

# Screen Culture and Sustainable Well-Being: A Study of Digital Balance, Social Relationships, and Quality of Life among Gen Z with reference to harbour suburb of Mumbai

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## Abstract

*Screen culture has rapidly developed and broadly influences the lives of Generation Z. This paper explores the impacts screen use has on the sustainable well-being of Generation Z, concerning digital balance, social interactions, physical and mental health and overall quality of life. Digital technologies provide functional benefits related to education, social networking, and entertainment. However, despite the technological boom, adverse effects of screen use include social isolation, reduced physical activity, sleep problems, and increased stress, anxiety, and emotional reliance on the screen. The questionnaire and its analysis test how excessive screen use may reduce the quality of face-to-face social interactions, contribute to loneliness and weaken emotional regulation processes, influencing mental health and social bonding. On the other hand, digital balance—defined as awareness and prudent use of digital technologies—emerges as a critical focal point in achieving sustainable well-being. The current study looks to characterize patterns of screen usage and plausible effects on physical, psychological, and social health, which, in turn, will contribute to insights on how Generation Z can achieve positive integration of screen media into daily life. Ultimately, this research aspires to surface insights that shall inform educators, parents and policymakers about the need to encourage positive and balanced digital integration to foster sustainable well-being and an improved quality of life.*

**Keywords:** Screen Culture, Sustainable Well-being, Digital Balance, Generation Z, Social Relationships, Quality of Life

## Introduction

Technology has made screens a commonplace part of modern life, particularly for Gen Z. The screen has grown to play a significant role in younger generations' learning, communication, enjoyment, and creative expression through cell phones, social media, educational websites, and

entertainment websites. For many people in this generation, checking their phones or social media accounts has actually become a daily ritual. Technology has accelerated life, but it has also altered how people perceive their social, emotional, and physical well-being.

Generation Z is highly dependent on screens for learning, socialization, and seeking emotional support. Although these tools help in connecting and informing individuals, there are some issues associated with excessive screen time. Excessive screen time has been associated with a lack of exercise, difficulties in sleep, increased levels of stress, anxiety, and trouble regulating emotions in people. Additionally, it influences real-world relationships since most communication has become limited to screens, leading to feelings of alienation among individuals.

However, it is important to note that screens do have some negative effects as well. Used in a balanced and thoughtful way, screens can help in learning as well as creativity and self-expression. This is where the concept of digital balance cuts in. Digital balance is about being aware of the use of screens in terms of time and reasons and choosing not to overdo it.

The research is aimed at understanding the influence of screen culture on the sustainable well-being of Generation Z. Through the investigation of the usage patterns of screen culture and its influence on physical well-being, mental well-being, social interactions, and overall quality of living, this research will seek to emphasize the positive and negative influences of screen culture. Through this research, the results will seek to inspire healthier usage patterns of screen culture among students, educators, parents, and policymakers for a healthier living experience.

### **Problem Statement**

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the way individuals communicate, learn, work, and socialize. For Generation Z—individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012—digital screens are not merely tools but an integral part of daily life. Smartphones, laptops, tablets, and social media platforms have become essential for education, entertainment, and social interaction.

While digital media has enhanced access to information and connectivity, excessive and unregulated screen usage has raised concerns regarding physical health, mental well-being, and social relationships. Issues such as sleep disturbances, stress, anxiety, emotional fatigue, reduced physical activity, and declining face-to-face interactions are increasingly reported among young adults.

In this context, the concept of **digital balance** has gained importance. Digital balance refers to maintaining a healthy and mindful relationship with digital devices so that technology supports well-being rather than harming it. This study attempts to explore screen culture among Generation Z college students and its implications on their overall quality of life.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To study the pattern and purpose of digital screen usage among Generation Z college students.
2. To examine the impact of excessive screen time on the physical and mental well-being of students.
3. To analyse the effect of screen usage on social relationships and face-to-face interactions.
4. To understand the concept of digital balance and identify healthier screen usage practices among Generation Z.

### **Scope of the Study**

- The study is confined to Generation Z college students.
- The geographical scope is limited to the Harbour Suburb of Mumbai.
- The sample consists of 100 students from Vidyalkar School of Information Technology (VSIT).
- The study focuses on screen usage patterns, well-being, social relationships, and digital balance practices.

