SEJ
SPOŁECZEŃSTWO
EDUKACJA
JĘZYK

Tom 20/2024, ss. 49-62
ISSN 2353-1266
e-ISSN 2449-7983
DOI: 10.19251/sej/2024.20(4)
www.sej.mazowiecka.edu.pl
Otrzymano: 30.06.2024
Zaakceptowano: 27.11.2024
Opublikowano: 30.12.2024

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IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR DEVELOPMENT OF READING HABITS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GENERATION Z REPRESENTATIVES

Abstract

In this text, the authors describe the opinions of Generation Z representatives on the significance of social media in developing reading habits among high school graduates. The study aimed to determine whether young people read books, and if so, in what form; to understand the relationship between the content observed on social media and reading habits among youth; and to describe the correlation between the family's attitude towards reading and the reading habits of young people. The research adopted a quantitative strategy, using the diagnostic survey method with an original questionnaire. The study results reveal that most young people read books, most often in paper form and that social media, especially short videos, play a significant role in shaping their reading choices.

Keywords: reading habits, Generation Z, youth, social media, BookTok, BookTube, Bookstagram

Introduction

Social media plays a significant role in the modern world—in 2023, 74% of Poles had an account on at least one social media platform (CBOS 2024). Users of these sites create content on various aspects of social life, stimulating the expression of opinions on books, films, and products. At the same time, companies have recognised the potential of these platforms as marketing tools, enabling the rapid dissemination of information to consumers and building relationships (Fabjaniak-Czerniak 2012, Kowalska 2013).

Social media is also increasingly crucial in education. Research shows that 83% of teachers use them during lessons, with YouTube being the most common platform (58%). These media are employed, inter alia, to search for educational material and to enrich students' interests (Garwol 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic initially increased interest in reading. However, subsequently, the level returned to pre-pandemic figures. In 2022, 18% of young people read seven or more books per year, with higher rates among those who are educated and studying, and more often among women (Chymkowski, Zasacka 2022).

During the pandemic, the number of books sold online increased, while library lending decreased due to temporary closures. Even after restrictions were lifted, libraries recorded lower lending activity (Nejman 2022). In 2022, only 4% of readers read at least one book in electronic form, with printed copies being more popular (Chymkowski, Zasacka 2022).

Current literature rarely addresses the correlation between social media and reading, although these sites are becoming integral to young people's lives. Despite the common perception that social media competes with reading, accounts increasingly promote books in ways that appeal to young people. Through reviews and short films, online creators effectively encourage audiences to reach for books. Publishers are also beginning to use social media to promote literature. This raises the question of the impact of social media on the development of reading among youth, for whom these platforms are an essential part of everyday life.

1. The role of social media in promoting reading

The invention of printing enabled broad access to books, contributing to their popularity and establishing their role in culture. Modern technologies, including social media, significantly change how books are perceived and understood. Due to their popularity among young people, these media are becoming essential tools in popularising literature. Book reviews by well-known online authors are crucial for young people's reading decisions, increasing their literary interest.

Social media also offers opportunities for interaction—users can exchange opinions, create their own reviews, and share them with others. This phenomenon

has fostered an increase in the number of not only readers but also young literary critics who share their insights with their peers (Wójcicka 2017). Emotional reactions to social media content, including book reviews, play a pivotal role in promoting reading.

The social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1977), posits that people learn by observing the actions of others. They imitate the behaviour they observe, especially if these individuals are considered authority figures. Through social media, youth can acquire reading habits by watching influencers and book reviewers. Bookfluencers, active on platforms such as BookTok or Bookstagram, often serve as role models for young people, influencing their reading choices. Regular book recommendations on social media make specific titles more desirable and increase the likelihood of youth reaching for them.

Bandura's theory explains why social media shapes young people's reading habits. Media users can develop literary preferences by observing content published by bookfluencers and others active in book communities. Book choices are often based on recommendations from individuals whose opinions are deemed valuable and credible.

In recent years, book-focused communities such as BookTube, Bookstagram, and BookTok have gained popularity. The creators of these platforms, known as bookfluencers, build relationships with their audiences through authenticity and mutual trust. Research reveals that young people increasingly opt for books promoted on these platforms, especially in genres such as young adult, romance, fantasy, and science fiction (Reddan 2022).

