

Social Media and Gen Z's Mental Well-Being: Impact of Excessive Usage on Anxiety, Stress, and Depression Levels Analysis

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Abstract

Generation Z's unprecedented access to social media, facilitated by their lifelong exposure to technology, has raised concerns about its impact on mental health. Despite evidence indicating that excessive social media use can negatively affect mental well-being, limited research specifically addresses Gen Z, the true digital natives. This study contributes to this discourse by examining the effects of high social media usage on the mental health of Gen Z, the newest generation in the workforce. While previous research has explored the impact of excessive social networking site (SNS) use on mental health, it often lacks generational specificity. This study employs the DASS-21 survey instrument to assess the impact of social media on depression, anxiety, and stress among Gen Z. Problematic social media usage is measured using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), an adaptation of the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS). The sample includes social media users who participated either through in-person interactions or online surveys. Correlation analysis identifies the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes, while Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) elucidates the connections between variables influencing social media usage and mental well-being. Findings suggest that excessive social media use may negatively impact mental health, particularly among vulnerable Gen Z populations.

Keywords: Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Gen Z, Mental health

Introduction

In recent years, Generation Z's (Gen Z) unprecedented access to social media has raised significant concerns about its impact on mental well-being (Priporas et al., 2024; Jijina et al., 2020). As true digital natives, Gen Z has grown up with technology seamlessly integrated into their daily lives, making them particularly adept at navigating social media platforms. This constant connectivity, while offering numerous benefits, also presents potential risks. Evidence suggests that excessive social media use can negatively affect mental health, leading to increased levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (Bohlmeijer & Westerhof, 2021; Li & Lyu, 2021; Durlabhji, 2011). Social media refers to online platforms and applications that enable users to create, share, and exchange information and ideas within virtual

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communities and networks (NCBI, 2016). Social media has offered numerous benefits to humanity, such as increased connectivity, instant communication, access to information, Social Support, Enhanced Life Satisfaction, Reduced Loneliness, Access to Information, Stress Release, and Social Connection (Kanwal & Isha, 2022; "Rowan et al., 2015). The proliferation of social media platforms over the last two decades has been a defining feature of modern society, and it has fundamentally altered communication, information

dissemination, and social interaction (Kane et al., 2024; Olan et al., 2024). While social media platforms have become ubiquitous in modern society, providing a means for individuals to connect, share content, and stay informed, the impact of social media is multi-faceted, influencing geopolitics, economics, businesses, and individuals. Social media use is linked to mental health outcomes, but the exact relationship is still somewhat unclear (Chugh et al., 2024). Social media can be a resource for obtaining information and support for mental health issues, but it also has its own set of challenges and drawbacks (Seif & Niezgoda, 2018). Excessive use of social media, particularly among vulnerable individuals, is correlated with mental health disorders (Engel et al., 2024). Social media can provide a sense of community and support for mental health, excessive and increased use, particularly among vulnerable individuals, is associated with negative mental health outcomes. However, it also presents opportunities for predicting and addressing mental health issues. The relationship between social media use and mental health is complex and requires further research to fully understand its implications.

Each generation has reacted differently to social media. Baby Boomers (1946-1964) were not digital natives but have increasingly adopted social media platforms over the past decade. They tend to use Facebook more than other platforms, valuing it for reconnecting with old friends and staying in touch with family (Carrillo-Durán et al., 2022; Wohlmacher et al., 2023). Generation X (1965-1980) straddles the line between analog and digital worlds. They are comfortable with technology and use a variety of social media platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram (Nuzulita & Subriadi, 2020; Sümer, 2016). Millennials (1981-1996) are digital natives who witnessed the rise of social media and are early adopters of new technologies. They are the first generation to grow up immersed in information and communication

technologies, making them early adopters of new technologies, including social media (Tkalac Verčič & Verčič, 2013; Vodanovich et al., 2015). Gen Z (1997-2012) is the first generation to grow up with smartphones and social media from a young age. They are the first generation to grow up with instantaneous access to information via digital mobile technology and rely on digital platforms and social media for information "(Dahlquist & Garver, 2022). For Gen Z, the interplay between social media use and mental well-being is particularly pronounced, given their high levels of engagement with these platforms. Several advantages and disadvantages of these digital ecosystems cannot be ignored. The proliferation of social media has introduced a range of negative consequences, from the facilitation of targeted socio-economic attacks to the detrimental impact on mental health and emotional well-being.

