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THE STATE OF YOUNG WORKERS – MEMBERS OF GENERATION Z FROM POLAND, SLOVAKIA AND FRANCE

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to examine the state of young workers, focusing on three aspects: internet usage, attitude to work and physical well-being.
Design/methodology/approach: Young adults now entering the workforce are members of Generation Z. They are characterised by a high level of competence in searching and processing information on the internet, thanks to their exposure to digital technologies from an early age. The research material consists of data collected among students studying business-related programmes (N = 151) from three countries: Poland, Slovakia, France.
Findings: The results of the study (N = 151) revealed intrinsic differences within the group of young people, which can be associated with the time spent online and the frequency of physical activity. These factors were subsequently reflected in the BMI, an indicator of physical well-being. Our findings indicate that viewing young workers in only one dimension – as 'digital individuals' – is insufficient. There is no doubt that what they have in common is the use of new technologies. As these are universal and global in nature, the country of residence is irrelevant when analysing Generation Z.
Originality/value: Analysis of economics students as young employees in terms of health, professional and time management. The paper is for labor market analysts, public health analysts and academic teachers.
Keywords: Generation Z, internet, work, physical well-being.
Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Generation Z in the labour market is very different from the generations that came before. The main characteristic of this young population entering the workforce is a high level of familiarity with new technologies. Practically all of them have access to the internet and the time they spend online is steadily increasing (reaching more than 7 hours per day for the 16-24 age group) (Digital 2024. Global Overview Report). Research focusing on Generation Z as young workers, along with reports reflecting employers' perspectives, highlight various aspects that are directly or indirectly shaped by this unique characteristic. Overstimulation, digital addiction, but also the ease of finding new jobs, a strong drive for new challenges, heightened sensitivity to social and environmental issues, an expectation for instant gratification, and a demand for personalisation and transparency in interactions are some of the challenges facing employers today. However, it remains uncertain whether universal digital technologies reflect and determine the universal characteristics of Generation Z. One way to answer this question is to look at the general state of young people across a number of different dimensions in order to test the assumption of their homogeneity, regardless of the country in which they live. The aim of this article is to examine the state of young workers – members of Generation Z – from three European countries: Poland, Slovakia and France, focusing on three aspects: internet usage, attitude to work and physical well-being.

2. Generation Z in the labour market

The youngest participants in the labour market have a number of characteristics that clearly distinguish them from older generations (Table 1). Generation Z is recognised as a distinct cohort, particularly because of their relationship with new technology. As a result, they have been referred to as the digital generation, the network generation, the next generation or Generation C (connected), the Facebook generation or the global generation. This group consists of students and relative newcomers to the labour market, soon to become the leading workforce (Mladkova, 2017).

Table 1.
Comparison of Generations X, Y and Z

Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
Intelligent Educated Not afraid of change Courageous Able to work with new technology Eager to learn Have no problem changing jobs if there are additional benefits involved Constructive criticism is important to them Not very outgoing in interpersonal relationships	The most educated Eager to grow/develop Work-life balance is very important Proficient in modern technologies Work is supposed to be fun Have no problem with frequent job changes Expect help, support from their manager Have no problem with globalisation Do not like to be left out Have their own opinions Tend to use social media for communication	Work-life balance Individualists Reliant on technology Looking for stability Ambitious Competitive Sceptical Distrustful Expect clear objectives Prefer direct communication

Source: Ragin-Skorecka, Falfer, 2024, p. 292.

The age boundaries defining Generation Z are not clearly defined (Levickaitė, 2010; Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomątowska, 2014; Goh, Lee, 2018). For the purposes of this article, Generation Z is defined as people born between the mid-1990s and 2010. When describing Generation Z, their immersion in new technologies and constant online presence are highlighted as key characteristics (Kall, 2015). Their social reality is mainly shaped by social media and platforms that act as new educators (Messyasz, 2021). No previous generation has lived in an era where technology has changed at such a rapid pace and been so readily available to young people (Turner, 2015). At the same time, this very characteristic often remains dominant in the description of Generation Z. However, it must be acknowledged that it can be seen as both a cause and an effect of young people's behaviours, consequently affecting their condition. Ultimately, they may not be such a homogeneous group and therefore may have different attitudes and expectations towards future employers.