Libraries are also adapting to the new trends by establishing social media accounts, aimed at not only informing the community about new releases but also engaging the community through interactive actions to promote reading (Przybysz, Pioterek 2015). Examples of such activities include the sleeveface or #niceBookChallenge campaigns, which have gained popularity through creative literature promotion (Morawiec 2014, Marzec-Jóźwicka 2018).

2. Current state of reading research

The Polish National Library's 2023 report indicates that 43% of respondents read at least one book annually, the highest figure in a decade. Only 8% reported reading seven or more books (Zasacka, Chymkowski, Koryś 2024). According to Zofia Zasacka, 55% of young people read books, 71% of them girls and 40% boys (Zasacka 2020). The largest group of readers (68%) comprises learners, half of whom claim to derive pleasure from reading despite their compulsory schooling.

Education plays a vital role in forming reading habits. More than half of those with tertiary education read books regularly, and women are more likely to read than men (Zasacka et al., 2024). Research also shows that 69% of those whose father has a university degree read at least one book a year, as do 70% of those whose mother has a university degree. These habits are often inherited as part of cultural capital.

The printed version remains the preferred form of a book, with 98% of respondents reading paper books and only 7% reading digital books. In the 15–24 age group, 11% of men and 4% of women choose digital versions (Zasacka et al. 2024). Among the sources of acquiring knowledge about books, the most important are friends (41%), family (34%), and independent browsing in bookstores and libraries (24%).

After the pandemic, interest in social media as a source of information on books increased, with communities such as BookTok, BookTube, and Bookstagram becoming popular venues for sharing book reviews. In 2023, 7% of respondents reported using these platforms, with 17% of users aged 15–24. Women are more likely than men to use recommendations on social media platforms (Zasacka et al., 2024). The most widely read genres are crime fiction (28%), romance (22%), and non-fiction (17%).

3. Generation Z on the Internet

Generation Z includes those born after 1995 (or, according to some researchers, after 2000). From an early age, they have grown up in an environment saturated with technology and the internet, earning them the label 'digital natives' (Twenge 2019). They did not need to learn how to use computers or media, as these technologies were a natural part of their daily lives. Constant access to the Internet, taken for granted, makes computer or network use a daily habit for this group, often leading to addiction (Sudomir 2020). For representatives of this generation, virtual and actual reality frequently intermingle.

Mark McCrindle and Ashley Fell (2019) identified several characteristics of Generation Z:

- digital—access to technology from an early age shapes their work, private life, and education. They acquire information mainly through screen-based devices.
- global—access to the internet means that young people from different parts of the world have access to the same content, including music, films, trends, and lifestyles.
- social—interpersonal relationships are shaped by social media, where young people spend much time seeking information, advice, and recommendations. Online friendships transcend social, geographical, or demographic barriers.
- mobile—young people prefer mobile devices that enable them to study, work, and travel in different parts of the world. They are open to training and professional development.
- visual—they prefer visual content such as videos and graphics, which are more likely to replace traditional texts. YouTube videos are more frequently used for learning than articles.

Generation Z spends considerable time online and contact through technology often replaces face-to-face communication. The preference for text and picture

messages over phone calls is an interesting phenomenon (Hysa 2016). They primarily seek knowledge on the Internet and treat printed sources as a last resort. They learn intuitively, through trial and error, discovering new technologies through action, experimentation, and collaboration, rather than reflection (Olive, 2023). They also prefer to read from the screens of electronic devices, although up to 87% of students choose paper books, according to a study at American University. In education, they value content that is simultaneously useful, interesting, and fun (Oliwa, 2023).

The digitalisation of Generation Z's lives has both pros and cons. Problems with reading comprehension, excessive internet use, and distorted self-image are just some of the difficulties they face. Seeing 'ideal' figures on social media often leads to comparison and low self-esteem. This phenomenon is associated with lower feelings of happiness, increased stress, and a sense of constant scrutiny (Całek 2021).

