


Yazar(lar) / Author(s)

Doç. Dr. Tamer Bayrak 
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi, İletişim
Fakültesi, Yeni Medya ve İletişim Bölümü,
Çanakkale, Türkiye
e-posta: tamer.bayrak@comu.edu.tr
(Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding author)

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The Hybrid Culture of Generation Z: Digital Identity and Community Construction through TikTok, Discord, and Twitch

Abstract

This study examines how Generation Z constructs identity, culture, and social relations through new media platforms with a focus on the Turkish context. The study adopts a qualitative document analysis approach, examining academic literature, official reports, and platform-based data related to TikTok, Discord, and Twitch between 2019 and 2025 to identify recurring themes in Generation Z's digital identity and community formation. Platforms such as TikTok, Discord, and Twitch are not tools of entertainment and communication but hybrid spaces where young people perform identities, strengthen community bonds, and engage in cultural production. Findings reveal that Generation Z reproduces their offline experiences in online environments, while simultaneously transferring their online identity performances into everyday social life. This dynamic indicates that youth culture should be understood not as a one-dimensional process of digitalization but as a hybrid form shaped by mutual interaction. The study also highlights challenges faced by young users, including risks of addiction, algorithmic inequalities, and privacy concerns, which coexist alongside opportunities for individual expression and collective creativity. In conclusion, the digital practices of Generation Z embody both opportunities and risks, making new media culture a multidimensional phenomenon that requires critical analysis within the fields of youth sociology and communication studies.

Keywords: Generation Z, New Media, Digital Identity, Participatory Culture, Hybrid Youth Culture.

Z Kuşağının Hibrit Kültürü: TikTok, Discord ve Twitch Üzerinden Dijital Kimlik ve Topluluk İnşası

Öz

Bu çalışma, Yeni Medya Platformları Aracılığıyla Kimlik, Kültür ve Sosyal İlişkilerin İnşası: Türkiye Bağlamında Z Kuşağı konusunu incelemektedir. Çalışma, Z Kuşağı'nın dijital kimlik ve topluluk oluşumundaki tekrarlayan temaları belirlemek amacıyla, 2019-2025 yılları arasında TikTok, Discord ve Twitch ile ilgili akademik literatürü, resmi raporları ve platform tabanlı verileri inceleyen nitel bir doküman analizi yaklaşımını benimsemiştir. TikTok, Discord ve Twitch gibi platformlar yalnızca birer eğlence ve iletişim aracı olmanın ötesinde, gençlerin kimlik sergilediği, topluluk bağlarını güçlendirdiği ve kültürel üretime katıldığı melez alanlar olarak işlev görmektedir. Bulgular, Z Kuşağı'nın çevrimdışı deneyimlerini çevrimiçi ortamlarda yeniden ürettiğini, aynı zamanda çevrimiçi kimlik performanslarını gündelik sosyal yaşama aktardığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu dinamik, gençlik kültürünün tek boyutlu bir dijitalleşme süreci olarak değil, karşılıklı etkileşimle şekillenen melez bir form olarak anlaşılması gerektiğini göstermektedir. Çalışma ayrıca, bireysel ifade ve kolektif yaratıcılık fırsatlarının yanı sıra genç kullanıcıların karşılaştığı bağımlılık riskleri, algoritmik eşitsizlikler ve gizlilik endişeleri gibi zorluklara da dikkat çekmektedir. Sonuç olarak, Z Kuşağı'nın dijital pratikleri hem fırsatları hem de riskleri bünyesinde barındırmakta, yeni medya kültürünü gençlik sosyolojisi ve iletişim çalışmaları alanlarında eleştirel analiz gerektiren çok boyutlu bir olgu haline getirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Z Kuşağı, Yeni Medya, Dijital Kimlik, Katılımcı Kültür, Hibrit Gençlik Kültürü.

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1. Introduction

In the digital age, Generation Z stands out as the first cohort to grow up fully immersed in the internet and smart devices. This generation experiences a distinct process of socialization and identity construction compared to older generations, largely due to the role of social media in their lives. In the case of Türkiye, Generation Z constitutes a significant portion of the population; according to NielsenIQ data, in 2024, approximately 24% of Türkiye's population consisted of members of Generation Z (Analiz Gazetesi, 2024). The study describes Generation Z as "the first true natives of the digital world" and emphasizes that these young people spend an average of five hours per day online (Analiz Gazetesi, 2024). The strong presence of young people on digital platforms has brought about substantial changes both in individual identity presentation and in social relations. For example, TikTok has reached more than 1 billion users worldwide, with over 41% of its users aged between 16 and 24 (Atalay & Tamkoç, 2022, p.18). In this respect, new-generation platforms such as TikTok, Discord, and Twitch are not merely spaces of entertainment but have become domains where youth culture is produced, shared, and new communities are established.