By 2030, almost 30 percent of the global workforce will be Gen Z (Managing Gen-Z Workforce, 2023). It is proven that Gen Z's interaction with social media differs fundamentally from older generations (Ospina & Roser, 2021). Additionally, unregulated social media usage is often linked to negative psychological effects and mood disorders such as anxiety and depression (Vagka et al., 2024). However, despite the documented negative psychological effects of social media, how it affects Gen Z has been largely overlooked "(PrakashYadav & Rai, 2017). Cristina (2021) concluded that with every new generation entering the workplace, organizations must evolve to support individual performance, leading to organizational success. Most studies have been conducted in Western contexts, highlighting the need for cross-cultural research to explore how social media impacts Gen Z in diverse cultural settings. Differences in cultural norms, values, and social structures can significantly influence social media's effects. Studying Indian Gen Z is crucial for several reasons, given the unique socio-economic, cultural, and technological landscape of India.

Indian Gen Z is entering the workforce and will soon become a dominant force in the global labour market. The evolving Gen Z cohort is posited to reorient the paradigm in business, leadership, and governance (Hameed & Mathur, 2020). Despite the growing body of research on social media's impact on mental health, much of it lacks a specific focus on Gen Z. This generation's unique relationship with technology and social media necessitates a closer examination of how these factors influence their mental well-being. The current study addresses this gap by investigating the effects of high social media usage on Gen Z, the newest cohort to enter the workforce. While extensive research has explored the impact of excessive social media use on mental health, much of this work lacks a specific focus on Gen Z. As the first true digital natives, Gen Z's interaction with technology and social media is fundamentally different from previous generations. Most existing studies do not account for this generational specificity, leading to a gap in understanding how high social media usage uniquely affects Gen Z's mental well-being. Additionally, while there is evidence suggesting a correlation between social media use and adverse mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and stress, the mechanisms underlying these relationships remain underexplored, particularly for Gen Z. This study aims to fill these gaps by employing generation-specific methodologies and analytical techniques to provide a nuanced understanding of the effects of social media on the mental health of Gen Z. To address this research, question this study address the following research questions:

RQ 1: *What is the impact of social media usage on anxiety levels on Gen Z users in India?*

RQ 2: *What is the impact of social media usage on the Stress levels of Gen Z users in India?*

RQ 3: *What is the impact of social media usage on the depression levels of Gen Z users in India?*

For studying the impact of social media on mental wellbeing several mental wellbeing parameters can be considered. This paper is organized into certain sections, each addressing a specific aspect of the research. The introduction section introduces the context of the study, outlines the research objectives and questions, and discusses the significance of the study. Literature review sections review existing literature on Gen Z, social media usage trends, and the impact of social media on mental health among various generations. The Gen methodology section details the research design, including the participants, instruments used, and data collection procedure. The results section presents the findings of the study, including descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses. The result section follows a discussion, limitations, and scope for further studies.

Literature review

Theoretical Framework

Social media addiction can be defined by way of an excessive preoccupation with social networking sites (SNSs), which are determined by a strong drive to use them (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014; Sathyanarayanan et al., 2012). It involves spending a substantial amount of time and effort towards SNSs, leading to impairments in other areas such as social life, jobs, education, relationships, and overall psychological well-being. This encompasses the symptoms commonly associated with addiction. SNS addicts often spend considerable time contemplating SNSs and finding ways to allocate more time for online social networking (salience). They frequently exceed their intended duration of social networking, experiencing an urge to engage in it even more to achieve a similar level of pleasure (tolerance). Gen Z consumes SNSs to alleviate negative emotions like guilt, anxiety, restlessness, helplessness, and depression, using it as an escape from personal problems (mood modification) (Liu et al., 2024).

