
Digital Distress in the Social Media Era: FOMO, Anxiety, and Sleep Quality among Generations Y and Z

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ABSTRACT

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has become the recent issue of the digital era that reflects the fear of not receiving the rewarding experience because of constant social media use. The current paper examines the connection between FOMO, using social media, anxiety, and the quality of sleep in two generational groups, including Generation Y (born 1981-1996) and Generation Z (born 1997-2012). They included 110 participants who consisted of 55 members of each generation in a comparative, cross-sectional design. The data were gathered using three psychometrically appropriate measures based on standardised scales, which included the Social Media Use Scale (SMUS), Sleep Quality Scale (SQS), and Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21). Such tools determined the level and patterns of social media use, the effects of its use on sleep quality and related psychological distress. The hypothesis was that Generation Z would have an increased level of digital immersion, elevated FOMO, and anxiety, as well as less favourable sleep outcomes, when compared to Generation Y, the level of digital behavior of which is expected to be moderated. The research aims to give a subtle reading of the generational disparity in digital well-being and the consequences of the same on mental health. The results are believed to make a contribution to the expanding literature on digital psychology, providing information on the effective practices of alleviating FOMO, anxiety, and enhancing mental health outcomes related to sleep issues in young adults.

KEYWORDS: *Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), social media, anxiety, Generation Y, Generation Z, sleep quality, digital well-being, and DASS-21.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, due to the hyper-connected world, digital technology has entered the lives of people and transformed the nature of communication, relationships, and self-perception. Constant use of smartphones and access to the internet have allowed people to become more connected than ever before, enabling associations, knowing more about others. Specifically, social media outlets like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and TikTok have transformed the interactions between people, especially in the younger generations. Social media provides instant interaction, group creation, self-expression, and social approval via likes, comments, and shares. This has resulted in the fact that social media ceased being a tool in the process of communication, and it is now a key aspect of identity building and general living, especially

among Generation Y and Z members. Although this is the case, there are also disadvantages associated with the digital revolution caused by the use of social media. The interactive and addictive nature of social sites promotes overuse of technological devices, the need to compare themselves continuously, and the fear of losing their popularity in society. In addition to all the benefits of global connectivity and the immediacy of information sharing, the list of psychological anxieties is slowly growing. These are increased anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, sleep disorders, and poor interpersonal relationships. It has the most significant effects among younger groups of the population since younger people are still growing up emotionally, cognitively and socially.

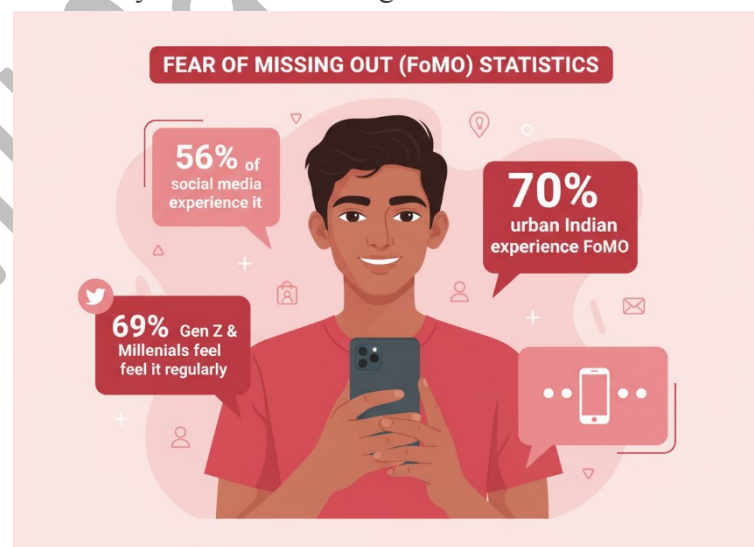
Surveys revealed that the psychological impacts of the use of social media may differ on the basis of a variety of aspects that include the type of social media, usage patterns, and individual vulnerabilities (Keles et al., 2020). A large number of users, particularly adolescents and young adults, have complained that using social media leaves them emotionally worn out or overwhelmed. This is commonly known as digital distress, where the mental and emotional drain due to the continuous connectivity and online presence is captured. It is very much connected to other constructs such as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) or social anxiety, which will be discussed in-depth in the present paper. The study proposed will pursue the interaction between the use of social media and mental health among generations Y and Z. Not only are these cohorts the digital natives, but they are also the most vulnerable to digital stressors. The research will examine the various ways in which FoMO, digital well-being, poor sleep and social anxiety affect different generations. It will also analyse the role played by the design and culture of social media facilities, which also facilitates such psychological outcomes. The notions of sleep allocation as opposed to distraction, the emotional impact of nonstop notifications, and the illusiveness of the online and offline selves will be discussed in special detail.

Through this articulation of the intricate connection between digital settings and mental health, the paper aims to share information that can be used to make a meaningful digital

lifestyle change, specific interventions, and friendly digital environment policies for digital natives. This work is based on an empirical literature review, generational psychology, and digital behavioural trend research, and could therefore provide a meaningful contribution to the current discussion on mental health in the digital age.

Digital Distress

Digital distress refers to the psychological discomfort resulting from the overuse or misuse of digital devices, characterised by emotional exhaustion, distractibility, irritability, and anxiety linked to constant online activity. Factors contributing to this state include the demand for continuous responsiveness, persistent notifications, and the pressure to maintain social



acceptability. Symptoms may involve compulsive social media checking, social avoidance, and a sense of digital overload, potentially leading to decreased productivity, withdrawal, and mood issues. Importantly, digital distress stems not only from screen time but also from individual perceptions and emotional responses to online interactions.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

FoMO, or the Fear of Missing Out, is an anxiety that arises when individuals perceive they are missing enjoyable experiences others partake in, primarily driven by social media's curated images and updates. This phenomenon can lead to compulsive behaviours such as frequent app checking and posting for validation, disrupting real-world interactions. Excessive FoMO is linked to mood swings, low self-esteem, and life dissatisfaction, serving as a potential indicator of digital addiction, especially among teenagers and young adults. This cycle fosters constant comparison, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion among users.

Mental Health and Social Media

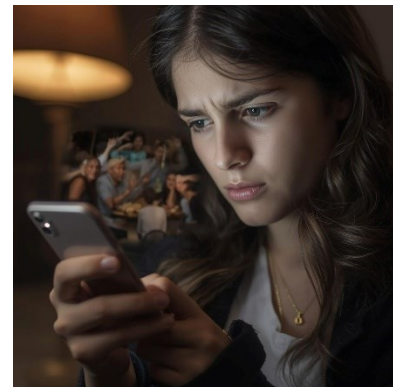
The influence of social media on mental health is multifaceted, offering opportunities for self-expression, peer support, and access to mental health resources, especially for marginalized groups. However, excessive use can lead to adverse effects, as highlighted by Keles et al. (2020), who found that increased social media engagement in adolescents correlates with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. Negative experiences such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and online harassment contribute to these issues. Additionally, algorithm-driven content can expose users to emotionally charged or idealized representations, potentially distorting their self-image and contributing to body image problems and relationship insecurities.

Psychological Well-being

Wholesome psychological health encompasses emotions, social function, and personal development, characterised by six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Social media can enhance well-being by fostering relationships and growth, but it can also harm autonomy and negatively affect self-perception, particularly in youth who may prioritize their online identities. Issues such as digital distress and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) can disrupt emotional regulation, resulting in chronic stress or depression, which adversely impacts overall well-being.

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety involves fear or uneasiness in social situations, leading to avoidance and poor social interactions. Social media presents a complex challenge for individuals with social anxiety; while it provides a safer communication avenue, it also exposes them to judgment and criticism. Weidman and Levinson (2015) note that the anxiety can escalate as individuals obsess over their online engagement, leading to feelings of inadequacy. This is exacerbated by the performative nature of social media, where users feel pressured to project idealised versions of themselves, which can further impact their self-esteem and communication skills.