Platforms such as TikTok, Discord, and Twitch hold a special place in the daily lives of Generation Z. TikTok, with its short video format and algorithmic flow, has become one of the most popular spaces where young people express themselves. Global studies have highlighted TikTok's natural and egalitarian environment; the platform's "sincere, relaxed, easy, and equalizing" structure has been identified as one of the main reasons for its appeal to young users (Balci, Akgül, & Astam, 2024, p.716). For instance, according to Kobak and Soğukdere, TikTok's visual flow provides faster and more accessible content compared to YouTube, a more relaxed atmosphere compared to Twitter (X), and a less ostentatious environment compared to Instagram (Balci, Akgül, & Astam, 2024, p.716). In this way, TikTok enables the creation of a participatory culture where young people develop spaces for collective creativity and reinterpretation. Field studies conducted in Türkiye also demonstrate that young people continuously produce content on TikTok to meet their needs for entertainment, communication, and self-expression (Balci, Akgül, & Astam, 2024, p.716).

Similarly, platforms such as Twitch and Discord are also significant in shaping youth culture. Twitch, with its live streaming and real-time chat features, stands out within gaming communities while enabling young people to develop a sense of belonging and attachment. Research has shown that among the strongest determinants of why Twitch viewers remain on the platform and follow streamers is the sense of community (İlhan, Görgülü Aydoğdu, & Emiroğlu, 2022, p.177). Viewers' support through subscriptions and donations has transformed gaming into both a form of entertainment and a digital labor activity. Discord, on the other hand, initially emerged as a group chat application designed for gaming communities, but today it has become a virtual space for various communities that young people establish according to their interests. International studies have defined Discord as "networked communities" where young people collaborate and socialize in gaming, education, or hobby groups. In Türkiye, young people also create Discord servers for various purposes-such as studying, language learning, or fan clubs-and spend time together through new media tools.

New media environments are transforming the identities, cultures, and social relations of Generation Z. Social media platforms allow young people to selectively present their personal

images and to experiment with multiple selves. As Sherry Turkle has argued, the concept of virtual identity is shaped by elements such as avatars and profiles that individuals use in online environments (Yavuz, 2024, p.1575). According to Turkle, young users in the online sphere are individuals “seeking who they are or what they want to become”; in this process, mechanisms of privacy, anonymity, and feedback provide new workshops for identity formation (Yavuz, 2024, p.1579). Moreover, as in Goffman’s theory of self-presentation, young people also perform “front stage” roles in online platforms according to social expectations (Çankal, 2024, p.326). However, digital platforms have rendered this performance far more flexible and variable compared to the past. Çankal’s research has shown that Generation Z constructs different “conditional identities” in online environments for their close circles and for strangers, and that they employ these identities with a pragmatic approach (Çankal, 2024, p.326). In other words, young people’s digital identities are not static but are continuously renewed in accordance with the requirements of the networks to which they belong and the moment they are situated in.

New media also provides a foundation for the cultural production and sharing practices of young people. Through digital platforms, youth construct a distinctive image by sharing cultural indicators such as music, film, literature, and games. For example, on Instagram, they may document their favorite books, art events, or special interests to present a “cultured” identity (Kaya, 2021, p.1409). Such posts not only signal one’s tastes and values to the audience but also serve as a means of building connections with the communities to which they feel they belong. In other words, members of Generation Z demonstrate their social capital through digital cultural symbols; they carefully curate their posts on mobile applications to create an image of originality, prestige, and refined taste (Kaya, 2021, p.1409). The NielsenIQ study also revealed that in Türkiye, young people show great interest in digital activities and social media influencers: Generation Z prefers spending time on social media, following influencers, and participating in digital live events (Analiz Gazetesi, 2024). This indicates that young people are positioned not only as consumers but also as cultural producers.

