GENERATION Z AND CONSUMPTION: HOW COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT SHAPES YOUTH CHOICES

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ABSTRACT *Using smart applications, members of Generation Z communicate in their networks on a wide range of issues, which forms their social sensitivity and makes impact on their consumption. The article focuses on Generation Z in Central and East Europe (CEE) where youth as a share of the total population is the smallest in the world. This study investigates Generation Z in Lithuania, one of the CEE countries, and presents the results of a large-scale survey of youth which analyses the expression of consumption and its interconnection with characteristics formed by social media. There are three main characteristics that explain consumption by Generation Z: cultural tolerance, social tolerance and tolerance to otherness on the network. This threefold theoretical model was proved using the Structural Equation Model (SQM). On the basis of this test we found out that social mindset is the strongest mediator between communication environment and consumption by Generation Z. At the same time, communication environment motivates for self-reward and hedonic consumption which does not compete and goes along with the social mindset. We conclude that Gen Z is a new group in consumer society that is distinctive by its unique characteristics.*

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INTRODUCTION

Each generation has its own characteristics due to a different communication environment. Since the largest amount of information reaches Generation Z (Hume, 2010: 385-94) (Gen Z) through mobile technologies, this creates unique communication environment where decisions and choices are made. Thus, changes in consumption are understood by analysing communication environment where generation becomes a research object. The main variables in such a study are the values and choices of consumption formed by the social media and social networking. Communication environment leads to unique social barriers and opportunities, technological activity, distinctive social perceptions and norms (Hume, 2010: 385-94; Ordun and Ordun, 2015: 40-55) and finally the generation affects consumption more than education or gender. The number of studies on Gen Z is growing; however, research on Gen Z consumptions is fragmented and dominated by North American researchers. These studies confirm that Gen Z is different from all the others in terms of interconnection between communication environment, social values and consumption. Research in the USA showed that members of Gen Z are sensitive to social issues on social media and therefore they give priority to the values while purchasing: they tend to use brands or goods to support the idea that is important for them and reject using brands whose ideas or behaviours do not match their own values (Ferguson, 2018). This and other studies performed in the USA highlight the global communication environment and its impact on the choices this generation makes. However, there are no studies that would confirm the unity of Gen Z across different countries. On the contrary, studies of previous generations show that differences in behaviour of generations in different countries are essential (Grant, 2018). This is why research on Gen Z at the national level is important. Therefore, this article will investigate how contemporary communication environment shapes Gen Z's consumer behaviour in Lithuania. Lithuania was chosen as one of the Central and East European (CEE) countries where according to the UN Report (World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2018), youth as a share of the total population is the smallest in the world.

The article presents the results of a large-scale survey of Lithuanian youth which analysed the expression of consumption and its interconnection with other characteristics that represent Gen Z in the communication environment. The research measures consumption in line with three characteristics driven by social media: cultural tolerance, tolerance to otherness in networking and social mindset.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we review existing literature and conceptualize the notion of generation and consumption in a changing communication environment. Second, we define the main characteristics of Generation Z and the measures of consumptions. We continue by outlining our research instrument and measurement model. The hypothesised measurement model was tested using the Structural Equation Model in two stages with AMOS ("IBM SPSS Amos" 2017) software.

UNDERSTANDING GENERATIONS

The communication environment affects generations differently, thus each and every one of them has different communication patterns and habits. Gen Z, also known as 'digital natives', emerged in cyberspace, so their content and habits of communication and consumption are different from those of previous generations, making them unique consumers.

The age of consumers is one of the most important characteristics of consumer markets. The age group is perceived as a factor determining social, cultural and political identity; therefore, the study of generations is given a great deal of attention in marketing and communication studies (Bolton *et al*., 2013: 245–67). The last three generations are divided into Gens X, Y and Z on account of their differences (Table 1). For instance, Gen Y that prefers teamwork precedes Gen Z, representatives of which are in their early thirties and like individual work as well as freedom of speech whether it is on the Internet, in school, or at home. This generation, however, prefers social networks to other means of communication. Meanwhile, Gen Xers, whose age varies between 38 and 53 years, are usually parents of Gen Z, are less prone to discrimination compared to the previous generations. In the Euromonitor International commissioned study it is noted that Gen Z is more honest than their elders (Make Way for Generation Z, 2011).

The differences between generations could be explained using a paradigm of social capital. Social capital is accumulated in the process of socialization that enables a person to recognize strategies and principles of other people's actions. Thus, while communicating with their generation, people learn generation-specific behavioural strategies. These strategies make a critical impact in understanding consumer behaviour. This approach to consumer behaviour extends our understanding of the differences in consumption inherent in the sociological approach which arise from social factors such as income levels, social class, personality traits, *etc*.

