

# The perception of linear radio among communication students from Generation Z

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## Abstract

*The main aim of this study is to determine how radio is perceived as a source of information and entertainment by young Generation Z university students who are studying on communication courses and will be the media workers of the future. A qualitative and quantitative methodology was used, based on 3 focus groups and a survey. The main findings of the survey reveal their perception of radio as a medium for mature audiences, the lack of content that meets their expectations and the failure to adapt it to their digital consumption habits. However, through podcasts, Gen Z students are already consuming radio narratives, sometimes without being aware of it. We conclude that, in order to attract this generational segment, radio broadcasters need to implement creative and innovative strategies to consolidate their presence in podcasting and enhance their corporate image in this emerging landscape.*

## Keywords

*Radio, podcast, audience, Generation Z, music consumption.*

## Resum

*Aquest estudi té com a principal objectiu determinar quina és la percepció de la ràdio com a mitjà d'informació i d'entreteniment dels joves estudiants universitaris de la generació Z que cursen estudis de Comunicació, els quals configuraran la futura força laboral dels mitjans. Per a això s'empra una metodologia qualitativa i quantitativa, basada en 3 focus group i una enquesta. D'entre els principals resultats de la prospecció en destaca la seva visió de la ràdio com un mitjà per a adults, l'absència de continguts que compleixin les seves expectatives i la manca d'adaptació al seu patró de consum digital. No obstant això, a través del pòdcast, els estudiants Z ja consumeixen narratives radiofòniques, de vegades, sense ser-ne conscients. Es conclou que, per atreure aquest segment generacional, la ràdio està abocada a implementar estratègies creatives i innovadores per consolidar la seva presència en el pòdcasting i potenciar la seva identitat corporativa en aquest territori emergent.*

## Paraules clau

*Ràdio, pòdcast, audiència, generació Z, consum musical.*

## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, mainstream media have managed to attract younger generations of audiences "through the various participatory and interactive formats that the Internet provides" (Carrera et al., 2020, p. 563). It is evident that generational transitions follow a gradual, staggered sequence, if we consider the incoming cohort - Generation Z - with respect to outgoing cohorts,

especially Generation X and *Baby Boomers* and the digital divide that this entails (Mori Cureses, 2023). This *impasse* is central to safeguarding the stability and economic viability of media and media consumption, yet it does not seem to occur naturally. This process not only involves transferring professional roles and responsibilities, but also other factors, e.g. adapting to the emerging communication dynamics of the market or reshaping the demands of the new audience. The specific form this

generational shift takes is, therefore, a key parameter of media adaptability in an increasingly segmented media environment with a wider range of news and entertainment content on offer. However, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have marked a turning point in the generational shift of traditional media audiences. Since the second decade of the 21st century, media consumption among 14-25 year-olds has plateaued, and this cannot be considered temporary (López-Vidales and Gómez-Rubio, 2021).

Linear radio is no exception to this phenomenon. The medium's audience ratings have fallen by 7.5 percent over the last ten years, from 2012 (61.9 %) to 2022 (54.4 %) (AIMC, 2023). According to Zumeta (2023), this trend will be virtually impossible to reverse and should lead us to reflect on how these figures will evolve over the next decade. The reason for this lies in the current omnichannel nature of the audio medium, which allows listeners to access audio content away from the airwaves, e.g. through streaming or on-demand radio, podcasts or audiobooks, using any digital device. These new options for consumers "broaden and enhance the capacity of audio media to reach large segments of the population both quantitatively and qualitatively" (Pedrero-Esteban et al., 2023, p. 84).

A higher percentage of members of Generation Z should have become regular radio listeners by now. According to the Estudio General de Medios (General Media Study), audiences aged 14-19 accounted for 5.2% of all listeners in Spain in 2022, while for the 20-24 age group it was 4.8% (AIMC, 2022). The lack of radio content that is geared towards this segment of the population "is jeopardising the future viability of these companies, which are seeing a gradual decline in the generational replacement of their audiences" (Robert-Agell et al., 2022, p. 4).

