

GENERATIONS X, Y, Z: HOW SOCIAL NETWORKS FORM THE CONCEPT OF THE WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS (THE CASE OF LITHUANIA)

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This article is based on sociological insight into the concept of up-to-date world without borders: technological impact and social networking. *Generations X, Y* and *Z* are discussed according to three categories: social, technological and historical environment. The survey results are provided representing the Lithuanian case. Six areas are analysed: 1) country of residence (a survey has been carried out among Lithuanians through social networks *Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn*, and *MySpace*); 2) age (generation) share; 3) number of social network connections (“friends”); 4) type of social network associates; 5) demand of physical meeting with social network associates; and 6) frequency of social networking. Out of 812 Lithuanians (social network users) who participated in a short survey the conclusion might be offered that they follow same digital trends and changes happening all over the world. Social networking may be part of every communication tool one uses; those tools in the very essence change how people interact with each other. In this case social networking loses categories of time and space providing the concept of the world without borders.

Keywords: *Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z*, generation, social network, world without borders.

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General concept of characteristics of generations: *Gen X, Y, Z*

A term *generation* first of all refers to classical meaning of the act of producing offspring. From the Latin *generāre* meaning *to beget*, a tentative guideline is linguistically set. A meaningful analogy of the word *generation* refers to stages of successive improvement in the development of technology, meaning the evolution in general. According to John Scott and Gordon Marshall (2005), a generation is a form of age-group consisting of those members of a society who were born at approximately the same time. Since World War II an idea of generation impact on social change has emerged.

Sociology refers to generation in the aspect of familial and cultural generation. It is important to distinguish those two generations due to different nature of the concept.

Familiar generation is defined as the average time between the first offspring of the mother and later of her daughter. The generation length in Western world is approximately 25 years. Handy talking about cultural generations which are cohorts of people who were born in the same date range and share similar cultural experience, have appeared in social grouping only in the 19th century. Prior generation referred to family relationship only. Emile Littré in 1863 defined generation as “all men living more or less at the same time” (Wohl 1979). The idea of French lexicographer Littré has developed a new concept of social grouping where biological age and producing offspring have gone to the second rate suggesting new concepts of modern sense of perceiving human age categories. According to Robert Wohl (1979), in the 19th century several trends promoted a new idea of generations, of a society divided into different categories of people based on age. These trends were all related to the process of modernisation, industrialisation, or westernisation, which had been changing the face of Europe since the mid-eighteenth century. Changing economic structure evoked rapid switch in mentality and personal values. People thought of themselves increasingly as part of a society, and this encouraged identification with groups beyond the local (Wohl 1979).

In the first half of the 19th century Auguste Comte was regarded as the first philosopher of science in the modern sense of the term (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2010). Although Comte was the first philosopher to make a serious attempt to study generations systematically, he suggested that social change was determined by generational change and in particular by conflict between successive generations (Jaeger 1977). The idea of “given age” was proposed and due to it the instinct of social conservation becomes stronger and causes falling into the conflict with the novelty which is an input of young generation.

José Ortega y Gasset was another influential generational theorist of the 20th century. He emphasized on sociology, based on science, rational ethics, and aesthetics. Ortega y Gasset developed the concept of generation both as a change and a task to be solved.

The term *generation* is a bind with conflict. Therefore the 20th century is rich in naming generations in accordance with social and historical events. For example, *The Lost Generation*, primarily known as *the Generation of 1914* in Europe, was that who fought in World War I (Wohl 1979). *The Greatest Generation* is the generation that includes the veterans who fought in World War II. They were born from around 1910 to the mid-1920s, coming of age during the Great Depression. *The Silent Generation* is the generation that includes those who were too young to join the service during World War II. *The Baby Boom Generation* is the generation that was born during World War II to about 1960, a time that was marked by an increase in birth rates. By the sheer force of its numbers, the boomers were a demographic bulge which remodelled society as it passed through it. Baby Boomers in their teenage and college years were characteristically part of the counterculture of the 1960s, the generation remained widely committed to keystone values such as gender equality, racial equality, and environmental stewardship (Strauss, Howe 1991).

