

Generation Z in Chile, Colombia, México, and Panama: Interests and new digital consumption habits. Their use of *Instagram* and *TikTok*

Eva-Citlali Martínez-Estrella; Eliana Samacá-Salamanca; Ainhoa García-Rivero; Carlos Cifuentes-Ambra

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Eva-Citlali Martínez-Estrella ✉
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6599-1050>

Universidad Complutense de Madrid
Facultad de Comercio y Turismo
Av. Islas Filipinas, 3
28003 Madrid, Spain
evacmart@ucm.es



Eliana Samacá-Salamanca
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5805-3602>

Universidad Complutense de Madrid
Facultad de Ciencias de la Información
Av. Complutense, 3
28040 Madrid, Spain
esamaca@ucm.es



Ainhoa García-Rivero
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4879-9950>

Universidad Internacional de la Rioja
Avda. de la Paz, 137
26006 Logroño, Spain
ainhoa.garcia@unir.net



Carlos Cifuentes-Ambra
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8066-7814>

Kontent Room
31 SE 5 street, suite 3516
Miami, USA
ccifuentes@kontentroom.com

Abstract

In a reality that combines the virtual with the physical and in a context of information saturation, there are consumers who are more critical, demanding, and less loyal. In this context, it is timely to know the new habits of the Centennials, so as to understand their behaviors and consumption trends, aligning future communication strategies to their personality and interests. The Centennials or Generation Z are digital natives, concerned with technology, and complex to understand (Alonso-López; Terol-Bolinches, 2020). Generation Z—analyzed in this study—is composed of those born between 2000 and 2008, which corresponds to the youth currently between 14 and 22 years old (Vilanova; Ortega, 2017; Hernández; Andrade-del-Cid, 2020). The main objective of this research is to determine the patterns of consumption and online behavior exhibited by this generation in Mexico, Colombia, Chile, and Panama, with a focus on the characteristics of communication processes, online consumption patterns, and the cultural traits they possess. To achieve this, a mixed method is proposed consisting of a *Twitter* conversation analysis, survey application (n=550), in-depth interviews (n=36), and focus groups (n=2); all of which have been applied in the four selected countries. The main conclusions are that the preferred content of Centennials is humor (75%), with *Instagram* and *TikTok* being the most used networks. For them, the most important thing is to take care of their image and 40% are not interested in technological topics. Furthermore, cultural characteristics are shared among countries; however, language is the main difference between countries.

Keywords

Instagram; *TikTok*; Gen Z; Generation Z; Centennials; Online behavior; Latin America; Conversation trends; Consumption patterns; Virtuality; Culture; Advertising.



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1. Introduction

The social phenomenon caused by different generations has been the subject of study for decades in different disciplines. For this research, we have chosen to analyze Generation Z or Centennials (throughout the text we use both denominations interchangeably) due to its prominence in recent years. Different industries are constantly searching for data on the behavior and consumption patterns of Centennials, which are functional when designing strategies and campaigns to inform or communicate products and services (**Goldring; Azab, 2021**). Unlike other generations, Z's

“do not know a world without the Internet, who are constantly accompanied by their smartphone and use social networks as their main communication tool, mainly *Instagram*” (**Alonso-López; Terol-Bolinches, 2020, p. 2**).

One of the most important characteristics of this generation is that they are digital natives, which results in a life both inside and outside of the network. This fact has a significant impact on how they communicate, the type of content they consume, and their interaction with the environment (**Turner, 2015**). It is worth mentioning that 88.4% of Centennials in the LATAM region have access to the Internet and actively use digital media (*Panamerican Health Organization, 2021*). Currently, these teenagers and young people represent 22% of the population of Latin America, and this figure is expected to remain until 2030 with a variation of 1%, according to data from the *Panamerican Health Organization (2021)*.

When talking about Centennials, some authors point out that “there is no definite consensus on the start and end dates for naming younger generations” (**Marinas, 2019; Francisco-Lens; Rodríguez-Vázquez, 2020**), and that also applies to Generation Z. In fact, some authors consider this generation to be individuals born between 1994 and 2010 (**Taylor; Keeter, 2010; Priporas; Stylos; Kamenidou, 2020**), while others limit it from 2000 to 2007 (**Martín-Ramallal; Micaletto-Belda, 2021**). Given the disparity of years for this cohort, and with the purpose of equalizing criteria, for this particular research, young people born between 2000 and 2008 (14 to 22 years old) are considered, an age range similar to that used by **García-Rivero, Martínez-Estrella and Bonales-Daimiel (2022)** in their research on Generation Z in Spain.

In Generation Z, it is important to note that the concept of adolescence is changing, as according to **Gualtero and Soriano (2013)**, adolescence is a period that is defined by both biological and social criteria: the transition from childhood to independence from parents. They add that especially in Western countries, the change from adolescence to youth is becoming increasingly delayed. Therefore, it is difficult to consider these young people as mature adults.

Therefore, the article aims to determine the consumption patterns and online behavior of Generation Z in Mexico, Colombia, Chile, and Panama, emphasizing their communication on social networks, topics of conversation, and their relationship with advertising. To obtain more detailed information about Centennials, the classification proposed by **Mascó (2012)** is used, which divides Generation Z into two age ranges: Z1 (14 to 17 years) and Z2 (18 to 22 years). This categorization is important when creating discussion groups and the survey, as well as highlighting the most significant information about these age groups in the discussion and conclusions.

Consequently, the elements necessary to achieve assertive communication towards this target audience are established, which can be useful for various sectors such as entertainment, advertising, sports, fashion, and even politics. As a secondary objective, the cultural characteristics of Centennials by country are also determined, and it is pointed out if there are significant differences between sexes; this with the intention of being able to describe in detail the Centennials of the selected countries and so that the found particularities can be taken into account in future works.

The research is developed through a mixed method –which considers the analysis of *Twitter* conversations, interviews, focus groups, and the application of an online survey. The perceptions and opinions of the Centennials themselves are prioritized in the data collection. The countries selected to carry out the study are Mexico, Colombia, Panama, and Chile. This selection is based on their Spanish-speaking populations, their population size of young people, their purchasing power, and the representative advertising investment that brands make in each country.