Generation Z (Dolot, 2018), also known as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), post-Millennials (Frey, 2018), or the technoliterate generation (Taylor, 2005), among other labels, consists of people born between 1993 and 2005 (Turner, 2019), between 1995 and 2012 (Twenge, 2023) or between 1995 and 2009 (McCrinkle, 2014). In any event, these are digital natives "who regard Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a natural part of their environment" (Perona-Páez et al., 2014, p. 209). They exhibit distinctive characteristics based on their use of new technologies for information and communication (Pérez-Escoada et al., 2016) and show a dependency on the Internet (Puspitasari et al., 2019). It is considered to be the first fully digital generation (Vilanova and Ortega, 2017), because it never experienced life before the Internet (Prensky, 2001). Members of this segment of the population have taught themselves how to access and master ICTs, becoming proficient with an innate command of the language (García et al., 2007).

Digital natives see the web as a space for interacting, obtaining information and learning, where they search for, create and share content in real time thanks to the immediacy provided by the digital environment (Álvarez et al., 2019). They mainly access content on mobile phones. According to Busquet, "the smartphone is an extension of their senses

that allows them to stay in touch with reality.../...and they cannot conceive the possibility of a life without it" (Busquet, 2021). From a sociological standpoint, Generation Z "is an enterprising, globalised, self-taught and non-conformist group of young people; they are adept at multitasking, but they are also individualistic, pragmatic and have little attachment to values such as family, friendship or hard work" (López-Vidales and Gómez-Rubio, 2021, p.544).

Social networks have become this group's natural habitat for real-time communication and instant content generation on digital platforms. (Carrera et al., 2020; Marugán Solís and Martín Critikián, 2023). This is the generation that uses them the most (6.5 networks on average) and spends the most time connected to them (1 hour and 32 minutes a day) (IAB Spain, 2023). More specifically, the platforms they most frequently access are Instagram and TikTok (BCMA, 2022). Besides providing interactive and communicative functions, social networks have redefined the role of traditional media by becoming their primary sources of information and entertainment. As a result, conventional media users among this segment of the population are the lowest ever recorded in the history of audience measurement (López-Vidales and Gómez-Rubio, 2021).

Generation Z has adopted the use of audio as an essential tool in building its identity. For Pelegrí, Sales Manager at Spotify Spain, "audio is not simply a source of entertainment, but an intrinsic tool for sharing ideas and feelings, serving as a catalyst for cultural evolution" (Del Hoyo, 2023). The high levels of listeners of playlists and podcasts on audio distribution platforms, which increased by 76% in 2023 year-on-year, are a good illustration of this (IAB Spain, 2023). However, given the above figures, listening to linear radio does not seem to be part of Generation Z's equation.

To date, academia has barely discussed this topic. There has been notable studies by Perona-Páez et al. (2014) on the audio consumption of young people in the omnichannel age; by Puspitasari et al. (2019), examining whether private radio in the Bandung region of Indonesia meets the news and entertainment needs of Generation Z; by López-Vidales and Gómez-Rubio (2021), on the communication paradigm shift of Millennials and Generation Z; and by Robert-Agell et al. (2022), which analyses the phenomenon from a media economics perspective. Against this backdrop, the main aim of this study is to determine whether Gen Z university students who major in communication studies are also showing little interest in using this medium for entertainment and news, unlike the generations that preceded them, who have become regular listeners of the medium.

### 1.1 *Podcasting: the new form of radio for Gen Z university students*

The content consumption habits of Generation Z are intrinsically linked to the fact that they are digital natives. In this sense, its members share certain defining characteristics, such as having

access to on-demand content; they intuitively use Google and YouTube as their main search tools; they are more visual than previous generations, and from an early age they create content on social media and share it (Freire, 2018). In terms of media consumption, according to data obtained from the research carried out by López-Vidales and Gómez-Rubio (2021) the preferred media among young Spaniards who belong to this group are the Internet, social media and virtual platforms (62.3%), television (25.3%), radio (9.78%), newspapers (2.47%) and magazines (0.19%).

In the United States, the Spoken Word Audio Report (2022) on audio consumption habits revealed that Generation Z was seeing the largest rise in consumption with an increase of 214%. This figure is due to the 116% rise in podcast audiences (Edison Research, 2022). In 2023, the categories that were most widely downloaded by these young people on the Spotify platform were comedy; society and culture; health and fitness; education and news (Spotify, 2023).

