

**MALADAPTIVE DAYDREAMING AMONG GEN Z COLLEGE STUDENTS:  
ASSOCIATIONS WITH STRESS, BOREDOM PRONENESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA  
USE**

*Dissertation Submitted to Kerala University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Award of the Degree of*

Master of Science in Counselling Psychology

Submitted by

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*Under the Guidance of*

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**DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY**

**LOYOLA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES (AUTONOMOUS)**

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

**2024-2026**

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2024-2026

## CERTIFICATE



This is to certify that **Gopika G** (Reg. No. **LC24PCP08**) has successfully carried out the project entitled "**Maladaptive Daydreaming among Generation Z College Students: Associations with Stress, Boredom Proneness and Social Media Use**" in the **Department of Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences (Autonomous), Thiruvananthapuram**, under the supervision and guidance of the **Dr. Pramod S K, Assistant Professor, Department of Counselling Psychology**, during the Fourth Semester of the M.Sc. Counselling Psychology programme in the academic year **2024–2026**.

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Submitted for the examination held on: .....

Examiner:

## DECLARATION

I, **Gopika G**, do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “Maladaptive Daydreaming among Generation Z College Students: Associations with Stress, Boredom Proneness and Social Media Use”, submitted to the Department of Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences (Autonomous), Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram, under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Pramod S K, Assistant Professor, Department of Counselling Psychology, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Counselling Psychology of Kerala University, is a bona fide work carried out by me during the academic year 2024–2026.

I further declare that this dissertation has not been submitted, either in part or in full, to any other University or Institution for the award of any degree, diploma, or other academic qualification.

Place: Sreekariyam

Gopika G

Date:

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M.Sc. Counselling Psychology

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## ABSTRACT

The present study examined maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students and explored its relationship with perceived stress, boredom proneness, and social media use. A quantitative, descriptive correlational research design was employed with a sample of 121 Generation Z college students from various colleges in India. Participants were selected using convenience sampling. Data were collected using the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS), and Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS). Descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk test, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, Multiple Linear Regression, and the Independent Samples *t*-test were used for data analysis. The findings indicated significant positive relationships between maladaptive daydreaming and perceived stress and between maladaptive daydreaming and social media use. Boredom proneness was not significantly associated with maladaptive daydreaming. Regression analysis indicated that perceived stress and social media use significantly predicted maladaptive daydreaming, with social media use emerging as the stronger predictor. No significant gender differences were observed in maladaptive daydreaming. The study contributes to the growing but still limited body of Indian research on maladaptive daydreaming and provides insight into the psychological factors associated with excessive fantasy involvement among Generation Z college students. The findings may assist counsellors, educators, and mental health professionals in developing interventions that promote adaptive coping strategies, healthy digital habits, and psychological well-being among young adults.

*Keywords:* maladaptive daydreaming, Generation Z, college students, perceived stress, boredom proneness, social media use

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**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 General Introduction

In recent years, mental health has been one of the most important public health issues among young adults. Rapid technological progress, globalization, changing social structures, competition in academia, and increasing uncertainty about future employment strongly influence the psychological well-being of adolescents and young adults. These changes have influenced not only the way of communication and learning, but also the way of managing emotions, coping with stress and social environment. Thus, a growing number of researchers have highlighted the importance of understanding the psychological experiences of young adults within the context of contemporary digital society (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).

Generation Z (Gen Z) represents a distinct generational cohorts, having grown up in a time of constant digital connectivity. This generation, broadly defined as those born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019), is often described as “digital natives” because digital technologies, smartphones, the internet, and social networking platforms have been a part of their lives since they were young (Prensky, 2001). Unlike their predecessors, Gen Z has been educated, communicated with, entertained, and socialized in predominantly digital spaces. Technological innovations have brought with them new avenues for learning, creativity and social connection, but also new psychological challenges linked to excessive digital engagement, information overload, a reduced attention span, emotional dysregulation and increased vulnerability to mental health concerns (Keles et al., 2020).

In this digital landscape, college students of Generation Z are in a particularly important place. Emerging adulthood, typically from late teens to early twenties, is a developmental stage of identity exploration, increased independence, career preparation, development of

interpersonal relationships, and emotional adjustment (Arnett, 2000). At this level, students are expected to handle a range of academic, personal and social responsibilities, as well as adapt to the shifting societal expectations. Some of the factors that often lead to increased psychological stress are academic pressures; examinations; financial issues; uncertainty about future careers; peer relationships; family expectations. For many students, these developmental challenges are combined with continuous access to digital technologies in which online environments become part of everyday life.

In recent years, maladaptive daydreaming (MD) has become an increasingly studied psychological phenomenon. Maladaptive daydreaming was first described by Somer (2002) as excessive, immersive, and emotionally engaging fantasy activity taking up substantial amounts of time and interfering with academic, occupational, interpersonal, or daily functioning. In contrast to the more common adaptive and temporary daydreaming, maladaptive daydreaming consists of elaborate fantasy worlds that are difficult to control and may serve as a form of psychological escape. Maladaptive daydreamers report high levels of emotional engagement with their fantasies, compulsive fantasy engagement, and difficulty refocusing on real life responsibilities (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011). Despite not being formally classified as a psychiatric disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR) or the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), maladaptive daydreaming has become an area of increasing research attention. This heightened interest stems from its observed correlation with psychological distress and impaired daily functioning.

Current research indicates that maladaptive daydreaming is not an independent occurrence but results from the interplay of emotional, cognitive, and environmental influences. Persistent stress, isolation, tedium, emotional discontent, or challenges in relationships may prompt individuals to engage in elaborate fantasies as a method for managing distress or avoiding adverse circumstances (Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018). While deep

immersion in fantasy might offer transient emotional relief, persistent reliance on this strategy can progressively impair concentration, output, social interactions, and general psychological health. Therefore, maladaptive daydreaming is increasingly understood as a detrimental coping mechanism that can both arise from and exacerbate emotional distress.

Stress has been repeatedly identified as an important psychological variable associated with maladaptive daydreaming. Stress is the mental and physical response to a situation in which the individual perceives that the environment's demands exceed his or her personal resources for dealing with the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). College students are often exposed to a variety of stressors. These include academics, exams, career planning, financial issues, interpersonal relationships and adjustment to adult roles. Long-term stress has been linked with emotional exhaustion, anxiety, reduced concentration, sleep disturbance and lower psychological well-being. People under increased stress can turn to maladaptive ways of coping for relief such as overuse of the internet, gaming, escapism into fantasy, or maladaptive daydreaming.

Another possible contributor to maladaptive daydreaming is boredom proneness, the relatively stable tendency to experience boredom, dissatisfaction and difficulty in maintaining engagement in activities that are perceived as monotonous or insufficiently stimulating (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986). Information is shared rapidly in today's digital world and there is a proliferation of stimulation, so people may become less tolerant of routine or repetitive activities. If persistent boredom is experienced by young adults, they might have a greater need for novelty and stimulation via internally rewarding experiences such as elaborate fantasy, which could increase the chance of immersive daydreaming. Boredom proneness has also been associated with impulsivity, attentional problems, problematic internet use, and other maladaptive coping behaviours (Mercer-Lynn et al., 2014).

Moreover, the widespread use of social media has transformed the psychological experiences of Generation Z. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Facebook, X, and TikTok have become fundamental for communication, education, entertainment and identity formation for young adults. While these platforms promote social connectedness and information sharing, overusing or using social media in a problematic way has been associated with decreased attention, sleep problems, emotional dependence, social comparison, anxiety, depression and decreased psychological well-being (Keles et al., 2020). Social media platforms also offer regular exposure to emotionally engaging content, fictional stories, music, gaming and virtual communities that may stimulate imagination and reinforce fantasy-oriented thinking. Thus, excessive use of digital media might play a role in the development and/or maintenance of maladaptive daydreaming, by offering external triggers and opportunities for psychological escape.

Stress, boredom proneness, social media use, and maladaptive daydreaming may have a particularly important relationship in Generation Z college students. Students who are under academic pressure and emotional distress may use social media and immersive fantasy experiences as a temporary means to feel better. Boredom proneness may increase the need for constant stimulation and activities that can provide internal rewards. Over time, these factors can work together to support maladaptive coping patterns that can impact academic performance, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships and overall mental health. Thus, understanding these interrelationships is crucial for identifying psychological vulnerabilities and facilitating adaptive coping strategies in young adults.

There has been a significant increase in the international research on maladaptive daydreaming over the last two decades, but there is a relatively small amount of research on its associations with stress, boredom proneness, and social media usage, especially in the Indian context. In addition, little research has specifically examined Generation Z college students,

despite their unique developmental characteristics and high levels of exposure to digital environments. The study of these associations may enhance the understanding of maladaptive coping styles in young adults and provide useful implications for counselling psychologists, teachers, and mental health professionals involved with students.

Maladaptive daydreaming has received increasing attention in recent years, yet research on this phenomenon among Indian college students remains limited. This study focuses on Generation Z college students and examines whether maladaptive daydreaming is associated with stress, boredom proneness, and social media use. By exploring these relationships in the Indian context, the study aims to expand the existing literature and generate findings that could support earlier identification of maladaptive daydreaming, inform preventive efforts, and encourage the development of healthier coping strategies for young adults.

## **1.2 Generation Z and the Digital Context**

Generation Z (Gen Z) generally refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019). They are the first generation to grow up with widespread access to the internet, smartphones, social media, and other digital technologies from childhood. For them, digital technology is not simply an additional resource but a routine part of everyday life. Activities such as communication, learning, entertainment, shopping, and information seeking are largely mediated through digital platforms, shaping the way young people interact with the world around them. Prensky (2001) referred to this generation as "digital natives," highlighting their familiarity with technology as a result of lifelong exposure.

The experiences of Generation Z have been shaped by a rapidly changing social and technological environment. Along with advances in digital technology, they have grown up during a period marked by globalization, economic uncertainty, environmental concerns, and continuous exposure to global events through online media. News about pandemics, climate

change, armed conflicts, and social issues reaches them almost instantly through smartphones and social networking platforms. While this level of connectivity has expanded opportunities for learning and awareness, it has also increased exposure to emotionally demanding information. Twenge (2017) suggested that constant digital connectivity may contribute to higher levels of stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and information overload among young adults.

Technology now influences almost every aspect of life for Generation Z. Social networking sites, streaming platforms, online games, artificial intelligence tools, and instant messaging applications are used not only for recreation but also for education, skill development, and maintaining relationships. These platforms create opportunities for collaboration, creativity, and self-expression while making information more accessible than ever before. Their importance became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when digital technologies enabled students to continue their education and remain connected despite physical distancing.

Although digital technology offers many advantages, concerns about its impact on psychological well-being have grown in recent years. Excessive digital engagement has been associated with shorter attention spans, emotional dysregulation, sleep disturbances, problematic internet use, and lower life satisfaction (Keles et al., 2020). Constant exposure to online content and the immediate rewards offered by digital platforms may leave less time for reflection, relaxation, and face-to-face social interaction. In addition, the expectation of being continuously available and responsive can contribute to emotional fatigue and psychological strain.

College students represent an especially important group within Generation Z because they are navigating the developmental stage of emerging adulthood. According to Arnett

(2000), this period involves identity exploration, increasing independence, educational achievement, career planning, and the formation of meaningful interpersonal relationships. Alongside these developmental tasks, students are expected to manage academic responsibilities, extracurricular commitments, financial concerns, family expectations, and preparation for future careers. Successfully balancing these demands is closely linked to their psychological well-being.

The college environment itself introduces additional sources of stress. Students often face examination pressure, uncertainty about employment, adjustment to new social settings, and interpersonal challenges. At the same time, many feel pressure to perform academically while remaining socially active and maintaining an online presence. Together, these demands can contribute to stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and other mental health concerns. Reports from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) have drawn attention to the increasing prevalence of psychological distress among university students, highlighting the importance of understanding the factors that influence their mental health.

Digital technology also shapes the ways in which Generation Z students respond to these challenges. Smartphones and social media are commonly used to communicate with friends, access educational materials, seek entertainment, and regulate emotions. Although these platforms provide opportunities for social support and information sharing, they may also encourage excessive screen time, social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and dependence on digital spaces for emotional comfort. As a result, online engagement has become closely connected with many students' emotional experiences and everyday coping strategies.

Researchers have suggested that prolonged exposure to highly stimulating digital environments may reduce tolerance for inactivity while increasing the preference for

immediate rewards (Elhai et al., 2020). Consequently, routine activities such as attending lectures, studying, or completing everyday tasks may seem comparatively less engaging. Some individuals may then turn to social media, gaming, streaming platforms, or immersive fantasy experiences to meet emotional needs or relieve boredom. These patterns have prompted growing interest in understanding how digital environments influence attention, emotional regulation, and coping among young adults.

Taken together, these developmental and technological characteristics make Generation Z an important population for studying maladaptive daydreaming. Students experiencing academic stress, boredom, emotional dissatisfaction, or heavy engagement with digital media may be more likely to use immersive fantasy as a way of coping with real-life difficulties. Examining these experiences can improve understanding of the factors associated with maladaptive daydreaming and may help inform interventions that encourage healthier coping strategies and better psychological well-being among young adults.

### **1.3 Maladaptive Daydreaming**

Daydreaming is a common cognitive experience that most people engage in at some point during their daily lives. It involves a temporary shift in attention from the external environment to internal thoughts, memories, fantasies, or imagined situations. People often daydream while travelling, performing routine activities, listening to music, or simply resting. In its ordinary form, daydreaming is considered a normal and adaptive mental process that supports creativity, problem-solving, future planning, emotional processing, and imagination (Singer, 1966). It allows individuals to mentally rehearse future events, reflect on past experiences, and explore possibilities beyond their immediate surroundings. For most people, these experiences are brief, flexible, and easily brought under conscious control.

However, daydreaming exists on a continuum. While many individuals can shift their attention back to reality without difficulty, others experience fantasy activity that becomes unusually vivid, prolonged, and difficult to regulate. When this occurs, daydreaming may begin to interfere with academic performance, work responsibilities, social relationships, and other aspects of everyday functioning. This persistent and immersive pattern of fantasy is known as maladaptive daydreaming.

The concept of maladaptive daydreaming was introduced by Eli Somer (2002), who described it as an extensive pattern of immersive fantasy that functions as a substitute for human interaction or as a way of coping with emotional distress. Individuals with maladaptive daydreaming often construct elaborate imaginary worlds containing detailed plots, recurring fictional characters, and idealized versions of themselves. These imagined experiences are typically vivid, emotionally rewarding, and deeply absorbing, making it difficult to disengage from them despite recognising their negative impact. Unlike ordinary daydreaming, which usually lasts for short periods and does not disrupt daily life, maladaptive daydreaming involves prolonged fantasy immersion that significantly interferes with real-world functioning.

A defining characteristic of maladaptive daydreaming is its compulsive quality. Many individuals report spending several hours each day engaged in fantasy, even after repeatedly attempting to reduce or control the behaviour. They often describe a strong urge to continue daydreaming, resembling the craving seen in certain behavioural addictions. As a result, studying, attending classes, completing assignments, and maintaining relationships may be neglected. Individuals frequently report feelings of guilt, frustration, or shame because they recognise that excessive daydreaming interferes with their goals but still struggle to stop (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011).

Researchers have also identified several behavioural features that commonly accompany maladaptive daydreaming. Repetitive movements such as pacing, rocking, or fidgeting are often reported while individuals are immersed in fantasy. Listening to music is another frequently described trigger, as it can intensify emotional involvement and help sustain imagined narratives (Somer, 2002). Fictional stories, films, television series, books, online videos, and emotionally meaningful life experiences may similarly stimulate immersive fantasy. Such cues often make it easier for individuals to enter elaborate imaginary worlds that feel personally meaningful and emotionally satisfying.

Recent research suggests that maladaptive daydreaming may function as a maladaptive coping strategy. Individuals experiencing stress, loneliness, anxiety, boredom, interpersonal difficulties, or dissatisfaction with real-life circumstances may turn to fantasy as a temporary escape from emotional discomfort (Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018). Within these imagined worlds, they may experience greater acceptance, achievement, emotional fulfilment, or control than they perceive in everyday life. Although fantasy can provide temporary relief, it does not resolve the underlying difficulties. Over time, excessive reliance on imagined experiences may reduce engagement with real-life responsibilities and contribute to further psychological distress.

Interest in the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and psychological well-being has increased considerably over the past decade. Studies have found significant associations between maladaptive daydreaming and symptoms of anxiety, depression, dissociation, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, attention difficulties, and emotional dysregulation (Somer et al., 2016; Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018). Individuals may also experience procrastination, reduced productivity, sleep disturbances, and difficulties maintaining meaningful interpersonal relationships. These findings suggest that maladaptive

daydreaming is linked to broader patterns of psychological distress rather than representing an isolated behaviour.

Despite increasing research interest, maladaptive daydreaming has not yet been recognised as a formal mental disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5-TR) or the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-11). The absence of formal diagnostic recognition has limited awareness among both mental health professionals and the general public. As a result, many individuals may hesitate to seek help because they view their experiences as unusual, embarrassing, or difficult to describe. It has also highlighted the need for further research to clarify the characteristics, associated factors, and clinical significance of maladaptive daydreaming.

The relevance of maladaptive daydreaming is particularly evident among Generation Z. Young adults today are surrounded by fantasy-oriented digital content, including films, television series, music, online games, virtual communities, and social media platforms. These environments provide constant opportunities for imagination and emotional engagement. At the same time, many college students experience academic stress, uncertainty about the future, loneliness, and boredom. Together, these experiences may increase the tendency to rely on immersive fantasy as a coping strategy, making maladaptive daydreaming an important area of study in this population.

