



# The Association Between Social Media Addiction and Mental Health Among Generation Z: A Cross-sectional Study in University X – West Sumatera, Indonesia

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Track Record Article	Abstract
<p>Revised: 8 May 2025 Accepted: 18 June 2025 Published: 30 June 2025</p> <p><b>How to cite :</b> Novnariza, E., Pradipta, Y., Henda, S. A. D., &amp; Shabrina, A. J. (2025). The Association Between Social Media Addiction and Mental Health Among Generation Z: A Cross-sectional Study in University X – West Sumatera, Indonesia. <i>Contagion : Scientific Periodical of Public Health and Coastal Health</i>, 7(1), 286–298.</p>	<p><i>Mental health issues among adolescents in Indonesia are significant public health concern, with the prevalence rate reported 9.8%. Advances in information technology and widespread use of social media are factors that bring benefits as well as adverse effects on adolescent mental health. The study aimed to examine the association between social media addiction and the mental health of Generation Z college students. We used a cross-sectional study on May-July 2024 in University X, West Sumatera Province. The sample was 140 students based on Lemeshow's sample size formula. We conducted purposive sampling in 15 faculties proportionally. Data were collected through interviews using structured questionnaires adopted from Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) and Self Report Questionnaire (SRQ)-20. Data were analyzed using linear regression test with 95% Confidence Interval. The Majority of respondents were female (60%), from 2023 cohort (26.43%), and lived in a boarding house (76.43%). The most frequently used social media by respondents were: Instagram (68.6%), TikTok (55%), and WhatsApp (50%). The most significant relationship (<math>p\text{-value} &lt; 0.001</math>) was found between social media addiction and students' mental health adjusted by gender, residential, and admission year of students. These findings suggest that social media addiction related to mental health issues among college students. It is recommended that the university collaborate with the health service to conduct regular screening and mental health assesment for students.</i></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> College Students, Generation Z, Mental Health, Social Media Addiction</p>

## INTRODUCTION

Mental health issues at a young age in Indonesia are currently a challenge and require serious attention to be addressed. Globally, one in seven children aged 10-19 years experience mental health disorders, which is 13% of the global burden of disease in this age group. Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of disease and disability among adolescents today. Meanwhile, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in the 15-29 age group. Failure to address mental health conditions in adolescents will have negative consequences until adulthood. This can also worsen the physical and mental health of adolescents and lead to limited opportunities to live a fulfilling life in adulthood (World Health Organization, 2024).

The results of the 2018 Basic Health Research show that the prevalence of severe mental disorders is 1.7 per thousand households, which means that there are seven households per 1000 households with people with mental disorders (ODGJ), which is estimated to be

around 450 thousand severe ODGJ. Meanwhile, the prevalence of depression in the population aged  $\geq 15$  years is 6.1% (12 million people aged  $> 15$  years). Other data shows that emotional and mental disorders with symptoms of depression and anxiety detected in the population aged  $\geq 15$  years are experienced by 9.8% of the population, or more than 19 million people (Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2020).

Indonesia is currently in a demographic bonus period. Based on the 2020 census data, the composition of the Indonesian population is mainly from Generation Z (27.94%), namely the generation born between 1997 and 2012. The millennial generation, predicted to be the driving force of today's social movement, is slightly below Gen Z, which is 25.87% of the total population of Indonesia. Therefore, the existence of Gen Z and millennials has an important role and can influence Indonesia's future development (Pusat Standar dan Kebijakan Pendidikan, 2021).

With the increase in the number of young people, especially in the age range  $\geq 15$  years or productive age in general, this condition is also inseparable from the problems that accompany it; if referring to the prevalence of mental disorders and depression, which is almost around 10%, then the increase in the composition of the young population also has the potential to experience an increase in the number of mental health disorders in the younger generation (Puspitarini & Nuraeni, 2019).

Students are in the age group of teenagers approaching adulthood, which currently includes Generation Z. They often face pressure in terms of academics, social, family, economy, and other aspects. Technological advances due to globalization also have significant influences on the pressure experienced by students because apart from being able to create convenient information, there are also negative impacts, such as trends and social comparison (Puspitarini & Nuraeni, 2019).

Many factors contribute to the increasing number of mental health disorders experienced by today's young generation. The younger generation is accustomed to being more expressive in prioritizing desires and more dynamic for things that are up to date, including in the field of work that is more challenging and high-risk. However, in general, they do not yet have the skills and confidence to manage the environmental uncertainty that often occurs, so they tend to be more anxious about living life.