From the employer's perspective, it is emphasised that the young workforce is increasingly exhibiting behaviours that were once considered marginal. These include mobility, frequent *job-hopping*, disengagement (*quiet quitting*), the *lazy girl job* mentality, and a preference for hybrid work. Generation Z places a high value on achieving a balance and harmonious integration of work and personal life, regardless of their country of residence. More important than the amount of money they earn are their well-being, personal growth and career prospects. Understanding their complex nature appears to be the key to building effective teams able to achieve business goals. Hence, the article attempts to diagnose the condition of young workers from three different perspectives:

1. as internet users, where more important than the question of access itself, which is a given, is how they engage with the global web, including social media and platforms, and the time they spend online, as more of their activities take place in the digital space,
2. as the future workforce, including jobs already held and career plans,
3. and as individuals with a specific level of physical well-being.

3. Material and methods

The research material consists of data collected among students studying business-related programmes (N = 151) from three countries: Poland n = 63 (24 male and 39 female), Slovakia n = 54 (15 male and 39 female) and France n = 34 (22 male and 12 female). Convenience sampling was used. Data collection consisted of respondents completing a questionnaire and non-invasive anthropometric measurements taken by the authors. The questionnaire was developed in 3 language versions: Polish, English and French. All respondents gave verbal consent to participate in the study. The research form (questionnaire and anthropometry) was anonymous.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and Ward's agglomerative clustering method, based on Euclidean distance. Assuming the hypothesis that the Generation Z respondents form a homogeneous group, it was expected that a single cluster (group) would emerge. The calculations were performed using Statistica 13.3 data analysis software.

The variables representing each metric, together with the scales used, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Metrics, variables and their scales

Metric	Variable	Scale
Internet usage	Hours spent online per day	0 1-3 4-6 7 and more
	Purpose of social media use	To be in touch For fun For education For travel Other (what)
	Purpose of website use	To find content To share content To create content
Attitude to work	Self-assessment of financial situation	Very bad Bad Average Good Very good
	Paid work	Yes No
	Erasmus participation	Yes No
	Career plans for next 5 years	Yes, I have No, I don't have I don't know what I want to do

Cont. table 2.

Physical well-being	Self-assessment of health status	Very bad Bad Average Good Very good
	Physical activity times [in h]/week	None 1 time 2-3 times 4 and more
	BMI body weight [in kg]/height^2 [in m]	underweight (< 18.49) normal weight (18.50-24.99) overweight ≥ 25.00

Source: own data and Physical status: the Use and Interpretation of Anthropometry. Report of a WHO expert committee. WHO Tech Rep Ser 854. Geneva 1995, p.452.

4. Results

In terms of geographic distribution, the largest proportion of respondents came from Poland (41%), followed by Slovakia (36%) and France (23%). The majority were female (63%). The mean calendar age of respondents was 20.95 years (max = 25.23; min = 17.24; Me = 20.71).

Most respondents rated their health as either good (48%) or very good (25%) and reported they exercised 2-3 times a week (45%). Almost half of those surveyed (48%) spend between four and six hours a day online. The objective assessment of respondents' health status is generally consistent with their subjective assessment – 60% of respondents had a normal BMI score.

Based on the dendrogram obtained, it can be concluded that, with the diagnostic variables used, three groups of greater homogeneity can be identified among the respondents: Group 1 with 39 respondents, Group 2 with 78 respondents and Group 3 with 34 respondents (Figure 1).

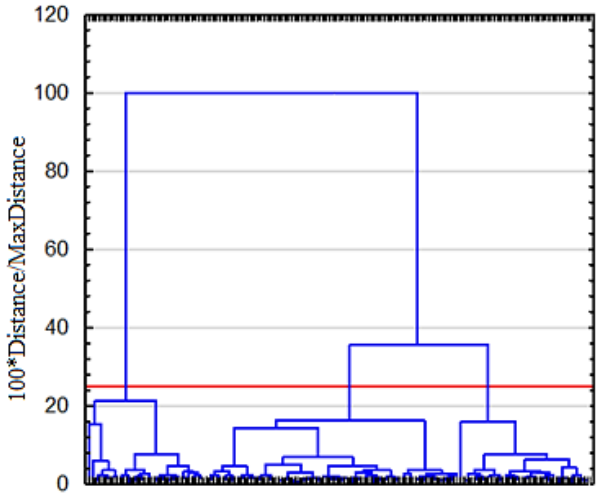

Figure 1. Division of respondents into three groups.

