

“A Study On Exploring The Complex Relationship Between Social Media And Mental Health In Gen-Z”

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Abstract

This study investigates a complex link between the social media and the mental health specially among the Generation Z of the age group between 15 – 23. Our study provides information about the platforms of social media, positive or negative effects, influences, behavioural changes, mental or physical health in our target respondents through deep research and a primary survey by aiming the Generation Z. Through the research we have dived down into multiple roles that social media does in the lives of teenagers in today's world. Our discoveries includes' the analysis of usage of social media, with the respondents agreeing to give their important time to use social media which exceeds more than two to three hours per day on different social media platforms. This study also helps finding out the factors and instances affecting mental health of Generation Z, and also acknowledging the same helps fostering awareness and implementing concepts which creates a safe and secure online environment for the Generation Z to make the right use of the social media

Keywords: Generation Z, mental health, social media, communication, effects.

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I. Introduction

The way we connect, communicate, and consume information has changed in the last several years due to social media's widespread effect. Social media sites such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become essential components of our everyday lives because they provide us with quick communication, extensive data access, worldwide network of contacts, to meet others who have similar interests to our own and we use these platforms to communicate with friends and family, accept invites to public events, and join online groups. Yet, concerns social media's effect on mental health have surfaced in addition to these advantages, there are other negative consequences such as crimes against children and cyberbullying, fraud and identity theft concerns, and privacy invasion. Teenagers who spend an increasing amount of time on the Internet and social networking sites (SNSs) are more likely to experience physical activity limitations, obesity, sleeplessness, issues with their eyesight, body aches, and other issues. Teenagers who use the Internet are observed to be more likely to engage in unsafe sexual behaviour, sext, and drug addiction also. Even if SNSs enable people to reestablish and strengthen connections, face-to-face sociability time is being compromised.

Social media has become an influential factor in our ever-changing digital ecosystem, influencing how people interact, communicate, and view the world. Of all the generations, Generation Z, or Gen-Z, is leading this digital transformation. Gen-Z, defined as those born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, are known for their natural affinity with technology because they grew up in an environment where social media, smartphones, and the internet were all around them. The widespread sale of smartphones was accompanied by a growth in the accessibility and affordability of high-quality cameras. Social media changed into a visually stimulating environment as people shared and captured daily life, travel experiences, and creative outputs. The tendency of real-time sharing and uncensored experiences was further propelled by the unpredictable nature of these media apps in real life situations. Facebook is particularly tempting because it's an easy method to keep tabs on your friends' lives, around 8 billion minutes is being spent on Facebook every day India having the most users than other country and also where India is the largest user base for WhatsApp. At 54%, Gen-Z leads the way in screen time, with an astounding amount of four hours or more every day. Gen-Z leads the way in screen time, with a whopping 54% of them using screens for four or more hours every day.

This study article also explores the complex relationship between mental health and social media use. Since teenagers are frequent users of social media and at risk for mental health issues, we specifically examine the effects of social media on them. Our goal is to provide light on the complex interaction between these two

domains by reviewing previous research and performing our own study. While social media has a multitude of potential benefits, its complex link with mental health has emerged as a source of intense inquiry and growing worry.

The significant amount of time that people spend on social media across the globe has focused researchers' attention on both the benefits and drawbacks of using it, as well as their multidimensional impact on our mental health. We'll start by looking at the potential benefits of social media, such its ability to develop relationships, build communities, and provide opportunities for self-expression and social support. However, we will also examine the darker side of the equation, looking into how excessive use, false depictions, and negativity can contribute to feelings of isolation, anxiety, despair, and even body image concerns. We'll work to highlight this relationship's complex and varied aspects throughout the course of our research. We hope to learn more about how social media may be a tool for promoting well-being as well as a possible cause of mental health issues by looking at pertinent research findings, firsthand accounts, and potential mitigating methods. In the end, this essay aims to further the current discussion about appropriate social media use and how it affects the state of mental health.

