Youth Journalism for Sustainable Democracies

Exploratory study on Gen Alpha in Poland

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Table of contents

Introduction **4**

Methodology **6**

Context **12**

Key Findings **20**

Quantitative data analysis **22**

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE 22

USE OF INTERNET AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS 26

TOPICS AND ONLINE CONTENT 35

SOURCES OF INFORMATION 42

RELATIONSHIP WITH INFLUENCERS AND CREATORS 51

WHAT CONTENT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT 56

Qualitative data analysis **67**

SOCIALIZATION AND FREE TIME 68

ALPHA AS SOCIAL MEDIA USERS 73

SOURCES OF INFORMATION 79

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS 90

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION, EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY 103

HOW TO TALK TO YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT SERIOUS TOPICS 110

Limitations **118**

Conclusion and recommendations **121**

Bibliography **125**

List of tables and figures **126**

Appendix 1. Survey questionnaire **128**

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study conducted in Poland as part of the international Erasmus+ project Youth Journalism for Sustainable Democracies, implemented in cooperation with partners from Poland, Romania and Italy. The project is based on the assumption that young people are not merely recipients of information but can play an active role in shaping the contemporary information ecosystem. This, however, requires providing them with appropriate competences, tools and spaces for participation in public and media life.

The study focuses on Generation Alpha – individuals born around 2010 and later, who constitute the first generation to grow up in a world dominated by social media, algorithms, artificial intelligence and constant online presence. For this group, the internet is not simply a communication tool but the primary environment for social, educational and civic socialisation. Understanding how young people function within this environment is essential for designing effective educational, civic and media-related initiatives.

The aim of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, needs and expectations of Generation Alpha in Poland, with particular emphasis on their relationship with digital media and their ways of accessing information about the world. The project sought to answer the question of how to communicate effectively with young audiences in civic and journalistic initiatives, and which strategies and content formats are most likely to increase their engagement. The findings are intended to inform the development of guidelines for training young reporters and content creators, as well as to support innovative approaches to media and civic education.

The study was exploratory in nature and employed a mixed-methods approach, including in-depth individual interviews (IDIs), focus group interviews (FGIs) and an online survey. Methodological triangulation made it possible to identify general trends while also gaining a deeper understanding of the language, emotions and lived experiences of young participants.

The thematic scope of the study covered key areas of Generation Alpha's socialisation. The analysis addressed young people's sources of information, their use of social

media and other digital platforms, relationships with online creators, peer interactions and leisure activities. An important component was also the assessment of attitudes towards democracy, public institutions and representative processes (such as student council), as well as views on the European Union, European values and identity.

The findings indicate that knowledge about the world often reaches Generation Alpha unintentionally – through social media use and the consumption of short-form video content. Young users operate in an environment dominated by algorithms and visual communication, and their interest in social and political issues is strongly shaped by emotions, aesthetics and the role of influencers. At the same time, their awareness of risks related to disinformation, social pressure and information overload is increasing.

The report has both a diagnostic and an applied dimension. Its purpose is to support civil society organisations, public institutions, educators, journalists and content creators in designing initiatives and communication aimed at younger audiences. The conclusions and recommendations may serve as a basis for developing media literacy programmes, strengthening young people's civic competences and increasing their participation in democratic life.

The structure of the report reflects the objectives of the project. The first section outlines the methodological assumptions and the context of Generation Alpha's functioning in the digital environment. This is followed by a presentation of the key findings. Subsequent chapters provide a detailed analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, covering patterns of internet and social media use, preferred topics and content types, sources of information, and young people's attitudes towards democracy, public institutions and the European Union. The report concludes with recommendations on effective communication strategies for engaging Generation Alpha.

The report is addressed to public decision-makers, educational institutions, youth organisations, media outlets, non-governmental organisations and all stakeholders involved in developing the civic and media competences of younger generations. Understanding how Generation Alpha perceives the world and participates in social life is crucial for building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies in Europe.

Kinga Wojtas-Jarentowska

Methodology

Methodological introduction

This qualitative and quantitative study was designed by teams from Poland, Romania, and Italy as an exploratory project. Its aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of how Generation Alpha perceives the public sphere, democracy, public institutions, the European Union, and their own civic agency. The project also considered the digital environment of young people's socialisation, including the role of social media, meme culture, and video platforms in shaping civic attitudes and political perceptions.

A particular objective of the study was to understand how to communicate effectively with young audiences in civic and journalistic projects, and which content strategies are most successful in reaching this group. The findings are intended to provide a basis for developing guidelines for training young reporters and content creators, especially regarding the preparation of journalistic materials aimed at Generation Alpha. The project focused on several key areas: young people's sources of information, use of social media and digital platforms, ways of forming peer relationships and spending free time, attitudes towards democracy and traditional public institutions, and perceptions of the European Union, European values, and identity.

The study used method triangulation (employing more than one research method to better understand the phenomenon and increase result reliability). This included individual in-depth interviews (IDI), focus group interviews (FGI), and an online quantitative survey. Each stage of the study had a complementary role. The survey provided an initial overview of broader trends. Individual interviews captured detailed narratives and personal experiences, while focus groups allowed analysis of how meanings are negotiated and the influence of peer environments. This combination enabled the researchers to capture both individual experiences and reflections, as well as the dynamics of opinions, negotiation of meanings, and peer influence on the formation of civic attitudes.

The study was exploratory in nature and was not aimed at achieving statistical representativeness. Its purpose was rather to gain an in-depth understanding of the

language, interpretative categories, and experiences of young people, as well as to identify key patterns of civic attitudes and orientations. The findings should be interpreted as a quantitative and qualitative mapping of the area studied, which, beyond fulfilling the project's objectives, can also serve as a starting point for further research.

An important element of the project was taking into account the limitations arising from the respondents' age. The participants were children and young people from Generation Alpha. This implied a diverse range of cognitive, linguistic, and social development, which influenced how they expressed themselves. In particular, younger respondents tended to refer more to specific school and relational experiences, and their understanding of concepts such as democracy, justice, or representation was intuitive, situational, and rooted in everyday practices. As a result, the survey and interview scripts, as well as moderation techniques, were adapted to the participants' age. This included activating elements, situational questions, and references to experiences familiar to young people.

In the case of FGIs, methodological limitations arising from the school context of the study should also be considered. The presence of an institutional setting may have influenced how participants expressed themselves, encouraging socially desirable responses. At the same time, the group dynamics within focus interviews could lead both to the expression of dominant opinions and to self-censorship among some participants. On the other hand, this context allowed researchers to capture natural communication processes and the negotiation of meaning within a peer environment, which plays a key role in the civic socialisation of young people.

Qualitative study – FGIs

The focus group interviews (FGIs) aimed to capture the dynamics of opinions, the negotiation of meaning, and the interactive construction of civic attitudes among members of Generation Alpha. The focus group technique allowed for the observation of group processes, including the influence of peer environment.

The research was conducted in four schools located in the Mazowieckie and Łódzkie voivodeships. The selection of schools was purposive and based on the criterion of municipality size, allowing for the capture of potential differences in the educational and social experiences of young respondents. The study included schools from:

- a large city (over 500 000 inhabitants),
- a medium-sized city (around 50 000 inhabitants),
- a small town (3 000 inhabitants),

- a rural area.

This sampling strategy allowed for the capture of the influence of the socio-spatial context on processes of civic socialisation, as well as on students' experiences with consuming online content.

In total, eight focus group interviews were conducted. In each category of municipality size, two focus groups were carried out among members of Generation Alpha, which increased the reliability of the findings and enabled comparisons of narratives between groups. Participants were recruited in cooperation with the schools, and participation was voluntary, based on parental or legal guardian consent, which was provided to the schools.

To capture developmental diversity, stages of civic socialisation, and patterns of online presence, the study included several age cohorts. Focus group interviews were conducted with:

- 2nd grade of primary school – pupils aged 7–8 (large city),
- 4th and 5th grade of primary school – pupils aged 9–11 (rural area),
- 7th grade of primary school – pupils aged 12–13 (small town),
- 1st grade of 4-year general (upper) secondary school – pupils aged 14–15 (medium-sized city).

It is worth noting that school classes in Poland are not age-homogeneous due to education system reforms. Children initially started school at age seven, later at age six, and in subsequent phases, cohorts were divided in half. In extreme cases, a single class may include children from three different year groups. For example, 15-year-olds may attend either the final year of primary school or the first or second year of upper secondary school.

The age diversity of focus groups allowed for the analysis of changes in behaviour and understanding of key issues from the study as pupils grew older, gained more school experience, and developed increasing cognitive and social autonomy.

Focus group sessions

Focus group sessions were conducted in school settings, in rooms providing comfort and a sense of safety for the participants. The duration of a single interview ranged from 45 to 55 minutes, depending on the age of the respondents and the dynamics of the discussion. Sessions were shorter than those conducted with adults, reflecting the

limited attention span of younger participants and the need to adapt methods to their cognitive abilities.

Groups consisted of 8 to 12 participants, which allowed everyone to take an active part while maintaining the interactive nature of the discussion. Due to participants' age and the organisational realities of school-based research, focus groups were larger than in traditional qualitative studies. This enabled observation of peer dynamics, which are a significant element in the democratic socialisation of younger respondents.

Moderation was conducted by two researchers, in line with methodological guidelines for focus group research. One researcher acted as the moderator, leading the discussion, while the other observed group dynamics, took notes, and supported the moderation process. This approach improved data quality, allowed better control of the session, and minimised the risk of missing important discussion threads.

The interview guide was partially structured and covered areas such as school experiences, student self-governance, pupil rights, democracy, values, the European Union, and young people's agency. At the same time, moderators maintained flexibility, allowing for spontaneous topics to emerge during discussions.

Methodological limitations

The research strategy was exploratory in nature, which entails certain limitations. Firstly, the selection of schools and participants was not random. Secondly, group dynamics could influence participants' contributions, resulting in both the expression of dominant opinions and self-censorship by some respondents.

Another significant limitation was the influence of the school context on the course of discussions. The institutional setting may have encouraged socially desirable responses. At the same time, developmental differences between age groups could affect the level of reflection and the ability to articulate experiences.

Qualitative study – IDI

The study employed a purposive sample based on participant availability (*convenience sampling*). Recruitment for the individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) was carried out according to pupils' willingness and ability to participate. This meant that the sample included individuals who met the study criteria (age and membership of Generation Alpha), were available during the project, and provided informed consent to participate.

The use of this sampling strategy was primarily dictated by organisational and time constraints. The study was conducted during the winter school holidays, which significantly limited access to potential respondents and the feasibility of institutional recruitment within schools. Consequently, the selection process relied on participant availability and readiness to engage in the interviews.

At the same time, the choice of convenience sampling was justified by the preliminary and exploratory nature of the research. The primary aim of the project was to understand how Generation Alpha interprets key civic categories, identify dominant narratives, and develop preliminary analytical categories. At this stage, representativeness was not assumed; the focus was on gaining a deep insight into young respondents' experiences and interpretations.

This sampling strategy enabled the collection of diverse narratives and information about the experiences of Generation Alpha. It should be noted that the findings are preliminary and primarily intended to deepen understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Individual interviews were conducted with 11 pupils born between 2009 and 2013, covering the younger segment of Generation Alpha and the oldest cohorts at the boundary between Generation Z and Alpha. Participants were born in the following years: 2009 (n=2) – formally considered Generation Z, 2010 (n=4), 2012 (n=2), and 2013 (n=3). This selection captured diversity in school experiences and stages of civic socialisation.

Methodological limitations

A key limitation of the individual in-depth interviews was the absence of peer interaction, which plays an important role in forming opinions. On the other hand, IDIs encouraged greater openness in sharing personal experiences and more candid reflection on power relations and agency. This enabled comparison of how categories such as democracy, pupil rights, the European Union, and civic agency were understood according to age and school experience.

All interviews were conducted with the consent of parents or legal guardians, as well as the participants themselves. Anonymity was ensured, and participants could withdraw at any time. The study included both face-to-face and online in-depth interviews. In total, three interviews were conducted remotely and eight in person. The dual approach was driven by organisational factors, including limited respondent availability during the holidays and the need to accommodate participants' time and location constraints. Online interviews allowed access to participants outside Warsaw who could not attend in person, while face-to-face meetings facilitated relationship-building and observation

of non-verbal communication, which was particularly valuable for analysing content viewed by respondents online. Combining both modes increased the study's flexibility and enriched the qualitative data while maintaining a consistent interview guide.

Quantitative study – survey

The survey was conducted using the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) method via Lime Survey software, ensuring full anonymity for participants, including the prevention of IP address collection.

Responses were collected between 19 January and 9 February 2026. The main channel for reaching children and young people was through schools. Contact details for individual institutions were obtained from the publicly available Register of Schools and Educational Institutions (RSPO[1]). Email invitations to participate in the survey were sent to nearly 7,000 schools, selected according to school type (primary or secondary) and location type (rural or urban). The invitation requested that the survey be shared with pupils' parents via the online school register or, for older pupils, be distributed directly to them. Responses were also gathered using a snowball method, sharing the survey with acquaintances and youth or educational organisations. When interpreting the results, it should be noted that this sampling strategy carries the risk of over-representing more engaged individuals or those interested in civic topics, which constitutes a methodological limitation.

The survey questionnaire was prepared collaboratively by research teams from Poland, Romania, and Italy. The Polish version of the questionnaire included an additional 8 questions, including questions about the language spoken at home[2] and open questions regarding favourite online content creators or recommendations for creating online content for young audiences. The final Polish questionnaire therefore consisted of 29 questions (including 7 conditional questions, displayed only to some respondents, and 6 demographic questions) – see Appendix 1.

We received 1281 valid responses from participants aged 8–15 years[3]. During the data cleaning process, a further 32 responses were excluded due to multiple missing values or inconsistent demographic information. The final number of valid responses included in the analysis was 1249.

[1] Wyszukiwarka Rejestru Szkół i Placówek Oświatowych. https://rspo.gov.pl/.

[2] In this way, we aimed to avoid overlooking important information regarding origin and different cultural backgrounds, particularly for children from Ukraine. However, the number of responses indicating a language other than Polish was small, and this was not included in the comparative analyses.

[3] The survey was open to participants of all ages (it did not include a filtering question at the start). By reaching respondents through secondary schools, we also collected data on Generation Z, which we plan to use in a separate publication.

Elżbieta Morawska-Dyś, Róża Rzeplińska

Context

Older members of Generation Alpha, born between 2010 and 2013 (aged 13–16), number over 1,5 million in Poland. They attend primary schools and the early years of secondary education – including general secondary schools (*liceum*), technical colleges, or vocational schools. Younger Alphas (aged 7–12), born between 2014 and 2019, comprise more than 2,3 million children studying in grades 1–5 of primary schools.

Research on digital habits, their effects, the effectiveness of digital education, and platform policies is conducted in Poland by several non-governmental organisations, public institutions, and academic research teams. Studies are often carried out in collaboration with research agencies that have access to research panels, including those enabling detailed tracking of users' screen activity.

In Poland, research on the digital behaviours of 7–18-year-olds is conducted, among others, by the Institute for Digital Citizenship Foundation in collaboration with Polskie Badania Internetu [*Polish Internet Research*] and the Gemius Research Panel, the State Commission for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation of Minors under 15 and the Parliamentary Committee on Children and Youth, Empowering Children Foundation, Fundacja Badań Społecznych [*Social Research Foundation*], the Ministry of Health, The National Centre for the Prevention of Addictions, the State Research Institute NASK, Orange Foundation, the Office of Electronic Communications, Demagog, the Institute of Media Monitoring, and School with Class Foundation.

These institutions provide a multi-faceted view of Generation Alpha's digital practices, the educational impacts of technology, and the policy landscape of online platforms.

Limitations in studying Generation Alpha's digital habits

Difficulties in studying the online behaviours of Generation Alpha stem from legal restrictions – participation of minors in research requires the consent of a parent or legal guardian (or the school, provided parents/legal guardians have previously consented to their child taking part in projects involving the school) – as well as differences in reading comprehension, language skills, and digital literacy.

Research on Alphas is also influenced by disparities in access to electronic devices, differences in the ability to use and permitted time on various applications, and variations in school policies regarding mobile phone use on school premises. As a result, Alphas of the same age, from families with similar socio-economic and cultural capital, and living in comparable locations, may have vastly different online experiences and use the internet in very different ways.

These factors are further compounded by the lack of access to platform data – such access would allow comparison of what Alphas and their parents report in surveys with the actual data recorded by social media services.

How do Alphas use internet-enabled devices?

58% of Polish children (1,4 million) aged 7–12 use social media platforms and messaging apps intended for users aged 13 and over[4]. Among 12–16-year-olds, young people spend an average of 4 hours 59 minutes online on weekdays, and 5 hours 16 minutes on weekends[5].

Access to social media is widespread, as children in Poland commonly use smartphones. Children typically receive their first smartphone between the ages of 7 and 10 (31% at 7–8 years old, 41% at 9–10 years old)[6]. This is often linked to religious traditions, such as gifts for First Communion, or to growing independence – by age 10, children may travel to school or extracurricular activities on their own, and parents often provide a phone for safety and supervision. First phones are usually chosen by parents (according to the children's responses – 58,2%, according to the parents – 54%), who also decide on the mobile plan in most cases (82,7%)[7]. In this report, the terms “phone” and “smartphone” are used interchangeably, as nearly all devices used by children are smartphones (96,7%).

Among 7–12-year-olds, one in three regularly uses TikTok (800 000), one in four uses Facebook (630 000), and 16% use Instagram (370 000). Messaging apps are also popular: 36% use Messenger (860 000) and 31% WhatsApp (750 000)[8].

[4] Instytut Cyfrowego Obywatelstwa. 2025. Internet dzieci 2025/2. Śródroczny raport z monitoringu obecności dzieci i młodzieży w internecie. Listopad 2025. https://higienacyfrowa.pl/publikacje/internet-dzieci/. Access: 16.02.2026.
[5] NASK. 2025. Nastolatki. Raport z ogólnopolskiego badania uczniów i rodziców. https://www.nask.pl/media/2025/09/Nastolatki_RAPORT-2.pdf. Access: 16.02.2026.
[6] Ibidem.
[7] Urząd Komunikacji Elektronicznej. 2023. Badanie konsumenckie dzieci i rodziców przeprowadzone w 2022 roku. https://www.uke.gov.pl/akt/badanie-konsumenckie-dzieci-i-rodzicow-przeprowadzone-w-2022-roku,466.html. Access: 16.02.2026.
[8] Instytut Cyfrowego Obywatelstwa, op. cit.

More than two-thirds of younger Alphas (ages 7-12) who use TikTok spend an average of over an hour a day on the app each day, and approx. half of them opens it 20 times or more daily. Usage rises during school holidays: average daily time increases by almost 30 minutes, and the number of children spending over an hour on the app reaches 600 000[9].

Among 12–16-year-olds, 70% have interacted with AI tools. ChatGPT is the most widely used (53% overall; 62% of boys, 43% of girls), followed by CapCut for video editing (25%) and Character AI (12%). Almost half use AI for learning, 40% for homework, 23% for entertainment, 21% out of boredom, and 19% to pursue hobbies. In 2024, only 23% of teenagers cited Wikipedia as a learning resource, down from 76% in 2018. Google is used by 45% (63% in 2018), while YouTube remains popular (49%)[10].

Teenage boys play computer games and use apps such as Discord, YouTube, and Twitch more often. Teenage girls favour social media platforms (Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Messenger) and use the internet for almost an hour longer than boys (3 hours 49 minutes per day)[11].

According to the study “Internet dzieci 2025/2” [*Internet of children 2025/2*], among the top 10 domains visited by children aged 7–14, there was a pornography website. Around one-third of young internet users in this age group visited it at least once per month: in April 2025 – 930 000 children, and in May and June – around one million each month. This exceeds the number of children in this age range visiting Wikipedia[12].

In the study “Nadużywanie mediów elektronicznych przez dzieci i młodzież” [*Overuse of electronic media by children and youth*], 95% of Alphas (7–14 years old) reported that their most frequently used device was a mobile phone. 41% use a smartphone for over two hours daily, including 19% for more than three hours. 56% of pupils use a laptop, 40% a gaming console (12% daily), 25% a tablet, and 22% a desktop computer[13].

96% of 7–14-year-olds stated that the most common reason for using electronic media was watching short videos, with 29% watching them daily. The second most common reason was contacting friends (91%), with 30% doing so daily. The third was using the internet as a source of learning materials (89%), with 9,4% using it daily for studying[14].

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[9] Instytut Cyfrowego Obywatelstwa, op. cit.
[10] NASK, op. cit.
[11] Ibidem.
[12] Instytut Cyfrowego Obywatelstwa, op. cit.
[13] Fundacja Badań Społecznych. 2023. Nadużywanie mediów elektronicznych przez dzieci i młodzież: badanie rozpowszechnienia problemu, jego determinantów i nowej interwencji profilaktycznej redukującej skalę problemu. https://kcpu.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/FBS_Naduzywanie-mediow-elektronicznych-przez-dzieci-i-mlodziz-.pdf. Access: 16.02.2026.
[14] Ibidem.

Young users (7–14), mostly on smartphones, watched series and cartoons and listened to music (86% each), searched for information about their interests (84%), viewed memes (82%), played single-player games (79%) and multiplayer games (68%). 61% searched for information from Poland and abroad, and 58% browsed social media platforms. Fewer than half shared their own photos or videos online (48%) or downloaded files (41%). Alphas were generally reluctant to publish their own content on platforms like YouTube (fewer than 15%) and only 8% maintained a personal blog. Over 2% of 7-14-year-olds played gambling games, with 0.2% doing so daily[15].

Research by the Fundacja Badań Społecznych examined how electronic communication relates to digital addiction. 28% of younger Alphas showed a significant tendency to overuse digital technologies, and 7% displayed strong signs of media addiction. In the high-risk group for digital addiction, 23% of boys and 17% of girls were identified. Most indicators were significantly higher among boys[16].

Does the age restriction actually work?

TikTok in Poland states that it does not collect information about users under 18 and officially does not target content at children. However, it has developed a message aimed directly at parents promoting the app for younger users: “See the best TikTok content for children! Discover educational videos, letters, and children’s rights. Perfect for the youngest users! TikTok for kids, educational TikTok videos, fun videos for children”[17].

Young users often deliberately misrepresent their age when creating accounts, frequently with parental approval. Parents tend to trust the platform’s messaging around “safety” and rely on parental control tools. As highlighted in the Fundacja Kids Alert report, these tools in practice only allow parents to limit screen time, offering no insight into search history, saved content, or the actual recommendations generated by the algorithm[18]. Experts in Poland consider TikTok one of the most significant challenges to online safety for children. They point to ineffective parental controls, aggressive algorithms, and genuine risks to the mental health of young users.

[15] Ibidem.
[16] Ibidem.
[17] TikTok, AI generated content, https://www.tiktok.com/discover/polski-tik-tok-dzieci. Update: 9.02.2026. Access: 14.02.2026.
[18] Suchodolska, M. 2026. Eksperci: TikTok poza kontrolą dorosłych. Algorytmy modelują emocje dzieci. PAP. https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/eksperci-alarmuja-tiktok-poza-kontrola-doroslych-algorytmy-modeluja-emocje-dzieci. Access: 16.02.2026.

Disinformation and information overload

The report “Między faktem a feedem. Podatność młodzieży na dezinformację i teorie spiskowe w środowisku mediów cyfrowych” [*Between Fact and Feed: Young People’s Susceptibility to Disinformation and Conspiracy Theories in Digital Media*] demonstrates that young people in Poland (aged 14–19) often feel they have limited influence over public life and their own futures. Their outlook is characterised by uncertainty and anxiety. Like adult Poles, they tend to consume political and social news via social media. They do not actively seek it out, but rather absorb what algorithms present to them, often without concern that serious content is mixed with entertainment.

Young people have their own views. If they change them, it is often due to emotions triggered by personal experiences or media messages, especially those with propagandistic elements. They report that “fact-checking is a constant part of their digital practice, although they sometimes skip it due to lack of time or fatigue”[19]. They are aware of the constant informational noise around them and navigate a landscape filled with manipulated and false content. It is common for them to become uncertain, doubting their own judgment and struggling to distinguish fact from opinion.

Even when they understand disinformation mechanisms, they do not always recognise falsehoods. In their online world, conspiracy theories circulate on the same level as scientific knowledge. Young people also acknowledge the possibility of “partial truths” – information that is not entirely false but not fully verified either[20].

Privacy and distrust

Comments act as informal guides to collective knowledge and opinion, offering social orientation and a way to adjust personal viewpoints within a wider context.[21] However, young people rarely comment publicly, and when they do, it is usually in private messages to friends or family. Generation Alpha does not trust communication via instant messaging apps, knowing that every element of a sent message – text, audio, video, or images – can be recorded and potentially misused. As journalist Justyna Suchecka (TVN24) notes: “From an early age, they grow up believing it is important to collect ‘evidence’, keep proof, and trust no one. Their lives involve constant calculation – whether to use, report, share, or expose something. Screenshots are taken for

[19] Uczelnia Korczaka. 2025. Między faktem a feedem. Podatność młodzieży na dezinformację i teorie spiskowe w środowisku mediów cyfrowych. https://uczelniakorczaka.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/raport_teorie_spiskowe_internet.pdf. Access: 16.02.2026.
[20] Ibidem.
[21] Ibidem.

different reasons. Someone may be a witness, a victim, or a perpetrator, and these roles can be very fluid"[22].

Consequently, apps that retain histories of texts, images, and videos tend to be used more cautiously. Alphas are conscious of the traces they leave online and often avoid publicising their opinions to prevent negative consequences. The "Dojrzeć do praw" [*Maturing into Rights*] report by the Orange Foundation observes: "Participants were aware that anything they post could be captured and used against them. Owning accounts, or observing accounts in environments with negative experiences from shared screenshots, fosters a strategy of caution and limits spontaneity. Young people are careful about what they write, avoid commenting on others, steer clear of sensitive topics, and sometimes discuss such issues only in safer, face-to-face conversations"[23]. Screenshots are normalised by popular influencers, who often use them to create online "dramas" reinforcing this cautious behaviour.

Online violence

One in three teenagers (12–16) experiences online violence. Unfortunately, 47% of those exposed to digital aggression did nothing in response. Children endure insults (29%), ridicule (19%), humiliation (18%), and threats (13%). 17% were unsure whether they had experienced abuse[24]. Researchers also note that new threats increasingly come from large language models (LLMs), chatbots, or "AI agents", which can engage users in complex interactions designed to capture attention, extract information, and manipulate behaviour. Among 13-year-olds, one in seven (16%) has received sexually explicit material online. In the past year, 26% of respondents participated in at least one online challenge in the last 12 months, and 22% of teenagers (regardless of gender) have watched "patostreams" at least once. Polish adolescents typically encounter online pornography shortly after their 11th birthday. In the 12–16 age group, one in three people view such content frequently (15% daily, 18% once or several times a week)[25].

Emotions in the digital environment: FOMO, stress and overstimulation

The report "Nastolatki. Raport z ogólnopolskiego badania uczniów i rodziców – raport badawczy" [*Teenagers. Findings from a National Survey of Students and Parents*] shows that over half of respondents (12–16) recognise a need to limit their phone use (55%) and admit they spend more time on it than intended (52%). One in four teenagers

[22] Suchecka, J. 2026. Skriny nie płoną. A ty ile masz zrzutów ekranu w telefonie i… po co? TVN24. https://tvn24.pl/polska/ skriny-zrzuty-ekranu-kto-i-po-co-je-robi-st8888465. Access: 16.02.2026.
[23] Fundacja Orange. 2025. Dojrzeć do praw. Raport z monitoringu praw i podmiotowości dziecka w Polsce w dobie społeczeństwa informacyjnego. Edycja II (2025). https://fundacja.orange.pl/prawadziecka/raport. Access: 16.02.2026.
[24] NASK, op. cit.
[25] Ibidem.

experiences physical or emotional effects from excessive smartphone use[26]. Why is this the case? Using digital devices can be exhausting: young people scroll while eating (55%), falling asleep (50%), studying (45%), watching TV (43%), and even during conversations with peers (33%) or parents (17%). 58% of teenagers – including 66% of girls – report frequently using the internet alongside other activities. These findings suggest difficulty in disengaging from screens and focusing on other tasks. The survey also notes that 36% of teenagers show moderate to severe signs of problematic internet use (PUI).

Excessive use of technology tends to increase with age. The "Dojrzeć do praw" [*Maturing into Rights*] report by the Orange Foundation – draws on survey research conducted among parents of teenagers. The authors highlight that almost one in five children aged 5–17 (17%) spend most of their time online, with 6% constantly connected. This includes 8% of younger children (5–8 years) and 25% of teenagers. Nearly two-thirds of minors over the age of four – including 36% of the youngest and 94% of teenagers – use the internet daily[27].

Complementing the survey data, qualitative research involved in-depth interviews with 27 students aged 12–17. These conversations reveal that the youngest members of Generation Z and the oldest Alphas have developed an automatic habit of reaching for their smartphones. They do so both out of boredom and in response to stress. Despite feeling distracted and overstimulated by notifications, they report experiencing digital FOMO – the fear of not responding in time or missing out, which could lead to being ignored or excluded. FOMO often drives excessive, sometimes compulsive phone use and carries a risk of addiction[28].

Alphas and nationality-based discrimination

Teenagers in Poland, including members of Generation Alpha, are diverse in terms of nationality and culture. Foreign students make up over 5% of pupils – nearly 500 000 children[29] – with the majority from Ukraine, although young people from most countries of the world are present in Polish schools.

The war on Poland's eastern border has introduced additional challenges in this area. Russian propaganda online aims to fuel anti-Ukrainian sentiment and reduce public willingness to show solidarity with Ukraine. Between November and December 2025,

[26] Ibidem.
[27] Fundacja Orange, op. cit.
[28] Ibidem.
[29] Centre for Citizenship Education (CEO). 2025. Foreign students in Polish schools in the 2024/2025 school year. https://ceo.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Foreign-students-in-Polish-schools-in-the-2024-2025-school-year.pdf. Access: 16.02.2026.

the number of anti-Ukrainian posts in Polish-language online spaces nearly doubled to 186 000, reaching over 66 million views. Research by Demagog and the Media Monitoring Institute indicates that an individual over the age of 15 could encounter said anti-Ukrainian content on average twice[30]. This means that Alphas are also exposed to content that fosters ethnic conflict and undermines trust in Ukrainian classmates.

