Generation Z Social Capital as a Result of Digital Socialization

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to reveal the features of the social construction of reality by representatives of generation Z and to assess, on the basis of the data obtained, the evolution of the social capital of modern society. Based on generational analysis, social constructivism, and research on social capital, the authors surveyed 201 students enrolled in higher education institutions in St. Petersburg. The focus of research attention was such characteristics of respondents as independence in decision-making, the ability to maintain rational thinking and conduct critical discussion, interaction with real and virtual spaces, and the cognitive foundations of social communications. Based on the data obtained, a number of important conclusions were drawn about the loss of social capital and the weakening of social ties, on the need to differentiate between social, cultural and civil capitals, on capital compensation in a virtual environment, as well as on the influence of modern technologies on the way of building social ties. This work is a continuation of the work of a team of authors on the study of the features of Generation Z, begun in 2019.

Keywords

Generation Z, social capital, virtualization, phygital reality, digital behavior

1. Introduction

The loss of social capital is becoming a problem in modern society, and Generation Z follows these trends with the peculiarities of their behavior and construction of reality. In general, it can be recognized that the "digitization" of social interaction reduces social capital every year.

Generation Z is currently a fairly small group. The total number of Russian "digital natives" today is approximately 22 million. (for comparison: "millennials" outnumber "buzzers" by about 1.6 times [1]). There is every reason to believe that Gen Z are more socially isolated from the mile than other generations. This is confirmed by the following social trends: the number of single parents in 2017 amounted to a third of all Russian families, and the number of single mothers over the past 20 years has increased 3 times [2]; it is also worth noting the low level of trust of Russians to each other - 56% of young people initially regard strangers with distrust (compared with an average value of 48%) [3].

The decline in social capital, especially characteristic of the youth environment, does not apply to the description of exclusively Russian reality. Generation Z, as noted by K. Trinko [4], is the loneliest generation in the United States. Cigna conducted a survey showing that about half of American citizens sometimes or always feel lonely, and one in five Americans surveyed reported that meaningful face-to-face meetings occur less often than once a week. At the same time, the survey did not reveal a significant difference in the levels of loneliness between those who often or, conversely, rarely used social networks [4].

A 2017 report for Senator J. Michael Lee of Utah described the following indicators of declining social capital in American society: Monthly church attendance has declined from the early 1970s to the present - from 50% to 57% up from 42% to 44% now; in 1974, a third of Americans communicated

with their neighbors several times a week, while in 2017 only 19% do it; people spend less time on casual conversations with colleagues, going from an average of 2.5 hours a week in the mid-1970s to just under an hour in 2012; families are also getting smaller, and the percentage of children raised with or without a parent has doubled, from 15% to 31% [5].

Perhaps the problem of social capital has a solution in its transformation - it flows from the physical world to the virtual world. D. Hessekil notes that generation Z has a much larger global network of connections and friends, which is worth learning from them [6]. Growing social disunity may well be accompanied by an increase in social connections in the digital world. At the moment, it is difficult to give unambiguous answers to questions about the pace at which the transformation of social capital is taking place, whether it is appropriate to compare social and virtual capital, and what are the possible consequences of these processes. However, in any case, the study of the specifics of the social capital of generation Z is necessary in the context of this topic.

2. Literature review

The study of the social capital of generation Z is based on the structuralist-constructivist theory of Bourdieu. The special type of reflexivity that is characteristic of Generation Z is in fact a form of cultural capital. Cultural capital in Bourdieu's interpretation is the sum of all the cultural resources of an individual [7]. Bourdieu identifies several types or states of cultural capital - incorporated, which involves the accumulation and creation of cultural potential by an individual, objectified, that is, capital in the form of cultural things, and institutionalized, that is, certificates of academic qualifications issued by various institutions [8; 9]. Among the followers of Bourdieu, we are most interested in the concept of "reflective habitus" by Sweetman [10], from the point of view of which reflexivity as a form of social capital is an advantageous property for more financially secured and educated students. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is effectively used to interpret the characteristics of youth [11]. Attempts are being made to quantify cultural capital [12; 13].

