Self-Esteem and Social Anxiety Among Generation Z Social Media Users: a Literature Review

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Abstract:

Generation Z's attachement to social media affects various psychological aspects, particularly in terms of self-esteem and social anxiety. Various types of content are shared on social media, often with the aim of attracting attention and gaining validation from other users. The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize and analyze relevant studies that discuss how social media influences self-esteem and social anxiety. The literature review was conducted by analyzing 20 articles published between 2018 – 2025. The articles are related to the impact of social media on self-esteem and social anxiety among Generation Z social media users and were searched using the Google Scholar, Scopus AI, and Sciencedirect databases. The review found that social media use has a significant and complex impact on self-esteem and social anxiety among Generation Z. Key triggers may stem from social comparison, Fear of Missing Out, and demographic factors.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Social anxiety, Generation Z, Social media, Literature review

1 INTRODUCTION

The number of internet users continues to grow each year. According to a 2024 survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), the number of internet users in Indonesia has reached 221.56 million. One dominant group of internet users is Generation Z, who use the internet to connect with others through social media. According to O'Day and Heimberg (2021), Generation Z spends an average of eight hours a day on various social media platforms, such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook. This generation uses social media to share information and current news by uploading photos or videos and writing their opinions about certain topics. The ease of accessing social media makes Generation Z dependent on the internet (Wijaya et al., 2023). This dependence will certainly impact individual psychological aspects, such as self-esteem and anxiety.

According Rosenberg et al. (1995), self-esteem is an individual's overall evaluation of themselves, including both positive and negative aspects. Low self-esteem, especially among Generation Z, can significantly impact social anxiety, particularly in the context of social media use. Furthermore, self-esteem levels on social media are related to the search for validation, which can lead to psychological pressure. When individuals do not receive comments or feedback that align with their expectations, they may feel inadequate and worthless. However, social media also has the potential to improve self-esteem. For instance, Kristanti and Eva's (2022) study of Generation Z Instagram users revealed that individuals with high self-esteem tend to be more satisfied with their character and abilities, paying less attention to others' opinions. Nevertheless, the negative impacts of social media, such as social comparison, are often found to be more prevalent. Generation Z, having grown up in the digital age, is highly vulnerable to and easily influenced by these negative impacts, which can ultimately contribute to low self-esteem.

The high intensity of social media use among Generation Z can trigger anxiety and emotional instability in this generation (Pranata et al., 2023). According to Watson and Friend (1969), social anxiety is defined as anxiety that arises in social situations. It is characterized by feelings of discomfort, fear, and anxiety during social interactions, as well as a tendency to avoid social situations and a fear of negative evaluations from others. Jiang and Nguyen (2020) found that social media users, such as Instagram users, indirectly increase social anxiety. This anxiety arises from psychological processes beginning with negative social comparisons and decreasing self-esteem due to Instagram content

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consumption. Social comparison, which can trigger social anxiety, impacts mental health, particularly among Generation Z, causing them to constantly reflect on various aspects of life (Lam et al., 2022). Consequently, Generation Z individuals who frequently engage in social comparison tend to experience higher levels of anxiety because they often dwell on social aspects of life, which ultimately affects their mental health.

Understanding the separate impacts of social media on self-esteem and social anxiety raises fundamental questions about how these elements interact in a complex reciprocal relationship among Generation Z social media users. Research by Rohmawati et al. (2025) explains that low self-esteem and social anxiety exacerbate each other in social media use. This creates a cycle where individuals tend to seek connections and validation due to feelings of insecurity, but are instead exposed to factors such as social comparison, which further damages their self-esteem and increases their social anxiety. In reality, this dynamic cannot stand alone but is also influenced by demographic factors such as age and generational group. Rahardjo and Mardianti (2023) state that the younger the individual, the more vulnerable they are to experiencing anxiety on social media. Especially for Generation Z, who are very close to social media, making them highly vulnerable to these effects.

