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Generation Z and the FOMO Effect: When Digital Connectivity Triggers Anxiety?

Geração Z e o Efeito FOMO: Quando a Conexão Digital Gera Ansiedade?

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates, from the perspective of specialists, how social media platforms intensify the feeling of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) among Generation Z youth. Using a qualitative approach, the study employed bibliographic research and interviews with four professionals in the fields of psychology, educational psychology, and sociology. The findings indicate that, although not the primary cause of FOMO, social media act as vectors that stimulate this feeling, especially among young people seeking social acceptance and the fulfillment of emotional needs.

Keywords: FOMO Effect. Generation Z. Consumption.

RESUMO

Este artigo investiga como as redes sociais intensificam o sentimento de FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) entre jovens da Geração Z. Com abordagem qualitativa, utilizou pesquisa bibliográfica e entrevistas com quatro profissionais das áreas de psicologia, psicopedagogia e sociologia. Os resultados indicam que, embora não sejam as causas principais do FOMO, as redes sociais atuam como vetores que estimulam esse sentimento, especialmente entre jovens em busca de aceitação social e preenchimento de carências emocionais.

Palavras-chave: Efeito FOMO. Geração Z. Consumo.

1 INTRODUCTION

In a short period of time, society transitioned from a model of mass, analog communication dominated by major media outlets to a digital and hyperconnected society driven by technology. The most recent data from the July 2024b report published by DataReportal in partnership with We Are Social and Meltwater reveal that Brazil ranks second globally in terms of time spent on the internet by users aged between 16 and 64 years. With a daily average of 9 hours and 8 minutes online, of which 3 hours and 33 minutes are dedicated to social media platforms, the country ranks behind only South Africa.

This behavior reflects the era of a digital society in which, as Bauman (2001) had already discussed, social behaviors have become increasingly fragmented and consumption-oriented. Within this same context, Lipovetsky (2005) raised the issue of how contemporary society, hyperconnected and hyperindividualistic, would be experiencing the “era of emptiness”. According to Lipovetsky (2005), this era was marked by exacerbated narcissism and individualism, constructed through mass consumption and media culture, characteristics that still remain in contemporary society. Current data from DataReportal (2024b) appear to reinforce these analyses, demonstrating the intensification of digital engagement and content consumption on online platforms. This behavior is particularly evident among Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2010, which is characterized by continuous immersion in the digital environment. As a digitally native generation, Generation Z absorbs and coexists with a set of influences and “triggers” within social media platforms that, according to Turato (2023), have led to conditions of anxiety, making it a “sick” generation and provoking the FOMO effect.

Given this scenario, the present study aims to investigate and analyze, from the perspective of specialists, to what extent social media platforms are responsible for intensifying the feeling of FOMO among their users and what its consequences are on the behavior of Generation Z. In order to achieve the proposed objective, Exploratory and Descriptive research was adopted, with a Qualitative approach, using Bibliographic and Field research as technical procedures, through individual interviews conducted with four professionals from the fields of psychology, psychopedagogy, and sociology, with the purpose of obtaining perceptions from different areas regarding the FOMO effect. The article is structured into five sections: introduction (Section 1); theoretical framework (Section 2), in which the following themes are presented: contemporary society & consumption; digital society, the FOMO effect & social media platforms, and Generation Z; Section 3 presents the

methodological procedures; analysis (Section 4); and finally, Section 5 presents the final considerations.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Contemporary Society: A Society Driven by Anxiety and Consumption

In contemporary consumer society, acquired goods transcend their utilitarian function, acting as carriers of cultural meanings that are constantly shifting and that serve to express identity, social belonging, and hierarchy (McCracken, 2007). From this perspective, Lipovetsky (2007) highlights that hypermodern society is marked by individualism, in which the “self” becomes central and the present is overvalued in order to provide immediate pleasure. For the author, hypermodernity is characterized by the excess of values created during modernity itself, such as consumption, which has become hyperconsumption.

For Castells (2009), globalization and capitalism reshaped both the means of communication and society’s consumption habits, leading individuals to consume products and information in a new way. Globalization enabled instantaneous interconnection on a worldwide scale, but it also fostered cultural standardization and increased social inequalities. According to the same author, the way information is presented and consumed has also been impacted by social media platforms, with news channels and entertainment platforms competing for users’ attention and interest, who increasingly seek fast and easily understandable content.

The changes mentioned by Castells (2009) are not limited solely to information consumption, since they also affect all social spheres and interpersonal relationships. In this era that values speed, Bauman (2010) highlights that, for many young people, investing in physical connections is considered a waste of time. Therefore, in order to save time and avoid emotional exhaustion, many of these young individuals prefer to connect through virtual environments, where less effort is required, but which, according to Bauman (2010), results in a loss of depth in relationships.

Thus, it becomes evident that this accelerated pace has profoundly affected social relationships, contributing to a liquid society that, according to Bauman (2001), is characterized by fragile, superficial, and unstable bonds among individuals. For the author, the result, amid an era of uncertainties with the digital world increasingly rooted in everyday life, is the emergence of new fears and insecurities.