An important conclusion from Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is that cultural capital is highly dependent on education and the introduction of innovations in society requires an impact on the individual's habit. Bourdieu noted that cultural capital flows from habitus [14]. Habit, in turn, turns out to be extremely dependent on the external social environment [15]. Creation of an environment favorable for the implementation of innovations is a promising direction for the development of social technologies.

R. Putnam's concept of social capital turns out to be very close to understanding cultural capital in Bourdieu's concept as part of a reflective habit. This theoretical analogy is especially important, since there are different interpretations of social capital and this concept itself was introduced into scientific circulation 6 times with different semantic shades [16]. Putnam understands social capital as social connections, networks, and norms that involve a relationship of reciprocity and trust. The characteristics of reciprocity and trust strongly influence the nature of social capital. In particular, in the book For Democracy to Work, Putnam cites the results of a study of Italian society, in which there is a significant difference between the north and south of the country [17]. The more economically successful northern regions of Italy are characterized by a large number of different communities and associations. In the south, on the contrary, mutual distrust is more widespread; nepotism and corruption flourish in society. Obviously, this situation is the result of certain cultural characteristics of the community, and in this interpretation, Putnam's social capital is close to the concept of Bourdieu's cultural capital.

In the context of the increasing virtualization of social interaction in the generation Z environment, the concept of Bourdieu's social capital is becoming extremely relevant. It demonstrates significant heuristic value for both theoretical interpretation and empirical study of the characteristics of the digital generation.

3. Theoretical and methodological foundations of the study

This article represents the second phase of Gen Z research. A series of studies in this area began in 2019 (DTGS-2020). This time, the focus of the study was the question of the formation of social capital in Generation Z in the context of the social construction of reality. The author's questionnaire was

compiled, which made it possible to identify the characteristic features of generation Z in the process of constructing social reality. The questionnaire assumed work with a random sample of 201 first and second year students from four universities in St. Petersburg. The sample size in this study was not large due to the difficulty of accessing students in a pandemic. In addition, the project itself involved working with three different questionnaires, which ultimately increased the volume of work to 600 observations.

The research program and the questionnaire were developed taking into account the theoretical concept of social construction of reality by P. Berger and T. Luckman, which is an expression of the theoretical and methodological approach of social constructivism. Interpretation, which is characterized by the inductive logic of research, laid the foundations for the epistemological orientation of our research. Interpretation of facts is based on the concepts of analysis of social capital by P. Bourdieu, R. Putnam, as well as theories aimed at analyzing generations by N. Hove, W. Strauss, J. Palfrey, D. Stillman, D. Tapscott, M. Prensky, Tolstikova I.I., Mamina R.I. and others.

This article presents the stage of the research associated with the analysis of the features of the social construction of reality by generation Z, therefore, as a research method, a questionnaire survey of 201 students was chosen, the choice of which met the requirements of representativeness, since it repeated the sex and age structure of society characteristic of the age cohort of 15-19 years old. those. 49% of men and 51% of women [1]. The sample is dominated by representatives of young people aged 18-19, their number is 74% of the total number of respondents. Analysis of the survey results and their interpretation allows us to establish a clear connection between the features of the social construction of reality by generation Z and the formation of their social capital.

The limitations of the study were related to the specifics of the object. It is difficult to separate the features of perception and changes in reality by generation Z, associated with the specifics of this cohort, from the process of primary and secondary socialization under the influence of social institutions. We understand these limitations.

4. An empirical analysis of the social construction of reality in Generation Z

The formation of social capital is one of the keys to a successful career, which is an important goal, especially for representatives of generation Z, who are gradually becoming equal members of society. This process proceeds simultaneously with the development of the surrounding world by young people, which means not just the assimilation of social values and norms, but also a conscious transformation of reality. The studies of the first stage (2019-2020) showed that despite the dominance of individualistic values in the profile of representatives of generation Z, he was also not free from the collectivist values of mutual assistance and empathy, which generally reflects the specifics of Russian culture [18].

