**THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP & IMPLICATION AMONGST GEN Z**

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**ABSTRACT:** The relationship between social media addiction and psychological demands in Generation Z (Gen Z) is examined in this thesis. In addition to focusing on social interaction, mood enhancement, and obsessive behaviours, the study aims to explore the potential effects of social media use on psychological well-being. Data will be gathered quantitatively via a survey sent to members of the Gen Z demographic. With this method, social media usage patterns and their effects on Gen Z members' psychological requirements may be thoroughly examined. A review of the literature will also be used to undertake secondary research. This will give psychological needs and social media addiction a theoretical foundation and contextual comprehension. The study intends to further the knowledge of the intricate connection between Gen Z's use of social media and the satisfaction of their psychological demands. The results have implications for treatments, and educational programmes that support wellbeing in the digital era and encourage better social media practices.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, Social Media Addiction, Use and Gratification Theory

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1. **Introduction**

In contemporary society, the integration of social media platforms into daily life has drastically changed how humans connect, communicate, and consume information. Although these platforms offer a large number of opportunities for social interaction and self-expression, they are also beginning to raise concerns about their potential impact on mental health and well-being of individuals. A specific area where concern has been expressed is in the phenomenon of social media addiction, which has been characterized by compulsive, overindulging, and excessive usage of screentime. This behaviour has managed to interfere with daily functioning of human beings (Ganguzza et al., 2019). In the following graph by *Statista* the increase of users on social media is displayed. The graph also provides a forecast of how many users can be found on social media until the year 2027 (Statista, 2023).



**Figure 1: Number of worldwide social network users**

Source: Statista, 2023

Psychological theories such as Maslow (1943) suggest that individuals have fundamental psychological needs, such as the need for social connection, self-esteem, and autonomy, that must be fulfilled for a person to be able to have optimal psychological functioning (Garibaldi et al., 2023). However, the extent to which individuals turn to social media to fulfil their underlying psychological needs and how this behaviour correlates with the development of addiction-like tendencies remains inadequately understood.

Social media addiction is a phenomenon that is influenced by various factors. Mainly by individual, social, and environmental factors. At its core, addiction to social media involves a compulsive and excessive preoccupation with these platforms, often leading to negative consequences such as neglect of responsibilities, social withdrawal, and diminished well-being. Understanding the factors contributing to the development and maintenance of social media addiction is essential for mitigating its adverse effects and promoting healthier online behaviours (Wang et al., 2015).

Psychological theories, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Self-Determination Theory, propose that humans have fundamentally important psychological needs that must be satisfied for optimal well-being (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). According to both theories, the fulfilment of the previously mentioned psychological needs is essential for individuals' psychological growth, satisfaction, and overall functioning. However, in the digital age, individuals may increasingly turn to social media platforms as a means of fulfilling these needs, thereby blurring the boundaries between online and offline interactions (Wang et al., 2015). Other researchers that have contributed to the literature suggest that individuals may engage with social media platforms to fulfil other psychological needs, including the need for social connection, self-expression, validation, and escapism (Sheldon, 2011). An example can be noted when individuals use social media to remain in contact with acquaintances, friends and family (social connection), actively seek comments and likes on their posts (validation) or scroll through social media mindlessly with the primary goal of escaping real life (escapism) (Rehbein & Baier, 2013).

The selected topic of social media addiction presents a challenging task for measurement due to its inherent variability that is dependent on each individual. Still there is lack of understanding of how usage of social media influences the behaviour of individual especially among the different generations (Koçak et al. 2021). Therefore, the following research questions are proposed:

**RQ. 1**: How does the duration of social media usage enable individuals to experience a sense of social connection?

**RQ. 2:** How is the mood improvement following the use of social media?

**RQ. 3:** How does the individual feel compelled to check their mobile phone for notifications if they are received?

**RQ. 4:** How does the duration of screentime impact the amount of mood modification?

**RQ. 5:** How does mood modification lead to compulsive checking?

**2. Literature review**

**2.1 Digitalization**

The recent years that elapsed have had a growth of technological advances, due to this it has been named "The Fourth Industrial Revolution" or "The Digital Era" (Coldwell, 2019). The creation of digital media was made with various intentions, the most relevant are the following: instrumental and socialization. The former focuses on needs from an individual’s real-life, which includes education and health. The latter is concerned with the distribution and generation of ideas, opinions and information within online communities. Socialization media platforms cover multiple fields such as employment (e.g., LinkedIn), friendships (e.g., Instagram, Facebook) and political communities (e.g., Twitter) (Stavropoulos et al., 2022).