2.1.1 A Society Beyond Digital

Bauman (2008), in his book *Liquid Fear*, emphasizes that human relationships, once perceived as a source of security and stability through solid institutions, have become a continuous source of anxiety, a phenomenon even more intensely observable in digital society. In an interview with the newspaper *El País* in January 2016, Bauman stated that social media platforms generate an illusion of proximity, as well as a false sense of control, further reinforcing isolation and individualization in contemporary society, an aspect also pointed out by Lipovetsky (2005). In this interview, Bauman (2016, n.p.) states that “The difference between a community and a network is that you belong to the community, but the network belongs to you.” This suggests that social platforms provide autonomy over connections, such as adding, deleting, and blocking, making social skills such as conflict resolution and dealing with disappointment increasingly unnecessary.

Converging with Bauman’s perspective, Haidt (2024) argues that only within communities, where relationships are embodied and synchronous, are human beings capable of developing such skills, which are often lost in virtual communication where it is impossible to identify tone of voice or facial expressions that facilitate the understanding of others’ intentions and feelings. The author also highlights that an individual can only become a functional adult when learning to deal with failures and disappointments during the most important stage of brain development, from childhood to adolescence (Haidt, 2024).

For Bauman (2016), platforms provide a controllable and predictable environment in which individuals become alienated within their own bubbles and, since they are not confronted with divergent views, fail to develop tolerance and critical thinking regarding opposing opinions. While Bauman (2016) criticizes isolation in the digital environment, other authors, such as Castells, hold a more optimistic perspective regarding internet use. In an interview with *Veja* magazine, Castells (2024) considers that the internet enhances sociability and generates greater life satisfaction among people in general. The author relates precarious living conditions to negative feelings such as sadness and anxiety, but does not associate these feelings with internet use.

Virtual dependency, which emerges as a consequence of fragile relationships, aligns with Turkle’s (1999) discussion on the boundaries between the real and the virtual. The author argues that it is mistaken to consider “real life” and “virtual life” as separate worlds because offline and online realities are deeply intertwined and equally important. However, similarly

to Bauman (2016), Turkle (1999) also questions whether virtual environments, such as social media platforms, can truly be considered communities due to the lack of depth in relationships and the absence of permanence, characteristics she considers essential for a community. In line with this perspective, Haidt (2024, p. 228) argues that “it is very difficult to build a purposeful life alone, lost among countless disembodied social networks. [...] human bodies need to be rooted in human communities.”

As a result of this interaction with the digital environment, it is possible to observe a phenomenon, which is the focus of this study, that has been gaining increasing relevance and media attention as excessive screen use has become commonplace in most people’s daily lives: FOMO.

2.1.2 What Is the FOMO Effect

Fear of Missing Out, popularly known simply by the acronym FOMO, refers, in free translation, to the “fear of being left out” or the “fear of missing something” (Rossini, 2022; Turato, 2023). More objectively, this psychological phenomenon can be understood as: “the apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, and the persistent desire to stay connected with what others in one’s social network are doing” (Elhai et al., 2022, p. 4). As a result, this effect may lead individuals into a constant state of anxiety and distress, which in many cases trigger or aggravate other comorbidities, as pointed out by Turato (2023). Feelings such as envy are also common in FOMO, stemming from frequent comparisons with realities displayed on social media platforms, often manipulated to appear different from what they truly are, generating, according to the author, a sense of inferiority in relation to others and potentially leading to impulsive behaviors, including product purchases influenced by others.

The acronym FOMO was coined and popularized in 2004 by a business student named Patrick J. McGinnis when publishing an opinion article entitled Social Theory at HBS: McGinnis’ Two FOs for The Harbus, Harvard’s student newspaper (Rossini, 2022). The topic subsequently became central to several studies, such as the work of Przybylski et al. (2013), considered the first theoretical and empirical study based on observations and practical application regarding this phenomenon.

Although FOMO gained even greater prominence because of social media platforms, which stimulated this feeling on a larger scale, the fear of social exclusion or rejection is a characteristic of human evolution and did not emerge with the rise of the internet

(Eisenberger, 2011; Rossini, 2022). According to Eisenberger (2011), in a neuroscience study analyzing the brain's response to social rejection, the pain of social exclusion is processed similarly to physical pain, activating the same brain regions responsible for processing these emotions. It can be observed that, with the emergence of social media platforms, there has been a transformation in what was formerly understood and defined as FOMO. For India (2024), what once meant the fear of missing real-world experiences has, for younger generations, become the fear of missing events occurring within social media platforms themselves. However, the author emphasizes that while suffering from virtual FOMO, individuals in face-to-face life have begun to deal with JOMO (Joy of Missing Out), which can be translated as the "pleasure of missing out," though in this context associated with avoidance. Thus, a large portion of young people from this generation attempt to escape possible rejection by refusing everything from social events to phone calls and, consequently, become increasingly isolated due to social anxiety, which has among its causes the high digitalization of everyday life and the lack of human interactions (India, 2024).

2.1.2.1 The Power of Social Media Platforms in Generating the FOMO Effect

Social media platforms created a favorable environment for FOMO to manifest itself, making it a highly discussed contemporary issue in society. With a worldwide user growth of 5.8% (282 million users) over one year, between July 2023 and July 2024, these platforms are estimated to gather approximately 5.17 billion people, meaning that 63.7% of the global population and 94.9% of individuals who access the internet are present on these platforms (DataReportal, 2024b). In January 2024, Brazil had 144 million social media users, representing 66.3% of the Brazilian population, a growth of 1.4% (2 million users) compared to the same period in 2023 (DataReportal, 2024a).

