



Investigating the effects of social media on global citizenship identity and its role in prosocial decision-making behaviors.

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### **Abstract**

With an increase in the existence of social media platforms, becoming staples in Generation Z's lives, this research investigates how the relationship between Social Media Usage (SMU) and Prosocial Behavior (PB) is positively mediated by Global Citizen Identity (GCI). Social Media platforms have been found to negatively impact psychological well-being and social involvement (Roberts & David, 2022). Prior research has identified Generation Z is becoming a cohort of globally engaged citizens (Dalton, 2009), which has been theorized to be a result of increased GCI. We have observed Social Media sites, be utilized to attract attention to movements such as #BLM, #MeToo, and #WalkForOurLives. Moreover, there has been a rise in open discussions on environmental and political movements. This cross-sectional study investigates how higher frequencies of SMU, specifically amongst members of Gen Z born between 1997 and 2004, influence an increase in PB through the mediation of GCI. With a total of 160 participants, this study demonstrated a positive correlation between all variables, supporting the hypotheses and belief that a higher level of social media usage would increase GCI and in turn result in higher PB. A partial mediation was identified, suggesting the role of other variables in the relationship between SMU and PB. The implications of this research are to understand how Social Media platforms can be capitalized to benefit society.

*Keywords:* Global Citizen Identity, Social Media Usage, Prosocial Behavior, Generation Z

## Introduction

*“It's really important to remember that [social media] increases access, it allows people to become activists in ways that they couldn't before.” - Sage Grace Dolan-Sandrino (MacColl, 2019)*

In the era shaped by digital connectivity, Generation Z (Gen Z) has embraced and leveraged the power technology has to offer in order to explore and bridge cultural divides, foster connections, and develop a global citizenship identity (GCI). Those born between 1997 and 2012 are considered members of Gen Z. Generations are defined by the events that occur in proximity to one another, influencing a specific cohort of people in distinct ways (Parry & Urwin, 2011). The UN has identified that Gen Z amounts to 26% of the total global population, making it the largest cohort alive (as cited in Brown, 2020). Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, COVID-19, and political polarization are just a few of the significant, life-altering events that have shaped the lives of Gen Z globally.

Being raised amongst conflict, racial injustice, political turmoil, and economic downturns has significant causes to create pessimistic and disengaged members of society; however, Gen Z presents themselves as motivated challengers to the systems around us. As a cohort, Gen Z has garnered two distinct nicknames for their generation: iGen—a reference to their innate digital fluency and nod to the naming style coined by Apple—and Generation Delta—representative of change, signifying their role as catalysts in our changing world (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). Where Gen Z differs from their predecessors is their reliance on social media to share information, develop relationships, and create meaningful experiences.

With limitless access to global information, cultures, and identities Generation Z has been able to develop a compassionate worldly view, fighting for equality and equity. Dalton (2009) has claimed that the members of this young generation are “engaged citizens”, partaking more willingly in protests and concerned with others—on a global level—and skeptical of the government (pp. 144-147). The internet fosters connections across time and space, allowing diverse people to connect who may have never crossed paths prior to the establishment of social networking sites (SNS).

Gen Z has become pragmatic in how they approach situations and search for solutions to pressing global issues they value (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Gen Z's strengths have been defined as the ability to be kind, fair and honest, their judgment and the ability to find humor in even the darkest of times (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). In the face of adversity and uncertainty Gen Z is able to balance the seriousness of the concerns of our world with humor, taking to SNS. These sites serve as platforms to discuss pressing matters, in ways that do not resonate with older generations. Gen Z's behavior is frequently seen as distasteful or weak attempts at social justice or clicktivism, rather than as a means of

communicating issues in ways that capture this specific generation's attention. Social media has been mostly seen in a negative, very destructive light; dismissing the positive, and the beneficial aspects of Social Media.

Social media has allowed Gen Z to become more globally aware than any of their predecessors. They are able to identify problems and find solutions, creating platforms for social change. Gen Z are pioneers of the new era, leading the way for future generations.

### **Impact of Social Media on Generation Z**

Social media has been cast in a negative light. The Mckinsey Health Institute notes that, on average, Gen Z is more likely than any of their predecessors to report negative feelings towards social media (as cited in Coe et al., 2022). Gen Z has been widely referred to as the most avid social media user, having accumulated the highest average of time, with over 3 hours on average spent daily on social media (GlobalWebIndex, 2023). There has been concern about how Internet communication might affect users who form superficial relationships, as Putnam (2000) claims is at the expense of pre-established companionship (as cited in Kraut et al., 2001). Kraut and colleagues (1998) argue, “The Internet is a social technology used for communication with individuals and groups, but it is associated with declines in social involvement and the psychological well-being that goes along with social involvement” (p. 1029).

Recent research has supported that the way in which we engage on social media directly influences one's well-being. Active Social Media Usage (ASMU), known as one-on-one exchanges such as private messages or “broadcasting” (eg. status, image, video posting), has been hypothesized to have positive effects on well-being. Passive Social Media Usage (PSMU), refers to the monitoring of the online life of others without engaging. PSMU has been argued to decrease the well-being of social media users as it induces social comparison and envy (Verduyn et al., 2017). It has been further supported that the higher the time spent passively engaging with social media the more negative the impact on social connection (Roberts & David, 2022).