When restricted from accessing SNSs, people with an addiction to social media generally experience stress, restlessness, agitation, or irritability and feel distressed if they are unable to engage in networking on social sites (withdrawal). Gen Z tends to disregard advice from others to lessen their SNS usage. Although they may have attempted to decrease their social networking time, they have been unsuccessful. Even when deciding to reduce the frequency of social networking usage, they struggle to follow through with their intention (relapse).

Salience:

The salience of the transactional model of stress and coping can exacerbate stress by heightening cognitive load and perpetuating continuous comparison, which are intrinsic to social media usage (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Anxiety may arise from the pressure to maintain a certain online image or fear of missing out (FOMO). Depression may result from negative comparisons or feelings of inadequacy stemming from excessive social media use. The prominence of cognitive-behavioral theory may intensify anxiety by fostering a state of continuous vigilance and comparison, which can result in distorted perceptions of self-worth (Beck, 1976). Depression may be linked to social media use if it reinforces negative self-beliefs or leads to social isolation.

Mood Modification:

According to Self-Determination Theory, mood modification on social media can temporarily relieve stress by offering distraction or validation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Anxiety may decrease momentarily through positive interactions, but dependence on mood enhancement through social media can lead to greater anxiety and depression when not fulfilled. According to Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, mood modification behaviors

can evolve into maladaptive coping mechanisms, thereby exacerbating stress levels if individuals become overly dependent on social media for emotional regulation (Beck, 1976). Anxiety and depression may worsen if social media use displaces healthier coping mechanisms.

Tolerance:

Cognitive-behavioral theory suggests tolerance in social media use may indicate increasing dependence to alleviate stress or anxiety temporarily, leading to heightened distress when access is limited (Beck, 1976). Depression may worsen due to withdrawal symptoms and feelings of loss of control. The transactional model of stress and coping explains how tolerance can lead to chronic stress, as individuals might neglect other responsibilities or encounter conflicts in real-life relationships, thereby worsening anxiety and depression (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Withdrawal:

According to attachment theory, withdrawal symptoms from social media can amplify anxiety if individuals experience separation anxiety or fear of missing out. Depression may worsen due to feelings of loneliness or isolation during periods of social media absence (Bowlby, 1969). Although cognitive-behavioral theory tells about the Withdrawal symptoms can intensify stress and anxiety as individuals struggle with the urge to reconnect online (Beck, 1976). Depression may be exacerbated if withdrawal from social media leads to feelings of worthlessness or disconnection.

Conflict:

Social Learning Theory said conflict between social media use and real-life responsibilities can generate stress and anxiety if individuals feel torn between online interactions and offline obligations (Bandura, 1977). Depression may result from

feelings of guilt or inadequacy stemming from neglected responsibilities. Further, uses and gratifications theory shows conflict can exacerbate stress and anxiety if individuals experience pressure to maintain online presence or fear social repercussions from reduced social media engagement (Katz et al., 1973). Depression may worsen if conflicts lead to social isolation or impaired relationships.

Relapse:

According to transtheoretical model of behavior change relapse into excessive social media use can heighten stress and anxiety if individuals feel unable to maintain behavior change efforts (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983). Depression may worsen due to feelings of failure or hopelessness associated with relapse. In addition to that biopsychosocial model relapse may be influenced by biological vulnerabilities (e.g., predisposition to anxiety disorders), psychological factors (e.g., coping mechanisms), and social triggers (e.g., peer influences), all of which can exacerbate stress, anxiety, and depression related to social media addiction (Engel, 1977; Durlabhji, 2011).

Social Media Usage and Mental Well-being

Social media enables individuals to maintain connections with friends and family in a distributed geography. Before the launch of various platforms (social media), the media idea assumed the role of an information dissemination platform. However, with the advent of social media platforms, its scope has expanded from mere dissemination of information to circulation, reposts, entertainment, and influencing the masses. India's Gen Z uses the top 5 social media platforms: WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, and Facebook Messenger, followed by Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and Pinterest (Unlocking the Future of Commerce in India, 2020). Most individuals aged 18 to 29 stated that they use either Instagram or

Snapchat, with approximately half reporting that they use TikTok. Particularly, the cohort of ages 18 to 24 reported higher use of Instagram (76%), Snapchat (75%) or TikTok (55%). These statistics starkly contrast with other older age groups. While 65% of adults aged 18 to 29 use Snapchat, just 2% of those 65 and older report using the app (Anderson, 2021). A significant proportion of Gen Z individuals express that they perceive a sense of support being offered through social media. However, it is noteworthy that nearly 40% of them acknowledge experiencing low self-esteem due to social media usage, as highlighted by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2018).