A survey conducted in April 2024 by Mobile Time in partnership with Opinion Box, involving 2,033 Brazilians aged 16 years or older who own smartphones, highlighted the predominance of certain applications within the national scenario. Among the six applications mentioned, respondents identified Instagram as the most installed platform, present on 90% of mobile phones, followed by Facebook (79%) and TikTok (40%). Kwai, a short-video application similar to TikTok, also proved relevant, with 29% installation rates, ranking fifth. These data highlight behavioral changes in new information consumption habits, directed toward short and visually attractive entertainment content with numerous scene transitions. According to Bueno (2024), the constant implementation of new features on these platforms,

such as the possibility of speeding up videos or running multiple tabs simultaneously, also contributes to “capturing” users’ attention even more, causing them to spend increasing amounts of time connected.

Another reason why the adoption of these platforms is so significant is algorithmic curation. In Pariser’s words (2012, p. 14), these filters “constantly create and refine a theory of who we are and what we will do or desire next.” Thus, platforms possess the power to seduce and retain users through a manipulated and personalized reality tailored to each individual. Furthermore, according to the author, algorithms are beginning to dictate and manage not only advertising, but also people’s ways of living. Even so, the author considers algorithms a necessary resource, since without such filtering, navigating the internet would be practically unfeasible considering the immense quantity of available data and information.

In 2017, a British study considered Instagram the most harmful social network, directly impacting young people’s mental health (RSPH, 2017). However, it is important to note that at that time TikTok had not yet achieved the popularity it currently holds. According to GWI (2023), TikTok was the social media platform that experienced the fastest growth among all generations since their 2021 survey. In the study conducted by Opinion Box (2024), focused on TikTok, among the 1,008 Brazilian respondents who were already users, more than half considered TikTok addictive, recognizing that excessive use may be harmful to mental health. The research also revealed that 36% of respondents access TikTok several times a day, especially at night, while 11% reported never closing the application, using it as a form of distraction, entertainment, and discovery of new things (Opinion Box, 2024).

The annual white paper Consumer of the Future 2024, published by WGSN (2024, p. 5), highlights that “people around the world said it used to be common to watch videos between 10 and 30 minutes long, but now they lose interest within minutes,” and identifies TikTok as one of the main contributors to this lack of interest and attention span. Given the presented data, the dependency these platforms have generated among users, especially TikTok, becomes evident.

From the perspective of Burhan and Moradzadeh (2020), this addiction occurs because each new interaction or notification is perceived by the human brain as a form of reward, encouraging individuals to constantly repeat behaviors that generate satisfaction. This process stimulates an increase in dopamine concentration, considered one of the most important neurotransmitters associated with the reward system (Burhan; Moradzadeh, 2020; Lembke, 2022). As dopamine tolerance develops (neuroadaptation), its effectiveness in providing pleasurable sensations tends to diminish, making even greater stimulation necessary to

achieve the same effect (Lembke, 2022). Thus, users end up entering a vicious cycle driven by the anxiety of receiving new notifications and content on their screens, as pointed out by Bueno (2024). Skinner (2011) also explains this repetitive behavior in his Theory of Operant Conditioning, which refers to actions whose repetition depends directly on the consequences they produce, occurring in the following sequence: behavior, consequence, and effect. In this case, the operant act of checking social media platforms first involves a search for immediate gratification and then, after being rewarded with a new notification, for example, comes a feeling of momentary satisfaction, increasing the likelihood of repeating the action. According to psychology, this process is called positive reinforcement, in which the frequency of the behavior tends to increase due to the pleasant stimulus received (Skinner, 2011).

In this context, it is important to highlight the significant participation of Generation Z which, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) (2024) regarding population projections for the year 2024, corresponds to approximately 50 million young people in the country. This information brings to light the issue discussed in this study, which aims to analyze the effects of social media platforms based on the characteristics and behaviors of Generation Z in contemporary society.

2.2 Generation Z's Immersion in the Digital World

Named Generation Z, individuals born between approximately 1995 and 2010, currently aged between 15 and 30 years, are considered the first generation to be born and raised in a hyperconnected world dominated by technology (Casarotto, 2020), being described by Prensky (2001) as digital natives. According to Haidt (2024), Generation Z was the generation most affected by what the author calls the Great Rewiring of Childhood, a theory developed by him and considered, in his perception, the only theory capable of explaining the increases in mental disorders such as anxiety, especially among females. Over the years, gradually, with the rise of parental overprotection, free play gave way to a phone-based childhood, with a more visible and intense transformation beginning in the early 2010s, mainly due to the popularization of smartphones, which ultimately established themselves as the new standard of childhood (Haidt, 2024).

In Owen's study (2018, p. 15) on Generation Z, Tess, a 20-year-old from Detroit, Michigan, describes social media platforms as an environment where "it's all about being popular, pretty, and fake." She comments that it is a mixture of admiration and frustration for not being able to replicate the posts of other girls she sees on Instagram.