On the other hand, technology has implemented new tools for optimization and functionality. Then most notorious has been Artificial Intelligence (AI) and AI algorithms. They have been employed in social media platforms and businesses alike. AI has been integrated in various fields including the telecommunications sector, finance, retail, healthcare, education, and human resource departments (Digital Transformation and Psychological Assessment, 2023). Other novel technologies such as virtual reality, smartphones, tablets and social robots have begun to be integrated in educational and organizational settings, increasing the amount of digitalization continuously.

The level of digital competence that was available during the COVID-19 pandemic was a valuable resource and allowed for facilitation of various processes but has ultimately allowed online presence to substitute offline presence (Stavropoulos et al., 2022). Simultaneously the digitalization that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic has left risk factors in its wake, including overindulgence of screen time and social media usage (Niedermoser et al., 2021).

**2.2 Addiction Definitions**

Addiction has been previously used to describe a behaviour that is unable to control decisions and impulses regarding alcohol, drugs and other substances. In the past, only chemical addictions, such as alcoholism or drug addiction, were officially recognised by the American Psychology Association (APA). In the beginning of the year 2000, more attention was paid to nonchemical addictions, also known as behavioural addictions. The newly discovered types of addictions were research by the World health Organization and the American Psychology Association (Andreassen et al., 2013).

Research indicates that both chemical and nonchemical addictions share various similarities. Salience is the first shared component; this is a behavioural factor responsible for feelings and thoughts. In other words, an attention-getting stimulus is salient because it draws attention from the bottom up (Bordalo et al., 2022). Withdrawal is the second element that both addictions have in common, it refers to the feelings that are usually negative when the behaviour in question is reduced or brought to a halt. An individual may experience withdrawal symptoms if they suddenly stop or reduce an activity (Varona et al., 2022). The last similarity presented is relapse, it takes place when earlier behavioural patterns are newly presented after a period of abstinence (Griffiths, 2005).

In the field of psychology, an addiction has been defined as a chronic and relapsing psychiatric and psychological disorder that affects human beings globally (Ray, 2012). It has been suggested that impaired control, as well as physiological and psychological dependence, are themes that are presented within the behaviour of an affected individual. The previously mentioned behavioural patterns have more commonly been observed in women, as opposed to men (Lang & Rosenberg, 2017).

**2.3 Social Media Platform Features**

Social Media platforms are by-products of the evolution of the internet (Ahmed & Vaghefi, 2021). They are a space where people, organizations, politicians, and governments can exchange information, thoughts, and services. The users of social media are also able to interact with each other online for various reasons, for instance socially, commercially, politically or educationally (Alalwan, 2018). Although, social media applications have the power to fuel fragmentation, problematic contents, and spread disinformation (Persily & Tucker, 2020).

Social platforms make use of technology that possess the ability to alter and shape a user’s reality, as well as re-direct their attention. The primary technology employed is algorithms and artificial intelligence, in most cases a combination of both technologies is used simultaneously (Swart, 2021). The main purpose of algorithms is to provide personalization regarding the users’ feed, advertisements, and recommendations, meanwhile at the same time filtering unpatented, explicit or inappropriate content. (Saurwein & Spencer-Smith, 2021). Algorithms are a central necessity to construct a social media platform system with precision, accuracy, and personalization for each individual person (Milan, 2015). Algorithms are able to make this possible by collecting and tracking the users’ interactions and information, this manages to facilitate social control and surveillance (Figueiredo & Bolaño, 2017).

As the popularity of social media applications increased, so did the curiosity of business. Companies sought a way for their products and organizations to have a larger reach. Advertisements are an innovative aspect featured on social media applications and platforms. Two main forms of communication have been enabled in advertising attributable to social media platforms. Firstly, communication from the organization to the consumer in a traditional way, secondly it allowed for the creation of a non-traditional communication between consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The latter takes place organically opening new ways to advertise products in online communities. It has led to an opportunity for the consumer-to-consumer (C2C) information to contribute to marketing firms’ strategy and aims (Alalwan et al., 2017).

