



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Islamic Solutions to Gen Z's Cognitive Challenges: A Path to Meaningful Life

Morteza Agha Mohammadi^{1*}

1. Assistant Prof. Department of Islamic Studies, the Higher Educational Complex of Language, literature, and Culture, Al Mustafa International University, Qom, Iran. (Corresponding Author)*

ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT	
Article History: Received: 20 March 2024 Revised: 15 May 2024 Accepted: 10 June 2024		SUBJECT & OBJECTIVES: This paper examines the cognitive challenges "Generation Z" faces and offers guidance based on Islamic teachings to address these issues.	
Key Words: Generation Z Cognitive Challenges Information Overload Gaslighting Virtual Life Instant Gratification Reduced Attention Span		METHOD & FINDING: Utilizing a descriptive and analytical approach, the article identifies key challenges as the virtual-real-life imbalance, susceptibility to gaslighting, information overload, the pursuit of instant gratification, and a diminished attention span. Islamic teachings offer practical solutions to these challenges. The paper is based on Cognitive-Behavioural Theory (CBT) as its theoretical framework.	
DOI: 10.22034/imjpl.2024.9965		CONCLUSION: From an Islamic perspective, practical strategies for enhancing the cognitive well-being of this generation include appreciating the value of time, fostering self-awareness, promoting <i>Wasatīyyah</i> (moderation), cultivating <i>Ṣilah ar-Raḥim</i> (genuine relationships) especially with family, regulating desires, verifying information before acceptance, seeking beneficial knowledge, managing time effectively, practicing self-reflection, encouraging critical thinking, developing patience, expressing gratitude, practicing <i>Khushū'</i> (mindfulness in worship), reciting and contemplating the Qur'an, avoiding excessive entertainment, engaging in social interaction, and seeking guidance from scholars. The mentioned factors are crucial in overcoming the challenges encountered by Generation Z.	
This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). 			
* Corresponding Author: Email: m_ghamohammadi@miu.ac.ir ORCID: 0009-0004-9171-4398		Article Address Published on the Journal Site: http://p-l.journals.miu.ac.ir/article_9965.html	
NUMBER OF REFERENCES 34		NUMBER OF AUTHORS 1	NATIONALITY OF AUTHOR Iran

Introduction

Generation Z faces unique cognitive challenges in the modern era due to the rapid advancement of new technologies. Growing up in an environment saturated with digital devices, social media, and instant access to information has profoundly impacted their cognitive development. These technological changes have introduced several cognitive challenges for Generation Z.

Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing strategies to support Generation Z's cognitive and psychological health in an increasingly digital world. Using a descriptive-analytic approach, this paper deals with some major cognitive challenges this generation faces and some advice according to the Islamic teachings will be suggested.

These cognitive challenges are particularly pertinent today due to the rapidly evolving global landscape. Recent global events and trends have exacerbated these issues, each contributing to the unique experiences of this generation. The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered how Generation Z interacts with both their peers and the world. With social distancing measures in place, many young individuals became heavily reliant on virtual platforms for communication and socialization. This shift has led to an increasing struggle to balance online interactions with offline relationships. The constant engagement with digital

devices can blur the lines between virtual and real-life experiences, leading to feelings of isolation and disconnection when not interacting online. As a result, fostering a healthy balance has become critical for their mental well-being.

Theoretical Foundations

1. Generation Gap

A generation gap refers to the chasm that separates the beliefs and behaviors belonging to members of two different generations. More specifically, a generation gap can describe the differences in thoughts, actions, and tastes exhibited by members of younger generations vs. older ones. The differences may be in politics, values, pop culture, and other areas. While generation gaps have been prevalent throughout all periods of history, the breadth of differences of these gaps has widened in the 20th and 21st centuries (*Hayes, 2022*). The internet and social media have widened the generational gap (*ZeinaliPoor, 2017, p. 79*).

In the context of Generation Z there are notable distinctions compared to previous generations. These differences arise from the unique social, economic, and technological environments each generation has experienced. One of the most defining characteristics of Generation Z is their identity as digital natives.

According to a GlobalWebIndex poll, 77% of Gen Z spend at least three hours a day using their smartphones, a significant increase compared to the previous

generation, many of whom experienced their formative years without such ubiquitous digital technology (*Amberblog, 2023*). Over 90% of Gen Z members own a smartphone, with 94% indicating that smartphones are their preferred device for accessing social media and content, reflecting a deeper integration of technology into their daily lives than previous cohorts (*CTA, 2024*).