When discussing influences on this generation, it is pertinent to address the role of digital influencers, since Generation Z is the generation that follows them the most on social media platforms (DataReportal, 2024b). From the perspective of Henrich and Gil-White (2001), through prestige bias, users seek not only to copy others, but also to identify, imitate, and approach the individual who stands out the most and appears successful in what they do, perceiving them as role models solely because of their status. For many members of this generation, influencers occupy a position of authority, with the capacity to exert great influence over their followers, even surpassing traditional media outlets (Covello, 2024). In a survey conducted by GWI in 2023 involving 225,744 participants from four generations (“Z,” “Y,” “X,” and Baby Boomers), it was found that Generation Z is the generation that most trusts digital influencers and is the most likely to purchase products recommended by them, considering these recommendations more relevant than traditional advertising. Another characteristic of Generation Z, according to Prensky (2001), is motivation based on rapid gratification. As early as 2001, Prensky (2001) already observed how this multitasking generation, accustomed to fast information consumption, prioritizes visual elements over textual content.

According to Bauman (2010), this tendency toward immediate pleasures is reflected in the incessant pursuit of experiences, even when they are financially unsustainable. Thus, driven by the desire to experience things they do not want to miss out on (FOMO), many adults from Generation Z are becoming indebted (Credit Karma, 2023). The study published by Credit Karma (2023), which interviewed 1,009 adults, found that 38% of Generation Z respondents, even without financial means, are influenced to travel after seeing other people’s vacations on social media platforms, while 46% of these young individuals stated that they are willing to incur debt in order to take these trips.

This behavior is discussed by Bauman (2010, p. 12), who highlights the transformation marked by the emergence of credit cards, which redefined the relationship between individuals, desire, and consumption, where “[...] you are free to manage your satisfaction, to obtain things when you desire them, not when you earn enough to obtain them.” However, the author argues that acquiring goods through credit in order to satisfy immediate desires and long-term aspirations may compromise the ability to meet future needs, in addition to generating a cycle of indebtedness, postponement of goals, and accumulation of problems (Bauman, 2010). It is evident that although the feeling of FOMO is not restricted to Generation Z, this effect becomes more apparent within this generation. Having been born immersed in a digital world, social media platforms play an important role in how this

generation relates, acts, thinks, feels, and consumes not only material goods, but also content and information. Following the theoretical contextualization of the guiding themes of this study, the methodological procedures are presented in the next section.

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This article is characterized as an Exploratory and Descriptive study (Gil, 2002), aiming to generate knowledge regarding the FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) effect by relating it to the impact of social media platforms in intensifying this feeling among Generation Z.

The technical procedures adopted were Bibliographic Research and Field Research. Initially, through Bibliographic Research, with the purpose of deepening the understanding of the topics addressed, previously published materials such as books, scientific articles, dissertations, theses, newspaper articles, and online publications discussing the themes under study, namely Generation Z, the FOMO effect, and social media platforms, were reviewed. Since this is a contemporary topic, extensive consultation of digital sources, such as websites and reports containing more recent and updated information on the subject, was chosen. In this way, it was possible to develop the theoretical framework through a dialogue among the ideas of different authors and various content sources (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013). Subsequently, in order to obtain information regarding the different perspectives of professionals from distinct fields concerning the subjects investigated in this article, Field Research was conducted with four professionals linked to the areas of psychology (02), psychopedagogy (01), and sociology (01), all of whom work with Generation Z, through qualitative interviews (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013) conducted using a semi-structured script (Lakatos; Marconi, 2003).

Thus, data collection was carried out through four interviews, using a non-probabilistic accessibility sample (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013), conducted individually and online through the Google Meet platform. The interviews took place in 2025 on the following dates: January 6 and 23, with the psychologist and the psychopedagogue, respectively, and February 14 and 24, with the psychologist and the sociologist, respectively, each lasting approximately 50 minutes. For the selection of interviewees, preference was given to professionals with experience and expertise in the field, prioritizing those who are also faculty members at Universidade Feevale, most of whom were recommended by the article advisor, thus facilitating contact. The psychopedagogue was recommended by one of the interviewees, while the sociologist was contacted because he had previously been the researcher's

professor. Data interpretation was conducted using content analysis, according to the methodology proposed by Bardin (2016), based on the categorizations used in the semi-structured interview script. The analysis development process consisted of a pre-analysis phase, followed by material exploration and, finally, the treatment and interpretation of results (Bardin, 2016).

4 ANALYSIS

The perceptions obtained through the interviews, combined with the theoretical framework, supported the analysis in order to achieve the objective of this article. The analysis is structured into three subsections corresponding to the categories derived from the interview script: contemporary society, consumption, social media platforms, FOMO, and Generation Z.

4.1 Profile of the Interviewees

In order to obtain a comprehensive and impartial perspective, professionals working in different fields were interviewed, whose profiles are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1 - Profile of the Interviewed Professionals

Interviewee	Area of Expertise	Years of Experience in the Field	Current Professional Role
CK	Psychology	36 years	Business consultant focused on the development of people management, clinical psychologist working with children and young people (Generation Z), professor and coordinator of the CIP at Universidade Feevale.
ES	Sociology, Anthropology, and Political Science	37 years	Researcher, writer, and professor working with Generation Z students at Universidade Feevale.
FM	Psychopedagogy	16 years	Clinical and institutional psychopedagogue focused on assisting children and young people (Generation Z).
LG	Psychology	6 years	Clinical psychologist working with children and young people (Generation Z) and professor at Universidade Feevale.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

Based on the profile of the interviewees, the interviews proceeded with the aim of understanding different perspectives regarding the scenario of contemporary society and the FOMO effect, especially present among Generation Z.