Previous studies have highlighted the influence of social media on self-esteem and social anxiety. However, most studies examine these two variabels separately and rarely integrate them into a comprehensive framework. This is particularly true with regard to the role of social comparison as a psychological mechanism that bridges the two. Additionally, the literature focusing on Generation Z is limited. Generation Z has the highest social media usage rates and different levels of psychological vulnerability compared to other generations. Addressing this gap is important to enhancing our understanding of the dynamics of self-esteem, social comparison, and social anxiety among Generation Z in a more comprehensive and contextual manner.

A comprehensive review of extant literature on the subject indicates that social media exerts a substantial influence on individuals' self-esteem and social anxiety. This prompts a fundamental question: How does the use of social media specifically affect self-esteem and social anxiety in Generation Z? Therefore, the objective of this study is to synthesize and analyze relevant literature on the impact of social media use on self-esteem and social anxiety in Generation Z.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study utilizes a narrative literature review approach as its primary research method to explore the potential influence of social media on anxiety and self-esteem among Generation Z. The articles selected for analysis were obtained through a systematic search of academic databases, specifically Google Scholar, Scopus AI, and Sciencedirect. The search was conducted using the following keywords: "Self-esteem," "Social anxiety," and "Social media." In order to guarantee the relevance and sustainability of the review, the search was limited to articles that had undergone the peer-review process and that had been published between 2018 and 2025. The selection criteria for articles focused on research that addressed social anxiety and self-esteem among Generation Z social media users and had a specific research subject within the Generation Z age group. Conversely, articles were excluded if the research subject was not Generation Z, if they did not present results relevant to the topic of social anxiety and self-esteem among Generation Z, or if they were not available in full-text format.

The initial article selection process yielded 96,800 publications from academic databases. The researchers manually screened the articles from the aforementioned electronic databases. In this study, researchers exclusively incorporated 20 articles deemed pertinent into the subsequent literature review. The selected articles are predominantly composed of quantitative studies (19 publications) and qualitative studies (1 publication) that concentrate on Generation Z. The findings from these selected articles serve as the primary material for further analysis, with the aim of exploring how social media can influence social anxiety and self-esteem among Generation Z and identifying existing research gaps.

3 RESULTS

All of the publications that met the study inclusion criteria were research articles published between 2018 - 2025. Most of the publications were quantitative studies.

3.1 Self-esteem among Generation Z social media users

The intensity of social media use among Generation Z is associated with various aspects of psychological well-being in a complex way. On the studies have shown that interactive features, such as likes and comments, can positively impact self-esteem (Dalila et al., 2021), suggesting that online feedback can bolster self-confidence. Furthermore, Sirajuddin et

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al. (2023) found a positive correlation between self-esteem and life satisfaction among Generation Z Instagram users. However, passive social media use can trigger envy and self-comparison, which may lower self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Previous research has found a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among Generation Z social media users (Fitri et al., 2024). The study found that Generation Z individuals with high self-esteem are better able to manage their social media use, which reduces negative impacts such as FOMO. Conversely, low self-esteem makes Generation Z more vulnerable to seeking validation on social media, which can increase FOMO due to exposure to damaging social comparisons. Therefore, it can indirectly be concluded that self-esteem plays a role in predicting FOMO among social media users (Siddik et al., 2020).

Kristanti and Eva's (2022) research on Generation Z's self-esteem on social media also explains findings in this study. Their research found a positive relationship between self-esteem and self-disclosure among Generation Z social media users, such as on Instagram. The study found that most Generation Z individuals have high levels of self-disclosure and self-esteem. This means that most Generation Z individuals in the study demonstrated their ability to express themselves openly on social media.

3.2 Social Anxiety among Generation Z Social Media Users

Previous studies have examined social anxiety among Generation Z social media users and its relationship with other psychological variables. The duration of social media use is significantly positively correlated with social anxiety, indicating that the longer individuals use social media, the higher their anxiety levels (Rahardjo & Mardianti, 2023). Lyngdoh et al. (2022) found that Generation Z individuals with high levels of social anxiety tend to feel more comfortable interacting online than in person. This is because interacting online eliminates the frightening aspects of social media, such as stuttering, anxiety, or worry about others' reactions to perceived physical flaws.

