

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

**Communicatio**

Volume 1, 2014

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania  
Scientia Publishing House



# Contents

<b>Editorial Foreword</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Theoretical Studies</b> .....	<b>7</b>
László Ropolyi Prolegomena to a Web-Life-Theory .....	9
<b>Research – Case Studies</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Mária Törőcsik, Krisztián Szűcs, Dániel Kehl How Generations Think: Research on Generation Z .....	23
Ádám Guld, Gyula Maksa On the Move: “Shadow Research” on the Media Habits of Generation Z. . .	47
Rita Glózer Social and Political Criticism in Hungarian Parodistic Videos on YouTube. ....	57
Rozália Klára Bakó Children Online: A Participatory Visual Approach .....	75
Gyöngyvér Tőkés Social Networking Practices of Young Romanians. ....	87
<b>Research Notes</b> .....	<b>107</b>
Orsolya Gergely New Media, New Idols? .....	109
József Gagyí “They Already Know Everything.” Computer Use by Teenagers and Associated Perceptions in Rural Communities .....	121
Áron Bakos Potentiality and Actuality: Some Results of an Ongoing Research on a Community of Massively Multiplayer Online Gamers. ....	131
<b>Book/Journal/Article Reviews</b> .....	<b>137</b>
Erika Both, Arnold Péter István Povedák (ed.), <i>Heroes and Celebrities in Central and Eastern Europe</i> .....	139





## Editorial Foreword

Dear Reader, we are glad to offer you the first issue of *Communicatio* – the newest journal series within the larger family of *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae* periodicals. This journal, as a publication based at the Sapientia Hungarian University of Romania, aims to gather and present the newest ongoing research on traditional and virtual communication, or new (mass and social) media, with a highlight on Central-Eastern Europe, and global perspectives. The main focus of the journal will be the study of new media, of their impact on generations, and of how they transform contemporary society in the region.

New media can be defined as a (convergent) constellation comprising digital technology, information technology, networking communication and the newest form of communication surpassing “the boundaries of direct interpersonal communication” with the help of instruments and techniques, more technology-dependent than any other before.

In this respect, the sociologist is interested rather in the ways of how do the technical-technological changes influence the social activity, the everyday life of human communities or individuals. Generation Z uses the most intensively these machines, surrounding themselves with this digital environment – it is legitimate thus to study them with more attention.

As an unavoidable peculiar task in the study of new media, we have to interpret an alternative reality forming in the network of computers, which can be created, accessed or represented only by technical means, and which we call temporarily for want of better: virtual reality. This means that the sociologist cannot ignore the unprecedentedly complex and never before so human machine, combined of hard and soft (body and soul) elements. Or, better said, research cannot disregard the relationship between human and computer, a system of relations between human and technical object/device more complex than ever.

We have to think further Bruno Latour’s statement, focusing on the process called by him translation, a continuous movement between the social and the technical, human and non-human poles. We have to observe the practices carefully and in detail, starting from the premise that the object–user relation is constructed through serial transmissions transferring meanings. These synergic actions are characterized by collisions, bargains, serial modifications, corrections, as well as efforts made to understand and represent them – all implied in the concept of translation –, the semantic field of which falls thus quite far away

from the meaning of (linguistic) translation, interpretation, which might come to our mind in the first place when hearing the term. In this practice, social and technical logic coexist.

We must gradually get accustomed to the idea that the research of mass media phenomena does not offer ultimate answers for any queries. The reason of this is that the human behaviours and the prospects, TV shows, debates, media representations presenting and popularizing the explanations and social effects of these behaviours are in constant interaction.

Bearing in mind these premises, we release the first issue of our journal, which offers valuable insights into the most recent scholarly study of the field. In the opening, you can read an essay about the philosophy of the Internet (*Prolegomena to a Web-Life-Theory*) by László Ropolyi, a leading theorist from Hungary. The “Case Studies” chapter comprises five empirical surveys and media analyses: two research studies on media habits and communication attitudes of Generation Z (*How Generations Think* by Mária Törőcsik’s research group from Pécs University, Hungary, and the “shadow research” *On the Move* by Ádám Guld and Gyula Maksa from the same University) followed by Rita Glózer’s study (*Freedom of Expression through Parodistic Videos*) analysing Hungarian YouTube memes; while the next two articles present the relationship of younger generations to the Internet and social media in Romania (Rozália Klára Bakó: *Children Online* and Gyöngyvér Tőkés: *Social Networking Practices of Romanian Young People* – both researchers are from the Sapientia University). The next chapter is dedicated to shorter research notes of ongoing projects – two investigations from the Sapientia University, Romania (*New Media, New Idols?* by Orsolya Gergely and *They Already Know Everything* by József Gagyi), and one inquiry from Hungary into the world of online videogames (Áron Bakos’s article *Potentiality and Actuality*). The issue is closed by an outlook into the international field: a book review written by Erika Both and Arnold Péter on the recent conference volume published in Szeged (2014) under the supervision of István Povedák: *Heroes and Celebrities in Central and Eastern Europe*.

Hoping that You will find relevant and valuable results and information in this introductory volume, we wish all our readers a pleasant lecture.

The editors

# **Theoretical Studies**







# Prolegomena to a Web-Life-Theory

László Ropolyi

Department of History and Philosophy of Science, Eötvös Lóránd University  
ropolyi@ludens.elte.hu

**Abstract.** Human existence is being transformed. Its structure, many thousand years old, seems to be changing: built on the natural and the social, there is a third form of existence: web-life. Man is now the citizen of three worlds and its nature is being formed by the relations of natural, social and web-life. We regard as our main goal the study of web-life, which has developed as the result of Internet use.

**Keywords:** Internet, web-life, philosophy, cultural, social

## 1. Methodological Remarks

1. While constructing a theory of web-life which interprets web-life, we will try to present and interpret the most important contexts primarily through philosophical trains of thought, above all the appearance of the Internet, its features, its widespread usage and the consequences of these. Firstly, we will try to reveal the complex *nature* of the Internet, and then we will examine the social and cultural *effects* of Internet use.

2. The two topics are of course closely related. The interpretability of social and cultural effects, to be discussed in the second step, requires a presentation of the nature of the Internet in which effects of this kind are conceivable at all. In certain cases, this involves trying to make use of connections which are uncommon in the task of interpreting the Internet. Thus, for example, we will engage in discussions of philosophy, philosophy of technology, communication theory, epistemology, cognitive science and social and cultural history instead of discussing directly the Internet “itself”. We will do all of this hoping that besides a more complete understanding of the Internet, we can prepare for the presentation of its social and cultural consequences as well.

3. On the other hand, it is of course also essential that the nature of the Internet has been developing and is developing not in a “naturally given” way but as a result of conscious decisions, serving certain social and cultural aspirations, following intentions, interests and values. Taking into consideration the social

and cultural factors which *define* as well as participate in the *shaping* of the nature of the Internet obviously helps identifying those social and cultural *effects that occur* in the course of Internet use. Thus, it seems to be useful to include certain social and cultural contexts in the examination of the nature of the Internet.

4. We have developed a complex method for the interpretation of the nature of the Internet, which we have dubbed “*the Aristotelian philosophy of the Internet*”. This has two important features:

i) We will try to present – as a philosophical introduction – a philosophical (and not “scientific”) description.

ii) In the course of this, we will try to apply the approach of the Aristotelian theory of causation as regards the nature of entities.

5. The *complexity* of the Internet and the extreme *diversity* of our experiences and ideas in connection with the Internet support these methodological assumptions. Among researchers of the Internet, there is a lack of consensus in this matter: according to many, it is not clear whether it is the (scientific) theory of the Internet or its philosophy that is missing for the time being. Scientific theories on the Internet normally apply the specific infrastructure of a scientific discipline (sociology, psychology, political theory, law, political economy, anthropology, theory of networks etc.) to characterize the Internet, as it can be found e.g. in the works of Castells (2001), Barabási (2002), Fuchs (2008), or Lessig (2006). In our view, *philosophical* descriptions can be more fruitful at the beginning; it is not constrained by the approach of any discipline. However, the available philosophical analyses (Dreyfus, 2009; Feenberg and Friesen, 2011) seem to have a very limited philosophical horizon.

6. The “omnipresence” or *ubiquity* of the Internet, that is, the experience that the Internet can be basically found in the whole of the human practice and has effects on it, makes the interpretation of the social and cultural effects of the Internet more difficult. A further difficulty is the essential *simultaneity* of the changes and the analyses. *Analogies* seem to be a useful methodological tool in this situation. We are going to introduce two illuminating analogies:

i) The *analogy of the reformation of knowledge* is based on the comparison of faith in the late Middle Ages and the late modern situation of scientific knowledge.

ii) The *analogy of the shaping of web-life* is based on the comparison of the changes of human nature caused by Internet use with the process of becoming human.

7. In this introduction, the interpretation of the nature of the Internet, the problems of the philosophy of the Internet and the analogies clarifying the effects of Internet use are all presented as theses. My discourse on the philosophy of the Internet puts the theses in a wider context and is available in Hungarian version (Ropolyi 2006) and in a draft English translation (Ropolyi 2014).

## 2. The Nature of the Internet

1. The tool of interpreting and describing the Internet is the Aristotelian *philosophy of the Internet*. This means that we look at the Internet in *four* – easily distinguishable, but obviously connected – *approaches*: as a system of technology, as a participant in communication, as a cultural medium and as an independent organism.

2. Just as other technologies, the Internet serves human control over given situations. With the use of a technology, man can create and maintain artificial entities, and, as a matter of fact, an artificial world: its own “not naturally given” world and he shapes his own nature through his own activity.

3. The Internet is a specific system of *information* technology. Essentially, it functions in the medium of information and not in a certain macroscopic physical sphere; it works with information. Since information is created through interpretation, a certain kind of hermeneutical practice is a decisive component of information technologies. Consequently, information – and all kinds of information “products” – is virtual by nature; that is, though it seems *as if* it were real, its reality has a certain limited, finite degree.

4. The information technological system of the Internet – in fact, we can talk about a peculiar version of a system, that is, a network – consists of computers which are interconnected and operated in a way which maximally secures the freedom of information of the individuals connected to the network: the control over information about themselves and their own world in space, time and context.

5. Thus, from a technological point of view, the Internet is an artificially created and maintained virtual sphere for the operation of which the functioning of the computers connected into the network and the concrete practices of people’s interpretations are equally indispensable.

6. For the characterization of the Internet as a participant of communication, we understand communication as a certain type of technology, the goal of which is to create and maintain communities. Consequently, the technologies of communication used on the Internet are those technologies with the help of which particular – virtual, open, extended, online etc. – communities can be built. The individual relationships to the communities that can be built and the nature of the communities can be completely controlled through technologies of the Internet (e-mail, chat, lists, blogs, podcast, the Facebook, etc.).

7. Communication through the Internet has a network nature (it is realized in a distributive system); it uses different types of media, but it is a technology which follows a basically visual logic.

8. Thus, as regards communication, the Internet is the network of consciously created and maintained extended plural communities, for the functioning of

which the harmonized functioning of computers connected to the network as well as the individual's control over his own communicative situations are needed.

9. From a cultural point of view, the Internet is a medium which can accommodate, present and preserve the wholeness of human culture – both as regards quality and quantity. It can both represent a whole cultural universe and different, infinitely varied cultural universes (worlds).

10. Culture is the system of values present in coexisting communities; it is “the world of” communities. Culture shapes and also expresses the characteristic contents of a given social system. Each social system can be described as the coexistence of human communities and the cultures they develop and follow. Schematically, society = communities + cultures. The individual is determined by his participation in communities and cultures as well as his contribution to them.

11. The Internet accommodates the values of the late modern age, or the “end” of modernity. That is, it houses late modern worlds. Late modern culture contains modern values as well, but it refuses their exclusivity and it favours a plural, postmodern system of values. The way of producing culture is essentially transformed: the dichotomy of experts creating traditional culture and the laymen consuming it are replaced by the “democratic nature” of cyber culture: each individual produces and consumes at the same time.

12. Thus, from a cultural point of view, the Internet is a network of virtual human communities, artificially created by man unsatisfied by the world of modernity; it is a network in which a postmodern system of values based on the individual freedom and independence of cyber culture prevails.

13. From an organizational point of view, the Internet is a relatively independent organism which develops according to the conditions of its existence and the requirements of the age. It is a (super)organism created by the continuous activity of people the existence, identity and integrity of which is unquestionable; systems, networks and worlds penetrating each other are interwoven in it. It has its own, unpredictable evolution: it develops according to the evolutionary logic of creation and man, wishing to control its functioning, is both a part and a creator of the organism.

14. The indispensable vehicles are *the net*, built of physically connected computers, *the web*, stretching upon the links which connect the content of the websites into a virtual network, *the human communities* virtually present on the websites as well as the infinite variations of individual and social *cultural universes* penetrating each other.

15. The worldwide organism of the Internet is loaded with values: its existence and functioning constantly creates and sustains a particular system of values: the network of postmodern values. The non-hierarchically organized value sphere of virtuality, plurality, fragmentation, implied modernity, individuality and opposition to power interconnected through weak bonds penetrates all activity

on the Internet – moreover, it does so independently of our intentions, through mechanisms built into the functioning of the organism.

16. Thus, from the organizational point of view, the Internet is a superorganism organized from systems, networks and cultural universes. Its development is shaped by the desire of late modern man to “create a home”, entering into the network of virtual connections impregnated with the postmodern values of cyber culture. For man, the Internet is a new – more homely – sphere of existence; it is the exclusive vehicle of web-life. Web-life is created through the transformation of “traditional” communities of society and the cultures prevailing in the communities. Schematically: web-life = “online” communities + cyber cultures.

17. To sum up: the Internet is the medium of a new form of existence created by the late modern man and it is built on the earlier, (natural and social) spheres of existence, but it is markedly differentiated from them. We call this newly formed existence web-life and we are trying to understand its characteristics.

### 3. The Reformation of Knowledge

1. For the study of the mostly unknown relations of web-life, it seems to be useful to examine the nature of knowledge which was transformed as a consequence of Internet use, its social status and the consequences of the changes.

2. The unhappy inhabitants of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and of our age have to face similar challenges: the citizen of the Middle Ages and the modern “web citizen” or “netizen” participate in analogous processes. The crisis of religious fate unfolded in the late Middle Ages and in our age the crisis of rational knowledge can be observed.

3. In those times, after the crisis – with the effective support of reformation movements –, we could experience the rise of rational thinking and the new, scientific worldview; in our times, 500 years later, this scientific worldview itself is eventually in a crisis.

4. The following question emerges today: how can we get liberated from the power of the decontextualized, abstract rationality that rules life? In the emancipation process that leads out of the crisis of our days, *the reformation of knowledge* is happening, using the possibilities offered by the Internet.

5. The reformers diagnose the transformation of the whole human culture: the possibility of an immediate relationship between the individual and knowledge is gradually forcing back the power of the institutional system of abstract knowledge (universities, academies, research centres, hospitals, libraries, publishers) and its official experts (qualified scientists, teachers, doctors, editors).

6. We can observe the birth of the yet again liberated man on the Internet, who, liberated from the medieval rule of abstract emotion, now also wants to rid

himself of the yoke of modernist abstract reason. But his personality, system of values and thinking are still unknown and essentially enigmatic for us.

7. Postmodern thinking was itself created and strengthened by the – more or less conscious – reflection about the circumstances of the crisis, as the eminent version of the philosophy of the crisis. The postmodern point of view clearly perceives the disintegration of the modernist conception based on abstract rationality; what is more, it evaluates it as a necessary and desirable development. But essentially, it does not have anything to say about the possibilities of recovering from the crisis.

8. The Internet developed and became widely prevalent simultaneously with the spreading of the postmodern point of view. It seems that the crisis of modernity created a “tool” which is in accordance with its system of values. It is kept because of this accordance; what is more, people develop it further. However, at the same time, this “tool”, the Internet, seems to be useful for pursuing forms of activities which are built on the postmodern world but transcend it and also for the search for the way out of the crisis.

9. The processes unfolding in the social and human system of relationships show a lot of similarities with the change of the status of religious belief in the Middle Ages.

10. The religious worldview lost its earlier stability 500 years ago; people’s trust in the contemporary religious institutional system and the official experts of faith wavered. At the same time, it is also obvious that they did not necessarily reject the truths of God but their embeddedness in society and their tendency to legitimize political power; they condemned the system of conditions of the creation and use of truths of faith.

11. Reformation movements of the age appeared as a response to the crisis of faith, as a consequence of which religious faith became pluralized to a significant degree. Reformed faith breaks with the medieval concept of faith, which can be characterized as an abstract emotional state and it fights for the acceptance of the personal versions of the relationship to God. But, of course, its “suggestions to solve the crisis” do not lead out from the world of faith.

12. It is well known that book printing played an important role in the reformation of faith. Books are “tools” which are in accordance with the system of values of the world undergoing modernization. They made it possible to experience and reform faith in a personal manner as a result of the fact that the modern book was capable of accommodating the system of values of the Middle Ages. But the typical usage of the book as a modern “tool” is not this but rather the creation and study of modern narratives in a seemingly infinite number of variations.

13. The scenes of the reformation of religious faith were religious institutions (churches, monasteries, the Bible etc.). Nowadays, the reformation of knowledge is being generated in the institutional system of science: research centres, universities, libraries and publishers.

14. The reformation of religious faith was a development which evolved from the crisis of religious faith. The reformation of knowledge is a series of changes originating from the crisis of rational knowledge.

15. In both cases, the (religious and academic) institutional system and the expert bodies (the structure of the church and the schools and especially universities, research centres, libraries and publishers, as well as priests and researchers, teachers and editors) lose their decisive role in matters of faith and science.

16. The reformation of faith, ignoring the influence of ecclesiastical institutions, aims for developing an immediate relationship between the individual and God. The reformation of knowledge creates an immediate relationship between the individual and scientific knowledge. On the Internet, Ideas can be presented and studied in essence independently of the influence of the academic institutional system. There are no critics and referees on web sites; everyone is responsible for his own ideas.

17. The reformation of faith played a vital role in the development process of the modern individual: harmonizing divine predestination with free will secured the possibility of religious faith, making the development of masses of individuals in a religious framework possible and desirable.

18. However, the modern individual that developed this way, “losing his embeddedness” in a traditional, hierarchical world, finds himself in an environment which is alien, what is more, hostile to him. As a consequence of his fear and his desire for security, the pursuit of absolute power becomes his second nature; the modern individual is selfish.

19. Man, participating in the reformation of knowledge (after the events that happened hundreds of years before) is forced again into yet another process of individuation. Operating his personal relationship to knowledge, a postmodern individual is in the process of becoming. The postmodern personality, liberated from the rule of the institutional system of modern knowledge, finds himself in an uncertain situation: he himself can decide in the question of scientific truth, but he cannot rely on anything for his decisions.

20. This leads to a very uncertain situation from an epistemological point of view. How can we tackle this problem? Back then, the modern individual eventually asked the help of reason and found solutions, e.g. the principle of rational egoism or the idea of the social contract. But what can the postmodern personality do? Should he follow perhaps some sort of post-selfish attitude? But what could be the content of this? Could it be perhaps some kind of plural or virtual egoism? The postmodern personality got rid of the rule of abstract reason, but it still seems that he has not yet found a more recent human capacity the help of which he could use in order to resolve his epistemological uncertainty.

21. From a wider historical perspective, we can see that people in different ages tried to understand their environment and themselves and to continue living by

relying on abstract human capacities that succeeded each other. People in primeval societies based their magical explanation of the world on the human will – and we managed to survive. After the will, the senses were in the mythical centre of ancient culture – and the normal childhood of mankind passed, too. Medieval religious worldview was built by taking into consideration the dominance of emotions – and this ended, too, at some point. In the age of the glorious reason, it was the scientific worldview that served the reign of man – until now.

22. Today, the trust in scientific worldview seems to be teetering; the age of the Internet has come. However, the problem is that we cannot draw on yet another human capacity since we have already tried them all once. Or have we? Do we still have hidden resources? Or can we say goodbye, once and for all, to the usual abstractions, and a new phase of the evolution of mankind is waiting for us, which is happening in the realm of the concrete?

## 4. The Formation of Web-Life

1. In order to study the mostly unknown context of web-life, it seems to be useful to examine the nature of human existence, transformed through Internet use and the consequences of the changes. Social scientists like Castells (2000), Wellman and Haythornthwait (2002), or Fuchs (2008) often characterize the consequences of the Internet use as pure *social* changes, including all kinds of changes into the social ones, and disregard the significance of more comprehensive changes. We focus on the latter one.

2. While using the Internet, all determining factors and identity-forming relations change which had a role in the evolution of mankind from the animal kingdom and in the process of the development of society. We can identify tool use, language, consciousness, thought as well as social relationships as the most decisive changes in the process of becoming human and in the formation of web-life which has developed as a result of Internet use.

3. The simultaneous transformations of animal tool and language use, animal consciousness and thought as well as social relationships and the series of interwoven changes led to the evolution of humans and to the development of culture and society. Nowadays, the robust changes in the same areas are also simultaneous. They point into one direction, intensifying each other, and induce an interconnected series of changes. The quantity of the changes affecting the circumstances of human existence results yet again in the qualitative transformation of the circumstances of existence: this is the process of the development of web-life.

4. The material circumstances of tool making and tool use lose their significance and the emphasis is now on the most essential part of the process: interpretation.



A crucial part of tool making is the interpretation of an entity in a different context, as different from the given (such as natural entities), and in this “technological situation” its identification as a tool. During Internet usage, individual interpretations play a central role in the process of creating and processing information on different levels and in the information technologies that are becoming dominant. At the same time, the material processes that provide the conditions of interpretation are to a large extent taken care of by machines. Hermeneutics takes the central role of energetics in the necessary human activity of reproducing human relations.

5. The human double (and later multiple) *representation* strategy developed from the simpler strategies of the representation characteristic of wildlife led to language, consciousness, thought and culture. Double representation (I can regard an entity both as “itself” and “something else” at the same time) is a basic procedure in all these processes – and in tool making as well – and an indispensable condition of their occurrence. The use of the Internet radically transforms the circumstances of interpretation. On the one hand, it creates a new medium of representation, in which – as in some sort of global “mind” – the whole world of man is represented repeatedly. On the other hand, after the ages of orality and literacy, it makes possible basically for all people to produce and use in an intended way the visual representation of their own world as well. Virtuality and visuality are determining characteristics of representation. We are living in the process of the transformation of language, speech, reading and writing, memory and thought.

6. “Traditional” human culture is created through the reinterpretation of the relations “*given by nature*”, it materializes through their perpetual transformation and it becomes a decisive factor in the prevailing social relations. The cyber-cultural practices of the citizens of the web are now directed at the revaluation of *social* relations, and as a result of their activities a cyber-, web- or Internet-cultural system of relations is formed, which is the decisive factor in the circumstances of *web-life*.

7. The basically naturally given communities of animal partnership were replaced by the human structure of communities which was practically organized as a consequence of the tool-use-based indirect, and language-use-based direct communicative acts. However, the control over communicative situations can be monopolized by various agents: as a result, it is burdened with countless constraints. The nature of the communities that come into existence under these circumstances can become independent from the aspirations of the participants: various forms of alienation and inequality can be generated and reproduced in the communities. The citizen of the web who engages in communication reinterprets and transforms communicative situations; above all, he changes power relations in favour of the individual: the citizen of the web can have full powers over his own communicative situations.

8. Society is a system of relationships which develops from and is built on the natural sphere. Web-life is a system of relationships which develops from and is built on the social sphere. Man now is not the citizen of two worlds but of three: he is the inhabitant of nature, society and web-life.

## **5. Web-Life in Practice**

1. The knowledge presented and conveyed through the Internet valorizes the forms of knowledge which are characteristically situation-dependent, technological and postmodern. The whole modern system of knowledge becomes reevaluated and, to a large extent, virtualized; the relationship to knowledge takes a personal, concrete, open and plural shape. The significance of the institutional system of science is diminished. Instead of scientific knowledge, technological knowledge and the technologies of interpreting knowledge are in the forefront.

2. Besides culture, which is created by the communities of society, individual cyber culture plays a more and more important role. The traditional separation of the producers and consumers of culture becomes more and more limited in this process. Supported effectively by information technologies, billions of the worlds of the citizens of web-life join the products of the professional creators of culture. Cyber space is populated by the infinite number of simultaneous variations of our virtual worlds. Aesthetic culture gains ground at the expense of scientific culture and imagination becomes the human capacity that determines cultural activities.

3. Personality becomes postmodern, that is, it becomes fully realized as an individual, virtually extremely extended, and acquires a playful character with ethereal features. A more vulnerable post-selfish web citizen is developed, compelled by a chaotic dynamics. Web citizens are mostly engaged in network tasks, that is, in building and maintaining their personalities and communities.

4. Besides the natural and the social spheres, a sphere of web-life existence is built up. Now man becomes the citizen of three worlds. The human essence moves towards web-life. The freedom of the access to the separate spheres and the relationship of the spheres of existence are gradually transformed in a yet unforeseeable manner.

5. Web-life as a form of existence is the realm of concrete existence. Stepping into web-life, the “real history” of mankind begins yet again; the transition from social existence to web-life existence leads from a realm of life based on abstract capacities to a realm of life built on concrete capacities.

Fellow-netizens of the web! Let's switch on our computers – the age of shaping web-life has come.

## Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the OTKA (The Hungarian Scientific Research Fund) under the No. K. 84145.

## References

- Barabási, A.-L. (2002). *Linked: The New Science of Networks*. Cambridge: Perseus Books.
- Castells, M. (2000). *The Rise of the Network Society*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
- (2001). *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dreyfus, H. (2009). *On the Internet*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London New York: Routledge.
- Feenberg, A.–Friesen N. (eds.). (2011). *(Re)Inventing the Internet: Critical Case Studies*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Fuchs, C. (2008). *Internet and Society. Social Theory in the Information Age*. London New York: Routledge.
- Lessig, L. (2006). *Code version 2.0*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ropolyi, L. (2006). *Az Internet természete. Internetfilozófiai értekezés. (On the Nature of the Internet. Discourse on the Philosophy of the Internet)*. Budapest: Typotex.
- (2014). *Philosophy of the Internet. A Discourse on the Nature of the Internet*. [.pdf format]. Budapest: Eötvös University. Available at: [http://www.eltereader.hu/media/2014/05/Philosophy\\_READER.pdf](http://www.eltereader.hu/media/2014/05/Philosophy_READER.pdf). [Accessed on: 26 September 2014]
- Wellman, B.–Haythornthwait, C. (eds.) (2002). *The Internet in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.



## **Research – Case Studies**





## How Generations Think: Research on Generation Z

Mária Törőcsik

PhD, University Professor, University of Pécs,  
Faculty of Business and Economics, Pécs  
torocsik@ktk.pte.hu

Krisztián Szűcs

PhD, Senior Lecturer, University of Pécs,  
Faculty of Business and Economics, Pécs  
szucsk@ktk.pte.hu

Dániel Kehl

PhD, Senior Lecturer, University of Pécs,  
Faculty of Business and Economics, Pécs  
kehld@ktk.pte.hu

**Abstract.** The relationship between current generations and the ones that grow up has always been ambivalent. There are a lot of motivations behind the criticism such as threats, envy or simply pride in the fantastic achievements of a generation, but lack of knowledge might be an explanation as well. The environment including the scientific-technical conditions and cultural-economic relations which surrounds the generations is changing significantly; thus, the socialization of new generations takes place under these altered circumstances, which means that they are not the same as the former young generations. Acceptance of new values and understanding of new behavioural patterns are difficult for parents, teachers and also for decision-makers. In this article, a generational approach is applied to analyse today's emerging young generation. The study presents the results of the research conducted with questionnaires and it highlights the characteristics and lifestyle groups of today's 15–24-year-old young people in Hungary, who are members of either the Generation Z or the late Generation Y. This topic appears in the research of several academic fields, while the conclusion of the research can not only support the development of the theory but the practical decisions as well.

**Keywords:** generations, generation values, youth, lifestyle, consumer behaviour

## Interpretation of Generations

Generations are interconnected by common experience, life experiences and common values. The interconnectivity is loose but significant in its nature. It is loose because members of generations experience a lot of different fates and life decisions which cannot really be considered uniform. However, there is a significant trend of values and common experiences which can connect these decisions and lead to the conclusions that there are differences between generations, and similarities within generations provide a frame for the decisions of the members of generations. This dimension of research comes into view from time to time, so researchers can enjoy the experience of “rediscovering”.

The study of generations is grounded on the difference in *value orientation*. This kind of differentiation results in quite large groups in the research. This might raise the question whether it is possible to interpret the different aspects of the groups that have been made uniform on the basis of lifecycles embracing 30 years, which is a three-generational approach. According to the results of research on this field, this might be the best possible method.

The research on this topic not only makes the results of the segmentation more transparent, but it also highlights the tensions between the generations since the relationship between the previous and the current generations has always been ambivalent (Törőcsik, 2010). The aspect of generation research includes the study of exciting issues which can be the basis of important decisions in several fields.

The generational approach to the description of the society and the examination of social problems mean the acceptance of a simple principle, which involves research based on cohorts (groups by birth age), which results in groups with perceivably different behaviour. The Yankelovich-Report, a research series in the USA, deals with studying the behaviour of generations (Smith–Clurman, 1997). Their initial concept is that basic experiences and major and influential events during socialization accompany people until the end of their lives and have impact on their lives and their choices. Thus, the initial thought is that the analysis of a few factor groups (Smith–Clurman, 1997) is sufficient to understand consumers and to predict their behaviour. These factors can make segmentation feasible such as:

- the *individual situation*, lifecycle, the social and economic status or even the physical condition typical of the individual studied;
- the *environmental influences*: the circumstances and characteristic phenomena that influence the individual’s purchasing power, motivation and vision;
- *cohort experiences*: the experiences of generations which shape the points of view of the people belonging to these generations.

On the basis of the concept, the markers and the cohort indicators of the different generations should be recognized, which can help to predict their behaviour and



explain their current decisions. It is the common experience, life experiences and common values that interconnect generations (Schewe–Noble, 2000). The point of this system is that the respondents' ages are strictly differentiated and individuals from different generations have different cohort-experiences. The question is what cohort-experiences are chosen to be shown and what sources are in the focus while experiences are collected. The sources can be great political, historical or economic events which had unsettling influences on the cohort, but it can also be the strong impact of significant innovations or the influence of arts, e.g. music and films.

According to Howe and Strauss (2000), there are three factors which can define generations more precisely than age, but these factors are also related to age; therefore, they are connected to cohort experiences:

- *perceived membership*: the self-perception of members, which starts with adolescence and becomes complete in adulthood;
- *common beliefs and behaviour*: attitudes towards family, career, private life, politics, religion etc. and behaviour (decisions concerning job, marriage, children, health, crime, sex, drugs etc.), which characterize the generation;
- *common place/situation in history*: the turning points of historical trends and significant events which affect the generation during the important years, such as adolescence or young adulthood.

When generations are studied, the first question is how to define generations, what kind of age limits and cohort-limits should be defined and how many generations should be thought about. For a long time, it was accepted that three generations should be examined, and it seemed obvious that young, middle-aged and old generations should be differentiated. The initial point of the generation research originally included the examination of the above three groups, which were called X-generation (based on Coupland, 2007), baby-boomers and the mature. American professional researchers were curious about the behaviour of the latest generation, which they called the Generation Y and the Millennium generation (Bakewell–Mitchell, 2003; Howe–Strauss, 2000; Marconi, 2000). Yankelovich and his colleagues defined four groups in order to follow changes and owing to the market pressure. They identify the Echoes (born between 1979 and 1991; career, independence and credibility are important for them), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1978; competence, diversity and enterprise are important for them), baby-boomers (born between 1946 and 1964; individuality, youth and egoism are important for them) and the mature (born before 1946; duty, winning and team work are important for them).

There are further ideas in connection with generations, for example the Pew Research Center conducted a study with five separate generations, which was aimed at revealing the differences in the Internet usage of generations. In this case, generations were differentiated on the basis of Strauss–Howe's ideas (Strauss–Howe, 1992). The initial point of the research is interesting since the Internet

usage is assessed; therefore, it is understandable why the young group is divided into several groups; however, it is less justifiable why the old group is divided into several subgroups. Echoes mean the groups that were born after the wars, and G.I. group means the generations who lived during the wars. Since Internet usage is a generational distinctive factor (Gergátz, 2010; Csepeli-Kígyós-Popper, 2006; Csepeli-Prazsák, 2010), it is interesting to note why and how often the different groups use the Internet.