Although research on maladaptive daydreaming has grown substantially in recent years, important gaps remain. The psychological factors involved in its development and maintenance are still not fully understood, particularly within the Indian context. Stress, boredom proneness, and social media use have emerged as potential correlates, yet evidence from Indian samples remains limited. Examining these relationships may contribute to a better

understanding of maladaptive daydreaming and help inform preventive strategies and counselling interventions for young adults who experience excessive fantasy involvement.

#### **1.4 Stress**

Stress is a normal part of life and is experienced by individuals across all stages of development. It refers to the psychological and physiological responses that occur when people perceive that the demands they face exceed their available resources or coping abilities. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model explains stress as the result of an interaction between the individual and the environment rather than as a characteristic of the situation itself. An event is experienced as stressful when it is appraised as threatening, challenging, or overwhelming and when individuals believe they lack the resources to manage it effectively. Although moderate levels of stress can enhance motivation, improve performance, and encourage personal growth, prolonged or excessive stress can have adverse effects on both physical and psychological health.

Stress has become an important concern among young adults, particularly those belonging to Generation Z. Growing up in a rapidly changing social and technological environment, this generation faces a unique combination of academic, economic, social, and digital pressures. Unlike previous generations, many Gen Z individuals remain continuously connected through smartphones and social media, making it difficult to disconnect from academic responsibilities, social expectations, or global events. Continuous exposure to information, together with pressure to remain productive and socially engaged, has been linked to increasing emotional strain among young people (Twenge, 2017). Consequently, stress is now recognised as one of the most frequently reported mental health concerns within this age group.

College students are especially vulnerable because they are navigating a period of emerging adulthood while managing multiple developmental and academic responsibilities. Entering higher education often requires adjustment to new learning environments, greater independence, changing social relationships, and decisions about future careers. At the same time, students must cope with examinations, assignment deadlines, financial difficulties, family expectations, peer competition, and concerns about employment. While many adapt successfully, others experience persistent stress that affects their emotional well-being, academic performance, and everyday functioning.

Within the Indian context, additional cultural and societal factors may further increase stress among college students. Academic success is often viewed as a key determinant of future opportunities, leading many students to experience considerable pressure to meet both personal and family expectations. Concerns about competitive examinations, career prospects, employment opportunities, and financial security may further intensify this pressure. Balancing academic responsibilities with personal relationships, extracurricular activities, and social commitments can also leave limited time for rest and emotional recovery.

Persistent stress affects multiple aspects of psychological functioning. It can interfere with attention, memory, decision-making, and problem-solving, making it more difficult for students to concentrate on academic work. Chronic stress has also been associated with anxiety, irritability, sadness, emotional exhaustion, and reduced life satisfaction. Physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances, and changes in appetite are commonly reported. If left unmanaged over time, prolonged stress may increase the likelihood of developing anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms, and burnout.

People differ considerably in the ways they respond to stressful situations. Some rely on adaptive coping strategies, including seeking social support, engaging in physical activity,

practising relaxation techniques, or using effective problem-solving skills. Others adopt avoidant forms of coping that provide temporary emotional relief without addressing the source of stress. These behaviours may include excessive internet use, prolonged gaming, social withdrawal, substance use, emotional suppression, or excessive involvement in fantasy. Although such strategies may reduce distress temporarily, they often contribute to additional psychological difficulties over time.

Maladaptive daydreaming has increasingly been understood as one of these avoidant coping strategies. Individuals experiencing persistent stress may become deeply immersed in elaborate fantasy worlds that offer temporary relief from real-life demands and emotional discomfort. Within these imagined experiences, they may experience feelings of achievement, acceptance, safety, or control that seem difficult to attain in everyday life. While fantasy immersion may initially help regulate distress, excessive reliance on daydreaming can interfere with academic responsibilities, interpersonal relationships, and effective problem-solving, potentially maintaining or even increasing existing stress levels (Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018).

Empirical research consistently demonstrates a positive association between maladaptive daydreaming and psychological distress. Individuals reporting higher levels of maladaptive daydreaming also tend to report greater stress, anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive symptoms (Somer et al., 2016; Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018). These findings suggest a reciprocal relationship in which psychological distress may encourage excessive fantasy, while persistent immersion in fantasy reduces opportunities to address real-life stressors. Over time, this pattern may create a cycle in which stress reinforces maladaptive daydreaming, and maladaptive daydreaming contributes to continuing stress.

This relationship may be particularly relevant for Generation Z college students. Academic demands, uncertainty about future careers, financial concerns, interpersonal challenges, and continuous engagement with digital environments can all increase stress. At the same time, easy access to entertainment, music, fictional media, and online platforms provides readily available opportunities for psychological escape. Exploring the relationship between stress and maladaptive daydreaming may therefore help identify students who rely on fantasy-based coping and support interventions that promote healthier emotional regulation and more adaptive coping strategies.

Given the growing prevalence of stress among college students and its influence on emotional well-being and behaviour, examining its relationship with maladaptive daydreaming is both timely and important. A better understanding of this relationship may contribute to the expanding literature on the mental health of Generation Z and provide useful insights for counsellors, educators, and mental health professionals working with students in higher education.

### **1.5 Boredom Proneness**

Boredom is a common emotional experience that most people encounter in everyday life. It is generally characterised by feelings of restlessness, dissatisfaction, lack of interest, and difficulty becoming engaged in ongoing activities. Although temporary boredom is considered a normal part of life and can sometimes encourage creativity, reflection, or exploration of new ideas, some individuals experience boredom more frequently and intensely than others. This tendency is known as boredom proneness, a relatively stable personality disposition in which individuals consistently perceive situations as uninteresting, monotonous, or insufficiently stimulating (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986). People with high boredom proneness often struggle

to stay engaged in routine activities and are more likely to seek new or highly stimulating experiences.

Interest in boredom proneness has grown considerably because of its links with a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Unlike temporary boredom, which is tied to a particular situation, boredom proneness reflects a persistent tendency to lose interest across different contexts. Individuals with this disposition may feel dissatisfied even when opportunities for engagement are available. Research has associated boredom proneness with reduced motivation, poor concentration, impulsive behaviour, and difficulties with emotional regulation (Mercer-Lynn et al., 2014).

The construct has become particularly relevant for Generation Z, whose everyday lives are shaped by continuous access to digital technology. Social media, online gaming, streaming services, and other digital platforms provide constant stimulation and immediate rewards. While these technologies offer many educational and social benefits, they may also reduce tolerance for slower-paced or repetitive activities. Routine tasks such as attending lectures, studying, or completing assignments may therefore seem less engaging when compared with the rapid pace of digital content, increasing the likelihood of boredom (Elhai et al., 2020).

College students may be especially vulnerable to boredom because much of their academic work involves sustained attention and repetitive tasks. Long lectures, examination preparation, assignment writing, and regular study routines can become mentally demanding, particularly when students have limited intrinsic interest in the material. Feelings of uncertainty about the future, academic pressure, and limited opportunities for recreation may further contribute to emotional disengagement. Interestingly, despite being surrounded by digital entertainment, many students continue to report frequent experiences of boredom, suggesting that constant stimulation does not necessarily result in a greater sense of fulfilment.

Research has consistently linked boredom proneness with several maladaptive behaviours. Individuals who have difficulty tolerating boredom may seek stimulation through excessive internet use, social media engagement, gaming, substance use, impulsive decision-making, or other risk-taking behaviours (Mercer-Lynn et al., 2014). Although these activities may provide temporary excitement or distraction, they rarely address the underlying experience of boredom. As a result, individuals may find themselves repeatedly searching for new sources of stimulation without achieving lasting satisfaction.

Fantasy and imagination may represent another way of coping with boredom. Daydreaming naturally occurs during periods of reduced environmental stimulation and, in most cases, serves an adaptive function by allowing individuals to reflect, imagine, or mentally rehearse future events. However, for people who experience boredom frequently, fantasy may become particularly appealing because it offers novelty, excitement, emotional engagement, and escape from monotonous situations. Over time, repeated reliance on fantasy for stimulation may contribute to the development or maintenance of maladaptive daydreaming (Somer, 2002).

Individuals with maladaptive daydreaming often describe their imagined worlds as more exciting, emotionally satisfying, and rewarding than everyday life. For someone who experiences persistent boredom, these fantasies may provide a reliable source of stimulation and relief from monotony. Although immersion in fantasy may temporarily reduce boredom, excessive daydreaming can gradually interfere with academic performance, productivity, interpersonal relationships, and engagement with reality. Rather than encouraging individuals to seek meaningful experiences in the real world, it may reinforce avoidance and psychological withdrawal.

Several studies have reported positive associations between boredom proneness and behaviours such as problematic internet use, attentional difficulties, emotional dysregulation,

and dissociative experiences (Goldberg et al., 2011; Mercer-Lynn et al., 2014). These findings suggest that individuals who struggle to tolerate boredom are more likely to adopt coping strategies that provide immediate stimulation or emotional relief. Because maladaptive daydreaming also involves immersive fantasy as a means of escaping an unsatisfying reality, boredom proneness may be an important psychological factor associated with its development and maintenance.

This relationship may be especially relevant for Generation Z college students. Academic life requires sustained attention, persistence, and self-regulation, whereas digital environments constantly offer fast, engaging alternatives. Students who are highly prone to boredom may therefore find routine academic tasks increasingly difficult to sustain and may instead turn to fantasy or digital distractions for stimulation. Understanding how boredom proneness relates to maladaptive daydreaming may provide valuable insight into the coping strategies used by young adults and the factors influencing their psychological well-being.

Given the growing concern about boredom in highly digitalised environments, examining its relationship with maladaptive daydreaming is both timely and relevant. A clearer understanding of this association may contribute to the broader literature on maladaptive daydreaming and support the development of interventions aimed at improving attention regulation, emotional resilience, and healthier ways of coping with boredom among college students.

## **1.6 Social Media Use**

Social media has become an essential part of everyday life, particularly for young adults. Over the past decade, digital platforms have transformed how people communicate, access information, express themselves, and maintain relationships. Applications such as Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok are

now woven into daily routines, allowing users to interact with others, share experiences, consume entertainment, and participate in online communities. For Generation Z, social media extends beyond communication; it has become an important part of their social, educational, and personal lives.

Generation Z is the first generation to grow up with widespread access to smartphones, high-speed internet, and social networking platforms. Consequently, digital communication is deeply embedded in their everyday experiences. College students frequently use social media to stay connected with friends and family, collaborate on academic work, participate in discussions, access educational resources, follow current events, and explore personal interests. These platforms also encourage creativity, self-expression, professional networking, and community building, making them valuable tools for learning and social interaction.

Alongside these benefits, increasing social media use has raised important concerns about its effects on mental health and psychological well-being. Many social networking platforms are designed to encourage prolonged engagement through personalised content, continuous scrolling, notifications, and immediate feedback in the form of likes, comments, and shares. Such features can make social media highly engaging and may encourage users to spend increasing amounts of time online (Montag et al., 2019). Although moderate use may offer social and educational benefits, excessive engagement can interfere with academic responsibilities, sleep, face-to-face interactions, and overall emotional well-being.

Research has linked excessive social media use with a range of psychological concerns, including reduced concentration, sleep disturbances, anxiety, depressive symptoms, loneliness, and lower levels of psychological well-being (Keles et al., 2020). Constant exposure to carefully curated online content may encourage social comparison, leading individuals to evaluate themselves against idealised portrayals of others. This process can contribute to

feelings of inadequacy, reduced self-esteem, dissatisfaction with one's own life, and fear of missing out (FOMO). For college students who are already managing academic and developmental challenges, these experiences may add to existing emotional stress.

Social media also plays an important role in emotional regulation and coping. Many individuals turn to these platforms during periods of stress, boredom, or loneliness as a way of distracting themselves from unpleasant emotions. Watching short videos, listening to music, browsing entertaining content, or interacting with online communities may provide temporary emotional relief. However, when social media becomes the primary way of coping with negative emotions, it may reduce opportunities to develop more adaptive strategies for managing stress and emotional difficulties.

Researchers have also suggested that social media may encourage **escapism**, or the tendency to avoid real-life problems by becoming absorbed in alternative activities or experiences. Digital platforms offer an almost endless supply of entertaining and emotionally engaging content, making it easy for users to disengage temporarily from everyday responsibilities. While occasional escapism is not necessarily problematic, relying on digital environments for emotional relief over long periods may reinforce avoidant coping patterns and reduce active engagement with real-life challenges.

The possible relationship between social media use and maladaptive daydreaming has attracted growing research attention. Social media exposes users to a wide variety of emotionally engaging material, including fictional stories, films, music, online gaming, fan communities, and imaginative content. Such experiences may stimulate imagination and encourage immersive fantasy. Individuals who already have a tendency toward vivid imagination may find this content especially engaging, making it easier to become absorbed in elaborate internal fantasy worlds (Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018).

Music and fictional media, both widely available through social media platforms, have been identified as common triggers for maladaptive daydreaming (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011). Many individuals with maladaptive daydreaming report listening to music while imagining detailed narratives involving fictional characters or idealised versions of themselves. Similarly, emotionally engaging videos, films, television series, and other online content may provide ideas, themes, and emotional cues that enrich fantasy experiences. Although these activities are often harmless forms of entertainment, excessive involvement may contribute to prolonged fantasy immersion and reduced engagement with everyday responsibilities.

Interestingly, maladaptive daydreaming and problematic social media use appear to share several psychological characteristics. Both involve repetitive, highly rewarding behaviours that may provide temporary emotional relief while becoming increasingly difficult to regulate. They have also been associated with emotional avoidance, attentional difficulties, compulsive engagement, and reduced participation in real-world activities. These similarities suggest that excessive social media use and maladaptive daydreaming may reinforce one another, particularly among individuals who rely on digital or fantasy-based experiences to cope with stress, boredom, or emotional dissatisfaction.

Understanding this relationship is especially important for Generation Z college students, for whom social media has become deeply integrated into academic, social, and personal life. Distinguishing between healthy engagement and excessive or maladaptive use is therefore increasingly important. Examining the relationship between social media use and maladaptive daydreaming may provide valuable insight into the psychological experiences of young adults and support interventions that encourage balanced digital habits, healthier emotional regulation, and more adaptive coping strategies.

As digital technologies continue to shape the lives of young people, understanding the psychological implications of excessive social media use has become increasingly important. Investigating its association with maladaptive daydreaming may contribute to the growing literature on digital mental health while offering practical insights for counsellors, educators, and mental health professionals working with college students in an increasingly connected world.

### **1.7 Relationship Between Maladaptive Daydreaming, Stress, Boredom Proneness, and Social Media Use**

Mental health is shaped by a complex interaction of emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and environmental factors. Psychological experiences rarely develop in isolation; instead, they emerge through the combined influence of personal characteristics and life experiences. Maladaptive daydreaming appears to reflect this complexity, as growing evidence suggests that it is associated with a range of psychological and behavioural variables rather than a single underlying cause. Among these, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use have received increasing research attention. Examining how these factors relate to maladaptive daydreaming may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, particularly among Generation Z college students.

Stress has consistently been identified as one of the psychological factors most closely associated with maladaptive daydreaming. College students commonly experience academic demands, examinations, financial concerns, interpersonal conflicts, and uncertainty about future careers, all of which can contribute to emotional strain. When these demands are perceived as exceeding available coping resources, some individuals may turn to immersive fantasy as a temporary escape from distress. Imagined worlds can provide feelings of achievement, acceptance, safety, or control that may be difficult to experience in everyday life.

Although this form of escape may offer short-term emotional relief, excessive reliance on fantasy can reduce active problem-solving and engagement with real-life challenges. Studies have reported positive associations between maladaptive daydreaming and psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018).

Boredom proneness represents another factor that may be closely linked to maladaptive daydreaming. Individuals who frequently experience boredom often struggle to maintain attention, remain engaged in routine activities, and tolerate low levels of stimulation. In digital environments where entertainment is constantly available, everyday tasks may appear increasingly monotonous by comparison. Under these conditions, internally generated fantasy may become an appealing source of novelty, emotional engagement, and stimulation. While imagination is a normal aspect of cognitive functioning, repeated reliance on fantasy to cope with boredom may increase the likelihood of excessive and immersive daydreaming.

Social media use may also influence maladaptive daydreaming through several pathways. Digital platforms provide continuous exposure to emotionally engaging content, including music, fictional narratives, gaming, online videos, and virtual communities that can stimulate imagination. Many individuals use these platforms not only for communication but also for relaxation and temporary escape from everyday concerns. Although social media offers numerous educational and social benefits, excessive engagement may encourage avoidance of real-life difficulties and increase reliance on virtual experiences for emotional satisfaction. For individuals who are already inclined toward immersive fantasy, such content may further strengthen daydreaming experiences (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011).

The concept of escapism provides a useful framework for understanding this relationship. People experiencing stress, loneliness, boredom, or dissatisfaction may seek temporary relief through emotionally engaging online content that allows them to distance

themselves from everyday concerns. Music, films, online videos, fictional stories, and gaming environments can stimulate imagination while also providing themes and emotional cues that enrich fantasy experiences. Over time, repeated reliance on these forms of escape may reinforce maladaptive daydreaming by increasing opportunities for fantasy immersion and reducing involvement in real-world activities.

These variables are unlikely to operate independently. Stress may increase the tendency to seek distraction through social media, while frequent social media use may reduce tolerance for boredom by providing constant stimulation and immediate rewards. Individuals with greater boredom proneness may then become more inclined to seek excitement through immersive fantasy when routine activities fail to provide sufficient stimulation. Together, these processes may interact in ways that increase the likelihood of maladaptive daydreaming and help maintain the behaviour over time.