Table 1. **Characteristics of X, Y and Z generations (source: created by the authors, based on Bolton et al. (2013: 245–67), Make Way for Generation Z (2011), Schroer (2019) and Spenny (2014)**

Characteristics	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z
Date of birth	1965-1979	1980-1994	1995-2011
Philosophy	Scepticism	Optimism	Realism
Main characteristics	Rebellion	Motivation	Frivolousness
Involvement	Local society	International society	Global society
Role	Mixed	Collectivism	Individualism
Activity level	Low	Medium	High
Knowledge level	Low/medium	Medium	High
Qualification	Hard work, education	Paid education	Learning for oneself
Attitudes in consumption	Value autonomy and personal data	Prefer webrooming	Insistence on convenience, fun and economical

In the age of digital technology, generations are analysed as audiences. In this discourse, the new generation is treated as naturally technology savvy. Prensky (2001: 1-6) was first to use the terms 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' to describe differences between new and old generations. Despite the criticism of this approach (Hargittai, 2010: 92–113), it helps to distinguish one generation from the previous ones in the new communication environment.

Gen Z, born in 1995 and later, is the first digital generation. This means that they were born when digital technology had already been developed and was fully used to communicate (Fortunati, Taipale, and de Luca, 2019: 95–112), shaping the characteristics of this generation. According to Schroer (2019), Gen Z is the most diverse of all generations as they live in the globalization era which is the "golden age" of new technologies and means of communication. Being native in digital environment forms tolerance of others, and networking abilities (Turner, 2015: 103–13). Trust in "others" is related to content sharing as Gen Z is sharing to a greater extent about their personal life on social networks. At the same time, scientists (Kubátová, 2016: 61–70; Targamadzė *et al.*, 2015) distinguish a lot of negative characteristics such as prioritizing one's interests, forming one's opinion, not accepting other opinions, not trying to meet the norms and requirements of the society, *etc*. Thus, versatility and, at the same time, egocentricity are mutually compatible characteristics of Gen Z that determine their behaviour in the communication environment and their unique approach to the surroundings.

COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCE ON GEN Z ATTITUDES WHICH AFFECT CONSUMPTION

The analysis of Gen Z allows us to take a new perspective on consumption. Using smart applications, members of this generation communicate in their networks on a wide range of issues, which forms preferences and affect consumer choices. We propose that since Gen Z is a digital generation characterized by hyper-connectivity, they generate endless new wants that are attached to their social environment. We marked out three interlinked factors that define consumption by Gen Z and segregate it from the generations of their predecessors. They are (1) cultural tolerance, (2) tolerance to otherness, and (3) social mindset (Figure 1).

X & Y generation-specific characteristic	Z generation-specific characteristic
Ethnocentrism	Cultural tolerance
Uniformity	Tolerance to otherness
Productive mindset	Social mindset

▲ *Figure 1.*
Transformation of consumers' characteristics that outline consumption by Gen Z

Cultural tolerance (global focus) in consumption is typical of Gen Z and it becomes one of the main characteristics which separate this generation from ethnocentrism attentive predecessors. With the expansion of global media, tolerance to culturally different people and products is rising among youth. According to Kimball (2019), we can observe the global culture of youth that "is more accepting of differences that their elders". With increased globalization and economic development, young consumers become cosmopolitan and realize that home and foreign products are equally competitive (Jin *et al.*, 2015: 380–93). Cultural tolerance is manifested not only in consumption, but also in other areas of life. For example, 62% of Gen Z say that helping people of the world is a very important value in their life and it is 18% more than the average of all adults (Morning Consult, 2018). Despite the fact that youth is creating their social identities very carefully, cultural identity is losing its momentum, hence our first hypothesis is:

H1: Cultural tolerance (global focus) is positively related to consumption by Gen Z

Equally important is factual behaviour in social networks where *tolerance to otherness in networking* is proved. Members of Gen Z are more tolerant than their predecessors regarding all minorities (sexual, ill-health, cultural, *etc.*) as ICT erases the boundaries between majorities and minorities, as according to Milner (2016), communication becomes purely instrumental where status concerns are less important:

H2: Tolerance to otherness in networking is positively related to consumption by Gen Z

Gen Z is described as a *socially-minded* group of consumer society. Gen Z's choices are based on customer experience where interaction, transparency and social accountability become inseparably linked to consumption. As stated in large scale research, more than 50% of Gen Z purchase brands if they know a brand is socially conscious (Ferguson, 2018). Very strong social mindset in consumption is indicated in Nielsen's (2015) survey; according to it, 72% of Gen Z are willing to pay more for the brands with reputation for environmental stewardship. In this context, Gen Z can be defined as socially conscious consumers. By definition, a socially conscious consumer is the one "who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change" (Webster, 1975: 188). It should be noted that, while purchasing, members of Gen Z take into account only those social issues that highly resonate with their values and at the same time they are highly demanding. Using smart applications, members of this generation communicate in their networks on a wide range of issues, which forms preferences and affects consumer choices. We propose that since Gen Z is a digital generation characterized as hyper-connectivity, they generate endless new wants that are attached to their social environment. Taking into account theories of modern consumer behaviour, consumption by Gen Z can be explained as 'production of consumption' rather than 'consumption of production' (Campbell, 2018: 77–105; Lukacs 1972), *i.e.*, consumption rises from attachment rather than fear of unfulfilled needs.

H3: Social mindset is positively related to consumption by Gen Z

The analysis of Gen Z allows us to take and test a new perspective on consumption where social mindset, tolerance to otherness and cultural tolerance shape young consumer choices.