Podcasts are consumed on-demand using any digital playback device. The high penetration of smartphones makes them a key tool for consuming audio products (Pedrero-Esteban et al., 2019). You can subscribe to audio feeds, which are identified with an RSS (*Really Simple Syndication*) tag, and download them automatically to your devices. This makes it unnecessary to visit the original source to listen to new content that is published regularly (Nafría, 2007; Gallego-Pérez, 2010).

The figures available for 2023 indicate that podcast audiences among this generational segment grew by 20% and more than half of them listened to at least one podcast in 2023 (Spotify, 2023). However, “contrary to what might be assumed due to the rise of podcasting, this format still has little weight as a listening platform for Generation Z” (Robert-Agell, et al., 2022, p. 4).

With podcasts, adult audiences have rediscovered the appeal of audio storytelling, while for younger generations, they serve as the main medium through which they are introduced to spoken audio. Besides providing a source of entertainment and information, 62% of young people in this demographic use this medium to find answers before talking to their families and to relieve their stress (Zamarrón, 2022). The option of subscribing to content helps to build listener loyalty, while fostering the creation of a community among audiences (Barbeito-Veloso and Perona-Páez, 2019), providing a sense of belonging to Generation Z.

In terms of production sources, audio distribution platforms host both amateur and professional podcasts owned by podcasting industry operators, including production companies, distribution platforms and media outlets (Dosdoce.com, 2023). For radio companies, the format “represents a disruptive technology that has helped the radio industry to rethink its practices and preconceived ideas about audiences, consumption, production and distribution” (Pedrero-Esteban and Conteras-Pulido, 2019, p. 361), and has allowed it to adapt its identity to new communication channels that meet

the needs of modern digital listeners. Some of the most popular podcasts on the major audio distribution platforms are either in-house productions of the radio company, created specifically for on-demand consumption, or repurposed content from the airwaves (on-demand radio). In Spain, this latter category includes shows such as *Nadie sabe nada* (Cadena SER), *Segunda acepción* (Cadena SER), *Buenismo bien* (Cadena SER), *Las noches de Ortega* (Cadena SER), *La sotana* (Cadena SER), *El partidazo de la COPE* (Cadena COPE) and *Crimis* (Catalunya Radio), among many others. In these instances, for radio broadcasters, podcasts are “an attractive way to distribute what they already offer on air” (Martínez-Costa, et al., 2020, p. 56) and to build an audience “outside the boundaries of mainstream radio” (Tapia-López, 2016, p. 9).

## 2. Objectives

According to the above information and the literature discussed above, Generation Z has little interest in linear radio. The main aim of this paper is to determine whether undergraduate students of communication sciences from this generation, most of whom are likely to be part of the media landscape in the future, also exhibit this skewed attitude towards radio, given that they are assumed to have a broader knowledge in this field than students from other disciplines (Giraldo-Luque and Fernández-Rovira, 2020).

## 3. Methodology

To answer this research question, we replicated the methodology used by Perona-Páez et al. (2014) in their study on media, devices and consumption habits of young people in the digital sound-sphere. We followed the mixed method approach in two stages. In the first, qualitative approach, three focus groups were set up. This empirical tool provides an insight into the spontaneous discourse of the participants, how they attribute meanings to a topic, idea or concept, and the perceptions and attitudes of the set of people who are being represented by these particular groups (Edmunds, 1999); De Miguel, 2005).

In the second, quantitative stage, we conducted a survey aimed at the target group in order to build on the results obtained with the first method. This dual data collection approach stems from the fact that focus group discussions serve as a preliminary device for data collection, which increases the reliability of the quantitative research design (De Miguel, 2005). The results obtained using the focus group method largely determine the design of the questionnaire. Firstly, the preliminary information that has been gathered makes it possible to adjust the questions to follow the direction set by the groups. And secondly, it allows us to follow the verbal code of the individuals in the groups.

The study sample is composed of a total of 255 individuals, students from the Faculty of Communication Sciences at the

Universitat Internacional de Catalunya and Abat Oliba CEU. All participants were enrolled in journalism, audiovisual communication, advertising and public relations and marketing courses for the 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years. They all belong to Generation Z, with an average age of 20 at the time of the study.