Problematic social media usage refers to negative after-effects that may occur after some or prolonged usage of social media (Lopes et al., 2022). Multiple variables could potentially play a role in problematic social media usage, including factors like nighttime usage, emotional engagement, and whether individuals primarily engage as active or passive users. However, it is worth noting that the reasons associated with problematic social media usage were not found to be specific to any particular gender. Additionally, social media usage has a strong bi-direction with depression and anxiety (Marino, 2018). Moreover, problematic social media usage has been associated with addictive behaviors. A study revealed that social media addiction is correlated with elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among adolescents (Hong et al., 2014). Additionally, the authors discovered a positive association of social media addiction with sleep disturbances, decreased self-esteem, and decreased academic performance. This review provides evidence to use caution when using social media for Gen Z.

Social media is a constant presence in the lives of Gen Z, being the medium of choice for finding and sharing information, emotions, reactions, and intentions (Nuzulita & Subriadi, 2020). For Gen Z, social media is not merely an addition to daily life

but a central element of their identity and social ecosystem (McKee-Ryan, 2021). Several intergenerational research have also shown that there are differences in how different generations relate to social media and for what purposes they use platforms (Bowe & Wohn, 2015; Hilsen & Helvik, 2014; Munger et al., 2021). There is evidence of intra-generational variance in social media use (Bowe & Wohn, 2015).

Hence, social media has distinct impacts on different generations, shaped by their unique experiences and technological adaptability. Understanding these generational differences is crucial for developing tailored strategies to mitigate negative effects and enhance the positive influences of social media across all age groups.

Social Media Usage and Mental Well-Being among Gen Z

Ninety-one percent of middle-aged Gen Z individuals acknowledge having encountered at least one physical or emotional symptom resulting from stress in the past month, compared to a lower percentage of 74% among adults overall (APA, 2018). A report published by the American Psychological Association claims that 27% of this cohort have a high probability of reporting their mental health as either fair or poor. Fewer Millennials (15%) and Generation X (13%) report poor mental health, while even fewer Boomers (12%) reported poor mental health.

Few studies have found a complex and multifaceted association between social media and negative mental health outcomes. There is a linkage between social media usage and both positive as well as negative mental health outcomes based on the type of social media activity (Valkenburg et al., 2016). Furthermore, recurrent social media use and extensive internet usage were identified as strong predictors of depressive symptoms. Conversely, high-stress levels

significantly predicted problematic internet usage (Mamun et al., 2019). Four overarching categories of exposure to social media are identified: activity, amount of time spent, investment made, and addiction (Keles et al., 2020). Interestingly, each of these categories was found to be positively correlated with psychological distress, anxiety, and depression. Thus, problematic social networking site usage can lead to psychopathological and psychiatric disorder symptoms (Hussain & Griffiths, 2021).

Excessive social media usage can have a range of negative effects, including increased feelings of isolation, lower self-esteem, negative social comparison, technostress, and a fear of missing out. Unsupervised social media use also reduces self-esteem and negative perception of body image. For instance, a study revealed that social media usage positively contributed to lower self-esteem among adolescents (Perloff, 2014). Social media usage is connected with negative body image, especially among females (Mabe A et al., 2014). A study concluded three important findings concerning social media usage and Gen Z, which causes reduced body confidence, increases self-objectification, and instils an atmosphere of surveillance (Giancola et al., 2023). These negative feelings may directly affect an individual's anxiety and stress and may lead to depression.

Today, workplaces have started recognizing and supporting mental health as essential to employee engagement and productivity (How Is Social Media Affecting Workplace Mental Health?, n.d.). Although Gen Z is the least likely to have worked at a young age, they are most likely to suffer from anxiety, stress, and depression due to increased social media usage. Thus, in the current study, the focus is on the three main mental health disorders induced by increased social media usage – anxiety, stress, and depression.

