

The Psychological Impact of Social Media on Gen Z

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Abstract:

In the era of rapid development of science and technology, the popularity of social media and online communities has shaped the experiences and perspectives of Generation Z (Gen Z) - those born between the mid-90s and early 2010s. In recent years, more and more individuals and media have begun to pay attention to the impact of social media on people. This paper, which takes Generation Z as the research object article, will focus on the psychological impact of social media on Gen Z. Generation Z, unlike any previous generation, has a unique growing environment --- a digital environment. Starting from this perspective, the paper will analyze why human beings are faced with unprecedentedly complex psychological problems according to existing literature, with the purpose of in-depth research on the psychological impact of social media and online communities on Generation Z. this paper concludes that social media will greatly affect people's psychological state, which has good and bad effects on current people. While social media platforms offer avenues for connection and self-expression, they also present various new challenges. Promoting the mental health of young people in a digital environment is crucial by balancing the positive aspects of social media with being aware of its potential negative effects.

Keywords: GenZ (Generation Z), Social media, Psychological

1. Introduction

Social media is an inseparable part of modern life, and there is almost no way to live without it. This is particularly obvious in Generation Z. As a generation that has lived in the heyday of social media since childhood, the daily life of Generation Z cannot leave the electronic products they rely on and a variety of social media based on electronic products, such as online games, forums, short video communication software and a variety of friend circles or communities.

Overall, there is a large volume of research on the relationship between social media and adolescents' psychological problems. Since 2017, more and more people have done related research every year. The main relevant studies have linked the rise of social media with teenagers' negative emotions and studied teenagers' abnormal behaviors and social media addiction. This paper concretizes the teenagers that most studies focus on and introduces the concept of Generation Z for more detailed research. The different influences brought by social media are also the research direction of this paper. The overall quality of the relevant research is high, and there is much data to support the conclusions reached, such as how the effects of social deprivation on adolescent development and mental health can be improved through social media and how social media can be a catalyst for negative attitudes and behaviors in adolescents [1]. It is worth mentioning that the number of relevant studies has

increased significantly in 2020, and 2020 is the year when COVID-19 begins to spread and people are most isolated at home.

The research goal of this paper is to conduct a comprehensive study on the impact of social media on the public from multiple aspects and angles. From the perspective of studying the impact of social media on the human psychological state, this paper analyzes the relationship between the unprecedented psychological problems of Generation Z and the rise of social media with the development of technology.

2. Characteristics of Gen Z and the Key Differences between Gen Z and Other Generations

2.1 Millennials vs. Gen Z

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are the generation before Generation Z. Mostly, this term refers to people born between 1981 and 1996 who currently range in age from their twenties to their forties.

In comparison, Generation Z, often abbreviated as Gen Z, is the generation after millennials and before Generation Alpha, which means this term refers to the post-millennial demographic. Although the media and the general public do not have a definitive date for the birth year of Generation Z, it is generally defined as a group born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s. Generation Z is currently between the ages of 10 to 25.

Gen Zers are more racially and ethnically diverse than any other generation. Forty-eight percent of Gen Zers are non-white, compared to 38% of millennials during the same period in their lives [2].

2.2 What makes Gen Z unique

Compared to previous generations, the rapid advancement of technology is the root cause of changes in Gen Z's values and behaviors. At the same time, the convenience of technology has made Gen Z more individualistic when it comes to learning, human interaction, and communication [2].

2.2.1 Digital Natives

Gen Z is the first digitally native generation with internet access available at all times. Technology is central in most aspects of their lives, including communication, socialization, and leisure activities [2].

2.2.2 Global Awareness

The development of technology makes the rise of social media seem inevitable. With the rise of social media and its popularization to the public, the digital natives of Generation Z grow up in an environment filled with all kinds of information. From a very young age, learning about what is happening worldwide through the Internet is easy. The diversity of Generation Z has always been a feature that people cannot but mention. People of all races communicate through the Internet, which objectively promotes the development of human society toward globalization, whether it is good news or bad news.

3. Analysis

3.1 Positive Psychological Effects on Mental Health

Although many studies have expressed concerns and negative attitudes towards social media, it should be noticed that social media is a double-edged sword, which has also brought positive effects to people, including Gen Z, in its rapid viral development.

3.1.1 Promote Communications and Informational Benefits

Compared to previous generations, Gen Z feels normal about socializing online. They are born with one more way to socialize - online. In this way, people can communicate with each other and ignore the gap of time and space.

