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Reading Behaviour In The Digital Age: Impact Of Covid-19 On Consumer Behaviour

ABSTRACT

People's lives have been significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, including their shopping behaviour. The authors of the article characterized the individual generations, their shopping behaviour and their relationship to reading and buying books with a focus on e-books. Due to the significant change to the online environment, there may be a presumption that the current situation has an impact on the reading of e-books across all generations. The aim of the research was to find out what effect the pandemic has on the reading and purchasing of e-books and how consumers behave, what their consumer habits are and what influences their shopping behaviour. The paper publishes the results of research conducted by electronic surveying on a sample of 658 respondents. The results showed that the generation influences the purchase of e-books during the Covid-19 pandemic, while respondents prefer to shop in domestic e-shops. The results of the research will be offered to publishers to be able to adapt their marketing strategy and respond to the changes that the current Covid era brings. The research was carried out in Slovakia, in the following period the authors will focus their attention on the countries of Central Europe.

KEY WORDS

E-books. Consumer behaviour during Covid-19. Generations. Digital reading. Digital media. Marketing communication.

1. Introduction

The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic in Slovakia is part of a worldwide pandemic of the infectious disease Covid-19. The first case was confirmed in Slovakia on the 6th of March 2020. It involved a 52-year-old man from the Bratislava region who had not been travelling recently, however his son was in Venice in mid-February. The first measures (actions) against the epidemic were taken on the 6th of March, and a state of emergency was declared on the 12th of March. Schools were closed on the 16th of March and the state of emergency lasted until the 14th of June. On the 1st of October, a second state of emergency was declared, lasting 45 days, but extended by the government to 90 days. School teaching during the school year 2020/2021 was interrupted again from the 12th of October 2020.

The first victim of Covid-19 in Slovakia was a 60-year-old man who died on the 30th of March, a few hours after being released from hospital. Strict rules and measures (actions) taken at the beginning of the pandemic kept the number of infected people under control from spring to summer. The consequences of the pandemic manifested themselves in several areas. Social isolation and reduction of social contact due to preventive measures have had a negative impact, especially on young adults under 30 years of age.¹ Research from other countries also shows that the younger people are, the worse they handle a pandemic. We recorded a similar phenomenon in Slovakia. The basic manifestations of social isolation included nervousness, anger, loneliness and depression. Increasingly, as a result of the interruption of the teaching and educational processes and their replacement by distance forms of learning, there is talk of the lost generation of Covid-19 young people. Jobs for young people are at greater risk and only six Member States have been able to provide digital education for at least 80 % of students.²

However besides reading a variety of content, people have many other activities to do which include: cooking, watching movies/TV shows, playing mobile games, playing mobile group games with friends/family remotely, cleaning at home to maintain health and hygiene, playing indoor games with family, learning a new skill, learning a MOOC course, developing a new hobby, spend time on social media and many more. During the Covid-19 pandemic, fraudulent campaigns spread mainly through social networks were problematic. It is media literacy in the field of health that should be constantly strengthened and promoted.³

Covid-19 has also significantly contributed to the change in consumer behaviour in Slovakia. Slovak consumers, as well as consumers in the surrounding countries, initially started buying in bulk due to concerns about a reduction in the intensity of distribution and the shortage of some foods. This is also confirmed by the data of a retail audit by the company Nielsen, which shows that Slovaks started to buy more than they really needed. Compared to 2019, purchases of fast-moving goods at the beginning of the pandemic in February 2020 increased by 20%. Under the influence of media reports from around the world, a shopping spree started, shopping centres and grocery stores, and drugstores were filled. Shops recorded shortages of disinfectants, soaps, wet wipes, rice, flour, yeast, and other durable foods.⁴ (Nielsen study). A slight decline was followed by a resumption of consumer shopping behaviour in week 11 (i. e. from the 9th to the 15th of March 2020). For retailers, this was the second most successful week of the year, just behind the week before Christmas, the third week of December. Even sales during the pre-Easter weeks in 2019 or 2018, which are without exception the second

¹ *Ako sa máte Slovensko?* [online]. [2021-06-21]. Available at: <https://www.sav.sk/index.php?lang=sk&doc=services-news&source_no=20&news_no=8935>.

² *Regionálny a miestny barometer EÚ varuje: až 10% pokles príjmov v regiónoch a mestách ohrozuje verejné služby.* [online]. [2021-07-20]. Available at: <<https://cor.europa.eu/sk/news/Pages/eu-regional-and-local-barometer.aspx>>.

³ JORMAND, H. et al.: Qualitative Study on People's Experiences of Covid-19 Media Literacy. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 48.

⁴ *Covid 19 mení nákupné správanie slovenských spotrebiteľov.* [online]. [2021-06-21]. Available at: <<https://www.nielsen.com/sk/sk/>>.

strongest period, did not reach their turnover levels during the 11th week of this year. The market of Slovak hypermarkets and supermarkets recorded a 28% increase in turnover during this period.

People also felt a significant reduction in social contact (28%). They limited themselves to visiting their extended family, grandparents, meeting friends, or for example attending cultural events. They also reported spontaneously reducing the amount of time spent outdoors (20%) and paying more attention to childcare (17%). From the above, it is possible to assume more time was spent on leisure activities such as e.g. watching movie series and reading books. The authors of the study found how the habits of Slovaks changed during the epidemiological situation of Covid-19 with a focus on reading books and e-books.

