NEWS FOR GEN Z. HOW PLATFORM JOURNALISM MEETS THE NEW GENERATION

Alexandra Codău,
Bogdan Ivulescu
Ovidius University of Constanța

Abstract: *This paper analyses the ways in which editorial content addressed to young audiences is adapted to the media consumption particularities of Generation Z, in the context of the transformations brought about by the digital environment in the production and reception of information. Recent changes include the proliferation of visual platforms, the reduction of average attention span, and shifts in the channels through which young audiences' access and navigate journalistic content. The object of the research is represented by the posts published by the platform "Gen, știri", a Romanian journalistic project active on Instagram, which delivers information through visual, short, and interactive formats, especially carousel posts. The analysis focuses on four editorial techniques: the fragmentation and segmentation of discourse, the integration of visual elements, signalling through graphic markers, and the selection of content relevant from the perspective of public interest. In a context in which digital media shapes the information consumption behaviours of younger generations, this study examines the formal characteristics of these posts and the ways in which they are designed to correspond to a fragmented media consumption regime. The analysis of the selected corpus demonstrates that "Gen, știri" posts are clearly designed to faithfully adapt to the media behaviour of young people – fast, visual, fragmented – through formats that support efficient processing, attention orientation, and the delivery of public interest. On the other hand, qualitative limitations of Gen Z tailored content are emphasised in the study.*

Keywords: *"Gen, știri"; Generation Z; editorial content; attention fragmentation; signalling principle; Dual-Channel Multimedia Processing; carousel post.*

Theoretical Framework

The concept of *generation*, analysed by Constantin Schifirneț in *Generation and Culture* (Schifirneț 20), refers to social groups formed through shared experiences and influenced by historical, economic, and political contexts, possessing a social and cultural dimension that goes beyond mere biology. Mass media and modern technologies shape the values and behaviours of these generations, which adapt their communication according to the constantly changing digital environment. This dynamic produces differences in ways of thinking and expression, while mass media plays an active role in shaping generational identity. Communication addressed to young people thus reflects adaptation to the speed, fragmentation, and interactivity of information specific to the digital era.

A classical definition with explanatory value for the concept of generation belongs to Mannheim: "The central idea is that there is such a unit as a generation, by virtue of the cohorts coming of age that have similar

experiences in a specific social and political context, marked by certain events" (Mannheim apud Petre 271).

Attention fragmentation, defined by Göran Bolin in *Media Generations: Experience, Identity and Mediatised Social Change* (Bolin 38), is a cultural and cognitive process reflecting the preference of younger generations for short, interactive, and multisensory content, as opposed to the linear narratives favoured by previous generations. This phenomenon results from digital interactivity, multitasking, and multiplatform use, leading to a rapid and fragmented mode of information processing. Textually, fragmentation manifests through the structuring of messages into short, autonomous units – such as dividing the text of a slide into at least two concise sentences instead of a single extended formulation – reflecting the adaptation of media discourse to new reception practices specific to digital environments.

The "*digital native*" concept, introduced by Marc Prensky in *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* (Prensky 1), refers to individuals born and raised in the digital era, surrounded by technology, the Internet, social networks, and mobile devices, who possess cognitive abilities different from those who adopted technology later in life. According to the Pew Research Center (Dimock), Generation Z includes individuals born after 1997 and is characterised by growing up entirely in the era of smartphones, high-speed Internet, and video-first social platforms such as Snapchat and TikTok, which shape their modes of consumption and communication.

Differences in Media Consumption between Millennials and Generation Z

The article *"Gen Z's Content Format Preferences vs Millennials: Key Differences"* (Atikah) highlights differences in media consumption between Millennials and Generation Z. According to this study, Millennials prefer longer and more detailed formats, such as blog articles, podcasts, and explanatory newsletters, being accustomed to an in-depth approach to editorial content. In contrast, Generation Z, raised in a fully digital environment, favours short, visual, interactive, and easily scannable content, such as visual carousels, animated infographics, and short videos. According to the same source, this preference reflects a cognitive model oriented towards clarity, synthesis, and immediate visual narrative design.

Regarding content regimes, Pablo J. Boczkowski argues in *"The development and use of online newspapers: What research tells us and what we might want to know"* that a "*content regime*" (Boczkowski 278) is a socio-technical system combining artefacts, editorial processes, information networks, and organisational forms that influence media production and consumption within a demographic segment. For Generation Z, such regimes include short-form video, algorithmic personalisation, and active

participation. Gen Z prefers interactive, visual content and micro-narratives, replacing traditional texts. Platforms such as TikTok have become their primary source of information, surpassing classical news channels, at least in Central and Eastern Europe (Dragomir et.al.).

