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Hybrid Generation: The Perception of Social Networks in Generation X in Portugal

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate the role of social networks in the social lives of Generation X. Often referred to as the "hybrid generation," individuals in this cohort have experienced both pre-technology and technology-driven worlds. As active participants in social networks, particularly Facebook, Generation X offers a unique perspective. This distinctive characteristic makes them an intriguing case study compared to other generations, especially younger ones.

Design/methodology/approach – This study applied a survey consisting of three sections and 18 questions, targeting residents of the metropolitan area of Lisbon, Portugal (N = 390), aged between 40 and 59 years. Participants' social media use was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale. The collected data was then analyzed using statistical inference methods to draw meaningful conclusions.

Findings – The results reveal that Generation X's perception of social media use is distinctive. While this generation has adapted to the growing ease of using technology, having witnessed its emergence, they still experience some difficulties and challenges in understanding certain functionalities.

Originality/value – These findings are valuable for analyzing the user profile of this generation, as well as understanding the emotions and attitudes associated with social media use among this group.

Keywords – Social Networks, Generation X, Information Technologies, Digital, Communication, Behavior

Paper type – Research paper

1. Introduction

The advent of social media has revolutionized the way individuals interact, communicate, and consume information (Bates, 2007). This phenomenon is particularly intriguing when examining Generation X, a cohort uniquely positioned at the intersection of a pre-digital and a technology-driven era. Referred to as "The Hybrid Generation", Generation X encompasses those who have witnessed and adapted to the rapid advancements in digital technologies, shaping their engagement with social media in distinctive ways (Baltazar, 2022).

This study investigates the significance of social media for the socialization of Generation X, aiming to unravel the complexities behind their usage patterns, platform preferences, perceived benefits and drawbacks, and how these compare to other generations, especially when the age pyramid, in Portugal, is reversing its current trend, showing a widening at the top compared to the base, which reflects an aging population (Magalhães, 2016).

Theoretical insights suggest that Generation X's engagement with social media extends beyond mere connectivity with friends and family. This generation leverages technology to stay informed about current events, consume entertainment, engage in leisure activities, and network with peers (Global Web Index, 2019), which highlights the multifaceted nature of their social media usage.

To delve deeper into these dynamics, a survey was conducted among 390 individuals aged between 40 and 49, residing in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. The study revealed a high prevalence of social media use within this generation, with WhatsApp, Facebook, and Facebook Messenger emerging as the most popular platforms. Notably, smartphones were identified as the primary devices for accessing these applications, with a significant daily usage rate.

Furthermore, the survey provided insights into the average time Generation X dedicates to social media, revealing a daily engagement of 2 to 3 hours, predominantly during evening hours. Despite this extensive usage, there was no consensus on whether their social media activity had increased compared to the previous year.

The findings also highlighted the psychological and social impacts of social media usage. A substantial portion of the sample reported losing track of time while using digital platforms and feeling societal pressure to remain active on these networks. This pressure, however, did not deter their continued digital engagement.

Moreover, the study uncovered that Generation X perceives increased social media usage as enhancing their sense of connection with peers, fostering community participation, and facilitating exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives. Nonetheless, this digital immersion also brings challenges, such as the risk of negative self-comparisons, information overload, and difficulties in discerning credible information.

In sum, this research seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of how social media influences the socialization processes of Generation X, offering valuable insights for both the scientific community and practical applications in digital communication strategies.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Information Society

Throughout history, humanity has displayed a relentless pursuit of progress, driven by a desire to improve processes and enhance human capabilities. These innovations, from the invention of electricity to the computer, have profoundly impacted society throughout the ages, shaping the world we inhabit today. These advancements serve as extensions of the human, empowering us to transform the societies we live in (Salarelli, 2021).

Fueled by constant technological evolution, new devices emerged that bridged the gap between sender and receiver, ushering in the digital revolution. Society witnessed pivotal moments: the combination of text and image, voice messaging replacing traditional calls, and the development of automated digital assistants (chatbots). These culminated in the landmark arrival of the World Wide Web, marking a historic milestone in communication (Schlobinski, 2012; Castells, 2000).

Another technology that significantly impacted history is the invention of the mobile phone. Once miniaturized to fit comfortably in the hand, cellphones became a powerful convergence device, integrating functionalities of other devices (serving simultaneously as alarm clocks, cameras, and notepads) (Carbonell et al., 2013).

The explosion of digital platforms has fueled a surge in technological innovation, offering an unprecedented range of opportunities accessible at our fingertips. These apps have become indispensable, seamlessly integrating into the fabric of our lives. Our world has become a constantly connected network, empowering individuals with the freedom and agency to act as they see fit (Keskin, 2018).

The rise of the networked world has fundamentally reshaped our understanding of privacy. Communication has become more interactive and dynamic, fostering the exchange of information and personal experiences. Society leverages the internet as a platform for self-expression, seeking connection and external understanding. This makes the online sphere a powerful social force, fostering the creation and growth of new communities (Rettenmaier & Ebert, 2017).

