THE CULTURE OF GENERATION Z – THE PATH FOR CREATING NEW EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTS

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ABSTRACT

If we summarize the experiences of the past, it can be said with certainty that social, economic and social changes determine the culture of individuals and the community as a whole. The Covid - pandemic intensified the integration of the world into the virtual dimension of life, and together with the psychological and social consequences of its development - created a world that has grown into the greatest historical challenge of all science. The generation born after 2000, categorized as Generation Z, learns and develops in technologically advanced circumstances and influencing factors that go beyond traditional pedagogy. Among the factors that determine the personality development of these generations, in addition to family and peer groups, the media have a dominant place. Technology is a part of their identity, and they are tech savvy but lack problem-solving skills and have not demonstrated the ability to look at a situation, put in context, analyze it and make a decision (Coombs, 2013). The language of Generation Z is a communication system with authentic rules and inner structure. Faced with modern forms of communication, they create new language codes and innovative and creative forms of expression. Faced with the greatest challenges in the history of education and the impact of technology on child development, modern education systems require models, approaches, skills and literacy that will meet the individual needs of the new generation of young people and, at the same time meet market needs. For these reasons, new educational concepts should be based on approaches that ensure the integration of critical and creative thinking and the development of emotional intelligence. Artificial intelligence is increasingly creating operating systems that are predictors of user behaviour. Algorithms have become the most powerful tool for targeting, managing and directing culture. Hence, the new culture, almost without exception, is defined as an algorithmic culture.

Keywords: generation Z, culture, applications, language, education

The content of this paper is a product of research conducted with students from several high schools in North Macedonia, related to the use of social media and its impact on language and culture. The group was composed of high school students aged 15 to 19, which is the richest resource for establishing examples of communication and language transformation. At the same time, they were chosen because they represent Generation Z - children born from 1996 to 2015 (in terms of age and characteristics).

The initial hypothesis of this research was formulated in the affirmative form: The culture of Generation Z is a base for creating new educational concepts. In other words, the results of the research should emphasize the intensity of using social media and their input in the culture of living. Received data confirm the impact of communication in the virtual space, on language and perception of reality.

The purpose of this research is to show the objective situation in North Macedonia in terms of social media use and youth. The research is based on the data gathered in the form of a Questionnaire, available database, interviews and interaction with parents and students. Some information was gathered from the relevant journals, direct discussion with the experts, and different magazine articles.

Due to Covid - protocols in schools and the inability (at the time of this research) to be in personal contact with students in schools, teachers were coordinators in conducting this research. In coordination with the author, they shared material with the students in the classes.

The basic method of research was a Questionnaire in electronic form, which was shared in high schools from Skopje, Gostivar, Kumanovo and Kriva Palanka (SUGS "Orce Nikolov" – Skopje, SUGS "Zef Ljus Marku" - Skopje, SUGS "Gjorce Petrov"- Kriva Palanka, SSUGS "Vlado Tasevski" - Skopje, SSUGS "Vasil Antevski - Dren" - Skopje and SSUGG " Gostivar" - Gostivar).

The questionnaire was implemented in the period from 14.11.2021 - 22.11.2021. Participants were students from the first to the fourth grade of secondary education (15-19 years). Due to the circumstances and the impossibility of approaching the research in a paper sample, the precise selection of the groups could not be precisely organized in terms of equal gender representation in the respondents. The entire selection of the surveyed groups was mediated by the teachers, respecting the diversity in age as a priority.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW

The history and epochs through which the evolution of mankind has passed, confirm that culture is the most authentic archive of human behavior. It is unique in its definition, written or left as a seal in the collective memory. Regardless of the historical period and circumstances, it is a system of values, attitudes, styles, patterns of behavior and form of communication. It reflects ideas, places, events, objects, and people. It shapes the basics of human behavior over time.

Human behavior means adapting to changing situations. "What is implied is that humans have a set of innate needs, requirements, or abilities that must be met or realized in order for vision to exist. "(Johnson, 2013. p. 108). Definitions of culture have changed over time and it is gradually defined as a concept from several different aspects. Croeber and Parsons defined culture as a process of: "transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaning systems as factors in shaping human behavior" (Croeber & Parsons, 1958: 583). Even more often, culture is defined, according to Kluckhohn as "patterns of ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, which constitute the characteristic achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts (Klukhohn, 1951. p.86).

