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Mass media usage from emerging adults in times of crisis: evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The objective of this research paper is to investigate the media consumption habits of emerging adults during the Covid-19 crisis, with a particular focus on traditional media. A Google Search survey was conducted, in which 284 respondents participated. The survey aimed to gather information on various aspects of their media consumption, such as demographic information, previous experience with mass media communication, frequency of usage of different mass media, perception of the significance of mass media, and perception of TV as a mass medium on several topics. The results of the study indicated that TV was the most frequently used medium among the respondents, given its importance in disseminating information and their previous experience with it. Radio was the second most popular medium, followed by print media. However, a closer examination of the TV data revealed that only 4.6% of the respondents completely agreed that TV messages were a good source of information, and only 8.5% had complete trust in the credibility of the information provided on TV. Additionally, only 5.3% of the respondents had a completely positive attitude towards the TV. In summary, although TV was the preferred medium compared to radio and print media, emerging adults did not have a wholly positive attitude towards TV, nor did they perceive it as a reliable source of information.

Keywords: mass media, emerging adults, communication, crisis, covid pandemic

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an undeniable impact on the behavior of emerging adults. Social media consumption has seen a dramatic uptick of more than 60%, due to users' satisfaction perceptions being positively affected by it. Additionally, it serves as a coping mechanism during periods of social isolation [1]. Before the dawn of the internet, television was the primary source of entertainment and information. It took the radio, newspapers, magazines and movies much longer to become popular-yet the internet was able to reach global ubiquity in just 15 years. In rural communities, TV is still seen as the primary source of media content [2]. However, the pandemic has seen a rapid rise in competition between traditional and social types of media. Cimino et al. (2020) found that the average evening news viewership increased by 14%, with a higher increase of 20% among younger audiences [3]. Túnñez-López, et al. (2020) found that television news was the most widely used source of information about the pandemic [4], while Speck (2020) reported that fewer people turned to the radio for news about Covid-19 [5]. It is clear that media consumption has seen a dramatic increase since the pandemic began, and it is driven by various motives of its users. When it comes to understanding the reasons why one may choose one medium over another, it is important to consider a range of factors. People of all ages, genders and employment statuses have unique characteristics and needs. To understand any particular demographic, it is important to consider the characteristics that are relevant to them. Understanding their background regarding the education they have completed, their knowledge of languages or their cultural background is important in making a more profound analysis of a specific topic. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze the media usage of emerging adults about the traditional types of media (television, radio and print magazines). Through this analysis better understanding of emerging adults' engagement with traditional types of media during the corona crisis will be obtained. Hence, the results of this paper will provide a better understanding of media usage among emerging adults and their preferences during Covid-19.

The section is organized as follows. After the Introduction section, a literature review with recent and relevant studies in this research field is provided. Section 3 presents the used methodology and the sample, whereas Section 4 introduces the results and opens up a discussion. The last and fifth section provides valuable conclusions, limitations of the study and guidelines for future work.

2. Literature review

The COVID-19 pandemic “has profoundly affected the mental health” of many human beings, including adolescents and emerging adults. Moreover, the lockdowns, lifestyle changes and social distancing protocols have “driven a surge in social media and digital technology usage” [6]. However, what is more important is that the COVID-19 pandemic “has resulted in an avalanche of information, much of it false or misleading” and was the first major crisis that occurred “during an unprecedented age of simultaneous atomization and connectivity, in the so-called age of social media” [7]. This is one of the main reasons why mass media usage in emerging adults in crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic is such a vital issue. Namely, mass media reports potentially modify people's knowledge and opinions of “emerging infectious diseases, thus changing the public attitudes and behaviours” [8] and in the time of the pandemic, media usage has increased

dramatically. Approximately “58%/58% and 48%/43% of adolescents and young adults had spent more time on respectively social media and streaming/TV than before the pandemic” and around 67% of youth informed themselves regularly via the media in comparison with the period before the pandemic [9]. This is a very topical and trending issue that has been largely investigated in the past few years. Namely, Kolapo et al. (2021) have investigated the knowledge, perception, and sources of COVID-19 information among Nigerian youths and found that “social media (64.4%) and television (58%) were the main sources of COVID-19 information” [10]. Liu et al. (2020), on the other hand, investigate how the amount of media exposure to different COVID-19-related contents affects the anxiety levels in different categories of the public in China [11]. Their findings, among other, reveal the particularly crucial role of media “in affecting the public responses to COVID-19”.