As social media platforms have grown, they made a point of providing easy and simple solutions, this can be observed in the shopping section of the platforms. Social media takes into consideration the users’ preferences with the aid of algorithms and creates product suggestions for the user to purchase (Zhang et al., 2017). Online stores possess many other advantages, such as the convenience and the time saved when travelling to the store or waiting in line. Another positive factor is the accessibility that is offered at all times, as well as the abundant information about the products or services (Moshrefjavadi et al., 2012).

**2.4 Motivations for Social Media Usage**

As social media and technology have continued to advance, their utility has expanded beyond their original purpose of facilitating individual-to-individual communication. Today, social media serves as a multi-use platform for social connection, information dissemination, and entertainment (Noguti & Waller, 2020). Individuals who spend more time browsing social media, rather than actively posting content, demonstrate a heightened motivation for continued usage of these platforms (Lin et al., 2017).

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon, characterized by a pervasive apprehension regarding potentially missed experiences, has become increasingly prevalent in the context of social media use (Abramowitz et al., 2009). Social media platforms offer users a sense of connection and support through features such as likes and comments, which can instigate a compulsion to repeatedly check one's accounts (Fontes-Perryman & Spina, 2022). Consequently, individuals may experience a sense of deprivation from social information and support when disengaging from their social media presence for extended periods (Liu & Ma, 2020), thereby reinforcing their motivation for continued usage.

Psychological ownership emerges as a significant driver of social media engagement, as users invest time and effort in creating content for various platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter (Karahanna et al., 2015). The sense of ownership is rooted in three primary motives: the need for a sense of belonging, the need for self-identity expression, and the need for efficacy (Pierce et al., 2003). As individuals invest themselves in crafting and curating content on social media, they develop a sense of ownership over their virtual spaces, further reinforcing their attachment and engagement with these platforms. Scholar such as Ji and Hu (2024) are reported that sense of belonging significantly correlated with social media usage more specifically for sojourners. In the same line, by providing social support through social media, social media usage enhances self-efficacy and loneliness.

**2.5 Underlying Reasons for Social Media Usage in Gen Z**

The generational cohort theory is a system that serves as a way to divide the population into different segments according to their date of birth extending to twenty-five years (Schewe & Noble, 2000). The individuals in the same generation cohort find themselves having shared attitudes, ideas, values and beliefs, therefore the core values are constant throughout a generation’s lifespan, this achieves what is known as a ‘generational identity’ (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016).

The generations that have had interactions with various technologies and are familiarized with them in the beginning of their life receive the name of "digital natives"" or in some scholars called them iGeneration (Horská et al. 2023). Gen Z differentiates itself from millennials in many ways, including flexible hours, remote work opportunities, and varied job content (Fuchs et al., 2024). This is a demographic that has not experienced a world without the internet and mobile devices. The technological advances and media have become an extension of the individuals in this new generation. They have become accustomed to a constant input of information being brought upon them, due to advanced devices having allowed access to various services. When the constant input overload is missing, the result frequently ends in boredom. On the other hand, the individuals who were exposed to technologies, such as the internet in adulthood are called "digital immigrants" (Stavropoulos et al., 2022). The digital immigrants do not require a constant delivery of input and therefore do not crave it.

The use of social media within younger generations has increased drastically in the past twenty years, therefore it has a high likelihood making an impact on social experiences and motivations (Armstrong-Carter et al., 2023). Recent studies have demonstrated that teenagers and young adults spent approximately between three and four hours per day on social media, this information casts light on the addictive nature of these platforms (Ahmed & Vaghefi, 2021). This has occurred to the younger generations, namely the Centennial generation's (Gen Z) due to their age. They are more susceptible to addictive behaviour patterns and tendencies, since they were in the early stages of development when the technology became a part of daily life (Andreassen et al., 2013).

Gen Z are sustainable oriented Krippes et al. (2024), typically uses social media for the exchange of information between themselves and their peers, friends, and partners, this allows them to expand their network of social connections (Lenhart, 2015). When individuals browse social media without engaging in interactions with their peers, they are more prone to experiencing feelings of disconnectedness compared to when they actively participate in social media interactions involving their peers (Pouwels et al., 2021). The situation highlights the "Need to Belong" (NTB), a need, which conceptualizes a fundamental human motivation of creating and maintaining meaningful social bonds (Greenwood & Long, 2009).