Social media seems to be an effective solution when it comes to social deprivation during epidemics. While living in isolation because of COVID-19, people can interact digitally through various technologies, from

interactive video to social media. These can encourage various activities, such as connecting with friends or interacting with social media influencers. To measure the impact of social media on relationships and well-being, it is necessary to distinguish between its different uses. Specifically, active use of social media, such as engaging in targeted communication or Posting directly on others' social media profiles, has been shown to increase happiness and help maintain relationships [3]. Of all the few studies on the effects of social deprivation or isolation on human adolescent development, these studies have looked at loneliness in humans and reported a link between self-reported loneliness and mental health problems, and their results are similar to those of animal social deprivation experiments. Animal studies have a long history of documenting the causal effects of social deprivation, including complete isolation, on the adolescent brain and behavioral development in animals. Lack of social interaction hurts the intellectual development and brain development of teenagers. Thus, it can be believed that social media's reasonable, effective, and positive use can contribute to people's well-being. As Gen Z is considered digital natives, they utilize social media more seamlessly, which can effectively alleviate feelings of loneliness.

From the government's perspective, new media can change the power relationship between citizens and organizations. This means that the new media has equally divided the discourse power originally belonging to the government to the public, which has greatly promoted the process and development of social change. Gen Z has a right to be heard online, and based on their technical familiarity and open-minded approach, they master leveraging this power to drive governance through communication, especially online communication. To create a more open government, New media may even change the current system of governance at the city, state, or national level [4].

3.1.2 Promote Creativity and Self-Expression

For people, social media gives individuals access to a wider range of content, including art, music, literature, and other creative works. Exposure to different ideas can inspire individuals to explore their creative interests. It is difficult for people to create information and develop a unique personality in an environment without any information. However, it is easier to find a place in an information-rich environment. As a digital native, Gen Z has been exposed to a wide range of content through the Internet and social media since childhood. Different ideas and opinions due to the diversity within the generation

and global awareness, as well as works on the Internet, have made Gen Z more creative than other generations.

3.2 Social media and negative impact on Gen Z

The use of social networks is strongly linked to anxiety and other psychological disorders such as depression, insomnia, and stress. These associations are directly related to the time, frequency, and volume of use of social media platforms [5].

3.2.1 Destroying Gen Z's Psyche: The Impact of Misinformation and Fake News

There is a line in the Frankfurt school's view of the media: The media becomes a lie when the public has access to it. Most people are incapable of distinguishing right from wrong. When the media is in the hands of the public, there may be people who pass on false news and false statements, and there will not be many people to verify the truth and distinguish the truth. When people's lives are filled with too much information that is not true, society is bound to enter a toxic state. The fakiness on social media makes people lose the ability to distinguish between true and false, and anxiety and depression are inevitable [5].

In the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries faced the challenge of responding to the sudden outbreak with much misinformation on social media. Research has shown that the COVID-19 information overload on social media is negatively impacting the mental health of Gen Z social media users. Too much inaccurate information is flooding the Internet, causing many Gen Z users to have negative feelings about social media. Misinformation during the pandemic was a major problem, and about 30% of these rumors were found to be spread via social media [6]. However, social media was the primary way Gen Z users kept in touch with others during the lockdown, so even though the perceived "information overload" exacerbated Gen Z's social media fatigue and fear of COVID-19, they did not stop using social media [7].

3.2.2 Cyberbullying and mental health

Cyberbullying and cyberattacks are an increasingly worrying phenomenon affecting people. Victims may experience a wide range of emotions, with negative consequences such as embarrassment, depression, and isolation from other community members, which can lead to more serious consequences such as suicide attempts [8]. Incendiary one-sided true and false information, with the arrival of the new media generation, has become an invisible killer on the Internet and may trigger cyberbullying. According to Cybersecurity Malaysia's Incident Statistics 2020, cyberbullying is among the

top five cyber-related threats facing Malaysians. It's currently in third place, behind online fraud and hacking. 59.7% of Malay Internet users have been cyberbullied, with university students accounting for the majority. Cyberbullying in Malaysia has also increased due to an increase in negative Internet use by young people [9]. The spectacle of unsupervised cyberbullying has turned Gen Z's online life into a brutal one. A big part of Gen Z's psychological problems come from cyberbullying. Victims of cyberbullying may be more likely to have mental health issues than victims of traditional bullying, with research showing that cyberbullying victims, rather than victims of bullying, tend to reflect on past angry incidents and strong beliefs about an unjust world, and are more likely to develop psychiatric symptoms. For example, victims reported more anxiety and depression symptoms, feelings of loneliness, anger, frustration, and distress than individuals who did not engage in cyberbullying. Various studies have shown that cyberbullying can increase the risk of depression and other mental illnesses [10]. As Gen Z is exposed to social media for a long time and considered digital natives, they are more likely to encounter such situations and be negatively affected.