The report 'Generation Z is in the game' [Polish: 'Generacja Z wchodzi do gry'] indicates that social media plays three prominent roles in their lives: as a source of information, for entertainment, and to connect with friends. As many as 93% of young people consider YouTube their primary source of knowledge about the world, followed by Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. These media meet information needs and enable youth to share their interests and thoughts. For Generation Z, social media is also a way to 'kill boredom'—they use it in their leisure time, in between tasks, or while travelling, with TikTok as their primary source of entertainment and YouTube as the most frequently chosen platform for content consumption (Clue PR 2022).

4. Methodological assumptions of the study

The research problem of this study is the role of social media in the development of reading. The subject of the study is the opinions of high school graduates (representatives of Generation Z) on this topic. The study aims to determine whether young people are reading and, if so, which books and in what form. Additionally, the study seeks to understand the role young people attribute to social media in the context of reading, to describe the relationship between content observed on social media and reading, and to investigate a potential correlation between family attitudes towards reading and young people's reading habits. It should be emphasised that the authors are aware that the results presented are not necessarily representative of the entire population of young people and are only a survey to gauge the opinions of the analysed group.

Based on the quantitative data collected, the authors formulated the following research questions:

P_1: Do young people read? If so, which books are available and in what form?

P_2: What relevance do social media user recommendations have for book selection in the opinion of high school graduates? Who pays more attention to these recommendations—girls or boys?

P_3: What forms of recommendation/review are most convincing to high school graduates?
P_4: Are book referrals more likely to be used by individuals from homes with frequent reading or those without such role models?

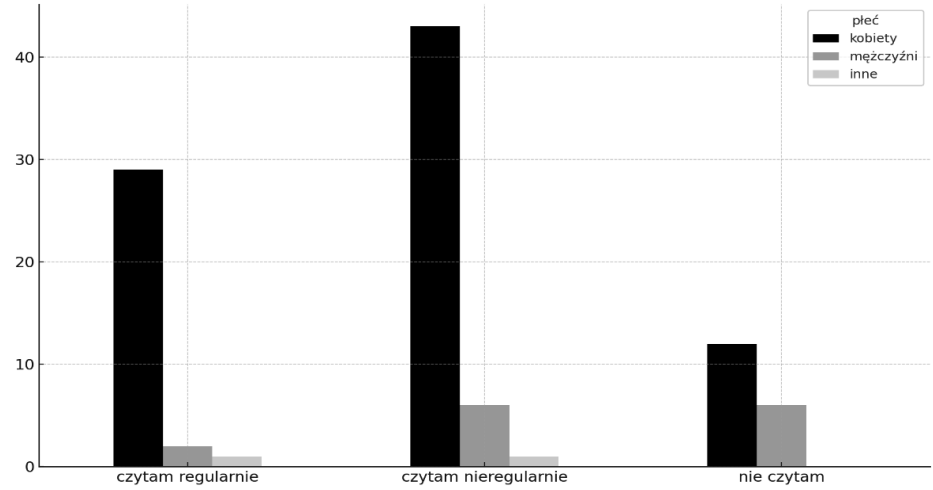
Four hypotheses were formulated to address the above research questions.
H1: More than half of Generation Z confirms that they read books. Most often, they choose romances and prefer the printed form.
H2: Most young people use online recommendations when seeking book suggestions, with girls paying more attention to them.
H3: High school graduates prefer short films about books as the most convincing recommendation.
H4: Individuals from homes where reading is common are more likely to rely on book referrals.

The study employed a diagnostic survey, a survey technique, and an online questionnaire as a research tool. The authors of the article developed the questionnaire. The sampling was non-random, purposive, and based on the principle of availability. The survey covered high school graduates and was conducted between April 21 and May 4, 2024. Participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary. A link to the questionnaire was made available on Facebook groups aimed at high school graduates. Questionnaires from 106 individuals were included in the analysis, comprising 90 females (85%), 14 males (13%), and two non-binary individuals. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 19.

5. Presentation of collected empirical data

In the first question regarding the regularity of reading books, 32% of respondents indicated that they read regularly, 50% irregularly, and 18% do not read at all. Among regular readers, 29% were female, 2% male, and 1% others. The group of irregular readers included 43% women, 6% men, and 1% others. Among those who do not read, 12% are women, and 6% are men (Figure 1).