Media Preferences of Generation Z: Between Fragmentation and Immersion

According to the *Average Screen Time Statistics* study conducted by Mastermind Behavior in 2025, Generation Z spends over nine hours per day in front of screens, yet its attention is fragmented and selective. The *Attention Spans* study conducted by Microsoft (2015) shows that the average attention span of smartphone users has decreased to approximately eight seconds, compared to twelve seconds in the early 2000s, imposing new regimes of information consumption. In response, we observe the emergence of media formats adapted to the preferences of this generation, such as short videos (TikTok, Instagram Reels), animated infographics, visual carousels on Instagram, and educational memes. These formats combine the need for rapid attention capture with the desire for immersion and interactivity, defining the ways in which Generation Z accesses and processes information.

Illustration as a Narrative and Functional Tool in Journalism

Editorial illustration, as defined by Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design (RMCAD), plays the role of adding meaning, context, and emotional impact to written content, transforming complex subjects into accessible visual stories. This can be observed in illustrated journalism, where text and image form a hybrid discourse with increased emotional impact. Laura Schlichting's study, *Interactive Graphic Journalism* (VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture), shows that interactive graphic journalism combines investigation with visual presentation that stimulates empathy and public understanding, facilitating more nuanced reception in the context of media oversaturation. The image thus functions as an "entry point" into the text, guiding attention towards essential elements. According to Mayer (Mayer 1), visual information is processed and retained more efficiently than textual information.

Adapting Illustration and Summarisation Techniques to New Media Formats: The Visual Carousel

"Introduced in 2017, Instagram carousel posts have become a highly popular content format used by individuals, content creators, and brands alike"[1] says meetedgar.com. According to eclincher.com, "An Instagram

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[1] https://meetedgar.com/blog/instagram-carousel, accessed on 15.12.2025

carousel is a single post that contains 2-20 photos, videos, or a mix of both. Followers swipe left (or click the arrow on desktop) to view each slide. It appears as one post in the feed with small blue dots underneath indicating there's more to see."[2] This format allows for the fragmented, yet coherent, presentation of complex messages, with each slide focusing on an idea, a suggestive image, or a key point. Thus, the carousel facilitates the understanding and retention of information, adapting to the fragmented attention of young audiences. At the same time, the format stimulates the creativity of authors, who can combine visual and textual elements to reflect the identity of the brand or platform. "This feature is commonly used on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn to tell a story, showcase products, or share detailed information in a visually engaging way".[3] The carousel allows for a step-by-step presentation, flexible and adaptable to various digital communication styles.

Dual-Channel Multimedia Processing

According to the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, information processing in working memory occurs through two distinct channels: one for visual–pictorial information and one for verbal–auditory information. The dual-channel model argues that communication efficiency increases when materials exploit the complementarity of the two channels while avoiding cognitive overload of either (Mayer & Moreno 43). Recent research of Romanian online journalism points out that the most common combination of content is still that of text and imagine (Vanghelescu).

Richard Mayer reiterates this idea in the second edition of *Multimedia Learning*, stating that "people have separate channels for processing visual and verbal material" (Mayer 45). This principle significantly influences the design of digital and educational content, including on social media platforms, where images, text, and sound must be harmoniously combined to optimise understanding and information retention while preventing channel overload.

Principles of Readability and Intelligibility

The signalling principle, formulated by Mayer (2009) in *Multimedia Learning*, states that "people learn better when cues are added that highlight the organisation of essential material" (Mayer 108). These signals may be visual – arrows, colour highlights, bold text, frames – or auditory – voice modulation, pauses in speech. Their role is to guide users' attention towards key message components, facilitating cognitive processing and clearer understanding. In digital and journalistic content, this principle is applied

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[2] https://www.eclincher.com/articles/instagram-carousel-post, accessed on 22.12.2025
[3] https://www.kontentino.com/social-media-urban-dictionary/carousel-post/, accessed on 18.11.2025

through graphic elements such as emojis, bullet points, font and colour variations, which help rapidly orient attention and enhance readability and communicative impact.

Another essential principle in multimedia theory articulated by Mayer is the segmentation principle, according to which "people learn better when multimedia messages are presented in user-controlled segments rather than as a continuous unit" (Mayer 175). This approach reduces cognitive load by dividing information into small, coherent units that can be sequentially processed and integrated. Segmentation is particularly relevant for digital content addressed to audiences with limited attention or fragmented consumption habits, such as social media users.

Journalistic Content

As explained by Raluca Petre in the course material *Introduction to the Mass Media System (Media și societatea în schimbare)* (2019), journalistic content is material created in accordance with professional norms, aimed at informing the public in an objective, verifiable, and socially relevant manner. In the context of contemporary information oversaturation, the main challenge lies in selecting information that is genuinely relevant to the public interest.

Journalism plays an essential role in the continuous monitoring of social reality and institutions, especially those funded by public money, contributing to power accountability and the strengthening of citizens' civic competence. Thus, journalistic content must offer not only what the public wants, but above all information of public interest that supports informed decision-making and orientation in the contemporary world. Important information serves the public interest, not merely the private interest of the consumer (Petre 7).