From the perspective of counselling psychology, understanding these relationships has important practical implications. Maladaptive daydreaming may initially appear to be a harmless habit or an active imagination, making it easy to overlook as a potential indicator of psychological distress. However, persistent dependence on fantasy as a coping strategy can interfere with academic performance, interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation, and overall psychological well-being. Identifying the psychological factors associated with maladaptive daydreaming may therefore help counsellors and mental health professionals recognise students who are at greater risk of developing maladaptive coping patterns and provide appropriate support.

Although international research on maladaptive daydreaming has expanded considerably over the past two decades, studies examining its relationship with stress, boredom proneness, and social media use remain limited, particularly in the Indian context. Research

exploring these variables together among Generation Z college students is especially scarce. Given the rapid growth of digital technology and the increasing mental health challenges experienced by young adults, further investigation of these relationships is both necessary and timely.

Against this background, the present study examines the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use among Generation Z college students. By investigating these variables within the Indian context, the study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on maladaptive daydreaming and provide findings that may support early identification, preventive interventions, and the promotion of healthier coping strategies among young adults.

### **1.8 Statement of the Problem**

Generation Z college students are growing up in an environment where digital technology has become deeply integrated into everyday life. Although technological advancements have created new opportunities for learning, communication, and social interaction, they have also introduced challenges such as increased academic demands, career uncertainty, continuous online engagement, and greater psychological pressure. As students navigate higher education and the transition into adulthood, these experiences may influence both their emotional well-being and the ways in which they cope with everyday stressors.

Social media and other digital platforms have become central to students' daily routines. Beyond communication and entertainment, these platforms are widely used for learning, maintaining relationships, and accessing information. However, excessive engagement may contribute to prolonged screen time, social comparison, emotional dependence on online interactions, and reduced involvement in real-world activities. For some individuals, digital

environments may also serve as a means of escaping stress, boredom, loneliness, or other forms of emotional discomfort.

One psychological phenomenon that has gained increasing attention in recent years is maladaptive daydreaming, defined as excessive and immersive fantasy activity that interferes with academic, social, occupational, or personal functioning (Somer, 2002). Although immersive fantasy may provide temporary emotional relief, excessive involvement can disrupt concentration, productivity, interpersonal relationships, and overall psychological well-being.

Existing research suggests that maladaptive daydreaming is associated with several indicators of psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, and dissociative tendencies (Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018). Emerging evidence also points to boredom proneness and excessive social media use as factors that may encourage fantasy-based coping. Students who experience persistent stress or boredom may increasingly rely on immersive fantasy to escape real-life demands, while continuous exposure to emotionally engaging digital content may further reinforce these experiences.

Despite growing international interest in maladaptive daydreaming, research in India remains limited. In particular, relatively few studies have examined the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use among Generation Z college students. Given the widespread use of digital technology and the psychological challenges experienced during emerging adulthood, there is a need to better understand how these factors are related within the Indian context.

Accordingly, the present study examines the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use among Generation Z college students. The findings are expected to contribute to the existing literature and provide insights

that may assist counsellors, psychologists, educators, and other mental health professionals in supporting the psychological well-being of young adults.

### **1.9 Need and Significance of the Study**

Mental health among college students has become an increasingly important area of psychological research because emerging adulthood is accompanied by numerous academic, personal, and social challenges. For Generation Z, these developmental demands occur alongside continuous engagement with digital technology, making it important to understand how contemporary lifestyles influence psychological well-being and coping behaviour.

Maladaptive daydreaming is a relatively recent psychological construct that has attracted growing research interest over the past two decades. Although ordinary daydreaming is a normal cognitive process, excessive and immersive fantasy may interfere with academic performance, interpersonal relationships, emotional well-being, and daily functioning. Despite this growing body of research, awareness of maladaptive daydreaming remains limited among students, educators, and even mental health professionals. As a result, individuals experiencing maladaptive daydreaming may fail to recognise it as a significant concern or may hesitate to seek professional support.

The present study is significant because it focuses on Generation Z college students, a population whose lives are closely connected with digital technology and social media. Constant connectivity offers important educational and social opportunities but has also been linked to challenges such as information overload, excessive screen time, reduced attention, and greater dependence on digital environments for emotional comfort. Examining maladaptive daydreaming within this context may provide a clearer understanding of the psychological experiences of contemporary college students.

Another important contribution of the study is its examination of the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and three relevant variables: **stress**, boredom proneness, and social media use. Although each of these variables has independently been associated with psychological well-being and coping, comparatively little research has examined how they relate to maladaptive daydreaming, particularly among Indian college students. Investigating these relationships together may improve understanding of the psychological processes associated with excessive fantasy involvement and help explain why some individuals are more vulnerable than others.

The findings may also have practical value for counselling psychology. A better understanding of maladaptive daydreaming and its associated factors may help counsellors, psychologists, educators, and student support services identify students who rely on excessive fantasy as a coping strategy. Such knowledge may support early identification and guide interventions focusing on stress management, emotional regulation, balanced digital habits, attention management, and healthier coping strategies, ultimately promoting students' academic functioning and psychological well-being.

From a research perspective, the study contributes to the limited literature on maladaptive daydreaming in India. Much of the existing evidence has been generated in Western countries, while relatively few studies have explored this phenomenon among Indian college students. Cultural values, educational systems, family expectations, and patterns of digital engagement may influence how maladaptive daydreaming is experienced, highlighting the importance of research conducted within the Indian context.

The study may also increase awareness of maladaptive daydreaming among educational institutions and mental health professionals. Greater awareness could encourage earlier

recognition of excessive fantasy involvement as a potential indicator of psychological distress and strengthen the support available to students through counselling and mental health services.

The present study addresses an emerging psychological phenomenon within a generation whose daily lives are closely shaped by digital technology. By examining the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use, the study aims to contribute to the existing literature and provide evidence that may support future research, counselling practice, and the development of preventive mental health programmes for college students.

### **1.10 Objectives of the Study**

#### **General Objective**

To examine maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students and explore its relationship with stress, boredom proneness, and social media use.

#### **Specific Objectives**

1. To assess the level of maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students.
2. To examine the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and stress among Generation Z college students.
3. To examine the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and boredom proneness among Generation Z college students.
4. To examine the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and social media use among Generation Z college students.
5. To determine whether stress, boredom proneness, and social media use significantly predict maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students.

6. To examine whether maladaptive daydreaming differs based on gender.

### **1.11 Hypotheses of the Study**

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the present study:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and stress among Generation Z college students.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and boredom proneness among Generation Z college students.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and social media use among Generation Z college students.

H<sub>04</sub>: Stress, boredom proneness, and social media use do not significantly predict maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students.

H<sub>05</sub>: There is no significant difference in maladaptive daydreaming based on gender among Generation Z college students.

### **1.12 Conceptual Definitions**

#### **Maladaptive Daydreaming**

Maladaptive daydreaming refers to excessive, vivid, and immersive fantasy activity that occupies a considerable amount of time and interferes with an individual's academic, occupational, social, or personal functioning. Unlike ordinary daydreaming, maladaptive daydreaming is characterised by compulsive engagement in elaborate fantasy narratives that are emotionally rewarding yet difficult to control. Individuals often use these fantasies as a means of escaping from stress, loneliness, boredom, or other forms of emotional distress (Somer, 2002).

## **Stress**

Stress refers to the psychological and physiological response that occurs when individuals perceive that the demands of a situation exceed their available coping resources. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress arises from the interaction between the individual and the environment and depends on how situations are appraised and managed. Although stress is a normal part of life, prolonged or excessive stress may negatively affect emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and physical well-being.

## **Boredom Proneness**

Boredom proneness refers to an individual's tendency to experience frequent and persistent feelings of boredom, dissatisfaction, and lack of engagement across different situations. It reflects a relatively stable disposition in which individuals perceive their environment as insufficiently stimulating and often experience difficulty maintaining attention and interest in ongoing activities (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986).

## **Social Media Use**

Social media use refers to engagement with online platforms that enable users to communicate, share information, create content, interact with others, and participate in virtual communities. While social media serves various educational, social, and recreational purposes, excessive or problematic use may involve compulsive engagement, difficulty regulating online behaviour, and dependence on digital interaction for emotional gratification (Andreassen et al., 2017).

## **Generation Z**

Generation Z refers to individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012, who have grown up during a period of widespread access to digital technology, smartphones, the

internet, and social media. As the first generation to experience continuous digital connectivity from childhood, Generation Z demonstrates patterns of communication, learning, and social interaction that are closely integrated with digital environments (Dimock, 2019).

### **1.13 Operational Definitions**

#### **Maladaptive Daydreaming**

In the present study, maladaptive daydreaming refers to the level of excessive and immersive fantasy activity that provides temporary escape but interferes with real-life functioning., as measured using the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale–16 (MDS-16) developed by Somer et al. (2016). Higher scores indicate greater levels of maladaptive daydreaming.

#### **Stress**

In the present study, stress refers to the degree of psychological strain that increases alertness and effort but reduces emotional comfort, during the recent past. It was measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983). Higher scores indicate higher perceived stress.

#### **Boredom Proneness**

In the present study, boredom proneness refers to the tendency to frequently experience activities as uninteresting, repetitive, or unstimulating, leading to disengagement. It was assessed using the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS) developed by Farmer and Sundberg (1986). Higher scores indicate greater boredom proneness.

#### **Social Media Use**

In the present study, social media use refers to the extent of habitual and frequent engagement with social media platforms for entertainment, connection, and emotional satisfaction and the degree to which such use reflects addictive or problematic patterns. It was

measured using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) developed by Andreassen et al. (2016). Higher scores indicate greater problematic social media use.

### **Generation Z College Students**

In the present study, Generation Z college students refer to undergraduate and postgraduate students aged 18 to 25 years who belong to the Generation Z cohort and were enrolled in colleges at the time of data collection.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 Introduction

A review of literature is an essential component of any research study because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the existing knowledge related to the research problem. It enables the researcher to examine relevant theories, empirical findings, and methodological approaches adopted in previous studies. Reviewing the literature helps identify patterns, inconsistencies, and gaps in existing research, thereby providing a strong foundation for the present study. It also assists in refining the research objectives, formulating hypotheses, selecting appropriate research methods, and interpreting the findings in relation to earlier evidence.

Maladaptive daydreaming has received increasing research attention because of its association with emotional distress, excessive fantasy involvement, and impairment in daily functioning. Although daydreaming is generally regarded as a normal cognitive process that supports creativity, imagination, and future planning, researchers have recognised that, for some individuals, fantasy can become excessive, compulsive, and disruptive to everyday life (Somer, 2002). As a result, research on maladaptive daydreaming has expanded over the past two decades, focusing on its characteristics, associated psychological factors, and possible underlying mechanisms.

Researchers have also explored several psychological variables that may be associated with maladaptive daydreaming. Among these, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use have received considerable attention. Stress is a common experience among college students and has been linked to a range of maladaptive coping behaviours. Boredom proneness has similarly been associated with attentional difficulties, emotional dysregulation, and the tendency to seek highly stimulating experiences. At the same time, the rapid growth of digital

technology has prompted researchers to examine how social media use influences emotional well-being, attention, and coping, particularly among Generation Z, whose daily lives are closely intertwined with digital environments.

Although these variables have been studied individually, relatively few studies have examined their relationship with maladaptive daydreaming within a single framework. Existing evidence suggests that psychological distress, boredom proneness, and excessive digital engagement may be associated with immersive fantasy involvement; however, research in this area remains limited, particularly in the Indian context. In addition, much of the available literature has been conducted in Western populations, highlighting the need to examine these relationships among Indian college students, whose cultural, educational, and social experiences may differ.

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to maladaptive daydreaming, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use. It also examines studies that have explored the relationships among these variables to establish the background for the present investigation and identify the research gap addressed by the study.

## **2.2 Review of Literature on Maladaptive Daydreaming**

Maladaptive daydreaming is a relatively recent psychological construct introduced by Somer (2002) to describe excessive, immersive, and emotionally engaging fantasy activity that interferes with everyday functioning. Since its introduction, research has increasingly focused on its characteristics, prevalence, assessment, and associations with various psychological conditions. Although the literature is still developing, available evidence consistently indicates that maladaptive daydreaming is linked with emotional distress, attentional difficulties, dissociative experiences, and maladaptive coping patterns.

The concept was first described by Somer (2002) through clinical observations of individuals who engaged in prolonged fantasy as a way of coping with emotional distress and traumatic experiences. Participants reported spending several hours each day immersed in elaborate imaginary worlds that interfered with academic, occupational, and interpersonal functioning. Many described fantasy as a substitute for real-life social interaction and acknowledged difficulty controlling their daydreaming despite recognising its negative consequences. This pioneering work established maladaptive daydreaming as a distinct area of psychological inquiry and provided the foundation for later empirical research.

Expanding on these initial observations, Bigelsen and Schupak (2011) examined the experiences of individuals who identified themselves as maladaptive daydreamers. Their qualitative findings revealed recurring themes, including prolonged engagement in vivid fantasy, imagined relationships, idealised identities, and elaborate fictional narratives. Participants also reported behaviours such as pacing, rocking, and listening to music while daydreaming. Excessive fantasy involvement was associated with reduced academic productivity, occupational difficulties, and strained interpersonal relationships. Importantly, participants remained aware that their fantasies were imaginary, distinguishing maladaptive daydreaming from psychotic experiences, while also describing a loss of control that resembled compulsive behaviour.

A major advance in the field came with the development of the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16) by Somer et al. (2016). The researchers demonstrated that the instrument had strong psychometric properties and could reliably distinguish individuals experiencing clinically significant maladaptive daydreaming from those engaging in ordinary daydreaming. The availability of a standardised measure facilitated more systematic investigation of maladaptive daydreaming across different populations and cultural settings.

Using the MDS-16, Soffer-Dudek and Somer (2018) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and psychological distress. Their findings showed that higher levels of maladaptive daydreaming were associated with greater stress, anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, and dissociative experiences over time. The authors suggested that maladaptive daydreaming may function as an avoidant coping strategy that provides temporary emotional relief but ultimately contributes to continuing psychological distress. They further proposed that psychological distress and excessive fantasy involvement may reinforce one another in a reciprocal cycle.

Additional evidence supporting the psychological complexity of maladaptive daydreaming was provided by Somer, Soffer-Dudek, Ross, and Halpern (2017). Their study found significant associations between maladaptive daydreaming, dissociative experiences, and obsessive-compulsive symptoms. However, the researchers concluded that maladaptive daydreaming could not be fully explained by either dissociation or obsessive-compulsive disorder alone, suggesting that it represents a distinct psychological phenomenon requiring further investigation.

Research has also explored maladaptive daydreaming beyond clinical populations. Pietkiewicz et al. (2018) examined maladaptive daydreaming in a non-clinical sample and found that, although ordinary daydreaming was common, a smaller proportion of participants experienced fantasy that significantly disrupted everyday functioning. Higher maladaptive daydreaming scores were associated with greater emotional distress, loneliness, and poorer quality of life, indicating that the phenomenon is relevant not only in clinical settings but also among the general population.

More recent studies have considered whether maladaptive daydreaming shares features with behavioural addictions. Somer et al. (2020) reported characteristics such as compulsive

engagement, craving, difficulty controlling the behaviour, withdrawal-like experiences, and persistence despite negative consequences. At the same time, they cautioned that current evidence is insufficient to classify maladaptive daydreaming as a behavioural addiction, highlighting the need for additional empirical research.

Researchers have also begun to examine maladaptive daydreaming within the context of increasing digital media use. Continuous exposure to music, films, online gaming, fictional media, and social networking platforms has been suggested as a possible trigger for immersive fantasy experiences. Although digital media is not considered a direct cause of maladaptive daydreaming, it may encourage prolonged fantasy involvement among individuals who are already vulnerable to excessive imagination or emotional escapism. This perspective has prompted growing interest in examining maladaptive daydreaming alongside variables such as stress, boredom proneness, emotional regulation, loneliness, and social media use.

Somer, Soffer-Dudek, Ross, and Halpern (2017) investigated the construct validity of maladaptive daydreaming by comparing individuals who experienced excessive fantasy involvement with those who did not. The researchers reported that participants with maladaptive daydreaming demonstrated significantly higher levels of dissociation, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. Although these psychological characteristics frequently co-occurred with maladaptive daydreaming, the findings suggested that maladaptive daydreaming represents a distinct psychological construct rather than simply a symptom of another psychiatric condition.

Expanding this line of research, Soffer-Dudek and Somer (2022) examined the role of emotional regulation difficulties in maladaptive daydreaming. Their findings indicated that individuals who experienced greater difficulty managing emotions were more likely to engage in prolonged fantasy activity. Participants frequently described daydreaming as a strategy for

reducing unpleasant emotions, avoiding stressful situations, and obtaining temporary psychological comfort. However, the researchers noted that although fantasy immersion initially reduced emotional discomfort, excessive reliance on this coping strategy was associated with greater psychological distress and impaired daily functioning over time.

The relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and behavioural addiction has also received considerable attention. Somer et al. (2020) reported that many individuals experiencing maladaptive daydreaming described symptoms resembling behavioural addiction, including intense urges to daydream, difficulty controlling fantasy episodes, unsuccessful attempts to reduce daydreaming, and continued engagement despite recognising negative consequences. The authors suggested that maladaptive daydreaming shares several behavioural characteristics with addictive behaviours, although further research is required before it can be classified within behavioural addiction frameworks.