II. Review Of Literature

1. (M Bonfils, 2022) This study says that Digital Connectivity by Gen Z is high because they are constantly available and are heavily influenced by digital technology and social media. They all are exposed to social media platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, X, TikTok, and Instagram at a young age. Gen Z uses social media for various purposes such as connecting with family and friends and researching services and products. 65% of Gen Z's users use social media platforms daily, spending an average of 2 hours and 43 minutes per day. The constant use of social media has impacted or affected Gen Z with brain development like memory loss and poor academic performance. This has triggered emotions connected to mental disorders or anxiety in 2022. Excessive use of social media might lead to anxiety and depression.
2. (C Berryman, 2018) This research talks about the popularity of social media is identified as a significant factor influencing young adults because it is an enormously popular tool for social cohesion and interactions. The relationship between social media and mental health problems among young adults is nuanced.
 - 1) Overall relationship with mental health: This can have an adverse effect on youth when excessive use of social media.
 - 2) Exception: Vague booking: The study identifies an exception to the overall trend, highlighting that vague booking (social media posts designed to elicit attention without clear information) predicts loneliness and suicidal thoughts.

Predictors of mental health issues: Parents are one of the strongest predictors of mental health problems when it comes to their children. Spending more time with family and friends can improve mental health. Social support is consistently needed or acts as a protective factor.
3. (G PrakashYadav; 2017) The goal of this study is to examine social media's impact on individuals, organizations, and society at large, as well as to investigate the awareness of how the current Generation Z uses it. The study distinguishes between Generation Z and other subsets of the generation that exhibits systematized differentiation in the values, decisions, and behaviour that hold across time. It describes how they use social media and how generational differences arise from personal and environmental causes.

Individual driving and steady factors are the two categories of variables. The usage of social media by the forward-thinking Generation Z impacts society, organizations, and individuals. There are some concerns, nevertheless, about how Gen Z's usage of social media may affect people's lives in various contexts and how that would affect businesses and society. Marketing analysts are encouraged to investigate some of the issues that the authors have attempted to uncover in this study and believe that the resolutions will be beneficial to consumers, policymakers, and civic policymakers.
4. (S Surat, 2021) This study demonstrates how the implications of this research can improve society overall especially for Generation Z, since the study's conclusions negatively impact their daily lives. A study by Carbonell et al. (2018) found that a user's dependence on technology will affect their mental health, including stress, anxiety, and depression. In addition, parents and teachers can identify people who display a dependence on technology, which can result in psychological problems that worsen mental health and learning disabilities. Hence, efforts have been attempted to rationalize the smart and controlled use of the gadgets among Gen Z to enhance their time management and achieve good academic performance thus maintaining a more positive level of mental health.
5. Swarnam, S. (2021) This study mainly tells us that lockdown in India has really affected students putting them on the addiction of social media. It said students used social media for entertainment purpose during lockdown, spending most of the time in a day on it to overcome depression, irritation and negativity. Most of the people who were working used to do yoga and spend time with family because that was the only time

they got to be with their family. This study also gave some suggestions and advice to be engaged in physically activities and other lifestyle practices like meditation, creating bonding sessions, reading books, playing indoor sports which will help students get away from the negativity, irritation or being bored and also to talk on video calls to increase positivity and good vibe. The analysis of this study says that the most users of social media are students, after it is working people and then it is non-working people or business people, the analysis stated the screen time of using social media is more after 2 AM and least at 12 AM to 2 AM, this is because students said that using social media helped them gain positivity getting out from the whole days stress.