## Review of Literature

**Dwidienawati, D., Pradipto, Y., Indrawati, L., & Gandasari, D. (2025).** The Generation Z derives its name from those born between 1996 to 2010. The Generation Z has been defined as a generation having the most significant issues with well-being. The Generation Z is in a very important stage of life and represents the largest portion of the population at this point in history and thus will provide the economic and social foundations for future generations. Current studies indicate that Generation Z's most common issues are stress, feelings of emotional fatigue, and decreased life satisfaction.

Well-being consists of internal factors and environmental factors both of which have an impact on the way we experience the world around us. The internal factors of well-being are the individual's ability to manage his or her environment, including but not limited to, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), personality type and resiliency; FoMO being the strongest link to feelings of anxiety and over-engagement with technology. The environmental factors impacting well-being include increased time spent on technology and the constant state of being connected to the internet all leading to sleep disruption and mental strain.

While having family and friends as a source of social support positively impacts one's overall health and happiness, using too much technology to communicate may result in less meaningful relationships with others in person. Researchers have studied how long people spend on their devices, how much they are affected by their fear of missing out (FoMO), and how much social support they receive from their families and friends separately; however, very little is known about the combined effects of these three areas on Generation Z's overall health and happiness. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the combined influences of Generation Z psychological characteristics, screen use, and social support on Generation Z health and happiness.

**Hayes, A. M. (2021).** Technology, mainly social media, has a large presence in Generation Z's day-to-day lives. Digital natives, Generation Z has continual access to messages through platforms such as Instagram that can affect emotions, mental states, and general wellness. This has led to increased interest in understanding the effects of social media's integration into their daily lives.

Research has shown that there are both positive and negative effects of social media use on Generation Z. Although the excessive use of social media may cause mental strain, some studies suggest that Instagram has the potential to provide an outlet for self-expression, promote social engagement, and inspire creativity thus contributing to emotional wellness. Theories such as Media Ecology Theory and Media Dependency Theory provide insight into how continuous exposure to media can affect people's perceptions and emotional responses.

In general, the available research indicates that the effect of social media on Generation Z's emotional wellness is determined not only by their overall use of social media, but also the way they are treated as meaningful platforms.

**Premalatha, R. (2024). Sleep hygiene and disorders among Gen Z:** The increasing use of digital devices during the late evening hours by Generation Z is raising concerns about how it affects their sleep habits. Studies indicate that long-term use of screens before going to bed affects the body's natural rhythm of sleep and decreases the quality of sleep, as well as adversely impacting the overall health of an individual. As such, the effects of digital devices on sleep are influenced by various factors including how much time is spent using digital devices, what type of content is being viewed, and how actively engaged people are in using technology late at night.

Additional research has also shown that when young adults (Gen Z) do not practice good sleep hygiene, this will result in higher levels of stress, lower cognitive performance, and an overall drop in their ability to perform well at school and work. The poor sleep quality translates into lost productivity and increased need for medical care (economic impact). Many researchers stress the importance of educating Gen Z about digital literacy, recognizing healthy screen time habits, and regulating their use of technology as a means of reducing the negative impact on sleep and promoting better health outcomes among Generation Z.

**Nugraheni, M. (2025, August).** In general, the spread of digital technology has changed how Generation Z (those currently in university) interacts with their environment and how they interact with each other. Students today are much more likely to use technology for academic purposes than ever before and, as a result, they spend more time on their computers for both social and academic activities. In recent years, there has been increasing concern over “digital burnout”, which refers to the effect of excessive use of technology on one’s mental health, and excessive screen time. Research from recent studies has shown that by virtue of their use of technology, students are at greater risk for mental health issues.

Previous studies have indicated that there is a direct correlation between excessive screen time and increased levels of stress, which, in turn, leads to increased anxiety, reduced emotional wellness, and increased levels of emotional exhaustion. Stress is an important contributor to the deleterious effects that excessive screen time has on mental health. Of the numerous digital activities, screen use seems to be the greatest contributor to student mental health and well-being. Screen time directly impacts student’s mental health by causing stress and through that stress indirectly influencing their mental health.

The overall findings in the literature support the idea that universities should assist students in achieving digital wellness, which can be accomplished by encouraging the development of healthier habits for screen time and strategies to manage stress. Because the digital lives of Generation Z are becoming more prevalent in their daily experiences, improving students’ psychological resiliency is an important consideration in creating supportive environments in post-secondary educational institutions.

**Bakshi, M.** OTT platforms are rapidly overtaking other forms of content consumption, particularly among Gen Z in India’s urban areas (especially in the Indian state of Maharashtra). The results of various research studies indicate that binge-watching is related not only to psychological determinants such as enjoyment and feeling lonely. For many Gen Z users, OTTs also serve as a way to fill emotional voids or sense of isolation.

