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SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS: THE SOCIAL UTILITY OF
TECHNOLOGIZATION IN DIGITAL GENERATION Z

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KEYWORDS

Digital natives, generation z, students, social platforms: social media, communication, documentation, content creation, expectations from employers, young polytechnic student

INTRODUCTION

The era of digital technology, also known as the information age, has profoundly transformed the way we communicate, learn, and conduct our daily activities. In the contemporary digital landscape, the terms "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" have become essential descriptors for two distinct groups, each with varying levels of familiarity and adaptation to digital technologies. As Kesharwani (2020) noted, digital natives, often associated with younger generations, are individuals who have grown up in a technology-saturated environment, having access to it since childhood. With the emergence of open-access information technologies such as television, personal computers, smartphones, and tablets, the informational hierarchy has collapsed. Generation Z, already familiar with digital communication, has become a digital accelerator (McCrinkle & Fell, 2020).

The entire endeavor of this work integrates into the realm of technology, social media, and how it is utilized by digital natives of Generation Z in the technical field. Our research aimed to identify, based on the analysis of how specific platforms are used, the existence of viable communication models among digital natives in the technical field concerning the process of assimilating useful knowledge necessary for entering the job market.

The innovative element lies in the correlation between the use of social platforms for specific purposes of communication, documentation, and content creation, with the interests and

expectations of young people in the technical field, and especially the predictive value of their choices based on the use of social media platforms. The theories that underpinned the research on social networks served as a source of inspiration for constructing the questionnaire and structuring our research..

The paper consists of two parts. The first part is dedicated to reviewing the main theoretical approaches concerning digital natives, their integration within the generational context, communication in the digital age, and the role of influencers, as well as a brief exploration of the climate of the Industrial Revolutions—past, present, and future.

The second part is dedicated to research aimed at identifying viable communication models for digital natives in the technical field in relation to the process of assimilating useful/necessary knowledge for entering the job market.

SYNTHETIC PRESENTATION OF THE CHAPTERS OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

The first chapter of the work: Digital Natives and Their Place in the World reflects what numerous studies conducted globally have sought to highlight, namely the impact of technology and its effect on generations. While those born in the technology era have been implicitly associated with the term "digital natives," their parents have been referred to as "digital immigrants," meaning individuals who adapted to digital technologies later in life, often due to social or professional pressures. Safarov (2021) emphasizes that these individuals may belong to older generations or demographic groups that did not experience the widespread adoption of digital technologies during their formative years.

In this regard, we would find ourselves in the prefigurative culture anticipated by Mead in the 1970s. No matter how visionary she was regarding this era, Mead could not have suspected how dramatic the consequences of rapid technological changes would be for individuals, families, and society. Young people find it easy to observe that compared to their parents, as well as their teachers, they hold supremacy in the use of technology, which likely contributes to a greater confidence in their ability to manage the abundance of information available online.

Understanding the different generations and the inter- and intra-generational gaps has applications in various areas of social, professional, and personal life, such as: the parent-child relationship, the teacher-student relationship, the employer-employee relationship, and relationships within a team made up of individuals of different ages, etc.

Our attention has turned to Generation Z in this research, as they are already well-defined as a generation, with specific traits and values, of which we will mention just a few:

- Gen Z shares a wide range of opinions across the political spectrum (Pew Research, 2019; Ernst & Young, 2020), with most of their values grounded in equality, respect, and inclusion for all individuals, extending beyond themselves to include and protect everyone (Parry & Battista, 2019; Pew Research, 2019).
- Gen Z advocates for non-discrimination and gender equality. Movements such as Black Lives Matter, Body Positivity, Gender Equality, and LGBTQ+ Rights have gained the support of young activists.
- In 2013, Max Mihelich spoke about Generation Z's concern for the environment, imminent shortages, and lack of water, indicating that they have a strong sense of responsibility toward natural resources.
- Berkup (2014) mentions that the most distinctive traits of Generation Z are "confidence, freedom, individualism, and dependence on technology and speed." Iorgulescu (2016) describes other characteristics, such as: "Generation Z has extreme self-confidence, an optimistic outlook on their professional future, and tends to have entrepreneurial initiatives, being very creative and innovative."
- Gen Z values global citizenship and is optimistic about the effects of globalization on their opportunities (McCrinkle, 2018; Fromm et al., 2020). Global warming, air pollution, species extinction, and ocean pollution are concerns for young Generation Z members engaged in pro-environment activities (Topic & Mitchell, 2019).
- Journeys for self-discovery are also a fundamental motivation for this generation with a desire for adventure, which associates international travel with a marker of success in maturation (Deloitte, 2019).

- Members of Generation Z are extremely efficient multitaskers, possessing a developed ability to critically assess content in less than 8 seconds while directing their attention to up to five devices simultaneously (Spears et al., 2015; Weise, 2019).
- Their intrinsic relationship with digital technology redefines face-to-face communication, enriching their experience through video calls (Weise, 2019; Dorsey & Villa, 2020). More than ever, they have embraced new technologies and, during the global pandemic, facilitated digital acceleration within their families (McCrinkle & Fell, 2020).

A specific characteristic of the generation is the concern for preserving identity in the online environment, one in three young people prefers to communicate through online means rather than face-to-face when it comes to personal matters (Rădăcină, 2018). This preference is due to social media functions that provide young people with a stronger sense of control, or more precisely, the illusion of control (Bach et al., 2013). They live under the impression that they can decide with whom, how, and when to interact and whether or not to reveal their identity. This sense of control makes them feel safer and more self-assured on social media than in real-life situations

Technology has created a world without borders, facilitating real and valuable connections with colleagues from around the globe, enjoying face-to-face friendships in digital communities built around shared passions (Yang et al., 2020; Fromm & Read, 2018; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Communication in the digital age has been captured in Chapter 2 of this work, an era in which time and space acquire new meanings and dimensions. Temporal boundaries and delimitations dissipate. The implicit phenomena that the digital age brings with it absorb us into a new reality and cyberspace.

Transnationalism, social nomadism, global, interconnectedness, and hyperconnectivity have radically transformed the way we interact with information and with others. According to Carne (2011), the Digital Age is a period that began around 1980, during which "computers and data networks began to create a digital world for anyone with the right equipment to enjoy." This constant connectivity, facilitated by technology, not only provides access to an immense amount of information but also to the opinions and perspectives of others. Thus, an environment conducive to the uptake of external opinions is created through a process of social contagion, without these opinions being filtered or critically analyzed. In this context, young people, as well as other

segments of the population, often engage in the consumption of media messages in an impulsive, almost instinctual manner, raising essential questions about our ability to discern information and form well-founded opinions.

Young people are, by their nature, accustomed to interacting with technology and social media in a way that facilitates their rapid consumption of information. This interaction, although it may seem harmless, can make them vulnerable to manipulation and external influences.

Social media plays an important role in modern communication, providing people with the opportunity to connect, share opinions and information, and collaborate in various ways. It is also a vital tool for marketing and promotion, being used by companies to reach customers and build brands. Additionally, social media can influence public opinion and serve as a space for activism and social mobilization.

According to a global investigative report, users spend an average of 6 hours and 35 minutes on social media, with connections to others being the most popular reason for using these platforms (Nie et al., 2023). As of April 2023, there were 4.80 billion social media users, representing 60% of the global population (Nie et al., 2023).

The theories that underpinned research on social networks have also been captured in this chapter:

Theories of personal behavior (Knoke, Yang, 2019; Vallerand et al., 1992; Bateson, 1973) exemplified by the theory of planned behavior (Vallerand et al., 1992).

Social behavior theories (Ballentine, 2022; Litterio, 2021; Berry, 2012; Boncu, 2002).

