Self-Concept as a Mediator in the Relationship between TikTok @_Project.xo Social Media Usage and Psychological Well-being of Generation Z

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Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran konsep diri sebagai mediator dalam hubungan antara penggunaan TikTok @_Project.xo dan kesejahteraan psikologis di kalangan Generasi Z di Indonesia dengan analisis PROCESS Macro. Fokus studi ini adalah memperdalam pemahaman teoritis mengenai mekanisme internal yang menghubungkan keterlibatan media sosial dan kesejahteraan psikologis. Pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain deskriptif-korelatif dikumpulkan dari 150 responden Generasi Z yang dipilih melalui *purposive sampling*, Data dikumpulkan menggunakan tiga instrumen terstandar: Skala Keterlibatan Media Sosial untuk Remaja (SMES-A), Kuesioner Konsep Diri Robson, dan Skala Kesejahteraan Psikologis Ryff (18 item). Hasil aalisis menunjukkan bahwa konsep diri secara signifikan memediasi hubungan antara penggunaan TikTok dan kesejahteraan psikologis ($\beta = 0.057$; 95% CI = 0.022–0.094). Penggunaan TikTok tidak berpengaruh langsung terhadap kesejahteraan psikologis, tetapi memberikan efek tidak langsung melalui konsep diri. Hal ini menegaskan bahwa konsep diri berperan sebagai mediator penuh. Temuan ini memperkaya literatur tentang kesejahteraan psikologis Generasi Z Indonesia serta membuka arah penelitian lanjutan untuk mengeksplorasi variabel mediator atau moderator lainnya.

Abstract. This study examines the role of self-concept as a mediator in the relationship between TikTok @_Project.xo usage and psychological well-being among Generation Z in Indonesia using PROCESS Macro analysis. The focus of this study is to deepen the theoretical understanding of the internal mechanisms linking social media engagement and psychological well-being. Collect a quantitative approach with a descriptive-correlative design from 150 Generation Z respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using three standardized instruments: the Social Media Engagement Scale for Adolescents (SMES-A), the Robson Self-Concept Questionnaire, and the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (18 items). The analysis shows that self-concept significantly mediates the relationship between TikTok usage and psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.057$; 95% CI = 0.022–0.094). TikTok usage does not have a direct effect on psychological well-being, but has an indirect effect through self-concept. This indicates that self-concept serves as a full mediator. These findings enrich the literature on the psychological well-being of Generation Z in Indonesia and open up further research directions to explore other mediator or moderator variables.

Key word: Self-concept; Social Media Use; Psychological Well-Being; Generation Z; Tiktok.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2010, represents the largest age cohort in Indonesia, accounting for 27.94% of the population according to the 2020 BPS Census. Given their demographic dominance, society places considerable expectations on this generation (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021). Gen Z is generally characterized by strong goal orientation, advanced technological literacy, and a greater willingness to take risks (Aziz et al., 2022; Sawitri, 2022). Nevertheless, they also face various psychological challenges, including tendencies toward social comparison, low self-confidence, and difficulties in decision-making and establishing relationships Suharyanti & Hanathasia (2021). These conditions underscore the increasing urgency of addressing mental health issues among this generation.

Ryff (1989) conceptualized psychological well-being as an optimal state of being encompassing six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. In line with ongoing scholarly developments, recent studies highlight the significant influence of digital media, self-concept, and the quality of social relationships on the psychological well-being of young people. Social media, particularly TikTok, plays a dual role: while it facilitates self-expression and enhances self-confidence, it can also generate negative effects such as fear of missing out (FOMO), anxiety, and social comparison (Adawiyah, 2020; Reer et al., 2019a; Sharma & Veer Singh, 2023). Within this context, self-concept serves as a key mediating factor that bridges the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being (Reer et al., 2019b; Sharma & Veer Singh, 2023).