According to the authors, the Covid-19 pandemic affects many situations more than ever before, which we will try to prove in the survey conducted on reading e-books by selected generations. Research results in this area are not publicly available in Slovakia. For an introduction to the issue, we can rely on the research of Hrdináková, Kopáčiková and Rankov from 2017 entitled *Text and Reading, Youth and Libraries*. As many as 70% of respondents (of generation Z (1653 total of respondents) answered that they do not read e-books, although they are interested in paper books.⁵ Although, after being confronted by other issues, they found that not reading e-books does not stem from a relationship with new media but from a relationship with reading as such. They also found that there was a link between their parents' education and the school they attend. The higher the level of education of the parents and the more demands are placed on the respondent of generation Z, the greater the presumption that they read e-books.

This fact also inspired the authors to carry out this survey and to find out the current situation of reading e-books during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a sample, we addressed respondents who read books regularly and have a positive attitude towards new media. Therefore, we searched for respondents in the social media environment.

The results will form a picture of the current situation of e-book reading during the Covid-19 pandemic by generations X, Y and Z, but they can also help in the further strategic planning of promotional campaigns for companies in the Slovak book market.

In the following part of the study, the authors will analyse the basic theoretical background of the researched issues, focusing on the characteristics and classification of e-books and the characteristics of individual generations. These will serve as basic starting points for the empirical part. In the article, the authors define the basic research methods, characterize the target group and determine the basic research hypotheses that examine whether there is a statistical dependence between individual generations and their shopping behaviour with a focus on reading and buying e-books. The study presents the results of a survey that aims to determine the impact of the current Covid-19 situation on reading and consumer behaviour in individual generations (generations Y, X, Z). In conclusion, the authors present possible recommendations for publishers that would help them to seize the opportunities presented by the changing environment and use them to their advantage.

2. Literature Review

We began to encounter the term electronic book in the 1970s, mainly due to the development of computer technology and related new information and communication technologies. Mattison defined an e-book: *“as a monograph akin to a printed book that is made available in a digital format to be read online or downloaded to a handheld device.”*⁶

⁵ HRDINÁKOVÁ, L., KOPÁČIKOVÁ, J., RANKOV, P.: *Text a čítanie, mládež a knižnice*. [online]. [2021-04-26]. Available at: <http://sakba.sk/wp-content/uploads/publikacie/Citanie_mladeze_2017-1.pdf>.

⁶ MATISSON, D.: *Alice in a Book Land: A Primer for Librarians*. In *Computers in Libraries*, 2002, Vol. 22, No. 9, p. 14.

According to Suryani,⁷ the e-book comprises the general components of printed books such as text, pictures, or graphs. These components are equipped with audio, animation, video, and hyperlinks so that the information conveyed in digital books is richer than using printed books. Abbott and Kelly explained that “while an e-book can be as simple as a scanned version of a printed publication, inherent in e-books is the ability to make available a number of features to the reader which include multimedia, hyperlinks, and other interactive components, search features, and customizability to change text size or convert text to audio so as to meet the needs of special readers. As a result, they explained that print on demand books should not be considered e-books, as once printed, many of the qualities inherent in the electronic format cease to be available.”⁸ M. Kovač defined the attributes that e-books have versus printed books as “a minimum length, emphasis on textual content, boundaries to its form, book information architecture.”⁹ buy-in formats – MOBI, EPUB, and PDF. Electronic books can be classified in terms of the type of document, according to the method of their origin and property rights. Carolyn Morris and Lisa Sibert¹⁰ divide electronic documents by type into e-references (manual-type books, eg dictionaries, and encyclopedias), e-textbooks (textbooks), e-literature (various types of genres), e-monographs in series (monographs and proceedings). According to their origin, they can be divided into digitized (initially there is an analogue version, which is then digitized), born-digital (the document was created as electronic, there is no paper version). Depending on the duration of property rights, they can be freely available (property rights no longer exist) or charged (during the duration of property rights).¹¹

Wilson reported¹² that while proponents believe that e-books will come to change the way we understand reading and represent the future of reading in this digital age, critics explain¹³ that reading on a screen is an unpleasant experience that has, and will continue to, stymie the growth of e-books.

The new opportunities brought by communication technologies are able to make digital reading more attractive. Not all texts that are read on screens are considered digital. These texts must meet at least two characteristics: integration of different reading modalities patterns – oral, written, visual, gesture, touch screen and spatial – and with different connection forms between the texts, such as, hyperlinks.¹⁴ Mobile devices (for example) offer augmented mobility – a mobility that is connected, networked and collaborative.¹⁵ Based on these definitions, it can be assumed that there is a need to have certain digital skills when reading e-books. These multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted texts on the screen require different skills and strategies than static texts. According to research conducted in the UK (using the EBONI method) on five different portable media, half of the respondents would continue to reuse and read e-books,

⁷ SURYANI, N.: Utilization of Digital Media to Improve the Quality and Attractiveness of the Teaching of History. In *Proceeding The 2nd International Conference On Teacher Training and Education Sebelas Maret University*, 2016, Vol. 2 No. 1, p. 136.

⁸ ABBOTT, W. A., KELLY, A. K.: *Sooner or Later! Have E-books Turned the Page?* [online]. [2021-06-21]. Available at: <<http://www.vala.org.au/vala2004/2004pdfs/46AbbKel.pdf>>.

