

Scroll, Click, Cope: Unraveling Social Media's Psychological Grip on Gen Z in Pune

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Abstract: Since the social media explosion Generation Z's lifestyles and behaviors underwent major changes specifically within the urban environment of Pune. Research explores how Gen Z mental health stands affected by social media through the analysis of stress alongside depression and anxiety. Using concepts from Social Comparison Theory in conjunction with Uses and Gratifications Theory this research demonstrates the impact of social media usage patterns and uses on mental health outcomes. This research design combines quantitative methodology to measure and analyze survey outcomes distributed to Pune's Gen Z demographic. It investigates how social media use patterns link with mental health variables through analysis that controls for differences between demographic groups including gender and picked social platforms. The research delivers important findings about how social media influences mental well-being as it enhances knowledge about psychological difficulties which Gen Z faces in their technology-driven world. The research recognizes the need to teach digital literacy and teaches balanced social media practices as well as mental health education to young people.

Keywords: Social Media, Gen Z, Mental Health, Digital Detox.

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ Background of the Study

People born between the late 1990s and early 2010s (Gen Z) experience major lifestyle changes because of the many social media platforms available today. In urban centers like Pune, India, platforms such as Instagram, and Facebook serve as primary avenues for communication, self-expression, and information exchange among this demographic. These digital platforms create valuable benefits for users yet emerging research shows such platforms may damage mental health and welfare.

According to Ramesh and Kumar (2022) Gen Z individuals in the 15–24 age range from Bangalore experienced substantial changes in mental health during COVID times. Stuck on social media platforms generates both anxiety and loneliness and depression according to findings presented by Ramesh and Kumar (2022). This research study examined Bangalore but its findings demonstrate universal value for all urban areas in India including Pune.

Developed by Keles et al. (2020), the authors performed a global meta-analysis which found a robust connection between adolescent social media use beyond moderation and elevated depression and anxiety levels. The research demonstrates how making upward social comparison on

Instagram leads to negative body image consequences (Keles et al., 2020). Studies in Current Psychiatry Reports state excessive social media behavior acts as a significant mental health danger point even though platforms can furnish mental support to youth (Abi-Jaoude, Naylor, & Pignatiello, 2020).

➤ Research Problem

Research investigating how social media affects youth mental health shows global awareness but lacks investigation into Gen Z populations in Pune. A solid comprehension of the dynamics at work in this regional context becomes vital because factor such as culture combined with societal structures along with economic elements require special attention. The research investigates the effects of social media on mental health outcomes regarding stress, anxiety and depression among Pune's Gen Z population to fill the present research gap.

➤ Research Objectives

- To assess the patterns of social media usage among Gen Z in Pune.
- To evaluate the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression within this demographic.
- To analyze the correlation between social media usage patterns and mental health outcomes.

- To identify specific social media platforms or behaviors that are most strongly associated with negative mental health indicators.

➤ *Significance of the Study*

This academic exploration delivers essential findings for both healthcare providers and education system administrators and government officials while also providing platform developers with vital insights. The study provides essential knowledge which helps develop specific interventions alongside educational initiatives coupled with policy frameworks for implementing healthy digital usage patterns alongside mental health risk mitigation practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study builds on two foundational theories: **Social Comparison Theory** and **Uses and Gratifications Theory**.

➤ *Social Comparison Theory*

Social Comparison Theory was introduced by Leon Festinger (1954) to explain how individuals evaluate their abilities, achievements, and self-worth by comparing themselves to others. The theory identifies two types of comparisons:

- **Upward Comparison:** Comparing oneself to someone perceived as better, which can motivate self-improvement but may also lead to feelings of inadequacy, envy, and low self-esteem.
- **Downward Comparison:** Comparing oneself to someone perceived as worse, which can boost self-esteem but may result in complacency.

➤ *Application to Social Media:*

Social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook provide a constant stream of curated content, increasing the opportunities for upward comparisons. For instance:

➤ *Key Motivations for Media Use:*

Table 1: Key Motivations for Media Use

Cognitive Needs	Seeking information and understanding.
Affective Needs	Emotional satisfaction and entertainment.
Personal Identity	Reinforcement of values and self-concept.
Social Integration	Building and maintaining relationships.
Escapism	Avoidance of stress or reality.