2. Generation X, Y, and Z

The generation born between 1965 and 1980 is called 'Generation X. *"Anyone born between 1981 and 1996 is considered a Millennial, also known as Generation Y, and anyone born from 1997 onward is part of a new generation who came to be called Generation Z, the iGeneration, and Home landers"* (*Dimock, 2019*). The term Generation Z colloquially known as Zoomers is used to refer to people born in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The term is modeled on boomer, a common shortening of baby boomer, and earlier use of zoomer referred to physically active baby boomer (*Merriam-Webster, 2021*). It is commonly called Gen Z, and Gen Zers for short. This generation is considered to last till 2012 and after that comes Generation Alpha (*Warren, 2024*). Gen Zers are the first generation never to know the world without the internet (*Katz et al., 2021, p. 1*).

3. Second life

Second Life is a life-simulation network on the Internet created in 2003 by the

American company Linden Research, Inc. Second Life allows users to create and manage the lives of avatars they create in an advanced social setting with other online "Residents." Although it parallels a video game in some ways, Second Life lacks typical gaming objectives. Instead, it presents a world where users can create a persona and build a virtual life (*Ray, 2012*).

Method of Research

Using a descriptive and analytical approach, the paper is based on Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT) as its theoretical framework. CBT is a well-established psychological framework that focuses on identifying and changing unhelpful cognitive distortions and behaviors. It can be particularly useful for addressing the cognitive challenges faced by Gen Z, such as identity crises, susceptibility to gaslighting, and information overload. This framework allows for a structured analysis of how thoughts influence emotions and behaviors while integrating spiritual and ethical guidance from Islamic teachings.

The first step in practicing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is to clearly define the specific issue or problem that the individuals are facing. Data regarding these challenges is collected from observations and research conducted by others. Following this, Islamic solutions are proposed, incorporating behavioral activation techniques that encourage individuals to engage in enriching activities to effectively address these challenges.

One of the core tenets of CBT is the identification and modification of negative thought patterns that contribute to emotional distress and behavioral problems. Given that Generation Z grapples with issues such as misinformation, self-doubt influenced by social media, and an overwhelming flow of information, CBT's focus on cognitive restructuring allows individuals to develop healthier thought patterns and coping strategies. CBT is inherently pragmatic, emphasizing skills and tools that individuals can apply in their daily lives. The application of CBT in this study will focus on addressing key cognitive challenges faced by Generation Z. For example, CBT techniques such as behavioral activation will be employed to encourage Generation Z to engage in real-world activities that foster meaningful social interactions and experiences outside the digital realm. This can help mitigate feelings of isolation and improve their overall mental health.

Literature Review

The cognitive challenges faced by Generation Z have emerged as a significant concern, driven by rapid technological advancements that alter perceptions and interactions with the world. Scholars have begun to explore these challenges in depth through various publications. Notable works include the book *"The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains"* written by Nicholas Carr, in which the author

examines how the Internet affects cognitive processes and attention spans.

The next one is the book *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (2012) by Sherry Turkle. He addressed the detriments of communication and social interactions.

Additionally, the book *The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World* (2016) written by Adam Gazzaley and Larry D. Rosen elaborates on cognitive overload.

iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood (2017) written by Jean M. Twenge examines the mental health implications of digital connectivity for today's youth.

While these works provide valuable insights into the cognitive difficulties of Generation Z, they primarily adopt secular viewpoints that overlook spiritual or ethical dimensions that could help mitigate these issues. This study aims to provide a more comprehensive analysis that includes often-neglected moral and spiritual aspects, presenting a unique approach to navigating the complexities of the digital age while supporting cognitive and psychological well-being.

Cognitive Challenges Before Generation Z

Understanding the cognitive challenges of this generation is crucial for educators, employers, and policymakers to support them in developing the skills

needed to thrive in a complex and rapidly evolving digital landscape. By addressing these issues proactively, it is possible to help this generation harness the benefits of technology while mitigating its potential drawbacks. Below, five cognitive challenges confronting this generation will be analyzed. These challenges are derived through inductive reasoning and there may be additional cognitive challenges that have yet to be identified.

1. Falling Into the Trap of Virtual Life

The breakthroughs in IT such as the virtual life or “second life”, made the modern man more confused in defining himself, his values, goals, and purpose of life; going that much further sometimes to prefer to live as their avatars in the second life or spending long hours a day in the virtual life by being connected to social media, trying to run away from the realities, hardships, and challenges of the real life. This preference can be attributed to the nature of online communication, the psychological comfort it provides, as well as the opportunities it presents. Individuals with introverted tendencies often find it challenging to vocalize their thoughts in face-to-face settings due to social anxieties or public speaking fears (*Mehta, 2017*).

It also enables individuals to connect with like-minded people beyond geographical boundaries and to broaden their social networks (*Thomas, 2016*).