Furthermore, Fitts (1971) defined self-concept as an individual's frame of reference in interacting with their environment. It reflects personal evaluations of the self in physical, psychological, and social dimensions (Burns, 1982). Self-concept is not innate but develops over time through life experiences and environmental influences (Oktaviana et al., 2023; Janah, 2022). Individuals with a positive self-concept are more likely to experience higher life satisfaction, demonstrate greater self-regulation for personal growth, and achieve higher levels of psychological well-being (Khotimah Sirajuddin et al., 2023; Oktaviana et al., 2023).
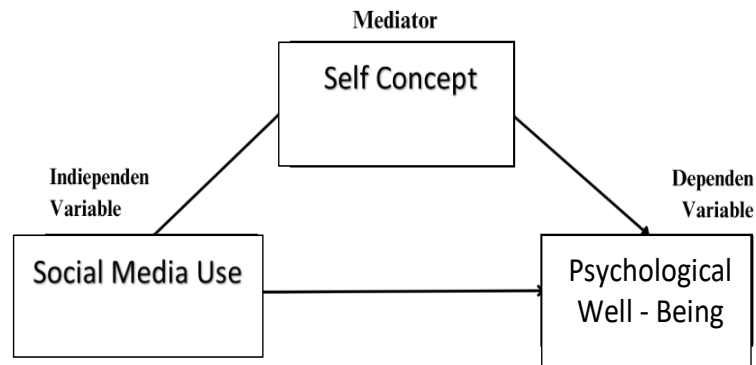
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Depicting the Independent, Mediating, and Dependent Variables

This study aims to examine the extent to which self-concept mediates the relationship between social media use (independent variable) and psychological well-being (dependent variable). Social media platforms, particularly TikTok, are believed to shape the self-concept of Gen Z through visual content that fosters social comparison processes. When managed positively, such comparisons can reinforce a constructive self-view and enhance psychological well-being (Siallagan et al., 2021; Wimona & Loisa, 2022). Although several studies have reported significant associations between social media use and well-being, the findings remain inconclusive. Some research even indicates no substantial effect (Eva & Naurasari, 2021; Hancock et al., 2022; Oktaviani et al., 2022). Moreover, studies specifically addressing the mediating role of self-concept are still scarce, particularly within the context of Gen Z, who exhibit distinctive patterns of digital interaction. Therefore, this research seeks to fill this theoretical gap.

Building on this rationale, the present study investigates the impact of TikTok use (@_Project.xo) on the psychological well-being of Generation Z, with self-concept as a mediating variable. Employing a quantitative approach and correlational method, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological dynamics of Gen Z in the digital era, particularly regarding the influence of social media on self-concept formation—a topic that remains underexplored in the Indonesian context.

METHOD

This study was conducted online through the TikTok account @_Project.xo, which is known for providing content on positive affirmations, self-awareness, personal counseling, social issues, and mental health. A quantitative approach with a descriptive-correlational design was employed. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, and psychological scales served as the primary data collection instruments. The sampling process and distribution of the psychological scales took place between March and April 2025. Prior to the main data collection, the instruments were tested for validity and reliability, with results indicating satisfactory internal consistency, confirming their suitability for use in the main study.

Three standardized instruments, adapted and back-translated by the P2BPP LP3 Universitas Negeri Semarang, were utilized: the Social Media Engagement Scale for Adolescents (SMES-A; 11 items, α = 0.776), the Robson Self-Concept Questionnaire (RSCQ; 30 items, α = 0.856), and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (18 items, α = 0.837). All items were deemed valid (r-calculated > r-table, $p < 0.05$) and reliable, making them appropriate for assessing participants' social media engagement, self-concept, and psychological well-being. Before completing the questionnaires, participants were provided with information regarding the research objectives and assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

The purposive sampling technique was employed to target individuals meeting predefined criteria: members of Generation Z who follow the TikTok account @_Project.xo. This technique was chosen to ensure that the sample was relevant to the study's objectives. Upon receiving permission from @_Project.xo to conduct a cross-sectional study, a total of 150 participants were obtained within the one-month data collection period. Although the sample size was below the 340 respondents recommended by Isaac and Michael (1976) for a 5% margin of error, the final sample met the eligibility criteria: Generation Z (aged 15–25), followers of @_Project.xo, and completion of all questionnaires. Data were gathered online via links shared through posts and direct messages on TikTok. The sample comprised 55.92% female and 44.08%

male participants, with the majority being students (42.95%) and private-sector employees (39.60%).

