

## TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON GENERATION Z'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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### **Abstract**

*The development of social networks has determined some changes in the behavior of users, especially those of Generation Z, who spend a lot of time online. Every connection brings benefits, but also some negative consequences for the younger generation. The impact of social networks is also visible in the educational process, in the interactions between students and teachers. The research methodology was based on interviews with 30 teachers. The main results indicate that, from the teachers' perspective, there are advantages for Generation Z using social networks, but also certain risks. The educational process can be improved by the new means of communication, but at the same time it promotes the superficiality and inattentiveness of the students. A balanced coverage and the maximum use of the advantages offered by social networks can contribute to the bio-psycho-social development of the representatives of Generation Z.*

### **Keywords**

*Social Media, Generation Z, Teachers*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Social media has been a game changer in people's lifestyles. Nowadays, it represents an evolving environment that offers new perspectives regarding how people interact. Technological means are directly related to communication in various

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fields. The number of users is on the rise year after year, and the younger generation is interested in having daily access.

A study by Clement (2020) shows that in 2019, the average daily use of social media worldwide will be 144 minutes per day. This compares to 142 minutes the previous year. The Philippines is currently ranked as the country with the highest daily social media usage, with users averaging three hours and 53 minutes daily.

Social media encompasses any digital technology that allows users to connect with other users. Generally, the opportunity to comment on or modify the content of information is a hallmark of social media (Greenhow, 2017). The virtual environment is challenging because of the potential for uncensored expression, socialization, and the creation of new friendships.

In a digitized society, virtual communication is a *sine qua non* (indispensable ingredient) for interactions between people. Most of the people involved in the educational act (teachers, students) are active members of the new means of communication. Socialization involves the transmission - the assimilation of values, attitudes, or behavioral patterns specific to a group or community from the perspective of the formation, adaptation, and social integration of another person (Zamfir et al., 1998). The use of social networks involves an interactive process of communication in which participants are both senders and receivers.

Teachers can use social networks in the educational act for organization, planning and information. They can also join different groups where the latest information in the field they are involved in is posted. Then there is the possibility of attending seminars that help in personal development and at the same time keep in touch with teachers from different areas of the country and beyond its borders.

However, young people, Generation Z, are the most active on social networks. According to Samsung's Innovation

Report study, Generation Z, also known as the iGeneration, Centennials or Digital Natives, refers to people born between 1995 and 2012. At this moment, 32% of the world's population belongs to Generation Z, making it the category with the largest representation worldwide, and in Romania there are approximately 2.26 million people from Generation Z, between the ages of 13 and 23 (Seol, 2020). It is worth noting that the majority of Facebook users are over the age of 40, according to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center between the 25th of January and the 8th of February 2021 (Figure 1). Teenagers are more interested in Instagram, and children pay more attention to the platform of TikTok.

The new social network is sought by the younger generation, but studies are still being done to discover the psychological and social impact on users (McCashin et al., 2023). Mental health can be affected by how often you go online. However, the younger generation prefers activity on Instagram and TikTok. The most searched content is related to humor (Martínez-Estrella et al., 2023), and users are interested in maintaining a positive self-image.

On the other hand, TikTok helps to appreciate images from various activities and lived experiences, promotes creativity among users by providing various tools for video editing. However, specialists warn about the danger of dependence on the new social network (Bin Salam et al., 2022).

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Bopp and Stellefson (2020) note that the rapid development of social networking has led to increased use by the younger generation for educational purposes. The authors believe that the new means of communication should also be used from a physical activity perspective. Sedentary lifestyles are a danger for young people who spend a lot of time online.

In studies on the relationship between social media and education, the most discussed topics are related to the introduction, use and effects of new media in the educational process (Denen et al., 2020). The authors believe that it is worthwhile to carry out more complex analyses in order to understand the pedagogical usefulness of social networks.

The opportunities offered by the online environment are also an advantage for students in the academic development process (Rahman et al., 2019). The responses of young people in the higher education system are positive. The use of social media provides a high level of satisfaction and security. Young people value online interactions and find them rewarding in the educational process.

Teachers are challenged by new communication systems not to limit themselves to traditional teaching methods (Namaziandost et al., 2019). In the classical version, teachers did a lot of talking and students became mere spectators. Frequent interactions should take place in every classroom session, and the teacher-student relationship should be close by changing the roles of sender and receiver.