⁹ KOVAČ, M. et al.: What is a Book? In *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 2019, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 313-326.

¹⁰ MORRIS, C., SIBERT, L.: *Acquiring E-books*. In POLANKA, S. (ed.): *No Shelf Required*, Chicago : American Library Association, 2011, p. 96.

¹¹ KRAVIAROVÁ, M.: E-kniha v digitálnej ére. In BOČÁK, M., REGRUTOVÁ, L., RUSNÁK, J. (eds.): *MÉDIÁ A TEXT 5*. Prešov : Filozofická fakulta PU v Prešove, 2015, p. 175.

¹² WILSON, R.: *Ebook Readers in Higher Education*. In *Journal of Educational Technology Society*, 2003, Vol. 6, No. 4, p. 9.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 8-17.

¹⁴ AMIAMA-ESPAILLAT, C., MAYOR-RUIZ, C.: Digital Reading and Reading Competence: The Influence in the Z Generation from the Dominican Republic. In *Comunicar: Media Education Research Journal*, 2017, Vol. 25, No. 52, p. 105-113.

¹⁵ ČABYOVÁ L., KRAJČOVIČ, P., PAVELEKOVÁ, J.: Digital Literacy and Readership of E-Books in Slovakia. In *International Journal of Media and Information Literacy*, 2020, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 4.

the other half gave a negative assessment. The basic reasons for the re-use of e-book reading devices were the portability of the device, clarity, and hypertextuality. Negative reviews were influenced by the price of the e-book, the weight of the device, the benefits of the print version, and the lack of functionality. Further findings¹⁶ identify other significant problems associated with the use of e-books. and e.g. battery problems and poor screen quality. However, e-books are easily accessible, you can have them with you anytime and anywhere and they will not take up much space. You have no problem with storage. You can share the content of an e-book with many readers at once (unless it is protected or protected only by social DRM), the printed version of the book can only be read by one user. Research suggests the interactive and collaborative features of digital textbooks may increase student engagement in learning.¹⁷ Kraviarová¹⁸ considers their price among the main advantages of e-books (compared to printed books they are 30% cheaper, some are free), they can be bought quickly, their purchase is not tied to time and space, after payment they are immediately available to the reader, there are no additional costs in the form of postage with the delivery, they are more storable and they take up less space. In this paper, the authors focused on defining the differences between individual generations – Generation Z and Generation Y in reading books, respectively. e-books. The issue of generations is relatively new, but it is addressed by many authors, e.g. R. Hill, E. Williams, D. V. Bergh or M. Behrer, K. M. Wallace, who did not begin publishing their research until the beginning of this millennium. The specificity of the elaboration of the theoretical basis of the issue of generations is that each author states a different time frame for individual generations and it is not always possible to grasp the agreement in their psychological profile. Nevertheless, the idea of dividing the population into individual generations has been adopted and this typology is currently recognized and often cited. According to the age of birth, generations can be divided into the following groups – generation Z, generation, Y, generation X and Baby boomers. Generation members are similar in certain traits, values, lifestyles, or interests, so it is possible to define their common generational identity, which remains the basis for decision-making management processes.¹⁹

A characteristic feature of Generation Z is their connection to digital technologies and the virtual environment. In connection with this basic feature, millennials born at the turn of the millennium have been referred to as the virtual generation since 1996. However, in the literature, we find other designations, the common feature of which is their digital skill and the digital competences of Generation Z (Facebook Generation, App Generation, iGens, @generation, Selfie Generation, Rainbow Generation, Post-Millennials, Internet Generation, Google Generation, Net Generation).

It is digital media that allows users not only to consume content,²⁰ but also to create content that allows this generation to integrate into the virtual environment even more than generations before it. Due to their behavior, they are increasingly revealing their adolescence on the Internet, because it is already the Internet generation.²¹

¹⁶ WILSON, R.: Ebook Readers in Higher Education. In *Journal of Educational Technology Society*, 2003, Vol. 6, No. 4, p. 8.

¹⁷ ABACI, S.: *Student Engagement With E-Texts: What the Data Tell Us*. [online]. [2021-04-28]. Available at: <<https://er.educause.edu/articles/2017/10/student-engagement-with-etexts-what-the-data-tell-us>>.

¹⁸ See also: KRAVIAROVÁ, M.: E-kniha v digitálnej ére. In BOČÁK, M., REGRUTOVÁ, L., RUSNÁK, J. (eds.): *MÉDIÁ A TEXT 5*. Prešov : Filozofická fakulta PU v Prešove, 2015, p. 174-186.

¹⁹ See: GREŠKOVÁ, P.: Špecifická generácie Y z pohľadu súčasnej spoločnosti, hodnôt a marketingovej komunikácie. In *Fórum manažéra*. [online]. [2021-04-21]. Available at: <https://forummanazera.sk/cms/art_db/2017-2-4.pdf>; See also: FAŠIANG, T., KOLLÁROVÁ, D., KUSÁ, A.: *Retail Marketing Communication and the Consumer Behaviour of Selected Generations*, 2021.

²⁰ RADOŠINSKÁ, J., KVETANOVÁ, Z., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: To Thrive Means to Entertain: The Nature of Today's Media Industries. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 18.

²¹ TRNINIC, D., KUPRESANIN VUKELIC, A.: Privacy on the Internet Concerning Generation Z in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 181.