The internet and new technologies have undeniably revolutionized our world, opening doors to a wealth of opportunities and enriching experiences. These are facilitated by social media platforms, which facilitate the exchange of information at an unprecedented speed, within this global network (Spizzirri et al., 2017; Castells et al., 2013).

2.2. Social Media

The term “social media” was coined in 1994 at a Tokyo conference on traditional media, to first describe the online environment Matisse (Aichner et al., 2020).

This shift marked a clear departure from traditional media's "one-to-all" communication model. In contrast, social media thrives on a "one-to-all" exchange of information, employing distinct business models and strategies (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). And there is an increasing adherence of social media users to the stimuli of companies/brands that increasingly use these networks to reach consumers (Ferreira & Alturas, 2010).

Interaction with their customers and followers is one of the topics that most attracts the attention of organizations, as social networks have an extraordinary viral effect, influencing, positively or negatively, the brand image of organizations (Fonseca et al., 2014).

This shift marked a clear departure from the "one-to-all" communication model of traditional media. Social media, by contrast, thrives on an "all-to-all" exchange of information, using distinct business models and strategies. (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). These new platforms allow for the creation of networks wholly centered on individual expression (Gentile et al., 2012).

Social media are demonstrably replacing traditional media. (Fietkiewicz et al., 2016) While these platforms create opportunities for their users, they also cultivate a growing sense of dependence on being constantly online (Nesi, 2020).

Social media empowers users to become creators and distributors of content, developing spaces for digital communities to share opinions and ideas (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As such, the resulting engagement and validation can fuel a constant need for these platforms, leading to addiction and dependence in some cases (Malita, 2011). As usage intensifies, new risks emerge, including the spread of inappropriate content, privacy concerns, and exposure to dangerous ideologies from extremist groups (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

Information which circulates on social media platforms, personal or informative, provides a constant stream of updates, mirroring a live experience. However, while the prevalence of social media may reduce face-to-face interactions, it doesn't necessarily hinder the formation of strong personal relationships (Khurana, 2015).

Humans are inherently social beings, driven by a fundamental need for interaction, community, and relationship building with family and friends. Social networks, and their underlying business models, complement these social features by providing platforms for such connection. Understanding social networks is crucial to comprehending contemporary society in its totality and the multifaceted human experience (Sousa & Cerqueira-Santos, 2011).

It becomes clear that the rise of information technologies, particularly social media's influence, has become a defining event for society due to the way it has fundamentally reshaped how we communicate – creating a new paradigm of ease and accessibility for conversations and the fast and quick transmission of information (University Canada West, 2023).

2.3. Generation X

Associate professor at the sociology department at ISCTE (Instituto Universitário de Lisboa) argues that Generation X, born between the 1960s and 1980s, has lived through a transition period, having experienced a life with and without these technologies, unlike younger generations who grew up entirely in the digital age (Baltazar, 2022).

Growing up during period of economic recession had a significant impact on Generation X. It instilled the development of a strong sense of independence from a young age and a

familiarity with emerging technologies equipped them with ability to act with intelligence, speed and ease (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016).

According to Boterri and Cremonesi, it is possible to delimitate Generation X in people born between 1965 and 1984 (Cirilli & Nicolini, 2019). Following their insights, Generation X, in Portugal, is the largest demographic group, representing roughly 29.2% of the total population, in 2022 (INE, 2023).

Despite being a hybrid generation, this generation had to adapt to using computers and the internet. However, they tend to be less active online compared to younger generations (Song et al., 2017). Consequently, this shift allowed them to develop valuable skills and absorb vast amounts of information, enhancing their digital abilities, and shaping how they communicate and consume information in ways never before possible (Zemke Ron et al., 2013).

This generation's social media usage differs from younger generations. They primarily use these platforms to reconnect with old friends and acquaintances, nurture existing friendships (particularly long-distance ones), and stay in touch with family. Social media also serves as a source of entertainment for this demographic (Alemdar & Koker, 2013).

According to a 2019 Global Web Index study titled "Gen X: Examining the Attitudes and Digital Behaviors of Internet Users Aged 37-55," Generation X dedicates an average of 3 hours and 21 minutes daily on tablets, computers, and laptops, and 4 hours and 41 minutes on their phones (Global Web Index, 2019)

The study also revealed that Generation X spends an average of 2 hours per day on social media. Their motivations include: around 39% stating they aim to stay updated on current affairs; 37% for communicating with friends and family; 31% for finding and consuming entertainment content; 31% to fill free time; and around 30% for networking with other people (Global Web Index, 2019).

3. The empirical study

For the purpose of understanding how Generation X uses social media for socializing, this study employed a questionnaire; as it is a valuable measuring tool which translates the research objectives into measurable variables, aiding with data standardization, quality control, and the improved management of outliers (Fortin & Salgueiro, 2009).