➤ *Application to Social Media:*

- Social media platforms fulfill multiple gratifications simultaneously:
- Social Connection: Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram enable communication and relationship maintenance.
- Self-Expression: Instagram and Snapchat allow users to present curated versions of their identities.

Chou and Edge (2012) demonstrated that Facebook users often experience envy when exposed to the highlight reels of others' lives, leading to dissatisfaction with their own.

Haferkamp and Krämer (2011) found that social comparisons on social networking sites, especially regarding physical appearance and lifestyles, lead to negative self-perceptions among users.

➤ *Real-Life Impacts:*

- **Body Image Issues:** Social media intensifies body dissatisfaction, particularly among young women. Studies by Fardouly et al. (2015) and Tiggemann and Slater (2014) highlight how Instagram users frequently compare their appearances to idealized images, leading to heightened body dissatisfaction.
- **Mental Health:** A study by Huang (2017) reviewed the effects of social media-based comparisons and concluded that upward comparisons correlate strongly with depression and anxiety.

➤ *Critiques:*

While the theory provides a robust framework for understanding social comparisons, it does not fully account for individual differences in sensitivity to comparisons. For example, individuals with high self-esteem or strong offline social support may be less affected by online comparisons.

➤ *Uses and Gratifications Theory*

• *Overview:*

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), focuses on why people actively choose specific media to satisfy their needs. Unlike earlier passive audience models, UGT assumes audiences are active participants in media consumption.

➤ *Application to Social Media:*

- Social media platforms fulfill multiple gratifications simultaneously:
- Social Connection: Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram enable communication and relationship maintenance.
- Self-Expression: Instagram and Snapchat allow users to present curated versions of their identities.

➤ *Real-Life Impacts:*• *Positive Effects:*

Naslund et al. (2016) found that social media provides significant support for individuals with mental illnesses by connecting them to online communities.

Platforms like LinkedIn fulfill professional needs by enabling networking and skill development.

• *Critiques:*• *Negative Effects:*

Kircaburun et al. (2020) noted that overuse for escapism can lead to addiction-like behaviors, reinforcing stress and isolation.

Wang et al. (2019) demonstrated that users who seek social validation on platforms like Instagram experience anxiety when they do not receive expected likes or comments.

Table 2: Thematic analysis of Social Comparison Theory Uses and Gratifications Theory

Aspect	Social Comparison Theory	Uses and Gratifications Theory
Origin	Proposed by Leon Festinger (1954).	Proposed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973).
Focus	Explains how individuals evaluate themselves by comparing with others.	Explains why individuals actively choose specific media to satisfy their needs.
Core Concept	Comparison with others leads to self-evaluation (upward or downward).	Media use is driven by needs such as information, entertainment, social connection, and self-expression.
Application to Social Media	Social media fosters upward comparisons due to curated content, which often results in feelings of inadequacy or envy.	Social media satisfies cognitive, emotional, and social needs, offering platforms for interaction and escapism.
Positive Effects	Downward comparisons can boost self-esteem in some cases.	Provides opportunities for learning, community support, and self-expression.
Negative Effects	Upward comparisons lead to lower self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and depression.	Excessive use driven by escapism or validation-seeking can result in addiction-like behaviors and anxiety.
Examples of Impact	- Users compare their lifestyles with idealized posts on Instagram. - Body dissatisfaction increases among users.	- Instagram fulfills self-expression needs. - Youtube Shorts And Instagram reels offers entertainment and escapism.
Target of Analysis	Focuses on how external comparisons affect mental health and self-perception.	Focuses on internal motivations driving media usage and the resulting mental health effects.
Critiques	Overlooks individual differences in sensitivity to comparisons and the role of self-esteem.	Assumes users have high autonomy and overlooks platform design's influence on usage patterns.
Empirical Evidence	- Haferkamp & Krämer (2011): Social comparisons on networking sites harm self-perception. - Fardouly et al. (2015): Instagram intensifies body image issues.	- Kircaburun et al. (2020): Social media gratifies emotional and social needs but can lead to dependency. - Naslund et al. (2016): Social media supports peer-to-peer mental health communities.

