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The digital World and the media preferences of Generation Z

Introduction

Representatives of Generation Z are young people born between 1996 and 2010, also referred to as *digital natives*. This is a generation that has grown up immersed in the internet, mobile technology, and social media (Cajhamlová 2017). They grew up in a virtual world – an internet and mobile environment – and are therefore often critically labelled by society as “living outside of reality”, disconnected from the social events taking place “live”. The public perception of this generation, made up of other, predominantly older age groups, is that their reality takes place predominantly in the “digital world”, which may condition their behaviour to be largely shaped by the form of digital content with which they are in almost constant contact. In this virtual space, they communicate, entertain, educate, spend their leisure time, etc. “Life behind the screen” allows them to express their opinions and attitudes – in secrecy, anonymously, and similarly their socialisation takes place – often impersonal conversations without deeper knowledge of the people “on the other side”, with whom they are most often connected via Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok... (Berg 2020).

The authors McCrindle & Fell (2019) refer to Generation Z (henceforth Gen Z) as digital integrators because they have seamlessly integrated modern technology into their lives. Having used it from a very young age, it is almost like the air they breathe, permeating all areas of their lifestyles and relationships. According to the authors, Generation Z is the most materially equipped, technologically saturated, and formally educated generation ever. It is the first generation that is truly global – in addition to music, movies, or celebrities, their everyday, “lived culture” consists of global fashion, food, online entertainment, social trends, communication, videos – so-called memes, etc. It is also interesting to note that members of this generation, more than any other generation, are connected to and shaped by their peers.

Generations Y and Z have almost twice as many friends as older generations – especially in the online social media environment. Thanks to digital platforms, they are globally connected to a multitude of people who influence them around the clock – 24/7 – regardless of geographic borders or socio-cultural constraints.

The media habits of Generation Z have been at the forefront of much research, particularly with an emphasis on their specific position as the first generation to grow up with a smartphone in hand and unlimited access to online content (Waalkes 2023). This generation is characterized by high levels of multitasking and a preference for visual and interactive content over traditional text-based formats (Eddy 2022). For example, in the area of getting information about world events, a number of international studies on “Gen Z” media behaviour (see Pew Research Center – Generation Z section) suggest that young people today do not see news as a separate category of media content, but as part of a broader infotainment stream that they are exposed to on social media. Many of these messages arrive unplanned, as part of personalized algorithmic recommendations, fundamentally changing the way young people form their image of the world (Mascheroni & Ólafsson 2014). Importantly, in the context of media literacy, while this generation exhibits high technological competence, they also face challenges associated with assessing the credibility of sources (Ofcom 2023). While older generations retain trust in traditional media, Generation Z is often sceptical of traditional media and tends to trust peer-to-peer content and influencers (Eddy 2022).

Also, because of these aspects, we consider it extremely important to further investigate the media behaviour of Generation Z, as it is the way they consume, interpret, and disseminate media content that influences not only their individual attitudes, values, and behaviour, but also broader social trends and cultural norms. Thanks to their digital competence, Generation Z not only receives but also actively co-creates the media space, but their media preferences and ways of interacting with content have a direct impact on the shaping of public opinion, the selection and dissemination of information, and how current and future

social realities are constructed today. It is also specific to the characterisation of this generation that, although it is one generation, the media behaviour of its individual members can vary considerably due to the variety of media available and the ever-changing technological offerings that shape individual preferences, habits, and styles of content consumption. Understanding the media habits of this generation is therefore crucial for the media, content creators, educational institutions, and public policy makers, who need to reflect the new ways of communicating and the changing expectations of young audiences. The aim of the present study is, through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a dataset obtained through a questionnaire survey, to identify the current preferences and modes of interaction of Generation Z with the media, which will provide valuable insights into the current trends in communication, culture, and social participation of this generation in the digital age.

Methodology

The research was conducted during the summer semester of the 2024 academic year at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at UCM in Trnava. The target group consisted of first-year bachelor's students ($N = 108$) of the subject "Psychology and Sociology of Communication", who represent the typical age group of Generation Z. Data collection was carried out using a standardized anonymous online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms (conducted during face-to-face teaching). We justify the choice by the assumption that, since they are first-year students of mass media studies, although they are interested in media, their media perception and behavior are not yet influenced by the studies, and thus that primary media stereotypes are still preserved. In terms of demographics, we report that of the total number of participating students, 57.4% (62 people) live in urban areas and 42.6% (46 people) live in rural areas. The largest number of students comes from the Žilina region – 19.4% (21 people), followed by the Prešov region (17.6% – 19 people), then the Trenčín region (16.7% – 18 people), the Banská Bystrica region (15.7% – 17 people), the Trnava region (13% – 14 people), the Košice region (9.3% – 10 people), and the Nitra and Bratislava regions had the smallest number of students, which did not exceed 5% of the total number of respondents. One student comes from the Moscow region. In terms of age average, the most widespread category was 21-year-olds – a total of 46 students (42.6%); the second most prominent was the category of 20-year-olds – 45 students (41.7%); there were a total of 14 students older than 21 (13%) and one student was 19 years old. In terms of gender, females dominated with a total of 77 (71.3%) and males 31 (28.7%).

The questionnaire contained approximately 20 questions – a combination of closed (single-choice, multiple-choice) and semi-open questions. It

focused on the frequency and manner of media consumption (both traditional and digital), specifically the platforms and media that respondents follow, the credibility of the media and personalities, media habits (e.g., subscriptions, interaction with news), and reflection on their own media preferences (qualitative responses). In terms of the scales used, it mainly included the following: the Likert scale (1 - 4) to express the degree of agreement with statements (e.g., trust in the media), frequency scales (e.g., daily, several times a week, once a week, etc.), and selection scales to indicate preferred media, platforms, formats, and personalities. The primary analytical procedures used here are: quantitative analysis – based on the calculation of absolute and relative frequencies (in %), qualitative analysis – using thematic coding of responses to open-ended questions (e.g., reasons for the popularity of media personalities). The data were processed in Excel and Google Forms.