In *Information Management in the Media* (2019), the same author explains that information of public interest concerns the entire community and supports the proper functioning of democracy by facilitating citizens' access to essential decisions regarding public life. Such information enables institutional monitoring, understanding of public fund usage, and the exercise of civic rights. Unlike information of private interest, which has individual impact, information of public interest has collective consequences and influences civic life. Free access to such information, guaranteed by Law no. 544/2001 in Romania, is vital for institutional transparency, accountability, and democratic participation.

Methodology. Research Questions and Hypotheses
The research questions underlying this study are as follows:
   1. Is the presentation strategy of *"Gen, știri"* aligned with the expectations of Generation Z?

2. How does the structure of text in *"Gen, știri"* carousel posts reflect the presentation of information according to the concept of attention fragmentation?
3. To what extent do *"Gen, știri"* posts integrate visual and textual elements into a multimodal formula in line with dual-channel multimedia processing?
4. To what extent do visual markers appear in the analysed posts, according to the signalling concept?
5. How many of the analysed posts provide information of public interest?

The working hypotheses are:
- If *"Gen, știri"* adopts an editorial policy aligned with Generation Z's expectations, it will predominantly use the segmentation principle.
- If *"Gen, știri"* adopts an editorial policy aligned with Generation Z's expectations, it will predominantly use dual-channel processing.
- If *"Gen, știri"* adopts an editorial policy aligned with Generation Z's expectations, it will predominantly use visual and textual signalling.
- If *"Gen, știri"* adopts an editorial policy aligned with Generation Z's expectations, coverage of public-interest information will integrate as many presentation strategies as possible (segmentation, dual-channel processing, visual and textual signalling).

The Corpus and Its Description

The analysed corpus comprises all posts published on the Instagram page @genstiri between 15 and 21 May 2025. All posts published during this interval were analysed, regardless of the audience size or the reactions they generated. The analysis focused on identifying the intrinsic characteristics of the content (visual and textual elements), without including extrinsic metrics such as reactions or shares.

Given that a rigorous mapping is necessary in order to understand the mechanisms through which a media product such as *"Gen, știri"* communicates effectively with Generation Z, we opted for quantitative content analysis aided by a qualitative content analysis. Through this method, narrative and visual characteristics are transformed into measurable indicators that can be compared. The interpretation is possible in the framework of the qualitative content analysis.

We recorded the frequencies and distributions of variables such as the number of sentences, number of slides, density of visual markers, content fragmentation rate, integration of dual-channel elements, and the presence of public-interest information. In this way, given features were converted into concrete sets of items that could be analysed systematically, moving beyond

the level of subjective perception when it comes to the quantitative content analysis.

This analysis enabled the identification of recurring patterns, the evaluation of editorial techniques (segmentation, signalling, multimodal balance), and the highlighting of relationships between form and content, such as the link between a post's level of fragmentation and its public-interest value, or between the density of visual markers and the length of informational sequences. Consequently, the research hypotheses were empirically tested, providing a solid basis for the study's conclusions.

The Interview as a Research Instrument

Septimiu Chelcea defines the qualitative interview as "a direct investigative technique through which the researcher obtains relevant information about behaviours, attitudes, opinions, and social representations, within a direct, face-to-face verbal interaction" (Chelcea 267). This method involves a flexible and adaptive dialogue, distinct from the questionnaire, as it facilitates the free expression of the interviewee. The interview thus represents a dialogical relationship based on meaningful social interaction, rather than a simple one-way transmission of information.

The Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis Method

As noted by Raluca Petre in the course materials for *Theories and Methods of Communication* (Petre 72), drawing on ideas from Mircea Agabrian's *Content Analysis* (18), quantitative content analysis is an objective, systematic, and reproducible procedure that transforms the manifest components of media messages (texts, images, symbols, themes) into numerical variables through the identification and counting of relevant characteristics (Petre 72). "Content analysis is a technique for collecting and analysing textual content. Content refers to words, meanings, images, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated. Text refers to anything that is written, viewed, or spoken and serves as a medium of communication" (Agabrian 18, cited in Petre 72).

Quantitative content analysis enables the systematic identification and measurement of the structure of visual-textual messages, highlighting the organisation, frequency, and emphasis of elements – key aspects in understanding digital communication addressed to Generation Z (Agabrian 18). This method is particularly suited to investigating content on social media platforms, the preferred environment of digital youth, who consume information in a fragmented, rapid manner and through cognitive multitasking (ContentGrip, 2023; Microsoft, 2015; Socialinsider, 2022).

Integrating Key Concepts into the Methodology

The definition of Generation Z as a cohort of "*digital natives*" (Dimock, Pew Research) underscores its familiarity with digital language and rapid processing capacity, justifying the use of quantitative analysis to assess the extent to which carousel posts align with the cognitive and aesthetic preferences of this audience. Thus, the analysis provides an empirical basis for understanding and comparing communication practices adapted to the new generation.