**2.6 Self Determination Theory**

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is an approach to human motivation and personality, it shows the importance of personality development and behavioural regulation (Ryan et al., 1997). Three needs have been identified as essential components for facilitating social development and personal well-being (Ryan et al., 2000). Relatedness is the need to feel connected to others and satisfying the sense of belonging. Competence entails feeling capable and effective when facing difficult tasks. Lastly, autonomy focuses on feelings of self-governance as opposed to actions (Deci et al., 2002). The previously mentioned components are "nutrients" that impact motivation and well-being positively (Mack & Wilson, 2021). Understanding how effectively an individual's psychological needs are met within a social context can describe the underlying motivational mechanisms of an individual’s behaviour (Zhang et al., 2015).

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) comprises six distinct sub-theories, each developed at different junctures (Hsu et al., 2022). Among these, the Cognitive Evaluation Theory primarily delves into intrinsic motivation, while the Organismic Integration Theory explicates extrinsic motivational factors. Additionally, the Causality Orientations Theory delineates variations in motivational orientations. The Basic Psychological Needs Theory specifically addresses psychological well-being, while the Goal Content Theory focuses on the formulation of individual goals and lifestyle choices. Lastly, the Relationships Motivation Theory underscores the significance of fostering high-quality interpersonal relationships. It is important to note, however, that these sub-theories collectively contribute to, but do not entirely encapsulate the framework of the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2022).

**2.7 Use and Gratification Theory**

In order to maintain the Use and Gratification Theory modernized with technological advances, its scholars occupy themselves with the following questions: "Why do individuals become involved in one specific type of mediated communication and what are the gratification that are received from it?" (Ruggiero, 2000). The Use and Gratification Theory (UGT) is defined as a perspective on communication that focuses primarily on how mass media and methods, like interpersonal communication are used by individuals (Urista et al., 2009).

This model is composed of several key components. Firstly, UGT emphasizes that people are active agents who are able to select media based on their own motivations, goals and preferences; unlike traditional media theories that tend to be passive recipients of media (Katz et al., 1973). Additionally, UGT recognizes that individuals exhibit media usage patterns that are dependent on their needs and gratification. The patterns take into consideration the following factors: frequency of use, selection of content, media platforms, and duration of use (Rubin, 1983). Lastly, the theory acknowledges the importance of the role that media consumption plays in shaping a person’s attitudes and behaviours (McQuail, 1984).

The UGT can help identify the various motivations that drive individuals to use social media (Katz et al., 1973). The use and gratification theory suggests that individuals engage with social media platforms based on their expectations of gratification, meaning they expect to receive social connection, entertainment, and information about social contexts when accessing social media (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1985). By focusing on an individual’s role on choosing and employing media to fulfil particular needs and gratifications, the UGT framework proves valuable for examining the complex interplay between social media addiction and psychological needs fulfilment.

**2.8 Conceptual Model & Hypothesis**

A model was created for this paper with the following variables, screentime, mood modification, and compulsive checking as independent variables and social media addiction as the dependant variable, the following hypothesis are proposed:

***H. 1:*** *The greater the duration of time allocated to social media usage, the more pronounced the sense of social connection experienced.*

***H. 2:*** *Following the utilization of social media, an individual's mood demonstrates improvement.*

***H. 3****: If a notification is received, they will promptly check it.*

***H.5****: Compulsive Checking is a direct result of Mood Modification caused*

***H.4****: The higher the amount of screentime, the more a user’s mood will be modified*

***H.5:*** *Compulsive Checking is a direct result of Mood Modification caused*



**Figure 2:** Proposed Model of Social Media Use

Source: Own elaboration

**2.9 Social Media Addiction**

The relevance and impact of an internet addiction has risen and increased due to the advancement in technology (Ryding & Kaye, 2018). An internet addiction is defined as an inability to be able to regulate excessive use of the internet, this eventually leads negative outcomes that are self-induced. Problematic Internet Use (PIU) is another term established by experts in this field, it refers to an individual who spends a significant time online and is not able to control or change their behaviour, thus leading to an impairment of their daily life (Lee & Lim, 2021). The addiction of social media usage has been added to the group of internet addictions (Tutgun-Ünal & Deniz, 2015), with the other addictions included in the group being video game addiction and online shopping addiction (Andreassen et al., 2013).

The criteria that have been used to define other behavioural and substance addictions have been found to be crucial for internet addictions (Grant et al., 2010). Another study highlighted that neuroimaging studies have shown that areas of the social media users’ brain are active are the same that are displayed in a person’s brain who experience substance abuse (Brand et al., 2014). This information allows for internet addiction to become fully recognized in its field.