Anxiety:

There is a significant relationship between excessive use of social media and elevated levels of anxiety among individuals from Gen Z. High social anxiety can lead to having lower self-perceptions with respect to status and can have negative emotional impact (Parsons et al., 2021). Increased anxiety levels are negatively associated with life satisfaction, affecting an individual's perception of self and causing social anxiety among these individuals such that they cannot operate in their immediate physical world (Zhao & Zhou, 2020). Thus, individuals with social anxiety feel comfortable in the virtual world of social media. Individuals who grapple with social anxiety and feelings of loneliness often resort to social media as a means to compensate for their absence from in-person relationships. However, this reliance on social media can sometimes exacerbate these feelings rather than alleviate them, creating a complex relationship between social media use and social well-being. Paradoxically, this social anxiousness can lead them to use social media excessively, creating a cycle where they seek connection online but may end up feeling more isolated or anxious (O'Day et al., 2021). Gen Z seems trapped in this vicious cycle of social media use. This correlation between social media usage and anxiety among India's Gen Z remains untested. The anxiety scale evaluates skeletal muscle effects, autonomic arousal, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect (Lovibond, 1995).

Stress:

Stress can lead to signs of depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders. Social media usage has often been associated with increased stress levels among Gen Z in studies focused on Western countries. Social media usage can be one of the factors leading to technostress among Gen Z (Is Smartphone Addiction Really an Addiction? In: Journal of Behavioral Addictions Volume 7 Issue 2

(2018), n.d.). Fear of missing out plays a role in increasing sensitivity to stress caused by being ignored by peers online, and this increased sensitivity can trigger addiction to social media, which ultimately hurts the emotional well-being of teenagers (Fabris et al., 2020). Chronic users of social media are more inclined to describe their mental well-being as compromised, exhibiting signs of anxiety and depression (Social Media And Mental Health Issues, n.d.). The stress scale assesses the individual's nervous arousal, difficulty in relaxing and getting agitated, being irritable, impatient, and over-reactive (Lovibond, 1995).

Depression:

High social media usage was linked with higher depressive signs among adolescents (Vannucci et al., 2017). They concluded that unadulterated social media use among adolescents can result in increased feelings of isolation, increased feelings of loneliness, negative self-perception, decreased self-esteem, and negative social comparison. Research on early-age Gen Z individuals has indicated that those who spend 4-5 hours per day on social media are notably more prone to depression compared to their peers who use their phones for an hour or less daily (A Generation Of Adolescents Might Suffer Because Of Unregulated Social Media, Suggests New Research, n.d.).

Previous studies have explored the impact of excessive social media usage on mental health. However, most of these studies lack specificity to a particular generation. We explored its impact on depression, anxiety, and stress among Gen Z. This 7-item scale developed by (Lovibond, 1995) comprises seven items, which is further divided into subcategories to ascertain various aspects of depression, including hopelessness, anhedonia, dysphoria, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, inertia and lack of interest/ involvement.

From the above discussion these connections

illustrate how each construct of the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale and theoretical model can contribute to understanding the interplay between social media addiction and the experience of stress, anxiety, and depression. Integrating these perspectives can provide a comprehensive framework for studying the psychological impacts of excessive social media use. There are theories

that relate to the six factors of social networking addiction; salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict and relapse. These theoretical connections provide a multidimensional understanding of how each construct of the BSMAS relates to various theoretical models, offering insights into the complexities of social media addiction and its impact on mental health.

