Influence of new technologies on family in the consciousness of youth of the iGen generation attending secondary schools in the Opole Voivodeship

Abstract

The doctor dissertation focused on the issue of the influence of new technologies on the family of the iGen generation of youth attending secondary schools in the Opole Voivodeship, and investigated how these devices affect the representatives of this young generation - people for whom the virtual world is an integral part of everyday life and an extremely important point of reference for everyday tasks or problems. Consequently, in their case, real and virtual reality intermingle very strongly, which for the representatives of the iGeneration is natural and often unnoticeable. However, for the older generations, these are still two separate spaces. Understanding the functioning of these young people, therefore, is a huge challenge for today's parents, as they are the ones who have to cope with the upbringing of truly digital citizens and be "signposts" for all the families that will come after them.

The aim of the dissertation was to examine how new technologies affect the family of young people belonging to the iGen generation attending secondary schools in the Opole region, and representatives of this generation. The subject of the research was therefore the iGen generation youth from secondary schools in Opole Voivodeship and their families.

The main research hypothesis of this dissertation was that new technologies affect the families of youth belonging to the iGen generation attending secondary schools in the Opole Voivodeship and representatives of this generation. In order to verify this hypothesis, specific hypotheses were also put forward. Almost all of them were positively verified. The main research problem was expressed in the form of the following question: How do new technologies affect the family of young people belonging to the iGen generation attending secondary schools in the Opole Voivodeship and the representatives of this generation? The way to solve the presented problem was not only the analysis of source materials and literature on the subject, but first of all the results of empirical research conducted for the purposes of this research. The research was conducted among representatives of the iGen generation from all secondary schools in the Opole Voivodeship.

Analyses made in the present research were of theoretical and empirical nature. The theoretical part contains two chapters concerning both the functioning of modern families in the era of the expansion of new communication technologies, and the characteristic features of young people of the iGen generation. The empirical part of the research begins with
a description of the rationale for choosing the topic of the dissertation in the context of the Opole Voivodeship, together with the characteristics of the research procedure. Then, the analysis of own research results was carried out, the hypotheses were verified and remedial actions for modern families were proposed. The dissertation ends with conclusions related to the impact of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic on young people of the iGen generation and their families.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first of these presents the role of new communication technologies over the centuries. The chapter also explores postmodern society and the place of the modern family in this society. It also discusses how new technologies affect family relationships and ties.

The second chapter focuses on the characteristics of young people of the iGen generation. Based on the analysis of the available literature in this field and the available data, it is presented how new technologies affect the youngest generation in terms of mental and physical health and social relations. The chapter ends with a brief characterisation of the impact of the pandemic on the use of new technologies by the young people studied.

The third chapter begins with reflections on the relevance of the choice of topic in the Opole Silesia perspective. As part of the description of the research procedure, the aim of the research is presented, the research problem and hypotheses are formulated, and then the methods, techniques and research tools as well as variables and indicators are described. This chapter also includes a description of the sample selection and a brief description of statistical methods used in the research to analyse the collected data.

Chapter Four presents the results of our own research and a number of analyses showing the effects of excessive contact of the iGen generation with advanced technology and the opportunities it offers. These analyses were divided into four areas, and separate subsections refer to the social and psychological consequences of using new technologies and the impact of new technologies on the health of the examined young people. The added value of this subsection is a brief characteristic of the impact of the pandemic on the manner of using new technologies by the iGen generation youth from secondary schools in the Opole Voivodeship.

The last, fifth chapter, also based on the results of our own research, presents the role of new technologies in the everyday lives of families in Opole, as well as analyses of the impact of family ties and relations on the attitudes of the iGen generation towards new technologies. It also describes a proposal of remedial actions for the modern family in the matter of using new technologies by the youngest members of the family. Also this part of the research ends with a brief characteristic of the impact of the pandemic on the family of the iGen generation youth from the Opole Province.
The research has shown that families in Opole are very well equipped with modern devices, in particular with smartphones/mobile phones, of which almost 70% of the families surveyed had four or more. It is thanks to them and the possibilities they offer (i.e. access to instant messaging or mobile phone calls) that family members stay in constant contact. According to the majority of respondents, these devices contributed to the improvement of their communication with parents, which made both them and their guardians feel safer. The young people surveyed also frequently used the opportunities offered by modern technologies, i.e. instant messaging, to contact family members they had not seen for a long time. Many respondents acknowledged that such an opportunity was particularly useful during the restrictions associated with the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

Smartphones/mobile phones have become an integral part of the daily, social functioning of the young people interviewed, enabling them to constantly remain online. This results in them having their smartphone/mobile phone always beside them, also at night time. In the case of the young people tested, the impact of new technologies was noted in each of the categories analysed, i.e. mental and physical health and social relations.

The aim of this dissertation was to fill a gap in the scientific literature concerning a so far little recognised fragment of social - and also Opole's - reality, which is the broadly understood influence of modern technologies on the family, but also on the members of the iGeneration. It probably does not address exhaustively the complexity of the subject, but it may be a starting point for further, more detailed analyses, especially in relation to issues directly related to the impact of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic on the everyday life of the iGen generation in Opole and their families.

Keywords: family, iGen generation, new technologies, new communication technologies.