Social networks have become useful tools for teacher training activities. As in the case of Generation Z, the time teachers spend online offers some benefits, but also some risks. The impact of online activities affects intrapersonal and interpersonal communication, as well as interactions with students and other teachers (Carpenter et al., 2019). Therefore, teachers can use the online environment constructively or it can become a harmful environment.

Many adolescents spend time in the virtual world on a daily basis and are not only consumers, but also producers of social media content. Each post conveys a story of the user and followers can discover the mood of the sender (Rubio-Hurtado et al., 2022). Specific training is needed to make young people aware of the dangers of disclosing some of their personal information online in educational activities.

A study conducted in several educational institutions in Pakistan (Abbas et al., 2019) shows that the use of social media has a predominantly negative impact on the behavior of a young person involved in the educational process, beyond the positive aspects of online communication. The benefits, but also the risks of the new means of communication have been analyzed (Goodyer et al., 2019), and the majority of respondents believe that users are no longer effective in educational activities, considering the time spent in the virtual world.

In the virtual environment, young people are attracted by the fast communication and the new possibility of entertainment (Palanisamy et al., 2020). Over time, the younger generation has been attracted to social networks, and adults in families have been surprised by the attraction of new modern media. Today, there is a need to educate parents to protect children from accessing inappropriate sites. There are many dangers, including sending sexual messages, being exposed to vulgar language, or interacting with people who hide their identity.

Some research mentions the great potential of social networks for formal as well as informal education (Greenhow et al., 2018). To get the most out of the online environment, users must not be content to be consumers, but creators of useful material. Specialized educational programs can help the younger generation take advantage of the online environment in the educational process.

The topic of the relationship between social media and the younger generation is topical, and there is a need after media literacy for young people to develop their critical thinking and become intelligent consumers of the online environment (Sachdeva et al., 2019). Involving decision makers (government, educational institutions) by providing training courses would solve some of the current problems. Some information can be added to subjects that are in the curriculum.

The development of social networks has brought changes in several areas, including education. People with advanced online skills are valued in the job market worldwide. A disadvantage is that many countries still use traditional learning methods, which means memorizing information without developing the application side (Vukmirović et al., 2019). The online environment is integrated into the daily activities of young people, and its use in education would be an advantage. Other research mentions the link between mental health and social media use (Holmes et al., 2020). Therefore, the online environment can be an educational tool to raise awareness of the importance of mental health among the younger generation. Useful information from professionals can help prevent some of the conditions that characterize online addiction. There are other risks associated with the use of social media, such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and privacy violations. Therefore, any means of prevention through the promotion of educational materials, even though the virtual environment, can help users.

The impact of online platforms on the younger generation is directly related to their lack of involvement in real socialization. The priority has become online interaction at the expense of real-life interaction (Goswami et al, 2021). Over time, social media users are unable to prioritize the activities that really matter because online presence comes first every day. Lifestyle, social life, leisure activities are directly affected by frequent interactions in the virtual world.

In the educational process, active participation in online communication by using very limited language and relying on automatic spelling on mobile phones severely affects the individual's long-term ability to apply correct spelling (Tilak et al, 2021). The use of emoticons, abbreviations and certain symbols are common in texts sent by the younger generation. However, a more complex mental exercise is needed to achieve creativity in writing and analyzing immediate aspects of life.

The development of technological means has prompted research in several areas to understand the impact, positive or negative, of the virtual world on the user (Wong et al., 2023). The influence is direct on young people and is also related to their diet. Campaigns to promote products through social media have been successful among the younger generation. As a result, some products are consumed based on the existing advertisements and thus the diet is changed.

Excessive use of social media leads to drug-like behavior among individuals. Sleep disturbances and depressive symptoms are also observed (De Donckker et al., 2022). Young people spend the most time online and are the most affected. Studies are needed to understand the consequences of prolonged use of social media.

On the other hand, the positive impact of the online environment in the educational process is highlighted in the study by Ansari and Ali Khan (2020). Social networks play an important role in effective interaction with other students and teachers. Used intelligently, new communication media can contribute to academic achievement. Young people can be more creative, dynamic, and research-oriented in order to acquire new information in a given field.

There are also many teachers who do not use social networks, not having the necessary training and at the same time considering that there are certain risks in the online environment. However, academic staff who use the new technology appreciate the fast communication, promoted information and creativity on social networks (Chugh et al., 2020).

