1

Interpretation: The correlation analysis reveals a significant negative relationship between Social Media Addiction and Emotional Well-being ($r = -0.53$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that greater use of social media may result in diminished emotional health. Furthermore, Social Media Addiction shows a positive correlation with Neuroticism ($r = +0.41$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a possible connection between excessive social media usage and emotional instability. Finally, there is a negative correlation between Neuroticism and Emotional Well-being ($r = -0.33$, $p < 0.05$), reinforcing the idea that individuals with higher levels of neuroticism tend to have lower emotional well-being.

Table 3 ANOVA TABLE (WELL-BEING ACROSS TEMPERAMENT TYPES)					
Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	528.42	2	264.21	6.37	0.002
Within Groups	8102.58	197	41.11		
Total	8631	199			

Interpretation: Significant disparities in emotional well-being are evident among varying temperament classifications. The findings indicate that Social Media Addiction exerts a substantial adverse influence on the dependent variable. In particular, elevated levels of social media addiction correlate with diminished levels of [emotional well-being/performance/etc]. The model's statistical relevance ($p < 0.001$) and standardized beta coefficient (-0.53) underscore that this represents a robust and consequential association.

Table 4 REGRESSION OUTPUT					
Model	B	SE	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	22.15	1.23	—	18.01	0
SM Addiction	-0.49	0.08	-0.53	-6.01	0

Equation: Well-being = $22.15 - 0.49 \times (\text{Social Media Addiction}) + 0.49 \times (\text{Social Media Addiction}) \times \text{Well-being} = 22.15 - 0.49$. According to the regression analysis, the dependent variable is negatively impacted by social media addiction in a statistically significant way. The effect magnitude is moderate to high, as shown by the beta value of -0.53 . The highly significant link is shown by the p-value (< 0.001). This suggests that [emotional well-

being/temperament/academic performance] drastically decreases when social media addiction rises.

Findings

The descriptive statistics indicate that participants showed moderate levels of social media addiction ($M = 19.45$, $SD = 4.32$). Emotional well-being scores ($M = 12.88$, $SD = 5.76$) were relatively low and variable, indicating fluctuating emotional states. The neuroticism scores were notably high ($M = 16.78$, $SD = 4.09$), pointing toward a tendency for emotional instability and anxiety traits. On the other hand, extraversion was found to be moderately high and consistent ($M = 14.30$, $SD = 3.15$).

CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence that social media addiction significantly and negatively influences emotional well-being, particularly among individuals with heightened neuroticism. The observed moderate-to-strong negative correlation between social media usage and emotional health underscores the psychological toll of excessive digital engagement. Moreover, the regression analysis validates that social media addiction is a statistically significant indicator of diminished emotional well-being, emphasizing worries about its widespread effects on mental health.

The findings highlight that individuals who engage heavily with social media are more prone to emotional instability and experience diminished psychological resilience. This is particularly concerning for younger populations such as Generation Z, who are both highly active on digital platforms and vulnerable to emotional and behavioral shifts. Given these insights, it is crucial for stakeholders—including educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers—to foster healthier digital habits and promote emotional regulation strategies. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts, mediating variables such as personality traits, and intervention-based approaches to mitigate the adverse psychological outcomes associated with social media overuse.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study used a cross-sectional survey to collect data at one time, making it difficult to show a clear link between mental health and social media use.
2. Participants answered their surveys, which can lead to biases or inaccurate assessments, especially on sensitive topics like mental health and addiction.
3. The sample mostly included people from a similar age and background, which may not represent the full diversity of Generation Z.

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