Cross-cultural research has further contributed to understanding maladaptive daydreaming. Pietkiewicz, Nęcki, Bańbura, and Tomalski (2018) investigated maladaptive daydreaming among Polish adults and reported that individuals with higher maladaptive daydreaming scores experienced significantly greater emotional distress, loneliness, attentional difficulties, and impairment in everyday functioning. Participants frequently described fantasy activity as emotionally rewarding while simultaneously acknowledging that it interfered with academic responsibilities, work-related tasks, and interpersonal relationships. The findings suggested that maladaptive daydreaming is observed across different cultural contexts and is not limited to a specific population.

Research has also focused on maladaptive daydreaming among young adults and university populations. Marcusson-Clavertz, Cardeña, and Terhune (2020) examined daydreaming patterns among young adults and found that while ordinary daydreaming was

common, individuals who experienced excessive and immersive fantasy demonstrated greater psychological distress and poorer attentional control. The researchers differentiated adaptive mind-wandering from maladaptive daydreaming by emphasising that maladaptive daydreaming is characterised by compulsive engagement and significant interference with everyday functioning.

More recently, West and Somer (2024) explored the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming, emotional dysregulation, and psychological well-being. The researchers found that greater emotional dysregulation and poorer coping abilities were associated with increased maladaptive daydreaming severity. Individuals who experienced difficulty processing negative emotions appeared more likely to retreat into elaborate fantasy worlds, supporting the view that maladaptive daydreaming often functions as an avoidant coping strategy.

A comprehensive meta-analysis by Mazzoni et al. (2025) synthesised findings from forty empirical studies involving nearly twenty-five thousand participants. The analysis demonstrated that maladaptive daydreaming showed moderate to strong positive associations with depression, anxiety, perceived stress, dissociation, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, attention difficulties, loneliness, problematic internet use, and difficulties in emotion regulation. The findings indicated that maladaptive daydreaming is consistently associated with poorer psychological well-being across different populations and highlighted the need for further longitudinal research to understand its developmental pathways.

Similarly, a scoping review conducted by West et al. (2025) examined eighty-nine empirical studies on maladaptive daydreaming. The review highlighted the rapid growth of research on the phenomenon and indicated that maladaptive daydreaming is increasingly recognised as a psychologically significant experience affecting emotional functioning, academic performance, occupational productivity, and interpersonal relationships. The authors

also identified limited research from low- and middle-income countries, including India, and emphasised the importance of culturally diverse investigations to improve understanding of maladaptive daydreaming across different populations.

### **2.3 Review of Literature on Stress**

Stress has been extensively studied as an important psychological factor influencing the mental health and well-being of college students. Researchers have examined its prevalence, contributing factors, psychological consequences, and relationship with emotional and behavioural outcomes. Existing literature indicates that college students experience stress due to multiple factors, including academic demands, interpersonal relationships, financial concerns, family expectations, and uncertainty about future careers. These stressors may influence emotional functioning, academic performance, and the coping strategies adopted by students.

One of the earliest and most influential studies on perceived stress was conducted by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983), who developed the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) to assess the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as stressful. Unlike measures that focus on specific stressful events, the scale evaluates the degree to which individuals experience situations as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overwhelming. The researchers found that perceived stress was significantly associated with psychological distress and health-related outcomes. Since its development, the PSS has become one of the most widely used measures for assessing perceived stress across different populations, including college students.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which provided a significant theoretical framework for understanding stress. According to this model, stress arises from the interaction between individuals and their environment rather than

from external events alone. The authors suggested that individuals first evaluate whether a situation is threatening or challenging and then assess whether they have sufficient resources to cope with it. Thus, the psychological impact of stress depends not only on the nature of the stressor but also on an individual's perception and coping responses.

Research focusing on university students has consistently demonstrated the presence of significant stress levels within this population. Misra and McKean (2000) examined stress among university students and found that academic workload, examinations, time management difficulties, financial concerns, and adjustment to college life were major sources of stress. Higher stress levels were associated with poorer academic adjustment, reduced concentration, and increased emotional difficulties. The study highlighted the importance of effective coping strategies in managing stress during higher education.

Similarly, Bayram and Bilgel (2008) investigated depression, anxiety, and stress among university students and reported that many students experienced considerable psychological distress. Higher levels of stress were associated with poorer mental health outcomes and reduced life satisfaction. The researchers emphasised the importance of accessible psychological support services and preventive mental health programmes within educational institutions.

The relationship between stress and psychological well-being among young people has gained further attention with changes in contemporary lifestyles. Twenge (2017) reported increasing levels of psychological distress among younger generations, attributing this trend to factors such as academic competition, economic uncertainty, and continuous digital connectivity. The author suggested that frequent engagement with social media and online communication may reduce opportunities for psychological recovery and contribute to emotional exhaustion among adolescents and young adults.

Within the Indian context, research has also highlighted the presence of considerable stress among college students. Kumar and Bhukar (2013) examined perceived stress among Indian university students and identified academic pressure, parental expectations, financial concerns, and uncertainty about future careers as important contributors to stress. Students reporting higher stress levels also demonstrated poorer psychological well-being, indicating the influence of educational and socio-cultural factors on student mental health.

Researchers have further examined the coping strategies used by students when dealing with stressful experiences. While adaptive coping methods such as problem-solving, seeking social support, and positive reframing may help individuals manage stress effectively, some students rely on avoidant coping strategies, including procrastination, excessive internet use, emotional withdrawal, and fantasy-based escape. Although these strategies may provide temporary relief from distress, they may not effectively address the underlying sources of stress.

More recent research has explored the influence of digital technology on stress among young adults. Continuous access to smartphones and social media has reduced the separation between academic responsibilities, social interactions, and leisure activities. Students may remain connected throughout the day through messaging applications, social networking platforms, and online content consumption, even during periods intended for relaxation. Researchers have suggested that constant digital engagement may contribute to cognitive overload, sleep disturbances, reduced attention, and increased perceived stress, particularly among Generation Z students.

Stress among college students has continued to receive considerable attention because of its influence on academic performance, emotional well-being, physical health, and overall quality of life. While earlier studies primarily focused on identifying sources of stress, more

recent research has examined the long-term psychological consequences of chronic stress and the coping strategies adopted by young adults. The growing recognition of stress as a risk factor for various mental health problems has encouraged researchers to investigate its relationship with behavioural and cognitive processes, including maladaptive coping mechanisms such as excessive daydreaming.

Beiter et al. (2015) examined the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among university students in the United States. The researchers found that academic workload, financial concerns, future career uncertainty, family expectations, and interpersonal relationships were the most frequently reported sources of stress. Students experiencing higher stress levels also demonstrated poorer academic adjustment and reduced psychological well-being. The study emphasised the importance of early identification of stress and the implementation of mental health support services within educational institutions.

Similarly, Pascoe, Hetrick, and Parker (2020) conducted a systematic review investigating academic stress among university students. The review revealed that prolonged academic stress was consistently associated with anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, emotional exhaustion, reduced concentration, and lower academic achievement. The authors noted that chronic stress affects not only students' emotional health but also their motivation, decision-making abilities, and interpersonal functioning. They recommended strengthening stress management programmes and promoting adaptive coping strategies within higher education settings.

The influence of stress on emotional regulation has also been widely investigated. Compas et al. (2017) reported that young adults who experienced persistent stress often found it difficult to regulate emotions effectively, increasing their reliance on avoidant coping strategies. Students who lacked adaptive coping skills were more likely to withdraw from

stressful situations, procrastinate, or engage in behaviours that provided temporary emotional relief without addressing the underlying problem. These findings support the view that chronic stress may increase vulnerability to maladaptive psychological coping mechanisms.

Within the Indian context, Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015) examined academic stress among Indian adolescents and reported that parental expectations, examination pressure, competition, and concerns regarding future careers were major contributors to psychological stress. Students experiencing greater academic stress also reported lower life satisfaction and higher emotional distress. The researchers highlighted the influence of socio-cultural factors on student stress and recommended greater attention to mental health support within educational institutions.

Similarly, Reddy, Menon, and Thattil (2018) investigated stress and coping among Indian college students. Their findings indicated that although many students adopted adaptive coping strategies such as seeking social support and problem-solving, a substantial proportion relied on avoidance-oriented coping methods, including excessive internet use, social withdrawal, and emotional disengagement. The study suggested that prolonged reliance on avoidant coping may increase vulnerability to emotional difficulties and reduced psychological adjustment.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified research on student stress. Son et al. (2020) examined the psychological impact of the pandemic on university students and found that uncertainty regarding academic progress, social isolation, financial instability, and concerns about personal health significantly increased perceived stress. Many students also reported reduced motivation, impaired concentration, emotional exhaustion, and increased dependence on digital technology as a coping method. These findings highlighted the

interaction between stressful life circumstances and changing patterns of psychological adjustment among young adults.

Research conducted after the pandemic has continued to demonstrate elevated stress levels among Generation Z students. Reports from the American Psychological Association (2023) indicated that young adults continue to experience considerable stress related to academic responsibilities, economic uncertainty, future employment concerns, and continuous digital connectivity. These findings emphasise the importance of understanding stress within the broader context of contemporary student life and its influence on emotional regulation and coping behaviour.

## **2.4 Review of Literature on Boredom Proneness**

Boredom proneness has gained increasing attention in psychological research due to its association with emotional well-being, cognitive functioning, and behavioural outcomes. While boredom is a common emotional experience that occurs temporarily in everyday life, boredom proneness refers to a relatively stable tendency to experience boredom frequently and intensely across different situations. Researchers have examined boredom proneness in relation to attention, self-regulation, impulsivity, emotional distress, addictive behaviours, and maladaptive coping patterns. Individuals with higher levels of boredom proneness often experience difficulty maintaining engagement in routine activities and may seek alternative sources of stimulation to overcome feelings of monotony and dissatisfaction.

One of the earliest and most influential contributions to the study of boredom proneness was made by Farmer and Sundberg (1986), who developed the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS) to measure individual differences in the tendency to experience boredom. The researchers conceptualised boredom proneness as a relatively enduring characteristic rather than a temporary emotional state. Their findings indicated that individuals with higher boredom

proneness reported lower life satisfaction, reduced engagement in daily activities, and greater difficulty maintaining attention. The development of the BPS provided researchers with a standardised method for examining boredom proneness across different populations.

Subsequent research has expanded understanding of boredom proneness by examining its relationship with emotional regulation and behavioural functioning. Mercer-Lynn, Bar, and Eastwood (2014) found that boredom proneness was associated with impulsivity, reduced self-control, emotional dysregulation, and poorer psychological well-being. Individuals with higher boredom proneness were more likely to seek immediate stimulation and experience difficulty tolerating situations that lacked novelty or excitement. The authors suggested that boredom proneness represents more than a simple lack of activity and may reflect difficulties in attention regulation and emotional management.

The role of attention in boredom experiences has also been highlighted in psychological research. Eastwood et al. (2012) described boredom as an unpleasant emotional state that occurs when individuals struggle to engage their attention effectively with available activities. The researchers proposed that boredom involves both a desire for meaningful engagement and difficulty achieving such engagement. This perspective has contributed to a better understanding of why certain individuals experience boredom more frequently and why boredom may influence motivation and behaviour across different settings.

Research has consistently linked boredom proneness with maladaptive behavioural outcomes. Goldberg et al. (2011) reported that individuals experiencing higher levels of boredom were more likely to engage in problematic internet use and compulsive online behaviours. The researchers suggested that digital environments may become particularly appealing to individuals who seek immediate stimulation or distraction from feelings of

boredom. Such findings have contributed to growing interest in examining the relationship between boredom proneness and technology-related behaviours.

With the increasing use of smartphones and digital platforms, researchers have further explored boredom in relation to problematic technology use among young adults. Elhai et al. (2020) found that boredom was significantly associated with problematic smartphone use, particularly when individuals used mobile devices as a way of managing unpleasant emotions or maintaining constant stimulation. Although digital engagement may provide temporary relief from boredom, excessive reliance on technology may interfere with productivity, attention, and psychological well-being.

College students represent an important population for studying boredom proneness due to the demands and routines associated with academic life. Activities such as attending lectures, preparing for examinations, completing assignments, and following structured study schedules often require sustained attention and motivation. Students with higher boredom proneness may experience greater difficulty maintaining engagement in such activities, which may contribute to procrastination, reduced academic motivation, and poorer adjustment to academic demands.

Boredom proneness has also been associated with various forms of psychological distress. Studies have reported relationships between boredom proneness and anxiety, depressive symptoms, loneliness, and reduced life satisfaction. Researchers have suggested that individuals who frequently experience boredom may be more vulnerable to emotional difficulties because they may engage in behaviours that provide immediate stimulation without addressing underlying psychological concerns. Thus, boredom proneness has been recognised as an important factor influencing both emotional experiences and behavioural responses.

Interest in boredom proneness has increased considerably over the past decade, particularly because of its association with emotional well-being, attention regulation, self-control, and various maladaptive behaviours. Researchers have argued that boredom is not merely an unpleasant emotional state but may also reflect difficulties in finding meaning, maintaining attention, and engaging with everyday activities. Consequently, individuals who frequently experience boredom may seek alternative sources of stimulation, increasing their vulnerability to behaviours that provide immediate psychological gratification.

Struk, Carriere, Cheyne, and Danckert (2017) examined the psychological characteristics associated with boredom proneness and reported that individuals with higher boredom proneness experienced greater impulsivity, reduced self-control, and lower satisfaction with everyday life. Participants who frequently experienced boredom also demonstrated greater difficulty sustaining attention during routine tasks and were more likely to seek novel or stimulating experiences. The researchers concluded that boredom proneness represents an important psychological characteristic influencing emotional and behavioural functioning.

Similarly, Tam, Van Tilburg, and Chan (2021) investigated boredom proneness among university students and found that persistent boredom was associated with lower psychological well-being, increased emotional distress, and reduced academic engagement. Students who frequently experienced boredom reported difficulty maintaining motivation during academic activities and were more likely to disengage from classroom learning. The authors suggested that boredom proneness may negatively influence both academic functioning and psychological adjustment among young adults.

The relationship between boredom proneness and problematic digital behaviour has also been widely explored. Elhai, Yang, Rozgonjuk, and Montag (2020) reported that boredom

was a significant predictor of problematic smartphone use among young adults. Individuals experiencing greater boredom were more likely to use smartphones excessively as a means of escaping monotony and maintaining continuous stimulation. Although smartphone use initially reduced feelings of boredom, prolonged digital engagement was associated with difficulties in attention regulation, sleep disturbances, and increased psychological distress.

Research conducted by Martarelli et al. (2021) further demonstrated that boredom proneness was positively associated with problematic internet use and difficulties in emotional regulation. Participants with higher boredom proneness frequently engaged in online activities to cope with feelings of emptiness, dissatisfaction, and lack of stimulation. However, the researchers observed that excessive reliance on digital activities often reinforced avoidance-oriented coping patterns rather than encouraging active engagement with real-life experiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided additional evidence regarding the influence of boredom on psychological functioning. Bench and Lench (2020) reported that prolonged periods of social isolation and restricted daily activities increased boredom among young adults. Many individuals responded by increasing their engagement with digital entertainment, social media, gaming, and other psychologically rewarding activities to reduce emotional discomfort. The findings suggested that boredom may motivate individuals to seek alternative experiences when opportunities for meaningful real-world engagement are limited.

Recent investigations have also examined boredom proneness from the perspective of attention and emotional regulation. Danckert and Eastwood (2020) proposed that boredom reflects difficulties in directing attention toward meaningful goals rather than simply the absence of external stimulation. According to the authors, individuals experiencing chronic boredom may struggle to regulate attention effectively, making them more likely to disengage from current activities and seek internally or externally stimulating experiences. This

perspective provides a theoretical explanation for why boredom proneness may contribute to behaviours such as problematic internet use, immersive fantasy, and maladaptive daydreaming.

Within educational settings, boredom proneness has emerged as an important concern among Generation Z students. Continuous exposure to highly stimulating digital environments has influenced expectations regarding entertainment, communication, and learning. As a result, routine academic activities may appear less engaging compared to rapidly changing online experiences, increasing the likelihood of attentional disengagement and the search for alternative sources of stimulation. These observations have encouraged researchers to examine boredom proneness alongside other psychological variables, including stress, problematic technology use, and maladaptive daydreaming, to better understand coping patterns among contemporary college students.

## **2.5 Review of Literature on Social Media Use**

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed the ways in which individuals communicate, learn, and maintain social relationships. Social media platforms have become an important part of everyday life, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Applications such as Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) allow users to communicate instantly, share information, access educational content, and participate in virtual communities. Although social media provides several opportunities for connection and self-expression, increasing attention has been given to understanding the psychological effects associated with excessive or problematic use.

One of the earliest comprehensive studies examining problematic social media use was conducted by Andreassen et al. (2012), who developed the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) to assess addictive patterns related to social networking behaviour. The scale was based on components commonly associated with behavioural addictions, including

salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. The researchers found that excessive social media use involved difficulties in controlling online behaviour and shared similarities with other forms of behavioural addiction. The development of the BSMAS provided researchers with a reliable measure for investigating problematic social media use among adolescents, university students, and adults.

The association between social media use and psychological well-being has been widely investigated. Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) conducted a systematic review examining the relationship between social media use and mental health among adolescents and young adults. Their findings indicated that excessive social media engagement was associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. The authors suggested that factors such as social comparison, cyberbullying, reduced sleep quality, and fear of missing out may contribute to these negative outcomes. They also highlighted the need for further research to understand the direction and nature of these associations.

The impact of social media on perceived social connection has also been examined. Primack et al. (2017) reported that individuals with higher levels of social media use experienced greater perceived social isolation compared to those with lower levels of use. Although digital platforms are designed to enhance communication, excessive reliance on online interactions may reduce opportunities for meaningful face-to-face relationships. The findings suggested that the quality of social interaction may play a more important role in psychological well-being than the amount of time spent online.