The main limitations of the research include the fact that the sample was purposeful and limited to one university institution; however, as these are future experts in the media field, a higher level of orientation in the media environment was expected. Another limitation is that female respondents predominated (more than 70%), which may influence certain statements (e.g., in relation to preferred formats and personalities). Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the entire Generation Z population, but represent a probe into the media behavior of one specific group – young adults with a profile in media studies.

We declare the results in individual sections, in which we specifically define the media behaviour of Generation Z. These components of the empirical part of the study cluster specific manifestations of media behaviour into key areas that are crucial for identifying relevant differences in generational media behaviour. These sections are:

1. Media viewing (what media are they watching, how often, and why);
2. The economics of media viewing (ownership of media technologies, relationship to monetization of media content (willingness to pay for media content));
3. The focus of the content they are pursuing (what topics are dominant, what needs are they fulfilling – informational, entertainment, educational...);
4. Popular content and formats.

Results

a) Gen Z media activities

The results of a questionnaire survey of 2024 mass media communication students highlight the diverse range of media activities they engage in as

representatives of Generation Z. The data reveal that the most frequently cited activity is **photography**, in which 23% of students are interested, either professionally or in their leisure time (representing 34 respondents out of 108 respondents).

Similarly, another (audio)visual activity – **video production** (production and post-production) – is also highly attractive, which was indicated by 21% of respondents (31 students out of a total of 108), which confirms the preference for multimedia format as a tool for both expressing and processing information. Videos are also the dominant format on platforms such as Tik-Tok, Instagram, and YouTube, which are among the most used information and entertainment resources of Generation Z. These percentages confirm assumptions and previous research pointing to the strong visual orientation of this generation, as well as the availability of mobile technologies that make this form of creation significantly easier and more accessible.

Creating graphics for different types of media (web, magazine, advertising...) was mentioned by 16% of respondents (24 out of 108 students surveyed), which indicates an interest in the aesthetic and visual aspects of media production. **Text production** (represented by writing or editing articles), as one of the basic media skills, was less frequent in this section compared to digital skills, but it can be argued that it is still present in a relatively high representation – 13% (representing 20 out of 108 students surveyed). This figure supports the hypothesis of the declining importance of textual content among young users who prefer quickly accessible, visual, and dynamic formats of information.

Activities such as **filmmaking**, **podcast** and **website production**, **advertising production**, etc., were less frequently represented, with **less than 10%** of the surveyed student population interested in these activities, which may indicate their higher technical difficulty or lower daily availability compared to photography or shooting short videos.

Within this section, it can be stated that the media activities of the selected research group of Generation Z representatives are strongly conditioned by the availability of technology, with an emphasis on visuality and interactivity and a shift from traditional text production to the creation of visual and audiovisual formats. This trend is consistent with international studies (e.g., Newman et al. 2023; Waalkes 2017) that highlight the dominance of short, visual, and dynamic content among young digital media users.

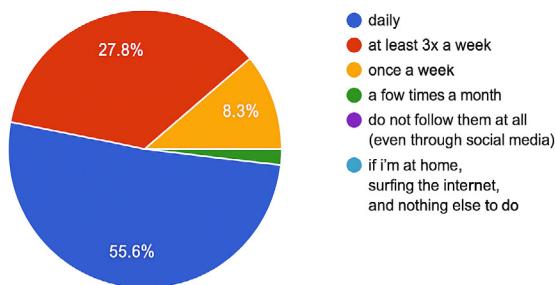
b) Media monitoring in Slovakia and abroad

In terms of the evaluation of the frequency of watching professional or informational media (news portals, web editorial offices, professional radio and television), we report that of the 108 students surveyed, **55.6% of respondents**

declare that they *watch professional media on a daily basis*. 27.8% watch these media *at least 3 times a week*, which confirms regular contact with information content even outside the school environment. Lower proportions have responses of *once a week* (8.3%) and *a few times a month* (7.4%), indicating a smaller but still present group of occasional consumers. Only 0.9% of respondents indicated that they watch media exclusively at the weekend when they are at home, and *no one* indicated a complete absence of viewing; see Chart 1.

Follow media (= news websites, newsrooms professional radio and television) (even just through social media)

108 responses



Graph 1.

Source: Primary data, 2024

The representatives of Generation Z who took part in our survey thus follow professional media *on a very regular basis*, and the results of the questionnaire survey indicate that the majority of Generation Z respondents have a pluralistic approach to professional media content – as many as 66.7% (72 respondents) said that they follow both *domestic and foreign media*, which points to the ability of young media users to search for and combine different information sources and allows them to capture a more comprehensive picture of social events. In the context of digital literacy, this trend can be seen as a positive manifestation of media diversification, which can increase the ability to think critically and confront views from different cultural or geopolitical backgrounds. In this categorization, watching *online news portals* dominated the news consumption, with 72.2% (78 of the students surveyed) using at least three times a week to get quality information about the events in society. In addition to online news, up to 62% (67) of students get information about what is happening in society *by listening to podcasts*, and 23.1% (25) through other *streaming services*.

Our research is consistent with the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2023, which finds that younger age groups prefer to access news through

“side-entrances” such as social media, search engines, or mobile aggregators. **Facebook remains one of the most used social networks overall**, they say, but its influence on journalism is declining, as it increasingly moves away from news. It is Facebook, for many years the most popular social platform, that is facing new challenges from established platforms such as YouTube and dynamic, youth-oriented networks such as Instagram and TikTok. According to Reuters (2023), this Chinese medium is used by up to **20% of respondents to get news**. TikTok is experiencing the fastest growth in the Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America regions. A significant finding is that audiences on TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat pay more attention to celebrities, influencers, and social media personalities than to journalists themselves when consuming news.