### **Prosocial Behavior through Social Media**

Many claim that Gen Z is a generation enslaved by technology (Karanfiloğlu et. al., 2022). Gen Z's use of technology has unified them, connecting individuals beyond borders and differences. This unity has resulted in Gen Z taking to social media in protest against countless social, political, and environmental injustices. PB occurs when there is a cost to an individual for the benefit of others (Witteck & Bekkers, 2015). Tiktok, among other social media platforms, has been used by Gen Z to

spread information about injustices in a different light to spread awareness and challenge these concepts (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2022; Alexandro et. al., 2022).

Gen Z has put their efforts to defend equality, our environment, and human rights. A prime example of Gen Z taking action, and using social media to their advantage, was after the Parkland shooting in 2018. Students took to social media to draw attention and call for gun control. They collectively organized school walkouts, commemorating the lives lost, which gained over a million participants across the United States, known as the “Walkout for Parkland”. In less than two months, their movement spread around the globe. With protests in Washington DC, among other cities, Twitter was another outlet that Gen Z monopolized to gain support (Rue, 2018). There is a long list of outspoken changemakers like Emma González, Maya Ghazal, Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, Taylor Jones, and many more who are alike in this way.

While Gen Z frequently explores topics of high arousal via SNS, like Tiktok, which is a key driver behind viral videos (Berger & Milkman, 2013). These viral videos are not only for entertainment purposes but also serve as knowledge acquisition. Twitter, Youtube, and Tiktok have become a destination of choice used largely for information dissemination. With the exploration of these social, political, and environmental issues comes “clicktivism”. As times change, with new innovative technology around us, the definition of civic engagement will also change (Papacharissi, 2015). SNS allows for affective statements to mix with emotions and opinions (Papacharissi, 2015), creating a diverse space for open and honest conversations.

***Hypothesis 1:*** Social media use is positively correlated with Prosocial Behavior in Generation Z

### **Gen Z as Global Citizens**

Globally, “Over two-thirds of [Gen Z] think that making a wider contribution to society beyond themselves and their family is important” and report themselves as supporters of diversity, equality, and liberal values (Broadbent et al., 2017, p. 21). This report coincides with defining terms of “global citizenship”. Schattle (2008) found through interviews with self-described global citizens that the primary themes are: global awareness, responsibility to act, and action. Similar research conducted found that the themes were: human rights and social justice, environmental sustainability, an obligation to others outside one’s nation, responsibility to act to help others, global awareness, inclusiveness, the promotion of peace, and the valuation of diversity (Pitty et al., 2008).

The hyperconnectivity of the world, thanks to the internet, allows for collective action from larger groups. Research on shared identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) has identified that the closer people identify with a group the higher the collective contributions (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). The presence of

social media and access to the wide-reaching internet has posed as an accessory to establishing global citizenship. Wang and colleagues (2021) defined global citizen identification as the notion that all humans can and should be seen as belonging to “in-groups”, which, supported by social media, reduces the distance between people and allows them to be in the same group despite religious, ethnic, or racial differences. This identification establishes the care and promotion of justice and sustainability for the world's benefit (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013).

***Hypothesis 2:*** Social media use is positively correlated with Global Citizen Identity in Generation Z

This phenomenon results in people thinking less in terms of “in-group” and ”out-group”, and more as seeing humankind as a ‘we’ (Buchan et al., 2009). Buchan (2009) also discusses how access to global public goods increases world identity. If we know that prosocial decision-making is usually correlated with sharing a group identity, it is feasible to believe that this shared global identity would be the same in that respect. The research found this to be true when examining PB in face of the COVID-19 pandemic. They identified that those who had a strong feeling of global citizenship also reported a greater likelihood of engaging in PB in relation to the pandemic, further that global identity played a larger role than national identification. The theory they proposed behind this was the high threat on a global level, which aroused urgency and one's identification as a global citizen, and that behaving in a global prosocial way also benefits the local community (Wang et al., 2021). It has previously been identified that shared grievances will trigger higher engagement in collective action, it is specifically when groups feel influential (Van Zomeren et al., 2004) and emotions are high (Tausche et al., 2011) that collective action is taken. Which in a time of environmental anxiety, brings Gen Z closer together.

***Hypothesis 3:*** Global Citizen Identity is positively correlated with Prosocial Behavior in Generation Z.

### **Gen Z Taking Action**

Social movements are “interactions between [groups] engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of shared collective identity” (Diani, 1992, p. 8). These social movements generate social actions (e.g., petitions, protests), and aim to produce systemic change. The rise of social media and technology has enabled people to more easily share their experiences and thoughts. Social movements or activism that happen on social media are labeled as cyberactivism (Carty & Barron, 2019) and digital activism (Mendes & Ringrose, 2019). The possibility to remain anonymous on social media platforms further makes activism safer to engage in, especially on sensitive topics such as violence against women.

While digital activism has been receiving a positive response, we still see the controversy of clicktivism. However, Chadwich has explained to *Bustle*, for March For Our Lives, “everyone who was retweeting our tweets, they actually came out to the march.”. March For Our Lives garnered an estimated crowd of more than 200,000, which is evidence that Gen Z’s methodology of activism is not limited to behind their screens (MacColl, 2019).