To participate in this study, participants had to satisfy the criteria of being between 40 and 59 years old, ensuring they belonged to Generation X. The sample size aimed to be representative of Generation X in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, which has a population of approximately 2,871,133 individuals (INE, 2023).

Employing the method developed by Krejcie & Morgan, the ideal sample size (or minimum value) was determined using the following parameters: the population size (N = 2871133); the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at 0.05 (X = 1.961); the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (d = 0.05); the population proportion,

normally assumed to be 0.5 to provide the maximum sample size (P = 0.5) (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

To conclude, the required sample size is of a minimum of 384 participants (n = 384).

3.1. Participants

The survey was administered to 390 participants using the Google Forms tool. To make data analysis more efficient, using the logic provided by the Instituto Nacional de Estatística, participants were grouped into 4 age categories: 40-44 (inclusive); 45-49; 50-54; and, lastly, 55-59, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Distribution of participants' age.

Age	Percentage Frequency (%)
40-44	34%
45-49	27%
50-54	25%
55-59	14%

Participants exhibited a relatively balanced gender distribution, with males accounting for approximately 51% of the sample and females for 49%.

Regarding Education, approximately 59% of participants hold either a high school diploma or an undergraduate degree, with 32% (the mode) and 27% of the sample, respectively, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Distribution of participants' education.

Education	Percentage Frequency (%)
Elementary	8%
Middle School	8%
High School	32%
Undergrad	27%
Postgraduate	9%
Masters	13%
Doctor	3%

Additionally, to really understand how Generation X utilizes social media, it was crucial to differentiate users from non-users. According to the survey, approximately 86% of the sample uses social media, representing the mode, while 14% do not use these digital platforms.

3.2. Procedure

The survey was administered over a period of one and a half weeks, from 12/05/2024 to 22/05/2024. In an initial phase, the survey was shared individually with the study author's closest contacts through various digital platforms and in-person approaches. Subsequently, periodic shares on the social networks Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to reach a wider audience. A total of 390 responses were collected.

3.3. Material

The first section/group of the survey, consisting of 4 questions, refers to the participant's profile, that is, information regarding gender, age, and educational background. Additionally, it aimed to determine whether the respondent used social media.

The second section of the survey consists of 14 questions derived from the theoretical background. These questions aim to explore specific aspects related to the research topic.

Within this section, it was possible to have two different analyses. Social media users were directed to questions 5 to 17; whereas non-social media users were directed to question 18. Additionally, participants responded to the questions using a 5-point Likert scale to indicate their level of Agreement, Frequency and Likelihood (Appendix).

4. Results

To analyze the data efficiently and ensure quality, the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software and Microsoft Excel were utilized. Firstly, using Microsoft Excel, all variables were transformed into a numerical component to facilitate the calculation of mean, mode, standard deviation, variance, maximum and minimum for each variable.

Following that, the data was exported to the SPSS and, to reduce the number of variables, was applied the PCA (Principal Component Analysis) and the respective correlations between the variables were analyzed, aiming to enhance clarity and ease of interpretation (IBM, 2023).

Out of 390 participants, 336 indicated that they use social media. According to the survey, it is possible conclude that the three most popular social media platforms among the participants are: WhatsApp (with frequent use of 18.8% and daily use of 66.7%), followed by Facebook and, lastly, Facebook Messenger. The least used social media platforms among Generation X are Snapchat, Pinterest e o X (former Twitter).

The survey also reveals that smartphones are the primary device used to access social media among the participants, with frequent usage of around 19% and daily usage of 69.9%. Social media usage is found to be more prevalent after 12 pm with peak usage period occurring between 6pm and midnight – the daily usage reaching around 68.2%. Early morning hours exhibit the lowest social media usage, with daily usage of only 2.4%.

In terms of social media usage duration, participants indicated that they spend an average of 2 to 3 hours on these platforms, with a total agreement of 45.5% among participants.

Significantly, a 55.1% of the sample agreed that they tend to lose track of time while using social media. Among these individuals, 31.1% agreed and 23.8% fully agreed with this statement.

Furthermore, approximately 46.4% of participants fully agreed with the statement "I believe I spend too much time on social media." This variable has a mode of 5 and a mean of 3.04.

To analyze the remaining variables within the “Social Media User” group, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was employed using SPSS. This technique offers the significant advantage of reducing the number of variables to a more manageable set (IBM, 2023)

Initially, there were 40 variables (considering only questions 11 to 17), excluding the sample characteristics variables, as these were not included in this technique. Additionally, the variables from questions 5 to 10 were also excluded. This decision was made to enhance the accuracy of participant perceptions by focusing on variables that reflect critical aspects such as satisfaction, trust, and impact on personal life, for instance (IBM, 2023).

In addition, variables 13.2, 16.2, 17.2, 17.3, 17.4 e 17.6 were eliminated due to redundant information, resulting in a final set of 34 variables.