Generation Z was born and raised in an overprotective parenting style amidst uncertain world conditions, including economic recession, digital transformation, and invasions in several countries, including natural disasters and also disease outbreaks. Therefore, in adulthood, Gen Z becomes less tolerant of environmental uncertainty due to an overprotected

childhood. This is confirmed by the results of a study by the American Psychological Association quoted in *Media Literacy for Digital Natives: Perspectives of Generation Z in Jakarta* (2018), that the ability to manage stress and achieve a healthy lifestyle is decreasing in each generation. If this phenomenon continues in the future, Gen Z will be the most stressed generation in history. This condition is also related to the character of Gen Z, who has no boundaries with other individuals, making it possible for them to be quickly unstable because they receive exposure to information and conditions that change quickly and randomly (Rastati, 2018).

Along with the development of the era with globalization and rapid technological developments, the use of digital platforms such as social media is increasingly massive among Gen Z as a medium for interaction, socializing, entertainment media, and exchanging information in everyday life. The positive impacts of the use of social media among Gen Z are also accompanied by negative impacts such as addiction to gadget use, sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, stress, and even the potential for suicide. The mental condition of Gen Z, which is still unstable and in a period of behavior searching for identity, makes them vulnerable to mental health disorders due to exposure to content and information containing negative trends that are widely scattered on various social media platforms, especially if the intensity of social media use is high, so a better understanding is needed in overcoming this phenomenon.

Several studies have conducted to assess the social media addiction among high school students and college students. The qualitative study in England found that social media as a threat to mental wellbeing among students aged 11-18 years, and some student experienced mood and anxiety disorders and viewed social media as a platform for cyberbullying (O'Reilly et al., 2018). In Turkey, Unal-Aslan & Tar found that there was significant positive correlation between social media addiction and mental disorders among adolescent nursing students (Ünal Aslan & Tar, 2021). Other study also reported that increasing social media addiction will decrease prosocial behaviours (Sümen & Evgin, 2021).

Meanwhile in Indonesia, the study that conducted in Pekanbaru City found that the social media addiction has significant relationship with mental health among junior high school students (Amirah et al., 2023). On the other study, there is negative effects of Social Media Twitter to the mental and health among the high school students (Hastuti et al., 2023). Although global studies have reported an association between social media usage and mental health problems among adolescents, limited research in the Indonesian context—particularly among Generation Z college students—has empirically examined this relationship using standardized mental health assessment tools. Based on the background that has been described previously,

the formulation of the problem in this study is how is the relationship between the use of social media and emotional mental disorders in Generation Z.

## METHODS

This type of research is quantitative research with a cross-sectional study design. The research was conducted on May-July 2024 in University X, West Sumatera Province, Indonesia. The population of this study were all the undergraduate students in University X. We used Lemeshow's Sample Size Formula to determine the minimum sample size in this study. The sample was 140 students selected proportionally from 15 faculties. We used purposive sampling technique to meet the eligible respondents.

Data were collected by using a structured questionnaire with informed consent. The Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ), consisting of 20 questions, was used to measure mental health among college students. In contrast, the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) questionnaire was used to measure the level of addiction on social media with Internal consistency coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) was 0.967. Test-retest reliability co-efficient was found to be 0,84. SMAS consists of 4 parts: occupation, mood modification, relapse, and conflict, with 41 statements (Tutgun-Ünal & Deniz, 2015). Independent samples T-Test was conducted to examine the mean differences of SRQ's mean score based on gender and residential. One-way Anova was used to identificate the different of SRQ's mean score between admission year of students, and Pearson's correlation test was conducted to determine the relationship between social media addiction and mental health. Multiple linear regression with 95% Confidence Interval was conducted to predict mental health among college students. Data were analyzed by using open software Epi Info 7.

