

A Socio-Demographic Profile of the Generation Z Media Audience and the Communicative-Linguistic Aspects of Digital Media Consumption Intensity

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ABSTRACT

This article employs a comprehensive approach to analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of the Generation Z media audience, the intensity of their digital media content consumption, and the communicative and linguistic aspects of this process. Furthermore, it evaluates the role of communicative strategies, short-form texts, visual-verbal units, and modern linguistic tools used on digital platforms in capturing this audience's attention. The article substantiates the need to consider linguistic factors when creating media products for a Generation Z audience and presents research findings on improving the effectiveness of digital communication.

Keywords: Generation Z, media audience, digital media consumption, communicative and linguistic aspects, media discourse, digital communication, media content, socio-demographic profile, linguistic strategies, audience behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The study of the Z-generation media audience is of particular importance in modern journalism and mass communication theory, as this generation differs significantly from traditional audience models in the processes of receiving, sorting,

processing, and disseminating information. While for previous generations, media appeared primarily as an institutional channel consumed through an external source of information, such as newspapers, radio, television, or websites, for Generation Z, media has become a constant environment of daily life, a platform for communication, a means of self-expression, and a mechanism for social identification [1: 22]. Therefore, in this chapter, the socio-demographic portrait of Generation Z and the intensity of digital media consumption are analyzed not only as a sum of statistical indicators but also as a communicative basis that determines the processes of adopting and creating Creolized media content.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In academic literature, Generation Z is typically characterized as those born in the late 1990s and early 2010s who grew up with digital technologies, the mobile internet, social networks, and visual platforms. Although it is conventional to consider this generation as “digital native” their relationship with media is truly characterized by the fact that they are shaped by digital devices starting from childhood and adolescence. Panayotu, Lazu, and Balyu link the media consumption of the Z-generation with media and information literacy, emphasizing that this generation is not only a recipient of information but also a subject obliged to evaluate its reliability, source, and social value. Therefore, when studying Generation Z, along with the age limit, their level of media literacy formed in the digital environment, platform experience, and attitude toward information must also be taken into account.

The first important feature of the Z-generation media audience is that it is a demographically and technologically “connected” generation. According to the International Telecommunication Union, 5.5 billion people worldwide used the Internet in 2024, accounting for 68% of the world's population [2: 1]. These global numbers are important for understanding the environment in which Generation Z has formed, as the socialization of this generation has occurred in

parallel with the expansion of the internet, the cheapening of mobile communications, and the penetration of platforms into everyday life. At the same time, the overall increase in internet access does not automatically mean the same digital experience; the country, urban-rural environment, family economic capital, educational level, and language environment influence the intensity of media consumption among Gen Z. From this perspective, it is advisable to view Generation Z not as a single global audience, but as a media group with common digital codes that are formed differently in local socio-demographic conditions.

In the context of Uzbekistan, the demographic significance of the Gen Z audience is particularly high. According to the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as of January 1, 2025, the number of youth aged 14–30 in the republic was 9,630,556 people, accounting for 25.7% of the total population. According to UNFPA data, Uzbekistan is one of the most populous countries in Central Asia with a relatively young demographic composition. [3;5] These indicators provide an important theoretical and practical basis for the dissertation topic: Generation Z is not only the “audience of the future” but also a large social stratum actively involved in the current media market, social media environment, journalistic content consumption, and digital communication practices. Therefore, studying the media consumption characteristics of this audience is of strategic importance for national journalism and mass communications.

Internet, mobile communication, and social media infrastructure play a special role in analyzing digital media consumption in Uzbekistan. Data Reportal’s ‘Digital 2025: Uzbekistan’ report summarizes comprehensive statistical indicators on the internet, mobile communications, and social media audience in the country [4]. Such reports allow for the interpretation of Gen Z media consumption not merely as an individual interest or personal habit, but as a social process associated with the availability of digital infrastructure, smartphone adoption, mobile internet, and platforms. Especially in Uzbekistan, the expansion of Telegram, YouTube, Instagram,

TikTok, and other visual communication platforms creates a hybrid media environment for Generation Z, where information, communication, entertainment content, educational materials, and social debates merge into a single space.

The intensity of digital media consumption of Generation Z is characterized by its “constant online” state. According to a 2024 study by the Pew Research Center, 95% of US teens aged 13-17 have access to a smartphone, 96% use the internet daily, and nearly half describe themselves as “almost always online” [4: 1]. The 2025 report indicates that platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat hold a steadily high position in the daily lives of adolescents, with almost all adolescents using YouTube, while TikTok and Instagram remain the primary daily visual and communicative environments [5: 4]. Although this data pertains to a US audience, it serves as a comparative benchmark for understanding the logic of global platforms and the digital habits of Gen Z. In Uzbekistan, accessing the internet via a smartphone, viewing video content, obtaining information via messengers, and communicating on social networks are becoming the primary channels of youth media consumption.

