



# A STUDY EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON GEN-Z WELLBEING

Syed Bilal Irfan<sup>1</sup>, Malavika.M<sup>2</sup>, Aaminah Firdos<sup>3</sup>, Afifa Sadaf<sup>4</sup>, Mohammed Ibrahim<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Chief Operating Officer, PropLeader® Pvt. Ltd, Bengaluru

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Brindavan College, Bengaluru

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, BMS College of Commerce & Management, Bengaluru

<sup>4</sup>Undergraduate Student, Department of Commerce, HKBK Degree College, Bengaluru

<sup>5</sup>Undergraduate Student, Department of Commerce, HKBK Degree College, Bengaluru

## ABSTRACT

*Social media have become thoroughly rooted in modern culture. The usage of social media is inevitable, as it has become an integral part in the life of every individual. Its impact is greater on the younger generation especially in Generation Z also popularly called Gen-Z. With evolving technology and increased platform retention times - Gen Z users are being influenced to an extent beyond anything we have previously discovered.*

*With almost 100 percent of Gen Z adults using social media, are the first true digital natives, having grown up in a world entirely connected by the internet and mobile devices with 24/7 access. Social media runs this generation, and it often seems as if with every free moment, they are on Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, etc. With this so-called social media dominance, it is important to note the positives and pitfalls that it has on the generation.*

*This paper tries to explore a better understanding of Gen-Z's relationship with social media and how it affects the way, they feel about physical and mental wellbeing. The research explores important topics such as mental and physical health, social comparison, negative and positive impacts occurring due to social media addiction.*

**Key Words:** Social Media, Generation Z, Physical Wellbeing, Mental Wellbeing, Addiction

## INTRODUCTION

Social media is a powerful tool, predominately used to entertain, communicate and educate its users. Social media is the collection of online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration. However, there is no iota of doubt that it has an impact on different aspects of our lives, family ties being one of them. The increase in technology in recent years led to a change in the way family members interact with one another. Social networking tends people to ignore their feelings, and obligations to the people around them. When people are without the internet it makes them anxious about the updates and responses that are waiting for them to check.

Social media is a very effective tool for connecting with people. While observing the impact created by it among the users, there are both positive and negative aspects. In spite of all positive usage of social media, there is a general opinion that it creates addiction in the younger generation, especially among college students which made them find it difficult to concentrate not only in their studies but also is affecting their mental and physical health.

### Who are Gen-Z?

Generation Z (aka Gen Z, iGen, or centennials), refers to the generation who were born between the year 1995-2012. This generation has been raised on the internet and social media, with some of the oldest finishing college by 2020 and entering the workforce.

Gen Z are the first digitally native generation, born at the peak of technical innovation. They are the generation who have always had access to a variety of digital platforms and social media. This allows them to stay connected to all forms of self-expression, which has supposedly contributed to their increasingly liberalized viewpoints. This propagation of diversity is often also reflected in their self-expression, distinguishing them from previous generations. This includes gender-fluid expression with clothing and hair, and a morose mood that is befitting of their constant eco-anxiety.

Few characteristics, which differentiates Generation Z from other generations are Gen-Z's are –

- **Diversity is their norm:** One of the core characteristics of Generation Z is racial diversity. They are more likely to have grown up amid diverse family structures, whether in a single parent household, a multi-racial household, or a household in which

gender roles were blurred. As a result, they are less fazed than previous generations by differences in race, sexual orientation or religion.

- **They are our first digital native:** Gen Z was born into a world of peak technological innovation, where information was immediately accessible and social media increasingly ubiquitous. These technological advancements have had both positive and negative effects on Gen Z. On the plus side, an abundance of information is at their fingertips, allowing Gen-Z'ers to broaden their knowledge and be proactive in their learning. On the other hand, too much screen time can compound feelings of isolation and lead to under developed social skills.
- **They grew up anxious and are willing to pay for their privacy:** Cyberbullying, suicidal ideation fostered by online perpetrators, and mass shootings, have been normalized for Gen-Z, fostering perpetual mental health issues. They have a love/hate relationship with screens. Teens are aware of the dangers of information shared with vendors and perpetrators. They will enter adulthood willing to pay for their privacy online.
- **Their lives are guided and monitored by social media apps:** Millennials grew up with a cell phone; Generation Z grew up with a smartphone. Smart technology turned phones into portable computers. All activity is tracked and nudged, which keeps us interacting with our tribe in echo chambers. Narratives are niched. In short, when our phones had leashes, we were free. Now our phones are free, and we have leashes.