MOTIVES FOR GEN Z CONSUMPTION

The literature explains that communication environment is the main driver for *conspicuous consumption* and *hedonic consumption* (Bögenhold and Naz, 2018: 3952; Koles *et al.*, 2018: 96–133; O'Cass and McEwen, 2004: 25-39). However, the external (*conspicuous)* and internal (*hedonic*) contradiction in motivation to consume has not been addressed sufficiently in measuring Gen Z's consumption. In this section, we review these two classical characteristics and justify the factors that are relevant to Gen Z.

Taking Gen Z as the research object, it is important to consider the impact of symbols of lifestyles and social norms that surround them. Following Zentner (2016), symbols represent values and attitudinal behaviour, and they also force youth to connect with certain lifestyle or attitudinal group. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), habitus forms a lifestyle which is a formed stereotype of behaviour that consists of symbols influenced by consumer goods. Consumption includes signs, symbols, ideas, and values that distinguish one social group from another. Thus, a generation's behaviour is a kind of interaction between the individual and the society using symbols.

Taking this classical approach of symbols in consumption, *conspicuous consumption* by Gen Z could be explained as follows: conspicuous consumption is a consumption of symbols and is not so much a way to meet one's needs as much as the desire to stand out, express or create one's own status in the society. Taking Veblen's perspective (Currid-Halkett *et al.*, 2019: 83–117) on consumption and its theory of conspicuous consumption, Gen Z could be described as a group of consumers with a clear indication of conspicuous consumption. They demand not only utility or functionality but also require from the brands to reveal socioeconomic position (Currid-Halkett *et al.*, 2019: 83–117). The process of purchasing is associated with the consumer's social image and status (Duan and Dholakia, 2018: 64-80) and groups of the society chooses a life of idleness which in the long run gives way to conspicuous consumption. This is manifested in the acquisition of exceptional goods and services that exceed personal needs. Thus, at first sight, irrational behaviour has a rational social foundation and is directed to prove one's solvency and high social status.

Social identification, especially in social networking, draws the red line that distinguishes Gen Z from previous generations. Studies show that *social identification* has a direct effect on the participation in online communities as well as on purchasing preferences on line (Lee *et al.*, 2011:59-63). Already the German sociologist Simmel presented the ideas of consumption from the perspective of fashion, which the scientist

considered to be one of the forms of social interaction as it means at the same time belonging to a particular social class, group as well as uniqueness (Frisby, 2013). In this context, consumption is the process of social identification which, in connection with fashion, distinguishes social classes since it expresses and emphasizes the urge for social equalization.

In addition to social identification, Gen Z's consumption is characterised as a desire for *individual differentiation*. It is a pursuit of imitation and the aspiration to stand out. Exclusivity, superior functionality and innovation in consumption could have a much greater impact on people's daily lives than other behavioural activities. Money is spent on exclusive computer games, fashion and beauty products, technical equipment, and music as well as snacks and drinks. Researchers point out that celebrity culture, the power of social networks and word-of-mouth make people spend more on this type of products. We believe that such pragmatism can be positive since it is in the pursuit of real and specific goals, *i.e.* high social status, material well-being, quality leisure as well as cultural entertainment. These possibilities can be identified as a certain foundation for the creation of the new middle class among Gen Z.

Status consumption of Gen Z is expressed differently from the ones by previous generations. It appears that status consumption is focused on self-concept and is related to "desires to gain prestige from the acquisition of status-laden products and brands" (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004:25-39) that are designated to reach greater self-esteem and self-respect (Eastman, 2015). Internally motivated *consumption of self-status* products is related to virtual reality which creates immersive alternate authenticity. This type of consumption provides "an opportunity for someone to communicate and express something from his or her self-image" (Kapusy and Logo 2017: 237–42). Additionally, in the age of technologies and personalized solutions, status consumption splits into consumption of self-status and *consumption as self-reward*. Researchers have observed the gradual shift from materialism to consumption where possession of expensive goods becomes less important (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2019: 273-87). Taking behaviour of Gen Z into consideration, they even prefer to reward themselves by getting "access to products or services, not necessarily owning them" (Francis and Hoefel, 2018).

Hedonism is the third classical motivator for consumption which, in case of Gen Z, demands additional elaboration. Consumption to experience more pleasure is an integral part of consumption based on both classic and modern approaches. It is noteworthy that a consumer society has a distinctive culture that provides pleasure while aggravating anxiety because, if people feel completely safe, they will not need to consume. In fact, consumption has always been related to the concepts of rest and pleasure. Scientists emphasize that in today's society hedonism is widespread as people are more likely to choose the good that gives them more pleasure (Pruskus, 2015: 48-62). Even the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus identified a 'static' and a 'kinetic' pleasure (Nikolsky, 2001: 440-65). Consumption fulfils people's emotional needs that, paradoxically, are never fully satisfied as the market forces consumers, who, according to Bauman, are first and foremost gatherers of sensations (Bauman, 2001: 105-19), to crave more and more.