There is currently no research specifically addressing digital discrimination based on ethnicity or other characteristics among Generation Alpha. This does not mean the problem does not exist. The Orange Foundation report cites the “Indeks Praw i Podmiotowości Dziecka” [*Child Rights and Agency Index*] – a measure based on expert and academic assessments – which scored 2,3 out of 10 in 2025, reflecting a very poor evaluation of children’s situation[31]. Key issues identified include discrimination against children from minority or disabled groups, unequal access to valuable online content, hate speech, and inadequate protection of personal image and privacy online.

Experts emphasise that these issues coincide with declining mental health among young people, which, without sufficient support in family, school, or institutional environments, may increase their vulnerability to algorithmic influence[32].

[30] Demagog, Instytut Monitorowania Mediów. 2025. Antyukraińska propaganda: sierpień–listopad 2025. https://demagog.org.pl/analizy_i_raporty/antyukrainska-propaganda-sierpien-listopad-2025-raport-demagoga-i-imm/. Access: 16.02.2026.
[31] Ibidem.
[32] Ibidem.

Key Findings

- For Generation Alpha, the internet is not merely a tool but a natural environment for social, entertainment, and educational life. Average daily online time ranges from 3,5 hours on weekdays to over 4,5 hours on weekends, increasing with age – the oldest respondents (14–15 years) spend almost six hours online on non-school days.
- A striking 91,5% of respondents own their own smartphone. The milestone age is 11, after which having a smartphone becomes almost universal among children.
- Analysis of Generation Alpha's social media activity shows a clear dominance of video formats. YouTube is the undisputed leader in reach (83%), but TikTok demonstrates the highest user loyalty – almost every user engages with it daily.
- A concerning trend is the widespread disregard for age restrictions. Among respondents under 13, 83% use YouTube (53% daily) and 27% use TikTok (22% daily).
- The internet primarily serves social purposes (communication with peers) and entertainment (online gaming, short and long-form videos). At the same time, over 40% of respondents value its educational potential, using it for learning and developing personal interests – highlighting the significant potential of formats that combine education with play.
- Content that engages Generation Alpha tends to be thematically personalised (66%), entertaining (54%), and presented by a creator they like (40%). One in three respondents also appreciate interesting graphics or video editing.
- Over two-thirds of respondents follow creators on social media, with this behaviour increasing sharply with age – from 25% among eight-year-olds to over 80% among the oldest Alphas. Digital influencers can have a real impact on children's attitudes and interests, effectively bypassing official platform age restrictions.
- In terms of information sources, Generation Alpha shows an evolution from family authority towards the dominance of social media. While family remains the main source of knowledge for the overall group (59%), its influence declines with age, as social media becomes the primary reference point for 14–15-year-olds (65%). A

similar shift occurs from school (for younger children) to friends (for older children) as key sources of information.

- Over one-third of respondents use chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT), often treating them as an alternative to traditional search engines.
- More than half report encountering disinformation, though their responses are typically passive – two-thirds simply ignore false content or take no action. Younger Alphas rely on adults to verify information, whereas older ones often use peer comments or cross-check with other sources.
- Young people rarely seek information intentionally. Knowledge about the world often reaches them while scrolling through TikTok or Instagram, and their definition of "news" has broadened – political events are treated on par with influencer scandals. Reaching this group effectively may therefore require content that interweaves serious topics with entertainment.
- This trend is not limited to information gathering but extends to social media use more broadly. Young users' choices are largely shaped by platform mechanisms, particularly recommendation algorithms. Respondents often consume content passively, viewing only what appears on their homepage, and rarely make deliberate choices such as searching for specific topics or creators. Many cannot even identify which types of content they watch most frequently or which subjects interest them the most.
- Although Alphas consume content intensively, the majority remain passive recipients. Younger Alphas are more likely to create edits and record videos, while older ones recall their YouTube or TikTok past with laughter or embarrassment. Today, they post sparingly – typically moments from their lives via Instagram Stories or by reposting content they consider important. Every interaction (following, commenting, reposting) is a deliberate decision intended to build status within their peer group.
- Young audiences expect dynamic video content, enriched with music and graphics, that can capture attention within the first few seconds. Effective content must include a so-called hook at the outset. Without immediate engagement, viewers quickly scroll past. Another key factor is showing how a given event or topic directly impacts the young person's life.
- Memes and other humorous content can also serve as important carriers of information. Humorous material often acts as a starting point for deeper exploration of a subject.

Katarzyna Prachnio

Quantitative data analysis

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

The analysis draws on data from 1249 respondents. The gender composition of the sample is broadly consistent with that of the general population. In Poland, females account for 49% of the pre-working age group (aged 0–17)[33]. In our sample, after excluding missing responses ("Prefer not to say"), girls make up 51%.

The largest age group among respondents (30%) consists of the oldest cohort of Generation Alpha, namely 15-year-olds. The youngest age cohorts are notably under-represented. This is likely due to the fact that younger children are less likely to own personal electronic devices and generally spend less time online. In addition, in their case the survey could only be reached via parents, who – due to time constraints or limited interest in the topic – may have been more likely to ignore the invitation to participate. Schools may also have been less inclined to share the survey with younger children and their parents, considering that issues related to internet use are not yet as relevant for this group as they are, for example, for 15-year-olds.

To avoid bias resulting from unequal numbers of respondents across age groups, this variation is taken into account when presenting comparative statistical analyses in cases where differences between age groups had a clear impact on the structure of responses.

[33] Statistics Poland (GUS). 2025. Demographic Yearbook of Poland 2025. https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/statistical-yearbooks/statistical-yearbooks/demographic-yearbook-of-poland-2025,3,19.html. Access: 13.02.2026.

Table 1. Respondents by age and gender.

	Male	Female	Other	Prefer not to say	All
8	38	27	-	2	67
9	42	46	-	-	88
10	66	61	-	5	132
11	67	55	-	6	128
12	54	73	2	7	136
13	70	86	2	10	168
14	68	77	2	8	155
15	161	185	6	23	375
All	566	610	12	61	1249

Note. n=1249. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

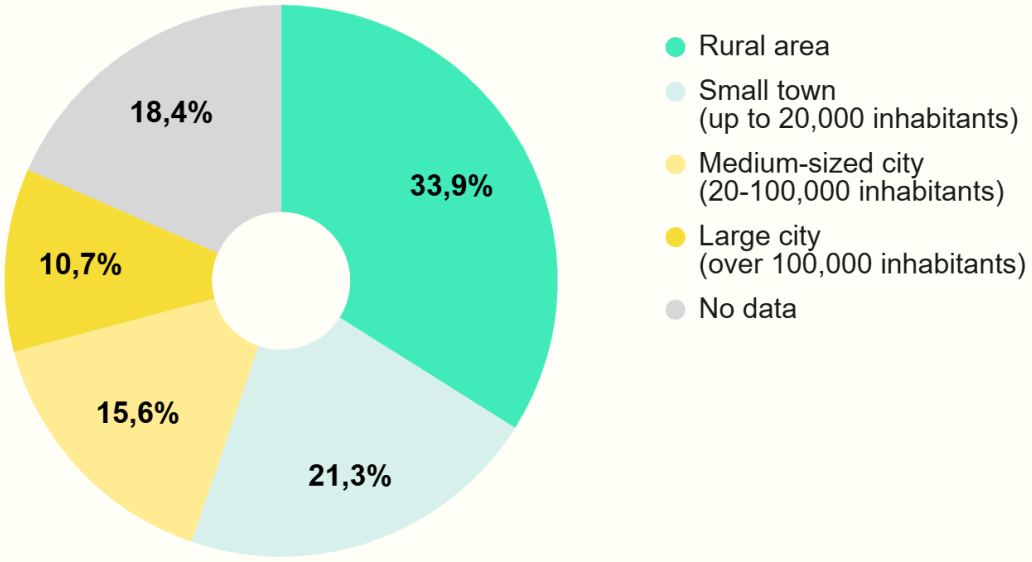
The majority of respondents live in rural areas and small towns with up to 20,000 inhabitants (55% in total). Medium-sized and large cities were reported by 26% of respondents. The question on place of residence was open-ended and asked respondents to provide either the name of their locality or its population size; responses were subsequently coded into four categories based on population size. This approach was chosen in view of the young age of the respondents and concerns that not all of them would have sufficient knowledge to select an accurate option from a predefined list based on population size. A drawback of this solution was the relatively high level of missing data, likely reflecting concerns about the disclosure of private information such as place of residence.

Excluding missing data, 42% of respondents live in rural areas. This proportion is broadly consistent with the population distribution, as 45% of children in Poland aged 0–17 reside in rural areas[34].

Children and adolescents from all Polish voivodeships took part in the survey; however, the size of these groups varies considerably. Responses were most numerous from the Łódzkie, Śląskie, Świętokrzyskie and Wielkopolskie Voivodeships, which together account for 48% of all responses. This is partly attributable to the timing of school winter holidays, which varied across voivodeships during the data collection period.

[34] Statistics Poland (GUS). 2025. Demographic Yearbook of Poland 2025. https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/statistical-yearbooks/statistical-yearbooks/demographic-yearbook-of-poland-2025,3,19.html. Access: 13.02.2026.

Figure 1. Respondents by place of residence.



Note. n=1249. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Table 2. Number of respondents by voivodeship (administrative units), by age group.

Voivodeship	age 8-10	age 11-13	age 14-15	All
Łódzkie	34	84	64	182
Śląskie	33	49	43	125
Świętokrzyskie	43	52	29	124
Wielkopolskie	28	32	56	116
Podkarpackie	32	37	26	95
Podlaskie	16	26	50	92
Pomorskie	6	17	45	68
Lubuskie	16	30	17	63
Lubelskie	10	17	32	59
Mazowieckie	19	10	30	59
Dolnośląskie	9	16	31	56
Zachodniopomorskie	10	10	36	56
Warmińsko-mazurskie	9	12	28	49
Małopolskie	7	10	22	39
Opolskie	11	15	12	38
Kujawsko-pomorskie	3	14	5	22
No answer	1	1	4	6
All	287	432	530	1249

Note. n=1249. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

For over 96% of respondents, Polish is the main language spoken at home. Only 23 respondents reported Ukrainian as their home language, while a further 20 indicated another language (including six reporting Russian or both Russian and Ukrainian, five reporting Silesian[35], two Kashubian[36], and four German). Given the very small number of respondents indicating Ukrainian, this group was not treated as a separate category in the comparative analyses.

[35] The ethnolect used in Upper Silesia does not officially have the status of a separate language or a regional language.
[36] The only legally recognised regional language in Poland.

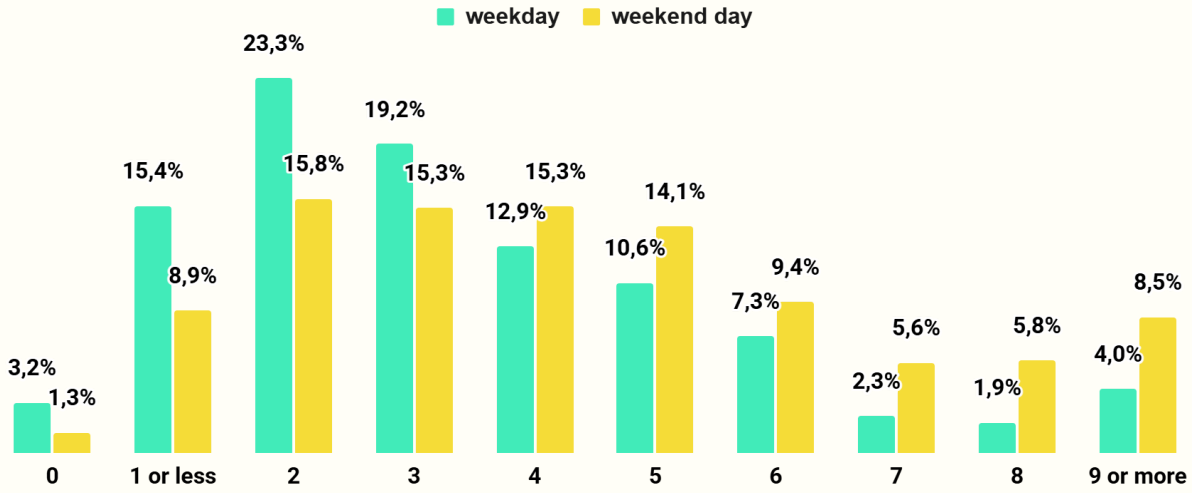
USE OF INTERNET AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

In this section, we present the results concerning the digital activity of Generation Alpha. We focus on the time spent online and the goals and tools that shape the everyday online life of children and young people in different age groups.

The young people participating in the study spend an average of 3 hours and 26 minutes online on a typical weekday and 4 hours and 31 minutes on an average weekend day[37]. The data clearly shows a shift in activity towards longer internet sessions during leisure time, away from school.

During the week, when a significant portion of their day is occupied by school, online activity is lower. The largest group comprises those who use the internet for 2 hours per day (23%), while almost one in five children spends 3 hours online. Additionally, 19% of respondents use the internet for one hour or less on weekdays (including not at all). Overall, 61% of respondents spend a maximum of 3 hours online per weekday.

Figure 2. Number of hours spent online per day on a weekday and on a weekend day.



Note. Missing data has been excluded. Weekday: n = 1198, weekend day: n=1226. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Weekend internet activity is characterised by higher intensity. Significantly more responses fall into each category from 4 hours per day upwards. On an average

[37] During the data cleaning process, extreme responses (20 hours or more) as well as answers that were drastically inconsistent with the respondent's other responses were excluded.

weekend day, 58% of children spend at least 4 hours online, including 29% who spend 6 hours or more. For 14% of respondents, the internet entirely structures their weekend day, with 8 hours or more spent online.

Girls spend more time online on average – 3 hours 35 minutes per day during the week and 4 hours 37 minutes at the weekend. For boys, the averages are 3 hours 14 minutes on weekdays and 4 hours 22 minutes on weekend days. Only in the 8–10 age group do boys spend slightly more time online. Girls (17%) are somewhat more likely than boys (12%) to report using the internet for more than 5 hours.

Table. 3. Average number of hours spent online per day.

	Weekday			Weekend day		
Age group	Girls	Boys	All	Girls	Boys	All
8-10	1,88	1,94	1,92	2,73	3,02	2,89
11-13	3,25	2,94	3,08	4,20	4,11	4,12
14-15	4,73	4,29	4,56	5,94	5,42	5,73
all	3,59	3,23	3,44	4,61	4,36	4,51

Note. Missing data has been excluded. Weekday girls/boys: n=1126, All: n=1198; Weekend day girls/boys: n=1154, All: n=1226. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

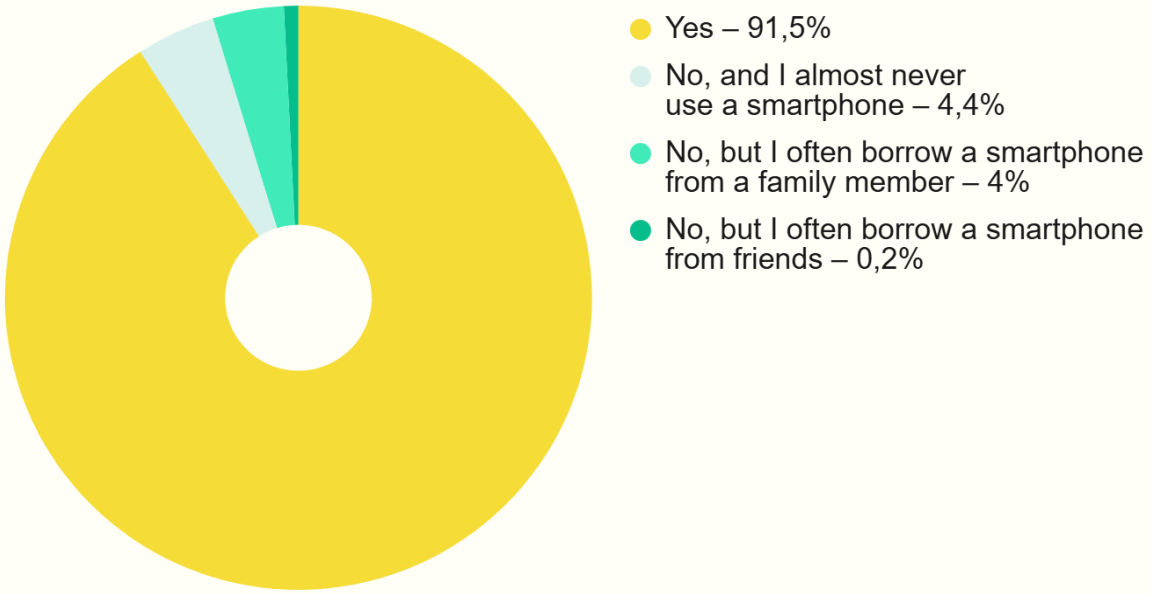
Time spent online also increases with age. While the youngest group (8–10 years) spend just under 2 hours online on weekdays, the oldest age group averages more than 4,5 hours. The difference is even greater at weekends, with 8–10-year-olds averaging 2 hours 53 minutes, compared with 5 hours 44 minutes for adolescents aged 14–15.

Respondents living in rural areas spend slightly less time online – 13 minutes below the average during the week and 16 minutes less at weekends. However, there is no clear overall pattern (for example, larger settlements do not necessarily correspond to longer online time).

The vast majority of participants (91,5%) own a smartphone. Among the 105 respondents who do not, just over half report that they almost never use a smartphone, while the remainder use devices belonging to family members. Using a friend's smartphone is uncommon, with only two respondents indicating this.

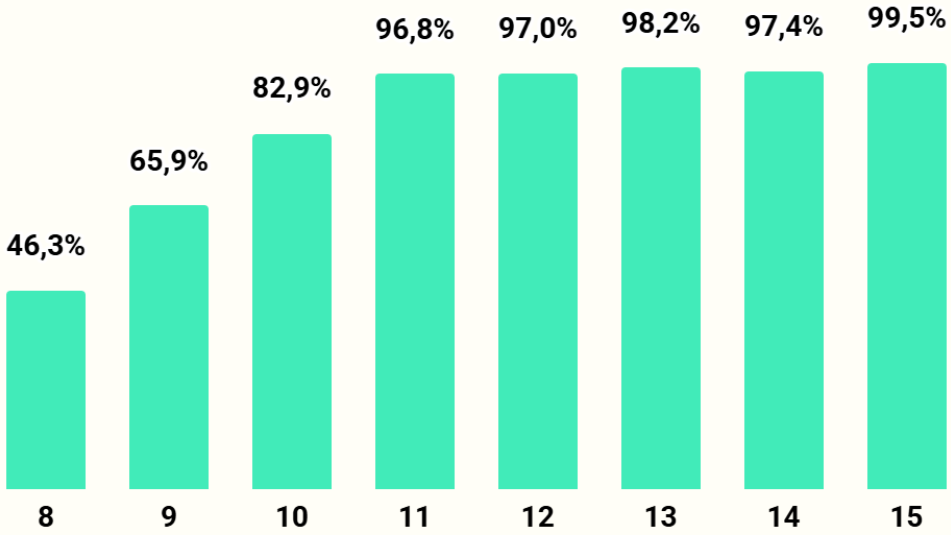
The proportion of respondents owning a smartphone increases with age. Almost half (46%) of 8-year-olds have one, rising to 66% of 9-year-olds and 83% of 10-year-olds. It appears that the threshold is reaching 11 years of age, as from this age onwards nearly all respondents own their own smartphone.

Figure 3. Personal smartphone ownership.



Note. Missing data has been excluded. n=1238. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Figure 4. Personal smartphone ownership by age.



Note. Missing data has been excluded. n=1238. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

In the following questions, participants were asked about the purposes for which they use the internet, as well as the apps and online platforms they use. The Polish version of the survey included additional questions in this section. We asked separately about

apps that respondents use at all and those they use on a daily basis. Similarly, two questions addressed the purposes for which they use the internet.

For the study participants, **the internet primarily serves as a social and entertainment space**. Children and adolescents most often use it to keep in touch with others – nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated this, and **66% communicate online daily**.

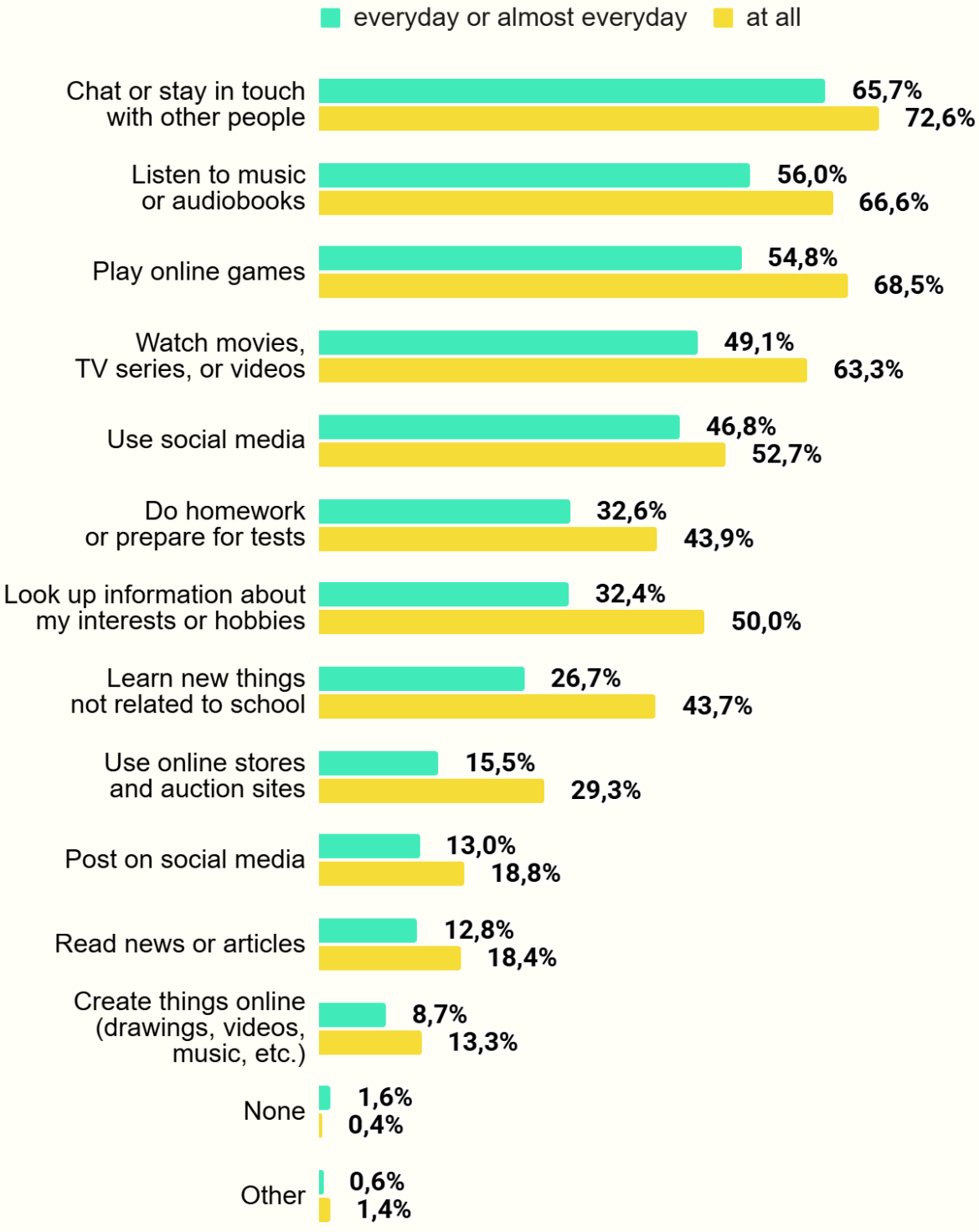
Entertainment purposes follow closely. **The foundation of digital entertainment is online gaming**, cited by 69% of respondents, with over half (55%) playing daily. However, among daily recreational activities, **listening to music and audiobooks** ranks first (56%). Third, after gaming, comes watching films and series, with 49% of respondents doing this daily. For some respondents, these activities are likely more common at weekends, similar to gaming, as indicated by the fairly large difference (14 percentage points in all cases) between overall engagement in watching films and series and daily participation in this activity.

53% of respondents indicate that they use the internet to **check social media** (47% daily). This is the case for one in five 10-year-olds, one in two 12-year-olds and three quarters of 14- and 15-year-olds. However, it should be noted that this result is significantly underestimated, as young audiences do not treat YouTube as a social media platform. In the next question, we see that over 80% of respondents use it, including over half of the youngest Alphas.

Although entertainment clearly dominates, **the internet also provides important support for learning and development**. Half of the respondents use the internet to search for information related to their own interests and hobbies, with one-third doing so daily. Similarly, one in three children complete homework or prepare for tests online every day, and more than one in four learn new things unrelated to school, for example by watching tutorials or checking how to do something.

Some internet functions are less popular in this age group. Daily use of online shopping is rare (16%), although overall nearly one-third of respondents use it. **Posting on social media was reported by 19% of respondents, including 13% who do so daily.** Notably, this internet use was reported by 10% of all respondents under 13 years of age, including 20% of 12-year-olds, 10% of 11-year-olds, and 7% of 10-year-olds. There were also isolated cases among 8- and 9-year-olds (1,5% and 3,5% respectively).

Figure 5. Purposes of using the internet.



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. Missing data has been excluded. At all: n=1247, Every day: n=1242. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Less than one in five respondents (18%) report at least occasional reading of news and articles, with 13% doing so daily. This activity was mainly reported by children aged 12–15. In other parts of the study, we find that this type of information reaches young people mostly "by chance" while scrolling social media. Many respondents probably do not consider this as "reading the news," particularly given that social media today is dominated by video content.

Creating drawings, music, or videos online is the least common of the listed activities, with only 8,7% of respondents doing so daily. Other activities mentioned included sport (both practising using apps and watching matches or competitions), photo editing, listening to the radio, reading books, and even writing their own book or working in digital marketing.

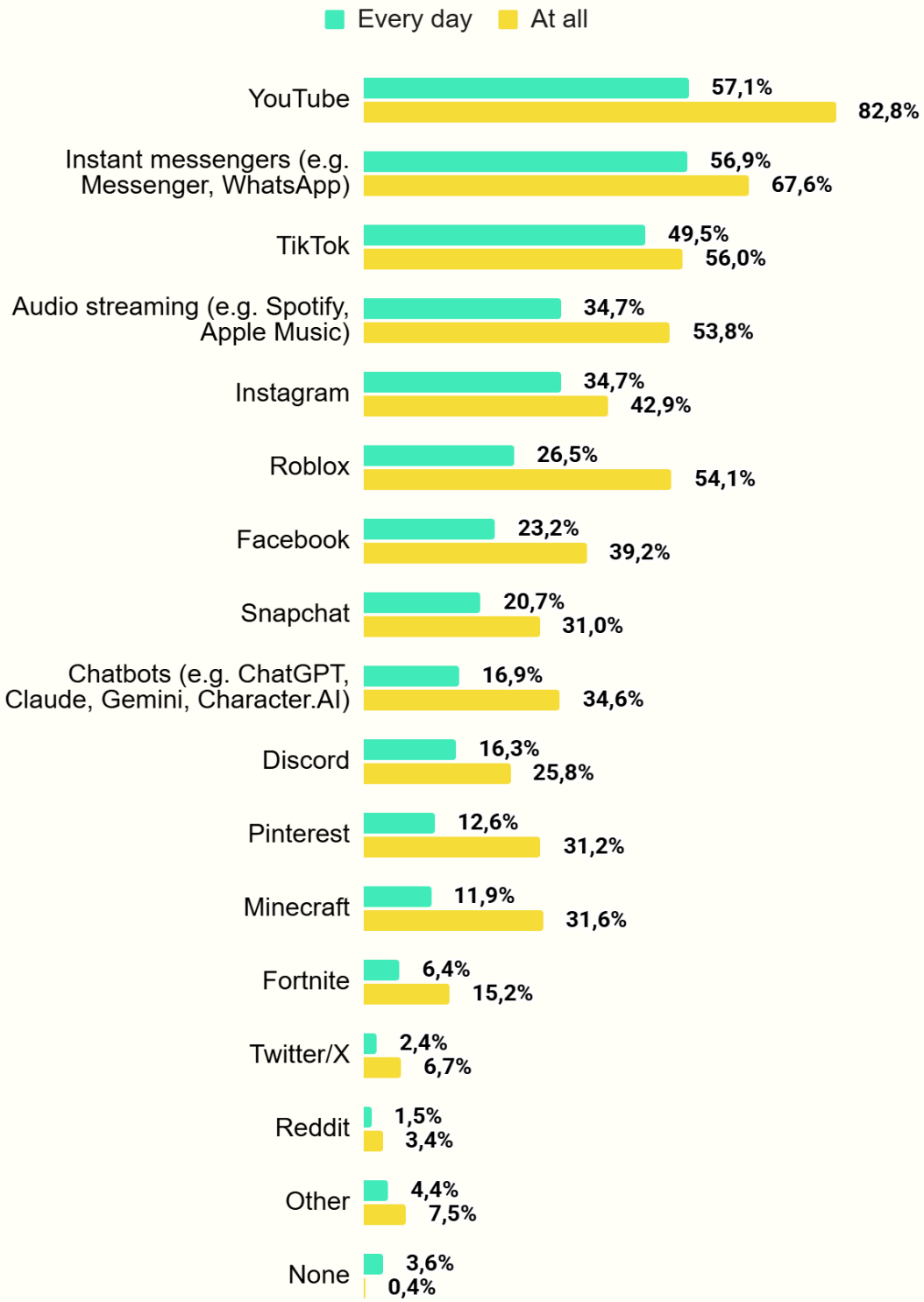
To gain a better understanding of the digital ecosystem in which young people operate, we asked them about the **apps and online platforms they use**. Respondents were presented with an extensive list of options but could also provide their own answers.