In our survey, approximately one third – **30.6% of respondents** (33 students in total) – stated that they watch **only Slovak media**, while **41.7%** (45 students) watch **commercial Slovak TV stations** and **37%** (40 students) listen to **Slovak commercial radio stations**. Additionally, **21.3%** (23 students) watch **public television**, and **10.2%** (11 students) listen to Slovak **public radio stations**. This behaviour may result, for example, from a preference for easier language comprehensibility, localized content, or habitual (“learned”) media behaviour, customs, etc. Within this categorisation, we see room for the development of global media literacy, e.g., through educational modules or comparative journalism projects, etc.

In terms of specific Slovak sources of obtaining information about what is happening in the company, the most frequently mentioned were **Refresher**, **Startitup**, **Interez**¹ – **20%.** **Apparent preference for visual, short, informal, and lifestyle-oriented news formats**, which, however, also cover politics, culture, economy, and other socially important topics. These platforms are well **adapted to social media, and their form of processing** (short one or two-sentence formulations capturing the essence of the information) corresponds to the communication habits of Generation Z. The next most used sources for obtaining “world knowledge” were **Aktuality.sk** – **11%**, **Denník N** – **7%** and

¹ Refresher – a modern online magazine aimed at the young generation, combining lifestyle, pop culture, fashion, social events and news. It features visually appealing, dynamic content adapted to a social media format. Refresher emphasizes trends, entertainment, interviews with influencers and also covers current social topics in an attractive and informal way, which has gained it a strong popularity among Generation Z. Startitup – Slovak online portal focused on entrepreneurship, startups, innovation, technology trends and lifestyle. It combines economic and social topics with a modern, simple and visually appealing design, thanks to which it appeals mainly to young, active people interested in new trends and business opportunities. Interez – Slovak online magazine focused on fun, curious, travel and social topics, combining articles on nature, psychology, culture and current events. It is especially popular for fast, engaging and humanly crafted articles accessible to a wide audience.

SME - 8%², which indicates that traditional, established news portals are also of interest. A relatively surprising finding is that although these were media studies students, these media do not represent the main information authority for this group. On the other hand, their continued use points to the continued **trust of some young users towards verified content**. The low percentage of interest may also be due to the more difficult accessibility for a wider group (e.g., due to the payment of subscriptions). Up to 7% of respondents declare **zero interest in socio-political events**, and **2% get information only from friends or family**. Traditional electronic media in Slovakia (TV JOJ, Markiza, STVR, TASR, TA3, or Express)³ make up **63.9%** of all **reported sources of information about socio-political events** among respondents. This figure significantly corrects previous estimates and shows that despite digitalization, members of Generation Z, who prefer Slovak media, still trust established media to a large extent – but often through their online versions, social networks, or video formats.

When it comes to getting information about the world from foreign sources, only **2.8%** of respondents (3 students) prefer **foreign media** exclusively. The above (dis)interest may be conditioned by the specific focus of these media – i.e., that they primarily bring information about foreign and

² Aktuality.sk – Slovak news portal, which profiles itself as a fast and up-to-date source of information. It covers a wide range of topics – from politics, economy, society to sports and lifestyle. It places a strong emphasis on investigative journalism and regular podcasts. Denník N – premium Slovak online media focused on quality, analytical and opinionated reporting. It was founded as an independent project after the departure of editors from the daily SME. It is known for its critical approach, explanatory texts, and emphasis on the values of democracy and the rule of law. It is also strongly oriented towards a younger, more educated audience. SME – traditional Slovak media, originally a daily newspaper, today also a popular online portal. It provides balanced news, commentary, analysis and journalism. Emphasises both topicality and deeper connections. After the transition to a digital model, it offers content in a combination of freely available and premium (paid) articles.

³ TV JOJ – Slovak commercial television with a strong emphasis on entertainment, reality shows, series, but also news. Its content is easily accessible and often tailored to a wide audience. TV Markiza – the largest Slovak commercial television, the market leader. In addition to entertainment and series, it also offers news programmes. It also invests heavily in online platforms such as VYO. STVR (Slovak Television and Radio) - public television, provides balanced news, cultural programmes and educational content. It focuses on the public interest but faces the challenges of modernisation. TASR – The Press Agency of the Slovak Republic, a state-owned agency that provides fast, factual and reliable news to the media, the public and institutions. It is an essential source of information, but is not directly consumer-oriented. TA3 – Slovak private news television with 24-hour broadcasting. It specialises in news, analysis and journalism. It reaches a more targeted audience interested in politics, economics and social events. Radio Express – commercial radio, the leader in listenership. Primarily offers music and entertainment content, short news bulletins and traffic service. It is popular for its accessibility and simple format, suitable for 'background' listening.

international events, which is interesting for this generation only in terms of the overall trend of globalization, or the worldwide interconnection of society.

Of the respondents who regularly (at least three times a week) “consume” print media, **13.9%** (15 respondents) reported ***tabloids***, **9.3%** (10 respondents) reported ***lifestyle magazines***, **6.5%** (7 respondents) reported ***professional magazines***, and only **4.6%** (5 respondents) reported ***print newspapers***. These low percentages indicate a ***significant decline in the importance of periodicals*** for the younger generation. Compared to digital formats (e.g., online news or podcasts), print and specialized periodicals appear less attractive – probably due to their physical form, periodicity, more difficult accessibility (they have to be bought in a brick-and-mortar store), or the absence of an interactive element. However, it is interesting to note the ***slightly higher proportion*** for ***tabloid newspapers (13.9%)***, which may be attractive to Gen Z due to their production of sensational content and often visually processed information. This suggests that a proportion of Gen Z students surveyed tend to gravitate towards media with a ***lower level of newsworthiness but higher entertainment value***. The significantly ***low values for professional and lifestyle magazines*** may indicate the need for new forms of distribution and communication of professional content, e.g., through digital formats, to better match the media habits of this generation. The data also support the assumptions that Generation Z is moving away from traditional print media and preferring digital, visual, and mobile forms of news and entertainment. In the context of media content creation, this poses a challenge for traditional publishers, who are increasingly adapting their content and distribution strategies to appeal to young audiences.

