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SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE READING DECISIONS
OF GENERATION Z[*]

A b s t r a c t . The aim of the article is to identify the impact of social media on the reading decisions of young Generation Z readers, including relevant platforms and content types. Based on a literature review and empirical CAWI research among 105 Generation Z participants, the study explores how online creator recommendations influence this group. Findings highlight social media as a key source of book information, comparable to family and friends. Short, dynamic content significantly increases book awareness and interest. Although creator recommendations influence reading decisions, the overall level of trust in book influencers remains moderate.

Keywords: social media; social media marketing; generation Z; book promotion; reading promotion

INTRODUCTION

Today, social media are seen by most people as an essential part of everyday life (Alalwan et al., 2017), and the nature of social media platforms has permanently changed the way people communicate, connect and consume information (Patel et al., 2025; Salman Farid, 2024). The development of these platforms has also altered the perception of marketing communication and digital marketing (Shorey et al., 2024; Wijaya et al., 2024), opening up new opportunities for organisations to reach their audiences. Social media marketing (SMM) and related techniques are gaining particular importance in the context of interacting with young consumers belonging to Generation Z (D. Singh et al., 2022).

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Representatives of this generation are referred to as digital natives, a term first used by Prensky (2001). This term refers to people who have grown up with constant access to the internet, computer games and mobile applications. Representatives of Generation Z are very active on social media, preferring short, visually appealing content (Eandhizhai et al., 2025; Prasanna and Priyanka, 2024). Social media, along with endorsements from peers and influencers, are regarded crucial factors in the purchasing decisions of Generation Z (Ridwan et al., 2025). This group gathers information about brands and products from content shared on social media (Sobura, 2023) and also encounters content related to cultural goods, including those about books (Hrehorowicz and Chmielewska, 2024).

In 2024, Poland's reading rate stabilized at over 40%, with 41% of people reading at least one book (Chymkowski et al., 2025). In 2023, results of the research conducted by the National Library for the first time included social media as a source of information about books, where the Bookstagram, BookTok and BookTube communities are present (Zasacka et al., 2024).

Despite the interest in social media and the expectations and preferences of generation Z towards this type of communication, previous research has mainly focused on brands and products, when the area of the role of social media in promoting cultural goods to this cohort, especially books, has not yet been explored in depth (Euzéby et al., 2024).

The aim of this article is to assess the impact of social media on Generation Z's reading decisions. Specifically, the study identifies the most relevant platforms, content, and the influence of online creator recommendations on their reading choices.

The article proceeds in five main parts: a literature review regarding characteristics of generation Z and the use of social media to promote reading, research methods and questions, analysis of findings, discussion of results, and a summary.

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF GENERATION Z

Most studies on the discussed cohort indicates that Generation Z was born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s (Eandhizhai et al., 2025; Fauziah et al., 2024; Prasanna and Priyanka, 2024; Ridwan et al., 2025; Salam et al., 2024; Sinha, 2025). As the first generation to fully grow up in a digital environment, they show unique preferences, which influences the decisions they make as consumers. Sinha (2025) believes that Generation Z plays a pivotal role in reshaping the contemporary marketing environment. This generation not

only commands substantial purchasing influence but also signifies the forthcoming trends in both consumer behaviour and marketing strategies. Generation Z influences purchasing behaviour and alters the way consumers engage with products and brands (Waworuntu et al., 2022). According to Guerra-Tamez et al. (2024), this demographic values authenticity and integrity in brand communications, which significantly influence their buying behaviour. Furthermore, members of Generation Z place a significant emphasis on the quality, authenticity and uniqueness of any product or service they choose to engage with or consume (Nugroho et al., 2022). Consumers from Generation Z are identified as being careful with their spending and prioritizing value when making purchasing choices. They tend to favour online shopping, a method that helps them save both money and time (Guerra-Tamez et al., 2024; Thangavel et al., 2022). Throughout this process, online product reviews often play an important role in their decision-making (Guerra-Tamez et al., 2024). Social media, peer recommendations, and influencer marketing are highlighted as crucial components that shape the preferences and affect the trust of Generation Z individuals (Ridwan et al., 2025). Considering that this group values transparency and reliability, it is important to note that they tend to support and pay attention to individuals who demonstrate these traits (Nugroho et al., 2022).

2. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROMOTING READERSHIP

Publishers and authors are increasingly turning towards social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram to promote books. These channels enable them to customize book-related content for various age demographics, especially appealing to younger audiences through interactive features (Bessarab et al., 2025). According to Okhrimenko and Fedoruk (2024), in recent times, readers have shown a growing tendency to depend on suggestions for new books that are shared on social media platforms. This trend has evolved these platforms into key channels that greatly influence the final book choice. Results reported by Segarra-Saavedra and Torres-Huamanyauri (2024) suggest that 97.2% of books promoted on TikTok are aimed at young readers. These data clearly highlight the trend of BookTok, as well as Bookstagram and BookTube, which significantly influence book sales and the revival of reading popularity (Wiederhold, 2022) by raising awareness about titles (H. Singh and Singh, 2024). Communities like BookTok, Bookstagram, and BookTube are centered on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube respectively, focusing specifically on literature

(Sosnowska and Wójciszyn-Wasil, 2024). These groups are characterized by individuals sharing insights on book recommendations, announcing the latest publications, as well as distributing other types of book-centric content (De Melo, 2024). They successfully bridge geographical and cultural divides, creating an inviting environment where readers can access information about titles, interact and discuss with each other, and explore new books or literary genres (Obreja and Manolica, 2024). Research indicates that, in addition to defining BookTok, Bookstagram and BookTube as communities, they can also be treated as forms of book reviewing and tools to support book promotion (Dera, 2024).

Social media book communities are related to eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth), user-generated content, and influencer marketing. eWOM involves sharing opinions about products online (Budzanowska-Drzewiecka, 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). User-generated content (UGC) includes media created by users (Bruns, 2016) and influencer marketing uses influencers to promote products on social media (Nadanyiova and Sujanska, 2023). Content creators who focus on book content are known as book influencers and when discussing a specific platform, they are identified as bookstagrammers (Obreja and Frunza, 2023) or booktokers (Guiñez-Cabrera and Mansilla-Obando, 2022).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The primary goal of this study was accomplished through empirical research utilizing the CAWI method and a custom-designed questionnaire with 22 closed questions, including demographic queries. The voluntary study was conducted among Generation Z students at Krakow University of Economics between late May and early June 2025. The questionnaire, hosted on Google Forms, was structured into six sections, assessing respondents' social media usage, reading habits, the impact of social media on reading choices, engagement with online book creators, and trust in those creators.

For the research, the author developed the following research questions:

Q1: Do young readers get their information about books from social media?

Q2: Does book related social media content influence the reading decisions of Generation Z?

Q3: Which social media platforms are most frequently used by generation Z as a source of information and inspiration regarding books?

Q4: What types of social media content are most important in shaping young readers' reading preferences and choices?

Q5: Which factors have the greatest impact on the credibility of book recommendations from content creators?

Q6: Which reading decisions are most influenced by recommendations from content creators?

The research included 105 participants: 86 women, 18 men, and a person of another gender identity. The age distribution was as follows: 23–24 years (53 participants), 21–22 (40), 25–26 (9), and 19–20 (3). This age demographic reflects Generation Z. Each participant reported daily active social media usage. Of all participants, 92 reported reading at least one book annually, forming the research sample.

4. THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE READING DECISIONS AND PREFERENCES OF GENERATION Z

Due to the limited number of respondents, the author opted to present absolute values in the analysis of the study results. The initial questions assessed general social media use.

Figure 1 illustrates that nearly half of the participants (49 out of 105) reported using social media for 3 to 4 hours daily. The subsequent largest group, consisting of 27 respondents, spends 5 to 6 hours per day on social media. Given the findings displayed, a notable portion of participants can be classified as heavy users, dedicating 3 or more hours each day to social media (Mougharbel et al., 2023).

Figure 1. Time spent by respondents on social media during the day
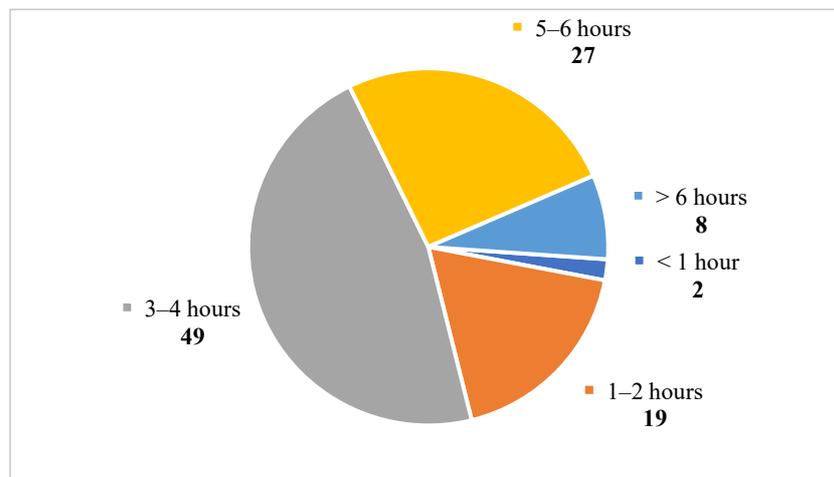
Participants listed the social media platforms they use, with Instagram (103) and Messenger (102) being nearly universally reported. A significant majority also utilized YouTube (88), Facebook (81), and TikTok (74). Significantly fewer participants use WhatsApp (48), X (35), and other platforms.

