

GENERATION Z AND THEIR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract

In the ever-changing 21st century, a new generation has emerged that is ready to change the way we see and interact with others. The aim of this article is to observe the intricacies and complexities of Generation Z's personal relationships. To study this particular generation in more detail, we conducted a quantitative study, a survey to be precise, and the results were interesting. We were able to observe how much value these people place on their personal relationships, how they maintain them, how they engage with each other and how important these relationships are to them personally. Personal connections were highly valued by the majority of participants and had a major impact on their lives. Most of them enjoy meaningful relationships and are satisfied with their circumstances. Despite the fact that this generation is chronically online, it seems to be much easier for most of them to build relationships offline, face-to-face. The ability to express ourselves better in person, the fact that we are social creatures, and the fact that real friendships can form and last much longer are just some of the reasons why some people find it easier to build relationships offline.

Keywords: Gen Z, personal relationships, quantitative research, survey, offline and online interactions, social dynamics

JEL Classification: J11, I31

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1. Introduction

Our world is developing from day to day and makes us marvel at what mankind is capable of. Alongside these new technologies that are developing around us, our own relationships have also changed incredibly since the beginning of time. At our core, we are social beings who thrive on human communication, and the need to socialise is amplified by the desire to be part of something, to connect with other people and build meaningful relationships. There are two types of relationships: personal, which relate to family, friends, romantic partners and others, and professional or business, which can develop at work or in more formal circumstances. These types of relationships have long been studied because each of them has certain effects on our well-being, our social standing and even our health.

The aim of this article is to observe the intricacies and complexities of personal relationships, particularly those of Generation Z (also known as Gen Z). In the ever-changing 21st century, a new generation has emerged ready to change the way we see and interact with others. Gen Z refers to the group of people born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2000s (Singh and Dangmei, 2016). Generation Z has grown up in a society that is very different from that of their ancestors. It is characterised by technological progress, changing social dynamics and easy and quick access to information (Bulut and Maraba, 2021). Due to the unique environment that shapes both their personal and professional interactions, academics, researchers and society at large are compelled to examine and understand the nuances of these individuals' relationship experiences.

The study of Generation Z relationships is of paramount importance as it provides invaluable information about the dynamics, difficulties and opportunities that characterise their interpersonal interactions on both a personal and professional level. Generation Z is the first generation to have grown up entirely in the digital age. They are used to navigating the overwhelming digital environment and are adept at using social media and online platforms to communicate with others. They are digital natives (Singh and Dangmei, 2016). The landscape of business and professional contacts has changed due to these digital technologies, which have also changed the way Gen Z builds and maintains personal relationships.

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Gen Z also places more value on sincerity, acceptance and diversity (McAllister, 2022). Having grown up in a time of cultural diversity, they are more accepting and understanding of others' feelings. They seek connections that share their own unique values and views and value partnerships that are open-minded. They are outspoken and not afraid to speak their mind or expose wrong ideas and perceptions.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

This section is about a generation that is questioning accepted beliefs, defying traditional rules and leading cultural change. This generation is known as Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s. This generation is a colourful and diverse mix of people shaped by the rapid development of technology, changing global dynamics and a very complicated environment.

2.1 Description of Generation Z

Singh and Dangmei (2016) explain in their study that Generation Z is defined as the generations born between the 1990s and the 2000s who live in a world where they have instant access to the internet, smartphones, laptops, open-access networks and digital media. These generations experienced the most significant changes of the century during this period. The social web was part of Generation Z's upbringing, and the digital world is important to their identity and lifestyle. The terms Generation I, Gen Tech, Digital Natives, Gen Wii, etc. are also used to describe them. Their existence is more closely linked to technology and the digital world than that of any previous generation, as they were born and raised in this world. Generation Z is the most technologically advanced and racially diverse generation to date. Social networks are a crucial key to Generation Z's existence and they have a casual, direct and distinct communication style that is extremely different to what we have faced in the past. They are a generation that values DIY (Do It Yourself). According to a study by Dan Schawbel (2014), Generation Z is less driven by money than Generation Y and is more entrepreneurial, trustworthy, tolerant and open-minded. What is admirable about Generation Z is that they have a strong sense of responsibility towards the environment and are particularly concerned about environmental issues.

Harber (2011) focused on the study of Gen Z and discovered that compared to people of other generations, members of Generation Z do not have great interpersonal skills and are poor listeners. Many people communicate with each other by using various apps and social media platforms. Due to their passion for technology, they are always found in areas that have access to the internet. The interpersonal skills of the latest generation, Gen Z, differ from those of other generations due to their constant use of technology. At this age, interpersonal skills are not yet very developed. They are unable to hold a meaningful long conversation and find it difficult to empathise with the feelings of others.

With technology dominating society, Harber (2011) found that Generation Z is sometimes referred to as the "silent" generation. They view social media platforms such as Facebook as their personal community and take the internet for granted. In this online community, you can get to know many people without ever meeting them in person. As members of the "silent generation," they shy away from personal encounters with friends that could develop into romantic partnerships. In their eyes, their personal space is violated by others. They enjoy discussing and exchanging ideas with other members of Generation Z. It is easier for them to work internationally as they accept diversity in terms of culture, religion, race and ethnicity earlier than previous generations. Companies need to recognise and take advantage of Generation Z's global perspective. They also get along easily with people from all over the world (Chillakuri and Mahanandia, 2018).

