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Some Thoughts Regarding Generation Z's Social Characteristics and Their Likely Effects

Parents of the current generation are likely to have difficult times shortly, as it becomes more and more demanding and tiresome to safeguard their children's complete well-being against the outside world. They also face the new challenge of actually cooperating and cohabiting with the ones they swore to protect from any harm. As a result of their children spending an ever-growing number of time stuck to the screens of their smart devices and wasting long hours on the omnipresent internet, there is a high risk to be accounted for here, particularly in the life of teenagers. The present paper aims to shed light on the many negative aspects of using smart devices in our everyday life, particularly in the life of younger children and teenagers. Beyond revealing these effects, it also seeks to offer feasible and working solutions to the above-mentioned issues to compensate for the possible negative influences that are to be discussed.

1. Generations and differences

According to certain generation-related theories (e.g. Székely 2017, 2020; Twenge 2017), there is a significant gap between members of any group chosen from two different generations, which is mostly to be attributed to the chronological, historical and environmental factors affecting each individual's life. In addition, strategies used in cooperation with difficulties are to be taken into consideration as well when examining such phenomena.

In this paper, I consider Zita Komár's guidelines (Komár 2017) as markers of distinction between previous and current generations, and offer an English version based on her summary here for further inquiry:

Members of the silent or veteran generation (1925–1942) are considered to be more contemplative and careful in their approach to all matters of life than the generations following them. They hold traditional values and family traditions dear, and these play a crucial role in their life: members of this generation are highly likely to maintain a conservative, almost bigot morality and rather one-sided way of thinking. Due to

said likely rigid way of living and thinking, they face serious issues when entering the world of digital natives: they consider the use of modern technology almost impossible to comprehend or to be utilised.

Those who belong to the generation of prophets, idealists or baby boomers (1943–1960) are born after the 2nd World War. Their youth is determined by the rise of civil movements. Their adolescent years were riddled with disobedience, rebellion and challenging authorities. Examples include the hippie movement, the sexual revolution and the start of mass drug consumption. They are mostly motivated by conforming to both parental and social demands, a desire for thorough knowledge in any specific field as well as a wish for being versatile.

Nomads, digital immigrants or generation X (1961–1981) are also known as "the transitional generation", whose members spent most of their youth in relative peace and wealth while society witnessed unprecedented progress in all aspects. Seekers of solutions, characterised by a creative and flexible way of thinking, and open-mindedness. They are reliable individuals who often possess high levels of self-discipline, while also maintaining a steady and deep understanding of their field of expertise. More likely to be expected to be motivated by financial and material means than previous generations. Social standing, prestige, wealth and job perspectives are crucially important for them.

Heroes, civilians, the 1st generation of digital natives or generation Y (1982–1995) has witnessed the rise of terrorism during 9/11. They are often considered determined and energetic, with plenty of innovative ideas and many great insights. However, their attitude towards education and working is in sharp contrast with members of the other generations. They grew up hand-in-hand with modern technology following its progress right from the start and as such, can handle modern-day technical devices and gadgets far more than their predecessors. They possess a tremendous thirst for knowledge and are also quite comfortable in a multicultural environment, handling it with a relaxed approach. They are capable of multitasking. Their motivation is based on their role and position within a community, mainly that of their peers. They are happy to work or spend time together with the above-said group, however, they can be easily swayed towards idleness, aimlessness and unpredictability.

Artists, the adaptive ones, the internet generation, Digital natives or generation Z (1996–2010) are born during the period of global warming, global terrorist threats and the economic crisis, those belonging to this generation are burdened with all the above-written challenges. They are often living their lives entangled in the web of social media, gadgets and the internet, and as such, are adept at using a multitude of devices at any time. This also gives a clear explanation for their seemingly effortless use of any sort of technical device. They are confident in their skills (especially those in connection with information and communication technology), are brave in certain aspects, while also lacking in others (mainly in offline social interactions) and are also ready to take the initiative. Their approach to both education and work can be considered pragmatic and practical. They consider theoretical or general knowledge as something of a burden, rather than a useful resource they can rely on. The presence of boundaries in their lives weighs heavy on them, and experiencing such boundaries is a rather tough one for them. Their motivation is partly based on material wealth,

thus an affluent job, offering them a good salary and a stable position is almost a must in their lives. At the same time, they are in constant demand of an ever-renewing source of stimuli and change. Thus, they deem the use of modern-day technology, social media and the internet an absolute necessity in all walks of life. It should also come as no surprise that because of their constant focus and most of their time spent in the virtual world – see films such as *Ready Player One* – their skills used in the offline world are rather limited. This is very much transparent when it comes to dealing with conflicts, whether coming from an internal (self-esteem, self-image) or external source (parental, societal, academic demands). Because of the above-mentioned lack of social skills, they often react in a wild and impulsive way, with sudden outbursts of anger both verbally and physically. Finally, they are harsh critics regarding figures of authority and rather than simply comply with their wills and demands, they instead expect to be treated as partners at home as well as at school or a job.