The second half of the 20th century was challenging in the terms of both political environment and technological innovations. The term *Generation* went much more into social aspect rather than biological or medical. Three coming generations were a natural response to political, social, technological change. The Table 1 represents a short introduction to regimentation categories of three generations (hereafter *Gen*) which are used to determine a social, historical, technological, psychological environment change during the last fifty years in both the social sciences and popular culture.

Table 1. Categories of *Gen X*, *Y* and *Z* regimentation

<i>Gen</i>	Born	Social environment	Technological environment	Historical environment
<i>X</i>	From the early 1960s to 1974	Living at home, remaining without a family or children, delaying a full career longer than any generation before them	Seeing the inception of the home computer, the rise of videogames, and the Internet as a tool for social and commercial purposes	Formed by political experiences and cultural perspective of the fall of Berlin Wall, collapse of USSR, Yugoslavia
<i>Y</i>	1975–1989	Shaped by the events, leaders, developments and trends of its time	Technology communicators	Seen as the ultimate rejecters of the counterculture which began in the 1960s, more involved in technologies than everyday events
<i>Z</i>	From the mid-1990s to the late 2000s	Instant online, holding nicknames	Fully technology communicators	Social networking – world perceived without time and space limits

Generation X, those who were born after baby boomers, describes a demographic, social, cultural social group in the Western culture and refers to people born in the 1960s and 1970s. The term was given in 1964 by American and British researchers Charles Hamblett and Jane Deverson (1964) who have conducted a series of interviews with teenagers. Definitely conformist youth cultures (pros and cons racism, homosexual rights, Vietnam War; hippies) were defined by the term *Gen X*.

Generation X was formed by contradictions, fetish, political flows, e.g. the phrase was picked up as the name of a punk rock band featuring Billy Idol (Coupland 1989). The term *Generation X* was later popularized in 1991 after Douglas Coupland (1991) has published his novel spreading conformist ideas among Westerners. According to Coupland (1991), *Generation X* is a category of people who wanted to hop off the merry-go-round of status, money, and social climbing that so often frames modern

existence. *Generation X* matured seeing the inception of the home computer, the rise of videogames, and the Internet as a tool for social and commercial purposes.

The term **Generation Y** first appeared in 1993 (*Ad Age* editorial). The term was used to describe a separation from *Generation X*. Those born between 1974 and 1980s are the attributes of so-called *Generation Y* or *Echo Boomers* or *MTV Generation*. William Strauss and Neil Howe (1991) have offered their term – *Millennials* which means being not in association with *Generation X*. *Millennials* are also named *Generation Next* or *Net Generation*. Like other generations *Generation Y* was formed and shaped by the political, technological events, also trends and fashions of the time. The rise of new media, instant communication technologies, social networking has changed the classical meaning and understanding of communication, working and socializing habits. Computer and Internet technology made a huge impact on *Generation Y*, computer gaming, flash mobbing, Internet dating became a self-expression form re-warding classical forms and perception of socializing. *Generation Y* sometimes is also referred to *Peter Pan Generation* – those who do not want to grow up and stay home longer than their parents or grandparents did. The rise of Internet use and the culture attributes especially music and literature being unventilated have influenced the increasing demand for the pop culture products. It changed business models and also formed new approaches to supply and demand chains. *Gen Xers* were formed by technological stories such as famous *Napster* story when its inventor Shawn Fanning opened the world free media download opportunity. *Generation Y* is shaped by technological standing and inventions.

Generation Z, those who were born during the middle 1990s and late 2000s, is the generation of full technological users so-called “instant online”. Neologisms describing this group are proposed following the latest trends of technology development, i. e. *Generation I*, *The Internet Generation* or *Generation Next*, *Net Generation* or *iGeneration*. Strauss and Howe (1991) offer the term *The New Silent Generation*.

Mission and Ministry (2010) define *Generation Z* as world’s first 21st Century generation – the digital natives, the dot-com kids, *Generation Media*. According to them, *Generation Z* is differentiated from any other generation by 3 factors: 1) age and life stage (ontological factors); 2) times and technology (sociological factors); and 3) events and experiences (historical factors). *Gen Zers* are the youngest generation but are being parented by older parents (the median age of mother at birth of the 1st child is approaching 31) and taught by older teachers (the median age of a school teacher is 42) than ever before. They are the up-ageing generation. They are growing up faster. They are in education earlier. They are being exposed to marketing younger. This internet-savvy, technologically literate generation has been shaped to multi-task. They move quickly from one task to another placing more value on speed than accuracy. They have only known this wireless, hyperlinked, user-generated world where they are always only a few clicks from any piece of knowledge (Mission and Ministry 2010). Surely *Generation Z* is entirely digital and their communication and social interaction habits turn to be digital as well.

