

RESEARCH

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OBJECTION TO GENERATIONAL RESEARCH IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES: A THEORETICAL CRITIQUE

Objeción a la investigación generacional en los estudios de comunicación: una crítica teórica

 Kaan Taşbaşı¹: Yeditepe University. Turkey.
ktasbasi@yeditepe.edu.tr

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In recent years, the characterization of the X/Y/Z generation has been used almost continuously in both popular thought and discourse and in academic literature. According to this conceptualization, generational difference is accepted as the primary determinant of social and political transformation. Theoretically and methodologically, studies that focus on the ways in which generations use communication technologies should be seen in relation to the American positivist research tradition that began and grew in the 1930s. The other pillar of these studies can be seen as based on the work of Marshall McLuhan, which came to the fore in the late 1950s. Another cornerstone of these studies should not be overlooked in relation to the arguments of postmodern theory, which proclaims the death of class, based on the assumption that it is not possible to perceive and change the world holistically in the 1960s. **Methodology:** This study presents a theoretical and methodological critique of studies that focus on the relationship between society/youth segments defined as Generation X/Y/Z and digital communication technologies. As a qualitative and explanatory research, this study has tried to prove that the dominant communication research/microscopic research, technological determinism, and postmodern theory are grounded on the same level. **Results:** The results of this study demonstrate that the characterization of the X/Y/Z generations as the primary determinants of social and political transformation should be viewed in the context of the American positivist research tradition, the work of Marshall McLuhan, and the arguments of postmodern

¹ Kaan Taşbaşı: PhD, Associate Professor at Yeditepe University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Radio Television and Cinema.

theory. Furthermore, it is argued that these approaches share similar methodological and theoretical foundations in relation to communication research and digital communication technologies. **Conclusions:** In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of considering the historical and theoretical context in which the characterization of the X/Y/Z generations is situated. It is evident that the relationship between these generations and digital communication technologies is complex and cannot be understood solely through a deterministic lens. Moreover, the need for methodological critique in communication research to avoid oversimplifications and excessive generalizations is underscored. Ultimately, it is suggested that future research should take a more nuanced and contextualized perspective on the relationship between generations and communication technology.

Keywords: Generation X/Y/Z, communication technologies, digital communication, technological determinism, sociology of generations.

RESUMEN

Introducción: En los últimos años, la caracterización de las generaciones X, Y y Z ha sido ampliamente utilizada tanto en el pensamiento popular como en la literatura académica. En esta conceptualización, se acepta que las diferencias generacionales son el principal determinante de la transformación social y política. Este enfoque se relaciona teórica y metodológicamente con la tradición de investigación positivista estadounidense que se originó y creció en la década de 1930. Además, se basa en el trabajo de Marshall McLuhan, que cobró relevancia a finales de la década de 1950, y en los argumentos de la teoría posmoderna, que proclama la muerte de la clase en la década de 1960, basándose en la premisa de que no es posible percibir y cambiar el mundo de manera holística. **Metodología:** Este estudio se presenta como una crítica teórica y metodológica de las investigaciones que se centran en la relación entre la sociedad y los segmentos juveniles definidos como Generación X, Y y Z, y las tecnologías de comunicación digital. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa y explicativa que ha buscado demostrar que la investigación dominante en comunicación, la investigación microscópica, el determinismo tecnológico y la teoría posmoderna están fundamentados en el mismo nivel. **Resultados:** Los resultados de este estudio ponen de manifiesto que la caracterización de las generaciones X, Y y Z como determinantes principales de la transformación social y política debe ser vista en el contexto de la tradición positivista estadounidense, el trabajo de Marshall McLuhan y los argumentos de la teoría posmoderna. Además, se argumenta que estos enfoques comparten fundamentos metodológicos y teóricos similares en relación con la investigación en comunicación y las tecnologías de la comunicación digital. **Conclusiones:** En conclusión, este estudio destaca la importancia de considerar el contexto histórico y teórico en el que se enmarca la caracterización de las generaciones X, Y y Z. Se evidencia que la relación entre estas generaciones y las tecnologías de comunicación digital es compleja y no puede ser comprendida únicamente a través de un enfoque determinista. Además, se subraya la necesidad de una crítica metodológica en la investigación en comunicación para evitar simplificaciones y generalizaciones excesivas. En última instancia, se sugiere que futuras investigaciones deben considerar

una perspectiva más matizada y contextualizada de la relación entre las generaciones y la tecnología de la comunicación.

Palabras clave: Generación X/Y/Z, tecnologías de la comunicación, comunicación digital, determinismo tecnológico, sociología de las generaciones.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, generational concepts, and in particular the X/Y/Z generational characterisation, have been almost universally used in popular thought and discourse as well as in academic literature. According to this conceptualisation, which focuses on generational differences, generations are accepted as the primary determinants of social and political change.

In this respect, it is noteworthy that in communication studies, as in various fields of the social sciences, research that can be summarised under the term "sociology of generations" or "generational studies" has been among the most popular research topics in recent years. The sociology of generations, the foundations of which were laid by Karl Mannheim at the end of the 1920s, has begun to form the backbone of many studies through the combination of the thesis that can be called as the neo-McLuhanism with the changes in communication technologies in the 2000s. In line with this interest in the generational studies, with the definition of communication technologies as an independent variable, generational identity/difference has been understood (Mercan, 2016; Kırık and Köyüstü, 2018) in this axis, and the social, political and cultural outline has been interpreted within this framework (Hafızoğlu, 2021). With the change in communication technologies, it is claimed that "the end of the world as we know it" has come and that new analyses are needed. The studies conducted within this framework show that the habits and patterns of using medium/means of communication stand out as a viable, if not the only framework for explaining the world (Tutgun-Ünal and Deniz, 2020). This is due to the fact that different generations either keep up with or are distant from the change in communication technologies (Kuyucu, 2017). The following sections of the study will mention aforementioned studies, which highlight generational belonging and difference by focusing on technology, and attempt to identify how they relate to neo-McLuhanism.