Ursula Lehr (Lehr, 2010), the German researcher, says that instead of the three generations examined previously, five ones should be studied, and the co-operation and “social contract” of these generations should be solved so that various social problems can be sorted out. She says that nowadays, due to the increasing longevity, five generations might live together during the examination periods, so their common problems should be solved. She suggests that the elderly generation between 60 and 85 years should be divided into two parts: the self-sufficient and people in need of nursing.

According to other German studies, three generations can be considered as a relevant initial point (Glas, 2009), and they make proposals based on this. However, generational boundaries are also defined differently from the “classical” Yankelovich categories and researchers emphasize that young people between 18 and 29 are the mature youth, members of the middle generation are between 30 and 49, and people between 50 and 69 are members of the best age generation. The results of the research reveal significant differences in terms of consumption and involvement in different product categories. Young people are interested in mobile phones, fashion and computers, members of the middle generation like holidays and clothing, while members of elderly generations prefer travelling and gardening.

It is obvious that the differentiation of generations is a crucial issue; however, obvious boundaries and calculation methods for generations cannot be identified even in the classical Yankelovich-Report. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that one can be considered a member of the young generation up to 29 years of age, middle generation includes people aged 30 to 59 years and members of the elderly generation are over 60 years. It is quite an important question if the three-generation distinction is applied, where the boundaries of the generations are today, when there have been changes in several socio-demographic features and whether criteria for this distinction can still be regarded relevant. It is often debated if the increase in the time spent in education and the tendency of starting a family later than before would change the boundary of the young generation so that the middle generation could start at the age of 35 years. If this assumption were to be accepted, there would be another question whether people at the age of 60 years belong to the elderly generation or, considering the Hungarian situation nowadays, this starting age should be 50 or 55 years. However, if trends of developed countries are taken into consideration, the boundary could be the

age over 65 years. If all of these suggestions are accepted, five or six groups or even more could be formed (Tarr, 2010), which, on the one hand, would approach the fundamentals of lifecycle-marketing, while it would cease the advantage of this simple conceptual system, on the other hand. Therefore, it seems to be useful if it is reviewed what different researchers dealing with the generation boundaries think about the labels and boundaries of generations. (Table 1)

**Table 1.** Generation labels and periods in different sources

Source		Labels			
Howe and Strauss (2000)	Silent Generation (1925–1943)	Boom Generation (1943–1960)	Generation 13 (1961–1981)	Millennial Generation (1982–2000)	-
Lancaster and Stillman (2002)	Traditionalists (1900–1945)	Baby Boomers (1946–1964)	Generation Xers (1965–1980)	Millennial Generation; Echo Boomers; Generation Y; Baby Busters; Generation Next (1981–1999)	-
Martin and Tulgan (2002)	Silent Generation (1925–1942)	Baby Boomers (1946–1960)	Generation X (1965–1977)	Millennials (1978–2000)	-
Oblinger and Oblinger (2005)	The Mature (<1946)	Baby Boomers (1947–1964)	Gen-Xers (1965–1980)	Gen-Y; NetGen; Millennials (1981–1995)	Post-Millennials (1995–present)
Tapscott (1998)	-	Baby Boom Generation (1946–1964)	Generation X (1965–1975)	Digital Generation (1976–2000)	-
Zemke et al. (2000)	Veterans (1922–1943)	Baby Boomers (1943–1960)	Gen-Xers (1960–1980)	Nexters (1980–1999)	-
Reeves and Oh (2008)	Mature Generation (1924–1945)	Boom Generation (1946–1964)	Generation X (1965–1980)	Millennial Generation (1981–2000)	Generation Z (2001–present)

Source: Reeves and Oh (2008: 296–297)

Generational division and even the application of a generational approach might raise questions since this is an artificial segmentation method; however, it is indisputable that this method can be applied for certain markets quite well. This can be proven with a review (Table 2) which highlights the different characteristics of generations.

**Table 2.** Generational differences based on 12 criteria

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Boomers</b>	<b>Gen Xers</b>	<b>Millennials</b>
<i>Level of trust</i>	Self-confident, no respect for authority	Low respect for authority	High respect for authority
<i>Loyalty to institutions</i>	Cynical	Naive	Committed
<i>Importance</i>	Seizing power	Starting an enterprise	Following a hero of integrity
<i>Career goals</i>	Building a stellar career	Building a portable career	Building parallel careers
<i>Rewards</i>	Title and corner office	Freedom not to do anything	Meaningful work
<i>Parent-child involvement</i>	Receding	Distant	Intruding
<i>Having children</i>	Controlled	Doubtful	Certain
<i>Family life</i>	Indulged as children	Alienated as children	Protected as children
<i>Education</i>	Freedom of expression	Pragmatic	Structure of accountability
<i>Evaluation</i>	Once a year with documentation	“Excuse me, how am I doing?”	Feedback whenever I want it
<i>Political orientation</i>	Attacking oppression	I – Individual and indifferent	Craving community
<i>The big question</i>	What does it mean?	How does it work?	How should we build it?

Source: Reeves and Oh (2008: 99)

It is the three-generation approach that is typical of the Hungarian research (Törőcsik, 2007), although Istvánné Hoffmann proposes the examination of four generations (Hoffmann, 2007). She suggests that four generations should be studied: those who were born between 1920 and 1938 – they are the generation of big changes; members of the losers and winners generation were born between 1939 and 1960; the generation of the post communist era includes those who were born between 1961 and 1980, while the Millennials were born between 1981 and 2000. However, research on this has not been conducted yet.

If generational marketing is not regarded only as a theoretical issue and it is reviewed how generational approach to the research of particular fields appears in the Hungarian literature, then mostly instances of the three-generation approach can be found (Törőcsik, 2009).

## Youth, Media Generations

Nowadays, the focus of the media turns towards the youth, newer and newer “generations” are discovered and the media write about their “fantastic” traits. It is important to highlight this because the logic of the categorization described above is the interpretation of the features of larger groups that are distinguished on the grounds of values that are mostly based on characteristics such as reading, media usage, gathering information, source of knowledge and attitude to health. It is clear that the uniform handling of generations might result in wrong conclusions; however, everyone knows and perceives that the behaviour and view of life of generations are different.

It is obvious that thinking about the youth may seem to be a mistake and it does not matter if this group is labelled as Generation X (Coupland, 2007), Generation Y (Tari, 2010), Generation G ([www.trendwatching.com](http://www.trendwatching.com)) or Generation Z (Tari, 2011). If the research is focused on the millennial generation, who were born around the millennium, the problem may arise that it is quite difficult to generalize because the diversity of their lifestyle, motivation and habits is quite high, which is also true within other generations, which become “homogeneous” and characteristics only after a while.

Today’s youth can be described with scenes (Prykop, 2005) rather than with larger groups. This is a characteristic feature which is the result of today’s freer choice. Several different studies deal with the life of the young, and now these results are summarized.

Fanta Trendriport 6 focuses on recreational activities. The results of the study reveal that young people spend their free time mostly with some kind of electrical device (Fanta Trendriport 6). The rate of computer and Internet users was approximately 90% in 2008 (Ifjúság 2008: 83), which has become almost 100% since then (Csécsi et al., 2012).

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from the analyses of the youth within lifestyle researches. The study of German youth between the ages of 14 and 19 years (Borgstedt–Calmbach, 2010) may illustrate well the milieu-oriented lifestyle groups of young people. Based on the outcomes of Hungarian lifestyle research (Törőcsik, 2010), three large groups with different motivations can be distinguished:

- There are young people who are prestige-oriented and *strive for outstanding knowledge* (17%). They not only want to obtain a university degree but also want to acquire outstanding knowledge and have a significant career.

- *Experience seekers* (33%) would like to “live”. They meet the minimum educational expectations while they are sometimes willing to accomplish new levels of knowledge acquisition.

– *The level-headed* (43%) live in difficult circumstances; they do not have great plans. Comfort, cheapness and price-performance ratio are important for them. Young people wishing to break out also belong to this group.

The literature provides a lot of different attempts to define *Generation Z* (Pál, 2013). There are research studies which rate those who were born after 1982 as members of this generation (Howe–Strauss, 1991), while other researchers suggest that those who were born between 1991 and 2010 belong to this generation. According to some approaches, members of *Generation Z* were born after 1995 (Grail Research, 2010 and Tari, 2011) and 1996.

Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) call this group post-millennarians, but it is also called „Facebook Generation”, digital natives (Prensky, 2001), zappers, which means switchers, “Instant online” group (Mutte, 2004), “dotcom” kids, net generation, iGeneration. This generation is often called *Generation C*, where C stands for connection, or *Generation D*, which refers to digital, or *Generation R*, which stems from the word responsibility (Heckenberg–McDuff–Smith–White, 1991).

It is important to emphasize that *Generation Z* is the first global generation in the world (*Homo Globalis*). They grow up using the same culture, they like mostly the same food, fashion and places. Globalization appears in their language as well because they use words and expressions that the members of other generations do not use and often do not understand (Tari, 2011). They are affected and formed by the same impacts; they may be interconnected on the web and social networks (McCrindle–Wolfiger, 2010), which is another factor related to globalization.

Members of *Generation Z* have the same problems as the previous young generations did, but their technical opportunities provide such new frames in their lives which make their behaviour incomprehensible for elderly generations.

The youth of today are members of the generation that grow up using the Internet and know the verbal and visual world of the Internet. It means that they handle short, up-to-date, real time information with pictures. Short attention span is typical of this generation, thus messages for them should be created by taking the “less is more” approach into consideration. Simplification and getting to the point can be productive.

Young people spend more and more of their free time using the social media, which means either immobility or time consumption in a mobile way. This means that they have less time left for outdoor activities. It is worth creating a strategy for the social media so that they can be reached.

Increasingly more members of the generation take part in education. It means that they are under time pressure because they are required to achieve the expected performance, which takes a significant part of their free time. Therefore, they mostly make contact by using devices – so, contact via the Internet is more typical of them than the personal one.

Today, the youth accept only a few adult role models. The most trustworthy faces for them are young people from their own generation who have achieved something significant in a field, or at least they are famous. They do not want to look up on these people, but they would rather face them.

For today's young people, interactivity and involvement in processes are quite natural. If they can participate in product development and the discovery of new technologies and new procedures in order to inspire large multinational companies, it can be also fruitful for secondary and tertiary education not only to enquire about their opinions but also to accept their proposals and include their ideas in the communication and the education.

This period of their life is not necessarily about career-planning and knowledge acquisition but rather about finding themselves, experiencing relationships and finding a circle of friends. This socialization process is at least as important as the acquisition of rational knowledge.

The conclusions of the interviews conducted with young people have revealed what kind of rules should be followed if anyone would like to communicate with them:

- young people are in difficult life situation; that is why they and their problems should be taken seriously;
- sharing is typical of them; that is, the information obtained has no value, so they want, expect and pass on everything for free;
- they only accept trustworthy people and things (except celebrities);
- they reappraise, question and criticize everything;
- they are pragmatic, they reject those things which are too expensive, too popular or too uniform (except for their “cool” brands – they would give anything for these);
- they belong to scenes and cliques; however, they would like to implement the expression of individuality;
- experiences and pleasure are especially important for them;
- egocentric behaviour and the rejection of problems and rebels are typical of them;
- because of the excessive supply of the media, they are very selective, they criticize, click and surf on the Internet;
- they like provocative, extreme, spectacular and show-like presentations.

## **About the Project**

The research presented in the study was supported by SROP-4.2.2.A-11/1/KONV-2012-0058, modelling the effects of the energy production, utilization and waste management technologies to the competitiveness of the cities and regions (2013–

2014). The basic aim of this research was to present the results and values of the scientific and academic work of the University of Pécs to young people between 15 and 24 years of age. This aim can be achieved if this age-group is known and they are approached by using their specific language, communication style and means of communication. Activities are concentrated on the young generation so that the goal of the project can be met; thus, activities which involve high school students, university students and PhD students should be devised. The following activities and activity groups have been created so that the aim of the projects can be achieved.

### **1. Acquaintance with young people's behaviour and decisions**

Since there is little comprehensive and reliable research information available about the target group, which is the youth of the new generations, a Hungarian representative survey was carried out with the participation of 2000 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in order to raise awareness about this group. Separate research on young people living in the South Transdanubian Region in Hungary was carried out. Qualitative methods were applied in order to meet the objective: ten focus group discussions were organized with high school students and university students, ten interviews were conducted with high school teachers and ten interviews with university teachers to get to know their experiences about the above mentioned generation.

### **2. Acquaintance with young people's communication**

In parallel with the examination of young people's general characteristics, the method, channels and characteristics of their communication were also explored. The results can be found in other studies in the current issue of this journal.

### **3. Development of the PhD community**

The focus was also extended to PhD students. The development of an online platform, the target audience of which comprises PhD students who have started their studies but have not finished it yet, was implemented in the frame of this project element. The connection of members of the target audience is feasible with the usage of the interactive application on the website of the project. Web2 offers the opportunity for PhD students to help each other's work to a greater extent, plan and implement manifold research activities.



#### **4. Researcher portraits and exciting research topics**

Exemplars should be presented to young people; that is why short, 1-2-minute-long researcher portraits were prepared with young researchers who work at the university and with students who have outstanding scientific achievements. These videos can be downloaded from the website of the project and are presented on different platforms to the target audience. Besides, short videos of 2-3 minutes are being prepared to present different topics that compel the audience to think. These videos are about different comprehensive topics, such as transparency, secret or experience, and three researchers give inspiration in connection with the topics.

#### **5. Flash mob events**

Flash mob-like events are taking place in order to present the scientific achievements and innovations of the University of Pécs, mostly to high school students. 72 flash mob activities are taking place during the project in Pécs and in the smaller settlements of the region.

#### **6. Communication with Generation Z – the transfer of knowledge**

The information gathered due to the research and activity elements of the project should be presented to the people interested and forums should be created in order to discuss the results. For example, conferences should be organized for discussions. The outcomes of the research are carried on by the staff of the university and by colleagues working in educational institutes and organizations which have connection with the target audience. Four workshops were organized for those who work in the front offices of the University of Pécs so that their communication with university students can be improved. An in-house conference was organized for university teachers (mostly for teachers who meet first-year students) so that new knowledge and experiences obtained during the research can be passed on and discussed.

### **About the Research**

The description of the project reveals that activities and research constitute this work. A few results of the quantitative research referring to *Hungarians between the ages of 15 and 24* are discussed here. During this research, a sample of 2,000 young people was interviewed in Hungary. Besides this research element, five-five focus group discussions with 8-9 participants were conducted with high school students and university students from the South Transdanubian Region. The

purpose of this project element was to find attractive solutions to and arguments about science communication. One further research element was the in-depth interviews with high school and university teachers about their educational experiences concerning Generation Z. *Ten-ten in-depth interviews* were planned and implemented in connection with the secondary data analysis. There are several good solutions to reaching the young segment; therefore, the best practice examples of the communication with young people were collected with trend research in one of the work phases of the research project. Studies were written about related topics, such as time utilization, learning and content consumption, which can be used in the later phases of the project. These studies are available in Hungarian on the website of the project: <http://www.zgeneracio.hu/tanulmanyok>.

During the interviews with the large sample, *values, lifestyles, every day activities* and the communication channels of young people were in the focus. Obviously, the fundamental aim of the project was also important concerning this research element; that is why the attitudes of the target audience to science, natural sciences and scientific achievements were examined. It means that several topics were in the focus of this element:

- science and attitudes about scientific results;
- the main characteristics of attractive science;
- science communication – trends and tools;
- time utilization and free time activities;
- content consumption and preferences;
- values, attitudes and lifestyle;
- media usage.

The purpose of the survey on a large sample was to gather substantiated information about the preferences of the target audience with the involvement of those topics which can support the dissemination of scientific results effectively. It was of great importance that the sample should be representative and the interviews should provide the best possible approach so that the research goals and the content elements of the project could be supported. After all these were taken into consideration, face-to-face interviews seemed to be the best method. This research element took place at the beginning of the project in 2013.

## Methodological Considerations

During a survey research, the researcher hopes and compiles the necessary tool in order to be able to gather correct data that are related to the research questions. In this context, correct data mostly means data free from measurement errors, which is an optimistic presumption in most cases; that is why potential problems should be dealt with before deeper analysis is carried out and conclusions are drawn

(Kehl, 2011). Measurement errors should be reviewed so that their possible causes and the methods of their management can be understood. Handbooks on survey research often put potential errors in four categories (Grover–Vriens, 2006):

*Sampling error*: every instance of sampling causes errors, which means that the gathered information about the population is not as accurate as if the opinion of the whole population would have been interviewed. This error cannot be prevented.

*Coverage error*: this error happens when the potential participants of the research do not cover demographically the whole population. This error can be prevented with the careful preparation of the sampling plan.

*Non-response error*: this error occurs when some of the potential respondents cannot be reached or they reject the response. In the current research, this kind of error is not typical because the proportion of those who did not respond is quite low compared to the size of the sample. It is a more serious problem when this proportion exceeds 10% significantly or when not responding is systematic. In this research, the data did not show the signs of these phenomena.

*Measurement error*: this error indicates the difference between the actual value of the respondent for a given variable and the value obtained with the questionnaire from the survey. This error occurs the most frequently and is the most difficult to recognize and to prevent. Respondents themselves or the method of the survey (e.g. a face-to-face interview results in different outcomes than a telephone interview does) can cause systematic measurement errors, though it is often difficult to distinguish these reasons. These kinds of errors are often called *common method variance* in the literature, which has been a serious research field since the 1960s. Podsakoff et al. give a very extensive summary about this field (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Measurement errors and respondent bias frequently occur; however, researchers do not often take them into account. Errors can cause several different kinds of bias; however, in the current research, the focus is on the impact on the relationships between the variables. In some cases, Type 1 and Type 2 errors can occur due to bias; that is, in some cases, correlation can be detected between independent variables due to overestimation, and vice versa: an existing relationship between variables can be obscured owing to bias. These kinds of systematic errors can make the actual correlation and the measured one have opposite signs. The degree of the error depends on many factors, but the largest bias occurs in the case of attitude statements according to Podsakoff's study (Podsakoff et al., p. 880). The respondent bias that is mentioned the most frequently and has generated the most research is the following:

*Socially desirable responding*: it is the tendency which means that respondents make themselves appear to be better than they are in reality owing to the existing social norms. Typical examples are questions about tax evasion, alcohol consumption or racism.

*Acquiescent responding:* according to the general definition, this bias includes the tendency which means that respondents agree with the statements regardless of their content (Winkler, Kanouse and Ware, 1982). The phenomenon is also called agreement tendency, yea-saying and positivity. The acquiescent responding has a less frequent counter-version, the nay-saying or disacquiescence responding.

*Extreme responding:* this means the responding pattern, in which respondents choose the extreme (the lowest or highest) values regardless of the content of the question. There may be a lot of reasons for this kind of responding. According to research, little children and those respondents who have strong emotions about the topic can fall for this kind of bias.

*Midpoint responding:* this responding pattern is the opposite of extreme responding. It means that respondents choose the middle value from the scale regardless of the content of the question. The reason for this bias is usually caution.

There are other potential threats than the above mentioned ones, and their management is very important so that right conclusions can be drawn.

## The Results

A short overview of the basic data of the research is presented, and then the focus of the study will be directed on youth lifestyle groups.

80% of the respondents live with their parents, 60% of them study and 23% of them work. Participants were asked to evaluate their *awareness about everyday news* on a five-point scale and the mean value was 3.31, which is not an outstanding result. On the other hand, it is not that important for them (3.48). People living in larger settlements and older respondents appeared to be more interested. Surprisingly, the most frequently used everyday *information source* is still the news on television. 35.4% of the respondents (n=2000) watch the news on television almost every day. 32.5% (n=2000) read online news portals and 21.9% (n=2000) listen to radio news almost every day. The information channel which is the least frequently used by the youth is the print media. It is only 11.6% of the respondents (n=2000) who regularly read newspapers.

However, online sources are considered to be the most important in terms of *active information seeking*. Most members of the age-group (56.7%; n=2000) find answers to their questions on the Internet, and they usually use search engines if they need information. Personal contacts are regarded important when they seek information. 48.8% (n=2000) of young people ask their peers and friends for information, and 45.8% (n=2000) of them ask their parents. Only 31.3% (n=2000) of the respondents use social media on a regular basis to find information. Print media is the least used information source among young people: only 16.8%

(n=2000) reported to gather information from books and newspapers. It is an interesting result that female members of the age-group prefer using offline sources, especially personal contacts. The larger settlements they live in, the less significant these sources are, and online sources become more dominant.

The rapid spread of *smartphones* indicates that 59% of respondents (n=2000) in this age-group have such a device and 45.5% of them (n=2000) even have mobile Internet connection. Whereas 11.1% (n=1181) of smartphone users have never downloaded any applications on their telephones, 45.8% (n=1181) of them regularly update applications. Almost half of the respondents (46.8%; n=2000) reported that they used increasingly more functions of their *mobile phones*.

The proportion of households where *Internet connection* is available is 94.9% (n=2000), which is almost the same as access to television in households. As it is expected, households in smaller settlements are less likely to have Internet connection.

According to the research, young people have *regular contacts with others mostly on online* platforms, with 37.2 people on average (n=1946). The average number of personal contacts is 21.9 (n=1981) and contacts via the phone are 12.0 (n=1970). One of the respondents reported to keep in touch with 1,500 other people on the Internet, which indicates the contact intensity of online platforms. Naturally, most of these online relationships mean weak connections because *an average 15-24 year-old young person considers 11.1 people as friends* (n=1982), while *there are typically five people in a circle of friends*. A good indicator of an active social life of the age-group is that only 15 people (0.7%; n=1982) reported to have no friends at all.

Whereas 35.9% of the respondents (n=2000) are interested in *new scientific achievements*, 26.0% of them are not interested in scientific novelties at all. The *average value of 3.11* of the responses is almost the same as the value of how interested the youth are in checking scientific contents in social media. As it is expected, older members of the segment, men and those who live in larger settlements are more open to research and development.

*Outdoor activities* of youth are fairly active; respondents spend 4.58 nights out of 10 on average out of their homes. As the settlement hierarchy rises, the number of nights spent out of the home also increases.

An average young person between 15 and 24 years of age read 5.23 books (n=1864) the year before the research, which did not include compulsory reading and textbooks. The dispersion of the responses is significant since there were respondents who had not read any books the year before, whereas other respondents had read 150 books during the previous year. The attitudes are well reflected by the mode value, which is zero in this case, since 21.7% of the respondents (n=1864) did not read any books and 6.8% (n=2000) could not answer the question. The most typical mode value was 2 among those who

read books, while 16.5% (n=2000) responded that they had read two books the previous year. Women and respondents living in Budapest typically read more than the average. It is a popular free time activity among the youth to *watch movies and series*. 67.0% of them (n=2000) watch series at least every week and 16.9% (n=2000) watch every day. Women and the younger members of the segment seem to watch series more actively than the average. 31% of those who watch series (n=1470) follow the series in a foreign language, mostly in English. The rate of other languages is very low.

On the basis of the findings of the research, *high confidence* is typical of the respondents. 64% of young people (n=1989) think that they are successful in what they do. 62.2% (n=1990) even think that they can always get, receive and achieve what they really want.

In the survey, respondents were asked about *satisfaction with their life*. The average is closer to 4 on a five-point scale (3.77), while the median and the mode are also 4. Two-thirds of the respondents (66%, n=1976) are quite or absolutely satisfied with their lives. 7% reported that they were mostly dissatisfied with their lives. 27.1% chose the middle value. It can be considered a tendency that as the respondents' age increases, their satisfaction with life decreases. The research has yielded another interesting finding. Decrease in the degree of urbanization makes young people's satisfaction increase gradually. The average value of young people from Budapest (n=346) is 3.36, which reflects that they are the least satisfied, whereas young people living in settlements with a population of 2,000 are the most satisfied. There is no significant difference between the satisfaction of men and women.

*Appearance* is really important for this segment. 63.6% of the valid responses (n=1996) gave a value higher than three about the statement that 'I take a good care of my appearance.' The average agreement with this statement is 3.8 (n=1996), whereas the median is 4 and the mode is also 4. Good appearance is important especially for young women, their average (3.94; n=1017) is 0.3 points higher than men's value. It is interesting that people living in Budapest and in small settlements with a population of less than 2,000 think that appearance is very important.

It also supports the importance of appearance that 49.8% of the respondents (n=1986) chose the two highest values on a ten-point scale when they were asked about how important it was for them *to have their own style*, and the number of respondents who opted for ten on this scale was the highest.

Typical groups (clusters) that represented significantly different attitudes to the *judgment of science* were identified among young people. Ten attitude statements from the questionnaire were used for this analysis. The simple k-means cluster analysis seemed to be the most effective to identify the clusters of science communication. After a multiple iteration process, a solution consisting of four

clusters was chosen. The four segments deriving from the cluster analysis show preferences that can be separated and interpreted well; so, the following clusters can be identified:

1. *anti-science group*: their main feature is that they consider the efforts of science to be dangerous and they protest actively;

2. *believers of science*: they have totally different views from those of the first group, they agree with every statement to a greater than average extent, and their support is active;

3. *science supporters*: their important feature is that they support science passively; that is, they understand and acknowledge science and the importance of scientific achievements; however, they do not want to take part in the development of science; so, their support can mostly be considered passive;

4. *the indifferent*: they practically rejected all of the statements compared to the other groups. They can be supposed to protest passively.

## Lifestyle Groups

One of the most important questions of the research was about the lifestyle of youth. For this purpose, a model was initially chosen, whereby groups were identified in the dimensions of *pace of life* and *value orientation* (Töröcsik, 2011). Since the adaptability of the model had been previously justified (Szűcs–Töröcsik–Soós, 2010), data processing could be started from this initial point. The aim was to define the latent variables of pace of life and value orientation on the grounds of data cleared from the average respondent characteristics. A principal component analysis of the transformed values was conducted in accordance with the model. Some of the variables were removed for professional reasons and there were variables which did not correlate with any other variables. These variables were removed from the analysis. The remaining variables consisted of two principal components which were called pace of life and value orientation on the basis of the model:

*Pace of life* (To what extent do you agree with the following statements?):

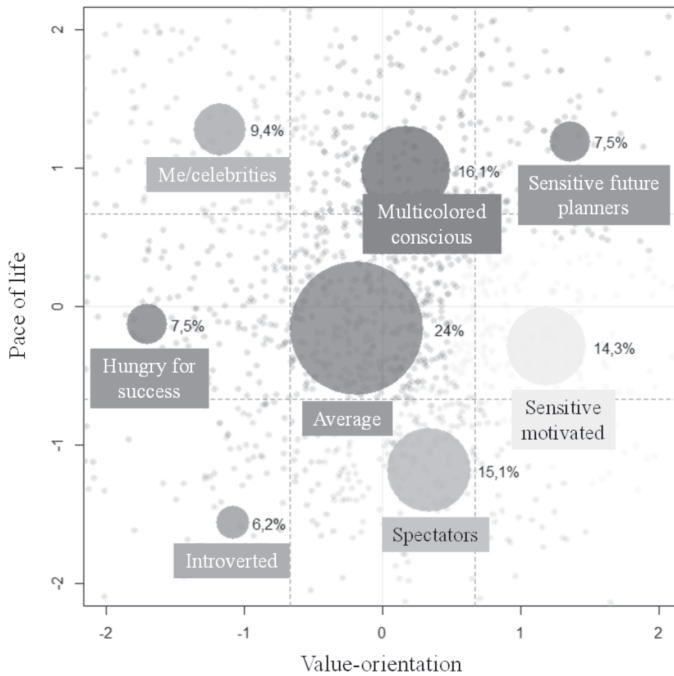
- I like to be everywhere and live intensively. (-)
- I take great care of my appearance. (-)
- I stay out of things. (+)
- I usually just contemplate. (+)
- I live slowly compared to others. (+)

*Value orientation* (To what extent do you agree with the following statements?):

- Wealth and money. (+)
- Listening to other people, who I do not agree with. (-)
- Humble, modest and restrained. (-)
- Success and acclaim. (+)

The categories above can be considered as the final consequence of the analysis. The principal component analysis was chosen so that latent variables can be defined. The analysis was applied for the modified variables which measured pace of life and value orientation. The principal components with eigenvalues over 1 were included, whereby the total variance explained reached 50%, and communality values were between 0.4 and 0.5. The 0.764 value of KMO test, which is used conventionally, can be considered good. The positions of the groups are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Lifestyle groups of Hungarian young people



Source: edited by the authors

The presentation of the groups shows that three groups faster than the average could be identified and there were three other groups with fast pace of life and two more groups that were slower than the average.

The description of all eight groups is summarized in the following section:

The *multi-coloured conscious* group (16.1%) consists of young people who live a faster life than the average, they have a lot of different friends, they enjoy life and they are satisfied with it, which is supported by the fact that their families are relatively wealthy. They plan their future, they are preparing for it consciously, but this does not mean that their interests focus only on a few things. They like



taking care of themselves and they know and like the various brands; however, education is also very important in their life. Women and young people from Budapest are slightly overrepresented in the group.

The *sensitive future planners* (7.5%) also live fast lives, and they are in the middle of actions. They not only study but they also spend their free time actively. Their distinguishing feature compared to other groups with fast pace of life is that they pay attention to others. Kindness and modesty are their preferred values. They are sensitive but they have definite ideas. The rate of younger respondents and women is higher in this group than in the sample. Their relationship to sciences is positive; they like to study and plan to go to university or to college. They are also satisfied with their lives; their family is in a good financial situation.

The members of *me/celebrities* group (9.4%) live a fast life. They take care of their own appearance intensively. It is important for these young people to show their own style. They know and like the various brands. They spend quite a lot of time by themselves, they are confident, they dare to be themselves and they regard money and success important. Interestingly, this is a group typically comprising men and people living in large towns. They are not that interested in sciences, except informatics and information technology. Their Internet usage is high, they are quite active online, upload photos, like to chat and they keep contact with a lot of online and offline friends.

The *average* group (24%) presents the median values and average speed of life which are typical of the average Hungarian young people because most of the values do not differ significantly from the average; therefore, conclusions referring to them can be generalized. Money and success seem to be very important for each member of this age-group. They are also confident, they think they are not left out of anything and they take part in every significant event. It is essential for them that they should prepare for the future; however, they do not do too much for it. What differentiates this group from the others is that they do not consider style to be of great importance, they appreciate it less than the other groups do and they have fewer friends than the average.

Members of the *sensitive motivated* group (14.3%) typically think that understanding others and paying attention to others are very important, which means that they do not deal only with themselves and their own plans, but they also react on their environment. They evaluate characteristic features such as being humble, modest and restrained. Contemplating is typical of the group rather than taking part in everything intensively, although they may not have the opportunity for this. Members of this group are satisfied, they typically live in smaller settlements and they have modest financial conditions. They are especially interested in sciences; the majority of the group is planning their future consciously, which can be an opportunity for them to break out. They mostly plan their future on the field of humanities.

Members of the *hungry for success* group (7.5%) have average pace of life. It is not a large group, but some characteristics are quite typical in the group. It is obvious that the desire for tangible assets, money and success greatly influence the group members' way of thinking. They seem to be envious but they do not do anything in order to get in a better situation. They do not appreciate modesty, and do not pay attention to others. Education is not important for them and the proportion of those group members who have vocational school diploma is high. They follow brands on the Internet and they admit overtly that they are interested in these brands, even if they are not necessarily available for them. Their online activities include watching videos and uploading contents, and they feel good in the virtual space. They have a strong desire to live another life, but they are not dissatisfied with their current life.

15.1% of young people are *spectators*. Members of this group live more slowly than the average; they prefer contemplating, but they are not dissatisfied with their circumstances. This group is not that motivated to continue their studies and to deal with sciences and they do not deal with building their future. Men have a higher participation rate than the average in this group. In contrast with the other groups, the group members' Facebook activity is less intensive; however, writing blogs is interesting for them. They are less satisfied with their health conditions, they are a little introverted and only a few of them have a relationship.

The group of the *introverted* is not a large group (6.2%). Its members seem to be problematic, and they are definitely separated from other clusters. They have few friends, they are reserved and they live slowly and they even think that they are left out of things. Men are overrepresented in the group. Their Internet and Facebook activities are low. Their relationship with the virtual world is not that close. They are not interested in sciences; however, engineering raises their interests a bit. The financial situation of the group members is under the average, but money is important for them too.

