

# DIGITAL ECHO CHAMBERS: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IS RESHAPING YOUTH LIFE

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**Abstract:** At the moment, social media is not just an platform that people spend time on, but it is now has become a part of them. This research is dedicated to finding out what are the effects of using social media applications has on daily activities, learning process, sleeping and professional development of the youth.

With conducting an anonymous research among 53 young individuals, we managed to find out different problems that current generation is facing and among those one of the problems of using the social media platforms is the issue of digital displacement – time spent on the internet instead of sleeping, working out, studying and communication with other people. The majority (56.6%) of them admit spending more than 3 hours per day using social media apps which can be more if the research was conducted on more peoples. The application of social media has some negative effects as well: 81.2% of the respondents use social media when they should be studying or working, 64.2% have problems falling asleep and they keep awake for hours because of smartphones and 64.2% of them suffer from eye strain caused by the phone screen.

Still, the issue is more complex since these young people understand the negative effects of social media apps and some of them also try Digital Detox which is avoiding the use of the mobile phones to keep themselves away from the social media addictions. Generation Z knows what FOMO means, they feel sorry about their constant social media addiction and understand the importance of restricting the time spent on it (60.4%). Nevertheless, social media plays an essential role in both leisure and professional development of the youth. The social media is also becoming a stable career option for the youth and many of them understanding it and exploring the content creation as their career.

**IndexTerms** - Social Media, Behavioral Science, Digital Well-ness, Sleep Displacement, Attention Economy, Echo Chambers, Content Creation, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Creator Economy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Using mobile phones and various visual apps like Instagram and YouTube has significantly changed the life and education of today's generation and it getting changed each and every single day. While few years back for the previous generations the Internet usage was associated with finding an available place to use a computer, for Gen Z it looks quite differently. It is mobile and visual. With the help of the mobile phones the ease of using the social media is on their fingertips.

Also, there are some advantages of the connection. First of all, the process of communication has been accelerated significantly; the process of learning has become easier; there are more opportunities. Also with the help of the social media learning platforms like youtube people are learning and ex-ploring new opportunities for the free of cost. On the contrary, it has resulted in something which nowadays is described as digital distraction that causes people to be involved in the social media's endless watching loop which negatively impacts not only academic performance but may even be considered dangerous. Today psychologists and behavioral scientists pay close attention to the negative influence of being always connected online as far as the physical and psychological condition of people is concerned as well as their sleep and communication with others. They also found that majority of the people can't live a day without the mobile phones.

For this research, we would like to investigate more the im-pact of the connection. With the help of a survey among young adults, we managed to examine the influence of the scrolling on the development process, offline socialization and career formation, as well as the problem of digital echo chambers. So we can understand how the social media platforms are affecting the Gen Z and how they are tackling it.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide an example of how today's apps are using the dopamine loop and Algorithm Curation to make user spend as much time as they can which can have been utilized for other important activities.

### 2.1. The Dopamine Loop and Behavioral Addiction

It is easier to understand why it's so difficult to put down one's phone is through the platform design itself the design is willingly in such a way, which creates an incentive for people to stay engaged. The behavioral study indicates that checking feeds on smartphones is similar to playing a slot machine where the outcome is unknown and people are engaged that they're going to see something different and new. This creates a release of dopamine, thus creating the desire to check more often. In the long run, it could affect one's default mode network of the brain. That's what makes it more difficult to keep themselves away from the smartphones and social media platforms since with every refresh and scroll there is something new to watch.

### 2.2. Algorithm Curation and Digital Echo Chambers

All platforms strive towards achieving one thing and in current days they are doing it perfectly – the time the user spends in the application. This requires them to use algorithms that suggest information that is similar to the preferences of the user or what they believe in. So this is also something that keeps them engaged since the kind of content they like it keeps coming endlessly. According to Cinelli et al., [1] this results in the creation of echo chambers that are prevalent in sites such as Facebook and Twitter, whereby

users hardly get different opinions.

### 2.3. The Attention Economy

Digital economy operates based on the single currency, which is attention. The endless scrolling, autoplay, recommendations – none of this happened accidentally, but was deliberately created to attract the user's attention as long as possible. The point is that planning and impulse control are regulated by prefrontal cortex, which matures by the age of 25. So for the young generations it's easier to grab their attention rather than a mature person. The endless scrolling keeps the users stuck on their platforms so they tend to spend their more time on the social media platforms rather than investing that time for something meaningful.