Source: own data.

In terms of country of origin, more than half of the students in Group 1 came from Slovakia, with Poland being the least represented nationality (Table 3). In turn, in Groups 2 and 3, students from Poland were the most numerous and about a third were from Slovakia. Respondents from France were least represented in Group 3.

Table 3.
Proportions of students from France, Slovakia and Poland in the three groups identified

Group	Country		
	France	**Slovakia**	**Poland**
1	11 (28.2%)	20 (51.3%)	8 (20.5%)
2	18 (23.1%)	24 (30.7%)	36 (46.2%)
3	5 (14.7%)	10 (29.4%)	19 (55.9%)

Source: own data.

In terms of gender, Group 1 had the highest proportion of females (Table 4). Group 2 was slightly more balanced (with just under 60% female) and Group 3 exhibited gender parity.

Table 4.
Respondents by group and gender

Group	Gender	
	Female	Male
1	32 (82.1%)	7 (11.9%)
2	46 (59.0%)	32 (41.0%)
3	17 (50.0%)	17 (50.0%)

Source: own data.

In terms of age, there were no statistically significant differences between the three groups (Kruskal-Wallis test: H = 1.724432; p = 0.4222, Table 5).

Table 5.
Respondents by age and gender

Calendar age						
Group	**N included**	**Mean**	**Me**	**Min**	**Max**	**SD**
1	39	20.79	20.70	18.40	23.66	1.50
2	78	20.89	20.66	17.24	25.23	1.79
3	34	21.30	21.31	18.46	25.23	1.66

Source: own data.

Respondents' self-assessment of their financial situation was also relatively consistent across the groups (Figure 2). More than half of the respondents in each group described their financial situation as at least good, with nearly all others rating it as average.

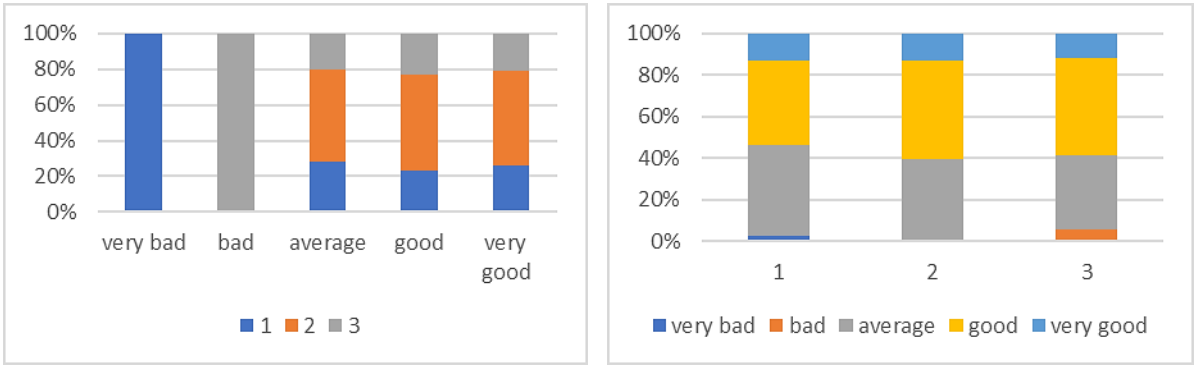

Figure 2. Proportions of respondents by self-assessment of financial situation and by groups.

Source: own data.

Across all groups, almost the same proportion of respondents (around 60%) reported having paid work during their studies (Figure 3).