Carousel post: according to Instagram specifications, a carousel post is a single post containing multiple photographs or videos through which users navigate by swiping. Operationally, in the present study, we included all posts meeting this criterion during the analysed period and recorded the total number of slides (images/videos) per post.

Image: any distinct visual element (photograph, illustration, graphic) present on a carousel slide. We recorded the number of images in each post.

Sentence: a syntactic unit composed of two or more clauses, separated by a full stop, question mark, or exclamation mark. Operationally, sentences were delimited in post texts using these punctuation marks, and the number of sentences per slide and per post was counted.

Visual marker: any text-formatting element or graphic symbol used to highlight information (e.g. underlined text, emojis, arrows). According to Mayer's signalling principle, discussed earlier, such markers draw attention to important content. During coding, we identified and counted each visual marker in the text (e.g. highlighted words or sentences) as an indicator of informational focus.

Defining these concepts allowed their operationalisation within a coding scheme applicable to digital posts. For example, in analysing a carousel post, we recorded the presence of at least two sequential images; for the signalling principle, we coded the presence of bold text, emojis, frames, and visual contrast. Indicators related to attention fragmentation tracked text length, as well as the number of words and sentences.

Fragmentation condition: the fragmentation condition is met at the slide level when its text is structured into at least two short, concise sentences rather than a single extended formulation. This presentation style reflects the adaptation of media discourse to new reception practices specific to social media environments, characterized by multitasking and distributed attention.

*Fragmentation coefficient***:** the fragmentation coefficient represents the ratio between the number of slides that meet the fragmentation condition and the total number of slides in a post. It indicates the extent to which a post adopts a textual structure adapted to fragmented reception, characteristic of digital environments. If a post has a fragmentation coefficient greater than 0.5 (i.e. more than 50% of its slides meet the fragmentation condition), it may be

considered fragmented and aligned with Generation Z's information consumption style, marked by a preference for short, clear, and rapidly decodable messages.

Regarding content, we aimed to identify information of public interest based on criteria such as references to social, economic, political, legal, and educational topics, mentions of institutional sources, or references to public authorities and institutions. In this way, theoretical concepts were translated into observable variables for empirical analysis.

The coding and analysis procedure involved several steps. In terms of data collection, all carousel posts published during the specified period were extracted from the @genstiri page. Each post was identified and stored separately for analysis. Subsequently, sentences were delimited and counted for each slide of each carousel. This segmentation yielded quantitative indicators such as the number of sentences per post and the fragmentation coefficient. Next, the images in each post were analysed (each photograph or illustration on a slide was considered a single image), and the presence of each visual marker (e.g. highlighted words or phrases, emojis) was recorded. These data provided indicators such as *images per post* and *visual markers per post*. Finally, the data were analysed by entering them into a database for descriptive statistical calculation. Frequencies and descriptive measures (distributions) were computed for each indicator (e.g. sentences per post, words per post, images per post).

Coding Scheme

Field / Variable	Meaning / Application	Coding Example
Unit ID	Unique internal code for each analysed post (e.g. POST001, POST002…)	POST001
Date	Publication/posting date. Extracted from the platform or screenshot.	2025-06-10
No_slide	"Yes" if the post has ≥ 2 slides (carousel), "No" if it is a single-slide post.	YES
Carousel	"Yes" if the post has ≥ 2 slides (carousel), "No" if it is a single-slide post.	YES
No_images_total	All images included in the post (including graphics, illustrations, photographs).	4

No_sentences_total	Total number of sentences in the entire post.	1
No_visual_markers	Total number of visual markers (bold text, underlining, colour highlighting, signalling emojis, arrows, etc.) across the entire post.	5
Dual_Channel_pct	The carousel simultaneously contains text and image (dual-channel principle).	YES
Fragmentation_pct	Number of slides that meet the fragmentation condition.	67%
Public_interest	"Yes" if the topic is of public interest (education, health, politics, safety, etc.), otherwise "No".	YES

Findings. Analysis of the "Gen, știri" Format

The *"Gen, știri"* project was launched in September 2021, adapting to changes in media consumption observed among Generation Z, who prefer short, visual, and dynamic formats, as observed in the literature review. *"Gen, știri"* offers visually synthesised and contextualised news, tailored to the cognitive needs of young people, through carousels and videos on Instagram and TikTok. The editorial team, composed of teenagers and young adults, actively contributes to all stages of the editorial process, ensuring authenticity and relevance.