Theoretically and methodologically, there exist several paradigms upon which communication technology usage among generations can be historically analysed. The American positivist research tradition that emerged and expanded in the 1930s should be compared to the first turning point that opened the door for studies focusing on generations and communication. Because of its tendency to examine very diluted variables and microscopic focus, the American positivist researchers cleared the path for technology to be viewed as a component that could be independently examined in the processes of communication in the decades that followed. It should be emphasized that Marshall McLuhan's methodology paved the way as the second pillar of the research that provided the foundation for the generational studies in question. It should be noted that the other pillar of the research that served as the foundation for the generational research in question was built on Marshall McLuhan's

conceptualization, nonempirical studies, and Daniel Bell's empirically designed analysis of the information society, which put technology - as an isolated variable - at the center of social phenomena and processes. The generation X, Y, and Z distinction, which is frequently used today, and the studies carried out based on this distinction concentrate on the ways in which different age groups use communication technology and attempt to explain the sensory, intellectual, and behavioral distinctions. Since all historical-social contexts are left out of these studies' discussions of communication technologies, it is vital to comprehend the theoretical underpinnings of this idea and, in turn, explain McLuhan's methodology and analyses. It is important to note the relationship between the principles of postmodern theory, which flows parallel to the 1980s declaration of the death of class and is founded on the premise that it is no longer possible to view and alter the world holistically since the late 1960s. Although there exists not a formal connection between these three distinct intellectual traditions, there is an intersection cluster, and generation-oriented studies are at the core of this intersection cluster.

2. OBJECTIVES

With the intensification of the use of digital communication technologies, to which generational studies ascribe a central importance, it is assumed that there are/will be developments in terms of awareness of facts, democratic demands, ensuring social justice, and so on. This approach, which corresponds to the analysis of a specific moment in human history, uses an anti-dialectical method. This interpretation, which corresponds to the analysis of a specific moment in hundreds of thousands of years of human history with an anti-dialectical method, treats human being, society and technology as an ahistorical/non-historical entity. This perspective leads to a functional application in various fields, from marketing to education, from health to politics. Thus, while reproducing the interests of the ruling class, this situation is concealed by arguments such as "new", "innovation", "change", "dynamism", which have taken on a fetishistic character.

Within this framework, the study aims to carry out a methodological and theoretical discussion, with an overview of the academic studies that have been carried out on the generational research. The study discusses the ways in which research that combine the sociology of generations and technological determinism reproduce relations of sovereignty.

Focusing on the Turkish context, this paper tries to offer a theoretical critique of the concept that focuses on the relationship of the segments of society defined as Generation X/Y/Z to digital communication technologies. It is apparent that these distinctions, which the field of business and marketing uses/may use in stratifying the consumer profile, sometimes occupy a pivotal place in some critical studies that position themselves at a critical stance.

3. METHODOLOGY

The overall properties of qualitative research are listed as evaluating, using concepts, using theories, interpreting and criticising via the interpretation (Berger, 2000, p. 14, as

cited in Geray, 2017, p. 63). As a type of qualitative research, explanatory research aims to understand how the processes operate by explaining what is available for events, facts and situations (Geray, p. 66).

As a qualitative and explanatory research, this study will try to explain that dominant communication research/microscopic research, technological determinism and postmodern theory are grounded on the same level. Through this link, it will be argued that the naming of generations and the effort to ascribe certain characteristics to generations, especially in the context of their relationship with communication technology and media, is aimed at maintaining social power relations. This theoretical discussion is supported by propositions derived from various studies.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Fragmenting Society and Reality: Researching "the effects"

Although it is possible to trace the first research in the field of communication in the history of modern society to the second half of the 19th century, it was not until the 20th century that communication research became systematic and firmly rooted. In the first half of the twentieth century, it would not be wrong to say that the social sciences and communication studies as a discipline under that umbrella, were largely shaped by the dominance of North American researchers. This situation is also an indicator of the hegemony of dominant/mainstream thinking. In this period, the paradigm known as media (direct vs limited) effects research, whether it assumes that media have powerful effects on audiences or that they have limited and individual effects, has produced research aimed at maintaining the status quo. In the first quarter of the century, the function of propaganda in manufacturing consent to war was first discovered. Then, with the invention of the concept of the *consumer*, it was realised that communication could be used much more strategically in line with economic interests.

It is well known that Edward Bernays, from the 1920s onwards, developed various methods of persuading the masses to consume, and that these methods worked. However, Bernays' campaigns were based on intuition, assumptions and unsystematic observations. Bernays, who is considered a canonical name in the advertising and public relations industry, and his contemporaries conducted their campaigns in a relatively groping manner, but in the ensuing period there was a need to rationalise campaigns in a way that did not allow for coincidences and failures. Positivist research can provide data to reduce or eliminate randomness before the buying and selling process.

In particular, positivist research, which has gained strength since the 1940s, has taken an X-ray view of human beings and society. In this way, the specificity of the elements that make up the society was accepted and the interactions of these elements with each other were determined in detail and turned to account. This utilisation has taken the form of maintaining and reproducing the dominant social system and relations. Attitudes, opinions and behaviours have been measured in many areas, ranging from the shaping of political behaviour to the identification of consumption tendencies, and these measurements have enabled *mind management* (Schiller, 1973) strategies to be

implemented in a rationalised manner. In this way, the function of demographic elements (such as age, gender, ethnicity, etc.), social, political and cultural forms of belonging in ensuring the rhythm and continuity of capitalist society has been studied in depth. From a microscopic point of view, the set of findings based on measurement and statisticalisation has made it possible to continue the destruction of all characteristics of human and society.