### 3.1 Focus group: participants, design and procedure

The focus groups were held between 2021 and 2023. The representatives were recruited among communication students based on random criteria. A total of 18 students took part. To ensure productive discourse, the group was divided into three focus groups that were each composed of six subjects, a number that ensures the effective viability of the method (Juan and Roussos, 2010).

The meetings lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The groups were coordinated by a moderator, who first introduced the participants to the topic of discussion and led the group conversation with the aim of gathering as much information as possible in the allotted time, indicating the key points — required to fulfil the research objectives— to be discussed. More specifically, the guiding questions presented by the moderator included topics such as the sources of information and entertainment used, radio medium consumption habits and methods, perceptions of the medium and an appraisal of radio programming. There are also discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of radio compared to podcasting and vice versa. This approach would allow us to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

The three sessions were recorded and subsequently transcribed, categorised and analysed. At a later stage, we identified the topics that had emerged naturally in the participants' discourses. These are the Recording Units (RU), themes whose presence or frequency have some bearing on the chosen analytical objective (Bardin, 2009). An in-depth analysis of the conversations allowed us to obtain a number of fragments that fit the purpose of the study.

### 3.2 Survey: participants, design and procedure

In the second stage of the research, in order to supplement the information obtained using the qualitative approach, an online survey was conducted, targeting the segment under study. A questionnaire was designed with questions adjusted to the direction previously set by the focus groups. It was distributed based on lists provided by the two universities where the study was being carried out, on the Google Docs online platform, between 13 and 20 February and between 22 and 26 April 2024. It consisted of 18 closed-ended and open-ended questions, with the option to include additional answers. The questions were divided into the following areas: 1) Demographic information, allowing us to identify and exclude any participants who did not belong to Generation Z. 2) Media consumption habits, to gauge their preferences. 3) Radio consumption, in order to understand their habits and ways of listening to the

medium —live or recorded— and the categories of content they consume —information, entertainment, etc.— 4) Perception of the medium, to identify factors that may be responsible for the group's lack of interest in linear radio. 5) Consumption and perception of podcasts compared to radio. 6) Finally, we gathered suggestions for radio companies on how to increase the group's interest in the medium. Beforehand, the questionnaire was tested to identify any problems with understanding the questions and the order in which they were asked.

Of the 237 surveys received, we were able to work with 234, an adequate number which, according to the saturation criterion (Morse, 1995), enabled us to determine the group's attitudes towards the phenomenon under study. The 3 rejected surveys were discarded because the subjects did not belong to the generational segment under study. The process of tallying the results was performed using the Google Forms platform, by exporting the answers to a spreadsheet, enabling a systematic interpretation of the results.

## 4. Results

The most significant results obtained from the focus groups and surveys are detailed below.

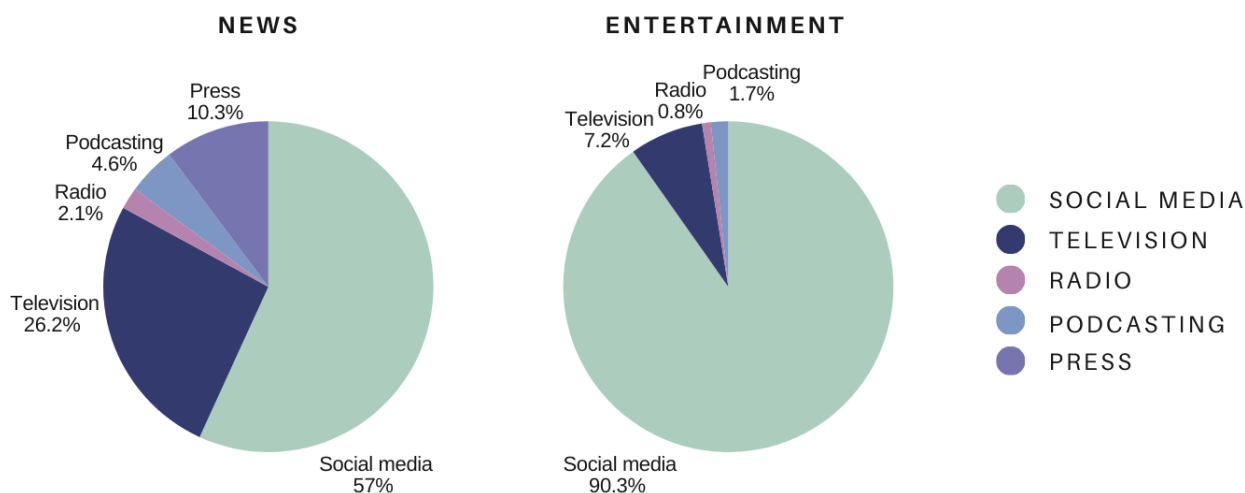
### 4.1 Radio consumption and perception

