
The Impact of Social Media on Generation Z: Influence on Well-Being and the Role of Mindful Healing in Promoting Life Balance

Bhikkhuni Tran Thi Binh

Nakhon Ratchasima Buddhist College, Mahamakut Buddhist University

email: huethuanvn@gmail.com

Received 28/02/2025; Revised 10/04/2025; Accepted 11/04/2025

Abstract

Social media usage has increasingly shaped the lives of Generation Z, often resulting in adverse mental and physical health outcomes. This pervasive influence on Gen Z's overall well-being highlights how mindful healing practices can promote a more balanced lifestyle. Generation Z is particularly vulnerable to the challenges posed by the digital age. This study explores the experiences of NBC-MBU at Fo Guang Shan Thai Hua Temple (佛光山泰華寺), where Buddhist educational practices intersect with contemporary well-being strategies.

The investigation unfolds across three interrelated dimensions. First, it examines the complex effects of prolonged social media engagement on mental health, emotional stability, and interpersonal relationships. Evidence suggests that extended exposure to social media is associated with increased levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, and a decline in face-to-face communication skills, all contributing to an overall imbalance in daily life. Second, the study emphasizes the cultural and educational significance of Fo Guang Shan as an institution dedicated to promoting holistic well-being through the integration of Buddhist teachings. Finally, the analysis focuses on a structured mindful healing program delivered to NBC-MBU undergraduates. This program includes mindfulness practices such as guided chanting, reflective outdoor activities, and periods of digital disengagement, all designed to foster self-awareness and establish healthy boundaries in the face of digital overload.

Preliminary reflections from participants indicate that these mindful healing practices enhance mental clarity and support improved interpersonal interactions and emotional resilience. By offering a narrative account of the integration of ancient mindfulness traditions with modern well-being strategies, this case study contributes to broader discussions on digital well-being. It underscores the potential of culturally embedded practices to mitigate some of the adverse effects of digital engagement, thereby suggesting a promising avenue for fostering more balanced lifestyles in an era of rapid technological change.

Keywords: Social Media; Fo Guang Shan Thai Hua Temple (佛光山泰華寺); Life's Balance; Generation Z; Mind Healing Training Program (MHTP)

Introduction

Social media profoundly influences online engagement and offline behaviour, shaping how individuals access information, communicate, and form personal identities. A global online survey conducted in February 2019 revealed that many users experienced improved access to information, more streamlined communication, and enhanced freedom of expression through social media platforms (Xu et al., 2022). However, these benefits are accompanied by significant concerns, including diminished privacy, heightened political polarisation, and pervasive everyday distractions. For Generation Z—those born between 1995 and 2012 and the first cohort to grow up entirely immersed in digital environments—such dynamics are particularly salient, as their formative experiences are inextricably linked to digital technology (Anderson et al., 2023).

In today's fast-paced society, chronic stress and burnout have emerged as pressing public health concerns. Research indicates that prolonged stress is associated with adverse outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and cardiovascular diseases (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Moreover, burnout—characterised by emotional exhaustion and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment—has become an increasing problem, especially among youth facing the demands of both academic and digital life (Salari et al., 2020). Generation Z's

preference for visually driven and interactive platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube further complicates this picture. Approximately 49% of young users report stress or anxiety related to their social media use (Vannucci et al., 2020), underscoring the pressing need to address these challenges.

Against this backdrop, Buddhist mindfulness practices have been advanced as a promising counterbalance. Rooted in traditions that emphasise mindfulness, self-compassion, and disciplined living, these practices foster mental clarity and emotional stability (Harvey, 2013). The Anapanasati Sutta, for instance, highlights mindful breathing as an essential method for cultivating present-moment awareness (Horner, 1993). Contemporary applications such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) have adapted these ancient techniques to alleviate symptoms of stress and depression (Gu et al., 2019; Pan et al., 2024).

This article examines the negative impacts of social media on Generation Z. It evaluates the "Mind Healing" training program implemented at Fo Guang Shan Thai Hua Temple (佛光山泰華寺) in Bangkok, Thailand. A case study of undergraduate students at NBC-MBU explores how integrating mindfulness practices into daily routines can facilitate healthier digital habits, support effective self-regulation, and ultimately enhance overall well-being. In doing so, the study contributes to a growing body of literature on digital well-being. It offers novel insights into the application of Buddhist mindfulness within modern educational settings in Thailand.

The Impacts of Social Media Usage on Gen Z's Life

Social media platforms have transformed global communication by enabling real-time connectivity and rapid information dissemination. This paper examines the relationship between Generation Z (Gen Z) and social media, focusing on both the transformative aspects of digital engagement and the adverse effects on physical and mental health.

The Relationship between Gen Z and Social Media

Gen Z is often described as the first true "digital native" cohort, having come of age alongside the rapid evolution of smartphones, high-speed internet, and social media platforms (Kastenholz, 2021). This generation demonstrates unparalleled engagement with social media: nearly half of U.S. teens report being online "almost constantly," with YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat remaining their most frequented platforms (Faverio & Sidoti, 2024)

Their reliance on these digital spaces for news, entertainment, and social interaction marks a profound shift from traditional media consumption, reshaping how young people communicate, form communities, and perceive the world around them (Vogels & Gelles-Watnick, 2023).