Finally, generation Alpha (2010–) which is the current generation, born after 2010 of whom we currently possess little knowledge. They are sometimes referred to as a "new silent generation" because they are quieter and more reserved both at home and at school, than their predecessors – albeit violence and aggression are still present among them from time to time.

The above-written list contains general characteristics of each generation and as such, it is not to be taken for granted, but rather as a guideline. As with all generalisations, we must consider the possibility of individual differences among the members these generations, both within and between each separate generation. Therefore, a cautious approach is recommended here to avoid any future stereotypes from occurring. In addition, we would like to offer the characterisations of Székely (2017, 2020) for further consideration, as it presents the major differences between the above-written typology that leans more towards Western society – and the United States in particular – and Hungarian society.

In addition to the previous description, actual differences in quality between each generation are to be taken into consideration. All ages are set up with different cultural, economic and social backgrounds to live, flourish and, eventually, give over their place to the next generation. As with such a linear phenomenon, there is almost no opportunity to measure the actual value and worth of each generation. This, in return means, that there is possibly no valid method that enables us to make a scientific differentiation between these generations and classify them as either a "better" or a "worse" generation than the one before them. These labels are rather to be seen as personal and subjective observations of specific individuals and are usually applied in a negative context to the generation in question.

Despite the above-claimed differences between these aforementioned generations, it is only natural to strive to work together to understand the other's cultural values and to comprehend their way of thinking while showing respect towards one another. In addition, this humane approach is crucial in obtaining a tolerant position within society. A society that requires its citizens both to maintain an open and mindful attitude within its folk, while also aiming at retaining that position when coming into contact with others (Twenge 2017).

Although many of the following points made here are either not valid or less transparent for modern-day Hungarian society, rather than the current American and European scene, it is still worth considering both the position of Twenge (2017) and that of Huntington (1996). Huntington in particular has demonstrated that the cultural influence of the United States can effortlessly reach beyond its borders and through globalisation transform any particular aspect of life within any given country.

In the following points, I shall present the evidence showcasing how Generation Z interprets the set of rules outlined above, how they live by those rules and how they adapt them in their own way. Based on my review of the relevant literature, I will focus on some of the most burning issues of this generation before offering suggested solutions to these issues. These issues include cohabitation, where the differences between the cohabiting generations are at the focal point; usage of social media and the possible distortion in self-image it induces; common activities related to Generation Z's online presence; the expectations Generation Z members have for the education system; cyberbullying as a recently arisen form of causing a disturbance in one's life; and finally, the role online pornography plays in current generations' lives, and how it transforms their attitudes towards both romantic and sexual orientation. I considered these factors to be the most relevant and burning for the society for further discussion, because the ever-present internet can effortlessly convey a multitude of aimed advertisements and other messages towards their target audience, thus influencing the current generations in a rather rapid way, unlike previous generations (attention economy).

Moreover, certain aspects of the present social scene (e.g. sexting at the topic of pornography and TikTok and BeReal at the use of social media) are omitted from my paper, because they are beyond the scope of the present study. By the end of this study, I hope that the list of possible solutions presented here will be a guiding force for actions to be considered or taken for the improvement of current generations' offline lives.

2. Modern-day restrictions

Members of Generation Z are in a difficult situation living in today's society which is in constant turmoil, and is hard both on their parents and others living together with them (Komár 2017). One of the most burning issues for Generation Z is the question of owning their own household and maintaining it. However, if they relocate to a big city and rent a flat, most of their income will surely end up being consumed by paying their landlords' expenses. But if they do not take this step, their life as self-reliant adults can easily be hindered by not leaving their comfort zone behind to start their actual life. With the rise of the prices that must be paid in higher education – including university fees and rents – there is only a slight possibility for many to start their own life in their twenties or thirties. According to Eurostat (Eurostat 2023), this issue is not only present in Hungary but in many European countries as well: while 17.3% of the total population of Hungary falls under the above-described category, Cyprians and Icelanders are the leaders in this aspect with 21.8 and 21.7%, respectively.

Those who are forced to live in "mommy hotels", are mostly in their twenties or thirties and are likely using their parents' home as a "temporary accommodation". They

are required to pay their part of the bills, either in terms of financial reciprocation or by doing household chores. This status of an "unwanted, yet tolerated house guest" can either remain as a completely unremarked position or be the target of criticism. In most cases, the reason why the above-described adolescents stay at home, rather than relocate is within their competence (except for the prices of rentable flats or buying a new house for themselves).

Here are a few likely reasons why young people decide to stay with their parents well into their thirties or even beyond that in modern society.

