

# POST-COVID MEDIA BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS OF THE GENERATION Z MEMBERS IN SLOVAKIA

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** The aim of the article is to identify and describe internet-consumption behavioral patterns that have been common after the Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted.

**Concept.** In July 2022, we conducted a quantitative research based on an online survey in which 800 members for the Slovak Generation Z participated.

**Results.** The results indicate a notable decrease in the quantity of time the Slovak Generation Z members spend daily online, when compared to the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, but the average daily time spent online never returned to the numbers typical for the pre-Covid times.

**Conclusion.** Our data are an asset to the general knowledge base about the Slovak Generation Z internet-consumption behavioral patterns, but they are also specifically relevant for the disciplines of marketing, and mass-media communication, that view the Generation Z cohort as a part of the global audience.

**Cognitive value.** The article contributes to the growing knowledge-base about the internet-consumption behavioral patterns of the (Slovak) Generation Z, and as such could be valuable for building theories about this part of the audience between the years 2020 and 2030, which will be a pivotal time for the development of marketing, internet and mass-media communication and the changes that will occur along with the change of the dominant position from the Generation Y to Generation Z, when it comes to the influence on the world's mass-media markets, but also in other segments.

**Keywords:** internet consumption, generation Z, quantitative research



## INTRODUCTION

For members of Generation Z, communication technologies and technological devices have been a natural part of their lives since birth. Of course, this also affects the way they approach obtaining information, it affects the creation of mutual relations with peers, as well as the way of building a value orientation. Media are an important part of Generation Z, which is going through “a period of significant holistic formation ... with an individual “package” of expectations and hopes, but also with knowledge, values, and attitudes” (Tkáčová, 2021, p. 430). A significant problem that members of generation Z are dealing with and will continue to deal with is the question of their own identity. Their identity is formed in a fundamentally different environment than was present in the case of their parents or grandparents. Their identity is dynamic, changeable and even unpredictable, which can be a serious problem for maintaining psychological stability and individual well-being, as was proven by the significant challenges that rose in the period of COVID-19 (Kondrla et al., 2022; Králik et al., 2022; Maturkanič, Čergeťová, Tkáčová et al., 2022) as well as in the period of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (Tkáčová et al., 2023).

The effects of the Covid-19 restrictions on media consumption of youth, especially regarding the internet, have been widely addressed (see Meyer, 2020). Studies analyzing the consequences of the loss of personal contact between students and teachers during the pandemic online education are also coming to the fore, having an effect not only on the moral formation of students, but also on their critical thinking manifested in the digital space (Králik & Máhrik, 2019, Kondrla, 2021). Furthermore, the average daily time spent on the Internet also increased significantly during the pandemic times (Siste et al., 2021; Werling et al., 2021). Some research already confirms the loss of trust in institutions, extreme sensitivity to conspiracy theories and the deepening of social and opinion fragmentation of society despite the fact that an increasing number of people enter the digital space (Tvrdoň et al., 2021; Kondrla et al., 2022; Tkáčová, 2022).

In our study, we further the knowledge-base about the effects on the internet consumption of youth that the restrictions connected to the Covid-19 pandemic have had. In July 2022, we conducted a study in which 800 Generation Z members from all regions of Slovakia took part. The study was quantitative in nature and utilized an online survey via the Google Forms service. The survey was first delivered to a pre-selected group of contacts, among which there were teachers, sports trainers, and other people working with youth. The participants were later presented with the survey by these contacts, the link connecting to the survey was mostly delivered via email and various other tools of online communication (Messenger, Whatsapp, Discord), as per preference of every member of the pre-selected contact network, and the young they had been working with.

While we had made no such requests, we noticed that the link for the survey emerged in several chat groups and public posts, for example on Instagram, or Facebook – the participants had decided to share the survey in their communication environments, on their own volition, without being directed to do so.