Mentioned microscopic studies were conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld, who is considered to be one of the pioneers of this research trend, and researchers gathered around him and produced a considerable number of studies in a very short period of time. According to Erdoğan (2005, p. 58), the fact that these research, which are referred to within the mainstream approach, were so 'fruitful' is based on the understanding of the function of propaganda during the war, as well as on meeting the market research needs of the developing and diversifying capitalist industries. In this context, the fact that the advertising, public relations and media industries, in other words, whole cultural industry and the traditional industries, required positivist (microscopic) research and could benefit from the results of such research, was the main factor giving direction to the aforementioned studies. In addition to the above-mentioned industries, politicians have been another group of people who have needed and benefited from these findings in order to understand voter behaviour and manage their campaigns. These studies have focused on accurately measuring the relationships between highly scrutinised variables. For example, a field study known as the Decatur Research measured women's preferences for various consumer products (brands, type of products, etc.) and the factors that influence these preferences (Baran and Davis, 2012, p. 145). A focus group study conducted at Columbia University among female newspaper readers can be shown as another example in this context (Güngör, 2018, p. 107). Lazarsfeld (1937, p. 3) mentions that market research, initially based on a meticulous sampling and recording system to determine "simple data" such as the number of radios owned, the brand of soap used, and the amount of money spent, later became more "sophisticated".

Gender, ethnicity, age, class, place of residence, level of education, and many more factors now have relevance and weight for researchers and those who gain from the findings of study due to the transition from highly generalized categories to more refined aspects. This importance lies in the exchange value that data based on demographics, identity, lifestyle, etc. have in themselves, and in their capacity to be used to create exchange value. In market terms, data that is extremely useful for all kinds of organisations, from the advertising industry to public opinion polling, has thus become a commodity and has itself acquired exchange value. On the other hand, this data can also be used to carry out all kinds of sales and marketing activities, thus creating exchange value. Data collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus group studies and laboratory research have been and continue to be used to absolutise consumption and social control. While microscopic communication research has fragmented society, it has also created a technical procedure that makes it possible to understand that reality cannot be grasped as a whole by fragmenting it. Within this historical framework, as Erdoğan states, the main starting points of today's dominant

scientific process are the development of new control mechanisms, "cognition, thought, interest, preference and behaviour management" and "learning people's opinions, thoughts, interests and preferences and determining their distribution with statistics to help companies in the business of controlling consumers, users and viewers" (2022, pp. 21-22).

4.2. An Invisible Suture: Technological Determinism and Postmodern Narrative

After the second half of the twentieth century, postmodern theory began to celebrate representation and pluralism. In this vein, a historical category such as class is seen almost as a concept of shame and disgust, almost as an *adolescent psychosis*. In this respect, it can be said that the intellectual foundations of the "postmodern world" that was talked about in the 1980s began to be laid in the 1960s.

Aforementioned theoretical basis can be traced through two contemporaneous theorists and the intellectual path they constructed. One is Daniel Bell's declaration of the end of ideologies and the narrative of post-industrial society; the other is Marshall McLuhan's technical/ technological determinism. It should be emphasised that neither Bell nor McLuhan contributed to the field of postmodern theory. Neither occupies a central place in the debates about postmodernism and postmodernity. However, it is possible to speak of an intersection between the two names, due to the fact that Wayne identifies 'the marginalisation or exclusion of social relations from analysis' (2015, p. 59) as one of the common features of the types of technological determinism.

The idea of post-industrial society, developed by Daniel Bell in the 1970s, argues that the development of information, knowledge and communication technologies has changed the nature of production and the structure of society. According to Bell, civilisation consists of three historical phases: pre-industrial society, where the source is land; industrial society, where the source is machines; and post-industrial society, where the source is information, which he describes as the third revolution (Bell, 1999, p. xxxiv). In the preface to the 1999 edition of his work, Bell sees technological change, which he sees as the fuel of the third revolution, as "a series of changes that pervade all aspects of society and reorganise all old relationships" (Bell, 1999, p. xxxvii). Describing telecommunication technologies and computers as the foundation of post-industrial society, Bell calls these technologies "intellectual technology" (1999, p. xxxviii).

According to Bell, the form of this society differs from both pre-industrial and industrial society. For Bell, it is the production and distribution mechanisms of information and knowledge that give post-industrial society its essence. A new social structure has emerged because of the production and distribution mechanisms of information and knowledge in unprecedented forms, ways and scales. In defining this social structure, communication technologies are of great importance as the means by which information and knowledge are produced, processed and disseminated (Bell, 1999, pp. 165-265). Although Bell describes a social segregation, he does not define this segregation in terms of mode and relations of production from a historical perspective; he is not interested in who produces, distributes and uses (which) information and (which) knowledge. Bell is arguing about the form, not the core. The

processes and techniques of production (not the mode of production) are changing. But those who produce are not as important as those which are produced. What is essential is the difference between the product itself, the technical conditions and possibilities for the production and the products. Changes in these elements shape the structure and functioning of society.

"Information", which Bell points out as the essential element of the current social structure, and the means by which information is produced and disseminated are also of central importance in the thought of another theorist, Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan adopts a convergent position with his contemporary Bell, regarding technical change and its reflections especially in the field of communication. McLuhan (2022, p. 10) considered technology as "a fundamental factor of social change that can lead to a real increase in human autonomy". Bell's analysis, which sets aside the relationship between the productive forces, is similar in McLuhan's thought. The description of technique/technology, which is detached from all its social and historical integrity, is like a celestial body oscillating in a zero-gravity environment. This celestial body, which cannot be predicted in which direction and when it will travel, drags its satellite along with it. This celestial body is so autonomous that it can determine the entire direction of social movement and the entire framework of human existence. According to McLuhan, since the functions of technology, which can almost be described in a manner similar to the laws of physics, cannot be defined, human is "pushed around" by technology. However, if we could "easily master the nature and consequences of all our technologies", it would be possible to understand both the pattern of human communication and social actions (2022, p. 14). According to McLuhan, the reason for our inability to fully comprehend both the pattern of communication and social action is obvious: the change in our senses. Any one of our senses, or an extension of it, alters all our intellectual processes and activities, and at the same time determines the way in which we understand and perceive the world (2022, p. 148). It is the technology that controls our senses and therefore our thoughts and actions. Since we cannot understand the structure of technology and tools, we are unable to analyse their effect on our senses. Therefore, in McLuhan's thought, technology appears as a fundamental factor of human and social existence.