Barinov (2022) conducted an empirical study among 400 students from Smolensk, Russia to investigate their attitude to the media coverage of the coronavirus. His most crucial finding is that “students’ perception of publications in the media about the coronavirus is accompanied by negative emotions (fear, anxiety, uncertainty, frustration)” because of both the content and the presentation of the publications. He also found a great dose of scepticism and distrust among students regarding official media reports on coronavirus and concludes that the new media such as Internet portals and social networks are ranked “second most popular news source after television” [12].

Mathews et al. (2021) have explored adolescents’ critical health literacy, focusing on the impact that trust in government leadership has on knowledge regarding COVID-19 in a sample of 194 STEM-oriented adolescents and young adults from the US and the UK [13]. Their findings and analyses reveal that “adolescents use both traditional news (e.g., TV or newspapers) and social media news to acquire information about COVID-19” and highlight that “trust in government leaders plays a critical role in COVID-19 public health messaging for adolescents”. Moreover, Vranken et al. (2022) constructed a prototype willingness model (PWM) in a cross-sectional study among Belgian adolescents and young adults to detect the “associations between pro- and antigovernmental (social) media and youth’s violations of the lockdown measures” [9]. Their study is very interesting since it sheds light on the implications for media research and health campaigns.

Srinivasan et al. (2021) focus on the impact of COVID-19 online classes on morningness/eveningness personality among 897 adult college students from SIMATS University, Chennai in India. They claim college students to be „the most vulnerable population who are at high risk to mental health issues” [14].

Some studies tackle the inevitable issue of vaccine hesitancy, such as the study of Hassen et al. (2022) which focus on vaccine hesitancy and the role of religious affiliation and an individual’s reliance on traditional remedy [15]. They found that, in a sample of 358 participants (staff and students at Jimma University), half of the participants were hesitant about the COVID-19 vaccine. What is more intriguing is that “the odds of becoming vaccine hesitant among those whose source of COVID-19 information is from four media sources (Social Media, Mass Media, Health care worker and Friends/family/Neighbor) is 74% lower than those with one media source”. Therefore,

they conclude that more media and information sources increase vaccine hesitancy in the observed sample.

Tamiru et al. (2020) have found that „age, level of education, browsing social media, and having interpersonal (family and friends) discussions were the independent factors significantly associated with good information exposure towards COVID-19” [16] and Bajwa et al. (2022) conclude that social media contributes greatly to the creation of literacy among masses, which “eventually helps people to use precautionary measure against COVID-19” [17].

3. Methodology

Since the literature suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has altered people’s daily lives as well as media consumption habits, it is of interest to see towards which media have people turned in times of crisis.

In this paper, we analyse the different mass media usage, with a focus on television, radio, and print. The reason behind researching the mass media communication and habits of emerging adults during a crisis is due to the existing gap in the literature on one side, and the need for updated data on communication trends, on the other.

The research sample consists of 284 emerging adults, aged 18 – 29 years. The size of the sample for this generation (age group) is above the national standard for representative samples of 0.5%, since the total population between 15-29 years of age is 480.828 (State Statistical Office, 2022), and the size of the sample according to the State Statistical Office standard for representative samples would be 240.

According to Arnett (2000), the generation of emerging adults consists of youth between 18 and 29 years old, living in the phase between the end of adolescence and young-adult responsibilities such as a stable job, marriage, and parenthood. Emerging adults are the generation that has experienced the biggest changes and advancements related to social media, the internet, smartphones, and other technological advancements, which became their identity (Singh and Dangmei, 2016).

