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Social Media as the Accelerator of Neoliberal Subjectivation and an Entrepreneurial Influencer Self among Youth?—The Hungarian Theater

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Abstract: Arguably, social media provides a new playground for the ever-expanding processes of neoliberal subjectivation in accordance with social or ethical standards such as the principles of performance and pleasure, competitiveness and consumerism vis à vis the general population. According to relevant data analyzed in the context of this research, any corresponding model anticipating such tendencies may seem to have limited validity in the context of Hungary, applying to certain segments of the population (aged 18–35) using social networking sites, but not necessarily a general experience. Thus, the present paper offers a theoretical and a Hungarian youth-focused empirical framework based on contemporary experiences for understanding the domestic nuances of real or perceived processes of neoliberal subjectivation.

Keywords: youth; digital culture; identity; self-presentation; social media; Hungary; postmodernism; subjectivation; entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

A large portion of postmodern traditions intend to explore how certain representations become dominant and permanently shape the ways in which reality is viewed and acted upon.

Michel Foucault's work on the dynamics of discourse and power in the representation of social reality, in particular, has been instrumental in unveiling the mechanisms by which a certain order of discourse produces permissible modes of being and thinking while disqualifying and even making others impossible (Escobar [1995] 2012, p. 5).

French psychotherapist Félix Guattari ([1989] 2000, p. 47) pointed out that post-industrial capitalism has tended increasingly to decenter its sites of power, moving away from structures producing goods and services towards structures producing signs, syntax and in particular: subjectivity. Such a tendency falls in line with the paradigm of neoliberalism based on its Foucauldian understanding that can be, tout court, grasped as the art of shaping populations (subjection) and the self (subjectivation) (Wacquant 2012, p. 69; Lorenzini 2018, p. 154). Partly following in such earlier postmodern footsteps, Dardot and Laval (2013, 2014a, 2014b) in their powerful attempt to criticize neoliberalism as a new way of the world, surpass the old Foucauldian views and examine how a new "entrepreneurial subject" (cf. Foucault 2008, p. 226) is manufactured.

The augmenting corpus of literature has applied the concept of "the entrepreneurial self" to examine various aspects of influencer economy and culture (Al Halbusi et al. 2022). Corresponding studies view influencers as both producers and consumers under neoliberal market forces. However, the interplay between influencer governance and the formation of specifically young "entrepreneurial subjects" is overlooked in the studies examining influencer culture and economy beyond the Western core countries' context (cf. Ran 2022, p. 619).

Correspondingly, social media, which has indeed generally opened up new opportunities for becoming involved in various forms of social life and engagements (Roberts 2014),

might fit in with neoliberal subjectivation at least in the social experience of core countries which determined the mentioned postmodern literature.

Consequently, among a plethora of its functions, social media offers a playground for neoliberal subjectivation with a move towards an entrepreneurial influencer Self (Al Halbusi et al. 2022). In this framework, social networking sites (hereinafter: SNSs) operate as fora for the individual or collective internalization of the spirit of competitiveness, ideals of pleasure and consumerism (cf. Türken et al. 2015) as behavioral and/or user models. This becomes materialized in patterns of sharing online content representing an internal conformity to "optimizing", "realizing" or "mastering" oneself. This is embodied in the search for excellence through constant self-work or self-improvement (Byung-Chul Han 2017), which is, arguably, shaped according to the principles of competitive performance, pleasure and consumerism.

With a view to this end, the predominance of a digital influencer model profoundly affects also the youth online culture, including the youngsters' self-presentation on social media especially, but not exclusively, in the Western core countries.

This endeavor aimed to identify whether interrelated discourses (cf. Türken et al. 2015; Byung-Chul Han 2017) such as (1) entrepreneurship (with its ideals of performance and competition, first hypothetical segment, hereinafter: HTS1), (2) pleasure (displaying positivity—HTS2) and lastly, (3) the ideal of consumerism (HTS3) that are supposed to constitute together the neoliberal subject (Dardot and Laval 2013, 2014a, 2014b), are represented and detectable among Hungarian higher education students.

This paper intends to challenge the earlier described trends by analyzing social media usage patterns indicating a corresponding 'order of discourse' (Escobar [1995] 2012; Fairclough 2004, p. 24; cf. Foucault 1978) vis à vis countries outside of the core and in particular, the Hungarian landscape. In order to identify such trends i.e., test the hypothesis, three-component quantitative and qualitative research was carried out between December 2022 and March 2023.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Macro- and Microscopic Findings of a Three-Pillar Quantitative and Qualitative Research

In order to identify such trends, i.e., test the hypothesis, three-component quantitative and qualitative research was carried out.

Thus, in addition to the content analysis conducted both via software specified at lexical and semantic scanning (Section 2.2.1) and manually (Section 2.2.2) with an aim to grasp the 'macroscopic' image, a relatively small-numbered but comprehensive (Diaz et al. 2016) survey (Section 2.2.3) among the target group (higher education students) was also administered ('microscopic' samples).

This bifurcation of the content analysis is interdependent as direct questioning vis a vis the target audience was necessary to test the "macro-tendencies" explored in the framework of the manual and digital content analysis. The reverse also holds true, as the "macroscopic" sample (i.e., mentions, sentiment analysis by source and aggregation of the main groups' posts) was illustrative only when juxtaposed with the 'microscopic' view of the answers given in response to the thematic questions raised among members of the target audience.