1. Engagement with Social Media

Central to this transformative journey has been the rise of Gen Z, a demographic cohort that has grown up in a digital-first environment. Gen Z's engagement with social media is distinguished not just by frequency and duration but also by a unique adaptability to the platforms' continuous innovations (Sharma et al., 2023). This has led to a significant increase in users, especially among younger demographics, who navigate these platforms with an unprecedented level of savvy and intuitiveness (Twenge & Martin, 2020). Gen Z who grew up in a digitised world, exhibits unique interaction patterns with social media. The relationship between Gen Z and social media is multifaceted, encompassing aspects of communication such as entertainment, information dissemination, and engagement in social interaction (Pichler et al., 2021). Gen Z is the central group in perfectly uses social media, as the research pointed out that they always take almost time to play or search for information on social media platforms.

2. Role of Social Media as a Communication Tool

The reliance on digital platforms among Gen Z marks a significant shift from traditional media consumption. According to Toma et al. (2023), platforms such as Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter have redefined how younger audiences access news and engage in social discussions. Furthermore, research has consistently highlighted Gen Z's preference for visually oriented platforms. For instance, studies by Kullolli & Trebicka (2023) show that platforms like Instagram and TikTok are particularly favoured due to their visually rich content formats. This preference aligns with findings that approximately 78% of respondents in recent studies have reported greater engagement with image- and video-centric social media (Kullolli & Trebicka, 2023).

The Negative Effects of Social Media on Gen Z

Despite the advantages of enhanced connectivity and access to information, the extensive use of social media by Gen Z has also been linked to adverse outcomes. These

include prolonged exposure to digital content, which can foster both physical and mental health issues, as well as a decline in face-to-face social interactions.

1. Social Media Addiction

Recent statistics from the World Economic Forum (2024) indicate that global internet users spend an average of 2 hours and 27 minutes a day on social media. Complementary data from Statista suggests a slight upward trend in usage, with global social media use averaging 145 minutes per day in 2021 and increasing to 147 minutes in 2022 (Statista Research Department, 2022). Lajnef (2023) posits that this prolonged engagement not only impacts communication patterns but also plays a pivotal role in shaping the identity and psychological well-being of Gen Z. Forbes further identifies Gen Z as “the first generation of true digital natives,” pointing to near-universal smartphone ownership—approximately 98%—and an average daily social media app usage of over four hours (Kastenholz, 2021). Such findings reinforce the notion that while social media serves as a vital communication channel, its overuse may predispose young users to digital addiction and its associated consequences.

In understanding Gen Z, it is essential to recognise their unique position as “true digital natives.” Recent analyses indicate that nearly universal smartphone ownership is reported among this cohort, with an estimated 98% adopting mobile technology. This proficiency in digital engagement is reflected in their daily usage patterns, where they reportedly spend, on average, over four hours on social media apps (Bergh et al., 2023). Research highlights the implications of this digital immersion, particularly in the context of marketing and personal branding (Tian et al., 2023; Ahuja & Grover, 2023).

Advertising strategies targeting Gen Z must account for their extensive social media engagement; they have grown accustomed to sharing personal information and often compare their realities with those presented on social platforms (Lyngdoh et al., 2022). This engagement influences purchasing decisions and cultivates brand loyalty, emphasising the need for marketers to adapt their strategies to resonate with this demographic's preferences for authentic and personalised content (Singh, 2023; Ameen et al., 2023).

The mental health landscape of Gen Z is also a critical factor to consider. The prevalence of smartphone and social media use is linked to increased feelings of social isolation and anxiety (Walsh et al., 2024). The implications for social relationships and mental well-being are significant, suggesting that while digital connectivity is a hallmark of their

existence, it may also contribute to negative psychological outcomes (Kiss et al., 2020). Studies have indicated that the impacts of excessive digital engagement on mental health are worthy of more extensive investigation, highlighting both risks and potential protective factors associated with their digital habits (Ameen et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the relationship between Generation Z and social media is complex and dynamic. While digital platforms facilitate unprecedented opportunities for communication, entertainment, and information sharing, they also present significant challenges, notably the potential for addiction and adverse health effects. Future research should continue to explore the nuances of these interactions to inform strategies that mitigate the negative implications while fostering the positive aspects of digital communication. Moreover, Gen Z's identity as digital natives markedly influences their social practices, marketing responses, and mental health dynamics. As researchers delve deeper into these interconnections, it becomes imperative to tailor approaches that reflect their experiences and the challenges they face in an increasingly digital world.

2. Mental and Physical Health Crises

Although social media fosters innovative forms of engagement and creativity, it also presents significant challenges for Generation Z. Numerous studies have raised concerns regarding the impact of prolonged social media use on mental health, particularly the emergence of anxiety, depression, and negative body image. Kerr & Kingsbury (2023) have noted that continuous exposure to curated, idealised portrayals of life on social media platforms is associated with diminished self-esteem and increased body dissatisfaction. In a similar vein, Faelens et al. (2021) reported that the prevalence of idealised content can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and contribute to adverse mental health outcomes.

