

## Media Generation and Media Consumption in Latvia in Autumn 2022

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**Abstract.** The article offers an insight into the data of the representative survey of the population of Latvia conducted in the autumn of 2022 concerning the media consumption and the priorities of news' thematic interests. The survey collects data on differences in the use of media types in different age groups. The research has concluded that the most noticeable difference is observed between the people in the age group 18–24 years and 65+ years, while the media usage habits of the age group 25–64 are quite similar. Survey data show that in almost all age groups the priority of thematic interests is the news of Latvia. At the end of the research, it was concluded that it was not possible to create a classification and characteristics of Latvian media generations only based on the analysis of survey data.

**Keywords:** media generations, media consumptions, age group, news priorities, survey

### Introduction

The concept of generations is used in the social sciences and humanities to structure the course of history, to characterise its phases and the specificity of its changes. In recent decades, a wide range of theoretical literature on generations has been produced and various classifications of generations have been proposed. One approach is the concept of media generations, which is used to describe people's relationship with traditional and new media, technology, access to information, media literacy and attitudes towards advertising. Generations form their own specific patterns of media use based on the type of media that was/is new in their formative years. This pattern is the one to which a given generation largely remains faithful throughout its lifespan. The dominant media in generational usage is used to name the generation, e.g., “newspaper generation”, “TV generation” or “network generation” (Goot *et al.* 2018, 289–290). Data on the Latvian media ecosystem demonstrate marked differences between generations in the use of traditional and new media (see Zelče *et al.* 2023). The aim of this article is to establish the character of these differences and their extent.

## Methodology

The research is based on theoretical approaches to generations and media generations, as well as on Baltic scholars' insights into the specificity of generational classification in the region in the 20th century shaped by dramatic historical turbulences (e.g., Aarelaid-Tart 2006; Nugin 2015; Nugin *et al.* 2016; Šūpulis, Zellis 2019/2020). The study analyses data from a representative survey of Latvian citizens on media use and news preferences, commissioned by the Latvian Council of Science's Fundamental and Applied Research Programme project "Jeopardizing Democracy Through Disinformation and Conspiracies: Reconsidering Experience of Latvia". The survey took place in autumn 2022 and involved 1621 residents of Latvia. Respondents were selected to form a representative set reflecting Latvian society demographically, geographically and socially. The interviews were conducted in Latvian or Russian (at the respondent's choice).

The research seeks to answer the question: what are the differences in media consumption and news preferences across generations of the Latvian population?

## Results

### 1. Media generations

Generation is a widespread concept in contemporary media studies and academic discussion. The idea of generations is an old one. "Generation" or a similar term was already used to describe the distance between parents and children. However, the generational approach emerged as a significant scientific concept relatively recently – in the early 20th century. It was given a sociological perspective by the influential theorist Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) in his classic essay "The Problem of Generation" (1928) (Misztal 2003, 83–84). His theorising was inspired by the social movements initiated by young people since the 18th century. Mannheim sometimes uses the terms "generation" and "youth" synonymously, emphasising that each new socio-economic period is mostly identified with the socially and intellectually active youth of that era (Lovell 2007, 7). Mannheim developed his theory of generations as an alternative to Karl Marx's class theory, which argued that social class was the historical subject and the driving force of social change. For Mannheim, the social subject was the generation as a group of people of similar age and similar location with similar attitudes towards what was happening in society and similar aspirations. Every generation is marked by a characteristic "social location" in an historical context and is influenced especially by the experiences and events occurring in the formative phase of an individual's younger years. Later life events are also of great importance, especially their turning points. All this together forms the biography of both an individual and a generation (Mannheim 1952, 282).

Mannheim emphasizes the importance of “fresh contact”, it is the moment when an individual is encountered with something new. The experience of a generation is formed through these “fresh contacts”, and they have an impact on the whole future life (Mannheim 1952, 293). “Fresh contact” is important in generational relations with communication technologies and new media.

Mannheim’s generational concept has inspired many theorists to develop it further and offer their own approaches (e. g., Eisenstadt 1956; Kertzer 1983; Strauss, Howe 1991; Eyerman, Turner 1998; Edmunds, Turner 2002). Among them are also media generational theories, which describe different generational media experiences and their usage habits. Hepp and his colleagues suggested that media generation forms “groups of people who in their media appropriation share a specific experience space of mediatization and subsequently, based on their personal media biographies” and develops “a shared self-image as a media generation” (Hepp *et al.* 2017, 111). Bolin points out that the concept of media generations is relative, as it is difficult to draw boundaries between different age groups, their relationships with technologies, media consumption habits, and the media landscapes of their lives. However, the media generations approach is often used to explain the history of mediatization and its contemporary processes (Bolin 2017, 130–132). The media generation approach is widely used in comparative media use studies of different population groups of the same country or region, as well as of different countries/regions. It helps to structure the data, systematize the biographies of media consumers and obtain an overall picture of the situation.