Social media use has also been linked with self-esteem and self-evaluation processes. Vogel et al. (2014) found that frequent exposure to idealised online representations of others encouraged upward social comparison, which negatively influenced self-esteem and subjective well-being. Individuals who repeatedly compared themselves with carefully presented images

and achievements of others were more likely to experience dissatisfaction with their own appearance, abilities, and personal circumstances. These findings highlighted the influence of online environments on the emotional experiences of young adults.

The relationship between social media use and academic functioning has received considerable attention among university students. Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) found that excessive Facebook use was associated with reduced study time, lower academic performance, and greater difficulty concentrating on academic responsibilities. The researchers suggested that frequent engagement with social networking platforms may contribute to procrastination and ineffective time management. However, they also acknowledged that social media can support academic collaboration and information sharing when used appropriately.

Recent research has focused on the technological features that encourage prolonged engagement with digital platforms. Montag et al. (2019) suggested that features such as personalised content, notifications, infinite scrolling, and reward-based feedback systems encourage repeated platform use by providing continuous stimulation and immediate reinforcement. These design features may make it more difficult for individuals to regulate their online behaviour and may contribute to compulsive patterns of engagement, particularly among younger users.

The COVID-19 pandemic further increased reliance on social media and digital platforms among college students. During periods of physical distancing, social media served as an important means of maintaining relationships, accessing educational resources, and receiving information. At the same time, increased screen exposure was associated with concerns such as digital fatigue, sleep disturbances, and psychological strain. These findings highlighted the complex role of social media as both a source of support and a potential contributor to difficulties related to excessive use.

Social media use has become particularly relevant among Generation Z, who have grown up with widespread access to smartphones, internet connectivity, and online platforms. For this generation, social media is integrated into various aspects of life, including education, communication, entertainment, and identity development. While digital platforms provide opportunities for creativity, self-expression, and social connection, continuous engagement may also influence attention patterns, emotional regulation, and dependence on online environments.

The increasing integration of social media into everyday life has prompted extensive research examining its psychological effects, particularly among adolescents and young adults. While social networking platforms facilitate communication, information sharing, learning, and entertainment, concerns have grown regarding the consequences of excessive and uncontrolled use. Recent studies have explored the relationship between social media use and mental health, emotional regulation, academic performance, self-esteem, and behavioural addiction. The findings suggest that although social media offers several benefits, excessive engagement may contribute to various psychological difficulties.

Bányai et al. (2017) examined problematic social media use among adolescents and reported that excessive engagement with social networking platforms was associated with poorer psychological well-being, reduced self-control, and increased emotional difficulties. The researchers found that individuals who spent prolonged periods on social media often experienced greater interference with academic responsibilities and daily functioning. The study highlighted that problematic social media use shares several characteristics with behavioural addictions, including compulsive engagement and difficulty reducing online activity.

The relationship between social media use and emotional health was further explored by Shensa et al. (2018). Their findings indicated that higher levels of social media use were associated with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression among young adults. Participants who spent more time on social networking platforms reported greater emotional distress, poorer sleep quality, and reduced life satisfaction. The authors suggested that frequent exposure to idealised online content and continuous social comparison may negatively influence psychological well-being.

Research has also focused on the influence of social media on academic functioning. Junco (2015) reported that excessive use of social networking platforms was associated with lower academic performance, reduced concentration, and increased procrastination among university students. Students who frequently interrupted their studies to check social media found it more difficult to sustain attention during academic tasks. These findings emphasised the importance of balanced technology use within educational settings.

Hunt et al. (2018) conducted an experimental study examining whether reducing social media use would improve psychological well-being. Participants who limited their social media use reported reductions in loneliness and depressive symptoms compared with individuals who continued their usual patterns of use. The researchers suggested that controlling the amount of time spent on social networking platforms may contribute to improved emotional well-being among young adults.

The relationship between social media use and sleep has also been widely investigated. Woods and Scott (2016) found that frequent nighttime use of social networking platforms was associated with poorer sleep quality, higher levels of anxiety, and lower self-esteem among adolescents. The authors suggested that continuous online engagement before bedtime may interfere with emotional recovery and increase vulnerability to psychological distress.

More recently, Rozgonjuk et al. (2020) examined problematic smartphone use, social media engagement, and psychological functioning among university students. Their findings demonstrated that compulsive social media use was positively associated with stress, anxiety, fear of missing out, and reduced attentional control. Individuals experiencing greater emotional distress appeared more likely to use social media as a coping mechanism, reinforcing repetitive patterns of online engagement.

Within the Indian context, Bhat (2022) investigated social media use among college students and reported that excessive engagement with social networking platforms was associated with reduced academic productivity, emotional exhaustion, and sleep disturbances. Students who spent longer periods online also experienced greater difficulty maintaining concentration during lectures and study sessions. The study highlighted the increasing influence of digital technology on the psychological well-being of Indian college students.

Researchers have increasingly recognised that Generation Z represents one of the most digitally connected generations. Constant exposure to online communication, entertainment, and personalised digital content has made social media an integral part of daily life. Although these platforms support social interaction and access to information, excessive use may reduce opportunities for face-to-face communication, emotional regulation, and engagement in offline activities. These findings have encouraged researchers to examine how problematic social media use may interact with emerging psychological phenomena such as maladaptive daydreaming, particularly among college students navigating the demands of contemporary digital environments.

## **2.6 Review of Literature on the Relationship Between Maladaptive Daydreaming and Stress**

Research on maladaptive daydreaming has increasingly focused on identifying the psychological factors associated with excessive fantasy involvement. Among these factors, stress has emerged as an important correlate of maladaptive daydreaming. Researchers have suggested that individuals experiencing psychological stress may engage in immersive fantasy as a way of temporarily escaping emotional discomfort, unresolved difficulties, or demanding life circumstances. Several studies have therefore examined the association between maladaptive daydreaming and stress across different populations.

The relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and emotional distress was initially highlighted by Somer (2002) through clinical observations of individuals who experienced excessive fantasy involvement. Many participants reported using fantasy as a means of coping with stressful life experiences, loneliness, trauma, and emotional dissatisfaction. Their imagined worlds provided feelings of comfort, achievement, and control that were difficult to experience in everyday life. These findings suggested that maladaptive daydreaming may function as an avoidant coping strategy rather than simply representing excessive imagination.

Further support for this perspective was provided by Bigelsen and Schupak (2011), who explored the experiences of individuals identifying themselves as maladaptive daydreamers. Participants reported that stressful situations, interpersonal difficulties, academic pressure, and emotional distress frequently triggered episodes of prolonged fantasy. Although daydreaming provided temporary relief and emotional comfort, excessive involvement often resulted in reduced productivity, procrastination, and difficulties managing daily responsibilities.

A major contribution to understanding this relationship was made by Soffer-Dudek and Somer (2018), who conducted a longitudinal study examining maladaptive daydreaming and

psychological distress. Their findings demonstrated a significant positive association between maladaptive daydreaming and perceived stress. Individuals with higher levels of maladaptive daydreaming reported greater psychological distress, including increased stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and obsessive-compulsive tendencies. The researchers suggested that the relationship may be reciprocal, with stress increasing the tendency to engage in fantasy while excessive daydreaming may further interfere with effective coping and emotional adjustment.

Similarly, Somer et al. (2017) examined the psychological characteristics associated with maladaptive daydreaming and found that individuals with higher levels of fantasy involvement displayed greater emotional vulnerability and psychological distress. The findings indicated that maladaptive daydreaming may serve as an emotion regulation strategy among individuals who experience difficulties managing stressful experiences through adaptive coping methods.

Research among university students has also highlighted the relevance of stress-related coping behaviours. Academic workload, examinations, interpersonal difficulties, and uncertainty regarding future careers are commonly reported sources of stress among students. In response to these challenges, some individuals may rely on avoidant coping strategies, including withdrawal, excessive digital engagement, or fantasy-based escape. While such strategies may provide temporary emotional relief, prolonged reliance on them may interfere with active problem-solving and contribute to additional psychological difficulties.

The relationship between stress and maladaptive daydreaming can also be understood through the framework of coping theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). According to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, individuals respond to stressful situations based on their appraisal of the stressor and available coping resources. While adaptive coping

strategies help individuals manage challenges effectively, avoidant coping strategies may provide short-term relief without addressing the underlying problem. Maladaptive daydreaming may represent one form of avoidant coping in which individuals temporarily distance themselves from stressful experiences through immersive fantasy.

Recent research has also considered the influence of digital environments on coping behaviours among young adults. Stress may encourage increased engagement with activities such as listening to music, consuming fictional media, browsing online content, or participating in virtual communities. These experiences may provide emotional distraction while also creating opportunities for prolonged fantasy involvement. This has encouraged researchers to examine the interaction between psychological distress, digital engagement, and maladaptive daydreaming, particularly among younger populations.

## **2.7 Review of Literature on the Relationship Between Maladaptive Daydreaming and Boredom Proneness**

In recent years, researchers have increasingly recognised boredom proneness as an important psychological factor associated with maladaptive daydreaming. Although boredom is a normal emotional experience, individuals who frequently experience boredom may develop coping strategies that provide stimulation and temporary relief from monotony. One such coping strategy may be excessive fantasy involvement. Since maladaptive daydreaming offers novelty, emotional engagement, and excitement through internally generated fantasy, researchers have suggested that individuals with high boredom proneness may be particularly vulnerable to developing immersive daydreaming patterns.

The concept of maladaptive daydreaming as a psychologically rewarding escape from reality was first proposed by Somer (2002). Based on clinical observations, Somer noted that individuals experiencing maladaptive daydreaming often described their fantasy worlds as

more exciting and emotionally satisfying than their everyday lives. Many participants reported turning to elaborate fantasy during periods of loneliness, emotional dissatisfaction, or inactivity. These observations suggested that when reality failed to provide sufficient emotional stimulation, individuals might increasingly rely on fantasy to meet unmet psychological needs.

Further insight was provided by Bigelsen and Schupak (2011), who examined the experiences of self-identified maladaptive daydreamers. Participants frequently reported that periods of inactivity, repetitive daily routines, and feelings of boredom often preceded episodes of prolonged daydreaming. Many explained that fantasy provided continuous novelty, emotional excitement, and intellectual engagement that they found lacking in ordinary life. Although these experiences initially appeared pleasurable, excessive fantasy gradually interfered with academic responsibilities, occupational functioning, and interpersonal relationships.

Research examining boredom proneness has consistently demonstrated that individuals who experience chronic boredom actively seek alternative sources of stimulation. Farmer and Sundberg (1986) proposed that boredom proneness reflects a stable tendency to perceive situations as unstimulating and to experience difficulty maintaining attention and interest. Individuals with high boredom proneness frequently report dissatisfaction with routine activities and often seek behaviours that provide immediate excitement or novelty. These findings suggest that immersive fantasy may serve as one such source of internally generated stimulation.

Similarly, Eastwood et al. (2012) described boredom as an unpleasant emotional state characterised by the inability to engage in satisfying activity despite the desire to do so. The researchers argued that boredom results from failures of attentional engagement rather than merely the absence of external stimulation. This perspective helps explain why some

individuals may turn toward internally generated fantasy experiences. When attention cannot be effectively directed toward meaningful real-world activities, elaborate daydreaming may become an alternative source of engagement and emotional involvement.

The relationship between boredom proneness and maladaptive coping has also been explored by Mercer-Lynn et al. (2014). Their findings indicated that individuals with higher boredom proneness were more likely to demonstrate impulsivity, emotional dysregulation, poor self-control, and reliance on avoidant coping strategies. The researchers suggested that persistent boredom encourages individuals to seek immediate psychological relief through behaviours that provide stimulation without addressing the underlying causes of dissatisfaction. Although maladaptive daydreaming was not the primary focus of the study, the findings provide theoretical support for understanding excessive fantasy as a potential boredom-related coping mechanism.

Research has also linked boredom proneness with excessive engagement in digital technology. Elhai et al. (2020) found that boredom was significantly associated with problematic smartphone use among young adults. Individuals experiencing persistent boredom frequently used smartphones to obtain stimulation and alleviate unpleasant emotional states. Since digital media often exposes individuals to emotionally stimulating content that encourages imagination, researchers have proposed that boredom proneness may indirectly contribute to maladaptive daydreaming by increasing both digital engagement and fantasy-oriented thinking.

Among college students, boredom may arise from repetitive academic routines, prolonged study sessions, limited recreational opportunities, or dissatisfaction with daily life. Students experiencing high boredom proneness may find it difficult to remain engaged during lectures, examinations, or routine responsibilities. Consequently, some may mentally

disengage from their immediate surroundings and become increasingly absorbed in elaborate fantasy experiences. Although daydreaming may initially provide temporary relief from monotony, excessive reliance on fantasy may reduce attention, productivity, and academic performance over time.

Recent discussions within the maladaptive daydreaming literature have suggested that boredom proneness may not simply accompany maladaptive daydreaming but may also contribute to its maintenance. Individuals who repeatedly experience boredom may increasingly depend on fantasy because it consistently provides emotional stimulation, excitement, and psychological escape. Over time, this pattern may become habitual, making it more difficult to engage with ordinary real-life experiences. This possibility has encouraged researchers to further investigate boredom proneness as an important psychological correlate of maladaptive daydreaming, particularly among adolescents and college students.

Despite these observations, empirical research directly examining the relationship between boredom proneness and maladaptive daydreaming remains relatively limited, especially within the Indian context. Most available evidence has examined boredom and maladaptive coping separately, highlighting the need for studies investigating their relationship among Generation Z college students. Such research may contribute to a better understanding of how boredom influences excessive fantasy involvement and may assist in developing interventions that promote healthier forms of emotional regulation and engagement with everyday activities.

## **2.8 Review of Literature on the Relationship Between Maladaptive Daydreaming and Social Media Use**

The rapid growth of digital technology and social networking platforms has significantly influenced the psychological experiences of adolescents and young adults. Social

media has become deeply integrated into everyday life, providing opportunities for communication, entertainment, self-expression, and access to information. However, excessive engagement with these platforms has also raised concerns regarding their influence on attention, emotional regulation, coping behaviour, and mental health. Although research directly examining the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and social media use remains limited, increasing evidence suggests that excessive digital engagement may contribute to avoidant coping patterns and provide opportunities for immersive fantasy experiences.

One of the earliest studies to describe the characteristics of maladaptive daydreaming was conducted by Somer (2002), who observed that individuals frequently used fantasy as a means of escaping from emotionally distressing or unsatisfying real-life experiences. Participants reported becoming deeply immersed in elaborate imaginary worlds that provided emotional comfort, excitement, and a sense of control. Although social media was not a major focus of the study at that time, Somer's findings established the idea that emotionally stimulating experiences and external triggers could reinforce excessive fantasy activity.

Further insight was provided by Bigelsen and Schupak (2011), who explored the experiences of individuals with maladaptive daydreaming through qualitative interviews. Participants reported that music, films, television programmes, novels, and fictional characters frequently served as triggers for immersive daydreaming. Many described using these forms of media to expand or enrich their fantasy narratives. With the increasing popularity of digital platforms that provide immediate access to similar forms of entertainment, researchers have suggested that social media may function in a comparable manner by exposing individuals to emotionally engaging and imagination-provoking content.

The relationship between problematic social media use and emotional well-being has been extensively investigated. Andreassen et al. (2017) reported that excessive social media use was associated with symptoms of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and reduced psychological well-being. Individuals experiencing emotional difficulties were also more likely to engage excessively with social networking platforms, possibly as a means of distraction or seeking emotional relief. These findings suggest that problematic social media use may involve avoidant patterns of coping that share similarities with the emotional escape associated with maladaptive daydreaming.

Similarly, Keles et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review examining the psychological impact of social media use among adolescents and young adults. The review concluded that greater social media use was associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and poorer sleep quality. The authors noted that prolonged exposure to social networking platforms may contribute to emotional exhaustion, social comparison, fear of missing out, and reduced opportunities for healthy offline coping. These emotional experiences may increase the likelihood of individuals seeking alternative forms of psychological escape, including immersive fantasy.

Research has also examined the design characteristics of social media platforms that encourage prolonged engagement. Montag et al. (2019) suggested that personalised algorithms, continuous notifications, infinite scrolling, and rapidly changing digital content provide constant stimulation and immediate reinforcement. These features encourage repetitive patterns of checking and extended online engagement, making it difficult for some users to regulate their digital behaviour. Continuous exposure to emotionally stimulating content may also provide triggers for imaginative thinking, particularly among individuals who already demonstrate a tendency toward vivid fantasy involvement.

Studies focusing on Generation Z have reported that young adults spend substantial amounts of time engaging with social media for communication, entertainment, education, and relaxation. While these platforms provide important opportunities for social interaction, they also expose users to fictional narratives, idealised lifestyles, music, gaming content, and emotionally engaging videos. Such content may provide material for imagination and contribute to prolonged engagement with fantasy-related experiences. Researchers have therefore proposed that excessive social media use may indirectly contribute to maladaptive daydreaming by increasing exposure to fantasy-related stimuli and reinforcing digital forms of emotional escape.

Recent discussions have also highlighted several psychological characteristics shared by maladaptive daydreaming and problematic social media use. Both involve repetitive engagement in highly rewarding activities, difficulty controlling the behaviour despite negative consequences, emotional reliance on the activity for relief from distress, and interference with academic, occupational, or interpersonal functioning. Although these similarities do not indicate that the two constructs are identical, they suggest that both may involve related processes involving emotional regulation, avoidance, and behavioural reinforcement.