According to information available on the Forum Apulum website, the organisation supporting the editorial project *"Gen, știri"*, the young members of the *"Gen, știri"* newsroom create original content and conduct on-the-ground reporting. The project's community has grown to over 215,000 followers (as recorded on 27 December 2025), and in the medium term, *"Gen, știri"* aims to expand to other digital platforms while maintaining the educational and civic support provided by Forum Apulum. Teodor Tiță, founder of *"Gen, știri"*, a journalist with over 20 years of experience in the media, states that one of the reasons for developing this editorial project was the lack of consideration given to young audiences in traditional audience metrics:

> "Romanian journalist Teodor Tita started *Gen, știri* three years ago on Instagram, also looking to address the lack of news tailored to young people. Tita, who has over 20 years of journalism experience in various media outlets, told me that Romanian news media didn't take younger audiences seriously at the time. According to our research, younger groups in many countries are showing a weaker connection with

news brands than they did in the past. Tita speculates that this is not because young people are turned off by news, but because they lack trust in traditional media."[4]

The analysis revealed that 33 out of 36 posts (91.67%) use visual or textual markers (signalling). The same analysis allowed observation of the average signalling density: approximately 1.26 markers per slide.

The raw results are further developed in the following sections in direct relation to essential theoretical concepts: attention fragmentation, the principle of information segmentation, the dual-channel model, and cognitive signalling. They are also complemented by the qualitative perspective derived from the interview conducted with Denisa Cotor, marketing coordinator of *"Gen, știri"*. Her responses provide not only internal validation of the data but also professional contextualisation of the editorial decisions behind the use of the carousel format.

Interview with Denisa Cotor, Marketing Coordinator of "Gen, știri"

From the interview conducted with Denisa Cotor, marketing coordinator of *"Gen, știri"*, during the last stop of the *"Gen, știri"* civic caravan on 11 June 2025 – hosted by the Journalism undergraduate programme within the Faculty of Letters at Ovidius University of Constanța – it emerges that the process of selecting information for carousel posts aims to maintain focus on the essence of the news while simultaneously providing relevant context. A clear understanding of the subject is essential for adapting the message to a young audience.

The structure of the carousels follows a model similar to that of classical news, with the first slide dedicated to an honest, non-clickbait headline accompanied by a suggestive image, while subsequent slides provide the content and necessary context.

To capture the attention of Generation Z, a balance is maintained between language, images, emojis, and colours, avoiding overload with any single element. For more complex topics, the team explores different modes of presentation – text, video, or images – to facilitate understanding. The visual identity of the *"Gen, știri"* editorial project is respected, predominantly using red and white, while emojis are applied moderately, especially in lighter topics, to create appropriate visual associations.

There are clear internal rules regarding text length per slide and the maximum number of slides, limited to approximately ten, to ensure an airy layout and good readability. Visual markers such as bold fonts, colours, or emojis are used both strategically – to guide readers' attention to key elements

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[4] https://www.niemanlab.org/2025/05/how-new-platform-driven-news-outlets-are-attracting-young-audiences/, accessed on 18.11.2025

– and stylistically. Distinctive branding elements, such as red underlining, are intentionally applied to important words rather than randomly.

Quantitative Content Analysis

The case study was built on a quantitative analysis applied to a corpus consisting of all posts published on the *"Gen, știri"* Instagram account between 15 and 21 May 2025. Out of a total of 61 posts published during the analysed period, 36 were identified as carousel posts, representing approximately 59% of the total. The remaining 25 posts were divided between static formats (single-image posts) and reels (video formats).

We chose to analyse carousel posts exclusively due to this format's potential to simultaneously incorporate textual fragmentation, multimodal integration (text and image), and visual signalling, all directly linked to the cognitive theory of multimedia learning and the specific needs of Generation Z audiences. Moreover, the carousel is a strategic format for information dissemination, preferred by the editorial team when explaining complex topics in an accessible and sequential manner.

Coding and Indicator Quantification
- Total number of posts analysed: 61
- Total number of carousel posts: 36 (59% of total)
- Total number of sentences in carousel posts: 479
- Total number of slides in carousel posts: 325
- Total number of visual/textual markers: 410
- Total number of integrated images: 325 (equivalent to the number of slides)
- Total number of public-interest posts: 31 out of 36 (86.1%)
- Total number of posts with fragmentation $\geq$ 50%: 32 out of 36 (88.9%)
- Total number of posts respecting the dual-channel principle: 36 out of 36 (100%)

Averages Calculated from the Data
- Average number of sentences per carousel post: 13.31
- Average number of slides per carousel post: 9.02
- Average number of sentences per slide: 1.47
- Average fragmentation coefficient: 73.50%
- Average number of visual markers per post: 11.39
- Average number of markers per sentence: 0.86
- Average number of slides per public-interest post: 9.13
- Average number of sentences per public-interest post: 13.6

Interpretation of Results. Adaptation to Fragmented Attention and Application of the Segmentation Principle

According to specialised literature, Generation Z exhibits a cognitive style characterised by "fragmented attention" (Prensky, 2001), adapted to digital environments that require rapid and sequential information processing. To respond to this reality, the segmentation principle formulated by Mayer (2009) recommends presenting content in small, coherent units, thus avoiding cognitive overload.

