

A Study of Various Factors that have contributed to the Alarming Surge in the Need for Instant Gratification in Generation-Z

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to understand the role of Instant Gratification with the context of Patience, Self-control and Social Media. With the onset of Globalization and Technological revolution, one has fallen prey to the temptations of immediate reward, but in the long run, it may provide adverse outcomes in academical, interpersonal, professional and intrapersonal domains. Hence, this study was undertaken to measure the gravity of the situation at hand. The variables undertaken were Social Media Addiction, Self-Regulation and Patience, the former is directly related to Instant Gratification while the other two are inversely related. A generic questionnaire of twenty-nine items, covering all the three variables was formed and an online survey was conducted. The research found that females have a higher need for Instant Gratification vis-à-vis males.

Keywords: *Instant Gratification, Social Media, Patience, Self-Regulation, Deferred Gratification, Generation, X, Y & Z*

Instant Gratification is the desire to receive pleasure or fulfilment without any delay or deferment. Sigmund Freud was the first one to talk about Pleasure Principle in 1895. Pleasure Principle is a primitive urge that drives us to fulfil all basic needs such as hunger, thirst, anger and biological needs. Id is the one, that is responsible for compelling us to seek Instant Gratification for these things. But something called Reality Principle or the Ego is the one that ensures all our desires and needs are manifested in an appropriate manner. As for example, one might feel a pang of vehement anger towards one's boss, the Id will make one want to yell at the superior, but Ego knows better. Reality Principle, will ask one to suppress the anger for the time being, and vent it out to a friend later in the evening, in a healthy way. The psychological development of a healthy ego is imperative for a child's growth and success. Hence, it must be harnessed carefully in the early stages of one's life.

In today's world, pleasure principle cannot be studied without the context of social media. More than 500 million people use Instagram every day. The reason it is so addictive is because whenever someone messages us, or a notification pops up, the region in our brain called ventral striatum gets activated. This is the region which is also turned on when one is presented with food, drinks, sex, money or drugs. Basically, it processes rewards, and

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reward prediction errors. With the onset of social media, the algorithms are complex and one never knows whether an outcome shall be positive or negative, hence it is difficult for the brain to predict a reward correctly.

Patience is a trait observed not only in humans, but animals too. Squirrels collect acorns in the autumn so that they have food stored for the winter season. In terms of humans, patience can be divided into two components – one is waiting for a desirable outcome, and second is showing less negative emotion at the onset of an undesirable outcome, or delay of a positive outcome. Some theorists also propose a third subset of patience which is “interpersonal patience”, interpersonal patience is utilized when you maintain your calm, even when there is a frustrating, irritating or obnoxious person at hand. It is used in social situations.

Social media and globalization, together, have led to dwindling patience rates. Might it be necessities, like food and groceries, which are being delivered by Amazon and Big Basket, or media and entertainment industry which has made binge watching an entire season in a day easy, or say relationships, which are now just a click away to be chosen according to your geographical location, sexuality, age and preferences; everything you desire is at your fingertips. Such convenience from early childhood instils the habit of Instant Gratification in a child and becomes a hurdle in future aspects such as career and interpersonal relationships. One of the reasons why suicide rates are escalating everyday is because the virtue of tolerance against hardships in life is running low.

Coming onto self-control, it includes various steps from deciding which goals to pursue, planning for them by deciding the rules or deadlines, implementing them, going through setbacks, again improvising, and then deciding whether to continue or not according to feedback. It is therefore, an exhaustive procedure which needs to be undertaken on a regular basis. It is especially vital for smaller goals such as scoring a 100/100 on a test, or maybe not taking up a cigarette when your friends are urging you to do so. Practicing self-control in these daily tasks, decides your lifestyle. If we choose to attain temporary pleasure, over choices that are better for us morally, physically, psychologically and academically; in the long term we will be filled with regret. It can also lead to obesity, mental disorders, biological ailments and a bleak, hopeless future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hansen et al conducted an informative study on the relationships between adolescent brains and its bias towards Immediate Reward, (2019), it showed that bias toward immediate reward in early adolescence was linked to higher activation in caudate, putamen and nucleus accumbens and also in ventromedial prefrontal cortex. All regions that are integral in processing reward during adolescence. This shows that they are more likely to take decisions that provide an immediate reward, even if it means forgoing a better reward, just to have an instant one. The participants in the study were early adolescents in the age group of 12-14, and were selected through newspaper advertisements and flyers. They were residents of a suburban area in the Mid-Atlantic United States.

The paper “A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety” (Moffitt et al, 2011), revealed that children who had poor self-control in early stages of life grew up to be adults with poor financial planning practices. They had acquired fewer financial building blocks (home ownership, investment funds, retirement plans) compare to other participants who had high self-control.

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A study conducted by Sarah Schnitker (2012) on “An examination of patience and well-being”, proves that patient people work towards more effort in terms of those goals and adopt goal flexible plans. It also shows that there is a relationship between one’s self esteem, confidence in competencies and consequent ability to work consistently towards goals, even if results are not immediate or instant.

Current research has shown that there is a possibility of a relationship between boredom and patience. Kenneth C. Dudley (2003), addressed this topic, when he wrote “In situations of boredom perhaps, there may be the desire for a goal, but an inability to determine or choose a particular goal.” This reasoning can be readily applied to the arena of Instant Gratification where the lack of judgement to determine a better goal, leads the individual to undertake an activity that might offer temporary satisfaction, but the task itself is not very useful. Adversely, it might even be harmful in the long run.

Several studies, including Schnitker (2010) found a very high correlation between patience and well-being.

Might it be today or the 1972 Marshmallow experiment which showed that the children who were willing to delay gratification and waited to receive the second marshmallow ended up having higher SAT scores, lower levels of substance abuse, lower likelihood of obesity, better responses to stress, better social skills as reported by their parents, and generally better scores in a range of other life measures, we can conclude that delayed gratification is a practice that is needed to be cultivated in generation Z.

Hilarie Cash et al conducted a study (2012), titled “Internet Addiction: A Brief Summary of Research and Practice” that discloses about how the internet works on a variable ratio reinforcement schedule, (VRRS), the one similar to gambling. No matter the purpose is for Internet usage, might it be surfing, pornography, video games, cloud applications etc, all these activities support unpredictable and variable reward structure. All these examples have a factor of unpredictability and stimulation which makes us want more, and gets us addicted. These addicted online users use the Internet as an excuse to avoid daily chores such as laundry, cutting the lawn or going grocery shopping. For example, one mother even forgot fairly significant tasks such as picking up her children after school, making them dinner, and putting them to bed because she became too absorbed in her Internet use.

Many times, when a person feels a void inside, he/she/they use social media, in order to achieve intimate relations, or maybe self-confidence through uploading posts that represent them in a better light than they actually are. Other times, internet just works well as a portal for escapism, avoiding the reality which is unfavourable or unaccepted. Research by Vogel (2014) et al supports this argument by proving that individuals having lower self-esteem use social media more, in order to gain attention, validation and affection. Other than that, various other studies have showed link between narcissism and the need to operate social media more.

Research has also been done upon Self-Control, and it has been found that it is a trait that is limited in nature. Just like a muscle, that gets sore after working too hard, exercising Self-Control in one arena of life, might lead to shortage in another. As for example, an experiment was conducted in which group one was given a plate of cookies and group two was asked to resist the temptation of eating the cookies, and munch on radishes instead.

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Later, both groups were asked to solve mental problems, group one who had the cookies could persist to do work for a longer time duration than group two who had radishes. In consequence of this discovery, one must vigilantly plan out what are their goals, and what do they successfully aim to have control over. Just like a muscle, we can train self-control to work in our favour. Asserting self-control successfully in some arenas in life, automatically reaps its benefits in other parameters too. Using humour or positive feelings like altruism, can also foster self-control. Practicing simple tasks such as improving one's posture or using the non-dominant hand while eating or brushing, can slowly enhance one's will power.

There is also a theory that replenishing one's glucose helps in restoring the depleted self-control, as all cerebral activities consume glucose, (Gailliot,2007). It does not imply that someone having an excess supply of glucose will necessarily be a guru when it comes to self-control, only the opposite of it, that is lack of glucose might affect the exercising control ability. Another study was done on the Stroop Effect, which confirmed the hypothesis, as participants who had lower levels of glucose performed poorly on the incongruent trials than the ones who had higher glucose levels. It thus becomes necessary that we eat carbohydrates rich food, especially when conducting tasks that require a high level of Self-Control.

In order to overcome the issue of Instant Gratification, the brain regions involved in self-regulation are to be worked upon, if that is done, one can successfully control and reduce adolescent's strong impulse making urges with respect to Immediate pleasure. Necessary steps should be undertaken to design strategies that strengthen adolescent's deferred gratification abilities.

Though it is also interesting, to ponder adolescents who are more impulsive in nature and choose short term reward over long term benefits, are indulging in higher risk. Hence, when their demands fail to meet, they will be more experienced in terms of failure or dissatisfaction. Iteration leads to improvement, and one may argue that these risk-taking individuals might gradually be the ones who learn to delay gratification more efficiently in the long run.