## Conclusions

In this study, the aspects of generational thinking, the possible segmentation of generations and the significance of cohort experiences were presented. It was highlighted that today's media-driven generation labelling is not enough to interpret generational characteristics. The examination was aimed at the segment of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who partly belong to Generation Z and partly to Generation Y, and are really important for universities both as potential students and also as current students. A project, which involves research and activities aimed at the acquaintance with the target audience, was introduced. Research findings were highlighted, which reveal that today's young

people cannot be described with uniform features, they do not consist of happy life-starters because they also have to struggle with problems. Their confidence and their desire for money and success are typical of them, but they also need help while they search for their identity. The question, which can initiate discussions, is whether today's young generation is different or they have to struggle with the same problems as previous generations had to at the same age. There is no doubt that the circumstances of this generation are different: for example, they use IT-devices, social media and mobile phones actively.

The study revealed the lifestyle groups of Hungarian youth, distinguishing carefree, ambitious, struggling and longing young people. Hopefully, this research can contribute to the better understanding of this age-group.

## References

- Bakewell, C.-Mitchell, V-W. (2003). Generation Y Female Consumer Decision-Making Styles. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* 31: 95-106.
- Borgstedt, S.-Calmbach, M. (2010). *Vernetzt, Verplant, Verschieden. Jugendliche Freizeitwelten*. Nürnberg: Das Baugerüst, Jugendarbeit 2017.
- Coupland, D. (2007). *X generáció*. Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó Kft.
- Csepeli, Gy.-Kígyós, É.-Popper, P. (2006). *Magára hagyott generációk. Fiatalok és öregek a XXI. században*. Budapest: Saxum Kiadó.
- Csepeli, Gy.-Prazsák, G. (2010). *Örök visszatérés? Társadalom az információs korban*. Budapest: József Műhely.
- Fanta Trendriport 6* – Retrieved from: [http://campuslet.unideb.hu/dokumentumok/tanulmanyok1/fantatrendriport6\\_091026062651.pdf](http://campuslet.unideb.hu/dokumentumok/tanulmanyok1/fantatrendriport6_091026062651.pdf)
- Gergátz, I. (2010). *ICT az 50+ generáció életében*. PhD értekezés, Pécs.
- Glas, I. (2009). *3 Generationen im Vergleich*. Bauer Media KG.
- Grail Research – A Division of Integreon. (2011). Consumers of Tomorrow: Insights and Observations about Generation Z – Retrieved from: [www.grailresearch.com/pdf/ContentPodsPdf/Consumers\\_of\\_Tomorrow\\_Insights\\_and\\_Observations\\_About\\_Generation\\_Z.pdf](http://www.grailresearch.com/pdf/ContentPodsPdf/Consumers_of_Tomorrow_Insights_and_Observations_About_Generation_Z.pdf)
- Grover, R.-Vriens, M. (2006). *The Handbook of Marketing Research: Uses, Misuses, and Future Advances*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Heckenberg, N. R.-McDuff, R.-Smith, C. P.-White, A. G. (1991). Generation of Optical Phase Singularities by Computer-Generated Holograms. *Optics Letter*.
- Hoffmanné, I. (2007). A generációs marketing alkalmazása a civil szférában. Retrieved from: <http://www.mifigyelo.hu/Civilkomp02.07/civilkompaudio.htm>
- Howe, N.-Strauss, W. (2000). *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. New York: Vintage Books.

- Jones, S.–Fox, S. (2009). Generations Online in 2009. Pew Internet Research – Retrieved from: <http://www.pewInternet.org/Reports/2009/Generations–Online–in–2009.aspx>
- Csécsi, R.–Dulka, M.–Juhász, Gy.,–Lakatos, D.–Molnár, Cs. G.–Mrázik, Gy. (2012). *Ifjúság 2012*, (ed.: Székely, L.) 3 December 2012. Retrieved from: [http://kutatopont.hu/files/2012/02/magyar\\_ifjusag\\_2012.pdf](http://kutatopont.hu/files/2012/02/magyar_ifjusag_2012.pdf)
- Kehl, D. (2011). Skálák és statisztikák: a méréselméletről és történetéről. *Statisztikai Szemle* 89(10-11): 1057–1080.
- Lehr, U. (2010). Herausforderungen der demografischen Entwicklung in Europa. Retrieved from: [http://www.google.hu/search?q=Lehr\\_20Vortrag.&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:hu:official&client=firefox-a](http://www.google.hu/search?q=Lehr_20Vortrag.&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:hu:official&client=firefox-a)
- Marconi, J. (2000). *Future Marketing: Targeting Seniors, Boomers, and Generations X and Y*. Chicago: NTC Business Books.
- McCrinkle, M.–Wolfinger, E. (2010). Az XYZ ábécéje. A nemzedékek meghatározása. *Korunk* 11: 13–18.
- Mutte, J.-L. (2004). Managing Workers of the Next Decade. Expatica HR [online] Retrieved from: <http://www.expatica.com/hr/story/managing-workers-of-the-next-decade-11866.html?ppager=1>
- Oblinger, D.–Oblinger, J. (eds.) (2005). *Educating the Net Generation*, Washington, D.C.: EDUCAUSE.
- Podsakoff, P. M.–MacKenzie, S. B.–Lee, J.-Y.–Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common Method Biases in Behavioral Research: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommended Remedies, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5): 879–903.
- Prensky, M. (2001). *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants I-II. On the Horizon*, NCB University Press, Vol. 9 No. 5, October.
- Prykop, C. (2005). *Scene-Marketing*. Wiesbaden: GWV.
- Schewe, C. D.–Noble, S. M. (2000). Market Segmentation by Cohorts: The Value and Validity of Cohorts in America and Abroad. *Journal of Marketing Management* 16: 129–142.
- Smith, W.–Clurman, A. (1997). *Rocking the Ages*. New York: Harper Business, p. 5. (2003). *Generációk, márkák, célcsoportok*. Budapest: Geomédia Könyvkiadó Kft.
- Strauss, W.–Howe, N. (1992). *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Reeves, T. C.–Oh, E. (2007). Generational Differences. *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology*, 295–303.
- Szabó, A.–Bauer, B. (eds.) (2009): *Ifjúság 2008 – Gyorsjelentés, Szociálpolitikai és Munkaügyi Intézet*. Retrieved from: [http://www.ncsszi.hu/download.php%3Ffile\\_id%3D785](http://www.ncsszi.hu/download.php%3Ffile_id%3D785)
- Szűcs, K.–Törőcsik, M.–Soós, J. (2010). Consumers' Trend Affinity in the Hungarian society. In: Bauer, A.–Agárdi, I. (eds.) *Marketing Theory*

- Challenges in Emerging Societies: MTC4*, 1<sup>st</sup> EMAC Regional Conference. Conference proceedings. Paper 1. Budapest: Corvinus University of Budapest.
- Pál, E. (2013). *The Generation „Z” – Overview Study*. Retrieved from: <http://www.zgeneracio.hu/getDocument/4252>
- Tari, A. (2010). *Y generáció: Klinikai pszichológiai jelenségek és társadalomlélektani összefüggések az információs korban*. Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó.
- Tari, A. (2011). *Z generáció: klinikai pszichológiai jelenségek és társadalomlélektani szempontok az információs korban*. Budapest: Tericum.
- Tarr, F. (ed.) (2010). *A 80-as generáció – pályakezdő társadalomtudósok esszékötetete*. Budapest: Kontra Műhely.
- Törőcsik, M. (2007c). *Vásárlói magatartás*. 1<sup>st</sup> edition Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- (2009). Generációs marketing. In: Bugár, Gy.–Farkas, F. (eds.), *Elkötelezettség és sokoldalúság*. Tanulmánykötet Barakonyi Károly tiszteletére. Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Közgazdaságtudományi Kar, 221–228.
- (2010). A fiatalok fogyasztói magatartása – az egyetemek fő célcsoportjának megértése. In: Törőcsik, M.–Kuráth, G. (eds.): *Egyetemi marketing*. Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem, 123–141.
- (2011). *Fogyasztói magatartás – insight, trendek, vásárlók*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Winkler, J. D.–Kanouse, D. E.–Ware, J. E. Jr. (1982). Controlling for Acquiescence Response Set in Scale Development. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 67: 555–561.





## On the Move: “Shadow Research” on the Media Habits of Generation Z

Ádám Guld

PhD, Assistant Lecturer, University of Pécs,  
Department of Communication and Media Studies, Pécs.  
guldadam@commonline.hu

Gyula Maksa

PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Pécs,  
Department of Communication and Media Studies, Pécs.  
maksa.gyula@commonline.hu

**Abstract.** The comprehensive research “The Media Usage Habits and Communication Practices of Secondary School Students” was carried out in 2013 as the subproject of the programme called “The Recognition and Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge” at the University of Pécs. The fundamental aim of this wide-range programme was to introduce and mediate the scientific achievements of the University of Pécs to the young generation living in the vicinity of the University. This aim could only be achieved by knowing the language and communication style of the young generation well. The aim of the research carried out with the assistance of the Department of Communication and Media Studies was to set up a knowledge base that would help us establish more efficient relationships with the target group mentioned above. The results of our investigation made it possible to draw a clearer picture about the communication practices and scenes of the so-called Generation Z, including the peculiarities of their media habits. We can capture the generation-specific characteristics appearing in the media usage of this age-group through the significance of motion. Regarding the use of media, motion may be interpreted as a movement in physical space but also as a transit through various media surfaces. The following study summarizes the most important results of our research.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, media habits, mobile communication

## Researching the Media Usage Habits of Generation Z

Most studies define Generation Z as the fifth age group living today, preceded by the Quiet Generation, the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Y. They will be followed by Generation Alpha (Pais, 2013; Pál, 2013; Székely, 2014). Generation Z is represented by young people born between the beginning and middle of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. Typically, they have older parents, live in small families, receive high-quality education and their life expectancy is significantly better than that of the previous generations. The most important feature of this generation is that its members are “born into” the world of digital revolution which makes them responsive towards technological inventions. This is clearly illustrated by the names given to this generation such as “Net Generation”, “Digital Natives” or “Wired Generation” (Sziártó, 2014: 19–21). For Generation Z, the role of network communication has primary importance; so, we can, somewhat ambitiously, say that they live their lives online. They understand technology well, their problem-solving skills are above average, they can easily multitask and prefer picture and sound to written text. At the same time, however, they frequently feel loneliness and think that they are unsuccessful outsiders. Frustration generated by such feelings often makes them isolated, anxious or depressed (more about this in Pais, 2013: 10–11).

In March 2013, a research project began at the University of Pécs aiming at the comprehensive investigation of the age-group known as Generation Z. In the framework of a subproject of the research called TÁMOP-4.2.3.-12/1/KONV *Recognition and Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge*, the Department of Communication and Media Studies of the University surveyed the most important scenes and forms of communication of secondary and tertiary students and the special features of their media usage. The aim of the research programme called *Understanding the Communication of Young People* was to expand and deepen the knowledge we have about the communication practices of today’s young generation.

The research carried out in 2103 applied a qualitative approach; it followed the methodological principles of the so-called “shadow research”.<sup>1</sup> This method refers to the principle that while the researchers do their best to have as little impact on the life of the informants as possible, they try to document their communication activities in the most credible way. Accordingly, when establishing our research method, we decided to use the combination of media diaries, interviews and mental maps, recording their communication practice in a visual form (Sheble–Wildemuth, 2009). We also heavily relied upon the experiences of a German research which investigated the communication networks of media users (Hepp–Berg–Roitsch, 2011).

1 On this, see as well: Gunter (2009: 22–55), Horning (2009: 95–115), Stokes (2008: 143–172).



Applying these methods, we were able to receive detailed information on the time, place, exact manner and conditions of media use. It follows from the manner of data communication that media use and the related impressions and emotions were also given greater importance, that is, we had the chance to record the media-related attitudes as well. Another benefit of this method is that it is suitable to survey the use of one particular medium (e.g. television or Internet) and also to reveal complex trends and habits related to the use of media when we are investigating the full spectrum of the devices and their possible uses in their context.

The general sample of the investigation included young people from South-Transdanubia. (The equality module of the research completed this general sample with two special sub-samples that included twenty-two young Roma people and sixteen children who lived in state care – more about this in Németh, 2013; and Glózer, 2013.) In the framework of a research seminar and following adequate preparation, we involved M.A. students from the Department of Communication and Media Studies and carried out 90-minute interviews with thirty-three secondary school students between the ages of 15 and 19. During the interviews, the interviewees interpreted the media diaries that recorded how they used the media. Connected to the interviews, we asked them to draw a map about their communication network and media habits. We tried to use these maps to understand how secondary students see their media use, what they see as of particular importance and how they interpret that. A little more than two-thirds of the interviewees were women and a little less than one-third included men. Regarding the schools, the sample varied significantly: we interviewed the students of secondary schools having different profiles, six from Pécs and one from Bátaszék, Kaposvár and Szekszárd. Most of the students live with their parents and about one-third of them live in hostels during the week. We also studied the media diaries of thirty-four university students between the ages of 19 and 23, who were not interviewed but prepared their communication network map. The sample showed significant variance regarding the degree courses of the students which included economy, law, medical science, ambulance officer, civil engineering, biology, psychology, English studies and liberal arts.

The following pages will treat the experiences we gained by analysing the general sample and the conclusions drawn on the basis of it. The first results can be read in our detailed research report (Guld and Maksa, 2013). Our intention with this paper is to give a short summary of our results and further consider the conclusions we drew there.

## On Our Results

Regarding the time spent on media use, the research in question revealed that the members of Generation Z spend between 5 and 6 hours using the media, but we found examples that differed significantly from the average. University students generally spend a little more time on using the media; however, the age-group of secondary school students produced the most extreme examples. They often reported on using the media for 10–12 hours, even during weekdays.

Looking at the devices preferred by the members of Generation Z, the significance of mobile devices is striking. Among these, smart phones are the most popular, while the presence of tablets is still negligible. The popularity of mobile devices can clearly be connected to the Internet as the most popular communication platform. The preference of social networking, file and video sharing sites, games and chat programmes within the applications accessible through the net seems to be impossible to defeat. Neither does the daily routine of Generation Z exclude classic mass media; however, its importance is being greatly reinterpreted. Radio and especially television are connected to background and parallel media consumption, so it is becoming less and less usual that young people pay attention to these media exclusively. When using radio and television, they carry out other activities as well (for example: eating, housework, physical training) or use another medium at the same time, which is mainly a computer or a mobile phone. The decreasing importance of newspapers and magazines as compared to radio and television is also evident.

The tendencies mentioned above clearly show that the members of Generation Z can rarely be characterized by active media use that is a period of time devoted to the use of only one medium. In case it happens, its duration is quite short and it is only the telephone, the computer and sometimes the television that appear in such contexts. In contrast, the use of media as a background is becoming normal practice. Its most dominant cases are the activities that can be connected to listening to music (daily routine, transportation, studying, relaxing, housework, etc.).

Regarding the media use of Generation Z, the development of the phenomenon known as multitasking is the most striking (see also: Kitta, 2013). We can talk about multitasking when two different media are used at the same time (e.g. television and mobile phone), when more than two different media are used at the same time (e.g. television, mobile phone and computer), when parallel media use is carried out on different surfaces accessible by the same device (e.g. the running of different computer applications at the same time). The phenomenon can be explained by saving time and organizing various tasks in a more efficient way; however, it has grave consequences regarding concentration and attention.

On the basis of the results, we can say that Generation Z is characterized by highly developed media consciousness though the majority typically underestimate the

time they spend on using the media. In general, young people treat the information provided by the media critically and are aware of the general dangers presented by it. However, while they consider their own media use normal, they frequently judge that of their fellows excessive and harmful. Finally, it is important to mention that this age-group consciously avoids advertisements; it is becoming one of the key features of their media use that they look for surfaces where there are no advertisements or where ads can be somehow filtered.

## On the Move

The characteristic features appearing in the media use of this generation can be best captured through the significance of motion. Regarding the use of media, this motion may be interpreted as a movement in physical space but also as a transit through various media surfaces (Guld, 2014a).

Movement in the physical sense can be interpreted in the context of *home*, *school* and the *road* connecting them. Here, special media usage habits are connected to each location and also to the road itself. This is made possible by the widely accessible wireless network and the wide variety of opportunities provided by mobile devices.

The most diverse ways of using the media are connected to the home, which is related to the great variety of communication devices available and the opportunities provided by the free time we have at home. Regarding home, young people’s own room has utmost importance as this is the central location of their media activities. In most households, every essential media device can be found here including television, computer, laptop and mobile phone, and sometimes a game console or music system. In their own room, we can find a PC or laptop in the centre, which are frequently used together with other media devices. While in the space of their own room, media use is a typically solitary activity, in the other rooms of the house – in the living and dining room or the kitchen –, this is clearly the source of a shared experience: the most common way of spending their free time together with the other family members. In the communal spaces of family life, it is still the TV that occupies the first place because in exceptional cases, typically at weekends, it is still able to sit the whole family down and grab their attention entirely. At times, radio also appears in this context; however, in contrast with the TV, the use of this medium can be explained by the parents’ choice, which can frequently be a source of serious conflicts between the older and the younger generations (Guld, 2014b).

Regarding the school and the hostel, it is mainly the rules stipulated by these institutions and the technical-technological conditions available there that influence the media use of young people. Our research has revealed that the role

of media devices in education seems to be accidental so far as is mentioned in the reports of primarily those students who participate in special informatics courses. The situation is even more problematic in hostels, where the lack of devices – which seems general – does not only hinder studying but also makes personal communication more difficult and heavily limits the ways students spend their free time. As a result of the above factors, young people tend to conceive the most diverse practices to circumvent the strict rules and the attention of their teachers. Their most important “ally” is the mobile phone which can be used undetected not only during the breaks but often during classes, too. Several students mentioned that during class they are regularly logged in to various social networking sites, while girls said they could listen to music using their mobile phone during class because their hair hides the earphones they use. There are places where even the password protected wireless network of the school or hostel does not present a problem for young people to access the Internet as the regularly broken codes spread like lightning among students. In summary, it seems that the education institutions have not yet been able to fully exploit the opportunities provided by the latest communication technologies, while students always try to find a chance to use these technologies via their own devices in order to satisfy their needs.

On the basis of the reports, most of the students have to commute between their home and school, so many of them spend a considerable amount of time on travelling. An essential accessory of any travel, let it be longer or shorter, is some media device and its use that is related only to travel. Thus, many students reported on how listening to the radio in the car had become part of their daily routine, an activity that they rarely or never do other times. Those not interested in radio programmes listen to their own music using their mobile phone or MP3 player in the car or on the bus. Frequently, this is the only time when others who go to school on foot grab a newspaper, typically freely distributed ones placed at bus stops or major crossroads. Using media while on the road is therefore a tool against boredom and frequently replaces or substitutes oral communication with parents, relatives or peers.

Movement in the virtual space of media can mainly be explained by the phenomenon mentioned above called multitasking, which means that young people tend to step over from one media surface to another with no problem; what is more, they are frequently present at various surfaces at the same time. To achieve this, they need complex communication infrastructure that is primarily accessible at home and whose central device is the PC or the laptop. As a result of the possibilities provided by the computer, it represents the most essential surface of multitasking and it would be difficult to list the possible ways of using a computer at the same time as revealed by our research. That is the reason why here we only talk about the three most important or most general surfaces. This category includes programmes suitable for playing music, social networking

sites and chat programmes like MSN or Skype. These programmes are constantly active on most young people’s devices; so, in this regard, they can be considered the most popular applications even if in this context they rarely get into the focus of undivided attention for a longer time. Furthermore, it is also vital that these surfaces can easily be associated with each other and with other offline or online activities; thus, their flexibility may further enhance the usability of programmes and the interoperability of virtual surfaces.

Finally, we should mention that besides physical mobility and the possibilities provided by multitasking a third type of mobility is worth noting (however, the diaries, interviews and maps give us information mainly about the first two versions). This is the mobility between geographic and cultural spaces. In the framework of a new, more focused research, it would also be worth surveying questions of how the use of media is connected to various geographic and cultural spaces. These issues include the following: situations when we use the media in our mother tongue and in a foreign language, gaining information on topical issues, the places of information and entertainment and their relation to global and local, transcultural situations and the appearance belonging to various communities in media use.

## Conclusions

The more thorough understanding of the practices recorded in the research documents and the novel user strategies outlined in this respect assign further tasks for the researchers and, by extension, for the players of the media market. As researchers, our most crucial duty is to further interpret and consider the results we have got. On the basis of the work carried out so far, we can draw a relatively detailed picture about the *general* trends in the media use of Generation Z; however, the new and special user practices appearing today can only be revealed through more precisely focused investigations. The aims outlined this way also have practical significance because it is easily understandable that the recognition of the new user practices and the adjustment to them would mean considerable advantages in the field of future competition.

The research forming the background of this study was made possible in the framework of the TÁMOP-4.2.3-12/1/KONV-2012-0016 project called “Science Communication for Generation Z”.

## References

- Glózer, R. (2013). *Hátrányos helyzetű fiatalok kommunikációjának és médiahasználatának vizsgálata*. Made within the framework of the TÁMOP-4.2.3-12/1/KONV-2012-0016 Science Communication with the generation „Z” project. University of Pécs: Pécs. <http://www.zgeneracio.hu/tanulmányok> [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].
- Guld, Á. (2014a). Mozgásban – A Z-generáció médiahasználati szokásairól. *Média, Kábel, Műhold* 18 (5): 24–26.
- (2014b). „Nálunk tévét csak a szüleim néznek” – a Z-generáció televíziózási szokásairól. *Média, Kábel, Műhold* 18 (9): 18–20.
- Guld, Á.–Maksa, Gy. (2013). *Fiatalok kommunikációjának és médiahasználatának vizsgálata*. Made within the framework of the TÁMOP-4.2.3-12/1/KONV-2012-0016 Science Communication with the generation „Z” project. University of Pécs: Pécs. <http://www.zgeneracio.hu/tanulmányok> [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].
- Gunter, B. (2009). *Media Research Methods: Measuring Audiences, Reactions and Impact*. London: Sage. Westport: Libraries Unlimited.
- Hepp, A.–Berg, M.–Roitsch, C. (2011). Mono-Thematic and Multi-Thematic Horizons of Mediatized Communitization: Patterns of Communicative Networking and Mediated Belonging. *Studies in Communication/Media*, o. Jg. 2: 1–34. [http://www.scm.nomos.de/fileadmin/scm/doc/SCM\\_11\\_02\\_Hepp\\_engl.pdf](http://www.scm.nomos.de/fileadmin/scm/doc/SCM_11_02_Hepp_engl.pdf) [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].
- Horning, S. (2009). *Doing Media Reserach*. London: Sage.
- Kitta, G. (2013). Médiahasználat a magyar ifjúság körében. In: Székely, L. (ed.), *Magyar Ifjúság 2012*. Budapest: Kutatópont. pp. 250–283.
- Németh, B. (2013). *Cigány fiatalok kommunikációjának és médiahasználatának vizsgálata*. Made within the framework of the TÁMOP-4.2.3-12/1/KONV-2012-0016 Science Communication with the generation „Z” project. University of Pécs: Pécs. <http://www.zgeneracio.hu/tanulmányok> [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].
- Pais, E. R. (2013). *Alapvetések a Z generáció tudománykommunikációjához*. Made within the framework of the TÁMOP-4.2.3-12/1/KONV-2012-0016 Science Communication with the generation „Z” project. University of Pécs: Pécs. <http://www.zgeneracio.hu/tanulmányok> [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].
- Pál, E. (ed.) (2013). *The Generation „Z”*. Made within the framework of the TÁMOP-4.2.3-12/1/KONV-2012-0016 Science Communication with the generation „Z” project. University of Pécs: Pécs. <http://www.zgeneracio.hu/tanulmányok> [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].

- Sheble, L.–Wildemuth, B. (2009). Research Diaries. In: Wildemuth, B. (ed.), *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*. pp. 211–221.
- Szijártó, Zs. (2014). Generáció és médiakutatás között: keretek és megközelítések. *Marketing & Menedzsment* 18 (II. különszám): 17–25.
- Stokes, J. (2008). *A média- és kultúrakutatás gyakorlata*. Budapest–Pécs: Gondolat.
- Székely, L. (2014). Az új csendes generáció. In: Nagy, Á.–Székely, L. (eds.), *Másodkézből – Magyar Ifjúság 2012*. Budapest: Kutatópont. pp. 9–29.







# Social and Political Criticism in Hungarian Parodistic Videos on YouTube

Rita Glózer

PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Pécs,  
Department of Communication and Media Studies, Pécs.  
glozer.rita@commonline.hu

**Abstract.** According to common sense, youngsters are more likely to turn their backs on politics. However, in my paper, I would like to throw some light on the subject by introducing a new form of mediated political reflexivity on various social and cultural issues. The phenomenon works through humorous and parodistic videos which are based on remixes of popular movies, songs, talk shows and news items and are circulating on social websites. Quite often the “actors” of these videos are “everyday celebrities” such as the homeless, the poor and the socially deprived. By using parody and hyperbola, the videos mock contemporary social setting that is based on entertainment and consumption, but in reality is cruel, violent, addictive and segregating. My hypothesis is that ridicule is a symbolic act through which youngsters distance themselves from social injustices while *order* is re-established. In conclusion, youngsters who tend to reject taking part in serious political acts can still make their voice heard in these videos.

**Keywords:** Internet, social media, YouTube, meme video, tabloidization, political deliverance, parody

## Youth, Public Affairs and Media

Both our everyday experience and the empirical research of the topic<sup>1</sup> reveal that today’s generation of young people and young adults are either indifferent or negative towards the issues of politics and public life. Most of them do not trust the political institutions and activities, and stay away from political participation<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, using social media, they produce and consume a

---

1 For example, the Hungarian module of the international EU KIDS research (Ithaka n.d.) or the Hungarian Election Studies ([www.valasztaskutatas.hu](http://www.valasztaskutatas.hu)) and the other representative research on young people (Szabó and Kern, 2011).

2 This is clearly reflected in the in-depth interviews carried out to reveal the media habits of young people in the framework of the research called TÁMOP-4.2.3.-12/1/KONV-2012-0016 *Science Communication for Generation Z*. (Guld and Maksa, 2013; Glózer, 2013).

great variety of humorous and parodistic content that reflect upon various social and cultural topics. From the point of view of late-modern media theories, this multimedia content introduces brand new forms of freedom of expression in the fields of politics and public life.

## Research Consideration and Methodology

Young generations are very responsive to the audio-visual contents and they consume these less and less on television, but rather on the Internet (Guld and Maksa, 2013). The new trends of the convergence television (Csigó, 2009) appeal the media consumers (particularly the young ones) into the online video market, where they can both consume and produce (Turner, 2010) different types of multimedia contents. The most popular kind of the user-generated multimedia content in the social media by the youth is the online video. On YouTube, the most favoured video sharing site in Hungary, the first young “producers”<sup>3</sup> (Bruns, 2008) appeared and began to publish user-generated videos around 2007. Thence, this online video scene has significantly evolved: many (young) “producers”,<sup>4</sup> different genres<sup>5</sup> (Glózer, 2014), a major and enthusiastic audience has expanded. The schemas were taken from the English-speaking amateur videos which the early Hungarian adopters have seen and followed, but the specific cultural milieu, common social and cultural experiences gave a unique profile to the Hungarian-speaking online video scenes.

The social criticism reflecting on the public and political affairs appears primarily in the parodistic videos. In this case study, I investigate the creations of Pempi, the most reputed early adopter in this genre. He is one of the first Hungarian amateur online video producers, focusing on the political and cultural reflexions in these. The nickname Pempi belongs to a student who has produced and published online videos since 2007. Actually he is one of the “oldest” and most beloved<sup>6</sup> producers in the scene of parodistic videos. Another reason to analyse these creations is the unique visual style and artistic quality of elaboration in his short films. He makes redubbed video-remixes with subtitles, and the “masking” (changing the face of the character with other characters’ faces from different films or videos) has become his brand. His works convincingly demonstrate the most important characteristics of the user-generated video contents: the parodistic and humorous style (Shifman, 2012), remix and montage as techniques (Manovich,

3 An amateur user who participates in the production or generation of media contents.

4 Their channels are followed by tens of thousands of users and the videos are liked by several hundred thousand people.

5 For example, the beauty videos, tag, haul and challenge videos, game plays and parodistic videos.

6 According to the statistics of YouTube.

2007), reflexions on the social situation and popular culture, conscious building of the audience and the community of fans (Csigó, 2009).

In pursuance of the research, I have made interviews with Pempi twice (on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2013 and on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2014), analysed his videos and followed the statistical data of these, the fans' comments and activities between September 2013 and September 2014.

## The Pempi Phenomenon

According to recent statistics, more than 60,000 people follow the different channels (Pempi, PempiHD, Pempi Classics, Steptronic87)<sup>7</sup> of the user called Pempi. There are 16,753 fans of the official Facebook site of Pempi,<sup>8</sup> most of them are aged between 18 and 24, says the Facebook statistics. The author of these videos remixes the characters and scenes of popular movies, recent and former pop hits, TV shows, soap operas and reality shows, computer games and well-known amateur Internet and viral videos so that he can compose short videos with a unique (and recognizable) style. His compositions, as he calls them, are primarily „funny videos, remixes and parodies” where the characters are pop musicians, media and Internet celebrities. The final results are absurd, funny and grotesque videos which are tragic and comic at the same time; they commonly use foul language and eventually make us laugh. These videos show scenes from popular Hollywood movies where, instead of the original actors, we can see the face and hear the voice of celebrities and participants of various reality shows and listen to remixed pop songs. The channels also show scenes (gameplays) from popular video games (Slender Man, Half Life) commented by the author.

The subject and source of humour is mostly connected to various social deviances (alcoholism, homelessness), to the different forms of otherness (e.g. ethnic otherness), to astounding and shocking behaviour, to foul language, to unreflected stupidity, to unscrupulousness and anti-social behaviour. Pempi takes the everyday characters of these videos from their original context and places them into the world of movies, videogames and stars. Using this strong

7 Javraj87, 2007. *Pempi* [YouTube channel] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/user/javraj87>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

PempiHD, 2012. *PempiHD* [YouTube channel] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/user/PempiHD>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

Pempi87, 2012. *Thug Life* [YouTube channel] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/user/Pempi87>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

Steptronic87, 2012. *Steptronic. Automotive channel* [YouTube channel] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/user/Steptronic87>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

8 Jenő Ph, 2007. *Hivatalos Pempi Facebook Oldal*, [Facebook] Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/javraj87?fref=ts>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

contrast, he can annul and ridicule the virtual world of the media and the phenomena appearing at the periphery of society and culture.

The overall picture is definitely a grotesque one: at first, the viewer may not even know what to think of these short films which ignore taboos and ridicule these untidy, toothless, seemingly intoxicated or homeless, Roma or coloured (African-American, Jamaican), extremely obese or shock-headed characters who are either completely mad or uproarious. Naturally, in the name of political correctness, we can condemn the parody of these people living at the periphery of society, but if we divert the focus of our investigations away from the concrete characters, we can get closer to the understanding of this phenomenon and decoding the causes of its popularity.

## **The Late Modern, Tabloid Hypermedia**

We are encouraged to create such an interpretation by those processes and developments that have taken place in the world of the media, in public life and in the scientific interpretation of these areas in the past decades. The ideal of a media that serves “public” interest represents important issues and provides information, while education has culminated in the concept of public service media. However, this ideal has become rather problematic. The concept of normative publicity by Habermas (1993) – including the judgement on the role of the media –, which is probably the most important starting point of the ideal, has become outdated. The use of television and, subsequently, the Internet brought changes that had an effect on the use and consumption of the media as a result of which a new and more democratic, “plebeian” publicity has developed (Császi, 2011).

The most important characteristic feature of this new, popular and plural publicity is ordinariness regarding the topics, the participants and the language. Through tabloidization, intimacy, scandal, rumour and, generally speaking, entertainment, have gained ground in order to satisfy the heightened demand for reality, which – according to Császi – is one of the important characteristic features of our late modern societies. Through introducing ordinariness, tabloids intend to captivate and engage the audience by showing themselves to them. The new media genres that combine the provision of information with entertainment are successful because they are close to the spontaneity and informality of everyday life.