They do not differentiate between friends they make online and those they meet in person. They move back and forth between groups that support their goals by utilising the extensive mobility that technology enables. Online communities are valued by Gen Z because they allow people from all socioeconomic backgrounds to interact with each other and unite over causes and interests. According to a study by Francis and Hoefel (2018), 66% of Gen Z respondents form communities based on shared interests and concerns rather than socioeconomic status or education level. Fifty-two percent of Generation Z members believe that it is normal to be a member of many groups and that it is not a problem to move between organisations.

Having grown up with high-speed internet and a willingness to share personal information on social media, Gen Z is known for interacting with their friends online. Generation Z often takes leadership

positions in both social media and business and thrives in the world of online connections. Social media is becoming increasingly important as technology evolves in today's society. However, this connection also extends to the way they interact with management. It may seem that their engagement with technology would make it difficult for them to maintain a close relationship with upper management, but the opposite is true (Western Governors University, 2021).

2.2 Balancing personal and business relationships

As Turner (2015) notes, society has become used to being connected on an individual level rather than being socially rooted in groups, as technology serves as a facilitator for people's relationships. Face-to-face socialising was once seen as complementary to online relationships, but as society has evolved, face-to-face conversations have been seen as unrealistic. The social presence and social context of these mediated conversations could diminish with the increase in social media exchanges. The social interest of Generation Z, who are no longer taught the art of conversation, could suffer and a lack of face-to-face interaction could affect their ability to develop interpersonal skills. Around half of Gen Z consider themselves to be more sociable than previous generations, and in some ways this is true - as they are constantly connected to their social networks, they socialise more frequently than previous generations. They use technology and apps to support their social needs and relationships, and consider the time they spend online with friends to be almost as important as the time they spend in person. However, their virtually uninterrupted relationship with friends and family appears to be markedly different from that of a teenager in the early 2000s. According to a study by We Are Family (2022), eating out was the most common on-site social activity, while gaming was the second most popular online activity.

According to Tulgan (2013), Generation Z represents the biggest generational shift the labour market has ever seen. Every sector of the workforce will face significant difficulties from Generation Z, including managers, supervisors, HR professionals and educators. They have both grown up far too fast and yet never did. They are aware of everything from an alarmingly young age and have unprecedented access to knowledge, concepts, images and sounds. But they are also marginalised and regimented in a way that young people have never been. Their natural habitat is characterised by a high degree of inactivity, but also by constant connection and communication. They are used to feeling mature and precocious (they are quite active in an internet-based peer environment) and to receiving at least some guidance and protection from their family members, educators and therapists. Interactions between people are now more important than ever. From Gen Y to Gen Z, there has been a huge increase in very involved parenting, teaching and counselling for teens. Zers are less inclined than Gen Yers to reject authority relationships, but they will only work with others if they have close professional relationships.

WLB (short for work-life balance) is the harmony of work and various facets of life. If a person can create a balance between their responsibilities at work and at home, WLB is present. Flexible work hours and schedules, family leave, employee support programmes, therapy sessions and childcare services are just a few examples of WLB practises. Work-related stress is a problem that affects a person's psyche and physiology and is caused by characteristics of work such as role complexity, increasing effort and role conflict. There is no doubt that high work intensity or workload can exacerbate fatigue and anxiety and also affect the quality of personal life. A poor work-life balance makes it difficult to build and maintain a positive work environment, which increases stress levels, reduces productivity and decreases employee loyalty (Hendriana et al., 2023).

All employees want similar things: more flexibility and a better work-life balance. However, as the workforce gets younger, these desires are becoming more audacious. Millennials feel the need to request a day off for mental health, but would they actually take it? Baby boomers wouldn't even consider requesting a mental health day off. Gen Z workers simply do. This generation places a high value on their personal time and wants to have a job that allows them to live a fulfilling life. When Millennials, often referred to as "Gen Y" and born roughly between 1981 and 1994 (Western Governors University, 2021), first entered the workforce, this factor was also very important, but the Great Recession caused them to value job stability even more (Deskbird, n.d.).

For Gen Z, diversity and inclusion are very important. They also expect their employer to maintain high ethical standards and openness, and to care about the environment. They want a genuine commitment

to climate change mitigation and environmental protection, not greenwashing. They are looking for companies that are truly sustainable, both to work for and to buy from (McAllister, 2022).

3. Research methodology

The type of research carried out is quantitative. The observation of events that have an impact on the sample population - a specific group of people - requires the use of quantitative research tools. In this type of study, different types of numerical data are collected using a variety of techniques and then statistical analyses are performed to aggregate, compare or reveal relationships between the data. Questionnaires, organised observations and experiments are all examples of quantitative research methods (Sreekumar, 2023).

The data collected is primary data, which is knowledge gained through first-hand observation. The quantitative method used was a survey designed by the author. I chose it because it is a very good way to get a lot of information from individuals quickly and/or easily. The advantages are numerous: people can participate anonymously, it is affordable to conduct, and it is easy to compare and analyse (Wagh, 2022).