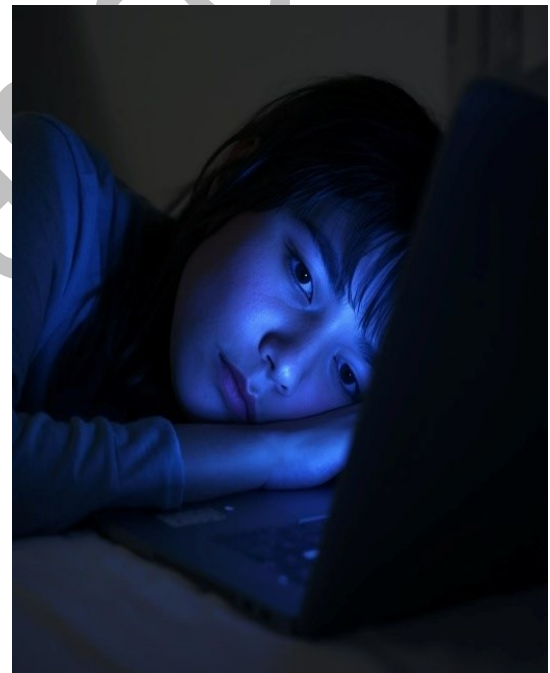
Depression

Depression is a state of mind that is characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, or emotional or physical difficulties that interfere with daily life. In young adults and adolescents, it often manifests as irritability, feelings of worthlessness, fatigue, and changes in sleep, appetite, or concentration.

Recent evidence indicates a concerning link between increased social media use and the development of depressive symptoms in youths. Idealised portrayals on social media foster unhealthy comparisons, low self-esteem, and loneliness, while maladaptive behaviours such as obsessive checking and anxiety about social approval exacerbate emotional distress. Additionally, online harassment can intensify feelings of rejection and sadness. Excessive social media use, particularly before sleep, disrupts mood regulation, increasing vulnerability to depression. The impact of social media on depression varies with individual differences and usage patterns, highlighting the importance of understanding these interactions in the context of modern digital life.

Generation Y (Millennials) and Z Digital Difference

Table 1 is a comparative analysis of Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z and presents the main differences in forming their digital generation, the use of social media, communication patterns, and mental health results. Although Millennials got to understand the development of the internet in their adolescent age and gradually managed to embrace the digital world, Generation Z has been exposed to it since childhood. This generational comparison demonstrates that emotional resilience, behavioural models, and definitions of digital well-being can be formed by the technological surroundings in which a person is brought up.



Generation Z, born after 1997, is also commonly seen to be the first digital-native generation. At a very early age, being exposed to high-speed internet access, smartphones, as well as social media applications such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube, digital interconnectivity has become embedded in almost every facet of their lives. Gen Zs, unlike Millennials, where social media is mostly used as networking and information, turn to social media as a means of identity creation, emotional support, and peer comparison. Their high level of anxiety, depression, and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has also been attributed to the intensity and likeness of their online activities (Twenge, 2017).

The Millennials, on the contrary, are avid digital users; they are more aware of screen limits, and digital burnout or fatigue is a more common expression than emotional deep entanglement. More likely, they want to find a balance between offline and online life and apply digital tools to professional development or to support already existing relations (Pew Research Center, 2019). This knowledge accentuates the necessity of designing mental health

approaches and digital literacy training based on generations and their requirements and actions.

Category	Generation Y (Millennials)	Generation Z
Birth Years	1981-1996	1997 onwards
Technology Exposure	Introduced to internet in adolescence	Grew up with smartphones and social media
Social Media Use	Networking, professional connections	Entertainment, identity, validation
Popular Platforms	Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter	Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube
Content Consumption	Blogs, forums, longer-form content	Short videos, memes, reels, fast content
Communication Style	Emails, texts, professional messaging	Visual, emoji-based, video messages
Digital Challenges	Digital burnout, privacy concerns	FoMO, cyberbullying, digital identity crisis
Mental Health Impact	Stress from multitasking and overworking	Anxiety, self-esteem issues from online comparison
Relationship with Tech	Tool-oriented, somewhat detached	Emotionally embedded, identity-forming
Digital Behavior	Balanced screen time, often mindful use	Frequent, compulsive, sometimes excessive usage

Table 1: Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z Differences in the Digital Age Distribution of Sleep vs. Distraction

How we distribute our sleep and how we distract ourselves are very important variables that affect our general sleep life and wellness. The Sleep Distribution factor is defined as the pattern through which people arrange their sleeping during the 24-hour time cycle and focus on maintaining regular bedtimes and sleep duration. Healthy sleep behaviours are the basis of emotional stability, cognition, and resistance to mental health adversities (Walker, 2017). Sleep Distraction, on the other hand, entails interruptions that occur because of using digital devices at bedtime. The use of social media, as per normal, receiving notifications, or responding to messages may put a person from going to sleep, as well as decrease sleep quality. Irritability, cognitive performance impairments, and increased susceptibility to anxiety and depression are linked with such distractions (Levenson et al., 2017). An awareness of such differences can help be ready to give precedence to habits and practices that would enhance a restorative snooze and decrease what hurts the latter. The table below shows how sleep distribution and sleep distraction are different:

Sleep Distribution	Sleep Distraction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent bedtimes • Regular sleep durations • Healthy sleep patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nighttime scrolling • Responding to notifications • Anticipating updates

Table 2: Sleep Distribution and Sleep Distracted Pattern Comparison FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) and sleep

FoMO is a widespread psychological phenomenon in the modern hyperconnected environment that leads to feelings of insecurity in the event that others are having pleasant or exciting experiences when one is not there. FoMO is also what leads to a compulsive issue consisting of constant online monitoring, nighttime scrolling, and responsive comm by young adults, especially those who belong to the Y and Z generations. The tendency is strongly connected to the 24/7 environment of digital reality, where social media never sleeps and social media sites are regularly updated. This makes people, mainly students and young professionals, acquire a culture of being alert well past when they plan to go to sleep to keep up with the news. The mind is kept psychologically aroused and emotion-stimulated instead of unwinding during the night, hence slowing down the natural circadian rhythm of the body, as well as sleep latency (duration of time it takes to acquire sleep).

Influence on the Quality of Sleep

FoMO negatively impacts both the quantity and quality of sleep, leading to procrastination from late-night gadget use and frequent awakenings due to notifications or racing thoughts. It results in reduced REM sleep, crucial for emotion processing and cognition, and increased sleep disruptions, making restlessness more common. A study by Adams et al. (2020) found a strong positive correlation between high FoMO scores and insomnia symptoms, daytime sleepiness, and emotional dysregulation.

According to a study carried out by Adams et al. (2020), there was a robust positive relationship between high scores of FoMO and sleep-related symptoms of insomnia, daytime sleepiness, and emotional dysregulation. These participants were much less satisfied with their sleep and more stressed throughout the day.

Psychological Mechanisms

FoMO is linked to social anxiety and low self-esteem, driving adolescents to maintain a perfected online image and respond immediately to messages. This online vigilance causes cognitive arousal in the brain during pre-sleep, leading to increased cortisol levels that inhibit melatonin production, essential for sleep. Sleep procrastination, often seen as revenge bedtime procrastination, is the deliberate choice to delay sleep despite knowing its negative consequences.

Long-Term Consequences

Persistent sleep disturbances linked to Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) negatively impact an individual's medical, emotional, and psychological well-being. This can result in heightened anxiety and depression, diminished performance in academics and work due to impaired concentration and decision-making, weakened immunity, and lower life satisfaction. Additionally, studies suggest that sleep-deprived individuals tend to increase social media usage the next day, perpetuating a cycle of FoMO and sleep deprivation.

Digital Age Social Anxiety

In the digital age, social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok intensify social anxiety, particularly among young adults, by fostering continuous self-presentation and social comparison. Users often encounter idealized portrayals of others' lives, leading to self-doubt and heightened sensitivity to feedback, especially among those with existing social anxiety. The pressure to achieve likes and followers can exacerbate perfectionism and the fear of rejection, prompting compulsive behaviors such as over-analyzing posts or deleting

unpopular ones. While social media may offer a means for shy individuals to connect, it can also encourage avoidance behaviors, resulting in poor self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and emotional discomfort over time, according to Vannucci et al. (2017).

The Digital Well-being Rise of Concerns

Digital well-being refers to maintaining a balanced and healthy relationship with technology. It involves self-monitoring screen time, regulating emotions during communication, and consciously using digital technologies to enhance well-being. With increased Internet usage, particularly on social media, issues like anxiety, sleep disturbances, low self-esteem, and attention difficulties have surged. To combat these problems, tools such as screen time trackers, downtime apps, and wellness prompts have been introduced, although a study by Orben and Przybylski (2019) indicates that these tools are underutilised, especially by younger users who may be more emotionally attached to their devices. Generation Z has a unique relationship with social media, viewing it as integral to their identity rather than a mere extension of it, unlike previous generations. This deep connection complicates their ability to disconnect, potentially leading to emotional fatigue or mental distress. As a result, there is an increasing emphasis on digital literacy, mindfulness, and self-regulation to support mental health in this context.