Moreover, research by Kullolli & Trebicka (2023) highlights a positive correlation between high levels of social media engagement and elevated indicators of stress and anxiety among Generation Z. Empirical evidence suggests that Gen Z spends between 60% and 80% of their time on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, which in turn amplifies the risks to their overall health. This over-engagement has been linked to rising rates of stress and burnout, reflecting an imbalance in modern life that is intensified by societal pressures to succeed (Kapur & Windish, 2012).

Further compounding these issues, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, 2024) asserts that social media may adversely affect young individuals whose neural development is ongoing, typically until the mid-to-late 20s. Problems such as cyberbullying, social isolation, and an inability to develop essential in-person communication skills have been identified as potential contributors to this crisis. Additionally, the convergence of multimodal information sharing (via text, images, video, and audio) on these platforms creates avenues for cybercrime. Cybercriminals may exploit personal data to impersonate individuals, commit fraud, or engage in cyberbullying through the misuse of personal media (NAMI, 2024).

In conclusion, extended and intensive social media use among Generation Z has been linked to significant mental and physical health challenges. Researchers have identified that constant exposure to curated, idealised images and information can foster heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and negative body image. These mental health concerns are compounded by indicators of increased stress and burnout linked to prolonged digital engagement. Moreover, the potential for cyberbullying and cybercrime adds another layer of risk, contributing to both psychological distress and physical health issues by disrupting sleep patterns and daily routines.

3. Decline of Social Communication

A prominent consequence of extensive social media usage among Generation Z is the reduction in face-to-face communication skills. As digital interactions become more prevalent, interpersonal skills critical for effective real-world communication may decline. Chassiakos et al. (2016) discuss how reliance on text-based interactions, which inherently lack the rich nonverbal cues present in personal conversations, can lead to a phenomenon known as social deficit. This deficit is characterised by a diminished capacity to accurately interpret verbal and nonverbal signals, ultimately impairing the development of empathy and effective interpersonal communication.

Consequently, while social media platforms expand one's network of contacts, they often undermine the quality of these interactions, leading to a decreased sense of belonging. This shift in communication dynamics can result in a growing divide between the quantity of online connections and the quality of in-person relationships. Collectively, these findings underscore the pressing need to address the adverse impacts of social media on communication skills among young users. These challenges, the current research advocates

for programs, such as training initiatives in Mind Healing for undergraduate students, aimed at promoting mental well-being and managing social media usage to mitigate these risks.

The pervasive use of social media is also associated with a decline in face-to-face communication skills among young people. As Gen Z increasingly relies on digital platforms for interactions, the absence of nonverbal cues in text-based exchanges undermines the development of empathy and effective interpersonal communication. This shift leads to what has been described as a social deficit, where the broad network of online contacts fails to translate into meaningful, in-person relationships and a strong sense of belonging.

The Overview of the Fo Guang Shan

Fo Guang Shan (FGS) is a prominent Buddhist organisation established in Taiwan that has expanded its influence internationally through a network of temples, educational institutions, cultural centres, and charitable initiatives. Founded in 1967 by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, FGS promotes Humanistic Buddhism—a doctrine that integrates traditional Buddhist teachings with contemporary social values (Huang, 2007). Master Hsing Yun, born in 1927 in Jiangsu Province, China, embarked on the monastic life in his early teens and later developed the constitutional framework of the FGS Patriarchal Association in 1972, significantly contributing to the modernisation and institutionalisation of Buddhist practice (Huang, 2007).

1. Purposes and Global Expansion

FGS is guided by four primary purposes: promoting Buddhism through culture, cultivating talents through education, benefiting society through charitable work, and purifying individual hearts via communal practices. In pursuing these aims, FGS has consistently advocated for interdenominational exchanges and global collaboration. By the late 1970s, FGS began expanding beyond Taiwan, establishing the Buddha's Light International Association across Asia, including in countries like India, Thailand, and Malaysia (Liao, 2018). Over time, the organization has developed a comprehensive infrastructure encompassing a university, Buddhist college, library, publishing house, translation center, literature center, teahouse, nursery school, care facilities for the elderly, secondary schools, a newspaper, and even a television station, thereby solidifying its role as a key promoter of Humanistic Buddhism both domestically and overseas (Huang, 2007).

2. Fo Guang Shan Thai Hua Temple in Thailand

A notable branch of FGS is the Thai Hua Temple (佛光山泰華寺) in Bangkok, Thailand. In February 1994, FGS signed an agreement with the Dharma Sangha in Bangkok, aiming to foster collaboration in publication exchange, human rights protection, religious freedom, and the preservation of Buddhist traditions (Huang, 2007). The temple is dedicated to the worship of Guan Yin (Avalokiteshvara), the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who is venerated within the Mahayana tradition as a source of comfort, protection, and blessings. This site not only functions as a place of worship but also as a hub for cultural and educational initiatives, including the “Mind Healing” training program designed to help individuals better understand themselves through Mahayana practices (Wang, 2015). With a presence in 173 countries and extensive outreach in Asia, FGS continues to be instrumental in disseminating Buddhist teachings and practices across diverse cultural contexts (Wang, 2015).