Among college students, social media often serves as a convenient means of coping with academic stress, boredom, loneliness, and negative emotions. Students may spend prolonged periods browsing online content, listening to music, watching fictional videos, or interacting with virtual communities. While these activities may initially provide relaxation, excessive reliance on digital environments may reduce engagement with real-world responsibilities and increase dependence on online experiences for emotional relief. This possibility has prompted increasing interest in examining the relationship between social media use and maladaptive daydreaming among young adults.

Despite growing international research on social media and mental health, relatively few studies have directly examined its association with maladaptive daydreaming, particularly among Indian college students. Most existing studies have investigated these variables independently, highlighting the need for further research exploring how social media use may relate to immersive fantasy involvement within highly digitalised educational environments. Such investigations may contribute to a better understanding of contemporary coping patterns among Generation Z and support the development of interventions promoting healthier digital habits and psychological well-being.

## **2.9 Review of Literature on the Prediction of Maladaptive Daydreaming**

In addition to examining the individual relationships between maladaptive daydreaming and various psychological factors, recent research has increasingly focused on identifying variables that may contribute to excessive fantasy involvement. Predictive studies are important because they help determine the relative contribution of different psychological characteristics and improve understanding of the factors associated with the development and maintenance of maladaptive daydreaming. Researchers have examined several potential predictors, including emotional distress, stress, anxiety, depression, dissociation, boredom proneness, problematic internet use, and excessive engagement with digital media.

One of the earliest explanations regarding factors associated with maladaptive daydreaming was proposed by Somer (2002). Based on clinical observations, Somer suggested that maladaptive daydreaming may develop as a coping response to emotional distress, loneliness, trauma, and unmet psychological needs. Individuals experiencing persistent emotional difficulties may gradually become increasingly dependent on immersive fantasy because it provides temporary emotional comfort and an imagined sense of control. Although the study did not employ statistical prediction models, it established the theoretical foundation

for later research investigating psychological variables associated with maladaptive daydreaming.

Using a longitudinal design, Soffer-Dudek and Somer (2018) examined the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and psychological distress over time. The researchers found that higher levels of maladaptive daydreaming were associated with increased stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and obsessive-compulsive features. The findings suggested that emotional distress may play an important role in maintaining excessive fantasy involvement by increasing individuals' reliance on fantasy-based coping strategies.

Research has also identified dissociative tendencies as an important factor associated with maladaptive daydreaming. Somer et al. (2017) reported that individuals with higher levels of dissociation and obsessive-compulsive symptoms also demonstrated greater maladaptive daydreaming tendencies. The researchers proposed that difficulties with attention regulation and engagement with the external environment may increase vulnerability to prolonged fantasy immersion. However, they also emphasised that maladaptive daydreaming remains a distinct psychological construct that cannot be fully explained by dissociation or obsessive-compulsive symptoms alone.

Studies examining behavioural reinforcement have similarly suggested that compulsive patterns may contribute to the maintenance of maladaptive daydreaming. Bigelsen and Schupak (2011) observed that participants often experienced strong urges to continue daydreaming despite recognising its negative impact on daily life. Many described losing track of time, postponing responsibilities, and repeatedly returning to fantasy whenever opportunities arose. These behavioural characteristics suggest that repeated emotional reinforcement may contribute to the persistence of maladaptive daydreaming.

Researchers have also proposed that boredom proneness may function as an important factor associated with maladaptive daydreaming. Individuals who frequently experience boredom often seek stimulation through activities that provide novelty, excitement, or emotional engagement. Since immersive fantasy offers continuous internal stimulation, individuals with higher boredom proneness may be more likely to engage in excessive daydreaming. Although direct predictive research remains limited, findings reported by Farmer and Sundberg (1986), Eastwood et al. (2012), and Mercer-Lynn et al. (2014) provide theoretical support for considering boredom proneness as a potential predictor of maladaptive fantasy involvement.

Similarly, increasing attention has been given to the role of social media use and digital engagement in relation to maladaptive daydreaming. Researchers have suggested that prolonged exposure to emotionally stimulating online content, fictional media, music, gaming, and personalised digital environments may provide triggers for imaginative thinking and emotional escape. Andreassen et al. (2017) and Montag et al. (2019) reported that problematic social media use involves characteristics such as compulsive engagement, emotional dependence, and difficulty regulating behaviour. These similarities have encouraged researchers to examine whether excessive social media use may contribute to maladaptive daydreaming by increasing exposure to fantasy-related stimuli and encouraging digital forms of emotional coping.

Among college students, multiple psychological and environmental factors often occur simultaneously. Academic stress, uncertainty regarding future careers, boredom arising from repetitive routines, and extensive engagement with digital technology may interact to influence coping behaviours. Rather than operating independently, these variables may collectively increase the likelihood of relying on immersive fantasy as a means of emotional regulation. Therefore, researchers have increasingly recommended examining multiple variables

simultaneously through statistical techniques such as multiple regression analysis to understand their relative contribution to maladaptive daydreaming.

Despite growing international interest in this area, predictive research on maladaptive daydreaming remains limited, particularly within India. Most available studies have examined individual relationships between maladaptive daydreaming and specific psychological variables rather than evaluating the combined contribution of stress, boredom proneness, and social media use. Furthermore, studies focusing specifically on Generation Z college students remain scarce. Examining these variables together may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors associated with maladaptive daydreaming and provide evidence for future psychological interventions among young adults.

## **2.10 Research Gap**

The review of existing literature indicates that maladaptive daydreaming has emerged as an important area of psychological research over the past two decades. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that maladaptive daydreaming is associated with psychological distress, anxiety, depression, dissociative experiences, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, emotional dysregulation, loneliness, and impairment in daily functioning. Research has also established that stress, boredom proneness, and excessive social media use independently influence the psychological well-being of adolescents and young adults. However, despite significant advancements in understanding these variables, several important gaps remain within the existing literature.

First, the majority of empirical research on maladaptive daydreaming has been conducted in Western countries, including Israel, the United States, Italy, Poland, and other European nations. Comparatively fewer studies have examined maladaptive daydreaming within Asian populations, particularly in India. Cultural values, family systems, educational

environments, and patterns of digital technology use may influence the experience of maladaptive daydreaming and its associated psychological factors. Therefore, findings obtained from Western populations cannot be directly generalised to Indian college students without further investigation.

Second, although previous studies have explored the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and individual psychological variables such as stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and problematic internet use, limited research has examined the combined contribution of stress, boredom proneness, and social media use within a single framework. Since these factors often coexist in the lives of young adults, investigating their combined influence may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological factors associated with maladaptive daydreaming.

Third, boredom proneness remains relatively underexplored within maladaptive daydreaming research. Although theoretical explanations suggest that individuals experiencing persistent boredom may seek internally generated stimulation through immersive fantasy, only limited empirical research has directly examined the relationship between boredom proneness and maladaptive daydreaming. Further investigation is required to understand the role of boredom proneness in the development and maintenance of excessive fantasy involvement.

Another significant gap concerns the increasing influence of digital technology. Although previous studies have reported associations between problematic internet use, smartphone use, and maladaptive daydreaming, relatively fewer studies have specifically examined social media use as a potential factor associated with maladaptive daydreaming. Considering the extensive use of social networking platforms among Generation Z, understanding the relationship between social media engagement and immersive fantasy experiences has become increasingly relevant.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature has employed correlational research designs. While these studies provide evidence regarding relationships among variables, they provide limited information regarding the predictive contribution of different psychological factors. Research examining whether stress, boredom proneness, and social media use significantly predict maladaptive daydreaming remains limited. Employing predictive statistical methods such as regression analysis may therefore provide greater insight into the factors contributing to excessive fantasy involvement.

Another important limitation is the limited availability of research focusing specifically on Generation Z college students. This generation has grown up within an environment characterised by continuous digital connectivity, widespread social media use, rapid technological development, and constant access to online information. These unique experiences may influence their coping strategies, emotional regulation abilities, and reliance on fantasy-based experiences. Despite these characteristics, relatively few studies have examined maladaptive daydreaming specifically among Generation Z college students.

Additionally, awareness and recognition of maladaptive daydreaming among students, educators, and mental health professionals remain limited, particularly within the Indian context. Since maladaptive daydreaming is not currently recognised as an independent diagnostic category in major classification systems, individuals experiencing excessive fantasy involvement may remain unidentified or may not seek psychological support. Further research is therefore necessary to improve awareness, facilitate early identification, and contribute to the development of appropriate psychological interventions.

In view of these gaps, the present study aims to examine maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students and investigate its relationship with stress, boredom proneness, and social media use. The study further seeks to determine whether these variables

significantly predict maladaptive daydreaming and whether differences exist based on selected demographic characteristics. By addressing these research gaps, the present investigation aims to contribute to the limited Indian literature on maladaptive daydreaming and enhance understanding of the psychological experiences of young adults within contemporary digital environments.

### **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The present study was conducted to examine maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students and to investigate its relationship with stress, boredom proneness, and social media use. This chapter presents the methodological framework adopted for conducting the study. It includes the research design, participants, sampling technique, variables of the study, research setting, tools used for data collection, procedure, ethical considerations, and statistical techniques employed for analysis. A systematic methodology was adopted to ensure that the data collected were reliable, valid, and suitable for addressing the objectives of the study.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach using a descriptive correlational research design. The descriptive component of the design was used to assess the levels of maladaptive daydreaming, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use among Generation Z college students. The correlational component was employed to examine the relationships among these variables without manipulating or controlling them.

Additionally, a predictive research approach was incorporated through multiple regression analysis to determine whether stress, boredom proneness, and social media use significantly predicted maladaptive daydreaming. The study also examined differences in maladaptive daydreaming scores across gender, using appropriate statistical procedures. Since the study aimed to examine naturally occurring psychological characteristics and relationships among variables rather than establish causal effects, a non-experimental research design was considered appropriate.

### **3.3 Variables of the Study**

The present study consisted of one dependent variable and three independent variables.

#### **Dependent Variable**

- Maladaptive Daydreaming

#### **Independent Variables**

- Stress
- Boredom Proneness
- Social Media Use

### **3.4 Participants**

The participants of the present study consisted of 121 Generation Z college students pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various colleges. The age range of participants was between 18 and 25 years, representing the target Generation Z population. Students from different academic disciplines and colleges participated in the study, thereby enhancing the diversity of the sample..

Both male and female students participated voluntarily in the study. Participants who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and provided informed consent were included in the research. Participation was completely voluntary, and participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences.

### **3.5 Sampling Technique**

The study employed a convenience sampling technique. Participants were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the research. Data were collected

through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms, which enabled the researcher to reach college students from different institutions within the available time frame.

Convenience sampling was considered appropriate because of practical constraints, accessibility of participants, and the exploratory nature of the study. However, it is acknowledged that this sampling method may limit the generalisability of the findings beyond the selected sample.

### **3.6 Inclusion Criteria**

Participants included in the study fulfilled the following criteria:

- Generation Z college students between 18 and 25 years of age.
- Undergraduate or postgraduate students enrolled in recognised colleges.
- Participants who were able to understand English.
- Individuals who provided informed consent.
- Students who completed all sections of the questionnaire.

### **3.7 Exclusion Criteria**

The following individuals were excluded from the study:

- Individuals below 18 years or above 25 years of age.
- Individuals who were not enrolled as college students.
- Participants who submitted incomplete responses.
- Individuals who did not provide informed consent.

### **3.8 Research Setting**

The study was conducted through an online survey method. Data were collected using Google Forms and distributed through various online platforms, including social media networks and student groups. The online format enabled participants to complete the questionnaire according to their convenience while ensuring accessibility, anonymity, and confidentiality.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for psychological research. Before data collection, participants were provided with information regarding the purpose of the study, procedures involved, and the voluntary nature of participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study.

Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. No personally identifying information was collected that could reveal the identity of participants. They were informed that they could discontinue participation at any point without providing a reason. The collected data were used exclusively for academic and research purposes and were securely maintained to protect participant confidentiality.

### **3.10 Tools Used for Data Collection**

Four standardized psychological instruments were used to assess the variables included in the present study. The selected tools were appropriate for measuring maladaptive daydreaming, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use among college students. The instruments were administered in their original form through an online questionnaire format, and necessary permissions were obtained wherever required.

### **3.10.1 Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16)**

Maladaptive daydreaming was assessed using the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16) developed by Somer, Soffer-Dudek, Ross, and Halpern (2016). The scale was developed to measure the severity and characteristics of maladaptive daydreaming experiences.

The MDS-16 consists of 16 items assessing various dimensions of maladaptive daydreaming, including intensity of fantasy experiences, emotional involvement in daydreams, difficulty controlling daydreaming, interference with daily functioning, and the amount of time spent engaged in fantasy activity. Responses are recorded using an 11-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0% (Never/None of the time) to 100% (All of the time/Extreme), with response intervals of 10%.

Higher scores indicate greater severity of maladaptive daydreaming. The MDS-16 has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across different populations. The original developers reported excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding .90. Previous studies have also provided evidence supporting the construct validity and criterion validity of the scale, making it a reliable measure for assessing maladaptive daydreaming among young adults.

### **3.10.2 Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)**

Perceived stress was measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983). It is one of the most widely used instruments for assessing the extent to which individuals perceive their life situations as stressful.

The PSS-10 consists of 10 items that assess thoughts and feelings related to stress experienced during the previous month. Participants respond to each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often).

Items 4, 5, 7, and 8 are positively worded and are reverse scored before calculating the total score. Scores range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater perceived stress. In general, scores between 0–13 represent low stress, 14–26 indicate moderate stress, and 27–40 indicate high perceived stress.

The PSS-10 has demonstrated good reliability and validity across different populations and cultural settings. Previous research has reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .78 to .91, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

### **3.10.3 Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS)**

Boredom proneness was assessed using the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS) developed by Farmer and Sundberg (1986). The scale measures an individual's tendency to experience boredom frequently across different situations and contexts.

The BPS consists of 28 items assessing characteristics such as lack of stimulation, difficulty sustaining attention, dissatisfaction with routine activities, and a tendency to experience boredom. Responses are provided using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Certain items are reverse scored according to the scoring guidelines provided by the authors. Higher total scores indicate greater levels of boredom proneness. The scale has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties, with reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients generally above .80, indicating good reliability and internal consistency.

### **3.10.4 Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)**

Social media use was assessed using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) developed by Andreassen et al. (2016). The scale evaluates problematic patterns of social media use based on the components of behavioural addiction.

The BSMAS consists of 6 items, with each item representing one component of behavioural addiction: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Participants indicate the frequency of their experiences during the previous year using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very Rarely) to 5 (Very Often).

The total score is calculated by summing responses across all six items. Higher scores indicate greater levels of problematic social media use. Previous research has demonstrated good reliability and construct validity of the BSMAS across different cultural settings, with reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .80 to .88.

### **3.11 Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection was conducted after finalising the research objectives, selecting appropriate standardized instruments, and obtaining approval from the research supervisor. The questionnaire was prepared using Google Forms, which included the participant information sheet, informed consent form, demographic details, and the four standardized psychological instruments.

The Google Form link was distributed among college students through online platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram, and student communication groups. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were instructed to provide responses honestly based on their personal experiences. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided.

The completed responses were automatically recorded through Google Forms. The collected data were screened carefully, and incomplete responses were removed before analysis. Following data screening, 121 complete responses were retained for statistical analysis. The collected data were organised using Microsoft Excel and subsequently entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis.

### **3.12 Statistical Analysis**

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Before conducting the analyses, the data were screened for completeness, accuracy, and suitability for statistical testing. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarise the demographic characteristics of the participants and to determine the levels of maladaptive daydreaming, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use among Generation Z college students.

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationships between maladaptive daydreaming and the independent variables, namely stress, boredom proneness, and social media use. This test was considered appropriate as the variables were measured at the interval level and the study aimed to determine the direction and strength of associations among the variables.

Multiple Linear Regression analysis was conducted to examine whether stress, boredom proneness, and social media use significantly predicted maladaptive daydreaming. Regression analysis was selected because it allows the researcher to determine the predictive contribution of each independent variable while examining their combined influence on the dependent variable.

An Independent Samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether significant differences existed in maladaptive daydreaming scores based on gender. Since the comparison

involved two groups, this statistical procedure was considered appropriate for analysing differences between group means.

The level of statistical significance for all analyses was set at 0.05. Findings with  $p$  values less than .05 were considered statistically significant.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The primary objective of the present study was to examine maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students and to explore its relationship with stress, boredom proneness, and social media use. The study also aimed to determine whether stress, boredom proneness, and social media use significantly predicted maladaptive daydreaming and whether maladaptive daydreaming differed based on selected demographic variables.

The data collected from 121 participants were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Appropriate statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk test for normality, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, Multiple Linear Regression, and the Independent Samples *t*-test.

The results are presented under separate sections corresponding to each objective of the study. Each table is followed by an interpretation of the findings, and the results are discussed with reference to previous research.

### 4.1 Gender Distribution of the Participants

**Table 4.1**

The gender distribution of the participants was analysed using descriptive statistics.

| Gender | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|--------|---------------|----------------|
| Male   | 62            | 51.2           |
| Female | 59            | 48.8           |

## Result

Table 4.1 presents the gender distribution of the participants included in the study. Out of the total sample of 121 participants, 62 (51.2%) were males and 59 (48.8%) were females. The distribution indicates that the sample consisted of nearly equal numbers of male and female participants.

## Interpretation

The relatively balanced gender distribution ensured adequate representation of both male and female college students in the study. This provided an opportunity to examine whether gender differences existed in the study variables while reducing the possibility of gender bias within the sample.