Most often their chosen academic field is not in direct correlation with the ever-changing and volatile job market demands either on a local or a regional, perhaps national scale. Consider the number of students still majoring or aiming at graduating in liberal arts, marketing or arts, for instance, on a worldwide scale (Ford 2015, Kárpáti 2019a). At the same time, the individual in question may partially or completely lack all those skills and personal resources, personality traits that are required for a particular job or jobs in general (e.g. resilience, focus, a well-developed knowledge of themselves, a stable and mature self-image, a growth mindset, tolerance for failure) (Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015; Twenge 2017). Another issue may be the permanent academic challenges, like dyslexia or dysgraphia and/or being physically or mentally impaired, which often act as a significant source of hinderance for the individual. Other times, some vital components are missing that are required for a specific job, including but not limited to a language certificate, a high school or university degree, practice and experience earned in a field. These components are particularly crucial within the frame of the Hungarian job market because there is a significant number of people who cannot obtain their degree without a language certificate. These diplomas are held back by universities until the candidates present these certificates. However, regarding the job market, we also need to point out that the current Hungarian government has introduced a new law, regulating the release of these degrees. According to the new regulation, those within a certain period after having taken successful final examinations, can get their diplomas, without the necessary language certificates. Finally, each family has its own set of value systems, cooperation strategies and particular lifestyles that can either hinder or support the individual in overcoming difficulties. In the case of a family with low socioeconomic or sociocultural background, the aforementioned factors can be quite disruptive or hindering regarding the betterment of younger generations or society in general. This in many cases is due to the above mentioned values not being compatible with the current national or global context.

It is also worth considering the following two mental disorders that can easily be spotted among members of Generation Z or the ones following in their wake: the Peter Pan syndrome and the Wendy syndrome. While the former was diagnosed by Dan Kiley in 1983 (Kiley 1983) and described as a situation when men between their 20s and 40s are unable or unwilling to take responsibility for anything while enjoying the support and pampering of their parents, the latter refers to those women who act as a supportive and caring 'Wendy' for their 'Peter'. This results in Wendy doing everything for Peter in the relationship, maintaining a detrimental effect on their personal growth while also hindering their individual development.

The above-written list contains many likely elements of why a great number of adolescents are shying away from the offline world in preference of a virtual realm. In addition, the overprotection of many parents also needs to be considered here as a factor delaying the proper maturation of one's child (Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015; Twenge 2017).

After having discussed the possible background and time frame of each separate generation – with Generation Z and the future generations in particular – we shall turn our attention to different aspects of the issue at hand. I will start with the ever-increasing number of social media users.

3. Teenagers and the use of social media

It is a common experience that today's young people easily and quickly discover social media for themselves and become both content consumers and producers of these platforms in a matter of weeks. Based on Twenge's research into the topic (Twenge 2017), the most frequently used social media sites are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat.

However, I would like to mention two other social media platforms that are rather noticeable: TikTok and BeReal. The former is more centred on producing short video clips with or without sound and spreading it quickly across the platform, thus realising what is referred to as "viral video". BeReal, on the other hand, is often likened to a "counter-Instagram", where users need to present their real selves in a matter of minutes to their friends and followers using their cameras' video recordings.

As I have pointed it out before, social media is offering a large variety of platforms for users regardless of the actual physical distance between them, to get in touch with each other through the net. This trend is highly likely to be expanding in the following years, because of the increase in the accessibility of the oncoming 5G network, which promises an almost instantaneous download speed, spectacular loading time for streaming services, and an ever-faster way of using social media. Bearing all that in mind, we can rest assured that more and more modern users will flock to join social media sites with every passing day, because of its quick, easy-to-access and comfortable way of contacting others.

In contrast with chatting on social media, traditional face-to-face conversations are a bit more demanding for Generation Z and the following generations (Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015; Twenge 2017). This is partly to be attributed to the fact that in offline conversations one cannot use emojis or GIFs to express their honest opinion or emotions, but is required to master the art of nonverbal communication, both in reading, interpreting and reflecting upon it. This is not something you can learn by typing away at a social media platform, which is most likely to leave many modern kids without the ability to understand others' real feelings without the above-said knowledge. Therefore, a critical aspect of modern education needs to teach children such values and skills as empathy and the reading and interpreting of the other's verbal and nonverbal messages. A shared language with older generations, who are likely less susceptible to modern gaming and its lingo than the current generation.

Critical thinking that is quickly put to the test when browsing through the list of fresh news in a Facebook profile or when reading a growing number of fake news and hoaxes, whether it is a virtual source or a printed one. Public speaking and arguing need to be a priority, too, because many are shy of openly giving their opinion to others in a proper manner during a traditional conversation, without bursting out at the other. Also, polite and self-disciplined behaviour that does not disappear when the other is refuting our argument or does not share our opinion on a certain topic, needs to be acquired here (Peterson 2018).

Now that a brief list of a few skills that require the attention of present-day and future teachers and parents to raise healthy and well-balanced children and adults has been established, let us move on to the question of what teens generally tend to do on the net.

4. Teenagers and online activities

Generation Z and the following generations' lives are completely interwoven by the usage of online platforms, as well as the daily consumption of internet-based content. This in return has a significant impact on their everyday lives (Price 2018). One of the most visible results is the six hours spent daily on any kind of activity that is internet-related (Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015; Huddleston 2016). These activities most often include, but are not limited to browsing or surfing the net, playing online games, using FaceTime or chatting with friends, or watching online videos depending on the country and the providers available (Twenge 2017).