An important feature that distinguishes these digital natives from previous generations, including their parents and teachers, is that they were born into the digital world, do not know a world without the Internet, and are extremely skilled at handling modern technologies, we can even say that they operate them intuitively. According to Kowalczyk,²² they prefer print books over digital ones, read literature for entertainment, and prefer reading instead of watching news.

Gibson²³ argues that the constant contact of children and adolescents with screens since early childhood causes a change in their neural circuits, which significantly affects the functioning of their minds, their relationships, learning style, mental health, and self-perception. These changes lead to students inability to pay attention, to underdeveloped social skills, new cognitive abilities have emerged²⁴ and students' learning styles have changed.²⁵ Another term used for Millennials is Echo Boomers as their large size, education and technical skills may echo the effect of the Baby Boomers on society and businesses.²⁶ As the children of these idealistic Baby Boomer parents, Millennials have been called entitled and empowered due, in part, to their inclusion in decision making since childhood.²⁷

Members of Generation Y (1978-1995) are less interested in traditional careers than Generation X. They prefer work that they can reconcile with their personal lives and in which they have a stimulating work environment.²⁸ The use of modern means of communication is a daily occurrence for this generation, therefore every day and internet communication has become a natural part of life for them. The rise of modern technologies, which are related to smartphones and the advent of social networks, has taken the opportunities for online communication to a higher level.²⁹

Generation X (1965-1977) is called the "lost generation". It was given some freedom, but it was unable to handle it. Generation "X" is the first technological generation. Technologies began to emerge during their lifetime, which gained importance especially from the point of view of marketing. This manifested itself in openness to traditional as well as modern means of communication.³⁰ This generation currently uses social media, spends more time online than their parents, travels a lot and likes to travel, considers itself more realistic, experiences more stress than the generation before it, and believes it spends more time at work than ever before.³¹ They are more likely to read on a tablet than the other generations. When shopping, members of this generation follow their own reasoning and attach great importance to experiences

²² KOWALCZYK, O.: *Comparing the Reading Habits of 5 Generations*. [online]. [2021-04-21]. Available at: <<https://ebookfriendly.com/comparing-reading-habits-five-generations-infographic/>>.

²³ GIBSON, C.: Who Are These Kids? Inside the Race to Decipher Today's Teens, Who Will Transform Society as We Know it. In *Washington Post*. [online]. [2021-04-21]. Available at: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/style/2016/05/25/inside-the-race-to-decipher-todays-teens-who-will-transform-society-as-we-know-it/>>.

²⁴ PRENSKY, M.: Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants: Do They Really Think Differently? In *On the Horizon*, 2001, Vol. 9, No. 6. No pagination. [online]. [2021-04-21]. Available at: <<https://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part2.pdf>>.

²⁵ Compare to: BRNÍK, A.: *Násilie na televíznych obrazovkách v kontexte jednotného systému označovania*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2020, p. 27.

²⁶ ALLEN, P.: Welcoming Y. In *Benefits Canada*, 2004, Vol. 28, No. 9, No. 28, p. 51-53.

²⁷ See: COOMES, D., M., DEBARD, R.: Understanding the Historical and Cultural Influences that Shape Generations. In COOMES, M., DEBARD, M. (eds.): *New Directions for Student Services: Serving the Millennial Generation*. San Francisco, CA : Jossey-Bass, 2004, Vol. 106, p. 28. p. 17-31.

²⁸ ŠVORCOVÁ, P.: Kto je generácia Y: Rozprávka o tom, ako budúci lídri zachránia svet. [online]. [2021-04-13]. Available at: <<http://zmensizivot.sk/kto-je-generacia-y-rozpravka-o-tom-ako-buduci-lidri-zachrania-svet/>>.

²⁹ BERGH, J., BEHRER, M.: *How Cool Brands Stay Hot. Branding to Generation Y*. London : Kogan Page, 2011, p. 21.

³⁰ HILL, R. P.: Managing Across Generations in the 21st Century. In *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 2002, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 62.

³¹ GREŠKOVÁ, P.: Špecifická generácie Y z pohľadu súčasnej spoločnosti, hodnôt a marketingovej komunikácie. In *Fórum manažéra*, 2017, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 24. [online]. [2021-04-21]. Available at: <https://forummanazera.sk/cms/art_db/2017-2-4.pdf>.

and references from acquaintances or friends.³² They are characterized by high loyalty and willingness to pay more for their favorite brand. Generation “X” can be considered the ideal target group from which to gain lifelong customers. However, this only applies if the company offers high-quality products and services that customers require from it. Compared to the younger generation, their willingness to try new brands is lower. The characteristics of this generation also include openness and influence. It is a generation that has adult children and usually also grandchildren, and it is when using or buying technology that you can advise them, so when addressing this generation, it is necessary to consider this factor as well.

Baby boomers are people born in the time of American and Western European economic prosperity after World War II. During their lifetime, many important social changes took place (the first landing of man on the moon, great steps towards racial equality and equality between men and women). This generation has undergone rapid and large social and technological changes and is the first generation to understand the importance of technology. These changes also contributed to their optimism because they believed that they could do anything if they wanted to. Although their generation is known for the rise of individualism, they are also a team-oriented generation – they have founded many associations. Baby Boomers grew up in difficult times, which resulted in economic prosperity. Older Baby Boomers are therefore different from younger who have already grown up in better conditions. Light³³ marked with tradition, currently approaching the younger generations, interested in an active lifestyle, travel, shopping, and general youth.³⁴ They are the least likely to read a book in digital format (19% versus 24-35% in other generations). They get their news from printed newspapers – 39% compared to 22% of Gen Z and 26% of Millennials.³⁵

From the previous characteristics of generations, it can be assumed that their relationship to reading books will also be different. As a result of the Covid-19 crisis, changes in the traditional behaviour of generations can be observed, and the habits and reading of books have changed. From results realized in the USA during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic (March 2020) it can be stated that Millennials were the most likely to read more books to keep themselves entertained whilst self-isolating, with 40 percent saying that they were more inclined to read books, seven percent higher than all adults in total.