Although Generation Z shares several characteristics among countries, there is a cultural, social, and economic context that influences behavior and purchase decisions; that is why, if one intends to study Centennials in LATAM, it is important to emphasize that the purchasing power and the value of the currency in Latin America is “significantly lower than the dollar” (*Statista, 2022*), with Mexico, Chile, and Panama being the countries with the highest purchasing power in the region. According to the *International Monetary Fund (2021)*, Panama and Chile have a purchasing power per capita of between \$36,085 US and \$28,526 US, similar to those of residents of Ireland and Singapore, which means that some countries in the region have exponential growth that contributes to purchasing decisions and modifies the communication forms of this generation.

In addition, it should be noted that during 2021

“total spending on advertising in Latin America amounted to 27,900 million US dollars, expecting growth above 30,000 million for 2023” (Statista, 2022).

This investment in commercial communication is mostly made in Mexico and Colombia, countries that are included in the study sample. For these reasons –language, population, purchasing power, and investment in commercial communication– Panama, Chile, Mexico, and Colombia have been chosen for the study.

Undoubtedly, Generation Z has become the focus of attention for different industries, such as communication and entertainment, because in the mid-term, these young people will have an incursion into the workforce, a situation that makes them the next potential consumers and demands strengthening the relationship between the user and companies.

1.1. Centennials profile in Latin America

Vilanova and Ortega (2017) define this generation by the rule of the “four i’s”: irreverence, immediacy, inclusion, and uncertainty (*incertidumbre*). This is due to

- feeling free to have thoughts different from other generations;
- access to the Internet to get what they want when they want it;
- collective and collaborative work, as well as a change in mindset regarding social rights; and
- the constant change that characterizes the current world and the instability that accompanies it.

Linked to the first and third characteristics, irreverence and inclusion, Madrigal-Moreno, Madrigal-Moreno & Béjar-Tinoco point out that

“in addition to having a more open thought than other generations, they know in which situations to say no and in which ones to raise their voice in defense of their rights” (Madrigal-Moreno; Madrigal-Moreno; Béjar-Tinoco 2021, p. 271).

Regarding the second characteristic and, therefore, access to the Internet, it is important to note that the technology available to “Z” youths has also altered their relationships with their close environments (Gómez-de-Travesedo-Rojas; Gil-Ramírez, 2020), specifically the use of the mobile phone

“mainly marks their behavior, their presence in the world, and, especially, the way in which they communicate with each other and with others” (Hernández; Andrade-del-Cid, 2020, p. 5).

The Centennials are “children of technology, of virtual learning” (Vilanova; Ortega, 2017, p. 1), so their relationship with technology has changed the consumption of content and, consequently, has caused “a change of paradigm in the communicative ecosystem” (López-Vidales; Gómez-Rubio, 2021, p. 550). Finally, with regard to the fourth characteristic: uncertainty, it should be noted that this age group was born and grew up during a time of crisis, a situation that causes social transformations (Unesco, 2021), influencing their behavior.

According to the report by the *Youth Observatory in Ibero-America* (2021), 92% of Latin American youth access the Internet daily. In countries such as Mexico, the Z generation invests 5.7 hours on average per day; in Chile it’s 4.7 hours, 3 hours in Panama, and 4.3 hours in Colombia. The mobile phone is the most used device throughout the region, and in order of preference, access to social networks is the most popular use of the Internet (65%), followed by instant messaging (49%). These frequency of use data coincide with the study by Giraldo-Luque and Fernández-Rovira (2020), who confirm that young people spend more than 4 hours a day browsing the Internet, concluding that they are immersed in a hyper-connected universe.

All of this is reflected in a change in media consumption, among other things. The immediacy that characterizes them, combined with the technological boom, has caused young people to gradually abandon traditional media and migrate to digital platforms and on-demand videos (Navarro-Robles; Vázquez-Barrio, 2020; Marcos-Ramos et al., 2020; Gutiérrez; Cuartero, 2020). Figure 1 illustrates this change in media consumption, showing the preference for communication media among young Latin Americans in recent years.

Generation Z, unlike Millennials, grew up during the Great Economic Recession period; according to Panocillo (2019), this made these young people more pragmatic and seeking opportunities that bring stability. It is important to note that Generation Z has

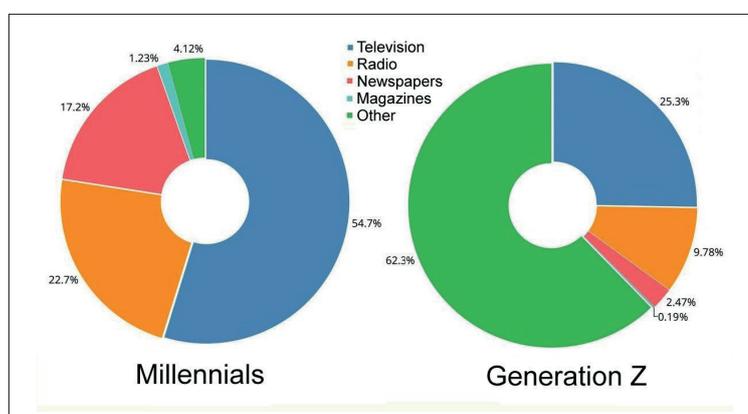


Figure 1. Comparison of preferred media: Millennials vs. Generation Z
Source: López-Vidales y Gómez-Rubio (2021).

come of age during a time characterized by crisis and, as a result, increased inequality and job insecurity, as well as the rise of social media in the technological sphere (Robinson; Schänzel, 2019).

In terms of brand communication, the figure of the influencer emerges, a characteristic aspect of this generation since, as noted, they are the “media referents of these young people” (Elexpuru *et al.*, 2021, p. 20). With influencers, a new advertising format emerges: product prescription; as a result,

“youth face an increasingly hybrid scenario in the context of social networks” (Feijoo; López-Martínez; Núñez-Gómez, 2022, p. 8).

In this sense, the research by Djafarova and Bowes (2021) argues that microcelebrities continue to be the main influence on the fashion impulse purchases of Generation Z women, because they set their trends. In the same way, these authors state that Generation Z is the one that makes the most impulse purchases (41%), followed by Millennials with 34% and Generation X with 32%. This fact is related to the transformation of social relationships in which Generation Z is immersed.