Another common feature of Generation Z is the extensive use of instant messaging, rather than giving the other person a call. This is most likely to be attributed to the fact that having a phone conversation may be considered an act of physical contact and a form of intimacy between two people (if we accept that talking to the other on the phone is an actual form of physical contact between people). By doing so, both parties need to pay close attention to what the other is conveying to them through their voice and not just their words. Such attention and empathy are rather rarely displayed by Generation Z and the following generations, because of their high-level exposure to communication through screens and less personal communication that helps them decode nonverbal communication and improve their social skills (Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015; Kárpáti 2016; Veszelszki 2017).

In addition to this handicap in social interactions, the daily dose of internet-based content can result in impatient behaviour that is clear and present when one jumps from one website to the other in search of information. This phenomenon is possible to witness in both the motivation behind reading, and the number of traditional (or digital) books and newspapers, and magazines read or subscribed to by teenagers today. This widespread lack of patience and tolerance, which is required for both reading and 'mentally digesting' such written products, combined with the low number of actually read books, can easily result in poor performance in reading comprehension tests or manifest itself in a poorer selection of words both in a written and oral context (Ford 2015; Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015). Because of this incredibly short span of attention

granted by teenagers to almost anything besides their screens, it is a real challenge in all aspects of modern society, with education and works at the forefront, to retain the focus on itself for a longer period. A mind immersed in such a virtual world right from the start is highly selective towards all contents and as such, will aim at sorting out anything it deems unwanted, unnecessary or boring in a matter of seconds (Ford 2015; Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015; Kárpáti 2016; Twenge 2017).

This rather negative influence can easily lead to younger generations not being able to hold their own in an actual, face-to-face conversation, not just because of a lack of vocabulary, but due to other reasons as well. Another main feature of offline social interaction is the process of maintaining eye contact, which is a basic requirement (Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015; Hevesi 2022). Because there was no such demand on the screen during chatting or typing away, teenagers are more prone to having difficulty with such actions. This poses the question: will the upcoming generations be able to have a decent deep and meaningful conversation, a light-hearted chat or even flirt and date in the offline world in the future? Or will only screens remain for them for the most part?

Another issue that needs to be mentioned here, is internet-based content creation. Those of Web 1.0 were more likely to consume content, rather than create it. However, Web 2.0 members not only discovered the internet as a platform for anything that can be spread in the virtual world, but also produced their leaders, a sort of modern critiques, thinkers, salespeople, teachers and other authority figures that all boil down to one character: the influencer. Even with basic or entry-level audio equipment, one can easily start a simple YouTube channel, or Instagram account, or set up a series of podcasts to share their passion with the rest of the world. However, no matter what kind of equipment an influencer possesses, as long as their passion is evident for certain topics, which can either result in a surge in popularity or land them in the top ten list on YouTube. Or be quickly dismissed by the audience if the topic is either uninteresting or presented in a less than enticing way, resulting in a life of mediocrity. Those with the highest number of followers, the most subscriptions, likes and comments are at the top of the virtual hierarchy and as such, present the most significant influence on young minds. This can be interpreted as follows: by winning these influential influencers because they can present vividly, they are likely to make the masses focus on the topic anytime and anywhere.

If videos constitute the fundamental core of YouTube, then images serve as the essence of Instagram. They are the driving force behind the platform, motivating users to share an ever-increasing array of their daily experiences. These pictures serve as small windows through which we can peak into the vivid and busy life of others. Others, whose lifestyle may be opposite of ours, and are most likely far more positive – either actually or being perceived in such a manner – which, combined with the ever-present nature of comparing and contrasting within us, can rapidly lead to a sense of discomfort and minor depression, if not handled with proper care in due time (Hevesi 2022). This process can be sped up by applying a large number of filters to said pictures, making the agent's skin and face seem like that of an almost deity-like creature, the weather perfect or the action far more interesting than it is. The flood of such nearly-perfect pictures, loop videos or short videos is two-fold: first, the constantly

improving specifications of smartphones – mainly that of the battery life and the camera quality – allow enhanced-level pictures and videos to be taken and edited in mere seconds (Ford 2015); and two, while one who wants to prove their prowess – in a broad sense – or portray them as living an extraordinary life, will be faced with one of the (un)uttered rules of the net, stating that 'pics or it didn't happen' (Hevesi 2022). This rule can be easily generalised to mean that one with the most 'quality' pictures (meaning a large number of filters present, hashtagged properly and displaying life in constant change, action and glamour and/or style) is the leader of the 'pack of the Instagram tribe'. Unfortunately, this shallow and superficial attitude of many content makers can easily be attributed to such almost perfect beings on Instagram, which in return can lead to the conclusion that our actual worth is determined by the number of expensive and material goods we own. Hence, the rejuvenation of Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1899) and invidious consumption in the 21st century.

Now that we have discussed the role of social media in the daily life of Generation Z and Alphas, I will turn to one of the most crucial aspects of their present and future lives: education, with a glimpse of job perspectives as well.