The theory of mass communication (Tabassum et al., 2018).

The theory of rational action (Montano, Kasprzyk, 2015).

The technology acceptance model (TAM)

Digital technologies, including: blogs, microblogs, social media platforms (Facebook), professional networks (LinkedIn.com), video sharing platforms (YouTube), photo sharing platforms (Instagram), presentation sharing platforms (Prezi), document sharing platforms, group platforms, forums, instant messaging (Messenger), etc., all allow virtually any form of communication, synchronous or asynchronous, and can be used to access various fields from the

comfort of our homes. In every field, we are now completely dependent on these digital tools (Rubeena, 2022).

Social media statistics from 2016 compared to 2023 truly reflect the direction we are heading, considering that in 2023, an estimated 4.89 billion social media users were projected globally out of 5.16 billion internet users, within a population of 7.9 billion people. This means that more than half of the global population is active on at least one social media platform. It is expected that by 2027, the number of users will increase to 6 billion, representing a growth of 1.2 billion users over the next four years.

As expected, social media has also penetrated education and the business environment. More and more enterprises are increasingly promoting their products and services through various channels. Managers and marketing directors utilize different digital mediums (including social networks, blogs, wikis, electronic forums, webinars, podcasts, videos, etc.) (Camilleri, 2019a). In this context, influencers have almost been invited to enter the market. One of the biggest challenges for startups is to build brand awareness with limited resources. As social media has become one of the most popular platforms for advertising, more and more brands are turning to social media influencers for collaboration (Kay & all, 2020).

The theory suggests that social media influencers have a significant impact on users' attitudes. They are often perceived as credible, likable, and similar to their audience—traits that, according to research, facilitate the persuasion process. The credibility of influencers leads to the internalization of the attributes they promote; the pleasure they inspire can create a halo effect; and their similarity to the audience stimulates social comparisons, suggesting that if a similar communicator appreciates a product, it is reasonable to assume that it will also be appreciated by the receiver (O'Keefe, 2016; Perloff, 2020).

Depending on the number of followers they have, influencers can be classified into micro-influencers, who typically have fewer than 100,000 followers, and macro-influencers, who can have millions of followers. Macro-influencers can be celebrities or affiliated with social media agencies (Arbeu, 2019).

The importance of the context generated by technological innovations is the subject of Chapter 3. Over time, technological revolutions have represented significant transitions in how people

produced goods and interacted with each other. In the present we live in, digital technological innovations are recorded in an endless immersion in everyday life and across all fields, and this requires a continuous adaptability to the social and cultural context. Technological change goes hand in hand with social and cultural change, and the central element is the human factor (Hosu & Hosu, 2019). Generation Z, as a central element of this time period, also comes with its own expectations regarding the future workplace as it enters the professional realm.

Our research aimed to identify, based on the analysis of how specific platforms are used, the existence of viable communication models among digital natives in the technical field concerning the process of acquiring useful and necessary knowledge for entering the labor market.

To gain a comprehensive and relevant perspective on the younger generation, we chose to focus the research exclusively on the youth of Generation Z from the technical field, specifically students from technical faculties in our country. To achieve the overall objective, within the context of globalization and the specific conditions in Romania, the research design was structured around three main axes, each with its own stage of analysis.

1. The stage of analyzing the usage of specific platforms by digital natives in the technical field in relation to their professional interests.
2. The stage of analyzing the perception of digital natives in the technical field regarding the ideal workplace.
3. The stage of analyzing the usage of specific platforms based on their personal and professional expectations.

The questionnaire, as a research instrument, focused on the use of social platforms for communication, documentation, and content creation; the channels used by students in the technical field to access jobs both domestically and abroad; what they associate with an ideal job; and how they perceive the role of influencers. The questionnaire was administered to students from 5 Technical Universities: "Politehnica" University of Timișoara, Technical University of Cluj Napoca, Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, "Politehnica" University of Bucharest, and Gheorghe Asachi Technical University of Iași, during the period from May to October 2019, to a sample of 2,830 students.