Gen Z’s global access has allowed them to reach information beyond their own, establishing the assumption that they hold a stronger global citizen identity. It is clear that Gen Z utilizes media to their advantage and has been prosocially vocal in recent years, both via media and outside of it. This study investigated the relationship Gen Z’s SMU has on global citizenship, and how this influences their prosocial decision-making. It is essential to recognize that as the world adapts to advancing technology, the way people share and use information also changes, which in turn influences how society functions and interacts. With the new tools social media has provided, it is essential to consider how this can be used to help unite the world.

***Hypothesis 4:*** Global Citizen Identity mediates the relationship between social media use and Prosocial Behavior in Generation Z

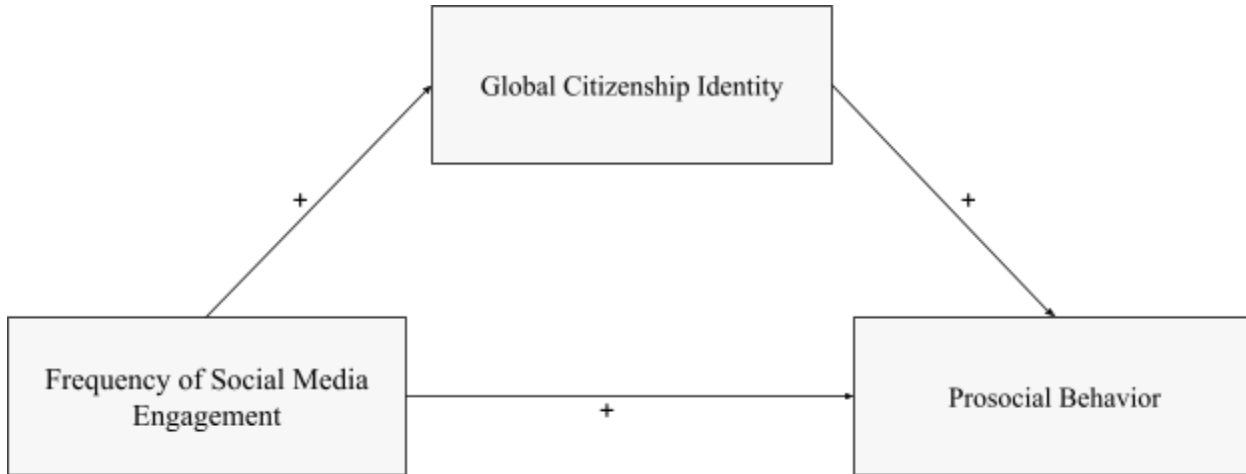
### **Aims of this Paper**

This paper explores how our global citizen identity shapes us, looking into the perspective of Gen Z and how their frequency of SMU impacts their PB. With the evidence supporting that a global identity induces more PB, and with Gen Z being the most inter-connected and immersed with technology and the global perspective it provides, it is clear that there may be a connection between these variables. Despite evidence that social media produces selfish and narcissistic personalities (Savci et al., 2019), this study argues that social media can in fact be used to promote PB. This paper will analyze the relationship between Gen Z’s SMU, and GCI increasing the PB of frequent users (see Figure 1).

***How are Social Media Use (SMU), Global Citizen Identity (GCI), and Prosocial Behavior (PB) related in Generation Z (Gen Z)?***

**Figure 1**

*Depiction of relationships and interactions between variables in this study*



## Methods

### Participants

A power analysis was conducted on G\*Power to identify the minimum number of participants needed for the study. A total of 123 participants were needed to ensure a power of 80% with a medium effect size ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.22$ ). A simulation analysis by Fritz & MacKinnon (2007) was referenced to ensure the validity of the participant sample size. Under the assumption that the effect size for the two paths through the mediation would be HL ( $\alpha = 0.26$  and  $\beta = 0.59$ ), the total sample size needed to reach 120.

The University of Utrecht follows the Code of Ethics for Psychologists. This project was registered with the Utrecht University Student Ethics Review & Registration Site (UU-SER). Following registration, the review board provided approval for this study, under the code 23-0356.

The total number of participants was 160. Inclusion criteria was met when respondents were born between 1997 and 2004. These birth years were selected to control for Gen Z while maintaining participation from individuals over the age of eighteen. The average birth year of participants was 1999.

Of the included participants, 59 identified as male (36.65%), 99 as female (61.49%), 2 as non-binary (1.24%), and 1 preferred not to specify. The most frequent birth year was 1999, with the average birth year being 2000 ( $SD$  1.61). The data is representative of 44 countries, with the majority from Germany (10%), Turkey (12%), and the Netherlands (20%). Out of the total research population, 36% identified as third-culture kids, a consideration that will be referred back to in this paper.

### Design & Procedure



The design of this study is cross-sectional. Participants were gained through convenience sampling via social media networks to attract the target group. Friends and family were asked to repost on their own social media accounts.

The post will contain the link leading respondents to the Qualtrics survey (see Appendix A). The first page of the survey will be a brief explanation of the study at hand and the consent form (see Appendix B), indicating their voluntary involvement and informing them of the anonymity of the survey. Following this brief, they will receive instructions on the tasks expected of them. After completion, participants will receive a final reminder regarding anonymity and confidentiality and an appreciation of their time.