The clear leader is **YouTube**, used by 83% of respondents, over half of whom (57%) use it daily. Messaging apps such as **Messenger** and **WhatsApp** support the most important purpose of internet use identified in the previous question, with 56,9% of respondents using them every day. **TikTok** ranks third (56%). Although its overall reach is smaller than YouTube, it demonstrates high user loyalty—almost every user accesses it daily (50%). Notably, 27% of respondents under 13 years of age use TikTok, with 22% of them using it daily.

Next in popularity are audio streaming platforms (e.g., Spotify) and Instagram, both with the same proportion of daily users (35%). Facebook has a similar overall reach to Instagram (39%), but only 23% of respondents use it daily. It is likely that young people have an account there but do not engage actively, preferring TikTok or Instagram instead. Snapchat also falls noticeably behind these apps in daily use, with 21% of respondents reporting using it.

The most popular gaming platform among respondents is **Roblox**, used by 54% of participants, half of whom access it daily. Minecraft (12%) and Fortnite (6%) have smaller daily player bases. For all three platforms, there is a substantial difference between overall and daily use, suggesting that young people may engage with them primarily when they have more free time, for example at weekends. Roblox is used by almost equal proportions of girls and boys, although boys use it slightly more intensively – 29% of boys visit the platform daily compared with 24% of girls. In contrast, Minecraft (used overall by 48% of boys and 19% of girls) and Fortnite (24% of boys and 7% of girls) are games clearly dominated by male participants.

Figure 6. Use of apps and online platforms.



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. Missing data has been excluded. At all: n=1247, Every day: n=1233. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Over one-third of respondents use chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT or Gemini), with half of them doing so daily. Although the qualitative part of the study indicates that the younger generation can be critical of artificial intelligence, some use chatbots as an internet search tool. There is also considerable variation by age – nearly half of the older members of Generation Alpha (13–15 years) use AI chatbots, with one in four doing so daily, whereas 8- and 9-year-olds hardly use them at all. Boys use chatbots slightly more often than girls on a daily basis (19% vs 15%).

Almost one-third of respondents use Pinterest at least occasionally, while one in four use Discord. A few participants also mentioned other streaming platforms in open-ended responses, including Twitch and Kick.

At the bottom of the list are X/Twitter and Reddit, used daily by only 2,4% and 1,5% of respondents, respectively.

Other apps and platforms mentioned by participants are mainly games, including Brawl Stars, FIFA/EA Sports FC, CS2, and Geometry Dash. Language learning apps (Duolingo, Savvy Quest) and educational or developmental platforms (e.g., Wordwall, knowledge quizzes, programming) are also popular. Other categories include VOD platforms (Netflix, HBO Max, Disney, CDA) and apps for graphics and video editing (Canva, CapCut, Ibis Paint). Additionally, respondents mentioned Google, search engines and web browsers, as well as internet radio, online banking, the online school register (Librus), and other apps such as Novelist, Wattpad, Ottopia, Flo, and the Online Bible.

Table. 4. Percentage of respondents who use the most popular social media platforms every day, by age.

Age	YouTube	TikTok	Instagram	Facebook
8	58,2%	6,0%	0%	3,0%
9	51,1%	10,2%	1,1%	8,0%
10	56,1%	13,6%	1,5%	6,8%
11	66,4%	24,2%	10,2%	17,2%
12	53,7%	41,9%	21,3%	18,4%
13	55,4%	60,1%	30,4%	33,3%
14	57,4%	66,5%	54,8%	36,1%
15	54,9%	76,5%	65,9%	29,1%
All	56,4%	48,8%	34,3%	22,9%

Note. Missing data has been excluded. n=1233. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

It should be emphasised that popular social media platforms are generally intended for users aged 13 and over. Of particular interest is how frequently children below this age use these platforms. More than half of respondents in every age group use YouTube daily. This platform offers the option to create a supervised account from the age of 11 and also provides a dedicated YouTube Kids version for younger users.

However, the youngest children are also creating accounts on TikTok in large numbers and using them intensively. 6% of 8-year-olds report being daily users of the platform. This proportion increases with age, and among 11-year-olds, one in four scrolls through TikTok daily. For 12-year-olds, the figure rises to 42% – and this still refers to children who are legally not allowed to have an account on the platform. A similar pattern is observed on Instagram and Facebook, although in both cases the youngest users are significantly fewer.

YouTube is more popular on a daily basis among boys, with 62% using it every day, compared with 52% of girls. Girls, however, are more likely to choose TikTok (54%) and Instagram (41%), compared with 43% and 27% of boys, respectively.

Summary

The study results paint a picture of Generation Alpha as a group for whom the internet is a natural environment. Respondents spend an average of 3,5 hours online on weekdays and 4,5 hours on weekends, with usage increasing with age. 92% of respondents own their own smartphone. A sort of threshold appears at age 11 – from this age onwards, owning a personal device becomes the standard for almost every child.

Girls dominate on TikTok and Instagram, while boys are more likely to use YouTube and also play games more frequently than girls. Although YouTube remains the platform with the widest reach, TikTok shows the highest “pull” – nearly every user accesses it daily. It is common for children to use platforms that are officially unavailable to those under 13, particularly TikTok, which is used daily by one in four 11-year-olds.

The main motivation for online activity is the need to connect with others and for entertainment. Despite the dominance of video content and games, the internet also serves an important educational function – half of respondents develop their hobbies online, and over 40% use it for learning. More than one-third of respondents already use chatbots (such as ChatGPT), indicating rapid adoption of new technologies.

TOPICS AND ONLINE CONTENT

We already know how much time participants spend online and which platforms they visit most frequently. The next section focuses on the topics and content that interest and engage young audiences.

The category that generates the greatest interest among respondents is clearly **video and entertainment content**, including films and series, as well as humorous material such as memes. This response was more frequently chosen by girls (67%), but among boys it was also reported by over half of respondents (56%). Slightly fewer respondents in the youngest age group selected this option (49%), including 8-year-olds (40%).

The second most popular category relates to **interactions with others**, including conversations with friends and staying in contact – 55%. This again highlights the important social function that internet activity serves for young people.

Music-related content (bands, albums, concerts, fandoms) ranks third – 54%. This option was reported far more frequently by girls (63%) than boys (43%), and also by the older members of Generation Alpha.

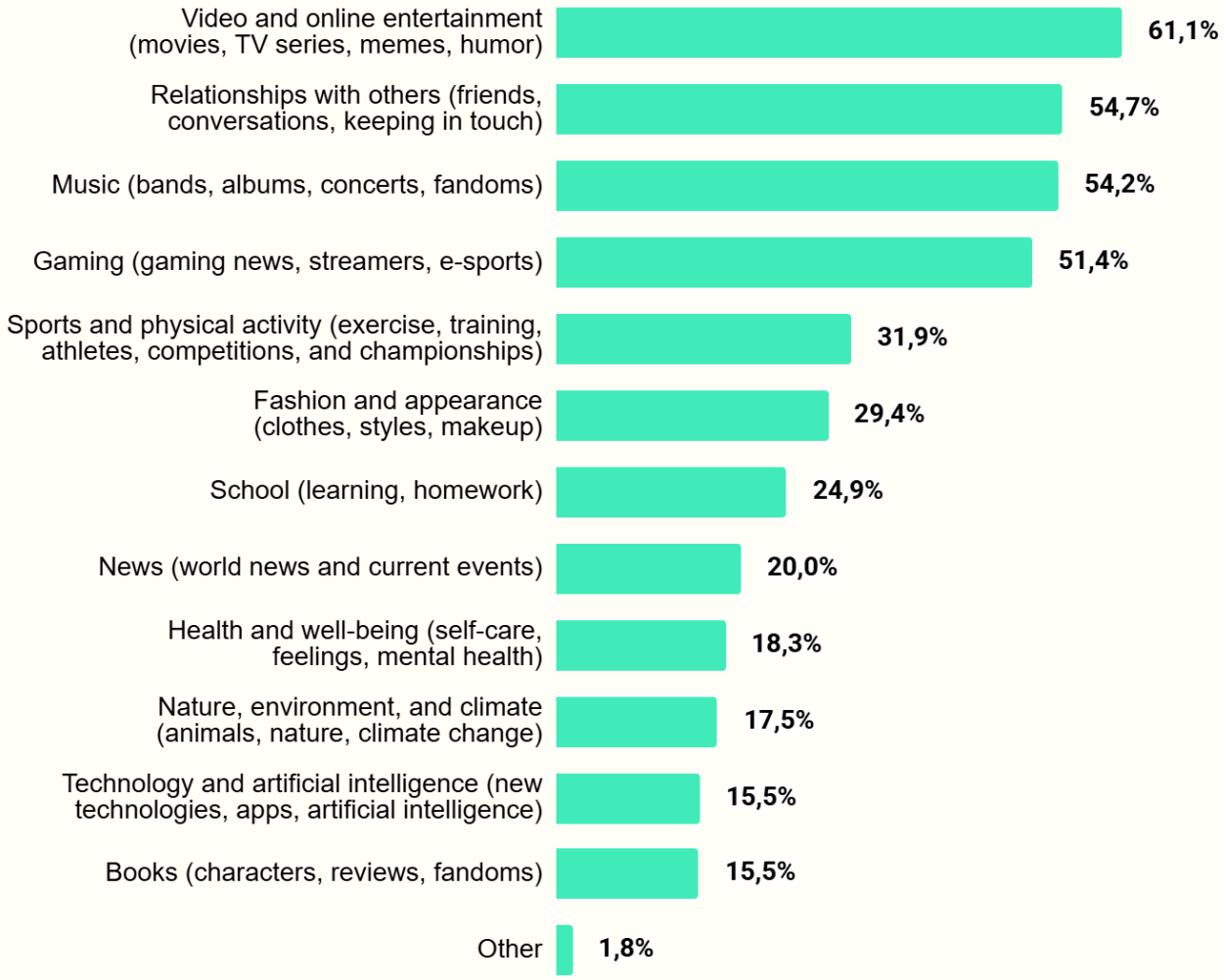
The final topic that interests over half of the respondents is **content related to games and e-sports**. This is much more popular among boys (70%) than girls (33%), although the gender difference varies across age groups – for example, only 19% of 8-year-old girls are interested in games, compared with 45% of 11-year-old girls.

Sport and physical activity (including training, athletes, and championships) interest 32% of respondents. Once again, this is slightly more common among boys (37%) and also among older internet users – ranging from 19% of 8-year-olds to 41% of 15-year-olds.

Conversely, a topic that generates significantly more interest among the female portion of the group is fashion and appearance (clothing, styling, makeup) – selected by 29% of respondents overall, but only 9% of boys and 47% of girls.

One in four respondents indicated an interest in school and learning topics. A further 20% expressed interest in news and world events. The popularity of news increases with age – from 6% among 8- and 9-year-olds to over 25% in the 13–15 age group. This response was slightly more common among boys (22%) than girls (17%).

Figure 7. Topics on the internet that interest Generation Alpha.



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. Missing data has been excluded. n=1236. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Other topics, of interest to fewer than one in five respondents, include health and well-being (self-care, emotions, mental health) and books (characters, reviews, fandoms) – both more frequently chosen by girls. Nature, the environment and climate (animals, nature, climate change) and Technology and AI (new technologies, apps, artificial intelligence) were also mentioned, with the latter more often selected by boys.

In the open-ended “Other” category, young people also mentioned artistic and creative activities, including drawing, crocheting, and DIY projects, as well as automotive topics, content related to food and cooking, or less obvious sports such as horse riding, acrobatics, and roller skating. Individual responses included cosplay, agriculture, fishing, and the military.

What else captures the attention of young audiences? Although browsing content on social media is often largely determined by algorithms, certain features make content more likely to reach them effectively – they will watch (or less often, read) it in full.

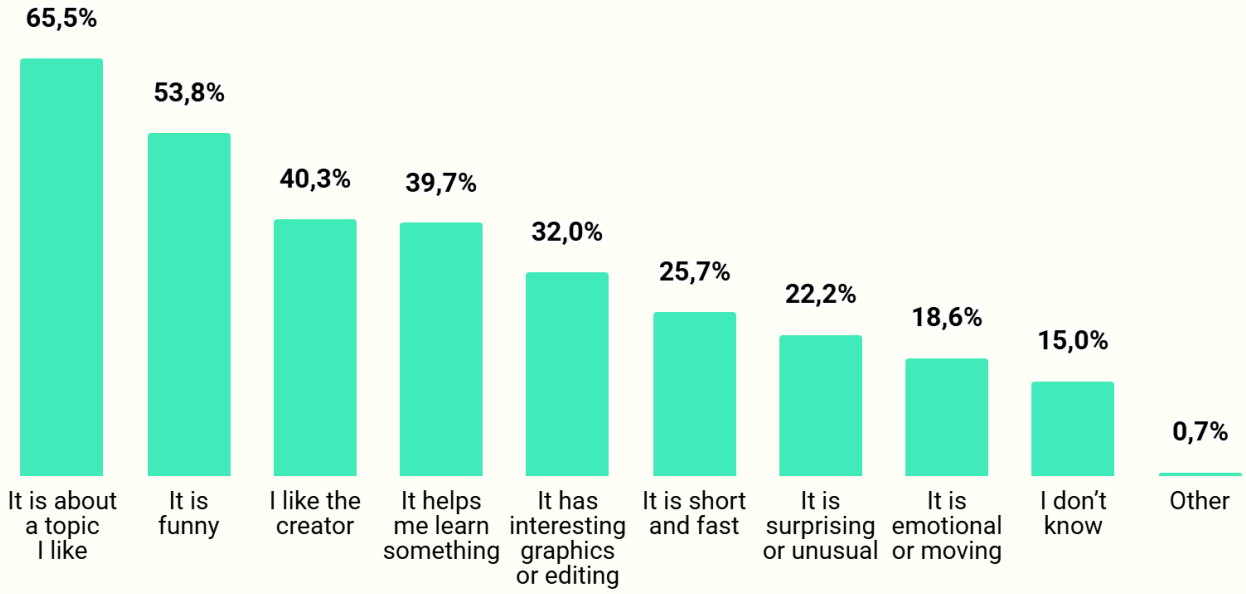
For Generation Alpha, **relevance to their interests is crucial**. This is a key factor – 66% of respondents indicated that content must be on a topic they like. More than half of respondents (54%) look for funny content online. For them, the internet is primarily a source of entertainment.

Young users also form bonds with online creators – for 40% of respondents, content is interesting when they like the creator. This confirms the significant role of influencers as opinion leaders in this age group. This is particularly important for the oldest members of the generation – 50% of 14–15-year-olds, compared with 28% of 8–10-year-olds.

Almost as many respondents (39,7%) indicate that content is interesting when it helps them learn something. This aligns with earlier data on using the internet for educational purposes and personal development, including hobbies and interests.

Aesthetics and presentation also matter: engaging graphics or editing attract the attention of 32% of respondents, while the feature “short and fast” is important for one in four children. This suggests a preference for dynamic formats that do not require prolonged focus.

Figure 8. Features that make online content interesting for Generation Alpha.



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. Missing data has been excluded. n=1228. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Less critical, though still noticeable, are elements that build tension or are emotionally intense. Surprising or unique content attracts 22% of respondents, while content that is emotional or moving is key for 18,6% of participants, more so for girls (21%) than boys (14%).

In summary, ideal content for Generation Alpha is thematically personalised, entertaining, and presented by a creator they like. Importantly, young users do not seek entertainment alone – 40% value educational aspects, which is an encouraging insight for creators of educational and educational-entertainment content (so-called edutainment).

It should also be noted that many young people are unable to specify what particularly captures their attention in online content. When asked what makes a post, video, or article interesting to them, 15% of respondents answered “I don’t know”. This response was slightly more common among girls (17%) than boys (11%). This may partly reflect the nature of social media platforms – the action of algorithms and the endless stream of content, which is often consumed without much reflection.

A few participants, selecting “Other,” also mentioned features such as “cool music”, self-created content (“without AI assistance”), or alignment between the creator’s opinions and their own. Less specific responses also appeared, for example: “It’s just cool” or “It’s just my vibe”.

The next set of data illustrates the mechanisms of active engagement of Generation Alpha on social media through interaction. We asked young people what actually prompts them to react to online content – by liking, commenting, or sharing. The largest group – 44% – indicated no specific reason, stating that **they rarely react to content in any way**. Additionally, a separate category was created for 4% of respondents who selected “Other” and reported that they never react in this way online (some of these do not even have social media accounts).

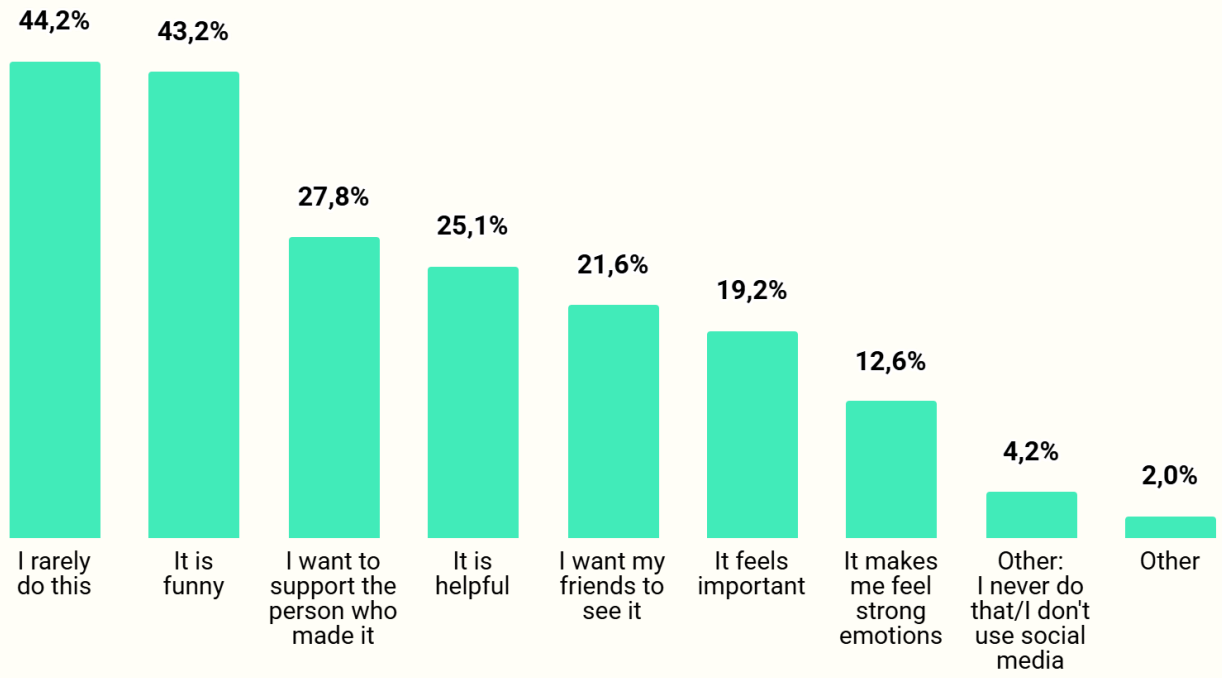
The most important motivation is humour – 43% of respondents react online to content that is simply funny. The second most important reason, indicated by 28%, is the desire to support the creator of the content, while the third, at 25%, is that the content is helpful. These findings align with responses to the previous question (features that make content interesting), in which, besides being on a topic they like, the most important factors were that the content is funny, they like the creator, and it helps them learn something.

It is worth noting that supporting a creator can mean popular influencers or content creators, but also friends – in the “Other” category, respondents wrote comments such

as: “If someone I know posts something, I like it because it will make them happy” and “I like helping others because creators get money for their next video”.

22% of respondents react to online content (like, comment, share) because they want their friends to see it. Interaction is not only a personal signal of “I like this” but also an act of communication directed at one’s reference group. Such behaviour contributes to building group identity and self-presentation, by sharing what interests, amuses, angers, or concerns them. It also fosters a shared experience – users want their friends to be “up to date,” familiar with the same memes or news.

Figure 9. What usually makes you like, comment on, or share content online?



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. Missing data has been excluded. n=1215. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Some young internet users also react to content because they consider it important (19%) or when it evokes strong emotions (13%). In the “Other” category, a few individual responses included: “I want to see more content like this,” “The content is true,” and “I agree with the content.” However, the majority of other responses indicate that respondents react to content when it is interesting, relates to their interests, or “I just like it”.

For respondents who answered that they react when “content seems important” (n=233), we asked an additional question about what they had recently found important online. Unfortunately, almost half of them (107 people) did not provide an answer to this question.

Among those who did respond, the largest group (36%) identified content related to their interests and hobbies (fishing, horses, cars, fashion, makeup, space, cooking) and entertainment (games, music, vlogs, series, "something funny") as recently important online. A further 14% mentioned healthy eating and sport (matches, sports news, advice, training).

The third most common category was "news", indicated by 13% of respondents (16 people). This included responses such as:

> *Current events around the world.*
>
> *What is happening in the city where my family and I come from (because there is a war in my country).*
>
> *Topics such as US migration policy (ICE), petitions calling for a stop to trade with Israel over alleged human rights abuses, or the closure of kindergartens and gynaecology-obstetrics wards in Poland.*
>
> *Actions of Donald Trump, the bombing of Palestine.*
>
> *Content about current global problems, violence, ICE, etc.*
>
> *The use of AI destroys many things, mentally and physically.*
>
> *The impact of humans on climate change, political conflicts around the world.*
>
> *A video essay about Epstein.*
>
> *The war in Ukraine and the views of US President Donald Trump.*

The next group of responses relates to animals or ecology, mainly about animal shelters[38], but also about testing cosmetics on animals, the impact of artificial intelligence on the environment, and more broadly climate change – such responses were indicated by 9% of respondents (11 people).

Another group (6%) admitted that they do not know or do not remember, and the same proportion mentioned health, including mental health. Other topics include educational content or school life, charity fundraising and other initiatives, combating online hate, interpersonal relationships (with friends and siblings), simple informational content (weather, school holidays in the next school year), online and street safety (safe crossing the street), coaching (content motivating learning, "discipline, appreciating what you have") and religious content (prayer, "I consider religious content about God and showing His love to be important").

[38] During the data collection period in Poland, a prominent topic was scandals involving poor conditions and severe neglect in animal shelters.

Summary

The analysis of Gen Alpha's interests confirms that the internet is primarily a social and entertainment space for them, although with a clearly marked educational component. Entertainment based on short video content and memes forms the foundation of this generation's digital culture. The internet also serves as a digital connector – for 55% of respondents, relationships and conversations with peers are key.

Among young users, certain gender differences emerge in the topics that interest them. Boys are more likely to engage with gaming and sports content, while girls show greater interest in music, fashion, and appearance. Interest in "more serious" topics, such as world news, increases with age, suggesting a gradual shift from a pure entertainment bubble towards civic awareness. At the same time, 15% of respondents cannot specify why something interests them, which may indicate unreflective engagement driven by algorithmic suggestions.

For young users, the keys to creating engaging content are thematic personalisation (66%) and humour (54%). Influencers play an extremely important role – a liked creator acts as a magnet for 40% of respondents, especially in the older age group. At the same time, 40% value the educational aspects of content, highlighting the strong potential for edutainment formats (learning through play).

Despite intensive content consumption, a significant portion of Generation Alpha (44%) remains passive, rarely interacting with posts. When they do engage, the strongest motivators are the desire to share content with others or the need to support a creator or friend. Interaction (liking, sharing) is not merely an assessment of content, but a form of group identity building and communication with their social environment.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

How do young people learn about what is happening in the world? In the study, we asked them about their sources of information. **Family** emerged as the leading source, indicated by 59% of respondents. This response was more common among the youngest members of Generation Alpha – almost 70% in the 8–10 age group.

Nearly half (48%) of participants gain knowledge about the world from **television**. This is an interesting finding given the declining popularity of television, especially among younger age groups. According to research by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), conducted on a representative sample of adult Poles, the frequency of citing television as the main source of information about national and global events increases with age (from 9% in the 18–24 age group to 83% among those aged 65+)[39].

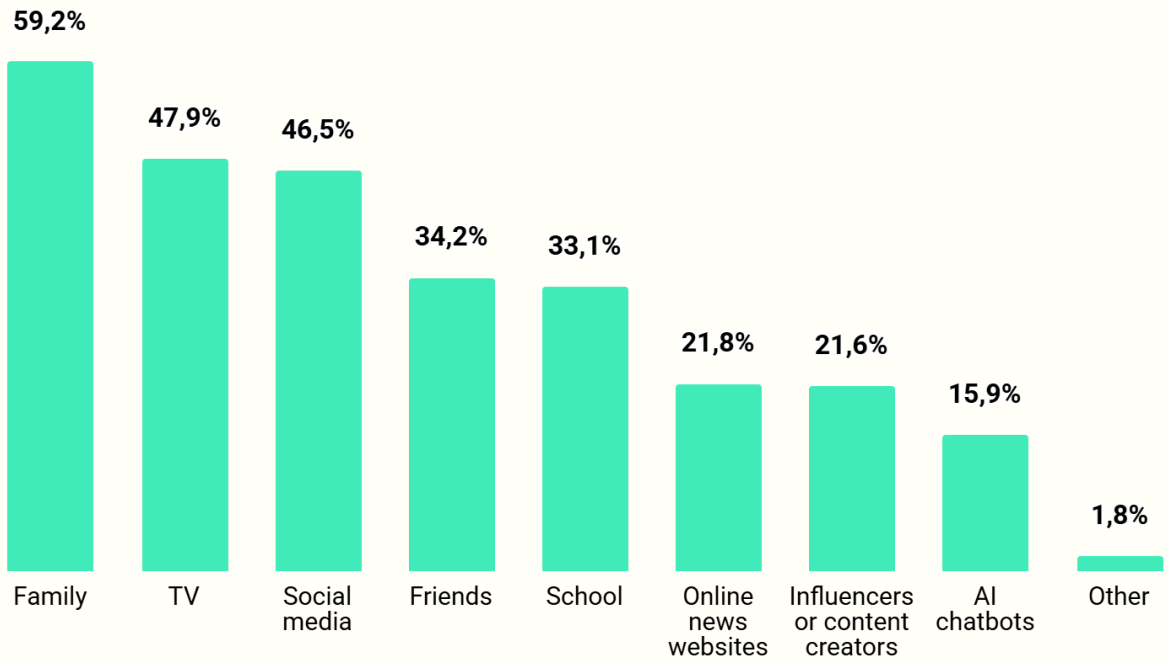
Importantly, television as a source of information was most frequently cited by children living in rural areas (52%), who make up 42% of all study participants. In every age group, children from rural areas were more likely than their peers in towns and cities to report obtaining information from television. Focus group interviews also indicate that young people usually watch news programmes on television with their parents or grandparents – sometimes consciously, sometimes incidentally. It is possible that more rural respondents live in large, multigenerational families where watching news on TV is often a regular part of the day. Children learn about wars, politics, or disasters because the television is on in the living room while adults watch the news. This is certainly an interesting aspect that could be explored further in future research.

Just behind television are **social media**, cited as a source of information by 47% of respondents. Their popularity as an information source varies significantly by age group. For the oldest members of Generation Alpha, social media are the main source of information – 65% of respondents aged 14–15 indicated them. In the 11–13 age group, this figure is 41%, while among the youngest it is only 16%.

One in three respondents learns about the world from **friends and school**. The role of school in this regard decreases with age – 39% of those aged 8–10 mentioned it, compared with 27% of 14–15-year-olds. The opposite trend is observed for learning from friends – 20% of respondents in the 8–10 age group cited friends as a source of information, compared with 40% of 14–15-year-olds.

[39] Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS). 2023. Źródła informacji o wydarzeniach w kraju i na świecie. https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2023/K_068_23.PDF.

Figure 10. Generation Alpha's sources of information.



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. Missing data has been excluded. n=1214. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

One in five study participants (22%) checks online news portals when they want to find out what is happening in the world. Among the youngest respondents, only a few mentioned this, with the highest usage in the 12+ age group (22–32% depending on the year). It is possible that some respondents were referring not so much to websites themselves but to social media profiles that such portals actively maintain.

The same proportion of respondents (22%) indicated that influencers and online creators are an important source of information. Their popularity is also slightly higher in older age groups.

AI chatbots were mentioned least frequently (16%). This was the least cited source in every age group, although among 14–15-year-olds, one in five uses them. At the same time, the role of artificial intelligence in everyday life is steadily increasing, for example through tools and features such as “AI Overview” in the Google search engine, which prioritises an AI-generated answer even when the user did not explicitly ask a chatbot. This study does not explore this topic in depth, but it is certainly an important issue requiring further research.

Girls were more likely to rely on social sources of knowledge – including family (60%), friends (34%), and social media (49%) – than boys (56%, 31%, and 42%, respectively).

Boys, on the other hand, obtain information from television (49%) and AI chatbots (17%) slightly more often than girls (45% and 14%, respectively).

For the youngest respondents, the main sources of information are family and school, while older age groups increasingly turn to social media. Regardless of age, television remains an important source of information.

Other sources mentioned by respondents (just under 2%) included Google search, radio, books, Wikipedia, as well as a few responses such as “I don’t know” or “I’m not interested”.

Who provides information on social media?

Additionally, respondents who indicated social media or influencers and online creators as their sources of information (n=648) were asked which social media profiles they check most often when they want to find out what is happening in Poland and the world. More than one third of these respondents did not provide an answer, so the percentages presented below relate to 390 respondents.

Only 14% of those answering this question actually named a specific account or influencer. One third did not specify profiles but referred to social media platforms instead, most often TikTok, followed by Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube; a few mentioned Snapchat and X/Twitter.

17% of respondents cited the names of online news portals or traditional media. These could refer either to the portals/media themselves or to their social media profiles. The most frequently mentioned portals were interia.pl, onet.pl, and wp.pl, as well as gazeta.pl and the celebrity gossip portal Pudelek.pl. Some respondents also mentioned local news portals (e.g., Lobez24.pl, Lublin112). Traditional media cited included television channels (TVN, TVN24, TVP, TVP.info, Polsat, Republika), newspapers (Gazeta Wyborcza), and radio stations (RMF FM, TOK.FM). Each of these maintains social media profiles, and respondents were likely referring to those.