4.2 Contemporary Society & Consumer Behavior

Bauman (2001) and Lipovetsky (2005) point out that contemporary society is marked by fluidity and individualism and, according to the authors, the digital era intensifies this fluidity, where relationships and information become increasingly ephemeral. Considering these approaches, the study initially sought to investigate opinions regarding the relationship between contemporary society and consumption. On this topic, all four interviewees presented similar perspectives, considering society to be mainly marked by consumerism, immediacy, anxiety, and social isolation. Interviewee CK comments that society “lives in very anxious, agitated, and immediate times. There is an overexposure to an excess of information that, at times, people do not know how to deal with, and this amplifies this anxious way of living.” She highlights that, internationally, Brazil is the country with the highest prevalence of anxiety cases, which may have a possible relationship with the data from the DataReportal report (2024b), which positions Brazil as second in the global ranking for the highest daily time spent online. Such data relate the excess of informational stimuli in the digital environment as one of the elements intensifying anxiety, making the Brazilian population the most anxious in the world.

From a more sociological perspective, interviewee ES expands the discussion by associating these facts with Bauman’s (2001) theory of liquid modernity, mentioning that everything has become transitory, such as the loss of durability of furniture, jobs, marriages, and human relationships themselves. It is further observed that the transition from a solid society, in which there were guarantees, certainties, and security regarding these aspects, to a liquid postmodernity, where everything is temporary, resulted in the fragility of human bonds and generated collective anxiety related to uncertainties about the future, since nothing is permanent anymore.

Regarding the transition from an analog to a digital society, interviewees were asked about the advantages and disadvantages they perceived in this transition. They recognized both the positive aspects of this technological change, especially quick access to information, communication, and new resources, and the negative aspects caused by the excess and misuse of technologies and information. The interviewees’ perceptions align with Castells’ (2009) perspective, which recognizes the duality of this transition, which also fostered globalization that, as a benefit, brought instantaneous interconnection and, as drawbacks, increased inequality and cultural homogenization.

Unanimously, when expressing their opinions regarding the increase in the three characteristics mentioned previously, anxiety, consumption, and immediacy, in comparison with previous times and generations, the interviewees agreed that there has indeed been an increase. Interviewee CK observes that the central difference lies in the abundance of offers, which directs and motivates new desires over time. She highlights that the logic of planned obsolescence stimulates continuous consumption. According to the interviewee, companies manufacture disposable products and recurrently launch new models, such as the iPhone, contributing to the maintenance of this consumerist cycle through planned obsolescence.

Regarding society's perception of consumption, the interviewees related it to an idea of belonging, which, in the words of interviewee LG, "measures your value as a person." She comments that this feeling of wanting to belong to a group becomes a strategic target for brands because they build and sell, above all, a desire, an idea that by owning a certain product, the individual becomes part of something greater than their mere existence. Interviewee FM contributes by bringing the discussion into the context of social media platforms, stating that consumption is shaped by what is publicized, especially by influencers, who end up occupying a position of authority and trust on the internet, leading followers to acquire what will allow them to integrate into certain communities and groups. These opinions align with McCracken's (2007) perspective, which addresses consumer goods as representations of status and groups, as well as the emergence of symbols and marketing strategies that stimulate consumer desire influenced by trends. Interviewee ES, in turn, shares his interpretation regarding this consumerist behavior by relating it to the lack of meaning in life, drawing a parallel with past societies:

The meaning used to be transcendence and going to heaven. Today, with the end of metanarratives, there is no longer a teleological meaning. There is no medium- or long-term meaning for my life anymore. The meaning is immediate consumption, this hedonism, this selfishness, this narcissism of myself with myself, in the mirror, taking pictures (ES, 2025).

Interviewee ES's comment is supported by what Lipovetsky (2005) discusses in *The Era of Emptiness*, related to narcissistic individualism, which turns the individual toward themselves as the center of everything, where what truly matters above all else is personal happiness. In this context, concern with self-image emerges as an attempt to provide new meaning to one's own existence and to fill a void left by the absence of collective meaning.

Another aspect verified with the interviewees concerned consumption as a means of fulfilling emotional needs. Regarding this issue, all agreed that there is a relationship between

consumption and compensation, associated with self-reward, personal satisfaction, and filling emotional voids, as pointed out by Lipovetsky (2007). Interviewee LG considers that, in addition to fulfilling emotional issues, consumption is also a search for acceptance. Interviewee CK emphasizes that exacerbated consumerism, within psychology, may be considered a psychological condition, a type of addiction characterized by excessive shopping. This behavior is highlighted by Lipovetsky (2007) regarding the continuous pursuit of pleasure as a characteristic of the hypermodern individual, which also dialogues with Bauman's (2001) perspective concerning the transience and instability of things in modernity, in which what matters is experiencing the pleasure of possessing something immediately without concern for the future. The logic of consumption in contemporary society generates a cyclical movement of desire and frustration, which is one of the aspects criticized by both authors. Such an approach is present in the interviewees' statements when they share the view that people are always searching for something more and that, although they agree that this way of acting is part of human behavior, they understand that this immediacy has been aggravated by technological advances, which stimulate and redefine consumption, as well as by social changes. Following the reasoning of the study, the interviewees' perceptions regarding social media platforms and aspects related to sociability and young people's disconnection from the real world were investigated.