The novelty in soap operas as well as in talk shows and reality shows is the application of a subjective viewpoint, the intention to affect the emotions and not the intellect, the scandalous presentation of the deviant, the other and the grotesque and the representation of the violation of the norms and morals of everyday life (Császi, 2011: 26). Therefore, this discourse does not represent high culture and the norm to be followed, but, on the contrary, it “puts the average into

the centre of attention through some shocking deviance” (Császi, 2011: 17). The representation of deviance does not serve as a deterrent, its aim is not to show the moral norms with the purpose of education or to rebel against the existing conditions, but – as it is put in an enjoyable form – to entertain the audience. Tabloid does not have any revolutionary ideology, it is not connected to politics, but instead it is embedded in commerce, entertainment and everyday life.

Technological development has brought about a unique mixture of the various media (music, film, television, radio, Internet) and genres (online television, radio and newspapers, reality shows). The boundaries of media have become interoperable; convergence and hybridity have become the most apparent features of the so-called “hypermedia”. The special features of hypertelelevision include, for example, the acceleration of the video’s rhythm, its extensive intertextuality,<sup>9</sup> the break of linearity or the content-providing activities of amateurs.

As a result of this, according to Scolari, hypertelelevision has produced a new cultural competence because while traditional television was created for people living after the war (who learnt to use the media through radio, movies and printed press), neo-television addressed a new generation who grew up watching TV (having higher-level skills at audiovisual interpretation), hypertelelevision “addresses viewers who are experts in interpreting fragmented texts and competent to navigate in an interactive environment” (Scolari, 2009: 411 cited in Császi, 2011: 42). It is therefore the youngest generations, born and bred to use the Internet and socialized by it, who possess such competence and it is the Internet that occupies their attention, not the TV.

## **Mediatized Folklore and Social Participation in Hungary**

Many would say that the tabloids of hypermedia are part of a new mediatized folklore (Blank, 2009; Bronner, 2009), “which is the public dramatization of those events, facts, emotions and fantasies that the members of the society all know, but judge differently” (Császi, 2011: 43).

One of the favourite targets of this modern, mediatized folklore is public life and politics. In Hungary, this popular, public and political way of reflection began in the form of election poems and songs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Balázs, 2004). After the eventful period of the 1830s and 1840s, this genre was reborn in 1945 and 1956, while during the time of the first free elections after the political changes (1989) poems and songs having similar style and structure were also produced. After that, the humorous and colloquial style of election folklore disappeared from public life for a long time (Balázs, 2004) to return during the 2002 election campaign. However, this time it was not so much in the field of

9 A constant reference to other media, genres and actors.

verbalism but through the text messages private people sent to one another (Balázs, 2004; Sükösd–Dányi, 2002). The traditional form of folklore was placed onto another media platform and, at the same time, became the instrument of a completely novel voter behaviour and discourse. During the 2006 elections, the voters sent far fewer political text messages to one another, however, the funny conversion and parodies of the political parties' election posters began to gain ground on the Internet. Bodoky (2005) explains the appearance of such pictures, named by the literature simply as Photoshop,<sup>10</sup> with the rapid growth of PCs and Internet providers and the expansion of other online services during the four years preceding the election. Besides politicians, the emblematic figures (popular domestic and foreign celebrities, actors of soap operas and reality shows, sportsmen and businessmen) and topics of contemporary mass culture also appear in such parodies (Bodoky, 2006: 17) together with the current issues of the given period: the panic caused by bird flu, the flood of the Danube, the forthcoming football world cup and even the 2003 catastrophe of Columbia.<sup>11</sup>

After the 2006 elections, a shift of emphasis took place in Hungarian political folklore again: following foreign tendencies, the first political video parodies appeared on YouTube. Considering their elaboration, there are two basic types: a series of pictures connected as a slide show with some music in the background (mostly popular Hungarian pop songs);<sup>12</sup> or writing subtitles for popular or cult movies<sup>13</sup> that carry some current political contents or dubbing films in an ironic way. The application of masking technology can be seen in the best short films<sup>14</sup> of this latter type. Besides popular movie films, animated movies, TV (news, soap opera, advertisement) and music (rap, ballad, communist song, folksong) genres also provided the playful film producers with raw materials.

In the past 2-3 years, however, a decreasing number of films containing direct political reflection were uploaded onto the video sharing sites. At the same time, memes, originating from various meme generators, flooded the different social networking sites. These funny works that combine a single picture with one or two lines of text and look like a photo, a caricature or a cartoon make it possible to voice a relatively simple message in a highly effective way. Because

10 The label comes from the programme called Photoshop which makes the transformation of pictures possible and which became widespread in the middle of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Hungary.

11 Bodoky mentions the space shuttle Discovery in his study by mistake.

12 Éva Dombóvári, 2010. *Padődö: - Orbán - "azt csinállok amit én akarok"* [video online] Available at: < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqjl6u0JD1U&feature=related> > [Accessed on: 08 December 2013].

13 Starwars, Der Untergang; Any Given Sunday (2evmulva, 2011. *Orbán – Al Pacion paródia by kslc.* [video online] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ps1CoQFhGDs>> [Accessed on: 12 August 2013].

14 Jocking3, 2009. *Star Wars Paródia (enyhén politikai jellegű...:D)* [video online] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnVRIz8rL3g>> [Accessed on: 12 August 2013].

of their simplicity, memes are not suitable to draw up an elaborate opinion, instead, they can be used to make a joke or send a short, witty and relevant message. The topics emerging are the most up-to-date ones, frequently reflecting on public and domestic political news. Scandals, involving politicians,<sup>15</sup> sayings by celebrities,<sup>16</sup> events producing a general laugh,<sup>17</sup> deeds or sayings that shocked the general public,<sup>18</sup> and even the slow reaction of the authorities to difficulties caused by unusual weather<sup>19</sup> have become memes among the Hungarian Internet users with lightning speed. As the significance of these events is often momentary and fainting, the public-political meme is an ephemeral genre, the funny pictures lose their timeliness rapidly. The fact that the use of social networking sites has gone beyond a critical threshold in Hungary has also contributed to the sudden increase in the popularity of these works. Facebook, the most popular social networking site, has become the primary instrument of spreading and sharing memes with funny political content.

This short review reveals how the development in the use of media has brought about newer and newer technologies (SMS, freeze-frame, moving picture) and ways of sharing information (sending, static publication, dynamic social network share). It can also be seen how the genres guaranteeing the political reflections of lay people have become increasingly rapid and short-lived. This acceleration necessarily reduces content complexity since the timelier and simpler the content is, as we can see in the case of the memes, the less suitable it is to reflect upon various social, cultural and political phenomena in a delicate way. It is also clear that the distrust and disappointment of the younger generations regarding institutional politics turns the delivery of public opinion away from direct political issues towards the general problems of society and culture. This may explain the emergence and popularity of the work of authors<sup>20</sup> like Pempi who do not make fun of concrete politicians and cases, but instead target the confusing social phenomena of everyday life (poverty, deviances, alienation). Regarding both the speakers and the subjects of their works, the publicity of popular media is a plebeian one which denies the rules of elite culture even in this way. Denial, protest and resistance, in their trivial way (Dessewffy, 1996), all characterize these contents as well as the Internet community that produces

15 For example, the plagiarism scandal of President Pál Schmitt.

16 You can live on 47,000 forints. Keep goats. etc.

17 For example, the Hummer-owners, whose cars fell through the ice of Lake Balaton. To reflect on this event, a separate blog was created: *Balatonhummer.blog.hu* [blog] Available at: <<http://balatonhummer.blog.hu/>> [Accessed on: 14 August 2013].

18 The reasoning of the politician who beat his wife saying that it was the blind dog who made his wife fall and that was how she got hurt.

19 The great amount of snow that fell around March 15, 2013, causing danger and emergency situations.

20 For example, HErBY, Bartos and Pamkutya and other authors of YouTube having similar profile and popularity.

and consumes them. This connection is not completely unknown by sociologists who research the phenomena of late modernity. Decades ago, Beck and Giddens considered the public discourse of intimacy as “the new and non-political form of publicity, which also meant the considerable reinterpretation and expansion of the Habermasian concept of political publicity” (Beck–Giddens–Lash, 1994; Giddens 1991, 1992, 1994)” (Császi, 2011: 54). While people all around the world tend to turn away from politics and the traditional political institutions, and practices become meaningless, through the intimacy and ordinariness of the tabloid, a new forum is developing on the new surfaces of popular publicity and hypermedia that can be used to discuss various public issues.

## **Pempi and the Hypermedia**

The actors in the Pempi videos are, on the one hand, TV and movie stars: local celebrities (unforgettable people from Mónika Show, Győzike, Fekete Pákó, Stohl András, Mucsi Zoltán, Nemcsák Károly, Gálvölgyi János, Szellő István, Erős Antónia etc.) and film stars from Hollywood. On the other hand, his videos also include “ordinary stars” who have become famous as a result of their “performance” recorded and uploaded onto the Internet. Among them, we can find self-appointed performers singing popular songs (e.g. *Cotton Eyed Joe* or *Nyár van [It's Summer]*), users who appear with their own songs and viral videos (e.g. the authors and actors of the music video titled *Mit mond a róka [What does the fox say?]*), drunken people who find themselves in funny situations and homeless people sitting on the stairs of underpasses or having a row in the street. Besides the media icons, we can see anonymous and average, flesh-and-blood human beings whose ordinariness represents a sort of deviance and who are nevertheless, part of our life.

Thus the participants of these videos mix characters who would never have appeared and indeed never appeared together on the surfaces of paleomedia in real life. Here, however, by eliminating the social differences and distances, the performers appear as equal partners in the democratic hyperreality of these videos and interact with one another, while the “plot” of such videos unfolds through this interaction. Their joint actions are permeated by happiness and laughter, which is enhanced by the joyful and dynamic music in the background.



**Picture 1.** András Stohl and a participant from a reality show in the parody titled Penge Pákó; **Picture 2.** Mónika Erdélyi, the host of a talk show masked as Zoltán Mucsi<sup>21</sup>



**Pictures 3-4.** „Bartos” and a nameless Internet “celebrity” in the parody titled Cotton Eyed Joe<sup>22</sup>



The reality presented by these videos is ordinary, personal, plebeian and democratic at the same time. In this environment, the actions and gestures of the actors are frequently accompanied by foul language. Such regularly occurring motives include the naming or visual representation of female and male sexual organs,<sup>23</sup> the vulgar or obscene representation of sexuality, the emphasis on the human body (excessive skinniness or obesity, muscles) and the visual representation of violence (fight, murder).

A unique way of placing the concept of boundaries into the centre of discussion is the introduction of visible ethnic otherness. A great portion of the actors in these parodies are Roma or coloured people (with African, African-American,

21 kriszdj1, 2010. *YouTube – Gollam Show.mp4* [video online] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqevYOWwiF4&spfreload=10>> [Accessed on: 12 January 2015].

22 PempIHHD, 2014. *Cotton Eyed Joe Paródia – Pempi* [video online] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=995AAcf4Dv0&spfreload=10>> [Accessed on: 12 January 2015].

23 The references to the male sexual organs almost always vary a meme (“chocolate penis”) originating in one of the media appearances of Fekete Pákó. The references to the female sexual organs in the Pempi videos are made possible by quoting a video where a man sings a song called “The Cunt Doesn’t Eat Lentils” (Paródiák Pempi, 2013. *Falusi Gangnam Style (Psy – Gangnam Style parody)* [video online] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEw5YpqFli4&spfreload=10>> [Accessed on: 12 January 2015].

Caribbean or Asian appearance). The obvious difference in skin colour or outlook is itself a source of humour in these videos as is indicated by the pictures taken from the parody titled *will.i.am – Scream & Shout*.

**Picture 5.** *will.i.am – Scream & Shout* parody;<sup>24</sup> **Picture 6.** *Cotton Eyed Joe* parody<sup>25</sup>



These forceful reflections on the extremities, taboos, deviances and violations of everyday life make certain social norms visible, which indicates that the young generation who consumes these videos does, in its own way, perceive the expectations that implicitly regulate the life of the society and does, in its own way – or using and transforming the patterns of the late modern tabloid media –, treat these issues, too. It portrays and discusses those issues whose debatability in the field of domestic publicity was first proven, in a groundbreaking way, by the talk shows of hypertelevisión (Császi, 2011).

At the same time, the videos heavily rely and reflect upon our motion-picture-dominated contemporary media by citing famous TV and movie stars and using other means such as the imitation of and playing with the various media genres. Among the videos of Pempí, we can see parodies of TV advertisements, newsreels, talk shows, soap operas, video games and quiz shows. The use of these genres in a playful and humorous way indicates both an intimate and close relationship with them and shows the young generation's retrospection from the world of Internet to these genres that determined the age of NeoMedia. This way of reflection represents an initial separation from the television-centred NeoMedia and an attitude of media consumption which is characteristic of Internet publicity and which also makes interactivity possible.

24 Pempí, n.d. *will.i.am – Scream & Shout* parody [video online] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yi132xqTqcg>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

25 PempíHD 2014. *Cotton Eyed Joe Paródia – Pempí* [video online] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=995AAcf4Dv0&spfreload=10>> [Accessed on: 12 January 2015].

**Picture 7.** Sinter Koton (+16) parody of an advertisement, music background: Fekete Pákó “chocolate penis”<sup>26</sup>; **Picture 8.** Reference to the quiz show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” in the video called “Pempi gives answers”<sup>27</sup>



Placing, for example, the characters of popular culture and everyday life into the world of video games and movies relativizes and ridicules the experience we have when watching a film or playing a game. Parodies make possible something that the traditional consumption of games and films did not allow: we can playfully reflect upon the excessiveness of the dramaturgy and visualization of popular films and video games as well as on the representation of violence and death and the unreality of their characters. This unmasked and upturned citation also ridicules the action movies we watched with excitement and anxiety, and questions the effect and influencing power of the media industry, too. The cult films that generally have great popularity among the members of his generation play a crucial role in Pempi's work. Some of them – e.g. *Matrix*, *Blade*, *Der Untergang*, *Mortal Combat*, *Alien*, *Skyfall* or *Lord of the Rings* – appear in several of his parodistic videos.

Video games, such as *Dead Island* or *Half Life*, played with humorous commentaries give us an insight into the different experiences of the young generation. Such video games which have high popularity among young people are originally connected to a private and not public situation and activity, where the player, the computer and possibly an online partner are present. The fundamental aim of demonstrating how to play the game and using humorous commentaries at the same time is to assist those who get stuck at certain points of the game. This support against the obstacles and difficulties created by the medium and the genre means that the media's power is called into question, that there is an alliance against and victory over the power of media, but it also represents a unique reflection on the medium and media consumption. On the other hand, however, it opens the personal and private use of media for the widest possible

26 Pempi, n.d., *Sinter Koton* [video online] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Crpgob9FaBE&list=RD399CSOdWUPrJ0>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

27 Pempi, n.d., *Pempi válaszol 4.* [video online] Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV-rN9vub4>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

publicity of hypermedia. The inclusion of television, film or video game into the platform of the Internet and the elaboration of a special version (e.g. Internet television) of them as well as the various forms of imitation and interpretation are regarded as the special manifestations of the ordinary experience of media convergence at the same time.

Curiously, it is not only the characteristic products of NeoMedia, which can also be regarded as direct antecedents, that appear in these parodies, but also some of the domestic hits of the folklorized paleomedia, for example the first Hungarian soap opera called “Neighbours” (“telenovela”), the Hungarian cult movie “Indul a bakterház” (The Rascal of the Railroad Shack) or the major hit “Nyár van” (It’s Summer) of the 1980s from the group called Neoton.

**Picture 9.** Feri Vágási, a popular character from the soap opera “Neighbours” in the film titled “Gabi, the Alien”;<sup>28</sup> **Picture 10.** Scene from the film “Indul a bakterház” (The Rascal of the Railroad Shack) in the Pempi video titled “Hungarian Skyfall”<sup>29</sup>



Citing and portraying the “hits” of online media including memes, stories and celebrities naturally expresses something about the relation their creators and consumers have towards the Internet. Those sentences that later became proverbs, like „bikicsunáj” (the Hungarian version of the Alphaville song “Big in Japan”), „mi folyik itt Gyöngyösön” (What’s going on in Gyöngyös), „Ízirájder, öcsém, ízirájder” (Easy rider, my friend, easy rider), „Ne fürgyé le”, (Don’t take a bath) „Gyúrunk, vazze” (Workin’ out, dammit), have become widely known partly through television and radio, however their folklorization became fully fledged via the Internet. They have been ripped from their original story and incorporating the joke and the context as a reference they developed a life of their own on YouTube. The modus vivendi of these contents is therefore intertextuality: if the appropriate environment is given, they trigger a reference to a well known joke

28 Pempi, n.d., *Nyolcadik utas a Gabi* [video online] Available at: <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hcaxfq\\_2bGY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hcaxfq_2bGY)> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

29 Pempi, n.d. *Magyar Skyfall* [video online] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsyLyQ-wCRQ>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

that enriches the original meaning by playing it in a new context. Naturally, only those enjoy such humours who know the original joke, video and character. That is, such jokes that are based on exchanging laughs, on “savouring repetition”, have a community building and empowering character: only those can be part of the discourse who are able to recognize and enjoy humour, those who know the given segment of media culture. This can also explain the generation-related consumption of the contents in question (though in the case of the Internet we cannot really talk about a generation gap as the different age-groups using the World Wide Web began their activities around the same time).

**Picture 11.** “It’s Summer” parody (I get the chills mix);<sup>30</sup> **Picture 12.** Part of the Internet meme called „What’s going on in Gyöngyös?” in the parody titled Hungarian Skyfall<sup>31</sup>



The scene of “calling” and reiterating these jokes as well as of collective laughter in relation to the Pempi videos is, on the one hand, the comments attached to films, and, on the other hand, a series called *Pempi Gives Answers* (Pempi TV) created especially to serve this function. Pempi uses this latter site to comply with the requests sent by fans via Facebook, e-mail or Skype and answer their questions in his unique and humorous style applying music, pictures or gestures performed parodistically by himself. Pempi TV is a sort of online request show where questions are also articulated as references whose subjects are mostly some sort of Internet folklore motifs and, less frequently, a piece of information connected to Pempi himself and his works.

30 Pempi, n.d., *Nyár van – paródia* [video online] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuZDW1bcaCw>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

31 Pempi, n.d., *Magyar Skyfall* [video online] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsyLyQ-wCRQ>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

**Pictures 13-14.** Parts from Pempi Gives Answers 1 video<sup>32</sup>



## The Cultural Importance of Parody Videos on the Internet

Courtesy of the commercial TV companies, the defining genres – talk show, reality show – of tabloid hypermedia appeared in Hungary at the beginning of the 2000s. Their approach and imagery exerted great influence on the opinion of people concerning publicity (and its players, style and topics), but their judgement by the public was far from uniform. Various groups of viewers and intellectuals who shape public opinion and the institutional players of media regulation judged these new programme types differently. It was especially the normative and elitist conviction of the latter two groups and, eventually, the sanctions of the ORTT<sup>33</sup> (National Radio and Television Authority) that led to the end of the two most popular Hungarian talk shows (Mónika Show of RTL Club and the rival TV2's Joshi Barat, both having begun in 2001) in the spring of 2010. Mónika Show, nevertheless, has crossed a boundary: it became possible to show the problems, conflicts and deviances of our intimate, private and everyday life in public.

Watching the Pempi parodies, we can see the unique continuation, the players and, eventually, the spirit and style and, to a certain extent, the function of the episodes of these talk shows. The actors, scenes and style of tabloid TV programmes live on in a folklorized form on the Internet (at the same time, however, new programme types of reality television also appear on commercial channels). The young adult generation, whose primary medium is the Internet and not the television, begins to satisfy their curiosity towards reality, everyday life and intimacy through such folkloristic, tabloid and hybrid multimedia contents (Shifman, 2012).

The heightened curiosity of young generations is partly an age-related peculiarity; however, it is more than that. One of the traditional frameworks

32 Pempi, n.d., *Pempi válaszol 1.*, [video online] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TF-sV-ufwAc>> [Accessed on: 10 February 2014].

33 The National Radio and Television Authority was established by the Hungarian Parliament to supervise the media – it functioned between 1996 and 2010.

of public discourse on social issues (on concrete and ideal reality) legally accessible for people is politics. However, in the Western world, politics interests citizens and especially young people less and less. The unprocessed plurality of everyday life, its disturbing ambivalence and unpredictability calls for reflection. The popular and tabloid contents – using the words of Császi – “prepare us to survive our everyday life, to prevent and encounter emptiness and inhibition. From a sociological perspective, the growing significance of the tabloid approach in popular media can be interpreted as a phenomenon that warns of the unexpectedness, extremities and reality of our risk society as opposed to the melodramatic and sentimental experience that is becoming lost in our late modernity” (Császi, 2011: 30). For strategic reasons, politics is either not or is only one-sidedly willing to discuss these phenomena widely and the scientific discourse of the intelligentsia is not popular (understandable, acceptable) enough, while television, influenced by cultural policy, is not given the opportunity to do that. The common enjoyment of folkloristic tabloid contents on the Internet can therefore be regarded as therapeutic (Császi, 2002). Experiencing and resolving the frustrations of everyday life through carnivalistic laughter and by twisting them may be one of the important benefits why young people sit down in front of the computer every day. Instead of being involved in “serious” opinion formation regarding politics, they treat the norms they know and sense very well in a “light-minded” (cf. Prenskey, 2001) way, parodying, mocking and ridiculing them, because these issues do interest them apparently.

## References

- Balázs G. (2004). Választási sms-ek folklorisztikai-szövegtani vizsgálata. Magyar Nyelvőr 1: 36–53. [.pdf] Available at: <<http://www.c3.hu/~nyelvor/period/1281/128104.pdf>> [Accessed on: 16 May 2014].
- Blank, T. J. (ed.) (2009). *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital Word*. Logan: Utah State Press, [.pdf] Available at: <[http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1034&context=usupress\\_pubs](http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1034&context=usupress_pubs)> [Accessed on: 16 May 2014].
- Bodoky, T. (2006). Többet retusálunk, mint négy éve. *Médiakutató*, 2. [online] Available at: <[http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2006\\_02\\_nyar/01\\_tobbet\\_retusalunk/09.html](http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2006_02_nyar/01_tobbet_retusalunk/09.html)> [Accessed on: 16 May 2014].
- Bronner, S. J. (2009). Digitizing and Virtualizing Folklore. In: Blank, T. (ed.), *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World*. Logan: Utah State Press. pp. 21–66. [.pdf]. Available at: <[http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1034&context=usupress\\_pubs](http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1034&context=usupress_pubs)> [Accessed on: 16 May 2014].

- Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Producership*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Császi, L. (2002). A World Trade Center viccek mint intenzív rítusok. In: Császi, L. *A média rítusai*. Budapest: MTA-ELTE Kommunikációelméleti Kutatócsoport. pp. 162–186.
- (2011). *A Mónika-jelenség kulturális szociológiája*. Budapest – Pécs: Gondolat Kiadó – PTE Kommunikáció- és Médiatudományi Tanszék.
- Csigó, P. (2009). *A konvergens televíziózás. Web – TV – közösség*. Budapest: L'Harmattan.
- Dessewffy, T. (ed.) (1996). Hétköznapi ellenállás (Tanulmányok). *Replika* 23-24: 69–158.
- Glózer, R. (2013). *Hátrányos helyzetű fiatalok kommunikációjának és médiahasználatának vizsgálata*. TÁMOP-4.2.3-12/1/KONV-2012-0016 Tudománykommunikáció a Z generációnak. Pécs: PTE. [online] Available at: <<http://www.zgeneracio.hu/tanulmanyok>> [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].
- Glózer, R. (2014). Z generációs tartalom-előállítók az új médiában. Egy YouTube-os amatőr videókészítő munkássága. *Marketing & Management*, (48)2 [special issue]: 55–67.
- Guld, Á.–Maksa, Gy. (2013). *Fiatalok kommunikációjának és médiahasználatának vizsgálata*. TÁMOP-4.2.3-12/1/KONV-2012-0016 Tudománykommunikáció a Z generációnak. Pécs: PTE. [online] Available at: <<http://www.zgeneracio.hu/tanulmanyok>> [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].
- Habermas, J. (1993). *A társadalmi nyilvánosság szerkezetváltozása*. Budapest: Századvég-Gondolat.
- Ithaka Research Consulting. (n.d.). EU Kids Online magyar jelentés [online] Available at: <[http://ithaka.hu/wpcontent/uploads/2012/07/ITHAKA\\_EU\\_KIDS\\_Magyar\\_Jelent%C3%A9s\\_NMHH\\_Final\\_1.2.pdf](http://ithaka.hu/wpcontent/uploads/2012/07/ITHAKA_EU_KIDS_Magyar_Jelent%C3%A9s_NMHH_Final_1.2.pdf)> [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].
- Magyar Választáskutató Program. (n.d.). [online] Available at: <<http://www.valasztaskutatas.hu/>> [Accessed on: 12 January 2015].
- Manovich, L. (2007). „Remixelhetőség”, In: Halácsy, P.–Vályi, G.– Wellmann, B. (eds.), *Hatalom a mobiltömegek kezében*. Budapest: Typotex/MOKK. pp. 79–90.
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. *From On the Horizon*, MCB University Press, 9(5) [.pdf] Available at: <<http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>> [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].
- Shifman, L. (2012). An Anatomy of a YouTube Meme. *New Media & Society* 14: 187–203.
- Sükösd, M.–Dányi, E. (2002). M-politika akcióban. SMS és e-mail a 2002-es magyarországi választási kampányban. In: Nyíri, K. (ed.), *Mobilközösség*,



---

*mobilmegismerés*. Budapest: MTA Filozófiai Kutatóintézete, pp. 273–293. [.pdf] Available at: <<http://www.kampanyarchivum.hu/tanulmany01.pdf>> [Accessed on: 15 May 2014].

Szabó, A.–Kern, T. (2011). Az ifjúság politikai aktivitása. In: Bauer, B.–Szabó, A. (eds.), *Arctalan (?) nemzedék*. Budapest: Nemzeti Család- és Szociálpolitikai Intézet. pp. 37–80. [online] Available at: <[http://ncsszi.hu/download.php?file\\_id=1403](http://ncsszi.hu/download.php?file_id=1403)> [Accessed on: 12 January 2015].

Turner, G. (2010). *Ordinary People and the Media: The Demotic Turn*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.





# Children Online: A Participatory Visual Approach

Rozália Klára Bakó

PhD, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania,  
Faculty of Technical and Social Sciences, Miercurea Ciuc  
rozalia.bako@sapientia.ro

**Abstract.** The present research note is an overview of a case study<sup>1</sup> based on a series of inquiries into elementary and high school children's online media use. In March 2012, a survey (N=761) showed that young people from a Transylvanian school<sup>2</sup> had shifted online as their premier source of information, with no significant divide between rural and urban environments or between girls and boys.<sup>3</sup> In June 2013, a focus group discussion suggested high school students' critical attitude towards information and communication technology (ICT) use, with a strong sense of purpose and environmental awareness.<sup>4</sup> In September 2013, a new series of inquiries set off, aimed at assessing 8–9-year-old children's attitudes towards ICTs and the Internet. Participatory visual methods offered both unique data gathering opportunities and media education tools. Key results of the case study show striking similarities with the Net Children Go Mobile research findings:<sup>5</sup> privatization of ICT access and use, and the pervasiveness of the Internet in children's lives.

**Keywords:** children, Internet, Romania, visual methodologies, participation

## 1. Why a Participatory Visual Research with Children?

While participative research has emerged as a method of collaborative approach to scientific inquiry for more than three decades and aiming at a more ethical approach to stakeholder involvement in the process, visual research set off systematically mainly after 2000. A “pictorial turn” (Mitchell, 1994: 11) has developed as a cultural paradigm shift in more theoretical studies, whereas a

---

1 Conference paper: *Towards the Good Society: European Perspectives*. Bucharest, 23–26 October 2013.

2 Historical region of central Romania.

3 Bakó et al., 2012.

4 Bakó, 2013.

5 Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2013: 5.

“visual turn” (Jay, 2002: 87) marked a more pragmatic and interdisciplinary setting lately. According to Thomson (2008: 10), “current interest in the visual stems from the simultaneous proliferation of the means of making images and the proliferation of image-based systems of communication in everyday life”. Proliferation of the visual methodologies in the social sciences resulted in a series of case studies and textbooks aimed at guiding newcomers to an emerging world of inquiry (Richards, 2011; Rose, 2001; Smith et al., 2005; Smith, 2008; Thomson, 2008; Van Leeuwen–Jewitt, 2001). Critical, warning voices have also been heard (Buckingham, 2009): visual studies can easily slide into naive empiricism or – at the opposite end of the spectrum – into blurry theoretical ramblings. Thomson (2008) also warned researchers about the difficulty of interpreting images, given the fact that they are not neutral: they are socially constructed realities through complex processes of selection, processing and editing. At the same time, images are polysemic: they can be “read” in various ways; therefore, visual analysis has to be “systematic, thorough and open to scrutiny” (Thomson, 2008: 10).

Participatory approaches to the visual offer a range of opportunities, as highlighted by Richards (2011: 6): “visual outputs produced by participants can be analysed for what they reveal about the way people choose to represent themselves to others and how they identify what is significant about their lives.” Meanwhile, a participatory approach takes research and researchers out of the “ivory tower” and gives them a better grasp of the realities they study. From the perspective of the participants, their involvement in the research process makes them motivated and thus keener on investing time and energy in revealing the world in which they live.

Children are already immersed in a multimodal visual world: participatory visual research is, in fact, a trigger to revealing their life-worlds. As Thomson (2008: 11) put it: “they like working with visual tools and media: photography, drawing, cartooning, multimedia production and film-making are already part of their image-saturated everyday lives.” Conducting participatory research in schools is both convenient and safe: it is a space of organized action, to which children are used to. Young people are ready-gathered, task-oriented and set for learning and involvement – although Prosser remarked critically that school is often a “non-teaching space” (2007: 16) because it is created by adults, according to their ideas. Thomson (2013: 8) highlighted some benefits of conducting participatory research with school children:

- addresses issues of importance to students and therefore serves their interests;
- allows marginalized perspectives to be expressed;
- uses students’ experiences to develop approaches and tools;
- can make a difference.

Wilkinson (2000: 4) also formulated a wide range of arguments on why we should involve children in the research process:

- participation is a right (UN convention on the Rights of the Child): the right to have their opinions on the matters that affect them;
  - to gain better knowledge on their views and priorities. Involving children and young people in the research process helps illuminate key issues and concerns.
  - for more effective action: case studies show a better decision-making and follow-up process when key stakeholders are involved;
  - to measure properly how effective we are: this means involving children and young people in the process of collecting, monitoring and interpreting results;
  - empowering children and young people: by “letting children decide what is important to them, we have the basis for a joint analysis based on a more equal power relationship between adults and children.” (Wilkinson, 2000: 5)
- Inspired by Hart’s idea on the “ladder of participation” (1992: 8), Wilkinson developed a model showing progressive levels of children’s involvement in the research process.

**Table 1.** The “ladder of participation”: Wilkinson’s conceptual model (2000: 5)

IV. Children/ community control research (identify question, carry out and analyse research)
III. Children/ community carry out research in partnership (involvement of stakeholders is shared at all stages)
II. Outsiders plan research and do analysis but involve children/ community through participatory methods/ approaches
I. Outsiders plan and analyse research and do not use participatory methods/ approaches

Wilkinson (2000: 6) addresses a key question: when is children and young people’s participation appropriate? Before planning and implementing a participatory youth research, we should ask ourselves:

- if it is a vulnerable group, is participatory research the most urgent thing to do?
- is the research going to bring benefits for the young people?
- does the researcher have the abilities and skills to conduct participatory research?
- do we have enough resources to implement participatory research, minding diversity?
- do we have access to young people?
- do those supposed to participate have the skills to do so?
- does participation involve disruption or creating imbalances at micro/ macro levels?

Having all these ideas in mind, a researcher has to consider carefully whether s/he can carry out or not a fair and methodologically sound inquiry into the

children's world by involving them, or s/he rather should use traditional, non-participatory methods and tools.

## 2. Children's Drawings as Means of Sensemaking

Drawing is more than making marks that have a meaning, Hall warns (2008). Today, there is a shift from a mainly psychological, decontextualized approach to children's drawings to a broader, socio-cultural focus of the research (Anning, 2003). In an increasingly multimodal communication world, literacies have to adjust and give more space to the visual. While noting the challenges drawing research involves, Eldén (2013: 78) acknowledges the difference visual research can make in understanding the complex world of today's world, where – as Anning has put it, “schools should build on young children's flexible approaches to combining speech, action, drawing and sound in their activities” (2003: 6).