In terms of social relations, new media platforms have transformed the ways in which Generation Z perceives the world and forms communities. According to Manuel Castells’ network society approach, the internet is an interactive space where individuals maintain their opinions and actions within the public sphere (Yıldırım & Sönmez, 2022, p.237). Within this framework, digital platforms function as a re-politicized public sphere for Generation Z. Castells argues that the internet is a medium where shared meanings are produced and where individuals can organize around these meanings (Castells, 2013). Indeed, young people in Türkiye also perceive online environments as public platforms where social issues are discussed and ideas are exchanged (Yıldırım & Sönmez, 2022, p.236). For instance, protest messages circulating on social media, virtual protest events, and the participation of young people in online debates highlight the potential of digital mechanisms to influence social change. Group chats and communities formed on platforms such as Twitch or Discord servers bring together young people who share similar interests. Studies such as those by Sjöblom and Hamari (2017) have demonstrated that a “sense of community” on such platforms strengthens viewers’ desire to remain engaged and connected (İlhan, Görgülü Aydoğdu, & Emiroğlu, 2022, p.177). In short, Generation Z individuals establish new relationships in new media both through global and local networks, finding opportunities to connect with like-minded others.

In this context, the digital practices of Generation Z on platforms such as TikTok, Discord, and Twitch are transforming not only everyday forms of entertainment and communication but also social values, cultural production processes, and identity construction. In the case of Türkiye, the active presence of young people on these platforms redefines intergenerational cultural transmission while simultaneously displaying both similarities and differences with international examples. Therefore, the shaping of youth culture through new media reveals both the flexibilization and multilayered nature of individual identities, as well as the reorganization of social relations through digital networks.

The findings of this study also resonate with Jean Twenge's analyses of the "iGeneration" (Twenge, 2017), who describes Generation Z as the first cohort to spend adolescence entirely in the digital realm. Twenge's empirical research demonstrates that this generation shows higher rates of anxiety, social withdrawal, and digital dependency compared to previous cohorts. These outcomes parallel the Turkish findings discussed in this study, suggesting that the hybrid culture of Generation Z embodies both connection and isolation.

Despite the growing body of international research on Generation Z and digital media, there is still a limited number of studies focusing on how Turkish youth construct identity and social belonging through hybrid digital platforms. Previous research has often emphasized Western contexts or single-platform analyses, leaving a gap in understanding the multidimensional, cross-platform interactions of youth culture in Türkiye. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how Generation Z in Türkiye constructs digital identity, culture, and community through platforms such as TikTok, Discord, and Twitch, and to reveal how these practices reflect a hybrid form of sociality that merges online and offline experiences. By addressing this gap, the study aims to contribute to the fields of youth sociology and communication by contextualizing global theories within the Turkish digital ecosystem.

At this point, a strong theoretical foundation is required to explain this transformation. Theoretical approaches that stand out in explaining youth culture, identity construction, and new media practices range from the cultural studies tradition to identity theories, from the network society perspective to the concept of participatory culture. In the following section of this study, these theoretical approaches will be addressed, providing a framework for understanding how Generation Z is positioned within the digital world.

1.1. Methodology

This study is designed as a qualitative research based on document analysis, which aims to interpret existing texts, reports, and data related to Generation Z's digital practices. The main purpose of this methodological approach is to understand the cultural and communicative dynamics of youth without relying on direct fieldwork but by systematically analyzing secondary data sources.

The data corpus consists of:

- Academic publications (articles and conference papers) on TikTok, Discord, and Twitch from 2019 to 2025 both in Türkiye and internationally,
- Institutional reports such as NielsenIQ (2024), Statista (2023), and the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (2024),
- Platform-based datasets published by Business of Apps (2023, 2025) and TwitchTracker,

- Expert interviews and public commentaries, including Veysel Bozkurt's (2021) interview "Bir yozlaştırma operasyonu: TikTok" and Jean Twenge's (2017) iGen.

Following Bowen's (2009) qualitative document analysis model, the study followed three steps:

1. Data selection – identifying documents directly addressing youth, identity, and platform culture;
2. Thematic coding – grouping recurring concepts under key themes such as identity performance, community belonging, and algorithmic influence;
3. Interpretation – synthesizing findings within theoretical frameworks, particularly those of Hall (1996), Castells (2013), and Jenkins (2006).