When Did It Change?

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 significantly transformed the relationship between individuals and digital technology. With the implementation of lockdowns, quarantines, and physical distancing measures, especially students and young people were compelled to embrace online platforms across various aspects of daily life. Educational institutions rapidly transitioned to virtual learning, businesses adapted to remote operations, and social interactions became predominantly digital, relying on video conferencing, messaging, and social networks. This dramatic shift not only increased screen time but also obscured the distinctions between personal, academic, and professional spheres, positioning digital platforms as essential tools for maintaining continuity, connection, and identity in an uncertain environment.

However, this dependency on digital technology carried psychological repercussions. Prolonged online engagement contributed to digital fatigue and fostered sensations of isolation, alongside inducing the phenomenon known as FoMO (Fear of Missing Out), compelling individuals to stay connected and visible within the virtual realm. Moreover, disruptive sleep patterns emerged from late-night scrolling and the absence of structured routines, leading to heightened stress levels characterized by anxiety, burnout, and difficulties in concentration. Recent research by Ellis et al. (2020) indicates that these behaviors have persisted into the post-pandemic context, suggesting that the transformations in the interactions of digital natives with technology signal a long-lasting shift rather than a temporary response. Specifically, for Generation Z, online communication has evolved from being an ancillary element to becoming central to everyday life, with the pandemic serving as a catalyst that accelerated and intensified this trend. Consequently, this intensified digital immersion has lasting implications for sleep quality, psychological health, and self-perception.

Despite a range of studies scrutinizing the impact of social media on mental health, limited research has specifically addressed the interplay between FoMO, sleep disruption, and

generational behavior. Existing literature often focuses solely on Generation Z or adolescents in general. This paper aims to bridge this gap through a comparative examination of both Generation Y and Generation Z, emphasizing the psychological consequences and effects on sleep quality induced by social media usage. The investigation will explore how young individuals relate to, express, and define themselves in the era of social media, acknowledging the psychological challenges that accompany these platforms, which merit urgent academic and societal attention. The forthcoming sections will delve into the experiences of digital distress and FoMO, alongside social media engagement and its implications for mental well-being, grounded in a thorough review of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and empirical findings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The 21st century has been termed the digital revolution, which is changing the way people interact, communicate and manifest themselves in the digital world. Although the digital environment, especially social media, has many advantages touching on information availability, community building and self-promotion, it has been implicated in increased psychological problems, especially by the young generation. Such factors are Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), the raised levels of social anxiety, and deteriorating sleep. Digital distress is a new concept that is used to explain the psychological burden brought about by excessive use or bad use of technology and digital platforms. FoMO, an anxiety caused by the perceived belief that others are enjoying appealing events without the person being involved, has been increased by social media. Applications such as Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok usually present edited highlights of individuals' lives, which encourages the person who uses them to make unrealistic comparisons. Those of the Millennials (Generation Y), who were introduced into technology during their adolescence stages in life, and the Gen Z, who have grown up with technology, are particularly influenced by such pressures. The studies indicate that FoMO is not just a transient emotion but more of a long-term psychological stress factor. Champ et al. (2022) and Alutaybi et al. (2023) associate the FoMO score with low self-esteem, the tendency towards emotional instability, and compulsive social media checking. And Gen Zs are hit especially hard by these, in part as a result of ongoing digital exposure. Yet, the presence of FoMO among some can be explained by their increased digital literacy (Dwidienawati et al., 2025). FoMO is both the cause and effect of digital addiction. According to Elhai et al. (2016) and Saura et al. (2025), most individuals with compulsive checking of social media exhibit withdrawal and compulsive behaviours. This is what results in impulsive posting, notifications, and an inability to detach from online environments, even at the expense of real-life experiences. The resulting anxiety, dissatisfaction, as well as continuously feeling inadequate are the results of these behaviours. These behaviours, as Bloodhart and Swim (2024) conclude, resemble the behavioural addictions with spending more time online, contributing to a poorer mood and social withdrawal. Where some are relieved to have a more diverse digital space where communication is not timely due to the ease of losing their bearings within non-timely feedback systems, others are at a greater risk of being judged by the parameters of such an online feedback system. Likes, comments, views and shares are all measures of success, and a lack of these can cause severe self-doubt. Weidman and Levinson (2015) demonstrated that socially anxious people tend to become obsessed with how their posts are perceived, and negative interactions may increase their

symptoms. Saura et al. (2025) noted that this cultural aspect of social media, which they termed as performance-based, promotes self-comparison, particularly among vulnerable users. Consequently, it is possible to face the improvement of social anxiety due to the necessity of permanent tracking of the online reputation and keeping it in good condition. Even millennials and Gen Z are pressured to be able to present an idealised online identity. The mismatch between the actual self and the online identity creates emotional depletion, self-consciousness and even introversion. In Gen Z, who did not know any other reality because they could not live without digital devices, this contradiction has become especially strong (Dwidienawati et al., 2025; Bloodhart & Swim, 2024). A vast stream of literature also associates social media use with psychological problems. These young users often report cases of anxiety, depression and emotional instability. Adolescents who use an excessive number of social media platforms in their lives are at significantly higher risk of developing mental health issues, the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory expressed concern in 2023. Marginalised girls and groups are highly endangered. Saura Roman et al. (2025) determined that the pressure to be online at all times, relieve validation and fulfil online commitments may lead to fatigue and evasion. Distress is also caused by cyberbullying, false information and viral content (Bloodhart & Swim, 2024). Although both the Millennials and Gen Z are equally affected, the latter generation has been discussed as more susceptible to it, as they have grown up in the digital world. Interestingly, Millennials might allegedly have lower rates of reported intensity of FoMO than Gen Z, despite them having more difficulty adapting to changing digital norms. Dwidienawati et al. (2025) recommend that digital resilience can be considered as a protective factor, especially in Gen Z, because it is strengthened by media literacy, emotional regulation, and supportive systems. The other substantial effect of digital interaction is a sleeping disorder. Poor sleep rates like insomnia, late occurrence of REM sleep, and daytime unresents are associated with high levels of FoMO and social media usage (Adams et al., 2020; Al Hourri, 2023). The use of screens late at night impacts the production of the hormone melatonin and leaves the brain in an alerting state. The study by Al Hourri (2023) demonstrated that low sleeping quality regularly mediates the association that relates digital usage and mental health challenges. Every time one socialises with social media, particularly at a late hour in the night, chances of developing anxiety and feelings of instability the following day increase. Sleep deprivation is an effect and a cause of distress to young users. Digital environments do not affect everybody in the same manner. The family, peer, and educational systems of social support may counter the adverse psychological effects of social media. Dwidienawati et al. (2025) explain that the Gen Z social media users claimed to experience less distress in the form of FoMO or online validation when characterised by more, as well as stronger, social connections and extraversion levels. Positive interventions based on encouraging healthy digital habits, self-regulation and offline activity can be useful. Especially important are programs to raise awareness regarding the curated aspect of social media, and to question online interactions and consider them critically. Additionally, translated into real life, in-person community work and enhanced emotional understanding could assist youth in engaging more safely in the digital world.

Research Gap

- Although it is subject to impressive developments, the literature still has serious gaps:
- Unavailable Nuanced, Comparative Studies: Few empirical studies provide a cross-generational, comparative approach to the impacts of digital distress and a need to explicitly compare the experiences of millennials and Gen Z.
- Lack of Attention to Moderators /Protective Factors: Additional research is required to investigate which variables predispose some youth to be more resilient than others, and which interventions are most effective across the profiles of different types of digital users.
- Evolving Digital Environment: Much of the evidence is pre-dating the latest wave of so-called short-form video apps and more highly personalised algorithm-driven feeds (e.g., TikTok, Instagram Reels), which may present new risk factors and defence mechanisms.
- Cultural and Socioeconomic Diversity: The bulk of the research work already available is not only Western and urban-biased, but the rural and low-income youth are significantly underrepresented.

The era of modernity has developed digital platforms that are now very integrated into the lifestyle of Millennials and Gen Z. Although they have a lot of positive effects, their excessive usage and the associated mental pressures they cause in the form of FoMO, anxiety, addiction, and sleep disturbances need to be addressed immediately. FoMO is one of the leading sources of distress, which perpetuates addictions and worsens self-esteem inefficiencies. Social media reward system and the culture of comparison generate a state of permanent mental tension, especially among Gen Z. The effects can be however mitigated by the existence of digital literacy, emotional endurance, and positive environments. Future interventions should be aimed at improving these protective factors to help the youth be aware of systems to ensure the usage of digital spaces in a conscious, balanced, and healthy way.