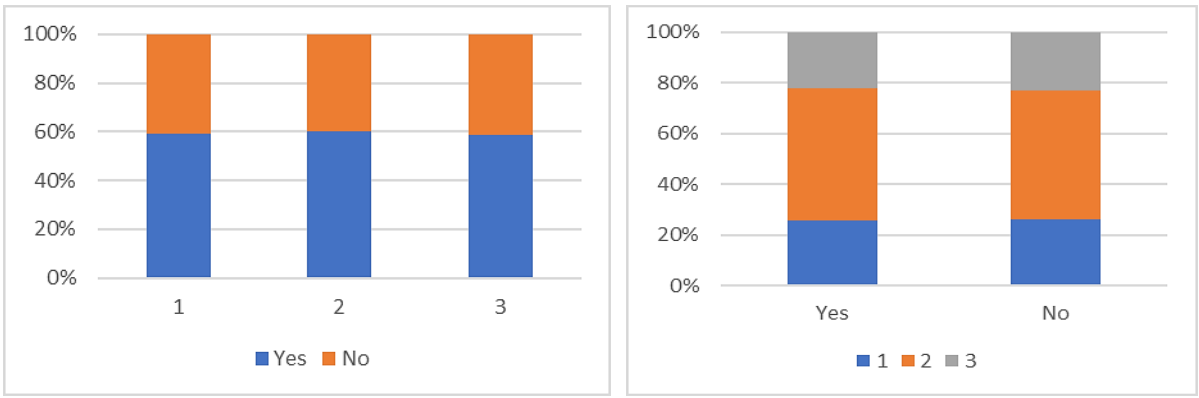

Figure 3. Proportions of respondents by paid work and by groups.

Source: own data.

Consistent results were also observed in response to the question about career plans for the next 5 years. In each of the identified groups, nearly three out of five respondents answered in the affirmative. The remainder were more likely to say that they did not know what they wanted to do than admit that they had no career plans (Figure 4).

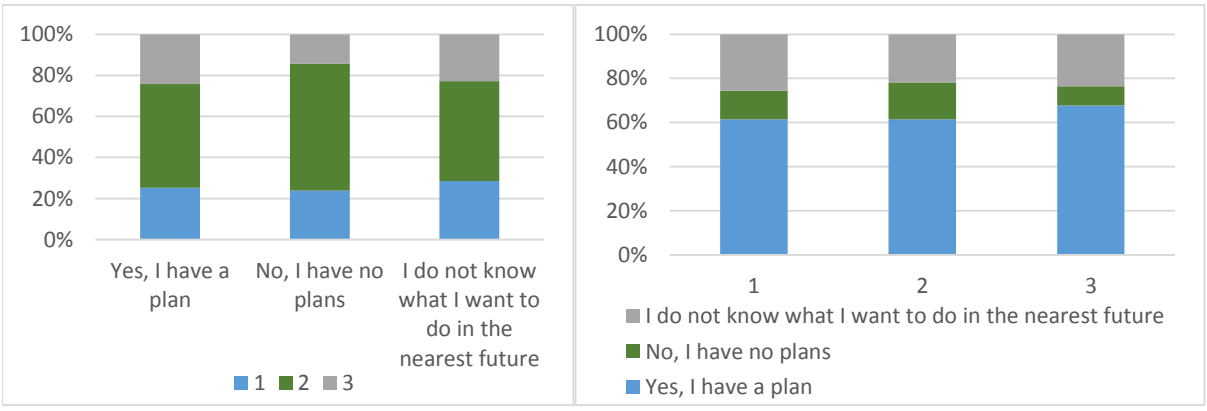

Figure 4. Proportions of respondents by career plans and by groups.

Source: own data.

Finally, statistically significant differences in BMI were found between respondents in each group (Table 6). This is demonstrated by both the Kruskal-Wallis test: H = 121.1441; p < 0.0005, performed on all three groups together, as well as the Mann-Whitney U test, which compared the groups in pairs (Group 1 – Group 2: Z = 8.5138; p < 5.0E-7; Group 1 – Group 3: Z = 7.3264; p < 5.0E-7; Group 2 – Group 3: Z = 8.2802; p < 5.0E).

There is a marked increase in BMI – from an average level (around 19) in Group 1 to over 30 in Group 3 (Figure 5). The BMI levels in Group 2 still fall within the normal range. The prevalence of overweight in young adults is a health concern, as a sedentary lifestyle – largely driven by the time spent online – contributes to weight gain.

Table 5.
BMI by group

Group	BMI					
	N included	Mean	Me	Min	Max	SD
1	39	18.92	19.51	16.59	21.27	3.33
2	78	23.32	23.37	19.66	26.46	1.68
3	34	31.02	29.60	25.41	55.96	5.59

Source: own data.