For pupils and students, the new means of communication represent an advantage in the educational process. Accessibility, quick interaction and diversity of materials are aspects appreciated by the younger generation. Through the use of social networks students believe that academic performance is improved (Al-Adwan et al., 2020). The online promotion of some educational institutions is appreciated by young people.

Modern technology also helps learning a foreign language much easier, such as English (Yu et al., 2022). Classic methods cannot be adapted to a high performing level like social networks. Thus, social, cognitive and emotional engagement is greatly enhanced. Updating data from the online environment is fast, and access to information is permanent by connecting to social networks.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Within the framework of the present qualitative analysis, the following objectives were established to contribute to the achievement of concrete results: (1) identify the benefits of using social networks by Generation Z; (2) identify the risks of using social networks by Generation Z; (3) analyze the influence of social networks on the educational process.

### **Research questions**

The research questions used in the research are as follows:

1. How do members of Generation Z relate to social media?
2. What are the main reasons why young people are connected to new technological means?
3. What are the opportunities and risks perceived by teachers regarding the new means of communication?
4. How and to what extent does the use of social networks influence the educational process?

### **Data collection methods**

The methodology used was qualitative, based on a semi-structured interview. The time allotted for the interview was 15-20 minutes, and the interviews took place during school breaks or during teachers' free time. The tool used was

designed by the author to be able to include the aspects pursued by the study.

The research is a case study to analyze the connection between social networks and the educational process from the perspective of teachers. The instrument used in the study was the interview guide that was designed for the teaching staff. The questions asked during the interviews were the following:

1. What do you think are the advantages of young people's use of social networks?
2. What worries you most about the online environment?
3. How has the educational process been influenced, positively and negatively, by the use of social networks?
4. What recommendations do you have for young people addicted to social media?

## **Participants**

The participants for the qualitative analysis consisted of 30 teachers who were selected for the semi-structured interview according to the following criteria: a) they must be teachers employed at one of the educational institutions involved in the study; b) they must teach in a high school class; c) they must be available to participate in the study. Most of the teachers (43.3%) who responded to the interview have more than 20 years of experience in education. This aspect is important because these people have experience in the educational framework and have had the opportunity to meet several generations of children. Therefore, I can highlight the aspects that have been lost over time and that were important for the full development of the students.

The number of teachers with 15-20 years of experience is also quite high (23.3%), followed by teachers with 10-15 years of experience and those with less than 5 years of

experience, with the same percentage (13.3%). The lowest index is for those who have been working in the educational system for 5 to 10 years, 6.7%.

According to the information above, it is understood that people with seniority in education were involved in the research. Those teachers have worked with multiple generations of students, including those who did not study in the era of social media development. Therefore, they were able to compare the educational outlook before and after the advent of new means of communication.

Ethical considerations regarding the role of social networks in the educational process have been the subject of many intense debates. On the one hand, there is the perspective of young people who consider them very useful, and on the other hand, the reaction of teachers who also mention the limiting aspects of the new means of communication. Interpersonal relationships represent a foundation for the structuring of personality, personality being both the result of interrelationships and the creator of interrelationships (Roratu, 2019).

On the other hand, there are concerns from users about the privacy of posted information and the exposure of personal data in the online environment (Hensley, 2023). However, both teachers and students must maximize the advantages of the new means of communication.

## **RESULTS**

The synthesis of the answers received from the teaching staff to the questions of the research segments incorporated in the interview includes several aspects (Table 1). Each emphasizes a direction of the new means of communication.

First of all, there are the advantages of the use of social networks by young people from the teachers' perspective, as follows: easy access to information; social binder, annex of the identity domain; real-time communication; transmitting

information quickly; maintaining friendships; developing digital skills; interplay; making connections with people who share their interests, socialization; effective way of intercultural communication; expressing creativity through posts.

Second, there are concerns about spending too much time online. The teachers believe that there are some disadvantages, as follows: loss of contact with reality; invasion of privacy; pornography; violence; wasting time with trivial things; lack of means of control and protection; the circulation of uncensored information; use of personal information and data; verbal violence; the promotion of non-values; the negative influence of influencers; addiction; self-centeredness; the fact that we do not know for sure who we are talking to, what the other's intentions are; lack of related legislation, lack of safety for young people in the online environment; superficial communication; toxic environment for peddling false information; the online environment doesn't worry me.