Historical technological revolutions have generally marked the stages of cultural development. The last, Fourth industrial revolution raised questions that are not only related to economic change but also the question of a redefinition of existence. Technology has transposed into all segments of life and created new challenges bordering on physical power and human influence. We are now talking about an algorithmic culture that determines the culture of the new age. Alexander Galloway explains culture in terms of the use of technology and video games (gaming), referring to it as an algorithmic culture. He links the new culture to the influence of big companies like Amazon, Google, Twitter, and Netflix. These concepts are increasingly being expressed in big data logic, which is also changing the way culture is understood, practiced, and defined. (Galloway, 2006).

All definitions of the new culture are related to the rapid development of technology and the digitalization of all segments of life. In this regard, if each generation inherits features and models from previous generations, then the generation born in this technologically advanced time will produce, consume, and interpret a completely different culture. This culture no longer refers to the content, beause it is by default new, compared to the older generations. The new is in all its form, in the perception of reality, in the auxiliary tools for its reception that offer sequences (simulacra), parts of the whole and virtual experience. The difference in those processes of receiving reality, based on which culture is built, creates the algorithmic culture.

If until now, the technological revolutions have been happening for a long time, now it is certain that in an average human life, we will witness many of them. In particular, with the Covid-pandemic, these changes began the rapid transformation of the world and bring closer the future that was not expected in this time frame. If we summarize the experiences of the past, it can be said with certainty that social, economic and social changes determine the culture of individuals and the community as a whole. Covid - the pandemic intensified the integration of the world into the virtual dimension of life and together with the psychological and social consequences of its development - created a world that has grown into the greatest historical challenge in all of science.

To determine the contours of the culture of the generation born after 1996 (Generation Z), we have to start from the first step - the way of socialization and communication. The theory of communication through a series of examples confirms that each individual has an acquired personal image. Thus, great efforts are made to impose this image on others through the process of communication. Each individual has his own personal style of speaking, but at the same time, each participant in communication has the so-called "discoursive roles", related to various personal characteristics (psychological concept, social context, cultural code, status, etc.). In this sense, the American linguist William Labov affirms that "each subject belongs to a certain linguistic community, within which he acquires certain skills, structured in different subsystems (stylistic and social variations)." (Labov, 1972, p.78)

These communities are in fact different sources of culture and the big picture of the values and trends of the time. Until the advent of the Internet and in particular, social media, communication and culture were defined based on the behavior of social groups and individuals who were leaders in change. With the emergence of social groups, new, unknown challenges have emerged that create and transform communication and the culture of generations.

If "we are all wrapped up in our own ideas and interests and have trouble seeing things from other The culture of Gen Z is closely related to mass media and technology, so today we can no longer talk about mass culture. This generation is a generation that does not have a unique culture. Their cultural map is a mosaic of subcultures and personalized forms that are so different and have so many variations that it is almost impossible to group them into a single cultural script that will be related to their overall behavior, communication forms, styles, clothing, music and fig. Under the influence of social media, they are faced daily with trends that change so quickly, that it is more and more difficult for them to build their authenticity or maintain it in the long term.

Social media has grown into a giant network of exchanging opinions, perspectives and interests. Apparently, this is also the case in the real context of everyday life. But the difference is that, in the case of social media, communication and culture are created not only by the users themselves (through the choice of information they read), but also by other invisible mechanisms - algorithms and the overall background infrastructure that creates behaviors and cultural patterns.

Driven by the media, Generation Z represents the so-called algorithmic consumer culture which is "collections of statistically modeled consumer experiences, encoded lifestyles, technologically governed social exchanges and predicted identities, resulting from the recursive loop generated by the largely black-boxed activities of the algorithmic systems featured by digital platforms and devices."(Massimo&Rokka, 2019)

The main goal of the research, the object of interpretation here, was to define the culture of communication of the high school population (popular, Gen Z) and their interaction. The questionnaire was conducted at the class level, during the teaching of individual subjects. Hence, this research will help in a general assessment of the participation of high school students in social networks, the choice of the communication platform, the number of their user-profiles and in particular, the use of communication signs and its forms. (see Exhibit 1)

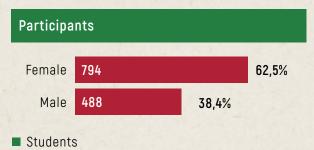


Exhibit 1: Number of participants in the research disaggregated by gender

During the implementation of the Questionnaire, we respected the principle of diversity in the target groups. In that sense, the research included students from the first to the fourth year, from high schools in several cities in North Macedonia and from different educational profiles (vocational school and gymnasium).