6. (Saini,2020) This study shows some of the advantages of life of social media users of networking sites versus non-daily users of the same. The results of their study said that 98% of people in their data use social media networking site which helped them in dealing with stress of relationship and work. The study also shows that with this social media they are more comfortable with their classmates, it helps them handle situations and physical appearance with their accomplishments in life. The research also concludes that the existing quality of life people are living especially the generation Z have drastically reduced, without a lot of connection with the reality of life.
7. (Sabbarwal,2017) This study observed that the usage if social media has increased drastically of the age of people 16 to 25. The study shows that the purpose of usage of social media are mainly surfing, dancing and surfing. The samples of the study were majority youth who spend 1/3rd of the day on spart devices having social networking sites which disturbed their daily routine daily. Most of the youth have experienced and said that social media gives positive energy through taking to people or utilization or any research, these you also told that they cannot or imagine life without social media, even though they are facing bad and negative impact of utilization. Over utilization of the social media addictiveness leads to physical even mental disturbances and reduce Productivity. This kind of social media is losing interest in real world making people less inactive
8. (Karim,2020) This study showed that mental health issues are exacerbated by social media use. This comprehensive study provides an overview of how social network use affects mental health. After using a variety of inclusion and exclusion criteria, fifty papers were shortlisted from Google Scholar databases. Of these, sixteen papers were selected, and each manuscript underwent a quality assessment. There were eight cross-sectional research, three longitudinal studies, two qualitative studies, and several systematic reviews among the publications. Anxiety and depression were the two mental health outcomes into which the findings were divided. Engaging in social media activities can positively impact the realm of mental health. Nonetheless, there are significant variations because of the cross-sectional design and sampling's methodological constraints. The way social media is structured and how it affects mental health has to be studied further using qualitative and cohort studies.
9. (Alubied,2023) This study showed that teenagers are finding it harder and harder to imagine their lives without social media. Risk assessment is a critical skill for practitioners, and social media may be a new factor to consider. Teenage and professional viewpoints greatly affect the impression of the relationship between social media and mental health, even though there is little actual data to support the notion. Risks connected to this population's use of social media include privacy issues, cyberbullying, negative effects on education, negative effects on mental health and associated with an increase in suicidality, self-harming behaviours, and mental distress. On the other hand, responsible use of social media can increase chances for interaction and communication, as well as improve health, raise self-esteem, and provide access to vital medical data. An empirical study on how teenagers understand social media, especially as a source of knowledge, or how they could use more general contemporary media discourses to express themselves. Large-scale youth use of cell phones and other media leads to chronic sleep loss, which impairs cognitive function, academic performance, and socioemotional functioning. These strategies include problem-solving exercises and instruction.
10. (Nazari.A,2023) This study showed that the allure of social media leads to increased use and issues. Thus, it may have an impact on mental health, particularly among students. The purpose of the current study was to ascertain whether students' mental health and social media use were related. Using the Convenience Sampling method, 781 university students in the province of Lorestan were the subjects of the current cross-sectional survey, which was carried out in 2021. A questionnaire on demographics, social media, problematic social media use, and mental health (DASS-21) was used to gather the data. SPSS-26 software was used to analyse the data. This Study demonstrates a substantial correlation between lower DASS21 scores (a lower DASS21 score indicates better mental health status) and marital status, major, and family income. Furthermore, there was a strong correlation between problematic social media use ($\beta = 3.54$, 95% CI: 3.23, 3.85) and higher mental health scores (a higher DASS21 score indicates a worse mental health status). There was a significant correlation between income and social media use ($\beta = 1.02$, 95% CI: 0.78, 1.25), and higher DASS21 scores (a higher DASS21 score indicates worse mental health status). A major was substantially linked to lower

DASS21 scores, where lower scores indicate better mental health. According to this study, social media use and mental health are directly related. Even though there is a lot of evidence that social media negatively impacts mental health, more research is still needed to identify the cause and find ways to utilise social media in a way that is safe.

11. (Naslund,2020) This article explores how using social media can affect mental health, like feeling depressed or anxious. The authors looked at different studies to understand this connection. They found that social media can be good because it helps people connect with others and find support for mental health problems. But spending too much time on social media might make depression and anxiety worse. The authors also talk about how social media can make people feel bad about themselves by showing unrealistic expectations. They say more research is needed to fully understand how social media affects mental health. Overall, it's a good summary of what we know so far.
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13. (Gkotsis. G, 2016) This study talks about how a social media application like reddit has become a valuable tool for connecting with people and exchanging personal stories which also include private details and at times some social media users discuss mental health they are going through as well. This study focuses on examining the language used in reddit postings related to mental health to find identify linguistic traits that might be useful for future application. Their findings demonstrate that a range of language characteristics can be further utilised in later classification tasks and discriminative across mental health user communities. The results of this study paves way for future work on classification of posts and comments concerning a mental health condition.

