# Intergenerational Conflict in Contemporary Societies: A Sociological Approach in Light of Value and Technological Transformations

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## Abstract

Intergenerational conflict is one of the most persistent social phenomena across societies, particularly in the context of current cultural, technological, and economic transformations. It reflects the discrepancies in value systems, behavioral patterns, and modes of thinking between one generation and another, thereby producing tensions within family, educational, and cultural structures. This study seeks to address the phenomenon from both theoretical and empirical perspectives, by analyzing classical and contemporary sociological approaches, with a special focus on its manifestations in Arab societies. The study concludes that intergenerational conflict is not merely a negative confrontation between past and present, but rather a social process that contributes to the reproduction and adaptation of values to the requirements of changing times.

**Keywords** : Intergenerational conflict, social values, social change, youth, modern technologies.

## Introduction

Intergenerational conflict is a recurring social phenomenon present in virtually all human groups. It reflects differences in patterns of socialization, as well as in the historical, economic, and cultural contexts in which each generation develops [1] (**Bauman,2016, p112**).With the accelerating pace of social and cultural change, particularly due to the digital revolution and globalization, the generational gap has deepened, making this phenomenon a central theme in sociological, psychological, and educational research.

The significance of this study lies in approaching intergenerational conflict as a dynamic mechanism that embodies both tension and complementarity between different generations. While some perceive it as a negative element threatening social cohesion, others view it as an essential factor in renewing the social system and ensuring its continuity [2] (**Jughoul, 1990, p45)**

## Theoretical Framework

The analysis of intergenerational conflict requires grounding in classical and contemporary sociological theories. The phenomenon is not a new one ; it has been discussed in various schools of thought, each offering a specific interpretation :

## Functionalist Perspective

From a functionalist lens, generational differences are natural outcomes of the process of social change. Talcott Parsons emphasized that each generation must perform a distinct role in the system, while conflict occurs when value transfer between generations is interrupted. [3] **(Parson, 1951, p67)**

## Conflict Theory

Karl Marx and subsequent neo-Marxist theorists interpreted generational conflict as part of broader structural contradictions. According to this view, the younger generation often represents forces of change, while the older generation embodies resistance to protect existing privileges and cultural capital [4] **(Marx, 1976, p213)**

## Symbolic Interactionism

This perspective highlights micro-level interactions. Generational conflict emerges from differences in symbolic systems, language, and everyday meanings. The way parents and children interpret authority, freedom, and identity often generates misunderstandings [5] (**Blumer, 1969, p45**)

## Contemporary Approaches

Recent sociological analyses consider globalization, digitalization, and postmodern transformations as catalysts of intergenerational conflict. These frameworks emphasize how digital natives differ fundamentally in cognitive styles, consumption patterns, and social behaviors compared to digital immigrants [6] **(Castelles, 1996, p89)**


## Intergenerational Conflict and Social Values

One of the primary sources of intergenerational conflict lies in the domain of social values. Values constitute the fundamental principles that regulate social life and provide individuals with criteria for judgment, decision-making, and behavior. When different generations adopt divergent sets of values, conflict becomes almost inevitable.

## Value Transformation

Younger generations are often more open to global values, such as individual freedom, gender equality, and consumerist lifestyles. These orientations sometimes clash with traditional values upheld by older generations, including collectivism, respect for authority, and adherence to religious or customary norms [7] **(Inglehart, 1997, p122)**

## Family as a Value Arena

The family is the primary space where value conflicts manifest. While parents emphasize obedience, discipline, and the preservation of tradition, young people often demand autonomy and personal

choice. Such tensions are evident in issues like marriage, career choices, and leisure activities [8] **(Bourdie, 1984, p56)**

## Societal Consequences

The widening value gap has consequences for social cohesion. In Arab societies, for example, the spread of global cultural products through media and digital platforms has accelerated the erosion of traditional norms, creating a sense of cultural insecurity among the older generation [9] **( Juhoul , 1990, p 112)** Yet, at the same time, this conflict pushes societies toward negotiation, adaptation, and the redefinition of their cultural identity.

## Intergenerational Conflict and Technology

Technology represents one of the most decisive factors in shaping intergenerational relations in the contemporary era. The digital revolution has created a profound gap between generations, particularly between those born before and after the spread of information and communication technologies.

## Digital Natives vs. Digital Immigrants

Marc Prensky introduced the distinction between « digital natives » and « digital immigrants » to describe how young people, who were born into the digital age, differ significantly from older generations in terms of cognitive patterns, communication methods, and cultural practices.[10] **(Prensky, 2001, p1-6)** While young people embrace social media, instant communication, and virtual communities, older generations often remain skeptical and prefer traditional face-to-face interactions.