The intensity of media consumption is not measured solely by screen time; it also reflects how the media is integrated into daily practices. A study by Turkish researcher Elkatmish on the social media habits of Generation Z notes that young people use platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram for educational, communication, and entertainment purposes, while many prefer visual and video-based platforms [6: 11]. These results show that the media consumption of Gen Z is multifunctional: one platform functions simultaneously as a source of information, a learning tool, a communication channel, a way of organizing personal time, and a sign of social belonging. Therefore, the division of Gen Z media consumption into separate activities such as “reading news” “watching videos” or “chatting” will be theoretically limited; their digital lives are hybrid, continuous, and cross-platform.

The uses and gratifications theory is one of the effective theoretical foundations for explaining Z-generation media consumption. A study by Hou, Hu, and Hu shows that

Generation Z uses social media to satisfy various needs, including daily habit replacement, socialization, obtaining information, entertainment, and self-expression [7: 5]. The authors note that economic capital also distinguishes forms of media participation; that is, all young people may be on the same platforms, but their purpose of use, level of activity, and social resources are not the same. In this dissertation, we consider it important to view Generation Z not only as a "generation that spends a lot of time online," but also as a media entity that meets various social, cognitive, and emotional needs through digital platforms.

Another important aspect of the Z-generation audience is their preference for visuals and concise formats. This generation often receives information before text in the form of images, thumbnails, emoji, video frames, stories, or reels. Therefore, Creolized media content, i.e., a combination of verbal and non-verbal codes, appears as a natural format in the media consumption of Generation Z. Tirocchi's research demonstrates that for Gen Z, influencers, authenticity-focused platforms like BeReal, and appearance culture are linked to social values. This situation indicates that in the media consumption of Generation Z, visual content is not only an aesthetic tool, but also a mechanism for trust, self-expression, belonging to a group and understanding social values. Therefore, in the study of this audience, along with the question "what does he read?," the questions "what does he see?," "what visual code does he believe?" and "in what format does he react?" are also of central importance.

In terms of information consumption, Gen Z is characterized as an audience that encounters news through social media and platform feeds rather than traditional journalistic channels. Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2025 highlights the growing role of social networks, video platforms, and influencers in global news consumption (Reuters Institute 2025). This situation changes Gen Z's attitude toward news: information often appears in a platform stream, among other entertainment or personal content, rather than by visiting a specialized news site. Therefore, for Gen Z, the process of recognizing, believing,

storing, or sharing news is linked not only to the journalistic brand but also to visual cues, social reactions, reviews, algorithmic recommendations, and peer interactions.

In such conditions, the trust criteria of Z-generation media consumption are also complicated. This generation lives in a multi-source information environment: official media, a blogger, an influencer, a peer, an anonymous channel, a meme page, and an algorithmic recommendation can simultaneously serve as a source of information. Panayotu et al. argue that for Gen Z, media and information literacy is a key prerequisite for assessing reliability, especially in the context of disinformation [8: 458]. UNESCO also links media and information literacy to the ability of citizens to find, evaluate, responsibly distribute, and participate in the digital environment. Therefore, it is not enough to generalize Gen Z as a generation that “knows the Internet well”; while actively using platforms, they may not always have the same level of competence in checking information, understanding source differences, and recognizing visual manipulation [9: 3].

In the socio-demographic portrait of Generation Z, education, economic opportunity, place of residence, language environment, and cultural capital are important differentiating factors. Although digital platforms are global, the conditions for their use are local: some have high-speed internet and a personal smartphone, others are limited to a family device or a low-cost tariff; some freely consume content in English, Russian, and Uzbek, while others rely primarily on channels in the local language. This is theoretically supported by the fact that Hou et al. showed that economic capital influences the motives for using social networks and the forms of participation. In Uzbekistan, too, differences between urban and rural, center and region, educational institution and family resources can affect the intensity of digital media consumption of Generation Z. Therefore, in empirical research, it is necessary to describe Gen Z as a complex media group with internal segments, rather than as a homogeneous audience.

Another sign of Gen Z media consumption is cross-platform mobility. This audience can see a piece of information on

Telegram, watch an explanatory video on YouTube, encounter a visual reaction on Instagram, see a brief commentary or meme on TikTok, and then discuss it in a private chat. Ha and Chen emphasize that Generation Z's communication through global social networks plays a crucial role in shaping their worldview, cultural connections, and social relationships [10: 302]. This cross-platform is an important condition for Creolized media content: the same message is encoded differently on different platforms, for example, on the website with a title and photo, on Telegram with a short text and link, on TikTok with sound, subtitles and editing, on Instagram in the form of a carousel or reels. Thus, Z-generation media consumption encompasses not a single "original" form of material, but its reformatted versions on various platforms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The ratio between passive consumption and active participation is also important when analyzing Gen Z media consumption. Not all young people are content creators; many follow the media flow, like, react briefly, or share material in a personal interaction. In the Elkatmish study, it is noted that a large portion of participants remain as observers rather than commenting on social media [11: 10]. However, in the digital environment, even seemingly passive actions have an algorithmic impact: viewing, saving, liking, watching until the end of the video, or skipping the material are processed by platforms as audience interest. In this sense, the digital media consumption of Gen Z is not only a subjective activity, but also part of the information economy of platforms. This situation also determines the visibility, distribution, and reach of journalistic content to the audience.