The data is collected through primary and secondary research. The primary research was done through a Google Forms questionnaire with a variety of questions with nominal, ordinal and interval (Likert) scales, distributed through Microsoft Teams to emerging adults (i.e. students) at the Faculty of Economics at the state university Goce Delcev – Shtip, Macedonia, present in online classes at the time of distribution.

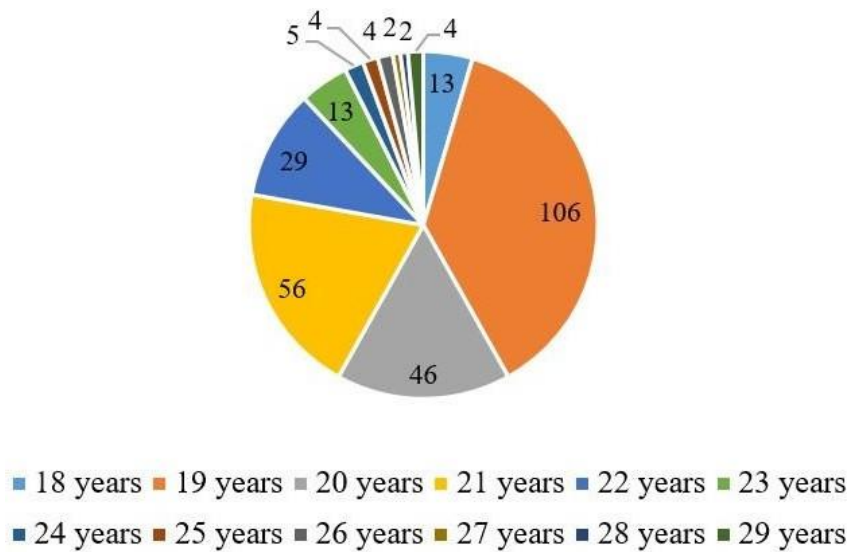
Participants then answered questions divided into subgroups: 1. Demographic information (age, year of study, available monthly income and work status); 2. Information about previous experience with communication on mass media; 3. Information about the frequency of usage of different mass media; 4. Perception of the significance i.e. the relative value of the mass media for communication with consumers; 5. Perception of TV as mass media on several topics (good source of information; relevance of information; credibility of information; the positive influence of information on decision-making; general attitude towards the TV as a medium).

The data are analyzed on the level of descriptive statistics in combination with relevant information from the existing academic literature. The aim of this paper is to provide more in-depth insight into

the current trends in mass media habits and communication under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, through a combination of primary and secondary research.

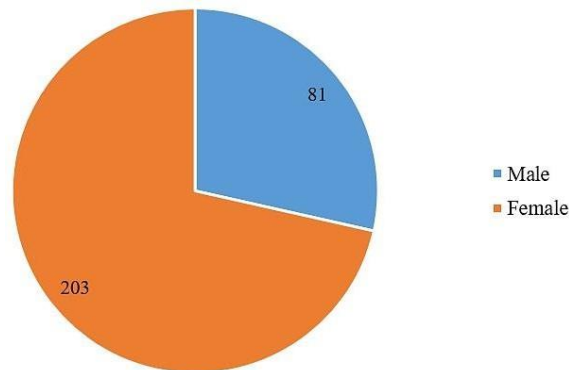
The demographic data shows that most of the respondents in the sample are 19 years of age, followed by respondents aged 21, 20 and 24 (Figure 1). Related to gender, 203 (71.5%) are male, and 81 (28.5%) are females (Figure 2). According to years of study, most of them 144 (50.7%) are in their first year of studies, followed by fourth-year 58 (20.4%), third-year 46 (16.2%) and second-year 33 (11.6%) (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Age