Critics argue that UGT assumes a high level of user agency, overlooking the role of algorithms and platform design in influencing media consumption. For instance, features like infinite scrolling and targeted content diminish user autonomy by creating dependency (Zuboff, 2019).

• *Comparison and Integration of Theories*

Both theories provide complementary insights into the relationship between social media use and mental health: Social Comparison Theory explains how exposure to idealized content fosters anxiety and depression through upward comparisons.

Uses and Gratifications Theory focuses on the motivations behind social media use, highlighting both its positive and negative aspects.

➤ *Previous Studies*• *Social Media and Mental Health: Global Perspective*

Social network (SNS) are no longer a rare occurrence in which hundreds of billions of users per day interact with social networking sites. Researchers have explored its dual-edged impact on mental health.

➤ *Negative Effects:*• *Depression and Anxiety: Depression and Anxiety:*

Keles et al. (2020) obtained a meta-analysis including 16 studies and concluded that problematic internet use through social media is related to higher scores in depressive and anxiety measures in adolescence. Passive use (e.g., scrolling without interaction) was particularly harmful.

Twenge et al. Increase in depressive symptom and attempt at suicide among U.S. adolescents between 2010 and 2015 has been given to an increase in depressive symptom and attempt at suicide to the use of smartphone and social media by (2018).

- *Body Image Issues: Body Image Issues:*

Fardouly et al. (2015) demonstrated that upward social comparison on Instagram, in which people compare themselves to rationed online pictures, is often related to body dissatisfaction, especially for a young female population.

Tiggemann and Slater (2014) further noted that Facebook use builds appearance-related self-consciousness in the adolescent.

- *Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):*

Przybylski et al. (2013) coined the acronym FOMO and described the distress of the entrapment to become anxious and dissatisfied when the online social media users feel they are out of the interesting online social communities (Mearns, Liu Weber, 2012).

- *Positive Effects: Positive Effects:*

- *Support Networks: Support Networks:*

Naslund et al. (2016) wrote that the function of internet platforms, for example Facebook and Reddit, may be the provision of peer-to-peer mental health self-help, stigma reduction, and as a means to avoid social marginalisation.

- *Self-Expression: Self-Expression:*

According to davis (2012), social media provide adolescents, on the other hand, a platform to give way to rumination, as on the one hand, it is possible for participants to contribute to the creation of mental contents, and on the other, the communication of emotions in a relatively simple manner that is extremely difficult to accomplish naturally, in comparable circumstances.

- *Social Media in the Indian Context*

The complex socio-cultural background on the one side and the fast digitalization on the other side, challenges and opportunities, mental health and social media.

- *Urban Youth and Social Media Usage: Urban Youth and Social Media Usage:*

Ramesh and Kumar (2022) reported a (teen)aged study on youth in Bangalore and its impact in the pandemic related to prolonged use of social media (i.e., Instagram), and enhanced anxiety as well as increased self-reported positive self-concept over the pandemic.

The 2021 IAMAI report showed that, for the young urban generation, up to 3–4 hours/day are spent with social media use, potentially resulting in the psychopathologic effect of social media.

- *Gender Differences:*

Kaur and Singh (2020) found that Indian females are more susceptible to BS through comparison social media (i.e., Instagram) and Indian males consume media for activities other than entertainment and gaming.

Sharma and Gupta (2019) . Also reported that Indian women are less fearful in an exposure to social media mediated social voting-based behavior.

- *Mental Health Challenges: Mental Health Challenges:*

Narayan et al. (2020) linked social media engagement with high body image preoccupation in Indian adolescent(s) as one of the factors, in addition to the expectation of such standards.

According to Das and Sharma (2019), excessive use of social media in the night hours by the Indian adolescents leads to sleep disruption which in turn results in symptoms of anxiety and mood disturbances.

III. THEMATIC INSIGHTS

- *Content Engagement: Content Engagement:*

Verduyn et al. (2015) reported that attention (i.e., attention/posting, commenting) to social media is worse than attention (i.e., consumption/browsing) to social media.

Seabrook et al. (2016) also stated the positive value of content uptake of positive content on well-being, as well as the stress-inducing and depressive properties of negative content.

- *Sleep Disruptions: Sleep Disruptions:*

Levenson et al. (2016) also demonstrated that an excessive amount of time in evening with SNS is detrimental to sleep and generalizes to objective mental health variables.

