

A LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INTENSITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND DIGITAL STRESS AMONG GENERATION Z

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Abstract

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This study aims to examine the relationship between the intensity of social media use and digital stress among Generation Z. Using a literature review method, this research analyzes various academic sources to understand how the duration and frequency of interaction with digital platforms contribute to psychological pressure. The results indicate a significant positive correlation between social media intensity and digital stress. Key factors identified include information overload, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and the pressure for constant social validation. While social media is often used for entertainment, excessive use can be paradoxical, leading to increased anxiety and mental fatigue. This study concludes that digital literacy and self-regulation are essential for Generation Z to maintain mental well-being in the digital era

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has had a significant impact on human life. Initially, humans created simple technologies. However, as civilization advanced, technology became integral to every aspect of human life (Yasin et al., 2022; Jannah et al., 2026). This development was influenced by the emergence of various new forms of media, such as the internet and digital platforms. This period is known as the digital revolution, which began to take shape in the 1990s. Digital technology is also characterized by the emergence of devices such as computers, the internet, and mobile phones, which have driven advancements in human communication and access to information (Khairani et al., 2025). In this fully digitized era, various social media platforms have become the most sought-after by diverse groups. Social media can be used as a platform to obtain information and can also be used to disseminate information indirectly, exerting significant influence —particularly negative influences—derived from social media. (Rahmadanti & Abelia, 2022).



According to a 2025 We Are Social survey on social media usage, there was another surge in social media usage in Indonesia of 26% year-over-year, reaching 180 million users—equivalent to 62.9% of the total population in Indonesia. The average weekly social media usage stands at 21 hours and 50 minutes, including watching online videos. In terms of usage, WhatsApp dominates with 90.8%, followed by Instagram at 82.4%, Facebook at 81.0%, and TikTok at 78.4%. According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) for 2025, the generation with the highest social media usage rate is Generation Z at 23.49%. This data indicates that Generation Z is quite dominant in social media usage.

According to Christina et al. (2019), excessive social media use has negative effects, such as causing anxiety, feelings of insecurity, and life dissatisfaction due to unhealthy social comparisons (Nafisah & Jannah, 2024). Digital stress is a condition of stress and anxiety caused by the influx of various notifications via social media resulting from the use of information and communication technology (Steele et al., 2020). Digital stress has several aspects, according to Hall (2021), namely availability stress, approval anxiety, fear of missing out, connection overload, and online vigilance (Novita & Utami, 2024).

Given the increasing intensity of social media use and the growing number of social media users among Gen Z, a literature review is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of digital stress, particularly among Gen Z. Through this literature review, various studies can be analyzed to identify the factors causing digital stress, the relationship between the intensity of digital media use and digital stress, as well as the psychological impacts on Gen Z social media users.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a literature review approach aimed at examining, analyzing, and synthesizing previous research findings relevant to the topic of the relationship between the intensity of social media use and digital stress among Generation Z. This approach is used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the patterns of relationships among variables based on various perspectives from prior research.

The data sources for this study consist of secondary data in the form of scientific journal articles, books, and research reports obtained through academic websites such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, GARUDA, and other academic websites. The literature search was conducted using keywords such as “intensity of social media use,” “digital stress,” “social media,” and “Generation Z.” The selected literature consists of scientific articles published within the past 5–10 years, relevant to the research topic, discussing social media use and digital stress, and focusing the study on adolescents and Generation Z. The inclusion criteria for data collection include: 1) Articles discussing the relationship between social media usage patterns and digital stress among Generation Z; 2) Articles published in national or international journals or conference proceedings with an ISSN/DOI; and 4) Articles that are fully accessible. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria for data collection include articles that are irrelevant to the research problem and discussion, duplicate articles, and articles that do not clearly state the results of the analysis. The article selection process involved several stages: 1) Identification of keywords in the articles, 2) Selection based on the relevance of the title and abstract, 3) Assessment of article eligibility based on content and overall quality, and 4) Final selection of articles

meeting the study's criteria. The selected articles were then analyzed using descriptive analysis and narrative synthesis techniques to compare studies, examine findings in the articles, and identify patterns of relationships between variables. The analysis results were then presented in tabular form to facilitate the comparison process and the drawing of conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Patterns of Social Media Usage Intensity Among Generation Z

Social media use refers to participation in activities related to social media, such as the frequency and duration of accessing social media (Firyal I et al., 2021). In the communication process that occurs, Generation Z tends to use slang, which often creates a communication gap between generations. In addition to linguistic changes resulting from technological advancements, social values have also undergone shifts. Although Generation Z is highly familiar with digital technology, this does not always have a positive impact on their behavior. Their proficiency in using various applications, particularly social media, is often misused to express themselves in inappropriate ways. The lack of restraint in word choice during online communication poses a significant problem, especially when considering how they interact with professors (Asni et al., 2025). The impact of social media on culture is not limited to positive or negative changes but also creates a rather complex dynamic. This encompasses various phases of development, ranging from the early phase when social media emerged as a new communication tool to the current phase where social media has permeated nearly every aspect of daily life (Fahma et al., 2024)

Zis et al. (2021) state that social media has a significant impact on interpersonal relationships, particularly among Generation Z. Research conducted by Astuti et al. in 2023 indicates that social media use among young people can reduce their interactions with family. Additionally, according to Laila's 2023 study, excessive social media use can lead to neglect of one's surroundings and even result in negative behaviors such as cyberbullying and suicide. Social media is also known to influence empathy and social skills (Ahmad et al., 2024)

Various studies indicate that Generation Z is the group with the highest level of social media usage compared to other generations. The intensity of social media usage is not only measured by the frequency of access but also by the duration spent in the digital space (.). This high intensity of usage is influenced by the characteristics of Generation Z as digital natives who have grown up in a technological environment that is already integrated into their daily lives. Various studies indicate that social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp serve as the primary channels for social interaction, seeking entertainment, and self-expression among Generation Z. However, this high intensity of use does not always yield positive outcomes.