Social media can take on many forms, namely microblogs, web applications, and networks. The reason for their use varies, for example to stay aware of what acquaintances and friends are doing, leisure time, meet new people, discover information about news and current events, and entertainment and content creation, thus creating many opportunities for social media addiction to take place (Aksoy, 2018). This type of addiction takes place when an individual displays a behaviour in which they desire to be notified constantly of the platform’s contents and updates, as well as spending over eight hours a week on the applications (Sahin, 2018).

The companies that have created social media platforms and applications have purposefully designed their platforms in a way that renders them addictive (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021). Therefore, a large number of countries have established that they will promote the establishment of clinics that will treat internet addictions, these countries include the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, China, South Korea, Japan, as well as the United States of America (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021). The importance of social media addiction has the potential to further harm the Centennial generation, as they have grown up with technology evolution and its content consumption. Therefore, the dependant variable that will be used as the primary focus of the research model is social media addiction.

**2.10 Screentime**

Screentime plays a significant role in regard to social media addiction (Ganguzza et al., 2019). Excessive screen time is categorized as spending more than 2-3 hours per day in front of a screen, the specifics of the electronic technology that is used includes television, mobiles, computers, or electronic devices (Neophytou et al., 2021). Over the years, this has been noticed and more focus has been dedicated to the evaluation and research of the topic. A study conducted in the year 2019 showed that between Millennials, the cohort generation from the 1980's, and the internet generation (iGen), a cohort generation beginning in the 1990's, there was an increase of psychological distress due to significant exposure to screentime (Twenge et al., 2019). The amount of exposure towards screen time has continued to increase as more generations have taken their place in the world. Children born after the year 2000 have been subjected to screen time from the age of four months old (Christakis et al., 2004).

The results of screen time abuse have been noted in adolescents that exhibit a reduced orbitofrontal cortex thickness, this result came to be because of internet gaming disorders (Hong et al., 2013). Another consequence that excessive screen time promotes is cannabis consumption in young adults (Montagni et al., 2016). Memory and learning processes in adolescents and young adults are affected when screen time is used immoderately (Neophytou et al., 2021). Screentime is crucial factor to take into consideration for the measurement of social media, therefore it is the first of three independent variables that will be used for the conceptual model of this thesis.

**2.11 Mood Modification**

Mood modification is the second independent variable that will be employed in the model, this has been chosen, because of the relevance it presents on a daily basis. People make use of the internet to alter their mood, especially when the mood is considered to be negative, leading users to make use of social media to escape from their life (Cheak et al., 2012). The phenomenon of mood modification is defined as a change in the mood of person that is conducting activities on social media platforms (Tutgun-Ünal & Deniz, 2015). In 2006, it was proposed that personality types can influence how much a person becomes psychologically stimulated by using social media and gaming, this is attributed to a sensation seeking factor (Chappell et al., 2006).

As social media has been proven to aid in the regulation of emotions (Nazlıgül et al., 2022), it can be observed when a user shares content about their environment and their personal lives. It allows them to receive attention, feedback and acceptance form other online users (Vermeulen et al., 2018). A study with the primary focus on artificial intelligence (AI) concluded that over-reliance on technologies has a possibility of becoming a substitute for fulfilling psychological needs that humans have regarding communication and therefore social connection (Serenko, et al., 2006). The features of today’s technology allow the creation of meaningful relationship with technology itself, as opposed to establishing significant relationships with humans (Epstein & Kumar, 2000).

**2.12 Compulsive Checking**

In behavioural literature, the compulsive checking, otherwise known as habitual checking (Du et al., 2019), on mobile devices is describe with thoughts that focus on the whereabouts of the mobile device when not in reach, as well as the need to check the device and feeling irritable when not being able to access it (David et al., 2015). As users repeatedly use social media, it has given way to the development of affective and approach tendencies with a social media stimulus (Du et al., 2019), meaning that it will facilitate the routine activity of mindlessly using social media applications and scrolling through the content. An illustration of the routine behaviour is presented when a person checks or scrolls through social media platforms every night before going to bed (Exelmans & Scott, 2019).

Compulsive checking has been notably prominent when a person finds themselves thinking about new messages or notifications that could possibly be received (Murdock et al., 2019), this can cause involuntary attention shifts (Kim, M., Kim, I., & Lee, U. 2021). The consequences of these thoughts have been associated with multiple negative outcomes one of which is motor vehicle crashes (Jenaro et al., 2007).