These values are also ***in line with trends captured in foreign research***. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Fletcher & Nielsen 2023), print reading among young respondents is declining across countries, with only a stronger interest in digital versions of traditional titles. In countries such as the UK, the US, and Spain, regular reading of print newspapers among under-25s is below 5%, which is almost identical to the findings in this study. Similarly, Pew Research Center (2019) notes a decline in interest in traditional print media among US teens and young adults, who largely prefer ***quickly accessible and personalized digital content*** (e.g., news via social media or mobile notifications)

There were also interesting findings from Ofcom research (2023), which reported that British teenagers often perceive print media as ***slow, not interactive enough, and less relevant to their lifestyles***. It is therefore marginalized in young people’s personal media routines.

Within the assessment of the category of media viewing, three students (2.8%) reported that they ***do not watch media at all***. It can be argued that this insignificant number indicates the general interest of Generation Z in quality media content. Rarer answers, such as “I watch both, but not very often” or

“I rarely watch both domestic and foreign media”, occurred in only 0.9% of cases (1 student in each category).

c) Popularity of media and media personalities

Respondents' preferences show not only which media and personalities are most attractive to Generation Z, but also what features and formats they consider important when choosing media content. We therefore discuss the survey results in detail in the following sections, where we look at specific media and personalities in the daily media routine of Gen Z representatives.

Preferences of specific Slovak media among Generation Z

The results of the research show that the selected group of young people representing Generation Z is heavily oriented towards online and commercial sources of information. The most frequently mentioned media that the selected respondents (108 students of Mass Media Communication) follow on a regular basis (at least 3 times a week) were:⁴

- *Refresher, Startitup, Interez* - 49 respondents (16%),
- *TV Markíza* - 47 respondents (16%),
- *TV JOJ and Aktuality.sk* - 25 responses (8%), and
- *STVR and Denník N* - 22 responses (7%).

Based on these findings, we reflect on several key trends:

1. Dominance of online magazines

Platforms such as Refresher, Startitup, or Interez are among the most frequently “consumed” resources. Their journalistic formats and mode of communication meet the demand of Generation Z for fast, unpretentious, and visually appealing content. These media outlets focus on a mix of lifestyle, social events, and pop culture. Similarly, Aktuality.sk is of interest to a select group of Generation Z (25 students - 8%), probably due to its digital and podcast forms of content presentation. Denník N (22 students - 7%) is also a favourite media among young people, which, in addition to the main website, shares its content on social media to a great extent. Internationally, this is a similar trend to following Buzzfeed or Vice⁵ among young people in the US and UK (see Pew Research Center, 2019).

⁴ Students also gave multiple examples of media within a single answer.

⁵ Both try to tackle complex topics in a simple, accessible and often visual way, with an emphasis on what is close to young people – authentic, short, engaging, personalised

2. Strong position of commercial

Despite the growing popularity of VOD platforms⁶, TV Markíza (the most popular Slovak commercial television) and TV JOJ still maintain a strong position in the minds of young audiences. This may be due to their predominantly entertainment nature, secondary consumption of content via the VOYO platform and social media (through online clips, Instagram Reels, YouTube, and TikTok formats). or passive viewing of these stations at home (TV running as a backdrop throughout the day). Conversely, the public service medium STVR scored lower (16 responses, 5%), which may reflect its low appeal and weaker adaptation to the preferences and needs of this generation.

In comparison with foreign research, we observe a significantly lower interest in watching linear television. In the UK, for example, up to 48% of 16–24 year-olds still watch traditional TV regularly (weekly) (although there has been a significant decline from 76% in 2018). However, they pay a lot of attention to streaming platforms – up to 93% of 16–24 year-olds watch a video on a streaming platform on average once a week. Ian Macrae, Ofcom's director of market intelligence, said that Generation Z and Alpha are used to swiping and streaming, not viewing broadcast TV channels. They crave the flexibility, immediacy, and choice offered by on-demand services, spending more than three hours a day watching video but only 20 minutes watching live TV (Craggs Mersinoglu 2024; Davies 2024).

3. Low viewership of traditional and reputable media

Hospodárske noviny, daily Pravda⁷, or SME recorded a relatively low viewership, which did not exceed 16%. These are traditional media outlets that may have moved their content to the web, but the way it is presented often requires a higher level of attention and analytical reading – which may contrast with the preference for short and visual content among Generation Z. A similar trend was noted in a Reuters Institute study (2023), which shows a declining interest among young people in “serious” media unless it is also available in audio-visual or abbreviated form.

content that is easily shareable on social media, often alternative topics, formats close to documentary journalism, etc.

⁶ Video on Demand – VOD represents video distribution where the user chooses what content to consume, when to consume it and on what platform (Sabo, 2020).

⁷ Hospodárske noviny – serious media focused on economy, business and finance, oriented to professional and business public. Denník Pravda – a traditional Slovak daily with general news coverage, addressing mainly the middle and older generation, rather more conservative.