The survey on the social construction of reality was presented by a series of fourteen questions reflecting the most important aspects of this social-cognitive process. So to the first question of the informational part of the questionnaire about the peculiarities of understanding the meaning of the concept of patriotism, the following answers were received. 48.8% of the respondents answered that they would find out the content of this concept on their own, either on the basis of experience or on the basis of reasoning. 25.9% of respondents (representatives of generation Z) answered that they would be guided by the opinion of experts. And only 9% of respondents would discuss this issue when meeting with friends or online. Thus, the frequency distribution of these responses allows us to conclude that generation Z predominantly seeks to penetrate the meaning of basic concepts either independently or based on the opinion of experts, which means that it is capable of making independent and balanced decisions. When asked how representatives of generation Z interpret such abstract concepts as "homeland", "religion", "humanism" 36.3% of the respondents answered that they do it with the help of concepts and formal logic; 27.9% visualize these concepts; 22.9% try to present these concepts intuitively and 11.4% represent some kind of visual and sound object. Thus, we can conclude that Generation Z has a penchant for analytical thinking, but not in the overwhelming majority. The hypothetical situation regarding the preparation of a report on the topic of comparative analysis of market and command economies assumed the identification of a tendency towards independence in the formation of a new product of knowledge. 40.3% of respondents answered that in order to prepare this

material, they will read some serious books and refer to primary sources. 33.8% of respondents answered that they would limit themselves to reading articles on the Internet. 15.9% of respondents said they would read books "diagonally". 5.5% will base their talk on short retellings of books. Based on this distribution, we can conclude that, in general, students strive to gain solid knowledge for presenting a report on a new and complex topic, however, due to time constraints, they make rational decisions about preparing reports based on more accessible sources from the Internet.

The next question in the questionnaire concerned decision-making in conditions of diametrically opposite points of view. It was formulated in relation to the acceptability of euthanasia, which was "discussed" in classroom and online. The question was how the panelists define a valid point of view. According to the answers of the respondents, 57.7% of them will adhere to the results obtained during the discussion in the group, 20.4% of the respondents trust the results of the discussion with fellow students after classes. And only 11.9% will rely on the results of online discussion. Thus, in spite of their "phygital" characteristic [19], most representatives of generation Z build an idea of the world and make judgments obtained as a result of real interaction and discussion, where the presence of social capital plays an important role. The question of discussing the problem of animal welfare assumed the identification of the position of representatives of generation Z regarding the possibility of multiple opinions. The situation when many opinions appeared in the course of the discussion may be associated with the possibility of the simultaneous existence of several correct opinions. This was the answer of 39.8% of the respondents. 26.9% of respondents came to the conclusion that any opinion can only be partially true. 25.9% of respondents answered that opinion is always subjective and it is pointless to seek the truth. And only 7% said that there is always one correct opinion. This distribution allows us to conclude that the young generation is ready for discussion and the development of deliberative democracy [20].
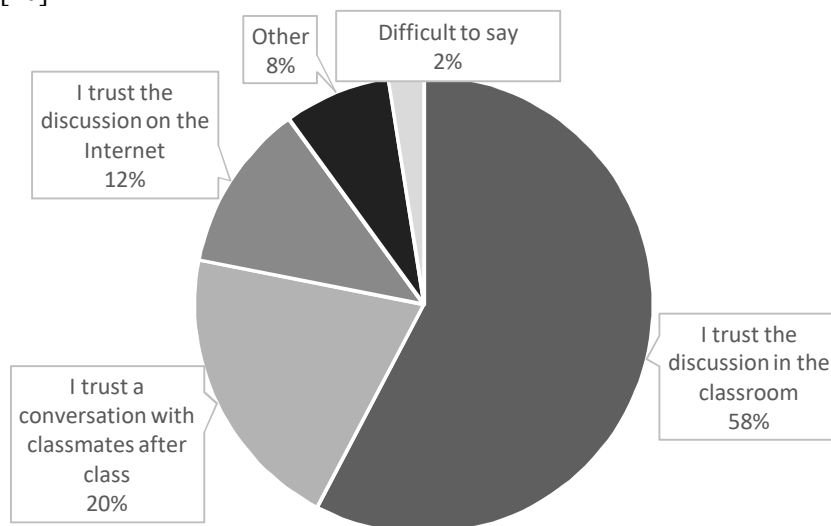