### 2.4. The Highlight Reel and FOMO

Overall, life seems glamorous on social media where every-body is travelling exploring and doing something new. People compare themselves with others and evaluate their lives based on the best moments in other people's lives which is the biggest mistakes that current young generation is doing. As Buglass et al. [3] report, this creates the feeling of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), and serves as a strong psychological motivation to come back to social media despite the stress it causes. After seeing the posts and videos of other people's lives which they have posted online they start comparing their lives with them and it causes a fear in their mind that they are missing something and it keeps bothering them.

## 3. THEROTICAL FRAMEWORK

To better understand the data obtained from our survey, we used some theories about social media usage from psychology.

### 3.1 Digital Displacement Theory

Another theory suggest in the current research is that the effect of using the social media on its user is indirect. That means social media is not harmful to people directly, it distracts them from something more useful and keeps them busy on their platforms with this people get stuck in endless scrolling and they tend to lose the track of time. If people spend an hour on social media, this means that they did not sleep, exercise, learn or spend time with friends. So instead of causing them any harm directly it keeps users busy on their platforms so that they miss out other important things in their lives. For the social media platforms the more user spends time on their platform the more benefit they get from that.

### 3.2 Social Media and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

What keeps on motivating people to use social media, while they know about all of its negative consequences and which keeps them stuck in the endless loop? According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, media consumption is connected with the satisfaction of particular needs and they get their needs satisfied with the social media's personalized recommendations based onto the users liking. Phua et al. [2] discovered that Instagram and Snapchat users need entertain-ment, exploration, socialization and even career.

### 3.3 Bridging vs Bonding Capital in the Visual Web

Sociologists describe two types of social capital. As Pittman and Reich [5] say, visual web sites such as Instagram can be used to fight loneliness and make casual contacts and which is helpful because with the help of the social media you can connect with the different people all around the world who share same likings as you do, however, if people depend on them too much, they can weaken other connections. So it's good if someone is using the social media platfroms for learning new things and socializing with new peoples but it doesn't means they have to completely ignore their offline relationships.

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. Research Design and Population

This research was conducted with an online cross-sectional survey involving 53 individuals to examine the usage of social networking sites and their effects on psychological, educational and physical factors.

As illustrated in Table I below, the majority of the re-spondents comprised male gender (62.3%) and belonged to different age group from 19 to 22 (54.7%). Furthermore, un-dergraduates formed 43.4%, postgraduates comprised 32.1%, workers comprised 18.9% and unemployed comprised 5.7%. Which means it has the people from different group which seek different based on their requirements.

**TABLE 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Cohort (N = 53)**

| Category  | Sub-Category | Percentage |
|-----------|--------------|------------|
| Gender    | Male         | 62.3%      |
|           | Female       | 37.7%      |
| Age Group | 15–18        | 9.4%       |
|           | 19–22        | 54.7%      |
|           | 23–25        | 28.3%      |
|           | 26+          | 7.5%       |

|                         |                       |       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| <b>Primary Activity</b> | Undergraduate Student | 43.4% |
|                         | Postgraduate Student  | 32.1% |
|                         | Working Professional  | 18.9% |
|                         | Unemployed / Seeking  | 5.7%  |

#### 4.2. Data Collection Instrument

The method used for data collection was done using an anonymous Google survey and questions were on Likert scale and multiple choice based on the following themes: demographics, app preference, screen time, FOMO, distraction from academics, physical symptoms, and opinion on content creation as a profession.

#### 4.3. Ethical Consideration and Data Privacy

The voluntary participation was also anonymous and have hidden the user for their safety. As some of the questions had something to do with personal behavior such as using the mobile phones while working or difficulties in interacting with people face to face, there was no need for names or e-mail addresses. This is more of understanding the behaviour of the majority of different groups.

### 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

#### 5.1. Usage Intensity and Platform Preferences

Usage of social media is not something new at all infact the social media is now a part of their lives, on the contrary, 28.3% of the participants use social media for more than five hours per day, while 28.3% use social media for three to five hours. This means that 56.6% of the participants use social media for more than three hours. The numbers can be higher if the research was conducted among large individuals.

As can be seen, visual media are the dominant form of usage in social media platforms; 37.7% of Instagram users, 32.1% Reddit users, and 24.5% of YouTube users.

The reasons for usage of social media platforms include boredom/entertainment (chosen by 81.1% of participants), but professional/academic networking is quite an important reason as well (54.7%) (Table II) that shows youth is also taking steps on the learning rather than just entertainment.