Rationale

- Taking into account the reported increasing levels of digital device use and mental health reports in youth, the psychological processes of digital distress are essential to comprehend. When not dealt with, digital addiction, FoMO, anxiety, and sleep disruption may hinder academic performance, income level, self-confidence, and future health.
- Policy and prevention are trailing: Legislation and education processes have failed to adjust as fast as the dynamics in digital platforms. Research-based evidence is critical in informing future guidelines, school-based interventions, and even platform design to safeguard well-being.
- Experiences between generations vary: Millennials and Gen Z will react to, engage and utilise digital technologies differently. Without generationally sensitive models, there is a risk that interventions will not work with and on the intended populations.
- The present situation is an aggravation of the reliance on the Internet: The pandemic and related quarantine sped up the trends of online communication, education, and working developed over a long period, therefore, increasing the risks to mental health outcomes.

- Systematic Differences in Generational Experiences: A comparison of the social media use, FoMO, digital anxiety and coping mechanisms of the Millennials and Gen Z.
- Focusing on Moderators: Highlighting moderators (e.g. social support and digital literacy, and resilience as protective mechanisms against poor outcomes).

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The research aims to explore the relationship between social media use and emotional distress, that is, depression, anxiety, and stress in young adults. Through these relationships, the study will aim to explain the degree to which high social media usage is related to poor mental health as assessed by the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the relationship between the use of social media and general emotional distress in the participants, including depression, anxiety, and stress indicators.
- To test the unique connection between social media use and the levels of anxiety.
- To establish the correlation between the use of social media and the degree of depression and stress among the participants.
- To add empirical data to the knowledge of psychological risks of the regular use of social media in a sample of young adults.

Hypotheses

H1: Higher levels of social media usage scale will be associated with higher levels of emotional distress (depression, anxiety, and stress) as measured by the DASS-21.

H2: Social media use and anxiety levels are significantly and positively related among the participants.

H3: Social media use and the extent of depression and stress in participants are significantly positively correlated.

Sample

The current research was undertaken in the Surat city of Gujarat to assess the psychological implications of the Fear of Missing out (FoMO), social media, and sleep quality among participants belonging to two different age group cohorts Gen Y (Millennials) and Gen Z. The sample size involved was 110 people where 55 members of the Generation Z (13-28 years old) and 55 Generation Y members (29-44 years old).

Purposive sampling method was employed to select participants, and this purposefully permitted entry of those individuals on the basis of generational categorisation, age and active participation in social media. The sample participants were enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate academic programs, and young professionals/recent graduates. The need to include the students and working population was to ensure a wider understanding of digital

behaviour and psychological trends among each generation. The sample was heterogeneous regarding the level of education, gender representation, socio-cultural background, and the lifestyle of individuals. This was necessary to provide a generalizability of the findings of a given study to the larger subgroups in each generational group. The subjects were recruited voluntarily and signed informed consent to participate in the research. To evaluate the variables of study, the following valid psychometric instruments were applied:

1. Sleep Quality Scale (SQS)- to assess the quality of sleep, sleep disorders and bedtime behaviours that could be affected by digital behaviour and emotions.
2. Social Media Use Scale - to gauge the extent of social media use by the survey participants in terms of frequency, the number of hours and types of interaction.
3. Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21) - A brief, reliable self-report measure to quantify emotional distress related to depression, anxiety, and stress.

Selection of all tools was done on the basis of relevance, psychometric strength, and suitability to the target population. Answers of the participants obtained through the organised structured questionnaires and the data were analysed, yielding responses to establish the generational differences in digital distress, social media dependency and the extent to which they affected sleep and emotional well-being. After this study design with a balanced sample within each generation, it was possible to have a significant connection when comparing the levels of manifestation of FoMO and digital media use are different among age groups and how the two factors are modified by sleep quality and psychological wellness.

Sampling Method

The rather limited sample, chosen according to the purposive type of sampling technique, embraced only the individuals who answered the specific inclusion criteria pertinent to the research subject matter on Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), utilisation of social media, and the quality of sleep. Purposive sampling was selected because it is effective in reaching particular elements of the population groups who have high engagement with digital technology and social media platforms- in this instance, members of Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z.

The study enrolled 110 participants, consisting of 55 participants in the Generation Z group (aged 13 to 28 years) and 55 participants in the Generation Y group (aged 29 to 44 years). Such equal attendance to the representatives of both generational cohorts was a necessary condition to provide the comparative analysis and to know more about the differences in the generational digital behaviour, sleep quality, and psychological consequences.

Selection of participants was done under the following pre-determined criteria:

1. Belonging to the generation boundaries of either Generation Y or Generation Z.
2. Frequent or frequent use of such social media, like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, or Twitter.
3. Undergraduate/graduate student/ working area or recent young professional.
4. The desire to take part voluntarily and submit to informed consent.

The study utilised purposive sampling to reach subjects with diverse genders, academic disciplines, and socio-cultural backgrounds. The method aimed to identify cases rich in information, providing depth to the research questions and insights into FoMO and sleep

disturbances related to digital activities, specifically focusing on generational digital engagement.

Data collection procedure

The data collection process in the current work took place during one week, with the aid of both online approaches and face to face to obtain the balance and representative sample of Generation Y and Generation Z. Three psychometric instruments were used in the research, including the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DAAS-21), the Social Media Use Scale (SMUS), and the Sleep Quality Scale (SQS) along with demographic questions and informed consent. The informed consent was provided in a structured Google Form, where the participants were recruited and their demographics (age, gender, occupation) and three standardised scales were included. The DASS-21 measured depressive, anxiety, and stress symptoms, and the items in each subscale were seven and rated with a Likert-type scale. The SMUS was a survey consisting of 22 items in five dimensions (social interaction, entertainment, information seeking, convenience, and social comparison) and was used to assess the frequency and reason for using social media. The 28-item scale, the SQS, measured a variety of areas of sleep quality, such as daytime symptoms, sleep restorative, and sleep satisfaction, and the response was rated on a four-point Likert scale. The internet approach enabled the respondents to answer questions when they could, and this ensured that it was confidential and consistent. In a bid to support inclusivity, particularly among persons with poor digital access, the researcher also undertook the face-to-face data collection at universities, workplaces, and residential places in Surat, Gujarat. In these interactions, the participants were also helped to fill out the Google Form and their answers were also recorded with the focus on integrity and considerateness. Open-ended questions were used to get subjective experiences, e.g. the urge to check social media late in the night or the feelings of being excluded after seeing other people's posts. All answers on the Internet were kept secret, and no personal information was attached to the replies. Google Forms data was exported to an encrypted Excel database to analyse the data statistically. The online collection of data improved the response rate in addition to the diversity and the representativeness of the sample, thus improving the validity and reliability of the collected data as far as age, occupation, and social-cultural context are concerned.

Tools used for the study

Three psychometric instruments, which demonstrated high standardisation and validation, were utilised to investigate the correlation between social media behaviour and sleep quality in various real-life situations, including university environments, social interactions, and workplace environments. These measures consisted of the Social Media Use Scale (SMUS) and the Sleep Quality Scale (SQS). All these instruments have been applied previously in other studies with high chances of reliability and validity, such that the outcomes of the studies are credible.

1. Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)

The SMUS is a 17-item self-report measure that describes thematic trends and frequency of use of social media during the past seven days. However, unlike other tools that gauge the use of social media only through the element of screen time, SMUS measures how and why people use social media. It is particularly helpful in finding the various psychological bases that drive people to go online.

Domains.

The scale has four subscales:

1. Image-Based Use (e.g. posting or editing photos, checking reactions),
2. Comparison-Based Use (e.g. comparing oneself with others in terms of their lives and their looks),
3. Belief-Based Usage (e.g., giving views or responding to provocative materials),
4. Usage-Pays (e.g. scrolling feeds, watching videos, navigation of unfamiliar profiles).

Preliminary validation trials indicate that the SMUS demonstrates both convergent and discriminant validity, supported by factor analysis revealing a four-subscale structure without the need for reverse-scored items. The scale exhibits a high intraclass coefficient, ensuring reliable scores across subgroups and responsiveness to varying levels of social media engagement. It effectively differentiates between distinct types of social media behaviors, highlighting the absence of a singular form of social media use. Additionally, the SMUS distinguishes itself from general internet addiction scales and helps researchers identify diverse motivations behind social media usage. Its validation across various demographic participants confirms its suitability for research involving university students, working adults, and the general population.