Social networks: emerging borders

Since the first social network launched 13 years ago sites have attracted millions of users. Social networks might be defined as social network sites 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 and those made by others within the system (Boyd, Ellison 2007). The first social network was launched in 1997 and is known as *SixDegrees*. The site was running till 2001 and then went offline. *SixDegrees* allowed its users to list friends, family and fellows both on the site and externally, later external contacts were invited to join the site. Starting from this example, other social networks were launched. One of the most popular ones – *Facebook* – was launched in 2004 at Harvard University. *Facebook* has grown to more than 450 million users in 170 countries over the world in 2010. According to David DiSalvo (2010), Nielsen Online reports that the 70 million *Facebook* members in the U.S. spent 233 million hours on the site in April 2009, up to 28 million hours by 23 million members the previous April – a 175 percent increase in per capita usage. <...> Although adolescents and college students constitute about 40 percent of social-networking users, according to *iStrategyLabs*, the fastest-growing segments on *Facebook* are *Gen Xers* nearing the age of 40 and *baby boomers* pushing 60. According to Manuel Castells (1998), “A culture of real virtuality, constructed around an increasingly interactive audiovisual universe, has permeated mental representation and communication everywhere, integrating the diversity of cultures in an electronic hypertext”. Today *Facebook* is used in all continents, including Antarctica. It allows people to have friends, mutual friends; also family members, relation status, personal information might be fully or partially published. The platform of the social network is based on automatic search – while finding and becoming friends there appear proposals to gain more mutual friends. Which means friendship network becomes off limits. “It is not surprising, then, that the social networkers who are best are the ones who use the technology to support their friendship. In a 2007 study of older adults <...> found that using social networks diminishes loneliness when online social contacts are also offline contacts” (DiSalvo 2010). Signing in to social networks requires some personal data to be filled in. It means one’s personal profile becomes not so used as anonymous but very personalized data presented to other members of the same social network. According to DiSalvo (2010), “as social networks proliferate, they are changing the way people think about the Internet, from a tool used in solitary anonymity to a medium that touches on questions about human nature and identity: who we are, how we feel about ourselves, and how we act toward one another”. Social networks open mind, doors, borders, and allow sharing personal information, feelings, news, actions, professional activities, etc. Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison (2007) indicate that “some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as

mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo or video-sharing”. Most of social networks serve in English and main world languages, some of them are homegrown and formed by language and culture factors. For example in China the strongest social network is *Baidu Space* uniting over 60 million Chinese speakers. The social network is not offered in any other language and is very specific to national and cultural attributes. Russia has its developed social networks as *Vkontakte* uniting over 70 million users. The social network is one of the most popular in Europe according to the number of signed-in users, page views. It is the leading social network site among people of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus.

The figure bellow represents world’s most popular social networks and more than 830 million users of World Wide Web friends (adapted from Uberti, Henriquez 2010).