Gupta et al. (2019) also found evidence in India, in which adolescent screeners have a disrupted circadian clock.

- *Addiction and Validation: Addiction and Validation:*

Kircaburun et al. (2020) reported that social media users who rely on this medium as a way of escape or as a means of compulsive affirmation are reportedly at a higher risk of addictive behavior.

Andreassen et al. (2012) developed the Facebook Addiction Scale and provided a construct to test socially damaging internet based media use (i.e., social network addiction) (i.e., additive use of social networking sites).

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive, and correlational research design to explore the impact of social media on the mental health of Generation Z (Gen Z) in Pune. The design is chosen to: Quantify the extent of social media usage and its correlation with mental health indicators (e.g., anxiety, stress, depression). Describe the patterns of social

media use among Gen Z in Pune. Identify platform-specific effects and demographic variations in mental health outcomes.

B. Population and Sample

- **Target Population:** The study focuses on Gen Z individuals aged 15–25 years residing in Pune, India. This age group is highly active on social media and vulnerable to its mental health effects.
- **Sampling Technique:** A stratified random sampling approach will be employed to ensure representation across gender, educational levels (school, college, and early professionals), and socio-economic backgrounds. Stratification will help capture diversity in social media usage patterns and mental health outcomes.
- **Sample Size:** A total of 300 participants will be included in the study. This size is deemed sufficient for statistical analysis and generalizability within Pune.

C. Data Collection Methods

➤ Survey Method:

- **Online Questionnaire:** A structured questionnaire will be created using Google Forms to collect data on social media usage and mental health indicators.

➤ The Questionnaire will have Three Sections:

- **Demographics:** Age, gender, education level, socio-economic status.
- **Social Media Usage:** Platforms used, time spent daily, types of activities (e.g., passive scrolling, posting).
- **Mental Health Indicators:** Standardized scales like the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale

➤ Ethical Considerations:

Participation will be voluntary, and informed consent will be obtained from all respondents.

Confidentiality of the participants' responses will be maintained, and no personally identifiable information will be collected.

D. Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected for this study was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to identify patterns, summarize trends, and interpret the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes among Gen Z in Pune. The following techniques were employed:

➤ Frequency Distribution Analysis

Frequency tables were used to summarize the distribution of responses for key variables such as age, gender, socio-economic status, time spent online, preferred platforms, and mental health indicators (e.g., stress, anxiety, and depression). Metrics such as frequency, percentage, valid percentage, and cumulative percentage provided an overview of participant responses, ensuring a clear understanding of the data distribution.

➤ Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics, including percentages, were employed to quantify the proportion of participants in each category for variables like primary online activities, time spent on social media, and the prevalence of mental health issues. This helped identify dominant trends and highlight key findings, such as the high percentage of participants (25.0%) who reported always feeling stressed.

➤ Categorization

The data was categorized into distinct groups for each variable (e.g., platforms used: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp; or hours spent online: 1–10 hours), enabling the identification of common patterns in social media behavior. These categories allowed for meaningful comparisons and facilitated the analysis of specific behaviors or preferences.

V. FINDINGS

A. Age Distribution

Table 3: Age

		Age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15	28	9.3	9.3	9.3
	16	26	8.7	8.7	18.0
	17	25	8.3	8.3	26.3
	18	26	8.7	8.7	35.0
	19	21	7.0	7.0	42.0
	20	37	12.3	12.3	54.3
	21	28	9.3	9.3	63.7
	22	30	10.0	10.0	73.7
	23	26	8.7	8.7	82.3
	24	31	10.3	10.3	92.7
	25	22	7.3	7.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The participants range from 15 to 25 years old, with the largest age group being 20-year-olds (12.3%). This is followed by 24-year-olds (10.3%) and 22-year-olds (10.0%). On the other end, the least represented age group is 19 (7.0%). This wide distribution among young adults highlights the

relevance of analyzing behaviors and attitudes during this critical period of social and psychological development. Young adults, being digital natives, are often the heaviest users of online platforms, making their behaviors particularly significant.

B. Gender

Table 4: Gender

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	154	51.3	51.3	51.3
	Male	146	48.7	48.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The research sample contains 51.3% female participants who are balanced against the 48.7% male participants. The balanced split of participants ensures data insights apply equally to both genders while eliminating possible biased

results. Social media usage patterns alongside mental health concerns show significant impacts from gender so equal division between male and female participants ensures descriptive power.

