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THE REVIEW OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS ENTITLED " THE SMARTPHONE IN THE LIFE OF ISRAELI YOUTH. FROM << VIRTUAL FRIEND>> TO ADDICTION" SUBMITTED BY DROR KRIKON. WRITTEN UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF PROF. WITOLD WRZESIEŃ

The doctoral thesis of Dror Krikon, M.A., submitted for the review, entitled *The Smartphone in the Life of Israeli Youth. From "Virtual Friend" to Addiction* has a structure typical of a monographic thesis, in which research results are presented in the classical book format. The dissertation is a bit extensive, containing 312 pages, along with a bibliography and the Appendix that includes the tools applied in the study. The dissertation is divided into six chapters describing the theoretical background, the methodology of the study's research, and its results with conclusions. The work fits into research in the field of the sociology of youth, sociology of everyday life, and sociology of communication, as it reveals the role of information and communication technologies in various social practices of young people.

In the chapter entitled *Introduction - Theoretical and Methodological Basis of the Dissertation* (pp. 4-44), the author presents the technological and social context for his considerations undertaken in the dissertation. Mr. Dror Krikon took as his starting point the discussion of postmodern culture, whose features such as ignorance from experts or multiplicity of opinion and the lack of a single truth cause 'randomness takes over from order, challenges the idea of free will and the deliberate value of judgment, and draws attention to the great power of arbitrariness" (p. 11). According to the author, technology (mainly digital and mass media) plays an important role in postmodern culture, which influences several social and cultural processes. Further in this part of the dissertation, the author describes selected theories of the impact of

technology on society and culture (mainly the perspective of technological determinism), specifies the changes that are taking place in society due to technology (including spatial change, globalization, labour market), and characterizes the consumer society. The *Introduction* also addresses issues of youth culture and the impact of technology on it, as well as formulates the research problem, and hypotheses and justifies the choice of methods concerning the adopted research (interpretive) paradigm.

In the next chapter titled (somewhat laconically) *The Smartphone*, the doctoral student presents the history of the development of mobile phones and their impact on various aspects of people's lives, e.g. face-to-face interactions, romantic relationships, life satisfaction, workplace, academic performance, leisure time, self-esteem, referring to the results of studies conducted in various countries. The next chapter, titled (also laconically) *The Youth*, deals with one research group - youth. The Ph.D. student addresses both definitional issues, and the temporal scope, as well as cites several examples of the treatment of children and youth in different eras. He also devotes a lot of space to the culture of youth from World War I to the present day, together with the characteristics of various generations distinguished by researchers (Generation X, Y, Z). In turn, the penultimate theoretical chapter, entitled (also laconically) *The Socialization*, considers the process of socialization from a sociological perspective in constructivist (Berger and Luckmann), interpretive (Weber), and phenomenological (Schultz) view, and discusses the role of the media as agents of socialization. This chapter also includes the archaic distinction between the real world and the virtual world (p. 128), with which mediatization scholars such as N. Couldry and A. Hepp (see the book *The Mediated construction of reality*, Polity), among others, argue.

In the final theoretical chapter, entitled *Smartphone addiction*, the author deliberates the phenomenon of "smartphone addiction" (debatable, which is why it's put in quotation marks), while wondering whether it's the right term. The author starts with a consideration of what addiction is in medical terminology, gives criteria for substance addictions, and describes the neurochemical brain processes in addiction.

Since "addiction" is only one of the phenomena related to smartphone use, highlighted by the doctoral student, in my opinion, so much space is unnecessarily devoted to it. At this point, I will only hint, as the author writes, that the phenomenon itself has not yet been included in any of the current qualifications of mental disorders and diseases (ICD-11, DSM-V-TR), and I prefer the term "problematic Internet use" rather than "addiction." By the way, I agree that a smartphone is a tool, as one becomes addicted to the Internet and its content. In addition to "smartphone addiction", the chapter also discusses the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out, Phantom Phone Sensations.