2.2. Content Analysis

Content analysis was employed being aware that it is a process of "summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method, including attention to objectivity/intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and (deductive) hypothesis testing" (Neuendorf 2002, p. 10; Lai and To 2015, p. 140).

2.2.1. Computer-Aided Lexical and Semantic Analysis of Online Content

By using lexical and semantic software with its corresponding statistical and graphical tools, not only the prevalence of usage of the relevant concepts, across the broad spectrum

of Hungarian online communication and a fortiori in the main SNSs could be objectively examined, with specific figures for each type, but also the analysis of the emotional loads within each context. Of course, here the scope of the analysis goes far beyond the target audience of young people. In any case, however, computer-aided content analysis proved to be important to identify main trends based on qualitative information regarding the distribution of concept use across major SNSs (e.g., Instagram is most consumerist, or all three concepts are exclusively in positive contexts in each type of SNS, regardless of the exact age distribution of users.)

2.2.2. Manually Conducted Data Analysis in a Seven-Step Model Based on (Lai and To 2015, p. 140)

Before any projection of the 'macroscopic' image described above onto the Hungarian university context, it was also necessary to scrutinize the type of content that the most popular (most followed) relevant groups (Budapesti Egyetemisták—University Students of Budapest; Budapesti Fiatalok—Youngsters of Budapest; Magyar Egyetemisták—Hungarian University Students) and their members themselves allow to be shared on their platforms, and share, respectively.

Accordingly, the following steps were taken:

1. selecting a topic (any topic in which members have posted)
2. deciding on the sample (in this case: time frame, variable among the three groups)
3. defining concepts or units to be counted (all content in any topic)
4. constructing categories (representation of neoliberal settings or not)
5. collecting data (manually)
6. analyzing data (thematic arrangement of posts)
7. reporting results (described above)

2.2.3. The 'Microscopic' Image Based on a Survey Conducted among the Target Group's Members

An anonymous survey based on 3 demographic (i.e., gender, residence, age,) and 8 thematic questions was conducted in several stages (1 September–26 January 2023) with 100 Hungarian participants, almost all of them users of SNSs in order to test both the hypothesis and the findings of the 'macroscopic data' described earlier.

Corresponding thematic questions (Tables 1–11 i.e., Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11) have been formulated, originally in the Hungarian language, as:

Table 1. Question 1 (hereinafter abbreviated as Q1): Where do you live?

Place of Residence	Budapest	Countryside
answers given (in total: 99)	52	47
proportion (%)	52.5%	47.5%

Table 2. Q2: What gender are you?

Gender	Female	Male	No Answer
answers given (in total: 100, equals proportion in %)	67	32	1

Table 3. Q3: What is your age?

Occasions	<18	18–26	27–35	36–44	45<
answers given (in total: 100, equals proportion in %)	1	67	21	10	1

Table 4. Q4: What do you use social media sites for?

	Gaining Public Information	Organizing Programs	Entertainment	Getting to Know People	Self-Representation or Branding for Individuals or Companies	"Flexing", i.e., Showing People You Have Bought Services or Things	Job Search	Keeping Up with Friends	Other
answers given (in total: 100, equals proportion in %)	82	63	72	22	24	5	45	16	24

Table 5. Q5: Do you share on any SNS experiences or content specifically related to entertainment or spending leisure time, and if so, how many times?

Occasions	Never	Yearly or Even More Rare	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
answers given (in total: 100, equals proportion in %)	14	49	35	1	1

Table 6. Q6: Do you share on any SNSs content related to your performance or achievements (e.g., newly acquired diplomas, medals, sporting achievements); if any, Q2b: how many times?

Occasions	Never	Yearly or Even More Rare	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
answers given (in total: 100, equals proportion in %)	20	71	7	2	0

Table 7. Q7: Do you share on any SNS content about items you bought or services you have gained or participated in?

Occasions	Never	Yearly or Even More Rare	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
answers given (in total: 99)	53	30	13	3	0
proportion (%)	53.5%	30.3%	13.1%	3%	0

Table 8. Q8: Was your main motivation to indicate a personal achievement therewith in the context of the questions above?

Motivation	Not at All	Rather No	Rather Yes	This Was Exactly the Goal
answers given	49	34	16	1

Table 9. Q9: To what extent are your posts inspired by a competitive spirit, i.e., a desire to compete with your acquaintances?

Motivation	Not at All	Rather No	Rather Yes	This Was Exactly the Goal
answers given (in total: 83)	50	19	14	0
proportion (%)	60.2	22.9	16.9	6.7
		(1)		

Table 10. Q10: Do you tend to be entrepreneurial?

Motivation	Not at All	Rather No	Rather Yes	Absolutely
answers given (in total: 98)	10	30	29	9
proportion (%)	10.2	30.6%	50	9.2%

Table 11. Q11: How much of your social media use is determined by an intention to be an "influencer", i.e., to be as popular and influential a player in the online world as possible?

Motivation	Not at All	Rather No	Rather Yes	Absolutely
answers given (in total: 100, equals proportion in %)	73	20	7	0

2.3. The Tree-Components Hypothesis and a Theoretical Focus Based on Socio-Cultural and Critical Traditions of Communication Theory

Both socio-cultural and critical traditions of the field of communication theory (Craig 1999, pp. 144–49) have engaged in understanding and discussing what we may call the "force field" of communication. The former holds that one is defined in accordance with how one is presented and represented. How one presents oneself is how one wishes to be perceived by other people and how others perceive one, which at the end of the day, reaffirms one's identity. Whilst the latter tends to revolve around the powers, potential inequalities and oppressions, and different privileges of the communicating society.