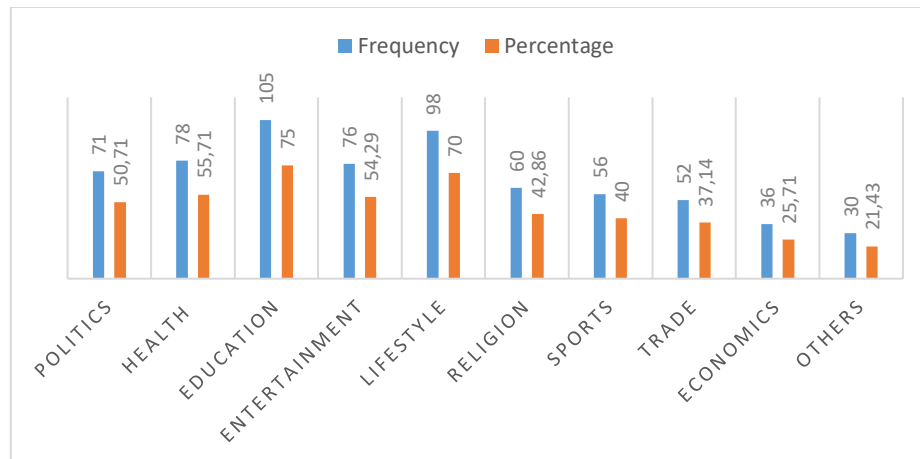
## RESULTS

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents (60%) are female, most of whom come from the faculty of economics and business (13.57%), from 2023 cohort (26.43%), and live in boarding houses (76.43%). Judging from the question of the duration of social media use by each respondent, it is known that the majority of respondents most often use Instagram (68.6%), TikTok (55%), and WhatsApp (50%). Most of respondents have SRQ's score equal and more than six points (54 %), so it can be concluded that they are having mental health issues. There were 140 students participate in this study, with the following characteristics:

**Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents (n=140)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency (n=140)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	56	40,00
Female	85	60,00
<b>Faculty</b>		
Economics	19	13.57
Pharmacy	3	2.14
Law	12	8.57
Culture	10	7.14
Political and Social Science	15	10.71
Medical	10	7.14
Dentistry	2	1.43
Nursing	4	2.86
Public Health	6	4.29
Mathematics and Nature	8	5.71
Agriculture	15	10.71
Husbandry	10	7.14
Engineer	15	10.71
Informatics	5	3.57
Agriculture Technology	6	4.29
<b>Admission Year</b>		
2020	36	25,71
2021	12	8,57
2022	33	23,57
2023	37	26,43
2024	22	15,71
<b>Residential</b>		
Parent's house	33	23,57
Boarding house	107	76,43
<b>Most frequent used Social Media</b>		
Instagram	96	68,57
Tiktok	77	55,00
WhatsApp	70	50,00
X	22	15,71
<b>Mental Health</b>		
Normal (score 0-5)	64	46,00
Risky (score $\geq 6$ )	76	54,00

Based on figure 1, it is known that the content most accessed on social media by respondents in this study was education (75%), lifestyle (70%), health (55.71%), entertainment (54.29%), while economics and other content was the lowest.



**Figure 1. Type of Content Accessed**

**Table 2. Distribution of SMAS dan SRQ**

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
SMAS	20.66	7.91	1	40
SRQ	6.75	4.36	0	20

Table 2 showed distribution of SMAS have 20.66 average score with deviation standard 7.91, minimum score is 1 and maximum score 40. Meanwhile the distribution of SRQ have 6.75 average score with deviation standard 4.36, minimum score is 0 and maximum score 40.

**Table 3. Statistical Results of Hypothesis Test for Independent Variables**

Variables	Mean $\pm$ SD	p-value
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	6.357 $\pm$ 4.558	0.387 <sup>a</sup>
Female	7.011 $\pm$ 4.241	
<b>Residential</b>		
With Parents	7.424 $\pm$ 3.968	0.312 <sup>a</sup>
Boarding house	6.542 $\pm$ 4.479	
<b>Admission Year</b>		
2020	6.138 $\pm$ 3.373	0.054 <sup>b</sup>
2021	5.083 $\pm$ 4.378	
2022	8.606 $\pm$ 5.165	
2023	6.702 $\pm$ 4.248	
2024	5.954 $\pm$ 4.157	