There are several definitions of the division of generations by year of birth. The authors of the article follow the following division.

	More	No change	Less	Do not know
Total	33%	54%	6%	8%
Gen Z	34%	49%	8%	9%
Millennials	40%	46%	6%	7%
Gen X	31%	53%	6%	10%
Baby Boomers	28%	61%	6%	6%

TABLE 1: *Share of adults reading books more frequently due to the coronavirus outbreak in the United States as of March 2020, by generation*

Source: Statista, 2020

³² WALLACE, J. E.: Work Commitment in the Legal Profession: A Study of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. In *International Journal of the Legal Profession*, 2006, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 137-151.

³³ LIGHT, P. CH.: *Baby Boomers*. New York : W. W. Norton and Company, 1990, p. 228.

³⁴ GREŠKOVÁ, P.: Špecifická generácie Y z pohľadu súčasnej spoločnosti, hodnôt a marketingovej komunikácie. In *Fórum manažéra*, 2017, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 23-24. [online]. [2021-04-21]. Available at: <https://forummanazera.sk/cms/art_db/2017-2-4.pdf>.

³⁵ KOWALCZIK, O.: *Comparing the Reading Habits of 5 Generations*. [online]. [2021-04-21]. Available at: <<https://ebookfriendly.com/comparing-reading-habits-five-generations-infographic/>>.

Research can characterize the basic changes in the behavior of individual generations. Gen Z has increased their reading more than any other generation since the start of coronavirus. Millennials read the most books. Physical books are preferable over digital books for every generation. Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation find their book ideas on bestseller lists, while Gen Z looks to social media. The surprise generation that uses libraries the most is Millennials. Gen X are pure “news junkies” – every day they read more online news than anyone else. Every Generation has a preference for physical books over digital ones.

The authors Čábyová, Krajčovič, Paveleková conducted a survey in 2020 on a sample of 465 respondents aged 15-55, which showed that e-books are regularly read by a quarter of respondents and e-books have been read at least once by more than a third of respondents. Readership was higher in women. Respondents most often read e-books on an e-book reader, followed by a smartphone, tablet, and laptop. However, 40% of respondents have not yet read any e-books at all. Almost 86% of respondents read classic books, while only 1% of respondents regularly buy newspapers or magazines.³⁶ It is online media that are the most widespread on the Slovak market. According to Panasenko, Krajčovič and Stashko online media make up 80% of the total number of monitored media.³⁷

3. Materials and Methods

In the article, we focused on the consumer behaviour of individual generations in relation to books, respectively, e-books. We investigated how the pandemic affects e-book reading and shopping, and how consumers behave, what their consumer habits are, and what influences their shopping behaviour. The survey was conducted through electronic inquiries, in which we addressed respondents who have a positive attitude towards books, i.e. books are read regularly. The authors deliberately formulated a narrower sample of respondents focused on generations X, Y and Z, so that the results of the survey as well as the suggestions could be better applied in practice.

The time span of the survey was during the period 17th November to 30th November 2020. The first step of our research was to decide on the target population, i.e. the type of respondents who are the basic set of our research. We selected respondents who have a positive attitude to reading, i.e. books are read regularly. We contacted respondents through FB groups and blogs that are focused on reading. We then calculated the sample size according to the formula (scheme):

$$n = \frac{z_{1-\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2 \cdot \pi \cdot (1 - \pi)}{E^2}$$

However, it is not possible to determine the exact size of the base file. Since we do not know the proportion of occurrence of the examined feature in the basic set, we chose the value 0.5 (recommended for unknown values), we set the maximum allowable margin of error (allowed margin of error) at 5% (in routine marketing research it is set from 2% to 10% variables in the formula, we find that the minimum size of our sample should be 385. The actual size of the respondents who participated in the survey was 658.

³⁶ ČÁBYOVÁ, Ľ., KRAJČOVIČ, P., PAVELEKOVÁ, J.: Digital Literacy and Readership of E-books in Slovakia. In *International Journal of Media and Information Literacy*, 2020, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 4.

³⁷ See: PANASENKO, N., KRAJČOVIČ, P., STASHKO, H.: Hard News Revisited: A Case Study of Various Approaches to an Incident at a Primary School as Reflected in the Media. In *Communication Today*, 2021, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 112-128.

We processed the obtained data using MS Excel. Individual values of the quantitative traits were arranged by number and by simple sorting written in tables, where the symbol f_i indicates the frequency of occurrence of the value x_i ($i = 1, 2, \dots, k$). The relation $f_1 + f_2 + \dots + f_k = n$ holds.

We examined the dependence between selected qualitative features, which acquire more levels, through their analysis, while on the elements of the sample we always observed two qualitative features A, B, which acquire more levels (A1, A2, ... f_l ; B1, B2, ... B_k). The condition was the validity of the relationship $k > 2$ or $m > 2$.