Lastly, virtual interactions allow users to create and engage with idealized versions of themselves or their experiences, often termed “avatars.” This ability can foster a sense of control over how one is perceived, providing a buffer against the inherent vulnerabilities of real-life interactions (*Tourjée, 2016*). Getting accustomed to virtual life causes the boundaries between the virtual and reality to blur in a person's mind. Consequently, individuals may fail to recognize their real priorities in life and may make mistakes in prioritizing their goals and values. To avoid such cognitive harm, Islam has some practical recommendations from many, some can be mentioned such as:

• Appreciating The Value of Time

Valuing time and recognizing that worldly life is a farm for the Hereafter can help individuals avoid becoming overwhelmed by virtual life and daily distractions. This perspective leads to a change in one's understanding of life and how to utilize time effectively as Imam Ali said, “The opportunities pass like the clouds, so seize them for doing good deeds” (*Sharīf al-Raḍī, 11th century CE, p. 471*).

Parents can implement a structured afternoon routine for their Gen Z children that prioritizes time management and reduces excessive virtual life engagement. For example, the routine can be designed around the concept of “Unplugged Hours,” where children are

encouraged to engage in offline activities that promote personal growth and well-being. Also, parents can incorporate family activities into their routines. It can include family activities that encourage bonding and collaboration, such as cooking together, outdoor games, or engaging in artistic projects. By promoting family engagement, parents not only manage their child's screen time but also create shared memories and strengthen familial bonds.

- ***Wasafīyyah (Moderation)***

Islam advocates moderation in all aspects of life. Prophet Muhammad said, "The best of affairs are those that are moderate" (*Bayhaqi, 2003, Vol. 8, p. 518*).

Encouraging balanced use of technology can help Generation Z maintain a healthier relationship with the digital world, preventing it from overshadowing real-life interactions and personal growth. Here, engaging the youth with sports and other physical activities fosters a lot. To promote moderation among Generation Z, schools can introduce a balanced lifestyle program that integrates moderation. This program would combine educational activities, physical health, and mindfulness practices, all aimed at cultivating a balanced approach to technology use and lifestyle choices. They can also organize workshops focused on the concept of moderation in daily life, particularly about technology use. Policymakers can support

community action campaigns that highlight the importance of moderation in technology use. These campaigns can include public service announcements, social media challenges prompting balanced technology usage, or events that promote offline gatherings. By framing these efforts within an Islamic context of moderation, they provide community backing to educate families on establishing healthy habits in technology consumption.

- ***Ṣilah ar-Raḥīm (Genuine Social Connections)***

Islam places a strong emphasis on maintaining family ties and fostering genuine relationships. Compassion and communication with friends and relatives can fill the gaps in human life and help people face the realities of life instead of escaping them. Prophet Muhammad said, "He who severs the ties of kinship will not enter Paradise" (*Bukhari, 2001, Vol. 8, p. 5*).

By prioritizing real-life relationships and community engagement, Generation Z can build a solid support system that reinforces their identity and values. To foster strong family ties and enhance social connections through organized community engagement, parents and children can enjoy board games and team-building activities that encourage interaction and collaboration. Also, scheduled picnics at local parks, where families can enjoy meals together, can promote outdoor activities, reducing screen

time. Organizing monthly gatherings for parents to discuss challenges, share experiences, and provide mutual support can help strengthen family ties and healthy communications.

2. Susceptibility to Gaslighting

Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation in which one person tries to make another person doubt their perceptions, memory, or sanity. The term comes from the 1938 play "Gas Light" and its subsequent film adaptations, in which a husband manipulates his wife into believing she is losing her sanity by making subtle changes to their environment and insisting she is mistaken or imagining things when she notices them (*Psychology Today*, 2023). When gaslighters take to the big stage of politics, traditional media, or social media. The potential to destabilize, skew reality, abuse, and control behavior and choices soar (*Sarkis*, 2018: 100).

Media can also engage in gaslighting. This can occur in several ways like misinformation, disinformation, bias, framing, downplaying or dismissing issues, and diverging narratives. Social media platforms serve as major arenas where gaslighting can occur. In these spaces, misinformation can spread rapidly, leading youth to question their understanding of events or realities. For example, influencers may distort facts for entertainment, and followers might internalize this misinformation, leading

them to doubt their perceptions. Cases where influencers accuse others of gaslighting in conflicts without providing valid evidence can also create confusion among their audiences (*Dodgson & Colomb*, 2021).

The first step to take towards being free from gaslighting is to recognize exactly what gaslighting is. It is often very hard to recognize the signs of gaslighting because they affect the mind so much that, after a long period, the victim does not trust their thoughts (*Mind*, 2020, p. 14). According to *Mind*, when we glorify the deceiver—when we need to consider him to be the love of our life, a commendable boss, or a brilliant parent—then, we make it more difficult to adhere to our sense of reality (*Ibid*, p. 17). Thus, one of the effective elements making people likely to be gaslighted is their wishes, likes, ambitions and loves that make them blind and not capable of seeing the truth. Imam Ali said, "Control your desires and passions, and your wisdom will reach its full potential" (*Āmidī*, 1989, p. 132).

The power to control one's self against temptations will free man from the servitude of desires. Imam al-Kāzīm said, "Distant dreams darken the intellect" (*Kulaynī*, 1986, Vol. 1, p. 17).