4. Radio and podcasts as additional sources

Nowadays, radio is perceived as an ambient medium – it is listened to as a “supplement” during other activities (e.g., in traffic, in a doctor’s waiting room, while doing housework, etc.). This hybrid mode of consumption (so-called media multitasking) is also typical for Generation Z. Our survey showed that respondents listen to linear radio broadcasts only minimally. Radio Express – the most listened-to public radio – is followed by 7% of students (20), Fun Radio by 4% (11 students), and the youth radio Europe 2 by only 3% (10 students). Their broadcasts are mediated by entertainment and music broadcast formats; sometimes they present short news blocks or interviews, also offered in the form of podcasts, which are popular with the youth of today. Public radio broadcasting was not mentioned by any student.

Popular media formats

The genre preferred by young people is the **interview or talk show – 17.6%**. These are interactive, often informal programmes that are either visually or personally appealing. They are often podcasts, videocasts, or YouTube shows that Gen Z likes to tailor to the topic or guests. Another preferred format is **news – 13%** – which still plays a significant role in young people’s media orientation, especially if it is presented concisely and visually. **Talk shows are also preferred by 13% of respondents.** The above findings suggest that a section of Gen Z is interested in in-depth treatment of topics. **Music shows are equally sought out by 13%** of respondents, confirming that music remains an important part of young people’s media environment, often coming from Spotify, YouTube, or other streaming platforms. **Publicity and educational shows (9.3%)** and other categories or genres – such as **documentary, entertainment show, sports**, etc. – did not exceed 9% interest.

Generation Z therefore prefers formats that are interactive, personal, and flexible – such as talk shows, interviews, and debates. Traditional news and education formats are relevant to them if they are adapted to their digital habits (short clips, streaming, podcasts). However, the results support the thesis that form is as important as content for young viewers.

Frequency of viewing electronic media

32.4% (35 students) said they **watch media such as TV and radio mostly through archive or streaming platforms**, indicating that Generation Z is moving away from a linear viewing model and **prefers to choose their own viewing time.** **23.1%** – watch media mostly at **specific times**, which may be related to daily routine, family environment, or habit (e.g., **14.8% watch electronic**

media exclusively through archives or streaming platforms. 17.6% of students reported that they **do not watch electronic media** at all, which confirms the trend towards social media, distrust of traditional media, and disinterest in those formats. These findings point to an increase in the **importance of archive platforms** (e.g., VOYO, STVR.sk, iRozhlas, Spotify, YouTube), highlighting **hybrid media behaviour** – young people combine “traditional” linear radio and TV viewing with the use of archives and streaming services. Traditional linear broadcasting is declining in interest, but is not disappearing completely – it retains part of its audience, especially if it offers trust or ritual (e.g., 7pm news, etc.). **A third of young people completely ignore traditional media**, which is a warning sign for both public and commercial media that fail to reach this generation through traditional linear channels.

Also interesting is the proportion of respondents who indicated that they do not follow the media at all – **10 responses (3% of students)** – or indicated **others** (11 responses – 4%), which may indicate either lower trust in “well-known brands” or a preference for **non-standard platforms** (e.g., specific podcasts, YouTubers, alternative blogs...).

The results again confirm that Generation Z selectively chooses media that are: digital, hybrid – entertainment and news, dynamic, easily accessible via smartphone, visual and interactive, or community-oriented. Media that can communicate via mobile devices and are personalized and visually rich have a higher chance of being perceived as relevant by them. Traditional media and public service formats appear only marginally in their spectrum of interest, which poses a challenge for building trust and increasing the appeal of public content for this age group.

Favourite Slovak electronic media personalities

Adela Vinczeová (popular presenter of various TV and radio talk shows and entertainment formats appearing on both public and private television) – 21% – is perceived by respondents as likable, intelligent, witty, and educated. Vincze's appeal to young people stems from her authenticity, her ability to maintain a human yet refined expression, and her personal charm, which is particularly valued in a digital world where authenticity plays a big role.

Marcel Merčiak (sports presenter and commentator – especially football; presenter of an entertainment competition show on public television) – 5% – is characterized by students as well-read, prompt, and professional in expression. He is valued especially for his competence and responsiveness, which is important for a generation accustomed to a fast flow of information and a dynamic communication style.

Michal Kovačič (host of a TV political discussion show on private television) – 4% – is perceived as professional, firm, strict, well-read, and intelligent.

His emphasis on direct and rigorous communication is perceived positively, especially in the context of seeking credible and clearly articulated news.

Braňo Závadský (host of a private radio political discussion show) – 3% – is rated as straightforward and interesting, mainly due to his ability to ask pertinent questions.

Ján Mečiar; Junior and Marcel; Becca (presenters of private radios and television) – 2% – valued more for their professional demeanor, wit, likability, and naturalness, which are qualities corresponding to the Generation Z's demand for informal and relaxed communication.

The results show that the attractiveness of presenters to members of Gen Z is not only about their popularity, but also about specific personality traits: **intelligence, authenticity, professionalism, or the ability to communicate in a prompt and interesting way**. Young people value **human yet professional speech, sincerity, and relaxedness** instead of mechanical and informationally empty appearances. This trend is confirmed by the findings of foreign studies on Gen Z preferences in the media environment.

Responses from international “youth” included media personalities such as: **Anderson Cooper** (CNN) – professional, empathetic, authentic speech, open about his private life; **Christiane Amanpour** (CNN International) – strong values, experience in field reporting, respect in foreign affairs; **Trevor Noah** (former host of The Daily Show) – ability to blend news with humor and critique of society, close to informal speech; **Laura Kuenssberg** (BBC) – trusted news correspondent, ability to explain complex political topics in simple terms; **Rachel Maddow** (MSNBC) – critical thinking, open-minded, and ability to analyze complex events for young audiences (Faverio & Sidoti 2024; Fletcher & Nielsen 2023).