## RESEARCH AIM

Our objective was to identify and describe some of the behavioural patterns that have been present since the restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, but remain in place even now. The research objectives have been more closely characterized by the following research problems:

- How long is the average daily time spent online actively for the Slovak Generation Z?
- What are the preferred social media of the Slovak Generation Z members?
- What kind of content do the Slovak Generation Z members publish online?

Besides these research problems, we also addressed some of the related issues, that are connected to the topic, not counted among the main research problems and objectives.

## METHODOLOGY

We utilized methods of a quantitative nature. Our survey was presented via the Google Forms services, and was afterwards submitted to our network of contacts who work with Slovak Generation Z in their professions – teachers, sports trainers et cetera. First, we used email to notify the contacts in our network about the survey. In the next stage, the survey naturally passed further – we noted its appearance on Facebook, Discord, WhatsApp, and Messenger, but reportedly, there were other instances in which the participants decided to share the survey further.

All of the answers were automatically stored within the Google Forms service's limits and the results were manually analyzed in Microsoft Excel. We concluded there were no indications of tampering with the survey, even though we deemed some of the answers suspicious – for example, a single participant mentioned in their form, that on average they spend about 23 hours online every day, which we deem to be unlikely. We did include this example and the possibility of other such occurrences among the limits of our research.

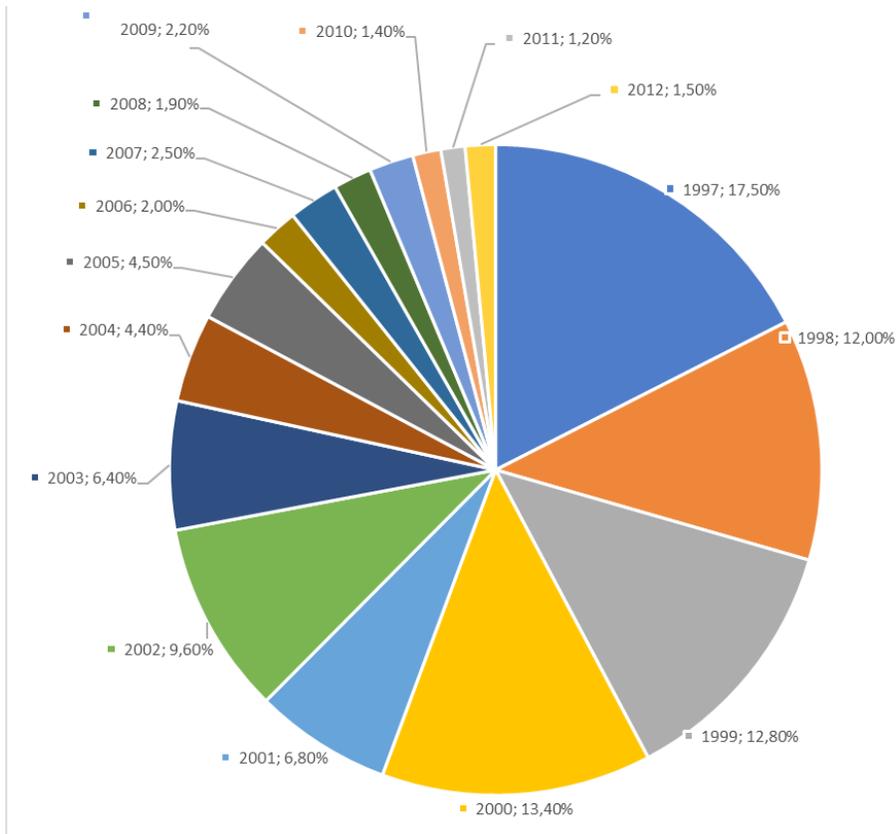
Altogether, 800 respondents from all regions of Slovakia answered our survey. These respondents all form a relatively representative sample for Slovak Republic, even though there are some imbalanced characteristics

among them. For example, there were more females than males in the sample, and the average age of our participants indicates that any possibility for generalization from our results would perhaps be more suitable to the older half of the Generation Z cohort, as older members of the cohort were represented to a much higher degree.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

Our survey first included five items that inquired about the personal background of our respondents. These topics had two functions:

- To categorize our respondents to enable us to identify the limits of our approach.
- To verify whether all of the respondents belong to the target group our survey was meant for – members of the Slovak Generation Z.



