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# Youth and Generation Studies

YOUTH AND GENERATION STUDIES

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## Lectori salutem!

We are pleased to present the second issue of the 2025 volume of Youth and Generation Studies. Each new issue represents an important milestone, reflecting the sustained and growing scholarly interest in youth and generational research. In 2026, the journal will enter its third year of publication, a period we anticipate will bring further development, including the strengthening of our academic standing through an expanded editorial board and the continued publication of high-quality research.

The present issue opens with a study by Tamás Bokor and Viktória Szabó on visual storytelling strategies in higher education. The authors examine the development of text-to-image prompting skills among students in arts education, conceptualising prompting as a digital competence that enhances the significance of linguistic and textual abilities among younger generations. Drawing on a case study of 37 students, the article demonstrates that iterative, tutored teaching methods can improve the effective use of textual prompts for visual image generation, thereby increasing the labour market value of these skills, particularly for Generation Y and Z cohorts.

Aleksandra Góralczyk and Weronika Ludek explore the role of the South Korean education system in shaping adolescents' identity. Employing a single case-study design supported by qualitative methods, including secondary data analysis and content analysis of reports and statistical indicators, the study offers a comprehensive assessment of how educational structures influence identity formation.

In a further contribution, Nilotpal Bhattacharjee analyses how young women use Instagram selfies to construct identity, manage self-presentation, and negotiate body image satisfaction within a visually oriented digital environment. Grounded in Uses and Gratifications Theory and Objectification Theory, the study investigates how visibility and validation on social media platforms shape young women's emotions and self-perceptions.

This issue also includes a book review by Gergely Réti of Paul Morland's *No One Left: Why the World Needs More Children* (2024), which provides a critical and thought-provoking examination of demographic

decline. The review highlights the book's discussion of the causes, implications, and contested narratives surrounding global demographic processes.

Finally, on the theme of demography, Katrina Magdalena Sarnyai presents a conference report on Family Formation and the Future: The Geopolitical, Cultural, and Legal Dimensions of Demographic Change, a two-day conference organised by the Danube Institute, held in Budapest on 1-2 April 2025. The conference addressed the pressing challenges of declining fertility rates and the future of family structures.

We hope this issue will prove both engaging and intellectually stimulating.

**Levente Székely**  
**Editor-in-Chief**

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# Visual Storytelling Strategies with Generative AI Tools among HEI Students

Viktória Szabó <sup>1</sup>, Tamás Bokor <sup>2</sup>

The paper explores the possibilities of the development of prompting skills of HEI students in arts education. Text-to-image prompting is regarded as one of the digital skills that increases the importance of linguistic and textual skills among youth. A case study of 37 students shows that iterative, tutored teaching methods can and do increase the efficiency of using textual prompts to generate visual images, enhancing the market value of the users' skills, especially in case of Generation Y and Z employees. When categorising prompt engineering as a digital skill, the traditional DigComp 2.2 digital competence framework is as much usable as the newer AI competence frameworks: In both cases, prompting is part of the problem-solving and human-computer communication.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence, prompting, HEI students, visual storytelling, arts education

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## Introduction

Prompt engineering – this increasingly popular technical term since 2022 refers to the fact that prompting (the linguistic instructions given as input to generative AI applications) is a central element of generative AI systems, while also suggesting that the "science" of prompting demands a level of precision from the user similar to engineering work.

In computer science, there is a debate about the extent to which natural language processing-based generative AI tools meet the original concept of artificial intelligence, as well as about how much the operation of applications based on learning algorithms can be considered creative (Justin 2024). However, a central element of the discourse on the use of generative AI tools is undoubtedly prompt engineering, as a new type of competence, the mastery of which increases the efficiency of these tools, thereby enhancing the market value of the user's skills, especially for Y and Z generation employees. This can reduce the most pressing challenge for the youth that is reported to be uncertainty and unpredictability (Radnai 2024). The way AI-powered tools are changing the most impactful areas of young people's lives, such as education and the labour market, prompts more and more experts to speak of an "AI generation" (Székely, 2025).

In addition to generating text, images, and video content, generative AI is also capable of creating program codes, databases, and many other forms of information. The common feature of all these outputs is that they can use natural language prompts as input. This transformation is particularly

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exciting when we want to create visual output from natural language instructions: a picture is worth a thousand words, but the image must be created with the most concise and clear string of words possible – at least before the multimodal possibilities of giving prompts. This – as many authors emphasise in the context of prompting – highlights and re-establishes the importance of linguistic competencies.

## Digital competence frameworks

Among the currently existing digital literacy frameworks and models, the DigComp framework stands out as the most comprehensive, detailed, widely accepted, applied, and tested model of digital competence (Balula 2016; Evangelinos and Holley 2015; Kelly 2019; Khan and Vuopala 2019; Kluzer 2015; Siiman et al. 2016). According to Ferrari (2013), the DigComp model can become a comprehensive framework for digital competencies after its 2.1 version was updated and published in version 2.2 a few years ago (Carretero et al. 2017).

DigComp is part of the extensive EU ecosystem of research, data, and reports (Caena and Redecker 2019; Ferrari 2012; Mattar et al. 2022). Therefore, it can be considered an official EU document that provides recommendations for national policies. It is closely linked to the related digital competence frameworks for educators (DigCompEdu) and educational organisations (DigCompOrg), which use the same foundational concepts. Currently, DigComp 2.2, thanks to its latest 2022 version, is the most up-to-date and significant digital competence framework.

The DigComp framework served as the primary framework for the UNESCO Global Framework on Digital Literacy (Law et al. 2018). When developing the methodology for the UNESCO framework, the authors thoroughly examined the ICT and digital literacy frameworks of 71 nations across the world. This was intended to ensure that the proposed global framework would be applicable to countries at different stages of development. The authors found that DigComp, which was designed for European countries, could also serve as a valuable foundation for developing a global literacy framework when supplemented with a few additional proposed competencies.

The model distinguishes five main dimensions that summarise an individual's digital capabilities and skills.

- Information and data literacy: The individual's abilities to effectively and securely manage and correctly interpret information and data. This includes not only the mere analysis of data but also the critical evaluation of information sources.
- Communication and collaboration competence: The individual's abilities for effective communication and collaboration using digital tools. This includes the use of digital tools and platforms for various communication purposes and the competencies required for group work conducted on digital platforms.
- Digital content creation: The individual's abilities to create and edit digital content. This includes the production of multimedia content, the creative use of digital tools, and the preservation of quality from both hardware and content perspectives.
- Security: The individual's abilities in the field of digital security, including the recognition and prevention of online threats, the protection of personal data, and the security of online identity.

- **Problem-solving:** The individual's abilities to identify and resolve issues related to digital devices and technologies. It includes diagnosing and fixing technical issues, as well as effectively using digital tools to solve everyday problems.

Seemingly, information and data literacy is the most studied among the five above-mentioned domains, while the other four skills bundles are somewhat more difficult to measure and define numerically (quantitatively).

The above five aspects are complemented by a "meta-aspect". Technology use is the individual's ability to use digital tools and technologies effectively and productively. This includes the skill of using tools and applications, as well as the understanding of those tools and technologies that assist the individual in their daily life and work. As Vaszkun et al. (n.d.) research has shown, studies using the main dimensions of DigComp as a research framework primarily focus on information and data literacy, as well as digital content creation, and very rarely address the areas of communication and collaboration, safety, and problem-solving.

## From digital to AI competencies

UNESCO developed the first version of the AI competence framework for teachers and students by autumn 2023 (UNESCO, n.d.), and the refined version is expected to be completed by the end of 2024. The development, as seen in the case of DigComp, focuses on the topic of education because the school system, including the community of teachers and educators, prepares students for all the skills and competencies necessary beyond school, which are required to handle AI applications in civic, professional, entrepreneurial, and other contexts.

The AI competence framework – similarly to DigComp – focuses on five main areas: human-centered thinking, the ethics of AI, AI fundamentals and applications, the role of AI in pedagogy and in vocational and technical training.

In all five areas, it defines what skills teachers need to acquire and deepen, which skills they can use to create with AI, and what comprehension, application, and creation skills students need to master for competent use of AI (Bokor, 2024).

UNESCO also has a separate AI competency framework specifically for public service workers (UNESCO Communication and Information Sector 2022). It defines the competencies of AI (and digital transformation) in the triad of digital design and planning, data use and governance, and digital management and implementation.

Concordia University and Dawson College (2021) have a similar framework built on a different logic, where we find technological, business, and human topics. The creators categorise competencies related to data, programming, deep learning, and machine learning under technology, while for business applications, they include AI-supported project planning and scaling, as well as the use of specific AI technologies. In the human domain, we find excitingly general categories: innovation, teamwork, professionalism. Under each topic area, there is a list of specific skills along with their associated ethical competencies.

The Alan Turing Institute (2023) addresses the topic from the perspective of business competencies. The framework consists of five dimensions that identify competencies and behaviours across five

areas. These are the following: 1. data protection and supervision, 2. specification, procurement, design, architecture, storage, and maintenance, 3. problem definition and communication, 4. problem-solving, analysis, modelling, visualisation, as well as 5. evaluation and reflection.

Khang (2024) offers a completely different approach. In his book, he discusses the 21st-century digital possibilities for talent development, addressing a very broad audience—students, teachers, researchers, academics, engineers, and other professionals. The AI competency framework leans more towards a general description rather than offering a model that covers specific occupational fields.

With the spread of generative forms of AI, the skills belonging to these types are gaining particular importance, complemented by the field of ethical questions. Prompt engineering, or the profession of effectively prompting AI linguistically, is still searching for its place between computer science and management (Justin, n.d.). Artists using AI's generative imaging skills are grappling with copyright and artwork definition issues, while the academic sphere is attempting to relate to AI – which sometimes appears as an assistant, sometimes as an inspiration, and sometimes as a co-author in scientific research – through a variety of strategies ranging from complete permissiveness to recommendations and strict regulation. Every knowledge-producing sector is affected where the effective success of users is no longer determined solely by technical and handling skills, but also by a range of "soft skills." These "soft skills" do not replace "hard skills" but complement them as equal partners, just as artificial intelligence increasingly appears as an equal partner alongside humans.

The rapid proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, particularly within the domain of image generation, has profoundly reshaped creative workflows across numerous industries, including the visual arts. The creation of art, representing the pinnacle of human creativity, has consistently posed the greatest challenge for engineers and theorists developing AI. Successfully replicating this highest form of human intellectual activity signifies a major breakthrough. While the accessibility and ease of use of these tools have contributed to their widespread adoption, their integration into established art education practices presents both significant opportunities and considerable pedagogical challenges. The current landscape demands a critical examination of how best to incorporate AI into artistic training, moving beyond simple tool familiarization to encompass a deeper understanding of AI's creative potential and its implications for the future of artistic practice.

## AI competencies in visual design

The evolution of AI art creation methodologies has moved beyond the initial emphasis on purely algorithmic generation, increasingly embracing a collaborative model that recognises and values the integral role of human creativity and intentionality. This shift is evident in the growing adoption of text-to-image models and the concurrent rise of "prompt engineering" as a key skill for artists working with AI. While earlier AI art often focused on mimicking human styles, the current paradigm emphasises human-AI co-creation, where the artist's vision is translated into a textual prompt, guiding the AI's generation process (Manovich, 2022; Manovich, 2023) . This collaborative approach acknowledges the limitations of purely algorithmic creativity, recognizing that AI systems function as powerful tools requiring human input and direction to realize their full creative potential.

This transition is closely linked to the broader shift from a purely technical, tool-based approach to AI art creation to a more communicative model emphasising dialogue between the human artist and the AI system (Cizek et al., 2019). This perspective views the creative process not as the sole product of either the human or the machine, but rather as a collaborative endeavour where both agents actively participate in shaping the final output. In this context, the textual prompt serves as the primary unit of communication, mediating the exchange of information and intentions between the human artist and the AI system. The final artwork, therefore, emerges as a result of this collaborative interaction, representing a fusion of human creativity and algorithmic capabilities.

The research conducted by the MIT Co-Creation Studio (Cizek et al., 2019) provides a valuable framework for understanding this shift towards a communicative model of co-creation. This study emphasises the importance of considering the collaborative nature of the creative process, highlighting the need for methodologies that account for the interactions and decision-making processes involved in human-AI collaborations. The concept of co-creation, as defined by Cizek et al. (2019), emphasises the equal partnership between human and non-human agents, rejecting the notion of the machine as a mere tool subordinate to the human artist. Instead, it positions the human and the AI as active participants in a shared creative endeavour, with the final output reflecting the contributions of both. This collaborative perspective underscores the significance of understanding the communicative dynamics involved in human-AI co-creation, highlighting the importance of effective prompt engineering and the ongoing evolution of artistic practice in the age of AI.