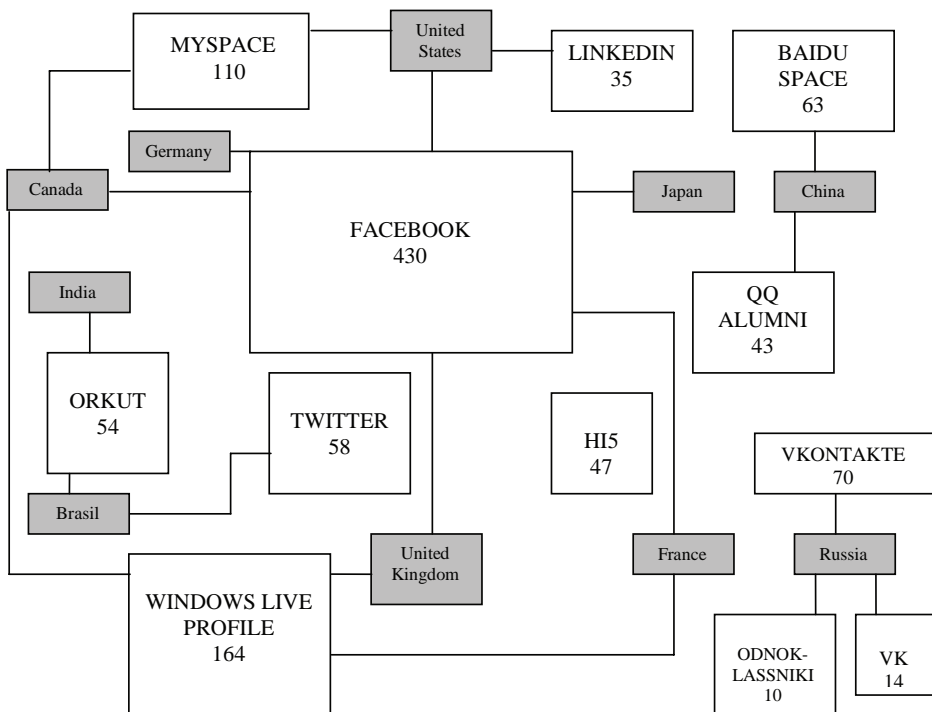


Fig. 1. Visitors of social networks via home and office computers in October 2009 (million users) (adapted from Uberti, Henriquez 2010)

Fig. 1 shows how social networking is shared by users and countries all over the world. China has roughly 50 million *QQ Alumni* and 60 million *Baidu Space* connections. Although these social networks are not popular in Europe, America or Russia they have over billion world users. CIS countries, especially Russia, have developed their own social networks used for private and business needs. Russian social

networks as *Odnoklassniki*, *Vkontakte*, *VK* have over 50 million connections. Among the United States users three most popular are *LinkedIn*, *Myspace* and *Facebook*. European countries such as France and the United Kingdom, Germany have most connections to *Facebook*, *Windows Live Profile*. *Facebook's* use among Indians is constantly growing. The presented data shows that in recent few years social networks have covered almost one sixth of the World population and social networking trends are strongly impacted by technological and media development. New versions of mobile phone *Facebook* or *Twitter* are launched giving the chance to socialize anytime one is dealing with any type of Internet device.

In 2007 Reynol Junco and Jeanna Mastrodicasa (2007) have conducted unique research on net generation college students. The research presented results of almost 8000 surveys. The unique research represents how students use technology to build social networks and communicate with each other. The survey was called *Net Generation Survey*. Surprisingly 97% of respondents own a computer and spend at least 3,5 hours a day being online. The survey was based on *Generation X* aged college students. Later, in 2009 Nicholas Deleon (2009) has announced that teens (*Generation Z*) spend approximately 5 hours a day being online. This research was conducted by *Cybersentinel* which provides software solutions allowing parents to block access to certain sites.

Following the idea of increasing hours of staying online and *Gen Z's* approach, few examples are provided confirming the idea of global world concept intensification and territory concept fail. For example, *Gen Z Global Stage* new pilot program is an effort to cultivate a web dialogue among young artists across the globe, and to facilitate artistic collaboration using digital technology. The web-based exchange has culminated in a multimedia theatrical piece on April 26, 2010. Another example is that social networks' as *Skype*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, etc. active user rate is constantly growing and mostly used as the main channel of online communication also serving for news, sales, free downloads, dates and other social wants. DiSalvo (2010) says, what once seemed a faddish online application is on its way to global ubiquity. Before long, social networking may be part of every communication tool we use – changing how we interact with one another, and in the process, changing us. In this case social networking loses categories of time and space providing the concept of the world without borders.

Lithuanian case: social networking among *Generation X, Y* and *Z*

In the spring of 2010 a survey was conducted among over 800 social network users in Lithuania. Six main problematic areas were analysed: 1) country of residence (the survey was carried out among Lithuanians through social networks *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn*, and *MySpace*); 2) age (generation) share; 3) number of social network connections (“friends”); 4) type of social network associates; 5) demand for physical meeting with social network associates; and 6) frequency of social networking.