We started up a participatory visual research in a school from Romania during September and October 2013, with the support of eight teachers who agreed to bring the topic “My family and the Internet” in their drawing classes with elementary school children. We designed the task as a contest: children were asked to produce the drawings at school, using coloured pencils, and informed them that the best drawings shall be exhibited at a later date. A number of 128 thematic drawings resulted in the period of October 4–14, which have been digitalized afterwards.<sup>6</sup> While age is a critical factor that makes a difference in the ways in which children conceptualize relationships and objects – as shown in pictures 2 and 3 –, a number of patterns have occurred irrespective of their age or gender. They will be analysed in the next section of this study.

As part of the participatory process, we have asked 16- and 17-year-old students from the same school, at a Sociology class, to help interpret children's drawings. A random sample of 42 drawings were distributed to students organized in small groups and their comments recorded on paper. Before that, the 11<sup>th</sup> grader students had been asked to sketch the plan of a poster titled “My family and the Internet”. Youngsters were struck by the colourfulness and aesthetic character of smaller children's drawings as compared to theirs, but also by the lack of deeper understanding and knowledge of the 8–9 year olds on “what Internet really means” (boy, 17). Meanwhile, a brainstorming was conducted among teenagers: they were asked to write down the first two things that came into their minds when they hear the word “Internet”. Most of them depicted the benefits, but the harms, too.

---

6 All drawings are uploaded in a virtual gallery, at:  
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9ykobpucfx1hd0q/AADKqAsTVhPtyBuK4vv97aWxa?dl=0>

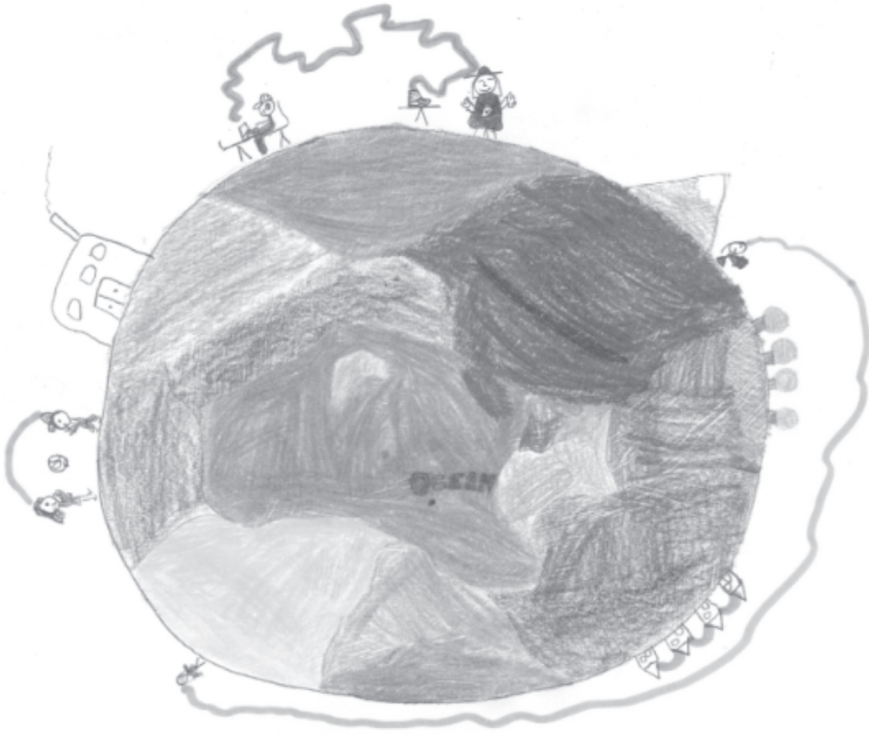
**Picture 1.** “My family and the Internet” (boy, 8)



While emotional expression of joy and enchantment can be clearly depicted – all the protagonists are smiling and gazing at the computer screen showing the search engine Google, the use of space is rigid and conventional. Space construction is linear, according to Lange-Küttner’s classification (2008), and representation is bidimensional. There is a minimal use of perspective, as shown in the size of the parents, situated close to the computer like “bodyguards”, as opposed to the smaller figures: the children.

A more rich set of experiences and skills, but also the age difference can bring about a merely different approach to the topic of a child’s family and the Internet, as shown in *Picture 2* below: she understands the multilayer character of the new medium that connects devices, houses, and people. We have singled out the drawing shown in *Picture 2* because it is the only one out of 128 pieces of work that gives a thoughtful, complex and advanced understanding of what online communication really means – in fact, out of the private space of their homes. Internet is pictured as a global phenomenon: green wires are bridging oceans, mountains and personal differences.

**Picture 2.** “My family and the Internet” (girl, 9)



To conclude, drawings are strongly connected to the socio-cultural context in which children live, and even more to their age (Anning, 2003; Hopperstad, 2010; Toomela, 2002). The more they develop in their mental and manual skills, the better they can represent relationships, perspective, objects' function and the broader significance of people's actions. Meanwhile, a topic of relevance to their lives – the relationship between family and ICT use, between everyday life and the Internet, given as a task at drawing classes to children from 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades – can provide useful insights both for the researcher and for the children themselves.

### **3. Children and the Internet: A Case Study**

The idea of conducting a participatory visual research at a Transylvanian school has emerged after drafting the report of a survey conducted in the same school among middle school and high school students. In March 2012, a number of 761 young people have completed a questionnaire aimed at assessing environmental



awareness and media use, and for the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders career choices as well. Response rate was as high as 91%.

Survey results (Bakó et al., 2012) have confirmed our hypotheses that Internet plays a key role in young people's lives and outweighs television as a source of information and entertainment. A surprising result was the lack of significant differences between rural and urban residences, or along gender lines: boys and girls were equally connected. As a continuation of the quantitative analysis, in June 2013, we conducted a mixed qualitative methods inquiry among a small group of seven students to whom we had privileged access through an extracurricular activity. We conducted a focus group discussion and a participatory visual research aimed at assessing ICT use among 14 to 17-year-old students. Students were asked to sketch "Me and my devices": it resulted in a series of highly critical approaches to conspicuous consumption and an environmentally-aware approach to technology use. When asked to pick their dream gadget, each student has chosen a piece that s/he considered either very functional (an e-reader, a quality digital camera), or creative (Google glasses). In the image-elicitation exercise, students explained: being part of the crowd longing for iPads or Samsungs is "not cool", "not interesting" but "worthless".

As a follow-up of this research, we moved our focus towards elementary school children. Although children and media literacy is an important research topic (Avgerinou–Pettersson, 2011; Harris, 2010; Prosser, 2007; Seiter, 2004), we have found little empirical evidence on using visual methodologies to explore kids' ICT universe. We designed a small-scale participatory visual study for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students (8–9 year olds) and, given the enthusiasm of some teachers, we also involved some 4<sup>th</sup> graders (10 year olds): their drawings were instrumental for comparison.

Given the topic "My family and the Internet", the research was unobtrusive and merely scratched the surface of children's' anxieties or distress, but resulted in an interesting array of topics and representations. The drawing class was conducted by their teachers – at this stage, I did not have any direct contact with the children.

A visual content analysis of the 128 drawings has been conducted by categorizing data along a set of criteria: family representation (alone, with family), human–computer interaction (HCI) – sharing devices or using them individually, ICTs depicted (no device, single device or multiple devices), the space of ICT use (living room, own room, kitchen) and Internet representations. Two-thirds of the children have represented their families in a mono-device environment dominated by the desktop (71%). Only a third of the drawings (31%) represent ICTs as switched off: this suggests that using communication devices is strongly embedded into elementary school children's lives. More than a third of the children picture their families and ICTs in the living room and only 19% visualize

Internet use in the privacy of their own room. An interesting feature of children's online worlds is parental control, depicted either explicitly as supervisors or indirectly as shown in drawing 019 (see appendix).

## 4. Conclusions and Further Steps

We live in a world of a digital turn (Westera, 2013). Children, as much as ourselves, are bombarded with visuals and grow up in a “convergent media ecology, whereby significant opportunities for sociability, self-expression, learning, creativity and participation are provided” (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2013: 5).

As Richardson has noted (2011: 7), “participation is designated to counteract a ‘top-down’ model of research. Visual methods are a particularly good way of increasing and sustaining participants . . . If participation is enabled and managed effectively, it can have long-lasting impacts on the lives of participants as well as improving the quality of the research data”.

Children are among the most vulnerable users of the Internet, and therefore a growing attention and concern is given by researchers and educators to their media literacy. Meanwhile, there is a low level of media education in Romanian schools: teachers' extra efforts and extracurricular activities are the main channels to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for a savvy use of ICTs.

The next step of the research aims at gaining a deeper insight into children's online worlds by conducting a series of interviews with parents, educators, and also further visual analyses of drawings for assessing the level of digital literacy among the 8 year olds.

## References

- Anning, A. (2003). Pathways to the Graphicacy Club: The Crossroad of Home and Preschool. *Journal of Early Childhood* 3(1): 5–35.
- Avgerinou, M. D.–Pettersson, R. (2011). Towards a Cohesive Theory of Visual Literacy. *Journal of Visual Literacy* 30(2): 1–19.
- Bakó, R. K. (2013). *Gadgetization Visualized: Reflections on a Participatory Youth Research*. Paper presented at the International Visual Sociology Association Conference. London: Goldsmiths University, 9–12 July 2013.
- Bakó, R. K.–Nistor, L.–Sólyom, A.–Telegdy, B. (2012). Környezettudatosság, médiahasználat, jövőstratégiák. Gyorsjelentés. (Environmental Awareness, Media Use, Career Strategies. Research Report) *Reconnect Working Papers* 2(1). 1–18.

- Buckingham, D. (2009). 'Creative' Visual Methods in Media Research: Possibilities, Problems and Proposals. *Media, Culture & Society* 31(4): 655–652.
- Eldén, S. (2013). Inviting the Messy: Drawing Methods and 'Children's Voices'. *Childhood*, 20(1): 66–81.
- Hall, E. (2008). "My Brain Printed it Out!" *Drawing, Communication, and Young Children: A Discussion*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, 3–6 September 2008.
- Harris, B. R. (2010). Blurring Borders, Visualizing Connections: Aligning Information and Visual Literacy Learning Outcomes. *Library Faculty Research*. Paper 11: 1–23.
- Hart, R. A. (1992). *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF.
- Hopperstad, M. H. (2010). Studying Meaning in Children's Drawings. *Journal of Early Childhood* 10(30): 430–452.
- Jay, M. (2002). That Visual Turn. *Journal of Visual Culture* 1(1): 87–82.
- Lange-Küttner, C. (2008). Figures in and out of Context: Absent, Simple, Complex and Halved Spatial Fields. In: Lange-Küttner, C.–Vinter, A. (eds.), *Drawing and the Non-Verbal Mind: A Life-Span Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 217–238.
- Mascheroni, G.–Ólafsson, K. (2013). *Net Children Go Mobile. Mobile Internet Access and Use among European Children. Initial Findings of the Net Children Go Mobile Project*. Available at: [www.netchildrengomobile.eu](http://www.netchildrengomobile.eu)
- Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Picture Theory*. Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Prosser, J. (2007). Visual Methods and the Visual Culture of Schools. *Visual Studies*, 22(1): 13–30.
- Richards, N. (2011). Using Participatory Visual Methods. *Realities* 17: 1–8.
- Rose, G. (2001). *Visual Methodologies*. London: Thousand Oaks – New Delhi: Sage.
- Seiter, E. (2004). Children Reporting Online: The Cultural Politics of the Computer Lab. *Television & New Media* 5(2): 87–107.
- Smith, K.–Moriarty, S.–Barbatsis, G.–Kenney, K. (eds.) (2005). *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*. Mahwah – New Jersey – London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Smith, M. (2008). *Visual Culture Studies*. Los Angeles – London – New Delhi – Singapore: Sage.
- Sorbring, E.–Lundin, L. (2012). Mothers' and Fathers' Insights into Teenagers' Use of the Internet. *New Media and Society* 14(7): 1181–1197.

- Thomson, P. (ed.) (2008). *Doing Visual Research with Children and Young People*. New York: Routledge.
- Toomela, A. (2002). Drawing as a Verbally Mediated Activity: A Study of Relationships between Verbal, Motor, and Visuospatial Skills and Drawing in children. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 26(3): 237–247.
- Van Leeuwen, T.–Jewitt, C. (eds.) (2001). *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Westera, W. (2013). *The Digital Turn*. Bloomington: AuthorHouse.
- Wilkinson, J. (2000). *Children and Participation. Research, Monitoring and Evaluation With Children and Young People*. Save the Children. Available online at: <http://goo.gl/Pp8FCV>

## Appendix: Selection from the 128 drawings<sup>7</sup>

**Drawing 008.** Multiple devices, multiple potential users in a living room



<sup>7</sup> Picture frames inserted by the author of this article.

**Drawing 015.** Multiple devices, multiple individual users in a living room



**Drawing 019.** Child at a desktop computer, supervised and timed in a living room



**Drawing 021.** Multiple devices, multiple individual users in separate spaces





# Social Networking Practices of Young Romanians

Gyöngyvér Tóké

PhD, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania,  
Faculty of Technical and Human Sciences Târgu Mureş,  
gyongyvert@gmail.com

**Abstract.** The aim of this study is to investigate the involvement of young Romanians in social networking activities and find out the popularity of the social networking among the range of available online activities. We analyse the characteristics of their online self-presentation and the social networking practices they develop. We describe and compare the progress of young Romanians in social networking activities, enhancing the differences in usage patterns occurred between 2010 and 2013. We also characterize the social networking patterns of the young Romanians as compared to European youngsters.

**Keywords:** social networking sites, social networking practices, Romanian young people, European young people

## Introduction

There are hundreds of social networking sites that offer various technological means of supporting a wide range of interests and practices. Whilst their key technological features are fairly consistent, the usage practices that emerge around social networking sites are varied. Most sites support the nurturing of pre-existing social networks, but others help strangers connect based on shared interests, views or activities (boyd–Ellison, 2007).

Social networking is one of the most popular online activities in which young people engage. Social networking sites offer a range of possibilities for young people to perform, express identity, create and communicate with others. What defines young people as social beings is reflected very often in social networking sites (Kupiainen–Suoninen–Nikunen, 2012: 99).

Previous research shows that the online and offline world of teenagers are intertwined (Livingstone, 2009; Livingstone–Mascheroni–Murru, 2011). Young people tend to use social networking sites predominantly to connect online with

friends made offline (boyd, 2008). A presence on social networking sites supposes the creation of an online identity by self-presentation. The online identity construction is a public process, blurring the boundaries between the public and private life of young people (Kupiainen–Suoninen–Nikunen, 2012: 102). But young people go online precisely to see and to be seen by others (boyd, 2008: 131).

In the present study, we investigate the involvement of young Romanians in social networking activities. We analyse the characteristics of their online self-presentation and the social networking practices they develop. We describe and compare the progress of young Romanians in social networking activities, enhancing the differences in usage patterns occurred between 2010 and 2013.

## About the Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are very popular among large segments of Internet users (Lampe–Ellison–Steinfeld, 2008: 721), and many of them integrate social networking activities into their daily practices (boyd–Ellison, 2007; Kupiainen–Suoninen–Nikunen, 2012: 99). Social networking sites are social spaces where many users interact over long periods of time (Lampe–Ellison–Steinfeld, 2008: 721). Social networking sites potentially integrate diverse online and offline modes of communication more seamlessly than was previously possible. As social media, social networking sites potentially mediate the social relations of everyday life (Livingstone–Mascheroni–Murru, 2011).

boyd and Ellison define social network sites (SNSs) as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections as well as those made by others within the system (boyd–Ellison, 2007).

boyd and Ellison (2007) highlight that the backbone of SNSs consists of visible profiles that display an articulated list of friends who are also users of the system. Profiles are unique web pages where one can represent oneself. After joining an SNS, an individual is asked to fill out forms containing a series of questions. The profile is generated using the answers to these questions, (typically including descriptors such as age, location, interests and an “About Me” section). Most sites also encourage users to upload a profile photo. Some sites allow users to enhance their profiles by adding multimedia content or modifying their profile’s look and feel.

The visibility of a profile varies by site and according to the users’ discretion. Structural variations around visibility and access are one of the primary ways by which SNSs differentiate themselves from one another (boyd–Ellison, 2007). What makes SNSs unique is that they enable users to articulate and make their social networks visible. After joining a social networking site, users are



prompted to identify others in the system that they have a relationship with. Most SNSs require bi-directional confirmation for friendship. The public display of connections is very important. The friends' list contains links to each friend's profile, enabling viewers to traverse the network graph by clicking through the friends' lists (boyd–Ellison, 2007).

Most SNSs also provide a mechanism for users to leave messages on their friends' profiles. In addition, SNSs often have a private messaging feature similar to webmail. Some have photo-sharing or video-sharing capabilities; others have built-in blogging and instant messaging technology. Some web-based SNSs (e.g. Facebook) also support limited mobile interactions (boyd–Ellison, 2007).

SNSs, including Facebook, integrate possibilities for self-presentation, contact, communication and participation. SNSs are social places where social relations of everyday life take place, mediating between the online and offline worlds of the users.

## About Facebook

For a better understanding of the social networking practices of young Romanians, we feature Facebook: the most popular SNS among Romanian young Internet users (NCGM 2013). Facebook exemplifies the notion of convergence culture by integrating chat, messaging, contacts, photo albums and blogging functions.

Facebook is the second most visited website in the world (Alexa.com, 2014) with more than 1.3 billion users. This very popular SNS is open to users over 13 years old who have a valid email address. Facebook began in early 2004 as a Harvard-only SNS (Cassidy, 2006). To join, a user had to have an institutional email address. This requirement kept the site relatively closed and contributed to users' perceptions of the site as an intimate, private community (boyd–Ellison, 2007; Zhao et al., 2008). In September 2006, Facebook was opened to the public and began expanding.

Users are required to register on Facebook with their personal information (including their real name) and are advised to create just one personal account. After registration, users have access to their personal wall: a virtual space in which personal content can be organized and displayed. Here they can post information and further personal content. They can also decide what kind of information to share and with whom to share it (Facebook, SRR). The user's wall is visible to anyone with the ability to see their full profile and wall posts by their friends that appear in the users' news feed. The news feed is a page in which users can view a constantly updated list of their friends' activities (Facebook, SRR).

There is also a communication function on Facebook that allows users to interact with one another through public comments and private messages (Zhao, 2008: 1819). Facebook users can give feedback to their friends with the *Like* function,

allowing the liked content to appear in their friends' news feed. Individual users can create groups where people can come together online to share information and to discuss specific subjects. Facebook members can use their account to log into third-party websites, mobile devices, and gaming systems. Via these media, they can connect and post information to their Facebook profiles (Facebook, SRR). A special feature of Facebook is that developers can create their own applications to interact with the core Facebook features.

## Online Self-Presentation

Like online contexts in which individuals are consciously able to construct an online representation of themselves, social networking sites constitute an important research context for scholars investigating processes of self-presentation and friendship performance (boyd–Ellison, 2007).

Self-concept is the totality of a person's thoughts and feelings in reference to oneself, and identity is that part of the self by which we are known to others. The construction of identity is a public process that involves both the identity announcement, which is made by the individual by claiming an identity, and the identity placement made by others who endorse the claimed identity. The identity is established when there is a coincidence of placements and announcements (Zhao et al., 2008: 1817).

Zhao et al. (2008: 1818) point out that in an anonymous online environment a new mode of identity production emerges. An important characteristic of this emergent mode of identity production is the tendency for people to play-act at being someone else or to reinvent themselves through the production of new identities.

But the online environment is not entirely anonymous. If an online environment can verify personal information and also make it public, then interpersonal relationships are fully anchored in that environment (Zhao et al., 2008). The non-anonymous online environment places constraints on the freedom of identity claims. In the non-anonymous online world, people may tend to express what has been called the "hoped-for possible selves", which are socially desirable identities an individual would like to establish (Zhao et al., 2008: 1819). Even if most sites encourage users to construct accurate presentations of themselves, participants do this to varying degrees.

Facebook provides users with new leverage for selective self-presentation. Facebook allows users to have control over their information and who sees it. Users can modify the basic visibility rule by the settings of their account. Users can present themselves differently to different audiences by hiding certain parts of the account from certain people or block certain people from viewing the account (Zhao et al., 2008: 1823). Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield (2008: 727) show

that Facebook members portray themselves positively by using specific strategies like constraining the people who see their profile or by removing elements that they feel would cast them in a negative light. Users become stars of their own production (Pempek, 2009: 234).

Zhao et al. (2008: 1825) identify a continuum of modes of self-presentation on Facebook from implicit to explicit identity claim. The most implicit identity claims are visual (presenting the user as social actor), involving the display of photos and pictures uploaded by the users themselves or pictures along with comments posted to their accounts by others. Facebook members usually use visual identity claims to generate a desired impression on their viewers, especially in terms of the depth and extent of their social ties. The second cluster of identity claims on the continuum contains consumption preferences and tastes (presenting the user's cultural self), signalling precise cultural tastes. The third mode of an identity claim involves the most explicit verbal description of the self (narrative self). On the continuum of claims from most explicit to most implicit, Facebook users prefer the most implicit ways to present themselves. They prefer to show rather than to tell.

Facebook users prefer to project a self that is socially desirable and close to normative expectations. They attempt to show their social connectedness and popularity among friends. Other characteristics commonly associated with the preferred identities produced are those of being well-rounded, fun-loving and sociable. A third type of personal quality commonly projected on Facebook is thoughtfulness (Zhao et al. 2008: 1828).

## **Networking and Friending Practices**

SNSs are important tools for interconnection and communication (Ross et al., 2009; Lampe–Ellison–Steinfeld, 2008: 722; Subrahmanyam–Reich–Waechter–Espinoza, 2008: 420).

Earlier communication tools enabled individuals to create a private list of contacts: to establish a group of contacts that were shared by others, but SNSs extended the practice of creating a publicly visible, personally developed list of contacts, and made it a mainstream practice. The connections between people serve multiple purposes on an SNS. They are employed to mark and display relationships, delineate who can access particular content, and serve as a filter through which viewers can discover friends they have in common. For users, these connections represent their social network (Ellison–boyd, 2013).

The most commonly utilized social networking activities include reading/responding to notes/messages, reading comments/posts on their pages/walls, writing comments on friends' pages, posting on other people's walls and tagging

photos. SNSs users use the sites primarily for social reasons that involve people from their offline lives (Subrahmanyam–Reich–Waechter–Espinoza, 2008: 426). Although exceptions exist, the available research suggests that most SNSs primarily support pre-existing social relations.

Friending practices are the core activity of SNSs. Even if all the contacts are called friends, users are able to distinguish among the kinds of relationships in their circle. In offline contexts, we maintain many different kinds of relationships, ranging from weak ties to strong connections, which exist in multiple contexts. As the personal networks on the SNSs grow, the kinds of connections also become more and more diverse (Ellison–boyd, 2013).

Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield (2008: 722) show that Facebook is used mainly to maintain existing offline relationships or solidify offline connections, as opposed to meeting new people. These relationships may be weak ties, but typically there is some common offline element among individuals who friend one another, such as a shared class at school. Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield (2008: 722) also point out that Facebook users searched for people with whom they had a previous offline relationship and that their anticipated audience was comprised of peers rather than non-peer members of networks. Facebook users engage in “searching” for people with whom they have an offline connection more than they “browse” for complete strangers to meet (boyd–Ellison, 2007; Ross et al., 2009; Pempek, 2009: 229). Facebook favours the transformation of latent to weak ties (Ellison et al., 2011) as well as the maintenance and strengthening of weak ties (Bohn–Buchta–Hornik–Mair, 2014: 31).

Children and young people, especially, are adopting social networking as part of their social relationships, learning, consumption and creative practices (Kupiainen–Suoninen–Nikunen, 2012: 99). boyd (2008) indicates that Facebook enables youths to socialize with their friends even when they are unable to gather in unmediated situations; she observes that SNSs are “networked publics” that support sociability, just as unmediated public spaces do (boyd–Ellison, 2007). For young people, SNSs are seen as functioning like places to which their identity is tied: not just with who you are, but with whom you are connected (boyd, 2007).

## **Popularity of SNSs among Young People**

Although some of the ways in which young people spend their time have changed in the digital age, the central developmental tasks of adolescence have remained constant. The key characteristics of adolescent development include the formation of identity, the creation of intimate relationships and the power of the peer group (Steinfield–Ellison–Lampe, 2008: 434; Subrahmanyam–Reich–Waechter–Espinoza, 2008: 421; Pempek et al., 2009).

SNSs generate culture by functioning as social spaces where users (from all age-groups) can explore patterns of social interaction, expression and identity formation. For young people, the question of “Who am I?” is more stressful compared to other age-groups, so they look for answers in their offline and also online world. Therefore, they become accentuated users of social networking sites. Given that adolescents are typically concerned with peer acceptance, physical appearance and the impressions they convey, they are receptive to SNSs because these sites present platforms by which they can connect to their peers without adult surveillance as well as to facilitate identity construction and experimentation within a social context (Livingstone, 2008). Young people want to show themselves and find out how they are seen (Livingstone–Mascheroni–Murru, 2011).

Young people use SNSs to interconnect with others, to stay in touch with their friends, family members and relatives, to keep in touch with friends they have not seen often and to make plans with those they do see often (Subrahmanyam–Reich–Waechter–Espinoza, 2008: 431). Steinfield et al. (2008: 435) suggest that maintaining friendships through SNSs by young people may play an important role in psychological development. Maintaining relationships influences identity formation and the ability to develop long-term relationships.

Previous research has shown that the online and offline worlds of young people are intertwined (boyd, 2008; Livingstone, 2009). Young people seem to use SNS predominantly to connect online with friends made offline and to get social support (Valkenburg et al., 2005; boyd, 2008; Ellison et al., 2007). Young people use the Internet to do traditional things in new ways (Mesch, 2009: 57). The Internet and the SNSs have provided social relations and identity construction with a new visibility rather than reconfiguring them completely (Robards–Bennett, 2011). To be on SNSs like Facebook is a statement of identity for young people (Davis, 2012: 27).

## Methods and Materials

In this study, we present the results of statistical analyses conducted on empirical data gathered in 2010 regarding Romanian youth within the *EU Kids Online II* project. We compare the data collected in 2010 with data gathered in 2013 in the context of the *Net Children Go Mobile* project. The quantitative data are completed with qualitative data from focus groups and interviews with young Romanian people carried out in June 2013 in the context of *EU Kids Online III* project.

*EU Kids Online* is a cross-national research network which seeks to enhance knowledge regarding European children’s online opportunities, risks and safety. It employs multiple methods to map children’s and parents’ changing experience of the Internet (EUKO). The *EU Kids Online II* (2009–2011) project

saw the participation of 25 countries, including Romania. The main focus was a survey of children and parents aimed at producing original, rigorous data on their Internet use, risk experiences and safety mediation. A random stratified sample of 25,142 young people aged 9–16 who use the Internet plus one of the parents of each youth was interviewed in 25 European countries during spring/summer 2010. In *EU Kids Online III* (2011–2014), 33 countries participated (again including Romania). The final empirical project is a cross-national qualitative study of teenagers' accounts of online risk. Qualitative data were gathered in 2013 by focus groups and interviews. In every participating country, 6 focus groups were conducted (3 with girls and 3 with boys) and 12 individual semi-structured interviews.

The *Net Children Go Mobile* (2013) project is aimed at studying the post-desktop media ecology that young people inhabit and its consequences on their online experiences. The project investigates access and use, risks and opportunities of mobile Internet access in the European context. In the project, data was gathered by a survey that involved 2,500 young people aged 9–16, who were Internet users, and their parents. Data was also gathered by qualitative means, such as group interviews with teenagers and focus groups with adults/parents, teachers and carers.

To analyse the social networking practices of the Romanian young people, we follow how social networking activities are integrated into other online activities. To reveal the online presentation of the self, we examine the characteristics of the online profiles of the young Romanians. For revealing their communication and networking activities, we look at the number of contacts they have. To understand and explain the popularity of the SNSs, we present quotations from focus groups and interviews in which Romanian young people interpret their social networking activities.

## Undertaking Online Opportunities

In this part of the study, we present the online opportunities taken up by European and Romanian young people in 2010. Then we compare this to the situation in 2013.

In 2010, the average number of online activities that Romanian young people engaged in was 7.4. Romanian children engaged in the same number of online activities as European children did. The number of online activities European and Romanian young people engaged in increased with age (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 25) and with the years of Internet use. There were gender differences in terms of both older and younger boys being involved in a wider variety of activities than girls of the same ages (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt–Runnel, 2012: 75; Tóké, 2014: 61). Teenage girls tended to engage more in communication

and entertainment practices, while boys of all ages played more (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 26).

Among young Europeans and Romanians in 2010, the content-based activities were the most popular, followed by the contact-based activities. The conduct-based activities, requiring the initiative to create content and claiming online skills, were the least frequent activities (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt–Runnel, 2012: 75; Tőkés, 2014: 64). Using the Internet for communication was also very common. Among European children, the instant messaging and the social networking activities showed a similar importance and were used almost equally (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt–Runnel, 2012: 76). Among young Romanians, the situation was markedly different; the instant messaging was very popular and the social networking less so.

In 2010, only half of the Romanian children (51.8 percent) visited a SNS regularly and 57.2 percent of Romanian children visited a SNS usually. The differences between the regularly and usually undertaken online activities show which of the online activities was important and common for Romanian young people. At this time, the Romanian young people were generally involved in 7-8 online activities, of which 4-5 activities represented daily activities (Tőkés, 2014: 61).

In 2010, visiting social network sites was prevalent among Romanian children over 13 years old. While one third of the 9–12-year-old children visited SNSs daily, more than two-thirds of the 13–16 year olds did the same. This daily online activity was more popular among 13–16-year-old girls (76.7 percent) than boys (70.3 percent). Considering that the lower age limit of most SNSs is 13 years old, it is noteworthy that one third of the 9–12 year olds engaged in social networking activities.

In 2010, the number of online activities carried out by Romanian young people positively correlated with gender and age, and the SES also positively influenced the amount of online activities (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt–Runnel, 2012: 75; Tőkés, 2014: 61). In 2010, visiting SNSs daily was more popular among Romanian children with high SES and less prevalent among those with low SES (59.4 percent vs. 44.4 percent).

In 2013, we saw an increase in personal and portable devices, leading to a greater personalization of Internet access and use among European young people. The laptop (46 percent) and the smartphones (41 percent) are the most used devices. *Net Children Go Mobile* data show that communication practices (social networking and instant messaging), entertainment activities (music, video clips) and the use of the Internet for school work top the list of activities performed on a daily basis. Compared with the *EU Kids Online II* data, we can see that the social networking, sharing and entertainment activities increased substantially from 2010 to 2013 among European young people. The creative and interactive uses of the Internet are still less practised. Mobile devices encourage all of the

online activities, the greatest differences being found in communication and entertainment practices (Mascheroni–Cuman, 2014: 14).

In 2013, Romanian children used the devices mostly in their own bedroom, but they had reduced access when they were out, on the move. The Internet is mainly a domestic phenomenon and it has not yet been integrated into school life (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 12). Smartphones are not so prevalent among Romanian children, just 26 percent of them own one (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 16); so, Romanian young people are more likely to use laptops than smartphones on a daily basis. The ownership of smartphones increases with age. Penetration of tablets is even lower than that of the smartphones, remaining under 10 percent (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 17).

The age, gender and SES differences persist also in 2013 among European and Romanian children as well (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 26). All the online activities surveyed increase with age, except gaming; girls tend to engage more in communication practices than boys, while boys play more. Gender variations combined with age differences tend to be greater among younger children. In 2010, 59 percent of European and 46 percent of Romanian young people had profiles on an SNS (Livingstone–Haddon–Görzig–Ólafsson, 2011: 36). Romania appears at the top of the list in 2013 with more than 80 percent of children having a profile on an SNS. Additionally, social networking activities have been increasing, having passed almost 80 percent (Mascheroni–Cuman, 2014: 26).

In 2010, on a European level, the most popular SNS was Facebook (Livingstone, 2011: 3). In 2013, Facebook is still the most used SNS among European children. In 2010, among Romanian young people, the most popular SNS was Hi5, while only 25 percent had a Facebook account. In 2013, almost 100 percent of Romanian children registered a Facebook account. All of the Romanian respondents indicated Facebook as the SNS they used the most. The second most commonly used SNS is YouTube (84 percent), mostly to create playlists and listen to the favourite videos (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 26–27).