In the methodological part, the doctoral student included the information on research methods and tools, as well as the research procedure. The main problem of the research was described as a question "what are the characteristic features of the influence of smartphone use on the everyday life of contemporary youth in Israel?". In addition, he identified as many as 17 specific research questions, which he only partially linked to the formulated hypotheses. The research was conducted using quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (individual in-depth interview) methods on a group of respondents from Generation Z aged 15-18 (N=537; interviews - N=30) and Generation Y aged 33-37 (N=152; interviews - N=20). The qualitative research, as justified by the doctoral student, served to deepen the phenomenon in question. For quantitative research, basic statistical calculations were made.

The analytical part presents the results of the collected data about four problem areas: 1. The smartphone in its general characteristics. 2. Sociality and smartphone use. 3. Effects of the smartphone in private use. 4. Self-esteem, popularity, and smartphone addiction. Each area first discusses the results of the quantitative surveys and then supplements them with relevant references to the interviews. Some results turn out to be very interesting. For example, when asked about the needs that a smartphone cannot satisfy, Generation Z respondents answered much more variably and indicated, for example, higher-order needs, such as happiness or identifying a lie (p. 173). In turn, Generation Y respondents' answers are related to daily household activities, such as preparing meals, washing dishes, and cleaning. Interesting results also come from a

comparison of motivation for face-to-face interaction (p. 182-183), which shows that Generation Z respondents have a higher motivation for face-to-face interaction than Generation Y respondents. Unfortunately, the researcher does not attempt to interpret these results, although we can find a clue in a statement by one of the Generation Y respondents. She talks about the lack of time due to work and family obligations. At this point, I would additionally like to comment on the differences in social interaction manifested in investing time in writing a message/email/recording a voice message instead of calling the person (p. 190). The data presented shows that in both groups, the vast majority of respondents prefer asynchronous communication channels to synchronous ones. This form of communication gives greater independence and the ability to respond at any time. In addition, as noted by Patrick B. O'Sullivan in his article What You Don't Know Won't Hurt Me:: Impression Management Functions of Communication Channels in Relationships (Human Communication Research, Volume 26, Issue 3, July 2000, Pages 403-431, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2000.tb00763.x) the choice of communication channel depends on the expected threat and how much it supports the sender's impression management. The preference for intermediary channels increased when a threat to one's own and one's partner's impression management helped minimize the effects associated with an embarrassing or an unpleasant message.

The reviewed doctoral dissertation of Mr. Dror Krikon presents general theoretical knowledge in the field of sociology, but also, significantly, in the field of other social sciences, mainly psychology and communication and media studies. The author demonstrates his knowledge of sociological theories on postmodern culture and successfully connects the themes of postmodern society, consumerism, and youth culture. In addition, he will identify the role of technology in modern societies, and the most important changes in them, and shows what role a smartphone plays in the process of socialization of children and adolescents. Overall, the theoretical part is written somewhat coherently, although some parts (which I will talk about later) could

have been completely omitted by the author, and others could have been better related to the research problem. The doctoral student has a great knowledge of youth culture and socialization theory, as well as problematic use of the Internet. However, it is only a pity that the specifics of Israel's culture and the use of digital media in the study group were described briefly and somewhat superficially.

The dissertation demonstrates the author's ability to conduct independent research. The author designed and conducted quantitative and qualitative research with two groups of respondents from Israel - Generation Z youth aged 15-18 (N=537; interviews - N=30) and Generation Y adults aged 33-37 (N=152; interviews - N=20). The various stages of the research process were described reasonably comprehensively, although the method of sampling could have been described in more detail (e.g., How did the doctoral student reach out to respondents from both groups? Where specifically did he distribute the questionnaire? How did he qualify respondents for interviews? How did he ensure the anonymity of the respondents, especially since, in the case of minors, he obtained parental consent?). Undoubtedly, it should be appreciated that the doctoral student conducted a pilot study for the tool, which allowed him to refine and modify it (however, it is not known what age the pilot group was). In addition, he independently constructed a comprehensive questionnaire for the quantitative survey (57 questions) and questions for the individual in-depth interview (38 questions).

The reviewed work represents an original solution to the scientific problem of identifying the characteristic features of the influence of smartphone use on the everyday life of contemporary youth and adults in Israel. Such comparative, intergenerational studies - oriented toward groups that experienced contact with mobile technologies at completely different periods in their lives - are extremely important, as they provide us with empirical evidence of whether a smartphone use is indeed different in the two groups. There are interesting conclusions from the research conducted by Dror Krikon. At the same time, I find it difficult to evaluate the findings described in the dissertation without reference to other Israeli social research related

to digital media use. Thus, it is unclear to what extent certain phenomena of smartphone use are global, and to what extent they are specific to this society. Unfortunately, I did not find an answer to this question in the dissertation, and therefore here I address it to the doctoral student.