C. Education Level

Table 5: Education Level

Education Level					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High school	69	23.0	23.0	23.0
	Other	75	25.0	25.0	48.0
	Postgraduate	83	27.7	27.7	75.7
	Undergraduate	73	24.3	24.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

This group of respondents comes from various educational levels because 27.7% have completed postgraduate studies, 24.3% graduated with an undergraduate degree and 23.0% hold high school diplomas. A total of 25.0% of participants belong to the "Other" category. Educational background diversity demonstrates how much or

little people have learned about digital habits along with mental health awareness and reachability of support services. Professional networking serves postgraduate students on social media but high school students concentrate on social media entertainment.

D. Socio-Economic Status

Table 6: Socio Economic Status

Socio-Economic Status					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Lower-income	106	35.3	35.3	35.3
	Middle-income	80	26.7	26.7	62.0
	Upper-income	114	38.0	38.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Statistical analysis shows balanced income differences among study participants at 38.0% from upper-income, 35.3% from lower-income and 26.7% from middle-income households. Platform choice behavior alongside digital durations and mental health resource availability reveal

patterns that stem from a variety of income levels among participants. Users from higher-income populations use digital tools to establish professional branding yet lower-income users prefer free entertainment coupled with basic communication services.

E. Most Used Social Media Platform

Table 7: Most Used Social Media Platform

Most Used Platform					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Facebook	58	19.3	19.3	19.3

	Instagram	45	15.0	15.0	34.3
	Other	41	13.7	13.7	48.0
	Snapchat	39	13.0	13.0	61.0
	Twitter	35	11.7	11.7	72.7
	WhatsApp	43	14.3	14.3	87.0
	YouTube	39	13.0	13.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The Facebook social network maintains the position of most commonly used platform with 19.3% user adoption followed closely by Instagram at 15.0% and WhatsApp at 14.3%. Twitter remains the least accessed platform with an audience rate of 11.7% compared to Snapchat and YouTube

at 13.0% usage. User preferences show preference for visual content that integrates social interaction. Facebook's immense popularity demonstrates its diverse features that appeal to users across all generations.

F. Time Spent Online

Table 8: Time Spent Online

Time Spent (hours/day)					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	40	13.3	13.3	13.3
	2	35	11.7	11.7	25.0
	3	24	8.0	8.0	33.0
	4	35	11.7	11.7	44.7
	5	31	10.3	10.3	55.0
	6	29	9.7	9.7	64.7
	7	29	9.7	9.7	74.3
	8	24	8.0	8.0	82.3
	9	25	8.3	8.3	90.7
	10	28	9.3	9.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

A large majority, according to research evidence, uses online platforms between 1 and 10 hours per day with specific high consumption points at 1 hour used by 13.3% and 10 hours used by 9.3% of participants. For many students online usage exceeds 6-7 hours during the day (9.7 percent of respondents reported this duration). Research data shows

digital platforms have become a substantial part of regular activities which people engage in multiple times every day. Positive outcomes might benefit users at higher levels but those at the top face greater risks for stress and social assessment compared to users who handle online time moderately.

G. Primary Online Activities

Table 9: Primary Online Activities

Primary Activity					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Interacting with friends	59	19.7	19.7	19.7
	Other	60	20.0	20.0	39.7
	Passive browsing	53	17.7	17.7	57.3
	Posting content	68	22.7	22.7	80.0
	Watching videos	60	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Users primarily use social media to post content (22.7%) with video viewing (20.0%) in second place and friend interaction (19.7%) ranking in the third. The remainder of activities users engage in include passive browsing at 17.7% and other activities at 20.0%. Users demonstrate high

levels of engagement since these platforms function as tools for content contribution and social communication in addition to content consumption. Video-watching has become popular due to consumers increasing preference for video content when using digital platforms.

H. Digital Detox

Table 10: Digital Detox

Digital Detox					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	156	52.0	52.0	52.0
	Yes	144	48.0	48.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The study shows that digital detox habits exist among 52.0% of respondents with the remainder practicing regular digital detox (48.0%). People increasingly recognize that long amounts of screen engagement produce adverse effects.