Fo Guang Shan exemplifies modern Buddhism by blending traditional teachings with contemporary practices. Since its founding in 1967, the organisation has expanded globally, using its core values of cultural promotion, education, charity, and communal practice to connect communities and address modern challenges. Its strong presence, especially throughout Asia, underscores its commitment to nurturing personal growth and preserving Buddhist traditions in today's interconnected world.

The Training of Mind Healing

The “Training of Mind Healing” program is designed to demonstrate how Buddhist mindfulness practices can enhance the effective use of social media among young individuals while promoting the development of strong interpersonal relationships. This training aims to reduce the negative effects of excessive digital engagement and cultivate emotional resilience and self-awareness.

1. Training Schedule and Structure

The program is based on the curriculum “English for Buddhist Propagation in the 21st Century” and consists of 24 students majoring in English for Communication at Nakhon Ratchasima Buddhist College, Mahamakut Buddhist University. The one-day training session takes place at the Fo Guang Shan Thailand Temple in Bangkok. Three mentors—Ven Braj Mohan, who assists the abbot of the Fo Guang Shan; Dr. Tran Binh; and Bhikkhin Tho—facilitate

the training, adapting the schedule flexibly to meet the participants' needs throughout the session. The curriculum emphasizes mindfulness practices designed to ground participants in the present moment. Guided exercises such as breath awareness and body scanning help participants recognize and articulate their physical states. Affirmations like "I am sitting," "I am standing," and "I am moving" (Horner, 2007) promote calm and deliberate awareness of bodily sensations and emotional conditions.

2. Content and Methodology

The training begins with an assessment of each student's social media usage to effectively tailor the mindfulness practices. Participants then engage in a five-step reflective process aimed at enhancing emotional regulation and self-awareness:

1. Recognition: Identifying feelings, such as anger, by acknowledging statements like "I know that anger is within me."

2. Acceptance: Embracing the presence of these emotions without denial.

3. Embracing: Learning to hold these emotions gently, much like a mother comforting her crying child.

4. Introspection: Examining the origins and underlying causes of their emotional states.

5. Insight: Gaining a deeper understanding of the multifaceted factors that influence their feelings, aligning with the mindful teachings of Hanh (2008).

The "Training of Mind Healing" program is designed to demonstrate how Buddhist mindfulness practices can foster more effective use of social media among young individuals while promoting the development of strong interpersonal relationships. This training aims to reduce the adverse effects of excessive digital engagement and to cultivate emotional resilience and self-awareness.

3. Outcomes, Implications, and Future Directions

The ultimate goal of the training is to empower young individuals by enhancing their emotional resilience and enabling healthier engagement with social media. By integrating mindfulness techniques into their daily routines, the participants are expected to experience reduced stress, improved emotional balance, and stronger interpersonal relationships. The program's approach underscores the potential of mindfulness practices to mitigate the negative impacts of social media on mental health while promoting constructive social

interaction. Moreover, mind-healing training seeks to address the immediate challenges linked to pervasive social media use and to instill long-term practices that promote psychological resilience and healthier social interactions. By fostering mindfulness, the program equips young individuals with the tools to navigate digital environments constructively and build relationships based on trust and sincerity.

In summary, the “Training of Mind Healing” program serves as an innovative intervention designed to harness Buddhist mindfulness practices to improve digital literacy and emotional well-being among young people. By guiding participants through reflective exercises and interactive activities, the program equips them with practical tools to manage their online behaviours and cultivate deeper, more genuine connections with others.