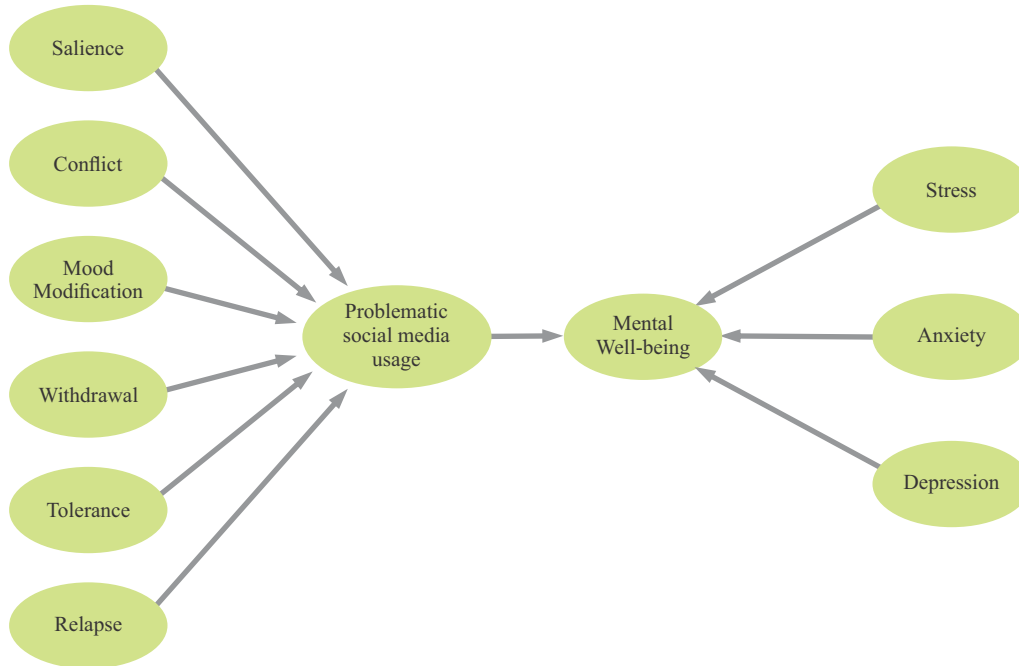


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

Material and Methods

Procedure and Participants

The sample comprised 283 social media users who participated through in-person interactions or online survey forms. Participation was voluntary, requiring respondents to use at least one social media platform. The online surveys were provided in English. To ensure the utmost privacy and confidentiality of all participants, everyone was guaranteed that their responses would be treated as anonymous and confidential. At the outset of the survey, a concise statement reiterated the study's objectives, and participants were informed explicitly of their right to withdraw at any stage.

Measures

Problematic social media usage was evaluated using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), an adapted version of the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS) developed by Andreassen et al. in 2012. It is based on six components of Griffiths' bio-psychosocial model of addiction that have been the most widely used criteria to assess and diagnose PSMU "(Griffiths, 2005). The study centered around problematic social media usage principles, encompassing six constructs related to an individual's preoccupation with social network sites. These constructs included salience, conflict, mood modification, withdrawal, tolerance, and relapse, each consisting of three statements. Participants rated their agreement with these statements using a five-point Likert scale. The

internal consistency of the BSMAS was robust, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .902.

The DASS, a shortened version of 21 items, is derived from a larger 42-item self-report instrument. Its purpose is to assess three interconnected negative emotional states. This scale is divided into three sub-scales, each containing seven items, addressing symptoms related to these emotional states. Respondents rate their experiences on a Likert scale (Four-point), ranging from "almost always" (3) to "never" (0). The DASS includes statements such as 'I tend to overreact to situations,' 'I felt that I had nothing to look forward to,' and 'I felt down-hearted and blue.' In the present study, we determined the internal consistency of this measure, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found to be .811 for depression, .735 for anxiety, and .829 for stress

Results

Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the characteristics of the sample. (ii) Correlational analysis involved the calculation of Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients, with 95% bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) confidence intervals, as well as accompanying coefficients of determination (R^2), to explore relationships between variables. Out of 283 respondents, over half were females (52.3%, $n=148$), while 22.58 was the mean age in years. ($S. D=2.77$). Table I represents the levels of addiction (Problematic Social Media Usage) and psychological health (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress) ($n = 283$). 63.96%, 66.78%, and 34.28% of respondents have shown mild to extreme scores of stress, anxiety, and depression, respectively. Table 1 shows the summary of the descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics will come here