Thus, it is essential to first regulate one's system of likes and desires based on rationality. More so, developing skills to analyze the data one receives can be very useful.

• Investigation Before Acceptance

It is significant to consider the sources one receives the information. Even though, one should not be biased in learning and man can seek knowledge from anyone, this is not what all people can manage and ordinary people are prone to be fooled by crooked media and news sources. Thus, many people need to get their knowledge from reliable sources. Allah advises Muslims to double-check the news brought about by non-reliable sources and says,

“O you who believe! If an evil-doer comes to you with a report, look carefully into it, lest you harm a people in ignorance, then be sorry for what you have done” (The Qur'an, 49: 6).

Trusting one source without investigation may gaslight people in a long term. To equip the youth with such capability, a series of digital literacy workshops can be organized in community centers or schools, focusing on the importance of investigating information before accepting it as true. These workshops would be designed to involve both parents and their teens, fostering open communication about the digital landscape. They can also engage in group activities that involve analyzing real-life examples of misinformation and applying investigation techniques to discern the truth.

• Critical Thinking

The Holy Qur'an encourages us to employ critical thinking in analyzing and evaluating

information to formulate effective responses. For instance, Prophet Abraham urged His tribe to engage their critical faculties to recognize their error in worshipping idols. He challenged them, asking,

“He said: What! do you then serve besides Allah what brings you not any benefit at all, nor does it harm you?” (The Qur'an, 21: 66).

On another occasion, He accompanied star worshipers. In this respect, Allah said,

“So when the night overshadowed him, he saw a star; said he: Is this my Lord? So when it set, he said: I do not love the setting ones.” (The Qur'an, 6: 76).

The star disappeared so it could not be God. God is always present. Abraham demonstrated how critical thinking can illuminate the truth and encourage introspection without resorting to personal attacks. Similarly, in a dialogue between Pharaoh, and a faithful man, despite Pharaoh's overwhelming power, the Man posed a pivotal question,

“...What! will you slay a man because he says: My Lord is Allah, and indeed he has brought to you clear arguments from your Lord?...” (The Qur'an, 40: 28).

Aware of his vulnerable position and Pharaoh's dominance, the Muslim neither attacked Pharaoh nor defended Prophet Moses. This exchange underscores the value of critical debate for all who seek wisdom. Reflecting on these dialogues, the Qur'an teaches us to

harness our critical thinking abilities when evaluating information. Muslims are encouraged to verify sources, consider different perspectives, and reflect on the relevance and implications of the information they encounter. In today's world, where social networks are widespread and information is rapidly produced and shared in cyberspace, it is essential to teach critical thinking skills in schools and integrate them into the curriculum. Students can participate in activities where they evaluate real news stories and social media posts to discern fact from fiction. This interactive approach encourages the practical application of critical thinking skills.

3. Information Overload

Information overload is a problem that is being exacerbated by the ongoing digitalization of the world and the growing use of information and communication technologies (Arnold, 2023). Information overload refers to the overwhelming abundance of information available to individuals, often resulting in difficulty in processing and making sense of it all (Appinio Research, 2023). Social media, news websites, blogs, and online forums constantly bombard users with new content. Constant exposure to vast amounts of information can lead to difficulty in filtering out relevant information from noise, affecting their ability to focus and make decisions like a person looking for a specific type of screw in a box containing hundreds of different

types and sizes. Having too many choices can sometimes lead to analysis paralysis and decision paralysis, where individuals find it difficult to decide due to fear of making the wrong choice or because they're constantly seeking more information to make a perfect decision. Psychologist Barry Schwartz identified the paradox of choice. He found that too many choices make decision-making difficult (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023). For example, a study reveals that COVID-19 information overload through social media harmed Gen Z social media users' psychological and cognitive well-being (Liu et al, 2021).

From an Islamic perspective, managing information overload can be approached through several principles:

- **Seeking Beneficial Knowledge**

Muslims are encouraged to seek beneficial knowledge that enhances their understanding of faith, improves their character, and benefits society. One day, the Prophet found a group of people gathered around a man who was a master of Arab genealogies, pre-Islamic history, and Arabic poetry. The Prophet then remarked,

"If this knowledge is unknown to others, it brings no harm. If known, it offers no benefit"
(Kulaynī, 1986. Vol. 1: 32).

It is important to note that during that era in Hijaz, people had limited exposure to information so they probably had enough time to spend on

unnecessary subjects as well. On the other hand, learning subjects like genealogy was significant in their culture. However, the Prophet urged prioritizing knowledge that truly matters. This emphasizes the importance of purposeful learning, avoiding trivial information, and focusing on valuable insights. Just as the Qur'an advises Muslims to be mindful of their dietary intake (*Ref: The Qur'an, 80: 24*), ensuring it is Halal and beneficial, similarly, as Imam al-Baqir said, "One should guard against filling their hearts and minds with useless conceptual and spiritual food that does not serve a meaningful purpose" (*Kulaynī, 1986, Vol. 1, p. 50*).