My general assessment of the doctoral dissertation is positive while finding in it several elements that should be rethought if the author would like to publish his work in a book version. My comments do not in any way detract from the work done by the doctoral student, but only serve to make him look at his work more reflectively in retrospect.

At this point, I would like to point out in detail those elements that, in my opinion, are worth rethinking and modifying.

1. I am not convinced that the title of the dissertation is entirely appropriate since the author is examining and comparing two groups - adolescents (15-18 years old) and a very narrow group of adults (33-37 years old). Thus, I find such a comparative perspective precisely the most valuable, and therefore it would be good if it was reflected in both the title of the dissertation and the theoretical part (which is somewhat the case when the author characterizes the different generations from the perspective of smartphone use).

2. In the theoretical part, I did not find the reference to sociological concepts of the information society (e.g. Bell), Castells' concept of the network society, or the concept of mediatization (here, especially the work of N. Couldry, A. Hepp 2016, The Mediated construction of reality, Polity, in which the authors refer to the publication of Berger and Luckmann, discussed in the doctoral dissertation, building an original, author's take on the creation of reality in the digital world).

3. I find certain threads unnecessary, as they are not reflected in the research questions and hypotheses, e.g. on the capitalist economy and its control by governments (p. 17), British cultural studies (p. 72), etc. Other strands, on the other hand, are poorly related or justified by the author, such as the critique of

consumerist society (after Barber and his somewhat dated 2008 book. "Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole," p. 21 and p. 22-23) or the role of neurotransmitters in consumption behavior, especially shopaholism (p. 23-27), and brain plasticity (p. 142). There was a lack of examples relating to the consumption of media content and media and leisure activities - such as entertainment vs. knowledge.

4. The titles of the chapters do not serve an informative function (e.g. *The Smartphone*, *The Youth*, *The Socialization*), as they only refer to their contents in a hash and a very general way. In addition, there is a lack of subsections, which would have made the work easier to read and better structure the argument (in many places I had trouble relating the content of the following paragraphs to each other).

5. The methodological section should include distinguished research questions and hypotheses, especially as they appear in the analytical section when they are verified by the researcher.

6. I would avoid additional verification of hypotheses by referring to qualitative research - it is important to remember that this is not their purpose. This way of describing the results somewhat obscures the picture of the analyzed phenomenon. Besides, the interpretive research paradigm adopted by the doctoral student focuses on the subjective perception of the world, with this paradigm mainly reaching for qualitative research methods (which, by the way, the doctoral student writes about on pp. 40-41).

7. There was too little interpretive discussion of the collected results in the analytical part. Nor does the doctoral student explain how the results should be understood in the context of the phenomena described in the theoretical part, such as postmodern society, youth culture, or media socialization.

8. In the questionnaire, some questions and response options are not quite well formulated. For example, in question 52 *In a moment of boredom, I...* the answers: *Pick up the smartphone* and *Look for someone to talk to* are not

disjointed (one can reach for the phone to talk to someone). The question about emotions (26) is also highly questionable, especially the terms that the doctoral student chose for the emotions depicted in the photos. This section should have referred to the universal emotions distinguished by Paul Ekman: https://www.paulekman.com/universal-emotions/

Despite pointing out some shortcomings or weaknesses, I believe that the work is of great cognitive value and proves that today the smartphone is not only a key tool for communication but also a functional tool that satisfies many needs, including informational, cultural, social, psychological, etc.

In conclusion, I hereby state that Mr. Dror Krikon's doctoral dissertation entitled *The Smartphone in the Life of Israeli Youth. From "Virtual Friend" to Addiction* is a work that meets all the requirements outlined in Article 187 of the Law of July 20, 2018. Law on Higher Education and Science, and therefore I evaluate it positively. I request that Mr. Dror Krikon be admitted to the further stages of the proceedings for the award of a doctorate in social sciences in the discipline of sociology.