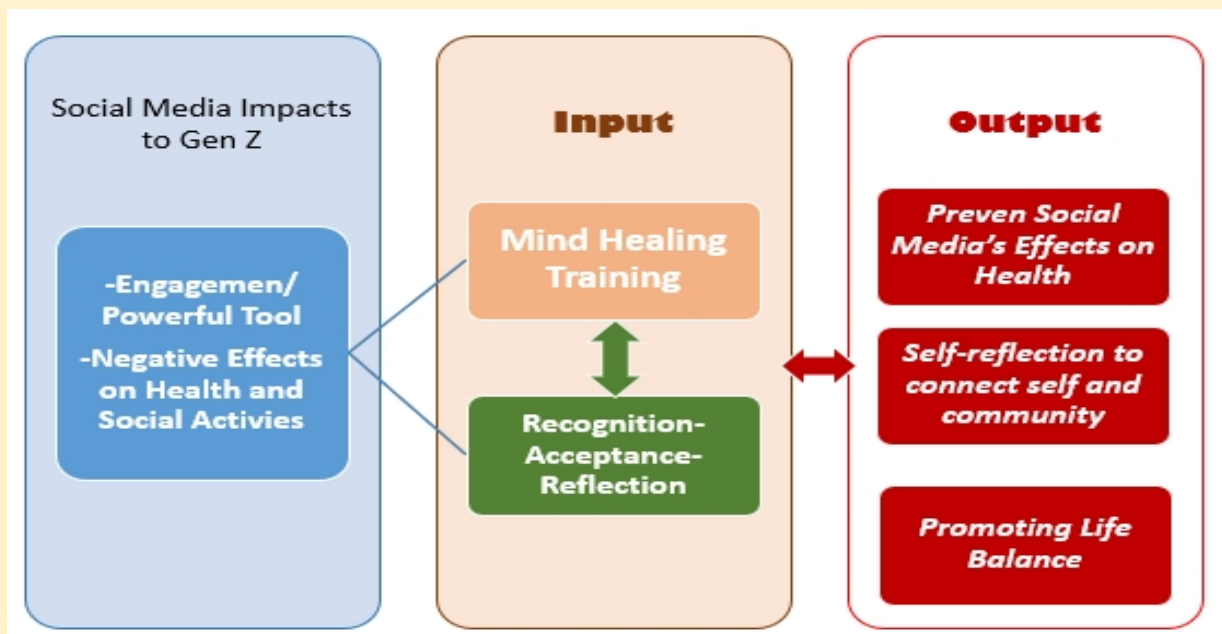


Figure 1: The summary chart of Output and Input of the Mind Healing Training

The Ambition of the Mind Healing Training

Gen Z, the first cohort to grow up in a hyperconnected digital landscape, faces unprecedented mental health challenges linked to excessive social media use, including anxiety, depression, and social isolation (Livingstone, 2017). The Mind Healing Training Program (MHTP) is a structured intervention designed to address these challenges by equipping adolescents and young adults with evidence-based mindfulness strategies. By integrating mindfulness practices with behavioral adjustments, the MHTP empowers participants to

mitigate the adverse effects of social media while cultivating meaningful, real-world connections.

The Ambition of the Mind Healing Training program is designed to equip Generation Z with mindfulness strategies to counteract the negative impacts of social media. By fostering self-reflection, digital literacy, and emotional regulation, the program aims to help young individuals maintain a balanced and healthy relationship with online platforms while enhancing their capacity for meaningful community engagement.

1. Preventing the Negative Effects of Social Media on Gen Z's Health

A comprehensive approach addressing both symptomatology and root causes of digital-related psychological distress in Gen Z is essential. Prolonged social media use has been linked to depression, anxiety, disrupted sleep, and self-harm ideation (Keles et al., 2019). Interventions such as the Mental Health and Technology Program (MHTP) combine psychoeducation on algorithmic reward loops with skill-building to mitigate compulsive use (Amen Clinics, 2024). Integrating mindfulness techniques—body scans and breath awareness—promotes emotional regulation and resilience (Britton et al., 2012). Anchoring these practices in respect, empathy, and compassion further buffers against digital toxicity and supports self-esteem (Ameen et al., 2022). Collaborative goal-setting unites participants in developing sustainable screen-time strategies aligned with personal values and health priorities (Hughes & Borrett, 2024).

Gen Z exhibits heightened vulnerability to adverse mental health outcomes associated with intensive social media exposure, including disrupted sleep patterns and body-image dissatisfaction (Keles et al., 2019). Reports indicate correlations between excessive online engagement and increased rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and self-harm ideation (Salam, 2023). This epidemiological signal underscores the urgency of evidence-based interventions that address both observable symptoms and underlying cognitive processes (Crosier, 2024).

Programs like the MHTP empower participants to identify and counteract addictive design elements such as infinite scrolling and autoplay (Amen Clinics, 2024). By elucidating algorithmic features that exploit reward-seeking, psychoeducation modules enhance digital literacy and foster intentional usage behaviors (Amen Clinics, 2024). Complementary

collaborative media planning ensures individualized limits that respect each participant's lifestyle and values.

Implementing body-scanning and breath-awareness practices yields measurable reductions in emotional reactivity to stressors, bolstering self-regulation capacities among young users (Britton et al., 2012). Contemporary cognitive-neuroscience frameworks categorize these interventions within attentional and constructive meditation families, emphasizing meta-awareness and cognitive reappraisal as primary mechanisms for sustaining behavioral change (Dahl et al., 2015). Grounding these techniques in respect, empathy, and compassion further strengthens psychological resilience and mediates self-esteem disturbances (Ameen et al., 2022).

Structured goal-setting sessions engage participants in co-constructing realistic media-use objectives aligned with personal and communal values. Empirical data suggest that accountability frameworks and mental health awareness initiatives significantly enhance adherence to balanced screen-time practices, thereby improving long-term well-being outcomes (Hughes & Borrett, 2024).

In conclusion, given Gen Z's unprecedented digital immersion, deploying integrated interventions that combine psychoeducation, mindfulness, and personalized planning is imperative for mitigating mental health risks and fostering sustainable technology engagement.

2. Fostering Self-Reflection to Enhance Community Connection

The MHTP employs guided journaling and group discussions to help participants critically assess their digital behaviours. Through structured self-reflection, individuals identify triggers for maladaptive use, such as social comparison or fear of missing out (FOMO), and reframe them using mindful awareness (Walshe, 1995). Modern research corroborates that mindfulness enhances emotional granularity, enabling individuals to disentangle self-worth from online validation (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). This introspective process fosters empathy, as participants recognise shared vulnerabilities, thereby strengthening offline relationships (Dahl et al., 2015). For instance, mindful listening exercises encourage nonjudgmental presence during face-to-face interactions, counteracting the superficiality of digital communication (Brown et al., 2007).