Figure 1: Trust in the Results of the Euthanasia Discussion

When asked about the acceptability of the ideologies of the past for modern society, 44.8% of the respondents concluded that, in general, these ideologies are suitable, but they need significant transformation. 38.3% of respondents concluded that they are suitable only in certain cases. 9.5% came to the conclusion that they are not like. 6% of the respondents said that these ideologies are completely suitable. Thus, we can conclude that the student part of generation Z is developing critical thinking, and they are ready for a conscious transformation of the social reality surrounding them in the present and the future.

Our empirical results confirm that representatives of generation Z consider the independence of decision-making to be the most significant setting, the importance of the opinions of friends and experts depends on the importance of the subject under consideration. So, when analyzing the answers to the question of what happiness is and how to find an answer to it, it was revealed that the majority of the surveyed representatives of the phygital generation (62.2%) prefer to independently determine the main

content of the concept of "happiness" based on their own experience and based on their reasoning. Zoomers are not afraid to follow their dreams, their ideas about "happiness" as their ideal are formed independently, since they are free from psychological clamps, prejudices and stereotypes: they do not delegate decision-making to experts (18.9%), although there is trust in expert opinion (8.5%) and least of all (5%) are inclined to discuss with friends. Independence in decision-making is clearly traced in the answers to questions about choosing a specialty for planning a career and about the possibility of using soft drugs - the absolute majority (65.7% and 78.6%, respectively) will make a decision on their own. The complexity of their perception of expert opinion can be traced in the answers to these questions. They will listen to the opinion of experts only on drug use (15.9%), and the opinion of experts on the labor market (8.0%) will be less preferable for them than the opinion of their relatives (13.4%), which indicates the importance of the role family, its values for Generation Z, as well as distrust of experts in the labor market.
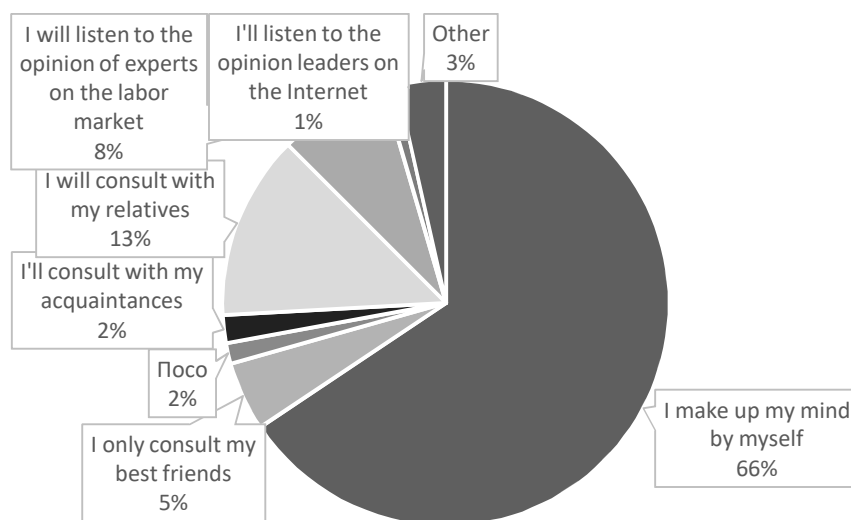

