



The Effects of Social Media on Gen Zs' Mental Health

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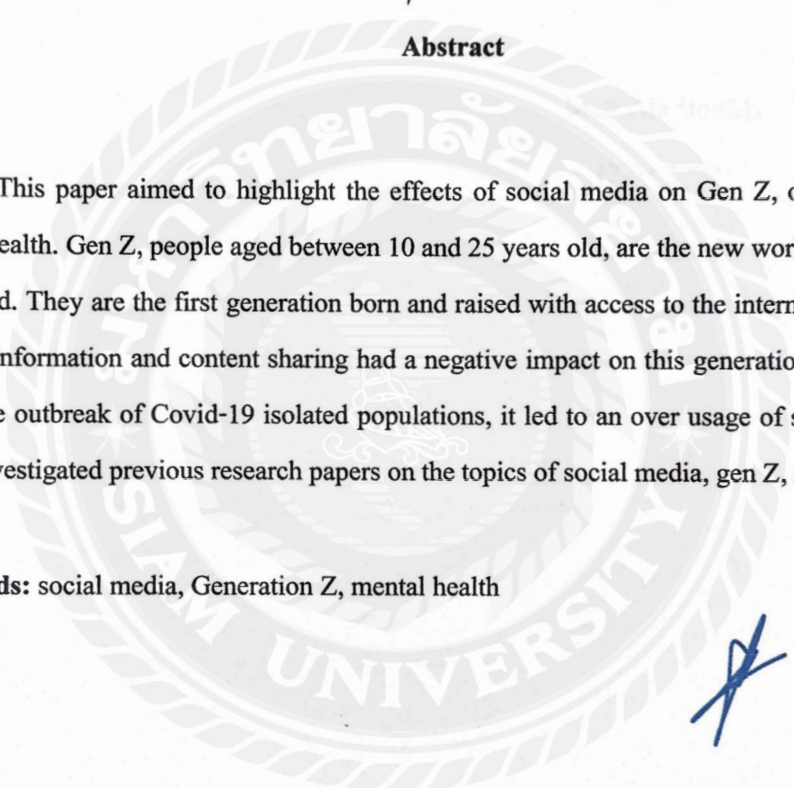
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Abstract

This paper aimed to highlight the effects of social media on Gen Z, or Generation Zs', mental health. Gen Z, people aged between 10 and 25 years old, are the new working generation of our world. They are the first generation born and raised with access to the internet. This unlimited flow of information and content sharing had a negative impact on this generation's mental health. Since the outbreak of Covid-19 isolated populations, it led to an over usage of social media. This study investigated previous research papers on the topics of social media, gen Z, and mental health.

Keywords: social media, Generation Z, mental health



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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The Generation Z is defined by the Pew Research Center as persons born in 1997 or after. This generation is known as the largest one ever, being almost 30% of the world's population. Globally, we can count roughly 2 billion of them (McCrinkle, 2019). This serves as "a relevant demarcation between Millennials and Gen Z for a range of factors, including major political, economical, and social aspects that characterize the Millennial generation's young years." As per Pew, Gen Z is a group that is "constantly available," alluding to their interaction with digital technology and social media. How Gen Z searches for information or is engaged to news is heavily influenced by social media. The News Media Alliance (NMA) analysis discovered certain tendencies in which platforms are used and at what time of day. For instance, 42% of Gen Z interviewees use Facebook first thing in the morning and then switch to other social media sites later in the day (G.A.P, 2022).

From a young age, Gen Z are exposed to several platforms, such as: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, and many more. In the United States, nearly all teenagers (95%) own at least one mobile device, with 89 percent owning a smartphone. (Rideout & Robb, 2018) This exposure made social media a part of this generation's daily life and quickly became a vital part of their identity. It is used for various purposes: to connect with friends and family, to research about services and products, and showcase Gen Z life and experiences, to name a few. According to a survey, more than 65% of the population in this age group are using one of the listed social media platforms every day (Wise, 2022) and spend an average of 2 hours 43 minutes a day on those platforms (Williams, 2022).

This constant use of social networks is known to create some issues in brain development (memory loss, poor academic performance) or mental health states, such as anxiety, or even depression. Only 45 percent of Gen Zers feel their mental condition is good or excellent, as per a 2018 poll done by the American Psychological Association. In the meantime, 91% of Gen Zers said they had physical and emotional symptoms connected to anxiety or mental disorder in the previous year (Witmer, 2021).

1.2 Research Problems

Generation Z is the group that uses social media the most; in fact, 100 percent of Generation Z members claim to have at least one social media account. (Génération Z et réseaux sociaux: entre conscience et addiction, 2021) According to a recent survey by “Sortlist”, a Belgian-based platform that connects firms with marketing agencies and creatives who meet their demands, a year of coronavirus-related lockdowns has spurred a considerable increase in people's social media usage. Researchers realized that the usage increased by 78% among Gen Z (Lyons, 2021).