Figure 2 outlines that when asked about their most frequently used platform, most respondents chose Instagram (41). This was followed by TikTok (24) and Messenger (18). YouTube (11) and X (7) were cited notably less with other platforms receiving negligible selections.

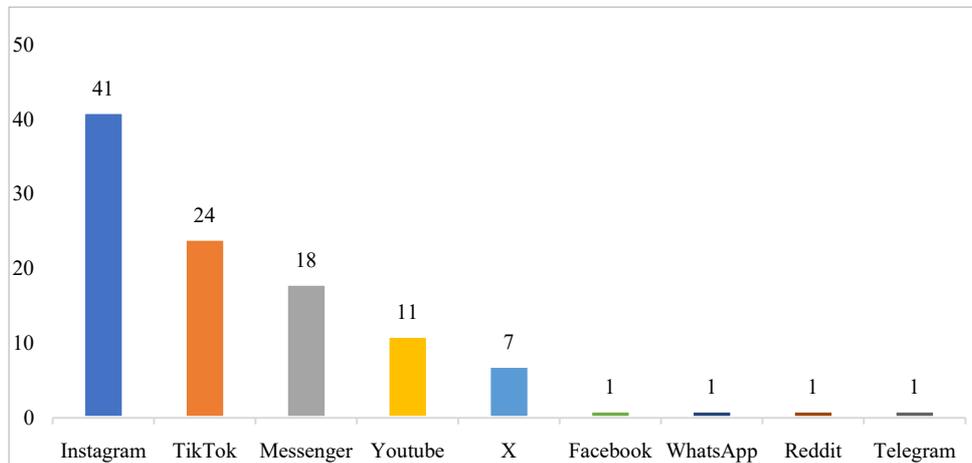Figure 2. The social media platforms that respondents use the most

Figure 3 illustrates that the primary motives for using social media were highly focused on following friends' activity and maintaining contact (92), seeking entertainment (87), and staying informed (79), possibly linked to the phenomenon known as fear of missing out (FoMO) (Gupta and Sharma, 2021). The next most common reasons included following celebrities/influencers (46), finding educational content (42), and searching for products (40). Content creation and business use were cited by significantly fewer participants.

Figure 3. Reasons why respondents use social media
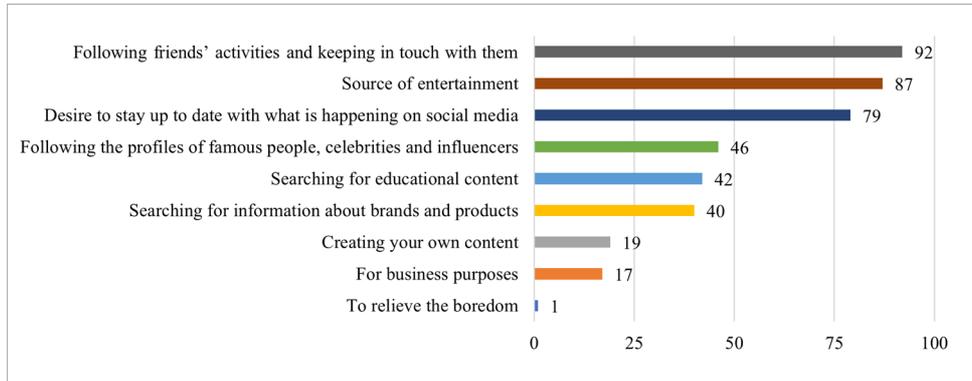
The question focused on reading habits found that 92 out of 105 respondents are active readers (consuming at least one book or audiobook per year). As displayed in Figure 4, the highest annual consumption rates fall into three main groups: one to two books (27), three to five books (26), and six to ten books (19).

Figure 4. Annual consumption of books, e-books or audiobooks
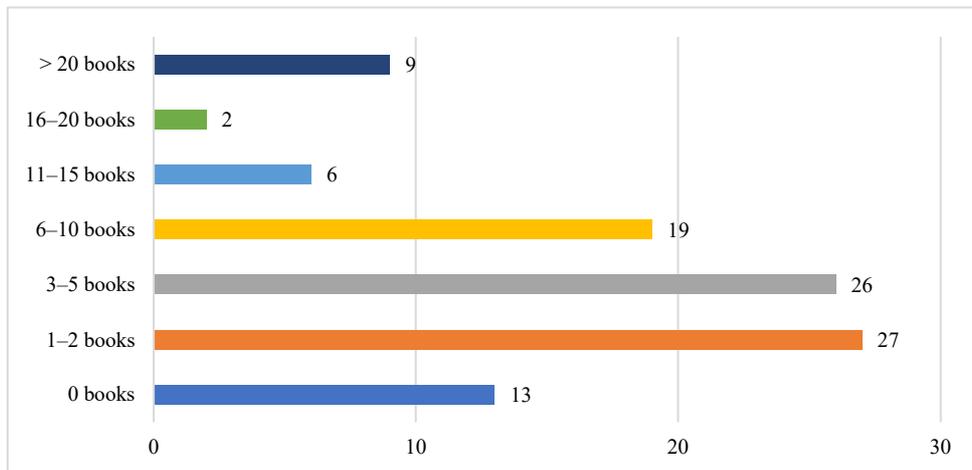
Among the 92 active readers who constitute the final research sample, the vast majority prefer paper books (68), significantly outweighing e-books (19) and audiobooks (5). The primary acquisition method is purchasing paper books from shops (46). Other notable methods include e-book subscriptions

(14), borrowing from friends (10), and library loans (8). Direct purchase of digital formats was minimal.