The survey was conducted mainly in Romania, with a few participants from other countries, 105 in total, and was created using Google Forms and distributed via social media platforms such as Instagram and messaging apps such as Whatsapp. It consists of a total of 21 questions, 4 of which are filter questions. Most of them are multiple choice questions and Likert scales from 1 to 5. There is also one open-ended question which was optional and where participants could write short answers to a question. Before starting the questionnaire, there is a short description of who the author is and what the aim is. It also emphasises the voluntary nature of participation and the confidentiality of participants' responses. Throughout the study process, the confidentiality and anonymity of participants is carefully maintained and all identifying information is removed from the data when analysed and reported. A definition of Gen Z is also provided at the end of the introduction so as not to confuse participants and to make them aware of its meaning.

As the study also focuses on professional/business relationships as they arise in the workplace, the study has been divided into 3 sections. The first section is aimed at all participants as it contains questions about their personal relationships, how important these are to them and also to assess the quality of these relationships. The second section, which was optional, is aimed at those who are currently working or have previously had a job. The last section, the third, consists of basic questions that you will find in every questionnaire, about age, gender, place of residence and income.

4. Results and discussions

In this section, the participants' responses are analysed and give us an insight into how Gen Z perceives their relationships.

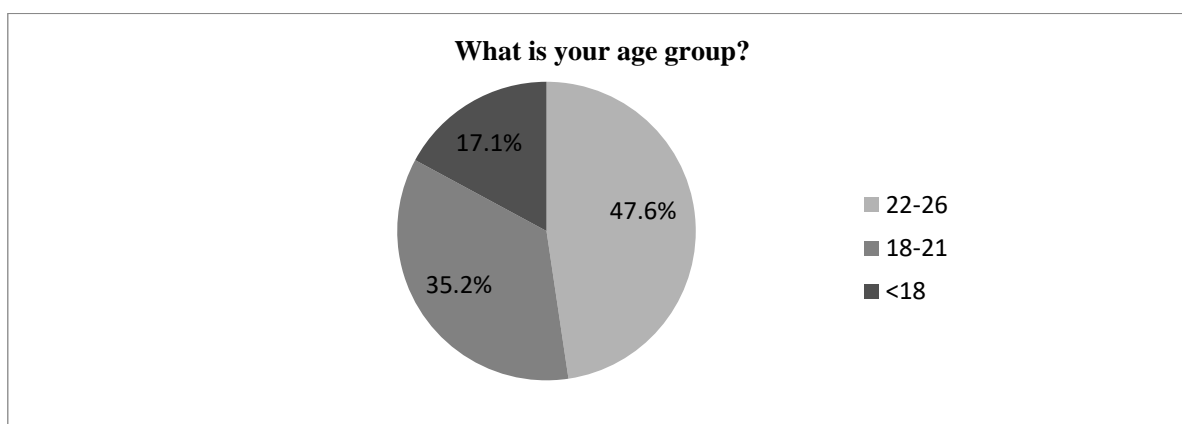


Figure 1. The age group of the respondents

Source: Author's own research

The survey begins with a filter question about the age group of the participants, which you can see in Figure 1. It was placed first because the study is ultimately focussed on one generation, so age is an

essential aspect. The generation known as Generation Z was formed between 1997 and 2012. The oldest members of this generation are now 26 years old, have completed their studies and many are starting to settle down or start families. The youngest members are still in school and preparing for their teenage years. According to the survey, 47.6% of participants are between the ages of 22 and 26. This is also the highest percentage among the age groups. 35.2% of the participants are between 18 and 21 years old. And finally, 17.1% of the participants are under 18 years old. From this we can see that the predominant age category is 22-26 years old, i.e. the oldest members of the generation.

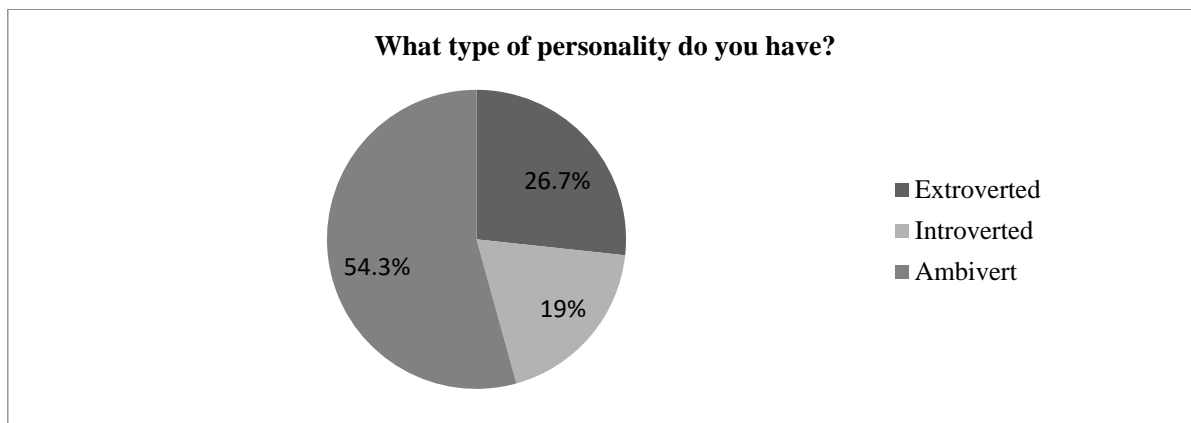


Figure 2. Type of personality
 Source: Author's own research

The second question is about the personality type of the respondents. The results can be seen in Figure 2. This is important to know because each personality type has some characteristic traits that affect their relationships with others and how they are perceived in a social context. Respondents had three options to choose from: extroverted, introverted and ambivert.

