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INTRODUCTION

Over usage of Social Networking Sites has led to certain negative consequences. The study found more than 40% of Instagram users who reported feeling “unattractive” said it began on the app; about a quarter of the teenagers experienced a feeling of “inadequacy” which started on Instagram (The Guardian, 2021). Generation Z (born between 1995-2012) is, particularly showing a rise in addiction to social media, resulting in transformation of their behavior (Sharma, Kaushal and Joshi, 2023). This article will mainly explore negative sides of social media on Gen Z in Uzbekistan, with a focus on three main areas including cyberbullying, mental health and communication skills.

Key words: Generation Z, Social media, Mental health, Cyberbullying, Communication skills, Uzbekistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Statista in 2024, the most used social media platform as of April is Facebook with 3,065 (in millions) users worldwide and Instagram with

2,000 active users. Watchdog groups have identified these two platforms as a place for cyberbullying which in turn contributes to mental health and decline in communication skills. There is a provision of sufficient data about the impact of social media on mental health, cyberbullying and communication skills in a global scale. This literature review aims to explore the global and regional data on these topics, whether similar trends correspond with Uzbek context.

Global trends.

According to statistics in 2023, 4,9 billion people use social media platforms. It has been calculated that average person spends 145 minutes every day (UC Davis Health, 2024). SNS started to serve as a tool of connecting people together, yet it is reflecting the opposite impact at the same time (Mateuzs Brodowicz, 2024).

Mental Health. Mental Health. As a result of over usage of social media, 39% of social media users in America admitted their addiction and 59% of adults have seen its negative affect on their mental health in the ways of sleep disturbances, isolation and anxiety (Butler Hospital, 2024). The excessive usage of social media could further result in continuous sleep issues and physical inactivity, while a main factor which contributes to depression is a lack of physical health (World Health Organization, 2023). “Sleep disorders are very common and most cases cause mental health problems. However, there is pretty much less attention given on sleep trainings by psychologists,” said Jennifer Mundt, PhD, director of the Northwestern University Behavioral Sleep Medicine Training Program. Poor sleep quality is known to contribute to cognitive impairments, emotional instability, and higher stress levels.

Cyberbullying. Research conducted by Pandey and Sharma (2022) shows that one in every 3 young people from around 30 countries experienced cyberbullying and it had a considerable negative impact on their mental health. According to Pew Research Centre, 59% of teenagers in the U.S have experienced at least one form of cyberbullying, name-calling being the most common type (Anderson, 2018). Furthermore, a report provided by Englander (2021) indicates

that victims of cyberbullying are mostly susceptible to face issues including depression, anxiety and isolation.

Communication Skills. According to statistics of Business Insider 2018, there were 1000 surveyed teenagers aged 13 and 17, 61% of them preferred connecting with their friends online rather than communicating face-to-face. Virtual interaction does not develop empathy the same as face-to-face communication does, thus individual's ability to communicate in the real world is decreasing (Mateuzs Brodowicz, 2024).

Regional trends

According to statistics given by Data Reportal, social media users in Uzbekistan amounted to 8.70 million in January 2024, equating to 24.6 % of the total population. In the very beginning of 2024, there has seen an activeness of 33.81 million in cellular mobile connections which equivalent to 95.5 percent of the total population. Likely to international trends, Instagram is considered as the most used platform in Uzbekistan, accumulating 42,4 percent (Stats Counter, 2024).

Despite the evidence of usage of social media in Uzbekistan, we could not find relevant findings of its negative effects contributing to the issues of mental health, communication and cyberbullying because of the gap in the regional data. Therefore, there is a need to conduct primary research and identify if there is a presence of these challenges among Gen Z in Uzbekistan.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed method is applied in this study including both primary and secondary research.