## Prompting as a new skill for a successful career

The early 2020s witnessed a paradigm shift in the creation of AI-generated art, driven by the emergence of programs utilising text-based inputs. This development marked a significant departure from previous methods, effectively replacing complex programming languages with a more intuitive interface based on natural language commands. This transition, as noted by Manovich (2023), elevated human-computer interaction to a new level of accessibility and ease of use, facilitating broader participation in the creation of AI art. The widespread availability, and initial free access, to these text-based AI art generators led to their rapid adoption by both professional artists and the public alike.

The foundation of this human-AI collaborative creative process rests upon the "prompt"—a textual command that instructs the AI system on the desired image characteristics (Oppenlaender, 2023). This interaction transforms image creation into a collaborative, co-creative endeavour, where the artist's success hinges upon their ability to articulate their artistic vision with precision and clarity through carefully crafted textual prompts. The efficacy of this collaboration is directly contingent upon the artist's capacity to translate their internal visual concept into a form comprehensible to the AI system.

This language-based approach to image creation represents a departure from traditional artistic practices, particularly for visual artists accustomed to more direct, hands-on methods of image manipulation. For these artists, the process of translating visual concepts into textual descriptions requires a significant shift in their creative workflow, demanding a new level of articulation and precision. While numerous manuals and guides now exist to assist in the creation of effective prompts (Oppenlaender, 2023), many remain at a superficial level, providing basic instructions for novice users without adequately addressing the specific needs of artists seeking to leverage AI for creative expression. These resources often fall short of acknowledging the complexities of artistic language, the nuances of stylistic choices, and the individual stylistic features that contribute to a unique artistic vision.

This limitation highlights the need for a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of prompt engineering within the context of artistic practice. The creation of effective prompts necessitates not only technical expertise but also a deep understanding of visual communication, artistic vocabulary, and the individual artist's unique creative process. Furthermore, the exploration of prompt engineering within art education requires a pedagogical approach that goes beyond simple instruction manuals, fostering critical thinking, experimentation, and iterative refinement of prompts to achieve optimal creative results. The following sections will further analyse research exploring the teachability of prompt engineering and its impact on the creative process within the field of AI-generated art.

The question of whether prompt engineering is an intuitive skill or a teachable ability forms a central focus of ongoing research within the field of AI-generated art. Oppenlaender et al. (2023) directly addressed this question through a series of experiments designed to investigate the teachability of prompt engineering and its impact on the quality of AI-generated images. These experiments departed from conventional research methodologies by involving participants who

lacked formal art education and were not actively engaged in visual creative practices. This novel approach allowed for a more objective assessment of the learnability of prompt engineering, isolating the impact of training from pre-existing artistic skills and experience.

One key aspect of Oppenlaender's research (Oppenlaender et al., 2023) involved assessing participants' understanding of fundamental art concepts, including their familiarity with various artistic styles, movements, and notable creators. This assessment aimed to establish a baseline understanding of the participants' pre-existing knowledge of art and its terminology. The research then explored the relationship between this pre-existing knowledge and the participants' ability to formulate effective prompts. A second set of experiments focused on the participants' ability to distinguish between effective and less effective prompts, testing their capacity to critically evaluate the quality of their textual inputs and their understanding of how variations in prompt language affect the AI's output.

The results of these experiments, as reported by Oppenlaender et al. (2023), provided compelling evidence supporting the teachability of prompt engineering. Participants demonstrated a significant improvement in their ability to generate high-quality images after receiving targeted training on prompt construction and refinement. This finding challenges the notion that proficiency in prompt engineering is solely an intuitive skill, suggesting instead that it can be effectively taught and learned through structured instruction and practice. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of considering pre-existing knowledge of art and artistic vocabulary when assessing the teachability of prompt engineering. The findings suggest that while artistic background can be beneficial, it is not a prerequisite for mastering this crucial skill within AI-assisted art creation. The implications of these findings for art education and the development of appropriate pedagogical strategies are significant and will be further explored in the discussion section. The origin of the term "prompt engineering" itself is noteworthy, emerging from a 2020 online forum post discussing the fictional writing capabilities of ChatGPT3 (Liu & Chilton, 2022), highlighting the organic and rapidly evolving nature of this new field. Oppenlaender (2023) further elucidates the structural components of effective prompts, including object markers, style markers, and image quality enhancers, providing a framework for understanding the complexities of this increasingly important skill.

## Case study

### *Sampling and methodology*

This study focuses specifically on the challenges and opportunities inherent in integrating AI image generation tools into the Hungarian visual art and design education system. The unique linguistic context, with Hungarian as the primary language of instruction and the prevalence of English-language AI platforms, introduces a significant barrier. This language discrepancy extends beyond basic usability; it profoundly impacts the crucial process of prompt engineering – the art of crafting effective textual instructions to guide AI image generation. Effective prompt engineering demands a sophisticated understanding of both the technical capabilities of the AI and the subtle nuances of language in conveying artistic intent. Therefore, successful integration requires more than simply introducing AI tools; it necessitates the development of innovative pedagogical approaches that explicitly address this linguistic challenge.

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies into higher education, particularly within creative fields like art and design, presents both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. This case study centers on comprehensive fieldwork research conducted over two consecutive semesters within seminars at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest. The seminars directly address the core question of how best to incorporate AI into artistic workflows, focusing specifically on AI image generation.

The focus group of this research was composed of art and design students, as the proliferation of generative AI tools has a particularly profound impact on the creative fields. The rationale for selecting this population lies in the dual transformation they face. Not only are market logics and expectations changing rapidly due to AI, but the very process of artistic creation itself is being reshaped. While traditional design tools allowed creators to retain full control over the production process, generative AI introduces a co-creative, communication-based workflow in which the machine contributes its own input to the final outcome.

The case study design was chosen for its suitability in examining complex, context-dependent phenomena such as human–AI co-creation in an educational environment.

The primary research questions were:

1. How should art colleges address the integration of generative AI in education?
2. To what extent can traditional teaching methods accommodate the emergence of AI-assisted creation, and where are new curricular approaches required?
3. What specific challenges do students face when working with AI, and how can educators best support them?

Data collection involved classroom observations, iterative project work, and feedback discussions between students and instructors. These were complemented by an analysis of students' final visual storytelling assignments, which provided insight into their ability to integrate AI into narrative and artistic workflows. The iterative, feedback-driven teaching method created a naturalistic environment for observing how prompting skills and creative strategies evolved.

The data was analysed thematically, with attention to recurring challenges (e.g., unpredictability of outputs, linguistic barriers, rapid tool evolution) and strategies of adaptation. While the sample size was limited and the findings cannot be generalized to all higher education institutions, the study offers valuable insights into the pedagogical and methodological requirements for integrating AI into art and design education.

The two-semester seminar involved a diverse group of students from various artistic disciplines. Participation was open to undergraduate and postgraduate students across departments including animation, textile design, graphic design, media design, and art management. This interdisciplinary approach enriched the learning environment, fostering cross-pollination of ideas and perspectives on AI's role in creative practice. A key feature of the seminar was its accessibility; no prior experience with AI tools was required. This inclusive approach aimed to gauge the potential of AI across a broad spectrum of artistic backgrounds and skill levels, encompassing both students familiar with digital tools and those with less experience in digital media.

The seminar benefitted significantly from the inclusion of a co-teacher, a highly experienced digital media artist specialising in AI-based image generation. This collaboration proved crucial in bridging the gap between the theoretical understanding of AI principles and the practical application of AI tools. The co-teacher's expertise ensured that students received both a strong foundation in the technical aspects of using the selected AI platforms (specifically, Midjourney and Gen-2) and insightful guidance on leveraging AI's creative potential within their own artistic practices. Their contributions extended beyond technical instruction; they also shared their own creative workflows and problem-solving strategies, enriching the learning experience with valuable real-world insights.

The number of participants fluctuated slightly across the two semesters, with 39 students participating in total. This relatively small class size facilitated a more personalised and interactive learning environment, allowing for close collaboration between students and instructors. The safe educational space encouraged open discussion, feedback sharing, and the development of a strong sense of community amongst participants.

The seminar employed a predominantly practical, hands-on approach to teaching. The pedagogical strategy prioritised active learning and collaborative engagement, recognising that the most effective way to understand AI image generation tools is through direct experience and iterative experimentation. The initial sessions focused on building a foundational understanding of the chosen AI platforms, Midjourney and Gen-2. These sessions covered the basic functionalities, command structures, and parameter adjustments, equipping students with the necessary technical skills to begin creating images. However, the emphasis was not solely on technical proficiency; equal weight was given to fostering a critical understanding of AI's creative potential and limitations.

Before tackling the main assignment, students were given a series of smaller, preparatory tasks. These tasks were designed to progressively build upon their skills in prompt engineering, allowing

them to gradually refine their ability to translate their artistic vision into effective text prompts. These preparatory assignments included exercises focused on image generation based on short descriptive texts, the creation of mood boards using AI-generated images, and the illustration of poems or articles using a combination of AI and traditional design techniques. This stepwise approach helped demystify the process of interacting with AI, breaking down complex tasks into smaller, more manageable components.

The central assignment of the seminar required students to develop a short visual narrative, told through a series of five to eight AI-generated images. This task moved beyond the creation of individual images, demanding a higher level of planning, narrative coherence, and consistent visual style across multiple images. Students had to carefully consider not only the aesthetic qualities of each image but also its role within the broader narrative arc, ensuring smooth transitions and a compelling visual flow. The challenge extended beyond technical skill, requiring creative problem-solving, artistic vision, and an understanding of effective storytelling techniques. This assignment served as a comprehensive assessment of their acquired technical and creative abilities, evaluating their ability to seamlessly integrate AI tools into their established artistic workflows. The entire process was supported by frequent feedback sessions, collaborative discussions, and individual consultations to address specific challenges and refine creative approaches.

### *Results and discussions*

During classroom activities, students frequently received assistance from their mentors, which greatly enhanced their learning experience. The iterative nature of this support allowed students to engage in a continuous cycle of feedback and improvement. This approach not only facilitated a deeper understanding of the material but also empowered students to develop effective strategies for completing their assignments. By collaboratively refining their techniques, students learned to craft precise and impactful prompts, ultimately leading to more successful project outcomes. This method of active learning through consistent mentor interaction fostered an environment of growth and confidence, enabling students to fully explore and realise their potential.

By the end of the semester, all students who actively engaged in the classwork successfully completed the final assignment. Each student managed to create a compelling narrative image sequence consisting of 4-6 pictures that effectively conveyed a story. This accomplishment was particularly noteworthy, considering that the quality of the final projects did not correlate with the students' prior experience with generative AI. Regardless of their initial familiarity with the technology, students demonstrated remarkable creativity and storytelling skills in their visual narratives. This outcome highlights the effectiveness of the course structure and the instructional support provided, which enabled students to harness the power of AI tools and unleash their artistic potential, surpassing initial expectations based on their previous knowledge. Such results are a testament to the inclusive and adaptive learning environment fostered throughout the semester, illustrating that with the right guidance and resources, all students can achieve excellence in leveraging emerging technologies for creative expression.

The seminar revealed several key challenges encountered by students in utilising AI image generation tools for creative projects.

One prominent hurdle was the inherent uncertainty of the AI generation process. Unlike traditional

design software, where the user maintains complete control over the final output, AI tools introduce an element of unpredictability. Students often found that the generated images, while often visually interesting, didn't perfectly match their initial vision. This discrepancy required a significant shift in mindset, demanding flexibility, iterative refinement, and a willingness to adapt and reinterpret their initial ideas in light of the AI's output. The process became less about direct control and more about collaboration and negotiation with the AI system.

Another significant challenge stemmed from the language barrier. While the students were primarily Hungarian speakers, the AI platforms operated primarily in English. This linguistic hurdle presented a double challenge. First, students needed to master the specific vocabulary and syntax required for effective prompt engineering, a language distinct from everyday conversation. Second, they needed to translate their artistic visions, often expressed initially in Hungarian, into precise English prompts capable of conveying the nuances of their creative intent. This process required not only linguistic proficiency but also a sophisticated understanding of how language functions in shaping AI's interpretation. This demonstrated the importance of communication skills in leveraging AI tools effectively.

The rapid evolution of the AI platforms themselves also posed challenges. During the course of the two semesters, several updates and improvements were released, introducing new features, altering existing functionalities, and sometimes even rendering previously effective techniques obsolete. This necessitated continuous adaptation on the part of both students and instructors, demanding flexibility and the ability to quickly learn and apply new methods. The constant technological flux highlighted the dynamic nature of the field and the ongoing need for professional development to keep pace with technological advancements.