4.3 Social Media Platforms & Escape from Reality

Regarding the influence of social media platforms on people's behavior, all interviewees agreed that platforms play a significant role in behavior, as well as in consumption, but mainly emphasized their negative effects. Interviewee CK, when asked about this influence, reveals that:

Just as television once dictated behaviors for an entire generation, social media today also dictates certain behaviors. There is that thing about the algorithm bringing you the information that best fills your search, your curiosity, and your likes. It is a way of shaping behavior, it keeps feeding itself back (CK, 2025).

The interviewee's statement regarding algorithms aligns with Pariser (2012), who argues that this personalized tool, fueled by users' own data, has become so powerful that it can manage people's behavior. Invisible filters, as the author calls them, restrict contact with

what is different and are capable of unconsciously inducing users to reproduce what they see online, incorporating discourses and replicating trends.

With a more critical opinion regarding platforms, especially TikTok, interviewee FM highlights that these platforms have been used not only for entertainment but also as sources of information. However, this use ends up being harmful because it leads many young people to believe that these spaces will provide everything they need, devaluing traditional and reliable forms of learning and access to knowledge, such as books. Therefore, it is observed that this exaggerated use of platforms has led many children and adolescents to reject reading, since the types of content most sought after and most visible on these platforms do not contribute to the formation of relevant knowledge.

Interviewee ES shares a similar opinion, stating that social media platforms validate and propagate unfounded discourses, allowing anyone to gain relevance and credibility simply because of the visibility they achieved on these platforms, regardless of how it was obtained. He also highlights that traditional media have given way to social media platforms, which aligns with Covello's (2024) perspective regarding the transition of media dominance due to the rise of influencers, contributing to the loss of centrality in journalism and traditional media. Furthermore, interviewee ES's statement also highlights aspects of prestige bias, following and copying those who appear successful, by emphasizing how individuals tend to place trust in prominent figures on social media platforms simply because of the image of success these influencers present, as pointed out by Henrich and Gil-White (2001). In response to the question regarding which platform most contributes to addiction to screens, interviewees CK, LG, and FM mentioned TikTok, while the sociologist highlighted Instagram, also mentioned by interviewee LG, and X. Regarding TikTok and Instagram, interviewee LG observes that these are two platforms in which the operation of the main screen, the feed, is similar, encouraging users to scroll endlessly in search of new content that is instantly updated, receiving multiple stimuli simultaneously.

Complementarily, regarding TikTok, interviewee CK states that the speed of the content displayed on this platform stimulates dopamine, making it difficult for users to disconnect from screens. To exemplify the impact of these platforms on everyday life, interviewee CK comments that an acquaintance watched the children's movie *Moana 2* with her underage children, which presents scene transitions, colors, and songs in a rapid manner and later realized that this rhythm resembled TikTok, aiming to capture the attention of children already accustomed to this incessant dynamic. These perspectives bring to light the Opinion Box study (2024), which exposes Brazilians' perception of TikTok as the most

addictive platform among others, as well as the WGSN publication (2024), which associates TikTok with the decline of attention and interest in other content currently considered traditional or common.

Continuing the interviewees' perceptions, interviewee ES observes that, in general, this dependency is constructed from the constant production of novelty inserted within platforms, since people do not want to miss out on what is happening. He associates the act of posting something online with the expectation of social validation and considers likes not only a form of financial profit for influencers, for example, but also a type of symbolic profit associated with personal recognition. The interviewees' perceptions corroborate the studies by Burhan and Moradzadeh (2020), Skinner (2011), and Lembke (2022), which relate addiction to social media platforms to the brain's reward mechanism, dopamine, and the repetitive pursuit of pleasurable stimuli.

Subsequently, in order to understand how interviewees perceive the sense of belonging and connection promoted by social media platforms, they were asked whether these experiences might actually be illusory. The responses present both similarities and divergences. Similarly, interviewee CK and interviewee ES consider that social media platforms promote a false sensation, especially when one has many followers, which does not necessarily imply real friendships. In this scenario, interviewee ES provokes reflection by asking: "How many of those people can actually help you solve a problem?".

Thus, for interviewees ES, LG, and CK, a true connection is only established in the physical world, or at least begins there, which aligns with Bauman's (2016) approach when highlighting the differences between the virtual world, with superficial and less challenging interactions, and the real world, where effort is required in dialogue, construction, and maintenance of relationships. Therefore, it is possible to consider that young people currently experience a situation of disconnection from reality, attributing to followers the same meaning and value as the word friends. In contrast, interviewee FM, to some extent, diverges from the others by stating that the feeling of belonging and connection are real, because individuals are indeed present, interacting and creating bonds with one another, although she recognizes that what may be false is the motivation, since not everyone recognizes what brought them together. However, because they feel welcomed, they seek to adapt by adopting other behaviors, not necessarily due to personal identification, but because of the feeling of acceptance provided by the group in which they became integrated and accepted.

However, the interviewees' perspectives converge in affirming that social media platforms create distance from reality and isolate individuals from real social interaction.