Another 10% of respondents indicated that when they look for information, they use a browser or search engine, for example: “I type it into Google” or “If I’m going to check something, I either ask someone or look it up in a browser”. There were also responses where it was unclear whether they referred to traditional web search engines or those built into social media platforms, such as the search function on TikTok – “None really [accounts], I just search for things like «news poland», «news and updates on changes in Poland/around the world»”. One respondent pointed out that they follow accounts that “provide real evidence and sources of information” (without giving examples of such accounts). A small group (2,6%) mentioned ChatGPT.

10% of respondents to this question said they do not know or do not remember the names of the accounts from which they get such information, while 9% gave answers such as: “None,” “I’m not interested in what’s happening in the world,” or “I don’t check accounts to find out anything.” The remaining answers were classified as “Other.” These mostly included general or unclear responses, such as “various,” or references to topics (weather, sport) rather than accounts. This category also included answers like “news” or “events,” which are ambiguous and could refer to TV news services or their social media profiles; “informational accounts,” “news accounts”; “usually some guy on TikTok” – these responses suggest that information reaches young people, but they do not actively seek it out and often do not pay attention to which account the information comes from. This is relevant in the context of misinformation and the ease of influencing this age group. Another set of responses highlighted the role of algorithms: for example, “None, I just scroll TikTok randomly and sometimes a news item pops up,” or “They appear automatically, so I can’t name specific accounts”. Some respondents said they simply follow what their friends or popular influencers share, although, as one respondent noted, this can include unreliable information: “Information comes to me from friends, often fake”.

The specific accounts and profiles mentioned by respondents were most often channels offering very short video news clips (20–40 seconds) covering various topics, such as curiosities, current events, accidents, crimes, celebrities, sports, and culture. Examples of such accounts include @niepekam, @bezuzytecznapl (depending on the channel, sometimes presented as graphics), @nataliasisik, @marekszpachelkanews (with frequent swearing), and @macioseu. Slightly longer formats are represented by channels like @nwasdniewiemalesiedowiem, which publishes approximately 3-minute reels. Similar content also appears in longer formats, such as 10–20 minute news services on YouTube, for example @planetafaktow and @BądźNaBieżąco. An example of a specialised, educational account is @prawomarcina, which provides legal education for young people, including information on students’ rights.

Respondents also mentioned larger media outlets such as Kanał Zero (a publicistic and news platform operating mainly on YouTube and social media) and wydarzenia24 – a social media profile publishing clips from Polsat’s news service. One respondent even mentioned a political party account (Lewica).

Creators of longer YouTube formats mentioned by young respondents include Globalista (geopolitics and economics), Konopskyy (mainly scandals and controversies involving influencers and YouTubers, but also political topics), and channels co-created by him, Globuzz and Na czasie (investigative journalism and documentary-style content,

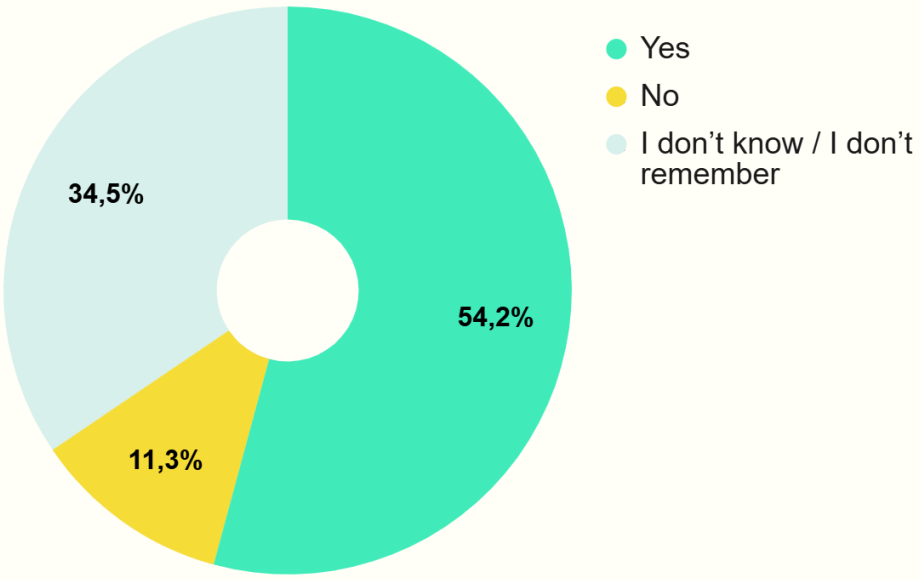
often presented with a sensational tone). Channels covering influencer life, as well as exposing or mocking their behaviors, include Zebo and Influnews.

Some international creators were also mentioned, such as Dean Withers – a 21-year-old who began producing content on equality issues (defending women's and LGBT rights) and now focuses on American politics and criticism of Donald Trump; and Nick Fuentes – an American far-right political commentator and live streamer.

Young people also referred to entertainment and lifestyle channels (e.g., streamers, vlogs, fashion and beauty content) as well as channels related to specific interests, such as football or books.

In summary, this part of the report shows that young audiences rarely seek high-quality information on current events online. Most often, they encounter it by chance while browsing social media content. It is also worth noting that young people consider a very wide range of topics as "informational content" about what is happening in Poland and the world, including scandals and celebrity news. Accounts providing updates on social and political issues were more often mentioned by respondents in the oldest age group (14–15 years). For these accounts to succeed, short and easy-to-consume formats are key, as well as mixing serious topics with entertaining, sensational events and attention-grabbing curiosities.

Figure 11. Exposure to false or misleading content in the last month.



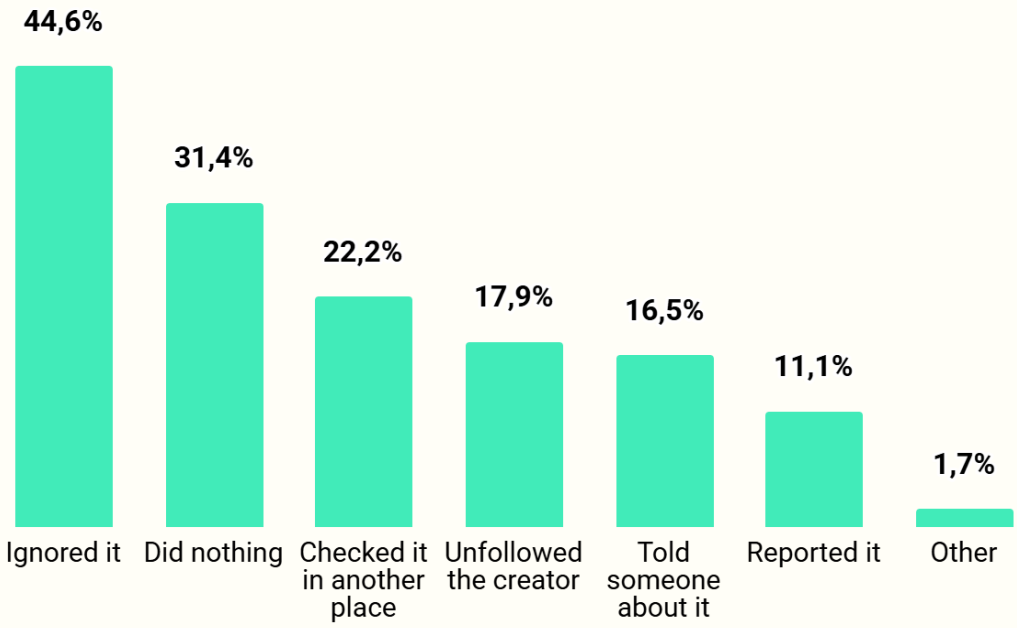
Note. Missing data has been excluded. n=1238. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Over half of the survey participants reported encountering false or misleading information online in the past month. Importantly, only slightly more than 10% of respondents stated that they had not seen such content, while over one-third were unsure or could not remember.

Participants who had encountered false content online in the past month were asked additional questions about how they reacted to such content and how they verify information.

The vast majority of respondents take no action when they recognize content as false. Most commonly, they reported that they simply ignore the information (45%) or do nothing at all (31%). At least one of these responses was indicated by 64% of participants, with boys selecting these options more frequently.

Figure 12. Reaction to false or misleading information



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. This question was only asked to respondents who indicated that they had seen false or misleading information online in the last month. Missing data has been excluded. n=666. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

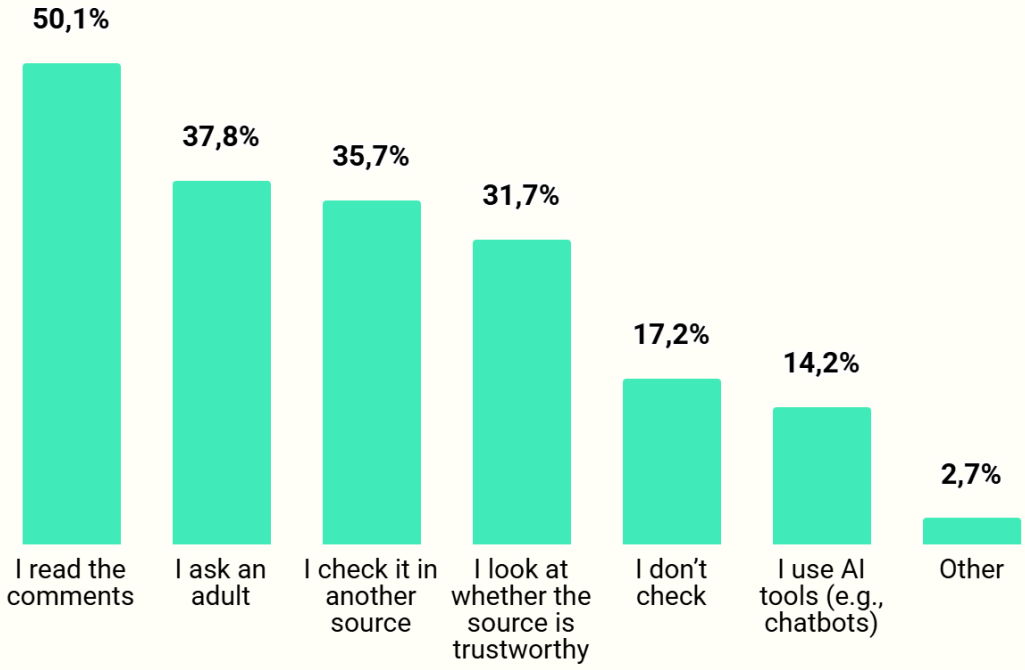
Only one in five young internet users (22%) checks the information in another source. Girls are slightly more likely to do this (25%) than boys (19%). The proportion of respondents who verify information elsewhere increases with age – 12% of 8-10-year-olds, 20% of 11-13-year-olds, and 28% of 14-15-year-olds reported doing so.

18% of respondents stop following a creator who shared false information, and 17% tell someone else about it. This last response is indicated mainly by the youngest participants (36%), while only 8% of 14-15-year-olds selected it. **Only 11% of respondents report false or misleading content**.

Among other responses mentioned by participants, the most frequent were related to comments – some young users look for verification in the comments section, others write comments themselves if they notice that information is false, or leave a like under another person's explanatory comment – for example: "I wrote in the comments that it's AI or that the site doesn't exist or something like that," "I commented under this false information to warn others that it's not true," "I started arguing in the comments."

Reading comments online is the most popular method of fact-checking among young users – half of respondents reported doing this. Older participants are more likely to use this method – in every age group from 11 years and up, at least half of respondents read comments for verification. Among 10-year-olds, it is 29%, and in the two youngest groups (8-9 years) it is around 10%. The opposite trend is visible for the second most common fact-checking method: asking an adult, which was reported by 38% of respondents.

Figure 13. Methods of verifying whether information is true.



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. This question was only asked to respondents who indicated that they had seen false or misleading information online in the last month. Missing data has been excluded. n=669. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Over one-third of respondents say they **check questionable information using another source**. It should be noted that this is 13.5 percentage points higher than in the previous question, which concerned actions taken in response to the recently seen false information. This may indicate that young people actually check information less frequently than they declare. Girls (39%) were more likely to say they verify information than boys (31%), and – once again – it is most common in the oldest age groups (among 15-year-olds, nearly half of participants check another source).

The last of the more popular methods is checking whether the source of information is reliable – 32% of respondents reported doing this. The least used method (14%) is using artificial intelligence tools, such as chatbots. Boys use this method slightly more often (17%) than girls (12%).

At the same time, **nearly one-fifth of respondents (17%) admit that they do not verify information at all.**

Table 5. Percentage of respondents who use selected methods of information verification, by age group and by gender.

	I read the comments	I ask an adult	I check it in another source	I look at whether the source is trustworthy	I don't check	I use AI tools (e.g., chatbots)
8-10	20,3%	62,4%	14,3%	12,0%	20,3%	6,8%
11-13	50,7%	45,3%	35,4%	31,8%	14,8%	13,5%
14-15	61,9%	21,9%	44,8%	39,7%	17,5%	17,8%
Boys	48,9%	38,7%	32,1%	32,5%	16,7%	16,7%
Girls	50,8%	37,8%	39,3%	30,5%	15,7%	11,8%

Note. This question was only asked to respondents who indicated that they had seen false or misleading information online in the last month. Missing data has been excluded. n=669. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

The majority of other responses categorized as "Other" relate to **intuition and personal experience**: "I don't check, I usually know right away," "I just know better," "I know it myself, my brain tells me," "I can usually recognize false content easily".

Importantly, young users tend to associate false information primarily with content generated by artificial intelligence. This is reflected in answers such as: "You can just tell," "It often looks obvious, it seems unreal".

A few respondents also mentioned asking friends for their opinion or trusting what an online creator says: "The streamer says whether it's true".

Summary

In terms of how Generation Alpha obtains information, there is a clear **evolution from reliance on family authority toward the dominance of social media**. While family remains the main source of knowledge for the overall group (59%), its role diminishes with age, giving way to social media, which becomes the primary point of reference for 14–15-year-olds (65%). Television also holds a surprisingly high position (48%), which, as qualitative research suggests, is likely linked to shared, often incidental viewing of news programs with adults.

Young people rarely search for information intentionally. Knowledge about the world often reaches them while scrolling through TikTok or Instagram, and the very definition of “news” has broadened: respondents place political events on the same level as influencer scandals. Short, dynamic video formats that mix serious and entertaining content are key to reaching this audience.

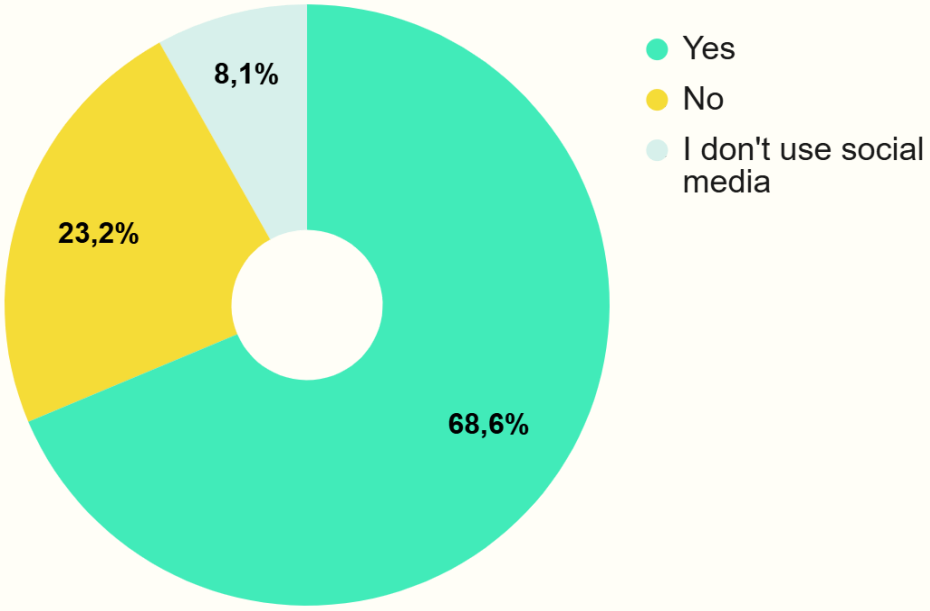
The issue of social media credibility remains a major challenge: **over half of respondents report encountering misinformation, yet their reaction is generally passive**. Two-thirds simply ignore false content or take no action. Verification processes are also becoming digitized – older teens are more likely to rely on comment sections than on adult authority, which remains crucial for the youngest users. Additionally, young people often associate misinformation with AI-generated content, which may lull them into a false sense of security when encountering manipulative text- or social-engineering-based content.

RELATIONSHIP WITH INFLUENCERS AND CREATORS

The next part of the study focused on the relationship between young audiences and creators. We examined what proportion of Generation Alpha follows online creators, what motivates them to click “follow,” and which influencer behaviors lead young people to end that digital relationship.

Over two-thirds of respondents follow influencers or online creators on social media.

Figure 14. Following influencers and online creators on social media.

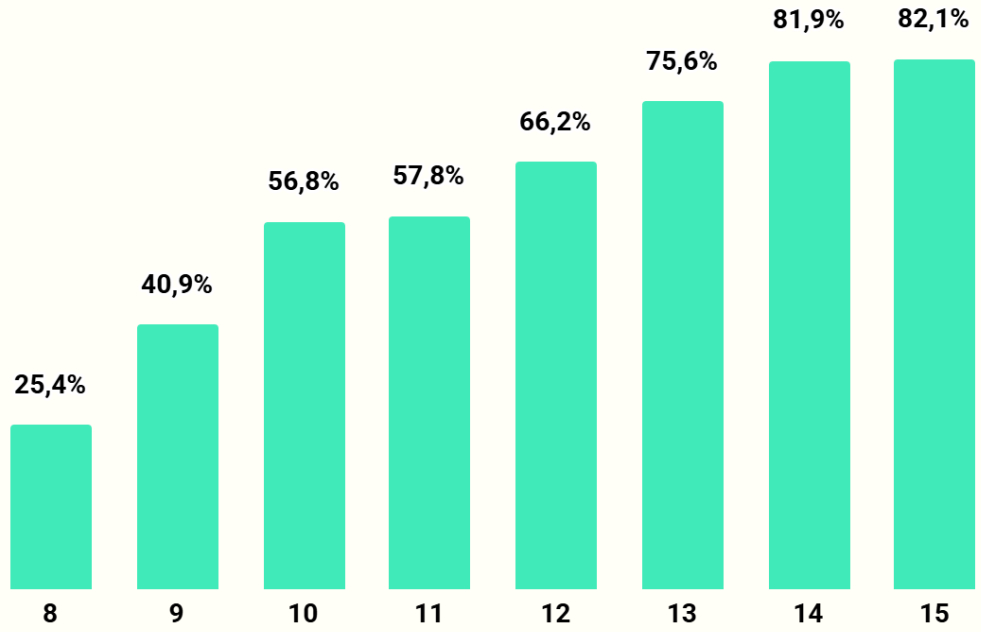


Note. Missing data has been excluded. n=1244. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

This proportion varies significantly by age. For example, only one in four 8-year-olds follow online creators, while among 10- and 11-year-olds it exceeds half, and for 14- and 15-year-olds it surpasses 80%.

Even among the youngest respondents, the share of those following online creators is still remarkably high, considering they are not legally supposed to use most social media platforms. It is worth noting, however, that YouTube – especially the child-friendly version – remains very popular among young users and allows subscribing to channels.

Figure 15. Following influencers and online creators on social media by age.



Note. Missing data has been excluded. n=1244. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

We asked participants who follow influencers and online creators on social media additional questions about their motivations and what makes them unfollow a creator.

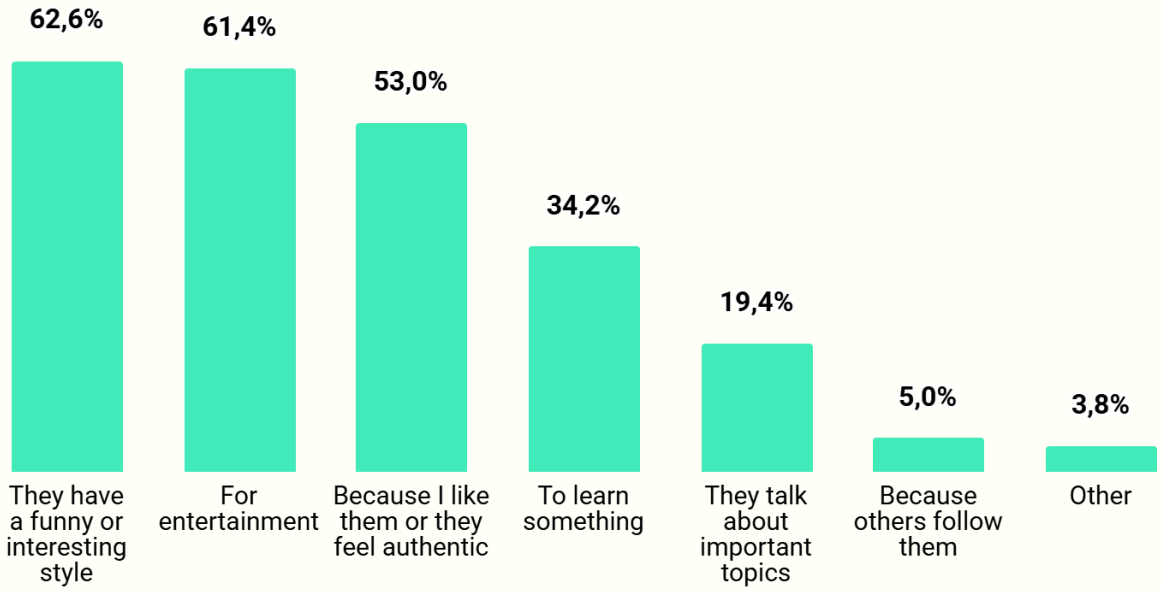
Respondents indicate that **the main reason they follow a creator is their funny or interesting style**. This reason was selected by nearly 63% of participants. Almost the same proportion follow influencers and online creators for entertainment. The third most common reason is “Because I like them or they seem authentic”, chosen by 53% of young respondents.

One third of respondents follow online creators to learn something or gain knowledge. This aligns with other responses – for example, 40% of them are interested in content that allows them to learn something.

A less important factor motivating young people to follow a creator is that they discuss important topics – this reason was selected by one fifth of respondents.

The least popular option was “Because others follow them”, chosen by only 5% of participants. This suggests that peer pressure does not play a significant role. However, it could be an implicit motivation – if all their friends follow a creator, a young user may end up encountering their content and ultimately find it interesting, while developing a liking for the creator.

Figure 16. Reasons why Generation Alpha follows influencers and content creators.



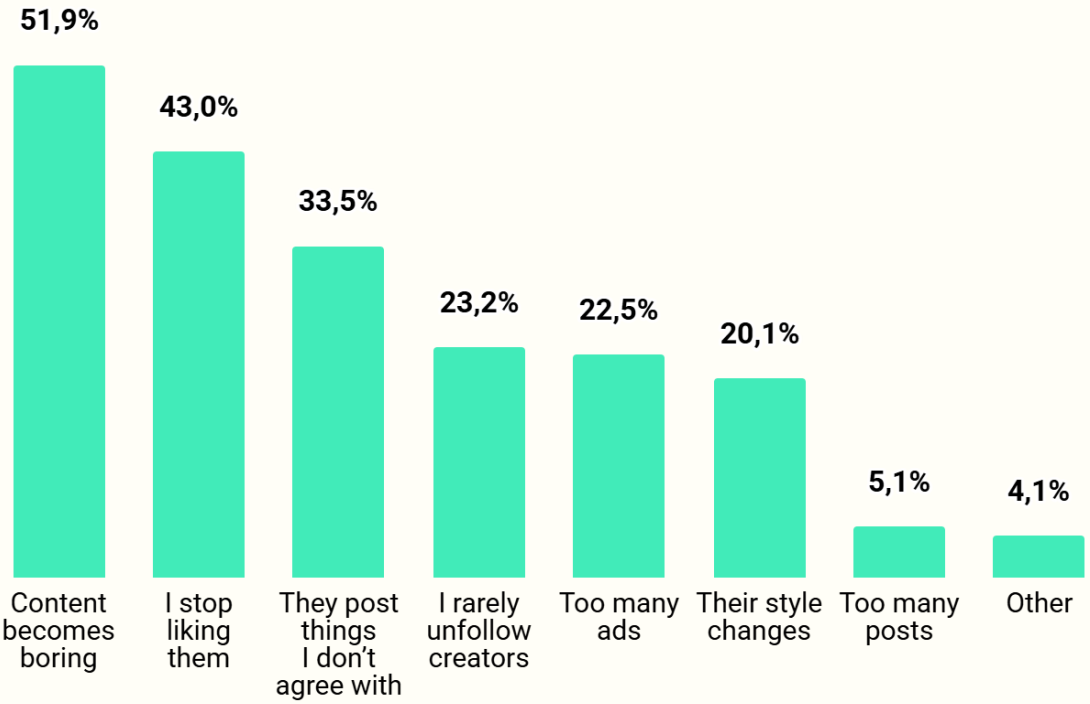
Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. This question was only asked to respondents who indicated that they follow influencers and online creators on social media. Missing data has been excluded. n=845. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Among other responses mentioned by participants, the most frequent were specific topics that capture their interest, meaning that they are encouraged to follow a creator because that person covers subjects they enjoy (e.g., travel or horseback riding). Others simply mentioned interesting or funny content. Responses also included musical creators and athletes. Examples given by respondents include:

> *Because I enjoy watching them and I am interested in the topics of their videos.*
>
> *Because I love this sport and they participate in it.*
>
> *They are intelligent and pleasant to listen to. They say true and wise things. They give good energy, improve my mood, or lift my spirits.*
>
> *They create great music.*

The next topic concerns reasons why young internet users stop following a creator. The most frequently cited causes are when the content produced by the creator becomes boring (52%) or when respondents simply stop liking them (43%).

Figure 17. Reasons why Generation Alpha unfollows influencers and content creators.



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. This question was only asked to respondents who indicated that they follow influencers and online creators on social media. Missing data has been excluded. n=827. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

One third of respondents stop following a creator if they publish content with which the viewer disagrees. This is an important finding, indicating that young people are particularly exposed to information bubbles. Their value system is still developing, so one-sided messaging can more easily radicalise them. Algorithms "feed" audiences what gives them pleasure, avoiding content that might irritate them. Moreover, since half of the respondents verify facts by reading comments (which are often written by people within the same bubble), the mechanism reinforces itself. Ignoring content one disagrees with and unfollowing creators who post it are manifestations of the confirmation bias.

Nearly 23% of respondents stop following creators whose channels contain too many advertisements, and a further 20% do so when the influencer changes their style. Only 5% cited posting too frequently as a reason – it seems that in today's social media landscape, the concept of "too much content" hardly exists.

Other reasons given by respondents include publishing misleading content, "stupid" content, overuse of artificial intelligence, scandals, and prioritising profit over authenticity and passion. Some respondents also mentioned that they only stop

following a creator when the creator themselves disappears from the internet – ceasing to publish. Examples cited by participants include:

> *They overuse AI, spread false information or scams.*
>
> *They stop recording and publishing.*
>
> *They do something inappropriate or cover topics they should not.*
>
> *They become a "patho-influencer".*
>
> *The creator changes their behaviour for the worse (due to fame or other influences).*
>
> *They begin to publish untrue content, become toxic, and prioritise content and money over authenticity.*
>
> *They start changing under the influence of fame and money or overuse AI.*

Summary

Influencers play a key role in the socialisation of Generation Alpha. Over two thirds of respondents follow creators on social media, with this phenomenon rising sharply with age – from 25% among eight-year-olds to over 80% among the oldest teenagers. These results confirm that, despite formal age restrictions on platforms, digital authorities shape the interests and worldview of even younger children.

The main motivation for following creators is the search for entertainment and a liking for the person. Young people value creators who are "somebody" – funny, intelligent, or inspiring. Credibility is crucial for young audiences. Loss of authenticity in favour of "chasing money", excessive advertising, or overuse of AI can result in losing young followers. Over half of respondents stop following a creator when their content becomes boring. The fact that one third of respondents unfollow a creator because of differences in opinion, combined with algorithmic filtering of content, may promote radicalisation of views and a lack of openness to dialogue.

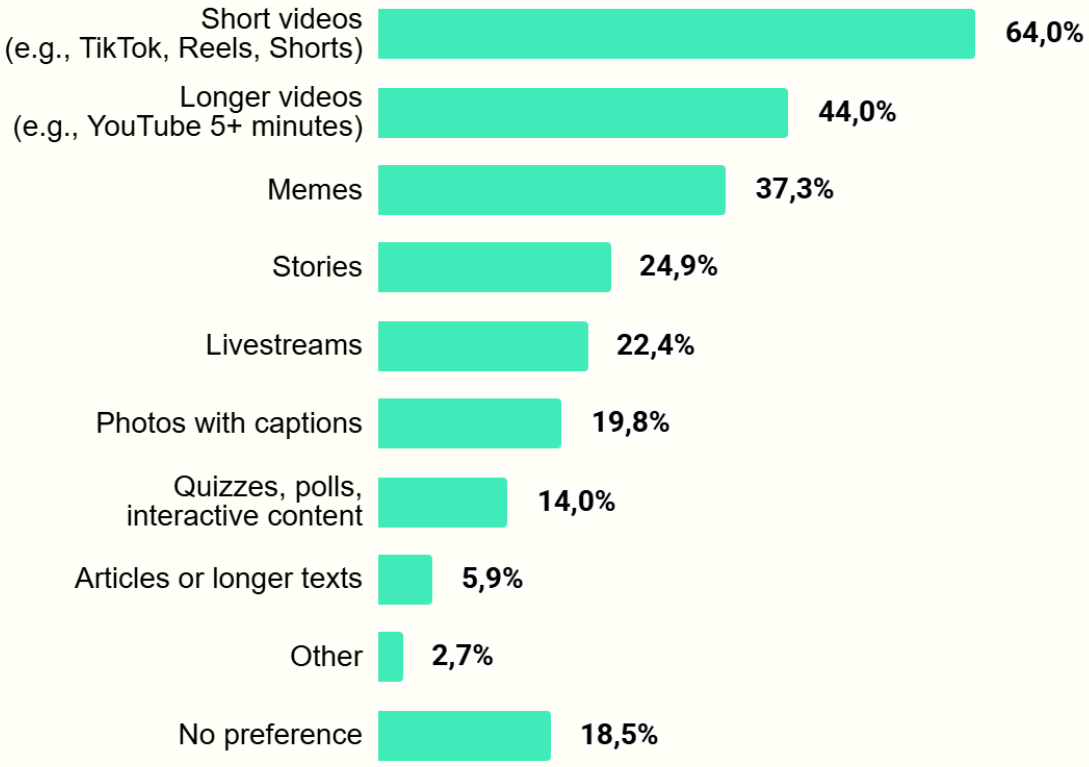
Although entertainment dominates, one third of respondents seek knowledge and new skills from influencers, highlighting the significant educational potential of these channels.

