Did Social Media actually made us Social?
Or why is Gen-Z the lonliest generaiton?

Introduction:

My aim with this research is to uncover the primary reasons why Gen-Z experiences such high levels of loneliness. Is it really due to social media and their upbringing in the digital age, or are other factors like the Covid-19 pandemic and the overwhelming array of opportunities?

I listened to a series of vedio (which was made by a generation researcher : Steigervald Krisztián) about the differences and personality traits of every generation, and in of these videos he stated that ("A Z-generáció tagjainak ezen kívül a személyes társas kapcsolatok kialakítása is nehezebb. Sok hazai kutatás szerint sokuknak vannak kapcsolódási problémái, és bár rendkívül magas az online jelenlétük, valójában magányosnak érzik magukat, mert kiszorulnak az életükből az offline tevékenységek, a közösségi programok.") – *It is also more difficult for members of Generation Z to form personal social relationships. According to many domestic researches, many of them have connection problems, and although their online presence is extremely high, they actually feel lonely because offline activities and social programs are pushed out of their lives.*"
This sentence stuck with me and I thought it would be valuable to conduct a more international research study on this topic.

Understanding Gen-Z's loneliness is crucial not only for social dynamics, such as in workplace environments, but also for the ICT field. It matters how we develop future systems. This generation might provide insights into how technology intertwines, and influencehuman connection.

Who is in the Generation Z and what are they known for?

Generation Z is the name given to the generation of people born between 1997 and 2012. It's commonly referred to as "Gen Z," for short. This generation comes after Millennials and before Generation Alpha.
Generation Z, the first generation never to know the world without the internet, values diversity and finding their own unique identities, says Stanford scholar Roberta Katz.

Before I start to describe or even write about the topic of Gen-Z, it is good to clarify, that the general opinions formulated about Generation Z do not apply to all members of the generation, and the various trends are experienced in the same way by people born in earlier generations as well.
Therefore even though I tried to look for research papers that are supported by clear data, I still cannot say that everything is the same for everyone, since we speak about a massive amount of people with different backgrounds, cultures, and stories.

In summary, if I should write down a typical Gen Zer, I would say they are highly collaborative, value flexibility, authenticity, non-hierarchial leadership, relevance, and

efficiency (especially in the work field). They are necessarily future-oriented, and they have very direct and informal communication. They value self-care, in terms for example mental health.

Why are they unique?

Because of the internet, their way of "looking out to the world", is significantly different, the speed scale, and scope of human communications have dramatically changed, a result that the way they face school, work, or relationships has also changed.

They can learn about people and cultures around the world quickly and from a very early age, which results in them appreciating diversity much more.
Also because they were more likely to have grown up in a diverse family structure – whether in a household of a single parent, multiracial, or where the gender roles were blurred, they, are more accepting or at least less fazed than the previous generations by differences in sexual orientation, race or religion.

What are their main problems?

A sad characteristic of Generation Z, is loneliness, for example, they spend hours online, which can cause a feeling of isolation, depression, and other mental health issues.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Gen Zers reported experiencing at least one mental health problem in the past two years, according to a multi-year study released in 2023. This statistic was lower for all older generations, including millennials (51%), Gen Xers (29%) and Boomers (14%). Regardless, it is important to emphasize, that this generation is still in a sensitive age, not like the earlier generations, where everyone is already an adult. However some researches indicates that Gen Z has higher rates of self-reported mental health challenges compared to pre-vious generations at the same age.
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(For example, the latest CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey data shows that 42% of Gen Z high schoolers reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in 2021, which is nearly 50% higher than reports of millennial high schoolers in the early 2000s. Among girls, this figure was 35% for millennial high schoolers in 2001 compared to 57% of Gen Z high schoolers in 2021.)

So why is Generation Z so depressed?

There isn't a simple answer to that, but since I started to mention technological advancements as one of the causing objects, let's start with that.

Technology & high rates of social media use:
Generation Z is the first one which have a native use of technology, meaning that millennials might witnessed the changes of the explosion of technology, and social media, Gen Z was born at the peak of these technological innovations – where pieces of information are immediately accessible.

Like everything it also has both positive and negative sides.
On the plus side, it allows this (or any other generation) to broaden their knowledge, as I wrote earlier it helps them to immediately see from a young age the diversity of the world. Social media can help them to keep contact, (However, it has shown from several studies, that their favorite form of communication is "in person".
https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2022/01/know-gen-z) and they can earn a significant amount of money through a variety of activities on these social sites.

On the other hand, too much screen time is linked to depres¬sion and anx¬i¬ety, low self-esteem and poor body image, eating dis¬or¬der behaviors, inad¬e¬quate sleep, and oth¬er health problems, and since they got all of them in a younger age, it is not easy to take in everything.

Financial stress and achievement pressure:

This generation could see the differences in the costs of living from a very early age, the barriers of the countries, and areas of cities didn't stop them from realizing how differently a person can live. Let's say that now a 13-year-old girl can see on TikTok that another person of the same age already has a Chanel purse, the newest iPhone, and lives in a mansion.
A 2023 Gallup sur¬vey found that more than two-thirds (69%) of Gen Zers ages 12 to 26 say their most impor¬tant hope for the future is to earn enough mon¬ey to be com¬fort¬able, yet 64% see finan¬cial resources as a bar¬ri¬er to achiev¬ing their goals or aspirations—by far the top report-ed barrier.

A lack of life direction and purpose:

There was a research (https://www.gallup.com/analytics/506663/american-youth-research.aspx), that found the most important thing in connection to their happiness, is their sense of goal either at school or work. Unfortunately 43% to 49% of Gen Zers "do not feel what they do each day is inter¬est¬ing, important or motivating.

Climate change and global worries:

One more thing that is also very unique from Gen-Z is their awareness of global changes and problems, A recent inter¬na¬tion¬al study of 10,000 young people ages 16 to 25 also found that more than 80% were wor¬ried about the cli¬mate cri¬sis, with many express¬ing feel¬ings of sad¬ness, anx¬i¬ety, anger, and pow¬er¬less¬ness. On the good side because of that, when buying a product in many cases they are taking personal steps to reduce their environmental impact. If they're not seeing their purchases align with that, then they're going to push for a better option.

A need for connection with others:

This might sound surprising, since this generation is currently in an age where, more than two in five (44%) Gen Z young adults feel like they don't mat¬ter to others, and one in three (34%) report lone¬li¬ness, according to the same Har¬vard sur¬vey. This is cor¬rob¬o¬rat¬ed by 2023 Gallup findings that about one in three Gen Zers ages 12 to 26 do not often feel loved (31%) or supported (35%) by others, and a similar share (30%) always/often feel like nobody knows them well.

And this is what my research is goint to be focused on, why exactly this generation is so lost in terms of emotions?

All in all, it is interesting to think that some way all of these problems are connected to the information that they can reach through social media.

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