Czech News Center (CNC) is trying to reach younger audiences through the TikTok platform. As part of this initiative, young influencers from Gen Z – **Johana Bázlerová, Sofie Najmanová**, and others – covering topics such as MMA and Formula 1, and a TikTok channel for iSports.cz has been created. This approach has led to a significant increase in viewership and engagement with young viewers (MediaGuru 2021; Kadlecová n.d.).

Similarly to the popularity of media personalities in Slovakia, foreign presenters are attractive to young viewers **because of their professionalism, as well as their informality and naturalness, credibility, ability to communicate complex topics clearly, openness to different opinions, and motivation to engage in discussion**.

Foreign media in the media routine of Generation Z

In contrast to the relatively high frequency of consumption of domestic media, only a minority of respondents regularly (at least 3 times a week)

watch foreign news portals, television, or periodicals. Of the 108 research participants, as many as 59 (49%) reported that they do not watch foreign media at all. The reason for this may be, for example, language barriers or cultural distance in the perception of such content.

The most frequently monitored foreign media were:

- **BBC** – 23 respondents (19%);
- **CNN and The New York Times** – 7 responses each (6%);
- **The Guardian** – 5 respondents (4%);
- **Vogue** – 4 respondents (3%);
- brands such as **The Times, Prima, ESPN, CT, Refresher CZ**, and others are at the level of 2-3 answers.

This data shows that even across the foreign media spectrum, Generation Z is particularly focused on brands that have strong online content, credibility, and global reach – such as the BBC, NYT, and The Guardian. Vogue and similar “magazine brands” appear as a complementary, lifestyle-oriented source – used for their visual and prestige value rather than for their analytical or educational function. The low level of interest in Czech media (Refresher CZ, CT, Prima) suggests that language proximity is no longer a guarantee of media savvy for Gen Z.

While the most followed Slovak media (Refresher, Markíza, JOJ, Aktuality.sk) reach 20–50 responses of interest, foreign media in most cases are well below the threshold of 10 respondents. The only exception is the BBC – probably due to its global reputation and the availability of short, simple formats suitable for young users. Compared to the studies cited by the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2023), which show that young Europeans are increasingly following foreign portals (especially via Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube Shorts), respondents from Slovakia show lower levels of “media internationalisation”. This may be due, for example, to less language practice, a still underdeveloped habit of following international news and journalistic content, or a preference for more easily accessible and localized content.

Popular social media

By far **the most popular platform** among respondents is **Instagram – 72.2%**. This indicates a preference for visual, quick, and interactive content. At the same time, Instagram serves not only as a source of entertainment for them but also as a source of information, news, and trends, reflecting a change in the way news is consumed. **The second most popular social media platform is TikTok at 23.1%**, whose popularity is growing mainly due to its short video format and content personalization algorithm. This platform plays an important role in disseminating both information and opinions, but often outside of traditional news frameworks. Other (older) platforms – such as **Twitter**,

Facebook, Spotify, Reddit, LinkedIn, and Pokec – are already losing popularity with Gen Z. Fewer than 2% of students use each of these, suggesting that these “classic social media” platforms are not attractive enough to young people.

We were interested in the reasons for the preference of each social media and what is attractive about them. Respondents mentioned the following:

1. **“Tailored content” – 31% (48 respondents)** – the most common reason for choice, pointing to the **intense need for personalisation of content** – social media algorithms that offer what the user expects and searches for are key. This aspect is closely related to the **selective reception of information** and the **so-called communication bubble effect**, and also explains the popularity of Instagram or TikTok.
2. **“Network popularity and social connectedness” – 17% (27 responses)** – popularity of the medium because “everyone else” is there – friends, followers, or creators. This points to the **social motivation to be part of a community and not miss out on trends**.
3. **“Fast information feed” – 17% (26 responses)** – platforms also serve as **an information source**, especially in a quick, short, and visual form, such as **news content**, which is consumed **passively, as part of the so-called feed**, and not through traditional portals.
4. **“Variety of platform options” – 16% (24 responses)** – the platform offers features such as stories, reels, livestreams, news, and more. The platform’s **dynamism and multimodality** add to its appeal.
5. **“Entertainment” – 8%** – remains important, but much less so than, e.g., content personalisation.
6. **“Work, clarity, design” – up 3%.**

In terms of intention to use the above social media, students most frequently responded as follows:

- **“Relax, have fun, watch videos” – 32% (45 students)** – the most common reason for using social media is the need to relax and have fun. This confirms the trend that Generation Z prefers quick, visual, and entertaining content (e.g., TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts).
- **“Chatting, communicating” – 27% (38)** – social media is a powerful communication channel for young people, mainly used to keep in touch with friends and family.
- **“Getting information about socio-political events” – 17% (24)** – as we have mentioned several times in this study, social media is an important source of news and social information, especially because of the dynamic and visually engaging way it is presented.
- **“Killing time and inspiration” – 13% (18)** – young people look to social media for ideas and motivation, whether in lifestyle, fashion, education, or career. However, the same percentage have no specific

intention of using the platforms. Their activity tends to be automated, with no deeper motivation.

- **“Work and add own content” - 8% (12)** - a smaller but still significant proportion of respondents use platforms for active content creation (e.g., video creation, blogging, profile management) - see more in subsection “Gen Z media activities”.

These findings confirm that Gen Z uses social media not only for entertainment, but also for gathering information and actively participating in the creation of its content, etc. At the same time, it reveals a diversified use of social platforms, dominated by multimedia content consumption, instant communication, and information seeking tailored to personal interests.

Some members of Generation Z living and studying in Slovakia spend most of their time on visual and short-form platforms, which significantly influences their media habits. Their media consumption is shifting from passive viewing to active selection of content according to their own interest, functionality, or aesthetics. This has implications for media creators who must adapt both the format and distribution of content for social networks, particularly Instagram and TikTok, if they want to reach this generation. For Generation Z, social media is not just a tool for entertainment, but also **a space for personalized, informational, and social “service”**. Platforms that can offer **relevant content, flexibility, and connectivity to the community** clearly have a higher chance of retaining their attention and regular usage.