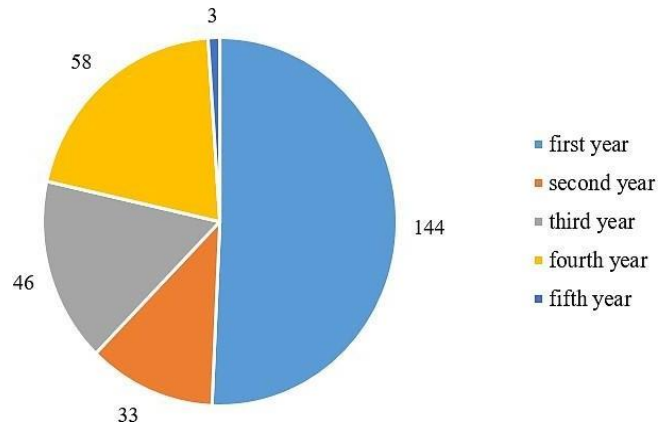
Source: Authors' own research

Figure 2. Gender of respondents



Source: Authors' own research

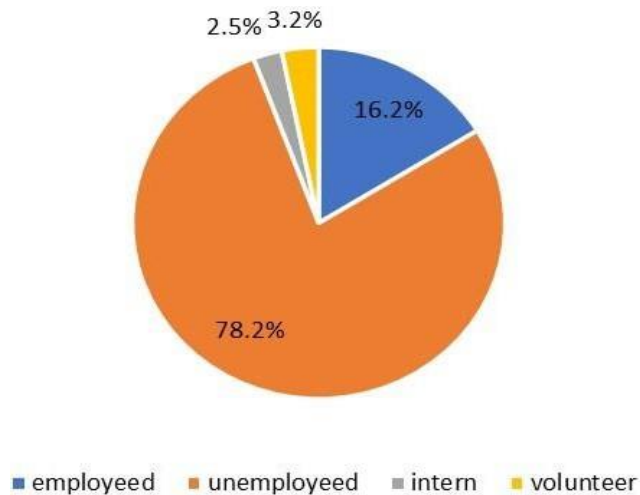
Figure 3. Year of studies



Source: Authors' own research

Regarding the work status of the respondents, most of them are unemployed 222 (78.2%), only 46 (16.2%) are employed, and the remaining 5.6% are interns or volunteers (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Work status



Source: Authors' own research

4. Results and discussion

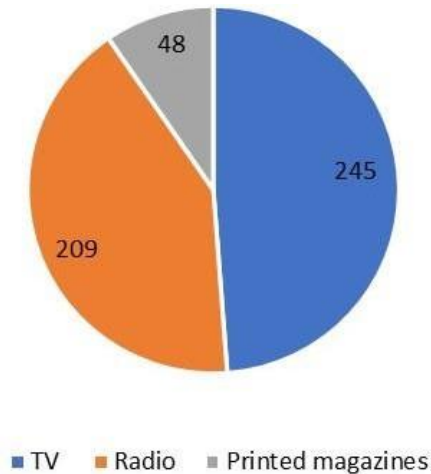
Media have a crucial role in the development of every society, through different aspects such as transparent and timely placement of important information, serving as a channel for messages from the Government, other public institutions, or from organizations and private companies that want to inform or sell their products and services to the consumers. Media can help in increasing public awareness of important societal issues, participate in educating people on different topics and even drive changes in behavior.

Therefore, understanding the habits and behaviour of the new generations, such as the emerging adults, in mass media usage is important for grasping the significance of the different media and their potential role in society, especially in times of crisis, when certain changes in behaviour in people are needed and even life-saving at times. Nowadays, more studies measure social media usage in emerging adults, which is why we have addressed the issue of mass media usage in this generation, so we can offer another perspective to the overall picture of media usage and its importance, especially since the occurrence of Covid-19.

In addition, we provide the results from the questionnaire.

With regards to previous experience with messages from different mass media (in the last six months during the pandemic) (Figure 5), most of the respondents have received messages from TV (86,3% or 245), additionally, 73,6% (209) have received messages from radio, while only 16,9% (48) have received messages from print media. This finding is in line with previous research (Mathews et al., 2021).