According to McLuhan, who, in addition to these general conclusions and emphases on technology, attaches a special significance to the means of communication; each phase of civilisation can be read in the light of the dominant means and techniques of communication in an age. A tribal society in which there was no literacy; a Gutenberg galaxy in which the culture of the printing press was dominant and certain senses were atrophied; the age of electronic communication in which the capacity of certain senses was enhanced and the earth was transformed into a vast "global village" in which an honest life would prevail. McLuhan's electronic communication age and global village narrative and Bell's post-industrial society complement each other like lock and key. The concept of Bell's post-industrialised society and the sensory and intellectual transformation of individuals observed in McLuhan's thought, meet in production of information and the communication technology.

The media also create the sensory perception specific to the technology in its audience (nowadays also defined as the user). "The extension of one of the senses changes the way we think and act, which in turn changes the way we perceive the world" (McLuhan and Fiore, 2019, p. 148). McLuhan and Fiore (2019), while enthusiastically welcoming advances in the field of electronics, argued that human senses and thinking capacities are not yet able to cope with electronic circuits. According to him, the reason for this lies in literacy (McLuhan, 2022, p. 34), which may even be the cause of schizophrenia, and even in the culture of printing, which is an advanced technical form of it. Reading is a one-dimensional perceptual and mental act. Human perception and mind are dulled because it focuses on a single sense, sight. For this reason, the conservative cultural production and pedagogy of the past, based on the printing press and the culture of print, captures and corrupts the youth (McLuhan and Fiore, 2019, p. 100). Therefore, there is a great need to abandon "the old" in educational and training institutions. In the prevailing situation, people's atrophied senses, perceptions and minds can respond passively to electronic circuits, and the extraordinary opportunity created by the technology is wasted (McLuhan and Fiore 2019, p. 63). "Like our personal senses, our technologies now require an interaction and a relationship that makes rational coexistence possible" (McLuhan, 2022, p. 13). "New" means of communication, equipped with electronic circuits, can mobilise not only the sense of sight, but all our senses. The senses other than sight, "frozen" for centuries in cold and dark dungeons, can now be liberated. It is television that heralds the freedom of the senses, of thought and action. According to McLuhan, television is a medium that "gives us an active and exploratory capacity for perception in which not only our gaze, what we can see, but all our senses are involved at the same time" (McLuhan and Fiore, 2019, p. 125).

According to McLuhan and Fiore, television is a medium that 'gives us an active and exploratory sense in which not only our gaze, what we can see, but also all our senses are involved' (2019, p. 125). Unlike print media, where senses other than the eye are frozen, television is a hot medium because it can involve other senses. Television, which reveals the sensory and intellectual capacities of human beings, is so crucial that it can transform society by creating its own generation. According to McLuhan and Fiore, "television children are more enterprising, more responsible children" who are not "flighty and frivolous like previous generations" (2019, pp. 125, 126). Television is changing generations, changing the world with them, creating a global tribe and building a global village.

In the global village, a tribe of pluralistic communities is beginning to live where identities are at the heart. In this village, the practices by which human beings construct themselves and society are insignificant; what is important are the tools they use in this process. While some see these tools as technical/ technological equipment, others see language as a factor that brings human beings into existence. Since the 1960s, there has been an overlap between the fetishisation of technical transformation in the means of production and communication, on the one hand, and the acceptance of the collapse of grand narratives, on the other. It is this acceptance that has begun to be discussed under the name of postmodernism. Ritzer mentions that although the

concept of postmodernism opens up a wide field for discussion and resonates in different fields, the meaning of the concept is ambiguous (2011, p. 629). It can be argued that this ambiguity stems from the nature of the concept itself. However, it is not possible to accept vagueness and ambiguity as absolute -contrary to the postmodernists claim- and therefore, despite all its volatility, there is a need for a ground on which to stand. In order to clarify the definition of the concept of postmodernism, we can trace Ritzer's system of three legs: Postmodernism, which defines a historical period that is sometimes intertwined and sometimes used as a substitute for each other; postmodernism, which refers to a cultural logic; and postmodern society, which corresponds to a social conception and theory (Ritzer, 2011, p. 629). The definition of postmodernism as a social concept and theory is important for the analysis of the social projection of generational studies.

The post-1968 developments that led to a "rigid rejection of abstract reasoning" (Harvey, p. 56) led to the glorification of difference and the invention of "the Other". Social movements embracing the difference and "the other" emerged in this context. It is noticeable that culture, identity, gender, pluralism and diversity are constantly emphasised (Yaylagül, p. 202). However, social movements that are supposed to challenge capitalism have not only failed to do so, but have also failed to roll back capitalism and its consequences as hoped and claimed (Harvey, 1999, pp. 56-69). Despite the search for and efforts to define it differently, the fact that the world we live in is -to a large extent- a capitalist world is self-evident. In fact, neither the defenders of capitalism nor those who criticise it and want to change it have any objections to this conclusion. However, the problems and consequences of capitalism's very existence have been understood and discussed as if they had nothing to do with capitalism. This in turn has weakened the basis of thought and criticism, perverted the purpose of action and made possible the reinforcement of capitalism. The crisis of 1973 can be seen as an important epoch of postmodern thought. As one of the crises of capitalist over-accumulation (Harvey, 1999, p. 362), the 1973 crisis led to the collapse of "confidence in the relevance of scientific and moral judgements" and accordingly "impermanence and fragmentation took precedence over eternal truths and holistic politics, and the effort to explain the world shifted from the realm of material and political-economic justifications to autonomous cultural and political practices" (Harvey, 1999, p. 362).