5. Generation Z and the education system

For previous generations, having a thorough general knowledge was almost a crucial aspect, both in their private lives – serving as verbal ammunition for sparking a great conversation – and their academic or working career (Ford, 2015; Twenge 2017). It could also act as a marker of one's social standing. However, Generation Z and the following generations are less likely to appreciate such a large amount of information as valuable. They are more prone to deem such factual knowledge as either irrelevant or simply unworthy of having it reside within one's brain cells. This is mainly because of the following factors: With almost unrestricted access to the world wide web that enables almost anyone to obtain information of any nature in a matter of mere seconds, the hardships of earning one's knowledge over the years are long gone (Ford 2015; Kárpáti 2016). Honing one's skills over decades almost seems like a ridiculous process and a wasted amount of precious time to said generations. Precious time that could be used to create personal content, centred around the individual and their life. This aspect is especially relevant for students of modern languages, who are keen on any topic, as long as it's personal. This also goes for any other academic field that use IT equipment to add more interactivity, and relevance to course material seen earlier as dry and a waste of time. If the above-written factors are present, Generation Z is more than pleased to have found a gateway to knowledge that is practical and can easily be exchanged for a well-paying position or make them famous and internationally recognised in a short period (Tari 2011; Twenge 2017).

A few examples where the above-written requirements are present in the individual's everyday life are: paying the bills (using an online bank account or a specific app instead of visiting a local post office to do so, like in Hungary), sending postcards to others (there is a repertoire of apps and gadgets for taking pictures

and printing them out as traditional postcards or transforming them into postcards and sending them to the other party through the app) or filing a report or complaint (this can be done without any paper being produced with the use of apps that allow for converting a document into a pdf and then signing it on one's laptop, smartphone or computer). All three examples are clear indications that the fine motoric skill development of putting pen or pencil to paper is almost absolutely out of date and is obsolete. The encroachment of modern technical equipment on such manual tasks is rather self-explanatory and also prone to have a critical effect on both education and working careers in the future (Ford 2015; Kárpáti 2019a).

However, despite having a vast amount of information at their disposal, many still struggle with distinguishing between "real" facts from reliable sources and sources of information spreading fake news. Therefore, one of the key challenges of future education systems will be to help students in recognising hoaxes, and with the use of their critical thinking point this out to others as well as defend their position with reliable resources and a solid reasoning.

After considering the issues of modern-day education systems for the current generation, I wish to highlight another problem that most frequently occurred within school settings in previous decades but has moved outside their frames in the present. We are examining cyberbullying in the next section.

6. Cyberbullying

Another issue in modern society and education is the rise of cyberbullying. While both verbal and physical abuse are generally seen to be on the decline (Pinker 2019), this new phenomenon poses the question and responsibility of not only adults but also of the victims, the bystanders and the bullies themselves. As cyberbullying is spreading worldwide, its prevention requires a new action plan to handle such situations (Coloroso 2009). When Dan Olweus published his work on school bullying (Olweus 1993) it was mostly centred around actually-occurring physical or verbal attacks against others. To prevent such actions from further happening, he outlined an action plan that focused on supportive communication towards the victims, reinforcing their sense of self-value and seeking help from adults. This approach seems plausible, but requires further improvements to face the above-mentioned challenge. One of the additions that could push back bullying – both online and offline – is to help the victims establish strong and meaningful relationships with their peers (Urbán – Villányi 2021). If a bully finds that one is not a lone target, they may lose interest in the seemingly weak prey and leave them alone. Furthermore, victims could also greatly benefit from picking up a sport and doing it regularly: by training frequently, they strengthen themselves both physically and mentally. By teaching teenagers the notions of resilience, tolerance for failure, teamwork, focusing on the challenge at hand and continuous self-improvement instead of the hindering factors, those benefited will surely enhance their fighting spirit against trolls and cyberbullies (Coloroso 2009; Carey – Rudkin 2021; Urbán – Villányi 2021).

Bullied teenagers can become easily irritated and have a tense, aggressive approach to others or become depressed instead. Their thoughts take a negative turn

and they often end up criticising themselves harsher than before, focusing too much on their appearance and skills, generalising their failures and neglecting their success, the results of the impostor syndrome (Urbán – Villányi 2021; Hevesi 2022). Their energy levels seem to be quickly depleted, similar to that of lacking enough sleep. They are afraid of their peers and are less likely to approach them, avoiding cooperative tasks most of the time or preferring to be left alone altogether. Should they meet with bullying, they either fail to ask for help or if they succeed in doing so, but do not receive any assistance, suicidal thoughts may envelop them. As a final cry for help, they may start hurting themselves, which goes on to ever greater extent, while finally they can end their lives (Coloroso 2009; Carey – Rudkin 2021; Urbán – Villányi 2021).