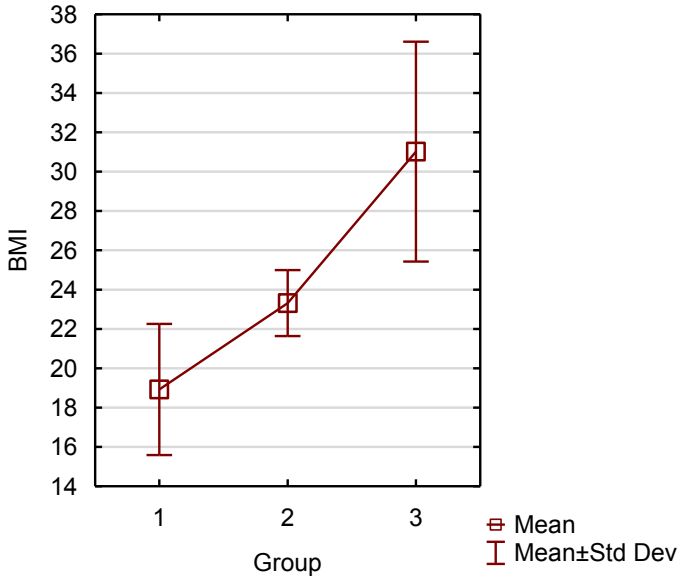

Figure 5. Distribution of BMI by group.

Source: own data.

Despite the statistically significant differences in BMI between the groups, these differences are not reflected in the respondents' self-reported health status. In each group, no more than one or two people described their health as poor or very poor, while three or four out of five described their health as at least good (Figure 6).

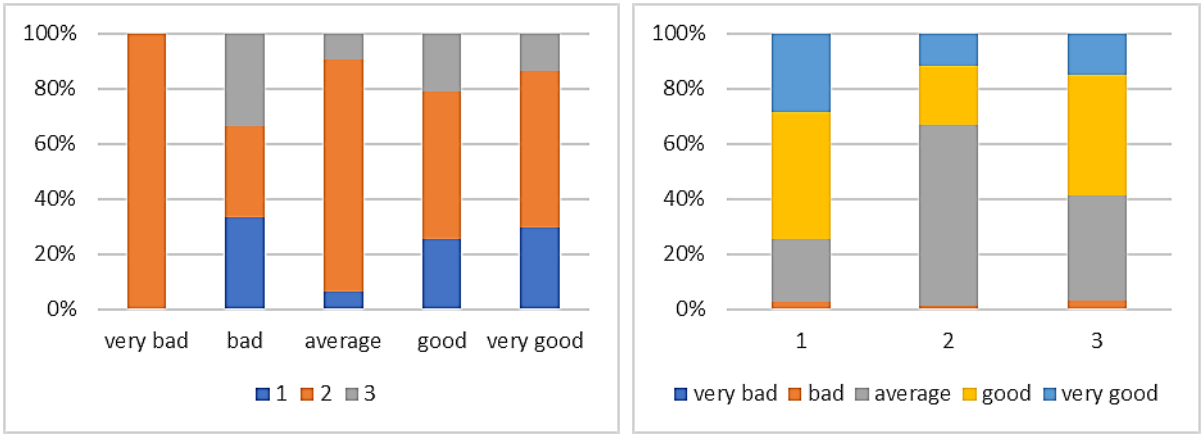

Figure 6. Proportions of respondents by self-assessment of health and by groups.

Source: own data.

The vast majority of respondents had not participated in the Erasmus international student exchange programme (Table 7). Participation in such programmes reflects a willingness to gain new experiences and an openness to challenges, qualities that are highly valued in future employees.

Table 7.

Participation in the Erasmus programme by group

Group	Erasmus participation	
	Yes	No
1	5 (12.8%)	34 (87.2%)
2	8 (10.3%)	70 (89.7%)
3	2 (5.9%)	32 (94.1%)

Source: own data.

The rise in BMI across the groups is clearly correlated with a rise in the proportion of respondents spending 7 or more hours per day online. While the increase in the percentage of such individuals in Group 2 compared to Group 1 is not yet statistically significant ($p = 0.0726$), the increase between Group 1 and Group 3 can be considered significant ($p = 0.0034$) (Table 8 and Figure 7).

Table 8.