The empirical data from the quantitative analysis of 36 *"Gen, ştiri"* carousel posts validates the principle: 32 carousels (88.89%) exceed the minimum fragmentation threshold of 50%, while the average fragmentation coefficient is 73.50%. In total, 479 sentences were identified across 325 slides, with an average of 13.3 sentences and approximately 9 slides per post. The average density of 1.47 sentences per slide supports fast, efficient reading adapted to the fragmented cognitive style of young users.

These results indicate a clear and logical structuring of content, where each slide expresses a distinct idea, facilitating sequential navigation and reducing cognitive effort. Furthermore, statements by marketing coordinator Denisa Cotor reveal the existence of internal rules limiting the number of slides to ten and requiring airy text for ease of reading and understanding.

Thus, the hypothesis that *"Gen, ştiri"* applies the segmentation principle is confirmed, answering research question no. 2: "How does the structure of text in 'Gen, ştiri' carousel posts reflect information presentation according to attention fragmentation concepts?" The answer is that textual structure is adapted to fragmented attention, facilitating readability, rapid processing, and retention of essential information.

Multimodal Integration and Application of the Dual-Channel Processing Principle

Mayer's dual-channel theory (2009) explains information processing through two complementary channels: visual and verbal. Effective communication requires a balanced integration of image and text, avoiding cognitive overload and facilitating message retention. The quantitative analysis of the 36 *"Gen, ştiri"* carousel posts shows that all of them (100%) combine visual and textual elements, each slide representing a clear visual unit, with an average of 9.02 images per post. The text explains and complements the image, while the image supports the understanding of the text, thus forming a coherent multimodal unit adapted to the cognitive style of Generation Z.

A relevant example in this respect is the post coded POST020, dated 17 May 2025, in which each slide combines explanatory text with suggestive images. The text does not explicitly and exhaustively describe the image but

rather contextualises or synthesises the visually transmitted information. More precisely, post POST020, entitled "Young People Clean Up Via Transilvanica", presents – through video accompanied by text – an action that is part of an environmental clean-up project entitled "Ziua Bună pe Via Transilvanica", carried out by the Tășuleasa Social Association in partnership with Coca-Cola HBC Romania, through the sustainability platform @dupanoi.ro.

Although the subject can be considered one of public interest (an environmental clean-up initiative), the *"Gen, știri"* post is marked with (P), in accordance with good practices in communication, so that viewers are aware that this content represents advertorial material. From the *"Gen, știri"* material we learn that 2,700 pupils and teachers from 87 schools across the ten counties crossed by Via Transilvanica participated in this clean-up action. This information is present both in the video material and in the overlaid text, which allows us to note a degree of informational redundancy.

This redundancy also applies to verifiable information presented both in the video material (produced in Romanian) and in the overlaid text (also written in Romanian), such as: "16,500 kg of waste" and "18-year collaboration between Tășuleasa Social and Coca-Cola". Furthermore, volunteers' statements are also transcribed as text and overlaid on the video material. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, the text does not fully overlap with the image; it is not merely descriptive text. Returning to the dual-channel principle, it is applied throughout this report, with the relationship between text and image being not only complementary but, at times, redundant.

Statements by *"Gen, știri"* marketing coordinator Denisa Cotor support this practice: "We prioritise what is essential, we understand the subject, then translate it into short and relevant sentences, alongside images that best illustrate the key idea." This approach reflects a conscious coordination of the visual and verbal channels.

Thus, hypothesis 2, according to which *"Gen, știri"* applies the dual-channel processing principle, is confirmed. In response to research question 3 *"To what extent do 'Gen, știri' posts integrate visual and textual elements into a multimodal formula in accordance with dual processing?"* – the result is that the posts provide an example of integrated visual–verbal communication optimised for a young, digitally native audience.

Visual and Textual Signalling: Strategies for Attention Orientation in Digital Communication

The signalling principle, as formulated by Richard E. Mayer (2009), optimises the learning process by explicitly highlighting important information using visual and textual cues. In the context of *"Gen, știri"*, the

analysis of 36 carousel posts shows that 33 of them (91.67%) contain visual or textual markers, totalling 410 such elements, with an average of 11.39 markers per post. The most frequent markers include underlining, bold text, emojis, and chromatic highlights, particularly in red.

One example is the post coded POST016, which includes 34 markers across 20 slides. Other examples include POST052, with 23 markers, and POST054, with 16 markers, all illustrating intensive and strategic use of signalling elements. The average density of 0.86 markers per sentence indicates that most ideas are accompanied by such cues, facilitating the rapid selection of key information by the audience.