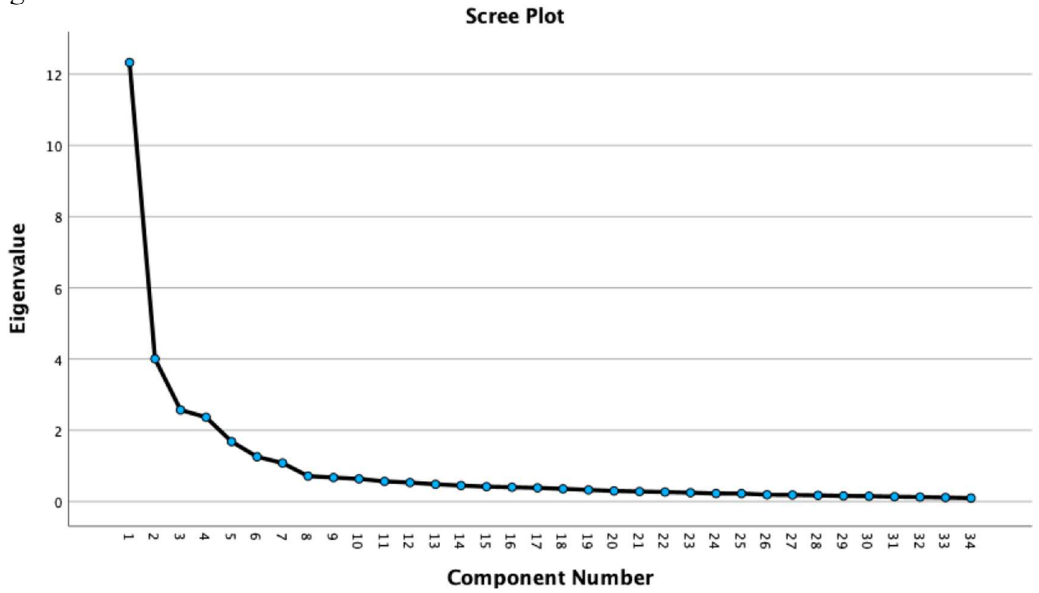
PCA was then applied to condense the 34 variables into seven. To validate the feasibility of this grouping, the Total Variance Explained (Table 3) was examined, confirming the validity of the seven generated components. Additionally, the Scree Plot (Figure 1) was analyzed, further confirming the number of components generated by PCA.

Table 3 – Total Variance Explained of the 34 variables used in the PCA.

	Initial Eigenvalues		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	12.329	36.262	36.262
2	4.005	11.780	48.042
3	2.569	7.556	55.599
4	2.365	6.957	62.555
5	1.680	4.941	67.496
6	1.255	3.691	71.187
7	1.079	3.173	74.360
8	.712	2.093	76.453
9	.670	1.971	78.424
10	.634	1.864	80.288
11	.563	1.656	81.944
12	.529	1.557	83.501
13	.481	1.415	84.916
14	.446	1.312	86.228
15	.414	1.216	87.444
16	.398	1.171	88.616
17	.381	1.121	89.737
18	.353	1.037	90.774
19	.323	.949	91.723
20	.295	.867	92.590
21	.277	.814	93.404
22	.263	.773	94.177

23	.245	.720	94.897
24	.222	.654	95.551
25	.220	.647	96.198
26	.187	.551	96.749
27	.181	.533	97.282
28	.169	.498	97.780
29	.154	.453	98.233
30	.146	.428	98.661
31	.132	.387	99.048
32	.122	.358	99.407
33	.109	.320	99.727
34	.093	.273	100.000

Figure 1 – Scree Plot of the 34 variables used in the PCA.



Following this verification, the Rotated Component Matrix (Table 4) was used to analyze the PCA results. Using this information, it is possible to consider that the first component is constituted of eight variables (13.1, 15.3, 15.5, 15.6, 15.8, 15.9, 17.1 e 17.5), which collectively describe the self-perception of participants during social media usage.

Table 4 – Rotated Component Matrix and Cronbach's Alpha of each component.

Rotated Component Matrix [a]							
	Components						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.1 - Usage Motives					.563		
11.2 - Usage Motives					.637		
11.3 - Usage Motives			.539				
11.4 - Usage Motives			.678				
11.5 - Usage Motives						-.415	
12.1 - Content					.641		
12.2 - Content				.750			
12.3 - Content				.518			
12.4 - Content				.726			
12.5 - Content			.785				
13.1 - Pressure	.730						
14.1 - Advantages		.473					
14.2 - Advantages			.729				
14.3 - Advantages		.691					
14.4 - Advantages		.775					
14.5 - Advantages		.548					
14.6 - Advantages		.698					
14.7 - Advantages		.608					
14.8 - Advantages		.600					
14.9 - Advantages		.537					
14.10 - Advantages				.540			
15.1 - Difficulties						.838	
15.2 - Difficulties						.907	
15.3 - Difficulties	.566						
15.4 - Difficulties							.607
15.5 - Difficulties	.778						
15.6 - Difficulties	.737						
15.7 - Difficulties							.746
15.8 - Difficulties	.809						
15.9 - Difficulties	.884						
15.10 - Difficulties							.587
16.1 - Sstop using							.716
17.1 - Generations Usage	.702						
17.5 - Generations Usage	.623						
Cronbach's Alpha	**0.912**	**0.917**	**0.858**	**0.832**	**0.841**	**0.187**	**0.677**

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 60 iterations.