Finally, the seminar revealed interesting differences in the proficiency of students from different artistic disciplines. While a detailed analysis requires further research, preliminary observations indicated that students from certain fields, such as animation, faced unique challenges compared to those from other fields like graphic design. This variation might stem from differences in their established creative workflows and their existing approaches to problem-solving and image creation. These preliminary findings suggest a need for further investigation into the relationship between artistic disciplines, cognitive styles, and the effective use of AI tools. These challenges underscore the complexity of integrating AI into art education and highlight the need for adaptable teaching methodologies that address the dynamic nature of the technology and the diverse needs of students.

The challenges encountered, particularly those related to language barriers and the rapid evolution of AI technology, highlight the ongoing need for continuous professional development for both educators and students. The curriculum must adapt to incorporate new tools and techniques, and educators must develop strategies to support students in navigating the complexities of AI-specific language and the dynamic nature of the technology itself. The development of resources and teaching materials tailored to the specific linguistic and cultural context of the learning environment is also crucial for maximising the impact and accessibility of AI-integrated art education.

The case study results clearly demonstrate how the DigComp framework's domains—particularly problem-solving, communication and collaboration, and digital content creation—find direct application in AI-assisted visual storytelling. Students' ability to craft effective prompts and

refine them iteratively aligns with DigComp's emphasis on problem-solving and human-machine communication. Moreover, the collaborative classroom setting, where peer discussion and tutor feedback shaped prompt refinement, echoes the communication and collaboration dimensions of DigComp. In this sense, the findings validate the framework's relevance, showing that structured educational interventions can translate abstract digital competence domains into concrete, creative practices.

The integration of AI competence frameworks into the study's pedagogical design is equally visible. UNESCO's emphasis on human-centered thinking, ethical awareness, and application skills resonates with the students' experiences of negotiating unpredictability, linguistic barriers, and evolving toolsets. The case study illustrates that mastering AI tools in education goes beyond technical fluency: students had to learn flexibility, critical evaluation, and adaptive strategies, reflecting the AI frameworks' call for balancing technical, ethical, and humanistic dimensions of competence. This supports the argument that AI-specific frameworks provide a necessary extension of digital literacy models, equipping students to engage with generative AI as both a tool and a creative partner.

Finally, the emergence of prompting as a teachable skill bridges digital and AI competence frameworks in a way that the case study makes tangible. The iterative assignments, where students translated artistic visions into precise English-language instructions, confirm that prompting is not only an intuitive talent but a competency that can be systematically developed. This process encapsulates the transition from digital literacy to AI literacy: while rooted in linguistic and problem-solving skills, prompting also involves communicative precision, artistic sensitivity, and adaptability to rapid technological change. Thus, the case study highlights how competence frameworks are not merely theoretical constructs but practical guides for cultivating future-ready skills in creative education.

## Limitations

This study is limited in scope by its focus on classroom-based activities within a higher education institution. While the findings provide insights into how students engage with generative AI in structured educational settings, the research did not examine how these skills transfer to professional or market contexts after graduation. Consequently, it remains unclear whether the competencies developed in the classroom—such as prompting strategies, co-creative workflows, and critical evaluation of outputs—retain their relevance and utility in real-world design environments. Future research should extend the investigation to alumni and professional practice in order to assess the long-term impact of AI literacy training and its applicability beyond the academic setting.

## Conclusions and further opportunities

In conclusion, while the initial challenges encountered in this study underscore the complexities involved in integrating AI into art education, the overall results remain overwhelmingly positive. The potential benefits of incorporating AI tools into creative workflows are substantial, and with carefully designed curricula and ongoing professional development, educators can successfully equip students with the skills necessary to harness the power of AI for artistic expression. This

requires a continuous cycle of adaptation, innovation, and pedagogical refinement to fully realise the potential of AI in shaping the future of art education.

The findings of this study indicate that structured educational programs can significantly enhance the prompting skills of students. The research demonstrates that while AI image generation tools offer significant potential for enriching art education, their successful integration requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both technical and pedagogical considerations. The findings strongly suggest that prompt engineering skills, while initially challenging, are indeed teachable. The structured curriculum, incorporating both theoretical instruction and extensive hands-on practice, proved effective in equipping students with the necessary skills to effectively communicate their artistic visions to AI. However, the process is not merely about technical proficiency; it demands a significant shift in artistic workflow, requiring flexibility, iterative refinement, and a willingness to embrace the inherent uncertainties of AI-assisted creation.

Among the competencies of the DigComp model, the domain closest to visual prompting is problem-solving and human-machine communication. Prompting also fits well with the emerging AI competencies: In particular, it can be categorised under the area of problem definition and communication, and, as such, is developable.

Further research is warranted to explore the observed differences in AI proficiency among students from various artistic disciplines. A more in-depth investigation is needed to understand the underlying factors contributing to these variations, considering cognitive styles, established creative workflows, and the ways in which different artistic practices might interact with the unique demands of AI-assisted creation. Such research could inform the development of more targeted and effective pedagogical approaches, optimizing the learning experience for students from diverse artistic backgrounds.

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# Self-Presentation in the Digital Age: A Study on Instagram Selfies, Body Image Satisfaction Among Young Women

Nilotpal Bhattacharjee<sup>1</sup>

This study examines how younger women utilise Instagram selfies to shape their identity, manage self-presentation, and negotiate body image satisfaction within a more visually focused digital environment. It aims to understand how visibility and validation on Instagram affect the emotions and thoughts of young women, through the frameworks of uses and gratifications theory and objectification theory. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 39 university students from the Northeastern states of India, and data analysis involved both a priori and inductive thematic coding using NVivo 14. The analysis revealed five main motivations for general Instagram use: self-promotion, entertainment, seeking validation, documenting, and leisure. Additionally, the four-factor framework (Sung et al., 2016), comprising attention seeking, communication, archiving, and entertainment, was applied to examine selfie-specific behaviours.

Findings indicate that selfies function as performative acts of agency and sites of self-surveillance. Respondents reported feeling empowered by the creative control and social recognition that selfies afford. However, many reported feeling anxious due to social comparison and the pressure to enhance their appearance. This emotional ambivalence reflects the complex nature of digital self-presentation, often characterised by a coexistence of empowerment and insecurity. By incorporating narratives from young women in Northeast India, this research contributes to global discussions about gender, visibility, body politics, and social media. It demonstrates that while Instagram enables women to express themselves and maintain social connections, it simultaneously reinforces subtle hierarchies of beauty, attention, and self-worth that continue to shape contemporary experiences of femininity.

**Keywords:** Instagram, selfies, body image satisfaction, uses and gratifications theory.

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## Introduction

In 2021, the Wall Street Journal published an investigative report, which revealed that Facebook was aware of the negative impacts of its photo-sharing app, Instagram, on the mental health of its users, who are mostly teenagers (Wells et al., 2021). The report revealed that Facebook's internal

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documents acknowledged Instagram's negative impact on adolescent well-being, noting that the platform made "body image issues worse for one in three teen girls" and that "teens blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression" (Wells et al., 2021). Several previous studies have similarly highlighted that female social media users often experience challenges related to body image satisfaction and self-objectification (Butkowski et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2017; Feltman & Szymanski, 2018).

In today's digital era, social media platforms have become integral to everyday life. Among them, Instagram stands out as one of the most popular social media platforms, with approximately 2 billion users worldwide as of 2022 (Barinka, 2022). India currently has the highest number of active Instagram users globally, witnessing a rapid increase from 209 million in February 2021 to an estimated 400 million by August 2022 (Chaturvedi & Laghate, 2022).

Instagram has gained prominence, mostly among teenagers and adults, because of its focus on visual content. Over 50 per cent of the total global users are below 35, and around 49 per cent of users are females (Wise, 2023). Instagram has revolutionised how people conduct and portray themselves in the digital realm.

Unlike traditional media, social media offers interactive features, allowing users to curate personalised content and share it with the world. It paves the way for users' self-presentation and empowers people to construct their digital identities. As a social practice, selfies are as common as texting. On Instagram, people often post selfies showing an edited version of who they are - smiling with friends at a café, posing after a workout or on a "good hair" day. Through these images, individuals control how they would like to be viewed by others (Shin et al., 2017).

Unlike other social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, Instagram is a photo-sharing application which allows users to edit their photos and videos and apply different effects and filters. Users can post these digitally enhanced images and videos on their profiles curating a visually pleasing and personalised feed for people to see. People react to these posts in the form of likes and comments. Instagram has played an important role in popularising the term selfie. A simple search for the #selfie hashtag on the photo-sharing app reveals a staggering collection of over 451.9 million photos. Additionally, there have been 17.4 million posts featuring the hashtag #selfietime and 2.9 million posts tagged with #selfiequeen on Instagram.

Self-portraits eventually become a part of the personal "brand" that a user wants to build about oneself on social media. Cohen et al. (2017) stated that Instagram users often indulge in "appearance-focused" photo activities. On Instagram, users can compare their body appearance with that of their relatives, friends, and celebrities, eventually leading to dissatisfaction with their body image (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011).

Many past studies highlighted that women tend to make more selfies and post them on their social media accounts than men (Dhir et al., 2016; Lakshmi et al., 2020; Sorokowska et al., 2016; Thomson, 2020). How a person perceives their physical appearance plays an important role in shaping their confidence and self-esteem. If they not feel happy about their appearance, it may lead to anxiety and

mental health issues. Mills et al. (2018: 90) discussed that females who uploaded selfies<sup>2</sup> on social media after the first take and without using any beauty filters “felt more anxious, less confident, and less physically attractive afterwards.”

The objectification theory (OT), proposed by Fredrickson & Roberts (1997), said that women are socialised to internalise the gaze of external observers and to evaluate themselves mostly on the basis of their physical appearance. This internalised surveillance leads them to monitor and judge their own bodies much as others might. The process is also evident on Instagram, as women assess their selfies and compare them to posts from their peers, as well as alter their appearance to meet certain standards of beauty and in the process, women are constantly evaluating their appearance, which reinforces self-objectification and appearance anxiety (Cohen et al., 2017; Feltman & Szymanski, 2018; Mills et al., 2018).

The available international research has linked women’s Instagram use with self-objectification, appearance comparison, and body image concerns (Cohen et al., 2017; Feltman & Szymanski, 2018; Mills et al., 2018; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018; Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). However, there is little peer-reviewed work from India. There have been limited studies on selfie behaviour of Indian adolescents (Lakshmi et al., 2020), there is not much empirical research examining how young women in India, particularly outside of Tier 1 urban centres, negotiate selfies, visibility and body image through Instagram. This study addresses that gap by focusing on female university students in Northeast India.

The present study examines how young women relate their selfie practices on Instagram to their perceptions of body image satisfaction and mental well-being. It explores how the act of taking and sharing selfies can influence self-evaluation, confidence, and anxiety among women in Northeast India, a region often overlooked in digital media research and considered vulnerable due to social and geographic marginalisation. The focus on women from Northeast India brings a distinct cultural dimension to the study. The region’s peripheral media visibility and diverse ethnic identities offer a meaningful context in which to explore how young women navigate self-presentation within overlapping influences of local culture, national identity, and global visual trends.

The researchers carried out a qualitative study involving in-depth interviews with a diverse group of women of different age groups who were enrolled in universities. The rationale for selecting female university students is that those who study in universities are generally perceived as mature and educated and therefore able to understand different aspects of selfies.

## Theoretical Framework

This paper drew on the uses and gratification theory to understand the different reasons for or needs underlying women’s use of Instagram. The uses and gratification theory deals with the questions: why do people engage with specific media, and what do they gain from it? According to

<sup>2</sup> “Selfie” was declared as the 2013 Word of the Year by the Oxford Dictionaries (BBC News, 2013), which defined the term as “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website.

the uses and gratification theory proposed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch (1973), the audiences are active participants who consume media based on their preferences and needs. The authors suggest that individuals may have different needs - psychological, social, informational, personal, or identity-related - and use media to satisfy these needs and derive gratification. The theory further posits that if individuals experience gratification from using a particular type of media, they are likely to continue consuming it in the future.

In the past, the uses and gratification theory primarily focused on traditional media such as newspapers, radio, film, and television. However, the theory remains highly relevant in the digital era. Researchers have applied the uses and gratification theory to study social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. (Apodaca, 2017; Hossain, 2019; Whiting & Williams, 2013). The theory identifies three critical sources of audience gratification: content, the act of media consumption itself, and the social context surrounding media use (Apodaca, 2017). Many people use Instagram to view content such as selfies, images, or videos posted by other users. Some derive gratification simply from scrolling through their Instagram feed. Additionally, Instagram users may experience satisfaction through social interaction with friends and followers, receiving likes and comments on their posts, and engaging in online discussions.