We start from the assumption that Gen Z students have a strong preference for using social media as their main source of information and entertainment, followed by television (Figure 1). In terms of using audio media for news, podcasting ranks fifth among their preferences (4.6%), followed by radio (2.1%). For entertainment, podcasting is the preferred audio medium for students (1.7%), while radio accounts for only 0.8%.

Regarding radio consumption, 39.7% of respondents actively choose to listen to the medium, while the rest do so passively, because others around them are tuning in, especially parents (65%). The daily listening frequency is 13.1%, either actively or passively, mostly while commuting (74.7%). 15.2% listen to the radio while performing other tasks —multitasking— and 10.1% listen to the radio during periods of relaxation (Figure 2). In terms of how they listen, 68.4% listen to it live via their analogue tuner, while 31.2% prefer to listen on-demand on audio distribution platforms. Furthermore, 24.5% listen to it live on the Internet, and 8% listen on demand via the radio station's website or app.

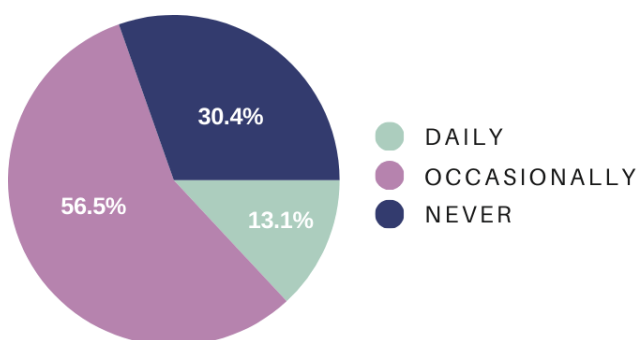
Music consumption plays a significant role in preferences for radio (88.6%). They appreciate the fact that on the radio they can discover the latest musical releases and get information and details about the performer. After discovering them, they select them on platforms, listen to them again and add them to their playlists. Through platforms such as Spotify, "finding new releases is not so easy, unless you get lucky with the algorithm", remarked one focus group participant. The sense of lack of control they feel as a result of not being able to choose

Figure 1. Media used by Gen Z communication students for information and entertainment (as % of total sample)



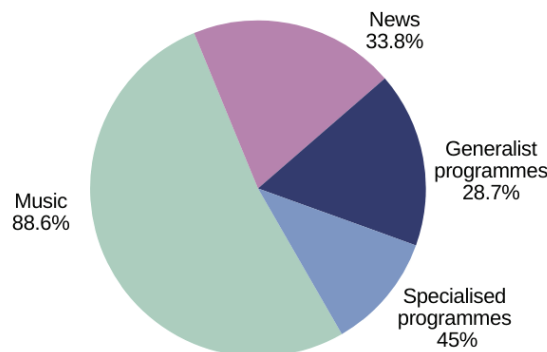
Source: Own elaboration based on field work.

Figure 2. Listening frequency and radio content of Gen Z communication students (as % of total sample)



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 3. Radio content consumed by Gen Z communication students (as % of total sample)



Source: Own elaboration.

the songs played on the radio and the frequent interruptions from commercials are repeatedly mentioned. For these reasons, they prefer to stream music. However, they do appreciate the surprise effect of hearing a song they like on the radio which they were not expecting (51.4%).

In terms of listening to spoken content, they express a preference for specialised programmes, general entertainment and news (Figure 3).

The Generation Z students ranked several aspects of radio, in descending order of importance: the possibility of obtaining real-time information on current affairs, the fact that it is free of charge, the option to listen on demand, the medium’s credibility as a source of information, and the fact that it covers a wide range of topics (Table 1).