Long-term usage of social media by the isolated Gen Z, might be a doubtful advantage, negatively impacting mental health owing to constant overexposure to facts and disinformation. (Lee Y, jeao Y.J, Kang S, et al, 2022). As per the Pew Research Center, anxiety and depression are important issues among Gen Z of all genders, ethnicities, and family-income levels. Only 45% of this generation affirms that they have good mental health conditions (E. Cassey, 2021). This could result in some long-established issues. An Indian study recently investigated the happiness and well-being among three generations, Gen Z being one of them. They stated that overall happiness would result in “better heart health and lesser risks of getting heart diseases” (Khan, Aleem, Walia, 2021). Not only Gen Z are exposing themselves to mental health issues but also to physical health directly correlated to those ones. Relationships with others tend to also be harder to create. Gen Z are absorbed by new technologies and not present in the “real” world. Christina R. Griffin highlights the inconsistencies in adolescent exposure to modern technology that affect their development of self and connection. She pointed that this dependence could limit room for personal growth and marginalize Gen Z (Leskauskas, 2020).

1.3 Research Objective

As our world becomes more digitalized, the study will investigate the effects of social media usage on Generation Z's mental health and recommend ways of overcoming, preventing, or reducing this phenomenon.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The impact of social media on Gen Z mental health is a topic that is gaining a lot of interested recently. The scope of the study is limited to collecting information among documents, articles, and studies to support the topic research. The focus will be Generation Z as a group of individuals and how their social media over usage can affect their mental health. Furthermore, research on possible ways to prevent or reduce this phenomenon. The analysis covers social media usage of Gen Z and Gen Z mental health issue over the period going from 2019 to 2022.

1.5 Research Significance

Most of the recent studies show the impact of social media on a wide range of population's mental health, not concentrating on a special group. Conduction this study on the impact of social media usage on Gen Z's mental health will:

- Fill the gap of other research paper and provide complete research on Generation Z
- Highlight the difference in usage before and after the COVID-19 pandemic
- Provide preventions and guidelines for a proper usage of social media by Gen Z

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social media

Social Media is defined as a “collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration” by TechTarget (Lutkevich, 2021). The usage of social media has been growing over the years, and nowadays counts approximately 3.8 billion users (Dollarhyde, 2021). A multitude of networks are known as social media networks, such as: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, YouTube. Facebook would be the largest social network with 2.91 billion members, surpassing YouTube (2.5 billion), WhatsApp (2 billion), and Instagram (1.4 billion), according to a Statista (S. Dixon, 2022)

report released in January 2022. The positions of WeChat, TikTok, Facebook Messenger, and Douyin would be 5, 6, 7, and 8, respectively. However, a difference in usage can be witnessed between various areas. Social media is used the most in Asia, Philippines being the country with the highest social media usage rate in the world: about 11 hours a day. On the other end, with an average time spent on social media of 2 hours and 7 minutes, USA is rated 25th in the world (Digital Marketing Institute, 2021).

The opinions on social media vary from one user to another, according to a Pew Research Center research, adolescents believe that social media helps them stay more connected to their friends' lives (more than 81%) and that it enables them to communicate with a broader range of individuals (more than 69%). Approximately 68 percent of teenagers who took part in the research claimed that social media gives them the impression that they have individuals who would help them in difficult situations (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Young individuals are also attracted by this “free of charge” technology. However, the reason behind social media being “free of charge” is purely business. Social medias are competing for the users' attention, developing a business model to keep people engaged on their screen. Social media isn't a product, social media is a “new kind of marketplace that trades in human futures” (Zuboff, 2021). As Jaron Lanier said: “It's the gradual, slight, imperceptible change in your own behavior that is the product” (The Social Dilemma, 2021).

By being extremely present and demanding social media can affect users' daily life. Managing time becomes gradually harder for most people, especially the younger generation. In terms of social media use, roughly one in five Gen Zers claimed to be accessing social media every hour of the day, while more than half used several social media platforms several times a day. In terms of how much time was spent on social media, over one-third of the students acknowledged using it 7–10 hours each day, and slightly less than one-third said they used it for 5–6 hours per day. (Ahmed, 2019). This extensive use of social media affects Gen Z's time management. Moreover, this generation is prone to risks online, one of them being cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is “the use of technology to repeatedly and intentionally harass, hurt, embarrass, humiliate, or intimidate another person.” (Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI), 2019). A study shows that some social media's count more victims of cyberbullying than others, Instagram being the first one with 42% of individuals reported as being victims of cyber bullying (UGC, 2021). Generation Z members are

usually bullied due to their appearance (61%), academic achievements (25%) and race (17%) (National voices for equality, education, and enlightenment, 2022).