WHAT CONTENT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

The final part of the survey focused on the content and formats preferred by young audiences from Generation Alpha. We discuss their expectations of adult creators, and finally give the Alphas themselves the floor, presenting their detailed recommendations for creating engaging posts on serious social issues.

Unsurprisingly, the favourite format for Generation Alpha turned out to be short video content – all kinds of TikToks, Reels, and Shorts. These are dynamic, brief formats that are able to capture and hold their attention far more effectively than other types of online content.

Figure 18. Preferred types of content for Generation Alpha.



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. Missing data has been excluded. n=1225. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

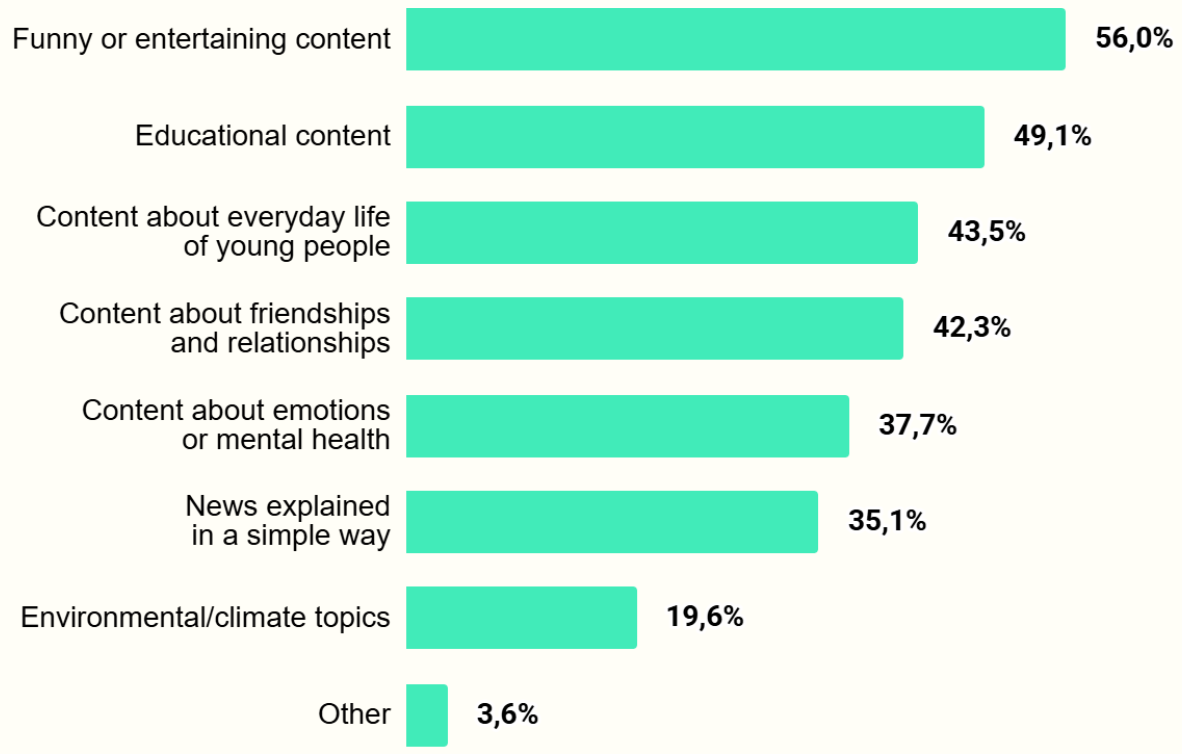
Video and graphics leave text-based formats far behind. While longer videos (e.g., YouTube videos over 5 minutes) still enjoy significant popularity (44%), traditional articles and longer texts are at the very bottom of the list, with only 6%.

High positions are occupied by visually and socially oriented content. Memes (37%) are the third most popular format. Since young people often consume information "incidentally," memes are an ideal vehicle for news or more serious information smuggled under a layer of humour. Stories (25%) and live streams (22%) indicate a desire for authenticity and a more immediate, closer connection with the creator.

One in five respondents likes posts in the form of photos or graphics with captions, while 15% are drawn to interactive content such as polls and surveys.

But what kind of content should adults actually create for young audiences? Generation Alpha expects primarily fun and entertaining content (56%). This answer was slightly more common among the oldest representatives of the generation. Educational content (49%), on the other hand, was most often chosen by the youngest respondents.

Figure 19. Content that Generation Alpha believes adults should create for young people.



Note. Respondents could select more than one option, total percentages exceed 100%. n=1199. Missing data has been excluded. Data source: Own work based on survey results.

Slightly fewer respondents, 43%, expect content about the everyday lives of young people. This answer was much more frequently chosen by girls (48%) than boys (35%). Similarly, content about friendship and interpersonal relationships (42% overall) as well as emotions and mental health (38%) is valued. One female respondent, choosing the "Other" option, added: "Many children hide their mental health issues because they are afraid to talk about them, so I think it would be good if they recorded motivational content".

News and events explained in a simple way are the type of content expected by just over one-third of respondents (35%). Interestingly, this percentage was identical among girls and boys. At the bottom of the proposed topics list are content related to climate and the environment, deemed necessary by one in five respondents.

Due to a technical error in the Polish version of the survey, the option "Content about culture and entertainment (e.g., books, movies, concerts)"[40] was not presented to participants. When selecting the category 'Other,' no one indicated topics related to culture in the broad sense, and entertainment content included games, animations, and memes (a total of five responses).

In addition, other responses included specific topics such as business, fashion, and sport ("If they are interested in something, they can reveal various secret tips").

A few respondents stressed that educational content should always also be entertaining to engage young people ("At the same time funny to catch attention, but also educational for value"). It should also be appropriately tailored to this audience, including in terms of language ("Some fun educational stuff, youth-friendly, not boomer-style").

One boy indicated a need for content "preventing the rise of Korwin and Braun supporters" [Janusz Korwin-Mikke and Grzegorz Braun – far-right Polish politicians].

However, some responses in the "Other" category included "None" and "They shouldn't create [content]". Some participants noted the generational gap between themselves and older creators and doubted that adults could effectively produce content for youth, e.g.: "None, because adults don't have the same views or interests as young people and will never create content that is relevant".

[40] During the development of the research tool, one closed-ended question did not include a response option for "Content about culture and entertainment (e.g., books, movies, concerts)". This omission was considered a limitation in the operationalisation of the variable and a potential source of measurement error. In order to minimise its impact, an additional analysis of the 'Other' responses was carried out. Furthermore, it was assessed that the absence of this option did not significantly affect the main research relationships, as most respondents made their selection from the available categories.

What do young people recommend?

In the Polish version of the survey, participants were directly asked at the end:

How should a post on a serious topic (e.g., an important event, elections, climate crisis, etc.) look to be interesting for you and to make you read or watch it to the end?

The question was optional, and less than half of all respondents answered. About 430 responses were substantive and analysed (after removing answers such as “I don’t know”, “I don’t make posts”, “I’m not interested” etc.).

Respondents emphasised the **format** – they overwhelmingly recommended video content (usually short), with background music and additional images and/or video inserts.

> *If it’s a video it shouldn’t be too long, preferably a few minutes, and it’s good if there’s music or funny sounds that grab attention. I also like when there are colourful pictures or short video clips showing what is being talked about, because it’s easier to understand.*
>
> *The video should be fairly short, include images, video clips, catch attention and explain the topic concisely.*
>
> *I like videos, no unnecessary talking, concrete information in clear graphics so it’s not chaotic.*
>
> *For a TikTok, immediately say what you’re talking about and then get straight to the point. Don’t make it too long, ideally show the speaker and not just a blank wall, but a ‘natural’ background like a corridor, gallery, park.*
>
> *Short video with a hook at the beginning, brief inserts, good editing.*

Young people emphasise that a topic should be presented **short and concise**. When creating content, it is important to find the right balance – on one hand, **necessary context and sources should be included**, but on the other, the material should not be too detailed or too long.

> *Short, concise, and to the point, with appropriate music and graphics.*
>
> *Interesting images, not too much content, only the key information.*
>
> *Don’t beat around the bush. For example, if something burned down, you can explain where, what, why, and when in two sentences, without writing a long account.*
>
> *The video should be fairly short and focused, without unnecessary tangents that bore viewers.*

> *I would make it short and to the point, with a few interesting facts to keep viewers engaged.*
>
> *A reel or short video should be simple so everyone can understand. Sources should be cited, and some context can be added.*
>
> *It should explain things in detail but without being boring.*

To balance these two aspects, additional information can also be provided in the description or in a separate material.

> *I think it should be a short video that gives the key information and directs those interested to another, longer video.*
>
> *A short video with a detailed description.*
>
> *It could be a short video with a fairly long description. It should include lots of emojis, some graphics, and interesting topics at the start.*
>
> *In my opinion, there should be as little text as possible requiring reading without a narrator, because most people prefer to quickly learn something and move on, rather than spend, say, 15 minutes pausing the video to read.*

Respondents emphasise that the **language** should be appropriate for a young audience – simple and easy to understand. Attention should also be paid to clear pronunciation and the pace of speech.

> *The presenter should speak well, because it's hard to listen to someone who stutters every other sentence or speaks too slowly.*
>
> *It must include correct spelling and an engaging style.*
>
> *It should definitely be recorded in simple, youth-friendly language so that it's easy to understand.*
>
> *Videos should be short, straightforward, and easy for children and teenagers to follow.*
>
> *A video where the presenter explains clearly what happened and why.*
>
> *Get straight to the point – no beating around the bush; show proof that the information is true, provide sources, and avoid artificially complex words or overusing long, complicated vocabulary. Both the presenter and the evidence should be clearly visible.*
>
> *A video using simple words, explained clearly and step by step.*
>
> *It is especially important that the language is accessible for young people – simpler language ensures that more viewers understand it, not only those already interested in the topic.*

Another key point is capturing the audience's interest right from the start – the content should include some kind of **hook**, an eye-catching thumbnail, and an interesting, even

sensational, headline. However, the content must faithfully match what the headline promises – clickbait is not welcome.

> *An interesting headline with content that actually matches what the headline says.*
>
> *A catchy title, an engaging thumbnail, and a detailed description of the event. It should be short and to the point.*
>
> *Eye-catching graphics and colours – first impressions are crucial. Keep the content short and concise, because if it's too long, it becomes boring.*
>
> *A good, engaging start with interesting content.*
>
> *I would start with something funny, then get to the main points.*
>
> *If I'm going to watch or read something to the end, the beginning must immediately grab my attention – for example, a cool image or a surprising title.*
>
> *A nice cover and title.*
>
> *It should have a large, attention-grabbing headline, ideally something funny or satirical.*
>
> *For example, start with a shock: USA kidnapped… and then continue with what the person actually says.*
>
> *It should immediately catch attention – for example, a question or a short note like "why this matters".*
>
> *It should be appropriate for my age, and maybe include something funny; I would prefer it to be a video with the most important information right at the start.*
>
> *It should be a video that engages viewers for at least the first 5 seconds.*
>
> *First, I would make an edit that encourages viewers to stay and watch, and then present the topic with facts in a way that interests young viewers.*

However, young audiences also have different preferences when it comes to the **emotional tone** of this type of content. Some are opposed to excessive emotions and sensationalism because it makes the content seem untrustworthy. Others actually find these traits attention-grabbing.

> *The topic at the beginning must be very engaging – in other words, a sensational headline.*
>
> *At the same time, it should maintain a calm, not chaotic, tone – no ALL CAPS ALERTS or similar gimmicks. Words like "attention" can be used to entice someone to read, but not overdone, because both the composition and the message should be delivered with reason and seriousness.*
>
> *I would immediately use a large title to grab viewers' attention and present it with strong emotions.*

> *The post should be serious; to attract attention, it should also have a catchy name so that people will click on it.*

For young audiences, **music** is an important element. A post must include an appropriate soundtrack, whether it is a video or a piece made from photos or graphics. To increase reach, it's possible to use sounds and music that are currently popular on social media. At the same time, it shouldn't be completely random but thoughtfully chosen to match the topic.

> *Short videos, small video clips, music that builds tension.*
>
> *The music in a short video should fit the content of the message; other materials should also be consistent and authentic with the message being conveyed.*
>
> *Posts that stand out the most are those with vibrant colours accompanied by catchy, memorable music.*
>
> *A soundtrack that is currently trending, a short video with graphics and text – emotionally engaging.*
>
> *There should be calm music in the background so it's not too boring, while still delivering key information.*
>
> *Videos should have some subtle background music so they're not dull, along with plenty of visuals.*

Although young audiences clearly prefer video content, a few guidelines also emerged for **text-based or graphic-text content** (e.g., Instagram carousels).

> *An article should be short and focused on a specific topic so as not to bore the reader. At the beginning, it should indicate how long it will take to read the article (e.g., "This article will take you 2 minutes to read").*
>
> *I like it when there's both text and images. At the start, there should be something interesting to make me want to keep reading. The text should be simple, and images should help explain the content. I like it when everything is clearly explained.*
>
> *Posts should include emojis because they make the text look nice.*
>
> *There should be a relevant photo, well-structured paragraphs, and proper formatting. A good font is important, because sometimes the text is hard to read.*
>
> *For example, in a carousel post – it should not be overloaded with graphics and should remain accessible in terms of content, with simple language.*

> *It should be colourful with engaging content that encourages reading, and include various fun graphics.*
>
> *It should have interesting illustrations and understandable text.*
>
> *Graphics should catch the eye and not just be a wall of text.*
>
> *Regarding the text itself, I prefer short sentences, some photos or drawings to keep it interesting. It's nice if there's a fun fact at the end.*
>
> *If it's a written post, the graphics attached should immediately catch my attention, and there should be a clearly visible headline I won't miss.*

Many young people think that serious topics should be **presented in a fun or entertaining way**. This is a method to engage them with subjects that might not immediately align with their interests. Additionally, young audiences usually look for content that is positive, pleasant, and enjoyable. However, this preference requires careful balance. Some young users feel that presenting important topics in a humorous way can undermine their seriousness, making the content seem less valuable or credible.

> *The approach should be serious but can include a touch of humour to capture attention and make it easy for everyone to understand.*
>
> *Content should avoid negative emotions while still being pleasant and lightly funny.*
>
> *It should not be mocking.*
>
> *The video should be presented professionally, yet in a way that is creative and amusing to engage youth. At the same time, it must never include trendy or viral content that is considered "brainroot" type 67 or similar.*
>
> *It should be lightly humorous, because if the video is overly sad or serious, young viewers often get bored or even intimidated.*
>
> *Posts on serious topics should remain factual and informative. If you try to make them overly entertaining, they risk coming across as careless or frivolous.*
>
> *It should be done in a comedic and enjoyable way.*
>
> *It's ideal if the presenter can add a bit of humour while weaving in important information, so that the content remains enjoyable without losing credibility.*
>
> *It should be a serious video.*

> *The presenter should sit comfortably, either on a chair or outdoors, with a serious expression. There should be cuts between the presenter and real footage on the same topic being discussed. The background should feature calm music, without funny emojis or overly exaggerated facial expressions. The best presenters for serious topics are adults aged 25–50, preferably men, as a mature, slightly rough voice in a calm tone reassures viewers while maintaining the video's charisma and engagement.*

Another way to grab the attention and interest of young audiences is to clearly **show what a topic, issue, or event directly means for them** – does it affect their life in any way? Does it change anything in their situation? This was a point that came up strongly during focus group interviews.

> *I also really appreciate it when the creator explains a situation by showing how it directly affects us, and does so in a way that people can relate to.*

> *A short video should start immediately with the most important point and clearly show what the event means for an average person.*

Some people also noted that there always needs to be something happening in the video. It cannot just show a person talking to the camera, because young viewers get distracted very quickly. One method is to present factual content (text or spoken narration) over video, even if it is completely unrelated to the topic – for example, gameplay or other colorful, visually engaging content.

> *There always MUST be some video on the side, for example Subway Surfers, because viewers with ADHD get bored quickly with just talking heads.*

> *The content should be written fairly short, funny, and interesting. It's best to present it on an appealing background – people often use slime or game footage in the background, with captions and an AI voiceover.*

However, opinions on this matter are also divided. Some say that there shouldn't be too much happening on screen, because it distracts the viewer too much. Some respondents are strongly opposed to using artificial intelligence to produce this type of content – it should be presented by a human, not an AI voice. Graphics generated by AI are also not welcomed by everyone, especially for posts on serious topics. Opposition to AI is also linked to the expectation that the presenter should be charismatic.

> *If AI is used, I won't watch.*

> *It should speak to conscience and imagination and show consequences. The person should tell it like it really is, not like AI.*

For a video or post to catch my attention, it must have cool graphics, be well-edited, and the creator must be charismatic and confident but not too serious.

Music is best. It must be entertaining and interesting, and the creator must be confident.

Definitely, it shouldn't be entirely made by AI – it should be done by a person.

Short and concise, with graphics that relate to the main topic – not AI.

Respondents also highlighted that **reliable and verified information** is important to them. They appreciate it when a creator presents convincing arguments and data to support the content discussed. The credibility of both the content and the creator is strengthened by clearly presenting sources of information. Previously mentioned video clips and images related to events, phenomena, or people featured in the video can serve a similar function.

It should be a video, not necessarily very long (around 3 minutes), containing information on the topic that is verified and from trustworthy sources. In my opinion, it should include images and/or clips that are also verified (not generated by artificial intelligence), because that makes it easier to understand and truly believe.

Little content, interesting graphics, facts supported by scientific research.

Graphic design, links to sources of information.

It must have strong arguments. Text backed by scientific evidence.

It should come from a reliable source, be short, accessible, informative, and free of vulgar content.

It should be truthful. Nothing that isn't true on the internet.

All I expect is a reliable source; nothing else matters to me.

Summary

The study of Generation Alpha's preferences shows the absolute dominance of short-form videos (TikTok, Reels, Shorts), which have almost completely replaced longer text formats. Young audiences expect dynamic content enhanced with music and graphics that can grab attention within the first few seconds. Effective content must include a "hook" at the beginning – without quickly catching interest, viewers will immediately scroll past. Traditional articles lose not only to video but also to memes, which have become an important medium for news delivered with a layer of humor for this generation.

In their relationship with adult creators, young people show some skepticism, fearing a mismatch of language and values. They expect adults to produce “edutainment” – a combination of humor and reliable knowledge. It is especially important to explain complex topics (e.g., politics, climate) in a way that is simple and adapted to young audiences. The key factor for engagement is showing the direct impact of a given event on their lives – answering the question, “what does this mean for me?”.

Content should be light but informative. Excessive joking about serious topics can undermine the creator’s credibility. Young people prefer charismatic, real presenters. When it comes to serious topics and information, there is some resistance to AI-generated voices and graphics.

They value facts supported by sources and visual evidence (photos, video inserts), which help them distinguish truth from misinformation. At the same time, every piece of content needs a balance between providing necessary context and keeping it short enough to not bore young viewers. One way to achieve this is by dividing more extensive topics into several parts or entirely different formats (e.g., meme, short TikTok video, longer YouTube video) to engage the audience with the topic and then guide more interested individuals to more detailed, longer content.

Qualitative data analysis

In this section of the report, we discuss the findings from the qualitative study, which comprised 8 focus group interviews (FGIs) and 11 individual in-depth interviews (IDIs). The thematic scope of the qualitative research was broader than that of the survey. In addition to habits and preferences related to internet and social media use and ways of accessing information, it also covered issues such as socialisation and forms of leisure, attitudes towards democracy and public institutions, as well as attitudes towards the European Union, values, and European identity.

Most themes were analysed and described jointly, with the exception of findings related to perceptions of democracy and the European Union. This decision reflects significant differences observed in this area between focus group participants and individual interviewees. These differences stem partly from the demographic characteristics of the respondents and from the greater opportunity for in-depth exploration offered by individual interviews. The IDIs involved mainly older members of Generation Alpha (aged 12–15) as well as two participants at the generational boundary (formally Generation Z, born in 2009), who nevertheless study and function socially within peer groups dominated by Alphas. All IDI participants live in large cities. In some FGI groups, developing democratic and European-related themes proved particularly difficult due to time constraints, high participant activity levels, and the resulting need for researchers to follow other emerging research topics as well as new, spontaneous threads that generated strong interest and emotional engagement among respondents. This reflects the very nature of semi-structured interviews.

Katarzyna Prachnio

SOCIALIZATION AND FREE TIME

Generation Alpha can hardly complain about boredom. Most of them have days filled with school, followed by homework or additional extracurricular activities and sports training. When they finally have some free time, some choose to read books, others play board games, but most often they opt for video games, browsing social media, or watching cartoons, films, and TV series. After a day spent at school, they also often feel the need to simply rest and do nothing.

> *I either like playing on the PlayStation or sleeping.* (2nd grade[41], large city, group 1)
>
> *I read, I watch films and TV series.* (5th grade, rural area)
>
> *We all have to study and do homework after school, but let's be honest – most of us spend most of our time online. We're on various social media platforms, like TikTok and Instagram, and we spend a lot of time on them.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

They often meet up with friends, although this depends on various factors. More often, they only find time to do so at weekends and on other school-free days (for children living in rural areas also because of long travel times, which, when they have little free time, is simply "not worth it"). In summer, they spend a lot of time outdoors; in winter – especially in small towns and villages that offer few places or opportunities to spend time together – they more often stay at home and play games.

> *I have a friend in Białystok and in the summer we go there and ride bikes to the pitch. And recently I was there for Christmas and we played games a lot. Mostly Fortnite and Minecraft.* (4th grade, rural area)
>
> *I go over to my friend's place to play Minecraft. Because we live on the same housing estate.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)
>
> *Now it's winter, so there aren't many things you can do. When it's warmer, we go to the school pitch here. There's also a playground.* (5th grade, rural area)

[41] Focus groups were conducted with pupils from several primary school classes and one secondary school class. Labels without the name of the school refer to primary school (the type of school is indicated only in the case of secondary school). The ages of respondents in each class were approximately: 7-8 years old (2nd grade), 9-10 years old (4th grade), 10-11 years old (5th grade), 12-13 years old (7th grade), and 14-15 years old (1st year of secondary school).

Some of our respondents declare that they spend less time online at weekends, mainly because they meet up with friends (mostly older participants) or spend time with family (younger ones). It should be noted, however, that according to the quantitative part of the study, Generation Alpha spends on average more time online at weekends than during the school week.

> *I usually [on the weekend] go to my grandma's or my granpa's. At my grandma's I play with the animals, and if I'm at my granpa's, I play in the yard, because my grandpa made something like a little playground there.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

> *In the morning I usually cuddle with my mum. Then I play with the dog. And on Sunday I first play until 11:00, because I go to ballet. And afterwards I sometimes go to the forest, and sometimes for a walk.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

> *For example, on weekends I go out with my friends more... I spend less time on the internet and more time with people. It's harder for me to do that during the week because of classes, school, and so on, it's harder for me to meet up, especially since I'm not from the city, it's not always worth it for me to commute for an hour to meet someone, for example, than if I lived in the city.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *Definitely [the weekend] doesn't look like the week, because for example we don't spend several hours at school and we can do something else during that time, but I think it also depends on the season. For example, when it's winter, I spend more time at home, but when it's summer, I meet up with friends or go somewhere to visit family.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 2)

Additionally, for the youngest representatives of Generation Alpha, time spent with pets is an important part of the day. Playing with a hamster, rabbits or a cat, or taking the dog for a walk, are activities that draw their attention away from other forms of entertainment, mainly video games. For most children this is an enjoyable part of the day, although some describe walking the dog more as a duty than a pleasure.

> *I go out with the dog for a walk, because I have to.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

> *I like playing and cuddling with my dog.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

> *I like playing, or playing with my hamster.* (2nd grade, large city, group 2)

> *When I come back from school, I feed the dogs.* (4th grade, rural area)

> *I play with the cat.* (4th grade, rural area)

For Generation Alpha, video games are one of the most popular leisure activities. The youngest participants (8-year-olds) most often choose Roblox, within which they play

games such as shooters (Rivals), horror titles (99 Nights in the Forest) or Steal a Brainrot. These titles were mainly mentioned by boys. Girls, by contrast, pointed to games such as Dress to Impress and, outside Roblox, Toca Boca and Avatar World. Other titles named by 8-year-olds included Minecraft, Brawl Stars and Clash Royale, as well as Fortnite (PEGI 12) and Spider-Man (PEGI 16).

> *[On the weekend] I play on the iPad, on Roblox, lots of different things.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)
>
> *Roblox, Brawl Stars and 99 Nights in the Forest. It's a horror. There's a mutated deer that chases you and tries to defeat you.* (2nd grade, large city, group 2)
>
> *Either I play Minecraft, or I play Spider-Man.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

Children in Years 4 and 5 (aged 10-11) mentioned a much wider range of titles. Although Roblox is also popular in this group, they tend to choose slightly different games within it, such as Scary Shawarma, New Heaven, Go Skate, Demonology, Tower Defense Simulator and various types of obby (obstacle courses).

In this age group, analogue games appeared more often as well – chess and draughts with a grandmother or grandfather, pick-up sticks, or classic board games played with parents – Monopoly, Ludo, Uno, as well as card games. They generally do not play online games with family members, although one boy mentioned a quiz-style knowledge game – Knowledge is Power.

Other titles mentioned by this age group included Block Blast!, Subway Surfers, Rocket League, FIFA/EA Sports FC, Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, Need for Speed, Fortnite, War Thunder, The Sims, Spider-Man, Phasmophobia (PEGI 16), Skyrim (PEGI 18), Grand Theft Auto (PEGI 18) and Counter-Strike (PEGI 18).

> *I play a game about ghosts. Like, you have to catch the ghost. I mean, recognise it. (What's it called?) Phasmophobia.* (4th grade, rural area)
>
> *I play Fortnite, CS.* (4th grade, rural area)
>
> *99 Nights in the Forest is boring, it's not scary. You already know everything that's going to happen in that game. [And which games are unpredictable for you? Where you feel that thrill, that you don't know what will happen?] Counter-Strike, definitely.* (5th grade, rural area)

Girls in 5th grade appeared to be largely uninterested in games. Their free time is more often taken up by social media, and this tendency becomes even more pronounced in the older groups.

The 7th grade group (aged 12–13) spoke about Roblox less frequently, although they still visit it from time to time – girls mentioned Brookhaven and Dress to Impress, while boys compete in Steal a Brainrot. They sometimes play 99 Nights in the Forest, but do not consider it a scary game – rather something done for fun and relaxation, often while talking on voice chat. On PlayStation they choose FIFA/EA Sports FC, Fortnite, Counter-Strike or Horizon (PEGI 16). They also play GeoGuessr, and some occasionally return to Minecraft. Among less popular titles, Potion Craft: Alchemist Simulator was also mentioned.

They talk about Roblox with laughter and use it in a slightly different way than younger children. They play creative games (e.g. Speed Draw!) and detective-style games (Murder Mystery – a digital equivalent of the social deduction game Mafia). They also enjoy talking to others, including strangers, via voice chat, or finding other, less typical forms of entertainment within Roblox, such as deliberately scaring younger players.

> *For example, even during lessons I play SpeedDraw! on my friend's iPad and draw, like, our maths teacher. Or the biology teacher.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *On Roblox there's a voice chat option, so you can talk to people. Even completely unknown people, because there's something like age verification based on appearance or some kind of document. (Do you talk about the game or about other things?) Generally about life – how things are going, what's up.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *You can also scare kids through Roblox. (laughs) In different games there's this currency – for example someone collects pets or some kind of brainroots. And kids are most afraid that it'll be taken away from them. For example, I write 'I'm going to take it away from you' and start chasing the kid, and they start screaming on the voice chat.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

Some games on Roblox are seen as silly and childish, which is why they look for different roles and activities within the platform.

> *99 Nights in the Forest is such a stupid game. I feel like whoever made it didn't really made an effort, but it's insanely popular. You can play it once, but then it just gets boring.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 2)

From mainstream titles, they choose Fortnite and Counter-Strike, and some still continue to play Minecraft. They are also interested in narrative-driven games such as The Witcher and Red Dead Redemption. They also mentioned Grand Theft Auto. All three are games intended for adult audiences. Overall, however, gaming is no longer as engaging for them as it was when they were younger. Their first, intuitive answer when

asked about free-time activities is generally scrolling through social media.

> *Personally, games are starting to bore me. I mean, it still happens sometimes, but not that often.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *Games have just got boring. They're boring now.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 2)

Summary

Children's daily lives are dominated by school and organised activities, leaving them with little free time during the week. This can lead to fatigue, which they often counter with simple pastimes such as naps or scrolling through social media. Games and the internet are the most convenient options, providing quick entertainment in short breaks between obligations.

The study reveals variation in recreational preferences according to age. For younger children, gaming forms the foundation of leisure time. As they grow older, interest in gaming wanes in favour of social media (TikTok, Instagram). At the same time, YouTube remains popular across all age groups, offering content in formats similar to TikTok, such as YouTube Shorts. For older members of Generation Alpha, gaming platforms are no longer just spaces for entertainment and competition; they also become "virtual playgrounds" – arenas for social interaction, discussions about life via voice chat, and social experimentation.