Chart 1. Book reading regularity among high school graduates

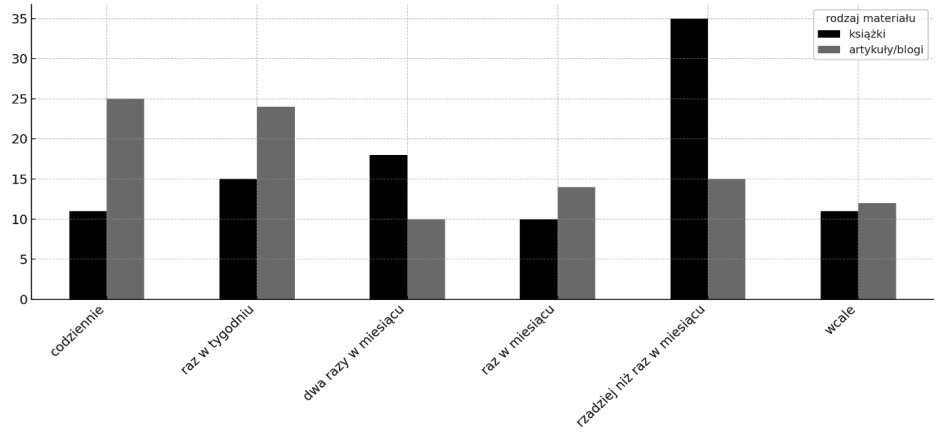


Source: own study.

The second question concerned the number of books read per annum. Forty-eight percent of respondents reported reading between one and three books, 25% between four and six books, and 16% seven or more books. Eleven percent of respondents had not read a book in a year. In terms of reading frequency, 35% read less than once a month, 18% read twice a month, 15% read once a week, and 11% read daily.

Another question pertained to reading articles and blogs online. Daily, such content is read by 25% of respondents, once a week by 24%, twice a month by 10%, once a month by 14%, and less than once a month by 15%. More than 1/10 (12%) do not read (Figure 2).

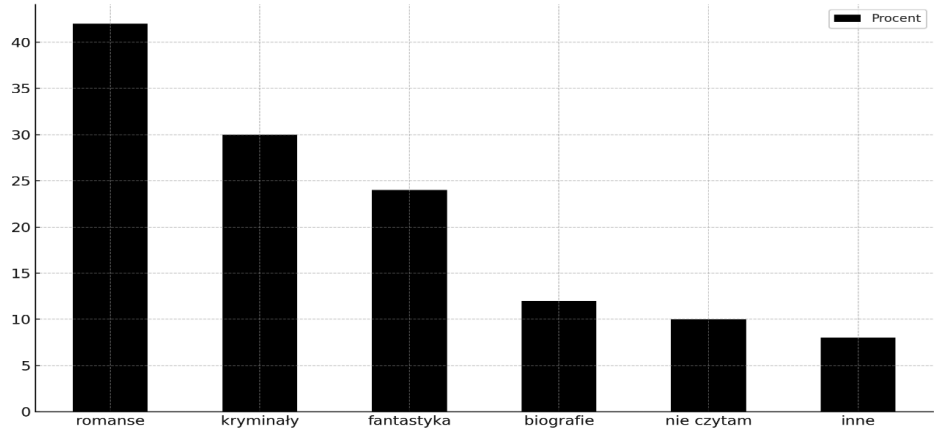
Chart 2. Summary of frequency of reading books and articles/blogs online



Source: own study.

The fifth question related to preferred book genres. The most popular choices were romance (42%), crime fiction (30%), and fantasy (24%). Biographies were chosen by 12% of respondents, while 10% declared that they do not read books. Open-ended responses included psychological books, documentaries, and religious texts (Figure 3).

Chart 3. Preferred book genres



Source: own study.

The next question addressed the preferred form of books, to which the responses indicated that 73% prefer hard copy books, 21% electronic books, and 6% do not read books. When choosing books, recommendations (from peers or family) and reviews were deemed most important. Nearly one-fifth of respondents (19%) paid attention to the cover and 7% to the author.