Thirdly, from the perspective of the educational act, teachers believe that there are also positive aspects with the development of new means of communication, among which the following are mentioned: people are open to ideas different from their own; making information accessible; materials can be sent more easily to students; maintaining the school-parent link; fast communication; information reaches many people in real time; the methods and procedures used in teaching the subject have multiplied. In addition to the opportunities specified above, teachers also mention negative aspects through the development of social networks, as follows: it encourages superficial thinking; diminishes the ability to differentiate between reality and fiction; spending a long time online; affects the teacher-student relationship; limits thinking and originality; easy access to information, at the expense of research and in-depth study; functional illiteracy, distracts during classes; posting videos with other classmates without their consent; is addictive; loss of interest in constructive reading.

Fourth, teachers offered practical suggestions for young people to limit their time online. Among the teachers' advice, we mention the following: to take a break for a few months, then use in moderation; to seek help as soon as possible and to find real activities in which they can get involved; to spend time with loved ones; to give up social networks; to sell phones; make a strict schedule and stick to it; to manage time rationally; to set a time to relax in nature, socialize with friends in the real environment, not virtual; get outdoors more with colleagues and real friends, read more, really socialize; learn the differences between fact and The synthesis of the answers received from the teachers to the questions of the research segments included in the interview includes several aspects (Table 1). Each of them emphasizes a direction of the new means of communication.

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Fifth, teachers believe that life without social media would have both advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, teachers

continued the statement "life without social media would be..." in the following ways: an oasis of calm; 20 years ago; the morning dew; no stress; unchaining and unleashing; a jungle without too many dangers; food without spices; a fairyland without adventure and danger; a true friendship that you take seriously and enjoy spending quality time with; soccer without the ball; a life lived to the fullest; awkward; a house with the curtains always drawn; more beautiful, people would spend more quality time with friends.

The results of the study offer certain perspectives that can contribute to the awareness of the impact of social networks on Generation Z from the perspective of teachers. New modern means can bring a loss of security, privacy, and freedom (Taplin, 2019) for users.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

In today's society, being connected online on a daily basis has become normalized. According to the digital consumption report for Romania, at the beginning of 2023, 67.3% of the Romanian population are users of social media platforms, while 88.9% of the total population have access to the Internet. Digitization has been successfully adopted: the equivalent of 145.4% of the total population had active telephone connections in the first months of 2023, which means almost 30 million connections from mobile devices (Kemp, 2023). Interactions in the online environment are frequent and blocking access, even for certain objective reasons, causes anxiety among young people.

The present study shows that social networks are recognized by teachers as a commonplace in the life of a young Generation Z. The impact of their use is complex, and the results are long-term. The existing debates in society are influenced by the degree of knowledge of the new modern means of communication.

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For example, during the pandemic, Generation Z, more than the other age groups, spent the most time in the virtual environment. Watching videos and TV shows with the help of the Internet, but also playing online games were the favorite activities (Figure 2). Also, exponents of this generation listened to music and read the press online. Communication on social networks was part of the daily schedule, even though through social media there was a danger that the psychological state of individuals would suffer (Liua et al., 2021).

Part of the time was also used for reading, but also listening to audio materials. There was no shortage of reading the print media to learn about events around the world. In addition to other activities, the study also indicates a relatively high interest in live-streamed events. Analyzing the results of the study, we better understand why among the ten important directions that shape generation Z (Twenge, 2020), we find No rush (continuation of childhood into adolescence), Internet or Inclusion (acceptance, equality, and debates on freedom of expression).

In the educational process, there is a need to adapt teaching methods according to new technologies. Learning through these networks is an attractive educational alternative that reduces time, social, spatial, or other restrictions (Pascu, 2015). The advantages of this type of learning are multiple, among which we mention: the space in which they work is intimate and does not require formalization, the user can learn at his own pace, quickly controlling his progress, benefiting from fast and permanent feedback, the interaction with the teacher is free and non-constraining, no travel expenses or

interruption of the current professional activity are necessary, if the traditional education is organized by age groups, the online one is organized by subjects; in a virtual class, subjects of all ages, with different training, can be brought together, neglecting spatial boundaries. In conclusion, the use of social networks in education represents the recognition of the social change produced by this phenomenon.

The topic of social networks remains topical, and through constructive discussions new means of communication can help develop the educational process. Students, teachers, parents, and the level of knowledge about the new modern means of communication influences the existing debates in society.

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The subject of social networks is still topical, and, through constructive discussions, new means of communication can contribute to the development of the educational process. Students, teachers, parents, and decision makers (government, educational institutions) must work together to maximize the benefits of the online environment for the educational system.