**Figure 1**  
*Participants divided into groups by their birth*

Source. Own research

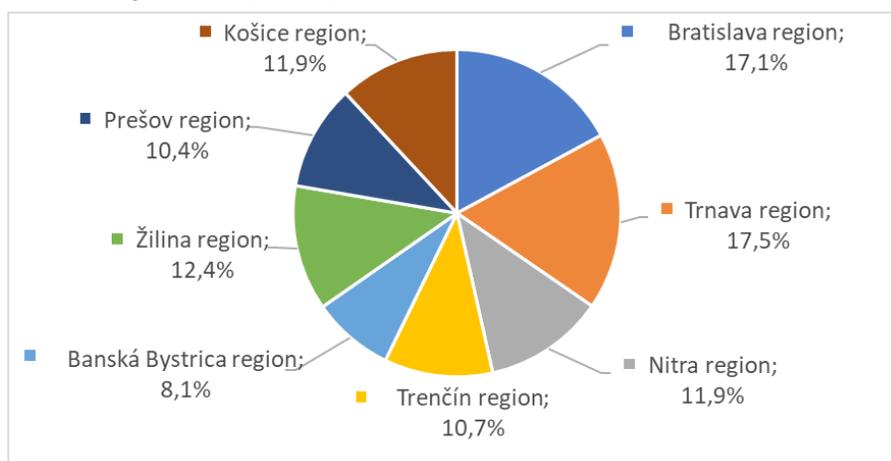
The average age of our respondents was 20.94 years. The older participants were more often represented than the younger ones – the year of birth 1997 most often, as 17.50% of our respondents were born that year. Other most represented groups were 1998 (12%), 1999 (12.80%), 2000 (13.40%), 2001 (6.80%), 2002 (9.60%), and 2003 (6.40%).

Given that the Generation Z cohort consists of fifteen groups set by the year of birth (1997-2012), it remains sub-optimal for our research that the elder groups were more often represented than the younger ones. This would imply that any efforts for generalization derived from our results would be better suited for the older members of the Slovak Generation Z. This disproportion might be partially caused by the focus of our contact network, that we used for the dissemination of the survey – as we later asserted, most of our contacts tended to ask high school students and college students for their cooperation, which seems to align with the resulting average age of 20.94 years.

If we were to recreate the context of this research with better coverage for all of the fifteen age groups of the Generation Z cohort, we would have to build the contact network more precisely. All age groups and their representations are displayed on Figure 1 further in the paper.

Apart from age, we also included a question regarding the gender of our participants.

Of our 800 participants, 58.50% identified as females, 39.10% as males and 2.40% of respondents chose the option 'other' when asked about their gender. Furthermore, we continued our personal inquiries in order to understand the context relevant for our research sample with the specifications of regions our participants came from.



**Figure 2**

*Participants divided into groups by their home region*

Source. Own research.

Since we intended to make our research relevant for all Generation Z members from Slovakia, we had to establish our coverage of its regions (Figure 2). Apart from the main two western regions (the Bratislava region and Trnava region), all were relatively similarly represented in our sample of participants. We had no control over the dissemination in regions, and so we decided to build our network of contacts so they would cover all of the regions – this proved to be sufficiently effective and even though two of the regions were more often represented than the others, we do not find any significant limitations consequential from these figures.

Our respondents also mentioned where they spend most of their time during the year:

- 87.80% of our respondents spend most of their year in Slovakia.
- 12.30% of our respondents spend most of their year abroad.

When it comes to social class, 51.50% of our respondents were either university or college students, 18.50% of our respondents were employed, 17.90% of our respondents were high school students, and 7.9% were on disability pension. Other recurring answers were unemployment, elementary school, and others, but these choices had very a minor prevalence in our research, making them practically of no significance at all. After the personal inquiries, the rest of the items in our survey were connected to research problems formulated in the objectives of our paper.