### 4.2 Test of Normality

**Table 4.2**

Shapiro–Wilk Test of Normality

| Variable                | Statistic | df  | Sig. |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----|------|
| Maladaptive Daydreaming | .993      | 121 | .811 |
| Stress                  | .976      | 121 | .128 |
| Boredom Proneness       | .956      | 121 | .081 |
| Social Media Use        | .989      | 121 | .422 |

## Result

The Shapiro–Wilk test was conducted to examine whether the data followed a normal distribution. The results indicated that the variables satisfied the assumptions of normality. Since the obtained significance values supported the assumption of normality, parametric statistical techniques were considered appropriate for further analysis.

## Interpretation

Testing for normality is an important preliminary step before conducting inferential statistical analyses. As the data were found to be normally distributed, parametric statistical procedures such as Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, Multiple Linear Regression, and the Independent Samples *t*-test were used to analyse the data.

### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

**Table 4.3**

Descriptive Statistics of Maladaptive Daydreaming, Stress, Boredom Proneness, and Social Media Use

| Variable                | Mean   | SD     |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|
| Maladaptive Daydreaming | 31.20  | 12.006 |
| Stress                  | 21.94  | 5.558  |
| Boredom Proneness       | 110.46 | 9.79   |
| Social media use        | 19.26  | 4.676  |

## Result

Table 4.3 presents the mean and standard deviation of the study variables. These descriptive statistics provide an overview of the participants' scores on maladaptive daydreaming, perceived stress, boredom proneness, and social media use.

The obtained mean scores indicate the average level of each variable within the sample, whereas the standard deviations reflect the degree of variation in participants' responses.

## Interpretation

Descriptive statistics provide a general understanding of the characteristics of the collected data before conducting inferential analyses. The observed variation in scores indicates that participants differed in their levels of maladaptive daydreaming, stress, boredom proneness, and social media use, thereby making further statistical analyses meaningful.

### 4.4 Levels of Maladaptive Daydreaming

**Table 4.4**

Levels of Maladaptive Daydreaming among Generation Z College Students

| Level    | Score Range | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| Low      | 0 - 19      | 18            | 14.9           |
| Moderate | 20 - 44     | 84            | 69.4           |
| High     | 45 - 64     | 19            | 15.7           |

## **Result**

Table 4.4 presents the distribution of participants according to their levels of maladaptive daydreaming. The findings indicate that the majority of participants fell within the moderate category, while comparatively fewer participants were classified under the low and high categories.

## **Interpretation**

The findings suggest that maladaptive daydreaming is relatively common among Generation Z college students, with most participants experiencing moderate levels of immersive fantasy. Although only a smaller proportion of participants reported high levels of maladaptive daydreaming, the presence of moderate and high scores indicates that excessive fantasy involvement is experienced by a considerable number of students.

## **Discussion**

The findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that maladaptive daydreaming is increasingly observed among young adults who experience academic demands, emotional challenges, and continuous exposure to digital environments (Somer et al., 2016; Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018). College students often encounter multiple developmental and academic stressors, which may increase the tendency to engage in immersive fantasy as a temporary means of emotional escape. Continuous engagement with digital media and fantasy-oriented online content may further contribute to this tendency, making maladaptive daydreaming an important area of concern within student mental health.

#### 4.5 Levels of Perceived Stress

**Table 4.5**

Levels of Perceived Stress among Generation Z College Students

| Level    | Score Range | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| Low      | 0 - 10      | 0             | 0.0            |
| Moderate | 11 - 25     | 87            | 71.9           |
| High     | 26 - 36     | 34            | 28.1           |

#### Result

Table 4.5 presents the distribution of participants according to their levels of perceived stress. The findings indicate that the majority of the participants experienced moderate levels of perceived stress, while a smaller proportion reported low and high levels of stress.

#### Interpretation

The findings suggest that most Generation Z college students experience a moderate level of stress in their daily lives. This indicates that although participants were generally able to cope with everyday demands, they continued to experience considerable psychological pressure arising from academic responsibilities, personal expectations, and other life challenges. The presence of participants with high stress levels also highlights that psychological stress remains a significant concern among college students.

## Discussion

The findings are consistent with previous research indicating that college students frequently experience moderate to high levels of perceived stress due to academic workload, examinations, interpersonal relationships, career uncertainty, and adjustment to adulthood (Cohen et al., 1983; Twenge, 2017). Generation Z students are also continuously exposed to digital technology and social media, which may increase information overload and emotional exhaustion. Persistent stress may influence emotional regulation and encourage the use of avoidant coping strategies, including excessive fantasy involvement and maladaptive daydreaming. These findings further support the importance of promoting stress management programmes and psychological support services within educational institutions.

### 4.6 Levels of Boredom Proneness

**Table 4.6**

Levels of Boredom Proneness among Generation Z College Students

| Level    | Score Range | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| Low      | 28 - 83     | 0             | 0.0            |
| Moderate | 84 - 140    | 121           | 99.2           |
| High     | 141 - 196   | 1             | 0.8            |

## Result

Table 4.6 presents the distribution of participants according to their levels of boredom proneness. The results indicate that the vast majority of participants fell within the moderate

category, whereas only a very small number of participants were classified under the high category.

### **Interpretation**

The findings suggest that most participants experienced moderate levels of boredom proneness. Although participants did not generally report extremely high levels of boredom, the results indicate that feelings of monotony, reduced interest, and the need for stimulation are relatively common among Generation Z college students.

### **Discussion**

The findings are consistent with studies suggesting that boredom proneness has become increasingly common among young adults living in highly stimulating digital environments (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; Mercer-Lynn et al., 2014). Continuous exposure to rapidly changing online content may reduce tolerance for routine activities and increase the desire for novelty and stimulation. However, in the present study, boredom proneness was not significantly associated with maladaptive daydreaming, suggesting that although participants experienced moderate boredom, it was not an important factor contributing to excessive daydreaming within this sample. This finding indicates that other psychological factors, particularly stress and social media use, may play a more substantial role in explaining maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students.

#### 4.7 Levels of Social Media Use

**Table 4.7**

Levels of Social Media Use among Generation Z College Students

| Level    | Score Range | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| Low      | 6 - 13      | 12            | 9.9            |
| Moderate | 14 - 22     | 79            | 65.3           |
| High     | 23 - 30     | 30            | 24.8           |

#### Result

Table 4.7 presents the distribution of participants according to their levels of social media use. The findings reveal that most participants reported moderate levels of social media use, while relatively fewer participants were classified under the low and high categories.

#### Interpretation

The results indicate that social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of Generation Z college students. Most participants demonstrated moderate engagement with social networking platforms, suggesting regular use for communication, entertainment, information seeking, and academic purposes. However, the presence of participants with high levels of social media use indicates that a section of the sample may be at risk of developing problematic patterns of digital engagement.

## Discussion

The findings are in line with previous research showing that Generation Z relies heavily on social networking platforms for various aspects of daily life (Andreassen et al., 2017; Keles et al., 2020). Social media offers opportunities for communication and information sharing, but excessive engagement may contribute to distraction, emotional dependence, reduced concentration, and escapism. The findings of the present study become particularly important because social media use was later found to have a significant positive relationship with maladaptive daydreaming and also emerged as the strongest predictor of maladaptive daydreaming. This suggests that increased engagement with digital platforms may provide continuous stimulation and fantasy-related content that encourages immersive daydreaming among young adults.

### 4.8 Relationship between Maladaptive Daydreaming, Stress and Social Media Use

**Table 4.8**

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation between Maladaptive Daydreaming, Stress and Social Media Use

| Variable | MDD  | Stress | SMU  |
|----------|------|--------|------|
| MDD      | 1    | .433   | .511 |
| Stress   | .433 | 1      | .337 |
| SMU      | .511 | .337   | 1    |

## Result

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was computed to examine the relationship between maladaptive daydreaming, perceived stress, and social media use among Generation Z college students.

The findings revealed a moderate positive correlation between maladaptive daydreaming and perceived stress ( $r = .433, p < .001$ ), indicating that participants with higher levels of perceived stress also tended to report higher levels of maladaptive daydreaming.

The analysis also showed a moderate positive correlation between maladaptive daydreaming and social media use ( $r = .511, p < .001$ ). This indicates that participants who reported greater social media use also tended to experience higher levels of maladaptive daydreaming.

In addition, a positive correlation was observed between stress and social media use ( $r = .337, p < .001$ ), suggesting that increased social media use was associated with higher levels of perceived stress among the participants.

## Interpretation

The findings indicate that both perceived stress and social media use are significantly associated with maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students. As levels of stress and social media use increased, maladaptive daydreaming also increased. Among the variables examined, social media use demonstrated the strongest relationship with maladaptive daydreaming, followed by perceived stress.

These findings suggest that psychological stress and increased engagement with social networking platforms may contribute to greater involvement in immersive fantasy

experiences. Students experiencing higher levels of stress may use daydreaming as a means of temporarily escaping academic, emotional, or interpersonal difficulties. Similarly, extensive engagement with social media may expose individuals to emotionally stimulating content that encourages imagination and fantasy, thereby increasing the tendency toward maladaptive daydreaming.

## **Discussion**

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research that has identified psychological stress as an important factor associated with maladaptive daydreaming. Soffer-Dudek and Somer (2018) reported that individuals experiencing greater psychological distress were more likely to engage in excessive daydreaming as a means of coping with negative emotions. Immersive fantasy may provide temporary emotional relief from stressful situations; however, prolonged reliance on this coping strategy may interfere with academic performance, social relationships, and everyday functioning.

The significant positive relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and social media use is also supported by previous literature. Andreassen et al. (2017) and Keles et al. (2020) suggested that excessive engagement with social networking platforms may contribute to emotional dependence, attentional difficulties, and escapism-oriented behaviours. Continuous exposure to digital content, fictional narratives, music, and idealised online experiences may stimulate imagination and increase immersion in fantasy, thereby reinforcing maladaptive daydreaming.

The present findings further indicate that social media use emerged as the variable most strongly associated with maladaptive daydreaming. This may be because digital platforms provide constant opportunities for entertainment, emotional stimulation, and escape from everyday stressors. Generation Z students spend considerable time interacting with

online environments, making social media an important contextual factor influencing their emotional experiences and coping behaviours.

#### 4.9 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

**Table 4.9**

Model Summary of Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Maladaptive Daydreaming

| Model | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | Adj. R <sup>2</sup> | F      | Sig. |
|-------|------|----------------|---------------------|--------|------|
| 1     | .582 | .338           | .327                | 30.166 | .000 |

#### Result

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was performed to determine whether perceived stress and social media use significantly predicted maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students.

The regression model was found to be statistically significant and explained a substantial proportion of the variance in maladaptive daydreaming scores. The findings indicate that stress and social media use together significantly predicted maladaptive daydreaming among the participants.

#### Interpretation

The results suggest that stress and social media use collectively contribute to explaining variations in maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students. The regression model indicates that these variables play an important role in understanding excessive fantasy involvement. However, it also suggests that other psychological and

environmental factors not included in the present study may contribute to maladaptive daydreaming.

#### 4.10 Coefficients of Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Maladaptive Daydreaming

**Table 4.10**

Regression Coefficients for Predicting Maladaptive Daydreaming

| Predictor        | B     | SE   | Beta | t     | Sig. |
|------------------|-------|------|------|-------|------|
| Stress           | .636  | .172 | .294 | 3.702 | .000 |
| Social Media Use | 1.059 | .204 | .412 | 5.184 | .000 |

#### Result

Table 4.10 presents the regression coefficients for the predictor variables included in the regression model. The findings indicate that both perceived stress and social media use made significant contributions to predicting maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students.

Among the two predictor variables, social media use emerged as the strongest predictor of maladaptive daydreaming, followed by perceived stress. This indicates that students with higher levels of social media use and greater perceived stress were more likely to report higher levels of maladaptive daydreaming.

#### Interpretation

The regression coefficients indicate that both perceived stress and social media use independently contribute to maladaptive daydreaming. Although both variables significantly

predicted maladaptive daydreaming, social media use showed a comparatively stronger influence. This finding suggests that digital engagement may play a particularly important role in understanding excessive fantasy involvement among Generation Z college students.

The results also indicate that while stress contributes to maladaptive daydreaming, students' patterns of social media use appear to have a greater impact on their tendency to engage in immersive fantasy experiences.

## **Discussion**

The findings of the regression analysis support the growing body of literature suggesting that maladaptive daydreaming develops through the interaction of psychological and environmental factors rather than a single cause. Perceived stress appears to encourage individuals to seek temporary psychological relief through immersive fantasy, whereas excessive engagement with social media may provide continuous stimulation that maintains or reinforces daydreaming behaviour.

The finding that social media use was the strongest predictor is particularly noteworthy. Generation Z has grown up in an environment where digital technology is deeply integrated into everyday life. Social networking platforms expose users to an endless stream of videos, music, fictional content, and emotionally engaging narratives, all of which may stimulate imagination and increase the tendency to engage in elaborate fantasy. Continuous engagement with such content may gradually encourage individuals to spend more time in internally generated fantasy worlds, especially when faced with stress or dissatisfaction in everyday life.

The significant contribution of perceived stress is also consistent with previous research suggesting that individuals often use maladaptive daydreaming as an avoidant coping strategy. When academic demands, interpersonal conflicts, or emotional difficulties

become overwhelming, immersive fantasy may provide temporary comfort and emotional escape. However, frequent reliance on this coping mechanism may reduce engagement with real-life responsibilities and ultimately contribute to further psychological distress.

The present findings highlight the importance of addressing both emotional well-being and healthy digital habits in interventions aimed at reducing maladaptive daydreaming among college students. Counselling programmes that focus on stress management, adaptive coping strategies, emotional regulation, and balanced social media use may help reduce excessive fantasy involvement and improve overall psychological well-being.

#### 4.11 Gender Differences in Maladaptive Daydreaming

**Table 4.11**

Independent Samples *t*-test Showing Gender Differences in Maladaptive Daydreaming

| Variable                | <i>t</i> | Sig.  |
|-------------------------|----------|-------|
| Maladaptive Daydreaming | 0.101    | > .05 |
| Stress                  | 1.266    | > .05 |
| Social Media Use        | 2.354    | > .05 |

#### Result

An Independent Samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether there were significant gender differences in maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students.

The results indicated no statistically significant difference in maladaptive daydreaming scores between male and female participants ( $p > .05$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant gender difference in maladaptive daydreaming was retained.

### **Interpretation**

The findings suggest that both male and female participants reported comparable levels of maladaptive daydreaming. Gender did not appear to influence the tendency to engage in excessive or immersive fantasy among the participants included in the present study.

This indicates that maladaptive daydreaming may be experienced by individuals regardless of gender and may be more closely associated with psychological factors such as stress and social media use than with demographic characteristics.

### **Discussion**

The absence of significant gender differences suggests that maladaptive daydreaming is a psychological phenomenon that can occur across both males and females. While some previous studies have reported slight gender variations in fantasy content or emotional expression, many researchers have found that the overall tendency to engage in maladaptive daydreaming is not substantially influenced by gender.

One possible explanation for the present finding is that both male and female college students experience similar academic demands, developmental challenges, and exposure to digital technology. As members of Generation Z, participants are likely to encounter comparable stressors and patterns of social media use, which may contribute more strongly to maladaptive daydreaming than gender itself.

The findings also indicate that interventions aimed at reducing maladaptive daydreaming should focus primarily on psychological risk factors such as stress, emotional regulation, and digital media use rather than on gender-specific approaches.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary

The present study was undertaken to examine maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students and to explore its relationship with perceived stress, boredom proneness, and social media use. In recent years, maladaptive daydreaming has emerged as an important area of psychological research due to its potential impact on academic performance, emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and daily functioning. At the same time, Generation Z has grown up in an increasingly digital environment where social media has become an integral part of everyday life. Academic demands, psychological stress, constant digital engagement, and changing social expectations make this population particularly relevant for understanding maladaptive daydreaming and its associated psychological factors.

A quantitative descriptive correlational research design was adopted for the study. Data were collected from 121 Generation Z college students aged 18 to 25 years using convenience sampling. Standardized psychological instruments were employed, namely the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16), the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS), and the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS). The collected data were analysed using SPSS. Statistical techniques including descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk test, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, Multiple Linear Regression, and the Independent Samples *t*-test were used to analyse the data.

The findings indicated that the majority of participants reported moderate levels of maladaptive daydreaming, perceived stress, boredom proneness, and social media use. Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and perceived stress, indicating that students who experienced higher levels of stress also reported greater maladaptive daydreaming. A significant positive relationship was

also found between maladaptive daydreaming and social media use, suggesting that greater engagement with social networking platforms was associated with increased maladaptive daydreaming. However, boredom proneness did not show a statistically significant relationship with maladaptive daydreaming in the present study.

Multiple Linear Regression analysis demonstrated that perceived stress and social media use significantly predicted maladaptive daydreaming, with social media use emerging as the strongest predictor. The Independent Samples *t*-test revealed no significant gender differences in maladaptive daydreaming among the participants.

The findings highlight that maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students is more closely associated with psychological stress and social media use than with demographic characteristics such as gender. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on maladaptive daydreaming and provides valuable insights into the psychological experiences of young adults in today's digital society.

## **5.2 Major Findings**

The major findings of the study are summarised below:

- The majority of Generation Z college students reported moderate levels of maladaptive daydreaming.
- Most participants experienced moderate levels of perceived stress.
- The majority of participants also reported moderate levels of boredom proneness.
- Most participants demonstrated moderate levels of social media use.
- A significant positive relationship was found between maladaptive daydreaming and perceived stress.

