

Generational Development of Self-Concept Through the Lens of Social Media Usage

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ABSTRACT

Self-concept is an individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is. Increased usage of smartphones in recent years is becoming more problematic and interests several researchers. This excessive use of mobile phones may lead to a lower level of self-concept in individuals. The aim of the study is to assess the difference in levels of self-concept of Gen X (1965-1979 or 39-54 years old) individuals and Gen Z (1997-2012 or 7-22 years old) individuals. To get qualitative insights about the underlying causes and factors about the same, 50 participants were administered Robson's Self-Concept Questionnaire to compare the levels of self-concept in individuals. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), t-test was used to further examine the data. The obtained results revealed a statistically significant difference between the self-concept of two sub groups.

Keywords: *Self-concept, smartphones, Gen X, Gen Z*

The development of self concept begins at toddlerhood. A child starts recognizing self from his/her surroundings, which mainly includes interaction, behavior and roles. Basically, self concept consists of an individual's values and beliefs about oneself. Perception of self is what makes an individual unique. In other words, it is conceptual and mental understanding that one holds for self. It is how you know and understand yourself.

One's self concept is influenced by social interaction. The difference that generations have made is based on the basis of accepting and deciding what they have to do. The individual's belief about themselves, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is (Baumeister, 1999). Throughout childhood and adolescence, the self-concept turns out to be more abstract and complex and is organized into a variety of different cognitive aspects of the self. An individual tries to explore his uniqueness and encompasses awareness of self. Having a healthy self-concept may lead to a great sense of worthiness and maximization of one's potential.

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According to Carl Rogers (1959), self-concept has three components viz. self image, self esteem and ideal self. Self image is how one sees himself. It can be affected by many factors such as peer group, parental influence, media, etc. Self esteem refers to the extent to which an individual accepts and values oneself. One may have either a positive or negative view of themselves. An ideal self is how a person wants to be. To be a better person, we all have our ideal self.

As we all can see how much technology has improvised in outer years. Today's generation is taking full advantage of available technologies. For instance, everything is easily accessible through the internet. Social media is the most used stage for sharing one's own thoughts, ideas, experiences, and opinions. Also, sometimes people misinterprets the situation. And some show their different selves based on the others or situation. People do try to understand each other's perspectives. They may learn something out of it. This makes people think of their better self or ideal self.

On the other hand, 1970s generation has different perspectives. At that time, technology wasn't involved in day-to-day life. They don't as such believe in technology as a great advantage. They believe in interacting with people in person. They tend to take advice from elders and try to work it in. People do not want to be dependent on technology based platforms. With the ascent of technology more individuals can associate with one another, while older people are intimidated by the innovation and internet based-life. There is an enormous hole in technology between these ages that makes it hard for them to get into it.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Alarming levels of smartphone usage comes with high chances of addiction and several other mental health issues like depression or anxiety. Both Gen X and Gen Z in previous researches have proved to be vulnerable to this phenomenon. Following studies shows how smartphone usage affects the self-concept of individuals of different age groups.

Giarla (2019) stated that Generation Xers feels as if technology and social media platforms take much of the time of their children and grandchildren, and they can no longer "live in the moment" with them without snapchatting or posting on the internet. Due to this behavior, their day to day conversation also hampers in some form or the other. It was also seen that Gen X is more engaged in using social networking sites to interact with friends online, exchange family photos, or perhaps join chat rooms or forums for political debates.

She also mentioned that Excessive use and access by young minds to social media and technology has led to serious psychological side effects, leaving this generation more vulnerable to psychological issues and anti-social behaviour. Generation Z questions this basic human trait by restricting their contact with the physical environment and focusing their attention on their digital environments. This creates a hindrance while building and maintaining relationships in-person.

Geffet and Blau (2016) aimed at comparing the reasons that smartphone addiction can forecast for different age groups. They collected data from three generations: Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z. The results of their study revealed Gen Z had a higher level of significance for the emotional gain from smartphone use, which represents user satisfaction and positive emotions along with relief of negative feelings and mental condition.