Interacting with other people energises extroverts. Extroverts often find satisfaction in interacting with others. They usually have a high level of social confidence and an overall high self-esteem. Others typically describe them as outgoing, lively and approachable. The world around them is less important to introverts than their own thoughts and ideas. They prefer to spend time with one or two people rather than large crowds or groups.

People who are ambivert exhibit characteristics of both extroversion and introversion and can switch between the two depending on their mood, the situation and their goals. The results are surprising: more than half of the participants are ambivert, 54.3% to be exact. 26.7% are extroverted and the least of them are introverted, 19%.

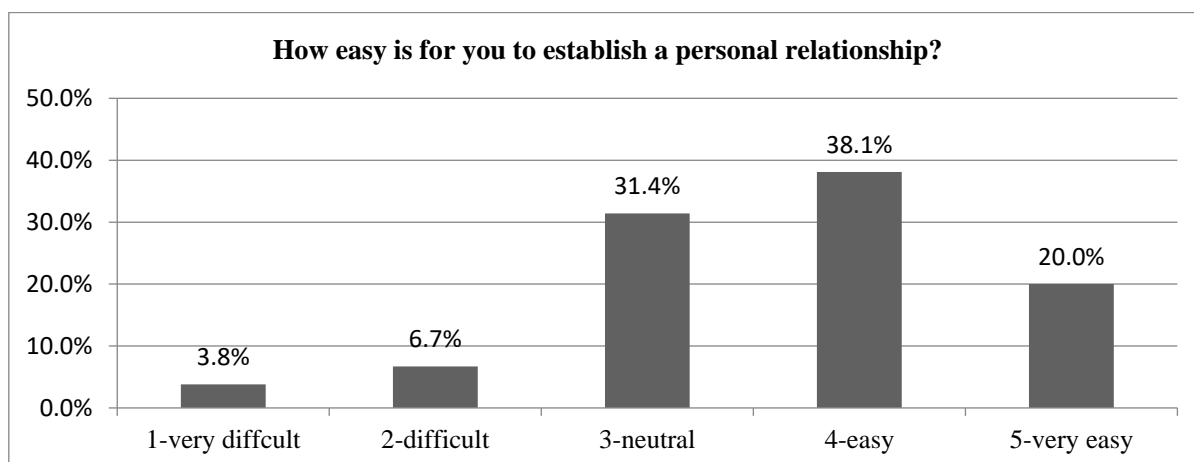


Figure 3. The ease of establishing personal relationships on a scale from 1 to 5
 Source: Author's own research

The third question is: “How easy is it for you to build a personal relationship?”. According to Figure 3, 3.8% of the respondents answered that it is very difficult for them, 6.7% answered that it is difficult,

31.4% are neutral, for 38.1% it is easy and finally for 20% it is very easy. From the results we can conclude that it is quite easy for most of them to establish a personal relationship with others without feeling this as a burden. This also shows that they are friendly and open to meeting new people.

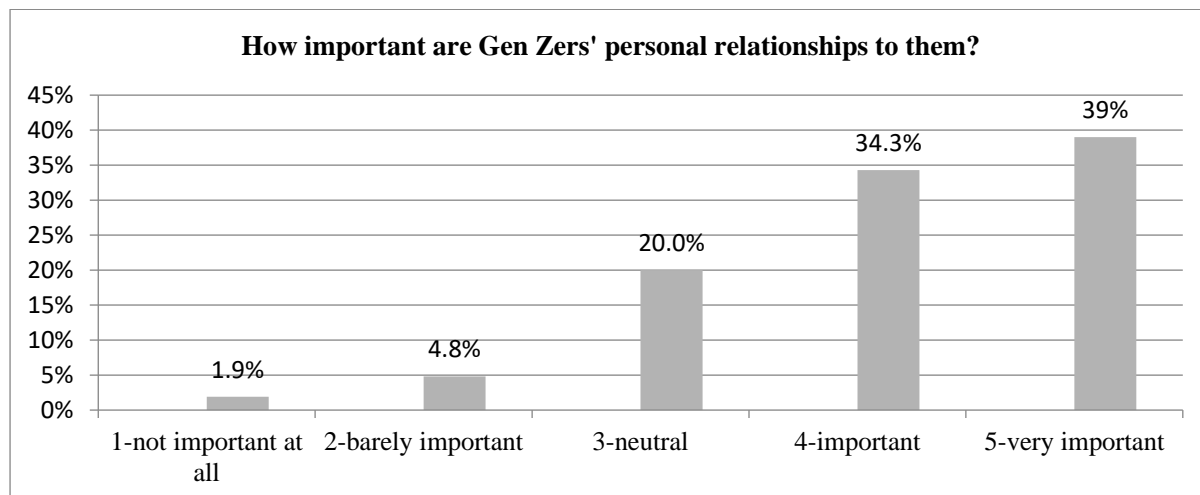


Figure 4. The importance of personal relationships to Gen Z on a scale from 1 to 5
 Source: Author's own research