Figure 5 shows that the primary sources of book information are equally divided between recommendations from friends or family (63) and social media (63), both cited by most respondents. Other significant sources included online book portals (31), bestseller lists (30), and the book cover description (29). Reviews on book blogs, traditional media, and opinions of booksellers or librarians were noted far less often.

Figure 5. The most important sources for respondents when seeking information about books
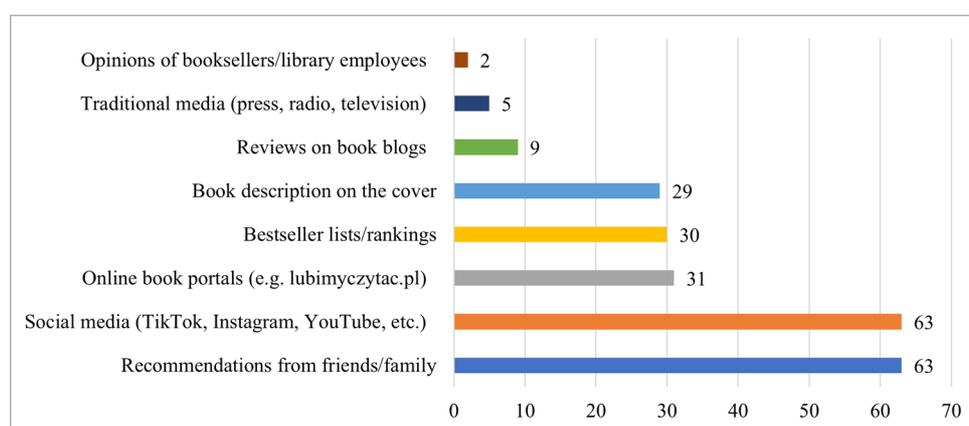
When examining how often participants use digital platforms (including those dedicated to book communities like lubimyczytac.pl and Goodreads) for book information, Figure 6 highlights several usage patterns. Instagram recorded the fewest *never* responses, though most users (29) engage only several times a year. TikTok, YouTube, and lubimyczytac.pl also showed relatively low *never* usage. TikTok (29 users reporting at least monthly use) was the most frequently used platform for book searches, followed by Instagram, YouTube, and lubimyczytac.pl ($n = 21$ each). Conversely, most respondents do not use Facebook, X, or Goodreads for this purpose. The lower popularity of Goodreads may stem from the platform's language barrier, which, unlike lubimyczytac.pl, is primarily aimed at English-speaking readers.

Respondents rated the influence of social media content on their reading decisions (acquiring books) using a 5-point scale (from 1 = *No influence at all* to 5 = *Very strong influence*). As shown in Figure 7, the collected data suggest a moderate influence on the respondents' book acquisition choices.