Time spent online by group

Group	Number of hours online/day		
	1-3	4-6	7 and more
1	17 (43.6%)	21 (53.8%)	1 (2.6%)
2	35 (44.9%)	35 (44.9%)	8 (10.2%)
3	9 (26.5%)	17 (50%)	8 (23.5%)

Source: own data.

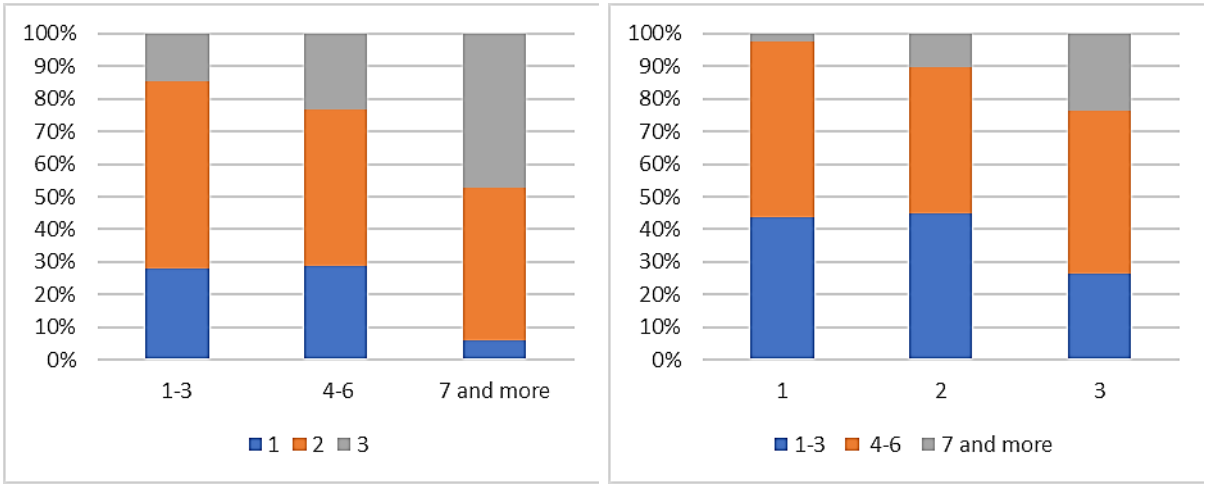

Figure 7. Proportions of respondents by time spent online and by groups.

Source: own data.

On the other hand, there are no significant differences between the groups in terms of how they use social media and websites (Figure 8).