## Online Self-Presentation of Romanian Young People

According to *EU Kids Online II* data in 2010, 59 percent of the 9–16-year-old European Internet users had a social network profile, while 23 percent of them had more than one profile. Social networking varied little by gender, with 58 percent of boys and 60 percent of girls having their own profile. It also varied little by SES. The age of the users formed the main differences in having an SNS profile. One quarter (26 percent) of the 9-10 year olds had their own profile compared with half (49 percent) of the 11-12 year olds (Livingstone–Haddon–Görzig–Ólafsson, 2011: 36). For teenagers, percentages were much higher:



77 percent of the 13–16-year-old Internet users had a social network profile (Kupiainen–Suoninen–Nikunen, 2012: 101).

In 2010, Romanian young people were underrepresented among European children having an SNS profile. At that time, 46.4 percent of Romanian young people had their own SNS profile. Three quarters of them had a single profile, while a quarter had more than one profile (Livingstone–Haddon–Görzig–Ólafsson, 2011: 36).

Contrasting age patterns for users of SNSs existed among Romanian young people: the percent of Romanian young SNS users was growing steadily from 29 percent among the 9–12 year olds to 69.7 percent among the 13–16 year olds. The differences between Romanian young girls and boys were not so accentuated, but there were more SNS users with their own profiles among girls (52.8 percent) than among boys (47.2 percent) (Livingstone–Haddon–Görzig–Ólafsson, 2011: 38).

In 2013, social networking tops the activities taken up by European children on a daily basis. 68 percent of European young people have an SNS profile. The use of SNS varies consistently by age. One fourth of children aged 9–10 have SNS profiles. 60 percent of children aged 11–12 on SNS is also noteworthy since most social networking platforms have age limits that are not being followed. Social networking varies very little by SES (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 25).

In 2013, 79 percent of Romanian young children had a profile on SNSs. So, Romania is at the top of the list among the European countries with around 80 percent of children having a profile on a SNS. In 2013, social networking activities increased considerably among Romanian young people; the rate of those who have profiles on SNSs almost doubled compared to 2010 (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 30). It is a notable fact that 50 percent of Romanian children aged 9–10 and 80 percent of children aged 11–12 have SNS profiles even though the age limit on the SNS is 13 years. 86 percent of the 13–14 year olds and 92 percent of the 15–16-year-old Romanian children have an SNS profile (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 26).

Users of SNSs have to make decisions concerning how much personal information they provide. Extending the friendship circle or looking for new friends on the Internet requires the revelation of a certain amount of personal information (Kupiainen–Suoninen–Nikunen, 2012: 99).

In 2010, almost half (44.2 percent) of the Romanian young people had entirely public SNS profiles, 18 percent partially private profiles and 37.8 percent private profiles. Usually, the profiles of young users included profile photos, more than half of them (54 percents) revealed their real age. It was less frequent to disclose their phone numbers (6.4 percents), address (17.1 percents), and school (18.5 percents). Even if SNSs are designed to provide personal information, European young people are more moderate in revealing personal data. In 2010, just 27 percent reported that their profiles were public, 28 percent kept them partially public, and 44 percent private (Kupiainen–Suoninen–Nikunen, 2012: 103). Girls

and children from high SES homes appeared to keep their SNS profiles private (Livingstone–Haddon–Görzig–Ólafsson, 2011: 39).

In 2013, the tendency regarding online disclosure by European children persisted. 29 percent of the European children have a public SNS profile, 27 percent have partially private and 44 percent private profiles. Romanian children are more likely than their peers in other countries to have public profiles. More than half of the Romanian children (57 percent) report having a public profile in 2013. Variations by gender are consistent, with girls being more likely to have a private profile. The majority of European children include their surname and a photo showing their face on their profiles. 9 out of 10 European children across all age-groups and genders do not share their phone number and home address. Since 2010, the proportion of children who posted an incorrect age on their profile has increased (one in six) in order to obtain a profile on age-restricted SNSs (Livingstone–Haddon–Görzig–Ólafsson, 2011: 40). In 2013, one in three European children displayed an incorrect age on his/her profile. Often this is the way children circumvent the age limits of the SNSs (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 32).

## **Social Networking Practices of Romanian Young People**

Online communication activities, like social networking or instant messaging, are increasingly important among young people in some countries, including Romania, in the early stages of Internet use (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt–Runnel, 2012: 82). Using the Internet for communication is very common, especially among older children. Media is shaping experience in online spaces and reorganizing social relations, for example, between parents and children, and between friends and strangers (Kupiainen–Suoninen–Nikunen, 2012: 100).

In 2010, few European children reported to have more than 300 contacts on their social networking profile (9 percent), although one in five (20 percent) had between 100 and 300. Half (51 percent) had fewer than 50 contacts and 20 percent had fewer than 10 contacts (Livingstone–Haddon–Görzig–Ólafsson, 2011: 38).

In 2010, most Romanian young people had just a few friends in their network. More than half of Romanian young people (63 percent) had up to 10 contacts on their contact list, one third (30 percent) had under 100 contacts and less than 10 percent had more than 100 contacts in their network (Livingstone–Haddon–Görzig–Ólafsson, 2011: 38). At that time, visiting SNSs was more popular among those Romanian young people who practised more than the average number of online activities. 89 percent of those who practised 10–12 online activities (from 17) and 97.8 percent of those who practised 13–17 online activities visited SNSs on a daily basis. It was also common that visiting SNSs increased with a higher level of digital skills (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt–Runnel, 2012: 76; Tőkés, 2014: 67).

In 2013, online communication – more specifically, social networking (SNS) and instant messaging (IM) – was on the rise among European children and adolescents. Staying in touch with friends represented a greater part of young people's online daily activities (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2013: 35).

Among European children, the proportion of those having small circles of friends on the Internet varied by age and gender, and it was higher among girls and younger children (51 percent of girls and 66 percent of 9–10 year olds having less than 50 contacts on SNSs). 18 percent of the European children had more than 300 contacts: this number rose to nearly one in four teenagers aged 15–16, while it made up just 2 percent of the 9–10 year olds. Around one in three European children (35 percent) had more than 100 contacts (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 36).

In 2013, 66 percent of Romanian children had more than 100 contacts. 34 percent of Romanian kids having less than 100 contacts. Romanian young children have a very special online communication pattern: under-age use has more than doubled in the last 3 years (from 29 percent of the 9–12 year olds to 65 percent); the number of children with over 100 contacts has also increased dramatically (from 8 percent to 66 percent) (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 37).

Friending norms influence the number of online contacts among young people. The majority of online contacts maintained through social networking sites as well as email and instant messaging are localized in offline social circles (Livingstone–Mascheroni–Murru, 2011). The proportion of children who have small circles of friends online is higher among girls and younger children. Older children are more likely to have over 300 online contacts (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 30).

In 2013, almost half (49 percent) of European young people added new contacts only when they knew them. 18 percent of European children added new contacts if they knew them very well and one in four accepted requests from people with whom they shared friends in common – just 9 percent accepts all requests. Gender differences were not pronounced, but girls were less likely to accept all requests. Older children were more likely to accept all friending requests (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 31).

According to 2013 data, the young Romanians have different friending patterns than their European peers: the under-age use is high and the number of children with over 100 contacts is also high. The number of children who generally accept all requests is the highest in Romania: 18 percent (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 30–31). 45 percent of Romanian young people prefer to add people they already know, 26 percent like to accept requests from people with whom they share friends in common and 11 percent add new contacts if they know them very well (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 31). This could be connected with the fact that searching for new friends has been more frequent in Romania (50 percent) and Bulgaria than in the rest of the investigated countries (40 percent) (Kupiainen–Suoninen–Nikunen, 2012: 104; Livingstone–Haddon–Görzig–Ólafsson, 2011: 43).

In 2010, gender and age differences were pronounced. Usually more boys (31 percent) than girls (20 percent) communicated online with people whom they only knew online. This could have multiple reasons: boys found it easier to communicate online than face to face, they took more risk, and they were more likely to maintain an online communication with strangers through multiplayer games. Four out of five children in each age-group communicated online with their existing offline circles. It was more likely for older children to communicate with people whom they had met online (Livingstone–Haddon–Görzig–Ólafsson, 2011: 41).

## **Popularity of SNSs and Facebook among Young Romanians**

Young people are adapting easily to the new digital cultures and are eagerly exploring online worlds that appear strange to many adults (Kupiainen–Suoninen–Nikunen, 2012: 99).

SNSs respond to important developmental requirements of the young people, offering new ways to present themselves, to maintain and develop their relationships with peers and relatives, to make new friendships, to establish communities, to organize common activities and participate in applications (Lampe–Ellison–Steinfeld, 2008). In this way, SNSs are new channels of communication and, at the same time, statements of identity for young people (Davis, 2012: 27).

A young person's social life is conducted both online and offline, and their overlap is leading to perpetual communication with peers. When coming home from school, youths continue to maintain contact with their school friends through SNSs like Facebook, Instagram etc. Social access to peers is one of the main motivations for adopting mobile communication. Children combine and integrate different SNSs with other communicative practices (Mascheroni–Ólafsson, 2014: 29).

This continuous contact provides a sense of belonging with others in a mediated environment. Conversations that started at school continue after school through mediated connections. They engage in informal talks, much like that they experience in the face-to-face space: reflections on their day's events, gossip about others etc. SNS also allow users to present information about themselves; encourage users to link to known and like-minded individuals; enable users to establish and maintain contact with others, to post comments, to create personal content etc. (Mesch, 2009: 58). These are peculiar developmental needs of young people, and they are fulfilled through SNSs.

Sometimes teenagers can experience difficulty managing face-to-face situations (Livingstone, 2009). In 2010, half of those aged 11–16 years across Europe found

it easier to be themselves on the Internet than face-to-face. One third (32 percent) of the European children said that they talked about private things online, things that they do not discuss face-to-face. For older teenagers, the Internet offered a valued opportunity for different, more intimate communication. For gender and SES, the differences were slight (Livingstone-Haddon-Görzig-Ólafsson, 2011: 40).

Between 2010 and 2013, the number of children who perceived the Internet as the place for more authentic communication decreased. In 2013, 64 percent of European young people did not consider it easier to be themselves on the Internet than face-to-face. Just 20 percent of European children said that they talked about private things online. Among the Romanian young people, more than half (54 percent) found it easier to be themselves on the Internet and 31 percent of them talked online about private things (Mascheroni-Ólafsson, 2014: 37). Also in 2013, the age differences influenced the responses, especially those of the 15–16-year-old teenagers, who considered the Internet and SNSs as an important opportunity for intimate communication.

To better understand the popularity of the Facebook among Romanian young people, we complete this part of the study with interpretations offered by Romanian young people regarding their social networking activities.

Each day, Romanian young people spend a considerable amount of time engaging in social networking activities on Facebook. To hang out, Romanian children passively follow their news wall, view friends' profiles or actively participate by posting messages, sharing links, photos and music/funny video clips. In this way, they give signals about their presence and participation on Facebook.

“My favourite activity on the Internet is Facebook...” (14-year-old boy)

“I check my Facebook messages... I chat...because here I have more friends... I look at the status messages of my friends... I play Farmville ...” (15-year-old girl)

“I am on the Internet because you don't always have somebody to go out with, and it is also expensive to go out all the time...” (15-year-old girl)

“I look at photos, give comments and likes... and sometimes I play.” (12-year-old girl)

“I give likes to pictures. I also have a page on Facebook and around 3000 likes or maybe 4000... There are friends who wait for the likes, and also who do not...” (14-year-old boy)

At the same time Facebook is used to gather news: “I read news on Facebook... also from Pro TV, sport.ro...” (14-year-old boy)

These Romanian youngsters dropped some hints that Facebook is the place where they are with their peers, so they resist adding adults like parents, teachers etc. to their contact lists (14-year-old boy, 15-year-old girl). On the other hand, parents' Facebook usage patterns influences the practices of children (10-year-old girl, 12-year-old girl).

Facebook develops new cultures of affiliation: children like to experiment with their identity, and it is usual to create common group profiles and play with them. It is a sign of friendship to share the password of personal profiles: “I have a common Facebook profile with one of my friends...” (10-year-old girl)

Romanian children are very willing to make friends, so they often also accept the requests of unknown contacts.

“If I get a friend request from unknowns, I look at their profile, and if I see that they are not aggressive, probably they will not create problems, so I accept them”. (14-year-old boy)

They also discuss school problems and homework: “I like Facebook very much... before I had my phone, I asked everything on Facebook, and I love games...” (11-year-old Hungarian girl)

They organize their leisure time: “On Facebook, we talk over our outings.” (14-year-old boy)

There are young people who are not so delighted with Facebook: “I don’t really like Facebook. I have made a profile because of my school, we have a group, and I want to see the school information.” (16-year-old Hungarian girl)

There are also young people who disbelieve in Facebook and they oppose the facilities offered by Facebook. In these cases, not being on Facebook is a significant part of the identity: “I do not use Facebook to find friends, I am not that type who sends friend requests all over the world...” (16-year-old Hungarian girl)

In the opinion of young people, there is also harmful behaviour on Facebook.

“You expose all your personal data: where you live, which school you attend, your hobbies, tastes, whether you have a boyfriend or not, show your relatives, give your address and plus you show also pictures of all these... I would not feel good knowing that all psychopaths and neurotics know all about me...” (16-year-old Hungarian girl)

“I used to play for hours on Facebook, I abandoned school, and I was obsessed by it.” (14-year-old boy)

“On Facebook, it can happen that some people take your picture and make a profile with your name, they pretend to be you, and then they write a lot of crazy things in your name...” (16-year-old Hungarian girl)

“On Facebook, there are a lot of bad people... give ugly comments... mock responses.” (15-year-old girl)

They even had harmful experiences: “A friend of mine hacked my account and he asked for money to give it back to me ...” (14-year-old boy)

“A friend of mine to whom I gave my Facebook password... opened my account and saw all my conversations...” (15-year-old girl)

## Conclusions

Our data show that using social networking sites leads the online communication activities among Romanian young people. The most popular social networking site is Facebook, followed by YouTube. Almost 100 percent of the Romanian young people have Facebook profiles.

Over the past three years, the practice of using SNSs has changed considerably among Romanian children. If in 2010 the most commonly used SNS was Hi5, by 2013 the leading SNS had become Facebook.

On Facebook, communication activities are the most popular, having informative or phatic functions. On Facebook, Romanian young people usually look for information and share content (self-created or someone else's) or make appointments, talk about homework etc. The most common manifestations on Facebook belong to phatic communication, such as commenting or sharing friends' content. To like others' content is also the manifestation of phatic communication. To like each other's shares, images, videos, means that they pay attention to one another, they prefer one another, thereby enhancing their mutual dependence. The reciprocity in giving likes is very important.

Romanian young people spend a lot of leisure time on Facebook. They are just hanging out, looking around, looking for new friends. They use Facebook to be together with their peers, and sometimes they deliberately exclude the adults from their online spaces.

We could not examine in depth the online identity formation of Romanian young people on Facebook. Further observations are needed to discover the strategies used by Romanian children in the process of online self-presentation. We do not have qualitative data about the habits of self-presentation nor about the role of friending activities in the construction of the online self.

The social life of Romanian young people is conducted both online and offline, just as among European young people. However, Romanian youngsters have different social networking habits in some points. Among young Romanians, there is very a high proportion of underage users (under 13 years); similarly, the number of those who have over 100 online contacts is high. During the interviews and focus group discussions, young Romanian users explained the high proportion of under-aged users as being due to the popularity and trendiness of Facebook. It is also a statement of identity for young people to have a profile and to interact on Facebook.

Among Romanian young people, the proportion of those who have completely public profiles is also high as is the proportion of those who accept friend requests from strangers. We assume that this situation can be explained by the lack of parental mediation and by the low level of digital skills of many Romanian

children. We are limited in explaining this situation and further observations are needed to establish the influence of additional factors.

We conclude that for Romanian youngsters, social networking is very popular among the range of available online activities, and it is the preferred channel for keeping in touch with friends on a daily basis. The use of SNSs among Romanian children progressed a lot from 2010 to 2013. Romanian young people display particular social networking patterns as compared to European youngsters. However, there is a pronounced element of risk in some aspects of their online behaviour.

## References

- Bohn, A.–Buchta, C.–Hornik, K.–Mair, P. (2014). Making Friends and Communicating on Facebook. Implication for the Access to Social Capital. *Social Networks* 37: 29–41.
- boyd, d. m.–Ellison, N. B. (2007). *Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship*. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x/full/> (Accessed on: 2014-08-19).
- boyd, d. m. (2008). Why Youth Love Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life. In: Buckingham, D. (ed.), *Youth, Identity, and Digital Life*. McArthur Foundation, Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 119–42.
- Cassidy, J. (2006). *Me Media*. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/05/15/me-media> (Accessed on: 2014-08-19).
- Davies, J. (2012). Facework on Facebook as a New Literacy Practice. *Computers and Education* 59: 19–29.
- Ellison, N. B.–boyd, d. (2013). Sociality through Social Network Sites. In: Dutton, W. H. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 151–172. <http://www.danah.org/papers/2013/SocialityThruSNS-preprint.pdf> (Accessed on: 2014-08-27).
- Ellison, N. B.–Steinfeld, C.–Lampe, C. (2011). Connection Strategies Social Capital Implications of Facebook-Enabled Communication Practices. *New Media and Society*. <https://www.msu.edu/~nellison/EllisonSteinfeldLampe2011ConnectionStrategies.pdf> (Accessed on: 2014-11-26).
- (2007). The Benefits of Facebook “Friends”: Social Capital and College Students’ Use of Online Social Network Sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12(4): 1143–1168. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x/full> (Accessed on: 2014-08-19).
- EUKO: EU Kids Online. I-II-III. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Home.aspx> (Accessed on: 2014-08-25).



- Facebook, SRR: Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. <https://www.facebook.com/terms.php> (Accessed on: 2014-11-29).
- Jenkins, H. (2004). *The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence*. <https://www.sfu.ca/cmns/courses/2008/428/Readings/CMNS%20428%20%282008%29,%20Required%20Readings/Jenkins%20%282004%29.pdf> (Accessed on: 2014-10-25).
- Kupiainen, R.–Suoninen, A.–Nikunen, K. (2012). Between Public and Private: Privacy in Social Networking Sites. In: Livingstone, S.–Haddon, L.–Görzig, A. (eds.), *Children, Risk and Safety on the Internet*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 99–112.
- Lampe, C.–Ellison B. N.–Steinfeld, C. (2008). Changes in Use and Perception of Facebook. <https://www.msu.edu/~nellison/LampeEllisonSteinfeld2008.pdf> (Accessed on: 2014-11-29).
- Livingstone, S.–Haddon, L.–Görzig, A.–Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risk and Safety on the Internet*. The Perspective of European Children. Full findings. London: LSE.
- Livingstone, S.–Mascheroni, G.–Murru, M. F. (2011). Social Networking among European Children: New Findings on Privacy, Identity and Connection. *Hermès* 59: 89–98.
- Livingstone, S.–Ólafsson, K.–Staksrud, E. (2011). *Social Networking, Age and Privacy*. London, UK: EU Kids Online.
- Livingstone, S. (2009). *Children and the Internet*. Cambridge: Policy Press.
- (2008). Taking Risky Opportunities in Youthful Content Creation: Teenagers' Use of Social Networking Sites for Intimacy, Privacy and Self-Expression. *New Media and Society* 10: 393–411.
- Mascheroni, G.–Cuman, A. (2014). *Net Children Go Mobile*. Milano: Educatt.
- Mascheroni, G.–Ólafsson, K. (2014). *Net Children Go Mobile*. Risks and Opportunities. Net Children Go Mobile, London, UK.
- Mesch, G. S. (2009). Internet and Youth Culture. <http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/archives/YouthCulture/Mesch.pdf> (Accessed on: 2014-08-27).
- NCGM: *Net Children Go Mobile*. <http://www.netchildrengomobile.eu/> (Accessed on: 2014-11-26).
- Pempek, T. A.–Yermolayeva, Y. A.–Calvert, S. L. (2009). College Students' Social Networking Experiences on Facebook. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 3: 227–238.
- Pruulmann, P.–V.–Runnel, P. (2012). Online Opportunities. In: Livingstone, S.–Haddon, L.–Görzig, A. (eds.), *Children, Risk and Safety on the Internet*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 73–87.
- Robards, B.–Bennett, A. (2011). My Tribe: Post-Cultural Manifestations of Belonging in Social Network Sites. *Sociology* 42(2): 303–317.
- Ross, C.–Orr, E. S.–Sisic, M.–Arsenault, J. M.–Simmering, M. G.–Orr, R. R. (2009). Personality and Motivations Associated with Facebook Use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, pp. 578–586.

- Sigur.info – Salvați copiii. (2013). *Studiu privind utilizarea Internetului în familie*. Cercetare socială calitativă. București. <http://www.sigur.info/docs/Studiu.pdf> (Accessed on: 2014-08-25).
- Steinfeld, C.–Ellison, N. B.–Lampe, C. (2008). Social Capital, Self-Esteem, and Use of Online Social Network Sites: A Longitudinal Analysis. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 29: 434–445.
- Subrahmanyam, K.–Reich, S. M.–Waechter, N.–Espinoza, G. (2008). Online and Offline Social Networks: Use of Social Networking Sites by Emerging Adults. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 29: 420–433.
- Tőkés, Gy. (2014). Oportunități *online* și tipuri de utilizatori *online* în rândul tinerilor din România. *Revista Română de Sociologie* 1-2: 57–77.
- Valkenburg, P. M.–Schouten, A. P.–Peter, J. (2005). Adolescents' Identity Experiments on the Internet. *New Media and Society* 3: 383–402.
- Zhao, S.–Grasmuck, S.–Martin, J. (2008). Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships. *Computers in Human Behavior* 24: 1816–1836.

## **Research Notes**





## New Media, New Idols?<sup>1</sup>

**Orsolya Gergely**

PhD, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania,  
Faculty of Technical and Social Sciences, Miercurea Ciuc  
gergelyorsolya@sapientia.siculorum.ro

**Abstract.** Who could be a role model for the teenagers? Whose attitude, outer and inner values appear to the teenagers as an example to be followed? Has the media and media usage an impact on this? How can this be identified? We wanted to find out whether the pupils from our region have idols and, if so, who their icons and role models are, who the ones are that have an exemplary behaviour in their eyes, to whom they would like to compare themselves when they grow up. Have the age, the gender, and residence of the pupils any influence on the choice of role model? Does the parents' educational level have any impact on this?

The paper aims to present the role model question among teenagers. The analysis is based on two important surveys conducted among Hungarian teenagers from Szeklerland, Romania (Covasna, Harghita and Mureş counties). The surveys took place in spring 2012, and more than two thousand of pupils in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades were involved.

Can we conclude that the new media brought along the new idols? The media has definitely a strong impact on the young people's, children's lives, on their world-perception – can this be identified even here, regarding the role models? And what do these results shed light on? What kind of new possibility, new chance or new challenge do the parents, pedagogues, teachers, local communities have if they know of these role model practices their teenagers have?

**Keywords:** role model, media usage, media star, teenager, value, content analysis

### About Socialization and Imitation

The issue of socialization is an important topic for several fields of science, such as pedagogy, psychology, sociology. Thanks to this, in the last few decades, several studies were written about the role of socialization, its duty, the actors and mechanisms that influence social development. Thus, it is already widely

---

1 The Hungarian version of the study was published in a volume of essays (Gergely, 2013).

known that the nature of children's personality, their system of values, their moral ideas is influenced by three general socialization backgrounds. The first and most important is the family as a first social environment, the second is the schools, where the peer-group influence is dominating, and nowadays it has appeared, next to these, the mass media as a socialization medium (László, 1999; Berta, 2009). The researches that have been carried out in this topic highlight the increased role of the media, which often de-emphasizes the role of family and school. This could mean that the social norms and rules, which are acquired through socialization, could or might be replaced or overwritten by the messages from the media.

According to scientific research, the observational learning, the model selection plays a very important role in the socialization process. Modelling means an accurate observation of others' behaviour and its "be-likely" imitation. By model-following, one can acquire new behavioural elements, may explore new combinations of personal behavioural repertoire and can recognize the consequences of others' actions (Kósa, 2005: 96). However, the observational learning is also a significant time-saving method: we do not always need personal empirical experimentation; it is enough if we have learned a certain kind of knowledge from someone else. Even though we have never personally experienced a major part of what we know and of what we have learned, we still have the knowledge (Gerbner, 2000: id.; Berta, 2009). In a lot of cases, the different kinds of stories that we heard, events that we saw, tales that we were told contribute to our gender, peer-group, social, occupational and lifestyle roles. These stories, experiences shape and define our thinking, our actions and our way of life. But a growing media influence might also increase the probability of the non-physical "role model" choice, the subject of the imitation; the "idol" will not be chosen from the direct physical behavioural area but from the virtual one. Models from the media could replace or take over the place and the role of persons from the physical, everyday life.

## **Searching for an Idol – Empirical Facts from a Survey**

In the spring of 2012, an important first survey research took place in Szeklerland among pupils in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade regarding media usage, knowledge about the media, user skills and so on.<sup>2</sup> 2,122 pupils were involved in our research from urban and rural areas from Covasna, Harghita and Mureş counties. We reached 63 schools where the pupils answered the self-completed questionnaires. The questionnaire had 49 questions; they had to relate their media usage, PC and

---

2 Our research group was formed by colleagues and students from the Sapientia University, Department of Social Science (Miercurea Ciuc); the survey was accomplished in partnership with the International Children's Safety Service (Budapest). The survey took place during March and April 2012.

phone usage, rules about all of these (in school, at home), Internet and PC knowledge. The major partial results of this research have been published in several academic publications (see Bodó, 2012; Biró–Gergely, 2013).

Among other questions in the questionnaire, there were included three questions about models and model-following: we wanted to find out whether the pupils from our region have idols and, if so, who their idols and role models are, who the ones are that have an exemplary behaviour in their eyes, whom they would like to compare themselves to when they grow up. This topic was also mentioned in the general summary of the research (Biró–Gergely–Kiss–Berényi, 2012: 68, 2013: 71), but a detailed analysis of the open questions has not yet been made. The present study aims to fill this gap, that is, a detailed analysis of issues relating to the role models. It makes a first attempt to point out who could be a role model for these teenagers, whose attitude, outer and inner values appear to them as an example to be followed.

Every language has a lot of proverbs, sayings on the importance of having an example to follow.<sup>3</sup> Not only what the person says is important but also how he or she behaves. This is true both for parents and for teachers. This example, however, can significantly help us to succeed in life: by imitating the behaviour of others, we can prevent countless things we would like to avoid (e.g. “When in Rome, do as the Romans do!”). The results of the Hungarian research (László, 1999) highlighted for us the importance of analysing this issue more closely.

Since only half of the 2,122 respondents gave a serious answer to the question and named a person to whom they would like to be similar to, we were obviously curious to find out what kind of pupils have an idol, in what way they are different from the “average”, and how we can describe in socio-demographic terms those who do not have a role model. First of all, we found out that the younger boys (aged 13) who live in urban areas have a more clear idea about who they want to be like, whose model they want to follow. While 51.3% of the total sample is in the seventh grade, among those who named a role model, 58.4% are in the seventh grade. Similarly, regarding to the gender, we can see the same: 43.6% of all respondents are boys, but among those who claim to have an idol the proportion of the boys is 47.49% (see Table 1).

There is an even bigger difference in the teenagers’ residence: 43.6% of the pupils involved in this research live in the urban area of Covasna, Harghita and Mureş counties; however, from among those who have an idol, more than two-thirds live in towns (71.23%).

---

3 The Hungarian language has many proverbs in this issue. For example, a proverb about the importance of a suitable example: *A good example is better than hundreds of lectures.* Or the importance of behaviour against speech: *The exemplary life of a priest is indeed a sermon.* And another about the importance and gain from observational model following: *In the church and in the tavern, take example from others.* (Hungarian proverbs)

Regarding the educational level of the parents, we could not identify such significant differences; there are only mild differences in cases of pupils whose parents have higher educational level.

While in the case of all respondents 17.21% of the pupils have fathers with a higher educational level and 20.1% of the pupils have mothers with higher educational level, among those who have an idol, these ratios are slightly higher: 18.88% in the case of fathers and 22.16% in the case of mothers were found with higher educational level. The table below shows the differences and similarities between the pupils having an idol and the total respondents.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the whole sample with the group of those having an idol

		Total		Pupils who have an idol	
			%		%
<b>Age</b>	13 years	1,088	51.3	725	58.4
	17 years	1,034	48.7	516	41.6
	<i>N</i>	2,122		1,241	
<b>Gender</b>	Boy	920	43.6	586	47.49
	Girl	1,190	56.4	648	52.51
	<i>N</i>	2,110		1,234	
<b>Residency</b>	Urban	920	43.6	884	71.23
	Rural	1,190	56.4	357	28.77
	<i>N</i>	2,110		1,241	
<b>Father's educational level</b>	Basic	963	47.2	556	46.45
	Medium	726	35.59	415	34.67
	Superior	351	17.21	226	18.88
	<i>N</i>	2,040		1,197	
<b>Mother's educational level</b>	Basic	778	37.86	431	35.77
	Medium	864	42.04	507	42.07
	Superior	413	20.1	267	22.16
	<i>N</i>	2,055		1,205	

## “I Want to Be Like... Because ...”

The students were asked four open questions related to the role model issue: (1) Name one person to whom you would like to be similar to when you grow up. (2) Who is this person? What is he/she doing? (3) What are his/her qualities for which you have chosen him/her? (4) If you do not have such a person, why not? As we have previously presented in the scientific report, the answers to the open questions are highly varied; there are, of course, quite a lot of answers which



cannot be taken seriously (see Biró–Gergely–Kiss–Osváth–Berényi, 2012). After a quick report, a very detailed analysis also revealed that an even bigger part of the answers than we have previously thought cannot be taken seriously. Only slightly more than half (58.48%) of the students answered the question in a way that it could be used for the analysis. However, surprisingly, many people did not write anything here or strongly stated that they have no role model, there is no need for one or they have outgrown this “idol” period. Among those who did not choose a role model, a lot of them justified the answer with the importance of an independent personality, with the will of not being compared to anyone, with the desire of not to imitate, not to copy anyone. They thought their personalities would develop without imitating someone else, they believed they were good as they were and that they did not have to become someone else. This is the message of most of the answers (Biró–Gergely–Kiss–Osváth–Berényi 2012).

Coding the answers was a serious challenge. The answers given to two or three, but mostly to four questions had to be analysed parallel to each other, constantly projecting the questions onto one another in order to filter out the non-real answers and to be able to identify the person that the pupil identified as a role model.<sup>4</sup>

By analysing the answers, after a long deliberation, we created 17 categories according to what could be found out about the idol. The list leaders are the parents: more than one third of the teenagers wants to become similar to their mothers (20.06%) or fathers (17.89%). There is a group of pupils who want to be like their brothers or sisters, while others want to be similar to their grandparents (in one case, to a great-grandparent) or to some other relatives, godfather or godmother (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Idol categories

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Mother</b>	249	20.06	20.06
<b>Father</b>	222	17.89	37.95
<b>Brother/sister</b>	70	5.64	43.59
<b>Grandparents</b>	31	2.5	46.09
<b>Relative</b>	90	7.25	53.34

<sup>4</sup> For example, there were cases where we found the name of a movie actor, but the name was not spelled correctly, not even close. So, we needed to see what the pupil wrote about this person in order to identify the right person and to know whether he/she messed up the name or it was about another person. It also happened that the pupil wrote down the name of his/her idol but did not tell anything more about this person, so we do not know whether that person is an acquaintance, a friend or a hero.

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Teacher, priest/pastor</b>	65	5.24	58.58
<b>Acquaintance</b>	63	5.08	63.66
<b>Best friend</b>	26	2.1	65.75
<b>Actor</b>	107	8.62	74.38
<b>Musician</b>	92	7.41	81.79
<b>Football player</b>	73	5.88	87.67
<b>Athlete</b>	66	5.32	92.99
<b>Famous person</b>	33	2.66	95.65
<b>Formula 1 pilot</b>	18	1.45	97.1
<b>Top model, movie star</b>	14	1.13	98.23
<b>Superhero, movie character</b>	14	1.13	99.35
<b>Writer, artist, theatre actor</b>	8	0.64	100
<b>Total</b>	1241	100.00	

Every twentieth (5.24%) teenager aged 13 or 17, who named a role model, would like to be like his/her teacher. The same number of pupils wants to be similar to an acquaintance, an adult who lives in their environment, whose behaviour and activities they know, whom they chose because of their profession or professional success, who seem to be adroit, courageous and skilful. Some examples: medical assistant, doctor, hairdresser, manicurist, flower shop owner, university student, girl next door, café shop owner, dance instructor, attorney, entrepreneur.