Taking Gen Z's characteristics into account, consumption to experience more pleasure reaches new heights. According to Bencsik *et al.* (2016: 93), the young often "grow out of their abilities and possibilities, therefore, their requirements culminate in varied forms". Thus, consumption to experience more pleasure is as important as other motivators for consumption while investigating Gen Z.

THE THEORETICAL MODEL OF GEN Z CONSUMPTION

Gen Z forms a new group in consumer society that is a distinctive unit in the system of social relations and social interaction. This group is distinguished by its characteristics. Accordingly, we developed a theoretical model of consumption among Gen Z.

Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of the expected relationship between communication environment and consumption. In our model, communication environment develops an approach to the key themes into which our society is stratified. Based on the theoretical review we provided, three characteristics/features of Gen Z are caused by communication environment. Gen Z differentiates in consuming in terms of (1) Tolerance to otherness in networking (T), (2) Social mindset (S), and (3) Cultural tolerance (C). Consumption in our model is measured using five observed variables: (1) Social identification (E1), (2) Individual differentiation (E2), (3) Self-status (E3), (4) Self-reward (E4) and (5) Hedonism (E5). In our case, the model consists of three exogenous variables (S, T, and C) and one endogenous variable (E).
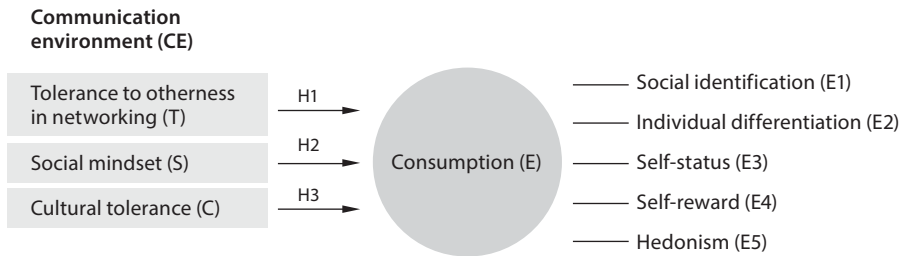
▲ *Figure 2.*
The conceptual model of consumption by Gen Z

METHOD

The sample and context of research population

Data were collected under the national research project *Peculiarities of the Youth as a Subject of Socio-cultural Space, Affected by Globalization and Information Society*. The omnibus questionnaire was the one in which respondents provided answers to all

questions analysed in this article. The research selection strategy, which was stratified by gender, age, place of residence, occupation and education of respondents' parents or guardians, met the requirements of sampling. Totally, 1,050 Lithuanians, aged 16-29 participated in the survey. The ethical principles of volunteering, anonymity, confidentiality and objectivity were adhered to during the study. The analysis we provide in the next section uses only a limited amount of data collected in this large survey.

In this research, we use only data of the target group of Gen Z, aged 16-24 and in our research, it composed a sample of n=570. The participants had a mean age of 18 years (SD = 1.970) and included 302 males (53%) and 268 females (47%).

Gen Z in Lithuania is the generation whose world view has been affected by globalization in the economy, politics, cultural and spiritual spheres. Moreover, the realities of today's life where foreign culture, social media shape low ethnocentrism; young people in Lithuania are becoming global consumers. According to research (Vaitkevičius, Piligrimienė, and Dapkutė, 2013), unbiased consumerism is typical for youngster generation (people under 18), while moderate ethnocentrism is observed among typical representatives of Gen Z (people 18-25 years old).

In Lithuania, as in other EU CEE countries, people aged 16-24 make up 11 % of the total population of the country and form a new social group of consumers. However, this socio-demographic group is not homogeneous as it can be differentiated not only by gender, age, but also education, material as well as social status. Up to 1/3 of people aged 16-24 are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This situation represents an average of highly diverse context in the EU CEE countries (Table 2).

Table 2: **People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age 16-24, percentage**

	Year: 2017	Year: 2018
European Union - 28 countries	29,0	n.d.
Euro area (19 countries)	28,6	n.d.
Bulgaria	44,8	35,3
Czechia	14,3	13,6
Estonia	25,0	24,2
Croatia	25,9	23,7
Latvia	25,7	27,5
Lithuania	33,3	n.d.
Hungary	30,3	26,0
Poland	26,0	24,8
Romania	43,7	37,4
Slovenia	15,7	15,2
Slovakia	19,8	n.d.

Source: Eurostat, 2019

When analysing the finances of young people, it is also necessary to take into account the factor of reliance on parents or guardians for money, which is particularly relevant to students who are not economically independent. About 8% of our research population lives in households with very low work intensity, compared with other EU CEE countries where this percentage varies from 3 to 10 (Eurostat, 2019).

The population of our study is characterized by their high education which should make their purchase decisions smarter. In Lithuania, 92% of people aged 20-24 have attained at least upper secondary education and this is one of the highest rate in EU (Eurostat, 2019).

Measures

Based on the measures on the impacts of communication environment on Gen Z's consumption described above, eighteen statements were written to capture each of the three types of impact.