### **Measures**

Given the data collection being across a single period of time, this study will utilize multiple reformatted variations of known measurements to identify participants' GCI, SMU, and prosocial tendencies. The measurement tool is a 40-item Likert-scale survey, constructed around three pre-existing surveys.

#### ***Social Media Usage***

To measure the frequency of SMU, participants were asked to report the average daily time spent on the selected SNS. These SNS were selected based on the survey results from various platforms (Lin, n.d.; YPulse, 2023; Sarah Best Strategy, n.d.) and a self-conducted survey. Participants were asked to select a range of time on a scale ranging from less than 30 minutes to more than 3 hours for the 5 selected SNS.

#### ***Global Citizenship Identity***

To measure the global identity of participants a shortened version of the Reysen and Katzarska-Miller (2013) 22-item Global Citizen Scale will be used. Given the scope of this project, participants were asked a series of questions to determine their global citizen score. The scale consisted of 11 items which were to be ranked on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' (5) to 'strongly disagree' (1). A higher value constituted a higher Global Citizenship Identity. Two examples of this scale are "I am interested in learning about the many cultures that have existed in this world" and "I believe that I am connected to people in other countries, and my actions can affect them". In this study, the scale was found to be reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.81$ ).

#### ***Prosocial Behavior***

To measure the PB and tendencies of participants, a shortened and edited version of the 16-item Prosocial Scale for Adults, created by Capara (2005), was used. As this study focuses on the behavior of

Gen Z, the edits reflect the changes made across various studies that applied Capara's scale. This scale consisted of 10 items, which were used to identify the prosocial tendency of the respondents. Items were to be rated on a five-point Likert scale, running from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). Where a higher value represents higher prosocial Intent. An example of this scale is "I immediately help those who are in need." (See Appendix A). In this study, the scale was found to be reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.80$ ).

### ***Demographic***

Beyond participants being limited to members of Gen Z, within the age bracket of 26 and 18, they were also asked their gender (options: male, female, non-binary, prefer not to say), nationality, and if they identify as a third culture kid. Gender was considered to ensure a collection of different perspectives from those who identify differently. Nationality was collected to ensure diverse data collection. Lastly, Third Culture Kid identification was collected to see if this would impact the results, as it represents an identification with various countries which can be inferred as a higher Global Identity.

## **Results**

This study aimed to investigate the hypothesis that Global Citizen Identity mediated the relationship between SMU and PB. The other hypotheses were that all variables were positively correlated with each other. To see if the hypotheses were supported a statistical analysis using PROCESS macro on SPSS was done to test the mediation effect. A correlation test was also performed.

The model of this study was tested using model 4 of the PROCESS macro SPSS package, intended for investigating a mediation relationship (Hayes, 2017). As a normal distribution of the scores was visible we can infer that the assumptions of normality were met. The data is slightly right-skewed, with more frequency in the standardized z scores, which can be a consequence of self-reporting bias. As the data was all self-reported it is possible that participants underwent social comparison, altering their responses to reflect the social norms and standards. While the normal Q-Q plots were met, indicating a close approximation of normal distribution, the detrended normal Q-Q plots do show a deviation in distribution across all variables. This could be due to the data collection methods or sample size. We can also accept all items as Cronbach's alpha was found to be reliable for every scale (see method).

### **Descriptive Analysis**

Instagram was ranked the highest among participants as their favorite SNS with an average ranking of 1.94, followed by Whatsapp (2.38), TikTok (3.10), Twitter (3.62), and Facebook (3.95) (see Table 1). When looking into the breakdown by gender, we see that female participants ranked Facebook higher than Twitter. Comparatively, male participants ranked Twitter higher than Tik Tok.

While predominantly there was no significant difference between social media platform preferences amongst gender, Tiktok and Twitter did have more significant differences in their preferential ratings. 13% of male participants ranked Twitter as their first choice SNS compared to their female counterparts which was only ranked number 1 by 5% (see Table 1). Similarly, 21% of female participants reported TikTok as their first choice SNS while only 8% of their male counterparts reported TikTok as their first choice SNS (see Table 1).

When investigating the frequency of time spent on the various social media platforms Instagram was identified as the most frequently used SNS, with 44.4% reported spending over 1 hour on the app each day. Similarly, Whatsapp has garnered high frequency, with over 36.3% using the app for over 1 hour a day. TikTok was reported on average to be used over one hour per day by 33.1% (see Table 2).

While with Instagram and Whatsapp, the reported scores for use between 30 minutes to an hour were 26.9% and 27.5% respectively, TikTok had a significantly larger population reporting using the app for less than 30 minutes per day (58.1%) Twitter and Facebook received similar reports of being used less than 30 minutes each day, on average, by 81.3% and 85.6% respectively.