Regarding social media use, 69% of respondents use it very often, 23% usually, 6% sometimes, and 2% rarely. The most frequently used platforms are Instagram (38%), TikTok (27%), Facebook (15%), and YouTube (12%).

More than half of those surveyed (59%) admitted that they had picked up a book based on a recommendation from social media. Of these, 39% actively sought such recommendations on Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. Most (58%) believe that young people pay attention to social media regarding books, and 31% have read a book promoted in the media, while 62% say that book recommendations are more persuasive for girls, and 54% read books regardless of their popularity in the media.

In contrast, short videos about books are the most convincing recommendation (54%), while one-fourth of the respondents trust traditional reviews more. Short videos were also considered more accessible to young people (87%).

The final question concerned reading patterns shaped at home. The table below shows details of the responses.

Table 1. Reading patterns in the family home

Scale / Responses	1 - strongly disagree	2 - rather disagree	3 - I have no opinion	4 - I rather agree	5 - definitely agree
Your family regularly read books or other reading material when you were/are a child.	11 persons (10%)	12 persons (11%)	8 persons (8%)	48 persons (45%)	27 persons (25%)
Your parents or other caregivers encouraged you to read books as a child.	3 persons (3%)	10 persons (9%)	12 persons (11%)	36 persons (34%)	45 persons (42%)
A variety of books were available in your home.	4 persons (4%)	14 persons (13%)	10 persons (9%)	31 persons (29%)	47 persons (44%)
Growing up in a family where many books were read influenced your interest.	19 persons (18%)	19 persons (18%)	29 persons (27%)	22 persons (21%)	17 persons (16%)
In your home environment, books were discussed or read together.	19 persons (18%)	28 persons (26%)	24 persons (23%)	24 persons (23%)	11 persons (10%)
I have an extensive library at home.	12 persons (11%)	25 persons (24%)	12 persons (11%)	31 persons (29%)	26 persons (25%)

Source: own study.

6. Conclusions and discussion

1. More than 80% of the young people surveyed read books, although with varying regularity. One-third of respondents consider themselves regular readers, while half read irregularly, and 18% declare that they do not read. More than half of Generation Z confirms that they read books. Most often, they choose romances and prefer the printed form. The data collected confirms hypothesis H_1—48% of respondents had read between 1 and 3 books, and the most frequently chosen genre was romantic literature (42%). Additionally, 73% of respondents prefer hard-copy books.

Table 2. Regularity of reading vs. factors determining the choice of book

Regularity of reading	**Factors determining the choice of book to read (N)**				
	cover	author	Recommendations (e.g., from peers, family)	Reviews (e.g., online)	I don't read
Regularly	6	5	12	11	0
Irregularly	10	2	19	19	3
I don't read	4	0	4	5	6

Source: own study.

2. More than half of those surveyed read a book because of online recommendations. Additionally, more than half of the respondents reported viewing book recommendations on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. The survey results reveal that 59% of respondents reached for a book based on recommendations from social media. Moreover, girls are more likely to be guided by online recommendations, confirming hypothesis H2.
3. For high school graduates, short films about books are the most relevant form of recommendation (over 50% of respondents). A significant proportion of respondents (87%) find short videos the most convincing form of book review. These data support hypothesis H3, which states that high school graduates prefer short films as the most compelling recommendation form.

Table 3. The form of social media vs. the most important social media for respondents

Form of book recommendation	**Social media (N)**						
	Instagram	Facebook	TikTok	YouTube	None	I do not use social media	Other
Posts with reviews	10	4	8	2	0	0	1
Posts with numerical ratings	3	1	1	2	0	0	0
Short films about books	21	6	18	8	1	1	3
None	6	5	2	1	1	0	1
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: own study.

4. Respondents with frequent reading in their families are more likely to rely on book recommendations than those without reading patterns in their homes. As many as 75% of respondents believe that having reading role models at home positively impacts their willingness to rely on book recommendations. These results support hypothesis H4.