- A significant positive relationship was found between maladaptive daydreaming and social media use.
- No significant relationship was observed between maladaptive daydreaming and boredom proneness.
- Perceived stress and social media use significantly predicted maladaptive daydreaming, with social media use emerging as the stronger predictor.
- No significant gender differences were found in maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The present study provides further evidence that maladaptive daydreaming is a relevant psychological phenomenon among Generation Z college students. Although daydreaming is a normal aspect of human cognition, excessive and immersive fantasy can interfere with academic responsibilities, emotional well-being, and everyday functioning. The findings of the present study suggest that maladaptive daydreaming is associated with higher levels of perceived stress and greater social media use, indicating that these factors may contribute to excessive fantasy involvement among young adults.

The finding that social media use emerged as the strongest predictor of maladaptive daydreaming highlights the influence of digital environments on the psychological experiences of Generation Z. Constant exposure to highly stimulating online content may encourage immersive fantasy and escapism, particularly among individuals experiencing stress. While boredom proneness was found to be moderate among participants, it did not significantly influence maladaptive daydreaming in the present study.

#### **5.4 Implications of the Study**

- The findings of the present study have several important implications for counselling psychology, educational institutions, mental health professionals, and future research.
- The study contributes to the limited literature on maladaptive daydreaming within the Indian context and adds to the growing understanding of this emerging psychological construct among Generation Z college students.
- The findings may help counsellors and psychologists identify students who rely excessively on fantasy as a coping mechanism for stress and emotional difficulties. Early identification may facilitate timely psychological intervention and prevent further impairment in academic and personal functioning.
- Educational institutions may use the findings to develop mental health awareness programmes focusing on stress management, emotional regulation, adaptive coping strategies, and responsible social media use among students.
- The findings also highlight the importance of promoting healthy digital habits and encouraging balanced engagement with social networking platforms. Psychoeducation regarding excessive digital engagement and maladaptive coping strategies may help reduce psychological distress among college students.

#### **5.5 Limitations of the Study**

- The study was conducted using a relatively small sample of 121 participants, which may limit the generalisability of the findings.
- Convenience sampling was employed; therefore, the sample may not be fully representative of the wider population of Generation Z college students.

- The study relied entirely on self-report questionnaires. Participants' responses may have been influenced by social desirability, memory bias, or individual interpretation of the questionnaire items.
- As the study adopted a cross-sectional research design, causal relationships between the variables cannot be established.
- The study included only college students between the ages of 18 and 25 years; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to other age groups.
- Finally, the study examined only stress, boredom proneness, and social media use as correlates of maladaptive daydreaming. Other psychological variables such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, trauma, personality traits, emotional regulation, and coping styles were not included and may also influence maladaptive daydreaming.

## **5.6 Suggestions for Further Research**

- Future studies may be conducted using larger and more diverse samples to improve the generalisability of the findings.
- Researchers may employ probability sampling techniques to obtain more representative samples.
- Longitudinal studies may be undertaken to better understand the development and progression of maladaptive daydreaming over time.
- Future research may examine additional psychological variables such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, resilience, emotional regulation, personality traits, self-esteem, and coping strategies.
- Comparative studies involving different age groups, educational levels, and cultural backgrounds may provide a broader understanding of maladaptive daydreaming.

- Qualitative research may also be conducted to explore the lived experiences of individuals with maladaptive daydreaming and gain deeper insight into the emotional meaning and personal significance of immersive fantasy experiences.
- Intervention-based studies may be undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of counselling approaches, stress management programmes, and digital well-being interventions in reducing maladaptive daydreaming among young adults.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A- Informed Consent Form

#### **Title of the Study**

Maladaptive Daydreaming among Generation Z College Students: Associations with Stress, Boredom Proneness, and Social Media Use

#### **Researcher's Details**

Name of the Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Programme: M.Sc. Counselling Psychology

Institution: Loyola College of Social Sciences, Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

#### **Purpose of the Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study titled "Maladaptive Daydreaming among Generation Z College Students: Associations with Stress, Boredom Proneness, and Social Media Use." This study aims to examine the level of maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students and to explore its relationship with perceived stress, boredom proneness, and social media use.

The study is being conducted as part of the academic requirements for the award of the Master's Degree in Counselling Psychology. The findings of the study are expected to contribute to a better understanding of the psychological experiences of college students and may help in promoting awareness regarding healthy coping strategies and psychological well-being.

## **Procedure of the Study**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire consisting of a Personal Information Schedule and four standardized psychological assessment scales related to maladaptive daydreaming, perceived stress, boredom proneness, and social media use.

The questionnaire will take approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. You will be asked to respond honestly to each item based on your personal experiences. There are no right or wrong answers, and your responses will be used only for research purposes.

The demographic information collected includes your initials, age, gender, and year of study in college. No personally identifying information such as your full name, phone number, or email address will be collected.

## **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide whether or not to participate. You may refuse to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and may withdraw from the study at any stage before submitting your responses without providing any reason. Choosing not to participate or withdrawing from the study will not result in any penalty or negative consequences.

## **Confidentiality**

All information collected during the study will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your responses will remain anonymous, and no personally identifiable information will be disclosed in the dissertation, presentations, publications, or any academic reports arising from this research.

The data collected will be used solely for academic and research purposes. The findings will be presented only in aggregate form so that individual participants cannot be identified. All electronic data will be stored securely and will be accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisor.

### **Risks and Benefits**

There are no significant risks associated with participation in this study. Some questions may encourage you to reflect on your daydreaming experiences, stress, social media use, or feelings of boredom, which may cause mild psychological discomfort. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, you may choose to skip any question or discontinue your participation.

Although there may be no direct personal benefit, your participation will contribute to psychological research on maladaptive daydreaming among Generation Z college students. The findings may help counsellors, psychologists, educators, and researchers better understand factors associated with maladaptive daydreaming and contribute to the development of appropriate mental health awareness and intervention programmes.

### **Consent Declaration**

I have read and understood the information provided above regarding this research study. I have been informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of my responses, and the possible risks and benefits of participation.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time before submitting my responses without any negative consequences.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

**Name/Initials of the Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of the Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of the Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B - Personal Information Schedule**

Please provide the following information. The information collected will be used only for research purposes and will be kept confidential.

**1. Initials:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Age:** \_\_\_\_\_ years

**3. Gender:**

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Other

☐ Prefer not to say

**4. Year of Study:**

☐ First Year Undergraduate

☐ Second Year Undergraduate

☐ Third Year Undergraduate

☐ Fourth Year Undergraduate

☐ First Year Postgraduate

☐ Second Year Postgraduate

☐ Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C- Assessment Tools

### Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16)

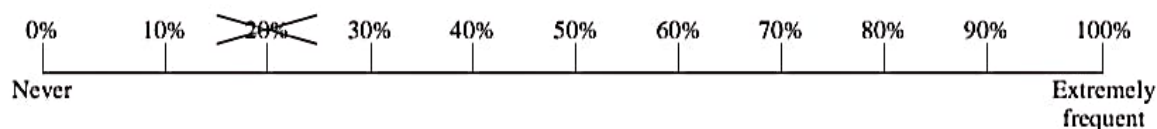
MDS

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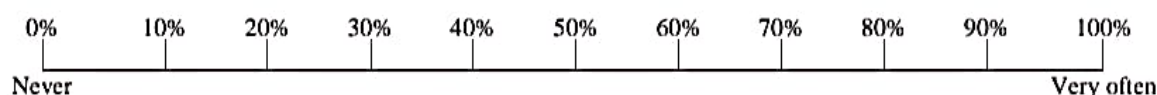
#### The 16-item Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16)

Eli Somer, Jayne Bigelsen, Jonathan Lehrfeld &amp; Daniela Jopp

In answering the following questions, please refer to your daydreaming activities in the last month, if not otherwise specified. Choose the option that best fits your experience. For example: Some people get so caught up in their daydreaming that they forget where they are. How often do you forget where you are when you daydream? In this example, 20% is chosen.



1. Some people notice that certain music can trigger their daydreaming. To what extent does music activate your daydreaming?



2. Some people feel a need to continue a daydream that was interrupted by a real world event at a later point. When a real world event has interrupted one of your daydreams, how strong was your need or urge to return to that daydream as soon as possible?



3. How often are your current daydreams accompanied by vocal noises or facial expressions (e.g. laughing, talking or mouthing the words)?



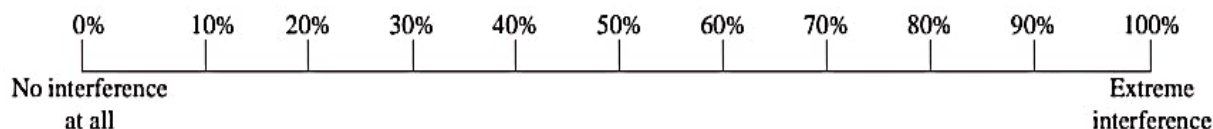
4. If you go through a period of time when you are not able to daydream as much as usual due to real world obligations, how distressed are you by your inability to find time to daydream?



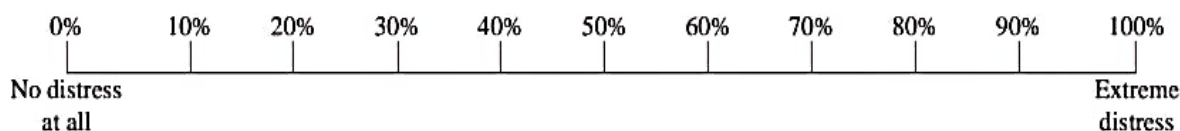
MDS

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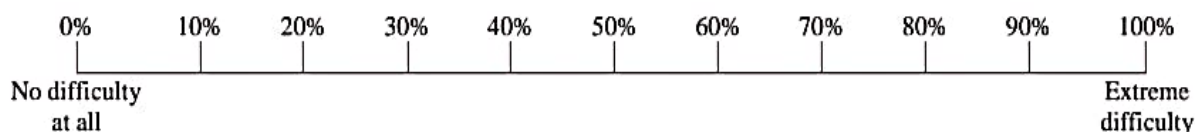
5. Some people have the experience of their daydreaming interfering with their daily chores or tasks. How much does your daydreaming interfere with your ability to get basic chores accomplished?



6. Some people feel distressed or concerned about the amount of time they spend daydreaming. How distressed do you currently feel about the amount of time you spend daydreaming?



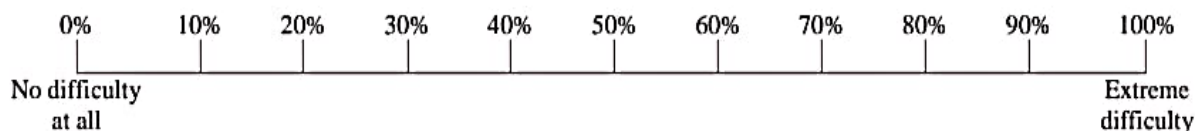
7. When you know you have had something important or challenging to pay attention to or finish, how difficult was it for you to stay on task and complete the goal without daydreaming?



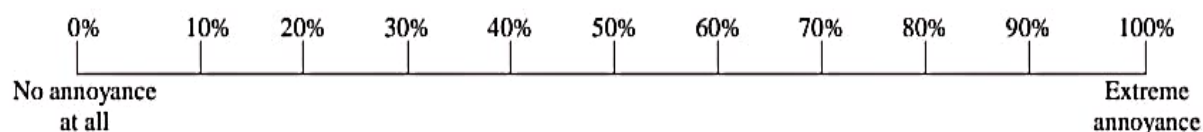
8. Some people have the experience of their daydreaming hindering the things that are most important to them. How much do you feel that your daydreaming activities interfere with achieving your overall life goals?



9. Some people experience difficulties in controlling or limiting their daydreaming. How difficult has it been for you to keep your daydreaming under control?



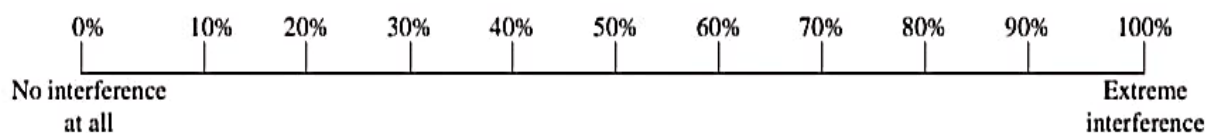
10. Some people feel annoyed when a real world event interrupts one of their daydreams. When the real world interrupts one of your daydreams, on average how annoyed do you feel?



MDS

Page 3 of 3

11. Some people have the experience of their daydreaming interfering with their academic/occupational success or personal achievements. How much does your daydreaming interfere with your academic/occupational success?



12. Some people would rather daydream than do most other things. To what extent would you rather daydream than engage with other people or participate in social activities or hobbies?



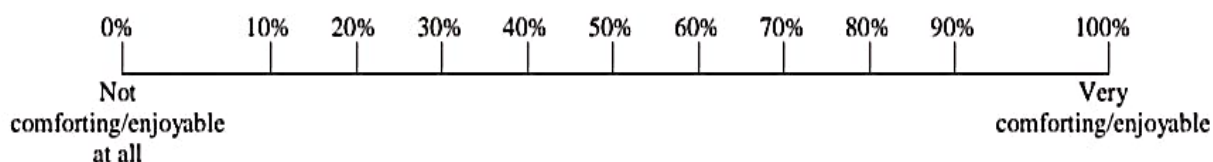
13. When you first wake up in the morning, how strong has your urge been to immediately start daydreaming?



14. How often are your current daydreams accompanied by physical activity such as pacing, swinging or shaking your hands?



15. Some people love to daydream. While you are daydreaming, to what extent do you find it comforting and/or enjoyable?



16. Some people find it hard to maintain their daydreaming when they are not listening to music. To what extent is your daydreaming dependent on continued listening to music?



## Perceived Stress Scale 10 (PSS-10)

### Perceived Stress Scale

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts **during the last month**. In each case, you will be asked to indicate by circling *how often* you felt or thought a certain way.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender (Circle): M F Other \_\_\_\_\_

0 = Never    1 = Almost Never    2 = Sometimes    3 = Fairly Often    4 = Very Often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?..... 0    1    2    3    4
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?..... 0    1    2    3    4
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"? ..... 0    1    2    3    4
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?..... 0    1    2    3    4
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?..... 0    1    2    3    4
6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? ..... 0    1    2    3    4
7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? ..... 0    1    2    3    4
8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?..... 0    1    2    3    4
9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control? ..... 0    1    2    3    4
10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?..... 0    1    2    3    4



1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - Somewhat disagree; 4 - Neutral;  
5 - Somewhat agree; 6 - Agree; 7 - Strongly agree

| Items                                                                                             | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 18. I often wake up with a new idea.                                                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 19. It would be very hard for me to find a job that is exciting enough.                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 20. I would like more challenging things to do in life.                                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 21. I feel that I am working below my abilities most of the time.                                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 22. Many people would say that I am a creative or imaginative person.                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 23. I have so many interests, I don't have time to do everything.                                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 24. Among my friends, I am the one who keeps doing something the longest.                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 25. Unless I am doing something exciting, even dangerous, I feel half-dead and dull.              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 26. It takes a lot of change and variety to keep me really happy.                                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 27. It seems that the same things are on television or the movies all the time; it's getting old. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 28. When I was young, I was often in monotonous and tiresome situations..                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| <b>Total score:</b>                                                                               |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |

### Scoring and Interpretation

The Boredom Proneness Scale is a self-reported questionnaire consisting of 28 items, rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Items 1, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 18, 22, 23, and 24 are reverse scored. To calculate the total score, reverse these items first, then add up all the scores. Higher scores indicate a greater tendency to experience boredom.

### Remarks

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## Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)

### **Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale**

1. You spend a lot of time thinking about social media or planning how to use it.

Very rarely

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Very often

2. You feel an urge to use social media more and more.

Very rarely

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Very often

3. You use social media in order to forget about personal problems.

Very rarely

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Very often

4. You have tried to cut down on the use of social media without success.

Very rarely

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Very often

5. You become restless or troubled if you are prohibited from using social media.

Very rarely

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Very often

6. You use social media so much that it has had a negative impact on your job/studies.

Very rarely

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Very often

### **Scoring and Interpretation of BSMAS**

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) is a concise and effective tool for evaluating the extent of social media addiction. It consists of six items, each rated on a **5-point Likert scale** ranging from 1 ("very rarely") to 5 ("very often"). The items are designed to assess the degree of preoccupation with social media, including the amount of time spent thinking about or planning to use social media, urges to use it more, using social media to forget personal problems, unsuccessful attempts to cut down usage, feeling restless or troubled when prohibited from using it, and the negative impact of excessive use on job or studies.

The total score of the BSMAS ranges from 6 to 30, with higher scores indicating a greater risk of problematic social media use (PSMU). Research using the Item Response Theory (IRT) has shown that scores exceeding **26 out of 30 point to a higher risk of PSMU**. This scale is particularly reliable for assessing average to high levels of the trait.

According to some studies, a **score of 24 or higher on the BSMAS is considered the optimal clinical cut-off for diagnosing social media disorder (SMD), especially among adolescents**. This cut-off point was determined based on the gold standards of clinical diagnosis and the estimated 12-month prevalence of SMD among Chinese adolescents was found to be 3.5%.

In terms of interpretive guidelines, it's generally believed that scoring more than 3 on at least 4 out of the 6 items could indicate an addiction to social media. This is based on the idea that higher scores in most of the criteria signify greater severity or frequency of the behaviours or feelings associated with social media addiction.

Moreover, the BSMAS has been **validated and adapted for different cultural contexts and age groups**, highlighting its relevance and applicability in various settings. The scale underscores the growing importance of understanding and addressing the psychological impacts of social media, especially among younger demographics