The intensity of media consumption is also related to Gen Z's perception of time and the level of patience with information. Short videos, instant messages, stories, vertical formats, and algorithmic feeds present information as fast-moving fragments. On the one hand, this allows for quick access to information, seeing different perspectives, and quickly understanding complex topics through visual materials. On the other hand, rapid

consumption can shorten the process of in-depth analysis, source verification, and context understanding. The OECD notes that while children and adolescents have opportunities for education, communication, and creativity in the digital environment, they also face issues of abuse, dangerous content, and online safety [12: 170]. Consequently, Z-generation media consumption is simultaneously a source of opportunity and risk, requiring assessment based on a balanced scientific approach rather than merely technological optimism or moral anxiety.

The intensity of digital media consumption among Generation Z is also inextricably linked to the rhythm of daily life. Social networks and messaging apps have adapted to different situations, such as waking up in the morning, going to school or work, eating, resting, doing homework, communicating in the evening, and the time before bed. This situation makes the media not a separate activity, but a constant background that follows daily practices. It is no coincidence that the Elkatmish study showed that young people use social media for educational, communication, and entertainment purposes; these platforms function as a universal environment that unites diverse needs. In the context of Uzbekistan, reading messages on a Telegram channel, watching explanatory videos on YouTube, watching visual content on Instagram, learning trends through short clips on TikTok, and personal communication in WhatsApp or Telegram chats appear as complementary digital practices. Therefore, the question “how much time is spent?” is not enough to measure the media consumption of Gen Z; Questions such as “in what situation?,” “for what purpose?,” “via what device?” and “on which platform?” should also be included in the analysis.

For this audience, the smartphone serves as the primary media device. A smartphone frees media consumption from spatial dependence: information can be consumed at home, in transport, in a classroom, at work, on the street, or during leisure. That's why Gen Z audiences interact with media on the basis of "micro-moments" rather than “sessions”: in a few minutes of free time, it becomes common to see a post, watch a short video, react to a message, or save a link. Such micro-consumption increases the importance of Creolized content, as the visual signal, title,

emoji, thumbnail, color, and composition become the primary entry points in the information perceived in a short time. Thus, for Gen Z, the impact of a media text often depends on its linguistic content, as well as how it appears on a mobile screen, how quickly it is understood, and how it is shared.

Platform algorithms are also an important factor in shaping the intensity of Z-generation media consumption. While in a traditional media environment, the audience chose a newspaper number, switched TV channels, or visited a website, on digital platforms, a large portion of the content arrives through algorithmic recommendations. These recommendations are based on the user's previous views, likes, searches, saved content, and interactions. Therefore, Gen Z media consumption is the result of the interaction between individual choice and platform selection. It is precisely with this process that Reuters Institute reports note the increasing role of social networks and platforms in news consumption. This situation poses an important problem for journalism: to convey information to Gen Z, journalistic material must be not only meaningful in content but also adapted in terms of platform format, visual presentation, and algorithmic visibility.

CONCLUSIONS

Language and cultural hybridity are also of particular importance in the socio-demographic portrait of Generation Z. Through global platforms, young people consume local, regional, and international content simultaneously. In Uzbekistan, this situation is manifested in the presence of content in Uzbek, Russian, English, and other languages. The choice of language will depend on the source of information, the level of trust, cultural proximity, and platform capabilities. For example, some young people may follow global trends through content in English or Russian, and receive local news through Telegram channels, websites, or bloggers in the Uzbek language. This multilingualism is also reflected in Creolized media texts: the text may come from one language, the meme template from a different cultural context, and the visual code from a global

platform aesthetic. Therefore, when analyzing Z-generation media consumption, the intersection of language, culture, and visual codes requires special methodological attention.

Within the framework of this section, the portrait of the Z-generation media audience can be summarized through the following main features. First, it is a demographically significant and socially active age group in the context of Uzbekistan, this group constitutes a significant portion of the population. Secondly, it is a digital audience that is inextricably linked to smartphones, mobile internet, and social networks. Thirdly, its media consumption is multifunctional: information, education, communication, entertainment, self-expression, and group membership needs are satisfied simultaneously. Fourth, Gen Z tends to perceive visual and short-form content quickly, which enhances the effectiveness of Creolized media texts. Fifth, this audience moves across platforms and receives information more through social media, messaging, video, and personal recommendations than from a journalistic website. Sixth, its media consumption has internal social differences: the level of economic capital, education, language, region, and media literacy results differently in different groups.

In conclusion, the Z-generation media audience is the most relevant object of study for the study of Creolized media content, as verbal text, images, video, voice, emoji, hashtag, interface and algorithmic recommendations are naturally combined in its daily communication. For this audience, media content is simultaneously a field of information, social communication, emotional experience, and identification. Therefore, in the following sections of the dissertation, the analysis of the characteristics of adoption and creation of Creolized media content should be based on this socio-demographic and digital consumption context. Without understanding the media consumption intensity of Gen Z, it is impossible to draw a complete scientific conclusion about how they perceive visual-verbal codes, which sources they trust, which content they react emotionally to, and which materials they reproduce and distribute.

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