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According to Gonzales and Hancock (2011), using FB is a technique to satisfy the self-worth motive, as it brings fundamental aspects of the self-concept to consciousness of an individual. The frequency of FB use was found to be positively correlated with a need to belong (Utz et al., 2012), to lessen feelings of loneliness, to be similarly associated with offline relationships (Lou, 2010) and to sustain long-distance relations (Billedo, Kerkhof & Finkenauer, 20).

Manzi et al (2017) found out Face book profiles might help teenagers improve and reinforce the satisfaction of identity motives and, in that sense, the FB profile becomes an essential component of the identity building process. The respondents preferred to use FB because their FB profile helped them fulfil their fundamental identity motives of self-esteem, efficacy, continuity and affiliation. This method was remarkably like that for adolescents and adults.

Barker (2012) found that, irrespective of age, respondents reporting high collective self-esteem and group identity were more inclined to use social networking sites to gratify peer communication and social identity, while those reporting negative collective self-esteem were more likely to use social networking sites to compensate.

In the context from the above discussion, following objective was sought out for the present study:

1. To compare the level of self-concept in Gen X and Gen Z participants
2. To study how one's self concept is influenced by the usage of SNS

Based on our present research, following hypothesis were proposed:

- H0: Gen X will have a higher level of self-concept when compared to Gen Z participants.

METHOD

Sample

For present study, primary data collection was used where in a sample of 50 individuals (n=50), 25 Gen X respondents and 25 Gen Z respondents of age group 39-54 and 7-22 years were selected through purposive and convenience sampling. The participants selected for the research were fluent in English and resided in urban settings. An online google form was created which consisted of a self-concept questionnaire and was sent to the participants for their ease and comfort.

Tools used

The research study performed the **Self-Concept Questionnaire (SCQ)** on the participants, designed and standardized by Robson. The SCQ is a scale that measures the self-concept of everyone (Robson, 1989). It consists of 30 items (e.g. "I have control over my life," "I feel emotionally mature," "even if others don't," I can like myself). Per theoretical and empirical information reviewed by Robson (1988), the items are based on seven components of self-esteem. The scoring is performed on a scale of eight points, ranging from entire disagreement to complete agreement. Individuals are asked to indicate how much they agree with each statement or disagree with it, by how they generally feel. The responses are rated on a scale of 0-7, and it generates a total score. A high score reflects a high self-esteem, with a standard deviation of 20 (Romans et al., 1996; Robson, 1989) being considered the "average" mean of 140. This measure was earlier used in studies with individuals with psychosis (e.g., Close and Garety, 1998; Freeman et al., 1998) and is highly correlated with

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Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem measure (Robson, 1989). The SCQ has been proven to have good reliability (Cronbach's α of .89) and good validity (clinical validity of .70; i.e.). Ata(2005) report that SCQ has very internal consistency, ranging from .94 to .97.

Design

A cross-sectional study was conducted between different generations of individuals to assess self-concept levels and how it is influenced by smartphone usage and social media.

RESULTS

Table 1 represents the significance of Gen X and Gen Z population at 0.05 level i.e. $0.024 < 0.05$. As it can be observed in the table that the group means are statistically significantly different because the value in the "Sig. (2-tailed)" row is less than 0.05. Looking at the group statistics table, we can see that Gen X has a higher self-concept than that of Gen Z. Therefore, our hypothesis is accepted/ proved. There is a significant difference between the self-concept of Gen X smartphone users and Gen Z smartphone users.

Table 1: Group Statistics

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Gen Z	25	124.4000	24.77734	4.95547
Gen X	25	141.5200	27.13258	5.42652

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test

		Equal Variances assumed	Equal Variances not assumed	
Levene's Test for equality of variances	F	0.214		
	Sig.	0.646		
t-test for equality of means	t	2.330	2.330	
	df	48	47.610	
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.024	0.024	
	Mean difference	-17.12000	-17.12000	
	Std. Error difference	7.34872	7.34872	
	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower Upper	-31.89560 -2.34440	-31.89873 -2.34127

*. t-test is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION

The present study was conceptualised as a comparative study between Gen X individuals and Gen Z individuals. Researchers used a cross sectional design aimed at measuring the differences between the self-concept of two generations, namely Generation X (Born between 1965-1979) and Generation Z (Born between 1995-2012) and how the use of smartphones affects themselves. Robson's Self-Concept Questionnaire was administered on the participants to assess the same.