Figure 2: Choosing a future career

In general, this confirms the results of the empirical study of 2019-2020 that we obtained, which determined that "the predominance of individualistic attitudes (self-expression, building a career) in the profile of a typical representative of generation Z in Russia allows us to speak of the formation of" generation I "in Russia, but with Russian specifics, since the behavioral profile is not free from collectivism attitudes (mutual assistance - 24%, empathy - 13%), which ranked second and fourth in the value system of representatives of generation Z, respectively "[18, p. 109]. The answer to the question about the importance of the opinions of other participants in the interaction testifies to the independence of the younger generation, and confirms the results obtained in the 2019-2020 studies, when, according to the survey, 74% of the participants took into account the opinion of others when making a decision, but put their own opinion [18, p. 109]. And, what is important, it destroys the myth about the priority of the importance of Internet communication in their lives - according to data from 2020-2021. from 1% (with people of varying degrees of closeness) to 5% (with close friends) are ready to discuss personal problems on the Internet.

Freedom of buzzers from psychological clamps, prejudices and stereotypes, the desire to find their own special new paths, as well as a lack of inclination to take risks, make them prone to organic growth and smooth transformations. Especially important for them are the values they share, including ecology, tolerance, etc. At the same time, their trust in official information has not yet been finally formed, and in answers to the question about making a decision about getting a job in a company with opposite characteristics - on the basis of official data and the opinion of acquaintances (48.8%) or a view of the problem of a representative of their generation (35.8%), - priority opinions are practically not defined. The time has come for a new generation, which itself chooses an employer, people for whom not only and not so much a brand is important as reputation, attitude to the values shared by Generation Z.

Many theories of the problems of integrating buzzers into business processes are built on one of the most common myths about Gen Z. We are talking about the so-called "translation difficulties" associated with the fact that zetas have a different perception of the communication process itself due to access to unlimited communication in social networks. But the Z-generation, communicating with everyone on an equal footing and highlighting this as a value, nevertheless understand the framework and boundaries of the hierarchy, which is expressed, in particular, in relation to the use of slang outside of subcultural communication, which was shown by the data of our survey. The majority of the surveyed students (76.1%) showed an understanding of the inadmissibility of using subcultural words as a deviation in the changing conditions of interaction on the example of using slang in a conversation with a teacher. An understanding of the presence of linguistic cultural norms of interaction was shown by many students (15.9%). Since it is culture that determines the participants in communication, the choice of topics and communication strategies, the context, the way of transmitting messages, the way of encoding and decoding, etc., understanding the regulated norms and those not recommended demonstrates the involvement of Z representatives in the general cultural context and removes the question of "translation difficulties". In the collision of cultural manifestations, both verbal and non-verbal, specific features that are not recognized in intracultural communication become obvious. This confirms the system of factors A.A. Leontiev, determining the national-cultural linguistic specifics (factors associated with cultural tradition: permissions and prohibitions, stereotyped, reproducible acts of communication; etiquette characteristics of universal acts of communication, role and socio-symbolic features of communication; factors associated with the social situation and communication functions: functional sublanguages and etiquette forms; factors related to the social situation in the narrow sense; factors determined by the specifics of the language of a given community) [21].

Also of interest is the relationship to political ideology and economic policy. As the study showed, the phygital generation is not positively oriented towards these topics, their interest is rather unstable, which can be characterized not only by the preferred answer for 34.3%: "If there is a mood, then I can read about something like that", but also specific answers about interest in articles on these topics on the Internet (26.4%) and books (18.4%); In total, 19% reported varying degrees of "no interest" or, which means roughly the same, view them "diagonally". This is vividly illustrated by K. Sobchak's interview with the popular tiktoker Danya Milokhin, 19 years old, 10 million subscribers, on YouTube on December 20, 2020. The presenter asks him the question: "Why doesn't your generation go to rallies?" To which Danya replies: "I am not against them, but not for them either. I stand on the sidelines and do not want to climb, I am not interested in. I do not try to understand this and do not want to fill my brain with this unnecessary information" [22].