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Saliency (mean, SD)	8.34	2.44	3	15
Conflict (mean, SD)	8.49	3.22	3	15
Mood modification (mean, SD)	8.60	2.89	3	15
Withdrawal (mean, SD)	6.46	2.68	3	15
Tolerance (mean, SD)	6.83	2.72	3	15
Relapse (mean, SD)	7.90	2.73	3	15
Social Media Addiction levels (mean, SD)	46.62	12.14	18	90
Depression levels (mean, SD)	12.47	8.93	0	42
Anxiety levels (mean, SD)	11.69	8.38	0	42
Stress levels (mean, SD)	14.13	8.49	0	42
Total DASS Score (mean, SD)	38.30	23.70	0	126

The summary of correlation analysis

The study's main variables were assessed using a

correlation analysis to provide insights into how they affect each other.

Table 2: Correlation between social media addiction parameters and stress

Variables	Stress	R ²	95% BCA CI
Saliency	0.133*	0.018	.006-.254
Conflict	0.382**	0.146	.281-.473
Mood modification	0.322**	0.104	.216-.421
Withdrawal	0.285**	0.081	.166-.398
Tolerance	0.302**	0.091	.188-.410
Relapse	0.384**	0.147	.274-.481

Bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples.

*Correlation is significant at $p < .05$

**Correlation is significant at $p < .01$

The SEM model finds the relationship between various variables determining respondents' social media usage and stress. The model fit summary indicated a reasonably good fit of the SEM model. SEM facilitated measuring the construct effects and how they propagated through various layers of variables via direct, indirect, or bi-directional paths of influence. The results have important implications for human resource practice to ensure Gen Z utilizes social media wisely.

The CMIN/DF ratio was 1.563 (below the recommended threshold of 3), the CFI was 0.939 (above the recommended threshold of 0.90), and the RMSEA was 0.045 (below the recommended threshold of 0.06), indicating a good fit—however, the PCFI value of 0.795. Overall, the model fit statistics suggest a good fit (Makkar & Singh, 2019; Pandey et al., 2023).

Table 3: Correlation between social media addiction parameters and anxiety

Variables	Anxiety	R ²	95% BCA CI
Saliency	0.09	--	-0.026-0.208
Conflict	.300**	0.090	0.194-0.41
Mood modification	.233**	0.054	0.118-0.357
Withdrawal	.293**	0.086	0.172-0.404
Tolerance	.265**	0.070	0.15-0.383
Relapse	.302**	0.091	0.176-0.413

Bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

**Correlation is significant at $p < .01$

The SEM analysis indicated a good model fit, with a CMIN/DF ratio of 1.361, Comparative Fit Index

(CFI) of 0.958, PCFI value of 0.811, and RMSEA value of 0.036.

Table 4: Correlation between Social Media Addiction Parameters and Depression

Variables	Depression	R2	95% BCA CI
Saliency	0.085	--	-0.024-0.198
Conflict	.342**	0.117	0.237-0.446
Mood modification	.264**	0.070	0.154-0.37
Withdrawal	.261**	0.068	0.146-0.367
Tolerance	.307**	0.094	0.206-0.405
Relapse	.323**	0.104	0.218-0.427

Bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

**Correlation is significant at $p < .01$

The SEM analysis indicated a good model fit, with a CMIN/DF ratio of 1.497, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.946, PCFI value of 0.801, and RMSEA value of 0.042.

Table 5: Correlation between overall social media usage and mental well-being

Variables	Social Media Usage	R2	95% BCA CI
Stress	0.422**	0.178084	0.324-0.514
Anxiety	0.345**	0.119025	0.231-0.438
Depression	0.370**	0.136900	0.263-0.464

Bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

**Correlation is significant at $p < .01$

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between problematic social media usage and the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among Gen Z users in India. The investigation sought to address the gap in literature regarding the specific impact of social media on the mental well-being of this digitally native cohort, who are distinct from previous generations due to their lifelong engagement with technology. Existing research highlights the complex and often adverse effects of excessive social media use on mental health. Previous studies have predominantly examined social media usage through the lens of frequency rather than the qualitative aspects of engagement (Carbonell & Panova, 2017). The literature suggests that excessive social media use can exacerbate mental health issues through mechanisms such as

increased social comparison, cyberbullying, and disrupted sleep patterns (Kross et al., 2021). For instance, extensive engagement with social networking sites has been associated with higher levels of social anxiety and loneliness, which in turn contribute to depressive symptoms (Oktarini et al., 2022). These outcomes are particularly pronounced in Gen Z, who are more likely to experience the adverse effects of social media due to their deep integration into digital environments from a young age (Twenge, 2019).. This study builds upon this foundation by focusing on the nuanced impacts of problematic social media usage as defined by the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and its implications for mental health outcomes. The findings indicate a significant relationship between high social media usage and elevated levels of anxiety, stress, and depression among Gen Z users.