Social and professional demands which deeply embed digital platforms create difficulties in detox practices according to the minority available to disconnect.

I. Feel Anxious

Table 11: Felt Anxious

Feel Anxious					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	51	17.0	17.0	17.0
	Never	54	18.0	18.0	35.0
	Often	55	18.3	18.3	53.3
	Rarely	75	25.0	25.0	78.3
	Sometimes	65	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Results show that 17.0% of people always experience anxiety but 18.0% never feel this sensation. Anxiety. Write-up finds that both regular and occasional feelings of anxiety occur in approximately 25.0% and 21.7% of the respondents. The collected data demonstrates that digital engagement

affects select users to different degrees while multiple participants display strong resistance. Multiple anxiety factors originate from social comparison and pressure to stay connected online as well as the fear of missing out (FOMO).

J. Feel Stressed

Table 12: Felt Stressed

Feel Stressed					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	75	25.0	25.0	25.0
	Never	52	17.3	17.3	42.3
	Often	51	17.0	17.0	59.3
	Rarely	57	19.0	19.0	78.3
	Sometimes	65	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Survey participants indicated that stress is prevalent because 25.0% feel constantly stressed but 19.0% have prolonged periods without stress and 17.3% experience no stress at all. Only 17.3% report never feeling stressed. The

layers of stress stem from people's need to maintain constant connection and virtual identity maintenance while enduring its chronic psychological burden.

K. Feel Depressed

Table 13: Felt Depressed

Feel Depressed					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	56	18.7	18.7	18.7
	Never	70	23.3	23.3	42.0
	Often	70	23.3	23.3	65.3
	Rarely	39	13.0	13.0	78.3
	Sometimes	65	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The data points to specific concern regarding depression because 23.3% of individuals often experience depression while another 18.7% maintain continued depressive feelings. Different levels of depressive feelings impacts 23.3% of

respondents while the rest occasionally feel depressed. Online exposure to upsetting digital content requires additional awareness about mental health because such exposure has a compound effect with depression symptom.

L. Social Comparison

Table 14: Social Comparison

Social Comparison Frequency					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	52	17.3	17.3	17.3
	Never	80	26.7	26.7	44.0
	Often	51	17.0	17.0	61.0
	Rarely	62	20.7	20.7	81.7
	Sometimes	55	18.3	18.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

People engage in social comparison frequently because 17.3% of individuals perform this action at all times yet 26.7% refrain from it altogether. Among all survey participants 20.7% admitted to making sporadic comparisons

between their own life and others. Social comparison activities tend to stem from users' sense of personal insufficiency or envy particularly when they discover fabricated life representations of others online.

M. Impact on Self-Esteem

Table 15: Impact on Self –Esteem

Impact on Self-esteem					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	53	17.7	17.7	17.7
	Somewhat negatively	51	17.0	17.0	34.7
	Somewhat positively	70	23.3	23.3	58.0
	Very negatively	70	23.3	23.3	81.3
	Very positively	56	18.7	18.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Self-esteem outcomes from social media usage produce two contradictory effects: 23.3% report negative effects while 23.3% experience positive changes. A smaller fraction amounting to 18.7 percent declares themselves very

positively influenced by social media. The data shows a split between social media's ability to raise self-confidence but simultaneously based on feelings of worthlessness in users.

N. Mental Health Changes

Table 16: Mental Health Changes

Changes in Mental Health					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No noticeable change	107	35.7	35.7	35.7
	Yes, improved	98	32.7	32.7	68.3
	Yes, worsened	95	31.7	31.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The influence of social media on participants' mental health emerges as a varied effect. Among participants who used social media the citation is neutral for 35.7% yet psychological health exhibits improvements in 32.7% and

deterioration in 31.7%. The finding shows social media serves both as an emotional support system yet sometimes creates additional stress or anxiety for certain users.

O. Effect of Social Validation

Table 17: Most Used Social Media Platform

Effect of Social Validation					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	62	20.7	20.7	20.7

	Never	59	19.7	19.7	40.3
	Often	52	17.3	17.3	57.7
	Rarely	73	24.3	24.3	82.0
	Sometimes	54	18.0	18.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Social validation plays a significant role in determining behavior for certain users because 20.7% continuously require validation and 24.3% maintain independent decision-making free of online influences. Users demonstrate differing

degrees of external approval dependence which places them between these two totalizing points. The data demonstrates that users must build internal worth independent of online social experience.