Eagleton notes that capitalism has historically had the knack of bringing together different ways of life, and that the "blinkered postmodernists who strangely think that diversity is a virtue in itself" fail to see the internal contradictions of capitalism (2006, p. 50). While society is imagined as a collection of strata in which the interests, priorities, goals, fronts, allies and enemies of none of the strata share almost no commonality with the other, capitalist hegemony is reinforced with discourses such as "diversity", "pluralism", "decentralisation", etc. According to the postmodern narrative accelerated in the 1980s, "whatever binds us together, whatever our similarities are, are seen and adopted as harmful things" (Eagleton, 2006, p. 46).

Olmann explains capitalism's strategy of fragmenting existence, thought and society as follows:

The fragmentation of existence in capitalism and the corresponding unidirectional and fragmented structure of socialisation have led the people subject to it to focus more on specific aspects, such as a person, a place, a job, that are involved in their lives, preventing them from seeing how these particularities exist in relation to each other, and thus causing them to ignore the constants that bind everyone, such as class, class struggle, alienation, etc., which actually arise from these relations. (2019, p. 17)

4.3. Generational theory as a framework that fragments thought and practice

Despite the different tendencies in generational studies, it is accepted that the individual, or the social segment to which the individual belongs, has certain competencies or inadequacies, competencies or incompetencies, development or backwardness, simply because of the time period in which they were born. This assumption also contains an inherent intellectual contradiction. On the one hand, the generation is described as a diversity, subtilised and idealised; on the other, it is transformed into an exceptionally inclusive category. Being born and raised in a certain period is a precondition for being labelled and identified. This contradiction is a typical example of a microscopic understanding and analysis of phenomena. Therefore, if generation is so inclusive, it is to be expected that people belonging to the same generation will have similar fates and histories almost everywhere in the world. However, an analysis detached from holism and historicity leads to a series of sequential fallacies, starting with the naming and defining of generations. This situation can be seen as an inevitable reflection of the short-sightedness of the analytical perspective.

It cannot be argued that there is no difference between generations, or that the difference is completely insignificant. Indeed, it cannot be denied that some generations have been the subject of important changes in human history. However, the role of generations in history, as the sum of social relations, can be explained in terms of the social and historical circumstances that gave rise to the generation; the generation cannot be seen as *the thing-in-itself*. It is also an ancient wisdom that generations are in a tense relationship with their predecessors and successors. In fact, ancient philosophers have left texts that shed light on this tension. This difference, which exists in various aspects of social life, is also reflected in the field of cultural production. It is possible to trace the same tension in the works of writers, painters and popular melodies. However, it is not the aim of this study to discuss the reasons for the difference between the generations and the tension that arises from this difference. The aim here is to draw attention to the fact that differences and tensions between generations are not a new phenomenon, and therefore no generation can be seen as an *omnipotent absolute* that has access to the secret of the world and the ability to change everything with communication technology and medium/media that are seen as a magic wand. On the contrary, no generation can be burdened with the weight of its age. It is equally unfounded to regard any generation as a "miracle" or "saviour", or to

declare it "guilty" or "responsible". Generations cannot be seen as either *Messiah* or *Antichrist*. Both views tend to see phenomena and events as outside history and society. Generational belonging and difference, accepted on the one hand as a biological miracle and on the other as a necessary consequence of technical/technological conditions, is accepted as a category without history. However, "people make their own history, but they do not make it by freely assembling the parts of their own choosing, but in the given conditions which they find immediately before them, handed down from the past" (Marx, 2010, p. 30).

Neither the concept of generation nor the theoretical explanations that are attempted to be constructed around this notion are ahistorical and non-social. Therefore, conceptual definition, starting from the most basic level, tries to give meaning to things, phenomena and events as a means of abstraction. However, it is not possible for concepts to have a character such as good-bad, positive-negative, true-false, valid-invalid (Erdoğan, 2022, p. 29). What gives concepts their meaning and scope is the social context in which they are circulated. Therefore, concepts can gain or lose different characteristic elements according to the power relations in society. In fact, while the framework of meaning of concepts is being drawn, a course parallel to the social power relations is emerging. In this respect, it can be said that concepts also have "fashions". Some concepts are favoured and become widespread in certain periods, and then their visibility declines. It is clear that the prominence of certain concepts in certain periods parallels economic, political, social and cultural power relations. Concepts are symmetrical and asymmetrical reflections of power relations in what they include and exclude. For example, the concept of 'globalisation', which began to spread by the 1980s and became widespread in the 1990s, has been widely and generally affirmed. Many critical studies have tried to break the hegemony of the concept, arguing that globalisation is a historical phase of capitalism. In its simplest form, globalisation, as a concept describing the unlimited capital flow, is a concept that can be attributed with positive qualities for the capitalist class and its proxies, while it presents the opposite view for the working class and the disempowered. Therefore, concepts and their meanings can be defined as an extension of the field of struggle that cannot be considered independent of social practices.

Various strategies are used in this struggle that emerges in the process of creating the meaning map of concepts (Erdoğan, 2022, pp. 36-87). The recourse to falsification through the use of various stereotypical narratives and thus the effort to confirm one's own preference is an element of these strategies (Erdoğan, p. 45). Through stereotyped narratives, determinations made by "acting from common and intangible conditions" are popularised by making the concepts used in these determinations popular. This conceptual diversion, which sometimes takes place under a critical shell, actually enables the reproduction of the given. In this way, "as in the case of concepts such as Generation X, the real is replaced by the fascinating deception that invalidates the real" (Erdoğan, p. 45). It can be seen that an approach that "glorifies the invalid" (Erdoğan, p. 45) is adopted in the generational studies that are widely conducted today.