The documents examined in this study were selected based on their direct relevance to the research questions. A total of 62 documents (academic publications, institutional reports, and platform-based datasets) published between 2019 and 2025 were included in the analysis. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) addressing issues related to Generation Z, digital identity, community formation, or platform culture; (2) providing empirical data or theoretical discussion specifically on TikTok, Discord, or Twitch; and (3) being accessible in either Turkish or English. These three platforms were selected because they are among the most intensively and interactively used by Generation Z in Türkiye, shaping youth culture through identity performance (TikTok), synchronous socialization and community interaction (Discord), and live-stream-based participatory culture (Twitch). As the study relies entirely on secondary data, the findings are limited to the literature and statistics available between 2019 and 2025; nevertheless, the comparative examination of multiple platforms provides a comprehensive framework for understanding hybrid youth culture.

This qualitative design offers a guiding framework for the findings section, ensuring that all discussions are grounded in systematically analyzed secondary data rather than anecdotal observation.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study incorporates a range of sociological approaches aimed at understanding the relationship between youth culture and digital media. In Stuart Hall's (1996) conception of cultural identity, identity is a dynamic process that is continuously "produced." According to Hall, identity is reconstructed through social interactions and cultural contexts, thereby presenting a fictional and variable structure. This perspective, which allows Generation Z to experiment with multiple identities on digital platforms, aligns with Bauman's notion of liquid modernity; Bauman (2000, 2017) emphasized that in the postmodern world, identities have become fluid and are continuously reconstructed through consumption and global networks.

Moreover, in Manuel Castells' studies on the network society, the internet is conceptualized as a new "networked public sphere." Castells (2013) emphasizes that in the information age, communication networks play a critical role in both political and social contexts; the non-hierarchical structure of new media provides individuals with the opportunity to participate directly in public life. Generation Z's perception of digital networks as spaces for public debate and action corresponds to this transformation anticipated by Castells (Yıldırım & Sönmez, 2022, p.235).

The dimension of cultural production and mass participation in digital platforms can be addressed through Henry Jenkins' concept of participatory culture. According to Jenkins, the traditional distinction between consumers and producers in media culture has been dismantled, with young individuals actively participating in content creation (Jenkins, 2006). For example, TikTok videos, Discord community events, and Twitch streams provide young people with practices of reinterpreting culture. Danah boyd (2014) examined Generation Z's search for privacy and social belonging within networked publics, emphasizing that young people transform online environments into spaces where they also explore their subjectivities. David Buckingham (2013) critically evaluated the concept of "digital natives," arguing that young people's use of technology cannot be generalized independently of its historical and socio-cultural context.

In addition to the concepts of participatory culture and network society, the notion of "echo chambers" also provides a critical framework for understanding how Generation Z interacts with algorithmic platforms. The term, widely discussed in digital sociology, refers to environments where individuals are primarily exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, thereby limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints (Sunstein, 2001). In the context of platforms such as TikTok and Twitch, algorithmic personalization can intensify these echo chambers by continuously recommending similar content, resulting in ideological and cultural isolation rather than pluralistic engagement.

In conclusion, when these theoretical frameworks are considered together, it becomes evident that Generation Z's processes of identity, culture, and relationship construction on digital platforms are multidimensional. The literature, ranging from social identity theories to digital identity studies, demonstrates that new media has a broad sphere of influence, extending from young people's self-presentation to their social participation. This research aims to make an original contribution to the field by examining how Generation Z youth in Türkiye produce identity and culture and establish social relationship networks within new media environments such as TikTok, Discord, and Twitch. In light of both international and local studies, it is considered that this study will address a significant need to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between youth, culture, and sociality, particularly in the context of Türkiye.

2. Findings and Discussion

2.1. TikTok: Audiovisual Content Production and Identity Performances

Research conducted in Türkiye shows that young people primarily use TikTok for entertainment, following trends, and self-expression (Atalay & Tamkoç, 2022). According to 2023 data from the Turkish Statistical Institute, 26% of young people aged 16–24 actively use TikTok (Analiz Gazetesi, 2024). On a global scale, this rate is higher; worldwide, 41% of users are young people between the ages of 16 and 24 (Statista, 2023).

Document analysis reveals that young people showcase their identities on TikTok particularly through dance videos, challenges, and lip-sync performances. In this context, participatory culture comes to the forefront; young people are not only consumers of content but also become its producers (Jenkins, 2006). However, the algorithmic structure of the platform compels content creators to act in a trend-oriented manner, rendering the balance between authentic identity performances and popular content fragile (Balci, Akgül, & Astam, 2024).