It is important to note the early exposure of respondents to content intended for adults. They report engaging with games rated significantly above their age group (e.g., Grand Theft Auto, Counter-Strike, The Witcher), indicating the limited effectiveness of parental controls or the tacit approval of guardians to access such content.

Despite high levels of digital engagement, direct interactions remain a key component of Generation Alpha's lives. Weekends, in particular, provide space for building family bonds (visiting grandparents, walks, board games) and peer relationships (more time to meet friends). For the youngest children, contact with pets and close rituals with parents are especially important, serving as a counterbalance to the virtual world and drawing them away from screens.

Place of residence also influences patterns of socialisation and leisure. Some children living in rural areas report greater difficulties in spontaneously meeting peers, especially during the week and in winter, which encourages a shift toward online activities. In summer, outdoor activities tend to resume, suggesting that the digital world often serves a compensatory function when other forms of interaction are less accessible.

Katarzyna Prachnio

ALPHA AS SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Favourite platforms and topics

Members of all age groups are active on social media, although with varying intensity. The youngest spend most of their time on YouTube, with some also using TikTok. What they watch is largely determined by algorithms, and they rarely reflect on their viewing choices.

> *I just watch whatever pops up that looks fun. As soon as something cool appears on my phone, I just start watching it.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

Because of this, younger children often struggle to specify what content they see most frequently or what interests them the most. Only through extended conversation were a few concrete answers obtained. Boys are primarily interested in content related to football and footballers (especially Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Robert Lewandowski) and games (Roblox, codes, skins). Girls more often prefer creative content (sewing, arts and crafts) or cooking (recipes), for instance making sweets, and they are also highly attentive to animal welfare content. All enjoy videos featuring animals — talking dogs and funny cats — as well as various challenges.

Among 10-year-olds, more than half of the focus group participants listed TikTok as one of their favourite apps, making it almost as popular as YouTube. Gaming remains one of the most appealing topics, alongside live-streaming content. Humour and entertainment are also highly consumed, including funny skits and stories (sometimes AI-generated), amusing animal videos, commentary videos on various content such as horror films or paradocumentary series (Trudne sprawy, Ukryta prawda), as well as stand-up and hip-hop freestyle battles. This age group also showed high awareness of current events in Poland and globally, though news primarily reaches them via television; social media is beginning to play a more important role in this regard.

The 11-year-old group displayed the most gender-based differences. While boys were almost entirely focused on gaming (both as players and as viewers of streamers and gaming influencers) girls tended to prefer lifestyle content: vlogs, shopping hauls, beauty and fashion, and content about influencers' lives. They also listen to podcasts, including crime-themed ones, and interviews with famous people. Girls are more likely

to use Instagram, while boys favour TikTok. YouTube usage is common to all, and each has favourite creators. TikTok and Instagram are mostly browsed passively, relying on algorithmic recommendations. Other topics of interest include travelling, healthy eating, challenges and pranks, and various reviews (places, hotels, restaurants). News and current events occasionally reach them, but they show little interest in this type of content. Longer formats are chosen when there is more free time and are often consumed alongside meals.

> *Honestly, I don't know, it's hard to say. We just scroll through everything and watch what looks fun.* (5th grade, rural area)

> *I mostly watch some games, streams of people playing.* (5th grade, rural area)

> *It's like a daily vlog. Someone records and just shows what their day looks like.* (5th grade, rural area)

Thirteen-year-olds in 7th grade primarily use TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. Some also mentioned Spotify (for music and podcasts) and Pinterest (for creative inspiration). Their phones are the first tool they reach for after returning home and accompany them at school – during breaks, lessons, commuting, and before bed. Short-form content (Reels, TikTok) dominates, but they also occasionally watch longer videos on YouTube. Binge-watching series is common, sometimes leading to sleepless nights on weekends.

Their interests are varied, including gaming, sports (they practice various disciplines themselves), books, cooking, and creative or artistic activities. They also enjoy lifestyle content (vlogs, shopping) and follow the lives of influencers (for example Andziaks, Wersow, Friz), tracking their careers and conflicts (e.g., diss tracks between Young Leosia and Fagata). This explains their interest in commentary channels and gossip podcasts. They watch Minecraft streams or story-driven series based on GTA, treating them like mini-series, alongside YouTubers producing entertainment-focused content such as challenges and game shows. Some of them also like true crime podcasts. News and information reach them incidentally while scrolling TikTok or Instagram, but older children are more likely than younger ones to actively engage with such content (reading comments, searching for more information). They also enjoy political memes.

> *Honestly, I watch pretty much everything. I might check TikTok, then YouTube, then scroll through Instagram stories. There's so much stuff for me, because I change my hobbies really quickly, so it's like a mix of everything. Right now I'm doing calisthenics, so sport. But also funny stuff, sometimes sad stuff. Everything literally shows up to me.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

The interests of secondary school students are similar to those described by 7th grade pupils. The creators they follow largely overlap, but they are slightly more critical of their

own activity. They laugh while discussing certain channels, sometimes showing embarrassment and downplaying their choices, explaining that they watch mostly for fun and relaxation ("to zone out").

> *Different funny commentary channels, because it's good to know what others think about various things.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *Even just for jokes, like someone commenting on other people's behaviour online, especially not-so-smart ones.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

Older children and teenagers actively seek the opinions of others, which explains the popularity of commentary channels. These cover both celebrity culture and political topics, though humorous and entertaining content predominates. Sometimes, such videos act as a kind of "cheat sheet" – some watch commentary channels to stay up to date and avoid feeling left out in conversations with peers who follow the latest influencer "dramas".

> *For example, I like celebrity stuff because my Instagram doesn't really cover it and I often don't understand what people are talking about. But when there are videos explaining the drama or whatever, I watch them, and at least I can follow what someone is saying later.* (IDI, 14 years old)

Apart from that, they also engage with channels related to their interests such as astronomy, books, or culinary topics, including reviews and food or restaurant testing. Educational channels, for example in mathematics, are frequently used to support learning. One participant mentioned following a specifically informational channel covering geopolitics and economics.

Regarding other social media activities, they engage in TikTok battles. Two creators connect during a live stream and compete for a set period to see who can earn the most points. These can be completely random people, sometimes from other countries or continents. Points are earned through gifts sent by viewers. The mechanism is based on real money – viewers buy coins, which they use to pay for the gifts, and the creator (and TikTok) earns from this. Interestingly, high school students said they participate to support their friends who are in the battle. Fifth-grade children, on the other hand, support influencers they like. Younger children declare that they do not spend money – they show support in the battle by tapping the screen and reacting.

> *– We send them gifts, roses. Unfortunately, we spend money on it.*
> *– Mostly friends send them.*
> *– Yes, just to support them. We see a live stream, our friend has a battle with someone, so we say: we must support him.*
> *– We have to help.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

– You tap the screen and three points are added. Hearts are points.
– Roses have to be bought with money. (Do you pay?) No, no.
– (And are these your friends?) No. Strangers.
– Influencers. Someone we like. (5th grade, rural area)

Personal channels and content creation

Young people on social media are mostly consumers rather than creators. Only a few run their own channels. Interestingly, this is more common among younger children than older teenagers – for example, 13- and 15-year-olds mentioned (usually with laughter or embarrassment) that they used to do it. Some are ashamed of this and generally did not want to specify what they recorded, answering vaguely that it was "everything" or "all sorts of things".

> *Quite a few people have had some kind of TikTok channel at some point, where they tried recording, tried to get noticed. For example, I read all the Harry Potter books, so my channel was about Harry Potter. Later it was about the game Brawl Stars and I just tried to get noticed because it was popular at the time.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *It was a long time ago, but there were popular things like 'ways to fight boredom' and I shared different ideas. It also got attention and I built a whole profile around it.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

Nowadays, older Alphas tend to treat social media profiles more as a means of communication or a personal diary – posting everyday photos or sharing content important to them (e.g., from their sports club) when they want more people to see it.

> *I think most people, even if they don't post on YouTube or TikTok, still have an Instagram profile where they put up photos, stories, share friends' posts, so it's usually just among friends. Socially, basically.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *(Do you post anything online?) On Insta story. Moments from life, or maybe from competitions. You share a photo, for example if the club posts something.* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

> *On TikTok it's more about reposts. You click repost and it shows up... My friends on TikTok see a video that I repost, for example. (But what do you usually repost?) Nonsense. Funny stuff.* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

Their online activity – not only what they post, but even who they follow and which posts they like – is constantly monitored. Every interaction is therefore a carefully considered decision. Some use this as an important tool, while others stay in "incognito mode" on social media.

> *When you're checking out a guy, you scroll through his reposts. Now people communicate through reposts. Want flowers from a boyfriend? Repost shitloads of videos with flowers and he has to get you flowers. Want to watch a movie with him? You repost. Want him to hug you? Repost a video of people hugging. I don't do stuff like that because I feel a bit uncomfortable that people might see it. I don't like anything on Instagram at all.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *I repost so it reaches my parents and friends too, mostly political stuff. Lately there's been some feminist content.* (IDI, 16 years old)

Among the 8-year-olds, some young YouTubers have already appeared. They post videos about computer games or football. One girl said she has material ready that she wants to publish when she's older.

> *(Do you create things online and post them?) Yes. About me playing football.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

> *About me playing Roblox. Rivals.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

> *I can't [post] yet but I have it ready for when I can. (And what is the video about?) My dog.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

10-year-olds are more likely to make edits and repost content shared by others. Boys were the ones most likely to boast about their own channels. Girls seemed more concerned with privacy and online safety. They also record themselves and make edits, but share them only among friends – in their friend circle or the class WhatsApp group.

> *My cousin has been recording on TikTok probably since she got her phone, so since she was about 7. I was 5 when she set up the account. She wanted to record lots of videos with me whenever we saw each other. My mum eventually banned her from doing it. Now she can only record with me privately [post on a private profile].* (4th grade, rural area)

> *[My friend] said she would record us all the time on a private profile. And Lena later told me she saw the recording. I asked, but did Milena show it to you privately or did she post it? She said it was private. I hope it stayed that way.* (4th grade, rural area)

Summary

The analysis of Generation Alpha's activity on social media shows a clear dominance of video formats, with YouTube remaining a universal platform and TikTok gaining popularity among users from around age 10.

The key mechanism guiding content choice is the algorithm – respondents often consume content unreflectively, selecting whatever "pops up" on their screens, which

makes it difficult for them to precisely identify their own online interests.

Younger boys' interests focus on gaming (Roblox, Minecraft, streams) and sports (e.g., football). Girls more often choose creative, culinary, and lifestyle content (vlogs, haul videos, influencer life). However, these gender differences become less pronounced in older age groups. A common point for both genders is entertainment and humour content.

With age (from around 13 years old), opinion channels and podcasts gain importance. For older teens, following "dramas" and other creators' opinions functions as a form of social capital – keeping them up to date in peer conversations and helping them develop their own worldview.

While some of the youngest respondents dream of a YouTuber career, older ones are more cautious and shy away from publishing content publicly. Their activity shifts to private spaces (Insta Stories, WhatsApp groups), and their creative output mainly consists of making edits or reposts, which has become a new form of communication (e.g., signalling needs by sharing specific videos).

Katarzyna Prachnio

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Our youngest respondents get their knowledge about the world from their parents and YouTube. However, when asked about the topics of these conversations and information, they mostly talk about everyday, familiar matters – food, games, online trends, sport, or animals. Sources for more serious topics are school or TV news, which they sometimes watch with parents or grandparents. Here, political issues and world events occasionally come up (most often concerning the war in Ukraine), but most children aren't interested in them. From TV news, they mention things like the weather, road accidents, and traffic jams.

> *I was talking with my parents that the world is getting dumber. (And what do you mean by 'dumber'?) Well, like they made six seven and Brainroots.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

> *I only had two performances, on Independence Day and in the nativity play where God was born. I had those two performances and learned a lot about such things.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

> *My grandma talks about politics sometimes, but my parents don't. (Do you talk about politics with your grandma?) No, because it's boring, there's politics all the time.* (2nd grade, large city, group 2)

In the older age groups, awareness in this area is much higher. We were surprised by the 4th graders (9–10 years old), who in conversation mentioned a lot of recent important facts and events, including Donald Trump political decisions or train accidents in Spain. The children admitted that they often talk to each other about current events and watch news programmes on TV with their family.

> *(What have you been talking about recently?) Sometimes about what's on the news. When there were elections, we talked about that.* (4th grade, rural area)

> *That Trump wanted to annex Greenland to the United States. And that he stole the president of Venezuela.* (4th grade, rural area)

However, this seems to be more a feature of this particular group. In the next group (10–11 years old), knowledge in this area was more superficial; the young people didn't follow events and weren't really interested in, for example, politics. Sometimes they watch the news with their parents, but mostly incidentally, while being in a room where

someone else is watching. Online, TikTok and YouTube provide them with information, although they rarely know the specific channels from which it comes.

> *For example, from social media. I scroll through videos and suddenly some information pops up. Recently, there was the northern lights [in Poland].* (5th grade, rural area)

> *(Do posts show you that something important happened in Poland or the world?) Yes. I mean, mostly it pops up… called "Wydarzenia" or something. They're news from TV, but someone edited them for TikTok. Like what happened in Poland, for example.* (5th grade, rural area)

> *Sometimes I just see a post with some information because I follow a few, I think, news channels. And on YouTube I watch, mainly information about this internet community, but I also come across news, for example about the world, about Trump.* (IDI, 15 years old)

For this age group, important information also includes sports and all kinds of curiosities about the world. They also classify celebrity-focused sites as news sources, such as Pudelek or Świat Gwiazd.

> *I recently found out that it would take 42 million stock cubes to fill the entire Baltic Sea.* (4th grade, rural area)

For some of the older Alphas, important sources of information are family (parents, siblings, friends) and school.

> *Honestly… mostly from conversations with people. I don't really take much interest myself. I have a friend who constantly bombards me with all kinds of random facts. But reading on my own? Not so much.* (IDI, 14 years old)

> *[Parents] mention something, but mostly it's in class. People just talk, or a teacher brings it up. I don't know, like when there was the war in Ukraine, my parents told me first at breakfast, and then the whole school was talking about it, and teachers mentioned it too.* (IDI, 16 years old)

Young people are especially interested in things that affect them directly or happen close by, geographically speaking. This emerged clearly in conversations with older students, though younger ones also mentioned it – for example, in the context of the European Union and attaching caps to plastic bottles (which annoys them and is a subject of jokes).

> *I think they are most interesting when it's shown directly, like something happening in Łódź Voivodeship, not somewhere else in the world. Because then you know that it happened somewhere close by.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *[I saw] that Librus is going to be removed, for example. They're going to get rid of all the platforms where grades are posted so that there's just one, so the Minister can oversee it, because there are more and more hacking incidents.* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

Some of the focus groups took place in the week when the Minister of Education announced changes regarding students' dress code and appearance in schools. Our respondents were very upset by this.

> *Recently, the Minister said she would ban large earrings and baggy jeans. Like baggy pants in general. In that case I switch to homeschooling. I just can't handle it.* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

This information was passed around among friends at school. Earlier, one of the girls had come across it on social media and became the source for the rest of the group. But where the information originally came from, they couldn't say.

> *– I think it was on Instagram. (Do you remember which account posted it? Was it Barbara Nowacka?) (laughs) Could be. You'd have to check. But I don't know, I don't remember.*
> *– It's floating around the internet.*
> (7th grade, small town, group 1)

This is a clear trend across all age groups. Young people often "know something", "heard something" or "it just popped up somewhere". They encounter information and news by chance and rarely consider where it came from.

> *For example, I accidentally found out about the shelter in Bytom. I came across it by accident. [highly publicised case of neglect in an animal shelter]* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

> *You can find [information] anywhere, but I see it most often on Instagram. When I scroll, various things pop up. (And what kind of accounts are they?) I don't think about it.* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

> *Some events, or just random stuff. Like people talking about it. Often there's a creator who specialises in it. (Do you remember their name?) No, no idea.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *I see various things, now for example about what Trump is saying. I think it's quite a serious matter. About his takeover of new territories. But I rarely see it. Just from time to time, because it's kind of popular. It shows up in my recommendations, but I don't search for it in any way.* (IDI, 15 years old)

They rarely search intentionally for information about current events or politics. This tends to happen only with older Alphas, usually when a topic really catches their interest

or matters to them and they want to learn more. On a day-to-day basis, they rely on the algorithm.

> *I mean, if we're talking about between the algorithm or searching, I think most of us just stick to whatever's on the homepage, what the algorithm shows.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

They rarely check specific creators' profiles (this happens among older viewers). Overall, older groups (13–15 years) already had some awareness of current events in Poland and around the world. Their preferred format is infotainment – short news, curiosities, and information presented in an entertaining way.

> *For example, the "Wszechobecne fakty" account on Instagram immediately pops up. And it's… just cool, because it doesn't go into details, but I get a general idea of what's happening in the world. There are also various curiosities. And the algorithm feeds it to us every day.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *So, when it comes to political matters, I try to keep up whenever a new post appears from a channel I follow.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *On Instagram, for example, there are accounts that post about events around the world. It's not mainly about politics. From the informational ones, I think many people in our group follow "Wiedza bezużyteczna", "orientuj.się".* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *(And anything political?) Well, if it shows up on TikTok, I sometimes watch it, just out of curiosity. Something pops up. Like something interesting about Poland, or maybe fun facts, that kind of thing, right?* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 2)

In older age groups, the informational role of social media grows. They rarely watch TV news, though there are exceptions – some start taking an interest in topics like politics and voluntarily watch with their parents. Sometimes they listen to the radio, but mainly incidentally, for example during car journeys.

> *– Sometimes when my parents watch [TV news]. I watch when I need to plug in my charger in the living room.*
> *– I don't watch the news. Ever.*
> *– I watch. At first I didn't, but now I started. Somehow, I got interested.*
> (7th grade, small town, group 1)

> *For example, I'm at my grandma's, and there's no Netflix or anything on the TV, so if there's nothing else, like documentaries aren't on, I turn on the news because there's nothing else to watch. As a last resort.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *I watch because everyone else is watching, so I see and hear it involuntarily.* (1st year of

secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *(When something serious happens in the world, how do you find out?) Sometimes my parents just tell me, and sometimes I sit and watch with them. I just pass by, have something to eat, and the news is on, so sometimes I get interested and watch it.* (IDI, 13 years old)

Serious topics often reach young people in the form of jokes. Internet memes and funny reels are formats that can hold their attention even on political subjects. Memes do not replace real knowledge, but they can lead to it. They are a good way to spark interest in an issue. Sometimes this leads to deeper learning about a topic – for example by reading the comments and searching for more information on their own via the TikTok search, Google, or AI chatbots.

> *After all, memes are some way of conveying information that has really spread.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *– I think we talk less seriously about these topics and more we just joke about them.*
> *– I disagree. I'm someone who likes to debate and listen to opinions.*
> *– Yes, I know you do, but I, for example… I mean it depends who with, but generally there are a lot of jokes about these topics.*
> (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

Older focus group participants recently became very amused by memes involving Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, and they also joke about the so-called "grieving tour" of the wife of murdered American political activist Charlie Kirk.

> *About that Venezuelan president, I found out when I saw a funny TikTok that he was supposedly asleep, and those from the USA just took him out and took him to America.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *There are memes of it, it's great. For example, there's a meme that Maduro was kidnapped and they gave him a Tech Fleece from Nike. Or that every time they take a picture of him, his outfit looks better and more branded.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *There's this politician, Charlie Kirk, who's dead now. And he and his wife are such a huge meme now that... There's this popular video where Charlie Kirk says "The thing I fear most is how my wife will manage when I die". Then there's his wife, performing on some ropes. And that's... the grieving tour. She's happy and performing on stage after becoming a widow.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

Sometimes they also find politicians funny in themselves, especially when they can't express themselves properly in interviews, show a lack of knowledge, or speak poorly in

foreign languages. Young people feel disappointed and outraged when those in high positions turn out to be incompetent.

> *For example, in interviews when they can't answer. Or like with flags, someone approaches and says 'tell me what flag this is'. And they don't know. And it's a simple European flag, let's say from a country in the European Union.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *It's embarrassing when they make a mistake on such a simple thing, or just try to act 'youthful'. (Do you find politics embarrassing?) No. Not politics itself, but… politicians more, their behaviour, especially their statements.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

Another important source of information for them is ChatGPT, which they often use like a search engine (e.g., 7th graders choosing a school), even though they're aware it doesn't always tell the truth. On the other hand, some participants voiced criticism when others praised AI chatbots. Some pointed out environmental concerns linked to the operation of huge server farms (water consumption), while others focused simply on the risk of receiving false information.

> *I have to say one important thing: ChatGPT, we just love it. We love ChatGPT. For example, when we're looking something up, instead of typing everything into Google, we just use the chat.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *If I want to know something, I prefer to ask my parents, but if I can't, I more often go to ChatGPT; Google rarely.* (IDI, 14 years old)

Opinions are also divided regarding the "AI Overviews" function in Google Search.

> *I'd rather use this AI [in Google Search]. Well, first of all, it pops up first, so I don't even look anywhere else because the information comes up before you. And it's great. Even when I'm researching something, it's just great.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *(And AI Overviews? Do you use it?) Rarely. I feel like it's not always true. A few times I came across something that really wasn't true.* (IDI, 13 years old)

High school students also insisted that they are conscious users of AI tools, aware of the risks and knowing that information should be double-checked. Children of all ages claimed they can usually recognise AI-generated content. Younger children referred mainly to audio and visual cues. The incredibly rapid development of AI tools, which now produce completely realistic content, thus poses a huge risk of disinformation – not only for the youngest audiences.

> *Because sometimes with AI, it's not that accurate. Sometimes, for example, something flickers.* (2nd grade, large city, group 2)

> *It speaks strangely. The voice is kind of inhuman. And it's unreal, like nobody would say or do that.* (5th grade, rural area)

> *I think, all in all, our age group is aware that AI can give very wrong information.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

In the youngest group, another way of verifying information is by talking with others – friends, or more often, parents. This aligns with survey results showing that younger children are more likely to ask an adult's opinion, while older children read comments and sometimes check information in other sources. In focus groups, they mainly discussed this in the context of deepening knowledge on a topic that interests them or verifying information obtained from AI chatbots.

Participants in individual interviews mentioned more deliberate and conscious verification of information encountered online. Some were aware of the risks related to disinformation.

> *Sometimes I also compare lots of sites because I've noticed that not all of them are true. You can come across fake news.* (IDI, 13 years old)

> *Usually there are some sources attached or shown on the screen where the info comes from. And if there aren't, I prefer to check myself. I Google it, or type it into YouTube.* (IDI, 16 years old)

At the same time, some simply trust their own intuition and prevailing narratives. Worryingly, some 11-year-olds believe something is true just because "everyone's writing about it" (here, in the context of the northern lights, which were visible in Poland).

> *Everyone's writing about it so it must have happened. (Do you even check if something is true?) No.* (5th grade, rural area)

For the youngest respondents, verifying information is also linked to tangible evidence. One boy told us about how he searched for proof that Santa Claus doesn't exist – he found hidden presents around the house. Likewise, something is considered true if it can be successfully replicated at home – for example, an experiment demonstrated by a YouTuber.

Secondary school students believe that access to diverse content on social media makes young people less likely to be trapped in informational bubbles, compared to their parents' and grandparents' generation, who often – especially regarding political topics – rely on a single main source of information, usually a TV station that tends to

support one side of the political debate.

> *It's the older people who aren't necessarily right in all topics, because, for example, when it comes to politics, they're focused on one party and can't really open themselves up to the facts. There's no middle ground – some are seen as very bad, others as very good. And sometimes they can't see the mistakes of the party they consider good.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *They use just one very well-known method, because it's not online, it's on TV – they have one channel they watch all the time, whereas we have many sources of information and can constantly compare them. That way, you can form a more objective opinion on a topic, a given view.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

Although the respondents show a high degree of critical thinking and accurately identify polarising mechanisms, their claim of being objective is overly optimistic. Television can rely on a one-sided narrative, and the lack of interactivity and limited ability to verify information immediately encourages the entrenchment of a particular worldview.

At the same time, respondents believe that access to multiple sources and types of content automatically ensures greater objectivity and the ability to form their own opinion. This is an illusion – young people often end up in a bubble not due to a lack of information sources, but because these sources are selected by algorithms based on the user's previous preferences, making the diversity of content only apparent. Moreover, simply having access to many sources does not protect against misinformation. Young people are just as prone to ignoring the mistakes of their idols, influencers, or political parties if these fit their value system. Respondents note the lack of a "middle ground" among older people, without recognising that the digital bubbles they inhabit themselves can be equally radicalising.

The oldest Alphas admit that they don't talk much with their parents or grandparents about politics, although this does not stem from a disinterest in the topic. Some declare that their opinions are dismissed by older generations because of their young age.

> *I think it's because adults often treat young people and children as if they're worse when it comes to political topics, that we don't know about these things, don't have our own opinions. We can't even have our own opinion. They explain it like, for example, when I once talked to my grandma about what I thought, she said (imitating a haughty tone) "you're so clever, we'll see".* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

An extremely unusual phenomenon, which even surprises their peers, is the case of parents completely delegating their voting decision to a child. A situation where parents ask their son to cast a vote on their behalf demonstrates not only a withdrawal from their own participation in public life but also a relinquishment of their role as an authority

shaping their child's worldview.

> *– My parents aren't interested in politics at all. For example, when there are elections, they say, 'Come on, Olek, you'll go with us and put an X somewhere, because we don't know who to vote for'. They know that I see certain things about politics, for instance in reels, and they say, 'Come on, you'll go with us, you'll choose the best for us'.*
> *– Wow! That would never happen to me. Never in my life.*
> (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

Although the young person may feel appreciated in this situation, the mechanism relies on a dangerous assumption – that the TikTok or Instagram algorithm is a reliable source of political knowledge. The group's reactions suggest that this is a rare case. For most members of Generation Alpha, the family home still has a clear vertical structure, and adults do not consult them about their political choices. The situation with their peer is seen as almost exotic, which only reinforces the sense that adults generally ignore young people in serious debates. For most, the reference point is rather the attitude of the grandmother from the first quote. In either case, adults cease to be a source of knowledge about the world (either because they are "closed to facts" or uninterested), which means young people build their worldview based on peers and influencers.

The oldest Alphas also admit that serious and tragic current issues, such as war, evoke less emotion than they used to. Their statements suggest a certain "familiarisation" with crisis. This emotional detachment does not stem from a complete lack of interest or empathy, but acts as a defence mechanism against an overload of negative stimuli. War and political conflicts are now treated as a constant part of the landscape.

> *– I think we used to get more stressed about these kinds of conflicts. Now we're more accustomed to them, because these are the times… literally times of conflict, there's always something happening. So honestly, it interests us less. I mean, we still care…*
> *– We're interested, but it doesn't cause such a reaction, maybe.*
> *– Yes. We're just set on the idea that it happened, it's happening, that's just how it is.*
> (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

A sign of this emotional distancing can also be the turn to humorous forms of sharing information. Memes may serve as a way to create distance and cope with difficult emotions and stress. At the same time, they often lead to further information-seeking, which in turn increases awareness and knowledge about the world.

Interest spikes dramatically when an event could directly affect them – for example, anything that concerns national security. One respondent described the situation when Russian drones entered Polish airspace:

> *I remember that day. I woke up in the morning, when I opened TikTok, the first thing I saw was that these regions won't have remote lessons. I looked at the comments, and there were mentions of Russian drones. That there were supposed to be remote lessons. (Did you keep looking?) I typed it, I even had suggestions, in the TikTok search engine, and I just watched.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

Once again, this shows how deeply rooted young people are in social media. Information reaches them passively, and active searching only happens when there is a high sense of personal interest or threat. The random discovery of an important event leads to a search for more detailed information – but not on news websites or Google; first they look in the comments, then in TikTok's search. This confirms the trend in which social media take over the informational function and become a closed knowledge ecosystem, with the popularity of a phrase in algorithmic suggestions perceived as a marker of credibility. It is also worth noting that young people gather knowledge from the comments section, which makes them extremely vulnerable to misinformation, especially in crisis situations.

Meanwhile, in conversations with the youngest Alphas, their empathy and sensitivity to injustice and the suffering of others – including animals – comes across strongly. Serious topics capture their attention through emotional appeal.

> *(What do you do when something sad pops up online?) I keep watching to find out what happened and why, and I make a sad face.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

> *(Would you like to change what's unfair?) Because some people are ill, some are healthy, and I'd like everyone to be healthy.* (2nd grade, large city, group 2)

> *(What news have you seen recently?) That dogs are being taken away from their owners because they are kept on chains, and that these chains really hurt them.* (4th grade, rural area)

Their emotional reaction is instinctive and straightforward. Unlike older groups, who expressed fatigue ("we care less about this now"), younger children don't look away – they try to understand the cause. This shows that emotion (sadness) can fuel their pursuit of knowledge. The comment about everyone being healthy is a classic example of childhood idealism. Younger children are "emotional sponges" – they react with sadness, want to heal the world, and experience serious topics personally, whereas older members of the generation build protective armour, rationalise conflicts, and show signs of fatigue from difficult, negative messages.

Summary

For Generation Alpha, information has become a by-product of entertainment. Most participants do not seek out information intentionally. Knowledge about the world reaches them incidentally while scrolling through TikTok or Instagram. Topics that directly affect them – for example, changes in school rules regarding dress codes – generate the highest engagement.

Respondents rarely identify a specific source or author of information, describing it vaguely as something that “floats around the internet”. The boundary between a “serious news” and “entertainment content” becomes blurred. Memes and short videos serve as an entry point – humour lowers the barrier to engaging with difficult topics and often motivates further independent fact-checking.

Older respondents are highly critical of previous generations, accusing them of being trapped in television “information bubbles”. At the same time, they fall into the illusion that access to multiple social media accounts guarantees objectivity, overlooking the influence of algorithms.