Cultural tolerance including global focus (S). We measure this construct with nine variables with good internal consistency (α = .880). The construct represents an opposite characteristic to ethnocentrism. Work by Lantz and Loeb (1996) can be used to further develop the idea of ethnocentrism. They claim that users with ethnocentrism perceive the nation as their own group. The communication environment, dominated by symbols of foreign/global culture, reduces the possibility for a person to identify one's national identity, strengthens a sense of independence and, above all, creates an understanding of what buying behaviour is morally appropriate. Cultural tolerance was measured using nine indicators: (1) tolerance to Roma or people with a nomadic lifestyle (S1 and S2), (2) sensitivity to the Holocaust and anti-Semitism (S3 and S4); (3) tolerance to Muslims and other cultural minorities (S5 and S6); tolerance to immigrants while they are using social goods, participate in labour market and use education (S7, S8 and S9).

Tolerance to otherness in networking (T) (α = .890) was measured using six positive variables: (1) attitude towards friendship with people of different races or nationalities within personal network (T1), (2) friendship with people of different social status (T2), (3) friendship with people of differing political beliefs (T3); (4) friendship with people of different religious beliefs (T4); (5) friendship with people of differing sexual orientation (T5); (6) friendship with people with disabilities (T6). The data was extracted using the question: "Do you have close friends in your social network that are..."

Social mindset (C) (α = .758) was measured using attitude towards the most recurring social topics on social media. Three out of seven variables were used to measure social mindset: (1) tolerance to the adoption of children by homosexual couples (C1), (2) sensitivity to people with disabilities in the labour market (C2), (3) sensitivity to sex-based pay discrimination (C3). Other variables were excluded from the model analysis due to low internal consistency of multi-item scale measurement.

Gen Z consumption (E) (α = .864). To assess this construct we constructed a five-item measure that captured all five important aspects of consumption discussed previously. Similarly to other studies on consumption, we asked respondents to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements about their choices in consumption. The answers were transformed into five variables: (1) Consumption for social identification (E1), (2) Consumption for individual differentiation (E2), (3) Self-status consumption (E3), (4) Self-reward consumption (E4) and (5) Hedonic consumption (E5).

All constructs were measured using five-point scales anchored by '1 = strongly agree' and '5 = strongly disagree'.

Analytical technique

Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data as well as the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to identify the key factors. The findings were analysed and described in several steps, the first of which was data editing. Then, once frequency distributions had been calculated and described, the distribution of responses by the demographic characteristics of the respondents was analysed.

The Structural Equation Model (SQM) test was used to test a theoretical network of relations among our observed and latent variables. The SQM was chosen to estimate the multiple and interrelated dependence in a single analysis of characteristics typical of Gen Z and their impact towards consumption. The analysis of latent constructs and measurable variables of the theoretical causal model was based on path analysis, factor analysis, and linear regression, in accordance with Byrne (2016) recommendations. The structural relationships were tested using IBM SPSS AMOS V25.0 program (IBM, 2017).

RESULTS

Economic and social characteristics of respondents

Prior to the analysis of consumption, we looked at the economic characteristics of our respondents, as economic standing in consumption is no less important than socio-demographic characteristics (Kraus and Park, 2014: 15; Nwokah and Wali, 2016: 291). According to our data, nearly half of the respondents (46%) considered their financial situation to be neither difficult nor easy. Even a quarter (27%) said that getting money was easy or very easy. Unfortunately, one fifth found it difficult or very difficult to make a living. These results are in line with the data of the Social Report in Lithuania. It states that 22.2 per cent of people in Lithuania were living below the poverty threshold (Social Report 2016-2017, 2017). This is one of the most significant indicators among all EU Member States, thus making monetary poverty the biggest problem in Lithuania (Youth Policies in Lithuania - 2017, 2017).

One-way ANOVA was used to compare whether the perceived economic standing makes any difference in consumption. An analysis of variance showed that the effect of economic position on consumption was different only in case of Self-status consumption, where $F_{(5, 564)}=5.325$, $p= .000$. This could be interpreted through the assumption that the financial situation is important only for internally motivated consumption.

The communication environment focuses on creating the image of a happy person (Manago and Vaughn, 2015:187-206), thus we measured whether life satisfaction makes any difference in consumption. For this reason, we asked the respondents whether they were satisfied with their life on a ten-point scale. An analysis of variance showed that the effect of life satisfaction was different only in case of Self-reward consumption, where $F_{(10, 545)}=4.140$, $p= .000$. It means that life satisfaction makes an impact on consumption differently only in case of self-reward consumption. To sum up, economic standing and life satisfaction make different impact on consumption of different groups of gen Z.

Consumptions choices among Gen Z

Appendix 1 presents mean, standard deviations and correlations among variables of the model analysed. Some of the variables of consumption show high intercorrelations, therefore we paid particular attention and assessed variables to evaluate their consistency of scale. We used principal component analysis of eighteen items. Using varimax and oblimin rotations, three factors were identified (Table 3).

Additionally, we use Cronbach's alpha (CA) coefficient as it is most frequently used to test an internal consistency of a scale (Garson, 2012). CA in the research exceeds the minimum limit of 0.6 (Smaliukiene and Survilas, 2018:230-43) and indicates acceptable internal consistency of each group of measures (Table 4).