The table above also reflects the fact that most of the idols chosen by the students are persons from their everyday lives, persons with whom they have physical contact: two-thirds of the teenagers identified a role model who they knew personally. The remaining 34.25% (every third student) chose a model known only from the media. Every eleventh teenager wants to be like an actress or actor (the favourites are: Angelina Jolie, Maite Perroni, Chuck Norris, Bud Spencer, Brad Pitt, Vin Diesel, Gabriela Spanic). In the category of singers, the most frequent idols are: Rihanna, Shakira, Beyonce, Gabi Tóth, Vera Kovács, Veca Janicsák, Laci Lukács, Katy Perry.

A lot of students, especially boys want to be like a well-known athlete or sportsman when they grow up. Because of the large number of answers in this category, we created three other role model categories: athletes, football players, car drivers or motorcycle riders. Every twentieth pupil wants to be like an athlete or a football player. Of course, this is more typical among boys. In the football player

category, Lionel Messi is on top of the popularity list, but he is followed by names like Cristiano Ronaldo, David Beckham, David Villa, Iker Casillas and Fernando Torres. Among the athletes, there appears Michael Jordan, Maria Sharapova and the first Hungarian names, as well. Especially the members of the Hungarian Handball National Team, such as Anita Görbicz, Katalin Pálinger, appear as idols for teenagers. The name of a local athlete, Éva Tófalvi, also appears here.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that the media celebrities do not have a very significant impact on the pupils' role model choice. In this category, there are very few candidates. We can enrol TV presenters like Balázs Sebestyén, Nóra Ördög, top models like Palvin Barbara, famous, rich people like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs or the writer of the Harry Potter novels. An interesting category is that of the fictional idols: some film characters or super heroes were chosen as idols. Dr. House's arrogance, insight geniality seems to be a model for a couple of pupils. Others found an example to follow in Batman's sense of justice, his fight against evil, while others would like to copy the resourceful, adroit MacGyver.

It also seems worth examining if the age, the gender, and residence of the pupils have any influence on the choice of the role model if differences along these demographic variables can be detected. Of course, a part of the answers is self-evident: those who are idolizing their mothers are mostly girls, while those who want to become like their fathers are mainly boys. As well, most of those whose idol is a football player, an athlete or a car racer are boys; girls chose more often an idol among film actors, singers (see Table 3). However, there are small differences that definitely worth taking a closer look at.

Gender, age and residence seem to have a significant correlation to the idol category, the type of idol chosen. Boys and girls have a little bit different types of idols; younger teenagers (aged 13) and the older ones (aged 17) named different types of human examples. The statistical tests<sup>6</sup> also show that whether someone lives in a town or village has an impact on their choice of idol. For example, among urban teenagers, it is twice more frequent to idealize a grandparent, a godparent or some other relative (11.43% of urban pupils have this kind of model). Among teenagers living in villages, this is less frequent (5.6%). In the case of teachers, it is just the opposite: choosing a teacher as a personal idol is more frequent among teenagers living in the rural area – 7.28% of them wishes to follow the example of a teacher. Among teenagers who live in towns, this ratio is only 4.41%. The same thing is true in the case of the best friend/close friend joint category: every tenth teenager who lives in a rural area has chosen a good friend or a best friend as a

5 Éva Tófalvi: athlete from Miercurea Ciuc, bi-athlete, world champion. She participated several times at the Winter Olympic Games in 2002, 2008, 2010 and 2014: she was the flag bearer of the Romanian team every time. Outside the tight circle of athletes, her sports achievements are not widely known; the situation is similar with other athletes from Romania.

6 Chi-square test.

model (11.2%). However, only every twentieth urban teenager went for the same option (5.41%). The proportion of pupils from rural and urban areas is similar regarding the enthusiasm for the football players. In the case of the singers and musicians, there is a little difference: 8.37% of the urban teenagers and only 5.04% of the rural teenagers named a musician or a singer as their role model.

**Table 3.** Idol categories by age, gender, type of residency<sup>7</sup>

Idol categories <sup>7</sup>	AGE (p=0.018)		GENDER (p<0.001)		RESIDENCE (p<0.001)	
	13 y	17 y	Boy	Girl	Urban	Rural
<b>Mother/Father</b>	146	76	176	44	146	76
<b>Brother/Sister</b>	46	24	24	46	48	22
<b>Grandparents/Relative</b>	61	60	36	85	101	20
<b>Teacher, priest</b>	36	29	16	47	39	26
<b>Friend/Acquaintance</b>	55	34	43	46	49	40
<b>Actor</b>	57	50	58	48	79	28
<b>Musician/Singer</b>	58	34	29	62	74	18
<b>Football player</b>	44	29	71	2	50	23
<b>Sportsman</b>	48	36	65	19	58	26
<b>Other</b>	28	41	46	22	61	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>725</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>648</b>	<b>884</b>	<b>357</b>

## “I Want to Look like Me!”

As we reported earlier, nearly half of the students (41.6%) did not define a model, an idol to whom they would like to be similar to when they grow up. However, since they were asked to justify their choice, we can make an analysis of those answers as well and we can figure out why the thirteen and seventeen year olds from this region do not have an idol. Unfortunately, this analysis was not possible in the case of all pupils since a third of the respondents did not write anything to this question, gave no justification in this respect or wrote something just to fill in the questionnaire, but the answers did not serve any purpose and gave us no information whatsoever (e.g. “I do not have an idol and that’s it!”). Thus, only 66.74% of the 971 teenagers tried to explain why they could not name a role model.

After coding the answers to the open question and taking into consideration the results of the Hungarian research (László, 1999), we grouped the answers into

<sup>7</sup> We group the earlier 17 categories in fewer categories to avoid statistical problems in the case of the chi-square test.

three categories: Undecided, Confident and Individual. In the case of our research – unlike the Hungarian results –, we could not identify four different categories but a very strong, powerful group (Individual), and two much smaller categories with very few items. In the “Confident” group, we included the answers which show that the respondent has a very strong self-confidence, knows her/his capabilities, skills and values, and does not need any personality change. 12.34% of the answers fall into this group. Some examples from here: “I am just perfect without an idol”, “I’m glad that I was born this way and I am satisfied with myself”, “I love myself”, “I don’t have a model, I don’t need it”, “I do not think it is helpful to have one.”

One out of four teenagers (26.39%) had not dealt with this “idol” question before: they say they cannot name a person to whom they would like to be similar to since they have never thought of this issue before. Some examples of these answers: “I have not really thought about this”, “I do not know exactly what I want to be”, “I do not know yet what kind of adulthood I will have”, “I have not thought about this yet, maybe because I do not know anybody to whom I fully look up to.”

The largest category is definitely the Individual category. Although nearly four hundred persons’ answers are included in this category, the answers are very similar and mostly even using the same language, the same words: I do not want to compare myself to anybody, everybody is an individuality, I do not want to imitate anybody.

“I am a special person, and I do not wish to be similar to anyone else, I am what I am”, “I do not want to live like somebody else, I follow my own path”, “I want to be like me!”, “I do not want to become anyone else’s copy because people nowadays want to imitate one another, for example in fashion, career etc.” Concepts, such as “I’m unique, each person is unique, everything is about the individual these days, I do not want to be an imitation”, send us the message that a lot of the pupils made the “Be Yourself”, “Be Who You Are!” type of messages, sent by the American film and pop culture, their own. They do not find in their immediate environment such a powerful personality whom they could accept as a role model, so they give answers which send the message “I do not have any role models and it is not fashionable nowadays to have one”.

## **Conclusions**

We have seen that in 2012 only half of the teenagers from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade named an idol. The others did not have one or did not want to have an idol mostly because they did not want to influence their “uniqueness”. Most of those who have a role model would like to become like their parents, siblings, grandparents, relatives or close friends. Among those who have an idol, every third teenager’s choice was influenced by the media, they have not met their

chosen role model personally, they have not talked to him/her, they only know a little about the chosen role model, and there are no valid impressions available for them about the chosen idol. The next survey is planned for 2014,<sup>8</sup> and it would be an important step in this process: we would be able to identify the direction of the role model choosing practice among teenagers.

Can we conclude that with the new media new idols have arrived? It is hard to answer this question because the answer is multiple. (1.) On the one hand, the answer can be **yes**, the teenagers choose a role model from their physical environment or from the media. Those local “heroes”, historical persons, contemporary talented but not mediated persons, who do not appear in the media, on the Internet, are not well-known. Because of the lack of their media appearance, they will not become popular; moreover, they will not appear in the focus of the teenagers, they can not become a model for them. (2) However, the answer could also be: **partially yes**, the new icons are infiltrated into the teenagers’ minds since one third of them (from among those who have an idol) chose some iconic person known from the media, television or the Internet, perhaps from the newspaper. But only partially yes, because the role and impact of this new model is not as strong as we would expect knowing the practice of teenagers in using the new media. They know very little about these mediated persons, very often they do not even spell their names correctly, so we can say that the idolization, the role-model following is not so strong. (3.) On the other hand, the answer could be even **partially no**: the teenagers can select. Even if the media has an important impact on their lives, two teenagers from three want to become like their mothers, fathers, a relative or a friend. The media has a strong impact on their lives, on their world-perception, but even so they can select what kind of role model is more authentic for them.

What do these results shed light on? What kind of new possibility, new chance or new challenge do the parents, teachers, local communities have if they know of these role-model practices of their teenagers? **For the parents**, these results could or might be a very strong positive acknowledgement from their children. If every third teenager wants to become like his/her mother or father, then the parents managed to be a strong, characterful, good example, which is iconic in the teenagers’ eyes despite of the virtual, mediated world in which they have an undoubted presence. But beyond the positive validation, they could also be less endangered by the media and be more open to learn new things together with their children, not to prohibit or restrict too much, but to be curious, to be open, to communicate about everything that the teenagers are searching, looking, following in or through the media. **In the case of the teachers**, this might have a moderate positive message and might indicate a lot of possibilities. It would

8 During the period of March–April 2014, another survey was conducted in the same area among teenagers in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. Unfortunately, in this moment, we do not have the possibility to bring in the new results, but in the next few months this will be possible.

be useful to include the “role model” issue in the latent curriculum since, as we could see, a lot of teenagers have an unsettled, improper and wrong idea about role models in our lives or a life period. In this way, the school might become an important actor in forming the role model of the teenagers. **For the local communities**, this could be an important monitor: the teenagers do not know very much about local historical and contemporary achievements, successes or good practices. Communities need to find a way to send messages about this to the younger population, to promote this by the teenagers’ communicational practices. Without this, there is no use in naming a school after someone, making a big ceremony in memory of someone or inaugurating a statue. If this person’s character and achievements are not known, if they are not so important, “fancy” and “fashionable”, they will not become a role model even if the teenagers could learn much more from their lives than from a media star’s life. The life of Zsolt Erőss,<sup>9</sup> the popularity and genius of László Barabási Albert,<sup>10</sup> the achievements of Károly Eduárd Novák<sup>11</sup> could be an inspiration for everybody. But they do not

- 
- 9 ERŐSS Zsolt (1968 – 2013) was born in Miercurea Ciuc, Harghita County. He was the most successful Hungarian high-altitude mountaineer, summiting 10 out of the 14 eight-thousanders. He was also the first Hungarian citizen to have climbed Mount Everest. In 2010, he lost his right leg in an avalanche accident, requiring amputation below the knee. Soon after his recovery, he returned to mountaineering, trying to summit the Cho Oyu in fall 2010. The expedition did not reach the top due to bad weather conditions, but later in May 2011 he successfully summited the Lhotse. After successfully scaling Kangchenjunga on May 20, 2013, he went missing in descent (source: [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org), [www.hoparduc.hu](http://www.hoparduc.hu)). Although he lived in Hungary after 1988, he was very popular among the population of Szeklerland. After 2000, he attended every year narrative presentation tours – among others – in almost every town of Covasna, Harghita and Maroş Counties. Even so, the teenagers seem not to know about him and not to choose him as a role model.
- 10 BARABÁSI-ALBERT László (born in 1967 in Cârța, Harghita County) is a Hungarian-American physicist, best known for his work in the research of network theory. He was working at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA, and current Distinguished Professor and Director of Northeastern University’s Center for Complex Network Research (CCNR) and an associate member of the Center of Cancer Systems Biology (CCSB) at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Harvard University. He introduced in 1999 the concept of scale-free networks and proposed the Barabási-Albert model to explain their widespread emergence in natural, technological and social systems, from the cellular telephone to the World Wide Web or online communities (source: [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)). He is appreciated and well known among the Hungarian population in Romania, as in a popularity contest won 3. place (source: <http://boxpopuli.transindex.ro>).
- 11 NOVÁK Károly Eduárd (born in 1976 in Miercurea Ciuc) is a road- and track-racing cyclist and Paralympic champion. Initially a speed skater, Novak lost one of his legs in a car accident in 1996. Subsequently, he switched to cycling and emerged to a professional cyclist. He took part at his first Paralympics in 2004, followed by two more participations in 2008 and 2012. At the 2008 Paralympic Games, he won the silver medal in the individual time trial, thus capturing Romania’s first ever Paralympic medal. At the 2012 Games, he reached further milestones by winning the gold medal in the 1 km track pursuit event – the first ever in the country’s Paralympic history – and setting a new world record time en route to the final. Additionally, he collected a silver medal in the road time trial race. (source: [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org), [www.tusnadcyclingteam.com](http://www.tusnadcyclingteam.com)).

appear among the teenagers' options. We have local "heroes" who could be a very good example for a lot of teenagers, but if we do not speak about them, do not invite them to the schools, to local festivities, teenagers cannot meet them, and they will "meet" more easily with Rihanna, Lionel Messi or Steve Jobs.

## References

- Berta J. (2008). A szocializációs ágensek hatása a példaképválasztásra. *Új Pedagógia Szemle* 58 (6-7): 64–78.
- Biró, A. Z.–Gergely, O.–Kiss, A.–Ozsváth, B. H. (2012). A média hatása a gyermekekre és fiatalokra. In: Gergely, O. (ed.), *A média hatása a gyermekekre és fiatalokra*. Volum de conferință. Miercurea Ciuc: Státus, pp. 9–74.
- Biró, A. Z.–Gergely, O.–Kiss, A.–Ozsváth, B. H. (2013). Társadalmi és/vagy egyéni innováció? A média hatása a gyermekekre és fiatalokra a székelyföldi térségben. In: Biró, A. Z.–Gergely, O. (eds.), *Ártalmas vagy hasznos az Internet? A média hatása a gyermekekre és fiatalokra*. Miercurea Ciuc: Státus, pp. 13–94.
- Bodó J. (ed.) (2012). *Esély vagy veszély? A média hatása a gyermekekre és fiatalokra*. Miercurea Ciuc: Státus.
- Gergely, O. (2013). Hasonlítani? Kire? Példaképkérdés a székelyföldi tanulók esetében. In: Biró, A. Z.–Bodó, J. (eds.), *Internethasználat vidéki térségben. A média hatása a gyermekekre és fiatalokra*. Miercurea Ciuc: Státus, pp. 55–66.
- Kósa, É. (2005). A szocializáció elméleti kérdései. In: Vajda, Zs.–Kósa, É. (eds.), *Neveléslélektan*. Budapest: Osiris, pp. 46–113.
- László, M. (1999). Példa-kép. A tizenéves korosztály értékválasztásai és a média. *Jel-Kép* 3: 33–47.





# “They Already Know Everything.” Computer Use by Teenagers and Associated Perceptions in Rural Communities

József Gagyí

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania  
Faculty of Technical and Human Sciences, Târgu Mureş  
gagyijozsef@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** The statement highlighted in the title, “they already know everything”, refers to a small group of Generation Z, rural children and teenagers in three communities in contemporary Transylvania. It is not them who describe themselves so, but a grown-up, a representative of Generation Y, Zalán M., an expert in the maintenance and use of digital devices who is recognized as such in the communities. Because of the recognition of his competence as an expert and the legitimacy this brings him, his views, which he proclaims vehemently and publicly, are shared by others as well. The cases presented in this paper come from a long-term field work with lengthy interruptions. The location is the communities of Vărgata commune in Mureş county (Vărgata, Valea, Mitreşti, as well as to a lesser extent Grăușorul and Vadu). I have been present as an ethnographer in the field since 2004, conducting observations focusing on various topics. My goal was the holistic understanding of the cultural behaviour and the creation of interpretations using knowledge from anthropological literature. Since the appearance and proliferation of digital and new media devices, the elements of knowledge needed to operate them and the attitudes associated with them are a new phenomenon that has been brought into the crosshairs of public attention in these last few years (since 2009), this paper draws on the contextual knowledge I have developed throughout the years of fieldwork to understand the computer use of the young members of Generation Z and the general perceptions the computer engenders, as well as opinions and ways of behaviour associated with it.

**Keywords:** generation Z, familiarization/domestication, media literacy/media illiteracy

## Frame of Reference: Familiarization/Domestication

My interpretation of computer use was mainly aided by the notions of familiarization/domestication Roger Silverstone focuses on. All that is presented in this paper resides in the context of everyday life, and the acclimatization with the media phenomenon that takes place in this environment shaped by digital devices appears in this context, performing its effects of transformation. Home is where members of Generation Z live together with members of the previous generation and the newly emerging technology, i.e. where the cumulative effects of new media may be observed. According to Zsolt Szijártó, qualitative characteristics are important, and instead the material aspects of access it is the issues of “mental access” (the capacity for learning, the intensity of its allure) that determine the Internet use (Szijártó, 2013). Referring to a previous state, Tibor Mester quotes Raymond Williams, who, instead of the technical innovations of television, places its communal usage at the focal point of scientific investigation, and states that the institutional framework and ways of usage that are developing have been determined by the cultural context, norms and values as well as the series of decisions that arise under the effects of societal attitudes. This is no different in the case of the Internet as well. The notion of domestication refers to the kinds of individual prerequisites and practices of knowledge and usage that come into being while using the television and the Internet: what happens in the home, or – as Roger Silverstone’s notion of familiarization suggests (Silverstone 1999) – in the families, during the coexistence of the generations. Homes, in this conceptualization, are: the instances and locations of interaction between the technology-accepting culture and the technology shaping the culture, with the actors of these activities organizing themselves into generational formations and becoming separate.

It is true that Silverstone developed the notion of familiarization in connection with the use of television and its everyday effects (Silverstone, 1999): just as individual people, persistent consumer items, meaning television or, in our case, computers, will also have a biography. And this develops during family interactions, in the communicational activities that mould families: before they buy it, they imagine the object and they shape its physical and emotional place (as if building it a nest before its arrival). Thus, the object is first present in its virtual rather than actual reality; its placement began before its actual appearance and use. The act of purchase itself has thus already been limited by preconditions: they are not buying just any object but one that can be fitted into a familial framework. An emotional preparation exists beforehand: they will choose not an item to be purchased, but an object which (and this is mostly irrespective of the object’s technical performance or specifications) best suits the place that has been prepared for it; of which they most believe will become a “family member” – or

more precisely: they project their perceptions about the objects appearing in the family and in search of their place, disregarding their options to a great extent.

Of course, we are not talking about a single situation, the sole act of purchasing: Silverstone also talks about the process of familiarization. The place and ways of usage of the object and, by extension, its (not technical, but cultural) characteristics are shaped and continually reshaped. The differences between individual family members and generations within the family can be great since they participate in this reshaping with varying levels of knowledge, skills, curiosity, patience and sacrifices (of their time and work). Certain objects or the ways they are used in may fit more readily into family structures and familial cultural behaviours than others. The series of activities which results in the family fitting objects, technologies and phenomena into their own familial culture, i.e. the ways in which they make use of their time and space, and their way of life can be quite time- and energy-consuming. Human behaviour, mechanized labour and technological processes meld together inseparably, yet it is still interpretations and connotations, i.e. cultural processes which are of utmost significance. The final results are what matter, i.e. a newer/renewed cultural way of behaviour: the life of objects happens in this cultural medium, the object and its usage becomes integrated into this familial medium; one may almost say that “tamed” (the original meaning of domestication) objects and uses are engendered. Furthermore, what is quite essential: the objects blend into the cultural medium, almost becoming invisible, which is a prerequisite for everyday normality, and function in the service of everyday routines until they break down, become obsolete, i.e. run the course of their own life cycles.

Domestication, besides taming, also means “accustoming to home”. Familiarization: making familiar, accustoming, becoming practised in the intimate sphere. And familiarization is in its essence the transmutation of attitudes, making familial, i.e. cosy and trusted. All of this may also be handled in a general way as an important characteristic and prerequisite of consumption, applied to families. If, by the egress of digital technology into the family, the digitally created virtuality can overwhelm the space and time of the family, saturating it with viruses, familiarization may also mean cohabitation, i.e. becoming immune.

## **Who Are They and What Do They Know?**

The members of Generation Z were children and pupils in the research period. In November 2008, there were 158 families<sup>1</sup> whose children attended the Vãrgata schools<sup>2</sup> (classes 1–8); this number has since lessened somewhat. According to the

---

1 All five communities have schools with classes 1–4, while classes 5–8 of the Vãrgata school are attended by pupils of all five communities.

2 Since I studied computer use in the family, and there are families with two or three children in

study done in 2009, 58 percent of the families whose children had attended the school already owned a computer; this proportion has since grown considerably. We might say that it is primarily the families who raise children that strove and still strive to purchase a computer<sup>3</sup> and have Internet access. The school has had a computer room since 2008. However, the children only learned basic word processor use here, nothing else. Consequently, all that members of Generation Z knew about the use of computers and the Internet at the time they left primary education was brought from home and was further developed in a home setting.

Case studies were done in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 about computer and Internet use in 38 families from Vărgata;<sup>4</sup> out of these, 34 have Generation Z members. This level of endowment means that the first computer was followed by the second one, and laptops treated as personal property have also appeared. I.e., in families who raise children, the time of the single computer in the family that had been used by everyone and had to universally serve everyone's needs had lasted a short time. Generally, when the older child graduated from the eighth class and continued his/her studies (this meant their moving away), s/he asked for and received a laptop, which s/he operated more in line with his/her own notions, needs and knowledge. Yet, treating it as exclusive property, and denying access to other family members (e.g. using a password) only occurred with university graduates.

What is it then that the members of Generation Z use the computer and Internet at their disposal for in the communities? What do they actually know about their operation and use, and what could the processes of familiarization/domestication be qualified as?

The first assertion: although there are differences within the families, not only among generations, but within these as well, keeping in touch (via mail, Messenger, Skype), listening to music, watching films, searching the Internet (e.g. adults read Internet newspapers and consult weather information) and, more recently, navigating Facebook have become part of the basic repertoire of skills (I will not address the behaviour of middle-aged male family members, i.e. the fact that in around half of the families investigated they are not willing to learn even the most basic operations; this requires separate analysis). Basic text input and editing is a rarer, yet also characteristic property. We have not encountered young members of the communities who were programmers.

---

school, I did not take into account the number of the children, opting instead for the number of the families.

- 3 This was helped by the aid programme of the Romanian government, which provided (and still provides) a subsidy of 200 euros for purposes of purchasing a computer for low-income families. The subsidy is available through a yearly grant application via the school.
- 4 The presentation of families examined who were chosen from among owning a computer and an Internet subscription was done by students from the Communications and Public Relations programme of Sapiientia EMTE based on a previously established system of criteria; I subsequently visited each chosen family, got to know the members of the said families, examined the use on the premises and talked with each computer user in the families.

Second assertion: the distribution of knowledge within the family is quite variable, but all families have “experts”, i.e. those who “know the most”, who can be called upon to answer minute questions related to computer usage; those who teach and help the others. In exceptional cases, these may be adults, but mostly comprise members of Generation Z. They show and represent the knowledge of the family “towards the outside”, towards other families, and they are known and consulted by the “experts” of other families. They are a “contingent of experts” in the communities regarding the types of computers, basic characteristics, the properties of programmes, installations, virus protection, specific Internet sites and downloads. There are some among them who are indeed well-versed and possessing basic IT knowledge, having usually attended or graduated IT profile classes (but not necessarily so) and, in one or two cases, hold university degrees indicative of high-level users. They are actually the representatives, operators and embodiments of the needs and acquirements having taken shape in the family vis-à-vis the community. Their knowledge is potentially adequate to diagnose and solve emerging issues (“there is no Internet connection”, “it can’t be downloaded”, “the programme is not responding”, “the computer has slowed down/doesn’t work”, “the computer has a virus”). They are easy to reach and call upon in reciprocity networks, such as those of neighbours, relatives or friends, and it is especially advantageous that, considering the lack of sources in the social medium and contrary to the services of professionals, using their skills does not cost money. Third assertion: often, adults have been heard to say that in their families the children must help in running the household, and this has priority: “work comes first, then the computer”. In organizing familial and individual time management and work processes, parents have a decisive role. They often voice their opinion to the children, but to the young adults who are not married yet but still living in the house that: “all right, it’s important for you, but you can’t make a living off the Internet”. The parents do not know and recognize that “fiddling on the computer” can involve gaming and entertainment, but also learning or earning money. Aside from certain users who practise their trade on them (e.g. bookkeeping), adults in Vārgata only consider and practise all that can happen in the digital world as a leisure activity. They believe that the computer and the Internet are a wonderful thing, and they do declare that “it’s not a good thing for a child to grow up without a computer”, but the types of knowledge that are valid, useful and make “getting along in life” possible are not connected with the computer and the Internet. The place on the mental map assigned to the computer that has been integrated into the household is between the TV (still the most important for adults), the telephone and the radio.

Fourth assertion: in the allotted time frame and free from parental supervision, children and young adults may use computers, according to their interests, at their own pace and in line with the compulsions transmitted via the social

relationships of their group of friends/institutional groups. This constitutes the main aim and occasion of visiting each other's homes. In the Vărgata school, free of the teacher's presence and supervision, the boys turn on the computers and gloat to each other and the girls about their new-found knowledge (gaming skills, downloads, access to adult websites). The individually acquired skills may be very different, but at the same time are organized into well-defined categories. Elemér M. and his friends know everything there is about games, websites and downloadable applications pertaining to football. Barbara K. and her friends have been playing with dolls for years on the Internet; I make mention of her because she is recognized as the foremost expert on Barbie dolls in her age-group. János K. and his younger brother specialize in all types of torrent and film downloads, they make and sell bootleg CDs. The case of Zsuzsa Sz. is interesting, yet not unique: the Facebook page of her parents' travel agency has been placed in her care, and the content about the business and any events that appear on the page is at her discretion (e.g. photos taken by her, in the order she deems fit), which is to say she does a sort of "ethno-PR" based on her own ideas, knowledge, diligence and the advice and comments of her fifteen-year-old contemporaries.

The fifth assertion, arising from the previous one: the computer skills of Generation Z are limited in and by exactly this: they are their own skills, yet they are not legitimate, they are not integrated into the world of the parents, i.e. it is knowledge without any validity for adults. It is characterized by different horizons, different expectations, different compulsions and answers sought and found for different questions. I formulate carefully since this is a strong assertion: to a certain extent and at present, this knowledge, in this societal context, is weightless, irrelevant. There is a story circulating among the parents that we regard with leniency, but acceptance as well: one mother, when a storm was descending, ran home from the fields and burst into the house shouting, "quick, disconnect the computer!" She was afraid for the newly-bought computer, and she made her children turn it off immediately and to also pull the plug out of the wall outlet. On the one hand, this story shows the hierarchy of values: that which costs a lot of money should, by applying the models of expediency hitherto established, be "spared" and protected, even by limiting its use. On the other hand, it shows a complete lack of trust: the children cannot handle this situation – she must intervene as an adult. Thirdly, this case (and others) have shown where the "digital divide" within the family is, and what results familiarization brings: the model of "new, valuable objects in need of safeguarding in the clean room" works for the mother, while for the children, learning and applying as many uses as possible is important, even if it means subjecting the computer to repairs (since they already know that much). Another story: a father said, reminiscing about an instance of costly computer repairs: "the brain had to be replaced because it was old and it gave out". It is a well-known fact that a computer has a "brain" and it can stop working. Processor, "Winchester"

(hard drive) – these are unknown notions here because familiarization involves changing known terminology and at the same time forming a private interpretation: if it is forced, the brain, the most important part of the computer, may “give out”; thus, it needs to be spared. How? There are different opinions as to this; the most common is that the time allotted to its use must be limited.

Sixth assertion: adults use one computer spot or environment, while it is characteristic for members of Generation Z, even in the community investigated, to multi-task (several devices, programmes, environments, several media used in parallel). An overwhelming majority of parents have no idea what the child – quietly tapping away on the computer with a headset on – is up to, what they listen to, what they open and what they close. It is indeed an important generation boundary that parents believe that what they sometimes see is the extent of what always is on the screen, i.e. they are in control, while children on the other side of this divide may, in principle, roam the considerable breadths of virtuality. Parents, as I have mentioned, may designate the occasion and time of computer use – but they are unable to impose what the child’s attention extends to, how they choose; i.e. they have no influence over the effects arising from multitasking. In this age of the information boom, there is much more accessible information than can be encompassed and organized – the greatest issue being the existence and operation of the filter (value system, life principles, critical thought) (Eriksen, 2011). This filter exists in a societal context: the experience, taste and horizon of knowledge that contemporaries possess.

Seventh assertion: in this community, the adults are, with few exceptions, media illiterate. I am not speaking about those who do not even have a computer in their household (in 2011, 70 percent of the families, the elderly and the Roma), but those whose households contain the computer and are able to start it up and perform a varying number of previously practised technical steps. The lowest level: “I can watch a film on the computer if they set it up for me, and when I push the long button, it goes, if I push it again, it stops”, says one head of the household. But the real question is the level of media literacy Generation Z members of the family are at. In this case, literacy means basically two things: the level technical devices are operated on and the level media messages are understood on. Both are equally important since this duality is mutually inseparable. According to László Ropolyi’s definition, “the Internet is a self-developing, complex technical device made up of computers, which, owing to its propensities, on the one hand, plays an important role in the communicational processes characteristic of the present, and, on the other hand, is a cultural medium suited to receive, display, conserve and operate fundamental human values, relationships and aspirations” (Ropolyi, 2006: 34). In order to be culturally present, one must rule the technical device, yet familiarization with and operation of the technical device may only happen based on cultural determinations. Computer-based, digital activities

are added to the established cultural behaviours of adult generations preceding Generation Z, and they modify and optimize these behaviours (speeding them up and facilitating them). It is a fundamental generational difference that the activity of Generations Z-ers are, characteristically for a universe of childhood, actually like unto discoveries and games, while grown-up generations, within or beyond playful discovery, learn the use of computers in order to attain certain work outputs, specialized in certain fields of expertise. Since in this rural environment the nature (physical, agricultural) of the work does not require the use of the “self-developing, complex technical device made up of computers”, this is not the primary representative of the “cultural medium suited to receive, display, conserve and operate fundamental human values, relationships and aspirations”.

Eighth assertion: the members of Generation Z are not technological beginners, but are still situated at the basic level of literacy defined as the attainment, evaluation, sorting and thoughtful criticism of information (Rotaru, 2010). It can thus be asked how they would act in the future within this intricate media environment, exposed to strong (even addictive) effects. What do they want to know, how do they sort and evaluate, and for instance do they use and produce the publicity that ensures political participation? What is the extent of the knowledge they want to attain, and what does the knowledge they have already attained enable them to do?

## **And Who Are the Ones Who Know Everything?**

Of course, there are no such ones. There are those exceptions like István D., born in 1943, who graduated high school and obtained a degree in mining, worked in Bălan, and returning home, worked in the industrial co-operative in leading positions, was also a migrant worker in France after 1989 for a year, and is now retired. His son lives in France, and he initially bought a computer to keep in touch with him, but then, spurred on by curiosity, he gradually got to the point where he reads Hungarian and French newspapers each morning, corresponds with acquaintances from different parts of the world, does e-banking, makes online purchases and if he wants information about something, he goes on the web and obtains it. In this respect, he has no peers in the local community. He also plays games if he is so inclined, and downloads e-books and films; he watches shows or listens to music like so many others. According to his wife, he barely goes out the gate, but in his opinion “the Internet is a big enough gate”. He does not and cannot know everything – but he claims that “I have experienced and learned everything that I need”. The boundaries of his needs and his attained knowledge overlap.