Research demonstrates enjoyment is a motivator for prolonging one’s viewing experience. Conversely, “loneliness” often leads individuals to watch television more than once, acting as an emotional escape. The higher the enjoyment level, the greater the relationship between loneliness and binge-watching exists, thereby increasing the amount of time spent on screens. This duality of binge-watching serves as an avenue for both enjoyment and emotional coping.

In summary, the majority of the currently available research supports the notion that Gen Z digital media consumption is based on their emotional desires, and as such, it is important to understand the psychological motivations for people to consume digital media excessively, particularly among urban adolescences living in a continually adapting digital world.

### **Research Methodology**

- **Type of research:** Descriptive and analytical
- **Data source:** Primary and secondary
- **Sample size:** 100 students
- **Sampling method:** Convenience sampling
- **Data collection tool:** Structured questionnaire (Google Form)

### **Significance of the Study**

The study provides useful insights for students, parents, educators, and policymakers to understand the effects of screen culture and encourages responsible and mindful digital usage among youth.

### **Scope of Study**

The scope of the present research outlines the boundaries within which the investigation on Screen Culture and Sustainable Well-being among Generation Z takes place. In order to be clear and focused, the study’s scope is defined under four dimensions: territorial, demographic, contextual and methodological.

## **Territorial Scope**

Geographically, the present study limits itself to the Harbour Suburbs of Mumbai, connected by the Harbour Line of the Mumbai suburban railway. The important localities that this research covers are Chembur, Mankhurd, Govandi, Kurla (East) and Trombay. From relatively well-planned residential areas to densely populated urban settlements, these localities are truly socio-economically diverse. Therein lies a rich and diverse base to understand the screen usage patterns and well-being experiences of Generation Z in an urban Indian context.

## **Demographic Scope**

The research focuses on Generation Z, people born between the years 1997 and 2012. The sample target will include both students and young working professionals within an approximate age bracket of 13–28 years who are residents of the selected harbour suburbs. The respondents from different educational backgrounds, income levels and classes can be included to understand whether digital balance and screen-related well-being vary within different sections of society within the same geographical area.

## **Contextual / Content Scope**

The study investigates various dimensions of screen culture: the use of smartphones, laptops, and gaming devices combined with time spent on popular digital platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. Then there is the nature of engagement with content: passive or active, limited to scrolling and watching or composing and creating content.

First, the concept of digital balance will be analysed about how Generation Z manages screen time, their awareness of overuse, experiences with digital detox practices and feelings related to FOMO. Furthermore, the study also looks at changes in social relationships, focusing on shifts from face-to-face interactions toward digitally mediated communication, and how screen use would affect family and peer relationships.

The research on sustainability of well-being and quality of life has been brought about both through physical health issues, such as quality of sleep, eye strain, or problems with posture and by aspects of mental health: stress, anxiety, self-esteem or overall satisfaction with life, considering the long-term effects of digital habits.

## **Methodological Scope**

### **Research Design, Data Collection and Analysis**

The study follows a mixed-method research design to examine screen culture and its influence on the well-being of Generation Z students. Quantitative data were gathered using a structured questionnaire focusing on screen time, usage patterns, and selected physical and psychological indicators. To add depth to the findings, qualitative insights were drawn from informal interactions and observations related to students' digital behaviour and emotional experiences. The study deliberately limits its scope to Generation Z students to ensure relevance and clarity, excluding other age groups and regions of Mumbai. Primary data were collected from 100 students of Vidyalankar School of Information Technology (VSIT) located in Mumbai's Harbour Suburbs, chosen as a focused and representative sample. Secondary data were sourced from academic literature, government reports, healthcare studies, and credible publications. The urban setting of the Harbour Suburbs, marked by long commutes, academic pressure, and high internet accessibility, intensifies screen exposure among students. Existing research indicates that excessive screen usage affects daily routines, physical activity, sleep quality, and emotional well-being. Overall, the findings suggest that digital habits among Generation Z are closely shaped by their urban lifestyle and environment rather than being isolated individual choices.