Purposeful reading and intake help filter out unnecessary or harmful information. To apply this in society, a "Knowledge Enhancement Program" can be initiated within local communities, schools, or mosques. This program would include a series of workshops, lectures, and interactive sessions specifically designed to teach young individuals how to identify, filter, and engage with beneficial knowledge in a way that counters information overload.

• Time Management

Besides the emphasis Islam places on prioritizing activities based on their benefits, as was already stated, Islam also encourages effective time management. In the Qur'an, time holds such reverence that Allah swears by it in chapter 103. He

emphasizes that all people are at a loss except those who utilize their time wisely, believe rightly, and perform good deeds to make the most of this valuable life. Islamic religious texts stress the importance of paying attention to time, using it wisely, and giving it due consideration. The Prophet advised Abu Dharr, His companion, to prioritize safeguarding his life and managing his time with greater sensitivity than accumulating wealth (*Tusi, 1993, p. 527*). This guidance allows individuals to allocate sufficient time for seeking knowledge while balancing other responsibilities and activities.

• Self-reckoning

Due to the importance of self-reckoning, many Hadiths emphasize its significance. Imam Ali said, "Anyone who examines himself will find his faults, be well-informed about his sins, and will erase and compensate for his shortcomings" (*Laithī al-Wāsiṭī, 1997, p. 435*).

In this respect, Imam al-Kāzīm said, "He is not one of us who does not account himself every day, so that if he did good deeds, he may request Allah to give him the chance to do more, and if he did something wrong, he may repent to Allah and ask for forgiveness" (*Kulaynī, 1986, Vol. 2, p. 453*).

Muslim scholars have frequently emphasized the decisive impact of self-reckoning in one's life. Furthermore, when it comes to self-reckoning, mystics put it into four stages:

- I. ***Al-Mush'ārīṭah* (Preconditioning):** Setting some preconditions for oneself early in the morning to practice God-pleasing acts and avoid sins
- II. ***Al-Murāqibah* (Self-watchfulness):** Observing vigilance and controlling one's deeds daily to fulfill duties and avoid committing sins.
- III. ***Al-Muḥāsibah* (Self-examination):** At night one should study and examine what he has done during the day.
- IV. ***Al-Mu'ātībah* (Self-rebuke) and *Al-Mu'āqibah* (Self-punishment):**

It is worth mentioning that the punishment does not mean physically hurting one's self, as it can be found in some non-Islamic traditions. In Islamic mysticism it is recommended to punish one's self by some permissible mortifications like fasting, paying charity, dedicating time to serve others, praying and reciting the Qur'an, etc (*Agha Mohammadi, 2021, pp. 63-64*).

Two important phases in the process of self-reckoning can help in better decision-making and information analysis. The first is filtering information one receives so he is careful not to surf unnecessarily. The second is the practice of making at least small decisions every day. Making small decisions quickly can train the brain to make larger ones

more efficiently (*Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023*). Thus, self-reckoning can help manage the information one receives and avoid analysis paralysis due to information overload. To practice this as a family, it is beneficial to incorporate a short session at the end of the day dedicated to reflection on how the day was spent. During this time, family members can discuss what they accomplished, what they enjoyed, and what could be improved upon. This practice helps children appreciate the value of their time and reinforces accountability for how they utilize their hours (*Gururaj, 2024*). Also, a series of self-reckoning sessions can be organized in schools, community centers, or youth clubs, specifically tailored to engage students in reflective practices.

• Seeking Guidance through Scholars and Experts

Consulting knowledgeable scholars and experts in various fields helps individuals navigate complex issues and validate information according to wisdom. The Qur'an advises people to be in connection to learned scholars and consult them in the issues they face in their life,

“And We did not send before you any but men to whom We sent revelation-- so ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know”
(*The Qur'an, 16: 43 & 21: 7*).

It is of vital importance to refer different issues to experts in their

specific fields to make better choices and decisions. To attain this, local communities, mosques, and educational institutions can come together to establish “Knowledge Hubs” dedicated to facilitating access to expert guidance. These hubs can be set up in places of worship or community centers, providing a welcoming environment for young people to gather, learn, and seek guidance on various informational topics. In addition to physical hubs, online platforms or forums can be created to allow broader access. The Knowledge Hubs can organize regular lectures and Q&A sessions led by qualified scholars and experts on topics relevant to navigating information overload.