The post coded POST052, dated 21 May 2025, consists of 15 slides and bears the title *"Friendship Day with Israel, Celebrated in the Romanian Parliament"*. The post contains no emojis but includes 23 visual markers consisting of red underlining applied to the following words or phrases: "Romania and Israel", "annually", "interim Prime Minister", "supported", "14,000 (newborn babies)", "suspended", "will take control", "minimal aid", "blockade", "100 (trucks in Gaza)", "reload separately", "authentic friendship", "Prime Minister", "turned off the microphone", "we will exist on earth", "Orthodox", "congratulated", "(relationship) normal with Israel", "method of war", "persecution", "53,000 (people in the Gaza Strip)", "1998", and "to punish people".

The post coded POST054, dated 21 May 2025, entitled "The Housing Crisis in Spain: the Government Wants to Remove 65,000 Airbnb Listings", contains, as previously mentioned, signalling elements. There are 16 red underligned words or phrases across the 9 slides of the informative material. These include: "holiday", "frequented by tourists", "rental licence", "appeal", "contravenes the law", "construction", "blocked", "illegally occupy homes", "15 days", "40 cities", "empty homes", "has doubled", "500,000 homes", "too many", "in one's own city", and "all".

Statements by marketing coordinator Denisa Cotor confirm the existence of an internal guide regulating the use of these markers, emphasising the deliberate and strategic nature of signalling, in line with Generation Z's cognitive profile. Thus, hypothesis 3 regarding the predominant use of visual and textual signalling in "Gen, știri" content is confirmed. Accordingly, research question 4 – "To what extent do visual markers appear in the analysed posts, according to the signalling concept?" – can be answered as follows: signalling elements are regularly present and play an essential role in organising information and capturing the attention of young audiences.

Journalistic Content and the Relevance of Public-Interest Information

An important objective of the research was to evaluate the presence of public-interest information in *"Gen, știri"* posts. The identification of public-

interest information was carried out based on the theoretical distinction between public and private interest (Petre 81) and the provisions of Law no. 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest.

Out of the 36 analysed posts, 31 (86.1%) were identified as having a clear public-interest character. These posts are characterised by high narrative consistency (an average of 13.6 sentences per post), structural clarity (an average of 9.13 slides per post), pronounced fragmentation (average coefficient of 74.68%), and intensive use of visual signalling (an average of 12.3 markers per post). Examples such as POST016 and POST020 highlight the relationship between public-interest topics and the integrated application of segmentation, dual-channel processing, and visual–textual signalling principles, with 30 of these posts simultaneously respecting all three editorial strategies.

Statements by Denisa Cotor, marketing coordinator of *"Gen, știri"*, contextualise this editorial approach within the news production process: "We try not to lose focus on what constitutes news; we aim to provide context."

This reflects a clear commitment to delivering relevant content with civic and educational impact. The results show that public-interest posts exceed the general corpus average in textual density, fragmentation, and signalling frequency, confirming hypothesis 4 regarding the consistent application of communication strategies for public-interest content.

Thus, in response to research question 5 *"How many of the analysed posts provide public-interest information, according to the concept of public-interest information?"* – the answer is that *"Gen, știri"* consistently offers relevant and accessible content adapted to Generation Z's specific consumption style.

Critical Qualitative Limitations of Gen Z Tailored Content

The informative material begins with the marking of Friendship Day between Romania and Israel in the Romanian Parliament, then moves on to aspects concerning humanitarian aid sent by the United Nations to Gaza, subsequently cites several statements made by Romanian MPs regarding Romania–Israel relations, later mentions that the President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, congratulated Nicușor Dan on winning the presidential elections, and notes the response of the Romanian President to the question of what he would do if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were to come to Romania, given that he is accused of crimes against humanity and that the International Criminal Court has issued an international arrest warrant in his name.

The post continues by recalling the invitation extended to Netanyahu in January 2025 by former Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu and concludes by mentioning that Romania is a member of the International Criminal Court and briefly explaining how this institution functions. The

"Gen, știri" post integrates, within only 15 slides, a large amount of information regarding the conflict between Israel and the Gaza Strip, visually signals it through red underlining of key words or phrases, but does not succeed in logically ordering the information presented. Thus, aspects concerning United Nations humanitarian aid to Gaza and the arrest warrant for Netanyahu are interspersed – rather unhappily – with statements made by Romanian MPs.

A more natural informational sequence would have placed all aspects related to the broader conflict context after the Romanian MPs' statements.

Regarding the post coded POST016, dated 16 May 2025, this brings together, under the general title *"What Do We Take Away from This Electoral Campaign"*, 20 slides – including the opening slide presenting the title – consisting of text, images, and video. The post represents a synthesis that briefly presents the events that marked the presidential election campaign in Romania in May 2025. Although the summarisation process in the *"Gen, știri"* post respects stylistic virtues of journalistic writing, such as clarity, concision, and coherence, the content may prove difficult to understand even for a representative of Generation Z if the reading takes place, for example, several weeks after publication.