Figure 6. Frequency of respondents' use
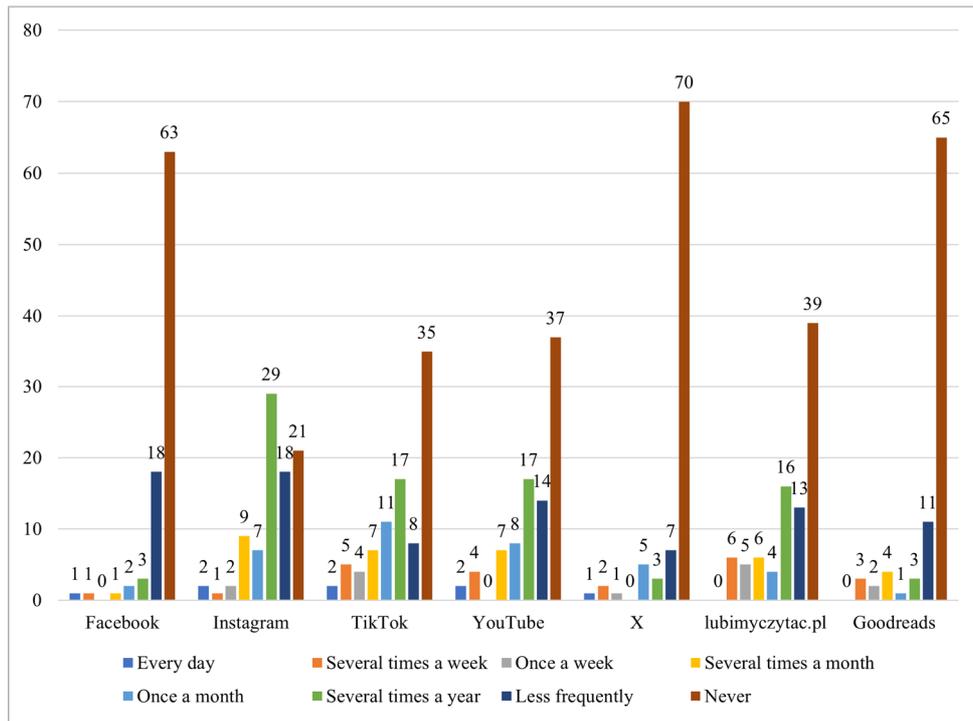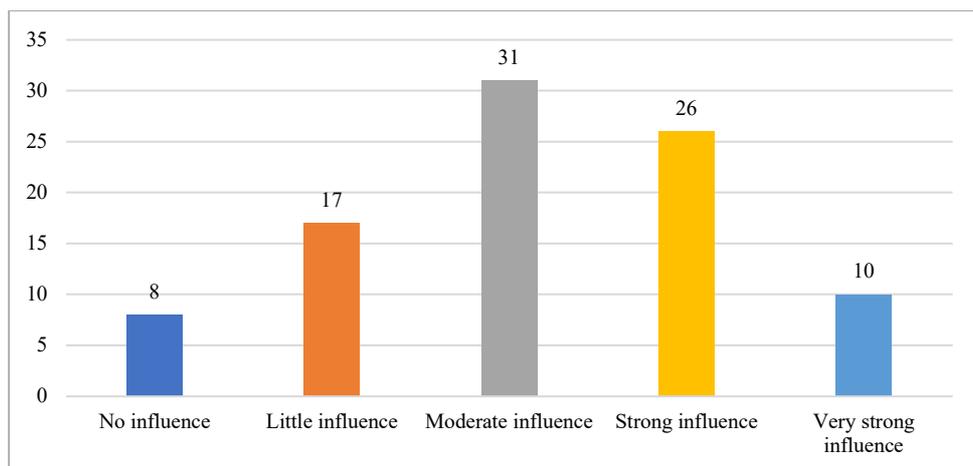of digital platforms to search for information about books

Figure 7. The degree of influence of content seen on social media on reading decisions, i.e. whether to buy or borrow books, from 1 = *No influence at all* to 5 = *Very strong influence*

When asked to select the top three most influential types of book-related content (Figure 8), over half of respondents (53) cited short, engaging video reviews. Following this, recommendation lists and book rankings (35) were preferred, ahead of book excerpts or quotes (28) and photo or graphics with descriptions (27).

Figure 8. Types of book-related content that play the most significant role in shaping reading preferences and choices
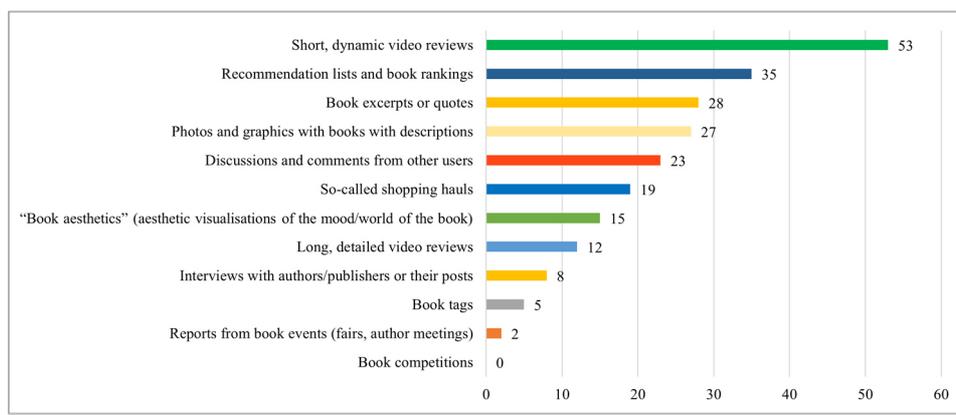
The study addressed content creators, revealing that 86 out of 92 active readers encounter book recommendations from online creators on social media. Figure 9 indicates that nearly half of respondents do not actively follow these creators, yet they occasionally see algorithm-suggested recommendations. Of those who do follow, 20 follow creators from other areas who sometimes share book posts, while only 13 respondents actively follow creators specializing in book content (e.g., BookTokers).