We recorded the results of the observation in a contingency table. As a test criterion we used the statistics χ^2 , which is given by:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \sum_{j=1}^m \frac{(f_{ij} - o_{ij})^2}{o_{ij}}$$

The degree of dependence between the individual variables is assessed using the contingency coefficient, which is defined by the following relationship:

$$C = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{n + \chi^2}}, \quad \text{kde } \chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \sum_{j=1}^m \frac{\left(f_{ij} - \frac{f_i^A f_j^B}{n} \right)^2}{\frac{f_i^A f_j^B}{n}}$$

We set a null and an alternative hypothesis for each area examined.

H0 – Characters A and B are independent. There is no dependence between the observed characters in the given files. Generation and e-book shopping are independent variables.

H1 – There is a statistical dependence between characters A and B. There is a statistical relationship between generation and e-book shopping.

We tested the statistical dependence between the individual generations and their change in behaviour in relation to shopping behaviour during the Covid-19 crisis, how much money is spent on e-books, and how they buy them. We also found out how the respondents relate to books by Slovak authors.

4. Results and Discussion

658 respondents from Slovakia, who read e-books, took part in the questionnaire survey. Of these, 89% were women and 11% were men. According to Eurostat, more readers are women than men, but men read a book on average longer than women.³⁸ We also checked the respondents' highest level of education: primary (4%), secondary (50%), higher vocational (2%), and university (44%). We also found from our respondents to which generation they belong according to the year of birth: generation Z (35%), generation Y (38%), generation X (26%). Other generations are not statistically significant for us.

From the results of the survey and the performed analyzes, we found that 74% of respondents read e-books and 26% of respondents read e-books occasionally. We were also interested in the reading of e-books. Only 1% of respondents read e-books for a maximum of half an hour. 10% of respondents read e-books at most. Most respondents spend 1-2 hours reading (45%). 41% of respondents read e-books for more than 2 hours at a time. The question could not be answered exactly by 3% of respondents. The data are shown in Figure 4.

³⁸ *Final Consumption Expenditure of Households by Consumption Purpose*. [online]. [2021-04-21]. Available at: <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tec00134>>.

The following survey may supplement our results: In 2008-2015, the EU conducted a survey of readers aged 20-74 in 15 countries, where they surveyed the average reading time of books but did not specify the type of book. In France, on average, readers read 2 minutes a day, in Italy 5 minutes, in Austria and Romania up to 10 minutes, in Hungary 10 minutes, in Finland and Poland 12 minutes, in Estonia 13 minutes. Slovakia was not included in the survey, but based on our results, we can assume that it would be placed at least on the average of the countries surveyed.

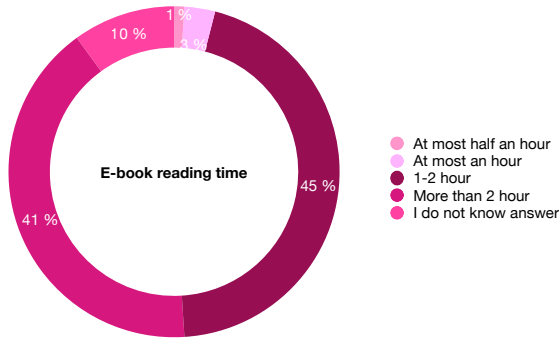


FIGURE 1: *E-book reading time*

Source: own processing, 2021

Respondents buy e-books mostly through domestic e-shops (49%). We found from the questionnaires that there is also a strong rate of illegal e-book downloads (29%). Krajčovič and Paveleková addressed the illegal download of e-books by Slovak readers in their as yet unpublished survey Reading of electronic books and illegal downloading. People download e-books quite often. They search for e-books from online free repositories the most. They cited the unavailability of titles or personal financial reasons as the reasons for their actions. Illegal e-book downloads threaten all markets, not just Slovak ones. Therefore, it may be a challenge to address this issue in more depth in the future. 11% of respondents shop in foreign e-shops. 7% of respondents receive e-books and 4% buy e-books directly from the e-reader. The data are shown in Figure 2.

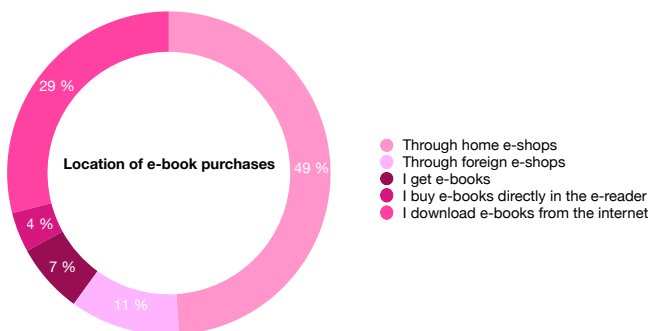


FIGURE 2: *Location of e-book purchases*

Source: own processing, 2021

Only 13% of respondents regularly buy e-books. As many as 38% of respondents do not buy e-books. They will either receive e-books as gifts or illegally download them from the store. More detailed results are shown in Figure 5. The interest of Slovak readers may to some extent influence publisher's plans to purchase a license to publish an e-book. In 2019, the least

original prints were published in Slovakia compared to previous years (1.890 prints). Publishers are not motivated to publish formats other than paper books due to lost profits, which are also caused by illegal e-book downloads.