## 2. Media usage in in different age groups Latvia in 2022

In the survey of Latvian citizens in the autumn of 2022, the question was asked: “Which media do you use to obtain information about current events?” (see Table 1).

Table 1. Media consumption in different age groups in autumn 2022 (%)

Media	Age													
	18–24		25–34		35–44		45–54		55–64		65+		Average	
	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Print media	96	4	93	7	91	9	92	8	87	13	76	14	88	12
Radio	78	22	70	30	65	35	65	35	60	30	50	50	63	37
TV	60	40	62	38	54	46	48	52	42	58	24	76	46	54
News portals	36	54	24	76	25	75	22	78	24	76	42	58	28	72
Social media	51	49	59	41	72	28	76	24	77	23	89	11	74	26

Survey data show that news portals are the main source of current information for almost all population groups. The only exception is people over the age of 65. People of this age group mainly use television for getting the latest news, however, they also like to use news portals and radio to attain information. Television was the “fresh contact” for people of this generation, whose members were born before the Second World War, during the war and in the post-war years. This communication technology entered the Latvian media landscape in the second half of the 1950s and its use became a habit in the 1960s, when these people were children, teenagers or young adults. People of this age group could be labelled as the “television generation”.

The most fragmented set of media habits is noted in the 18–24 age group. News portals and social media are almost equally important to this generation, however, a large part of it also uses television as a source of the latest information. Media selection habits are similar for people aged 25–64. According to the survey data, there is no deep “media gaps”, it is observed only between the oldest and the youngest age group.

### 3. Media consumption in the regions

The survey data suggests that age is not the only indicator of differences in media consumption. The use of one type of media differs in various regions of Latvia (see Table 2). The use of television to acquire the latest information is greater in rural regions than in Riga and in the more economically developed Pierīga region.

Table 2. Media consumption in regions of Latvia in autumn 2022 (%)

Media	Region													
	Riga		Pierīga		Vidzeme		Kurzeme		Zemgale		Latgale		Average	
	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Print media	91	9	89	11	89	11	84	16	88	12	88	12	88	12
Radio	64	36	56	44	71	29	63	37	61	39	63	37	63	37
TV	55	45	44	56	34	66	30	70	45	55	52	48	46	54
News portals	24	76	25	75	33	67	38	62	29	71	31	69	28	72
Social media	71	29	77	23	72	28	71	29	74	26	78	22	74	26

#### 4. Media consumption in groups with different education

Survey data show that education also determines media use preferences (see Table 3). People with lower education level have a greater preference for traditional media, whereas better educated people have better skills in using new technologies to obtain the latest information. However, this factor is not as significant as belonging to particular age groups

Table 3. Media consumption in groups with different educations in autumn 2022 (%)

Media	Level of education															
	Incomplete primary		Primary		Incomplete secondary		Secondary		Secondary vocational		Incomplete higher		Higher education		Average	
	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Print media	100	0	93	7	85	15	90	10	86	14	92	8	87	12	88	12
Radio	67	33	69	31	64	36	64	36	61	39	65	35	62	38	63	37
TV	67	33	43	57	41	59	44	56	42	57	58	42	50	50	46	54
News portals	67	33	67	33	51	49	29	71	29	71	24	76	18	82	28	72
Social media	67	33	65	35	75	25	72	28	79	21	73	27	72	28	74	29

#### 5. Thematic priorities of media news

The survey data show that there are significant differences between the news thematic priorities of the older and younger generations. This is evidenced by the respondents' answers to the question: "What topics in the media interest you?" (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Young people are primarily interested in music, news of Latvia and sports, while information from Latvia, local news and environmental issues are the most important to people aged 65+. According to the survey data, both of these generations are interested in Latvian events, although the interest is numerically greater amongst the older generation.