3.2.3 The Impact of Information Overload on Gen Z

According to George Mead, people can hardly tell if the information is true or false, and all that useless information keeps brains busy. Still, much information can spread quickly on social media. Information overload occurs when people are exposed to more information than they can optimally process effectively. Information overload causes users to feel overwhelmed and creates stress and negative emotional states. Thus, given the penetration of social media, information overload has come to be seen as a side effect of the information age [7]. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) refers to the mental state of being absent or missing out on what others may receive. During the lockdown, social media became Gen Z's primary tool for keeping in touch with others and meeting their needs to stay connected. So, while the negative mental states associated with social media use may cause Gen Z to reduce using social media, those who want to stay connected to others are less likely to disengage [7]. For example, checking mobile phone messages is now the most normal thing. In 2023, people will be everywhere on the street to check mobile phone messages; advanced technology and ease of communication allow people to receive unprecedented amounts of information. Whether it is work or life, trivia will be received through social media on the phone; as long as there is the Internet, this social can not stop, so it is almost impossible for the brain to

effectively process it and process the emotions generated when they see the information. When all the information comes in, people get wrapped up in a tidal wave of information and are hit with all kinds of emotions. It is 100% anxiety-inducing [6]. Research shows that too much pressure can cause people to lose focus [11]. Generation Z repeatedly falls into different difficulties, and the negative mental impact of information overload overwhelms Generation Z.

4. Suggestions

Based on the existing opinions, this paper puts forward the following suggestions to help people use social media rationally and avoid the negative psychological effects brought by social media. First, use social media appropriately, such as consciously noticing if too much time is spent on social media daily. Many studies have shown that time spent on social media is proportional to the odds of developing depression, proving that the more time spent on social media, the more likely a person is to develop a mental illness - depression or attention deficit. People need to socialize more offline, socialize more offline with their friends, and focus their lives on the real world rather than the online world [9]. Second, process information in the right way. When receiving information, distinguish between true and false, and use time wisely to process the information from social media. Also, manage time wisely, such as choosing not to receive work-related messages when there is no work or making time for life.

Last but not least, it is dangerous for social media to become entirely a tool for entertainment. In extreme entertainment, information from social media will be everywhere. Like boiling a frog in warm water, one slowly loses the ability to process information.

There are some benefits to using social media, such as improving one's communication skills and building more social relationships, which have a positive impact on mental health. Still, the negative effects of social media are clear from the data, and these suggestions can help us use social media better and protect our mental health.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, the psychological impact of social media on Gen Z is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, with both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, social media provides a platform for self-expression and communication connections, fostering Gen Z's personal awareness and individual creativity. However, the drawbacks of excessive use of social media cannot be ignored. Challenges facing Gen Z include anxiety,

depression, and constantly evolving new things, plus the addictive nature of social media, coupled with the fear of missing out (FOMO), can adversely affect sleep patterns, productivity, and overall well-being. Constant scrolling and instant gratification associated with notifications can lead to a lack of attention. False information and cyberbullying confirm that the vulnerability of network management systems is far from perfect.

Cyberbullying is almost impossible to stop and alarming. This has led to more uncontrollable mental illness in Gen Z. Every change in the data is linked to the growth of social media. There is no doubt that too much information has been raining down on people, and it is suffocating. People should use social media as a medium to get more meaningful information. At the same time, people need to distinguish valid information from false and inflammatory information. Generation Z, as a digital native, has experienced the barbaric growth of social media, which will become a threat to people's health if there are no sound management measures. Individuals, parents, educators, and policymakers must be more responsible in educating society about the dangers of social media to mitigate negative psychological effects. Encourage a balance between online and offline activities. As the relationship between social media and mental health continues to evolve, ongoing research, education, and supportive interventions are essential to address the complex landscape of generational psychological impact on the youngest generation, Gen Z.

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