2.3.1. Neoliberalism's Anthropological Aspects and Subjectivation

At the intersection of our socio-cultural focus on identity and a postmodern critique's field of vision lays information society as a framework of social media, which is interwoven with and furnished by a number of aspects of neoliberalism. David Harvey (2005, pp. 3–4) not only attributes to neoliberalism the disruption of the divisions of labor, social relations, welfare provisions, and technological mixes, but also ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, etc.: "In so far as neoliberalism values market exchange as 'an ethic in itself [. . .] it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market".

The idea that online activities and a fortiori, social media platforms offer a playground for certain neoliberal ideals, is obviously far from new.

2.3.2. Hypothesis (HT): Promotion of Neoliberal Ideals at the Online Social Networking Sites (SNS)

ICT itself already provides new opportunities for self-definition. Accordingly, we may well agree with Bolter and Grusin ([1999] 2000, p. 230), who claim 'for now we can identify with the vivid graphics [. . .] as well as the swooping perspective of virtual reality systems'.

The internet also became fora for (online) self-accomplishment. Dyson et al. (1994) in their paper entitled Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age way before the profound transformations of today, envisaged cyberspace as an expanded playground not only for wealth, power and sensual enjoyment, but also the potential for self-development and seemingly limitless optimization opportunities offered by digital devices and computing. With a view to this end, they anticipated that 'the meaning of freedom, structures of self-government, definition of property, nature of competition, conditions for cooperation, sense of community and nature of progress would each be redefined'.

By focusing on the increasingly popular media discourse of self-development, Türken et al. (2015) examined it in the frameworks of the technology of neoliberal subjectivation. Also drawing on Foucault (1978, 1994) understandings, they analyze data which are heavily influenced by neoliberalism across multiple social sites. They identified four interrelated

discourses—rationality, autonomy and responsibility, entrepreneurship, and positivity and self-confidence—demonstrating how these discourses constitute the neoliberal subject. At this point, we can well agree with British historian John Michael Roberts in his conclusion that "social media sites urge people to upload amusing, emotional and personal information about their Selves to others, including information about consumer and leisure pursuits. At the same time, it encourages users to 'manage' and 'market' their everyday Selves through popular culture and everyday personal experiences" to construct a "brand" for themselves on social media sites. (Roberts 2014, p. 93).

In this instance, social media articulates an ideology that is compatible with neoliberalism.

In the words of Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han "the neoliberal ideology of self-optimization [...] entails a new form of subjectivation" i.e., self-improvement (Han 2017, p. 30), the projection interface of which becomes the SNSs, as users are constantly called on to "confide, share and participate: to communicate [. . .] opinions, needs, wishes and preferences" (Han 2017, p. 15).

As argued above, this process occurs with the involvement of the subjects themselves and first and foremost, but not exclusively, in developed countries.

As anticipated above, neoliberalism has prevailed in a number of spheres of individual social life, i.e., the microcosm of the entrepreneurial subject (Foucault 2008; Dardot and Laval 2014a, 2014b) reaching far beyond the online sphere. The question arises: in what terms has it done such?

The influence of neoliberalism on culture and subjectivity is well documented. Authors from various backgrounds (Guattari [1989] 2000; Harvey 2005; Mignolo 2011; Dardot and Laval 2013, 2014a; Türken et al. 2015) have explored how subject formation has taken place in multiple and contradictory ways in recent years.

In the words of Dardot and Laval (2014a) "various techniques help to manufacture the new unitary subject", for which they coined the term "entrepreneurial subject".

For the entrepreneurial subject, "the target of the new power is the desire to realize oneself, the project one wishes to pursue, the motivation [. . .] ultimately, desire by whatever name one chooses to call it".

Accordingly, the prevalent "entrepreneurial ethic [. . .] vaunts the 'man who makes himself' and 'integral flourishing,'" (ibid.) and personal enterprise is a way of governing oneself according to principles and values. Nikolas Rose (1996, p. 154) identifies some of these as "energy, initiative, ambition, calculation and personal responsibility" (Dardot and Laval 2014b).

Türken (2017), by quoting Rose et al. (2006, p. 91) and Weidner (2009, p. 406), respectively, explain neoliberal subjectivation within the broader context of governmentality. Accordingly, a principal strategy of the latter is supposed to be "autonomy, self-responsibility, and the obligation to maximize one's life as a kind of enterprise" (cf. Rose et al. 2006, p. 91). In other words, "perhaps the most important way in which neoliberalism shapes subjectivity is in suggesting that each individual [. . .] must seek to maximize" his or her "own self-value" (cf. Weidner 2009, p. 406; Türken 2017, p. 12).

2.3.3. Hypothesis Segment1 (HTS1): Entrepreneurial Performance as a Behavioral Model

It logically follows from here that as neoliberalism encourages the individual to become a self-entrepreneur, a self-enterprising individual, it also demands a stronger degree of self-determination by pushing her toward engaging individually (Weidner 2009, p. 406; Türken 2017, p. 11). Thus, individualism operates hand-in-hand with competition.

The corresponding notion of entrepreneurial passion was described as "a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, find important, and in which they invest significant time and energy" (Al Halbusi et al. 2022).