**Table 1.**  
*Descriptive Statistics for Social Media, Rankings by Gender*

Social Media Site		N.	Mean	Std. Dev.
<b>Instagram</b>	Total	160	1.944	0.892
	Female	98	1.969	0.855
	Male	59	1.847	0.887
<b>TikTok</b>	Total	160	3.100	1.428
	Female	98	2.776	1.403
	Male	59	3.627	1.325
<b>Twitter</b>	Total	160	3.619	1.238
	Female	98	3.939	1.138
	Male	59	3.186	1.196
<b>Facebook</b>	Total	160	3.950	1.086
	Female	98	3.918	1.090
	Male	59	3.966	1.098

<b>WhatsApp</b>	Total	160	2.388	1.308
	Female	98	2.500	1.298
	Male	59	2.398	1.363

*Note.* N = Number of Participants

**Table 2.**

*Social media platforms and frequency of use reported in the study*

Social Media Platform	<30 Minutes	30 to 60 Minutes	1 to 2 Hours	2 to 3 hours	>3 hours
<b>Instagram</b>	28.75%	28.88%	25.62%	6.88%	11.88%
<b>TikTok</b>	58.13%	8.75%	18.13%	7.50%	7.50%
<b>Twitter</b>	81.25%	8.75%	6.25%	2.50%	1.25%
<b>Facebook</b>	85.63%	5.63%	6.88%	1.25%	0.63%
<b>Whatsapp</b>	36.25%	27.50%	24.38%	6.25%	5.63%

When examining why participants use social media the highest reported reasoning was “To keep in touch with my relatives & friends” (88.8%). Following this reasoning the reasons were “to connect with people from various countries” (72.5%), “To share or find new ideas” (68.8%), and “For reading news” (63.1%).

**Hypothesis Test**

In table 3, the correlation between the three tested variables in this study are shown. The results demonstrated from the Pearson Correlation (*r*) and P-Value (*p*) support for hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

It was hypothesized that SMU is positively correlated with PB in Gen Z (hypothesis 1), which is supported. The results indicate a positive correlation, despite a weak but significant relationship between SMU and global citizen identity ( $r = 0.24, p = .003$ ), suggesting that as SMU increases there is a tendency for GCI to increase, although the relationship is of moderate strength.

Secondly, it was hypothesized that SMU is positively correlated with Global Citizen Identity in Gen Z (hypothesis 2), which is supported. Similarly, to hypothesis 1, the results indicate a weak but significant relationship between SMU and PB ( $r = 0.16, p = .039$ ), suggesting that the higher the frequency of SMU the higher the PB tendency.

Finally, Global Citizen Identity is positively correlated with PB in Gen Z, supporting hypothesis 3. The results demonstrate a moderate and extremely statistically significant relationship between GCI

and PB ( $r = 0.54, p < .001$ ), suggesting that the higher the frequency of SMU the higher the PB tendency.

**Table 3.**

*Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for measures used in the study*

Measures	<i>M (SD)</i>	1.	2.	3.
1. Social Media Use	9.21 (2.65)	1	-	-
2. Prosocial Behavior	41.89 (5.22)	0.163*	1	-
3. Global Citizen Identity	45.00 (6.09)	0.236**	0.544**	1

*Notes*

\* -  $p < 0.05$

\*\* -  $p < 0.01$

Based on the mediation analysis, hypothesis 4, is partially supported. It is observed that the mediation role of Global Citizen Identity accounts for 77% of the total effect (direct effect:  $b = 0.037$ , indirect effect:  $b = 0.13$ ). Because there is a significant effect between SMU and PB ( $b = 0.037, SE = 0.063$ ), we can see the mediation effect of Global Citizen Identity is a partial mediation.

The relationship between SMU and Global Citizen Identity is positive and significant,  $b = 0.24$ , 95% CI [0.84, 0.39]. The coefficient ( $b$ ) indicates a moderate-to-strong positive association. The relationship between Global Citizen Identity and PB is also positive and statistically significant,  $b = 0.54$ , 95% CI [0.40, 0.67]. The coefficient indicates a moderate positive association that falls true within the confidence intervals.

When examining the confidence intervals of the other relationships we see that the effect of SMU on PB has a negative lower confidence interval,  $b = 0.037, p = .595$ , 95% CI [-.09, .17], which means that there is a lack of clear direction.

**Table 4.**

*Coefficients of research model looking into a direct relationship and indirect relationship*

	<b>b</b>	<b>se</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>LLCI</b>	<b>ULCI</b>
Outcome: Global Citizen Identity						
<b>Social Media Usage</b>	0.237	0.0773	3.059	.0026	0.0838	0.389
Outcome: Prosocial Behavior						
<b>Social Media Usage</b>	0.0367	0.0689	0.532	.595	-0.0994	0.173
<b>Global Citizen Identity</b>	0.535	0.0689	7.768	.000	0.399	0.671

**Table 5.**

*Direct and Indirect Effect compared to Total Effect*

	Effect	SE
Total Effect	0.3223	0.15
Direct Effect	0.0724	0.53
Indirect Effect	0.2499	0.08

A second analysis was conducted to observe if the identity of third-culture kids disrupted the data. The results did not support any significant change (direct effect:  $b = 0.0131$ , indirect effect:  $b = 0.105$ ). The direct effect found in the analysis without the control for third culture kid identity was already established as a weak relationship which only weakened with the control. Further, the role of the mediator is seen to increase from 77% to 88% which remains significant. A third check was done, to ensure that gender did not play a significant role. Similar results were found in this test (direct effect:  $b = 0.0127$ , indirect effect:  $b = 0.0971$ ), with a weaker relationship between the independent and dependent variables and a 88% role in the relationship from the mediating variable.