Social media engagement was measured using the SMES-A (Ni Ni et al., 2020), which consists of 11 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), covering affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement dimensions. All items demonstrated validity (r-calculated > r-table, $p < 0.05$) and reliability ($\alpha = 0.776$). Psychological well-being was assessed using the 18-item version of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989), which employs a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and measures six dimensions of well-being. All items were valid (r-calculated > r-table, $p < 0.05$) and reliable ($\alpha = 0.837$).

Self-concept was measured using the Robson Self-Concept Questionnaire (RSCQ; Robson, 1989), consisting of 30 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), reflecting seven self-esteem components outlined by Fitts (1971) in Zulkarnain et al. (2020): significance, worthiness, appearance and social acceptance, competence, resilience and determination, control over personal destiny, and sense of existence. The instrument showed high reliability ($\alpha = 0.856$) and theoretical relevance and has been widely applied in previous studies (e.g., Nwabuike & Nwankwo, 2020; Masek et al., 2021; Deshpande, 2022; Sukul et al., 2024). Example items include: "I enjoy being myself" and "I often feel unlucky.

All instruments demonstrated Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 (0.837 for psychological well-being, 0.776 for social media engagement, and 0.856 for self-concept), confirming their reliability. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to describe participant characteristics and provide an overview of the study variables. Inferential statistics involved multiple linear regression to examine the effects of the independent variable (social media use) and the mediator (self-concept) on the dependent variable (psychological well-being). Pearson's product-moment correlation (Babbie, 2013) was employed to assess relationships among variables.

The mediating role of self-concept was analyzed using the PROCESS Macro for IBM SPSS version 26, following the approach of Preacher and Hayes (2008). This method

examined the total and indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator using bootstrapping, producing bias-corrected confidence intervals to ensure the robustness of mediation estimates.

REASULTS AND DISCUSSION

The association between TikTok social media use, self-concept, and psychological well-being was analyzed using Hayes' PROCESS Macro with mediation testing. Preliminary diagnostic assessments confirmed that the dataset satisfied key statistical assumptions, including normality, linearity, absence of multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity, thereby validating the appropriateness of the regression model employed. The Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficients for the primary variables investigated are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Preliminary Results of Direct Correlation Between Variables

Variabel	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. SMU	38.84	6.32	-		
2. PWB	60.20	2.22	.244*	-	-
3. SC	97.16	6.25	.276**	.613**	-

Notes: N = 150. SMU=Social Media Use, PWB=psychological Well-Being, SC=Self Concept, *p<0.05 ; ** p<0.01

The bivariate correlation analysis revealed that social media use was positively and significantly associated with psychological well-being (r = 0.244, p < 0.01) and self-concept (r = 0.276, p < 0.01). Furthermore, psychological well-being demonstrated a strong positive correlation with self-concept (r = 0.613, p < 0.01). Subsequent mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Macro confirmed that self-concept served as a significant mediator in the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being (β = 0.273, p = 0.006). While social media use did not exert a significant direct effect on psychological well-being (β = 0.028, p = 0.234), self-concept was found to have a substantial and significant direct effect (β = 0.210, p < 0.001).

These findings align with the conceptual framework of the study, which identified self-concept as a mediating variable from the outset. The results underscore that social media use, particularly on platforms such as TikTok, can indirectly enhance psychological well-being by fostering a more positive self-concept. Detailed results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Specific Direct, Indirect, dan Conditional Indirect Effects

Predictor	Dependent variable model (specific direct effects)			
	B	**SE**	**t**	**p**
Outcome : Self Concept				
	.273**	.078	3.49	.006
Outcome : Psychological Well-Being				
1. *Social Media Use*	.028	.237	1.19	.234
2. *Self Concept*	.210**	.024	8.75	0.00
Indirect effects				
	B	**SE**	*Bootstrapping* **BC 95 % CI**	
Mediator			*Lower*	*Higher*
Self Concept	.057	.018	.022	.094

The analysis of the indirect effects further demonstrated that self-concept significantly mediated the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being, as indicated by a bias-corrected 95% confidence interval (β = .057, SE = .018, CI = .022, .094). The determination of this mediating role was based on the absence of zero within the confidence interval (Hayes, 2012), confirming that the influence of social media use on psychological well-being operates primarily through self-concept.