In modern capitalist societies, competition and personal success, both economically and politically as well as in the world of entertainment and sport, is encouraged, celebrated and rewarded (Mignolo 2011, p. 255).

The neoliberal subject is a man of competition and of power. The ideal entrepreneur is presented as one who "can stand on his own feet", "made for success", "destined to win", and is a "winning type".

The use of social media may enhance entrepreneur passion and self-perceived creativity because it not only increases entrepreneurs' confidence to face risks and challenges through access to business examples already in place, but also it offers instant contact with communities of experts ready to offer advice and guidance (Al Halbusi et al. 2022).

2.3.4. Hypothesis Segment2 (HTS2): Displaying Pleasure-Orientation and a Culture of Positivity

The target of the new power is the desire to "realize oneself", the project one wishes to pursue, and, ultimately, desire by whatever name one chooses to call it. The desiring being is not only the point of application of this power; it is the relay of apparatuses for steering conduct (Dardot and Laval 2013, p. 260).

Today's people are required to "go beyond themselves" and "expand their boundaries" corresponding to a social norm. This particular requirement of the system based on "growth" (i.e., capital accumulation) conditions that the individual identifies with the enterprise so much that the search for this 'beyond-the-Self' becomes a condition for the individual's and the enterprise's operation. This is the true meaning of the fusion of the entrepreneur Self and human capital. "Extra pleasure" extruded from ourselves is the driving force that operates the new subject and the new, competitive system enforcing, again in the words of Byung-Chul Han (2017, p. 30), the "neoliberal ideology of self-optimization".

2.3.5. Hypothesis Segment3 (HTS3): Hegemony of Consumerism

According to the post-Foucauldian interpretation of Rose (2007, pp. 131, 252), in the context of the 'politics of life itself' and, in Foucauldian terms, 'bio-politics', 'political and economic strategies for controlling life join forces with consumerism in a particular way: consumers are seduced to consume not because of the value of having such and such an object, but because consuming that would ensure a better and happier life. What is being sold and bought is not merely the commodity but the commodity as the ticket to enter the dream world of a longer and better life (cf. Mignolo 2011, p. 144).

Consumption as a social reality has been present well way before the advent of ICT. Accordingly, most of us are already living in a consumption economy, which never tires of novelty and citizens have been turned into consumers of services (Toulmin 1990, p. 5; Dardot and Laval 2014a).

Canadian economist of Hungarian and Polish background Polanyi Levitt (2013, p. 207) even ventures to suggest that 'consumerism is elevated to the status of the supreme objective governing rational human behavior'.

Even before ICT, traditional media itself had contributed thereto, as there is a wide range of specific messages in advertisements, suggesting connections between products and lifestyles and between services and states of mind. There is an underlying commonality to almost all advertisements: they are fundamentally about selling, addressing their audiences as consumers and celebrating and taking for granted the consumer-capitalist organization of society. Their perspective is, of course, decidedly ideological. Ads tell us that happiness and satisfaction can be purchased, that each of us is first and foremost an individual consumption unit, and that market relations of buying and selling are the appropriate— perhaps the only—form of social relations. In this process in question, advertising elevates certain values—specifically, those associated with acquiring wealth and consuming goods— to an almost religious status. Moreover, advertising promotes a worldview that stresses the individual and the realm of private life. The values that advertising celebrates do not come out of thin air, but this does not make them any less ideological. All in all, "the underlying message in advertising, which permeates our media culture, is the importance of the values of consumerism" (Croteau et al. 2021, p. 244).

2.4. Potential Structural Peculiarities of the Hungarian User Landscape

2.4.1. Historical Structural Characteristics of the Hungarian Landscape within the Central and Eastern European Region

The above-discussed trends can, of course, hardly be separated from certain socio-structural characteristics. Consumer society emerged in the Central and Eastern European region, and a fortiori in Hungary, in the wake of the regime change, i.e., in the 1990s. The structural changes in consumption gained momentum after economic growth kicked in, and are clearly reflected in a shift towards Western European consumption patterns. While leisure time did not increase significantly, how it was spent changed substantially through a process of commoditization (Tomka 2020, p. 436), which obviously affects either directly or indirectly, the young Hungarian population.

All in all, structural peculiarities such as the relatively new transformation to a consumer society and a shift towards Western European consumption patterns and the quality of leisure time may be fading away both on the regional and on the domestic scale.

2.4.2. User Tendencies from a Regional (Visegrad Countries-Focused) Perspective

As Hungarian university students can be considered a homogenous group with their equivalents from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (i.e., the Visegrad Countries) (Eger et al. 2020, p. 75), it is interesting to juxtapose our findings with those of earlier surveys carried out i.e., in the so-called Visegrad Countries (incl. Hungary).

At the regional scale, the most popular social media for college students are Facebook and Instagram. Approximately 30% of Facebook users are aged between 25 and 34 and most Instagram users are between 18 and 29 years of age. Similarly to general experiences, for students of Visegrad Countries, SNSs are user-friendly technologies that allow them to rapidly update, analyze, comment and share information with friends and other people. The main function of SNSs in the region is to maintain and develop relationships through effective online communication. Few students use social media only for information seeking and they argue that SNSs were created to join people into communities. The use of SNSs for entertainment is connected with organizing free time, for example during trips by public transport. Some of the students search for jokes, curiosities, humorous, funny videos, etc. They often use the YouTube channel instead of TV. The role of Instagram has been growing in this area. This generation usually applies multitasking, which includes activities of entertainment. Students very often switch between many popular SM platforms. Self-presentation using SNSs is also important, however, with individual differences. Some of them state that they do not share their private lives on social media. The older the respondents are, the less importance they attach to self-presentation. In contrast, a lot of them post pictures on Instagram. Some of them use SNSs for job searches and they are aware that potential future employers monitor their profile(s) on SNSs. Students also know that social media can serve as tools for personal branding. In general, it turns out that university students are mostly cautious and considerate of how they will look on social media (Eger et al. 2020, pp. 75, 83–84).