Research Gap

Research gaps that need to be filled in order to fully understand the complex relationship between Generation Z's use of social media and mental health. These gaps arise as a result of the multidisciplinary nature of interaction between societal media platforms and adolescents' mental wellbeing. There are some potential research gaps in this area, as follows:

1. **Mediating Mechanisms:** Research needs to be conducted which examines the underlying mechanisms involved in mediating a relationship of use of social media and outcomes related to Mental Health. Factors such as social comparison, cyberbullying, fear of missing out (FOMO), online harassment, and exposure to idealized images may influence this relationship, but their specific roles and interactions remain poorly understood.
2. **Protective Factors and Resilience:** While much research has focused on the negative implications of social media use on mental health, there is a dearth of studies exploring potential protective factors and resilience mechanisms that may mitigate these effects. A more nuanced understanding of how Gen Z individuals are dealing with the complexity of societal media and maintaining their wellbeing could be gained by investigating factors such as Social Support, Digital Literacy, Coping Strategies and Positive Online Experience.
3. **Interventions and Prevention Strategies:** There is a need for research evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and prevention strategies aimed at promoting healthy social media usage and mitigating negative mental health outcomes among Gen Z. Such interventions could include digital literacy programs, mental health literacy campaigns, school-based interventions, and policy initiatives targeting social media platforms.

Objectives of the study

1. To find out the most frequently used social media app
2. To find out how largely social media is influencing other's perceptions
3. To understand the negative effects of social media on mental health
4. To identify the addiction levels of social media and impact of it in Gen Z
5. To identify and research about different inputs to improve mental health

III. Research Methodology

This section outlines the comprehensive approach undertaken to investigate the complex relationship between social media and mental health in Gen-Z. The research methodology encompassed are both primary and secondary research methods to ensure a thorough exploration of the subject matter. By combining these two approaches, this study aimed to provide a holistic understanding of social media's impact on mental health.

Primary research methodology: We did this survey-based methodology using Google forms where we received 104 responses. The survey instrument was painstakingly designed to complement the goals and theories of the research. It included both open-ended and closed-ended questions so that answers could be analysed based on quantity and quality as well. The design sought to provide clarity and relevance to the responders while capturing a thorough understanding of the variables and factors under consideration.

To guarantee representation from a variety of demographic categories within the target population, a stratified random sampling approach was utilised. Using this method, the population was divided into discrete groups according to pertinent attributes (such as age, gender, or occupation), and participants were then chosen at random from each group. This approach reduced bias and improved the findings' applicability in general.

We had some limitation while doing this process because Survey-based approaches have inherent drawbacks, such as response bias, sample mistakes, and reliance on self-reported data, even with meticulous planning and execution. Although steps were attempted to lessen these constraints, it is nevertheless important to recognise their possible influence on the results and take it into account when interpreting the data.

Secondary research methodology: Numerous secondary sources, such as scholarly journals, books, government reports, trade magazines, websites, and databases, were searched. These sources guarantee access to reliable and current information because they were chosen for their relevance, dependability, and authority in the topic of study.

The selection of secondary data was based on predefined criteria, including relevance to the research questions, timeliness of the data and reliability of the source. Only peer-reviewed articles, reputable reports and scientific publications were included, which ensured the reliability and validity of the analysed data.

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the research area, insights derived from secondary studies have been incorporated into primary study results. This approach enabled a more complex understanding of the phenomenon under investigation to be developed, enhancing the depth and breadth of research findings by aggregating data from multiple sources.