Among older teenagers, a process of “familiarisation” with crises (such as war) is noticeable. Emotional distancing and turning to humour can serve as a form of protection against an overload of negative information.

Kinga Wojtas-Jarentowska

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

I. Understanding democracy in Generation Alpha narratives – IDI analysis

An analysis of in-depth individual interviews indicates that Generation Alpha and those on the cusp of Alpha and Z possess a complex and multidimensional understanding of democracy, although it is not fully formalised.

Young respondents do not refer directly to institutional or constitutional categories; rather, they reconstruct democracy through concrete social experiences, observations of decision-making practices, and interpretations of power relations. This means their understanding of democracy is situational – they do not define it in abstract or general terms (for example, through the constitution, separation of powers, or state institutions) but relate it to specific situations they have experienced or observed. At the same time, their perspective contains normative elements – describing a desired state – as well as critical ones, reflecting a developing civic awareness.

Democracy as a system of political communication and competition for support

One of the clearest themes is the perception of democracy as a communicative process, where the ability to gain support through symbolic messaging is key. Young respondents recognise that electoral success is not always linked to the quality of a programme, but to the ability to build relationships with voters. In one interview, a respondent noted:

> *And really, Maciek won by, I'm not saying a small margin, but compared to the plans, surprisingly small. I mean, he should have crushed him, not won by, I think, 15%.* (IDI, 16 years old)

This reflection leads to interpreting elections as a process where not only programme proposals but also persuasive strategies matter:

> *Such persuasion, well manipulation is persuasion, I don't know what to call it. (…) It's*

> *saying what people want to hear and promising what they want to hear, rather than thinking about what is best for the school.* (IDI, 16 years old)

The respondent also highlights the tension between short-term popularity and the long-term interest of the community:

> *And people don't always know that, for example, they want what is actually good for the school (…) in the long term.* (IDI, 16 years old)

These statements indicate a growing reflection on populism, political marketing, and voter mobilisation mechanisms. Democracy is viewed as an arena of competition, where emotions, communication, and tailoring messages to voter expectations are significant.

At the same time, there is awareness of simplifications and slogans in electoral campaigns:

> *The other candidate was kind of bribing (…) he had these very catchy slogans.* (IDI, 16 years old)

Democracy as a relationship of obligation and responsibility

An important element of understanding democracy is the relationship between the representative and the voters, interpreted as a relationship of obligation. Respondents indicate that choosing a leader generates moral and long-term commitments toward all citizens, regardless of their electoral preferences:

> *Well, in the first case, because they trusted you, gave you their vote, you have this (…) sense of duty, that you want to somehow prove to them that they were right to vote for you.* (IDI, 15 years old)

At the same time, there is reflection on responsibility toward those who did not support the candidate:

> *And to the other people, you want to show that they were wrong, that they didn't vote for you (…) you're not pointing fingers at them, but showing them (…) in the long term.* (IDI, 15 years old)

These statements indicate an intuitive understanding of democracy as an inclusive system of representation, encompassing all members of the political community.

Democracy, the state, and social justice

The interviews also reveal reflections on the role of the state in reducing inequalities and providing basic public services. Respondents refer to issues such as access to

education, infrastructure, and social support:

> *I think the state is for everyone.* (IDI, 15 years old)

At the same time, there is awareness of differing social conditions:

> *For example, I don't need something like that (…) I'm privileged (…) but I realise that some students have these difficulties, so (…) they should.* (IDI, 15 years old)

Respondents also point to the state's role in equalising opportunities:

> *Not everyone is born with the same standard of living, but everyone should be cared for.* (IDI, 15 years old)

These types of statements demonstrate a developing understanding of social justice and solidarity.

Democracy and equality, majority-minority relations

The narratives analysed indicate that young respondents understand democracy primarily as a system of equal rights, rather than the privileging of certain groups. One participant stated:

> *I don't think anyone should be special (…) everyone should have the same right to vote.* (IDI, 15 years old)

This statement indicates an egalitarian understanding of democracy as an inclusive system. Equality can therefore be a fundamental category legitimising democracy for young people. It has both a procedural and an axiological dimension. At the same time, there is a reflection on one's own position within the social structure:

> *I would say that [I belong] to the majority.* (IDI, 15 years old)

This suggests that young people locate themselves within the social structure, while simultaneously rejecting the idea of giving certain groups privileges at the expense of others.

Representation of women and gender as part of democratic awareness

In the analysed IDIs, the topic of women's representation does not appear systematically or in a directly political way. The only clear example concerns one respondent's self-identification as a member of a minority:

> *I think I belong to a minority. First of all, I'm a woman, secondly, I'm very left-wing.* (IDI, 16 years old)

This suggests that reflection on gender arises mainly in the context of identity and belonging to an underrepresented group, rather than as a distinct institutional or political issue. The absence of deeper statements about women's representation, quotas, or gender inequalities may indicate that this topic is not yet a central element of civic awareness for this age group. At the same time, the presence of the category "minority" in self-definition points to growing sensitivity to equality and diversity issues.

Democracy, the state, and inclusiveness toward people with migration experience

In the analysed interviews, there are no direct references to the representation of Ukrainian students or detailed reflections on their participation in school or political institutions. The absence of such topics can be interpreted as a significant finding. It may indicate normalisation of the presence of students with migration experience in everyday school life, or a limited political reflection on migration at this stage of development.

At the same time, a more general reflection emerges regarding the inclusive nature of the state:

> *The state should be for everyone, even for people who are not citizens (…) everyone within the borders of the state should feel cared for and safe.* (IDI, 16 years old)

This statement indicates a developing normative orientation toward inclusiveness, encompassing a broad definition of the political community. Although it does not refer directly to a specific group, it may serve as a basis for future attitudes toward cultural and migratory diversity.

Democracy as procedural quality and procedural justice

Respondents demonstrate a developing sensitivity to the quality of democratic procedures and point out their weaknesses in school settings:

> *Instead of holding some kind of re-vote (…) that was the biggest failure.* (IDI, 16 years old)

This indicates a growing awareness of the importance of transparency, equal opportunities, and fairness in decision-making processes.

Democracy in the context of conflict and polarisation

The analysed narratives also highlight experiences of political conflict and social pressure:

> *There was a lot of hate (…) about who your parents vote for.* (IDI, 16 years old)

This shows that democracy is also perceived as a space of conflict and social tension. Early political socialisation takes place in conditions of strong polarisation, which may influence future civic attitudes.

Conclusions

Analysis of the IDIs indicates that Generation Alpha's understanding of democracy goes beyond a simplified, purely procedural view of the political system. Young respondents reconstruct democracy through concrete social and school experiences, resulting in a relatively coherent, though not yet fully formalised, cognitive model.

Firstly, democracy is perceived as **a communicative and competitive arena**, where the ability to gain support through persuasion, tailoring messages to voters' expectations, and building relationships is crucial. Narratives reflect awareness of manipulation, political marketing, and the tension between short-term popularity and the long-term interests of the community. This points to a developing understanding of populist mechanisms and voter mobilisation strategies.

Secondly, respondents demonstrate **an intuitive but clear understanding of representatives' responsibilities**. The electoral mandate is interpreted as a commitment to the entire community – both to supporters and to those who did not vote for the representative. This indicates early internalisation of norms of inclusive leadership and long-term legitimacy building.

Thirdly, an important element of the narratives is **an egalitarian understanding of democracy**, based on universal rights and procedural equality. Respondents emphasise equality of voice and reject the privileging of certain groups, reflecting the predominance of formal equality over preferential policy concepts. At the same time, there is awareness of one's own social position and privilege, which encourages reflection on social justice.

Fourthly, democracy is also interpreted through **the lens of solidarity and equal opportunity**. Respondents recognise the role of the state in providing essential public services and reducing social inequalities, indicating the development of normative beliefs regarding the welfare functions of the state.

Fifthly, the narratives show **growing sensitivity to the quality of procedures**, including the importance of fair elections, transparency, and equality of opportunity. However, this reflection remains fragmentary and situational, suggesting an early stage in the internalisation of democratic norms.

Sixthly, democracy is experienced as **a space of conflict and polarisation**, arising

from observations of political disputes within family and media environments. Early civic socialisation thus occurs in conditions of high exposure to normative and ideological conflicts.

At the same time, the limited presence of in-depth reflections on women's representation and the absence of direct references to individuals with migration experience indicate that certain dimensions of democracy – particularly those related to social diversity – remain weakly institutionalised in this group's awareness. This suggests that their development will strongly depend on further educational, social, and media experiences.

As a result, it can be concluded that Generation Alpha is developing **a pragmatic and relational model of democracy**, which combines:

- procedural elements,
- normative reflection (on how things ought to be),
- experiences from everyday practices,
- and observations of communicative mechanisms and social inequalities.

II. Student council experiences and expressions of agency in Generation Alpha – FGI analysis

Analysis of the focus group material indicates that Generation Alpha's experiences with student governance are primarily practical – based on personal experience, relational – shaped by peer and school environments, and situational – dependent on specific circumstances, events, and contexts. Young respondents are familiar with the institution of the student council, yet their real participatory experiences focus on concrete actions and micro-initiatives rather than formal structures. Agency is understood as the ability to influence everyday school life and effectively achieve collective goals.

Critical awareness of electoral mechanisms and representation

Respondents demonstrate a relatively high awareness of electoral procedures, yet they often approach them critically. Narratives reveal themes concerning informal mechanisms of selecting representatives and limited trust in their transparency. One participant stated outright:

> *Rigged.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

Later in the discussion, students clarified that the selection of a representative in negotiations with teachers (not referring to the student council, but to arranging a

shared issue, e.g., rescheduling a test) can depend on personal favouritism or interpersonal relationships:

> *(So, you choose a representative?) The one the teacher likes the most.* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

This indicates the relatively early development of a reflective and critical approach to representation, as well as recognition of informal power structures – in this case, teachers. It also reveals an instrumental approach to selecting representatives.

The student council as a space for negotiation

Despite scepticism towards formal procedures, pupils recognise that the school student council can be a tool of real influence, especially in situations that require negotiations with teachers. In one of the focus groups, the process of organising a school event was described:

> *Well, today we're having a sleepover [in school], and that's ours… And mainly it happened thanks to our class.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

Respondents emphasised the importance of persistence and group pressure:

> *– Yes, because we kept bothering our form teacher about it.*
> *– Yes, because our form teacher is also the supervisor of the student council, so we negotiated it.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

These statements show that young pupils' sense of agency is based on their ability to negotiate, build relationships, and make use of available institutional channels of influence. This demonstrates their knowledge of how influence works and how to achieve their goals within the school environment.

Grassroots initiative as the dominant model of action

The focus group research indicates that young respondents often engage in grassroots activities that are not always formally assigned to the student council. Examples include organisational initiatives, class-based actions, or collective decision-making. Group cooperation and a sense of community are key here.

Respondents stress that pupil activity is spontaneous and collective in nature, while formal structures play a secondary role. Agency is understood as the ability to influence concrete situations, such as school events, the atmosphere in the classroom, or relationships with teachers.

Agency as responsibility and support

The material also includes references to the role of the class president or representative as someone responsible for others. Respondents indicate that an important role of a leader is to support the group:

> *To help.* (2nd grade, large city, group 2)

This means that young pupils link agency with social responsibility and a readiness to act for the benefit of the community.

Practical understanding of the leader's role

At the same time, the statements reveal ambivalence towards formal functions. Some respondents indicate that these roles are not always clearly defined, for example, regarding the purpose of a class representative:

> *I don't know. For nothing.* (5th grade, rural area)

Such statements suggest that formal roles do not always translate into real experiences of influence. Young students' agency therefore develops more through everyday actions than through formal positions.

Digital and informal forms of collaboration

The analysed material also contains references to organising activities through messaging apps and digital media, indicating the growing importance of digital skills in fostering agency:

> *(communication via Messenger in the class group chat): We are rescheduling the tests.* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

This shows that young students use technology to organise initiatives, coordinate activities, and make collective decisions.

Conclusions

Focus group research indicates that Generation Alpha develops agency in a decentralised, relational, and practical way. Formal student council structures are important as a point of reference, but they do not constitute the primary source of civic experience. Key factors include:

- grassroots student initiatives,
- negotiations with adults as centres of power and gatekeepers of resources,
- collective actions, often carried out in an "action mode",

- communication and digital skills, which respondents use to self-organise.

At the same time, young people demonstrate critical reflection on formal representation procedures and a high awareness of informal mechanisms of influence. The findings suggest that future educational initiatives should focus on strengthening students' real agency, increasing the transparency of electoral procedures, and developing participatory competences through practical, concrete activities.

Generation Alpha does not reject the idea of self-governance, but expects it to be more authentic, effective, and connected to everyday school experiences.

III. Student council experiences and expressions of agency – IDI analysis

The analysis of individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) indicates that student council experiences and broadly understood agency among young respondents are diverse and often informal. Generation Alpha rarely refers to formal participation structures (e.g., traditional student councils), instead highlighting micro-practices of agency related to organising classroom activities, co-deciding on the daily life of the school, and engaging in extracurricular spaces.

Limited formal experience, but high institutional awareness

Respondents are familiar with the institution of the student council, but their personal participation experiences are relatively limited. In some schools, these structures are more formal than genuinely participatory. As one respondent noted:

> *Personally, I've never been in the student council (…) because I think it was only possible from seventh grade.* (IDI, 16 years old)

In other cases, students refer to alternative, less typical models of functioning:

> *We don't have that typical student council (…) we have what's called a standing council.* (IDI, 16 years old)

This type of council appears to shift from an electoral model towards a consultative-organisational model, limiting its role as a space for representing interests (grassroots initiatives) to merely reviewing pre-prepared solutions. The interviews suggest that student council structures in many schools are perceived as distant or inaccessible to younger students, restricting early participatory experiences.

The student council as a space for changing everyday rules

A key theme is the perception of the council as a tool for introducing concrete changes in school life. Students indicate its function as influencing regulations that affect daily routines:

> *Some (...) changes in classroom rules.* (IDI, 16 years old)

This demonstrates that agency is not understood abstractly, but as the ability to affect specific decisions, such as organising events, establishing behavioural rules, or improving daily comfort for students.

Strong focus on grassroots and informal activities

Examples of grassroots initiatives appear far more frequently than formal student council structures. Students highlight organisational activity within the classroom, for instance:

> *We had (…) lots of things like shared breakfasts (…) each class could organise a shared breakfast.* (IDI, 16 years old)

Such activities are an important expression of agency, even if not formally linked to the student council. Generation Alpha views collaboration and event organisation as a natural way to influence the school environment.

Agency outside school – youth organisations and structures

The materials also include examples of extracurricular activity that indicate developed leadership and organisational skills. One respondent said:

> *I am actively involved in my scout troop; I have my own patrol.* (IDI, 16 years old)

Experiences like these (e.g., scouting) provide important social competences, often stronger than school-based participation, demonstrating that young people's agency can develop outside formal educational structures.

Early formation of civic attitudes

Respondents show awareness of obligations inherent in representative relationships and related responsibilities. One student noted:

> *They trusted you, gave you their vote (…) you have this sense of duty to prove that they were right to vote for you*. (IDI, 16 years old)

This reflects an intuitive understanding of the principles of representation and political

responsibility. Even without holding formal roles, students grasp electoral mechanisms and the logic of representation.

Agency as digital and informational competence

Some respondents demonstrate agency in the digital sphere, such as critically analysing information, creating content, or managing their online activity. Young people stress the need to verify information, identify manipulation, and use digital tools consciously. These competences constitute a new dimension of civic engagement and may translate into broader social activity in the future.

IV. Barriers to student council experience and agency of Generation Alpha – insights from focus groups and IDIs

Qualitative data indicate that a key limitation for developing formal student council experiences among Generation Alpha students is **restricted access to institutional representation structures**, particularly in earlier educational stages. Students often have minimal contact with formal electoral procedures or participate in a simplified, informal manner. Focus group discussions described class elections as spontaneous and loosely formalised:

> *– No, it was immediately 'we vote for'… yes, the whole class more or less agreed.*
> *– Or if someone didn't know, they just realised: oh, they're voting for him, so I'll vote too.*
> (7th grade, small town, group 2)

This demonstrates the dominance of informal group norms over democratic procedures. In some schools, secret ballots are not used, and the electoral process relies on consensus or group pressure:

> *Secret (voting) in our class doesn't work well.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

The second significant barrier is **the limited perception of real influence over school decisions**. Students often fail to see a clear link between electing a representative and changes in school functioning. Their statements suggest a belief that these roles are not always clearly defined or linked to actual competencies. Responses to questions about the motivations for choosing a leader are often superficial:

> *– (Why did you choose him?) I don't know.*
> *– Because he's cool.*
> (7th grade, small town, group 2)

In some cases, students perceive dependence on teachers and the relational nature of

representation (e.g., when the class needs something from a teacher):

> *[We choose] the one the teacher likes the most.* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

This may indicate limited trust in procedures and a belief that actual influence depends on interpersonal relationships rather than formal mechanisms.

Another factor limiting the development of civic experiences is the **formalisation and symbolic nature of some school institutions**, which are perceived more as organisational structures than as spaces for real participation. Among younger students, descriptions of the class president's role focus on orderly and organisational tasks:

> *– Move the chairs.*
> *– Clean the classroom.*
> *– Sweep the floor.*
> (2nd grade, large city, groups 1 and 2)

Such experiences may reinforce the belief that formal roles are technical rather than decision-making. At the same time, students recognise the communicative function of leaders, who act as intermediaries:

> *He probably goes to different classes and tells them what's happening at school.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

However, this illustrates the role of a student council member as a conveyor of top-down messages rather than bottom-up initiatives, which is the essence of this form of self-organisation.

Despite these limitations, it would be an oversimplification to claim that Generation Alpha students show low motivation to act. On the contrary, qualitative empirical material indicates high activity in **informal and grassroots forms of agency**. Young people frequently initiate actions, negotiate changes, and organise events. One of the most striking examples is the description of organising a school sleepover:

> *Thanks to our class (...) because we kept bothering our form teacher about it.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

These statements show that students understand agency as the ability to achieve specific goals through persistence, peer pressure, and relationships with teachers. Collaboration and communication within peer groups also play an important role, often supported by digital tools.

Conclusions

The research findings suggest that Generation Alpha does not reject the idea of participation but **prefers forms that are more flexible, direct, and relationship-based**. Formal structures are important to them as a reference point, yet **actual agency develops through daily activities, negotiations, and joint problem-solving**. This indicates a high civic potential for this generation, which, however, does not always find expression in institutional forms of representation.

From an educational practice perspective, these findings point to the need for:

- earlier inclusion of younger students in formal decision-making processes,
- increasing the real competencies of student councils,
- strengthening the transparency of electoral procedures,
- integrating formal and informal forms of participation.

Such measures could harness the high motivation and agency of Generation Alpha and increase their trust in institutional mechanisms for shared decision-making.

Kinga Wojtas-Jarentowska

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION, EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY

I. European Union, European values and European identity – FGI analysis

Analysis of the focus group interview material indicates that Generation Alpha's perception of the European Union is fragmentary and strongly grounded in everyday experiences, digital media, and education. Young people's statements do not form a coherent picture but reconstruct the EU as a complex (and often random) collection of symbols, experiences, and cultural associations.

The European Union as a symbol and visual sign

The most prominent element in the narratives, particularly among the youngest respondents, is the symbolic dimension. The EU primarily functions as a recognisable visual sign, present in public spaces and daily surroundings:

> *With the stars.* (4th grade, rural area)

> *– With blue.*
> *– With the flag.*
> *– There's a blue background and stars in a circle.*
> *– Twelve!*
> (2nd grade, large city, group 2)

European symbolism is easily recognisable but is not connected to knowledge about institutions or decision-making processes. These aspects did not appear at all in the respondents' statements. Instead, they indicated the spaces where they observe the presence of EU symbols:

> *– Flags in front of hotels.*
> *– In hotels too.*
> (2nd grade, large city, group 2)

This suggests that European identity is initially constructed through contact with symbols and visual signs rather than through knowledge about the organisation or its institutions.

Europe as a cultural space and diversity

The analysed statements show a strong theme of cultural diversity. Europe and the EU are associated with a variety of cultures, languages, and nationalities:

> *Different cultures, nationalities for example.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

This indicates a developing awareness of pluralism and cultural diversity, which constitutes an important component of European values, although it is not yet articulated in the language of young respondents.

Mobility and travel experiences as a foundation for european identity

Direct experiences of mobility and contact with other European countries play an important role. Respondents refer to trips, school excursions, and content from social media channels:

> *Even recently we went on a trip to Berlin.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *Travel vlogs are cool, for example to Italy. Or France.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

Mobility is both real and mediated through social media, travel vlogs, or culinary content. This suggests that European experiences are constructed through culture rather than political reflection. None of the respondents referred to freedom of movement (Schengen), which can be interpreted as taking it for granted.

The EU in digital and pop-cultural spaces

An important source of knowledge about the EU is social media, memes, and digital content:

> *– On TikTok.*
> *– We have bottle caps attached and suddenly there's a real winter (ironically about the impact of EU regulations on climate change)* (4th grade, rural area)

> *I even saw a meme…* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

This knowledge is simplified, often humorous, and fragmentary. At the same time, it demonstrates that European socialisation occurs in digital spaces.

European values – peace, stability, and security

The material includes intuitive references to European values, particularly peace and stability:

> *That there are the fewest wars in Europe.* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

> *If it weren't for the European Union, we wouldn't be alive anymore.* (4th grade, rural area)

The European Union is perceived as a space of security and stability. Although respondents do not refer directly to European integration as a political project, they intuitively understand interdependencies and the importance of a political community.

The EU as a system of regulation and public decision-making

In young people's narratives, the EU also appears as an institution that makes decisions affecting everyday life. An example frequently mentioned is the regulation concerning bottle caps:

> *They attached caps to the bottles.* (4th grade, rural area)

> *Everyone gets annoyed with those bottle caps.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

This theme indicates that the EU is perceived as a regulatory structure intervening in daily life. At the same time, ambivalence emerges – such decisions are often evaluated as burdensome, reflecting narratives circulating on social media.

> *Sometimes these are decisions that will actually get in our way in life, rather than make it easier.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

Fragmentation and ambiguity of knowledge

The analysis shows that young people's knowledge is associative in nature and often based on loose connections:

> *– Belgian fries.*
> *– Pizza.*
> *– Lasagne.* (4th grade, rural area)

> *Tusk [Donald Tusk – Prime Minister of Poland].* (4th grade, rural area)

Alongside gastronomic references, there are also spontaneous associations with politicians, often without deeper context. This indicates that knowledge about the EU is fragmentary, and elements of popular culture, everyday life, and media representations operate on a similar cognitive level – as loose associations. In this perspective, Europe

is understood primarily as a cultural and tourist space, and only secondarily as a political project.

Conclusions

The analysis of the focus groups indicates that the European identity of Generation Alpha is at an early stage of formation and is characterized as:

- symbolic and visual,
- cultural and practical,
- digital and mediated through media,
- fragmentary and association-based.

Young people:

- recognize European symbols,
- identify cultural diversity as a defining feature of Europe and associate the European Union with mobility and travel,
- perceive it as a space of peace and stability and notice its regulatory impact on everyday life,
- display ambivalence toward specific policies.

At the same time, the limited reflection on institutions and the lack of in-depth knowledge about the mechanisms and dimensions of integration point to the need to develop European education in ways that are grounded in young people's lived experiences.

II. The European Union, European values and European identity in the narratives of Generation Alpha – IDI analysis

Material from the in-depth interviews (IDI) shows that the European Union functions in the minds of young respondents not so much as a coherent image of institutions and procedures, but rather as **a bundle of concrete experiences, regulations and media messages**, which can be organised along several clear interpretative axes: (1) the EU as *a source of standards and protection,* (2) the EU as *mobility and openness*, (3) the EU as *geopolitical security*, (4) the EU as *a field of disputes over rights and values*, (5) European identity as *an experience of travel, comparison and "being in the EU"*.

It is worth noting that the in-depth interviews with members of Generation Alpha reveal somewhat different observations than those emerging from the focus group interviews (FGI). The analysis of the individual interviews indicates that the European Union is

understood by young respondents primarily through concrete experiences, regulations and media narratives. Students' statements rarely refer to formal EU structures, and instead more often focus on everyday practices, mobility, security and disputes over rights.

It should be emphasised that most of the excerpts analysed in this section come from interviews with the oldest participants, located at the boundary between Generation Z and Generation Alpha (born in 2009 and 2010). Younger respondents, similarly to focus group participants, were reluctant to engage with European topics, often admitting that they lacked sufficient knowledge or interest.

The EU as standards and protection of quality of life

In some narratives, the EU appears as an actor that sets norms and standards affecting citizens' everyday lives. Respondents point to regulations concerning health, product quality and consumer protection:

> *I like that it's supervised (…) that there really is something that looks from above (…) and takes care of people.* (IDI, 16 years old)

This image of the EU is linked to protection and regulation. Statements often refer to concrete examples:

> *These bottle caps are the smallest thing (…) but actually it's some kind of caring for the environment.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *When it comes to food and colourings, the EU has banned several that are used in the US. I'm glad the EU banned them because they are so harmful. For example, there is a colouring that is banned in the EU. They found a healthier alternative. For me, this is an advantage of being in the EU. They care about making things healthier. Even if it is not as efficient as in the United States, it is safer and healthier.* (IDI, 16 years old)

The EU is thus conceptualised as an authority that "raises standards", even if specific regulations are sometimes perceived as inconvenient.

The EU as mobility and freedom of movement

An important element of the experience of Europeanness is mobility. Respondents perceive the EU as a space that enables travel, trade, and migration:

> *For example, we have the Schengen Area (…) it allows trade.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *I can easily travel to Europe and visit Europe. (...) If I wanted to move to Spain now, I could. I don't need a visa or permits.* (IDI, 16 years old)

From this perspective, the EU is primarily understood as a practical infrastructure of freedom.

The EU as security and stability

In some statements, the EU also appears in the context of security and geopolitical threats:

> *If we weren't in the EU Russia could [act] faster (…) it would be easier.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *If we left [the EU] the war could reach us sooner.* (IDI, 16 years old)

These narratives reveal a strong association of the EU with security and stability, although young respondents do not always clearly distinguish between the EU and NATO.

European values as rights and social conflicts

In the narratives of the oldest respondents at the intersection of Generation Z and Generation Alpha, include references to rights and normative disputes, particularly in the areas of women's rights and human rights:

> *I found out that there was going to be a vote in the European Parliament (…) on access to abortion.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *I noticed an organisation (…) that operates within the European Union. As a resident of the European Union I would like to show support for such organisations.* (IDI, 16 years old)

At the same time, young people demonstrate a growing awareness of disinformation:

> *I've seen AI-generated videos (…) about Poland leaving the EU.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *It was made very specifically for particular people.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *Recently I've been seeing more content criticising the EU (…) often poorly informed.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *It really plays on people's emotions (…) talking about immigrants.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *They're cleverly made (…) to persuade people who are unsure.* (IDI, 16 years old)

European identity as a comparative experience

European identity is shaped through experiences of travel and comparison:

> *I travelled a great deal around Europe with my parents. I was in Albania (…) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It kind of sank into my subconscious (…) that Poland would look like that too without the EU. These are post-communist countries (…) and yet the difference is significant.* (IDI, 16 years old)
>
> *My parents didn't just show me tourist places (…) but ordinary towns.* (IDI, 16 years old)
>
> *So that I could see for myself (…) that I don't want Poland to leave the European Union.* (IDI, 16 years old)

Here, the EU functions as a point of reference for assessing development and quality of life. The role of the family as a key site of European socialisation is also clearly visible.

The EU as a field of disputes and symbolic conflicts

The material also includes reflections on polarisation and disputes surrounding the EU:

> *These are topics that divide people.* (IDI, 16 years old)
>
> *There is a lot of this kind of content on the internet.* (IDI, 16 years old)

This shows that the EU is perceived not only as an integration project, but also as a space of social conflict.

Conclusions

The IDI analysis indicates that Generation Alpha's understanding of the European Union is:

- practical and experience-based,
- regulatory and protective,
- linked to mobility,
- grounded in a sense of security,
- connected to conflicts of evaluation (the EU as a polarising element) and to digital media.

European identity develops primarily through experiences of travel, developmental comparisons, and contact with media content. Young people's knowledge is fragmentary, yet at the same time shows growing reflexivity. The findings point to the need to develop European education that is rooted in young people's experiences, critical thinking, and media literacy.

Katarzyna Prachnio

HOW TO TALK TO YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT SERIOUS TOPICS

At the conclusion of both focus group and individual interviews, participants were asked to provide recommendations on creating content about important topics (e.g., social or political) for themselves and their peers.

Suggested topics were tailored to the respondents' age and interests. For the youngest members of Generation Alpha, this could include content about animals. The primary recommendation from 8-year-olds was to appeal to emotions. They believed that young audiences could be captured by an image of a sad animal:

> *I would take a photo of Shelly [my dog], then put a sad face on Shelly, and then write something like "save the dogs".* (2nd grade, large city, group 1)

Music was also considered important. To make a post about animals engaging and evoke empathy, it should have a nostalgic tone. They referenced a recently trending sad cat melody on social media[42]. Other ideas included starting a video with an animation or educational cartoon and adding emojis. The animal should appear natural, not generated by artificial intelligence.

Other groups also emphasised the importance of trends. Using trends was seen as an effective way to reach a large audience, although, as secondary school students pointed out, their role on social media is changing. New trends are appearing more frequently, but their popularity is increasingly short-lived.

> *For example, make a popular trend.* (4th grade, rural area)
>
> *– Well, there are these mini trends, you could say.*
> *– But they pass very quickly.*
> *– There are more and more of them…*
> *– More and more, and they disappear faster.*
> (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

[42] Cotneus - Cute Meow (Miaw Miaw Miaw Sad Song). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UczJBCk_34c.

The content of the video itself should be well thought out and presented according to a pre-written script. It should focus on the most important facts and key information – for example, if it's about an event, the date and location should be given immediately. Using the example of information about the aurora (which was recently visible in Poland, an unusual occurrence), young people highlighted the need to draw viewers' attention to the uniqueness of the phenomenon with a sensational headline.