2. Sleep Quality Scale (SQS)

A 28-item self-report measure called the Sleep Quality Scale (SQS) was developed by Yi, Shin, and Shin (2006) to measure the many dimensions of sleep quality among adults. It was made to be an all-encompassing tool, one that could be employed during research as well as in a clinical setup. The SQS assesses six important areas regarding sleep: Daytime symptoms, Restoration on waking up, Issues of initiating and maintaining sleep, Difficulty waking, Sleep satisfaction, and Symptoms of sleeping issues.

The scale demonstrates strong psychometric properties, showing a high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$) and good test-retest reliability ($r = 0.81$). It effectively differentiates between normal and problematic sleep patterns and has positive correlations with stress, depression, and daily functioning. Its congruence has been validated across diverse populations, including healthy adults and individuals with insomnia or depressive symptoms. The scale has been successfully applied in various settings, including universities, workplaces, and the general community, thus reinforcing its reliability and stability.

3. Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21)

Introduction

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale - 21 (DASS - 21) is a 21-item self-report scale designed to measure negative affective states related to depression, anxiety and stress. Conceived by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) as a brief alternative to the original 42-item DASS, the instrument is designed to measure the severity of core symptoms that are associated with these three affective dimensions during the past week. It is widely used in empirical research as well as clinical practice in the screening, assessment, and follow-up of emotional distress in adult populations.

Domains

The DASS-21 is organised around three subscales, each of which has seven items:

1. Depression - Measures hopelessness, lowered self-esteem, anhedonic withdrawal, and affective sadness.
2. Anxiety - Measures the frequency of physical symptoms of tension, nervousness in certain situations, and fear or panic.
3. Stress - Measures the frequency of a person's chronic stress, difficulty relaxing and tendency to be easily irritated or agitated.

The DASS-21 exhibits strong psychometric properties with a validated three-factor structure of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress. It shows high correlations with established emotional distress measures, affirming its convergent validity. Each subscale maintains high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.85) and strong test-retest reliability. The instrument effectively distinguishes between clinical and subclinical psychological distress and highlights the interrelated yet distinct nature of its constructs. Standardised across various populations, including university students and clinical samples, the DASS-21 has established country-specific norms, enhancing its cross-cultural applicability in research and psychology.

Research Design

The current research adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design to test the association between social media use, emotional distress, and sleep quality in young adults who are members of Generation Y and Generation Z. The design was selected as it will be possible to measure naturally occurring differences in important psychological variables without controlling for any conditions. The research also tried to find the correlation between the indicators of mental health, such as depression, anxiety, and stress, with the levels of social media use, as well as the combined effect of the above factors in predicting the level of anxiety. The data were gathered with the help of the standardised self-report psychometric measures and the statistical analysis comprising the descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations and multiple regression analysis to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between different variables. The design was suitable to pursue the objectives of the study, which were to comprehend the patterns of digital distress and to indicate the difference between the experiences of different generations.

Statistical Analysis Data.

The data retrieved were analysed with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics. To perform the major analyses, the data were filtered on missing numbers, outliers, and statistical assumption breaches. To summarise the demographics and the general trends of social media use, sleep satisfaction, and emotional distress, Descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviation, and frequency distribution, were calculated. To determine the correlations between the variables, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was applied. This evaluation determined the quality and direction of associations between social media use, depression, anxiety, stress, and quality of sleep. To measure the predictive quality of the use of social media and emotional distress variables in predicting anxiety, multiple linear regression analyses were done. The hierarchical (two-model) regression method was used. In the former, the predictors of anxiety were input through social media use and the quality of sleep. The second model incorporated the measures of depression and stress to ascertain whether the indicators of emotional distress enhanced the general forecast of anxiety. All analyses were set at $p < .05$ as the level of statistical significance. Normality assumptions, linearity, homoscedasticity, and

multicollinearity were tested, and the results were found to be acceptable. All testing was done using the two-tailed tests.

RESULT

A research study examined two generation groups containing equal numbers of students (n = 110) drawn from Auro University Surat in India (n = 55 for each group). Students were between the ages of 18–25 years old. The participants were chosen based on a specific sampling method from numerous academic sections across the university.

Three psychological tools were used:

1. Social Media Use Scale (SMUS) - Measures the frequency, intensity, and patterns of an individual's social media usage.
2. Sleep Quality Scale (SQS) - It assesses six important areas regarding sleep: Daytime symptoms, Restoration on waking up, Issues of initiating and maintaining sleep, Difficulty waking, Sleep satisfaction, and Symptoms of sleeping issues.
3. Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21) - It measures the severity of core symptoms that are associated with these three affective dimensions: depression, anxiety and stress during the past week.

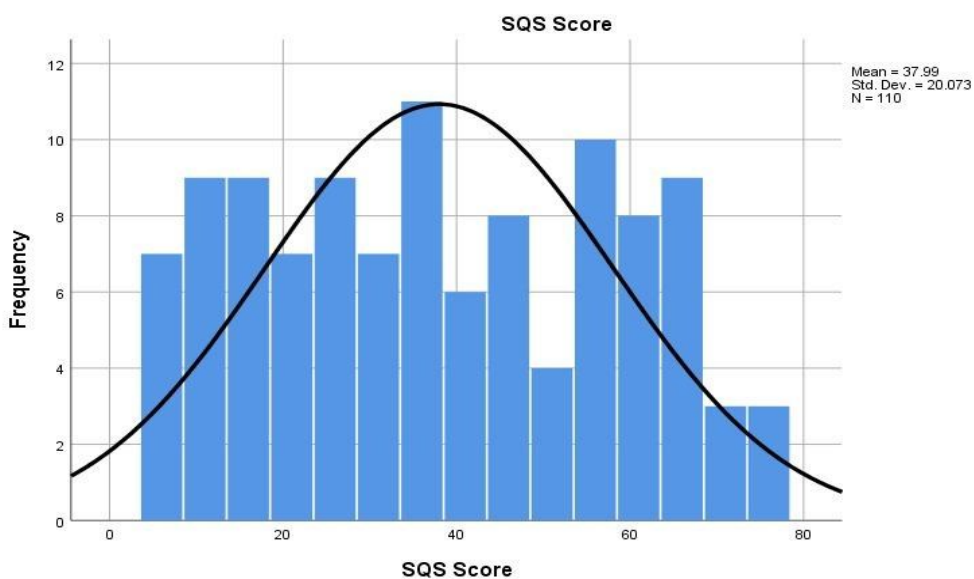
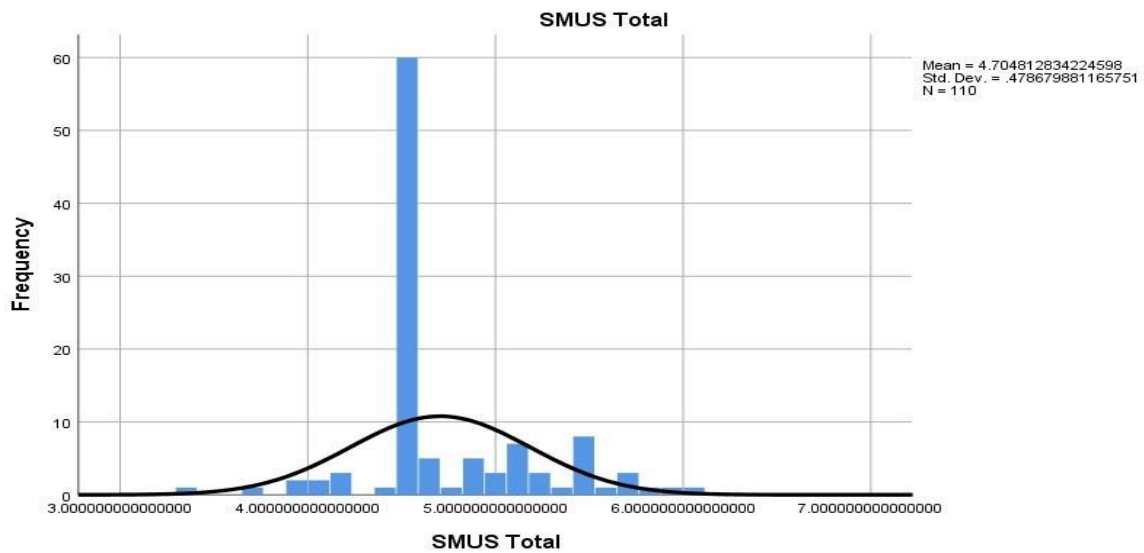
Data analysis utilised IBM SPSS Statistics, focusing on filtering missing values, outliers, and statistical assumptions. Descriptive statistics summarised demographics and trends in social media use, sleep satisfaction, and emotional distress. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation assessed correlations between these variables. Multiple linear regression, employing a two-model hierarchical approach, analysed social media use and emotional distress's predictive quality on anxiety. The first model included social media use and sleep quality, while the second added depression and stress measures. Analyses met a significance level of $p < .05$, confirming results for normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity, using two-tailed tests.