Haidt (2024) and Bauman (2016) point out that these platforms do not stimulate social development, generating the sensation of belonging to a group while actually facilitating isolation, making face-to-face relationships and interest in creating new friendships in what they call “life outside screens” more difficult. In the same line of reasoning, interviewee LG comments on the commitment required by real-world relationships, highlighting that the virtual world does not exercise the soft skills necessary to learn how to adapt within a relationship and that, within the digital environment, a simple disagreement may lead to rupture without any chance for reconciliation. Interviewee CK corroborates this perspective when adding that: “You end up feeding your personal truths within the network and it becomes very difficult to deal with what is different from what you think, so you isolate yourself and remain within that virtual circle that feeds your beliefs about the world [...]” (CK, 2025).

Regarding the long-term damages caused by the indiscriminate and excessive use of social media platforms, interviewees pointed out several negative consequences, such as social isolation, increased self-criticism regarding self-image, dependency, worsening concentration, and intensified anxiety. More emphatically, interviewee FM considers that for the most vulnerable individuals, unrestricted access to platforms can be even more concerning, like “a gateway to any other drug,” and adds that: “The operating logic, that I will use this and it will relieve me from my problem, it will empty my mind of what bothers me, is exactly the same. And as one thing no longer fulfills me, I will seek something stronger, something more immediate” (FM, 2025).

Interviewee ES is more moderate, considering social media platforms important tools, just as computers and calculators once emerged. He believes that these new technologies also possess a degree of importance, but that they should be used consciously and accompanied by regulation. It is perceived that many changes occur in people’s behavior, especially among young people, with emphasis on Generation Z. This has triggered the FOMO effect, the object of this article, which sought greater understanding through the interviewees.

4.4 Generation Z & the FOMO Effect

Prensky (2001) considers Generation Z to be digital natives because they have never experienced a society in which the internet was absent. In this sense, it is necessary to emphasize Haidt’s (2024) perspective, which states that Generation Z was particularly marked by hyperconnectivity and that, together with overprotective parents, this brought profound impacts on mental health and on ways of dealing with life, contributing to the formation of a

more fragile generation. Based on this, the study sought the interviewees' opinions regarding how Generation Z is perceived and how the FOMO effect manifests itself, especially among these young individuals, addressing more vulnerable profiles and discussing possible causes of the FOMO effect.

Considering current debates regarding anxiety and emotional vulnerability among younger generations, interviewees were asked whether they agreed with the statement that Generation Z is more fragile compared to previous generations and which factors might explain this perception. All interviewed professionals recognized this fragility and psychological suffering as a reality for this generation, although they mentioned different causes contributing to this outcome.

Interviewee LG adopts a multifactorial perspective, attributing this greater fragility to uncertainties regarding the future, also related to environmental issues, social changes, and the fragility of current family structures, with emotionally unprepared parents who have not undergone therapy and are unable to provide the necessary support for their children. For interviewee CK, this scenario, such as the increase in anxiety, constitutes a contemporary phenomenon that has intensified in recent times, even in a context where mental health is discussed more openly and where help is sought more frequently than in older generations. She points to overprotection during childhood as one of the main factors behind this worsening, since it prevented many individuals from this generation from facing challenging situations, resulting in young people with anxiety, low self-esteem, low tolerance for frustration, rejection, and the difficulties and responsibilities of adult life. Interviewee CK's statement aligns with Haidt's (2024) theory, which identifies overprotection in childhood as one of the main causes of this generational change.

Interviewee ES, in turn, attributes this issue to changes in family structures marked by smaller family sizes and social distancing, stating that "we are all increasingly physically close to one another in cities, crowded together, but socially distant from each other." Reflecting on his generational trajectory, he observes that this outcome is also caused by the political scenario and the educational model of the time, which transitioned from an authoritarian to a democratic regime.

Interviewee FM points to the indirect influence of technology as an important factor. For her, parents' behavior in treating social media platforms as a diary, recording and exposing every stage of children's development, stimulates anxiety in children, making them feel pressured to meet imposed expectations. Furthermore, when referring to Generation Z, interviewee FM, who is a psychopedagogue, observes that due to excessive freedom and the

absence of proper guidance, young people become lost amid so many choices, empowering themselves through what she calls empty arguments.

In light of these opinions, it is verified that the characteristics exposed by the interviewees connect with the FOMO effect and one of its main characteristics, anxiety. Seeking to expand the interviewees' opinions regarding the excessive use of social media platforms in triggering these disorders, it was observed that, in their statements, the family context is viewed as a highly influential factor, repeatedly mentioned throughout the interviews, as well as the relationship between informational overload and anxiety.

Interviewee LG considers that, in isolation, without considering genetic, environmental, and social factors, the use of social media platforms is not necessarily so problematic, although she highlights that it can indeed become a harmful factor. Interviewee FM points out that children with predispositions are already more likely to develop such disorders, but emphasizes that even without this predisposition, when parents themselves do not know how to deal with technology and allow children to access inappropriate content without regulation, these otherwise healthy children also become susceptible. She comments that excessive exposure leads to a feeling of insufficiency, in which children never feel satisfied or capable and, when faced with frustration, give up at the first attempt. Over time, this pattern contributes to the development of characteristics associated with anxiety and depression.