This study also explored the social comparison theory (SCT) to examine young women's tendency to compare themselves with others. According to the SCT proposed by Festinger (1954), people have a biological tendency to compare their skills, attitudes, appearance, and identity to those of others. Festinger proposed that people engage in two types of social comparison: upward and downward. Upward comparison involves comparing oneself with someone perceived as more successful or beautiful, whereas downward comparison refers to comparing oneself with someone considered less successful or less attractive. Although previous research has examined selfie behaviours across genders (Dhir et al., 2016; Sorokowska et al., 2016), the present study focuses exclusively on women, as appearance-related self-presentation and body image concerns have been found to be more pronounced among female Instagram users. This gender-specific focus enables a more in-depth understanding of how women in the Indian context experience self-presentation and body satisfaction through selfies. Since female Instagram users compare their selfies and body appearance with others on the platform, upward comparison may at times lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and anxiety.

Thornton & Moore (1993) found that women experienced a decline in self-perceived attractiveness and confidence after comparing themselves with physically attractive women. In the past, such social comparison was possible primarily through face-to-face interaction. However, the rise of social media has transformed this process, inundating individuals with a constant stream of images from friends, influencers, and celebrities, thereby encouraging continuous self-evaluation and comparison. Previous studies have shown that both the platform and the practices of self-presentation vary across age cohort. For instance, college-age users adapt their online identity management as they transition into adulthood (Yang & Brown, 2016) and selfie behaviours differ among adolescents, young adults, and adults (Dhir et al., 2016). Recent surveys indicate that Generation Z users place greater emphasis on image-based platforms such as Instagram (Anderson et al., 2023; Vogels et al., 2022).

The study has sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What motivates young adult women to use Instagram?

RQ2: Why do young adult women post selfies on Instagram?

RQ3: How do young adult women perceive the impact of selfies on their body image satisfaction?

RQ4: Do young adult women seek approval or feel pressured about their appearance before posting selfies on Instagram?

## Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach to explore female Instagram users' experiences and perceptions of selfies and body image satisfaction. Denzin and Lincoln (2017:2) stated that qualitative research is "an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world." Qualitative research focuses on analysing the respondents' words and behaviours to understand their views on an issue rather than quantifying data. The qualitative approach was chosen to allow the researchers to understand the respondents' emotions, feelings, and experiences regarding selfies and body image satisfaction on Instagram. The study employed an in-depth interview technique and used a semi-structured questionnaire to collect data. A semi-structured questionnaire allows respondents the flexibility to express their views in detail in relation to the questions.

The study included 39 young women between the ages of 20 and 30 ( $M=26.15$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ). Among them, ten 10 respondents were 25 years old. The oldest was 30, and the youngest one was 20 years old. This age group was targeted because young women have been identified as the most prominent users of Instagram (Greenwood et al., 2016).

Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, allowing researchers easy access. All respondents were students of two public universities in Assam, namely Assam University and Tezpur University, and come from six different states of the Northeast.

Of the 39, eleven are from Assam, eight from Meghalaya, six from Mizoram, four from Arunachal Pradesh, five from Nagaland, two from Tripura, and three are from Manipur. The researchers visited two university campuses and invited participants to take part in the study. Assistance was sought from professors at both universities to help identify potential participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and all participation was voluntary. The primary inclusion criterion was that participants had to be active Instagram users. The selection of participants from Northeast India was intentional, reflecting the study's aim to expand digital culture scholarship beyond India's metropolitan centres. The region's sociocultural diversity and relative marginality within national media discourse make it an important site for exploring how women engage with globalised platforms such as Instagram.

Given the study's qualitative approach, a small sample size was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of female Instagram users' perceptions of selfies and the influence of others' selfies on their body image satisfaction.

The questionnaire comprised both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Interviews were in English and audio recorded, with participants' responses transcribed verbatim for analysis. The interviews took place between August 21, 2023 and November 25, 2023. Thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted using NVivo 14 software, following an a priori coding process.

Although the study is qualitative in nature, it incorporated the four-factor selfie motivation scale developed by Sung et al. (2016) - which includes attention seeking, communication, archiving, and entertainment - not as a quantitative measure but as a framework for analysis. This reflects a theory-led, qualitative approach that draws on established concepts for initial coding, while remaining open to emergent meanings (Gale et al., 2013). Using Sung et al.'s framework allowed the researcher to maintain theoretical consistency with previous selfie studies while situating participants' stories within the sociocultural context of Northeast India. The motivational categories used in this approach were not rigidly imposed; rather, they provided a platform for contextual interpretation, allowing the data to nuance and expand the original four-factor model.

## Findings

A total of 39 young women between the ages of 20 and 30 took part in the study. As to how frequently they used Instagram, six respondents said "more than 2 hours," seven said "1-2 hours a day," 17 said "30 minutes to 1 hour" a day, and 12 said "less than 30 minutes" a day. The respondents' average (M) time on Instagram is approximately 0.911 hours per day, which is 55 minutes a day.

**Table 1. Time spent on Instagram in a day (24 hours)**

<b>Time spent on Instagram</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<i>More than 2 hours</i>	6
<i>1-2 hours</i>	7
<i>30 minutes to 1 hour</i>	17
<i>Less than 30 minutes</i>	12

Respondents were asked about their reasons for using Instagram. Researchers coded the transcripts based on inductive coding techniques. Two independent coders were also employed to code from the transcripts and find reasons for the use of Instagram. The coding was done using NVivo 14 software. Independent coders were engaged to minimise potential researcher bias and enhance the reliability of the analysis. The thematic analysis of transcripts revealed the following motivations for Instagram use among the respondents:

**Table 2. - Motivations for using Instagram**

Categories	Numer of coding references	Some illustrative examples
<i>Self-promotion</i>	10	To show my friends the good things about my life (Respondent 6,10, 11). To show my dance moves, I am a trained dancer/singer/photographer (Respondent 38,11,9,24).
<i>Entertainment</i>	6	I love to watch reels and trending videos (Respondent 1,4,5,8,12). To follow Bollywood gossip (Respondent 4,9,17,2,13,28)
<i>Seeking validation or attention</i>	7	To get attention from my followers (Respondent 33, 23, 24,17). I want to become an influencer and love people’s attention (Respondent 27,37,3).
<i>Documentation</i>	7	It is the best place for documentation (Respondent 9,32,39). I post pictures on Instagram to keep it as a memory (Respondent 9,11,18).
<i>Pastime</i>	9	To beat boredom (Respondents 3, 7, 19,21)

Self-promotion is found to be the primary motivation for using Instagram. However, most respondents described using the photo-sharing application as a way to spend pastime and enjoy watching reels posted by others.

Respondents were asked selfies. Out of the 39 respondents, 21 reported taking selfies "once a week," 10 stated that they take selfies "rarely," six mentioned taking selfies "a few times a week," and only two indicated that they take selfies "once a month". The data revealed that the majority of respondents preferred to take selfies using their mobile phones.

### Table 3. - Frequency of taking selfies

How often do you take selfies using your mobile phone?	Count	Relative Frequency
<i>A few times a week</i>	6	0.154
<i>Monthly</i>	2	0.051
<i>Once a week</i>	21	0.538
<i>Rarely</i>	10	0.256

Respondents were asked how often they posted selfies on Instagram. 20 respondents stated that they post selfies on Instagram "rarely," 10 reported posting them "monthly", six indicated posting selfies "a few times a week", and 3 reported posting them "once a week". None of the respondents reported never posting selfies on Instagram.

### Table 4. - Frequency of posting selfies on Instagram

How often do you post selfies on Instagram?	Count	Relative Frequency
<i>A few times a week</i>	6	0.154
<i>Monthly</i>	10	0.256
<i>Once a week</i>	3	0.077
<i>Rarely</i>	20	0.513

Respondents were asked about the motivations for posting selfies on Instagram. In a quantitative study, Sung et al. (2016) found four motivations behind the users' decision to post selfies on social networking sites. These are:

- (1) attention seeking,
- (2) communication,
- (3) archiving, and
- (4) entertainment

This study analysed the answers given by the respondents about their motivations for posting selfies based on the scale proposed by Sung et al. (2016). The answers were coded on NVivo 14 software following an a priori coding process. Two independent coders were engaged to code the transcripts separately.

**Table 5. - Motivations for posting selfies on Instagram**

Categories	Number of coding references	Some illustrative examples
<i>Archiving</i>	4	"I am a fitness enthusiast. I love to share selfies on Instagram as this helps me track my progress and stay accountable to my health goals" (Respondent 9)  "I use Instagram as a digital diary to document my travel adventures through selfies. I mostly travel alone, so I have no other option beside taking selfies for memories." (Respondent 11)
<i>Attention-Seeking</i>	17	"Through selfies on Instagram, I share my passion for makeup and beauty trends. It's a platform where I can showcase my skills and experiment with different looks." (Respondent 23)  "I use selfies to promote my creative endeavours. I love the positive feedback I receive about my eyes. Many say that my eyes are beautiful. So, selfies capture the eyes beautifully as selfies are clicked from proximity from the body." (Respondent 18)  "I use selfies to promote my jewellery brand." (Respondent 30)
<i>Communication</i>	12	"I post selfies, and my friends react to them. This process leads to communicating with friends once in a while. Nowadays, we do not have the time to talk to friends. So, whenever someone posts something, we react" (Respondent 19) "Through selfies, I am in touch with my followers" (Respondent 17)
<i>Entertainment</i>	6	"I enjoy posting selfies with my pets. They are so cute. Sometimes, I use different filters and post funny selfies." (Respondent 3)" Posting selfies makes me as I love taking them" (Respondent 13)

The next research question aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of the respondents regarding the impact of posting selfies on body image satisfaction. The thorough analysis of the respondents' answers revealed that many felt pressure concerning their physical appearance. Several respondents admitted spending considerable time deciding which photo to upload to their account, often seeking help from friends to determine which image might receive "more likes." In response to this question, one respondent stated:

*"I would say that posting selfies on Instagram is a mixed experience. There is a fun element to sharing moments with friends, but there is also this hidden pressure on me to look perfect in every photo. As a result, I take several selfies just to get a perfect one. This process is sometimes frustrating, especially if I don't get that perfect selfie, and sometimes this affects how I see myself."*

The ninth respondent echoed the first one's response about feeling pressured to get the perfect shot. She also added that she often compares her selfies with those of her friends and celebrities and tries to emulate them. She said:

*"Selfies are great. However, I would like to highlight that posting selfies on Instagram has increased my body image concerns. The pressure to present a 'perfect' image can sometimes be overwhelming. When I see someone post a selfie that looks really good, I immediately try to take some self-portraits on my mobile. But my selfies never turn out as good as my friends', so, I delete them and feel a bit dejected."*

Eight other respondents similarly mentioned that they compare their pictures with others - particularly celebrities - on Instagram and attempt to emulate them. One participant even shared that she purchased an Apple iPhone to take "perfect" selfies.

However, some respondents expressed a more carefree attitude, stating that they post selfies whenever they feel like it, regardless of others' opinions. Respondent 13 stated:

*"We should share selfies or any picture of ours without hesitation. I have many friends on Instagram, and I must say that sharing selfies has improved my body image satisfaction. I have never been bullied for my appearance and don't even care what people think. I know how to respond if needed. The positive interactions with my friends on Instagram have made me feel more confident and validated."*

Respondent 16 echoed Respondent 13:

*"Instagram is a great app. I love sharing selfies on Instagram, which has helped me appreciate my body more. It's liberating to see others supporting body diversity and encouraging self-love. I feel confident. And honestly, I don't bother about the number of likes I get in my posts."*

There were also some neutral responses. The respondents stated that they did not perceive any impact of posting selfies on body image satisfaction.

## Discussion

Findings revealed that selfies on Instagram embody a paradox of empowerment and exposure. Women are able to exercise control over how they are seen, however, this control often depends on continual self-monitoring shaped by the gaze of imagined audiences. The same act that grants agency simultaneously reproduces discipline. Consequently, self-presentation on social media reflects both freedom and constraint. The analysis identifies two layers of use. People engage with Instagram for purposes of self-promotion, entertainment, validation seeking, self documentation, and leisure, reflecting broader patterns of media gratification. Conversely, the act of posting selfies aligns more closely with the framework of attention seeking, communication, archiving, and entertainment proposed by Sung et al. (2016). The selfie thus constitutes an intimate, affective performance that demonstrates visibility and self-worth, while everyday use of the platform remains primarily motivated by social connection.

Attention seeking emerged as the most emotionally charged motive. Respondents acknowledged modifying their selfies by retaking, filtering, or deleting them in response to public reaction. Such activities render visibility a form of obligation - the obligation to maintain, compare, and present one's online image. Within the framework of uses and gratification theory, attention functions as a social reward; however, according to objectification theory, it also operates as a disciplinary gaze. These perspectives illuminate why recognition on social media feels simultaneously gratifying and exhausting, as self-worth is frequently quantified through metrics such as "likes".