Cyberbullying has many possible forms. These often range from slightly mocking remarks related to the physical appearance or the personality of the person or criticising them for their hobbies and free time activities, applying harsh caricatures and nicknames to them. In the most extreme cases the bullies/trolls venture as far as blackmailing the victim by using actual or altered pictures – nude pictures are quite common in this aspect – coming from their social media accounts (or other sources), voice messages or text messages (Carey – Rudkin 2021; Urbán – Villányi 2021). The threat here is to be publicly humiliated and have one's reputation openly destroyed. The final step is when the bully or troll suggests an escape from the situation, usually involving either explicitly or implicitly, the thought of committing suicide. This message is often reinforced by such messages as "The world would be a better place without you", "I wish you'd just die", "You are worthless", or "Nobody loves you". Such action can easily go unnoticed by authorities or parents, because bullies and trolls are adept at hiding in the depths of the world wide web, masking themselves and cowering behind different avatars all the time (Carey – Rudkin 2021; Coloroso 2009; Urbán – Villányi 2021).

After considering some of the possible threats that lurk on the internet, let us inquire into another widespread face of the modern generation: online pornography.

7. Sexuality and online pornography

With the expanding usage of the internet, much content that was previously only available offline is now accessible in online versions, too. One of the many "victims" of such digitalisation was the once well-known cassette stores or DVD stores where one could rent a VHS tape or a DVD for watching a film over and over again. For a price. These stores offered not only regular films but also erotic or pornographic films. For many teenagers nowadays, pornographic films are available in a wide variety, catering to all possible sexual fantasies, at the click of a button (Hevesi 2022). Unfortunately, these people are likely to fall victim to the following negative effects.

By seeking out instant gratification for their libidos, they no longer practice the virtue of temperance or self-control. Due to such a rush in their behaviour, finding a long-term relationship has become more difficult for them. They also experience a loss in the magical and intimate moments of real-life sex, because of the above-mentioned bountiful amount of its virtual counterpart (Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015;

Hevesi 2022). Porn movies almost exclusively depict men as sexual predators with the body of a Greek god, suggesting to young and malleable minds that this is the way a real man should appear and act in front of women. All this, to attract them (Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015). The same rule can be applied to porn actresses who act as both a target for the male audience and a subject of envy for the female viewers. This false image is further fuelled by the fact that porn movies portray their performers' energy levels and performance as somewhat impossible for a regular lover, with erections lasting for more than half an hour. Or the stamina of the actors reaching incredible heights to the delight of their female partners. This could further add to the false self-image and body image of the viewer, resulting in them considering themselves as inferior to those on the screen while starting a spiral leading to the mass consumption of services and goods related to alternating their bodies (Hevesi 2022). Examples include, but are not limited to silicone implants, liposuction and filling up of specific body parts, penis enlargement injections or pumps. Because of a heightened and enhanced level of sexual stimulus on both parties' side, either can rapidly and easily lose interest in regular sexual encounters (vanilla action), seeking more sexually stimulating action and genres related to that (Veszelszki – Aczél 2023). These genres can include latex, master-slave, BDSM, and cheating/cuckolding. This, however, can lead to such an overpowered mental state, where a lower sexual stimulus is less likely to cross the threshold, causing erectile dysfunction for men and frigidity for women. As an outcome, all the above-outlined negative thoughts and images slip inside the minds of the young and transform their worldview in a way that probably hinders their prospect of a healthy relationship before starting their own family, or after founding one (Carey – Rudkin 2021; Hevesi 2022). And, though this is common knowledge, no well-balanced relationship can flourish and survive without proper and mutual respect and open communication on both parties' sides (Zimbardo 2015; Twenge 2017; Carey – Rudkin 2021; Hevesi 2022).

After enumerating the possible difficulties that can arise as far as porn consumption is concerned, let us now enter the final section. There I will focus on the possible solutions and actions that are required to counter the negative influences we have collected above. Influences that are present in the lives of Generation Z and the generations following in their footsteps.

8. Possible solutions

Although the above-presented issues are both numerous and many folded, most solutions simply demand only the following: a more consistent lifestyle with meaningful rules for children and teenagers; extra investment in time, energy and attention spent on the family, resulting in quality time, establishing routines and patterns young ones can rely on in the future as adults and as family members; and a completely new approach from all effected members of society, whether they are closely related to the individual or are only part of the broader context (Townsend 2006; Chapman – Pellicane 2014; Huddleston 2016; Kárpáti 2016; Price 2018; Carey – Rudkin 2021).

In terms of education, a greater emphasis must be put on the more practical side of teaching: all subjects need to focus heavier on the everyday aspect of the given material. For example, IT courses should consider issues like cybersecurity, digital etiquette, digital footprints and how to handle hacking or trolls effectively.

Civics needs to teach the roles and responsibilities of each citizen of a given country; how to vote and how to decide who to vote for/against; the traps hidden behind political correctness and using such language for manipulation; the role of media in influencing public opinion.

Modern language education all over the globe needs to set up situational teaching as the golden standard for versatile and able language users. This means that instead of still focusing exclusively on memorising conjugation tables of verb forms, teachers need to emphasise teaching collocations and specific situations confronted during everyday life and how to handle them using the freshly acquired language. This also needs to be done both utilising verbal and non-verbal techniques, with communication strategies being a valuable asset here (Kárpáti 2017, 2019b).