<sup>a</sup> Independent Sample T-Test

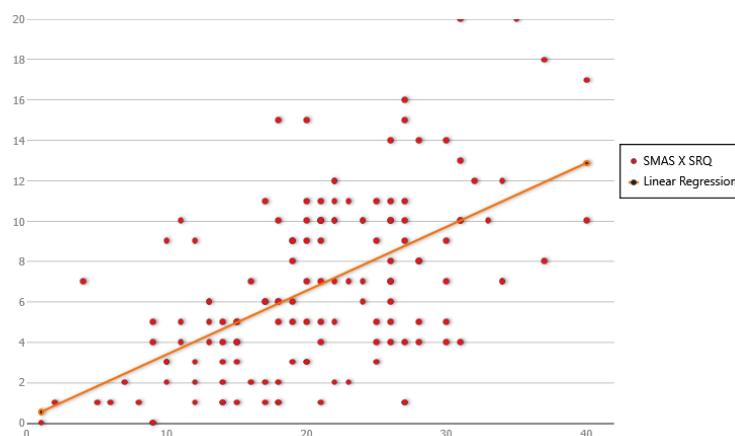
<sup>b</sup> One-way Anova

Based on the data analysis, the T-test result showed that mean of SRQ's score of female higher than male, but statistically there is no significant difference between gender variables with students' SRQ assessment results ( $p=0.387$ ). The student's who live with parents have higher mean of SRQ's score than student who live in boarding house. However, there is no relationship between the residential with the SRQ score in this study ( $p=0.312$ ).

**Table 4. Pearson's correlation test of Social Media Addiction and Mental Health**

Variables	p-value	r
Social Media Addiction	<0.0001 *	0.573

A pearson correlation test obtained a value of  $p < 0.0001$  and  $r = 0.573$ , which means that there is a positive correlation between social media addiction with mental health of college students. The results also showed that the higher the level of addiction on social media, the higher the mental health problems. The distribution of SMAS score and SRQ-20 score showed by scatter graph on figure 2 below:

**Figure 2. Scatter Plot Graph of the SMAS and SRQ**

We conducted the multiple linear regression analysis to predict the variable that contributed to mental health issues among college students. The results showed on table 5 below:

**Table 5. Multivariable Regression of Mental Health among College Students**

Variables	B	SE	p-value	95% CI
Social Media Addiction	0.327	0.038	<0.0001	0.250 - 0.404
Gender	0.631	0.621	0.311	-0.597 - 1.860
Admission Year	0.396	0.215	0.068	-0.030 - 0.823
Residential	-0.450	0.718	0.532	-1.870 - 0.969

\* $R\text{-squared} = 0.35$

Table 5 showed that social media addiction is the most significant factors that related to mental health among college students ( $p < 0.0001$ ). The value of  $R\text{-squared} = 0.35$  indicated that social media addiction contribute to 35% mental health issues among college students.

## DISCUSSION

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and self-reported instruments e.g SRQ-20 may introduce response bias. Moreover, the sample was limited to a single university, thus limiting generalizability to broader student populations.

## **Mental Health among College Students**

Mental health is a person's state of well-being when a person is aware of his/her abilities, can manage stress, adapt well, work productively, and contribute to his/her environment (World Health Organization, 2022). Based on the assessment conducted with the SRQ-20 questionnaire, the majority (54%) of students have been indicated to have mental health issues. This is in line with research conducted in Bogor City, which found that 65.5% of college students had experienced moderate mental health disorders and 17.2% in the high category (Sa'diyah et al., 2022). Other study reported that intensity of social media usage has a positive correlation with stress level among college students. Symptoms of stress that are often experienced by students are easily annoyed (27.5%), impatient (25%), difficulty resting (18.5%), difficulty calming down after something disturbing (27.5%) and easily anxious (27.5%) (Gunawan et al., 2021).

Based on the results, the most frequently used social media among students are Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. This aligns with study in Bandung City, which shows that Instagram is the favorite social media platform for students, followed by TikTok (Astuti et al., 2022). Instagram is a social media platform launched in 2010 and is used to express oneself, build a digital identity, and establish social relationships. Since TikTok launched in 2016 and provides a short video-sharing service, it has become increasingly popular because it is trending and provides creative audio-visual content. Instagram and TikTok are also designed with algorithms that can display content that may interest users (Wiwesa et al., 2023).

As a result, these social media have become the choice for getting instant entertainment for the global community. However, more social media account on the different platforms also affect the engagement the students to their gadget and duration of usage. They have spent the most of their time to explore the content on different social media platform, which is difficult to filtered from uneducated content, and it will affect the way of thinking, decision making, and student's social life.

## **The Relationship Between Gender and Mental Health**

This study found that the distribution of mental health disorders was more common in female students. In female students who were the majority of respondents, more than half were indicated to have mental health disorders. In the male gender, students indicated to be expected and had disorders, which were the same number. However, the results of statistical tests in this study showed that there was no relationship between gender and the mental health of students. This shows that mental health disorders can be a risk for both women and men.