Table 3: **Internal consistency of the research construct**

Latent variables	Measurement indicators	Component Matrix[a]
Consumption (E)	E1	
	E2	
	E3	
	E4	
	E5	
Tolerance to otherness in networking (T)	T1	0.616
	T2	0.654
	T3	0.508
	T4	0.647
	T5	0.575
	T6	0.632

▶▶

Latent variables	Measurement indicators	Component Matrix[a]	
Cultural tolerance and global focus (S)	S1	0.547	
	S2	0.747	
	S3	0.686	
	S4	0.663	
	S5	0.733	
	S6	0.735	
	S7	0.728	
	S8	0.538	
	S9	0.608	
Social mindset (C)	C1		0.784
	C2		0.854
	C3		0.799

a. three components extracted

Confirmatory factor analysis is applied to test our theoretical model by estimating how the observed variables are linked to latent factors. In the initial stage, 24 measurement errors are associated with factors, and indicators are created. Altogether 51 variables in our model are estimated.

Following the recommendation (Jaccard and Wan, 1996), we use more than three suitability tests to demonstrate the appropriateness of the proposed model. The literature (Byrne, 2016) recommends using chi-square ($\chi2$) with moderate samples, and we follow this recommendation. The test of the overall model fit results in a $\chi2 = 1132.904$ with 224 degrees of freedom and very low probability level (p = .000). Moreover, the other indicators representing goodness-of-fit of the theoretical model indicate mediocre to poor fit (Table 4); therefore, we introduce additional variables to the hypothesised model.

The respecified model consists of the same number of variables as hypothesised. Based on theory, we linked variables of conspicuous consumption and status consumption as they are used interchangeably in some of the previous research (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004: 25-39). Following the methodological guidelines of structural equation modelling to "add only one parameter at a time to the model" (Barbara, 2016), using goodness-to-fit statistics and the modification indices for each parameter, we estimated covariance within measurement errors of consumption for social identification and consumption for individual differentiation (e1↔e2) and self-status (e1↔e3). As structural equation modelling conjoins variance and measurement errors, we develop a respecified model (Saris and Revilla, 2016: 1005-20). In the theoretical model, variables and measurement errors are random, whereas in the respecified model, they are interconnected. We followed the methodological guidelines (Barbara, 2016) and added only one parameter at a time, run goodness-to-fit statistics and created a new measurement model.

Table 4: **Goodness-of-fit statistics of the hypothesised and respecified models**

Fit index	Recommended value	Hypothesised model	Respecified model
χ2/df	≤3	1.745	2.670
Probability level	>0.05	0.003	0.000
RMSEA	≤0.08	0.082	0.054
RMR	≤0.05	0.713	0.067
NFI	≥0.9	0.817	0.923
CFI	≥0.9	0.908	0.950
TLI	≥0.9	0.867	0.940

The respecified model is evaluated by statistical means to determine the adequacy of its goodness-of-fit: $\chi2/df = 2.670$, $p < .001$. Other goodness-of-fit indicators also show moderate to good fit. Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.054) is calculated as the most informative criterion in model measurement and it indicated good fit. The root mean square residual (RMR = 0.067) represents the average value across all standardized residuals and in our case, it indicates mediocre fit, as well as normed fit index (NFI = 0.923) and comparative fit index (CFI = 0.950). In addition, all factor loadings were high and significant. Figure 3 presents this model.
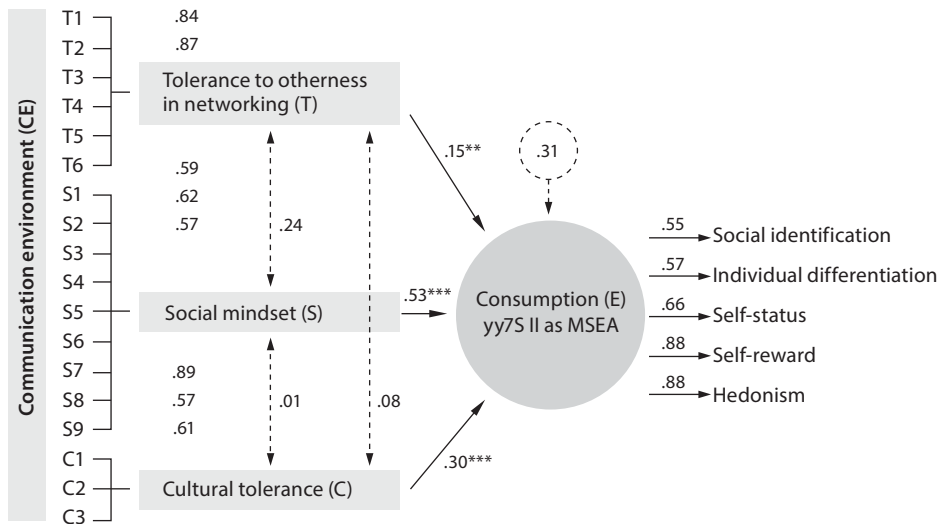
▲ *Figure 3.*
The structural equation model of the association among Gen Z consumption motives and attitudes formed by social media.
*** p<.001, ** p<.005. (For the sake of clarity, covariances among the variables are not depicted).