The study of students of St. Petersburg universities showed that extremism and radicalism are also not typical for generation Z. As noted by 64.7% of respondents, "such statements are inadmissible as much as they are inadmissible in real communication." The results of the survey confirm the conclusions of the study "Russian "Generation Z": Attitudes and Values" conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation: "Political apathy is widespread. Many young people (almost 60%) are not interested at all or are very little interested in politics. At the same time, they practically do not have confidence in the national institutions of power. Only 26% trust the government, 16% trust political parties, 25% trust the State Duma. The level of confidence in the president of the country is relatively high (42%)" [23].

The study of students showed that the level of trust in close friends is high - 66.2% are ready to share personal problems, in contrast to 18.4% of those who answered that they would not discuss it with others. At the same time, only 5% of respondents will share their personal friends on the Internet. In general, the myth about the priority or parity of the virtual world in comparison with the real world is destroyed by the answers of the surveyed students - representatives of generation Z - only 5.0% will discuss the philosophical question "what is happiness" with friends on the Internet; 5.0% - personal problems; 1% will listen to opinion leaders on the Internet about choosing a career path.

The conducted empirical research reveals positive trends in the formation of the reflective habit of generation Z. The digital generation demonstrates greater independence in the development of meanings in the process of social construction of reality. In doing so, they rely on serious literary sources and expert advice if they need to form an opinion on an important issue. Virtualization changes Gen Z communication, but does not have a significant negative impact on it. Advice from "opinion leaders" on the Internet is decisive for only a small proportion of young people.

5. Features of the construction of social reality by generation Z

The study of the features of the social capital of representatives of the "generation of gadgets" in the context of the increasing digitalization of social interaction was carried out on the basis of Bourdieu's theory. The main term in Bourdieu's theory that is most useful for interpreting social interaction is milleu. Since this term can be successfully used in interdisciplinary research, it has significant epistemological value for the study of the characteristics of the younger generation. The term "milleu" was used in his works by Durkheim [24, p. 233], however, Durkheim interpreted milieu from the standpoint of a systems approach, assessing the number of elements of this system and the nature of their interconnection.

From the point of view of Bourdieu, milieu is a more multifaceted term that combines both social characteristics and the characteristics of physical space [8]. According to Bourdieu, mileu consists of several types of capital. It combines traditional, financial capital with symbolic or cultural capital and social ties, which are also a kind of capital. This concept is integrative, since one type of capital allows one to interpret only a certain narrow aspect of the social characteristics of an individual. For example, if a person is very rich, but he does not have a sufficient level of education, then he will not become a full-fledged participant in communication among rich individuals. These three aspects of the social characteristics of the individual, combined by Bourdieu into a single concept of "milieu", form a certain generalizing characteristic of the individual. In the publications of European scientists, the term "milieu" is often used synonymously with the concept of lifestyle. Throughout the sociology of Bourdieu, the term "milieu" occupies a central place, also combining such terms as habit and reflexivity.

The multifaceted nature of the term "milieu" makes it a suitable tool for studying the characteristics of a generation of gadgets, since this generation lives in conditions of both virtual and traditional social interaction. From the point of view of Generation Z, there is no dichotomy of "real" and "virtual", these two spheres form a single communicative space. At the same time, in order to study real-virtual social interaction, it is necessary to have some point of contact between these communication spaces, and in Bourdieu's sociology, such a point is habitus, which is understood as "systems of stable, interchangeable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles that generate and organize practices and representations" [25, p. 153].

One of the main features of habitus is the purposeful nature of its formation. Living in society, the individual intentionally acquires certain objective and subjective characteristics. For the generation of gadgets, digital characteristics, the image of an individual in virtual space, become the most important characteristics of habit.

Another reason why the concept of "mile" is successful for studying the features of interaction between representatives of the generation of gadgets in a virtual environment is the increasing role of cultural differentiation.

If in traditional social interaction vertical characteristics play a decisive role, that is, an individual's belonging to a certain class and stratum, his place in the hierarchical structure of inequality, then in conditions of virtual interaction, the vertical characteristics of an individual are not obvious. In the context of digital interaction, a representative of generation Z can mislead interlocutors, present himself as a richer and more status member of society. In these conditions, the horizontal characteristics of the individual begin to play a much greater role, that is, his certain cultural characteristics are not associated with inequality.