812 social networks users participated in short survey. Figures bellow represent results of the survey and give an idea how different is the understanding of Internet associates between *Generations X, Y and Z*.

Fig. 2 represents country of residence although all respondents called themselves Lithuanians. Survey was distributed among Lithuanians through social networks *Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and MySpace*. Out of 812 respondents 640 reside in Lithuania, 69 in Great Britain, 58 in Ireland, 25 in USA, 5 in Denmark, 4 both in France and Poland, 2 in Norway, same in Spain and Germany, 1 in Finland.

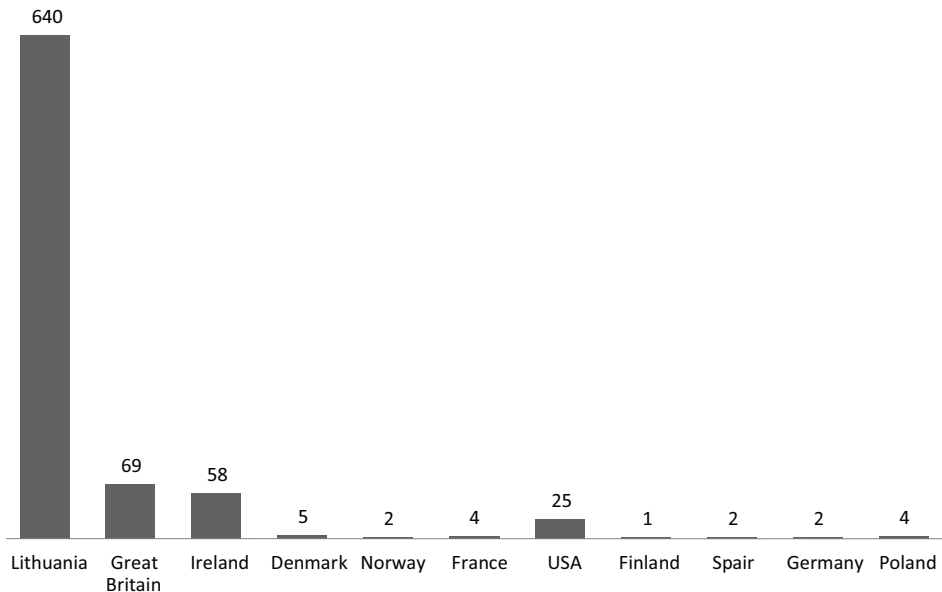


Fig. 2. Country of residence, N = 812

Fig. 3 represents share of respondents in terms of belonging to one or another generation. As the generation is more social than date matter, bracket information was proposed to make the respondents follow the idea of epoch they represent. Most of respondents – 456 out of 812 – subsumed themselves under *Generation Y* (born in 1975–1989). Among respondents 131 indicated themselves being representatives of *Generation X* (born 1960–1974) and 225 – of *Generation Z* (born 1990–2010).

Fig. 4 shows us how many Internet connections via social networks each generation representatives have. These connections in different social networks are called differently, e. g. friends, associates, contacts, profiles, etc. Most of *Gen Zers* and *Gen Y's* have more than 201 associates over social networks. Most of *Gen Xers* have 4 times less – 51 up to 100 social network connections.