**TABLE 2: Primary Motives for Social Media Usage**

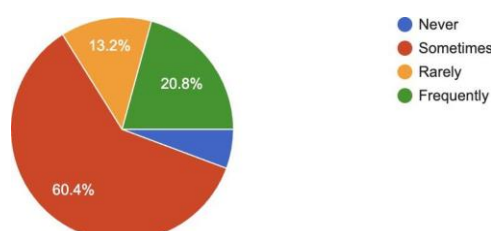
| Reported Motive                    | Percentage (Multiple Select) |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Entertainment / Boredom            | 81.1%                        |
| Professional / Academic networking | 54.7%                        |
| News and Information               | 52.8%                        |
| Socializing with friends           | 45.3%                        |
| Content Creation                   | 5.7%                         |

#### 5.2. Academic and Occupational Distraction

It was common for people to be distracted while working/studying and it is seen here as well. It turned out that 60.4% "sometimes" went to social networking sites at those times, while 20.8% "frequently" did it (please see Fig. 1 below). All in all, over 80% of students were distracted at least once. That shows for the sample size which is relatively small (n=53) but around 40 people are using social media while working and studying.

All distractions require a cognitive cost. When one switches the attention from studies to distractions, there appears so-called switching penalty. For some people it might be difficult to concentrate again and social media also puts a negative affect onto the attention span and concentration.

**Fig. 1: Frequency of Social Media Usage During Work/Study Hours.**



### 5.3. Social Dynamics and Withdrawal

The psychological impact is not limited to efficiency alone. About 49% of the population believe that their lives are less exciting and they feel left out than those of others who use social media.

These days, mobile phones are used to stay away from social interaction they tend to spend time more onto the digital platforms. People have avoided interacting with others using mobile phones in 41.5% of the cases. Besides, people have done so in 13.2% of the cases. Moreover, people find it easy to communicate through texts in 58.5% of the cases. So for communion and interacting with others onto the text and digital platforms people are finding it alot more easier.

### 5.4. Sleep Displacement and Physical Toll

Many users have trouble controlling their behaviors and it is becoming their habit slowly. 75.4% of the survey participants stated that they tended to scroll more than was required which causes them sleep troubles and other related problems which are stated below.

The problem impacts one's quality of sleep. 64.2% of the survey participants reported that bedtime procrastination problem where they used the internet or social media network at night and therefore were not sleeping and they were awake past their sleeping hours. Physical symptoms included digital eye strain (64.2%), sleeping problem (49.1%), headaches, and backaches. The poor sleep makes them feel tired entire day that also prevents them from giving their 100% and they seem lazy throughout the day.

Fig. 2: Distribution of Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media.

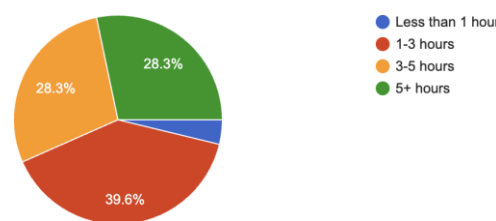
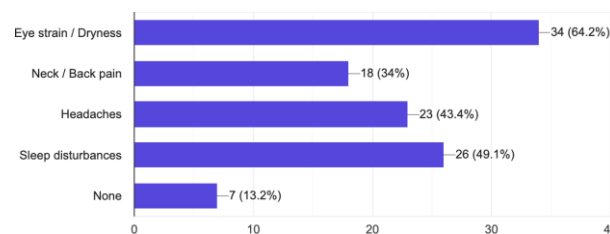


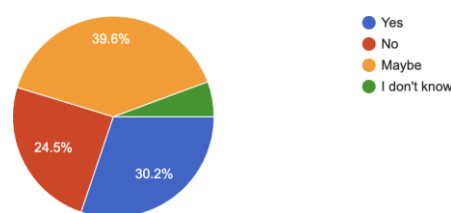
Fig. 3: Self-Reported Physical Symptoms Resulting from Prolonged Usage.



### 5.5. Content Creation as a Carrer Path

Another significant shift lies in the attitude of the respondent towards the future of work. It is evident that presently, only94.3% of the respondents are not generating any source of income from the social media platforms but majority of them considering it as a career option and might pursue it.

Fig. 4: Perception of Content Creation as a Stable Career Option.