In the specific case of Latin America, there has been a growth of these figures; for example, Mexico is the third country in Latin America with the most influencers, with approximately 443,000 nano and microinfluencers; Colombia follows with around 408,000 and Chile with approximately 386,000 (*Influency*, 2020).

Regarding the consumption of products and services by this generation, there are international studies in Latin America, such as the one by Ortega-Vivanco *et al.* (2021), which analyzes the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the buying behavior of these young people in Ecuador, Mexico, and Colombia. The authors assure that this generation “the delivery to the home and the virtual store during the crisis have reversed the flow of purchase and consumption of experiences, goods, and services” (p. 6), increasing significantly. Thus, these data demonstrate that we are facing a generation that, in addition to having its own particularities due to the context in which it was born and raised, seeks customization in the communication and content it receives; as well as not separating from virtuality. Both situations have a significant impact on their behavior and choices.

On the other hand, by considering four countries for the sample, the cultural and social aspects that each population may have are taken into account. Talking about cultural characteristics refers to a minimum frame of meaningful traits that can help recognize a culture. This includes language, religion, language, nationalism, history, legal system, arts, customs, moral principles, among other elements that define human behavior (Cepal, 1981; Gomáriz, 1996). Furthermore, information about the heterogeneity of a population is useful in designing integration policies and improving communication with citizens.

The cultural aspects of a country have significant effects on the values and attitudes of individuals (Robbins; Decenzo; Coulter, 2004). One of the variables within cultural characteristics is gender, because it influences the cultural identity of the population. Thanks to this, an individual can know themselves as unique and at the same time, belong to a group (Rocha-Sánchez, 2009).

It is also important to note that there have already been some authors who have analyzed young people from Colombia and Spain, comparing them with each other; this is the case of Almansa-Martínez, Almansa-Martínez, Fonseca and Castillo-Esparcia, who argue that

“young people have the need to show themselves in an original way, with their own language. Boys and girls compete to post striking photos for their peers: posed, suggestive gesture photos, retouched images, montages” (Almansa-Martínez; Fonseca; Castillo-Esparcia, 2013, p. 133).

For the research, language is considered one of the main variables within cultural characteristics.

2. Methodological development

To carry out this research, a mixed method was applied using qualitative and quantitative techniques. The quantitative approach, applied in this case to the listening of social networks and surveys,

“uses data collection to know exactly the behavior of the study population” (Hernández-Sampieri; Fernández-Collado; Baptista-Lucio, 2006, p. 45).

On the other hand, the qualitative vision performs an interpretive work between theoretical concepts and data (Blumer, 1982), which involves exploring a reality that, in this study, consists of online behaviors and consumption patterns of generation Z in Latin America. To obtain this qualitative information, in-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with both young people and their parents and experts.

Then, for the quantitative variables, the first step was to monitor conversation trends on *Twitter*. The data extraction was carried out from March to May 2022 through the specialized applications *NodeXL* and *Talkwalker*. Thanks to the functionality of these platforms, the data could be separated by geographical location to have the data divided among four selected countries (Mexico, Colombia, Panama, and Chile), as well as by generational gap and gender. In total, 17 databases were obtained, totaling 40,545 tweets.

The reason why *Twitter* was selected as the social network to analyze is because this microblogging platform facilitates the analysis of information diffusion patterns (Bakshy *et al.*, 2011) among users. In addition, there are precedents of observing conversation trends as presented in the research of Pérez-Dasilva, Santos-Diez and Meso-Ayerdi (2018) and Del-Fresno, Daly and Sánchez-Cabezudo (2016). Ahmed and Lugovic (2019), on the other hand, point out that data extraction can map the conversation by marking the topics that generate the greatest interest and reactions among Centennials in the selected countries.

This data collection determined the scope of the conversation points that were monitored, as well as the acceptance of certain content formats among the study population. With the *Twitter* databases obtained in each country, it was possible to divide the interests by generational gap, as well as to discard the temporal reactions; that is, conversations about specific issues about current events, which are usually transient and cannot be considered a priority topic for Centennials, there is no “fixation of the topic” (Mancera; Pano, 2013, p. 236).

Simultaneously, two focus groups were held with Centennials aged 14 to 22. Based on the affirmations of Meigniez (1971), group dialogue helps to accept or reject the phenomena that occur during the discussion and stimulates awareness, which links together the perceptions of the participants. The goal of the focus groups was therefore for young people to verbalize their ideas, perceptions, and feelings they considered about the proposed topics and thus understand the attitudes of this generation. The groups consisted of eight men and eight women, with an equal presence from each country. It is worth mentioning that the classification of Mascó (2012) was taken into account when preparing these discussion groups, and therefore, in one of them there were Centennials with a lower educational level, and in the other, those with a higher educational level.

Additionally, the young people who participated in the focus groups shared the content they publish on their *Instagram* and *TikTok* accounts, allowing for an evaluation of the type of posts they regularly make. The review of that content considered three variables: a) intention, b) tone, and c) aesthetics.

Due to the monitoring on *Twitter* and the application of focus groups, the most relevant sectors in the daily life of Centennials were identified: sports, entertainment, fashion, and music. Following this, 36 experts and professionals from different areas were contacted, such as education [university, high school and institute directors and teachers], social studies, psychology [counselors and therapists], social work, advertisers, influencers, and parents. Table 1 presents the information related to the interviews.

Table 1. Interviewee form

Country	Colombia	Chile	México	Panamá
University professor	2	2	2	2
High school teacher	1	2	2	2
Psychologist	1	1	1	2
Social studies	2			2
Publicist/comunicator		1	1	
Influencer	2		2	
Parents	1	2	2	1
Total	9	8	10	9

Subsequently, the interview information was processed in Atlas.it in order to find matches (Penalva-Verdú *et al.*, 2015) and thus confront the knowledge of the experts and parents with the perception that young people have of themselves, obtaining inputs that young Zs do not always reveal in a face-to-face conversation.