VITA ZELČE. Media Generation and Media Consumption in Latvia in Autumn 2022

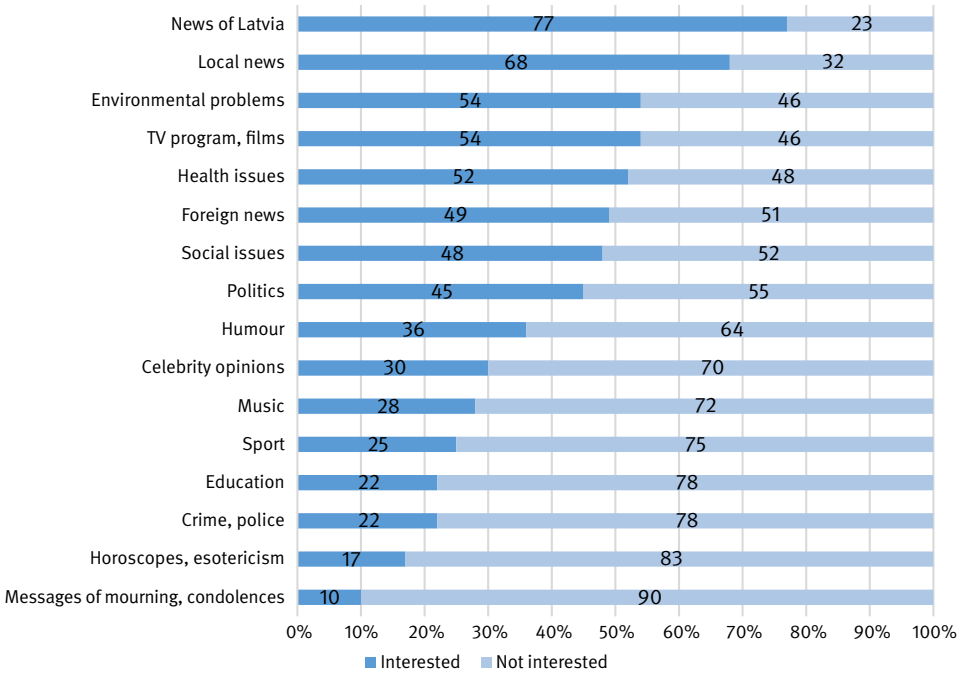


Figure 1. Priorities of media news in the age group 65+ years in autumn 2022 (%)

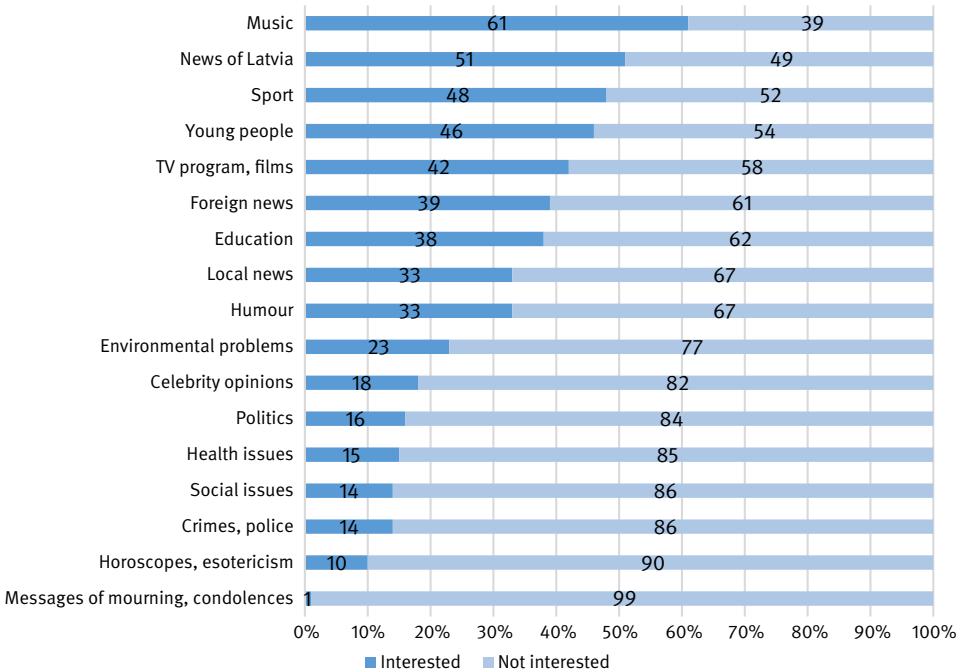


Figure 2. Priorities of media news in the age group 18–24 years in autumn 2022 (%)