The fourth question is: “How important are personal relationships to the Gen Zers”. According to Figure 4, 1.9% of respondents answered that they do not consider their personal relationships to be important at all. For 4.8% of respondents, these relationships are hardly important. 20% are neutral. 34.3% think that personal relationships are important to them. Finally, 39% responded that these types of relationships are very important to them. Based on these answers, we can see that the majority of respondents attach great importance to personal relationships, which play an important role in their lives.

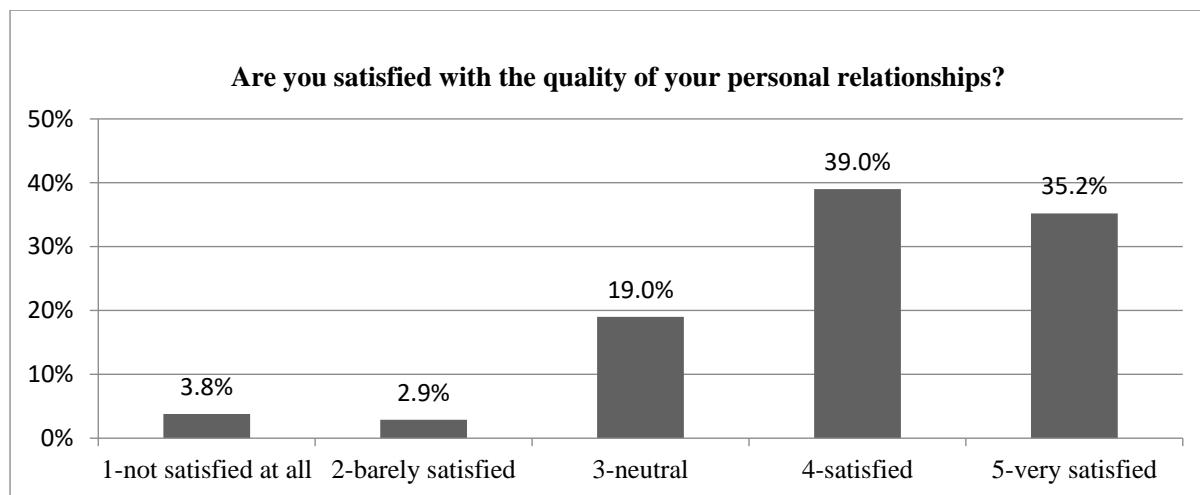


Figure 5. The quality of personal relationships on a scale from 1 to 5
 Source: Author's own research

The fifth question is: “Are you satisfied with the quality of your personal relationships?”. As Figure 5 shows, 3.8% answered that they are not at all satisfied with the quality. 2.9% are barely satisfied. 19% are neutral. Most of the respondents, 39%, are satisfied. 35.2% are very satisfied, which corresponds to the previous percentage. The results show us that most of them have quality relationships and are satisfied with their situation. From this we can also conclude that those who attach great importance to personal relationships know how to maintain them, sustain them and have valuable relationships overall.

The sixth question is: “Have technology and social media had an impact on your personal relationships?” The results, shown in Figure 6, are not surprising considering we have just experienced

a pandemic and people have had to transition to an online environment for almost 2 years, both at school and at work.