The results of our survey are confirmed by GWI’s recent extensive online research, which analyzed trends in internet and media usage in seven key markets in the Central & Eastern Europe (CEE) region: Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. Like us, they found that more and more consumers in the Central & Eastern Europe (CEE) region are using social media to stay informed about events and current affairs. Although the platforms used vary from person to person, trust in traditional media is declining, and consumers are looking for new ways to stay informed (Macsim, 2024). Similar trends are shown in a 2024 Pew Research Center survey of 1,391 U.S. teens to better understand how teens use digital devices, social media, and other online platforms. The research found that youth use **YouTube (90% of those surveyed)** ranked first, followed by **TikTok (63%)**, **Instagram (61%)**, and **Snapchat (55%)** (Faverio & Sidoti 2024). The survey also confirmed our finding that **the use of Facebook and Platform X has declined sharply over the past decade**.

Similarly, the findings of the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023 highlight a decline in engagement on traditional networks such as Facebook, X, and, conversely, the growing importance of TikTok and other video-oriented platforms. Despite the increasing fragmentation of channels and public concern about misinformation and algorithms reaching record levels,

young people's reliance on these intermediaries continues to grow. Newman (2023) attributes this phenomenon largely to the fact that Gen Z grew up with social media, which today pays particular attention to influencers or celebrities (even in the realm of news coverage).

d) Media ownership: individualization, sharing, and subscription

The results of the survey yielded findings that 80 students **individually own a smartphone**, 28 students individually own a TV, and 78 students have their own laptop. Regarding radio ownership, only 20 of the respondents independently own and use a radio. Based on these findings, we can talk about Generation Z's move towards media autonomy – individual devices are common, leading to personal content selection. Radio is a little-used medium among Generation Z, and its function is moving more to the background (passive, not active medium).

Subscription

Streaming TV services were the most represented subscription category, followed by podcasts, cable TV, news portals, etc. Students could choose from multiple options in this section, so we received a total of 138 responses (from the questionnaire).

Streaming TV – This type of media service is used by the highest percentage of students surveyed (52) – 37.7%, with Netflix being the most popular (21% of 108 students subscribe separately), followed by VOYO (6%), Disney+ (4%), and HBO Max and Apple TV (3% each). These data confirm the growing trend of young people moving to **streaming TV platforms**.

Podcast services – 44 students (32%) – are popular with Generation Z because they offer flexibility (listen anywhere, anytime), personalized content based on interests, and informal and authentic communication that suits them better than formal messages. Moreover, they appear more trustworthy than traditional media and allow for easier multitasking in everyday life (Reuters Institute 2023; GWI 2024).

Cable TV – in terms of individual subscriptions to this service, the percentage is very low – only 21 students (6.6%). These results also confirm the above-mentioned considerations that **cable TV is still part of households**, but it is no longer the preferred medium of the younger generation, which is more oriented towards the Internet and streaming.

Online news media – in this category, only 16 students use **subscriptions (approximately 5%)**, while the following media are regularly subscribed: Denník N – 5%, Aktuality.sk – 3%, SME – 3%, Refresher/Startitup – 2%, other news media – 1-2%. Despite the fact that **Generation Z prefers online media**,

they are **not used to paying for it** (they do not invest in subscriptions to serious news sources). This confirms **the trend of “freemium”** models or seeking free content (e.g. via social media, YouTube...). The results correspond with the trend of young people using information available for free – especially from visual platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Compared to the willingness to invest in Spotify (27%) or Netflix (21%) subscriptions, investing in news media subscriptions lags significantly behind, indicating the low priority of information content in youth spending. These findings confirm that **news media have a limited appetite for monetization among young users**, which is a challenge to their sustainability in the digital environment. For media content creators, this means the need to look for **forms and opportunities to make news accessible to Gen Z** – e.g., through short formats, personalisation, and publishing on social platforms.

Print media – lowest percentage of students – only 4 respondents subscribe to print newspapers or magazines individually. These findings indicate a significant decline in interest in this type of media.

Generation Z subscribes to traditional media (linear TV, print) to a very low extent, but rather invests in digital content. Although online news is interesting to them as a format, they are not willing to pay for it, which confirms the trend of consuming it “free and fast”. Thus, this generation expects multimedia value at a low cost.

Discussion and conclusions

Generation Z represents the first group for whom the internet, mobile technology, and social media are a natural environment, a daily lived reality – not an add-on. Life “behind the screen” is an integral part of their identity, communication, education, leisure, and socialisation, which makes the traditional understanding of “media watching” as a separate activity for Gen Z dissolve. Media is “ubiquitous” in their world, consumed alongside other activities, often passively and while multitasking.

The results of our survey show that although **digital formats** dominate (Instagram, TikTok, podcasts), **traditional media** (TV Markíza, TV JOJ, Aktuality.sk) retain some relevance – especially content in digitally transformed form (clips, archives, posts, videos...). Generation Z does not reject traditional media as such, but it **demands a different way of their form and accessibility** – flexibility, interactivity, attractive visuals, or personalisation are key.

The most common reason for choosing media is the need for “bespoke content”. Personalized algorithmic feeds (Instagram, TikTok) are replacing traditional media agendas. The risk of this trend is the emergence of **“communication bubbles”** – Gen Z increasingly consumes content that confirms their

interests and opinions, **weakening the common information space**; “general news for all” is slowly losing its relevance for them.