Based on qualitative document analysis, the study reveals that TikTok functions as a stage of identity for young people. Through the content they produce on the platform, young users position themselves as “fun,” “creative,” or “different”; this demonstrates, in line with Goffman’s theory of self-presentation, that they perform “front stage” roles according to social expectations. Sherry Turkle’s (2011) concept of “digital identity” is also illuminating in this regard; through TikTok, young people experience visibility and recognition that they may not possess in everyday life, treating the platform as an “alternative identity workshop” in the online sphere.

However, algorithmic guidance plays a decisive role in this process. TikTok’s “For You” page highlights popular content, directing young people to repeat certain patterns. This creates a tension between authenticity and popularity. Many young users feel compelled to use popular music, trending dances, or viral effects in order for their content to become visible. Thus, while TikTok offers creative opportunities for youth cultural production, it simultaneously contains a control mechanism that compels them to act in a “trend-oriented” manner. This mechanism can also be interpreted through the lens of algorithmic surveillance and digital labor, where users’ creative engagement is shaped by platform algorithms that both monitor and monetize their visibility (Fuchs, 2014; Zuboff, 2019). From a sociological standpoint, this dynamic reflects how young people’s participation contributes to the platform’s economic logic while simultaneously reinforcing self-discipline and performative visibility. This observation is grounded in the document-based analysis of previous research on TikTok and digital performance culture, which emphasizes that algorithmic visibility often pressures users to conform to trending formats (Balcı, Akgül, & Astam, 2024; Abidin, 2021).

This dual structure of freedom and control also manifests in the Turkish context. In the Turkish context, Veysel Bozkurt (2023) emphasizes that platforms such as TikTok reshape social interaction patterns by fostering a culture of exhibitionism and performance, where users are motivated by visibility rather than dialogue. His studies further indicate that excessive social media use correlates with increased feelings of self-centeredness and loneliness among youth, suggesting that digital networks, while connecting individuals, simultaneously deepen social isolation.

These findings demonstrate that although TikTok functions as a participatory and creative space, it also reproduces forms of digital individualism and isolation within youth culture.

In the context of participatory culture, TikTok creates a space where, as Jenkins (2006) notes, the distinction between consumer and producer is dissolved. Young people are not only viewers of content but also its producers and reinterpreters. A field study conducted in Türkiye revealed that university students not only consume content but that a significant portion also actively produce videos and participate in collective performances with their friends in this process (Balcı, Akgül, & Astam, 2024). This demonstrates that young people adopt the role of “prosumer” (producer + consumer) in cultural production. This prosumer identity simultaneously reshapes digital self-presentation, as young people construct and negotiate their online personas through cycles of production and consumption. Within participatory culture, prosumption functions as both a creative and disciplinary process, where individuals perform identity through algorithmically guided participation while seeking social validation (Jenkins, 2006; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). This dynamic illustrates how digital identity

formation is embedded within hybrid cultural processes that merge self-expression with platform-driven visibility.

In summary, TikTok brings together three functions for Generation Z:

Self-expression – enabling young people to gain visibility through diverse identity performances,

Community belonging – reinforcing a sense of “we” through participation in trend culture,

Algorithmic guidance – shaping content production according to the logic of popularity rather than authenticity.

Thus, TikTok, with both its liberating and constraining aspects, serves as the “digital stage” of youth culture, mediating a hybrid process of identity and cultural construction.

2.2. Discord: Socialization, Gaming, and Chat Culture in Online Communities

Discord has become not only a communication tool used during gaming for young people but also a platform for socialization and community building. Research conducted in Türkiye shows that young people use Discord not only to communicate while gaming but also to make friends, engage in everyday conversations, study together, and create communities based on their interests (Erdem & Bayrak, 2024).

Although research on Discord use among young people in Türkiye is limited, general trends can be observed through international reports. According to the 2022 Türkiye data from We Are Social and GWI, 20.1% of internet users aged 16–64 use Discord on a monthly basis. While this percentage does not directly refer to the category of “youth” or “university students,” it nevertheless indicates that Discord has reached a certain user base in Türkiye. Considering that young people show greater interest in digital platforms for gaming and socialization, this percentage provides an important reference point (Recro Digital, 2022; Eryiğit, 2023; Türkiye Sağlık Endüstrisi İşverenleri Sendikası İktisadi İşletmesi, 2022). Globally, the number of monthly active users is around 200 million (Business of Apps, 2023). These data demonstrate that Discord, particularly through gaming communities, language-learning groups, and hobby clubs, has become a platform that enhances young people’s cultural capital.

Based on document-based qualitative analyses of prior research on Discord and youth interaction, three critical functions emerge in youth culture. These analyses are derived from the systematic interpretation of secondary data sources, including academic research, institutional reports, and media materials on Discord use among youth in Türkiye.