The second component comprises eight variables (14.1, 14.3, 14.4, 14.5, 14.6, 14.7, 14.8 e 14.9) that describe social media usage in the context of digital communication.

The third component consists of four variables (11.3, 11.4, 12.5 e 14.2) that focus on the consumption of entertainment content.

The fourth component is composed of four variables (12.2, 12.3, 12.4 e 14.10) that reflect social media as a facilitator of communication.

The fifth component comprises three variables (11.1, 11.2 e 12.1) that refer to the existing connection with loved ones in the digital world.

The sixth component consists of three variables (11.5, 15.1 e 15.2), reflecting the complexity that some functionalities may represent for Generation X.

Finally, the seventh component comprises four variables (15.4, 15.7, 15.10 e 16.1) that refer to the social dilemma faced by this generation due to access to so much information from various sources.

Once the components have been determined, it is crucial to verify their reliability. For this purpose, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated, as presented in Table 4. While there are various interpretations of Cronbach's Alpha values, this study adopted the rationale proposed by Murphy & Davidshofer (1988) as interpreted by Peterson (Peterson, 1994).

According to this established criteria, components 3, 4 and 5 exhibit Moderate to high reliability, component 7 demonstrates Low reliability, and components 1 and 2 possess High reliability. Component 6, however, falls under the category of Unacceptable reliability and is therefore excluded from further consideration.

Having established the reliability of the different components, they were labeled as follows:

1. Personal authenticity;
2. Digital communication;
3. Digital consumption;
4. Proximity facilitators;
5. Peer connection;
6. Informational overload.

In order to analyze the relationship between these variables, Spearman's Correlation Coefficient was employed, as presented in Figure 2, due to the non-normal distribution of the data, confirmed by the tests of normality of Shapiro-Wilk. Moreover, to analyze the effectiveness of the variables used in the study, it is necessary to use the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test (Table 5), as this is a reliable alternative for non-normal samples (Woolson, 2008).

Figure 2 – Spearman's Correlation Coefficient

Correlations							
		Personal authenticity	Digital communication	Digital consumption	Proximity facilitators	Peer connection	Informational overload
Personal authenticity	Correlation Coefficient	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	34					
Digital communication	Correlation Coefficient	-.081	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.647					
	N	34	34				
Digital consumption	Correlation Coefficient	-.144	.208	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.418	.238				
	N	34	34	34			
Proximity facilitators	Correlation Coefficient	-.239	.378*	-.043	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.173	.028	.810			
	N	34	34	34	34		
Peer connection	Correlation Coefficient	-0.35	.217	.033	-.057	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.844	.217	.854	.748		
	N	34	34	34	34	34	
Informational overload	Correlation Coefficient	-.088	-.407*	.067	-.524**	-.111	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.619	.017	.705	.001	.533	
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34
**. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
*. The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							

Table 5 – Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

Variable	Median	Z value	p-value
5.1	4	-3,490	<.001
5.2	5	-10.523	<.001
5.3	2	-7.232	<.001
5.4	4	-3.310	<.001
5.5	3	-2.327	0.025
5.6	1	-8.871	<.001
5.7	5	-9.417	<.001
5.8	1	-6.965	<.001
5.9	3	-2.529	0.011
5.10	4	-1.849	0.065
6.1	5	-9.020	<.001
6.2	4	-7.465	<.001
6.3	2	-0.598	0.551
6.4	2	-6.303	<.001
6.5	1	-6.195	<.001
6.6	1	-10.134	<.001
7.1	1	-10.606	<.001
7.2	4	-2.826	0.005
7.3	5	-10.491	<.001
7.4	5	-9.112	<.001
8.1	1	-9.954	<.001
8.2	1	-10.693	<.001
8.3	4	-8.846	<.001
8.4	4	-5.397	<.001
8.5	3	-0.459	0.646
8.6	2	-4.573	<.001