The results of this study align with these findings, revealing a significant correlation between problematic social media usage and increased levels of anxiety, stress, and depression among Gen Z participants. This suggests that social media platforms may contribute to the psychological distress observed in this demographic. The correlation values indicate that as social media usage intensifies, so do the reported mental health issues, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. Furthermore, the entry of Gen Z into the workforce necessitates a comprehensive understanding of their unique mental health challenges. Organizations must be cognizant of the cultural and value differences inherent in this generation to foster a supportive and productive work environment (Tang, 2021). Addressing the mental health impacts of social media usage is crucial for enhancing the well-being of Gen Z employees and ensuring their effective integration into professional settings. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the relationship between social media usage and mental health among Gen Z, further research is needed to explore the causal mechanisms and develop effective strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of social media on this vulnerable population.

Implications

This study underscores the profound implications of social media usage on the mental well-being of Gen Z, particularly in the context of anxiety, stress, and depression. The findings provide valuable insights for various stakeholders, including managers, practitioners, and researchers, highlighting both practical and theoretical contributions.

For managers, especially those overseeing a predominantly Gen Z workforce, understanding the detrimental impact of excessive social media usage is crucial. Given that mental well-being significantly influences productivity and job

satisfaction, organizations must foster environments that mitigate these negative effects. This could involve implementing policies that encourage balanced social media usage, promoting digital detox initiatives, and providing mental health resources and support systems. Managers should also consider designing workspaces and schedules that reduce stress and anxiety triggers, fostering a culture that prioritizes mental health and well-being. By doing so, they can enhance overall employee satisfaction and productivity, leading to a more harmonious and efficient work environment. Practically, this study serves as a call to action for educators, parents, and mental health professionals. Awareness campaigns and educational programs should be developed to inform Gen Z about the potential mental health risks associated with excessive social media usage. Mental health professionals can use these findings to devise targeted interventions and coping strategies for individuals showing signs of social media addiction. Furthermore, the insights from this study can guide the development of digital tools and apps designed to monitor and manage social media usage, providing users with feedback and tips to maintain a healthy balance. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the existing body of literature by focusing specifically on Gen Z, a demographic often underrepresented in social media and mental health research. By utilizing the DASS-21 survey and the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, this study offers a robust methodological approach to understanding the nuanced relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes in this generation. The use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to elucidate these connections provides a comprehensive framework for future research to build upon. This study also highlights the need for generational specificity in research, acknowledging that different age groups may experience and interact with social media in varied ways, leading to distinct mental health outcomes. Therefore, this study emphasizes the necessity for targeted

interventions and informed managerial practices to address the mental health challenges posed by excessive social media usage among Gen Z.

Limitations and scope for further research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was restricted to respondents from India, which may not fully represent global patterns of social media use and its impacts. Future research should encompass a broader, more diverse geographical sample to capture variations in social media behavior and mental health outcomes across different cultures and regions. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which can be subject to biases such as social desirability or inaccurate recall. This may affect the reliability of the findings. Future research could incorporate objective measures of social media usage and mental health assessments to validate self-reported data. The study also focused primarily on quantitative measures of social media use and mental health, potentially overlooking qualitative aspects such as personal experiences and contextual factors influencing social media behavior. Future studies should include qualitative approaches to gain a deeper understanding of how social media use affects mental health on a personal level. Furthermore, the research did not account for variables such as social comparison, body image issues, or the role of social support systems, which are relevant to understanding the complex relationship between social media use and mental health. Future research should explore these factors and investigate potential interventions to mitigate adverse effects.

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