**Figure 2.**

*Identified relationships and interactions between variables in this study*



Notes.

\* -  $p > 0.05$

\*\* -  $p < 0.01$

## Discussion

As social media continues to hold a prominent role in Gen Z's lives, it is crucial to understand its full effects. In recent years there has been growing interest in researching the role of social media platforms in enhancing individuals' global identity, which other research has identified as a critical factor in promoting PB. These findings challenge the established concept and focus on the negative implications of SMU. The purpose of this study was to understand and present how social media can result in positive behavior and decision-making changes, specifically in relation to PB through the development of global citizen identity. Previous studies have investigated the relationships between SMU and global identity, as well as global identity, and prosocial identity. This study's findings link gaps in previous research in hopes to demonstrate the positive impact that social media can have on a global scale.

The results show a positive correlation between all variables. While there is a limited direct effect of SMU on PB, there is a significant effect through the mediation of Global identity. This represents the belief that access to and use of social media increases one's global citizenship, which directly impacts willingness to take action in a prosocial manner.

### **Social Media Use and Global Citizen Identity**

The results demonstrate a clear relationship between the frequency of SMU and one's GCI. Being the first generation to not know the world without access to the internet, social media has become an integral part of their lives. Past research found that on average Gen Z spends 3 hours on social media daily (GlobalWebIndex, 2023). This study, however, found slightly differing results. Based on the data collected from 160 participants, it was discovered that, on average, Gen Z spends approximately 30 to 60 minutes per day on one or all of the five social media platforms that were tested. The discrepancy in the data can be explained by a difference in sample size and the selected social media platforms. The sample used in this study was collected through social media, this also has the possibility to have impacted the data. Nonetheless, in support of this study, findings by Coe and colleagues (2022) address the positive impacts of social media, noting that more than 50% of participants from all generational groups report positive effects from the social connectivity that social media offers. This aligns with the role hyperconnectivity contributes to the growth and development of shared identities and liking towards various individuals to establish a shared identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), henceforth a global identity given the nature of social media.

Previous research, that has investigated the impact of shared identity on global citizenship, has established there to be a positive relationship between these variables (Wang et al., 2021). There is

further evidence that Global Citizen Identity has ties with themes such as global awareness, valuation of diversity, and inclusivity (e.g., Pitty et al., 2018; Schattle, 2008). These themes are comparatively associated with Gen Z and SMU. Social media platforms offer a unique space for individuals to engage without limitations and go beyond their inner circles. With Gen Z currently being known as the most diverse generation (Seemiller & Grace, 2016) and their access to a global sphere their diversity and global awareness continues to grow. This study's findings provide additional evidence supporting the significant value that Gen Z places on connecting with individuals from different countries, as well as sharing experiences and knowledge. Further, the personal morality within this generation reveals Gen Z to be supporters of diversity and equality (Broadbent et al., 2017), which stands with Dalton's claim that Gen Z is more "engaged citizens" on a global level (2009).

### **Social Media Use and Prosocial Behavior**

This study contributes to the idea that social media has the potential to increase the PB of those who use it. According to a survey conducted by Irregular Labs, 75% of Gen Z participants noted political or social engagement as highly important to their identity. Furthermore, 63% of the participants stated that their main approach to staying informed about crucial social and political issues was through social media (The Irregular Report, 2019). Previous research has found that SNS, such as TikTok, do not have a significant impact on users' well-being when used via passive or active engagement (Masciantonio et al., 2021). TikTok is a rising platform holding the most monthly installs (Curry, 2023), compared to its competitors of Instagram and Facebook. TikTok aligns with the values held by Gen Z regarding social media, excels as a platform that fosters shared knowledge exchange and enables meaningful engagement with individuals across borders. We have observed in the past how Twitter users have actively participated in digital actions, demonstrating their commitment to causes that matter to them. This trend of engagement continues on TikTok, where users also participate in similar actions, which are later reposted on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, reaching broader audiences. However, because of the insufficient evidence to support the relationship further research is needed to understand the nature of the relationship between SMU and PB.

The results of this study indicate ambiguity regarding the impact of the independent variable on the dependent. The confidence intervals lead to uncertainty about if the direction of the effect is truly positive or negative. Further, because of the p-value the results are not statistically significant, meaning there is insufficient evidence to support the direct relationship in this mediation model. So we can not conclude if hypothesis 4 was supported or rejected.

### **Global Citizen Identity & Prosocial Behavior**



As stated by Vikas Pota, "In this darkening political landscape...it is reassuring to know that, in the minds of [Gen Z], global citizenship is not dead: it could just be getting started" (Broadbent et al., 2017, p. 21). Though past research has reported that Gen Z is enslaved to technology and 'lazy' in regards to being socially engaged, there is substantial evidence that these claims are failing to capture the full picture of the topic. Gen Z is displaying early indications of becoming a global generation that exhibits less discrimination compared to previous generations.

This study attempts to change the narrative of how social media is perceived, in hopes to establish a healthier digital environment that promotes PB. Gen Z has demonstrated the power they hold by leveraging social media platforms to gain attention, take action, and unite in solidarity of various social and political injustices. As a result of the continuous connection to the world and citizens globally, Gen Z has proven how useful social media is as a tool. This further supports that Gen Z displays an innate ability to contribute to complex discussions in ways that break down barriers.