Organizing periodic trainings for teachers, offering appropriate programs and regular meetings for the exchange of experiences can contribute to the efficiency of the educational process through the new means of communication. Also, some meetings with parents can help to provide useful information from the online environment and present some risks of the online environment.

Providing facilities from the state for the purchase of modern equipment, merit scholarships for those who promote useful methods of using social networks in the educational process are work options. The adoption of effective modern

technological methods from other countries deserves to be integrated into the country's schools.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The answers given by the teaching staff confirm the three hypotheses of the study. Therefore, the use of social networks by young people involves both certain opportunities and risks. Then, the development of new communication technologies directly and indirectly influences the educational process. Moreover, excessive use of social networks decreases students' bio-psycho-social well-being. There is a danger that real-life interactions are limited by spending too much time on social media (losing touch with reality, shallow communication, encourages isolation, reduced interaction with teachers).

The fundamental requirements of the human being are found in the propositions of the virtual universe: friendship, love, appreciation, joy, and a pleasant existence (Katzner, 2018). However, for members of Generation Z, by being exposed to the online environment for a long time, there is a danger of acquiring violent language, decreasing self-esteem, and being negatively influenced by a harmful online environment.

The responses of the teachers confirm the three hypotheses of the study. First, the use of social networks by young people presents both opportunities and risks. Then, the development of new communication technologies directly and indirectly influences the educational process. In addition, the excessive use of social networks reduces the bio-psycho-social well-being of students. There is a risk that too much time spent on social media will reduce real-life interactions (loss of contact with reality, shallow communication, increased isolation, reduced interaction with teachers).

The basic needs of human beings are found in the propositions of the virtual universe: friendship, love, appreciation,

joy, and a pleasant existence (Katzner, 2018). However, for members of Generation Z, prolonged exposure to the online environment can lead to the acquisition of violent language, reduced self-esteem, and the risk of being negatively influenced by harmful online environments. Teachers also acknowledge that social media has its place, but young people need to better manage their time and find a balance to avoid addiction. Outdoor activities, direct interaction with family members and friends are ways to avoid being in the virtual environment.

Most teachers believe that there are many benefits to giving up online interactions altogether. The suggested perspective needs to be evaluated considering that many of the teachers involved in the study were involved in education 20 years ago when the online world was not as developed. The new generations of teachers, although active in the online environment, recognize the negative impact of social networking on Generation Z.

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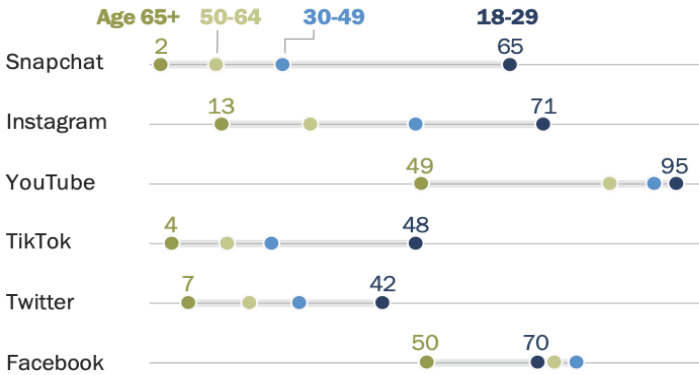
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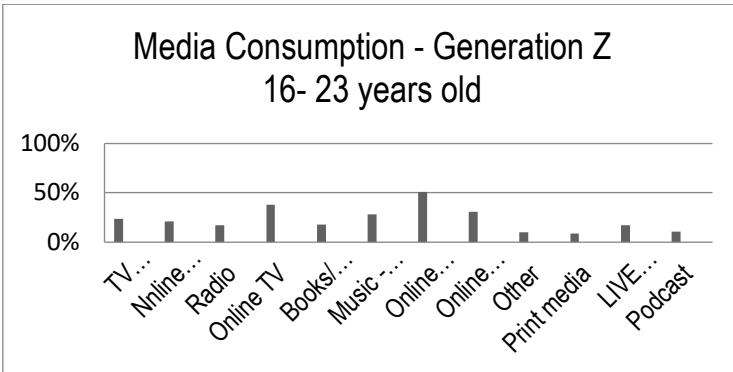
## APPENDICES