High-intensity social media use can trigger anxiety in Generation Z. According to research by Pranata et al. (2023), seeing the achievements of their peers on social media is the biggest trigger of anxiety for this generation. This creates social pressure for Generation Z to present themselves as better than others. Consistent with this, Abdellatif (2022) noted in their research that observing the behavior of others on social media tends to prompt Generation Z to compare themselves, which can exacerbate the negative effects of social media on life satisfaction.

Table 1: Summary of Studies Included in the Review

No.	Author and Year	Tittle	Methods	Result
1.	Lyngdoh et al. (2022)	Social Isolation and Social Anxiety as Drivers of Generation Z's Willingness to Share Personal Information on Social Media	Quantitative	Generation Z members who experience feelings of social isolation (F(1,158)=8.449, p<0.05, ηp2=0.051) and social anxiety (F(1,158)=8.741, p<0.05, ηp2=0.052) demonstrate a greater propensity to disclose personal information on social media platforms. This relationship is further strengthened by other factors, including the fear of missing out (FOMO), repetitive negative thoughts (rumination thinking), and perceptions of transparent privacy ethics.
2.	Fitri et al. (2024)	The Influence of Self-Esteem on Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among Generation Z Social Media Users	Quantitative	Self-esteem significantly affects Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and the relationship is negative. Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation (r = -0.236, p = 0.018), and simple linear regression analysis showed a significant effect (b = 173.824, SE = 0.954, p < 0.05), indicating that self-esteem contributes 5.6% to the total variance in FOMO. These results suggest that individuals with lower self-esteem experience higher

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No.	Author and Year	Tittle	Methods	Result
	1001			levels of anxiety and FOMO.
3.	Rohmawati et al. (2025)	The Relationship Between Self- Esteem and Social Anxiety with Fear of Missing Out in College Students	Quantitative	Self-esteem and social anxiety have been demonstrated to be significantly associated with Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) (F = 149.514, p = 0.000, R^2 = 0.726), a phenomenon often triggered by social media activities. The present study examined the relationship between self-esteem and FoMO, with findings indicating a significant negative influence of self-esteem on FoMO (β = 0.285, p = 0.000, t = 5.592, contribution = 28.37%). In contrast, social anxiety exhibited a significant positive influence, with a more dominant effect (β = 0.458, p = 0.000, t = 8.200, contribution = 44.23%). Individuals with high social anxiety are more likely to experience FoMO due to their increased use of social media, which can trigger an excessive awareness of others' social activities. This tendency is particularly pronounced in comparison to students who exhibit low self-esteem.
4.	Jiang, S., & Ngien, A. (2020)	The Effects of Instagram Use, Social Comparison, and Self-esteem on Social Anxiety: A Survey Study in Singapore	Quantitative	The present study explores the relationship between Instagram usage and social anxiety, with a focus on the role of social comparison and self-esteem in this association. The application of path analysis to the study revealed a significant relationship between Instagram use and mental health outcomes. Specifically, the analysis indicated that Instagram use was associated with an increase in social comparison ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$), which was then followed by a decrease in selfesteem ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < 0.001$). This decrease in selfesteem ultimately led to an increase in social anxiety. These findings underscore the significance of effectively managing social comparison behaviors and enhancing selfesteem to mitigate social anxiety among Instagram users.
5.	Lim et al. (2021)	The Moderating Role of Social Network Size on Social Media Use and Self-Esteem: An Evolutionary Mismatch Perspective	Quantitative	A social network's size acts as a moderator in the relationship between social media use and self-esteem. Social media use negatively affects self-esteem, but only when the size of one's social network is at an evolutionarily familiar level (below 150 individuals). No significant relationship was found for larger