Despite acknowledging the strengths of radio, it is important to stress that young people from this generation tend to associate the medium with a more mature audience, such as grandparents and parents. Therefore, they see it as a sort of companion that

provides them with a sense of familiarity, but also something that is out of touch with their current interests and their digital profile (53.6%). In this sense, they admit that they have never given the medium a chance and in some cases, they are unaware of the range of radio stations available. Some state that they are already used to listening to audio content on platforms and are not interested in discovering new stations other than the ones they have become acquainted with in their family setting. The high levels of advertising (34.2%) are also highlighted as a weakness of the medium. They believe that advertisements interrupt the content too often, as their comments reveal: “I often switch off the radio because there are lots of adverts. I find it annoying, when all I want in that moment is a break from reality”; “there is too much advertising on the radio, which I can avoid by paying for platforms”. Thus, they appreciate the low levels of advertising on audio distribution platforms and, in particular, the option to subscribe to premium plans, which gives them access to ad-free content through paid subscriptions.

**Table 1. Perception of radio among Gen Z communication students** (as % of total sample)

STRENGTHS	
Real-time information	56.1%
Free of charge	54.9%
Listen-on-demand option	41.4%
Credibility	33.5%
Wide range of topics	31.2%
WEAKNESSES	
Contents not adapted to your profile	53.6%
High levels of advertising	34.2%
Lack of interaction	14.3%
Fixed content	13.1%
Same offer in all broadcasters	7.2%
Inconvenient not to be able to watch	7.2%
Unreliable media	2.1%

Source: Own elaboration.

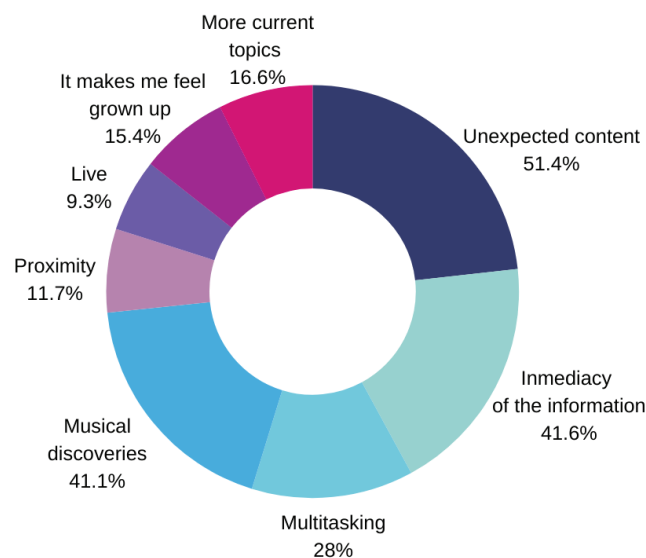
As regards the role of audio platforms, they mainly use them to listen to music. Among those who choose podcasts, 62.4% listen to them occasionally, 18.6% listen daily and 19% never listen to this format. In contrast to radio, they appreciate the fact that podcasts give them access to specialised content (63.7%), they can select on-demand content and avoid the constraints of scheduled programming found in linear radio (57.8%), a wider range of content tailored to their generational profile (36.3%), and less advertising, which they can avoid altogether with the premium subscription model offered by platforms (31.2%). 25.7% of Generation Z students surveyed reported that podcasts gave them the power to control playback through features such as pausing, fast-forwarding and adjusting speed. This gives them a greater sense of control and autonomy than traditional radio. They also highlight the brevity of podcasts (20.3%) and the fact that they can be shared (17.7%).

Conversely, regarding their perception of radio compared to podcasting, they highlight the surprise effect of listening to unexpected content (51.4%), the immediacy of the information (41.6%), musical discoveries (41.1%) and the possibility of carrying out other activities while listening (28%).

**4.2 Generation Z’s suggestions for creating a connection with the medium**

The participants in the focus groups are aware that their role as active consumers and future communicators is important

**Figure 4. Perception of radio compared to podcasting among Gen Z communication students** (as % of total sample)



Source: Own elaboration.

for the survival of the medium. Some of them believe that they do not listen to the radio because this habit was not instilled in them from an early age, so that they now lack any point of reference. In light of these observations, in two of the three sessions the students made several unprompted suggestions aimed at building a more effective connection with linear radio. These initial inputs were further expanded upon in the surveys that were conducted (Table 2).