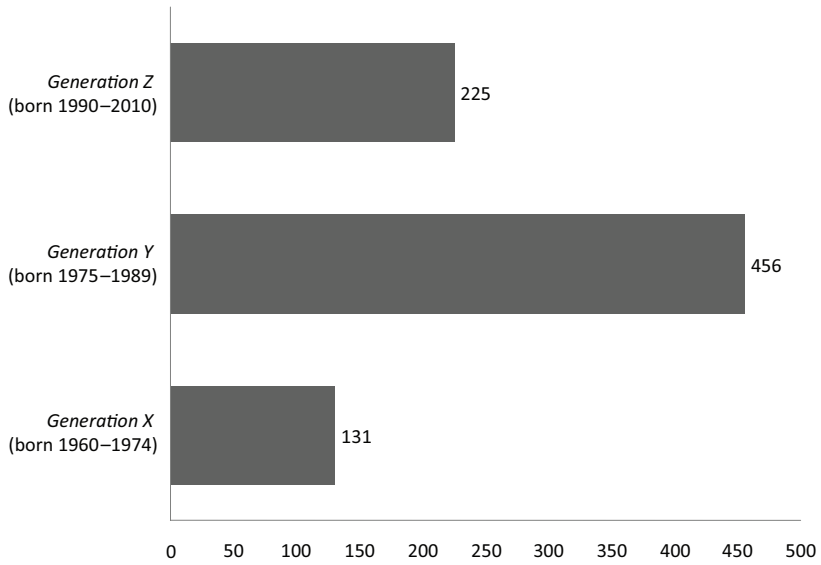


Fig. 3. Age (generation) share, N = 812

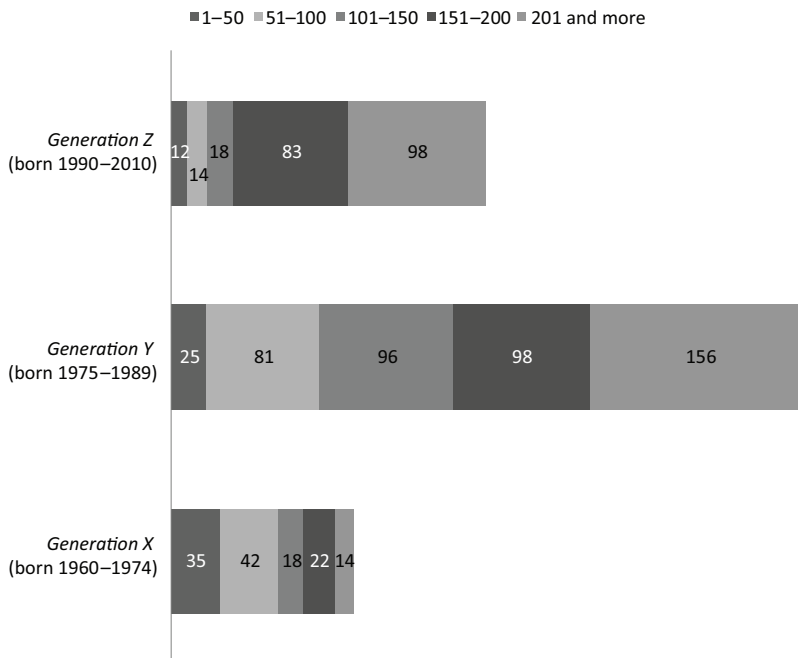


Fig. 4. Number of social network connections (“friends”), N = 812

Fig. 5 represents ranking of type of social network associates when 1 is very important and 6 is least important. Here some insights might be discussed: *Gen Xers* indicate “family members” as number 1, handy *Gen Y's* and *Gen Zers* “family members” are labelled as close to least and least important, accordingly 5 and 6. It is interesting that celebrities (who are usually never friends in real life) still play a role among Internet associates, being in connection via social networks with celebrities was ranked 5 among *Gen Xers* and *Gen Zers*, and 4 among *Gen Y's*. Foreign friends are quite important among *Gen Y's* and was ranked 2, the same category was ranked 4 among *Gen Xers* and *Gen Zers*. Still, friends in real life play the greatest role among Internet associates: *Gen Y's* and *Gen Zers* have ranked friends as very important (1) and *Gen Xers* as important (2).