4. The Instant Gratification Culture

The digital age often emphasizes instant gratification and quick fixes, which can undermine long-term decision-making skills that require patience and deeper consideration of consequences. Instant Gratification is the desire to experience pleasure or fulfillment without delay. It refers to the preference for a quick reward over a delayed but potentially more substantial one. For example, opting to eat a dessert immediately instead of waiting for a healthier meal, or choosing to spend money now rather than saving it for future needs, are instances of instant gratification. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat offer instantaneous validation through likes, comments, and shares. This immediate

feedback loop encourages users to seek constant engagement and approval, creating a dependency on these platforms for emotional satisfaction. The pursuit of likes and social recognition can lead to increased anxiety and pressure to curate one's online persona, as users often feel compelled to achieve higher engagement metrics (*Flex & Assoc, 2023*).

The allure of instant gratification is rooted in human psychology, where the brain's reward system seeks pleasure and releases dopamine, the "feel-good" neurotransmitter when we receive quick rewards like social media “likes” or one-tap orders. This creates a loop of seeking more instant rewards (*Mahbub, 2023*). The digital age, with its emphasis on instant gratification and quick fixes, can have several cognitive harms that affect our ability to make thoughtful, long-term decisions. Frequent exposure to immediate rewards e.g., likes, comments, or quick answers, can diminish the brain's ability to delay gratification. This can impact self-control and increase impulsive behaviors, making it harder to wait for long-term benefits (*Alsop, 2014*). If individuals become accustomed to quick results, they may lose the capacity to persevere through challenges or delays. This can affect their ability to engage in tasks that require sustained effort, such as studying, working on long-term projects, or saving money.

Adhering to the guidelines and solutions previously mentioned

regarding earlier issues also helps in effectively and successfully addressing this matter. Besides, Islam offers several teachings and practices to help overcome the culture of instant gratification. Here are some key Islamic principles and practices that address this issue:

- **Patience**

The Qur'an frequently emphasizes the virtue of patience. Allah says,

"And be patient, for surely Allah does not waste the reward of the good-doers." (The Qur'an, 11:115).

Muslims are encouraged to practice patience in their daily lives, whether it's in their worship, interactions with others, or facing life's challenges. Patience helps to delay gratification and focus on long-term rewards. To promote the value of patience and delayed gratification among children through a family savings challenge that emphasizes the benefits of saving for a larger, more meaningful goal rather than seeking immediate rewards.

- **Delayed Gratification in Worship**

Regular prayers, five times a day, are a discipline that requires setting aside time, focusing, and delaying other activities. This ritual teaches the importance of prioritizing spiritual over material gratification. The Qur'an commands believers to take recourse in patience and prayer (*Ref: The Qur'an, 2: 45*). Schools can engage students in activities that illustrate the principles of delayed

gratification. For instance, students can set personal goals—like improving their study habits or preparing for a competition—requiring them to forego certain leisure activities in favor of focused practice.

5. Reduced Attention Span

Constant exposure to digital stimuli, such as notifications, social media, and rapid content consumption, can lead to a state where people are frequently shifting their focus from one task to another (*Alsop, 2014*).

This overwhelming amount of rapidly consumable content fosters shallow engagement, making it difficult for users to focus for more extended periods. A study indicates that the average attention span for consuming content on platforms like TikTok is around 8 seconds, leading to a preference for bite-sized information (*FE News Editor, 2022*). This can result in a reduced ability to concentrate on a single task for an extended period. The habit of rapidly switching tasks can undermine the brain's ability to engage in deep, sustained focus, which is crucial for complex problem-solving and critical thinking. Previously mentioned strategies, such as self-reckoning, time management, and purposeful use, can also be beneficial in addressing this issue.

Islamic teachings offer several strategies to help the youth cultivate focus and avoid a reduced attention span, a

common issue in today's fast-paced, distraction-filled world. Here are some key pieces of advice to add to what has already been mentioned above:

- ***Khushū*' (Mindfulness in Worship)**

The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of humbled mindfulness during prayers. Muslims are encouraged to perform their prayers with full concentration (*Ref: The Qur'an, 20: 3*), focusing on the words they recite and their connection with Allah. This practice trains the mind to be present and attentive. Praying five times a day is an opportunity to break away from distractions and center the mind. This regular practice of mindfulness can enhance overall focus in other areas of life. Community centers can schedule regular Mindful Prayer Events where families gather for group prayers followed by mindfulness activities focused on the principles of *Khushū*'. Parents can encourage children to share their thoughts on how mindfulness during Salah helps them concentrate better in school or other activities.

- **Recitation and Contemplation of the Qur'an**

The Qur'an encourages believers to recite its verses slowly and thoughtfully. Allah says,

"Or add to it, and recite the Quran as it ought to be recited."
(*The Qur'an, 73:4*).

This practice requires attention and contemplation, helping to strengthen concentration. Reflecting on the meanings of the Qur'anic verses encourages deep thinking. This habit of reflection can improve one's ability to focus and engage in other activities more attentively. Local mosques and community centers can host workshops dedicated to Qur'an recitation and contemplation. Each workshop can begin with a group recitation of selected verses from the Qur'an, followed by guided reflection sessions. This helps participants practice mindfulness by focusing on the words and their meanings, encouraging deeper comprehension and connection.