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The whole present study's theoretical contributions lay in the conclusion that self-concept of an individual is hampered when he or she has access to smartphones and even to various Social Networking Sites (SNS) like Facebook or Instagram, they feel the need to connect with the world instantly, and upload every life moment of theirs on a social media platform. However, several studies have revealed that Gen Z is more active than Gen X about the use of Smartphone's and SNS and is more susceptible to comparisons of each other's lives that they portray on social media, and they are more affected by the number of followers and likes they get daily on their social media accounts.

As hypothesized, Gen Z will have a lower amount of self-concept when compared to Gen X's level of self-concept. The result obtained also confirms our hypothesis, where the difference of self-concept in both the generations is statistically significant. This could be due to several reasons including, during the developing years of Gen X, there were hardly any mobile phones, and the only way people could communicate was through landlines or handwritten letters. People also had a very little amount of exposure to the real world as television or radio with one or two channels and limited newspapers were their only source of information of what was going around in the world. Mobile technology advancement allows for Internet access via smartphones. The generation in which these individuals grew was a lot different from today, while they started earning in their late teen or early 20s nowadays people often study till their 30s. Gen X also married at an early age which often burdened them with many other responsibilities and had zero time to consider other's business and what was going on with them. Difference in parenting styles could also be a contributing factor to the same as parents themselves at that time, could not use mobile phones as there was lack of easy accessibility, families used to spend time with each other in person and would chat with their friends or colleagues through letters, but as we see a shift in the society, this tradition has faded over the years., people are more into video calls these days and prefer to sit in their homes generally on their smartphones and not interacting in-person.

Researchers also assumed that Gen Z will have a lower level of self-concept dependent on mobile phone usage. Several reasons that led to this assumption are, as the society is developing at a very rapid rate, it also demands the development of its members, nowadays people can connect to any part of the world within a few seconds, and however this was not the scenario 20 years back. Leung (2008) investigated the relationship between Smartphone addiction and psychological attributes amongst adolescents and found that participants who scored low on self-esteem reported the most improper use of the mobile phone. Friendship and relationship patterns have also changed over the years, nowadays people prefer friends who are of the same socio economic status and who match them in every single manner, if they fail to do so, they are either thrown out of the group or are made to feel embarrassed. They often portray themselves or their lives in a completely different manner on social media due to the fear of being judged or compared to other people or even often end up comparing themselves with celebrities or popular kids from school or college. Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2006) examined social media websites for friends, wellbeing, and self-esteem, and found that the frequency with which adolescents use social networking sites affects their social self-esteem and well-being. Some of the perspectives of self-esteem and well-being, including peer involvement and self-related feedback, are more likely to happen on social networking sites than most other internet features. Also, the competition level has increased so much in the past years that one often ends up comparing him/herself and becomes self-criticizing, one might also view themselves from the eyes of others and evaluate from other's perspective.

CONCLUSION

Self-concept is a state of how and what an individual perceives, thinks and evaluates about oneself. The present study revealed that self-concept of Gen X individuals is higher than that of Gen Z individuals. The study concludes that there are several factors that influence the self-concept of an individual regardless of their age or gender; it could be external or maybe internal for both the sub groups.

The limitations of the present study included a small sample size. The nature of the study was quantitative hence it limited the scope of analysis and overall approach of the study. It was also seen that many participants must have given socially desirable answers. Another limitation was that researchers only took up one variable for the study i.e. age.

Suggestions for future research includes taking up a larger sample size with different variables like, age, gender, ethnicity, culture etc. Various qualitative techniques can be employed such as in-depth interviews, focused group discussion, and observations. Researchers could also do an in-depth cross generational study of Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z and Millennial for future research purpose.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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