2.4.3. Statistics of Hungarian Youth (Age: 15–29) according to Recent Data

In order to grasp the online user trends in process, it is worth recalling the findings of an earlier research of the year 2020 (Tamás et al. 2020). In accordance therewith, young people aged 15–29 in Hungary can be considered daily internet users, with four-tenths of them online virtually all the time.

By 2020, almost all 15–29-year-olds in Hungary have started using "smartphones" (97%). Eight-tenths (81%) of 15–29-year-olds in Hungary are users of some kind of social networking site (SNS, with Facebook being the most popular in 2020. This is illustrated by the fact that 84 per cent of those who have registered on a social networking site use Facebook daily, while the next highest daily user rate is 50 per cent for YouTube.

On average, respondents have 575 friends on the most used social networking site. Social networking sites are mostly used by young people for information and entertainment.

Three-tenths of young people (31 per cent) visit online social networking sites daily for information, almost as many as for entertainment (29 per cent). 21 per cent use these sites at least daily to find out about local news. They do not typically use online social networking sites for other purposes on a daily basis, but a significant proportion also uses them for organizing activities and shopping, albeit less frequently (Table 12) (Tamás et al. 2020, pp. 46–49).

Table 12. Youth social media usage according to functions, purposes *.

For information in general	31%
For fun	29%
For information about local news (regarding the place of residence)	21%
To organize community programs	8%
For obtaining information related to political and public news	8%
Business (for work-related contact)	7%
For help and advice	5%
For dating	4%
To find a job	4%
For purchase	3%
For donation	2%

* According to research by (Tamás et al. 2020).

3. Results

3.1. Discovering the Nuances of the Hungarian Horizons of a Hypothetical Online Entrepreneurial Influencer Self in Light of Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Based on the findings of a three-component quantitative and qualitative research inspired by earlier assumptions described above, arguably, although both the presence and tendencies of a generally positive contextualization of certain neoliberal ideals such as entrepreneurship, performance and consumerism (cf. Türken et al. 2015; Dardot and Laval 2013, 2014a, 2014b) can be detected, this does not or not necessarily mean that Hungarian university students explicitly identify with an online influencer model during their usage of SNSs.

3.2. Presence and Positive Contextualization of the Interrelated Discourses of Performance, Pleasure and Consumerism within the General Population

According to findings of the computer-aided analysis of online content with corresponding statistical and graphical tools, in the course of a one-month time period (between 27 December and 26 January), 'performance' (indicating entrepreneurial ethos, as anticipated by HTS1) was mentioned 951 times (including both general wordings of posts and 'hashtags') in SNSs and websites of the entire visible Hungarian Sprachraum in the following distribution (Table 13):

Table 13. Mentions of performance by sources.

	Facebook	YouTube	Twitter	Instagram	Websites
number	41	208	126	58	518
proportion (%)	4.3	21.9	13.2	6.1	54.5

While these figures alone do not allow us to draw far-reaching conclusions, they, in fact, do provide a quantitative framework for sentiment analysis as follows (Table 14).

Table 14. Sentiments in the context of performance.

	Number of Mentions	Proportion (%)
Positive	614	65.7
Neutral	227	24.3
Negative	93	10

It is worth noting that the accurate knowledge of the specifics of these contexts remains unclear. One indeed encounters, however, a relatively low proportion (10%) of negative positions concerning the concept of performance (Table 15).

Table 15. Sentiments by sources (SNSs only).

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Facebook	27	7	7
YouTube	135	39	21
Instagram	37	16	1
Twitter	71	38	7

In the case of each SNS, a supermajority of positive sentiments towards performance was formed.

In the course of the following time period, 'pleasure' (as anticipated by HTS2) was mentioned 119 times in SNSs and websites of the entire visible Hungarian Sprachraum's online communication platforms in the following distribution (Table 16):

Table 16. Mentions of pleasure by sources.

	Facebook	YouTube	Twitter	Instagram	Websites
number	11	12	43	12	41
proportion (%)	9.2	10.1	36.1	10.1	34.5

Again, while these figures do not allow us to draw far-reaching conclusions per se, they do provide a quantitative framework for sentiment analysis as follow (Table 17):

Table 17. Sentiments in the context of pleasure.

	Number of Mentions	Proportion (%)
Positive	76	63.9
Neutral	27	22.7
Negative	16	13.4

Without being totally sure of contextual specificities, one encounters an extremely high proportion (86.6%) of the attitude adopted either in favor of, or not being opposed to, the concept of pleasure (Table 18).

Similarly to the context of performance, in the case of each SNS, a supermajority of positive sentiments towards pleasure was observable.

Lastly, once again, within the given time period between 27 December and 26 January (i.e., right after the Christmas holidays), 'shopping' (indicating consumerism as anticipated by HTS3) was mentioned 1329 times (including both general wordings of posts and 'hashtags') in SNSs and websites of the entire visible Hungarian Sprachraum in the following distribution (Table 19):

Table 18. Sentiments by sources (SNSs only).