With the members of Generation Z, the situation is usually radically different: considering their ever-growing needs, their knowledge, while also expanding,



seems quite limited from an outside view. Focusing on the case studied, however, I can claim that at present, the knowledge their environment provides them is sufficient to satisfy their needs, and the computers have truly been “domesticated” in their milieu – and this is what Zalán M. based the validity of his observation on when he said “they already know everything”.

## References

- Eriksen, T. H. (2009). A pillanat zsarnoksága. Gyors és lassú idő az információs társadalomban [Tyranny of the Moment: Fast and Slow Time in the Information Age]. Budapest: L Harmattan.
- Tibor, M. (2010). Hálózati közösségek etnográfiaja: megközelítések és elemzésipéldák [Ethnography of Networked Communities: Approaches and Examples of Analysis] [http://nydi.btk.pte.hu/sites/nydi.btk.pte.hu/files/pdf/Mester\\_Tibor2013\\_disszertacio.pdf](http://nydi.btk.pte.hu/sites/nydi.btk.pte.hu/files/pdf/Mester_Tibor2013_disszertacio.pdf), accessed on: 2014. 04.23.
- László, R. (2006). Az Internet természete. [The Nature of the Internet] Typotext.
- Silverstone, R. (1999). Televiziunea și viața cotidiană [Television and Everyday Life]. Iași: Polirom.
- Zsolt, Sz. (2013). „Forró témák” a Z generáció kutatásában. [“Hot Topics” in Generation Z Research] Fogalmi keretek – módszertani megközelítések. [Conceptual Frameworks – Methodological Approaches] [www.zgeneracio.hu/getDocument/521](http://www.zgeneracio.hu/getDocument/521) accessed on 2014.07.15.





## Potentiality and Actuality: Some Results of an Ongoing Research on a Community of Massively Multiplayer Online Gamers

**Áron Bakos**

Babeş-Bolyai University, PhD student  
bakosaron@gmail.com

**Abstract.** In my paper, I differentiate between two scientific approaches towards the Internet, one that examines the potentiality and one that studies the actuality of it. By briefly summarizing some of the results of my research of a community of video game players, I try to point out the flaws of the former method.

**Keywords:** mmorpg, netnography, Internet studies

In the last few decades, the Internet has become something ordinary, instead of being something special; as one Hungarian scholar puts it, it is no longer the playground of a small caste, but it is our main communication tool (Gelléri, 2001: 273.). “We are moving from a world of Internet wizards to a world of ordinary people routinely using the Internet as an embedded part of their lives.” (Haythornthwaite–Wellman: 6) This embeddedness means that for many people using the Internet becomes a way of spending one’s spare time. Playing online games is one possible and quite popular way to find amusement via the Internet. The popularity of such activities is empirically shown by a sociological survey which was carried out in 2008 (Csepeli–Prazsák, 2010). According to the research, the majority of Hungarian Internet users, 58 percent, played at least one online game (Csepeli–Prazsák, 2010: 107).

Despite the fact that the majority of users tried playing games, there are some considerable misunderstandings about the gamer culture, about people who play games regularly. Popular representations of gamers often depict them as socially isolated, highly alienated individuals. “According to popular belief, these games have caused players to forsake »real-life« obligations and »significant« offline relationships in order to pursue the »fake« and »trivial« online.” (Chee et al., 2006: 154.) The discourse applies a simple dichotomy, where the offline is seen as the positive, real, valuable, traditional, while the online as the negative, illusionary, corrupted and outrageous.

These representations are important as they affect the scientific discourse itself. As Karvalics (2010) pointed out, these stereotypes influence scholars in a way that sometimes they let their parental or civic concerns overwrite their obligations to the scientific community and, to a certain extent, they neglect to meet the expected standards of scientific research. As he also points out (2010: 146.) that this can be understood as a symptom of moral panic which follows the appearance of many technological inventions. “Technological developments, like social and economic changes, can be viewed positively, as increasing opportunities, or negatively, as a source of increased risk. The risk element is a source of anxiety because the new technology appears to escape previous forms of regulation and its possible effects are relatively unknown, especially the effects on the vulnerable (e.g. children) or the ‘marginal’ groups (e.g. the ‘underclass’)”. (Kenneth, 1998: 102)

As a result, academics often do not differentiate between the actual and the potential socio-cultural effects of Internet use. However, as actuality and potentiality are two different levels of being, one cannot present the latter as equal to the former. When authors look at the Internet as something harmful or as quite the opposite, something liberating, they often fail to distinguish between the two above-mentioned ontological levels and present their fears or hopes as actuality, not potentiality. Looking at some examples, we might understand how the lack of differentiation leads to false assumptions.

As Jahn-Sudman and Stockmann point out (2008: XVI), scholars often depicted the Internet as a world that lacks social sanctions, a world that lacks moral boundaries. If we treat this statement as something that describes a potential characteristic of Internet use, we could agree with it when we see how the technology allows individuals to act anonymously, avoiding risks, social sanctions, as it was pointed by Hubert L. Dreyfus (2009). Still, even if we have described **one** potential use of a communicational tool by this, it does not mean that we have described **all** the potential uses of that tool and, moreover, we have not said much about the actual uses of it, which might show many different forms in different cultural and social settings.

To prove my point, I would like to present some results of my ongoing research, in which I study a community of online gamers. Since the aim of my study is to grasp the everyday life of the community, I basically try to apply the methods of netnography as presented by Robert V. Kozinets (2010). I use the method of participant observation during the offline meetings and also in the online social networks, and I also carry out structured and semi-structured interviews. I did try playing the game so I can understand its system better, but, as in his review Richard Bartle (2010) points it out, it is not necessary to regularly play a game to be able to research it.

In 2010, the group was only present on the online scene where they formed a so-called guild in World of Warcraft, a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-

Playing Game (MMORPG), but, as time passed and bonds between the members became tighter, they started to organize guild-meetings, offline parties that today seem just as important in the life of the guild as the online events. As Jan van Dijk (2006: 168) also states, the two scenes are closely connected and hardly understandable without each other.

Rules with moral implications and social sanction formulate their community to a great extent. For example, the community expects their members to regularly play the game. Also, twice a week, they have prefixed times when they expect most members to log in. Becoming inactive in the game or missing the regular meeting times is something that the community tolerates if the individual has an explanation or excuse for his or her behaviour, but it is still something that has consequences. The guild master (GM) often demotes the players' avatar or they would not invite a specific gamer to raids. Raid is a very important feature of the game, in which the players co-operate and defeat monsters that individually none of them are capable of overcoming. The enemies which can be defeated during raids drop such items (loots) that are quite rare and on which the further progress of the avatars mostly rely. If they cannot progress, they cannot keep up with the others in strength, which means they become a less valuable member of the community, they lose their social status. Therefore, banning someone from raids is quite a setback for some players.

Also, as membership becomes a source of identity, behaviour becomes regulated in a moral sense too. The guild I research has a close relationship with another guild. They often visit each others' offline meetings; some of the members even have avatars in both guilds.<sup>1</sup> In the other guild it happened that someone was "kicked out" of the guild because he created an alternative character with a racist name. Despite the fact that he removed it as he met the disapproval of some leaders of the group, he still had to leave the group. As someone commented it, somebody with such an attitude would dishonour the name of the guild. In the guild of my research, reliability is quite important and it seems that whenever they talked of people who had to leave the guild, they often emphasized elements in their behaviour which can generally be considered as quite immoral like lying, gossiping or consuming drugs. On the other hand, the form of trolling, in which players spam the chat log with rude words, is an act that members could do because the previous GM also found it funny and did not forbid it. In the previous section, I only briefly listed and simplified some stories to a great extent, stories that are quite important in the life of the guild even to this day. By presenting some results

---

1 In the bipolar world of the game, to summarize it very briefly, there are two opposing factions, the Horde and the Alliance. The two factions consist of many fictional races of the fantasy world of the game. The taken side and the chosen race could also serve as a source of identity for the player, but I have no space to explain how this works in details. The guild I research is on the side of the Alliance, while the closely related one is on the side of the Horde.

of my research, I aimed to prove two points. The first point is that online gamers are not isolated individuals but quite the opposite: players are strongly connected to each other both offline and online. The second is that while the Internet can potentially be unregulated and amoral, this is certainly not the case with the community I research – their world is not one without social sanctions. From these two points, there come two theoretical conclusions, one in the narrower context of game studies and one in the broader context of Internet studies.

According to my findings, not the game but rather the interpersonal connections shape life online; it is the main motivation for most gamers for playing the game. They carry out tasks not necessarily because they enjoy doing it, but because others accept them to do it or because their status mostly relies on their achievements in the game. The strict rule to play the game in a regular manner, the often monotonous gameplay, the way how seriously success and failure in the game is taken by the members show that the game sometimes rather functions as work, as it was also showed in the case of a different game by T. L. Taylor (2006). The social consequences of not being online or not progressing fast enough to keep up with the other members sometimes turn gaming into a desperate act, thinning the line between play and work. For that reason, in the case of my community, we cannot apply without serious restrictions Huizinga's (1938) famous model of gaming, and for that very reason we cannot look at online gaming as something festive, liminal, and anti-structured.

From my results, I also conclude that examining the potential characteristics of the medium not only has its limits, but it can also be quite pointless and misleading. Potentiality-based texts mostly focus on the relationship between man and technological instruments and some of them even treat online networks as technological inventions, not as a possible space for social interaction (Crawford–Putter, 2007: 272–273). Such texts have an implicit technological determinist approach. When they try to examine the effects of inventions upon culture and society, they mostly consider the possible effects of the new technological inventions upon man and they neglect to consider the social, man-to-man relationships. For this reason, they are not really able to tell much about the role of the Internet in our lives although it becomes more and more part of our everyday existence. During my research, I found that it is our culture and social relations that shape how one uses the given tool as “reality is not constituted by the networks CMC [computer-mediated communication] users use, it is constituted in the networks” (Jones, 1995: 12).

## References

- Bartle, R. (2010). A “Digital Culture, Play and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader” Reader. *Game Studies*, 10(1) <<http://gamestudies.org/1001/articles/bartle>> [Accessed on: 15 January 2014].
- Chee, F.–Vieta, M.–Smith, R. (2006). Online Gaming and the Interactional Self: Identity Interplay in Situated Practice. In: Williams, J. P.– Hendricks, S. Q.– Winkler, W. K. (eds.), *Gaming as Culture: Essays on Reality, Identity, and Experience in Fantasy Games*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, pp. 154–174.
- Crawford, G.–Putter, J. (2007). Playing the Game: Performance in Digital Gaming Audiences. In: Gray, J.– Sandvoss C.– Harrington, C. L. (eds.), *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. New York and London: New York University Press, pp. 271–281.
- Csepeli, Gy.–Prazsák, G. (2008). *Örök visszatérés?* Budapest: Józsvöveg.
- Dijk, van J. (2006). *The Network Society*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dreyfus, H. L. (2009). *On the Internet*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Gelléri, G. (2001). Mit keres az antropológia a cyberben – és a cyber az antropológiában? In: *Tabula* 4(2): 270–286.
- Haythornthwaite, C.–Wellman, B. (2002). The Internet in Everyday Life: An Introduction. In: Caroline, H.– Barry, W. (eds.), *The Internet in Everyday Life*. Malden, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell, pp. 3–41.
- Huizinga, J. (1938). *Homo Ludens*. transl. by Máthé K., 1944. Budapest: Athenaeum.
- John-S., A.–Stockmann, R. (2008). Introduction. In: John-S., A.–Stockmann, R. (eds.), *Computer Games as a Sociocultural Phenomenon: Games without Frontiers, Wars without Tears*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. XIII–XIX.
- Jones, S. G. (1995). Understanding Community in the Information Age. In: Jones, S. G. (ed.) *CyberSociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*. London: Thousand Oaks – New Delhi: Sage.
- Karvalics, L. Z. (2010). Az univerzális kvantor rémuralma – avagy a veszélydiskurzusok logikai argumentumok szerkezetéről. In: Talyigás, J. (ed.), *Az Internet a kockázatok és mellékhatások tekintetében*. Budapest: Scholar, pp. 133–148.
- Kenneth, T. (1998). *Moral Panics*. London: Routledge.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. London: Sage.
- Taylor, T. L. (2006). *Play between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press.





## **Book/Journal/Article Reviews**





## **István Povedák (ed.), *Heroes and Celebrities in Central and Eastern Europe*<sup>1</sup>**

**Erika Both, Arnold Péter**

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania,  
Faculty of Technical and Social Sciences, Miercurea Ciuc  
erika.both@yahoo.com, arnye90@yahoo.com

This volume integrates studies that were presented in 2011 in a conference under the same name organized at the University of Szeged, Hungary. The book contains seventeen studies and it was published in 2014 with the support of the Hungarian National Research Fund in co-operation with the MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture. The conference itself was realized with the co-operation of the “Gál Ferenc” College in Szeged and the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Szeged.

The concepts of celebrity and star are presented in many aspects and meanings through personalities whose stories of becoming stars, celebrities or heroes might be stunning for the readers. The greatest significance of the studies is that they not only present heroes known from the history books, with glorious deeds, but also personalities of the everyday life, who had both good and bad deeds, and exactly these deeds made them become heroes of their own nations. This tome is also highly opportune because it presents contemporary heroes who live among us as well as heroes of the past who have become significant symbols for their nations today.

One of the most appealing aspects of this book is that the personalities presented in this collection of studies are not represented only as positive protagonists due to their heroic deeds, but the studies also reveal facts that are not known to the larger public, and they also present significant personalities, well-known and adored among their own nations, even if nobody says out loud that actually they are seen as heroes, be them any positive or negative ones. These scientific writings are also easily readable thanks to their accessible language, so the book offers a good comprehension for anybody who is interested in anthropology, sociology, ethnography and folklore, but it also provides some very interesting stories and myths about stars, celebrities and heroes. This collection of studies is also highly recommended for those who show interest in communication and media

---

1 Bibliotheca Religionis Popularis Szegediensis, Vol. 37, Szeged: Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, 2014, ISBN 978-963-306-255-5.

because, in most of the cases, the presented mass-media played an incontestable role in forming local and national heroes or celebrities, providing remarkable examples for the art and science of mass communication. The book has high interdisciplinary relevance for the fields of anthropology, communication, mass media and urban folklore because each of the studies presents the heroes and the cults built around them over time with a deep analytic insight.

István Povedák, the editor of the book, in the introduction writes about the similarities and differences of the concepts of celebrity and hero, giving many examples. The title of the book itself reveals that there are many differences between a hero and a celebrity although many people consider these terms as synonyms. The studies are proof to the fact that in contemporary meaning a hero is someone who stands out for his or her beliefs, religion or nation; in this way, that person becomes an iconic personality for those who are represented by his or her person. In opposition, a celebrity is mostly somebody whose fame is built up by the media in such a manner that the celebrity in question exists only thanks to it. Heroes live among the people in tales, songs and even jokes. There is a third term that also needs to be explained: the star. Just like the real celestial bodies, the stars always shine; so, being a star means being famous in a positive meaning. Stars also have behind themselves a stronger, more giving and passionate camp of fans or supporters than celebrities. Being a celebrity is not such a positive and outstanding thing as being a star. On a three-step scale, we can say that heroes are on the top and celebrities are at the bottom of it. Stars are somewhere in the middle: they are to become heroes, but already more than celebrities. Stars still belong to the world of mass media; they rise to the state of a hero when their fame exists even without the media.

István Povedák also enumerates a few famous personalities who might be called celebrities or heroes no matter whether they are politicians like Lech Kaczyński, the former Polish president, or football fans like Željko Ražnatović Arkan, the leader of the Serb hooligans, who rose from being an anti-social and destructive criminal to the state of a true hero and patriot thanks to his beliefs and, in a strange way, to his not so human ways. Robbers may also become heroes like Attila Ambrus did, who is also known in popular culture as the Whiskey Robber or as The Hungarian Robin Hood. He robbed several banks, but most people conceived his deeds as a favour to the Hungarian banks and even to the Police: he revealed the vulnerability of the banks and showed the impotence of the Police. It can be said that as a robber he contributed to the improvement of the security in most of the Hungarian banks and he also made the Police to improve their methods in order to be more effective. We have the case studies of musicians like the Croatian Marko Perković Thompson, who ended up as a hero thanks to his patriotic songs, or even religious rulers like György Bulányi, who accomplished the mission to bring the Church through the Communist era by

building and leading small underground congregations. The stories of all these people and of even more can be read in this collection of studies.

Let us overview shortly the studies. The first study presents heroes generally from all around the world. Alexandr Golozubov's study titled *Hero and Anti-hero in the Consumer Society and the Totalitarian States. Philosophical-Anthropological Analysis* gives us a brief description about the concept of the hero as well as about the mentalities concerning heroes or heroism. We can find out that there are many differences between the heroes of the Western and the Eastern societies: while in the Western societies there are a lot of heroes in the actual meaning of the word, in the Eastern societies, the concept of the hero is about to disappear.

Ildikó Landgráf's study *Lajos Kossuth in Hungarian Folk Narratives* presents the importance of a Hungarian national hero for the contemporary nation. From the study, we can also find out that this historical personality appears as a hero of the battlefield. He was, however, the intellectual leader of the Hungarian Revolution and Fight for Independence from 1848, who became a hero of the nation in the wake of this independence war. He is nowadays remembered among Hungarians as a soldier and a king; he is also called "Hungary's Moses".

Lina Gergova's article *Enlightenment Leaders Day – Subjects and Objects* presents a Bulgarian feast that nowadays is held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. The study also presents how this feast has changed during time. This feast was originally meant to familiarize the Bulgarian youth with the personalities who contributed to the education and the development of the political and cultural life of Bulgaria. The most interesting about this celebration is that it had a very controversial history, but, although its meaning and content were changed, even banned by the authorities several times during the political regimes of the twentieth century, it still survived and even regained its original purpose.

Following the brief presentation of one of Bulgaria's national feasts, the book does not leave this country, presenting the stories of other national feasts of this nation: Kjetil Rå Hauge's study *Named or Unnamed, but not Unsung – Bulgarian National Heroes* reviews the most important national heroes of Bulgaria and the stories related to them. The main national celebrations are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June and the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, each with different choreographies and in different locations. For instance, the celebrations on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March are held in the memory of the Bulgarian heroes fallen in wars and according to the instructions of *The Field Manual of the Bulgarian Armed Forces*. This manual contains very detailed instructions so that there would be no complications during and after the celebrations. On this ceremony, the fallen heroes like Khan Kubrat, Yuvigi Khan Asparuh or Tsar Simeon the Great are called out as being present on the ceremony as active members of different battalions. The male members of the battalions call out the names of the heroes

and, in this way, the female members call out what the reputation of each hero was to the Bulgarian state and the Bulgarian nation.

The reader here faces a change in style: after the national feasts of historical heroes, there follows a study that presents us a hero who may not actually be considered a positive model. Eva Krekovicova, in her analysis *The Image of the Highwayman Juraj Janošík – Slovak National Hero or Bandit?* offers a brilliant example of how a person can be at the same time both a hero and an anti-hero. This study also lets us know that sometimes a hero does not become a hero because of his good deeds or virtues but for his rebellious behaviour; the actions against a persecuting state in the favour of his own community may raise someone to the status of a hero. The hero presented in this study, who lived between 1688 and 1713, had become a favourite personage for the Slovak and Polish romantic literature; he is still very famous even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Janošík often appears on the Internet, in different magazines, in arts and also in the political life as a model used by both the leading political party and the opposition in order to strengthen their own discourses. It is possible for both parties to use the same hero in their own favour because Juraj Janošík has a vast and open field of interpretation, and right from the beginnings he is being conceived on the ‘hero–anti-hero’ axis. The mythical figure of this hero used in the political communication as an anti-hero continued at the end of the Robert Fico’s government and even contributed to the victory of the coalition of centre-right parties in the parliamentary elections of 2010.

The case study written by István Kósa, László-Attila Hubbes and Csilla-Dalma Zsigmond<sup>2</sup> introduces us into the contribution of the world of social networking on the Internet to the popularity of an anti-hero. In their article *A Postmodern Hero in Hungarian Social Media. Attila Ambrus, the “Hungarian Robin Hood” – A Comparative Analysis of the “IWIW” Profiles of the “Whisky Robber”* the three authors present the comparison of three IWIW profiles of Attila Ambrus, the so-called “Whisky Robber”.<sup>3</sup> These three profiles were supposed to be the personal profiles of the “Hungarian Robin Hood”. The study focuses on the pictures uploaded onto these profiles, the titles given and the comments posted to them, the authors using comparative analysis for the three IWIW profiles of the Whiskey Robber. The fact that these three profiles had a very similar content and were registered close to each other in time offered a great opportunity to analyse three profiles on the same social network in order to create a unique comparative research in new visual media analysis, semiotics and discourse interpretation. The study also contains discussions about how provocative the pictures posted and their titles

2 Current professors at the University of the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania.

3 IWIW used to be a Hungarian social network that has recently been closed. Its name comes from the first letters of its full name: International Who Is Who. It used to be very famous among the Hungarian people; it survived even when the world-wide social network, the Hi5, was on the top. Soon after Hi5 lost against Facebook, IWIW was also closed.

are, but the comments are also studied in details. The three researchers classify the comments according to the speech act typology of Austin and Searle, introducing a new speech act type: the qualificative/emotional-verdictive. The comments tell us a lot about their posters, for instance, the commenter's level of education. The case study also wants to show us the way how a media celebrity is reflected in the online social media and to find out how a single picture could produce a positive discourse when the Whiskey Robber's popularity was in a serious decline.

The book leads us next to the territory of the interconnections of sports with war and violence. The study of Alexandar Ivanovic titled *From the Stands onto the Frontline – The Story of How Hooligans Became Heroes* introduces us into the world of the football hooliganism in the Balkans. This is an exciting time travel from the beginnings to the present, including points like the relation of football and politics, the subjectivity of the press and the game itself as the field of the ethnic clashes. This study also reveals the fact that press and electronic media have an incontestable and very important role in creating heroes. The different interpretations of the deeds of football hooligans, the language they use to describe their lives and actions (for instance, the use of many military phrases), and even the subjectivity of the press and the terminology used also contributes to expand their fame. The press of that time also encouraged football hooliganism. The power and the ability of creating heroes of media are shown once again in this case study. Also, the connection between the elites, club management, media and fan club leaders cannot be missed.

In some way, the next case study belongs together to the previous one because they both discuss the same phenomenon in the same historical time and place. The hooligans belong to the marginal society although they have a powerful impact on central society. Maria Vivod's study titled *Heroes of the Serbian Nation – How Flamboyant Nationalism Influenced the Rise of Socially Marginal Individuals* explains on two levels how did certain individuals from the edge of society become national heroes. We can also find out that the leaders of the different paramilitary units, just like the convicts, can easily become heroes in case they support the expectancies of their society with their deeds. These men became heroes by acting for the society: the aim was the only thing that mattered instead of the human lives and the means to use. Militarized convicts became symbols of the liberation of nation. The semiotic sense of the 'hero' concept in the Serbian culture also has its interesting points: in Serbian folklore, the violent temper of a hero is an admirable mark. Politics and press also profit from this interpretation.

We take a turn, and the next example comes from the field of religion. The study written by András Máthé-Tóth titled *Heroes of the Faith in the Hungarian Underground Church* presents us the story of father György Bulányi, the founder of the so-called "bush-churches", which were small religious communities. These small grass-roots communities were founded in order to save and sustain

the message of the Christian religion through the period of the state socialism so it can rise again once the suppressing political system has fallen. Father György Bulányi has an important role in saving the Christian religion: as a leader, he was the one that these small communities had relied on, who had trusted him that he could bear his duty. He became a hero just by his role of a leader: he had to show courage and devotion towards his followers, but not only. The suppressing system, the one that wanted to eliminate him reached the exact opposite of it: as a rebel, who stood out for his communities and their targets, he truly became a hero quite in the reflection of the suppressing political ideology.

In close relation to the heroes of the underground church, in the next article we can read the story of Professor Sándor Bálint, a personality similar to Rev. György Bulányi. Gábor Barna's study titled *Why a Scholar Is Regarded as a Saint in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century? The Case of Sándor Bálint* tells us how an intellectual from the city of Szeged stands out for his family, his city and its treasures against the Communist regime. He has been punished several times for his intransigence and perseverance; this is why after his death he became a symbol and one of the most significant personalities of Szeged. His beatification is in progress.

We turn to the field of politics in this next study that presents us the tragic story of a statesperson. Kamila Baraniecka–Olszewska's article *The Third Twin: A Post-Mortem Image of the Polish President Lech Kaczyński – On the Preformative Power of Mourning* shows us the case of the tragically deceased Polish president, Lech Kaczyński. The tragedy changed the image of the President even in the opposition; the mourning actually touched everybody and each segment of the society. The tragedy seemed to ensure the unification of the Polish society, but unfortunately this was only the appearance, so it did not become reality. His being a hero consists in this: besides his role of a leader, when he deceased, he was on a mission for his nation. In this interpretation of the disaster by the media, the whole country started to consider him as a hero who died in duty for his people. The interpretation of one's death as a heroic one also gives birth to a so-called 'post-mortem hero'.

After the story of a deceased politician-hero, we find a study presenting a still active politician. Povedák István's study titled *One from Us, One for Us: Viktor Orbán in Vernacular Culture* gives us a view of Viktor Orbán's presence in folklore. This political personality strongly divides the Hungarian society, although his role in the country's politics following the 1989 events is incontestable. The proper communication of his actions, his TV performances also contribute to making him a very symbolic and important personality in the political and social life of Hungary.

We have already read about heroes of the nation, heroes of sports, heroes from the politics, so we cannot miss the "heroes" from the music. In the next article, the notion of 'star' is introduced, a term that defines famous personalities exclusively in the sphere of media and entertainment. This case study is written by Francesca



Rolandi and it is titled *Between West and East: The Case Study of Dordje Marjanovic*. This study gives us a view of the progress of some of the former Yugoslavia's singers, actors and sportsmen, resisting against the suppressing ideology and the critics that came from the country's political system but also from the highly educated and properly skilled competition. Some of these celebrities managed to record the greatest annual income in the country. They were supported by the community, who raised special demands that were fulfilled by these musicians. This was the key to the fame; so, they first became stars, then idols. This study shows us this process through the story of a rock singer.

The next study gives us another example for a star that became a hero, but this time the story is strongly related to the battlefield. Neven Duvnjak's study is titled *Marco Petrovic Thompson – National Hero or Croatia's Troublemaker?* This study shows us how a little melody born on the battlefield became the foundation stone of a whole system of traditions. The singer's style is very close to the folk-rock and was inspired by The Beatles, and it also embodies many religious and historical themes. He sang openly about the genocide of the Serbian nation, and there were used so many nationalist symbols by the audience on each of his concerts that the authorities banned the usage of such symbols during the performances. Talking about concerts and music performances, the presence of the media on these events is certain, just like in the process of elevating Marco Petrovic Thompson. The foreign interpretations of his music make him a national hero of Croatia.

Ana Stefanova's *The Phenomenon of the Metal Mayor* gives us the story of a rock-music-fan Bulgarian mayor, who invited the most famous rock bands and singers from all around the world to give concerts in the small city governed by him. At the beginning, the citizens argued saying "we want asphalt instead of rock music", but the mayor replied this way: "the asphalt is about to come by the rock music". And so it was: he built up an infrastructure of the city based upon rock music by establishing a series of rock festivals. These festivals "brought the asphalt" for real and they founded many new jobs too. This study shows us that if you stick to your dreams they really do come true and everything becomes possible. It describes the pattern of becoming a hero as a leader and a media star, a person standing out for his or her beliefs.

There exist many kinds of celebrities, a fact that is proven by the next study. Dan Podjed's writing titled *Slovenian Bubble Celebrities: Establishing and Maintaining Celebrity Status on the Internet* gives us a parallel: it presents the stories of three "bubble celebrities" from Slovenia in parallel with the story of a star known worldwide. We can read what actually these bubble celebrities are and how they keep up their fame after their explosive appearance. The "bubble celebrity" word construction refers to the sudden appearance and disappearance of such celebrities. Just like bubbles, they rise up very fast in a very short period of time, but the decrease of their fame is even faster. Just like the bubbles, their fame

also explodes and gets forgotten very fast. They mostly publish autobiographies and try to have a lot of appearances in different TV shows. We can also read about how the online media affects them and what hazards does the Internet have for them. The Internet is the place of the easiest way to spread and promote you, but the Internet's blessings are also its curse because it can be used in the same way by other such celebrities too. Bubble celebrities, Internet and media seem to have a mutual fellowship or co-operation: Internet and media create these celebrities, but they also keep creating new ones; so, it can be said that the soil that gives life is also the soil that buries them. This sphere of celebrities needs continuous rejuvenation; this is why celebrity on Internet and media is so ephemeral.

This book gives the reader the opportunity to know how ordinary people become heroes, stars and celebrities; beside this, it teaches us what the differences are between these concepts. It is a very interesting and entertaining volume of essays; the reader has nothing else to do than to wonder about how many kinds of people can become heroes in how many strange places and circumstances. The role of the media, press and the Internet is obligatory in the process of creating heroes; the different interpretations and the dramatization of their uncommon deeds also contributes to the success of this process. Certain terms can have different interpretations in foreign cultures, which can also be an influential factor in creating heroes. The certain thing is that there are more kinds of heroes, stars and celebrities; they may have lots of followers and supporters although the support of the media is crucial. One of the main concepts of this book is that besides beliefs and devotion media is the only soil that one needs to become what we call today a hero, a celebrity or a star.















# Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

The scientific journal of Sapientia University publishes original papers and deep surveys in several areas of sciences written in English.

Information about the appropriate series can be found at the Internet address  
<http://www.acta.sapientia.ro>.

## Editor-in-Chief

László DÁVID

## Main Editorial Board

Zoltán A. BIRÓ  
Ágnes PETHŐ

Zoltán KÁSA

András KELEMEN  
Emőd VERESS

# Acta Universitatis Sapientiae Communicatio

## Executive Editor

József GAGYI (Sapientia University, Romania)

## Editorial Board

Petra ACZÉL (Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary)

Rozália Klára BAKÓ (Sapientia University, Romania)

Ioana CIONEA (University of Oklahoma, USA)

Mark DEUZE (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Frans van EEMEREN (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Otília FÜLÖP (Sapientia University, Romania)

István KÓSA (Sapientia University, Romania)

László ROPOLYI (Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest, Hungary)

Anca VELICU (Romanian Academy of Bucharest, Romania)

Hanna Orsolya VINCZE (Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, Romania)

Gyöngyvér TÓKÉS (Sapientia University, Romania)

## Assistant Editor

László Attila HUBBES (Sapientia University, Romania)



Sapientia University



Scientia Publishing House

ISSN 2393-0438

<http://www.acta.sapientia.ro>

# Information for authors

*Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Communicatio* is a peer-reviewed scientific journal published yearly. It aims at publishing theoretical and empirical research in communication studies, with a focus on information society issues. The journal is interested in all the variety of academic traditions in the field, and promotes dialogue between them. Communicatio invites academic researchers and other professionals of communication and media to disseminate new and original works. It publishes genuine, previously unpublished research: surveys, case studies, reports and reviews, on both applied and theoretical aspects of communication issues.

All submitted manuscripts are reviewed by two anonymous referees. Papers should be submitted in English, in A4 format, electronically (in .doc, .docx or .rtf format) to the e-mail address of the journal: [acta-comm@acta.sapientia.ro](mailto:acta-comm@acta.sapientia.ro)

Manuscripts should conform to the following guidelines:

Articles should range from 4,000 to 10,000 words, including footnotes and references. Reviews and research notes should not exceed 4000 words. All manuscripts should be accompanied by a 200-250 words abstract, with 3-5 key words and with authors' affiliation. Tables and graphs, if any, should be prepared in black and white, titled, numbered and integrated in the main text. References should follow the author-date system of the APA Manual of Style (<https://www.citethisforme.com/guides/apa>). The list of references should appear at the end of the manuscripts.

*Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Communicatio* is published once a year in November.

## **Contact address and subscription:**

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Communicatio  
RO 400112 Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
Str. Matei Corvin nr. 4.  
Email: [acta-comm@acta.sapientia.ro](mailto:acta-comm@acta.sapientia.ro)

**Printed by Gloria Printing House**

Director: Péter NAGY