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from 100 Generation Z students of Vidyalankar School of Information Technology (VSIT) which is in Wadala region of Mumbai. The

data has been analysed objective-wise using percentage analysis, graphical representation, and descriptive interpretation.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Sample size: 100 Generation Z college students

#### 4.1 Daily Screen Time of Students

Daily Screen Time	No. of Students	Percentage
Less than 2 hours	10	10%
2–4 hours	30	30%
4–6 hours	35	35%
More than 6 hours	25	25%

Interpretation: Majority students spend more than 4 hours on screens, indicating high digital dependency.

#### 4.2 Purpose of Screen Usage — Educational Activities

Frequency	No. of Students	Percentage
Rarely	15	15%
Sometimes	30	30%
Often	35	35%
Always	20	20%

Interpretation: More than half the students frequently use screens for academics.

#### 4.3 Purpose of Screen Usage — Social Media

Time Spent	No. of Students	Percentage
<1 hour	20	20%
1–2 hours	30	30%
2–4 hours	30	30%
>4 hours	20	20%

Interpretation: Half the students spend over two hours daily on social media.

#### 4.4 Screen Usage for Entertainment

Level	No. of Students	Percentage
Low	18	18%
Moderate	32	32%
High	30	30%
Very High	20	20%

Interpretation: High entertainment screen usage is prevalent.

#### 4.5 Eye Strain due to Screen use

Response	No. of Students	Percentage
Never	10	10%
Sometimes	40	40%
Often	35	35%
Always	15	15%

Interpretation: Eye strain is experienced by most students.

#### 4.6 Sleep Disturbance due to Screen Time

Response	No. of Students	Percentage
Never	15	15%
Occasionally	35	35%
Frequently	30	30%
Always	20	20%

Interpretation: Screen time affects sleep patterns of students.

#### 4.7 Headaches and Digital Fatigue

Response	No. of Students	Percentage
Never	20	20%
Sometimes	40	40%
Often	25	25%
Always	15	15%

Interpretation: Digital fatigue is common among students.

#### 4.8 Posture-related Problems

Response	No. of Students	Percentage
Never	25	25%
Sometimes	35	35%
Often	25	25%
Always	15	15%

Interpretation: Poor posture issues are widely reported.

#### 4.9 Stress Levels due to Screen Usage

Level	No. of Students	Percentage
Low	20	20%
Moderate	40	40%
High	25	25%
Very High	15	15%

Interpretation: Moderate to high stress due to screen usage.

#### 4.10 Anxiety due to Digital Dependence

Response	No. of Students	Percentage
Never	25	25%
Sometimes	35	35%
Often	25	25%
Always	15	15%

Interpretation: Signs of digital anxiety are visible.

#### 4.11 Concentration Problems

Response	No. of Students	Percentage
Never	18	18%

Sometimes	40	40%
Often	27	27%
Always	15	15%

Interpretation: Screen usage reduces concentration span.

#### 4.12 Symptoms of Screen Addiction

Level	No. of Students	Percentage
Low	22	22%
Moderate	38	38%
High	25	25%
Very High	15	15%

Interpretation: Moderate to high addiction symptoms exist.

#### 4.13 Impact on Academic Performance

Impact	No. of Students	Percentage
Improved	20	20%
No Change	35	35%
Declined	30	30%
Highly Declined	15	15%

Interpretation: Excessive screen use negatively impacts academics.

#### 4.14 Frequency of Face-to-face Interaction

Frequency	No. of Students	Percentage
Very Low	15	15%
Low	30	30%
Moderate	35	35%
High	20	20%

Interpretation: Digital usage reduces in-person interactions.

#### 4.15 Quality of Social Relationships

Quality	No. of Students	Percentage
Poor	10	10%
Average	30	30%
Good	40	40%
Very Good	20	20%

Interpretation: Students maintain fairly good relationships.

#### 4.16 Time Spent with Family

Level	No. of Students	Percentage
Very Low	20	20%
Low	30	30%

Moderate	30	30%
High	20	20%

Interpretation: Family interaction is moderately affected.

#### 4.17 Awareness of Digital Balance

Awareness Level	No. of Students	Percentage
Not Aware	15	15%
Slightly Aware	30	30%
Aware	35	35%
Highly Aware	20	20%

Interpretation: Students show awareness of digital balance.

#### 4.18 Practice of taking Screen Breaks

Frequency	No. of Students	Percentage
Never	20	20%
Sometimes	35	35%
Often	30	30%
Always	15	15%

Interpretation: Break practices are inconsistent.

#### 4.19 Use of Digital well-being Tools

Usage	No. of Students	Percentage
Never	30	30%
Sometimes	30	30%
Often	25	25%
Always	15	15%

Interpretation: Low adoption of digital well-being tools.