Data Analysis And Interpretation

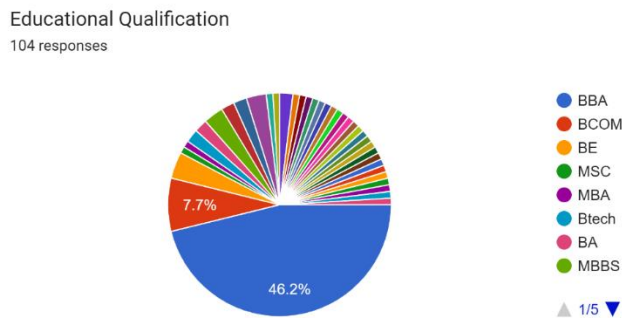


Figure 1

This data represents the educational qualification of our respondents. Majority of them were from commerce background mostly BBA and B.COM which composed of 46.2% and 7.7% respectively.

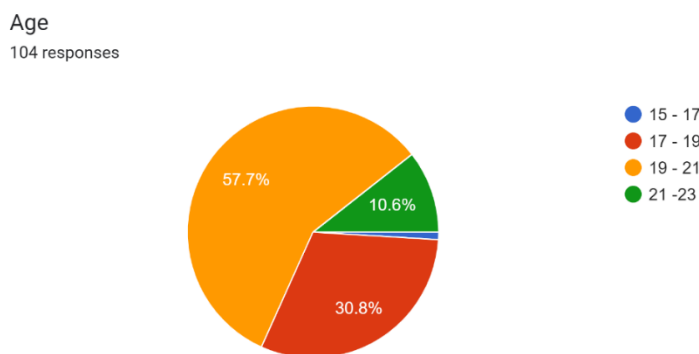


Figure 1.1

This pie charts shows that 57.7% respondents are between the age from 19-21 and 30.8% respondents are between 17-19 and 10.6% respondents are between 21-23 age group.

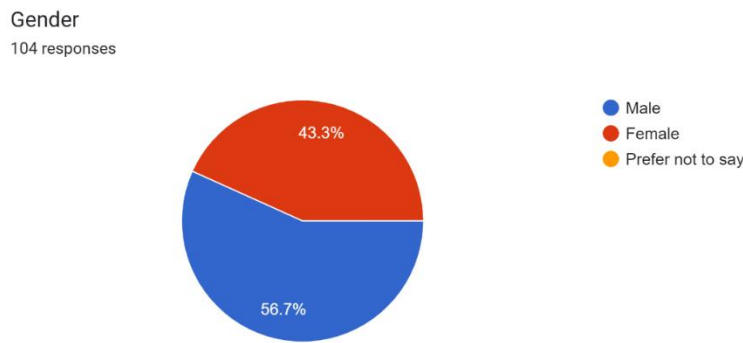


Figure 1.2

The data shows the percentage of respondents in which 56.7% are males and 43.3% are females which is almost equally distributed.

As per the data collected, these are the social media platforms which are used regularly, and the amount of time spent by teenager on social media.

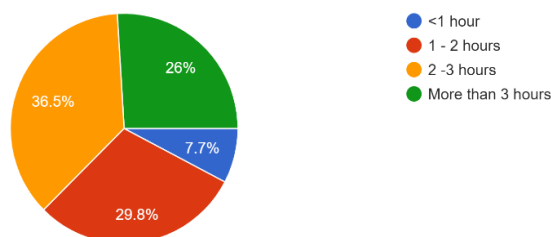
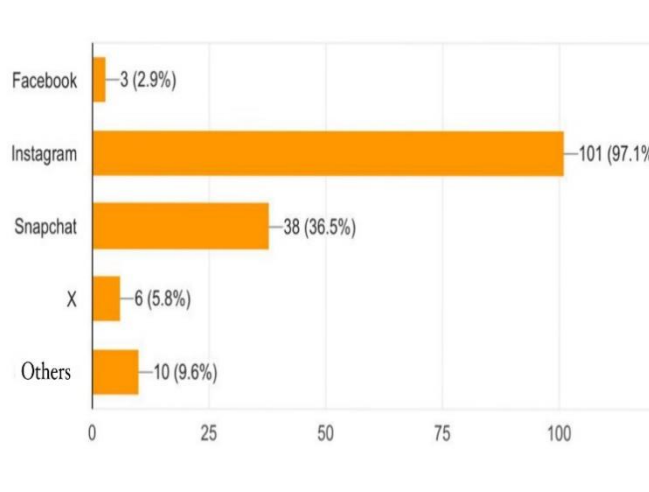