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No.	Author and Year	Tittle	Methods	Result
	1001			social networks (B small = -0.37, p < 0.01).
6.	Pranata et al. (2023)	Social Media as a Digital Platform Triggering Anxiety Instability Among Generation Z	Qualitative	High-intensity use of social media can trigger anxiety in Generation Z. The main cause of anxiety for this generation is content on social media that showcases other people's achievements and successes.
7.	Zsido et al. (2021)	The Role of Maladaptive Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies and Social Anxiety in Problematic Smartphone and Social Media Use	Quantitative	A significant mediating effect of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies has been identified in the relationship between social anxiety and Problematic Social Network Use (PSNSU) and Problematic Smartphone Use (PSU). A significant direct correlation has been identified between social anxiety and PSNSU, with a statistical significance of β = 0.30 and a p-value less than 0.001.
8.	Siddik et al. (2020)	The Role of Self- Esteem in Fear of Missing Out Among Teenagers Who Use Social Networking Sites	Quantitative	Self-esteem has been demonstrated to play a significant role in predicting Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). A simple linear regression analysis reveals a statistically significant negative relationship with an R value of 0.337, a p value of less than 0.05, and an R² value of 0.113 (11.3%), indicating that self-esteem accounts for 11.3% of the variation in FoMO. The findings suggest that adolescents with low self-esteem are more susceptible to FoMO and anxiety when disconnected from social media.
9.	Warella, V. W., & Pratikto, H. (2021)	Loneliness and social anxiety: Can they be predictors of social media addiction?	Quantitative	Instagram use has a positive effect on social anxiety among students. The regression analysis shows an R value of 0.431, R ² of 0.186 (18.6%), and a p value of 0.000. This means that Instagram use explains 18.6% of the variation in social anxiety among students. The more they use Instagram, the more anxious they feel, especially in social situations.
10.	Faiza, M. N., & Maryam, E. W. (2024)	Self-Diclosure, social comparison, and social anxiety among gen z social media users	Quantitative	There is a positive and significant relationship between the intensity of social media use and social anxiety. The results of the regression analysis indicate that social media influences social anxiety, with an R-value of 0.560 and an R^2 -value of 0.313 (31.3%), and a significance level of $p=0.000$. In other words, the more frequently students use social media, the higher their level of social anxiety, especially with regard to the pressure of social

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No.	Author and Year	Tittle	Methods	Result
	Ital			interaction and evaluation on digital platforms.
11.	Rahardjo, W., & Mardianti. (2023)	Social Anxiety in Social Media Users: Understanding the Role of Self-esteem and Demographic Factors	Quantitative	Self-esteem significantly influences social anxiety in social media use, particularly in the aspect of interaction anxiety. Regression analysis results indicate the highest influence on interaction anxiety ($R^2 = 0.190$, $F = 37.931$, $p < .01$) and the lowest on privacy content anxiety ($R^2 = 0.077$, $F = 13.541$, $p < .01$). These findings suggest that the lower a person's self-esteem, the higher the level of social anxiety experienced when interacting on social media, especially when forming new relationships or facing social evaluation in the digital space
12.	Kristanti, S. A., & Eva, N. (2022)	Self-esteem and Self-disclosure of Generation Z Instagram Users	Quantitative	A significant positive relationship exists between self-esteem and self-disclosure among Generation Z Instagram users, with a correlation coefficient of $r=0.608$ and $p=0.000$. This indicates that individuals with higher self-esteem tend to disclose more about themselves on social media. These results suggest that Instagram is an important platform for Generation Z to openly express themselves, influenced by their positive self-perception.
13.	Akbar, M.S.M., & Hakim, M. A. (2024)	The role of social comparison in the emergence of social anxiety among students due to social networking behavior on social media	Quantitative	A positive and significant relationship exists between the intensity of social media use and self-disclosure among Instagram users, with r = 0.370 and p = 0.000. This means that the more often students use Instagram and other social media platforms, the more likely they are to openly disclose personal information on them. These findings suggest that social media has become an important medium for students to build their self-identity and express their thoughts and feelings.
14.	Dalila et al. (2021)	The relationship between the intensity of Instagram social media use and self- esteem	Quantitative	A significant positive relationship exists between the intensity of Instagram use and self-esteem among students at Malahayati University. According to the results of the Spearman's rho correlation test, $r=0.338,p<0.01$, the higher the intensity of Instagram use, the higher the level of self-esteem.
15.	Triastuti et al. (2025)	Stress levels among Gen Z due to the	Quantitative	Generation Z is stressed by social media, mainly due to pressure, comparison, and