Gen Z exhibits low trust in traditional media, but is also **critical of social media algorithms**. When covering news, it prefers **influencers, personalities, and informal communicators** over professional journalists (especially on TikTok, Instagram, but also in electronic media environments). **Trust in media personalities is tied to authenticity** rather than the media brand, and **new authorities** are content creators who communicate in a human, direct, and transparent way (examples of Adela Vincze, Anderson Cooper, etc.).

Although news is one of Gen Z’s most sought-after areas of media interest, in terms of media monetisation, only a small proportion of our survey participants subscribe to news media. Platforms that combine entertainment, information, and free accessibility are a priority. Thus, **information content** for them must be attractive not only in content but also in form and affordability (short videos, visual storytelling, gamification of content, freemium, micropayments, use of platforms like Patreon, etc.). The vast majority of respondents own their own smartphones and laptops, which allows for **individual and autonomous media consumption**. They do not rely on collective or family viewing of TV, radio, or streaming platforms.

For a more comprehensive interpretation, we still present the key starting points of the study: **digital immersion** – media and digital platforms are a natural part of Generation Z’s lives; **multiplatform** – parallel consumption of traditional and digital formats; **personalisation and selectivity** – choosing content based on personal preferences; **new forms of media authorities/personalities** – trust is directed towards authentic individuals, not verified brands or exaggerated respectability (as in the past); **hybrid media habits** – mix of passive and active viewing, multitasking; **free economy** – preference for free or minimally paid content.

The results of our research are consistent in many aspects with the findings of international studies. Similar to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al. 2023), Slovak Gen Z leaders prefer quick access to news via mobile apps and social networks. The preference for visually appealing and short content corresponds with trends noted in a Pew Research Center study (Anderson & Jiang 2019), where young Americans consume news predominantly through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. In discussing the media rituals of Gen Z, an interesting comparison can be made with the results of Mascheroni and Ólafsson (2014), who in their European study “Net Kids Go Mobile” point to the importance of personalized information streams, where algorithmic recommendations shape young people’s media behavior. We observe a similar trend among Slovak students, who declared that they follow the news most often through social media, where an algorithm adapts content to them based on previous searches, etc.

The results of our research confirm the trends described in international studies. Similar to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman et al. 2023), Slovak Gen Z representatives prefer to consume news content via social media and mobile apps. This shift from traditional to digital platforms is a global phenomenon that reflects technological change, but also broader changes in young people's lifestyles (Waalkes 2017).

In our research, it has also been shown that social networks not only convey messages, but also serve as a tool for their selection and interpretation. This phenomenon is well described in the European study "Net Kids Go Mobile" (Mascheroni & Ólafsson 2014), which highlights the importance of algorithmic recommendations in shaping the media habits of youth. Thus, young people do not perceive news as a separate category, but as part of a fluid infotainment stream. Interestingly, similar to Ofcom's (2023) UK research, young people in Slovakia show less trust towards traditional media, but they favor the personalities (presenters and editors) of electronic media, whom they perceive as authentic, professional, open, and responsive. Despite the fact that Slovak data confirm many findings of foreign research, we have also identified some specificities. Students in our survey declared that they more often watch news content on platforms dominated by local and regional content, while students in Western countries show more interest in international events (Newman et al. 2023).

We realize that this is a small sample that cannot be generalized to a global prediction, but based on other studies (from other countries) confirming certain trends in the media behavior of Generation Z, we can consider our findings to be sufficiently relevant. However, a specific feature here is that this is a purposeful sample of students from one university, one faculty (with a focus on mass media) – possibly with a higher level of interest in the media than the general population of their peers. Furthermore, the "overrepresentation" of female respondents (more than 71%) may influence the selected preferences (e.g., choice of formats, platforms, or trusted personalities). The results should therefore be interpreted as a "case study" of the media behavior of a specific subgroup of Generation Z, rather than a representative picture of the entire generation.

We also consider it beneficial to add national specifics and point out similarities/differences in the context of global trends in the behavior of Generation Z worldwide. The results of this study correspond with several international studies (Reuters Institute, Pew, GWI), which identify the strong predominance of digital platforms and social media in the everyday media practices of Generation Z. The importance of content personalization, algorithmic recommendations, and an emphasis on the visual form of information is confirmed. The research also showed that even though the respondents are young and students who are closer to the media environment (and should be more media literate), they prefer a combination of domestic and foreign sources, which

demonstrates their ability to diversify their information inputs. However, the findings contribute significantly to the theoretical understanding of the media behavior of young users in the digital age. They support current discussions about the need for media education, the development of critical thinking in an environment of algorithmic content, and changing preferences towards traditional media. The study also illustrates how personalization and trust in individual personalities are replacing trust in media brands, which represents a new dimension in research on media trust and audience identification. In this regard, the work provides a basis for further research, as well as recommendations for media practice and education.

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Abstract

Generation Z is the first generation to be shaped by constant access to digital technology, the internet, and especially social media. This is fundamentally changing the traditional media habits characteristic of previous generations. The results of our survey conducted among mass media communication students in Slovakia confirm that the life of Generation Z is shifting significantly to the digital environment, with

platforms such as Instagram and TikTok playing a dominant role. Through both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study highlights the specificities of the media behaviour of young people in this age group, including their preference for personalized content, visual formats, or dynamic, short forms of news coverage. Respondents get their information primarily through online news portals and social media, with traditional media playing a secondary but still relevant role in their lives. The results are conceptually compared with similar foreign research, allowing broader communication trends to be tracked. The findings reflect fundamental shifts in media culture and suggest new challenges for media content creators and disseminators.

Słowa kluczowe: konsumpcja mediów cyfrowych, kultura medialna współczesnej młodzieży, zachowania medialne pokolenia Z, trendy w postrzeganiu mediów, zaangażowanie młodzieży w media

Keywords: digital media consumption, media culture of contemporary youth, media behaviour of Generation Z, trends in media perception, youth media engagement

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