Comparison with peers and influencers functions as the hinge between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. According to social comparison theory, exposure to idealised imagery carries emotional repercussions. Respondents reported experiencing anxiety and engaging in selective posting, reflecting Instagram's visual culture of self-scrutiny. However, these behaviours also reveal a degree of critical literacy: many young women recognised the inauthentic nature of their perceived beauty and expressed disillusionment at their inability to reproduce it.

Contextual narratives from Northeast India illustrate how regional identity shapes digital visibility. Within a media environment often characterised by a metropolitan and homogeneous brand of representation, Instagram offers a space for asserting both presence and difference. Posting selfies thus functions not merely as an act of individual expression but also as a means of affirming belonging within national and transnational visual publics. The platform consequently embodies a dual dynamic of cultural pride and conformity to prevailing aesthetic standards - a tension rarely examined in studies centred on urban India. The interplay of uses and gratification theory, social comparison theory, and objectification theory reveals a cyclical process of gratification→comparison→self-surveillance. Gratification denotes the initial motivation to connect and display; comparison captures the evaluative processes through which Instagram users engage with others; and objectification explains how these external evaluations become internalised, producing self-regulation.

Theories that are often examined in isolation intersect here, revealing that digital self-presentation integrates agency, emotion, and structure within a single act. The findings suggest that the selfie is far from trivial; it constitutes a meaningful mode of communication through which young women negotiate recognition, aesthetics, and identity. The results also underscore the urgent

need for a national media literacy campaign to raise awareness among young social media users about the way in which algorithms manipulate visibility and how appearance validates digital presence. Moreover, the study demonstrates how existing motivational frameworks can be synthesised with contextual interpretation, thereby extending the theorisation of digital femininity beyond Western and metropolitan contexts.

## Conclusion

This study set out to understand how young women manage and interpret self-presentation through their Instagram selfies. What emerged most clearly was a persistent tension between empowerment and exposure. Women recognise the power inherent in visibility, yet they also experience the strain it entails. While previous research has identified similar dynamics in Western contexts; this study extends the discussion by incorporating the perspectives of women from Northeast India - a region frequently excluded from global scholarship on digital culture. Their narratives add cultural and regional nuance to broader debates on visibility and self-representation in online environments.

The analysis contributes to the expansion of both uses and gratification theory and objectification theory. What begins as a pursuit of connection or enjoyment can quickly evolve into self-surveillance, influenced by peer feedback and algorithmic cues. Rather than dismissing selfies as superficial or self-indulgent, this study treats them as small yet meaningful acts of communication that expose how digital systems mold emotion, labour, and self-esteem.

The findings also demonstrate that metrics—likes, shares, and views—tell only a fraction of the story. Engaging directly with respondents through qualitative inquiry reveals how self-attention, validation, and social comparison intersect to shape online identities. These insights underscore the importance of studying digital behaviour not merely as data but as lived experience.

Future research could explore how these patterns vary across gender and age, as well as how feelings about digital self-worth evolve over time. There is also scope to examine how recommendation algorithms subtly mediate visibility, determining who is seen and who remains invisible. Charting these gradual shifts can illuminate how visibility functions as an emotional economy within the networked digital world.

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# Good Results or Going My Own Way? The Role of the South Korean Education System in Shaping Adolescents' Identity

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The purpose of this study is to characterise the South Korean education system and examine its role in shaping adolescents' identity. The research adopts a single case-study approach supported by qualitative methods, including the analysis of secondary data and content analysis of reports and statistical indicators. The theoretical framework is based on Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development and James Marcia's identity status model to interpret the mechanism underlying identity formation in the context of the Korean schooling system. The findings suggest that the education system's strong emphasis on academic achievement, conformity, and social expectations contributes to the predominance of acculturation over individualisation. This imbalance potentially hinders the exploration process essential for developing an achieved identity, fostering a foreclosure identity among adolescents. Such conditions appear closely linked with increased stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. In conclusion, while education has played a vital role in South Korea's economic and social development, it requires changes to balance academic performance with students' psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** South Korea, education system, adolescents, identity development, developmental psychology

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## Introduction

The primary objective of this study is to enhance the understanding of psychological aspects of South Korean adolescents' (aged between 12 and 18) identity development. The research aims to explore what role the structure of the South Korean education system plays in the young people's sense of identity. The theoretical framework is based on Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory and its extension – the theory implemented by James Marcia. The methodological section outlines research methods and techniques. Finally, in the results section, the association between such a constructed system and potentially developed identity is investigated. The central research question that we examine is the following: What role does such a construction of the education system play in developing adolescents' identities? For clarity, the term "Korea" throughout the paper refers to the Republic of Korea (ROK).

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## Review of Literature

Quality education, identified as the fourth of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals created by the United Nations, constitutes one of the key pillars of social progress (Grzelak & Roszko-Wójtowicz, 2017:275). In the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024, the organization states that the improvement in that area is rather slow, highlighting the COVID-19 pandemic as a major factor in such a situation.

According to the Ministry of Education, the government body responsible for the implementation of educational policies, the Korean education system consists of "6 years in elementary schools, 3 years in middle schools, 3 years in high schools, and 4 years in a University or 2-3 years at a junior college" (Ministry of Education, 2023). The first two categories are mandatory. The education sector has played a vital role in national policy as it is treated both as a means for self-development and as a contribution to collective social advancement (Korean Education Centre UK). As demonstrated in the OECD Indicators (OECD, 2023:179, 267-284), South Korean average annual expenditures on education are constantly increasing and the country's score remains above the OECD average in a plethora of categories. On the other hand, a great level of pressure can lead to phenomena described by Hee Youngas "hagwon culture" (Young, 2023:76). Students attend private academies (after regular classes at schools) to improve their results, acquire additional knowledge, and increase the opportunity of qualifying for the best schools. Such a state of affairs contributes to higher levels of stress and a focus on achievement. Moreover, since private academies are costly, they are increasing social polarisation among citizens. The intensity of the issue was exemplified by Friedrich Naumann Foundation (2024): "Private tutoring costs a Korean household about ten percent of their income. According to the Korean Statistics Office, households in the first quarter of this year spent on average more on private tutoring than on food and housing combined." Although general access to education is one of the state authorities' main goals, the majority of institutions offering academic education have a private character. In 2019, this figure was 372 out of 430 establishments. Additionally, high school education is not compulsory and it is connected to the fees. However, the admission ratio is above 99 percent. For this reason, since 2019, the government has been working on the implementation of fully sponsored education for high school students (Ministry of Education, 2020:46).

According to Rorty (1993), education exhibits two main functions: acculturation and edification. The first of them has more of a socialising role, while the second one plays a role in shaping individuality. To begin with, acculturation will now be briefly described. It is intended to prepare people to take on various tasks in society and is aimed at eliminating differences between students, as well as unifying them. Furthermore, it puts an emphasis on social resources and similarities to shape appropriate attitudes and value systems. On the other hand, edification displays the opposite role. It is focused on interpersonal differences and aims at reinforcing them (Brzezińska et al., 2014). Briefly, acculturation is connected with respecting social interest, whereas edification is connected with respecting individual interest. These two functions must go hand-in-hand, as it remains equally crucial for students to develop both skills. Over-emphasis of acculturation risks losing one's own individuality, whilst hypertrophy of edification runs the risk of excessive individualisation, which can lead to failure to adapt to social life (Brzezińska, 2000).

While analyzing the role of the education system in social progress, it is significant to focus not

only on society as a whole, but also on particular group members who participate in the above-mentioned structure. In this regard, identity remains a significant concept. Therefore, Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory will be outlined, emphasising the stage of adolescence. One of the key premises of Erikson's model is that human development is psychosocial, which means that it is constructed by societal influence in interaction with a physically and psychologically growing organism (Erikson, 2004). It underlines social determinants in people's functioning and represents a holistic approach, stating that development starts at the beginning of life and never ends, but extends throughout the lifespan. The author distinguished eight stages of development, each of them characterized by its own set of features, following a specific crisis that an individual must solve to advance to the next phase. If the crisis remains unsolved, one can potentially exhibit difficulties when facing challenges from the ensuing segment; however, it does not constitute a barrier to progressing. The first four stages occur in one's childhood, starting with infancy and proceeding to the school-age period, when a variety of alterations emerge, providing a person with numerous skills used to cope with further demands (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). During the stage of adolescence, the main distinguished crisis fluctuates around identity. It is claimed that this particular phase is responsible for developing an individual's sense of self and establishing a personal life goal. In comparison to previous stages, peer group is constantly gaining in importance, setting out a path of exploration. It is a period in which intimate relationships begin to form, a more distinctive set of values emerges, and an ability to maintain commitments made in the past occurs. It all aligns with the ongoing physical, sexual, and cognitive development, which allows an individual to progress with impending tasks. Such developmental tasks were proposed by Robert Havighurst (1948) and were defined by him as a responsibility "which arises at or about a certain period in the life of an individual, successful achievement of which leads to happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual... and difficulty with later tasks". During the adolescence, a person must achieve the following: (a) accept one's body and take care of it; (b) take on a masculine or feminine social role; (c) become emotionally independent from one's parents; (d) establish relationships with friends of the same and opposite gender; (e) prepare for a job; (f) prepare for marriage and stable life; (g) establish one's own set of values; (h) become socially responsible (Seiffge-Krenke & Gelhaar, 2008:34). It is expressly visible that the described concept combines various aspects of life; however, it is also crucial to highlight the fact that everyone's development is an individual process and diverse factors can have an influence on the pace and shape of it.

Derived from Erikson's concept, the identity status theory, proposed by James Marcia (1966), has been gaining in importance over the decades. The author defines the term identity as "a sense of who one is, based upon who one has been and who one can imagine oneself as becoming" (Marcia, 2009). It is treated as a "personality structure" and considered a foundation for working and forming intimate relationships. The researcher implemented a model of identity status and distinguished four of them: (a) identity achievement; (b) moratorium; (c) foreclosure; and (d) identity diffusion. Each of them is based upon two defining criteria: exploration and commitment. To begin with, identity achievement is characterised by high level of both exploration and commitment, which means that an individual actively pursued their goals and undertook to a certain life direction. It is not a simple process and frequently occupies a big part of one's life. Moratoriums, on the other hand, can struggle to make commitments; however are currently in the process of exploration. It can be a preliminary stage to an achieved identity and is commonly followed by experiments,

altering beliefs, procrastination and uncertainty. Thirdly, foreclosures are people who are committed, but haven't undergone the journey of discovery. This can occur when, under the influence of anxiety, one takes over another person's identity or value system. For instance, teenager's opportunity to explore is being limited by their parents who impose on them their own set of beliefs (or the one which they consider to be appropriate) or the culture, which adolescents live in, is characterised by rigid approach and high expectations. Further causes and consequences of such identity status will be discussed in the next section of the article, taking into consideration the context of South Korea's education system. Ultimately, identity diffusion is followed by neither exploration nor commitment. It usually emerges at an early stage of adolescence and is expected to evolve as one's growth progresses. However, there are cases in which a person does not proceed to next phases of development and gets stuck with a weak or no identity. That type of state can be marked by a lack of purpose in life, few meaningful relationships or little involvement in widely understood activities (Marcia, 2009).

Although Marcia's concept has been extensively examined across various contexts (e.g., Kroger et al., 2010; Waterman, 1999; Adams & Fitch, 1982), it has also faced criticism (van Hoof, 1999). Authors of the presented article acknowledge its shortcomings and are aware of potential limitations to it; nevertheless, the outlined theory will be adopted due to its universality and deep insight into the structure of humans' personality.

## Methodology

The entire research procedure was carried out in accordance with principles of the desk research method, which involves collection, analysis, combination, and comparison of available secondary data sources (Bednarowska, 2015:14-21). This approach was chosen to ensure reliability and methodological rigor. A single case-study design was adopted to provide an in-depth understanding of the South Korean education system and its role in shaping adolescents' identity based on E. Erikson's and J. Marcia's theories. Furthermore, a qualitative content analysis of selected reports, statistical data, and policy documents was carried out to juxtapose theoretical assumptions with empirical data, linking conceptual insights with measurable aspects of educational practice.