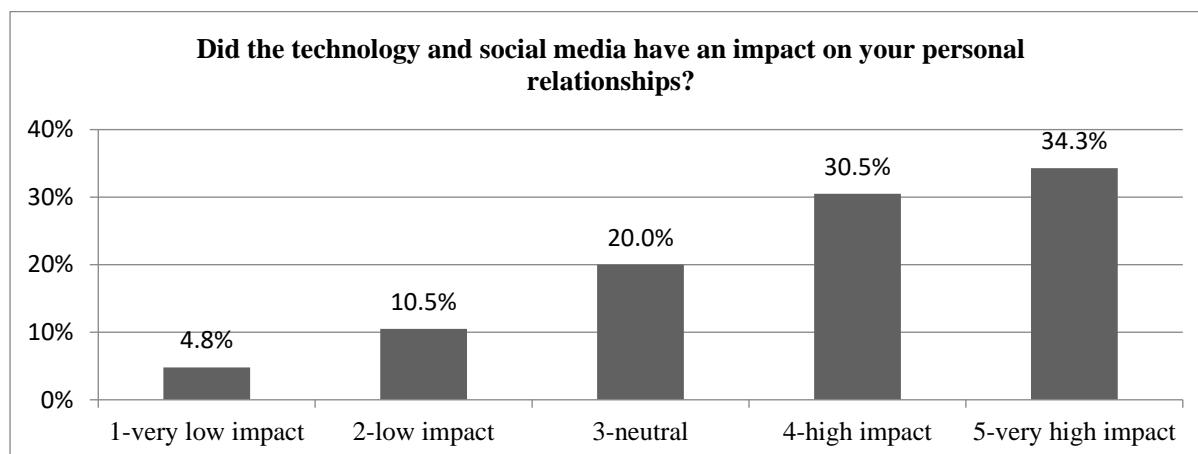


Figure 6. The impact of technology and social media on personal relationships

Source: Author's own research

We have all had to adapt to this situation, whether we like it or not. What's more, Generation Z has grown up constantly around and with technologies that were not available to previous generations, which means they have become more acclimatised to the online environment. Most of the respondents, 34.3%, answered that technology and social media had a very big impact on their personal relationships. 30.5% think that technology and social media had a great influence. 20% are neutral. For 10.5% the influence is low and for 4.8% it is very low. From these results, we can conclude that the majority have indeed been strongly influenced by technology and social media.

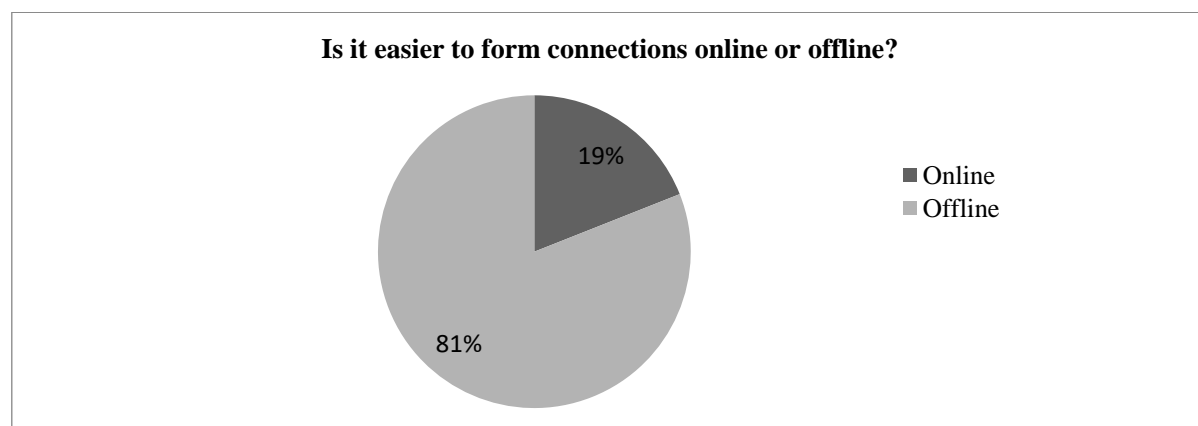


Figure 7. The easiest way to form connections

Source: Author's own research

The seventh question is whether it is easier to socialise online or offline. The results, which can be seen in Figure 7, are not as expected, with 81% of respondents favouring offline over 19% who are online. Although this generation is constantly connected to the internet, always on their phones and can find anything they are looking for with one click, it seems to be much easier for most of them to build relationships offline, face to face. The following question relates to this issue. It is an open question where respondents are asked to justify their choice in a short sentence if they wish. The answers they gave are quite interesting. Some of the reasons why it is easier for some to build relationships offline are: They can express themselves better face-to-face; *"since we are social beings, offline interactions are beneficial in many ways"*; *"real connections can be developed and last way longer"*. Many of the participants also mentioned that body language and facial expressions are important for expressing feelings and that these can only be conveyed face to face. This type of interaction requires a dialogue. Therefore, it is easier to find out whether there are common interests between the dialogue partners by looking at gestures, reactions and the intonation of the voice. One person answered that *"Face-to-face interactions give me the opportunity to connect with that person on multiple existential planes (physical,*

emotional, intellectual, and spiritual)”. Other answered that they prefer offline because “*they can feel the energy of the person right beside them and they can also communicate with them in a non-verbal way*”. Moving on to those who prefer the online medium, the main motive was that they have social anxiety, hence feeling more comfortable expressing themselves online. They can also “*think more about their answers and what they want to communicate*”. It's also a great way to meet people who have common interests, in games or special online groups. One answer that most ambiverts in the world can probably identify with is that it's easier to connect online. However, as things get more comfortable and you get to know the person better, it's more fun to connect offline.