In addition to the above-given areas of expertise, being able to express themselves fluently and masterfully at a high level – in all possible forms –, is a crucial factor for Generation Z and those coming after them. Humanities (mainly history and literature, both national and international) are the backbone of one's national identity, and as such, deserve a special place in the education of the youth. Without having a stable well-rounded national identity that is rooted in the common history, language and literature of one's nation, it becomes easy to turn into a rootless entity.

Seeing the relationship between local and global actions both in the past and the present may lead one to speculations about the future, constructing likely and unlikely scenarios that could surge brainstorming centred around certain issues, founding societies, clubs or other organisations for or against the above said issues, involving society in a more active approach. As a result, being led to a more eager and willing partnership between the people and the government (in an optimal scenario).

Furthermore, by immersing oneself in the vast number of books published either nationally or internationally (with one's particular interest as a guideline), any reader can quickly build up a significant vocabulary that is both horizontally and vertically wide. This can lay the very foundation for future orators. But having the vocabulary alone at your disposal is not enough. A true speaker needs a clear and well-built-up message to deliver to the audience, while also being able to deliver it with a unique style, eloquence and congruency. A well-prepared speaker is also able to see both sides of the argument and can plan counterarguments in advance or on the spot. Therefore, humanities are there for honing one's rhetorical skills and style and setting one on the path of critical thinking, too, as shown above.

Other subjects, like arts and crafts, music, film studies or home economics are essential for the following, respectively: by introducing the previous styles and genres of all possible forms of art, one can establish both their style and taste, as well as try their hands in different related fields. This, too, shall add to the appreciation of traditional methods applied in the process of creation while spurring one to try manually working with different materials, instead of switching to exclusively modern equipment. Equipment like smartphones, apps, or tablets used for creating any kind of

final product makes the above-given process far quicker and generally easier. However, as a result of using exclusively high-tech equipment and methods, fine motor skills are sure to degrade.

Home economics is required to teach one the essential financial skills of running a household without going bankrupt, which is a very serious issue in modern-day society. Furthermore, being able to cook your meals can act as cement and a special fun activity for all generations, dominantly with the beginning of a brand-new family life of one's own. Moreover, having healthier meals daily is crucial for living a longer and healthier life, resulting in less sickness and more productivity for all members.

P.E. and dancing are also vital in maintaining a healthy physical and mental state, which is not an easy task considering the sheer number of hours an average Generation Z member spends in front of the screen daily. To counter such less productively used time, one also needs to give dancing and going out with friends as a great opportunity to improve, while at the same time, testing your body's abilities on a dancefloor (Zimbardo – Coulombe 2015).

Being able to hold your own in a conversation of all nature, having actual friends of your own, goals and skills to rely on and strive for, and not being afraid to make mistakes and improving every day are the crucial components of both a fruitful and rewarding mindset and an incentive for Generation Z and the following generations to come (Peterson 2018). It is also worth mentioning that having a stable and rather large general knowledge is a vital part of our lives, because it is too comfortable to rely exclusively on search engines and cloud storage servers instead of training our brain and memory to perform under pressure and solve different issues instead of our modern technology. The latter should be seen as an enhancement, a small boost to our mental capacity, rather than having the exclusive role of our minds.

As I have pointed out, fighting cyberbullies and trolls requires tight-knit peer groups both offline and online, where one can rely on their actual friends for support. In certain cases, it is enough to ignore the bully, for they will likely seek out an easier target instead. Another possible solution is to unite with others and stand up together against the bully. The power of numbers alone can quickly and easily scare off much weaker ones. Sometimes, avoiding the circumstances that can lead up to such a situation in general can be a cure (Coloroso 2009). However, no matter the circumstances, the victim must reach out and seek help from others, either professional or non-professional (family, friends, peers, teachers), before the worst-case scenario unfolds (watchwellcast 2013).

The usage of smart devices is undoubtedly an essential part of our day-to-day lives and as such, regulating it as a parent or a teacher can be quite burdensome. This is especially true if we consider that most parents surprise their children with a new smartphone or tablet for their birthdays or holidays (Carey – Rudkin 2021). This can be attributed to either the peer pressure on the youngster or their parents. It is also worth considering the tremendous number of advertisements related to such goods being omnipresent. These young people are highly susceptible to the above-described negative influences of using smart technology without any constraint, especially before the age of 14 (Twenge 2017). To take back control over their children's lives in every aspect, parents both need to be real role models for their young, as well as implement

strict rules and regulations regarding the usage of gadgets at home. This is important if children are to live a healthy and rewarding life. A life that happens offline and not online all the time. As such, a possible solution is the following: during family lunch or dinner at a weekend, all members of the family need to place their gadgets inside a large bowl or on a platter while having their meal. Whoever takes out their device first, without actually finishing the meal, is the one to do the washing up or other domestic chores. In the case of friends visiting a restaurant, the same method can be applied with a minor alteration: the one who snatches away the device first pays the bill for the whole group.