#### 4.20 Preference for a Balanced Digital Lifestyle

Response	No. of Students	Percentage
Disagree	10	10%
Neutral	20	20%
Agree	40	40%
Strongly Agree	30	30%

Interpretation: Majority prefer balanced digital lifestyle.

### Conclusion

This study highlights screen culture as a major influence on the daily lives of Generation Z living in Mumbai's Harbour Suburbs. For today's youth, digital technology such as smartphones, tablets, social media platforms, and online streaming services has become an inseparable part of everyday activities related to education, work, and leisure. While technology offers several advantages—such as improved access to

education and career opportunities, enhanced creativity, and better social connectivity—its excessive and uncontrolled use can negatively impact both physical and psychological well-being.

The findings indicate that constant exposure to electronic devices, especially their presence in bedrooms, disrupts healthy sleep patterns among young individuals. Poor sleep quality was linked to increased levels of fatigue, stress, and reduced cognitive performance. Additionally, heavy use of social media and online entertainment platforms often leads to feelings of loneliness and social isolation, as virtual interactions gradually replace real-life connections. Emotional factors such as stress relief, entertainment, and the fear of missing out (FoMO) encourage behaviours like binge-watching and continuous scrolling, creating a cycle that further affects mental and emotional health.

The fast-paced urban lifestyle of the Harbour Suburbs further intensifies these challenges. Academic pressure, work demands, long commuting hours, and easy access to high-speed internet make it difficult for young people to maintain a healthy balance between online and offline life. However, the study also reveals that when digital media is used consciously and with clear purpose, it can produce positive outcomes. Platforms such as social media and OTT services can support creative learning, self-expression, and emotional support when used mindfully and in moderation.

Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of achieving digital balance in the lives of Generation Z to ensure long-term health and well-being. Families, educational institutions, and community organizations play a crucial role in guiding young individuals by promoting healthy screen habits, encouraging physical activity, supporting face-to-face interactions, and spreading awareness about the mental and emotional risks of excessive screen use. By learning to engage with technology in a mindful manner, Gen Z can enjoy its benefits while safeguarding their physical health, mental resilience, and social well-being in an increasingly digital urban environment.

### **Recommendation**

Establishing digital balance among Generation Z requires consistent efforts from educational institutions, families, and the wider community. Colleges and universities play a vital role by educating students about the health benefits of balanced screen usage and encouraging mindful use of digital devices. Activities such as workshops on digital detox, time management, and responsible smartphone usage can help students understand the long-term impact of excessive screen time. Promoting regular screen breaks, especially during study hours and before bedtime, can reduce digital fatigue and improve overall well-being.

Strengthening offline social connections is equally important. Colleges and community organizations can encourage face-to-face interaction through sports, cultural events, and group activities, helping students build meaningful relationships beyond digital platforms. Families also contribute by spending quality, screen-free time together, which supports emotional bonding.

In addition, institutions should integrate digital well-being into the curriculum and guide students to use technology mainly for productive learning. Encouraging physical activities such as yoga, walking, or sports further supports mental and physical health. Responsible social media use and awareness of its negative effects are essential for promoting a healthier digital lifestyle among Gen Z.

### **Suggestion**

- Future studies can improve the reliability of findings by including a larger and more diverse sample drawn from different geographical areas of Mumbai.
- Comparative research between Millennials and Generation Z may offer deeper insights into differences in digital behaviour and screen-use patterns across generations.
- Longitudinal studies can be conducted to understand the long-term impact of prolonged screen exposure on physical and mental well-being.
- Researchers may also examine gender-based differences and variations based on educational background to gain a more nuanced understanding of digital habits.

- The use of qualitative research methods, such as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, can help capture personal experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward digital media usage.

### **The 30:30:30 Digital Balance Model (Proposed)**

As a practical approach to promote healthy digital habits among Generation Z, this study proposes the 30:30:30 Digital Balance Model, which encourages mindful daily routines:

- 30 minutes of focused digital use for academic, learning, or productive purposes
- 30 minutes of physical or offline activity, such as walking, exercise, hobbies, or face-to-face interaction
- 30 minutes of complete digital-free time, especially before sleep, to support mental relaxation and emotional well-being

This model is simple, flexible, and easy to practice in daily life. By creating a balance between screen time, physical activity, and mindful breaks, the 30:30:30 model aims to reduce digital fatigue, improve focus, and encourage healthier lifestyle choices among students.

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