## Family and Technological Tensions

In many households, the excessive use of smartphones, video games, and online platforms by the younger generation becomes a source of misunderstanding. Parents may interpret it as a decline in discipline and respect for family ties, while the younger generation perceives it as a natural extension of their social life. [11] **(Turkle, 2011, p 78**)

## Education and Knowledge Transfer

Technology also affects education. Young people now have access to vast amounts of information online, sometimes challenging the authority of parents, teachers, and older intellectuals. This reconfiguration of knowledge transmission undermines hierarchical relationships and reshapes generational dynamics. [12] **(Castelles, 2009, p134)**

## Opportunities and Risks

Although technology is a major source of generational conflict, it also offers opportunities for bridging gaps. Virtual communication can help connect different generations across distances. However, without effective regulation, it risks deepening alienation and reinforcing stereotypes about the « other generation » [13] **(Wellman, 2004, p203)**

## Intergenerational Conflict and the Family

The family constitutes the primary context in which intergenerational conflict becomes visible and tangible. It is within the household that cultural traditions, authority structures, and patterns of socialization are transmitted across generations. However, it is also the space where contradictions between the « old » and the « new » are most directly experienced.

### Authority and Obedience

In many traditional societies, the family is structured around patriarchal authority, where parents—especially fathers—occupy a dominant role. Younger generations are expected to show obedience and respect. Yet, contemporary youth often challenge this hierarchy, seeking autonomy in decision-making regarding marriage, education, and career paths.[14] **(Parson, & Bales, 1955, p45)**

### Gender Roles and Expectations

Generational conflict in the family also emerges around gender roles. While older generations may insist on conventional divisions of labor between men and women, younger generations—particularly young women—tend to reject these restrictions and demand greater equality. This shift often generates tension in daily family interactions.[15] **(Stacey, 1996, p77)**

### Marriage and Partner Choice

The issue of partner selection illustrates generational divergence. Parents may prioritize kinship, social status, or cultural compatibility, whereas young people emphasize emotional attachment and personal compatibility. This discrepancy is a frequent cause of intergenerational disputes within families. [16] (**Thornton, 2005, p92**)

### Care and Interdependence

Another manifestation of conflict involves expectations of care and interdependence. In many Arab societies, parents expect adult children to provide financial and emotional support. However, younger generations—facing economic instability and globalization—may resist such expectations, leading to accusations of « ingratitude » or « selfishness » from elders. [17] **(Mernissi, 1987, p138)**

### Intergenerational Conflict and Education

Education plays a central role in shaping intergenerational relations, as it is the institutional framework responsible for transmitting knowledge, values, and cultural heritage from one generation to another. However, rapid social change has transformed education into a field where generational conflict is both produced and negotiated.

### Traditional vs. Modern Pedagogy

Older generations often favor traditional teaching methods emphasizing discipline, memorization, and respect for authority. In contrast, younger generations, influenced by digital learning environments, prefer participatory methods, creativity, and critical thinking. This divergence in expectations frequently produces tensions between students and teachers, as well as between parents and educational institutions. [18] **(Freire, 1970, p36)**

### Educational Aspirations

Parents usually project their aspirations onto their children, expecting them to pursue stable and prestigious careers such as medicine, law, or engineering. Young people, however, increasingly seek careers in creative industries, digital technology, or entrepreneurship. Such conflicting expectations reflect a clash between security-oriented and innovation-oriented value systems. [19] **(Bourdieu, 1977, p 89**)

## Knowledge Authority

The easy access to information through the internet has undermined the traditional authority of educators. Students often challenge teachers or parents by relying on online resources, leading to generational disputes about the legitimacy of knowledge and expertise. [20] **(Selwyn, 2012, p104)**

## Globalization and Curricula

The globalization of education has introduced new disciplines, languages, and worldviews into school curricula. While some parents perceive these innovations as threats to cultural identity, young people often embrace them as opportunities for integration into a globalized labor market. [21] **(Giddens, 1999, p89)**

## Intergenerational Conflict and Culture

Culture is one of the most sensitive arenas where intergenerational conflict is expressed. Since culture embodies the values, symbols, and practices that define collective identity, changes in cultural orientation often provoke tension between younger and older generations.

## Popular vs. Traditional Culture

Older generations tend to preserve folk traditions, oral heritage, and religious rituals as central elements of cultural identity. Younger generations, by contrast, are more attracted to popular culture—such as music, cinema, fashion, and social media trends—which they perceive as markers of modernity and individuality.[22] **(Hall, 1990, p227)**

## Language and Communication

Generational conflict is also visible in linguistic practices. Older generations may insist on the preservation of classical or standard language forms, while younger people often mix local dialects with foreign languages, particularly English and French. This linguistic hybridization is often criticized as a form of cultural erosion.[23] **(Fishman, 1991, p63)**

## Artistic and Creative Expression

The field of art illustrates cultural conflicts vividly. Whereas elders may value traditional forms such as poetry, theater, and classical music, younger generations often embrace rap, hip-hop, or digital arts. These artistic preferences symbolize deeper differences in worldview and identity. [24] **(Hebdige, 1979, p88)**

## Globalization of Cultural Patterns

Through the spread of global media, young people consume cultural products from diverse parts of the world, sometimes adopting lifestyles that diverge from local norms. This creates a « cultural

distance » between them and their parents, who may perceive these behaviors as forms of alienation or cultural loss. [25] (**Tomlinson, 1999, p102**)

## Intergenerational Conflict and Economy

Economic structures and transformations represent a critical dimension in shaping intergenerational relations. The unequal distribution of resources, employment opportunities, and access to wealth often generates tensions between younger and older generations.