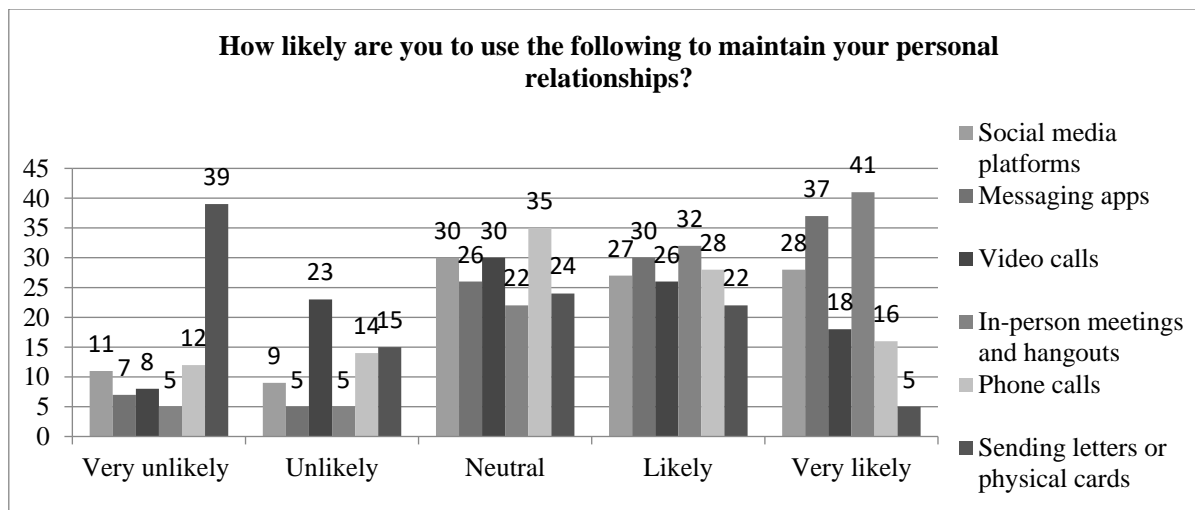


Figure 8. Methods of maintaining personal relationships

Source: Author's own research

The next question is about how likely they are to use certain methods to maintain their personal relationships. The first method mentioned was via social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook). Out of 105 respondents, these are the following results, as can be seen in Figure 8: for 11 it is very unlikely, for 9 unlikely, 30 are neutral, 27 are likely and 28 are very likely to use these platforms. We can see that the majority use social media to maintain their connections and after that most are neutral. The next method is messaging apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Messenger, iMessage). Of the 105 respondents, 7 consider the use of messaging apps very unlikely, 5 unlikely, 26 neutral, 30 likely and 37 very likely. As with social media, it is likely and very likely that the majority communicate in this way. People can quickly and easily send pictures, clips, links, memes, whatever they want via the apps mentioned above. It does not matter where you are, you just need a WiFi connection or internet access to send something. This is perhaps the best way to keep in touch with relatives or friends who live in other cities/countries. Video calls (e.g. Zoom, FaceTime, Skype) are another great way to maintain personal relationships. Their main advantage is that you can see the other person in real time, no matter where you both are. Out of 105 respondents, the results are: for 8 it is very unlikely, for 23 it is unlikely, 30 are neutral, 26 are likely and 18 are very likely. Most of them are neutral, but there are also some who use video calls to talk to their loved ones. Another method is face-to-face meetings and hangouts. Of all participants, this is very unlikely for 5, unlikely for 14, neutral for 35, likely for 18 and very likely for 26. The responses are similar to the other methods as most are neutral and a total of 44 are more likely to spend time with their friends face to face. The results for the phone call method are more balanced: for 12 it is very unlikely, for 14 it is unlikely, 35 are neutral, 28 are likely and 16 are very likely. Again, most participants are neutral, followed by those who are likely to communicate in this way. The last method is sending letters or physical cards, which is no longer as popular as it used to be. Of the 105 respondents, 39 are very unlikely, 15 unlikely, 24 neutral, 22 likely and finally 5 very likely. The results are predictable, as most of them are very unlikely to write letters or cards.

The next question, “*How important are good relationships with your peers at school/university to you?*”, was about finding out how much the connections you made during your time at school meant to you, as these can influence your academic performance and even your personal life. As Figure 9 shows, there is a tie between those who answered “important” and “very important”, with 38.1% each. 18.1%

consider the topic to be neutral. 4.8% consider it hardly important, while 1% believe that good relationships are not important at all. For most of them, it is therefore important to have good relationships with their colleagues. Having friends in these years is extremely beneficial for most of us because we can rely on them, ask them for help when we need it and spend time together after school doing fun activities.

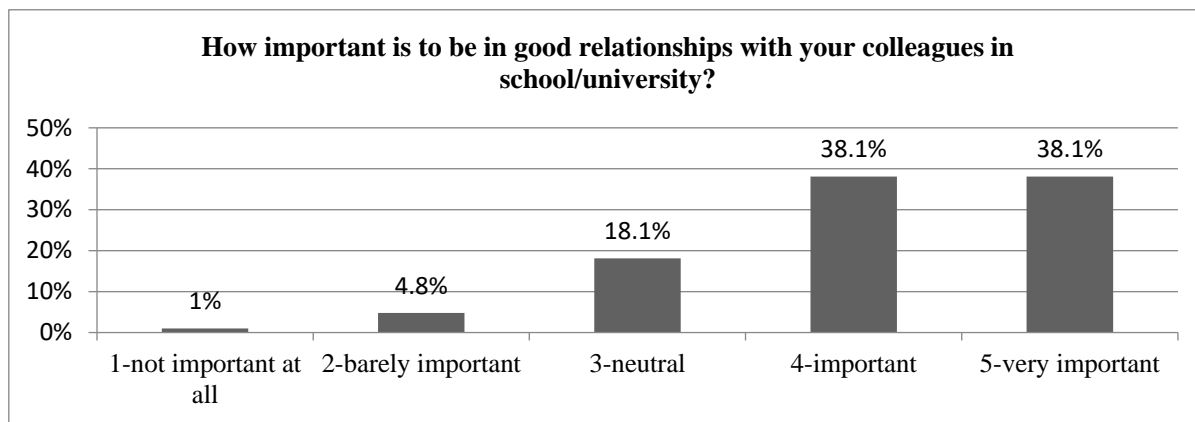


Figure 9. The importance of good relationships with colleagues in school/university on a scale from 1 to 5
Source: Author's own research