With the information gathered from the analysis of social networks, the interviews and the focus groups, the statements to be validated by a larger population group were structured. In this sense, an online survey was disseminated in the selected countries with the intention of validating the first data obtained with the previously applied techniques and also to identify new data of interest that could be broken down by country in order to identify the particularities of each geographical area.

To maintain the accuracy of the study, the estimation of the proportion in the sample was based on the current population of young people between 14 and 22 years of age in each country, considering the 2020 population censuses. A margin of error of 10% was respected, with a level of confidence of 90%. Therefore, the following percentages were met: Mexico (16%); Colombia (25.9%); Chile (13.9%) and Panama (16.8%). Based on these figures, the size of the sample required to validate the survey results was established.

Therefore, the online survey included a non-probabilistic random sample of men and women between 14 and 22 years of age. All of them are young students from high school or institute or university and belong to a medium, medium-high and high socioeconomic sector. The link was disseminated through the experts who participated and also in different educational entities of the levels mentioned. A total of 550 responses were obtained [Mexico n=235; Colombia n=130; Chile n=105 and Panama n=80]. 46% were men and 54% women. The average age of the sample was 18.8 years.

The questionnaire followed a thematic model, where questions were asked about the use of technology and consumption on social networks, as well as interests, such as hobbies and lifestyle. Some questions were open-ended, others were multiple-choice and the rest corresponded to a Likert scale that helps measure the validity of the proposed items

(Blanco; Alvarado, 2005). Thus, the degree of preference these young people have was found with regards to their tastes, preferences, life choices, and beliefs, such as the case of acceptance towards the LGBTIQ+ community.

To summarize, two focus groups were conducted with Centennials, 36 interviews with experts, and 550 surveys, as well as monitoring on social networks. With this information, the main conclusions were obtained which help establish guidelines for designing a communication strategy aimed at Centennials, determining consumption patterns, communication methods, and determining the most significant cultural characteristics of these young people by country.

It should be noted that the application of online methodologies such as surveys or focus groups is increasingly common in research and is supported by various authors (De-Marchis, 2012). In fact, one of the reasons why the internet has been used as an access channel is due to the

“possibility of reaching population segments that are difficult to locate through personal and telephone surveys” (Arroyo-Menéndez; Finkel-Morgenstern, 2019, p. 52),

an important point considering the geographical breadth outlined in the work.

3. Results

Below, the most notable results of each of the research phases are described to facilitate reading and highlight findings, the division between Z1 (14-17 years old) and Z2 (18-22 years old) is applied. Of the 550 responses collected in the survey, the Z1 group has 220 participants and 230 belong to the Z2 group.

3.1. Twitter conversation tracking

The conversation topics observed coincided with the daily trends marked by *Google Trends*, therefore it could be ensured that they were the topics with the most audience and interaction during the months of monitoring (from March to May 2022). Once the data was filtered and sorted, the main interests of conversation that Centennials have could be determined. Firstly, it was found that the strongest node [representation of the number of users] in the four countries is football, coinciding with the temporality of the *2021-22 Champions League* matches, and representing 80% of the conversation among men between 17 and 22 years old.

The next largest node is music, where the age range covers from 16 to 22 years old. Centennials tweet about their favorite artists and bands. Z1 prefer reggaeton; while Z2 listen to more rock and pop. The third topic of interest is politics; particularly in Chile, people tweet about their disagreement with the government; followed by Mexico, where security and drug trafficking issues are associated with political matters. In the digital conversation about these topics, it was detected that 25% of participation corresponds to young people between 20 and 22 years old, which refers to a youth interested in the future of their country.

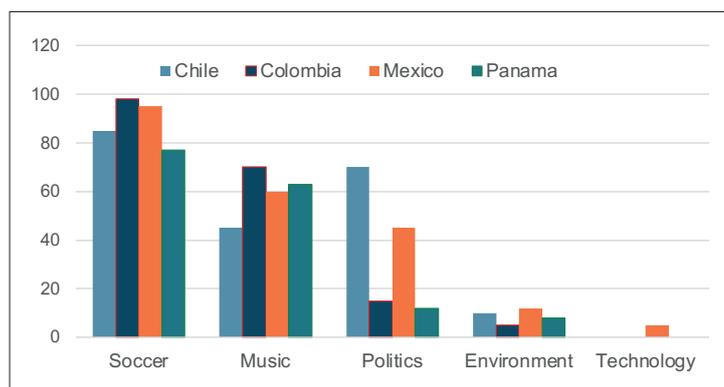


Figure 2. Conversation trends

In general, it is observed that one of the least talked about topics are those related to the environment and social causes, and it was also not found that technology is a trend in conversation for young people.

A peculiar observation in Panama is the interest in Turkish and Korean soap operas; 18% of the posts made about these television programs correspond to men and women between 18 and 22 years old (group Z2).

Similarly, the following of these topics coincides with what was discussed in the focus groups applied to Centennials, especially because they show no interest in the technology sector, such as online games, cryptocurrencies, or the metaverse.

Another finding that stands out, although not considered a trend, is the religious participation of these regions. Given that the observation on the network coincided with the celebration period of *Holy Week*, according to *TalkWalker*, 28% of the posts on this topic in Panama and 20% in Mexico corresponded to young people between 17 and 22 years old. When asked about their beliefs, 95% of the surveyed young people claim to believe in a deity –Catholic or Christian– and only 3.6% declare themselves as atheist. The rest believe in the power of nature and the energies of the cosmos.

3.2. Z Generation’s online behavior and consumption

The focus groups showed that Centennials cannot conceive of a reality without technology or the Internet: they have the need to be connected 24 hours.

“I check everything on my phone, I really prefer to learn things with tutorials, because it’s faster” (man, 16 years old, Panama).

The Zs from the four countries share informative and usability interests on social media; highlighting that they maintain *Facebook* accounts to be observers, because they do not post on that platform. Z2 is the group with the greatest presence on this social network. Furthermore, Centennials from the four countries do not continuously post information on their profiles and protect their privacy, which coincides with the survey responses, where more than 78% of the sample indicated that they have a passive and observer role on social networks. Moreover, Z1 confirms that for security reasons, they only make friends in person, at school or institute.