Figure 9. Following online creators who publish book-related content
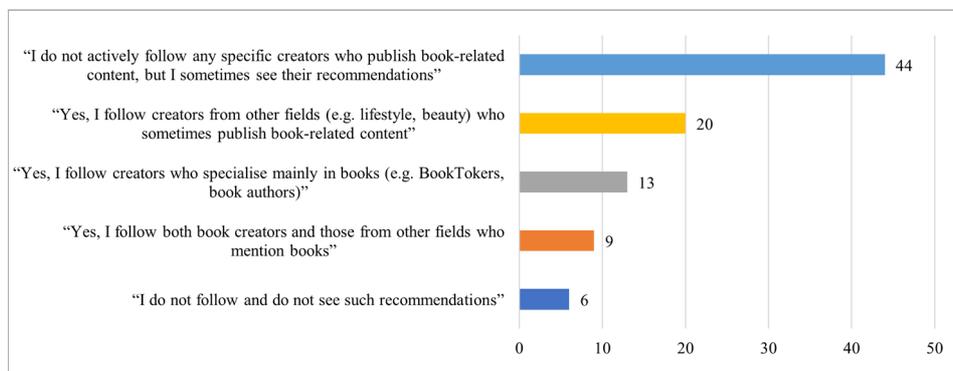
As subsequent research required exposure to book creator content, a screening question was used to identify eligible participants. This resulted in a final research sample of 86 participants.

Figure 10 illustrates the level of trust respondents placed in social media book recommendations. The data shows the largest group (38 participants) indicated moderate trust. When combining responses, a total of 32 respondents expressed some level of trust or full trust, while 16 participants reported no trust.

Figure 10. Level of trust in book recommendations from online creators whose content is displayed when browsing social media (from 1 = *Do not trust at all* and 5 = *Fully trust*)
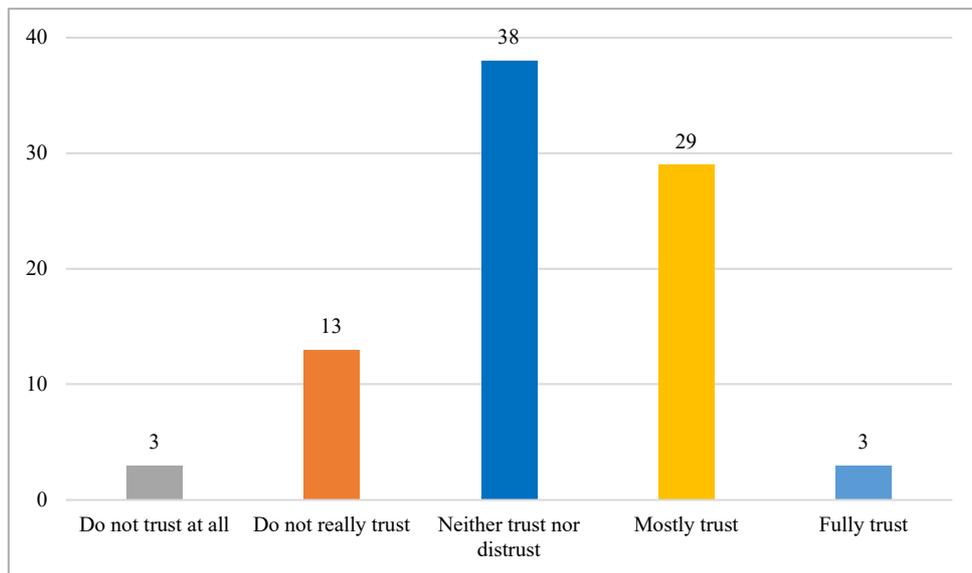
Regarding the number of book-related content creators followed, 44 respondents reported following 1 to 5 creators, closely followed by 36 respondents who do not follow any. Only a small minority of respondents (6) follows more than five creators. As shown in Figure 11, the level of trust in recommendations did not significantly increase, with the majority (32) still reporting moderate trust. Those expressing some or complete trust totalled 34, outweighing the 20 respondents who indicated a lack of trust.

Figure 11. Level of trust in book recommendations from online creators whom
respondents actively follow (from 1 = *Do not trust at all* to 5 = *Fully trust*)
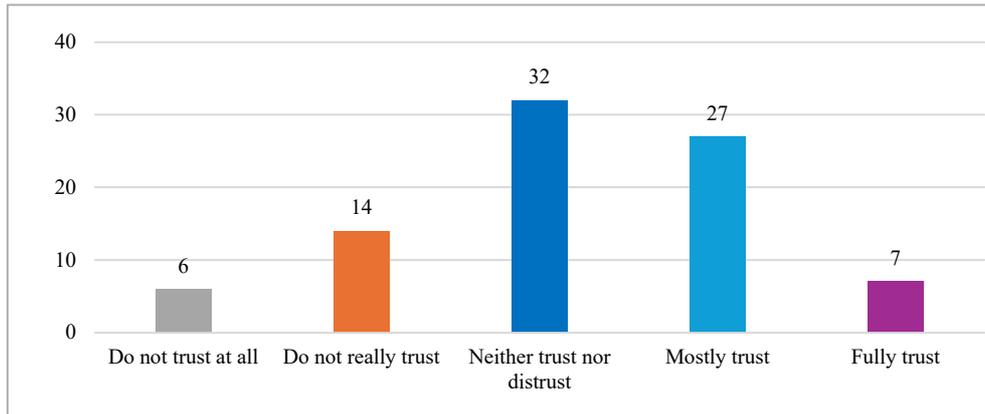
Figure 12 highlights the crucial factors for assessing a creator's credibility:
alignment of reading interests (51), the creator's authenticity and honesty (43), and
the presentation of the book's pros and cons (29). Respondents also valued compre-
hensive literary knowledge (29) and independence from the publishing industry (24).