Figure 1.3 & 1.4

When the respondents were asked both the most used social media apps and about the screen time of their preferred app, the most common answer was Instagram (97.1%), the second being snapchat (36.5%) while the least being Facebook (2.9%). The data also show that 36.5% respondents use social media for an average of around 2-3 hours per day, while 26% of the respondents are the users of more than 3 hours.

As per the pie chart below the respondents have answered if social media is the reason for anxiety and depression (Fig 1.5) and asked respondents about their opinion on the same (Fig 1.6).

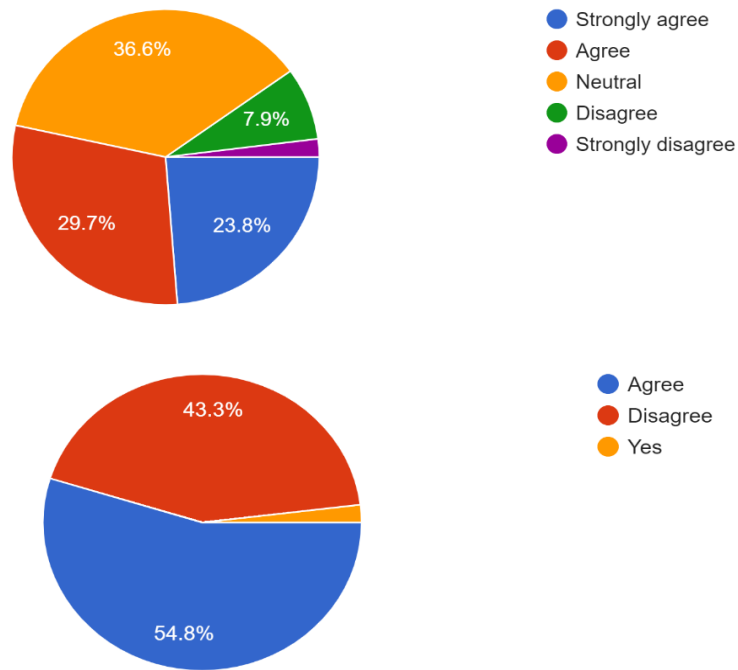


Figure 1.5 & 1.6

This pie chart shows that most of the Gen-Z’s feel that social media is a cause for anxiety and depression. 54.8% of respondents have felt anxious or depressed after using social media platforms. Social media platforms based on their impact on the respondents.

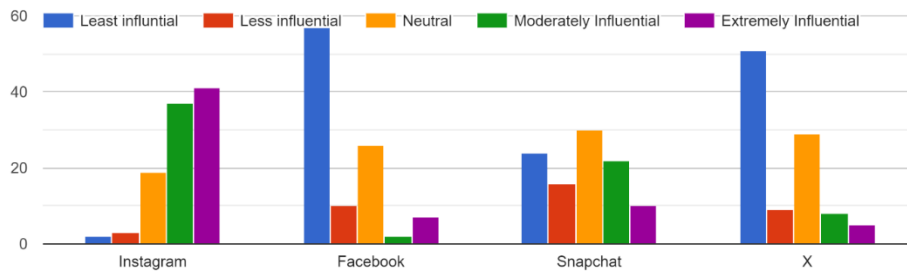
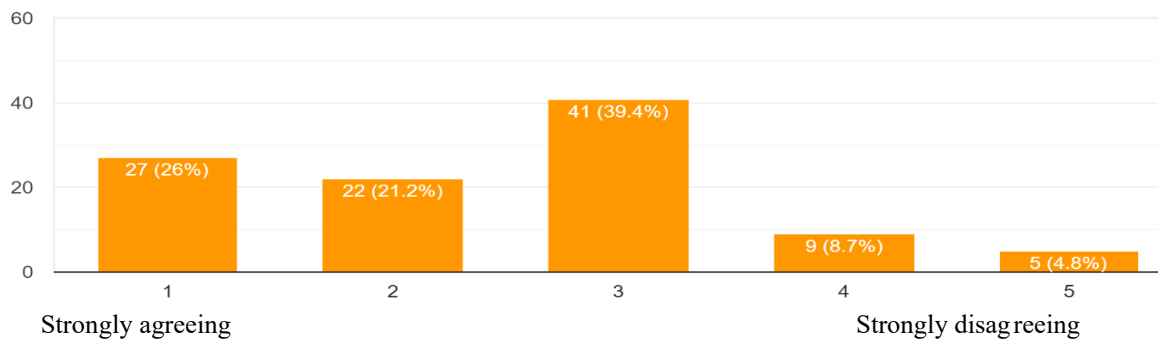