> *One of the most important things is the text of the video and the background music.* (4th grade, rural area)

> *Say when the aurora is. Definitely, that it will be in Poland. Something like: "Northern Lights in Poland!"* (5th grade, rural area)

For young audiences, the visual aspect of content is also very important. A post needs to be "aesthetic", although individual preferences vary greatly. Some prefer a lot happening on screen, with many special effects, while others favour more balanced and calm content.

> *It should be interesting and aesthetic. Everyone has a different definition of aesthetics. For some, it's a photo… (Talk about yours) It has to be a colour… no, not colourful, but the colours should be coordinated, matched.* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

> *– Gesticulation is also nice.*
> *– But not too much, so it's not over the top. Just enough, not exaggerated.*
> (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *My idea for a reel is to start with a super cool intro, with lights, captions, special effects (gestures with hands)… and then I'll explain how to build a computer.* (4th grade, rural area)

The default format proposed by young people is a short video featuring one person, with additional "evidence" appearing on screen – photos or video clips relevant to the topic.

> *– One person speaks, and below appear photos.*
> *– Yes, lots of graphics. For example, as they talk, underneath there are photos, under their image. For instance, photographs or video clips from events.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *I would suggest showing a lot of the content they are talking about, so it's not just them talking, but also showing photos or short video clips. That way it's more engaging, and it avoids the monotony of someone just talking constantly – it just looks better.* (IDI, 14 years old)

According to the respondents, this format is the clearest and most persuasive. Having too many people on screen can create confusion. However, interesting alternatives

include dialogues (two people) and vox pops – these are seen as good ways to show young audiences that their voice matters. The discussions frequently highlighted the need to be heard, especially regarding topics that directly affect them.

> *– I also like the format where two people talk to each other, but no more. You can follow the conversation, but sometimes I prefer just one person speaking. More than that – like three or four people – it's confusing, because sometimes two or three talk at once.*
> *– A dialogue where, for example, an older person asks a younger person, and they answer with their opinion.*
> *– Or walking around a square, asking random people questions.*
> (7th grade, small town, group 2)

Sometimes, especially older Alphas, also watch longer videos, for example whilst eating meals or when they have more free time at the weekend – however, this did not come up directly in the recommendations for content creation, but in an earlier conversation about how they use the internet.

> *I'm sure lots of people do this, for example, watching something longer whilst eating, and then as soon as they get to bed after school, it's mainly short clips.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *[While eating] some long videos, and then, for example, on the bus or somewhere like that, something short, or during a break at school.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 2)

Even if a topic doesn't have a direct personal dimension for the audience, it's always valuable to find elements they can relate to. One group suggested covering the war in Ukraine. How should it be presented? In a "real-life" way – focusing on the lives of ordinary people, soldiers, and the appearance of cities. This approach is also a way to evoke emotion, but the respondents emphasized it primarily in the context of a journalistic narrative that provides them with real knowledge about people's lives.

> *I think it should be more "real-life." For example, showing the harsh conditions, which the soldiers who are fighting face, how bad the circumstances are. Or a city after the front has passed through – bombed, looted, destroyed.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 2)

Depending on the topic, another effective way to reach young people with qualitative information can be a meme. Funny or trivial content can engage young audiences more effectively than serious narratives. Some of them may stop there, but even then, they will retain some basic information on the topic (and often it sticks with them longer – the respondents mentioned memes that made them laugh and that they shared with friends).

> *Sometimes there are memes about important global politicians or something. When I was at school, everyone laughed at it, I don't know why… about Donald Trump doing something in Venezuela, something with that president. And everyone laughed about Donald Trump kidnapping that president.* (IDI, 12 years old)

> *For me, memes pop up a lot too, and I like watching them. For example, a lot with Tusk [Donald Tusk – Prime Minister of Poland] appears. But I watch it just to laugh. I wouldn't watch it seriously, only for fun.* (IDI, 14 years old)

For others, a meme can encourage further exploration. Paradoxically, a meme can sometimes fulfill an informational role better than standard content, because at least it reaches young people, instead of being skipped over like some conventional news, which they often find boring.

> *For example, I think I would be interested in some political issue if I saw a meme about it. Then I already have some references on TikTok. And I go in and explore the topic in a more serious way. I see the meme, and that's how I dive into it seriously.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

At the same time, contrasting serious, even tragic topics with humor can capture attention by shocking the audience. A joke in such a context is inappropriate or inconsistent with the rest of the message, and paradoxically, it can make the tragic situation hit harder and lead to deeper understanding.

> *It's easier for it to stick in my head, and then I have a greater… I think awareness of how serious it is. Because if someone talks very seriously, of course I understand the situation, but it doesn't really hit me… but if someone approaches it with humor and says the worst thing in a humorous way, it reaches me: "Oh Jesus, these are tragic things!" We joke, but these are tragic things. It's like reverse psychology.* (IDI, 16 years old)

In general, young audiences prefer to watch young creators (aged 20–35). It's not necessarily about age or appearance, but about the way they speak and present the message.

> *When someone my age says it, I'll listen more, like: "Oh, someone my age did this. Cool that they are talking about it".* (7th grade, small town, group 1)

> *Well, older people can work too. But then it has to be a proper statement. For example, if it's a serious topic and the voice is serious, that could also interest someone.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *– Someone our age is best.*
> *– Like 20 to 30 years old. After that, they start overcomplicating things.*
> (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *If it's something political and done by a party, then it shouldn't be older people who don't understand trends. But younger people.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

For young audiences, it is important that the information "has a face" – this builds trust in the channel and the credibility of the creator. In a world where text can be generated by AI in seconds, a real human presenter becomes a guarantee of accountability for the message. It also creates a certain relationship that makes it easier to absorb difficult topics. At the same time, the creator should be charismatic and able to engage viewers through their voice and narrative style.

> *After all, I think a real person [not AI] encourages more.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

> *Being human, because that's also difficult now, with AI and all. And that's what appeals to me, so if, for example, there was an AI voice, or someone who sounded like they hadn't slept for three days and was explaining something, it wouldn't get through to me because I would switch off.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *Usually on Instagram, if we see information, we don't see a person. I prefer seeing a human than not. (…) Avoid, I think, using AI, because even though people my age use a lot of AI, people still don't trust it. (…) People will choose a human voice.* (IDI, 15 years old)

However, the video needs more than just a "talking head". Additional elements, such as photos or clips, both diversify the visual layer and anchor the facts, and, to some extent, allow for their verification in real time. If the creator talks about an event and simultaneously shows a photo or footage of it, the audience feels the information is complete and reliable.

> *For my age group, it's important that a lot happens on the screen, like five things at once or something, to just hold attention.* (IDI, 16 years old)

> *The editing is done so that while he's talking, I see some video or footage of the facts he's mentioning. And it seems to me that it's quite reliable.* (IDI, 15 years old)

> *For me, the best content is when… if it's videos, it's not just some guy standing and talking and talking – you fall asleep. But there are, for example, a few people who take turns speaking. You can add some graphics to diversify it…* (IDI, 14 years old)

They tolerate swear words, and sometimes, in their opinion, these can even enhance the message (showing linguistic naturalness and the creator's authenticity, especially when discussing a topic that evokes strong emotions), though it should not be overdone.

> *– Often, when there is a video, for example, explaining something, there is this little AI character. And he talks about it. And often, for example, he swears. Maybe it doesn't reflect well on me, but it really encourages me to watch something like that.*
> *– Because it reaches us. It's our language.*
> *– Exactly, it shows that it wasn't created by, let's say, some grandpa.*
> (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

They are very irritated when someone tries too hard to be "youthful". This applies both to online creators and, for example, politicians or messages posted on social media by political parties. It's not about the age of the creator or that older people can't use youthful language – they just need to know how to use it. If done poorly, it comes off as ridiculous, and definitely not serious or convincing for young audiences.

> *I think it depends more on this, because you have to know when and how to use those words.* (7th grade, small town, group 2)

To capture young audiences' attention, a strong introduction is essential. Teenagers suggest primarily using a catchy hook:

> *– Short and to the point.*
> *– With graphics and a quick intro.*
> (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *The beginning is crucial because it decides whether I want to know, what will be next, whether to keep watching or not. It's similar to newspapers using an intriguing headline or interesting description.* (IDI, 13 years old)

> *Make a catchy headline.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 2)

> *If someone immediately states the topic, what he's talking about, it grabs attention. You clearly say what you're talking about first, and then give all that details. This is the best content for me I think, because I don't always stop for content if the topic isn't clear upfront.* (IDI, 14 years old)

The content itself should be short and concise, presenting the key facts while remaining relatable and understandable for young viewers. It may refer to examples that will give the audience a point of reference, e.g. help them understand a difficult issue or make them aware of the significance of an event for themselves.

> *When information is presented, it should be fast because people now have a short attention span – they have to keep scrolling.* (IDI, 15 years old)

> *– It could be a topic like "The Ministry of Education introduces school uniforms – what do we think?"*
> *– Or: "Zero baggy jeans!" or something like that.*

> *– Briefly explain the whole issue.*
> *– Intro first, then our opinion.*
> (7th grade, small town, group 2)

> *I like listening to people, but don't bore me. Good examples help, like when someone gives a fact and immediately an example. Because when I hear just a bare fact, it's like , I don't know, wind blowing past me.* (IDI, 15 years old)

Young people are aware that it's not easy to capture their attention on social media. For this reason, some suggest using a "trick" that triggers a strong emotional reaction. For example, they propose starting content with controversy or even frightening the audience.

> *Something absurd or controversial, and then the content is actually what we want to convey. Or something, I don't know, showing reality in a maybe slightly exaggerated way…* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 2)

> *Maybe something like climate change or the environment in general. Or the impact of artificial intelligence on the environment. I think first I'd have to scare them [my peers] a bit… (laughs) Sorry, but that's how it works. For example, what the world might look like, what could happen if we don't stop doing this, something dystopian, for example.* (1st year of secondary school, medium-sized city, group 1)

The reaction of the interviewee herself is significant – she feels some discomfort (laughs, apologises), recognising that scaring people might not be the best way to communicate, she accepts the reality – it is one of the few effective methods. This also reflects a kind of generational cynicism – even if they dislike the realities of today's world and social media practices, they learn to navigate them according to the rules of the game. For online content to succeed, boredom is worse than controversy. Although clickbait is generally annoying, its "substantive version" can work in serious content, capturing the audience's attention and then delivering something meaningful.

It's also important not to stick to a single platform. Since young people are present on multiple channels, content creators should follow them there (or rather, stay ahead of them). When targeting Generation Alpha, the focus should be on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Facebook is less popular among this group, and X/Twitter barely reaches them at all. Diversification should also extend to content itself – testing different formats across platforms is recommended.

> *If creators want to reach people my age, they should try several platforms at once, so it's not all happening on TikTok – TikTok, Instagram, YouTube. To build your channel.* (IDI, 16 years old)

Additionally, individual interview participants recommended persistence and engagement for potential content creators. Some emphasised quantity, others quality:

> *The whole trick is just to target a specific group of people and keep making new videos, because the more videos you make, the sooner the algorithm will show them, logically.* (IDI, 14 years old)

> *Don't try to stand out. Standing out is a side effect of what you do. Do what you enjoy. And over time, if you're consistent… it will mean for you creating valuable content, and eventually, you'll get noticed.* (IDI, 15 years old)

Summary

In summary, Generation Alpha is quite aware of how platforms work and how young audiences' attention functions. Our respondents provided a set of recommendations that can help online creators effectively reach this group.

Participants show a strong need for contact with a "real human". In an era dominated by AI, human presence becomes a guarantor of reliability. Creators should tailor their content to the audience's age, but they should not try too hard to be "youthful", as this can result in awkward or forced use of teen slang. Authenticity is key.

Capturing the viewer's attention is decided in the first few seconds of a video. The beginning should feature a "hook" – recommended strategies include catchy headlines and controversial statements that pull the viewer out of passive scrolling.

Editing and visual "layering" are also important. A talking head alone is perceived as monotonous. Content must be supported with real-time evidence – videos, photos, graphics, or on-screen data. This enhances credibility while making the visual layer more engaging. Other effective formats include dialogues and vox pops.

It is also important to present issues in a "real-life" manner, drawing on examples and clearly showing what a given event means for ordinary young people.

Humour and memes are not treated merely as entertainment but as a primary informational format. Funny content often serves as a starting point for deeper exploration of a topic.

Kinga Wojtas-Jarentowska

Limitations

The results presented should be interpreted with a number of methodological limitations in mind, stemming both from the research techniques used (IDI, FGI, online surveys) and the characteristics of the study group – Generation Alpha.

Exploratory nature of the study

The study was primarily exploratory and diagnostic. Its aim was to understand the thinking, language, and experiences of young audiences in the context of civic and media projects, rather than to test statistical hypotheses. This means that the results are not representative and cannot be generalised to all young people in Poland. The use of qualitative method triangulation (IDI and FGI), supplemented by an online survey, increased interpretive reliability and deepened understanding of the phenomena analysed.

Age-related limitations

Another important limitation is the age of the respondents. Generation Alpha is at an early stage of civic and cognitive socialisation, which affects:

- the fragmentary and intuitive nature of reflections,
- limited ability to think abstractly about institutions,
- strong grounding of opinions in daily and relational experiences,
- difficulties in articulating political and social views.

Younger respondents may also be more susceptible to suggestion, peer pressure, and situational context. At the same time, their responses are often situational, emotional, and based on examples from their immediate surroundings.

Group dynamics in focus groups (FGI)

Using focus groups allowed for capturing the interactive nature of young people's opinions, but this also carries risks of more active participants dominating and of group conformity. In some cases, participants might adjust their responses to match group

norms or peer expectations. The presence of other students could also limit openness on sensitive topics, such as power relations at school or experiences of inequality.

Institutional context of the research

FGIs were conducted in a school environment, which could influence how respondents answered. They might have perceived the study as linked to the school, encouraging socially desirable responses. This applies especially to assessments of teachers, public institutions, or adherence to rules.

Sampling and respondent availability

In IDIs, purposive and convenience sampling was used, based on respondent availability and willingness to participate. This was related to organisational constraints, such as timing, school holidays, and access to schools and students. This recruitment method may have led to an overrepresentation of more open, communicative, and socially interested individuals. Consequently, the sample may have included fewer students with low civic engagement or limited communication skills.

Limitations of in-depth interviews (IDI)

In-depth interviews captured individual experiences and narratives, but their number was limited. In some cases, respondents had difficulty developing abstract reflections, resulting in shorter, more situational responses. Moreover, the researcher–respondent relationship, especially with children and younger adolescents, may create asymmetry and a tendency to give “correct” answers.

Online and offline research

Some interviews were conducted online, increasing respondent accessibility and organisational flexibility, but this introduces additional limitations. Remote contact may reduce observation of non-verbal communication, affect concentration, and make trust-building harder. In-person interviews allow for deeper interaction but may increase situational pressure. These differences could affect the style and openness of responses.

Limitations of online surveys

Online surveys allowed reaching a broader group of respondents, but the method carries risks of self-selection and limited control over questionnaire completion. Parents or older siblings might influence younger participants’ answers, and differences in access to digital devices or technological skills may arise. Younger respondents may also misunderstand questions.

Impact of digital culture and social media

Young respondents' opinions are strongly embedded in digital, meme-driven, and fragmentary culture. This may make it harder to interpret concepts such as democracy, Europe, or public institutions clearly. At the same time, the fast-changing media environment means young people's opinions and narratives can change quickly.

Temporal and contextual limitations

The study was conducted at a specific socio-political moment, which may influence respondents' interpretations. Results therefore reflect the current social and media context rather than permanent attitudes.

Despite these limitations, the research strategy allowed for obtaining a deep and multidimensional picture of Generation Alpha's attitudes, language, and experiences. The findings provide a solid basis for recommendations on designing civic and journalistic content aimed at young audiences.

Katarzyna Prachnio

Conclusion and recommendations

Members of Generation Alpha treat the internet as their natural environment. They are "digital natives" – they do not know a world without the internet, and technology is not an addition to reality but an integral part of it. In their world, the internet primarily serves social purposes (communication with peers) and entertainment (online gaming, short- and long-form videos), as well as educational and informational functions. While family remains the main source of information, older Alphas increasingly rely on social media and friends who are also immersed in digital environments. At the same time, knowledge often reaches them incidentally – they rarely seek information intentionally, instead consuming whatever the algorithm presents.

It is therefore crucial to reach Generation Alpha with high-quality information to support them in becoming conscious internet users and active citizens in the future. How can this be done effectively?

Choice of format

Short videos are the preferred format for Generation Alpha – including TikToks, Reels, and Shorts. Dynamic, concise content is far more effective at capturing and holding their attention than other types of online material.

Since young people often acquire information incidentally, memes are an ideal means of delivering news or more serious content, subtly delivered beneath a layer of humour.

Longer video formats are also popular, as they allow for deeper exploration of a topic.

Content preparation

The content of a video should be carefully planned and follow a pre-written script. It should focus on the most important facts and key information. For example, if covering

an event, the date and location should be stated upfront. Content can refer to examples that provide the audience with a point of reference, helping them understand complex topics or appreciate the significance of an event for themselves.

When preparing content, it is important to find the right balance – on one hand, the necessary context should be provided, but on the other, the material should not be too detailed or too long. Additional information can be included in the video description or in separate supplementary materials.

Diversifying content and platforms

Taking the previous points into account, diversification is key – it is worth testing different formats across multiple platforms and breaking content into smaller parts. A complex topic, for example, could be presented as a meme (teasing or sparking initial curiosity), a short TikTok video (generating interest and presenting basic information), and a longer YouTube video (providing broader context, deeper analysis, and more details).

Since young people are present across multiple channels, content creators should follow them there (or rather, stay ahead of them). This approach can help reach a wider audience with diverse needs, interests, and cognitive abilities.

Presenter

For serious content, Alphas prefer a real person over an impersonal artificial intelligence. It is important for young audiences that information “has a face” – this builds trust in the channel and credibility for the creator.

The presenter should have their own style and be able to engage viewers through their way of storytelling. Ideally, they should be “young” – not necessarily in terms of age or appearance, but in the way they speak and connect with the audience. Choosing younger creators offers a high potential for identification: a similar language code and way of being make the content more relatable and easier to understand.

Multi-layered content

To capture the attention of quickly distracted Alphas, a video cannot consist solely of a person speaking to the camera. Engaging editing is crucial. Recommendations often emphasised adding supplementary content – primarily photos or clips related to the topic. These serve multiple purposes. First, they enhance the visual appeal of the material, helping prevent the audience from becoming bored or losing focus. Second, they contribute to credibility.

Credibility

Alphas value creators who provide convincing arguments and supporting data. Credibility is strengthened when sources are clearly presented. Additional video and images referencing events, phenomena, or people can serve a similar function. When a creator discusses an event while simultaneously showing a relevant photo or clip, the audience perceives the information as complete and reliable. This approach not only enriches the visual layer but also enhances the creator's credibility.

The crucial first seconds

Effective communication with Generation Alpha requires balancing substance with strong attention-grabbing elements. A key part of any content is a catchy opening – the hook, headline, or thumbnail. This determines whether the viewer stops to watch or scrolls past. The hook can be sensational, controversial, or emotional, but it must remain honest. While young people reject empty clickbait, they accept a certain degree of exaggeration if it captures their attention.

Music

Posts should include an appropriate soundtrack, whether it's a video or a compilation of photos or graphics. To maximise reach, it can be useful to use sounds or music that are currently trending on social media. However, it should always match the tone and theme of the content (e.g., nostalgic, energetic).

Language

In addition to being brief and concise, the content must be understandable for a young audience. This means using simple and natural language. Even when explaining complex concepts or processes, they should be translated into straightforward terms. Creators should avoid trying to artificially adopt youth slang. If used incorrectly, it can appear awkward and unconvincing rather than relatable. Attention should also be given to clear pronunciation and appropriate pacing.

What does it mean for me?

A crucial factor in engaging Generation Alpha is giving content a personal and practical dimension. Young audiences evaluate material based on its relevance and impact on their own lives. Effective content allows viewers to find points of connection with their own experiences, emotions, or values. Young people engage with material that answers the question: "How does this affect me?"

Demonstrating a direct link between global events (e.g., climate change, political decisions) and the local, everyday perspective of young people transforms passive consumption into active interest.

Humor

Humour is one of the most effective ways to capture the attention of Generation Alpha, acting as a bridge between entertainment and education. Funny content should not be seen as merely trivial amusement. In the process of acquiring knowledge, it can serve as a first point of contact with a topic – often a complex or distant one, such as politics.

Moreover, young users primarily seek light and positive content online. Memes are memorable and widely shared among peers, making them an effective way of delivering news while encouraging viewers to later explore the topic in a more substantive way.

Text-and-graphics format (e.g., carousels)

Although video is the preferred format, participants offered some guidance for text-based materials. When using this format, visual presentation is crucial – text should be accompanied by plenty of illustrations, photos, or emojis. Text should be concise and set in a clear, well-chosen font for easy reading. Paragraphs should be clearly marked, bullet points used, and key information highlighted. As with video content, attention must be captured immediately with a compelling headline and/or engaging visuals.

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List of tables and figures

Table 1. Respondents by age and gender..... 23
Figure 1. Respondents by place of residence..... 24
Table 2. Number of respondents by voivodeship (administrative units), by age group..... 24
Figure 2. Number of hours spent online per day on a weekday and on a weekend day..... 26
Table. 3. Average number of hours spent online per day..... 27
Figure 3. Personal smartphone ownership..... 28
Figure 4. Personal smartphone ownership by age..... 28
Figure 5. Purposes of using the internet..... 30
Figure 6. Use of apps and online platforms..... 32
Table. 4. Percentage of respondents who use the most popular social media platforms every day, by age..... 33
Figure 7. Topics on the internet that interest Generation Alpha..... 36
Figure 8. Features that make online content interesting for Generation Alpha..... 37
Figure 9. What usually makes you like, comment on, or share content online?..... 39
Figure 10. Generation Alpha's sources of information..... 43
Figure 11. Exposure to false or misleading content in the last month..... 46
Figure 12. Reaction to false or misleading information..... 47
Figure 13. Methods of verifying whether information is true..... 48
Table 5. Percentage of respondents who use selected methods of information verification, by age group and by gender..... 49
Figure 14. Following influencers and online creators on social media..... 51
Figure 15. Following influencers and online creators on social media by age..... 52
Figure 16. Reasons why Generation Alpha follows influencers and content creators..... 53
Figure 17. Reasons why Generation Alpha unfollows influencers and content creators..... 54
Figure 18. Preferred types of content for Generation Alpha..... 56
Figure 19. Content that Generation Alpha believes adults should create for young people..... 57

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Appendix 1. Survey questionnaire

Alpha Survey January 2026

Poland

Hello!

Thank you for helping us with this questionnaire. We want to learn more about how children and teenagers use the internet: what they do online, what interests them, and what kind of content they like.

Your answers are private and anonymous. We do not collect names, and no one (parents, teachers, classmates) will see your individual answers.

There are no right or wrong answers. Please choose the option that feels closest to what you do or think. You can skip any question you don't understand or don't want to answer.

The questionnaire takes about 6–8 minutes.

Thank you very much for your help!

USE OF INTERNET AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Q1. How much time do you spend on the internet on a typical weekday (Monday to Friday)?

Number of hours per day: ……..

Q2. How many hours do you spend on the internet on a weekend day (Saturday or Sunday)?

Number of hours per day: ……..

Q3. Do you have a personal smartphone?

- Yes
- No, and I almost never use a smartphone
- No, but I often borrow a smartphone from a family member
- No, but I often borrow a smartphone from friends

Only in the Polish survey: Q4.A. What do you use the internet for?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- do homework or prepare for tests and exams
- learn new things not related to school (e.g. tutorials, how to do something)

- look up information about my interests or hobbies
- listen to music or audiobooks
- watch movies, TV series, or videos
- play online games
- chat or stay in touch with other people
- use social media
- post on social media
- use online stores and auction sites
- create things online (e.g. drawings, videos, music)
- read news or articles
- other ……..

Q4.B. What do you use the internet for <u>every day or almost every day</u>?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- do homework or prepare for tests and exams
- learn new things not related to school (e.g. tutorials, how to do something)
- look up information about my interests or hobbies
- listen to music or audiobooks
- watch movies, TV series, or videos
- play online games
- chat or stay in touch with other people
- use social media
- post on social media
- use online stores and auction sites
- create things online (e.g. drawings, videos, music)
- read news or articles
- other ……..

Only in the Polish survey: Q5.A. Which applications and online platforms do you use?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- audio streaming (e.g. Spotify, Apple Music)
- Chatbots (e.g. ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Character.AI)
- Discord
- Facebook
- Fortnite
- Instagram
- instant messengers (e.g. Messenger, WhatsApp)
- Minecraft
- Pinterest
- Reddit
- Roblox

- Snapchat
- TikTok
- Twitter/X
- YouTube
- other ……..

Q5.B. Which applications and online platforms do you use every day?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- audio streaming (e.g. Spotify, Apple Music)
- Chatbots (e.g. ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Character.AI)
- Discord
- Facebook
- Fortnite
- Instagram
- instant messengers (e.g. Messenger, WhatsApp)
- Minecraft
- Pinterest
- Reddit
- Roblox
- Snapchat
- TikTok
- Twitter/X
- YouTube
- other ……..

TOPICS AND ONLINE CONTENT

Q6. What topics are you most interested in online?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- School (learning, homework)
- Relationships with others (friends, conversations, keeping in touch)
- Health and well-being (self-care, feelings, mental health)
- Sports and physical activity (exercise, training, athletes, competitions, and championships)
- Fashion and appearance (clothes, styles, makeup)
- Nature, environment, and climate (animals, nature, climate change)
- Technology and artificial intelligence (new technologies, apps, artificial intelligence)
- News (world news and current events)
- Gaming (gaming news, streamers, e-sports)
- Music (bands, albums, concerts, fandoms)
- Books (characters, reviews, fandoms)

- Video and online entertainment (movies, TV series, memes, humor)
- Other: ……..

Q7. What makes an online post, video, or article interesting for you?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- It is funny
- It is short and fast
- It has interesting graphics or editing
- It is about a topic I like
- It is emotional or moving
- I like the creator
- It helps me learn something
- It is surprising or unusual
- Other: ……..
- I don't know / Not sure

Q8.A. What usually makes you like, comment on, or share content online?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- It is funny
- It is helpful
- It feels important
- I want my friends to see it
- I want to support the person who made it
- It makes me feel strong emotions
- I rarely do this
- Other: ……..

Only in the Polish survey: Q8.B. Can you give an example of content that you recently found important?

Only if Q8.A. is "It feels important"

Open text

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Q9.A. Which source do you use most often to find out what is happening in the world? (check all that apply)

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- TV
- Online news websites
- Social media
- Family
- Friends
- School
- Influencers
- AI chatbots

Only in the Polish survey: Q9.B. Which social media accounts do you check most often when you want to find out what's happening in Poland and around the world?

*Only if Q9.A. is "*Social media" or "Influencers"

Open text

Q10.A. In the past month, have you seen content that seemed false or misleading?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know / I don't remember

<u>If YES at Q10, apply Q10B AND Q10C; otherwise, skip to Q11A.</u>

Q10.B. What did you do when you saw information that looked false?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- Ignored it
- Unfollowed the creator
- Checked it in another place
- Reported it
- Told someone about it
- Did nothing
- Other: ……..

Q10.C. How do you usually check if information online is true or reliable?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- I check it in another source
- I ask an adult
- I look at whether the source is trustworthy
- I read the comments
- I use AI tools (e.g., chatbots)
- I don't check

- Other: ……..

RELATIONSHIP WITH INFLUENCERS AND CREATORS

Q11.A. Do you follow any influencers or content creators on social media?

- Yes
- No
- I don't use any social media

<u>If YES at Q11A, apply Q11AA, Q11B AND Q11C, otherwise, skip to Q12.</u>

Only in the Polish survey: Q11AA. Who is your favorite content creator?

Open text

Q11.B. Why do you follow influencers or content creators?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- For entertainment
- To learn something
- Because I like them or they feel authentic
- They talk about important topics
- They have a funny or interesting style
- Because others follow them

Q11.C. What makes you unfollow a creator?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- Too many posts
- Content becomes boring
- Too many ads
- Their style changes
- They post things I don't agree with
- I stop liking them
- I rarely unfollow creators

WHAT CONTENT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Q12. What types of content do you like the most?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- Short videos (e.g., TikTok, Reels, Shorts)
- Longer videos (e.g., YouTube 5+ minutes)
- Memes
- Stories
- Livestreams
- Photos with captions
- Quizzes, polls, interactive content
- Articles or longer texts
- No preference

Q13. What types of content should adults (media, teachers, creators) make for young people?

Rotate the answer options.

You can choose more than one answer

- Educational content
- Content about everyday life of young people
- Funny or entertaining content
- Content about emotions or mental health
- Content about friendships and relationships
- News explained in a simple way
- Environmental/climate topics
- Other: ……..

Only in the Polish survey: Q14. What should a post on a serious topic (e.g., an important event, elections, the climate crisis, etc.) look like for you to find it interesting and read or watch it to the end?

Open text

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Q15. What is your sex/gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Q16. How old are you?

Open numeric

Q17. Type of school:

- Primary school
- Secondary school
- Other: ……..

Q18.A. Place of residence:
Enter the full name of the town where you live. We just want to know the size of the town. If you do not want to give the name, please enter whether it is a village or a city and how many inhabitants it has (you can check this on the internet, e.g. on Wikipedia).

……

Q18.B. Voivodeship:

- Dolnośląskie
- Kujawsko-pomorskie
- Lubelskie
- Lubuskie
- Łódzkie
- Małopolskie
- Mazowieckie
- Opolskie
- Podkarpackie
- Podlaskie
- Pomorskie
- Śląskie
- Świętokrzyskie
- Warmińsko-mazurskie
- Wielkopolskie
- Zachodniopomorskie

Q19. What language is spoken in your home?
If more than one language is spoken, indicate the one you speak most often.

- Polish
- English
- Ukrainian
- Other: ……..