- **Avoiding Excessive Entertainment**

Islam emphasizes balance and moderation and teaches the importance of moderation in all aspects of life (*Ref: The Qur'an, 28: 76*). Engaging in purposeful and meaningful activities, rather than mindless entertainment, can help train the mind to focus. Activities like reading beneficial books, engaging in constructive hobbies, and participating in community service are encouraged. Families can plan a series of engaging, screen-free activities throughout the day that promote mindfulness and active participation. These can include workshops, outdoor games, group discussions, and skill-building sessions that encourage interaction without digital distractions.

- **Community and Social Interaction**

Islam encourages participation in beneficial gatherings and keeping the company of those who remind one of Allah (*Ref: The Qur'an, 9: 119*). Positive social interactions can inspire youth to engage in activities that require focus and mindfulness. Local mosques, community centers, and families can host various events to encourage youth to come together for enjoyable and educational activities. These gatherings can feature a diverse range of engaging and healthy activities as part of their programs.

By implementing these Islamic teachings, the youth can develop habits that enhance focus, nurture mindfulness, and foster a lifestyle that combats the distractions of the modern world.

Conclusion

The cognitive challenges confronting Generation Z are multifaceted and deeply intertwined with the complexities of modern technological advancements and social dynamics. This paper has elucidated key issues such as the allure of virtual life, susceptibility to gaslighting, information overload, a culture of instant gratification, and reduced attention spans. Each of these challenges presents significant obstacles to cognitive well-being, necessitating comprehensive strategies for intervention.

From an Islamic perspective, the recommended strategies provide

valuable insights for enhancing cognitive resilience among Generation Z. Emphasizing the appreciation of time, moderation, and the cultivation of genuine social connections can mitigate the distractions posed by virtual environments. Furthermore, developing critical thinking and a commitment to thorough investigation can empower individuals to navigate the complexities of gaslighting effectively.

Addressing information overload requires a proactive approach involving the pursuit of beneficial knowledge, effective time management, self-reflection, and seeking wisdom from scholars. The cultivation of patience and the acceptance of delayed gratification serve as powerful antidotes to the pervasive culture of instant gratification, fostering a sense of fulfillment and contentment. Finally, promoting mindfulness in worship, engaging in Qur'anic recitation, and prioritizing meaningful community interactions can significantly improve attention spans.

Therefore, by integrating Islamic teachings with practical cognitive strategies, there exists a profound potential to equip Generation Z with the tools necessary to navigate the cognitive challenges of the modern era. This holistic approach not only addresses the immediate cognitive concerns but also fosters a deeper understanding of the ethical and spiritual dimensions essential for

sustained cognitive well-being in a rapidly evolving world. Continued research in this area is essential to further explore these intersections and to develop frameworks that support the mental health and cognitive resilience of future generations.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to my beloved family for their unwavering support throughout my academic journey.

Funding

The author did not receive any financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Author Contributions

The author was solely responsible for the conception, research, analysis, and writing of this article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript.

References

The Holy Qur'an.

Agha Mohammadi, M. (2021). *Who Shia Are: The Attributes of Shia According to Imam Al-Sādiq (a.s) in His Maxims to Abdullah Ibn Jundab*. Johannesburg: al-Amin Publication.

Āmīdī al-Tamīmī, A. (1989). *Ghurār al-Hikam*. Qom: Dar Al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah. [In Arabic]

Alsop, R. (2014). *Instant Gratification & Its Dark Side*. Bucknell University. <https://www.bucknell.edu/news/instant-gratification-its-dark-side>

Amberblog. (2023). *Gen Z And Technology: How The Future Of Tech Is Changing*. <https://amberstudent.com/blog/post/how-gen-z-is-shaping-the-future-of-technology>

Arnold, M. , Goldschmitt, M. , & Rigotti, T. (2023). Dealing with Information Overload: A Comprehensive Review. *Frontiers in psychology*, 14, 1122200. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1122200>

Appinio Research. (2023). *What is Analysis Paralysis and How to Overcome It?*. Appinio. <https://www.appinio.com/en/blog/market-research/analysis-paralysis>

Bayhaqi, A. (2003). *Shu'ab al-Iman*. Riyadh: al-Rushd Publication with Cooperation of Dar al-Salafiyah in Mumbai. [In Arabic]

Bukhari, M. (2001). *Sahih al-Bukhari*. UK: Dar Tawq al-Najat. [In Arabic]

CTA. (2024). *Exploring Gen Z views and preferences in technology*. Consumer Technology Association. <https://www.cta.tech/Resources/Newsroom/Media-Releases/2024/February/CTA-Research-Exploring-Gen-Z-Views-and-Preferences>

Dimock, M. (2019). *Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

Dodgson, L. & Colombo, C. (2021). *Influencers are using psychological terms like*