Figure 5. Previous experience with receiving messages from different mass media

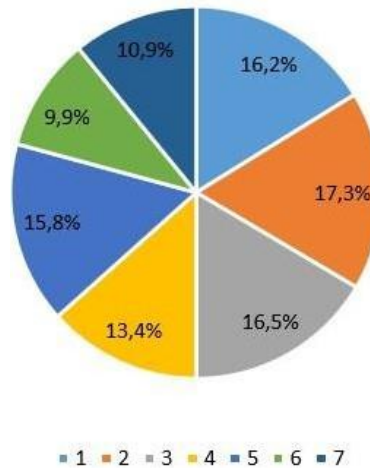


Source: Authors' own research

When it comes to the perceived relative value of different mass media as a medium for information placement, ranked on a scale of 1 (most important media) to 7 (least important media), TV (Figure 6) is ranked as the most important (with most respondents choosing 1 (16,2%), 2 (17.3%) and 3

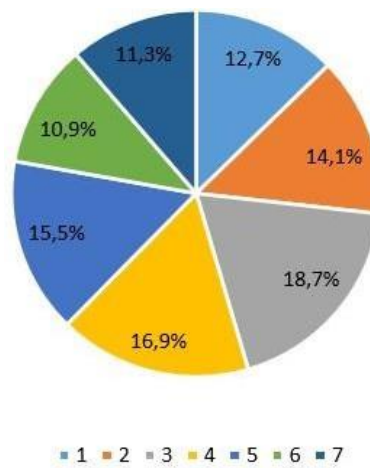
(16.5%) as scale values), followed by radio (Figure 7) (1 chosen by 12,7%, 2 chosen by 14,1% and 3 chosen by 18,7%), while print (Figure 8) is considered to be the least important media by the perception of emerging adults (1 is chosen by 13%, 2 by 9,2% and 3 by 18.7%).

Figure 6. The relative importance of TV as a media for information placement



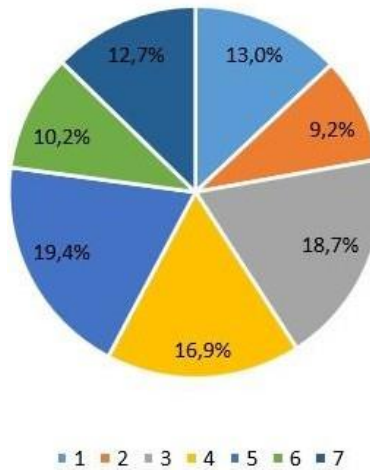
Source: Authors' own research

Figure 7. The relative importance of radio as a media for information placement



Source: Authors' own research

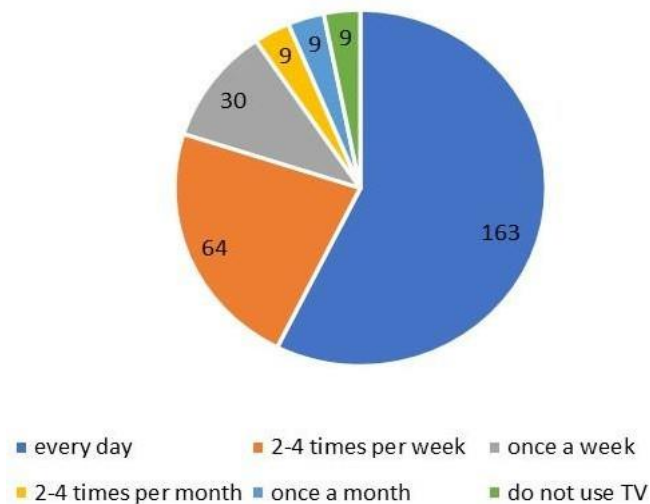
Figure 8. The relative importance of print as a media for information placement