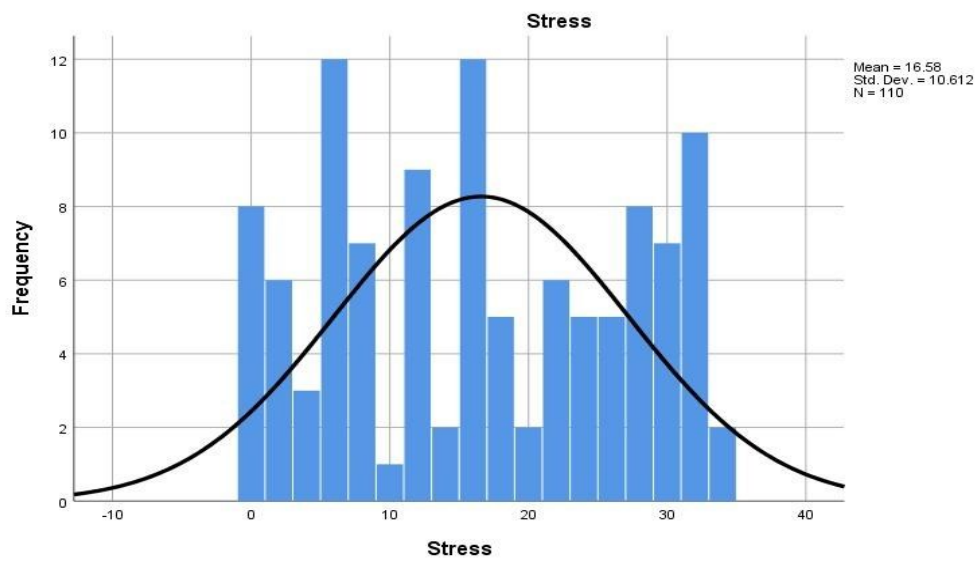
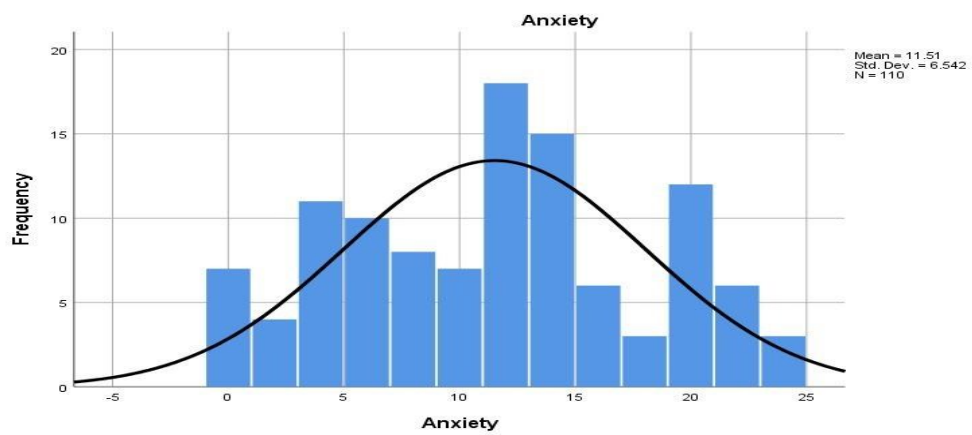
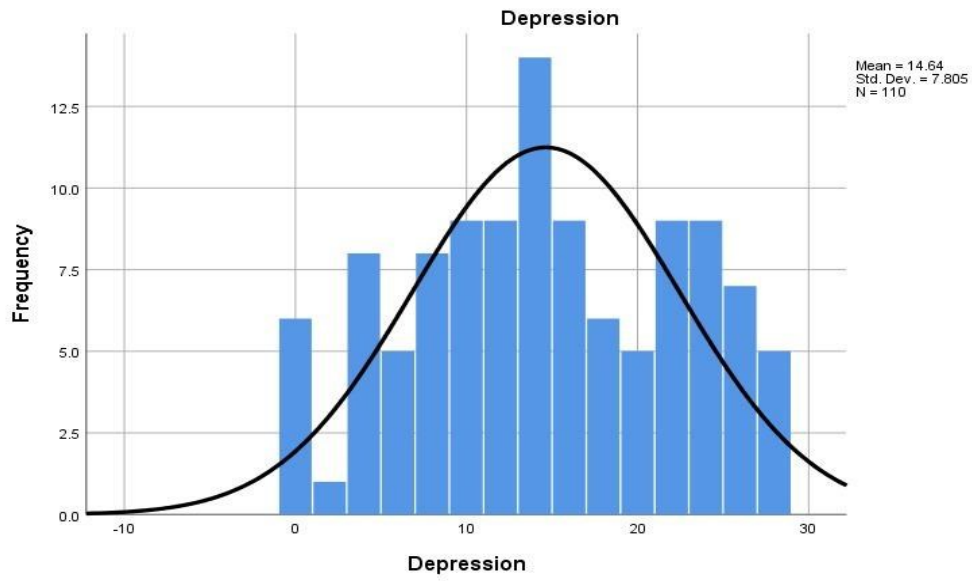
Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Social Media Use	4.70	0.48	3.35	6.12
Sleep Quality	37.99	20.07	6	74
Depression	14.64	7.80	0	28
Anxiety	11.51	6.54	0	24
Stress	16.58	10.61	0	34

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for SMUS, SQS, and DASS-21 Variables Among Generation Y and Generation Z Participants

The descriptive statistics were calculated on all the important variables of the study such as social media use, sleep quality, depression, anxiety, and stress. The average of social media

usage (SMUS) was 4.70 (SD = 0.47) and it was moderate in terms of the levels of daily engagement of the participants. The scores of sleep quality were very diverse (M = 37.99, SD = 20.07), which shows that there was great diversity in the experience of sleep across the sample. The mean scores of the emotional distress variables were as follows: depression- M = 14.64 (SD = 7.81), anxiety-M = 11.51 (SD = 6.54) and stress-M = 16.58 (SD = 10.61). The histograms have been visually inspected to ensure that all the variables are normally distributed, we do not have any significant outliers or skewness. The social media use, sleep quality, depression, anxiety, and stress distributions had bell-shaped shapes, which warranted the application of parametric statistical tests. Figures 1-5 show graphs of each variable alongside the observed data (bars) and fitted normal distribution curve (line).





These findings show the level of emotional distress among the respondents. The findings are all stated in line with the objectives of the study, and summary statistics are presented in the supplementary tables and figures.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Social Media Use (SMUS)	—	.173	.391**	.522**	.432**
2. Sleep Quality (SQS)	.173	—	.132	.140	.192*
3. Depression	.391**	.132	—	.670**	.719**
4. Anxiety	.522**	.140	.670**	—	.662**
4. Anxiety	.432**	.192*	.719**	.622**	—

Table 2: Pearson Correlations Among Social Media Use, Sleep Quality, and Emotional Distress Variables (N = 110)

The product-moment correlation coefficients of Pearson were computed to investigate the associations between the use of social media and emotional distress of the participants. There were strong positive correlations between the use of social media and the variables of emotional distress, depression ($r=.391, p<.001$), anxiety ($r=.522, p<.001$), and stress ($r=.432, p<.001$). Particularly, depression was also moderately and significantly correlated with the usage of social media.

These results suggest that those who reported more activities on social media sites also reported more depression, anxiety and stress levels, which supports Hypothesis 1 (H1).

In order to test Hypothesis 2 (H2), the correlation between anxiety and social media use was analysed separately. There was a moderate statistically significant correlation, which proved that ($r=.522, p<.001$), increased levels of anxiety symptoms are associated with increased levels of social media use among this sample. Accordingly, the data supported H2.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) was tested, based on the correlations of depression, stress and use of social media. The findings showed that both depression ($r=.391, p<.001$) and stress ($r=.432, p<.001$) showed significant positive relationships; that is, the more people use social media, the more they report their symptoms of depression and stress. These findings support H3.

These correlations and directions are consistent with other studies that indicate that the use of social media is positively associated with psychological distress among young adults and adolescents, particularly depression, anxiety, and stress.