Notifications play a large role in the formation of compulsive checking habits (Kim et al., 2021). They are tools that are featured and used on various devices, mainly on smartphones and applications, their main purpose is to engage a user’s attention to check social media or re-directed them to social media usage. Notifications use a variety of sensory stimulation to obtain attention, such as sound and tactile vibrations (Mikulic, 2016). The sensory stimulation has the ability to influence a user's decision making, for example reacting and focusing (Kim et al., 2021). For the previously mentioned reasons, compulsive checking is the third independent variable that will actively participate in the model of this paper.

1. **Research Methodology**

The chosen demographic population for this study is the Centennial generation, also known as Gen Z, includes individuals who are born between the years of 1997 and 2012, meaning that the participants of the survey were between twelve and twenty-seven years of age. This cohort generation has a unique upbringing alongside the rapid evolution of digital technologies and the internet, it renders them particularly susceptible to the allure and risks of social networking platforms. The survey obtained a total of 278 respondents, meaning sample size met the criteria for representativeness, ensuring the findings' generalizability.

Participants were assessed through a structured survey methodology with nineteen questions that commenced with demographic inquiries about age, gender, and preferred social media platforms, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of respondents' digital habits. The remaining questions, focused on the variables (Screen Time, Mood Modification, Compulsive Checking and Social Media Addiction) utilized a five-point Likert scale (ranging from Never to Always). The survey excluded open-ended questions to prioritize immediate, self-reported reflections on daily experiences. This deliberate design fostered spontaneous and conventional responses, thereby enhancing the conclusiveness and reliability of the collected data. The simplicity in the formulation of the questions allowed the respondents to respond and engage the queries in a reasoned and focused way, permitting the cognitive load to be minimized and the maximization of the validity of the answers.

To capture a snapshot of the population at a specific point in time, the study utilized a cross-sectional design. This methodology, which involved a single data collection point for each participant, eliminating the risk of repetitive data meanwhile streamlining the analysis process. By focusing on a single cross-section, the research design optimized both the efficiency and validity of the data gathering endeavour. Additionally, the selection of validated scales for social media addiction, namely The Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) by Tutgun-Ünal et al. (2015), ensured that the constructs were measured accurately and consistently. The use of established scales bolstered the study's internal validity and provided a basis for comparison with existing literature. By integrating these rigorous methodological choices, the research design aimed to provide a comprehensive and refined understanding of the target phenomenon.

1. **Results**

### **4.1 Assessment of the measurement model**

The reliability and validity tests were conducted to ensure the accuracy of the SEM findings and support the results. The tests and measurements for the accuracy assessment involved several well-established statistical tests and measures, all of which were conducted with the aid of SmartPLS-4 software, a widely recognized and powerful tool for SEM analysis.

The Cronbach's Alpha is known to be the most widely used consistency tool for proofing the reliability of internal consistency. The test has also been previously used by studies that implemented the Likert scale, due to its ability to measure the closeness of the corelated items (Taherdoost, 2016). Therefore, it was deemed appropriate for this study. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.6 or higher is generally considered acceptable, since it signifies a good level of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2021).

Composite reliability (CR) was another test implemented, it is used primarily to test the items withing each individual variable, to note if they can be reliable. For this study it is a further measure of internal consistency. A CR value of 0.7 or above is considered satisfactory, it indicates that all items are measuring the same constructs reliably (Hair et al., 2021).

Additionally, the Average variance extracted (AVE) was employed. This is a statistical measure used in the context of SEM. The AVE is responsible for evaluating the convergent validity of a construct, which means determining if the indicators are truly measuring the intended concept. The test of AVE must be higher than 0.5 in order to be acceptable (Hair et al., 2021). In this study it was used to assess the convergent validity.

Lastly, in order to assess the discriminant validity of the constructs, the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 2) was employed. The discriminant validity allows to determine if different constructs are truly distinct from each other, rather than measuring overlapping concepts. This test states that in order for the results to be accepted and valuable the AVE of a construct should be higher than its shared variance with any other construct (Hair et al., 2021).