2.2 Gen Z

As Jenniffer Meng said, a writer and member of the Generation Z, this generation is the first one to have never seen a world without the internet. Gen Zers grew up with access to the internet, were playing on computers instead of toys and learning from the vague source of information that can be find online. Defined as adolescents spending their whole time on computers, they are however trying to fight bigger causes following their own ways; especially through social medias (Meng, 2020). Social media has become Gen Z's' special and unique place to share any kind of information and use liberty of expression. The younger end of this generation, those between the ages of 18 and 24, are particularly likely to report using Instagram (76%), Snapchat (75%), or TikTok. Majorities of individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 say they use Instagram or Snapchat, while approximately half say they use TikTok (55%). For instance, only 2% of adults older than 65 mention utilizing Snapchat, compared to 65% of adults ages 18 to 29, a 63-percentage point gap. (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

Covid-19 did not help this generation to limit social media usage, on the contrary, the messiness and reality of everyday life have forced us to adapt how we operate on those platforms because of the new normal, where a greater portion of our daily interactions are now mediated by screens. As per a study share by Vox, visits to popular website between 2019 and 2020 increased respectively; 3% more visits for Facebook, 36% for Twitter, 43% for Instagram and 576% for TikTok. (Molla, 2021). As of September 2021, Gen Z TikTok users in the United Sates would spend an average of 10.12 hours on this social platform weekly. (Ceci, 2022). Intriguingly, and maybe as a direct outcome of COVID laws, individuals now interact with their friends more frequently on social media than in person.

Gen Z is a generation in quest for social interaction and defined as the loneliest generation nowadays. "Youngsters report higher level of loneliness and social isolation than 72 years old and older. We know that young people are "connected" but they seem to be disconnected from each other" states Jayne O'Donnel in an interview on USA today (Trinko, 2018). However, some Gen Z members are not aware of this impact and mention that social media helps them reduce their

sensation of loneliness by giving them the sense of community they long for. Two-thirds of Gen Z respondents said they felt lonely during the pandemic confinement, and 62 percent said they'd like to feel more connected to other people. This suggests that loneliness during the outbreak lockdown had an impact on Gen Z (Blank, 2021).

During one of the most important times in their lives, when they were supposed to leave their mark on the world, this group of people encountered incredible obstacles. Not only youngsters were isolated, but they were also forced a shift online university and work wise (Lloyd, 2022). This shift did not help the Generation Z in the slightest. Contemporary students frequently text or use video streaming during Zoom meetings, engaging in what psychiatrists refer to as "continuous partial attention." According to studies, the typical Gen Z student utilizes five electronic gadgets and has an attention span of eight seconds, which has a negative impact on their grades, concentration, and academic accomplishment. (Farley, 2021). The learning process is tough enough for a student. You must actively participate in class discussions, pay attention to lectures, interact with your fellow students, and maintain your organization if you want to do assigned tasks on time. You must continually employ both your voice and your brain. With online programs, a few additional variables such as technical proficiency, digital anxiety, and screen weariness come into play that make it more difficult for Gen Z to succeed (Sivadas, 2020).

2.3 Mental Health

World Health Organization states that mental health is a condition of mental wellness that helps people to manage life's stressors, develop their potential, study, and work effectively, and give back to their communities. It is a crucial element of health and well-being that supports both our individual and group capacity to decide, form connections, and influence the world we live in. A core human right is access to mental health. Additionally, it is essential for socioeconomic, communal, and personal growth (WHO, 2022). One in four individuals globally suffer from mental health problems yet getting help can be difficult for those who do. These diseases are complex and can manifest in various ways (Mukta, Islam, Shatabda, Ali, Zaman, 2022). A few mental health issues observed nowadays are:

- Depression: Undergraduate students and adults who suffer from depression frequently experience persistent sorrow, a sensation of melancholy, and a loss of interest in daily activities

(Ramon-Arbues, Gea-Caballero, Granada-lopez, Juarez-Vela, Pellicer-Garcia, Anton-Solanas, 2020)

- Anxiety: Sometimes the intensity or duration of an anxious emotion is out of proportion to the stressor that first set it off. Additionally, physical symptoms like nausea and elevated blood pressure might appear. Through these reactions, anxiety becomes an anxiety disorder (Felman, 2020)

- Eating Disorders: Eating disorders are psychological problems marked by significant and ongoing disturbances in eating patterns and the uncomfortable feelings and behaviors that go along with them. They can be extremely severe conditions that influence social, mental, and physical function. Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, avoidant restricted food consumption disorder, other specific nutrition and eating disorder, pica and rumination disorder are examples of several eating disorders (Guarda, 2021)

Covid-19 Pandemic had a real impact on the development of mental health problems in population. For example, college students are receiving less social and emotional support from friends, family, classmates, and professors because of social distance and the transition from in-person classrooms to online learning (Elmer, 2020). According to research, rates have risen since the pandemic started. Following the commencement of COVID-19, this study discovered that 35% of undergraduate students tested positive for major depressive disorder and 39% tested positive for generalized anxiety disorder (Chirikov, 2020).