## Presentation of Findings

According to the World Happiness Report (2023), the Republic of Korea ranked 57th, out of 137 countries, based on a three-year average (2020-2022). In the following year's report, the country's position improved to 52nd, indicating an increase in overall life satisfaction. However, statistics demonstrate that "suicide is the leading cause of death for people between the ages of 10 and 39 years in South Korea" (Statista Research Department, 2024). It is the country with one of the highest suicide rates in the world (Country Cassette, 2025). The main reasons enumerated are physical or mental illness and financial difficulties. In the survey conducted in 2022 by World Without Worry About Shadow Education (WWWSE), one in four Korean teenagers has contemplated suicide due to the overwhelming pressure of academic competition (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society, 2024). Additionally, some studies (Stearse et al., 2023) imply that suicide attempts occur less often during June, July, and August (non-school months), which is

consistent with other research discussing the presented association. Academic stress was stated to significantly predict suicidal ideation (Okechukwu et al., 2022, pp. 7-10), which raises concerns among health specialists. Although the budget for mental healthcare has risen from 2019 to 2023 by about 84 percent (Statista Research Department, 2024a), statistically, few residents have decided to make use of available mental health services (Statista Research Department, 2024).

In the Global Youth Wellbeing Index (2017), in comparison to other countries, South Korea scored high in domains like the education section. Even though the country has high results in academic achievements, it is shown that only 55% of youth report being satisfied with their education. One of the potential reasons documented in the subject literature is that being exposed to academic stress is frequently associated with deterioration in psychological well-being, for instance, depression, anxiety, or psychosomatic symptoms (Stearé et al., 2023:314-315; Tang et al., 2020). The presence of such issues can lead not only to emotional problems, but also to behavioural and cognitive difficulties. The exemplification of that would be the fact that academic pressure disrupts sleep patterns and can be a cause of a disordered lifestyle, which in turn induces next mental health issues (Merlo & Vela, 2022; Dewald et al., 2014). Furthermore, in another research, it was found that 70.1% of students experienced difficulty while trying to focus on learning, and 91.95% of respondents felt the pressure from educational expectations (Kabir et al., 2024:138, 140). Apart from that, facing such intense stress can lead to the opposite of what the education system intended by determining a set of objectives. These "reverse" consequences are low academic performance, loss of potential to do creative work, and failure to adequately prepare for exams (Shakeel et al., 2022:32).

South Korea's education system is also examination-oriented. A level of achievement is measured through standardised tests (Chung & Park, 2024). Therefore, staying obedient to the rules means following the path designated by other members of society. In this case, it would be a concentration on far-fetched goals achieved by high results in exams. One of the major sources of academic stress involves high-stakes examinations, a central component of Korea's education system. The fear of failure is further amplified by the high expectations directed towards them (Chung & Park, 2024:54-55).

Long-term goals orientation is not the only value highly espoused by Korean society. Others are centred around hierarchy, family, rules, collectivism, and success (Country Comparison Tool, 2025; Moon et al., 2018). These social values align closely with the acculturative function of education, which prioritises socialization and conformity over individuality and personal exploration. Moreover, it is closely connected with the importance of preparing students to perform tasks expected by family and other members of the community. The subject of expectations frequently comes up while discussing Korea's education system (Choi et al., 2019). As a result, there is little room left for the development of one's own interests, hobbies, and beliefs. What is more, schools are aimed at shaping appropriate values and attitudes, which coincides with requiring specific rules. While it is important for educational institutions to instill some ethics and social principles, it can also diminish pupils' uniqueness if used in excess or imposed.

The presented imbalance of education functions may have severe consequences on young people's minds. As mentioned above, dominance of acculturation leads to limiting one's own development of individuality (Brzezińska, 2000) and to potential indoctrination coming from compulsion to comply

with rules (Brzezińska, 2014). Additionally, it may result in unmet need for autonomy, which remains crucial for identity exploration. Students functioning in such a system may not obtain much support from others, unless they meet the requirements of the particular society. It can play a role in their self-esteem since those pupils who do not succeed at socialisation or academic work may perceive themselves as less valuable (Jagiello et al., 2024). Other potential consequences are struggling to develop one's own value system, interests, hobbies, or goals in life. The aforementioned factors have a key role in shaping adolescents' identity.

Taking into consideration all of the conditions explained previously, including social values, the education system's structure, and education functions, it can be assumed that Korea's youth has the possibility to develop a foreclosed identity status, characterised by making commitments without prior exploration (Marcia, 2009). It is necessary to stress that the education system solely does not determine identity development, but co-occurs with other essential factors. Nevertheless, it can contribute to the outlined phenomenon together with coexisting aspects. Furthermore, for each person, it may manifest in various ways and can be triggered by other elements. Foreclosure status can be developed due to strong identification with parents and internalising their identity or goals (Marcia et al., 1993). It aligns with an intensive desire for principles and family obedience, which form the basis of Korea's education system. Adolescents exhibiting this status typically refrain from exploring alternative beliefs or values, instead internalizing those transmitted by authoritative figures. What is more, if an individual belongs to an unvarying community, it increases the likelihood of developing a foreclosure identity status. Going further, if those societal demands are reinforced by the schooling system, the analysed possibility goes up. That process is closed by an individual choosing sources of information relevant to these views (Marcia et al., 1993). Foreclosure individuals perceive themselves as constantly trying to fulfil expectations of others, eventually identifying them as their own. They may tend to maintain or increase their aims after experiencing failure, which is consistent with potential deterioration in Korean youth's mental health. Another difficult aspect is that their self-esteem may be dependent on the results they achieve, not only academically, but also in other areas of life. Combined with high schooling demands, it can lead to severe consequences regarding psychological well-being, which can be currently observed (Marcia et al., 1993). Additionally, their self-evaluation is rather fragile, and they display a rigid or defensive cognitive style, which can cause difficulty in out-of-the-box thinking. Frequently, the presented identity status can provide a sense of security.

However, it does not necessarily lead to an individual's happiness (Marcia, 2009). For such teenagers, developmental progress may be facilitated when significant others encourage critical reflection on whether their adopted commitments align with their own vision of the future (Bardziejewska, 2004).

The education system, constructed the way it was described previously, may potentially lead to difficulties in reaching an achieved identity status. It is a result of various factors that intertwine with each other. However, it seems that key roles are played by values exhibited in Korean society and the emphasis on acculturation in the featured schooling system. Collectively, these factors may hinder adolescents' identity formation and increase the likelihood of a foreclosed identity status. As it was highlighted before, it does not necessarily mean that students are completely deprived of the opportunity to develop an achieved identity, as it remains a complex phenomenon, depending on more aspects than merely the education system.

## Conclusion

A higher level of education can serve as one of the components ensuring that society remains open and prepared for changes (Buchner-Jeziorska, 2016, p. 99). In the case of the Republic of Korea, expanding access to education was essential to rebuilding the nation after the Japanese colonial and the Korean War, as well as to transform its economy from agricultural to industrial (Rurarz, 2009). One of the reasons for rapid economic growth may be explained through the prism of the so-called "snowball effect", in which government support for universal education, combined with strong cultural values, fostered a widespread commitment to learning. In turn, the economic transformation, the gradual enrichment of citizens, and the rise of the Republic of Korea's position in the international arena, fueled the governmental investments in the education sector (Małota, 2020).

However, high academic achievement has not translated into correspondingly high levels of declared happiness and satisfaction. Therefore, taking into consideration both data and implemented reforms, the Korean government should consider implementing regulations concerning the amount of time spent at school and in self-study, as well as limiting excessive private tutoring through controlled opening hours and regular administrative inspections.

Moreover, the current system may not only result in difficulties in reaching an achieved identity during adolescence, but also contribute to forming a foreclosure identity, characterised by taking over someone else's value system and exhibiting hardships in discovering one's own beliefs. As the mental health indicators among youth in South Korea continue to deteriorate, urgent measures are needed to enhance adolescents' psychological well-being. The present schooling system may be a contributor to harmful psychological consequences, even though Korean students tend to obtain high academic results. Its current construction can potentially lead to severe mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, elevated levels of stress, and suicide ideation.

In line with Aaron Antonovsky's (1979) salutogenic model, undertakings should be focused on prevention and education. This would involve reconstructing the schooling system to achieve a more balanced emphasis between socialisation and individualisation. At the same time, initiatives encouraging participation in existing mental health programs should be prioritised. Thus, the attention cannot only be put on treatment but, most importantly, on effective prevention.

In conclusion, the investigation carried out in this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the interconnection between the construction of the education system and students' identity development in the case of South Korea. Future examinations should aim to empirically examine the correlations between educational practices, social values, and psychological outcomes, using reliable methodological tools. Such studies could facilitate more generalisable findings and foster dialogue between theorists and practitioners from multiple disciplines. Moreover, indicators of education quality, in addition to performance in various disciplines, should encompass measures such as self-satisfaction, well-being, or mental health conditions.

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# Family Formation and the Future – European and American Perspectives

Katrina Magdalena Sarnyai<sup>1</sup>

The Danube Institute, in partnership with the Youth Research Institute, organised a two-day conference titled "*Family Formation and the Future: The Geopolitical, Cultural, and Legal Dimensions of Demographic Change*" in Budapest, on April 1 and 2, 2025, addressing the pressing challenges of declining fertility rates and the future of families. As demographic trends reshape societies worldwide, the need for sustainable family policies has never been greater. Hungary, with its pioneering approach to family support, served as a focal point for discussions on how economic, cultural and legal measures can encourage childbearing and stronger families. By fostering dialogue and sharing best practices, the event aimed to contribute to global efforts in securing the future of family life.

**Keywords: family, future, Europe, US, Danube Institute, youth**

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## Family Formation and the Future -- Day 1

The first day of the conference opened with a welcome address by István Kiss, Executive Director of the Danube Institute, followed by, Helen Roy, co-organiser of the conference, Budapest Fellow at the Danube Institute, and author at the online journal Fairer Disputations.

H. E. Ambassador Eduard Habsburg-Lothringen, Hungary's Ambassador to the Holy See and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta delivered the keynote address. His speech highlighted the role of cultural and religious traditions in shaping attitudes toward family life. He compared his experience as the father of six children in Europe, where he rarely sees families this big, versus in the USA where often his family is considered small in religious and conservative circles. The Ambassador described children as a gift of life to one's spouse through a deeper discovery of each other, to one's other children as sibling relationships are invaluable, and to society at large, for they are the future.

Balázs Hankó, Hungarian Minister for Culture and Innovation, outlined Hungary's innovative economic measures, including tax incentives and direct subsidies, designed to encourage childbearing and ease the financial burden of raising a family. He underlined that it is their goal to ensure that those who choose to have children are not disadvantaged financially. He went on to call into question Brussels' and climate activists' goals to reduce fertility: How can they claim that having children goes against the preservation of life? The Hungarian government, as he stated, has undertaken the mission of fighting against this mainstream narrative and championing life.

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## The Demographic Picture in the US and Hungary

The first panel discussion featured a lecture by Georgina Kiss-Kozma, Head of Research at the Youth Research Institute, who presented comparative demographic trends between Hungary and the United States; her presentation sought to answer the question which is becoming all the more relevant, why do we need children? She outlined the demographic situation in Hungary today, the perceived achievements of Hungarian family policy, and compared young Hungarians' and Americans' opinions and plans on family and starting a family. Her analysis provided context for subsequent discussions on how policy and cultural shifts influence population growth and family structures. Following the lecture, a roundtable discussion delved deeper into the factors influencing demographic trends. The panel included Emma Waters, Researcher at The Heritage Foundation, Gergely Réti, Collegium Commissioner at MCC, and Johanna Frohlich, Researcher at Ludovika University. The discussion was moderated by Levente Székely, Head of the Center for Sociology and of the Youth Research Institute at MCC. The discussion covered topics such as the USA's so-called "marriage recession", the role of motherhood in society, and the difficulties young people face in dating. Moreover, the participants outlined the Hungarian government's family support network, comparing it to some of the efforts put in place in the USA. The panellists discussed the phenomenon of certain tight-knit religious communities which have managed to maintain relatively high birth rates. Emma Waters highlighted that it is the technology of the present that shapes our culture, and this is one of the driving forces behind lower birth rates.

Robert Palladino, Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., at the U.S. Embassy in Hungary, addressed American policies on marriage and family. His remarks covered the legal and social policy frameworks shaping marriage rates and family formation in the United States. He also mentioned the issue of drugs: Hungary and the USA alike are strengthening anti-drug efforts. In the USA, as he reminded, the opioid crisis is one of the most destructive forces going against families in America today, and President Trump is trying to make a difference in this.