The first research item regarded the average time our respondents spend daily in an active connection to the internet. The respondents were tasked with selecting an integer, a number from 1 to 24 to indicate how much time they spend online daily. They were given an explanation, that being *actively connected online* includes all activities that require internet access for their basic functions – for example streaming video or music, playing video games, browsing the internet, being on social media et cetera.

The average daily time spent actively connected counted from the values our respondents reported was 7.14 hours, which equals 7 hours and 8 minutes. In our previous research from that took place in January 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, the average value discovered using similar methods of online survey on 460 respondents, the average time spent actively online was 8 hours and 24 minutes (Lenghart, 2022). Furthermore, in a survey conducted in January 2020, before the Covid-19 pandemic occurred, and thus with no restrictions in place, the reported average time spent online daily was at 5 hours and 19 minutes (Lenghart, 2020) – the survey from January 2020 was conducted at a high school in Slovakia, 100 participants personally took part in the survey.

Our research activities, within their limits, indicated that between January 2020, during which there were no restrictions in place, and January 2021, for which social distancing and distance-learning via online methods were typical, there was an increase from the average daily time spent online – the difference between 5 hours 19 minutes (2020) and 8 hours and 24 minutes (2021). The following year (2022), the average daily time spent

online fell to 7 hours 8 minutes, marking a relatively significant decrease when compared to the Covid-19 times, but not falling to pre-pandemic values.

Our findings are aligned with the findings of authors conducting similar research in other areas of the western world (see Siste et al., 2021; Werling et al., 2021), as it has become a recurring discovery that the Generation Z members all over the world faced a steep increase in their time spent online during the pandemic times, but their average daily time spent online has not returned to the pre-pandemic values after the Covid-19-related restrictions were lifted. The general assumption remains, that the daily habits of the Generation Z members remained highly connected to their online environments, thus indicating an integral change in their lifestyles that occurred as a consequence to outside contexts (global crisis), but remained viable and natural for those who adapted, that even after the global context returned to a relative normality, the Generation Z members have not changed their lifestyles to their former forms.

In our survey, more than 99.50% of respondents answered they use social media daily. We asked them to specify and list all the social media they use at least once a month. The most popular was YouTube, which more than 93% admitted to using at least once a month. The second most-often mentioned was Facebook (including the Messenger by Meta) with the result of 91.30%, followed by Instagram (85.90%). After these, next most-often mentions were TikTok (37.60%), Discord (32%), and Pinterest (30.90%). Other commonly recurring mentions were Snapchat (25.90%), Twitter (25.40%), Reddit (21.30%), LinkedIn (15.90%), Twitch (15.40%) and Tinder (7.2%). About 14% of respondents also included other social media, but these mentions were relatively fringing and highly variable.

As we followed the issue of social media, we inquired what social media do our respondents use to publish their own posts. In the survey, we explained that by *publishing*, we mean making the post available to access freely for at least four different people. The first topic was publishing of texts – statuses, comments, articles, blogs et cetera. In the last month before they took part in our survey, more than 44% of our respondents had published a textual post on Instagram, while more than 36% had published a textual post on Facebook. Other often-mentioned social media where our participants published their textual posts were Discord (11.80%), Snapchat (11.40%), TikTok (8%), and YouTube (8%). Other mentions were well below 3% value. 34% of our respondents had not published a textual post on any social media in the month prior to taking part in our survey.

The next topic were our respondents' own photographs. More than 62% of our respondents had published their own photograph on Instagram in the month prior to our survey. More than 29% had published their own photograph on Facebook, and more than 12% on Snapchat. About 5% of our respondents had published their photograph on Discord in the month prior to our survey. Other mentions were well below 3% value. 27% of our

respondents had not published a photograph on any social media in the month prior to taking part to our survey.