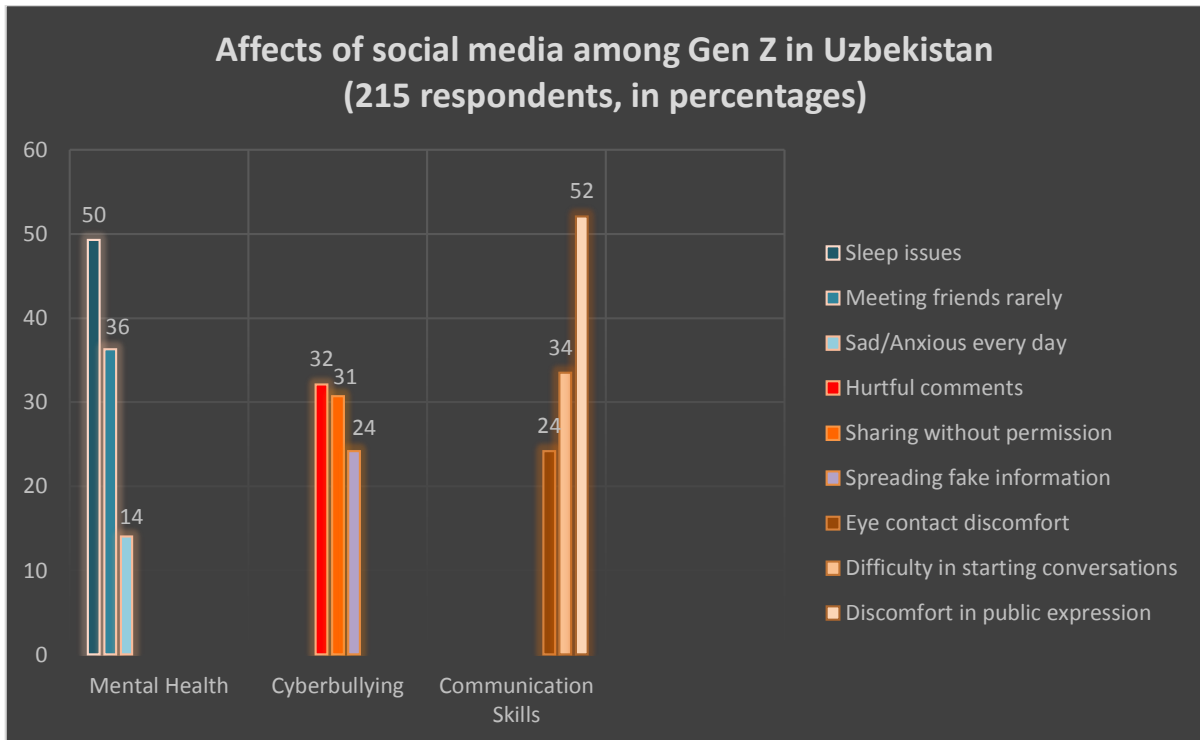
Primary research

Survey is selected as primary research focusing on four main areas: demographics, mental health, cyberbullying and communication skills. It is targeted at collecting 200 responses from participants aged 12-29 who affiliates to the category of Gen Z.