“They always tell you that talking to strangers on networks is dangerous. You hear it in school, in the media, and at home. So we have it very internalized” (man, 14 years old, Mexico).

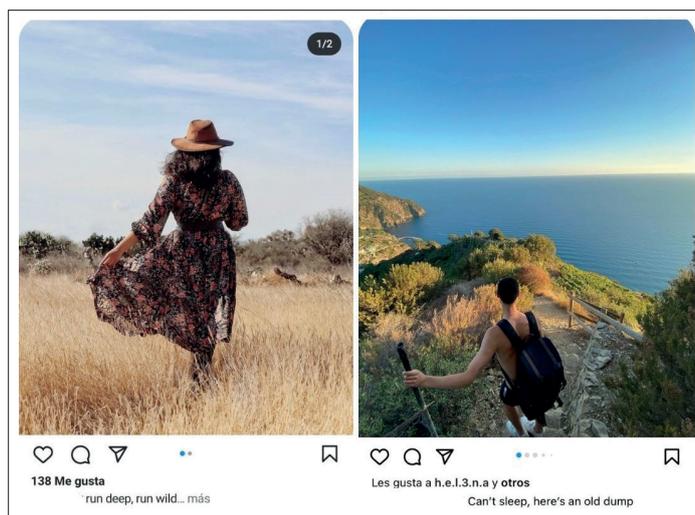


Figure 3. Zs' *Instagram* posts.
Source: *Instagram*, 2022.

Then, the content review that was carried out of the profiles on *Instagram* and *TikTok* of the focus group participants showed that aesthetics is the most important variable for Centennials. In general, on *Instagram*, they choose a minimalist style that revolves around sober and dark colors such as black, white, gray, and reddish; they avoid posing with their face in the foreground, thereby reinforcing the care they have with their privacy.

In Mexico, Chile, and Colombia, young people dress in an aesthetic style, limiting the use of bright-colored clothing, while in Panama, Centennials prefer a style inspired by hip-hop. The purpose of *Instagram* posts is mostly to showcase the places they visit and the hobbies they have. It is interpreted that they like to show their activities, primarily Mexican Zs sharing the places they are at, such as restaurants or while traveling. They also prefer to use the story option instead of making fixed posts on their profile.

“Social networks are like my resume to the world, I only post what I want others to see of me and my profiles are private” (man, 22, Colombia).

Regarding *TikTok*, Zs' videos are humorous, for example, they perform dances that are trending on this network. However, it must be noted that profiles on this platform are private.

“I like to dance with my friends and upload them to laugh, but they are not public” (woman, 17, Mexico).

Another aspect related to Zs' behavior is their openness to diversity and inclusion, specifically with the LGTBQ+ community, 44.5% of the sample showed indifference towards the topic, had no opinion and did not mention that they will take any particular action to support acceptance and/or inclusion of this population group.

“Everyone says they are allies but when it comes to their interests or when they are behind closed doors, they are judged” (woman, 20, Mexico).

It is noteworthy that in general, men have greater acceptance of this community. Although Panama and Chile are the countries with the least openness towards homosexuality, transgender issues, etc.

“In Panama, it is very far-fetched that they can express their gender change, that men can dress as women and vice versa” (mother, Panama).

“These archaic ideas are being broken and someone from the LGTBQ+ community is seen as brave” (man, 20, Chile).

When speaking of their online behavior and consumption, Centennials clearly differentiate between immediate communication and seeking entertaining content. 98% of the sample assured that *WhatsApp* is the social network they use to communicate, while for entertainment, they use *Instagram* (47%), followed by *TikTok* (30%) and *YouTube* (27%). *Twitch* is the platform used the least by young people, as 98% place this network in last place of use/preference. It must be noted that in Chile, Colombia, and Panama, *Instagram* is used more for recreational purposes, while in Mexico, the most used network is *YouTube*.

The most consumed content on social networks are humorous and comedy videos (75%). This is followed by videos that present scientific or curious facts (12%), in this type of content, it is common for creators to use the traditional “did you know?” formula. In third place (10%), beauty and exercise routines are positioned. This emphasizes the importance that young people place on taking care of their image.

“I like to exercise because basically I'm working on my body” (man, 22, Colombia).

It should be noted that it is the Z2 who have the greatest concern for body care, they are even careful with their diet, as this study found that in the Z2 from the four countries, fast food consumption is lower and there are more young people who claim to be vegetarians.

Lastly, suspense and horror series rank last in preference (3%). These choices are homogeneous among men and women, as well as among countries. Although, it can be noted that Z2 are the ones who, slightly, consume more videos about science and curious facts on *TikTok*.

67% of Centennials say that they follow an influencer on social networks, confirming that they feel linked to these figures in some way; for example, they may feel admiration for them, follow them because they provide them with useful information for their day to day, or because they feel identified with the interests that the influencer shares in their networks.

Within this type, figures such as athletes and actors weigh more than influencers as such. These public figures have a great media presence, as they dominate the scene in all countries: Luisito Comunica, AuronPlay, Ibai, Kimberly Loaiza, Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Robert Downey Jr, and Johnny Deep. It can be mentioned that recognition and engagement towards these characters is equal in all countries.

To determine whether following an influencer depends on the sex of young people, the chi-squared statistic was applied based on the percentage of responses from men and women.

A chi-square statistic of 2.95 was obtained with a p-value of 0.566 and maintaining a degree of freedom of 4. Therefore, as p is greater than 0.5, there is no dependence between variables, so it is only random differences. It can therefore be determined that following or not following an influencer on social media does not depend on the user's gender.

3.3. Experts describe the Z profile

Thanks to the interviews, it was possible to contrast what young people think with how they are perceived by experts. Figure 4 shows the main cores that are the subject of study in this research: communication, online behavior and advertising.

First, there is a direct relationship between communication and online behavior, as young people make excessive use of social media, through which they create their own language, which sometimes is even difficult for adults to understand. The constant flow of information triggers an overflow of impulses, which leads to the low attention and retention that Centennials have, both in entertainment and in the educational field.

“They are exposed to a lot of information and stimuli, so they have to do a much more intense work of integration, negotiation, and agreement than other generations” (psychologist, Mexico).