Due to the objective circumstances mentioned above, complete gender equality could not be reached (because it depended on the motivation of students for answering the questions and the motivation of the teachers to pursue the principle of gender equality in the selection of the group. (see Exhibit 3: Participants per age). It should be taken into account that high school classes have a larger number of girls in the classes.



Exhibit 2: Participants disaggregated by age

3) FINDINGS

The purpose of the Questionnaire was to get an objective image of the extension of social media usage and the impact of electronic communication on language. In that direction, the question was asked about the type of communication used in everyday conversations. Based on their answers, it can be noticed that digitalization, or more precisely, the virtual context amplifies the emergence of new forms of communication. Thus, texting becomes the dominant form of interaction. Intensive communication and new signs create an alternative, "secret" language of understanding.

Due to the intensity and the speed of the interactions - the members of Generation Z continuously create their own authentic language codes and expressions. "The stylistic range has to recognize not only web pages, but also the vast amount of material found in email, chatrooms, virtual worlds, blogging, instant messaging, texting, tweeting, and other outputs, as well as the increasing amount of linguistic communication in social networking forums." (Crystal, 2011: 10).

The new language, its forms and meanings are the objects of interest of science called the Internet – linguistic or internet – semiotics. Written internet language is not just made up of letters and does not necessarily consist solely of written language. Instead, the prototype of a text is changing to an amalgam of language and image elements, which constitutes the "textual reality" (Stöckl, 2009: 204).

One of the questions of the research was the question of the type of communication that high school students use most often (clearly and precisely coincide with the emergence of the new linguistic phenomenon textism). From the total number of participants, the following answers were given to this question:

What type of electronic communication do you use?



Exhibit 3: The most popular type of communication

More than 86% (n = 1270) of high school students in North Macedonia use written language in everyday communication. They talk less on the phone and actively communicate through chat. In this way, they create their own sub-culture, a language with an authentic grammar that deviates from all syntaxis, punctuation and spelling rules. It is a free system, without norm, in that sense, but with its own indigenous language code.

Communication of this generation sets up a new language system of abbreviations and visual signs. They are a product of a dynamic language zone of millions of information per day, on a dozen applications, sounds and notifications.

The great technological revolutions have had a mutual time span. Each of them was causally linked to major economic, social and existential changes. Each of them was a step forward in facilitating the life of the individual. After the Fourth industrial revolution, it becomes clear that this time frame is shrinking and that it is increasingly likely that such technological revolutions will occur much more frequently, even two or three in an average human life.

Social media has become a new virtual home and a new environment in which each individual builds their world and their digital friends and like-minded people. That tension, that high voltage that is created by the constant need to "enter" in our home every day, creates a new part of all of us our new identity. This ubiquity online, through the active reception of notifications and information and the instinct to respond to them, at least with our attention, has created the new phenomenon of *being at the moment*. "We tend to exist in a distracted present, where forces on the periphery are magnified, and those immediately before us are ignored. Our ability to create a plan – much less follow through on it – is undermined by our need to improvise our way through any number of external impacts that stand to derail us at any moment.

Instead of finding a stable foothold in the here and now, we end up reacting to the ever-present assault of simultaneous impulses and commands (Rushkoff, 2013: 4). This research confirmed that the most popular social platform for Macedonian high school students (aged between 15-19) is Instagram.



Instagram	1100	87,7%
Snapchat	71 5,6%	
Facebook	23 1,8%	
Twitter	16 1,3%	
Tik Tok	46 3,6%	

Exhibit 4: The most popular social media platform

This research was focused not only on the forms of communication but also on the context that produces language transformation. One of the questions concerned the degree of online active communication of high school students. So, to the question: In how many conversation groups (chat groups) you are included during the day? - more than half of the respondents confirmed that they are active in more than three groups every day. As many as 33.3% (n = 1265) of the respondents are active in even more than five chat groups. Only 9, 3% communicate in one chat group per day.





