Tomorrow's Affairs

Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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#WWIII – How is Generation Z turning global conflict into digital resistance?

The "WWIII" trend on the X network, formerly Twitter, has not only attracted the attention of the media and analysts in recent days but has also raised a much deeper question about the attitude of the younger generations to the crises of the present.

The hashtag #WWIII, which dominated global trends during the Israeli-Iranian attacks and counter-attacks, was neither a manifestation of political activism nor a call for peace. It was an avalanche of memes, ironic commentaries, TikTok videos and jokes that ranged from grotesquely cynical to self-deprecating, all in an atmosphere of general uncertainty.

Gen Z is neither indifferent nor uninformed. Their reaction is deliberate, digitally sophisticated and deeply political, even if many do not yet realise it.

Although this phenomenon is not new, its expression has never been more convincing. At a time when global instability is turning into the real possibility of a major conflict, the youngest generation is choosing to respond with humour, irony and the aesthetics of the absurd.

It is a generation that has grown up with news about terrorist attacks, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, climate catastrophes, pandemics, inflation, and social divisions. For them, constant uncertainty is the norm rather than the exception.

A new language of political expression

In such a context, digital irony becomes a way of coping with reality. When Generation Z posts a video of themselves "hiding from the draft" or creates a collage of potential World War III uniforms, it's not just an attempt to have fun. It is an emotional and political reaction. It reflects a mistrust of institutions, of the ability of political elites to avoid conflict, and of the idea that war has any meaning.

Many analysts see this as a superficial reaction

or a lack of seriousness. However, digital culture has become a new language of political expression, especially for those who have no direct power to influence the course of events.

In this language, humour is not an escape from reality but a way of exposing it. When war is used as a subject for jokes, it is also the outcry of a generation that does not want to take part in another power game in which there is no place for their lives, their plans, or their future.

Generation Z does not believe that the political systems will protect their interests. They do not believe that the institutions know what they are doing. Their reaction is to ridicule reality, to show the absurd exactly where others try to maintain seriousness.

> The digital sphere is no longer just a reflection of reality but its active form

The fact that #WWIII became a trend in over 20 countries within 48 hours speaks to a broader phenomenon. The digital sphere is no longer just a reflection of reality but its active form. Narratives, moods and attitudes are shaped there.

Paradoxically, a political battle is taking place there between the generations that have control over the institutions and the generations that have control over the language of the internet. This division is not without consequences.

When governments consider reintroducing conscription, as is the case in the UK and the US, their message is met with a wall of ridicule. Instead of a patriotic response, there is a video of someone dancing to the sound of an alarm siren.

This reaction is a symptom of a deeper political and psychological change. When traditional political institutions fail to establish a dialogue with the youngest voters, it is not just a communication problem. It is a crisis of legitimacy.

If young people believe that the only way to save themselves from war is to make it the object of ridicule, it means that the political system no longer offers rational protection. Behind this irony lies existential fear.

A meme with 10 million views is not just funny

What makes the situation even more complicated is the role of digital platforms. TikTok, X, Instagram and other networks are not neutral communication channels. They function as attention filtering systems in which political and military narratives are transformed into content for algorithmic consumption.

If a meme about the nuclear disaster gets 10 million views, it doesn't just mean it's funny. It means that it has taken the pulse of a generation, that it has expressed what millions are thinking but don't know how to say.
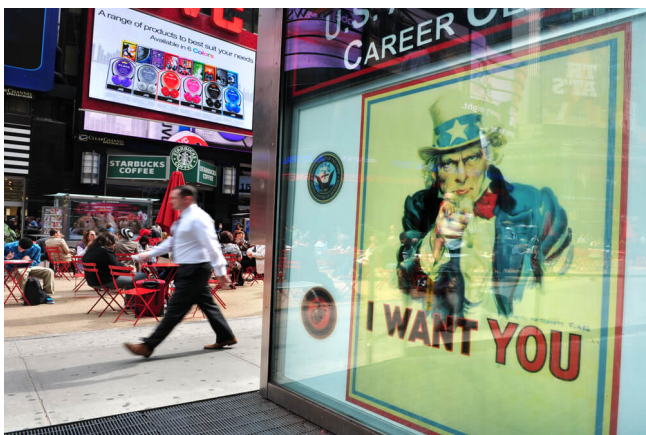
Generation Z will not go to war because politicians tell them to. Their battle will be fought on screen

This is a serious challenge for the political elites. There is no easy way to reach a generation that has grown up with systemic crises, does not believe in promises, and knows that information can be both a weapon and a tool of manipulation.

Traditional campaigns, television speeches, and patriotism in schools no longer work. Instead, digital reality is forcing new forms of political expression, where satire and memes have become legitimate forms of political

stance.

In the coming months, as tensions rise between Iran and Israel and more countries become embroiled in diplomatic and military calculations, it will be crucial to observe how young people will behave in countries that are reconsidering their own position in the conflict.

Will irony be a covert form of resistance? Or will it develop into a genuine political mobilisation? Will governments realise that communication can no longer be done through announcements but in a language that Gen Z understands and uses?

Either way, the #WWIII trend is not just a passing fad. It is a symptom, but also a signal. Generation Z will not go to war because politicians tell them to. Their battle will be fought on screen, in digital communities, in ironic songs and in filters that move tanks in video game landscapes.

If the world really is entering a new great destabilisation, it will not be enough to mobilise armies. Understanding will also have to be mobilised. Because without it, a state can exist, but it will not have people who believe that it makes sense for them.