The next topic were all other forms of imagery (gif, meme, motivational image et cetera). More than 29% of our respondents had published another form of imagery on Instagram in the month prior to our survey. More than 25% had published such material on Facebook, while more than 10% had done so on Discord. More than 6% of our respondents had published this kind of imagery on Snapchat in the month prior to our survey. Other mentions were well below 3% value. 52% of our respondents had not published such imagery on any social media in the month prior to taking part to our survey. The final topic about the nature of content our respondents had been publishing online on their social media were their own videos. More than 30% of respondents had published a video on Instagram in the month prior to our survey. More than 11% had done so on Facebook, more than 8% on Snapchat and more than 4% on TikTok. 60% of our respondents had not published their videos on any social media in the month prior to taking part to our survey.

### LIMITS OF OUR RESEARCH

The first limit of our research stems from the nature of the method we used – an online survey. We had no options to verify whether the survey was actually answered by the target group of the Slovak Generation Z members – there is a possibility some of our respondents lied in other areas of the survey as well.

The second limit of our research stems for the method of dissemination of our research. The network of contacts we used was primarily focused on the older half of the Generation Z cohort, which failed to predict in the preparation phase. This resulted in the occurrence that most of the respondents our network of contact gathered were older than 17 years old, which induced imbalance in the age group within our research sample.

The third limit of our research followed the network of contacts we had prepared for the survey – they used their own methods of communication, possibly causing disturbances in the data-collecting process. If they, for example, used Facebook to spread the survey, that would have caused a spike in Facebook occurrence in the results of the survey as well. We were unable to decide how much of the data might contaminated in this way – even though we speculate that this limit might not be significant, as we did discover in previous surveys (see Lenghart, 2021; Lenghart, 2020), that Facebook, for example, penetrates to at least 95% of all Generation Z members in Slovakia, therefore minimizing the threat of this limit to significantly reduce the value of data. The final significant limit comes from the fact, that the female population was over-represented in our research sample.

## CONCLUSION

In our research study, we conducted a quantitative study on 800 respondents from the Slovak Generation Z cohort. The research took place in July 2022. The form of the survey was electronic, utilizing the Google Forms service. The respondents were reached via a network of contacts we had prepared in spring 2022. This network consisted mostly of teachers and sports trainers from all regions of Slovakia, ensuring all regions would be represented – we conclude that we were able to reach this goal.

The average daily time our respondents spend in active connection online is at 7 hours and 8 minutes (2022). This value is significantly lower from the average daily value we discovered in January 2021, that was at 8 hours and 24 minutes. It was also significantly higher than the value we discovered in January 2020, that was at 5 hours and 19 minutes. This data is aligned with the academic consensus, that during the time in which the Covid-19 restrictions were in place, average daily time spent online increased significantly for the Generation Z cohort worldwide, and after these restrictions were lifted, the average daily time spent online has not returned to the pre-pandemic values. We also conclude that the Research Problem 1 has been answered appropriately.

We established that a huge majority of our 800 respondents actively uses YouTube (93%). Facebook (including the Messenger by Meta) is used by 91.30% of our respondents, followed by Instagram (85.90%), TikTok (37.60%), Discord (32%), and Pinterest (30.90%), Snapchat (25.90%), Twitter (25.40%), Reddit (21.30%), LinkedIn (15.90%), Twitch (15.40%), and Tinder (7.2%). Approximately 14% of our respondents also reported use of other social media, but the prevalence of all of these other internet media was insignificant. We conclude that the Research Problem 2 has been answered sufficiently as well.

Naturally following the list of most-commonly-used social media, the publishing habits of our respondents strongly correlate with the social media they use. From the data gathered we estimate that more than 50% of our respondents publish their own photographs and/or texts on their social media, while at least 25% of them also publish their own video material. We conclude that the Research Problem 3 has been answered.

This data implies that the user-generated content is an extremely significant area of all social media, in which the Slovak Generation Z regularly take part. The amount of time our Generation Z spends online connected to the behavioral pattern of actively taking part in contributing to social media content further develops the knowledge base in various fields and as such, we consider our study to be a relevant addition to the sum of data for academic purposes in various disciplines, including mass-media and communication studies, media psychology, sociology, education, and others.

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