Exhibit 5: Number of active participations in chat group during the day

This data confirms that the students' language skills are in intensive development. To communicate in several chat groups at the same time, means to be involved in using several language characters in parallel and different communication patterns. Each application and intern communication requires its own language rules, signs, codes, and meanings. Although written communication in these groups includes language that is non-standard.

The use of these linguistic signs does not reduce their literacy, because "children can not make variations with symbols, numbers and letters, if they do not have basic literacy" (Crystal, 2011. p.16).

The language of communication accumulates the values of a community and reflects personal, family and social components and conveys forms of socially and culturally acquired language patterns. We should be aware that modern communication is a mixed system of codes that are constantly changing, and this makes online communication a complex linguistic network. Gen Z young people (high school students) are active participants in a massive communication circle. They are constantly online, included in interactions as creators, editors, receivers and senders of information. The examples obtained with this research confirm the generational linguistic gap between the members of this generation (Generation Z) and the generations that previously had their own written language code. If all the examples of new language signs and words are summarized, it is almost certain that new language material has already been created for the lexicon of social media.

Word / sign	Meaning	
Wyd	what are you doing	
tbh	to be honest	
Aight	all right	
Gm	good morning	
ldk	i do not know	
Lol	laugh out loud	
Ngl	not gonna lie	
Nmv	never mind	
pls	please	
Rn	right now	
Bff	best friend forever	
Brb	be right back	
Lmao	laughing my ass off	
lg	i guess	
Gtg	got to go	
Hyd	how you doing	
Wut	what	
ldc	l do not care	

The following examples are the most common:

Exhibit 6: Table of the most popular chat-words

In addition to this language code, Generation Z also uses visual signs - emojis. They are a substitute for non-verbal signs and signify inner experiences that graphically written language cannot convey.

What is certain is that all previously stated research findings confirm that Generation Z is not just a new social and social community. They are a new, authentic language group. Their communication is more and more separated from the communication of their predecessors and creates a linguistic and thus a social gap with the other generations. This is not only a question of problems in understanding their language forms, here it is a question of a new culture of interaction, full of symbols and codes that are unreadable and unknown to others.

There are many other components that make up social media communication. Many researchers are debating this transformation of language. They are guided by two different theses. Some are on the side of change (that is a reality), while others are opponents of that acceptance.

"Are email, instant messaging (IM), and text messaging on cell phones degrading the language? This question surfaces in debates among language professionals and, perhaps more important, among parents and their teenage offspring. If some traditionalists are correct, we must take swift action now, before these children are reduced to marginal literacy.

But if those celebrating linguistic innovation are correct, adults should get out of the way of normal language change. Families and educational purists have an obvious stake in the outcome of this controversy, but so, too, do the makers and marketers of computer-based software and devices—from IM platforms to predictive text programs for cell phones." (Baron, 2005. p.29)

Gen Z's most popular online habit is posting stories on social media. This social media activity has also become a form of communication. On the one hand, the subject conveys a mes sage through a story (short video or photo), and on the other - receives feedback in the form of emojis, words and other types of signs-symbols). This form of communication is not verbal, but is a combination of several codes: language code - words, artistic code - photography, music and symbols to enhance the story, as well as aesthetic code - filters to beautify the subject of the message and the background of the story.

4) DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Education must not lose its function. The school should prepare the future citizens, today Generation Z and younger, to participate in the new culture of living, aware of the mechanism of algorithms, background infrastructure and all computer-mediated communication. How to prepare curricula that will be based on the interdisciplinarity of contents and a completely new concept of the classroom, when the creators of educational policies are themselves the product of a past educational concept?