Central to the training is the cultivation of self-reflection through mindfulness techniques. Participants are guided to explore and understand their digital behavior by examining the emotional roots and triggers that underlie their social media usage. As outlined by Walshe (1995), self-reflection offers immediate benefits by enhancing emotional well-being, providing clarity of thought, and promoting mindful awareness. The training incorporates a structured five-step reflective process:

1. Recognition – Acknowledging emotions such as anger (e.g., “I know that anger is in me”);
2. Acceptance – Validating these emotions without denial;
3. Embracing – Gently holding and understanding these feelings;
4. Introspection – Analysing the origins and circumstances that contribute to these emotions; and
5. Insight – Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted influences on one’s emotional state (Hanh, 2008).

Further empirical work by Sun (2023) suggests that such reflective practices can significantly diminish the compulsive cravings associated with excessive social media use, ultimately fostering a healthier and more balanced lifestyle. This process not only supports individual well-being but also strengthens community bonds by encouraging open dialogue and shared experiences among participants.

3. Promoting Life Balance in the Digital Age

The training program also focuses on the broader goal of achieving life balance by integrating digital well-being with everyday activities. Mindfulness practices, as elucidated by Hanh (2008) and supported by contemporary research (Wang et al., 2023), enable participants to understand the conditions that lead to stress and institute healthy daily routines. The curriculum emphasises the need for regular physical activity, healthy nutrition, and quality sleep, alongside real-time interpersonal interactions. Moreover, technological interventions—such as social media usage notifications and time limits—are explored as tools to help users self-regulate their digital habits (George et al., 2018). By integrating these strategies, the training empowers students to make informed decisions about balancing their digital and offline lives, ultimately leading to improvements in both mental and physical well-being.

The MHTP adopts Hanh's (2008) principle of "interbeing," emphasising harmony between digital and physical realms. Participants co-create routines that prioritise sleep hygiene, nutrition, and physical activity alongside mindful technology use. George et al. (2018) validate the efficacy of "tech breaks," where app notifications are replaced with mindfulness prompts, reducing cognitive overload. Additionally, the program incorporates nature immersion and art therapy to counterbalance screen time, aligning with Rahula's (2004) Buddhist teachings on holistic wellness.

By integrating mindfulness-based exercises with digital literacy instruction, the Mind Healing Training Program offers a holistic model for reducing Gen Z's social media-related distress while fostering healthier online behaviours. Mindfulness practices—such as breath awareness and body scanning—have been shown to decrease symptoms of social media addiction and academic procrastination, yielding significant improvements in concentration and emotional regulation among students and to mitigate anxiety and depression in youth populations. Concurrently, digital literacy strategies equip participants to critically evaluate content, resist misinformation, and establish personal boundaries around screen time, thereby enhancing resilience to digital stressors and addressing vulnerabilities to online disinformation. Through guided self-reflection exercises, trainees learn to identify emotional triggers of compulsive social media use, fostering insight and self-compassion that translate into sustained behavioural change. The program further promotes balanced living by encouraging offline social interactions and peer support, which strengthen community bonds and counteract loneliness. Emerging evidence underscores the efficacy of this combined approach, suggesting that mindfulness-informed digital literacy could serve as a scalable intervention to improve Gen Z's mental and physical well-being in our increasingly connected world.



Figure 2: Mindful hugging and holding hands together to build friendship and sympathy



Figure 3: Mind Healing Training Program (MHTP) at Fo Guang Shan Thai Hua Temple

Conclusion

Social media stands as a powerful yet complex tool, offering significant advantages as well as noteworthy disadvantages. On one hand, these platforms facilitate access to information, entertainment, and enhanced digital communication. Conversely, they can also lead to detrimental effects, especially for Generation Z—the first generation to grow up entirely in the digital era. For this cohort, extensive social media engagement is linked to challenges such as addiction, increased anxiety, depression, burnout, and a decline in traditional face-to-face communication skills.

This case study of NBC-MBU underscores the dual nature of social media and explores how mindful healing practices can mitigate its negative implications. A mindfulness-based intervention conducted at the Fo Guang Shan Thai Hua Temple (佛光山泰華寺)—an esteemed branch of Fo Guang Shan established by Venerable Master Hsing Yun—provided a structured environment for students to engage in reflective practices. Renowned for its dedication to humanistic Buddhism, cultural promotion, and educational outreach, the temple served as an ideal backdrop for this initiative. Through the "mind healing training" program, 24 undergraduate students majoring in English for Communication at Nakhon Ratchasima Buddhist College, Mahamakut Buddhist University, were guided to critically assess their social media use, recognising both its benefits and drawbacks.

By incorporating mindfulness techniques such as guided chanting, reflective outdoor activities, and intentional digital disengagement, the training aimed to equip students with practical strategies for managing screen time and achieving a more balanced lifestyle. Overall, the findings indicate that integrating traditional mindfulness practices into modern educational contexts can effectively alleviate the adverse effects of excessive social media usage. This intervention promotes mental well-being and enhances interpersonal communication, fostering a more balanced and fulfilling daily life.