### **Mediating Effects of Global Citizen Identity**

Previous research has identified that the more connected individuals are to other people, the more likely they are to be engaged in PB and GCI. Wang et al. (2021) found that higher levels of ASMU result in higher likelihood to engage in PB such as volunteering and donating money to charity. Additionally, Kahneman & Tversky (1984) found that the impact of SMU on PB can be both positive and negative. This study demonstrates a partial mediation of GCI on the relationship between SMU AND PB. The effect can be explained as the more connected individuals are to one another, the higher one's global identity is, which in turn results in a higher likelihood to engage in PB for the collective group. It is also established that the level of one's GCI is directly impacted by one's SMU as it acts as the connection to the larger global community, establishing a shared identity.

### **Implications**

What the findings of this study, along with pre-established claims, argue is that because of the global connectivity between members of Gen Z, there is a relationship between their use of these platforms and prosocial tendencies. Social media has become a catalyst for movements. Currently, Gen Z represents the largest populated generation, as well as being the largest demographic on social media. Gen Z is the first generation to live in a world with such fast-paced growth and development. Despite being pessimistic about the future, previous research has found that Gen Z has cited upcoming technological advancements as the main contributing factor to feeling hopeful (Broadbent et al., 2017). Digital advancements continue every year, currently with an emphasis on creative AI. According to We Are Social (*The Changing World of Digital*, 2023), not only did COVID-19 bring more traffic to social

media platforms, but the developments in digital platforms have as well. As of January 2023, there are 4.76 billion (59.4% of the world population) active social media users, which is a 137 million increase in the past year. The increase in PB amongst Gen Z also has the power to transfer to upcoming generations, as well as amongst themselves, who will learn from their predecessors. By acknowledging the positive contribution and potential that social media holds we open space to enhance users' experiences and well-being on these platforms.

The findings of this study have many implications on how, as a society, we can move forward and leverage social media to become a better asset in our lives. It is important to recognize that previous research on the engagement on social media does not examine the types of engagement beyond the “social” behaviors of messaging, posting, sharing, liking, etc. Active engagement can, and should be, expanded beyond a ‘social’ level of engagement but also to a ‘prosocial’ level of engagement. Active engagement on a ‘prosocial’ level would involve actions such as: sharing informative content, signing petitions, participating in online campaigns, and engaging in discussions. Passive engagement, however, would maintain its status as the ‘watcher’ where social media users observe the content and information without engaging. However, based on the results of this study we see the tendency of Gen Z to utilize social media for the exchange of information. If we were to begin investigating active engagement from the standpoint of a more ‘prosocial’ behavior, we could see that those who engage in this way face less negative consequences and increase their feelings of inclusion and belonging.

### **Strengths, Limitations & Further Research**

A strength of this study has been that it seeks to address the notable gap by shifting the focus towards the positive aspects of social media, which have often been overlooked or overshadowed by the prevalent emphasis on its negative implications. The prioritization of negative implications of social media may be overshadowing the potential positive outcomes that can be achieved. By examining, and bringing attention to these positive outcomes, this study provides a different perspective that can not be dismissed. The practical implications of this research also act as a strength as it holds relevance for various stakeholders. There is a growing emphasis on global citizenship in education, which by incorporating social media as a tool can facilitate opportunities for learning and fostering digital literacy. Secondly, fostering GCI amongst Gen Z can result in an increase in their social responsibility and engagement as global citizens.

This study has a few limitations that should be noted. Firstly, a limitation that could have affected the results is the potential impact of response bias as the data was self-reported. Because of the nature of this study, it is possible that social desirability bias played a role in reflecting desirable

behavior despite the anonymity of the responses. It would be valuable in a future study to alter the means of data collection to best test the variables in a different manner.

Secondly, despite the sample size being appropriate for the scope of the project, a larger sample size would have prompted better applicability of the results. The current sample, while representative of the selected population, may not fully capture the diverse perspective of Gen Z. Because the sample was collected via social media, this also prompts the limitation that it is neglecting a portion of the target population that does not utilize social media. The current study found that there is a lack of clarity of the direction, which can infer that if the sample size was higher or has the data been more diverse, there may have been a clear view on the direction of the data.

Lastly, because this study is a cross-sectional design it is difficult to assume more frequent use of Social Media impacts our GCI and PB in this study. In future research, it would be valuable to perform a longitudinal study to understand how these variables change over time with increased use. Another note is that due to this research being correlational, we can not assume causation and must consider alternative variables that may be impacting the data.

### **Conclusion**

As we continue to develop as a society and digitally, our digital identities will simultaneously increase and become more integrated with ourselves. How we respond to injustices or take action and engage in helping behavior tells us about how we perceive our role as a member of the community affected or how similar we feel to the individual. This study aimed to investigate the Frequent SMU impacts on Gen Z's PB. Furthermore, it investigated how GCI plays a mediatory relationship between the independent and dependent variables, finding there is a positive correlation and a partial mediation, indicating that there are other factors contributing to this relationship. This paper in no way aims to diminish the negative impacts that social media has, and may continue to have, on well-being; however, suggests the potential shift in outcomes. Despite the results not clearly identifying the direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, it does demonstrate the role that Social Media has in improving PB through GCI. At this point, it is speculative to assume, based on sample size, that the more we engage on social media impacts our global identity and PB. Future research should broaden the reach and perspectives of Gen Z while comparatively examining the differences between them and their predecessors.