Several studies indicate that excessive use can diminish the quality of social interactions, directly disrupt concentration, and increase exposure to digital social pressures. These findings suggest that social media functions not only as a communication medium but also as a space that can generate social and emotional pressures. The higher the intensity of social media use, the greater the likelihood that an individual will be exposed to digital stimuli that affect their psychological well-being.

The Phenomenon of Digital Stress

Digital stress is psychological pressure arising from the intensive and continuous use of information and communication technology (ICT), primarily due to constant access to various forms of information and social content (Hefner & Vorderer, 2022; Putri Salisanasti et al., 2025). According to Steele et al (2020), digital stress is divided into five components: *availability stress* (AS), *approval anxiety* (AA), *fear of missing out* (FOMO), *connection overload* (CO), and *online vigilance* (OV). *Availability stress* is a form of stress generated from the belief expectations of others regarding an individual's responsiveness and availability. Furthermore, *approval anxiety* is the degree of uncertainty and anxiety regarding responses from others and an individual's reaction to posts, photos, or messages regarding their digital footprint. *Fear of missing out* () is stress arising from real, perceived, or anticipated social consequences when others have enjoyable experiences at where the individual is not present. *Connection overload* is defined as stress resulting from the subjective experience of receiving excessive input from digital sources, including notifications, messages, and posts. The final dimension, *online vigilance*, refers to the behavior of compulsively checking social media accounts and a strong desire to have access to devices (Fitri Amir et al., 2025).

Based on research by Putri et al. (2025), digital stress is closely linked to sleep disturbances caused by excessive exposure to digital media. Individuals experiencing digital stress tend to have difficulty sleeping because they constantly check notifications, social media, and other digital activities. Additionally, research by Fitri et al. (2025) also indicates that the majority of adolescents fall into the moderate digital stress category due to high levels of digital technology use in daily life. These findings suggest that digital stress is not only related to technology use but also to psychological pressure arising from social demands in the digital space.

Analysis of the Relationship Between Intensity and Digital Stress

Research has found a significant relationship between the intensity of media use and significant associations between depression, anxiety, and stress among college students. Students who use social media at high to very high intensities tend to experience worse mental health symptoms compared to those who use social media at low to moderate levels (Erawati S & Ayu, 2025).

Although social media use was initially intended to reduce stress, its effects vary depending on the user. Several studies indicate that social media use as a form of stress management can be paradoxical. Rather than alleviating stress or anxiety, constant exposure to social media content can actually worsen mental health (Primack et al., 2017).

A synthesis of various studies indicates a positive correlation between the intensity of social media use and levels of digital stress among Generation Z. The higher the frequency and duration of social media use, the greater the likelihood that individuals will experience psychological pressure resulting from digital activities. This relationship arises because social media creates a communication environment that operates without time constraints. Generation Z tends to feel they must always be active and responsive in keeping up with information updates on social media. This situation gives rise to digital social pressure, which then develops into psychological stress.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review, it can be concluded that the intensity of social media use has a significant relationship with the emergence of digital stress among Generation Z. High frequency and duration of social media use make Generation Z more vulnerable to psychological stress resulting from excessive information exposure, the demand to always be connected, and the drive to gain social recognition in the digital space. These conditions trigger various forms of digital stress, such as fear of missing out (FOMO), connection overload, anxiety over approval, and online vigilance, which impact an individual's mental health.

A synthesis of various studies also indicates that excessive social media use not only affects emotional well-being but also impacts the quality of social interactions, concentration, and even sleep disturbances. Although social media is often used as a means of entertainment and communication, uncontrolled use can actually increase anxiety, stress, and mental fatigue among Generation Z. Thus, social media has a paradoxical nature: it can provide benefits while simultaneously serving as a source of psychological pressure for its users.

This study suggests that improving digital literacy and self-regulation skills is crucial in addressing the development of digital technology. Generation Z needs the ability to manage social media use in a healthier and wiser manner to minimize the risks of digital stress. Additionally, the roles of families, educational environments, and social institutions are vital in providing education on balanced and responsible social media use.

This study has limitations as it employs only a literature review approach; consequently, the data relies on findings from previous research and does not involve direct field data collection. Furthermore, the analyzed studies primarily focus on general discussions regarding mental health and have not yet thoroughly examined the specific experiences of digital stress among Generation Z in Indonesia.

Therefore, future research is recommended to use empirical approaches such as surveys or in-depth interviews to obtain a more specific picture of the experience of digital stress among Generation Z. Future research could also explore studies on coping strategies, digital literacy, and the influence of specific social media platforms on users' levels of digital stress.

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