This study aimed to examine the relationship between TikTok social media use, self-concept, and psychological well-being among university students while extending the existing literature on these variables. The findings indicate that social media use is positively associated with self-concept, supporting the theoretical assumption that engagement with social media can shape individuals' self-perceptions. This highlights that social media serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a platform for self-reflection and self-expression. Exposure to positive and affirming content can strengthen one's self-perception. These results align with Carolin et al. (2023) , who found that TikTok use significantly influenced self-concept formation among Indonesian youth by providing a space for self-expression. Other studies also suggest that the impact of social media use on self-concept is contingent upon the type of content consumed (Alfrida Mangundap et al., 2024; Lestari & Faizin, 2022).

Secondly, social media use was correlated with psychological well-being, although its direct contribution to psychological well-being in the regression model was not significant. This suggests that the effect of social media on well-being may be primarily

indirect and mediated by psychological factors such as self-concept. This finding corresponds with (Ostic et al., 2021), who concluded that social media influences psychological well-being indirectly through various mediators. The present mediation analysis further supports this notion, demonstrating that self-concept plays a critical mediating role in this relationship.

Thirdly, self-concept emerged as a key determinant of psychological well-being. This result is consistent with prior research indicating that individuals with a positive self-concept experience greater life satisfaction and possess better self-regulation, ultimately enhancing their psychological well-being (Kusuma & Oktavianti, 2020; Oktaviani et al., 2023). For members of Generation Z, a positive self-concept appears to be particularly vital for navigating responsibilities and achieving optimal functioning in daily life.

The central finding of this study lies in the mediating role of self-concept in the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being. The results indicate that the quality of social media engagement affects psychological well-being primarily through its impact on self-concept. When social media is used in a healthy and constructive manner, it fosters a more adaptive self-concept, which in turn promotes greater psychological well-being (Hassan & Afzal, 2022; Regita et al., 2024). This underscores the importance of self-concept as a mediator that bridges social media use and psychological well-being, as initially proposed in the study framework.

This conclusion is also consistent with Fitts' (1979) self-concept theory, which posits that self-concept serves as an internal reference framework shaping how individuals perceive themselves and interact with their environment (Zulkarnain et al., 2020). A positive self-concept enables individuals to evaluate themselves realistically, accept their strengths and weaknesses, and feel worthy, capable, and socially accepted(Hidayati, 2021; Sutjipto & Hafni, 2020; Yusri & Rahmi, 2020). Healthy social media use, such as engagement with affirmative content on platforms like @_Project.xo, provides cognitive and emotional stimuli that reinforce positive self-perceptions. This is supported by Mangundap et al. (2024) dan Wimona & Loisa (2022) who found that

frequent exposure to positive content on TikTok is associated with increased constructive self-reflection.

Moreover, the mediating role of self-concept can be further explained through Ryff (2018) Psychological Well-Being theory, which identifies six core dimensions of well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. These dimensions closely align with Fitts' (1979) conceptualization of self-concept as a reflection of one's internalized self-perception, shaped by personal experiences, social interactions, and internalized values (Zulkarnain et al., 2020).

Overall, the findings reveal that the effect of social media use on psychological well-being is fully mediated by self-concept. This suggests that social media engagement alone is insufficient to enhance psychological well-being without the reinforcement of internal factors such as self-concept. These results are consistent with Zhang et al. (2023), who reported that social media use does not directly enhance psychological well-being but exerts its influence through positive self-perception. Similarly, Oktaviani et al. (2022) found no direct contribution of social media use to psychological well-being, further supporting the mediating role of self-concept identified in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the pivotal role of self-concept as a mediator in the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being among Generation Z. The findings reveal no significant direct effect of social media use on psychological well-being. However, when social media use positively contributes to the development of self-concept, it significantly enhances individuals' psychological well-being. Thus, self-concept serves as a crucial mechanism bridging the impact of social media on psychological well-being. These results provide important insights that the influence of social media on psychological well-being is not linear but is shaped by internal individual factors. Purposeful and healthy social media engagement can strengthen self-perception and, consequently, improve psychological quality of life. Future research is recommended to examine other internal factors that may reinforce this positive

relationship, employ larger and more diverse samples, and consider longitudinal approaches to gain a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics between self-concept and psychological well-being over time.

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