'narcissist' and 'gaslighting' to fuel drama and bring in clicks. Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.nl/influencers-are-using-psychological-terms-like-narcissist-and-gaslighting-to-fuel-drama-and-bring-in-clicks/>

Dovetail Editorial Team. (2023). *Analysis Paralysis: Causes and Ways to Beat It*. Reviewed by Miroslav Damyanov. Dovetail. <https://dovetail.com/research/what-is-analysis-paralysis>

Flex, A. & Assoc, E. (Jul 5, 2023). *The Rise of Instant Gratification Culture: How Smartphones and Social Media Contribute*. Medium. <https://medium.com/@neonmaxima/the-rise-of-instant-gratification-culture-how-smartphones-and-social-media-contribute-33bfa3a43ab4>

FE News Editor. (2022). *TikTok and the 8 Second Attention Span: Study Reveals How UK Education Must Keep Up*. FE News. <https://www.fenews.co.uk/education/tiktok-and-the-8-second-attention-span-study-reveals-how-uk-education-must-keep-up/>

Gururaj, S. (2024). *Learning, Flexibility, and Purpose: Why Gen Z Workers Prioritize Growth Over Tenure*. Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). <https://www.shrm.org/executive-network/insights/learning-flexibility-purpose-why-generation-z-prioritizes-growth-over-tenure>

Hayes, A. (2022). *Generation Gap: What It Is and Why It's Important to Business*. Investopedia. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/generation-gap.asp>

Katz, R. Ogilvie, S. Shaw, J. & Woodhead, L. (2021). *Gen Z, Explained*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Kulaynī, M. (1986). *al-Kāfi*. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub Al-Islāmiyyah. [In Arabic]

Laithī al-Wāsītī, A. (1997). *'Uyun al-Hikam wa al-Mawāiz*. Qom: Dar al-Hadith. [In Arabic]

- Liu, H. Liu, W. Yoganathan, V. & Osburg, V. S. (2021). COVID-19 Information Overload and Generation Z's Social Media Discontinuance Intention During The Pandemic Lockdown. *Technological forecasting and social change*, 166, 120600. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.120600>
- Mahbub, J. (2023). Press This Button: The Allure of Instant Gratification in the Digital Age. <https://medium.com/@jubayermahbub2/press-this-button-the-allure-of-instant-gratification-in-the-digital-age-d453dbf32704>
- Mehta, D. (2017). Why Do Some People Prefer Online Interactions Over Real Life?. Forbez. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2017/10/20/why-do-some-people-prefer-online-interactions-over-real-life/>
- Merriam-Webster. (2021). Words We're Watching: 'Zoomer', What to Call Gen Z. Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/words-were-watching-zoomer-gen-z>
- Mind, J. (2020). Gaslighting: 4 Books in 1: Gaslighting Effect + How to Influence People + Dark Psychology and Manipulation + Master Your Emotions. [Self-published]. <http://library.lol/main/BB132862DD45FA3F36E971F8D9CDFC40>
- Psychology Today. (2023). Gaslighting. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/gaslighting>
- Ray, Michael. (2012). *Second Life*. Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/technology/online-gaming>
- Sarkis, S. (2018). *Gaslighting: Recognize Manipulative and Emotionally Abusive People and Break Free*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Sharīf al-Raḍī, Abū l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mūsawī . (11th century CE). *Nahj al-balāgha (collection of sermons, letters, and sayings attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib)*. Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lebenani. [In Arabic]
- Thomas, S. (2016). *A Virtual Life: How Social Media Changes Our Perceptions*. The Chicago School. <https://www.thechicagoschool.edu/insight/from-the-magazine/a-virtual-life/>
- Tourjée, D. (2016). *Real Life Is Not Enough: On Choosing Virtual Reality over the Physical World*. Vice. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/real-life-is-not-enough-on-choosing-virtual-reality-over-the-physical-world/>
- Tusi, M. (1993). *al-Amali*. Qom: al-Thaqafa Publication. [In Arabic]
- Warren, K. (2024). *Generation Z (Gen Z): Definition, Birth Years, and Demographics*. Investopedia. <https://www.investopedia.com/generation-z-gen-z-definition-5218554>
- Zeinalipoor, F. (2019). The Impact of Cyberspace on Family and Youth (Injuries and Solutions). *International Multidisciplinary Journal of Pure Life*, 6(17), 71-84. [In Persian]

AUTHOR BIOSKETCHES

Agha Mohammadi, M. Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, the Higher Educational Complex of Language, literature, and Culture, Al Mustafa International University .

✓ Email: m_ghamohammadi@miu.ac.ir

✓ ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9171-4398>

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Agha Mohammadi, M. (2024). Islamic Solutions to Gen Z's Cognitive Challenges: A Path to Meaningful Life. *International Multidisciplinary Journal of Pure Life*, 11(39), 69-87.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/imjpl.2024.9965>

URL: http://p-l.journals.miu.ac.ir/article_9965.html

پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی