

## Social Media Usage, Fear of Missing Out and Personality: A Comparative Study of Gen Z and Millennials

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### ABSTRACT

The rapidly growing and technologically advancing world holds huge significance in the lives of people nowadays. Individuals are being affected by the so-called 'Digital Era', so much so that their social and behavioral tendencies have slowly started shaping in accordance to the increasing dependency on digital devices and the constant urge to be 'online'. The present research attempts to investigate how personality factors affect the daily usage of (or time spent on) Social Networking Sites (SNS) (Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp). The research also aims to do an inter-generational comparison between Gen-Z (15 to 25 years) and Millennials (26 to 41 years) on their social media usage and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), to understand how the daily usage of social media platforms and one's level of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is affected by age. The study was based on a Quantitative research paradigm, using survey questionnaire technique for data collection. The 10 Item Fear of Missing Out Scale and the 50 Item IPIP version of the Big Five Markers Questionnaire were used. A semi structured tool was used for measuring social media usage. A total of 306 responses (156: Gen Z, 150: Millennials) were received and analyzed. Data was analyzed using descriptive and correlational analyses. The results obtained showed a significant positive correlation between Time spent on SNS and FoMO, and significant negative correlations between Time spent on SNS and Emotional Stability, and between Time spent on SNS and Extraversion. The Time spent on SNS and the level of FoMO also differed significantly across both the generations, wherein Gen Z showed significantly higher Time spent and FoMO than Millennials.

**Keywords:** *Social Networking Sites (SNS), Gen Z, Millennials, Personality, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)*

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## **S**ocial Media and its Usage

The mode of communication, and emotions are inseparably linked, and this is especially visible in the context of social media, as people express and navigate a wide spectrum of emotions through their digital connections. According to empirical literature, social media is an internet-based online media, sophisticated multimedia technology (Tim, 2009). It has made people bond with each other and has been able to give a strong sense of emotional connection. Since social media applications are relatively the 'new generation technology', there's little research to establish how these applications affect behavior, and how factors such as personality influences individuals to engage themselves with, and adapt with evolving technology.

The reason online social media is widely used today is convenience, speed, reduction in communication costs, and having relationships and participation with other people in their network. Another reason is the expression or establishment of individuals' identity in the online world making them known in that online social media group (Digital Government Development Agency, 2016). Empirical literature has found multiple studies showing strong links between heavy social media usage and an increased risk for social media related addictions (Lawrence et al., 2022). It has also been found that for many individuals, high engagement with social media, and associated addictive symptoms, is partially due to a "Fear of Missing Out" (FoMO) or, in other words, an anxiety stemming from missing important events, which others might be a part of. Research has shown that it is associated with the excessive use of new technologies (Oberst et al., 2017; Durak, 2018; Tomczyk and Selmanagic-Lizde, 2018).

### **Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)**

The concept of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) refers to the "pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences, from which one is absent" (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMO occurs and develops along with the development of information technology. Research has shown that FoMO occurs mostly in adolescence and early adulthood and is more prevalent in men (Alt, 2015; Dossey, 2013). Blackwell et al. (2017) found that people who demonstrate FoMO are more likely to spend excessive time online because social media enables easy access to social interactions and can increase perceived social involvement, making them ideal platforms for individuals who want to gather information about others (Przybylski et al., 2013). Thus, FoMO is always identified with the use of social media and the internet, although it may occur outside the context of internet use (Baker et al., 2016). According to Lifthiah et al. (2016) and Marshal (2015: 36), fear of missing out differs from one individual to another because of uniqueness, which is related to the personality each individual has.

### **Personality**

Personality is regarded as something relatively stable to a large extent (Corr & Matthews, 2009; Eysenck, 2013) but it is also dynamically and continuously evolving based on each individual's unique traits and characteristics and along with his/her experiences and interaction with his/her environment. Many studies have been carried out which explored the different aspects and correlations between users' personality traits and their social media use (Amiel and Sargent, 2004, Lampropoulos et al., 2022). there is a close interconnection between social media use and engagement and personality traits with some traits affecting it more drastically. As the pool of research on Internet use grew, several scholars examined the influence of personality traits on Internet uses by utilizing the Five-Factor Model (McCrae &

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Costa, 1997). Lepp (2015) also stated that the big five personality traits are relevant to comprehend the activities of individuals on social media. Personality has many dimensions out of which, for the current study, only Extraversion and Emotional Stability have been considered.

### ***Extraversion***

Extraversion is the measure of how active, person-oriented, sociable an individual is, and it describes his/her interpersonal status, excitability, assertiveness, and expressiveness. Individuals that belong to the extraversion dimension are characterized as active, person-oriented, talkative etc. Correa et al. (2010) study revealed that extraversion and openness to experiences were positively related to social media use. Ross et al. (2009) highlighted that this specific trait was not significantly related to the time spent online.

### ***Emotional Stability***

According to Sani et al. (2017), the use of social media requires emotional maturity, which includes emotional stability. Emotional stability, according to Smithson (in Chaturvedi & Chander) (2010), is an integrated and balanced way for individuals to understand life's problems. According to Arora and Rangnekar (2015), emotional instability (neuroticism) is characterized by instability, depression, and also shows insecurity. A previous study conducted by Setyawan (2016) on early adult subjects showed a significant negative relationship between emotional stability and the duration of social media use. Results show a significant negative relationship in the sense that the higher the duration of social media use, the lower the emotional stability, and vice versa.

### **Generational Differences in Social Media Usage**

Individuals use social media according to different subjective needs, and these needs keep changing as a product of how an individual grows. Age is a strong determinant of the frequency and quality of an individual's social media usage, and it is unsurprising that younger people are more comfortable with online communication than adults (Thayer & Ray, 2006). For the current research, 2 generations have been considered. Generation Y, born between 1980 and 1995, generally grew up in prosperity and have had access to technology, while Generation Z, born after 1995 is the recent generation, extremely close to accessing technology (Cilliers, 2017, pp. 189–190). Damrongsat and Suworawattanakul (2019) studied Generation Z and found that they used smartphones to access the internet, and online social media, the most (96.8%). This was also seen in a study conducted by Sarawanawong et al. (2017), which found that Generation Z mostly use the internet for online social media.

### ***Rationale***

Understanding the relationship between social media usage, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and personality traits between Gen Z and Gen Y (Millennials) is crucial in comprehending the potential implications on their well-being, mental health, and overall social behaviors. Gen Z and Millennials have grown up in an era where social media is an integral part of their socialization process. Investigating their social media usage patterns will provide insights into the extent of their involvement with different platforms, and duration of their usage. Previous researches suggest that the risk of developing psycho-social problems due to excessive social media usage is very high, with added risks of problems such as loneliness and fear of missing out, which can severely hamper mental health conditions. (Abel et al., 2016; Barry et al., 2017; Tomczyk & Selmanagic-Lizde, 2018; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). There is a need to understand the factors and underlying traits of a person that put them at a higher risk of such

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problems. The existing review of literature highlights that there are very few studies relating to social media usage and FoMO and its relationship with personality factors, yet findings of the available body of research are suggestive of the importance of such studies. Therefore, considering the paucity of such studies, the present study was designed to understand the relationship between social media usage and factors like personality and fear of missing out on two generations of people in India, i.e., Gen-Z and Gen Y.

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Objectives*

1. To examine the relationship between the time spent on social media applications and the level of FoMO
2. To examine the relationship between the time spent on social media applications, emotional stability and extraversion
3. To compare Gen Z and Gen Y on their time spent on social media applications and the level of FoMO

#### *Hypotheses*

Based on the empirical review of literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

**H1:** There will be a significant relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Time Spent on social media applications.

**H2:** There will be a significant relationship between Emotional Stability and Time Spent on social media applications.

**H3:** There will be a significant relationship between Extraversion and Time Spent on social media applications.

**H4:** There will be significant differences in the Time Spent on social media applications, between Gen Z and Gen Y.

**H5:** There will be significant differences in the level of FoMO, between Gen Z and Gen Y.

#### *Design and Sampling*

The study was based on the between groups design, quantitative and correlational in nature. The target population was taken as individuals belonging to the following 2 Generations: Gen Z (age range 15 to 25 years) and Millennials (age range 26 to 41 years) and were using any or all of the following social media applications: WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook. A total of 306 participants were selected using the purposive sampling technique, out of which 156 participants were Gen Z, while 150 were Millennials.

#### *Data Collection Tools*

##### **1. Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOs)**

Developed by Przybylski et al. (2013), the Fear of Missing Out Scale is a 10-item unidimensional scale set on 5-point Likert type responses, and measures the degree to which one fears missing out on social events, particularly involving friends and often, using social media to stay connected.

Reliability and Validity: The scale demonstrated high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .82$ ; Przybylski et al., 2013). Subsequent studies have continued to verify the scales' reliability, ( $\alpha = 0.87, 0.90$ ; Lai, Itavilla, Ronconi, & Aceto, 2016). The scale also evidenced high face validity, content validity, convergent validity ( $r: .40$ ), and discriminant validity ( $r: .29; .48; .53$ ) (Leary et al., 2013; Beyens et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2000; Santor et al., 2000)

Scoring: The average of the scores obtained by an individual on each of the 10 items, is the total score.

## **2. 50 Item International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) version of Big 5 Markers**

The 50 item IPIP (International Personality Item Pool) version of Big 5 markers, by Goldberg (1992) consists of a 50-item and 100-item inventory which can be freely downloaded from the internet (Goldberg et al., 2006). It is a self-report questionnaire that assesses one's personality according to the Big Five model of Personality. Items were administered with a 5-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very inaccurate) to 5 (very accurate).

**Note:** The current study made use of the 50-item version of the inventory, wherein 11 items measuring Emotional Stability and 9 items measuring Extraversion were selectively chosen to suit the objectives of the study.

**Reliability and Validity:** The internal consistency of the factors (Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) reported by Goldberg (2006), were between .79 to .87.

**Scoring:** For + keyed items, the response "Very Inaccurate" is assigned a value of 1, "Moderately Inaccurate" a value of 2, "Neither Inaccurate nor Accurate" a 3, "Moderately Accurate" a 4, and "Very Accurate" a value of 5. For - keyed items, the response "Very Inaccurate" is assigned a value of 5, "Moderately Inaccurate" a value of 4, "Neither Inaccurate nor Accurate" a 3, "Moderately Accurate" a 2, and "Very Accurate" a value of 1. Once numbers are assigned for all of the items in the scale, just sum all the values to obtain a total scale score.

## **3. Semi structured tool for demographic details, and time spent on Social Networking Sites**

The researchers of the study constructed a semi-structured tool to assess the social networking sites being used by the participants, and the number of hours they spent on the same.

The scales were digitized using Google forms and the link to the same was sent to the participants. At the beginning of the online questionnaire, the purpose of the study was intimated to the participants briefly, and their consent to participate in the study was also obtained.

### ***Data Analysis***

We utilized a two-step analysis using Microsoft Excel and Jamovi software. Since the Google Form collected responses in the form of statements, the data was first fed into an Excel sheet and was converted to appropriate numeric scores according to the scoring instructions of each scale. The total scores were also obtained similarly. Subsequently, the numeric data was fed into Jamovi, and was analyzed for descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), correlational statistics and independent sample t-test. The results obtained were exported in a tabular format.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The statistical analysis in this study aimed to examine the validity of the presented hypothesis. Various statistical tools were used to assess the impact of different variables on the population. The obtained results regarding the nature and extent of the relationship between the variables were used to interpret and discuss the hypothesis. The study utilized a sample size of 306 participants, and the statistical tools employed included calculating the mean, t statistics, and Pearson's correlation coefficient. These analyses provided quantitative information about the variables under investigation and their relationships. The resulting analysis outcomes are presented in the following tables, summarizing the statistical findings and their implications for the hypotheses.

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**Table 1: Relationship of Time Spent on Social Media Applications with Extraversion, Emotional Stability and FoMO**

	FoMO	Emotional Stability	Extraversion
<b>Time Spent on SNS</b>	0.232 ***	- 0.266 ***	- 0.036

(here, \*\*\*  $p < .001$ )

Table 1 shows the correlation of time spent on social media applications with extraversion, emotional stability and fear of missing out.

The relationship between time spent on social media applications and the level of FOMO is positive and significant ( $r = 0.232$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This means if a person spends more time on social media applications, they have a higher level of FOMO and vice versa. According to the Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication (Bandura, 2001; Valkenburg et al., 2016), social media use may reinforce certain cognitive, emotional, attitudinal and behavioral aspects of the user. This view emphasizes that social media use may increase the level of an individual's fear of missing out (Slater, 2007; Valkenburg et al., 2016). The amount of information presented on social media increases the visibility of individuals' missed activities. In the process of using it, the individual will experience the feeling of tension, anxiety and being excluded because they learn about a lot of things or activities that they were not involved in, such sense of relative deprivation leads to the emergence of fear of missing out (Baker et al. 2016; Buglass et al. 2017; Hunt et al. 2018). Moreover, because of the ostentatious and exaggerated nature of the information presented on social networking sites, viewing such information also increases the likelihood of social comparisons, making them think that other people's experiences are better than their own, and leading to fear of missing out (Bloemen & Coninck, 2020; Burnell et al., 2019; Yin, Wang, et al., 2019). More importantly, the information displayed on the virtual social platform is only a small part of real life, and can not replace the personal experience of individuals in real life. Therefore, when individuals spend their time online, they will worry more about whether they have missed some important activities or information in the real life, and eventually experienced a sense of fear of missing out (Bruggeman et al., 2019; Coyne et al., 2020; Li & Ma, 2019). Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have found that social media use did positively predict fear of missing out (Buglass et al., 2017; Li & Ma, 2019; Yin, Wang, et al., 2019). Thus, the first hypothesis (H1), stating that 'There will be a significant relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Time Spent on social media applications' has been retained.

It can be observed that there is a significant negative relationship between time spent on social media applications and emotional stability ( $r = -0.266$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, if a person spends more time on social media applications, he or she is less emotionally stable. Our findings are supported by previous research. Research conducted by Setyawan (2016) on early adult subjects showed a significant negative relationship between emotional stability and the duration of social media use. In another study conducted by Pungkasaningtyas (2017) on adolescents who are high school students, it was found that there is also a significant negative relationship between emotional stability of subjects and the duration of social media use. Both research results show a significant negative relationship in the sense that the higher the duration of social media use, the lower the emotional stability, and vice versa. Thus, the second hypothesis (H2) stating that 'There will be a significant relationship between Emotional Stability and Time Spent on social media applications' has been retained.

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There is no significant relationship between the time spent on social media applications and extraversion ( $r = -0.036$ ,  $p = 0.531$ ). This finding is not in line with previous studies. Alan and Kabadayı (2016) focused on identifying the personality traits of Generation Y (Millennials), which affect their social media usage. According to their results, individuals with a high level of extraversion and openness are more inclined to use social media platforms. Suresh (2013) conducted a study of the dynamics between user personality and Facebook use on the Indian population and found that those with lower extraversion had a higher percentage for amount of time on Facebook per day. Another study by Wang and Zhang (2018) found that extroverts were found to linger on SNS's longer daily than introverts did. However, a study by Zia and Malik (2019) found that Introversion was a significant predictor for usage of social media and social networking sites. According to Thomas et al. (2020), high-functioning introverts were found to use social media less as opposed to low functioning introverts. The possible reason for this can be documented by previous research, such as those conducted by McIntyre et al. (2015), who found that being introverted was associated with a lack of social connectedness and a greater likelihood to report compulsive internet use symptoms. Compulsive internet use seems to be prevalent in individuals who lack social connectedness in face-to-face interactions, and it seems that these individuals resort to excessive and maladaptive usage of social media to fulfill that social need. This assumption is further supported by a study done by Garcia et al. (2013) that found that face-to-face interactions can be used as a preventative factor for compulsive internet use. In other words, it seems that to offset increased usage, individuals should increase face-to-face interactions to fulfill their need to affiliate and belong. Thus, the third hypothesis (H3) stating that 'There will be a significant relationship between Extraversion and Time Spent on social media applications' has been rejected.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Independent Sample *t* test between Gen Z and Millennials (Time Spent on SNS)**

Variable	Generation	N	Mean	t statistic	df	p
Time Spent on SNS	Gen Z	156	2.44	3.04*	304	0.003
	Gen Y (Millennials)	150	2.13			

(here, \*:  $p < .05$ )

Table 2 shows the mean of Gen Z and Gen Y for Time Spent on Social Networking Sites (SNS). As observed, the mean for Gen Z is 2.44, while the mean for Gen Y is 2.13. The *t*-statistic obtained (3.04) is significant at the 0.05 level of significance, indicating a statistically significant difference in the time being spent on Social Networking Sites by individuals belonging to Gen Z and Gen Y. Gen Z spends much more time on Social Networking Sites than does Gen Y.

Like all other behavior, the use of social media is affected by individual motives. Within the framework of the Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz et al., 1973; Blumler and Katz, 1974), it has been argued that interpersonal needs can be satisfied through online communications. Social media is a strong contender as it enables individuals to have real-time, interpersonal communication in mediated forms. Although the possibility of being connected with people has considerably increased due to the easy accessibility of social media, it has also become a

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source of anxiety which arises from an exposure to abundance of choices particularly of a social nature. This anticipatory regret of not having chosen the best is understood as the Fear of Missing Out (FoMo). Pittman and Reich (2016) showed that age is a strong determinant of the frequency and quality of an individual's social media usage, and younger people are more comfortable with online communication than adults (Thayer & Ray, 2006). A research done by Duggan et al. (2015) showed that young adults consume social media more than any other age group. Thus, the fourth hypothesis (H4) stating that 'There will be significant differences in the Time Spent on social media applications, between Gen Z and Gen Y' has been retained.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and Independent Sample t test between Gen Z and Millennials (Fear of Missing Out)**

Variable	Generation	N	Mean	t statistic	df	p
FoMO	Gen Z	156	2.35	2.53*	304	0.012
	Gen Y (Millennials)	150	2.14			

(here, \*:  $p < .05$ )

Table 1 shows the mean of Gen Z and Gen Y for "FoMO" (Fear of Missing Out). As observed, the mean for Gen Z is 2.35, while the mean for Gen Y is 2.14. The t-statistic obtained (2.53) is significant at the 0.05 level of significance, indicating a statistically significant difference in the level of FoMO being experienced by individuals belonging to Gen Z and Gen Y. Gen Z experiences a greater level of FoMO than Gen Y. Previous research done on the same constructs show that FoMO occurs mostly in adolescence and early adulthood and mostly occurs in men (Alt, 2015; Dossey, 2013). Another study done by Herawati et al. (2022) shows that the habit of using social media has an impact on the fear of being left behind in Generation Z, and that the use of social media cannot be separated from their life. So, FoMO is one of the characteristics of this generation that distinguishes it from other generations. Another study shows that, when people cannot access their social media accounts, they feel as if they are being socially excluded from a group, which evokes a fear that they are being ostracized (Abel et al., 2016; Rozgonjuk et al., 2020).

According to the Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (I-PACE) model of problematic internet use, (Brand et al., 2016 (b); 2019) background personal variables such as personality, and responses to background variables such as affect, coping, and cognitions can also mediate the relationship between personal variables and use of internet. FoMO has been conceptualized as a maladaptive cognition related to use of social media within the framework of I-PACE. The need to belong is an innate human need and individuals use social media to fulfill this innate need. This is an evolving area of research particularly because digital platforms are increasingly becoming more important.

The self-determination theory (SDT) describes FoMO as an emotional experience when certain psychological needs are not met (Przybylski et al., 2013). According to this theory, self-regulation and psychological health are based on the satisfaction of three needs: the competence to participate in the world, the degree of personal independence, and feelings of social connectedness. There is a link between a shortage of these basic needs, FoMO, and



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social media use. Individuals use SNS to stimulate their social connection and competence, and FoMO therefore acts as a mediator in the relationship between the fulfillment of these basic needs and social media use (Beyens et al., 2016; Przybylski et al., 2013). Blackwell et al. (2017) found that people who demonstrate FoMO are more likely to spend excessive time online because social media enable easy access to social interactions and can increase perceived social involvement, making them ideal platforms for individuals who want to gather information about others (Przybylski et al., 2013). Thus, the fifth hypothesis (H5) stating that 'There will be significant differences in the level of FoMO, between Gen Z and Gen Y' has been retained.

### CONCLUSION

The current research investigated how Extraversion, Emotional Stability and Fear of Missing Out affected daily usage of social media in 2 generations, Gen-Z and Gen Y (Millennials). The construct of FOMO has been confirmed to play an important role in the development of maladaptive mobile phone use and its negative consequences for adolescents. It is interesting to know how factors such as personality play a role in the development of this tendency. The relationship between social media use, fear of missing out, and its relationship to personality is not only controversial in theory, but also inconsistent in the results of empirical studies. Given that both of them are relatively common in real life and will have an important impact on people's work and life, the relationship between these variables has important reference value for reasonable guidance of social media use and education correction or community intervention of fear of missing out.

Future research can make use of qualitative research paradigms, especially phenomenological approaches to look at subjective manifestations of Fear of Missing Out. Further attempts can be made to study the relationship between Extraversion and FoMO. Possible cause and effect relationships can be established by making use of an experimental design. Future research can also look at causes and effective management of FoMO and the effects of interventional strategies like those of CBT.

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The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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