### What is Digital Wellbeing?

Digital wellbeing is about how the internet and technology can make us feel. This includes recognizing the impact being online can have on:

- Our emotions,
- Mental health
- Physical health

Technology and internet should be a reason to enhance and simplify our lives rather than a cause of distraction or worry. However, not all online experiences are positive for young people; it can have a negative impact on how they feel about themselves, their friendships, relationships and even how they see the wider world.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the negative and positive impact due to usage of social media.
2. To examine the impact of social media on physical and mental wellbeing.
3. To explore the phenomenon of social media addiction among Generation Z.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature, as the data is collected from both primary and secondary sources, which includes various research journals, websites and newspapers. To perform the study, a questionnaire has been used as a research instrument that helped in understanding the impact of social media usage in few areas of life such as sleep, diet, workout and studies. It also assisted in examining the positive and negative result on one's mental, physical and social health due to social media and drew an inference whether Gen-Z are addicted to social media or not.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study will explore the impacts of social media usage on the well-being of young people, more specifically people born between the years 1995-2015 popularly known as Gen-Z. The important question that this study will answer is what are the psychosocial effects of social media communication on young people's well-being?

The question can be broken down into the following sub-questions:

1. What is the positive and negative impact on the amount of time spent on social media?
2. What are the benefits and concerns on physical and mental well-being by the usage of social media? and
3. Are Gen-Z addicted to social media?

Through this study, the researcher aims to gain further insight on the social media affects within this demographic and provide a solution for the addiction of the same.

The main hypothesis of this research project is that social media does have a negative impact on well-being.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Andreana Nop (2021)** Millennials and Generation Z were born into an age where social media and digital technology have been integrated in nearly all aspects of their lives. While social media has proven to be a valuable communication tool in connecting with each other and sharing information, the long-term psychosocial effects are beginning to become more apparent as social media matures.

(Nop, Andreana, "Young People, Social Media, and Impacts on Well-being" (2020). *School of Professional Studies*. 44.)

**Melanie Morris (2020)** Recent publications report that adults known as Generation Z, between the ages of 18 to 23, increasingly rely upon social media to gain knowledge of social issues. Given social media's embeddedness in Generation Z's life, this study sought to understand if or how social media has influenced and possibly empowered Generation Z to act on social issues, particularly global climate change.

(Morris, Melanie, "Climate change, social media, and Generation Z" (2020). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1184.)

**Sushma Rawath.S, Dr.R.Satheesh kumar & Venkatesh Kumar. (2019)** The extensive use of social media in India has been on the rise among the new generation youths. In today's world, use of social media has become an integral part of everyday life of human being. The new age social networking culture has been accepted and got an enthusiastic response. It is evident from the studies that social media has both positive and negative impact on youths.

*(Sushma Rawath.S, Dr.R.Satheesh kumar, & Venkatesh Kumar. (2019). A Study on Impact of Social Media on Youth. Journal of Management, 6(1), JOM\_06\_01\_010. <https://doi.org/10.34218/JOM.6.1.2019.010>)*

**Amanda Nicole Moscrip (2019)** Generation Z, also known as the iGeneration, iGenners, GenZ, and Generation Now, consists of those born in the mid-1990s through the late 2010s. Historical events important for this generation have influenced their perception of safety as well as how they interact with others. As compared to previous generations, technological advances (i.e., Smartphones, social media) changed how GenZ communicates, socializes, and receives information. Unique experiences and attributes influenced Generation Z's empathy because living through these events and seeing their impact changes how they can understand and take the perspective of others.