**Figure 1**  
*User Ages in the Virtual Environment*



Note: Source - Pew Research Center, April 2021

**Figure 2**  
*Covid-19 Media Consumption by Gen Z (%)*



Note: Source - Visual Capitalist, Global Web Index, Research Report Coronavirus - April 2020

**Table 1**

*Synthesis of the answers given by the teachers to the questions of the research segments included in the interview*

Research segments	The main answers
<p><i>The benefits of the use of social media by young people.</i></p>	<p><i>Easy access to information; Social binder, appendix of the identity domain; Real-time communication; Fast transmission of information; Maintaining friendships; Developing digital skills; Interaction; Making connections with people who share your interests, socialization; Effective way of intercultural communication; Expressing creativity through posts;</i></p>
<p><i>Reasons to be concerned about the online environment.</i></p>	<p><i>Loss of contact with reality; Breach of privacy; Pornography; Violence; Wasting time with trivial things; Lack of means of control and protection; Circulation of Loss of contact with reality; Invasion of privacy; Pornography; Violence; Wasting time on trivial things; Lack of means of control and protection; Circulation of uncensored information; Use of personal information and data; Verbal violence (bullying); Promotion of non-values; Negative influence of influencers; Addiction; The fact that we don't know for sure who we are talking to, what the other person's intentions are; The lack of relevant legislation, the lack of safety for young people in the online environment; Superficial communication; Toxic environment for spreading false information; The online environment does not worry me;</i></p>
<p><i>The influence of social networks on the educational process.</i></p>	<p><b>Positive</b> - <i>People are open to ideas different from their own; making information accessible; materials can be sent to students more easily; maintaining the school-parent relationship. Link; fast communication; information reaches many people in real time; methods and procedures used to teach the subject have multiplied; exchange of experiences between schools from different geographical areas; quality video resources that could improve the didactic act; online hours during the pandemic; offers new perspectives for getting a message across.</i></p> <p><b>Negative</b> - <i>Encourages superficial thinking; reduces the ability to distinguish between reality and fiction;</i></p>

Research segments	<i>The main answers</i>
	<p><i>spending long hours online; affects the teacher-student relationship; limits thinking and originality; easy access to information to the detriment of research and in-depth study; functional illiteracy, distracts during class; posting videos with other classmates without their permission. consent; is addictive; loss of interest in constructive reading; cultivation of selfishness; students have run out of time because of social networking; ability to concentrate has decreased, boredom sets in quickly, desire to read books has decreased greatly; demotivation, lack of control; encourages isolation; encourages little teacher-student interaction, with serious consequences for education.</i></p> <p><i>It can be a useful tool in the teaching process, but ineffective in terms of actual class participation and ineffective assessment;</i></p>
<p><i>Recommendations for young people with a social networking addiction</i></p>	<p><i>To fast for several months, then use sparingly; To seek help as soon as possible and find real activities to get involved in; To spend time with loved ones; To give up social networks; To sell the phones; To make a strict schedule and stick to it; To manage time rationally; To set aside a time to relax in nature, to socialize with friends in a real environment, not virtual; To get out more with colleagues and real friends, to read more, to really socialize; To learn the difference between fact and fiction and to appreciate privacy; To make real friends; Live your life, you only have one; Control this addiction by highlighting the educational aspects that social networks can bring; Life is more beautiful free of any addiction; Get off social media as soon as possible; Don't forget that this is false socialization; Balance and filter; Build a controlled system of time spent on social networks; Do sports, go out in nature; Open the phone only after achieving their important goals for the day; Re-evaluate their priorities in life; Consciously control and replace with other constructive activities;</i></p>

Research segments	<i>The main answers</i>
<i>Living without social media would be...</i>	<i>An oasis of peace; 20 years ago; the morning dew; no stress; unchaining and releasing; a jungle without too many dangers; food without spices; a fairy tale land without adventure and danger; a true friendship that you take seriously and enjoy spending time with; soccer without a ball; a life lived to the fullest; awkward; a house with the curtains always drawn; more beautiful, the world would spend more time with friends; a summer vacation with the grandparents; an unpolluted mountain stream; a life without light; a world more eager for face-to-face communication; contemporary man in archaic times; a tree planted by the water's edge; a panorama from the top of a mountain without fog, a woman without makeup; a lake without frogs (the lake exists, but there are no sounds, which can make you happy if you hear them a little, but can stress you out if you spend too much time around them); the city without pollution.</i>

*Note:* Source - Generated by the author