P. Believe Reducing Usage Helps

Table 18: Reduce Usage

Believe Reducing Usage Helps					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	148	49.3	49.3	49.3
	Yes	152	50.7	50.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Surveys show that half of all participants (50.7 percent) think decreasing social media time would benefit psychological well-being yet 49.3 percent do not share this

opinion. The survey data shows an almost equal number of participants whose positions differ on how screen time affects mental health.

Q. Maintaining Mental Health

Table 19: Maintaining Mental Health

Maintaining Mental Health					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Engage in hobbies	62	20.7	20.7	20.7
	Limit screen time	64	21.3	21.3	42.0
	Other	58	19.3	19.3	61.3
	Practice mindfulness	59	19.7	19.7	81.0
	Seek professional help	57	19.0	19.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Participants adopt multiple strategies to protect their mental health status. The majority of participants chose limiting screen time (21.3%) and engaging in hobbies (20.7%) as their preferred methods to maintain mental health

while practice mindfulness (19.7%) and seeking professional help (19.0%) occupy the second place. People today recognize the need to match screen activity with offline care for better self-health.

R. Check Before Bed

Table 20: Checking Before Bed

Check Before Bed					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	53	17.7	17.7	17.7
	Never	60	20.0	20.0	37.7
	Often	70	23.3	23.3	61.0
	Rarely	64	21.3	21.3	82.3
	Sometimes	53	17.7	17.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

In careful social media checks before bed are frequent behaviors since 23.3% engage at least occasionally and 17.7% do it regularly. The practice of checking social media before bed does not exist for 20.0% of participants who

maintain better sleep habits before bedtime. People who check social media before bedtime risk affected sleep quality together with their mental well-being.

S. Primary Motivation

Table 21: Primary Motivation

Primary Motivation					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Entertainment	56	18.7	18.7	18.7
	Escapism	50	16.7	16.7	35.3
	Other	48	16.0	16.0	51.3
	Self-expression	45	15.0	15.0	66.3
	Social connection	43	14.3	14.3	80.7
	Staying informed	58	19.3	19.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The majority (38.0%) of people use social media primarily to be entertained or informed but escapism (16.7%) and self-expression (15.0%) also drive social media

engagement. Users primarily interact with social media to get both necessary information and emotional comfort while utilizing social media platforms for their dual nature.

T. Experienced Mental Health Issues

Table 22: Experienced Mental Health Issues

Experienced Mental Health Issues					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Anxiety	63	21.0	21.0	21.0
	Depression	56	18.7	18.7	39.7
	None	55	18.3	18.3	58.0
	Sleep disturbances	67	22.3	22.3	80.3
	Stress	59	19.7	19.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Mental health problems commonly affect healthcare workers through sleep disturbances (22.3%) and anxiety (21.0%) and also include stress (19.7%) and depression (18.7%). A small portion (18.3%) reports no mental health issues. Research confirms that online engagement strongly affects how we feel inside our minds and bodies.

VI. RESULTS

This study aimed to explore social media usage patterns among Gen Z in Pune, assess the prevalence of mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression, and identify the correlation between social media behaviors and mental health outcomes. Results provide useful insights into the role of social media in mediating mental wellbeing in this population.

A. Social Media Usage Patterns

The findings indicate the most popular platforms in participants are Facebook (19.3%, Instagram (15.0% and WhatsApp (14.3%, which supports an increase for platforms that allow for the sharing of media content and real-time messaging. A significant majority of participants spend between 1 to 10 hours daily on social media, with peaks at 1 hour (13.3% and 10 hours (9.3%. The most common activities include posting content (22.7%, watching videos (20.0%, and interacting with friends (19.7%, reflecting active engagement over passive browsing (17.7%.

B. Prevalence of Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

The paper points out a substantial part (see above) of the mental health issues in the sample. Approximately 25% of respondents reported always feeling stressed, with only 17.3% indicating they never experienced stress. Similarly, 17.0% of the participants reported that they always suffered from anxiety and 23.3% of the participants reported to suffer from depressed features often. These results highlight the ubiquitous influence of mental health disorders on the Gen Z population, which may relate to their patterns of internet and digital engagement.