*(Moscrip, Amanda Nicole, "Generation Z's Positive and Negative Attributes and the Impact on Empathy After a Community-Based Learning Experience" (2019). UNF Graduate Theses and Dissertations. 908. <https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/etd/908>)*

**Zadrian Ardi, & Shania Andrisa Putri (2020)** Social media is used to obtain various information and is used to interact with other people. Even though they are in different regions and even countries, interactions can still be done by utilizing this technology. Even the latest news developments, quality improvements, and business-related dissemination have been effectively using social media platforms. This development makes social media one of the most dominant technology platforms for internet use. Nevertheless, in some cases, there are negative impacts that arise from social media use, especially those related to the interaction between users in it. The millennial generation, who are the primary target users of this platform, felt a significant impact.

*(Zadrian Ardi, & Shania Andrisa Putri. (2020). The analysis of the social media impact on the millennial generation behavior and social interactions. Southeast Asian Journal of Technology and Science, 1(2), 70–77. <https://doi.org/10.29210/81065100>)*

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

**Table 1: Displaying the demographic profile of the respondents**

Indicators	Number	Percentage
<b>1) Age Group</b>		
Between 1995 - 2002	153	68%
Between 2002 - 2007	68	30%
Between 2007 - 2012	4	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>2) Gender</b>		
Male	135	60%
Female	88	39%
Prefer not to say	2	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>3) Educational Qualification</b>		
Pursuing Senior Secondary Education	17	8%
Pursuing Under Graduation	123	55%
Pursuing Post Graduation	37	16%
Working Professional	48	21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 displays the results out of 225 respondents 39% were female and 63% were male, which shows that most of our respondents are male (2). On age parameters 68% were born between 1995 and 2002, 30% were born between 2002 and 2007, and 2% were born between 2007 and 2012. This distribution shows that maximum respondents were born between 1995 and 2002 (1).

In addition, the table shows the respondents' educational backgrounds. 55% of the respondents are pursuing their under-graduation, 21% are working professionals, 16% are pursuing their post-graduation and 8% are pursuing their senior secondary education starting from 10<sup>th</sup> standard until 12<sup>th</sup> standard (3).

**Table 2: Displaying the extent of positive and negative impact on sleep by the amount of time you spend online**

Age	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact
1995 - 2002	13	107	33
2002 - 2007	9	34	25
2007 - 2012	0	4	0
Total	22	145	58
	10%	64%	26%

Table 2 exhibits that out of 225 respondents, 64% of respondents indicated that their sleep is negatively impacted by the amount of time they spend online.

**Table 3: Displaying the extent of positive and negative impact on diet by the amount of time you spend online**

Age	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact
1995 - 2002	19	66	68
2002 - 2007	8	18	42
2007 - 2012	0	0	4
Total	27	84	114
	12%	37%	51%

Table 3 displays 37% of respondents indicated that their diet is negatively impacted by the amount of time they spend online.

**Table 4: Displaying the extent of positive and negative impact on workout and exercise by the amount of time you spend online**

Age	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact
1995 - 2002	28	72	53
2002 - 2007	12	25	31
2007 - 2012	1	3	0
Total	41	100	84
	18%	44%	37%

Table 4 displays 44% of respondents indicated that their exercise is negatively impacted by the amount of time they spend online.

**Table 5: Displaying the extent of positive and negative impact on studies by the amount of time you spend online**

Age	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact
995 - 2002	38	85	29
2002 - 2007	17	32	19
2007 - 2012	3	1	1
Total	58	118	49
	26%	52%	22%

Table 5 exhibits that 52% of respondents indicated that their study is negatively impacted by the amount of time they spend online.

Collectively the data exhibited in Table 2,3,4 and 5 shows that social media has a terrible negative impact on the most important aspects of life like sleep, diet, workout and studies of the young generation.

**Table 6: Displaying the positive impact on mental health by social media use**

Age	Affected	Not Affected
1995 - 2002	136	17
2002 - 2007	55	13
2007 - 2012	4	0
Total	195	30
	87%	13%

Table 6 displays that out of 225 respondents, 195 respondents believe that social media has also positively affected their lives.