From the figure shown above, it is evident that almost 40% of them believe in the stability of such a career path towards the social media and which is going to keep on increasing in the upcoming few years. Among all the respondents, 30.2% would prefer to choose content creation as a career path while 39.6% would consider the same as well. Instagram is not only a means of entertainment but a way of earning a living as well and people are understanding it slowly they are moving towards the content creation as well on these platforms.

### 5.6. Social Media as a Carrer Enabler: The Indian Context

However, this description of social media as a distractor would be incorrect. The creator economy in India is viewed as a legitimate career and it is seen as well few years.

Based on estimates, the creator economy size is expected to reach USD 61.87 billion by 2033 in India alone which is huge number [6]. As it stands now, there are already more than 4 million active creator professionals in India and the creators are re-shaping the indian economy [7]. Furthermore, based on research findings, it is expected that digital creators will influence more than USD 1 trillion of consumer spending by 2030 [8] (Figure 5).

Also, there is a trend towards regionalisation. Since there is an enormous number of Internet users in India (more than 900 million), creators from the Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities have also managed to build a wide audience in regional languages [7]. In addition, many of them try to move towards professionalization by registering, live commerce, subscriptions, and diversified revenue streams rather than depending only on brands [8].

However, even with all these possibilities, there are some disparities in the tendencies. Viral content becomes preferred as the algorithms create a survival bias and it can boost someones content while being bias towards others who are not following that viral trend. Actually, fewer than 10% of active creators can earn their living from their work [6], [8].

Fig. 5: Projected Growth of the India Creator Economy Market.

| Report Coverage                    | Details      |                        |              |
|------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Base Year:                         | 2025         | Market Size in 2026:   | USD 15.03 Bn |
| Historical Data for:               | 2020 To 2024 | Forecast Period:       | 2026 To 2033 |
| Forecast Period 2026 to 2033 CAGR: | 22.4%        | 2033 Value Projection: | USD 61.87 Bn |

## 6. DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### 6.1. The Productivity and Well-Being Paradox

They social media platform users are quite known with the negative effects. They get headaches, suffer from poor sleep, have problems focusing on studies and engaging in social communication, they also face difficulties in being focused and concentrated for long hours. As much as 60.4% of them actually support restrictions on social network use which also suggests they want there should be some sort of restrictions to keep peoples away from the endless scrolling loop.

Limitations or not, 66.1% of them consider social networks to be a "good platform." Apparently, entertainment, networking, and content creation compensate for all the downsides at the moment. Also with the use of the social media people consider it a platform to raise their voices they can get support from the large audience and can get resolved their issues or if they are facing some serious problems.

### 6.2. Implications for Education and Public Health

In cases where there are distractions for learning which af-fects more than 80% of students, there must be something else apart from lecturing about the importance of self-discipline and being focused. This is because one will have to deal with an algorithm-driven site that wants to keep its users busy always and keep them stuck in the endless scrolling loop. What there must be in this case is a process where digital hygiene is inculcated into the learners. It is important that public health campaigns recognize the gap existing between aspiration and reality in the context of the creator economy. Youth must be made aware of how income is distributed within the creator economy.

### 6.3. The Economic Illusion of the Echo Chamber

The job of being a creator may be based on algorithms partially as well and it can be difficult for the new creators. The platforms give their customers the products made by highly successful creators every single day, making them think that this job is rather easy and profitable. In fact, this statement is far from being true since there are only few people who manage to succeed in it. So for the new and small creators it may be difficult to survive onto this social media platform if they are doing something exceptionally good.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Social media is reshaping youth lifestyles in measurable ways and it has it's own affects. The evidence for digital displacement is strong: time that could support sleep, study, and offline relationships is being absorbed by scrolling and being stuck on the social media platforms for hours. Distraction during work hours and physical symptoms such as eye strain and sleep problems are widespread. People feel left out and there is a feeling of missing out which keeps on bothering them if they are not using the social media platforms.

At the same time, these platforms are no longer viewed purely as leisure tools. For many young people, they function as networking spaces and potential career platforms, social media platforms are also creating jobs and employment such as the social media manager different celebrities use entire social media team to keep them revelant as per the new trends and viral content. Simply telling users to delete their apps is unlikely to work because it ignores how embedded social media has become in education, work, and identity formation.

A more realistic approach is digital mindfulness: under-standing how algorithms influence behavior, setting personal boundaries, and learning to use platforms intentionally rather than reactively. With the proper understanding of how the algorithm is shaping their lives and keeping them busy rather they can utilize that same time onto something more useful and meaningful. Parents, educators, and young users all have a role in building healthier habits within an attention economy that is unlikely to disappear.

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