Predictor	Model 1 B	Model 1 SE B	Model 1 β	Model 2 B	Model 2 SE B	Model 2 β
Constant	-22.12	5.32	—	-12.27	4.34	—
Social Media Use (SMUS)	7.01***	1.14	.513	3.50**	0.99	.256
Sleep Quality (SQS)	0.02	0.03	.051	-0.00	0.02	-.008
Depression	—	—	—	0.30***	0.08	.358
Stress	—	—	—	0.18**	0.06	.295

Table 3: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Anxiety from Social Media Use, Sleep Quality, Depression, and Stress (N = 110)

The present analysis has examined the aspects that forecast anxiety among the students, such as social media use, sleep quality, depression, and stress. In the first step (Model 1), we were testing social media use and the quality of sleep. We discovered that the more elevated the social media use, the more anxiety. The quality of sleep was not significant. In the second step (Model 2), we included depression and stress in the model. Even with the addition of these, social media use was also a major predictor of anxiety, but it was less powerful. Anxiety was also a major predictor of both depression and stress. The quality of sleep was found not to be linked to anxiety; the findings conclude that the more students use social media and the more depressed and stressed they are, the more anxiety is observed. This study did not find a relation between sleep quality and anxiety.

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of the study was to investigate the complex relationship between Social Media use and the fear of missing out (FOMO) and the mental health outcome, especially depression, anxiety, and stress, among college students. In the current digital era, social media has become an integrated part of young adults' daily lives, serving as a source of connection, entertainment, and self-expression. However, the excessive or maladaptive use of social media platforms has increasingly been linked to various psychological challenges. The studies sought to understand not only the direct relationship between Social Media engagement and mental health, but also how FOMO is an immediate factor that contributes to the negative emotional state, such as anxiety and depression, as well as the stress in both Generation Z and Generation Y.

Generation Y, often referred to as “digital immigrants,” experienced the transition from offline to online culture during adolescence and early adulthood. Their relationship with social media tends to be more functional and social, used for networking, career purposes, or maintaining friendships. Studies suggest that Gen Y individuals maintain better digital boundaries and are somewhat less affected by FOMO-driven anxiety because they developed social habits before social media became pervasive (Turner, 2015).

Generation Z, in contrast, is true “digital natives.” They have grown up with constant access to smartphones, apps, and internet connectivity. Social validation through likes, shares, and followers forms an integral part of their self-concept (Barry et al., 2017). Consequently, Gen Z participants are more likely to experience FOMO, compulsive checking, and validation-seeking behaviours, which contribute to heightened emotional distress. The positive correlations found in this study reflect this generational susceptibility.

The APA (2022) has similarly cautioned that younger cohorts, due to their immersive relationship with digital media, face increased vulnerability to social comparison, cyberbullying, and distorted self-perception. Thus, while both generations experience emotional strain from social media, the intensity and psychological mechanisms differ, with Gen Z showing more dependency and sensitivity to online feedback loops.

Social Comparison Theory

The significant positive correlations between social media use and emotional distress can be interpreted through Festinger’s (1954) Social Comparison Theory, which states that individuals evaluate their worth and success relative to others. On social media, where users typically present idealised versions of their lives, these comparisons often result in unfavourable self-evaluations. When individuals perceive themselves as less successful, attractive, or happy than peers, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy, depression, and anxiety.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

FOMO further amplifies the emotional consequences of social comparison. Defined by Przybylski et al. (2013) as the fear that others might be engaging in rewarding experiences without one’s participation, FOMO leads to compulsive online engagement and difficulty disengaging from social platforms. The cycle of checking updates, notifications, and stories creates constant emotional vigilance and hyperarousal—states commonly associated with anxiety. This study’s findings reinforce that FOMO is both a cause and consequence of social media use. Students who fear exclusion spend more time online, but this overexposure, in turn, heightens anxiety and depressive symptoms, creating a reinforcing loop.

Self-Determination Theory

According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), humans have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Social media platforms often distort these needs. Although users seek connection (relatedness), the interaction is superficial and validation-based. This undermines autonomy and competence, as individuals begin to rely on external approval for self-worth. This dependency can manifest as chronic stress and emotional dysregulation, as observed in this study.

Sleep Quality and Digital Habits

Contrary to expectations, sleep quality did not significantly predict anxiety in the final regression model. While past studies (Levenson et al., 2017) have shown that late-night screen use disrupts circadian rhythms and contributes to poor mental health, the current data suggest that psychological stressors outweigh physiological ones in predicting anxiety levels. One explanation could be that self-reported sleep data lacked precision—students might underestimate sleep disruptions or equate quantity with quality. Another explanation lies in the interrelatedness of emotional variables: depression and stress might have absorbed much of the variance attributable to poor sleep, rendering their independent effect insignificant.

Nonetheless, the wide variation in sleep quality scores indicates that the issue remains important and should be examined with more refined tools in future research.

The result revealed that the higher level of Social Media engagement was strongly associated with the greater experience of FMO and relative symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Participants who reported spending longer durations on platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp also reported more experience of social comparison, fear of exclusion, and the pressure to stay constantly updated.

The showcase describes the FOMO as a prevention apprehension that others might be having a rewarding experience from which one is absent, such as the appreciation of individual needs to remain connected, scrolling through updates and notifications in an attempt to validate the fear of being left out. However, this contact stands to exacerbate anxiety, high stress, and decrease life satisfaction.

The hard key regression analysis is conducted in the study, providing a deeper insight into this dynamic, even after controlling for variables, sleep quality, depression, and stress of social media use remains a significant predictor of anxiety. This indicates that the relationship between Social Media engagement and anxiety is not merely a byproduct of poor sleep or existing psychological distress but rather a unique and independent effect. The finding highlights the uncontrollable nature of digital engagement in modern life, where constant notification and social comparison can contribute to cognitive overload and emotional strain. This observation that Social Media use continues to predict anxiety even after controlling for other mental health factors emphasises the need for targeted intervention that focuses on the health of Digital habits, and this is more shown in the concentration, which is the upcoming generation of our future.

Moreover, the results are consistent with guidance and raised by global organizations, such as the World Health Organization and the American Psychological Association. The WHO has identified executive digital use and “technostress” as emerging in mental health challenges in the 21st century. Nothing that constant exposure to online scanning disturbs emotional regulation and the sleep cycle. Similarly, the APA 2020 has found that heavy Social Media engagement can intensify feelings of loneliness, stress, and former, especially among adolescents and young adults who are particularly vulnerable to peer influence and validation. Sneaking behaviour. This Institute observation aligns with the current study finding, suggesting that the issue of social media-related anxiety is both global and growing.

From a psychological point, the connection between the former and the mental health outcomes can be explained by the self-determination theory, which points that the unmet psychological needs from autonomy, concept, and related tendency can result in an emotional distress, social media of an amplification, this affect by creating environment where individuals constantly compare their achievement, appearance, and lifestyles with others. This ongoing comparison fosters feelings of educational exclusion in low self-esteem, which may then manifest as anxiety or depression symptoms.

The findings of the studies underscore the psychological tools of excuses, social media use among young adults, emotional well-being, scientific associations with social media, engagement for and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Stress reviews the pressing needs of awareness programs and digital interventions on Generation Z and Generation Y, courage, mindful social media, practising, promoting offline interaction, and setting health goals.

Digital boundaries can serve as effective strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of social media on mental health, as the WHO emphasises addressing the digital era's stressors in a crucial way for forecasting, promoting psychological resilience, and enhancing overall mental well-being among young people.

The present studies aim to explore the relationship between social media. Use fear of missing out FOMO and mental health outcomes, especially depression, anxiety, and stress, among Generation Z and Generation Y. Using quantitative measures such as the social media use scale, the sleep quality scale, and the depression, anxiety, stress scale, DASS-21, the research examines how the execution engagement with a social media platform relates to emotional distress and well-being. The study also explores whether the sleep quality variable of one is linked with the digital media exposure, meditation, or influences this relationship. The findings reveal a consistent pattern: the higher social media use correlated positively with emotional distress. Students who spend more time on platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and YouTube are more likely to experience symptoms, depression, anxiety, stress, interestingly, sleep, quite, did not improve as a scientific predictor of anxiety in the Archie regression and the model suggesting at this contents in primary driven by the psychological rather than the physiological factor, the result highlighted how digital engagement pattern among younger generation, particularly Zenzi and why shapes, mental health outcomes, validating existing corners raised by international psychological bodies, such as WHO world health organisations and American psychological association about the mental health impact of excessive digital exposures.