**Table 1. Construct Validity and Reliability**

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**Table 2. Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Lacker Criteria**

In this study, hypothesis testing was conducted for direct effects using a bootstrapping approach in the SmartPLS software to evaluate the relationships between the constructs. The confidence level was set at 95%, with a t-value threshold of ≥ 1.967 indicating statistical significance and the P-value of the analysis must be > 0.05 to be considered valid. The results of the hypothesis testing can be observed in Table 5. and Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Model Hypothesis Testing for Direct Effects**

Source: Own elaboration

Simultaneously, Table 3. displays the results of the hypothesis testing for direct effects in a numerical way. This allows for a deeper and richer understanding of the testing performed. The columns on the right side of Table 3. are the confidence intervals for the sample mean that have been place between 5% (lower limit) and 95%. (upper limit). The results shown in the t-value collum for all the relationships between the variables are above the appointed threshold of 1.967, meaning that they are significant.

**Table 3. Hypothesis Testing for Direct Results**

***Assessment of the structural model***

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**Table 4. Structural Model Statistics**

Table 4. is divided into two sections, namely the path coefficients, that show the direct effect of one variable on another. As the table shows that the P<0.05 on all the path coefficients, it demonstrates that the variables do in fact have an effect on each other.



**Figure 4: Structural Equation Model (SME)**

Source: Own elaboration

The strongest relationship in the model can be observed between mood modification and compulsive checking (0.558), indicating that mood modification is a significant predictor of compulsive checking.

On the other hand, the weakest relationship featured in the first section of the table is found between screen time and social media addiction. Although the relationship is significantly weaker than the previous relationships, it is still positive. It manages to highlight that more screen time is associated with a higher likelihood of developing social media addiction. The second part of Table 6. is focuses on the specific indirect effects, which represent the influence of one variable on another through an intermediary variable. The table applies the same value P<0.05 in order to be considered positive.



**Table 5. R-squared (R2) Test**

The data was entered into the SmartPLS software, to ensure accuracy, double data entry was performed. The results from the data verification method were equal to each other, meaning there was no error in the data entry. The SEM Model can be observed in Figure 3. the research conducted for the model is grounded in the Use and Gratification Model (Katz et al., 1973) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

The outer loading must meet the expectation of 0.70≤ loading, but if removing it would cause serious problems for the content validity of the measurement model, then 40≤ is deemed appropriate to allow the outer loading to remain within the model. All the outer loadings are above the required amount (40≤).

In order to test the quality of the structural model, the R2 test was performed in Table 5. This test focuses on determining if a model is illustrating the variance of the independent variables. The R2 value typically ranges between 0 and 1. In scholarly research there are three thresholds for the evaluation of the values. The substantial rate is 0.75, meanwhile the moderate evaluation is 0.50, and, lastly, the weakest threshold is considered to be 0.25 (Hair et al., 2021).Based on the values shown on the tables, the following results can be drawn. The R-squared value of 47.8% means that Compulsive Checking (CC) and Mood Modification (MM) together explain 47.8% of the variance in Social Media Addiction (SM). In other words, variations in CC and MM can account for almost half of the observed changes in SM. The adjusted R-squared value, while slightly lower, still supports this interpretation. It confirms that the model, even after adjusting for the number of predictors, remains quite effective in explaining the variance in SM.

1. **Discussion**

This thesis investigated the interplay between social media addiction and psychological needs among Generation Z, exploring the relationship between social media usage, mood modification, social connection, compulsive checking, and overall well-being. Through surveys and analysis of social media behaviour, this study aimed to understand how social media use influences Gen Z's psychological state and if it contributes to addictive patterns. The thesis proposed a total of five research questions accompanied by five hypotheses.

The first research question "how does the duration of social media usage enable individuals to experience a sense of social connection?" was followed by H1. The research confirmed positive correlations between the duration of social media use and feelings of feeling connected to other, suggesting that increased amounts of time spent on social media enhance the perception of social bonding. This finding is in accordance with the conclusion of Kim et al (2023) and Ji and Hu (2024) that emphasize the link between self-connection and social connection leading to information sharing. In a study by Lukindo (2016), it was found that individuals who spend time on social media are more likely to have friends in that community. In comparison, Twenge (2013) research revealed that social media led to millennials' social disconnection. These results illustrate how Gen Z behaves differently from Gen Y.

The second question posed in this paper was how does social media impact Gen Z mood. In this case, our study revealed a noticeable improvement in mood after social media usage by gen z, leading to an understanding that platforms offer a temporary emotional support and distraction through social validation and entertainment. Although it is important to note that the sustainability of the mood enhancement requires further investigation. According to Sampasa-Kanyinga et al. (2019), Canadian high school students who spend up to 2 hours (moderate use) on social media feel more connected to their peers. A Goldilocks effect was attributed to it by the researchers. Nevertheless, the same study shows that students' academic performance is negatively impacted by spending more than two hours on social media. Again, Gen Z behaves differently than older generations. The use of social media by Gen Y created shallow and weak ties, which adversely affected the mental health of some individuals, according to Twenge (2013).