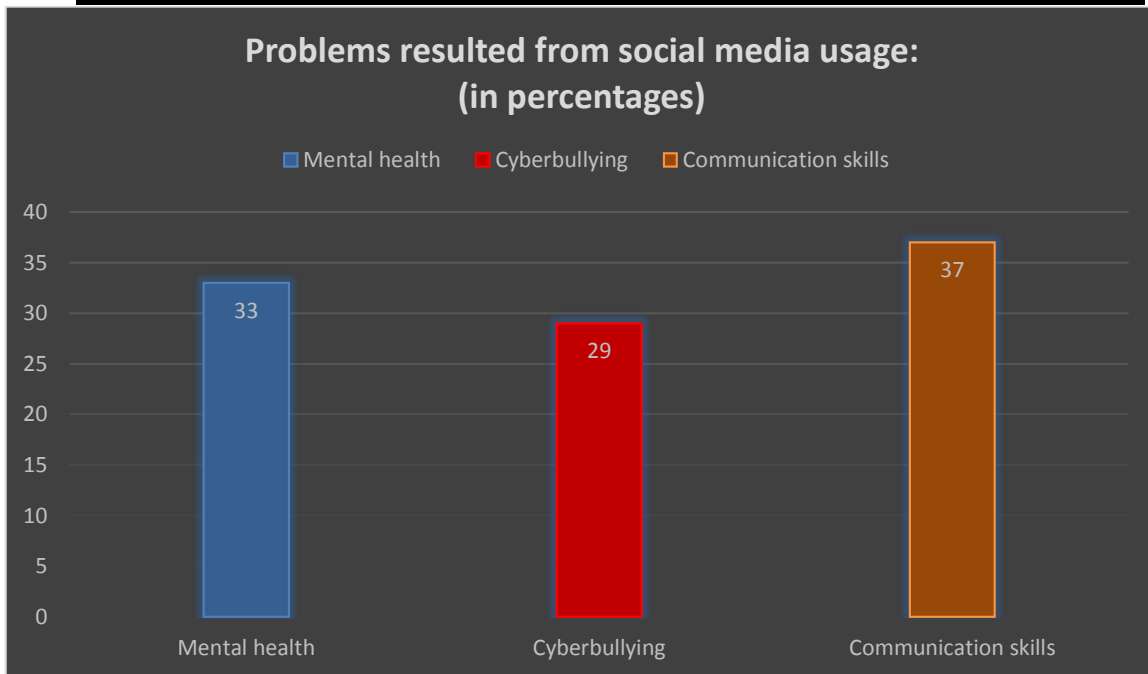
Secondary research

The secondary research is made with the help of existing sources available on the Internet including articles, books and reports highlighting the adverse consequences of social media on mental health, cyberbullying and communication skills.

RESULTS



The responses regarding negative effect of social media usage are illustrated in bar chart above. Overall, it can be seen that even the highest indicator exceeded only 50%, while the lowest rate shows 14%. There is a huge gap between negative influence on sleep problems and feeling sad or anxious with a half and 14% respectively in mental health category. Whereas, the results of all three problems related to cyberbullying are similar with approximately one third. It should be mentioned that the most negative influence of social media was seen on public expression of thoughts and feelings with 52%.



It is evident from the graph that the largest part of respondents is having issues with communication skills, more precisely 37%. Following that mental health and cyberbullying indicators are 4% less than communication skills.

ANALYSIS

Given the rise in social media usage all over the world and trends in cyberbullying that cannot be overlooked, it is crucial to analyze to what extent it has been spreading its negative effects and consequences in Uzbekistan. Considering the fact that there is a lack of resources on the presence and trends in cyberbullying in this country, there was an urgency to conduct a survey on this particular topic to find out whether these trends are present in Uzbekistan or not. Our survey of 215 respondents consisting of Generation Z reveal that it is more than important to take necessary steps to increase awareness and mitigate the issue.

Cyberbullying

One of the alarming results from our survey was that 86% of the participants who are in the category of Gen Z, use social media more than 2 hours daily, meaning that this generation has a high possibility of encountering cyberbullying. The survey also indicates that 32,1%, which equals to 69 respondents, have received hurtful comments at least once in their lives. A significant number of studies have shown that receiving hurtful comments can

lead to serious mental health problems, especially social isolation, decreased self-esteem, increased anxiety, even cases of suicide have occurred (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2023).

Furthermore, there were 52 respondents, 24,2% to be more precise, who admitted that they experienced cases when someone shared fake information about them online. This particular form of cyberbullying is found to be one of the most damaging ones which may leave long-lasting psychological and mental effects. For instance, according to Kent State Online (2022), as misinformation can spread more quickly and to more audience than traditional bullying, a victim is highly likely to feel powerless, humiliated and helpless. Spreading misinformation, in turn, leads to mistrust by the social circle of the victim and isolation. Apart from that, the survey results reveal that 30,7% of respondents experienced instances when their personal information was shared on the Internet without their consent. The fact that nearly one-third of respondents faces these issues point to potential mental affects on Generation Z, especially vulnerability and low self-esteem.

Mental Health

Some of the main factors of poor mental health are having sleep issues, socializing less and feeling sad or anxious more often (World Health Organization, 2022) Results, collected from 215 people, show that significant portion of them has already experiences these three key factors. More than 40% respondents experience all those issues mentioned above.

86% of Gen Z reported that they use social media more than 2 hours on a daily basis. More precisely, 49,3% of them are facing obstacles with their sleep cycle. Which in turn addresses to excessive screen time, that leads to the disturbance of sleep patterns.

Another important concern, which is being isolated and becoming less sociable, illustrates 36,3% result. Namely, that amount of young people meet their friends once a week. If it is calculated, the anticipation will be 4 times in a month, resulting that they are definitely spending less time with their friends.

The study also delves into the analysis of emotional well-being of youths. The other question is targeted at identifying that how often they feel sad or anxious. It demonstrates 46,5% respondents experiencing the feelings of despair and anxiety 2-3 times a week. Another exceptional data is that, 14% youths of Gen Z are grappling with sadness and anxiety every day.