Descriptive analysis was conducted to understand the generated tendency in the social media usage, sleep quality, and emotional distress among the participants. DASS21. The mean social media use score ($M=4.70$, $SD=0.47$) indicates a moderate to high engagement level consistency, which suggests that the college students are among the most active social media users. The diversity in sleep quality scores ($M=37.99$, $SD=20.07$) shows that the participation in sleep expense widely reflects differences in digital habits, academic workload, and stress regulations.

The mean DASS 21 for depression ($M=14.64$), anxiety($M=11.51$), AND stress($M=16.58$) suggests that why not all participants exhibited clinical distress, clinical emotional strain is widespread. This finding shows global trends showing rising mental health concerns among college students, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, while remote learning and increasing digital dependency blurred the boundaries between rest and study as well as leisure.

The correlation analysis aimed to examine the relation between the social media, use an emotional distress variable, specially the depression, anxiety, and stress among the Gen Y and Gen Z Pearson correlation conflict reveals scientifically positive relationship between Social Media use and all three dimensions of emotional distress, depression ($r=.391, p<.001$), anxiety ($r=.522, p<.001$) and stress ($r=.432, p<.001$) this finding provides strong empirical support of for the studies hypothesis one, which propose that the higher level of social media engagement would relate positively with higher level of emotional distress. In other words, as students spend more time engaging with the social media platform, self-reported symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress tend to increase proportionally.

This pattern of association suggests that heavy social media use may contribute to an overall decline and emotional well-being. Users who are frequently exposed to content experience, social comparison, fear of exclusions, and the constant pressure of maintaining a current digital person, all of which heighten psychological strain and also showcase that the individual with exclusive social media exposure often displays low happiness levels, and higher symptoms of loneliness and depression. Research also highlighted that the frequent checking behaviour, notification, and comparison exaggerate the emotional packet, reflecting stress levels. The same tendency was observed.

The second hypothesis specifically focused on the relationship between social media use in anxiety, which emerged as a strong correlation in anxiety ($r=.522, p<.001$). These findings imply that as Generation Z increases their social media use, anxiety levels rise more sharply, compared to depression or stress. This supports the idea that digital hyper connectivity fuels unconscious anticipation stemming from the need to stay updated, respond quickly, and seek approval through likes or comments, and shares the phenomenon, commonly known as the fear of missing out, which intensifies this anxiety as users constantly compare their experience with others' more fulfilling lives. This suggests that the anxiety in the digital era is not solely an emotional disorder, but may also be a cognitive reaction to information overload, social pressure, and the fast-paced nature of online engagement, as well as to constantly being good-looking and quick, as with the trend.

Hypothesis 3 predict that the social media use would be positively correlated with the boat, depression ($r=.391, p<.001$) and stress ($r=.432, p<.001$) this indicates that the generation Z who are more involved in social media experience, greater depressive and stress related symptoms exposed to the analyses online portray can discern their self-perspective and poster, feeling of indicates or hopelessness contributing to depression. Mood more over the pressure to maintain online visibility and manage the multiple digital interactions can lead to stress, and students may become mentally exhausted and emotionally overloaded. This reflects social Media pate a state of cognitive overload and emotional depletion, resulting from the constant online engagement.

This scientific relationship found across emotional distress variables refers to the notion that social media is not a communication tool, but a psychological environment that influences cognitive and emotional states. WHO 2023 wants exclusive screening time, and online interaction patterns are increasingly recognised as a risk factor for anxiety, depression, and stress among young adults. Similarly, the American Psychological Association APA in 2022 emphasised that social media use, especially when combined with poor self-regulation in high compensation, can influence social regulations in mental health resilience.

This finding highlighted the need for greater digital awareness and promotion of mental health. Online habits and encouraging mindfulness. Using digital detox, practising and emotional regulation strategies as a provision measure against the trend of social media-related psychological issues, the evidence underscores the importance of addressing social media behaviour as a concept in mental health and the intervention in different societies and colleges.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictors of anxiety among participants. In Model 1, social media use and sleep quality were entered as predictors. Social media use significantly predicted anxiety ($B = 7.01, p < .001$), whereas

sleep quality did not. This suggests that higher engagement with social media platforms increases anxiety levels regardless of sleep patterns. In Model 2, depression and stress were added as additional predictors. While social media use remained significant ($B = 3.50, p < .01$), its predictive strength reduced when depression and stress were introduced, indicating overlapping variance. Depression ($B = 0.30, p < .001$) and stress ($B = 0.18, p < .01$) emerged as strong independent predictors of anxiety. The insignificant role of sleep quality ($B = -0.00, p > .05$) implies that anxiety among these participants is more strongly related to psychosocial mechanisms—such as emotional reactivity, interpersonal comparison, and online pressure—than to biological factors like sleep disturbance.

Implications

1. **Psychological Education and Awareness:** Since the current state of Gen Z and Gen Y students results in significant distress related to online behaviours, online wellness modules ought to be included in the counselling and orientation programs at universities. They would educate students about finding maladaptive habits on the internet, controlling notifications, and mindfulness when using digital media.
2. **Intervention to address FOMO:** The online interaction and the reliance on social validation re-framing in the form of workshops on FOMO and its cognitive mechanisms can assist students in becoming less dependent on online interactions. Activities involving real-life offline connections, creative participation, and peer interaction can be encouraged to build self-esteem without social media approval.
3. **Facilitating Healthy Sleep Hygiene:** Despite the non-significant role of sleep quality in the prediction of anxiety in this case, the enhancement of sleep is necessary. Interventions may impact positively on mental health indirectly, such as educational campaigns on the topic of digital curfews or screen-free hours before bedtime.
4. **Digital literacy across Generations:** It is important to be aware of the differences in generations. Whereas Gen Y users may be helped by stress management and limitations on social media use, Gen Z users would need emotional control and self-esteem training to decrease dependence on validation.
5. **Policy and Institutional Action:** On a larger scale, learning institutions may team up with the help of psychologists to arrange digital detox weeks, social media challenges, and mental health assessments in accordance with the Global Mental Health Action Plan (20232030) provided by WHO.

Limitations and Future Research.

There are a number of restrictions that can be mentioned. The research was based on a self-report survey, which is vulnerable to response biases and not necessarily true in terms of screen time or mood. The cross-sectional research design does not allow making causal conclusions- as much as the use of social media is associated with emotional distress, we cannot be sure that this is its cause. Additionally, it only covered college students mostly in urban settings, and this might not apply to the rural and older groups. Longitudinal or experimental design should be used in future studies to test the causal mechanism. It would be more informative to include both objective (e.g., the data on app usage, sleep trackers, etc.) and qualitative interviews to more comprehensively show the emotional dynamics of

online usage. Moreover, cross-cultural research may show the effect of cultural norms and values on FOMO and online actions.

CONCLUSION

The research study examines the impact of social media on the psychological well-being of young adults from Generation Y and Z in today's digital-focused environment. It finds a significant link between increased social media use and heightened emotional distress, including symptoms like fear of missing out (FOMO), depression, anxiety, and stress. Notably, social media engagement is shown to be a strong predictor of anxiety, even when controlling for factors like sleep quality and pre-existing mental health conditions. Unique aspects of digital interactions, such as online social comparison, immediate response pressure, constant digital monitoring, and an overload of information, contribute to anxiety in these demographics. The study concludes that sleep quality's impact on anxiety levels is minimal when other psychological variables are considered, suggesting that the challenges of digital interaction may outweigh the influence of sleep on mental health. This aligns with concerns from organisations like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Psychological Association (APA) about the mental health risks stemming from excessive screen time, hyperconnectivity, and negative social comparisons prevalent on social media. Empirical evidence from this research links social media behaviour with emotional well-being, proposing that these influences require serious attention. The authors recommend educational, therapeutic, and institutional measures to promote healthier online behaviours, especially in university settings where digital dependency is common. Suggested interventions include digital wellness education, coping strategies for FOMO, and fostering healthier technology relationships. Mental health practitioners are encouraged to assess clients' digital behaviours and provide psychoeducation focused on the effects of social media, particularly for those experiencing anxiety and social comparison distress. The study emphasises the generational challenges and advocates for deliberate, constructive interactions in a world marked by instant connectivity. It stresses that emotional health in this digital age is shaped not merely by the frequency of online activity but by the psychological patterns and experiences these engagements create. The research calls for collaboration among educational institutions, mental health professionals, and social organisations to cultivate a healthier digital environment that promotes resilience and meaningful connections for overall well-being.

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