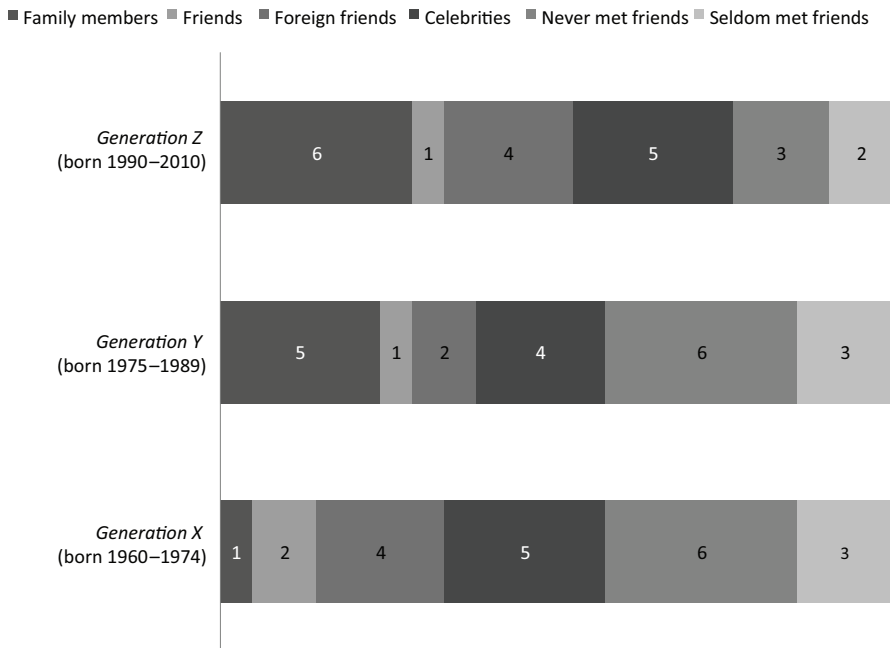


Fig. 5. Ranking of type of social network associates, N = 812

Fig. 6 is providing details of demand for physical meeting with social network associates. Here thinking directions vary as follows: *Gen Xers* think that physical meeting with Internet associates would be interesting and very important; most of *Gen Y's* do not feel any difference if they physically meet Internet associates or not, also for them social networking is enough for keeping connection with associates. Handy *Gen Zers* mostly agree that social networking is enough for relation with Internet associates, which means there is the least demand for physical meetings.