As a parent, you can set up the following rules at home: children can only use their gadgets at home for one or one and a half hours, at maximum, per weekday and only after all their homework and personal household chores are done. This will teach children to take their tasks first before actually enjoying a good video or a game on their screens, rather than just using it as either an excuse not to do something or as a substitute for doing something productive. The period can be lengthened to two hours at weekends, abiding by the same rules. However, each hour needs to be followed by at least ten minutes of some sort of physical activity, in addition to blinking and drinking. The latter two are especially important if we consider that an average teenager seldom blinks or hydrates properly during the day or the days of hardcore gaming or binge-watching films and series (Twenge 2017; Carey – Rudkin 2021). This demanding process can easily cause severe eye irritation or put a strain on them and lead to dehydration. Also, the brain requires that short period spent with something less straining to digest all the audio-visual material it had just come in contact with.

One mustn't gaze upon the screen an hour before going to bed, either. If one fails to avoid watching a film or an episode, play games or type away at their laptop or tablet in the above said period, their sleeping cycle will become unbalanced. This is because of a distortion in the production of melatonin, a hormone responsible for controlling and coordinating the natural cycles of being awake and asleep. Patients suffering from low levels of melatonin find it incredibly tiresome to get enough high-quality sleep during the night. In addition, modern screens emit blue light that can further stimulate the brain, aggravating the effect of "snacking" some screen time right before bedtime. Luckily, the effects of blue light can be easily blocked by setting up a filter in our devices' settings, installing an app responsible for doing so or applying special glasses to protect our eyesight and mental state, too.

Parents can also introduce "offline days" when there is no usage of gadgets at all (Huddleston 2016). Instead, there are a bundle of offline activities that can be done together with the rest of the family, including hiking, going sightseeing or visiting relatives. In addition, there are plenty of activities that can be done inside the house, like playing board or card games or – with a bit of cheating involved – watching films or series and discussing them together. Discussing films together is important both for the practice of critical thinking in general, offering arguments on both sides, as well as showing children that their parents consider their ideas and reward them with their appreciated attention. This in return can strengthen the bond between parents and children (Carey – Rudkin 2021).

Careful consideration of the above-outlined factors is not only to be attributed to adolescents but also to parents and adults who can be just as addicted to their gadgets

as children can (Chapman – Pellicane 2014). Because parents are role models for their kids, they must be humane in their approach to the issue. Having a conversation with their children about the usage of devices, setting up rules for their daily use and what it means to be a technology addict are all critical points. Especially because children can frequently feel ignored by their parents and can easily interpret this as a loss of love for them, leading to finding appreciation and gratification in the virtual world. Also, if they are unable to counter the negative effects of technology in their lives, it is highly recommended to seek out professional help. This is to achieve the state of "digital detoxification" (Price 2018) and as "freshly cured patients" to show the right path to free one from the shackles of the overuse of digital technology, thus helping their children to follow in their footsteps (Townsend 2006).

As a final note, we can point out that many families and family members are quite adept at striking a working balance between their private life and their professional career, meaning that they can find enough time to relax after work, with their family members without using too much technology to achieve the said state. This could be considered the golden middle solution for all: all members who are old enough to use technology and not being used by it, while still retaining the will and self-control to stop using it at any time if something more important rises in the offline world (Townsend 2006; Chapman – Pellicane 2014; Huddleston 2016).

In the above-given list, I have enumerated several possible solutions to counter the overuse of digital technology. With the internet and smart devices at the forefront of all walks of life, we need to take into consideration all the possible negative effects, both physical and mental, of the aforementioned technical innovations to effectively counter these influences before the detrimental force gains an irreversible foothold on us.

9. Conclusions

In this paper, I aimed to shed light on some of the most burning issues of Generation Z and the following generations and to offer some likely solutions to said issues. I must emphasise that neither Generation Z nor the following are to be considered less manageable or worse than their predecessors: the only significant difference is in the environment, both internal and external, they are living in and the way they react to change within this frame. Their lives are spent in an ever-changing milieu that demands constant change and offers less than enough stability in finding guidelines for reaching adulthood. To counter such challenges, both the new generation and their elders need to be in continuous correspondence with one another, providing feedback on every issue that may occur to them, teaching the other and not leaving them behind. Both sides of the generation scale must realise that gadgets are to be used and not to be used by them. As such, parents need to regain their positions as role models for the youth. As role models, they are to fill in the vacant position of a close friend, one to whom children can turn when being alone, bullied at school or online, and someone who can show them the real meaning of love and sexuality, instead of online pornography and the hook-up culture.

The key issue here is to help all those who are somehow trapped inside the virtual world, to face their fears and issues in the offline world and take back their lives, living it to the fullest of their possibilities. If they succeed in achieving this, then there is still hope for the generations to come. Hope that there will be real humans walking this earth and not just droids plugged into their devices non-stop.

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