## Employment and Labor Market

Older generations, having secured stable employment in public institutions during periods of economic expansion, often contrast with younger generations who face precarious work conditions, high unemployment rates, and limited prospects. This gap fosters feelings of resentment among youth who perceive the system as favoring their elders. [26] (**Standing, 2011, p45**)

## Wealth and Property

Property ownership constitutes another site of conflict. In many societies, older generations control the bulk of land, housing, and financial resources. Younger generations, struggling with rising housing prices and unstable incomes, frequently view this as a structural injustice that restricts their autonomy. [27] (** Piketty, 2014, p109**)

## Retirement Systems and Social Security

The demographic aging of societies places increasing pressure on retirement systems. Younger workers often express frustration at having to finance the pensions and healthcare of elders, while doubting whether the same benefits will be available to them in the future. This fuels perceptions of intergenerational inequality.[28] (**Laslett, 1989, p142**)

## Consumption Patterns

Economic conflict also appears in divergent consumption habits. While older generations tend to value saving and stability, younger generations are more inclined toward consumerism, digital economies, and lifestyle spending. These contrasting economic orientations reflect broader cultural differences about security versus experimentation. [29] (**Bauman, 2007, p65**)

## Intergenerational Conflict and Politics

Politics provides another important arena where intergenerational conflict manifests itself. Generational differences in political participation, ideological orientation, and trust in institutions highlight how age cohorts engage differently with power and governance.

## Participation and Political Engagement

Older generations are often more attached to traditional political parties and institutional forms of participation, such as voting and union membership. Younger generations, however, tend to prefer informal activism, social movements, and digital campaigns. This divergence reflects both a change in political culture and a crisis of institutional legitimacy. [30] (**verba ; Shlozman &Brady, 1995, p87**)

## Trust in Institutions

Surveys frequently show that young people exhibit lower levels of trust in political institutions, perceiving them as corrupt, rigid, or unresponsive. By contrast, older generations, having invested much of their lives in the political system, display relatively higher loyalty and attachment. [31] **(Inglehart, 1990, p144)**

## Generational Representation

Political leadership is often dominated by older elites, which limits opportunities for younger individuals to access decision-making positions. This lack of generational representation fuels a sense of marginalization among youth, who view politics as an exclusive arena for elders. [32] **(Norris, 2011, p96)**

## Ideological Divides

While older generations may hold on to nationalist, conservative, or religious ideologies, younger generations are often more inclined toward progressive, globalist, or environmentalist perspectives. These ideological rifts are increasingly visible in debates over democracy, climate change, and cultural freedoms. [33] **(Beck, 1992, p178)**

## Managing Intergenerational Conflict

Intergenerational conflict is not an inevitable threat to social cohesion. On the contrary, it can be managed effectively through deliberate strategies that foster understanding and collaboration between generations.

## Dialogue and Communication

Promoting open and respectful dialogue between generations is essential. Families, schools, and community organizations can create forums where the perspectives of young and older members are heard and negotiated. [34] **(Turkle, 2011, p205)**

## Flexible Socialization

Educational and socialization practices that incorporate flexibility, empathy, and active listening help younger generations develop skills to engage constructively with elders, and vice versa. [35] **(Freire, 1970, p72)**

## Technology as a Bridge

Technology can both generate and reduce conflict. Digital platforms allow knowledge transfer between generations : young people teach elders to navigate digital tools, while elders share experiential wisdom. This exchange fosters mutual respect. [36] **(Tapscott, 2009, p 134)**

## Cultural and Media Policies

Governmental and institutional policies that support inclusive media and cultural production help mitigate conflicts by highlighting shared values and creating spaces for intergenerational collaboration. [37] **(Castelles, 2009, p 2009)**

## Political and Social Inclusion

Integrating youth into decision-making processes and social programs reduces feelings of marginalization. Representation in politics, economic participation, and civil society strengthens generational bonds. [38] **(Bayat, 2010, p221)**

## Conclusion

Intergenerational conflict is a multifaceted social phenomenon that spans family, education, culture, economy, and politics. It reflects both the tensions and opportunities arising from differences in values, technological adoption, and social expectations between generations.

This study highlights that intergenerational conflict should not be perceived solely as a negative phenomenon threatening social cohesion. Rather, it represents a dynamic mechanism for renewing social values, encouraging innovation, and adapting cultural identity to contemporary challenges.

Effective management of intergenerational conflict relies on dialogue, flexible socialization practices, technological literacy, cultural policies, and political inclusion. When appropriately addressed, the generational gap can transform into a source of creativity, mutual learning, and societal resilience.

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