Might it be lack of Patience, Social Media Addiction or Self Control issues, all three can be overcome if there is a confirmation or clarity of goals. Determination towards a particular path can only lead to Deferred Gratification habits. Other than that, meditation and visualization techniques must be undertaken for a clearer mind. Visualising of the goal or the desire, can lead to affirming the mind to redirect itself for achieving the same. Meditation on the other hand, improves attention and cognitive performance, which can also aid in delaying pleasure, and working on the situation at hand.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify and define Instant gratification, explore its relevance in generation Z.
- To probe the causes of the issue of Instant Gratifications and assess their origins.
- To confirm the relationship between Instant Gratification and the selected variables for the study.

Hypothesis

- Higher level of patience is associated with lower need for Instant Gratification.
- Social Media aggravates the Need for Instant Gratification.

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- Good self-regulation is linked with delaying of gratification.
- There is no significant relationship between gender and Instant Gratification.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Respondents were 240 students, mostly from Ahmedabad, a few from other cities such as Jaipur and Bangalore. They were asked to fill a 29-item online questionnaire, and their complete consent was taken before initiating the survey. After collecting the necessary data, the same was analysed by statistical tools such as T test and Correlation to analyse and interpret the results.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection was done through a well-structured questionnaire of 29 items, through the medium of Google forms. The sample size of the survey was of 224 participants- mostly college going students; few school going students. The age group of the respondents was of 17-21. A Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree was undertaken and was converted to scores from 1 to 5. The individual scores were then added to form an aggregate score.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to calculate scores, individual scores from each variable- Patience, social media and Self-Regulation were undertaken. The correlation results came as follows:

- Correlation between social media and Patience was calculated to be 0.564.
- Correlation between social media and Self-Control was calculated to be 0.585.
- Correlation between Patience and Self-Control was calculated to be 0.5702.

The scores suggest that though there is some relation between the selected variables, it is not mandatory that a person having low patience, will have poor self-regulation practices. This indicates that the need for Instant Gratification is activated by different reasons, which might be unique to each individual.

Patience and Self-Control, might deceivingly give a common first impression but both are different, yet required in case of Instant Gratification. Patience is the ability to wait, even when circumstances or outcomes are not in your favour, it is still committing to the activity at hand. Self-Control is controlling the impulse to indulge in an undesirable act. For example, patience is working hard despite the low marks achieved in two consecutive tests. It is waiting for a better outcome instead of giving up and watching a television show. Self-Control is when you are offered a piece of truffle cake, but you know you are already on the line of obese, so you refuse it and stick to your diet. In both scenarios, patience and self-control lead to delayed gratification, might it be in terms of better grades or a better physique.

The null hypothesis, that there is no connection between gender and instant gratification, was rejected when it was found that females had a higher mean of 83 on overall score, while males had 80. The p value was 0.103 which is less than 0.5 that is the confidence level, hence, we can accept the alternative hypothesis, that there is a relationship between gender and instant gratification. Females have a comparatively higher score than males, in terms of Instant Gratification.

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One cannot ignore the social desirability factor, as it is commonly observed that teenagers share every achievement and act of recognition on their Instagram, yet a huge chunk of the respondents refrained from affirming that they did so. This observation conceives the possibility that maybe the generation is not completely, consciously aware that they are actually desiring instant satisfaction. Maybe they are participating in the act of seeking satisfaction, on such a subtle level, that it has become a habit for them to do so. Hence, it is no longer specifically considered as “A desire” to have that gratification.

In order to overcome the need for Instant results, especially in terms of academics, the process of knowledge dissemination must be restructured. Nowadays, with access to all kinds of information, knowledge imbibition has become quicker and faster but it is above the surface and lacks depth and width. True knowledge requires curiosity, the urge to learn along with patience and right guidance and mentorship.

If an individual feels he or she has lack of close connections or does not possess a healthy self-esteem, a hobby must be inculcated which can channelize the negative emotions and can also form a platform for making new friends. Sublimation can birth great artists. In grave cases, counselling can be undertaken in which the concerned individual can express their emotions in a different way, helping them to break the internet addiction.

Even before that, a child’s patience must be worked upon from childhood, Patience Cycles, a paper by Richard C. Barnett, Joydeep Bhattacharya and Mikko Puhakka (2009) beautifully explained how inculcating good reading practices, or providing an opportunity to learn a musical instrument from a young age wires the brain to defer gratification from a young age. Angela Duckworth has explained the importance of Self Control Strategies, exceptionally well in the text, “Self-Control in School Age Children” (2014). According to the situation, one of the five strategies, that is; situation selection, situation modification, response modulation, cognitive change and attention deployment must be adopted to restructure the brain’s thought patterns.

Constraints of the Study

Despite the efforts put in to make the item pool as wholesome and valid as possible, the factor of bias and its role in interpreting results can’t be ignored. There are two major biases which can cause the responses to be dishonest- The bias of Social Desirability and the Self Bias.