Table 2. Do you follow any influencer? Observed value

	Men	Women	Total
Yes	154	202	356
No	99	95	194
Total	253	297	550

Table 3. Do you follow any influencer? Chi²

	Men	Women
Yes	0.50	0.49
No	1.07	0.89
Chi ²	1.57	1.38

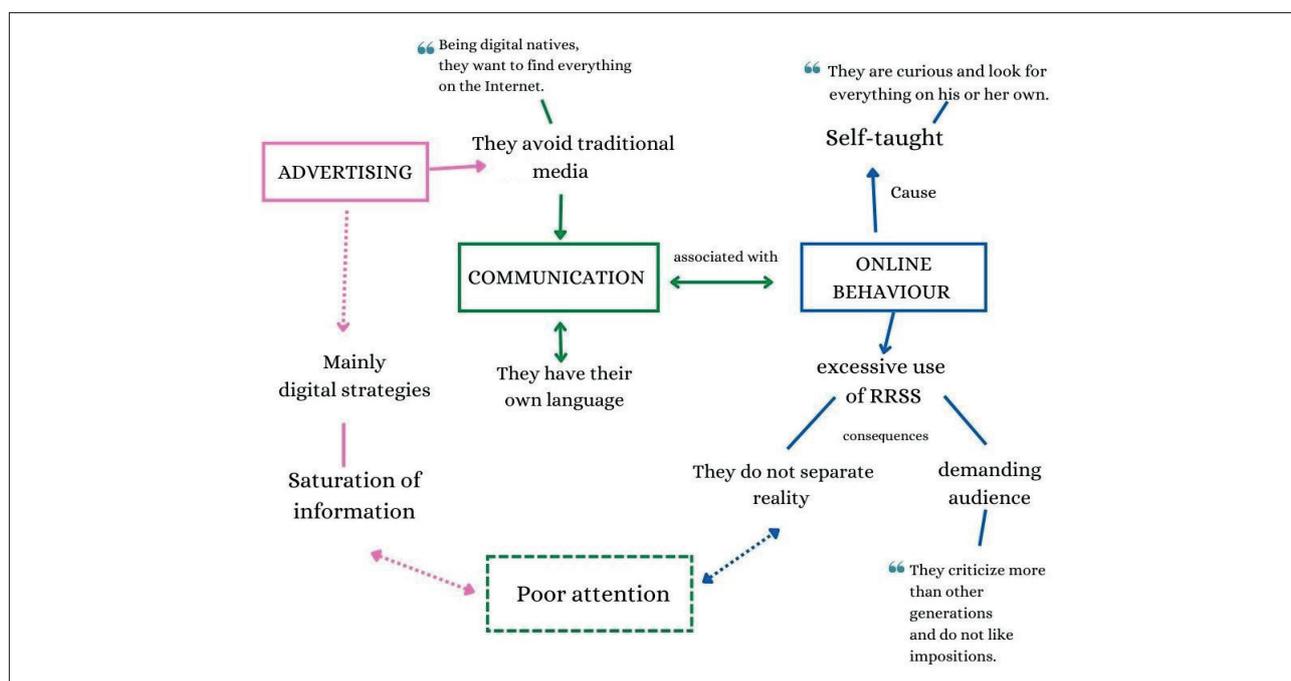


Figure 4. The Z profile according to the experts

Similarly, it's striking that professionals emphasize that many young people treat virtuality as another reality.

“Being so digitalized, they live a lot in superficiality, so what do they value? Being seen and appreciated for who they are and how they are” (high school teacher, Chile).

“The constant flow of information triggers an overflow of impulses, which leads to the low attention and retention that Centennials have, both in entertainment and in the educational field”

In addition, the interviewees agree that the main characteristics of Centennials when communicating and using social media are:

- use of short messages;
- they like to read little;
- they use their own language;
- they use emojis and stickers to replace words and expressions;
- they have parallel conversations on various platforms.

Another finding related to their online behavior is the privacy they maintain when using social media. This situation is contrasted with the observations of experts, in relation to what Centennials think, as they do not consider themselves exhibitionists and do not constantly publish content.

“They publish everything, they need constant validation from their social circle” (high school teacher, Mexico).

Table 4. Contrasts the statements of each party

Experts	Centennials
Like to be the center of attention	Privacy matters
May be exhibitionists	I don't like to upload pictures of myself
They talk to people they don't know	My circle in social networks is closed: only friends or acquaintances
Like to have an opinion on everything	I inform myself about current issues in order to be able to give my opinion

Likewise, experts agree that they are a generation with a more developed critical thinking and willing to question when there is an abuse of power.

“The student does not accept authority simply because it is authority; it can be questioned, counter-questioned and disagreed with” (university professor, Colombia).

On the other hand, the interviewees agree that Centennials have the desire to always be informed and know other truths. For this reason, it is emphasized that the majority are self-taught; their main source of information is the Internet, considering *Twitter* and *Instagram* as means of following news that interests them.

Additionally, in their behavior, the internalized idea of living in constant comparison is highlighted.

“They feel much fear of being left behind, they feel fear of failure, because as they are involved in this world, where everyone posts what they do, where they go, what they have; then, they always feel that need; they compare themselves or believe they are compared to others” (high school teacher, Panama).

Another important aspect that experts point out is that young people have a different notion of time than other generations. For them, time passes faster and the novel quickly loses that quality. When referring to “retro” issues, it is just 5-6 years old. In this sense,

“that dimension of time raises fleeting relationships with everything else” (university professor, Colombia).

Finally, experts add that, to capture the attention of Centennials, the brand should not show itself as superior, but as equal and not have complex storytellings. The challenge is to surprise the young audience without falling into falsehood.

“The most important thing is to seek to make a match” (communication and brand positioning consultant, Chile).

Thus, the elements that best score Centennials in advertising are originality, brief messages, and narratives that resemble their reality.

3.4. Advertising according to the Z Generation

The characteristics found in this demofigureic indicate that 72% want ads that provide useful information about the product and/or service being promoted, compared to 62% who are only interested in ads that relate to their tastes. 27% prefer advertising to be very colorful, while 24% opt for advertising products that have special effects. These perceptions are equal among countries and between the sexes. However, Z1 prioritizes advertising that provides them with functional information.