## Marriage, Family and Public Policy

The next panel explored the role of public policy in strengthening family structures. The discussion examined which policy interventions — such as tax benefits, childcare support, the restriction of porn, and work-life balance initiatives — are most effective in supporting marriage and family life. The panellists included Brad Littlejohn, Director of Programs and Education at American Compass, Tim Carney, Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, Patrick Brown, Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, and Fiona Bruce, Conservative Member of Parliament for Congleton from 2010 to 2024. Fiona Bruce began the conversation by highlighting the extent of the crisis of families in the UK: currently the United Kingdom has the highest rate of broken families in the world, fatherlessness is incredibly common. Moreover, over the course of her work, she came to discover that the social work system is extremely splintered and works in silos; in more extreme cases, families could have overfifteen staff working on their case and not communicating with each other. To solve this issue, she helped promote a country-wide social services program that assists the family comprehensively as a unit. Next, Brad Littlejohn spoke at length on the porn epidemic. He pointed out that by allowing children to have smartphones, parents unknowingly invite anyone

into the process of raising their child. Early exposure to porn leads to shortened childhoods and expedited adulthood, and simply relying on the parental control settings of devices is laughable. He believes that access to porn must be restricted and considers the argument that this is an infringement on free speech invalid. Next, Patrick Brown emphasised that today, one of the most expensive parts of raising children is not the everyday cost of care, but rather the *"opportunity cost"*; in other words, the fact that a mother cannot do paid work for a period of time. He believes that people view marriage today as more of a *"capstone to be achieved than a cornerstone of life"*. Regarding the situation in the USA, he mentioned that more American women remain unmarried than ever before, and that the historic baby boom was tied to a building boom, whereas now real estate is more expensive than ever. Increasing available housing could be a route to raising fertility rates, he suggested. Lastly, Tim Carney, author of *Family Unfriendly: How Our Culture Made Raising Kids Much Harder Than It Needs to Be*, discussed some of the findings of his book and brought a comical example of one of the biggest challenges (and possibly turn-offs) of parenting: the struggles associated with the car-seat. In his opinion, America's crippling reliance on cars is one of its most family-unfriendly aspects. His research shows that proximity to high fertility communities can result in higher fertility at a base level. The panel was moderated by Zsófia Rácz, Editor-in-Chief of Hungarian Conservative and former Deputy State Secretary of Youth Affairs of Hungary.

## Men, Women and the Birth Dearth

After a lunch break, the conference resumed with a panel examining the sociocultural and economic forces behind declining fertility rates in developed nations. The discussion focused on shifting gender roles, incentives for marriage and childbirth, and the broader implications of population decline. The panellists included Brad Wilcox, Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia, Erika Bachiochi, Professor at Harvard University and Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Louise Perry, Author of *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*, Catherine Pakaluk, Professor at the Catholic University of America, and Imre Bedő, Founder of the Men For All Organization (Férfiak Klubja). Brad Wilcox started off the conversation by bringing men into the focus: According to some surveys, women are generally not satisfied with the dating pool of men. Important attributes that women seem to be attracted to include a man's ability to provide, protect, and pay attention. Brad Wilcox then sought to flesh out the question of what pushes the weaker men down. One prevalent example he presented was the poor performance of men within education in comparison to women. Another statistic he highlighted shows that when a husband loses his job, the chance of divorce goes up by 30 percent, but when the wife becomes unemployed, the risk of divorce is negligible, which underscores the essentiality of a man's ability to provide. His research shows how important strong males are to healthy and happy families. Next, Louise Perry, host of the podcast *Maiden Mother Matriarch*, explained that while many are approaching this question from several directions, it is very difficult to pinpoint one factor as the cause of dropping fertility rates. She believes, however, that in the big picture, affluence seems to be the root cause of falling fertility rates. As soon as almost any country reaches a certain level of affluence, their fertility rates begin dropping. This begs the question, whether affluence itself is self-sustaining or leads to an *"evolutionary bottleneck"*. Erika Bachiochi then followed, discussing the gender roles and socialisation of young women and men today. She underscored the increasing polarisation between the two sexes – especially on the political spectrum. Even though, according to her, conservatives may tend to side with and sympathise

with young men, we must strive to understand and elevate young girls as well. Catherine Pakaluk began her talk by describing the societal and economic transformation that followed the large scale introduction of cars and how rapidly they were adopted for being more efficient, hygienic and faster than horses. In fact, today, about the only people who keep and care for horses are those dedicated to equestrian culture. She then related this to having children today: Only the dedicated choose to have children due to the demands of modern life and the lack of financial incentives. She ended her presentation by calling for more kindness and understanding towards (often religious) communities that foster high fertility rates. Imre Bedő returned the conversation to contemporary gender roles and the plight of men. He believes that in order to be valued again properly in families, men need to have their own spheres, in which they are honoured for their contribution. His organisation has launched several initiatives to promote this concept and get fathers involved in their children's lives and activities without the help or involvement of mothers.

The conference continued with a report on family and youth aspirations in Poland, delivered by Barbara Socha, President of the Generations Institute Foundation in Poland and former Polish Deputy Minister of Family & Social Policy. She shared insights on demographic shifts and family formation trends in her country and how the relationship young people have with their parents impacts their own future plans. She found that many young Poles foster a close relationship with their mother but not with their father. Regarding Poland's demographic situation in general, Barbara Socha revealed that her country has been struggling with high rates of childlessness since the end of WW2.

This was followed by a report on Hungary's demographic and social policies presented by Katalin Gyurkó, Ministerial Commissioner for Intergenerational Cooperation, who provided examples of some of Hungary's most fertile communities. She described two particularly interesting examples: Százhalombatta, an industrial town located next to Budapest, and Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe), a town in Transylvania, Romania, with a majority Hungarian population. Katalin Gyurkó attributed the higher fertility rates to small but visible efforts on the municipality-level supporting families, thriving communities where young people can meet, and most importantly, local jobs available for young people. She remarked that when youth move or migrate to new locations, typically for work, their childbearing is postponed on average by five years.

## What is to Be Done?

Miriam Cates, GB News Presenter and Conservative Member of Parliament for Penistone and Stocksbridge from 2019 to 2024, delivered a speech outlining potential strategies for dealing with demographic decline in the UK. She also underlined the severity of broken families in the UK: nearly 2.5 million children do not have their father in their lives. In other words, as she starkly put it, British children are more likely to have a smartphone than a father at home. She outlined the unquestionable family-based principles that most of humanity was based on until about 50 years ago: parental authority, lifelong marriage, and the sanctity of children. However, currently these principles are not only continuously under fire but also simply not widely held anymore. She emphasized that parenting must be learned – it is not necessarily instinctive. Thus, these liveable principles and good parenting must be brought back into the public sphere. One more point she

added was that governments should introduce economic incentives for staying home and raising children. More specifically, she believes that the number of children a woman has had should be calculated into her eligibility for the age pension as this may offer a solution to both population ageing and falling birth rates.

The closing panel of Day 1, with Erik Almqvist, Former Swedish MP, Miriam Cates, GB News Presenter and Conservative MP, Anna Nagy, Founder and Chair of the Board at the Single Parent Families' Centre, András Pári, Scientific Vice President at the Mária Kopp Institute for Demography and Families, and moderator Philip Pilkington, Visiting Fellow at the Danube Institute, began by debating the success of family policy communication in Hungary. András Pári listed some markedly improved demographic indicators such as the higher marriage and lower abortion rates as well as Hungary's improved fertility ranking within the EU. Erik Almqvist, who currently lives in Hungary, mentioned the many fun and well maintained playgrounds built throughout Hungary as a small but meaningful example of family friendliness. He also talked about the need to extend the middle class to help facilitate childbearing similarly to Sweden, as more people in the upper-middle class manage to achieve their desired fertility of two or more children. Anna Nagy used the example of billboards at Budapest Ferenc Liszt International Airport displaying Hungary's family-friendly stance in dozens of languages. She also drew attention to the fact that Hungarian family policy is designed for all families, including patchwork and single-parent families that she works with most often. Miriam Gates left the audience with a message that she finds effective when promoting pronatalist, pro-family policies: It is widely known that most women regret not having any children by the time they reach their 40s or 50s. By introducing measures that support the institution of the family, governments are allowing women to achieve their dream of motherhood, if that is what they seek.

## **Family Formation and the Future -- Day 2**

Building on the themes of the first day, the second day of the conference examined crime, immigration, aesthetics, technology, social welfare, and the spiritual dimensions of modern society.

The keynote address was given by Balázs Orbán, Political Director to the Hungarian Prime Minister. He emphasised the Hungarian government's commitment to policies that support family stability and demographic growth. He outlined the broader geopolitical context of demographic trends and discussed Hungary's pioneering role in developing pro-family economic policies. Balázs Orbán criticised the liberal ideology on family and population as well as migration: Liberals have weakened the foundation of society, the family, and thus have weakened their nations. He joked that Budapest serves as the ideal conservative safe space within Europe, and expressed his hope that the United States, under the second Trump administration, will continue to be more open.

## **Crime, Immigration, and the Family**

The first panel of the day tackled one of the most pressing issues in contemporary politics: the impact of crime and immigration on family stability. Moderated by Simon Hankinson, Senior Research Fellow at The Heritage Foundation, the discussion focused on whether current immigration and criminal justice policies strengthen or weaken communities and family units.

Heather MacDonald, Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, presented data on urban crime trends and their consequences for families, particularly in high-density areas. She finds fault with the fact that the only allowable explanation for higher crime and incarceration amongst Black people in the USA is systemic racism; she believes the issue is much more complex and that the anti-police stance is not helpful in resolving this at all. She pointed out that though Black people bear the brunt of crime in the US, it has not had an impact on their fertility rates. They do, however, suffer from the highest rates of broken families and missing fathers. Asian families in comparison have shown remarkable success in American society, and much of it is connected to extremely tight-knit families and parental involvement. Mark Krikorian, Executive Director of the Center for Immigration Studies, analysed the role of immigration policies in shaping social cohesion, questioning whether current policies are conducive to family-oriented communities. He pointed out that immigration does not raise fertility rates, in fact, when there is a substantial influx of immigrants to a community, the native population typically suffers lower fertility. Theo Wold, former Deputy Assistant to President Donald Trump, highlighted the legal and policy implications of mass migration on national identity and family structures. He denounced the concept behind immigration that *"anyone can do anything anywhere."* Not only is this simply not true according to him, but also, it implies that humans are mere *"widgets"* that can be transplanted wherever there is an economic need for them. Daniel Whitehead, Senior Fellow at the Hungary Foundation, compared the liberal ideology and the conservative perspective on immigration, concluding that the leftist views will not stand the test of time and will eventually fail. Juan Angel Soto Gomez, professor at the Universidad de Navarra, spoke last, bringing examples of the emerging dire situation in Spain. While there is already immense pressure on the Canary Islands and other coastal locales, regions such as Catalonia have been purposefully importing non-Spanish-speaking migrants to boost their numbers. He believes that gang activity is on the rise due to this influx of migrants which will only be exacerbated by the threat of ethnic gang wars.

## The Role of Aesthetics in Public Life

The conference turned to a topic often overlooked in policy discussions: the role of aesthetics in shaping public life. Moderated by Ashley Noronha, Professor at the Pontifical University of Rome, the panel explored how beauty influences social cohesion and cultural continuity.

Jan Bentz, Professor at Oxford, argued that aesthetics is a fundamental aspect of civilisation and that societies that neglect beauty in architecture and public spaces suffer from cultural fragmentation. Anthony O'Hear, Professor at the University of Buckingham examined how artistic traditions and urban design can foster a sense of belonging and community. He believes the family is where a respect for beauty should be fostered, and every child should receive a proper education in music and the muses at home. John Noronha, Professor at the Pontifical University of Rome, discussed the moral dimensions of beauty, linking aesthetic principles to broader philosophical and theological concerns. He revealed that his background in engineering lead him to seek out more in the world than the frameworks, logistics and strict confinements that defined his work, bringing him to where he is today.

## Tech and Human Relationships

After the lunch break, the conference resumed with a panel on the effects of technology on human relationships. As digital technology increasingly mediates social interactions, this discussion, moderated by Emma Waters, Researcher at The Heritage Foundation, addressed the challenges posed by social media, artificial intelligence, and digital communication.

Mary Harrington, author of *Feminism Against Progress*, examined how modern technology affects gender roles and traditional relationship structures. She discussed her idea of truth-seekers in the modern world and, referring to John Noronha's statements, the case for engineers in finding order within that truth. Alexandra Kaschuta, writer and host of the *Subversive* podcast, spoke about the alienating effects of digital culture, arguing that online interactions are reshaping expectations around intimacy and social bonds. She opened by telling a typical story of boy-meets-girl from before the era of dating apps, however, admitting that she herself met her now-husband online. She emphasised the need for human interaction in human development and understanding of who we are as young men and women. Nina Power, author of *What Do Men Want?*, provided a philosophical perspective on how the internet has altered human behaviour, especially in the realms of dating and marriage. She cited a shocking statistic from her home country: only one percent of the UK attends church regularly, revealing a fundamental disconnect from their faith as a country. She pointed out, however, that if we were not feeling this epidemic of sadness and depression from all this time spent online and technology-centric lifestyles, then we would be truly lost. In other words, this feeling of emptiness and sadness proves that our humanity is still present, and that we need human interaction and real-life experiences. Francesco Giubilei, Italian columnist and political analyst, considered the implications of digitalisation on family and public life, particularly the situation with artificial intelligence. Oftentimes, artificial intelligence can go as far as to step in to solve human conflicts, thus taking the whole personal aspect out of the experience and relegating it to technology.