The idea of systematic research on generations by considering them as a distinctive entity was put forward by the sociologist Karl Mannheim. According to Mannheim (1928), the issue of generations, which is treated by everyone from their own point of view, creates a complex situation in the disciplines dealing with social and cultural phenomena. For this reason, "never pausing to consider the various aspects as part of a single general problem, so that the contributions of the various disciplines to the collective solution could be planned" (Mannheim, 1928, p. 163). Many social scientists found Mannheim's intellectual approach appealing. William Strauss and Neil Howe's theory of generations was the most popular and widely accepted. Both Strauss and Howe worked as consultants for US government organisations. During the Vietnam War, Strauss, together with Lawrence M. Baskir, conducted a study of the reasons given by those who objected to the obligation to go to war; the study sought to explain the stereotypical reasons given by the people by focusing on 'generation' (O'Sullivan, 1978). In a way, this study can be said to provide governments with data on the path they should follow in order to boost willingness and readiness to fight.

Strauss and Howe construct a popularised narrative by suggesting that generations can be analysed in 20–25-year cycles. Based on the identification of cycles, Strauss and Howe's 1991 study *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, published by Strauss and Howe in 1991, claims to analyse American society over the centuries through generational differences and to make predictions for the future. Their 1997 work *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy - What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny* is another work that is considered important in terms of generational studies today. It should be noted that most of the generation nomenclatures commonly used today were made by Strauss and Howe.

Research on generations in Turkey tends to increase over a period of about 10 years. In order to test this assumption, a query was made in the database of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) for thesis and dissertations in which the terms X, Y and Z generations were mentioned in the title of the dissertation. When the search was carried out with each generation title, it was found that there were 9 studies in which Generation X was used, 221 studies in which Generation Y was used and 209 studies in which Generation Z was used. As one or more generational labels may be mentioned in the title of a paper, only the word 'generation' was searched. This search yielded 624 studies. Studies that may have used the word 'generation' in the title of the paper in a different way to the way it is used in this study were excluded. After eliminating the word "generation"² with its terminological meaning in fields and subjects such as geology, literary studies, art history, health sciences, broadcasting etc., a total of 440 studies were found to have titles and scopes that included the phrase of X, Y and Z generations. It was found that the majority of these studies were conducted in the fields of business administration, marketing, public relations and advertising, and a significant number were conducted in the field of education. Differences/similarities between generations are defined in studies on topics such as "career expectations", "teamwork", "motivation", "purchase decisions", "brand preference", "attitude and

² Turkish word for generation is "kuşak".

opinion surveys", etc. This growing interest in generations over the last decade has been useful in obtaining data and developing techniques for the 'effective' and 'efficient' use of labour in the workplace. In addition to the labour force, a large number of studies have been conducted to determine the "buying tendencies" of consumers of goods and services and of the political class. There has been a lot of research into which segments of society hold which opinions, which attitudes they are likely to develop and which behaviours they are likely to adopt, based on age. In this respect, as in many other areas of research, generational analysis is useful for the capital. The usefulness derives from the development of procedures and techniques for maximising profits and maintaining the status quo and relations of domination.

A prominent writer and consultant, Evrim Kuran, on generational studies in Turkey, sums up the process of getting to know this field of study as follows:

At the beginning of the millennium, that is, at the beginning of the 2000s, about 15 years ago, I was introduced to generations when I was doing academic studies. I was very impressed and decided to explain that generations exist, that they are real and that they are worth studying. Those were the years when I was treated as a bit crazy. In fact, I was not successful in a study I did at the Academy, in a thesis I wrote in this field, and I was expelled from the school. Although I returned several times later with amnesty, I could not get the academic studies I wrote and did on the generational system accepted at the Academia in those years, that is, 15-16 years ago. And yet the academy did not accept me, but the business world did. For the last 10 years, I have been working on the generational system with various organisations and institutions in Turkey and the Middle East. (TEDx, 2016)

This statement, which the speaker used to summarise her own background, is also consistent with the data in the YÖK dissertation database. Indeed, it can be observed that the number of generation-oriented studies has increased in the last 10 years, and this increase is almost exclusively in the field of social sciences. As Adorno points out in his well-known aphorism, "Science needs the disobedient". So it is not unusual for an idea or a thought to be thrown out of the university, and it does not always mean that what is thrown out is worthless and invalid. However, apart from the fact that the expelled idea is "disobedient", if that idea generates "obedience", it should be questioned in terms of scientific thought and scientific output. Adorno defines the "disobedient" as follows: "The light of knowledge cannot even illuminate itself if there is no salvation from suffering. A science without the expectation of emancipation is only a reconstruction, a technique" (Jay, 2001, p. 15). The fact that the doors of "academia" close to an idea or a researcher, while the "business world" welcomes an idea or a researcher, points to the usefulness of that idea for the capital. As mentioned in an article, understanding generations, understanding 'generational systems', while adding 'another powerful muscle to the company', 'does not suddenly destroy your areas of struggle in the organisational system', 'it acts as a powerful 'lens' to analyse and make sense of certain behavioral patterns' (Kuran, 2017), is actually a technique of reconstruction, a technique carried out under the shell of science. The function of

knowledge and science should not be to create corporations with even more powerful muscles, but to ensure the liberation of those who perish under these powerful muscles, the oppressed. As Bourdieu puts it, "sociology is a sport of struggle". This sport should be practised not in order to further strengthen the structures whose muscles have become overgrown, but in order to resist them.