Bourdieu's sociological legacy contains the concept of social fields, which may also be useful for studying Generation Z in the context of digital interaction. Under the social field, Bourdieu understood a certain area of social reality, which is characterized by the predominance of a certain type of social capital. So in the conditions of the political social field, social ties will prevail, while in the academic field, the symbolic type of capital will become the predominant type - knowledge [26]. In relation to each other, social fields can be relatively independent since the participants in each field have specific goals and interests. When studying any social processes or interactions, it is important to understand in which social roles they occur.

Representatives of certain groups or social classes will interact in a special way in different social fields. The difference between the virtual space lies in the fact that it forms, as it were, a single social field in which the differences between representatives of certain classes decrease. For this reason, the

most important aspect of the milieu in the virtual space is the cultural capital of the individual. Since we are witnessing an increasing digitalization of social interaction in all spheres of social life, it is logical to assume that cultural capital, as part of the milieu, will play an increasingly important role in the life of every individual. For representatives of the generation of gadgets, this circumstance opens up great prospects. Although they do not have significant financial capital or high social status.

6. Discussion, conclusion, perspectives

The research results give a very clear picture of the construction of social reality by representatives of generation Z. The data obtained in the course of the study represent the image of the "zoomer" as a "good citizen", inclined to independence in decision-making, rational-critical discussion and gaining knowledge. The knowledge, abilities, skills and perceptions acquired by "digital natives" as a result of interaction with physical reality turn out to be more significant than the same competencies, but acquired in the virtual world. Gen Z representatives generally do not support extremist ideas, and the authority of teachers and educators is practically unshakable.

On the other hand, the research results reveal a number of social disfunctions of representatives of generation Z, in particular, the lack of self-criticism. The respondents show a readiness to criticize others, information from the Internet, the actions of authorities and economic agents, but, apparently, do not criticize themselves and their own opinions, their position, their actions. This probably speaks of a general trend associated with the humanization of public relations and greater concern for the protection of human and civil rights and freedoms, but it also speaks of the prevailing model of perception of social reality that corresponds to a certain generally accepted standard. The survey focused mainly on students, who probably consider studying at a university as a necessary and important process in the formation of a personality, so important that it is not questioned. This may also be related to the age of students, which largely depends on the opinions of parents and teachers. But this is largely due to digitalization - the possibility of self-expression through social networks. Self-PR excludes self-criticism.

An uncritical attitude towards self-promotion means opens up almost unlimited trust in "smart" devices and platforms. "Digital natives" deserve such a name, since the fusion of oneself with the technical world gives rise to a curious phenomenon – a phygital or, more precisely, psychotechnical reality, a view of society and the world around us through the prism of an information bubble that surrounds a person. These are full-fledged socio-technical systems in which natural and artificial intelligences mutually enrich each other.

It is difficult to answer the question of how such a situation will affect the quantity and quality of various types of capital, if we follow the ideas of P. Bourdieu. While social capital flows from the physical to the virtual world, civil and cultural capital can increase. Individualization and atomization can foster an increased focus on civic engagement and creativity. An increase in the level of education can also lead to participation in cultural production and reproduction, which affects the level of cultural capital only positively.

Also, at the moment, there is no definite answer to the nature of the mutual influence of the involvement of representatives of generation Z in the virtual world on innovative activity. On the one hand, the growing volumes of information used by "buzzers" should create a positive dynamic of creative capital. However, on the other - and probably more important - side, the choice of the information consumed, the quality of the content is of fundamental importance, and here, most likely, the fundamental influence of the Internet on creativity will not be found.

Summing up the research, it should be noted that the topic of social capital of generation Z is far from being completed and developed. A more detailed and detailed study of the social capital of generation Z is the scientific task of the team of authors in the near future.

7. Acknowledgements

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