Another question is: “How well do you get on with your colleagues at school/university?”. The answers are the same as in the previous question. 38.1% get along very well, 32.4% get along well, 21.9% are neutral, 5.7% get along somewhat and 1.9% do not get along at all. Those who believe that a good relationship with their colleagues is important and beneficial are also satisfied with the current state of these relationships. A harmonious relationship with your colleagues often leads to a strong and consistent sense of support and connection.

The last question of the first section is: “How likely are you to stay in contact with your current colleagues?”. The results are as follows: 1.9% are very unlikely, 10.5% are unlikely, 24.8% are neutral, 32.4% are likely and 30.5% are very likely. We can see that most of them want to maintain the relationships established at school and stay in touch, even if they may go their separate ways. This means that they value their colleagues who have become friends and do not want to lose them. These connections usually include shared memories, encounters and a familiarity that can provide compassion and support. Maintaining contacts from high school can also be beneficial professionally. Future networking opportunities or access to career prospects can be made possible through these people. They may have contacts or information in certain professions or companies that could be useful for advancing in a career.

5. Limitations and future directions

Although surveys are a great way to gather up-to-date information quickly and easily, they also have their limitations. Self-reporting by participants about their experiences, perceptions and activities is an essential part of surveys. This introduces the possibility of bias when people give answers that they think are more acceptable or sound better than those that actually reflect their true experiences. The accuracy of the data collected can be affected by these biases. The fixed set of questions and response options limits the scope of surveys. Participants are not able to fully describe their experiences or provide more insight than is offered due to this limitation. The pre-defined response forms may not take into account the diversity of opinions or experiences of participants and oversimplify Gen Z relationships. Survey responses are based on a sample of participants, which may introduce bias. It is possible that respondents who are more likely to participate in surveys have different relationship experiences than non-participants. The results may therefore be more difficult to generalise.

Future research on the interpersonal interactions of Generation Z has tremendous potential to deepen our understanding of this evolving generation. Researchers can explore a variety of areas and perhaps even compare Generation Z with the previous one, Generation Y. There are quite a number of differences between these two due to the rapidly changing times and advanced technologies. Studies could also be conducted over a long period of time, from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, to

understand what really motivates them and how their circumstances affect them. Another key area that would provide researchers with important information about this generation is the impact of technology on their lives. A study focusing solely on this would reveal the extent of the influence the internet has on them. As this generation is used to finding everything they want in a matter of minutes with a few clicks, it would be interesting to see how they navigate the world, how they deal with certain situations without relying on technology.

Another aspect that would shed light on her social skills would be her relationships with older generations such as Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers. They encounter them every day in certain situations because some of them are their parents, their grandparents or even great-grandparents. In addition, Gen Z also interacts with them in more formal settings, for example at work. The way Gen Z co-operates, communicates and resolves conflicts when working with people of different ages could shed light on how to build successful intergenerational relationships.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the study of Generation Z interpersonal connections is a rich and intriguing field of research with important implications for people, organisations and society as a whole. We have explored numerous facets of Gen Z relationships in this study. By exploring this topic, we have learned a great deal about the dynamics, difficulties and opportunities Gen Z faces in building and maintaining relationships in today's rapidly changing world. These generations have experienced the most significant changes of the century. The social web is part of Gen Z's upbringing, and the digital world is important to their identity and lifestyle.

The age category to which most respondents belong is between 22 and 26, making it the oldest of this generation. More than half of the respondents stated that they are ambivert, i.e. they have both extroverted and introverted characteristics, but this depends on the circumstances, the people they are with, their mood, etc. Personal connections were highly valued by the majority of participants and had a great impact on their lives. Most of them enjoy meaningful connections and are satisfied with their circumstances. From this, we can also conclude that people who place a high value on interpersonal connections are able to nurture, maintain and generally have valuable relationships. Despite the fact that this generation is chronically online, it seems to be much easier for most of them to build relationships offline, face-to-face. The ability to express ourselves in person, the fact that we are social creatures, and the fact that genuine friendships can form and last much longer are just some of the reasons why some people find it easier to build relationships offline. Many of the participants also pointed out the importance of body language and gestures in communicating feelings, which is only possible face-to-face.

To understand the dynamics between Gen Z's personal life and their professional goals, you need to understand their interpersonal and professional connections. It is critical to foster meaningful connections, diversity and inclusion because Gen Z will shape the future of our world. In this way, we can build a society that is more connected and peaceful, where people can succeed both personally and professionally.

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