Communication Skills

More than a third informed that they feel discomfort while initiating conversations. This finding is an evident for lower social anxiety level among Gen Z in Uzbekistan. According to Anxiety Institute 2024, the level of social phobia among youth aged 17-18, 18-29 consists of 6,9% and 13,6% respectively.

Relatively to this data, youth in Uzbekistan may need to work more on overcoming their social phobia.

The survey results show that 24,2% of participants admitted that they have difficulties with keeping eye contact with people. The challenge in keeping eye contact may increase social isolation and restrict from meaningful interactions. However, if we look at findings globally, Research published in 2023 in the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships reported that keeping eye contact during conversations is related to higher level of connection with people, which means Uzbek youth can enhance the quality of their interactions.

A crucial insight from the whole survey was that more than half respondents acknowledged that they face difficulties in public expression with 52,1 indicators. Although majority reported about the convenience in starting conversations and keeping eye contact, they find it difficult to express themselves verbally. According to Pumble 2024, 70% of huge companies pay specific attention for public expression while hiring employees, which means Gen Z may have some challenges in academic and professional success.

The findings show a troubling case in communication skills of Gen Z in Uzbekistan. Even though, a majority find it comfortable in starting conversations and keeping eye contact, nearly half still struggle to express themselves verbally. The influence of social media shows this duality, which can both improve connectivity and create challenges in face-to-face interactions.

DISCUSSION

Valuable insights can be gained by looking at the findings of the survey that was aimed at Generation Z in Uzbekistan. This discussion will examine whether global trends in cyberbullying, mental health and communication skills are reflected among the youth in Uzbekistan by comparing these results with global data.

As stated by Pandey& Sharma (2022), one-third of young people in over 30 countries has experienced at least one form of cyberbullying online. Similarly, the findings from our survey indicate that 32,1%, nearly one-third of 215 respondents admitted that they received hurtful comments online, which is almost similar to the global trend. Also, the results of misinformation and sharing unauthorized information showing around 30% of people experiencing those forms of cyberbullying, suggest that Uzbekistan is experiencing privacy violations no less than other countries.

While the study conducted by Business Insider (2018) indicates that 61% of teens in general prefer online communication rather than meeting them in person, the survey results show that around 36% of Generation Z in Uzbekistan meet their friends only once a week. According to this result, it can be highlighted that people, especially the youth are switching from face-to-face communication to online communication, as they find it more comfortable. Besides, 52,1% of participants reported that they experience problems with public expressions, which may be the consequences of overestimating online communication.

In addition, global and regional trends highlight both similarities and differences in social media usage patterns. For example, according to Statista (2024), Facebook and Instagram were the most popular platforms among the users of social media with 3,065 and 2 billion users respectively. When it comes to Uzbekistan, statistics show that 42,4% of users prefer Instagram compared to other platforms (Stats Counter, 2024).

Overall, both global and regional patterns demonstrate that social media is having a considerable affect on the mental health of young people resulting

from safety violations and diminished communication skills, Instagram being the most widely used platform.

CONCLUSION

This article is dedicated to provide profound research about the negative effects of the most concerning topic, social media, all over the world. Definitely, there are plenty of data regarding this issue worldwide, however Uzbekistan lacks in the same trend. This study gives an answer to the question “Is Generation Z in Uzbekistan negatively affected by social media?”. It has been obvious that, Uzbekistan’s Generation Z has already affected by social media and has experienced its negative consequences: mental health issues, cyberbullying and decline in communication skills. Primary research results clarify that, many of them reported issues such as sleep disturbances, feelings of isolation, and anxiety linked to their social media usage. Furthermore, the prevalence of cyberbullying is a critical concern in Uzbekistan, as a significant percentage of respondents have experienced harmful interactions online, including non-permitted sharing of personal information. Additionally, there are indications that Uzbek youths feel discomfort in face-to-face interactions with expressing their thoughts while keeping eye-contact.

FURTHER RESEARCH

If these trends stay unaddressed, the future generation could face profound mental, social, and professional consequences. Mental health challenges, cyberbullying effects, and weak communication skills may significantly limit their ability to thrive in academic, personal, and professional domains. Therefore, it is vital to implement preventive measures, promote healthier digital habits, and provide support systems to mitigate the negative impact of excessive social media usage on Generation Z in Uzbekistan. This calls for comprehensive strategies involving families, educators, and policymakers to mitigate these negative effects and empower Generation Z for a healthier and more connected future.

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