References

- Ahuja, S., & Grover, K. (2023). Excessive use of social networking sites and intention to invest in stock market among Gen Z: A parallel mediation model. *Journal of Content, Community & Communication*, 17(6), 63–78. <https://doi.org/10.31620/JCCC.06.23/063>
- Ameen, N., Cheah, J., & Kumar, S. (2022). It's all part of the customer journey: the impact of augmented reality, chatbots, and social media on the body image and self-esteem of generation Z female consumers. *Psychology and Marketing*, 39(11), 2110-2129. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21715>
- Amen Clinics. (2024 February 21). 5 Most Addictive Social Media Features. <https://www.amenclinics.com/blog/5-most-addictive-social-media-features/>
- Anderson, M., Faverio, M., & Gottfried, J. (2023). *Teens, social media and technology 2023*. Pew Research Center.
- Bergh, J., Pelsmacker, P., & Worsley, B. (2023). Beyond labels: segmenting the Gen Z market for more effective marketing. *Young Consumers Insight and Ideas for Responsible Marketers*, 25(2), 188-210. <https://doi.org/10.1108/yc-03-2023-1707>
- Britton, W. B., Shahar, B., Szepsenwol, O., & Jacobs, W. J. (2012). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy improves emotional reactivity to social stress: results from a randomized controlled trial. *Behavior therapy*, 43(2), 365-380. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2011.08.006>
- Brown, K. W., Ryan, R. M., & Creswell, J. D. (2007). Mindfulness: Theoretical foundations and evidence for its salutary effects. *Psychological Inquiry*, 18(4), 211–237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10478400701598298>
- Chassiakos, Y. R., Radesky, J., Christakis, D., Moreno, M. A., & Cross, C. (2016). Children and adolescents and digital media. *Pediatrics*, 138(5), e20162593. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-2593>
- Crosier, S. (2024). Gen Z, Social Media, and Mental Health: A generation raised on the internet is feeling its effects, navigating algorithms, and forging community. <https://sph.emory.edu/news/news-release/2024/05/gen-z-social-media-mental-health.html>
- Dahl, C. J., Lutz, A., & Davidson, R. J. (2015). Reconstructing and deconstructing the self: cognitive mechanisms in meditation practice. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 19(9), 515-523.

- Faelens, L., Hoorelbeke, K., Cambier, R., van Put, J., Van de Putte, E., De Raedt, R., & Koster, E. H. (2021). The relationship between Instagram use and indicators of mental health: A systematic review. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 4, 100121. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2021.100121>
- Faverio, M. & Sidoti, O. (2024, December 12). Teens, Social Media and Technology 2024. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2024/12/12/teens-social-media-and-technology-2024/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKC Ajw8If ABhBXEiwAxRHlsCggSpIIdznc_4jrWSqw4a2CXtJV7VocMqen4UlwNEQQuxNfjnNpLRoCFy4QAvD_BwE
- George, M. J., Jensen, M. R., Russell, M. A., Gassman-Pines, A., Copeland, W. E., Hoyle, R. H., & Odgers, C. L. (2018). Young adolescents' digital technology use, perceived impairments, and well-being in a representative sample. *Journal of Pediatrics*, 219, 180-187.
- Gu, J., Strauss, C., Bond, R., & Cavanagh, K. (2019). How do mindfulness-based Uhlscognitive therapy and mindfulness-based stress reduction improve mental health and wellbeing? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 59, 52–60.
- Hanh, T. N. (2008). *The heart of Buddha's teaching*. Random House.
- Harvey, P. (2013). *An introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, history, and practices*. Cambridge University Press.
- Horner, I. B. (1993). *The Anapanasati Sutta: Mindfulness of breathing* [Commentary]. Wisdom Publications.
- Horner, I. B. (Trans.). (1993). *The collection of the middle length sayings (Majjhimanikāya, Vol. III)*. PTS.
- Horner, I. B. (Trans.). (2007). The collection of the middle length sayings (Majjhimanikāya, Vol. I) (pp. 70–82). PTS. Retrieved February 25, 2025, from <https://www.discoveringbudha.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/PTS-The-Collection-of-Middle-Length-Sayings-Vol-1-IB-Horner-1954.pdf>
- Huang, Y. C. (2007). Flame-like Ritual Music and Its Religious Connotations: The Case of the Buddhist Temple System in Taiwan. *Taiwan Music Studies*, 4, 20–38.
- Hughes, L. & Borrett, A. (2024). Teenage social media use strongly linked to anxiety and depression. <https://www.ft.com/content/bced2138-366b-448f-ab12-3c068199145a>
-

- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg016>
- Kapur, N., & Windish, D. M. (2012). Health literacy as a social determinant of health.
- Kastenholz, C. (2021, May 17). Gen Z and the rise of social commerce. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesagencycouncil/2021/05/17/gen-z-and-the-rise-of-social-commerce/>
- Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2019). A systematic review: the influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 79–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1590851>
- Kerr, S., & Kingsbury, M. (2023). Online digital media use and adolescent mental health. *Health reports*, 34(2), 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.25318/82-003-x202300200002-eng>
- Kiss, H., Fitzpatrick, K., & Pikó, B. (2020). The digital divide: risk and protective factors and the differences in problematic use of digital devices among hungarian youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 108, 104612. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104612>
- Kullolli, T. & Trebicka, B. (2023). Generation Z and the Evolution of Social Media: A Two-Decade Analysis of Impact and Usage Trends. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research and Development*. 10(3). 77-83.
- Lajnef, K. (2023). The effect of social media influencers' on teenagers' behavior: An empirical study using cognitive map technique. *Current Psychology*, 42, 19364–19377. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04273-1>
- Liao, Y. (2018). The Philosophy and Practice of Humanistic Buddhism - A Sociological Analysis of Humanistic Buddhism in Fo Guang Shan. *Essays in the Sociology of Human Buddhism*, no. 1, pp. 302–318.
- Lindsay, E. K., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). Mechanisms of mindfulness training: Monitor and Acceptance Theory (MAT). *Clinical Psychology Review*, 51, 48–59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2016.10.011>
- Livingstone, S. (2017). iGen: why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy – and completely unprepared for adulthood. *Journal of Children and Media*, 12(1), 118–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2017.1417091>