On this basis, in order to explain the contradiction based on the fragmented interpretation of social life, it would be useful and functional to look at the commonly used definitions of generations. The Silent Generation, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z and the emerging Alpha Generation, according to commonly used and well-known definitions, refer to different segments of the population within a century, some of which we have left behind and some of which we are still living through.

The group defined as the *silent generation* includes those born in the 1920s. It is known that the definition of the Silent Generation first appeared in Time magazine in 1951. In an article published in Time magazine, the Silent Generation is defined as a generation that "working fairly hard and saying almost nothing", "With some rare exceptions, youth is nowhere near the rostrum", "It does not issue manifestoes, make speeches or carry posters". The article analyses the meaning of "silence" by asking what it conceals, and includes a question about the possibility of deaf elders instead of the silence of the young (People: The Younger Generation, 1951). This generation has also been described as the Great Generation in a popular book by television journalist Tom Borokaw. The fact that millions of people who lived through the most turbulent periods of modern history are now labelled 'silent' by social scientists seems to require some explanation. Those who were born into the crisis of 1929, those who killed and were killed in the Second World War and the Korean War.

The *baby boomer* classification within generational studies was developed in Western societies to define those born after the Second World War. The baby boomer characterisation refers to the increase in population observed as a result of the end of the war and the relative improvement in welfare levels following the decline in population caused by the loss of life in the Second World War. Although this characterisation refers to conditions in Western countries that were at the forefront of the Second World War, it is not possible to say that the definition of baby boomers applies to Turkey, for instance. The fact that a significant proportion of Turkey's population lost their lives in frontline wars such as the Balkan Wars and World War I, as well as the country's unique economic, political and social dynamics, the establishment of the Republic and subsequent developments, can be used to argue that the situation that is attempted to be characterised as a baby boom found its reflection in Turkey some 25 years before the West. In this case, the inclusion of the Turkish population in the definition of baby boomers should be considered as an inconsistent and invalid claim. The term 'baby boomer' is also used in everyday language, simplified as 'boomer'. This word has negative connotations such as conservatism, lack of openness to innovation, obsolescence and is even accepted as an insult.

The age group defined as Generation X refers to those born in the late 1960s and 1970s. The word Generation X was first used in the name of Generation X, the music group formed by rock musician Billy Idol in 1976, or Gen X as it was later used. However, the word owes its reputation, current meaning and prevalence to a book written by author Douglas Coupland. The popularity of the book led to the appropriation of the term Generation X by the mainstream media and thus the word seeped into the cultural consciousness (Gozzi, 1995, p. 331). Like any generation, Generation X is said to be a 'penitent' generation that feels it has to bear the burdens of life. As Gozzi stated, supposedly having missed out on the entertainment of the sixties, full of protest, sex, drugs and Rock'n'Roll, Gen Xers are thought to be struggling with the rising cost of living and falling standard of living, believing that they are stuck at home and facing unemployment because all the good jobs have been taken (Gozzi, 1995, pp. 332-335). While some characterise Generation X as a generation that has no problem with authority (Kuyucu, 2017, p. 849), others argue that the same generation is complaining and dissatisfied with almost everything, distant from bureaucracy and cynical about managerial authority (Kırık and Köyüstü, 2018, pp. 1501-1502).

It has been claimed that their relationship with technology is whenever needed and as much as necessary (Kuyucu, 2017; Kırık and Köyüstü, 2018; Tutgun-Ünal and Deniz, 2020). Some studies characterise Generation X as the first global generation and argue that members of this generation have similar characteristics almost everywhere in the world (Tuncer & Tuncer, 2016 as cited in Kırık and Köyüstü, 2018, p. 1501). If the inclusiveness of the generational definition is accepted as so obvious, the wide range of differences between those living the same stages of their lives in different geographies, as well as in different class and social strata within the same geography, need to be explained in terms of this generation. The age group defined as Generation X spent their childhood/early adolescence in Turkey during the 12 September coup.

The definition of *Generation Y* or the *Millennial Generation* was put forward by Strauss and Howe. This generational definition includes those born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. There is a consensus that the letter Y is used because of its phonetic similarity to the English word 'why'. With this ambiguity, it is claimed that Generation Y are questioners. The most fundamental characteristic that distinguishes this generation from its predecessors and makes them "superior" is their relationship with digital media and platforms. If we look at the period of time in which the generation referred to as Generation Y was born and grew up, it coincides with the increase in the capacity, functionality and prevalence of personal computers (PCs), the advent of mobile phones, the establishment of data storage and transfer technologies such as CD/DVD and, most importantly, the emergence and spread of Internet technology. In light of these technological variables, the term *digital native* has been coined to describe this situation, as the lives of Generation Y are almost entirely surrounded by digital technology. The relationship with these technologies is also believed to be the distinguishing feature of the segment of society characterised as Generation Y with its predecessors. This generation is considered to have an extremely high ability to use technology. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this generation is almost positioned as an *übermensch* because of their relationship with technology.

Those labelled as Generation Y have been described as "an independent, self-confident, collaborative, selfish and diverse generation" (Yüksekbilgili, 2013, p. 343), "capable of doing more than one job at a time thanks to their ability to think at a higher level, the speed of their information acquisition processes and their high adaptability" (Mercan, 2016, p. 65). In Turkey, there is an opinion that the Gezi Resistance was led by Generation Y. It is argued that Generation Y is a group of people who have the ability to use digital communication technologies have an intense demand for and sense of "justice", and their role in the Gezi Resistance is analysed in this context.