CONCLUSIONS

A centralization of the results shows that indeed, technical students in Romania in 2019 used platforms differently based on their professional interests; however, the most popular ones remain "Facebook," "YouTube," "Instagram," "Messenger," and "WhatsApp." It is also noteworthy that they are content consumers even on platforms intended for creation. They use all of them in a similar way, with communication being predominant. Research plays a rather important role in this equation, while content creation occupies the last place.

Analyzing the use of communication platforms by gender, it is observed that girls are often oriented towards visual and creative platforms, while boys tend to prefer platforms that facilitate discussions and information exchanges. Girls are more active online, exploring various aspects of research, including design and presentation of information, while boys focus on quickly obtaining relevant and up-to-date information from platforms like YouTube.com and Reddit.com for content creation.

In the digital age, across multiple social media platforms, influencers are central figures with a remarkable presence and considerable impact on their online communities. They manage to directly influence the decisions and perceptions of other users regarding the products, services, or topics they promote. In our research, we highlighted their influence in education, career guidance, community selection, and expectations of employers. The responses were correlated with the platforms used by students for communication, research, and content creation. Although with limited predictive power, we observed some differences in platform usage across the three areas, among which it is noteworthy that engineering students who use the platform LinkedIn.com for communication are less influenced in their career choices by influencers. Regarding expectations of employers, the likelihood of using platforms like TED.com and Reddit.com for communication decreases. For young people who emphasize the importance of influencers in education, there is a significant probability of using platforms like Books.Google.com, Piazza.com, Viber, and Tumblr.com for communication purposes.

Young individuals who use social media platforms for research tend to credit influencers less as their interest in scientific information increases; they prefer to "research" on their own, gathering information independently and crediting those with a reputation as researchers in their field rather than those who simply express opinions.

Individuals who significantly appreciate the role of influencers in career guidance are highly likely to use the platform Facebook.com for content creation.

To analyze the perception of digital natives in the technical field regarding the ideal workplace, multinational corporations, SMEs, education, public institutions, NGOs, and self-owned businesses were targeted, while search channels were represented through: profile websites, social media accounts, job fairs or career centers, and received recommendations.

Multinational corporations ranked highest in the preferences of polytechnic students as an ideal workplace, followed by private companies (SMEs) and NGOs. There are a few aspects worth mentioning, namely: using profile websites as a criterion and career fairs as another criterion, we observe the absence of education as an ideal workplace, which means that young people who utilize profile websites to search for jobs do not perceive education as an ideal workplace. When using recommendations as a criterion, SMEs and public institutions rank at the top of preferences for an ideal workplace.

Regarding the intention of young people to emigrate, we can say that polytechnic students who focus their employer searches on profile websites are less likely to consider emigration. This aspect highlights the importance of online tools in influencing decisions related to professional mobility and suggests that the accessibility and information available on profile websites can decrease young people's desire to seek job opportunities abroad.

The analysis of how specific platforms are used based on the personal and professional expectations of young polytechnic students has highlighted their use for communication, as well as for research and content creation, on platforms such as Groups.Yahoo.com and Groups.Facebook.com, which aim to encourage them to stay in the country. Groups.com platforms are online discussion group platforms that allow users to join various groups based on shared interests. Young people interacting on platforms like Groups.Yahoo.com or Groups.Facebook.com

can share personal experiences and success stories that may inspire other young individuals to remain in the country, demonstrating that there are positive prospects and opportunities available. When assessing corporations as the ideal workplace, young people evaluate them based on their media presence, industry, and company reputation. For those who view multinational corporations as their ideal job, utilizing a multitude of platforms for communication, research, and content creation becomes an essential practice, reflecting not only a trend but also a well-calculated strategy in the pursuit of professional opportunities. This approach is driven by the desire to maximize the chances of success in today's competitive professional environment, where networking and access to information are crucial.