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No.	Author and	Tittle	Methods	Result
	Year	influence of social media		seeking digital validation. 110 respondents (ages 12–26) scored highest on the emotional (mean = 2.88) and problem (mean = 2.52) coping indicators. Despite having strategies, social media is a threat to their psychological well-being (mean primary appraisal = 2.39). Social media significantly affects Gen Z's emotional well-being.
16.	Lam et al. (2022)	College students and cyberbullying: how social media use affects social anxiety and social comparison	Quantitative	Social media rumination is significantly and positively associated with social anxiety. The results of the path analysis indicate that higher levels of social media rumination are associated with higher levels of social anxiety, with a coefficient of $\beta=0.28$, $p<0.001$. These results confirm that dwelling on social media activities and interactions can trigger anxiety in social situations, particularly due to concerns about others' judgments
17.	Alaska et al. (2024)	Husnuzan, social comparison, and social anxiety in emerging adults social media users	Quantitative	Positive self-perception and social comparison behavior significantly influence social anxiety in early adults who use social media. Multiple regression analysis (F=121.537; p<0.001; R²=0.340) revealed that positive self-perception has a negative effect on social anxiety (β =-0.184; p<0.001), while social comparison has a positive and stronger effect (β =0.467; p<0.001). This means that the higher the positive self-perception, the lower the social anxiety, and the higher the social comparison, the higher the social anxiety. These findings confirm that increasing positive self-perception and reducing social comparison can reduce social anxiety among young adult social media users.
18.	Sirajuddin et al. (2023)	The relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction among Generation Z Instagram users	Quantitative	A significant negative relationship exists between the intensity of social media use and self-esteem in adolescents, with $r=-0.646$ and $p=0.000$. These results suggest that the more frequently and for the longer periods of time adolescents use social media, the lower their self-esteem. The findings suggest that excessive exposure to social media content can trigger negative social comparisons and feelings of dissatisfaction, leading to lower self-evaluation.
19.	Sabneno et al. (2025)	FOMO among adolescent social	Quantitative	The results of the analysis indicate that social anxiety and self-esteem are significantly

No.	Author and Year	Tittle	Methods	Result
		media users: the role of social anxiety and self-esteem		related to Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among adolescent social media users, with a correlation value of $R=0.836$ and a significance level of $p<0.05$. There is also a significant positive relationship between social anxiety and FOMO: the higher the level of social anxiety, the higher the FOMO.
20.	Yang et al. (2018)	Whether and how will using social media induce social anxiety? The correlational and causal evidence from Chinese society	Quantitative	Passive social media use increases social anxiety through upward social comparison and self-esteem mediation. Results of the path analysis show that passive use has a positive effect on upward social comparison, decreasing self-esteem and increasing social anxiety. This emphasizes the importance of reducing upward social comparison and enhancing self-esteem to reduce social anxiety.

4 DISCUSSIONS

This literature review methodically examines and analyzes the impact of social media use on self-esteem and social anxiety, with a focus on Generation Z as active users. The findings from a series of studies indicate a complex and multifaceted relationship between these variables, with social media acting as a catalyst for change in individual mental health.

Generation Z's ability to express themselves on social media is closely related to their self-esteem. According to Rosenberg (1995), self-esteem is an individual's overall evaluation of themselves, which can be either positive or negative. Kristanti and Eva (2022) state that individuals with high self-esteem tend to openly share their activities, hobbies, friendships, and other aspects of their lives on social media. This behavior is driven by confidence in one's abilities and by internal and external motivations. Conversely, individuals with low self-esteem tend to be less open on social media due to concerns about failing in social interactions or receiving negative judgments. Understanding self-esteem as an individual's positive or negative view of themselves is crucial to understanding this behavior of self-expression.