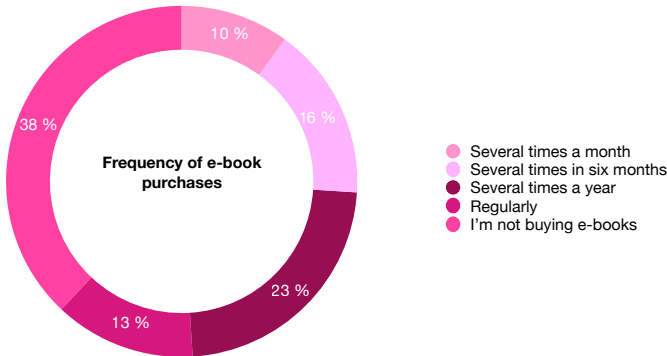


FIGURE 3: Frequency of e-book purchases

Source: own processing, 2021

For e-books, readers spend different amounts on their purchases – less than € 10 (7%), between € 10-20 (38%), more than € 20 (22%). Again, 38% of respondents do not buy e-books, similarly to Figure 3. The amount that readers are willing to pay for e-books may depend on their own household income and expenses. This year, however, the situation in connection with the pandemic may also affect everything. Preventive measures have affected several areas in Slovakia and unemployment has risen. Figure 4 shows budget data for eBooks.

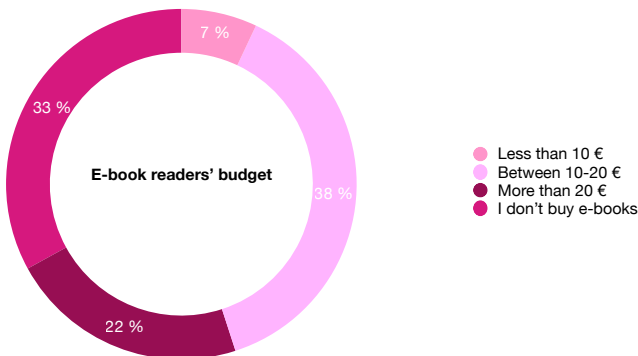


FIGURE 4: E-book readers' budget

Source: own processing, 2021

In the research, we also focused on the preferences of e-books by Slovak authors. As many as 64% of respondents stated that they read e-books by Slovak authors, but only 38% of them prefer to read e-books over paper prints. Others, if they have a choice, will choose a classic book. The most popular Slovak authors of e-books were: Dominik Dán, Baja Dolce, Michaela Zamari, Emily D. Beňová, Lina Elys and Jozef Karika. Although domestic works are popular, translated fiction still has a strong presence in Slovakia.

In examining the hypotheses, we investigated whether there was a statistically significant relationship between generations X and Z and a change in the frequency of e-book purchases during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The hypothesis of independence between generation and e-book shopping has not been confirmed. The test showed that there is a relationship between these features. The results are shown in Table 2.

Generation / Purchase of e-books	Less often	The same	More often	Not buying	Together
1965-1979	0 (10,83)	84 (61,41)	63 (39,74)	21 (56,00)	168
1980-1995	28 (16,25)	98 (92,12)	56 (59,61)	70 (84,00)	252
1996-2009	14 (14,90)	56 (84,45)	35 (54,64)	126 (77,00)	231
Together	42	238	154	217	651

TABLE 2: Real and expected numbers (generation affiliation and e-book shopping)

Source: own processing, 2021

We reject the tested hypothesis at the level of significance α if the value of the test criterion exceeds the critical value. The test showed that generation affects the frequency of book purchases. The value of the test criterion is 12.592. The degree of statistical dependence was calculated using the contingency coefficient ($C = 0.3859121134914971$). The calculated value of the contingency coefficient shows that there is a slight degree of connection between the characters.

The research was limited to the Slovak book market and Slovak readers. From the point of view of scientific and practical contribution, it would be interesting to carry out this research abroad as well, especially in markets similar to the Slovak one. The results could be compared with each other and bring a new perspective needed to improve the shortcomings at work.

We focused on a narrow sample of respondents so that we could generalize the results more effectively. We also did not limit ourselves to a certain genre and did not separate the respondents accordingly. The preferred genre was not decisive, which limited us in the results section, respectively, in the possibility of more efficient use of results. For us, one idea for the future could be an extension of this survey, where we would focus not only on generations but also on the preferred genre or language of the e-book. More specific results would reflect the current situation in more depth and could also be applicable to specific companies in the Slovak book market. Another limitation of the survey is the current situation and the development of the Covid-19 pandemic, which affects other measures of the government in Slovakia in order to prevent the transmission of the virus among the population as much as possible.

The results of other research on the Slovak book market have so far not reflected the interest of generations X, Y and Z in reading e-books. Either the authors did not focus on a deeper knowledge of the specific generations or the sample did not show the interest of respondents in reading e-books, similarly to that found in the research of Hrdináková, Kopáčiková and Rankov.³⁹ Their sample of respondents from generation Z read books, but new media did not expose them sufficiently to tend to read e-books. In our sample of generations X, Y and Z, not only do respondents read e-books, but the Covid-19 pandemic has affected their shopping behaviour and they buy more e-books. This is a clear signal to companies in the book market about which products their potential customers are also interested.