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Facebook	5	1	5
YouTube	8	2	2
Instagram	11	1	0
Twitter	28	9	6

Table 19. Mentions of shopping by sources.

	Facebook	YouTube	Twitter	Instagram	Websites
number	188	170	211	664	96
proportion (%)	14.1	12.8	15.9	50.0	7.2

In this case, interestingly, contrary to the findings of the former two categories, Instagram reached an even higher proportion, i.e., exactly half of all mentions, than websites did.

Once again, the figures above provide a quantitative framework for sentiment analysis as follows (Table 20):

Table 20. Sentiments in the context of shopping.

	Number of Mentions	Proportion (%)
Positive	784	60.1
Neutral	417	32.0
Negative	104	8.0

One encounters a relatively low proportion (8%) of negative positions concerning the concept of shopping, which is far more important for conclusions than the previous experiences concerning either performance or pleasure (Table 21).

Table 21. Sentiments by sources (SNSs only).

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Facebook	41	133	14
YouTube	79	77	12
Instagram	538	89	17
Twitter	76	95	38

In this case, of each SNS, apart from Instagram, where an overwhelming majority of positive sentiments towards 'shopping' was formed, indicating consumerist trends, other SNSs turned out to be much more balanced, with only a slight superiority of the positive attitude.

3.3. University- and Public-Life-Related Orientation of Relevant SNSs Groups and Influencers Related to the Target Audience

Overall, approximately 32,000 members of three relevant universities and/or youth groups on Facebook were primarily concerned with university or public life-related matters during the period under review in the following composition:

- Budapesti Egyetemisták (University Students of Budapest) with Membership counting 21k: Between the time period of 1 December 2022 and 16 January 2023, 35 posts can be counted. Out of those, one finds promotions of festivals (2 times), language courses (1),

concerts, musical events (5); international voluntary activities (2), job opportunities (2), Helpline (2); members' enquiries about curriculum (1), questionnaires (6), evaluation of universities (1); advertisements (private teachers, 9 times, AVON, 2) and a music video (1).

- Budapesti Fiatalok (Youngsters of Budapest) with 5.1k members: Between the time period of 1 January 2023 and 25 January 2023, 47 posts can be counted. Out of those, one finds news (41 times) and a poll (1) directly related to social life (public transport, urban planning, university events); international references as examples to be or not to be followed (4); and a utility app (interactive map, 1)

- Magyar Egyetemisták (Hungarian University Students) with a 5.9k members: Between the time period of 1 January 2023 and 25 January 2023, 73 posts can be counted. Out of those, one finds members' enquiries about or advertisements of Hungarian universities or training courses, conferences (49); searches for or advertisements of private tutors (8); promotions of student camps (3); opportunities for internships and student employment (6); questionnaires (5); calls for applications (2).

In addition to our findings discussed in detail above, manual selection, based on random choice, of content shared by three influencers explicitly attached to the university sphere has been carried out over the course of exactly one month, i.e., between 27 February and 27 March in the context of the qualitative aspects of our research.

Accordingly, the personal blog of a post-student teacher influencer "Jocó bácsi világa" (i.e., "the world of Uncle Jo" with more than 96k followers shared content related to public life (8); anecdotes, stories with moral (4); personal confessions (3); articles presenting pedagogical philosophy (1); promoted public events (2); online courses (1) and (sport-centric) lifestyle (1).

The page entitled "SzM'ART—Alkalmazott Rendhagyó Tanítás" (i.e., SzM'ART—Applied Irregular Teaching) with 4.5k followers shared digital picture puzzles (3 times); made general proposals for those interested (1).

The third forum manually selected was "TanTáv—Tanárszakosok a távoktatásért" (approx.: Tele-Edu—Students for distance education). With its membership of 4.6k, this public group of university students studying to be teachers shared podcasts about mindfulness strategies (1); promoted civil activities for children (1); foreign language training (1).

In general, we may argue that these influencers did not represent neoliberal settings (performance and pleasure, competitiveness and consumerism) at all. However, as it was still not quite clear how, in what terms and to what extent university students themselves apply certain neoliberal settings in question (apart from manually selected influencers virtually detached from those), qualitative research was still needed.

3.4. Moderate Promotion of Personal Traits of Performance, Pleasure and Consumerism with an Inclination towards Entrepreneurship without Claims for Being Influencers

Under the assumption that digital records of certain debates provide an opportunity to better understand social opinions (Diaz et al. 2016) and after the establishment of the theoretical framework at hand, an anonymous survey was conducted between 1 September and 26 January 2023, in several stages in order to elicit trends reflected by the proportion of contents related to the hypothetical synchronism of entrepreneurship, performance and pleasure, and consumerism. The corresponding questions have been formulated in order to explore whether or not users of social media upload amusing, emotional and personal information about themselves, demonstrating competitiveness, consumer and leisure pursuits (cf. Roberts 2014, p. 93). These may arguably present, in broad terms, certain neoliberal settings (Türken et al. 2015) and self-entrepreneurship (Dardot and Laval 2014b) described in the theoretical framework deployed later.