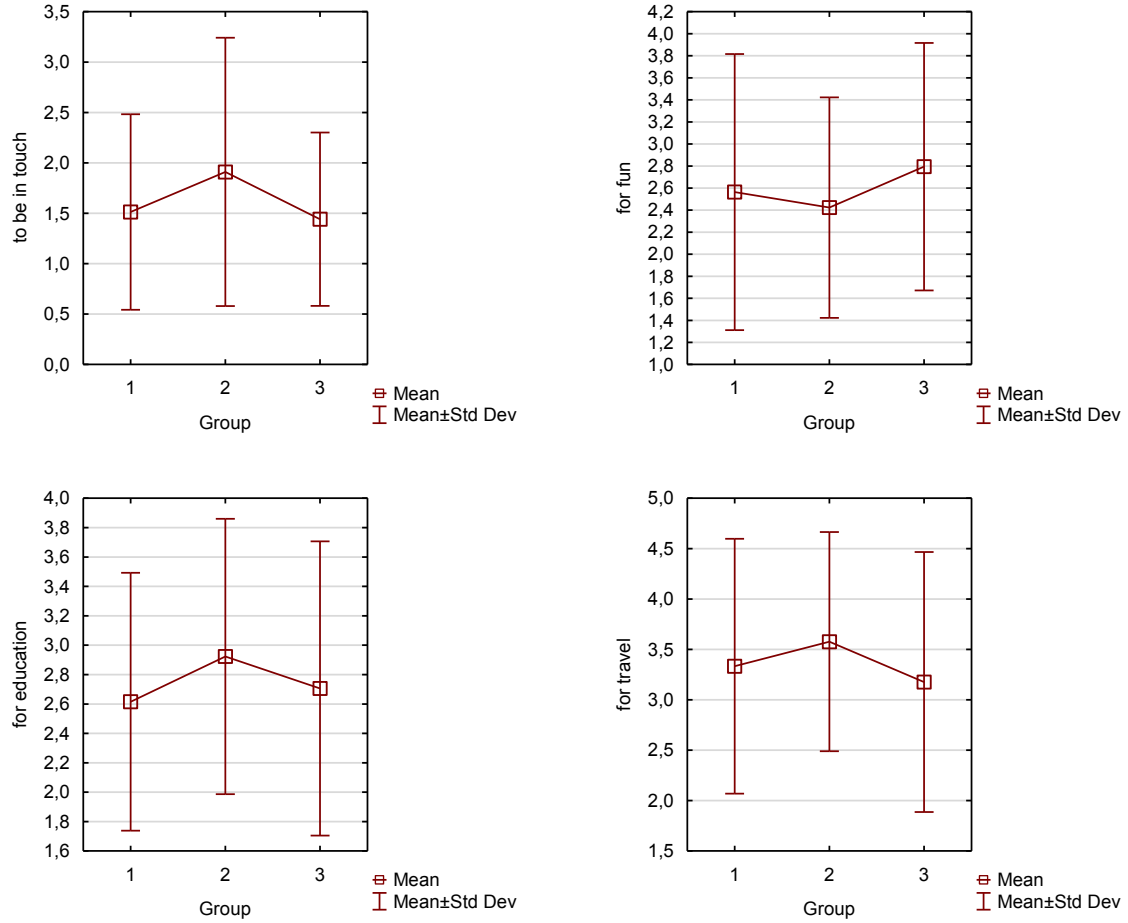

Figure 8. Distributions of purposes of social media use by group.

Source: own data.

Usage of internet websites is also nearly the same across all groups (Table 9). It is primarily used as a source of information, with respondents being least engaged in creating online content.

Table 9.
Purposes of website use by group

Group	Purpose		
	To find content	To share content	To create content
1	33 (84.6%)	4 (10.3%)	2 (5.1%)
2	68 (87.2%)	8 (10.3%)	2 (2.5%)
3	30 (88.2%)	3 (8.9%)	1 (2.9%)

Source: own data.

The majority of respondents reported that they engage in physical activity at least once a week. On the other hand, Group 3 has a significantly higher proportion of respondents who do not participate in sports at all compared to Group 1 ($p = 0.0299$) (Figure 9).

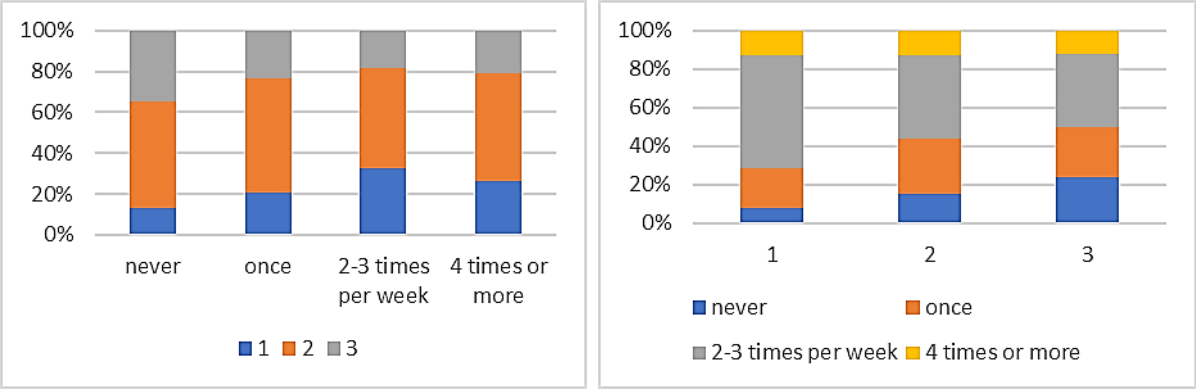

Figure 9. Proportions of respondents by frequency of exercise and by group.
Source: own data.

5. Discussion & Conclusions

Generation Z, like every generation that has gone before it, is inherently different from its predecessors in terms of world view, professional skills and interpersonal relationships. What sets them apart, however, is that they have been immersed in an online environment since birth. This defining characteristic often leads to an oversimplified analysis of Generation Z from a single perspective. This article seeks to challenge that approach by exploring other traits across three different aspects: internet usage, attitude to work and physical well-being.