Community Belonging: As revealed through document-based qualitative analysis, young people socialize and develop a sense of “we” in servers organized around their interests (e.g., gaming, music, anime, language learning). This aligns with Castells’ (2013) concept of the “network society,” in which individuals produce shared meanings and cultural capital within online networks.

Identity Performance: Discord servers provide young people with the possibility of anonymity, which facilitates experimentation with different identities. According to Turkle’s (2011) notion of “digital identity,” these environments serve as spaces for young people to test alternative selves. This interpretation is supported by prior research emphasizing the role of online

communities in shaping youth self-expression and identity experimentation (boyd, 2014; Turkle, 2011; Jenkins, 2006).

Education and Functionality: During the pandemic, many students in Türkiye used Discord for “study groups,” and in some universities, extracurricular activities were organized through Discord servers. This demonstrates that the platform has acquired a function not only in gaming but also in education and productivity. Empirical and institutional evidence confirms that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Discord served as a complementary learning platform, enabling collaborative study and peer support among students (OECD, 2021).

However, the literature also reveals that Discord poses certain risks for young people. In particular, cyberbullying, toxic communication, and privacy concerns are among the negative aspects frequently mentioned by youth (klicksafe, 2023-b). In this context, access to Discord in Türkiye was blocked on October 9, 2024, by the decision of the Ankara 1st Criminal Judgeship of Peace. This decision was taken following allegations that some users on the platform had shared illegal content, such as child sexual abuse and obscene materials. Moreover, the platform’s refusal to share the requested user data with security authorities also influenced the ruling. Some sources claim that, as of February 13, 2025, certain users are still able to access Discord through methods such as VPN or DNS; however, no official statement has yet been issued by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) or other official bodies confirming that the restriction has been fully lifted. On some internet service providers, access remains blocked. Similar bans on Discord also exist in countries such as China, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates.

In conclusion, Discord has become a digital space for Generation Z youth in Türkiye, where gaming culture is transformed into a form of collective sociality and everyday practices (such as chatting, education, and friendship) are sustained online. It has thus been positioned not merely as a communication tool but as a social arena that expands young people’s cultural capital and enables the reproduction of their identities. However, due to the security concerns it entails, efforts have been made to restrict its use in Türkiye as well as in several other countries.

2.3. Twitch: Live Streaming Culture, Gaming Communities, and Participatory Culture

Over the past decade, Twitch has become one of the most significant digital platforms shaping youth culture. In particular, in Türkiye, it functions as a space where young people construct their digital identities and community experiences through e-sports, game streaming, and chat broadcasts. A study found that among the motivations for viewers to prefer Twitch, the highest-rated factor was the “sense of community,” followed by “real-time interaction” (İlhan, Görgülü Aydoğdu, & Emiroğlu, 2022, p.199). This finding demonstrates that Twitch is not merely a “viewing” platform but a socio-digital space that supports participatory culture.

2.3.1. Twitch Usage in the Context of Türkiye

In Türkiye, young people use Twitch not only to watch game streams but also to chat with streamers, share their own broadcasting experiences, and build connections with communities. In particular, the rise of the “Just Chatting” (a live-streaming genre on Twitch where creators engage directly with their audience through informal conversations rather than gameplay) category has enabled young people to share aspects of their daily lives, humor,

cultural debates, and even political views through this platform. This demonstrates that Twitch has begun to function as a “digital public sphere” in Türkiye (Çakar, 2021).

Qualitative analyses show that young people in Türkiye perceive Twitch streamers not only as “gaming experts” but also as a kind of “digital role model.” The streamers’ discourse, humor, game preferences, and community interactions influence the cultural practices and everyday language use of young audiences. In this context, Twitch has become a space for young people that produces not only entertainment but also cultural capital (Yavaşçalı & Uğurhan, 2019).

2.3.2. Twitch Culture on a Global Scale

On a global scale, Twitch had an average of 2.37 million concurrent viewers in 2024, with the majority of users being under the age of 34 (Business of Apps, 2025). This figure highlights the platform’s direct association with youth culture. Research has shown that the foundation of Twitch’s global success lies in real-time interaction (chat system), the streamer–viewer relationship, and the platform economy (subscriptions, donations, advertising revenues) (Taylor, 2018).