Social media is also one of the factors that is increasing mental health issues' presence in nowadays population. It is important to note the connection between social media use and the incidence of depression and anxiety, especially in Generation Z. Depending on how a person uses the network, social media use can have either beneficial or bad consequences on mental health, and as discussed previously in this research paper, Gen Z are addicted to social media usage. In the globe, over than 13% of people aged 10 to 19 experience mental problems, according to a recent UNICEF report (UNICEF, 2021). In addition to being often recurring, depression and anxiety are frequently co-occurring. These mental illnesses, which often first manifest in early adulthood, can damage social interactions and even result in mortality and disability (Lipei-Tang, 2022). According to the the latest APA Stress in America™ Survey, Among Gen Z people, more over 90% (91%)

reported having at least one physical or mental sign of stress, such as feeling down or unhappy (58%), or lacking interest, motivation, or energy (14%) (55 percent). Only 50% of Gen Zers believe they handle their stress well enough (Bethune, 2019).

2.4 Past Research

We can find research papers that correlates the effects of social media on mental health, but just a few concerning Generation Z. This evaluation discovered a general correlation between social media use and mental health difficulties, despite the study's inconsistent findings. The reverse has been claimed, despite the fact that there is strong evidence supporting a connection between social media and mental health.

For instance, prior research revealed no correlation between social media use time and sadness or between social media-related behaviors, including the quantity of "pictures and videos" and online friends, and depression (Marwick, Boyd, 2014). Likewise, Neira and Barber discovered no association between the regularity of social media usage and depressed state, even though increased social media investment (such as active social media use) anticipated teenagers' depressive symptoms (Neira, Barber, 2014).

Contrarily, one of the unexpected consequences of excessive social media usage is despair. In-depth, depression is restricted to social networking sites like Facebook in addition to others, which results in psychological issues. In a study published by the National Library of Medicine, researchers found that social media are to blame for making mental health issues worse. People who use social media, games, messages, mobile devices, etc. have a higher risk of developing depression (Cureus, 2020).

In another study, the connections between social media use and mental health were compared by gender. Compared to men, women were shown to be more hooked to social media (Wartberg L, Kriston L, Thomasius R, 2020). Also, social media usage that is passive, such as viewing postings, is more strongly linked to sadness than active use, such as posting (Odgers, Jensen, 2020).

3. Finding & Conclusion

Previous studies suggest that there is a correlation between social media usage and reported mental health issues but not in all cases.

Age is the most significant factor, according to a recent study on the effects of social networks on young people's mental health (Nature Communications, 2022). Age affects how the brain responds to the effects of social networks. At certain times, they may have a slight effect on mental health: when younger generations are getting ready to leave the house.

Social media on the other hand are not perfect and can lead to issues, but the point is to demonstrate that the effects vary. We can emphasize that social media sites can also be advantageous in some ways. They can aid young people in developing connections and social skills at specific stages of their lives. On the other side of the equation, the emotional regulation deficiency present in Gen Z can itself lead to the use of social networking sites, creating a vicious cycle, leading back to depression.

4. Recommendation

Gen Z should first restrict their use of social media. Social media use can restrict and block in-person encounters. Cell phones should be put on airplane mode or turned off to improve communication with loved ones, friends, and coworkers as well as workplace productivity and sleep patterns. The aforementioned elements may all contribute to improved mental health among Generation Z.

By practicing emotional mindfulness, Generation Z may be better able to choose what is best for them. Users must remember that active social media users, who actively submit their own content and engage with others online, feel better than passive users, who merely browse and read other people's postings. They should always make an effort to speak with acquaintances in person. Lastly, there are many excellent online tools and resources that can support all aspects of mental health and wellness. They may use these to help promote healthy mental health and wellbeing. They can find anything here, from relaxation and concentration-enhancing meditation apps to identity- and self-development platforms that keep you connected and support one another. There are many excellent online learning resources available where they may try something new, such as yoga or sketching, which can develop new cognitive and creative skills. They can also take online workout classes to maintain your health and decompress. It can be anyone or any group that inspires them to be healthy in mind and body. Generation Z can try to find positive and inspiring content and creators to follow, such as athletes, singers, home cooks, self-made entrepreneurs, authors, or even young people speaking up about mental health and managing their own mental health issues.

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