Figure 1.7

According to the above data, different social media platforms has influenced people in different ways, targeting Gen-Z. We can see that Instagram was highly influential while Facebook being the least influential for the Gen-Z. As per the data collected, we see if social media has a negative impact on the mental of individuals.



In the below pie chart, the respondents answer if they feel left out or lonely by seeing their friends posts on social media.

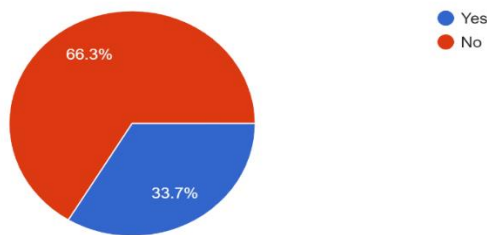
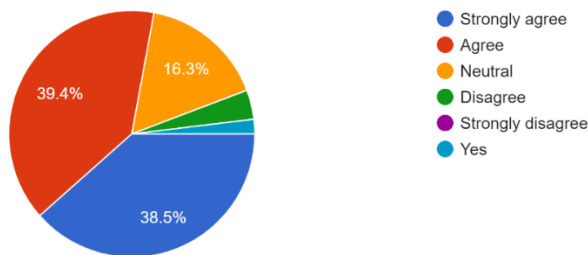


Figure 1.8 & 1.9

Out of the 104 responses, 27 of the respondents feel that social media has a negative impact on the Gen-Z users, while 41 of them have a neutral feeling. Even though 2/3rd of the respondents mentioned that they do not feel left out by seeing others’ posts, 1/3rd of them has and answer yes i.e. do feel left out which is a main factor affecting the mental health of the Gen-Z users.

In the below pie chart, respondents give their own views on social media addiction as a real issue.



As per the data received the respondents provide their clarification on if social media companies should do more to protect user’s mental health.

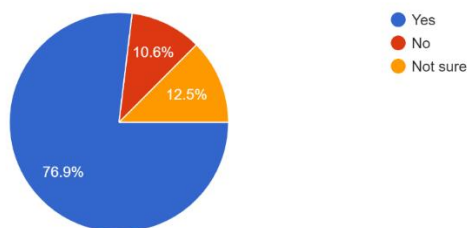
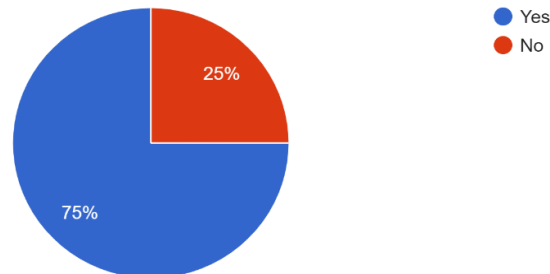


Figure 2 & 2.1

Gen-Z members do feel that social media is a very real addiction within them. Understanding that it is a real addiction, they even do feel that social media companies should promote the safety and protection of its users' mental health.