One of the predominant mechanisms elucidating the impact of social media is the phenomenon of social comparison. Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory posits that social comparison is defined as the behavior of individuals actively comparing themselves with others to assess their own abilities and opinions. Social media users, including Generation Z, are directly exposed to a plethora of information and achievements shared by others, which often triggers self-comparison (Akbar & Hakim, 2024; Pranata et al., 2023). This social comparison, particularly the upward comparison (observing individuals who are regarded as superior), has been demonstrated to exert a substantial influence on self-esteem. Wang et al. (2017) definitively demonstrate that passive social media use exhibits a positive correlation with upward social comparison, which consequently negatively impacts users' self-esteem and subjective well-being. The frequency with which Generation Z engages in social comparison has been shown to have a significant impact on increased levels of social anxiety (Pranata et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is also a significant consequence of social media use among Generation Z, which is closely related to self-esteem levels. Fitri et al. (2024) discovered that high self-esteem can function as a protective factor against FOMO (fear of missing out) tendencies. This suggests that individuals with high self-esteem are less prone to experience feelings of exclusion or social isolation in the context of social activities. In accordance with this perspective, Siddik et al. (2020) underscore that the phenomenon of FOMO frequently originates

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from low self-esteem, which materializes as sentiments of exclusion from social settings. This underscores the importance of self-esteem as a protective factor in coping with social media pressures.

Research has shown that the intensity of social media use is a direct trigger of social anxiety in Generation Z. Pranata et al. (2023) emphasize that excessive social media usage can lead to anxiety instability, particularly when individuals are exposed to content showcasing the accomplishments of others, triggering feelings of being left behind. In the context of Chinese society, a study by Yang et al. (2023) causally demonstrated that higher social media usage intensity correlates with higher social anxiety. The researchers identified two main mediating pathways. First, social media-induced upward social comparison directly increases social anxiety. Second, upward social comparison leads to decreased self-esteem, which exacerbates social anxiety. Faelens et al. (2019) reinforce these findings by identifying the central role of social comparison and self-esteem as mediators between social media use (including passive use) and psychopathological indicators, such as depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress.

In addition to psychological mechanisms, demographic factors also play a role. Rahardjo and Mardianti (2023) found that younger age is significantly and negatively correlated with social anxiety on social media. Conversely, longer duration of social media use is significantly and positively correlated with higher levels of social anxiety. These findings suggest that Generation Z, being both young and heavy users of social media, is particularly vulnerable to these negative effects. However, Alaska et al. (2024) suggest that a positive attitude toward others' circumstances and achievements can reduce self-comparison behavior and alleviate social anxiety, offering potential mitigation strategies. Thus, cognitive interventions and changes in thinking patterns may be crucial in mitigating the negative effects of social media.

This literature review reveals that social media significantly and complexly impacts the self-esteem and social anxiety of Generation Z. Key mediators in this relationship include social comparison, especially upward comparison, and individual self-esteem levels. Intense social media use can exacerbate these issues, and demographic factors such as age and duration of use also play a role. Developing strategies that enhance self-esteem, manage social comparison, and promote positive thinking is crucial to mitigating the negative impact of social media on Generation Z's mental health. Further research is needed to explore effective interventions and understand how these effects vary across different cultural contexts.

However, the studies reviewed have a number of weaknesses. Most of the research used correlational designs and self-report instruments, both of which limit the ability to draw causal conclusions and are prone to response and memory biases. Additionally, the majority of samples came from specific cultural contexts, which makes the results less generalizable. Additionally, few studies have consistently distinguished between active and passive social media use, despite the fact that these differences can produce different psychological effects.

This literature review is subject to certain limitations, including its focus on literature published in reputable academic journals and the fact that the majority of the literature is in Indonesian. Consequently, it is possible that findings published in other languages or on different platforms may have been overlooked.

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