Additionally, the readers should be wary, not to over interpret the statistical results included in this study, as more efforts can definitely be given to make this scale more reliable. The current sample consists of people mostly from Ahmedabad and of age group 17-22, but as now mobile phones are quite common at 13 years of age, too, the sample could be more inclusive by covering 13–17-year-old respondents as well. But we can surely use the test to raise awareness and ignite the act of introspection in generation Z.

CONCLUSION

The problem of Instant Gratification can be curtailed. It will, however, need take time and effort from the early childhood, to develop necessary habits along with structuring the brain in the desired way. Putting the child into a hobby from an early age will help in developing patience. Initiating cognitive restructuring of the brain and determining specific goals, breaking them down into smaller, attainable units shall help in self-control. As for social

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media addiction, it can be addressed through developing a healthy self-esteem from childhood and using app features which set daily activity limits for individuals. In a nutshell, Instant Gratification is not indomitable issue. It can lead to emotional, physical, psychological, financial and academical disturbances, but in depth understanding, backed by baby steps every day, can make one cultivate the art of deferred gratification.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest regarding this paper.

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APPENDIX- A

Question Statement and their corresponding responses in percentage	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
If I am studying and my friends call, I will postpone my work for later.	9.8%	31.6%	33.2%	18.9%	6.6%
If I don't find the required information on the first page of Google, I don't bother visiting other pages	11.5%	19.3%	7%	38.9%	23.4%
I understand people have hectic schedules but late replies annoy me	22.1%	25.4%	17.2%	21.3%	13.9%
I have to post a picture the moment I capture it	2.5%	5.3%	13.1%	40.6%	38.5%
I end up overeating when it is my favorite dish.	24.2%	39.8%	12.3%	16.4%	7.4%
While watching television, I keep switching between channels during advertisements.	35.2%	36.9%	12.7%	11.9%	3.3%
At times, I find myself asking for help even before trying myself first.	7.8%	27.5%	16.8%	25.8%	22.1%
I find it difficult to follow and implement long term goals.	9%	37.3%	18%	25.4%	10.2%
I have to post about every accomplishment/achievement I attain in life.	3.3%	4.9%	18.9%	36.9%	36.1%
I find myself using my mobile phone for longer periods of time than intended.	30.7%	41.8%	16.4%	8.6%	2.5%
In an examination I always check my answer sheet for possible mistakes before submitting.	27.5%	37.3%	15.2%	16%	4.1%
When I have a crush on someone, I check their stories and posts repeatedly	26.6%	39.8%	15.2%	12.3%	6.1%
When someone yells at me in an argument, I get mad and reciprocate with the same tone and slang.	11.6%	29.3%	24.8%	25.2%	9.1%
I keep checking whether my message has received a blue tick on Whats-app	9.5%	24.4%	16.5%	30.2%	19.4%
Though I am considerate of my friends' perspectives in a	11.2%	42.1%	21.5%	21.5%	

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Question Statement and their corresponding responses in percentage	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
discussion, sometimes I just can't wait for my chance to speak.					
Despite my attempts to wake up early, I always end up hitting the snooze button.	25.6%	27.3%	13.6%	23.1%	10.3%
I find myself gossiping about people I don't even care about.	7.9%	25.2%	18.2%	28.5%	20.2%
When I get into a fight with someone, I block/ unfollow them from social media immediately.	-	7%	15.7%	29.3%	44.6%
Upon illness or disease, I get frustrated and hope the medicine will work within 24 hours itself.	18.2%	29.8%	16.9%	20.7%	14.5%
I cannot bear to stand in queues.	10.3%	25.6%	24.8%	27.7%	11.6%
I just think it is better to use stairs rather than to wait for the lift to arrive at my floor.	17.4%	33.1%	17.4%	21.5%	10.7%
I can't help but click on a notification when it arrives	10.3%	24.4%	26.4%	28.9%	9.9%
I take baby steps every day to achieve long term goals.	17.4%	40.9%	25.2%	14%	-
I sometimes break the signal in the absence of a policeman because waiting for a green light makes me restless.	5.8%	7.9%	8.3%	34.7%	43.4%
When I am feeling low, using social media makes me feel better about myself.	7.9%	22.3%	22.7%	27.7%	19.4%
At the cinema, I find myself finishing the popcorn even before the movie begins.	16.1%	15.3%	13.6%	32.6%	22.3%
I like to think patiently and deeply before making any important decision.	40.1%	40.5%	13.2%	5.4%	-
I only buy things that are an absolute necessity.	19.4%	28.1%	23.1%	23.6%	5.8%