Table 4. Regularity of reading and the importance of having reading patterns at home on the use of book recommendations

Regularity of reading	Answer to question: Do you think that having reading patterns at home can influence whether a person is more likely to rely on book recommendations?		
	Yes	No	I have no opinion
Regularly	28	2	4
Irregularly	40	7	6
I don't read	11	6	2

Source: own study.

The authors suggest that the survey results may be related to the predominance of women among the respondents. Unsurprisingly, romance was the most popular genre. Women are also more likely than men to prefer printed books, perhaps due to habit or the pleasure derived from physical contact with a book, such as the smell or texture of the paper. The ability to read without needing electronic devices is also an essential factor. The fact that young people seek book recommendations online is not surprising. Generation Z has essentially grown up in a world where computers and the internet are ubiquitous.

The data collected show that girls are more likely than boys to suggest book recommendations on social media. The authors believe that women are more likely to take advice from others and are more open and trusting towards online recommendations (Kornaszewska-Polak 2020, 207). The popularity of short films among respondents may be attributed to the growing concentration problems among Generation Z (Ignaciuk, 2023). Videos lasting between 15 and 60 seconds are attractive to high school graduates because they do not require much intellectual engagement. Moreover, they are designed to quickly capture the viewer's interest by including short quotes or the most interesting excerpts from books to encourage them, without requiring them to read a longer review.

The authors opine that the confirmed relationship between reading patterns at home, book reading, and reading regularity is also essential. Young people who grew up in homes where reading was promoted are more likely to seek book recommendations because the habit has been instilled in them. These individuals are more interested in reading than those whose homes did not foster a reading culture. Unfortunately, reading problems often start in childhood. In families where the pleasure of reading is not passed on, or children are not read to, young people rarely reach for books independently. Many parents find it easier to turn on a computer game or a smartphone cartoon for their child than to read a book. In such an upbringing, reading is perceived as a punishment, something unpleasant, a school duty, rather than a form of entertainment (Lobacz 2016, 47-52).

Conclusion

Social media is where young people spend a significant amount of their time, and at the same time, they increasingly access book-related content. Entire communities dedicated to literature have emerged in the media, and popular accounts have become 'reliable' sources whose opinions on books carry significant weight. The study findings show that many high school graduates read, albeit with varying regularity. At the same time, there is a strong interest in using social media. Digital platforms are evolving to such an extent that they are beginning to combine seemingly unrelated

elements, such as books and social media. Young people, particularly girls, are more likely to rely on book reviews and recommendations posted online.

This phenomenon can be explained in light of Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that people learn by observing and imitating others. In the case of social media, young people derive behavioural patterns from content creators, known as bookfluencers, who influence reading choices through their popularity. Bandura indicated that imitation is more effective when the model whose behaviour is being observed receives positive reinforcement. By gaining popularity and audience engagement, bookfluencers become authorities for young people, and their book recommendations directly shape the reading habits of Generation Z. Thus, social media promotes books and strengthens the development of a reading culture based on contemporary forms of interaction and exchange of opinions.

The increased interest in social media, including book media, may have been reinforced by the pandemic and the associated home confinement. During the first year of the pandemic, an increase in reading interest was observed, but in the subsequent period, its levels returned to pre-pandemic levels. In the second year of the pandemic, only 5% of young people read more than seven books, possibly due to the burden of remote learning. When restrictions were lifted in the spring of 2022, and young people returned to school, surveys showed an improvement—the number of individuals reading seven or more books rose to 18%. Educated individuals and women were more likely to read than men and older people.

Generation Z frequently uses social media, focusing on accounts dedicated to books. Social media plays a vital role in shaping young people's opinions about books, particularly through short videos that appeal to them. The contemporary publishing market is extensive. Therefore, young people prefer to explore the opinions of others to save time and money. However, replacing book reading with TikTok videos can have negative consequences. Lack of interaction with a book affects speech development, concentration, and memory, especially when children watch short and fast-moving content (Breczko, 2023). Limited inculcation of a reading culture can lead to intellectual poverty, lack of reflection, and superficial content reading. Although the authors recognise the positive aspects of promoting reading on social media, they hope young people will not focus solely on viewing e-recommendations.

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