Since we did not identify specific book titles, genres, or authors, it is difficult to plan a communication strategy without any other information. Only the information that potential customers want to read e-books and also to buy them to an increased extent is weak, but it can be the initial idea in a company's marketing decisions. From the final report of the Association of Publishers and Booksellers in the Slovak Republic, we can conclude, however, that publishers and bookstores should focus most on fiction when planning their promotional campaigns, as this has also been the best-selling e-book genre in recent years.⁴⁰ This figure, combined with the results of our survey, can greatly help businesses to conduct promotional activities during the pandemic.

³⁹ HRDINÁKOVÁ, L., KOPÁČIKOVÁ, J., RANKOV, P.: *Text a čítanie, mládež a knižnice*. [online]. [2021-04-20]. Available at: <http://sakba.sk/wp-content/uploads/publikacie/Citanie_mladeze_2017-1.pdf>.

⁴⁰ *Správa o knižnom trhu*. [online]. [2021-04-20]. Available at: <https://zvks.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Knizny-trh_2019.pdf>.

The results are applicable in practice and can help publishers to make decisions in several directions. In the first place, there is a demonstrated interest in ebooks. Generation X, Y and Z read e-books, want to read them and the Covid-19 pandemic affects their shopping behaviour. We have shown that generation has an influence on the purchase of e-books during a pandemic. Therefore, they should consider publishing more titles in this format as well. Research has shown the phenomenon of illegal e-book downloads. Although e-books are protected by legislation and e-book protection (e.g. social DRM), this protection appears to be insufficient. Therefore, the results of the research may tell publishers how else they can protect e-books or how to persuade the reader to buy an e-book rather than download it from the Internet. Last but not least, the results regarding the reading of Slovak authors could help Slovak publishers. Many publishers focus on the translation of foreign fiction and Slovak authors are just a supplement in their portfolio. Readers also want to read e-books from local personalities. The results included not only Slovak regulars in the book market, but also newcomers. Therefore, we recommend that publishers focus not only on publishing Slovak authors but also on their more concentrated marketing promotion.

The Covid-19 pandemic brings companies new opportunities to communicate with their customers, so we recommend publishing book titles not only in electronic format but also focus on online marketing promotion, which is still not a matter of course. The research approach of Slovak publishers to e-books during the Covid-19 pandemic shows that publishing houses in Slovakia do not pay more attention to the promotion of e-books. Rather, they rely on the fact that if the reader sees the campaign for a book title in paper form, he will look for his electronic form himself and buy it. However, the profit for e-books compared to paper titles does not support their opinion.

5. Conclusion

E-books already have an irreplaceable place in society today. They offer many benefits to users – they are more portable, do not require much storage space, save the environment and also the finances of the reader themselves because in most cases they are also cheaper than their paper versions. They also offer benefits for publishers and self-publishers themselves – in particular, they save the budget for printing and distribution, so the budget can be planned differently than for other titles.

E-books at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic are more available. In some cases, brick-and-mortar bookstore stores are closed during government orders. Readers can either order the paper book at home or at Post office. However, this distribution of the product can take several days, so the reader does not have his book immediately available. It's different from the electronic version. The reader can download the e-book to their device immediately after making the payment and can also choose the file format. Some can buy e-books directly on their in-app reader (for example, on Kindle readers, where readers can buy books directly through Amazon). The purchase of new stories during a pandemic thus takes on a different dimension, as the reader does not have to endanger their health due to the purchase and can also choose from a wide portfolio of products in Slovak and foreign languages.

In this paper, we focused on the generations that are influenced by technological developments. Technical skills are required to read e-books, and the reader must have a reading device – e.g. an e-book reader, a smartphone, a tablet or, in some cases, a laptop, which can be very inconvenient. Generations X, Y, Z are used to using modern devices in everyday life and being online. Therefore, we examined the consumer behaviour of generations in relation to e-books during the Covid-19 pandemic. The impetus was that the pandemic affected and influenced the shopping behaviour of consumers in various segments around the world. We were also interested in the interest of Slovak authors as well as the budget for e-books. The results can help publishers and publishers respond more effectively to customer needs when purchasing e-books during a pandemic.

Our research showed that the most numerous group of e-book readers are women. The results showed that the generation influences the purchase of e-books during the Covid-19 pandemic, while respondents prefer to shop in domestic e-shops such as Martinus.sk, Pantarhei.sk or Ibox.sk. They spend 1-2 hours reading e-books at once. There is also still interest in e-books by Slovak authors. However, there is still a trend of illegal e-book downloads, for which the book market is losing profits. However, the exact number is unknown. We can assume that weak protection of e-books, readers' preferences, but also the space for illegal distribution of e-books in the online space influences the decision-making of publishers when purchasing a license for electronic formats.

During the implementation of the research, we most often encountered a barrier in addressing different types of generations. To some extent, we assume that this is due to measures being taken preventively against a pandemic. It was easier to address in the sample of generation Z, which has been taught for several months in a distance online form, than generation X, whose life has not changed significantly and does not spend more time with a PC than before. This caused a more difficult penetration of this generation, but with the right specific communication channels on Facebook, we finally managed to reach the respondents of this generation.

The longer the pandemic lasts, the more the shopping behaviour of selected generations when buying e-books can be influenced in either a negative or positive direction. In the case of a declining family budget, it is rather assumed that the illegal downloading and sending of e-books will become even more widespread unless the publishers themselves respond to it. Readers want to read e-books and prefer this reading format during a pandemic.

The challenge for the authors of the article will be to find out how the pandemic will affect shopping behaviour and what the e-book market will look like after the pandemic.

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