“I prefer a brief advertisement with a clear message that gives me something” (man, 15 years old, Chile).

It is worth noting that 95% of Centennials think that the daily ads they see on their social media profiles do not impact them or influence them to want to buy a certain product.

Despite these young people being digital natives and averaging four hours online per day, they do not have a fondness for online shopping or playing online. This situation may also be due to their age and the low or no income they have.

“I don’t like shopping online; I like the experience of going to the stores and trying on what I want” (woman, 22 years old, Mexico).

In fact, those who claim to make any online purchases do so on *Amazon*, and most of these are young people between the ages of 20 and 22, that is, the “older” Centennials. In the case of minors, the purchase process is supervised by their parents.

The buying criteria of this generation is to buy products because they are “in fashion” or because “everyone uses them”. *Nike* (27%), *Apple* (13%), *Zara* (12%) and *Samsung* (12%) are the most purchased brands. However, the sample pointed out that they do not follow the brands they consume on any social network, because they consider it does not provide useful or entertaining information.

Regarding technology brands, only 15% of the sample is aware of the meaning of the metaverse, relating it to virtual worlds and network connectivity. In fact, 40% responded that they don’t know what “metaverse” means. 10% answered that NFTs are digital items or Non-Fungible Tokens. This shows that the surveyed Centennials are not inclined to these products, nor do they show interest in them.

4. Discussion

The study countries present similarities in their online behaviors and consumption patterns, prioritizing the same social networks and buying from similar brands. The main difference lies in the topics of conversation, as the context of each country is different and is an influential factor. Their interests –both in conversation and actions– go hand in hand with current trends; this generates a very changing and complex Z profile.

Talking about trends reflects the Z’s constant need to be updated and not fall behind. However, political and social cause debates are the least interesting to this population. Soccer is the most recurring topic. In addition to following trends, this research proves that experts and professionals are unaware of the importance that Centennials attach to their online security and privacy, as the Zs have their social media profiles in private mode and do not constantly post photofigures of themselves. With this data, **Almansa-Martínez, Fonseca and Castillo-Esparcia** (2013) findings are refuted.

Generation Z individuals have an observing role on their social media profiles and use the Internet and social media as their main sources of information, according to the study by **Gómez-de-Travesedo-Rojas and Gil-Ramírez** (2020). The fact that *WhatsApp* is the most used social network among Generation Z reflects their dislike of being disconnected, especially from their circle of friends. Similarly, there are coincidences with what was determined by **Garitaonandia et al.** (2020), who mention that young people use the Internet to communicate with their surroundings and for entertainment purposes.

Another characteristic of their online behavior is their ability to continue a conversation across different platforms. In this type of communication, visual resources and short phrases, along with the use of emojis and stickers, take priority, creating a unique symbolism in their language and emphasizing their digital qualities. This result is in line with the established findings by **Almansa-Martínez, Fonseca and Castillo-Esparcia** (2013) regarding the evolution of language among Generation Z youth.

“ Young people have a different notion of time than other generations. For them, time passes faster and the novel quickly loses that quality. When referring to “retro” issues, it is just 5-6 years old ”

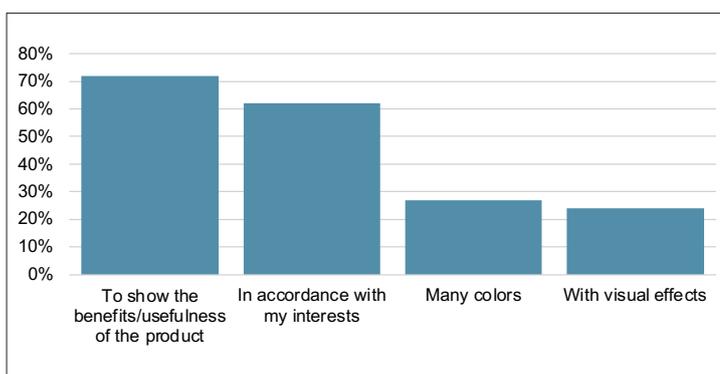


Figure 5. Advertising interest

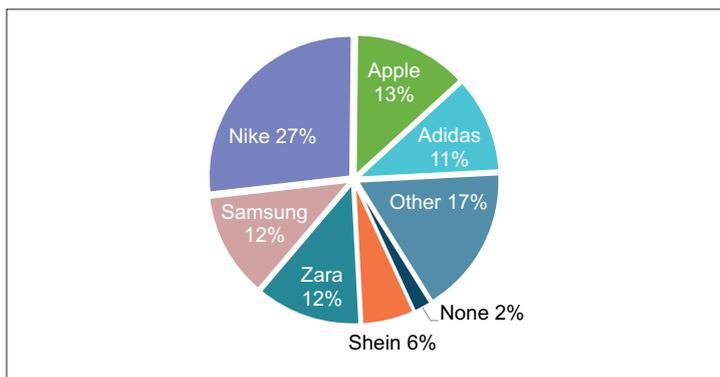


Figure 6. Main brands consumed by Generation Z

Therefore, their online consumption can be divided into two categories: the content and information they seek and the purchases they make.

In the content typology, humorous and entertaining resources are preferred. Centennials claim that what they like most about being on social media is “laughing”, which is consistent across all countries. *Instagram* and *TikTok* are the most used networks for this purpose.

However, these results differ from those found among Spanish Centennials, as *TikTok* and *Twitch* have made a strong impact on the lives of the Generation Z in Spain, according to the work of **García-Rivero, Martínez-Estrella and Bonañales-Daimiel** (2022), which does not occur among young people in the countries analyzed in the present study (especially with regard to *Twitch*). Therefore, the preference for social networks among this cohort cannot be homogenized.