**Table 7: Displaying the negative impact on mental health by social media use**

Age	Affected	Not Affected
1995 - 2002	123	30
2002 - 2007	45	23
2007 - 2012	4	0
Total	172	53
	76%	24%

Table 7 shows 76% of respondents indicated that social media negatively affects their mental health.

**Table 8: Displaying the negative impact on physical health by social media use**

Age	Affected	Not Affected
1995 - 2002	105	48
2002 - 2007	37	31
2007 - 2012	2	2
Total	144	81
	64%	36%

Table 8 displays that 64% of the respondents indicated that social media has negatively impacted their physical health. Collectively Table 6, 7 and 8 clearly indicates that social media has both positively and negatively affected the respondents mental health and very badly influenced their physical health.

**Table 9: Displaying the data whether social media has negatively affected the way one feels about their body**

Age	Affected	Not Affected
1995 - 2002	115	38
2002 - 2007	38	30
2007 - 2012	2	2
Total	155	70
	69%	31%

**Table 10: Displaying the data whether social media ever made to permanently change a part of your body through surgery**

Age	Yes	No
1995 - 2002	13	140
2002 - 2007	4	64
2007 - 2012	0	4
Total	17	208
	8%	92%

Table 9 and 10 displays how social media negatively affected the way respondents felt about their body. About 69% of the respondents indicated that social media affected very badly the way they felt about them, but on a positive side,

only 8% indicated that social media made them feel so negative about their body parts; they even thought to change a part of their body through surgery.

**Table 11: Displaying the data how often social media pressurized one to be perfect**

Age	Affected	Not Affected
1995 - 2002	105	48
2002 - 2007	38	30
2007 - 2012	2	2
Total	145	80
	64%	36%

**Table 12: Displaying the data how often one feels unsatisfied with their life when comparing with others on social media**

Age	Affected	Not Affected
1995 - 2002	99	54
2002 - 2007	37	31
2007 - 2012	2	2
Total	138	87
	61%	39%

Table 11 and 12 displays one of the most negative finding during the study that is nearly 64% of the respondents felt that social media makes them think they are imperfect which is so upsetting and 61% feel unsatisfied with their life when comparing it to others on social media.

**Table 13: Displaying whether social media use has made them anxious**

Age	Affected	Not Affected
1995 – 2002	110	43
2002 – 2007	44	24
2007 – 2012	2	2
Total	156	69
	69%	31%

Table 13 displays 69% of respondents indicated that social media use makes them feel anxious.

**Table 14: Displaying the data whether the respondents are addicted to bad news online**

Age	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree
1995 - 2002	31	49	73
2002 - 2007	10	24	34
2007 - 2012	1	1	2
Total	42	74	109
	19%	33%	48%

**Table 15: Displaying the data whether the respondents feel safe to share their opinions and views on social media**

Age	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree
1995 - 2002	33	62	58
2002 - 2007	21	28	19
2007 - 2012	2	0	2
Total	56	90	79
	25%	40%	35%



**Table 16: Displaying the data whether the respondents are addicted to social media**

Age	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree
1995 - 2002	78	21	54
2002 - 2007	32	23	13
2007 - 2012	2	0	2
Total	112	44	69
	50%	20%	31%

**Table 17: Displaying the data whether the respondents feel better when they spend less time on social media**

Age	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree
1995 - 2002	98	42	13
2002 - 2007	44	16	8
2007 - 2012	2	1	1
Total	144	59	22
	64%	26%	10%

Table 14 displays that only 19% of respondents indicated that they feel addicted to bad news online.

Table 15 depicts that 35% of respondents do not feel safe to share their opinions and views online.

Table 16 shows that 50% of the respondents agree that they are addicted to social media and Table 17 shows 64% of the respondents feel better when they spend less time on social media.

### TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS

Test of significance was carried out using Chi-square method to analyze the data. In presenting the data, Chi-square test statistics and exact significance (p-values) are reported. All tests were conducted at the  $\alpha = 0.05$  level of significance.