Source: Authors' own research

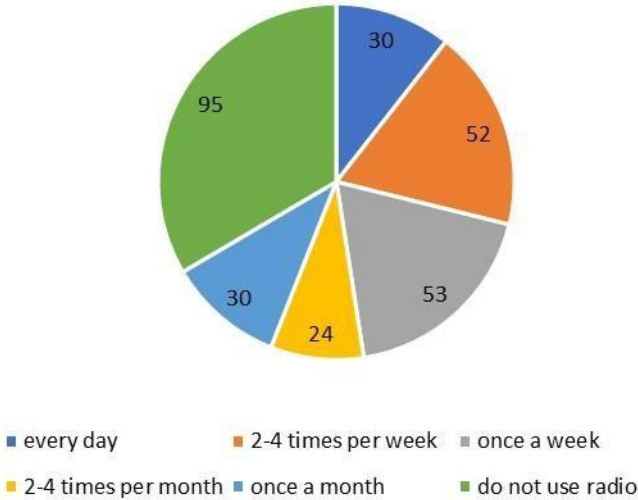
The research on characteristics of different mass media usage, regarding frequency shows that TV (Figure 9) is the most frequently used mass media by most of the respondents (57,4% use it daily and 22,5% use it 2-4 times per week), followed by radio (Figure 10) (10,6% use it daily, 18,3% use it 2-4 times per week and 18.7% use it once per week), while print (Figure 11) is less frequently used media (21,1% use it once per month, while 40,2% do not use print media at all).

Figure 9. Frequency of TV usage



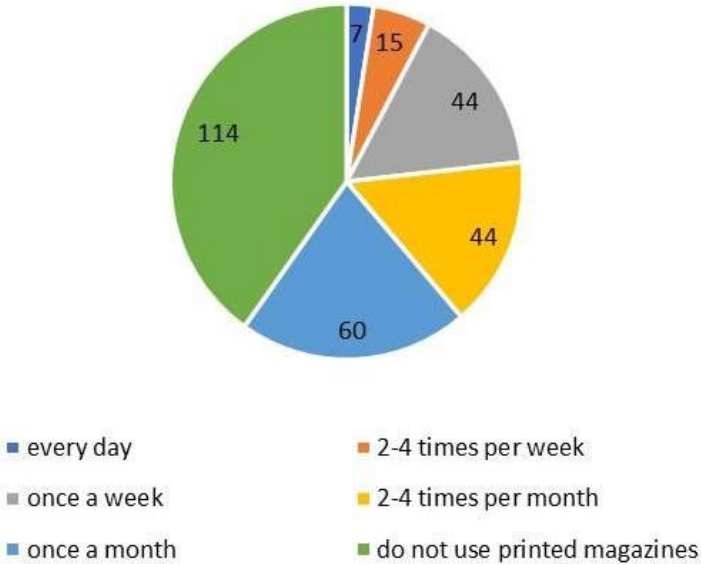
Source: Authors' own research

Figure 10. Frequency in radio



Source: Authors' own research

Figure 11. Frequency in print usage



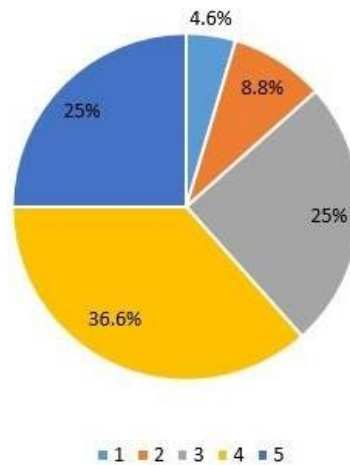
Source: Authors' own research

Additionally, the research presents more in-depth information about respondents' perceptions regarding different aspects of TV, as the most frequently used and the media with the largest relative importance in their opinion.

From Figure 12 to Figure 15 we present results on different perceptions about messages and information placed on TV as a medium, on a 5-point liker scale (1 – completely disagree and 5-completely agree).

Figure 12 shows that only 4,6% completely agree that messages on TV are a good source of information; 8,8% agree; 25% neither agree nor disagree, while the majority, cumulatively, disagree with this statement 61,6%).

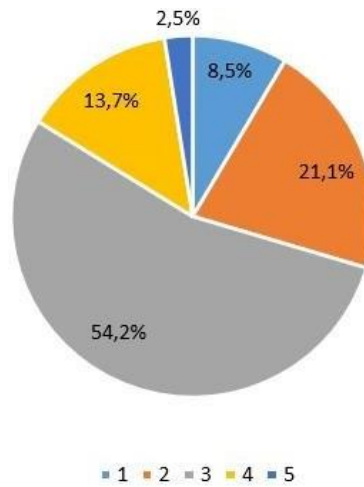
Figure 12. Messages on Tv are a good source of information



Source: Authors' own research

Regarding the credibility of the messages and information placed on TV, most of the emerging adults (54,2%) neither agree nor disagree; only 8,5% completely agree; 21,1% agree; while 13,7% disagree and 2,5% completely disagree.