Notable suggestions include the need to create content that is tailored to Generation Z, focusing on their particular interests and preferences (41.8%). They also highlight the importance of including more voices of young journalists in the creation of radio content, which would increase the feeling of identification and empathy within the group (19%). Although some acknowledge that efforts are already being made towards this end, they feel it is essential to broaden the range of programmes designed for, produced and presented by this generation. In this vein, they suggest that collaborations between radio and social media influencers should become more common. However, they also express criticism regarding the quality of content aimed at young people, claiming that it is superficial or banal simply because it is intended for them. They also highlight the potential of social media, the medium they engage with on a daily basis, to create a buzz around radio programmes, which could encourage young people to tune in.

**Table 2. Gen Z communication students' suggestions**

Content adapted to Generation Z	41,8%
Products created by Generation Z (journalists and influencers)	19,0%
Elimination or reduction of ad slots	12,8%
More interaction with the audience	8,3%
Greater presence of linear radio on social media to promote it and consume fragments of it.	5,6%
More offer of linear radio on podcasting platforms	4,6%
Shorter programmes	3,4%
More offer of thematic radio stations with specialised contents	1,9%
Meets my expectations	1,5%
There is no solution	1,1%

Source: Own elaboration.

Eliminating advertising or reducing ad slots is another recurring theme discussed by Gen Z students (12.8%). However, they are aware that advertising is the main source of revenue for many broadcasters, so its total elimination is viewed by the group as unrealistic.

Time management is a common concern, and they suggest that radio should focus on shorter, less dense and more dynamic programmes (3.4%). Regarding this point, they recommend that broadcasters share condensed versions of the highest-quality linear radio programmes on social media (5.6%) and offer more content on podcasting platforms (4.6%).

Despite these suggestions, they admit that they have a deeply entrenched habit of consuming on-demand content and that even if the radio were to offer a more suitable content of the kind they suggested, they would be unlikely to listen to it live.

## 5. Discussion

In general terms, the results of this study confirm the phenomenon that had previously been reported by authors such as López-Vidales and Gómez-Rubio (2021), who highlight Generation Z's detachment from traditional media. They also confirm that digital immigrants and digital natives have different preferences regarding content, leading to the digital divide that has already been posited by other authors (Mori Cureses, 2023). While we disagree with Zumeta's (2023) assertion that this trend is impossible to reverse, there are elements such as the immediacy of on-demand content, that hinder competition from traditional radio, which is constrained by live schedules and content, echoing the arguments put forward by Álvarez et al. (2019).

As for the spoken audio medium, Gen Z students see linear radio as a medium that is mainly aimed at mature audiences, which does not cater to their current interests or their digital profile. They have two main criticisms: firstly, the lack of content tailored to their generation and, secondly, the failure to cater for their digital consumption habits, marked by a preference for on-demand content and new media formats, as referred to by authors such as Gómez de Travesedo Rojas and Gil Ramírez (2020) and Cortés Quesada et al. (2022), as remarked above. While it is true that radio has focused its attention on the most profitable audience segments, Spanish radio also offers, albeit limited, programming designed specifically for Generation Z, which can be easily found through a simple Google search. Furthermore, there are already thematic radio stations, especially music stations, that cater to their preferences by speaking their *language*.

It is important to note that some of the podcasts that they listen to, which were mentioned in the focus groups and surveys, are produced by radio broadcasters –native podcasts–, selected content from their schedules –on-demand radio–, or *ad hoc* content produced by broadcasters, which can only be consumed on platforms. Therefore, we believe that the problem is not due to a lack of appealing content, but rather to the limited availability of radio content in the digital environment with which they engage; to a weak sense of identification with the content creators; and to the absence of a radio culture in the group, which prevents them from associating the content with the creator. In other words, through podcasting, Generation Z is already consuming radio narratives, but sometimes they are not aware of it, essentially because they do not usually listen to traditional radio and are not familiar with the range of radio stations on offer. As such, podcasts have emerged as the preferred format of Generation Z for consuming radio narratives. This revelation came to light during the focus groups when they discovered that some of the podcasts they listen to originate from traditional radio programmes. The moderator pointed out the connection, which was totally unexpected by the participants. This discovery underlines the continuity and progression of audiovisual storytelling in the digital age, where the boundaries between traditional and modern media are becoming blurred and where Generation Z is not aware of the original source of the content due to the limitations outlined above.