For a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) appreciated as an ideal workplace, it is evaluated based on its field of activity, media presence, and ethics within the company. Young people who believe that an ideal job can be found in a private company are significantly more likely to use the platform "Instagram.com" for communication purposes. This trend can be explained by the visual and social nature of Instagram, which aligns with the values and culture of private firms that often promote a dynamic and innovative image. Additionally, Instagram is a popular platform among young professionals looking to build and maintain a network of professional and personal contacts, which fits the characteristics and communication strategies of many private companies.

Education and NGOs are evaluated based on the same criteria, namely: market position, media presence, and number of employees. Young people who consider education as the ideal workplace are significantly less likely to use "Instagram.com" and "SnapChat" for communication purposes.

Those who choose a public institution as their ideal workplace stand out for their use of a multitude of platforms for communication, documentation, and content creation, which has become an essential practice for them as well.

Those who opt for their own business as their ideal workplace look at media presence, the field of activity, and the company's reputation. We can easily observe how important the organization's media presence and its field of activity are for young polytechnic graduates in the evaluation criteria they apply when considering their ideal job. The use of a variety of platforms for communication has also become a common practice for them.

In direct connection with the aforementioned, the appreciation of online work as an essential criterion for defining the ideal workplace is increasingly relevant in the current context, where technology and digitalization are transforming the way we work. This appreciation is closely linked to the need to respect employees' privacy, considering that online work can bring both benefits and challenges regarding the balance between professional and personal life..

The existence of a positive connection between the benefits package, working conditions, and labor relations confirms hypothesis number 8, in the sense that labor relations are not limited to direct interactions among employees but also include organizational culture, peer support, and effective communication. When employees feel valued and supported by their colleagues and superiors, they become more engaged and motivated, which leads them to take greater advantage of the benefits offered by their employer.

The connection between the use of platforms like "Facebook.com" and "YouTube.com" for communication and the desire of young people to work in the field they studied is due to the fact that these platforms provide tutorials, webinars, and interviews with professionals from various fields, which can inspire young people to pursue careers in their areas of study. For research purposes, the platform "Messenger" appears to be the most used by these young individuals who wish to work in their field of study. For content creation, they utilize the platform "Groups.Yahoo.com" and are likely not to use the platform "Tumblr.com." Individuals who appreciate the importance of finding the ideal job tend to use platforms such as LinkedIn.com, Instagram.com, and various messaging or group platforms more frequently for communication, research, and content creation purposes.

Individuals who consider finding the ideal job important are more likely to use platforms that facilitate professional networking, document management, and communication. Young people who expect to find their ideal job tend to use a variety of platforms, with a special emphasis on those that facilitate networking and access to relevant career information. LinkedIn.com proves to be the most important tool in this context, followed by platforms that offer visual and educational resources or collaboration and communication features.

OWN CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research aimed to provide only a small insight into the vast issues surrounding technology and its influences, focusing on the main actor of this phenomenon: the Generation Z youth in the technical field. Furthermore, even within this more restricted issue, we have selected and explored in depth only a few aspects related to social media and the expectations of Generation Z youth in the technical field as they enter the job market.

The own contribution is reflected both in the research methodology and in the development of the predictive profile equations. Without aiming to exhaust the topic we addressed or to assert definitive conclusions, we believe that the theoretical synthesis and the results of the empirical studies presented in this paper represent a small step in exploring the vast realm of new technologies and their utility.

There are several limitations to this work that hinder the generalization of the research data, including:

- The restriction of the research to students from Technical Universities in Romania
- The data was collected during 2019, and technological evolution is rapid

We fully assume the limitations resulting from such an arbitrary approach.

RESEARCH PROPOSALS:

The continuation of the research could be achieved through a longitudinal study of predictive validity

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