9.1	4	-9.296	<.001
9.2	3	-0.770	0.441
9.3	2	-5.054	<.001
9.4	4	-9.153	<.001
9.5	2	-7.762	<.001
9.6	3	-1.540	0.124
10.1	3	-0.501	0.616
10.2	1	-10.709	<.001
10.3	2	-6.036	<.001
11.1	4	-1.068	0.285
11.2	5	-10.885	<.001
11.3	4	-0.869	0.385
11.4	4	-2.370	0.018
11.5	4	-5.508	<.001
12.1	5	-8.415	<.001
12.2	4	-9.685	<.001
12.3	4	-4.520	<.001
12.4	4	-5.864	<.001
12.5	4	-9.331	<.001
13.1	5	-10.429	<.001
13.2	1	-10.350	<.001
14.1	4	-1.876	0.061
14.2	4	-8.370	<.001
14.3	4	-4.973	<.001
14.4	4	-4.945	<.001
14.5	4	-8.470	<.001
14.6	4	-1.612	0.107
14.7	4	-0.652	0.522
14.8	4	-1.196	0.232
14.9	4	-5.573	<.001
14.10	4	-7.071	<.001
15.1	3	-2.437	0.015
15.2	2	-7.774	<.001
15.3	3	-2.838	0.005
15.4	2	-6.870	<.001
15.5	3.5	-4.371	<.001
15.6	5	-10.990	<.001
15.7	3	-2.841	0.004
15.8	4	-9.426	<.001
15.9	4	-4.372	<.001
15.10	2	-4.325	<.001
16.1	1	-11.315	<.001
16.2	4	-6.461	<.001
17.1	5	-10.280	<.001
17.2	1	-9.571	<.001
17.3	1	-9.699	<.001
17.4	1	-9.090	<.001
17.5	5	-9.786	<.001
17.6	1	-9.419	<.001

By analyzing the “Digital communication” column and its intersection with other variables, it becomes evident that the Spearman correlation is negative with the “Information overload” variable and positive with the “Proximity facilitators” variable. This implies that when the correlation is negative, an increase in one variable corresponds to a decrease in the other, and when the correlation is positive, the increase in each variable is also accompanied by an increase in the other.

As such, increased usage of social media for digital/online communication is associated with ease in recurring to these digital platforms as facilitators for connecting with groups, communities, individuals, events, and more. Conversely, as digital communication and social media usage intensify, so does the potential for information overload and excessive stimuli and, consequently, diminished ability to process credible information sources.

Another significant correlation to examine is the relationship between the "Proximity facilitators" and "Informational overload" variables. Given its negative sign and level 0.05 significance indicate that when the user's increased usage of social media for connecting with others in the digital realm, the lower the level of trust in the information encountered on social media platforms.

Within the "Digital communication" variable itself, a weak to moderate positive correlation can be observed with the "Digital consumption" and "Peer connection" variables.

Regarding the "Personal Authenticity" variable, a weak to moderate negative correlation emerges with the "Proximity facilitators" variable. This suggests that the more social media is used for connection in the digital realm, the lower the user's sense of authenticity may be.

5. Discussion

5.1. General discussion

This study delves into the question of "how are social media significant for the socialization of Generation X." To address this inquiry, an examination of Generation X's current social media usage patterns was conducted, including their preferred platforms, perceived **benefits** and **drawbacks**, and comparisons with other generations. According to data gathered by the Instituto Nacional de Estatística, this generation constitutes the largest age group within the Portuguese population, accounting for approximately 29.3%. Notably, this generation holds the distinction of having experienced both a pre-technology and technology-driven world, earning them the moniker "The Hybrid Generation" (Baltazar, 2022)

However, the theoretical background revealed that within Generation X, diverse factors drive individuals' decisions to engage with social media beyond simply staying connected with friends and family. Many turn to technology to stay updated on current events, consume entertainment and for leisure, or even network with others (Global Web Index, 2019).

To gain a deeper understanding of this generation's perception of social media, a survey was administered to 390 individuals (aged between 40 and 49, inclusive) residing in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. The findings revealed that a significant portion of the sample (approximately 89%) utilizes social media platforms, with the top three being WhatsApp, Facebook, and Facebook Messenger. Additionally, smartphones emerge as the primary device for accessing these applications, with a daily usage rate of 69.9%.

The survey also shed light on the average time Generation X perceives they dedicate to social media, with self-reported estimates ranging between 2 to 3 hours per day, with a preference for evening usage (between 6 pm and midnight). However, no unanimous opinion regarding social media usage compared to the previous year was evident.

As a consequence of using digital platforms, approximately 55.1% of the sample admitted to losing track of time while engaging with social media, further complemented by the fact that nearly 68.1% felt societal pressure to utilize these platforms. Despite this pressure, however, it did not serve as a deterrent for discontinuing digital navigation.

The study further revealed that within Generation X, individuals perceive that increased social media usage for digital communication is associated with a greater sense of connection with peers, individuals, events and participating in communities, they also believe it facilitates learning about new cultures and perspectives, participation in debates and discussions on topics of interest, and acting as a communication facilitator.

Generation X acknowledges a high likelihood of following accounts of individuals they know in real life, However, they also recognize that increased usage of information technologies can negatively impact their personal perception. This steams from the heightened risk of comparing themselves to others' profiles, potentially amplifying insecurities, or even being cautious of sharing personal information with fear of becoming vulnerable with online exposition.