In sum, these results indicate that our hypothesised model is confirmed: three unique features (three latent factors: tolerance to otherness in networking, social mindset and cultural tolerance) explain consumption as a composition of five motivators (consumption for social identification, for individual differentiation, self-status, self-reward and hedonic). Due to the nature of structural equation modelling, we cannot analyse factors in isolation. Nevertheless, we can see from the model approved (Fig. 3) that social mindset (S) is the most important exploratory factor for Gen Z consumption (.53, Z=8.048, p<0.001). Tolerance to otherness in networking (T) and cultural tolerance (C) are the factors that explain consumption in a lesser extent (.15, Z=2.808, p<0.005 and .30, Z=6.162, p<0.001, respectively).

DISCUSSION

The analysis of Gen Z allows us to take a new perspective on consumption as this generation no longer opposes yet combines two distinctly different factors – social mindset and hedonic consumption. These are two main factors that best explain consumption by Gen Z in our research sample. At the same time, these two factors are inseparable from additional effects of the communication environment.

The findings contribute to the emerging research on the next generation of consumers (Bolton *et al*., 2013: 245-67; Fortunati *et al*. 2019: 95-112; Jin *et al*., 2015: 380-93). Our unique contribution to this field is the examination of communication environment impact on consumers' behaviour, more specifically, on motivations for consumption. There are several key findings, each contributing to the body of knowledge on consumer behaviour.

First, our research supports the statement that consumption by Gen Z can be explained by characteristics, which are different from previous generations. Ethnocentrism, uniformity and productive mindset were the dominating factors of consumption in several ways. First, it proves that *conspicuous consumption* and *hedonic consumption* both play a vital role in explaining Gen Z's motivation to buy, thus corroborating the findings of Bögenhold and Naz (2018: 39-52), Koles *et al*. (2018:96-133), O'Cass and McEwen (2004: 25-39). However, in a symbol-full communication environment, *conspicuous consumption* and *hedonic consumption* merge and no longer separate external and internal motives. Consumption behaviour of the generations X and Y can be labelled as conspicuous (Fernández-Ferrín *et al*. 2015: 73-88; Jin *et al*. 2015: 380-93). The variance in the consumption of Gen Z can be explained by cultural tolerance, social mindset and tolerance to otherness in their network.

Second, social mindset is the strongest mediator between communication environment and consumption by Gen Z. This supports other research findings where social mindset is identified as one of the features differentiating Gen Z from their predecessors (Bencsik *et al*. 2016: 90-106; Bolton *et al*. 2013: 245-67; Morning Consult, 2018). Using smart applications, members of this generation communicate in their networks on

a wide range of issues, including business transparency and social accountability. This applies only to those social issues that highly resonate with their values and perceptions. Based on the findings of this research, we can assert that social mindset determines Gen Z's consumption for social identification, individual differentiation, self-status, self-reward and hedonism.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

These findings support and extend contemporary theory and statistics in the field of consumerism and corroborates the view that consumption can still be explained by social identification. Yet, new drivers in Gen Z's consumption as individual differentiation, self-status and self-reward are treated as external as well as internal motives in consumption. This highlights the need for more comprehensive theoretical insights about consumption and its causes in the environment of 24/7 access to interactions. As one of the first steps in this field, we included and tested in our model five factors that jointly explain conspicuous and hedonic consumption: *social identification, individual differentiation, self-status, self-reward* and *hedonism.*

Second, the results of our research are important in the development of consumerism theory. Until now, social sensitivity was perceived as a philosophy of sufficiency economy that deters conspicuous and hedonic consumption (Mongsawad and Thongpakde, 2016: 136) This insight was true for the previous generations. As our study shows, Gen Z is socially sensitive and has the following characteristic: cultural tolerance, social tolerance and tolerance to otherness in the network. These characteristics do not reduce consumption, on the contrary, they explain conspicuous and hedonic consumption. We found that social mindset is the strongest mediator for consumption and that hedonic consumption is the strongest driver in Gen Z's decisions. We conclude that Gen Z is a new group in consumer society that is distinctive by its unique characteristics. Further research on this topic could focus on how young consumers integrate contradicting factors in their consumption decisions.

Limitations

Though the presented results are significant empirically, there are some limitations. First, the results are based on the youth survey in one country. Taking into consideration the differences in behaviour of consumers in different countries (Grant, 2018), our research finding could be limited in generalization in a multinational context. At the same time, we can claim, this limitation would be very relevant in research on other generations. In case of Generation Z, differences across countries are less relevant as members of this generation, in virtue of being digital natives, share many common views.

Second, the data were collected using a self-reporting survey, which could constrain the relationship between characteristics caused by social media and motivators for

consumption. However, we paid particular attention and assessed variables to evaluate their consistency of scale. Third, an in-depth qualitative explanation of the factors used in the study is missing, as research used only quantitative data. A qualitative research on these factors could open new insights and extend findings of this research.