Our findings indicate that viewing young workers in only one dimension – as 'digital individuals' – is insufficient. There is no doubt that what they have in common is the use of new technologies. As these are universal and global in nature, the country of residence is irrelevant when analysing Generation Z. This was confirmed in our study. There was not a single respondent who did not use the World Wide Web. Furthermore, the purposes for which

social media – popular among this group – and websites are used were similar across respondents. However, we observed differences in the number of hours spent online each day, again regardless of country. Respondents also differed in the frequency of physical activity, which is correlated with time spent online. As a result, this had an impact on their physical well-being, as reflected in their BMI. The more time spent online, the higher the BMI, suggesting an unfavourable (overweight) physique. On the other hand, our research has found that respondents share a number of similar characteristics in terms of variables describing attitudes to work. It therefore appears to be universally true that young people at work are concerned with three factors: satisfactory pay, opportunities for development and concern for their well-being (Money.pl).

These differences made it possible to distinguish three groups. In the first group, 'disengaged', virtually no one spent 7 hours or more a day online, and more than half of its members were physically active 2-3 times a week. They had the lowest BMI (both individual and average). The second group, 'balanced', was characterised by a normal BMI, its members usually spent up to 6 hours a day online and were physically active. Their average BMI was in the normal range. The third group, 'immersed', had the highest proportion of people who were physically inactive compared to the previous groups, and the lowest proportion of people who used the internet for less than 3 hours a day. The average BMI suggests that people in this group were overweight.

This analysis focuses on a specific fraction of Generation Z, namely business students. The different birth year ranges used to identify Generation Z also make it difficult to compare research findings.

A study by Pawar (2013) provides for six forms of employee well-being, namely; physical well-being, emotional/subjective well-being, psychological well-being, social well-being, ethical well-being and spiritual well-being. His results suggest that organisational behaviour and all forms of well-being included in the analysis are broadly linked to employee performance (Pawar, 2013).

Physical well-being is an essential aspect of a worker’s overall condition. Feeling fulfilled at work is the result of having the right skills, a positive working atmosphere, opportunities for self-fulfilment and personal satisfaction, along with other factors that may be subjective. Physical activity is crucial for maintaining physical well-being, whatever the age of the worker. Awareness of the importance and need for regular exercise can vary from person to person, but the opportunities provided by employers to promote physical activity play a crucial role in advancing preventive health. Sports participation reduces sickness absenteeism and employee turnover, boosting productivity and job satisfaction, as well as enhancing the company’s image and cost efficiency (Malińska, 2017). Therefore, health promotion programmes in the broadest sense are beneficial to both employers and employees. A study by Hamar et al. (2015) found that increased employer support for well-being was linked to improvements in both well-being and productivity. Over a two-year follow-up period, well-being and productivity increased,

while presenteeism (ineffective presence at work) and health risks decreased significantly (Hamar et al., 2015). Interesting findings were reported by the research team led by Fannin et al. (2024), showing that employees' emotional and psychological well-being are inversely correlated with self-reported sickness absences. Based on this, it can be concluded that employer initiatives aimed at improving overall workplace well-being should help reduce employee sick leave levels.

The concept of work-life balance, which originated in the USA in the late 1970s and early 1980s, is and should continue to be revised. Today, it is no longer just a question of balancing work with family and social commitments. The issue of overstimulation has emerged, as escaping the impact of computerisation and digitalisation seems impossible. For Generation Z, immersion in new technologies is already a reality, influencing both work activities and leisure time. Consequently, emphasis should be placed on the importance of leisure, with clear boundaries drawn between work focused on earning a living and other activities, particularly physical exercise and intellectual or cultural pursuits. A new role is emerging for employers in encouraging and supporting employees in areas such as sports, culture, health, and even hobbies. With mutual awareness and cooperation between employers and employees, it is possible to achieve and sustain comprehensive employee well-being. This is especially important for members of Generation Z who are already in the labour market. On the one hand, their familiarity and competence with digital and technological solutions make them valuable and indispensable. On the other hand, their hypersensitivity, impatience and difficulties in interpersonal relationships are evident. In light of the above and the findings of this study, there is a need to broaden and deepen the analysis of issues related to the overall well-being of workers from the perspective of employers and the labour market.

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