Additionally, they express concerns that increased digital communication usage renders them more susceptible to information overload, which could negatively impact their ability to process information credibly and distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources.

To conclude, while social media platforms facilitate communication and social connection, they also present challenges, such as information overloads and impacts on personal perception, both positive and negative. Understanding the interplay of these dynamics is crucial to enable individuals to experience the benefits that information technologies foster today.

5.2. Contributions to the scientific and business community

The present study makes contributions to the bettering of our understanding of intergenerational dynamics and how various events have shaped attitudes and behaviors across generations.

By focusing on Generation X, the study sheds light on how this "hybrid" generation utilizes social media for communication and interactions within their social environment and highlights the potential challenges they face in using these platforms.

The findings of this study have valuable implications for various business sectors:

In Marketing and Advertising, the study provides valuable insights into Generation X's relationship to social media, which can be leveraged to develop more effective advertising campaigns on these platforms and enhance customer retention strategies within this age group.

Product management is another area which can benefit from the findings of this study. By understanding behavioral patterns in the digital realm, companies can develop products and services tailored to this demographic, utilizing online platforms to gather direct user feedback.

Additionally, the study can be valuable to Human Resources, as improving employer branding on social media not only promotes communication amongst employees, but also increases attractiveness to potential candidates.

5.3. Limitations and future studies

As with any study, this one also has limitations, primarily related to the data collection method and sample size.

Given that the use of a questionnaire and closed-ended responses were avoided as much as possible, always applying a 5-point Likert scale, this choice can be limiting and may not allow for a clear reflection in detecting sensitive differences in the responses. Additionally, the subjective nature of the questionnaire items could lead to inconsistences in responses.

Future studies seeking to investigate Generation X's social media perception, consider incorporating interviews to complement the questionnaire. This would provide a more personal understanding of the participants' perspectives. Additionally, including open-ended response options (in a hybrid questionnaire format) could enhance understanding of individual responses.

This approach would allow for a deeper exploration of Generation X's behaviors and interactions with these platforms, offering more profound insights than a solely questionnaire-based study.

An interesting alternative would be exploring the differences in behavior and interactions across various social media platforms utilized by Generation X, which could reveal the influence of platform choice on individual behavior.

Lastly, although the sample representative of the Portuguese population in terms of number, it was restricted to individuals residing in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. Future studies should consider a larger and more diverse sample encompassing different regions of the country.

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7. Appendix

Questionnaire: Study on the perception of social networks within Generation X

Group I – Characterization of the participant

1. Indicate your age:
1. ( ) 40 – 44
2. ( ) 45 – 49
3. ( ) 50 – 54
4. ( ) 55 – 59

2. Indicate your gender:
1. ( ) Feminine
2. ( ) Masculine
3. ( ) I do not want to share it

3. Indicate the last level of education you completed:
1. ( ) Primary Education
2. ( ) Basic Education
3. ( ) Secondary Education
4. ( ) Bachelor's Degree
5. ( ) Postgraduate
6. ( ) Master's Degree
7. ( ) Doctorate

4. Do you use social networks (for example, Instagram, Facebook, X, LinkedIn, YouTube...)?
1. ( ) Yes
2. ( ) No

Group II A – For participants that indicate that they use social media in question 4, also called the "Social Media User" path.

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Never' and 5 means 'Everyday,' indicate how often you use social networks:

Question	1 – Never	2 - Rarely	3 - Occasionally	4 – Frequently	5 – Everyday
5.1 Instagram					
5.2 Facebook					
5.3 X (Twitter)					
5.4 Youtube					
5.5 LinkedIn					
5.6 Pinterest					
5.7 WhatsApp					
5.8 Snapchat					
5.9 TikTok					
5.10 Facebook Messenger					

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Never' and 5 means 'Everyday', indicate how often you use the following devices to access social media:

Question	1 – Never	2 - Rarely	3 - Occasionally	4 – Frequently	5 – Everyday
6.1 Smartphone					
6.2 Laptop/Computer					

6.3 Tablet					
6.4 Smart TV					
6.5 Console					
6.6 Smartwatch					

7. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Never' and 5 means 'Everyday', indicate how you usually use social media at different times of the day:

Question	1 – Never	2 - Rarely	3 - Occasionally	4 – Frequently	5 – Everyday
7.1 Early morning (12AM to 6AM).					
7.2 Morning (6AM to 12PM).					
7.3 Afternoon (12PM to 6PM).					
7.4 Evening (6PM to 12AM).					

8. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree', indicate how much time per day you would say you dedicate to using social media:

Question	1 – Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
8.1 Less than 30 minutes.					
8.2 Between 30 minutes and 1 hour.					
8.3 Between 1 hour and 2 hours.					
8.4 Between 2 hour and 3 hours.					
8.5 Between 3 hour and 5 hours.					
8.6 More than 5 hours.					

9. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree', rate the following statements regarding the amount of time you dedicate to social media:

Question	1 – Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
9.1 I feel like I lose track of time while I'm on social media.					
9.2 I feel that my time on social media interferes with my daily responsibilities.					
9.3 I feel guilty when I realize how much time I've spent on social media.					
9.4 I feel anxious if I don't check my social media regularly.					
9.5 I feel that my time on social media makes me feel less connected to the people around me.					

9.6 I feel that my time on social media negatively affects my mental health.					

10. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree', rate the following statements regarding the time allocated to your use of social media, compared to the previous year:

Question	1 – Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
10.1 I believe I dedicate more time to social media.					
10.2 I do not believe I dedicate more time to social media.					
10.3 I believe I dedicate the same amount of time to social media.					

11. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree', rate the following statements regarding your reasons for using social media:

Question	1 – Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
11.1 To stay updated with current events.					
11.2 To communicate with friends and family.					
11.3 To find and consume entertainment content.					
11.4 To ocupy free time.					
11.5 To network with other people.					

12. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Very unlikely' and 5 means 'Very likely', rate the following statements regarding which types of accounts/profiles on social media you would be more likely to follow for their content:

Question	1 – Very unlikely	2 - Unlikely	3 - Neutral	4 – Likely	5 – Very likely
12.1 Profiles of people you know in real life.					
12.2 Profiles of brands you like/use.					
12.3 Profiles of news sources, like a newspaper.					
12.4 Profiles relevant to your professional field.					
12.5 Profiles of artists, such as singers, musicians, or bands.					

13. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree', rate the following statements regarding the pressure from other members of society, in general, to use social media:

Question	1 – Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
13.1 I feel pressured to use social media by society.					
13.2 I do not feel pressured to use social media by society.					

14. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "Strongly disagree" and 5 means "Strongly agree," rate the following statements regarding the advantages you perceive in using social media:

Question	1 – Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
14.1 I feel that they promote connection/closer relationships between people.					
14.2 I feel that I can create new friendships/meaningful connections through social media.					
14.3 I feel that I can participate in groups/communities related to my common interests on social media.					
14.4 I feel that I obtain relevant and updated information about events and news through social media.					
14.5 I feel that social media helps me expand my professional network and find career opportunities.					
14.6 I feel that social media allows me to learn about new cultures and ways of life.					
14.7 I feel that social media helps me stay updated on events and invitations for social activities.					
14.8 I feel that social media allows me to participate in debates and discussions on important topics.					
14.9 I feel that social media allows me to discover and explore new cultural, artistic, and entertainment trends.					
14.10 I feel that social media helps me stay in touch with classmates or colleagues, facilitating communication and collaboration.					

15. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree', rate the following statements regarding the difficulties you experience when using social media:

Question	1 – Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
15.1 I feel confused by the constant updates to privacy settings on social media.					
15.2 I have difficulty understanding the purpose of certain features on social media, such as 'Stories' and 'Reels.'					
15.3 I feel excluded in online groups due to jokes or references I don’t understand.					
15.4 I find it hard to keep in touch with friends and family without feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information on social media.					
15.5 I feel that social media amplifies my insecurities, especially when I see photos or					

updates from people who seem to have perfect lives.					
15.6 I hesitate to share photos/personal information for fear that they might be used against me in some way.					
15.7 I feel that it is difficult to maintain a boundary between my personal and professional life on social media.					
15.8 I feel pressured to maintain an online 'persona' that meets others' expectations, even if it doesn't reflect who I really am.					
15.9 Sometimes I feel "behind" when I see updates about the accomplishments or experiences of others on social media.					
15.10 I feel that the information published on social media is trustworthy.					

16. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree', rate the following statements regarding the possibility of stopping the use of social media due to the difficulties mentioned earlier:

Question	1 – Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
16.1 I have considered stopping the use of social media due to the difficulties mentioned earlier.					
16.2 I have not considered stopping the use of social media due to the difficulties mentioned earlier.					

17. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree', rate the following statements regarding your use of social media compared to other generations:

Question	1 – Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
17.1 I feel that I have more difficulty using social media than the following generations.					
17.2 I feel that I have less difficulty using social media than the following generations.					
17.3 I feel that I have the same difficulties using social media as the following generations.					
17.4 I feel that I have more difficulty using social media than the previous generations.					
17.5I feel that I have less difficulty using social media than the previous generations.					

17.6 I feel that I have the same difficulties using social media as the previous generations.					

Group II B – For participants that indicate that they do not use social media in question 4, also called the "Non Social Media User" path.

18. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree', rate the following statements regarding your reasons for not using social media:

Question	1 – Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly agree
18.1 Preference for offline interactions.					
18.2 Lack of familiarity with technology.					
18.3 Concerns about privacy and security.					
18.4 Lack of time.					
18.5 Preference for direct communication.					