Moreover, we observed that this generation's radio consumption habits are based on familiarity. Most of the stations they actively choose to listen to are predetermined because they are frequently listened to in their home environment. To a certain extent, they replicate family consumption habits by tuning in to the stations that are played in their homes. This behaviour underlines the strong influence of the family environment on their choice of stations and the emotional connection they feel when tuning in to stations that are a permanent fixture in their most intimate environment. However, as remarked by Robert-Agell et al. (2022) "the traditional prescription of the family setting towards radio consumption has been altered

completely, and this chain of habit transmission will have to find other formulas for achieving contact with the medium” (p. 16). Habits being passed down through families will not be enough to make this generation engage with the medium; its content needs to be reshaped to meet the expectations of the generation and, above all, it must be made available through the channels with which they engage.

Finally, we have found that the spoken audio consumption habits of this generation are marked by a preference for short formats (Scolari, 2020), due to their lack of patience and the immediacy to which they are accustomed; and also by on-demand consumption of content, which allows them to control what they listen to and when they do it. This makes it very difficult for them to adapt to the radio medium, which is based on continuous, live broadcasts and long programmes. In this regard, we agree with Pedrero-Esteban et al. (2023) on the possibilities offered by the digital medium to connect with new audiences. As such, podcasting has emerged as the present-day/future equivalent of radio for Generation Z.

## 6. Conclusions

Generation Z are known for being the first digital natives which, *per se*, poses a resulting challenge to the survival of traditional radio. Against this backdrop, linear radio must prepare for a radical transformation, since, as the results have shown, there is no sign of generational replacement in audiences. Radio production companies therefore need to deploy creative and innovative strategies to consolidate their presence in the emerging field of podcasting. In recent years, there has been a marked tendency towards inaction that must now be remedied as a matter of urgency. Furthermore, it is also necessary to strengthen corporate identity and brand awareness within podcasting, by establishing a distinctive position in this expanding medium. Another notable aspect of the study is that a significant number of young podcast listeners are not aware that much of this content is produced by traditional radio broadcasters, which they dismiss or label as old and outdated, mainly due to a lack of familiarity with the broadcasters’ output. This lack of recognition emphasises the need for a more effective branding strategy within this digital audio medium. Consequently, we highlight the urgency for traditional broadcasters to adapt to change and also stress the importance of a more effective branding and communication strategy in the digital landscape.

For broadcasters, podcasts could become a strategic asset, whether they create original content to supplement their regular schedules, or content that can be consumed both on linear radio and via podcasts. Additionally, the practice of cherry-picking content from radio schedules to be distributed on audio platforms or in the media’s own digital repositories (webs or apps) remains an effective way to broaden their audiences among digital users.

While we have identified a growing perception that radio is not fully exploiting the potential of podcasting to engage and retain digital audiences, there is also a lack of innovative proposals from listeners which could help to transform the medium or bring about the aforementioned generational shift. However, in the focus groups we observed a problem that runs counter to these strategies. The participants wanted highly specific and segmented content and, furthermore, they did not make any suggestions that catered for broad requirements, only very precise ones. Therefore, in view of these findings, we conclude that an integrated strategy is required between radio and podcasting to combine hybridisation with content repurposing and the creation of original content.

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of how linear radio is perceived among Generation Z communication students, the results of which should be compared with larger quantitative samples to gain a more accurate picture of the results of this initial analysis. Furthermore, it is important to stress that even communication students, who are set to become the communicators of the future, are not showing a great deal of interest in radio. According to some remarks made by participants in the focus groups, this lack of interest is also reflected in their reluctance to establish future employment links with radio companies. This may lead to a gradual loss of younger workers in the medium, creating a negative feedback loop. It is therefore essential to address this lack of interest and to encourage greater appreciation and respect for radio in communication faculties, and for the various professional opportunities it offers, thereby helping to safeguard the future of the medium as a profession. In this respect, we also intend to pursue further lines of research that reflect on the consequences that this lack of interest in traditional radio may have on the next generation of workers in the radio medium.



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