According to the way of purchasing, most Centennials said that they continue to buy in person and those who decide to buy online, decide to check the product reviews made by influencers, friends, or people with “many followers”. Product reviews on social networks become one of the most viewed content, as mentioned by **Hernández and Andrade-del-Cid** (2020) and this is a variable that brands must consider in their campaigns. Although influencers are media references for this generation (**Elxpuru et al.**, 2021), it should be noted that there is no dependence of variables and, therefore, it cannot be sustained if men or women follow more influencers. Thus, this study refutes the assertion of **Djafarova and Bowes** (2021), who established that women follow more fashion influencers, being a variable that intervenes in their purchasing process.

The most purchased brands are the same in the four countries and although Z-ers are not interested in debating technology, they do care about buying cutting-edge devices, with *Apple* and *Samsung* being the best-positioned brands. This also shows the great notoriety and global recognition obtained by brands such as *Adidas* or *Nike* among the youth population.

Regarding the cultural characteristics of each country, it is noted that although they share a language, there are differences in how they speak it; in Panama and Mexico, it is common for young people to use Anglicisms, expressions, and words in English in their conversations or posts, showing a clear influence from the United States. It should be mentioned that in no country is importance given to indigenous origins, having primarily a capitalist and consumerist mindset.

There is also not excessive concern for the preservation of natural resources or roots. This situation continues to be one of the main problems that must be addressed in the Latin American region (**Oszlak**, 2010).

“There is no concern or interest in knowing their past, their history; it seems that they are at odds with anything that is old” (high school teacher, Panama).

Regarding their beliefs, Catholicism is not openly rejected in any country. Panama and Mexico are the countries with the highest percentage of Centennials posting messages related to religion, indicating a behavior that tends to be conservative. However, it is noted that in Mexico, despite being a country with a high number of Catholic believers, there is greater acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, which does not happen in Panama.

Experts and the Centennials themselves indicate that they have a limited openness to difference, emphasizing the trend in their behavior of being individualists.

“In times when difference is proclaimed, certain differences are not accepted, only those that they believe are convenient” (social studies expert, Colombia).

Generally speaking, Gen Z cares about maintaining their image. However, it has been found that there is an excessive focus on physical appearance in Colombian culture. Both experts and survey participants mentioned that taking care of their physical appearance is a priority in their lives. On the other hand, Chilean youth has a cultural trait of being nationalist; its youth continuously discusses political issues and the direction of their country, demanding greater youth participation.

The findings of this research confirm that the Z generation easily perceives advertising; however, they prefer those that they consider provide valuable information, teach them something, or communicate the utility of the promoted product or service. It is relevant to note that, according to Centennials, advertisements posted on *Instagram* are easily detected as advertising, while many of those appearing on *TikTok* are defined as platform-specific content, which is an advantage for brand strategy design.

“Talking about trends reflects the Z’s constant need to be updated and not fall behind. However, political and social cause debates are the least interesting to this population. Soccer is the most recurring topic”

“Communication with this generation must be open, bidirectional, and multi-platform, avoiding rigid structures”

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the results provided offer a detailed view of the behavior and digital consumption patterns of Generation Z, as a way of exploring in Mexico, Colombia, Chile, and Panama. First, it should be highlighted that the differences between Z1 and Z2 are slightly smaller, as the main difference lies in their conversation topics; a situation that is linked to their age and the stage of life they are going through.

Generation Z individuals have an observing role on their social media profiles and use the Internet and social media as their main sources of information

Next, in terms of cultural characteristics, they maintain a dominant religious aspect and detachment from their origins; there is a particular disinterest in history. However, a single communication approach cannot be used for all four countries, as the main cultural difference is in the use of language. There are two languages present:

- Z, composed of symbols and abbreviations;
- cultural, made up of Anglicisms and expressions specific to each country.

Regarding their behavior, it can be highlighted that Centennials prioritize themselves, so they take care of their image and body; Z2 have a greater concern for this. Zs are not a completely open-minded generation towards diversity, because their own interests are the most important, this is related to individualistic traits in their lifestyle. They also demand attention, respect for their rights and do not accept impositions; they are not satisfied with absolute truths, even less so if they are imposed by adults with traditional arguments. With open access to information, data comparison is constant and is part of their daily lives, which makes everything debatable, contrastable, and refutable. For these reasons, communication with this generation must be open, bidirectional, and multiplatform, avoiding rigid structures.

The qualitative and quantitative research conducted determines that communication directed towards this target audience must use short and impactful messages, using the characteristic language of Centennials, as the attention span of Zs on timelines must not be forgotten. Additionally, this study determines an evolution in their consumption of information and entertainment, as Zs prefer social networks that prioritize image and immediacy, such as *Instagram* and *TikTok*.

In terms of consumption patterns, this generation prioritizes technological consumption—understood as the acquisition of new devices—which is closely related to their hyperconnectivity, as digital tools are part of their daily dynamics and they are not easily surprised by this type of product. Similarly, it can be noted that they prefer to buy in physical stores rather than online.

Centennials seek honesty and consistency between the actions and discourse of the brand. Pretentious messages cannot be designed. Furthermore, it is established that this generation easily perceives advertising content, which if it generates any kind of value—informative, utilitarian—will be well received. Therefore, the biggest challenge for brands is the factor of surprise. For this reason, the use of social listening tools is suggested to allow them to identify Z trends in real-time and thus become part of their conversation organically.

The Centennial consumer will be increasingly demanding, especially with the content they want to receive; they may even be willing to change brands if they find one that is more personalized and suited to their interests and tastes, always looking for more quality instead of volume. The Zs expect to find authentic brands, which demands that organizations create specific narratives for this audience.

As future lines of research, it is proposed to compare these results with the Gen Z young people from other Spanish-speaking countries to study their differences and similarities. Similarly, it would be interesting to sample and study in more countries in Latin America, in order to have a radiofigurey of this generation in the region and to take into account other countries outside of America. As a result, a broader vision of the Zs could be obtained, regardless of their geographical location.

Finally, it is considered necessary to unify criteria on the part of the scientific community about the years that define this cohort, as there are many proposals in this regard. In this sense, this research has considered the age range most used by communication and social sciences researchers, with the intention of unifying criteria and serving as a precedent.

This study determines an evolution in their consumption of information and entertainment, as Zs prefer social networks that prioritize image and immediacy, such as *Instagram* and *TikTok*

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Información: **Isabel Olea**
epi.iolea@gmail.com