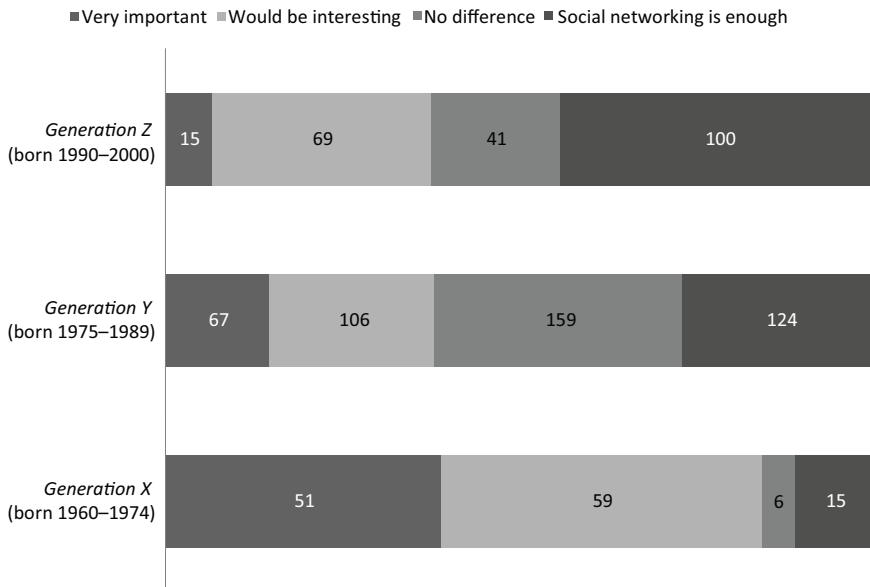


Fig. 6. Demand for physical meeting with social network associates, N = 812

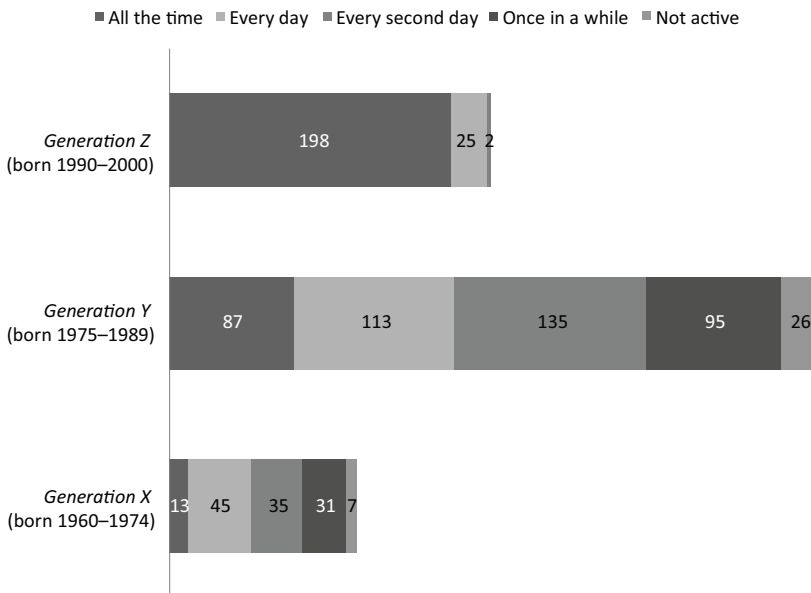


Fig. 7. Frequency of social networking, N = 812

The last Fig. 7 represents frequency of social networking between *Generations X, Y and Z*. Most of *Gen Xers* and *Gen Y's* are social network users every day or every second day. *Gen Zers* mostly are social networking all the time. An assumption might be made that these are instant online and using different Internet access devices. None of *Gen Zers* have indicated social networking as “once in a while” or “not active”.

Resuming the survey some insights might be concluded: comparing *Generations X, Y and Z* the last ones can be described as instant online, brave and adventurous in Internet communication, technology users, least demanding for physical meeting with Internet associates, having friends abroad and not caring much of meeting them live. Quite the opposite, *Gen Y's* are more conservative in adventurous association via social networks, preferring live (physical) meeting, giving priority to family members and real friends while they have them among Internet associates. *Gen Xers* are in transition to sharing totally the Internet and real associates, having “no difference” apathetic attitude to meeting or not their Internet associates.

Conclusions

Characteristics of the generation vary by cultural, regional, social environment. During recent fifty years characteristics of generation is most impacted by technological development, Internet use, changes in media and communication. The main categories describing differences in the discussed *Generations X, Y and Z* are: social environment, technological environment and historical environment. Here we come to a kind of generationism concept providing with an idea of belief that the contemporary generation is superior to previous. A change in communication and interaction habits is validated by the survey conducted via social networks. Out of 812 Lithuanians (social network users) who participated in a short survey the conclusion might be offered that they follow the same digital trends and changes happening all over the world. Social networking may be part of every communication tool one uses; those tools in the very essence change how people interact with each other. In this case social networking loses categories of time and space providing the concept of the world without borders.

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Y, X, Z KARTOS: PASAULIO BE SIENŲ IDĖJOS FORMAVIMAS NAUDOJANTIS SOCIALINIAIS TINKLAIS (LIETUVOS ATVEJIS)

Rasa Levickaitė

Santrauka

Straipsnyje remiamasi sociologinėmis išvalgomis, kaip socialiniai tinklai šiaudien padeda formuoti pasaulio be sienų idėją. Straipsnyje aptariamos paskutinių penkiasdešimties metų X, Y ir Z kartos trimis aspektais: remiantis socialine, technologine ir istorine aplinka. Pateikiami tyrimo, atlikto Lietuvoje 2010 m., naudojant socialinius tinklus, rezultatai. Tyrimo metu aiškintasi šešios sritys: 1) gyvenamoji šalis (visi tyrime dalyvavę respondentai buvo lietuviai, klausimynas buvo platinamas per socialinius tinklus *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn* ir *MySpace*); 2) pasiskirstymas pagal amžių; 3) kontaktų skaičius socialiniuose tinkluose; 4) kontaktų tipas socialiniuose tinkluose; 5) fizinio susitikimo poreikis su socialinių tinklų dalyviais; 6) dalyvavimo socialiniuose tinkluose dažnis. Iš 812 lietuvių, socialinių tinklų vartotojų, atsakymų matoma, kad Lietuvoje vyrauja pasaulio socialinių tinklų tendencijos, vyksta komunikacijos ir medijų pokyčiai. Socialiniai tinklai gali būti žmonių naudojamos komunikacijos priemonių dalis, kurios iš esmės keičia žmonių bendravimo įpročius. Remiantis

tiriamuoju atveju, darytina išvada, kad buvimas socialinių tinklų dalyviu (vartotoju) suteikia visuomenei pasaulio be sienų idėją mažinant laiko ir erdvės kategorijų įtaką.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: X karta, Y karta, Z karta, pasaulis be sienų, socialiniai tinklai.

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