#### Hypothesis No. 1

**H0: There is no positive impact on mental health by the usage of social media**

**H1: There is a positive impact on mental health by the usage of social media**

#### Observed Frequencies

Scale	Affected	Not Affected	Total
1995 - 2002	136	17	153
2002 - 2007	59	13	72
Total	195	30	225

#### Expected Frequencies

Scale	Affected	Not Affected	Total
1995 - 2002	132.6	20.4	153
2002 - 2007	62.4	9.6	72
Total	195	30	225

**Calculated Value:**  $\sum (O-E)^2/E = 2.043269231$

**Degree of Freedom:** 1

**p-value:** 0.152880771

#### **Inference:**

The p-value 0.152880771 is more than  $\alpha$  at 0.05 level of significance degree of freedom being 1. Hence null hypothesis is accepted.

**Hypothesis No. 2****H0:** There is no negative impact on mental health by the usage of social media**H1:** There is a negative impact on mental health by the usage of social media**Observed Frequencies**

Scale	Affected	Not Affected	Total
1995 - 2002	123	30	153
2002 - 2007	49	23	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>225</b>

**Expected Frequencies**

Scale	Affected	Not Affected	Total
1995 - 2002	116.96	36.04	153
2002 - 2007	55.04	16.96	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>225</b>

**Calculated Value:**  $\sum (O-E)^2/E = 4.13802574$ **Degree of Freedom:** 1**p-value:** 0.041930045**Inference:**The p-value 0.041930045 is less than  $\alpha$  at 0.05 level of significance degree of freedom being 1. Hence null hypothesis is rejected.**Hypothesis No. 3****H0:** There is no negative impact on physical health by the usage of social media**H1:** There is a negative impact on physical health by the usage of social media**Observed Frequencies**

Scale	Affected	Not Affected	Total
1995 - 2002	105	48	153
2002 - 2007	39	33	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>225</b>

**Expected Frequencies**

Scale	Affected	Not Affected	Total
1995 - 2002	97.92	55.08	153
2002 - 2007	46.08	25.92	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>225</b>

**Calculated Value:**  $\sum (O-E)^2/E = 4.443678513$ **Degree of Freedom:** 1**p-value:** 0.035030692**Inference:**The p-value 0.035030692 is less than  $\alpha$  at 0.05 level of significance degree of freedom being 1. Hence null hypothesis is rejected.**Hypothesis No. 4****H0:** There exists no social media addiction among Gen-Z**H1:** There exists social media addiction among Gen-Z**Observed Frequencies**

Scale	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Total
1995 - 2002	78	21	54	153
2002 - 2007	34	23	15	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>225</b>



**Expected Frequencies**

Scale	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Total
1995 - 2002	76.16	29.92	46.92	153
2002 - 2007	35.84	14.08	22.08	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>225</b>

**Calculated Value:**  $\sum (O-E)^2/E = 8.449245607$

**Degree of Freedom:** 2

**p-value:** 0.014630852

**Inference:**

The p-value 0.014630852 is less than  $\alpha$  at 0.05 level of significance degree of freedom being 2. Hence null hypothesis is rejected.

**FINDINGS**

The study was undertaken to figure out Gen Z's relationship with social media and how it affects the way, they feel about their bodies, lives and personal wellbeing. During the study it was found that most of the youth are addicted on checking social media, scrolling Instagram reels, sending e-mails, watching news before bed, keeping them awake late night, hence negatively affecting their sleep cycle. One reason for the excessive use of social media before bed is the fear of missing out, commonly referred to as FOMO. It is a response to this dilemma, characterized by a never-ending desire to stay connected to what others are doing and seeing.

The study also pointed out that excessive social media engagement has led to negative influence on eating habits of the younger generation who are now conditioned to concept called 'Diet Culture'. It refers to a set of beliefs that values thinness, appearance, and shape above health & well-being. Additionally, the concept places importance on restricting calories, normalizes negative self-talk, and labels certain foods as "good" and "bad". Individuals subjected to "diet culture" messages have been conditioned to believe that not only does thinness and dieting equate to health, but also makes one person morally superior to another.