This difficulty arises because, although the context in which these events occurred is mentioned, a hurried reader – who does not habitually engage in rigorous, attentive daily reading aimed at a deep understanding of reality – may struggle to follow events of different natures and from various domains. These range from controversial statements made by presidential candidates to accusations of fraud, from electoral debates to candidates' educational backgrounds. The separate titling of slides included in post POST016 is another aspect worth noting. These include titles such as *"Donors"*, *"Dexonline"*, *"Autism"* – titles which, being composed of a single word, are, in principle, according to specialised literature, "not capable of generating meaning" (Preda 119).

In other words, it may be difficult for a Generation Z reader who did not follow the electoral campaign in real time to understand the significance of single-word titles and even of the events themselves *post factum*. From this perspective, although the present study does not explicitly aim to examine these aspects, we note that, at least in the case of post POST016, readers may face difficulties in understanding both the editorial content and the broader context in which the events are situated. Furthermore, general, notional, or abstract titles – such as *"International Press"* and *"Romanian Press"* – do not facilitate the reader's understanding of reality, precisely because of their highly general and vague character. In fact, these titles refer to the relationship between one of the presidential candidates and various media institutions.

Further on, in the post coded POST054 on the housing crisis in Spain, the summarisation process suffers. While it provides context, the material does not rigorously structure the information, which may make it difficult to follow. More specifically, the post presents a series of figures, aspects related to housing space and rental properties, information about court decisions, various regions of Spain, and public and private institutions. Overall, it represents an informational mosaic presented without adherence to a clear structure – for example, without applying a recognised journalistic writing technique such as the inverted pyramid, which involves organising information in descending order of importance.

"The pyramid is inverted precisely because the most important, newest, freshest, or most striking part of the information is concentrated at the top of the text, forming its base – the densest and most substantial part of the message" (Vasas in Coman 197). It is true that the *"Gen, știri"* format does not represent traditional media; nevertheless, the post entitled *"The Housing Crisis in Spain: the Government Wants to Remove 65,000 Airbnb Listings"* suffers in terms of clarity and coherence precisely because the information follows an apparently random order.

These qualitative limitations need to be addressed in distinct audience research in order to observe how Gen Z 'reads' the news in real time.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to investigate how the *"Gen, știri"* project adapts visual and narrative communication to the cognitive, behavioural, and informational specificities of Generation Z. The research was built upon theoretical concepts from multimedia learning theory (Mayer, 2009): segmentation (adaptation to fragmented attention), dual-channel processing (integration of text and image), and signalling (attention-orienting markers). These were complemented by a focus on public-interest content and linked to five research questions and corresponding hypotheses.

Through the operationalisation of these concepts via a coding grid, we conducted a quantitative analysis of 36 carousel posts published between 15 and 21 May 2025, alongside a structured interview with Denisa Cotor, marketing coordinator of the *"Gen, știri"* editorial project.

The results confirm the exploratory hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 (Segmentation): 32 out of 36 posts (88.9%) meet the minimum fragmentation threshold of 50%, with an average fragmentation coefficient of 73.50%, an average of 13.3 sentences per post, and 1.47 sentences per slide. These indicators reflect a structure adapted to fragmented attention.

Hypothesis 2 (Dual-channel processing): All analysed posts (100%) combine text and image on each slide, confirming the constant integration of visual and verbal channels in a coherent and complementary format.

Hypothesis 3 (Signalling): 33 out of 36 posts (91.67%) include visual or textual markers, with an average of 11.39 markers per post and a density of 0.86 markers per sentence. Examples such as POST016 (34 markers), POST052 (23), and POST054 (16) illustrate a deliberate strategy of attention orientation.

Hypothesis 4 (Public interest): 31 posts (86.1%) address topics of public interest, with indicators exceeding the corpus average: 74.68% fragmentation, 12.3 markers per post, and 13.6 sentences across 9.13 slides. Of these, 30 posts simultaneously apply all three editorial strategies.

Statements from the interview reinforce these findings. Denisa Cotor notes: *"we prioritise what is essential for the subject," "we translate it into short and relevant sentences,"* and *"red underlines are not placed randomly; we have an internal guide."* These statements reflect a coherent editorial strategy aligned with Generation Z's media consumption style.
The research thus answers all five research questions and, in particular, responds affirmatively to research question no. 1: *"Is the presentation strategy of 'Gen, știri' aligned with the expectations of Generation Z?"* The analysed data show that *"Gen, știri"* posts are deliberately constructed to respond to young people's media behaviour.

In conclusion, *"Gen, știri"* offers, through engaging content, a functional model of journalism adapted to the digital era. The carousel format proves to be an appropriate tool for communicating with a generation accustomed to multitasking, rapid stimuli, and short formats, yet which continues to value clarity, meaning, and civic engagement. Nevertheless, the scattered context and amalgamated content do represent risks for loss of clarity, but these are to further verified in empirical reception studies.

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