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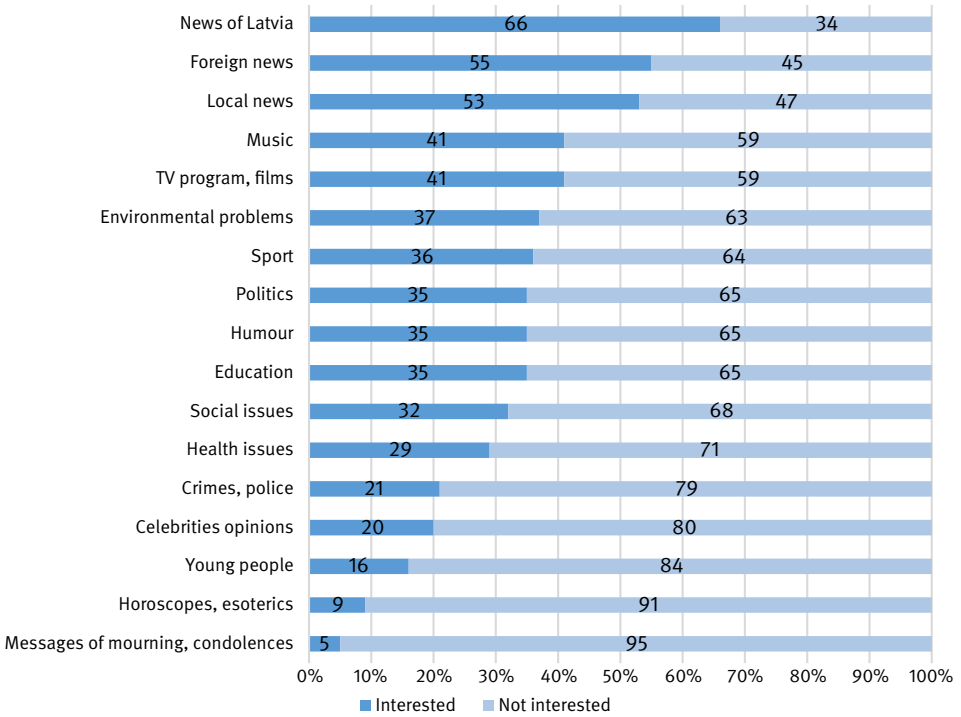


Figure 3. Priorities of media news in the age group 25–44 years in autumn 2022 (%)

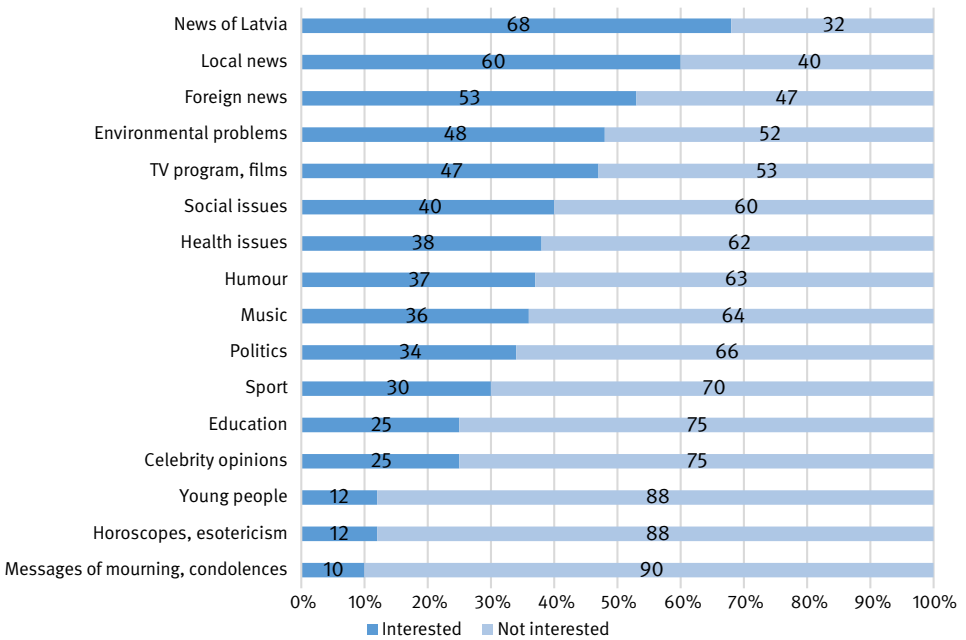


Figure 4. Priorities of media news in the age group 45–64 years in autumn 2022 (%)

Survey data show that different age groups have various priorities regarding current news obtained in the print media, radio, TV, news portals and social media. They also have a lot in common, for example, the news of Latvia is the most important for people aged 25 to 65+ (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). Data on news priorities are an excellent source of information for creating the classification and characteristics of Latvian media generations.

## Conclusions

The data of the survey conducted in the autumn of 2022 permits to conclude that different age groups have different habits of media consumption and news priorities. These differences are not very pronounced, the boundaries between generations are blurred in the use of certain types of media. Despite this, it is possible to create a classification of the media generations of the Latvian population, using the theoretical approaches of generations and media generations. The characteristics of media generations can be defined more profoundly by the data on media consumers' places of residence, education, occupation, income, gender and nationality. This information would supplement biographical descriptions of media generations.

It must be concluded that, unfortunately, the statistical data on habits of media consumption and consumers gathered in this article are insufficient to draw conclusions about media generations of Latvia and propose their labels. It is necessary to conduct in-depth interviews with representatives of different age groups and social groups in order to understand their relationship with different types of media and technologies, and to find out the topic of their interests.

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