It was noticed that people scrolling down social media has both motivated and demotivated to work out and exercise. By seeing exercise-related social media posts, such as images of friends exercising or wearing workout clothes, checking into gyms, or posting about fitness-related accomplishments, made them feel motivated to work out. For others, however, viewing fitness posts had a negative effect on their body image. Such posts actually made them feel badly about their weight.

The study mainly concentrated on the digital wellbeing of Generation-Z i.e. recognizing their emotions, mental and physical health that were impacted by being online. Social media had a very positive impact especially during the social distancing times, where it was the only channel of communication and socialization. Social networking has allowed users to meet people they may not have otherwise met. These platforms are often a way for people who may be introvert to make friends. For many, it can help to alleviate loneliness and depression. It has also allowed people to precipitate social change on massive scale by sharing their ideas and experiences. On the contrary, social media has very badly affected both mental and physical wellbeing of this generation. Features like infinite scroll and algorithms designed to continue showing related interests keep people on these sites as long as possible. As with any obsession, people sacrifice much of their time for social media usage and destroy their health.

Social media is creating lot of insecurities among the Generation-Z. Gen-Z follow famous people and set unrealistic expectations for body image. A negative body image can lead to low self-esteem and even eating disorders. These young adults are often bombarded with images and videos of influencers who appear to be living picture-perfect lives. They fail to realize that presenting these perfect images is how these people make money and develop false expectations of what happiness should look like. When their own lives fall short, they may experience loneliness and depression. Therefore, Gen Z are pressurized to be perfect and created desire for cosmetic surgery among younger women, urge to gender change has become very common.

Since these youngsters spend so much time online, they often suffer from information overload that leads to confusion and lack of factual evidence. Gen-Z are often engaged in cyberbullying or being its victim, which is one of the worse effects as it develops narcissistic behavior, where they have overwhelming need to share photos of themselves and feeling like life events are meaningless if they do not share it online. Youth are inclined mostly to bad news online making them anxious, feel guilty about everything in their lives and losing hope on everyone. On the other hand, 65% of the Gen-Z population also agree that they feel better, less depressed and anxious when they spend less time on social media.

**CONCLUSION**

Social media is emerging as the most powerful, rapidly growing tool to connect people across the globe. Thus, there are many unexplored and unexpected constructive answers associated with it. Lately, this research paper has found that using social media platforms can have a detrimental effect on the psychological health of its users. This systematic review has found that social media envy can affect the level of anxiety and depression in individuals.

According to one of the research, in the current era after the COVID – 19 pandemic, an average Indian has a screen time of 7 hours in a day. It means, people use phones for 7 hours every day, at times, scrolling social media, watching videos on YouTube or watching films on Netflix. If youngsters waste their valuable time on this, not only does it affect their health, studies, job, business or hobbies but also, it will ruin the rest of their life.

There is no doubt that social media has become an addiction due to two main risk factors namely easy access and speedy rewards. People are so addicted to their mobiles in such a manner, that if it is taken away, they start getting irritated, restless and some experience stress too. Firstly, social media is very easy to access whether it is Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, you simply have to pick your phone, unlock it with a swipe and on one tap, and all the applications can be opened. When a notification is seen that someone has liked a photo or left a nice comment, it makes them happy. The human brain records in its diary entry as "I am happy because of this thing, I will do it again", and makes it a habit but slowly the excitement gets decreasing. Secondly, m people stay

connected on social media due to speedy rewards such as the likes on the posts, the comments on it and the messages of many people or the entertainment, which one gets from watching videos etc.

The increase in internet usage and advancement in technology, social media networking will continue to be reckon with as part and parcel of everyday life. Social media is a vast field of communication where barriers are fast fading while the growing need for access to data is now of great significance. This will continue to influence activities of Gen-Z and youths in particular within this global world. This unfortunately has become detrimental to youth's academic performance and psychosocial behavior. Hence, when put to proper use will enhance both. Therefore, it is imperative to equally consider other variables to assess the correlation with social media usage.

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