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Appendix 1
Means, standard deviations and correlations [a]

Variable	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Tolerance to otherness in networking (T)												
T1	3.35	1.02										
T2	3.31	0.99	0.75									
T3	3.38	1.00	0.77	0.73								
T4	3.06	1.08	0.52	0.65	0.55							
T5	2.88	1.21	0.56	0.49	0.57	0.67						
T6	3.05	1.12	0.47	0.51	0.50	0.53	0.47					
Social mindset (S)												
S1	3.70	1.48	0.11	0.18	0.20	0.15	0.08	0.21				
S2	4.29	0.96	0.18	0.27	0.18	0.18	0.09	0.17	0.38			
S3	4.19	1.06	0.13	0.20	0.11	0.11	0.07	0.16	0.35	0.76		
S4	4.09	1.20	0.16	0.25	0.19	0.11	0.09	0.18	0.41	0.56	0.52	
S5	4.47	1.02	0.17	0.25	0.21	0.16	0.09	0.16	0.42	0.61	0.55	0.60
S6	4.51	0.98	0.25	0.31	0.26	0.17	0.08	0.17	0.37	0.63	0.58	0.47
S7	4.50	1.02	0.15	0.24	0.20	0.11	0.03	0.14	0.42	0.64	0.58	0.59
S8	4.08	1.64	0.08	0.15	0.14	0.15	0.09	0.14	0.44	0.35	0.36	0.29
S9	3.62	1.14	0.16	0.26	0.15	0.20	0.14	0.10	0.30	0.48	0.46	0.41
Cultural tolerance (C)												
C1	1.20	1.29	0.07	0.02	0.05	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.02	-0.03	0.05	-0.09
C2	1.18	1.34	0.02	0.05	0.09	-0.02	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.09	0.04
C3	1.06	1.27	0.02	0.04	0.07	-0.05	-0.01	-0.01	-0.03	-0.06	0.02	-0.04
Consumption (E)												
E1	2.92	1.33	0.03	-0.07	0.04	-0.01	-0.01	0.08	0.22	0.20	0.23	0.13
E2	3.35	1.30	0.02	0.03	0.07	0.10	0.01	0.09	0.19	0.19	0.18	0.15
E3	4.10	1.23	0.27	0.14	0.27	0.02	0.10	0.14	0.26	0.33	0.32	0.32
E4	4.15	1.24	0.25	0.16	0.27	0.06	0.11	0.13	0.21	0.31	0.25	0.31
E5	3.42	1.37	0.12	0.01	0.09	-0.01	0.10	0.11	0.24	0.24	0.27	0.19

▶▶

Variable	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Tolerance to otherness in networking (T)												
T1												
T2												
T3												
T4												
T5												
T6												
Social mindset (S)												
S1												
S2												
S3												
S4												
S5												
S6	0.65											
S7	0.66	0.62										
S8	0.42	0.42	0.46									
S9	0.45	0.43	0.48	0.43								
Cultural tolerance (C)												
C1	-0.07	0.00	-0.05	0.05	-0.06							
C2	-0.01	0.10	0.04	0.07	0.02	0.54						
C3	-0.06	0.00	-0.07	0.02	0.00	0.43	0.56					
Consumption (E)												
E1	0.12	0.17	0.20	0.21	0.17	0.26	0.16	0.11				
E2	0.15	0.29	0.21	0.18	0.15	0.20	0.22	0.11	0.59			
E3	0.29	0.35	0.37	0.20	0.19	0.17	0.17	0.13	0.51	0.49		
E4	0.27	0.35	0.36	0.22	0.17	0.21	0.23	0.16	0.47	0.52	0.78	
E5	0.16	0.22	0.26	0.16	0.22	0.16	0.20	0.12	0.57	0.53	0.59	0.58

A for all variables N=570, p=0.000

GENERACIJA Z I KORIŠTENJE: KAKO KOMUNIKACIJSKO OKRUŽENJE OBLIKUJE ODABIRE MLADIH

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SAŽETAK *Koristeći pametne aplikacija, pripadnici generacije Z komuniciraju putem svojih mreža o širokom spektru tema, što oblikuje njihovu društvenu osjetljivost i utječe na njihovo korištenje medija. Članak se fokusira na generaciju Z u Srednjoj i Istočnoj Europi gdje je udio mladih u ukupnom stanovništvu najmanji na svijetu. Ova studija istražuje generaciju Z u Litvi, jednoj od zemalja Srednje i Istočne Europe te predstavlja rezultate opsežne ankete provedene među mladima koja analizira korištenje i povezanost s obilježjima koja oblikuju društveni mediji. Tri su glavna obilježja koje objašnjavaju korištenje generacije Z: kulturna tolerancija, socijalna tolerancija i tolerancija prema drugačijima na mreži. Ovaj trostruki teorijski model dokazan je uporabom strukturalnog modeliranja (Structural Equation Model - SQM). Na temelju ovog testa otkriveno je da je društveni način razmišljanja najjači posrednik između komunikacijskog okruženja i korištenja kod generacije Z. Istodobno, komunikacijsko okruženje motivira na samonagrađivanje i hedonističku potrošnju, što je u skladu s društvenim načinom razmišljanja. Zaključujemo da je Generacija Z nova grupa u potrošačkom društvu koja se razlikuje po svojim jedinstvenim obilježjima.*

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