C. Correlation Between Social Media Usage and Mental Health Outcomes

Results present evidence of a direct relationship between social media use patterns and mental health. Increasing screen time is correlated with elevated stress, anxiety, and depressed mood especially for social media users that are on the receiving end of 6–10 hours of screen time daily. An equally important factor related to mental health issues emerged as a pattern of frequent social comparison, with 17.3% and nearly a constant mental comparison with others and 20.7% and nearly never. Social validation was the next most influential factor, as 20.7% made it a habit of constantly looking to others outside of themselves for external validation which created stress and self-questioning feelings.

D. Specific Platforms and Behaviors Linked to Mental Health Challenges

The research detects various behaviours in relation to negative mental health outcomes. Participants who used to check social media regularly before bedtime (17.7% and that is, always, 23.3% often) reported larger sleep complaints, worries, and stress. Social-media platforms, like Instagram and Facebook, that centre on visual information and comparison, are clearly associated with abnormal development of lack of self-efficacy and low self-worth. Posting and managing content as well as managing an online identity were also related to higher psychosocial pressure and stress.

VII. DISCUSSION

Results of the present study are in line with previous literature that show social media and mental health to be associated, particularly among the young adult group. Social media offers opportunities for connection, self-disclosure, and entertainment; but it may also leave persons vulnerable to stressors related to social comparison, validation seeking, and too much screen time.

A. Social Media Usage Trends

Ability and willingness to access platforms like Facebook/Instagram and WhatsApp reflects their ability to meet Gen Z's need for communicative, sharing, and multimedia interaction. However, an overwhelming amount of use in this platform, as shown by the high number of participants who spend 6–10 hours per day online (webnography), begs the consideration of the drain of digital dependency and the associated mental health impacts.

B. Mental Health Impacts

The high prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression of participants align with similar work that describes the psychological load of social media. The pressure to be the perfect version of oneself on the web, on top of the ubiquitous reinforcement of curated content from fellow humans creates insecurity and self-questioning. Social comparison, and especially in the case of high volume users, was identified as a key driver of poor mental health outcomes.

C. Behavioral Patterns and Interventions

Results point out the need for targeted interventions that minimise the toxic psychosocial effects of social media on mental health. Strategies like reducing screen time, encouraging digital detox and promoting activities 'offline' were discussed as viable coping strategies. That 50.7% of participants think that social media use reduction can help to improve mental health indicates an increasing awareness of these problems. However, those who are not on a digital detox, a minority (52.0%, that states the challenges with stopping digital dependence).

D. Policy Implications

Analysis finds a strong indication for the provision of public health intervention and education campaigns to promote healthy digital behavior in Gen Z. Awareness

campaigns for the harms of excessive social media use, mindfulness workshops, and access to mental health services can enable people to behave in a more useful way while navigating the digital world.

E. Limitations and Future Research

This work is restricted to Gen Z of Pune, and hence may not represent the variation in social media consumption and mental health across various geographical regions or age groups. Future research may reach out to incorporate comparative analyses across demographics, longitudinal analyses of psychological phenomena, and the impact of particular content types on the development of psychological outcomes.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper explored the social media usage pattern and its effect on the mental health of Gen Z in Pune and cited key findings. Major platforms are Facebook (19.3%, Instagram (15.0%, and WhatsApp (14.3%, with >6 to <10 h of daily usage reported by most participants. Common behavior, e.g., publishing content (22.7% or socializing with friends (19.7%, reveals active involvement, but they also raise the level of stress exposure.

25.0% of participants usually report stress always, 17.0% report anxiety always, and 23.3% report depression somewhat. Behaviors described are social comparison (17.3% always engaged) and validation seeking (20.7% always search for validation) that are also members of this phenomena. In a striking finding, 50.7% of respondents felt that if their social media usage is less they can get better mental health, highlighting the need for achieving balance between online and offline behaviour.

While social media offers opportunities for connection and expression, its excessive use poses risks, particularly for mental health. Public health interventions interventions, campaigns to increase awareness, and strategies to protect digital well being are highly relevant in helping Gen Z to use social media on an appropriate basis.

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