Although interviewee CK agrees that there are more vulnerable profiles, she believes that these disorders may arise in anyone. According to her, situations such as cancellation within a social group can generate feelings of rejection, triggering depressive conditions in any profile experiencing such a situation, for example. Regarding the profiles most vulnerable to experiencing FOMO, interviewees pointed to socially disconnected individuals, people with fewer psychological resources, those already presenting low self-esteem, anxiety and depression, and young individuals in developmental stages, such as children and adolescents.

Interviewee ES adds that when individuals are socially isolated, they are more likely to suffer the impacts caused by social media platforms. In other words, these are individuals who lack family bonds, close friendships, and active participation in a community. Interviewee FM resumes the discussion regarding Generation Z, observing that for these young people, the notion of belonging was built exclusively in the virtual environment and, for this reason, she considers them the generation with the profile most vulnerable to FOMO.

Interviewees were also asked whether the fear of missing out would be a reflection of dissatisfaction with real life. Their responses indicate that there is indeed a connection

between the two, generally related to other aspects already analyzed, such as the need for acceptance, emotional deficiencies, and FOMO as a means of escaping one's own reality. Thus, it is pertinent to highlight interviewee LG's statement, in which she observes that although many people claim to be indifferent to others' opinions, deep down everyone desires to be accepted and loved. She relates FOMO to the sensation of existing and being recognized:

It touches this feeling that if I am not there, consuming, interacting, knowing, knowing who is who, I will not have a solid identity. I will not be someone, I will be invisible. It is from there that I exist, that I appear, that I am. So, it is this idea that if you are online, you are alive (LG, 2025).

From the interviewees' statements, it becomes possible to understand how the fear of missing out mainly affects this generation that lives extensively through screens. According to the interviewees, social media platforms generate a feeling of FOMO in users who watch others' lives as a spectacle, generating internal pressure to achieve the same success. Interviewee ES and interviewee CK emphasize that social media platforms display only an idealized fragment of happy moments that do not always correspond to reality. Such a situation is evidenced by Owen (2018) through the report of interviewee Tess, who addressed the pressure and frustration she felt for not being able to replicate photos and achieve the same standards as the girls she saw on Instagram. Thus, it is noted that the type of content published, designed to be aesthetically pleasing, as well as algorithms, function as key elements causing especially young people to be affected by the fear of missing out or losing something, thereby impacting their mental and even physical health, such as in cases of bulimia.

At the end of the interviews, interviewees pointed to some paths toward establishing a healthier relationship with the digital world. The suggestions mentioned included: awareness regarding usage, resuming face-to-face social interactions, muting notifications, turning off cell phones during certain occasions, using tools provided by the platforms themselves to monitor and manage screen time, as well as seeking other sources of pleasure in the physical world. Complementarily, interviewee ES advises that it is necessary to focus on the present, emphasizing that the past has already happened and the future is merely a projection of what may still occur. Based on these contributions, it becomes evident that the best path is to find balance between these two worlds, so that technology functions merely as an ally rather than a substitute for existence outside screens.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research aimed to investigate and analyze, from the perspective of specialists, to what extent social media platforms are responsible for intensifying the feeling of FOMO among users and what consequences this has on the behavior of Generation Z. Based on the interviewees' perspectives, it became evident that although social media platforms play a significant role in the emergence and amplification of the FOMO effect, this intensification is connected in a deeper way to human fragility, constituting a reflection of an external process. In other words, part of the difficulties faced by contemporary individuals in real life end up being projected into social media platforms. Therefore, it is observed that psychological factors, such as the search for acceptance, belonging, and emotional deficiencies, inserted within a hyperconsumerist, individualistic, and immediate context, are central factors in intensifying this effect. It is worth highlighting that, in contemporary society, consumption acts as a search for social inclusion, especially among already fragile individuals who also use consumption as a means of fulfilling emotional deficiencies. This pursuit is constantly fueled by social media platforms through elements that operate together, such as advertising, influencers, and algorithms, which benefit from the fear of missing out.

Particularly regarding Generation Z, it was found that this is the generation most vulnerable to digital FOMO due to its hyperconnectivity. However, this vulnerability varies from person to person and is also influenced by factors such as fragile family structures or the presence of other disorders. Furthermore, the interviewees' perspectives reinforce the authors' ideas regarding the damages caused by the uncontrolled consumption of certain platforms, especially TikTok, among this generation, which now faces problems related to lack of face-to-face socialization and difficulty in dealing appropriately with criticism and frustrated expectations. It can be verified that social media platforms cannot be considered the main culprits for the emergence and intensification of FOMO, but rather function as vectors that favor and stimulate this effect, especially among young individuals from Generation Z, who seek to fulfill emotional deficiencies and social acceptance, transforming the fear of missing out on something occasional into a frequent sensation, making it even easier to observe in the twenty-first century. In addition, the interviewees' perceptions revealed that platforms create an idealized reality in which other people's lives are always better and also impose standards of beauty and behavior.

The relevance of this topic lies in provoking reflection regarding the role of communication and the need for more responsible strategies that consider impacts on the

mental health of Generation Z, an aspect frequently neglected by the market and advertising professionals. Finally, the present study opens paths for further investigation of the topic through the inclusion of a greater number of interviewees, as well as the search for other perceptions regarding this effect through interviews with digital influencers and advertisers who, in some way, stimulate and benefit from provoking feelings of FOMO in individuals.

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