Judit Regős, Social Policy Expert and President of the Parents' House Foundation, then delivered a presentation on social welfare policies in Hungary. She outlined how government programs and community initiatives have sought to alleviate economic burdens on families, discussing the effectiveness of state interventions in supporting family formation and child-rearing.

## The Political Reality of the Spiritual Dimension

In an era of growing secularisation, the next panel, moderated by Jonathan Price, Matraszek Fellow at Pusey House & St. Cross College, Oxford, and Visiting Fellow at the Danube Institute, addressed the question of whether faith still plays a vital role in shaping public life. The panellists debated the intersection of faith, politics, and cultural identity, exploring the role of religious traditions in contemporary governance.

H.E. Eduard Habsburg-Lothringen, Ambassador of Hungary to the Holy See and the Sovereign Order of Malta, provided historical and diplomatic perspectives on the enduring significance of religious institutions. He posed the question, "*Why are Christian societies so devoid of Christian faith?*". He recalled that former US President John F. Kennedy was the one to really launch this approach when, as the

first Catholic presidential candidate, he stated that he would not allow his faith to interfere with his politics (mainly in response to accusations that he would serve the Pope over the interests of his nation). The Ambassador believes that politicians should freely express their faith – and Vice President JD Vance is a wonderful positive example of this. Spencer Klavan, author of *Light of the Mind, Light of the World*, discussed the intellectual and moral foundations of the Christian tradition and their relevance in governing. According to him, no government could be that good if mankind is diminishing under its rule (i.e., birth rates below replacement); on the other hand, no government – and here he referred to the oft-criticized monarchies of the past – could be that terrible if they were contributing to a surging birth rates. Currently, he believes that the “*hiding latent principles*” in society that are suppressing fertility must be identified in order to reach a solution. Joseph Backholm, Senior Fellow at the Family Research Council, examined the implications of declining religious adherence for family formation and social cohesion. He quoted from the Book of Genesis, “be fruitful and multiply” and explained that this is part of the formula for happiness that God outlined in the very beginning for humanity. A simple formula for finding happiness, according to him, is “faith, fertility, friendship, and work” -- and this will in and of itself lead to flourishing birth rates. Solene Tadié, Europe Correspondent for EWTN, shared insights on religious trends across Europe, considering whether the continent is truly entering a post-Christian era. She brought some rather shocking figures from her country of origin, France, on the transmission of faith from parents to their children according to religion: while Muslims manage to transmit their faith at a rate of about 95 percent, Jews reach about 80 percent, and Christians manage only to pass on their faith at a rate of about 65 percent. In the brief conversation that followed, the speakers discussed how Christianity is an increasingly “cool” topic now entering the mainstream, however, also expressed their hope that people will maintain their true faith without the help of trends.

Last speaker of the day, Philip Pilkington, Visiting Fellow at the Danube Institute, provided an analysis of how economic structures influence demographic trends. Pilkington argued for the need to integrate economic reforms with pro-family policies to ensure long-term demographic stability. He pointed out that a libertarian approach will not only be unsuccessful in solving the birth dearth, but will not be able to solve the crisis of population ageing, either.

The event concluded with closing remarks from organisers Helen Roy and Melissa O’Sullivan, Deputy Director of the Danube Institute.

The discussions provided a multifaceted exploration of the challenges facing families today and underscored the need for holistic solutions that integrate policy innovation with cultural renewal. As demographic changes continue to reshape societies worldwide, the insights shared at the Danube Institute’s conference alongside the Youth Research Institute’s efforts will undoubtedly contribute to ongoing debates on the future of family and civilisation.

# Book Review - No One Left: Why The World Needs More Children by Paul Morland

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Paul Morland's most recent monograph, *No One Left: Why the World Needs More Children*, was first published in the United Kingdom in 2024 by Forum. The book offers a sober and wide-ranging analysis of one of the most pressing challenges confronting contemporary societies: the global demographic crisis.

Public discourse on demographic change has long been dominated by concerns about overpopulation. Low fertility, when acknowledged, is often framed as a problem confined to developed Western societies. Morland challenges this assumption, demonstrating that fertility decline is now a global phenomenon. He shows that even populous countries such as China and India are experiencing sustained decreases in birth rates, while across much of Africa fertility is stagnating or falling, with high rates persisting only in limited regions. East Asian societies, most notably Japan and South Korea, exemplify the advanced stages of demographic ageing; in the latter case, Morland warns that, without reversal, population size could fall to just over ten per cent of its current level within three generations. These trends imply a rapidly increasing old-age dependency ratio, with profound economic consequences, including labour shortages, fiscal strain, and pressure on pension systems. In the long term, Morland argues, such dynamics risk economic stagnation, political instability, and the resurgence of extremist ideologies historically associated with periods of social and economic crisis.

Morland situates the demographic crisis as a

defining challenge of the twenty-first century and traces its origins to the sharp fertility decline observed in developed countries from the mid-twentieth century onward. While improvements in healthcare, education, and technology have increased life expectancy and living standards, they have coincided with fundamental shifts in family formation. Childbearing has increasingly been postponed or forgone in favour of individual educational attainment, career advancement, and financial security.

The first chapter examines how demographic decline, once characteristic of ageing rural regions, has become a feature of advanced economies. Morland links contemporary labour shortages to long-term fertility decline, arguing that insufficient births decades earlier now manifest as structural workforce deficits. Although the global population continues to grow, its growth rate has halved, with expansion increasingly driven by declining mortality rather than new births.

Morland outlines three stages of population decline: falling fertility, a sustained excess of deaths over births, and eventual absolute population contraction. Countries such as Japan, Russia, and China, he argues, have

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already entered the final phase, in which immigration is insufficient to offset natural decrease. As with the population explosion of the twentieth century, population decline is likely to reshape geopolitical power relations and everyday social life, largely in unfavourable ways.

The second and third chapters address the causes of declining fertility, distinguishing between biological fertility (the ability to conceive) and demographic fertility (actual childbearing). Morland contends that contemporary low birth rates are primarily social rather than biological in origin. Despite concerns over declining sperm counts, most couples remain biologically capable of conceiving. Instead, fertility decline correlates strongly with secularisation, higher levels of female education, delayed partnership formation, and changing gender relations. Religious affiliation, particularly within Abrahamic traditions, is shown to be positively associated with higher fertility, partly due to normative frameworks and supportive community structures. The author also highlights educational and assortative mating patterns, especially the mismatch between highly educated women and less educated men, as significant contributors to childlessness. Politically, fertility tends to be higher in conservative communities and markedly lower in liberal, urbanised contexts.

The fourth chapter challenges the assumption that socioeconomic development inevitably leads to sub-replacement fertility. Through comparative analysis, including case studies of Indonesia and Israel, Morland demonstrates that high living standards, education, and urbanisation do not necessarily preclude relatively high fertility. Israel, in particular, stands out as a fully developed society with birth rates well above replacement level.

In the second half of the book, Morland addresses common objections to pronatalist arguments,

most notably the claim that population growth threatens environmental sustainability. He rejects static conceptions of planetary limits, emphasising the role of technological innovation in expanding productive capacity and improving environmental outcomes. According to Morland, sustained innovation depends on large, healthy, and dynamic younger generations.

Chapter five addresses gender equality and fertility. Morland proposes differentiated taxation between parents and non-parents, while noting empirical evidence that women in developed societies typically have fewer children than they desire. He argues that both patriarchal constraints and inadequate work-family reconciliation depress fertility. Societies characterised by greater male participation in domestic labour tend to exhibit higher birth rates. Morland advocates a form of feminism that supports, rather than marginalises, parenthood.

Chapter six critiques anti-natalist perspectives within environmental movements. While acknowledging ecological challenges, Morland notes that historical indicators show substantial improvements in human wellbeing, including reductions in hunger, child mortality, and disaster-related deaths. He warns that demographic collapse poses risks comparable to environmental degradation, leading to ageing societies, economic contraction, and unsustainable public debt. Environmental protection and demographic sustainability, he argues, are not mutually exclusive.

In chapter seven, Morland addresses accusations that pronatalism is inherently racist, rejecting this claim on the grounds that fertility decline affects all ethnic groups. While acknowledging the existence of discriminatory pronatalist policies, he distinguishes these from pronatalism as a general framework. He further argues that immigration cannot provide a long-

term solution to labour shortages, as migrants also age and fertility declines in countries of origin. Moreover, large-scale labour extraction from developing regions raises ethical concerns.

Chapter eight examines the role of technology, drawing historical parallels with earlier waves of mechanisation. While robotics and artificial intelligence may reduce labour demand in certain sectors, Morland finds little evidence that they can fully replace human labour or eliminate the need for demographic renewal. Technological change continues to generate new forms of employment, often requiring higher levels of skill and specialisation.

The final chapters focus on government responsibility and societal agency. Morland reviews pronatalist policies across different national contexts, highlighting evidence that comprehensive childcare provision combined with gender equality yields the most effective outcomes. Ultimately, however, he argues that policy measures alone are insufficient without broader cultural change. Religion, social norms, positive role models, and family-friendly workplace practices all contribute to shaping reproductive decisions. Addressing demographic decline, Morland concludes, requires a collective effort that balances individual freedom with long-term social sustainability.

Overall, *No One Left* offers a comprehensive examination of demographic decline and its far-reaching social, economic, and cultural implications. Morland convincingly demonstrates that fertility is not merely a personal issue, but also a cultural and economic one with profound consequences for societal continuity. The book serves as both a warning and a call for thoughtful, interdisciplinary engagement with one of the defining challenges of our time.

### ***Who is Paul Morland?***

Paul Morland is a leading British expert on global demographic trends. He is a Fellow of the University of London and a Senior Fellow at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. His previous publications include *Population Strategies in Ethnic Conflict* (2014), *The Human Tide: How Population Shaped the Modern World* (2019), and *Tomorrow's People: The Future of Humanity in Ten Numbers* (2022).

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## Author resumes

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Katrina M. Sarnyai holds a Bachelors degree in Political Science from the McDaniel College and is pursuing her Masters degree in Interdisciplinary Family Studies at the Semmelweis University. She currently works as a communications specialist. Her research interests are family policy and demography.

### Viktória Szabó

Viktória Szabó is a lecturer at Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design and a PhD candidate in the Communication Science Doctoral Program at Corvinus University of Budapest. She has led workshops on transmedia storytelling, worldbuilding, game design, and generative AI-based design processes. Her research focuses on visual design education in the age of generative AI.

### Tamás Bokor

Tamás Bokor PhD is the head of the Institute of Marketing and Communication Sciences at Corvinus University of Budapest. He graduated as a communication expert in public relations and media as well as a historian. Later, he extended his expertise towards service design methods. Besides communication training for the improvement of interpersonal communication skills, he studies digital media competencies and the human-computer interactions.

### Nilotpal Bhattacharjee

Nilotpal Bhattacharjee is pursuing his doctoral research at Assam University, Silchar, India. His research focuses on digital diplomacy and political communication, with an emphasis on how social media shapes narratives of identity and power. An alumnus of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, he has worked as a media analyst for the US Embassy and the Australian High Commission in New Delhi, and as a Social Media and Advocacy Officer with the UNDP in India.

### Aleksandra Góralczyk

Aleksandra Góralczyk holds a master's degree in Psychology. She is a member of the organizational staff of the Postgraduate Studies in Sexology at Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań, Poland. She has clinical experience working with adult patients at a psychiatric day hospital, providing both group and individual support. She is also employed at the District Family Assistance Centre (Powiatowe Centrum Pomocy Rodzinie) in Gniezno, Poland, where she works with foster families and children.

## Author resumes

### Weronika Ludek

Weronika Ludek is a PhD candidate at the Doctoral School of Social Sciences at Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań, Poland. Her research explores topics such as: development of the Neurodiversity Movement, inclusion of neurodivergent citizens, political participation, advocacy for human rights, and South Korean politics and culture. She employs qualitative methods, primarily focusing on developing neurodivergent participatory research in Poland.

### Gergely Réti

Gergely Réti is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of Pázmány Péter Catholic University and a Collegium Commissioner at Mathias Corvinus Collegium, where he also teaches at the MCC Law School. He previously studied at Lovassy László Secondary Grammar School and spent a semester at the University of Barcelona. His research and publications focus on youth affairs, youth policy, and constitutional law, and he works as a researcher at the Youth Research Institute. He speaks fluent English and Spanish.

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