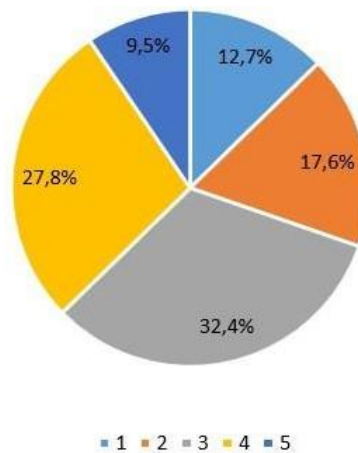
Figure 13. Messages and information on TV are credible



Source: Authors' own research

Regarding the influence of information placed on TV on the decision making process of people, 12,7% completely agree, 17,6% agree (cumulatively 30,3%); 32,4% neither agree nor disagree; 27,8% disagree and 9.5% completely disagree.

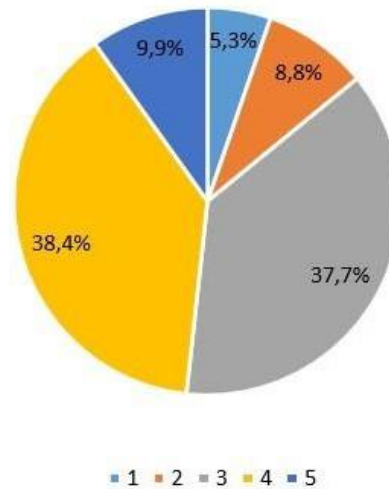
Figure 14. Messages and information have a positive influence on my decision making



Source: Authors' own research

When it comes to the general attitude towards the TV as a medium, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 – completely negative and 5 – completely positive), 5,3% have a completely positive attitude towards TV; 8,8% have a positive attitude; 37,7% have a neutral attitude; 38,4% have a negative and 9,9% have a completely negative attitude towards the TV as a medium. This result shows that even when emerging adults increase their time and their attention towards information on TV, their general attitude is not mostly positive and they don't have high trustworthiness in the information they receive, i.e. don't perceive the information as highly credible.

Figure 15. General attitude towards TV as a medium for information consumption



Source: Authors' own research

Conclusion

In times of uncertainty, individuals may exhibit changes in behavior. However, humans possess inherent adaptability and resilience, allowing them to adjust to circumstances and overcome obstacles. The literature suggests that media plays a vital role in societal development. Nevertheless, the Covid-19 crisis has had an impact on people's media consumption habits and the use of various media. Identifying a gap in the analysis of traditional media usages, such as TV, radio, and print, this paper aims to explore this field. To this end, a Google Search survey was conducted on 284 respondents, covering several aspects such as demographic information, previous experience with mass media communication, frequency of usage of different mass media, and perception of the significance and role of TV as a mass medium on several topics. The findings of the study reveal that most respondents were males in their early twenties. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that TV was the most frequently used medium for receiving messages, followed by radio and print media. In the same order, the results indicate the preference for these media as a means of information placement. Given that TV was the most used and preferred medium compared to radio and print media, a more in-depth analysis was conducted. The results demonstrate that emerging adults do not consider TV as a credible source of information.

Finally, this study has some limitations such as the sampling method that depends on voluntary participation. Consequently, this leads to higher selection bias. An additional drawback is a focus on one generation of consumer-emerging adults, which limits the possibility of generalizing the findings to the population. Another limitation refers to the follow-up period for the respondents.

These limitations create a need for further research in this area, where other forms of media can be incorporated to provide a more comprehensive overview of the utilization of various media options. A larger sample that includes other generations can provide a better picture of the opinion and attitudes of the population. Furthermore, a comparison between communication practices can be conducted to better understand the most effective media channel for communication with people.

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