This study findings supported other researchers reports such as Johannes et al. (2019) and Bartoli and Benedetto (2022) and confirms that if a notification is received by Gen Z, they will promptly check it. It seems that receiving notification triggers a compulsion check on the technological device. Some researchers linked it to “smartphone vigilance” (Johannes et al., 2018). This highlights the addictive nature of social media rewards system and disregard for the time at which the notifications are sent or regardless of immediate impact on productivity. FOMO could also explain this behaviour, where people feel anxious about what others are experiencing without them (Liu &amp; Ma, 2020).

Moreover, our study shows that the higher the amount of screentime, the more a user’s mood will be modified. The findings highlighted that screen time affects mood modification and can contribute to co-dependence and addictive patterns. Gen Z is more inclined to share with their networks and cares about how their networks react to their posts, so the more reactions, the happier they feel. As a result, their brains look for such rewards constantly (Sherman et al., 2016).

Therefore, our findings are suggested that compulsive checking is a direct result of mood modification caused.Demonstrating that emotional highs and lows that are experienced reinforce the impulse to constantly check social media for updates and add to the cycle of addiction. This could be also led to increased feelings of depression and anxiety (Elhay et al., 2017).

It important to note that this research is only estimated the relation among the change of mood and usage of social media and not how does it impact individual performance. As most of researchers show how individual and student’s performance negatively impacted by extensive use of social media (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2019).

Overall, this study contributes to the field of psychology and media studies by shedding light on the intricate relationship between social media addiction and psychological needs in Generation Z. The findings have implications for mental health professionals, educators, parents, and social media platform designers. Specifically, this research suggests that while social media can fulfil certain psychological needs, excessive use and reliance on platforms for mood regulation could lead to addictive behaviours and potential negative impacts on well-being.

Limitations of Study

Due to the complex nature of the topic of social media addiction, there were various limitations that presented themselves at different stages of the conduction of the study, while other limitations were defined at the conclusion of the study. While the paper and study focus on social media and its negative aspects, it overlooks other potential positive outcomes, such as self-expression, information seeking and social connections (Ellison et al., 2007).

The survey was developed with the aid of the secondary research that was conducted. The literature revealed that the Likert scale was an established scale, therefore it was employed for this study. Likert scales may not always be able to feature the full complexity of human opinions, thoughts and feelings. Another limitation took place with Likert scale, convenience sampling, and operationalization process of the variables. The previously mentioned tools rely mainly on self-reported data, meaning they are subjective and can be altered by respondents to appear more desirable or socially acceptable (Kelly et al., 2018). Additionally, the study dealt with complex psychological constructs that can challenge participants in regard to personal biases that could potentially lead to inaccuracies, due to recall issues.

The topic of social media and its addictions are constantly changing, because new platforms, features and trends are emerging and will continue to do so. This is also relevant for social media addiction, due to the variations on how it is defined and measured in the future. (Andreassen et al., 2016). Therefore, the findings in this study may possess a limited long-term relevance due to the constant evolving state of the topics.

Recommendation for Future Research

The research presented in this paper has explored the interplay between social media addiction and psychological needs. While this study has produced valuable and acceptable results, research is an ongoing process, and there are always new avenues to explore and questions to answer. Therefore, this section outlines various potential directions for future research that could build upon the foundation laid by this study.

This study selected a survey as a primary source of research, future studies could select to conduct interviews instead. In-depth interviews can extend the exploration of Gen Z's experiences with social media, proving a larger and richer understanding of their motivations for its usage (Jain, 2021).

Future research could potentially take a cultural approach and apply a cross-cultural comparison. This can be achieved by replicating the study in different cultural contexts, in order to investigate how cultures and values influence social media patterns, as well as the possible addiction they create in relation to psychological needs (Brislin, 1976). This type of study is able to provide insight if the observed relationships are universal. On the other hand, the conduction of longitudinal studies could examine how the relationship of social media addiction and psychological needs would evolve over time, (Pelclová et al., 2021). Allowing for identification if unmet needs lead to addiction, as well potential long-term consequences for mental health and well-being.

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