The generation referred to as *Generation Z*, which is assigned a *messianic* role and function, is defined as those born between the second half of the 1990s and around 2010. It is considered important that this generation was born fully into digital technology and digital culture. This period coincides with the proliferation of internet-based communication devices and applications, as well as mobile devices. In this sense, Generation Z is said to be the true *digital native* generation. It is argued that Generation Z is a "lucky generation that will enter through the doors opened by Generation Y" and it is claimed that "Generation Y and Generation Z share common characteristics such as being digital citizens of a huge global village" (Çavdar, 2018). It is determined that this generation is "the generation with the highest synchronisation of motor skills such as hand, eye, ear and the like in the history of humanity" (Serçemeli et al. as cited in Kırık & Köyüstü, 2018). Such statements, which are not supported by scientific data, stand out as a typical example of the repetition of McLuhan's claims by adapting them to current conditions and embellishing them with an evolutionary claim. In the mentioned studies on which this claim is based, no evidence was found from fields such as physiology, psychology, neurology and neuroscience to support this thesis.

It is claimed that members of Generation Z closely follow the news thanks to internet technology (Hafızoğlu, 2021, p. 146), and that they can break the cage built around them by the fragmented and inconsistent content they are constantly exposed to through digital media and devices, "by searching for new things whenever they want due to their flexible minds" (Hafızoğlu, p. 144). It is believed that Generation Z, who lead a life equipped with technology, are skilled in the use of technology, which is "critical for the success of organisations and nations" (Akduman and Hatipoğlu, 2021, p. 204). Due to their ability to use technology, it is said that "sensory organs, brain and muscles work together in harmony", so Generation Z can "think and do many different things at the same time" (Çiçek and Ünlü, 2019 as cited in Akduman and Hafızoğlu, 2021).

The generation defined as Generation Z is assumed to have broad access to information and 'truth' due to their widespread access to digital technology and platforms. With access to digital communication technology and media throughout their lives, it is assumed that almost all of this generation's knowledge of the world is infallible and deceptively accurate. McLuhan's argument is at the heart of this assessment. It would not be wrong for proponents of this approach to say that the *übermensch* costume tailored for Generation Y is too tight for Generation Z. Many

researchers argue that members of this generation are able to focus on many tasks at once because of the communication devices and media they use, and that this ability is more advanced than that of their predecessors.

Since the end of the Latin alphabet with the letter Z cannot be considered the end of history, a new letter is needed to identify the generation after Generation Z. The solution was to rewind the alphabet, but this time starting with the Greek alphabet and starting with the letter Alpha. The Alpha generation is defined as those born after 2010 who were in childhood at the time of this study.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to the claim that the technology is neutral, it is not neutral. Any device functions according to the intention and purpose of those who own it and have the privilege of using it, within the framework of social conditions. Both the steam engine and robotic production technologies acquire meaning within the framework determined by whether or not there is a property owner of these utilities, and if there is a property owner, within the framework determined by them. For property owners, these means can increase production and maximise profits. In the case of collectivisation of property, results such as a reduction in working time and an increase in human welfare can occur. What creates both situations are not the device or technology itself, but those who own it, their intentions and the sociality they create. For "society is not just a collection of individuals; it is the sum total of the relationships these individuals have with each other" (Erdoğan, 2022, p. 55).

In this context, communication devices and technologies are not neutral and do not by themselves construct individual and social formation. The function of communication devices and technologies can be explained according to the intentions of those who hold these in their hands, those who can control them directly or indirectly. As a means of communication, the book is given its meaning by what it contains; the book does not carry this meaning on its own. This situation can be clarified by considering two different categories of books. Books in the category of personal growth self-development give lessons to their readers in line with the ideology of individualism. The idea is that everything that happens to people (success-failure, happiness-unhappiness, wealth-poverty, etc.) is the result of their own choices, and that the only way to change this is within the individual. Books of this kind play an important role in the maintenance and reproduction of the given. However, it cannot be said that books as a form of communication are solely responsible for the spread of individualist ideology. Apart from the aforementioned books, there are also books that aim to broaden the intellectual horizons of readers and contribute to their critical thinking and questioning processes. As a tool, the book does not perform any of these functions on its own, it does not perform any function on its own, free from its author and publisher, and the author is not dead, as is claimed.

Based on this framework, current communication technology and media, which definitions such as new media and new communication technologies attempt to encompass, do not assume a role independent of social and historical conditions. It

cannot be argued that generations define the world in different ways simply because of the intensity of their relationship with these technologies and media. The content produced and mediated is not independent of the existing social order. Therefore, it is not the technology that breathe their soul into generations, but those who have the ownership and privilege to use the technology. The world view and framework disseminated by "former" communication technologies and the content produced by "newer" communication technologies are not incompatible and contradictory. In this sense, we can speak of a historical continuity. Since the relations of sovereignty do not change, there may be a change between the "old" and the "new" not in the core but in form.

This fragmented picture is exacerbated by the increasingly narrow expertise of the social sciences, rhetorically constructed clusters of concepts, and attempts at theoretical explanation that are not coherent and holistic. "It has reinforced this tendency by fragmenting and compressing holistic knowledge about human beings into isolated areas of specialisation, into the narrow sphere of disciplines, each with its own language, and by concentrating on those small areas of life on which statistical manipulation is possible" (Olmann, 2019, p. 17).

Looking at the determinations and claims made with a focus on generations, it can be said that the variable 'generation' functions as a kind of horoscope or prophecy in maintaining the status quo and reproducing relations of domination. Both the academic and popular proliferation of the concept points to this tendency. The various differences attributed to generations are explained entirely on the basis of definitions made apart from society and history. This, in turn, leads to the transformation of all human practice into a market instrument, a value of use and exchange. It should be seen as a matter of urgency that the human being stamped with letters should untie the knots that try to bind them.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS, FUNDING, AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Author Contributions: Kaan Taşbaşı.

AUTHOR:

Kaan Taşbaşı: PhD, Associate Professor at Yeditepe University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Radio Television and Cinema. He conducts research and lectures on mass communication, sociology of communication, culture and communication.

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0837-1191>