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## APPENDIX A

Prosocial Behavior of Gen Z: a relationship with global identity and social media

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This study has been approved by the Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University (approval number: 23-0356)

The goal of this research is to understand the prosocial nature of Gen Z, for that reason please only participate if you were born between or in 1997 and 2004. With a rise in globalization and access to various cultures, there has been an identified increase in global identity. Research has identified that there has been a rise in prosocial tendencies from the young generation. This insight will be examined against social media use, a leading contributor to the increase of global identity.

During this procedure, you will be asked to partake in a survey that should take around 5-10 minutes.

There are three subsections that pertain to prosociality, global identity, and social media usage.

There are no expected risks that could occur in the interview process.

Please be informed that your participation is completely voluntary, it is possible to withdraw your participation at any time without a given reason. Your decision to stop participating is entirely your own. Withdrawal from the study: You may stop participating in the questionnaire at any time, for any reason, if you so decide.

The collected data will be saved for 5 to 10 years in an anonymous format, this is in case the dataset will be used for a peer-reviewed journal. Data will only be used for this reason and this thesis, remaining anonymous at all times.

Questions about the research?

If you have any questions concerning the research in general, the data collection or your role as an interviewee please contact the researcher. Contact details are indicated above.

By checking off the “agree” box and continuing with this survey you are providing your consent to participate in the study “Prosocial Behavior of Gen Z: a relationship with global identity and social media” conducted by Katia Gregorek. You are agreeing to have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. It should be noted, once again, that you are not waiving any of my legal rights by agreeing and can withdraw at any time.

## APPENDIX B

What gender do you identify as?

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Non-Binary
- d. Prefer not to day

What year were you born?

- a. 1997
- b. 1998
- c. 1999
- d. 2000
- e. 2001
- f. 2002
- g. 2003
- h. 2004

What is your nationality?

Do you identify as a Third Culture Kid? (having lived in and been raised in a culture other than your parents' or the culture of their country of nationality or having lived abroad in your childhood years)

Section1 Question (Social Media - Frequency) <30 minutes, 30-60 minutes, 1-2 hours, 2-3 hours, >3 hours

1 Please indicate your Daily Average for: Instagram

2 Please indicate your Daily Average for: Tiktok

3 Please indicate your Daily Average for: Twitter

4 Please indicate your Daily Average for: Facebook

5 Please indicate your Daily Average for: WhatsApp

Please rank the following Social Media Sites by dragging into the order of your preference:

The following statements describe a large number of common situations. There are no right or wrong answers; the best answer is the immediate, spontaneous one. Read each phrase carefully and fill in the number that reflects your first reaction.

#### Section2 Question (Social Media - Purpose/role)

1 I use social networking sites to keep in touch with my relatives

2 I use social networking sites to share new ideas

3 I use social networking sites to create my social identity

4 I prefer using social networking sites to attending a social gathering

5 I use social networking sites to get information regarding current social events

6 I use social networking sites for online academic group discussion

7 I use social networking sites for reading news

8 I use social networking sites for sharing pictures

9 I use social networking sites to do research work

10 I use social networking sites to look at funny posts

Please select the reasons you use social media:

I use social networking sites to keep in touch with my relatives & friends

I use social networking sites to make new friends

I use social networking sites as relief from stress

I use social networking sites to share or find new ideas

I use social networking sites for reading news

I use social networking sites to connect with people from various countries (this can include family, friends, and others)

Section3 Question (Prosocial)

1 I am pleased to help my friends/colleagues in their activities

2 I share the things that I have with my friends

3 I try to help others

4 I am empathic with those who are in need

5 I immediately help those who are in need

6 I am willing to make myself available to help others (i.e. I tell people to contact me for help)

7 I try to console and give comfort to those who are sad

8 I easily lend money or other things

9 I easily put myself in the shoes of those who are in discomfort

10 I easily share with friends any good opportunity that comes to me

11 I give to those in need (charity, homeless, etc)

12 I give up my seat on public transport to the elderly

#### Section4 Question (Global & Prosocial)

1 I believe that I am connected to people in other countries, and my actions can affect them

2 I try to stay informed of current global issues

3 I understand how various cultures of this world interact socially

4 I would describe myself as a global citizen

5 I am able to empathize with people from other countries

6 It is easy for me to put myself in someone else's shoes regardless of what country they are from

7 I am interested in learning about the many cultures that have existed in this world

8 I would like to join groups that emphasize getting to know people from different countries

9 Those countries that are well off should help people in countries who are less fortunate

10 Basic services such as health care, clean water, food, and legal assistance should be available to everyone, regardless of what country they live in

11 If I had the opportunity, I would help others who are in need regardless of their nationality

12 If I could, I would dedicate my life to helping others no matter what country they are from

13 Being actively involved in global issues is my responsibility

14 It is my responsibility to understand and respect cultural differences across the globe to the best of my abilities