This economic dimension also generates a distinct practice of identity and belonging for young people. Donating to or subscribing to a streamer is perceived not merely as a financial transaction but also as an indicator of community belonging. In this way, Twitch fosters forms of digital solidarity among individuals and introduces a new “digital consumption culture.”

2.3.3. Critical Evaluation

Twitch is a platform that attracts significant attention from young audiences both globally and in Türkiye; however, this also raises concerns about addiction and content inequality. For instance, in December 2023, Twitch had an average of 2.5 million concurrent viewers, 41% of whom were between the ages of 16 and 24 (Küçükali, 2025). The average global user age is approximately 26, with users watching around 106 minutes per day, and 58% remaining engaged for more than 20 hours per week (Thakur, 2025). This intense viewing pattern indicates risks of social withdrawal and addiction. Within youth sociology and media studies, such patterns are interpreted through the lens of digital dependency and affective engagement, where platforms sustain user attention through emotional reinforcement and social gratification loops (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

On the other hand, Twitch’s algorithmic design reduces discoverability and further amplifies already popular streamers (Houssard, Pilati, Tartari, & others, 2023). Research has shown that the absence of alternative recommendation mechanisms reinforces a “rich-get-richer” effect, whereby a small number of streamers attract the vast majority of total viewership. This phenomenon exemplifies what scholars describe as algorithmic inequality - the structural bias of recommendation systems that privilege visibility and profit accumulation for a limited number of content creators, thereby reproducing new hierarchies in digital labor and attention economies (Bishop, 2021).

In this sense, Twitch should be critically examined not only as a platform of entertainment but also as a socio-technical system that shapes digital labor, identity, and inequality through algorithmic governance.

As of 2023, Twitch hosts an average of 2.5 million concurrent viewers. Among these, 41% are young people aged 16–24, and the average user age is approximately 26 (Küçükali, 2025). The

average viewing time on the platform is 106 minutes per day, and 58% of users watch Twitch for more than 20 hours per week (Thakur, 2025). These figures demonstrate both the intensity of Twitch use among young people and its potential for addiction. On a global scale, the platform reached approximately 240 million monthly active users in 2025 (Thakur, 2025). Within this total, around 7.5 million users are located in Türkiye, accounting for about 2.92% of the global share (World Population Review, 2025). With internet penetration in Türkiye at 86.5% and an average of seven hours of daily online activity, 67.4% of the country's youth are active social media users (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, Directorate General of Strategy Development, 2024), reflecting a high level of engagement with platforms such as Twitch.

Viewer behaviors further indicate growing signs of dependency. According to TwitchTracker (n.d.-a), 68% of Twitch users reported reducing their traditional TV viewing time in favor of watching streams, suggesting a broader shift in entertainment consumption habits and reinforcing the potential for addiction among young audiences. Beyond behavioral dependency, structural inequalities also shape the Twitch ecosystem. The distribution of viewership and revenue is highly concentrated: the study by Houssard et al. (2023) found that the income Gini coefficient was approximately 0.57 among the top 10,000 streamers and around 0.93 for all streamers, demonstrating that a very small number of creators capture the vast majority of attention and income. A similar concentration is evident in Türkiye, where the ten most popular channels account for nearly 26% of total weekly viewing time (TwitchTracker, n.d.-b). This indicates a significant inequality among content creators, producing a stratified digital economy.

Adding to this dynamic, Twitch's algorithmic architecture operates differently from most other social platforms. As one of the few platforms that does not employ a conventional recommendation system, Twitch's design relies heavily on user-driven discovery. However, this choice unintentionally reinforces existing hierarchies: the absence of algorithmic suggestions pushes viewers toward already popular streamers, limiting visibility for smaller channels and reducing overall content diversity (Houssard, Pilati, Tartari, & others, 2023). Consequently, Twitch functions not only as a site of participatory entertainment but also as a socio-technical ecosystem where algorithmic design, economic concentration, and digital dependency converge to shape the cultural practices of Generation Z.

These quantitative data demonstrate that Twitch is a powerful medium transforming youth culture; however, high levels of participation increase the risk of addiction, while the platform's algorithmic structure deepens content inequalities. The trends observed in Türkiye reflect similar global patterns. Both the dimensions of addiction and inequality are of critical importance in analyzing the digital consumption habits of young people.

2.4. Discussion: Hybrid Youth Culture

The research findings reveal that the cultural practices of today's youth are increasingly taking on a hybrid character (García Canclini, 1995). Offline experiences and the social interactions of everyday life are being reproduced on online platforms; conversely, the identities, affiliations, and community relations constructed in online environments directly reflect upon young people's physical lives. This situation necessitates defining youth culture not as a one-dimensional process of digitalization but as a mutually interactive transformation.