- Lyngdoh, T., El-Manstrly, D., & Jeesha, K. (2022). Social isolation and social anxiety as drivers of generation Z's willingness to share personal information on social media. *Psychology and Marketing*, 40(1), 5-26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21744>
- Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2016). Understanding the burnout experience: Recent research and its implications for psychiatry. *World Psychiatry*, 15(2), 103–111.
- Miller, K. A., Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1988). Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior. *Contemporary Sociology*, 17(2), 253.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). (2024). Social media use and impact on mental health. <https://www.nami.org/advocacy/policy-priorities/stopping-harmful-practices/social-media-use-and-impact-on-mental-health/>
- Pan, Y., Li, F., Liang, H., Shen, X., Bing, Z., Cheng, L., & Dong, Y. (2024). Effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on Mental Health and Psychological Quality of Life among University Students: A GRADE-Assessed Systematic Review. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 1, 8872685. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2024/8872685>
- Pichler, S., Kohli, C., & Granitz, N. (2021). DITTO for Gen Z: A framework for leveraging the uniqueness of the new generation. *Business Horizons*, 64(5), 599–610. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2021.02.021>
- Rahula, W. (2007). *What the Buddha taught*. Grove Press.
- Salam, E. (2023, April 28). Social media particularly damaging to mental health of Gen Zers, says study. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2023/apr/28/social-media-mental-health-gen-z>
- Salari, N., Hosseinian-Far, A., Jalali, R., Vaisi-Raygani, A., Rasoulpoor, S., Mohammadi, M., Rasoulpoor, S. & Khaledi-Paveh, B. (2020). Prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression among the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Globalization and Health*, 16, 1-11.
- Sharma, M., Kaushal, D., & Joshi, S. (2023). Adverse effect of social media on Generation Z users' behavior: Government information support as a moderating variable. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 72, 103256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103256>
- Singh, D. V. (2023). Influencing Gen Z's mindset towards a product through content marketing. *EPRA International Journal of Economics, Business*

- and *Management Studies*, 10(6), 141–148. <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra13508>
- Statista Research Department. (2022, February 22). Daily time spent on social networking by global internet users from 2012 to 2022 (in minutes) [Data set]. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/>
- Sun, L. (2023). Social media usage and students' social anxiety, loneliness and well-being: Does digital mindfulness-based intervention effectively work? *BMC psychology*, 11(1), 362.
- Tian, S. C., Cho, S. Y., Jia, X., Sun, R., & Tsai, W. S. S. (2023). *Antecedents and outcomes of Generation Z consumers' contrastive and assimilative upward comparisons with social media influencers*. Sacred Heart University Digital Commons. https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/wcob_fac/696/
- Toma, S.-G., Grădinaru, C., Hudea, O.-S., & Modreanu, A. (2023). Perceptions and Attitudes of Generation Z Students towards the Responsible Management of Smart Cities. *Sustainability*, 15(18). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151813967>
- Twenge, J. M., & Martin, G. N. (2020). Gender differences in associations between digital media use and psychological well-being: Evidence from three large datasets. *Journal of Adolescence*, 79, 91–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.12.018>
- Vannucci, A., Flannery, K. M., & Ohannessian, C. M. (2020). Social media use and anxiety in emerging adults. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 49(9), 1723–1735. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.08.040>
- Vogels, E. A. & Gelles-Watnick, R. (2023, April 24). Teens and social media: Key findings from Pew Research Center surveys. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/24/teens-and-social-media-key-findings-from-pew-research-center-surveys/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw8IfABhBXEiwAxRHlsGLSerM2_znrj6A0_e46nlBy1qb7HfJdsezbmnvHG7YMzSRINz6D5BoCYMcQAvD_BwE
- Walsh, L., Regan, A., Okabe-Miyamoto, K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2024). Does putting down your smartphone make you happier? the effects of restricting digital media on well-being. *Plos One*, 19(10), e0306910. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0306910>
- Walshe, M. (Tran.). (1995). *The long discourses of the Buddha: A translation of the Digha Nikaya*. Wisdom Publications.
-

- Wang, Y. (2015). *A Preliminary Study on the Religious Beliefs of the “Four-Faced Buddha” in Thailand and Taiwan, Vol. 1*. Social Science Literature Publishing.
- World Economic Forum. (2024). Infographics: Global average time spent on social media per day 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-social-media-statistics-2024>
- Xu, Q. A., Chang, V., & Jayne, C. (2022). A systematic review of social media-based sentiment analysis: Emerging trends and challenges. *Decision Analytics Journal*, 3, 100073. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dajour.2022.100073>