Our future is happening now, and it has begun its rapid pace of change with the Covid pandemic. Covid circumstances set new conditions and transformed the overall life of the people. On the one hand, it has brought inequality and a different approach to education and technology, but on the other hand, it has opened up new ideas for redefining education, knowledge and literacy. The main question is, what are the goals of education and what kind of literacy is needed by the generations trapped in the matrix of new technology? For them, devices are windows to the world and the experiences with the machine build their worldview. If the results of this research are summarized and if we take into account the overall transformation of life under the influence of technology, it is already certain that education is facing the most difficult challenge in the history of mankind. Social media has become a dominant force in creating and managing culture. It is a time for a different type of literacy. New literacy means a broader concept, a set of reading, comprehension and digital literacy skills. Contemporary education and students need multiple literacies that "include the varied forms of text as well as the cultural identities expressed during communication, known as discourse" (Sheridan-Thomas, 2007. p.121). Sociolinguists discuss discourse, semiotics and other terms relating to the use of symbols to convey meaning with and emphasize culture and the role it plays (Gee, 1996).

The development of technology has brought to humanity a set of tools for a better life and access to the incredible ocean of resources. But at the same time, the communication process in that circle created problems in the creation and management of information. Also, today, the big question is the ethics and ethical use of data from big companies like Google, Amazon, Facebook and many others.

All of this is important and should be an integral part of educational curricula. Awareness of the existence of mechanisms for manipulation, disinformation and propaganda is a new threat in the daily life of digital nomads. Young people "travel" daily through several zones (linguistic, informatic, virtual), which opens a great chance to be a target and a means of manipulation. The OECD report notes that the risk of life online:

"Algorithms that sort us into groups of like-minded individuals create social media echo chambers that amplify our views and leave us insulated from opposing arguments that may alter our beliefs. These virtual bubbles homogenize opinions and polarise our societies; and they can have a significant – and adverse – impact on democratic processes." (OECD report, 2021.p.15) Knowledge about media, the development of critical thinking, linguistics and digital and information literacy are the basic principles of future education. Every student has to be aware of their own authentic life and identity and cautious in the digital society and virtual identities on social media.

The penetration of AI in all spheres initiates the need for changes and transformation of education and learning concepts. The last innovation, the so-called ChatGPT confirms, among other things, that the Internet has grown into a global database that, with the help of artificial intelligence, creates its own connections and creates ready-made patterns. All this leads us to the conclusion that we are faced with the historically greatest transformation of education, during which the question of what is actually "knowledge" and how to approach the new generations in the educational process is being redefined. What to evaluate? The creativity, the argumentation of the statements, the innovation, the authenticity of the conclusions that the student draws after researching on the Internet, the critical opinion, the original views. Or all together?

It is clear that we first need to change the way we teach. Classic pedagogy is going down in history and teachers have to adapt to the changes. It is already obvious that after the expansion of social media and the hyperproduction of information, databases and various forms of communication, the transformation of the school is inevitable. The ways of imparting knowledge, the way in which students will navigate through the media world and manage that entire information universe should be an imperative of education.

The main goal of the new educational concept is to prepare the student for the safe and reliable use of technology, for ethical communication on social media, for the use of technology for creating innovative products, for the creative connection of science and art, etc. Due to the emergence and easy availability of artificial intelligence tools, writing and research as basic skills for intellectual and further professional development are under threat of misuse and undermining of academic potential. In such a spectrum of data, the need for "soft skills" and humanization of the generation that grows and is shaped in a technologically developed time and with social media mechanisms that manage their styles, choices, way of thinking, dressing, culture in general is already visible.

Al has become the new force that will make tectonic shifts in educational concepts. This is that historical moment of an educational revolution, which is not created by man, but by machines and computers. With the simplicity with which large databases from all fields are reached, with new innovative platforms, such as the last one (ChatGPT), it is likely that conditions are being imposed for the so-called "verbalization" of education and for practices that will initiate individual originality, dialogue, individual approach to the student, teamwork, projects that will be connected to immediate social, societal and scientific issues and dilemmas.

An education that will include the learner himself, who will use technology and data as support to create original educational products. It is certain that education based on the use of technology is increasingly under the threat of creating a false and unrealistic assessment of the personal achievements of students. Applications that solve math problems, platforms that write essays and research on their own, using data that is unverified or incorrect - these are just a few of the challenges for every teacher. Education, in a race with the technology and tools of artificial intelligence, has only one choice in three steps - to adapt, integrate and transform! The future that we expected to meet in fifty or a hundred years is fast approaching us now. Let's hope we find a way to be a part of it!

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