Table 1: Platform Usage Rates of Generation Z in Türkiye and Worldwide

Platform	Usage in Türkiye	Usage Worldwide	Main Purposes of Use
TikTok	26% (ages 16–24)	41% (ages 16–24)	Entertainment, identity performance, participation in trends
Discord	20% (high school) – 35% (university)	200 million monthly users	Gaming communities, socialization, language learning
Twitch	15% (active young users)	240 million monthly users, 72% under age 34	Live streaming, sense of community, interaction

Note: The data presented in Table 1 were compiled from secondary statistical sources covering both the Turkish and global contexts. The figures for Türkiye were obtained from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK, 2023) and We Are Social (2024) reports, while the global data were derived from Statista (2023–2024) and Business of Apps (2023) statistics.

In the case of the three platforms most intensively used by young people in Türkiye, this hybridization can be observed more clearly. TikTok transports the entertainment, dance, humor, and performance-based codes of everyday life onto a digital stage, offering young people opportunities for visibility and interaction. These contents do not remain confined to the digital sphere but extend into school corridors, family settings, and gatherings with friends; thus, online practices also transform offline social life.

For young people, Discord functions not as a replacement for offline socialization but as a complementary tool. What began as a usage centered on gaming culture has, over time, expanded to include activities such as making friends, forming study groups, and engaging in everyday conversations. The community bonds established in this space generate a form of digital social capital that also nourishes young people's relationships in the physical world.

Twitch, on the other hand, demonstrates the most dynamic examples of hybrid culture. The real-time interactions that take place during live streams not only strengthen the sense of digital community but also extend online affiliations into offline spaces through e-sports tournaments, meetups, and events held in physical settings. In this way, for young people, Twitch is not merely time spent in front of a screen; it becomes a hybrid social arena where identity performances, forms of solidarity, and cultural consumption practices are reproduced.

In conclusion, the cultural life of young people is no longer confined to school, family, and physical circles of friends; rather, permeability between offline and online spheres gives rise to a multilayered sociality. For instance, humor, slang, and fashion trends that emerge in digital spaces such as TikTok or Discord are often transferred into face-to-face interactions among peers, while offline social norms (such as group belonging and status signaling) are simultaneously reproduced in online environments. This hybrid youth culture not only reflects the impacts of digitalization but also reveals how traditional social structures are being transformed through new media technologies.

3. Conclusion/Discussion/Suggestions

This study has examined how Generation Z constructs identity, culture, and social relations through new media platforms from a Türkiye-centered perspective, while also presenting a comparative framework within the global context. The findings indicate that digital platforms such as TikTok, Discord, and Twitch are not merely communication tools but hybrid spaces situated at the core of identity performances, community belonging, and cultural production practices.

In Türkiye, young people's search for visibility and creativity through TikTok, their practices of community building and collective sharing on Discord, and the strong examples of participatory culture and game-based socialization on Twitch stand out. In this respect, new media platforms provide young people with opportunities for both individual self-expression and collective solidarity. However, algorithmic inequalities, risks of addiction, and privacy concerns constrain young people's experiences on these platforms and bring forward the critical dimensions of digitalization.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that youth culture can no longer be explained solely through offline experiences. Generation Z lives its daily life in a hybrid form; while reproducing offline practices in online environments, they also transfer their online identity performances into offline social relationships. This demonstrates that young people are positioned not only as consumers but also as producers and active agents.

When compared with the global context, the ways in which young people in Türkiye use platforms display certain distinctive features. In Türkiye, where family ties are relatively strong, digitalization generates new dynamics in the intergenerational transmission of values, enriching family-child relationships while also creating new areas of conflict. In contrast, while young people worldwide tend to focus more on individual identity performances, in Türkiye collective production and a stronger sense of community appear to be more prominent.

In conclusion, the impact of new media platforms on youth culture is a multidimensional process that entails both opportunities and risks. Therefore, future research should place greater emphasis not only on the algorithmic operations of platforms, digital addiction, and privacy concerns but also on the forms of solidarity, creativity, and cultural sharing that young people develop in digital environments. Furthermore, for policymakers and educational institutions, strengthening digital literacy and developing strategies to support young people in using new media environments more consciously, critically, and productively are of vital importance.

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