Data on social media users in Indonesia in 2024 shows that the percentage of female and male social media users is not much different. Female social media users are 51.3%, while male social media users are 49.7% (Panggabean, 2024). This is in line with the research in Banyuwangi District which found that there was no relationship between gender and levels of depression among college students (Aidi et al., 2021). Likewise, other research also stated that there was no relationship between student gender and their anxiety level (Assyifa et al., 2023). This might be caused by similarities in the academic workload and activities between female and male students. The tight schedule of lectures, assignments, practicals and exams often puts pressure on students to complete their studies well. Apart from that, non-academic activities that students participate in, such as student organizations, also provide social dynamics, conflict, and have the potential to cause physical and mental fatigue.

### **The Relationship between Residential and Mental Health of Students**

Students who live alone have challenges adapting to new environments (Anggriani & Agus Arswimba, 2023). In this study, it was found that the majority of respondents who experienced mental disorders were students who lived in boarding house. Living alone requires students to be more independent in managing daily needs, finances, and academics, which can increase stress levels. However, this study found that there is no significant relationship between residential and mental health among students.

The results of this study in Kuningan District that there is a significant relationship between residence and mental health among college students (Wulan et al., 2023). Difficulty on adapting to a new environment is also a risk factor for mental health (Gunandar & Utami, 2017). Family as a support system can support the learning process and provide moral support for students. The support provided can be in the form of information support, advice and suggestions to solve problems. However, it is not necessarily true that students who live alone in boarding houses are more prone to mental health problems, this is due to the presence of peers who also live in the same boarding house, who can help and provide input if there is a problem, and provide a sense of brotherhood because they live in the same boarding house (Wulan et al., 2023).

### **The Relationship Between Social Media Addiction and Mental Health**

The advancement of information technology and the flow of globalization are increasingly increasing digital literacy, one of which is the widespread use of social media among young people, including students and college students. Social media that is not used wisely and excessively becomes a potential problem if there is no control, especially amidst the onslaught of harmful and uneducational content that can cause mental health disorders in

its users. Previous research on the relationship between social media dependence and student's mental health has provided insight into how students' social media management is related to their mental health conditions, especially the ability to manage emotions, time, and stress. Wise and moderate use of social media can positively impact the mental well-being of the younger generation, including students.

The overuse of social media can lead to sleep disruption, social comparison, and reduced offline interaction with parents and friend, which in turn contribute to FOMO (fear out missing out), emotional distress and anxiety. Mental health issues among students also contribute to decreasing academic performance and social life as the students. It is relevant with the systematic review study that found the intensity of general stress has a negative impact to academic performance (Richardson et al., 2012).

The theory of planned behavior explained that intentions to perform different kind of behaviors be predicted with attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of social media addiction, students access social media to interact with friends, share photos and videos, and some post content showing their daily activities. In addition, uploaded social media posts can lead to showing off behavior to gain recognition from others. The type of content accessed can also affect social media usage behavior, such as entertainment content, podcasts, and gossip, so that the more it is accessed, the more curiosity about something will increase, and can spend more time using social media.

One of the studies conducted in West Java Province found that the use of twitter (one of social media platform) related to the mental health of adolescents. This negative effect is likely triggered by the mental and emotional conditions of adolescents who are not yet stable and vulnerable if they continue to receive damaging information and content on social media. In addition, environmental factors such as relationships with peers and family have the potential to be disrupted as a side effect of excessive and continuous use of social media without being able to be controlled (Hastuti et al., 2023).

Other research also found that most students (71.9%) were addicted to social media, where their thoughts, feelings, and behavior are dominated by their desire to continue using social media. One of the adolescent behaviors that appears as a result of excessive use of social media is hyperactivity, namely being unable to sit still, restless, and speaking out of context (Amirah et al., 2023). The results of this study highlight the urgent need for universities to implement mental health screening and digital literacy programs. Collaboration between campus health services and student affairs is crucial to mitigate the negative impacts of excessive social media use.

## CONCLUSIONS

Social media addiction has a significant relationship with the mental health of generation Z in University X. The higher the level of addiction, the higher the risk of mental health issues among college students. However, this study has several limitations, cross-sectional study design that used restricts the causal inference, so longitudinal study was necessary to explore the psychological impact of social media overuse.

Increasing awareness of the negative impacts of social media dependency and wise campaigns in using social media is important for the younger generation especially college students, considering the risk of mental health disorders due to excessive use of social media. We recommend to strengthening collaboration between Health services and university to conduct the screening for student's mental and emotional health, to provide the counseling services for student with excessive social media use and mental health issues, and integrating digital literacy and mental health on Smart and Healthy Campus Program.

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