The relevant survey involving 100 participants, mostly women (67%—identified in the context of Q1) of an average age between 18 and 35 (88%—Q3) residing rather in the capital, Budapest (52.5%—Q2), indicated that the main purpose of Hungarian higher education students' use of SNSs is to gather public information, similar to regional findings attested

by Eger et al. (2020). Such diversity of use may well be understood as symbolic or ethical resources. It is important to note, however, that the promotion of leisure activities also continues to be among the dominant themes of Hungarian users of SNSs as altogether, 72% (Q5) of those responding confirmed to have shared content accordingly, which is interesting from the point of view of our hypothesis segments. The third most popular objective proved to be the management of social programs (63%).

Here, it is reasonable to argue bona fide that such patterns of banal usage i.e., posting for or about entertainment and leisure can also be interpreted as simple representations of hobbies or predictable everyday engagements that do not necessarily give floor for abstract concerns.

Consequently, although data seems to moderately support and confirm earlier understandings in the context of the relevant segment of the hypothesis (HTS2) that pleasure does become represented via social media's certain types (e.g., Facebook), it also becomes evident that posting about entertainment and leisure seems to be far from being an exclusive objective when using social media (cf. Q5).

The exact reasons behind personal internalizations of such patterns and motivations (cf. Q9), i.e., whether all this is driven by a competitive logic is highly doubtable as 83.1% of respondents rather or absolutely not claim competitiveness (Q9) as a driver behind sharing content. Still, even such a minuscule support enhances the relevance of other aspects, especially having in mind certain criticisms of neoliberalism such as the incorporation of "a normativity centered on generalized competition" (Dardot and Laval 2014b).

Women's over-representation in use and, at most, moderate inclination towards such ideals could be all the more interesting, as, whether "as enthusiastic consumers of lifestyle and self-improvement products, or as ambitious entrepreneurs who are exhorted to 'lean in' to achieve corporate success, young women appear ubiquitously as the key demographic that can simultaneously achieve personal transformation and drive the global economy" (Giroux and Giroux 2006; cf. Rutherford 2018).

Having such an argument in mind, the question, of whether such tendencies—perceived or real—also apply to Hungarian youth, becomes truly intriguing. However, there seems to be a much less significant inclination towards the demonstration of self-improvement and development in terms of personal capabilities and results, as less than a fifth (17%) of all replies reflect willingness in that regard.

Although it obviously cannot be disregarded per se, the segment of the hypothesis concerning the presence of consumptive practices and orientation (hereinafter: HTS3), or tout court, consumerist trends again prove not to be as widespread as assumed, since approximately one out of every two users (53.5%) claims never to have posted in correspondence therewith (Q7). Out of those who have ever done so, less than one-third of total respondents (30.3%) share content yearly or even less frequently and 16.1% monthly or weekly, while daily sharing of such posts was nonexistent. This is crucially important having in mind earlier 'macroscopic' data, attested to by computer-aided sentiment analysis, regarding the presence of the concept of consumption and its positive contextualization on SNSs (especially Instagram) among the general population.

However, to decide whether such a trend generally applies to all types of social media, or rather only to some of them and whether these findings suggest that conspicuous (cf. Veblen 1899) qualities can be juxtaposed with these consumerist patterns, again, further examinations are needed.

In any case, it remains intriguing, however, that an extremely high proportion (83%) of those responding confirmed—rather or completely—positively to an explicit drive for sharing content in order to demonstrate personal achievements (Q6). Although 71% only shares such content yearly or even less frequently, we may add that in the context of Q4, almost one in four (24%) explicitly responded to using SNSs for individual or corporate branding.

Again, it is thought-provoking that out of those confirming the latter hypothetical segment, 16.9%, i.e., a not insignificant proportion, acknowledged being inspired by a competitive spirit, i.e., a desire to compete with other acquaintances (Q9).

The findings of the last two questions are the most intriguing and should be discussed in parallel. On the one hand, in the context of Q10, almost six out of ten (59.2%) of those surveyed characterized themselves as being rather or completely entrepreneurial (cf. HTS1), which provides a view of what can be considered a general characteristic of Hungarian users of SNSs. On the other hand, according to Q11, an extremely low proportion (7%) claims intentions to explicitly become an influencer per se, without any response indicating an absolute goal to become one. Obviously, the wider contexts of these enquiry directions may overlap. It is also evident that explicit distinction is not necessarily possible between implicit and explicit inclinations. Formulation of questions may, arguably, also have an effect of discouraging the audience from giving adequate or honest answers (in particular, in the case of Q8, Q9 and Q11).

As pointed out above, based on the literature, SNSs, in general, may well manifest "the neoliberal ideology of self-optimization" (cf. Byung-Chul Han 2017, p. 30) while "a stronger degree of self-determination" (Weidner 2009, p. 406; Türken 2017, p. 11) is indeed evoked.

Therefore, in light of such results, arguably certain types of social media, although in a nuanced way and to a (much) lesser extent than anticipated, might be understood as dispositives of neoliberal settings (Roberts 2014; Türken et al. 2015; Rose 2007) in terms of encouraging users to modify their identities and assemble "their Selves into competent online 'brands'" (cf. Roberts 2014, p. 93). Sharing content in order to demonstrate personal achievements on behalf of a relatively significant proportion of respondents, and/or the acknowledgement of being entrepreneurial, and/or consumerist trends obviously need to be taken notice of.

However, as for the much narrower sense of entrepreneurial (cf. Dardot and Laval 2014a, 2014b; Al Halbusi et al. 2022) influencer Self: although it may seem logical, any postmodern complex model that assumes synchronous and overarching tendencies of competitive, consumption-promoting and experience/performance-driven patterns needs to be considered to have severely limited validity in the context of Hungary, i.e., only in view of a certain segment of users.