Figure 12. Factors influencing the credibility of book recommendations
from an online creator

Figure 13. The influence of book recommendations from online creators on respondents' past reading decisions and behaviours (from 1 = *No influence* to 5 = *Very strong influence*)

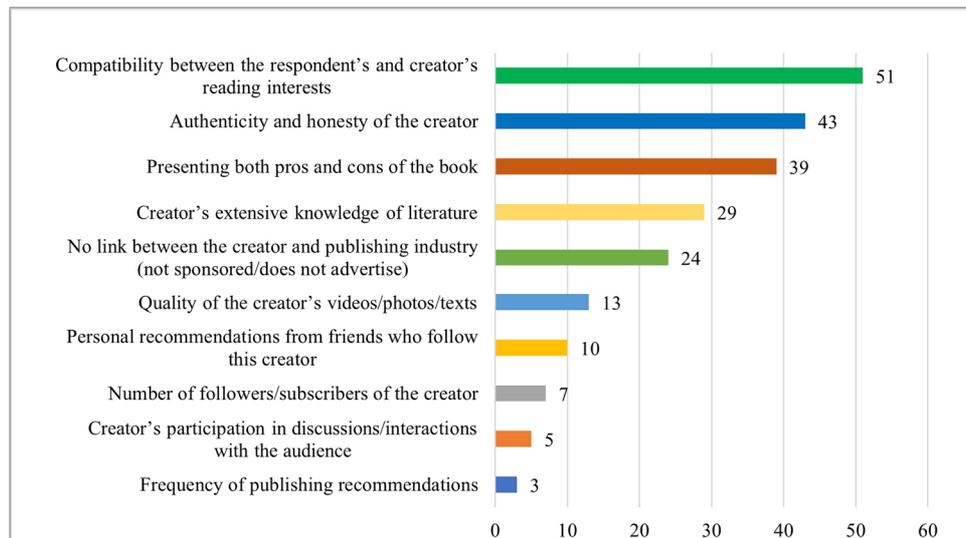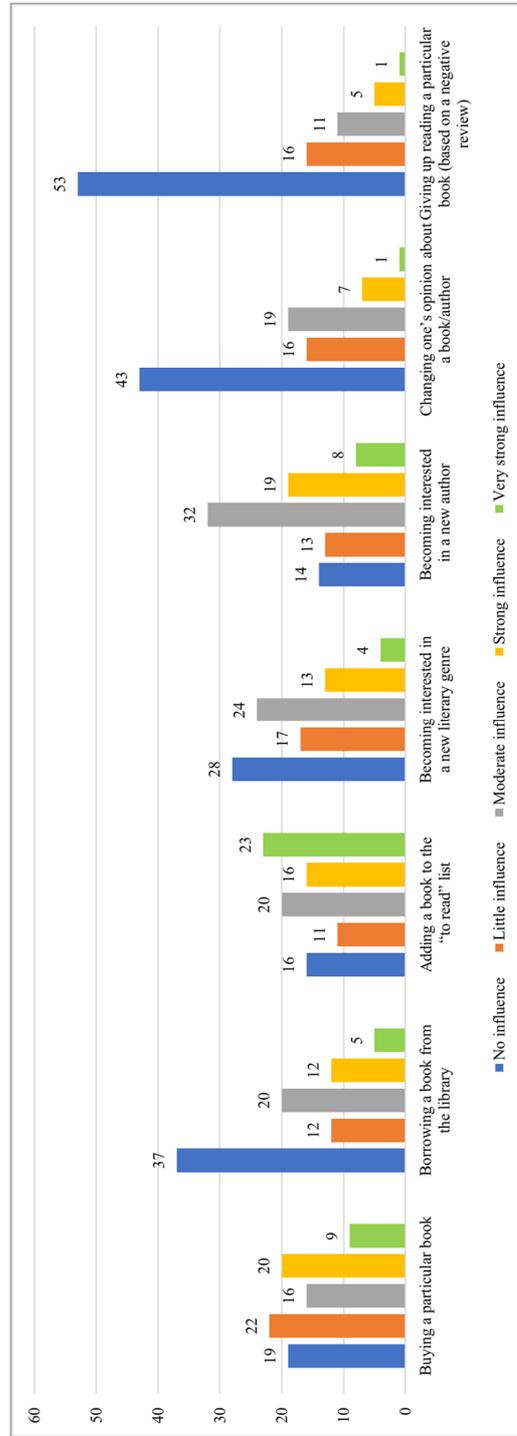The impact of creator recommendations on specific decisions and behaviours in the past is detailed in Figure 13. The greatest influence was on adding a book to the "to read" list (39 total responses for large or very large influence). Visible influence was also reported for purchasing a new book (29) and becoming interested in a new author (28). Recommendations had the least influence on abandoning reading (53), changing opinions (43), and borrowing from a library (37), where the counts represent those who reported "no influence at all".

6. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND CONTENT CREATORS IN SHAPING THE READING DECISIONS OF GENERATION Z

The results of the study correspond with the fact that Generation Z uses social media to search for various types of information (Setio Devi et al., 2024). The conducted study allowed the author to answer her research questions, which were relevant to the main objective of the article.

Firstly, the findings show that Generation Z readers rely on social media as much as friends and family for book information, underscoring the role of electronic word-of-mouth and consumers' use of data in minimizing online shopping uncertainty (Khalid et al., 2020). These results also provide support for the statement by Ridwan et al. (2025) that social media and peer recommendations are crucial in shaping Generation Z's preferences and trust in shopping online.

Secondly, the analysis indicates that book-related content on social media moderately affects decisions such as buying or borrowing books. These results differ slightly from those reported by Wiederhold (2022), which indicated a significant contribution of TikTok to book sales.

Thirdly, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and lubimyczytac.pl are the most preferred platforms for seeking book information. These results are consistent with those presented by Elkatmış (2024), who identified Instagram, TikTok and YouTube as the most preferred social media platforms among Generation Z.

Respondents expressed specific expectations for content that shapes their reading choices, favouring short, dynamic video reviews, lists of recommended titles, rankings, as well as book excerpts and quotes. Short video content is considered highly significant in the context of digital marketing, primarily due to its ability to quickly engage digital audiences, which is regarded essential in the rapidly changing online environment (Manic, 2024).

As detailed in the previous section, respondents expect credible book recommendations from content creators. The most important factor is the alignment of reading interests. Key aspects also include the creator's authenticity, sincerity, presentation of pros and cons of a book, and their literary expertise. Similar conclusions were drawn by Ilieva et al. (2024), who stated that influencers (referred as content creators in that article), who possess specialist knowledge, are perceived by their audience as competent, credible and trustworthy, and Liu and Zheng (2024), who concluded that informative value of influencers' content, as well as authenticity, affects followers' purchase intention.

Importantly, the results show that content creators' recommendations influence reading decisions, especially when it comes to adding books to a "to-read" list. Respondents trust influencers to a moderate degree but consider their opinions important when adding books to their list, suggesting that content creators influence awareness and interest in books rather than their purchase.

This preliminary pilot study has several limitations, including the non-representative sample and the Poland-only geographic restriction, thus limiting result generalizability. Furthermore, the discussions highlight the necessity for further research to fully exhaust the topic of social media book promotion.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines how social media impact the reading preferences of Generation Z. The theoretical section provides an overview of the current knowledge regarding Generation Z, emphasising the role of social media in the promotion of reading. The empirical section presents findings derived from research on how social media and content creators impact reading decisions of this demographic. The findings indicate that for Generation Z, social media constitute a significant source of book information, on a par with recommendations from family and friends. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram, through short videos, help Generation Z discover new books, while content creators significantly boost awareness and interest in particular titles. Although the research is preliminary, the results have noteworthy implications for stakeholders in the book market, including publishers, authors, and marketing agencies collaborating with them. Nevertheless, it is recommended to validate this study with a larger sample. The role of social media in book promotion, including communities such as BookTok or Bookstagram, is a promising research area. Future studies should focus on specific platforms and explore trust in book

creators and factors influencing book purchase choices based on their recommendations. Findings can aid publishers using social media and influencers in marketing.

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MEDIA SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWE A DECYZJE CZYTELNICZE POKOLENIA Z

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest określenie wpływu mediów społecznościowych na decyzje czytelnicze
młodych czytelników z pokolenia Z, uwzględniając preferowane przez nich platformy i typy treści.
W oparciu o przegląd literatury oraz badanie empiryczne przeprowadzone metodą CAWI wśród
105 przedstawicieli pokolenia Z, w niniejszym opracowaniu przeanalizowano wpływ rekomendacji
twórców internetowych na tę grupę. Wyniki wskazują, że media społecznościowe są kluczowym
źródłem informacji o książkach, porównywalnym z rodziną i przyjaciółmi. Krótkie, dynamiczne
treści znacząco zwiększają świadomość i zainteresowanie książkami. Pomimo odnotowanego
wpływu na decyzje czytelnicze, zaufanie do influencerów książkowych pozostaje umiarkowane.

Słowa kluczowe: media społecznościowe; marketing w mediach społecznościowych; pokolenie Z;
promocja książek; promocja czytelnictwa