In the below pie chart, respondents provide their views on improving safety and soundness on social media platforms



In the below pie chart, respondents put forwards their experience on being cyberbullied.

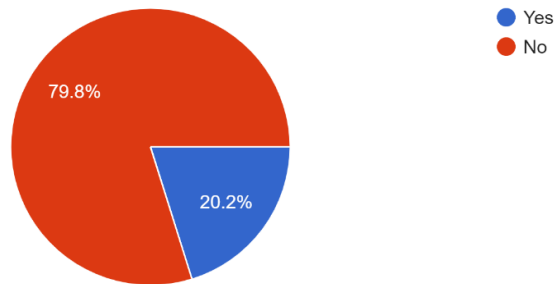


Figure 2.2 & 2.3

Although 79.8% of the respondents haven't faced cyber bullying, the remaining 20.2% of them have faced this issue, which equalises to 3/4th of the users who still prefer or ask social media to be safe and sound to protect mental health.

IV. Findings

Through this study we have understood and have been provided a lot of insight when it comes to social media and the mental health of the Gen-Z population. We went through a lot of past research papers and reviewed them. We have seen how the current technology and digitalisation especially social media has caught the attention of the people aged 16-25. They use it normally for a lot of networking and even for business benefits, but social media also have a lot of negative impacts as well, especially on the Gen-Z population. According to various research papers social media has weakened the brain of the current young population and even led to bad memory of the population. It has even been found out that parents can easily identify when social media has affected the mental health of their kids in a negative manner, and they try to provide some social support.

From the primary research done through the help of a survey, we had asked a few questions to the Gen-Z population. A lot of them were from the commerce background and included a good portion from science and other backgrounds, with their aged ranging from 16-23. We found out that a lot of them have been using multiple social media platforms for an average of 2-3 hours minimum per day, and for some even longer. A lot of them have even informed us about how social media has been impacting the way people think nowadays. It has been affecting the mental health of the Gen-Z population in a negative way which needs to be addressed. Social media platforms are very influential and has been the cause for anxiety and depression in the Gen-Z. Cyberbullying and people being jealous and left out after seeing others posts on social media are a few factors affecting the mental health of Gen-Z. These issues need to be addressed to protect the mental health of the Gen-Z population.

V. Suggestion

- Trying to limit the screen time of the users of social media as it will help them to focus on the real world and not digital life. It will free them from the anxiety and stress that we receive from social media platforms.
- Social media platforms need to start promoting and coming up with ways to protect the safety of mental health of their users to reduce negative impact of mental health.
- More positive and informative content to be promoted on social media to improve the mental health of the users by having a positive impact.
- Enhance the privacy and control awareness of social media platforms as that is a way to reduce cyber bullying and reduce the victims and help the users in multiple ways.
- Try to be more social and supportive in the real world and help them by talking to them and helping them to open up and trying to make them reduce social media to just necessary purposes.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, our study investigated the complex relationship of social media use and mental health in Generation Z, 16-25 year olds. We have gained important insight into the role of social media in society as an integral part of youth's lives, playing both good and bad roles through a thorough review of previous research and survey data collection. We have identified alarming trends in the use of social media through our primary research, conducted in the context of a survey targeting Generation Z individuals, predominantly from business backgrounds. A large majority of respondents reported that they spend a considerable amount of time on more than one social media platform per day, with some allocating up to two or three hours each. The findings of our study show that it is critical to address the negative effects of social media on Generation Z's mental wellbeing, by raising awareness about these issues and introducing targeted interventions. One limitation of our study is the potential for sample bias in our survey respondents. Most participants were from commerce backgrounds, which may not fully represent the diversity of the Generation Z population. This limits the generalizability of our findings to other demographic groups. Finally, the study shows that it is important to promote a balanced approach to online use where benefits and risks are taken into account. We can empower young people in an increasingly connected world to navigate responsibly online spaces and protect their mental health by raising awareness of the dangers of excessive social media use and teaching them digital literacy.

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