This is attested by the fact that data more or less refute or at least shade theoretical postulates presented in detail earlier (Sections 2.3 and 2.4), i.e., tendencies of constant and explicit "maximizing of self-value" as self-entrepreneurs and self-enterprising individuals (cf. Weidner 2009, p. 406; Türken 2017, p. 12) claimed by mainstream postmodern scholars.

4. Discussion

Both the post-Foucauldian neoliberal subjectivation of late capitalist societies, which have become deeply embedded in the socially intertwined systems of power and meaning and the phenomenon of social media usage attract the attention of a wide range of academic disciplines such as communication, history, anthropology, cultural theory and sociology.

This paper aimed to explore recent tendencies of neoliberal subjectivation (cf. Dardot and Laval 2013, 2014a, 2014b) on and by social media from a post-Foucauldian (Foucault 2008; Guattari [1989] 2000; Escobar [1995] 2012; Byung-Chul Han 2017) perspective representing the tradition of critical social theory (Craig 1999, pp. 144–49) that aims to discover the paradigm of neoliberalism (cf. Foucault 1978, 2008; Harvey 2005; Mignolo 2011) contextualized as governmentality (cf. Wacquant 2012; Türken 2017; Lorenzini 2018). Thus, including an interdisciplinary framework, the theoretical spectrum of this research assumed that experiences of social media can be carefully juxtaposed with the premises of a hypothetical entrepreneurial subject described by postmodern literature (Foucault 2008; Dardot and Laval 2013, p. 259; 2014b).

The theoretical framework of this article built on the Foucauldian perspective of "the entrepreneurial self" (Dardot and Laval 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Al Halbusi et al. 2022) with a

real or perceived "obligation to maximize one's life as a kind of enterprise" (cf. Rose et al. 2006, p. 91).

Consequently, certain tendencies, perceived or real, such as the "neoliberal ideology of self-optimization" (cf. Byung-Chul Han 2017, p. 30), "entrepreneurial self" (cf. Dardot and Laval 2014a; Ran 2022), constant "maximizing of self-value" (cf. Weidner 2009, p. 406; Türken 2017, p. 12) and modifying identities and assembling "their Selves into competent online 'brands'" (cf. Roberts 2014, p. 93) identified by mainstream postmodern scholars were needed to be tested by research involving young Hungarian users of SNSs, including influencers themselves.

This endeavor relied on the premise that nuanced approaches are needed to discover whether the neoliberal concepts of a competitive entrepreneurial Self (HTS1), pleasure-orientation manifesting a culture of positivity (HTS2) with an inherent inclination for consumption (HTS3) define young user attitudes and trends.

Although findings of our computer-aided lexical and semantic and sentiment analysis highlighted the presence and positive contextualization of certain neoliberal ideals, manual selection combined with a questionnaire largely counterbalanced such findings. Both thematically relevant Facebook groups, popular influencers and respondents from university backgrounds contributed to having a nuanced case in this regard, which can be juxtaposed with earlier domestic (Tamás et al. 2020) and regional (Eger et al. 2020) findings.

Correspondingly, our survey based on demographic and eight thematical questions substantially related to our segments of the hypothesis carried out among Hungarian SNSs users demonstrated that:

– diverse user patterns indicate various types of motivation instead of synchronous tendencies; yet,
– a significant number of Hungarian users (median: of age 18–35) do engage in sharing posts expressing performance- or pleasure-driven (HTS2) and consumerism (HTS3) orientation, arguably, even driven by a competitive spirit (HTS1); still,
– corresponding competitive, pleasure-driven and consumerist tendencies are far from being general, rather, apply only to a certain segment of users.

Consequently, postmodern models of the governmentality school (cf. Wacquant 2012, pp. 68–69) that suggest synchronous and general processes of neoliberal subjectivation (Dardot and Laval 2013, p. 297; 2014b) might not (yet) hold for the (entire) Hungarian SNS landscape.

5. Conclusions

Instead of identifying ubiquitous tendencies, the measurable but relatively low presence of separate ideals of competitiveness, consumerism and pleasure apparatus anticipated by our hypothesis segments (HTS1-3) was revealed in accordance with our research carried out among young Hungarian users during the winter of 2022–2023.

The findings of this research at hand highlighted corresponding age-related and regional nuances, thus providing new layers for understanding the social effects of social media both universally and in terms of youth user patterns.

Therefore, an epistemological regime which stipulates the microcosm of the neoliberal subjects, who always want to perform, enjoy and consume 'ever more' proved to be highly questionable as age specifics and regional particularities (e.g., core vis à vis Central and Eastern European countries) should not be disregarded.

In fact, with regard to the data revealed by our three-component qualitative and quantitative research at hand, certain tendencies manifest significant openness to entrepreneurship among the Hungarian higher education students, but this does not or rather does not necessarily implicate a drive to become influencers.

Thus, overall, we can conclude that there is a relative prevalence of neoliberal settings among Hungarian youth.

All in all, on social media, competitive and consumptive practices moderately arguably become integrated in a discursive order (Escobar [1995] 2012, p. 5; cf. Fairclough 2004, p. 24).

However, to what extent they do so and whether these processes point in the direction of the new (both neoliberal and online) "way of the world" (Dardot and Laval 2013, 2014a, 2014b) remains for the future with further research to tell.

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